

## Cliffe Fort Brennan Station

<b>Commenced</b>	1877	<b>Armament</b>  1877 to 1905 Brennan Torpedoes
<b>Completed</b>	1877	
<b>Cost</b>	£	
<b>Map Reference</b>	TQ 706 767	
<b>Position</b>	Cliffe Fort Thames defences	
<b>Type</b>	Brennan Torpedo Station	
<b>Ditch</b>	River Thames	
<b>Guns</b>		
<b>Barrack Accom.</b>	Inside Cliffe Fort	
<b>Present use</b>	Derelict	
<b>History</b>	Active use until 1905	
<b>Disposal</b>		
<b>Condition</b>	Mostly destroyed	
<b>Access</b>	With permission. Slipway visible	
<b>Sources</b>	The Brennan Torpedo by Alec Beanse. WO78/4963	

### History and Description

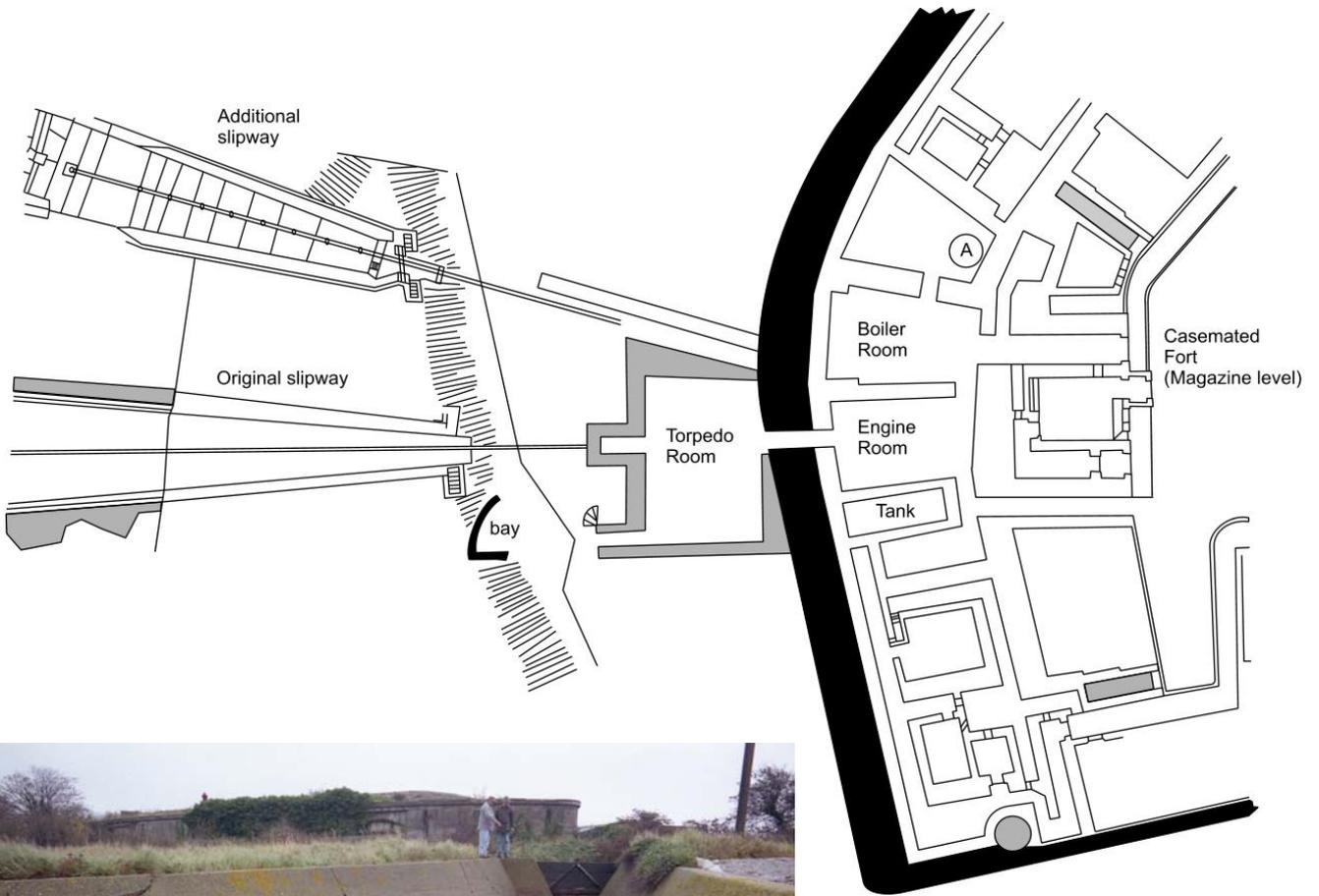
The installation at Cliffe was partially built into the existing Royal Commission Fort and the result was an altogether unique design also influenced by the low level of the site. The date the Brennan installation was added is not known but it was probably shortly after the adoption of the Brennan in 1887. To accommodate the installation, the magazine under the 9inch Rifled Muzzle Loader adjacent to the casemated battery was gutted out forming a chamber for the engine room. This was flanked by the boiler room, water tank and pump chamber. A roof was put over the now redundant emplacement above. This area was probably used for maintenance or wire-winding. A rectangular opening in the floor, with provision for a hoist above, allowed items to be raised from the engine room below. It also seems likely that the front of the former emplacement contained the directing station for the torpedo.

