

Members of the Colchester Home Guard with a Spigot Mortar



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Follow the World War Two Trail

This walking trail follows the defences of the River Colne from the Middle Mill bridge in Castle Park eastwards to The Hythe. It takes in the anti-tank blocks in the park, the base of a pillbox at the side of Maidenburgh Street, a Roman drain (not accessible) used during the war as an ammunition dump, and a surviving pillbox by the river north of Worcester Road.

Also included are a fortified wall built as an infantry firing position overlooking East Bridge, a second pillbox by the river just north of The Hythe and third final pillbox by Cowdray Avenue at the east end of Pillbox Walk. The total distance is just under four miles (6.5 km).



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On the cover:
Colchester Home Guard
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App Download

The app is available to download for free by following QR codes above.

Further Information

Leaflets accompanying this and other World War Two walks in Essex are available from Tourist Information Offices and local libraries. There is a website at: www.worldwar2heritage.com

Acknowledgements

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Colchester at War

1939-1945

World War Two Trail





Castle Park Anti-tank Barrier

Here, the defence line ran along the river through Castle Park, with the waterway itself as a natural anti-tank obstacle. Middle Mill bridge would no doubt have been mined or demolished. It can be seen from aerial photographs taken during the 1940s that the river alongside the bridge was heavily silted up with a broad sandbank across much of its width, thus providing an easy crossing point for enemy tanks.

To prevent this, the defence planners contrived an ingenious solution, the remains of which can be seen in front of you. Back from the river bank, in firm ground, they placed a row of heavy, concrete blocks, each set into the ground with a large footing. Each block weighs several tons. While at the wet stage, two steel cables were embedded in the concrete, one at chest height and the other at knee height. The cables were tightened to present a continuous concrete and steel anti-tank barrier along the river bank.

Artist's impression of how the anti-tank blocks would have been used in the event of a German attack



The Defence of Colchester

In 1940, after the evacuations from Dunkirk, an invasion of Britain seemed inevitable. Essex, with its relatively flat, open countryside was seen as particularly vulnerable to an armoured thrust from the coast towards London or the industrial Midlands.

However, in the path of a German Army driving west from a seaborne landing on the Harwich, Clacton and Jaywick beaches lay Colchester, through which

all routes inland passed. As a result the town was heavily fortified by a vast ring of defences, with over 120 pillboxes, anti-tank barriers, gun emplacements and road blocks.

