

Broad Character: Military

Character Type: Military defence and fortification

Irish Sea Regional Perspective

Introduction: Defining/Distinguishing Attributes

Military defences are found all along England's Irish Sea coastline. There are significant concentrations in Cumbria, relating to the Hadrian's Wall west coast defences, and around the main ports. As well as these concentrations of defensive features there are, or have been, numerous individual defensive features relating to the First and Second World Wars.

The Hadrian's Wall west coast defences extend the chain of forts, milefortlets and watch towers along the coast as far south as Parton, just north of Whitehaven. South of Maryport, the military zone runs through areas which have been developed for settlement or industry. In most cases, the surviving evidence is below ground, and is discernible only as cropmarks or soilmarks. In some cases the exact locations of the smaller features are not known, but have been determined by their relation to other, known features such as the forts. The most southerly feature relating to the chain of Roman defences is the fort at Ravenglass, which survives as an earthwork, along with the upstanding masonry of its associated bath house.



Fort Perch Rock

Whitehaven Fort is a fortification of post medieval date, which only partially survives on the cliffs above the harbour. It is now used for recreation as public open space. Liverpool had been protected by forts and batteries in the post medieval period, but their location and extent are difficult to map because all were swept away and redeveloped with the expansion of the town and port in the 19th century. The importance of the Mersey maritime trade led to the construction of fixed defences on the Wirral in the early 19th century, including the coastal battery at Perch Rock and the battery and magazine at Wallasey.

The greatest number of military defences and fortifications along England's Irish Sea coast are of 20th century date, from the First and Second World Wars. They are concentrated around the mouth of the Mersey, near Fleetwood and Morecambe, around Barrow and the Solway Estuary. They protected port facilities as well as a number of important airfields and communications sites. In addition to the mapped concentrations, there are many individual

sites of pill boxes, aircraft obstructions and other features which formed a dense line of fortifications and defences along this coastline, reflecting the importance of the industry and port facilities of the region in the first half of the 20th century. During World War One, the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 enabled vast tracts of land to be requisitioned for camps, airfields, munitions production, and storage.

Historical Processes; Components, Features And Variability

The northernmost part of England's Irish Sea coast in the Roman period was protected by the frontier works of Hadrian's Wall, constructed from AD 122, and which defined a stable frontier to the Roman Empire in Britain. The western end of the Wall is at Bowness-on-Solway, but the defences continued around the coastline, at least as far as Flimby south of Maryport, but with forts at Burrow Walls, Moresby and Ravenglass (Austen and Young 2002, 7). Beyond the Wall, the defences comprised a string of fortlets and towers, in part linked by a metallised track and double ditches. The character of Roman defences has only a limited expression in the current landscape, usually as earthwork remains, but these and other below-ground remains are scheduled where they can be accurately located.

The region had medieval defences on or close to the coast, but none had a specifically maritime defensive function. The biggest, most powerful castles were at Carlisle, Lancaster and Liverpool, for example, but their functions related to administration and control of their hinterlands, rather than control of the sea. The development of Whitehaven as a port led to the introduction of defences to protect the town in the form of a battery built during the Jacobite risings of the 18th century (Hay 1965). In 1762, a survey was carried out in order to erect further forts and other works for the defence of the town and harbour, although a year later, orders are given to remove the guns from the Old Fort and Battery and put them in storage (Hay 1965, 292). One of the most famous incidents at Whitehaven, however, occurred in 1778, when it was attacked by John Paul Jones, and ex-native of the town who was fighting on the side of the Americans in the War of Independence. He spiked 36 cannon of the fort and battery, although it is likely that at least some of these guns were already unusable. After this, the townspeople clubbed together to put the defences in order and the number of strong points was increased to five. Some guns were removed in 1818, and the remaining guns appear to have been last fired in 1824 to mark the laying of the foundations for the West Pier. The final guns were removed during the First World War (Hay 1965).

