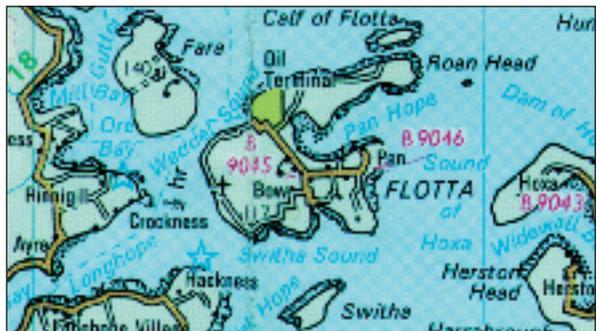


## SOUTH ISLES - FLOTTA



Crown copyright

**FLOTTA** (ON *Flat-ey*, Flat Isle), belonged to the old Bishopric estate, and was feued out along with Burray. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it became part of the Stewart of Burray estate, and eventually most of the farms became owner-occupied. By 1911 the population was 431 on this quiet, but industrious island.

**20<sup>th</sup> Century Wars** brought an influx of servicemen and development to Flotta, which was much used by the Navy in both World Wars. There was even a golf course at Roan Head with its own steel jetty as well as a huge cinema, of which one wall remains standing above the pier.

A large Royal Navy Port Signalling and Observation

Station was built at **Stanger Head** (ON *Steines-gardr*, Standing Stone Farm, ND375925) in World War I, and enlarged in World War II. Access to this tower is difficult, but there is a marvellous view from the top over Scapa Flow and its southern approaches.

Flotta had several gun batteries. At **Stanger Head** there were twin 6in coast defence guns in pits with underground magazines defending Hoxa Sound which were enclosed in a permanent structure similar to Ness Battery at Stromness. This was mostly destroyed in quarrying operations.

**Buchanan** (ND375935), faces the Sound of Hoxa, and during World War II covered

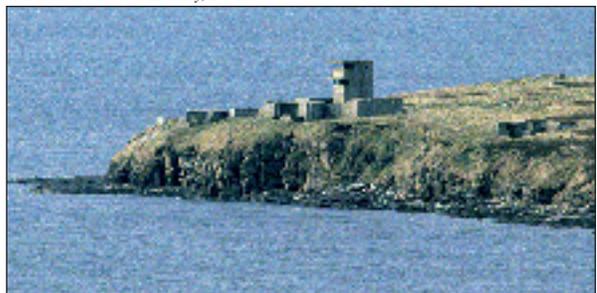
the inner boom defence net (initially an open-sided 12-pounder, but replaced with a twin 6-pounder in a standard enclosed battery) and is typical of such installations with a concrete observation tower, gun emplacement and protected magazine, plus searchlight houses on the shore, all powered by a generator house.

At **Roan Head** in World War I there was a twin 12-pounder in a concrete parapet to cover the boom defence net. From **Gate-Innan Neb** (ND349923) another covered the boom in World War I, while in World War II a twin 12-pounder concrete gun house, with a single tower and underground magazine was installed. In addition there were several anti-aircraft and barrage balloon sites on the island.

The **Golta** peninsula also saw much wartime activity. In World War I the stone *St Vincent Pier* on Roan Head was built by men from that battleship. The nearby and now ruinous YMCA building dates from this time.

During World War II a rocket battery with 66 launchers and a grid of over 100 shelters was installed on Golta. Although never fired in anger the flames and noise during tests were apparently impressive. Large quantities of boom defence netting were dumped in Calf Sound at the end of the war and are slowly corroding away.

Innan Neb Coastal Battery, Flotta



## SOUTH ISLES - FLOTTA

For most of World War II Flotta became a huge army camp, with huts, roads and facilities all over the place to cater for the large number of personnel manning all the installations. New piers were also built and now Gibraltar Pier is used by the ferry linking Flotta to Houton and Lyness, while Sutherland Pier is used by the Oil Terminal.

