

DEFENCE AREA 71

BROMBOROUGH POOL

1. **Area details:**

Bromborough Pool lies close to Port Sunlight on the Wirral peninsula, 3 miles S of Birkenhead.

County: Wirral.

Parish: Bebington.

NGR: centre of area, SJ 343841.

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

Bromborough Pool Bridge carries the broad A41 road over the River Dibbins, a tributary of the River Mersey, close to Bromborough Pool itself, which was developed as an industrial dock from the mid-nineteenth century. It is currently disused. A short distance to the north west is the model village of Port Sunlight, and, to the south west, the Lever Works¹, the soap products of which originally gave Port Sunlight its name. South east of the bridge, an area of former works has been re-developed as the 'Wirral International Business Park'.

A little further to the south, the B5137 Bromborough Road crosses the River Dibbins as it emerges from the Port Sunlight Works and runs below a steep tree-covered cliff that marks the original southern perimeter of the works. The main railway line to Birkenhead runs on the western edge of the Works.

The principal viewshed of this scattered defence area is focused on Bromborough Pool Bridge and the pillboxes that guard it.

2. **Assessment.**

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

Defence overview -

Bromborough Pool Bridge, and the surrounding area, were defended as part of the defences of the Birkenhead Sector of the Mersey Garrison. The southern boundary of this Sector crossed the Wirral peninsula from Ellesmere Port to Ness.² A particular task of the defences at Bromborough was to prevent the penetration into Port Sunlight and Birkenhead of enemy airborne troops landing at Hooton airfield to the south. Birkenhead, linked with Wallasey, was an anti-tank island nominated by Western Command, and heavily defended with encircling stop lines fronted by anti-tank ditches and minefields.³

¹ Now 'Port Sunlight Works'.

² TNA: PRO WO 166/1351 and TNA: PRO WO 166/6872.

³ TNA: PRO WO 166/1351.



The particular defences of the Bromborough Pool area were pillboxes to defend both the southern and northern ends of the road bridge, as well as a roadblock further to the south. The bridge was also probably mined for demolition. Two other roadblocks were constructed to the south of the Lever Works, and, close by, two pillboxes overlooked Bromborough Road. Additionally, spigot mortar emplacements were probably positioned on the southern perimeter of the Lever Works. This factory complex, with its own tracks running from the main railway line on its western border, was undoubtedly producing materials vital to the war effort and needed to be protected as a Vulnerable Point in its own right. A rail block was also positioned at Bromborough Station at the south-west corner of the defence area.

