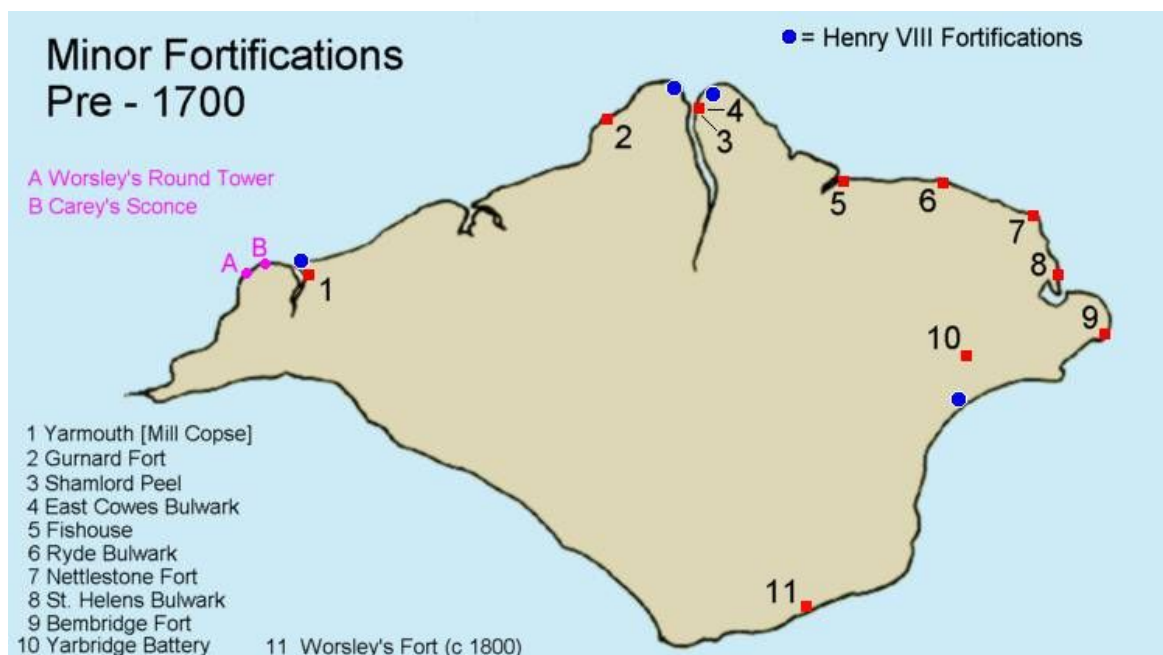


Minor Fortifications of the Isle of Wight



Until the late 20th century, the Isle of Wight's geographical position, combined with the weapons technology of each previous age, meant that the Island always possessed a strategic importance for both invaders and defenders. In effect, the Isle of Wight has always been a 'frontier' zone - a potential battleground; an entry point to England, open to invaders; or a base from which to attack the mainland. Consequently from an early time, the local inhabitants, and in times of a more centralised, national infrastructure, the government has felt it necessary to defend the Island from a perceived threat by establishing three forms of defence: a local militia force, an early warning system and fortifications.

There have been two periods of organised, planned fortification building in the Island's history. The first was Henry VIII's programme of planned coastal fortifications during the period 1539-40. The second period spanned from 1855 through to the First World War and fort building tended to occur at sporadic intervals when high international tension demanded a response. However, prior to the seventeenth century there were a number of small, local fortifications that do not belong to either of these state-financed fort building programmes. The relevant forts were built of varying construction and quality, around the north coast of the Island



Most of these small forts were located near creeks or estuaries, or easy landing areas. They were sited to provide a field of covering fire to prevent or hinder a landing of enemy troops or to prevent access by enemy ships to the Island's creeks or havens. All were small in size containing only one or sometimes several guns. At least three were constructed mainly from timber and earth, while two were most probably made of local stone. There are useful records available for the construction of Carey's Sconce, which provide useful pointers to the structure of several of the smaller forts. However for most of these minor forts, there is only a few references in documents or maps. Only Ryde fort is with significant mentions in the records of the Manor of Ashey and Ryde.

FORT LOCATIONS

1. Yarmouth Fortifications

To defend the important anchorage of Yarmouth roads and harbour, Henry VIII had built Yarmouth Castle in 1539-40. In the 17th century, further small fortifications were built to defend the landward side of Yarmouth. Sir John Oglander and a guide to Britain [*Britannia, or, A geographical description of the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland ... by Richard Blome. London, 1673*] both suggest that there were several small defences constructed.

It is possible that one was located on the high ground at the entrance to Yarmouth next to the common to cover the drawbridge, thus lending the name "*The Mount*" to a later house that was built on the site in the 19th century [A mount was a term used in fortification architecture to denote a small, detached earthwork, constructed away from the main lines of fortification used to cover an entrance, and was often known as a *cavalier*]. However, one of these small forts can be definitely identified from map and document sources. It stood at the south end of the present-day mill dam and by 1720 was the only one of the small forts remaining.

See [The Minor Fortifications of Yarmouth](#)

2. Gurnard Fort

Before 1600, the land on the west side of Gurnard marsh extended a lot further out to sea than it does today, providing a small but usable harbour. Dr. Wilkins, a noted geologist, recalled that "*In my own recollection acres of land have been carried away at Gurnard and the Solent has been much widened. Indeed, when I was a boy, a man occupied a cottage and a garden (long since washed away) which I visited. That old man told of a time when in his youth he had played on fields then existing on the site of the present white buoy (two-fifths of a mile offshore) which now warns vessels from the Gurnard Ledges*".

At a later date, Harry Guy, a local resident, recalled memories of this rapid erosion of this area:

"As I am penning this to her [mother] dear memory I gaze across to Gurnard Ledge buoy, where the Solent waters are being churned into a raging sea by the north west wind that is reaching towards a gale. The remains of the cottage where she was born (April 30th, 1829) are under that raging sea, about one-eighth of a mile from the shore, and at low water spring tides anyone can walk about on the stone flag kitchen floor. The fields where she played as a girl are all gone with the encroachment of the sea."

