

Great fortresses have guarded the western entrance to the Solent for over 500 years. The earliest defences were built here at the behest of King Henry VIII and these have been added to and re-armed every time a foreign power has threatened Britain's shores.



Both Yarmouth and Hurst castles date back as far as the 16th century, but the majority of the defences that stand guard on the cliff tops of the Isle of Wight date from the mid 19th century, when Britain and France appeared to be on the brink of war. Prime Minister Lord Palmerston ordered the largest defensive programme ever conducted in peacetime and soon great ports like Plymouth and Portsmouth were surrounded by dozens of forts, bristling with guns.

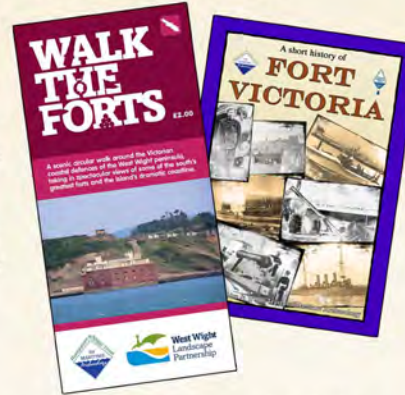
The Solent is one of the most important waterways in Britain, and it was essential to guard the 'back door' at the western end. The numerous forts built overlooking the Needles Passage went on to see service for the next 100 years, guarding against each enemy that gazed at our shores from across the Channel.



The Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology promotes interest, research and knowledge of maritime archaeology and heritage in Great Britain, with core activities concentrated in Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and the adjacent South Coast areas.

If you're thinking of visiting any of the West Wight coastal defences, the **Walk the Forts** guide book makes an ideal companion.

The 26 page guide is available at numerous shops on the Isle of Wight or, along with other Trust publications, can be purchased from Fort Victoria or the Trust's website.



The Trust 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? To find out more, visit:

www.hwtma.org.uk

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WALK THE FORTS



Explore West Wight's spectacular coastal defences



The Forts

* **Hurst Castle** is the oldest surviving fort guarding the Needles. Built in 1540, it was considerably expanded before it was closed in the 1950s.

* **Yarmouth Castle** was built in 1545 and remained in use until the 19th century.

* **Fort Victoria**, the oldest Palmerston Fort on the island, was built on the site of several smaller forts that date back to the days of Henry VIII. It is now part of an extensive country park.

Fort Albert, the blockhouse that sits in the water, saw many uses in its 100 year life – even serving as a torpedo station.

Cliff End Battery was frequently used to train men based at other forts or Territorial Army soldiers during summer camps.

Warden Point Battery was regularly used for Army summer camps, before it became a holiday resort for the public in the 1960s.

* **Hatherwood Battery** offers picturesque views over the Needles and Alum Bay.

* **The Needles Batteries** sit 75m above sea level, dominating the surrounding waters. Later the headland became a top-secret rocket testing ground. It is now run by the National Trust.

Fort Redoubt defended Freshwater Bay and still provides spectacular views along the southern coast of the Isle.

Golden Hill Fort was built to garrison the gun crews of the surrounding forts and defend them against an attack from behind. Today it sits at the centre of a country park.

* Forts that are open to the public.

