

*Brixham Battery Heritage Centre Group*

# *Battery Banter*

Registered Charity No. 1082171

Winter 10/11 Newsletter

## **Christmas in Brixham**



Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December saw 20 floats and approximately 350 people take part in the annual Brixham Carnival procession.

Earlier in the day there was heavy rain but fortunately this stopped about 4.30pm and the carnival got under way. Led by local Town Crier, Tony Criddle and Okehampton Marching Band Battery members joined many other organisations in the regular event which was

enjoyed by the many who lined the town's streets.



*The pictures show Battery members during and after the procession*



## **Early Spring Cleaning**

The sun was shining on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January when some willing volunteers helped paint the Humber Pig Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) Gate Guard and the 12 pounder gun. The early spring cleaning wasn't limited to outdoors with our large number of brass shell cases getting a polish too. Our stewards were also kept busy answering questions from the many visitors who visited the museum.

*Right: The Humber PIG APC getting a spruce up*



# Fundraising Update

The War Shelter Restoration fund is now standing at about two thirds of the way towards our target of £6000. This is a great achievement in the time since the appeal was launch last year and the restoration is still on schedule to open the War Shelter and tunnel to the public at Easter.

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> December saw over £200 added to the appeal fund following another successful coffee morning, held at the Community Christian Hall in Fore Street, Brixham. Not only was the tea and coffee great value as always but re-enactors were on hand to add a 1940's feel. If that wasn't enough then entertainment was provided during the morning by 'Ells Angels', otherwise known as Kingswear Village Choir who serenaded customers while they enjoyed their drinks.



*Above right: ATS Marie Youngs working hard during the morning.*

*Left: Our re-enactors, Peter Bailey, Steve Watkins and Andy Youngs.*

or by joining our group. Membership costs just £5 for adults and £2 for under 16s per annum. For further information please telephone Phil Trayhorn on 01803 752239 or email [hiightres@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hiightres@tiscali.co.uk).

*Right: 'Ells Angels' entertaining customers.*



## Educational



The battery considers education as a vital part of role not only to the many visitors who come in to the museum as part of a day trip or their holiday but also to people who live locally and want to know more about Brixham's role in World War II.

November in particular was a very busy month for local primary school visits to the Battery with over 200 pupils spending hours working through their

curriculum questions with our stewards and guides.

Pupils from Galmpton, Eden Park and Chestnut Drive schools enjoyed guided tours of the museum, underground tunnel and War Shelter rooms as well as the recently restored harbour defence pill-box, suitably

manned by the Home Guard! Veteran soldiers, airmen, sailors and evacuees were able to give insights into what life was like for both service personnel and civilians during the dark days of World War II.



*Right & Above Left: Local school pupils enjoying the Battery museum*



*Left: Home Guardsman Andy Youngs manning the pill-box during a school visit*

museum opening hours until Easter. Thanks to all members who helped out during these visits which were thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils. We received letters from the children who thanked us for 'filling their brains up with lots of Second World War facts' and letting them explore the tunnel.

If you know any schools or other interested groups who would like to arrange a visit to the Battery, please contact Phil Trayhorn on 01803 752239 or email [hiightres@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hiightres@tiscali.co.uk) for details.

*Right: Pupils from Eden Park School holding examples of their WW2 project work*



## Another Battery in the South West

At the outbreak of World War II much of Britain's coastline had little or no defences, even our major ports. All around our shores plans were hastily drawn up to protect against German hostilities and following the fall of France in 1940, to repel the expected invasion.

Many of these new coastal defences, including Brixham Battery, were built on older fortifications as these sites tended to occupy the best sites for defence. One of the most spectacular sites to be updated for this purpose was Pendennis Castle in Falmouth. Known as Cornwall's Greatest Fortress, Pendennis has a long military heritage protecting the port of Falmouth and the vast Fal estuary anchorage known as Carrick Roads. Originally built between 1540 – 1545 on the orders of King Henry VIII to defend against a possible invasion by France and Spain, the fortress was in use until being decommissioned in 1956.

In April last year I visited Pendennis Castle while on holiday in Cornwall and as well as seeing the original Tudor fortifications, it was interesting to see another of the South West's World War II Battery's and it is this part of the castle that I shall try to give a taste of.

Now in the guardianship of English Heritage, Pendennis Castle has had many areas restored which the visitor can enjoy, including the Battery Observation Post and Half Moon Battery.

### **Battery Observation Post (BOP)**

During the 1800's Half Moon Battery became the main offensive gun position at the fortress. When reconstruction of the battery took place in the later half of the 1800's an observation post was built on the ramparts to control the battery below.



