



EMBARKATION HARDS. CAT HOUSE, WOOLVERSTONE. SITE N.K.

Cat House, Woolverstone was chosen after the period of assessment as one of the 68 Embarkation sites to be constructed around the south and east coast for several reasons.

Firstly, Cat House sits on the south bank of the river Orwell, a broad, heavily wood fringed, tidal river close to Harwich and Felixstowe. The south bank is more shady, perhaps more hidden, than the north bank. Secondly, Woolverstone Hall was close by. The Hall had lain empty since its sale to Oxford University in 1937. The Hall and park offered an ideal space for accommodation, training and command organisation. Thirdly, Woolverstone was served by a good, wide road from Ipswich, the High Road, which could take a high volume of heavy traffic quite easily both from road and rail connections.

Work on Cat House hard, site N.K., began in late summer of 1942 and was completed by 7th May 1943, although the target date had been 31st March. Cat House hard was designed for Landing Craft Tank and constructed to take four 4 craft.

A long, re-enforced concrete access road was built from the High Road down to the river, known until recently as "Tank Road" by local people. This is over half-a-mile long. There is a carefully designed entrance which allows heavy vehicles turning off the High Road, a sweeping turn rather than tight corner. Immediately afterwards there is a passing place. Tank Road continues down to the river. There are seven passing places along its length. Two thirds of the way down there is a large turning circle where vehicles could off-load their secret cargoes, to be hidden under the trees and covered in camouflaged netting.

An apron fronting the river was constructed 64m (70yds) in total width. It varies in depth between 13.8 m (15 yds) and 16.5 m (18 yds).

A concrete retaining wall, three lengths of concrete tall, was required to retain the base of the cliff and built along the rear of the apron.

A jetty, or pier, comprising three square, wooden dolphins and two, smaller intermediate supports between 1st and 2nd dolphin, was constructed in the centre of the hard.

There were a further three wooden and steel dolphins built slightly further up the river. These can be seen in a photograph taken in late 1940s. They were used for tying up ships and off-loading diesel oil to the storage tanks.

Then there were ancillary buildings as well as use of the old Berner's boat house and Cat House. Four Nissen huts were erected close to the hard.

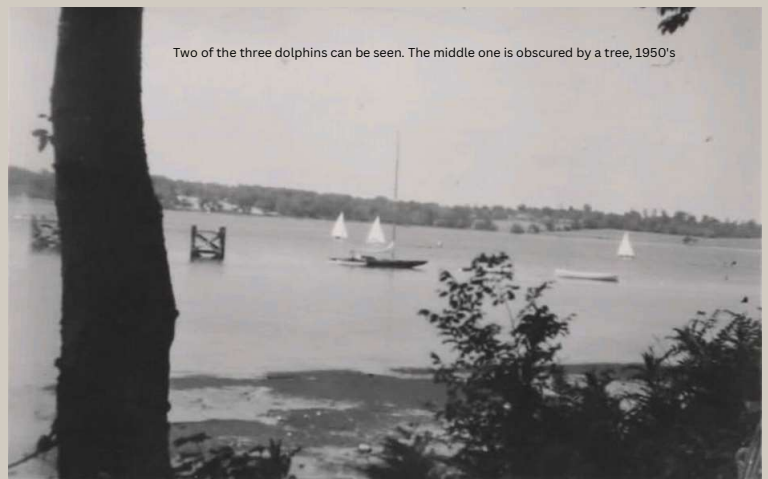
Two where the site of the RHYC now exists, plus two Nissen huts behind the retaining wall to the west of the jetty beneath the cliff and one small Nissen hut on top of the cliff that looked out across the river and to the embarkation hard below.

There was also a guard hut, control room, watch hut, workshops, stores, winches and latrines.

Two diesel storage tanks were built, one close to the cliff, a second one further up the site, close to where the football pitch is today.



The intertidal zone was completed with flexible matting. This reaches down a further 11.8 m (13 yds) into the river giving a total depth of 27.3 m (30 yds). The mats were designed to provide a stable surface that could support the weight of heavy vehicles, even on sandy or uneven terrain, whatever the height of the tide.

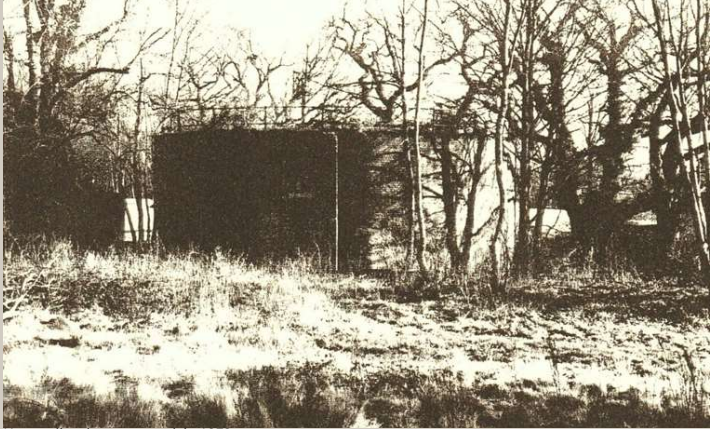


Two of the three dolphins can be seen. The middle one is obscured by a tree, 1950's





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Upper diesel storage tank in 1972



Lower diesel storage tank c. 1950

These storage tanks supplied diesel, fed by gravity, through 6in cast iron pipes to LCT moored against the jetty. The Army was responsible for the construction on land above the high water mark and the Navy on the intertidal area. In addition to Cat House hard, there was also use of the Slumpy Lane wharf, which was extended, at Freston.



The whole area along the river Orwell became a restricted zone from April 1, 1943. Heavy security was put in place. Guard houses were placed at Freston crossroads, Woolverstone, Hollow Lane in Chelmondiston to ensure secrecy and safety.

During the autumn of 1943, several days of loading experiments were carried out from Cat House hard. These tests were carried out with utmost secrecy. The tests were to find the optimum loading arrangements.

Tanks, including Churchill, Crusaders and Shermans, were loaded and unloaded in different configurations and tested on the river.

Much of Woolverstone site N.K. embarkation hard can be seen today and is a reminder of the effort and sacrifice made by civilian workforce and the armed forces.

In the end, Woolverstone was not used to embark troops destined for Normandy but it had an important role to play in the success of Operation Overlord – the deception plan Operation Quicksilver.

