

North Clyde Archaeological Society
Military Project 2015 >
On going report updated as work commences

Woodend Military Installations
Tam Ward. June 2016



Frontispiece. Illustration from Mugdock Park HAA gun site.

Abstract

*The remains of Heavy Anti Aircraft gun batteries (HAA) along with control rooms and ancillary buildings, surviving in the area of operations of the NCAS are currently being researched, surveyed and recorded by photography as part of NCAS **Military Project**. This report deals with the site at Woodend, Helensburgh.*

Introduction

The River Clyde Estuary contains the largest number of HAA and other military coastal defence sites in Scotland. The heavily defended site of Scapa Flo in Orkney comes second in numerical terms to that of the Clyde.

North Clyde Archaeological Society (NCAS) are engaged in a Military Project to record the surviving remains of all periods in their area of interest, and to compile research on such sites with a view to publishing the results more fully in due course. The sites consist principally of former gun installations with ancillary buildings, although hospitals, POW camps and other sites also existed in the area.

Methodology

The buildings and their layout are surveyed using the taped offset method and/or measured as an upstanding buildings survey. Drawings are completed at appropriate scales and the entire sites are recorded by digital photography.

This project comprises of a survey of visible remains only and therefore some interpretations of buildings etc may be compromised by lack of data at particular places. Many buildings now survive merely as rectangular concrete slabs and vegetation probably covers some of those, therefore understanding their original layout and function is difficult, although comparanda with other places where survival is better, and from other available information, may help in due course. This survey uses metric measurements however the original construction sizes were probably imperial.

WOODEND SURVEY Centred NS 24850 81249
OS Explorer Map 347, 1:25,000 Series. Loch Lomond South.

Fig 1



Fig 1

The site lies on an elevated piece of ground immediately on the northern side of the railway which itself skirts around the northern side of the town of Helensburgh.

The radar mat area of the HAA gun site is given on the above map (Fig 1) along with two buildings which are no longer extant. It is suspected that a modern electrical sub station may have been built on part of the military site.

The site has been extensively demolished with the gun positions showing as piles of rubble and the adjacent Command Post only surviving as a few concrete walls on the ground surface. Three ammunition (?) buildings survive as basal levels outwith the perimeter fence which encloses only the gun positions and the fence line is entire. Two locations within the compound may be search light positions (to be confirmed) and the camp area to the SW is seen as concrete foundation slabs, some of which have collapsed and broken concrete roofs lying over them. Consequently the survey reveals few details as to function of most buildings. The radar mat area is well defined as a feature on the landscape. On the north side of the sub station area is an arc of four earthworks running in an E/W alignment, these are thought to be gun positions which pre date the more formal brick and concrete structures.

SURVEY RESULTS

GUN AREA Fig 2

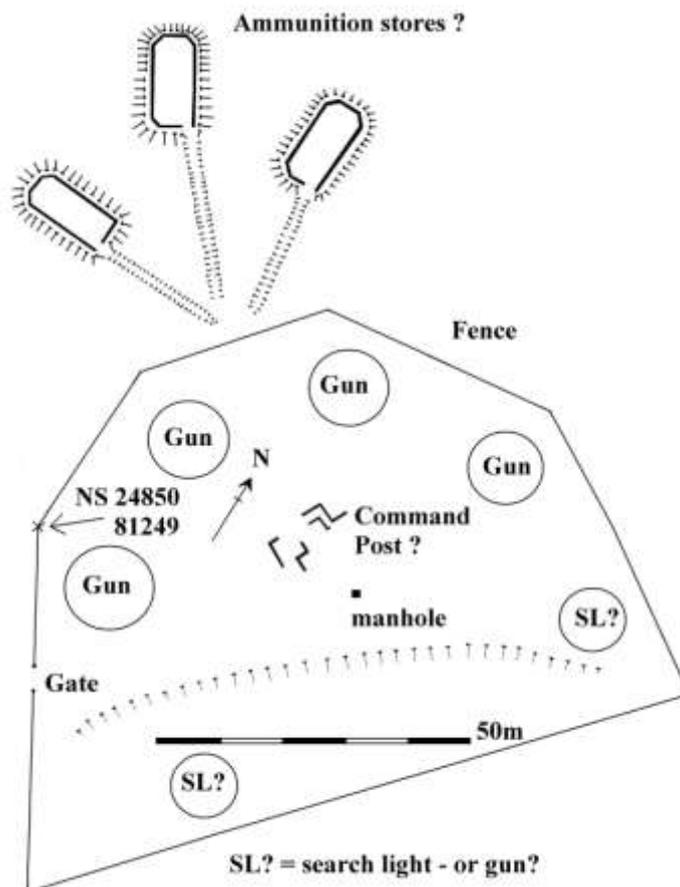


Fig 2.

