

Local List Officer Report

Spigot Mortar off Shilton Lane, Oxford Canal

1.0 Location and Background

1.1 Context

- 1.1.1 A 29mm Blacker Bombard spigot mortar located along the Oxford Canal off Shilton Lane. It forms one of a pair along the Oxford Canal however the second is not within Coventry Cities Boundary. The Spigot Mortar was reported by a member of the public and recorded on the Historic Environment Records (HER). A further two Spigot Mortars are known; one off Bennetts Lane and a second off Staircase Lane in Allesley, both also have been documented on the HER (Table 1 and Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 The spigot mortar at Bennetts Lane was the first recognised before publicity of it identified the other two. It was Locally Listed in 2025 and identified the value of the World War II defences as of local importance. During the assessment of this Spigot both those on Oxford Canal and at Staircase Lane were visited to establish their condition and potential group value.

Table 1: Location, Grid Reference, HER Monument number and Designation number

Bennetts Road, Keresley	SP 32023 83357	MCT17239	DCT1428
Staircase Lane, Allesley	SP3013 8110	MCT17243	NA
Oxford Canal, Shilton Lane, Potters Green	SP3762 8295	MCT17244	NA

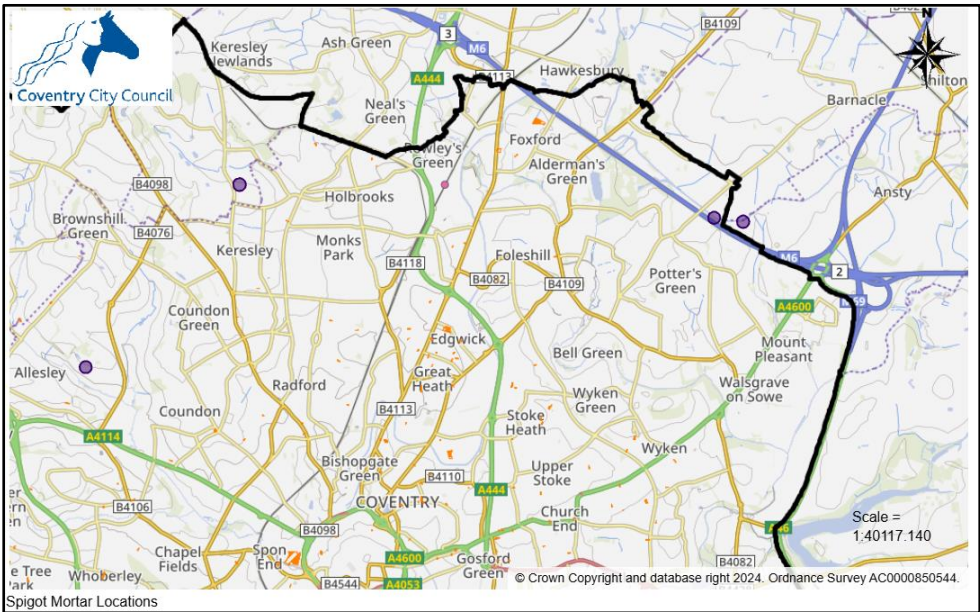


Figure 1: Locations of Spigot Mortars

1.2 Location

- 1.2.1 The spigot mortar off Shilton Lane is located on the left side of the tow path after crossing Stone Bridge to the west (SP3762 8295). The Spigot is situated in an opening within the treeline; the ground appears to be in regular use with evident bike tracks. The area is bounded to the north by the tow path and canal, to the south by a permanent fence and beyond that the M6.
- 1.2.2 The site was visited on 20th May 2025; it confirmed the Spigot Mortar was well preserved. It is composed of a round concrete pedestal, or 'thimble', mounted with a central steel pintle, it has however lost part of the casing of the concrete pedestal. There was no clear evidence of a surrounding pit or trench. Of significant note this spigot mortar has a surviving ammunition locker, and the surrounding areas have clear evidence of other structural remains. (Fig 2 and 3).



Figure 2: Spigot Mortar (rear) and ammunition locker (front)



Figure 3: Courses of brick exposed in surrounding area

2.0 Assessment

2.1 Historical Context

- 2.1.1 From the summer of 1940 England's defences strengthened against the threat of German invasion and a variety of defensive structures were built across the country.
- 2.1.2 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).
- 2.1.3 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.
- 2.1.4 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.

2.1.5 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.

2.1.5 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 (Fig 1).

2.2 Coventry Spigot Mortars Emplacements

2.2.1 The first spigot mortar that was identified is located in the tree line / hedgerow between two fields east of Bennetts Road. It was located during Archaeological Field Evaluation by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services in 2022 and recorded within the works.

2.2.2 It is composed of a round concrete pedestal, or 'thimble', mounted with a central steel pintle (Fig 4). 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 no other defensive structures had been identified and it was presumed that Coventry's defensive line was lost.



Figure 4: Bennetts Lane Spigot Mortar

2.2.3 Historic England assessed the spigot mortar for formal designation and concluded it did not meet the level necessary for listing in the national context. It was suggested for Local Listing due to its wartime value, its vast contribution to the military efforts, and a site type which had at that point not been recorded within the city.

2.2.4 The Spigot mortar off Shilton Lane, along the Oxford canal is one of three known emplacements within Coventry. The concrete pedestal is in good condition although some of the outer casing has been lost and the steel pintle was also still in place. A specialist has noted the pintle is missing the circular platform that would normally sit underneath but this may be a localisation to the construction (Fig 5). A surviving ammunition locker is visible as well as rubble in the surrounding landscape that may be associated (Fig 6).



