

## Hicks Lane 'Shelter'

One cold, January day in 2019, I was driving along London Road when I reached its junction with Hicks Lane. I had never even heard of Hicks Lane until this day when I suddenly noticed out of the corner of my eye as I passed, an area of cleared shrubs and undergrowth which had revealed what I thought must be a Second World War pillbox. I quickly turned round and parked across the road in order to investigate.



I was amazed at what I saw. The building didn't look like any type of pillbox I knew of. It was low and circular, with a thick concrete roof and two entrances. There didn't seem to be proper loopholes built into it to fire from and its location didn't seem to make any sense. Hicks Lane, that can be seen disappearing off into the distance in the photo above, leads down to the brickyards, and I assumed it must be something to do with that. After all, they had the bricks to build it and may have designed it themselves for their own purposes.



I had a quick look on the internet and found The Pillbox Study Group website. They had no idea of this building's existence, and couldn't say what it was either, saying it did not appear on any database they had seen, including that of the Defence of Britain. Luckily, one member of the group

who I assume lived fairly locally, paid a visit to the building and managed to get inside. He took the following photographs:



The image above left shows the door just inside the entrance. This door shows signs of once having a smoke or blackout curtain fixed to the frame. I think the metal gate must be modern but it obviously wasn't locked as this person made his way inside.

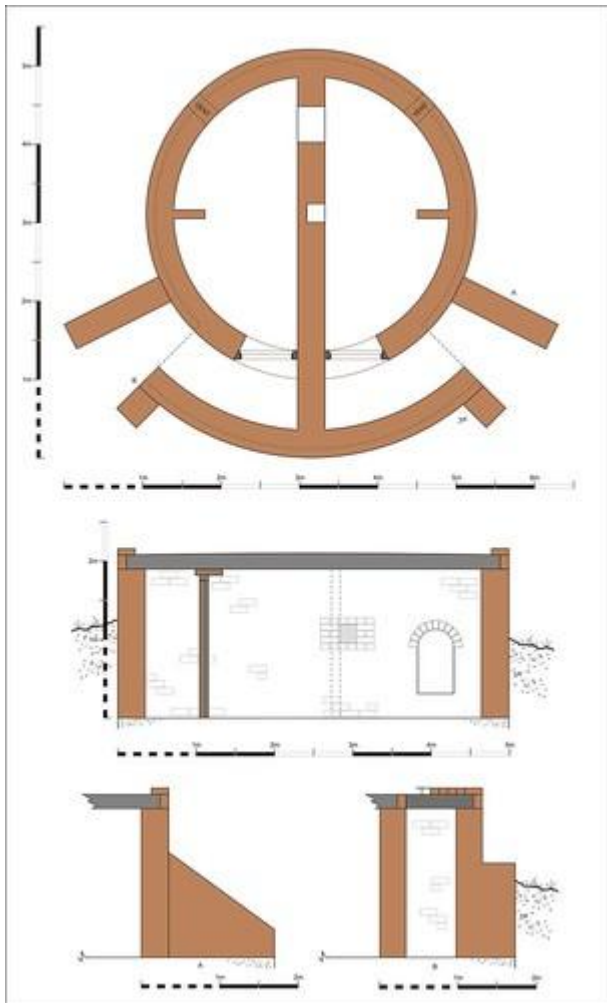


This photo on the right shows the curved outer wall on the left with a small opening at the top. This opening is too high and too small to be a loophole for firing through and could possibly have been used for ventilation purposes. The floor looks pretty cluttered with the sort of rubbish that is usually found in pillboxes. The roof is partly constructed from iron girders and bearing in mind the thickness of the concrete, it is pretty substantial.

The wall to the right is strange as it appears to divide the building into two parts. Ahead at the bottom of this unpainted wall we can just about make out an arched opening. You would need to bend down pretty low to gain access through this to other half of the building. On going through the doorway we find that the other half of the building has grey painted walls. There is also some kind of niche built into the dividing wall this side.



There is nothing else in this half of the room to identify its purpose either. The visit was invaluable however, as the visitor was able to gather enough information during his visit to produce the plan below, which he uploaded to The Pillbox Study Group website.



What a fascinating design, and totally different from just about anything else. I say 'just about', as I discovered later there are only two other examples of this type of WWII building in the country, both of them in Selby in Yorkshire. This makes the Hicks Lane building extremely rare, but I was not to know this until much later.