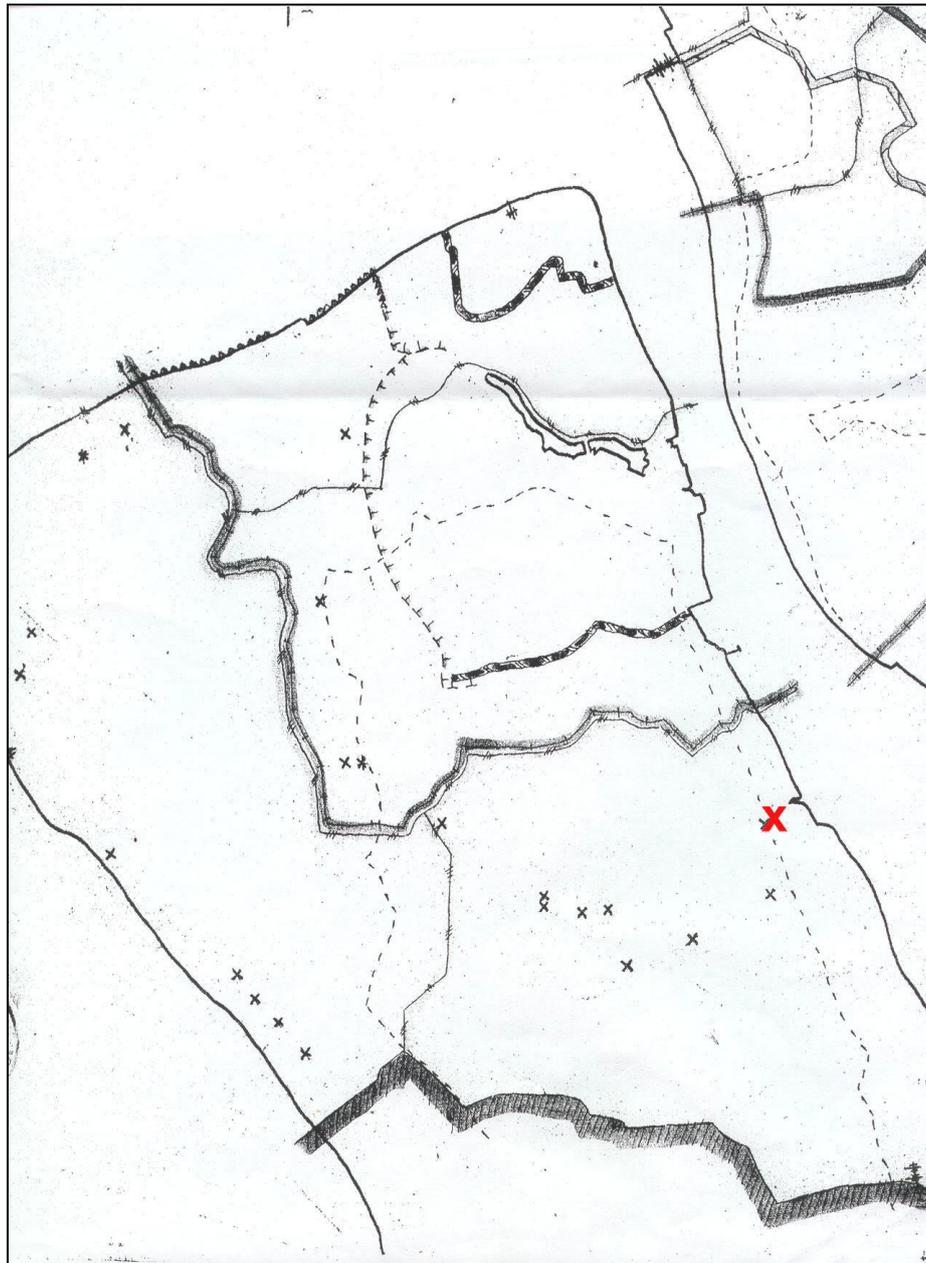


Fig. 1 - Map showing the defences of the Birkenhead Sector. The red cross marks the position of the Bromborough Pool Bridge area, with the encircling defence lines around Birkenhead to the north.⁴

⁴ TNA: PRO WO 166/1351.





Fig. 2 - Bromborough Pool Bridge and its three pillboxes can be seen in this 1948 air photograph. At the centre bottom are the Lever Works, and at the top the geometric layout of the model village of Port Sunlight.

The defences in the Bromborough Pool area were built in the period July-August 1940 under the direction of the 284th Field Company Royal Engineers. The three pillboxes (termed 'machine gun posts') at Bromborough Pool Bridge were begun after 11th July by the contractor, James Tomkinson & Co. of Liverpool. By 9th August they are recorded as 'completed, less camouflage'. By 30th August the camouflage (not specified) was in place. The roadblocks, and the Bromborough Road pillbox [UORN 6164], were constructed in the same period.⁵ The Bromborough defences were manned by units from the 4th (Wirral) Bn. Cheshire Home Guard, although the

⁵ TNA: PRO WO 166/3753.



railblock at Bromborough Station was the responsibility of a 'railway platoon' from the 21st Bn. Cheshire Home Guard.

The defence works -

The three pillboxes built to guard Bromborough Pool Bridge, one to its north and the other two on opposite sides of the road at its south end, all survive. They are excellent examples of pillboxes surviving in an urban context relatively untouched by the expected vandalism. The three are all type 24 hexagonal infantry pillboxes built with local variations to doorways and embrasures. The positions of the two south pillboxes [UORNs 6150 and 7371] are perhaps surprising inasmuch as UORN 7371 faces east across the road rather than south like its companion. Clearly the intention was to concentrate fire at the end of the bridge while also covering the roadblock that lay some 150 yards to the south.



Fig. 3 - UORN 15716, north of Bromborough Pool Bridge, a good example of a pillbox surviving in an urban context.



