An aviation guide through East Lindsey
locating active RAF stations and former airfield sites
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East Lindsey District Council gratefully acknowledges the following people and organisations for providing material for this booklet: IX(B) Squadron Association; 619 Squadron Association; Air Cdr Milligan CBE; Andy Thomas Collection; A and K Markham Photography; Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire; Brian Stafford; Down To Earth Promotions; John Whitley’s family, Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre; Lincolnshire County Council; Mill Design & Advertising; Mr Fred Witchell Collection, courtesy of North Staffs 1940s Group; Nev Franklin Collection – Newark Air Museum Archive; Peter Green Collection; Peter Snaith; Peter Allam; Petwood Hotel; RAF Coningsby (BBMF); Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre; Woodhall Spa Cottage Museum.

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Cover picture captions, starting top left to right: 227 Sqn crew with their Lancaster 9J-J. Typhoon ‘afterburner’ take-off at RAF Coningsby. Nose art on a Bardney based Lancaster. Main picture: BBMF Lancaster PA474 taxys out to take off at RAF Coningsby. Bottom left picture: AOC’s Inspection at RAF Coningsby.

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Introduction

The patchwork of fields across Lincolnshire’s landscape has been sculpted by aviation from the earliest days of flight with the introduction of the World War I landing grounds and aerodromes.

The pace of this sculpting was increased by World War II and the need for airfields close to the county’s coastline. In some places it was changed irrevocably by the laying down of countless concrete runways and taxiways that criss-crossed the region and in doing so helped cement a common bond of service and camaraderie. These bonds were formed in the shadows of adversity, but they connected people together from around the world in a way that remains strong today.

In several places in East Lindsey these changes continued post-War, during the Cold War Era through continued military development; like the V-Bomber base at RAF Coningsby; the Thor IRBM base at RAF Ludford Magna; and the Bloodhound SAM base at RAF North Coates.

Some locations, such as RAF Coningsby have continued to develop and are still active today with Typhoon fighters, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and Visitor Centre. Other aviation locations are merely marked with memorials to the fallen, like the inspiring mosaic at North Thoresby.

Please note: Some of the sites featured are on private land and we urge you to respect the privacy of those locations. However the memorials featured are all publically accessible.

Abbreviations

AAS ............... Air Armament School
ABG ............... Air Base Group
ABS ............... Air Base Squadron
Air Cdr ............ Air Commodore
AOC ............... Air Officer Commanding
AOS ............... Air Observer School
ARS ............... Air Rescue Squadron
BAT ............... Beam Approach Training
BBMF .......... Battle of Britain Memorial Flight
BDT ............... Bomber Defence Training Flight
BDU ............... Bomb Disposal Unit
CH ............... Chain Home
CHL ............... Chain Home Low
DFC ............... Distinguished Flying Cross
EAAS .......... Empire Air Armament School
ECAS .......... Empire Central Armament School
ELDC .......... East Lindsey District Council
FIDO ............... Fog Intense Dispersal Operation
FJWOEU .... Fast Jet & Weapons Operational Evaluation Unit
Fit ............... Flight
GAS ............... Ground Armament School
Gee ............... Code name for - hyperbolic navigation system
Gp ............... Group
HD ............... Home Defence
IRBM .......... Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile
MOD ............... Ministry of Defence
MU ............... Maintenance Unit
NZ ............... New Zealand
NAFFI .......... Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
OCU ............... Operational Conversion Unit
RAAF .......... Royal Australian Air Force
RAF .......... Royal Air Force
RAFCAW ...... Royal Air Force College of Aerial Warfare
RAFA .......... Royal Air Force Association
RAFFC ...... Royal Air Force Flying College
RCAF .......... Royal Canadian Air Force
RDF .......... Radio Direction Finding
SAM ............... Surface to Air Missile
Sqn ............... Squadron
Sqn Ldr ........ Squadron Leader
USAF .......... United States Air Force
VC ............... Victoria Cross
Wg Cdr ........ Wing Commander
WWI ............... World War One
WWII .......... World War Two
Bardney went from being a wartime bomber base through to a Thor Missile site.

