

# BOMBER COUNTY



## AVIATION RESOURCE

## East Lindsey Aviation History Trail (South)

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

### Route details between the different RAF bases.

#### Section 1

##### *Boston to RAF Coningsby*

From Boston, follow signs for the A17 towards Sleaford. At Hubberts Bridge Crossroads (next to a railway signal box, with markers indicating the distance to go) turn RIGHT and follow the sign posts for Coningsby. This road is the B1192, and you will need to follow it to New York - no joke, this one was here before the American one! At the crossroads in New York, just before the chapel on the left hand side, turn LEFT and follow the road along, round through the sharp right hand bend at Dogdyke, until you pass the RAF fuel dump on your left hand side.

The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight visitors' car park is on the LEFT.

N.B. If you do not wish to visit the Flight but would rather spend a few minutes watching the more modern (and noisy) Typhoons, Harriers and Tornados, there are ample places to park up either in the spotter's car park on the Dogdyke road, in the car park for the BBMF visitor centre and a few outside the fence by the front of the BBMF hangar. However, please do NOT block the large emergency gates in the fence, as they are to be kept clear at all times. Also, please try to avoid parking on the road, as it creates a dangerous obstruction to other users of the narrow roads around the base.

#### Section 2

##### *RAF Coningsby to RAF Woodhall Spa*

Turning LEFT out of the BBMF car park, head into Coningsby village, and turn RIGHT at the crossroads (signs to Horncastle). Just out of the village, turn LEFT onto the road to Kirkby on Bain and Tattershall Thorpe. Follow the signs for Tattershall Thorpe. The turning is a concealed T-junction, with a small flat-roofed building on the right hand side (this was the home of No. 705 Mobile Radar Bomb Scoring Signals Unit, who tracked the accuracy of V force practice bombing but the installation now houses RAF Coningsby's guard dog section). Turn LEFT here, and at the T-junction at the end of the road, turn RIGHT. A little further on, through the village, you will find the Blue Bell pub on the left hand side of the road.

This contains some aviation memorabilia from the former RAF Woodhall Spa airfield. Approximately half a mile further along the road you will see the Thorpe Camp Museum - dedicated to the history of RAF Woodhall Spa, occupying the former domestic site of this station. This delightful small museum is well maintained and boasts a Bristol Bloodhound and an EE Lightning as outside exhibits.

The Lightning is the one used by Airfix as a pattern for its model of that mark. It was saved from the former Bomber County Aviation Museum when it closed several years ago. As you continue from the museum along the road (the B1192) you will pass along a straight tree-lined stretch of road - to the right of the road, you are looking out over the remains of RAF Woodhall Spa (the hangars that you can see are still in use by the RAF, and house the servicing unit for the RB199 engines as used by the Tornados at Coningsby). Continue on into Woodhall Spa itself and at the crossroads, turn RIGHT.

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It is recommended that you find a parking space either in the small car park on the right hand side or along the roadside itself here, and walk over to the impressive No. 617 Squadron memorial garden. The memorial itself was unveiled in 1982, and serves as a lasting reminder of the squadron, who were based here from January 1944 to June 1945, and adopted the Petwood Hotel in the village as their Officers' Mess. To visit the Petwood Hotel, go back to the roundabout in the centre of the village and take the 3rd exit (marked Bucknall, Stixwold & Bardney) and continue for approximately ¾ mile. The hotel entrance is on your right hand side.

Continuing on your way from the 617 Squadron memorial, carry on along the road away from the roundabout, and take the FOURTH turning on the RIGHT (it should be signposted for KIRKBY ON BAIN), and follow the road along for approximately 1 mile, and look carefully for a small track leading off to the RIGHT with a car park at the end. Parking here, you will be able to follow the firebreaks in the woodland until you come across signs of the former airfield. Most of RAF Woodhall Spa has been reclaimed for agriculture or mineral extraction, but this section is still mainly untouched.

### Section 3

#### *RAF Woodhall Spa to RAF East Kirkby*

On leaving the car park at Ostler's Plantation (RAF Woodhall Spa), turn RIGHT, and continue into Kirkby on Bain. At the fork in the road, go LEFT, and follow signs for Haltham. This route will take you across the Horncastle Canal, and will bring you out onto the A153 next to a garage. Turn RIGHT here, and drive on until you reach the roundabout at Tumbly, where you should turn LEFT (first exit) and go along the A155 towards Spilsby. As you drive along, you will pass the Red Lion at Revesby and the deer park associated with Revesby Manor.

