

REPAIR Good Practice Example: Fort Amherst, Medway UK

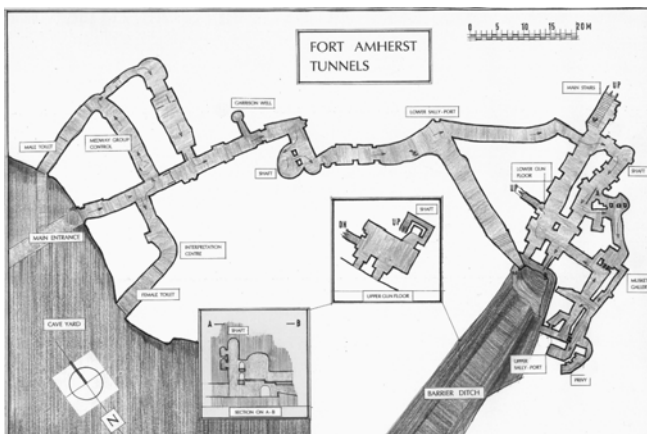


A raid on Chatham Dockyard by a Dutch fleet in 1667 led to a review of the defences of the South Coast and the Royal Dockyard at Chatham (known today as the Historic Dockyard.)

Amongst the recommendations eventually implemented in the 1750s was the building of defensive fortifications around the area known as the Great Lines.

These fortifications were designed to defend the strategically vital Dockyard at Chatham from a landward attack and to protect the route to London (since an invader marching from the Kent Coast could not afford to leave such a stronghold to threaten its supply routes).

Fort Amherst, built on the ditch and rampart principle as were many others of the period, was completed in 1756 comprising an extensive network of tunnels, gun placements, and hidden defences, is in uniquely complete condition and is the world's largest surviving fortress from the Napoleonic era. The Fort Amherst tunnels were constructed by Cornish tin miners and Board of Ordnance Engineers and not, as urban legend has it, French Prisoners of War.



Map of Fort Amherst tunnels

The major difference however, is the underground tunnel system (built between 1776 and 1805) linking many areas of the fort that would provide protection in the event of a siege. At its peak the garrison maintained a complement of 125 guns (mainly 24 pounders). A system of three defended gateways with ditches (at Chatham, Brompton & Gillingham) meant that the Dockyard and the other military barracks of the time could be isolated from the

surrounding towns and countryside. The principle purpose of Fort Amherst was to protect the former Royal Dockyard at Chatham from a land-based attack and its original defences, over 3 kilometres in length, totally enclosed the Dockyard and the village of Brompton.

Fort Amherst is Europe's largest surviving and Britain's best surviving example of a Napoleonic Fortress and is of great international historical importance.

Since 1982 Fort Amherst has been as a registered charity known as the Fort Amherst Heritage Trust with twelve Trustees who serve in a non-paid capacity to manage the business. The trust was established with the clear aim of securing the preservation of Fort Amherst, its surrounding defences and to ensure these are available to the public for education and recreation. The Trust is involved in the restoration and management of Fort Amherst since the beginning and has a very important role to play today as it forms a major part of Chatham's bid for World Heritage Site status.

The principle achievements of the Trust have been to prevent the destruction of the site through its possible development as a housing estate. Having secured the future of the site by purchasing the freehold the Trust embarked upon an ambitious project to restore and open the Fort as a tourist attraction. The Trust works in partnership with local and national government to secure support and funding and has developed extensive links with other heritage projects in the UK and Europe.

The Trust relies heavily on the expertise of its Trustees and Volunteers to manage, maintain and sustain all of the activities, which are required to continue.



It has been recognised that without Fort Amherst Heritage Trust there would be no WHS bid, since without them, the Fort would have been redeveloped or demolished and the quality of Medway's heritage offer significantly diminished.

There would be no Great Lines Heritage Park, and no permanent free access to the Fort's over ground areas would be available.

Fort Amherst Heritage Trust has made a significant contribution to Medway's cultural offer as a centre for volunteering and education; a stimulus for events, productions, artistry and as a venue for events.



Fort Amherst view of Chatham Riverside

Put simply the problem is the perennial problem of raising sufficient funds for ongoing maintenance, remedial work, promotions and events.

In April 2008 Medway Council relocated the Civic Head Quarters building to Gun Wharf on Dock Road, CHATHAM opposite Fort Amherst. Car park space at the new building was limited so an arrangement was made with Fort Amherst to provide an additional 100 spaces on lease. This arrangement provided a contribution to the funds of Fort Amherst Heritage Trust.

By April 2009 FAHT reached agreement with Medway Council to improve the car park facilities and through a Service Level Agreement between the two organisations the decision to instal a new energy-efficient lighting system to the Car Park area. The new lighting installation at the fort encompasses the entrances, the car park area, key external spaces and takes advantage of the latest, energy-efficient lighting technology with improved running costs.

As well as using less power and having lower costs, the Ganz illuminators last longer requiring less maintenance - minimising ongoing costs and on site disruption – at the same time the was limited carbon footprint is reduced.

This initiative has realised savings of more than £2000 per quarter following the replacement of halogen-style lamps with Ganz LED illuminators and has provided an improved environment for public events and visitors and allow the generation of further revenue through these activities in ticket sales and through the on-site social business – The Cave Yard Cafe.

Fort Amherst is an excellent example of public/private partnership working together to provide a facility of tremendous social value.

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