Two wreck buoys which the ferry passes on the approach to Flotta recall incidents in World War I. In January 1916 the oiler *Prudentia* dragged her moorings, ran across the bows of *HMS Iron Duke*, and later sank. A much more serious incident occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1917, when the battleship *HMS Vanguard* blew up at her moorings with the loss of over 800 men.

A hut dating from World War I recalls the detection and sinking of the German submarine, *UB116*, on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1918. She was detected by hydrophones, which were being monitored from this "Silent Cabin" at Quoyness. After the war the hut was dragged to Peerie Lurdy for use as an extra room.

Royal Navy Port Signalling and Observation Station



The battleship "HMS Vanguard" blew up off Flotta in 1917

**North Sea Oil** The discovery of oil under the North Sea in the early 1970s was to lead to much longer-lasting and economically beneficial developments on the island. **Flotta Oil Terminal** (ND350950) was developed originally by the Occidental Oil Company in 1976, to take crude oil from the Piper and Claymore fields in the North Sea, the former starting in 1976, the latter in 1977. It was then taken over by Elf Enterprise and is now

run by Talisman Energy.

The Terminal exports a sizeable fraction of Britain's oil, and has given a big boost to the Orkney economy over the last 30 years through employment and royalty payments. Large ships are again part of the scene in Scapa Flow.

Production fell dramatically in 1989 after the Piper Alpha disaster, when the platform exploded with the tragic loss



Innan Neb Coastal Battery

Stanger Head, Flotta



## SOUTH ISLES - FLOTTA



Scapa Flow and Flotta Oil Terminal from Wideford Hill

of 167 men. Following installation of the Piper B platform in 1992 and addition of several smaller fields, output was over 10 million tons of oil and gas in 2002, of which about one third was from Foinaven. A peak of over 13m tons was reached in 1995.

The Terminal won the contract to handle oil from the Atlantic Frontier in hard competition with Sullom Voe in Shetland. BP ships oil from the

Foinaven floating production facility to Flotta using shuttle tankers. Production started in 1999 and is about 3.7m tons per year. More fields out to the west will be developed over the next few years and will probably considerably extend the life of the Terminal.

Oil-developments have been confined to Flotta, which means that Orkney has benefited from the new jobs and royalties brought by the oil,

without having to suffer much change to the life of the community. With the western oil-fields on stream, and new technology being applied to maximise the older fields, it is to be thought that the terminal will continue to benefit the community for a long time to come. Hopefully its excellent record in avoiding pollution will also be maintained.

**Visiting Flotta** Despite the oil developments and relics of wartime, Flotta makes an interesting visit. Compact enough to explore on foot, this little island has many contrasts of old and new, past and present. Well served by ferries, there is still a substantial local population. The Orkney Ferries vessel *Hoy Head* calls at Flotta several times per day and connects to Houton and Lyness.



Kirk Bay and the Head of Banks, Flotta

"Gibson's Folly", Pan Hope, Flotta



Creels at Pan Hope, Oil Terminal in the background



## SOUTH ISLES - FLOTTA

**Archaeology** Nothing now remains of the supposed standing stone at Stanger Head or at the eponymous farm near the kirk. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century an altar slab dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century was found on Flotta, implying the presence of a Pictish chapel. The old farm name of Hallywell suggests the presence of a holy well. Traditionally there is one, Winster's Well on Roan Head.

**Wildlife** As on some of the other smaller islands the less intensive farming results in beautiful pastures of wild flowers in summer time. The verges, coastline and uncultivated areas all allow plants to thrive. Although not famous for its birdlife, the quietness of Flotta makes viewing of many common species easy.

Seals lie up on many of the flat rocks around the shore, and Otters are regularly seen near the Oil Terminal. Stanger Head is a good place from



Aerial view of Flotta Oil Terminal from the north with Pan Hope on the left



Flotta from West Hill

which to see the Harbour Porpoises which are resident in Hoxa Sound for much of the year.

There are several panoramic views across Scapa Flow and

the South Isles, especially from Stanger Head and from West Hill (ND352939), one of the few places in Orkney from which both Kirkwall and Stromness can be seen.

Carved 8<sup>th</sup> century altar front found on Flotta now in NMS



NMS