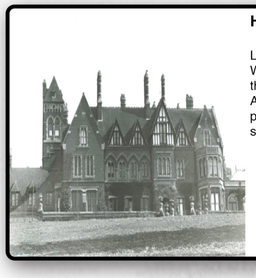
A GUIDE TO THE SIGNIFICANT LOCAL SITES DURING THE BUILD-UP TO D-DAY

Southwick House

With the extended planning for D-Day, General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces made his headquarters at Southwick. In the build up to D-Day, all the main allied commanders, including Naval Commander-in-Chief Admiral Ramsay, and the Army Commander-in-Chief General Montgomery, were based there.

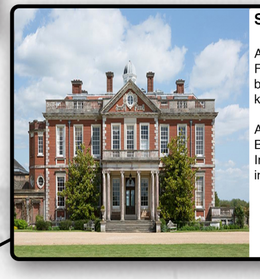


HMS Vernon Leigh Park House

Leigh Park House and its grounds, and West Leigh House, were taken over by the Mines Warfare Department of the Admiralty. Here they developed the plans for the mines and ammunition supplies needed for Operation Overlord.

The King's Stone

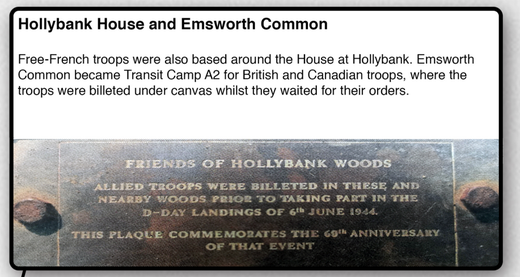
Just prior to the invasion, on 22 May 1944, King George VI walked from Rowlands Castle to Horndean to inspect the troops, who were soon to be deployed for Operation Overlord. Local eyewitnesses reported there were thousands of troops lined up waiting to be inspected and that the King took time to speak to many of them. The King's Stone was erected as a memorial to the inspection and is situated north of St John's Church on the B2148.



Stansted House

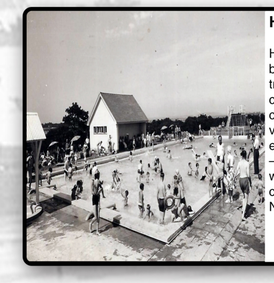
Along with British troops, the Free-French, and Canadian troops were billeted in the grounds of Stansted Park, known as Transit Camp A1.

A local evacuee recalls, "The soldiers, British and Canadian were everywhere. In the woods, in tents on The Green and in Stansted Park."