I decided to find out who actually owned this building. Someone must be looking after the area as the bushes had all be cut down. I contacted the City Council and a very nice lady responded saying it did not belong to the council, and she believed the land it stood on formed part of the Hampton housing estate.

I trawled the internet and found that the owner of the Hampton estate was a developer called O&H Land, also called O&H Hampton Ltd. I emailed them from their website asking them to confirm that the building did indeed belong to them, and asking what they intended to do about its long term future. If they were looking after the verges by cutting back the undergrowth, I thought this indicated they were a responsible land owner and could be relied upon to ensure that this once lost, now found, piece of Peterborough's wartime history would be preserved. Unfortunately I did not receive and answer. Just silence.

Months passed and the undergrowth took over again and I started to worry that the building would just suffer a cycle of damage caused by undermining of roots, followed by indifferent cutting back, frost damage and occasionally wanton vandalism. The problem was that the owners were not interested; in fact I believed they were deliberately refusing to engage because they didn't want to take responsibility.



So I decided I would get it listed (just like that), and then they would have to take notice and do something about it. As you can imagine, it's not easy to get a building listed, but anyone can try, you don't have to be the owner. I won't go through the whole process here, but suffice to say I downloaded all of the relevant documents and forms from Historic England and filled them in. You have to describe the building in detail, tell them why you think it deserves to be listed, what makes it special and how it fits in with the history of the area and country. They want photographs and plans and of course, they want to know who owns it. In turn, Historic England evaluate the information and carry out their own visit to decide if the application has enough merit to submit their own report to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I was amazed to hear back that they had submitted a report on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, but then began a wait of many more months, during which the undergrowth continued with its work.



In their Consultation Report to the Minister, Historic England decided to call the structure a 'Second World War Civil Defence Building – Fire Watcher's Post or Air Raid Shelter'. I was extremely pleased and surprised that they appeared to be very much on my side. Their report is reproduced below.

### Hicks Lane Shelter – **Consultation Report 845561**

Historic England (Designation) Consultation Report 01 October 2020

**Case Name:** Hicks Lane Air Raid Shelter

**Case Number:** 1464014

#### **Background**

Historic England has received an application requesting we assess a Second World War civil defence building standing at the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane in Peterborough for listing.

#### **Asset(s) under Assessment**

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

#### **Visits**

Date: None

Visit Type: No Visit / Data from other sources

#### **Annex 1**

The factual details are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

#### **Factual Details**

**Name: Former Second World War Civil Defence Building**

## **Location**

At the junction of Hicks Lane and London Road, Peterborough

County District Type Parish: City of Peterborough Unitary Authority Non Civil Parish

## **History**

Until the early C20 the British, as an island nation, generally felt safe from foreign attack. However, this illusion was shattered on 16 December 1914 when the battlecruisers of the German High Seas Command bombarded Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool, resulting in 137 deaths and 592 other casualties. Six days later a German seaplane made the first attempted air attack on Great Britain, with the two bombs falling harmlessly into the sea off Dover. A subsequent attack two days saw a German bomb land and detonate in a Dover garden. Combined with the regular bombing of Paris, it was becoming evident that there was now a clear indication that the German General Staff intended to use their air power to cause mass terror and the collapse of civilian morale.

The scale of the attacks escalated once the Germans embarked upon its Zeppelin bombing campaigns against London on the night of 31 May / 1 June 1915. Civilian damage and damage to property mounted sharply, causing a public outcry over the lack of defences and the provision of shelters. Although shelters were provided on a piecemeal basis in basements, the first purpose-built shelters, along with an effective air warning system, were only introduced after the first Gotha bomber raid against London on 13 June 1917, when 14 aircraft dropped 118 bombs, killing 162 people and injuring 426. Basements, cellars and crypts were also strengthened as communal shelters.

After the First World War civil defence was virtually abandoned until, with the rising threat of German air attacks, the Air Raid Precautions Act (ARP) of 1937 came into force on 1 January 1938, placing a statutory duty on local authorities to provide shelter and anti-gas precautions. The Munich crisis in August 1938 gave new impetus and increased central government control with the enactment of the Civil Defence Emergency Scheme 'Y' in the following month, which saw twelve Civil Defence regions established. The following December approval was given for the Anderson Shelter, the first Government-designed domestic air raid shelter, of which 2,300,878 had been issued by September 1940. The passing of the Civil Defence Act of 1939 also obliged local authorities to install domestic shelters, impose APR design considerations on new buildings and placed a statutory obligation on employers to provide ARP protection in the workplace.

