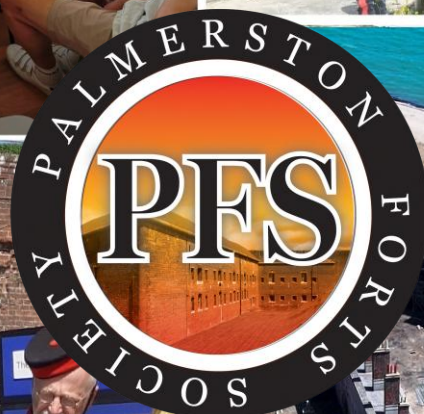




The Palmerston Forts Society 2026-2031

Celebrating Our Victorian Fortified Heritage
Preserved, Understood, Enjoyed

Who We Are

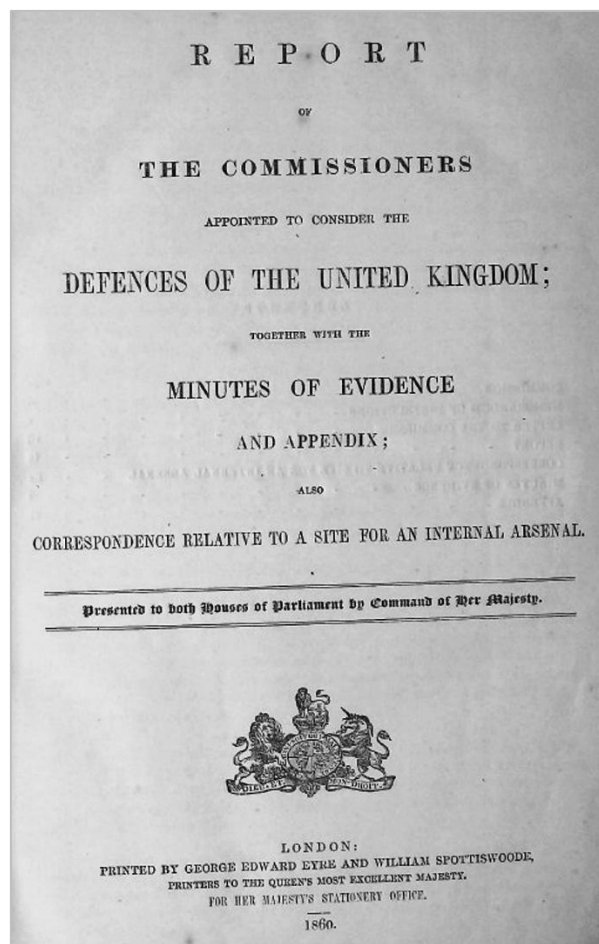
Founded over 40 years ago to support Hampshire County Council in the rescue and preservation of Fort Nelson, the **Palmerston Forts Society** (PFS) has grown to become the UK's most trusted and knowledgeable organisation dedicated to British Victorian fortifications notably the "Palmerston Forts" built following the recommendations of the 1859 Royal Commission. Our society brings together like-minded individuals who share a passion for Victorian fortifications. We offer a welcoming and supportive environment where members can make friends, exchange ideas, share their enthusiasm, and contribute to the collective knowledge through discussion and research. Today, membership extends across the UK and into numerous countries worldwide mirroring the spread of British Imperial fortifications around the globe.

In line with our charitable objective of educating the public on the history of Victorian fortifications, members are encouraged to share their research for potential publication in the Society's respected annual journal, *The Redan*. The Society also supports the improvement and interpretation of surviving fortifications for public benefit. Alongside the *Redan* and regular newsletters, members enjoy exclusive benefits which include access to the Society's archives, webinars, and organised visits—many offering rare behind-the-scenes access to historic sites.

The Society also maintains a uniformed reenactment section: the **Portsmouth Artillery Volunteers** (PAV). Dressed as the 2nd Hampshire Volunteer Artillery of the 1880s, they help enliven the history of Fort Nelson by the accurate portrayal of life in the artillery volunteers during the Victorian era.

In recent years, the Society has established the **Victorian Fort Network**—an international initiative uniting owners and operators of British Imperial fortifications of the Victorian period. This forum promotes collaboration, knowledge sharing, and best practice in fort preservation.

The Palmerston Forts Society continues to act as a leading authority on Victorian fortifications, responding to enquiries from researchers, and offering expert support to developers, local authorities and government bodies.



