



BOLDON CAMP HERITAGE GROUP

“EAST BOLDON ANTI-AIRCRAFT SUPPLY DEPOT (HER 1829)”



The Boldon Camp Heritage Group has been formed to raise awareness of the existence in Tyneside of one of the last major “above ground” military complexes constructed prior to the start of World War Two. The site in question, is located to the east of East Boldon within South Tyneside. Little is known of the wartime history of the camp which is referred to as “East Boldon Anti-Aircraft Supply Depot (HER 1829)” in the Newcastle City Council Tyne & Wear Specialist Conservation Team document “A Guide to the Archaeology of the Twentieth Century Defence Sites of Tyne and Wear”.

The document was printed in 2008, and amongst its contents lists three (now demolished) World War Two military complexes which were of major importance to the defence of Tyneside during the war. One of these military complexes was demolished in the mid 1990’s with the other two demolished after the documents publication.

The first of these complexes was north of the River Tyne and was the “Killingworth Anti-Aircraft Supply Depot (HER 1828), which was described as an anti-aircraft and barrage balloon depot, one of two to serve the Tyne & Wear area. (The other being South of the River Tyne and is the “East Boldon Anti-Aircraft Supply Depot (HER 1829)”. The Killingworth site has now been demolished and the land developed as a housing estate over the last few years. **This leaves the site South of the River Tyne at East Boldon as the ONLY remaining substantial World War Two “above ground site” in Tyne and Wear.**

The second complex to be demolished was the Benton Barrage Balloon Station (HER 5673) which was responsible for maintenance and testing of the barrage balloons, plus collecting the remains of balloons and their cables when damaged. The main hangar and wooden huts were demolished in 1992.

The third of these complexes was the “Fellgate, Red Barns Farm, Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery Site (HER 1796)” which was located near the Mill Lane/A194 Roundabout. Up until ten years ago this site was complete, however the last buildings have now been demolished and the land excavated for an open cast quarry, extracting clay.

The “Fellgate, Red Barns Farm” site once consisted of 4 anti-aircraft gun emplacements, 1 command post, 2 ammunition magazines, a gun store, NAAFI canteen, motor transport workshops and officers’ quarters. It was described in the Tyne & Wear Conservation Teams document as an important site, one of the few “Munich Crisis” batteries to survive.

In Sir Thomas Inskip’s 1937 defensive plan, there was to be an anti-aircraft battery site located at “Red Barns Farm” along with a total of 64 AA guns to protect the coast between the Tyne and the Tees. However by the time of general mobilisation on the 24th August 1939 there were only nine guns defending the Tyne, four of which were at “Red Barns Farm”.

With three major World War Two sites now demolished in the last two decades, the **ONLY** remaining historically significant “above ground” wartime complex left in the Tyne and Wear area is the “East Boldon Anti-Aircraft Supply Depot (HER 1829)”.

This unique complex of derelict military buildings from World War Two, located to the East of East Boldon, just off the A184 within the green belt between South Tyneside and Sunderland has been the subject of a “Strategic Land Review” by South Tyneside Council. This was initiated in 2016 at the request of Central Government to all authorities in England to determine the availability of undeveloped land that could be released for potential housing. The Strategic Land Review was completed in early 2019 and the results fed into the South Tyneside “Draft Local Plan” which will provide the blueprint for all available housing land within the borough up to 2035.

The “Draft Local Plan” was published in early August 2019 and shows that the “East Boldon Anti-Aircraft Supply Depot (HER 1829)” site which covers an area of 7.6 Hectares has been classified as remaining as part of the existing “Green Belt” land between South Tyneside and Sunderland.

Approximately 50% of the site contains the original cast concrete World War Two road network, five ammunition bunkers, a large warehouse building, vehicle workshop, a complex of three other buildings, a large brick enclosure probably used for storage of flammable materials and gasses plus a large metal “Romney” style hangar for storage. All of the buildings are in various stages of dereliction and have been vandalised over time. The remaining 50% is “Rough Pasture Land” which used to contain a significant hutted encampment (which at one time housed German Prisoners of War). This complex of huts and other small buildings were demolished a long time ago and the site returned to rough grassland.

Should this 7.6 hectare complex of derelict military buildings and land within the “Green Belt” be lost to neglect and dereliction, then the two major conurbations of Tyneside and Wearside (Tyne & Wear) with a total population exceeding 1,115,000 will lose one of the last remaining significant historical sites from World War Two not just in Tyne and Wear or the North East, but within the whole of the North of England.

The “Boldon Camp Heritage Group” has been formed to raise awareness of the historical significance of this important wartime site and how it should be saved to tell the story of the defence of Tyneside & Wearside during the dark days of World War Two.

It is also hoped that this website which was created in July 2019, will raise awareness of the existence of this “Regionally Important Military Site”, and an attempt might be made to purchase the whole site with a view to restoring the buildings and creating a unique wartime period, military museum within South Tyneside

which would be a major educational, recreational and tourist attraction not only in the North East but also the whole of the North of England.