As you drive along, you will pass the Red Lion at Revesby and the deer park associated with Revesby Manor. Approximately 3 Miles further along, you will come to the village of East Kirkby, with its famous derelict windmill. The airfield entrance is about mile through the village, on the right hand side. As you enter the site of the museum, which now occupies part of the airfield, you will see a memorial to No. 57 and No. 630 Squadrons who served her between 1943 and 1945. The museum boasts one of only 4 preserved Lancaster's in the country - the other three being at RAF Coningsby, the Imperial War Museum at Duxford and the RAF museum at Hendon.

### Section 4

#### *RAF East Kirkby to RAF Spilsby*

On leaving the museum at East Kirkby, turn RIGHT onto the A155 again - CAUTION this road is very busy, and it may take a few minutes to get across, please be a patient driver rather than a hospital in-patient! Continue along the A155 to its junction with the A16 at Keal Hill, and turn LEFT onto the A16, going up the hill. You will notice that you are apparently miles above the rest of Lincolnshire, which stretches away on three sides (on a clear day, it is possible to see Boston Stump - St. Botolph's church - from here). This location was used as a marker station for East Kirkby airfield, and as many former airmen who took the night shift here will testify, it provided an ample supply of fresh rabbits, which made a tasty addition to RAF rations.

Following the A16 for another 5 miles, you should take the turning to the RIGHT for Spilsby. Follow the road to the crossroads near the church, and turn RIGHT to go through the centre of this small town. Continue to follow the B1195 towards Great Steeping. Approximately 1 mile out of Spilsby, you will go through the village of Halton Hologate, where, on January 17th 1977, Vulcan XM600 of No. 101 Squadron, RAF

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suffered engine failure, and crashed into a field (on your right hand side, just before the junction in the village). On a corner, as you are leaving the village, stands the Bell Inn, a public house which is full of photographs and other memorabilia from RAF Spilsby, if you have a few minutes to spare, and the pub is open, it is well worth a visit.

Further along the B1195, you will come to the village of Great Steeping. This village is the nearest inhabitation to the site of RAF Spilsby, and the domestic site can be reached by taking the first road turning on the LEFT after the crossroads in the village. This is now private land. Several of the buildings are still visible and many have been put to alternative uses.

### Section 5

#### *RAF Spilsby to RAF Wainfleet*

Retrace your route along the track to the B1195, and turn LEFT to leave the village of Great Steeping. Follow the road into Wainfleet, where you will come out into the marketplace of this small town. Turn RIGHT and follow the signs for the A52 and Boston. As you leave Wainfleet, just before you cross the River Steeping, you will see an old windmill, minus sails, with a most unusual weathervane. This is the home of George Bateman & sons brewery, producers of award winning beers which have been consumed by the residents of Lincolnshire (and further afield these days) and have been a favourite of RAF personnel stationed in the county over the years.

On joining the A52, turn RIGHT and head south-west, to the crossroads in Friskney, which is just past the Barley Mow pub. At this crossroads, turn LEFT and follow the narrow road along for about 2 miles, heading for the control tower. When you reach the control tower, carry on over the bank, and along to the next embankment. At this point, the old saying "look before you leap" should be remembered, as over this bank is the parking area for the Weapons Range - unless it is high tide, in which case, you will see several miles of water, with Hunstanton and the Norfolk coast on the other side.

Whilst here, please bear in mind the notes at the front of this guide, paying special attention to the section about not picking things up.

### Section 6

#### *RAF Wainfleet to RNAS Freiston*

Retrace your route along the road from the range to the A52 crossroads by the Barley Mow, and turn LEFT to head towards Boston. At the hamlet of Haltoft End, turn LEFT at the crossroads (opposite the pub), and follow the signs for Freiston. Follow the road through the village, and you will see the outline of the HM Prison in front of you.

### Section 7

#### *RNAS Freiston to Boston*

On leaving the site of the former RNAS station, return to the centre of the village and follow signs to Boston, which is approximately 4 miles away.

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### RAF base information.

#### *RAF Coningsby*

The site of RAF Coningsby was chosen and surveyed in the pre-war expansion scheme, and work on the airfield began late in 1937. Construction progressed slowly, and it was not until November 4th, 1940 that the station opened, initially with 2 hangars and grass flying surfaces. Three months later, in February 1941, No. 106 Squadron arrived from RAF Finningley, flying Hampden's. The squadron later converted to Lancaster's, by way of the Avro Manchester. During September 1942, the station was closed for improvement, which included the laying of concrete runways.

When it reopened in August 1943, the first residents were No. 617 Squadron, the famous 'Dambusters', who stayed until January 1944, when they swapped bases with No. 619 Squadron, flying Mosquito's from RAF Woodhall Spa. They were joined by No. 61 Squadron the next month, with both leaving the airfield in April 1944. Their places at the airfield were taken by No. 83 and No. 97 Squadrons, who lodged until October and November 1946 respectively. The last raid of the war carried out by aircraft from Coningsby was on the oil installation at Tonsberg, Norway, on April 25th 1945.

