

BACKGROUND

In the years leading up to the First World War, there were increasing fears of a German invasion on the East Coast, which was nearest to the German ports.

During the war, it was thought that the Germans might try to end the deadlock of trench warfare in Europe by landing large numbers of troops in England. In response to this threat, guns were mounted around parts of the Norfolk coast, backed up by trenches.

PILLBOXES

At least 48 pillboxes are known to have been built in Norfolk during the First World War, of which 24 currently survive, the majority being in North Norfolk.

The World War 1 pillboxes were usually circular and made of concrete blocks. It is thought that the name 'pillbox' derives from their similarity to the kind of circular cardboard box in which chemists of the time supplied pills.

Pillboxes were not observation posts, but were designed to protect British troops firing at the invading force and were manned by regular troops.

The pillboxes had several openings, 'loopholes', through which soldiers could fire at the enemy. Most of them had steel shutters that could slide down over the loopholes not being used, to keep the enemy from firing back through them. They also had thick steel doors to protect the soldiers.

In North Norfolk, there was a continuous line of pillboxes along the coast from Cley to West Runton, with possibly a WW1 pillbox further west at Stiffkey on National Trust land, part of the Norfolk Coast Path. This line was reinforced by a second line just inland, between Holt and Aylmerton.

A line of pillboxes ran along the course of the River Ant. Several pillboxes survive on the upper Ant, with more coastal pillboxes at Mundesley, Bacton, Sea Palling and Great Yarmouth.

The pillboxes were usually built in pairs to provide mutual fire support. Surviving pairs at Bradfield, Little London, White Horse Common and Thorpe Market, are all included on the trail.

Other World War 1 pillboxes are located at Kelling, West Runton, Mundesley, Bacton, Hanworth, and Spa Common near North Walsham.

Pillboxes were still being constructed as late as July 1918, as seen in the graffiti written in the drying concrete on the pillbox at Sea Palling, by the men of the Royal Engineers who built it.

LATER USES

Some of these pillboxes were reused in the defence schemes of the Second World War. At Little London and Weybourne (part of the Muckleburgh Military Collection), Second World War pillboxes can be found beside their First World War predecessors, as the same locations, like coastal points and river crossings, were often chosen to be defended again.

For more information, activities and events visit
www.northnorfolk.org/WW1

Acknowledgements and contributions

Christopher Bird - Author - Silent Sentinels
Martyn Coope - Pillbox Photographs
North Norfolk World War 1 Network (NNWN)
North Norfolk Town and Parish Councils

THE NORTH NORFOLK WORLD WAR I PILLBOX TRAIL



© 2015 - Christopher Bird, Photographer

The Pillbox Trail forms part of North Norfolk's World War 1 Centenary Commemorations 2014 – 2018 and offers a unique opportunity to visit and view many of the remaining WW1 pillboxes in North Norfolk.