The Battery Observation Post that can still be seen at Pendennis was constructed during World War II. It is a low concrete building sunk into the rampart for protection, with glazed front and sides allowing a wide view of the sea. The BOP has been restored to its wartime appearance, with dark blue walls to reduce light reflection. Above the window can be seen a panorama of the coastline which could be used as a quick reference chart by the observers.

As at our own battery in Brixham, the BOP was used by observers to provide accurate position and range details for targets. This information was relayed to the gunners who would adjust the guns accordingly allowing the target to be hit.

Before 1880 getting an accurate position for an enemy target was not easy and relied on the experience of the observer, using simple instruments. During the 1880's optical instruments which could determine the accurate range and bearing of a moving target entered service.

The BOP at Pendennis has a reproduction depression position finder which allowed observations by telescope to be plotted onto a gridded map on a semicircular table underneath. If you repeated the readings you could determine the course and speed of a ship which allowed its future position to be predicted. With this information, along with wind and tide details, gunners could fire shells to land in the path of a moving enemy ship.



During World War II the BOP was used to co-ordinate the two 6 inch guns, which were installed at Half Moon Battery, and its related searchlights. Observers would monitor

shipping in the English Channel and use reports from other coastal defence positions between Portloe in the east and St Agnes in the west. The range and bearing details for targets was set on dials and sent to the guns electrically by a system of motors and cables called Magslip transmission, an early form of remote control. Some of the Magslip equipment can still be seen in the BOP.

## Half Moon Battery



*Left: One of the two 6-inch gun emplacements at Half Moon Battery as seen from the Battery Observation Post*

In 1793 a new battery was built to replace the ones on the shoreline and the fort at Pendennis Point. In order to provide a wide arc of fire out towards the mouth of Falmouth Harbour this new battery was built in the shape of half a moon, hence the name.

The original battery was built for cannon but was rebuilt in 1895 to house two 6-inch breech loading 'disappearing guns' (ones which could be sunk into a pit when not firing for protection). However in 1911 further changes took place and more conventional 6-inch guns were installed.

When war was declared against in September 1939 planning started for new gun emplacements at Half Moon Battery. Within three months, remodelling of the battery and the installation of two new 6-inch guns had been completed. At this time the battery was manned by Cornwall Heavy Regiment, 193 Heavy Battery.

*Right: The Battery showing the canopy and 6-inch gun with a 40mm Bofors anti aircraft gun in foreground*



*Below Left: One of the 6-inch guns*

Following an air raid on Falmouth in July 1940 concrete anti-straiving canopies were built over the battery, work being completed in December. Camouflage netting would have hung from the canopies to disguise them from the air. Permanently tethered barrage balloons were also added at this time.



The guns at Half Moon Battery were replaced twice during WWII. By 1943 the 6-inch guns had a range of 12 miles and received their target data from radar. They could fire three different types of shell, high explosive, shrapnel or armour piercing and used a fabric cartridge bag containing

Cordite instead of the more traditional brass cartridge case. To man the battery at this time required 99 people but gunners only made up 36 of this number. The rest were operating searchlights, involved in position/range finding or communication.

While the Falmouth batteries saw less action than some other coastal installations they were used in anger on a number of occasions. The first action was on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1943 when Half Moon Battery fired at what was suspected to be a German E-boat (fast, light torpedo gunboats) forcing it to alter course and head for the French Coast. The final action was in March 1944 when E-boats were detected by radar far out to sea. This was important as at the time the build up to D-Day was under way at Falmouth.

After World War II Half Moon Battery was still operational and used for training until 1956 when the Coastal Artillery branch of the army was disbanded. By this time guided rockets had made batteries like Half Moon redundant.

The battery today has been maintained to appear very much as it did at the end of World War II along with the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century underground magazine and war shelter. The guns which can be seen today at Half Moon Battery are similar to those in use during World War 2 but are 6-inch Naval experimental guns from 1946. The barrels are identical to those which were installed at Half Moon Battery at the end of the war but the breeches bear no similarity to coastal defence guns, they are the forefathers of the 6-inch MK5 QF gun used by the Royal Navy from the early 1950's. The guns at Half Moon Battery today, while having the ability to be fully functioning cannot be fired due to the location of Falmouth Coast Guard Station.

*Sources: English Heritage produced guide books for Pendennis Castle used as reference material.*

## Memorabilia Donations Continue

Many thanks to George for donating the British Army wireless set WS88 complete with metal instruction plate.

