

Fort Ben Buckler buried under Hugh Bamford Reserve

The Ben Buckler Gun Battery 1893 is buried under Hugh Bamford Reserve, Military Road, Bondi.

It is listed with the NSW Heritage Office & is identified as a “unique coastal defence battery. Apart from comprising a rare intact concrete 1890’s emplacement specifically developed for the then new disappearing guns common to the period, the site retains significant archaeological potential due to the probable retention of the original 9.2inch naval gun and mounting – the only complete 9.2 inch example to exist in Australia. The gun battery was one of three large coastal batteries installed in NSW”. “The Ben Buckler gun is held in high esteem by military experts as perhaps the best example in Australia.”

Due to the presumed integrity of the reinforced concrete gun pit, associated rooms, and the probability of the entire gun and mechanism being extant, the Ben Buckler battery site has the potential to provide significant insights into late-Victorian defence technologies”

(NSW Heritage Branch, http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5056455).

“The Heritage Office became aware of the gun’s existence through a published Information Sheet developed by Waverley Council and Waverley Library for Heritage Week in 1985. Based on the surviving records, the Heritage Office led a remote magnetometer search of the site on 6 April 2005. The site visit involved discussion with Sydney Water who provided modern survey drawings of the oval with an overlay of the suggested location of the gun pit based on the previous exposure of the site in 1984. The survey was assisted by heritage staff at Waverley Council and Rod Caldwell, Project Officer, from the Fort Scratchley Historical Society, Newcastle” (NSW Heritage Branch).

For full listing on Battery with the NSW Heritage:

http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5056455

Waverley Council & the NSW Heritage Office identifies Ben Buckler Point (Ray O’Keefe Reserve) as being the “site of former fort, constructed 1891-1920” (NSW Heritage Branch).

This must be incorrect, the re-discovery of the gun battery in the Waterboard’s excavation in 1984 should have alerted the Council to this inconsistency.

Fort Ben Buckler, with it’s battery & potentially intact gun and associated munitions rooms, is buried under Hugh Bamford Reserve.

“The Ben Buckler site retains a close bond to the artillery units of colonial NSW who manned and trained at the site.” (NSW Heritage Branch)

In 1887 the coastline at Hugh Bamford Reserve down to the Beach was known as ‘Ben Buckler’ as noted in newspaper articles from the time.

Fort Ben Buckler was the first of the 3 coastal forts to be complete in 1893, the others at Signal Hill, Vaucluse & Shark Point, Clovelly were complete later in that same year. (Dean Boyce, Defending Colonial Sydney).

The following newspaper articles from 1887 refer to the intention of building a 'Military Road & building Fort Ben Buckler, Bondi:'

was remanded for sentence. A list of the cases
down for trial on Monday appears in another portion of
the paper.

We understand that it is proposed to erect a power-
ful fort on the coast at or near the suburb of Bondi.
Such a fort would form one of a line of defense works
between the entrance to Port Jackson and Botany, or
some place further southward, which, in the opinion of
many persons, is necessary to keep this portion of the
colony free from attack by any hostile fleet. Certain it
is that if heavily-armed batteries, fitted with the latest
improvements and types of ordnance, were erected on
the cliffs between the South Head and Botany Bay there
would be little fear of having the city shelled by an
enemy in the case of an outbreak of war. Of course if
the coastline were fortified from the North Head to
Broken Bay the metropolis would be rendered
doubly secure from an attack by sea, as
it would be well-nigh impossible for an invader
to run the gauntlet of a number of batteries.
The cliff known as Ben Buckler, situated on the nor-
thern side of Bondi Beach, is spoken of as the probable
site for the new fortress, which, if erected, would in all
probability be armed with 8 or 9 inch guns, mounted on
the hydro-pneumatic principle. One or two other
places along the coast have been inspected with a view
to ascertain whether they would be suitable sites upon
which to build forts. Up to the present time, however,
the intentions of the Government with reference to the
construction of any additional fortifications have not
been divulged, and nothing definite is known as to
when the fort or forts are to be erected. Probably
General Schaw's report would, if made public, throw
some further light upon the important subject of
coastal defenses.

The majority of the 6-in. guns which arrived in
the Cairnbulg some few days ago will, we understand,
be mounted on hydro-pneumatic carriages for the
harbour defense works. Two of these powerful
weapons are to be sent to Newcastle for the purpose of
strengthening the defenses of that port.

The Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 8 October 1887 reported that it was
“proposed to erect a powerful fort on the coast at or near the suburb of Bondi. The fort would form
a line of defence between Port Jackson and Botany. Which in the opinion of many persons, is
necessary to keep this portion of the Colony free from attack by any hostile fleet.
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ordnance, were erected of the cliffs between the South Head and Botany Bay there would be
little fear of having the city shelled by an enemy in the case of an outbreak of war.
The cliff known as Ben Buckler, situated on the Northern side of Bondi Beach is spoken of as the
probable site for the new fortress, which if erected would in all probability be armed with 8 inch
guns, mounted on the hydro-pneumatic principle”

Shots From the Barracks.

OUR ILLUSTRATION OF THE COASTAL DEFENCE GUN.

This huge piece of ordnance, weighing 23 tons, was taken from the Barracks on a sling wagon used for transporting great weights, by McMahon, the carrier. A delay was caused immediately outside the Barracks by the weakness of the road, which was unable to support the great weight of the gun and wagon, despite the broad tyres of the latter. Eventually, however, it was got under weigh, dragged by a team of 40 horses over the rough and sandy road between the Barracks and Ben Buckler at Bondi. It was nearly a week in transport, as from time to time the wheels sunk from 19in. to 18in. in the ground. The gun has, however, been safely transported to its site, where it is now waiting to be mounted. Its description is a rifle breechloading gun, with a 9.2 bore, and its weight is, as has been said, 23 tons. When this monster speaks in earnest it should give a good account of itself. The magnificent gun has a range of 12 miles, and throws in this distance a projectile weighing 600lbs.

Well, Easter has passed once more without an encampment. The country is the richer for this by about 230,000, and it is questionable whether it is any poorer in military equipment. We have not much faith in the cut and dried military system under which the successes of our citizen soldiers are arranged. We do not, in fact, believe that the British Army system is at all adapted to the conditions of a new country. Our new military commandant, it will be remembered, upon accepting the post offered by the Government, uttered some words of warning regarding the British Army. He condemned its drill methods and systems of organization in strong terms, which had all the more weight coming from a man highly competent to express an opinion. Should this country ever be attacked by land the successful defence will be accomplished by methods decided upon the moment by men familiar with the country. The record of British failures when the British army has been called upon to act in new conditions is a long and heavy one.

Indoctrination of course by the historic gallantry of the soldier, but only by that. In the New Zealand war the British regulars were broken down and beaten, not so much by their loss as by the wretched limitations of the system of rules and regulations which does away with adaptability and makes a soldier a machine instead of a thinking man. It was the colonists who had never been subjected to these restrictions who finally overcame the British. For the same reason the Americans defeated the British in their two wars. To the same cause, as everybody who is familiar with the account of Colonel Dunsterville's action as told by his brother, was due the brilliant affair of Iwaidiwan, where the Zulus

stop to the British occupation. Should she make a hostile demonstration it can be by water, and by the water, moreover, of the Mediterranean Sea. But France is not powerful enough upon the sea to do this. England's Mediterranean fleet would throttle her long before she could get to Egypt. This necessity for naval action in any attempted interference with English projects in Egypt makes the strength of England's position. On the whole there seems nothing for France but to give and bear it, unless she likes to take Morocco as an equivalent.

In consequence of the Heligoland having rejected the proposals of the Government for increasing the German army, the peace strength of the Austro-Hungary army is being raised at an extra cost of £2,000,000. Why the result of a vote in the German Reichstag refusing to sanction the increase of the German army should lead to an increase in the strength of the Austro-Hungary army is explainable only by a reference to the presumed terms of the triple alliance. It has been alleged that these provide that the armies of Germany, Italy, and Austria must at all times overshadow those of France and Russia. How close the alliance must be, and how faithfully its terms are adhered to is shown by the event on which

now playing the midnight meet of the Grand Old Man. But these United gentry do not speak to fight. They are excellent at a game of bluff. In the end they will find it better to remain loyal to the Queen's Government than to fight her soldiers, and they will make this discovery just before the battle instead of after. Gladstone, Morley, and Rosebery between them represent a tremendous amount of backbone, and this without being flagons.

