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# Post-War Gosport (Old Town)

Elain Harwood

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



## POST-WAR GOSPORT (OLD TOWN)

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## **SUMMARY**

Gosport has a wealth of historic buildings, mostly connected with the Royal Navy. The old town itself, however, was almost entirely rebuilt between 1945 and 1980 save for parts of the High Street and Holy Trinity Church. A large area to the south of the High Street was badly damaged in the war, but this total reconstruction owed more to the demands of local councillors and planners in the borough and county councils. A drastic example of a small town's bid to provide modern living conditions for its citizens and to alleviate traffic congestion, the story of what most visitors to Gosport see today has never been fully researched and is itself coming under threat. The new housing charts the stylistic evolution of public housing during the post-war period and the limited role played by conservation. Research on the High Street and its western extension, Stoke Road (a mix of buildings from the late nineteenth century, 1930s and 1970s) was prompted by the High Street Heritage Action Zone declared in 2019.

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

Elain Harwood is a Senior Architectural Investigator with Historic England.

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## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Gosport was formed c. 1200 from part of the manor of Alverstoke, and until 1922 the name referred only to the promontory of land occupied by the historic town. The building of defences around the old town from the late seventeenth century onwards served to confine what was essentially a medieval plan (Fig. 1). Its east-west running High Street (Middle Street on eighteenth century maps) was laid out with building plots in the hope of establishing a base for cross-channel trade that was never realised. It was flanked by North Street and South Street, with small cross streets linking the three; this is comparable with, for example, the layout of St Andrews, Fife.



Figure 1: Eighteenth-century map of Gosport (north is to the right) showing the main streets [© British Library Board: Maps K Top 14.24].

Gosport's subsequent growth mirrored the expansion of the Royal Navy. As victualling yards, a prison, hospitals and barracks steadily surrounded it, so the well-placed little town grew prosperous and the peninsula filled with buildings (Fig. 2). By the early nineteenth century it was densely populated, and buildings began to appear beyond the defences in Dock Village and Bingham Town, as well as along the Forton and Brockhurst roads.

South of South Street, residential terraces of houses were set along Chapel Row and in courtyards off Haslar Street (now Haslar Road). Large industrial premises were mixed in; at their heart was the substantial Flux's Laundry, while large boatyards blocked the shore to the east. The development ended at Holy Trinity Church, a building of 1696 much extended and refaced in the nineteenth century, and two substantial houses: the handsome grey-brick vicarage built in 1795 and The Hall, grander still and built from about 1805, both commissioned by the Rev. Richard Bingham. The latter was used after 1945 as offices by Gosport's Engineer's Department. To their east was a line of cottages on Little Beach Street and a small terrace facing the water built as the Metropolitan Water Police Quarters. The planner



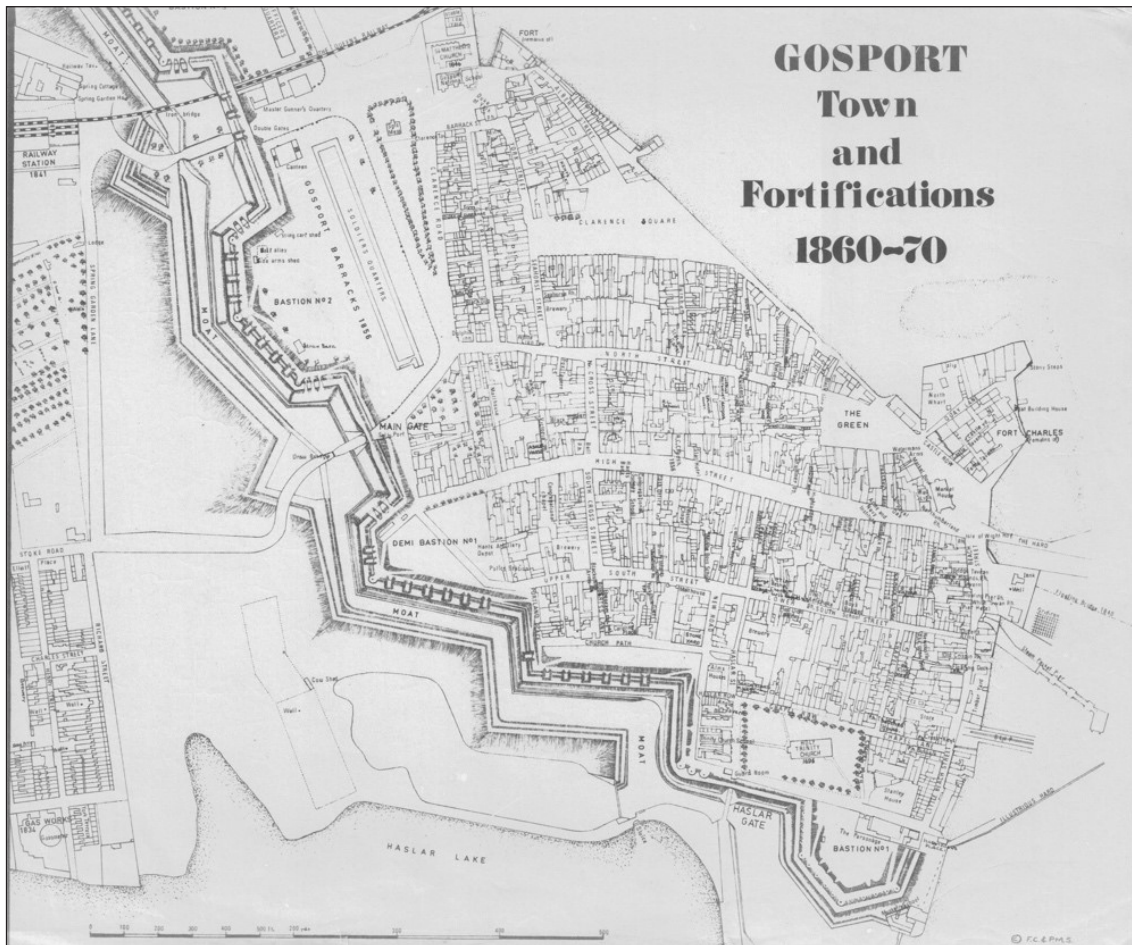


Figure 2: Gosport and its defences, 1860-70, drawn by Brian Patterson, Portsmouth historian, 1976. [By kind permission of David Moore, <https://historicgosport.uk/>].

Max Lock (1909-88), commissioned in 1947 to make a report on the greater Portsmouth area, described Gosport as ‘a town handicapped by nature and by history’, an acknowledgement of the constrained site.<sup>1</sup>

Gosport was administered by manorial courts and from 1763 under a private Act of Parliament, its trustees elected only from 1867. They amalgamated with the Alversoke Rural Sanitary Authority in 1874 and in 1894 became the Gosport and Alverstoke Urban District Council (Fig. 3). This became the Metropolitan Borough of Gosport in 1922, to which Lee-on-the-Solent and Rowner were added in 1930-1, since when the local authority boundaries have remained unchanged. In the 1930s some thousand houses a year were built and the area claimed the highest birth rate in the country.<sup>2</sup> The population of 35,607 in 1921 had risen to 47,630 by 1939. Although most of Gosport’s inter-war housing was built privately, the borough council had contributed 748 houses and flats across its area by 1939, beginning at Forton, and including estates in Anns Hill Road and Seafield (Old Road).

Central Gosport was still a largely Georgian town in 1939, but Conservative and Labour elements within the borough council had united in recognising its decayed state and need for comprehensive rebuilding. They worried at the congestion of

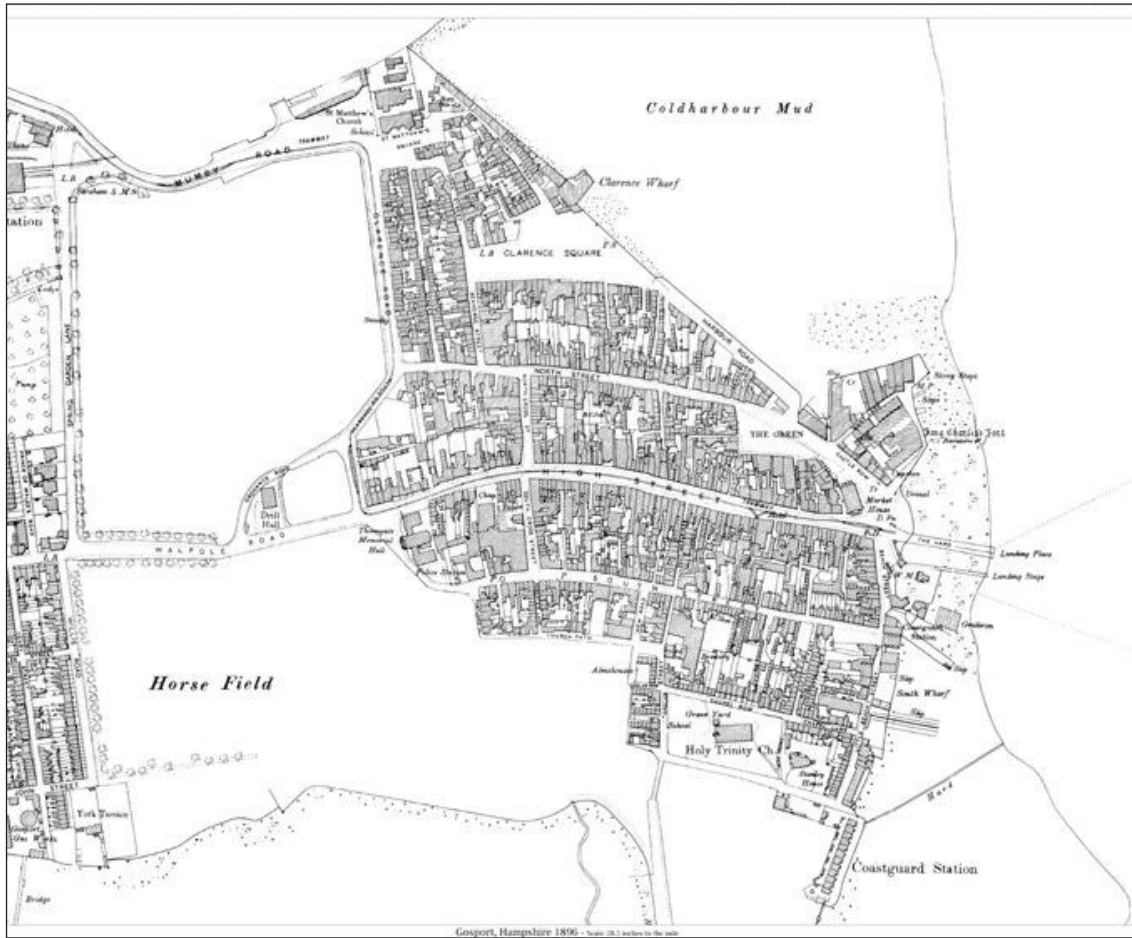


Figure 3: Gosport as shown in Ordnance Survey map of 1896. [© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2022). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024].

industry, housing, offices and shops amid the rising traffic drawn to the area by the ferry to Portsmouth; Gosport's most distinctive feature led councillors to describe the old town as the 'front door' of the borough.<sup>3</sup> In 1944 the passenger ferries transported nine million people across the water, most of whom arrived at the Gosport terminus by bus. Max Lock in 1949 recorded that 24,000 foot-passengers and 3,600 bicycles were carried each day. By contrast, the 'floating bridge' vehicle ferry took only 20 cars at a time and closed in 1959.<sup>4</sup> The council had cleared part of the foreshore to create the Esplanade Gardens in 1924 and looked to expand this amenity southwards by relocating boatyards there to the north side of North Street.

