

# DEFENCE AREA 61

## CHESHUNT

### 1. Area details:

The defence area is 2 miles NW of Cheshunt, 8 miles SW of Harlow, and 17 miles N of the centre of London.

County: Hertfordshire.

Parish: Cheshunt.

NGR: centre of area, TL 335046.

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

The defence area lies to the west of the valley of the River Lea at a point just north of suburbs that are virtually continuous from here to the centre of London. It is characterised by a ridge running west-east that is fronted to the north by the Turnford Brook flowing towards a series of waterways in the Lea valley.

Much of the area is farming land, mainly arable and grass fields, with woodland to the north and the suburbs of Hammond Street to the south. The area is bisected by the minor, but busy, road, Park Lane Paradise, and is also traversed by the narrow, sharp-cornered Bread and Cheese Lane, and by various footpaths and tracks. Several farms lie within the area, including the large Cheshunt Park Farm which itself borders Cheshunt Park, now a golf course and public recreation area.



*Fig. 1 - Portion of a 1946 air photograph showing the central part of the defence area. The pattern of small fields and woodland is largely retained today. The course of the infilled anti-tank ditch can be seen towards the bottom of the photograph with several pillboxes alongside it.*

The boundaries of the area are the line of suburbs to the south, the Turnford Brook and woodland to the north, Bread and Cheese Lane to the west, and the eastern borders of Cheshunt Park to the east. The principal viewshed is at the centre of the



area north of Appleby Street Farm where the ridge falls away north towards Thunderfield Grove, and the defence line can be visualised running west-east across this tract of land marked by pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles in view.

## 2. Assessment.

### 2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

#### *Defence overview -*

The defence area formed part of the Outer London Anti-Tank Line that ran for some 121 miles around London, generally coinciding with the then London Area boundary. This was also known as Line 'A', and by 1941 had been developed as a continuous tank obstacle, using rivers, canals, and machine-dug artificial ditches, with a series of roadblocks covered by pillboxes and fortified houses that themselves were surrounded by slit trenches and protected with perimeter wire. A series of section posts were also constructed along the Line, which was defended in depth, with the principal anti-tank obstacle forming the forward edge of the main position. Minefields were also laid at points in front of the Line.<sup>1</sup> Forward defended localities were organised along the course of the Line, and other defended localities at each roadblock.<sup>2</sup>

Some four to five miles within the London Area boundary, a further line - the Centre Line (Line 'B') - was established. This was formed principally by blocking main roads and all gaps for half a mile either side of them, making a chain of defended localities covered by pillboxes and defended buildings. Finally, there was the Inner Line (Line 'C') to the north of the Thames only, protecting the heart of the City and with a central Whitehall keep, formed in much the same way as the Centre Line.<sup>3</sup>