1 STIFFKEY
TF 96755 43995
X 596464 Y 343931
NR23 1QE
Greenway, Stiffkey
www.nationaltrust.org.uk



2 WEYBOURNE
TG 10215 43345
X 610496 Y 342868
NR25 7EG
Muckleburgh Collection
Weybourne Road
www.muckleburgh.co.uk



3 BEESTON
REGIS
TG 16741 41592
X 616741 Y 341592
NR26 8TP
Britons Lane



4 AYLVERTON
TG 18339 40532
X 618339 Y 340532
NR11 8QE
Church Road



5 THORPE MARKET
TG 24090 35346
X 624090 Y 335346
NR11 8UB
A149, opposite
Church Road,
Junction 34



6 THORPE MARKET
TG 24146 35392
X 624146 Y 335392
NR11 8UB
Church Road



7 BRADFIELD
TG 27180 33427
X 627180 Y 333427
NR28 0QR
Common Road,
North Walsham



8 BRADFIELD
TG 27174 33416
X 627174 Y 333416
NR28 0QR
Common Road,
North Walsham



9 LITTLE LONDON
TG 29668 31323
X 629668 Y 331323
NR28 9SN
Bacton Road,
North Walsham



10 LITTLE LONDON
TG 29660 31326
X 629660 Y 331326
NR28 9SN
Bacton Road,
North Walsham



11 WHITE HORSE
COMMON
TG 30826 29622
X 630826 Y 329622
NR28 9NH
Happisburgh Road,
North Walsham



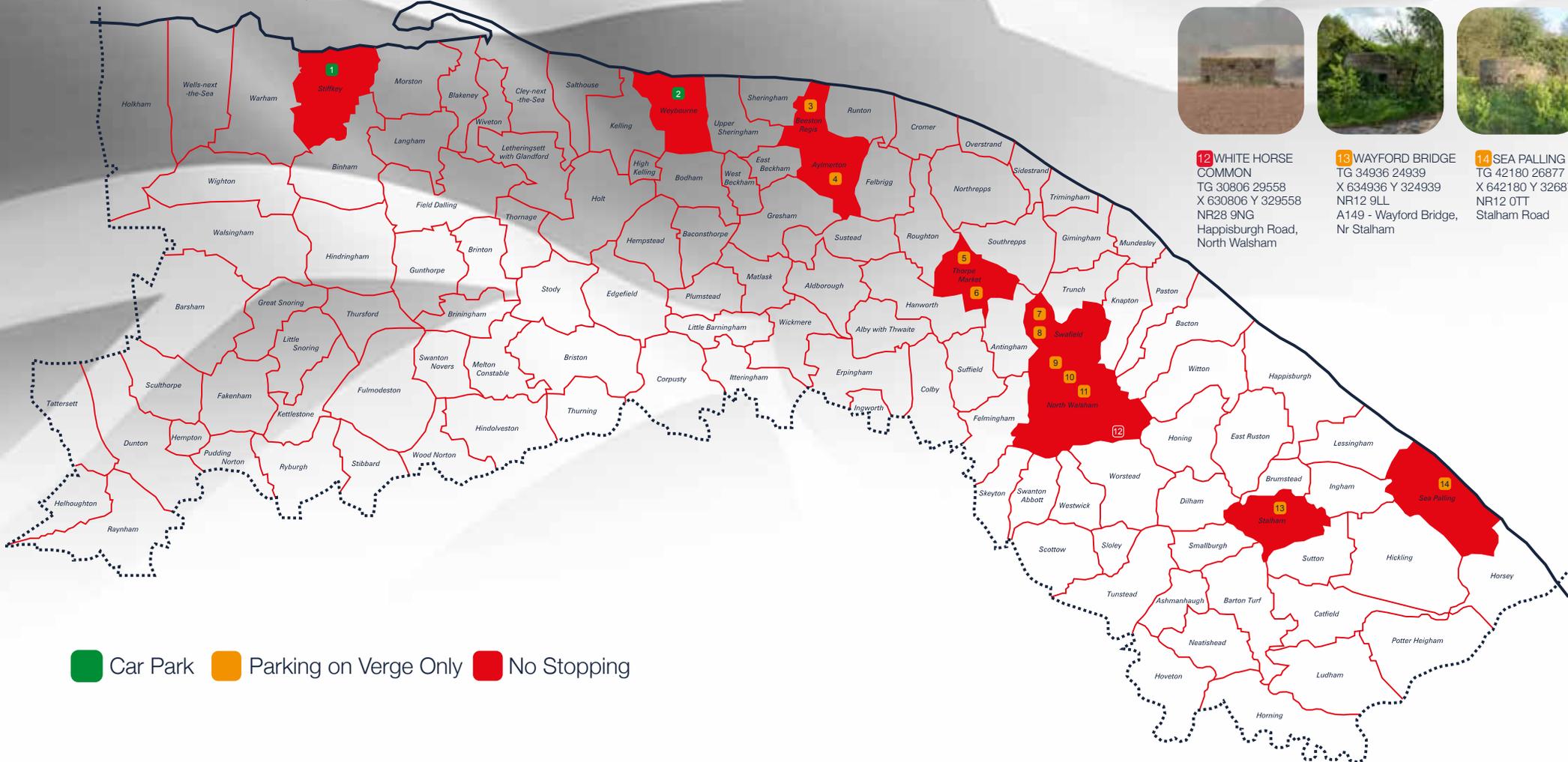
12 WHITE HORSE
COMMON
TG 30806 29558
X 630806 Y 329558
NR28 9NG
Happisburgh Road,
North Walsham



13 WAYFORD BRIDGE
TG 34936 24939
X 634936 Y 324939
NR12 9LL
A149 - Wayford Bridge,
Nr Stalham



14 SEA PALLING
TG 42180 26877
X 642180 Y 326877
NR12 0TT
Stalham Road



Car Park Parking on Verge Only No Stopping

NORTH NORFOLK WW1 PILLBOX TRAIL CHALLENGE

Want something different to do? Why not combine a little bit of history with seeing some of the lovely North Norfolk Countryside?

Visit at least 10 of the Pillboxes in the trail and take a photo at each one.

Email the photos together with your name and postal address to ww1@north-norfolk.gov.uk in return we will send you a North Norfolk Pillbox Trail certificate.