

KENT'S TWENTIETH-CENTURY MILITARY AND CIVIL DEFENCES. PART 3 – CANTERBURY

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With contributions from Mark Harrison

Parts 1 and 2 of the report on the Defence of Kent Project study of the county's twentieth century military and civil defences concerned the findings from the Thameside and Medway areas.¹ Part 3 discusses the findings from Canterbury district, made by Peter Seary of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, with further research by the writer, supplemented by the discoveries of Mark Harrison and the *Timescapes* team. This report involves analysis of 584 sites, which are now available for viewing on the on-line Kent Historic Environment Record (www.kent.gov.uk/HER). The purpose of the Defence of Kent Project and a description of the context for the county's defences may be found in Part 1.²

Boundaries and physical characteristics

The district has an area of 124 square miles and is coterminous with Canterbury City Council, formed in 1974 from an amalgamation of Canterbury County Borough, Whitstable and Herne Bay Urban Districts and the Bridge-Blean Rural District. It is bounded to the north by the Graveney-Reculver coast and the Thames Estuary, to the west by the councils for Swale and Ashford, to the south by Shepway and to the east by Thanet and Dover (**Fig. 1**).

The North Downs, from 60-150m high, occupy the southern part of the district. These are penetrated north-east/south-west by the valleys of the Great and Little Stour. To the north, the country is hilly, sloping gradually to the clay cliffs along the coast and to areas of marsh, especially at Graveney and Reculver. The district contains woodland of varying extent, with intervening areas of agricultural land. Canterbury was and is the main commercial centre, with other centres at the coastal towns and small harbours of Whitstable and Herne Bay.

Major roads converge on Canterbury from every direction, including

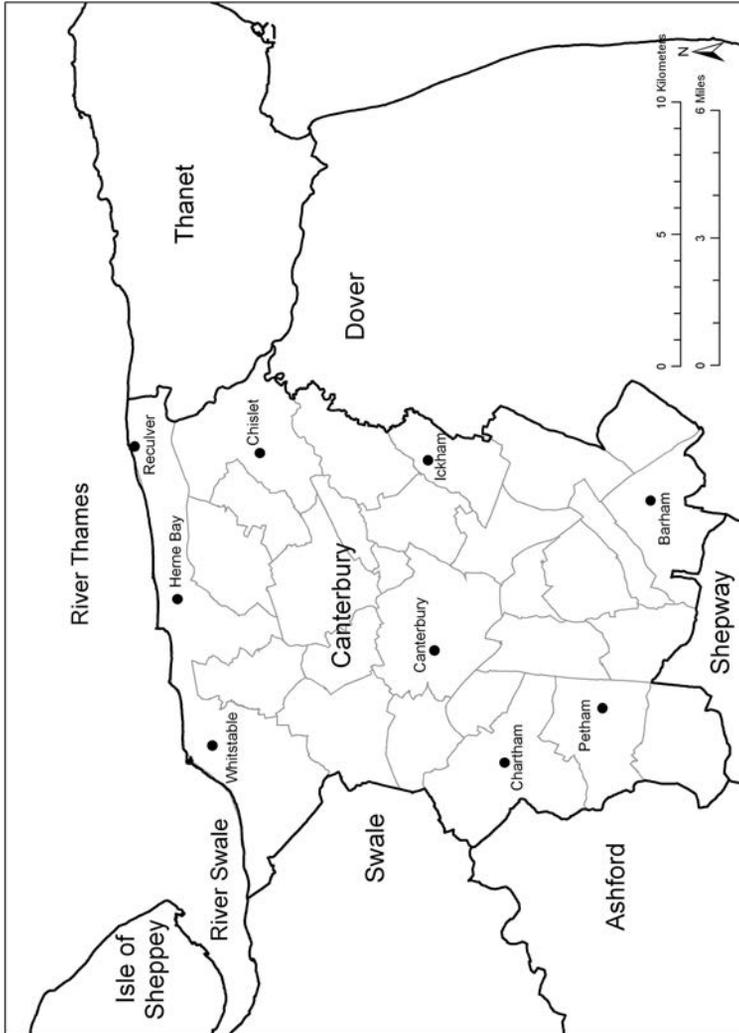


Fig. 1 The boundaries of Canterbury district (V. Smith and B. Croxford 2011).

Watling Street (the A2), providing a reciprocal route between Dover and London. Networks of smaller roads form their own nodes in villages and, in turn, connect with the major roads. At the start of the twentieth century, the district was already well supplied with railways, also converging on and radiating from Canterbury, with a line along the coast between Faversham and Margate.

Strategic Significance

The district's shoreline was seen as less inviting to an enemy as a primary point of invasion than the eastern extremity of Kent and the beaches of the Channel coast. These had the advantage of a shorter distance and steaming time from the Continent and the presence of better ports, notably Dover, whose capture would facilitate the re-supply of invading forces. From a landing in these areas the district might well have been crossed by an enemy force advancing towards London, the prime target for an invader. Yet the district's coast remained vulnerable to the possibility of a smaller and subsidiary descent, whether in support of the main invasion, related to an attack on the military assets of the Medway or to a landing in the narrowing Thames upstream.

As a major hub for road and rail communications to and from the Channel coast, Canterbury itself was of key strategic significance for invader and defender alike. It was also a garrison town and in the Second World War became an important nodal point or anti-tank island.

With the coming of airpower and the two world wars the district was, from time to time, crossed by enemy aircraft flying to or from targets many of which were outside the area. The district contained no significant industry to invite bombing, but this did occur in a desultory way during the First World War. In the Second World War air attack was more extensive, whether in the form of the unloading of unwanted ordnance intended for targets elsewhere which raiders had failed to reach or more heavy and targeted raiding as in 1942 when Canterbury itself was subjected to devastating bombing little related to sound strategic reasoning. There was also opportunistic strafing from fighters such as the BE109 and the FW190. In the event of an invasion, the transport infrastructure within the district might have been selectively targeted by an enemy's air force to disrupt the movement of defending forces.

FINDINGS

Before the First World War 1900-13

At the opening of the twentieth century there was no sense of an immediacy of war with any Continental state but there were rivalries and tensions

with France and Germany. These, it was recognised, could lead to war.³ A War Office report of 1904 advised that the coastline of the district was only 'partly practicable for a landing', an earlier assessment having been that the inshore water was so shallow that no large-scale landing could be attempted, although Whitstable and Reculver might be suitable for small descents.⁴ Indeed, the cutting and controlling of the coastal railway by a raiding force would have disrupted British anti-invasion troop and supply-carrying movements along that route. There were no coastal defences in the district, the nearest long-range guns at Sheerness and Shoeburyness being unable to reach the waters off its coast. Prevention of a landing would have depended upon local naval forces based in the Medway and the Nore to intercept and destroy enemy landing vessels and their supporting warships, if not already mauled by the main fleet. Neither do there appear to have been local military units specifically designated for protection of the district's coast. Repelling a lodgement would have been the responsibility of the commander of the British field army operating in Kent who would detach forces for the task.

In the preparations for defence against an invasion of east Kent, Canterbury would have been an important focal point for the field army. Although without defences other than residual medieval walls and the castle, it was an important military centre, being the headquarters of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, of the 3rd Regimental District and of the East Kent Regiment.⁵ It was, besides, the headquarters of the 3rd battalion of the East Kent Militia, the Royal East Kent Mounted Rifles (Imperial Yeomanry) and of a company of the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the East Kent Regiment. Collectively, there was accommodation for over 3,000 men, distributed between the Cavalry barracks in Military Road, in the infantry barracks in Margate Road (built at the end of the eighteenth century) and in the nineteenth-century artillery barracks, next to a military hospital. For the volunteer element there were drill halls or headquarters in St Margaret's Street and in Northgate Street. There were also drill halls for a company of the 1st Volunteer battalion of the East Kent Regiment off High Street in Herne Bay and on Cromwell Road, Whitstable.⁶ In both cases their war station was at Dover. Additionally, a later nineteenth-century training battery established on the coast at Whitstable for use by the Royal Navy Reserve may have continued into the early years of the twentieth century.⁷

Despite the Entente with France of 1904, a sense of security and confidence about the intentions of that country was not instantly achieved. It was felt that the French needed to be watched and it is known that they continued to frame plans for invading Britain until as late as 1907/8.⁸ The British Admiralty affirmed that the ships of the Royal Navy could prevent invasion, whether by the French or by Germany.⁹ The latter loomed ever larger as the more likely future enemy.