At the outbreak of the Second World War most civil defence structures were housed in pre-existing buildings. Subsequently, specific designs for all types of civil defence buildings were issued by the Ministry of Home Security, with considerable variety in detail and materials occurring as local authorities adapted the official designs or drew up their own. Along with a wide variety of air raid shelters, civil defence structures included: ARP warden posts; control centres; first aid posts; gas decontamination centres; fire watchers' posts (Fire Guards); 'Jim Crow' posts (industrial bomb watchers); National Fire Service garages and fire stations; air raid warning posts and pillars; and ARP gas schools and rescue training sets. Probably the most common type of structure built was the 50 person public shelter of which some 16,747 were built in the Leeds area alone. Although the main German blitz on British cities ended in May 1941, civil defences were maintained as sporadic attacks continued. It was during this period that many of the adapted pre-war buildings were replaced with purpose-built structures, and eight deep tube shelters were completed in London.

In the summer of 1944 Hitler's 'vengeance weapons' began to target London and the south-east: the pilotless V1 flying bomb or doodlebug (from 13 June), and the V2 long range ballistic rocket (from 8 September). This brought about a demand for more Anderson and Morrison shelters, which were supplied by re-claiming shelters from less threatened areas like South Wales. These attacks finally came to an end on 29 March 1945 as the advancing Allied armies over-ran the rocket launch sites. The stand-down of the civil defence organisation followed soon afterwards, on 2 May 1945. The demolition of the vast majority of warden posts and the 50-person public shelters commenced virtually as soon as the local authorities obtained permission. Many stood on public roads, pavements and back lanes, forming hazards to vehicles and pedestrians. Where such structures

stood on local authority land, they were often retained as storerooms for parks and schools, changing rooms at sports grounds, and some were even converted into public conveniences.

At the outset of the Second World War in Peterborough the local authority embarked on a programme of civil defence construction. By the end of 1939 an organisation comprising ARP wardens, auxiliary nurses, WVS members, rescue and demolition workers and fire-fighters had been put in place while a network of Cleansing and Decontamination Centres, Warden's Posts, Ambulance Stations, First Aid Posts and Auxiliary Fire Stations had also been established. A programme of communal domestic shelters began with 65 fifty-person shelters in six locations to accommodate 3,250 people, soon increased to 107 shelters for 5,350 and then to 310 shelters for 9,000. Eventually there were shelter places for 30-35,000 people along with Emergency Feeding Centres for 6,000 in seven designated schools. Anderson Shelters had also been issued and a need for more was identified in Summer 1942. Examples of work place shelters included the three concrete shelters built at Farrow's Works in Fletton to house 500 employees, the 26 shelters constructed at Baker Perkins Westwood Works, some of which were dug into the railway embankment near Spital Bridge, and the old tunnels at the London Brick Works which were refurbished and brought back in to use as shelters.

However, despite the presence of factories producing important munitions, Peterborough did not suffer the intensity of bombing that was anticipated, with just eight bombing raids targeting the city, with most of it being over by mid-1941, with only sporadic raids in 1942. One surviving civil defence building constructed in Peterborough during the Second World War is a brick-built shelter which stands on the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane. Although its semi-sunken form, reinforced concrete roof and blast wall are all indicative of a structure built to resist an incendiary bomb, its exact function is unknown. Its sunken form, which demanded increased man power and expenditure over and above covered trench shelters and surface shelters, indicates that use as a domestic air raid shelter was probably unlikely, while its size and internal sub-division also discounts any probable role as a Home Guard Post. However, as the surrounding area was dominated by brick works at the outset of the War, this suggests a possible use as a fire watchers post, built to warn of the approach of German bombers. Such posts were generally sited on commercial or industrial premises, and usually manned by employees. However, given its form, a possible role as an air raid shelter cannot be discounted.

### **Details**

Former Second World War civil defence building, probably a fire watchers' post or air raid shelter.

