

Capel Battery

— Jon Iveson —

WITH THE COLLAPSE OF FRANCE in June 1940 Britain found herself facing possible invasion. Accordingly there was an urgent need for guns to defend the coast, particularly in the area around Dover, only twenty-two miles from German occupied France.

In July 1940, amongst many other measures, Winston Churchill ordered the Admiralty to release six fifteen-inch and six eight-inch high performance guns to boost coastal defence and to improve cross channel artillery capability from Dover.

Three of the eight-inch Mk8 guns (serial numbers 152,156 and 164) were destined for Capel Battery and three for Hougham just over a mile away.

Major C.S. Woodford, R.A. of the Royal Artillery Armament Unit was made responsible for mounting the guns. This was no easy task as the mountings were fully automated traverse and elevation with powered breech opening and ramming. In addition these guns taken from the cruisers Norfolk, Dorsetshire and York, were on Mark II barbette mountings which gave a

maximum elevation of seventy degrees.

Design and mounting began in October 1940 and the work was to be done by Vickers Armstrong at the Elswick works in Newcastle. Because of the problems matching the mountings to concrete pits building work did not begin until May 1941 and the guns were not ready for action until May 1942.



Number three gun at Capel. 26 May 1942

The final design of the gun pits was for a magazine to be placed below and behind the guns. Seventy shells could be stored in ready racks around the pit of each gun and the charge bags and replenishment ammunition brought from the magazine and shell store by lift. A special platform enabled five shells to be lifted in a vertical position. These were then moved to the gun by trolley.

The eight inch Mk VIII gun was fifty calibres long and fired a 256lb projectile at a muzzle velocity of 2725 feet per second using a single bagged charge of 67lbs of cordite. This gave the gun a range of 29,000 yards.

The guns were supplied by road and were manned by 424 battery of 520 Coast Regiment Royal Artillery who arrived on site in December 1941. The guns were put on care and maintenance in 1944 having seen very little action, although they had been used firing a fixed barrage against aircraft.

The guns were finally removed in 1952 and the above ground structures bulldozed in April 1980.



Magazine under construction at Capel Battery