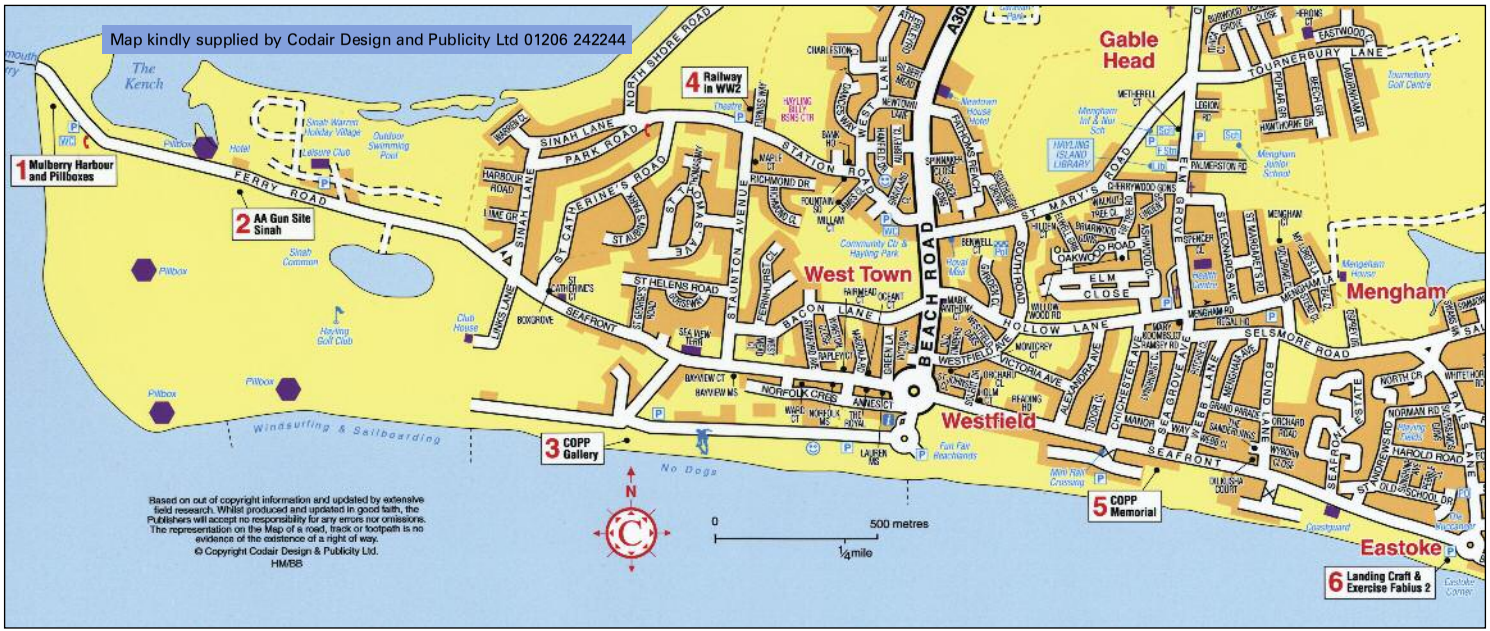

1. Mulberry Harbour and Pillboxes **2.** AA Gun Site **3.** COPP Gallery [Inn on the Beach] **4.** Railway in WWII [Station Theatre]
5. COPP Memorial **6.** Landing Craft and Exercise Fabius 2 [Eastoke Car Park]

Follow the Hayling Island WWII Heritage Trail from the western Ferry area, east along to Eastoke Car Park, and view the six information boards

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Featuring the Hayling Island WWII Heritage Trail

HAYLING AT WAR

1940 to the D-Day landings

HAYLING ISLAND IN WWII

The military significance of Hayling was recognised at the outbreak of WWII. It had been in the forefront of the pre-war holiday camp boom creating perfect accommodation for the many thousands of service personnel drafted in to train on the Island. The pre-war population of around 3,000 inhabitants increased to over three times that number, all being shipped in on the former Hayling Billy line.

Follow the Hayling Island WWII Heritage Trail from the western Ferry area, east to the Eastoke car park, and view the six information boards which can be identified on the back of this booklet.