**MATERIALS:** of brick with a reinforced-concrete slab roof.

**PLAN:** the building is circular-on-plan with a segmental blast wall on the north side.

**EXTERIOR:** the building is semi-sunken below the level of the surrounding ground surface and embanked with earth. On its north side there are two baffled doorways (one probably an entrance and the other an emergency exit) protected by a segmental blast wall supported by angled buttresses. The walling of the shelter is predominantly blind except for two horizontal observation slits placed immediately below the roof line on the south-east and south-west sides. The reinforced concrete roof now bears slight scarring around its circumference.

**INTERIOR:** the interior is divided in half into two semi-circular compartments by a brick wall which also supports the roof. The west side of the wall contains a smoke-blackened niche which was probably used to house a candle holder. At the south end of the wall there is a round-headed emergency exit which allowed the occupants of one chamber to move to the other should one of the entrances become blocked. When in use it would have been enclosed by weakly-bonded brickwork which was designed to be easily broken down, but this brickwork is now missing. Dark inclined witness marks on the walls to either side of the doorways may indicate that the shelter was possibly equipped with roll-down anti-gas curtains.

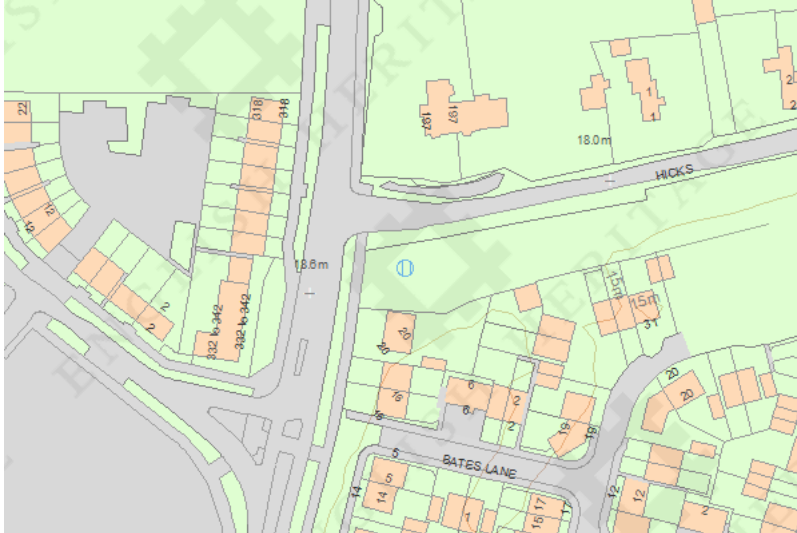
## Selected Sources

### Books and journals

Osborne, Mike, *Defending Cambridgeshire: The Military Landscape from Prehistory to Present*, (2013), 158-161

## Map

National Grid Reference: TL1883196117



© Crown Copyright and database right 2015. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

I hadn't forgotten about my application, but having heard nothing for more than six months did not give me much confidence. Then, on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021, I received the email below from the Listing Coordinator at Historic England.

### Hicks Lane Shelter - **Email from Historic England**

16th April 2021

Dear David Gray,

**Former Second World War Civil Defence Building, Junction of Hicks Lane and London Road, Peterborough - Awarded Listed Building Status**  
**List Entry Number: 1470530**

Following your application to add the above building to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, we have now considered all the representations made and completed our assessment of the building. I am delighted to inform you that having considered our recommendation, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has decided to add Former Second World War Civil Defence Building to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The building is now listed at Grade II.

The List entry for this building, together with a map, has now been published on the National Heritage List for England, and will be available for public access from tomorrow.

The local planning authority will now be preparing the statutory notices required under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.

Please be aware that the listing of the building took effect on the day that the List entry was published on the National Heritage List for England.

As of 25 June 2013, the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act (ERRA) has enabled a number of heritage reforms, including an amendment to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that provides two potential ways to be more precise about what is listed. Whether or not the new provisions have been invoked with regard to this building is explained in the Advice Report. A List entry that makes use of these provisions will clarify what attached and curtilage structures are excluded from the listing and/or which interior features definitively lack special interest; however, owners and managers should be aware that other planning and development management constraints might apply to these structures, and should clarify these with the Local Planning Authority. Further information is available on our website at

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/listed-buildings/listing-and-the-erra/>

If you consider that this decision has been wrongly made you may contact the DCMS within 28 days of the date of this letter to request that the Secretary of State review the decision. An example of a decision made wrongly would be where there was a factual error or an irregularity in the process which affected the outcome. You may also ask the Secretary of State to review the decision if you have any significant evidence relating to the special architectural or historic interest of the building which was not previously considered. Further details of the review criteria and process and how to request a review are contained in the annex to this letter.

