

After 161 years the fort is to fall!

The old fort flanking the West Beach will soon be no more. A local firm of contractors has been engaged to demolish the ancient pile because it is feared that it is becoming dangerous.

It has been part of the **Littlehampton** scene – and a landmark on the south coast – since it was built 161 years ago. The old fort is a relic of the Napoleonic War. It was put up in preparation for the invasion of our shores which never came, and as far as can be gathered the only real purpose it served was to garrison some troops way back in 1857.

Armed for 30 years.

According to a newspaper cutting of those times, preserved at the Littlehampton Library by the former curator, the late Mr E.J.F. Hearne, the building was part of the fortifications of Littlehampton Harbour. The cutting adds “The guns of the fort were first mounted in the comparatively modern fort on the Clymping side of the River Arun in 1857.”

“The late Mr McDonald (then in the Heavy Artillery and not long home from the Crimean War) assisted in their placing. He served at various stations for a long time afterwards.”

It appears that the fort was armed for upwards of forty years, but with the French no longer threat to British shores, the guns were dismantled and the station abandoned in August 1887

Favourite playground.

And since then? Mr C.A. Butt says that in the beginning of the 1914-1918 war a body of yeomanry occupied the fort with their horses stabled in the disused moat. But after only a fortnight the men and horses had to be evacuated because so many of the troops went down with dysentery.

And in the last war the Littlehampton Home Guard had a special hut and post on the dunes near the old fort, and on one or two odd occasions some of the men had a meal inside the derelict building.

Mr Willis Aylmore, chairman of Littlehampton Urban Council was one of those Home Guard men. He recalls earlier days when, as a boy, he played games in the fort.

Boys of today will miss the familiar, musty old fort for much the same reason. Despite the barbed wire they have always played their games there. The land which contains the ruins is leased to the Golf Club, and now that the buildings are declared dangerous they must come down.

The demolition work will take some weeks, says the contractor Mt R.T. Page.