

DEFENCE AREA 30

SALTFLEETBY

1. Area details:

The defence area lies on the S side of Saltfleet, 6 miles NNW of Mablethorpe, and 7 miles E of Louth.

County: Lincolnshire.

Parishes: Saltfleetby All Saints / Saltfleetby St. Clement / Theddlethorpe St. Helen.

NGR: centre of area, TF 466917.

1.1 Area Description: [see Map 1].

The defence area lies both along the coast - an expanse of sand dunes, salt marsh, and open sand - and inland where a number of small settlements stand amongst a chequer-board pattern of small fields lined by sharp-angled drains. A few roads either run parallel with the coast or approach it at right angles following the line of the drains. The largest water way is the Great Eau, which, in the southern part of the area, turns inland to flow south.

The continuous line of sand dunes on the coastal front, some rising to a considerable height in the area of Rimac, are now a National Nature Reserve, and access points with visitor information are provided at locations that correspond with the Second World War defended localities.



Fig. 1 - UORN 16198: the church tower of Saltfleetby St. Clement was used as an observation post during the war, and provides a good view over a wide area.



The focal points of the area are these access points - from the north, Sea View, Rimac, and Sea Bank respectively. The first two were known by these names by the military, but the latter was termed by them, 'Olivers'. The area contains a number of viewsheds - firstly, the expanses of salt marsh and sand around each of the three access points, with their surviving defence works, and secondly inland, at two adjacent areas where defence works are positioned at road junctions. At the centre of the northern part of the area, the tower of Saltfleetby St. Clement church which served as an observation post in 1940/41 [see Fig. 1] can be seen over a wide distance, and helps link the coastal defence visually with that further inland.

2. Assessment.

2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

Defence overview -

From late 1940 to 1941, the Saltfleetby area was part of 'A' Sub Sector of 'C' Sector of the Lincolnshire coast, defended by the 205th Infantry Brigade of 1 (Lincoln County) Division of I Corps.¹ Earlier, in August 1940, the defending brigade had been the 1st Guards Brigade, with its forward battalion, the 2nd. Bn. The Hampshire Regiment, setting up Forward Section Posts that consisted of pillboxes sited for beach defence with additional three-man fire trenches dug on their landward side. The Great Eau drain would have served as a rear anti-tank ditch. It is likely as well that Bren light machine gun sections were placed in the saltings forward of these defence locations. In addition, a defence in depth was established, with inland pillboxes, roadblocks, and observation posts manned by the local Home Guard.² Demolitions and craterings of bridges and roads were also

prepared, these being categorised by their level of importance and the precise action to be taken in the event of an invasion.³



Fig. 2 - The Forward Section Post [defended locality] at Sea View in an air photograph taken in 1953. Defence works, including anti-tank blocks, are visible. The Great Eau drain and the A1031 road run behind.

¹ TNA: PRO WO 166/896; TNA: PRO WO 166/4562; and TNA: PRO WO 166/1058.

² TNA: PRO WO 166/4324.

³ TNA: PRO WO 166/3568 and TNA: PRO WO 166/898.



In early 1941 the defending battalion was the 7th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment, and by this time the Forward Section Posts (or platoon localities) in the Saltfleetby area were known (from north to south) as Sea View, Rimac, and Olivers. Each was defended by medium and light machine guns, mortars, and anti-tank rifles.⁴ They would have had wired perimeter defences, and very likely there were continuous barbed wire entanglements along the whole coastal front. Some use of concrete anti-tank blocks was made, but tubular anti-tank scaffolding does not appear to have been erected. Later 6pdr QF Hotchkiss guns were positioned at Rimac and Olivers, and a 75mm gun at Sea View.⁵ By mid-1941, the defending battalion was the 7th Bn. Leicestershire Regiment, with two companies forward on the coast in the Saltfleetby area. Anti-tank mines were laid widely, in set area minefields, at road blocks, at gaps in the dunes, and at bridges over the drains. The rear defended localities were manned by the Home Guard.⁶



Fig. 3 - The Forward Section Post (defended locality) at Rimac in an air photograph taken in 1953. Pillboxes and slit trenches, since destroyed, are visible.