Apart from slum clearance programmes there seem to have been no comprehensive programme of redevelopment for the old town before 1941. The exception was the construction of 20 houses built privately in 1936 for Rev. H. J. Cobbett on the south side of Church Path, adjoining the small streets of late Georgian housing on land that had formerly been part of the fortifications. These conventional two-storey brick houses were arranged as four terraces each of four houses, with two pairs on its eastern corner. They do not appear on the 1938 Ordnance Survey map, which otherwise gives a good indication of the state of the town as war began (Fig. 4).

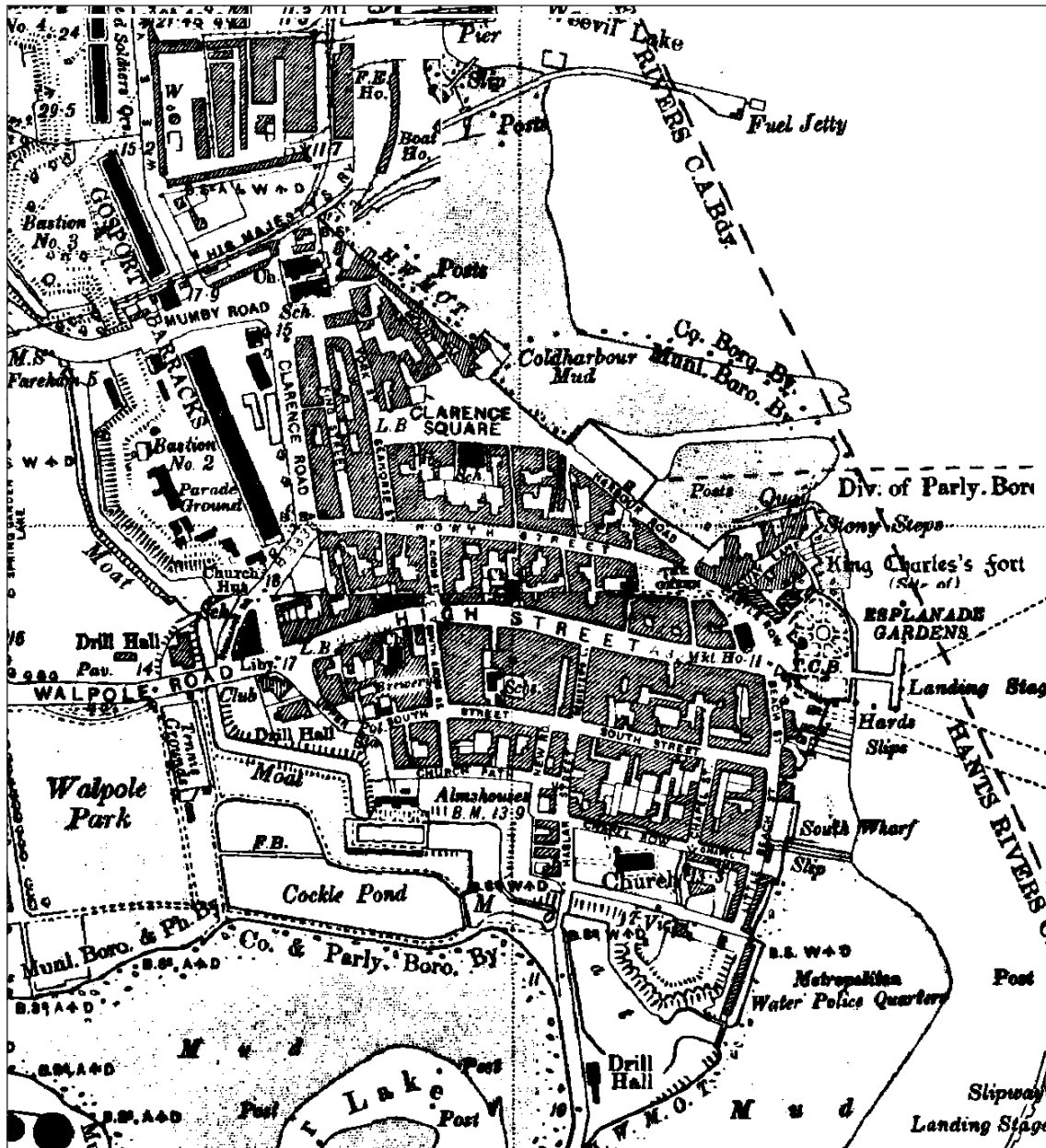


Figure 4: The 1938 Ordnance Survey map does not show the houses on Church Path but is otherwise a good indication of Gosport immediately before the war [© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2022). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024].

## The Impact of the Second World War

Gosport, like Portsmouth, suffered heavily from war damage (Fig. 5). The aerial photograph taken in 1945 shows clearly the severe damage to the heart of the town, with the housing around the church (and the new housing just beyond) surviving rather better. The most severe raids were on the nights of 10/11 January and 10/11 March 1941, the latter seeing serious damage to the town hall, congregational church, police station, magistrates' court and the Thorngate Hall, a magnificent assembly room by Davis & Emmanuel opened in 1885. These buildings formed a civic enclave to the south of the High Street and west of South Cross Street.<sup>5</sup> To the



Figure 5: Gosport in 1945. Note the large cleared area south (left) of the High Street. [By kind permission of Nev Churcher].

north there was also damage to Clarence Square, three irregular and run-down terraces from the early nineteenth century that overlooked the harbour on the fourth side. At the end of the war, the borough council reported that 422 high explosive bombs had landed on the town, mostly near the harbour. A total of 454 properties were totally destroyed and 933 seriously damaged; only one building in 13 across the borough survived unscathed and in the old town a quarter of all properties were deemed beyond repair.<sup>6</sup> Those who could move out did so, leaving many buildings to become derelict.<sup>7</sup>

At its meeting of 9 September 1941, the Plans and Buildings Committee of the Metropolitan Borough of Gosport (Gosport MB) claimed already to have a 'draft planning scheme'. However, it accepted that something more thoroughgoing was needed in response to enemy action and resolved to prepare 'a scheme to control the re-development of the destroyed areas' that could be implemented as soon as hostilities ended.<sup>8</sup> It appointed a reconstruction sub-committee which met from October 1941 until July 1949. This was formed of seven members of the council and one representative from each of the Gosport Owners and Tenants Protection Association, Gosport and Fareham Federation of Building Trades Employers, Gosport and District Trades Council, Gosport Chamber of Trade and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Architectural Association; a member of the Portsmouth Interdenominational Committee joined in 1946 to represent church interests.

During the war, the borough council also acquired 150 acres at Bridgemary, some four miles north-west of the old town, where it planned a large housing estate with its own community buildings and shops. It began building as early as August 1945, when it agreed a contract with the builders John Laing & Son for 200 houses built to its Easiform system of prefabricated concrete construction, the first of many deals with major building firms that bolstered Gosport's impressive housebuilding record. The government allocated 600 of its 'temporary houses' or prefabs, some 200 of which were also erected at Bridgemary. Additionally, the council assisted the Victory Housing Society, a housing association for the armed forces, to acquire and develop an estate of 278 houses for serving naval ratings, completed in 1952. This ambitious programme was led by Alfred Robert (Bob) Nobes (1905-65), from a family of builders and Gosport's first Labour councillor; he represented the Brockhurst and Elson Ward from 1931, the Town Ward from 1934 and Bridgemary as alderman from 1952. He was also chairman of the Gosport Labour Party and served as mayor in 1946-9.<sup>9</sup> In 1956 the *Hampshire Telegraph* recorded that 'During the dark days of World War II, Alderman A. R. Nobes was preparing his housing programme with the result that at the end of hostilities, Gosport leaped ahead of all other towns in the country'.<sup>10</sup> He subsequently served on the influential Parker Morris Committee, which in 1961 set out new standards for council housing, and the main committee room in the town hall was named after him in 1975.

In a private memorandum of 1952, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) rated Gosport as 'an efficient and expanding town and a good housing authority that has built considerably above the average of houses'.<sup>11</sup> The town's growth was supported by old-established firms and a large number of jobs connected with the armed forces, many taken by ex-servicemen who settled permanently in the area. Other families arrived from Portsmouth, whose housebuilding programme lagged behind Gosport's, and there was a large retirement population. But with water on three sides, large areas still in military ownership and protected prime farmland at the heart of the peninsula, land for housing was limited. This led in 1952 to a stand-off between the council, the Ministry of Agriculture and the War Office, until Ernest Marples, permanent secretary at the MHLG, negotiated the release of military sites and more building at Bridgemary. Portsmouth's own building programme at Leigh Park was finally approved in April 1952, but relieved only a little of the pressure.<sup>12</sup>

Gosport's population rose from 49,690 in 1949 to 58,840 by 1959, excluding service personnel. A review of the town development plan in 1962 focused on completing Bridgemary and new estates at Lee-on-the-Solent and Fort Gomer. In the late 1960s the borough revised its target population from 69,140 to 78,300 by 1981, based on developing the military Grange Airfield, where the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Public Buildings and Works were already erecting housing for service families, the first phase traditionally, the second and third using Laing's 12M Jespersen system.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile more housing, public and private, spread across the peninsula, almost linking Gosport with Lee-on-the-Solent and Fareham. Thus, the borough council ran a substantial programme of family housing alongside its rebuilding of the old town centre with flats, giving a balance to its provision.

## The First Post-War Plans

John (later Lord) Reith, the former chairman of the BBC, was appointed in September 1940 to the Ministry of Works and Building, which he quickly refashioned as the Ministry of Works and Planning responsible for reconstruction. He encouraged all blitzed towns to make a plan on the broadest and most imaginative lines (Fig. 6). In April 1942 Gosport's councillors debated proposals for the widening of Chapel Lane and Chapel Row, the extension of South Street to provide a service road for the High Street and the widening of North Street. Land north of this was to be zoned for industry, with the High Street left as a general business district and a triangle of land east of Clarence Road 'undetermined'. Land to the south of South Street was to become wholly residential.<sup>14</sup> The council duly approved proposals in May 1942. However, it continued to debate whether the High Street should be widened to cope with the traffic, with a 100ft (30.48m) wide dual carriageway among its proposals, only to recoil when valuers costed the scheme in mid-1945.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 6: Gosport Town Plan, 1952, issued 1955, showing the road proposals cross-hatched [TNA HLG 89/939, as reissued 1961].

