

Cliffe Fort

<p>Commenced July 1861</p> <p>Completed c.1870</p> <p>Cost £ 162,937 Estimated</p> <p>Map Reference TQ 706 767</p> <p>Position South bank of River Thames, opposite Coalhouse Fort</p> <p>Type Sea/river</p> <p>Ditch Dry</p> <p>Guns Not known</p> <p>Barrack Accom. 300 men proposed</p> <p>Present use Derelict Owned by Blue Circle Industries</p> <p>History</p> <p>Disposal Sold 1950s/1960s.</p> <p>Condition Pretty good</p> <p>Access By arrangement with Blue Circle Industries</p> <p>Sources Wilson, Later 19th Century Defences of the Thames (Journal of Socy. for Army Historical Research 1963)</p>	<p>Armament</p> <p>1887 2 x 12.5-inch 9 x 11-inch RMLs in casemates plus 2 x 9-inch RMLs in open battery</p> <p>1890-1906 Brennan torpedo station.</p> <p>1895 2 x 12.5-inch RML 5 x 11-inch RML 1 x 9-inch RML plus 3 x 3pr. QF. in open battery</p> <p>1899 4 x 12pr.Q.F</p> <p>Later 2 x 4.7-inch or 6-inch</p> <p>WWII 2 x 4-inch BLs</p> <p>Caponiers None</p> <p>Counterscarp galleries None</p> <p>Haxo casemates None</p> <p>Moncrieff Pits None</p>
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History and Description

Cliffe Fort was the only totally new work of the Thames defences being proposed by the 1859 Commission. The 1860 plan was for 13 guns on the terreplein protected by shields, 3 guns en barbette and 2 for land defence, with casemated positions for 20 guns behind iron shields beneath. The front, forming a quadrant, was to be flanked by three musketry caponiers and the gorge building formed two bastioned fronts. A main magazine, four shell filling rooms and four expense magazines were provided. All of this was to rest on a 'cake' of concrete 7 feet thick. In May 1861 gravel was found at a depth of 60 ft and chalk at 79ft and the contract for the laying of the foundations was entered. It now required piles 30ft long and a bed of 14ft of concrete. In 1865 reports of difficulties with foundations on the marshy ground, including subsidence and cracking, resulted in the original plan to mount guns on the fort's roof being abandoned to leave a casemated fort very similar to Coalhouse. Cliffe Fort's main claim to fame is that it became a Brennan torpedo station. One of the 9-inch magazines was converted for this use. Two of the launching rails survive as does part of the retractable observation post. Between 1895 and 1906 the fort was modernized with concrete emplacements on the roof for 4 x 12pr. QFs. The fort retained its 12.5 inch guns.

Cliffe Fort is now owned by Robert Brett & Sons Ltd. The RML casemates are remarkably complete in their fittings with shields extant. Some casemates have been filled with concrete, apparently to form traverses as was done at Coalhouse Fort. The magazines are damp and prone to flooding in places. Two of the BL positions on the roof were subsequently altered for anti-aircraft guns. The fort is overgrown and decaying. There is no easy access to the interior.

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