



**So much more
than just a view**



COUNTRYSIDE
COMMISSION

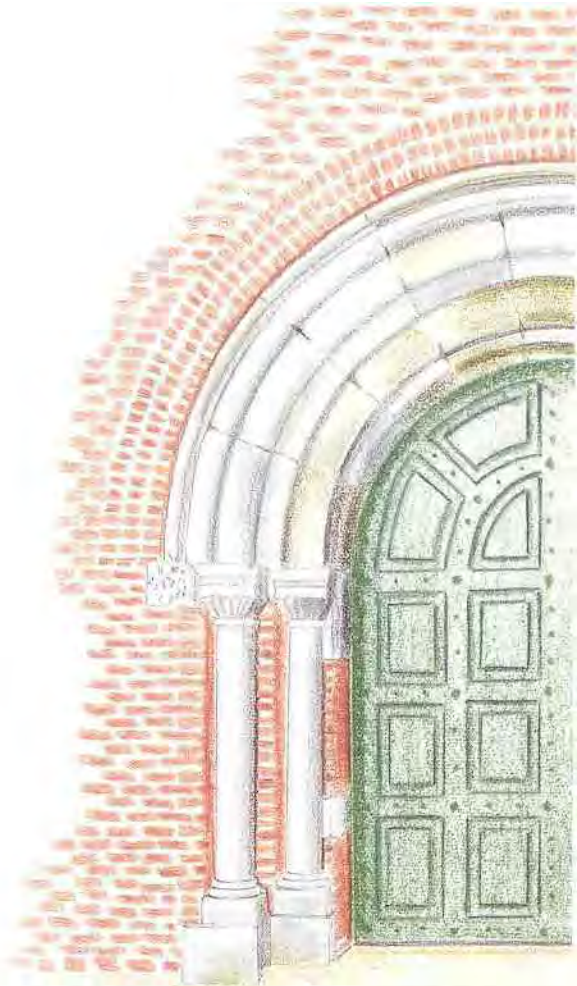


The Portsmouth Hill Countryside Management Project covers 4,500 acres of Portsmouth Hill and adjoining countryside to the north. The Project was set up by Portsmouth City Council, Fareham Borough Council, Havant Borough Council, Winchester City Council and Hampshire County Council together with the Countryside Commission and English Nature to co-ordinate a countryside management programme which will ensure the protection of the chalk downland and surrounding countryside for everyone to enjoy.

For further information

If you've enjoyed your visit, wish to voice any concerns, or would simply like further information, please contact the Project Officer, Portsmouth Hill Countryside Management Project, Fort Widley, Portsmouth Hill Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 3LS.





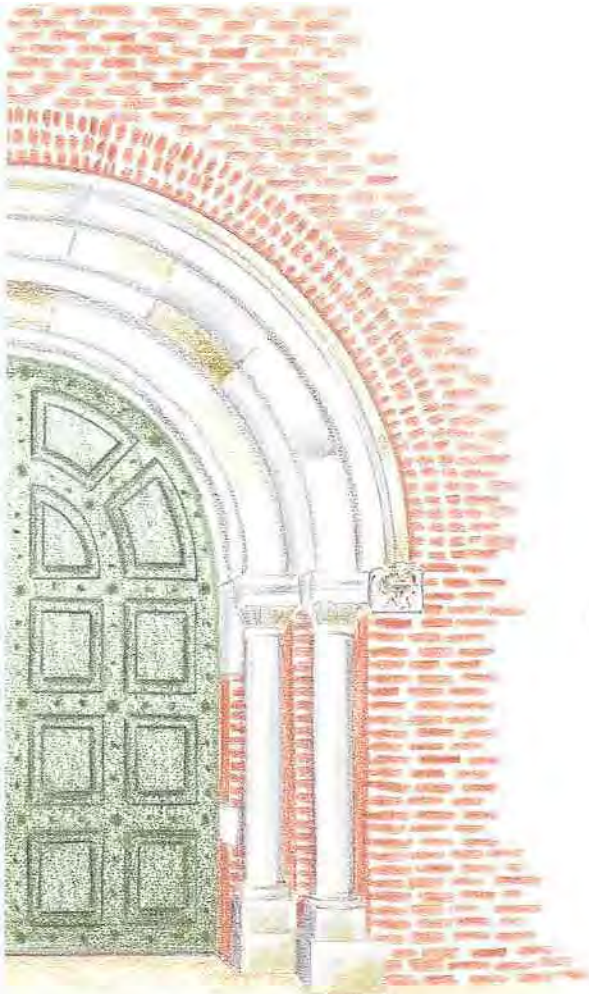
The entrance to Fort Nelson which houses the Royal Armouries