The First World War, 1914-18

Anti-invasion defence

When war with Germany was joined in 1914, the Admiralty became less confident about the Royal Navy's ability to prevent invasion. The threat of this appeared greater after October when Germany seized Ostend, seemingly poised to capture the French channel ports, more perilously close to England.¹⁰ By November, and independent of Jellicoe's Grand Fleet, a coastal defence force of 260 vessels had been created, part of which was earmarked for defence of the Thames. Coastal watchers such as bicycle troops were to report sightings of an invasion fleet to the Coastguard for passing on to the military communications network. There were to be military security checkpoints at Whitstable and Herne Bay. There is a suggestion that Canterbury itself might have been protected against land attack and that there appear to have been defensive positions or stop-points on its outskirts. Outside the district to the west, between the Swale and Maidstone, came to be formed an impressive stop line of trenches somewhat resembling the Western Front in Belgium and France. This was positioned to face an expected axis of advance west through Canterbury and/or Ashford districts from a landing in east Kent.¹¹

Whether in the event of a landing in east Kent or on the coastline of the district, the strategy for defence involved local forces reacting to a first contact with an invader; followed by deployment of a central force to deliver a major counterstroke once the enemy's intentions became clear. Defence was to embrace full use of roads and railways for rapid military transit. In the event of the landing of enemy forces on the beaches of the district the coastal railway together with the line from Canterbury to Whitstable and several parallel roads could have been used for the transfer of interdiction forces. Aeroplanes were also to become part of the defences, whether in a reconnaissance role, supplemented by airships such as the patrol type, or as bombers to attack landing vessels. How seriously the German general staff considered invading Britain is uncertain. The battles of the Western Front absorbed most of their energies. Germany needed naval supremacy to invade but was worsted at the Battle of the Dogger Bank in January, 1915. The last time she seriously challenged the British Royal Navy was at the Battle of Jutland in 1916. In that year, and as part of the field army for home defence, Canterbury was the headquarters of the 67th (Home Counties) Division, with the 10th Provisional Brigade headquartered at Herne Bay and the 1st and 9th Brigades at Sandwich and Margate respectively.¹²

Enlarging the British army for the western front and for other theatres of the war greatly increased the need for accommodation and training facilities in England. Within the district there were numerous additional camps, both for the infantry and the cavalry, often on farms. Village forges were

requisitioned for the cavalry (e.g. at Broad Oak and Wickhambreaux).¹³ Given the pre-eminence of trench warfare, practice trench systems were created on Barham Downs. Trenches, which are known from aerial photographs to have existed at Canterbury's Old Park, may have had a similar purpose and date. There is thought to have been a Lewis gun training range at Herne Bay during the early part of the war, one of a miscellany of such facilities.¹⁴ Troops in training for the Western Front or for other theatres were available for Home Defence while they remained in England. Anti-invasion defences received a temporary boost in early 1918 when the German Luddendorff offensive on the western front raised the spectre of an allied defeat. Later, in October 1918, tanks were deployed for home defence, being intended to strike at an enemy breakthrough in the event of an invasion. Some 48 tanks were divided between depots at Canterbury, Colchester, Dorking and near Norwich but this hardly mattered as it became increasingly evident that Germany was near to collapse.¹⁵

Establishment of air defence (Fig. 2)

The district came to have a place in air defence against attack by Zeppelin airships and bomber aircraft through incorporation within a barrier of gun defences and fighter interceptors extending south across Kent from Herne Bay to Romney Marsh. This was the middle of three layers of air defence for London between an outer one along the coast from Thanet to Folkestone and inner concentric lines around the capital itself.¹⁶ Interceptors were based at Bekesbourne, with a patrol line to seaward of Reculver, and at Throwley, just outside the district (with a similar patrol line north of it to the Thames estuary). Further interceptors were based at other airfields outside the district. Within the district there were anti-aircraft batteries at Herne Bay and Whitstable as well as at West Blean, Hackington, Harbledown and Chartham, closer to Canterbury itself. These were single 13-pr. guns on mobile mountings and, as such, redeployable. There were searchlight positions at Chislet, Littlebourne and at Patricxbourne and probably elsewhere. To aid in the spotting of enemy aircraft there was a network of ground observation posts. These reported any sightings by telephone to a control room, for activation of the air defences. Among the observation posts were windmills, that at Chislet having reputedly been utilised.¹⁷ The first approval by the Kaiser and the High Command of January 1915 for German forces to attack Britain from the air specified the need to concentrate on coastal defences and industrial areas. However, uneven standards of accuracy often led to bombs landing where not intended. Target selection also expanded to include other assets including, in Kent, the coastal ports of Sheerness, Margate, Ramsgate, Dover and Folkestone. In July 1915 a Zeppelin was fired at from Herne Bay and Whitstable as it flew towards Ashford. In

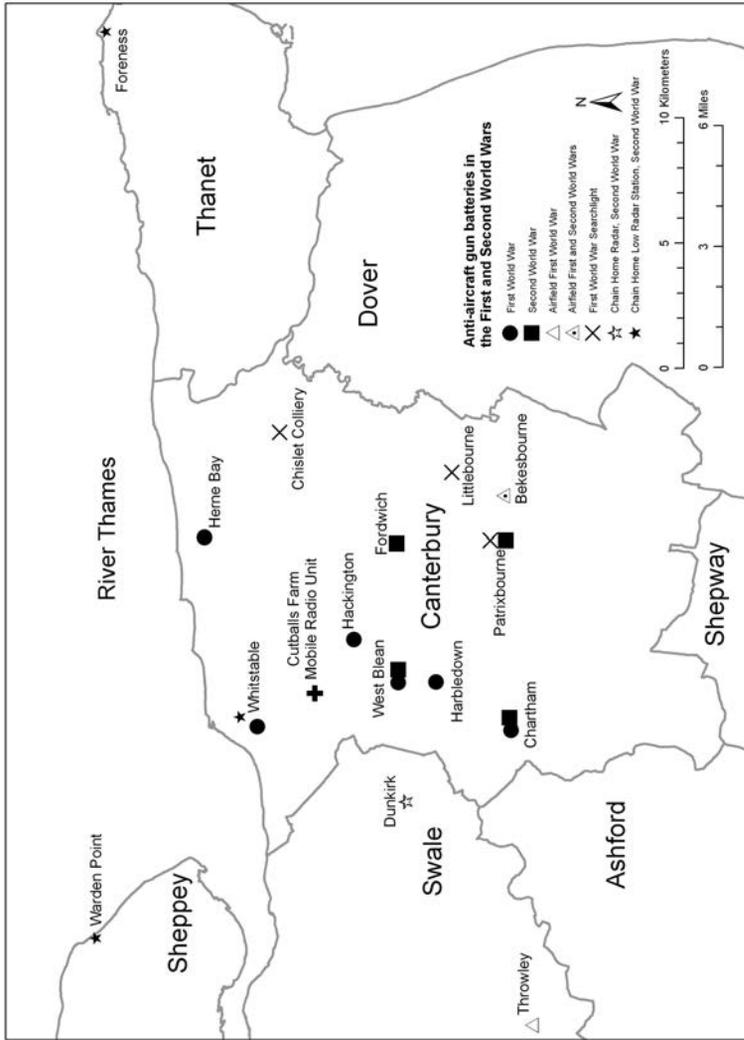


Fig. 2 Map of the anti-aircraft gun batteries in the First and Second World Wars (V. Smith and B. Croxford 2011).

April 1916 another Zeppelin dropped a bomb on Whitstable. Although Herne Bay was not a military target it was also bombed in October 1917 by a German aircraft that had failed to reach its intended objective elsewhere and, in turning back, had scattered its bombs on any targets of opportunity it flew over.¹⁸

Bombing within Canterbury district was not serious, the German air attack effort being directed more at military and economic assets elsewhere. Some civil defence existed and, although information about this is limited, it appears that cellars in various locations were designated as air raid shelters. Air raid warning in Canterbury itself is believed to have been given by, among other methods, the use of a red flag displayed from the Westgate Towers.¹⁹

Voluntary Aid Detachment hospitals

As elsewhere in the country, suitable premises were adapted for use as Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) hospitals for the care and recuperation of British and allied war casualties from abroad. There were several hospitals in Canterbury, including Dane John House with a hundred beds; Abbots Barton on New Dover Road, with an annex at Pinecroft, in Barton Fields; a reception hospital at Ersham House (demolished), New Dover Road; some wards of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital (the old site at Longport) and the Isolation Hospital on Stodmarsh Road. St Augustine's Theological College was used during the autumn of 1914. An executive committee had a surgical department in the School of Art, on St Peter's Street, although this may have been concerned with assembling medical materials for dispatch, rather than providing treatment. As a resort Herne Bay had many sizeable villa residences suitable to adapt as VAD hospitals. Sometimes these were designated for particular ranks, or for nationalities; Broad Oak Lodge, Sturry, was apparently set-aside for Canadian officers. Other modest medical facilities (not necessarily those under the VAD) were established for contingents billeted or camped in their area, as in the case of the Sturry Congregational Chapel, a sick bay for the East Kent Yeomanry. In 1915 an Executive Committee was formed by volunteers in Canterbury to organise various types of war work. They established a depot and workrooms in St Margaret's Street to coordinate local women's efforts in providing clothing and bedding for soldiers and hospitals. Additionally, a depot for sandbags was opened in the capacious setting of the Cathedral Chapter House.²⁰

The county was host to many camps for German prisoners of war. One is thought to have operated, from about 1916, between Forty Acres Road and Roper Road, besides St Dunstan's Street, Canterbury. The Blean Rifle Range, on the edge of Church Wood on the road to Whitstable, is believed to have been built by prisoner of war labour.

