

### VE Day in Lockdown



As the period of lockdown continues, we are unable to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE Day (Victory in Europe Day, when allied forces announced the surrender of Germany in Europe) in person, at parks.

So instead, we thought we would look back at the part that Norfolk, and our local area, played in World War Two.

#### **The Royal Artillery Camp at Weybourne**

Down the road from the park is [The Muckleburgh Collection](#) a tank museum built on the old Royal Artillery Camp at Weybourne.

The Royal Artillery Camp was the primary location for training anti-aircraft gunnery regiments in Britain. Following their training, thousands of young men and women were dispersed across the country to serve as anti-aircraft gunners defending towns, cities, and industrial areas from bomber attack. They were true 'citizen soldiers', recruited from civilian backgrounds to defend their homes, factories, country and way of life!



The camp at Weybourne did not have all the luxury furnishings of our campsites today and in fact in wintertime Weybourne was known as one of the worst postings in Britain, if you were unlucky enough to be billeted in a Bell tent!

#### **Threat of invasion**

On the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, the only defensive measure carried out immediately in Norfolk was the installation of a 6 inch gun battery in Yarmouth, as the prospect of invasion seemed remote.

#### **Defending our coasts.....**



This complacency was short-lived and was replaced by alarm following the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) from Dunkirk in May/June 1940, and the fall of France shortly afterwards. Threat of invasion was feared to be high along the East Coast and consequently some 18,000 Pill Boxes were built in 1940. The pillbox was mainly associated with beach defences, anti-invasion defensive stop lines and 'nodal' points, although some were placed to defend coastal batteries, airfields, and radar stations. They were part of an integrated invasion defence system including tank destruction blocks, anti-tank ditches and scaffolding, roadblocks, barbed wire, and mined areas.

The War Office issued designs with variations to meet the needs of an anti-invasion defence reflecting the kind of weaponry they were to contain and their proposed location. In practice these standard designs were seldom followed to the letter, but you will find that pillboxes retain a range of common features, nearly always under two metres high, of squat, heavy construction, and usually flat roofed. The most common shape of pillbox in WW2 was hexagonal, the round pillboxes such as those that can be seen at Weybourne, Stiffkey, Bacton, North Walsham and Stalham are from WW1. There is a World War Two type 22 pillbox dating to 1940 half buried in shingle on the beach at Kelling Hard.

We would imagine it was a cold lonely shift being stationed in one of the pillboxes for the night – *makes our own lockdown confinement feel much more comfortable!*

### **An alternative type of defence**

Along from Weybourne on a footpath at Cley-next-the-sea you will find an Allan Williams Turret, these were a pre-fabricated steel defence structure designed to be manned by two men with a machine gun, giving them a 360 degree arc of fire! The turret was considered a viable alternative to concrete pillboxes.



### **The war in the air**

We had many airfields and bases in Norfolk many of which can still be seen today, the last operating RAF base was at Coltishall before it closed in 2006. RAF Coltishall became a fighter station in 1940 and up to 1945 the station was home to more than 80 fighter squadrons, including Polish and Czech units. Several famous aces served here, including Douglas Bader, "Sailor" Malan and "Cats Eyes" Cunningham, flying Spitfires, Hurricanes, Beaufighters and P51 Mustangs. By the end of the war Coltishall had destroyed 207 enemy aircraft, with 48 "probables" and more than 100 damaged.



There is an [Aviation Museum](#) on the outskirts of Norwich which is reached by road through the village of Horsham St Faith and is dedicated to the preservation of the aviation history in Norfolk.

## Air Defence



To assist with the war in the air, the Air Ministry established a brand-new Air Defence station in 1941 at Neatishead near Horning. Its purpose was to direct RAF fighters, day, or night, to attack enemy aircraft from Germany as they launched raids against Military and Industrial targets in Norfolk as well as against the City of Norwich itself.

At first, the station was home to temporary mobile Radars, but it was soon to boast new, improved fixed Radar systems such as

the Type 7 Search Radar and Type 13 Height-finding Radars. The Control Room otherwise known as the “Happidrome” was built and it is this very building which, today, forms part of the [RAF Radar Museum](#).

### Now to celebrate VE Day!

At 11am we will in line with the country as a mark of respect be observing a 2 minutes silence to mark the end of World War 2 – and in turn, the end of Adolf Hitler’s reign which is even more poignant this year given that it is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

And hopefully, you will be having a street party whilst in your front garden to respect social distancing and help to protect those brave heroes currently fighting on the frontline for the health of our country!

