

Second World War Pillbox

Following the fall of France in June 1940, plans were drawn up to defend the United Kingdom against a full-scale German invasion. This included the construction of a network of defensive structures along a series of 'stop lines'. This pillbox lies to the east of the General Headquarters (GHQ) Line A, which stretches from Reading to Farnham and was probably associated with the defence of the British Army Arborfield Garrison.

Pillboxes were a type of guard-post with the name either derived from the term 'pillar box' or a joke about their appearance. It is thought that up to 18,000 were constructed in the nine months following the evacuation of Dunkirk in northern France. They were generally based on a standard military design but were adapted for local circumstances. This pillbox appears to be a variant of the Type 26.

The structure is partially sunk into the ground for protection and camouflage and positioned to cover the road junction to the east. It is made from concrete and brick with the 2ft thick walls designed to be shell proof.

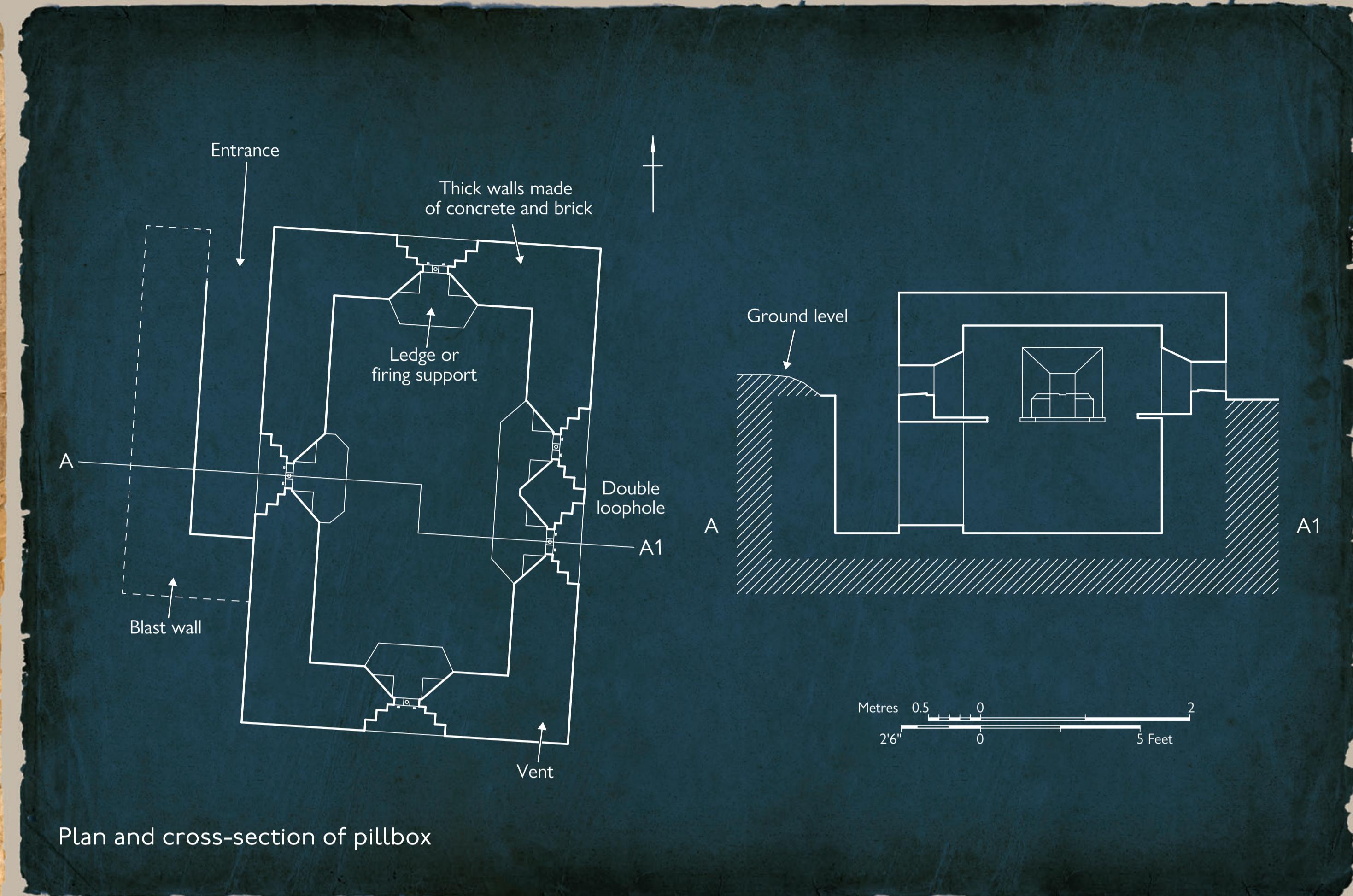
Access inside is through a narrow passageway along the western wall created with an 'L'-shaped brick wall which would have acted as a blast wall protecting defenders from artillery fire or adjacent explosions. Due to the narrow, low doorway, access would only have been possible by stooping or crawling.

The pillbox contains a precast concrete embrasure loophole in each wall, with a double one on the eastern side. These would have allowed for all sides to be defended and would have been manned by light machine guns or rifles supported on the built-in ledges just inside. The stepped concrete surround was designed to prevent incoming rounds being funnelled inwards. A fragment of a flameproof asbestos shutter with a rusted iron hinge attached was found in the southern loophole, these could have been raised in the event of flame thrower attack. Also found nearby was an iron screw picket fence post for holding barbed wire.

Several iron hooks can be seen in the western wall, these were likely to secure camouflage netting. A vent can also be seen in the southern wall where a ceramic pipe provides additional ventilation to the inside protected by an exterior grill.

While the German invasion never came to pass and the effectiveness of these structures was never put to the test, they remain an evocative and visible reminder of an important part of our history.

This pillbox has been adapted to provide a roost for bats. Bats are protected under Regulation 43 of the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)* so please keep your distance from the pillbox to avoid disturbing them.



Plan and cross-section of pillbox



Eastern wall with double loophole



Pillbox interior with eastern double loophole, vent and southern wall



Entrance and blast wall



Western entrance and northern wall



Iron screw picket fence post