



Cockerham Sands Observation Tower

PHASE I CONSERVATION STATEMENT

Issue 4

October 2015



**MORECAMBE BAY
PARTNERSHIP**



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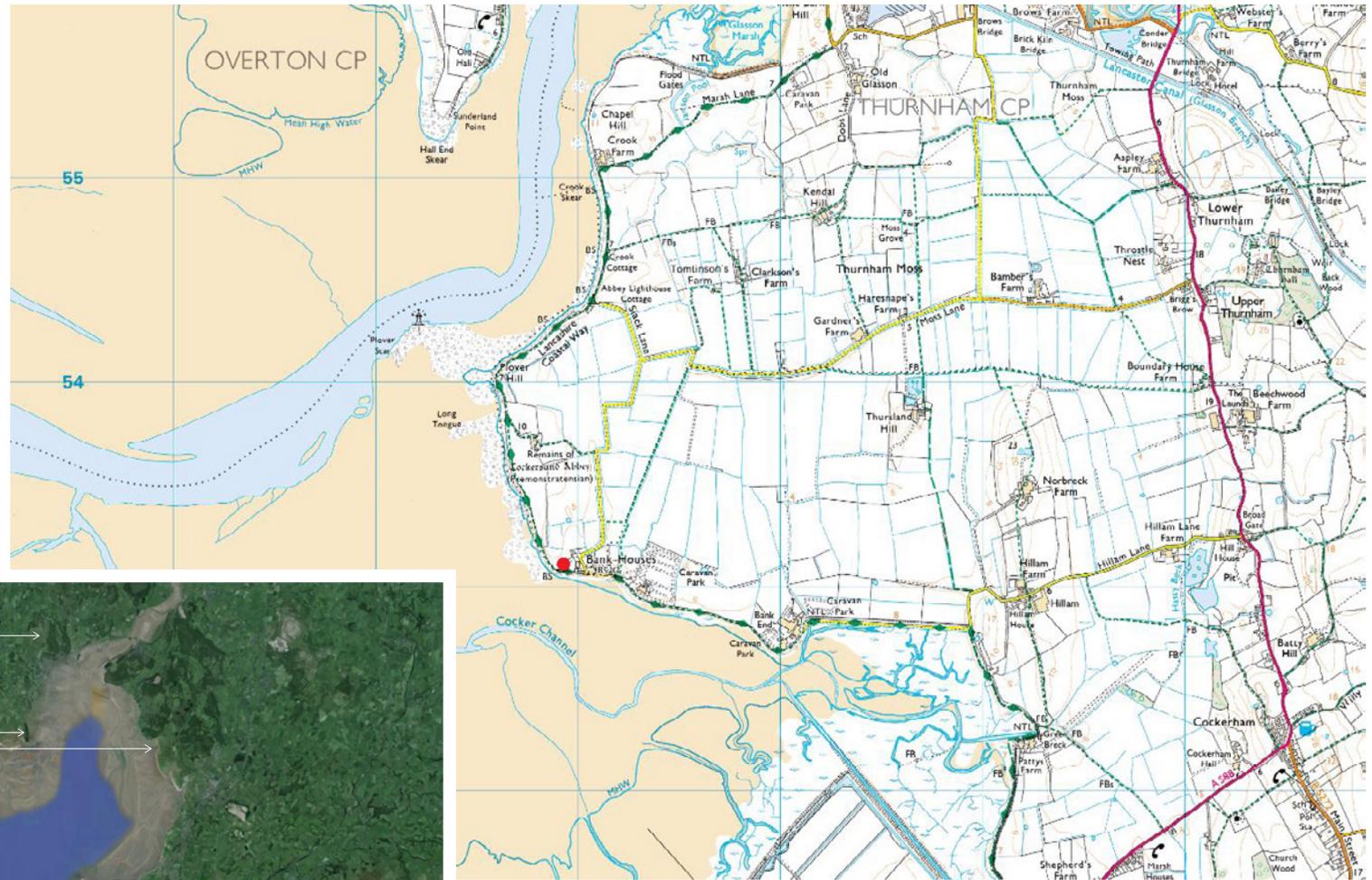
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Location of Cockerham Sands Observation Tower indicted in red.
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Location Plan (Base plan © 2015 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky)

I INTRODUCTION

I.1 REASON FOR THE CONSERVATION STATEMENTS

Morecambe Bay Partnership has commissioned Purcell to undertake built heritage conservation statements for five areas/sites around Morecambe Bay. This programme of work will support the delivery of the Headlands to Headspace (H2H) Landscape Partnership Scheme Project 1 (Built Heritage and Lookouts), allowing for conservation and consolidation proposals of key built heritage sites to be taken forward.

