

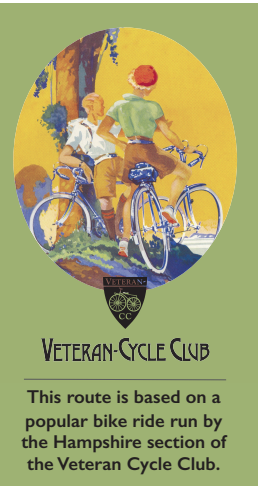
Gosport Hidden History Ride

20 miles on road

Gosport is renowned for its rich history and wealth of heritage sites, but there are many fascinating places which are not so well known. Cycle use in Gosport is much higher than the national average, and the bicycle has been important in Gosport ever since becoming a widespread mode of transport and recreation in the early part of the last century. This circular cycling route of about 20 miles around the borough reveals some of the Hidden History of Gosport.

As a circular route, it can be started and finished at any point. This route is on a mix of public roads and cycleways. Gosport is flat, so the going is easy. There are many opportunities to break the journey for a meal or light refreshments.

Keen cyclists who do not linger could easily complete the route in a couple of hours or so, but it might be best enjoyed as a leisurely day out, with plenty of stops for exploring and a relaxing lunch break.



Please Note:

Some of the places listed are private and not open to the public, but can be viewed from a public place. Please respect the privacy of others and do not trespass. Please be aware of the security sensitivity of active military sites.

Hardway, Elson and Brockhurst

The slipway at Priory Road, Hardway, was a major embarkation point for D-Day, and the original wartime concrete "Chocolate Block" surface can still be seen near to the water. There are still residents who remember the tanks and troops who camped in the road before embarking.

Turn right at the end of Priory Road and pull up on the wide paved area at the junction with Elson Road and Heritage Way.

On three sides of this junction you can see three Admiralty boundary stones with anchors and numbers. Similar markers of old military land can be found all across the Gosport area., some have arrows and the letters WD for War Department and others have anchors

Turn right on Heritage Way and continue on the cycleway to the A32. This road follows the line of the former railway track that served the Priddy's Hard Royal Naval Armaments Depot until the late 1980's.

Continue straight ahead on the cycleway and cross the signalised junction to Forest Way. Before the bend turn left to join the popular cycleway along the former Fareham to Gosport Railway line and then continue left (south) towards Rowner.

Passenger services ran on to Gosport on a branch line off the London to Southampton Railway, from 1841 to 1953 with freight services continuing until 1969. Queen Victoria used the route regularly, travelling to the private station built for her at Royal Clarence Yard where the Royal Yacht would whisk her away to her royal residence on the Isle of Wight, Osborne House.

At the railway bridge over the Rowner Road which is affectionately known to local children as Dolphin bridge you can take a minor diversion to see the last surviving relics of the old Gosport railway.

Continue under the bridge to the next junction where Military Road meets Station Road and use the pedestrian crossing.

Fort Brockhurst Railway Station which opened in 1865 to service the nearby military forts. Now an occupied private house, the station building has fortunately survived several periods of dereliction with many of its original features remaining intact, including the station platforms.

From here re-trace your route up the old railway cycle path back to dolphin bridge.

Rowner

After the bridge, go left to join the cycleway alongside Rowner Road, which passes above. At the parade of shops, cross the road and turn into Rowner Lane.

On your right you will find the C.17 Church Cottages, thatched, Grade II listed and recently restored as a single dwelling. This quaint old building may come as a surprise in an area perhaps best known as a vast naval housing estate. St. Mary's, the nearby large, modern church conceals a secret in the form of the original C.13 church building adjoined. The medieval part is Grade I listed, and contains the elaborate Jacobean tomb of the Brune family. All that is left of the Brune's manor house is a well near to the road, now capped by the relocated gravestone of Henry Cunningham (1814-1875), a notable maritime inventor who lived and worked in Gosport.

Cherque and Daedalus

Continue along Rowner Lane and turn left into Mansfield Road, which is typical of the naval housing in the area. At the end, turn right into St. Nicholas Avenue and then almost immediately left into Brune Lane. Then bear left into Shoot Lane.

