

BOMBER COUNTY



AVIATION RESOURCE

East Lindsey Aviation History Trail (North)

The trail begins at Horncastle and the route has been carefully planned so as to end there too.

Route details between the different RAF bases.

Section 1

Horncastle to RAF Ludford Magna

Depart from Horncastle Market place, and join the A158, heading towards Lincoln. At the junction with the B1225, turn RIGHT, and take the B1225 until you reach the crossroads with the A631. At this junction, turn RIGHT, and enter the village of Ludford Magna. The accommodation site for the airfield was actually situated at the rear of Ludford Parva.

The somewhat unusual names come from Latin - magnus = large, parvus = small. In the centre of Ludford, on the left hand side of the road near the church, there is a memorial to No.101 Squadron, RAF who flew for most of the war from here. This memorial was erected in 1978, and was dedicated on July 16th of that year. Also serving as a reminder to those of the squadron who died during the war is a book of remembrance, which is housed in the parish church.

Section 2

RAF Ludford Magna to RAF Kelstern

From Ludford Magna, continue to follow the A631 towards Grimsby. Take the second turning on the LEFT and follow this road. When you arrive at the crossroads, turn LEFT and continue to the T junction, past several of the former airfield buildings. To your left, you will see the memorial to No.625 Squadron RAF, which has served as a template for several other memorials across the country. If you look to your left at this point, you will be looking across the airfield.

Section 3

RAF Kelstern to RAF Binbrook

At the junction by the memorial, take the LEFT road. Follow the road until you reach another T junction, where you should turn RIGHT, and then RIGHT again at the next T junction. The road should be signposted for Binbrook, and you should continue along this road until you reach the village. At the junction in the village, go straight across, and follow this road towards Thoresway. You will go through a series of cuttings, alternating with raised sections of road, and at this point, if you look to the right, you may catch a glimpse of RAF Binbrook. Continue along to the crossroads, and turn RIGHT, towards Croxby and Beelsby.

Along this road, you may also catch sight of the airfield to your right. At the next crossroads, turn RIGHT, and head into Thorganby. This road passes the northern end of the main runway.

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Section 4

RAF Binbrook to RAF Waltham

At the Y junction in Thorganby, turn RIGHT, and then take the LEFT turn for East Ravendale (the B1203). Follow the road along through East Ravendale, and at the crossroads with the B1431, go straight over. You will go through Brigsley before arriving in Waltham.

At the major junction in Waltham, turn RIGHT and follow signs towards the A16. As you travel along this road, to your left are the remains of the Technical and Domestic sites of RAF Waltham. As you join the A16, turn LEFT, and head towards Grimsby. This section of road crosses the airfield, and you will see a lay-by on your Left hand side, close to one of the former hangars. Pull in here, and spend a few moments examining the memorial to No.100 Squadron.

Section 5

RAF Waltham to RAF North Coates

From the No.100 Squadron memorial, retrace your route along the A16 towards Boston, until you come to a LEFT turning signposted for Tetney. Follow this road into Tetney, and at the junction in the village, go RIGHT, and at the junction by the church, turn RIGHT again. At the end of this short road is a junction with a larger road (the A1031), and you should turn RIGHT onto this road, heading towards North Coates. When you are just outside the village on the A1031, turn LEFT to go into North Coates itself, and follow the road until you see a turning to the RIGHT, which will take you up to the main gates.

Should this route not be accessible, pause awhile at the church, and admire the memorial to those who died at RAF North Coates, which is located there. Retrace your way back to the A1031, and at the junction, turn LEFT and continue until you come to a sharp right hand bend in the road. Just around this bend is a small road to the LEFT. Follow this, and at the fork in the road, turn LEFT; at the end of this road, you will be looking out across the airfield.

Under no circumstances should you attempt to enter the airfield, which is now privately owned, without the express permission of the new owner.

As has already been mentioned, a memorial is situated in the church at North Coates, commemorating those who died whilst stationed at the airfield.

Section 6

RAF North Coates to RAF Donna Nook

From North Coates, retrace your route to the A1031, and drive in the direction of North Somercotes. When you arrive in the village, take the LEFT turn opposite the church, and follow this road right to the end. You will be in the Stonebridge car park, and it is from here that viewing of the RAF in action on the firing ranges is recommended. To view the technical site of RAF Donna Nook, from the car park, turn LEFT onto the road, and follow it along. The fifth turning on your LEFT hand side will lead you to the RAF station.

Section 7

RAF Donna Nook to RAF Manby

Return to North Somercotes village, and re join the A1031. Continue along until you come to the junction with the B1200 (signposted to Louth). Turn RIGHT onto this road, and follow it until you come to the crossroads in Manby village. Go STRAIGHT AHEAD at the crossroads, and to your left hand side, you will see the airfield.

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Section 8

RAF Manby to RAF Strubby

Continue along the B1200, heading towards Louth, and at the junction with the A157, turn LEFT onto this road. Continue along the A157 through the villages of Legbourne, South Reston and Withern. Just outside of Withern is a sharp right hand bend in the road. Immediately after this, on your right hand side, you will begin to see the remains of the former RAF Strubby.

Section 9

RAF Strubby to Horncastle

From Strubby village, continue along the A157 to the junction at Maltby Le Marsh. Turn RIGHT onto the A 1104, and follow this road through the historic market town of Alford (famous for its craft fairs), and at Ulceby Cross roundabout, take the A16 towards Boston. At the next roundabout (Partney), take the A158 and follow signs to Horncastle.

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RAF base information.