I.2 HOW THE CONSERVATION STATEMENTS FIT INTO THE H2H SCHEME

The Conservation Statements will combine work already undertaken for H2H (principally the feasibility studies produced for the sites by Greenlane Archaeology) to detail the history of each site, significance and conservation issues.

The Conservation Statements will follow a two phase approach. The initial reports at the end of phase 1 will provide an assessment to determine which sites are significant enough and viable to be taken forward to phase 2. Phase 2 will involve the production of full Conservation Statements for those sites being taken forward, including accurate costed proposals for the potential conservation, consolidation and interpretation of the site.

By prioritising the sites and focusing on those that can be taken forward, the process will help to achieve the four key outcomes of H2H, which are to:

- Conserve and protect Morecambe Bay's rich natural and cultural heritage
- Involve the Bay's communities in all aspects of this scheme
- Provide significantly improved access for all audiences to the key natural and cultural heritage sites
- Provide training

I.3 AUTHORSHIP

This Conservation Statement has been prepared by Purcell, a firm of conservation architects and heritage consultants. Specifically it has been prepared by Nicholas Meny, MA (Hons), Heritage Consultant and Matthew Dyer, BA (Hons), BArch, ADPPA, RIBA, Senior Architect.

I.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This report will cover Cockerham Sands Observation Tower and its setting on the coast, west of Cockerham in Lancashire. As a phase 1 report, it will provide a summary understanding of the structure, will discuss the setting in order to put the structure into its physical and historical context and will include an initial assessment of suitability with a commentary on condition and potential future uses. This will inform the conclusion as to whether it is appropriate to take the site forward to the full conservation statement stage.

I.5 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The initial stages of the work involved gathering readily available information to present a background to the sites. This included site surveys where the structures were inspected and photographic evidence taken of each site. This physical evidence was supplemented by documentary evidence from the Lancashire County Council Archives in Preston and the Historic Environment Record (HER). The North West Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment (NWRCA), carried out between August 2007 and September 2009 by Archaeological Research Services on behalf of English Heritage and available online, was also consulted. Additional primary and secondary sources were provided by Louise Martin, Morecambe Bay Partnership and Louise Parkinson, Archaeological Consultant.

2 SUMMARY UNDERSTANDING

2.1 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

The Cockerham Sands Observation Tower is not covered by any statutory designations.

As such it can be considered as a non-designated heritage asset. Local planning authorities may identify non-designated heritage assets. These are buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which are not formally designated heritage assets.

The National Planning Policy Framework identifies two categories of non-designated site of archaeological interest:

(1) Those that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments and are therefore considered subject to the same policies as those for designated heritage assets (National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 139). They are of three types:

- those that have yet to be formally assessed for designation
- those that have been assessed as being nationally important and therefore, capable of designation, but which the Secretary of State has exercised his discretion not to designate usually because they are given the appropriate level of protection under national planning policy
- those that are incapable of being designated by virtue of being outside the scope of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 because of their physical nature

(2) Other non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest. By comparison this is a much larger category of lesser heritage significance, although still subject to the conservation objective. On occasion the understanding of a site may change following assessment and evaluation prior to a planning decision and move it from this category to the first.

Where an asset is thought to have archaeological interest, the potential knowledge which may be unlocked by investigation may be harmed even by minor disturbance, because the context in which archaeological evidence is found is crucial to furthering understanding.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

National planning policy relating to heritage is contained within Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which can be accessed via this link: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf.

Local planning policy will be contained within the Lancaster District Local Plan, which is currently in development. It will be made up of five documents, including a Morecambe Bay Action Plan. The new Local Plan for Lancaster District will replace the current policies in the Lancaster District Plan (adopted in 2004) and the Lancaster District Core Strategy (adopted in 2008). These can be accessed in full via the council's website at <http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/planning/local-plan/>.

2.2 MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE AND USE TODAY

Cockerham Sands Observation Tower is not currently publicly accessible. It sits on private land in a field on Bank House Farm. The structure is not used in any way and is not subject to any maintenance. An internal wall was partly demolished to free a cow that became trapped inside the tower.

2.3 LOCATION

Cockerham Sands Observation Tower is located on the coast, approximately three miles west of the village of Cockerham. In its immediate vicinity, the structures of Bank House Farm sit to the east and just beyond them is the Cockerham Sands Caravan Park. The nearest large town is Lancaster, which is approximately seven miles to the north east, while Morecambe is approximately eight mile to the north, along the coast.