H.M.S. Howe, one of the Channel Squadron, which went aground on the Pacific Bank, at the mouth of the Farol Barco, Spain, on November 2 last, has been successfully floated. It will be remembered that Vice-Admiral Henry Faulkner, C.B., in command of the squadron, was tried by court-martial for neglect in connection with the disaster to the Howe, but was acquitted. The Howe is a good ship, and it is satisfactory to find that she is not to rust on the rocks, as was at first supposed would be the case. Considering the cost of these great ships of war, one can estimate the responsibility which rests upon the shoulders of their commanders. The Howe is not to end their ingloriously.

The Russian Government have given directions for the rapid completion of

made since it would touch on, while to escape, the case of the p

It will be new Government authority upon when a building a military marine force been the case in regard of ordnance; as garrisoned who forming his invited his as its still be of that office only chance expert. The June, 1890, connection. No old personal Colonel had served far and in France England's ship commander promising ti

From Aming density American's or disadvantages shipyard, people, last United States and cities in large delay might, while this month the blower still down high in at River, and was toward about one service and ment. The Jessie Hill



The New 23-ton Coastal Defence Gun. On the way to its site at Ben Buckler, near Bondi. The gun has a range of 12 miles, and throws a projectile weighing 600 lbs.

we are commenting. And the readiness with which Austria in supplying the complement of men which the triple alliance deems necessary to its ends, evidences the perils uncertainty of the present European situation. The looseness of the terms of the Triple Alliance is a threat to the disturbing elements in European politics, which are France and Russia. How will they reply to these threats. Only a few weeks ago General Gorke, the grim and brilliant soldier who leads the Russian war party, announced that the "harvest" was nearly ripe. It is evident that things were near at a more dangerous tension than at present in Europe. If France has internal complications to distract her, the Germans

several cruisers which are in course of construction on the Baltic. These cruisers are of the North type—steel turret ships, armed with guns of the Russian Krupp pattern, and also fitted with Sea Fish torpedoes discharges. They are capable of steaming 18 knots an hour. Viewing the number of warships now afloat and in course of construction, representing hundreds of millions of money, it can be fairly assumed that the destruction caused by the next great war in the money value of lost ships alone will be something enormous—enough, probably, to pay the national debt of Australia.

It is understood that the Government of Victoria intends reducing the number of

art, four or Gattings, a gun are pe from the de guns are at may be the 18in. and 2 barrels, two upon a sup are all not of the last on an Am 14in. to 15 different pe breakers on engine in- partment, I injury. T

In April 1893 the gun was delivered to Ben Buckler. As reported by **The Illustrated Sydney News 8 April 1893:**

“This huge piece of ordnance, weighing 23 tons, was taken from the Barracks on a sling wagon used for transporting great weights, by McMahon the carrier. A delay was caused immediately outside the Barracks by the weakness of the road, which was unable to support the great weight of the gun and wagon, despite the broad tyres of the latter. Eventually, by a team of 40 horses over the rough and sandy road between the barracks and Ben Buckler at Bondi. It was nearly a week in transport, as from time to time the wheels sunk from 19inch to 18inch in the ground. The gun has, however, been safely transported to its site, where it is now waiting to be mounted. Its description is a rifle breechloading gun, with a 9.2 bore and its weight is, as has been said, 23 tons. When this monster speaks in earnest it should give a good account of itself. The magnificent gun has a range of 12 miles, and throws in this distance a projectile weighing 600lbs.”



And in the **Sydney Mail, Saturday, April 22 1893:**

“Owing to the steepness and bad conditions of the roads, the removal of the gun from Victoria Barracks was no easy task. Thirty five horses were employed and more than once the wheels of the trolley sank into the ground and the whole affair had to be helped out with cranes. It was taken along Old South Head Road towards the lighthouse and then back towards Ben Buckler by a track leading up the rocks in a zig-zag direction. Here most of the horses were dispensed with, and the trolley was got along by foot by placing iron plates in front of the wheels over which it was dragged by horses, the plates were then again moved to the front and the same process repeated...In this way Ben Buckler was reached in about three weeks or a month from Victoria Barracks. McMahon & Co had the contract for the removal of the gun from the Barracks to the Fort.”

WERE THEY SPIES?

— SYDNEY FORT PHOTO- GRAPHED. —

Sydney, March 24.

