



ULSTER  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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# Survey Report

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Reference: **Survey Report No. 51**

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Location:

**Grey Point Fort  
Helen's Bay  
Co. Down**

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In association with:



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## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken on Saturday 25 October 2014 at a coastal defence battery at Grey Point Fort, Ballygrot townland, Irish Grid reference J 4569 8325. The survey was the eighth in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society during 2014.

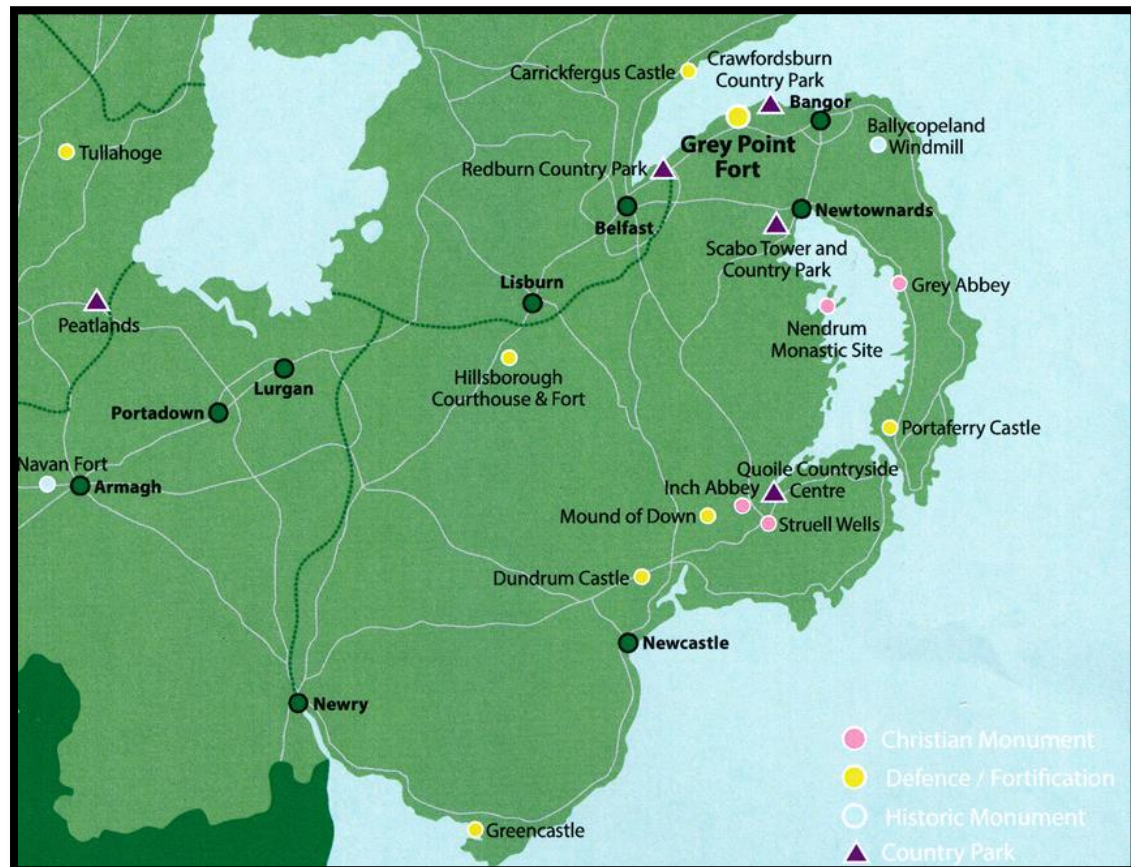


Figure 01: Location map *NIEA*

Current archaeological investigations at the site have been designed to enhance the Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Built Heritage (NIEA) Defence Heritage database as part of a Defence Heritage Project. Grey Point Fort is currently a State Care monument in the care and management of the NIEA.