Memories of a Cowes Born Lad, Harry S. Guy [IOW County Press, 1932]



According to some sources, "*here was antiently a seaport, but at present, a common wherry is rarely seen in its contracted channel.*" [A picture of the Isle of Wight, delineated upon the spot, in the year

1793 by Henry Wyndham. London, 1794] Certainly maps prior to 1800 tend to show, on the west side of Gurnard marsh, a significant headland projecting out northward, from which a low-lying spit curves round eastwards to form what looks like a small harbour. This is supported by a list, drawn up c.1625, of boats belonging to Binstead, Gurnard and Cowes [Sir John Oglander's Book of Accounts and Common place Book 1623 - 1628. OG/90/2 f.104] While the boats belonging to Cowes range between 3 and 7 tons, those of Gurnard vary from 10 to 20 tons. That people used Gurnard in earlier times as a landing/embarcation point is suggested from the references to people entering and leaving the Island from Gurnard, such as Lord Conway in 1627 ["... he landed at Gournord, where all ye Gentlemen mett him, and brought him to ye Castle ..." OG/90/3]. In 1559, a commission was appointed to undertake a royal survey of the defences of the Isle of Wight to discover their true state. Although its main purpose was to establish the exact condition of the Island's fortifications, it also looked at the infrastructure and population from a military perspective. A series of nineteen questions were asked, one of which inquired about the nature of landing places round the coast. Only Ryde and Gurnard are named as places of "common passage" [i.e. crossing points]: "Gurnarde - a common passage of Thysley halfe a myle est from North ledge good landinge at full see a quarter of a mile longe at a fadom water and at low water drye" [D(W) 1778/III/01]



Top left: John Andrews, 1769. **Top centre:** Thomas Milne, 1791. **Top right:** Burns, 1794.
Bottom left: Isaac Taylor, 1759. **Bottom centre:** John Albin, 1795. **Bottom right:** Ordnance Survey, 1793.

It was no doubt to protect this landing place/harbour that Gurnard Fort was constructed some time perhaps around 1600. In 1635, during a tour of the southern and western counties of England, an officer from the Norwich militia paid a visit to the Island. From Leap, "*I there wth much adoe Leapt my Nag into the Boat, & got passage to crosse over that 3 miles rough, & untoward Channell to Gurnord, & there set footing (where before I was soe putt off) in that strong, healthful, & pleasant Island of Europe.*" During the course of his journey, he listed the captains in charge of the various forts that he encountered. On the Island, he noted that a Captain Barret was commander of "Garnord ffort". He also described the defence of the Island in the most approving terms:

"As this precious Island is well strengthned and fortify'd inwardly, so is she also well guarded, defended outwardly, by Yarmouth Castle, Cowes Castle, by the Needles & Sandom ffort, havin no place of Invasion, either In, or Outletts, but such places as are safely defended. At Yarmout agt [against] Hurst Castle; Garnord agt Leap; Cowes agt Calshoke Castle; and Ride agt Portsmouth so as no daring approaching Enemies can passe those Channells without thundring Gun-shot from those commaunding Castles."

[BL Lansdowne 213 ff. 351-384 "Relation of a short Survey of the Western Counties . . . obser in a seven Weekes Journey, begun at Norwich and thence into the West, on Thursday, August 4th, 1635 . . . By the same Lieutennant, that with the Captaine and Ancient of the Military Company in Norwich made a Journey into the North the yeere before."]

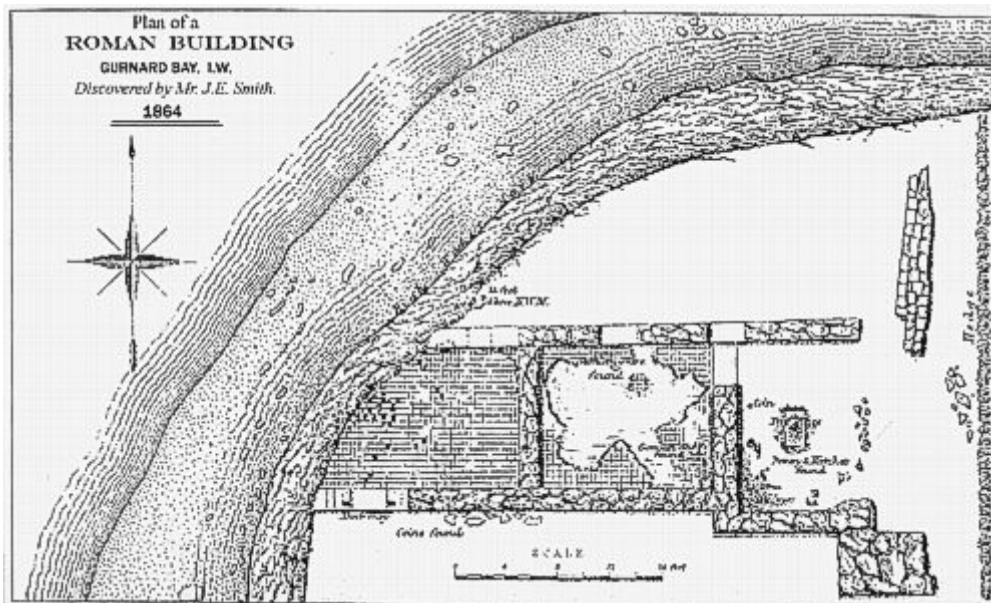
This fort is again referred to in [government accounts](#), where it is referred to as "*Gurnerds fort*". It is also mentioned in other government accounts, where it is listed as Gurnard Fort [Official letters addressed to Colonel William Sydenham, Governor of the Isle of Wight, 1643-1659; BL Add. Mss. 29319 f.113, mentioned in *Our Island. The Isle of Wight 1640-1660*, Paul Hooper. Cross Publishing 1998]

The fort disappears from records at the end of the seventeenth; presumably it was allowed to decay, there being no longer any need for it. Cowes had developed rapidly in the 17th century from nothing to being the main commercial and transit port for the Island. Gurnard also suffered increasingly from erosion on the seaward side and silting of the creek or 'luck' on the landward side. The low headland that existed on the west side of Gurnard marsh was steadily eroded in the 18th century probably due to the continual encroachments of quarrying that denuded the natural protection provided by the Bembridge Limestone ledges in the vicinity.

By the 19th century all traces above ground had been erased. However, in 1864, an archaeological excavation of a Roman villa also led to the uncovering of the remains of Gurnard Fort. The villa was sited to the north-west of today's Marsh Cottage and while uncovering the eastern end of the villa building range, it was noticed that the fort had cut right through the roman walls. An account of the excavation written by Edwin Smith in 1883 described what he uncovered:

"In 1868, permission was obtained to continue the excavation, when it was found that the building had been cut through at right angles directly through the hypocaust, and the materials thrown up to form a rampart for the Gurnet Fort, which was probably a work of Henry 8th and which was in a state of deficiency in 1635, and probably to the end of the seventeenth century. It was evidently nothing but an earthen Rampart with two or three small guns on stone platforms.

