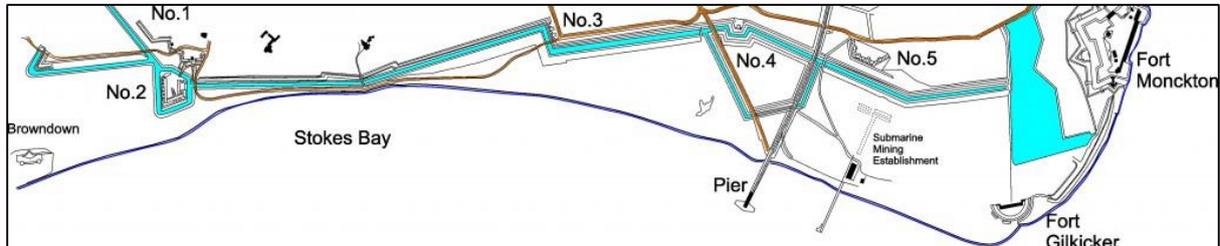


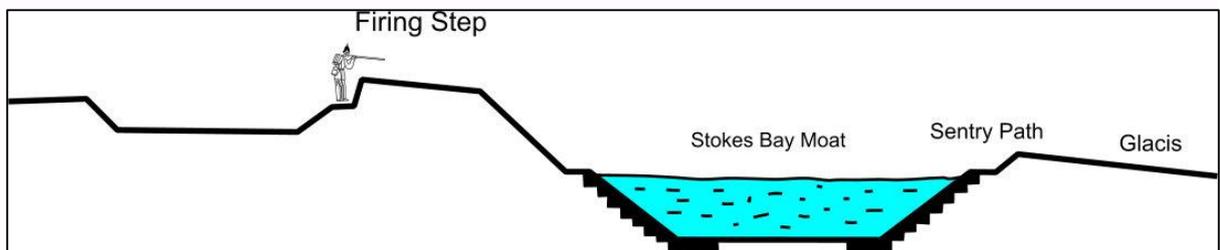
Follow the Lines! – An archaeological trail only seen through traces and parch marks in a dry summer.

The Stokes Bay Lines a massive system moats and defence batteries at Stokes Bay near Gosport stretching from Gilkicker Lake and Fort Monckton (centre SZ 60600 97900) in the east, to Browndown (centre SZ 59015 98770) in the west, a distance of about 2.7kms along the full length of the bay.



Picture from friends of Stokes Bay website

Constructed from 1859 by the Royal Engineers the Lines were the last stage in a defensive system of forts that was to protect Portsmouth harbour and Naval Dockyard from an overland invasion on its western approach. Stokes Bay had a fine shelving beach, recognised as a good place to land a large an invasion force. The Lines consisted of an earthwork rampart carrying a concrete-lined canal containing the re-routed river Alver and defended by five gun batteries built into or immediately behind the rampart. Completed by 1870, the Lines were removed and levelled in the 1950s and 60s. Evidence remains of the batteries, ramparts, moat and parts of the former course of the River Alver. The footprint of the Lines is mostly still visible as parch marks in dry summers and give an impression of the size and scale of a feature that has continued to influence the development of roads and other land use on the sea front.



Picture from friends of Stokes Bay website

'In both extent and cross-section the moat and the rampart were conspicuous features. The moat was 18.3 metres wide by up to 3 metres deep (60 feet by 9 feet), built with sloping banks that were lined with concrete. A glacis extended along most of its southern bank. The rampart, which overlooked the north bank of the moat, was of similar width, with sloping sides and a 6m wide (20 feet) parapet. The parapet sloped gently to the south and a firing step and parallel roadway were built on its rear (north) side. Late 19th century section drawings indicate that its dimensions varied but its height was typically about 4.57 metres (15 feet).' Historic England Report 36/2019

The moat replaced parts of the former course of the river, which included Lake Gilkicker. 18th century maps show the river flowing southwards to a position just north of the beach at Browndown Point, then turning parallel with the beach for about a mile to the south-east until it turned south again near Gilkicker Point. The western section of the Lines, between Batteries 2 and 3, is the best preserved area and was built alongside the former course of the river, which survives in modified form as a wooded gully and footpath.

