

# DEFENCE AREA 45

## BREAMORE MILL

### 1. Area details:

The defence area is half a mile south of the village of Breamore, some 2½ miles N of Fordingbridge and 8 miles S of Salisbury.

County: Hampshire.

Parish: Breamore.

NGR: centre of area, SU 162175.

### 1.1 Area Description: [see Map 1].

The defence area lies in the broad valley of the River Avon just beyond the north-west edge of the New Forest National Park. The A338 road runs along the valley from Ringwood, via Fordingbridge, to Salisbury, and at the time of the Second World War there was also a single track railway line, now disused. At Breamore, the Avon flows in two main channels, also connecting with a network of drains through the surrounding water meadows.

Just south of Breamore village, a minor road to Woodgreen runs east from the A338, crossing first a drain from the Avon and then, by two bridges, some seventy yards apart, the main river channels. On the north-east side of the western channel, but also straddling it, are the red brick buildings of Breamore Mill, consisting of the mill itself, the mill house, and various outbuildings. The presence of the eastern channel, and a further waterway to the north, mean the Mill is surrounded on three sides by water.



*Fig. 1 - Breamore Mill from the eastern of the two bridges over the channels of the River Avon. The defended outbuilding [UORN 475] can be seen.*





*Fig. 2 - The western channel of the River Avon and Breamore Mill seen from the north. On the left of the picture amongst the trees is pillbox, UORN 485.*

## 2. **Assessment.**

### 2.1 **Defences:** [see Map 2]

#### *Defence overview -*

Breamore was a defended locality on the Ringwood Stop Line, which ran from Christchurch to Salisbury. This was a V Corps Stop Line, built as part of Southern Command's 1940 Home Defence Programme.<sup>1</sup> In 1940-1941, it also fell within the Southampton Sub Area of Hampshire Area, later termed Hampshire and Dorset District.<sup>2</sup> It was a main anti-tank line facing west, defended by a series of defended localities. By December 1940 it had been half-completed.<sup>3</sup> A short distance to the south of the Breamore defended locality lay Fordingbridge, designated in 1940 as an anti-tank island, but later termed a 'centre of resistance'.<sup>4</sup>

Breamore defended locality was almost certainly centred on Breamore Mill, where defence works survive, rather than to the north-west on Breamore village itself where there are none. A documentary source records the 8th (Avon Valley) Battalion, Hampshire Home Guard manning 'selected posts in defences' at Breamore: the four-figure military grid reference for these positions would exclude Breamore village but include the Mill. Some uncertainty also attaches to the position of the recorded roadblock at Breamore. The documentary source clearly gives an incorrect military grid reference (560378) which if corrected to 600378

<sup>1</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1319 and TNA: PRO WO 166/61.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1206 and TNA: PRO WO 166/1319.

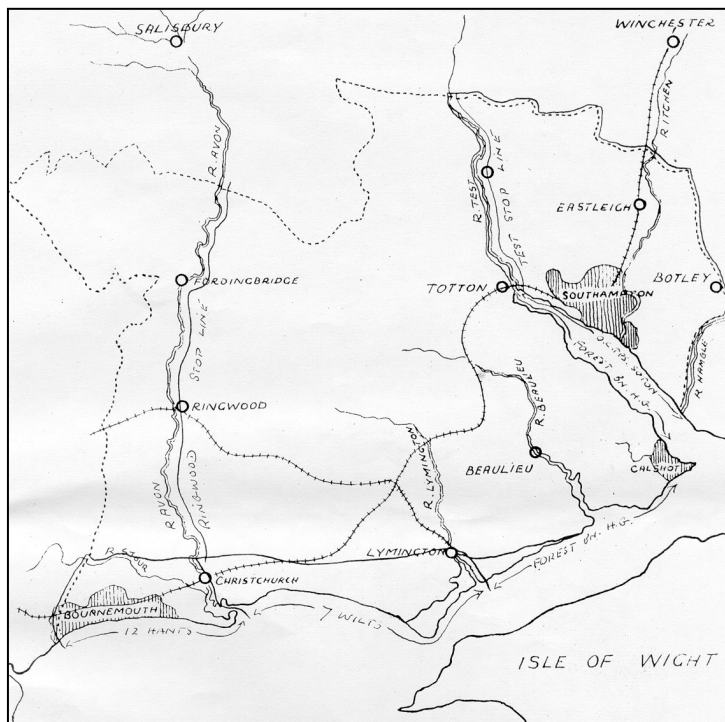
<sup>3</sup> TNA: PRO WO 199/1714.

