



## The Spigot Mortar(s) Local Listing Nomination - Officer Report

### 1.0 Context

A 29mm Blacker Bombard spigot mortar located within a hedgerow on land off Bennetts Road, Keresley (Fig. 2). Reported to the Coventry Historic Environment Record in 2022 by a member of the public and confirmed during archaeological works undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services.

Following public consultation last year presence of two additional spigot mortars came to light, located at Staircase Lane, Allesley and along Oxford Canal, south-east of Shilton Lane, Potters Green. A third has also been identified in proximity to Shilton Lane but is just outside of Coventry's boundary.

This report has since been updated by city council's archaeology officer to reflect the overall group value of line of defence to which these WWII structures relate to, identified within our geographical boundary with grid references as given here,

Location and Grid Reference (Fig. 1)

Bennetts Road, Keresley	SM 1	SP 32023 83357
Staircase Lane, Allesley	SM 2	SP3013 8110
Oxford Canal, Shilton Lane, Potters Green	SM 3	SP3762 8295

### 2.0 Visits

A site visit was undertaken by the Council's Archaeological Officer on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at Keresley. Subsequent site visits to the two additional Spigot Mortars were completed on visited 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025 by the Council Officers.

The reported Spigot at Staircase Lane was found to be inaccessible due to overgrowth however its location has been confirmed on the Historic Environment Record and photographic evidence is indicated in an article in the Allesley Parish Magazine (Fig. 3).

## Local List of Heritage Assets

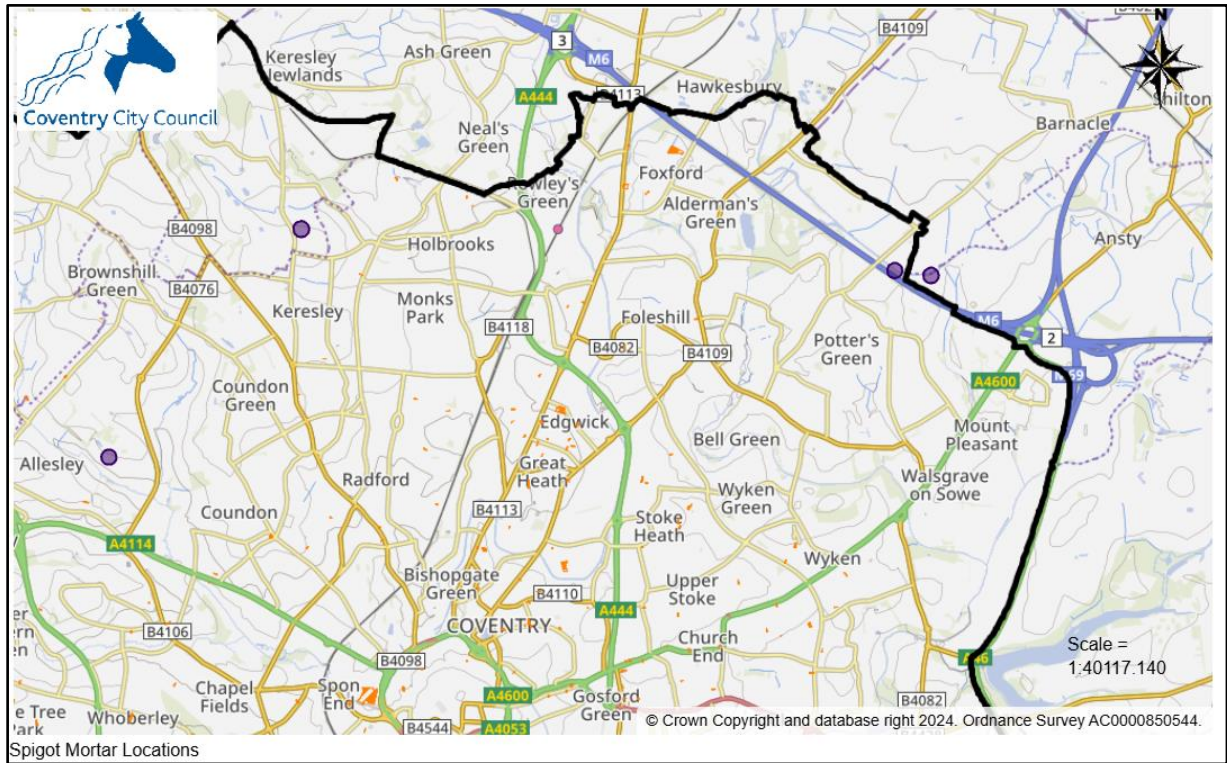


Figure 1: Spigot Mortar Locations



Figure 2: Spigot Mortar at Bennetts Road (looking north)




