

1.7 BROAD CHARACTER: MILITARY

1.7.1 CHARACTER TYPE: MILITARY DEFENCE AND FORTIFICATION

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: EAST ANGLIA

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The proximity of the region to continental Europe and its strategic importance, particularly with regards to London, has resulted in an outstanding defence heritage resource in East Anglia (Williams and Brown 1999, 34). The coast faces towards Europe and has low cliffs, an absence of rocks or reefs and miles of gentle, inviting beach (Williamson 2005, 144). Defences and fortifications of all periods from Roman to Modern can therefore be found along the coastline with some strategic ports such as Harwich bearing witness to centuries of re-fortification.

Roman fortifications still survive at Burgh Castle and Caister-on-Sea in the north of the region, although those to the south have not survived for a number of reasons. Medieval fortifications include Caister Castle and Orford Castle in Suffolk.



Burgh Castle

Post medieval fortifications and defences are much more common and include a range of structures from the unfortified location of the six Elizabethan 18 pound culverins on Gun Hill in Southwold to the much more substantial and long-lived Landguard Fort overlooking the peninsula in Felixstowe.

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Many of the post medieval defences in this area were a reaction to the threat from Napoleonic France including the string of 'Martello' towers stretching southwards from Aldeburgh and ultimately around to the south coast, and the Redoubt fort in Harwich.



Clacton Martello tower

The area was also highly significant for defence in both World Wars and a number of defences remain. In particular the WWII anti-invasion defence system originally stretched along almost the entire length of coast. Parts of this system remain throughout including most commonly features such as pill boxes, gun emplacements and anti-tank cubes along with associated fieldworks structures such as linking trenches. Other fortifications which survive in places include monitoring posts, anti-aircraft batteries, scaffolding obstacles and bombing decoys.

Offshore a series of four forts (known as Maunsell Forts) were built around the Thames estuary which were intended to act as an early warning system, break up aircraft formations and prevent minelaying. Two of these were located within the region and one (Rough Sands) survives today, having had a colourful history culminating in its being declared as an independent state.

The area also comprises a number of naval battlefields including Sole Bay, Kentish Knock and the Gabbard, all of which took place in the 17th century Anglo-Dutch wars.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

There is no evidence of attempts to fortify the coastline prior to the Roman invasion despite evidence indicating extensive trade and other cultural links with the Continent across the sea from the Neolithic onwards. As such the earliest defensive structures we know of are Roman in date. As outlined above two Roman fortifications still exist in the north of the region, a further structure which once stood at Walton has since been lost to the sea. All three structures were part of the system of 'Saxon Shore forts' built in the 3rd century AD to defend against the increasing threat of Germanic invasion and piracy. The line of forts stretched from Brancaster in Norfolk (Branodunum) to Porchester in Hampshire (Portus Adurni). The surviving forts at Caister and Burgh Castle were originally placed either side of a wide estuary complex (Malster 2003). This complex gradually silted up and accreted leaving the structures much further inland today. The outer walls of Burgh Castle remain almost intact although the Caister fort is now ruined.

The shore fort at Walton would have been a similar structure but in direct contrast with the northern forts this was lost to the sea as a result of coastal erosion. The fort was probably located c. 2 miles seaward of the current shore. The last of the structure is thought to have fallen into the sea in the 17th century and although drawings of the fort survive it is unclear if these are antiquarian forgeries (Williamson 2005, 13).

Following the withdrawal of the Romans and the Saxon settlement of the area the next threat from overseas came from the Vikings in the 9th to 11th centuries. No evidence survives of defensive structures, however Alfred is said to have destroyed a fleet of sixteen Viking ships attacking Harwich in 885 AD.



Orford Castle

Construction of defensive coastal structures continued into the medieval period. A keep was built inside the walls of Burgh Castle shore fort between 1095 and 1110. Records indicate that the castle still existed in the 13th century when towers and a gatehouse were added.

One of the most notable coastal defences is Orford Castle. This was built overlooking the port in 1173 by Henry II in order to help consolidate power in the region. The castle became less important after Henry's death in 1189 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>) and was briefly taken by Prince Louis of France in 1216. In 1336 Edward III sold the castle to Robert Ufford, Earl of Suffolk. By this time the port was declining as a result of silting of the harbour. The Earl of Hertford, owner of the castle in 1809 wanted to demolish the building, however its function as a navigational aid saved it. As a result of the siltation of the river the castle now stands 500 m inland.

