

Box Hill Fort

Last Ditch Attempt to Save The Empire



Changing Tactics in the Theatre of War

The artillery guns of the late 1800's were very accurate and very powerful. Constructing a Fort that would withstand a concentrated bombardment was considered too expensive. At the same time, advances in rifles and the introduction of the machine gun made entrenched warfare far more effective.

Upon invasion, the ridge of the North Downs would have been defended by men in trenches. The gaps in this range of hills, such as the Mole Gap here at Box Hill, would have been more heavily defended with large artillery guns. Now referred to as Forts, these structures were originally commissioned as Mobilisation Centres. They were designed as supply depots, providing tools and ammunition to regular soldiers, volunteers and contracted labour.

The whole hillside would have been a line of defence and soldiers could be moved quickly along the trenches to counter an enemy advance. The soldiers would have been in a very strong position, being equipped with rapid firing rifles, protected by an earth trench and occupying the high ground.

Finding Out More

In addition to Box Hill Fort, the National Trust also owns Reigate Fort, part of the same chain of defences. A glossy 22 page booklet, entitled Reigate Fort – The Defence of London, holds more information on the history and politics behind this scheme. **This booklet is available for £3 from Box Hill shop or by mail order by sending a cheque and an A4 SAE to the Surrey Hills Office.**

Further information about Box Hill Fort and Reigate Fort can be found at www.nationaltrust.uk







Opening Times, Information

The ramparts and surrounds of Box Hill Fort are open daily between dawn and dusk. Access to the buildings can be arranged for groups by special appointment through the Head Warden.

Box Hill		
All year		M T W T F S S
Servery		
29 Mar–24 Oct	9–5	M T W T F S S
25 Oct–31 Oct	10–4	M T W T F S S
Shop/info centre		
29 Mar–24 Oct	11–5	M T W T F S S
25 Oct–31 Jan 10	11–4	M T W T F S S
Shop, information centre and servery closed 25 Dec. Toilets are open 10am to 4pm daily.		



How to Get There

-  **By Car** – Park in Box Hill pay and display main car park at the top of the hill and walk towards the buildings. Box Hill Fort is located just behind the Shop and Servery.
-  **By Train** – Nearest station is Box Hill & Westhumble. Options include walking up the Burford Spur or cycling up the Zig Zag road. Both are uphill. Allow half an hour to an hour, depending upon personal physical fitness.
-  **By Bicycle** – The Fort is located just one mile to the east of a National Cycle Network route, which runs past the bottom of the Zig Zag road.
-  **Bus Link** – 516 Sunray Travel, Leatherhead through Headley to Dorking stops at Box Hill. 465 Arriva, Leatherhead through Mickleham to Dorking stops at Burford Bridge.

Contact Details

Box Hill Head Warden's Office: 01306 885502
 Café and Shop: 01306 888793
 Learning and education: 01306 742809
 Surrey Hills Office, Warren Farm Barns, Headley Lane, Mickleham, Dorking, Surrey RH5 6DG: 01372 220643

Welcome to Box Hill Fort – Last Ditch Attempt to Save The Empire

If London fell, the British Empire was likely to follow.

Box Hill Fort was built in the late 1800's during a crisis period in British history. It was part of the London Defence Scheme, literally a last ditch line of defence for the capital of the greatest empire the world has ever known.

The nineteenth century saw revolutionary changes in military hardware and tactics. On the oceans wood and sail were giving way to steam and steel, large artillery guns were becoming more accurate and more destructive, infantry rifles became quicker to reload and the first reliable machine gun, the Maxim, was adopted by the British Army in 1889.

Britain's construction of modern warships had not kept pace with her enemies, particularly the French. British forces were spread thinly across her huge empire and London was vulnerable to invasion. If London fell, the whole empire was likely to follow. The capital had to be protected whilst naval forces were bolstered.

Box Hill Fort was one of thirteen military installations forming a series of defences seventy two miles long, known as the London Defence Scheme. It was designed as a last ditch stop line to protect London from the south and east.

By 1906, the British Admiralty was confident that naval supremacy would safeguard against invasion. That year saw the launch of HMS Dreadnought, the fastest and most heavily armed battleship ever built. The Forts were no longer required and most were quickly sold in a display of confidence in the admiralties abilities to repel an enemy fleet.



The magazine rooms were protected from enemy shelling by the earthen roof. They contained ammunition for infantry rifles and artillery guns. Gunpowder was kept in good condition by controlling the temperature and humidity with damp proofing and ventilation chimneys.



The doors and windows were made of thick cannon proof steel, fitted with rifle loops to defend the fort from an enemy at close quarters.



Candle lanterns were used to provide lighting. The internal windows were designed so the lanterns were not taken into the magazine. This reduced the likelihood of explosion.

