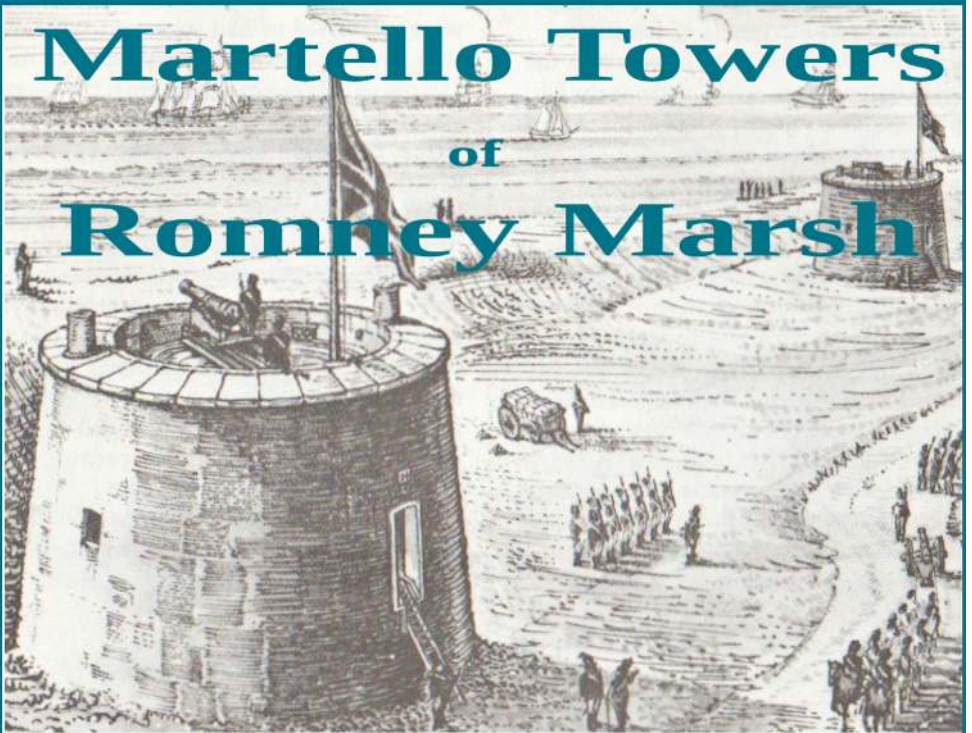


# Martello Towers of Romney Marsh



Along the coast of Romney Marsh, from Dymchurch Redoubt, south east of Hythe, to St Mary's Bay, there were nine Martello Towers built. This booklet tells you about them



## Introduction

Martello Towers, sometimes known simply as Martellos, are small defensive forts that were built across the British Empire during the 19th century, from the time of the Napoleonic Wars onwards.

Many were built along the Kent coast to defend Britain against the French in the early 1800s, then under the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Given that the Romney Marsh beaches are just 29 miles away from the French Coast across the English Channel, it was one of the areas that was most at risk from invasion by Napoleon's forces.

Originally 103 towers were built in England between 1805 and 1812'. 74 were built along the Kent and Sussex coastlines from Folkestone to Seaford between 1805 and 1808, the other 29 to protect Essex and Suffolk. 45 of the towers still remain, but many are in ruins or have been converted, and only 9 remain in their (almost) original condition.

Along the coastline of Romney Marsh, from Dymchurch Redoubt, south of Hythe, to St Mary's Bay, there were 9 Martello Towers built.

Martello Towers Nos. 19, 20, 21, 22, 26 and 27 have since been demolished, but Towers Nos. 23, 24, and 25 still remain.

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## Origins and Purpose of the Martello Towers

The design of the bomb-proof Martello Towers was inspired by experience of the British in Corsica in 1794.

Circular fortified towers, used as strongholds or look-outs, had been built from prehistoric times, but in northern Europe, they had fallen from favour late in the fifteenth century after the invention of gunpowder and artillery had led to radical changes in the design of fortifications.

The strength of such towers had been dramatically demonstrated to the British in February 1794, when a fleet under Lord Hood had been sent to capture Corsica. Crucial to the British attack was the capture of a stone watch-tower on Mortella Point. This tower was armed with one 6-pounder and two 18-pounder guns and it successfully repulsed an attack by HMS Fortitude (74 guns) and HMS Juno (32 guns), both of which withdrew with serious damage and some sixty casualties.