There is evidence in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record that the area has been occupied for many thousands of years. These include a Mesolithic occupation site and a rath probably dating from the early medieval period (Table 02). In addition, during the excavations of 2014, an extensive trench system was investigated to the north of the fort buildings. Local informants also described the use of surrounding woodland during the Second World War as a firing range for military personnel based in the area.

SMR NUMBER	SITE TYPE
DOW 001:012	Rath
DOW 001:014	Enclosure
DOW 001:015	Church and Holy Well
DOW 001:016	Enclosure
DOW 001:017	Tree Ring ('Tennyson's Clump')
DOW 001:030	Mesolithic occupation site (grey point)
DOW 001:037	Triangular enclosure
DOW 001:039	Water Mill
DOW 001:040	A.P. Site – tree ring?
DOW 001:041	A.P. Site – enclosure

Figure 02: Table of archaeological monuments currently recorded on the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record in Ballygrot townland

## 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the monument and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and to the archives of the Ulster Archaeological Society.



Figure 03: No. 2 Gun being fired *NIEA*

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The survey of Grey Point Fort was undertaken on 25 October 2014. It was carried out by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society, in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and Grey Point Fort was subsequently chosen to be the fifty-first of these. Grey Point Fort was chosen after the Northern Ireland Environment Agency extended an invitation to the society to participate in a public-outreach excavation that took place there during October 2014.

### 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

Various maps and plans of the site, many commissioned by the Ministry of Defence, have been produced of the site and details of these are available in the NIEA files. More recently, a LiDAR (remote laser scan) survey of the area around the fort was carried out by the Rivers Agency in 2009-2010. As far as it is known, there has been no recent archaeological survey at this site, other than in preparation for the 2014 excavations.

### 2.3 Cartographic Evidence



Figure 04: Ordnance Survey, County Series Map, First Edition, Down, Sheet 1 (part of) 1834 *Ordnance Survey*



Figure 05: Ordnance Survey County Series, Down, Sheet 1 (part of) Third Edition, 1901 *Ordnance Survey*

Grey Point Fort first appears on the Ordnance Survey County Series Third Edition, map Down: Sheet 1 in 1901 as an encampment of huts (Figure 05).

## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records are currently archived at the Ulster Archaeological Society.

## 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and included Michael Catney, June Welsh, Ian Gillespie, Lee Gordon, Duncan Berryman, Laura Van Der Sluis, Anne MacDermott, Pat O'Neill, Ken Pullin, Randal Scott, Heather Montgomery, Chris Stevenson, David Craig and Karine Wright. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Emma McBride of the NIEA and Heather Montgomery and Ruairí Ó Baoill, of Queen's University, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access. The group are also extremely grateful to the members of the Grey Point Fort Amateur Radio Society, who facilitated access to the site museum and shared their knowledge and enthusiasm for the monument and its history.



### 3. UAS 2014 Survey

#### 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings and elevations, accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

#### 3.2 Production of plan drawings

Plan drawings and elevations were completed, using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using all three of the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring devices, the first occasion on which all three had been deployed. Sketch plans were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

