

West Dean Village History Trail

ROYAL NAVAL ARMAMENTS DEPOT

No 4c



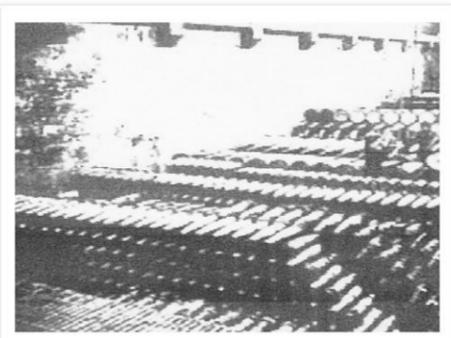
*VIEW OF SITE WHILE UNDER CONSTRUCTION
(NOW DEAN HILL PARK)*

In 1938, with the threat of war looming, the Admiralty requisitioned over 500 acres of land in West and East Dean and work began on the Depot. Over three years teams of Irish miners and Scottish fitters, aided by local labourers, tunnelled 24 storage magazines up to 71 metres in depth into the chalk of Dean Hill and over the rest of the site built some 150 buildings including workshops and laboratories.

The Depot opened in 1941 for the storage, inspection and maintenance of naval munitions. These would be sent from Dean to the forward depots at Priddy's Hard and Gosport from which they were issued to ships. Storage was in the magazines

burrowed into the hillside, light laboratories carried out general inspection of armaments returned from sea or after long storage and heavy laboratories carried out repair and refurbishment.

The surrounding agricultural land was retained. The securely fenced site was safeguarded by the Admiralty Constabulary for whom 30 houses were built at The Quarters, now Hillside Close, plus a block for single officers of which only the concrete base remains. Near East Dean level crossing a standard gauge railway line left the main line to run into the Depot's marshalling yard with its two transfer-sheds. Within these sheds munitions were transferred to the extensive narrow-gauge railway that ran to almost every building on the site as well as into the storage magazines. In the early 1990s the link to the main line was discontinued. Thereafter munitions were taken into and out of the site by lorry but transport within it continued to be by the narrow-gauge railway.



*A TYPICAL STORAGE
MAGAZINE IN WWII*



*THE NARROW-GAUGE RAILWAY
IN ACTION*



THE SIX LIGHT LABORATORIES



*ENTRANCE TO ONE OF THE
STORAGE MAGAZINES*



*THE LAST POST
31 MAR 2004*

In 1999 the Depot was renamed Defence Munitions Dean Hill and began handling munitions for other services. In 2001 the decision was taken to close the site and all munitions were moved out by September 2003. In October of that year Walter Kimberley, supervising engineer for the construction of the site, revisited for the first time since handing it over to the Admiralty in 1942. The Depot closed on 31 March 2004 with a formal ceremony attended by over 100 people which ended with the lowering of the Union Jack while a Royal Marines bugler sounded the Last Post. The gates were locked for the last time by Kathleen Parsons, aged 88, once a fervent opponent of the Depot spoiling a beautiful landscape but later won over by the profusion of wildflowers and butterflies it protected.