This tree lined route still has the feel of the rural lanes which once criss-crossed the area whilst still small fields. You will pass the early C.19 Shoot Farmhouse, which is Grade II listed, with its vast adjoining brick barn.

After Shoot Lane, go right and cross Broom Way, then take Daedalus Drive

This new link road leads us through what was once Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) HMS Daedalus. The road follows the line of WWII aircraft hangers, some now used as industrial units. Further on, to the right, you should notice the original watch office (a.k.a. control tower), a rare Fleet Air Arm three-storey type surviving from WWII. It houses a cafe with a viewing garden for what is now a busy civilian airfield. Spitfire pleasure flights on offer for those with deep pockets gives cafe visitors and passers by an occasional extra plane spotting treat.

Lee on the Solent

From the airfield road, turn left onto Marine Parade West, the main seafront road, and then bear off left at the war memorial into Richmond Road. Here you can see over the wall to Daedalus the the 1930's Officers Quarters and mess which are now listed buildings. Along Richmond will see a row of interesting Admiralty married quarters, built in a cottage style just after WWI.

At the end of Richmond Road, turn left into Milvil Road. On the corner of Newton Place is Grey Heathers Nursing Home, site of the Mansfield Hostel. During a night raid by German bombers on 23rd November 1940 an anti-aircraft shell hit the dining room where young WRNS had gathered for dinner and exploded, killing 10 women. There is a memorial plaque on the nursing home wall and many of the WRNS are buried at Haslar Naval Cemetery which we will be visiting later.

Opposite is a group of three beautifully restored modernist houses. These were designed by Eric Andrewes and Cyril Bagley in 1937. Turn back and head along Milvil Road in the direction of the seafront. You will pass Shangri-La care home. Now unfortunately much altered, the original building, Rose House, was co-designed by internationally renowned architect and designer Marcel Breuer, during a brief period working in England after leaving Nazi Germany and before eventually settling in the U.S.A.

Continue back along Milvil Road past St.Faiths church, turn left into the High Street and then right into Pier Street. Cross over the road at the lights and walk to the Solent Gardens pocket park.

Although Lee on Solent was first developed as a seaside resort in Victorian times there are lots of art deco inspired buildings and varied architecture to be seen along Lee seafront. Ahead would have originally been the stunning modernist Lee Tower cinema, ballroom and viewing tower complex, along with the earlier pier - all now sadly lost. The interpretation panel at the waterfront shows images of Lee waterfront of old.

Turn right on to shared use cycleway along Marine Parade West and follow the coast road for over 1.5 miles to the right turn into Browndown Road (you might just spot another boundary stone along the way!).

Browndown and Stokes Bay

Turn right at the roundabout onto Stokes Bay Road and follow the cyclepath around to the bay. This is roughly the half way point.

On your right, you will see No.2 Battery, a Victorian fort housing Britain's only dedicated diving museum. On the beach can be spotted part of the concrete apron remaining from the site of the world's first scheduled hovercraft service - from Gosport to Ryde in 1965. This is also where the Royal Engineers redirected the River Alver to meet the sea. The Alver Valley and Browndown are SSSI's and important natural habitats.

If you don't mind a detour and an energetic trudge along the shingle, pass through the gate into Browndown Military Ranges. Bikes are hard to push over shingle and you can always park up by the Diving Museum to aid your trudge. **Do not pass this point when the red flag is flying!**

In a few hundred yards, just beyond Browndown Battery with its eerie abandoned lookout tower you'll come to the fabled Browndown Mushroom. This impressive mushroom-shaped structure, in fluted concrete and with true "brutalist" style, has no access points. Local legend claims it to be something secretive and sinister, but nobody seems to know its purpose for sure.

Head back across to the cycleway along Stokes Bay Road, and turn off left towards The Alverbank Hotel.

