

Fort Cumberland

Commenced	1785	Armament	1820 64 emplacements of ramparts
Completed	1810		1872
Cost	£ 110,229 - 11s - 6½d		2 x 7inch R.B.L. 12 x 8inch S.B.
Map Reference	SZ 683992		21 x 32pr S.B. 5 x 24pr S.B.
Position	Eastney point on Portsea Island -Langstone Harbour		1886
Type	Casemated (star) bastioned fort		1 x 7-inch R.B.L.
Ditch	Dry		12 x 8-inch S.B.
Guns	81		15 x 64pr R.M.L.
Barrack Accom.	714 (1860) 526 (1882)		1890
Present use	English Heritage Updated in 1858, 1890s.		4 x 6-inch B.L. 6 x 64pr R.M.L.
History	Royal Marines Depot R.M. withdrew 1970s		1897
Disposal			2 x 9inch R.M.L. H.A. guns added.
Condition	Casemates generally sound		
Access	None yet		
Sources	Portsmouth Papers "Fort Cumberland" P. McGrath		

History and Description

Fort Cumberland, designed to defend Portsea Island's Eastern flank, was the last self-contained fully bastioned fortress constructed in England. It was the brainchild of the 3rd. Duke of Richmond, who, as Master general of the Ordnance, conceived it during an extensive Southern tour in 1782. He most likely envisaged a showpiece structure incorporating new techniques advocated by the Frenchman Montalembert. These were not, however, immediately acceptable to English Engineers trained more traditionally in the Vauban school. So a compromise was reached utilising casemates revived by Montalembert and Vauban's bastions. The twenty-five year project involved thousands of transport-destined convicts representing a security nightmare but a cheap and semi-skilled labour force. The site, including a south-western facing ravelin and outworks, covers some twenty four acres. It contained 41 barrack casemates with four magazines for a powder capacity of 2200 barrels. Between 1882 and 1890 major revisions were undertaken to the south and left bastions, including the intervening curtain, and the centre bastion to provide a clear field of fire for the 6-inch BL guns. The Royal Marine Artillery's permanent association with the fort began in 1817 and during the Great War became the base for its Howitzer and anti-aircraft Brigade. During the last war it played host to 'X' organisation or the Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation specialising in a variety of activities including landing craft work. The Royal Marines used the fort subsequently until the 1970s. Ancient Monument status was bestowed upon it in 1959. Currently it is owned by English Heritage, housing the Central Archaeology Service. Their intention is to conserve it and open parts of it to the public.

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