The complete 'D' shaped perimeter fence area measures 110m by 75m and lies on the summit of the hill, a gate position is indicated by larger concrete posts on the southern side. Despite the demolition, the typical arrangement of gun positions set as an arc of four, with the Command Post within the arc is identifiable. Hurll and Cadder bricks have been used in the gun constructions.

Possibly the surviving concrete walls are part of the open air Predictor area and the Command Post may be underground here. A brick built manhole 0.6m square and 1.25m deep, with two rung handholds with a concrete cover can be seen nearby, its purpose is unknown. The only other visible features are two places where circular arrangements of concrete stumps and large threaded bolts are seen among dense overgrowth, concrete block walls have been in position around these (Fig --), but they have been effectively removed for the most part.

A break of slope running over the east side of the enclosure is possibly natural, but the level ground adjacent it on the east side may have been a designated area, however, this part of the enclosure is densely overgrown with naturally regenerated gorse and brambles.

Outwith the perimeter fence and to the west are three sunken buildings, made with double brick walls, the bricks are marked 'Cadder', and each building has a gully leading from its entrance (all 1.5m wide) and towards a common point in the fence. The internal size of the buildings is 14m long by 6.5m wide and some but not all corners are chamfered. One building survives to a depth of 2m below the extant long walls, but at the ends, an elevated 3m length by 1m high section of brickwork appears to stand as free standing walls above the rest. The gullies are assumed to have been ramps, possibly railed, leading upslope to a now vanished gate in the fence and the buildings are currently assumed to be ammunition stores supplying the guns. The interpretation is re-enforced by the fact that each has a revetment of earth and turf surrounding them to just below the height of the surviving wall heads, the banks extend for 3m from each building by 1.5m high.

The prominent and level radar mat area measures c130m in diameter and is seen as a huge scarp surrounding the SE side, clearly the site has been modified by bull dozer activity to level such a large area and volume of ground.

EARTHWORKS AREA Fig 3

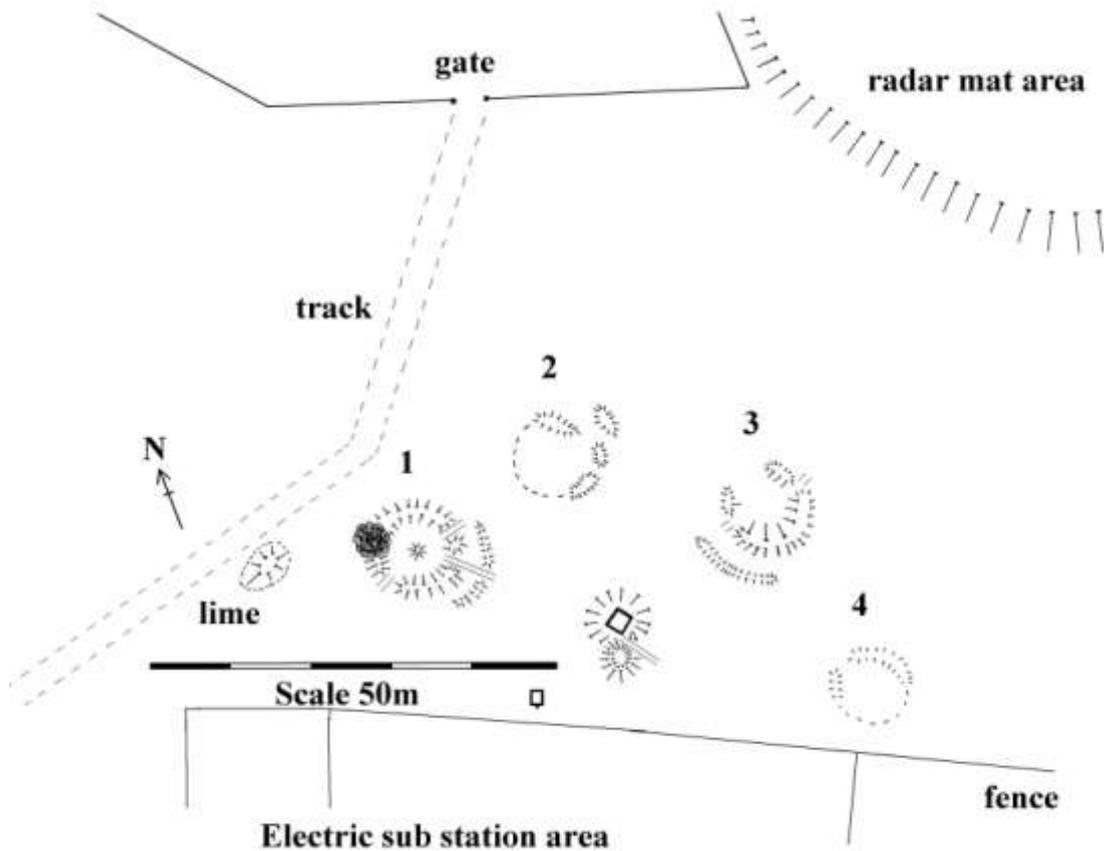
Immediately on the north side of the sub station fence is an arc of circular earthworks and two brick structures. A pile of unused field lime also lies beside the track and is given here only to avoid confusion with the military remains.

