

THE DROP REDOUBT

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The Drop Redoubt is a polygonal fort at the eastern end of the complex of fortifications known as the Western Heights. It is 267 feet above sea level and overlooks the town. It was designed to act independently of the other fortifications if necessary, and most of its heavy guns looked inland, as did those on the rest of the Heights. This arrangement was intended to beat off an attack to capture the port from the landward side, as attacking a defended port from the sea was rightly regarded as being impossible.

The Drop Redoubt was built on the site of the western Pharos (Roman lighthouse) which had been quarried away to leave an irregular lump known as the Bredenstone or the Devil's Drop of Mortar. These remains seem to have been lost in the haste to build fortifications on the site.

The earliest permanent fortification on the site was probably a square gun tower shown on a plan of 1784 depicting works proposed and under construction. Whether it was built at this period is not known but it appears on a number of distant views of Dover at the end of the eighteenth century. This tower sits directly over the Bredenstone, and it seems likely that it was during this phase of building that it was lost.

Against a background of fear of invasion, and with the tents of Napoleon's army visible across the Channel, work began on a new fort in May 1804, and it is this fort which forms the basis of what remains today. Whilst the original plans have not survived, a plan of circa 1860, drawn to accompany proposals for a new ablutions building, shows the Redoubt before the addition of the caponnières. This

shows a five-sided solid earth fort revetted with brick. On the top, but below the parapet, are a series of five casemated barracks, a privy and a magazine. The fort is reached by a swing bridge. Although the gun positions are not marked on the plan, guns for both local defence of the fort and for engaging targets at long range would have been mounted along the parapet.



In October 1804 it was proposed that the Redoubt be armed with twelve 24 pounder guns and two 24 pounder carronades. The carronades were short barrellled guns designed originally for ships. When used for local defence of forts they used case shot and were devastating short range anti personnel weapons. The armaments return for 1805 lists thirteen 24 pounders.

On 31 July 1805 Major General Twiss recommended that bombproof barracks for 200 men be constructed.

The casemated barracks, guardroom and magazine were completed in 1806 except for the paving. In January 1810 320 barrels of gunpowder were sent to the Drop Redoubt from Purfleet. At the end of the Napoleonic wars spending on fortifications on the Heights ceased, but Shaft Barracks and the Drop Redoubt continued to be manned.

In February 1851 the armament of the Drop Redoubt is listed as being, three 24 pounders mounted on traversing platforms, six 12 pounders mounted en barbette for saluting and one 8 inch mortar.

Between October 1859 and February 1862 four caponnières were constructed in the ditches to allow guns to be mounted to fire along the ditch floors. Bombproof barracks

for the officers and a ditch and lines connecting the fort to Drop Battery were also built, and the foundations of the Pharos were rediscovered. After these alterations were completed, at a total cost of £37,577 (£13,276 coming from the Loan for Defences and the remainder from the Annual Estimates), it was reported that there were positions for 17 guns on the terreplein, and 15 in the caponnières. Of the seventeen guns on the terreplein six looked out to sea and nine to the landward side, two looked to both. This separation of the armaments of the fort, with local defence being provided by guns in the



caponnières and long-range artillery on the top, was in keeping with new ideas about fortification. These new ideas aimed at concentrating as much heavy artillery where it could be brought to bear on the enemy at the earliest opportunity. This meant that the space taken up by short-range weapons was required by long range guns.

It seems that the main magazine was constructed in two phases. The first phase was evidently a freestanding brick building, with a window at the northwest end and a shifting lobby at the southeast end. A report of 5 October 1868 describes the magazine at that date as an old construction with a roof of six feet thick, consisting of a brick arch with concrete and slates on top. At this date it was considered vulnerable and not sufficiently hidden beneath the parapet to protect it from direct fire from the seaward side.

In 1886 there were eleven 7 inch RBL's and fifteen 12-pounder SB carronades mounted in the fort. However it was proposed that all of

the 7 inch RBL's except the two on the west face be removed and replaced with six 64 pounder RML's on blocked up carriages. Only two of these were intended for the Drop Redoubt itself, the other four were to be mounted along the parapet west of the fort. It was also suggested that the number of carronades should be reduced to fourteen and that these should be 24 pounders.

In July 1891, following a letter from the Officer Commanding Royal Artillery, South-Eastern District, suggesting that eight of the carronades in the Redoubt be returned to store as they were without carriages, and that magazine rifle fire was an adequate replacement, the RA and RE Works Committee visited Dover. They again recommended that all but two of the 7 inch RBL's be removed, and suggested positions for the six 64 pounder Rimless previously approved. The eight carronades without carriages were to be removed, and two machine guns on parapet mountings were to be provided. By 1906, when the Committee again reported, these two machine guns were all that remained.

During the First World War the Drop Redoubt was used as part of the anti-aircraft defences and a searchlight was mounted in the fort. The Dover Anti-Aircraft Corps was raised by the Admiralty and commanded by Lieutenant Commander Capper. In August 1916 control of the anti-aircraft defences passed to the Royal Engineers and the defences moved further out from the town. It appears that the searchlight was removed from the Drop Redoubt as part of this reorganisation.

During the Second World War the Redoubt was used as a base by a Commando unit commanded by Major Lord Lovat. To enable guards to patrol the ditch doors were cut into the caponnières at ditch floor level. Slit trenches and machine gun positions were cut into the tops of the caponnières to defend the fort with more modern weapons.

Today the Drop Redoubt is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and is owned and maintained by English Heritage. It is not normally open to the public.