
GOSPORT

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HMS DAEDALUS
Building No 118 (Officers' Mess
and Quarters)

GV

II

Officers' Mess for 100 and quarters for 54 single officers. Dated 1935, architect M May. Flemish bond red brickwork, Portland stone dressings, plain tile roof.

PLAN: An unusually large block on 3 storeys plus attics, the principal reception and recreation rooms to the ground floor, with kitchens and support spaces in the right wing, and boiler room and service spaces to the left, all to a broad reversed 'U' plan with inner corridors to the upper floors having bedrooms to outward-looking walls, and service rooms to the inner courtyard, including two small light-wells. An entrance lobby, flanked by an orderly room and a telephone room leads to an inner octagonal hall, linked by short corridor to the large mess hall set across this short axis as a free-standing separately roofed unit. At each end of the front range is a primary staircase, with secondary stairs in each of the wings, all rising the full height of the building. The layout is very generous, reminiscent of a high quality hotel, facing to the S over a broad grassed area.

EXTERIOR: Windows are generally small-pane casements with mullion and transom set in flush stone dressings. The S front is in 9 bays, the centre brought forward with a gable over two floors of mock framing and with 2 lights at first and second floors; there is also a small light on the returns. The ground floor here is in ashlar, with a central door on 2 steps under a 4-centred moulded arch,

moulded label-course, and jambs; above the door is the carved date, 1935, and there is a small light on each return. Three flanking bays each side have paired lights to a brick mullion and soldier archers, with stone sills; the ground floor paired lights have a stone mullion and transom, and flush irregular quoins, all set below a moulded stone string. The hipped end bays have a wide 4-light with stone dressings to the upper floors, and a canted bay with 1:3:1 lights in stone dressings, surmounted by a small brick balcony with weathered stone coping. These end units have regular flush alternating stone quoins. There is a continuous offset stone plinth rising to first sill level, and returned in part to the wings; the central gable is flanked by bold stacks, with two further stacks in the roof slopes to each side. The long E wing, to the right, has the first five bays detailed as for the front, with steel casements in flush stone surrounds; in bay 2 is a broad flush eaves stack with dressed stone shoulders, and bay 5 has a pair of doors, an elliptical head and 3-pane overlight. The wing continues with a slightly lower ridge, beyond a coped gable at the party division, and is in 6 bays with paired casements direct to brickwork, with brick central mullion, plus a single light seventh bay; the stone plinth-mould continues, over a brick plinth. The outer roof-slope has 3 stacks here, as elsewhere, with stepped brick cappings. The hipped return has 4 windows to the upper 2 floors, and 2 doors at ground level, and the courtyard return has smaller casements to the service rooms. The W wing is similar, but not identical, with a slightly projecting eaves stack flanked by single lights each side in the upper two floors, a door in stone dressings to bay 3, then the slightly lower continuation in 6 bays; there are two small dormers and 3 stacks to the outer roof slope, and the hipped return is in the E wing. The courtyard return has additionally a large 3-light and 3 smaller dormer windows. The courtyard wall to the front range has small casements, and flat-roofed stair turrets to the internal angles. There are two small internal light-wells.

A linking corridor leads to the free-standing transverse mess hall, with a steep-pitched roof behind high brick parapets with moulded saddle-back coping continued to the plain end gables, above a frieze-band. The long N front has 5 large steel casements in flush stone dressings, with central mullion and two transoms, and 4 similar windows to the S wall.

The mess hall and courtyard are enclosed by a brick wall with brick copings, and with three openings, formerly gated.

INTERIOR: The interior retains most of the original trim detail, such as panelled hardwood doors (1 above 3 panels) in moulded architraves, triple-faceted skirting, picture rails, and ceiling coving or cornices. The ground floor has reconstructed stone 'Minster' fir surrounds in principle rooms, and at first floor some fireplaces retain painted wooden bolection-mould surrounds. There are two principal staircases, at each end of the transverse corridor, with solid strings, moulded handrails, turned and tapered balusters and square newels, continued with a small open well through all floors; in each wing is a smaller secondary stair.

The narrow entrance lobby is flanked by small spaces - telephone room and orderly room, giving to an octagonal hall with oak dado panelling, and decorative plasterwork with pilasters, this leads, via a narrow passageway, to the large mess hall or dining room. A large 6-bay lofty hall, well-lit from each side, this has a flat segmental plastered ceiling, with broad dividing ribs and principal soffits in large square panels; the centre panel to the 2 centre bays has a decorative lay-light. The plastered walls have a panelled dado and the ceiling springs from a continuous horizontal moulded cornice. At one end is a recessed gallery at upper level above a pair of doors, and with a bowed and panelled gallery-front.

HISTORY: With the 1930's expansion, it was evident that the original Officers' Mess, in Westcliffe House (qv) would be inadequate to the station, and this new building was set out on a much more generous scale. The high quality of the design, both in organisation and in detailing, is evident, and there have been no later alterations of any substance. It is one of the key elements in a group which - in its diversity of technical and evolved domestic architecture - survives as the most complete surviving example of a seaplane base in Britain. It breaks away from the established neo-Georgian style adopted for the domestic sites of air bases of this period, but on account of its exceptionally good detailing and handling - both within and externally - it ranks with the mess at Biggin Hill and York House at Cranwell as the most architecturally distinguished product of the liaison then promoted by Government between the Air Ministry and the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

Established in 1917 as a temporary naval seaplane training school, this was first developed as a satellite to the Royal Naval Air Service base at Calshot, on the opposite (west) side of Southampton Water. In 1918 the RAF took over its administration, and in the 1920s training continued for the newly-formed Fleet Air Arm, training pilots for warship and later armed merchant cruisers in the Battle of the Atlantic. The site is immediately adjacent to the Solent, but severed from it by a road (Marine Parade).

Lt J G N Clifts was responsible for a number of buildings on the site from 1918, including the Power House of 1918. The whole base is closely woven into the adjacent suburban roads, houses predating 1917 being either demolished or reused: the most notable amongst these is Westcliffe House, a characteristic example of how early seaplane bases requisitioned earlier properties for use as officers' messes. A major rebuilding was undertaken after 1931 when the base became Coastal Area HQ. The most architecturally distinguished building relating to this phase is the officers' mess, a fine and unique composition by which fronts onto a large grassed area to its south. This is bounded to its SE side by a group of married quarters in the Garden City style characteristic of RAF expansion up to 1934. To the north is the station guardhouse (a 1926 design), institute and barracks square of 1932-5. Further additions in 1939 included the H-plan barracks blocks and Eagle Block, which served as HQ of Coastal Command until August 1939.

(Francis, P: HMS Daedalus, Report for Hampshire County Council, July 1996).