*The Original Martello Tower in Corsica*

Not surprisingly, the resistance of this tower made a deep impression on the attackers; drawings and sketches were made of it, and before its demolition prior to the British withdrawal from Corsica in the autumn of 1796, a scale model was constructed for display in the Royal Artillery Museum at Woolwich.

## Design of Martello Towers

The Kent Coast towers were all of identical design. Although superficially circular, they are elliptical in plan with the inner and outer circles of the tower walls arranged eccentrically so that the thickest part of the wall faces seawards.

The towers are some 33 ft (10m) tall and tapered so that on the seaward side the walls vary in thickness from 13 ft (4m) at the base to 6 ft (1.8m) at parapet level. To increase their ability to withstand bombardment, the bricks were bedded in hot lime mortar.

Entrance to the towers was at first-floor level. This floor was divided by timber partitions to form living-quarters for the garrison of 24 men and one officer. The floor was lit by two small windows overlooking the rear or landward side. The unlit ground floor, approached by an internal ladder, contained space for stores and ammunition.

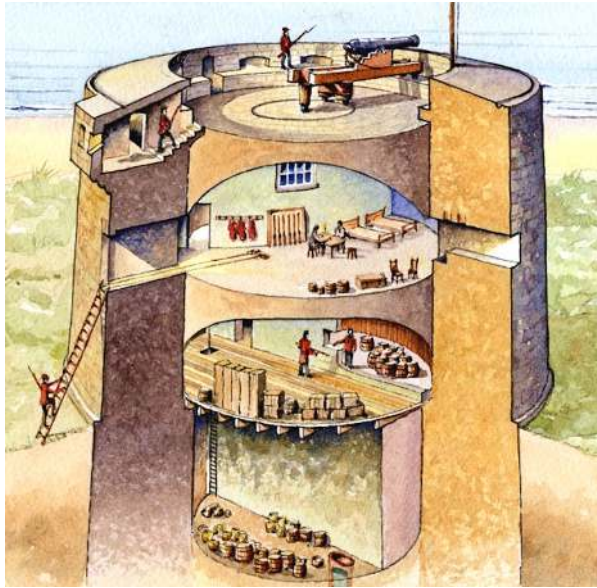
The flat roof, which formed the gun platform inside the thick parapet, was carried on a circular brick vault supported by a central column from the base of the tower. The roof was gained from the first floor by a stair contrived in the thickness of the wall.

The great breadth of the walls also allowed space, for ventilation shafts and chimney flues which emerged in the thickness of the parapet. The main armament of a Martello Tower was a 24-pounder gun mounted on a carriage capable of traversing 360 degrees. The garrison was also equipped with muskets.

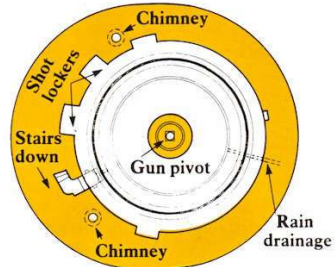
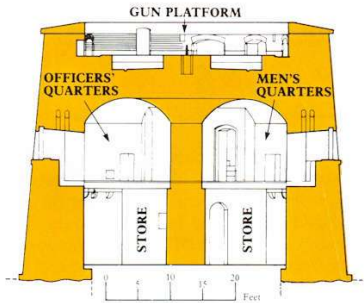
### Key Features of Martello Towers

- used for coastal defence
- very thick strong walls and long-lasting
- flat roof with parapet
- high-level entrance door
- elliptical shape
- walls have a distinct slope from the base of the tower to its top
- large cannon able to traverse through 360°
- small garrison
- a large, strong central pillar to support the cannon and act as a pivot for its traversing carriage

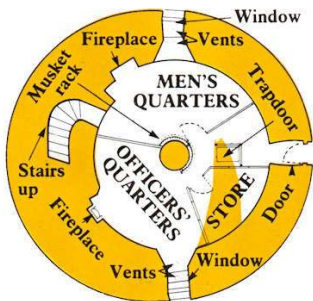
Not all of the c200 Martello Towers built throughout the world had all these characteristics but most had many of them. The 27 Martello Towers built along the Kent coast had all of these characteristics.



