

DEFENCE AREA 41

WEYBOURNE

1. **Area details:**

Weybourne is 3½ miles W of Sheringham and 15 miles NE of Fakenham.

County: Norfolk.

Parishes: Weybourne / Kelling / Sheringham.

NGR: centre of area, TG 111436.

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

The defence area lies west and east of the North Norfolk coastal village of Weybourne. At the centre of the sea frontage is Weybourne Hope, a point where the cliffs fall away and where today there is a car park and public access to the beach. Weybourne village is half a mile inland, and to its west are the heights of Fox and Muckleburgh Hills. To the south-west is high heathland topped by Telegraph Hill.

The focal point of the area is Weybourne Hope with viewsheds along the coast to west and east. To the west, the viewshed is closed by the rising land of the former army camp, now owned by a military museum known as the Muckleburgh Collection, and to the east by a skyline dominated by a windmill (an observation post in 1940). To the south, the land rises steeply. These viewsheds provide the boundaries to the area. On the seafront itself, to the east, the beach is backed by high cliffs, but, to the west, they are much lower and give way at the boundary of the area to salt marshes.

Beyond the eastern boundary of the area, there is a further important group of defence works. These lie on the National Trust land of Sheringham Park. Descriptions of these works are included in this report, as it is considered that a 'pillbox walk' from Weybourne Hope might incorporate them as well.



*Fig. 1 -
Looking east
from pillbox,
UORN 1051,
towards
Weybourne
Hope.*





Fig. 2 - The windmill - a Second World War observation post [UORN 15992] - seen from Weybourne Hope.

2. Assessment.

2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

Defence overview -

A fort was built at Weybourne Hope in 1588 against the threat of the Spanish Armada. An old rhyme was quoted over the centuries, 'He who would Old England win must at Weybourne Hoop begin'. In the First World War, troops were camped here, and the coast defended with a large number of pillboxes as well as earthworks.¹ One of these pillboxes survives [UORN 1057]. In the mid-1930s, a tented anti-aircraft training camp for the Territorial Army was established west of Weybourne village, in an area with a coastal frontage. In 1936-37, a permanent camp, with hutted buildings, was built, and this was occupied throughout the Second World War and afterwards. In 1959 the camp was closed, and the land acquired in the 1980s by the Muckleburgh Collection, which opened a military museum in former army buildings.² The small anti-aircraft radar station of RAF Weybourne stands nearby.



Fig. 3 - UORN 1057: First World War pillbox on land of the former army camp, now the Muckleburgh Collection military museum. It has an iron door still in place. In the Second World War it was sandbagged and used as an air raid shelter. The roof is now badly cracked and needs urgent conservation work.

¹ In December 1939 a reconnaissance was made of all concrete 'blockhouses' in the area of 53rd Infantry Brigade. A detailed list with grid references is in TNA: PRO WO 166/3756.

² *The Muckleburgh Collection*, pp28-29.



In August 1940, Weybourne lay within a Sub-Sector of Norfolk Defence Sector 'A',³ defended by 53rd Infantry Brigade (to be replaced in 1941 by 222nd Infantry Brigade). The first troops defending Weybourne were the 6th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment, but they were replaced late in August by their sister 5th Bn, the 6th Bn. becoming the reserve battalion. The 2nd Bn. Cambridgeshire Regiment were positioned on the right at Sheringham, and the 9th Bn. Northumberland Regiment on the left at Blakeney.⁴ In November 1940, and throughout 1941, the defence of the Area was taken over by the 8th Bn. Lincolnshire Regiment.⁵ The troops were told to defend their positions to the last round. The 'Defence Scheme' of the 5th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment had also stated, 'There will be no withdrawal'.⁶

Weybourne village was a designated Category 'C' defended place, with defences manned by the 4th Bn. Norfolk Home Guard. Further inland, Holt was defended as a category 'A' nodal point.⁷ The eastern boundary of the Sub-Sector was a stop line running from Stiffkey via Norwich to Beccles.⁸ It was considered that, had their forces made a landing on the North Norfolk coast, the German intention would have been to seize the port of Great Yarmouth on their left flank, and make an advance via Norwich towards London.

