

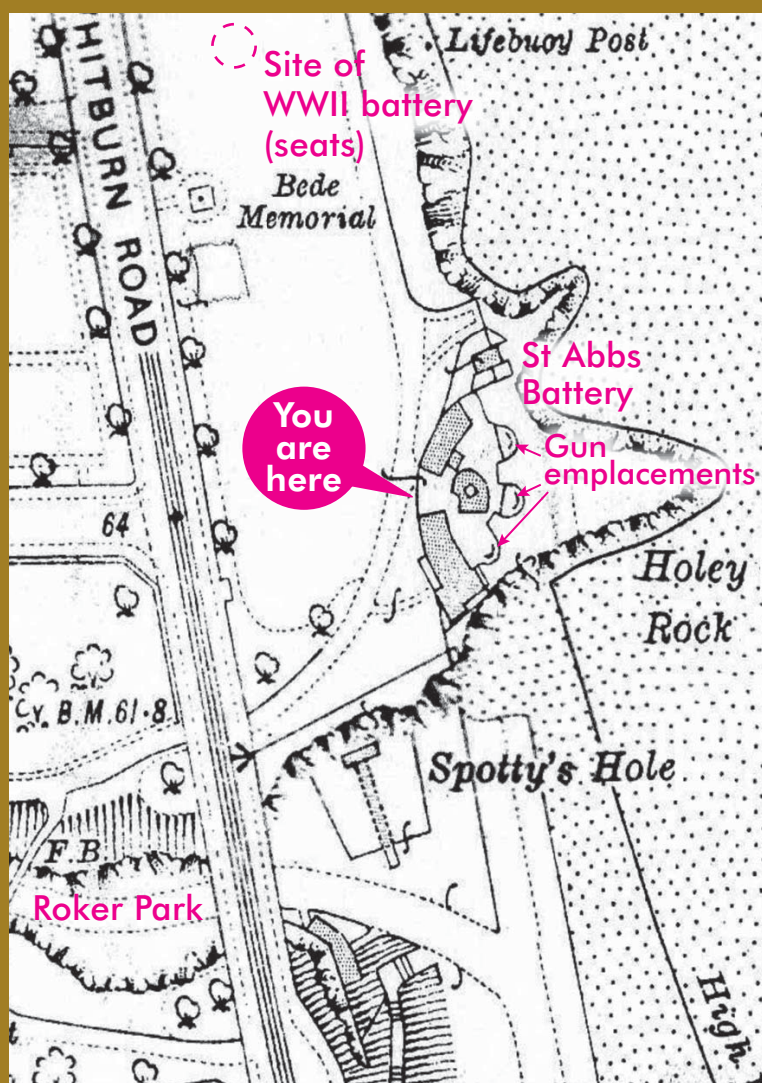
Welcome to Roker cliff top

Here at Roker in 1940 you are in the middle of the military zone. You shouldn't even be here! There are soldiers on patrol and manning the big guns. The beach down below is covered with barbed wire. All around there are signs warning of land mines. Local folk who live along the front have been moved inland and their houses are being used for soldiers and other military personnel.

Big guns at Roker

There have been defences on the cliff tops at Roker at various times for about 200 years. St Abbs Battery was just in front of you as seen on the map below. The battery saw action during World War I – on 1 April 1916 gunners fired at a zeppelin which had carried out a bombing raid on the city.

After the war the guns were removed and the battery abandoned, but in 1940 heavier 6 inch guns were installed to repel enemy aircraft as air raids started to hit Sunderland. To the left from here you can see where these later guns were positioned, now created into seating areas.



Above: General Alan-Brooke inspects Roker Battery in 1940
© Imperial War Museums (H 5791)