Fig. 4 - Pillboxes, UORNs 7371 (left) and 6150, at the southern end of Bromborough Pool Bridge. The pillboxes have evidently survived as the road is broad and they do not impede on the carriageways.





Fig. 5 - UORN 6150: this pillbox fired south covering a roadblock some 150 yards away.



Fig. 6 - UORN 7371: close up of one of the pillbox's forward faces, with its principal arc of fire east across the south end of the bridge. Evidence of vertical wooden plank shuttering, and a concrete heavily matrixed with stone chippings, can be seen.

The pillbox off Bromborough Road, close to Mill Road [UORN 6164], is of an unusual five-sided shape. It has received some attention from vandals, and its embrasures and doorway are now all blocked up. Far worse, however, is the vandal damage to the square pillbox at the southern edge of the former Lever Works [UORN 7254]. Here, an embrasure and wall have been badly damaged by what might be termed 'herculean vandalism', and the structure has been extensively covered in spray-paint graffiti.





Fig. 7 - Pillbox, UORN 6164, standing by Bromborough Road close to the River Dibbins and beneath the tree-grown bank marking the former southern perimeter of the Lever Works.



Fig. 8 - UORN 7245: square pillbox, badly damaged by vandalism, which once protected the southern perimeter of the Lever Works. Such sites, acting as a magnet for 'undesirables', can become a blight on the surrounding area, and are often destroyed by the local authority as a solution to the problem.

The pedestals of two possible spigot mortar emplacements stand against the former railway embankment at the south side of the Lever Works. The identification of these sites as spigot mortars is not certain as the top centre of the pedestals is hollow and there is no evidence of the steel spigot. However, the shape of the concrete pedestals is correct, and it is hard to know what other purpose they might have served. There is



no evidence now for any of the three roadblocks. Air photographic evidence shows that these had been removed by 1948.

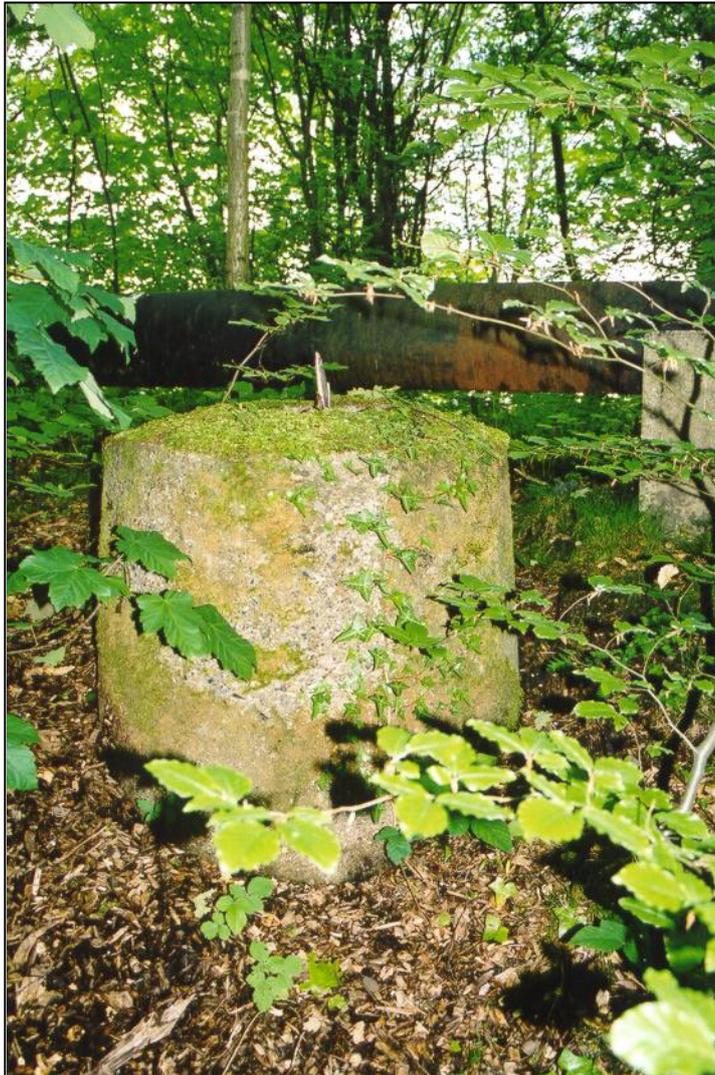


Fig. 9 - UORN 12445: probable spigot mortar pedestal against the embankment of a former Lever Works railway, one of two close to each other. The central steel spigot has been removed from both.