#### *RAF Woodhall Spa*

Work began on the site of RAF Woodhall Spa early in 1941, and the airfield opened in February 1942, when No. 97 Squadron arrived with their Lancaster's. They stayed at the airfield until April 1943, when they were relieved by No. 619 Squadron, flying Lancaster's. In January 1944, they swapped bases, moving to RAF Coningsby, while No. 617 Squadron moved from RAF Coningsby to take up residence at RAF Woodhall Spa, which offered greater security. Whilst at the base, the Officers of No. 617 Squadron commandeered the Petwood Hotel in the village as their Mess. The hotel is still open, and contains mementoes of their stay.

During their time at Woodhall, the squadron, led by Wing Commander Leonard Cheshire, perfected a method of extremely accurate target marking, achieved by dive-bombing the objective with their Lancaster's. In April 1944, No. 627 Squadron arrived with their Mosquito's. They were part of the elite Pathfinder Force, used for marking enemy targets for the main bomber formations to aim at. This provoked friendly competition between the two squadrons to see who could provide the most accurate results.

On September 8th 1944, Wing Commander Cheshire was awarded the Victoria Cross whilst serving here. Unfortunately, the station's claim to being the only one in the RAF with two holders of the VC serving was short lived. On 19th September, just 11 days after W/C Cheshire was awarded his VC, the other holder, W/C Guy Gibson, had taken off on a mission in a Mosquito of No. 627 Squadron, flying to Rheydt, and being shot down in flames over Holland.

#### *RAF East Kirkby*

Work started on the construction of East Kirkby aerodrome in 1942. In order to accommodate the size of the airfield, two minor roads across the site had to be closed (both of which are now open). By August 1943, the airfield was ready for use, and its first occupants were the Lancaster's of No. 57 Squadron, who migrated south-east from RAF Scampton.

On November 15th 1943, 'B' Flight of this squadron was detached to form the nucleus of No. 630 Squadron, also to be based at East Kirkby. Both squadrons flew from the base (radio callsign 'Silksheen') for the duration of the war, with the last combat mission being flown against Hitler's 'Eagle's Nest' at Berchtesgarden, Bavaria



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on 25th April 1945.

### *RAF Spilsby*

Construction work began on the airfield early in 1943, and several small roads were closed to the north of Great Steeping to provide the area necessary for the airfield. When it was complete, the runways were longer than was usual, measuring 7590, 6000 and 4290 feet. The first squadron to take up residence was No. 207, who arrived in October 1943. They flew for the duration of hostilities from Spilsby, and on D-Day, June 6th 1944, they were engaged in the bombing of Caen, near to the Allied beachheads. In September of that year, 207 was joined by No. 44 Squadron who stayed on until July 1945, when they departed for Mepal in Cambridgeshire. The last combat mission flown by units at Spilsby was on April 25th 1945, against Berchtesgarden in Bavaria, along with aircraft from most of Lincolnshire's airfields. Replacing No. 44 Squadron, No. 75 Squadron arrived in July 1945, and stayed until they disbanded on 15th October 1945. In the same month, No. 207 Squadron departed to take up residence at Methwold.

### *RAF Wainfleet*

The bombing and gunnery ranges at RAF Wainfleet opened in August 1938 on the site of a former artillery firing range, and remained one of the busier ranges in the UK until it closed on 3rd December 2009 as part of a swathe of Government cutbacks. It was here that No. 617 Squadron perfected its use of the Stabilised Automatic Bomb Sight, which, coupled with their extraordinary flying skills, enabled them to achieve phenomenal accuracy.

The most frequently seen aircraft in the final years until closure were F-15E Strike Eagles of the 48th Fighter Wing, USAFE, based at RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk. RAF Tornado GR4s and occasionally Harriers also used the range, as did a variety of NATO aircraft, especially during the regular exercises, such as Elder Forest, which were held annually.

The modern control tower opened in May 1981, replacing a somewhat Heath-Robinson affair, which was apparently a garden shed raised above the ground on copious quantities of scaffolding. The bombing range closed on December 3rd 2009, and is now being cleared of unexploded ordnance. The targets can still be seen on the outmarsh from the bank.

### *RNAS Freiston*

This station opened in 1917 to provide armament training for the RNAS station at RAF Cranwell, and in April 1918, following the amalgamation of the RNAS and the RFC into the RAF, became No. 4 School of Aerial Fighting. This title was altered to become No. 4 Fighting School in July 1918, and continued as such until the unit was disbanded in March 1920. The airfield closed later in that year and today, there is nothing left to show that it was ever here. The site is today occupied by HM Prison North Sea Camp.