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Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90211)

Taken into State care: 1995 (Ownership)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

HACKNESS BATTERY AND MARTELLO TOWER



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HACKNESS BATTERY AND MARTELLO TOWER

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument comprises an early 19th-century gun battery and Martello tower which, with its sister tower at Crockness, was built to provide defence against French and American privateers for convoys assembling in Longhope Sound. The battery was upgraded in 1866 against a perceived threat from the American Fenian Brotherhood. Neither saw the action for which they were intended, but each continued to be used for military purposes into the 20th century.

The consolidation of the martello tower is complete and public access provided; its interpretation scheme comprises the installation of a replacement gun on a modern carriage. Works to the interior have proceeded on the assumption that the living quarters will be partly reconstructed (and can be contrasted with the unreconstructed but equally well-preserved Crockness Tower on the opposite side of Longhope Sound).

Upon taking the battery into care, Historic Scotland has implemented a programme of consolidation, repair, archaeological and historical research and partial reconstruction of the monument (essentially some limited reversal of 20th century works and reconstruction to the 1866 appearance, *where there was sufficient evidence to justify this*). The philosophy has been to present the physical remains of the monument in their 1866 phase, reversing some of the 20th-century alterations made when the site was a working croft. Together with the provision of mains water, a modern toilet has been inserted into the former latrine block. Lighting has been installed in the barracks and latrine and cable ducting, for possible future use, laid to all other buildings.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- These monuments are sited in Scapa Flow which is known to have played a vital role in British maritime history as a secure place of rendezvous for centuries, for example King Hakon's Viking fleet set off from here in 1263 and it was used by Hanseatic merchants in medieval times, but also in the last 200 years.
- The battery and Martello tower, built in response to the threats of the early 19th century and the subsequent war with the United States, fall at the beginning of the sequence which ends with the Second World War. At this time merchant ships involved in the lucrative Baltic trade and requiring Royal Navy protection met at Longhope Harbour to form convoys. The initial threat to the merchant fleets was from privateers – French, American, Danish and Norwegian. Later a perceived threat from the American Fenian Brotherhood led up an upgrade of the battery and rearmament of the towers in 1866. In fact, the guns never saw active use.
- Despite the threats of the War of American Independence and war against Napoleonic France, very few coast defences were built in Scotland at this time, unlike further south (see also **Fort Charlotte**). Declaration of war by the United

States of America in 1812 prompted the construction of batteries at Aberdeen, Greenock (both now lost) and in Orkney from 1813, where two Martello towers were added from 1814.

- The external defences of the battery (now filled in) were recognised as not providing sufficient defence for attack since this would predominantly come from the sea. In response the Admiralty had the Martello towers built.
- The most significant action was in 1892 when the Orkney Volunteer Artillery were engaged at the battery for a few hours of drilling and gun practice, during which they struggled to get some of the unused guns to work. The guns were probably removed early in the 20th century and the battery was sold after the First World War.
- Sir Walter Scott visited the Martello tower on 14 August 1814 while under construction. His account of this, including his sceptical observations on the defensive capabilities of the towers, can be found in *Northern Lights or a Voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht to Nova Zembla and the Lord knows where in the Summer of 1814*.
- The battery's initial armament comprised eight 24-pounder cannon, supplied with powder from a magazine at the rear of the battery. A barrack block for the soldiers was located between the guns and the magazine. The 1866 refurbishment involved replacing the guns with four 68-pounder cannon that now fired through embrasures in a modified stone and earth defensive wall. The new guns were supplied by ammunition stores built into this remodelled rampart. Separate accommodation was added to the barracks for non-commissioned officers and men. Officers lived in another building on one side of the entrance, with a guardhouse on the opposite side. A latrine (now partly reconstructed so as to serve its original purpose once more), cookhouse, stores and an ablution block completed the complex.
- An additional magazine was built adjacent to the existing magazine in about 1890 for the Orkney Volunteer Artillery.
- For much of its military history a caretaker was responsible for looking after the barracks. In the First World War navy personnel were billeted in the barracks while they operated the boom defences in Scapa Flow.
- For the last 80 years the battery has been used for a completely different function to that which it was built, having been occupied as a working croft.
- The Martello tower came into state care in 1975, the battery in 1995.

