

Thorn(e) Island Fort

Commenced	1852-57
Completed	modified 1862-4
Cost	£ unknown
Map Reference	SM 846038
Position	Angle, on Thorne Island
Type	Sea Battery
Ditch	Sea
Guns	9
Barrack Accom.	2 officers & 55 men
Present use	Hotel
History	Sea battery and supporting barracks
Disposal	Sold by War Office in 1932
Condition	Unknown
Access	By boat with permission
Sources	1858 & 1868 Committee Reports, Precis of Correspondence prior to 1893 National Archives.

Armament

1872	5 x 7-inch RBL 4 x 68pr SB guns
1886	Open Battery 5 x 7-inch RBL 3 x 68pr SB
1893	Mounted 2 x 7-inch RBL Proposed Nil.
1895	Disarmed

History and description

A Fort on Thorne Island was originally conceived by Colonel Bryce in 1817 as a six gun battery with a barracks in rear for 1 officer and 40 men. General Sir John Burgoyne recommended a Fort for the island mounting between 12 and 18 guns. Some time between 1852 and 1858 the existing Fort was built, one source suggests that building commenced in 1854 and that is the date shown above the entrance to the fort, however records are silent on the construction dates and the costs. The battery was originally proposed to prevent an enemy making use of the anchorage at the mouth of the haven. In 1871 it was proposed to abandon the batteries at Dale Point, Thorne Island and West Blockhouse but Thorne Island and West Blockhouse *should be retained as even with their existing armament these two works were of value in guarding an advanced line of submarine mines. It was further recommended that when funds could be made available they could be armed with 3 x 18tons guns in casemates.* In 1872 it was decided that the proposed guns at West Blockhouse and Thorne Island should be 80pr RML. In 1874, referring to the proposal to mount 38 ton guns at Thorne Island it was decided '*Owing to the salient position and the wide lateral range required to bear on the channel from Stack Rock on the right, of East Blockhouse Point on the left, these guns cannot be mounted in casemates. They should be mounted so as to obtain this great lateral range, and their number should be increased to four. Also considering the width of the channel opposite the island, the extensive range of these guns have seaward, and the increasing thickness of ship's armour, 11inch guns of 25tons should be provided instead of those hitherto proposed. Accordingly the Committee recommend that Thorne Island be remodelled for an armament of 4 x 11inch 25tin guns. Bearing in mind however the large number of guns already provided for Milford Haven they are of the opinion that the supply of the guns to Thorne Island may be postponed until more oppressing requirements at other places have been complied with.*'

In 1874 it was decided that the approved armament of 3 x 10inch RML be replaced with 4 x 11inch RML. In 1876 it was again decided to mount 3 x 38ton guns at the fort. In 1869 it was recognised that as Thorne Island may have to carry on a contest with ships single handed mounting 38tons guns in the fort would be very desirable. Despite these proposals to mount heavier guns at the Fort from time to time they came to nothing, perhaps because of the difficulty of shipping heavy guns to a fairly isolated site. In 1886 it was decided that: *no heavy defence is required in advance of Stack Rock and West Blockhouse and Thorne Island should be disarmed.*

Throughout its life as a defence work it was armed with a mixture of smooth bore and rifled breech loading guns until it was disarmed in 1895.

In the early years of the twentieth century a searchlight position was built below the battery with a directing station above it on the parapet of the battery, these remain today. After the Fort was sold in 1932 it subsequently became an hotel and has been on the market a number of times in recent years - in 1997 with an asking price of £250,000 and again in 2011 for £750,000.

The Fort has a seaward facing battery for nine guns all firing en barbette with a single storey barracks in the rear at a lower level around a small parade ground; most of the barrack accommodation was for soldiers, the officers' accommodation was on the left flank. At roof level on the barracks there was a loopholed wall facing the mainland. The magazine was on the left flank just below the gun battery.

The fort was sold in November 2011 to 'Kent Mushrooms' who wanted to "explore the possibilities of future commercial use"; at a price lower than the guide price of £750,000. It lay unused for five years and was put onto the market again in December 2016, inviting offers in excess of £550,000.

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