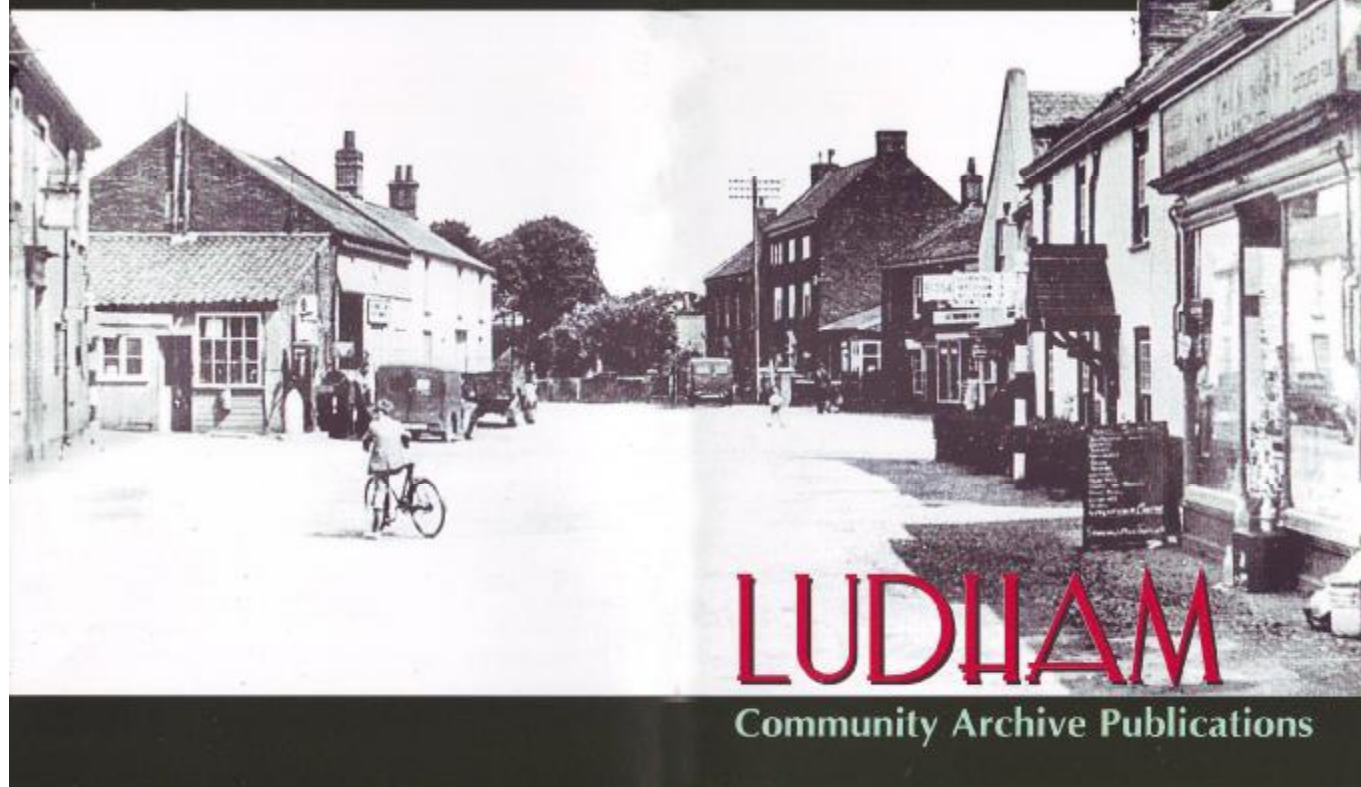


LUDHAM AIRFIELD
BY
MIKE FULLER



The Ludham Community Archive Group

The group came together during the Jubilee year of 2002 to celebrate it through a community event in the village. The result was a textile triptych, which was completed with the collaboration of over 100 residents of the village. It is now on show in the Parish Church of St. Catherine's. We were supported in this enterprise by the Arts Officer of North Norfolk District Council, Brenda Seymore, and by our Art Tutor, Nicky Maule.

While the project was in progress we introduced local walks, led by knowledgeable villagers, to learn more about the community in which we live. Winter walks also evolved from this. We were also introduced to a method of recording the information that we were acquiring during this process and it was at this point that the archive aspect of the project really began.

