

DEFENCE AREA 74

ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT

1. **Area details:**

St. Michael's Mount, and Marazion, are 2½ miles E of Penzance and 12 miles from Land's End.

County: Cornwall.

Parish: St. Michael's Mount / Marazion.

NGR: centre of area, SW 515300.

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

The defence area consists of the detached rocky promontory of St. Michael's Mount, connected by a causeway at low tide to the small town of Marazion. St. Michael's Mount is crowned by a great house and castle, with terraced gardens descending the slopes to the sea. At its northern point, where the causeway joins, is a small harbour and a settlement of a few houses. As the causeway approaches Marazion, it passes a high area of detached rocks - Chapel Rock - which is not completely covered by the sea even at high tide. Marazion is a busy town, particularly in the holiday season. Behind it, steep slopes rise to a landscape of small pasture and vegetable fields. To the west, the sweep of the sandy beach of Mount's Bay stretches as far as Penzance. To the east, the rugged coastline of rocks and cliffs continues towards the Lizard Point.



Fig. 1 - St. Michael's Mount, with the causeway from Marazion.



The two foci of the defence area are St. Michael's Mount itself and the shoreline of Marazion. There are viewsheds between the two. The area is bordered by the shores of St. Michael's Mount itself, and, to the north, by the rising land behind Marazion. Arbitrary borders are selected as cut off points on the coastline to the west and east.



Fig. 2 - Chapel Rock, near the northern end of the causeway at Marazion. This rock, uncovered even at high tide, appears to have been part of the defended locality protecting the causeway.



Fig. 3 - A 1958 air photograph shows the causeway and Chapel Rock at low tide. Marazion stands amongst a patchwork of small fields.



2. Assessment.

2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

Defence overview -

St. Michael's Mount lay within No.3 Sector of the Lands End District, part of the Cornwall Sub-Area of the military South Western Area.¹ To its west, the beach of Mount's Bay stretching to Penzance was a 'classified beach', considered to be vulnerable to an enemy landing.² St. Michael's Mount was an important defended locality protecting the bay's approaches, which were also commanded by the two 4in. naval guns of Penzance Battery.³ Other adjacent defended localities were The Causeway, at the point where it passed Chapel Rock to join the Marazion shore line, Marazion Station, further west beyond the borders of the study area, and Top Tieb, a small harbour and battlemented tower on the eastern side of Marazion. The Cornish peninsula was cut in two by a stop line running between Fowey on the south coast and Padstow on the north. Wadebridge, Bodmin, and Lostwithiel on that line were designated anti-tank islands.⁴



Fig. 4 - St. Michael's Mount seen from the south in 1945. One pillbox [UORN 150] can be made out.

At the height of the invasion danger of 1940/41, it was 203rd Infantry Brigade from 48 Division that was responsible for the defence of the St. Michael's Mount and Marazion area. One company of the 11th Bn. West Yorkshire Regiment was

¹ TNA: PRO WO 166/1252 and TNA: PRO WO 166/4732.

² TNA: PRO WO 199/48 (map).

³ TNA: PRO WO 166/10904.

⁴ TNA: PRO WO 166/1252.



stationed here to defend the Marazion beaches, with a platoon manning the defences of St. Michael's Mount (one NCO and nine men). For this defence in 1941, the West Yorkshire Regiment had seventy-eight rifles (with more than 14,000 rounds of ammunition), five Bren guns, two anti-tank rifles, one 2in mortar, and a 6pdr. gun.⁵ The 6pdr. was almost certainly positioned at the Marazion Yacht Club where the embrasure for it can be seen today [UORN 11821]. A 4in naval gun was also sited on Rosehill and manned at first by the 209th Medium Battery RA, then later by the 952nd Battery.⁶ The local Home Guard unit would also have had a role in the defence of the area.



Fig. 5 - Air photograph taken at low tide in July 1946, showing St. Michael's Mount connected by its causeway to Marazion.

⁵ TNA: PRO WO 166/1056 and TNA: PRO WO 166/4732.

⁶ TNA: PRO WO 166/1056 and TNA: PRO WO 166/4732.



The defence works -

Three pillboxes, and an emplacement for a light anti-aircraft battery, were constructed on St. Michael's Mount - all these sites survive. Two of the pillboxes are of a type 24 design, but the third [UORN 153] is an interesting variant form built to fit its position between the rocks. At Marazion, a concrete emplacement for a 6pdr. gun was built into the harbour wall beneath the Yacht Club [UORN 11821]. A line of pillboxes ran around Mount's Bay to Penzance, all of which have now been removed, although several were extant until the 1960s.



Fig. 6 - UORN 11821: embrasure for a 6pdr. gun set into the harbour wall at Marazion beneath the Yacht Club.