Unusually for a small municipal borough, Gosport had its own town planner, Norman Gommersall, appointed as a planning assistant in 1935 and who retired only in March 1975, aged 66.<sup>16</sup> He produced a series of detailed proposals in 1945-6 that form the basis of what was built, before the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 passed planning functions to the county councils and he was transferred to Winchester. He looked to expand the Esplanade Gardens and open space at the ferry head, 'The Hard', with a turning space for cars, taxis and buses. The council agreed that the east end of the High Street could be cleared. In October 1945 Gommersall suggested creating a pedestrian square of shops with central gardens and car parking on the land south of the High Street that had suffered the greatest war damage, but this was rejected as 'unnecessary and unwanted'.<sup>17</sup> He also looked at creating pedestrian ways linking service streets to the north of the High Street, and the retention of Bemisters Lane as an arcade for specialist shopping, rather like Thomas Sharp's better-known proposals for Princesshay in blitzed Exeter.<sup>18</sup> A model and plans were exhibited as early as January 1946, and a revised version of these proposals won outline approval in October 1946 along with the building of flats and creation of more car parking off South Street. Here was the basis of the plan put into operation over the next four decades.

Gommersall's final plans sought to retain more of the surviving buildings and road pattern, after the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in November 1947 had pointed to the shortage of labour and materials for reconstruction.<sup>19</sup> He proposed the widening of the High Street to 60 feet (18.29m), something considered in the 1930s when stores like Woolworth's and Littlewood's had been built with a 'bungalow front' intended to be removed when widening could be enforced along the rest of the road. Burton's, at 111-112 High Street, built in 1930 by its in-house architects, retains this feature. However, Gommersall focused on building relief roads by widening and extending North Street and South Street, which would meet at the east end of High Street in a new roundabout alongside the ferry and a large bus station. Land between South Street, High Street and South Cross Street, including the site of the Thorngate Hall, was identified for public buildings.<sup>20</sup> Service roads would be provided behind the High Street, with King Street becoming that for the shops then lining the east side of Clarence Road. Beyond this, the extension to North Street would be driven through old industrial premises, but also through Clarence Square and the adjoining St Matthew's Church of 1845, demolished in 1954 and its name passed to a new church in Bridgemary. The only survivor in this area was Clarence Square School, built in 1906-7 by the urban district council and now in commercial use.

Gommersall's proposals in 1946 identified the area south of South Street for flats. In April 1949 the Engineer's Department (which included the borough's small team of architectural assistants) produced more detailed proposals, retaining only Holy Trinity Church. It proposed to erect 17 six-storey blocks of flats (588 units in total), beginning along South Street and around Holy Trinity before building alongside the harbour, where there would be a new promenade. The plans included the infilling of the defensive moats (stagnant and considered malarial) with debris from the demolished properties to create open spaces with tennis courts and bowling greens which would be linked by a continuous promenade to a new harbourside walk extending to Ferry Gardens.<sup>21</sup> The council sought approval from the Ecclesiastical

Commissioners to convert Holy Trinity's disused graveyard into an open space with lawns and trees. There would be no shops or pubs, but initial proposals included an infant school and nursery at the south end of the model yacht pond.

The ambitious proposals impressed the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. Its local representative was Colin Buchanan, then a member of its research and advisory team, Planning Technique, but later to become Britain's most important traffic planner with the publication in 1963 of a government report *Traffic in Towns*. He and his successor, a Mr Cooper, agreed to Gommersall's proposals save that they asked for the retention of the Castle public house (then on Harbour Row, now Mumby Road). It was one of six pubs near the ferry, of which four remained in use.<sup>22</sup> Gosport MB's Licensing Planning Committee had proposed to replace these with two new public houses, but the retention of the Castle meant that only one was needed. Unusually the Ark Royal, opened on 18 November 1965 as the new terminus of the High Street, was shared between rival brewers Brickwoods Ltd of Portsmouth and Watney Coombe Reid & Co. Ltd of Alton and London since it replaced three pubs (two owned by Brickwoods and one by Watneys; it is now a coffee shop).<sup>23</sup> Buildings further to the east, including the gutted New Market House of 1811 on the north-east corner of the High Street and the Isle of Wight Hoy Tavern opposite, were approved for demolition.<sup>24</sup> The council duly approved a revised scheme by Ernest Tuck, the incoming borough engineer in succession to a Mr A. Barlow, though it recognised that bombed buildings set to be cleared as part of the redevelopment would receive smaller payments from the War Damage Commission than if they were reinstated.

Gommersall's post was transferred to the county council under the 1947 Town Planning Act, but he continued to work closely with Gosport Borough Council. Before construction could begin, however, Gosport had to await the production of a regional plan for Portsmouth and its surrounding area, which was commissioned only in 1947 after the county council and relevant local authorities were summoned to a meeting with the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and admonished for their tardiness.<sup>25</sup> Finally published in 1949, its chief author was Max Lock, an architect-planner who had made his reputation during the war with a master plan for Middlesbrough based on an unusually detailed survey of the existing town and its environs. Gosport's councillors urged him to give priority to their blitzed old town while accepting his revisions – all matters of detail – to their development at Bridgemary.

Lock's report identified small pockets of 'blight' in the borough, defined as houses in bad structural condition, lacking a bath and/or indoor toilet, set in terraces of more than ten units without rear access or at a density of more than 50 to the acre.<sup>26</sup> It encouraged reconstruction in the old town, a better ferry service and the building of a tunnel under Portsmouth Harbour. It also sought a greater economic diversity, noting how war damage had weakened the position of the old town as Gosport's shopping, commercial and administrative centre, with Stoke Road picking up much of its retail trade, and recommended that it be restored to its pre-war status since it was the natural focus of the bus and ferry routes. Lock recognised the problems of traffic congestion and access from the western parts of the borough, however,



and confirmed the essentials of Gommersall's plan. As well as roads, he noted that 'Gosport intend to provide in the Plan for their Central Area a number of flats on the south side of this area, which should more than accommodate the present population living there, and those who live in blighted houses'. He encouraged the armed forces to release land for a primary school there, and for more housing between Alverstoke and Lee-on-the-Solent.<sup>27</sup> Lock emphasised that reconstruction should begin as soon as possible, before the old town became wholly derelict.

Gosport Borough Council accepted Lock's recommendations for the old town in outline in February 1950 but reserved the right to make its own decisions on details.<sup>28</sup> In meetings over the next two years it debated the line of the northern thoroughfare, realised as an extension to Mumby Road, and whether decent houses south of South Street, including The Hall as well as houses on Chapel Row, should be included in the Comprehensive Development Order (Figs 7 and 8). In March 1953 council officers met representatives of the MHLG to discuss the removal of 20, 21 and 22 Chapel Row from the national list of buildings of special architectural and/or historic interest, agreed in July 1954 after the local MP gave his support for their demolition.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 7: South Street, No. 1 Area; Compulsory Purchase Order, 16 October 1953. The listed buildings are shown hatched. [TNA HLG 111/2990].



Figure 8: Panorama View of Chapel Row, 1953, annotated 'being demolished in 1955'. [Historic England Archive MHLG 1687\_137/op36217].

A 'Gosport Town Map', produced in 1955 by the county planning officer T. F. Thomson as part of the Hampshire Development Plan, identified the old town as a comprehensive development area (Fig. 6). It set out the routes for South Street and for an extension of Mumby Road to North Street, with a new bus station at the ferry head where they met. It followed the detailed layout presented by Ernest Tuck in 1951. This plan reserved a large site bounded by the High Street, South Street, South Cross Street and the Ritz cinema (now the site of an Iceland store) for municipal offices, a post office, police station and court buildings. Hampshire County Council had agreed the southern part of this site at the corner of South Street and South Cross Street for its new courthouse and police station which, once built, would permit the war-damaged buildings to be demolished. The council confirmed the area south of South Street for housing and that north of North Street for industry – including the relocation of the marine firm Camper & Nicholson from land by the harbour on the south side of the town off Beach Road.<sup>30</sup>

A review of the plan in 1959 noted that 2,261 dwellings had been built across the borough since 1951, including 1,348 flats.<sup>31</sup> It added more land for industry and identified three areas for car parking in the old town. That year Hampshire returned some of Gosport's earlier planning powers, and back came Gommersall along with an assistant, H. J. Darby, who saw the work through over the following decade. The Town Centre Map was again updated in 1970, when it included proposals for pedestrianising the High Street. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1971 and local government reorganisation in 1974 strengthened the planning powers of second-tier authorities like Gosport – for example, in declaring comprehensive development areas. The council restructured its organisation in 1974, introducing a chief technical officer (again an engineer) and a borough architect primarily responsible for housing.<sup>32</sup>

Not everyone supported Gosport's programme of comprehensive renewal. In 1963 the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England identified Gosport as one of four towns that had lost the highest proportion of its historic buildings. The Civic Trust followed this up, declaring in 1967 that Gosport was a 'horrifying

sight because of its destruction of many fine Georgian buildings'.<sup>33</sup> Most notable was a campaign to save The Hall led by a 14-year-old schoolboy, Stephen Weeks, who claimed that the council had demolished 56 listed buildings (including local listings) between 1947 and 1965 (Figs 9).<sup>34</sup> Gosport declared its first four conservation areas only in March 1975, when it began to take a firm stance on details such as roof extensions as well as the retention of the buildings in these areas.<sup>35</sup> However, it did not entirely change its position as regards the old town, although the High Street became the fifth conservation area, declared in September 1978 when agreement was also reached with John Blundell Ltd to create a service road between the High Street and the Crown public house on North Street.<sup>36</sup>



Figures 9: The Hall, Haslar Street, in 1965; the aerial view was taken from the tower block in the other picture [Historic England Archive, bb65/1190 (EP:1688\_195) and bb65/1188 (EP:1688\_199)].