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A castle was also built at the port of Harwich, in the 14th century, known to have still been in use in 1547, with a small harbour (the King's Quay) built onto the eastern side in the 1580s. It is likely that the first Beacon Hill fort was also constructed in the 16th century (<http://unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk>). The castle may have housed the gaol in the early 1600s but was abandoned in 1625 and a new fort erected on King's Quay. Nothing remains of the castle today.

A four turreted castle is also mentioned as being located in Great Yarmouth in 1399 and again in the late 16th century, however there are no physical remains of the fortification.

Caister Castle was constructed between 1432 and 1446 by Sir John Fastolf and was notable for a number of reasons. The castle was one of the first to be built with brick and was the recipient of one of the five licences to crenellate issued by Henry VI, during his reign (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>). The castle was besieged and captured by the Duke of Norfolk in 1469 and fell into ruin after 1600 when a newer house was built nearby.

The post medieval period saw an expansion in construction of coastal defences. The first of these occurred under Henry VIII due to concern about invasion from France and the Holy Roman Empire. In 1539 Henry ordered a survey of coastal defences which found them to be wanting. Subsequently Great Yarmouth was substantially fortified beginning with the construction of three earthen bulwarks near the entrance to the harbour. These were declared useless by 1546, possibly because they had no guns. In 1540 two batteries were also constructed in the town.

At the same time the first defences comprising a blockhouse and a few earthwork were erected at Languard Fort in Felixstowe to protect the entrance to Harwich harbour. This was by far the best deep water harbour on the East Anglian coast and was viewed as a 'potential back door to London' (Williamson 2005, 145). The fortification was dismantled in 1552 but restored in 1588 due to the threat of the Spanish Armada.



Languard Fort

This period also saw the construction of 'the Mount' in Great Yarmouth erected in 1569, an earth platform built against the inside of the inner town wall. Batteries were constructed at Southwold and Aldeburgh. Later the 'South Mound' was built between the South Gate of Yarmouth and the River Yare and topped with heavy guns to cover the southern approach to the town.

During the 17th century both France and the Netherlands were perceived as major threats. A true fort was constructed on Landguard Point between 1624 and 1626 including four bastions, brick barracks and turf ramparts. In 1667 the garrison of 400 musketeers and 100 artillerymen successfully repelled a Dutch invasion force of 1500 men that had landed on Felixstowe beach.

The Anglo-Dutch wars of the mid to late 17th century saw numerous sea battles within the region. Famous battles include Kentish Knock, the Gabbard, Lowestoft and Sole Bay. The battle of Kentish Knock took place in October 1652 during the First Anglo-Dutch War. A total of 68 English ships led by Robert Blake met the 62 ships of the Dutch led by Witte de With. The English ships were larger and better equipped than the Dutch who were fighting amongst themselves and finally withdrew.

The Battle of the Gabbard took place in June of the following year. The English fleet comprised 100 ships, led by Generals George Monck and Richard Deane. The Dutch had 98 ships under Lieutenant-Admiral Maarten Tromp and vice-Admiral Witte de With. On the 12th June the Dutch attacked and were forced back. A second attack on the 13th June resulted in disaster for the Dutch who lost 17 ships. The Royal Navy ship HMS Gabbard was named in honour of the battle (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>).

The Battle of Lowestoft took place on June 13th 1665 during the Second Anglo-Dutch War. More than 100 ships under Jacob van Wassenaer attacked an English fleet of similar size under James, Duke of York (later James II), 40 miles east of Lowestoft. The aim of the Dutch was to try and prevent another English blockade of their ports. However the battle was a decisive English victory.

The Battle of Sole Bay took place on 7th June 1672 and was the first naval battle of the Third Anglo-Dutch War. Sole Bay was the embayment containing Southwold, a major fleet anchorage in the 17th century. The English and French fleet had been assembled under James, Duke of York to carry out maintenance and supply before going to Dogger Bank to blockade the Dutch ports. The aim was to enable the English and French to take control of the lucrative trade with Asia built up by the Dutch East India company. However while at anchor the Dutch under Admiral de Ruyter attacked unexpectedly. The Anglo-French fleet was caught unprepared, with many of the crew still on shore leave. Although a French frigate warned of the Dutch approach, the Anglo-French fleet was surprised when the attack came from the north-east rather than the south-east. The French fleet became detached from the English, who were left to fight alone. The battle was inconclusive, with both sides claiming victory, but the losses to the English fleet, including the destruction of the flag ship Royal James, were such that the proposed blockade of the Dutch fleet was never attempted. Five wrecks from the battle are known (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>).

