

DEFENCE AREA 65

LUDHAM BRIDGE

1. **Area details:**

Ludham Bridge is 1½ miles SW of Ludham and 15 miles NW of Great Yarmouth.

County: Norfolk.

Parishes: Ludham / Horning.

NGR: centre of area, TG 372171.

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

The defence area lies on the margins of the River Ant at the point where it is bridged by the A1062 road. The small town of Ludham stands to the north-east. About a mile to the south, the River Ant joins the River Bure.

The focal point of the area is the bridge, the defence works being situated in the flat landscape immediately to its north, on both the west and east bank of the river. Viewsheds are formed by the bridge, the drainage mill, and the fields to the west.

2. **Assessment.**

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

Defence overview -

Ludham Bridge was a Forward Defended Locality (FDL) of the 213th Infantry Brigade within Norfolk Defence Sector 'B'.¹ In 1940/41, it was defended by one NCO and sixty other ranks of the 9th Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment, who were relieved every forty-eight hours.²

Ludham Bridge lay on the Eastern Command Demolition Belt FI, which ran parallel with the coast from Antingham to Ludham before turning east to meet the sea north of Winterton.³ All bridges in this demolition belt were prepared for destruction in the event of an enemy landing, and chambers to hold the necessary explosives would have been constructed within the fabric of Ludham Bridge: the bridge has been replaced in recent years, so no evidence survives. Ludham Bridge also lay on a short fortified stop line that ran between Halvergate and Wey Bridge.⁴ This stop line was held by one company of the Berkshire Regiment.

The River Ant, joining with the Bure to the south, was patrolled by the Broads Flotilla, small boats manned by the Home Guard and armed with Lewis Guns [see

¹ TNA: PRO WO 166/1066 and TNA: PRO WO 166/464 [see Fig. x of Defence Area 56].

² TNA: PRO WO 166/4528.

³ TNA: PRO WO 166/194 and TNA: PRO WO 166/464.

⁴ TNA: PRO WO 166/4528.



also Defence Area 15 - Acle]. The town of Ludham itself was a Category 'B' 'defended place' or nodal point.⁵ Later in the war it was heavily garrisoned with troops, army camps being set up within the built-up area of the town. An airfield also lay to its north-east.

Documentary evidence and air photographs enable the full extent of the Ludham Bridge defences to be reconstructed. The mined bridge was blocked by both bent and horizontal steel rails, the latter ready to be placed in concrete plinths on either side of the road in the event of an emergency. A pillbox and an Allan Williams steel turret stood in the fields north-west of the bridge, and flame fougasses were set in the hedgerow banks on either side of the road a short distance from the western end of the bridge. Close-by, there was also probably a further sandbagged infantry post. These defence works had perimeters formed of barbed wire entanglements.⁶

The defence works -

From May 1941, at least two spigot mortar emplacements were constructed on opposite banks of the river north of the bridge. The weapon-mounting pedestals of these survive [UORNs 15768 and 2347].



Fig. 1 - UORN 15768: the top of a spigot mortar pedestal used today as a boat mooring.

Alongside the eastern spigot mortar emplacement, a strongpoint was formed by fortifying a disused wind-pump tower [UORN 2348]. The brick walls of this had eight loopholes cut into them on two storeys, and a brick blast wall was built to protect the entrance to the tower. The structure, still with the evidence of its

⁵ For details of the defences of Ludham, see the Home Guard map preserved at the Norfolk Record Office (MC 1759/2). Few of these defence works appear to survive.

⁶ TNA: PRO WO 166/1066 and WO 166/4528.



Second World War fortification, survives in very good condition, although the floor between the two levels of embrasures has now gone. Together with its adjacent spigot mortar pedestal [UORN 2347], it makes a compelling monument to the invasion danger period of 1940/41.



*Fig. 2 -UORN 2348:
the fortified wind
pump tower.*



*Fig. 3 -
Loopholes cut
into the lower
storey of the
tower.*



Fig. 4 - UORN 2348: the entrance to the tower protected by an angled blast wall and a loophole. A spigot mortar emplacement stands close to the entrance [UORN 2347]. The site is very overgrown.

2.2 Landscape:

The landscape of the defence area differs little from that of 1940/41. Aerial photographs taken in 1946 show the pattern of fields around the bridge to be much as it exists today.

The bridge has been replaced by a modern construction, and, on its north side, boats crewed by holiday makers exploring the Broads tie up to take on water and provisions at mooring points on the river banks. There is also a cafe and shop by the roadside to the east of the bridge.

The surviving defence structures can be accessed by footpaths on both banks of the river. Car parking is possible in a sizeable lay-by to the west of the bridge.

2.3 Statement of Significance:

This defence area provides a good example of a defended locality, set on a stop line and within a demolition belt. The documentary evidence enables the defences to be reconstructed and interpreted, and they provide visual evidence of the importance of the defence of communication routes in the overall anti-invasion defence strategy of 1940/41. The fortified wind pump tower dominates the defence at Ludham Bridge, and is an individual monument of national importance. It provides an excellent example of how existing buildings were fortified for defence, assisting in the camouflage of the defended landscape. The two spigot mortar pedestals are also important, showing how the defence was augmented after this weapon became available to the Home Guard in mid-1941.





Fig. 5 - Aerial photograph showing Ludham Bridge at the centre, and the junction of the Rivers Ant and Bure to the south. The wind pump tower lies on the east bank of the Ant to the north of the bridge.

3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works at Ludham Bridge be considered of national importance. They enable the Second World War defence of the bridge 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 surrounding the wind pump tower so that it can be seen more clearly in relation to the adjacent spigot mortar emplacement for the purpose of 1. above.
 3. That, in a possible initiative with Norfolk County Council and the local authority, a short walk be established to view the defence works, and that an information board be provided to explain the defence of the bridge. As access to the wind pump tower is difficult, the ground being overgrown and surrounded by deep ditches, a length of path would need to be constructed here, if the landowner was agreeable.
4. **Supporting material.**
- 4.1 **Photographs:**
Figs. 1-4 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 29.7.2002.
Fig. 5 - 106G/UK/1634 fr.3061 (9.7.1946) - NMR.
 - 4.2 **Documentary Sources:**
'II Corps Defence Scheme', 1940 (from II Corps CRE War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/194.
18 Division 'GS' War Diary, June 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/464.
'A' Sector Defence Scheme', 15.7.1941 (from 213th Infantry Brigade War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1066.
'9th Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment Defence Scheme', 15.7.1941 (from 9th Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4528.
'A' Sector, Norfolk Division Demolition Scheme', August 1941 (from 270th Field Company Royal Engineers War Diary - TNA: PRO WO 166/3739.
Home Guard map of Ludham, c.1940 - Norfolk Record Office, MC 1759/2.
Files categorising military defence works for maintenance of demolition, 1949-50: Ludham - Norfolk Record Office, C/P 8/1/224.
 - 4.3 **Aerial Photograph:**
106G/UK/1634 fr.3061 (9.7.1946) - NMR, Swindon.
 - 4.4 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**
TG 3617-3717 (1978) - BLML.
 - 4.5 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**
[see 5. 'Annex'].

