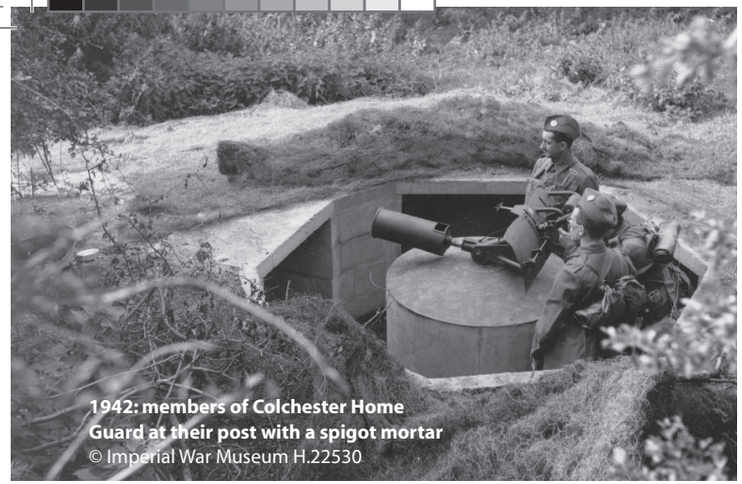
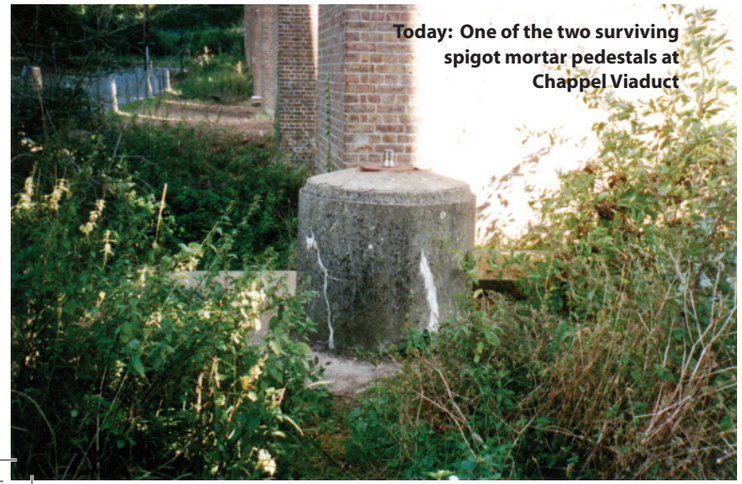


1942: members of Colchester Home Guard at their post with a spigot mortar

Follow the World War Two Trail

A walking trail has been compiled to take in a number of the pillboxes, anti-tank obstacles and spigot mortar pedestals – see the dotted line on the map. The area covered is south of Colchester Road encompassing The Street, Millennium Green and the main bulk of defence structures around the arches close to the river.

There is no fixed route; the trail can be followed in several directions. Parking is available either at Chappel and Wakes Colne railway station, where there is a museum open from 10.00am to 4.30pm daily, or to the rear of The Swan public house. Both the railway museum and The Swan offer the opportunity for refreshments.



Today: One of the two surviving spigot mortar pedestals at Chappel Viaduct

Colchester

Essex County Council

Colchester+Ipswich Museums

Essex & South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership

ESSEX HERITAGE TRUST

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On the cover:
Wartime photo of Colchester Home Guard manning a Northover Projector

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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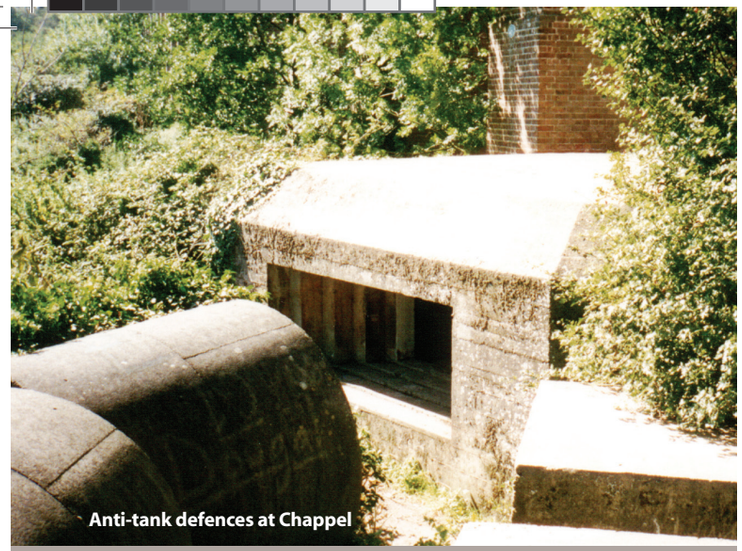
Chappel & Wakes Colne at War 1939-1945