Fortification continued through the 18th century including a new battery at Landguard Fort in 1716 and a completely new fort in 1745-1751. In 1744 new batteries were established at Southwold and Aldeburgh during the War of

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Austrian Succession. It is the culverins given to Southwold at this time which still stand on Gun Hill. In 1778 eight forts were built in Yarmouth as a reaction to the American War of Independence which were maintained until 1815.



Old Gun Hill, Southwold

It was however the threat of French invasion which once again inspired large scale fortification of the coast in the early 19th century. This was particularly significant in Harwich and included the Redoubt (1808-1810) a circular fort, surrounded by a moat, over 60 m in diameter with walls 2.5 m thick. The fort possessed ten 24-pound guns placed on the roof and a circular parade area, surrounded by brick-faced ditch. In 1811 small gun batteries were also erected on Bathside Bay, Angel Gate and Beacon Hill, the latter eroded into the sea by 1822.

A string of 105 structures known as Martello Towers were also built along the coast between Aldeburgh, Suffolk and Seaford in Sussex between 1804 and 1812.



Bawdsey Quay martellos

These were squat, circular towers named after a similar structure at Mortella, Sicily. Those in the region, of which 10 remain, were among the latest dating to 1810-1812 and were supplied by the Redoubt. The towers were placed to protect exposed beaches, mouths of estuaries and strategic points. The structure at Felixstowe Ferry replaced a floating battery with four guns which had been stationed at the mouth of the Deben.

The towers were generally 10 m high, brick-built and rendered to resemble masonry containing two floors and a heavy gun on top, protected by a parapet. The Suffolk towers were generally egg-shaped in plan, the narrower end with the thickest wall facing the sea. The northernmost structure at Slaughden had a unique quatrefoil layout. The towers were never tested against a Napoleonic fleet and found different uses after the threat had passed, including as private residences, restaurants, museums and galleries. Some were also washed away and a number were taken over by the coastguard to prevent smuggling.



Slaughden Martello tower

Later in the 19th century the fortifications were maintained by remodelling of the Redoubt in 1861 and a major rebuild of Landguard Fort during the 1870s when the interior barracks were rebuilt to a keep-like design and the river frontage rebuilt with a new battery. A new seven sided fort was built on Shotley Point in 1862 and a battery was also constructed on Beacon Hill in the 1890s, completing the protection given to Harwich harbour as the strategic regional port.

Latterly the coastal area was well fortified during the World Wars. Little remains of the WWI fortifications other than pill boxes and other small features. However the WWII remains survive much more extensively along the entire length of the study area coast. Following the German invasion of France in June 1940 a huge programme of military coastal defence construction was undertaken. This included long linear obstacles like barbed wire, scaffolding and anti tank cubes, which linked together important nodal points such as pill boxes, anti-aircraft batteries etc (Hegarty and Newsome 2005, 126). Defences also included underground monitoring posts, barrage balloon sites, check points infantry strong points and enclosed minefields. Three WWII bombing decoys at Kirby-le-Soken are recognised as scheduled monuments.

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Some areas such as Harwich and Felixstowe, defending the haven, were more heavily defended, including refortification of Beacon Hill and Landguard Fort. The latter was used as a barracks and training ground until 1945 as well as a launch site for Operation Outward, a project to attack Germany by means of thousands of unmanned hydrogen balloons.

Offshore, the area was defensively mined as part of a large coastal barrier during WWII (Foynes 1994). The wreck evidence in the area illustrates the significance of Harwich Haven in particular with a number of aircraft and mined vessels resting in the Haven including the remains of a WWII Lancaster Bomber, HMS Gypsy, HMS Sisapon and HMS Tunisian.

The area also contained two of the four Maunsell forts built to protect the Thames Estuary - Sunk Head and Rough Shoals, named for local marine features. The forts were designed by G A Maunsell to protect London and the coastal areas from enemy aircraft and shipping attacks, and were placed in 1943. This was particularly crucial as a result of the new German Magnetic Influence Mines which were being dropped by parachute from seaplanes, resulting in heavy shipping losses (<http://www.bobleroi.co.uk>). Each fort had a steel gun platform with two anti-aircraft guns, a control tower and radar equipment. The platform of the forts were supported by two 8m diameter concrete towers on a floating pontoon base. Each tower contained seven floors comprising living quarters and storage areas and would have been occupied by 150-300 Royal navy personnel. The forts adopted the MOD code Uncle with each given the abbreviation U. The Rough Shoals fort was known as U1 and Sunk Head as U2. For unknown reasons the latter was often called Churchill One.