Left: Ordnance Survey map, 1913
Courtesy Sunderland Museum

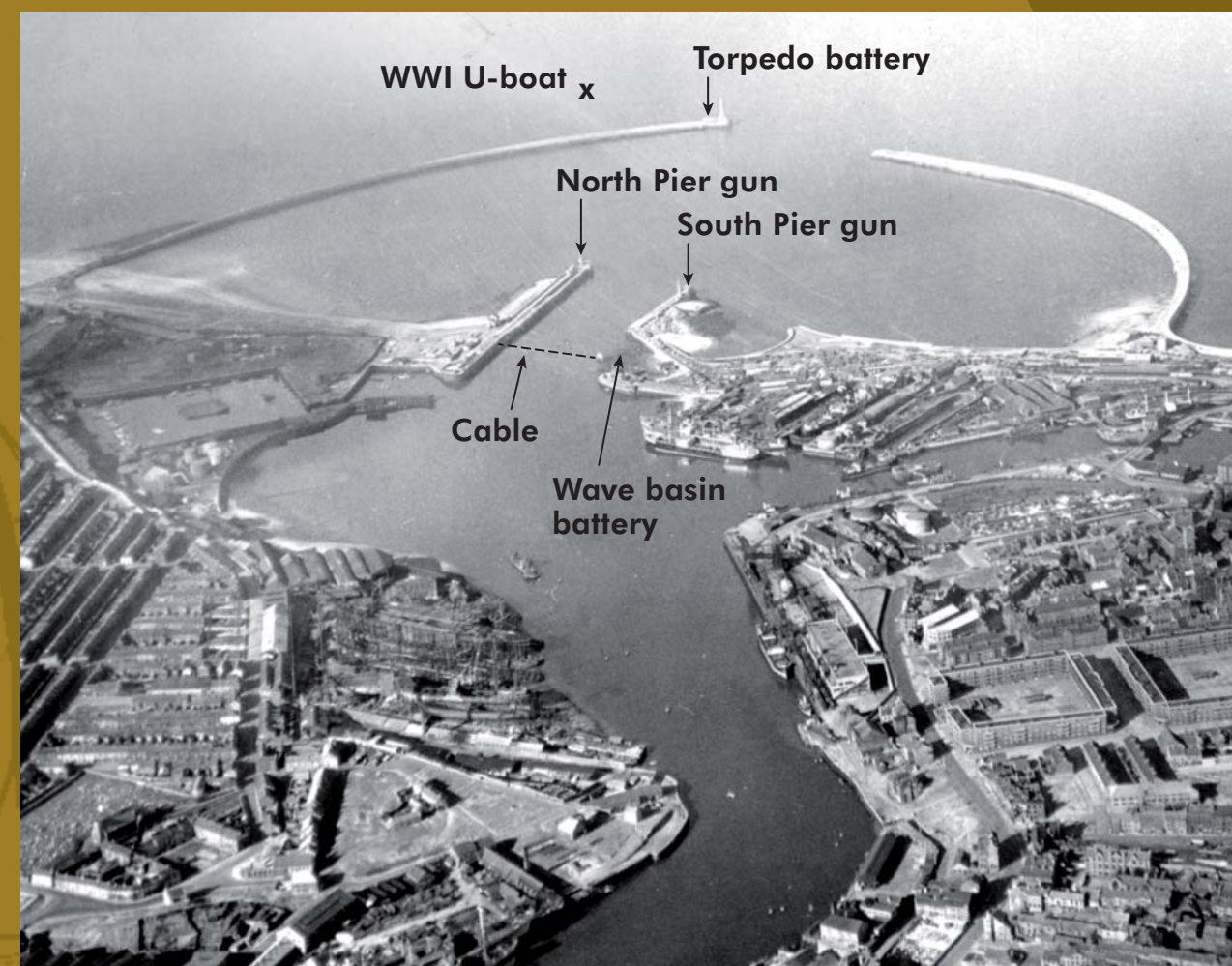
Protecting the port

A short way from this panel gives you a fine view over Roker Beach towards the harbour mouth. With its commercial shipping, coal exporting, shipbuilding and other industries it's not surprising that Sunderland's busy port was a prime target in both World Wars.

The mouth of the river was protected by a ring of batteries within the harbour as well as from the cliff tops.

The gun emplacements of Wave Basin Battery were constructed in 1860 in response to fears of French invasion. The guns were removed in the early 1900s and replaced with two machine guns. The Wave Basin Battery was used for training purposes in WWI, then in WWII it was armed with anti-aircraft machine guns and two 12-pounder guns (Barron's Battery) were located on the outer ends of both inner piers.

Defences in Sunderland Harbour in 1940. Courtesy of Sunderland Museum.



An additional line of defence during WWII was the installation of a steel cable strung across the entrance of the inner harbour. The old gun emplacement at Wave Basin Battery was concreted over and used to hold the cable.

In one failed attack during WWI a German U-boat sank close to the pier in 1917, having hit one of its own mines.



Sunderland was badly hit in both World Wars, especially in World War II. The worst bombing was between 1940 and 1943. During these devastating raids 267 people lost their lives and 4,000 homes were destroyed or damaged. Central station was hit in 1940 (above). © Sunderland Echo

A torpedo battery was built at the end of Roker Pier to fire at enemy vessels. The remains of the torpedo storage house can still be seen today next to the lighthouse.

As well as all these defences, Sunderland had two naval vessels – **Examinations Service Ships** – which patrolled the coast and checked all ships approaching the harbour.

This project has been coordinated by Groundwork NE & Cumbria; Changing Places, Changing Lives – one green step at a time. Find out more at www.groundwork.org.uk/northeast or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

