

Placenames in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown

d/r Lexicon in association with Blackrock Education Centre

Compiled by Séamus Cannon and Ríonach O Callaghan

LESSON PLAN 2:

Martello Towers

Focus:

- Martello Towers - location and purpose; structure of Martello Towers

1. Resources

1. Teacher information
2. Map of Martello Towers along the coast
3. Photographs of Seapoint Martello Tower
4. Diagram of Tower
5. Cannon on Seapoint Tower
6. Student activity sheet

2. Introduction:

1. Revisit Dún Laoghaire - iron age ringfort. A Martello tower was erected on the site of Laoghaire's fort. It was demolished in 1836 when the railway was built. Establish students' understanding of Martello Towers.

3. Development:

1. Show no. 2 map of Martello Towers. 26 towers and 10 gun batteries were built along the coast of County Dublin in 1804-5 to defend Dublin from invasion by Napoleon. The towers were built from Bray to Balbriggan. The United Kingdom was at war with France at this time.
 1. Can you guess from the map where Napoleon was expected to land? Why there?
2. Show 3, photographs of Seapoint Tower. Discuss shape, construction, windows, door. The photographs show the machicolation from the outside and inside; the murder hole above the entrance passage; the gun platform with the rails on which the gun rotated, pulled by ropes through the rings on the wall; the furnace for heating the cannon balls to white heat.
3. The door was placed high up facing the land. Why was that? Soldiers entered by ladder. Explain features like Machicolation (the projecting platform which protected the door) and the murder hole inside the door
4. Show 4. The tower had three levels. Explain why the ammunition was in the basement – the thickest walls; what each floor was used for; why the copper door on the ammunition room and a copper key for the door? The middle floor was the living area for the 12-16 soldiers: it must have been very uncomfortable. The rooftop was where the cannon gun and flagpole were placed.
5. Show 5, photos of rooftop, gun platform, furnace, machicolation and murder hole. The cannon could rotate and fire in any direction. There was a furnace area on the roof where the cannon balls could be heated till they were white hot. Why do you think this was important? (To set the wooden sailing ships on fire)

4. Conclusion

1. Student activities: see attached sheet

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Resource 1

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TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

LESSON 2

Martello Towers

The 'dún' of Laoghaire was at the mouth of a small stream on a very rugged, uninhabited coastline. The little fishing village which grew up there much later, alongside the present site of the Purty Kitchen was called Dunleary. In 1804, the British government built a Martello tower on the site of the 'dún' and the dún was destroyed. The tower was one of many built on the Irish coast at that time, but what were they for?

At the time of the tower's construction, the United Kingdom was at war with France, led by Napoleon Bonaparte. Ireland was part of the United Kingdom since the Act of Union in 1800 and the British feared that Napoleon would invade Ireland. An earlier failed attempt at invasion had taken place in 1796. The British authorities were afraid that if the French did invade, they would have been supported by the Irish who had revolted against the crown in 1798 and in 1803. The principal target for the French was thought to be Dublin itself, and Dublin was very poorly defended. It was decided then to build a series of heavily armed small forts along the coast to protect Dublin Bay, starting at Bray Head and going as far north as Balbriggan, 28 in all. As well as a chain of Martello towers, there were several gun batteries, including at Dunleary. However, the French invasion never came and over time the Martello towers fell into disuse. The Martello tower at Dunleary was itself demolished in 1836 when the railway line from Dublin was extended through the tower site to its present location. All remaining traces of the dún of Laoghaire were erased at that time.

Several Martello towers remain in place. The Tower at Seapoint has a replica cannon gun on top and is open to the public at certain times. Several towers have been converted into private residences. South Tower number 2, Bray Point, was the home of Bono, star of U2 for a time. Possibly the most famous Martello of all, in Sandycove, was the home of James Joyce, the famous writer, for a short while in 1904. He immortalized it as the location for the opening chapter of his most famous work, *Ulysses*. Joyce left the tower after only six nights and walked to Dublin in the middle of the night, all because of a row over a black panther, but that's another story!

The construction of the tower is interesting. Generally, a tower was built from stone quarried close to the site. In Dún Laoghaire that was obviously granite. The walls are very thick, to withstand gunfire from ships. The door to the tower was at first floor level and was accessed by ladder. This was the living area of the tower for the 12 to 16 men stationed there. On the ground floor, in the area least vulnerable to an enemy shell, was the ammunition store and there were trapdoors to enable the ammunition to be lifted to the top. The basement also accommodated the sergeant in charge, and the cooking area. Access to each floor within the tower was by a narrow staircase built into the wall. At the top was a very large cannon gun and the furnace chamber for heating the cannonballs to a white heat. This was intended to set the enemy's wooden sailing ships on fire. The cannon could rotate a full 360 degrees to face an enemy from any direction. Above the entrance was a machicolation, a platform with holes in it that enabled the defenders to shoot at any attackers at the door. If the enemy did break in there was a murder hole above the entrance passage.

Interesting fact: the presence of gunpowder meant that great care had to be taken not to set off an explosion! The key to the tower and the door of the ammunition store were made of copper as were the studs on the men's boots. Copper doesn't spark against stone.

There was one exception to the location of the door on Martello Towers. On Dalkey island the Tower was accessed through the roof! This was because it was surrounded by sea on all sides and there was no safe side to put the door.



