

FHBRO Number 96-96

Colwood, British Columbia

Upper Battery - Gun Emplacement and Magazine

603 Fort Rodd Hill Road

The Gun Emplacement and Magazine of the Upper Battery, part of the coastal defence system for the Royal Navy base at Esquimalt, was constructed between 1895-1898. The open Emplacement with a disappearing 6-inch gun and the subterranean complex of rooms of the Magazine was designed by the British Royal Engineers. The guns and carriage mechanisms were removed in 1943. External modifications include removal of World War II installations, including the “dummy” gun on the glacis south-west of the 6-inch gun pit, the anti-aircraft machine guns (the pit remains), and loss of some of the barbed wire at the flanks (nd). Internal modifications include: new work benches in the Lamp Room and Royal Artillery Store (nd); and repairs to window and door component in various rooms (nd). The complex is currently interpreted as part of the Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Site. Parks Canada is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 96-96.

Reasons For Designation

The Gun Emplacement and Magazine has been designated Classified because of its architectural importance and its environmental significance as well as its historical associations.

The functional military structures follow a standard Imperial pattern, with a sophisticated functionality in the symmetrical, low profile design incorporating a sunken terreplein giving access to the below-grade magazine adjacent to the guns. The pleasing aesthetics derive from the varied profile and sweeping horizontal lines. Exposed walls of either concrete or brick and brick vaulted ceilings have high quality craftsmanship which contributes to the overall functionality of the design.

The Batteries are the most sophisticated structures of Fort Rodd because of their functional design, with layout, construction and use of materials highly specialized to accommodate technical functions and equipment.

Functionally, the Gun Emplacement and Magazine are complex pieces of design both in their fittings and physical layout. The U-shaped gun emplacement with concrete parapet (seaward) and terreplein (landward) incorporates an angled, inclined supporting wall with benchmark, and cartridge and dial recesses in the parapet wall - terreplein side. The underground portion includes an entrance well, the lamp room, crew shelter, Royal Artillery store, shell store, shifting lobby, cartridge store, ammunition passage and ventilators for the underground vaults. These facilities were grouped to one side of the

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emplacement, providing bomb-proof protection for the stores and without placing them beneath the guns. The below-grade storage of supply ammunition is an important feature which improved the safety of the men who transported ammunition to the guns.

The above-grade exposed concrete elements of the Battery continue to reinforce the military character of the site. The open setting and the scattered structures which are low to the ground and subordinate to the environment define the low-key appearance of the military site. The overall inconspicuousness is a characteristic of coastal defences of the late-19th century.

These structures are associated with the late-19th century approach of military planning for British coastal defences. Their construction in the late 1800s aided local development and their presence contributed to the overall influence of the military in the life of the local community.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Gun Emplacement and Magazine resides in the overall massing, profile, construction materials, interior planning and site relationships.

The low-scale massing of the Gun Emplacement and Magazine is defined by the U-shaped gun pit and the open areas behind limited by the upper retaining walls and including the recessed entrance well. Heritage character resides in features expressing its role as a specialized coastal artillery structure, designed for the disappearing carriage of the 6-inch guns in an open battery, supported by a bomb-proof magazine. Externally, the features which define heritage character are the U-shaped gun pits behind concrete aprons and parapets with five shell and cartridge recesses in the rear face of the gun pit wall and one enclosed recess for small gun stores, the ammunition hatch, and the two storage recesses (cartridge and dial) with doors on one side of the wall, the angled inclined supporting east flank wall with inscribed benchmark and the defensible walls on the landward side. The bomb-proof magazine is also a characteristic of this type of installation and is reached by the recessed stairwell with davit and pipe railings off the courtyard. The massing, profiles and footprint reflect internal functions; the clarity of this expression should be respected.

The simply detailed concrete work and steel pipe-rail guardrails contribute to the functional appearance of the structures. Brick veneer is employed throughout the

underground portion of the magazine and its simple detailing includes radiused brick

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edges at all openings.

The underground rooms have wood two-over-two sash windows which appear to be original. The functional design is expressed in the original wood entrance doors with their solid wood plank construction and heavy iron hardware.

The functional interior planning of the magazine, including a lamp room, shifting lobby, cartridge store and shell store areas, was designed to provide support for the gun. The magazine interiors maintain the visual qualities of the 1895 design, including the vaulted construction and use of simple interior finishes like v-joint panelling, painted masonry and concrete floors. These exhibit a deliberately utilitarian, functional character and should be maintained.

The simple, closely-cropped turfgrass plane emphasizes the rolling, hilly terrain of the site. Maintenance of the site should encourage management of vegetation to maintain original sight lines. The integration of the structures with the area's natural features is characteristic of coastal defences.

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For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.
