

# DEFENCE AREA 35

## FREISTON SHORE

### 1. Area details:

Freiston Shore is 2 miles E of Freiston village and 5 miles E of Boston.

County: Lincolnshire.

Parish: Freiston.

NGR: centre of area, TF 397424.

### 1.1 Area Description: [see Map 1].

The defence area lies at the edge of the Fen landscape east of Boston at a point where it merges with salt marsh and sand banks before the open sea. A RSPB nature reserve has recently been established here [see 'Landscape']. The flat farming lands to the west are protected by a system of sea banks running parallel with the coast. These were fortified in 1940 against enemy landing.

The central focal point of the area is the small settlement of Freiston Shore (once a seaside resort in the first half of the nineteenth century). Viewsheds are formed by the salt marsh and sea to the east, and by the sinuous course, north and south, of the inner sea bank on which most of the defence works were constructed.



*Fig. 1 - The settlement of Freiston Shore was once a seaside resort where horse racing was held on the beach. There were at least two hotels, of which this ruined building may have been one, possibly the Marine Inn which provided accommodation for the defending platoon in 1940/41.*





*Fig. 2 - The settlement at Freiston Shore in an oblique air photograph taken in 1969.*

## 2. Assessment.

### 2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

#### *Defence overview -*

In 1940-1941, the Freiston Shore coastal area was part of 'A' Sector of the Lincolnshire coast, defended in July 1940 by the 131st Infantry Brigade, and then later by the 212th Infantry Brigade, of the 1st (Lincoln County) Division of I Corps.<sup>1</sup> The infantry brigade held the coast with three battalions forward, of which the centre battalion was the 'Boston Battalion' which was responsible for a defence Area that included Freiston Shore. Forward posts (defended localities) were established on the sea wall, with one at Freiston Shore, and a system of defence in depth was organised around 'Bases' (nodal points) that, adjacent to Freiston, included Boston, Sutterton, and Kirton.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the battalion forward defended localities, Freiston Shore was also the site of an Emergency Coast Defence Battery. One particular role of the infantry defended locality was the battery's protection. The battery was operational by mid-June 1940, the two 6in. Mk.VII guns being manned by the 321st Coast Battery RA. The gun emplacements were disguised as bungalows, and air photographs taken in 1953 show that the camouflage pitched roofs were still in place at that date [see Fig. 3].

<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/896; TNA: PRO WO 166/982; and TNA: PRO WO 166/1065

<sup>2</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/982 and TNA: PRO WO 166/1065.





*Fig. 3 - Portion of an air photograph taken in 1953, showing [towards the bottom edge] the buildings of the Freiston Shore Battery, with pitched roofs concealing the two 6in gun emplacements.*

In 1940, troops at Freiston Shore were from the 1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment, and later, towards the end of July, the 1st. Bn. Duke of Wellington's Regiment who were ordered to take up their positions 'when the pillboxes are complete'.<sup>3</sup> In March 1941, the Boston Battalion was the 10th Bn. Gloucestershire Regiment which carried out a reorganisation of the defences.<sup>4</sup>

The forward defended localities were made up of pillboxes with wired perimeters and surrounding slit trenches. The pillboxes were stocked with ammunition, grenades, and food and water: the white concrete was darkened with mud, and sharp outlines broken up by earth and grass. A continuous belt of triple Dannert wire fronted the defence positions on the sea bank. Accommodation for the defending troops at Freiston Shore, when not on duty, was in the nearby Marine Inn [see Fig. 1].<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere Nissen huts were used for accommodation, and the presence of one Nissen adjacent to pillboxes south of Freiston Shore may be a survival from this use [see as well Page 6 and Fig. 9].

In a defence reorganisation in March 1941, section posts [possibly earthworks] were loopholed for flanking fire, with breastworks built to cover the rear. The wire perimeters were brought in and thickened, and 'knife rests' set up on roads and tracks.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/4495 and TNA: PRO WO 166/4236.

<sup>4</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/4296.

<sup>5</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1065.

<sup>6</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/4296.





### *The defence works -*

The fine surviving structures of the Freiston Shore Emergency Coast Defence Battery must be mentioned here, although strictly coastal batteries are excluded from the remit of this project. However, as one of the anti-invasion infantry roles at Freiston Shore was in support of the battery, it must clearly be given its correct prominence in the overall scheme of defence at this location. The two searchlight buildings (CASLs) survive, as do the two gun emplacements and their holdfasts, as well as a number of additional buildings that were not surveyed for this report. Air photographs show the battery in July 1940 with semi-circular breastworks constructed on the outer face of the sea bank. Such breastworks can be seen around other groups of defence works to the south of Freiston Shore.