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### Allesley Home Guard Defensive Site

Out on a local Allesley walk I took these photos of an infilled and overgrown concrete defensive structure. It was positioned behind a hedgerow next to a road bridge across the River Sherbourne.




discovered that it is a spigot mortar emplacement with a shelter / weapons pit. After the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk in 1940, an invasion of Britain by Nazi Germany was seriously expected. The British Army had been forced to leave many weapons behind in France and was now desperately short of anti-tank guns. The spigot mortar was therefore issued in considerable numbers to the Home Guard as an inexpensive anti-tank and anti-personnel weapon to protect bridges and other strategic locations.

This device needed a crew of between three and five to operate it. Two types of ammunition were available: a 20 pound (9 kg) anti-tank bomb and a lighter 14 pound (6 kg) anti-personnel warhead.

The bomb had a propellant charge inside its tail. When the mortar was to be fired, the bomb was pushed down onto the spigot, which exploded the propellant charge and blew the bomb into the air.

A couple of local residents, who were teenagers during the Second World War, told me that this site had been manned by the local Home Guard as part of the defences for the Brown's Lane Daimler shadow factory that was producing military aircraft engines. I have seen many Second World War pill boxes dotted around the landscape but had not previously come across this type of structure. I therefore did some research and



*Spigot mortar ready for action  
(my sketch inspired by Second World War manual)*

Figure 3: Spigot Mortar Staircase Lane, article from Allesley parish magazine



Figure 4: Spigot Mortar with ammunition locker at Oxford Canal, Shilton Lane (looking north-west)

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### 3.0 Assessment – Discussion and Detail

From the summer of 1940 England's defences were strengthened against the threat of German invasion and a variety of defensive structures were built across the country.

These included 29mm spigot mortars which were developed between 1940 and 1941 and were used to engage static or mobile armoured targets, as anti-tank defence (Fig 2 to 4).

Designed by Lieutenant Colonel VVS Blacker they were also known as 'Blacker Bombards'. In addition to mobile units, a large number of static emplacements were issued. They were placed at points of local tactical advantage often as part of linear defences schemes such as 'stop-lines', composed of a number of defensive structures which were designed to obstruct the enemy's advance.

Drawings issued by the Directorate of Fortifications and Works in September 1941 show that the fixed emplacements were designed to consist of a circular or octagonal concrete pedestal or 'thimble' with a metal pintle at its centre onto which a weapon could be swivel mounted. A narrow pit around the outside of the pedestal allowed the operating crew a degree of protection and the ability to turn the mortar in any direction. The pits could also incorporate approach trenches and up to four brick or concrete ammunition lockers. It is estimated that around 8000 fixed emplacements were issued, though far fewer survive.

The majority of spigot mortar emplacements that are represented on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) are designated as components of wider scheduled sites; however, three examples are scheduled in their own right. The spigot mortars at Hapton, Lancashire (NHLE 1432881) Farnham Park (NHLE 1444575) and RAF Kenley (1487945), these examples survive remarkably well and have readable layouts which retain a diversity of original features including ammunition lockers. They also have group value with other listed assets that form part of a wider Second World War group.

The spigot mortar emplacements identified as part of this application are all located on the northern outskirts of Coventry and were probably constructed around 1941 or 1942. They will have formed part of an inland defensive stop-line, along with further defence structures (as seen in Fig 1).

The first spigot mortar is situated in the tree line / hedgerow between two fields east of Bennetts Road. It is composed of a round concrete pedestal, or 'thimble', mounted with a central steel pintle (Fig 5). There is no visible evidence of an associated pit, trench or ammunition lockers however an undesignated red-brick pillbox approximately 270m to the north-west.

At the time of application for scheduling, no other associated defensive structures had been identified, and it was assumed that others forming part of the defensive line had been lost. Since a further two spigot mortars have been identified through public consultation within Coventry's boundary and a third just outside. Information on Keresley's well preserved underground shelter on Tamworth Road has been come forward which sheds more light on city's defence line.