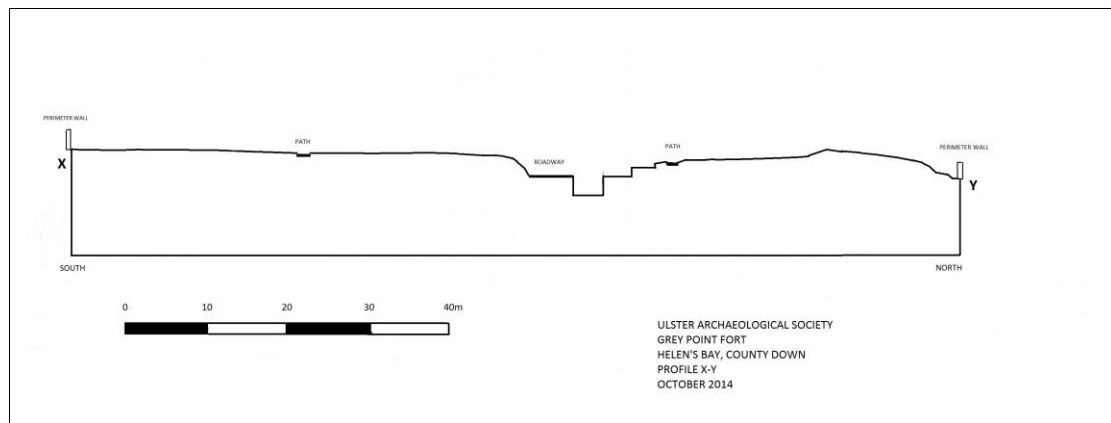


Figure 06: North/south profile of Grey Point Fort

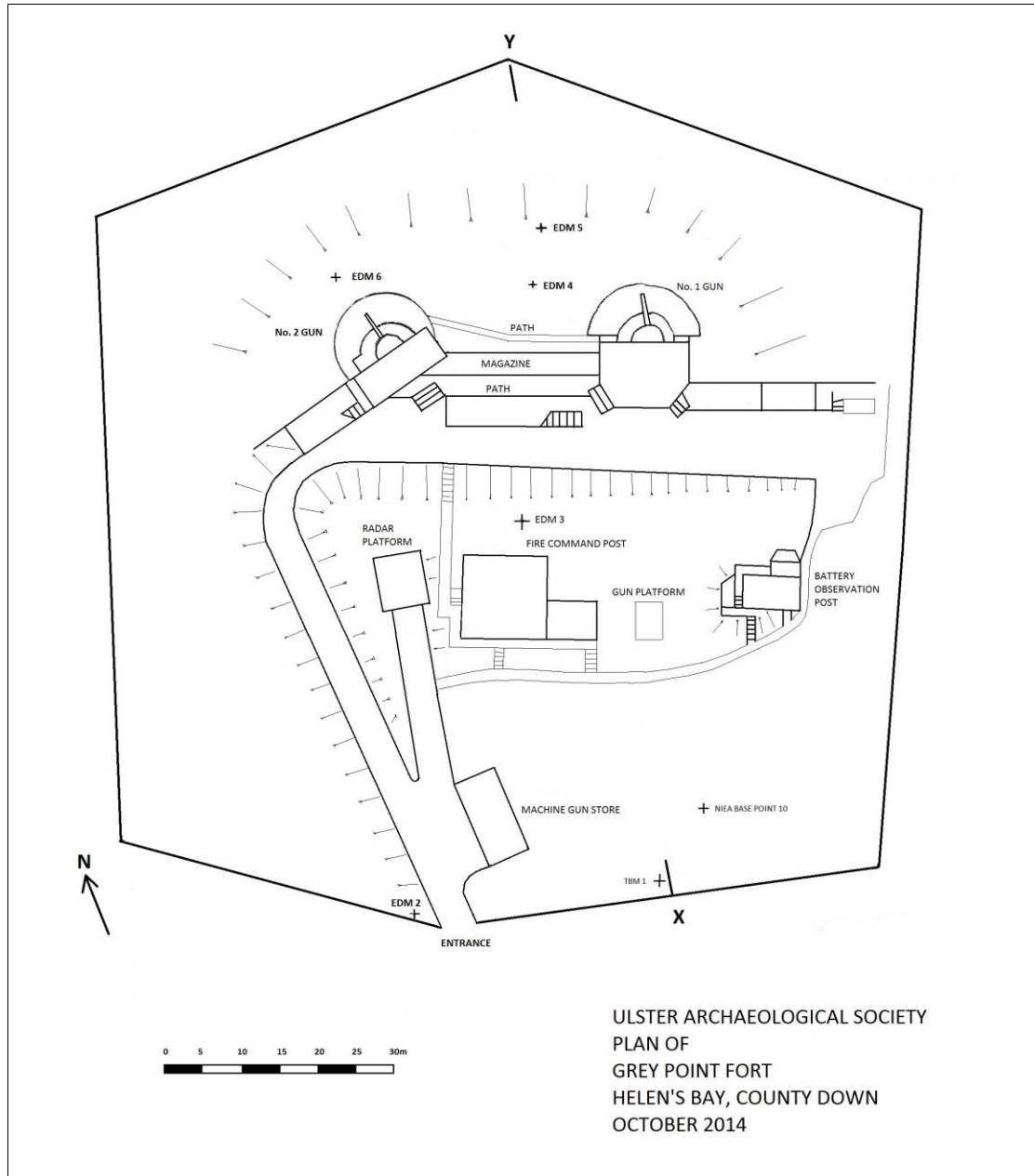


Figure 07: Plan of Grey Point Fort

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Ricoh G600W* 8 megapixel digital camera and a photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 25 October 2014. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.



Figure 08: UAS survey team members at work at the north of the site



Figure 09: The Battery Observation building, looking south-east



Figure 10: The Gun Battery, looking north-west



Figure 11: The Fire Command Post, looking north-east



Figure 12: No. 1 Gun Position and magazine, looking north-east



Figure 13: Fire Command Post and Radar Platform, looking south

#### 4. Discussion

The Fort was built as an irregular hexagon-shaped fort on land acquired from Marquess of Dufferin and Ava for the sum of £8,400. The first records of construction work at the site, carried out by Messer's W. J. Campbell and Son of Ravenhill Road Belfast, date to 1904 with the Fort becoming operational by 1907. Two six-inch Mark VII breech-loading guns were initially installed in 1907 and associated outbuildings were constructed over the next three years providing workshops, shelters, stores facilities and other ancillary buildings prior to the outbreak of the First World War (Clements 2003, 62-68).

In addition to the construction of Grey Point Fort to aid in the defence of Belfast, the recommendations of the Owen Committee, set up in 1905 by the War Office and the Admiralty to report on updating coastal defences, required that a second similar battery be constructed on the opposite side of Belfast Lough at Kilroot. This second battery would be employed as the 'examination depot' for ships and other vessels making the journey up Belfast Lough, the location at which all crafts had to signal