*Fig. 4 - Oblique RAF air photograph of July 1940 showing [towards the lower centre] the coastal battery on the sea bank, with its two semi-circular earthworks fronting the gun emplacements. The camouflage designed to disguise the battery as bungalows is not yet in place.*



*Fig. 5 - UORN 16238: 6in. gun emplacement of the coastal battery with its companion in the distance.*





*Fig. 6 - UORN 16244: structure to hold one of the coastal battery's two searchlights (CASLs).*

Prominent alongside the carpark at Freiston Shore is a tall type 22 pillbox [UORN 5172] with a solid upper structure probably intended as the base for an anti-aircraft gun. It is rendered with pebble dashing to assist in its camouflage.



*Fig. 7 - UORN 5172: tall type 22 pillbox, with a solid upper portion to serve as the base for an anti-aircraft gun.*

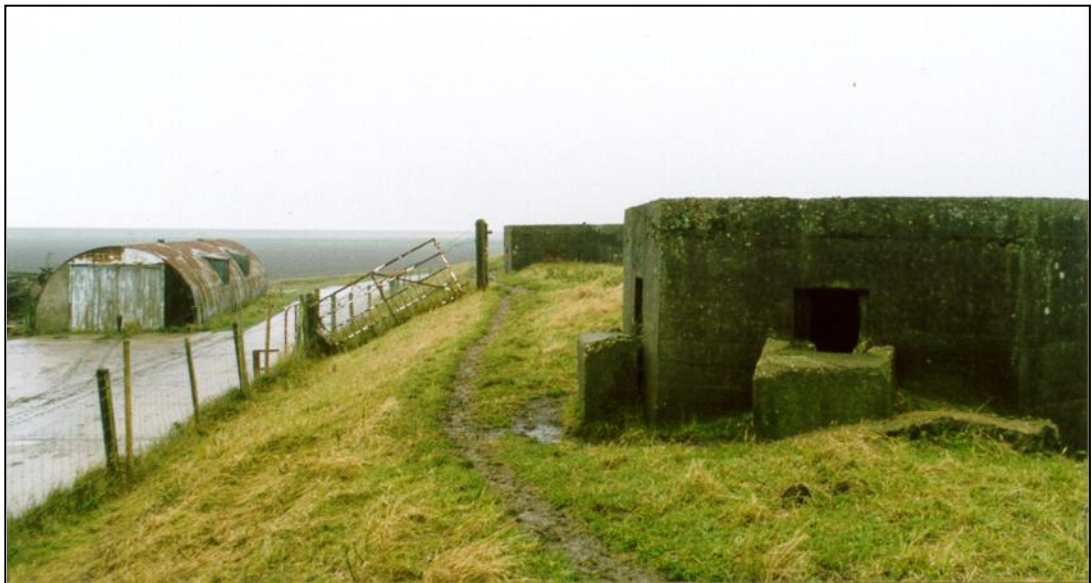
Between the gun emplacements of the coastal battery is a rectangular three-bayed 'Lincolnshire-type' pillbox (variant on a type 23) [UORN 2041] with the anti-aircraft gun mount still present in its central open chamber.





*Fig. 8 - UORN 2041: roof of 3-bayed 'Lincolnshire-type' pillbox showing the central AA gun mount. The southern CASL of the coastal battery is in the distance [see Fig. 6].*

Air photographs show that various groups of defence works were built on the sea bank north and south of Freiston Shore. All those to the north for a considerable distance have been destroyed, but to the south there is a good survival. Prominent are type 22 pillboxes, with unusual projecting external sills to the embrasures and with evidence of the roof mounting of anti-aircraft weapons. UORNs 2044 and 16021 are two such pillboxes standing close together, with a Nissen hut nearby. An air photograph of March 1941 shows the pillboxes with the Nissen hut alongside (its current position is not the original): it was probably used for accommodation, although its uncamouflaged position and vulnerability to air attack is surprising.



*Fig. 9 - UORNs 16021 and 2044, forming a strongpoint on the sea bank. The Nissen hut appears to have been for the accommodation of the defending troops, although it has been moved from its original location.*

An interesting discovery made during the fieldwork for this report were the remains of two Ruck Machine Gun Posts [UORNs 16245 and 16246] consisting of their pits and fragments of their walls. These stand on the rear edge of the sea bank in the southern part of the defence area. Use of this type of defence work on the Lincolnshire coast appears to have been relatively common, despite their rare survival today [see also Defence Areas 30 - Saltfleetby and 55 - Lawyers' Creek, Holbeach].

Although the survival of defence works south of Freiston Shore is very good, some groups of works that show on air photographs have disappeared entirely, including what might have been another battery position with semi-circular breastworks [UORN 16240].