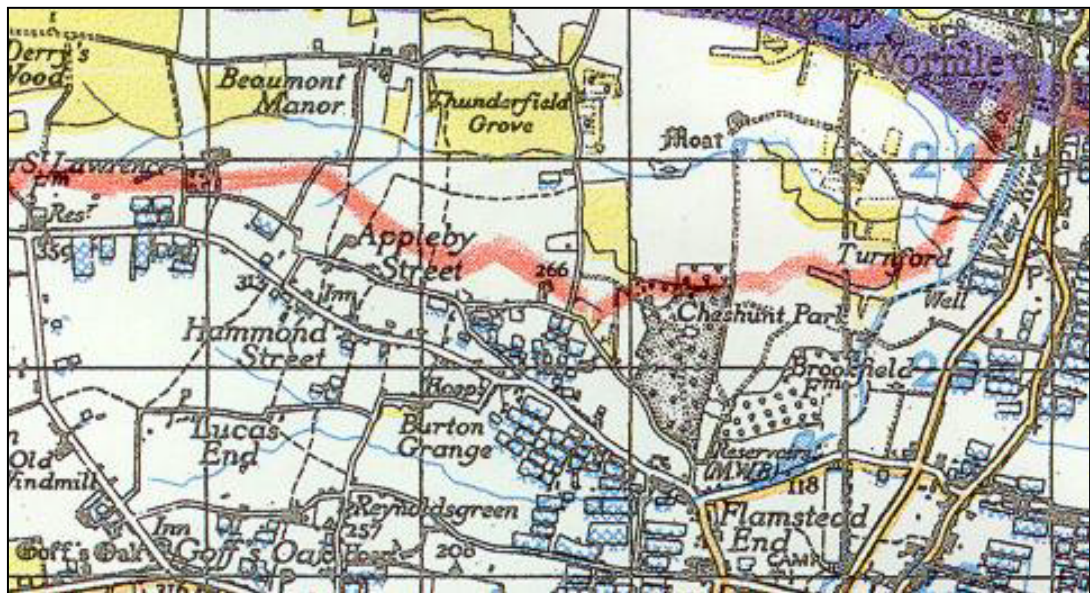


Fig. 2 - Portion of a map showing the course of the artificial anti-tank ditch [the red line] through the Cheshunt area. The map was drawn up specifically to show the lengths of anti-tank ditch remaining to be infilled in August 1944.<sup>4</sup>

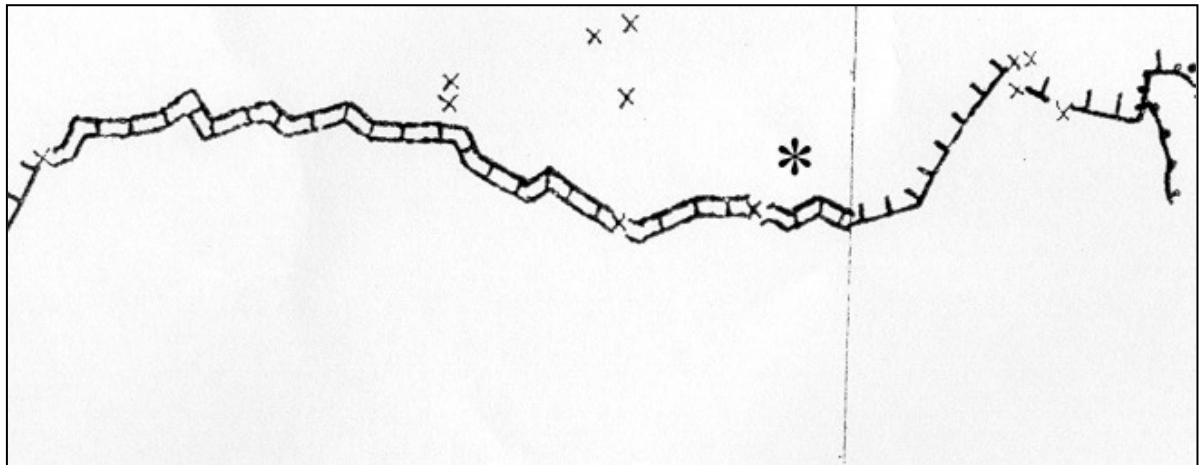
<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1159.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/897.

<sup>3</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/6814 and TNA: PRO WO 166/1159.

<sup>4</sup> TNA: HLG 7/973.





*Fig 3 - Portion of a Royal Engineers tracing showing the anti-tank obstacle of the Outer London Line. The Cheshunt area is indicated by the added asterisk. The parallel lines are stretches of two-way anti-tank ditches, the single lines, one-way. Crosses show sites of roadblocks.<sup>5</sup>*

The defence of London was controlled by the London Area, which was an independent military area falling directly under GHQ Home Forces. In 1940, it was divided into two Sub-Areas, North London and South London.<sup>6</sup> By 1941 the Area was known as London District, and further sub-divided into North West, North East, South West, and South East Sub-Areas. Cheshunt fell into the North East Sub-Area.<sup>7</sup>

The main threats to London were perceived in 1940 as coming from the west, east, and south, each potential direction of assault having seized airfields at that point. To protect London from these directions of attack, additional defensive lines ('switch lines') were established along the lines of the River Thames, the River Lea, and the River Brent and Grand Junction Canal. Certain areas around London were also categorised as dangerous for the landing of airborne troops which might advance on London using seized motor transport.<sup>8</sup>