Bardney

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 121SK135708; close to the B1202 Bardney to Wragby road

DATES OF OPERATION:
1943 to 1945 – bomber base
1945 to 1959 – storage & maintenance
1959 to 1963 – Thor missile base

SQUADRONS:
IX(B) Sqn; 227 Sqn; 189 Sqn; 106(SM) Sqn

RAF Bardney’s major wartime role was as the main base for IX(B) Sqn, which along with 617 Sqn was one of the RAF’s main precision bombing squadrons.

The airfield site at Bardney was first surveyed in early 1941 and was designed in the standard pattern with 3 concrete runways. Construction work started in 1942 but was delayed by a shortage of construction materials.

The base opened in April 1943 when IX(B) Sqn moved from RAF Waddington to Bardney. Most accounts note that the squadron took off from Waddington on 13th April on a raid to Northern Italy; after take-off the ground crews relocated to Bardney ready to receive the returning aircraft from the raid.

Early IX(B) Sqn operations out of Bardney coincided with the ‘Battle of the Ruhr’. On 20th April 1943 Lancaster W4964 (WS-J) took off from Bardney on an Op to Stettin, that particular aircraft went on to become a ‘100 Op’ aircraft when it took part in a Tirpitz Raid in September 1944. Post war the aircraft was displayed in a small museum at the College of Aerial Warfare at RAF Manby; was then scrapped and a small fuselage section survived as a garden shed, before being donated to the Newark Air Museum in 1974.

IX(B) Sqn soon became established as a two Fight Main Force Squadron and during the ‘Battle for Berlin’ established a reputation for high accuracy bombing. Operating with 617 Sqn, IX(B) Sqn was used on Ops targeting U-Boat pens; railway bridges; V weapon sites; Normandy fortification; and the Tirpitz battleship.

In October 1944 ‘A’ Flt of 227 Sqn was reformed alongside IX(B) Sqn at Bardney; whilst ‘B’ Flt was formed alongside 619 Sqn at Strubby; before both Flt’s moved to RAF Balderton.

One of IX(B) Sqn’s finest Ops took place on 12th November 1944, whilst flying from RAF Lossiemouth, Y – ‘Younger’ piloted by Doug Tweddle and with bomb-aimer Denis Nolan, is widely believed to have dropped the Tallboy bomb that finally turned the Tirpitz battleship over and made it inoperable.

In April 1945 Bardney hosted 189 Sqn; with IX(B) Sqn returning to RAF Waddington shortly after the war ended.

A period of use for storage and a Care and Maintenance role followed; before Bardney returned to operations in a Cold War role as a Thor Missile Base with 106(SM) Sqn based there between 1959 and 1963. The site was eventually used for gliding and by an aerial crop spraying company.

There is an excellent memorial on the village green at Bardney map ref: Sheet 121 SK19693.

1. Nose art on a Bardney based Lancaster
2. The Bardney watch office as it looks today
3. Bardney crew in front of Lancaster H ‘Hepzbah’
4. IX(B) Sqn crew on Lancaster Y ‘Younger’
5. RAF Bardney Memorial on the village green
6. IX(B) Sqn bomb-aimer’s Log Book entries
RAF Coningsby, a “Classic RAF base” that has seen operations over a seventy year period.

**LOCATION / GRID REF:**
Sheet 122 SK230570; just off the A153 Sleford to Horncastle road

**DATES OF OPERATION:**
1940 to current

**SQUADRONS:**
- 106 Sqn; 97 Sqn; 617 Sqn; 1514 BAT Flt; 61 Sqn; 83 Sqn; 97 Sqn; 109 Sqn; 138 Sqn; XV Sqn; 44 Sqn; 40 Sqn; 57 Sqn; IX(B) Sqn; 12 Sqn; 35 Sqn; 228 OCU; 6 Sqn; 54 Sqn; 41(R) Sqn; 111(F) Sqn; BBMF; 5 Sqn; 229 OCU; 56(R) Sqn; 29(F) Sqn; 6 Sqn; 29 (F) Sqn; 3(F) Sqn; 41(R) Sqn

Many people describe RAF Coningsby as a classic RAF base, which has been at the heart of RAF operations since November 1940; although work had started on its construction during the pre-war expansion phase in 1937.

The first operational unit was 106 Sqn with Hampdens, closely followed by 97 Sqn and they transferred through Manchesters; sadly operations with these types were often synonymous with heavy losses. Coningsby became the second RAF base to receive Lancasters, but conditions were not ideal for them. 97 Sqn moved to the newly built RAF Woodhall Spa and 106 Sqn to RAF Syerston and the base closed for reconstruction.