The Interwar Period, 1919-37

The maintenance of a strong Royal Air Force, with a robust home defence element, was an aspiration during the interwar years, mainly to achieve parity with the French air force. The Steel-Bartholomew scheme of 1923 aimed to re-establish concentric layers of anti-aircraft defence around London.²¹ Part of the district was to be within an advanced zone of ground observers, with posts established in 1925-9 at Barham, Canterbury, Chislet, Herne Bay, Whitstable, etc.²² There were no longer any gun defences within the district or active military airfields but it was within the protective range of interceptors flying from Biggin Hill, Detling, Manston and Hawkinge. The Thames and Medway (Interim) Defence Scheme of 1934 reported that the coastguard station at Reculver had been selected as an Air Defence Look-out and Reporting Station.²³

There were still no coastal defences in the district. But the range of the 9.2-in. guns on Sheppey, Grain and at Shoeburyness had increased so that enemy vessels in the Thames as far downstream as a Herne Bay-Foulness line could now be engaged. Less effectively, fire could reach a slightly greater range, perhaps acting as a disincentive to the approach of enemy warships.²⁴

By 1934, the imperative for air parity with the French had been overtaken by planning to counter a revived German threat and the Royal Air Force was further expanded, although this was still without the establishment of airfields in the district. Planning for the London Air defence Area was upgraded, with an intended outer artillery zone passing through Swale just west of the district. There was a large network of ground observers; within the district these were mostly the ones established in 1925-9 but several sites were relocated. The entire district was now considered to be within the radius of action for bombers from bases in Germany, even with their detouring to avoid violating the airspace of the Low Countries.²⁵

In 1935/6 there were proposals for the establishment of an air defence early-warning system of acoustic mirrors to cover the Thames Estuary, with intended sites in Canterbury district at Swalecliffe and Reculver. A mirror already existed at Warden Point on the north shore of Sheppey, with others along Kent's Channel coast. However, this approach was soon seen to be a technological blind alley, to be set aside against the promise of the new radio direction finding, expressed by the building in 1938 of the Chain Home radar station just outside the district at Dunkirk.²⁶ Elsewhere in Kent, in the Thames and Medway and at Dover, sites were planned for a new network of anti-aircraft guns, Canterbury district being at this date omitted from inclusion in any gun defended area.²⁷

Following creation of the Home Office Air Raid Precautions Department in 1935, local authorities were advised to begin civil defence planning.²⁸ The nature and extent of measures taken in the ensuing years differed

between urban and rural parts of the district. Within the three towns of Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable these followed a similar path but with variations in the timing and nature of the works – reflecting their different physical and social environments and, it seems, the ethos within the different civil defence committees. By 1939 the Executive Committee at Canterbury had obtained a reputation for high-handedness and extravagance, reported in the *Daily Mail* in October of that year. Whitstable initially lagged behind Herne Bay in the provision of civil defence facilities.²⁹

The Munich Crisis, September-October 1938

As described in more detail in Parts 1 and 2, during the Munich Crisis elements of the nation's armed services were, in varying degrees, activated or put on standby. Against possible raiding from the sea, these included the country's naval forces and the coastal defences. Invasion seemed highly improbable, however, and serious defensive measures were not taken against this. As earlier mentioned, active air defence depended on interceptors based outside the district, many of which were obsolescent biplanes, supported by a small but growing number of the new monoplane fighters.

Within the district there was hasty provision of civil defence. This included issue of gas masks and, at Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable, as in other parts of Britain air raid shelters were excavated, both timber-lined and unlined. These tended to be located in open spaces such as recreation grounds adjoining residential areas.³⁰ Basements of various commercial premises may also have been made available for sheltering. At Herne Bay £610 was spent between 14 September and 3 October on public trenches at Westbrook, Winches Field and Kent College Close. At Whitstable trench shelters were dug on Westmeads Recreation Ground as well as a still surviving surface shelter in Westmead School grounds, with others at Endowed and St Alphege Schools. Canterbury's shelters were probably the timbered trenches mentioned later in wartime council minutes in Green Court, the old Kent and Canterbury Hospital, the Dane John Gardens and Blore's Piece. The extent of shelter provision in rural areas is unclear.³¹

The Year to the Outbreak of War, November 1938-August 1939

The Munich Crisis drew attention to inadequacies in Britain's home defence and raised questions about her fitness to fight in what seemed to be a looming European war. This energised government and local authorities to improve preparedness. Within the district civil defence received most attention. Earlier measures were extended to create an infrastructure of

civil defence control centres, administrative headquarters, air raid warden posts, first aid and auxiliary fire service posts, depots for rescue services, gas cleansing centres and depots for equipment and salvage. These were more densely provided in the urban parts of the district than in rural ones.³²

Civil defence control centres

Control centres were established to receive information about the effects of air raids in the communities they served and to coordinate the civil defence rescue services. At Canterbury, Herne Bay and Whitstable these were in, or adjacent to, council premises. Canterbury's, completed a week before the outbreak of war, was in new underground rooms beneath the municipal buildings on Dane John Gardens. There was apparently also an alternative control centre at the St Laurence cricket ground. That at Herne Bay, proposed in mid-September 1938, was in a strong room under the council offices on Central Parade, perhaps being later extended. Whitstable's was in Tankerton Castle situated at Tower Hill, which had been acquired by Whitstable Urban District Council for use as offices in 1935. The premises were strutted and sandbagged in August, 1939. Bridge-Blean's was in Bridge's Public Assistance Institution. There would be a sporadic need to extend civil defence administrative provision. Sometimes businesses seeing lean time ahead, sought to take advantage of this by encouraging councils to pay for the use of their premises for civil defence purposes to recoup some of their expected losses.³³

Wardens' posts

Wardens' posts were among the earlier civil defence sites to be established, especially where a telephone for communication with the control room was available or could be readily installed. Canterbury's were chosen from the spring of 1939, a mixed use of private houses, commercial premises and institutions. Others were timber-framed structures, protected with sandbags. At Canterbury an initial stipulation was that posts should not be underground, unless in a basement or in a public air raid shelter. However, many seem to have been wholly or partly dugouts, later seen as an advantage. In Herne Bay the majority of posts were in, or attached, to private houses except for those at the Convent High School and the Kent County Council clinic on Cavendish Road. In Whitstable they were more likely to be in council or commercial premises or institutions. Most appeared in August 1939 when copious sand bags were distributed. Rural posts tended to be one or two to a parish, whether in private houses or parish halls, it being unclear whether they originated before the outbreak of war. At Canterbury, some posts were manned 24 hours per day, others

on an action warning. Conditions in posts were initially basic but were later improved with more waterproofing and electric fires. In time, some posts were withdrawn from pre-existing premises and replaced by small purpose built blockhouses.³⁴

Air raid sirens

Initially, air raid sirens were in short supply and steam whistles on industrial and municipal premises could be used. Officially issued sirens, with an audible range of over a mile, were gradually received and installed. Herne Bay's arrived in mid-December 1938 but for a time a steam one at the gas works was used and another at a water tower on Mickleburgh Hill. The Fire station was an early recipient of an electric siren. Whitstable had a siren fitted to Tankerton Castle. The earliest sirens at Canterbury were at the Stone House Mental Hospital on Martin's Hill, West Gate and the Public Assistance Institution, and were possibly in place before the outbreak of war. Initially rural areas had to lobby for a siren and they do not seem to have been provided until 1941 onwards.³⁵

Rescue, salvage and repair services

Council premises were utilised for rescue, salvage, repair and decontamination services and for storage of civil defence equipment and vehicles. Rescue units were equipped to extract people from collapsed buildings. There were other services to rehabilitate buildings and thoroughfares after air raids. Gas cleansing stations were formed for personnel contaminated with poison gas. Whitstable's services were, by July 1939, based at the council depot at Diamond Road, having a rescue party, decontamination squad and stores; another depot was on Island Road. Herne Bay's facilities were at the council depot in Hanover Square. Initially Canterbury's depot may have been in the Electric Road council yard. Other smaller stores and depots were scattered around these towns. More were established as the war progressed.³⁶