Ludham Archive is held on computer and continues to expand as further information comes to light. Photographic, pictorial and a variety of other images, supplemented by reminiscences form the basis of the archive. In addition, many people have been interviewed and the results recorded. All of this is seen as a beginning of what should become a continuing process to record the evolution of a changing community. Archive materials are open to access by villagers and can be seen at regular evening meetings. Dates of meetings can be found in the monthly parish newsletter.

The archive provides the source of material to make publications available as CD Rom and other visual media, as well as pamphlets and booklets.

LUDHAM AIRFIELD

BY MIKE FULLER

Mike Fuller was a boy during the Second World War. He lived in a house to the east of Ludham village overlooking farmland. In 1941 the whole area was transformed into RAF Ludham and Mike had a grandstand view of the goings on. He watched the airfield being built, he saw the planes operating from the station and he saw it demolished at the end of the war. He even sneaked in from time to time to take a closer look.

Mike Fuller is a long time local resident and a founding member of the Ludham Community Archive Group. This booklet contains Mike's memories of Ludham Airfield. Let them be your guide and enjoy the trip.



RAF Squadrons operating from Ludham from 1941 to 1943

152	Spitfire IIa	Nov-Dec 41	6 days	Code UM
19	Spitfire V	Dec-Apr 1942		Code QV
610	Spitfire V	Apr-Oct 1942		Code DW
167	Spitfire V	Oct-May 42-43		Code VL
195	Typhoon	May-Jul 1943		Code JE
611	Spitfire V	July 1943	5 days	Code FY

Ludham airfield was then unused until August 1944 when the Royal Navy took over as HMS Flycatcher commissioning five MONABs and one TAMY (see page 7 for more details).

The RAF returned in 1945 as follows

602	Spitfire XVI	Feb-Apr 1945		Code LO
603	Spitfire XVI	Feb-Apr 1945		Code XT
91	Spitfire XXI	Apr-Jul 1945		Code DL
1	Spitfire IX			
	Spitfire XXI	May-Jul 1945		Code JX

1482 (Flt) also used the airfield – dates unknown.

My memories of Ludham Airfield come from when I was a boy between the ages of 11 and 15 years. I first knew something was going on when the biggest lorries I had ever seen began unloading bags and bags of cement in the farm buildings on Fritton Road. Due to wartime security, nobody told us what was happening, but it soon became obvious.

After the lorries, other machines started to arrive and began to level off the ground where the runways and hard standings were going to be. Then loads and loads of sand and shingle were carted onto the airfield and a mobile concrete mixer started moving up and down the runways and other places. At the same time, men were building huts everywhere round the airfield.

Then the Army started putting barbed wire fences up and blowing up all the trees that were in the way of the aircraft. They put in their own gun platforms, at the sides of the airfield.

This work all began in February 1941 and was mostly completed by November of that year. The first aircraft to land at Ludham was a Hurricane which arrived in October. It came very low over our cottage early one morning and landed on runway 02-20. It looked as if it was damaged and glad to get down. This was all a long time ago. Now all that remains is one piece of the runway (still used as an airstrip) and the control tower. The area has mostly returned to farming, but you can still walk round the former airfield and, if you know what to look for, evidence of the past is all around you.



If you take a look at the Ordnance Survey map or an aerial photograph you can easily make out the triangle shape of the former runways superimposed on the landscape. To take a walk round the airfield and down memory lane, start at Malthouse Corner. Follow Fritton Road to its junction with Long Lane. Turn left and follow this road past the Shell depot to Malthouse Lane where you again turn left and make your way back to Ludham. You have now walked right round the airfield, but not the living quarters which were outside this area.

There were 8 different sites on the boundaries of the airfield (see sites Map on page 4 and the airfield map on page 5).

Site Number 1 is the airfield itself, including the three runways, perimeter tracks and blast bays. There was one large hangar and four blister hangars plus two firing butts, one for cannon and one for machine guns. Petrol storage tanks for 24,000 gallons were underground by the road near Fritton Farm.

To defend the airfield, there were 4 Bofors guns, one on each side about half way along. The Army were in charge of these guns. In 1943, a German plane flew low over the airfield and the Bofors gun on Fritton Road opened fire. It only managed to shoot out the tops of all the trees and if you look today, you can still see the results.