... From the refuse heap, the ground had been disturbed, to form the rampart and ditch of Gurnard Fort. The building was set out about two feet from the commencement of the Kitchen and continued in a straight line from thence to its termination about 40 feet to the East.."
[ACC 86/51 - Account by Edwin Smith of the excavation of the Roman building at Gurnard, written in 1883.]



Smith identifies the garden of Marsh Cottage as it was then as the site of Gurnard Fort. Much of the villa site was rapidly eroding before their very eyes at that time, further emphasizing the rapid denudation of this area. Today the site of the villa has totally vanished, while over half the garden area has also disappeared.

3. Shamlord Peel

In the 14th century, it is recorded in the Calendar of the Fine Rolls that a number of oaks from the King's Forest [Parkhurst] were ordered to be used in the construction of some peels at *Shamelhorde*, the old name for Cowes.

Commission to John de Weston, John Wyndesore and William de Keleswych, reciting that the oaks lately growing in the King's forest in the Isle of Wight have been thrown down in great numbers by a violent storm of wind, and that for the defence of that isle against the attacks of aliens, the King has ordained that in the port of Shamelhorde in that isle one or two peels, as need require, shall be built with part of the said oaks, and the residue thereof sold to the King's advantage; and appointing the said commissioners to survey the said oaks so thrown

down and cause as many as will be necessary for the building of the said peel or peels to be brought to the said port, and the peel or peels to be built there, and to sell the residue of the oaks and receive the money arising from the sale thereof and apply it to the costs of building the peel or peels and to keep the residue of the money, so that they answer at the Exchequer therefor; the King having ordered John de Countevyll, keeper of the said forest, to be intendant.

By the guardian and council.

[7 Nov. 1339. Cal. of Fine Rolls 1272-1445 17 Vols. London.]

A *peel* or *pele* is generally thought of as a defensive tower in and around the Scottish borders. English Heritage define the term as "*An uncrenellated, strong, fortified dwelling, of between two and four storeys. Occupied only in times of trouble built mainly in the border country of the North from the mid 14th to the 17th century.*". However, the earlier, more general word has the sense of a wooden, defensive stockade or palisaded enclosure, often temporary in nature. It is derived from the latin word *palus*, meaning 'stake', which is also related to the English word 'pole' and 'pale' [hence "The Pale" in Ireland]. From the latin, the middle English word *pel[e]*, that developed via the Old French word *pel* or *piel*, was another word for 'stockade' or 'stake' and simply referred to a palisade or fence of stakes. Indeed, Thomas Blount, in his *Calendarium Catholicum*, defined a peel or pele as "*a Fort built for defence of any place, especially against the force of the Sea*" [*Calendarium Catholicum*, or, An universall almanack 1664, by Thomas Blount. 1664] Thus the peel at Cowes was a timber stockade feature for defence of the small landing place at the mouth of the Newport River [Medina river]. Given the fact that East Cowes was more developed in that it had rudimentary landing facilities, it is at East Cowes that this peel has been located on the map above.

4. East Cowes Bulwark and Chain

----- To be completed soon -----

5. Fishouse and Quarr

During the Hundred Years War in the 14th century between England and France, much of the south coast of England was vulnerable to seaborne military raids by French forces, which in some cases were particularly destructive. Most coastal communities in the south of England suffered from these attacks and the Isle of Wight was no exception. The Abbot of Quarr, being one of the more wealthy and powerful landowners on the Island, was charged by the King, along with others, with the defence of the Island, such was the local nature of national defence in the medieval age. The Abbot at the time, a man known only as William, was also given permission by the King, Edward III, to protect Quarr Abbey and its possessions with fortified walls and other defences.



The site of *Fissheous* at the mouth of Wootton Creek.

The Abbey was surrounded by a stone precinct wall, encompassing the main site. A number of rough gun-ports were also introduced into the masonry at a number of points to allow small calibre guns to cover the area to the north between the abbey site and the sea. The western extant embrasure is 24 inches wide and 28 inches high [The Enceinte Wall of Quarr Abbey, D.F. Renn.]. It is made up of four dressed slabs of Bembridge Limestone and is only 2 feet above the present ground level. The outer side of the embrasure is made of two rough slabs, each with a semi-circular opening, which when placed together, form a circular gunport hole. "*Fissheous*", on the right bank of Wootton Creek at Fishbourne Point, was also provided with defence works, possibly small fortifications of some sort, as the Abbot had "*caused*

certain fortalices to be constructed at Fisshehous and at the abbot's mill". Wootton Mill was also fortified in a similar manner.

Edward III 24 Oct. 1365 Westminster

Licence for William, abbot of Quarr, in the Isle of Wight, and the convent of the same place, in the lifetime of the said William, to enclose with a wall and crenellate as many plots of land and of such precinct as they please on their own soil in the island, as well in the place called "Fisshehous" on the coast as elsewhere where it shall be expedient, and make castles or fortalices of these.

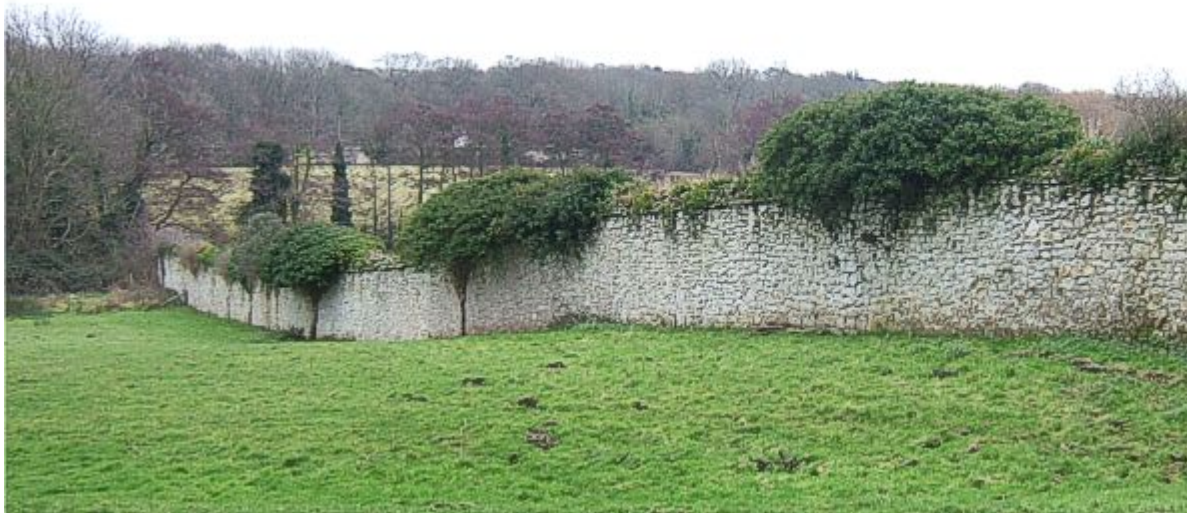
[C 66/272 Part 2, 39 Edw. III; or Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1216-1553, p.168.]

