The *'bombproof'* Martello towers of the United Kingdom & its former colonies are important remnants of European history. Constructed in response to the fear of invasion by the revolutionary leader & Emperor of the French Napoleon Bonaparte. During the early nineteenth century King George III ordered the construction of the raised Martello towers by his subjects to protect the Irish coastline with the majority located around Dublin Bay from Howth Head to Dalkey. A chain of twenty-six were constructed in each other's sight & facilitated communication between the military personnel stationed there. These towers were modelled on the Tour de Mortella, a circular fortress that the British had tried but failed to penetrate at Mortella Point in Corsica in 1794. They had a height of up to forty feet with walls up to thirteenth feet in width. These towers were able to withstand cannon fire. The flat roofs had a platform for a pivoting mounted cannon also the walls were fitted with slits for musket fire as an attack mode. Entrances were raised approximately ten feet above the ground that were reached by ladder. Several were further protected against approach by moats. Martello towers became outdated with the increased development of hand-held firearms in the late nineteenth century. Several fell into disrepair, but several of the Dublin ones have been preserved as residences, guest houses or museums. (*23rd August 2016*) [v]

The name '*Martello*' is derived from a coastal defense structure at Martello Point in Corsica. The towers were copied from that design. They were constructed during 1804 due to a fear of invasion by Napoleon. Contractor for the Dublin Martello towers was a M. Ross, with Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Fisher as supervisor. Each tower cost in the region of £2,000.[vi]

There were fifty signal towers known as Martello towers constructed during the Napoleonic wars. Constructed as a type of coastal defence to alert the rest of the country of French Invasion. They were strategically placed in preparation of a signal. The nearest one in sequence would repeat until the whole coast is lit up. [vii]

Known simply as *'Martellos'* the Martello towers were small defensive forts that were constructed during the nineteenth century by the British Empire at the time of the French revolutionary wars. Martello towers were inspired by a round fortress erected during 1565 as part of a larger Genoese defence system at Mortella *(Myrtle)* Point in Corsica. They were designed by Giovan Giacomo Paleari Fratino (*el Fratin.*) Within Ireland these were mostly visible along the east coast of Ireland where chains of Martello Towers were constructed. They were twelve metres in height with two levels. Their circular structures with thick walls (& *several thicker on the seaward side*) of solid masonry were resistant to cannon fire. The walls had narrow slits for defensive musket fire. The towers were twelve metres in height with a width of 2.4 metres in thickness. The height was an ideal platform for the single heavy artillery piece that was mounted atop the flat roof with a capability of over a complete three – hundred - degree circle. The entrance was three metres from the base with a machicolation platform for the use of material as an attack mode. The terreplein had a high parapet with a raised platform in the centre that included a pivot for a cannon that traversed a three hundred - & sixty - degree angle. On the ground floor were stored the magazine, ammunition, storerooms, provisions also water. The garrison of fifteen to twenty men with one officer had accommodation of the first floor that included several rooms with fireplaces. A well or cistern within the fort supplied the water plus an internal drainage system was linked to the roof thus enabled rainwater to refill the cistern. [viii]

Balbriggan

Balbriggan Martello tower was constructed during 1804, it overlooked the King's Strand in North County Dublin. The Martello name came from an original tower in Corsica that guarded the entrance to the Gulf of Fiorenzo. Fear of an invasion to Ireland by the British led to the constructions of those structures to prevent an attempted attack by Napoleon. The bomb - proof towers were situated in strategic locations that enabled them attack incoming vessels or troops. The largest concentration were constructed with solid stone along the east coast. The towers were impressive with walls eight feet in thickness. They had a height of forty feet above the ground. The entrance door was ten feet from the base of the tower. The ground floor had a master gunners store to contain the cannon balls plus barrels

of gunpowder. The floors & walls were covered in timber. Instead of nails wooden pegs were used. The doors or hinges were covered in or produced of copper. The top was surrounded by a parapet that had a central pivot on which rotated a heavy wooden beam; that in turn held a twenty - four pounder canon. The first floor had accommodation for the officers with his men. This tower appears to have been filled in at various stages over the years. This Balbriggan structure is protected by Fingal County Council. (*'Fingal Independent'* 4th *April 2003*) [ix]