## The Housing South of South Street

The council's first housing scheme near the old town comprised 110 units on the south end of Walpole Park, approved in December 1949. The council had had to accept a covenant forbidding any permanent buildings when it first acquired the land from the War Department, but in 1938-9 it had succeeded in lifting the covenant to build new civic offices; in the late 1940s housing had to be prioritised. Willis Road was laid out and 88 flats and 44 houses went out to tender in April 1952. The first major residential development planned within the old town was for 96 flats 'up to five storeys high' on the south side of South Street. Gosport MB made a compulsory purchase order in September 1952 for a strip of land between South Street and Church Path, and continuing eastwards to a similar extent and width but also including the listed 65-7 (consecutive) Chapel Row immediately to the south (Figs 7 and 8).<sup>37</sup> Development was delayed because the council tried to use old planning legislation (the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act) to secure the site, thinking it would get better terms than under the 1949 Housing Act that superseded its provisions, and because of steel shortages.<sup>38</sup> In January 1953 the borough engineer submitted several alternative layouts for four blocks of 'double-storey' units (i.e. maisonettes) with drying areas.<sup>39</sup>

Instead of using its own plans, however, the council turned to George Wimpey & Co., who tendered in January 1954 to build five blocks, each of five storeys and comprising two tiers of maisonettes over three ground-floor flats. They were to be built using its 'no-fines' system of reinforced concrete. No-fines was a technique first developed in the Netherlands in the 1920s that used reinforced concrete with no sand or fine material in the aggregate. This produced a drier mix that was easier and quicker to use than conventional concrete construction, mainly since the concrete did not make the shuttering heavy and wet, so allowing it to be reused more often. The system did not permit large window openings but the holes between the large pebble aggregate made for good insulation; these holes are a distinctive feature of no-fines but are rarely seen since the concrete is generally rendered inside and out.

A number of major building firms experimented with no-fines concrete, including Laings and Holland, Hannen & Cubitt, but only Wimpeys developed the system extensively. A shortage of skilled labour in the post-war years made it an attractive option for a large, well-organised firm that had the capital resources to invest in shuttering. By 1951 Wimpeys could build 10,000 houses a year and offered a wide variety of plan types for three large suburban estates built at Coventry from that time onwards. It then began to use the system for larger flats, building six-storey blocks at Birmingham in 1953 and 11-storey point blocks at Tile Hill, Coventry, in 1956. Gosport councillors visited no-fines schemes at Coventry in November 1953 before selecting Wimpeys in December.<sup>40</sup> In June 1968 the firm claimed that three-quarters of a million people were living in no-fines accommodation, but new commissions then declined rapidly, as local authorities withdrew from system building following the collapse of Ronan Point, Newham, and timber-framed and traditional brick construction became more competitive.<sup>41</sup> However, Wimpeys continued to work extensively for Gosport Borough Council, for example building low-rise rented housing at Alverstoke Green in 1974-6.

It is likely that Gosport developed a tradition of working with large construction companies because, like most small authorities in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it could not attract and keep architects. The architectural team within the Borough Engineer's Department numbered no more than ten assistants and trainees at its height in the late 1960s. It was headed from 1949 by (John) Edward Tyrrell, who had joined the council in 1947 and who made his career in the town, retiring in June 1973.<sup>42</sup> As well as designing new buildings he advised on the refurbishment of older properties and was a member of the Gosport Records and Museum Society, serving on its advisory committee in 1971. Most of his assistants moved on after two or three years. As well as working with Wimpeys and Laing, the council also commissioned considerable housing from Selleck Nicholls & Co., developer of the Cornish system using clinker from china clay works around St Austell – for example, at Rowner and in Wilmott Lane, Forton.

Wimpeys revised their five-storey design at Gosport in February or March 1953 to incorporate coal sheds and pram stores for each unit as part of the main blocks rather than making these into separate structures. Demolition work for the first block began in April 1954.<sup>43</sup> Construction then proceeded rapidly and in November the council agreed to name the new blocks from west to east: Burney House, York House, Rodney House, Nelson House and Trinity House – the latter renamed Winchfield House in March 1955 since the vicarage was already called Trinity House.<sup>44</sup> A sixth block – Portland House – followed to the west in 1959 on the site of Portland Place (acquired separately since it was Crown Land), after it was agreed not to build council offices on this site but to extend the town hall (Fig. 10).



Figure 10: Five-storey Wimpey blocks on Church Path [Elain Harwood, EH00110].

In early 1958 the corporation looked to continue its redevelopment south of South Street. It considered using Selleck Nicholls's four-storey units, but in February decided that two 11-storey Wimpey blocks each of 22 two-bedroom flats and 43 one-bedroom flats would give a higher density and in June agreed a tender of £267,524.<sup>45</sup> Work began in 1959 with the demolition of South Street and Chapel Street, as well as the listed 11-16 Chapel Row. The scheme initially included 14 garages, subsequently increased to 46. The council agreed to give priority to sitting tenants and those already living and working in the borough, with rents of 64/- (£3.20) for upper-floor flats and 45/- (£2.25) for those at the bottom, including underfloor heating. Maple trees were supplied by Hilliers of Winchester (then Britain's largest firm of horticulturalists) as landscaping.<sup>46</sup>

Blake Court was completed in December 1959, when it was open for public tours for three days, as was Hammond Court in February 1960 (Fig. 11). The blocks were well-equipped, with a laundry room containing a spin dryer provided on each floor, and a resident caretaker at Blake Court kept them in good order. In June 1958, the council approved a model for the entire redevelopment of the peninsula south of South Street, featuring an old peoples' home, houses, two-storey flats and more tall flats. In all the area was to have 709 housing units accommodating 2,115 people.<sup>47</sup> This suggests that there was some consistent thought given to the housing provision, despite its loose-knit, open appearance.



Figure 11: Blake Court, 11-storey Wimpey Block, Haslar Road [Elain Harwood, EH09803].

Again in 1958, the council secured land to the west of Haslar Street from the Crown and local grocers R. D. Gunton. For this site it commissioned two blocks of one-bedroom flats from Selleck Nicholls, which displaced some of the defensive earthworks.<sup>48</sup> The full council agreed in May, when it reserved the rest of the land west of Haslar Street facing Haslar Creek for a school, never realised. The two blocks, which were named Trinity Close only in 1973, were completed in May 1960 (Fig. 12).<sup>49</sup>

The first sheltered accommodation for pensioners was approved in October 1958, a block of 13 flats, of which two were for couples, with a warden's flat. The MHLG published a series of booklets on flatlets for the elderly, which it recommended as offering greater independence than a conventional old people's home, and Gosport Council picked up on the second of its circulars, *More Flatlets for Old People*, published in 1960.<sup>50</sup> Members of the council visited the Government's model block of sheltered flats at Stevenage in March 1962, but this was only after building its own



Figure 12: Trinity Close, Selleck Nicholls flats, Haslar Road [Elain Harwood, EH09806].

block. This replaced the Peachey Charity's almshouses in Haslar Street, demolished in 1961, and was named Barclay House after the Rev. C. L. T. Barclay, since 1936 the vicar of Holy Trinity, who opened the building in August 1961. A second block was quickly built alongside, originally named Gloster House but now 15-28 Barclay House. This was more sophisticated in its design than the first, with a screened bed recess and better insulation; the installation of a public phone for the residents was regarded as a major amenity. A television (and licence) came from a private donor. The block also included a visitor's room where a friend or family member could stay for 3s.-5s. per night (Fig 13).



Figure 13: Barclay House, with Blake Court and Hammond Court behind [Elain Harwood, EH00095].

Between the two blocks the council built a three-storey block of nine houses and two flats, approved in November 1961. This seems to have used traditional construction and an in-house design, for which tenders were received in April 1962; building began in November that year, when it was named The Mews (Fig. 14).<sup>51</sup> In 1960 the council proposed another five-storey block, on land behind the Holy Trinity vicarage, and a two-storey range of flats on the site of nineteenth-century accommodation for the Water Police.



Figure 14: The Mews, with Blake Court behind [Elain Harwood, EH00108].

Then in December 1960 the Housing Committee considered a scheme by Wimpeys for two 14-storey blocks on the site of Camper & Nicholson's slipways next to the water, containing one- and two-bedroom flats and a rooftop observation room.<sup>52</sup> There were also to be garages and parking for cars and motor bikes below a first-floor promenade deck for residents.<sup>53</sup> The next month the blocks were raised to 16 storeys; flats over 11 storeys needed expensive piled foundations so the extra storeys offered an economy of scale, and in March 1961 the MHLG gave its approval. Camper & Nicholson relocated north of North Street, expanding their original premises in Quay Lane and Harbour Road so that its site along Beach Street could be laid out as an esplanade, later extended along Little Beach Street. Other industries also moved from the South Street area: the corset makers Twilfit built a new factory in Mumby Road (now demolished) and Blake's Engineering moved to Park Road, Alverstoke (also now demolished).<sup>54</sup> A new sea wall was begun in 1966, with parking, gardens and a promenade linking up with Ferry Gardens by the early 1970s.<sup>55</sup> The council provided a new maintenance building for the Portsmouth Harbour Ferry Company in Mumby Road, so that its old site could also be laid out as gardens.



The 16-storey flats were not only the last element of the council's post-war housing programme south of South Street, but also the most ambitious. Each floor above the ground floor contained four one-bedroom flats and four with two bedrooms. The borough engineer in January 1961 asked the Housing Committee to reflect on the two towers' prominence on the Gosport waterfront and recommended that they be decorated with tile murals, submitting a sketch. In February 1961 the Housing Committee approved a design for a mosaic mural on each tower, at a cost of £2,400 per block or £20 per flat, 'satisfied that they would improve the aesthetic value of the blocks'.<sup>56</sup> In March 1962 Wimpey produced two detailed designs, one black, white and blue and one black, white and red. This suggests that while the idea of the mural may have come from Tyrrell and his team, the actual design was worked up by Kenneth Barden, a young in-house architect with Wimpey who also designed a tile mural at Halifax Swimming Pool, built in 1964-6 to designs by F. H. Hoyles, deputy borough architect.<sup>57</sup> At Gosport, Tyrrell's initials appear with Barden's on the murals. The mosaic pieces were manufactured by Carter's of Poole.

The Housing Committee considered that the mural should include a continuous 'vertical sight line' for shipping, which was approved in June 1961 along with moorings for visiting boats.<sup>58</sup> However, in the final designs of March 1962 the 'sight line' was realised by ensuring that the adjoining set of windows were given white window frames, lintels and spandrel panels, while in the mosaic the most continuous lines are black (Fig. 15). The mosaics were extended along the screen walls concealing the parking for cars and motor bikes; it was also agreed to introduce mosaics round the entrance doorways, a feature that was either never realised or which has been altered. The names Seaward and Harbour towers, with Watergate for the two-storey range of 24 one-bedroom flats, were approved at the same time.



Figure 15: Seaward and Harbour towers, with murals by Kenneth Barden [Elain Harwood, EH00097].