An airfield of this size usually had about 16 – 20 aircraft and about 24 pilots. A motor transport section was in the corner near Malthouse farm and some of these buildings are still standing. Further into the field were four or five small buildings used as ordnance stores.

The field itself was surrounded by four or five rolls of barbed wire with just three gates. The main gate was in Malthouse Lane near the control tower. Another was in Fritton Road for the use of petrol bowsers and there was one at the corner of Malthouse Lane for the motor transport section.

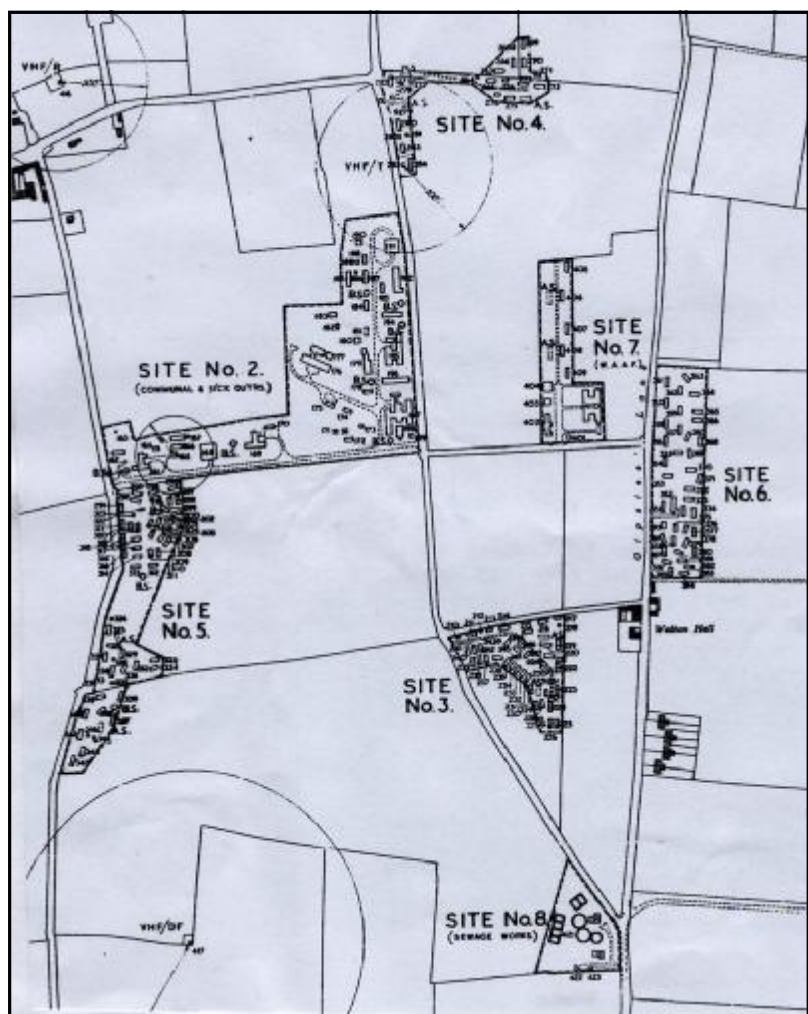


Typhoon 1B - 195 Squadron, May 1943

Typhoons came to Ludham in May 1943 and also on occasional days at later dates. The main reason for this was that RAF Matlaske tended to get waterlogged and Ludham had concrete runways for the heavier planes. Another reason was to stop German hit and run FW190s coming in over Great Yarmouth and dropping a bomb or two before heading home. This strategy was very effective.

Typhoons did a lot of skip bombing practice on the airfield. This was done by putting up a large white canvas stand. The Typhoons would then come in from the Catfield end and skip bomb through the target with 10lb bombs. Some of the bombs would come across Fritton Road in two pieces and my friends and I would collect them as souvenirs.

Map showing the seven sites
not on the airfield itself
(see text for details)



There were seven sites outside the airfield itself. They were located just to the west of the airfield on either side of the Catfield Road just south of Sharp Street. (see map) These sites were mainly communal and living quarters for the airfield personnel.

No. 2 Site was between Catfield Road and Wateringpiece Lane. This site was communal plus Sick Quarters and also had a water tower. There is still a water tower on this site although the current one is newer and larger.