Bray

During 1804 & 1805 three Martello towers were constructed on Ireland's east coast at Bray in Co. Wicklow about ten miles south of County Dublin. This *Tower number 1* was erected on a sandbank. It was damaged in a storm during 1878. It was destroyed in 1884. *Tower number 2* was constructed with coursed granite on the southern side of the Harbour. The circular tower comprised of a high battered granite wall with small plain defensive openings. It (*no.2*) is now surmounted by a glazed '*drum*' with a glazed conical roof as part of a private residential property. Tower *number 3* was situated on the coastline. It was constructed on top of soft rock but collapsed into the sea in circa 1870. [x]

Cork Harbour

The term Martello tower was named for a type of defensive structure during the Napoleonic era. The circular structures were designed to enhance existing fortifications where their field of fire could be directed at constricted areas such as inlets or Harbour mouths like those in Cork Harbour.   Approximately fifty Martello Towers were constructed within Ireland with a total to date of thirty – nine in survival. The average height was twelve to fourteen metres. The circular or elliptical towers had approximately fourteen meters of external a diameter. The inner walls were 2.5 metres in thickness. The Cork Harbour Towers commanded a three hundred - & sixty - degree vantage of almost the entire Harbour. They were constructed with local limestone. The ground floor was used for storage, ammunition plus supplies. The middle floor supported living quarters. A cistern or a well was included. The top of the structure had a vaulted ceiling that supported a flat limestone flagged roof. On the roof a central pivot that supported a traversing gun carriage with an eighteen or twenty – four muzzle gun that ran on an iron rail was affixed to the parapet. This Martello tower was converted to a museum during the 1990's. (*Four of the Martello Towers of Cork Harbour Belvelly, Ringaskiddy, Rosslague also Fota were not designed for bombardment vessels. One may view their history at this site*) (*May 2020*) [xi]

Dalkey

The Dalkey (*'Thorny Island'*) Martello tower with its gun battery constructed during the early 1800's is referenced on this site: https://curiousireland.ie/dalkey-island-south-co-dublin/)

Garnish Island

This Martello tower was an original structure constructed on Garnish Island's southern shore circa 1805. Like several others in Cork, it had a straight cylindrical shape that did not splay out at its base. Now set in landscaped gardens following restoration by the Office of Public Works. A beautiful sketch features on this page. [xii]

The Garnish Island Martello tower in Cork was constructed during 1805 as one of the number of defensive towers. The design was based on a tower on Martello Point in Corsica, it is akin to other Cork Martello Towers. Unlike other Irish Martello structures, it had straight walls not battered ones. It was constructed during the Napoleonic wars to a freestanding circular - plan of a three - bay two - stage Martello tower.   The flat flagstone casemated roof with parapet had stone coping with coursed cut block traversed platform also a central gun pivot. The stone walls were built with rubble. There was camber - headed openings of stone sills with voussoirs. The south door opening was camber - headed

to the first stage with an additional of recent steel flight of steps. The south stone walls were enclosed with rubble. There were flagstone copings with camber - headed openings. The structure had a carved date plaque. It is now disused. Excellent images feature on this site. Registered number 20910421. Coordinates are 93529, 54823. (*date recorded 8th May 2008*) [xiii]

Haulbowline

Martello towers were forts erected by the British forces in several countries from the Napoleonic wars until the middle of the nineteenth century. This structure was constructed during 1822 as one of a line of defenses in anticipation of an invasion of Cork Harbour. The structures were of a circular – planned defensive buildings. It had dressed limestone walls with cut - limestone coping. They had carved limestone water drainage spouts. It had square - headed also segmental headed openings with later replacement timber windows. Included were segmental - headed door - openings on the first floor plus a replacement battered door that was approached by a flight of metal steps. It survives largely intact. Images may be viewed on this site. Registered number is 20908769. Coordinates are 178866, 65465. (*date recorded 3rd October 2007*) [xiv]