Stop at the little brick bridge (over the original course of the River Alver) and look at the end of the left hand wall. You will see a "broad arrow" ordnance survey benchmark and height marking, as carved by the Royal Engineers. The hotel, built in 1842 in the "Romantic Tudor" style, was once a country house frequented by royalty, the nobility and prominent politicians.

Alverstoke and Anglesey

From the hotel's drive, turn left back on to the Stokes Bay cycleway to the corner of Jellicoe Avenue. Behind is an interpretation board about Ray Reece, Gosport's very own round the world cyclist. This cycleway is named after Ray in honour of his record breaking cycling adventures.

Turn left up Jellicoe Avenue, then second right on to Village Road. This was a tank holding area for troops waiting to board landing craft at Stokes Bay bound for the D-Day beaches.

Continue on Village Road through Alverstoke to Church Road, at the junction turn right and immediately left into Little Anglesey Road.

In approx 40 yards on the left in front of the Old Rectory lies a very large stone on a grass bank. This prominent rock is known to have been in place since Victorian times. The rectory originally having been a merchant's house and the creek originally having reached as far as the village centre, some historians describe it as a medieval mooring stone - others think it may have been a mounting block for the merchant to take to his horse. On the other side of Stoke Lake once stood the prominent 75 ft. Kicker Gill seamark tower, built in 1643 and demolished in 1965.

Gosport Park

Continue along Little Anglesey Road which becomes Park Road. Around the corner on the right is Gosport Park.

This was the work of William Fry, the town surveyor. It opened in 1891 as a delightful spot for promenading under ornamental trees and enjoying genteel sporting facilities. The Dell, the sunken area in the middle, was landscaped by Fry from an existing gravel pit, and contained tennis courts. It is now a rugby pitch. Fry laid out a "three laps to the mile" shale-surfaced cycle racing track around it, and a narrow grass running track along the cycle track's inner edge. In the 1890s cycle sport was fashionable, the preserve of the wealthy, and had been banned from the road - hence the need for a dedicated track. Many parks had one, as can still be seen at Poole, Winton and Brighton. The cycle track was turfed-over in the 1960s, but its egg-shaped path is still clearly visible on satellite mapping images. During the summer, it is visible at ground level as a ghostly disturbance to the grass.

Clayhall

Go left back on to Park Road, on the right hand side is the Millennium Copse, now a well established little woodland habitat.
Continue back to Little Anglesey Road and turn immediately left on to the railway cycle path and stop on the iron bridge across the creek.

This iron bridge is known locally as Jackie Spencers bridge, it once carried a branch line to Stokes Bay, where there was a shed-like station on a pier. This connected to paddle steamer services by which Victorian ladies and gentlemen from London reached the Isle of Wight. Looking back along Stoke Lake, towards Alverstoke village and church, affords one of Gosport's best views, much recorded by artists and photographers.

The cycle path will bring you to Clayhall Road. Turn left and follow to a red brick lodge house hiding behind a substantial red brick wall on the left. Go through the narrow blue wooden pedestrian gate is the Royal Naval Cemetery. Please wheel your bike through here.

This is a most tranquil place, with row upon row of military graves and interesting old trees and plants, it is a haven for nature and wildlife. Here you may gain solemn awareness of the wars, conflicts, near forgotten skirmishes of empire building, accidents and diseases which took the lives of seamen who could not be saved at the Royal Hospital Haslar. Others who perished on ships in the Solent and beyond are also interred here. There are more than a few surprises to be found, and this is an excursion from the route which is well worth taking your time over.

Anglesey again

Continue left along Clayhall Road and take the first right into Monckton Road. This wide avenue of detached houses includes some quirky and individual architecture.

Turn right on to Fort Road and then first right into Crescent Road. On your right, visible beyond a security fence and gatehouse is Monckton House, home of the Institute of Naval Medicine since 1969, a medical training and research establishment.

Continue and turn right into St. Marks Road, then left into Anglesey Arms Road. Yes, we have just avoided the wonderful Crescent, one of Gosport's heritage gems, but this is "Hidden History" so please bear with us!

