

The Verne (Citadel)

Commenced	1857
Completed	1869
Cost	£ 215.667 (including East Weare)
Map Reference	SY 692735
Position	On the heights above Portland Harbour
Type	Fortress
Ditch	Dry on the south and west
Guns	9 main armament 10 mobile
Barrack Accom.	18 officers, 484 men, 30 hospital
Present use	Prison

History	Coast Defence & garrison
Disposal	1948 to the Prison Commissioners
Condition	Fair with some conversion
Access	By writing to the Governor

Sources	1869 Committee Report FSG Fort supplement Vol. 9 1981
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Armament

1888?		1899
Position		2 x 12.5-inch RML
No. 1 & 2	12.5-inch RML	3 x 7-inch RML
No. 3	7-inch RML	
No. 4 & 5	7-inch RML	
No. 6	7-inch RML	
No. 7	8-inch SB 54 cwt.	1941
No. 8	7-inch RML	2 x 3-inch AA
No. 9	10-inch RML	2 x 40mm bofors
plus 10 mobile guns		

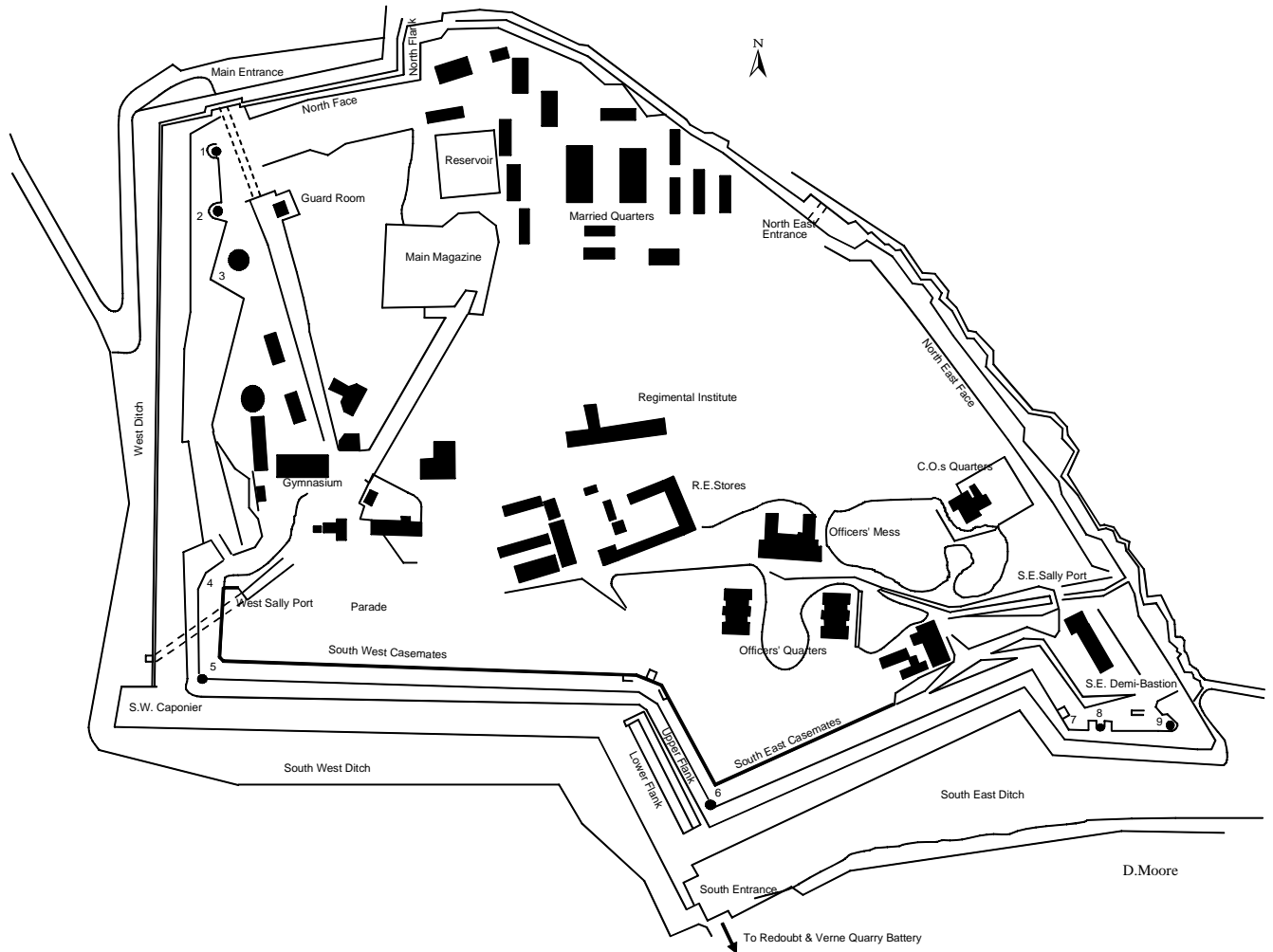
Caponiers	2
Counterscarp galleries	None
Haxo casemates	None
Moncrieff Pits	5?