World War Two Trail



Anti-tank defences at Chappel

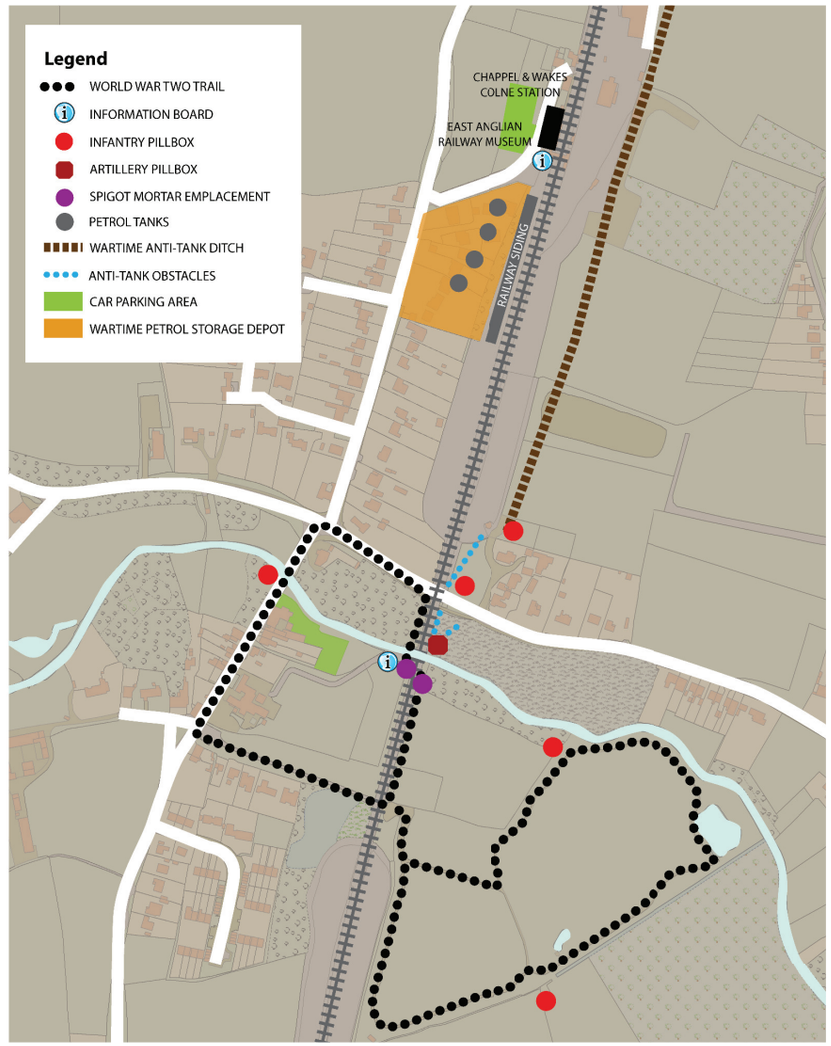
Pillboxes, Anti-Tank Obstacles and Spigot Mortars

The standard defence structure was the re-enforced concrete pillbox, built to hold a squad of infantrymen with rifles or machine-guns firing through small loopholes. Following the river from Colchester to Chappel viaduct these infantry pillboxes, 200/300 yards apart, covered the opposite bank with over-lapping fields of fire.

There are five, all still standing, around Chappel. Covering the road approach was, and is, the most prominent pillbox, an artillery type built to house a six-pounder anti-tank gun on a concrete pedestal.

Anti-tank cubes, each weighing several tons, were built to block each arch of the viaduct, north and south of Colchester Road. Most of these still survive. The river itself was blocked by three "cylinders". Originally sewage pipes, they were filled with concrete and stood on end in the river. They now lie on the bank among the standing cubes.

Two 29mm spigot mortar pedestals stand beneath the arches covering the road approaches from east and west. This early anti-tank weapon was introduced to the Home Guard in 1941/1942. Although not very accurate, it was surprisingly powerful.



The Viaduct

The viaduct was built between 1847 and 1849 as part of the Colchester, Stour Valley, Sudbury & Halstead Railway (later part of the Great Eastern Railway), under the supervision of the engineer Peter Bruff. It has 32 arches and at 342m is the longest viaduct in East Anglia, as well as being perhaps the second largest brick-built structure in Britain.

The Defence of Chappel Viaduct

During the early part of World War Two, Britain was criss-crossed by lines of defence to protect the country against an expected German invasion. The main concern in Essex was that if enemy armoured divisions were able to make a successful landing on the East Coast they would run riot across the largely flat, open terrain of East Anglia, as they had done in the Low Countries.

One of these defence lines, the Eastern Command Line, followed the River Colne from its outlet at Mersea Island, around Colchester, westwards to Chappel Viaduct. Here, it left the river to continue northwards, following the railway embankment. With the defence of the country at stake, it was crucial that this junction of road, river and rail be protected by all means possible.

The Chappel 'POL' Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants Depot, enabled fuel delivery by trains to serve the local American Air Force airfields.

Artillery pillbox beneath the viaduct.