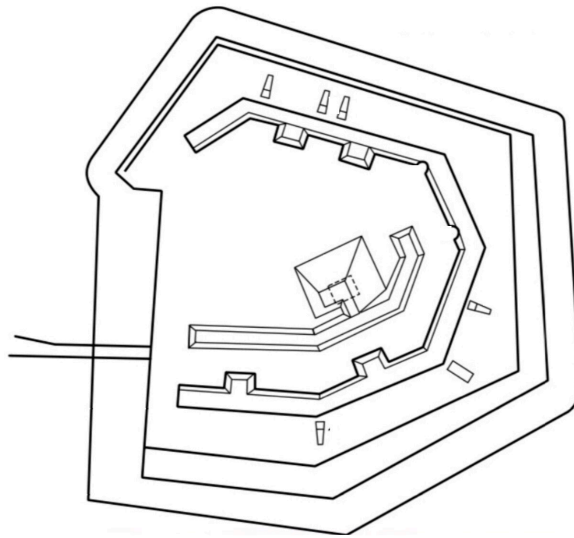


# Crookhorn, Farlington and Langstone Redoubts

by Neil Spurgeon



Farlington Redoubt

When the line of forts on Portsdown Hill, commonly known as Palmerston's Follies, was constructed in the 1850s it was recognised that the eastern end of the line was relatively undefended. This would be particularly dangerous if the French, the assumed invaders, should choose to land a little to the east along the beaches of West Sussex or perhaps up into the harbours of Emsworth or Langstone.

The great ring of Victorian fortifications to defend Portsmouth from attack by an invading force landing to west, and later perhaps to the east, was started with the construction beginning in 1852 of the Gosport Line. Following this, the Royal Commission reported in the same year, proposing a ring of fortifications around a number of key naval harbours including the naval dockyard at Portsmouth.

The main idea was to ring 'Fortress Portsmouth' with several lines of fortifications to protect the dockyard and the fleet from attack by any invading force. The fortifications to the west were considerably deeper and more extensive than those in the east and three additional smaller redoubts were planned, and two built, to support the eastern end of the ridge. All three were outworks

of the most easterly of the Portsdown Hill forts, Fort Purbrook. A Redoubt is defined as a temporary or supplementary fortification, typically square or polygonal in outline and without flanking defences. The land falls sharply from the heights where Fort Purbrook was built into a potentially dangerous open area and it is this danger that the three redoubts were planned to overcome.

Purbrook, like the other four big forts along the top of the hill, is a polygonal fortification designed to shoot across a curve to the north, from north west to north east to protect the naval defenders to the south from attack from the lee side of the Portsdown escarpment. This is why, because the guns seemed to point in the wrong direction, people have frequently known the hilltop forts as Palmerston's Follies.

## Crookhorn Redoubt

This outwork was the first to be attempted with work starting in 1862. It lay to the north east of Fort Purbrook and the site can be visited as it lies within the golf course. As planned the Redoubt was specifically designed to cover an area of dead ground commanding the north east approaches up Portsdown ridge but which could not be

adequately covered by the original design of the fort. The front face of the Redoubt was to have been at an acute angle, to have had two caponiers\* (from the French 'chicken coop'), a defensive box for guns to poke out and fire from, counterscarp and scarp galleries for musket/rifle fire and, originally, it was planned to have 16 guns on a terreplein, a high protected firing platform, and six guns in the corner caponiers. Unfortunately a section of blue slipper clay, as opposed to the chalk of the rest of the escarpment, was discovered and only the southern half of the original design was pursued. This proved inadequate and by 1870, with only the prepared earthworks yet built, it was abandoned and in 1876 Crookhorn was claimed to have been demolished.

### **Farlington Redoubt**

This was constructed although not fully as designed. Work started late in 1862 and was completed by 1891. In the original plan there were to have been a complement of 18 guns plus two batteries of three mortars mounted behind the eastern caponier. This model duplicated the structures at the northern extremities of the larger forts on the ridge, but these were abandoned probably because of cost overruns and the final outfit of munitions was finalised in 1896. Though the magazine was subterranean, most of the construction was on a single level with walls built up on the five outlying sides. Two 64 pounder rifle muzzle-loaded guns were mounted on the clever Moncrief disappearing mounts which effectively removed the guns from sight of the enemy while they were reloaded. A further series of guns mounted on more flexible gun carriages were installed in the parapet. Only seven guns were finally supplied augmented by a single four inch breech loader situated at the south eastern corner to cover the gap southward that the two caponiers could not adequately fire towards.

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\* A caponier is a covered passage across a ditch from whence, usually, defenders could provide fire into the ditch

The Redoubt probably was not especially effective. None of the Portsdown ridge forts ever fired a shot in anger and by 1907 Farlington Redoubt had been disarmed. However it was considered for reuse during both world wars, fitted as a machine gun outpost in 1914 and suggested as an anti-aircraft battery during the Second World War, although the three chosen sites for these were actually on the other side of the slope, facing north.

The site of Farlington Redoubt was converted into a quarry after 1945 and later the whole area was demolished in the 1970s to make way for an underground storage facility for British Gas. The site is currently the headquarters for L & S Waste Management Limited who park their extensive skip lorries on the remains of the outwork, whose outline shape is clearly visible in aerial photographs of the site. Also clearly visible is the remains of the covered way leading towards Fort Purbrook.

### **Langston or Langstone Redoubt**

This was never built nor indeed named but a section of the site between the railway line and the motorway now contains the remnants of a WWI anti invasion redoubt. This is extremely difficult to access requiring a more than one mile walk from the Farlington Marshes car park and the remains are not particularly impressive. The design is similar to that used for Fort Gilkicker on the southern side of Stokes Bay, and it was originally intended to mount 18 guns. There is no doubt that this was a well chosen site to defend Langstone Harbour and the railway hence the reason for its reuse in WW1.

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