We are in this little back street to have a look at the coach houses. Every grand Georgian household would have had numerous domestic staff - and a carriage with horses. Many of the coach houses have been changed beyond recognition, and some have been lost altogether. However, two or three seem very original and are well worth stopping to see.

On leaving this lane, turn right, back into St. Marks Road, and then right again into Crescent Road. You are now allowed to enjoy the spectacular facade of this impressive but incomplete development, the other half of the Crescent didn't get built due to lack of funds to finish it.

Fort Monckton

At the end of Crescent Road, turn left into Anglesey Road, and then left again at the roundabout into Fort Road. We have just taken you round in a complete loop! Continue along Fort Road Enjoy snippets of sea views and interesting houses before passing Fort Gilkicker.

Turn right into Military Road follow it round through Stokes Bay Golf Course and within sight of the gatehouse to Fort Monckton.

Fort Monckton is one of the only remaining military forts in England still in commission. Known by locals as 'the spy school' it is best viewed from the road. Stringent security measures are all around, and a total lack of signage or identification, betray the current sensitivity of this place, so it is generally advisable not to venture too close unless you enjoy unscheduled interviews by security personnel!

The fort was built in 1779, and is a spectacular "star fort" in the continental style. It stands on the site of Henry VIII's Hasleworth Castle and the later Gill Kicker seamark tower - hence the naming of the nearby, Victorian, Fort Gilkicker. Fort Monckton's deep moats and landscaped embankments mean that not much is visible from land. From the sea, it has a stone frontage with multiple gun ports, and a shingle beach which is only accessible from inside the fort through a sally port. From the air, it is star shaped.

Haslar Sea Wall

Continue left through the golf club entrance road, and stop where this re-joins Fort Road again.

On your left you will see a curious, triangular stone tower. The area around Fort Monckton was a large Royal Engineers training encampment between the wars. The little tower, as evidenced by an inscription stone, was built by "R.E. Mason Boys" in 1929. This was effectively an "apprentice piece" folly, originally housing a clock in each face. The triangular shape was almost certainly inspired by the aforementioned Kicker Gill tower, which in 1929 still loomed large in Clayhall Road. It is worth considering the fact that some of the Mason Boys would have been just fifteen years old when constructing the tower.

Turn right cross the gravel car park - once the parade ground for the Royal Engineers training camp. Continue beyond the railings and ride slowly all the way to the end where you can pass through a narrow gap on to Haslar Sea Wall.

This vantage point allows wonderful views of the Palmerston sea forts, Southsea, and the Isle of Wight, and is a popular fishing spot - it's the perfect place for a picnic stop. Continue along the wide concrete sea wall path and enjoy the views (**do not turn right!**), at the end go left into Dolphin Way. To the right you can see the back of the former Haslar Naval Hospital complex and to the left are the high walls of the onetime barracks, prison and later detention centre.

Turn right, back on to Fort Road, then take the first right into Haslar Road and continue for just under a mile.

Gosport Waterfront

Along Haslar Road you will pass many heritage features and attractions including main Haslar Hospital building, Victorian Gunboat Yards and Submarine Museum which are very well documented elsewhere - not hidden, history and so beyond our remit! One point to note is Haslar's tall water tower, some say that German Luftwaffe pilots used it as a navigation however, this didn't fully protect the naval hospital from the impacts of the many wartime bombing raids which targeted Gosport and Portsmouth's numerous naval bases and military assets.

Once over Haslar bridge, turn right into Rampart Row. On your left is the 17th Century Holy Trinity Church whose Victorian Tower is visible from across water. This beautiful church is home to the hidden treasure that is composer Handel's pipe organ which was bought from the auction of a wealthy landowners estate before demolition.

Follow the brick wall on the right until you reach large wooden gates. Hiding inside is the best surviving section of Gosport's once extensive "mound and moat" defensive ramparts, which walled-in the entire old town.

