



WOOLVERSTONE PARK AND HALL - WORLD WAR TWO

Observation staging on the roof of the Hall



Woolverstone had a small but important part to play during the Second World War 2, especially in the run up to D-Day.

After the Hall was sold to Oxford University in December 1937, it lay empty for over a year. Along with many other large country houses, it was commandeered by the government in 1939 for the war effort. Alterations were made to the Hall. WRNS quarters were erected. Initially it housed troops. First there were the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire regiment. They were followed by Liverpool Scottish, 2nd battalion in 1940 and then various groups of both the Royal Artillery and also Engineers regiments.

Between October 1942 and May 1943, the concrete road from Main Road down to the river was constructed as well as the concrete hard and pier. Oil storage tanks were installed further up the hill. Also, in 1942, staging was erected on the roof of the Hall for the Royal Observer Corps, whose post had previously been in the field behind the Post Office at No 24 Main Road since 1926.

From late 1942, Woolverstone Park was, among other things, a landing craft base and training establishment for Combined Operations. Combined Operations was a department of the War Office whose purpose was to harass the occupying German forces in Europe. They utilised all three service arms: the Royal Air Force, the British Army and the Royal Navy. The main focus of the operations were the Commandos.

Staff had to plan operations and develop ideas and equipment to harass the enemy. It also incorporated all those who worked with landing craft up to and including landing ships that were used in the various amphibious operations. During this period many different classes of landing craft were stationed on the river Orwell: LCT (Landing Craft Tank), LCM (Landing Craft Mechanised), LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel) and LCA (Landing Craft Assault). There were around 70 of these smaller craft based at Woolverstone.

HMS Woolverstone - a stone frigate - was commissioned by the Admiralty in 1943. The base was commissioned on 1/1/1943, care and maintenance from 9/7/43, re-commissioned on 15/10/43 and paid off on 20/2/46



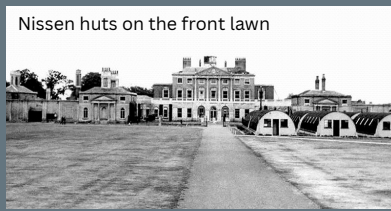
During the Autumn of 1943 several days of loading experiments and tests were carried out from the Cat House hard. These tests were carried out in great secrecy, tanks (Churchills, Crusaders and Shermans) and other vehicles were loaded onto the landing craft in several different orders the craft and tested on the river for stability.

Not only were landing craft anchored here before going south and on to Normandy, but also Woolverstone was part of the deception force working under the auspices of Operation Quicksilver where a fleet of dummy landing craft were assembled before being put out on the river to confuse the Nazis.

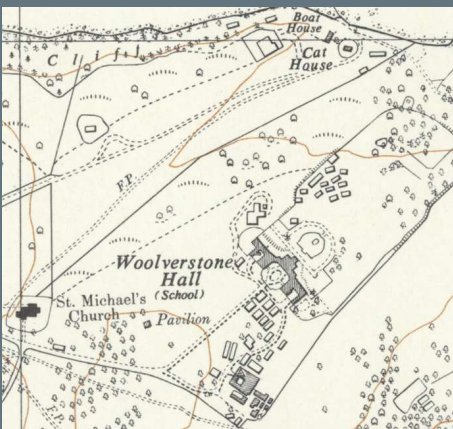
Officers were housed in the Hall, other ranks in Nissen huts dotted around the grounds. Stables used for stores.



Nissen huts on the front lawn



Nissen huts to the side of the western balustrade



St Michael's church was used by the Navy for worship.

There were over 1000 personnel present at HMS Woolverstone during the "lock down" month preceding D-Day on 6th June 1944.

In one poignant account from WRNS officer, she described going to Woolverstone church on the morning of Sunday 4th June 1944 and on her return from the service she found the landing craft had slipped off down the Orwell on their way to Normandy.



Aerial photograph of Woolverstone Park - March 1944

On the morning of 5th June 30 fully loaded landing craft left the Cat House Point for the Normandy beaches. These had been loaded with troops and vehicles at Felixstowe on 2nd June and came up the river waiting for the signal to go which had been delayed by a day because of poor weather in the channel.

HMS Woolverstone continued to play a part in Operation Quicksilver and the construction of dummy landing craft after the Normandy landings. Later in the war, receiving landing craft for repair or decommissioning.