

Horse Sand Fort

Commenced	July 1861 and March 1865	Armament 1886 - Mounted Lower - 10 x 12.5-inch RML 1 x 12-inch BL Upper - 12 x 10-inch RML 1893 - Mounted Lower - 7 x 12.5-inch R.M.L., 5 x 12-inch B.L. Upper - 8 x 10-inch R.M.L. 5 x 12-inch B.L. 1898 - Mounted Lower - 7 x 12.5-inch R.M.L., 5 x 12-inch B.L. 12 x 6pdr.QF Upper - 8 x 10-inch R.M.L. 5 x 12-inch B.L. 12 x 6pdr.QF 1912 - Mounted 3 x 6-inch BL guns, 9 x 12-inch BL (12-inch removed 1918) 1925 - Mounted Roof - 2 x 6-inch BL, 3-inch AA (removed 1941) 1948 & 1951 all remaining guns removed.
Completed	March 1880	
Cost	£ 424,694	
Map Reference	SZ 655949	
Position	In the sea at Spithead, Eastern approaches to Portsmouth Harbour	
Type	Sea Fort, circular, casemated iron/granite	
Ditch	None, in the sea	
Guns	49 in two tiers plus roof	
Barrack Accom.	5 Officers, 72 soldiers + hammocks	
Present use	Empty, future unknown	
History	In active use by the military up to 1957	
Disposal		
Condition	2016 owned by Clarenco	
Access	Poor, mostly derelict but recently cleared. None yet	
Sources	Solent Papers No 1 'Spitbank and the Spithead Forts'	

History and Description

The Spithead forts were built in the 1860s to guard the eastern approaches to Spithead and Portsmouth Harbour. The forts were approved by the Royal Commission of 1860 and work began on the two larger forts in March 1865. Horse Sand Fort and No Mans land Fort are identical in plan, each having two floors of gun casemates, a basement level containing the shell and cartridge stores and a roof level originally intended to mount guns in turrets. Built by the same method used for Spitbank Fort, Horse Sand Fort has its foundation on the sea bed of Horse Sand Shoal. A ring of stone 231ft. in diameter narrowing to 205ft. at the top of the sill course, rises from the sea bed. Contained within the masonry basement were the twenty-four shell stores and fourteen cartridge stores. On top of this the gun floors were constructed with an iron framework supporting iron armour. A central core separated from the main gun floors by a courtyard contained ancillary rooms and officers' quarters.

Horse Sand's main armament of 24 guns on the lower tier and 25 on the upper tier, together with 10 guns in turrets was to give a total armament of 59 guns. In June 1871 the Defence Committee recommended that some of the new 35-ton guns be introduced into the armament of the Spithead forts. By 1874 a change was made and the proposal was to mount heavy 12.5-inch 38-ton guns on the lower tier with 10-inch 18-ton guns on the upper one. In 1887 trials took place on Horse Sand to test hydraulic machinery for the 38-ton guns. This resulted in an accident damaging part of the iron structure which had to be made good. Then began a series of armament and re-armament as the Engineers struggled to keep up with developments in artillery. Eventually the largest guns installed were huge 12-inch B.L. 45-ton guns on special 'yoke' mountings. Between 1884-86 trials took place on Horse Sand Fort to test the hydraulic buffers on a 12-inch BL gun. In May 1887 some of the 12.5-inch guns had been removed from Horse Sand Fort and four emplacements prepared for the 45-ton guns, which were paid for by the 1888 Imperial Defence Loan. At the same time the outer ring of magazines were filled in to give greater stability. Experiments were carried out to operate the 12-inch guns by hydraulic machinery. Sometime prior to 1891 6pdr. QF guns were added to the main armament. In 1909 the section of sea between Horse Sand Fort and the mainland at Southsea was closed by a line of concrete blocks as defence against fast torpedo boats. With a similar line from No Man's land Fort to the Isle of Wight the only channel open to ships lay between the two forts. In 1912 both forts were armed with three 6-inch BL guns. Horse Sand also retained nine of the 12-inch guns and two 12.5-inch guns. In 1925 two 6-inch guns remained on each with a 3-inch AA gun on Horse Sand. During the second World War a boom defence was laid between the two forts and an indicator loop placed on the sea bed to detect enemy craft. Horse Sand Fort was finally released by the military in 1993 when the Portsmouth Naval Base Heritage Trust bought it for £80,000. They planned to restore it and open it to the public, but finally decided to put it on the market in 2002.

In 2012 Clarenco, who converted Spitbank Fort to a luxury retreat, announced that they had purchased Horse Sand Fort and they intended to convert it to a museum with displays of the history of the three forts. In 2016 Clarenco put Horse Sand Fort back on the market. Its future is uncertain. In 2019 Clare put all three of his Solent Forts back on the market.

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