No. 3 Site was at the junction of Catfield Road and Loke Way, leading to Walton Hall Farm. It was communal, showers and ablutions.

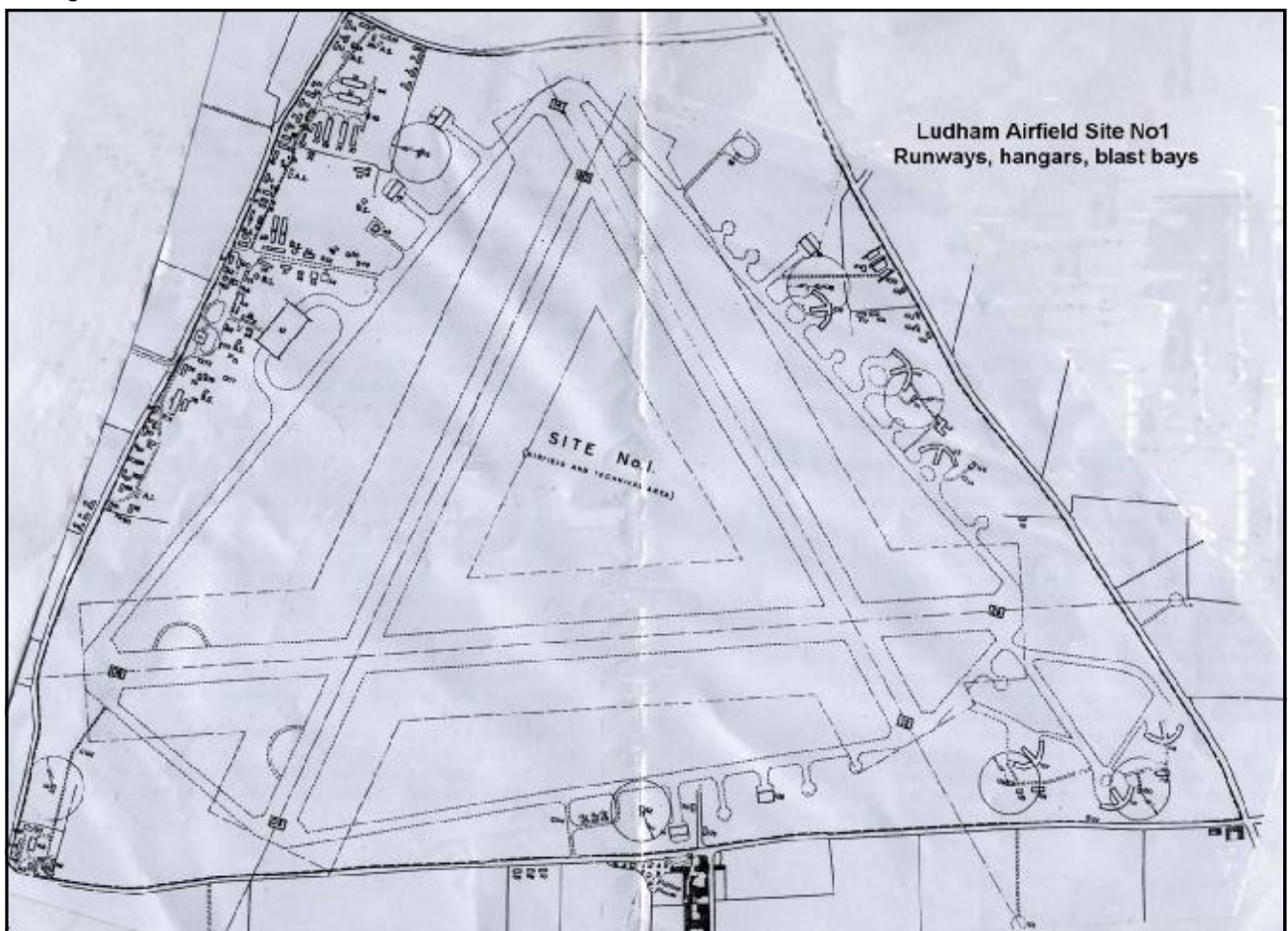
No. 4 Site was to the east of Catfield Road. This site was communal quarters and air raid shelters. There was also a VHF radio facility.

No. 5 Site was on Wateringpiece Lane. It was the sergeants quarters and air raid shelters.