The design of the flats had been modified in August 1961 to meet restrictions on capital expenditure newly imposed by the Conservative government. Sliding windows to enclose the balconies were withdrawn, though each floor still featured a laundry room and spin dryer. Thicker glass was installed into the top two storeys after problems in gales at similar Wimpey blocks in Sheffield, and timber panelling was introduced by the lifts in the entrance hall. A sign of growing affluence amongst ordinary people was the council's decision in April no longer to fit cookers in its properties, save in cases of hardship, since most people now had their own. It also agreed to finish the flat roofs of the 16- and 11-storey blocks with white granite chippings to reduce what was called 'solar heat', preferred to a coating of whitewash and tallow.<sup>59</sup> Harbour Tower was officially opened in May 1963, followed the next year by Seaward Tower, open for 'public viewing on 29 February and 1

March 1964.<sup>60</sup> Although some flats had been pre-let, in January 1964 the Housing Committee reported a shortage of tenants; notably, it found little demand for the two-bedroom flats, particularly between the sixth and thirteenth floors.<sup>61</sup> This meant that until October 1975 the flats were offered to tenants from outside the borough as well as from within, with priority given to those wanting to downsize from a larger property.

The proposed additional five-storey block was to have been accompanied by a new vicarage. However, in February 1966 the Portsmouth diocese wrote that it could not afford to build one, and the council acknowledged the proximity of the proposed five-storey block to the tall towers. In June 1968 it accepted that the new site for a vicarage was no longer required and the old one was spared; instead, alterations for the church's community work were approved for the ground floor and basement. However, demolition of The Hall began in January 1965 and was finally completed in 1967. Work on re-landscaping Trinity Green had begun in January 1962 with the replacement of gas lamps by new streetlighting. The Thatched House pub on Trinity Green was demolished in early 1962, when proposals for a shop in the area were rejected. Instead the road was widened, and in May 1962 the council invited tenders for the adaptation of the churchyard as a garden of rest crossed by new footpaths.<sup>62</sup> The council agreed to level and landscape the ramparts to the rear in November 1962, finalising its proposals in February 1967 to create more open space.<sup>63</sup>

It remained to complete the new South Relief Road, replacing South Street and bypassing Stoke Road, by the 1950s itself a congested shopping street. The first maps were prepared in 1951 on the basis that no work would begin until the 1970s, but after five years the council recommended that it be included in its more immediate plans. A public inquiry was held in December 1962 and the MHLG included it in its national road policy, but without a fixed start date. However, in March 1968 the council considered a less ambitious scheme, with a single rather than a dual carriageway. The divisional road engineer of the Ministry of Transport then stepped in, recommending a wider road even than that first planned, with the promise of a grant from the minister (Barbara Castle). Duly admonished, the council accepted the need for the dual carriageway, and made an immediate application to build the section between Walpole Park and Shaftesbury Road so as not to delay its new housing at Joseph Street. The agreed route did not change, for the council considered this the cheapest, shortest option that involved the demolition of the fewest properties.<sup>64</sup> The road was finally built in the 1970s, with the western part not completed until 1979.

There was one more attempt to build flats south of South Street, with a proposal in late 1974 to build a block of 65 flats and shops at Trinity Green. Early the next year the council appointed the Architect and Planning Partnership (APP) of Horsham.<sup>65</sup> However, in February 1976 the Department of the Environment advised that high winds roused by the four tower blocks would make building a shopping centre and housing on Trinity Green difficult. The Housing Committee recognised that any scheme would have to be low and dense, taking away the open space. Instead it determined to retain the open spaces round the towers, responding also to public

pressure, or what the press called ‘The Battle of Trinity Green’.<sup>66</sup> A landscaping scheme was approved in December 1977.

## Rebuilding in the High Street

While the 1930s had seen national chains like Woolworth’s and Burton’s build new stores to the designs of its in-house architects, rebuilding in the 1950s and 1960s was largely by speculative companies from which the large stores and supermarkets took leases. The exceptions were the Portsea Island Mutual Co-Operative Society (PIMCO), which used local architects rather than those of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and the banks and building societies which became increasingly prominent in the High Street with the growth of personal banking in the late 1960s and through the 1970s; Barclays and Westminster banks and the Leeds Permanent Building Society are good examples.

The first redevelopment in the High Street, of three shops and four flats by the architects Gunton & Greenburgh, was completed under licensing as early as February 1952.<sup>67</sup> It was followed by the rebuilding of 132 High Street, on the east corner of South Cross Street, by S. W. Turner for Hulverstone Properties, for which permission was granted in May 1955, including a ‘bungalow front’ like that of Burton’s from the 1930s (see p.8) which could be removed if the road was later widened.<sup>68</sup> This was subsequently occupied by PIMCO as a grocery store. Meanwhile the council looked to make a new roundabout and other improvements at the ferry terminus. In April 1958 it applied to demolish the listed 43 North Street, 5 Portland Place and 3-5 Clarence Square as part of its scheme to cut Mumby Road through these old streets.<sup>69</sup>

The council’s opposition to listing continued. In April 1965 it learned that 1 High Street, St George’s Barracks, 6 Seahorse Street and the Seahorse Hotel were to be listed in grade II, and the Bell Hotel, numbers 2, 63-4, 88, 99, 103, 109 and 124-6 High Street, the Haslar Tavern on Trinity Green, and the Clarence Tavern and 1-5 Clarence Road in grade III (an equivalent of local listing that existed until 1967). It immediately opposed all the designations save for the barracks and High Street properties, arguing that the others did not have ‘architectural historic interest of sufficient worth to justify the expense of putting them into a state of preservation’.<sup>70</sup> Today (apart from the barracks) only 1-4, 88, 99/99a, 109 and 125-6 High Street survive, with 6 Seahorse Street (now 9, 13 and 17 Seahorse Walk). Subsequently the following were also listed: 13-14 North Cross Street, the Fox Tavern and 84-92 (consecutive, including the Crown pub) North Street, and 19-22 Seahorse Street (now 6-12 Seahorse Walk).

In January 1963 the council agreed to demolish Blakes’ chandlers’ factory between Bemisters Lane and South Cross Street on South Street to create a service road and car park behind the High Street. It also commissioned a survey of business uses along the whole north side of the High Street and the south side from South Cross Street to the ferry.<sup>71</sup> In May the council bought the Old Northumberland (at no. 72, previously identified as the new eastern terminus of the High Street) and Isle of Wight Hoy public houses for redevelopment, followed in February 1964 by the Ark

Royal on the north-east corner of the High Street, and in July 1963 declared 101-2 High Street (Hope Bros menswear) 'unfit'. The High Street was slowly transformed in a piecemeal way, as reported by the Plans and Buildings Committee of Gosport Borough Council from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, from which the following list is compiled. All numbers in the High Street are consecutive (Fig. 16).

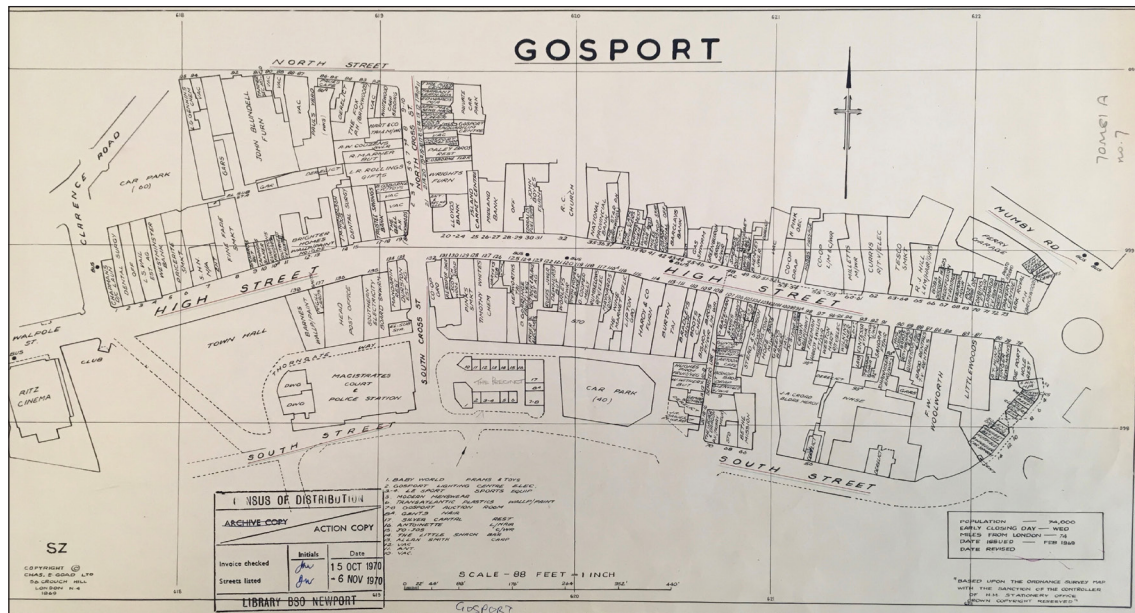


Figure 16: Gosport High Street and surrounding shopping streets in February 1969 [Hampshire Archives, 70M81/7; [© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2022). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024].

## High Street

The following list is taken from the minutes of the Plans and Buildings Committee of Gosport MB from 1945 to 74 and of Gosport Borough Council 1975-80, where the council approved major alterations and the rebuilding of individual properties. It does not include applications for internal alterations, external alterations that did not happen, nor for new shopfronts that have since been replaced again. It will be seen that not every building on the High Street was substantially altered or rebuilt in these years. On the other hand, some new buildings, such as for the Post Office, did not require detailed planning approval and are poorly recorded.

No. 5: new building for the Westminster Bank approved in November 1965.<sup>72</sup>

Nos 6-9: a supermarket and smaller shop approved in January 1961 (Figs 17 and 18).<sup>73</sup>

No. 18: approval for rebuilding the frontage was granted to the Portsmouth Trustees Savings Bank in February 1972.<sup>74</sup>



Figure 17: 1-4 High Street in 1965 [Historic England Archive, bb65\_1030 (EP:1689\_012)].



Figure 18: 5-7 High Street in 1965 [Historic England Archive, bb65\_1033 (EP:1689\_088)].

No. 19: Approval for building the Leeds Permanent Building Society on the site of the Bell public house was granted in September 1974, the new building to be designed by its in-house team of architects and surveyors (Fig. 19).<sup>75</sup>

No. 25: change of use from carpet centre to bank (addition to Lloyd's Bank) approved May 1977.<sup>76</sup>

No. 37: converted from The Star public house (Brickwoods) to a coffee lounge in June 1978.<sup>77</sup>

No. 42: this building was the offices of the *Gosport Journal* and by 1970 of the *Evening News*. Portsmouth and Sunderland Newspapers applied in June 1972 to rebuild the property, which had reported damp problems a decade earlier, and secured approval in November.<sup>78</sup>



Figure 19: former Leeds Permanent Building Society, 1974-5 [James O. Davies © Historic England Archive, DP276894].

Nos 43-4: Barclays Bank rebuilt its Gosport premises in 1967 to the designs of Kelsey, Hunter & Partners after it found that a new building would cost little more than the modernisation and extension of its existing building on this site. The new ground floor was wholly taken up by the banking hall, with other public areas on the first floor and staff facilities to the rear and on the second floor. The stairs are set at an angle behind the blind part of the façade where a Barclays sign and the company crest have been removed in favour of the present fascia. The heavy timber double-doors survive.<sup>79</sup> (Fig. 20)



Figure 20: Barclays Bank, 1967 to the designs of Kelsey, Hunter & Partners [James O. Davies © Historic England Archive, DP276931].