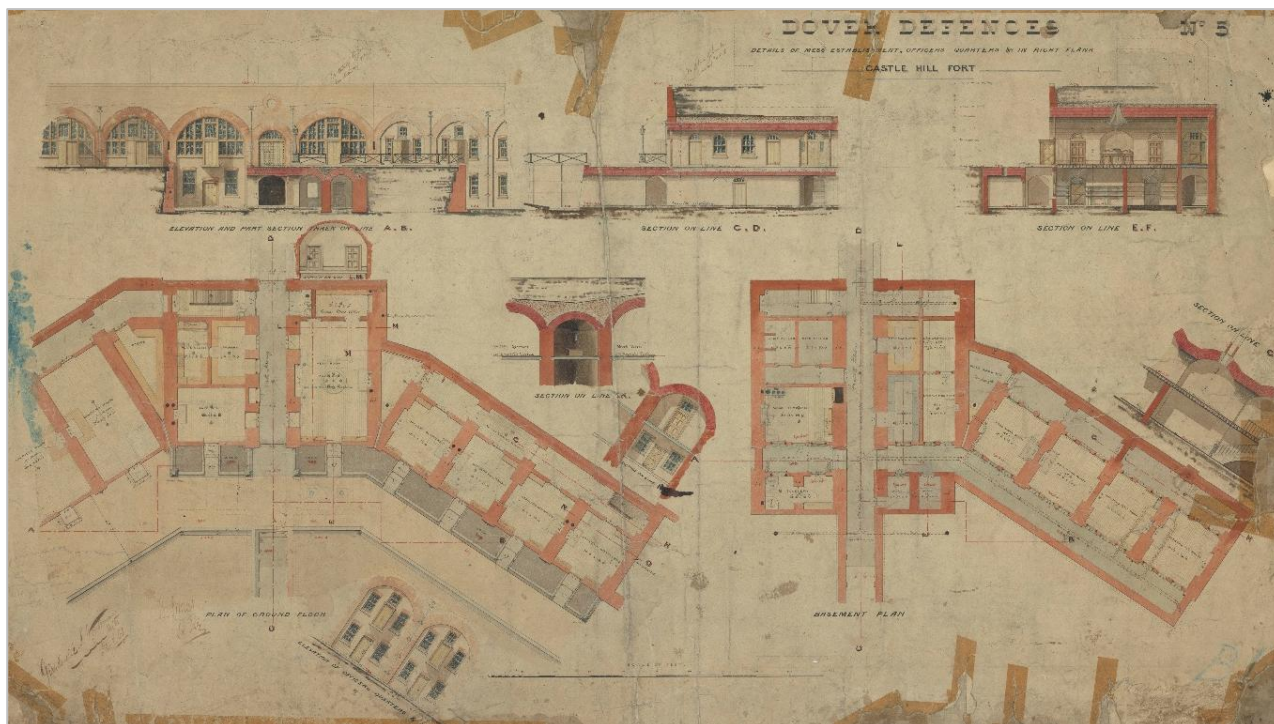
Chairman's Introduction

As we look to the future, the Palmerston Forts Society is in good shape, with record membership and a wide range of activities. We are poised not only to preserve the past, but to shape the future of how it is understood and enjoyed. This Strategic Framework offers us the opportunity to become something truly remarkable: a vibrant, outward-looking community that inspires public interest, leads in historical research, and supports the physical preservation of these extraordinary sites. At the heart of this strategy of championing Victorian fortifications as living heritage, are our three guiding pillars—**Preserved, Understood, and Enjoyed**.

To achieve our ambitions, we are driven by the support and engagement of our members. A recent comprehensive members' survey told us that, our membership is very engaged with heritage, with two-thirds of them also involved in local history or other military history groups. Beyond a general interest in the topic, members join the PFS to connect with like-minded individuals and broaden their knowledge. We are a distributed society, over half of our members living more than two hours from our traditional base at Fort Nelson, with nearly sixty percent valuing webinar access and a similar proportion engaging with us on social media, clear signs of how PFS has evolved. Still, many members prefer the social aspects of in-person events, reinforcing the need to maintain a balance in our offer. There is strong support for our charitable activities—and a clear demand for us to do more.

As such we are committed to enhancing the offer to our members, through richer experiences, deeper engagement, and new opportunities to connect with our shared heritage. Whether through behind-the-scenes access, digital innovation, learning opportunities or community events, we aim to make membership more rewarding than ever before.

Built on our three guiding pillars, this plan sets out a clear and realistic direction for the next five years. It'll help us grow, make a bigger difference, and strengthen the relationships and skills we need to thrive in a changing world. Whether you are a long-standing member, a heritage professional, a new enthusiast, or a partner organisation, we invite you to be part of this exciting new chapter as we work together to make real, lasting change—to honour the ingenuity of the past while securing its legacy for generations to come.



What We Do

At the Palmerston Forts Society, we are passionate about bringing the fascinating history of Britain's Victorian defences to life. We are dedicated to the preservation, study, and promotion of Victorian fortifications both in the UK but also worldwide. Through research, education, and community engagement, we work to ensure these unique structures are protected, understood, and appreciated by future generations, sharing their stories with the public, and inspiring interest through social media, events, tours, publications, and educational projects.