When it reopened in August 1943, its first unit was 617 Sqn and this famous ‘Dambusters’ squadron arrived on 25 August 1943. From Coningsby they undertook raids on the Dortmund Ems Canal and the Antheor Viaduct and in January 1944 they moved to RAF Woodhall Spa.

Moving in the opposite direction was 619 Sqn (The Forgotten Squadron) who spent 4 months at Coningsby before moving on to RAF Dunholme Lodge. 619 Sqn had been joined at Coningsby by 61 Sqn. RAF Coningsby then became involved in 83 Sqn and 97 Sqn helping to develop target marking (Pathfinder) techniques for 5 Group, which eventually became central factors in 5 Group’s excellent bomb aiming techniques.

Post World War II RAF Coningsby remained operational with RAF piston-powered and jet bombers through until 1964. Types operating from the base at various times included Lancasters, Lincolns, Mosquitoes, Washingtons, Canberras and Vulcans of the V-Force.

The temporary closure in 1964 was for Coningsby to be upgraded for the iconic TSR-2 and the base was slated to be the OCU and Operational Development Unit for the type.

Following the cancellation of the TSR-2 project Coningsby changed roles and became a fighter base and for many years operated the Phantom strike fighters with various squadrons and units based there. In 1976 the legendary Battle of Britain Memorial Flight was relocated to Coningsby, where it remains today.

In 1984 Coningsby received Tornado F2 interceptors and these were followed in 1988 by the Tornado F3s.

The current phase of Coningsby operations with Typhoons started in 2005, when 29 (R) Sqn stood up at the base as the OCU and in 2006 the first operational unit 3(F) Sqn was formed at the base.

The excellent Battle of Britain Visitor Centre is also located at the base on Dogdyke Road, map ref: Sheet 122 SK215565. This venue is featured on pages 30 and 31.
East Kirkby

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK338618; just off the A155 Coningsby to Spilsby road

DATES OF OPERATION:
1940 to 1958; current Visitor Centre

SQUADRONs:
57 Sqn; 630 Sqn; 460(RAAF) Sqn; 139 Sqn; 231 OCU; [USAF era] – 3931 ABG; 3917 ABS; 62, 63 & 64 ARS

In early 1940 East Kirkby was established as a decoy airfield site for RAF Manby and was bombed several times. Formal airfield constructions started in 1942 and the base was ready for operations in mid-1943.

The first operational unit was 57 Sqn, which arrived from RAF Scampton on 20 August 1943; they flew their first op from RAF East Kirkby on 27 August 1943.

In November 1943 the squadron’s ‘B’ Flight was used to form the nucleus of 630 Sqn at the base and their first op took place on 18/19 November 1943.

During April 1944 RAF East Kirkby was given Base Station status and it became responsible for major servicing of aircraft from Spilsby and Strubby. The station and its squadrons suffered several sets of heavy losses on ops and on 17 April 1945 a bombed-up 57 Sqn Lancaster blew up at dispersal, killing 3 personnel and destroying 4 other Lancasters.

As the war in Europe drew to a close RAF East Kirkby undertook the role of training crews for Tiger Force operations in the Far East.

57 Sqn also became a trials unit for the new Lincoln bomber. Following 630 Sqn’s disbandment 460(RAAF) Sqn moved to RAF East Kirkby from RAF Binbrook.

After a brief spell under Care and Maintenance, RAF East Kirkby re-opened to accommodate 139 Sqn & 231 OCU from RAF Coningsby with their Mosquitoes.

During the early Cold War era of the 1950s East Kirkby was selected for use by the USAF Strategic Air Command. The runways were extended and facilities upgraded as the base began to accept a series of temporary USAF deployments. Of particular note were the modified C-47 aircraft of the 62, 63 & 64 ARSs that trained in the clandestine role of rescuing downed aircrew from behind enemy lines.

In 1958 the USAF started to leave East Kirkby and significant areas of land were returned to agricultural use, with the land eventually being sold by the MOD.

The memorial at the site to 57 Sqn and 630 Sqn was unveiled in 1979 and brothers Fred and Harold Panton established the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre on the site just off the A155 road in 1988, map ref: Sheet 122 SK338618. This venue is featured on pages 32 and 33.

From decoy site, through operations, East Kirkby still reverberates to the familiar Lancaster sights and sounds.