their information and intentions and where they had to register before then being permitted to travel further inland. Kilroot was not completed until 1910 with the final fortifications recorded as having been similar to Grey Point, both forts contained dual gun emplacements with protective armour and associated magazines, shell stores and shelters constructed below the gun positions.

Proposals were drawn up in 1913 for the installation of concrete blockhouses at Grey Point Fort, intended to provide protection from attack from the land. However, the existing fort records indicate that these had not been installed by the start of the First World War but later as a consequence of the hostilities in Europe with the potential threat from sea in addition to the current political unrest in Ireland at the time. Three diamond-shaped blockhouses were raised with the intention they would reinforce land-front earthworks at the promontory, constructed at both the east and west corners of the Fort wall and in the centre of the northern wall. Plans from the early twentieth century indicate that the Fort was additionally fortified by wide barbed-wire entanglements with the blockhouses acting as caponiers, a type of fortification structure serving as covered means of access to outworks while enabling protected rifle fire to be better directed against the possibility of any breach in defences by the enemy.

The Orlock Port War Signal Station was established further around the County Down coast at Donaghadee and was employed in the identification of warships on their approach to Belfast Lough, informing naval headquarters and in turn the garrison commander at Grey Point by telephone of any approaching vessels. By 1916 the Battery Command Post was established at Grey Point Fort and oversaw operations at Kilroot, Orlock Point, East Twin Island and the Carrickfergus Garrison Artillery.

