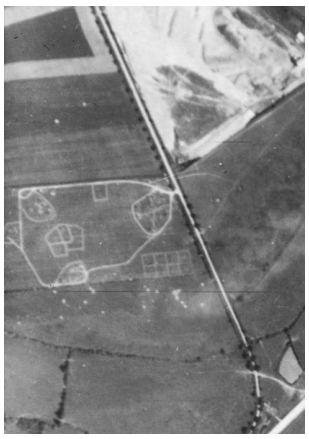
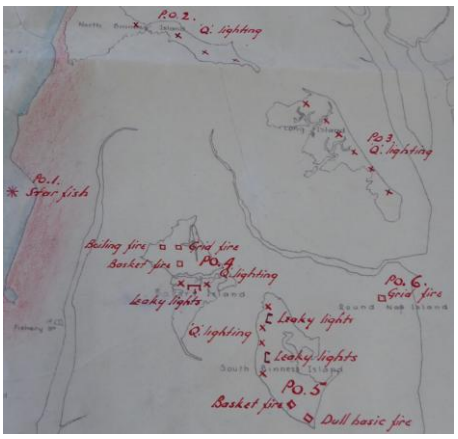
BOMBING DECOYS

During World War Two (WWII), bombing decoys were established across the UK with the intention of diverting enemy bombing away from strategic targets. Decoys were typically built in open areas near the targets they were designed to replicate. These targets ranged from large cities and industrial areas to critical infrastructure such as railways or shipyards, or military establishments such as airfields.

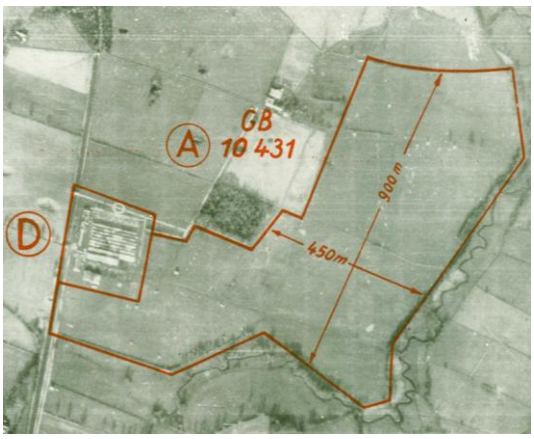
During WWII, an estimated 792No. bombing decoys were built across the UK. The success rate of individual decoys varied, with successful decoys attracting hundreds of bombs during single raids. Collectively, decoys drew at least 5% of the total weight of bombs dropped on the UK away from their intended targets.



Footprint of a Starfish decoy



A plan of bombing decoys in Langstone Harbour



A decoy airfield and associated aircraft factory buildings

Decoys were categorised by the type of targets they were replicating and the way they were operated.

K sites and **Q sites** were replica airfields which included dummy aircraft, airfield buildings, and landing lights or flare paths to simulate airfield lighting. They would be operated during the day (**K**) or at night (**Q**).

Starfish (SF) sites were designed to replicate cities and towns and comprised structures filled with combustible materials. The material would be ignited when the first wave of bombs were dropped to simulate the results of a successful raid, luring the subsequent waves of enemy aircraft to the decoy location instead of the real target.

Quick-fire (QF) sites were variations of SF sites, using the same combustible material technique but to replicate successful bombing raids on airfields, factories, or other military establishments. **Oil QF sites** were a variation of QF sites built specifically to replicate petroleum and oil depots.

Quick lighting (QL) sites simulated urban or industrial lighting that had been poorly hidden in a blackout. Mobile variations – **Mobile QL (MQL) and Assault QL (AQL) sites** – were established to replicate assembly points, troop or vehicle convoys, embarkation points, or temporary camps.

Decoys could also be categorised into various 'series' depending on the nature of their intended target: C-series (civilian), A-series (Army), N-series (Naval), P-series (petroleum/oil), or M-series (dummy buildings).

Some areas decoys were co-located for heightened realism. For example, QL and QF sites were often co-located to indicate there was an urban area, identifiable by its poorly blacked out lighting, which had been chosen as a bombing target, identifiable by the fires indicative of a successful bombing raid.

Hazard

If a bombing decoy was successful, there is potential for an Unexploded Bomb (UXB) hazard, both within the decoy boundary and the immediate surroundings. Many decoys were established on greenfield sites and their facilities removed shortly after WWII, meaning seemingly innocuous fields may have a potential UXB hazard.

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