Our Aspiration

We imagine a future where Victorian fortifications are widely recognized as vital cultural and historical assets, preserved through collaboration and shared knowledge, and actively explored and appreciated by as many people as possible and as remarkable landmarks of Britain's defensive heritage. **Preserved, understood, and enjoyed.**

Our Guiding Principles

Heritage Preservation - We are committed to the conservation and protection of Palmerston-era fortifications for future generations, respecting their historical and architectural significance.

Historical Integrity - We strive to present accurate, well-researched interpretations of the fortifications and their role in history, maintaining scholarly and factual integrity.

Public Engagement - We believe in making the history of the Palmerston fortifications accessible and engaging for all, fostering curiosity through visits and events, publications and digital media.

Collaboration - We value partnerships with local communities, historians, heritage organizations, owners and developers, and national and local government bodies to support conservation efforts.

Education and Research - We promote the study of Victorian military architecture and defence policy through encouragement of research and publication.

Volunteering and Stewardship - We recognize the dedication of our volunteers and members, whose passion and commitment drive the Society forward.

Respect and Inclusion - We welcome individuals of all backgrounds, recognizing that different interpretations can enrich our understanding of history.



The Three Pillars of the Palmerston Forts Society

We have chosen the three pillars — **Preserved**, **Understood**, and **Enjoyed** — to clearly express the full scope of the Society's undertaking. Together, they reflect our commitment not only to the physical conservation of Victorian fortifications, but also to deepening public knowledge and fostering meaningful engagement. These pillars ensure our work remains balanced, sustainable, and impactful — honouring the past while securing the future of these remarkable heritage sites.

1. Preserved

We are committed to the protection and sustainable conservation of Victorian fortifications for future generations. This involves:

- Supporting restoration projects and site improvements.
- Advocating for the safeguarding of historically significant sites.
- Promoting responsible stewardship through collaboration with owners, developers, local authorities, and heritage bodies.

Lumps Fort had a unique history and was the only surviving Victorian fortification in Portsmouth not to have the protection of listed status. Through the hard work and dedication of a PFS member, research was conducted and the PFS put forward a case and the Fort has now been added to the National Heritage List for England as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Preservation is the foundation upon which all our educational and public engagement work depends.

2. Understood

We believe that understanding is essential to appreciation. The Society encourages and facilitates:

- Rigorous historical research into Victorian military architecture, technology, and context.
- The publication and sharing of knowledge through *The Redan*, webinars, talks, archives, publications and digital media.
- Expert advice and interpretation to deepen public and scholarly awareness.

By enhancing understanding, we help connect people to the historical, technological, and social significance of the fortifications.

To support their field agents' investigations, Historic England Library has become our first stakeholder member ensuring the latest fortification research is more widely available.

3. Enjoyed

We strive to make Victorian fortifications accessible and inspiring for all. This means:

- Organising visits, events, and tours -including exclusive “behind-the-scenes” experiences for our members.
- Supporting interactive learning and living history through the Portsdown Artillery Volunteers.
- Fostering a welcoming and inclusive community of our members, scholars, and the general public.

Through enjoyment, we ensure these remarkable landmarks remain relevant and valued in contemporary life.

Five Year Strategic Framework (2025–2031)

Goal 1: Expand Public Engagement and Membership

(supports the **Enjoyed** Pillar by expanding community and participation)

Strategic Objective:

Broaden awareness and public participation in the society's work, growing an active and inclusive membership base.

Key Initiatives:

- Launch a national membership campaign targeting underrepresented areas and audiences (e.g. young adults, educators, local communities near fortifications).
- Review membership tiers and benefits to maintain an attractive offer to members.
- Establish partnerships with schools, universities, and local history groups.
- Re-energise the Portsdown Artillery Volunteers to support Fort Nelson, and other fortifications.
- Deliver a members' events and visits programme offering unique and enjoyable benefits and opportunities to our members.

Outcomes by 2031:

- 10% growth in total membership.
- At least 10 new institutional or educational partnerships.
- Increased engagement across social media and digital platforms (measured by reach and interaction).
- At least two member-exclusive visits annually, with a minimum of two full-weekend events across the five-year period.
- 50% growth in strength of the Portsdown Artillery Volunteers
- Annual General Meeting format transitioned to an exclusive Members Day.

The PAV attended the Victorian spectacular event at Fort Brockhurst where they were able to dress a gun as it would have appeared ready for action in the period. With members dressed in appropriate uniform, they were able to engage with the public and provide accurate information on how the fort would've been manned and fought.

Goal 2: Support and Enable Fort Preservation Projects

(supports the **Preserved** Pillar)

Strategic Objective:

Actively contribute to the preservation and public improvement of key Victorian fortifications.

