

Mines at Simon's Town East Dockyard



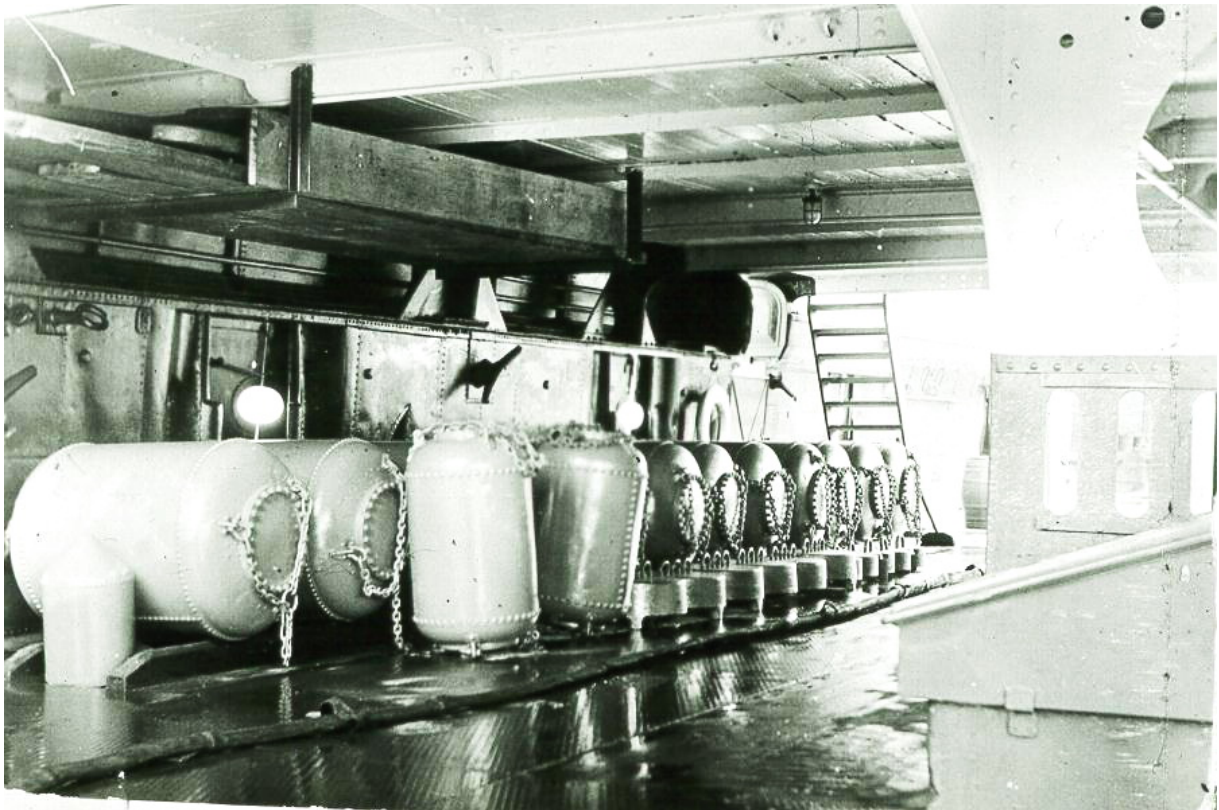
These corroding iron cylinders were photographed adjacent to Building 562 in Simon's Town East Dockyard, during the Navy Festival 2008. They are approximately 4 feet in diameter by 5 feet overall height (1220mm x 1525mm).

Building 562 was originally part of the Royal Engineers sub-marine mining depot, which was established around 1888 and handed over to the Royal Navy for incorporation into the Naval Ordnance Depot on 24th October 1890.

In 1915 the building was listed as 'Workshop No. 9'. When the depot moved to Klawer, the building was handed over to the dockyard stores organisation for use as a storeroom.

It appears that when the move to Klawer occurred, these four items were somehow overlooked! It is likely that they been half-buried for around 115 years – their function was probably to stabilise the soil bank.

