

DEFENCE AREA 32

HOG WOOD

1. Area details:

Hog Wood is 1 mile N of Hinton Charterhouse village and 3½ miles SE of Bath.

Unitary Authority: Bath and North East Somerset.

Parish: Hinton Charterhouse.

NGR: centre of area, ST 774595.

1.1 Area Description: [see Map 1].

Hog Wood is a small block of deciduous woodland occupying the summit of a spur of land between the Wellow Brook to the west and the River Avon to the east. This is high limestone country intersected by steep river valleys. The defence area is bordered to the west by the B3110 road and to the east by the main A36, both running to Bath.

The focus of the area is formed by the belts of woodland making up Hog Wood. To the west, the woodland is bordered by open arable fields that are crossed north-south by the line of a Roman road. To the east, the woods overlook parkland associated with nearby Hinton Abbey. Viewsheds are formed by Hog Wood itself, and by the views bounded by the roads both to the west and east.

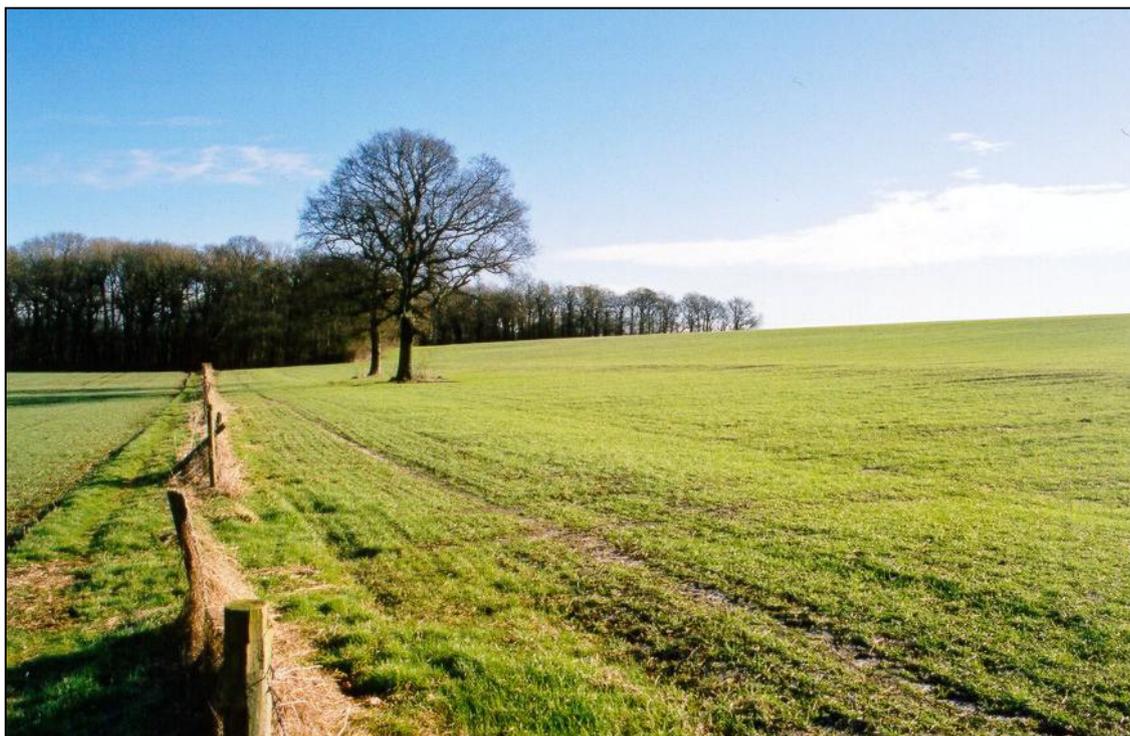


Fig. 1 - Hog Wood seen from the west. The Roman road crosses from right to left at about the position of the camera. The line of the anti-tank ditch can be made out as a slight ridge in the middle distance running towards Hog Wood.



