

## St. Helens Fort

<b>Commenced</b>	1867
<b>Completed</b>	1873
<b>Cost</b>	£ 123,311
<b>Map Reference</b>	SZ 648899
<b>Position</b>	St. Helen's Point, Ryde, eastern Spithead Approaches
<b>Type</b>	Coast Defence, Sea Fort / Granite
<b>Ditch</b>	None - in sea
<b>Guns</b>	5
<b>Barrack Accom.</b>	1 NCO & 5 gunners + 25 hammocks
<b>Present use</b>	Was private residence, now empty

**History** Army to 1920 then Admiralty

**Disposal** Sold in 1983 to private buyer

**Condition** Habitable

**Access** None, can be seen from IOW

**Sources** Solent Papers No 1 'Spitbank and the Spithead Forts' G. Mitchell and A. Cantwell

### Armament

#### 1867 - Proposed

4 x 12-inch, 6 x 10-inch, 4 x 7-inch R.M.L.s

#### 1893 - Mounted

1 x 12.5-inch R.M.L., 2 x 10-inch R.M.L.

#### 1899 - Mounted

1 x 12.5-inch 2 x 10-inch R.M.L.s, 2 x 6pr. QF

#### 1895-1899

2 x 6pr. Q.F. Hotchkiss

#### 1906 - Mounted - nil

#### 1916 - 27 Mounted

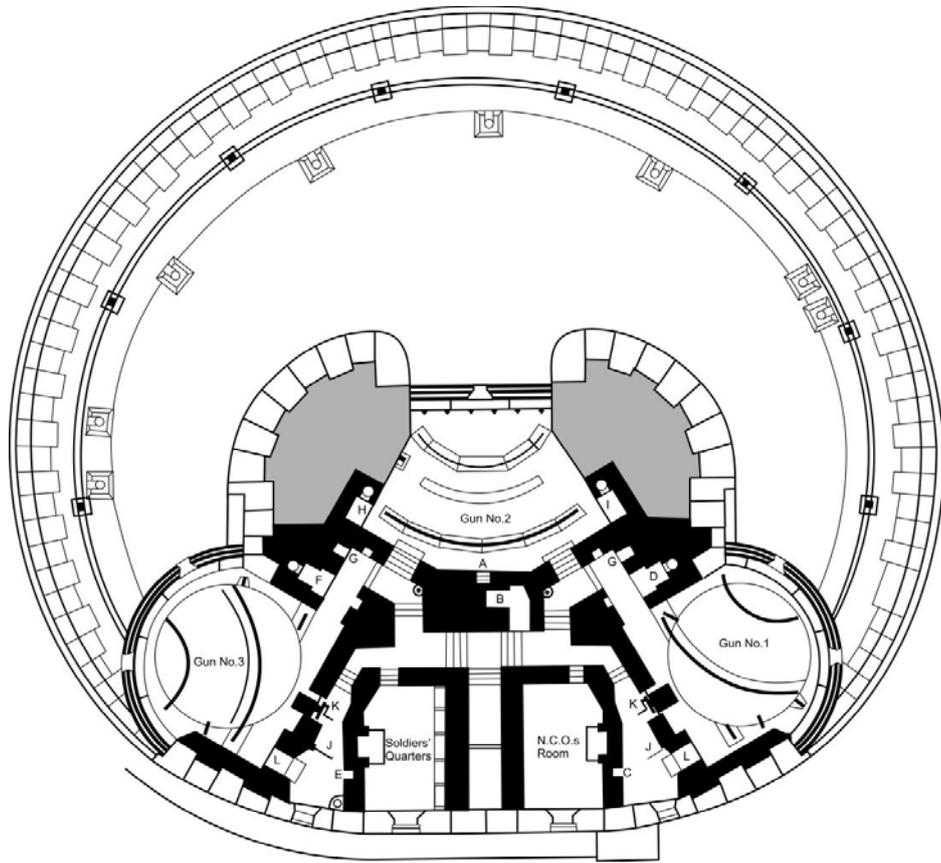
2 x 12pr. QF

WWII 1 x 40mm Bofors 2 x searchlights

### History and Description

The defence of the anchorage at St. Helens was not originally included in the plans of the 1860 Commission but the abandonment of the proposed fort on Sturbridge, because of lack of a foundation and shifting sands, led to the proposal for a fort on Ryde Sand instead. A design was approved for a masonry casemated work for nine guns on the beach in front of St. Helens Point to cover the beach and anchorage. No progress was made with this and in February 1867 another design for a small sea fort with one tier of sea-facing, iron plated-casemates and granite faced casemates covering the land side was approved. The suggested armament was fifteen guns in casemates. In 1867 two turrets were also approved each mounting two guns. The fort was built on a spit of land projecting eastward from Bembridge Point. A ring of iron caissons filled with concrete was laid on the soft blue clay of the shoal and a structure 150 feet in diameter built as a foundation. The sand within the ring was excavated and filled with concrete. The foundations were nearly complete by 1867 and walls of granite were added to form the superstructure, supplemented with concrete. Subsidence caused a change of plans and the final form of the fort was not circular as proposed. The whole lower gun floor above the basement level was abandoned and the two seaward guns, 10-inch 18-ton R.M.L.s, on each flank were fitted on turntables with two ports for each gun. To keep the weight over the central caissons the gun floor was shifted rearwards and the turrets abandoned, a 12.5-inch R.M.L. being fitted in the centre face firing through an iron shield. This armament was installed in 1880. Two 40pr. R.B.L.s intended to flank the rear entrance were not fitted and the casemates used as accommodation instead. The entrance to the fort is at the rear, at basement level. At the centre of this floor is the pump room with shell and cartridge stores around it. Accommodation was in two rooms at the rear of the gun floor. In war time more accommodation would be provided by hammocks. The central casemate held a 12.5-inch RML on a traversing platform. Either side were the 23 feet in diameter steel-plate turntables, for the 10-inch R.M.L.s. In 1915 the fort became the examination battery of St. Helens Road and two 12pr.s and two searchlights were fitted. These were dismantled in 1918 but not removed until 1927. The fort was re-activated in 1940 to provide searchlight illumination and two searchlights were fitted once more. A 40mm Bofors gun was added to combat E boats. The Bofors was removed in 1945 and the searchlights were scrapped in 1957 when the fort was put up for disposal. It was sold and converted as a private residence. It was later acquired by the Isle of Wight Council and then sold to a private buyer, who intended to convert it to a holiday home. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, first listed in 1967.

# St. Helens Fort



Gun Floor