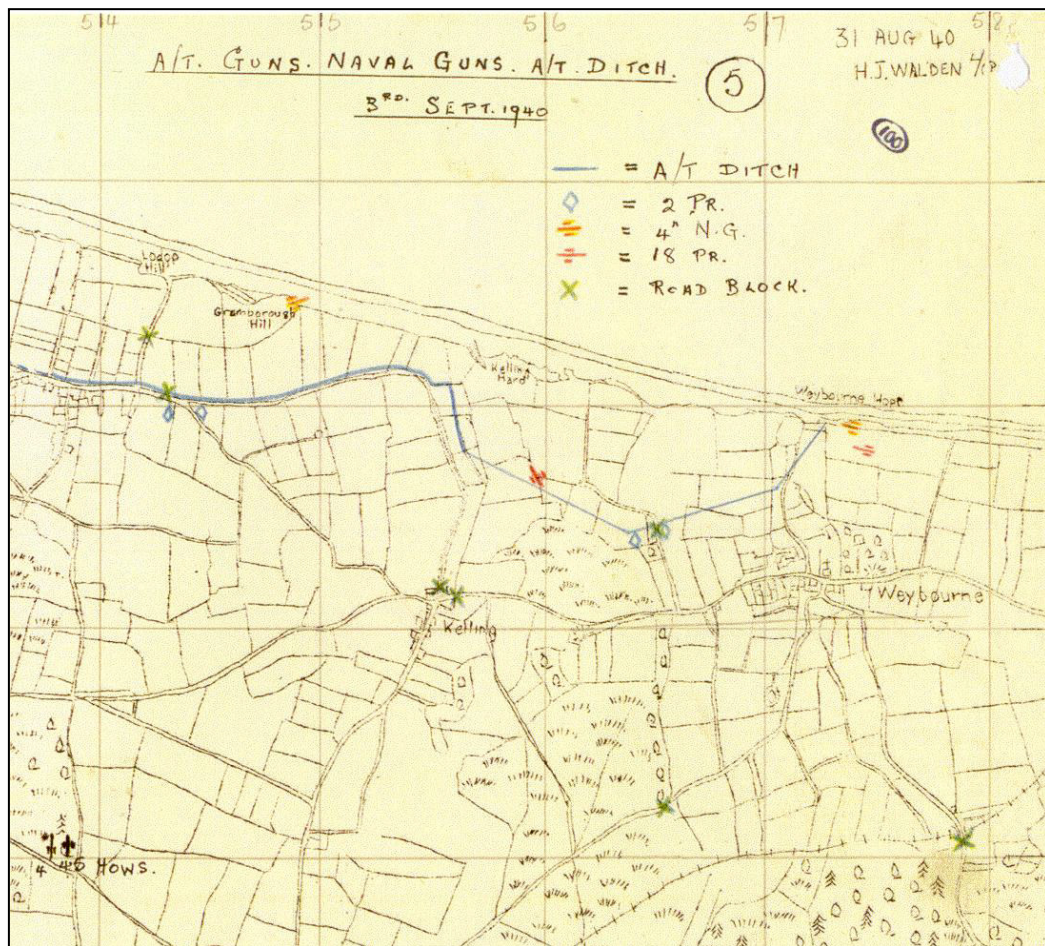


Fig. 4 - Map showing dispositions of artillery defending Weybourne, 31 August 1940. Comparable maps provide the positions of section posts, Bren guns, A/Tk. rifles, and 2in and 3in mortars.⁹

³ See Fig. 3 of Defence Area 56 - Winterton-on-Sea.

⁴ TNA: PRO WO 166/960.

⁵ TNA: PRO WO 166/4432.

⁶ TNA: PRO WO 166/4560. A veteran of the Lincolnshire Regiment stated in 2001 that, as the local pub was in his platoon area, the idea of staying 'to the last round' was quite attractive!

⁷ TNA: PRO WO 199/544 and WO 166/10881 (map).

⁸ TNA: PRO WO 166/189.

⁹ TNA: PRO WO 166/4560.