To view this feature start at No 2 Battery which is off Stokes Bay Road. There is a car park, teashop and toilet adjacent to the Battery which now houses a Diving Museum and is normally open to the public at week-ends.

Archaeological evidence:-

1. Immediately to the west of Battery 2 the Stokes Bay Lines survive as a water filled channel (carrying the River Alver south to the sea.) No surface traces survive of the moat surrounding Battery 2 and the remains of Battery 1 are on private property in the caravan park.



Parch mark showing the northern edge of the moat looking eastwards

2. East of Battery 2 traces of the northern bank of the defences survive to the east of the footpath linking Stokes Bay Road with Bay House School. There is a pronounced drop of up to 1.5m runs parallel with the northern side of the moat This feature corresponds closely with the line of the northern bank shown on historic mapping (OS 1933), and is likely to represent the truncated remains its outer (northern) face. The top of the bank, including the firing step and the inner (southern) face no longer survive as surface features, having been removed during the levelling and infilling of the moat.

The southern edge of the bank is visible as a parch mark in dry weather. Slight changes in orientation of the lines and a gun platform can be seen in the parch marks along the northern edge in dry weather.

3) Immediately to the south of this section of the lines there is an outfall pipe visible at low tide that was possibly linked to the management of water in the moat.

4) Eastwards is the best-preserved segment of the Stokes Bay Lines. In this area although the moat has been partially filled and grassed over, its line is clearly visible and survives to a depth of approximately 1m. The bank to the south of the moat, and forming the northern boundary of tennis courts/crazy golf course may preserve part of the Lines' southern bank. The northern bank survives as a substantial earthwork to a height of between 2.5 to 3m and was deliberately retained in the 1950s to provide a barrier between the gardens on Palmerston Way to the north and the open ground of Stokes Bay to the south (<https://www.fortgilkicker.co.uk/lines.htm>).



The moat looking east towards the site of Battery 3 gives some idea of the original scale of the lines

5) The Lines turn south through 90 degrees at Battery 3. In this area, whilst the base of both the western and eastern banks are visible, their full extent is hidden by thick vegetation. Battery 3 lies in a private garden immediately to the east.

6) Between Battery 3 and Lifeboat Lane the Stokes Bay Lines survive as a very slight earthwork and show as parch marks in dry weather. In 2020 it was possible to pace out the 60 ft width of the moat between parch marks on the northern and southern edges. The parch marks were clear as far as the causeway to the seafront but between the causeway and Lifeboat Lane no traces of the Lines remains. This area was heavily used during the preparations for D Day and also on the other side of Lifeboat lane there is extensive evidence of Anti-aircraft batteries also surviving as parch marks from 1940s



Parch mark indicating the southern edge of the moat looking eastwards. The northern edge is of similar clarity at the foot of the parallel hedge

7). Lifeboat lane was built upon the loop extension of the moat to the south of the lines. (see plan above.)

8) To the East of lifeboat lane and to west of Battery 5 the area is largely obscured by vegetation although some evidence exists of Batteries 4 and 5 and traces of the concrete lining of the moat, this is on private/MOD land. Landscaping and golf course features have removed all surface traces of the very eastern end of the Lines. It is possible to walk along the seafront path to view the exteriors of Forts Gilkicker and Fort Monkton and the artificial lake that formed the outfall of the water from the moat/river Alver.

References and further reading:-

<https://www.friendsofstokesbay.co.uk/stokes-bay-lines/>

<https://www.fortgilkicker.co.uk/lines.htm>

<https://research.historicengland.org.uk/> Report 36/2019 'Five Centuries of Coastal Defence' Solent Papers No.12: The Stokes Bay Defences by David Moore 2010

Photographs authors own