

**Broad Character: Military**

**Character Type: Military Facility**

**Regional Perspective: Southern England**

**Compiled by Seazone Solutions Ltd / M A Ltd, January 2011, after comment from D Hooley, English Heritage**

**INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES**

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. For example, it includes training areas and establishments, barracks, and repair and maintenance areas

Military facilities are mainly found in the central area of the Southern England coastal region, with few examples on the extremities (eg eastern Dorset and East Sussex). The examples that are in evidence are varied and cover a broad range of areas and sites.

Barracks are found on the Isle of Wight, with disused examples at Littlehampton (West Sussex) and Seaford (East Sussex).

Firing ranges (land) can be found at Newtown on the Isle of Wight, with a former example at Shoreham-by-Sea (West Sussex).

The two military airfields found within the region are now disused. They are Thorney Island and HMS Daedalus (Royal Navy air station).

Military bases are found around Poole Harbour (Royal Marines Poole training base, Admiralty Research Establishment), throughout coastal Hampshire (eg Browndown Training Camp, HMS Collingwood, Marchwood Military Port, MOD Research Establishment on Portsdown Hill), and West Thorney Island (West Sussex). There are a number of now disused batteries on the Isle of Wight. The main naval dockyard in the region is at Portsmouth.



### **Poole Harbour (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)**

Ordnance dumping areas, used for the disposal of spent or redundant military weaponry are found off the coast of Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and include mines and explosive dumping areas.

Military practice areas cover much of the offshore area south of the Isle of Wight and Dorset. These include submarine exercise areas.

### **HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY**

During WWI, the Defence of the Realm Act enabled vast tracts of land to be requisitioned for camps, airfields, munitions production, and storage. 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 WWII, 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.

Barracks are found on the Isle of Wight eg Sandown Barracks and Northwood Barracks. Barracks were also formerly at Littlehampton (West Sussex) and Seaford (East Sussex). These have now been converted into civilian residential developments.

A firing range (on land) can be found at Newtown on the Isle of Wight with a former example at Shoreham-by-Sea (West Sussex), which was set up as an army training camp and was in use between 1914-1918.

The two military airfields found within the region are now disused. They are at Thorney Island and Lee on Solent (*HMS Daedalus*) Royal Naval Air Station. Thorney Island juts into Chichester Harbour, and was opened as a military airfield in 1938. By 1944 there was permanent accommodation for 3636 male and 508 female personnel. In the Battle of Britain it was used by fighter aircraft of 236 Squadron of 11 Group, Royal Air Force: the most heavily engaged Group in the battle. Its later wartime role was as an operational airfield for Royal Air Force Coastal Command. During WWII the island was protected by both military defences and a sea wall. There was a dummy airfield (bombing decoy) at West Wittering to draw enemy fire away from the airfield on the Island. Flying ceased in 1975, the site became a naval base and from at least 1985 a barracks for the Royal Artillery (Baker Barracks). The airfield now lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural beauty (AONB) ([www.pastscape.org.uk](http://www.pastscape.org.uk)).



**Chichester Harbour looking across to Thorney Island (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)**

Royal Naval Air Station Lee-on-Solent (HMS *Daedalus*) was one of the primary shore airfields of the Fleet Air Arm. It was first established as a seaplane base during the First World War, and later became the main training establishment and administrative centre of the Fleet Air Arm. In March 2006 the site was split, with ownership of the central area including the runways transferred to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) who have continued to use it as a base for their air-sea rescue helicopters. Hampshire Constabulary's fixed wing aircraft have also continued to use the airfield. The outlying areas, including the former accommodation and technical area and surrounding land, hangars, and dispersals, were transferred to the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA).

There are numerous military bases in the Southern England region. Surrounding Poole Harbour are the Royal Marines Poole training base and Admiralty Research Establishment. Other bases are located in Hampshire and include Browdown Training Camp (mainly used by the Army Cadet Force, Combined Cadet Force, Army Training Corps and the Territorial Army), HMS Collingwood which hosts the Maritime Warfare Centre, Marchwood Military Port, and the MOD Research Establishment on Portsdown Hill.



**Old Needles Battery, Isle of Wight (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)**

Her Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Portsmouth is one of three operating bases in the UK for the Royal Navy. The base is the oldest in the Royal Navy, and has been a vital part of its history and the defence of the England and, later, the United Kingdom for centuries. It was in 1194 that Richard I took the decision to create a naval and military base there from which he could attack France (Wheatley, 1990). It is home to the oldest surviving dry dock in the world, as well as being the base port for two thirds of the Royal Navy's surface fleet including two aircraft carriers. The base also houses a number of commercial shore activities including shipbuilding and ship repair, naval logistics, accommodation and messing and personnel support functions. Within the overall area of the Naval Base is the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, where members of the public can visit major maritime attractions such as the Mary Rose, HMS Victory and HMS Warrior.





**Portsmouth Naval Base (© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)**

Ordnance dumping areas, used for the disposal of spent or redundant military weaponry are found off the coast of Dorset and Hampshire and include mines and explosive dumping areas.