40 Edward III 12 June 1366 Westminster

Whereas the King lately granted licence for William, abbot, and the convent of Quarr in the Isle of Wight to enclose and crenellate divers plots of land on their own soil and castles or fortalices thereon in a place called Fisshehous on the sea coast and elsewhere on the island; he has now learned on the abbot's behalf that, whereas he has caused certain fortalices to be constructed at Fisshehous and at the abbot's mill and elsewhere on the island by virtue of the said licence, certain men of those parts are scheming to hinder those works and often set themselves to lay low and destroy the works begun by the abbot at his mill, the King has therefore taken the abbot, monks and fellow brethren, and the workmen and works of the abbey into his special protection, and has appointed Richard de Pembrugg and Theobald de Gorges, and deputies whom at the request of the abbot they shall appoint to survey the works, maintain and defend the abbot, monks and workmen and works, and arrest all contrariants during pleasure.

[C 66/273 Part 1, 40 Edw III ; or Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1216-1553, p. 253.]

The term **fortalice** carries the meaning of a fortification or strong place, although it did not imply the large scale fortification now known as a fortress, with which it is related. Fortalice derived from the Medieval Latin *fortelitia*, which in turn derives from the latin *fortis* meaning 'strong'. The word was usually used in conjunction with the words **castle** and **tower**. By the 18th century, it had developed the sense of a small fort or sconce [see A dictionary, English-Latin, and Latin-English, containing all things necessary for the translating of either language into other. by Elisha Coles. London, 1716. "**fortalitium,ii,n (a fortis) a fort, Sconce.**" ; and Young, William. A new Latin-English dictionary: ... by William Young. London, 1757. "**fortalitium,i,n. A fort, a strong place.**"]





[Above] The northern precinct wall of the Quarr Abbey complex looking east, showing the stone masonry elevation which stands approximately 10 to 12 feet. The gun loops are situated at the western end of this wall.

[Below] Position of the gun loop at the west end of the wall near to the gateway. There is a second gun loop about 20 metres to the east of this one but it has been blocked up.

[Left] Close-up of the gun loop, showing the rough nature of its construction.



Near right:

View of west gun loop from inside the enclosure wall.

Far right:

View of east gun loop from inside the enclosure wall.



A selection of gun loopholes. **Left:** early gun loop at Cooling Castle (1381), similar to Quarr. **Left middle:** loophole in Southampton town wall, mid 14th century. **Right middle:** Winchester Westgate. **Right:** Carisbrooke Castle gatehouse tower.

It is not known whether Wootton Mill and Fisshehous were each defended with a small fortification, such as a blockhouse, or peel, as at Shamlord [East Cowes] or whether they were fortified with a stone masonry wall, crenellated on the top and interspersed with artillery loops, as at Quarr Abbey. Of course, a ditch and palisaded rampart are also not out of the question, but the use of the word *fortalice* rather than *wall* does imply a small fort of some sort. Whether it has any bearing on these works is uncertain, but a defensive tower is known to have existed at the top of the hill flanking the west side of Wootton Creek, near to Wootton farm and church.

That traces of other fortifications (both archaeological and earthwork remains) from this period remain to be discovered is most probable as the abbot of Quarr was also instructed by the Crown to construct walls and ditches to protect vulnerable landing places on the Island.

40 Edward III 23 January 1369 Westminster

Commission to the abbot of Quarr, John de Insula, knight, Theobald de Gorges, Thomas Langeford and John Fitz Eustace, constable of the castle of Carresbrok in the Isle of Wight, ... to guard the said island, array and try all defensible men thereof, ...and make proclamation that ... all places by the sea in the said island where ships can put in be made secure against incursions of the enemy and be fortified and strengthened with walls and dykes; and to arrest all contrarians and to commit them to prison until further order. By King and Council.

[Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1216-1553, p.189.]

As most of the potential landing places are the on the low-lying coastline of the north side of the Island, it is here that significant discoveries may be made. However, given the extent of coastal erosion at such places as Gurnard, Quarr, Hamstead and Elmsworth, it is also clear that any potential remains will have disappeared, forcing a reliance on documentary sources.

6. Ryde Fort

By 1489, there was a small 'Bulwarke' at Ryde near the sea shore, [located](#) roughly at the foot of Union Street. A Victorian guidebook mentioned that, "*The watchhouse stood on the site of the coffee room of the Pier Hotel*" [Guide to the Isle of Wight, Rev. Edmund Venables. 1860]. It is clear that this refers to a watch-house that was built on the shore or 'waste' at a later date and not the fort itself. An indenture of purchase between Sir John Dillington and Henry Player in 1705 gives details of all the properties belonging to "*All that the Manner of Ashey and Ryde als. Buckland*", which Player was buying off Dillington. Mentioned in this indenture is a lease issued in 1681 to Charity Mitchell, which helps to locate this fort more exactly. It describes that the abutments of the property "*extendeth from the Bulwarke on the South to the Sea on the North*". This property was situated at the bottom of modern Union Street "*at the North End of a Close called Noad Close*" and was known as "The Steps". It was located immediately on the west side of Union Street and extended to the east side of the same street. The "*Common footpath and the Queen's Highway*" ran down through it. A distance of thirty yards is given from the sea on the north back to the southern boundary where the bulwark was; this boundary on the south is in line with the north building line of Church Lane. The fort can therefore be located on or near the site of 79 Union Street, possibly taking in part of Union Street adjoining.[OG/46/4]

The fort was mainly a wooden construction, the Manor accounts mostly mentioning expenditure for timber and carpenters. Its armament consisted of one gun that fired lead and stone shot. The bulwark seems to have had lines of hedging bushes planted in front of it as additional defence. Expenses for this fortification were met by the Lord of the Manor of Ashey, the Abbey of Wherwell, and thus it was a privately financed venture. This was a usual trait of small, local fortifications, whereas large forts were too expensive for private means, and thus required government intervention.