1. 57 Sqn and 630 Sqn memorials at the entrance
2. 630 Sqn Lancaster ‘LE-F’ ‘Popeye’, East Kirkby 1944
3. 630 Sqn Lancaster I LL966 LE-P, East Kirkby 1944
4. Tributes at East Kirkby’s memorial
5. Lancaster ‘Just Jane’ taxis out
With operations in both wars Kelstern was one of the highest airfields in the Lincolnshire Wolds.

Despite the often harsh operating conditions encountered in their remote location, RAF Kelstern ground crews were noted for attaining high serviceability. This included an occasion in February 1944 when two feet of snow fell across the Wolds; RAF Kelstern was clear of snow and operational some two days quicker than nearby RAF Binbrook.

During early 1944 RAF Kelstern suffered some of its heaviest losses and 625 Sqn was involved in the notorious Mailey-le-Camp Raid during the run up to D-Day.

By autumn 1944 625 Sqn had expanded to become a 3 Flight unit; and then their ‘C’ Flt was used to form the nucleus of 170 Sqn, which quickly relocated to RAF Dunholme Lodge.

Over the winter of 1945 heavy snow again disrupted operations at RAF Kelstern. However, during this period the site was used to undertake trials on the servicing requirements for the new larger Lincoln bomber. This included the installation at the base of tram tracks from Grimsby to work out how Lincolns could be jacked onto trolleys and moved sideways into the T2 hangars.

By 9 April 1945 all of RAF Kelstern’s aircraft had left the base and it was officially closed in October 1945. In 1946 RAF Kelstern’s aircraft had left the base and it was officially closed in October 1945. In 1946 RAF Kelstern became one of the first RAF bases in Lincolnshire to be returned to agriculture, although some wartime structures can still be seen in the area today.

In 1964 Kelstern achieved another first when the site became one of the first in the county to have a memorial erected and dedicated to the base’s squadron and personnel. Funded by the 625 Squadron Association the memorial was dedicated on 25 October 1964. It is still there today, close to the T junction where the Ludborough Road meets the North Elkington to Binbrook Road, map reference: Sheet 113 SK253920.
Ludford Magna

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 113 SK205878; just off the A631 Louth to Market Rasen road

DATES OF OPERATION:
1943 to 1945 – bomber base
1958 to 1963 – Thor missile base

SQUADRONS:
101 Sqn; 1682 BDTF; 104(SM) Sqn

Operating out of RAF Ludford Magna 101 Sqn undertook a special role from October 1943 right through until the end of the war in Europe in May 1945. This was flying top secret ABC or ‘Airborne Cigar’ Lancasters; these aircraft were fitted with an early form of electronic counter measures. Carrying an 8th crew-member who spoke German, these Lancasters operated receiving and transmitting equipment that confused the German night fighter radio frequencies.

Like RAF Kelstern, RAF Ludford Magna was high in the Lincolnshire Wolds and often suffered from poor ground conditions, which earned it the nick name “Mudford Magna”. Poor ground conditions saw RAF Ludford Magna get the nick name “Mudford Magna”.

In December 1943 RAF Ludford Magna became the headquarters for 14 Base, assuming control of RAF Wickenby and RAF Faldingworth. As with other sites this involved further facilities and hangars being added to the site. ABC Lancasters from 101 Sqn were heavily involved in providing ‘electronic interference’ for the airborne forces operations during D-Day.

Other innovative uses were found for RAF Ludford Magna, which became the first 1 Group airfield to be fitted with FIDO (petrol burning fog dispersal equipment). Sadly, operating conditions at the base were not ideal for FIDO; foggy conditions often being low cloud rather than the ‘radiating’ fog encountered elsewhere in the county; plus high winds on the exposed location blowing the flames away from the runway.

Another innovation trialled by 101 Sqn was the Lincolnshire manufactured Rose Turret, to replace the Lancaster’s Fraser-Nash rear turrets. These new larger turrets also had larger calibre guns, which enabled the rear gunner to wear his parachute at all times.

101 Sqn remained at base until October 1945, when they moved to RAF Binbrook; and RAF Ludford Magna became a sub-base. Briefly handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture, RAF Ludford Magna was reactivated in 1958 as a Thor Missile Site. 104(SM) Sqn was formed at the base as part of the RAF Hemswell Missile Wing. This nuclear deterrent role came to an end in May 1963, shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis of the previous autumn.