The Martello tower on Haulbowline Island was constructed between 1813 to 1815. It commanded the narrowing river channel between the island with the town of Cobh to the north. This tower was in direct line of sight of the Ringaskiddy Tower. [xv]

Howth

Howth Martello tower is situated in north County Dublin. It was constructed during 1805 as a defensive position that overlooked Howth Harbour. An image features on this page. [xvi]

Howth Martello tower overlooks Howth Harbour. This Martello Tower possesses a vintage radio museum that exhibits radios plus gramophones from the early 1900's to the present day. [xvii]

Martello north *Tower number 2* is one of the village of Howth's Martello towers that overlooks the Harbour. It has been transformed into a vintage radio museum. (*4th March 2021*) [xviii]

The Howth Martello tower has a vintage radio museum in Howth. This tower is the only one in north Dublin that was restored by Fingal County Council. [xix]

Ireland's Eye

The Martello tower located on Ireland's Eye is one of the largest in north County Dublin. This is the third also the last of the towers located on the Howth peninsula. Its large dimensions enabled two heavy calibre artillery weapons to be placed on its roof. It had four machicolations. Boiling water, hot oil or rocks were among the items that were dropped through those passages thus acted as an effective defence mechanism. (*This ancient Martello Tower is one of two buildings that were constructed on this Island, the other being the ancient ruin of St. Nessan's Church*) [xx]

The ruins of a Martello tower are visible on Ireland's Eye off north County Dublin coastline: https://curiousireland.ie/irelands-eye-north-county-dublin/

Killiney

This distinctive Martello tower is located at Tara Hill, Killiney Bay on Dublin's southern peninsula. It is known as Martello south *Tower Number 7*. It has been carefully restored but now is privately – owned. The structure features a working cannon as well as a coach house also a gunner's cottage. [xxi]

Martello *Tower Number 7* is located on Killiney Hill in south County Dublin. As one of fifty towers erected by the British, this *'Martello No.7'* was unique for its unusual location atop a hill half a kilometre away. Dublin Bay had a high concentration of towers as twenty-six were constructed in sight of each other, they provided the ability to communicate or warn of any incoming attacks by the French navy. This has been restored over a ten - year period. It includes a proofed eighteen - pounder cannon. There is also a coach house, an artillery store, a tool shed, a gunner's cottage also a gunpowder store. The building is now privately owned. (*When the restoration was completed on 12th July 2008 it was inaugurated by the firing of its cannon*) [xxii]

A video tour of *Tower Number 7* may be viewed at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ-v3AUw7nw

This site has interesting information re Killiney Tower: http://www.photopol.com/martello/no7.html

Millmount

Millmount Martello tower was constructed on a mound during 1898 on the south bank of the river Boyne at Drogheda in Co. Louth. It is believed that the mound is over three thousand years old. According to legend it was the burial place of Amergin, a famous early Celtic poet & Queen Scotia the daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh. Folklore stated that the mound was originally a passage grave prior to the erection of the fort. An Anglo - Norman Hugh de Lacy during the twelfth century constructed a motte and bailey castle on the site. Several years later it was replaced with a fortified castle. This tower is at the summit of the Fortifications. (*During the 1922 Irish Civil War it was bombarded by Irish Free State soldiers*) This Martello tower was restored by Drogheda Corporation then opened to the public during 2000. (*Millmount Museum that won an International Gulbenkian Museum Award has an admission fee that includes access to the Millmount Tower*) An image features on this link of the Millmount Tower that followed the attack during 1922 by Irish Free State forces. [xxiii]

Portmarnock

This Martello tower was constructed during 1805 as one of Ireland's defensive positions by the British who copied the design from a Sicilian town named Corsica. The tower was constructed to a forty feet diameter. The entrance was constructed above ground then assessed through a doorway by either a staircase or ladder. Now disused it is privately owned. [xxiv]

