
Military Aviation

In the area around Bluntisham

Bill Wade - 15 February 2020

The area around the Parish of Bluntisham has a rich and very varied aviation history dating back over 100 years from the opening of Wyton as a Royal Flying Corps airfield in 1916, later becoming RAF Wyton when the Royal Air Force was formed in 1918.



Development of numerous other airfields followed with numbers peaking during the 1939-45 war. RAF Wyton launched the first operational sortie of WW2 when a Blenheim bomber of No 139 Sqn carried out a photo recce flight over the German coast on 3rd September 1939.

Right - Blenheim bombers at Raf Wyton

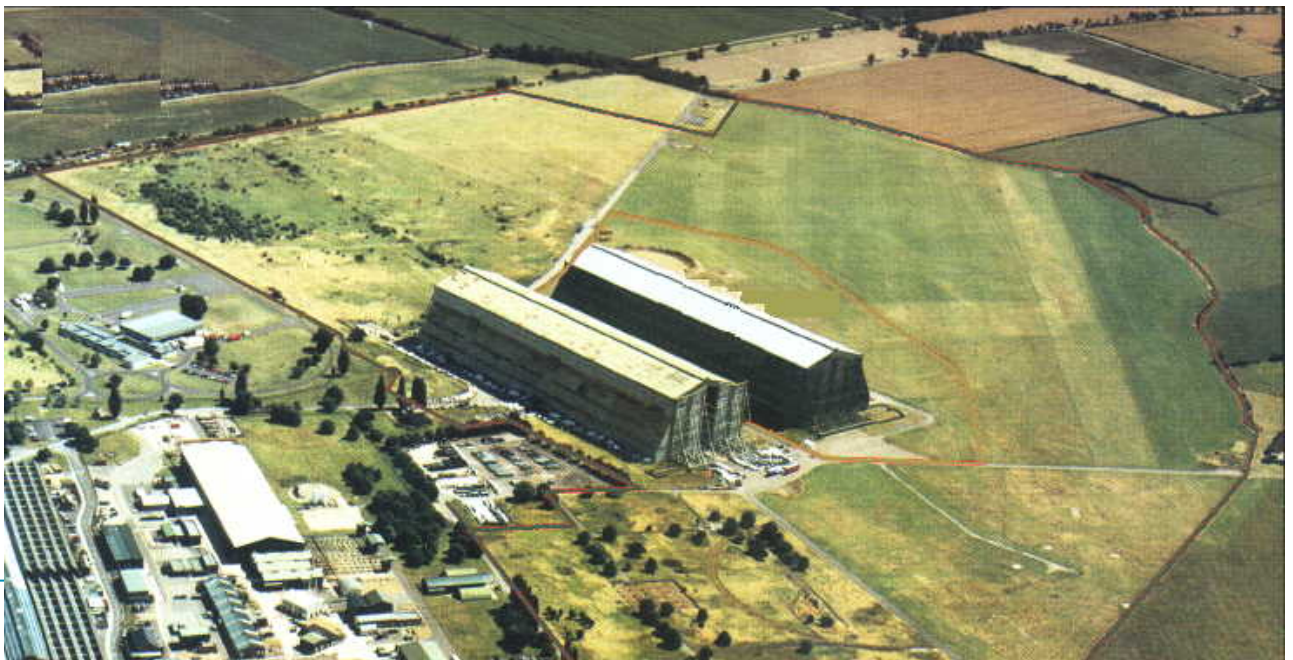


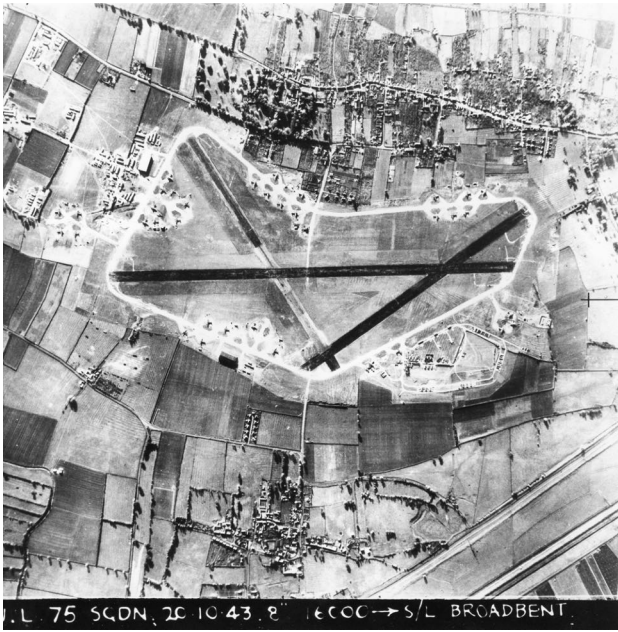


From August 1942 the famous Pathfinder force operated from several airfields around Bluntisham. RAF Wyton was home to No 83 Sqn of the Pathfinders where they flew in Avro Lancaster's.

Left - No 83 Sqn Avro Lancaster

At Cardington, approximately 22 miles southwest of Bluntisham, an airfield was developed by Short Brothers in 1915 with the building of two very large hangars and the building of two rigid airships the R1 and the R32. When the R101 development ended in disaster, crashing on its maiden flight in 1930, the development was abandoned. The site was later used for Balloon training and development of civil airships. In the 1980s, Airship Industries initially building an airship with a view to supplying the US Military. In 2016 a company called Hybrid Air Vehicles started development of the Airliner 10 airship for civil or military use. The other hangar is now used as a film set and stadium tour rehearsals. This area of Bedford is known as Shortstown.





At Mepal airfield, the THOR intermediate range ballistic missile system, was based here from July 1959 until July 1963 during a time of heightened tension with the USSR

Left - aerial view of RAF Mepal.

RAF Molesworth, approximately 15 miles west of the Bluntisham opened in 1917. It was active throughout WW2 and later gained prominence with the stationing of ground launched cruise missiles between December 1986 and October 1988.



Right - RAF Molesworth

