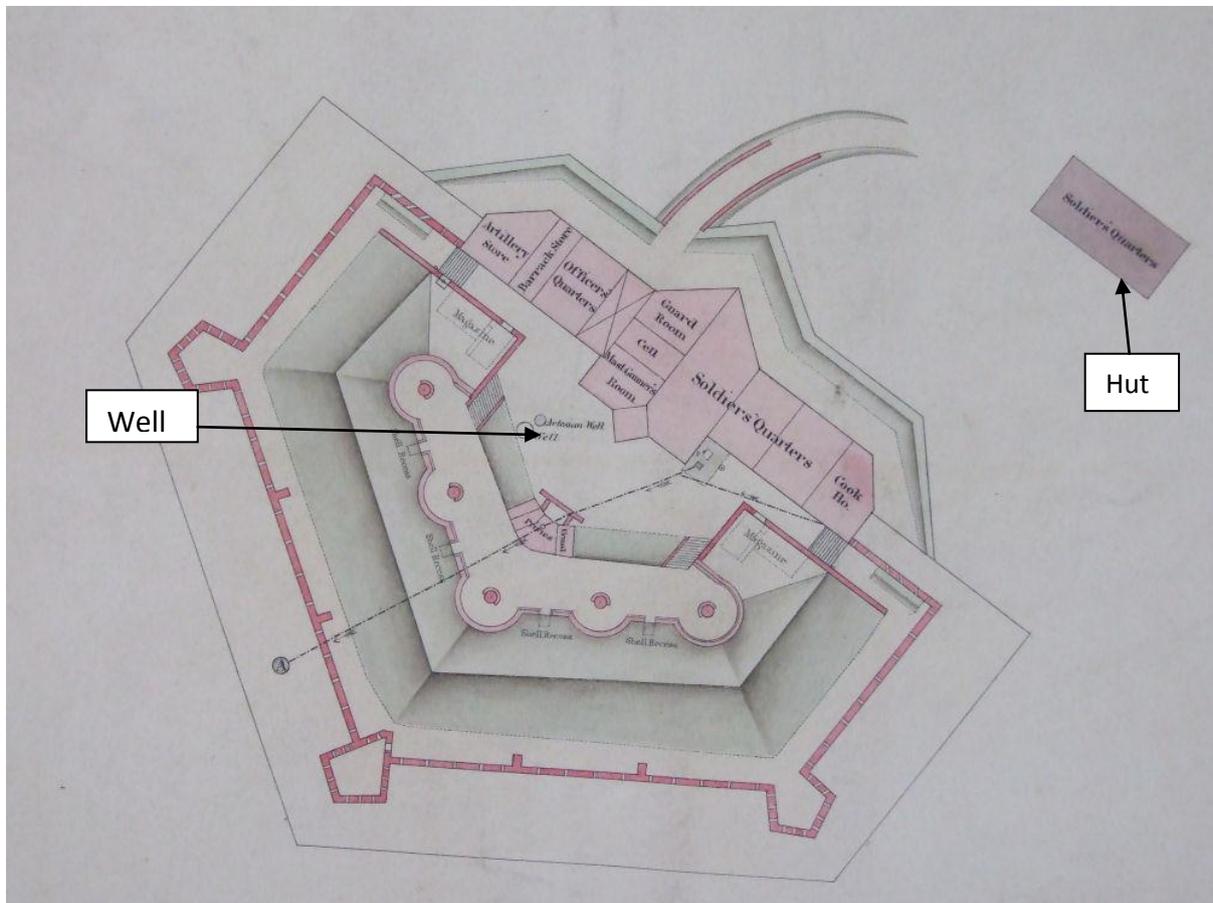


Edward Corney, builder

Littlehampton Fort was the work of (at least) three building firms. Locke and Nesham from London constructed the walls in 1854, the local firm of Robert Bushby added the glacis in 1855 and, in 1859, Edward Corney was hired to sink a well and also to build an additional accommodation block

The Builder: Volume 17 February 19th 1859

“Sinking a Well at Little Hampton. — A contract with the Board of Ordnance is being carried out by Mr. Edward Corney for the supply of spring water to the military fort at Little Hampton. Seven iron caissons of 3 feet 6 inches diameter and 5 foot lengths, are being sunk, from which boring will be adapted, to receive 12 inch tubular iron, to the depth of 71 feet 8 inches, and if necessary, to be carried lower. At the depth already penetrated to the 9th inst. viz 26 feet the indication is promising.”



Plan of Littlehampton Fort August 1859

The depth, 71 feet 8 inches (21.85 metres), would be a long way below sea level. It is not known if this well was successful but there is a suspicion that the water was brackish. The fort also appears to have had water storage tanks recorded as holding 6,400 gallons in a survey of August 1859 (WO 78/2849) and 8,900 gallons in the plans of August 1886 (WO 78/3290). Presumably these tanks were under the parade ground, as at Shoreham Fort.

