

# Submariners' Memorial, Fort Blockhouse

## Overview

Heritage Category:  
Listed Building

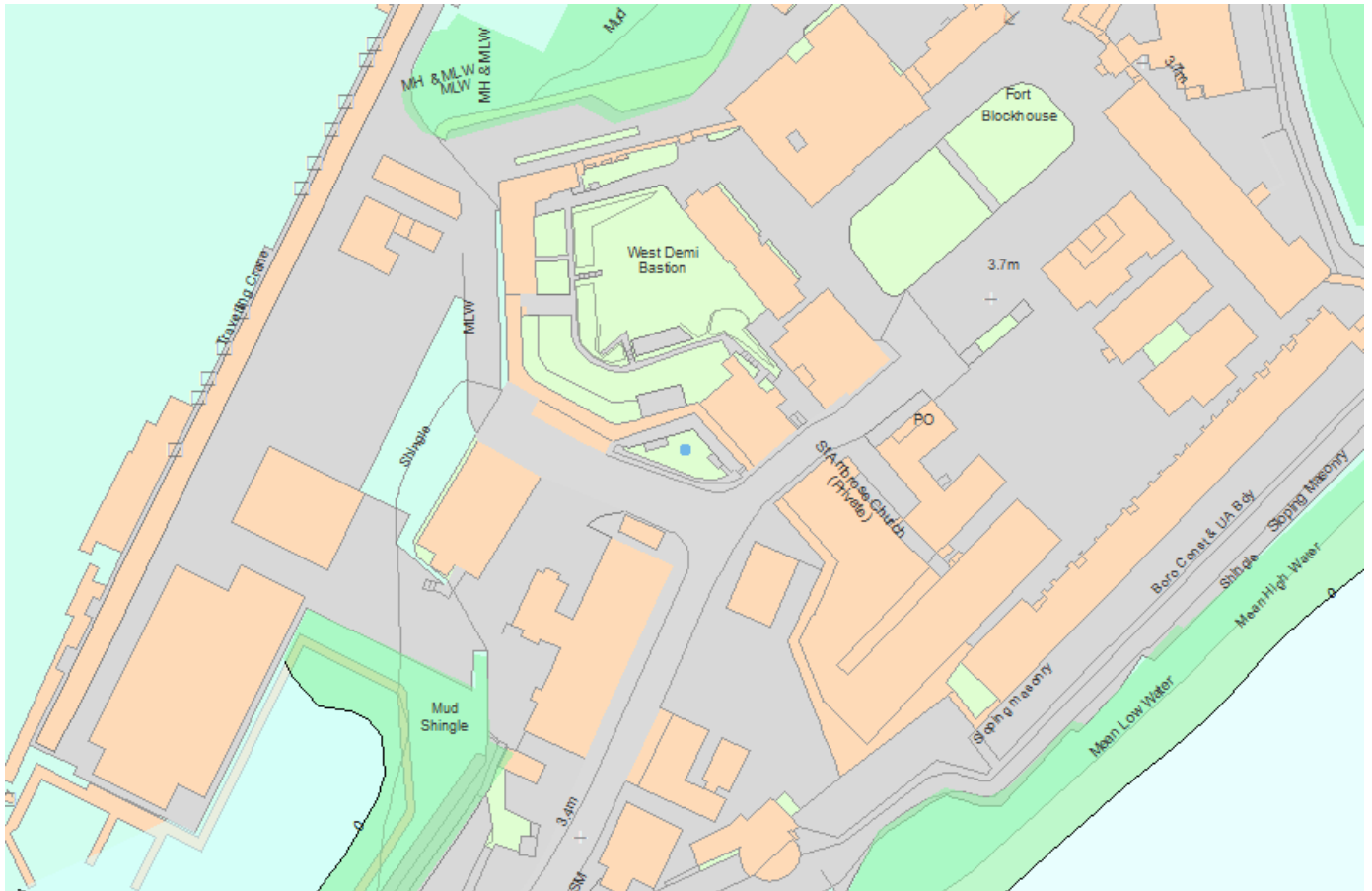
Grade:  
II

List Entry Number:  
[1469589](#)

Date first listed:  
13-Nov-2020

Statutory Address:  
Fort Blockhouse, Haslar Road, Gosport, PO12 2AB

## Map



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([http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservicehle/StatutoryPrint.svc/541209/HLE\\_A4L\\_Grade|HLE\\_A3L\\_Grade.pdf](http://mapservices.HistoricEngland.org.uk/printwebservicehle/StatutoryPrint.svc/541209/HLE_A4L_Grade|HLE_A3L_Grade.pdf))

The PDF will be generated from our live systems and may take a few minutes to download depending on how busy our servers are. We apologise for this delay.

This copy shows the entry on 18-Nov-2020 at 10:50:33.