Rolls and Deeds relating to the manor of Ashey

[British Library Add.Ch 74487 - 74759]

6 Henry 7 Michaelmas 1489 - Mich. 1490

24 Leaden shotte newly bought for the Gonne lying on the Bulwarke, towards the sea for defence against the enemies coming to the Island by sea

13 Henry 7

The same render Account in the payment to 2 carpenters for newly repairing the Bulworke there this year 13/4 In the carriage of Timber to the same 2/4 In payment for taking away the old bulworke

The same Account in payment to carpenters for newly making the Bulleworke this year done by express contract 18/- and in payment for the carriage of 4 cart loads of Timber for the Bulworke 2/-

14 Henry 8 (1522)

For repair of the Gonne of the Lady there 2/6 for 11 lbs of Gunpowder bought for the said Gonne

Farmer's Account 15 Henry 8 (1523)

... and in ten Gonne stores bought whereof 4 of lead and 6 of stone 15d

15 James I (1616)

Presentment that John Smith dug up the Plushes planted at Ryde for defence against foreign

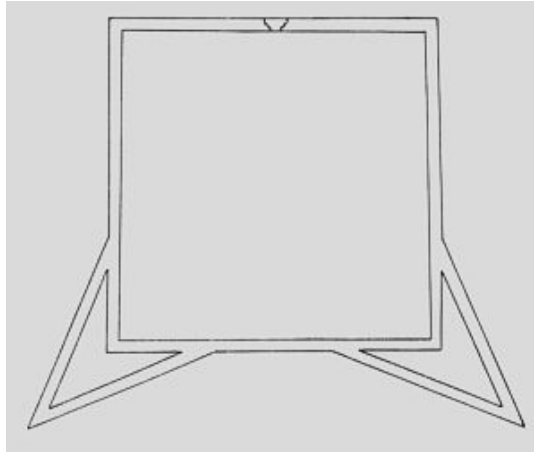
enemies - commanded to plant a new the same before the next court so as they become sufficient for the Bulwerke as in times past.

Steward's Account April 1627

Paid ii men to work about the Bulwerke one day 0 - 1 - 4

Sharpenode Fort

A clue to the construction of Ryde fort can be sought in Sharpnode fort at the west of the Island. This latter was a square platform, 37 feet by 37 feet and 8 feet high on the seaward side. It was described as "*a massy platforme only walled wyth planke and that begynneth to fayle wyth out anny dytche aboute yt*" [1559 Royal Survey of the Isle of Wight : Staffs. Co. Record Office, D1778,III,01, f.8].



Plan of Sharpenode Fort from the 1559 Survey. The top of the picture faces towards the sea, while the angle bastions are directed towards the land. The walls were constructed from timber and intermediate ground filled with earth. It is possible that Ryde Fort was similarly constructed as a square, timber and earth platform for a gun.

The fort fell into disrepair and, with the Spanish threat looming, Sir George Carey, the Island's governor, spent money on reconstructing an earth and timber sconce on the site. The accounts for this shed even more light on the construction of simple coastal forts on the Island:

**Woorkes and Repacons done upon her Graces Castles and Forts within the Isle of Wight, viz. at Caresbrooke, Yarmouthe, Freshwater.
...from the 25th of March 1587 annoq. 29 dne. Eliz. ... until the 24th day of November anno 30 dne. regine**

Freshwater, viz.

... making a skonce of earth and turfe at Sharpnode in Freshwater, felling of trees hewing sawinge woorkinge and settinge of postes and rayles about the same at Sharpnode conteyninge 39 perches with other woorkes done there within the tyme of this accompte as hereafter more particularly is mentioned, viz.

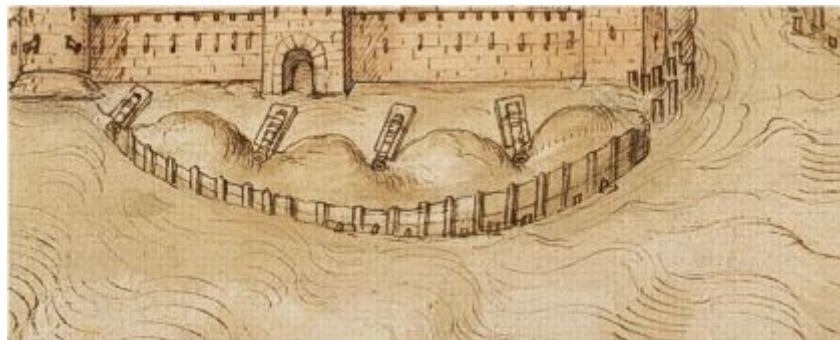
Boordes for carryng of turfe and earth 200 at 6s. 8d. the 100	0-13-4
Settinge of pykes and hedges to kepe of the force of the sea from the skonce	1-4-0
A greate levell to be used about the woorkes with 3s. for a small corde	0-5-6
Wages of laborers making a skonce of turfe and earth at Sharpnode at Freshwater at 8d. per diem	117-0-8

Taskewoorke, viz. to John Brett carpenter for felling of trees hewing sawinge woorkinge and settinge of postes and rayles about the skonce at Sharpnode conteynge 39 perches at 1s. 8d. the perch	3-5-0
Henrye Hall havinge the direccion of the earth woorkes and oversight of the labourers for 98 days at 1s. per diem	4-18-0

[PRO E351/3571. the castles and forts of the Isle of Wight. 25 Mar.-24 Nov. 1587]

From these accounts, it is clear that a square perimeter wall was constructed of posts with planks nailed horizontally with edges abutting. The interior was filled with earth with possibly a low rampart round the edge. A semi-circular version can be seen in the picture of Hull town defences below.

In the manor accounts for 1489-90, the use of the word "*lying*" when describing the gun could well suggest that the gun was mounted on a sledge-type mounting rather than on a wheeled carriage. This was a common arrangement in the early days of gunnery and was evident on ships such as the Mary Rose, and also on land where guns did not need to be moved a great deal, such as defensive positions round towns or in forts.