Portsmouth Hill is a chalk escarpment 120 metres high. It is an excellent vantage point with spectacular views across the sea to the Isle of Wight. But it is much more than just a view.

Portsmouth Hill has an interesting military history, as well as being an important area for wildlife and there is much to explore.

This includes a series of Victorian hill forts which were built to protect Portsmouth's dockyard and naval base.

A wide variety of plants and animals, particularly butterflies, thrive on the chalk grassland and include some species not



Artillery Museum – open to the public on certain days during the summer.

commonly found elsewhere in Britain.

Up on the hill you will find plenty of car parking space and a variety of Trails to follow. These will provide pleasant walks with interesting information along the way about the history and wildlife of the area.

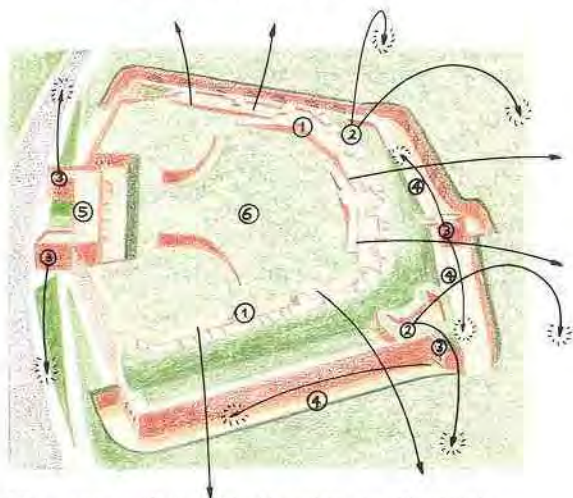
A continuing programme of grassland management work and footpath improvement is already opening up more and more of this wild and fascinating area.

So feel free to come and discover the joys of Portsdown Hill – there's much more than spectacular views to enjoy.

THE FATE OF BRITAIN'S FLEET DEPENDED ON PORTSDOWN HILL!

The development of rifled gun barrels during the 1850's improved accuracy and doubled their range, which meant that an

FORT WIDLEY c.1868

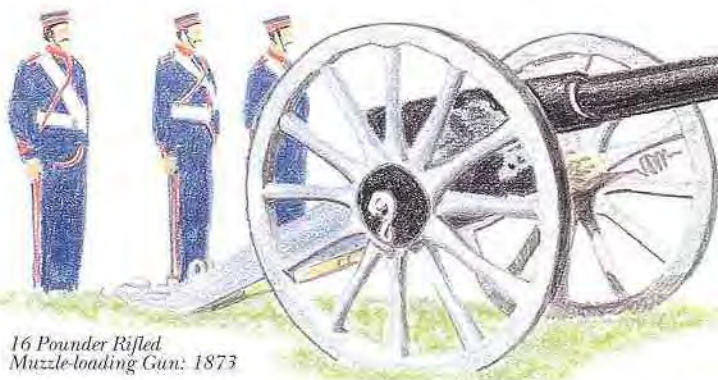


Heavy guns on the terreplein (1) and mortars (2) covered the surrounding area, while guns in the caponiers (3) covered the ditches (4). Underground tunnels linked the barracks (5) and ammunition store (6) to the gun and mortar positions, providing protection for troops and equipment.

enemy capturing the heights of Portsdown Hill would be able to bombard the British fleet at anchor in Portsmouth harbour.