A simple memorial to 101 Sqn was dedicated in July 1978, which has been kept up to date with the squadron’s Battle Honours, including the South Atlantic (Falklands); Gulf War I; and Kosovo. The memorial is on the side of the A631 in the village of Ludford, map ref: Sheet 113 SK196890.
Manby

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK395870; just off the B1200 Louth to Saltfleet road

DATES OF OPERATION:
1938 to 1974

SQUADRONS:
1 AAS; 2 GAS; ECAS; RAFFC; AFS; RAFCAW

Construction at Manby began in the RAF’s Expansion phase of the mid-1930s. In 1937 the nearly complete Manby was used for an experimental cross-wind landing screen, but this was removed before RAF Manby opened as No 1 AAS in August 1938.

RAF Manby’s many aircraft types: Harts & Hinds; through Wallaces & Overstrands; to Fairey

At the end of the war aircraft numbers were reduced, but aircraft from RAF Manby toured the world. The Royal Air Force Flying College was formed at RAF Manby on 1 July 1949, with a mixture of types including: Lincolns, Valettas, Meteors and Vampires. One airframe, the ‘Aeries III’ Lincoln undertook a famous Polar flight in 1951 and RAF Manby specialised in navigation training.

On 20 March 1951, HQ 25 Group re-formed at RAF Manby to form a new series of jet Advanced Flying Schools. Between 1949 and 1954 the RAF Handling Squadron operated from the base, usually receiving early new production aircraft to assess their operation and to prepare ‘Pilot Notes’.

Further ‘Aeries’ series aircraft operated from RAF Manby, including Canberras and they undertook several record breaking flights. In June 1962 the RAFFC was renamed the Royal Air Force College of Aerial Warfare; with new aircraft types like the Jet Provost and Dominie jet trainer. The college even had its own aerobatic display team the Macaws.

The early 1970s was an unsettled period and RAF Manby eventually closed for flying operations on 31 March 1974. Part of the domestic site was purchased by East Lindsey District Council for their main offices and other parts remain intact but under various different ownerships. The Station Commanders Board still exists in Guy Gibson House on Manby Park and in special circumstances this can be viewed by prior arrangement with the building tenants the Environment Agency. Many of the roads still proudly carry aircraft names that flew from RAF Manby.

Battles operated mainly on the bombing ranges of the Lincolnshire coast. This role became more important with the outbreak of war and in July 1940 the AAS work was enhanced with the formation of 2 GAS.

Training at RAF Manby was an international affair and 1 AAS achieved ‘Empire’ status on 18 April 1943. The Empire Central Armament School (ECAS) devised and refined new techniques for bombing leaders / instructors and armament instructors.

Additional concrete runways were laid and a wide range of aircraft types operated from RAF Manby including: Wellingtons, Hudsons, Blenheims and Lancasters. The last wartime change occurred in November 1944 when ECAS became the Empire Air Armament School (EAAS).

1. Former RAF buildings are now used by ELDC
2. Former RAF buildings still in use
3. You can still sense the RAF presence at Manby
4. The Station Commanders board in Guy Gibson House
5. Macaws aerobatic team booklet cover
6. A Varsity landing at RAF Manby
North Coates has seen on and off aviation related operations from 1916 through to the present day.

**LOCATION / GRID REF:**
Sheet 113 SK375025; just off the A1031Tetney to Marshchapel road

**DATES OF OPERATION:**
1916 to 1919 – fighters; 1927 to 1952 – various roles
1957 to 1971 – Bloodhound SAMs
1976 to 1990 – Bloodhound SAMs

**SQUADRONS:**
33 Sqn; 2 AAS; 235 Sqn; 236 Sqn; 248 Sqn; 22 Sqn; 812 Sqn; 816 Sqn; 42 Sqn; 86 Sqn; 407 (RCAF) Sqn; 59 Sqn; 53 Sqn; 415 (RCAF) Sqn; 404 (RCAF) Sqn; 143 Sqn; 254 Sqn; 236 Sqn; 53 MU; 5131 BDW; 275 Sqn; 25 Sqn; 85 Sqn

A Night Landing Ground was established at North Coates Fitties in 1916, which saw operations of various types until 1919, when the site reverted to its original owner.