Archaeological Overview

- Historic Scotland has commissioned a series of excavations at the battery in advance of site consolidation and presentation. The 1997 excavations were intended to provide information on the layout of the 1866 gun battery as well as providing data on the earlier 1815 gun battery. Trenches were also excavated

to the E of the gun battery to investigate geophysical anomalies, while there was also work to clear and understand the magazine. These excavations demonstrated, as might be expected, that there was some minor variation in execution from the Board of Ordnance plans. They were successful in revealing the layout of the earlier guns, although these include unusual and unparalleled features that are difficult to explain.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- Only three Martello towers were built in Scotland (the third was at Leith, Edinburgh). Taking their name from the round fortress at Mortella Point, in Corsica, their elegant and compact design combines military and domestic functions. Martello towers are more commonly found in S and SE England.
- From the original Board of Ordnance plans (1813 and 1866) for the tower and battery we can see how the space within each was intended to be organised. These plans provide invaluable evidence for the original layout of the battery during both its 1815 and 1866 phases, as well as for the Martello tower.
- An unusual feature of the battery guns is a series of massive cuboid granite blocks. These are apparently unparalleled and their precise function is not known, but could have functioned as the anchor stones for a gantry used to lift the guns onto the carriages.
- Both the tower and the battery were designed to resist sustained bombardment from the sea. The tower has a thickened seaward wall giving an elliptical horizontal cross section and the battery protected by an earth embankment which would shield the battery from the sea.

Social Overview

- For much of its life the battery was seldom occupied by military personnel and the locals found alternative uses for it, such as using the barracks for dances, as the barrack building had for many years the largest clear open room on the island. Some of this unofficial use is documented in press cuttings and the like.
- The (very elderly) last occupant of the battery during its lifetime as a croft, Mr Cload, still lives in the officers' house. He is an unofficial, expert guide whose presence can enhance the interpretation of the monument for many visitors that he meets. Historic Scotland has undertaken some recording of his oral history of the site.

Spiritual Overview

- Not assessed.

Aesthetic Overview

- These monuments, but particularly the tower(s), are visually dominant in the local landscape, whether from across the land or sea.
- Both the tower and early phases of the battery are handsome, robust examples of deceptively simple but elegant Georgian military architecture.

- The significance of these monuments is enhanced by their unspoilt setting and their close and ready association with the land- and sea-scape.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The site has been extensively researched since it came into state care.
- However, we still know relatively little about the non-military use of the site by locals. Further work in local archives, oral history, etc might enhance this picture.
- Historic Scotland needs to ensure that it has a full oral history of the site, including from Mr Cload, and that this is properly recorded and archived.
- The function of the stone cuboids still needs confirming.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- The Martello tower is one of only three in Scotland; it is intervisible with a second, while the third (in Leith) is partly obscured and difficult to access at present.
- Of the few batteries belonging to this period, Hackness is not only a rare survival but also the best preserved.
- The battery and Martello tower are exceptionally well-preserved military monuments of a type that is rare in Scotland. Along with Crockness, the battery and tower are part of a single defensive system, and it is all the more extraordinary that this should survive in such a complete manner.
- Extensive militaria survive on Hoy and related islands, designed to protect Scapa Flow, latterly, and most famously, in the First and Second World Wars. As a group, the military remains of Scapa Flow are of international significance and reflect the strategic importance of Scapa Flow, including Longhope Sound. The Hackness monuments belong at the beginning of this sequence.
- The significance of these monuments is enhanced by their unspoilt setting and their close and ready association with the land- and sea-scape.
- The local and secondary non-military use of this site adds a fascinating personal and social dimension to a military site that never had to serve its intended functions.

Associated Properties

Crockness and Leith Martello towers (scheduled ancient monuments); Scapa Flow Visitor Centre (OIC). Crockness Tower requires active conservation and has the potential to enhance the interpretation of the Hackness monuments. **Fort Charlotte.**

OIC plans to develop a strategy called Defence of Orkney, i.e. a wartime heritage trail.

A large body of artefactual material from the clearance and excavation of the site is stored in a temporary hut outside the entrance to the Battery. There is also material recovered from the excavations.

Keywords martello tower, battery, Orkney, Scapa Flow, Hoy, militaria, croft, Sir Walter Scott.