Perch Rock coastal battery was built between 1826 and 1830 and formed part of the fixed defences of the Mersey. There had been a magazine to the south of Perch Rock, in New Brighton, but which by the mid-19th century was marked only by a park named Magazine Park. Perch Rock was remodelled in the 1890s, and in the First World War two coast artillery searchlights were installed. It formed part of the 'coastal crust' and hinterland defences along this Irish Sea coastline during the Second World War when it was manned by the Home Guard. The 'coastal crust' was maintained through the deployment of the few mobile columns available combined with static defended lines, in order to obstruct and contain the advance of an enemy from the coast or an inland airborne landing, both by the use of obstacles and by fire from troops on the ground, thus allowing time for relief by a mobile reserve (English Heritage 2003). Beaches were to be made impenetrable by erecting scaffolding, and extensive areas of anti-aircraft obstructions were laid out on the sands of the Solway and Morecambe Bay. At Moss Bay, between Harrington and Workington, in Cumbria, the iron works provided a ready source of materials for anti-tank defences. Locally known as 'skulls, they were cast in ladles from slag and iron and were set out on the shore in front of the steep railway embankment (<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/>). Lines of these defences still survive along parts of the shore line. Anti-aircraft batteries were

established around important ports and industrial areas such as Barrow and Liverpool. Many of the defences were dismantled after the war, but small defences such as individual pill boxes were often left and many still survive.



Pill box, part of the World War II defences around Barrow Docks

Values And Perceptions

Hadrian's Wall is considered the most complex and best preserved of the Roman frontiers of the Roman Empire. Its individual sites are subject to national designations, and the Wall and its associated fortifications are a World Heritage Site. As a World Heritage Site, it is covered by a Management Plan, which seeks to ensure its preservation for future generations and that it is made accessible for all to understand and enjoy. The Wall, associated features and its setting are an important part of the local sense of place and identity, and it plays a key role in generating income through tourism.

The defences and fortifications of post medieval date, at Whitehaven and Perch Rock, are also displayed for public understanding and enjoyment. The fort at Whitehaven survives only partially as ruins, which are laid out in public recreation space above the harbour, with interpretation boards. Perch Rock is a grade II* listed building. It was restored in the 20th century, made fully accessible by a causeway and has been a museum and events venue.

Twentieth century defences are appreciated as part of the historic legacy of the landscape in the North West. In particular, the features of the Second World War, such as pill boxes, and anti-aircraft obstructions, are seen as significant in their place in the front line of the fight for freedom, particularly around industrial centres and ports such as Liverpool and Barrow.

Research, Amenity And Education

The Roman fortifications of Hadrian's Wall and the western coastal defences are relatively well understood, even where there are few above ground remains to be seen. They are a major tourist attraction in the region, and the western end of the Hadrian's Wall National

Trail is at Bowness-on-Solway. Many of the forts and other defences along this coastline have some public access and interpretation. The main museum along the western coastal defences is the Senhouse Museum which displays finds from the fort at Maryport and the neighbouring Roman civil settlement. A recent geophysical survey of the fort and civil settlement has revealed it to be one of the largest and best preserved in the north of England.

There is an increased public interest in the surviving military remains of the 20th century around the Irish Sea coastline of north-west England. Many have been recorded under the Defence of Britain Project from 1995-2002 (<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/cba/projects/dob>), and in Cumbria further detailed survey work has been carried out by individuals (<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/>). Although many of these sites lie on private land, they are a highly visible reminder of 20th century conflict and defence, and there is considerable public interest in their preservation.

Condition And Forces For Change

The most vulnerable sites of this Character Type are the structures from the First and Second World Wars. The effects of time, erosion and vandalism mean they are a rapidly disappearing resource, and it is difficult to find meaningful uses for some of the structures which might aid their preservation. At the time of writing, there is a proposal to record the Second World War features around Morecambe Bay, and to reuse appropriate structures such as pill boxes, as potential information and interpretation points.

Rarity And Vulnerability

Hadrian's Wall and its associated fortifications have gained international recognition from their designation as a World Heritage Site, and although individual elements are found elsewhere from Roman Britain, as a whole complex, the Wall, its associated infrastructure and level of preservation is unique in Britain and rare on an international scale. Although monuments along the Wall and the western coastal defences are designated as Scheduled Monuments, though some remain at risk through coastal erosion and plough damage.

The 20th century sites are relatively common but reflect the importance of the region to the war effort in the Second World War. The sites are generally vulnerable to coastal erosion, vandalism and neglect.

Published Sources

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