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Fort Lytton.

Fort Lytton, which is at the mouth and on the southern shore of the Brisbane River, is Queensland's foremost military exhibit and has extensive historic fortifications, Queensland's largest military museum and provides regular military re-enactments. The fort is open on Sundays, most public holidays and on special occasions from 10am to 4pm. Admission, guided tours and parking are all free. It's a great day out for everyone, from families to serious historians and if you're free on a Sunday, pack the kids and a picnic and go and have a look, it's worth the short 15 klms drive from the centre of the City for a leisurely stroll around. A picnic area is provided by the banks of the Brisbane River however open fires are not permitted, if you plan to have a barby, bring a portable gas one though there is a sausage sizzle where you can buy a snag and onions in a slice of bread for \$2.50.

Pets of any description are not allowed.



Many years ago, Fort Lytton played a strategic military role as a hidden fortress guarding the developing Brisbane colony against attacks from potential enemy ships. A quarantine station also operated there preventing diseases spreading to a thriving population. Built in 1881 as a strategic fortification and military training base to protect Brisbane from foreign aggression, the pentagonal shaped fort with its grassy parapets is a unique piece of nineteenth century military architecture. It was the only fortress in Australia surrounded by a water-filled moat and located near the mouth of the Brisbane River, it was designed to support under water river mines and prevent attacks on Brisbane's port facilities.

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Years back, the Australian colonies were part of the powerful British Empire, whose colonial ambitions frequently brought it into conflict with many other expanding European empires. Based on the advice from the illustrious British military engineers [Jervois and Scratchley](#), Queensland opted to rely heavily on Fort Lytton as a fixed defence position for its wealthiest port and capital, Brisbane. At the time the fort was built, Brisbane's population was less than 100,000, but it had a wealthy annual trade worth more than £4,000,000.

Initially, Fort Lytton had four heavy gun positions, two to fire down the river and two to fire across the river. The guns were positioned to support an underwater mine system, which was laid across the river in times of emergency and to engage enemy vessels as they entered the river. The controlled minefield was operated from a concealed tunnel under the fort. The tunnel was built in the early 1890s and can still be visited today. By the turn of the 20th century, Fort Lytton's armaments had increased to six heavy guns and two machine-guns. The main ordnance was two six-inch, five-ton, breech-loading Armstrong guns. These so-called "disappearing" guns (below) could be raised rapidly to fire over the fort's ramparts and quickly lowered below the parapet just 20 seconds later.



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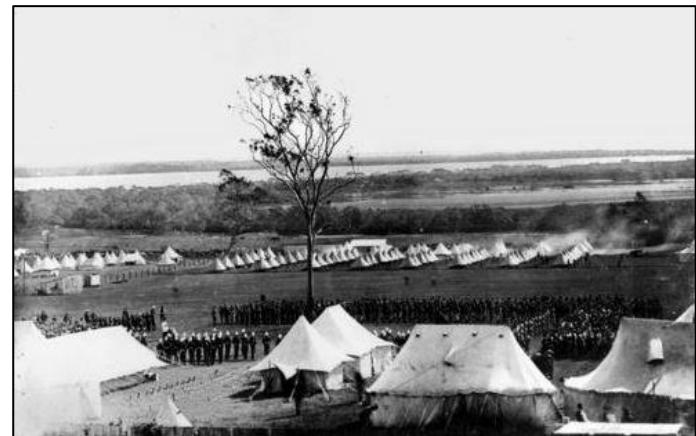
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Two six-pounder quick-firing Hotchkiss guns, a four-barrel one-inch Nordenfelt machine gun and a ten-barrel 0.45-inch Nordenfelt machine gun supported the heavy armament. Two 64-pounder muzzle-loading guns were sited in an auxiliary position closer to the river. Queensland's defence force started out with volunteers in 1860, and by the mid 1880s had expanded to include a small group of permanent soldiers, a militia and a volunteer component. Fort Lytton was the main training ground for the southern companies of the defence force. These annual camps were run by permanent defence staff and provided the only continuous training for part-time soldiers. In the early years the camps were a highlight of Queensland's political and social calendar.



Thousands of Brisbane's citizens would travel by train or boat to Lytton to watch the spectacular military manoeuvres and ceremonial displays. By the time of Federation, Queensland was able to contribute a well-trained military force for defence of the new nation. Throughout World War I, Fort Lytton continued as the primary defensive position for the port of Brisbane and was put to the test twice. The Fort's guns were used to warn a Dutch steamer and a fishing vessel which tried to ignore the official procedure before going upriver.