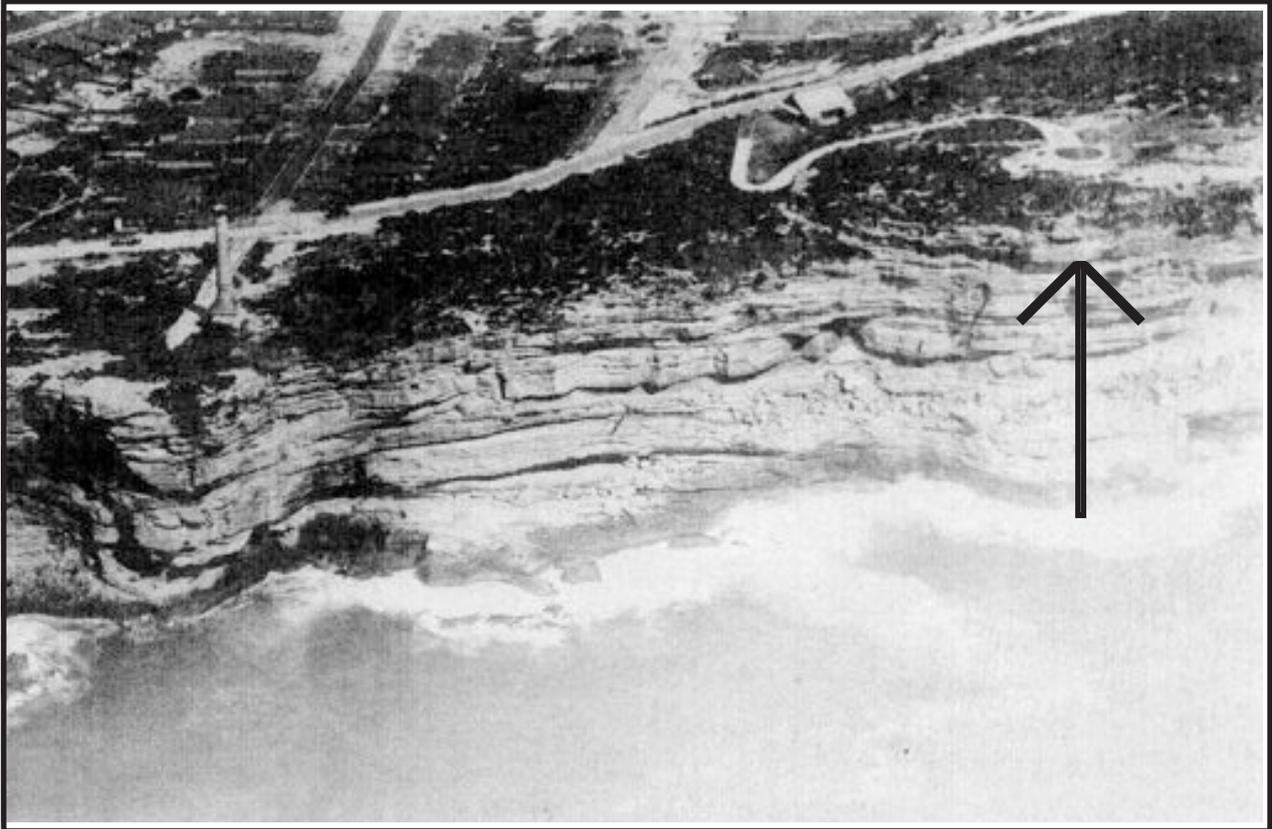
A few days ago a Japanese man and a Japanese boy were seen taking photographs of the fort, which stands on an eminence behind Ben Buckler, the northern head of Bondi Bay. The incident was noticed by two boys, sons of a local resident. The Japanese had a small collapsible hand camera with them, and took a series of snapshots from various points. The interior of the fort and the arrangement of the gun pit, the protective embrasure, and magazine, were, of course, not observable from any of the points from which the Japanese took the photographs, but they were able to command the whole contour and configuration of the country, and show the various approaches to the fort with accuracy, a result that would be of enormous value to any invading force. The boys only reported the matter yesterday.

The Adelaide Advertiser on Saturday 25 March 1911 reported:

“Were they Spies? Sydney Fort Photographed

A few day's ago a Japanese man and a Japanese Boy were seen taking photographs of the fort, which stands on an eminence behind Ben Buckler, the Northern head of Bondi Bay. The incident was noticed by two boys, sons of a local resident. The Japanese had a small collapsible hand camera with them, and took a series of snapshots from various points.