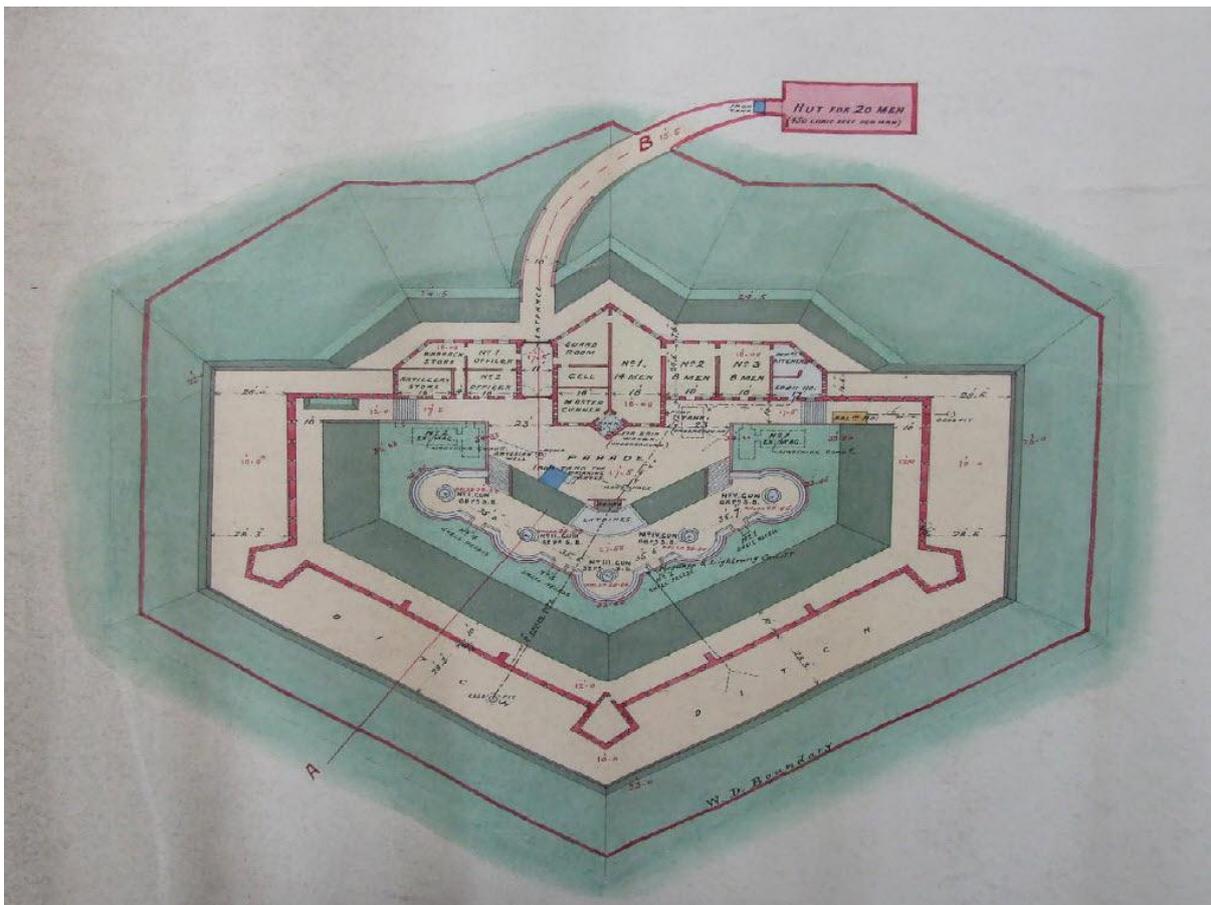
At more-or-less the same time Corney was asked to build a barrack block at the fort to accommodate men undergoing rifle training. This year, 1859, was the year of the 'great panic' about the threat of invasion by Napoleon III of France and the consequent founding of the Volunteer Rifle Corps (see my essay 'Holding the Fort'). The local Volunteer Rifle men and the Sussex militia men were trained at Littlehampton.

The West Sussex Gazette May 26 1859

"LITTLEHAMPTON

Admiral Chads and several other officers of the military service were here a few days since on a visit of inspection to the fort, having reference, we believe, to the intention of a much larger number of men being sent her for rifle practice; in furtherance of which object Mr E. Corney has received an order to create forthwith a building 50 feet in length by a breadth of 20 feet."

Presumably this new accommodation was the hut shown on the plan as being just outside the fort. In the 1886 plan this is described as a hut for 20 men allowing 450 cubic feet each, which would make the hut 9 feet tall.



Plan of Littlehampton Fort August 1886

In actual fact the hut may have held more men than this- the 1859 plan says it could hold 30 and the 1886 plan that it could hold 50.

