

A top secret rocket test site

At the height of the Cold War in 1956 the World War 2 gun emplacement known as the New Needles Battery was brought back to life as the Highdown Rocket Test Site.

Hidden in a natural bowl, with underground bunkers already on site, the New Needles was ideal for the Top Secret Test Facility.

HIGHDOWN ROCKET TESTING SITE

Why was it needed?

Saunders Roe was an aerospace engineering company based in East Cowes. In the 1950s they won a contract to build rockets for the British Government.

The Government wanted these to test the effects of a rocket re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. This information would help them to develop ballistic missiles.

The Saunders Roe engineers needed somewhere close to the factory but away from towns where the rocket motors could be tested. Highdown was perfect.

About ballistic missiles

ROCKET POWERED MISSILE

FIRED FROM EARTH INTO SPACE

TRAVELS IN A LOW ORBIT OF THE EARTH

RE-ENTERS THE ATMOSPHERE TO HIT TARGET

V2 ROCKET WAS FIRST BALLISTIC MISSILE
FIRED BY NAZI GERMANY AGAINST TARGETS
IN PARIS AND LONDON IN WORLD WAR 2

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HIGHDOWN SITE
COURTESY OF SAUNDERS ROE ARCHIVE