The interior of the fort and the arrangement of the gun pit, the protective embrasure, and magazine, were, of course, not observable from any of the points from which the Japanese took the photographs, but they were able to command the whole contour and configuration of the country, and show the various approaches to the fort with accuracy, a result that would be of enormous value to any invading force. The boys only reported the matter yesterday”.



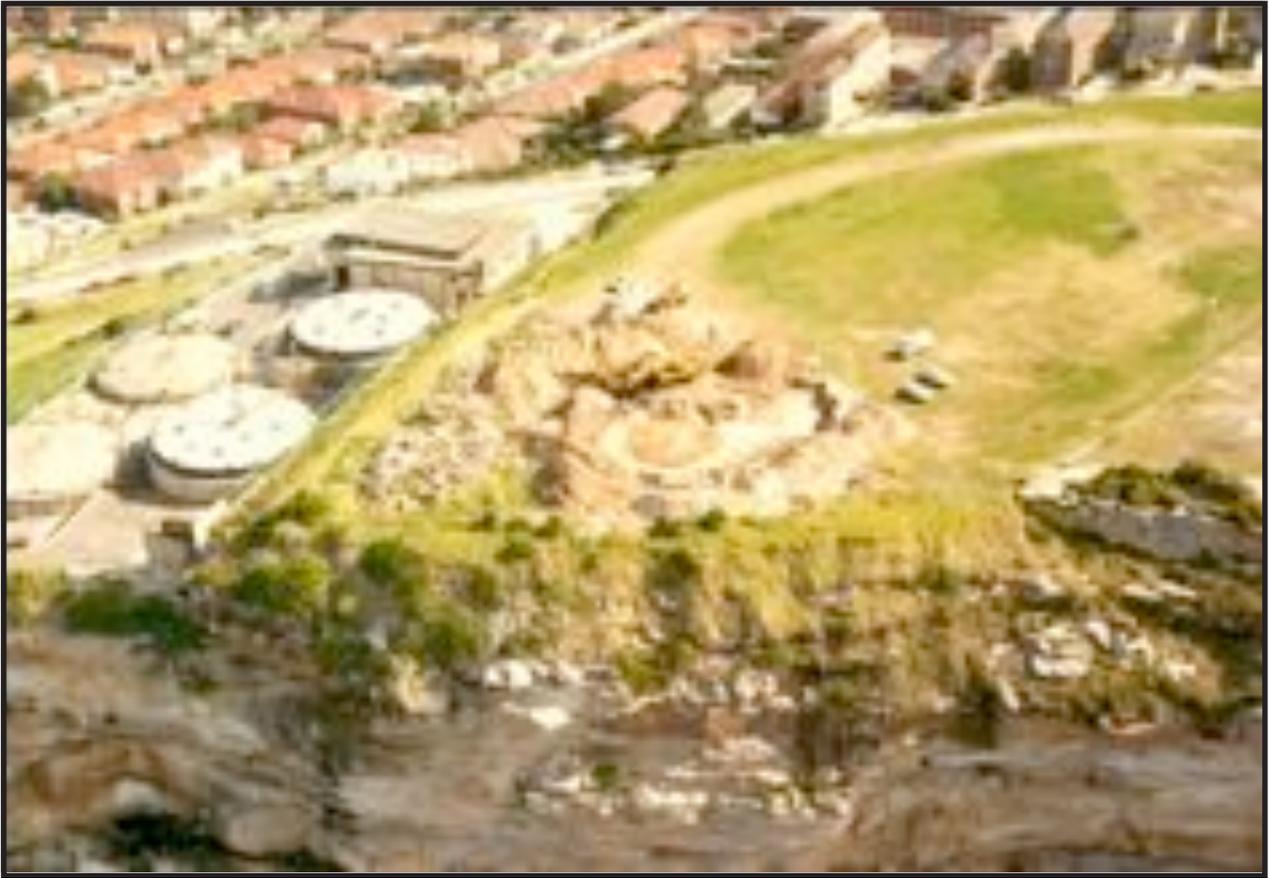
View of Fort Ben Buckler with Gun Battery
Zig Zag road as described in the transport of the gun to the Fort

Bondi Coast 1930-1931
Image from the Mitchell Library

The site of Hugh Bamford Reserve was noted as a 'Military Reserve' early Maps of Waverley
Sometime in the 1950's the Military vacated the site.

