

# Blast from the Past no.4

brought to you by the History Society

This month, we report on the History Society's packed May meeting at which BRIAN FLOOD and MARK COOPER spoke about the SECOND WORLD WAR DEFENCES IN AND AROUND SHEPHERDSWELL AND COLDRED.

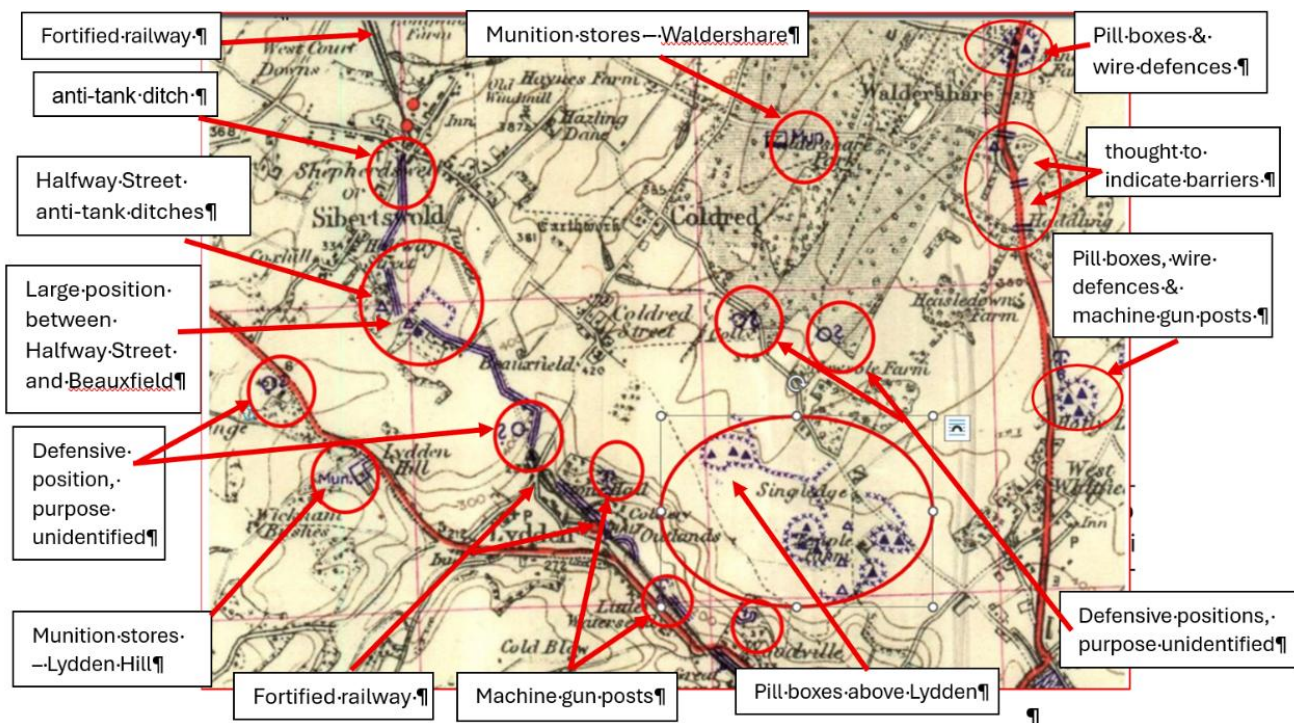


Mark Cooper & Brian Flood

With the threat of German invasion in the Spring and Summer of 1940, Shepherdsweil was accorded a prominent position on the defensive line known as the East Kent Corps Stop Line. The first section ran from Dover to Canterbury, using the railway as a natural anti-tank obstacle. Throughout the spring and summer of 1940, defensive positions were built—both as obstacles to a German advance and to counter the threat of glider landings 'behind the lines'.

German reconnaissance flights had sought to identify the defences and German military intelligence recorded them on British Ordnance Survey maps. The History Society has a copy of a German map in its archives. Produced in November 1940, after Hitler postponed Operation Sea Lion, it is a response to his orders to revise an invasion plan for Spring 1941.

Here is the map with an indication of the defensive installations identified by the Germans:



The district was, in fact, much more heavily defended than the Germans thought. Defences not on the map included:

- A minefield at Halfway Street
- Bridges prepared with slots for 'hedgehog' rail anti-tank obstacles
- Two Flame Fougasse bombs on Church Hill
- 4 houses turned into fortified gun positions
- Field guns on Westcourt Down
- A pillbox erected at the Grange
- Ditches in open fields, both as defensive positions and to deter glider landings
- Concrete tank traps on the East Kent Railway site and elsewhere
- 50 holes for McNaughton Tubes (pipe bombs) drilled by Royal Canadian Engineers

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The Home Guard was largely responsible for the defence of Shepherdsweil. As Mark Cooper explained at the History Society's meeting, the popular 'Dad's Army' image of these men should be discarded. They were tasked with 'a static defence' of the installations – a 'no surrender', 'no prisoner' policy, which would have meant certain death in the event of a German advance.

The Germans, of course, never came; but the defences remained in place throughout the war. The Fougasse Bombs – 40 gallon drums of petrol and high explosive – were not removed until 1946!

Today, though overgrown, traces of the defences still remain, including pill boxes, tank traps and munitions stores. Several years ago, the slots for anti-tank obstacles were uncovered when the railway bridge in Shepherdsweil was resurfaced in May 2014.

Memories fade but it would be sad to forget the crucial role the district and the Home Guard were slated to play in making the East Kent Stop Line a formidable defence against invasion.

**Brian Flood**



Roadworks revealing anti-tank obstacles on bridge in Shepherdsweil. *Photos: Steve Durbridge*



'Dragon's teeth' tank traps on Rubery Bridge – on road between Frogham and Woolage Village

## Shepherdsweil and Coldred History Society

### A look back at Sibertswold School

**Thursday 24 July: 7.30 Shepherdsweil Village Hall**

CHRIS GRAY leads an informal discussion looking at the history of Sibertswold School, which opened in 1853 with a single classroom. There will be a chance to look at old documents, registers and photographs. If you have memories or even photos of the old school, please bring them along for a trip down memory lane.

### Don't miss Big History Day!

**Saturday 6 September: 11.30 – 2.30,**

**Shepherdsweil Village Hall**

**After last year's break, our celebration of local history returns.** There will be exhibits, interesting talks, heritage stalls, archaeological finds, activities for children, food and refreshments, including an opportunity to indulge in a ploughman's lunch and fantastic home-made cake. Look out for more details nearer the date!



*Sibertswold School around the time of the Great War*

**[www.shepherdsweilhistory.org](http://www.shepherdsweilhistory.org)**