2.4 SITE DESCRIPTION

The Observation Tower is a two storey brick building with flat roof. There is a projecting section on the south west elevation underneath the large, main first floor window opening. The south east elevation has openings at ground and first floor levels and there is also an opening at first floor level on the north west elevation. A flight of steps is built into the north east elevation.

2.5 SUMMARY OF SETTING AND SITE CONTEXT

The Observation Tower faces south west overlooking the shoreline and Morecambe Bay. It sits alongside an electric fence that demarcates the field it is in, which is used for grazing. The structure is visible from Moss Lane, although is not readily accessible, sitting as it does on private land beyond two gates. Farm building are close by to the east while Cockersand Abbey is located a few hundred metres along the coast to the north.



- 1 South east and south west elevations
- 2 The Observation Tower from the west
- 3 View from the Observation Tower

2 SUMMARY UNDERSTANDING

2.6 SUMMARY HISTORY OF THE SITE

The late 17th century farmhouse to the east of the Observation Tower is described in the HER (PRN20005). It is dated to 1690 with later alterations and the hearth has a door inscribed; 'TFE 1690'. The northern room has a small stone fireplace of 18th century type with a false fluted keystone. Bank House Cottage is more recent; a mid-18th century farmhouse and attached shippon, rebuilt after 2006 as holiday accommodation (PRN38917).

The HER also describes three pre-1847 boundary stones on the foreshore (PRN5427). They formerly marked the edge of a detached section of Stalmine Parish. Only the central one is shown on the modern mapping, the boundary now marking the division between Cockerham and Thurnham parishes. The HER also notes sea defences (PRN23616), which are evident on the 1848 OS mapping but probably have much earlier origins.

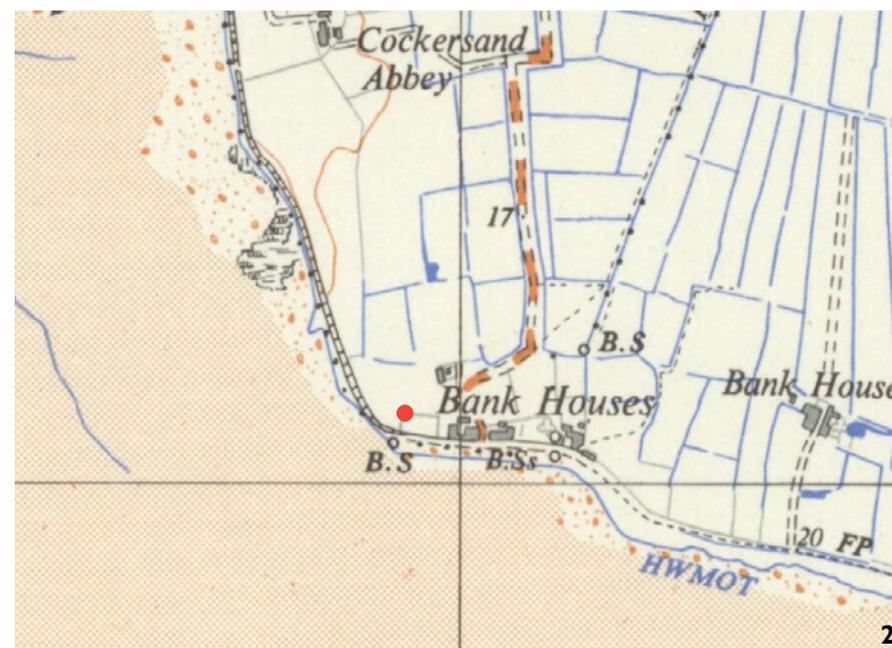
The Observation Tower was constructed during the Second World War to overlook a bombing range on the beach and is listed in the HER, alongside other features of the bombing range, as PRN26071. The seashore was used by the Fleet Air Arm from 1942 with specially erected targets for bombing and rocket training missions. These targets included a metal cut-out silhouette German Messerschmitt 109 (pictured opposite) and a brick built U-boat, which were anchored to the seashore.

The tower is consistent with a relatively standard design used by the British throughout the Second World War for observation posts on various types of practice ranges.¹ Known as Quadrant Towers, they were built around the coast of Britain, usually in pairs, forming a triangle with the target itself.² Unfortunately map evidence does not provide any further clues about the tower or its counterpart. The

first Ordnance Survey map published post war was the 1954 edition, which does not show the towers or bombing range. The 1971 edition shows the site very much as it is today with the single remaining tower standing in isolation, with the other features of the site presumably having been removed by this time.

