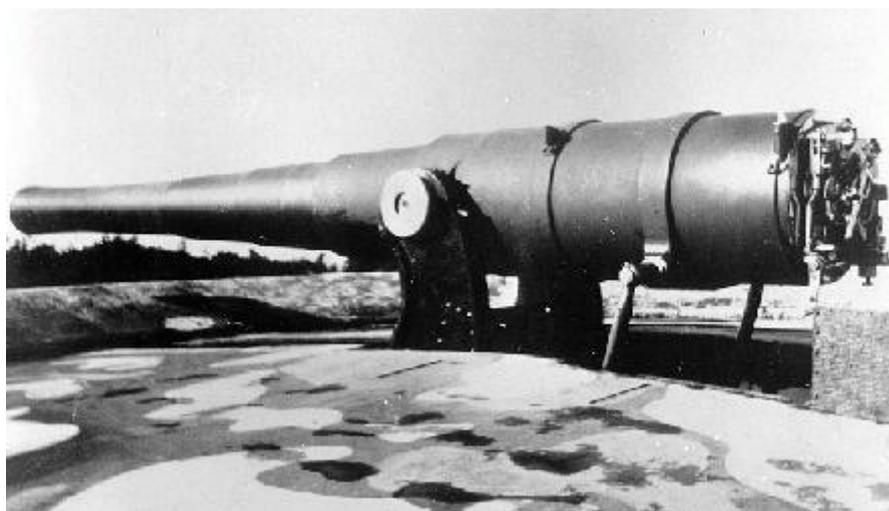


## Big Gun at Ben Buckler



The north Bondi coastal defence fortifications were built in 1892, as one of three, to house the, newest 9.2 inch breech loading guns. They were the largest guns to be installed in the colony of New South Wales. The forts built at Signal Hill, Vacluse Shark Point, near Clovelly; and Ben Buckler, were the last link in Sydney's outer defence ring, which began some twenty years earlier, and were designed to protect the colony from bombardment by an enemy ship standing off the coast.

The gun installed at the fort at Ben Buckler WAS made by the Armstrong Company, England. Its barrel weighed 22 tons and was carried to the fort by a team of thirty six horses with great difficulty, as the roads were in poor condition. The journey from Victoria Barracks took over three weeks. The gun was installed on a disappearing mounting operated by hydraulic power. It was hidden below ground level, beneath an iron shield in a reinforced concrete wall, ten metres in diameter. When it was to have been fired, the hydropneumatic action popped the gun barrel forward and up through a slot in the shield. After firing, its recoil pushed it back down below the ground again. This was intended to protect the gun crew and make the gun a very difficult target for an enemy ship to hit.

In practice, the performance of this system was disappointing. The hydraulic pressure generated was often inadequate to get the gun barrel all the way up. The sweating crew had to hand crank it the rest of the way, which inspired its own brand of humour.

In April, 1908 the Sydney Morning Herald reported on the findings of a board of enquiry into the premature firing of the great gun in Ben Buckler . The cause was A defective lock.

The great gun was in regular service until the Second World War when it was held in reserve.

To house the master gunner and his family, a weatherboard cottage was built below the fort off Millinary Road.

In the 1950 s the army vacated the old fortifications and the government was unable to find a scrap metal buyer to take the gun away. The gun was then covered with sand and the site given over to parkland. Its existence was forgotten, until rediscovered by the Water Board engineers about twelve years ago while planning a new pipeline.

It is now classed as an architectural relic and is protected by the Heritage Council.

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