

Notes on the South-East Research Framework public seminar on Defence (24/11/07)

Chair: Victor Smith

Speakers: Victor Smith, Andrew Saunders, Peter Kendall and Andrew Richardson

Notes: Jake Weekes

Victor Smith (VS), the SERF Defence Theme group co-ordinator, began the meeting with the following introductory paper and another paper on the 20th century defences in the region.

Introduction

Victor Smith (VS)

Purpose and hoped for outcome

For those who are not already involved with SERF, I'll begin by explaining the mission for this subject, which embraces the preparations for defence since the application of gunpowder, broadly from 1380–2000, for, and within the region comprising Kent, the Sussexes and Surrey. It is in short to take stock of what we have in the way of knowledge of sites and documented evidence, to decide how much we know, to identify the gaps in knowledge and to decide what scope there is for finding out more. And from this to evolve a strategy for needful future research and perhaps ways of commissioning and sustaining that.

But all of this is intended to do more than to indulge academic curiosity. There needs to be usable outcomes. There are more than a dozen of these, the more important of which need to engage with the wider community. Within the frame of enabling a better understanding of the historical environment, there is the prospect of educational outputs through the promulgation of findings in public consumption literature and other media - and by encouraging historical encounters through heritage tourism, from choices deriving from information gained from the study - and thereby encouraging a greater sense of historical place.

The significance of the region

The South-East region, which, incidentally, follows somewhat the strategic grouping of territory in the Second World War's South-Eastern Command, has figured prominently in the defence of Britain. This was because its closeness to the Continent via the convenient sea-crossing of the English Channel which so favoured communication and trade also exposed a vulnerability to raiding and to the landing of an enemy, making the broader land-mass and the country in general open to invasion, conquest and occupation. And as the coast was a national border, its security and that of its hinterland was an insistent and enduring concern to government and people. That is why the signature of defence was written so assertively in stone, brick, earth, concrete and steel, sometimes prominent and sometimes below ground, upon the territory of the region as well as perhaps more passingly - or not - in its social and industrial development.

What has been done so far

The first step in this research assessment was to gather together a team of knowledgeable and interested specialists willing to contribute their knowledge and ideas. There soon existed, rather like the days of Arthurian legend, a round table of 12 knights, good and true, to help carry this forward. To start things off and, in a process of 'brainstorming' to use a now politically incorrect term, I circulated to them an initial written assessment to sound them out and to ask for their additions and alterations. This has greatly benefited from their knowledge and judgement. Several theme group members will be giving presentations this afternoon.

Purpose of this seminar

This seminar is taking place to help advance the cause of the defence assessment by exploring several defence history themes and, by doing that, hopefully to receive some reaction and feedback from the audience, which can then be embraced within the assessment. Of course, it is not possible to include all aspects of defence of the region in one afternoon but I hope we shall cover some useful ground.

An overview of the results so far

In just the few minutes available, a comprehensive overview is not possible but here are half a dozen of the major points, which have emerged from theme group members, among many others:

- Although we already had a good understanding of the sequence of defensive structures in the region, their origins and nature, and sometimes in considerable studied and published detail, there are factual gaps
- The fortifications along our coasts and inland are the most vivid expressions and reminders of our defensive past and, as a result, have so far attracted and absorbed the majority of research effort. But they existed within a wider infrastructural context of the manufacturing sector which supplied them with weapons and ammunition. This connection and relationship, which in modern times has come to be embraced within the labelling of the 'military industrial complex' has not been without research effort but still leaves huge potential for comprehensive exploration and better understanding
- Somewhat linked, defence, whether as fortifications or of any form, evolved in a context of scientific and industrial progress, either 'following' or 'leading'. That relationship should be explored, as should their part in the wider context of the military-technological progress in Europe and other parts of the world
- That wider context also includes social interaction and effects on local and regional economies of the presence of garrisoned fortifications, barracks and, in time of war, and expected invasion, additional formations of troops. The presence of garrisons could both create communities and affect those already existing around them and be a stimulation to the local economy by – alongside central purchasing – local purchasing of goods, supplies and services. Just as camps of troops could be either a benefit to or an annoyance to existing communities and often both at the same time

- Both tactically and strategically, fortifications did not exist in isolation but formed components of a larger military machine that included a manoeuvring field army and the protective influence and activity of the fleet with the connections of the naval bases and fleet anchorages, together with an infrastructure of routes for travelling and of communications for sending messages and orders. These relationships were understood by defence planners throughout the centuries even though it has been suggested, they were not always implemented by them in joined up writing. These issues are worthy of being explored
- Then there is the influence of geology including changing coastlines, on the provision of defence as well as the effects on landscapes of that provision
- No only that but we need to know more about what the enemy attack and invasion plans were at different dates, how much we actually knew about them and how well we responded to them and were prepared, or not prepared. And as part of that how political relations with Continental Europe and elsewhere influenced development – do we know all that there is or is there more to know?

