

DEFENCE AREA 39

DEANGATE RIDGE, HOO

1. **Area details:**

The defence area is 4 miles NE of Rochester and 8 miles E of Gravesend.

County: Kent.

Parishes: Hoo St. Werburgh / High Halstow.

NGR: centre of area, TQ 776733.

1.1 **Area Description:** [see Map 1].

The defence area is part of the Hoo peninsula of North Kent, crossed diagonally by the A228 road (known at this point as the Ratcliffe Highway) running between Rochester and the Isle of Grain. South-east of the A228 is the small town of Hoo, the north suburbs of which have spread as far as the main road. The crossroads where a minor road from Hoo crosses the A228 and continues to High Halstow is known as the Deangate crossroads. This is a dangerous junction where, at the time of writing, the Ratcliffe Highway is being widened and a roundabout built.

The Deangate crossroads lie on the high point of a low ridge of land, which to the north descends and then rises again to a parallel ridge known as Lodge Hill. Much of this ridge is occupied today by the Royal School of Military Engineering's Lodge Hill Camp and Chattenden Barracks, the modern successor to various munitions establishments on the site from before the Second World War. An army camp - Kingshill Camp - also stood to the south of the Deangate crossroads until the 1970s: the site is now occupied by housing.



Fig. 1 - Site of Kingshill Camp until demolished in the 1970s. It now forms a housing estate south of the Ratcliffe Highway.



To the south-east of the Deangate ridge can be seen the flat marshlands at the edge of the Medway estuary, and, to the north, from Lodge Hill the waters of the River Thames with Essex beyond. Many of the defence works lie within these viewsheds, with the focus of the area on the Deangate ridge. This is Grade 'A' agricultural land, and the countryside is intensively farmed, with large, open fields bearing arable crops bordered by occasional stands of woodland. Pasture land on the slopes of Lodge Hill is grazed by sheep. To the east of Hoo are apple orchards, remnants of the fruit farms that once predominated in this area. The southern boundary of the defence area is represented by a position just south of Stoke Road east of Hoo, and the northern by the north-east extent of Lodge Hill Camp. Beyond this boundary, the defence works appear to survive very well, but, as they lie on military land, there is no access to them.



Fig. 2 - Looking over the flat landscape to the south-east of the Deangate ridge, with Kingsnorth Power Station in the distance.

2. **Assessment.**

2.1 **Defences:** [see Map 2]

Defence overview -

The defence area was crossed by a section of the Newhaven - Cliffe branch of the GHQ Line, here close to its northernmost extent. It also lay within the Hoo Sector of the Gravesend Sub-Area, part of the military Kent Area. In 1941, Hoo was a defended village (ref. V.2) with a garrison of 63 men, eight Boys anti-tank rifles, three Bren guns, and a Northover Projector from the 14th (Hoo) Battalion, Kent Home Guard. Kingshill Camp was a designated defended locality (ref. DL.4) manned by 100 troops from the 347th Searchlight Battery RA: its perimeter may have included the Deangate crossroads. To the north, a defended locality (ref. DL.3) around the village of High Halstow was garrisoned by over 300 men from a company of the 8th Bn. Royal West Kent Regiment together with a searchlight detachment from the 163rd Battery HAA: the weapons available to these troops included sixteen Lewis light machine guns and four Vickers medium machine guns. The intense militarisation of the area was increased by the presence of a Royal Navy Ammunition Dump (RNAD) at Lodge Hill with a garrison of 300 men, and weapons that included eleven medium machine guns.¹

¹ TNA: PRO WO 166/1286.



The GHQ Line, having followed the River Medway to Rochester, was carried across the Hoo peninsula by an artificial anti-tank ditch dug between the Medway and the Thames. This ditch passed to the east of Hoo village, crossed the A228 road east of the Deangate crossroads, and ran east and north of RNAD Lodge Hill before turning north to Cliffe and Higham marshes. This line was defended against attacks from the coast by infantry pillboxes and anti-tank gun emplacements built on its west side, and by blocks where it crossed roads and trackways. Individual defence posts would have been encircled by barbed wire as would the perimeters of the defended localities. Undoubtedly the concrete defence works would have been supplemented by slit trenches and other earthworks.