It is clear that this fort was protected by a natural barrier in the form of a line or lines of [plashed hedging](#). This served two purposes. Firstly, it acted as a form of sea defence to lessen the force of the sea, by catching beach material in the wattle-like branches of this fence. This allowed the beach to build up here and acted as a sort of groyne. This same function was a feature of Sharpnode Fort at the west of the Island where money was spent in 1587 on the "*Settinge of pykes and hedges to kepe of the force of the sea from the skonce*". Secondly these 'plushes' or plashes acted as a form of anti-personnel barrier - a sort of organic, early barbed wire. When hawthorn, blackthorn or firethorn were plashed in a hedge, they formed a difficult defensive hedge that acted as an obstacle to an attacking force. In the field, fortifications and troops used a dead version of this called [abbattis](#), which were large branches of trees dug into the ground so that the splayed end branches formed a barrier to enemy troops. They were designed to slow down an advance enough to allow the defenders to have free shots as the attackers tried to clear the branch obstacles.

Sir Thomas Wilson, in the comment already mentioned, also seems to refer to the fort at Ryde, when he noticed:
"At Yarmouth against Hurst Castle; Garnard against Leap; Cowes against Calshoke; and Ryde against Portsmouth so as no daring approaching enemies can pass those channels without thundering gunshot from those commanding castles."
 [BL Lansdowne 213 ff. 351-384 "Relation of a short Survey of the Western Counties . . . observed in a seven Weekes

7. Nettlestone Fort

8. St. Helens

Both these forts can lay claim to being the fort mentioned in the reports of the French attack on the Island in 1545. If so, date of construction must be before 1545. Sir John Oglander, a gentleman who lived nearby at Nunwell, but was writing about eighty years after the event, presumably based his version on eye witness accounts and people's memories:

"...the[y] landed in thre[e] severoll places all at one time pourposely to devid owr forces. Pierre Strosse landed at Bindebridge St Hellens where then wase a littell forte, and beate ower men being devided from ye forte into ye woods ..."

Sir John Oglander's Book of Accounts and Common place Book [OG/90/3]

However, on the French side, there is a more detailed account of the 1545 attack on the Island by Martin du Bellay, a soldier and governor, who wrote about events between 1513 and 1546:

"... La descente se fait en trois divers lieux tout en un temps, pour tenir la force des ennemis separée : en un costé fut mandé le seigneur Pierre Strosse, pour descendre au dessus d'un petit fort ou les ennemis avoyent quelque artillerie, dont ils battoyent nos galleres par flanc : là dedans s'estoit retiré un nombre de gens de pied du país, lesquels, ayans veu la hardiesse des nostres, abandonnerent le fort, et se meirent en fuite dedans un bois taillis, vers les parties mediterranes : noz gens à la poursuite en tuerent quelques uns, et bruslerent les maisons circonvoisines."

(...To keep the enemy's forces separated, a simultaneous descent was made in three different places. On one side the Seigneur Pierre Strosse was bidden to land below a little fort where the enemy had some artillery with which they assailed our galleys in flank, and within which a number of Island infantry had retired. These, seeing the boldness of our men, abandoned the fort and fled southward to the shelter of a copse. Our men pursued and killed some of them, and burned the surrounding habitations...)

[Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Les Mémoires de Messire Martin Du Bellay, Vol. 10 pp. 560 - 578, reproduced in Collection Complète des Mémoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de France Vol. 19, ed. Claude-Bernard Petitot.]



The **Nettlestone fort** is clearly marked on a map [right] of c. 1570, commissioned by Lord Burghley. It is believed to have been made by John Rudd, a vicar who also became a skilled cartographer.

[BL Royal MS. 18. D.III, f.18]

The fort is circular in shape and seems to be made up of curved sections, suggesting the masonry of a small, round stone tower. This may be seen as a smaller version of round, stone artillery platforms such as the Round Tower at Portsmouth (a plan is shown in the inset picture for comparison) or Cromwell's Castle, Tresco.

It may even be in the tradition of a locally built stone tower, such as Worsley's Tower at the west end of the Island. This tower was built by Sir James Worsley, while he was captain of the Isle of Wight between 1520 and 1538. It was described as 'round square [octagonal] and was 19 feet high and 26 feet in diameter. It has been suggested that "it was probably a single-storey structure, with provision for mounting the main armament on the roof, firing through embrasures in the parapet, with further gun-ports opening through the lower part of the walls near ground-level" [The History of the King's Works, vol.3, H.M. Colvin, gen. editor. HMSO, 1975]. This puts Worsley's Tower in same category of early Tudor gun-towers as Dover, Camber and Portsmouth. Given the easy local availability of stone, then the forts at Seaview, St. Helens and Bembridge may also belong to this same fort-building style.

This fort was still in working existence in 1654, when it is mentioned in the accounts of Col. Hammond, that had been submitted and allowed by the Council in London on 21 August 1654. In a section on provisions for Yarmouth and Cowes Castles and Nettlestone Fort, it lists 39 shillings and 6 pence spent by Mr. Stephen Galpin for necessaries at Nettlestone Fort. [1654 Aug 17-31. SP 18/87] It is referred to again in [government accounts](#) in 1655, where it is described as *Nettlesheigh Fort*. Nettlestone Fort is again mentioned in accounts dated 12 July 1655, detailing the cost of garrison soldiers in England and Wales [SP 18/99] . In November 1658, Col. Sydenham, commander of the Island, received pay for various Island forts, one of which was that at Nettlestone [Official letters BL Add. Mss. 29319 op. cit.].