These are just a few of the possibilities, each of which may be explored with reference to both regional and local situations and their part, or non-part, in a national and international context.

The region's defences have, of course, been regarded as symbols of a determination to safeguard our freedom against foreign aggression. In this they have been seen as part of a sense of nationhood. But also in an age in which Britain and her Continental neighbours settled their differences by force of arms, they were a necessary consequence of needing protection against adverse and militant reaction from states with which we were in determined political, economic and colonial competition. They also underpinned a programme of expansion across the world which for some centuries, embraced slavery as a device to assist national enrichment. So what defences 'mean' to us is perhaps as relevant to what they are or were, and this will be determined by the attitudes of society at any given time, whether of pride or of apology about our past.

Discovering and understanding our 20th century defences

Victor Smith (VS)

Introduction

Within all this, let's take a view of the 20th century and the potential it gives us for study and gaining new knowledge and insights.

Well, after the achievement of the Council for British Archaeology's quite outstanding studies of the original documentation of Britain's 20th century defences, of the Defence of Britain Project's epic survey of defences, followed by William Foot's valuable study of military landscapes, some might think that there is not a great deal more to learn. But as demonstrated by the progress so far, of a major study of Kent's Defences in the 20th century, started and managed by the Heritage Group of

Kent County Council, there is a very great deal more to learn. We still need to know more about the nature of sites and numbers but even more we need to be able to know their pattern, distribution and context across the region and beyond to better understand their meaning and significance.

What the CBA's documentation studies have done is to give us a really good 'leg-up' and a frame of reference to find out more. That was their whole point and that was their exhortation. The Defence of Britain Project broke new ground on a national scale in the production of the publicly accessible logging record of the sites notified to their database manager by hundreds of informants, both professional and voluntary sector, up and down the country, as well as from archives to which the Project had access. But as they would readily accept, there are vast acres which have yet to be ploughed, and the many civil defence sites of the two world wars and the Cold War have been little exploited. Again, we should see their achievement as an encouragement to do more, much more. Just as, in fact, William Foot's studies of Second World War military landscapes have demonstrated not only that such entities *existed* but that there is large scope for exploring more and seeing how they might relate to each other.

These are points that a number of members of the defence theme group have made and especially persuasively by John Wells.

The significance of the 20th century

Well the 20th century is an especially rich century in defence terms. As well as receiving, continuing and developing elements of earlier scientific and industrial progress, it marked a separation from the past, by introducing a raft of new technologies in warfare. Most significant and far-reaching of all was the invention of the aeroplane and of the threat of bombing attack from the air, with in the First World War, powered airships initially predominating. This required a fundamental re-think of defence strategy and the creation of an innovative organisation of defence to cope, leading to a large gun defence and fighter airfield infrastructure. The utilisation of the internal combustion engine as a power plant for military transport and for tanks was a revolutionary new force in warfare, starting to have an effect in the First World War, and asserting itself more in home defence in subsequent decades. The use of acoustic science for detection of enemy aircraft at a distance was a device pioneered during the First World War and developed in the 1920s and early 30s. This was a technological blind alley, but Radio Direction Finding (later called radar) provided in its place from the mid 1930s a quantum leap in very long-range target detection at both a strategic and a tactical level, but with the short-term retention of sound detection for tactical purposes by mobile units.

Radio transformed communications. And the period saw, for the first time, the enmeshing of the general population in the war effort and it becoming a target for enemy action. Indeed, and most tellingly, where in earlier centuries defences against foreign invasion had (with some exceptions) been mainly along the coast and hinterland, these technologies led of necessity, to a more emphatic spread of anti-invasion and air defences deep inland, as well as of civil defence for the population at large. There was the added threat of the science of the test tube producing the possibility of attack with chemical and biological agents and the splitting of the atom leading on to the emergence of nuclear weapons of such apocalyptic power and effect

to present the possibility of the extinction of large parts of mankind. In these respects, the 20th century was for Britain quite unlike previous centuries. Everything I have described applied to the SERF region. And, indeed, given its geographical position, *especially* to this region. And in the records, scope exists for exploration and understanding of all this and very much more.