2. Assessment.

2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

Defence overview -

The defences in the Hog Wood area formed part of GHQ Line Green, which is described in the report on Defence Area 20 - River Brue: Cripp's Bridge. [See as well the map at Fig. 2 within that report]. This Line defended against an attack from the south.

From Radstock, the principal anti-tank obstacle was the course of the Wellow Brook. However, rather than carrying the Line along this stream to its junction with the River Avon north of Limpley Stoke, which would have created a salient into the defended area, it was judged necessary to cut an artificial anti-tank ditch over the spur of high land crowned by Hog Wood that would join eventually with the River Avon south of Freshford. At the latter point, a Command stop line left GHQ Line Green, running to Salisbury and then on to Odiham in Hampshire.



Fig. 2 - Air photograph taken in January 1946. Hog Wood lies to the right approached by the anti-tank ditch that has climbed from the valley of the Wellow Brook to the west [left] and crossed the B3110 road (this crossing point in 1940 was almost certainly protected by a roadblock). The ditch followed the edge of Hog Wood, emerging from its southern spur [at the extreme right].

At Hog Wood, the anti-tank ditch was dug from the B3110 road to cut across the fields to the east. It then followed the southern perimeter of the wood, being constructed just within the shelter of the trees. It emerged from the long strip of woodland at the south-east extent of Hog Wood and crossed the meadow by Hinton Abbey to reach the A36 road. Pillboxes were sited in defence of the Line, and various slit trenches and other earthworks dug. There were almost certainly roadblocks at the crossing points of the two roads.



The defence works -

The most remarkable features of this defence area are the lengths of unfilled anti-tank ditch running at the edge of Hog Wood. Some sections survive probably to their original depth and width (10ft deep, 15ft wide at the top), and the bank (rampart) on the north side is also clear. The sharp angled corners of the ditch are still sharply defined, and short spur lengths can be seen running up to the various pillboxes that are set on its flanks. About 300 metres of the ditch are extant, and the reason it has survived appears to be its position within woodland. It must have been extremely difficult to excavate the ditch in such a wooded location, and its subsequent infilling was clearly not considered worth the trouble. Air photographic evidence shows that sections of the ditch beyond Hog Wood were being infilled in April 1946.



Fig. 3 - Anti-tank ditch within Hog Wood running east from pillbox, UORN 8549.



Fig. 4 - The anti-tank ditch looking from pillbox, UORN 8550, showing its sharp-angled turn at this point.





Fig. 5 - The rampart of the anti-tank ditch within Hog Wood.

Also preserved within Hog Wood are an elaborate series of slit trenches running parallel with the eastern margins of the wood. These follow a sinuous course, and sometimes are in two lines, with other trenches leading into them. They are almost certainly part of the defences of GHQ Line Green rather than being, for example, training trenches dug later in the war. Their position at the edge of the wood to supply flanking fire to any crossing of the Line makes this clear.



Fig. 6 - The curving lines of slit trenches [UORN 13996] at the eastern edge of Hog Wood.



Set at intervals along the anti-tank ditch, and within Hog Wood at its sharp-angled turns, are a number of infantry pillboxes. These are primarily brick-shuttered hexagonal type 24s, but square type 26s were also constructed in this sector of the Line, of which one example survives at the south-west corner of the wood [UORN 8549]. The pillboxes are all overgrown, but their interior condition is very good: there is no evidence of vandalism here.



Fig. 7 - UORN 8550: hexagonal pillbox at the central south corner of Hog Wood.



Fig. 8 - Interior of pillbox, UORN 8550, with its deep, splayed embrasures.





Fig. 9 - Pillbox, UORN 8550, at a corner of Hog Wood, seen from woodland at a lower level to the south.