The fort ceased to exist at some point in the next century. However, a house remained on the site during the 18th century, known as "Fort House" or "Old Fort House", while the point of land here was always referred to on 18th century maps as "Old Fort" [Isaac Taylor 1759; John Andrews 1769; Thomas Milne 1791; John Albin 1795; Richard Warner 1795; Ordnance Survey

1793/1810]. Whether the building had anything to do with the fort is unknown. However, it is more likely that it was built from the masonry remains of the fort, since photographs of this building show a typical domestic dwelling with a thatch roof, similar to other cottages on the Island. There is no military, functional aspect to it at all. In a booklet of memories of S. Matthews and R. Cheverton, both lifelong residents of Seaview, the site is described. "*Next door is Old Fort Cafe, formerly a thatched stone-built cottage with a lean-to on the eastern side. Here Miss Frances Newell ran a grocery business. ... When she retired, the property was sold to a Mr. Salter, of Ryde, who had the site cleared and built the Riviera Cafe. During demolition, some old walls, mud-bonded, were discovered, relics of the fortress of 1540.*" [Memories of Old Seaview, S. L. Matthews and R. J. Chiverton. Newport, 1975]



A fort is first mentioned at St. Helens in an account of the military expenses of Henry VIII's and Edward VI's wars 1538 -1552, entitled 'Charges of the Kinges warres and Fortifications' [c. 1553. Bodleian MS. Add. D. 43 f.11] From a Royal Survey of 1559, it is clear that there was a fort at the foot of the sloping cliffs at St. Helens, north of the Church seamark. In a detailed list of the lands belonging to the Priory of St. Helens, a fortification is used as one of the land marks: *And alonge upon the shore on theste side of the priory Moore to the Bulwarke and so upon the cliffe to Sainte Hellains pointe - xx acres of pasture*
Survey of the State of the Isle of Wight 20 Nov. 1559. SP 12/7/60 St Helens]

This seems to point to this bulwark being in the vicinity of Nodes Point, which had always been known as "Watch House Point" until the 19th century, because of the watch house that had been sited on top of the cliff at that point. Only later was the point renamed Nodes Point after the name of a field "Node Close". It may be significant that a Victorian battery was constructed here in the 19th century on top of the slumping cliffs at a very similar point to the Tudor fort of three hundred years before.

Both this fort and the one at Seaview were sited to cover the anchorage at St. Helens, which was to become a favoured sheltered naval station in the 17th and 18th centuries. The forts also provided defence against any landings by enemy forces in the area. Although the area between Seaview Duver and St. Helens Duver consists of slumping cliffs, these are low in places and can be described more accurately as steep slopes covered with woods.

The last mention of the fort seems to be in a letter, dated 10 May 1660, from Lord Culpeper, Governor of the Island, to Sir William Oglander, Colonel of the East Medine militia, ordering him ensure that each Company performed two days labour on the fortifications at St. Helens and Bembridge [OG/19/78 or OG/BB/520].

9. Bembridge Fort

That there was a fort on 'Bembridge Isle' is evident from brief mentions in documents. It is first alluded to by Sir John Oglander in his Common place books while bemoaning the plight of the Island in having to put up with a military presence on the Island: "*How willing were we to have soldiers brought in to us, and to have new forts built at Bembridge, Cowes, Nettlestone etc., till now our Island being all made a Garrison, we now too late repent us, as being made slaves to our slaves.*" This fort is further mentioned in [government accounts](#), where it is referred to as "*Brinn Bridge*" fort. It is also mentioned in other government accounts, already mentioned, where it is listed as Bembridge Fort [SP 18/99 Accounts 12 July 1655; Official letters BL Add. Mss. 29319 op. cit.] The last mention of Bembridge fort arises in

the letter already mentioned above between Lord Culpeper and Sir William Oglander in 1666 [OG/19/78 or OG/BB/520].

Like the forts at Nettlestone and St. Helens, this fort was abandoned in the late 17th or early 18th century. A memory of it remained in the field name "*Fort Ground*" that lingered on until the early 19th century.

A counterpart lease of Forelands Farm to Mr. Henry Dennett, dated 6 Dec. 1780 mentions this field called Fort Ground: "... *One other Close called Fort Ground containing by Measure Five acres Two roods and Thirty perches One other Close called Nine Acres containing by Measure Eight acres One rood and Thirteen perches* ... [HG/2/93]



[Above] Part of a "*Survey of Lands estate of Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldercombe Isle of Wight*" c. 1774 [JER/WA/33/36]

Forelands Farm possessed the following fields:

X Home Ground

Y Fort Ground

Z Nine Acres

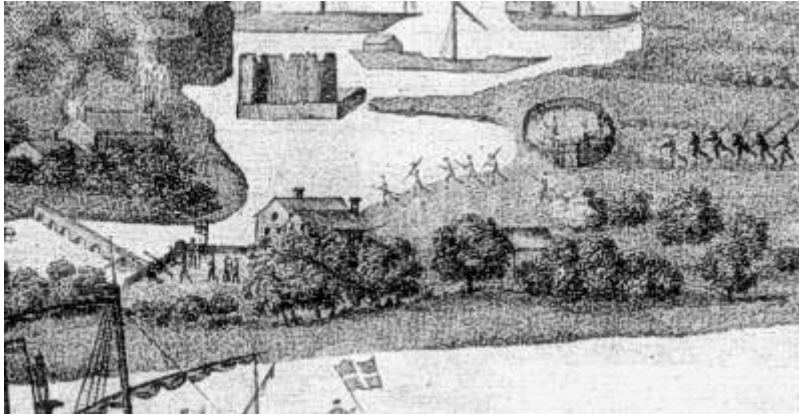
The site of the fort can be identified as the area adjacent to the north side of the Crab and Lobster pub in Bembridge, where there is today a modern coastguard station and where there is access to the beach. [Below]



The site of *Fort Ground* as it is today looking north-east towards Forelands.

10. Yarbridge Battery

In the Cowdry engraving entitled "*The Encampment of the English Forces near Portsmouth*", a gun battery is visible at Yarbridge covering the causeway that gives access to the Bembridge peninsula. Armed men are shown with two guns behind two ramparts that are arranged to form a wide salient angle. Towards Sandown, at Morton, there is a timber peel or circular wooden stockade, again containing armed militia. There is no reason to doubt the truth of these two features as other fortifications have been included accurately in the engraving. Today there is a conspicuous flat topped ridge of hard Upper Greensand stone to the south of the-The Mall where it descends to the crossroads traffic lights at Yarbridge. This can be explained as a natural feature, where the road has caused erosion on the north side to form a small gorge. However, it would also give a vantage point for a gun battery allowing a certain amount of elevation over the causeway.

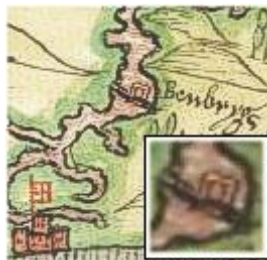


[Left] Detail from the Cowdry engraving showing Yarbridge and Sandown area in 1545.

[Below] Enlarged detail of timber stockade.



Enlarged detail of gun platform.



[Left] Map of c. 1570 showing square feature in the middle of Yarbridge causeway [BL Royal MS. 18. D.III, f.18]. Inset shows an enlarged detail of structure. Its function is unknown but possibly serves a defensive purpose.