Offshore, there are several designated Military Practice and Exercise Areas (PEXAs) within the region which are in use or available for use by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for practice and exercises. These include RAF practice areas, and submarine exercise areas.

#### **VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS**

This Character Type presents controlled specific areas which may dominate the landscape physically (through warning signs and security devices like fences) as well as psychologically and, by the presence of military vehicles and their occasional noise, through the senses too. This is also true of the coastal training from the region's military facilities, as with the Royal Marine exercises within Poole Harbour where safety issues are an obvious concern in this busy stretch of water. The use of hazardous materials at many military facilities means that possible contamination of land and sediments also remains an issue at many such sites even when decommissioned (LDA Design 2010).

Many of the areas owned and used by the military have restricted public access due to safety and security reasons but some military ranges do permit public access when not being used for military exercises and are popular attractions. For examples, Portsmouth Naval Base holds an annual Navy Day ([www.navydaysuk.co.uk](http://www.navydaysuk.co.uk)) which allows access to areas not normally open to the public.

#### **RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION**

Most military bases have restricted access to the general public and usually only authorised personnel may enter them. Safety requirements mean that public access to

the coast within ranges is not permitted for much of the year (Dorset Coast Forum, undated) although this limited public access, and reduced agricultural activity within the ranges has had some wildlife benefits through reduced disturbance. Some marine danger areas restrict recreational boating and fishing during weekdays outside the main holiday periods, and during 6 weekends each year which are used for Territorial Army training (Dorset Coast Forum, undated).

As defence installations, active modern components are generally kept secret or confidential. However, military features from earlier periods have received considerable attention from military historians. Military installations and their history are part of the nation's local, regional, national and international historic environment and strongly influence cultural perceptions of landscape and seascape. The inherently competitive nature of warfare and the rapid technological advances that can result, means that features 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 both dramatic and, to most, unfamiliar at the same time.

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

Some military facilities have been converted in museums, for example, the Naval Dockyard at Portsmouth which now also hosts the Historic Dockyard. This allows members of the public to visit important maritime attractions such as the Mary Rose, HMS Victory and HMS Warrior, and also contains the National Museum of the Royal Navy and Action Stations, an interactive museum which allows the public to experience many of the aspects of life in the Royal Navy.

#### **CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE**

The modern components of this Character Type in the Southern England region which are still in use are well maintained. However, defence cuts announced in 2010 by the government saw the decommissioning of some of the current components such as the Ark Royal

The existence of military practice areas in the region is dependent on the location of military bases. For example offshore naval exercise areas in the region have substantially decreased since closure of Portland naval base (just west of the Hastings to Purbeck project area) and the relocation of the Navy's sea training unit. Surface exercises by warships is now much reduced and has been mainly transferred to waters off Devon and Cornwall. Submarine exercises are rare off the Dorset coast, but do continue off the Isle of Wight and Hampshire coasts.

The effects of military activity on the landscape/seascape in the region are linked to the level of use. Direct effects are a product of construction and operations, such as the use of tracked vehicles, trench digging and explosions. Artillery and bombing ranges also have clear physical effects on the inter-tidal and sub-tidal zones, but understanding the net effects of military bases on the landscape is not straightforward: much has been made in recent years of the ecological benefits resulting from the restrictions on development and reduced visitor pressure that commonly result from military use.

A particular issue identified by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is the disposal of litter, rubble, spoil, and military equipment. The excavation of pits to dispose rubbish could be considered as an intrusive activity which may impact adversely on the historic

environment (Fulford 1999). There are also issues with seabed litter from munitions and potentially so from underwater noise (LDA Design, 2010).

The Royal Marines use of fast boats within busy waters in Poole Harbour is an issue which may require a change from present activity. The lead responsibility for managing the harbour lies with Poole Harbour Commissioners. Whilst the MoD are not subject to harbour authority powers of direction, good liaison with the managers of the harbour remains the most effective means of avoiding possible conflicts. Outside of the harbour RM Poole give rise to limited impacts in the areas where they operate. MoD consider that the most significant impact is from loading and unloading of vehicles from landing craft (Dorset Coast Forum, undated).

#### **RARITY AND VULNERABILITY**

This Character Type contributes strongly to landscape character due to its scale and has considerable research and amenity potential which becomes live once installations are decommissioned.

The number of military installations has reduced considerably as they have become more centralised. Offshore naval exercise areas in the west of the region have also substantially decreased since closure of the Portland naval base and relocation of the Navy's sea training unit.

Closure of naval bases and other military establishments remains subject to further Government defence reviews.

From a maritime perspective, very little is currently known about the physical signatures of this Character Type in the marine zone.

#### **PUBLISHED SOURCES**

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#### **WEBSITES**

[www.britarch.ac.uk/projects/dob/review/index.html](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/projects/dob/review/index.html)

[www.historicdockyard.co.uk](http://www.historicdockyard.co.uk)

[www.navydaysuk.co.uk](http://www.navydaysuk.co.uk)

[www.pastscape.org.uk](http://www.pastscape.org.uk)

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