Scale: 1: 100,000

■ Easting: 706639 Northing: 715934





Resource 3.2
Machicolation and murder hole

Resource 3.3 Machicolation external



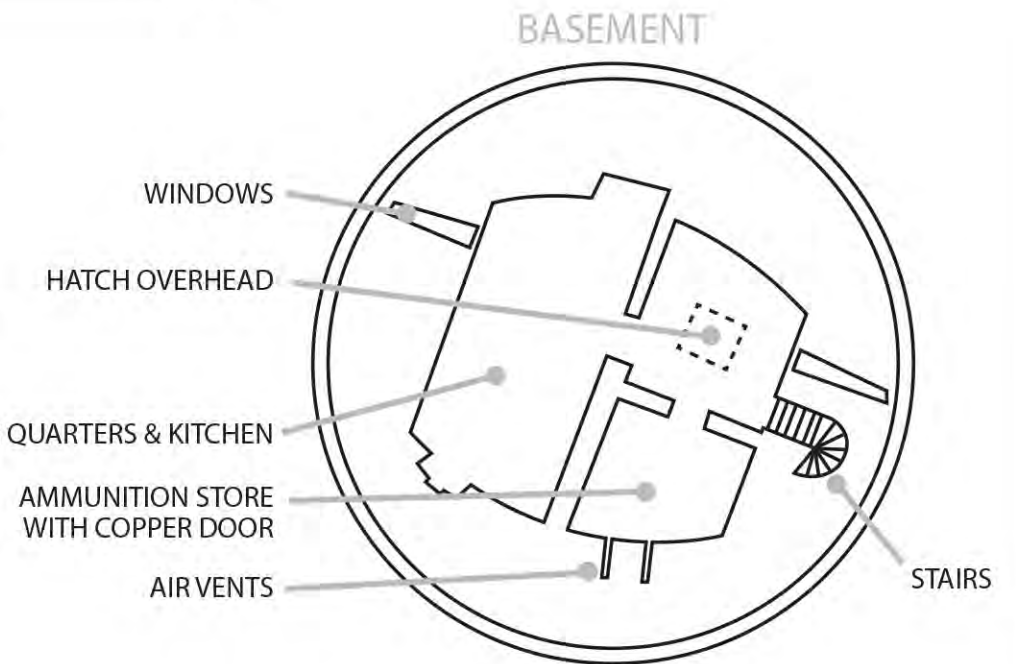
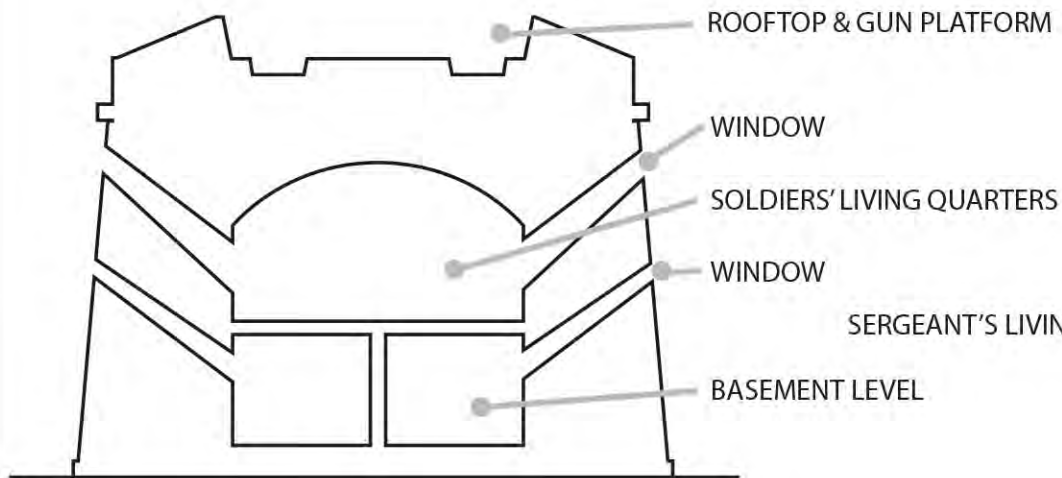
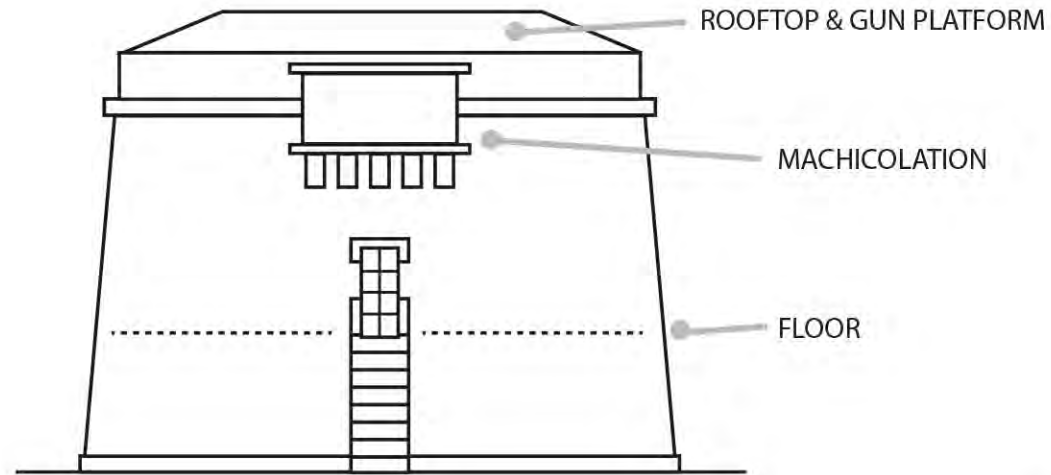
Resource 3.4 Gun platform





Resource 3.5 Furnace

Resource 4





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WORKSHEET 2

LESSON 2

Outline drawing of Martello Tower

- Draw in all the things should be on each level
- Create a model/drawing of a Martello Tower

