



KLAXON

April 2025

Newsletter of the International Research Group Orford Ness

This year, we look forward to meeting the public at a greater number of events than ever, starting with showing you what happened during the Cold War on our “home turf” of Orford Ness on the weekend on 17th and 18th May. These are always excellent opportunities to make new contacts and for you to see what projects IRGON are working on currently. If you are interested in delving into the military research carried out on this very special and beautiful location, come and see us on “the Island” in May!

Olaf Kirchner, Chairman

IRGON presentation to the Royal Aeronautical Society – At the end of March 2025, IRGON gave a presentation to the Royal Aeronautical Society, Christchurch Branch. Our presentation was entitled “Orford Ness Through the (Military) Ages”, and we covered such diverse elements as:

- camouflage experiments from the WW1 era;
- transition of bomb ballistics technology during the interwar era;
- lethality tests with the German R4M rocket in the immediate post-war era;
- detection of the French nuclear tests in the Cold War era.

Our talk was very well received, and we made a couple of valuable contacts with connections to Orford Ness.



*The RAeS lecture was given at
Bournemouth University*

IRGON to participate in Cold War Network Heritage Week on Orford Ness

Orford Ness has previously hosted a meeting of the newly established Cold War Network, an organisation looking to provide public access to the history of the Cold War in the UK:

<https://coldwarnetwork.co.uk/news-and-updates/blog-into-the-past-uncovering-orford-ness-cold-war-history/>



On Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th May, IRGON will be partnering with the National Trust on Orford Ness with an information display illustrating the history of this site in the Cold War, including an actual casing of the WE177 nuclear bomb:

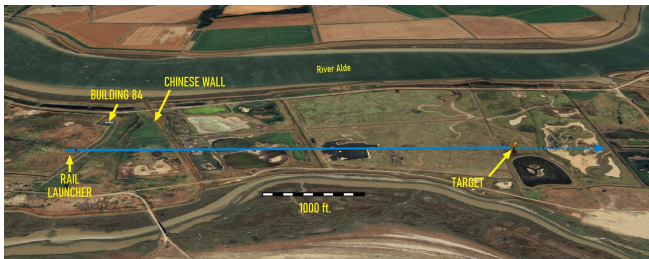
<https://coldwarnetwork.co.uk/places-to-visit>.

Note that you will have to reserve a ferry crossing online to get to Orford Ness on:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/suffolk/orford-ness-national-nature-reserve>

Infra-red fuse testing on Orford Ness

In the 1950s and 1960s, Britain had many military test ranges available. Orford Ness was one of many, albeit with a much more diverse scope. In this era, guided weapons would normally be tested at the GW ranges at Aberporth in Wales or the missile range at South Uist in the Hebrides. The Weapons Research Establishment in Australia was also established where longer ranges were required. However, IRGON recently learned of the involvement of Orford Ness in Britain's air-to-air missile programme. Thanks to aviation author Dave Forster, we discovered that infra-red fuses for air-to-air missiles were tested on the Ness, using the existing rocket range on King's Marsh. This is an exciting find, as it also illustrates a direct collaboration between the Royal Radar Establishment, under whose auspices the fuses were developed, and Orford Ness.



IRGON has been mapping the exact location of the infra-red fuse testing by combining our existing data to create a map overlay.

According to the test report, the trial was very successful: a 3" rocket carrying the fuse detected the thermal radiation from the target (a propane gas burner on top of a 65-foot pole!) and detonated correctly.

The Heritage and Archaeology Rangers Team Initiative and IRGON.

In 2024 the National Trust began an initiative "to improve the Trust's understanding of the archaeological sites under our care", with a volunteer Heritage and Archaeology Rangers Team (HART) established to collect information on the current condition, and long term viability of nearly 100,000 archaeological sites and historic buildings.

In early February, six dedicated volunteers, including myself as the IRGON representative, began surveying the 89 sites on Orford Ness which are included in the HART initiative. These ranged from a derelict toilet in the middle of nowhere to the external condition of Labs 1 to 6. Buildings which were already listed, or of similar status were not surveyed, for example, the Black Beacon.



This lone toilet was discovered.... 300 metres from the control room and no direct path

In practice, we were given a survey area map and a set of data sheets on which we recorded the stability, vulnerability and overall condition of the sites. We also recorded any observations and took photographs where appropriate. Glen and team provided self-drive transport to get around the Ness. This enabled us to visit remote sites which are closed to the public, including the bombard to the east of the bomb ballistics building and the armoury buildings to the north of Lab 1. We completed the survey in mid-March and our general findings were that most of the surveyed sites were in very good to good condition, very stable and not under major threat from damage agents such as vegetation ingress.

All data has been uploaded onto the National Trust Heritage Records Online (Home | National Trust Heritage Records - National Trust Heritage Records Online), and we are busy cataloguing the photographs, some of which are National Trust copyright. The immediate aim is to host the photographs on the IRGON shared area and, in the longer term, make non-copyright material available on our website.

We would like to thank Glen and the team on Orford Ness for their support and help in this activity.

Visit to COBRA MIST

At the end of March, IRGON organised a visit to COBRA MIST, which is not normally open to the public. We were welcomed by Mike, who ferried us over and gave us an excellent guided tour.



Two IRGON members poring over one of the maps on site

The COBRA MIST building is the largest structure on Orford Ness, and the size of the antenna field could be appreciated when we were on the ground. Our team, including our tame radar expert took careful note of some of the documents, photographs and drawings still on site, and we are hoping for further good cooperation with the site owners to further document the history of this unique facility.



Inspecting the focal point of the antenna array.

Dates for your calendar



IRGON has a busy year in 2025, and will be participating in all the events listed below:

- Friday 17th - Saturday 18th May 2025: Cold War Network Heritage Weekend on Orford Ness
<https://coldwarnetwork.co.uk/places-to-visit>
(see article on page 1)
- Friday 15th August: "Radar in the Air" event at Adastral Park, Martlesham Heath
Details to follow
- Sunday 14th September: Martlesham Heath Aviation Society Open Day
<https://www.mhas.org.uk>
- Sunday 21st September 2025: Bentwaters Cold War Museum Open Day
<https://www.bccwm.org.uk/>

Want to know more or join us? – If you have an interest in military history, if you have a personal or family connection to the work carried out on Orford Ness or access to information that may help us further document this history, you will find our contact details on www.IRGON.org.

Thank you!

Website – Our updated website now has new articles, visit us to find the most up-to-date information and discoveries made by IRGON.



www.IRGON.org