

Background Information

The impetus for this trail was initially the 75th anniversary of VE Day in 2020 but it has evolved into a general memory trail of people, events and locations, around Newbury, from the Second World War era.

This walking trail is approximately 2.7 miles in length; it starts from the West Berkshire Museum (Wharf Street) and ends at Newtown Road Cemetery. It shows the location of significant sites in Newbury, and outlines their relevance to the Second World War. The trail can easily be split. The Museum to the Corn Exchange section is around 1.4 miles and the railway station to Newtown Road Cemetery around half a mile.

A number of additional locations, further afield, are highlighted together with a short note of their significance. Some of these additional locations can be visited on foot but the greater distances will require transport. Greenham Common Control Tower is the furthest southerly location but the significant role the Common played in the Second World War makes it well worth a visit.

Trail leaflets can be collected from:

West Berkshire Museum
The Wharf, Newbury RG14 5AS

Please check the website for opening times:
www.westberkshireheritage.org/west-berkshire-museum

Greenham Common Control Tower
Burys Bank Road, Newbury RG19 8BZ

Please check the website for opening times:
www.greenhamtower.org.uk

Both venues host programmes of exhibitions, workshops and talks. Up to date information is available on each individual website.

Greenham Control Tower Memorial

A memorial commemorating American troops who died in Berkshire during the Second World War was unveiled in Greenham Business Park by Princess Anne in 2012. This monument was relocated to the Control Tower in late 2019 and a commemorative service is held here on December 12th every year.



Acknowledgements

West Berkshire Museum: Janine Fox
West Berkshire Archaeology Service: Sarah Orr
Text and Photography: Rob Carpenter LRPS
Leaflet design and print: West Berkshire Council
Research: Valerie Pollitt, Pam Hart
Bowdown House photo courtesy of Mr Michael Dormer
Mill Hall photo courtesy of the Mary Hare Foundation
Greenham Control Tower photo courtesy of
Mr Steven Marwick
USAF Memorial photo courtesy of Oxygen Photography

Parking

The Wharf and the Kennet Centre.
Street parking around Newtown Road (charges may apply), Link Road, Porchester Road etc.
Greenham Common Control Tower car park.
Greenham Common Pyle Hill car park.



Peter Baker
Foundation

Heritage Walking Trail

Second World War, Newbury



Prepared by
West Berkshire Museum and
Greenham Common Control Tower



The Walk

These guidance notes accompany the map where the individual locations are marked; locations A, B and C are not part of the Trail but are identified because of their significance.

From the West Berkshire Museum in Wharf Street (1) take the bridge (2) over the canal into Victoria Park. Queen Victoria's statue (3) is at the top of the Park in a roughly north easterly direction. Return to the canal, do not cross but instead turn right and take the towpath towards the town. Turn right at Northbrook Street and then turn left along Northcroft Lane (signed Northcroft Leisure Centre) for approximately half a mile. Turn left on the public footpath after the Cricket Club and before Northcroft Leisure Centre, then cross the River Kennet. The Type 22 pillbox (4) can be seen to the right of the Monkey Bridge before crossing the canal. Continue crossing the canal and then turn left.

Head towards the town, centre passing the 17th century Weavers Cottages and West Mills. The Newbury War Memorial (5) is on your right as you reach Bartholomew Street. Cross the road, continue straight on and turn right into the Market Place. The Corn Exchange (6) is on your left. Continue into Cheap Street noting the old Post Office building (7) on your left then continue until you reach the A339 dual carriageway and turn right.

Cross the railway and turn right into Station Road. An above ground brick built air raid shelter is located on the A339 side of the station building (8). Continue past the station. The original signal Box was located beyond the western end of the platform. St Nicolas School and playground are on your left. This was the original location of the Newbury Senior Council School (9). Continue along Station Road.

Turn left into Newtown Road and continue south past Fair Close Centre (10). Continue until St John's Church (11), on your left, which was totally rebuilt after the 1943 bombing. Carefully cross St John's Road and enter the Memorial Garden (12). Continue south on Newtown Road until you reach the entrance to the Newtown Road Cemetery (13). The cemetery is open daily between 10 am and 3 pm (please check, not open Christmas Day).

This is the end of the walking trail but some (more distant) additional locations are illustrated which may be of interest.

More Distant Sites of Interest

St Mary's Church New Road, Greenham RG19 8RZ.

Unusually, the cemetery contains a war grave memorial for a New Zealand pilot killed in 1943.



Mill Hall (Greenham Lodge) Pigeons Farm Road RG19 8XA. (No access to this property.)

The Headquarters of the 101st Airborne in the Second World War. It is reported that on the evening of June 5th 1944, General Eisenhower watched the mass take off of Dakotas from here as they headed to France for the D-Day offensive. It is now owned by the Mary Hare foundation.



Bowdown Woods bomb stores

Burys Bank Road.

A network of roads can be followed to a variety of overgrown brick, concrete and earth structures. It is presumed they were used for munitions storage, away from the airfield.



