

Plymouth Breakwater Fort

Commenced	1862 & 1863	Armament	
Completed	1870	1880 Mounted	14 x 12.5-inch 35-ton RMLs 4 x 10-inch 18-ton RMLS
Cost	£ 167,062	To be added	4 x 6pr. QF
Map Reference	SX472505	1898	6 x 12.5-inch 35-ton RMLs 6 x 6pr. QF
Position	In the sea behind Plymouth Breakwater	Caponiers	None
Type	Se Fort	Counterscarp galleries	None
Ditch	The sea	Haxo casemates	None
Guns	18	Moncrieff Pits	None
Barrack Accom.	60 to 180 men		
Present use	Storage for Bovisand Diving Centre		
History	PWSS and AA Training School		
Disposal	Military released the fort in 1976		
Condition	Poor to reasonable		
Access	By arrangement		
Sources	1893 Precis of Correspondence, 1869 report, Historic Defences of Plymouth Woodward and Pye		

History and Description

The fort was originally conceived by the Royal Commission of 1860 as a powerful casemated work mounting 100 guns with accommodation for 600 men to protect the anchorage to the rear of the Plymouth breakwater and close the gap between the batteries at Bovisand and Picklecombe. The design, by Captain Siborne, was approved in November 1860 as an oval work of masonry on four tiers for 33 guns, with two tiers of granite gun casemates protected behind iron shields and a further seven guns on the roof. Work was commenced in 1861 and the foundations were complete in 1865. Experiments between 1860 and 1869 proved that only an iron structure would give sufficient protection against fire from the latest heavy RMLs and the plans to the breakwater fort were adjusted. The design was altered to one of two storeys, the lower for stores and magazines and the upper for 18 heavy rifled guns in casemates, entirely protected from direct fire by iron, with preparation on top for two turrets with two guns in each. The turrets were subsequently omitted. The fort is 144ft. Long and 114ft. wide and stands 100 yards behind the centre of the breakwater in six fathoms of water.

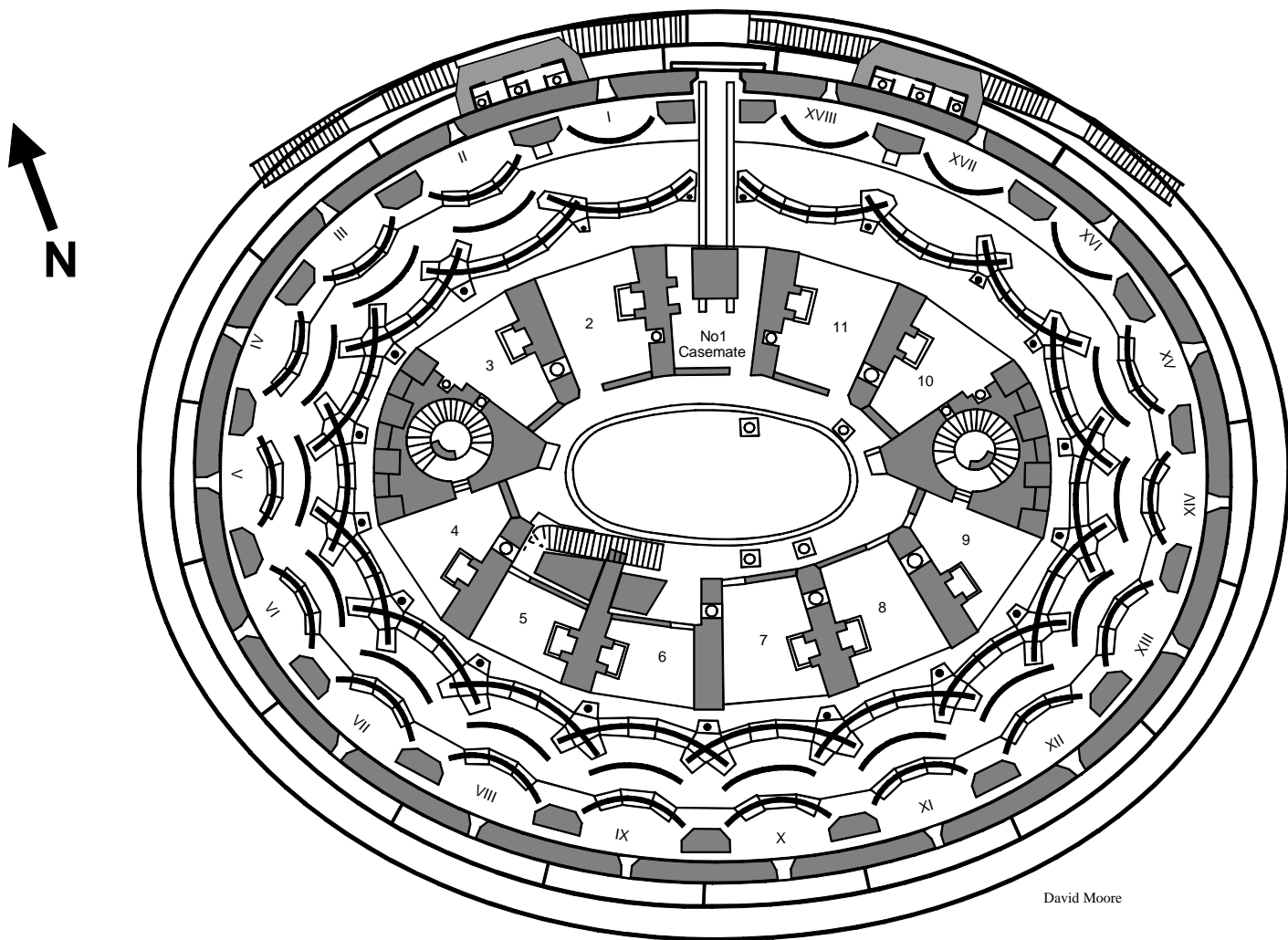
In 1875 the armament was approved as 14 x 12.5-inch RMLS of 18-tons to cover the sea in front and the channels on either side with four lighter 10-inch RMLs to cover the anchorage at the rear. Special 'small port' muzzle pivoting carriages had been developed for the fort (together with Fort Cunningham in Bermuda) to utilize smaller gun embrasures. These were fitted in 1879 and the fort was fully armed in 1880. By 1893 seven of the 12.5-inch guns were removed and four 6pr. QF guns on saddle mounts were fitted. The magazine level was greatly altered by the filling in of many of the seaward casemates to strengthen it against shell fire.

By 1903 another 12.5-inch RML was removed and shortly afterwards a searchlight was installed on the roof supplemented by another in 1911. Although the fort was disarmed by WWI the searchlights were still operational and it served as the Port War Signal Station throughout the war.

In 1936 it became an Anti Aircraft Training School with additional AA guns installed on the roof. After the war it served as a Naval signal station.

The military released the fort in 1976. The work is largely unaltered from the original. It was used as storage and for training as a part of the nearby Fort Bovisand diving centre. Most of the gun casemates are now empty and derelict. The basement level still has some generators in place but some earlier features such as ammunition lifts can be seen. Some of the later roof structures have recently been removed.

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