

Appendix 3 – Conservation Statement

The Wish Tower, Martello Tower No.73, Eastbourne

Conservation Statement prepared by Nicholas Antram IHBC, MRTPI

1.0 Introductory

- 1.1 This document must be read in conjunction with Eastbourne Borough Council's Planning Brief for The Wish Tower Restaurant King Edward's Parade
- 1.2 The Wish Tower is a scheduled Ancient Monument, National Monument No.32262 and any proposed repairs or alterations will require consent under the Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979, known as Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). Annexed to this report is the Schedule entry and plan showing the scheduled area. The latter excludes the restaurant but includes the public lavatories.
- 1.3 The purpose of this statement is to supplement the Council's Planning Brief with more specific guidance on what aspects of the monument are considered important and so to inform possible changes required for a new use.

2.0 History of Martello Towers

- 2.1 The Schedule entry details the history and significance of Martello towers and describes the monument in some detail. Briefly, the South coast Martello towers were built between 1805-10 as part of the defence of the Kent and Sussex coast from the threat of invasion by Napoleonic forces. A chain of 74 bombproof gun towers was erected from Seaford, in the west, to Folkestone in the east. Of the 74 built 25 survive. A further group of towers was built slightly later along the Essex and Suffolk coast.
- 2.2 No South coast tower ever fired a gun in anger but they continued to form a recognised part of the Country's defences, with some being re-equipped with heavier guns in the 1860s. In the early 20th century many were sold off but were requisitioned once more for use against the fear of invasion during World War II. Tower 73 was armed again at this later period.

3.0 Design of Tower 73

- 3.1 A standard design was used for the South coast Martello's. The form is essentially that of an upturned flower pot with massively thick walls of good quality brick, set in a mortar consisting of lime, ash and hot tallow, and finished with a coat of cement render. The tapering, or battered, form of the walls would help deflect cannon shot. To give greater protection from attack the walls were thicker towards the sea. This results in a slightly elliptical form to the tower and the circular plan of the interior is not entirely concentric with the exterior.
- 3.2 Tower took advantage of a natural rise and was set within a dry moat, the spoil from which was used to enhance the existing mound or glacis beyond a retaining wall, protecting the tower from ground assault and cannon fire. In 1959 the moat was partly filled in and the South West section of the glacis removed. A café was built in this area in 1960.
- 3.3 As a defensive structure the number of external openings is minimal. The entrance is on the side away from the sea and set at a height measured with the sill above the height that could be reached by a man with outstretched arms standing on the shoulders of another. A drawbridge connected the entrance to the glacis but a timber stair now affords access. On either side was a window, that on the east was enlarged, to provide a second entrance, at some time between 1886 and the 1930s, during which time the tower was used as a museum of geology. An additional entrance was also introduced at some stage beneath the drawbridge entrance, but this was subsequently closed off again.
- 3.4 The tower is arranged on three levels. At the lowest level was the magazine and stores, with slate-lined cisterns below. Access was via a trap door to the floor above, later replaced with two spiral staircases. The garrison level (designed for 24 men under a single officer) is a brick vaulted space with a central column to take the weight of the gun. This was originally divided by timber partitions, forming an entrance lobby, officers' quarters and men's quarters, and a store. Two fireplaces heated the quarters.
- 3.5 On the roof, (accessed by a stairway within the thickness of the wall) a single 32-pounder gun was mounted on a pivot in the centre. The forward end of the gun carriage was mounted on wheels running on a circular iron rail in the floor. In 1940 a pair of six-inch guns was placed in front of the tower and a concrete observation post (later removed) was erected on the roof.

4.0 Key aspects of historic character which must inform future changes

- 4.1 The description of the structure in section 3 says much about the essential defensive character of the tower which must be preserved in any future use of the building and site.
- 4.2 First and foremost the monument was a defensive structure. This aspect of character has been eroded by the external stair and, more significantly, by the infilling of the moat and removal of part of the glacis. Excavation of the moat to its original level and reinstatement of the glacis and retaining wall is highly desirable and could be achieved with a building under a grass roof.
- 4.3 Access should remain via the original entrance, preferably with a lightweight bridge over the moat or with a lightweight staircase. Alternative secondary access need not be ruled out, using one or other of the two later access points mentioned above; however this would need to be judged against the benefits of an overall proposal.
- 4.4 Any new building within the context of the monument must leave the monument as the dominant structure and allow its historic function to be understood. It goes without saying therefore that any new structure must be well below the height of the tower. The historic landscape context of the monument is that it was seen rising from a shingle beach and relied on intervisibility with neighbouring towers for mutually supporting fire. Whilst this context has changed it is helpful to understand the historic context in considering future possibilities.
- 4.5 There is little scope for gaining more natural light into the tower, as any new windows would compromise the all-important defensive character. However, there may be creative and subtle ways of introducing natural light using very small openings or light tubes, perhaps utilising chimney flues. Once again, any such 'negative' changes would need to be balanced against the merits of an overall proposal which improves the understanding of the structure.
- 4.6 Some Martello towers have been converted to residential use, with additional glazed storeys added to the roof, for example tower 61 at Pevensey. This is not an approach which works well with the defensive character of the structure (the prime

purpose of which was to mount a cannon for attacking a maritime invasion force) and does not aid understanding of its purpose.

