
South Channel Fort



SOUTH CHANNEL FORT
SOHE 2008



1 south channel fort gun
emplacement jun1989

Location

SOUTH CHANNEL PORT PHILLIP BAY, Unincorporated

Municipality

UNINCORPORATED

Level of significance

-

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H1502

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

South Channel Fort, constructed between 1879 and 1888, was designed by Colonel Peter Scratchley of the Royal Engineers using the 'Twydall Redoubt' principles of sand parapets to be the key fort in the network of the outer defences of Port Phillip protecting it from anticipated naval attacks in the late nineteenth century. The fort was intended to play a key role in holding enemy ships in a triangle of fire between Queenscliff, Point Nepean (or Point Franklin) and its own guns; and to lay, control and test the minefield in the South Channel.

The fort is an artificial island built up on 14,000 tonnes of bluestone boulders and concrete with sand overburden. It is 121.9 metres long, 76.2 metres wide and 6.4 metres high above sea level. The fortifications comprise a concrete and red-gum military dugout bunker system which is mainly underground with some areas breaking the surface as gun emplacements facing south and as a service yard facing north. The system includes ammunition magazines, kitchen, officer's quarters, storage areas and power room connected by a network of tunnels. The heavy gun battery originally consisted of five guns, of which only a 6 inch gun in the centre and an 8 inch 'disappearing gun' on either side of the island have survived.

The sandy soil supports a shrubland of coast saltbush (*Atriplex cinerea*), seaberry saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana*), bower spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*) and taupata (*Coprosma repens*). The understorey includes great brome (*Bromus diandrus*) and buffalo grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*).

How is it significant?

South Channel Fort is of historical and architectural significance

Why is it significant?

South Channel Fort is historically significant for its association with the defence of the Port of Melbourne, protection of the entrance to Port Phillip and the main shipping channel. The fort is the only known place where the Twydall principles for a defence layout were applied to an island fortification.

South Channel Fort is architecturally significant for its revolutionary design using camouflage and new methods of protection against bombardment, for its armament, and for its relative intactness. The disappearing or hydro-pneumatic guns are of particular significance for their early date and rarity of the 8 inch guns.

The fort is also of interest for its range of vegetation which includes prickly shrubs used as a deterrent to attack. [Online data upgrade project 2003]

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Construction dates | 1879, |
| Heritage Act Categories | Registered place, |
| Hermes Number | 125252 |
| Property Number | |

Physical Description 1

Date Started 1879; Date Finished 1888; Storeys 0; Desc FORT;

Designed by Colonel Peter Scratchley of the Royal Engineers (source AHC)

Physical Conditions

State of the Historic Environment survey report - fair condition. See Events.

Veterans Description for Public

Construction of the South Channel Fort began in 1879 and continued throughout the 1880s. Built out of fear of Russian invasion, the fort was intended to defend the approaches to Melbourne in a triangle of fire between Queenscliff, Point Nepean (or Point Franklin), with artillery fire and a submarine minefield; however advances in technology had made the fort redundant by 1908. A jetty was also constructed between 1889 and 1901, as the

fort was entirely dependent on sea transport for supplies.

The fort is an artificial island built up on 14,000 tonnes of bluestone boulders (which were transported from Bacchus Marsh) and concrete with sand overburden. It is 121.9 metres long, 76.2 metres wide and 6.4 metres high above sea level. The fortifications comprise a concrete and red-gum military dugout bunker system which is mainly underground with some areas breaking the surface as gun emplacements facing south and as a service yard facing north. The system includes ammunition magazines, kitchen, officer's quarters, storage areas and power room connected by a network of tunnels. The heavy gun battery originally consisted of five guns, of which only a 6 inch gun in the centre and an 8 inch 'disappearing gun' on either side of the island have survived.

The fort also used two electric lights as a defence. One had a fixed beam; the other a wandering beam to be used as a search light. The lights and other electrical equipment were powered by an oil generator. The fort is significant for its revolutionary design using camouflage and new methods of protection against bombardment, for its armament, and for its relative intactness

The sandy soil supports a shrubland of coast saltbush (*Atriplex cinerea*), seaberry saltbush (*Rhagodia candolleana*), bower spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*) and taupata (*Coprosma repens*). The understorey includes great brome (*Bromus diandrus*) and buffalo grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*). Its range of vegetation includes prickly shrubs used as a deterrent to attack.

Extent of Registration

All of the place known as South Channel Fort South Channel Port Phillip Bay

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>