During World War II the main defences for Brisbane were artillery batteries on Moreton and Bribie islands (right). Fort Lytton retained its role as a major training facility during the war and provided the last line of defence for all shipping entering the river. It played a significant role in protecting Brisbane from air attack and as a signals relay station for the south-west Pacific campaigns. By the end of the war the site, which had been in use for 65 years, no longer met defence needs and was gradually abandoned. In 1963 the land was included in property obtained by the petroleum company Ampol (now Caltex) to build an oil refinery but ownership of the Fort Lytton site was transferred back to the Queensland Government in 1988 as part of Bicentennial festivities.



Ampol had carefully maintained the site and with growing public interest in heritage places, the fort developed a high profile as an historic site under the management of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

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Early Queensland depended heavily on primary production and animal products therefore it was essential to quarantine all livestock coming in and in June 1889, an additional 2 acres of land at Lytton was proclaimed for these purposes. Livestock arriving on ships were quarantined here before being allowed to enter Queensland. Following the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, quarantine became a federal responsibility under the Commonwealth Quarantine Act 1908 and Fort Lytton came under the control of the Federal Government. The Federal Lytton Quarantine Station was established in 1913-1914, to accommodate newly arrived immigrants and persons considered to be at risk of causing infection to the general population. It was officially opened in 1915. Many of the buildings remain, however some original buildings have been removed since its closure in 1982. The reception house, bath house, disinfecting block, boiler house and blacksmith shed (below), laundry block, dining hall (Mess), doctors' quarters and launchmens' cottages can still be seen.



Remnants of the jetty and the tramline which linked the buildings making it easier to move goods still exist. The original dining hall was removed from the site around 1988 and used as a fire and rescue training centre. It was returned in 2002 and is currently used as a conference and training centre. This building is available for hire.

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With the fear of a rabies outbreak in the early 1900s, all dogs arriving on ships were also quarantined and housed with cattle. Two years later as dog numbers increased, an additional 2½ acres was added to the reserve with a fenced yard for 12 kennels. Little remains of this Animal Stock Quarantine Reserve, now in the grounds of the Caltex oil refinery to the right of the park's entrance.

We had a look around the complex, and here are some of our pics. You can click some for a better view.



When you enter the park, your first port of call should be the Visitor Centre and Canteen (above). This building, which was the old laundry, is part of the old Quarantine Station and now contains many small museum pieces as well as a small canteen which provides basic food and drink. You can also buy historical magazines, souvenirs or pick up a free information brochure.



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This complex, like everywhere else in the grounds, is staffed by volunteers – please support them, they do a wonderful job.



The old Quarantine Area, looking from the Fort Complex. The open shed in the left foreground houses examples of some of the mines that would be laid across the river mouth.

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The old disinfecting block, in front of the brick chimney. The building to the left (above), with the cars, is the Visitor Centre and to the left of that again is the old Mess, now the Conference Centre.



The disinfecting block with the bath house and reception house in the right background.

You can see a site map of the complex [HERE](#)

Someone asked an old man : "Even after 70 years, you still call your wife – Darling, Honey, Luv. What's the secret ?" Old man : "I forgot her name and I'm too scared to ask her."