Nos 51-2: these buildings were shown as vacant in the 1969 plan, and a new scheme by A. J. Lockyer and Sons was approved in March 1969.<sup>80</sup>

Nos 53-9: PIMCO, selling ladies, men's and children's clothes, now Superdrug-VPZ; approval for rebuilding with rear extension granted in October 1962.<sup>81</sup>

Nos 63-64: new supermarket (Victor Value/Tesco, now Peacocks) for the Arndale Property Trust; approved in September 1968 to designs by architects by Newman Levinson & Partners.<sup>82</sup>

Nos 65-74: in January 1963 the council asked William Saunders & Son (architects of the town hall) and a Mr Tomlinson (also an architect) to undertake the rebuilding as a co-ordinated development, along with a Mr Hill at the Ark Royal public house (no.74).<sup>83</sup> The Ark Royal opened in November 1965 on the site of the Old Northumberland public house and early nineteenth-century market hall gutted in the war.

Nos 79-80 (south-east corner, now the Great Wall Chinese restaurant and Fry Days restaurant): approval for rebuilding as the Porthole restaurant approved in January 1963.<sup>84</sup>

Nos 81-4: (New Look) was formerly Littlewoods.

Nos 85-6: (Poundland/Pepco) was formerly Woolworth's and retains its 1930s façade on the first floor.

Nos 105-6: rebuilding with two-storey offices over shops approved in March 1974, but only a partial refronting seems to have taken place.<sup>85</sup>

No. 109: substantial alterations approved for Boots in July 1963; further alterations and additions in July 1968.<sup>86</sup>

Nos 111-12: Montague Burton's outfitters was built in 1930 by its in-house architects under Harry Wilson, on the site of George Cooke's grocery store. An application for a new shopfront was submitted in October 1969 and approved in March 1970; however, it retains its bungalow front (Fig. 21).<sup>87</sup>

No. 114: substantial alterations approved for Hardy & Co. (furnishers) in July 1965.<sup>88</sup>

No. 121: new shopfront for J. H. Dewhurst, butchers (now The Legend hairdressers) approved May 1970.<sup>89</sup>

No. 123: new shopfront approved, September 1972.<sup>90</sup>



Figure 21: Burton's store, 1930, ground floor remodelled c. 1970 [James O. Davies © Historic England Archive, DP276970].

No. 127: new shopfront for Boots approved in June 1971.<sup>91</sup>

No. 128: alterations for Abbey National Building Society (now Santander) approved in September 1972.<sup>92</sup>

No. 132: an extension by PIMCO approved in July 1973, matching existing materials.<sup>93</sup>

No. 135: this building was the Southern Electricity Showroom (now Bright House).

Nos 136-7: these premises were formerly the head post office, built in 1960-1 (see below).

Nos 138-9: Barnes & Co, selling wallpaper and paint, remodelled their shop and extended into No. 140 in late 1958, before securing permission for a full rebuilding in January 1962 of their site between the town hall and post office notable for its blue tiles (now A Plus/boarded up, Fig. 22).<sup>94</sup>





Figure 22: Former Barnes wallpaper and paint shop, 1962 [James O. Davies © Historic England Archive, DP276994].

## Other Shopping Streets in the Old Town

Other streets adjoining the High Street also contained shops which were wholly or partly rebuilt in the post-war years. At 2-14 South Street, new shop fronts were approved in March-September 1965 suggesting the block was newly completed.<sup>95</sup> In June 1968 permission was granted to Mr J. Valente for a restaurant at No. 6, extending over the first floors of the adjoining properties. Napier, Harding & Partners inquired in March 1961 about building a shopping precinct on the corner of South Street and South Cross Street.<sup>96</sup> The site was very close to that suggested by Norman Gommersall for a pedestrian precinct back in October 1945. The council had acquired the land under a compulsory purchase order of 1952, but it had become surplus to its needs, so it recommended approval. A precinct was eventually built by Central and Provincial Properties in 1966-8 (Fig. 23).<sup>97</sup>

Other development directly on to South Street was discouraged. In March 1955 the brewers Friary Holroyd & Healy inquired whether Gosport Borough Council would seek to make a compulsory purchase order for the George and Dragon public house, dating from about 1889, with the reply that one would be sought in about five years' time. Instead the Haslar Tavern closed in 1964 to permit the widening of Haslar Street, renamed Haslar Road. An amendment to the original plan in 1968 increased land for parking and open space, and confirmed the retention of the George and Dragon as a terminating feature of Bemister's Lane.<sup>98</sup> The car park on South Street next to Bemister's Lane was laid out in October 1971, and alterations to the George and Dragon by Ind Coope were approved in May 1972. In February 1976 Ind Coope agreed to pay for a seat on the vacant site adjoining the pub, creating 'an amenity and rest area' in collaboration with the Gosport Chamber of Commerce, which survives.<sup>99</sup>



Figure 23: Gosport Shopping Precinct, South Cross Street, 1966-8, architect unknown [Elain Harwood, EH09788].

In January 1973 the corporation also considered a detailed scheme for a three-storey car park and shopping precinct in an L-shaped plot behind Bemister's Lane and the High Street, accessed using the existing passage between 93 and 94 High Street, but this had been abandoned by 1975.<sup>100</sup>

## Stoke Road

Stoke Road differs from the High Street in that it was traditionally filled with smaller, mainly local shops rather than national multiples and this continued in the post-war years until the building of Waitrose in 1972-3. The result was attractive parades of shops, notably Portland Buildings from the 1930s but also Stokesway from the 1960s. However, some units were set back in anticipation of future road widening: the Rose and Crown rebuilt for Watneys in 1960, nos.47-51 and the former PIMCO store at 13-15 Stoke Road, now a snooker hall. Larger development reached the road in the 1970s with the building of South Street nearby to relieve it of traffic congestion, when it also became a focus for the building of small office blocks and flats. A detailed breakdown of the later post-war buildings in Stoke Road follows:

No. 9: new shop front for PIMCO approved in September 1975.<sup>101</sup>

No. 13: new shop front approved in May 1972.<sup>102</sup>

No. 27: new shop front for the New Bengal Restaurant approved in October 1971 (the restaurant is still there, but it is not clear if it retains that shopfront).<sup>103</sup>

No. 40: a three-storey office scheme by the architect Hedley Greentree (see below) on the site of Fox's Furnishings' derelict showrooms was approved in October 1973, but a new scheme of offices with a showroom (Cray House) was substituted in May 1974.<sup>104</sup>

No. 49: shops created from former car showroom, approved December 1971.<sup>105</sup>

No. 89: new shop front approved in April 1971.<sup>106</sup>

No. 91: new shop front approved in November 1971.<sup>107</sup>

Nos 97-9: new shop front approved in September 1971.<sup>108</sup>

Nos 135-41: an application for a supermarket, store and petrol station on the block between Molesworth and Shaftesbury roads, including the site of the former Forum Cinema (already converted into a car showroom and petrol station), was first made in May 1971 by the Gredley Investment Company and finally approved in June 1972. The designer was Hedley A. Greentree (1939-2016), a Portsmouth-born architect who was later responsible for the Spinnaker Tower, Gunwharf Quays, Port Solent and the Solent Hotel in his native city. The landmark white building acknowledged the curved faience façade of the former cinema. The Stoke Road scheme was delayed by problems of vehicular access and landscaping to the rear, where Shaftesbury Road was widened. The shop front for Waitrose was approved in January 1973 when new developers, Lane, Fox & Co., applied to build a three-storey block of offices and shops on the corner of Molesworth Road, using the same materials and distinctive façade treatment – so suggesting that Greentree was again involved.<sup>109</sup>

Stokesway: The flats to the rear were approved in August 1972, built for the Reynolds Trust, but Stokesway itself is rather earlier.<sup>110</sup>

Corner of Stoke Road and Queen's Road: a scheme of nine three-storey houses and garages was approved in March 1980.<sup>111</sup>

Jamaica Road was created as a rear loading road to Stoke Road in 1971 as part of the extensive Joseph Street housing redevelopment. It includes one remarkable house, Jamaica Cottage, built in 1974-5 by Nev Churcher of Hampshire Architect's Department for himself, his wife and their two children.<sup>112</sup>

## **Public Buildings in the High Street Area**

A group of public buildings replaced the large bombsite bounded by the High Street, South Cross Street and what was then Upper South Street, an extension of South Street which joined Walpole Road at its junction with the High Street outside the Conservative Club. One of the most significant wartime losses was the courthouse at the heart of this site, with the police station also suffering damage. In December 1949 Gosport Borough Council agreed a site for a new police station at the corner

of South Street and South Cross Street, with a courthouse set behind it where noise from traffic would be less. The following February it suggested that a new post office should occupy land on the High Street between this complex and the town hall, already proposed for extension. This was agreed and the sites duly reserved, while the police station and court were completed by the county council in 1957 (Fig. 24). The police station was extended in 1973-4.



Figure 24: Police Station and Magistrates' Court, South Street, Hampshire County Council, 1955-7 [Elain Harwood, EH00111].

In 1955 the Ministry of Works sought a larger site for its post office to include a sorting office, but in March S. J. Baglis, an administrator in the General Post Office's headquarters, accepted the need for a building in the High Street (with a separate depot elsewhere).<sup>113</sup> This was delayed in 1957-8 by government restrictions on capital expenditure following the Suez Crisis of 1956 and a subsequent backlog of public building works, and in 1959 members of the council met representatives of the Minister of Works and Postmaster General to hasten the Gosport building.<sup>114</sup> It seems to have been finally built in 1960-1.

By 1960, Gosport had raised the number of its councillors to 40 and was looking for a larger council chamber and committee room, as well as more offices for its growing staff. After considering a site for new offices south of South Street, it decided instead to extend the existing town hall, built in 1885 to the designs of London architects Davis & Emanuel. The site was that of the bombed out Congregational Church between it and the new post office, and the councillors envisaged these would form a group of public buildings along with the new courthouse and police station. When it proved impossible to recruit its own temporary architectural staff, Gosport Borough Council advertised for a private firm to take on the job, selecting William H. Saunders & Son of Southampton.<sup>115</sup> The council proposed to link the old

town hall to the new works by a bridge, recommending in January 1961 that the old council chamber should be subdivided into committee rooms. In the same month it approved the demolition of 140-148 High Street for the extension.<sup>116</sup> In January 1962 the architect Reginald Leggatt of W. H. Saunders & Son produced plans featuring a new mayoral suite and new offices, along with improvements to the existing building.<sup>117</sup> Thorngate Way, on the east side of the old town hall, was stopped up in October 1962, followed by South Cross Street in April 1963; the MHLG gave its final approval and Jonathan Croad, a local contractor with a depot in the old town, secured the tender in January 1963.<sup>118</sup>

However, in July 1964 the council resolved to entirely rebuild the town hall, with a mayoral suite and a library on the site of Davis and Emanuel's building.<sup>119</sup> Saunders & Son produced a new scheme in September 1964, but the MHLG rejected it, ruling that the library should be a separate building. The architects duly produced yet another design in October, with the main five-storey block already under construction now to be flanked by two two-storey wings, one containing a first-floor mayoral suite, and to the south a second wing linked by a ground-floor colonnade to a new library. The first stage opened in March 1965.<sup>120</sup> The circular council chamber facing the remains of Upper South Street was completed in 1969-70 but there were problems with the acoustics and amplification was introduced in March 1972.<sup>121</sup> Saunders & Son produced a new scheme for an extension to the south of the council chamber in April 1970, and approval was given for a further extension to the ground floor in September 1975 (Fig. 25).