The boards can be found adjacent to the Ferry Cafe, at the Sinah gun site, outside the Station Theatre site of the original station, the Inn on the Beach, by the COPP Memorial, and at Eastoke car park. The Trail covers a distance of approximately 3 miles, and can be followed using the map on the back page.

The vast majority of service-men were involved in landing craft training or construction and repair duties along the Chichester Harbour shore.

In June 1940 the Royal Navy requisitioned the Northney, Sunshine and Coronation Holiday Camps, renaming them HMS Northney 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Ready-made accommodation, canteen and recreational facilities for many hundreds made these ideal bases for sailors. Mill Rythe Holiday Camp was taken over by the Royal Marines, while Mill Rythe itself was the location of the HMS Northney dockyard facility for landing craft repair and maintenance.

On the Island's far western tip lies a construction site for the Mulberry Harbour project, while a little further east, lies the Sinah gun site, established in 1939. Hayling played a very important part in the aerial defence of Portsmouth and the Dockyard, with three AA units who were billeted mainly in the Sinah area, particularly at the present Sinah Warren Hotel.

Hayling Island Sailing Club made a major contribution to the war effort, hosting a top secret reconnaissance unit code named COPP, or Combined Operations Pilotage Parties.

Hayling's WWII pillboxes

Keen-eyed visitors will be aware of the many relics of our years on the wartime frontline, such as the numerous pillboxes still scattered about Hayling. At least twenty five were built across the island to help delay any possible invasion forces. Five were sited in the Golf Course area, and another five along the southern shoreline towards Hayling Island Sailing Club. These among others, have long been demolished or lost to the sea.

Other pillboxes were sited on West Lane, Daw Lane, Havant Road, Hollow Lane and along the eastern shore. Another one was sited close to our present Station Theatre complex, to protect the important railway approaches.

Apparently, two in Northney were disguised as farm buildings to blend into the landscape. We have even heard of one elsewhere, being diguised as a pub!

More examples can still be seen on the roadside close to the bridge, along West Lane and alongside the Kench close to the Langstone Ferry. They are not particularly pretty objects, but the pillboxes are significant reminders of Hayling's wartime heritage.

Hayling Island Golf Club has several fine examples plus a concealed control centre across its picturesque links course, not least the prominent one sited on the central mound.