First aid and hospital services

First aid services were to provide initial treatment of air raid casualties. Posts were established at Canterbury's Kingsmead depot and at Kent and Canterbury Hospital on Longport. There was also a mobile unit. New Kent and Canterbury Hospital was the main emergency hospital, with subsidiaries at Stone House Mental Hospital and at the Public Assistance Institution at Nunnery Fields. By September 1938, first aid posts existed at Herne Bay's Convent High School and the Friendly Society's Convalescent Home. Progress at Whitstable was faltering

but by August, 1939, there were some main posts and smaller first aid points. There were expected to be many fatalities from air raids and war emergency mortuaries were designated for pre-burial storage of bodies. At Canterbury, two existing and two new mortuaries were reserved, with overspill premises at an oast house at Oaten Hill on the south-east side of the city. Whitstable, and Herne Bay, appear to have been slower in their earmarking of premises.³⁷

Air raid shelters

Provision of permanent public air raid shelters was now more seriously pursued. By the outbreak of war, Canterbury had shelter spaces for 1,960 people in basements and 1,540 in covered trenches. The latter included Munich Crisis ones made permanent, such as those on Blore's Piece. Basement shelters were often in commercial premises, strutted for the purpose, and usually rented by the authorities. Ersatz conversions included two brick kilns at Canterbury. Part of Canterbury Castle was utilised. Whitstable and Herne Bay faltered in their provision. Herne Bay had started to plan lining existing trench shelters as early as February, 1939, but negotiations with the Home Office impeded progress and the scope of pre-war shelter provision is unclear, as it is for Whitstable. A number of families and individuals throughout the district chose to build their own shelters.³⁸

Hersden in Westbere, has a special interest. This was a new village from the later 1920s-early 30s, built beside Island Road to house miners and their families from the adjacent Chislet Colliery. It was owned by the mining company, which took responsibility for air raid shelter provision. The colliery clearly came to be important to the war effort as a source of fuel but also for training conscripted miners, known as the Bevin Boys, employed in the Kent coalfield. It had its own independent civil defence infrastructure and, later, was protected by pillboxes and a ring of anti-aircraft guns, mounted on the colliery spoil heaps.³⁹

Other preparations

Military preparations saw some of the wartime administrative structures put in place. Troops began to accumulate in the district from the end of 1938, largely for training. This resulted in provision of additional, hutted accommodation, including a camp for the Royal Army Service Corps at Herne Bay. The need for preparation seemed more insistent after the German seizure of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, showing that the Chancellor had no intention of abiding by the Munich Agreement. Measures were taken for greatly increasing the size of the Territorial Army. Paradoxically for the apparently half-hearted civil defence efforts

of Whitstable and Herne Bay, an air raid precautions map of April, 1939, showed these areas to have a high level of perceived vulnerability to air attack.⁴⁰ But Canterbury, which was doing so much, was then rated as having a reduced air attack risk, as were its outlying rural areas. In mid-1939 began a drive to obliterate names and markings which could be seen from the air, including on the roof of a hangar at Bekesbourne. As anxieties became greater, other measures were suggested, such as the camouflaging of a water tower and gasholder at Herne Bay, cinemas and a gasometer and the painting out of the name 'Whitstable' from the top of the latter.⁴¹ The implications of the Russo-German pact (23 August 1939) signalled a need for further defensive measures, including the start of air patrols of the outer Thames Estuary and the North Sea, activation of the fleet and the coastal defences, including those of the Thames.⁴²

The Second World War

Enhanced civil defence

Although considered vulnerable to air bombing, in the first few days of the outbreak of war Herne Bay and Whitstable found themselves the recipients of evacuee children from the Medway Towns, as did Canterbury's rural areas. In other respects the outbreak of war was followed by vigorous efforts to complete the already well-advanced civil defence infrastructure. Within this, the public shelter programme was advanced, with more attention being given to providing shelters for schools. In the first few months of war many new shelters, public and private were built in Canterbury, public ones being provided with lighting, toilet and washing facilities. At Whitstable there was some reluctance to spend money on adapting several earmarked buildings but shelters, often in basements of large buildings, were at length provided, with additional provision at Tankerton Tennis Courts and in the cellar of the old council offices. At Herne Bay in December, 1939, a suite of new public shelters for 500 people was proposed, many being built, occupying and adapting desolate tourism facilities in cafes, lavatories and subways. The ubiquitous Anderson Shelter was, in varying degrees, provided across the district. Protective sandbagging of many buildings against the blast effects of possible air raiding continued, not least of Canterbury Cathedral from which, as a precaution, priceless stained glass windows had been removed.⁴³

Protection against gas attack and the Auxiliary Fire Service

Protection against gas attack saw enhanced provision of cleansing stations at Canterbury's council depots in St Peter's Lane and Kingsmead. Although initially for decontamination of council works staff, these were

later extended for public use. Decontamination laundries may have come into being later. Whitstable's decontamination centre in Station Road probably appeared by early in 1940. Herne Bay's was in existence by the end of 1939.

Putting out fires started by air raids remained a key aim and the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), formed in 1938, was augmented. Canterbury's AFS headquarters were established in 1938, with fire stations provided, by 20 September 1939, three being in Canterbury itself. A station is thought to have existed in Sea Street, Herne Bay. Four units of the AFS were based in Whitstable, each equipped with a portable pump, at least initially, to be towed by private cars and small commercial vehicles. With all this went construction of emergency water tanks for the fire service, of varying designs and construction, to supplement mains supply and in the event of failure to the latter. Aerial photographs taken in 1946 show a number of these to have been circular canvas or square metal tanks.⁴⁴ At Whitstable these were situated at Diamond Road, Victoria Street, Cornwallis Circle, Station Road, Castle Road, Tankerton Road, Gladstone Road, Hillview Road and Oxford Street.

There was also a civil defence ambulance service, with garages in Stour Street, Canterbury, and later a concentration of services in the Poor Priests Hospital. There were depots at New Street and in the St John's Ambulance hut in coastal road, Herne Bay.⁴⁵ Additional air raid sirens appeared in Canterbury with others at Whitstable. Ten sites are known although none have been positively identified in the Herne Bay area.⁴⁶

Military activity

Initially there were no German air raids and, with the theoretical containment of German forces by the Franco-British alliance, there seemed little need to consider a threat of invasion. Routine military security precautions were, however, taken. The main military activity in the district centred on providing increased accommodation and training facilities for troops designated for serving abroad, particularly to add to the British Expeditionary Force on the Continent. This also saw billeting, with the occupation of many houses, large and small, villas on the outskirts of Canterbury and Herne Bay, as well as schools and farms. Larger houses with grounds would be successively occupied by various military units. Mystole House at Chartham later had anti-vehicle blocks on its approach road. Another major house in use was Broome Park, Barham, occupied first by the infantry and then by artillery and armoured units. Training facilities proliferated at a variety of places, with instruction being given in infantry movement, live-firing, field engineering, bridging over water and tank operations. Old quarries provided useful settings for training.⁴⁷

Anti-invasion defences (Fig. 3)

The German occupation of Norway from April 1940 began to focus British minds on invasion issues, especially looking ahead to the implications of a possible occupation of Holland from which, it was considered, operations against England might be launched. This led to the planning of defences and a start to construction.⁴⁸

Indeed, the military complexion changed for the worse after the German conquest of Belgium and Holland in early May, followed by allied defeat in France, symbolised by the Dunkirk evacuation in May/June. Now invasion from across the short sea crossing seemed not only possible but probable. Moreover, the territories which had been newly occupied by Germany, allowed reduced flying times to Britain and thus increased the ease of air attacks and bombing raids and airborne landings. Britain now struggled to prepare against invasion, while at the same time fighting the life or death Battle of Britain.⁴⁹

General Ironside, who became Head of Home Forces on 27 May 1940, evolved a new strategy for anti-invasion defence, requiring construction of a vast network of anti-tank obstacles, trench systems, minefields, barbed wire obstacles, concrete pillboxes and gun emplacements. Wherever possible, and as illustrated by examples in the district, defence lines were to utilise natural and man-made features such as rivers, drainage ditches, canals and railway embankments. The defensive network consisted of (a) a coastal crust of defences (b) in rear of this, stop lines to delay and hopefully channel an invader into prepared battlefields and (c) where roads important to an enemy advance converged in towns, the creation of nodal point defences or anti-tank islands, with lesser defended villages and hamlets. There was also the need to defend vulnerable and key points, such as airfields (e.g. against parachute landings) and elements of the country's infrastructure. Ironside was, of course, fully aware of the German Blitzkrieg methods which might be expected in the event of invasion. However he was constrained to adopt a more static approach to defence than he would have preferred by the critical losses of materiel in France, the very limited numbers of tanks and artillery then actually available in Britain and by serious shortfalls in the numbers of trained forces with the resources to mount large-scale mobile counter attacks.⁵⁰

