

DEFENCE AREA 48

CANEWDON

1. **Area details:**

Canewdon is 8 miles N of Southend-on-Sea, 1 mile S of the River Crouch.

County: Essex.

Parish: Canewdon.

NGR: centre of area, TQ 905945.

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

The defence area lies in the flat landscape to the south of the River Crouch. It is set around the small village of Canewdon, which serves as its main focus.

Three separate sites of the former RAF Canewdon Chain Home Radar Station provide their own visual envelopes. The first to the north consists now of open fields backed by the River Crouch, flanked to the west by the village hall and housing. The second to the south has a focus in a fenced compound containing surviving Second World War buildings. The third to the east now lies within further open fields in sight of Lambourne Hall to the north.

Most of the defence structures can be approached from the main village street, and by side lanes and footpaths, but some of those associated with the second site are on private land to which there is no access.

2. **Assessment.**

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

Defence overview -

RAF Canewdon was a type 7000 Air Ministry Experimental Station (AMES) established by August 1937. In the Second World War it formed one of the 'East Coast Type' Chain Home (CH) Stations, of which Bawdsey was another [see Defence Area 29]. It was designated a Vulnerable Point (VP), being given the XI Corps serial reference, 'E6'.¹

Canewdon fell within the Rochford Sub-Sector of the Southern Sector (No.2 Sub-Area), which in April 1941 was the defence responsibility of the 207th Infantry Brigade. In 1940, it was defended by one platoon of the 7th Bn. Essex Regiment, and, from 1942, 31st Bn. Suffolk Regiment.² A 6,000 yard defensive perimeter was set up with sixteen pillboxes. In November 1940, the commanding officer of 7th Bn. Essex Regiment recommended that the perimeter be shortened to 4,000 yards and that five pillboxes of the eastern defences, and four of the western, be abandoned. The remaining seven pillboxes were to be the nuclei of

¹ TNA: PRO WO 166/1207.

² TNA: PRO WO 166/1060; TNA: PRO WO 166/958; and TNA: PRO AIR 29/167.



small defended localities, some of which would be occupied by the Home Guard.³ Four roadblocks were also established in the area.⁴



Fig. 1 - Canewdon radar masts, with riggers, c.1937.

RAF Canewdon was established at three separate sites [see Map 2]. No.1 was the main transmitter site with four masts, north of Lambourne Hall Road just to the east of Canewdon village. No. 2 was the receiver site with three masts, south of Gardener's Lane to the south of the village. No. 3 appears to have been an accommodation and stores site further to the east and south of Lambourne Hall. Each of these sites had its own defences, of which a number of the pillboxes survive.



Fig. 2 - Aerial photograph taken in 1948 showing the three sites of RAF Canewdon. The main transmitter site can be seen at the top with the shadows of its four masts, and the receiver site towards the bottom, with three masts showing: this site remains substantially intact. The third site lies at the bottom right, and appears by this date to have been dismantled. Both the latter site, and the main site, are now open fields.

³ TNA: PRO WO 166/1060. It is not known if this recommendation was followed. A precise Defence Scheme for Canewdon RDF Station is likely to survive at The National Archives, but has not yet been located.

⁴ TNA: PRO WO 166/4289.



The dismantlement of RAF Canewdon, and the clearance of the main transmitter site, seems to have taken place in the 1960s. The last radar mast was removed by 1975, and it may be this one that has been re-erected at Great Baddow near Chelmsford.

The defence works -

There is little evidence of Site 1 today other than for two surviving pillboxes [UORNs 439 and 440]. Although its masts have long since gone, Site 2, however, remains substantially intact. Site 3 was largely cleared by the late 1940s, some of the surviving buildings being converted into kennels. It was only within recent years that these have been swept away, and the site incorporated in open fields. One pillbox [UORN 13634] is the only legacy.

At Site 1, in the period 1999-2000, three pillboxes were regrettably destroyed by the local farmer because they obstructed the enormous field stretching to the river that has now been created there. However, two type 22 pillboxes survive, one at the very edge of the road [UORN 440] and another behind the village hall [UORN 439]. Another pillbox that may possibly survive, UORN 437, could not be located during fieldwork.



Fig. 3. - UORN 440: type 22 pillbox at the edge of the road, once part of the southern perimeter defences of the main transmitter site.



Fig. 4 - UORN 439: type 22 pillbox now standing behind the Canewdon village hall.



At Site 2, there is no access to the surviving compound and its buildings. However, one pillbox associated with this site, heavily overgrown, can be seen at the edge of the lane [UORN 16084], and two others can be viewed at a distance [UORNs 16083 and 16139]. A little to the west of the site, and presumably part of its defences, stands an unusual defence structure where a brick addition has been added to the roof of a concrete type 22 pillbox presumably to mount an anti-aircraft gun [UORN 13637].