<sup>4</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/10842. A report in April 1941 questioned the anti-tank capability of the Fordingbridge defences - see TNA: PRO WO 199/1714. At least eleven infantry pillboxes survive in and around the town.





would place it at the road bridges over the Avon at Breamore Mill. However, its exact position, whether to the east or west of the bridges, or between them, cannot now be determined.<sup>5</sup>



*Fig. 3 - Map showing the course of the Ringwood Stop Line as well as other strategic points to its east.<sup>6</sup>*



*Fig. 4 - Portion of a 1946 air photograph showing Breamore Mill where the road crosses the river channels. Breamore village lies at the top left of the picture.*

<sup>5</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1319. A further documentary source refers to the 'roadblock on the bridge' at Breamore - TNA: PRO WO 199/1801.

<sup>6</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1319.





*Fig. 5 - The most likely position for the roadblock is opposite Breamore Mill itself between the two bridges over the River Avon. The defended barn [UORN 475] would have commanded the roadblock.*

#### *The defence works -*

Breamore Mill was clearly occupied by the military and fortified. It is possible the mill house was used as a headquarters in which case the whole property may have been requisitioned and the owner evicted.<sup>7</sup>

The three pillboxes that are built into the Mill and its outbuildings were undoubtedly supplemented by other defences that have long been filled in or removed, for example section and observation posts, slit trenches, land mines or demolition charges, fougasses, and barbed wire. A spigot mortar emplacement might also be expected here, but, if this was constructed, its pedestal and pit have been removed or covered over.

The three pillboxes, two built as additions to buildings and designed to blend with them, and the other constructed within an existing building, are all in very good condition, both externally and internally. They can only be visited by permission of the property owner, although the external embrasures of two can be seen from the adjacent lane.

North of the main Mill buildings, built against what was once apparently a pumping house but is now a store, is a square pillbox with an exterior blast wall protecting a low entrance[UORN 485]. Inside, are the remains of wooden firing shelves.

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<sup>7</sup> The great majority of anti-invasion defence works were built under Defence Regulation 50, which gave the military the power to enter land and construct works, paying compensation for any consequent diminution in the value of the land. Defence Regulation 51, which was the full power of requisition leading to the eviction of civilian inhabitants, was used sparingly for this purpose, and mainly for coastal fortification where it was sometimes necessary to destroy houses and other property that were obstructing fields of fire.







*Fig.6 - UORN 485: square, brick-shuttered pillbox with stepped embrasures and an exterior blast wall.*



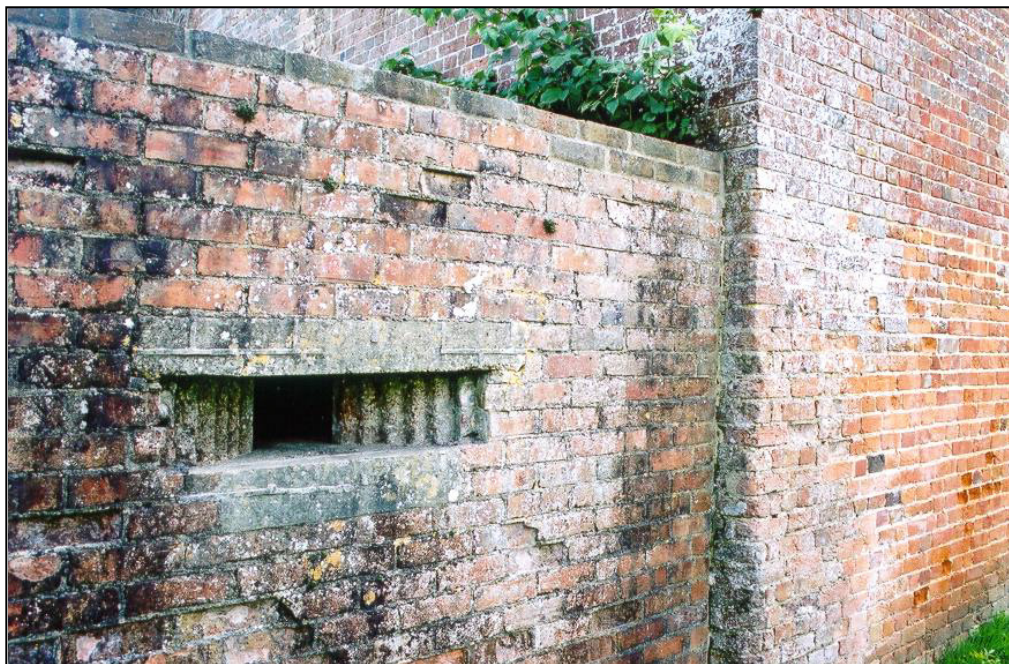
*Fig. 7 - UORN 485: the interior with remains of wooden firing shelves.*

A further square pillbox [UORN 488], similar to UORN 485, was attached to the north-west corner of the Mill buildings, being designed to blend with them through the use of matching brickwork. It was undoubtedly further camouflaged and probably had an artificial pitched roof. Pointing that survives over the exterior concrete embrasures is also probably the result of some camouflage scheme [see Fig. 9].