Although it was thought that almost the whole of the eastern and southern seaboard of Britain could, in theory, be subject to landings of varying scale it was the south-east corner of England, which was judged to be the more likely place for a full-scale invasion. Within that, the Corps Commander Lt Gen. Andrew Thorne, with responsibility for Kent and Sussex, identified the north Kent coast, including that within the district and round to Dover, as especially vulnerable.⁵¹ However, known German intentions and more general British expectations saw the

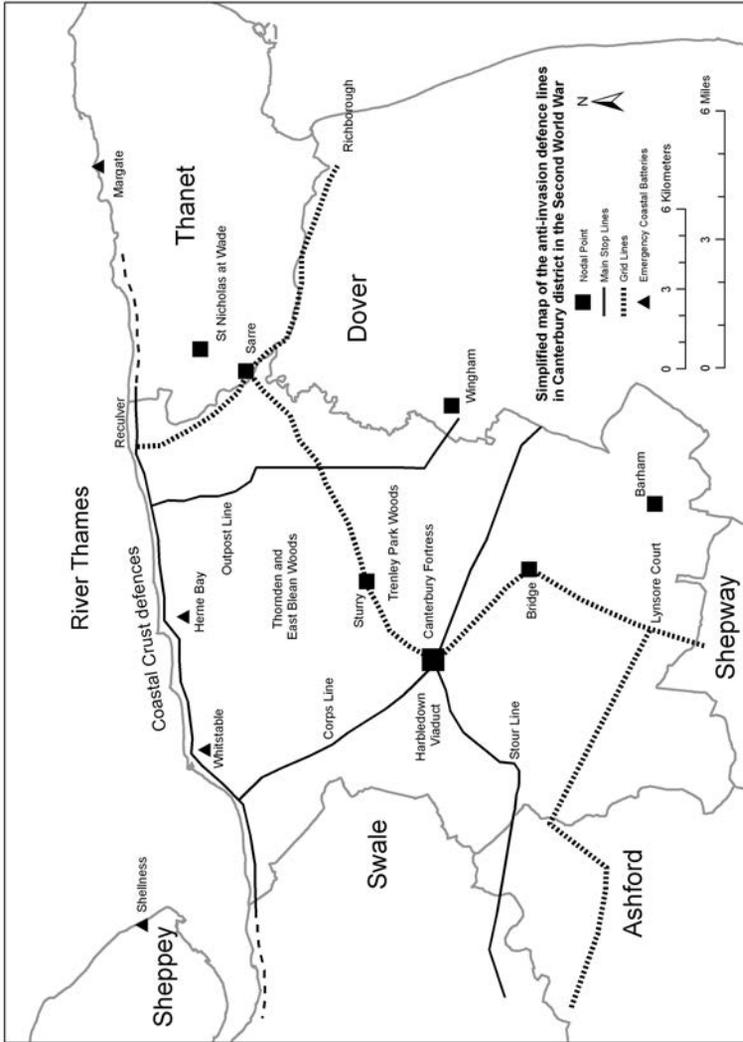


Fig. 3 Simplified map of the anti-invasion defence lines in the Second World War (based on research by Peter Seary of the CAT); (V. Smith and B. Croxford 2011).

location for a main landing as the Channel coast beaches of east Kent and East Sussex, favoured by the shortness of sea journey and the presence of several harbours, not least Dover and Folkestone, suitable for the landing of reinforcements and supplies for the invading forces. Nevertheless, with the possibility of a landing on the coast of the Canterbury district in mind, whether of a subsidiary nature or something more, this coastline was powerfully defended with the classic elements of the coastal crust. The emergence of mechanised warfare and the ability of improvised shallow-draught landing vessels to deliver tanks and trucks to beaches helped determine the nature of these defences.⁵² In common with general practice for coastal areas, for security reasons there was reduced public access to them and some evacuation of civilians.⁵³

The coastal crust

Progressing in stages between the summer of 1940 and the spring of 1941, the district's coastal crust defences came to consist of a multiplicity of elements. Firstly, to strike out at invasion shipping in the Thames there were two casemated emergency batteries, each with two naval guns, on the cliffs at Herne Bay and on Borstal Hill at Whitstable. There was



Fig. 4 Remains of the tubing of anti-invasion scaffolding on the foreshore at Seasalter (Mark Harrison 2009).

another at Shellness on Sheppey.⁵⁴ With the long-range guns at Grain and Sheppey, and some remaining guns at Shoeburyness, the seaborne approach to the coast of the district was covered, as well as that to the eastern entrance of the Swale. Against a landing was inshore scaffolding festooned with contact mines on the practicable beaches (**Fig. 4**). Along and behind beaches and cliffs were lines of interrelating pillboxes (**Fig. 5**) and other fire positions, with concrete anti-tank obstacles and barbed wire and in some areas such as Tankerton, scaffolding obstacles were constructed on the land, probably to disrupt vehicles that had made it ashore. Part of Herne Bay's pier was removed lest an invader use it to land troops and supplies.⁵⁵ Because of its similar usefulness, the harbour at Whitstable was defended with pillboxes (some of which appear to have been disguised as railway wagons), concrete obstacles and flame defences. There was also a boom obstacle, which could be drawn across the entrance to the harbour.⁵⁶ Roadblocks and other obstacles impeded the ways inland. Some fields suitable for the landing of troop-carrying aircraft were obstructed with poles and wires as well as by castellated ditches and mounds.⁵⁷ The coastal railway was provided with blocks along its length and on crossing bridges. Research by Mark Harrison and the *Timescapes* organisation has produced a striking synthesis of the Whitstable/Seasalter sector, both from photographic and documentary evidence and from the discovery of surviving elements. There is some survival of German intelligence maps which may allow comparison of the German perception of the defences and the actuality.⁵⁸



Fig. 5 Local variant pillbox on marshland overlooking the London-Margate railway. It had been painted green and given a timber facade to represent itself as the lambing shed marked on then current OS maps (Mark Harrison 2009).

Inland defences and stop lines

Against an invader advancing from east Kent and the south was a corps stop line (formed from July 1940) running north through the district, from the coast at Dover, along the line of the railway to Canterbury and, thereafter to the coast via woodland obstacles, drainage ditches and newly cut anti-tank ditches. The stretch from Dover to Canterbury used cuttings and embankments as obstacles, augmented in weak sectors with concrete obstacles and ditches. There were roadblocks at railway crossings, pillboxes covering them, with bridges over the line prepared for demolition. Some survive – there are three non-standard brick-shuttered pillboxes at Adisham, Bekesbourne and at the vital Harbledown Viaduct built under the span of railway bridges, to fire up and down the road. Where the corps line diverged from the railway north of Canterbury, it was continued by anti-tank ditches as far as the Forest of Blean, whose eastern edge formed the stop line as far as Honey Hill, Blean. Thenceforth to the coast at Seasalter the line followed the main drain of the Graveney Marshes.⁵⁹

In advance of the corps line an outpost defence line passed from Ickham, past Chislet Colliery, through Old Tree, Highstead and Hillborough, to join the coastal crust. This was distinguished by a lavish provision of pillboxes, comparable with the coastal crust and exceeding that of the corps line itself. Several survive in good condition.⁶⁰

Defensive grid-lines were a further measure to break-up, disorganise and delay an enemy advance. These, lacking a continuous anti-tank barrier, linked stop lines and nodal points like a series of obstacle fences. Where grid lines met with other defences were defensible ‘junctions’, as at Whitstable, Reculver, Lynsore Court and one on Monkton Marshes. One grid line followed Island Road north-east from Canterbury to Sarre; another followed the River Wantsum from Reculver, through Sarre and Monkton Marshes to Richborough. An unfinished grid line ran south from Canterbury, through Bridge, Lynsore Court and down to the Royal Military Canal. Yet another ran west from Lynsore Court as a line of natural and semi-natural obstacles, viz. woods and railway cuttings and embankments. Gaps between woods were seeded with anti-tank mines. Roads and tracks crossing the line were strengthened with concrete pimple obstacles. In March/April 1941 a new stop line was started along the Stour from Canterbury to Ashford, with road blocks and bridges prepared for explosive demolition.⁶¹

The Canterbury Nodal Point (‘Canterbury Fortress’)

Stop lines worked in partnership with the nodal points. Chief among them was that at Canterbury (**Fig. 6**) established by June 1940, one of six key Category ‘A’ nodal points in Kent, the others being at Ashford, Tonbridge,