**Our Public Engagement Manager may like to work with you on communications for the listing of this building. Please do not send out any separate communication announcing the listing prior to the publication of a Historic England press release.**

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance. More information can also be found on our website at <https://historicengland.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely

**Julie Aldous BA (Hons)**  
**Listing Coordinator (East)**

Historic England  
24 Brooklands Avenue  
Cambridge  
CB2 8BU

I couldn't believe it! My little shelter had been listed, and declared a "Unique and rare surviving example". The Notification Report explaining their reasoning and confirming the Listing is below.

**Hicks Lane Shelter – Notification Report**

Historic England Advice Report 06 April 2021



**Case Name: Hicks Lane Air Raid Shelter**  
**Case Number: 1464014**

### **Background**

Historic England has received an application requesting we assess a Second World War civil defence building standing at the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane in Peterborough for listing.

### **Asset(s) under Assessment**

Facts about the asset (s) can be found in the Annex(es ) to this report.

Annex List Entry Number Name Heritage Category HE

Recommendation

1 1470530 Former Second

World War Civil

Defence Building

Listing Add to List

### **Visits**

Date: None

Visit Type: No Visit / Data from other sources

### **Context**

The civil defence building standing on the corner of Hicks Lane and London Road in Peterborough is not subject to a current planning application and does not stand in a conservation area.

### **Assessment**

#### **CONSULTATION**

The owner, the applicant, the local planning authority and the Historic Environment Record were invited to comment on the factual details of the case as part of the consultation process . Responses, for which Historic England is grateful, were received from the applicant and the local planning authority. The applicant stated that they had no further comments while the local planning authority supported the listing of the building with regard to it s unique design and survival. No other responses were received.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The statutory criteria for listing are the special architectural and historic interest of a building as set out in the Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings (DCMS, November 2018). To be of special architectural interest a building must be of importance in its architectural design, decoration or craftsmanship, and significant plan forms may also have special interest; to be of special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspect s of the nation's social, economic, cultural, or military history. There should normally be some quality of interest in the physical fabric of the building itself to justify the statutory protection afforded by listing. Before 1700 all buildings that contain a significant proportion of their original fabric are listed, from 1700 to 1850 most buildings are listed, and after 1850 progressively greater selection is necessary . Additional guidance relevant to civil defence building and air raid shelters is set out in Historic England's Listing Selection Guide for Military Structures (December 2017). Here it states that discretion is required over Second World War shelters, which in general are fairly common. Determinant factors in an assessment will include rarity of type; relationship to other listed buildings; and significance for overall understanding of the development of the category.

The recognition and appreciation of military buildings associated with Civil Defence and Air Raid Precautions in England during the Second World War, specifically those designed to protect the civilian population from enemy air, naval and artillery assault, whether by high-explosive, incendiary,

chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons, has often been overlooked in favour of structures associated with home defence, such as anti-aircraft batteries, pillboxes and bombing decoys. Nonetheless, these buildings played a significant role in our national story and all surviving examples now stand as stark reminders that no one was immune from enemy attack.

Initial interest in the Second World War civil defence building standing at the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane in Peterborough, probably built as a fire watchers' post or an air raid shelter associated with the surrounding brick works, is derived from the fact that it survives as an evocative witness to civil defence provision in England during one of the major conflicts of the C20. Although Second World War civilian shelters associated with industrial sites still survive throughout the country, albeit in varying degrees of intactness, the majority were generally mass-produced rectangular or sub-rectangular structures of a standard design. The shelter being assessed here, however, is significantly more sophisticated, with its circular design being a unique and rare surviving example, especially as the two circular shelters built to serve the workforce at Empire Mills, Selby, North Yorkshire, are the only other examples known to Historic England. In addition, its semi-sunken form, which demanded increased man power and expenditure over and above covered trench and surface shelters, further illustrates how the neighbouring brick work owners appreciated the need for substantial air raid precautions for this reserved occupation.

