

THE IRON-FRAMED BUILDINGS OF PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD

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In 1975 there were strict security precautions in the Naval Dockyard and it is unfortunate that these notes, which are based on those written by D.W.Lloyd, BA., MRTPI, for the Victorian Society visit 6-7th April 1975, cannot be illustrated by plans or photographs. It is, however, possible to get some idea of the importance in the history of iron construction, of the buildings, by looking again at "The Functional Tradition in Early Industrial Buildings" written by J.M. Richards and published by the Architectural Press in 1958, pages 57-73.

Let us begin on page 63, with the photograph of a delicate two-story arcade of slim cast iron columns, the ground floor being twice the height of the first floor, linked by open arched cast iron beams, all similar to early railway station train sheds. The date in the book is 1879, but the Society notes state that this is 1843-5, and originally supported a water tank. It is now enclosed as a fire station.

Imagine a very much heavier version of this structure, with stocky iron Tuscan columns linked with massive open girders stiffened with underslung tie-rods, which in turn support at mid-span, lighter iron beams. This is No 6 Boat House, also of 1843; and is the most massive iron-framed building of any date that the writer has yet seen.

Returning to pages 70 and 71 of "The Functional Tradition", and exterior and interior views of the vast timber-framed No 53 Boat Store at Chatham Dockyard, built in 1813 to completely enclose ships like "HMS Victory". Imagine at Portsmouth two enormous sheds like this, side by side, producing one repair shop for two men-of-war and constructed in the lightest of iron columns and wall and roof windbracing, and you have No 3 Ship Shop of 1845-6, as a companion, Newcastle Central Railway Station was built in 1848 and Paddington in 1850. This building will have to be demolished, but an identical one at Chatham, and also originally pre-fabricated in London, will be preserved.

There are no more photographs in the book to assist these notes, so try and imagine a small brick arched room with the four tunnel vaults meeting in cross formation on an iron

column, which has a capital and above that the soleyed bases of the vaults, also cast in iron, flush with the brickwork. This was designed by Sir Samuel Bentham as the Pay Office, and is now the building housing the Royal Naval Film Corporation.

It is likely that a few months before the birth of Charles Dickens his father came to work in this Pay Office.

Finally there is a delicate ornate open side iron-framed shelter, free standing near a dock, which is the Royal Railway Shelter of 1893 to protect the ageing Queen Victoria, between the Royal Coach and the Royal Yacht.