

Great Archaeological Sites in Neath Port Talbot



7. MARGAM RADAR STATION



Not all archaeological sites are ancient, or even very old. Archaeology is the study of the physical remains of human activity, and that includes even things that happened very recently. The 50th anniversary of the Second World War in the 1990s saw a big upsurge of interest in finding and recording the remains of the structures that had been put in place for the defence of Britain, which were gradually becoming lost through neglect or active demolition. Comparing the official blueprints with the structures that were actually built on the ground, and linking them with the stories of the people who had known and used them, has increased our knowledge of this iconic period of our national history.

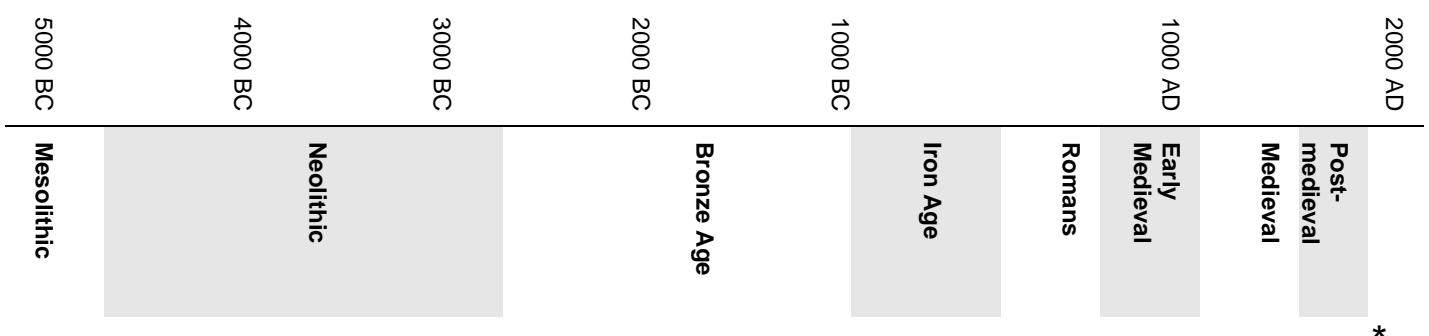
Overlooking the Bristol Channel from high on the hillside above Port Talbot, alongside the Wales Coast Path inland route, stand the remains of a Chain Home Low Radar Station. The original Chain Home Radar system was developed to detect enemy aircraft, but whilst it was extremely effective at identifying aeroplanes at a distance and flying at high altitudes, it could not see them when they flew low on

bombing missions. The development of Chain Home Low Radar filled in these gaps, using smaller, higher-frequency antennas which could be manoeuvred easily to pick up signals. These were initially fitted on to existing Chain Home Radar stations, but there were still gaps in reception, so separate Chain Home Low Radar stations were built to fill them in.

The station at Margam is one of these, probably constructed by the army between 1941 and 1943 before the system was taken over by the RAF. It consists of three squarish concrete buildings with flat roofs. On the roof of the building at the north-western end is a truncated pyramid of steel lattice. This is the remains of the support for the radar transmitter/receiver array. It is the only example of a 'bestead array' known to survive anywhere in the British Isles. Next to it stands the generator house that supplied the necessary power. The third building is believed to be a standby generator house, so that the system could continue to work if the main generator broke down or was damaged.

The site stands alongside the Wales Coast Path section above Port Talbot (inland route). You can pick up the path in Margam Park, where there is parking. See Margam Country Park website for opening hours and charges. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 165.

Timeline (the asterisk indicates the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The radar station has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 02995w, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. You can find more about the remains in Glamorgan and Gwent dating to both world wars via the modern pages of our timeline <http://www.ggat.org.uk/timeline/timeline.html>.