Despite some spalling to the brickwork, particularly to the course immediately below the concrete roof, the exterior appears to be relatively complete, including its double-blast baffled entrances and observation/ventilation slits. Internally, however, while there are indications of previous fittings, such as the dark inclined witness marks visible on the walls to either side of the door, which are indicative of a roll-down anti-gas curtain, these do not survive. However, this is to be expected, as most timber would have been robbed late in the war or immediately post-war, when firewood was in short supply. It is also likely that seating was never installed, particularly as long air raids were not anticipated, with workers being expected to stand for the duration. While its brick walls and reinforced concrete roof are utilitarian in appearance, the shelter embodies historic and technical values illustrating the all-encompassing nature of total warfare, and the experience of the civilian during one of the major conflicts of the C20.

Overall, on the basis of current Historic England knowledge, the former fire watcher's post or air raid shelter standing at the corner of Hicks Lane and London Road, Peterborough, is of special interest in a national context for its rare and unique circular design which still survives relatively well. As such, and as a representative example of civil defence provision in England during the Second World War, it is recommended for listing at Grade II.

In recommending the extent of designation, we have considered whether powers of exclusion under s1 (5A) of the 1990 Act are appropriate and consider that they are not.

#### **CONCLUSION**

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are fulfilled. The Second World War Civil Defence building standing at the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane in Peterborough should therefore be listed at Grade II.

#### **REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION**

The Second World War Civil Defence building standing at the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane in Peterborough, probably a fire watchers' post or air raid shelter associated with the neighbouring brickworks, is recommended for listing at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

Architectural interest:

- \* for its unusual and rare circular design of which only three examples are known to exist in England;

Historic interest:

- \* although it has a utilitarian appearance, it embodies historic and technical values illustrating the all-encompassing nature of total warfare and the experience of the civilian in one of the major conflicts of the C20;

- \* as a representative example of civil defence provision in England during the Second World War.

**Countersigning comments:**

Agree. The former fire watchers' post or air raid shelter at the junction of Hicks Lane and London Road, is of a rare circular design which survives well. It represents civil defence provision in England during the Second World War and is recommended for listing at Grade II. Caroline Skinner 19 February 2021.

**Annex 1****List Entry****List Entry Summary**

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest .

**Name:** Former Second World War Civil Defence Building

**List Entry Number:** 1470530

**Location**

Junction of Hicks Lane and London Road, Peterborough, PE7 0LD. The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County District District Type Parish: City of Peterborough Unitary Authority Non Civil Parish

**National Park:** Not applicable to this List entry.

**Grade:** II

**Date first listed:**

**Date of most recent amendment:**

**Legacy System Information**

This section only relates to older records, created before the introduction of the National Heritage List for England in 2011.

**Legacy System:** Not applicable to this List entry.

**Legacy Number:** Not applicable to this List entry.

**Asset Groupings**

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

**List Entry Description****Summary of Building**

Former Second World War civil defence building, probably a fire watchers ' post or air raid shelter, built to serve the neighbouring brickworks.

**Reasons for Designation**

The Second World War Civil Defence building standing at the corner of London Road and Hicks Lane in Peterborough, probably a fire watchers' post or air raid shelter associated with the neighbouring brickworks, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

**Architectural interest:**

\* for its unusual and rare circular design of which only three examples are known to exist in England; Historic interest:

\* although it has a utilitarian appearance, it embodies historic and technical values illustrating the all-encompassing nature of total warfare and the experience of the civilian in one of the major conflicts of the C20;

\* as a representative example of civil defence provision in England during the Second World War.

Historic England Website Official List Entry: [Former Second World War Civil Defence Building , Non Civil Parish - 1470530 | Historic England](#)

I contacted Historic England's Public Relations Engagement Manager as I was desperate to notify the local press about this amazing event, but they wanted to coordinate anything I did with their own announcement which they were to make in the national press first. I waited, but heard nothing from them so I emailed again. I got the answer back that they do not make any announcements in the

press regarding new Listings until they had contacted the building's owner and advised them of the facts. Would you believe it, they had been trying to get in touch with the owners for some time but had not received any response back from them. I was so disappointed, but at least I had given the building some sort of protection and I can only drive by occasionally to check that it is still there.

© David Gray 2025