Portrane

During 1803 an Act of Parliament was enacted for the proposal of the construction of defensive sites within Ireland by the British. With compulsory acquisition of land, the building of the Martello Towers began during 1804. They were named after their prototype at Cape Mortella in Corsica Sicily. This Portrane is numbered *Tower Number 6* at Balcarrick Portrane Beach in North County Dublin**.** The Irish towers were never engaged in attacks on vessels. A large cannon was mounted on the roof on a traversing carriage. Now in disuse the entrance door & windows are boarded up. [xxv]

This Portrane *Tower Number 6* may be viewed at this site:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh5JyEfeMgU

Sandycove

Sandycove Martello tower is also known as the James Joyce tower. It is located approximately eight miles south of Dublin on the coast road. [xxvi]

The Irish novelist James Joyce stayed at the Martello tower at Sandycove that is near Dún Laoghaire for several days prior to writing his '*Ulysses.*' He used it as a location in his famous novel. It has since been converted into a museum dedicated to the author. [xxvii]

James Joyce tower was one of a series of Martello towers constructed to withstand an invasion by Napoleon. It is located eight miles south of Dublin on the coast road. The tower is a museum devoted to the life and works of James Joyce who made the tower the setting for the first chapter of his masterpiece '*Ulysses*'.   The gun platform with its panoramic view also the living room of the tower are as his descriptive passages stated. Museum's collection includes letters, photographs, first or even rare editions also personal possessions of Joyce along with items associated with the old Dublin of *'Ulysses'.* (*'Ulysses' was set on 16th June 1904*) On Bloomsday 16th June annually, the museum opens from 8 am – 6 pm for readings plus celebrations. [xxviii]

Sandymount Martello tower by James Barry 14th July 2009 may be viewed at this link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDwEyWR1SUk

Skerries

There are two Martello towers in Skerries (*one on Red island the other on Shenick island*) The word Martello is a corruption of Mortella that is the name of a Headland in Corsica. That original squat tower defended the approaches to the Gulf of Fiorenza. The structures were constructed similarly of solid stone usually granite. The walls were nine feet in thickness. Each separate tower had a guardroom with an ammunition store. A platform on the roof enabled three cannons to be secured . The entrance to the tower was through a door that was between ten & fifteen feet above ground. Each tower was erected in sight of two on either side. [xxix]

The name '*Skerries*' comes from the Norse word '*sceir*', meaning reef or rocky islands. The name '*Martello'* as in Mortella was a place in Corsica when during 1793 a fortified tower was a structure that resisted British forces. So impressed were the British they erected similar structures among their empire that included fifty towers along the Irish coastline during the 1800's. Skerries Martello Tower was located near the Harbour. It had extensive views of the south to Howth also north to the Mourne Mountains**.** [xxx]

During the 1920's the Martello tower on Red Island was used as a ballroom. It was replaced during the 1940s by Toft's amusements. This building is now disused. [xxxi]

Sutton Red Rock

The first Martello tower constructed was north of Dublin at Red Rock in Sutton. The tower was constructed on a rocky promontory. The materials used were the local quartzite red rock. This Sutton structure was the last in the Dublin area to be disarmed circa 1881. There were two entrances: with the main entrance by a stairway that led up to the main door. The tower is now privately - owned & operates as self - catering accommodation. An image features on this site. [xxxii]

Martello Tower Sutton was the first tower to be erected in Dublin. It is referred to in the *'Annals'* as *Tower Number 1.* Within the Dublin area there are twenty - one structures that remain with several derelict or some demolished. Government departments own several while many are privately owned. This site states the belief that *'Martello Tower Sutton represents the best and most sympathetic refurbishment of any tower in Ireland.'* [xxxiii]

The initial fear of an invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte was the reason for these defence structures around Ireland's coasts. The name *'Martello' d*erived from the name of a tower at Mortella point in the Gulf of Fiorenzo. The original towers were of circular shape with two to four meters thick walls constructed from local sourced stone. The entrance doorways were three metres above ground with access to the

entrance by a ladder. This entailed the ladder could be removed as protection. This site details the history of the renovations at this tower. Several images may be viewed on this page. (*11ᵗʰ February 2020*) [xxxiv]