Below: Pillbox at Mill Rythe, Chichester Harbour

Corner of West Lane and Daw Lane

Hayling Golf Course

The Kench pillbox

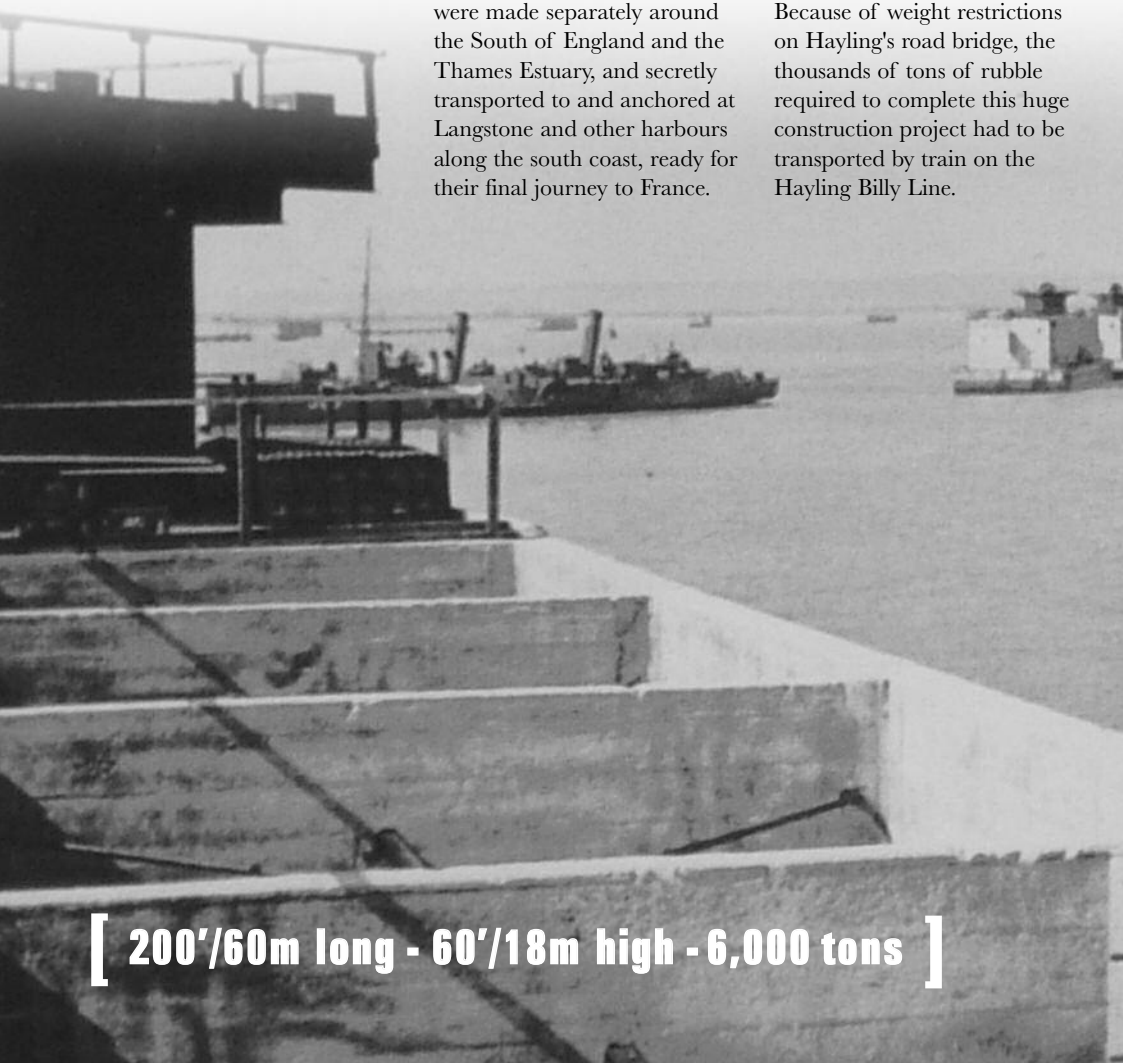
MULBERRY HARBOUR

Just a hundred metres or so north of the Hayling Ferry pontoon, lies a huge semi-sunken concrete structure, the remains of one of Hayling's Phoenix sections of the Mulberry Harbour used on the beach at Arromanches after the D-Day landings.

Along the beach, south of the Ferry Boat Inn, four sections of the Mulberry Harbour were built by a local builder named Travis, employing some 600 workers, most of whom were bussed onto the island daily.

The four sections built on Hayling were Type B2s (non-gun carrying) and were part of the total build of 164. Others were made separately around the South of England and the Thames Estuary, and secretly transported to and anchored at Langstone and other harbours along the south coast, ready for their final journey to France.

Each Phoenix section, was 200 ft/60m long, 60 ft/18m high and weighed over 6,000 tons. Because of weight restrictions on Hayling's road bridge, the thousands of tons of rubble required to complete this huge construction project had to be transported by train on the Hayling Billy Line.



When these Mulberry Harbour sections were completed, they were temporarily hidden by being sunk with all the others off Selsey.

As D-Day approached it was planned to raise 3 or 4 sections a day. However, when they were being recovered some refused to float as they stuck in the sand and mud of the channel. Air jets were used to clear away the mud and by 2nd June 1944, four days before D-Day, all but three of them were ready for the channel crossing.

Anti-aircraft gun site, Sinah

The gun site was built early in 1939 during the 'phoney war', prior to the outbreak of hostilities on September 3rd. Three anti-aircraft batteries were established - one at Sinah Common, another at Northney, and a mobile unit, plus a search-light battery in the present Cherrywood Gardens area.

Below: Sinah Common gun site today
Bottom: Gunsite in 1941

The Sinah battery was initially equipped with Mk 2 4.5" naval guns, later replaced by four 5.7" AA guns. The heavy guns were brought in by sea, as they were too heavy to come across the bridge. Later there were three mobile 3.7 inch guns. The site consisted of four permanent concrete gun emplacements, all connected by concrete paths to ammunition stores, command and control buildings and accommodation blocks.