Greenham Common Control Tower

Burys Bank Road.

(Check opening times.)

This was a Cold War airfield control tower; it has now been refurbished and is a visitor centre, exhibition area, cafe and venue for informative evening talks.



Further Historical Facts

The bombing of Newbury

Newbury suffered three air raids during the War; there was no direct loss of life from the first two raids in 1940 and 1941. However, on February 10th 1943 a German Dornier bomber dropped eight high explosive bombs which caused devastation to St John's Church, St Bartholomew's almshouses and the Newbury Senior Council School. This raid resulted in the deaths of 15 people and 41 were injured.

The Old Fire Station

The current Fire Station has been located in Hawthorn Road since 1956 but during the Second World War it was based in The Wharf together with the ambulance station. A combined funeral procession for three Newbury firemen who lost their lives whilst on duty in the Portsmouth Blitz stretched the length of a crowded Northbrook Street in 1941.

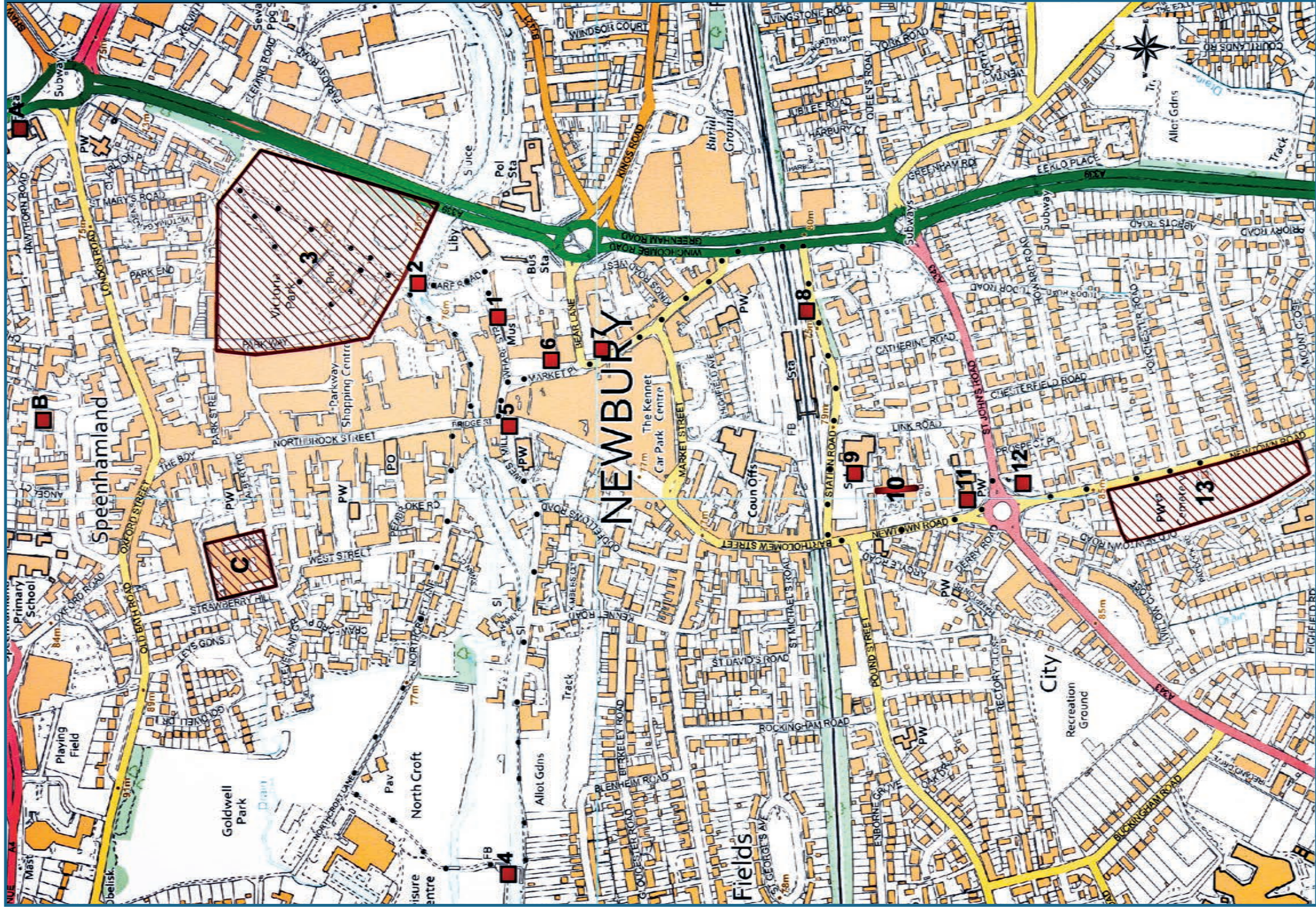
Newbury Racecourse

During both World Wars, the racecourse was taken over by the military. In 1942 it was handed over to the US Army and a huge depot and rail marshalling yard was created to supply Greenham Common with equipment for the invasion of Europe. A prisoner of war camp was also established on the site.