The 5th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment had three rifle companies forward, and one in reserve. They established light machine gun section posts that covered by fire all possible landing places, and set up Lyon lights above the beach against the prospect of a night landing. Roadblocks were constructed and manned, and standing patrols carried out, including one on Telegraph Hill. There was also a mobile group whose task was to operate against enemy parachutists and protect the rear of the Area. A 4in. naval gun, a 6in gun, and an 18pdr. provided artillery support - the construction of the emplacement for the 6in gun demanded the demolition of six houses [UORN 16222].¹⁰ The locations of the battalion and company battle headquarters are also recorded.¹¹

The defence works -

The defence area has been extensively cleared of its anti-invasion works, but many nevertheless remain, in particular within the boundaries of the former army camp, now the Muckleburgh Collection. The coastline and its hinterland were intensively defended, the degree of fortification steadily increasing as construction materials and weaponry became available, until, by mid-1941, the defence system was at its most developed.

Where the coastal cliffs ended, or were not considered of sufficient height and steepness to constitute a satisfactory defence, anti-tank ditches were dug. The principal such ditch was constructed from Weybourne Hope, running south-west, then west behind the army camp, before joining with natural waterways near Kelling Hard. A further short length of defensive ditch was constructed to the east of Weybourne Hope, running parallel with the cliff edge. It was evidently considered there was a danger of enemy troops scaling the low cliffs here. This ditch was never infilled, and its course can be traced today.

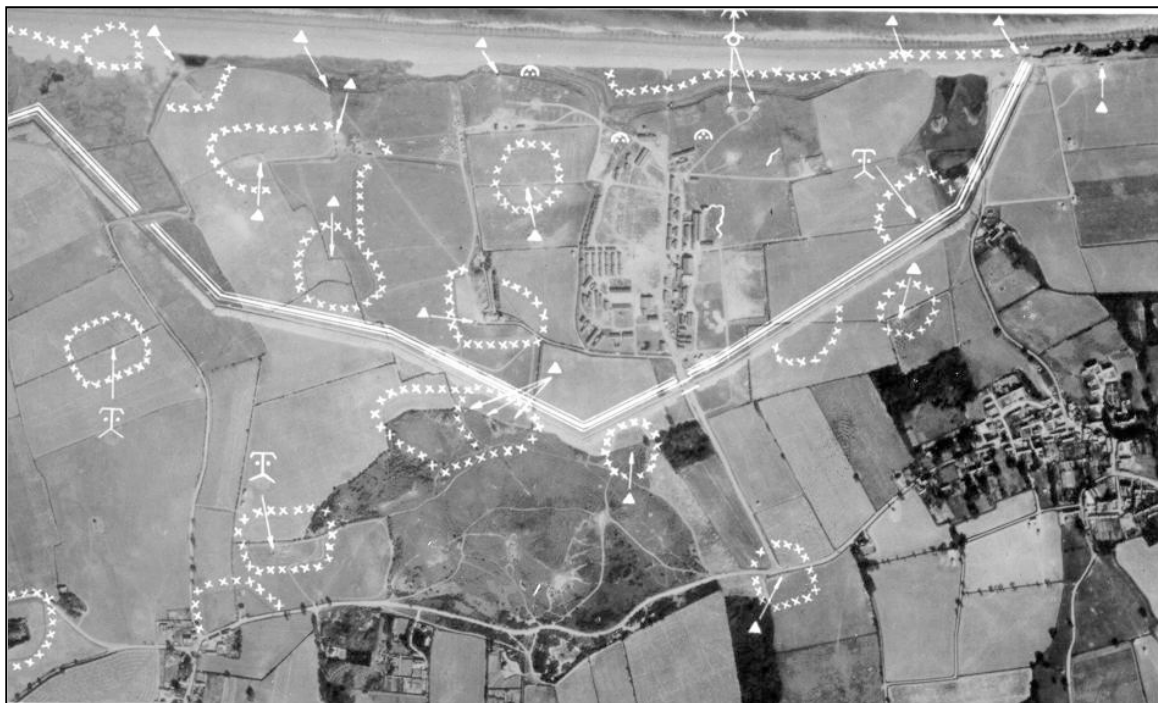


Fig. 5 - German aerial photograph taken probably in August 1940, showing defence positions, including pillboxes [triangles] with their enclosing barbed wire perimeters. The course of the anti-tank ditch south of the army camp is clear. Weybourne village lies towards the bottom right.

¹⁰ TNA: PRO WO 166/3756.

¹¹ TNA: PRO WO 166/4560.





Fig. 6 - UORN 1011: anti-tank ditch in Sheringham Park. The cliff edge has eroded by several feet since 1940. During the war, the ditch was filled with barbed wire and scaffolding.