Travel on towards the two sixteen storey tower blocks which dominate Gosport's waterfront and stand guard over Portsmouth Harbour's entrance. Seaward Tower and Harbour Tower, built in 1963 on the site of Georgian and Victorian terraced housing, might otherwise be unremarkable - were it not for their full-height mosaic murals. The abstract murals were designed by artist Kenneth Barden, but are all signed "JET" for J.E. Tyrrell, Gosport Council's Chief Architectural Assistant of the time. The tiny individual tiles were made by Carter's of Poole. At 135 ft. high, these are some of the largest hand-laid mosaics ever made, and are perhaps one of Gosport's most overlooked and undervalued heritage gems.

Royal Clarence Yard

Weaving along the service road adjacent to the Esplanade, you will pass the soon to be lost Brutalist concrete bus station, look out for a large sign with the spelling "BUSSES"! Gosport has grandstand views of Portsmouth's historic naval dockyards, ships and Semaphore Tower.

Where the service road ends walk along the esplanade to the Gosport Ferry and Falkland Gardens. *Their are two route choices here.*

Straight ahead lies Gosport's historic High Street. It's worth looking up to appreciate the beautiful old buildings with interesting architecture, every building is different. Walking up the High Street past the many little alleyways and lanes it's easy to imagine times gone by with the many pubs and navy press gangs looking for men for short crewed ships.

At the top of High Street turn right into Clarence Road, at the end turn left and immediately right to Weevil Lane or use the crossing OR from Falkland Gardens Turn right into Mumby Road. Follow this until you reach the traffic lights and turn right into Weevil Lane.

Stop and look left behind St. George's Barracks; guardhouse. Can you see a railway track and a tunnel? More about those follows.

Take a detour right into Royal Clarence Yard, a former victualling yard established in the 1770's. Now developed for housing, this once comprised the extensive facilities necessary to feed and victual the world's greatest naval force. Supplies from Royal Clarence Yard, in the form of biscuits, rum and salted meat, would have provided sustenance to British sailors in the remotest outposts of empire.

The yard also contained Queen Victoria's private railway station, accessible via a gate from Gosport Railway Station and the aforementioned tunnel breaching the ramparts, from where she travelled over to Osborne for lengthy visits. Sadly, this was also the route of Victoria's final return journey in January 1901.

From the far end of Weevil Lane, cross the traffic free Millennium Bridge which crosses Forton Lake. To the right Portsmouth's Royal Navy Dockyard and ships can be seen at close quarters. To the left near the site of the old Forton Lake boatyards you might spot the remains of the rotting hulks of wooden barges, ferries and minesweepers from a previous century.

Priddy's Hard

Once on the northern side of the bridge turn left and follow through the recent Priddy's Hard housing developments. The wooded area to the left contains some of the last remains of Gosport's outer ring of defensive ramparts. The large brick building in the bushes is a munitions magazine - the entire area once having been a vast naval munitions factory and storage facility. Priddy's Hard supplied Nelson's navy with gunpowder - and sent 30,000 tons of shells to France during the D-Day invasion. The munitions yard is now the Royal Navy Museum of Firepower 'Explosion'. The permissive shared use cycle path along the harbour wall then leads past shell piers, where munitions were once loaded on to lighters for transfer to warships.

Continue up the harbourside path into Priory Road past the Jolly Roger Pub. Opposite the former Rose and Crown pub is a jetty which was used by the RAF's fast Air Sea Rescue launches which picked up downed airmen in WWII. Today the pier is used by the local boat yard to ferry sailors to their moorings. On the left is Hardway's D-Day slipway and memorial green where we began.

Refreshments can be found at numerous locations including: on the route Lee-on-Solent High Street and Seafront, Battery no. 2 and Stokes Bay, Alverstoke, Haslar Marina, Gosport High Street, Royal Clarence Yard and Hardway.

Public Toilets can be found at Lee-on-Solent, Battery no.2 and the Falkland Gardens. Please check opening times.



The Veteran-Cycle Club was founded in 1955 to promote the riding and conservation of older cycles as well as the study of cycles and cycling history. Today the club has over 2,400 members; the largest of its kind in the world.

Ownership of an old cycle is not required, the club caters for all machines through all eras. All ages of members are welcome, families too, the Veteran bit refers to the bicycle, not the member.