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Of the additional spigot mortars identified one is located at Staircase Lane, Allesley (Fig 3). The site is largely covered with overgrown shrubbery and foliage and so the Spigot Mortar is not visibly identifiable. The spigot is however recorded in an article in the Allesley Parish magazine in which photographs indicate on the very top of the spigot was visible, this is now likely covered by the overgrowth.

The second one identified on the Oxford canal off Shilton Lane has a similar structure to that of Bennetts Road but had lost part of the casing of the concrete pedestal. Of significant note this spigot mortar had a surviving ammunition locker (Fig 6). There was also some evidence in the surrounding landscape of structural remains.

Although outside Coventry's boundary a third Spigot Mortar was identified further along Oxford canal and displays an anti-tank structure to the south-west c. 20m, likely part of the same line of defence, covering the outer perimeter of Coventry. The pedestal was much larger in diameter and the concrete top has been lost exposing the iron supports (Fig7).

Historic England have recently assessed the original site at Bennetts Road (Fig 1) for formal designation but determined that it did not quite meet the requirements of national listing, stating that while the spigot mortar was of clear local interest as one of a small number of recorded defensive structures in Warwickshire, it did not meet the level necessary to recommend it for listing in the national context. It is representative of the wartime value of Coventry, with its vast contribution to the military efforts, and a site type which has hitherto not been recorded within the city and was therefore suggested for Local Listing. The mortar sits within the tree protection zone of a number of mature oaks and therefore is outside of the area of proposed redevelopment. As part of the planning consent, the mortar spigot will be protected and a historic building survey completed, recording all elements of the structure. National designation maybe revisited should further surviving elements be uncovered, such as ammunition lockers and when considering emerging evidence that further suggest a WWII Coventry defence line.

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*Figure 5: Spigot Mortar close-up, Bennetts Road*



*Figure 6: Spigot Mortar, Oxford Canal, close-up with ammunition locker*



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*Figure 7: Spigot Mortar, Oxford Canal outside of boundary close-up*

### 4.0 Public Consultation

A six-week consultation on the 29mm Blacker Bombard Mortar Spigot in Keresley was held in July 2024 in accordance with governments Community engagement: guidance for local authorities, to enable public participation. Public responses received for the proposed addition to the Coventry Local List of Heritage Assets has been hugely positive. Out of the nine responses received, seven were in support, one abstained and one nominated two additional spigot mortar sites.

The two spigot mortars revealed through public responses have emplacements spread across a wider area in this part of Coventry, one being at Staircase Lane, Allesley and two off Shilton Lane, along the canal, Potters Green.

These sites suggest that the Bennetts Road Spigot Mortar is part of a group of surviving WWII defences indicating Coventry City's defence line.

Conferred with these additional locations the original Local Listing nomination report was then updated by the officers with subject matter expert's advice to provide a comprehensive overview of all the identified spigot mortars in Coventry.

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### 5.0 Assessment – Criteria

Assessing the heritage asset against the Local List criteria, the heritage asset is valued locally for the following:

#### **Historic:**

The original accessed site displays substantial historic, social and community significance and was felt by Historic England to only fall short of national importance. The addition of further spigot mortars with associated defensive structures gives higher value to the historic significance.

Historic value considered medium to high.

#### **Age:**

The sites were likely constructed in 1941-42 and although not of great antiquity, dates from a period when there was a massive change in the very fabric of the lives of Coventrians. The specific structures relate directly to war defence and are therefore characteristic of the period.

#### **Rarity:**

The original site was the first known surviving 29mm Blacker Bombard from Coventry, it has highlighted further Coventry WWII defences, including identification of the other two Spigot Mortars within Coventry's boundary. It is suggested the examples may show regional construction trends as they do not show a domed construction over the concrete pipe sealing the pedestal and is missing the circular platform below the steel pintle.

Rarity is considered to be medium to high.

#### **Integrity:**

The spigot emplacements themselves are relatively complete although it is uncertain whether any associated elements have survived although surrounding landscape suggest unknown structural and landscape features.

Integrity is considered to be medium to high.



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### Group Value:

The Spigot Mortars formed part of a wider defensive network, at the time of National Heritage List for England application the spigot mortar identified at Bennetts Road was the only identified remnant of this network.