Figure 5: Steel Pintle atop spigot mortar platform





Figure 6: Surviving ammunition locker

2.2.5 A third spigot mortar has been documented at Staircase Lane, Allesley . 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 (Fig 7).

18

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.





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 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.



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

Figure 7: Spigot Mortar Staircase Lane, article from Allesley parish magazine

2.3 Wider Boundary

2.3.1 The spigot mortar outside of Coventry's boundary which was paired with the one off Shilton Lane, was also visited and observed. To the south-west of the spigot mortar an anti-tank structure was visible, likely part of the same line of defence covering the outer perimeter of Coventry. The spigot was observed and displayed some difference to that of the one within the boundary, the pedestal was much larger in diameter and the concrete top has been lost exposing the iron supports (Fig8 and Fig 9).



Figure 8: Anti- tank structure south-west of spigot mortar



Figure 9: Spigot mortar outside of Coventry's boundary along the Oxford Canal

3.0 Assessment – Criteria

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

3.1 Historic:

The site displays substantial historic, social and community significance. The spigot mortar off Shilton Lane confirms further surviving structure related to Coventry's WWII defence line. Along with the locally listed spigot mortar off Bennetts Lane (DCT1428) and the further identified/documentated structures higher significance is being highlighted.

Historic value considered medium to high.

3.2 Age:

The site is of the modern period, with construction taking place 1941-1942. The period is of particular significance due to the second world war and the impact it had on everyday life. For Coventry the spigot mortars reflect a material response to the threat of WWII and need for defence. The structure is characteristic of this period and considered a direct response to historical events during the time.

3.3 Rarity:

The publicity of the first identified 29mm Blacker Bombard off Bennetts Lane 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 it is missing the circular platform below the steel pintle. Along with the other spigot mortars some variation in the doming of the concrete pedestal have also been noted.

Rarity is considered to be medium to high.

3.4 Integrity:

The spigot emplacements themselves are relatively complete and this example in specific has an associated ammunition locker. The surrounding landscape suggests unknown structural and landscape features that may also be related to the spigot mortar.

Integrity is considered to be medium to high.

3.5 Group Value:

The spigot mortars formed part of a wider defensive network, at the time of consultation for the one identified at Bennetts Road, it was the only known remnant of this network. The interest from the public has led to the identification of the further two spigot mortars as well as the third located just outside of Coventry's boundary.

The spigot mortar in question, off Shilton Lane, provides a unique opportunity amongst the group due to the surviving ammunition locker to understand the setting of the assets.

Group value is considered low to medium,

3.6 Coventry's identity:

The spigot mortar off Shilton Lane, along the Oxford Canal forms part of Coventry's wartime defence line. There are now a growing number being recognised and incorporated into Coventry Historic Environment Record. Potential remains to research the Spigot Mortar's as a group within Coventry and to understand firing range, defensive position as well as characterising the regional construction techniques.

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

3.7 Evidence:

- 3.7.1 The site forms part of a small, distributed group of spigot mortars and has high potential to contribute to the narrative of wartime Coventry's defence perimeter. 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.
- 3.7.2 The spigot mortar off Shilton Lane has potential to inform on the setting of the assets through the preservation of further surviving features such as the ammunition locker. The presence of original features confirms a higher potential for remains in the surrounding area; visible debris may be related directly to the spigot mortar (Fig 9).



Figure 9: Spigot Mortar, Off Shilton Lane, Oxford Canal surrounding rubble

3.7.3 Considering it alongside the second spigot mortar along the Oxford Canal, outside of Coventry's Boundary, there is more evidence to suggest preservation of surrounding features in this area is high. The spigot mortar was within distance of an anti-tank defence and was surrounded by areas of raised landscape.

3.7.4 Desk-based assessment uncovered an aerial mosaic which further suggests the area has high probability of structural and landscape remains in situ. The photograph (Fig10) was taken by the R.A.F in 1946, the canal has less growth and the spigot emplacements can be seen clearly. A total of four spigot mortars are visible along the canal in the photograph: the one in question, an additional one on the opposing side of the canal, the known one within Warwickshire's boundary and another further down the tow path to the east. The photograph suggests that the spigot mortars have surrounding trenching and perhaps further structural details.

3.7.5 Consequently, the sites have clear historical value and the potential for further archaeological significance. 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.



Figure 10: Air Photo Mosaic Sheet (1:1,250 scale): 42/3782 N.E. / SP 3782 N.E.
 Above: zoomed in. *Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of
 Scotland- purchase digital download November 2025.*

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1.1 Desk-based research supported by a site visit assess the application to be valid and considered of local importance. Public consultation for Bennetts Lane spigot mortar confirmed resounding support and it is expected that this second spigot mortar off Shilton Lane, Oxford Canal would also have strong support. The importance and support deriving from the enhancement in understanding Coventry's WWII defences.
- 4.1.2 It is concluded that undertaking a consultation on the nomination would therefore be beneficial to gain a greater understanding of the views of local people on the nominations inclusion to the Local List of Heritage Assets, and invite contributions which may further the understanding of heritage value.

Report Dated 17th November 2025 Sara Farey MA BA PCIfA

Historic Environment Record Access 2025, entry contributions from Matt ParkerWooding

Specialist Consulted- Chris Kolonko