

Broad Character: Military
Character Type: Military Facility
National Perspective

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The Character Type Military Facilities includes the following Sub-types:

- Barracks
- Firing range (land)
- Military airfield
- Military base
- Ordnance dumping
- Military practice area
- Naval dockyard
- Naval firing range

This Character Type covers a broad range of areas and sites intimately connected with military activity but ancillary to the locations of defensive or offensive activity themselves. So for example it includes training areas and establishments, barracks, and repair and maintenance areas.

Barracks are areas of buildings designed to house members of the armed forces (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>). Such areas may also include closely related buildings such as refectories, mess rooms, hospitals, schools and gymnasias.

A 'Firing range (land)' involves a piece of ground on which small arms or large artillery may be fired at targets (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>) as part of military training.

Military airfields are landing or taking-off areas for military aircraft. They often include ancillary structures and buildings for the maintenance and storage of aircraft, etc. (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

A 'Military base' is a building or groups of buildings, often surrounded by a system of fortifications, used as residential and training sites by members of an armed force (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

Ordnance dumping is an area regularly used for disposal of spent or redundant military weaponry. Material known to have been dumped at sea includes both conventional and chemical weapons, and the mode of disposal may include carriage on ships scuttled over the disposal site.

A 'Military practice area' is an area used by armed forces on land or at sea for training and military exercises.

A 'Naval dockyard' is a naval base that builds, repairs, docks or converts warships, and is manned by civilian engineers and workers and administered by engineer duty officers (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

A 'Naval firing range' refers to an area of sea across which naval ships fire artillery at target sites or areas. In some cases accompanied by land-based observation facilities housing equipment to record accuracy and damage (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk>).

Most military bases have restricted access to the general public and usually only authorised personnel may enter them (be it military personnel or their relatives and authorized civilian personnel). Military bases usually provide housing for military personnel, a post office and refectory facilities. They may also provide support facilities

such as snack bars, a petrol station, chapels, schools, a hospital or clinic (dental and/or health clinics), shopping and convenience retail stores. Sometimes facilities such as fitness centres, libraries, athletic fields, and nurseries, amongst others can be found. Military bases provide accommodation for one or more units, but they may also be used as a command centre, training ground or providing ground.

Naval dockyards are often characterised by dry docks, basins, and tidal berths. Other facilities may include naval training establishments and bases for the Royal Marines (e.g. Plymouth). Often, some dockyards open to the public on certain days to enable visits by local residents and tourists (as for example on the Plymouth 'Navy Days'). Those that have museums are generally open most of the year (e.g. Portsmouth and Chatham).

Around English Territorial Waters there are several designated military practice areas, formally entitled 'Practice and Exercise Areas' (PEXAs), which are in use or available for use by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for practice and exercises. These include Royal Air Force (RAF) practice areas, submarine exercise areas and firing danger areas. Many of the practice areas in the marine zone in East Anglia are used for mine laying and mine counter measure exercises. Another off the south-east Cornwall coast is used for live firing exercises. Public access across these areas is only restricted during active exercises.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

Typical components of this Character Type include:

- Army bases and barracks
- Radar bases and listening posts
- Firing/rifle ranges
- Naval docks and bases
- Submarine bases and exercise areas
- RAF bases

Before the mass mobilisation responding to the French Revolutionary (1792-1802) and Napoleonic Wars (1803-1814), soldiers and marines were usually housed within the structures that they garrisoned or close to naval bases. The massive increase in the number of military personnel after this point necessitated a widespread programme of barrack building, largely to a standard construction. Many of these were subsequently abandoned after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. The invasion scares of the 1850s led to further military construction, this time with more of an emphasis on the provision of facilities for military families (Bone and Dawson 2008, 248).

Towards the end of the 19th century the advent of the railways and reforms aimed at stationing troops within population centres with the aim of fostering connections and boosting recruitment meant that barracks were no longer required to be located in areas vulnerable to enemy attack, for example the south coast (Bone and Dawson 2008, 248).

Formal naval facilities were established at Harwich in the 1650s and Devonport in the 1690s with the construction of the dockyard. The Devonport yard and its associated facilities expanded throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, becoming, with Portsmouth, one of the two largest naval bases in the country. In addition to the dockyard, facilities included a watering point, victualling stations (most notably the Royal William Yard), hospitals, gunpowder mills, and powder magazines. These were dispersed along the coastline fronting Plymouth Sound (Bone and Dawson 2008, 246).

During WW1, the Defence of the Realm Act enabled vast tracts of land to be requisitioned for camps, airfields, munitions production, and storage. This included re-establishing Harwich as a naval base, sheltering the destroyers of the Harwich Force. Half a million people were stationed in England as a home defence force, and coastal defences were greatly extended. Much of the training of the army took place across the

English Channel, or on battle fronts. Some troops practised the construction of fieldworks for trench warfare, which left distinctive features on the landscape which can still be found today.

