

explore wembury

The Staddon Heights Defences

The sites built on this headland belong to the Staddon Heights defences of the 1860s. They face both landward and seaward. Staddon Heights overlooks the old part of the city, the approach channel and the harbours of Sutton Pool and the Cattewater. The bulk of the defences here faced landward and were intended to protect these areas from an enemy invasion.

Much of this land is in private ownership or MoD estate. Please stick to the South West coastpath.

Watching your back

With fears that the enemy may land at nearby beaches, or around Newton and Noss on the Yealm and attack from behind, two forts and three batteries were built facing landward. They were all linked by a military road and a series of ditches, slopes and embankments. Together they formed an independent and formidable defensive system. The Staddon Heights defences are nationally important and survive virtually complete. They help us to understand more about Victorian military fortification.



Staddon Heights 1908

Defence of the Realm

In the mid 19th Century, the British government became increasingly concerned about the threat of French naval attack. Military technology was advancing rapidly. The Royal Commission on the Defences of the United Kingdom was set up in 1859. It found that the existing shore-based defences would be no match for the new iron-clad fast French fleet, armed with more accurate long range guns. The Commission recommended a huge programme to fortify Plymouth with "a ring of fire". As a result, 24 forts were built encircling Plymouth in two rings, to protect from seaward and landward attacks. They were planned and constructed during the 1860s at a cost of around £3,000,000.



Aerial view showing Staddon Line defences

MAP KEY

- - South West Coastpath
- - Military Road
- - Ditch
- i - Other Interpretation Panels

Target Butts



The high butressed wall of the target butts is about 300m long and still a prominent local landmark. The northern half was built for the army between 1860-70 for practise when it was converting to high velocity rifles. The southern half was built for the Royal Marines between 1872-1894.

Target Butts

Barrage Balloon Site

YOU ARE HERE

No public access

Watch House Battery

Watch House Brake Battery

Frobisher Battery

Barrage balloon

The World War II barrage balloon site is a circle of 24 concrete anchor points around a central square block. It remains as the only known complete site in Plymouth.



Barrage balloon

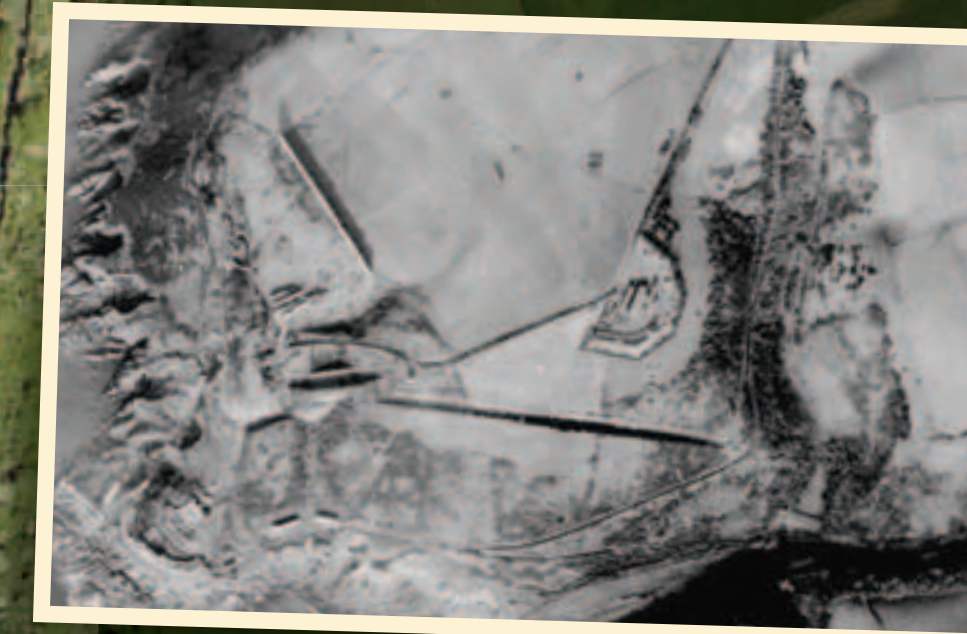
Staddon Fort...

...was the principal land fort of these defences and is on the highest point. It was completed in 1869 and was intended to be armed with 30 guns and barracks for 250 men, although this number of guns was never deployed. The barracks and main magazine have been adapted for other uses, but much of the fort is now empty and remains in excellent condition.



Brownhill battery...

...was built to cover the valley below and the clearance area extending as far as Down Thomas. It was completed in 1869 and had space for 14 guns, 4 bomb proof chambers and an open gorge. As with the other sites, there were various gun changes but by 1879 it was used to store gun cotton for use in submarine mines. The battery was probably disused by World War I. It is now overgrown although some of the buildings are used for animal shelters and a riding paddock is in the interior.



Aerial view showing Brownhill Battery and Fort Bovisand in 1946.

Watch House battery

...was completed in 1901 and armed with two 6 inch breech loading guns. It was built to cover the seaward approaches to the Sound. At 352 feet above sea level, it was the highest battery of this type in the country. It consisted of gun emplacements, magazines and associated buildings – shelters, guard house, artillery store, lamp room and remains largely complete. It remained in action through World Wars I and II, when searchlights were fitted.



Watch House battery in use and now derelict (pictured below) with guns removed