11. Worsley's Battery

Although this is not a pre-1700 fort, it has been included as it is an example of a minor fort built privately by a local landowner. In the late 1790's, as the international situation between Britain and Revolutionary France became increasingly tense, Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldercombe decided to construct a small battery on the cliff top overlooking Mount Bay. Written in 1847, the recollections of John Green, a local St. Laurence inhabitant, shed some light on this fort. These were printed in the Isle of Wight Mercury in 1890, and special thanks are due to Dr. Alan Champion for making this and other excellent primary sources available on his [website](#).

The fort erected on the lawn at St. Laurence by the late Right Honourable Sir Richard Worsley, of Appuldurcombe Park, (who died August 8th. 1805), and mounted six six cannon guns, a present by his late Majesty, King George the 3rd. The guns were Bell metal, cast from bells of churches in France in the time of war, and taken by some of gallant heroes and brought to England as a prize. At the finish of the fort, there was great rejoicing amongst the people, and in exercising the guns an accident happened, and a man's thumb was blown off by neglect in stopping the vent.

The fort has been improved by the late Honourable Earl of Yarborough; but 'tis not the same guns as were there at first.

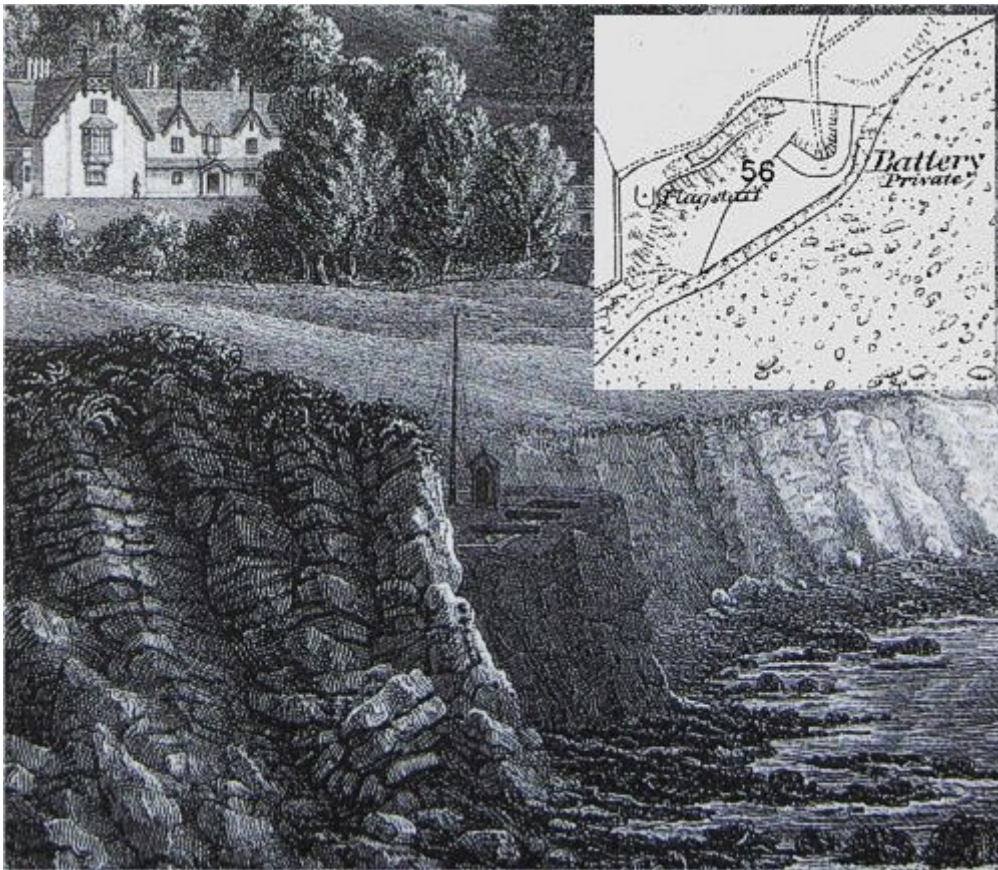
[Isle of Wight Mercury, 18 June 1890]



Detail of St. Lawrence area, showing the fort set up by Worsley.
Vectiana or Companion to the Isle of Wight, by John Albin. [Newport, 1806]

In the early 19th century, a number of guidebooks mention this fort, which was built on the land of the new cottage, Marine Villa, that Sir Richard Worsley had built to the east of St. Lawrence. John Albin, writing in 1818, described the origin of the canons mounted in the battery: *"Here among other whimsicalities, is a fort on which are mounted guns cast out of the church bells at Nantes during the French Revolution, which guns were taken from a French privateer, captured a little way off, opposite the spot where they are now placed"* [A Companion to the Isle of Wight, John Albin. Newport, 1818]. In 1806, John Bullar wrote: *"Since the present war, the late owner erected a battery, with several pieces of cannon, commanding the adjoining coast."* [An Historical and Picturesque Guide to the Isle of Wight, John Bullar. Southampton, 1806]. In 1812, William Cooke wrote two pages describing this cottage: *"In the deep recess of the village of St. Lawrence, between the road and a pleasant sandy cove, bounded by white cliffs, and defended by a small battery of brass cannon, on a verdant lawn, embowered in delightful shades, stands this lovely Marine Villa"* [A New Picture of the Isle of Wight by William Cooke. Southampton, 1812]. In Brannon's 1848 edition of Vectis Scenery, he writes: *"On the sea-cliffs are two small forts mounting several guns and carronades : and at a short distance is a long, slated building, occupied by the men (and their families) belonging to the preventive service."*

The battery is situated on a wide ledge on the side of a cliff and commands the shingle beach of Mounts Bay. It is built in the form of a raised platform. The walls are constructed using stone ashlar blocks, with thin paving stones (106cm x 46cm) with a bevelled edge forming the top of the platform. The wall on the sea side of the battery was constructed from rough blocks of random rubble stone. A mixture of soil and small broken rocks was used as packing infill between the walls.



Above: Detail from a Brannon engraving of *The Southern Coast of the Isle of Wight*, showing the battery in the middle of the picture. [Vectis Scenery, George Brannon. Wootton, 1848]

Inset map shows the battery in 1862.

Below: A magic lantern slide from 1896, showing the battery. [Thanks to Stef for permission to include this]





Above: The remains of the battery in 2015.

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