

A very brief history of Fort Victoria

- 1852 Construction begins.
- 1855 Fort Victoria is finished and armed for coastal defence.
- 1891 Royal Engineers convert the fort into a Submarine Mining Depot.
- 1908 Men from the fort rewarded for saving lives during the *HMS Gladiator* disaster.
- 1920 Royal Engineers depart.
- 1939 Fort re-activated.
- 1941 Used for coastal battery training.
- 1944 Becomes HQ of Water Transport Unit in preparation for D-Day.
- 1946 Water Transport Training Unit established at the fort.
- 1962 After more than a hundred years of service, the fort is decommissioned.



Do you have any memories or mementoes of Fort Victoria? Perhaps you were stationed here or remember the fort before its demolition. The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology is trying to collate as much information about the fort as possible, to preserve its history for future generations. If you have something you would like to contribute please get in touch with us!

The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology,
Tel: 023 8059 3290, Email: info@hwtma.org.uk

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If you're thinking of visiting Fort Victoria, its only a short stroll along the shore from Yarmouth. Cross the bridge next to the harbour and follow the footpath to the beach at Halletts Shute. Then just follow the coastal path for five minutes and you'll find yourself at the fort.



The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology run the Underwater Archaeology Centre at Fort Victoria, which has an exhibition about the fort's history as well as several displays about the submerged secrets of the Solent. Between March and October the museum is open daily from 10am to 4pm. If you want to find out more why not pay it a visit ?

Underwater Archaeology Centre,
Fort Victoria Country Park,
Yarmouth, Isle of Wight PO41 0RR.

Tel: 01983 761214

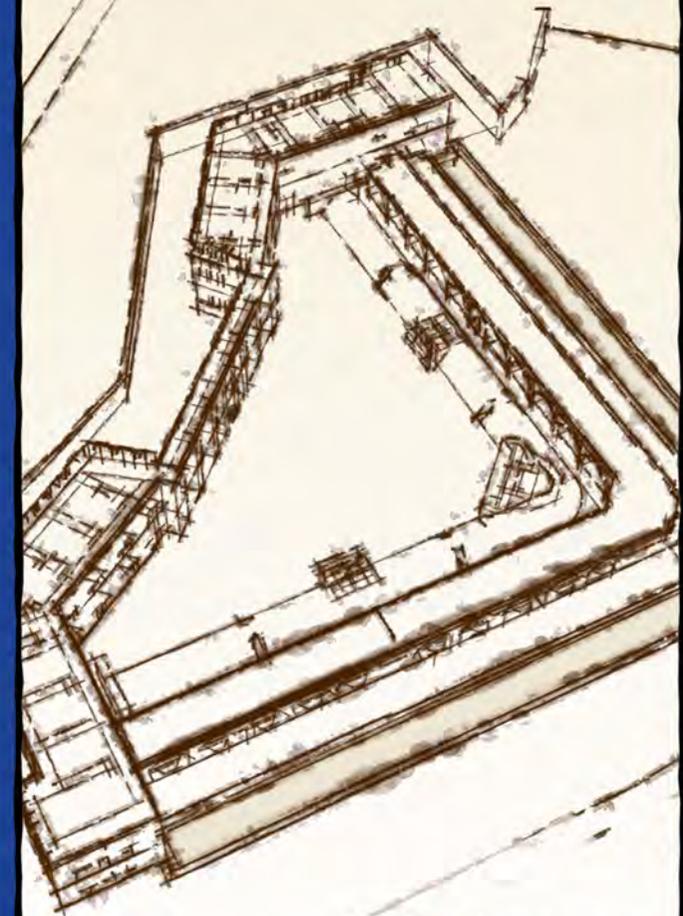
www.underwaterarchaeologycentre.co.uk



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FORT VICTORIA

Tracing the history of West Wight's oldest coastal defence



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Of all the 19th century forts built on the shores of the Isle of Wight during the reign of Queen Victoria, it is the one bearing her name with the longest and most varied history.

Fort Victoria was the first of the Victorian coastal batteries built to guard the important Needles Passage – the back door to the Solent. Later in its life it became a sea mine station, an artillery school and an important base for British Army vessels that took part in D-Day. After the war it remained in use as a training school and was the last military garrison on the entire Isle before it closed in 1962.

Fort Victoria was originally much larger than it is today, but after large sections of it were demolished in 1969 all that is left are the 'casemates'. These tough archways were built to protect the fort's guns which overlooked the Needles Passage. Originally each casemate was an open arch that housed a cannon operated by a crew of ten men.

As the fort's role changed the casemates were bricked up to create rooms. During the 19th and 20th centuries they were used to store a variety of military technology including ship engines, small boats and even sea mines! Today they are home to a number of attractions, including the Underwater Archaeology Centre. But if you look, there are plenty of other reminders of the fort's service in the country park...



In the fort are cannons, gun mounts and the remains of a railway track used to move mines. In the woods and on the shore you'll find old bunkers and Britain's last remaining emplacement for a See-Saw Searchlight, a Victorian idea as unusual as its name!

Fort Victoria wasn't the first fortification at Sconce Point. During the reign of Henry VIII a tower was built 600m further down the beach and an earthen fort was built at the point. It was replaced during Queen Elizabeth's reign and again during the Napoleonic Wars.



Fort Victoria was built on the same spot in 1855 and if you stand on the roof of the fort you can see why. Hurst Spit is only one mile away and any ship heading into the Solent had to pass within range of the fort's guns. From this low lying position it was possible to fire at enemy vessels near their water line – an important advantage in the days of iron cannonballs and wooden warships.