Fig. 7 - RAF oblique aerial photograph taken in August 1940, showing the revetted anti-tank ditch ending at the Weybourne Hope beach. This point was very heavily defended, and some of the defence works can be seen in the photograph.

Other than for the roadblock at the crossing of the anti-tank ditch south of Weybourne Camp, concrete anti-tank blocks do not appear to have been used within



the study defence area. However, for linear beach-front defence, as well as for the perimeters of individual defence works, great use was made of barbed wire fences and entanglements¹². Minefields, bordered by barbed wire, were also laid - some 200 anti-tank mines, for instance, were placed between Weybourne Hope and Gramborough Hill to the west.¹³ From early in 1941, beach scaffolding, with anti-tank scaffolding behind, was added to the shore-line defence.



Fig. 8 - RAF oblique air photograph taken in August 1941, showing anti-tank scaffolding and barbed wire fences in place at the eastern end of the defence area. A pillbox [UORN 16173 - now destroyed] can also be seen.



Fig. 9 - UORNs 1090 and 16122: remains of tubular beach scaffolding projecting from the shingle. The scaffolding ran in front of the pillbox and was added after it was built.

¹² It has not proved possible to show the positions of these exactly in Map 2.

¹³ TNA: PRO WO 166/4560.

Within the area of the army camp, there were at least six 3.7in. and 5.25in. anti-aircraft gun emplacements. Although the remit of the Defence Areas Project would normally omit sites connected with the Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB), in this case three of the emplacements have been included [UORNs 1097-1098 and 16181]. They provide excellent examples of this category of defence structure, and are in good condition.



Fig. 10 - UORN 1097: one of three heavy anti-aircraft gun emplacements at Weybourne Camp. The Muckleburgh Collection plans to restore the emplacements, and present them to the public as part of their museum displays

Several good examples of Vickers machine gun pillboxes, as well as lighter infantry pillboxes, an emplacement for an anti-tank gun, and two spigot mortar pedestals, one now ex-situ, also survive on the former army camp land. Concrete cubes from the roadblock (sited very near the present museum buildings of the Muckleburgh Collection) were only removed in recent years.



Fig. 11 - UORN 1049: pillbox, with another behind [UORN 1050], on the site of the former army camp. The buildings in the background are a metrological station.





Fig. 12 - UORN 1096: gun emplacement, probably for a wheeled 2pdr. anti-tank gun. An observation post [UORN 1095] stands adjacent to this structure.

At Weybourne Hope, a substantial group of defence works once guarded this key point. Most of these were either removed in the immediate post-war years, or have since been destroyed by coastal erosion. Several fragments of concrete structures are revealed at low tide, and Defence of Britain Project records show that within recent years there were more substantial remains on the beach here.¹⁴ These, however, appear to have been destroyed recently, unless they have become buried under the shingle.

A machine gun emplacement [UORN 1068] stands perilously close to the crumbling cliff edge on the eastern heights above Weybourne Hope, and, to the south-east, a type 24 infantry pillbox can be seen in the middle of a field [UORN 1056]. Further east, three infantry pillboxes survive, with a further one (totally overgrown) near the cemetery on the south side of the Sheringham Road. This eastern part of the defence area is overlooked by the tower of the windmill, which in 1940/41 was without its sails and used as an observation post.

Beyond the eastern boundary of the defence area, a further group of defences within Sheringham Park is of considerable interest. The surviving length of anti-tank ditch [UORN 1011] has already been mentioned, and there are also good examples of a type 24 pillbox and a possible type 23 [UORNs 1053 and 1054]. The latter has recently been converted into a bird observatory. An oblique aerial photograph shows a concentration of other defence works at this point, including several slit trenches and an Allan Williams turret. The area was also used as a rifle range.

¹⁴ Defence of Britain Project Archive, NMR.





Fig. 13 - UORN 1068: emplacement for a Vickers medium machine gun, built to provide fire west across Weybourne Hope. It stands now on the very cliff edge, but was originally set some twenty feet back. Before long, it will follow at least two other pillboxes at this point that have fallen to the beach beneath.



Fig. 14 - UORN 1056: type 24 brick-shuttered pillbox, half-submerged by grass and crops.



Fig. 15 - UORN 1032: type 26 pillbox dug into a bank near Weybourne windmill.