The HER (PRN26071) also records the remains of a Fairey Swordfish aircraft, minus the engine, located on the sands in front of the Observation Tower. This aircraft is believed to be Fairey Swordfish DK689 of 766 Squadron, based at nearby RNAS Inskip, which had to land in the sands following engine failure during an anti-submarine bombing exercise. The engine of this aircraft was recovered in 1979, although its present whereabouts is unknown.

The structures of the practice range and various targets remained for decades after the war. The HER records that in c.1970 all of the targets were removed and the observation towers destroyed, with just the Cockerham Sands Observation tower left upstanding.



- 1 Photograph of target plane at Cockerham, date unknown
- 2 1954 Ordnance Survey with approximate site of the Observation Tower indicated with a red circle

1 <http://www.secretscotland.org.uk/index.php/Secrets/DunureQuadrantTower> accessed 11 August 2015

2 <http://canmore.org.uk/> accessed 11 August 2015

3 INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Cockerham Sands Observation Tower was one of two such structures built to oversee the target range on the shoreline opposite. Its significance derives from the fact that it is the only remaining tower and as such the last tangible connection to this aspect of the local wartime heritage. It has lost significance as the context of the target range and the other observation towers has been removed and it now sits in isolation.

The Observation Tower appears to conform to the standard plan for British Quadrant Towers built during in the Second World War and is consistent with many others that can be seen around the Britain, for example those at Tentsmuir in Fife, Dunure in Ayrshire and Carsington Water in Derbyshire. Other sites such as the Ashley Walk Bombing Range in the New Forest provide a more complete survival of a Second World War bombing range and at Nigg in the Scottish Highlands and Skipness in Argyll and Bute, pairs of Quadrant Towers can still be appreciated together. Cockerham Sands Observation Tower is of lower significance although its importance may grow if other such structures are lost and it becomes an increasingly rare survival.

Overall, the Observation Tower is of local significance as it is not a particularly rare example of its type and unlike other such surviving structures, does not retain the context of the rest of the bombing range. Its lower significance is demonstrated by its lack of designation as a heritage asset.

4 ASSESSMENT OF SUITABILITY FOR PHASE 2

4.1 EXISTING CONDITION

The building has a flat concrete roof with asphalt covering. The asphalt roofing has come away around the eaves, which suggests it will be badly cracked and failed on the roof surface proper and will require replacing.

The facing brickwork to the external walls is generally in a good condition with the exception of a minor area of spalled brickwork at low level and some areas of brickwork which require cleaning. There are also remnants of what are assumed to have been penetrations.

To the wall which encloses the ground floor entrance, there are some bricks missing as well as the concrete coping units, however these could readily be made good. The balustrade coping units to the staircase leading to first floor show signs of jacking with some damage to the top course of brickwork, however the damage is minor. To the first floor, the corner window opening has a missing cill unit.

Internally, there are exposed reinforcement bars to the concrete slab, however there is no evidence of cracking or any sign that this is causing any significant issue. The exposed brickwork is in fair condition, excepting the service penetrations mentioned earlier.

To the openings, there are remnants of steel windows. If windows are to be reinstated, it would be desirable to use these as a pattern.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Replace asphalt roofing.
- Clean brickwork where necessary and make good any areas where there have been penetrations.
- Treat the remnants of the flagpole mounting to prevent cracking to the concrete padstones in which it is embedded or a new flagpole provided.
- Make good missing bricks and coping units.
- Lift off and re-bed the balustrade coping units to the staircase.
- Reinststate the missing cill unit to the first floor corner window.
- Treat the exposed reinforcement bars and repair spalled concrete cover.

4.3 ASSESSMENT TO SUITABILITY FOR PHASE 2

Although of low significance and in need of conservation and repairs, the Observation Tower does readily lend itself to possible re-use as holiday accommodation. Such imaginative re-use of the building would ensure its survival without detracting from its significance.

The site is not at immediate risk of coastal erosion, however the North West Rapid Coastal Assessment does note that if any managed realigned of the coastline were to take place, it could put the site at risk of medium term coastal erosion, within 50 years.

Given the opportunities for converting and re-using the building, it is recommended that a Phase 2 Conservation Statement is produced for the Observation Tower. This would follow best practice whereby alterations should be informed by a detailed understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and would allow the impact of any works to be assessed against the significance of the building and its setting.

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