

DYMCHURCH MARTELLO TOWER, KENT

One of 74 towers built along the south coast between 1805 and 1812 to resist the threatened French invasion. Restored to its original design and containing replica gunpowder barrels and a 24 pounder muzzle-loading cannon on the gun platform.

Historical Description

Dymchurch Martello Tower (no 24) is an example of a specialised type of coastal fortifications erected during the Napoleonic Wars to repel a feared enemy invasion.

In 1804 French troops were known to be mustering at Boulogne with the object of crossing the Channel. Plans were made to place towers along likely invasion areas in Suffolk, Essex, Kent and East Sussex. The design of the >bomb-proof= towers was inspired by a fort in the Bay of Mortella in Corsica which had beaten off two British warships in 1794. By 1812 there were 74 such towers sited on the South Coast and a further 29 in Suffolk and Essex. Some of them were placed in pairs to protect the gates of marsh sluices. Tower 24 at Dymchurch and its counterpart no 25 (now largely derelict) was an example of the latter type.

The design of the towers was simple with the seaward walls thicker than those to landward. A single entrance was placed at first floor level approached by a removable ladder. The only windows were small and high, facing inland. The gun platform was on the top. Dymchurch tower reveals all the features of the original design. The basement was for storing ammunition, fuel and provisions and these supplies were separated from each other by wooden partitions. In addition the gunpowder barrels were placed in a specially ventilated recess. The risk of fire was avoided by protecting the necessary lantern with a glass plate. Ventilation ducts were provided to keep the stores dry.

The first floor contained quarters for both officers and men although it is apparent that the full complement of 24 would have been very cramped. The gun platform housed a muzzle-loading 24-pounder which could be turned through 360 degrees with the aid of ropes. It was worked by a team of 10 to 14 men using step-boards along each side. Such a gun could fire a solid or explosive round shot

for over a mile. The ingenuity of the design of Martello Towers was never put to the test since Nelson's defeat of the French fleet at Trafalgar in 1805 and Napoleon's decision to invade Russia removed the possibility of a French invasion.

Learning Opportunities

The Martello Tower would be a good starting point for a study of the design and siting of fortifications. A geographical study of the area using mapwork, aerial photographs and other sources, would lead to the locating of other martello towers and defences of the time. The Tower could also be a focal point in a study of the causes and consequences of the Napoleonic Wars. During the visit, pupils could investigate the layout of the tower and predict how effective the design would have been if the invasions had taken place.

They could consider the life of a common soldier stationed here, and adopt roles to discuss the threats of invasion. This may lead to written work of various kinds, letters, diaries, official reports etc.

The Martello Tower could be compared with defences around the Kent coast built at other times in the past. This would be a good focus for Local History study units, both for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Structures and locations would range from the Roman Shore Fort at Richborough, the massive Dover Castle, the Henrician coastal forts at Deal and Walmer and also the twentieth-century defences in the south east. The design of each of these could be studied at the same time as the threatened invasions and the weaponry used at that time in history. Pupils could produce a large illustrated time line or wall map to show the locations and comparisons of these features. At the same time pupils could discover if these structures were actually attacked and proved an effective defence, or as in the case of the Martello Towers, proved to be unnecessary.

Opening Hours

Open by appointment only.

Telephone 01483 252013 for details.

Location

In Dymchurch, off the High Street.
OS Map 189. Grid ref TR 102294.

How to get there

Road: In Dymchurch. Signposted from the High Street. No access from seafront.

Bus: Hourly service from New Romney. Also from Folkestone. East Kent Bus Co. Tel: Folkestone 01303-53118.

Train: Nearest mainline station at Folkestone.

The 15" gauge Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railway stops within walking distance of the site. Enquiries tel: 01679-62353.

Facilities

Access for disabled visitors: Regrettably no wheelchair access since the entrance is via the first floor

Parking: Town centre Pay and Display car park very close to site.

Toilets: Public toilets at car park.

Information panels inside tower. Also cannon and replica powder barrels.

Free Educational Visits

All visits by educational groups are free but special arrangements apply at this site. Teachers are asked to telephone the Regional Office for details: 01483 252013 We strongly recommend that teachers make a preliminary visit to explore the possibilities of the site before bringing their groups.

Limit on party numbers: Please note that a maximum of 25 can be accommodated at one time inside.

Staff/pupil ratio: at least 1 to 15

Safety: Teachers are advised to bring their own first aid kit, and to ensure that pupils are adequately supervised at all times.

Contacts

Booking and information: English Heritage, Eastgate Court, 195-205 High Street, Guildford, GU1 3EH. Tel: 01483 252013.

Regional Education Officer: Jennie Fordham

Nearby and Related Sites

Martello Tower no 25 is close by. Once paired with no 24, it is now largely derelict. No 23, now a private house, is also nearby.

Martello Tower no 73 at Eastbourne houses a Coastal Defence and Invasion Museum. Open daily. Tel: 01323-35809.

The Redoubt Fortress, Eastbourne is a circular ten-gun fort restored to house a military museum. Contains a collection

of cannon. Tel: 0323-33952.

A Guide to Resources

Dymchurch Martello Tower, Leaflet, English Heritage. ISBN 1-85074-035-6. Available at the site.

Sutcliffe S. Martello Towers, David and Charles, 1972. Out of print but useful reference. Contains history of all sites and information about how the towers were built.

Boreham B. Kent Martello Towers. Out of print but copies available in Kent libraries.

Barnes J. Design and Technology and the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 1999.

ISBN 1-85074-399-1.

Copeland T. Geography and the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 1993, ISBN 1-85074-332-0.

Lockey M and Walmsley D, Art and the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 1999.

ISBN 1-85074-329-0

All English Heritage resources are available by post from

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