The same land was re-purchased in 1927 for use as a landing ground for bombing training camps at the Donna Nook range. In 1935 North Coates Fitties became a permanent base with 2 Air Armament School and then 1 Air Observer School.

In February 1940 the base transferred to Coastal Command and was renamed as RAF North Coates. Various squadrons arrived including 235 Sqn, 236 Sqn and 248 Sqn; their Blenheim undertook long range maritime patrols. As these squadrons moved in April 1940 22 Sqn arrived with Beauforts and 812 Sqn with Swordfish. A new Fleet Air Arm unit, 816 Sqn, arrived in March 1941 and was soon followed by 42 Sqn. These were both replaced by 86 Sqn in 1941 and was joined by 407 (RCAF) Sqn; both units flew ‘Rover’ anti-shipping strike sweeps along the European coast. These were daring raids and casualties were high.

Both squadrons were replaced in early 1942 with 59 Sqn and 53 Sqn. Other squadrons arrived and operated as a Strike Wing and included: 415 (RCAF) Sqn; 404 (RCAF) Sqn; 143 Sqn; 254 Sqn; 236 Sqn. Using the Beaufighter they evolved into a potent force and sank tonnes of enemy shipping.

In July 1945 the base was closed and transferred to Maintenance Command; operation by 53 MU and 5131 BDU helped clear Lincolnshire of airframes and munitions.

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1. The North Coates memorial looks out over the Humber Estuary
2. Bloodhound missiles
3. Navigator statue, part of the North Coates memorial
4. A moving inscription about the RAF North Coates Strike Wing
5. The North Coates Flying Club
6. The Heritage Room at North Coates Flying Club

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The base was flooded during the east coast floods of January 1953 and ironically the next unit to arrive was ‘B’ Flt 25 Sqn, undertaking search and rescue duties with Sycamore helicopters; before going into Care and Maintenance in July 1956.

RAF North Coates reopened in 1957 as a Bloodhound I air defence missile site and in May 1960 it became HQ 148 Wing controlling several missile sites in the county. 25 Sqn formed to introduce the Bloodhound II into service and the base undertook a lot of missile and radar development work. Eventually the units dispersed and the base closed on 28 February 1971.

The missile era re-started in 1976 when ‘B’ Flt 85 Sqn arrived with their Bloodhounds and the base was finally closed in 1990. The North Coates Flying Club now operates from the site and is developing a Heritage Room.

A stunning memorial to the RAF North Coates Strike Wing can be found opposite the RAFA Club in the ground of Ross Castle, above the Central Promenade car park in Cleethorpes, map ref: Sheet 113 SK305093.
Spilsby

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK450650, just off the B1195 Halton Holegate to Great Steeping road

DATES OF OPERATION:
1943 to 1958

SQUADRONS:
207 Sqn; 44 Sqn; 75(NZ) Sqn; 7536th Material Sqn

The construction of RAF Spilsby began in late 1942, formally opening as a satellite to RAF East Kirkby in September 1943. 207 Sqn with Lancasters was the first unit to move to RAF Spilsby arriving on 12 October 1943. They were quickly into action with ops over Germany before the major 1943-44 'Battle of Berlin' offensive.

At the end of September 1944, 44 (Rhodesia) Sqn moved to RAF Spilsby from RAF Dunholme Lodge. These two noted and long standing 5 Group squadrons undertook various ops during the winter of 1944-45 and continued right through until the end of hostilities in Europe. 44 Sqn had been earmarked to be part of the ‘Tiger Force’ but its aircraft were passed to 75(NZ) Sqn at RAF Spilsby. As the ‘Tiger Force’ itself was disbanded both squadrons were reduced to non-operational flying.

An Armament Practice Station was established at RAF Spilsby on 26 October 1945 as part of 12 Group Fighter Command; and various visiting squadrons participated in air firing exercises out of the base, including: 29 Sqn; 65 Sqn; 129 Sqn; 219 Sqn; 264 Sqn; and 222 Sqn with their Meteor jet fighters.

RAF Spilsby went into the Care and Maintenance programme in the mid 1950s, before being allocated for use by the USAF on 15 June 1955; this role was in support of their operations at RAF East Kirkby. At this time one of the runways was extended and strengthened, only to see the base returned to the Air Ministry in March 1958.

