



WWII trail

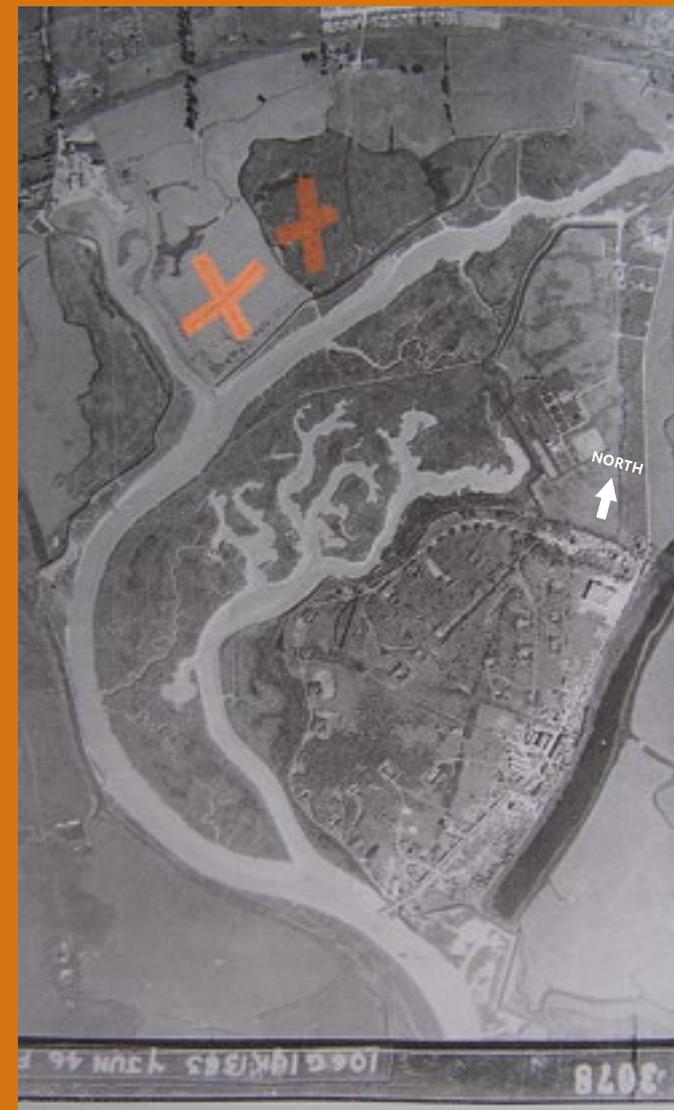


Defensive ditches

The high land you can see across the water is a landfill site. It has risen up high above the surrounding flat landscape as more of the area's rubbish has been piled up here. The marshland now hidden beneath it was once criss-crossed by an extensive network of anti-glider and anti-tank ditches, dug by tractors as a measure to prevent gliders using the otherwise flat marshes as runways where they could land and attempt to capture the Pitsea Sea Transport Stores, which the Wat Tyler site was home to at the time.

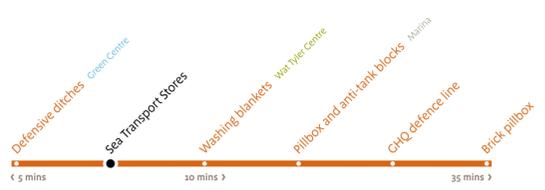
The ditches were dug as the country was bracing itself for a Nazi invasion of Britain, and a massive ditch-digging programme began around south and east England in the anticipation that an invasion could begin at any moment.

Buildings to the left were the Guard House and the Supervisors accommodation, where trucks coming in and out would be stopped, searched and directed to various buildings around the site.



Glider ditches

This 1946 RAF aerial photograph of the Pitsea site clearly shows the distinctive cross patterns of glider ditches (picked out in orange) on the marshes to the north. Glider ditches were more extensively cut into the marshes to the East of the site.



WWII trail



Sea Transport Stores

During WWII this site was used by the Ministry of War to store equipment vital for fitting out troop ships, and for reconditioning and servicing other vessels including hospital ships.