The forts were abandoned in 1956 and some utilised by pirate radio stations in the 1960s. Sunk Head fort was blown up by the military in 1967 to avoid further use. Rough Shoals is presently occupied by the family of Paddy Roy Bates, a former radio broadcaster and British Army major who took the fort by force in 1967. The Royal Navy tried to forcibly evict Bates at this time but were repelled by warning shots. As the fort was outside territorial waters at the time a court ruled in Bates' favour. Although the fort has no legal status the family claim it is an independent state of 'Sealand'. Following this they introduced a flag, constitution, currency and passports (<http://en.wikipedia.org/>). In 2010 the fort was put up for sale by the family.

Military defences continued to be important in the region after WWII, most notably at Orfordness which was under the control of the military from 1913 through to the 1970s (see Military Facility). During the cold war period the ness was used as an atomic research establishment and in 1971 the base was used for development of COBRA, an over-the-horizon early warning system which was abandoned as a failure. Orfordness is now owned by the National Trust and maintained as a nature reserve, including the military structures.

Landguard Fort continued to be used as an anti-aircraft operations room for Harwich in the 1950s. The fort was designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1961 and is now a tourist attraction housing Felixstowe museum.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Remaining fortifications of different dates are perceived in very diverse ways by the general public. For example visiting structures such as the Roman shore forts and medieval castles has very much become a recreational activity. The WWII defences in contrast have traditionally been viewed with more foreboding, possibly as a result of the temporal closeness of the threat they represented. This opinion has started to change in recent years with more people beginning to appreciate the 20th century defensive heritage.

Overall the defence heritage along the coastline in this area is perceived by most as being an important aspect of the landscape. This applies to both what is represented by the fortifications and more practically to the value of structures such as Orford castle as navigation aids.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Most of the fortifications outlined above act as major tourist attractions in the region. In many cases these have been developed to make the most of this. For example Caister Castle has been combined with the motor museum which attracts many people. Landguard Fort is in an area which is very significant for wildlife watching and Orfordness is run as a nature reserve. In addition a number of the Martello towers have been converted to public amenities such as museums and galleries. Jaywick tower is a good example of this, displaying exhibitions relating to the themes of Community, Heritage and Environment in an impoverished area.



Jaywick Martello tower

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Much research has been conducted in recent years on 20th century defences, most notably the Defence of Britain Project, which ran from 1995 to 2002 under the auspices of the CBA. The project aimed to record the 20th century military landscape of the United Kingdom, and to inform the responsible heritage agencies at both local and national level with a view to the future preservation of surviving structures (<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/cba/projects/dob/>). During its lifetime nearly 20,000 20th century military sites in the United Kingdom were recorded by c. 600 volunteers. This has been enhanced and verified by the recent Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys (RCZAS).

Smaller heritage projects have also included recent archaeological exploration into the lost curtain wall at Orford Castle. The castle has a display run by the Orford Museum Trust exhibiting archaeological artefacts found locally, including Roman brooches, medieval seals and coins, as well as the castle history.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

The earlier fortifications which remain in the region are mostly in good condition. The standing walls at Burgh castle for example are striking and Orford Castle is one of the best preserved keeps of its period. In other areas structures have been lost to sea or are at risk of being lost to erosion, such as the shore fort at Walton. Some of the structures at Orfordness may also come under threat in the near future.

In some cases the 20th century defences in particular have been forgotten and allowed to deteriorate and there are very few traces of WWI defences left. However, this lack of knowledge has begun to be rectified by the Defence of Britain project and RCZAS projects which have cultivated interest in the later fortifications.

Increasingly these lines of defences are becoming tourist attractions as interest in the World Wars grows and they gradually take their place in perception as a part of the nation's history beyond most people's living memory. These features are well placed to create heritage tours along the coast which will be helped by the opening up of coastal access by the implementation of the Marine and Coastal Access Act. The main objective of this Act of relevance here, is to ensure that there is a route for the whole of the English coast to allow recreational journeys on foot or by ferry. The route will in many cases cross previously private land and will open up many previously inaccessible sites of interest. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmbills/137/2009137vol1.pdf>. <http://www.insights.org.uk/articleitem.aspx?title=Tourism%20and%20the%20Proposed%20Marine%20and%20Coastal%20Access%20Act%202009>

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

As outlined above many of the 20th defences are at risk from erosion and significant numbers of features have already been lost this way. However the increasing recognition of these monuments as a valued part of our tangible heritage means that many are now being preserved. The WWI structures in particular are relatively rare.

In addition although in good condition, features such as the Roman forts and medieval castles of the region are part of quite limited survivals of structures dating to these periods which can give us insight into coastal defences through the ages.



Erosion at Naze cliffs including the remains of a pill box, fallen onto the beach
Photo courtesy Bill Wilkinson

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