Figure 25: Gosport Town Hall, 1964-76, by W. H. Saunders & Son [Elain Harwood, EH09778].

Gosport had a fine public library on the corner of the High Street and Walpole Road, built in 1900-1 by A. W. S. Cross of Spalding & Cross, best known as specialists in designing public baths and swimming pools. It remains the town's most elaborate Arts and Crafts building. It was extended in 1902 to provide a technical institute, which was quickly taken over by the county council under the Education Act that year to become the Boys' County Grammar School and extended in 1907. However, in 1959 the library was declared to be too small, and the children's library was moved into a former air raid shelter next door and then into the ground floor of the school, which had moved to new buildings in 1957. From 1962 the borough council operated its limited educational functions from offices also in this building.

In May 1964, the Watch and Library Committee proposed building a new library on the edge of Walpole Park next to the Ritz Cinema (now Iceland), but this was rejected by the main council. Instead it asked William Saunders & Son to add a library on the ground floor of the town hall, prompting it in July 1964 to produce the revised scheme that replaced the old town hall. Following the MHLG's ruling, W. H. Saunders & Son submitted separate plans in December 1964, placing a reference library on the lower ground floor, with lending and children's libraries above and a first-floor lecture hall alongside space for a music and picture library. The council asked for more natural light. Revised plans in February 1965 proposed a basement stack, ground-floor lending library and children's library, a first-floor reference and periodicals library and a second floor devoted to a lecture hall, music and picture library, and an area dedicated to quiet study and homework.<sup>122</sup>

Building was then delayed, as experienced with public buildings across the country, by local government reorganisation. Many authorities set to be merged or lose status built a public library at this time as a memorial, and although this was not specifically minuted the councillors were disappointed to lose their library and remaining education functions. They recognised that their expenditure on its library service was one of the lowest in the country for an authority of its size, so new buildings offered some redress.<sup>123</sup> It went ahead with a new central library (and branches at Elson and Bridgemary) before responsibility for the borough's library service passed in April 1974 to the county council. The library adviser of the Department of Education and Science (DES) confirmed the need for a separate site for the central library, and in October 1969 the council determined that the Connaught Drill Hall on Upper South Street, built in 1902 and used since 1962 as county council offices, was the most suitable site, reporting that a new library would be 'more in keeping with the modern municipal and private development in this area'.<sup>124</sup> It commissioned yet another design, considered in April 1970.<sup>125</sup> Again the DES stepped in, recommending that it be reconfigured to make better use of the site, should include a disabled lift, and that there should be areas for both fiction and popular non-fiction on the ground floor.

The final layout was confirmed in August 1972. The complex plan was a 3:2 section around the central stairs, with subject bays and music on the floors above the popular area, with higher ceiling heights to two reference floors – the lower one featuring areas devoted to newspapers and quiet study and the upper one devoted to local history collections.<sup>126</sup> The new library covered 24,000 square feet compared

with 8,000 in the old one. Details of the concrete frame and brick construction, with tile floors, hardwood stairs and mild steel balustrades were also approved at this time.<sup>127</sup> The council completed its purchase of the drill hall in March 1971 and accepted tenders in August.

A foundation stone was laid in February 1972, coinciding with the appointment as borough librarian of Miss Joan Lockhart, who had joined the service as a junior assistant in 1947 and overseen the design of the new building. Committee members visited the new library at Andover to inspect its internal decoration before determining that at Gosport.<sup>128</sup> Upper South Street was finally closed between the town hall and library in April 1973. The new library was officially opened by Lord Maybray-King (a former Southampton MP and Speaker of the House of Commons) on 31 October 1973, and admitted the public from 1 November 1973.<sup>129</sup> It was agreed in January 1974 that the old library should become a museum, and this officially opened in April 1976.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, as part of his final work before retirement, the council's own architect Edward Tyrrell produced designs for the branch libraries at Elson and Bridgemary, considered by the council in March 1973 and opened in November 1975 (Fig. 26).<sup>131</sup>

The in-house architects and engineers submitted their first proposals for a new bus station in March 1965, along with a roundabout at the east end of the High Street – as well as a three-storey car park, but these were rejected. A revised design was approved in April 1965, but in November 1969 the council reported that the local bus companies were not happy with this elaborate scheme, for which they would have to pay a substantial rent. Instead the council produced a simpler bus station, without a car park and extending the Ferry Gardens, reclaiming land in a scheme for a new sea wall built by Wimpeys. It is not clear whether the new scheme was designed in house and then passed to Wimpeys for detailing, or whether it was entirely by the builders' in-house team.



Figure 26: Gosport Central Library, 1972-5, by W. H. Saunders & Son [Elain Harwood, EH09780].

As approved in January 1970, the bus station scheme comprised 16 bus stands, a ticket office, shops, lavatories, a waiting room, inspector's office and a canteen, with a solarium or shelter at the south end so people could enjoy the view with some protection from the weather. It removed kiosks and unseemly structures from the gardens, while leaving space for a taxi rank and allowing the Hants and Dorset company to retain their own depot off Harbour Road.<sup>132</sup> Work began in mid-1971 with the reclamation of the Old Floating Bridge Yard alongside the old bus stand, but at that point the design was changed again to accommodate larger buses, with Wimpeys producing the landscaping for Ferry Gardens – reclaiming land from the harbour – in March 1972.<sup>133</sup> The eventual bus station, built that year, included four small shops for existing kiosk holders, lavatories, ground-floor offices for ferry tickets, enquiries and the bus inspectors, with lettable office space on the first floor.<sup>134</sup> However, in May 1973 the corporation had to allow Wimpeys to put in additional 'weather protection' for passengers queueing at the bus stands.<sup>135</sup> The fountain was restored in 1976 as part of the council's celebrations of Queen Elizabeth's jubilee. The Ferry Gardens were renamed in 1984 following the Falklands War.

In the early 1960s the council expected to make the High Street one-way with the completion of the new North Street and South Street, rather than consider pedestrianisation. It began a detailed investigation of the latter in October 1974, looking at full pedestrianisation or the option of allowing buses to continue using the street. To achieve the latter required an alternative access from the rear for service vehicles, but this was incomplete on the north side to the west of North Cross Street, and the Catholic Church complained about access for its parishioners attending regular services as well as for weddings and funerals.<sup>136</sup> Yet councillors worried that a scheme permitting buses and essential services would be no safer for pedestrians. A trial scheme was approved in March 1976 for the complete pedestrianisation of the High Street west of North Cross Street, with the eastern part becoming one way, but this was delayed when in July 1976 the Chamber of Trade withdrew their support because of fears that the High Street would lose trade to the Asda store then being built at the Anchorage.<sup>137</sup> The High Street was fully pedestrianised only in 1988.

## The Area North of the High Street

Previously North Street had been Gosport's second shopping street, but only a few premises on the east survived post-war rebuilding (Fig. 27). The land north of the High Street and west of Clarence Road was declared a comprehensive development area in 1955, but little was done while the council concentrated its rebuilding efforts elsewhere (Fig. 28). Work began on clearing the old North Street and The Green to its east in 1960. Mumby Road was extended in two phases in 1961-4, giving its name to the whole of the new road, which cut through Clarence Square, King Street, Seahorse Street and Burnham's Place, the latter stopped up in October 1962.<sup>138</sup> One contrast to the policy of wholesale clearance was a scheme launched in 1961 by the Civic Trust (founded in 1957), with local traders to improve the premises in North Cross Street by repairing buildings, improving shop fronts and introducing better lighting. With the street set to be cut off by the extended Mumby Street, the council welcomed this upgrading and repositioning for specialised shopping (Fig. 29).<sup>139</sup> There were a series of alterations to the small shops which survive on the east side





Figure 27: View of North Street from an old postcard, 1950s. [Historic England Archive, pen01\_11\_02\_25098b].



Figure 28: Clarence Road in an old postcard, early 1900s. [Historic England Archive, pen01\_11\_02\_25098a].



Figure 29: North Cross Street in an old postcard, c. 1920. [Historic England Archive, pen01\_11\_02\_25098c].

of North Cross Street while the west side was the subject of a series of proposals for major redevelopment. The council approved the rebuilding of furniture showrooms at 21a North Cross Street in April 1971, followed in November by major alterations to the shop and first floor at No. 18, where the old building remained behind a new façade.<sup>140</sup>

In August 1964 the council invited tenders for the service road on the north side of the High Street. Minnitt Road was partly completed by January 1968 when Father Foley applied for better access to the new church hall behind Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (St Mary's), with a second tender approved in December 1970.<sup>141</sup> The council, meanwhile, continued to buy up properties in the comprehensive development area, acquiring 2-6 Seahorse Street in April 1969, and the 1971 Town and Country Planning Act gave it more powers to make compulsory purchases. It agreed not to buy up the Clarence Tavern (an 1860s extension of an earlier building) or the masonic hall (extended in 1929), two buildings that survive on Clarence Road.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, in July 1967 Camper & Nicholson first proposed to develop its land as a yacht marina, securing a deal with the council over the latter's town moorings on Quay Lane, and this use came to dominate the land north of Mumby Road.

The council had first proposed building more shops on Clarence Road and North Street, but now feared a lack of demand and that their redevelopment might simply lead to empty shops elsewhere. In December 1965 it commissioned a new shopping survey from Cluttons, its consultant valuers. Although the council continued to buy up properties in Clarence Road, North Street and Seahorse Street (Nos. 7-10) the survey confirmed its view in November 1966 that a new shopping precinct in the area would damage the High Street, where developers were rebuilding more shops than it had originally expected.<sup>143</sup> It did, however, encourage a proposal for shops and parking by Centros Investment Ltd at 16 High Street and 5-8 (consecutive) North Cross Street, revised in August 1969; this was a difficult site largely behind the High Street for which it had looked in vain for government support under its rolling programme for town centre redevelopment.<sup>144</sup> The Minister of Housing and Local Government indicated that it would support a private scheme for light industry, offices and warehousing by a nationally known development company, and the council determined to continue buying up land.<sup>145</sup> However, in October 1971 Centros backed out.<sup>146</sup> Similar proposals followed from Raglan Properties in 1974, again only to be withdrawn the next year. This was frustrating for the council since the site was critical in offering access for service vehicles to the rear of the High Street shops.