*Fig. 8 - UORN 488: square pillbox built against a building of Breamore Mill. The flat roof was probably disguised by an artificial pitched roof.*



*Fig. 9 - UORN 488: multi-stepped embrasure, with the remains of pointing covering the concrete, probably as part of the pillbox's camouflage.*



Unquestionably, the most outstanding of the three Breamore Mill pillboxes is that built within a barn close to the lane and the bridges over the River Avon [UORN 475]. This probably commanded an adjacent roadblock, perhaps formed by vertical rails inserted in the road surface [see under 'Defence overview' above]. A rectangular-shaped pillbox was made by building a concrete wall with an entrance way within the barn, and covering it with wooden slats to blend with the rest of the barn interior. The external barn walls were probably strengthened to a double thickness of bricks, and openings for three embrasures made through the south-west, south-east, and north walls. The pillbox also received a flat concrete roof. It provides an outstanding example of a building converted for defence, surviving in excellent condition, although used today as a store. It retains a complete wooden firing shelf.



*Fig 10 - UORN 475: the barn (originally a carriage shed) converted for defence. A further embrasure is out of sight in the north face. The brickwork of the south-west face [on the left] appears to have been replaced once the pre-cast concrete embrasure was inserted. The embrasure on the south-east face has simply been cut through the existing brickwork.*



*Fig. 11 - UORN 475: interior, with strengthened brick walls and concrete roof.*





*Fig. 12 -  
UORN 475:  
detail of a  
complete  
wooden firing  
shelf at the  
south-east  
embrasure, a  
rare survival.*

## 2.2 **Landscape:**

There are few apparent changes to Breamore Mill, and the landscape immediately around, since the Second World War. The bridge over the eastern of the two river channels was restored in 2001-2002.

The main recent impact on the landscape has been the growth of tourism. The lane past the Mill, and the bridges, are narrow, and there is little space for parking. Visitors come to look at the picturesque scene here, and some try fishing, boating, and bathing, all of which are discouraged as the river banks are private property.

Whereas the embrasures of UORNs 475 and 488 can be seen from the lane, there is no access for the general visitor to inspect the pillboxes without special permission, application for which would not be encouraged.

## 2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

The pillboxes at Breamore Mill make a most significant group, being the survivors of the defences of a defended locality that protected an important crossing of the River Avon, and was one of a series of such defended localities on the Ringwood Stop Line.

Breamore Mill provides an excellent example of how buildings were adapted for the needs of defence. Because the pillboxes have always been on private land with no access to the public, they survive in first-rate condition with a number of interior fittings intact.

The fact that two of the pillboxes, merging with the Mill buildings, can be seen from the adjacent road adds to their importance from the point of view of public education on the nature of the 1940 anti-invasion defences. Although close-up inspection of the defence works is not generally possible, their significance as part



of a defended locality, which included a roadblock, protecting the River Avon crossing can be readily appreciated.

With the co-operation of the owner of Breamore Mill House, an information board might be set up to explain the purpose of these defences which are visible to the casual visitor.

### 3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works in the Breamore Mill area be considered of national importance. They enable the defence of this defended locality on the Ringwood Stop Line to be interpreted, and provide evidence of the articulation of the defence and the inter-relationship of its functionally different components.
2. That consideration be given, in a possible initiative with Hampshire County Council, the local authority, and the property owner to providing information for the public on the Second World War defensive role of Breamore Mill. An information board for this purpose might be erected at a point adjacent to the river bridges.

### 4. **Supporting material.**

#### 4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1-2 and 5-12 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 13.8.2003.  
Fig. 4 - CPE/UK/1749 fr.4352 (21.9.1946) - NMR.

#### 4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'Construction of GHQ Zones, defence lines, road blocks, etc', July-October 1940 - TNA: PRO WO 199/1801.  
Hampshire Area War Diary, 1940-1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1206.  
'Construction of Anti-Tank Islands and Centres of Resistance' [Report on Fordingbridge], April 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 199/1714.  
Southampton Sub-Area HQ War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/1319.  
Southern Command Headquarters 'G' Branch War Diary, 1941 - TNA: PRO WO 166/61.  
Hampshire and Dorset District War Diary, 1943 - TNA: PRO WO 166/10842.  
Nigel Walker, 'Breamore Mill' [Report for the Defence of Britain Project], 1996 - Defence of Britain Project Archive, NMR.

#### 4.3 **Aerial Photographs:**

CPE/UK/1749 fr.4352 (21.9.1946) - NMR.  
CPE/UK/2038 fr.3020 (27.4.1947) - NMR.  
OS/79117 fr.152 (14.9.1979) - NMR.

#### 4.4 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