Fig. 3 - Air photograph taken in January 1947 showing what in 1941 was the Royal Navy Ammunition Dump at Lodge Hill [upper left] and the Deangate crossroads [left, lower centre]. Kingshill Camp can be seen below the crossroads. The line of the infilled anti-tank ditch can be clearly made out running from top to bottom of the view.



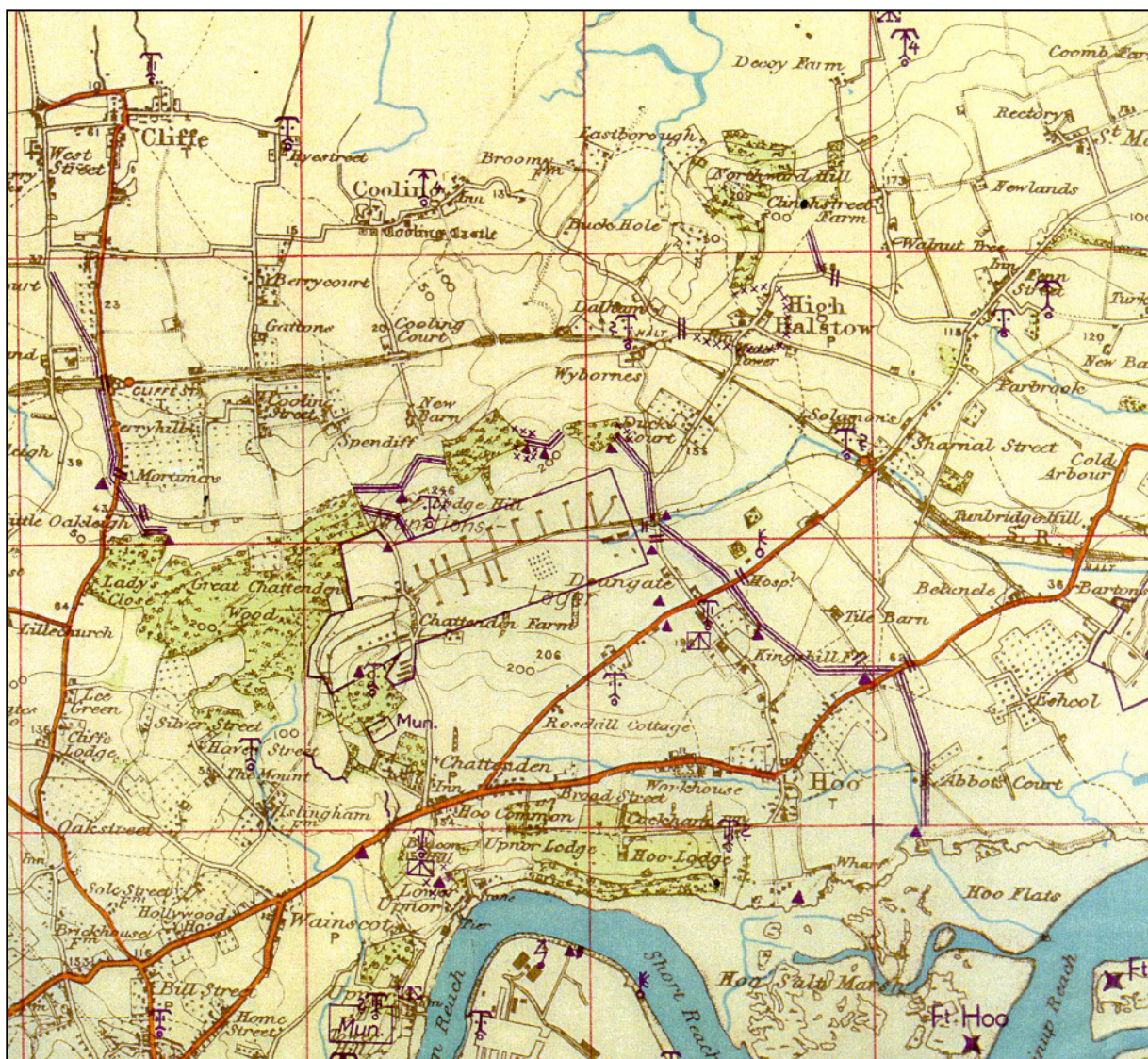


Fig. 4 - Portion of a German map with details of the British defences overprinted in purple on the Ordnance Survey base. The anti-tank ditch has been drawn in where it has been plotted from Luftwaffe reconnaissance photographs. Pillboxes are shown by triangles and roadblock sites by short parallel lines.²

The defence works -

There is a very good survival in the defence area of the hardened defence works of this section of the GHQ Line. Two single-chambered anti-tank gun emplacements [UORNs 2671 and 12587] to take either 2pdr. or 6pdr. guns stand at the centre of the line south-east of the Deangate crossroads. These are positioned at the edge of orchards and are not publicly accessible, but they can be viewed from close by. A further anti-tank gun emplacement [UORN 2668] stands by a house north of the Deangate crossroads and has had a garden terrace built on its roof, but otherwise survives in good condition. Just beyond the north-west boundary of the study area, two further emplacements stand south-east of Lodge Hill Wood. One just south of Stoke Road on the eastern side of Hoo [UORN 2703] has regrettably been destroyed in recent years.

² Sheet 116: Befestigungskarte Grossbritannien 1:50,000 (BLML).



