

Local Archaeology: investigating parch marks* at Stokes Bay, Gosport (during a lock -down walk).

*parch marks: during hot dry conditions, areas where remains of buildings or structures lie just underground are always drier. So the grass there will wither more quickly, creating brown parch marks that contrast with the greener surrounding grassy areas.

From the information board at Stokes Bay:

“Gosport in 1943/44-D-Day- Preparation and Embarkations.”

“As part of the preparations for D- Day, an enormous construction programme to create two artificial harbours, known as Mulberry Harbours was started in 1943. These harbours would be taken across the Channel in sections and assembled on the Normandy beaches. The construction of the caissons, code named 'Phoenix', took place in the south of England, 14 of them at Stokes Bay. When the caissons had reached a height of six metres, they were moved to the shore- line on steel carriage ways, to be completed afloat. **During dry summers, evidence of the carriage ways can be seen on the grass east of Stokes Bay Sailing Club.** Whilst the caissons were being constructed at Stokes Bay, approximately 1,500 men were employed day and night to meet the punishing deadlines”. The British Mulberry Harbour was towed to Arromanches in Normandy, where structures still survive.

We took photographs of these carriage ways on 26th May 2020, and paced out some approximate dimensions to the East of the Sailing Club.



We could see 8 parallel lines running north-south, approximately 37 metres in length, and approx 6 metres apart. A parch mark at right angles to these lines cuts across these approximately half way along their length. A more modern bank then separates them nowadays from the promenade and then the beach. Areas of square parch marks further to the east may define areas of accommodation.

The building that is now the Sailing Clubhouse was the Loading Control Centre for the embarkations.



At Arromanches, the Harbour was known as Port Winston, and it is estimated that 2.5 million men arrived through this harbour, 500,000 vehicles, and 4 million tons of supplies.



Aerial view of the Mulberry Harbour, Arromanches, 1944



Remains of the Mulberry Harbour today.

There are many websites, but two that are particularly informative are:

www.ice.org.uk (Civil Engineering)

www.forces.net 'How the Allies floated concrete to Win D-Day'