Edward Corney, the builder, was a member of one of Littlehampton's leading families. Corneys had been traders and ship builders in the town for over 100 years and he had numerous relatives in the streets around the River Arun. Peregrine Phillips who kept a diary of his visit to Littlehampton in 1778 wrote:

"The Dukes, the Corneys, the Scarvels, the Henrys and the Isemongers have by intermarriage peopled the whole village"

Born in Littlehampton in 1811, Edward was the son of John Corney, a merchant. In 1835 Edward married Mary Hill from West Tarring and they had three daughters- Emma born 1837 who died as a baby, Mary born 1839 and Jane born 1841. In the censuses of 1841, 1851 and 1861 the family is recorded as living at a property in River Road. River Road at this time was home to all the major ship-building firms in Littlehampton and comprised a series of wharves for the import of timber and coal.

In 1856 Corney's builder's yard survived a serious fire:

Sussex Advertiser - Tuesday 25 November 1856

"Fire - An alarming and destructive fire broke out shortly after 11 o'clock on Wednesday evening, in a store adjoining the workshop of Mr E. Corney, builder, which spread so rapidly as to cause the destruction of the carpenter's shop, store, and whole of the buildings and contents. Great alarm was at one time felt for the safety of the large shop and store, full of wood goods, of Mr I.E. Butt, situate on the premises adjoining leeward of the fire, but fortunately there was little wind, otherwise its destruction seemed inevitable."

One consequence of the fire seems to be that from 1858 onwards Corney is listed as the Littlehampton agent for the Sun Fire Insurance Company.

In *Kelly's Post Office Directory of Essex, Herts, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey and Sussex, 1867* Edward Corney, builder, is listed as being in Ferry Road so he may have opened a new yard on the other side of the river as his work expanded.

Corney was obviously a rival of the main building firm in Littlehampton belonging to Robert Bushby.

Sussex Advertiser Tuesday 1 April 1856

"At the meeting of the commissioners of the Port, on Thursday, tenders were received for the considerable new works to the harbour for 1856, from Messrs Bushby, Butt, Henly and Corney, that of the latter being the successful one."

Hampshire Advertiser - Saturday 20 February 1858

"LITTLEHAMPTON. February 20. The Tenders for the Harbour Works, on Thursday, exhibited a close competition by the local parties, R. Bushby and E. Corney, the former the lowest by only £2. The other tenders (by four London contractors) were variously in excess to over £300."

Unlike Bushby, Corney did not prosper as a builder and in 1867 his firm was declared bankrupt.

London Gazette November 1867

“At the Court of Bankruptcy, Basinghall-street, in the city of London, before Henry Philip Roche Esq., Registrar:

Edward Corney, of Littlehampton, in the county of Sussex, Builder, adjudicated bankrupt on the 3rd day of April, 1867. A-Dividend Meeting will.be held on the 27th November instant, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon precisely.”

The cause of this disaster is not recorded. It seems that Corney was not deterred from a career in business because in the census of 1871 he is listed as trading as an undertaker, living with his family in Arundel Road (in one of Bushby's houses?) and in 1881 he is an undertaker with premises at 27 Surrey Street (nowadays a Chinese Restaurant). Before he became a builder Corney was described as a “carpenter and undertaker” in Pigots Directory of 1840, so he obviously revived his old skills.

Nor does his reputation as a businessman seem to have suffered from the bankruptcy as he remained a prominent member of the local community. He was, for some reason,

- Vice-Consul for Norway & Sweden
- Census Enumerator for Littlehampton District 12 (All that part of Littlehampton called Beach Houses and that part from the Watch House down to the Battery Station both inclusive on the South)
- Poor Law Overseer
- And Rate Collector for the Town Board. This last post put him in charge of the town finances.

In his book Little Hampton Long Ago 1974, page 99, H.J.F. Thompson described the activities of the Local Board:

“Quite often decisions were arrived at in somewhat unofficial gatherings in the smoking room of the Norfolk Hotel, Surrey Street. Most of the Board being local tradesmen, it was all too easy for them just to congregate over a glass or two, and settle matters as they arose, rather than wait for the next official meeting date. The same rather nice casual approach appears to have been exemplified in the person of Ed Corney, local undertaker, who handled the town's finances, and, so it is told, kept the official monies in one trouser pocket and his own in the other, and never the twain did meet! Since, in common with other local worthies, and in accordance with the custom of the time, he also acted as a local tax collector, one is inclined to wonder whether a third pocket was involved, and if so what jangling progress he must have made through the streets.”

It was this same Board that Robert Bushby subjected to an inquiry by the Home Office in 1871 for neglecting their duties to public health by failing to spend any money on installing a sewerage system in the town. Bushby won his case but no sewerage system appeared until 1881. (See my essay on Robert Bushby)

Edward Corney died in Littlehampton on 20th May 1884. His wife, Mary, had died in 1883 and his daughter Mary died in 1861. He left his personal estate worth £109/9s/9d to his only surviving daughter, Jane.

Sources

Peregrine Phillips A Sentimental Diary in a Month's Tour from London to Littlehampton 1778

The Union , Parish and Public Health Officers Pocket Almanac and Guide for the year of our Lord
1865

HJF Thompson *Little Hampton Long Ago* 1974