In 1914 mobilization for war necessitated the construction of supplementary housing for the officers and men of the permanent garrison from the Royal Artillery. Lands acquired by the war office to the south-west of the main fort, were developed and construction began. A Royal Engineer Plan of the Fort, *c.*1915 provides reference to these structures, they comprised Barrack huts, Sergeant's mess, canteen, cook house and dining area, guard house and regimental office, ablutions shed and latrines, drying

room, coal store and harness room, affording accommodation for six Officers and 172 Other Ranks of the Royal Garrison Artillery. As the war progressed an additional building was acquired to the south-east of the battery for an Officer's mess; furthermore changes were made in the use of some of the temporary hutting most notably the re-assignment of the sergeant's mess reassigned for use as a Machine Gun Office. Historical investigations have found reference to the use of the Battery by training battalions of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division of Kitchener's New Army, in particular the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles who were billeted at the nearby Clondeboye Training Camp and regularly marched across to the Fort for instruction in the use of Machine Guns, 1914 -18 (Royal Ulster Rifles Museum, Waring Street, Belfast, 2316 a/b/c). Although the Fort never saw action during the First World War, the defence battery remained in operation after the war as part of the permanent coastal defence of Belfast. Further amendments were made to the camp and the main Fort during this period, including the installation of two large coastal search lights in 1936.

On the 24th August 1939, Grey Point Fort became fully operational again as the outbreak of the Second World War loomed. Construction of the concrete gun houses began in 1939 as defence against the threat from the air became the primary concern requiring the coastal defence guns to be safeguarded. Rectangular concrete concealments were established to shelter the guns with additional accommodation erected during the summer of 1939. The Battery was also armed with one 3 inch anti-aircraft gun as well as a single Lewis gun position and by 1941 there were two 6 inch guns in place at the Fort. Grey Point Fort was 'down-graded' in August 1943, along with the structural remains of the main battery the Fort was then used only as the HQ for the 525<sup>th</sup> Antrim Coastal Regiment of the Royal Artillery as a Naval Station. This was in view of the fact that the coast defence at Orlock, Co. Down, took over the protective role at the entrance at Belfast Lough.

At the end of the Second World War Grey Point Fort continued to be maintained. In 1954 a mobile radar (AA No.3 Mark 2/7) was installed. Grey Point Fort ceased operations as a coastal defence battery in February 1956 leading to the eventual abandonment of the Fort in a formal military fortification apart from occasional use by the OTC from Queen's University, as a training ground. The guns were removed as part of this process. The Fort has been used since 2008 by the Grey Point Amateur Radio society which has permission from the NIEA to occupy and maintain the Fort. Members of the society have provided access to their private collections of WW1 and WW2 military memorabilia, presenting a small museum to the visitor experience. Between 1992 and 1999, two replacement guns were obtained from Cork, one from Fort Mitchell on Spike Island and the other from Fort Davis (formerly Fort Carlisle).

Although a range of documentary evidence relating to the history of the Fort and its various phases of use exists there is much that is still unknown about how precisely the fortification actually developed throughout the 20th century. A number of military plans exist for the battery illustrating various stages of the Fort's development. These include *Mapping of War Office Boundaries and Encroachments for the lands at Grey Point*, c.1907 (KEW WO78 4730); a plan indicating earthworks, trenches, barbed wire entanglements and locations of various ancillary buildings, c.1911 (KEW WO78 5208); a Royal Engineers plan of the Fort c.1915 (IE/MA/MPD/AD119287-008) as well as plans dating c.1931-32 which appear to document later modifications leading up to the Second World War. These documents shed light on the early construction

phase of the Fort. One of the purposes of the 2014 excavation is to try and fill in some of the gaps in information that currently exists regarding the fort (Montgomery and Ó Baoill 2014).

The restored Grey Point Fort coastal artillery site currently consists of a perimeter wall within which a number of military features are contained. The main components of the Fort, marked on the plan below (Figure 15) are:

Number on Plan	Details	Number on Plan	Details
1	Quarters/Guard House	8	Battery Observation
2	Engine House	9	Fire Command Post
3	Entrance	10	Radar Platform
4	Gun Store	11	Searchlight 1936
5	Battery Emplacements	12	Searchlight 1940
6	Magazine	13	Searchlight 1936
7	Shelters		

