



Victorian Forts Network RESOURCES

Topic:	Topic
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Content:	Replica 7- inch RML Zinc Cylinders at Steep Holm

1. Background

From PFS Fort Log Bristol 1

The island of Steep Holm was fortified in the 1860s, along with fortifications on Brean Down, Flat Holm and Lavernock Point to provide a defensive line across the Bristol Channel protecting the commercial ports of Bristol, Cardiff and Newport.

Steep Holm is an island of around 49 acres with an average height above sea level of about 200 feet. As its name suggests the island is bordered by steep cliffs with few landing places. In the 1865 the War Department leased seven parcels of land dotted around the coast of the Island to build the fortifications.

At the top of the zig-zag path leading from the landing place at the eastern end of the island, Tombstone Battery was built at a height of 217 feet for a single 7-inch RML. The battery was named after a gravestone found on the site and incorporated into the sidearm shed. Like all of the other gun batteries. Tombstone Battery had its own underground magazine which stored both cartridges and filled shells. The magazine was built into the hill-side to the rear of the battery and it had a capacity for 12 barrels of powder or 56 zinc cylinders containing charge bags.

2. Restoration Project

Tombstone Battery has been selected some restoration activities and this has included fixtures and fittings for the Cartridge Store.

Zinc Cylinders were used to store made-up gun powder charges within expense magazines. As well being used to store the charges, the cylinders were used to safely transfer the charges to the gun for loading. Steep Holm Trustee and Palmerston Forts Society member Mark Harris has produced a batch of fourteen replicas of these 7-inch RML Zinc Cylinders to equip the restored Cartridge Store.

Ther photos show the quality of the work and the final appearance of the cylinders. Mark has adopted a very pragmatic strategy in this work. Wherever possible, he has used available products and materials that are a close match to the originals. As he readily admits, they are not exact copies but "pretty damn close". Perhaps it is more accurate to call them facsimiles than replicas. In any case, they are an excellent tool for interpretation of the site by the public.

The main body of the cylinders were made from tubing normally used for woodwork dust extraction systems. Paint kettles were cut down to form the lids and the handles came from some cheap coal scuttles bought from eBay. All the other parts were made scratch built by hand.

You can get more details on the materials and techniques used by contacting Mark at Steep Holm or via: enquiries@palmerstonfortssociety.org.uk







