

Bembridge Fort

Commenced	May 1862	Armament	
Completed	July 1867	1869 to 18921	6 x 7-inch RBL
Cost	£ 48,925	1893 to 1900	2 x 4-inch B.L. 6 x 64pr. RML
Map Reference	SZ 624861	1900 to 1901	2 x 4-inch B.L.
Position	Isle Of Wight / Eastern Defences, Bembridge Down		Moveable armament stored in fort
Type	Land Front	1905	2 x 5-inch BL Howitzers, 3 x 9pdr RML 8 machine guns (field carriages)
Ditch	Dry	1907	2 X 5-inch BL howitzers, 6 x 15pdr BL, 4 x machine guns (field carriages)
Guns	10	1910	2 x machine guns (field carriages)
Barrack Accom.	4 officers 106 men	1907	Disarmed
Present use	National Trust/Industrial unit	Caponiers	3
History	1900s became a barrack and store. Test site for anti torpedo/submarine	Counterscarp galleries	None
Disposal	Relinquished 1945	Haxo casemates	None
Condition	Altered in places but mostly intact	Moncrieff Pits	None
Access	By Arrangement with National Trust		
Sources	PRO WO33,78,192,199,396. CAB 3,13,18 &36		

History and description

Bembridge Fort, constructed as part of the 1860 Royal Commission defences of the Isle of Wight, was intended to be a keep to the four coast batteries in Sandown Bay. It occupies the heights on Bembridge Down, commanding the space between Brading Haven and the sea. It has a deep dry ditch surrounding it with a covered way and rifle parapet on the outer side, complete with crochets. The fort was to serve as a last stand if the Isle of Wight was invaded. It was to be armed initially with 20 guns. There were some alterations to the original design when single caponiers were substituted for double ones and the scarp and counterscarp were fully revetted. The original armament fitted consisted of six 7-inch RBLs that were replaced in 1893 by six 64pr. 71cwt RMLs on 6ft parapet carriages and two 4-inch B.L.s. on siege travelling carriages. The 64prs were removed in 1900 but the 4-inch BLs remained until 1903. The fort then stored the moveable armament for the eastern end of the island until at least 1910. Between 1880 and 1900 the fort was used as an experimental test facility for experiments with anti-submarine and anti-torpedo devices. Two cables ran from the fort to the sea and a magnetic field between was to be used to detect any metal objects passing. The fort, for much of its existence was used as a barracks and a store by various army units stationed in the locality; when Culver Down Battery was built the fort housed the BOP and a PF cell and this continued until the end of WWII. Because of this the fort acted as a co-ordinating point for the 9.2-inch guns at Nodes Point Battery and Culver Down Battery. Two Allen Williams turrets were installed on the roof. The fort was placed in the hands of a caretaker from 1945 to 1948 when it was relinquished. From then on to 1965 the property was heavily vandalised until the IOW council purchased the property in 1965 and the National Trust bought it from them in 1967.

In 2008 the fort was occupied by a light engineering firm. The National Trust have undertaken some clearance work within the fort and open it to the public on a limited basis.

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