

## **THE LANDSCAPE OF WAR** **Relics of World Wars I and II**

The 20th century was an age of wars – two World Wars were followed by the prolonged 'stalemate' of the Cold War, precariously balanced on the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction.

With the exception of the Channel Islands, no part of Britain came under enemy occupation, yet evidence of the measures taken in preparation can still be seen in the landscape. The later, offensive phase of World War II has left Scotland with a number of military airfields and their associated buildings.

The expectation of invasion during World War II led to the construction of defences, most prominently along beaches. The most widespread of these were lines of tank traps – concrete blocks, set in line and intended to impede the progress of tanks landed by sea. These were of the commonest, rectangular form. Others were shaped as truncated cones, groups of cylinders or 'coffin' shapes. Their effectiveness was never put to the test.



Linked to these lines of defence were so-called '**pill-boxes**' – square or polygonal concrete shelters, from which invaders could be fired upon. This one on **Balgownie Links, Aberdeen**, is of a standard, cast concrete build.

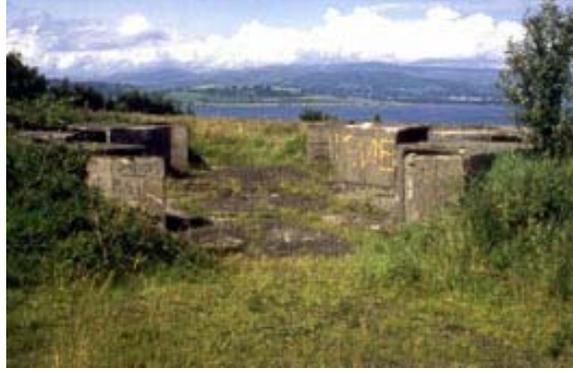
© Aberdeen City Council via SCRAN

Another, at **Hatston, Orkney**, has a more improvised look, having been built from bags of liquid concrete.



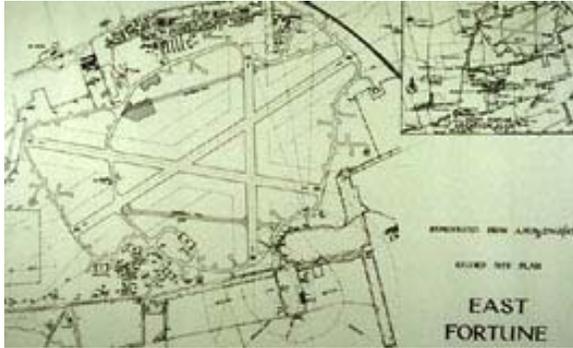
© Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland via SCRAN

Other forms of defence included **anti-aircraft emplacements**, such as this one at **Greenock, Renfrewshire**.



© West of Scotland Archaeological Service via SCRAN

The potential of aerial warfare, for both defensive and offensive use, was already becoming apparent during World War I. **East Fortune aerodrome, East Lothian**, opened in 1915 as a base for aircraft intercepting German airships. In the following year, airships were based here. It saw further action during World War II. The site is now home to the **National Museums of Scotland's Museum of Flight**.



This site plan shows the three intersecting runways, the main group of buildings (lower, south side of plan) and the military hospital (north of runways).

This site plan shows the three intersecting runways, the main group of buildings (lower, south side of plan) and the military hospital (north of runways).

Military airfields were established at several other sites, principally in the east, closest to targets on the continent and also with the best stretches of flat ground. An exception to this **was Wigtown aerodrome, in south-west Scotland**. The site was chosen in 1938, before the outbreak of war. It was subject to flooding, had, initially no runways, latterly only two rather than the customary three, on account of the cramped site. It finally closed on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948.



© RAF Museum, Hendon via SCRAN

Sea defences were concentrated in the vicinity of naval bases, such as Scapa Flow, Orkney and Port Edgar and Rosyth on the First of Forth. In **Orkney**, the eastern approaches to Scapa Flow were closed off, as a defensive measure, by the so-called '**Churchill Barriers**'. These now provide a useful road link between the Orkney mainland and the islands to its south.



© Richard Welsby via SCRAN



© The Finlaggan Trust via SCRAN

One of the factors in the allies' eventual victory, in World War II, was the use of radar. Evidence of its early use can still be seen, as at **Ballinaby, Islay**, where the associated **generator house** is still in place. Radar also played a part in the early warning systems set up during the Cold War – this scarred hilltop at **Noss, Shetland** is a monument to decades of mutual paranoia during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.



© Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland via SCRAN

**To find out more:**

Lowry, B. (editor) *20<sup>th</sup> Century Defences in Britain: An Introductory Guide*, CBA, York, 1996

Evans, M.M. *The Military Heritage of Britain & Ireland*. London, 1998

Smith, D.J. *Action Stations 7. Military Airfields of Scotland, the North-East and Northern Ireland*. Cambridge, 1983

## **The Landscape of War – THEN and NOW**

1. The expectation of invasion during World War II led to the construction of defences, most prominently along beaches. No part of Britain (with the exception of the Channel Islands) came under enemy occupation, yet evidence of the measures taken in preparation for invasion can still be seen in the 'relics' left on the landscape.

**Can you think of any examples of these preparations that remain on Scotland (or indeed Britain's) landscape *now*?**

**Why do you think beaches were considered a focal point for defences?**

**Have you come across any other such 'relics' in Europe?**

Consider the differences, ***then and now***, in the public's state of mind. In a time of instability, what was important ***then***? What is important ***now***? Have times changed much?

2. The landscape of war is not a particularly attractive or scenic view.  
**Why do you think 'relics' of war remain on the landscape today?**

3. Military airfields can be found all over Scotland – particularly in the east and in areas of flat ground. **Why?**