

London's Civil War Defences

The Latest Research

by David Flinham

In 2022 I wrote an article for *Battlefield*, 'The search for London's lost English Civil War defences', [*Battlefield*: Volume 26, Issue 3] introducing a new project that is drastically changing our understanding about fortifications built during 1642–43 to protect London. The capital was one of 157 towns in England fortified during the English Civil Wars, but at 18km-long, London's was by far the largest, yet there is no known contemporary plan of them.

The Civil War defences of West London reviewed: Bloomsbury to Park Lane

Peter Mills

Introduction
This article is the third in a series for *London Archaeologist* reviewing the Civil War Defences of London, the previous two covering the East¹ and North.² This article covers Part 1 of the Western Defences – a stretch of the defences built from Bloomsbury by the British Museum to Park Lane (Fig 1). Future articles will cover Hyde Park Corner to Millbank, and South London. The defences hurriedly thrown up by the City in late 1642 against the King were followed in early 1643 by the erection of a series of forts in a great ring (12 miles/18km) around London,

Westminster and Southwark. The forts were joined by 'Lines of Communication' – trenches with external earthen banks, that allowed safe passage between the forts.³ The defences were slighted by the Parliamentary General Sir Thomas Fairfax in August 1647. The location of the defences was soon forgotten and/or deliberately ignored by map makers after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.⁴ Unfortunately, until recently a fictitious map of 1738 has formed the basis for locating the forts.⁵ The research undertaken for this project has

identified new documentary and cartographic evidence for the location of the forts and the morphology of the Lines. A new source: Richard Daynes' survey of the defences, March 1643 During research into the Western Defences, an entirely new documentary source has been located. At the end of March 1643, a surveyor named Richard Daynes completed a document entitled *A Survey of the Forts with the Breastworks and trench or Line of Communication about the Cities of London and Westminster*.⁶ This

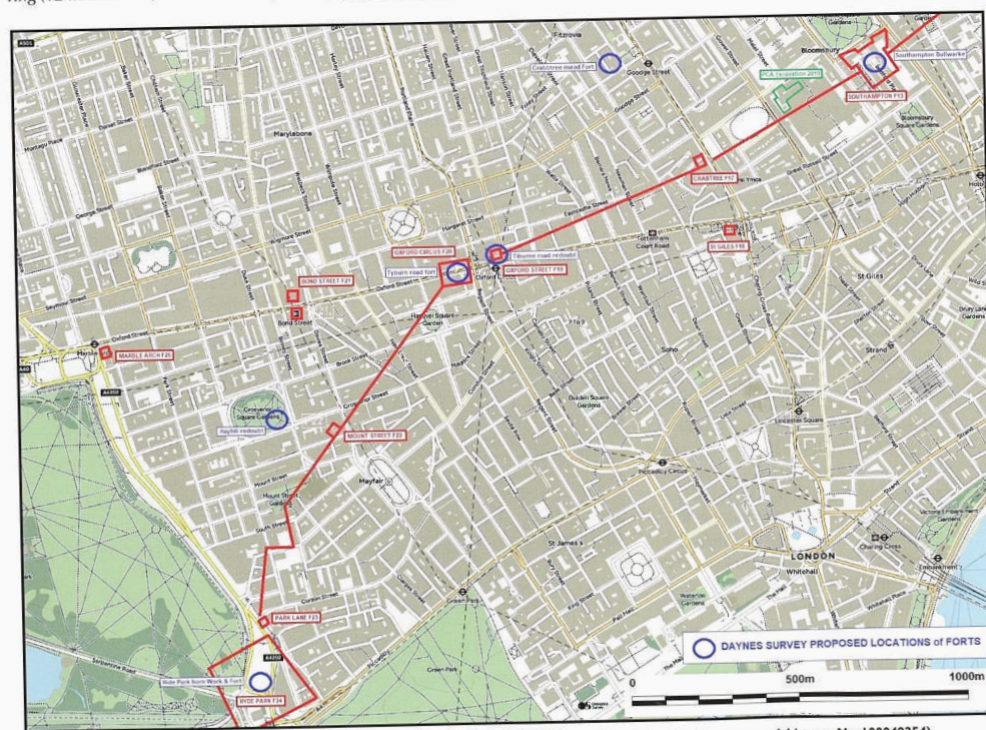


Fig 1: revised Civil War Defences and the proposed defences of Daynes, March 1643 (© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No. 100049254)

The first page of the *London Archaeologist* article.