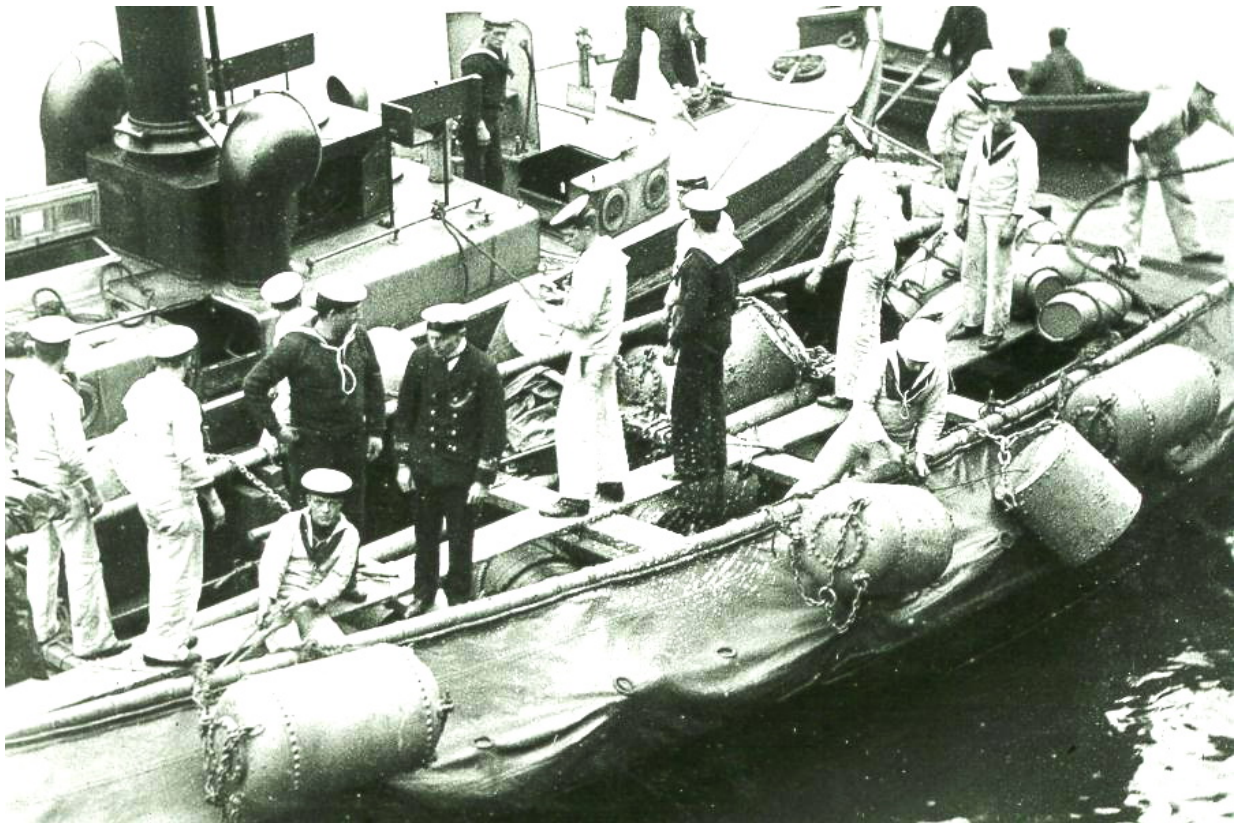




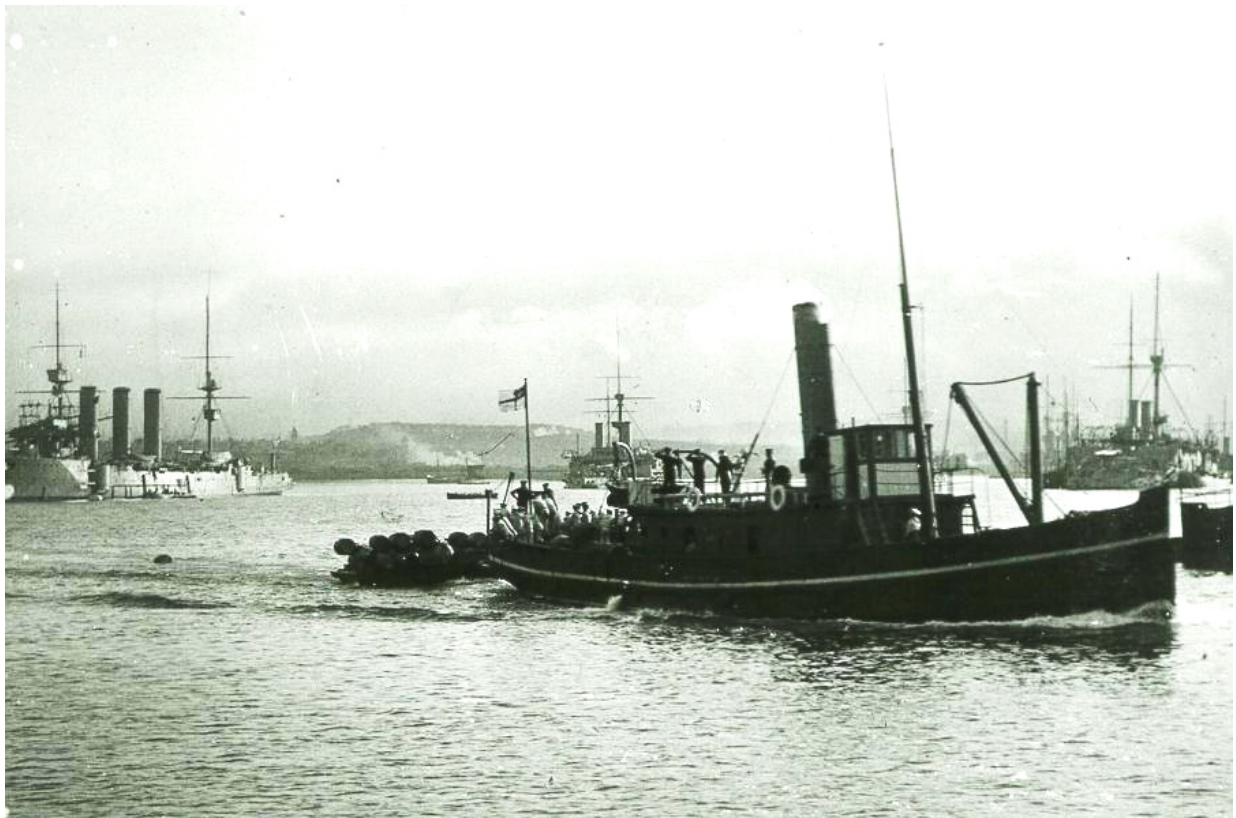
This photo shows the items to be mines – here seen aboard a Royal Navy vessel around 1890 - 1900. The larger ones are 500lb gun-cotton mines, and appear to be identical to the four in the Simon's Town East Dockyard.