The defence works -

Some excellent examples of defence works survive, both on the coast and inland, and, together with the documentary evidence, they enable the defence strategy to be understood. The best survival is at Sea View, where a pillbox can be seen on a sand dune above the car park. This still shows evidence of its original camouflage [UORN 5131]. Adjacent to the car park are concrete cubes placed edge to edge that, with an earthwork set forward of them, long since destroyed, formed an anti-tank barrier blocking the exit here through the dunes [UORN 5132]. On top of the

⁴ TNA: PRO WO 166/4562.

⁵ TNA: PRO WO 166/1058.

⁶ TNA: PRO WO 166/4421.



dunes to the south-east are the rare remains of a Ruck Machine Gun Post, half-hidden amongst the undergrowth [UORN 16248]. Below it is a Lincolnshire-type three-bay pillbox, with its central open chamber for anti-aircraft fire [UORN 16234]. To the north, a further Lincolnshire type pillbox [UORN 5130] now stands marooned amongst the salt marshes, which, at the time it was built, were probably open sands [see under 'Landscape']. Also to the north, air photographs show three gun pits that may be the remains of an anti-aircraft battery positioned in 1944 for anti-Diver operations [UORN 16233].



Fig. 4 - UORN 5131: pillbox dug into the sand dunes above Sea View, with concrete lumps on the roof to break up its outline.



Fig. 5 - UORN 16248: the remains of a rare Ruck Machine Gun Post above Sea View.



Fig. 6 - UORN 5132: concrete cubes that once formed part of an anti-tank barrier protecting Sea View. If these defences were not so overgrown, their purpose could be better understood.



Fig. 7 - UORN 5130: Lincolnshire- type three-bay pillbox.

Rimac has been swept clear of its defence works, but three good examples of Lincolnshire type pillboxes do survive to its south on what would have been the beach front in 1940 [UORNs 16249, 16250, and 16251]. Olivers is represented by the surviving pillbox, UORN 2080, which probably formed the principal component of the Section Post itself. Also, in this locality, still set in lines on the sands, are a number of iron posts which may be survivors of obstacles set up here against the danger of German aircraft landing on the sands.



Inland at Saltfleetby All Saints, pillboxes, an anti-tank cylinder, and a Home Guard store are reminders of the in depth defence system. Here were the positions of mined roadblocks covered by fire from the pillboxes, which were also armed with anti-aircraft weapons.



Fig. 8 - UORN 5138: the only surviving evidence of one of several roadblocks within the area. The concrete obstacles were fronted with anti-tank mines set beneath the road surface ready for detonation.



Fig. 9 - UORN 16252: possible iron anti-landing posts on the open sands at the south of the defence area.



2.2 Landscape:

Wartime, and immediately post-war, air photographs appear to show that the area of salt marsh that now fronts the coast between Sea View and Rimac, as well as extending a good distance to the south, has formed since the war. Pillboxes that currently appear marooned amongst marsh, or which front expanses of reed bed, were probably, when built, at the edge of open sand. This change, therefore, has to be borne in mind when viewing the surviving coastal defence works.

The establishment of the Saltfleetby - Theddlethorpe Nature Reserve ensures that there is good access to the coast at Sea View, Rimac, and Sea Bank (Olivers). In the area of the latter, however, an air bombing range, which was also in use during the war, means there is restricted access here when the red flags are flying.

Inland, the pattern of fields, drains, and roads, with the occasional small settlement, is little changed from that which prevailed during the war. The sites of the roadblocks can be determined from documentary evidence, and from the positions of surviving pillboxes. Roadblock, UORN 16217, for instance, is described as being 'at The Prussian Queen', and this public house still stands looking largely unchanged from sixty years ago. Bridges over the drains that were prepared for demolition have been replaced with modern structures.

The nature reserve is set with information boards and maps, and footpaths allow for access to all the surviving defence works on the coast. However, inland, the three pillboxes and Home Guard store stand on private land, and permission would have to be obtained for a close inspection.