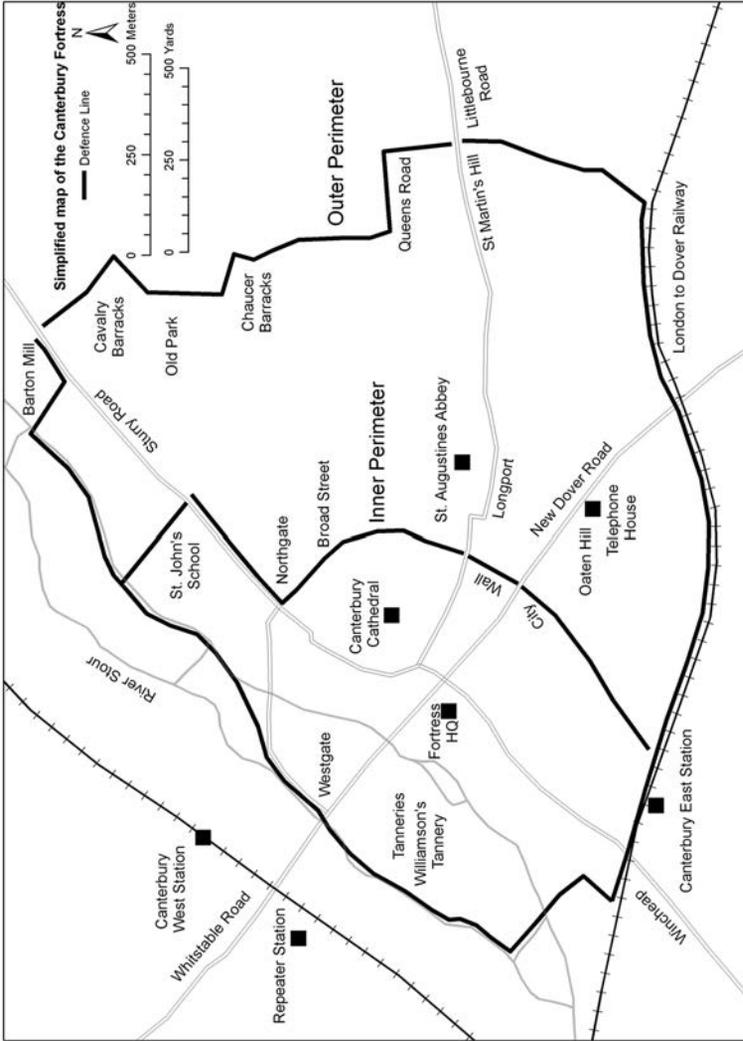


Fig. 6 Simplified map of Canterbury fortress during the Second World War (based on research by Peter Seary of the CAT); (V. Smith and B. Croxford 2011).

Folkestone, Dover and Maidstone.⁶² All were to be held to the last man and the last round. These had been started under General Ironside and continued to be developed by General Alanbrooke, his successor, from July 1940 during whose tenure nodal points began to predominate over stop lines as materiel arrived from war industry, providing the means for a more mobile defence. Pillboxes on the near road approaches to Canterbury probably originated in the summer of 1940. From May-October 1941, Canterbury's defences were augmented, resulting in the establishment of a very powerful position, known from June 1941 as the Canterbury Fortress. It had both outer and inner circuits of defences.⁶³ These connected with the Dover-Whitstable corps line as well as with others.

The *outer perimeter* was as follows:

From the heavily defended Barton Mill it crossed the Sturry Road, where there was a pair of road blocks, to skirt the perimeter of the Cavalry Barracks. From here, defended by barbed wire defences and Canadian Pipe Mines, it crossed Old Park, to St Martin's Hill, where an impressive line of concrete anti-tank obstacles bordered the eastern edge of Querns Road Estate. Southwards from St Martin's Hill an anti-tank ditch was cut, with further pipe mines in front of it, as far as the London to Dover Railway. The perimeter then followed the railway line – already defended as part of the Dover, Canterbury, Whitstable Stop Line – as far as Wincheap. Here, another anti-tank ditch led up to the River Stour at the Tanneries. The perimeter then followed the River Stour past the Westgate, and thence, along the river's main channel, back to Barton Mill. Road blocks were placed wherever the perimeter crossed a road.

The *inner perimeter*:

The western side of the inner perimeter coincided with the outer perimeter, following the River Stour. Departing from the outer perimeter at St John's School, it ran down to the Sturry Road and followed the latter as far as Broad Street (**Fig. 7**). From here it broadly followed the line of the ancient city wall, clockwise along Broad Street and Lower Bridge Street to the East Station where it again merged with the outer perimeter. Along the road from Longport to St Martins Hill on the eastern side of the fortress there were road blocks and a great many defended houses.

Chaucer barracks (a Divisional headquarters), Telephone House and the Telephone Repeater Station were key points to be held without withdrawal. Harbledown Viaduct was one of four forward posts outside the fortress perimeter. Other posts defended the northern and eastern approaches. By November 1941 there were 160 fougasses (improvised explosive devices and flame projectors) on the perimeters.⁶⁴

The Canterbury Fortress came under the operational command of the 44th Division, whose HQ and signal elements were assigned there. Troops allocated to the fortress were the 57th anti-tank regiment of the

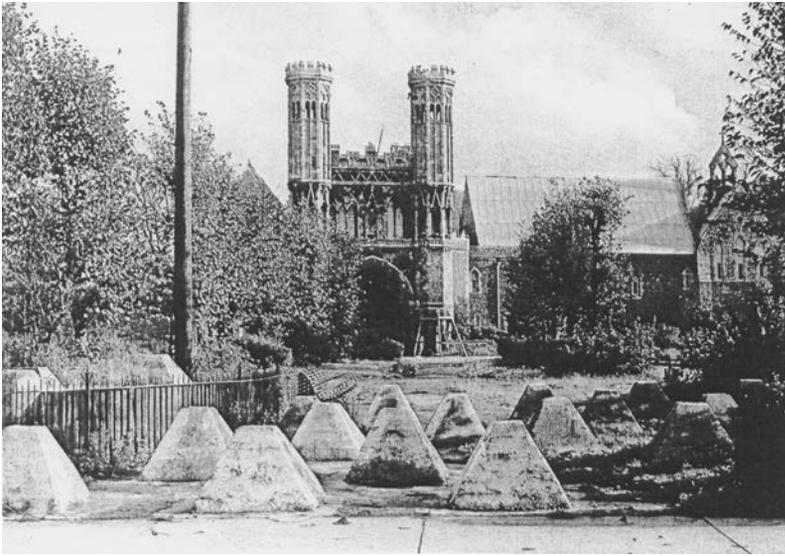


Fig. 7 Concrete anti-vehicle obstacles at Lady Wootton's Green, Canterbury (off Broad Street), during the Second World War (*Kent Messenger* 1580036).

Royal Artillery, 3 Royal Engineer companies, elements of the Royal Army Service Corps, several companies of the Cheshire Regiment and the 3rd battalion of the Kent Home Guard, with parts of two others.

Category 'B' nodal points were at Sturry, having a cluster of fortified houses and anti-tank obstacles, at Bridge and at Barham, centred on a cross-roads. There will also have been a number of defended villages of a lesser category.

More research is necessary to recover details but a sequence of points of resistance was designated along the Watling Street, both on its approach from the south-east to Canterbury and west of the latter and out of the district on the journey which an enemy would take to the strategic Medway bridge crossing at Rochester.