Fig. 16 - UORN 1054: rectangular pillbox converted in 1993 into a bird observatory. Although some conversion of Second World War defence works is acceptable, and even desirable for their future preservation, in this case the alterations have destroyed the integrity of the structure, which is now hard to interpret.



Fig. 17 - Oblique RAF air photograph taken in August 1941, showing defences in the group to the east of the study defence area. Tubular scaffolding can be seen at the western end of the cliffs, with a pillbox [probably the destroyed, UORN 16173] at the head of the beach. On top of the cliffs are the butts of a rifle range, a further pillbox, slit trenches, and a domed shape that may be an Allan Williams turret, although one would have expected it to have been camouflaged.



Because of the fullness of the documentary evidence for this defence area, the positions not only of the principal headquarters of the troops defending it but also their buried battle headquarters are recorded. The latter was in a disused quarry pit just south of the A149 road west of the village, where fieldwork might be able to locate evidence of it.

2.2 Landscape:

The most significant feature of the landscape change within the defence area has been the coastal erosion that has removed up to twenty feet of the cliff face immediately east of Weybourne Hope, and a lesser distance further to the east, as well as to the west. Most of the pillboxes, therefore, that were built at the head of the beach, or on the cliff edge, have thus been removed by that erosion. There are some remarkable survivals, including pillbox, UORN 1090, which becomes a small island at high tide and has so far resisted the force of the waves. A few years' further erosion, however, will undoubtedly lead to the collapse of emplacement, UORN 1068, now perched on the very edge of the cliff. It is doubtful whether anything could be done to save it.



Fig. 18 - UORN 1090: pillbox maintaining its defiance: this time the enemy is the sea. [See also fig. 9].

The other significant landscape change has been the closing of the army camp, and the returning of some parts of this land to agriculture, while a portion of the camp has been preserved and converted into a military museum. There are now some small suburbs to the south of Weybourne village, and there has been a further housing development to the west, south of the main road, below the slopes of Telegraph Hill. The grounds of Weybourne Hall are used as a caravan park. At Weybourne Hope, a car park has been set out for visitors wishing access to the beach, and this provides a starting point for walks along the coast to west and east. Beyond the eastern boundary



of the defence area is Sheringham Park, land that is owned by the National Trust. To the south of the area, the sandy heights of Telegraph Hill enable good views to be obtained of the coastline. It was used by the Royal Artillery as an observation post. This area of Kelling Heath saw much military occupation, including a camp and several pillboxes. The battle headquarters of 53rd Infantry Brigade was also situated somewhere on its southern boundary.

Weybourne, and in particular its beach front, is much visited by summer holidaymakers. Most parts of the defence area can be reached from the coastal paths, with access possible to many individual structures. Some, however, are on private land, or stand within fields that cannot be crossed when in crop. Sites on the land of the former army camp can only be visited with permission from the Muckleburgh Collection. A 'Second World War heritage trail' through the defence area, possibly including a visit to the Muckleburgh Collection, which is a popular visitor attraction, could readily be established.

2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

The defence area represents an important sector of 1940/41 coastal defence where surviving defence works set at the very sea edge can be seen to be backed by other works further inland, some protecting a designated 'defended place', forming overall a coastal crust defence in depth. The situation of the defence works in relation to the topography of the area can also be appreciated.

The importance of the area is greatly supplemented by the excellence of the surviving documentation, which enables a very detailed local study to be made. The degree of detail available, in fact, goes far beyond the present purpose of this report, and much detail, of necessity, has had to be omitted from the defence description and from Map 2. The list of documentary sources given below will greatly assist future researchers.

Several important individual structures survive within the defence area, including a First World War pillbox, anti-aircraft gun emplacements, various machine gun and infantry pillboxes, a stretch of anti-tank ditch, and remains of beach scaffolding.

This is a good area in which to understand the form and type of Second World War anti-invasion coast defence. The visitor's interest can be supplemented through the Muckleburgh Collection, with its displays of period weaponry, surviving camp buildings, and general information on the military history of Weybourne. Provisional plans by the director of the museum to reconstruct the anti-aircraft defences of the former army camp, as well as a representative section of beach-front anti-invasion defences, is an exciting prospect which would provide an immediate and compelling visualisation of the nature of these defences at a critical time in the nation's history.