Many of the local airfields ceased operational use in the 1990s, whilst some stations themselves remain open in new roles. The loss of our two local airfields with their flightpaths over the village, in the case of RAF Wyton and just south of the village in the case of RAF Alconbury, has resulted in a much reduced volume of air traffic. However we are lucky to be on a favoured north/south route used by many transiting aircraft of the Battle of Britain Memorial flight operating from RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire.



There are also a number of local, privately owned aircraft including Spitfires, which can be seen and heard manoeuvring overhead. In the past we also had regular training aircraft such as Tornado, Tucano and Hawk flying low level cross country routes using our water towers as a waypoint on their route. This activity has also reduced with the consolidation and relocation of flying training.

We also , occasionally, have aircraft from RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath overhead, especially when the wind is from an Easterly direction. Other activity includes the Air Ambulance based at RAF Wyton, numerous microlight aircraft and during clam periods in early mornings and evenings hot air balloons. Specialised aircraft such as RAF C130 Hercules and Chinook can also be seen using the River Ouse for low level training.

Over the years many residents of Bluntisham and the local area have worked for the Armed forces especially the RAF, MOD and USAF both as service and civilian personnel. Unfortunately there is not much information known about these personnel before the late 1970s but since then they are known to have served in the UK and throughout the world including the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and the Falkland Islands.

A little further afield The Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden airfield near Biggleswade and the Imperial War Museum at Duxford airfield offer superb collections of aircraft covering the period from around 1900 until present day.

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Bluntisham is full of serving and EX members of the armed forces and is looking to record short biographies of these people as part of the project. If you are interested in taking part for either yourself or a relative with a link to the village please email us at info@bhpc.org.uk and we will make contact - thank you