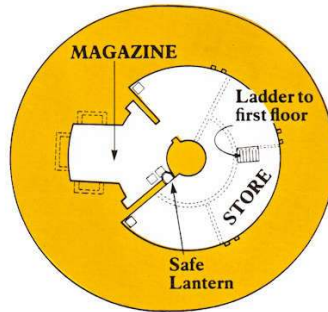
Artist's impression of a Martello Tower



GUN PLATFORM



FIRST FLOOR



BASEMENT

Plans of a typical Martello Tower

## Martello Tower No. 19

Tower No.19 is located right on the beach on the foreshore of the Hythe Army Ranges on the A259. It was built in 1806 but in late 1970 it was being seriously undermined by the sea.

In the 1960s it was still in reasonable condition and was listed Grade II in 1973.

The tower has now (2021) collapsed on the shingle beach, having been slowly worn away by the incoming tide. The tower is still recognisable for what it was, providing an insight in the fabric of the tower eg the thickness of the walls can be seen, smoke holes, the entrance etc

*NB The tower can only be viewed when there is no firing on the ranges and at low tide. **Please take care if you plan to visit the tower***



*Martello Tower No.19 in 2019*



*Showing the smoke/vent holes*



*The entrance*

## **Martello Tower No.20**

## **Martello Tower No.21**

Towers Nos. 20 and 21 were located about 3 miles to the north of Dymchurch village but in the early 1900s, both collapsed and completely disappeared.

*The last 6 towers built in Kent were 3 pairs built to protect the 3 main drainage outfalls/sluices on Romney Marsh, which controlled the water level on the Marsh*

## **Martello Tower No. 22**

Built with Martello Tower No. 23 to protect the Willop Sluice in Hythe Road, Dymchurch. The tower was demolished by Kent County Council in 1956 for improvements to the A259 road. It was extremely difficult to remove and was only eventually demolished by using high explosives.



*Martello Tower No.22 before it was demolished in 1956*

## **Martello Tower No. 23**

This Martello Tower is located on the A259 coast road to Hythe just outside Dymchurch village. Tower No. 23 was built to protect the Willop Sluice, one of the main sluices helping to drain Romney Marsh. It was paired with Martello Tower No. 22 to the north on the other side of the sluice.

Originally the ground floor was where the magazine store was located and the first and second floors were the living quarters.

The tower has been restored and converted into a private dwelling in the standard style. It has windows on the top to take advantage of the sea views.

It has previously featured on the television series called World's Most Extreme Homes and you will find videos of its inside on YouTube



*Martello Tower No. 23*



## Martello Tower No. 24

Martello Tower No. 24 was built in 1806 as one of a pair (Martello Tower No.25 to the south) to protect the Marshland Sluice, one of the main sluices helping to drain Romney Marsh.

From about 1819/20, the Tower was taken over by the newly formed Royal Naval Coast Blockade Service in the 'war' against smuggling on Romney Marsh. When the Coast Blockade was absorbed into The Coastguard Service, which came into operation in 1822 and the Coastguard continued to use the tower, together with their families. During the Second World War, it was used to spot incoming aircraft and the V1 and V2 flying bombs.

Of the 74 Martello Towers built on the Kent and Sussex coast, Martello Tower No.24 is considered to be the best surviving example, being closest to its original condition and it can be seen as it was when occupied by the military in 1806. It has been restored to its original design and layout with almost all of the original tower still in place, including the original 24 pounder muzzle-loading cannon on the roof.

The tower is owned by English Heritage, with The Friends of Martello24, a Registered Charity, acting as custodians of the tower on their behalf and who manage its openings to the public.

*Please visit [www.martello24.net](http://www.martello24.net) for more information*



*Martello Tower No. 24*

## **Martello Tower No. 25**

Tower No.25 is located in the Dymchurch Martello car park just as you enter Dymchurch on the A259 from New Romney to its south.

Martello Tower No. 25 was built as one of a pair (Martello Tower No.24 to the north) to protect the Marshland Sluice, one of the main sluices helping to drain Romney Marsh.

