

A Brief Military History

1. Dummy airfield on Cliffe Marshes

This was located at Priory Marsh and consisted of 21 flarepath lights and also decoy lights on the decayed jetties of Curtis and Harvey all facing east to attract German bombers, further south there were bunkers for staff, searchlights and generators.

2. Curtis and Harvey Powder Works

'Lower Hope Point' on Cliffe Marshes. This site was chosen because of its isolation and was where high explosives were produced under contract to the government. During World War 1 around two thousand people travelled to work there by foot, six horse coach or cycles provided by the company. It was extremely dangerous work, especially for the people who handled the nitro-glycerine which was an oily yellow substance and sadly some workers died in explosions there. This sixty acre site was once covered in trees for camouflage purposes, this site can only be viewed from the footpath.

3. Cliffe Battery

Situated at Lower Hope Point and no longer visible the original Battery was abandoned sometime after the Napoleonic War but was rebuilt in 1848 a number of quick firing guns were added and it remained operational until the end of World War 1. In Dickens '*Great Expectations*' Pip used to visit the remains of the old gun battery and said '*It was peaceful and quiet out there with the sails on the river passing beyond the earthwork, and sometimes when the tide was low looking as if they belonged to sunken ships that were still sailing on at the bottom of the water*' and as you walk past the remains of the Curtis and Harvey Powder Works towards the sea wall the same is still true today.

4. Cliffe Fort - Scheduled Monument

Cliffe Fort was constructed in the 1860's to defend the lower Thames with a moat and earthworks on the seaward side. Part of the fort on the seaward side was rebuilt in 1885 for a Brennan Torpedo Station. This was an experimental harbour defence system and was the worlds first wire guided missile. Roof positions were added in 1905. It was rearmed with light guns in World War 2. One of the first pollution controversies on the Hoo Peninsula was when the famous General Gordon complained that fumes from the Francis cement kilns were damaging the health of his soldiers stationed at Cliffe Fort, a chimney was constructed to carry the fumes over the Fort and thus the matter was resolved. The Fort is now derelict and can only be observed from the footpath.

5. Thames Estuary Maunsell Forts

Nore Fort was the nearest of the Maunsell Forts to the shore, situated northeast of Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey. It was dismantled in 1959 and the concrete bases towed and dumped in the Thames just west of Cliffe Fort and the wreck of the '*Hans Egede*' where they can still be seen today at low tide.

6. World War 1 and World War 2

On the first Christmas Day of the 1914-18 war Cliffe became the first place in England for a bomb to be dropped. The 18lb bomb exploded on the main road into Cliffe just south of the old railway station, thankfully no one was injured. However Cliffe was not to be so lucky during WW2 on the 24th October 1942 when a Stirling bomber crash landed onto the farmhouse at Rye Street sadly killing a young woman inside, just missing her baby who was unharmed, and killing all of the aircraft crew.

North Kent Marshes Self Guided Trails Cliffe Military Heritage Trail

Distance approximately 7 miles



Cliffe Fort

Please take care when walking on the road sections especially from West Court Farm to the old air raid shelter due to heavy lorries

Other trails in this series;

Wildlife Heritage Trail
Farming Heritage Trail
Heritage Buildings Trail
Industrial Heritage Trail

Literary Heritage along the Saxon Shore Way



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Cliffe Military Heritage Trail

A circular trail starting at St Helens Church Cliffe turn left at the Six Bells and walk straight down Pond



4. Brennan Torpedo launch rails



4. Gun placements inside Cliffe Fort



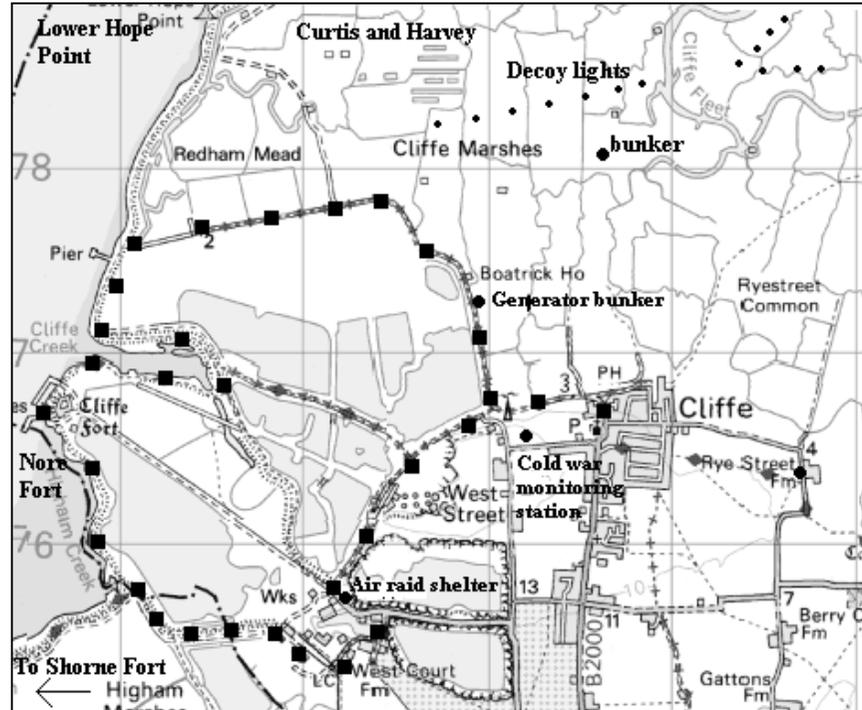
4. Cliffe Fort beneath the telescopic tower



5. Nore Fort remains



Shornemead Fort situated a couple of miles further west along the river footpath



2. Curtis and Harvey Powder Works



1. Generator bunker along Point Road with Boatwick House in the distance



6. Air raid shelter for cement factory workers western