The selling off of the site started in 1962 and gradually parts were returned to agricultural use of various types. Memorials were erected on the former airfield, including the impressive new memorial that was dedicated in the summer of 2012. This can be located off the B1195 Spilsby to Wainfleet Road, following the signs to the Heavy Horse Centre along the road between Halton Holegate and Bratoft/Gunby, map ref: Sheet 122 SK445649.

In May 1944 the 5 Group Anti-Aircraft School opened at the base to train ground personnel in the use of the Hispano 20mm AA gun; with live firing exercises taking place on the nearby Wainfleet Sands bombing range.

Base aircraft played an active role in bombing operations pre and post D-Day landings, mainly against tactical targets in northern France.

Following its initial satellite airfield status, RAF Spilsby became home to several noted RAF squadrons.

1. The impressive Spilsby memorial was dedicated in 2012
2. Ground crew pose with Lancaster EM-Y
3. An unknown aircrew with Lancaster EM-W
4. RAF Spilsby interpretation panel
5. Spilsby memorial and interpretation panel overlook the former airfield
6. The Spilsby memorial commemorates squadrons and an airfield incident
LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK445810; just off the B1373 Withern to Alford road

DATES OF OPERATION:
1944 to 1972 – RAF Phase
1974 to – current civilian phase

SQUADRONS:
280 Sqn; 144 Sqn; 404(RCAF) Sqn; 619 Sqn; 227 Sqn; 5 Gp AAS

RAF Strubby officially opened on 13 April 1944 as a 5 Group base but the first unit was 280 Sqn Coastal Command, with Warwick Air Sea Rescue aircraft. In July 1944 they were joined by Beaufighters of 144 Sqn and 404(RCAF) Sqn. After these units left, 619 Sqn (The Forgotten Squadron) moved to RAF Strubby in September 1944. Towards the end of World War II both squadrons began to fly repatriation flights, which helped return more than 2,000 prisoners of war from Belgium and the Netherlands. Many Commonwealth airmen flew from RAF Strubby and their personnel were awarded a high proportion of medals: including Flt Lt John Whiteley DFC from 619 Sqn who is pictured with his crew at RAF Strubby.

By the end of June 1945 the squadrons had left and ground parties for the ‘Tiger Force’ started to form up at RAF Strubby and personnel numbers grew. However the base soon moved to a Care and Maintenance footing and became a relief landing ground for the RAFFC at RAF Manby. During this operating phase many types operated from RAF Strubby including: Athenas, Vampires and Canberras.

By the mid-1950s new types seen on base included Meteors and Hunters. As training into the 1960s continued lots of the types inter-changing between RAF Manby and RAF Strubby included: Jet Provosts; Varsitys; Dominies; with the latter two types remaining at RAF Strubby until it closed in September 1972. Post RAF closure Strubby saw additional aviation activity in the form of a heliport to service the gas production rigs in the southern North Sea and some work for the Trinity House lighthouses and lightships. The gas rig work continued until the early 1990s.

Many buildings can still be seen at Strubby that provide a reminder of its wartime role.
Woodhall Spa

**LOCATION / GRID REF:**
Sheet 122 SK210610; just off the B1192 Woodhall Spa to Coningsby road

**DATES OF OPERATION:**
1944 to 1945 – World War II phase; 1960 to 1965 – Bloodhound missile phase

**SQUADRONS:**
- 106 Sqn
- 97 Sqn
- 1514 BAT
- 617 Sqn
- IX(B) Sqn
- 627 Sqn
- 109 Sqn
- 464 Sqn
- 222 Sqn
- 112 Sqn

RAF Woodhall Spa opened as a satellite base to RAF Coningsby in February 1942. The first squadron to fly from the base was 106 Sqn; however the Lancasters of 97 Sqn arrived on 1 March 1942, becoming operational on 20 March 1942.

In April 1943 97 Sqn moved to RAF Bourn but three crews remained as the nucleus of 619 Sqn (The Forgotten Squadron), which formed at RAF Woodhall Spa on 18 April 1943 and the squadron became operational on 11 June 1943.

Various regional RAF base responsibility changes saw 619 Sqn move to RAF Coningsby, with 617 Sqn moving in the opposite direction. Both squadrons had officers’ quarters in what is now the Petwood Hotel. By this time 617 Sqn was using two Mosquitoes for low-level target marking and 627 Sqn moved to the base to learn this technique.