## Location

Statutory Address:

Fort Blockhouse, Haslar Road, Gosport, PO12 2AB

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

Hampshire

District:

Gosport (District Authority)

**Parish:**

Non Civil Parish

**National Grid Reference:**

SZ6254099246

## Summary

Memorial, built in about the mid-C20 and dedicated to naval submariners. Inspired by the submariner featured on the Combined Services Memorial in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

## Reasons for Designation

The submariners' memorial, built in about the mid-C20, inspired by the submariner featured on the Combined Services Memorial in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey and dedicated to Royal Navy submariners, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: Architectural interest: \* a well-crafted commemorative structure of aesthetic quality, based on a design by the sculptor Gilbert Ledward (1888 to 1960) for the Combined Services Memorial in Westminster Abbey;

\* as an unaltered and well-preserved memorial.

Historic interest: \* as a poignant reminder to those who served in the Submarine Service from its inception in 1901, and the 174 boats and their crews that have since been lost during active service; \* for its historic association with Fort Blockhouse, a bastioned artillery fort that was central to the defence of Portsmouth Harbour in the C18 and C19, subsequently becoming a Royal Engineers establishment in the late C19, before serving as a principal base and spiritual home of Britain's submarine service during the C20.

Group value:

\* with the scheduled artillery fort of Fort Blockhouse. The group value extends to further listed buildings and structures, including the gatehouse datestone (C18), Admiralty boundary stone (C18), the former guardhouse (C19), cannon bollard (C19), Arrogant and Thames Block (C19), the Submarine Memorial Chapel (built 1917), and the Submarine Escape Training Tower (C20). In addition, with the Grade II-listed Submariner's Memorial at Clayhall Royal Navy Cemetery, Haslar.

## History

Fort Blockhouse is sited on the western side of the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour at the end of a peninsula joined to Haslar by a narrow neck of land. A timber blockhouse was recorded on the site in the early C15. It stood opposite The Round Tower (NHLE 1386901) on the eastern side of the harbour entrance; a chain between the two securing the entrance against enemy ships. In about 1538 the west side was refortified with the addition of Lymeden's Bulwark but by the late C16 the fortifications were derelict. In the late C17, during the Second Dutch War (1672-1678), concerns over the vulnerability of naval dockyards to attack led to new schemes by the great fortress engineer Sir Bernard de Gomme to strengthen Portsmouth's defences. An L-shaped battery was built on the site. A plan of 1668 shows a fort with defences facing the land and sea. In about 1709, there was major reconstruction work. The fort's south-west defences were considerably strengthened with a redan, moat and outer work, as well as a south-east sea battery. The remaining north-west and north-east sides of the fort were enclosed by oak palisades with an angled bastion to the north. In the early C19 further work was undertaken, including the northwards extension of the western face of the west demi-bastion and extensive remodelling of the sea battery. Between 1845 and 1848, the sea battery was further strengthened