No. 6 Site was beside Gipsies Lane north of Walton Hall Farm. This was further airman's quarters with showers and ablutions. After the war, this site was turned into a cow shed and milking parlour. Now, it has two large pig houses on the site.

No. 7 Site was the site of the WAAF's quarters for officers sergeants and airwomen. There was also an institute room included.

No. 8 Site was the sewage works for the airfield. Nothing much has changed, as it is now the Ludham sewage works.

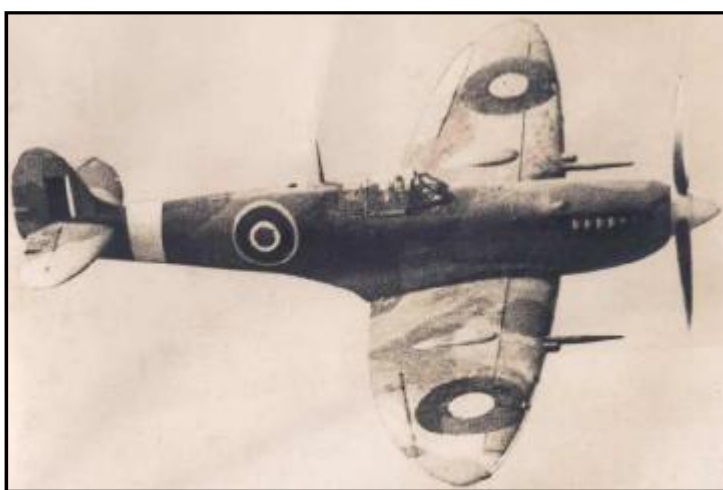


MEMORIES AND INCIDENTS

In February 1942, a tragic accident happened on runway 02-20. A spitfire taking off collided head on with another one landing. Both pilots were killed and ammunition exploded everywhere.

Later, in May 1942, as 610 Sqdn were landing after a sortie, one spitfire was too close to another and so he pulled away to go round again. As he did so, he sliced off part of the other aircraft's tail with his propeller. One crashed near Heath Farm Catfield and the other landed safely.

During the summer of 1942, I was sitting with some friends near a haystack close to High Mill one evening. A thunderstorm started, so we got almost under the haystack to keep dry. Then we heard the engines of Swordfish aeroplanes. 12 of them started to land on runway 02 with the storm all round them. By the time they had all landed it was dark and I could not see them any more. When I got up in the morning and looked out of my bedroom window, there were 11 of them all in line beside the runway and one was at the far end of the runway.



Later, I found the reason for this was that 811 Sqdn FAA, stationed at Bircham Newton, did not have the range reach the Dutch coast and attack shipping there. So they landed at Ludham to collect more petrol and to be armed with torpedoes before flying out to complete their mission. This continued for about 3 months.

In 1943, we had other types of aircraft using Ludham . A Flying Fortress crash landed and overshot runway 02. It then crossed Long Lane and the railway before reaching

Overtons Farm and demolishing a house. I believe the crew were safe.

The next accident was when a Flying Fortress tried to land on runway 08, but was badly damaged and ended up hitting one of the only trees left on the airfield. Some of the crew were injured, and the plane was a complete wreck.

Crashes were not confined to the airfield. A damaged American Lightning was trying to land on runway 02 on one engine. The other engine gave out and the plane crashed into the passageway between Throwers shop and the butchers on Ludham Street. Bits were scattered across the road and into the gateway opposite. Cyril Thrower and Russell Brooks helped to save the pilot's life.

I was coming home on the School Bus and got off to see smoke from one of the engines lying in The Street. If you look at the way at the end of the house, you will see different coloured cement where the



house got burned.

At Easter 1944, we were watching the airfield as it was misty and there was a lot of engine noise. Then along runway 20 came a Flying Fortress. It could not stop and went straight across Fritton Road and halfway along the next field. We ran to see it. Within an hour of this, a Liberator arrived. He tried to stop and his undercarriage collapsed, so he finished up across Fritton Road with his engines still running.

Later that week, another Flying Fortress came in on runway 14 and finished up in the field across Fritton Road near Bell's buildings. All were safe.

Later still, in 1944, I got up one morning and there in the runway near Fritton Road was a Mosquito with its undercarriage broken. So that night, after tea, two of us climbed through the barbed wire to take a closer look. We had great fun sitting in the cockpit.

