The re-use of fortified heritage assets – managing change to the Couvre Porte, Chatham Lines, in the context of conservation philosophy
Location of Chatham Dockyard, Sheerness Dockyard and associated defences in Kent
Fortifications across Medway

Map 2: Napoleonic Defences of Chatham and Rochester

Map 2 taken from the Brompton Lines Conservation Area Appraisal, Medway Council, 2006
Long view showing relationship of Chatham Lines to the Field of Fire and the Dockyard it was built to protect
Chatham Lines and The Dockyard it protects

- Southern end of Chatham Historic Dockyard
- Location of Couvre Porte (reservoir and outline of hornwork visible)
- Fort Amherst
- Chatham Lines
- Field of Fire
- Chatham Historic Dockyard
Background to the site – why change is needed

**Issues**
One of the last unrestored parts of the Lines

In MOD (defence) ownership and closed to the public

Heavily overgrown – historic form and function of this area of the lines not understood in present condition

On the English Heritage buildings at risk register because of condition and because no long-term use secured yet

**Opportunity**
To remove vegetation in order to allow greater visibility of the defence and therefore greater understanding

Through change, provide better cohesion of the whole site

Open the site for public enjoyment and appreciation

Improve links between the Field of Fire and Inner lines (issue of integrity??)

Carry out essential conservation work to the defence to protect the historic fabric from further deterioration
History and evolution of the Couvre Porte

First fortifications built c1756 due to the threat of invasion from France during Seven Years War

Originally ditch and ramparts formed as earthworks

Not intended solely for static defence – sallyports allowed defenders to access the Field of Fire and engage directly with enemy

Map from 1763 (top left, fig 1), shows the form of the first fortification (prior to the construction of the Couvre Porte)

Fortification renewed (this time in brick) during period of American Revolutionary War (c1779-1783)

Improvements proposed by Royal Engineer Hugh Debbeig – including improvements between Kings Bastion and Prince of Wales Bastion to create a more elaborate defended entrance, forming a true defended gateway – the Couvre Porte

Original design to include gatehouse in ramparts with demi bastions in front of the gatehouse to increase the amount of defensive firepower possible (see fig 2, bottom left) (Kendall, 2012, p1-2)
Chatham Lines and Couvre Porte continued

A map of the site dating from 1786 (fig 3 on left) shows how the Couvre Porte was actually constructed

No detailed plans known to exist of the site

Initial analysis of the structure today has confirmed that some of the fabric likely dates to this period

During Napoleonic War 1803 – 15, Chatham Lines largely rebuilt and Couvre Porte altered from a defended gateway to a hornwork

Fig 4 (bottom left), plan dated to 1806 showing the newly constructed hornwork

Gatehouse of the Couvre Porte retained (although altered), but now used only as a means for troops to access the hornwork (Kendall, 2012, p.2)
Chatham Lines and Couvre Porte Continued

Although vast sums of money were spent on improvements to the Chatham Lines in the early part of the C19, no important new works were carried out until the late C19.

In the late C19, with the Dockyard now protected by a ring of fortifications (dating from the 1860’s onwards and taking the form of polygonal forts built at a greater distance from the Dockyard reflecting changes in artillery), the Chatham Lines no longer served a defensive purpose and were laid out as Garrison gardens.

Not known if the defended gatehouse and hornwork formed part of the gardens, but fig 5 (OS map dating to 1879) suggests they were not used as gardens.

At the end of the C19 and following the construction of new and very large naval barracks, a reservoir was formed in one half of the abandoned hornwork (fig 6, bottom left).

The southern half of the hornwork was excavated and the ditch walls lined with concrete.