## **2.2 Landscape:**

During the Second World War the defended sea bank was fronted by salt marsh, beyond which lay the open sea. In the 1980s, an outer bank was built, and the salt marsh between the two banks drained and converted to agricultural land. South of Freiston Shore, this recently acquired farming land remains intact, some of it farmed on behalf of the nearby North Sea open prison camp with inmates providing labour. North of Freiston Shore, however, an ambitious new project (the Washbanks Project) was implemented early in 2002. This involved breaching the outer sea wall, and re-establishing large tracts of open lagoon and salt marsh. A RSPB nature reserve has also been established, and trails and information for visitors set out. Consequently, in the northern half of the defence area, the landscape to some extent has reverted to its appearance of 1940.

Inland, and in Freiston Shore itself, the landscape has changed little in sixty years. Some fields have been enlarged, but by and large the open pattern of fields and deep drains is much the same. There has been little or no housing development in Freiston Shore, although some refurbishment work and demolition is currently under way.

Public footpaths follow the sea banks, and access to all the defence works (interior and exterior) is possible. With its other historic and wild life associations, this is a most interesting area of landscape to which the addition of public information on its Second World War heritage would provide a further valuable asset.

## **2.3 Statement of Significance:**

This defence area is of importance as it shows well the forward defended localities of the Field Army in 1940 and 1941 in their role of the defence of the Lincolnshire coast. Differing types of defence works are represented, including those of an Emergency Coast Defence Battery surviving in excellent condition as well as good examples of type 22 and 'Lincolnshire-type' (type 23 variant) pillboxes. The remains also of two Ruck Machine Gun Posts are an important discovery as this is a type of defence work that survives rarely, but which appears to have been relatively widely employed on the English east coast.



The evidence of aerial photographs enables the surviving works to be evaluated against the totality of the original defence system in this area, and to identify sites that have been destroyed.

This is a fine, 'atmospheric' landscape, with good public access to all the structures, most of which allow for interior inspection. It merits the establishment of a 'pillbox walk' and the provision of public information on its Second World War heritage.

### 3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works on the sea bank at Freiston Shore, and to the south, 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 wartime aerial photography that allows for the identification 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 possible excavation, consolidation, and preservation of UORNs 16245 and 16246 which are the remains of rare structures that are now vulnerable to total destruction.
3. That, in a possible initiative with Lincolnshire County Council and the local authority, a 'pillbox walk' be established here. An information board on the area's Second World War defence heritage could be set up within the car park at Freiston Shore. Such information should include reference to the continuity of the coastal defence beyond this area, and possibly indicate adjacent locations where defence works can be seen.

### 4. **Supporting material.**

#### 4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1 and 5-9 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 21.10.2002.

Fig. 2 - TF 3942/4 fr.068 (1.1.1969) - NMR.

Fig. 3 - 540/1078 F21 fr.0081 (18.2.1953) - NMR.

Fig. 4 - TF 3842/1 MSO 31145 fr. 01001 (14.7.1940) - NMR.

#### 4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'131st Infantry Brigade Operation Instruction No.1', 25.6.1940 (from 1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4495.

'Operation Instruction No.100', 2.7.1940 (from 3rd Infantry Brigade HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/898.

'Operation Instruction No. 2', 8.7.1940 (from 131st Infantry Brigade War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/982.

'Operation Instructions No. 4', 24.7.1940 (from 1st. Bn. Duke of Wellington's Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4236.





321st Coast Battery RA War Diary, June-December 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1816.

212th Infantry Brigade War Diary, February 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1065.

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

'Reorganisation of Defences' [memorandum], 4.3.1941 (from 10th Bn. Gloucestershire Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4296.

4.3 **Published Source:**

*Freiston Shore: Sea/Coastal and Anti-Invasion Defences* - Internet web pages - <http://www.lincolnshireairwar.co.uk/ww2freistonshore.htm>.

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

TF 3940/4 MSO 31145 fr.00998 (14.7.1940) - NMR.

TF 3941/3 MSO 31145 fr.01000 (14.7.1940) - NMR.

613C/BR19 frs. 4,5,7 (31.8.1940) - NMR.

613H/BR68 fr.14 (25.4.1941) - NMR.

TF 3942/1 MSO 31145 fr.01001 (14.7.1940) - NMR.

TF 3941/4 MSO 31155 fr.07956 (24.3.1941) - NMR.

106G/LA/67 fr.3006 (2.12.1944) - NMR.

540/1012 frs.112-113 (4.2.1953) - NMR.

540/1013 fr.76 (4.2.1953) - NMR.

540/1078 F21 frs.0081-0082 (18.2.1953) - NMR.

TF 3942/4 fr.068 (1.1.1969) - NMR.

FSL/7181 fr.1143 (5.9.1971) - NMR.

4.5 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**

TF 3841-3941 (1971) - BLML.

TF 3842-3942 (1971) - BLML.

4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