To some extent in the First World War, but more so in the Second World War, the region became, and visibly so, a militarised landscape and townscape, with the images of war and of defence never far from view. Whether as coastal batteries and naval bases, roadblocks, anti-tank ditches, anti-aeroplane landing devices or barrage balloons and in towns, the sight of people in uniform everywhere, bomb-taped windows, Anderson shelters, street shelters and wardens and first aid posts, and sandbagged buildings and, indeed, much else besides. Moreover, the war, or as it was called ‘the bloody war’ was constantly in the minds of just about everyone.

Despite the undoubted knowledge which exists, we do need to know of all this more comprehensively and of the archaeology which survives. And the scope is there – most recently for example a ‘lonely’ corps line of the Second World War and a nodal point, have become enmeshed in a newly-found web of grid defence lines which seems likely to spread. A whole ring of defences has been identified around one town. The infrastructure of civil defence for a whole area has been discovered. These are just examples.

But twentieth century defence studies are moving on to greater maturity. And to use a buzz-word of today, parallel with this and partly in explanation, we need to take a more holistic view in order to understand the wider defensive fabric and context.

To give some examples, under this head, the research themes suggested by theme group members and earlier by John Schofield in his *Modern Military Matters* and by the Defence of Britain Project have included:

- Utilities and communications as applied, adapted or enhanced for war, a key but somewhat neglected element of defensive preparation and resilience.
- Areas for training of military, naval and airforce personnel. This was clearly of vital importance for fitting people to do the jobs they were expected to perform and to acquire and promulgate the necessary skills.
- The effect of war and of defence on pre-existing communities, whether urban or rural. There were always such effects but these were more marked in the First World War and especially the Second, whether from the effects of bombing, the envelope of air raid precautions within which populations lived, the removal of populations from defence zones, limitations on travel, changes to industrial production and movements of people for that, preparations for D-Day, including formation of holding area army camps, PLUTO etc.
- Equally, there is also the creation of military and war-related communities – these of course include barracks and concentrations of people where new military or war related activities emerged.

- The effects on agriculture – and this went two ways (1) increasing amounts of land under cultivation to make England more self-sufficient and to beat the U-boat menace in both world wars and (2) the reverse of that in the interruption of agricultural land by the presence of defence works.
- Aircraft crash sites and underwater wrecks - Both have large potential for discovery and learning from archaeological investigation but these are areas of activity I am advised merit some degree of promotion of a regime of consistency of standards of investigation and recording and review of the degree of regulation which exists or perhaps should exist.

Such themes have the potential to deconstruct and reconstruct our defence history in some interesting and hitherto perhaps less explored and exploited ways. But the possibilities are much more extensive.

In a declining way because of the reality of the lifespan of people with memories but less so for the Cold War, evidence can be collected locally by an oral history type approach. This is a supplement to the vast amount of information to be had from the range of documents at the National Archives, aerial photographs at county council archives, Swindon, German intelligence mapping, local authority minutes and a ½ dozen or more significant other sources.

And perhaps I can add at this point Peter Kendall's remarks that 'every time traditional archaeological methods have been deployed alongside the historic documentation, the true position has been revealed as much more rich and complex and the physical remains provide both different insights and the opportunity for a more direct engagement of people with the places and processes that created 21st century Britain.'

How are such studies to be encouraged? There are of course possibilities for work to be undertaken by local societies, giving perhaps local perspectives but ones, which are nonetheless useful. More broadly, such initiatives as Kent County Council's Defence of Kent Project could be a template for studies covering other parts of the region. As well as broad-brush studies commissioned by such organisations as English Heritage. Another area where some good work has been done is in post-graduate degree theses and this is a fruitful area, which could be encouraged. But that is for the next stage of a research agenda...

Ephemera

Andrew Saunders (AS)

AS drew attention to the less often investigated ephemeral features in the historic environment relating to defence matters, pointing out the need to acknowledge these features also when debating strategies. Such features, which are by nature temporary, include linear defences and stop lines, military training areas, and even areas where re-enactments have taken place; there is also sometimes a crossover with garden design here. Manoeuvres of 18th and 19th century militia often constituted

entertainment for gentry. More recent examples of such ephemera include anchor points for barrage balloons. AS would focus on the post-medieval and modern.