Key Initiatives:

- Identify priority fort sites for support, in collaboration with site owners, operators and other stakeholders.
- Offer expert advice, guidance and support for interpretation, conservation, and public access. This includes commercial and residential developments where appropriate.
- Act as a conduit between members and fortification owners to galvanise volunteers and establish work parties and support weekends to help stabilise and maintain fortifications.
- Use Support Grants to facilitate preservation projects.
- Maintain a watching brief on planning applications impacting on fortifications and act as an expert witness to ensure that significant historic elements are safeguarded.

Volunteers on Steep Holm battery wanted to create an accurate representation of how the magazine would have looked. The PFS were able to provide drawings and guidance which allowed an accurate reproduction to be made.

Outcomes by 2031:

- Direct society involvement in at least five fort preservation or enhancement projects.
- At least 5 support grants issues for the stabilisation / improvement / interpretation of Victorian Fortifications.
- At least 3 working parties established helping sustain fortifications for the future.
- Effective network established to monitor planning applications impacting on Victorian fortifications thereby permitting timely support or intervention if required.
- Measurable improvements in public access or condition at selected sites.

Goal 3: Enhance Research and Educational Output

(serves the **Understood** Pillar through research and education)

Strategic Objective:

Strengthen the Society's role as the authoritative source for knowledge on Victorian fortifications.

Key Initiatives:

- Digitise and catalogue a useful portion of the key historical materials within the Society's archive, making it searchable and accessible.
- Trial an annual research symposium (in person or hybrid).
- Increase *The Redan's* reach through wider promotion of content accessible to members.
- Update and expand range of Fort Logs.
- Offer annual research grants or awards to encourage new contributions.

Outcomes by 2031:

- Digitisation of key parts of our archive content. Prioritisation of content for digitisation will be based upon a review of the needs of members and external stakeholders.
- Fort Logs extended to include Ireland, and option to make selected Fort Logs publicly available reviewed.
- Increase in the number of individual contributors to *The Redan*.
- A growing pipeline of member-generated research.

Dorset council wanted to refurbish and protect the High-Angle Battery. The PFS were able to advise on the technical details ensuring the interpretation was accurate and informative. The Rediscovering High Angle Battery project received the 'Award for Heritage' at the Weymouth Civic Society Awards.

Goal 4: Develop Digital and On-Site Interpretation

(bridges **Understood** and **Enjoyed** Pillars, using digital and on-site tools)

Strategic Objective:

Enhance the public experience of Victorian forts through high-quality interpretation—both online and on-site. Making the heritage more accessible and enjoyable for all audiences.

Key Initiatives:

- Review and consider digital tools such as virtual tours, an interactive map of UK forts, 3D modelling and downloadable guides.
- Support fort sites with improved signage, storytelling, and QR code-enhanced trails.
- Consider a mobile-friendly learning hub with content for schools and general visitors. (such as a digital Encyclopaedia of Victorian Fortification)
- Collaborate with museums, site operators and heritage bodies on digital interpretation standards.

Outcomes by 2031:

- A suite of digital tools identified that are in use by members and the public.
- Interpretation support provided to at least five sites.
- Positive visitor feedback on educational and interpretive quality.

Two members who live on the Isle of Wight, needed to visit the National Archives to further their research. The PFS funded the research trip. This resulted in a talk to members and an article in the Redan furthering the understanding of the defences of Sandown.

Goal 5: Strengthen the Victorian Fort Network

(boosts all three pillars by creating a platform for collaboration and shared impact)

Strategic Objective:

Position the Society as a global hub for collaboration among Victorian fort owners, researchers, and interpreters.

Key Initiatives:

- Enhance the Victorian Fort Network with a dedicated coordinator and annual agenda.
- Sustain and facilitate an annual physical meeting with one or more topic special virtual meetings per year for network members.
- Enhance our knowledge-sharing platform for greater collaboration (e.g. best practices, toolkits, contacts).
- Facilitate joint research or interpretive projects across countries.

Outcomes by 2031:

- Network includes 35+ active partners across multiple countries.
- Knowledge sharing platform actively used by network members.
- Tangible joint initiatives or support achieved.

Crownhill Fort needed to make one of the caponiers safe for public access. A PFS grant was able to fund the architectural design of the new safety rails, allowing the project to proceed.

Goal 6: Ensure Organisational Sustainability and Impact

(how the Society will sustain or evaluate the strategy)

Strategic Objective:

Maintain the Society's capacity to deliver its mission through robust governance, funding, and evaluation.

Key Initiatives:

- Establish Strategic Monitoring as a standing committee agenda item.
- Consider setting up impact reporting on key initiatives.
- Seek out alternative sources of income generation.

Outcomes by 2031:

- Strategic Monitoring reviewed at least twice annually.
- Impact reports published every two to three years.

For more information:

enquiries@palmerstonfortssociety.org.uk
<https://www.palmerstonfortssociety.org.uk>



Website



Facebook Page