

DEFENCE AND CONFLICT

Many of the sites and monuments included on the Tyne and Wear Historic Environment Record (HER) are associated with defence and conflict. All periods of human history in the North-East are represented, from the earliest, represented by finds of Neolithic and bronze age arrow-heads (e.g. from Sunderland and Ryton - HER 9 and 551) and axes (e.g. from Roker, Hylton and Throckley - HER 57, 381 and 5450), to the latest, represented by 20th century observation posts (e.g. Washington – HER 5385).

The earliest surviving monumental remains of a defensive structure in Tyne and Wear are at Washingwells, where a Roman Fort was constructed out of earth and wood and briefly occupied towards the end of the 1st and early part of the 2nd century A.D. This represents the advance of the Roman army into northern Britain, a move that was consolidated with the construction of Hadrian's Wall, built in the early 2nd century A.D. and occupied until the beginning of the 5th century A.D. (HER 196). The wall is made up of a number of components, including a wall with turrets, milecastles and forts spaced along it, a ditch in front with defensive pits in the space between wall and ditch (HER 197-209). West of Newcastle there is also a ditch, the vallum, behind the wall. Four Roman forts sit on or close to the line of the wall within Tyne and Wear, at South Shields (HER 198), Wallsend (HER 197), Newcastle (HER 204) and Benwell (HER 208).

Few remains of defence and conflict survive from the early medieval period, but the arrival of the Normans in the late 11th century brought a period of overt military rule to the region. In an attempt to increase the security of the region the Normans built motte and bailey castles on their estates in the region, one of which was the original New Castle upon Tyne, founded in 1080 by Robert Curthose, eldest son of William the Conqueror. None of these castles survive well in their original form in Tyne and Wear, although the present castle keep at Newcastle is a 12th century Norman rebuild of the original earth and timber motte and bailey type structure. Tynemouth castle is also known to have been established by the late 11th century.

Following the Norman period, between the 13th and early 16th centuries, some of the earlier Royal and baronial Norman castles were expanded, as at Newcastle where an enclosing curtain wall and gateway was added in the 13th century, followed soon after by the construction of the new town wall - built to oppose Scottish armies - which incorporated a much wider area. New castles were also built, including Ravensworth Castle (HER 106), believed to be 13th century in origin, and Hylton Castle (HER 12), built at the end of the 14th or early 15th century. The purpose of such castles (and the town wall at Newcastle) was to provide strong bases for garrisons of troops, representing local baronial leaders or the king, and temporary refuge for large numbers of ordinary people.

Lesser landlords constructed smaller strongholds on their estates. Initially, between the 13th and 15th centuries, these smaller peles and towers were built as places of temporary refuge in the event of invasion or raiding by Scottish armies, but later, in the 16th and perhaps early 17th centuries, they were intended to protect their inhabitants against border reivers and other thieves. The remains of such structures survive at Heaton (HER 116), Burradon (HER 312), while the locations of many others are known from documentary records (e.g. HER 139, 726, 788 and 964). In contrast to the larger castles, the purpose of such small strongholds, variously known as peles and rather than as a base for a garrison of troops. Similar buildings were often provided for the vicar or priest of the parish church, as at Houghton-le-Spring, where

there is documentary evidence for a fortified rectory in the 15th century (HER 264), and at Ponteland, just over the county boundary, where part of such a 'peel' survives. In the 16th and 17th centuries the threat of warfare and enemy raiding decreased, and such strongholds became less fortified, with thinner walls and larger windows.