Protective earthworks outside besieged towns form another category of ephemeral defence earthwork, and there are a variety of extra mural defences to consider. By the same token there are potentially many examples of siege works that are yet to be explored, such as that within the Connaught barracks site, which is soon to be redeveloped.

The 1588–89 Armada led to the creation more complex and extensive defences, such as the additional defences at west Tilbury outside Henry VIII's quarters. Further defences were thrown up with successive threats from France. Fieldworks became a subject of antiquarian interest during the 18th century, including the ancillary earthworks along the South coast: those between Deal and Walmer were recorded by Stukely in 1785, for example. These need confirmation and their profiles recorded.

The South-East did not feature prominently in the Civil War in this regard (although London was surrounded by sconces). Instead research might focus particularly on the Napoleonic wars from the 18th century. The Duke of York is known to have been enthusiastic about emergency earth works. Archaeological evidence hard to find but not impossible: the 1797 and 1801 invasion scares in particular brought about temporary defences. Natural barriers (the Downs, the Weald, the Medway) were intended to be augmented by series of stop lines (these may not have been started, however, as usual the practice would have been to wait until invasion had actually commenced).

Later examples include those at Dover castle (1803), which are substantial earth works (as well as unfinished 1797 earthworks), revealed by Paul Pattison's work on the Western Heights, the Drop Redoubt, and intermittent Martello towers as well as the Royal Military Canal (a stop line). From the 1890s the idea was to create mobilisation centres and military redoubts; these lines of trenches and earthworks conceived though not necessarily constructed. In 1917 there was a revival of invasion fears, with entrenchments on Isle of Sheppey and in the Maidstone area. These defences are yet to be found and properly recorded. There are also practice trench lines of this date constructed by and for troops in training for Western Front.

As well as defensive structures, there are ephemera relating to the social life of armies to consider, including barracks and enclosed camps. The design of marching camps owed much to classical writers, with ranks having their places within the camp, designated patterns for the laying out of camp streets etc. (cf. Roman marching camps). A late 18th century tented camp is known at Coxheath (3.5 miles south of Maidstone), complete with tent layouts analogous to a company on parade, in ranks. There are also the prisoner of war camps of the region (for example at Sissinghurst Castle), and of course the Chatham Lines, which in the 19th century were an active training centre for Royal Engineers; Dickens described these in his *Pickwick Papers*. Peter Kendall would no doubt refer to these defences in the next paper. AS has also carried out his own work on firing ranges in the region (relating to the use of Hythe muskets in particular), and has noted some previously undiscovered rifle ranges in woodland near Cranbrook, Kent, of unknown dates, but probably dating to the 19th century, given that they are currently hidden in established woodland.

Chatham as a case study for the Defence theme

Peter Kendall (PK)

PK spoke about Chatham as a case study, noting the proposal to nominate Chatham as a World Heritage Site. While the dockyard is well known the fortification and the rest of garrison are not as well understood. Yet the quality of the historical archive available is of the highest order. So is there a real need for archaeological techniques?

There is, because the depictions in the historical archive of fortifications are can merely be proposal drawings; moreover, what actually got built was often different, and the fortifications were also often subsequently modified a great deal. This, coupled with the well known military tradition of the “self help” principle, which may well have led to variations in plan and execution, provides a strong argument for looking at the archaeological evidence. A multidisciplinary approach to historical records and archaeological evidence is required.

The South-East should also be approached as a militarised landscape, and we have to understand Chatham in the regional context (for example in comparison with Dover Western Heights, coastal Martello towers, and the Royal Military Canal. We should also look landward, for example investigating mechanisms for getting troops quickly into the danger area: Guildford was used as a muster site and the road along the North Downs designated for communication. There is a need to think about interrelationships between these different components.

It is the hinterland of the Chatham barracks that is most under threat from development, but this is just where we will find the information to enable an understanding of the overall sites. PK indicated Brompton as a good example. Here the contemporary Ordnance Survey map designates the site as a military area, blacked out, making the historical source a mere starting point in understanding what is a massive area. How and why did it develop as an enclave? Archaeologists also need to tell the stories of people who lived there, and to spread the interest in military matters beyond mere description of weapons and defences and consider the people involved. Actually there is a complete swathe of the population missing from our understanding of these sites; these are the women and children who lived in the barracks in the same squalid living conditions as the men. As we look at barrack sites archaeologically we should indeed be able to pick up evidence of people who lived there, and aspects of their lives and experiences that may well be missing from the historical sources

Lots of Barrack sites at Chatham destroyed after the WWII, including the depot for military recruits for India, which was also the place where soldiers were returned in order to assess them for pension or not (through illness, and less commonly through wounding). We need to look at this in more detail, and to look at building plans, including known ones that have gone since 1960s (e.g. the Soldiers Institute).