Figure 14: Legend for Figure 15

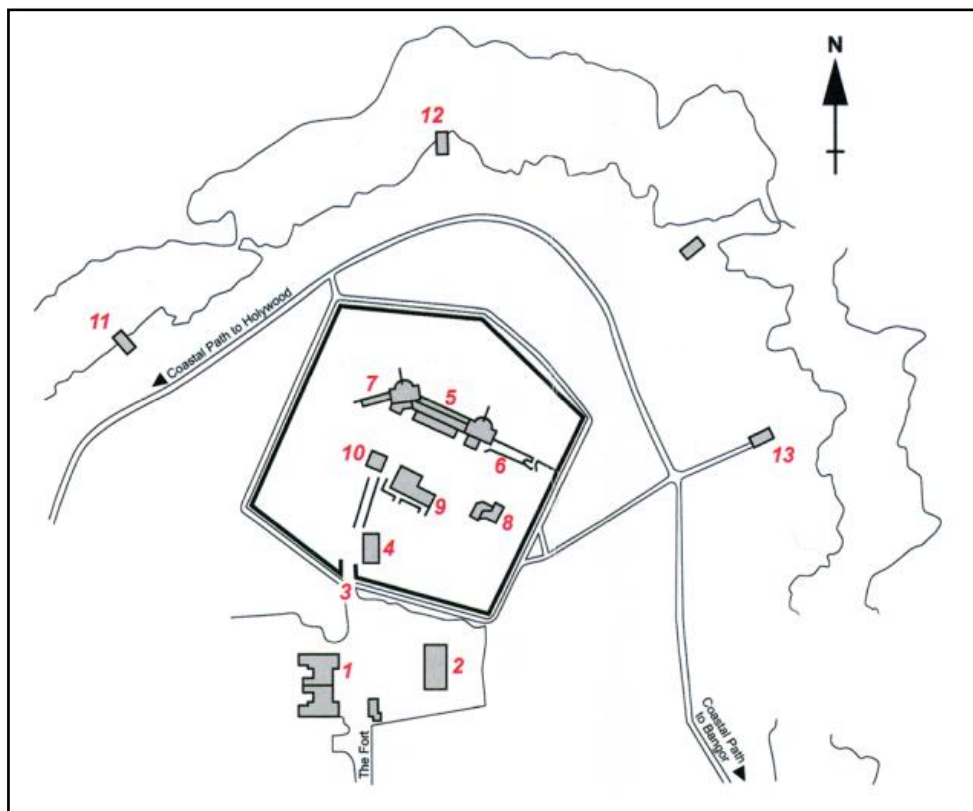


Fig. 15: Plan of Grey Point Fort (after NIEA guide, nd).

The Fort is a State Care monument. It is listed in the NIEA Defence Heritage database as monument No. 315. The three coastal artillery searchlights associated with the Fort are also recorded in this database (Nos. 316-318).



## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations for further work**

It is hoped that work will continue to record and preserve this fascinating monument for future generations to enjoy.

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- [www.militaryarchives.ie](http://www.militaryarchives.ie)
- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>
- <http://www.proni.gov.uk/>
- <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/defence-heritage-record.htm>

**APPENDIX - PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD FORM**

**Site:** Grey Point Fort, Helen's Bay, County Down

**Date:** Saturday 25 October 2014

**Make and model of camera...** Ricoh G600W

<b>Frame No.</b>	<b>Viewed From</b>	<b>Details</b>
DSC3131	North-east	View of gun
NIEA	West	Gun being fired
DSC3139	South	Survey group in action at north of site
DSC3159	North-west	View of Battery Observation Building
DSC3161	South-east	View of gun emplacements
DSC3185	South-west	Fire Command Post
DSC3189	South-west	View of magazine and museum
DSC3171	North	Fire Command Post and Radar Platform
DSC3125	North	Gun emplacement
DSC3126	North	Gun emplacement
DSC3128	North	Survey group in action
DSC3178	South	Ammunition
DSC3186	South-west	Signal Gun
DSC3187	South-east	Signal Gun
DSC3190	North-west	Radar Platform
DSC3192	South-east	Magazine
DSC3216	South	Perimeter wall

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