Fig. 5 - UORN 13637: type 22 pillbox variant, with a brick-walled anti-aircraft platform on the roof. The AA gun mounting has long since been removed, and has been replaced today by a traffic cone! The hexagonal shape of the addition is not in conformity with that of the pillbox structure it is built upon.

A single type 22 pillbox standing solitary today in a large open field marks the south-east corner of site no.3 which it once defended [UORN 13634]. No other defence works of this site survive.



Fig. 6 - UORN 13634: this type 22 pillbox, standing now all alone, once defended the south-east corner of the easternmost of the three RAF Canewdon sites.



Undoubtedly, there would have been roadblocks established on the streets of Canewdon, and on the lanes approaching the village from the west. There is no air photographic or other evidence for these, however, although the sites of two roadblocks to the east of the area are documented [UORNs 16506 and 16507]. Depth charges for road cratering would also probably have been prepared. They are known in this defence sector as 'Bosche bumps'. Extensive perimeter barbed wire entanglements, both around the various RAF Canewdon sites themselves and the individual pillboxes, can also be assumed.

2.2 Landscape:

The most striking change in the landscape of this defence area over the last sixty years has, of course, been the removal of RAF Canewdon itself. With the gradual restoration of the land of the main transmitter site, and that of site No. 3 to its east, the opportunity has been taken to create large open fields for the growing of arable crops. Housing development has taken place both to the north and south of Canewdon village, and houses now line what was once the south-west perimeter of the site.

Other than for these changes, the landscape remains substantially the same as when the RAF station was in use. Canewdon is still a relatively small village, isolated amongst the flatlands south of the River Crouch, and with only small, sharp-angled lanes connecting it with the nearest towns. There is a strong community spirit here, very much aware of its recent history.

2.3 Statement of Significance:

The surviving pillboxes at Canewdon are an important legacy of the RAF Chain Home station that stood here from the late 1930s to the 1960s. They serve as a visual reminder of this important period of the village's history.

A strong community spirit, expressed to the Defence of Britain Project when pillboxes were being destroyed in 1999-2000, seeks the prevention of further loss to its Second World War defence heritage.

The surviving pillboxes form an interesting group. They are all type 22s, but some with interesting modifications and evidence of attachments for camouflage. Without previous knowledge of the three RAF Canewdon sites, only the southern of which is obvious today, the pillboxes appear now to be widely scattered east of the village without apparent purpose. They thus form an important reminder of a major military establishment that helped play a vital role in the Battle of Britain.

The southern site (No.2) survives with many buildings and apparent underground structures, and the recording of these, in addition to their defence works, with a possible view to preservation, is clearly needed.

A 'pillbox walk' could readily be established to include the three RAF Canewdon sites, most of the defence structures being accessible or visible from lanes and footpaths.



3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving defence works of the former RAF Canewdon be considered of national importance. They enable the Chain Home Radar Station to be identified and its defence interpreted. They also 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 collaboration with Essex County Council and the local authority, to establishing a 'Second World War walk' in Canewdon and its immediate environs. An information board on the village's Second World War heritage could also be provided, possibly adjacent to the village hall.
3. That English Heritage consider the recording of the surviving structures of RAF Canewdon that lie in the compound south of Gardeners Lane.

4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Fig. x - source, Internet web site of the Aerial Erector School, Royal Air Force - <http://www.aerialerectorschool.fsnet.co.uk>.

Fig. x - 58/109 fr.5033 (29.8.1948) - NMR.

Figs x, xx - taken (AWF) during field survey, 13.6.2002.

4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

46th Infantry Brigade HQ War Diary, 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 166/958.

'Operation Instruction No.6', 28.7.1940 (from 2nd Bn. Glasgow Highlanders War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/4289.

45 Division 'G' Branch War Diary - TNA: PRO WO 166/537.

'Southern Sector Defence Scheme', April 1941 (from 207th Infantry Brigade War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1060.

'Hertford Area Defence Scheme', 1941 (from Hertford Area HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1207.

Operations Record Book of Type 7000 Station, Canewdon, 1942-1944 - :PRO AIR 29/167.

4.3 **Published Source:**

Fred Nash, 'Rochford, 1940' (from *Essex Past & Present* Issue 5, 5 November 2003).

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

106G/UK/1496 fr.3250 (10.5.1946) - NMR.

106G/UK/1702 fr.4034 (27.8.1946) - NMR.

58/585 fr.5189 (11.10.1950) - NMR.



82/708 fr.88 (4.2.1953) - NMR.
540/176 fr.128 (9.2.1953) - NMR.
58/109 fr.5033 (29.8.1948) - NMR.
MAL/80030 fr.87 (5.10.1980) - NMR.

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

TQ 9093-9193 (1972) - BLML.

TQ 9094-9194 (1966) - BLML.

4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