The outside of the tower had been restored but the inside is in a very poor condition. The internal walls and floors have all collapsed and it is currently unused and closed up.

The tower was for a time in private ownership and then given to the District Council. It wasn't in a good state of repair and at some time in the early 1970s the District Council had the outside rendered.

For a short time it was used as a cafe. In 2017 it was sold at auction to a private buyer, who have since received planning permission (May 2019) to convert the tower into a four-storey 4 bedroomed holiday let. As at February 2021, the conversion work had not yet started.



*Martello Tower No. 25*

## **Martello Tower No. 26**

## **Martello Tower No. 27**

Towers Nos. 26 and 27 were the first brick-built structures to appear on the St. Mary's Bay shoreline. Tower No. 26 was built on the eastern side of the Globdsden Gut Sluice, which ran into the sea near the present Dunstall Lane. Tower No. 27 was built approximately a quarter of a mile to the west; both were built to protect the Globdsden Gut Sluice.

Neither tower stands today. The site of Tower No.26 was on what is now the sea wall next to the car park opposite Dunstall Lane, roughly in front of where the toilet block now stands. It lasted until 1871. Tower No. 27 was at one time a semaphore station. Damaged by sea erosion it was demolished in 1841.

## **Dymchurch Redoubt**

The Dymchurch Redoubt was one of three that were constructed to act as supply depots for the smaller Martello Towers, as well as being powerful fortifications in their own right. The redoubt was built between 1798 and 1809 to support the chain of 21 Martello Towers that stretched between Hythe in Kent and Rye in Sussex, and to act as a supply depot for them.

The Dymchurch Redoubt is located on the south (seaward) side of the A259 main road roughly half-way between Dymchurch and Hythe.

Dymchurch Redoubt is circular in form and built of brick with granite and sandstone dressings, measuring up to 68 metres in diameter and stands 12 metres above the floor of its 9 metre-wide dry moat. Beyond the moat, an earth bank or glacis helped to protect the masonry from masonry from artillery fire.



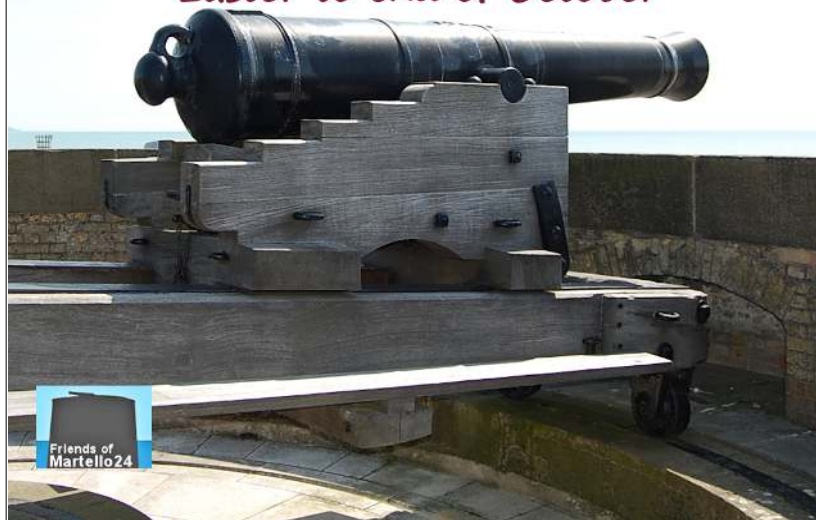
*Dymchurch Redoubt*

# *Martello Tower No.24*

*Open 2pm to 4pm*

*Every Saturday, Sunday & BH*

*Easter to end of October*



Martello Tower No. 24 is the only tower on the Kent Coast that is open to the public. Please help to keep Martello Tower No.24 open by giving a donation to the Friends of Martello24. The Friends of Martello24, a Registered Charity, act as custodians and manage the tower's openings to the public on behalf of the owners of the tower, English Heritage.

You can find out more and donate online at [www.martello24.net](http://www.martello24.net)

*You can find out more about Martello Towers at*



[martellotowers.co.uk](http://martellotowers.co.uk)  
*and Romney Marsh at*  
[theromneymarsh.net](http://theromneymarsh.net)

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