The Irish Times columnist Rosita Boland on 13ᵗʰ July 2015 detailed her experiences of her time in the Martello Tower at this link**:** https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/lesser-spotted-ireland-the-martello-tower-and-the-magic-carpet-of-the-irish-sea-1.2279270

North Tower n*umber 1* in Sutton on the Howth Head Peninsula is now a luxury holiday home: https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/architecture-spotlight-the-martello-towers-of-dublin/

The first of the twelve Martello towers in north Dublin was located at Red Rock Sutton Creek**:** https://visithowth.ie/the-martello-towers/

Additional Information

'Billy Pitt had them built: the Napoleonic towers in Ireland' Clements Bill (*The Holliwell Press*) From *'History Ireland'* Sylvie Kleinman centre for war studies, Trinity College Dublin. Article may be viewed at this link: https://www.historyireland.com/uncategorized/billy-pitt-built-napoleonic-towers-ireland

Several images of Martello Towers feature at this link: https://curiousireland.ie/category/time-period-of-styles/military-forts-martello-towers/

Footnotes

[v] Architecture Spotlight (https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/architecture-spotlight-the-martello-towers-of-dublin/) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[vi] Origins of Martello Towers (http://www.askaboutireland.ie/learning-zone/primary-students/looking-at-places/dun-laoghaire-rathdown/martello-towers/origin-of-the-martello-to/) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[vii] The Martello Towers (https://visithowth.ie/the-martello-towers/) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[viii] Martello Tower (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martello_tower) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[ix] Balbriggan (https://www.independent.ie/regionals/fingalindependent/localnotes/200-years-of-balbriggan-martello-tower-27774914.html) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[x] Martello Towers in Ireland (https://martellotowers.co.uk/ireland) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[xi] Martello Towers (http://www.corkshipwrecks.net/martellowtowerscork.html) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[xii] Martello Towers in Ireland (https://martellotowers.co.uk/ireland) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[xiii] Garnish Island (https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/20910421/martello-tower-garinish-island-garinish-island-county-cork) [Assessed 28ᵗʰ February 2021]

[xiv] Haulbowline (https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/20908769/haulbowline-island-haulbowline-island-cork) [Assessed 29ᵗʰ February 2021]

[xv] Martello Towers (http://www.corkshipwrecks.net/martellowtowerscork.html) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xvi] Martello Towers in Ireland (https://martellotowers.co.uk/ireland) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xvii] Howth Martello Tower (https://curiousireland.ie/howth-martello-tower-howth-north-co-dublin/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xviii] Architecture Spotlight (https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/architecture-spotlight-the-martello-towers-of-dublin/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xix] The Martello Towers (https://visithowth.ie/the-martello-towers/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xx] Ibid.

[xxi] Architecture Spotlight (https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/architecture-spotlight-the-martello-towers-of-dublin/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xxii] Killiney (https://curiousireland.ie/killiney-martello-tower/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xxiii] Martello Towers in Ireland (https://martellotowers.co.uk/ireland) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxiv] Portmarnock (https://curiousireland.ie/carrick-hill-martello-tower/) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxv] Portrane (https://curiousireland.ie/tower-no-6-balcarrick-portrane-beach-co-dublin-1804/) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxvi] Martello Towers in Ireland (https://martellotowers.co.uk/ireland) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxvii] Architecture Spotlight (https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/architecture-spotlight-the-martello-towers-of-dublin/) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxviii] James Joyce Tower https://web.archive.org/web/20130703200612/http://www.dun-laoghaire.com/profile/joyce_tower/index.html) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxix] Old Skerries (https://oldskerries.ie/the-martello-towers/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xxx] Skerries (https://curiousireland.ie/skerries-martello-tower/) [Assessed 28th February 2021]

[xxxi] Ibid.

[xxxii] Martello Towers in Ireland (https://martellotowers.co.uk/ireland) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxxiii] History / Martello (https://martellotowersutton.com/history/) [Assessed 29th February 2021]

[xxxiv] Coastal Treasurers (https://coastmonkey.ie/history-martello-towers/) [Assessed 29th February 2021]