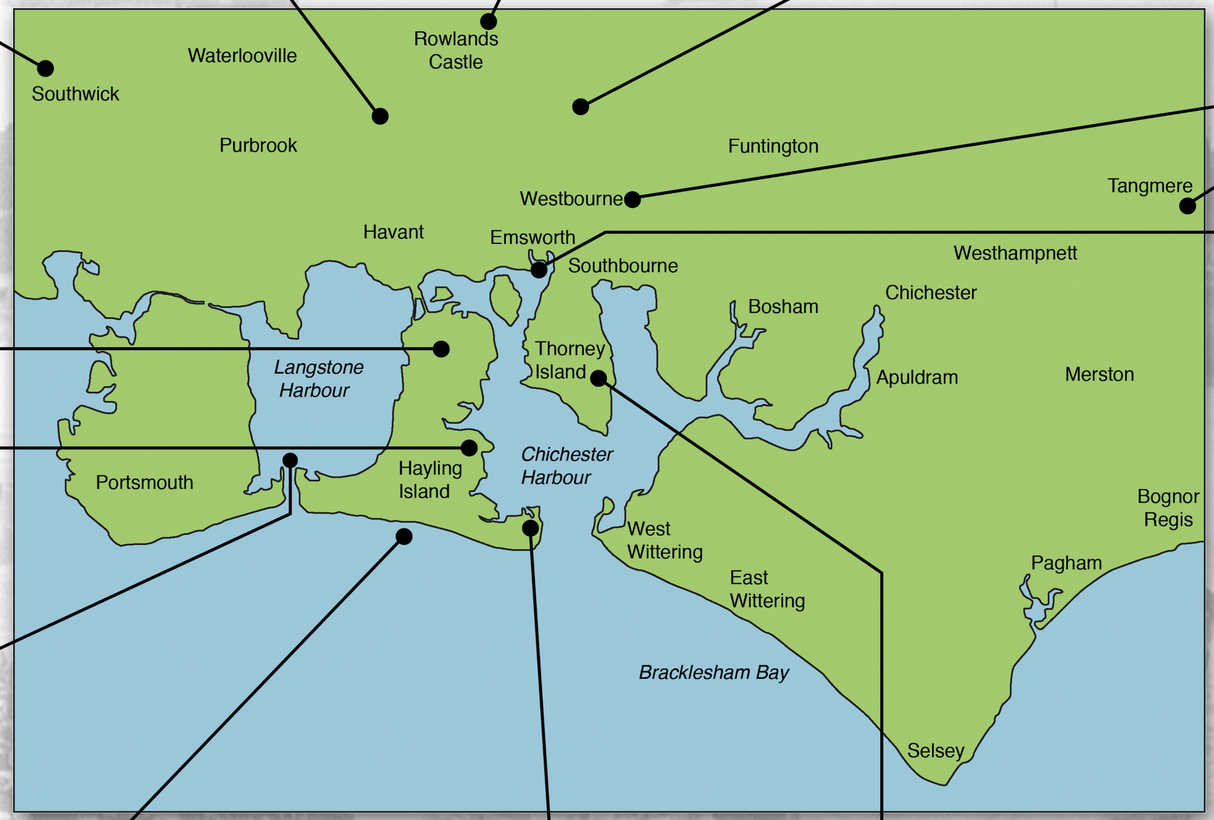
Hollybank House and Emsworth Common

Free-French troops were also based around the House at Hollybank. Emsworth Common became Transit Camp A2 for British and Canadian troops, where the troops were billeted under canvas whilst they waited for their orders.



HMS Northney

Hayling Island, with its open sea and beaches with surf provided an ideal training site for the crews handling the cumbersome and unseaworthy landing craft. Being able to land the craft in a variety of sea and wave conditions was essential. Hayling's three holiday camps – Northney, Sunshine and Coronation were requisitioned as a base for the crews and became known as HMS Northney.

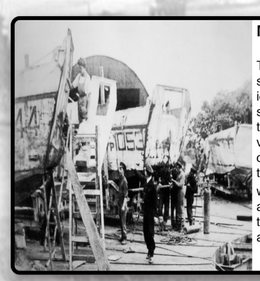


Tangmere Operations Room

Tangmere became one of the RAF's top fighter aerodromes, with Hawker Hurricanes based there. These were a new generation of fighters, developed to combat the Nazi's planes. Airfields were added at Westhampnett, Merston, and later at Funtington, Apuldram, Selsey and Bognor to support the D-Day landings. The Tangmere Operations Room at Bishop Otter College (now University of Chichester) managed the air activity surrounding the landings.

Emsworth Harbour

As part of the major logistical operation to transport the 160,000 troops across the Channel, the quiet shelter of Emsworth Harbour was used for the embarkation of the 5th Battalion King's Regiment for Operation Overlord.



Mill Rythe

The wooded shoreline of Mill Rythe, in sheltered Chichester Harbour, provided ideal cover for construction of the specialist landing craft vessels needed to transport the troops and military vehicles across the Channel. Hundreds of specialist landing craft were needed to cope with crossing the rough open waters of the English Channel, as well as be driven up the beaches to deliver troops, tanks and military equipment, in a serviceable condition.

Mulberry Harbours

The western tip of Hayling Island, near the Ferry Boat Inn, was a construction site for some of the Mulberry Harbours which were a remarkable achievement, creating an artificial harbour structure, which enabled the rapid offloading of cargo onto the beaches during the invasions. Four of the large sections, known as caissons, were built on Hayling Island by a local builder.

Operation Fabius

Operation Fabius was a series of trial run landings based at Bracklesham, Littlehampton and Hayling Island which took place on 4 May 1944 under the watchful eyes of the senior officers from the top of the former Royal Hotel. Troops from Force G, based in the New Forest, were successfully landed on Hayling beach front. They then regrouped at Leigh Park House to rest and recuperate before returning to their base.

Hayling Island Sailing Club – Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPPS)

Throughout the winter of 1943/44, teams of 10 to 12 volunteers, including canoeists, paddled and swam to the Normandy beaches to make detailed surveys and collect soil and sand samples. Submariners operating the minute X-Craft submarines made drawings of the beaches. It was an operation of immense danger but crucial to the success of the invasion.

Thorney Island

Typhoon Squadrons based at Thorney were ideal for ground attacks. Immediately prior to the D-Day operation, their task was to attack the radar stations along the French coast to prevent them giving advance warning of the invasion fleet. On D-Day itself the Typhoons attacked the roads and railways, targeting tanks and armoured vehicles, to prevent enemy reinforcements getting close to the British troops coming ashore.

The Allied invasion of the Normandy coast of France commenced on 6 June 1944 under the name of Operation Neptune, now commonly known as D-Day. On 6 June nearly 160,000 troops crossed the Channel and were landed on the Normandy beaches. By the end of August more than three million allied troops were driving into the heart of France. The result of years of planning, Operation Overlord (code name for the Battle of Normandy) was one of the most complex military operations ever planned.

The local communities all along the South Coast, particularly around Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester Harbours, were involved in the Operation – construction sites, troop billeting, assembly points and training grounds. Vital to the success of the Operation was the need for absolute secrecy from the Germans about where and when the invasion would take place. Whilst many locals knew 'something' was going to happen, that was about the extent which they knew.