Although hostilities with Scotland largely ceased in the 16th century, the Civil War of the mid-17th century and second Jacobite Rebellion a century later showed that the threat of warfare, both from north of the border and elsewhere remained throughout the post-medieval period. The first armed conflict of the post-medieval period occurred in 1640 was precipitated by King Charles I's attempt to impose a new prayer book on the Scots. This led to military conflict on 28th August at Newburn Ford, west of Newcastle, where a Scottish army of up to 20,000 men crossed the Tyne in order to attack Newcastle from the weaker southern side. The crossing was opposed with fortifications, but the defenders were beaten off by the Scots, who afterwards occupied Newcastle. The Battle of Newburn Ford led to the refortification of existing, medieval defensive structures, such as the castles of Newcastle and Tynemouth, where new fortifications were built and adaptations made for guns and canon (e.g. HER 134). Completely new structures were also built, notably at North Shields in 1642 (HER 151), Shieldfield in c.1643 (HER 285) and Sandgate, Newcastle in 1644 (HER 1500), all as part of the build-up to the Civil War which culminated in the siege of Newcastle in 1644, when the castle was temporarily re-fortified and a number of houses were demolished to improve the field of fire. The Royalist garrison used the Keep as a place of last resort, holding on there for three days after the fall of the town on 19th October. Towards the end of the 18th century there was increased worry about possible invasion from across the sea, and although there were few defences to protect against the threat of attack by Napoleon, a number of barracks were built (as at Sunderland – HER 2870) or enlarged (at Fenham – HER 4093) in response to this threat. Also, in response to the threat of sea-borne attack was the construction of Clifford's Fort in 1672 (HER 149) at the beginning of the third Dutch War.

In the modern period a number of these 17th century defensive structures were maintained for continued use. Clifford's fort, for example, was improved with 18th century alterations and continued in use until 1881 when it was declared obsolete as a place to mount guns, but suitable as a base for the Tyne Division Royal Engineers (Volunteers) Submarine Miners. Most of the old buildings in the fort were demolished at this time and new ones erected. The old gun embrasures were blocked up, a narrow-gauge railway was laid to a new gate in the south-east angle to move mines out to a boat, and two 6-pounder guns were mounted on concrete bases to defend this gate and cover the minefield. The fort remained in use until 1928, and was briefly re-established as an Emergency Coast Battery in WW2 with two 12 pounder gun emplacements.

Sites such as Clifford's Fort, used during the defence of Britain in WW2, make up the majority of sites in the region associated with conflict and defence. A wide variety of defensive sites are recorded from the period of the First World War – e.g. trenches at Brunton (HER 5030) and Hylton (HER 5481), and a munitions factory at Lemington (HER 4943) – but the great majority date from World War Two. Recorded sites can be divided into a number of categories: Early Warning Systems, Anti-Aircraft Defences, Anti-Invasion Defences, Coastal Defences, Civil Defensive Sites, and Airfields.

Specific sites of recorded importance in Tyne and Wear include an Operations Room at Kenton (HER 5035), a Prisoner of War Camp at West Boldon (HER 5852) and a Home Guard bunker at Houghton-le-Spring (HER 5504). The most ubiquitous sites are pillboxes of various designs (e.g. HER 1778-94), many of which survive, and sites of (usually concrete block) roadblocks (HER 5772-5851). Air-raid shelters were also common during World War Two, but many were relatively insubstantial and few are recorded (e.g. HER 5854). Sites designed for active combat include anti-aircraft batteries (HER 5493-5503), mostly sited at coastal locations such as Whitburn (HER 1795), Tynemouth (HER 1919) and Cleadon (HER 4912). Other sites designed to counter enemy aircraft include bombing decoys, such as at Scaffold Hill (HER 1827) and trenches designed to obstruct potential landing sites, such as Ryton Willows (HER 1904). Newcastle Airport contains the site of a World War Two aircraft hangar (HER 4928). Other sites from the period include ammunition dumps (e.g. HER 5853) and loopholed walls, such as at Fenham barracks and Washingwells, near Whickham (HER 5662). The latter, made up of a series of machine gun rests placed behind a pre-existing stone wall next to public footpath was placed there when Whickham was identified as a likely place for an air-borne invasion. This provides an insight into the fears of the period and the level of detailed planning that went into defending the country as part of the Defence of Britain project.

Following World War Two the defensive programme organised during World War Two was not completely abandoned, but was selectively maintained during the Cold War period, when particular attention was paid to early warning systems. Some of the defensive installations set up or, like the 18th century Fenham Barracks (HER 4093), re-used in the 20th century continued in use throughout the Cold War period.