Torpedoes were stored in a large concrete room which was built on to the front of the fort. The roof of this room was reinforced with a number of large steel girders and sloped down at the same angle as the slipway. It was connected to the engine room by a passage through the wall of the Fort, the outer section of which was formerly the entrance for a caponier at this point. The torpedoes were brought into the torpedo room along a short tunnel running forwards from one side of the torpedo room and stopping just short of the unclimbable fence, where a gate allowed access to the ditch. Opposite this gate, a curved retaining wall in the counterscarp formed a bay large enough to turn a torpedo in. This would indicate that torpedoes were brought ashore at a small quay to the side of the fort from where a tramway ran, along the floor of the ditch, to the bay. The torpedoes were then turned 90 degrees into line with the tunnel and pushed into the torpedo room. Because this site was so low, the launch rail started on the roof of the torpedo room and not inside as elsewhere. This required the torpedoes to be raised through a slot in the roof to bring them into line with the slipway before launching. The launch crew and the opening in the roof were exposed to fire from ships coming up the river. To remedy this, flank walls were constructed on the roof of the torpedo room to afford some protection. The tunnel mentioned previously allowed the crew to get up on the roof, via some steps, without exposing themselves unduly.

The original slipway was supported on wooden piles 12inches square with the flat bottom rails bolted to brackets attached to the top of the piles. A second slipway was added, probably in the early 1900's, to the right of the first and angled 17 degrees down stream of it. This second slipway also started at roof level to the right hand side of the torpedo room. The torpedoes, after being raised to roof level, had to be pushed across the roof in to line with this second slipway. A rail was fitted to the torpedo room roof to facilitate this.

Probably coincident with the addition of the second slipway was the construction of a conning tower. This tower was unique to Cliffe and was located at the upriver end of the casemated battery. The mechanism passed through the roof and gun-floor to the magazine level beneath where it terminated in a deep pit. This would, no doubt, have allowed easier acquisition of targets and control of the torpedo as Cliffe Fort is on a low site with no high ground behind on which to place a directing cell. It is hard not to conclude that this tower would have made an obvious target and it may be that once a target had been acquired the tower was lowered into the protection of the conical concrete collar on the roof for the actual engagement. The installation is derelict with very little left to recognise its function. One slipway remains together with vestiges of the conning tower.

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The slipway



Remains of the telescopic tower



The concrete protection for the conning tower