On the night of 17th April 1941 more than 30 bombs were dropped on the Sinah Warren gun site, knocking out three of the four guns, killing six of the gunners and injuring 30 others. The gunners who died are now commemorated at one of the surviving gun emplacements, now a designated National Heritage site and picnic area.

The destroyed gun site lay to the north of Sinah Lake, which at the time, was very much smaller than it is today. In 2008 an English Heritage initiative led to the conservation of the main ammunition store which had been in danger of sinking into the lake.

Early models of the parabolic radar aerial were installed at the Sinah gun site to help with the detection of incoming enemy aircraft. The gun site was initially manned by the gunners of 219 Battery 57 HAA Regiment Royal Artillery, but soon after the direct hits on the gun site, the majority of the gunners were drafted onto active service overseas. They were largely replaced by ATS women, who operated the site with outstanding success during the following three years.

Decoy Units

Typical was the 17 year old Londoner Dot Watson, who joined up in 1940 at the height of the Blitz, and served on Hayling for the next three years. She was promoted to corporal and put in charge of the anti-aircraft height finder, helping to destroy three enemy aircraft.

Dot was billeted in Sinah Lane and says that despite the tough conditions and demanding work these were the best years of her life - it was 'freedom' after her strict Cockney upbringing.

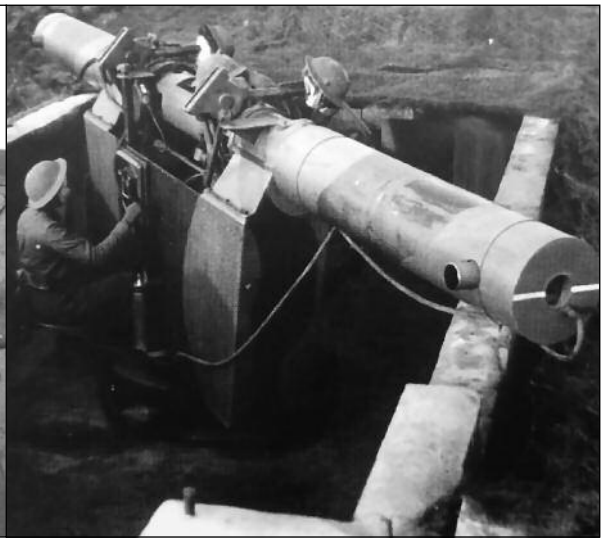
When the night air raids started in late 1941, the authorities made a tactical decision based on Hayling's similarity to Portsmouth from the air.

It was decided to try diverting bombers away from the vital Naval Dockyard onto Hayling Island, using burning oil drums and lights known collectively as 'Q Decoy Sites'.

Fire baskets and burning oil drums were triggered from a control bunker about 600 yards away. Sinah Common, the Golf Course and Langstone Harbour were chosen as being ideal places for these 'Q Decoy Sites'. There were carefully positioned structures, which when lit from the inside, would mimic the effect of light shining through chinks in doors and windows in a carelessly blacked out area, to simulate people at home and burning buildings in Portsmouth. The ruse was often dramatically successful, and on the night of 17/18th April 1941, over 140 enemy aircraft were lured away from Portsmouth and unloaded in excess of 200 air-dropped munitions into Langstone Harbour and Farlington Marshes.

This was the most successful of the 'Q Decoy Site' operations of the war, but sadly led to the destruction of much of the Sinah gun site. Although by June 1944, 'Q Decoy Sites' had been attacked on over 730 occasions, casualties on Hayling Island were remarkably light.