In 1860, with the French rapidly building up a fleet of modern, steam-powered, ironclad battleships just across the English Channel in Cherbourg, England's prime minister Lord Palmerston was convinced that the emperor



*16 Pounder Rifled
Muzzle-loading Gun: 1873*

Napoleon III was preparing to launch an attack against Britain.

To counter this he ordered fortifications to be constructed all around Portsmouth which included a line of hill forts to be built along the crest of Portsdown Hill at 2,000 to 3,000 yard intervals, specifically to repulse any attack from inland.



Portsdown Hill's vital line of defence

Six hill forts were completed by 1868. From west to east they are Forts Wallington, Nelson, Southwick, Widley, Purbrook and Farlington Redoubt (now demolished).

Based on a Continental design, they have been dug out of the chalk and constructed with bricks made in a local brickworks just north of Fareham. From the seaward side their solid red brick walls can be clearly seen along the ridge of Portsdown Hill. But from the landward side it's a very different scene.

Forts what forts?

To an enemy advancing towards the crest of Portsdown Hill from inland nothing more than a grass covered ridge is visible. The defensive walls have been cleverly hidden behind grass ditches along which fire could be directed from guns in the caponiers.

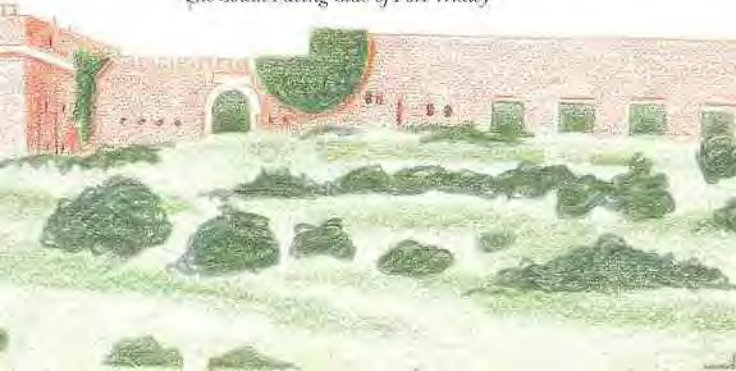
*Mid 18th century
24 Pounder Gun
on 19th century
Garrison Carriage*



13" Mortar

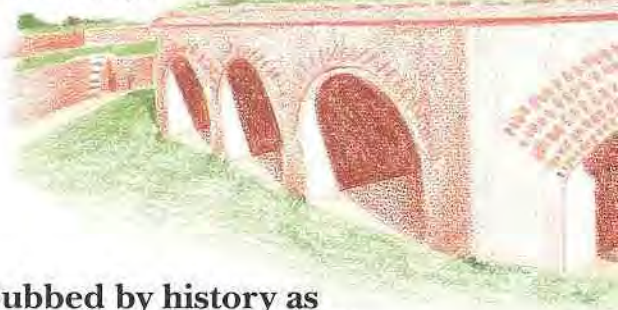


The South Facing Side of Fort Widley



From behind the grass covered ramparts above, mortars and heavy guns on the surrounding terreplein would provide heavy bombardment against the enemy.

*Reinforced Mortar Positions
beneath Main Rampart*



Dubbed by history as “Palmerston’s Folly”!

Ironically, not a single gun was ever fired from any of these hill forts in anger.

By the time construction of the forts was finally completed in 1868, France clearly had no intentions of making war on Britain and the forts had only limited strategic use. Ever since then this massive scheme of fortifications has become known as “Palmerston’s Folly.”



FROM PORTSDOWN'S PREHISTORIC PAST TO THE PRESENT DAY

*Fossilised
Mollusc*



Portsmouth Hill's history goes back a great deal further than the mid 19th century. Some 60 million years or more in fact.