History and Description

The Citadel on the Verne was constructed as a 50 acre fortress, built partly by contract and partly with 'free' (convict) labour. It has a sheer drop on the north and east sides, with an enormous ditch cut from the rock on the other two sides. As well as the usual barrack casemates it was constructed with a gymnasium, hospital, recreation rooms, museum, lawn tennis and cricket grounds. In time of danger the fortress would have been a refuge for the local civilians as well as its garrison. The Verne was to accommodate enough troops to defend Portland's military and naval establishments and was intended to be a siege fortress impregnable to attack and able to prevent an enemy from capturing the harbour of Portland. It also supplied accommodation for the gun detachments required to man the East Weare batteries to the east. The Fortress was designed in 1857 by Captain William Crossman R.E. with modifications by the Royal Commission in 1859. The ditch was begun as early as 1848 so that the stone could be used for Portland breakwater. Fifty arched casemates occupy the space underneath the broad south and west ramparts overlooking the parade ground. Sufficient earth covered them to make them bombproof. The original entrance was a large archway in the north side with a sally port to the East Weare batteries down the east escarpment. Twenty eight and twelve casemates were constructed in the south-west and south-east for 20 men each. Six upper flank casemates had accommodation for ten men each (1 for sergeants and 5 for a hospital) nine lower ones were for seven gunners each. ten other casemates were for the cookhouse, ablutions, tailors shop, sergeants' mess, guardroom and prisoners' room. These last two had storerooms beneath. Commissariat stores for bread, bedding, meat coal and utensils were located in five more casemates. Sixty four single officers were accommodated in two blocks, with the officers' mess and kitchen on the smaller parade ground. Two large and one small block of married quarters were built at the northern end, together with cottages for specialist R.E. Officer and Garrison Engineer's Department staff. The Colonel's residence was near the South East Demi-bastion. The original accommodation was for 8 officers with 484 men but in the later years 1,000 could be accommodated. The peace time accommodation was for one or two companies.

The armament was for siege protection and coast defence support. The first installed were on the south-east demi-bastion. On the south and west faces guns firing en-barbette mounted on the ramparts. Eleven more guns were to be mounted in the south-west lower flank positions to fire out over the glacis. At the south-west corner a small redoubt for ten 40pr. RBL guns was raised up to cover the high counterscarp at this point. Sheds for these mobile guns were built near the south-east demi-bastion. A drawbridge across the ditch gave access to the redoubt via a tunnel from the south flank. The single south caponier had three gun ports facing east and three west covering the grand ditch. The sally port was fitted with a Guthrie rolling bridge, much of which still survives. The north caponier covered the main entrance. The ditch turns north in front of it and stops at the cliff face, which protects the rest of the north and the east sides of the fort. The access tunnel to the north caponier, south-west caponier and west sally port have now been filled with rubble as a security measure for the current use of the fort as a prison. In 1877 heavy 12.5-inch RMLs were fitted on the west rampart. Other armament fitted included a 7-inch RMLs and a 10-inch RML forming three batteries of guns in all. The main magazine is in the north west of the fort, near the main gate and rendered bombproof with an earth covering. The expense magazines were all supplied from this with trolleys, there being no ammunition lifts. By 1906 the fort had been disarmed, but a Fire Command Post was still in use to control all the guns in the area from a Central headquarters, just north of the south-east demi-bastion. During the two world wars the Headquarters of Coast Artillery was moved to The Verne. In 1941 the Coast Defence Tactical Radar Set was moved to The Verne from Grove Point and put into no.9 gun pit. A Chain Home Low Radar set for the RAF was fitted to The Verne. The main magazine was re-used as a hospital. The Verne is now a prison.

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South Lower Flank Battery 1992