RAF Ludford Magna

RAF Ludford Magna was opened in June 1943, having been constructed in the unbelievable time of just ninety days. Such were the pressures on Bomber Command at that time, that they required new bases virtually overnight (compare this gestation period with that of nearby RAF Binbrook, which was not fully completed with concrete runways until May 1943 - some four years after it was begun).

The technical site and runways were situated to the south of the A631, in Ludford Magna, whence the airfield derives its name, but the living accommodation was to be found to the north of the road, in the village of Ludford Parva.

RAF Kelstern

The site of RAF Kelstern has been connected with aviation since the days of the first World War, when it was used as an emergency landing ground by the Home Defence Squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps. This association lasted until just after the War, when the fledgling RAF decided to terminate their usage of the site, which was then returned to agriculture. Kelstern remained under the plough until the winter of 1942 - 43, when Bomber Command's rapid expansion necessitated the acquisition of more airfields.

In September 1943, RAF Kelstern opened, and it received its first operational unit on October 1st when No.625 Squadron, RAF formed there.

RAF Binbrook

Work began on RAF Binbrook in the late 1930s, but the station was not ready for use at the outbreak of hostilities. It finally opened in June 1940, although it was still not complete. The next month saw its first inhabitants, No.12 and No.142 Squadrons, arrive with their Fairey Battles. Both squadrons had seen service in France before and during the German invasion. On August 13th of that year, both squadrons departed for RAF Eastchurch in Kent in order to allow building work to be completed, and they returned in September.

November 1940 saw No.12 Squadron reequip with Vickers Wellingtons, and they flew their first raid against Emden on April 10th 1941. Another new shape was temporarily to be seen on the airfield in September of that year, when the Lysander's of No.1 Group Target Towing Flight arrived for air to air firing practice over the North Sea.

RAF Waltham

Also known as Grimsby, RAF Waltham was originally Grimsby's municipal airfield, hosting a civilian flying club. With hostilities apparently imminent, in June 1938, the airfield became host to No.25 Elementary & Reserve Flying Training Squadron, flying Magister's, Hinds and Tiger Moths. At the outbreak of war in September 1939, the unit disbanded, and the site was requisitioned for RAF use.

Early in 1940, work began on construction of concrete runways suitable for use by the new generation of RAF heavy bombers. Waltham officially reopened in November 1941, and was home to No.142 Squadron, who flew their Wellingtons from here until December 1942. Barely had No.142 Squadron left, when No.100 Squadron began to arrive with their Lancaster's. Waltham was to remain their base until close to the end of the war.

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RAF North Coates

North Coates (also called North Cotes) was originally called North Coates Fitties when it opened in 1918 as a base for No.404 Flight of No.248 Squadron, who were flying Shorts 225s on coastal patrol. The unit disbanded in March 1919, and the airstrip was discarded in June that year. In 1927, the Air Ministry purchased 88 acres of land on a site which covered the former landing ground for bomber squadron armament practice, and from 1927 until 1935, RAF North Coates was open only in the summer for Armament Practice Camps.

In 1935, the station became home to No.2 Armament Training Camp, and this was joined in 1936 by the Air Observers School. The year 1937 saw the merger of these two units into No.2 Air Armament School, which was thus named until March 1938, when it was retitled No. 1 Air Observers School. This unit was disbanded in September 1939, and its place was taken by No.1 Ground Defence School and 2 Recruit Training Pool, who stayed until 1941.

RNAS Donna Nook

Late in 1940, an airfield was opened at Donna Nook to act as a relief landing ground for RAF North Coates, and although no units were permanently based here, it did provide an overspill area when that airfield became too crowded. The airfield closed to flying in 1945. A gunnery and bombing range was opened on this site in 1926, and remained open until 1950, when firing was transferred to Theddlethorpe, further south along the coast. The range was reactivated in December 1973, when complaints from residents at Theddlethorpe caused the MOD to close that range. It was at Theddlethorpe that the first firing in the U.K. of a Hispano Suiza 20 mm cannon took place in December 1939.

RAF Manby

Work began on the construction of RAF Manby in 1936, and the station was planned as a typical pre war base, with great attention paid to the architecture of the barrack blocks and offices. There was one deviation from the standard pattern, however, as Manby only had two paved runways, instead of the more usual three. At the same time as the Technical and Domestic sites were being built, work began on the erection of a huge steel windbreak, 50ft high and 1500ft long to enable aircraft to operate in the stiff winds that blew across the airfield off the North Sea.

The screen was completed in April 1937, but it saw little use; in February 1938, work began on dismantling it, and it was transported to Rolleston Camp in Wiltshire for re erection. The airfield was officially opened in August 1938 as No.1 Air Armament School, but in July 1944, it was renamed the Empire Central Armaments School, and in November that year, it became the Empire Armaments School.

RAF Strubby

RAF Strubby opened on April 15th, 1944 as a Coastal Command station, with a standard bomber airfield layout of three runways and widely dispersed accommodation. The first resident unit was No.280 Squadron, flying lifeboat - equipped Vickers Warwicks on Air Sea Rescue duties. Two months later, they were joined by No.144 and No.404 Squadrons, flying Beaufighter's, who moved in to form the Strubby Strike Wing, operating against enemy shipping near the Dutch / German coast.

No.144 and No.404 Squadrons stayed until September 1944, when they left to re equip with Mosquitoes and formed the Banff Strike Wing, in the company of No.143 Squadron from RAF North Coates. In the same month, No.208 Squadron departed to RAF Langham, in Norfolk, leaving the airfield for No.619 Squadron to inherit for their Lancaster's.