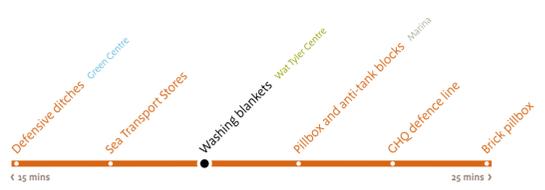
The sheer size and capacity of this building shows just why the Ministry of War chose this site as their Sea Transport Stores. With easy access to the River Thames for shipping and a huge volume of existing storage space the site was quickly, easily and cheaply converted from a redundant explosives factory to the Sea Transport Stores.

Fragments of human bones have been uncovered around the Green Centre. They are thought to be the remains of amputated limbs from wounded soldiers treated on board hospital ships.



British soldiers aboard a hospital ship.

Carl Mydans, November 1939
from LIFE magazine © Time, Inc.



WWII trail



Washing blankets

The Wat Tyler Centre building was used to store flea-ridden blankets from troop ships, which were washed in a giant hand-powered wooden washing machine in a building opposite, not far from the site of Holly Cottage.

Women folded and stacked clean blankets ready for the next time they were needed anticipating the order to pull them out of storage and into use in France.

A variety of smaller buildings stood around the Wat Tyler Centre site, used for storing spare parts.



Survivors
British soldiers & crew rescued from a troop ship that was torpedoed near the coast of N. Africa.

*Margaret Bourke-White, February 1943
from LIFE magazine © Time, Inc.*



Pillbox & anti-tank blocks

This concrete pill box was designed to defend the South Essex marshes from invasion from the sea. It's one of many defences still clearly visible all along the sea wall.

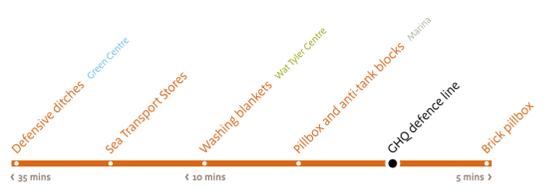
The two large concrete blocks on the sea wall connecting Wat Tyler Country Park to the landfill site were constructed as a barrier to prevent enemy tanks pushing towards London. It was anticipated that tanks could have been delivered by air onto the flat marshland that is now the landfill site.

The road up to the Wat Tyler Centre would have been lined along the left hand side with a series of open fronted sheds, part of the Sea Transport Stores. The sheds stored fire fighting equipment used on board Royal Navy ships.



Concrete and wire
Cement anti-tank barrier shrouded with barbed wire.

*Eliot Elisofon, 1945
from LIFE magazine © Time, Inc.*



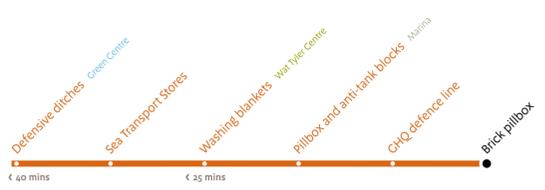
GHQ defence line

This pillbox was an important part of the GHQ (General Headquarters) defence line in South Essex – the first line of defence for London. The vantage point over vast stretches of the marshes made this site, and particularly this pillbox, a key element of the military occupation of the marshes.

The GHQ line was one of many lines of defence around the country, each working independently of the others to provide maximum resistance to potential invasion. Camouflaged control rooms and bunkers along the defence lines coordinated a concealed resistance to the anticipated Nazi invasion.



WWII defence lines
The Essex section of the GHQ line between Great Chesterford (just north of Saffron Waldron) and Canvey Island included around 400 concrete pillboxes.



 WWII trail



Brick pillbox

In the later years of the Second World War, wood became more and more scarce as a tightening German U-Boat blockade choked Britain's supply lines. This made construction of concrete structures difficult, because they needed wooden shuttering to hold the concrete in place as it set.

The pillbox on the far side of the field was built as part of a second phase of defences in those later years of the war. Builders made these later pillboxes in brick, which was still readily available throughout Britain.



Allied tanker sunk
A tanker belches smoke as it sinks into the Atlantic after being hit by a German torpedo, 1942.

from LIFE magazine © Time, Inc.