The Home Guard, which in 1941 was organised into twenty zones within London, had the task of defending the three anti-tank lines and manning the roadblocks. As they had no anti-tank weapons, in the critical invasion danger period of September 1940, regular units with anti-tank rifles were interspersed amongst them.<sup>9</sup> In the Cheshunt area, these troops were from the 2nd Bn. (K.R.R.C.) The Rangers. On their left, east of the River Lea, were the 2/8th Middlesex Regiment.<sup>10</sup> These two regiments also manned the switch line along the River Lea. Many of the regular units available made up the London District Field Force whose task was to advance to defend any threatened point. Other regular units were formed into Mobile Columns. In 1941, the 6th Det. (Holding) Bn. Scots Guards was allocated as a Mobile Column to the defence of the Cheshunt area.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> TNA: PRO WO 199/1202.

<sup>6</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1159.

<sup>7</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/6814.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1159.

<sup>9</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/897.

<sup>10</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/4466.

<sup>11</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1159.







*Fig. 4 - An air photograph showing defence works surviving in 1963 around Cheshunt Park Farm [at the upper right edge of the photograph]. The line of the anti-tank ditch approaching the roadblock on Park Lane Paradise can still be seen as a soil mark. Permission was requested to survey Cheshunt Park Farm, but this was not forthcoming.*

#### *The defence works -*

The principal structure to be seen amongst the defence works within this area is the octagonal type 27 pillbox with its central well to mount an anti-aircraft machine gun. Seven examples survive in the study defence area, which, although often badly overgrown, preserve the iron rungs and access doors to the central well, usually in good condition, and the detached, loopholed blast walls. This was the main type of LMG pillbox built in this sector of the Outer London Line.

Interspersed amongst the type 27 pillboxes are also examples of the type 22, including one unusual variant form on Bread and Cheese Lane where the pillbox is heightened to fire over the banks of the lane and the crest of the hill to the rear [UORN 5061].





Anti-tank cubes from roadblocks survive on Bread and Cheese Lane and at Candlestick Lane in Cheshunt Park, and an impressive line of cubes supplementing the anti-tank ditch can be seen north-west of Appleby Street Farm [UORN 5063], as well as a shorter line near Gammon Farm [UORN 16689].



*Fig. 5 - UORN 5065: the interior of a type 27 pillbox showing the access to the central well for anti-aircraft fire.*



*Fig. 6 - UORN 5065: exterior of a type 27 pillbox. The anti-tank ditch ran across its front.*





*Fig. 7 - UORN 5061: unusual heightened type 22 pillbox facing east across Bread and Cheese Lane. The embrasures are of the rarer vertical pattern, i.e. higher than they are wide.*



*Fig. 8 - UORN 584: type 22 pillbox in Cheshunt Park with good examples of stepped embrasures and a low entry porch.. It has been damaged recently by a fire being lit against it, and the interior is littered with rubbish.*





*Fig. 9 - UORN 16689: three cubes strengthening the anti-tank obstacle, overlooked by type 22 pillbox, UORN 5062.*



*Fig. 10 - UORN 5063: an impressive line of anti-tank cubes forming the forward edge of the Outer London Anti-Tank Line at this point. They are viewed here from a distance as there is no public access.*



*Fig.11 - UORN 5065: detail of the loophole in the exterior blast wall of a type 27 pillbox.*

## 2.2 **Landscape:**

The most significant change in the landscape of the defence area since the Second World War has been the housing development that has taken place at its southern edge. The course of the Anti-Tank Line itself, however, is largely unaffected, and the broad pattern of field and wood, intersected by roads and footpaths, is little altered. The farms themselves, upon whose lands the defence works were constructed, all survive. Cheshunt Park Farm is a large complex and must have formed an important defended locality in 1940. It is unfortunate that permission was not obtained to inspect the surviving defence works here that may have been more numerous than can be determined from air photographs.

Cheshunt Park has been developed as a golf course and a public park, allowing attractive walks in open parkland within which many features of the formal grounds of the original house can be traced. The Anti-Tank Line ran across the northern edge of the Park, just north of the golf course.

