

Something camouflaged

I suppose it's Monday morning – so what did you do over the weekend?

We went for a walk along the Thames coastal path in Essex at Coalhouse Fort in East Tilbury.

The first time I went to Coalhouse Fort was 45 years ago, following a brown sign (in England tourist information signs are brown) that said 'CoalHouse Fort Ancient Monument' expecting an Iron Age hill fort, hitherto unknown to me. It turned out to be a Victorian Artillery Fort built by General Gordon in 1870 to increase the Thames estuary defences. He was based at Gravesend for some years before deployment to the Sudan and Khartoum and realised that the bend in the river needed something before potential invaders reached the larger forts of Tilbury (originally built by King Henry VIII, where Queen Elizabeth I made her famous speech as the Armada approached) and New Tavern in Gravesend.



Coalhouse Fort was decommissioned in 1949. The local council own it and could make more use of it; a volunteer group are working hard to bring it up to a standard of safety for public interest and it is open on certain days of the year for visits. Some of Batman Begins was filmed there. Outside there is a park, a rather good cafe and interesting walks along the river and ancillary fortifications.

Where we found this.



It is built to look like an ordinary water tower but that is a cunning disguise. It is (or was) a radar station, 1940 – 1944 placed to detect enemy submarines coming up the Thames. The crew lived in the bottom bit and the equipment was above. Some of that equipment is believed to now be in the main fort, but much was lost during the period it was near derelict.

If I ever get inside again (the main fort not the radar post,

that looks dangerous) I may bore you with that.