Fig. 10 - Air photograph taken in 1953 showing the coastline from a point south of Rimac looking north towards Sea View. Areas of open sand have turned into salt marsh in more recent years.



2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

This defence area is large, but has been selected as it enables both coastal and inland defences to be viewed and their purpose understood. It reflects as well the combined defence strategies of the Field Army working in conjunction with the Home Guard, with the coastal front defence the responsibility of the former and the inland area defence that of the latter.

The three forward defended localities are still very clear on the ground today, in particular at Sea View where the defence works survive best. The various examples of Lincolnshire-type three bay pillboxes are nearly all in very good condition, and make a significant group of this pillbox type. The Ruck Machine Gun Post, although incomplete, is an important survival of this rarely found structure, and it is vulnerable to further damage. At Sea View, the rows of anti-tank blocks are a reminder that a principal threat came from enemy armoured fighting vehicles, which the defences were designed to contain.

If the posts on the sands at the south of the area can be confirmed as anti-landing obstacles, this will be one of the very few places in the country where such defences remain in situ.

This is a most interesting area of unspoilt landscape in which the establishment of a 'pillbox walk', with public information on the Second World War heritage, would provide a valuable asset.

3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works within the defence area, both on the coast and inland, be considered of national importance. They enable the Second World War defence of the Lincolnshire coast to be interpreted, and provide evidence of the articulation of the defence and the inter-relationship of its functionally different components. Such interpretation is assisted by the documentary evidence provided in this report of defence structures that were built as part of the overall strategy, but which have now been removed.
2. That especial consideration be given to the preservation of the Ruck Machine Gun Post [UORN 16248] which is a rare structure vulnerable to further damage.
3. That the vegetation be cleared from around the anti-tank cubes [UORN 5132] in order that they may be seen better.
4. That, in a possible initiative with Lincolnshire County Council, a 'pillbox walk' be established at the Sea View and Rimalc locations. An information board on the Second World War defence heritage could be set up within the car parks at both places, adding to the topographical and natural history information that is already provided.



4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1 and 4-9 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 23.10.2002.

Fig. 2 - WAD/2 fr.0099 (1.2.1953) - NMR.

Fig. 3 - WAD/2 fr.0097 (1.2.1953) - NMR.

Fig. 10 - 58/1005 N1 fr.0107 (3.2.1953) - NMR.

4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'Defence Scheme - Right Sub Sector, 1st Guards Brigade', 1.8.1940 (from 2nd Bn. The Hampshire Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4324.

'Operation Instruction No.1', August 1940 and 'Operation Order No.3', 18.2.1941 (from 23rd Field Company Royal Engineers War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/3568.

'"B" Sector Defence Scheme', September 1940 (from 3rd Infantry Brigade HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/898.

'Operation Instruction No.11', March 1941 (from 2nd Infantry Brigade War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/896.

'Battalion Defence Scheme', 2.6.1941 (from 7th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4562.

'Defence Scheme "A" Sub Sector', 27.8.1941 (from 7th Bn. Leicestershire Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4421.

'Defence Scheme for "C" Sector of the Lincolnshire Coast', 1.9.1941 (from 205th Infantry Brigade War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1058.

4.3 **Aerial Photographs:**

MSO 31140 fr.05724 (14.7.1940) - NMR.

MSO 31140 fr.05729 (14.7.1940) - NMR.

AC/186 fr.5002 (27.1.1943) - NMR.

CPE/UK/2012 fr.4245 (16.4.1947) - NMR.

541/110 fr.3072 (27.7.1948) - NMR.

WAD/2 fr.0097 (1.2.1953) - NMR.

WAD/2 fr.0099 (1.2.1953) - NMR.

58/1005 N1 fr.0107 (3.2.1953) - NMR.

540/1009 fr.128 (4.2.1953) - NMR.

TF 4692/7 fr.04 (8.8.1994) - NMR.

4.4 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**

TF 4490-4590 (1972) - BLML.

TF 4491-4591 (1972) - BLML.

TF 4492-4592 (1972) - BLML.

TF 4691-4791 (1973) - BLML.

TF 4692-4792 (1973) - BLML.

4.5 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