Fig. 7 - UORN 150: hexagonal pillbox, with attached blast wall and entrance porch, facing east across Mount's Bay from St. Michael's Mount.





Fig. 8 - UORN 151: hexagonal pillbox at the southern-most point of St. Michael's Mount.



Fig. 9 - UORN 151, showing the sunken entrance way protected by a blast wall attached to the pillbox.



Fig. 10 - UORN 153: trapezoidal-shaped pillbox built to fit in a cleft in the rocks. It is made of concrete blocks and has very small embrasures. The entrance at the rear can be accessed with difficulty through a narrow gap in the rocks.



Fig. 11 - The interior of UORN 153, showing the small, splayed embrasures. The pillbox has been used as a play area by local children.



Fig. 12 - UORN 16442: a light anti-aircraft battery was positioned within this 16th century gun emplacement of the St. Michael's Mount castle.

Landscape:

Other than for some housing development, principally to the west of Marazion, there has been little change over the past sixty years in the landscape of St. Michael's Mount and Marazion. The main impact on the area has come from tourism. St. Michael's Mount, which is owned by Lord St. Leven, is much visited, in particular at the weekends when the house and gardens are open. The Mount is also in the care of the National Trust. Crossings can be made on foot, at low tide, by the causeway, and in summer by boat. Car parking at most times of the year is at a premium within Marazion, but there are large car parks to the west on the beach front.

Access to the pillboxes on St. Michael's Mount, it is believed, is by permission only from the Levan Estate, although it is possible there is public access to them on open days.

2.3 Statement of Significance:

St. Michael's Mount provides a dramatic setting for the anti-invasion defence works that survive on this part of the Cornish coast. The Mount's historic and strategic importance protecting Mount's Bay, coupled with its scenic role as a major tourist attraction, makes this a defence area of significance within the remit of the present study.

The pillboxes on the St. Michael's Mount are all in good condition, and show variations from standard types, both in terms of their form and their method of construction. The trapezoidal-shaped pillbox [UORN 153] is of particular interest, and is an excellent example of how a defence work was designed for its site and built to blend with its surroundings. At Marazion, the 6pdr. gun embrasure that can be seen within the harbour wall is an unusual and rare survival.

3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works on St. Michael's Mount, and in Marazion, be considered of national importance. They enable the defence of this section of the Cornish coast to be interpreted, and provide evidence of the articulation of the defence and the inter-relationship of its functionally different components.
2. That consideration be given, in a possible initiative with the Levan Estate and the National Trust, to providing information for visitors to St. Michael's Mount on the Second World War defence of the area. Such information could also be displayed in Marazion. Consideration might also be given to allowing the public access to the pillbox sites on St. Michael's Mount, assuming that this is not already done.

4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1-2 and 6-12 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 20-21.1.2003.

Fig. 3 - SW 5130/13 fr.0053 (1.9.1958) - NMR.

Fig. 4 - SW 5129/20 fr.0061 (11.5.1945) - NMR.

Fig. 5 - 106G/UK/1663 fr.3311 (12.7.1946) - NMR.

4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'Southern Command Home Defence Programme, 1940' (map from General Headquarters Paper, Defence Works) - TNA: PRO WO 199/48.

'Operation Instruction No.9', 28.7.1940 (from South Western Area War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1252.

'Operation Order No. 1', 13.10.1940, 'Operation Order No. 3', 11.1.1941, and 'Operation Instructions No. 5', 18.1.1941 and 15.3.1941 (from 11th Bn. West Yorkshire Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4732.

'Battle Order', 4.6.1941 (from 203rd Infantry Brigade War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1056.

'List of Coast Artillery Batteries in S.W. District', 1943 (from South Western District War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/10904.

Cornwall Sub-District War Diary, 1943 - TNA: PRO WO 166/10949.

4.3 **Aerial Photographs:**

SW 5130/7 fr.01127 (6.6.1941) - NMR.

SW 5130/8 fr.01128 (6.6.1941) - NMR.

SW 5130/9 fr.01129 (6.6.1941) - NMR.

SW 5129/20 fr.0061 (11.5.1945) - NMR.

3G/TUD/UK/209 fr.5144 (13.5.1946) - NMR.

106G/UK/1663 fr.3311 (12.7.1946) - NMR.

SW 5130/13 fr.0053 (1.9.1958) - NMR.

SW5230/2 fr.0055 (1.9.1958) - NMR.

58/6399 fr.215 (2.7.1964) - NMR.

OS/72166 fr.34 (14.6.1972) - NMR.



- 4.4 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plan:**
SW 5129 (1964) - BLML.
- 4.5 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**
[see 5. 'Annex'].