The area is crossed by a number of footpaths and roads providing public access to most of the defence works. Parking at the roadsides, however, is almost impossible, and the visitor is advised to use the public car park at the Cheshunt Park golf club, and walk from there. Bread and Cheese Lane is very narrow and is used by farm traffic. The only sensible way to approach the defence works there is on foot.

## 2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

The defence area provides an excellent example of a section of the Outer London Anti-Tank Line where differing components of the defence survive very well in a landscape largely unaltered from that of 1940. The run of the pillboxes from the west to the east of the area is complete, forming a mixture of the type 27 and the type 22. The type 27 examples, particularly if cleared of vegetation, are some of the best preserved in the country of this relatively rare pillbox, with its dual anti-aircraft role [see as well Defence Area 9 - Sudbury]. The type 22 [UORN 5061] is also an unusual example of a pillbox that has been especially heightened to provide a better field of fire. Excellent examples of anti-tank cubes used to supplement roadblocks and strengthen the anti-tank line itself also survive in the area.

Air photographs enable the line of the anti-tank ditch to be traced exactly, although there is no trace now on the ground. Standing on the ridge north of Appleby Street Farm enables the defended landscape to be reconstructed, and there is something particularly atmospheric about this green vista of field and wood, knowing that once it was precisely measured and plotted, with ranges and arcs of fire set out, section posts and slit trenches dug and surrounded by barbed wire, shuttering set up and concrete poured, all for the ultimate purpose of the defence of the capital lying fifteen miles to the rear. Only the bare bones of the pillboxes and the anti-tank cubes survive today, but these are enough to indicate the totality of the defence that was prepared here

This is a good location to establish a 'pillbox walk', through which, with the appropriate information, the general visitor would be able to visualise the 1940 defences that protected London.





### 3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works in the Cheshunt area be considered of national importance. They enable the defence of this part of the Outer London Anti-Tank 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 to removing the overgrowth on the structures lying within Cheshunt Park in order that these may be better seen by the public using the Park
3. That consideration be given, in a possible initiative with the local authority, to providing information for the public on the Cheshunt area as part of the Outer London Anti-Tank Line. Such information could direct the visitor to the structures lying within Cheshunt Park, and to those further west where they are publicly accessible. Information could be displayed by the car park to the golf club where there is an information board already on the history of Cheshunt Park.

### 4. **Supporting material.**

#### 4.1 **Photographs:**

Fig. 1 - CPE/UK/1779 fr.3013 (10.10.1946) - NMR.

Fig.4 - OS/63006 fr.151 (24.3.1963) - NMR.

Figs. 5-11 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 15.7.2003 and 22.8.2003.

#### 4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

3rd London Infantry Brigade War Diary, 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/897.

2nd Bn. (K.R.R.C.) The Rangers War Diary, 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/4382.

London District 'G' War Diary, 1940-1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1159.

2/8th Bn. Middlesex Regiment War Diary, 1940-1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/4466.

London District Home Defence Scheme, December 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 199/3259.

North East London Sub-Area War Diary, 1942 - TNA: PRO WO 166/6755.

'Chief Engineer, London District: Anti-Tank Defences' [map], July 1942 - TNA: PRO WO 199/1202.

'Intelligence Folder', Feb.1943 (from London District CE War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/6814.

London District 'G' War Diary, 1943 - TNA: PRO WO 166/10862.

'Restoration of defence works', 1943-1944 - TNA: PRO HLG 7/973.

[Map of London showing 'General Line of A/Tk. Defences'], 1944 - TNA: PRO WO 205/41.



4.3 **Published Sources:**

'Invasion Defences 1940' [parish of Cheshunt] n.d. - copy in Wills Collection, NMR.

Web page, Jim Apps, 'Fortress Hertfordshire' -

<http://www.brookmans.co/history/features/defences/index.shtml>.

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

106G/UK/1565 fr.3351 (7.6.1946) - NMR.

CPE/UK/1779 frs.3012-3014 and 3016 (10.10.1946) - NMR.

541/183 fr.4157 (19.10.1948) - NMR.

OS/63006 frs.150-151 (24.3.1963) - NMR.

OS/87038 fr.7 (23.4.1987) - NMR.

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

TL 3204-3304 (1971) - BLML.

TL 3404-3504 (1971) - BLML.

4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