Naval ratings under instruction in the preparation of mines for deployment, at the HMS Defiance Floating Torpedo & Submarine Mining School, Plymouth, U.K., around 1890 -1900.



Naval ratings under instruction returning mines and their sinkers (weights) after a test deployment at Plymouth, around 1890 – 1900.



A tug with mines and flotation barrels under tow for a test deployment at Plymouth, around 1890 - 1900.

These mines do not have the “horns” – contact fuses – of the more familiar spherical mines that were deployed in large numbers in World War 1 and 2.

Those shown in the photographs were designed to be remotely detonated by electricity from an onshore observation/control point, via subsea cables.

The four mines at the East Dockyard are rare examples – it is remarkable that they have survived, and they may be the only ones of this type still in existence in Africa. Being of iron construction, two are in an advanced state of corrosion.

The other two mines (serial numbers 773-A and III-RL-A-762) have relatively light corrosion and have now been cleared from their location. When the 24 securing nuts were removed from the top covers, it was revealed that both had been filled with dry sandy soil – about a tonne to a tonne and a half in each. This was dug out, which in turn exposed the wiring inside at the base. This would have been connected to the fuse.



The mines have iron covers secured with 24 studbolts and sealed with a CAF (Compressed Asbestos Fibre) gasket. The nuts came off easily after the application of WD-40 fluid, but some of the nuts were corroded and extremely brittle.

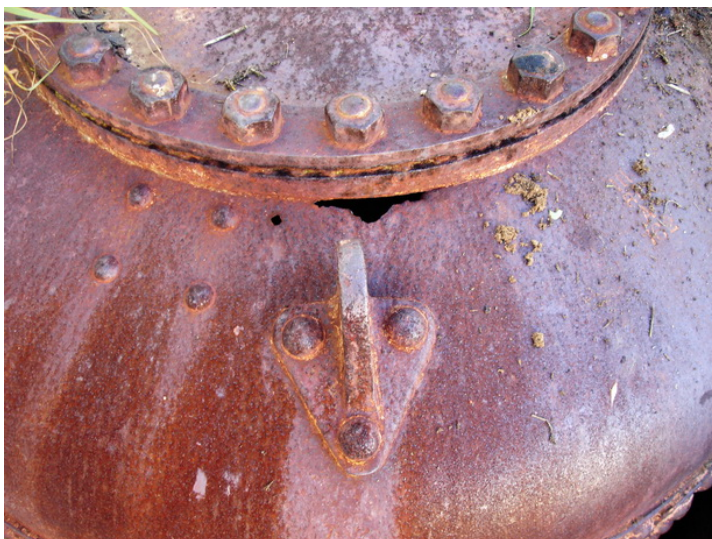
There are 4 of these assemblies fitted inside the top of the mines – function unknown at present.



Interior base, showing wires which entered the body of the mine through a sealed gland, attached to the base exterior. The original red lead internal paint is largely intact. A total of around 300 rivets were used in the mine's construction.



The external gland arrangement on the base of the mine.



Localised corrosion of the upper dished end plate of Serial No. III-RL-A-762.



Cover plate – interior side up.



In the U.K., many spherical mines have been painted red and positioned in prominent positions at coastal resorts. Besides bearing a plaque that explains their history and purpose, these mines have a small slot cut in the casing to allow coin collection – the funds collected are used to support the RNLi (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) or the British Legion.



“Ready for Re-Deployment”

Conservation – Draft proposal for review/discussion

1. Remove the two reclaimed mines from their current location alongside Building 562 to the naval workshops, minimal grit blast to remove corrosion and apply durable paint scheme.
2. Since the mines will not safely stand upright (tendency to overbalance) a simple and robust seat arrangement will need to be designed, fabricated and attached.
3. It is suggested that subject to agreement from Flag Officer Commanding Simon’s Town Naval Base, one mine could be exhibited at the Naval Museum, the other in Jubilee Square or in a suitable location in St. George’s Street – endorsement would be necessary from Alderman Holderness, Simon’s Town Business Association and STCA/STADCO.
4. One or both mines could (as per the U.K. example) be fitted with a theft proof internal collection box – funds collected could be directed to the Naval Museum / Naval Heritage Trust and the National Sea Rescue Institute as applicable.
5. Suitable robust plaques will need to be designed, manufactured and fitted to provide public information about the mines, their age, origin, characteristics and deployment details etc. Some further research will necessary to complete the required data input.

Notes by David Erickson
July 2008