Individual Vulnerable Points within the district requiring special measures of defence were the Chain Home Low radar station at Whitstable, a radio facility at Cutballs Farm (explained in an ensuing section on radar), Chislet Colliery, Herne Bay's waterworks on Mickleburgh Hill, Telephone House and the Repeater Station at Canterbury (the latter two mentioned earlier) and a large ammunition store in Trenley Park Woods.⁶⁵

As with the coastal crust, many open spaces were obstructed with anti-glider defences. Wire and steel poles survive in a field at Blean. Railway

sleepers and steel poles might also be used. Playing fields at Simon Langton and King's schools, Canterbury, were provided with a range of improvised obstacles.⁶⁶

Utilising the dense network of railway lines, heavy railway guns were held, ready to move to or in rear of the coasts of east Kent, for example the 18-in. Bosche-Buster held on the Elham Valley line, a 9.2-in. at Bridge and another gun at Chartham Hatch. These guns required strengthened permanent ways, firing points and magazines.⁶⁷

A new offensive spirit in home defence

Defensive forces comprised the navy at sea and, on land across the district, regular army infantry, engineers and tank forces, as well as units of the new Home Guard. There was also the support of fighter and bomber aircraft, to begin with in limited numbers. The Home Guard, with elements of the regular army, were to operate from the stop lines and nodal points and to fight delaying actions against enemy advances by their ambush along roads and at junctions. Regular forces were to carry out counter-attacks, supported by some elements of the Home Guard. With the arrival of General Montgomery as commander of 12th Corps in April, 1941, emerged a greater offensive spirit, the deletion of the 'defences' from the vocabulary of planning and military memoranda because of its passive connotations and the substitution of a determination to 'defeat the invader', with a greater emphasis on strategies for more vigorous counter-attacks by mobile forces. As part of this an infantry brigade was to be held in readiness in Thornden and East Blean woods. Trenches had always been an adjunct and a support to pillboxes wherever these had been sited but another feature of this period was a greater emphasis on the use of fieldworks. It was commented in instructions for defence that 'riflemen cannot use their weapon effectively inside a pillbox and will fight outside in trenches or weapon pits. Full use will be made of alternative positions in order to facilitate concealment and to deceive the enemy'.⁶⁸

Triumvirates

Under invasion conditions, key communities and locations were to be administered by a Triumvirate, formed of army, police and civil representatives. These included the nodal points at Canterbury and Sturry, with others at Whitstable, Herne Bay, St Cosmos and St Damian in the Blean, Chartham and Barham.⁶⁹

Covert forces

In the event of invading forces occupying territory there was a covert

army of Home Guard auxiliaries or partisans whose task was to commit sabotage behind the enemy lines. Secret hides for them were established across the district, including two in Blean and one each in Littlebourne and Godmersham Park just outside the district. There will have been others.⁷⁰

Defence against air attack

The need for a continuation of measures to improve the air defences had been underscored by the Battle of Britain in July-August, 1940. According to official records, the early-warning Chain Home radar outside the district at Dunkirk was provided with a Mobile Radio Unit at Cutballs Farm instead of a buried reserve. By around July the previously-mentioned Chain Home Low station was built at Whitstable, looking out across the Thames. This could detect lower-flying aircraft than the Chain Home stations and was important for plotting the approach of aircraft dropping magnetic mines, or intent on carrying out low-level raids on coastal communities. There was another Chain Home Low station outside the district to the east at Foreness and, to the west, a combined Coast Defence/Chain Home Low station at Warden Point on Sheppey, able to detect both surface and low-flying targets. This provision covered a wide sweep of the Thames. By 1941/2 new offshore anti-aircraft gun forts in the estuary provided not only gun defence across the estuary but additional radar cover.⁷¹

Dozens of anti-aircraft searchlights were established in phases in the district from 1940-1, some locations being known. There were also barrage balloons, although information about their sites is, at present, less clear.

There were no fighter interceptor airfields in the district but for a short time the airfield at Bekesbourne was reactivated as a base for reconnaissance missions during the Battle of France in 1940 and as an emergency landing ground.⁷²

Whether there were heavy anti-aircraft guns in the district at the beginning of the war is at present unclear. None are recorded in the summer of 1940 but in time Canterbury was given such protection.⁷³ A listing of 22 June 1942 records 3 sites under Canterbury (Chartham, Blean and Fordwich) with a total of 12 guns and a fourth prepared but vacant site at Patixbourne.⁷⁴ These probably originated as a reaction to the 'Baedeker' raids in the spring of 1942, targeted on Britain's historic cities for terror and psychological effect and which came to include Canterbury. In efforts to distract enemy raiders from Canterbury, by May 1942, two flame and smoke-emitting 'starfish' bombing decoys had been established at Bridge and Hackington.⁷⁵ An unofficial decoy composed of bales of hay soaked with oil is said to have been lit in a field during part of the Baedeker offensive in June 1942. It was in that month that Canterbury was devastated by several heavy raids, causing considerable loss of life, serious injury and obliteration of large areas of the city, the



Fig. 8 The devastated St George's Street area, Canterbury, after the German air raids of June 1942 (*Kent Messenger* LI17660).

old quarter suffering particularly (**Fig. 8**). This was said to have been a reprisal for a devastating recent allied raid on Cologne. A German post-raid communiqué referred to their aircraft having bombed a strong garrison town and grain marketing centre but this justification could not disguise the almost capricious nature of the Baedeker raids. The city had of course already obtained 'Blitzmerge' status.⁷⁶ The experience of air attack suffered by Canterbury was far removed from the expectations expressed in the air raid precautions map of April 1939, which had suggested that it was not vulnerable to bombing. This underscored, in the light of experience, how predicting the course of actions and events in a future war could be uncertain. As commented by Basil Collier on the Baedeker raids more generally, 'Goring and his staff may well have wondered whether the price [of German bomber losses] was not too great for an offensive which served no clear strategic purpose'.⁷⁷

Light anti-aircraft gun defence of the Chislet Colliery has been ment-

ioned. In addition, the airfield at Bekesbourne was similarly protected during its reactivation. There would have been some level of light anti-aircraft gun protection for the emergency batteries at Herne Bay and Whitstable, albeit already canopied against strafing, and for the Chain Home Low station at Whitstable.

The last phases of new civil defence

The period also saw further enhancement of civil defence, especially in Canterbury itself, a consequence of the realities of air raiding and of the city becoming a nodal point, which would have been closely targeted from the air in the event of an invasion. The enclosed nature of the nodal point led to some key civil defence facilities established earlier now falling outside the perimeter. This was followed by replacement provision inside, such as a new decontamination laundry at Williamson's Tannery. Some earlier plans for public air raid shelters outside the perimeter were not pursued, being succeeded by provision of 10 steel-arched shelters within the city. With the greater risk of air attack on nodal points, shelters were to be provided for much of Canterbury's population, leading to a massive increase in the numbers of trench shelters in areas and ground where they could be dug. Since the summer of 1940 there had also been a proliferation of brick surface shelters with concrete roofs for communal use. Gas proofing of shelters had been carried out since the autumn of 1940. There was also a great increase in the number of emergency water tanks. In expectation that air raids might cause widespread homelessness or damage to domestic kitchens, rest centres and emergency feeding centres were set up across the community, often in institutional buildings.⁷⁸

Preparing for the liberation of German-held Europe

By the summer of 1943, Germany was itself under pressure from allied air attacks, as well as from the successive Russian land offensives and the British/American landings in Sicily. Invasion of Britain had ceased to be seen as remotely possible. In consequence many elements of the anti-invasion defences, except nodal points, some key roadblocks and the emergency coastal batteries, were reduced to a lesser state of readiness. By now the allies were planning less against German invasion and more for the liberation of Europe. Part of this involved a deception plan to convince the Germans that the allies intended to invade through the Calais coastline rather than the intended Normandy and the Canterbury district became part of the setting of the fictitious First U.S. Army Group.⁸⁰ In preparation for the real invasion there was a genuine troop build-up around Herne Bay and other areas in 1944 but, from its placement, this too served as a coincidental part of the deception.

The V-weapon offensive

Shortly after the allied landings in Normandy in June, Britain was subjected to the V1 flying bomb offensive, mostly aimed at London. This was reacted to by the transfer of barrage balloons nearer to London and by the formation of the new DIVER Coastal Gun Belt along the south coast and by the Kentish Gun Belt, part of which, containing several batteries of light anti-aircraft guns, was located in the western fringe of Canterbury district.⁸¹ There was also the Thames estuary DIVER Box, whose administrative boundary touched Herne Bay. More widely, the combination of guns on the ground and fighter interceptors in the air ensured that most of the V1s did not reach their target but there was no defence against the supersonic V2 ballistic missile.⁸²

In the months leading to, and immediately after, D-Day, anti-invasion defence was further reduced, the coastal batteries at Herne Bay and Whitstable being downgraded to care and maintenance status. The Home Guard was stood down in the autumn of 1944. Although the reduction of civil defence was temporarily halted during the V-weapon offensive, this rapidly resumed. By the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, anti-invasion defence and civil defence had ceased to exist.⁸³

The scale of air raiding and damage caused in Canterbury district

The most devastating effects of air bombing were, of course, in Canterbury during the Baedeker Raids of late May and June 1942. Perhaps 20 per cent of the city was devastated (Fig. 8). There was further raiding and strafing in October of the same year. In total some 445 high explosive and 10,000 incendiary bombs were recorded by one source as having been dropped on the city area, with over 250 people killed and injured. Strafing attacks were also experienced in numerous other towns in the district in October. During the course of the war in the wider district official records list the dropping of 1,700 high explosive and 20,000 incendiary bombs (mainly from unloading rather than focused attacks), leading to 48 people killed and 332 injured. Some 177 houses were destroyed, with 931 severely damaged and 7273 lightly damaged. The parachute bomb which landed on Sturry in November 1941 caused much damage and 15 deaths. One V1 flying bomb hit the city of Canterbury and 16 elsewhere in the district.⁸⁴