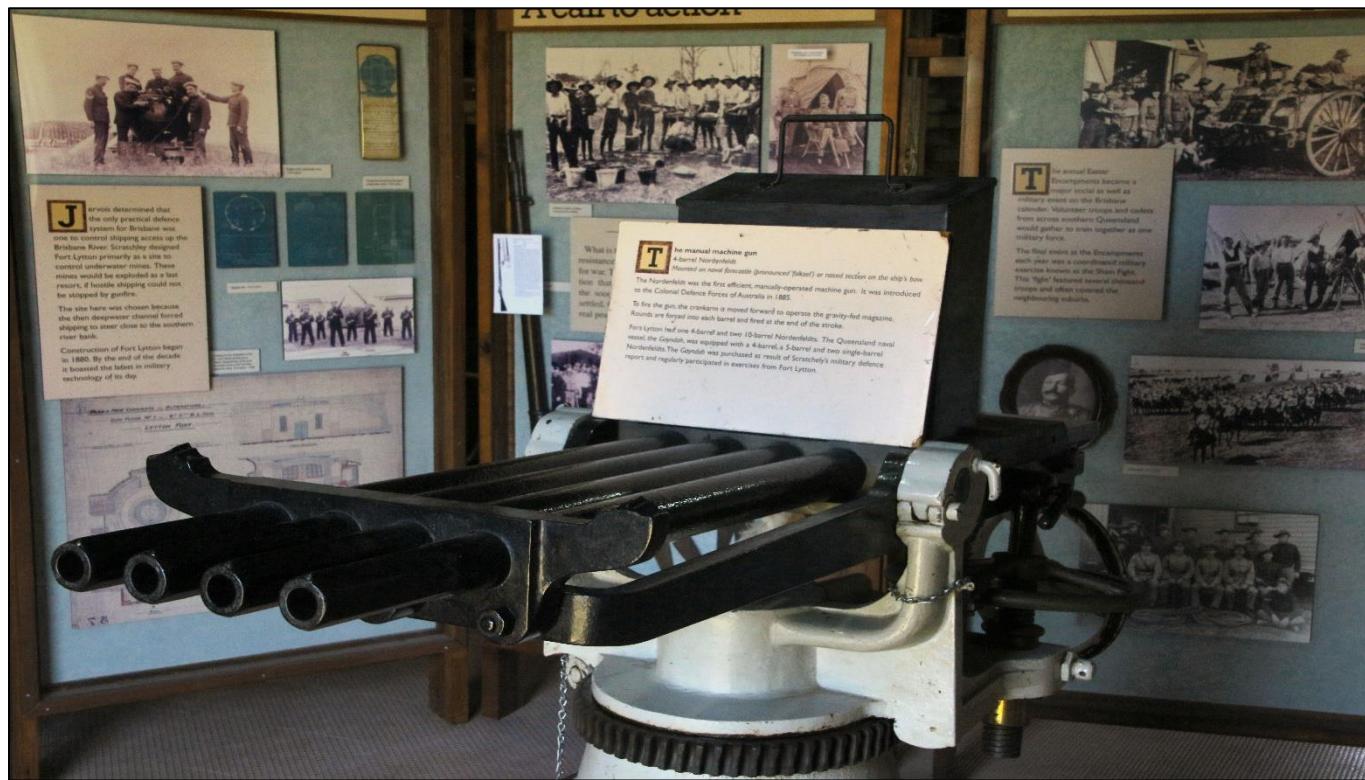
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It's about a 150 metre walk from the Visitor Centre to the old Fort which is hidden behind an earthen embankment and surrounded by a moat. Getting there you pass by what used to be the former artillery stores, now the Fort Lytton Museum.



The four barrel Nordenfeldt machine gun. This was the first efficient manually-operated machine gun and was introduced to the Colonial Defence Forces of Australia in 1885. To fire

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the gun, the crankarm was move forward to operate the gravity fed magazine, rounds were forced into each barrel and fired on the return stroke. All barrels fired together.

Some of the old radio equipment on display.



The light grey transmitter/receiver sets on the left were manufactured by the successful Crammond Radio Manufacturing Co, a Brisbane based company which had its offices in Queen St and its manufacturing sheds at North Quay. Crammond Radio was established in 1928 and continued operating until 1949 and was one of the earliest radio businesses in Queensland.

As well as radios for the home, they designed and manufactured a range of Tx/Rx sets for Marine use and for the Queensland Police.

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Once you cross the causeway which crosses the (now mainly dry) moat and pass through the gap in the embankment, you enter the Fort Complex (above). The moat was dug mainly by prison labour and the earth removed was used to build the embankment.

Previously, a number of bridges crossed the moat, initially a timber and rope suspension bridge that could be withdrawn during attack, then more permanent structures were built. A substantial timber structure was erected in 1907 but was damaged by fire in the 1950s. It was replaced by an earthen causeway during the construction of the Ampol refinery.

The grassed area in front of the buildings was the old parade ground. The building far left (above), with the two openings was the engine room. It housed two 15 HP steam engines which provided power to drive a dynamo via flat leather belts which provided power for the searchlights to illuminate targets in the river and also for domestic lighting.



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The two rooms above were the living quarters for the gun crews. The rooms have steel doors and windows and rifle slits to enable the position to be defended.



Looking back towards the entrance from the roof of the engine room, the “gap” in the earthen wall can be seen in the far right.