Undertaken by Mills Whipp Projects and funded by Historic England, this archaeological project has uncovered several previously unknown documents, most significantly Richard Daynes' March 1643 *A Survey of the Forts with the Breastworks and trench or Line of Communication about the Cities of London and Westminster*. This, combined with a thorough re-analysis of existing documents and archaeological reports has 'redrawn' the map of the fortifications, realigning the locations of many forts and the connecting line, and adding several 'new' forts.

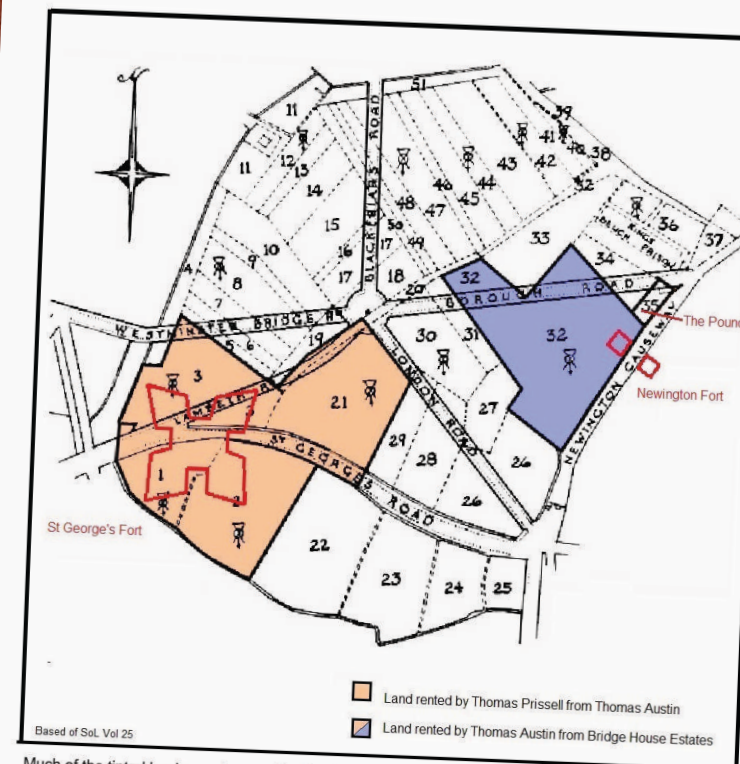
The fortifications have been divided into five sections: Wapping to Hoxton, Hoxton to Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury to Park Lane, Park Lane to Millbank, and, south of the Thames, Vauxhall to Rotherhithe. The accompanying map shows the revised locations of the forts and the connecting line north of the Thames.

The project is uncovering the impact of the fortifications on the immediately surrounding countryside, demonstrating that this 'landscape of war' extended far greater than just the land taken up by the construction of the defences themselves. An example of this is shown on the accompanying plan of the area surrounding St George's Fort.

An important discovery concerns the lines that connected the forts. Whilst the forts were 'traditional' earthworks, with ramparts fronted by ditches – many of them containing multiple defensive features – the forts were not connected by a continuous line of ditch-fronted ramparts. Instead, a system of trenches were dug, probably fronted by some sort of parapet, so not unlike what would be found on the Western Front during the Great War. Whilst some stretches of ditch-fronted ramparts would have been present in lower-lying areas (close to the Thames for example), elsewhere it was trenches which made up the Line of Communication.

