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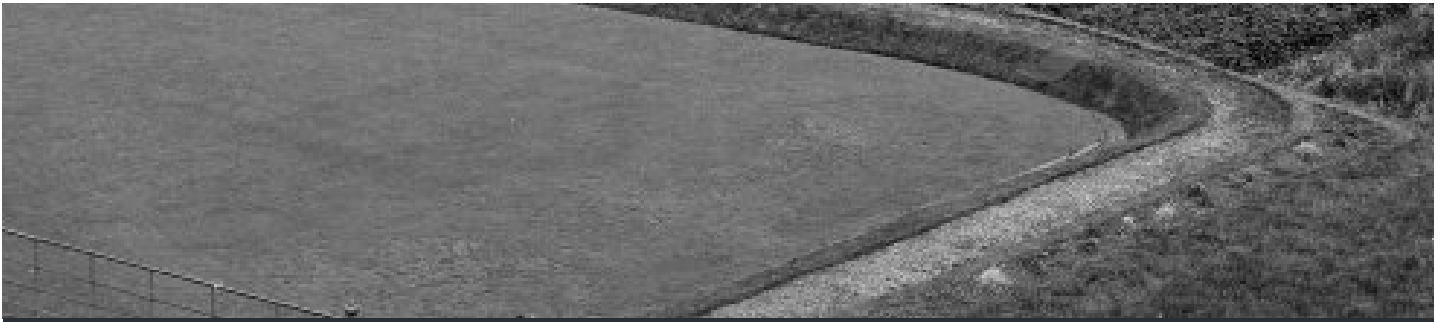
## Archaeology InSites



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### Fort William artillery fort - Fort William, Lochaber, Highland





## The story of the fort

*Any map of the Great Glen will reveal that there are three 'Forts' along its length. The current Fort George replaced a demolished fort of the same name located in Inverness. In the centre of the Great Glen is Fort Augustus, the remains of which have been incorporated into the later abbey, while Fort William is positioned to defend the southern end of the glen. Together they represent successive efforts at governing the Highlands from the mid 17th-19th century.*

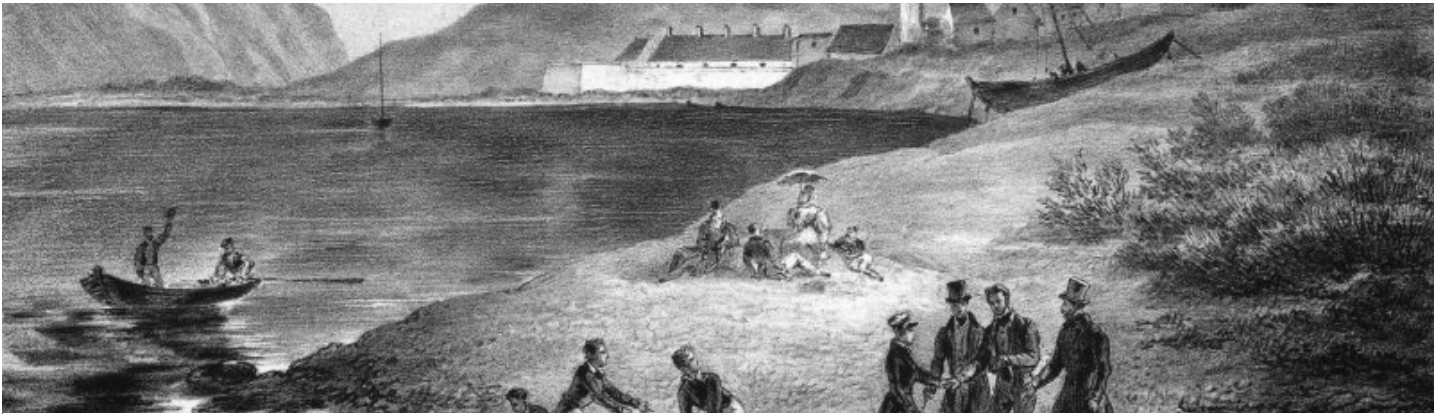
*In 1654, General Monck, the commander of Cromwell's army in Scotland, began the construction of 'Inverlochy Citadel', as the first fort on the site was called. It was fairly simple, being an irregular pentagon on plan, with defences of earth and turf surmounted by wattle walls. It was situated by the shore of Loch Linnhe at the mouth of the River Lochy and housed 250 men. This fort was one of five erected in Cromwellian times, of which only that at Ayr now survives.*

*The fort was abandoned in 1660 following the restoration of the monarchy, but was rebuilt in 1690, after years of debate and arguments, when General Mackay was given permission to establish a new fort on the site. With a force of 7000 men, construction was completed 11 days later and Mackay named it 'Fort William' in honour of the King.*

*The fort comprised a main gate on the south, which was protected by a ravelin and ditch, while contemporary plans suggest that the Sally Port in the north-west was reused. On the south and west, ditches and glacis presented a formidable barrier to attack, but the site was overlooked by the steeply rising ground on the south-east. Mackay installed a garrison of 1200 men who were initially housed under canvas. This was not ideal because the weather eventually turned nasty and constant rainfall caused the ramparts to collapse and so timber huts were erected in their stead. A small settlement named 'Maryburgh' (after King William's wife) developed outside the defences. Thereafter, the routine of fort life was largely concerned with policing the surrounding area.*

*Stone walls were erected in 1698, providing better protection and reducing the time spent on maintenance, while new stone barracks, stores and a magazine were completed by 1714. By then the Jacobite uprisings had begun and the government's strategy was that the fort and its soldiers would subdue the unruly clans. As part of this plan, General Wade built the two other forts in the Great Glen.*





## The siege and the aftermath

*When Bonnie Prince Charlie landed in 1745, the Fort William garrison watched, safe in the knowledge that the Jacobites did not have the artillery to lay siege. Nevertheless, they prepared for such a possibility, destroying much of Maryburgh in the process to prevent their enemy from using it as a base for attack. On the 20th March 1746, the Jacobites began to lay siege to the fort - the last in the Highlands that still remained in government hand. However, this was resisted and on the 3rd of April the assailants abandoned their positions. Thus ended the last siege on British soil. After the siege Maryburgh needed to be rebuilt and the fort was in need of repair; once the works were complete both town and fort became known as Fort William.*

*As the Jacobite threat receded, the size of the garrison was reduced and the fort staggered on until 1864, when it was sold by the War Office to Mrs Christina Campbell, who converted the buildings to housing. In 1889 the fort was bought by the West Highland Railway, which demolished a large part adjacent to the old Sally Port for a yard. The officer's block was used by the railway until 1935, but by 1948 the remaining gable wall had been demolished and with it the last trace of the fort's interior. By the time the railway yard was removed only the northern and western defences remained.*

*Today, what survives of the fort lies to the north of the town centre, between the railway station car park and Loch Linnhe. This is free to visit, as is a former gate which was reconstructed in 1896 at The Craigs Burial Ground, Belford Road.*

Sources:

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*Wallace, T. (1911b) Military roads and fortifications in the Highlands, with bridges and milestones', Proc Soc Antiq Scot, vol. 45, 1910-11. Page(s): 330-31*

*Tabraham, C. and Grove, D. (1995) Fortress Scotland and the Jacobites, B T Batsford for Historic Scotland*

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<https://canmore.org.uk/site/23715/fort-william-fort-and-governors-house>  
<https://canmore.org.uk/site/108567/fort-william-the-craigs-burial-ground-ewen-maclachlan-obelisk-and-gateway>  
<http://her.highland.gov.uk/SingleResult.aspx?uid=MHG4196>



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