- 4.7 Whilst an additional storey would be controversial and is not advocated it should not be completely ruled out. Recent examples in East Anglia have introduced extra accommodation at roof level with greater subtlety, for a digital arts venue with look-out at Jaywick and a residential conversion of a Suffolk Martello by Piercy Connors Architects where the roof appears to float above the structure.
- 4.8 The substantial interior structure of pier and vault supporting the rooftop emplacement are crucial features to an understanding of the tower's purpose and how it worked. Any changes must aim to preserve the legibility of form and function. The Schedule entry describes the interior and identifies specific internal features of importance.
- 4.9 New intervention must be legible as such and therefore it is likely that any new work would be of contemporary design and probably using modern materials to contrast and not confuse the understanding of the historic fortified structure. For the same reasons it is probable that any new building within the vicinity of the monument would also be designed in a contemporary manner using modern materials.

5.0 Repair, Maintenance and Interpretation

- 5.1 The Wish Tower is currently forlorn and neglected and there is no positive relationship between it and the adjoining café use. From the south the tower is seen as an alien structure set behind a garden and attached to the much larger café building. From the beach the tower is obscured by the café. The best view is obtained from the north, where, with the fall of the land, some impression of the tower's defensible purpose can be appreciated.
- 5.2 It is self-evident that there is an inherent conflict between the functionality of the tower as a defence structure and the leisure activity of prime seafront promenade, nevertheless repair and reuse of the Wish Tower provides an opportunity for an imaginative re-presentation of the immediate context which aims to increase understanding of the historic purpose of the tower.

5.3 Repair and maintenance of the Wish Tower is an ongoing process and any development proposal needs to provide for both short-term repair and long-term repair and maintenance. Interpretation must also be a part of the future strategy.

6.0 Impact Assessment

6.1 Every conservation decision requires an impact assessment so that the decision maker can be properly informed of the impact of the proposal.

6.2 The first task is to understand the historic significance of the structure and the wider site. Much information is provided in this document as a foundation for a more comprehensive analysis of the historic significance. In addition, more site-specific detail will be required, including a measured survey.

6.3 A condition report will be needed and, as part of any proposals, a repair specification.

6.4 The impact of proposals – for repair and alteration to the Wish Tower, for changes to its setting, and the impact of new uses both of the structure and its environs – will need to be considered and documented. The need and justification for the work must be set down. Impacts may be beneficial or adverse. With any adverse impacts it will be especially important to justify and to reduce or mitigate.

6.5 The English Heritage publication *Informed Conservation: Understanding historic buildings and their landscape for conservation*, Kate Clark 2001, is a useful guide to conservation planning.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Tower 73 has been put to various low-key uses since it ceased its military function. Its character has been compromised by work carried out to the environs in 1959-60 and an opportunity now exists for imaginative redevelopment of the site which undoes the harm done in 1959-60, repairs and provides a new use for the tower itself and aids understanding of the military purpose of the monument. Whilst the nature of the building imposes considerable limitation to changes it can be a stimulus for an imaginative solution, which achieves these objectives.

1.
1065

KING EDWARD'S PARADE

Statue of Spencer Compton,
Eighth Duke of Devonshire,
K G (1833/1908) Mayor of
Eastbourne 1897/98

TV 6198 7/73

II

2.

In gardens in front of Grand Hotel. Bronze on granite plinth. Erected 1910. Depicted standing, wearing Chancellor's robes and 'George' collar.

1.
1065

KING EDWARD'S PARADE

Wish Tower

Martello Tower No. 73

Ancient Monument

2

2.

Martello Tower erected in 1806 as a defence. The walls are 8 feet thick built of brick with a cement coating. The door is 20 feet above the ground. Inside was a magazine with 2 rooms above it. On the roof was a gun emplacement. This Tower has been largely spoiled during the 1939/1945 war by an observation post or range finding look-out having been built on top of it with a square roof that juts out in front.

1.
1065

LANGNEY RISE

Langney Priory

TQ 60 SW 13/38

27.5.49.

II*

3

2.

The oldest portion of this house is the chapel, refectory and dormitory built by the Cluniacs before 1121 as part of the Grange of St Pancras at Lewes. On 1st floor, garderobe and roof supported by tongued and grooved kingpost. Doorway in church reputed to be of Saxon origin. The walls are chequered work composed of rectangles of sandstone and knapped flints placed alternately. There are 2 buttresses on the South side of which the Western 1 is narrower than the other. It has a double chamfered modified abacus above the ground level, and above this is wider than below, being on that level hollow, and part of the adjoining room on the 1st floor with a window in it. A very unusual feature of which the purpose is obscure but may be connected with the smuggling trade. The South wall has 1 trefoil headed lancet and 3 square-headed windows, 1 of 2 lights. The East wall has a window of 2 lights with cinque-foiled heads and a quatrefoil between these and the pointed arch of the window. This part of the building has a fine timbered roof, now covered with tiles.