As an example of the new information that archaeology can contribute, PK summarised the findings of recent developer led archaeology associated with the building of a new campus for Mid-Kent College, within the Lower Lines at Chatham. The area had originally been used as an open field of fire for the barracks, and became

a Royal Engineers practice ground for siege training from 1870s onwards. Documents and photos recording 'mine warfare' date to 1877, and we should remember that the Crimean War involved a siege of a dockyard town not unlike Chatham. It was originally questioned whether any archaeology would remain in the area (some thought it would all have been destroyed during mine warfare practice). Nonetheless strip, map and sample techniques revealed very interesting results, including a network of complete subterranean listening post structures with tunnels connecting, for the countering the digging of mine tunnels; these would not have been found if curators had not insisted that proper archaeological excavation.

As well as looking for buried evidence, it is important to curate and respect surviving evidence of the militarised landscape within the new developing landscape. PK pointed out Paul Pattison's work on the Lines proper: the Ministry of Defence had been persuaded to take all vegetation away from the disused site, which in fact survives as a major fortification with evidence of 150 years of adaptation. Another example is at Lodge Hill, with mid-19th century ordnance stores. Anti-aircraft batteries (WWI) at Lodge Hill are very well preserved and represent the first purpose-built permanent anti-aircraft emplacement that we know of, an attempt to counter the threat of Zeppelin raids on the ammunition dumps.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme and Defence

Andrew Richardson (AR)

AR, Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) for Kent, first approached the topic from a personal angle, recounting his family background in Folkestone, and elderly relatives with many tales to tell about the impact of two world wars on their local patch in Folkestone. There must be so much of this material available but being lost at an alarming rate, not much of which has been recorded by oral historians. From the perspective of finds liaison, AR pointed out that metal detectorists record vast quantities of defence and military related material from the landscape, but that the capacity of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) is particularly limited in this regard.

The focus of the Scheme has tended to be on objects dated prior to the 18th century. AR argued that the PAS was not making progress in addressing the issue of military associated metalwork, particularly in terms of the South-East. In particular, AR promoted the need to account for Battle of Britain metallic residues, but this had met with little interest on the basis that there was "plenty of historic evidence" available. So, unsystematic collection of this material is ongoing. AR said that he was troubled by this stance on the part of the PAS, and wished to put it before the defence specialists present.

In so doing, AR also presented a diverse selection of post-medieval and modern war related artefacts recovered from his family farm by two metal detectorists in just two days of searching. Should we be concerned about this material being unsystematically removed from the landscape? Metal detectorists are very keen to engage with archaeological/historical community, and there is a real willingness among clubs to participate in the South-East; these people are already in place as an enthusiastic

amateur team with their own specialists. AR urges their involvement in archaeological projects, where they can add a new dimension and contribute to a more holistic approach.

Discussion:

It was agreed that metal detecting provides an important resource and should be used wherever appropriate. What we need is perhaps a little bit more thought about the range of circumstances in which such material can be used: how this might develop into a code of practice is as yet unclear. Of course, metal detecting can also produce evidence of sites we did not know existed. At Farnham Castle recording of fall of musket shot was important to determine actual weight of attack on any part of the line. The fall of anti-aircraft fire can also determine where emplacements were. Research remains weak in understanding importance of recording on ephemeral sites, but also in multidisciplinary approaches. An example of how important such methods can be is provided by a Time Team of a 1908 site in South London, where a historical reference to a gun, oral history from a local resident, and a webbing slide excavated from the site all contributed to the overall reconstruction.

Researchers also need to put the people back into the subject, and relate defence and military matters to other aspects of contemporary society. The question of why we are interested in this material was raised, and the fact that there are ideological aspects to consider. Why do we need a developing narrative on past wars, and how should such ideas inform educational structures and other mechanisms for dissemination, such as the internet. This in turn led to a brief discussion of the archive, including the problems of grey literature and of making information more widely available on-line. The diminishing resource of oral history was also discussed. The latter needs to be targeted as a priority immediately, with training for researchers and digital archiving techniques.