Shaw House

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Shaw House was requisitioned for the army. The grounds became a military training area, initially for men from the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. In 1942, American and Canadian troops were housed at Shaw before taking part in the D-Day landings. In May 1943, the House became temporary school accommodation after the bombing of the Newbury Senior Council School (schooling continued until 1985).







1 West Berkshire Museum

West Berkshire Museum is housed in two of Newbury's best loved historic buildings - the Grade I listed 17th century Cloth Hall and the Grade II* Granary or Corn Stores in Wharf Street. It is a modern community museum working with, listening to and welcoming everyone who lives, works in or visits West Berkshire.



2 Canal Bridge

The "American bridge" was built in 1940 to provide a second canal crossing. It was designed and built by British contractors but the plans allegedly certified for use by the Americans. The "American bridge" was replaced in 2001 with the current structure.



3 Victoria Park

Originally, this area was called The Marsh but it was renamed Victoria Park because of the popularity of the Queen. Victoria's statue was originally located in the Market Place in 1903 but ended up here in 1966. During the Second World War, anti-tank defences or "dragon's teeth" were positioned along the current route of the A339. The Park contains a small, brick built air raid shelter for an adjacent nursery.



4 Northcroft Pillbox

The pillboxes along the Kennet and Avon Canal were part of the GHQ Stop Line Blue; a planned anti-tank defence running from Wiltshire to Theale using waterways, ditches and concrete structures as obstacles to an enemy invasion. This is a Type 22 pillbox which would have been manned by the Home Guard.



5 Town War Memorial

The War Memorial was unveiled in October 1922 to commemorate 338 local men and one woman who died in the First World War. After the Second World War, the record was updated with the names of 171 local men who died in this conflict. Like many other war memorials, this was recently nationally listed. St Nicolas Church was hit by an incendiary bomb in November 1940 but only suffered minimal damage.



6 Corn Exchange

This opened for trade in June 1862 and is now a Grade II listed building. On the 25th July 1944 the Glen Miller band played a concert at the Corn Exchange for the 101st Airborne and the people of Newbury and the venue was packed. The evening was so well attended that loudspeakers were set up in the Market Place for people waiting outside.



7 The Old Post Office (no access)

In the entrance vestibule is a visible brass plaque in memory of seven Post Office workers who fell in the Second World War.



8 Newbury Railway Station

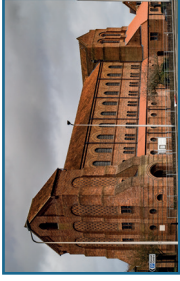
The low, brick built structure on the A339 side of the station building is the only surviving example of a public air raid shelter in Newbury. The right hand side was built during the Second World War and the left is modern (note the brickwork join). At the other end of the Station platform during the war years, a signal box was situated on the other side of the tracks from where you are standing. It escaped the 1943 bombing with superficial damage but was removed at a later date.



9 Location of the original Newbury Senior Council School
This is now the site of St Nicolas C of E Junior School. The Newbury Senior Council School (opened March 10th 1909) was partially destroyed in the bombing of February 1943 when three pupils and two members of staff were tragically killed.



10 Location of St Bartholomews Almshouses
he row of Almshouses was located behind the Fair Close Centre roughly where the flats are situated now. The Almshouses were totally destroyed during the 1943 bombing when seven people were killed.



11 St John the Evangelist Church
The original church was consecrated in 1860 but in 1943 the bombing caused total destruction with only the altar left standing. The church was rebuilt after the War and was consecrated in June 1957. It is one of Newbury's modern listed buildings.



12 St John's Memorial Garden
On February 10th 2013, the Mayor of Newbury unveiled this marble plaque to remember the victims of the bombing in 1943. The memorial is close to the spot where the first bomb landed.

Additional Note:

The Shaw cemetery at Shaw Hill contains the communal grave of 13 of the 15 victims of the 1943 bombing and other Newbury inhabitants who lost their lives during the Second World War.



13 Newbury Road Cemetery

This was closed in 2000 but, in subsequent years, the Friends (www.fmrnewbury.org.uk/index.asp) have been restoring the cemetery and researching and documenting the memorials. The cemetery contains five war graves from the Second World War (and 14 from the First World War) according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Information on additional marked locations of interest:



A. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue, Hawthorn Road
This station contains a memorial to the three Newbury fire-fighters who lost their lives in the Portsmouth blitz on March 10th 1941.

B. Royal British Legion, Pelican Lane

The British Legion is one of the UK's largest membership organisations and recognised as custodians of Remembrance. The blue plaque on the right is a memorial to the Royal Navy submarine HMS Tigris which was adopted by the people of Newbury in 1942.



C. Location of Elliotts Albert Works, West Street

Elliott's of Newbury Ltd. was a furniture factory, founded in 1895. During the Second World War, a largely female workforce produced components for the Spitfire and the Horsa glider. The factory was demolished in the 1970s.