HERITAGE HARBOURS

The more you keep information under your hat

—the safer he'll be under his!

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES

TRANSFORMED BY WAR 1939 - 1945

Defending the small ports and rescuing Allied airmen

In North Norfolk (**Wells-Next-the-Sea Heritage Harbour**) the concern was a potential invasion from the Netherlands using the wide expanses of sandy beach for aircraft landing, despite some useful obstacles such as the marshes and difficulty of navigation at night.

Admiral Dreyer reported to General Ironside 3 June 1940

"The sands north of Wells next the Sea would at low water provide very good landing grounds for aircraft"

In response beach barricades were established, and anti-invasion defences covered the sand flats at low water- in the form of steel poles, twisted wire fencing, and mines hidden under the sands. Behind the beach stood an artillery camp with six-inch anti-aircraft naval guns, capable of firing shells more than seven miles into the deep-water shipping channel off the coast where German E-boats hid.

Fishing vessel Rose: one of seven Wells boats with seventeen men that answered the "call for all boats" on May 30th, 1940, to participate in the Dunkirk evacuation.
Image: Wells Harbour Commisioners

The present-day Harbour Office and former home guard station during WWII. The word 'TEAS' on the roof had to be removed by orders from the ministry as they proved to be a clear identification mark when enemy planes were targeting the harbour.
Image: Wells Harbour Commisioners

Wells harbour was not closed but had major restrictions on vessel movements, with navigation of the entry channel blocked with a boom.

Apart from the small fleet of RAF Air Sea Rescue launches, and also the local fishing fleet, the major trade was with Thames barges. Thirty three barges are recorded in 1943 importing cement for the building of the local airfields. This was considered so important, that dumb barges were anchored in the harbour approaches, from which barrage balloons were winched up to protect the barges while unloading at the Quayside.

These records and much more are held in the Wells Harbour Commissioners archives.

Historic England