The ten infantry pillboxes that can be seen in the area are all examples of the type 24 and are brick-faced, but with an area above each embrasure free of bricks, giving them a distinctive appearance unique to this particular part of the GHQ Line. Presumably this was the construction technique of a particular contractor. Several pillboxes are very overgrown, and one [UORN 2706] by the Deangate crossroads will be destroyed during current road widening works. An underground Royal Observer Post was built alongside pillbox, UORN 2669, and both structures survive well amongst a tangle of undergrowth. On the slopes of Lodge Hill, pillbox, UORN 11954, appears to stand exceptionally tall, but, being on private land, it was not possible to inspect it close up.



Fig. 5 - UORN 2671: anti-tank gun emplacement at the edge of an orchard and used today as a store.



Fig. 6 - UORN 2668: anti-tank gun emplacement with a garden terrace built on its roof.

The only survivor of the various roadblocks in the defence area are the two supporting concrete plinths for a horizontal rail block on the trackway to Tile Barn Cottage [UORN 2707] showing how even minor routes were blocked in this way. This is an

important survival as these blocks are rarely found today, usually having been cleared away from positions beside busier routes. To the north of the Deangate crossroads, anti-tank 'pimples' said to be at a road bridge over a former light railway could not be located during fieldwork.



Fig. 7 - UORN 2706: type 24 infantry pillbox at the Deangate crossroads, showing the unusual 'cut outs' above the embrasures, a feature of pillboxes in this area. This pillbox will be destroyed in current road-works.



Fig. 8 - UORN 2672: type 24 infantry pillbox with its entrance now blocked up. It faced E across the anti-tank ditch which ran on the other side of the hedgerow.



Fig. 9 - UORN 11954: exceptionally tall type 24 pillbox, built to allow good visibility towards the anti-tank line over the slope of Lodge Hill.



Fig. 10 - UORN 2707: rare surviving concrete plinths of an horizontal rail roadblock.

