



Viewpoint

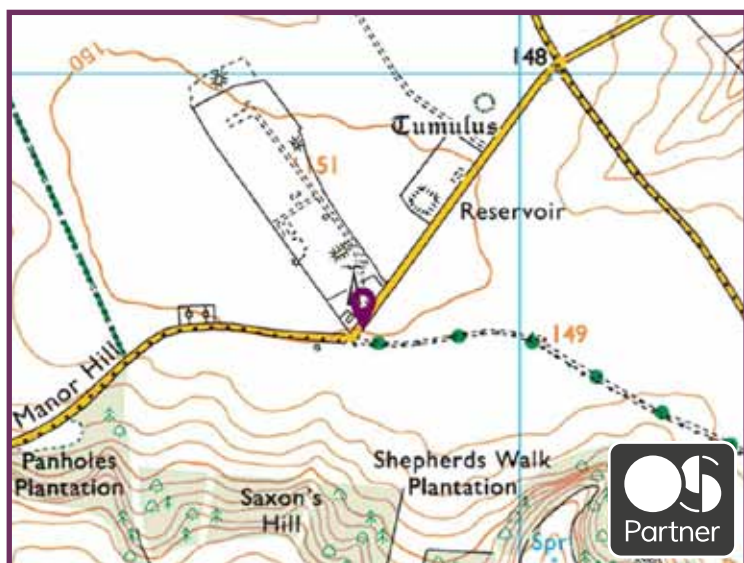
Silent sentry



Time: 15 mins

Region: East Midlands

Landscape: rural



Location:

Manor Hill, Stenigot, Lincolnshire LN11 9RH

Grid reference:

TF 25700 82500

Keep an eye out for:

The large satellite dishes in the field nearby

Standing like a sentry, the mast in front of us keeps its silent watch over the Lincolnshire Wolds. There are plenty of masts across Britain today, many of them built recently to provide mobile phone signals, but this is a radar mast dating back to the Second World War.

Many of the structures hastily constructed to defend Britain during the war have since been lost, together with the stories that they told. This is especially true of the radar stations, so the mast at Stenigot is a remarkable survivor.

So what did this mast do and why is it here?



The radar system warned Britain of impending attack from German aircraft. The mast itself transmitted radar signals and the low concrete structures visible beyond the modern buildings housed the radar equipment. There were separate buildings for the transmission and receiving apparatus.

A radio signal was sent out through the mast, it bounced off enemy aircraft and the time it took to return revealed how far away the planes were. This is why it is called 'radar' – **RA**dio **D**etection **A**nd **R**anging. But why is the mast located here?

Radar waves travel in straight lines, so they are limited by the natural curve of the Earth. As the Earth's surface curves away from us the signals go off into space. Setting a radar transmitter in a high location increases its range, allowing the waves to travel a little further around the Earth.

The hill here at Stenigot is one of the highest in Lincolnshire, so it was a perfect choice for the radar engineers. The 110-metre mast improved the range even further.

There was also another reason: the Lincolnshire Wolds were strategically important. Lincolnshire was on the flight path of the enemy bombers heading for the industrial areas of South Yorkshire and the East Midlands, which produced ammunition, explosives and tanks for Britain's war effort.

When German planes were detected RAF fighters could immediately be sent to intercept them before they reached their targets. Stenigot formed part of a system of radar stations known as the Chain Home network that protected Britain's coast.

Most RAF radar stations were dismantled after the war as they were no longer needed. Some masts remained for civilian use for air traffic control. Stenigot, however, was given a new lease of life. In the 1950s it became part of NATO's Cold war defence system. The mast was part of an early warning and surveillance network which passed military messages between allies from northern Norway to eastern Turkey.

See if you can spot the large dishes in the next field. They were abandoned in the 1980s when they became outdated but were considered too expensive to move so they have been left to rust here. However, if the price of scrap metal keeps increasing they may not remain for long!

The mast, meanwhile, is now used to train people working with telecommunications aerials. Although it might look like an old electricity pylon, the radar mast of RAF Stenigot is now a Grade II listed structure. It is funny to think that we now protect a structure once built to protect us.

Parallel lines

Besides having an important story to tell about our past, structures like the Stenigot radar tower also inspired poetry! From the 1930s a group of poets wrote about features like pylons, factories and petrol stations to reflect Britain's changing landscapes.

The writers - including W H Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender – became known as the 'Pylon Poets'. The name came from Spender's poem called 'The Pylons'.

What do you think of objects like these? Are pylons worth writing a poem about? Can practical objects like the Stenigot tower be beautiful?