At the outbreak of WW2, under the Defence Regulations, the power to requisition and make use of land was given to service and civil departments. In 1944, at the peak period of the militarisation of the landscape in England, around 11½ million acres (4.6 million hectares) was under some form of military control.

As a result of these processes, the character of certain areas of the country became dominated by military facilities, for example the numerous airfields and bases of East Anglia. In recent years as the international political context has changed many of these facilities have been abandoned and in some cases re-used. A good example is the Orfordness base, which was used by the military from 1915 as a result of its isolated nature. The area was initially used as an airfield, an experimental station and a prisoner of war camp. After WW1 'the Ness' continued to be used for experimental flying and then as a general experimental facility and featured in the development of radar. The facility was used in WW2 as a training ground. However it became most significant during the Cold War when it was an atomic research establishment, developing the firing mechanisms for nuclear devices. Following the end of the Cold War Orfordness was bought by the National Trust and is now run as a nature reserve.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Recent military installations are usually perceived as State interventions in the landscape for national strategic reasons. This Character Type controls specific areas across the country dominating the landscape physically (through warning signs and security devices, sometimes highly intrusive in the landscape such as fences) as well as psychologically. Within some otherwise popular areas of the English coast, access is restricted due to firing, the Lulworth Range in Dorset being a good example.

Some of the more specialised military facilities have gained an air of mystery, most notably Orfordness in Suffolk. Its series of unusual structures and the isolated nature of the area, in addition to its long period of closure, has created an enigmatic feel for this disused facility.

Orfordness also exemplifies the maritime value of such facilities as its structures, including its highly visible radio masts, are important navigational aids in an otherwise featureless area of coast.

Elsewhere, extensive former military facilities situated in or near urban areas may offer redevelopment opportunities which use the former military fabric as a prestigious design feature, almost a pre-defined brand asset for the future development, a good example being the mixed-use redevelopment of the Royal William Victualling Yard in Plymouth.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

As defence installations, while in active use they are generally kept secret with restricted public access if any at all. However, recently decommissioned military sites and such features from earlier periods have received considerable prompt attention from military historians. Military installations and their history are understood as part of the nation's local, regional, national and international past and present. The inherently competitive nature of warfare means that technology and its material expressions change rapidly in this particular sphere of human activity. Therefore, there is scope for further detailed and comprehensive archaeological research complementing both land and maritime perspectives. While operational, there will be little or no potential for amenity use but

once decommissioned, military sites have considerable potential, being dramatic and 'exotic' at the same time. Those uses for public amenity may well compete with government needs to maximise financial returns from the land by disposing of it for development.

Programmes such as the Defence of Britain project (DOB), the National Mapping Project (NMP) and the Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys (RCZAS) have begun to record these facilities in locations where they may have otherwise been overlooked or forgotten.

Disused facilities have sometimes been put to educational and functional use, as seen at Orfordness which houses displays relating to its military use as well as providing a valuable amenity for eco-tourism and wildlife watching.

In terms of formal education, this character type is particularly relevant to the Secondary National Curriculum for history and geography, providing local, regional and national foci for studies of British, European and World History.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

The Ministry of Defence and the armed forces themselves acknowledge the need, and take active responsibility for, maintaining historic features on their estate. The modern components are usually well-maintained while in use, although earlier features are vulnerable to alteration or removal by changes in current installations.

In the post Cold War period, the international political context has changed dramatically, as has the availability of training areas beyond the UK, and funding for the nation's defence. As a result of policy changes and defence reviews, many military needs served by these facilities are no longer supported, leading to their widespread decommissioning. With the government needing to maximise financial returns from this land, there are strong economic motivations to clear the remains of former military facilities and dispose of the land for redevelopment. This is especially true where the facilities are deemed to have little aesthetic value but which may nevertheless hold substantial historic evidential value which will need expert advice to elucidate.

A particular issue identified by the Ministry of Defence is the disposal of litter, rubble, spoil, and military equipment. The excavation of pits to dispose rubbish an intrusive activity which may impinge upon otherwise intact earlier deposits, especially as many coastal military training areas occur in areas also containing extensive surviving prehistoric and historic landscape features (Fulford 1999).

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

This Character Type's occurrences for HSC are mostly scattered along the coasts of southern England and East Anglia, contributing strongly to landscape character as they tends to extend across discrete, often large, areas with a frequently high-profile sensory presence. Whatever one's perceptions of these areas, their decommissioning may inevitably lead to rapid character change which will vary according the form, age and design of the facility and its potential for re-development. Examples where redevelopment has recognised the development asset value of the facility itself, as at the Royal William Yard in Plymouth, may be rare but could be more widely adopted if more imagination, understanding and sensitivity was exercised, recognising the various conservation values embodied by such facilities as they become redundant.

A particular issue has been the availability of a sufficient window of accessibility for historic environment specialists' recording and recommendation needs between a facility's announcement of decommissioning and proposals for actual closure and

clearance for redevelopment. Improved understanding and communications between heritage professionals and the MoD would help resolve that.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

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WEBSITES

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