Air photographic evidence shows other earthworks dug in the fields to the west and east of Hog Wood. A zig-zag slit trench ran across the meadow north of Hinton Abbey, with one end resting on a square pillbox (now destroyed) positioned near the anti-tank ditch. Also close to the anti-tank ditch, but this time on the south side of it, running along the line of a hedgerow near the B3110 road, are a series of earthworks, in plan like castle castellations, similar to those that were dug in the First World War for a front line infantry trench. The position of these earthworks on the attack side of the GHQ Line Green is perhaps surprising, but they were almost certainly part of its defence: it is hard to think of an earlier, or indeed a later, purpose for them.



Fig. 10 - Looking at Hog Wood from the south. The line of the anti-tank ditch ran across the foreground towards the wood.



2.2 **Landscape:**

There has been no evident change to the landscape of this defence area in the period since the Second World War. The same pattern of field and wood, road and path, as prevailed in 1940 exists today. This is a compelling piece of landscape, made perhaps more interesting archaeologically by the fact that the Second World War works pass through, or lie close to, the remains of earlier periods - a Roman road, Bronze Age tumuli, and a medieval abbey.

It is farming countryside of arable crops and managed woodland. Tourists pass by on the roads to Bath, but few would stop to walk here. Both the B3110 and A36 roads are dangerously busy, and there are few places to park by the roadside in order to take one of the public footpaths that lead to Hog Wood. Once on the footpaths, however, finding the defence works is straightforward, although the anti-tank ditch, slit trenches, and pillboxes lie to one side of the public footpath that traverses Hog Wood: there are signs stating 'Keep to the path'.

2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

This area is of major importance because of the preservation within Hog Wood of the earthwork elements of a Second World War stop line. The survival of unfilled anti-tank ditches in any condition is extremely rare, and here some 300 metres are extant, with certain sections surviving to their full depth and with their original profile. The same is true of the slit trenches built in an anti-invasion role: most surviving slit trenches relate to infantry training at a later period in the war. This fossilised defence landscape, with its earthworks and pillboxes, is thus of enormous significance to the archaeology of the anti-invasion period. This is undoubtedly one of the most important surviving sections of a 1940 stop line.

It would be possible to set out an attractive and instructive 'pillbox walk' through Hog Wood, although it would be necessary to obtain permission from the landowner to allow walkers to leave the footpath to see the pillboxes and anti-tank ditch more closely

3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works in the Hog Wood area be considered of national importance. They enable the defence of this section of GHQ Line Green to be interpreted, and provide evidence of the articulation of the defence and the inter-relationship of its functionally different components. Such interpretation is assisted by the air photographic evidence of defence structures that were built as part of the overall strategy, but which have now been removed.
2. That the earthworks within Hog Wood be professionally surveyed in order to make a full record of their surviving condition.
3. That consideration be given, in a possible initiative with the local authority, to establishing a 'pillbox walk' that would take in the defence works within Hog Wood, and in the areas to the west and east of it. Such a walk should start outside the defence area where parking facilities might be better obtained. Information on



the walk and the defences of GHQ Line Green might be supplied in the form of a leaflet.

4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1 and 3-10 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 5.2.2003 and 13.3.2003.

Fig. 2 - 3G/TUD/UK/25 fr.5165 (14.1.1946) - NMR.

4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'Southern Command Home Defence Programme, 1940' (map from General Headquarters Papers, Defence Works) - TNA: PRO WO 199/48.

'Report on Reconnaissance of Outer Bristol Defence Position', 18.6.1940 (from 48 Division 'GS' War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/578.

'Somerset Sub-Area Defence Scheme', August 1940 (from Somerset Sub-Area HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1317.

'Western Area Defence Scheme', 23.6.1941 (from Western Area HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1251.

4.3 **Published Source:**

(Major) M. Green, *Warwalks: Stop Line Green* (Reardon Publishing, 1999).

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

3G/TUD/UK/25 frs.5165-5166 (14.1.1946) - NMR.

106G/UK/1415 fr.3455 (14.4.1946) - NMR.

OS/71127 fr.32 (2.5.1971) - NMR.

4.5 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

