



TELEGRAPH HILL – AN EARLY WARNING STATION

The flat-topped Telegraph Hill at 184 metres (just over 600 feet above sea level) is the highest point of Hertfordshire, so named from its use as a signalling station during the early years of the Napoleonic Wars when England was regularly threatened with invasion by France.

The hill, then much more open, was one of a chain of similarly open sites forming a chain linking Admiralty headquarters in London with a naval base at Great Yarmouth. A team of two or three former seaman no longer fit for active service were stationed in a hut from where they could operate lever-controlled semaphore signalling arms mounted on its roof. The semaphore arms were later replaced by an all-weather heliographic system with shutters exposing a light source.

Its exact position is probably the small rectangular patch at TL 117288 lying adjacent to the Icknield Way. Similar sites at suitable intervals could transmit a message across the 100 miles distance in just a few minutes.

Another relic of this efficient (for its time) warning system is preserved in the name 'Telegraph Road', part of a former drovers' road at Icklingham in Suffolk where a signalling hut once stood – and which also lies on our Icknield Way Path.

Tony Northwood, Icknield Way News Autumn 2008