2.2 Landscape:

Although there have been considerable changes to the manufacturing and industrial areas around Bromborough Pool Bridge, some detailed under 'Area Description' above, nevertheless the basic structure of the roads and factory areas that were once defended remains the same. The Lever Works have been demolished and rebuilt as the Port Sunlight Works, and areas formerly occupied by factory buildings and their attendant infrastructure now lie open. The southern perimeter of the Works once occupied by railway lines and sidings is today followed by a public right of way that can be accessed from Bromborough Road.

The area beneath Bromborough Pool Bridge is overgrown and derelict, but there is evidence that current work being carried out there might be designed to regenerate it as a public space. If so, the adjacent pillboxes would be freed from the threat of vandalism indicated by the present surrounding litter of beer cans and bottles. Vandalism at pillbox UORN 7254, however, would appear to be endemic, and the area ideally should be cleaned up and fenced off.



Parking for visitors wishing to see the defence structures in the Bromborough Pool area is difficult, and it is recommended that for Bromborough Pool Bridge they park among the streets of Port Sunlight and walk back. No parking is allowed on the bridge itself. Bromborough Road is narrow and much used by traffic, so, for the sites off this road, it is best to find parking in Mill Road and walk from there.

2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

The Bromborough Pool area provides an excellent example of defence works surviving in an urban landscape where usually physical evidence of the Second World War has long since been swept away by the development of housing, factories, and roads. Indeed, it was city sites that impeded and endangered the public which often received top priority for removal after the war. Hence the survival of the pillboxes at Bromborough Pool Bridge is even more remarkable.

The Bromborough Pool pillboxes form an interesting group, being of several different types and construction methods. The two at the south end of the bridge are of particular importance because they can be seen now to be integrated with the fabric of the bridge and consequently are viewed as a physical part of the history of the area.

A 'pillbox walk' to visit the surviving sites at Bromborough Pool could be drawn up, and information provided for the benefit of visitors and local residents alike.

3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works at Bromborough Pool be considered of national importance. They enable the defence of the area 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 the area surrounding pillbox UORN 7254 be cleared and fenced off for the future protection of the structure.
3. That consideration be given, in an initiative with the local authority, to displaying information for visitors on the Second World War history of the area, such information possibly to include details of a 'pillbox walk'. An information board might be erected by one of the pillboxes at the south end of Bromborough Pool Bridge.

4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Fig. 2 - CPE/B/UK/19 fr.5362 (26.4.1948) - NMR.

Figs 3-9 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 19.5.2003.



- 4.2 **Documentary Sources:**
'Mersey Garrison Operation Instruction No.1', 27.9.1940 and 'Operation Order No.1', 4.12.1940 (from Mersey Garrison HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1351.
Works Reports, 1940 (from 284th Field Company Royal Engineers War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/3753.
'Mersey Garrison Home Security Scheme', March 1942 (from Mersey Garrison HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/6872.
'Standing Operation Instruction', 1943 (from West Lancashire District HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/10858.
'Operation Instruction No.5', 1943 (from Mersey Sub-District War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/10985.
- 4.3 **Published source:**
Web page, 'Port Sunlight' - <http://www.diarama.cwc.net>.
- 4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**
106G/UK/626 fr.3130 (10.8.1945) - NMR.
106G/UK/626 frs.4128-4129 (10.8.1945) - NMR.
CPE/B/UK/19 fr.5345 (26.4.1948) - NMR.
CPE/B/UK/19 fr.5362 (26.4.1948) - NMR.
H.Q.T.T.C fr.539 (19.8.1948) - NMR.
- 4.5 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**
SJ 3483 (1956) - BLML.
SJ 3484 (1956) - BLML.
- 4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**
[see 5. 'Annex'].

