

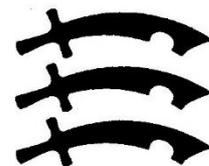
SURVEY OF WORLD WAR TWO DEFENCES IN THE BOROUGH OF COLCHESTER

PROJECT REPORT: NOVEMBER 2007

Volumes One and Two



Colchester Archaeological Group



Essex County Council

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Fred Nash
for
Colchester Archaeological Group
and
Essex County Council

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and in part by:



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The original 2007 Volume 2 is now in divided into section A (part), B and C

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Frontispiece: SMR 10877: The River Colne formed the major barrier along much of the Eastern Command Line. Pillboxes were dotted all along its western bank as here, facing across to Wivenhoe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The recording of World War Two defences in the Borough of Colchester could not have been successfully carried out without the considerable help of local people and the co-operation of the landowners.

The final phase of the work, World War Two Defences in Rural Colchester, has been completed with the continued enthusiasm of members of Colchester Archaeological Group guided by Military Archaeologist Fred Nash for Essex County Council. Thanks are extended to all.

Fred Nash
Historic Environment Branch Essex
County Council
November 2007



SMR 10930: In August 1942, the Colchester Home Guard, with a strength of over 2,000, was engaged in Exercise 'Crack'. This picture was taken along Cymbeline Way – the Avenue of Remembrance. The exact spot can be identified from the anti-tank 'pimples' in the background, which can be seen on 1940's aerial photographs. (Photograph courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London. H22528)



Web Edition

This report was edited in May 2020 to enable accessing from to the CAG website. This involved making some layout changes to the 2007 report to reduce the overall file size for technical reasons. No changes have been made to the original text.

The original report was in two volumes, but on-line it is now in five files/sections, Prelims and Contents, Introduction and History, Site reports in Section A, B and C.

The Site Report sections have been page numbered which it was not on the original.

Acknowledgement

Thanks are given to John Mallinson of the Colchester Archaeology Group for his custodianship of the Project's text files and his encouragement in producing this on-line edition.

This 2020 edition was edited to celebrate the 75 years of peace since WWII.

Introduction to the 2020 on-line edition

WORLD WAR TWO DEFENCES IN THE BOROUGH OF COLCHESTER

In 1993, Essex County Council began a project to locate and record the county's World War Two defence sites with the aim of providing an historical and archaeological database of the sites within the Essex Historic Environment Record (EHER).

By 2004, 1,900 sites had been located, visited, photographed and recorded across the county. In the Borough of Colchester, 279 had been recorded, mostly along the Eastern Command Line, which bisected the Borough, and around Colchester itself. All of these were already on the EHER and were resurveyed and recorded by Fred Nash, military Archaeologist, at that time attached to Essex County council. However, it was known that many more remained to be tracked down in the rural areas. These included a range of Home Guard defences, several of the enigmatic British Resistance sites and, importantly, the Borough's World War Two airfields and their outlying accommodation sites.

In the latter part of 2004, with the interest and enthusiasm of Colchester Archaeological Group, the completion of the Borough became a possibility. This became reality when the group made a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for grant funding through the Local Heritage Initiative scheme, and with a final funding element provided by Colchester Borough Council a joint endeavour to discover the remaining WWII sites, as a single World War Two Defences in Rural Colchester project, could begin.

Under the advice and supervision of Fred Nash, the Initiating Phase of the project began in April 2005 followed by the detailed research, location and surveying work over the following 22 months. By April 2007, 109 sites had been located and documented by the project teams. A late discovery brought the total to 110.

During the summer of 2007 the results were compiled and added to the 279 already on the Essex Historic Environment Record. This data, covering all the 389 sites in the Borough, under the authorship of Fred Nash, was published in 2 large volumes and presented to Colchester Archaeological Group in December 2007*.

It makes a fascinating read. Have a look and see what sites there are near you, and next time you go for a walk have a look for them. We would like to hear what state they are now in, particularly if there has been any change since the time of recording. You will probably already be familiar with your local pillboxes or airfield runways, which are prominent and almost indestructible features of the landscape, but you might have tank traps lurking in your local undergrowth, or the remains of barriers along the sides of your local road. It is even possible that your garden shed is an old ammunition store, or that that scruffy farm building down the road is part of an airfield dispersed site. You may even be lucky enough to have the remains of a secret resistance bunker in your local wood.

Of particular interest are the bases of spigot mortars. The spigot mortar was a particularly lethal anti-tank weapon. (see p.17) Lethal for the defenders, that is. The mortars only had a range of about 100 yards and were notoriously inaccurate, so when you had a Panzer tank with a big gun on the front coming towards you at 40 mph, you might if you were lucky be able to get off one shot, after which..... well, let's just say it is a good job for all involved in the Defence of the Realm that they were never used in anger. It is thought that many more mortar bases remain to be discovered, lurking unrecognized or buried in front gardens and field corners, so next time you stick a fork in the ground and it goes clunk, take a careful look. You never know.

John Mallinson