

Old Needles Battery

Commenced	September 1861
Completed	June 1863
Cost	£ 7,656
Map Reference	SZ 296848
Position	Isle of Wight / West / Needles Passage
Type	Coast battery
Ditch	Dry - land side only
Guns	6
Barrack Accom.	1 officer 2 NCOs 21 men
Present use	National Trust managed property.
History	First AA gun tested 1913
Disposal	Moth-balled 1945. N. T. 1975
Condition	Good. Under restoration
Access	Open to the public - Summer season
Sources	Solent Papers No.2, Precis of correspondence prior to 1898

Armament

1869 6 x 7-inch R.B.L.
1872 Authorised 2 x 9-inch 4 x 7-inch R.M.L.
1873 Revised 6 x 9-inch R.M.L.
1886 Proposed 3 x 10-inch R.M.L.
1892 2 x 6pr Q.F. tested
1893 Mounted 6 x 9-inch R.M.L.
Proposed 3 x 10-inch R.M.L.
1895-1899 6 x 9-inch R.M.L.

Caponiers None

Counterscarp galleries None

Haxo casemates None

Moncrieff Pits None

History and Description

A battery was proposed for this site in 1855, to mount six 68prs to cover Alum Bay to the north. The Needles battery, later referred to as Old Needles Battery to distinguish it from the new battery built nearby, was constructed as part of the Royal Commission defences of the Needles Passage. It is a barbette battery built on the projecting point of the chalk ridge above the Needles Rocks, at an elevation of 254 feet above sea level. It commanded the narrow channel between the Needles Rocks and the Shingles, the edge of that shoal being a little more than 2,000 yards distant so that passing ships would be subjected to plunging fire upon their decks. The height of the battery protected it from potential counter-fire. It was designed for six guns, first being armed with 7-inch R.B.L. guns which were replaced with 9-inch R.M.L. guns, surplus from Hurst Castle, by 1898. The gorge of the fort is closed with a ditch cut through the chalk of the narrow ridge on which it stands. Access to the fort was over a rolling bridge. The other sides are protected by the precipitous chalk cliffs which surround it. It had accommodation for 1 officer, 2 NCOs and 21 men as well as the usual magazines, laboratory and stores. Water was supplied from rain-water tanks. The battery was only to be garrisoned in time of need, the men living in a barrack on the parade, now demolished. In peacetime a Master Gunner lived there to maintain it, whilst the garrison gunners lived in Golden Hill Fort.

In 1869-73 the gun emplacements were remodelled for two 9-inch and four 7-inch RMLs but in 1893 six 9-inch RMLs were installed. These were in place until 1903 when they were removed by throwing them over the cliff. All have now been recovered, two still in the fort on replica carriages. The other are scattered on the mainland. The battery was considered obsolete and a new one was built 1893-95 on the crest of the headland to replace it with three modern BL guns. In 1885 a tunnel was dug from the parade towards the Needles and a Submarine Mining Cell added. By 1887 a lift shaft was dug from the ditch to sea level and five emplacements built into the north cliff face for QF guns to counter torpedo boats. Experiments were carried out with searchlights 1890-92. In 1908 a Fire Command Post for all of the Needles defences was added. In 1913 Britain's first AA gun, a 1pr. Pom Pom, was tested on the parade. The battery was reactivated in WWII with a sentry beam fitted into the cliff emplacement and a Radar installed in 1944. Armament then consisted of a 3-inch AA and a 40mm Bofors. The battery was moth-balled in 1945 and was bought by the National Trust in 1975 who opened it to the public in 1982.

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