Left: Dot Watson, and with friends
Below: Operating the AA height-finder



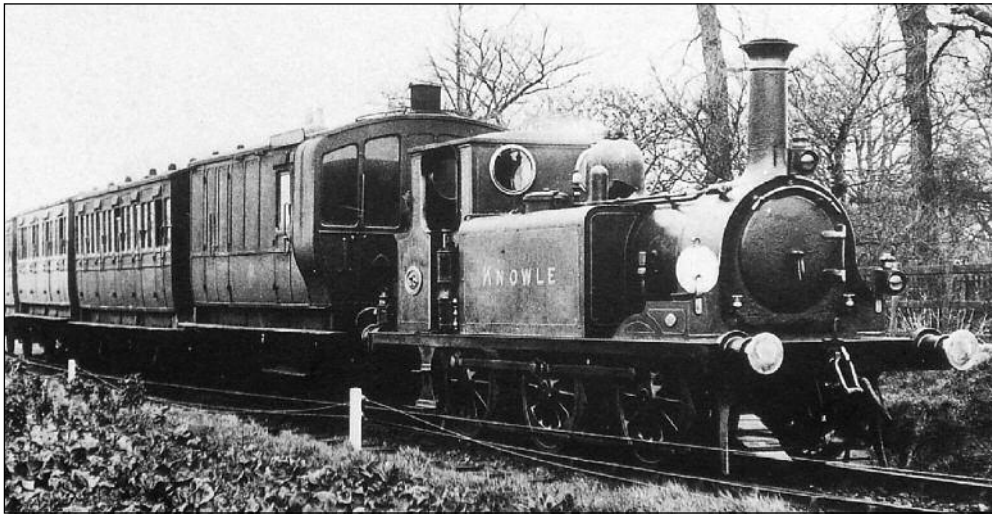
The Hayling Billy line

The Hayling Billy railway line was used to maximum capacity transporting the thousands of servicemen who poured onto the Island during WWll. It was a vital link ferrying in military stores and munitions, not least the equipment deployed at the Sinah Common gun site.

In 1944 it also played a major role in bringing in thousands of tons of rubble needed for the construction of the Mulberry Harbour sections, all coming through the site of our present Station Theatre, built around the original goods shed.

The large number of Wrens and ATS girls stationed on the Island had a 9pm curfew on their leave, and only one late pass a week off the Island to enable them to return by the last train. Those who had boy-friends on the Island got in league with the late-night train drivers. About a mile out of Hayling Station, they blew their whistles loudly, a signal to the girls to hurry to the station and meet others from the train, and all proceed to their digs together, thus having late passes every night of the week.

Southern Railway employed many female guards during the war years, like Molly Smith [pictured below]. It is interesting to note that all the civilian staff were required to leave the premises whenever any military supplies or personnel were due to arrive.



Hayling's secret navy

From January 1943 until the war's end, Hayling Island Sailing Club was the HQ base for a top secret reconnaissance unit whose clandestine operations world-wide saved the lives of thousands of Allied troops.....

Centre: Guard Molly Smith

Combined Operations Pilotage Parties - COPP

One dark winter's night in late 1943, two shadowy figures emerged from the surf of a Normandy beach on a mission to survey the future invasion beaches under the noses of the enemy, six months prior to D-Day. Their story is typical of the short but glorious history of this secret unit.

Main picture: Lieutenants Smith and Brand
Below: COPP members in 1943
Right centre: Jim Booth secures X23 D-Day+1
Right: X-Craft interior
Far right: Lieutenant Jim Booth

Recruited from the Royal Navy and the Army, the unit's cover was never broken, which may explain why their deeds are so little known and to this day, theirs' remains one of the great unheralded stories of special operations.

There were many COPP heroes, and we can tell you of just a few of their amazing tales, but two men stand out for their exceptional work prior to the D-Day Normandy landings. They were Major Logan Scott-Bowden of the Royal Engineers, and Sergeant Bruce Ogden-Smith of the East Surreys.

On December 31st 1943, the 24-year-old major boarded a motor gunboat at Gosport with his companion-in-arms Bruce Ogden-Smith. A few miles from their target, the two men changed into their bulky rubber swimsuits, and strapped on heavy bandoliers, backpacks, measuring equipment and weapons.

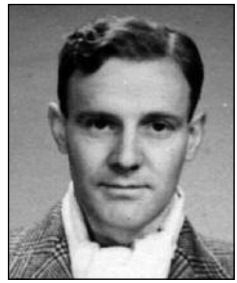
They transferred to a small inshore craft which took them to within a quarter-mile of the beach, and then swam in to reconnoitre the Gold Beach area around Ver-sur-Mer.

Another outstanding tale is that of Lieutenants Smith and Brand, who completed an epic 75 mile, 44 hour voyage by canoe from the beaches of Sicily back to their base in Malta after a failed rendezvous with their submarine in February 1943.