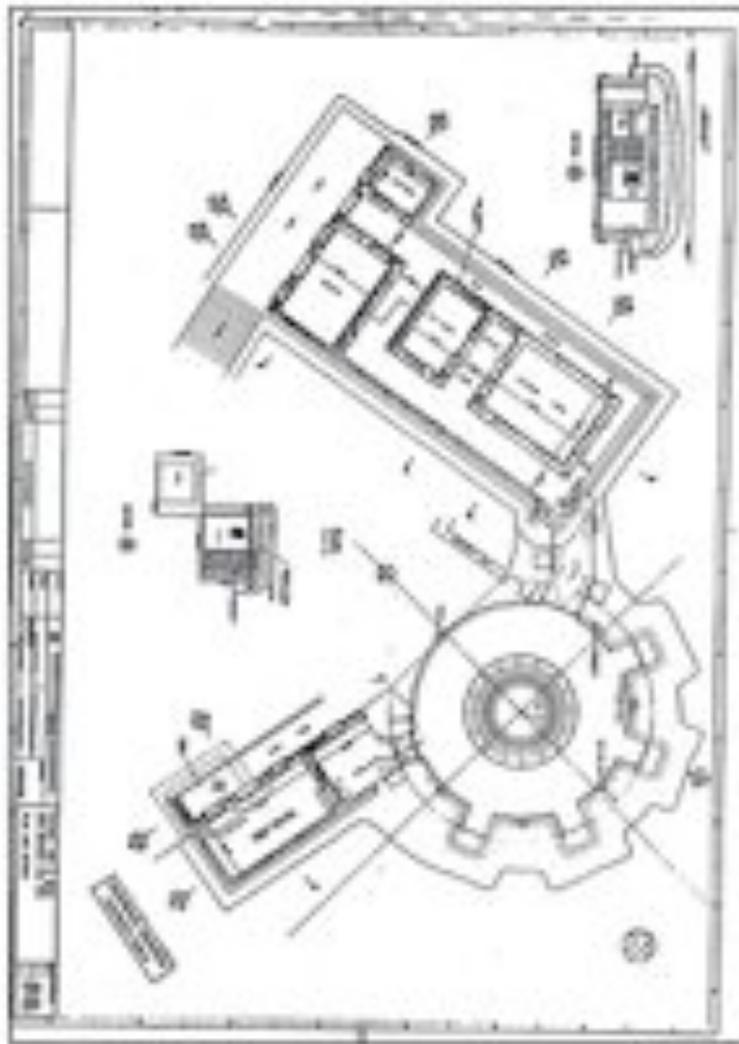
The Sewege Treatment Plant, Military Road was constructed in approx 1960, with further building development up until 1980, the road leading up to Fort Ben Buckler & the Military building on the site would have been demolished when the Sewege Treatment works took over some of the Military Reserve.

The battery was filled in and the rest of the land given over to a park.



Images from 1984 Waterboard excavation - taken from the NSW Heritage Website

Ben Buckler Gun Battery 1893



Detailed drawing of Ben Buckler Battery site, presumed based upon 1984 Waterboard survey.

Image Type:

Map / Plan

Image By:

Waterboard Authority

Image taken from the NSW Heritage Website

Waverley Council have not supplied a heritage report with the REF.

The NSW Heritage Office advised that Council should have a 'Conservation Management Plan' in place for the gun Battery.

The Council failed to show the Fort/Gun Battery on their plans in the REF. Section 7.6 of the REF states "The Gun battery is currently buried near the south-western corner" and "as excavation for the sub depot occurs beneath the Hugh Bamford Reserve at the south eastern corner, it is not located near the Gun Battery".

The Heritage website shows the Gunnery Draft Curtilage Survey and the Battery Plans.

The superimposed plans shows the excavations going right up to the Fort Magazines. The REF is demonstrably incorrect in this regard.

If this development went ahead the finished level of Hugh Bamford Reserve would be permanently higher than the natural level of the Fort site (already it is not the natural coast line as Sydney Water have cut and filled it with debris from their works in the past).

This would mean that if the Fort/Battery site were to be exhumed at a later date – it would bear no relationship to the line of the proposed depot grassed roof, further altering it's relationship with the original line of the historic site and coastline.



Overlay of plans showing the development in relation to the Battery:
all three to the same scale; i.e. the Council Plans, the Heritage Survey and the Gunnery Plans.

Proposed sub depot in grey taken from REF.

'Waterboard' Plan of Gun Battery and associated rooms.

Heritage NSW photo identifying 'curtilage' by the blue outline.

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