



BWAS

Birmingham and Warwickshire
Archaeological Society

See it for Free!

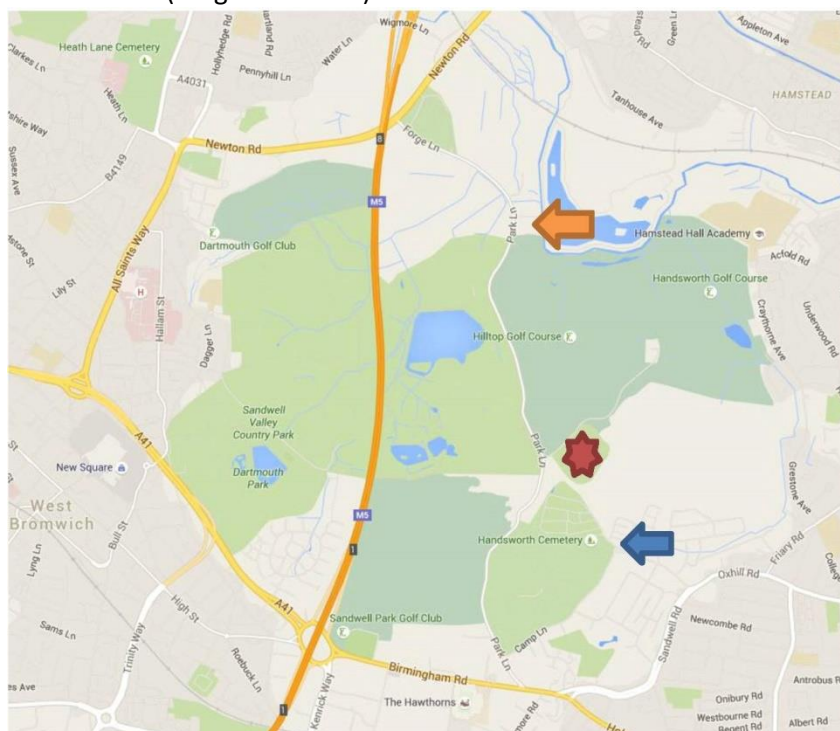
BWAS site guides provide information on free and accessible archaeological sites in Birmingham and Warwickshire

4

ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN PLACEMENTS, HANDSWORTH

Nearby postcodes - B21 8HH (Oxhill Road) or
B71 3SZ (Forge Mill Farm)

Remains of World War II anti-aircraft
gun placements at Hill Top, north-west
Birmingham.



Start from The Leveretts



Start from Forge Mill Farm



Parking - There is a car park at Forge Mill farm 2km north of the site. Or park on the road near to the bus terminus in Oxhill Road 500m to the south.

Public transport – There are regular bus services from Birmingham City Centre through to Oxhill Road / The Leveretts (terminus). For bus times and numbers see

<http://www.networkwestmidlands.com/>

Ordnance Survey

Landranger Map – 139

Explorer Map – 220

Grid reference

03365 91301

Access - The site is in public open space. There is a footpath / bridleway leading from Forge Mill Farm and from near the Oxhill Road bus terminus. Some paths are across rough ground and can be muddy in wet weather. There are a river and lakes near Forge Mill Farm. Keep to paths where they are close to neighbouring golf courses. Sandwell Valley Trails free leaflet, toilets and refreshments available from Forge Mill Farm shop. A walking trails map showing the location of the gun placements can be downloaded at

http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200248/parks_and_green_spaces/790/walking_in_sandwell_valley

What you can see



An interesting and relatively well preserved group of structures dating from the Second World War (1939-45) consisting of two anti-aircraft gun placements and a command post located on high ground overlooking the north Birmingham.

From Forge Mill Farm it is a pleasant 2km walk along well marked paths. Take the footpath from the carpark past a panel with a map and head towards the river.



Don't cross the river but continue ahead along a wide path then bear left along a gravel path on the south side of the river.



After about 600m, when you can see the RSPB Nature Centre building in the distance to your left, look out for a bridleway leading off into woodland to the right. Cross a boardwalk and continue along a path that twists through woodland on the edge of the golf course until you reach a wide gravel path that leads off to the right.



In a short while you reach an access road leading to the golf clubhouse where you will see a fingerpost. Cross the road and continue in the direction of Handsworth. Follow the path uphill until you reach another fingerpost and turn to the left.



In a short while you will come to another fingerpost indicating the way to the anti-aircraft placements.



The concrete paths here are part of this World War II installation built in 1941 but already empty by late in 1942. Follow the paths to find all of the features of interest. This was a Heavy Anti-Aircraft gun battery.



There are two gun placements each octagonal in shape built of reinforced concrete surrounded by earth banks. There may have originally been 4 as this was the usual arrangement although in this case it is possible that only the two were actually built.



At the centre of each the position of the gun is marked by metal sockets in the ground to house the holdfast bolts that secured it in place. Each placement would probably have housed a standard 3.7 inch AA gun and the holdfasts were built to a standard pattern so that guns could be moved from site to site according to need.



Each placement had six ammunition lockers the remains of which can be clearly seen.



One of the placements has a shelter built into the side.



Follow the concrete paths until you locate the command or observation post consisting of two small concrete structures surrounded by a high earth bank. It is possible to scramble up the bank and look down on these structures but they are rather overgrown and it isn't safe to enter them.



Close to the path where you first entered the site from the north you may be able to locate, in the undergrowth, foundations of a brick building which may have provided accommodation for some of the soldiers who manned the guns. It is likely there were other buildings in the area providing facilities for the soldiers but there is no visible evidence on site. Nearby is what appears to be demolition rubble including heavy slabs of reinforced concrete which may have been the site of the magazine where ammunition was kept.



If approaching the site from the bus terminus continue along the Oxhill Road, past The Leveretts, until you reach the gates to the allotments and a white vehicle barrier. To your right a grass path leads uphill towards the gun placements at the top of a steep hill.

The site needs more research but is well worth a visit being located on a hill with spectacular views over the city in the distance.

From the Oxhill Road bus terminus it is also possible to visit the remains of Sandwell Priory located just under 1km walk to the west in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough. Near the allotments gates take the path going straight ahead, keeping the allotments fence on your left. Cross Park Lane, a busy road, with care and carry on about 200m and you will see the priory ruins to the right side of the footpath.

Forge Mill is one of a series of mills along the River Tame and started life in the late 16th century as a finery forge in which pig iron was re-melted, so that the carbon and silicon content could be burnt out of it (fining) and the resultant mass of iron drawn out under a water powered hammer into bar iron (wrought iron). In 1669 it made 146 tons of iron. The forge closed in the 1820s and was replaced by a corn mill, whose buildings survive. This closed in 1914. You can still see the remains of the mounting for the wheel in the far side of the building.

Find out more:

- Hodder, M, Birmingham: the Hidden History. (2004 /2011)
- Lowry, B, 20th Century defences in Britain (1995/1998)
- Jones, C ;Lowry, B & Wilkes, M, 20th century defences in Britain: The West Midlands area (2008)

Birmingham and Warwickshire Society aims to support and raise the profile of the region's archaeological heritage, providing a monthly lecture series, annual transactions and many other benefits to members. Membership is only £20 per year for individuals, and each subscription contributes to supporting the archaeology of Birmingham and Warwickshire. Find out more at <http://bwas-online.co.uk/>

(c) The Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society
Registered Charity No.X81677