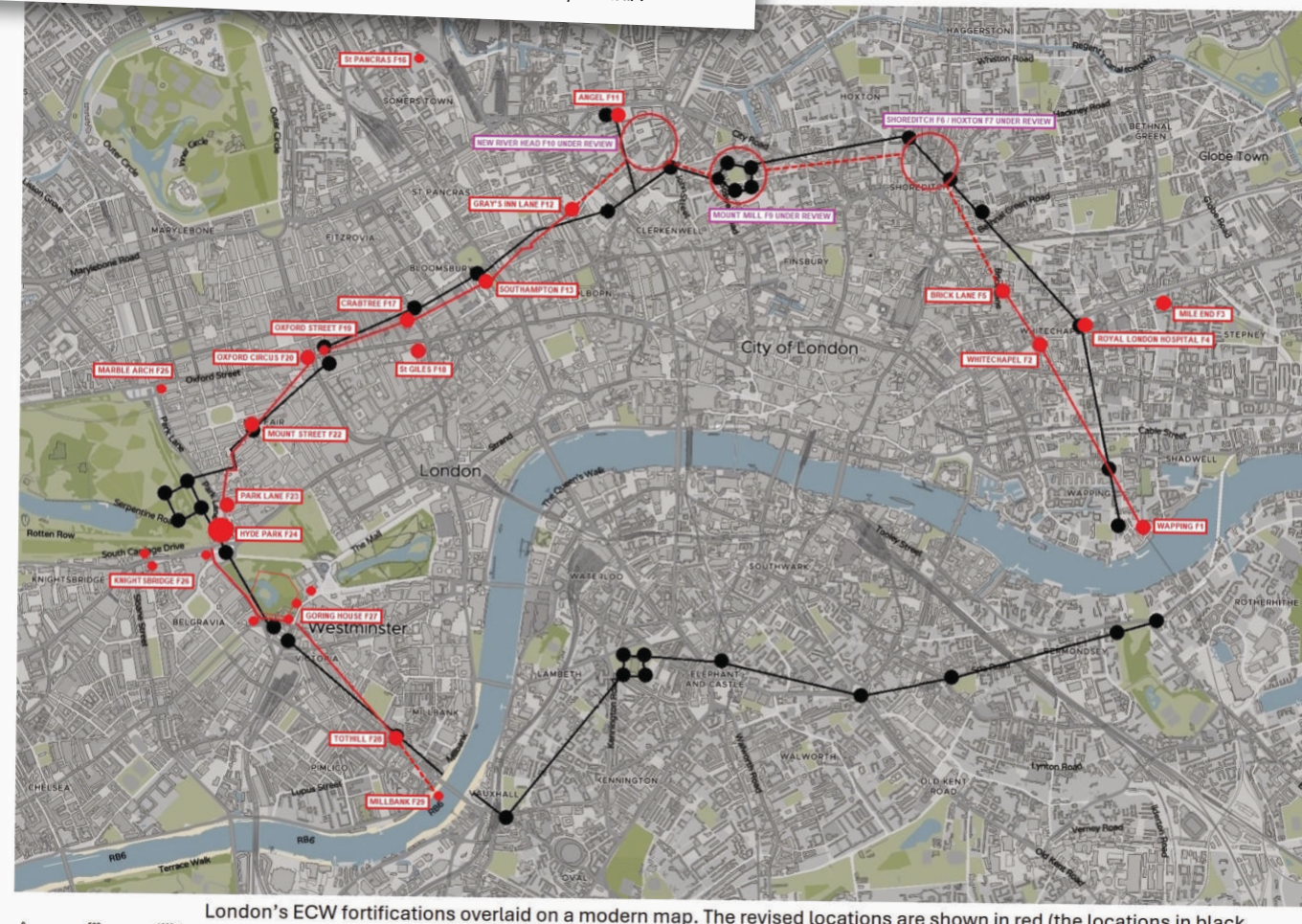
In addition, the project has demonstrated that the most well-known 'plan' of the defences – the one drawn by George Vertue in 1738 – was in fact a forgery, which calls into question any study using this plan as its basis.

FIG.11.4 St GEORGE'S FIELDS
LANDSCAPE of WAR



Much of the tinted land was damaged by the defences, forming part of the 'Landscape of War'

A plan of St George's Fields showing St George's Fort and the wider 'landscape of war'.



London's ECW fortifications overlaid on a modern map. The revised locations are shown in red (the locations in black represent the original layout). This shows the revised locations north of the Thames (those south of the Thames will be covered by a future study/report)

A map showing the revised locations of the defences north of the river Thames

Whilst the formal reports for each of the sections are being submitted to Historic England, to assist planners, archaeologists and historians, progress and findings are also being published in the *London Archaeologist* magazine. To date, the following have been published:

Wapping to Hoxton – *London Archaeologist*, volume 16, no. 3 (2021) [[www.doi.org/10.5284/1106857](https://doi.org/10.5284/1106857)]
Hoxton to Bloomsbury – *London Archaeologist*, volume 16, no. 11 (2023) [Not yet available online]
Bloomsbury to Park Lane – *London Archaeologist*, volume 17, no. 9 (2025) [Not yet available online]

These articles are well-illustrated, and for anyone with an interest in London's fortifications, or Civil War fortifications more generally, they are strongly recommended as they are perhaps the most comprehensive study of any urban defensive system constructed during the Civil Wars.

The author is grateful to Peter Mills for his contributions to this article, especially for the illustrations.