and new casemates were built on the north and the eastern sides of the fort, as well as a limestone-faced north bastion. However, the advent of larger rifled cannon meant the defences became increasingly obsolescent as the C19 wore on. In 1873 Fort Blockhouse was taken over by the Royal Engineers who were engaged in the use of fixed minefields as a means of harbour defence. A loading shed, workshops, mess room, boat and cable sheds, and a jetty were built. In 1904, the fort became a submarine base with the addition of new jetties and submariners accommodation. The hulk HMS Dolphin was also brought to the site to provide further accommodation and in 1912 gave its name to the newly established independent command. During the First World War, the base was the Royal Navy's principal submarine depot and a memorial chapel was erected in 1917. A mock submarine control room known as an 'attack teacher', was also erected along the northern curtain wall; only traces in the brickwork now remain. After the war, the outer C18 defence works were reduced, the moat partly infilled, and several buildings constructed within the fort interior, outside the main gate and surrounding it. In 1935 to 1937, a new headquarters was built for Rear Admiral, Submarines (commander of the service) with an operations room and communications facilities. At the outbreak of the Second World War, HMS Dolphin was home to 5th Submarine Flotilla. Operations were conducted in the Channel and the Bay of Biscay, and in June 1944 X-craft from HMS Dolphin were used to mark the D-Day landing beaches. After the conflict HMS Dolphin resumed its role as the main base for the submarine service, rising in prominence in the mid-1960s when the service provided the country's nuclear deterrent. The base expanded with many new buildings on the land to the south-west of the peninsula. However, the end of the Cold War in 1991 led to a major reappraisal of defence requirements, and HMS Dolphin closed in 1998. The Submarine School was transferred to HMS Raleigh at Torpoint, Cornwall, and the Defence Medical College was established at Fort Blockhouse; the base being occupied by 33 Field Hospital. In 2016 the government confirmed that Fort Blockhouse was to close; the estimated date for disposal is 2022. The aftermath of the First World War saw a huge wave of commemoration; a result of both the huge impact on communities of the loss of three quarters of a million British lives, and also the official policy of not repatriating the dead: therefore memorials provided the main focus of grief felt at this great loss. The inability to perform burials following losses at sea was a common part of the naval experience and had led over previous years to the erection of memorials to sailors of the Royal Navy, Merchant Marine, and other services such as the RNLI. One such memorial is situated at the nearby Clayhall Royal Navy Cemetery, Haslar, and commemorates those who died in four disasters to A-Class submarines between 1904 and 1912; illustrating the perilous nature of the occupation at this time (Submariners' Memorial, Grade II-listed, NHLE No 1428138). The First World War was the first arena in which submarines would play a significant military role. Their most important function was the defence of Atlantic merchant shipping convoys against German U-boat attacks, which intensified after Germany announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare from 1 February 1917. A total of 54 boats were lost during the war and with them the lives of 138 officers and 1,225 men; approximately one-third of the Submarine Service's personnel. The Second World War also proved extremely hazardous for submarine crews; 3508 submariners perished or were captured out of a total of 9310 personnel who served. The submariners' memorial at Fort Blockhouse is a poignant reminder of the sailors who served in the Submarine Service from its inception in 1901, and the 174 boats and their crews that have since been lost during active service. It is especially poignant given its location at the principal base and spiritual home of Britain's submarine service during the C20. Many of the submariners that went to sea would have sailed directly from Fort Blockhouse (HMS Dolphin). The design of the memorial at Fort Blockhouse is based on the submariner of the Combined Services Memorial, which is located in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. That monument was designed by the sculptor Gilbert Ledward (1888 to 1960), and has three bronze figures in stone niches with the dates '1939' and '1945' on tablets between them. At Westminster, the submariner figure stands above a plaque embossed with the inscription: TO THE/ GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY/ OF THE OFFICERS/ AND MEN OF THE SUBMARINE/ BRANCH OF THE ROYAL NAVY/ WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES/ BOTH IN PEACE AND WAR./ THE LAST ENEMY THAT SHALL BE DESTROYED IS DEATH. The Westminster memorial was unveiled by Winston Churchill in May 1948. The original submariner figure was modelled on Leading Seaman Reginald Read (died 1987). He was a torpedo operator during the Second World War and served on HMS Sealion, Seadog, Uther, Storm and Token from 1939 up until he was discharged in 1947. Replica statuettes have been sold all over the world, making Read a worldwide icon and the unofficial representative of the Submarine Service. A silver replica statuette was also given to Queen Elizabeth II in 1958 when she presented the Queen's Colour to Submarine Command. An example was also created using lead from the batteries of Holland I, the Royal Navy's first submarine. Around the 1920s the moat on the south-western side of the fort was infilled and in 1960 the gatehouse was demolished to ease the movement of motor vehicles. The gatehouse datestone was retained and subsequently moved to a grass bank near the original entrance. It stands adjacent to the submariners' memorial, which may also post-date these changes. Until recently an example similar to the Fort Blockhouse submariners' statue stood at HMS Raleigh in Plymouth. It was donated by Tom Topham who also served in the Submarine Service, but the statue has now been relocated to Clyde, Scotland. The Fort Blockhouse example may also have been presented to the men and women of HMS Dolphin by a serving or ex-service submariner. Its inspiration no doubt lay in the commemoration of the Submarine Service from its inception in 1901, and the 174 boats and their crews that have since been lost during active service.

## Details

Memorial, built in about the mid-C20 and dedicated to naval submariners. Inspired by the submariner featured on the Combined Services Memorial in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.

**MATERIALS:** carved from Yorkstone on a red brick base.

**DESCRIPTION:** the broadly rectangular memorial stands around 2m high by 1m wide and has a life-sized image of a submariner, carved in relief, against a background finished as punched stone with a distinctive arrow pattern. The submariner is styled in the Moderne idiom and is depicted in look-out mode, searching the sky. He wears a Royal Navy cap and roll-neck jumper over trousers tucked into sea boots. One hand rests on his hip and the other holds a large pair of binoculars, which hang from his neck. He stands on a plinth which is inscribed with the text: THOSE WHO SERVED. The rear and side faces are left as quarry-faced stone and the memorial is set into a brick base.

## Sources

### Books and journals

Evans, D, *Arming the Fleet: The Development of the Royal Ordnance Yards, (1770-1945)*

Hall, K, *HMS Dolphin: Gosport's Submarine Base, (2001)*

Moore, D, 'Fort Blockhouse and Fort Monckton' in *The Portsmouth Papers*, , Vol. Number 30, (2018), Unknown

### Websites

Royal Navy website, accessed 15 May 2020 from <https://www.nmrn.org.uk/research/submarine-losses>  
(<https://www.nmrn.org.uk/research/submarine-losses>)

Stonemason's Portfolio, accessed 10/2/2020 from <http://qualifiedstonemason.com/portfolio/conservation/hms-raleigh/>  
(<http://qualifiedstonemason.com/portfolio/conservation/hms-raleigh/>)

Westminster Abbey , accessed 10/2/2020 from <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/combined-services-memorial>  
(<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/combined-services-memorial>)

### Other

Francis, P, and Crisp, G, *Military Command and Control Organisation*, report for English Heritage (2008)

Historic England, *Screening for Potential Listing Report: Fort Blockhouse, Gosport, Hampshire* (2020)

## Legal

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

End of official listing

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