The area north of North Street was eventually redeveloped with housing rather than shops and industry. The council received an application in November 1972 from Land and Estate Consultants to build 19 maisonettes, 10 flats and 32 houses with garages in the triangle of land between Mumby Road, Clarence Road and North Street. It agreed to close Seahorse Street and King Street to create a completely new street pattern, to be developed largely with two-bedroom flats. The corporation debated whether these should be developed as a low-rise scheme around a square, or in a 10- or 16-storey tower with garages. Further options considered in July included 45 houses with three blocks of flats.<sup>147</sup> A scheme comprising three blocks of flats and patio housing (housing where one unit forms a garden wall to the next), with parking and soft planting, was finally approved in November 1973.

The council continued to seek the delisting and demolition of the Seahorse Hotel and 6 Seahorse Street, photographed by the RCHME in February 1974, though the developers indicated that they would be prepared to incorporate the pub if necessary (Fig. 30). Related to this scheme was one for two office blocks on the north side of Mumby Road. However, after securing tenders, in August 1974 Lands and Estates Consultants (LEC) asked Gosport if it would take over the scheme, which the Housing Committee considered favourably: it needed more housing for rent, and thought it could be done under the housing yardsticks (cost controls) under Circular 70/74 using LEC's architects Barnard, Morris & Partners. Such was its shortage of in-house architects that by the early 1970s the council was buying up and restoring older properties as social housing rather than building new schemes.<sup>148</sup> In January 1975 the mayor, Councillor Hewitt, agreed the deal with LEC. The new scheme produced by Barnard, Morris & Partners was for three four-storey blocks of flats and maisonettes and 36 houses, with the closure of King Street approved in February.<sup>149</sup> White Lion Walk seems to have been completed in 1977 (Fig. 31).



Figure 30: 6 Seahorse Street, photographed in February 1974 [Historic England Archive, bb74\_7019 (EP:1689\_065)].



Figure 31: White Lion Walk, 1975-7 by Barnard, Morris & Partners [Elain Harwood, EH09776].

The Department of the Environment insisted that 6 Seahorse Street be retained, although the cost of its retention pushed the scheme over its yardstick. At a public inquiry in June 1975 the inspector suggested that a better and more economical scheme could be produced if other cottages in Seahorse Street were also retained, and Gosport's Libraries and Museums Committee declared itself in support of this proposal. Barnard, Morris & Partners proposed that it produce a new scheme retaining the cottages across the street (19-22 Seahorse Street), which would be easier and avoid the cost of realigning the remains of North Street. This would also enable the old Crown Hotel and Fox Tavern to be preserved, and all these buildings were subsequently also listed.<sup>150</sup> The revised scheme considered in December 1975 included two more dwellings.



Figure 32: Seahorse Walk, 1978-9 by Barnard, Morris & Partners [Elain Harwood, EH09776].

In August 1976 the council applied for listed building consent to demolish 19-22 Seahorse Street, since it could not afford to convert them into flats, because all the available budget was committed to No. 6. Councillor Leyland questioned whether 'the council [is] legally obliged to squander public money on a building that most people believe to be of no architectural merit', receiving a simple reply from Councillor Green: 'Yes'.<sup>151</sup> In July 1977 the newly formed Hampshire Building Preservation Trust stepped in and offered to take on numbers 19-22, which they bought for £5.<sup>152</sup> The scheme duly gained its listed building consent in December 1977 and tenders were received in January 1978, with Seahorse Walk completed in 1979. This was the last major scheme of public housing by Gosport Borough Council in the old town; apart from a scheme of 62 houses and flats in Dolman Road, approved in 1985, the reduction of government support for capital schemes left it to focus on sheltered housing for the elderly. The Crown Hotel, formerly the Red Lion and converted to a furniture store, was adapted for housing in about 1990.

Since 1980, the High Street has seen the replacement of the Ritz Cinema with shops in 2002 and the building of a small hotel in 2017-19, but relatively little development elsewhere save in the marinas north of Mumby Road. A landscape scheme, the *Millennium Timepiece*, was installed in 2000 between Harbour and Seaward Towers.

## Endnotes

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3. TNA, HLG 79/194: Town and Country Planning Act 1944, Declaratory Order under Section 1, minutes of a public local inquiry at Lee Tower, 3 November 1948, p.3.
4. Max Lock with Frank Layfield and Douglas Teohey, *Outline Plan for the Portsmouth District 1949-1963* (Winchester, 1949), 101.
5. Lesley Burton and Brian Musselwhite, *The Book of Gosport* (Tiverton, 2004), 135.
6. TNA, HLG 79/194: Town and Country Planning Act 1944, Declaratory Order under Section 1, minutes of a public local inquiry at Lee Tower, 3 November 1948, 3.
7. Hampshire Archives, 123M96/DC19/4: report of the Planning and Buildings Committee, 21 July 1948, Gosport Metropolitan Borough (MB).
8. *ibid.*, 9 September 1941, Gosport MB.
9. *Portsmouth Evening News*, 26 October 1933, 13. Nobes stood down as mayor to contest (unsuccessfully) the 1950 election, before becoming an alderman of the borough. He served as chairman of the Housing Committee through the 1950s.
10. *Hampshire Telegraph*, 7 December 1956, 10.
11. TNA, HLG 79/892: memo to G. W. Moseley, private secretary, 11 February 1952.
12. Hampshire Archives, 123M96/DBC29: report to the Plans and Buildings Committee, 3 April 1952, Gosport MB.
13. I am indebted for this and other details to Philip Eley, by email via Robert Harper, 12 April 2022.
14. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC20: minutes of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 9 April 1942; 10 September 1942, Gosport MB.
15. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC24: minutes of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 11 and 31 May 1945, Gosport MB.
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20. Bombed in 1941, the remains were cleared in 1958, when a time capsule in a bottle was discovered built into the wall; this was incorporated into the new community centre built in Bury Street, west of Walpole Road.
21. Hampshire Archives, 123M96/DBC27: report of the Housing Committee, 28 April 1949, Gosport MB.
22. TNA, HLG 79/193: report by Planning Technique, Ministry of Town and Country Planning, August 1949.
23. *Red Barrel* (Watney's in-house magazine), information from Emily Cole; Philip Eley, via Robert Harper, pers. comm. 12 April 2022.
24. Hampshire Archives, 111M97/A2/10; Ian Edelman, Gosport, *the Archive Photographs* (Cheltenham, 1995) 14.
25. *ibid.*; 123M96/ DC19/4: report of the Planning and Buildings Committee, 10 July 1947.

26. Max Lock, in collaboration with Frank Layfield, Douglas Tookey and others, *Outline Plan for the Portsmouth District, 1949-1963* (Winchester, 1949), 77
27. *ibid.*, 25, 77.
28. Hampshire Archives, 123M96/DBC27: minutes, 2 February 1950, Gosport MB.
29. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC30: minutes, 31 March 1953; 123M96/DBC32: 28 September 1954, Gosport MB.
30. T. F. Thomson, *Hampshire Development Plan, Gosport Town Map* (Winchester, 1955), 3. The Ritz was built in 1935 but was badly damaged in a raid on 10 January 1941 and reopened only in 1958. It closed in 1999 and was demolished in 2001; an Iceland store occupies the site.
31. T. F. Thomson, *Hampshire Development Plan: Gosport Town Map, Report of Survey, First Review* (Winchester, 1959), 3.
32. Hampshire Archives, 141/A13/A1: report, Plans and Buildings Committee, 19 February 1974, Gosport MB.
33. Quoted in Lesley Burton and Beryl Peacey, *Go Ahead Gosport, 1935-2001, The 'new look' town in words and pictures* (Gosport, 2001) 20.
34. [https://en.everybodywiki.com/Hall\\_affair](https://en.everybodywiki.com/Hall_affair) (accessed 16 November 2021).
35. They were at Alverstoke, Bury Road, Peel Road (Newtown) and Anglesey; Hampshire Archives, 91M76MZ6G: *Borough Times*; 141/A13/A2: report of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 11 February 1975, Gosport Borough Council.
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38. TNA, HLG 79/892: Note, 24 April 1952.
39. Hampshire Archives, 123M96/DBC29: minutes, 28 February 1952; DBC30, 29 January 1953, Gosport MB.
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41. Brian Fimmimore, *Houses from the Factory, System building and the welfare state 1942-74* (London, Rivers Oram Press, 1989), 189-93.
42. Hampshire Archives, 1213M96/DBC51: report, Housing Committee, 26 April 1973, Gosport Borough Council.
43. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC32: minutes, 29 April 1954, Gosport MB.
44. *ibid.*, 25 November 1954; 1 March 1955.
45. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC35: minutes, 13 February 1958, Gosport MB. There were ten Cornish blocks of flats elsewhere: in Brading Avenue, Gorselands Way, Hamble Road, Landor Road, Noton Close, Tudor Close, Turner Avenue and Wilmott Lane. Further Selleck Nicholls blocks followed in 1960.
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47. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC36: report of the Housing Committee, 26 June 1958, Gosport MB.
48. *ibid.*: minutes, 24 April 1958, Gosport MB.
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51. Hampshire Archives, 123M96/DBC40: report of the Housing Committee, 29 November 1962, Gosport MB.
52. *Ibid.*, 123M96/DBC38: report of the Housing Committee, 29 December 1960, Gosport MB.
53. *Ibid.*, 123M96/DC10/6: report of the Housing Committee, 29 December 1960, Gosport MB.

54. Information from Philip Eley, by email via Robert Harper, 12 April 2022.
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56. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC38: report of the Housing Committee, 10 February 1961, Gosport MB.
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59. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC40: report of the Housing Committee, 28 March 1963, Gosport MB.
60. *ibid.*, 123M96/DC10/18: report of the Housing Committee, 6 June 1963, Gosport MB.
61. *ibid.*, 123M96/DC10/19: report, Housing Committee, 30 January 1964, Gosport MB.
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66. Lesley Burton and Brian Musselwhite *The Book of Gosport* (Tiverton, 2004), 32.
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71. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC40: reports of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 27 November 1962, 1 January 1963, Gosport MB.
72. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC43: report of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 30 November 1965, Gosport MB.
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74. *ibid.*, 123M96/DBC49: report of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 1 February 1972, Gosport MB.
75. *ibid.*, 141/A13/A1: report of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 3 September 1974, Gosport BC.
76. *ibid.*, 141/A13/A4: report of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 10 May 1977, Gosport BC.
77. *ibid.*, 141/A13/A5: report of the Plans and Buildings Committee, 20 June 1978, Gosport BC.
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