It was determined that it may be associated with a pillbox 200m to the northwest. The pillbox is of red brick and concrete construction, with walls of red brick and a roof of corrugated iron or asbestos sheeting covered in a later of concrete. It has a square plan form with wall 2.75m in length and 1.75m. To the south there is a central entrance opening, which steps down onto a sunken concrete floor. The entrance has suffered damage to its brickwork in addition, may have had a concrete/brick blast guard in front of it – several large lumps of concrete were lying on the ground on the east side of the structure. Its northern wall has a single firing embrasure offering a good field of fire along the line of Bennetts Road to the north and is positioned close to a small bridge over the Hall Brook. It is a non- standard design, but the nearest comparable examples architecturally are the Royal Ordnance Factories (ROFs) type. It is not proposed at this stage to locally list the pillbox.

The two additional Spigot Mortars indicated in the report at: Staircase Lane, Allesley, SP3013 8110, and along the Oxford Canal south-west of Shilton Lane, SP3762 8295. A third also identified in proximity to the second on Shilton Lane but outside of Coventry's boundary establishing City's WWII defence line and thus being recorded on group value for the first time through this report.

Group value is considered low to medium.

### Coventry's identity:

These sites represent a rare or potentially unique example of the wartime defensive circuits around Coventry. There are now a growing number being recognised and incorporated into Coventry Historic Environment Record. Potential remains to research the Blacker Bombards as part of a group along with the other Spigot Mortar's to understand firing range and defensive position as well as characterising the regional construction techniques.

Coventry's local identity value is considered medium to high.



*Figure 8: Home Guard soldiers operate a 'Blacker Bombard' spigot mortar during training at No. 3 GHQ Home Guard School in Shropshire, 20 May 143*

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### Evidence:

These sites show high potential contributing to the narrative of wartime history of Coventry, being rare survivor of the WWII outer defence perimeter as a small, distributed group.

The Spigot Mortars may offer insight into regional construction techniques and should be recognized with the others coming to light as part of a wider defensive network.

Although the structure at Bennetts Road is legible as a spigot mortar emplacement, it lacks the level of survival and diversity of original features that are better demonstrated in designated examples and therefore is deemed to be of local to regional significance. It is possible that further evidence survives such as ammunition lockers, which may be hidden by overgrowth or buried now beneath the soil.

The additional spigot mortars identified have further suggested this. Along the Oxford Canal surviving ammunition lockers are visible as well as rubble in the surrounding landscape that may be associated (Fig 9 and 10). Furthermore, the spigot mortar outside of Coventry's Boundary was within distance of an anti-tank defence and was surrounded by areas of raised landscape (Fig 11).



*Figure 9: Spigot Mortar, Oxford Canal ammunition locker (looking north-west)*



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*Figure 10: Spigot Mortar, Oxford Canal surrounding rubble*



*Figure 11: Anti-tank defensive structure, Oxford Canal beyond Coventry Boundary*

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Consequently, the sites have clear historical value and the potential for further archaeological significance. It is only now through recognising the Spigot Mortar at Bennetts Road that a further understanding of Coventry's WWII defence line is being recorded.

Further scope for expert investigation is indicated to fully understand the nature and role of these war defences from this period of history in the wider Warwickshire area and how they relate to one another.

The evidential value is considered medium to high.

### 5.0 Conclusion

After a comprehensive review of the information presented, taking into consideration the public responses, subject matter expert views, site visits and desktop research of the nomination, the application is assessed to be valid and considered of local importance to Coventry. Public consultation has presented support for the application which reflects its importance as part of Coventry's World War Two heritage.

Therefore, officer recommendation is to list the Spigot Mortar(s).

This report dated: 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024

Report updated post consultation: 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025

<http://www.coventry.gov.uk/localist>

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*Report Ends.*

<i>Report Document Control</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Officer</i>	<i>Checked</i>
<i>Site visit</i>	<i>16<sup>th</sup> February 2024</i>	<i>Matt PW</i>	<i>Afreen PS</i>
<i>First Cabinet</i>	<i>17<sup>th</sup> June 2024</i>	<i>Matt PW</i>	<i>Afreen PS</i>
<i>Revised &amp; updated</i>	<i>30<sup>th</sup> May 2025</i>	<i>Sara F</i>	<i>Afreen PS</i>
<i>Updated</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025</i>	<i>Sara F</i>	<i>Afreen PS</i>
<i>Second Cabinet</i>	<i>19<sup>th</sup> June 2025</i>	<i>Afreen PS</i>	<i>Anne Lynch</i>