The WS88 was introduced by the British Army in 1947 as a platoon level radio designed to replace the wireless set 38. It was made by E.K.Cole Ltd (EKCO) in Malmesbury, Wiltshire and was important as it moved the inter platoon radio traffic to VHF. Another important feature for the WS88 was that it was completely hermetically sealed which was a lesson that had been learnt from issues using the WS38 in the tropics.

As seen in the picture the wireless set along with the 90v + 1.5v battery unit are carried in web pouches on the signaller's belt. The wireless set being on the left hand side of the wearer and the battery unit on the right, linked by a cable. The antenna is a 4 foot sectional rod although a trailing wire could also be used for camouflage.



The set was practical in design, rugged and simple to operate, e.g. there wasn't even a volume control. Depending on terrain and weather conditions the set had a range of up to 1.5 – 2 miles. The regular army continued to use the WS88 until the early 1970's, albeit by then in a limited capacity, but it was still on issue to the cadets until the 1980s.

Thanks also goes to Julian Symes who has kindly donated a 1930's tea-set, which will form part of the display in the Generator 1940's room once the restoration of that building is completed.

If you have any military memorabilia that you would like to donate to the Heritage Centre please contact Phil Trayhorn on 01803 752239.

## Calendar of Events

### March

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> – **Dartmouth Castle New Shop Opening**

Group members will be providing an Honour Guard for the opening of the new shop at Dartmouth Castle.

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> – **Film Night at the Battery** 7.30pm (*Members Only*)

Rod Hart is organising Part 2 of the British Army Film Unit Archive film show. Unfortunately due to available space this event will be for group members only.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> – **Coffee Morning** 09.30am – 12.00pm

Held at the Community Christian Hall, Fore Street, Brixham. Come and enjoy a tea and biscuit for just 60p while supporting the Battery at the same time.

### April

Date TBC – **The Battery presents 'Old Time – Wartime – Music Hall Do'**

Keep an eye on the website for details of what is planned to be a great evening.

### May

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> – Bank Holiday Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> – **Cobbaton Combat Collection 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Preston Isaac's Cobbaton Combat Collection opened to the public in 1981 and this weekend will be a 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. Details for the weekend are still to be confirmed but if you haven't visited Cobbaton before then this would be a good opportunity to make the trip to North Devon. The Collection is located 5 ½ miles south east of Barnstaple.

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> – **Churston School Veterans Day**

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> – Monday 30<sup>th</sup> – **Paignton & Dartmouth Railway Heritage Festival**

Celebrating 150 years since the railway reached Churston. Battery members will be in attendance.

## June

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> – **D-Day Anniversary BBQ** 2pm – 5pm

D-Day Anniversary event with WW2 re-enactors and military vehicles on display at the Battery as well as live music throughout the afternoon. There will also be the traditional BBQ at 4pm if weather permits. The event is **FREE** to all with any donations going towards our War Shelter Restoration Appeal.

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> – **Annual General Meeting at the Heritage Centre** – 7pm

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> – **Torbay Veterans Day**

Details to follow.

## July

Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> – **South Devon Railway 1940's weekend / Buckfastleigh Military Vehicle Show**

## August

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> – **VJ Weekend at Cobbaton Combat Collection**

Displays of military vehicles from Devon MVT, militaria stalls, re enactors and hopefully local Burma Star Veterans. Open 10am – 5pm daily, free entry but donations gratefully accepted for local Burma Star Veterans. Camping from Friday 12<sup>th</sup>. 5 ½ miles south east of Barnstaple, North Devon.

Monday 29<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> - **Living History Event Dartmouth Castle**

Two day living history event with BBHG taking over the castle as in World War II.

## Heritage Centre Opening Times

**Winter Opening (until Easter)**

**Sunday, Monday and Friday 2.00 – 4.00pm**

Other times by appointment including group bookings, to arrange please telephone Phil Trayhorn on 01803 752239 or email [hiightres@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hiightres@tiscali.co.uk). **Admission is free.**

## Membership Details

Would you like to help preserve one of the country's last remaining Coastal Defence Battery's? Then why not become a member of the Brixham Battery Heritage Centre Group.

To become a new member, or renew your current membership, costs just £5 for adults and £2 for juniors per annum. For further information please telephone Phil Trayhorn on 01803 852449 or email [hiightres@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hiightres@tiscali.co.uk).

**Find us at [www.brixhambattery.org](http://www.brixhambattery.org)**

**Brixham Battery Heritage Centre Group, Fishcombe Road, Brixham, TQ5 8RU**