

From Monument to Place: English Heritage and Military Industrial Complexes in England

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English Heritage has over the last decade invested considerable resources in the study of military architecture and archaeology. Even before the end of the Cold War the privatisation and rationalisation of the naval dockyards at Sheerness, Chatham, Portland and parts of Portsmouth made them much more widely accessible to the public, and their buildings receptive to a new diversity of civilian uses. The contraction and rationalisation of the Ministry of Defence estate after the end of the Cold War coincided with an appreciation by English Heritage of the need to inform the wider public understanding and where appropriate the conservation of military sites. The research commissioned by English Heritage since 1994, initially targeted towards the identification and protection of the best-preserved and most historically-important sites, has now broadened into fully-integrated techniques for appraising entire landscapes, taking in public values and informing development proposals at the earliest possible stage.

One of the first completed and published studies was of barracks (Douet 1998). This study raised the profile of the subject at a critical moment, when many of these sites were being sold for development or reorganised for changing military requirements. It emphasised that national protection can stimulate rather than constrain imaginative new development that responds to a sense of place, many of the sites affected by our recommendations for

protection being transformed from candidates for demolition into highly sought-after real estate (Figure 1). It also served to emphasise the international context that is fundamental to the study of military sites, the Spanish state itself being in the forefront of the development of state armies and corps discipline, and - through *barraca*, the word for a shelter – the originator of the term barrack. The reviews of other military sites made it imperative that their archaeological layers and potential were also subject to evaluation. Thus the review of the protection through listing of the naval dockyards (Douet and Lake, 1997) was accompanied by a map-based exploration of the layered archaeology of Portsmouth and Plymouth by Wessex Archaeology. Evaluation of the ordnance yards that supplied armaments to naval ships has similarly been determined by the need to understand, initially through interrogation of the archives rather than puzzling over the complexity of the sites themselves, their development from storage complexes, whose magazines held great quantities of gunpowder, into sites for the preparation and inspection of new types of propellants and projectiles, developments which took place against the background of the arms race of the second half of the nineteenth century, first against France and then against Germany (Lake 2003; Evans 2006, forthcoming). The recording that underpinned the protection of extensive explosives sites such as Waltham Abbey, which had a continuous history of production from the 16th to the late 20th centuries, also emphasised the need to break down the barriers that had hitherto existed between the surveys of buildings and archaeology, an invaluable lesson that was also carried forward into the study of Cold War sites (Cocroft 2000, 2001; Cocroft and Thomas 2003). When it came to the

monuments of 20th-century conflict, including the many thousands of anti-invasion defences and other sites of a more archaeological nature, the fundamental importance of documents became evident (Dobinson, Lake and Schofield, 1997; English Heritage 1998). Archives, which contrary to a widely-held view at the outset of our work exist in great quantities, provide the rationale behind the deployment and design of military sites and structures, which were in turn conditioned by the degree of political support and events on the world stage. Carefully-targetted fieldwork only took place once the degree of survival against the documented resource had been determined through the examination of maps and aerial photographs. The study of anti-invasion defences also brought to the fore the need to understand and protect these monuments in the context of entire landscapes, rather than focus on the protection of individual examples (Foot 2006). The results of this work is now in the course of being published (Dobinson 2001, 2003).

English Heritage is also actively involved in providing advice both centrally and through its regional teams to owners and local authorities throughout the country. It is involved at a European level, enabled by Interreg funding, in for example comparing the options for reuse of military-industrial complexes such as Woolwich Arsenal in east London (website reference to add). At a broader international level, it has participated in various forums for discussion including the World Archaeological Congress. In 2003 English Heritage produced a thematic volume of Conservation Bulletin on *The Archaeology of Conflict* and a research agenda (*Modern Military Matters*) was published in 2004. These and further details of the range of work being conducted can be

found on [www.english-heritage.org.uk/military] and on the linked National Monuments Record website.

Rather than provide a summary of all our projects in this field, the intention in this short article is to provide insights into some of the challenges that exist and how approaches to complex sites have developed through examination of three subject areas – the naval dockyards, military aviation and Bletchley Park. It will simply concentrate on various aspects of this vast and complex subject, in order to provide the reader with an overview of work in progress, to stress the need for international context in evaluating these sites and for an insight into some of the new techniques that have been developing.

The Naval Dockyards

By the end of the eighteenth century the dockyards of the Royal Navy were the largest industrial complexes in the land, both constructing and maintaining an enormous fleet, which at its peak in 1809 numbered 728 ships of all classes. In March 1814, when swollen to its greatest extent, it comprised 15,598 men and boys (Morriss 1983, 108-9; Brown 1990, 168). By the 1850s the fleet was mostly powered by steam, a close co-operation between the state yards and the private sector resulting in the construction from the 1830s of new Steam Factories designed around new types of industrial plant, initially for the fitting out and maintenances of boilers and engines in line-of-battle ships which looked little different from their predecessors that had fought at Trafalgar half a century earlier. It was this post-1815 aspect of the naval