The fossil remains of sea urchins and other creatures have been unearthed from the chalk of Portsmouth Hill, proving that the chalk was formed in marine waters several hundred feet deep.

The layers of chalk were pushed up to form Portsmouth Hill as a result of Continental drift, and the fact that once formed the hill has never been resubmerged after subsequent Ice Ages makes it geologically unique.

During prehistoric times much of the hill would have been covered in woodland. This is borne out by the ancient shells of



*Fossilised
Sea Urchin*



*Bloody
Nosed L*



woodland snails that can still be found to this day in the soil overlying Portsdown's chalk.



Our ancestors' effect on the environment

8,000 years ago early man started clearing the trees for growing crops and rearing domestic animals to provide food and clothing.

The resulting grassland provided grazing for large flocks of sheep. Their intensive grazing

over many hundreds of years not only

kept the grass short, but led to the

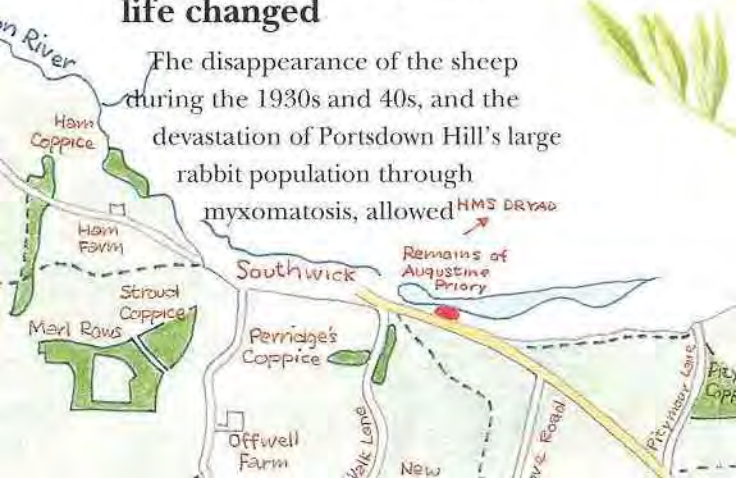
development of a particular group of plants which could survive in the

nutrient-starved soil.



How Portsdown's plant life changed

The disappearance of the sheep during the 1930s and 40s, and the devastation of Portsdown Hill's large rabbit population through myxomatosis, allowed



Kidney Vetch



coarser grasses previously kept at bay by intensive grazing to flourish unchecked. Shrubs began to thrive. Bushes grew into trees. And the area gradually evolved into the way it looks today with thickets of hawthorn, wild privet and dogwood.

Grassland management is now underway to enhance and maintain the chalk downland, a large area of which to the south and west of Fort Widley has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



Marbled

Small Blue



LOTS OF AMAZING WILDLIFE TO DISCOVER

The lush green turf may have become overgrown, but the wonderful variety of birds, butterflies, wild flowers, insects and mammals that abound still make Portsdown Hill a fascinating place to explore.

Bring the family for a day out. Bring a picnic lunch.

Breathe in the fresh hilltop air high above the traffic fumes and pollution you've left below. And when you've taken in the spectacular views across Portsmouth Harbour to the Isle of Wight, take in the natural attractions that are all around you.



White



Know your wild flowers to find the butterflies

Sunny summer days on Portsdown Hill bring out the butterflies. Common varieties like the Small Heath, Meadow Brown and Common Blue are easy to see as they flit amongst the colourful Scabious, Greater Knapweed, Viper's Bugloss, Musk Thistle and Harebell.

But you'll need to find the Horseshoe Vetch to have a chance of seeing the rare Chalkhill Blue, and Kidney Vetch is the favourite plant of the rarer Small Blue.

You'll recognise the Marbled White, of course. It's depicted on our Portsdown Hill symbol.

Even orchids can be spotted here

Chalk hills are home to several species of orchid.

Bee Orchids, Autumn Lady's Tresses and the

Common Spotted Orchid can be found here. Please remember it is an offence to damage or dig up wild flowers — particularly orchids as many can take up to 10 years to mature and flower, and some flower only once and then die.