The earthworks each form circular enclosures of c12m in overall diameter and spaced in an arc on an E/W alignment approximately 20m apart. Only turf banks varying in height and width and in various states of preservation are seen. They are described here as given on the plan:

No 1

No 1 is the most complete features of the four, it comprises of turf banks between 0.5m and 1m in height and spreading to 3m wide. An outer bank lies on the east side and curves to respect the main enclosure which has three distinct gaps, one of which

also runs through the outer bank. A low mound lies in the centre of the features and a pile of stones, clearly dumped at a later period lies over the west side.



No 2

Poorly preserved but nevertheless quite obvious, No 2 comprises of four banks, one of which lies outwith the arc made by the other three. Gaps in the banks appear to replicate those in No 1.

No 3

No 3 is best preserved on the southern side where an outer bank also survives at least in part. Gaps in the NE and SW sides conform to those on No 1. The central area was probed and found to be solid, it is assumed that a concrete base exists here, supporting the idea that these are gun positions.

No 4

No 4 is the poorest regarding preservation, but the partial banks survive with a gap on the NE side.

Lying centrally positioned to the four earthworks is a brick (HURLL bricks) 'tank like' structure built as a double brick wall. It lies in a sunken area or pit measuring about 7m in diameter. The structure measures just over 2m square and since it is not cement rendered on the inside it is assumed not to be a water tank. However it does not appear to have a way in from the sides, the brickwork being continuous on each side, nevertheless a sunken way leads away from it to the SE and past a circular pit like earthwork on the south side.

The only other extant feature in this area is a small double brick building measuring 2m by 1m and with an extension of brickwork on its south side, it appears like a manhole (?).

The ground along the sub station fence drops steeply down and it is clear that whole area has been levelled when the electrical apparatus was installed. Parts of the military installation are likely to have been removed at that time.

CAMP AREA Fig 4

-- buildings survive to various degrees on SW side and are bounded by the railway on that side and by a farm road on the west side.

They are described here as numbered on the survey plan:

- No 1
- No 2
- No 3
- No 4
- No 5
- No 6
- No 7
- No 8
- No 9
- No 10
- No 11
- No 12
- No 13
- No 14
- No 15
- No 16
- No 17
- No 18
- No 19
- No 20
- No 21
- No 22
- No 23
- No 24

DISCUSSION

The principal surviving feature of this site is a massive area of the radar mat which is still given on OS maps. The concrete posts for the security fence around the gun positions also survive to given the complete circuit of the fence and the main gate position where the track runs downhill towards the railway crossing.

Unfortunately the gun positions and the Control building are severely demolished, but the three ammunition (?) stores survive enough to be planned with their access routes to the gun enclosure. Two positions where the circular arrangements of concrete blocks over large threaded bolts are presently not understood, but similar features are

seen at Geilston Farm and may have been for search lights or other types of guns, hopefully this will be resolved as research continues. At both Woodend and Geilston these features have been enclosed by concrete blocks of which only a few remain in situ at Woodend.

The camp area survives mainly as concrete bases of various sizes but all rectangular in shape. A common size is 4.5m wide, presumably the width of Nissen huts. Few visible details of the function of these buildings survive; some have steps on their ends indicating entrances in those positions. Concrete slab roofs have been collapsed onto some of the sites, also obscuring details.

Of considerable interest are the earthworks which are assumed to be the positions of guns judging by their disposition as an arc, and their size and spacing. It is possible that guns were initially installed in haste at Woodend and therefore with minimal construction involved in advance of the more formal installations. The small square building centrally positioned with the arc may have been an early type of command post? But it does seem to be associated with the earthworks.

Further research should reveal whether other buildings were removed during the construction of the electrical sub station.

Woodend site may have been chosen for its easy access to the railway for conveyance of construction materials, equipment and personnel, although its elevated position over the town of Helensburgh and with good views of the Clyde estuary must have been a major consideration in that respect. It was also within direct sight of the HAA gun installation at Rosneath Castle Farm to the SW, but now completely removed.

Acknowledgment

NCAS is grateful to Luss Estates for permission to carry out the survey.