dockyards that required documentary research, which was published in 2003 (Evans 2003). This has considerably deepened our understanding of, for example, the way in which the dockyards had to be assessed in relation to developments in the civil and commercial spheres. This in turn raised other issues, firstly that of international context. For none of the Great Powers of continental Europe was the strategic benefit weighted so heavily toward naval as against military strength as it was in Britain. This close working relationship between the Royal Yards and civilian manufacturers and engineers underpinned Britain's lead in so many aspects of industrial technology, and the effectiveness of the British battle fleet as a deterrent. The development of the wet and dry docks at Plymouth and Portsmouth in the 1690s formed the model for all subsequent developments, and it would be interesting to determine the extent to which the provision of docks in other countries was modelled on developments in Britain. Spain's principal naval base in the Americas, at Havana in Cuba, had cranes and dry docks which are apparently modelled on British precedents (Harbron 1988, 62). Other examples would include the adoption of the traveller crane for transporting heavy materials in gun foundries (as in Barcelona in 1766) or gunpowder magazines from the 1740s in England (Utrilla, 2004; Lake 2003, 56-7). The exchange of ideas at an international scale is both well documented, and still visible, in the developing infrastructure of explosives sites in the 19th century (Cocroft 2000, 77-83; 146-7). It follows that a major research priority should surely be to explore the degree to which the military-industrial complexes of other countries developed in relationship to developments in the civil field and at an international scale. They also – as we witnessed in this conference in the

Trubia area of Asturias in Spain – had a profound impact on their surrounding landscapes, through the extraction of raw materials, the exploitation of woodlands for charcoal (for gunpowder or iron foundries), the planned and *ad hoc* development of settlements and adjustment of surrounding rural areas for the supply of produce.

Airfields

It similarly became evident that airfields had to be considered as functionally-interdependent ensembles within a rounded understanding of their historical context (Lake 2003; Lake, Dobinson and Francis 2005). The criteria for selection have focused on a range of factors, in addition to the degree of completeness of individual buildings or groups. Over 250 buildings are now protected, the majority of these are concentrated on the 26 ‘key’ aviation sites in England which, as a consequence of events on the world stage, military imperatives or varying degrees of public and political support, best reflect the development of military aviation from 1910 to 1945.

Aviation is arguably the most iconic technology of the twentieth century, and clearly one where international parallels are of fundamental value to the evaluation of sites and structures. By the 1930s, the issue of airbase design had become inextricably bound with that of national identity, from the International Modern of newly-independent styles Finland to the self-consciously traditional style adopted for 1930s German training bases. In Britain, and in contrast to the more stridently modern styles for civil terminal architecture, the planners for the post-1934 expansion of the RAF were

required to soften the impact of new bases on the landscape by politicians mindful of public concerns over the issues of rearmament and the pace of environmental change. The result, for the first generation of bases constructed after 1934, was a blend of traditional style for the domestic buildings and a streamlined Moderne style for the technical buildings (Lake 2002, 175-6). (Figure 3)

Knowledge of the international context has been vital to our work, providing additional confidence to difficult and sometimes controversial decisions about what can or cannot be protected and has enabled a sharper and more critical focus to be brought on what has survived in this country and elsewhere in Europe. It is now known, for example, that the group of sites developed around the army training areas at Salisbury Plain before 1914, and that have survived remarkably intact, represent a uniquely important survival ((Lake 2002, 176-8; Hawkins, Lechner and Smith 2005).

Guidelines were developed in order to assist in the management of these sites (English Heritage 2003), but their evaluation raised questions about how these sites could continue to change and be adapted. Scampton, a highly representative and historically important bomber station which opened in 1936, and achieved worldwide fame on account of its association with 617 Squadron and the Dambusters Raid in May 1943 (Figure 3). The inter-war base has examples of modified but characteristic examples of inter-war Expansion Period airbase architecture, including a neo-Georgian officers' mess and a suite of concrete technical buildings close to the hangar group,

which includes 617's squadron offices and has been recommended for listing at grade II as part of the thematic survey. In the early 1950s, Scampton became one of ten existing airfields selected as the main bases for the V-force, which carried Britain's airborne nuclear deterrent from 1953-68. The modifications are mostly associated with the site's Cold War use, the extensive additions to the officers' and airmen's housing exemplifying its expansion and importance in this period. These alterations are representative of the levels of investment put into the core sites scheduled for retention by the RAF after 1945.

The hangars have been protected through listing, but the immense scale of Scampton – which is roughly the size of Truro, the capital of the county of Cornwall in south west England – requires a different approach, one which enables an understanding of their sense of place and character, their context and their value to be aligned with the present and projected management of these sites and their associated structures (Atkins 2004). Such sites do not simply represent the destruction of ancient landscapes – 'Barbaric England of the scientists, the military men and the politicians' (Hoskins 299) – but instead they must be understood and managed as an integral part of landscapes that have experienced fundamental change over the millenia. The landscape around Scampton represents two major phases of change and creation, firstly in the enclosure in the 18th century of a previously open landscape by hedgerows, and then the removal of many of these hedgerows as part of the post-1950s intensification of agriculture and its attendant ecological impact. Many airfield sites, as a consequence of the latter, are now reservoirs of

fauna and flora. The challenges to narrow specialisms thrown up by these issues need to be thrown open to public debate (Bradley, Buchli, Fairclough, Hicks, Miller, and Schofield, 2004). This raises the issue of public value, and the range of emotions that such sites provoke today – not just pride, but also images of the destruction wrought by these sites on civilian populations (Schofield 2002).