Weybourne was but one well-defended point on the Norfolk coastline, and the sweep of the beach-front to the west and the east reminds the visitor of the continuity of the anti-invasion coast defence. Other important surviving defence works lie adjacent to this area, in particular at Sheringham and Salthouse.



3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works at Weybourne, within the boundaries of the defence area as defined on Map 2, be considered of national importance. They enable the Second World War defence of the Norfolk coast at this point 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, additionally, the anti-invasion defence works lying in a group to the immediate east of the defence area, as set out on Map 2, also be considered of national importance. They can readily be visited from Weybourne, and indicate the continuous nature of the coastal anti-invasion defences.
3. That, in a possible initiative with Norfolk County Council, the local authority, and the Muckleburgh Collection, consideration be given to establishing a 'Second World War heritage trail' within, and immediately adjacent to, the defence area. Information boards might be provided at a number of points, including the car park at Weybourne Hope and at the Muckleburgh Collection.
4. That assistance be given to the Muckleburgh Collection regarding the preservation of the important First World War pillbox, UORN 1057, where the cracked roof needs urgent conservation treatment.
5. That liaison with the Muckleburgh Collection be maintained regarding their proposed presentation of Second World War anti-invasion defence works.

4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1-3, 6, 9-16, and 18 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 27.6.2002 and 20.8.2002.

Fig. 5 - 'Taktisches Luftbildbuch', p55 (?August 1940) - IWM, uncatalogued.

Fig. 7 - MSO/31030 fr.3276 (16.8.1940) - NMR.

Fig. 8 - MSO/31254 fr.19 (28.8.1941) - NMR.

Fig. 17 - MSO/31254 fr.20 (28.8.1941) - NMR.

4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

18 Division CRE War Diary, 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/468.

18 Division 'GS' War Diary, June 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/464.

'Works Progress Report - No. 2 Section', 11.7.1940 (from 287th Field Company Royal Engineers War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/3756.

'53rd Infantry Brigade Defence Scheme' (from 53rd Infantry Brigade HQ War Diary), August 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/960.

'List of Nodal Points in Eastern Command', September 1940 (from General Headquarters Papers, Home Forces) - TNA: PRO WO 199/544.



'Battalion Defence Scheme', 12.9.1940 (from 5th Bn. Royal Norfolk Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4560.
 'Battalion Defence Scheme', 14.11.1940 (from 8th Bn. The Lincolnshire Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4432.
 II Corps 'G' War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/189.
 8th Bn. Leicestershire Regiment War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/4422.
 222nd Infantry Brigade HQ War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1075.
 'Progress Report of Pillboxes', 25.4.1941 (from 240th Army Field Company Royal Engineers War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/3709.
 Norfolk and Cambridge District HQ War Diary, 1943 - TNA: PRO WO 166/10881.
 Files categorising military defence works for maintenance of demolition, 1949-1950: Weybourne - Norfolk Record Office, C/P 8/1/104.
 Survey of coastal defence works [maps], 1947-1950 - Norfolk Record Office, C/P 8/3.

4.3 **Published Sources:**

The Muckleburgh Collection [booklet] (English Life Publications, 1996).
 Christopher Bird, *Silent Sentinels: The Story of Norfolk's Fixed Defences during the Twentieth Century* (The Larks Press, 1999).
 Peter Kent, *Fortifications of East Anglia* (Terence Dalton, 1988).

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

MSO/31030 fr.3725 (16.8.1940) - NMR.
 MSO/31030 fr.3726 (16.8.1940) - NMR.
 MSO/31030 fr.3728 (16.8.1940) - NMR.
 268A/BR183 frs.3-11 (17.12.1940) - NMR.
 MSO/31254 fr.19 (28.8.1941) - NMR.
 MSO/31254 fr.20 (28.8.1941) - NMR.
 3G/TUD/UK/84 fr.5003 (26.3.1946) - NMR.
 106G/UK/1571 fr.3170 (7.6.1946) - NMR.
 106G/UK/1636 fr.4413 (9.7.46) - NMR.
 58/840 fr.5100 (11.3.1952) - NMR.
 82/707 fr.473 (4.2.1953) - NMR.
 543/986 frs8-9 (12.7.1960) - NMR.

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

TG 1042-1142 (1972) - BLML.
 TG 1043-1143 (1972) - BLML.
 TG 1242-1342 (1972) - BLML.
 TG 1243-1343 (1972) - BLML.

4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

