

Royal Artillery School of Coast Artillery

In 1940 the School of Coast Artillery on the lower slopes of the Great Orme, Llandudno officially became operational. It re-located from Shoeburyness and was moved as it needed to expand (due to the war) and that was proving to be difficult in Essex; this coupled with increasingly heavy air-raids and the threat of invasion led to the decision to move.

Many sites on the west coast of Britain were looked at before the decision was taken to opt for the area of land at the end of Llys Helig Drive on the West Shore of the Great Orme. The land was duly requisitioned by the War Department from Mostyn Estates and was chosen as it required little alteration. It was vital that there was suitable anchorage for the target vessels and good conditions for radio direction finding and searchlight training. Royal Engineers designed and planned the layout of the site allegedly taking only one day and using toy balloons purchased from the local Woolworths store!

Initially there was only a gunnery wing but wireless and searchlight wings were established in October and December 1940 respectively. The wireless wing was expanded and in April 1941 the first special wireless course began, training instructors in radar work for service both home and overseas. By 1942 the Coast Training Regiment was based there and remained until 1944. Training at the school reached a peak in 1942 when 150 officers, 115 Cadets, and 445 other ranks were accommodated, and up to 14 courses could be run at any one time.

Troops were not billeted at the Artillery School but instead various properties and hotels were requisitioned in Llandudno itself. The headquarters and senior officers mess was located at the now demolished Gogarth Abbey Hotel, junior officer's messes were situated at the Richmond and White Heather Hotels while workshops making target vessels were at Red Garages and Pearson's Garage in Central Place.

The staff of the Coast Artillery School took part in many sporting activities in the town and staged several amateur variety shows at local venues. They also participated in joint exercises with the local Home Guard and the R.A.F. who had a radar station at the Great Orme Summit Hotel.

At the end of the war the armaments and equipment were removed and the Coast Artillery School moved to Plymouth and in 1946 the land was returned to the Mostyn family. The buildings became derelict and most were demolished in the 1950s although it is still a fascinating place today to spend an hour wandering around.