Bletchley Park

Bletchley Park, like Scampton, raises the key issue of how we can contribute at the earliest possible stage in the development process to an informed understanding of character, value and sensitivity to change. It is globally renowned for the achievements of its codebreakers, and for their contribution to the outcome of the Second World War, the development of the modern computer and associated achievements in a whole range of subjects from mathematics to linguistics. Its evolution from a cryptographic research centre into a global signals intelligence (SIGINT) hub, in addition to underpinning its wartime success, shaped the development of SIGINT as a vital contributor to the global mission of Britain and its allies in the Cold War period and beyond.

There has been considerable uncertainty, however, concerning the degree to which the landscape and surviving fabric at Bletchley Park – which apart from a Victorian mansion and stable yard mostly comprises a collection of wartime huts and blocks - provide a *tangible* reflection of its role and contribution to the outcome of the Second World War and the birth of the Information Age. In 1993 the wartime structures were rejected for listing on the advice of the

English Heritage Historic Buildings Advisory Committee, and the site was not included by the UK government on the shortlist for UNESCO World Heritage Sites in September 1999, on the grounds that it 'does not offer enough artefacts for UNESCO'. This uncertainty has presented obstacles to an agreed approach by the site's many stakeholders to funding options and sustainable development proposals. This is critical, as home at its peak in early 1945 to nearly 9,000 people, and now located midway between the Oxford-Cambridge technology arc, Bletchley Park has rich potential to build on its past to contribute to the economic and social well-being of the Bletchley area and also the wider Milton Keynes conurbation, identified by government as the target area for approximately 70,000 homes over the next generation.

It was recognised that a framework for the sustainable development of the site as a whole was needed, providing owners, local authorities and potential investors with the confidence to plan for and invest in the site. This had to be based upon a clear understanding of its character as a product of past change, filtered through an understanding of Bletchley Park's overall cultural values and context. It was then important to identify on what issues the perceptions of value wider public and other professional groups converge and diverge. The next step was to determine the extent to which surviving fabric and landscape both informs and reflects these key values, and thus ultimately to ensure that the cultural value of the site is fully appreciated and understood, prior to the consideration of other key issues, such as the capacity for change of individual structures, their condition and their viability for reuse.

Contrary to popular perception, a vast amount of documentation relating to Bletchley Park was retained by GCHQ after the war, and much of it has found its way into the National Archives at Kew. This was subject to a rapid overview, in order that its development could be determined. A Values paper was drafted and distributed to key players in autumn 2003. Public consultation – and the completion of a detailed survey of the buildings and their landscape setting (Monckton et al, 2004) - informed the final drafting of the Values paper and its incorporation into the Masterplan and the Conservation Management Plan. These were formulated in order in order to guide development options aimed at the conservation and regeneration of Bletchley Park and its wider area. The Masterplan, critically, was formulated as a flexible framework that enabled the character, value and sensitivity to change of identified areas of the site to be made available on the point of need. (For the Values paper, see www/english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation. For the Masterplan, see www.mkweb.co.uk/urban-design).

This engagement with the site as a whole is fundamental, because it was at Bletchley Park that the diverse strands of signals intelligence were, uniquely in a global context, brought together on one site.¹ This is unique in a global context. It is *the* major factor which, powered by its collective brilliance of minds, contributed to Bletchley Park's wartime development, surviving character and global significance - the development of signals intelligence (SIGINT) that occurred in parallel with the war, and the development of the

¹ The two minor exceptions were Communications Security (the production of codes) which moved to Mansfield College in Oxford, and the removal of the Diplomatic Section to London in early 1942.

key themes of encryption, computing, information storage, information handling and processing from quite literally a cottage industry into a global hub for the reception, decryption, analysis and dissemination of information.

Conclusion

Arsenals and military heritage sites throughout Europe face significant financial challenges with respect to their long-term use. The viable long-term conservation of these sites is heavily reliant on cooperation and joint-working between a wide variety of interests and disciplines. These are, however, some of the most challenging historic sites to conserve for future generations, and a fine balance has had to be met between the needs for recording and in-situ conservation. This is due both to practical considerations – their extent, complexity and the problems of decontamination – and the fact that they are often located in some in some of the most economically and socially disadvantaged areas of the country.

It has become increasingly clear that we must use the techniques of architectural and archaeological survey in combination with the documentary sources. The methods adopted at Bletchley Park have comprised early engagement with key stakeholders through rapid documentary analysis and setting out a framework for understanding the site as a whole, and the subsequent refinement of this framework through detailed research and public consultation. These likewise demonstrated that the process of research and establishing a framework for sustainable development do not have to be mutually exclusive, with the latter only following on from completion of the

research. It is a process of enquiry that must be seen as constantly evolving. Considerable investment has already been made in the infrastructure at Bletchley Park, and a framework put in place that can guide design and development proposals at the outset.

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