These outstanding feats were typical of the spirit and great determination of all the men of COPP, who completed many further hazardous missions, and in the process won over 90 medals and commendations.

The COPP unit was established through the efforts of Lieutenant Commander, later Captain Nigel Clogstoun Willmott, whose uncle had served in the disastrous WWl Gallipoli operations.

Willmott learned from him the great dangers faced in opposed landings onto unknown and uncharted enemy beaches. Geoffrey Galwey also deserves mention as the man who found and equipped the COPP unit's base at Hayling Island Sailing Club. Electrical mechanic Peter Palmer too was quite unique in serving with the COPP unit from its inception in late 1942 to the end of the war in the Far East in August 1945.



Main picture: Countess Mountbatten dedicates the COPP Memorial on Hayling Seafront, on September 27th 2012

Above right: Countess Mountbatten in 1944

Above far left: Nigel Willmott
Second left: Geoff Galwey
Above: Peter Palmer

Exercise Fabius 2

In the spring of 1944, the Allies were preparing for D-Day and the invasion of mainland Europe. This would involve the surprise landing of 150,000 men and their equipment onto the Normandy beaches from over 7,000 ships and landing craft, in the last and most decisive event of the war in Europe.

This massive operation required detailed planning and rehearsal to ensure its success. Six Fabius exercises were carried out in all, three in the local area.

Hayling Island was chosen as the location for D-Day reheasal Fabius 2, while Bracklesham Bay [Fabius 3] & Littlehampton [Fabius 4] were used on the same day to check all aspects of the invasion plans.

When 'G' Force, the unit which was eventually destined for Gold Beach in Normandy, landed at Beachlands the Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Allied Supreme Commander General Eisenhower, are said to have watched the 50 ships participating, from the roof of the Royal Hotel.

The vast number of ships, men and aircraft involved, meant that there was considerable risk that the enemy would detect the activities and deduce that an invasion was imminent. The entire Channel was therefore sealed off by extensive naval and air patrols to ensure no German observation would be possible.

Landing Craft

Hayling Island played a major role in many aspects of the Allied war effort during WWll. Its location on Chichester Harbour made it ideal as one of only two landing craft training and repair bases in the whole UK, and many thousands of Navy and Royal Marines personnel came to the Island to train along our eastern shore.

The range of craft was wide, from the 50ft LCM [Mk3] to 117ft LCT [Mk1] craft designed to carry tanks, and the 158ft LCLs capable of transporting 200 troops and equipment.

As well as their purpose-made accommodation pre-war holiday camps had excellent halls, which provided recreation facilities for the troops. Coronation camp [Lakeside] was requisitioned for the armed forces and renamed HMS Northney 3, and held frequent dances for the service personnel and the locals.

Island landgirl Phyl Rowe, met her future husband Gordon, who was a crewman on LCL8, at a dance in late 1943. They fell in love, but completely lost touch for many months when his landing craft sailed for the D-Day beaches without any warning in June 1944. He returned eventually and they were married at St Mary's Church at the war's end.

Top: Butlin's Holiday Camp in 1939
Above: Phyl Rowe and Gordon
Below: LCT704 on Hayling beach, 1944

Top: Douglas Sharp aboard his LCS[M]
Above: LCL8 at Mill Rythe
Inset: Douglas Sharp in 1944

Of particular interest were the specially adapted LCS[M] landing craft which were fitted with pointed bows and a variety of armaments. These were designed to act as patrol craft around the Dutch islands of the Zeeland region, to counter the activities of German midget submarines and gunboats, which were deployed to protect the V2 rocket launching sites aimed at London.

These modified vessels were 40' long with 10' beam, and were armour plated and powered by twin Ford V8 engines, giving them a speed of 12 knots. They each carried twin Vickers machine guns, two Lewis guns and smoke mortars in the bows.

Islander Douglas Sharp was a captain in the Royal Marines in 1944, and can be seen aboard his specially adapted landing craft. He trained his 12 boat flotilla on the south side of the Hayling Island Sailing Club at Black Point, while the men of the COPP unit trained along the opposite northern shore. Following their mission to Holland, the flotilla returned to their Chichester Harbour base at the war's end.

Below: Crowds welcome the flotilla home