In 1945, after the spitfires had come back, a Lancaster bomber landed one night in March and ran right across Malthouse Lane and Catfield Road to end up in the next field on the chance light pad.



KING GEORGE VI AND QUEEN ELIZABETH VISIT

On January 28th 1943, the royal party made an official visit to Ludham Airfield. While they were inspecting A Flight, two spitfires took off to intercept a German JU88 off Great Yarmouth. They shot it down and returned to be presented to the King and Queen.

ROYAL NAVY TIME AT LUDHAM

From 24th August 1944 to 16th February 1945, the Fleet Air Arm took over and Ludham was known as HMS Flycatcher. The Navy used the base to assemble five Mobile Operational Naval Air Bases (MONABs) and one Transport Aircraft Maintenance Yard (TAMY). The MONABs were HMS Nabberly, HMS Nabthorpe, HMS Nabbington, HMS Nabron and HMS Nabswick. After completion, they were shipped to Australia.



Ground Crew of 19 Sqn, 1945

RETURN OF THE SPITFIRES

On 16th Feb 1945, 602 Sqn moved in from Coltishall. The next day, 603 Sqn arrived to do armed reconnaissance and to dive bomb V1 and V2 sites. This was the first time 2 squadrons were stationed at Ludham. The well known broadcaster, Raymond Baxter was a flight leader in 602 Sqn.

French members of 91 Sqdn, 1945



Both these squadrons left in April 1945 for Coltishall and 91 Sqdn arrived to take over their duties until May when 1 Sqdn moved in. They stayed until July and by that time, the war was over. On 12th May, a spitfire doing aerobatics dived straight into the ground killing the pilot. Two days later, another spitfire crashed while landing and the pilot was killed.

Ludham then went into care and maintenance until April 1946 when it was finally vacated.

THE METEOR

Two years later on 19th March 1948, with Ludham quiet, a Meteor of 257 Sqdn was glad to find it still there. It made a dead stick landing which undershot the runway and the plane was written off. The meteor was from Horsham St Faith (now Norwich International Airport).

AFTER THE WAR, PEACE TIME USES

With RAF Ludham no longer needed after the war, the land was taken back by the farmers who had owned it before the war started. The runways were gradually broken up and carted away to build roads elsewhere. The large hangar was taken over by the Fire Service and was used for maintenance of Fire Service vehicles for some years.

One section of runway parallel to Fritton Road remained and this was used for a crop spraying business. It remains as a landing strip today. It is privately owned and still in use for light aircraft. Ludham Fire Service used the control tower for practice ladder drills and the static water tank for pump work.

In later years, the Army gave the whole airfield a bomb disposal test and found a lot of unused ammunition which was disposed of. The airfield could then go into private ownership and the small blister hangar became a workshop for the repair of old bygone planes.

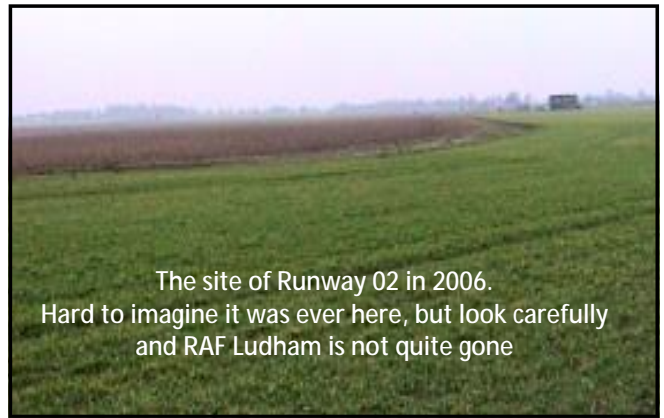
Control Tower in 2006



In the early 1990s, the control tower was renovated and turned into a museum. A show was held for visitors with a few of the ex-pilots returning. The museum was not a success, but the control tower is still there and is privately owned.



Remains of one of the firing butts now demolished.



The site of Runway 02 in 2006. Hard to imagine it was ever here, but look carefully and RAF Ludham is not quite gone

Airfield Booklet Issue 4. March 2012

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Edited by Nigel Pope

Re-Edited by Jon Simpson, 2014.



We are grateful to everyone who has supported us in this project, particularly our local sponsors who are listed below.

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