

FHBRO Number 96-96

Colwood, British Columbia

Lower Battery - Gun Emplacement and Magazine

603 Fort Rodd Hill Road

The Gun Emplacement and Magazine of the Lower Battery, part of the coastal defence system for the Royal Navy base at Esquimalt, was constructed in 1895-1898. The open Gun Emplacement with two disappearing 6-inch guns and the subterranean complex of rooms of the Magazine was designed by the British Royal Engineers. The guns and carriage mechanisms were demobilized and used as reserve armament in 1917. In the 1920s one 6-inch Quick Firing (Q.F.) gun was mounted on a naval pedestal at the glacis southeast of the Left Gun Emplacement; it was removed c.1940. A 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft gun was mounted in the Left Gun Emplacement c1942. In 1944 all guns and carriages were removed. Interior alterations have been minor, involving small components like some bolts on the entrance doors, the frames, grilles and glass doors of the window recesses, some repair work to the concrete-faced vaults, and the barrier of the shifting lobby. The building 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 Gun Emplacement and Magazine, following a standard Imperial pattern, has a sophisticated functionality in its symmetrical, low-profile design around a sunken courtyard 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, in which their layout, construction and use of materials was highly specialized to accommodate highly technical functions and equipment.

The above-grade exposed concrete elements of the Lower Battery continue to reinforce the military character of the site, and the prominent defensible walls and gate bordering the north part remain as important site elements. The park-like open setting and the scattered structures low to the ground and subordinate to the environment define the

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character of the military site. The overall inconspicuousness is a characteristic of coastal defences.

This is one part of a scattered series of batteries which comprised the first large-scale military fortification on Canada's west coast for the defence of Esquimalt and Victoria. The construction in the late 1800s aided local development, and its 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 emplacement raised platform and the open areas behind, including the perimeter walls and buildings. Externally, the features which define heritage character are the two u-shaped emplacements behind concrete aprons and parapets with five shell and cartridge recesses in the rear face of the drums; the ammunition hatch; the two storage recesses with doors on either side of the drum; the small crew shelter of the right gun emplacement; the stairwell and the right depression range-finder position; and the loopholed defensible walls on the landward sides. The bomb-proof magazine is also a characteristic of this type of installation and is reached by an entrance way off the courtyard. The massing, profiles and footprint reflects internal functions; the clarity of this expression should be respected.

The simply detailed concrete formwork and small amount of stonework used for retaining walls contribute to the functional appearance of the structures and reflect modern military detail preferences. Steel pipe-rail guardrails are a prominent element defining edges of stairwells, contributing to the functional character.

The functional design is also expressed in the original wood entrance doors with their solid wood plank construction and heavy iron hardware. These should be maintained.

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 emplacements. The original layout and access should be maintained. The magazine

interiors maintain the visual qualities of the 1895 design including the vaulted

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construction and use of simple interior finishes like wood v-joint panelling, painted masonry with radiused brick edges, concrete floors, thin metal vault sheeting and simple wood fittings. These exhibit a deliberately utilitarian, functional character and should be maintained.

The simple, low ground cover of the landscape emphasizes the rolling, hilly terrain of the site and should be maintained. Maintenance of the site should include management of tree growth to maintain original sight lines. The park-like setting and the integration of the structures with natural features is a characteristic feature of coastal defences and should be maintained.

1997.11.25

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