2.2 Landscape:

This is a compelling area of landscape, which, despite its modern busyness, retains much of its appearance at the time of the Second World War. Suburbs have spread north from Hoo to incorporate the former site of Kingshill Camp, and the main A228 road is currently being widened and a roundabout built. Essentially, however, the pattern of farm and field, with the Lodge Hill military establishment to the north-west of the area, remains the same. Hoo itself retains its character as a small town surrounded by a farmed landscape, but with evidence of modern industrialisation on the skyline.

Public footpaths enable many of the defence works to be inspected at close hand. The defence line can be traced from a trackway that runs from the banks of the Medway

estuary to Stoke Road east of Hoo, and then by a further footpath running at the edge of apple orchards to the Deangate crossroads. It is then possible to walk along Dux Court Road to a footpath that rises onto the eastern slopes of Lodge Hill. The continuation of the defence works to the west can be seen from here as well as the fences of the Lodge Hill military land. Parking is possible in a substantial lay-by just south of the Deangate crossroads or in a car park off Stoke Road in Hoo.

2.3 Statement of Significance:

The defence area provides a most interesting and important example of a section of stop line [GHQ Line] linking with documented points of area defence in a highly militarised landscape. Despite the forthcoming loss of one pillbox [UORN 2706] under a current road-widening scheme, the survival of nine other infantry pillboxes and three anti-tank gun emplacements within the defined area, with further pillboxes and emplacements just beyond it to the north-west, make this a well-populated landscape of concrete defence works that provides an excellent illustration of the intensity of the 1940/41 defence. The presence also of an underground Royal Observer Corps post adds to the overall military interest of the area, as does the continuing Army presence at Lodge Hill Camp.

This would be an ideal area within which to draw up a 'pillbox walk' as most of the defence structures can be seen at close quarters from public rights of way, or viewed from a reasonable distance. Appropriate literature could be produced, with possibly an information board sited in Hoo itself, providing details of the anti-invasion defences of the area for the benefit of public enjoyment and education.

3. Recommendations:

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works north and south of the Deangate ridge at Hoo be considered of national importance. They enable this section of the defence of the Newhaven - Cliffe branch of the GHQ Line 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 documentary evidence provided in this report of defence structures that were built as part of the overall strategy, but which have now been removed.
2. That consideration be given, in a possible initiative with Kent County Council and the local authority, to providing an information board on the anti-invasion defences of the area. A 'pillbox walk' could also be drawn up and described on the board, or made available in other publicly-available literature.

4. Supporting material.

4.1 Photographs:

Figs. 1-2 and 5-10 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 18.12.2003, 10.2.2004, and 4.3.2004.

Fig. 3 - CPE/UK/1923 fr.4079 (16.1.1947) - NMR.



4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

Befestigungskarte Grossbritannien: 1:50,000 (Sheet 116), 20.11.1940 - BLML 1305(13).
Gravesend Sub-Area War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1286.
'Kent Area Operational Instructions No.3' (from Kent Area HQ War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1216).

4.3 **Published Sources:**

Colin Alexander, *Ironsides Line* (Historic Military Press, 1999).
Andrew Saunders & Victor Smith, *Kent's Defence Heritage: Gazetteer Part One*, KD 164 'Hoo St. Werburgh to Lodge Hill line of pillboxes' (Report for Kent County Council, December 2001).

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

106G/UK/1444 fr.3042 (1.5.1946) - NMR.
106G/UK/1702 fr.3060 (27.8.1946) - NMR.
CPE/UK/1789 fr.3028 (11.10.1946) - NMR.
CPE/UK/1923 frs.4078-4079 (16.1.1947) - NMR.
541/591 fr.4026 (29.6.1950) - NMR.
58/856 frs.3080 and 3082 (24.4.1952) - NMR.
MAL/69021 fr.3 (27.3.1969) - NMR.

4.5 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**

TQ 7673-7773 (1963 and 1974) - BLML.
TQ 7674-7774 (1963 and 1978) - BLML.
TQ 7872-7972 (1969) - BLML.
TQ 7873-7973 (1962 and 1977) - BLML.

4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