SERIOUSLY

Get off my lawn.

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The two 64 pounder guns, looking from the top of the embankment. These guns were a rifled, muzzle loading artillery gun, manufactured in England in the 19th century. They fired a projectile weighing approximately 64 pounds. The gun's standard shell was "common shell" (a hollow cast iron sphere filled with black powder), for firing on troops in cover, ships and buildings. The shell weighed 57.4 pounds when empty and had a bursting charge of 7.1 pounds. A Shrapnel shell, which weighed 66.6 pounds and had a 9-ounce bursting charge which propelled 234 metal balls, could also be fired.

A shell is a payload-carrying projectile which contains an explosive or other filling. Shot on the other hand is a large solid projectile.



Looking towards the guns from the Canteen area.

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A typical shell, as fired from the 64 pound gun with the fuse which is screwed into the front of the shell. On impact, the fuse ignites the black powder which exploded the shell into fragments.



From the 3rd Feb, then every first Sunday on every second month thereafter (Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct and Dec), at 11.00am, 1.00pm and 2.00pm, the two 6 pound field guns and one of the 64 pounder guns are fired by volunteers all decked out in period costume.

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The big gun, being readied for firing.

Murphy showed up at Mass one Sunday and the priest almost fell down when he saw him. He'd never been to church in his life. After Mass, the priest caught up with him and said, "Murphy, I am so glad ya decided to come to Mass. What made ya come?" Murphy said, "I got to be honest with ya Father, a while back, I misplaced me hat and I really, really love that hat. I know that McGlynn had a hat just like mine and I knew he came to church every Sunday. I also knew that he had to take off his hat during Mass and figured he would leave it in the back of church. So, I was going to leave after Communion and steal McGlynn's hat."

The priest said, "Well, Murphy, I notice that ya didn't steal McGlynn's hat. What changed ya mind?" Murphy replied, "Well, after I heard ya sermon on the 10 Commandments, I decided that I didn't need to steal McGlynn's hat after all." With a tear in his eye the priest gave Murphy a big smile and said; "After I talked about 'Thou Shalt Not Steal' ya decided you would rather do without ya hat than burn in Hell?"

Murphy slowly shook his head. "No, Father, after ya talked about 'Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery' I remembered where I left me hat."

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We took some video of the guns being fired, you can see it [HERE](#). Apologies for the wind noise.

The large area of grass between the old Quarantine Centre and the Fort itself is regularly used by members of the Light Horse Association who you can see training their mounts for the various events to which they attend.

The Australian Light Horse Association Ltd is a non-profit organisation whose aim is to preserve the history and tradition of the Australian Light Horse and its predecessors. Their horses do not "live" at the fort but are floated in individually.



When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

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The search-light bunker. This static installation consisted of the light within a concrete emplacement near the river bank closer to the jetty than the Fort. The "Clark Chapman" searchlight could also be mounted on a light railway carriage and was then able to be moved to the best position for its use. The light consumed 50 amps at 75 volts DC.

The searchlight consisted of a barrel supported on trunnion arms on a turntable to enable the light to be elevated or traversed as required. Glass lens at the front of the light shielded the electric arc from winds. In front of the lens there was a shutter which allowed the beam of light to be exposed or dowsed. At the rear of the barrel a glass parabolic reflector directed the beam of light to the search area.

Two carbon electrodes produced an incandescent gas of high intrinsic brilliancy. The heat of the arc caused the electrodes to be consumed and the automatic mechanism fed the electrodes to maintain the arc at its correct length. A fan drew out the products of combustion. When the electrodes were consumed to their minimum lengths, the operators switched off the lamp, withdrew the used electrodes and inserted new ones which were adjusted to their correct positions before switching on again.

The Fort and surrounding area have been put to good use by a few Film Makers over the last few years. Firstly some early scenes from "The Railway Man" were shot here quite a while ago,

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they used the Engine Room and some of the old radios as part of the Surrender to Japanese Forces scenes. This was followed by "Unbroken" which was filmed over 3 months in late 2013 and then "Bullets for the Dead" was filmed there in 2015. A substantial sum was donated by these film companies because the Fort had to be closed when they were shooting the films.



If you live in or near Brisbane, we suggest you set aside a Sunday, grab the kids/grandkids and head for the Fort, the kids will love it – entrance is free, all you need is a hat and some sun screen.