Bee
Orchid



Greater Knapweed



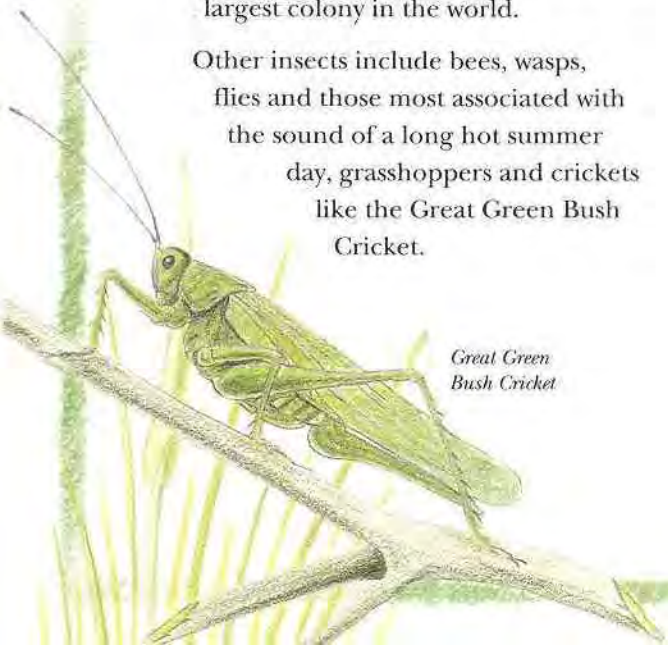
From spiders to cricket on the green!



Garden
Spider

No fewer than 29 different species of spider have been recorded on Portsdown Hill, including a large species of Mediterranean origin *Argiope Bruennichi* which is now possibly the largest colony in the world.

Other insects include bees, wasps, flies and those most associated with the sound of a long hot summer day, grasshoppers and crickets like the Great Green Bush Cricket.



Great Green
Bush Cricket



Birds, birds, birds!

There are a wide variety of birds to see and hear. Crows and Black-headed Gulls soar high on the wind currents rising from Portsea Island, demonstrating what an ideal place this is for flying kites. Robins

fight over territories amongst the elder bushes in the chalk pit of Candy's Pit Trail, and Jackdaws strut about the brick built forts.

Keen bird spotters may be rewarded by seeing a Corn Bunting or Lesser Whitethroat.

Listen out for songsters like the Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, and the Skylark rising into a sky in which you will often see a Kestrel hovering over its prey.



kestrel

Lesser Whitethroat

Black-headed Gull

Ba...



Gull

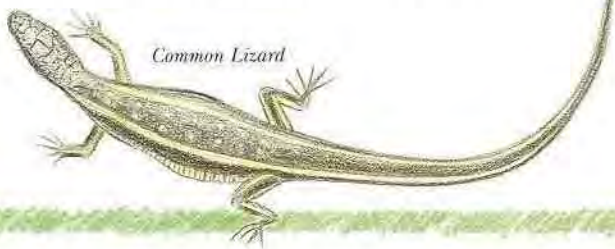


It's the mammals and reptiles you're least likely to see

What the sharp-sighted Kestrel can see are the Field Voles, Wood Mice and Common Shrews which abound in the undergrowth where they are also hunted by Stoats and

Weasels. Also on Portsdown Hill are Foxes which live in deep holes and Badgers whose favourite diet is worms, slugs and snails.

It is also possible, though highly unlikely, to find the Common Lizard and Grass Snake basking in the sun on a summer day.



Common Lizard



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

We are working hard to make the whole of Portsdown Hill a place you will want to come and enjoy. Not just for the magnificent views out to sea as well as inland, but for the recreational opportunities and wealth of military and natural history waiting to be discovered.

You'll find a series of Information Boards at key points which provide additional facts about the history and wildlife in the immediate vicinity.



Wood Mouse



Fox