Spoil from the excavation was deposited in the lines (some of the musket loops beside the gatehouse are partially covered) and also a little possibly deposited on the remaining intact half of the hornwork, changing the levels of the fortification (Kendall, 2012, p.3).
Summary

Couverre Porte has undergone significant change, over a period of time

The detailed form of the Couverre Porte as originally constructed is not known

Part of the later hornwork has been dismantled (although the footprint of the full hornwork is still legible on aerial maps)

The site is not open to the public

Legibility of the fortification (whilst in active military use as part of the defences) is severely diminished by;

- alterations carried out in the late C19
- latterly by heavy vegetation, in particular tree cover which hides both the physical structure and the relationship between different levels within the Couverre Porte

Figure 7 showing the reservoir and remains of hornwork visible in the centre of the image

Question

If this area of the Chatham Lines is bought back into use and change required to accommodate a new use, what form should any change take? How do we judge what form of the fortifications history is most important?
To ensure that proposed adaptations required to accommodate a new use do not detract from the historic and architectural significance of the monument, their impact (in England) is assessed in the context of English Heritage’s

‘Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment’
Conservation Principles

Number of different principles, the most important ones are;

‘understanding the significance of places’ and ‘significant places should be managed to sustain their values’ and where appropriate take actions which reveal and reinforce those values (EH, 2008, p.21-22)
Heritage Values and Significance

To assess significance, EH lay down four heritage values which can be attributed to a monument (and have been in the statement of significance) These are;

**Aesthetic Value** – “deriving from the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place” (EH, 2008, p.72)

**Communal Value** – “deriving from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory” (EH, 2008, p.72)

**Evidential Value** – “deriving from the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.” (EH, 2008, p.72)

**Historical Value** – “deriving from the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present.” (EH, 2008, p.72) Historical value can be illustrative and associative

**Significance** – “the sum of the cultural and natural heritage values of a place, often set out in a statement of significance.” (EH, 2008, p.72)
Heritage Values of the Couvre Port – taken from the Statement of Significance (written 2012, by Peter Kendall, Ancient Monuments Inspector for English Heritage)

Evidential Value
• Limited value to produce archaeological evidence of earliest phases, more likely to encounter evidence of later hornwork, possibility of evidence of WWII use

Historic Value
Illustrative
• High illustrative value as a representation of changes in fortification design and theory as a response to threat of major invasion (covers period from true Couvre Porte to creation of hornwork)
• High illustrative value as an example of the additional defensive outworks needed to protect the gatehouse which was a point of weakness
• The reservoir has limited illustrative value as a representation of the large military presence here by virtue of the size of water supply it required

Associative
• Associates values with recognised military engineers

Aesthetic Value
• High aesthetic value in particular the gatehouse, which could be described as sublime. This is because the fabric allows a visitor to understand from the remaining visible fabric (even in its current state) an idea of the position a defender or attacker would have been in. This in itself creates a sense of awe.
• High aesthetic value in the complicated vaulting and high quality brickwork

Communal Value
Limited communal value – the reservoir is associated with the death of a local child, now used as a play space

Conclusion – On balance the reservoir is harmful to significance of the Couvre Port and should be viewed as intrusive
Aspirations for the site

• To enhance an understanding of the most significant period of the fortification, the Couvre Porte (in its original form) and the later hornwork, giving greater cohesion to the site

• To allow public access, appreciation and enjoyment

• To remove it from the EH Heritage at Risk Register

• To remove tree growth allowing an understanding of the form of the ramparts and clearer understanding of firing lines and levels of the fortification and how it functioned

• To enhance circulation between the Inner Lines and the Great Lines Heritage Park (Field of Fire)

Fine detail of the gatehouse on the left and the later and less historically significant wall (left) inserted to create the reservoir with rendered surface covering the earlier fine historic brickwork
Based on the statement of significance and working within the guiding principles of EH, the following proposals have been developed:

- Linking the ditches: creation of a new walking route between Spur Battery and Sally Port through the base of the ditches by creating gated opening in inserted walls.
- Creation of a new footpath utilising part of the inserted reservoir wall – this follows the historic entrance/exit from the guardhouse through the centre of the hornwork.
- Removal of vegetation (specifically heavy trees) to open up views, ‘restoring’ the historic open form of the landscape (only where possible).
- Removal of one of the reservoir walls and either full restoration of the hornwork (based on surviving evidence of form in the northern half of the hornwork) or creation of the outline of the missing hornwork on the concrete base of the reservoir to create greater coherence to the site.
- Removal of security fencing to open up views.
EH’s Conservation Principles also sets down polices which guide the process of change and help assess the impact of any proposed change on the significance of the monument. The policies cover the following areas;

- management, maintenance, periodic renewal and repair
- intervention to increase knowledge of the past
- restoration
- new work and alteration
- integrating conservation with other public interests

The document also sets down guidance on the notions of;

authenticity and integrity, sustainability and reversibility
At the Couvre Port we are looking to either fully re-instate the form of the missing half of the hornwork or provide an indication of its extent on the bottom of the reservoir.

Restoration – *to return a place to a known earlier state, on the basis of compelling evidence, without conjecture* (EH, 2008, p.58)

Is acceptable provided:
A, the heritage values of the elements that would be restored, decisively outweigh the values of those that would be lost,
B, the work proposed is justified by compelling evidence of the evolution of the place and is executed in accordance with that evidence
C, the form in which the place currently exists is not the result of an historically significant event,
D, the work proposed respects previous forms of the place
E, the maintenance implications of the proposed restoration are considered to be sustainable
Restoration of the missing half of the hornwork and its acceptability is also linked to the notion of authenticity and integrity.

Authenticity lies in whatever most truthfully reflects and embodies the heritage values (historical, aesthetic, evidential and communal) and can therefore relate to;

- Design
- Function
- Fabric (EH, 2008, p.45)

However, restoration of design value could be at the expense of evidential value.

"Retaining the authenticity of a place is not always achieved by retaining as much of the existing fabric as possible.” (EH, 2008, p.45)

At the same time, authenticity also infers that deliberate change to a place should be distinguishable but the degree with which new work is distinguishable should also take into account the aesthetic values of a place. EH argue that subtle differences in new and old work are more likely to retain coherence than jarring differences.

**How can we restore and distinguish at the same time?**

Bricks which match historic manufacture process but are not marked by the patina of age Pointing which is ‘honest’ i.e. not coloured to match the condition of the historic pointing
At the same time integrity, sustainability and reversibility must be considered.

**Integrity**: wholeness or honesty (EH, 2008, p.71)
Can apply to

- a structural system
- design concept
- way in which materials are used
- character of a place
- artistic creation
- functionality

**Reversibility**: capable of being reversed so that the previous state is restored (EH, 2008, p.71)

However, whilst it may be desirable to make change which is reversible, this is not always possible.

**Sustainable**: capable of meeting present needs without compromising ability to meet future needs (EH, 2008, p.72)
Within the context of EH’s guiding principles and conservation philosophy how then can we make a decision which is balanced and most appropriate for the Couvre Porte?

Evaluation of the heritage values of a place summed up in a statement of significance

 Leads to an understanding of what is important and why

 Leads to an understanding of what change a monument can take without an undue negative impact on the aspects of the monument which have high heritage values

 Means that in looking to restore an element, some heritage values may be diminished, whilst others enhanced

 These types of changes (restoration) might be acceptable because:

1. Public benefit the works might bring
2. Reinforce or enhance the heritage values
3. Accepted that an enhancement of some heritage value, may diminish others
4. Only if the restoration is justified by compelling evidence and respects the previous form of the monument
5. That issues of authenticity and integrity are considered - yes because restoration would result in a better understanding of the original design intent and historic function of the Couvre Porte (authenticity) and because restoration would result in the creation of something which enhances the wholeness or cohesion of the site, whilst being detailed in an ‘honest’ way (integrity)
6. If the work is sustainable, i.e. that it considers that the heritage must continue for generations to come, but that it also might be subject to change again the future as ideas and thoughts evolve
7. If the work is reversible or if not possible then change must take into account the other points above
Thankyou for listening