

ST MARTINS BATTERY

Western Heights

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St Martins Battery was built as a coast defence battery towards the end of the nineteenth century. It seems to have been the earliest of the batteries on the Western Heights specifically intended for coast defence. Prior to this the emphasis of the defences on the Heights was to oppose attack from the landward side. The improvements in gunnery and the launching of new armoured ships made attack from the sea a real possibility and defence against it an urgent necessity.

The battery was open to the sky with three 10 inch rifled muzzle loading guns mounted in gun pits, each flanked by a shell and cartridge store. The battery went out of use at the turn of the century but in 1940, with invasion threatened, it was converted into an emergency battery mounting three 6 inch breech loading guns.

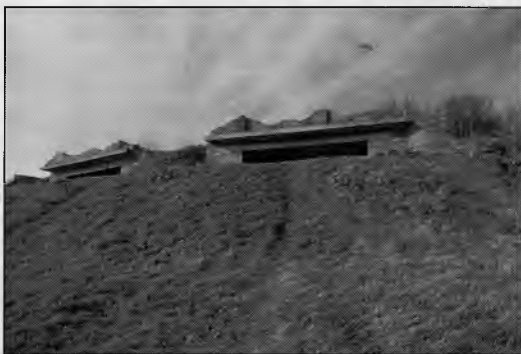
The first mention of this battery appears in 1872 when it was proposed that the two 10 inch RML guns earlier proposed for Archcliffe Fort be installed at a site on the Western Heights. A third 10 inch RML was added to the proposal when it was decided not to extend Hospital Battery from three to four guns.

As originally constructed the battery consisted of three open gunpits each flanked by a shell and cartridge store. The guns were mounted on carriages which recoiled along pivoting sloping slides. These used friction and gravity to absorb the recoil and the gun in its recoiled position would be in a convenient position for reloading down the muzzle. Rails in the bottom of the pits ran around the front of each gun to allow the ammunition to be wheeled around to the muzzle for reloading.

It was proposed that the central gun be removed and its place occupied by a new magazine. The two remaining guns were to be adapted for high angle fire. However this plan was not adopted and a new magazine was built into

the hillside in 1890. In 1895 it was suggested that the three 10 inch RMLs be replaced with two breech loading guns but this does not seem to have happened as the 1902 list of guns at Dover does not mention St Martin's Battery.

During the Second World War the battery was rebuilt as an emergency battery. The Victorian gunpits were filled with concrete, crew rooms were built behind and a concrete roof was put over



the whole battery. A Type 23 dual purpose pill-box was built adjacent to the battery to give local defence and light anti aircraft defence, and an additional square pill-box was also built. In the hill behind the battery a deep shelter was added to the Victorian magazine. Three naval 6 inch Mk VII breech loading guns were taken out of store and mounted on P VIII mountings, and the battery was ready for action by 29 September 1940. These guns, designed in 1898, fired a shell weighing 45.5 kilos to a maximum range of 11520 metres.

One of the 6 inch guns was removed soon after installation. The battery was put on a care and maintenance schedule on 23 December 1944 and the guns were finally removed in February 1947.