Removing the defences

Before the end of the war, and continuing afterwards initially with greater vigour, efforts were made to remove the military defences from the landscape and civil defence assets were disposed of either by physical demolition or by sale. In the financially difficult post-war period however,

government money for demolition began to run out. As a result, many sites were left in place, until some of these became victims of later phases of public demolition or development.⁸⁵

The Cold War 1946-90

Paradoxically, the rush to dispose of the reminders of war was soon challenged by the start of the Cold War in 1946 and by an imperative to rebuild the nation's defences. The thrust of defensive preparation was against air attack. Part of this was the continuation of the early-warning Chain Home radar just outside the district to the west at Dunkirk as well as the Chain Home Extra Low radar at Foreness to the east. The nearest gun defence of air spaces was outside of the district to the south-east to protect the port of Dover and to the west for the defence of London and the military and naval assets of the Medway.⁸⁷ Air interception of enemy bombers was based on fields outside the district. Starting from 1948, civil defence was revived, including reformation of the Civil Defence Corps. This saw a return to the tried and tested wartime arrangement of control centres including at Canterbury and Whitstable, warden posts, civil defence stores, garages for vehicles and training grounds for the practice of rescue techniques. In 1949 a combined operational unit was set up for the then autonomous County Borough of Canterbury and the neighbouring Stour sub-division.⁸⁸

During the Korean War period (1950-3) there was increased concern that international tensions might spill over to a war involving Europe. In 1951 (and again in 1959) the councils constituting the district were asked to carry out surveys of sheltering requirements for their communities and of the places which might be used for this purpose.⁸⁹ The Home Guard was revived in 1952 to defend against parachute attack and to assist the Civil Defence Corps. Within the district there was at least one battalion of the Kent Home Guard.⁹⁰ Another part of the response was to supplement long-range radar with re-established ground observation posts to spot for enemy bombers. These occupied earlier sites in the district at Barham, Canterbury, Chislet, Herne Bay, Whitstable and elsewhere. Underground posts succeeded these from 1960-5 when the role of the Royal Observer Corps changed to reporting the location of nuclear bursts and the spread of radiation. The threat of attack by bombers was now supplemented by the expected use of guided missiles for the delivery of nuclear weapons.⁹¹ There are maps and listings of civil defence warden posts operative in 1965 at Whitstable, Seasalter, Swalecliffe, Herne Bay and Blean (**Fig. 9**), as well as Canterbury itself. Some of these re-used Second World War structures but many others were to occupy spaces in community halls and schools.⁹² Against the background of a British balance of payments crisis and as part of a reduction of the size of the Royal Observer Corps, a



Fig. 9 Vent and entrance structure of the Clay Hill Royal Observer Corps underground post (Mark Harrison 2009).

number of their posts were shut in 1968 and in the several ensuing years.⁹³ With this went the standing down of the Civil Defence Corps but the capacity for civil emergency communication in war was continued. From 1975 a county shadow control centre was located in basement rooms to the rear of the municipal offices at Dane John, which had previously been used as a control centre by the city council. This function ceased after a fire in 1978, which rendered use of the premises untenable but a basement was to be reserved for use as a control centre in new council offices to be built on the Chaucer Barracks site.⁹⁴

Against the background of a perceived increased Soviet threat in the later 1970s there was a modest revitalisation of home defence. In 1982 this saw the setting up of the voluntary Home Service Force, with a company attached to the Queen's Regiment (TA) at Canterbury, having the task of guarding key points against enemy special forces and saboteurs.⁹⁵ There was also a revived determination to upgrade civil defence telecommunications and yet another shelter survey occurred in 1982.⁹⁶ Alongside this in 1984 was the earmarking of schools and some churches as rest centres and first aid posts for use after an air raid and the formation of the Kent Community Volunteers with a role that combined

dealing with the effects of an air war as well as handling civil disasters.⁹⁷ In time, civil defence communications came to be exercised from the Canterbury council's normal office accommodation.⁹⁸

Shortly after the end of the Cold War in 1989/90, the Royal Observer Corps and its several monitoring posts within the district were stood down. The HSF was disbanded in 1992. Local authorities were no longer required to maintain war plans but continued to prepare for civil contingencies. A regular and Territorial Army presence remains at Canterbury but this is for the needs of the army in general. In the event of the emergence of a revived threat of nuclear attack, the technology has been developed for the production of automatic sensors to detect and monitor radioactive fallout. Such equipment could, if necessary, be deployed across the district. A new challenge is the threat from international terrorism, for which contingency plans have been made. In due course these will come to be part of the defensive history of the district.

Conclusion and Heritage Aspects

Militarily, Canterbury district had evolved differently from the coastal commercial, naval and military centres of the Thames, Medway and Dover and the Channel 'invasion' coast which, over the centuries, had more pressing and constant strategic imperatives for defence. Indeed, the district began the twentieth century without defences, which came into existence for limited periods only, according to the exigencies of war. Its northern coast had not been defended since the minor and short-lived measures of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Moreover, the still impressive circuit of Canterbury's city walls had been unmaintained as a defence since the medieval period but the city had had military barracks from the eighteenth century, giving it the status of a garrison town. Its node of roads had, as has been noticed, made Canterbury an important communications centre. Added to this from the nineteenth century were railways, enhancing its status as a focal point for transport. These generalities continued to somewhat influence the approach to defence in the twentieth century, especially in the Second World War. During the age of airpower the district was variously part of wider systems of air defence as well as of local protection for Canterbury itself. This was subsumed during the nuclear age into a national umbrella of civil defence.

Progress has been made with fieldwork to establish the extent of survival of the sites identified in records by Peter Seary but more needs to be done to complete this process. The commonest survivals of Second World War military sites are elements of the inland stop lines and coastal crust defences. The civil defence infrastructure survives to a lesser extent, with some new-builds in the form of air raid shelters in various locations

and a gas decontamination centre in Canterbury itself. There are a variety of surviving civilian buildings utilised as warden's posts and for other purposes. Among the traces of the Cold War is the Royal Observer Corps post at Clayhill, near Blean.

There is much that might be done to explore in more detail the themes introduced in this overview. More could be discovered about how the district featured in anti-invasion defence planning to 1913 and in implementation during the First World War. Air defence in the latter period would merit further investigation, particularly in relation to whether there are any traces to be found of the line of anti-aircraft gun positions across the district. More study of the training camps and practice trench systems for troops destined for the Western Front could contribute knowledge to a generally neglected area of research. Likewise identifying training areas, especially during those created during the Second World War. The latter war offers great opportunities for synthesising the military landscapes created by the elaboration of anti-invasion defence systems. Mark Harrison and the *Timescapes* team have shown a way ahead for this in their extensive and detailed work on the Graveney-Whitstable-Herne Bay section of the coastal crust.⁹⁹ Their methodology would merit extension to the Corps and other stop lines passing through the district, to their related grid lines, as well as to the Canterbury Fortress and subsidiary nodal points which it should be possible to reconstruct on paper. Field investigation of the anti-aircraft gun network of the Second World War could yield interesting results, including elements from the DIVER scheme, which may have left traces on the western fringe of the district. Peter Seary's work on civil defence has hinted at the potential for further investigation, particularly contrasting the approach adopted in town and country. There is a substantial documentary resource available, as there is for the Cold War, which will be enhanced when currently embargoed records become accessible.

Because of its many survivals, it is the Second World War anti-invasion heritage, which offers the best opportunities for interpretation and possible trail access. This is particularly so for the coastal and stop lines. There are possibilities for the Canterbury nodal point also: although there is a little surviving of its defences; a trail leaflet, supported by contemporary images and a map, would be a stimulating way of presenting the 'fortress that was', especially as a good part of the trail would be within walking distance and there would be the added interest of the earlier historic environment, including the city walls, to experience along the way. A welcome step forward by the *Timescapes* team in 2010, and funded by a range of heritage partners, was the mounting of a major exhibition *The Forgotten Frontline*, explaining how Whitstable prepared for war. Funding has also been secured to provide an information panel for visitors to the Royal Observer Corps post at Clay Hill and to develop a series of

heritage trails to guide visitors through conflict landscapes in parts of Canterbury District.

There is also a need to seek statutory protection of appropriate sites, not least of the Second World War anti-invasion defences, to foster the survival of these important systems and as places which may continue to be encountered on an interpretation trail.

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ENDNOTES

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- ⁸⁵ Numerous records of the arrangements for removal of war works, e.g. CCA: UD-WT/O/C/4/9; UD-WT/O/C/4/45/12.
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