On 19/20 September 1944 Base Operation Officer Wg Cdr Guy Gibson VC flew as master bomber in a Mosquito; sadly he crashed near Steenberghen, the Netherlands; killing him and his crewmember Sqn Ldr Jim Warwick; a plaque at Newark Air Museum commemorates this loss. 617 Sqn flew ‘Tallboy’ and ‘Grand Slam’ ops from RAF Woodhall Spa and as the war in Europe drew to a close 617 Sqn crews were moved around other squadrons to teach precision bombing techniques. At this time preparations were underway at RAF Woodhall Spa for it to become an assembly base for ‘Tiger Force’ ground crews.

In September 1945 627 Sqn ceased flying and their aircraft passed to 109 Sqn; 463 Sqn Mosquitoes arrived in late September for disbanding. RAF Woodhall Spa itself closed on 10 December 1945 and went into Care and Maintenance, when it was used to store munitions.

To support the build-up of the V-Force and the Thor Missile sites across Lincolnshire, RAF Woodhall Spa began ops in May 1960 as part of 13 Group Fighter Command as a Bloodhound I SAM base with 222 Sqn. This unit was later replaced by 112 Sqn with Bloodhound II SAMs under the area control of 148 Wing at RAF North Coates. This unit moved to Cyprus in 1965.

Large parts of the former airfield site were returned to agriculture, but parts of the Missile site remained in use for engine testing by engineers from RAF Coningsby.

There is a major memorial located in the centre of the nearby town of Woodhall Spa, map ref: Sheet 122 SK193631; plus there is the Cottage Museum, map ref: Sheet 122 SK196634 (venue featured on page 37). The activities of RAF Woodhall Spa are actively reflected in the displays and exhibits at the Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre, (venue featured on pages 34 and 35) which is located adjacent to the former RAF Woodhall Spa site B1192 Woodhall Spa to Coningsby road, map ref: Sheet 122 SK215597.
Other Locations

**Bucknall**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 121 SK170705
This was the location of a World War I Night Landing Ground that was used by 33 (HD) Sqn operating aircraft such as Avro 504s, FE.2bs, FE.2ds and F.2bs; between 1916 and 1919.

**Ludborough**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 113 SK280965
Major airfields throughout Lincolnshire were normally allocated an emergency landing ground. Some reports note Ludborough (located close to the B1431) as being such a site for RAF Binbrook; although it may have undertaken a similar role for RAF North Coates.

**RAF Market Stainton**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK227801
Set in the heart of the Lincolnshire Wolds, RAF Market Stainton opened in early 1943 as 233 MU and was quickly established as a major munitions storage facility supplying 1 Group airfields across the north of the district. These munitions were typically delivered by rail on the Lincoln to Louth line and eventually the site had well over 200 personnel based there. Unusually most of these munitions were stored along the country lanes and verges of the area and are reported to have stretched for up to 60 miles.

**Moorby**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK300655
A Class 1 Landing Ground for use by 38 (HD) Sqn between 1916 and 1918; and by 90 (HD) Sqn between 1918 and 1919, before it was closed.

**Skegness – Burgh Road**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK556643
Reports indicate that this site was used to carry out anti-Zeppelin patrols off the east coast soon after the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

**Skegness - Winthorpe**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK568665
This site was laid out as a civilian airstrip in 1930 as part of Eastern Air Transport Ltd’s operations. The Skegness and East Lincolnshire Aero Club formed there in 1932 and held an Air Pageant soon after. Regular flight services were operated across the Wash to Hunstanton.

One notable aviator who is said to have learnt to fly at the location was Alex Henshaw. The airstrip was closed in the late 1930s as war loomed.

**Skegness - Ingoldmells**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK565675
Built in 1948 opposite the Butlin’s Holiday Camp this airstrip was called Butlin’s Skegness (Ingoldmells) Aerodrome and was officially opened on 13 June 1948 by Alderman J Forester, Chairman of Lindsey County Council.

Butlin’s owned light aircraft provided pleasure flights for holiday makers, however these aircraft were moved away and Skegness (Airport) Ltd was formed by a young Freddie Laker. Various other companies operated from the site and a notable use occurred in the early 1960s when the aerodrome was used to base the aircraft for the making of the film, ‘Those Magnificent Men In Their Flying Machines’.

The aerodrome closed in the early 1990s although there is now a micro-light landing strip in the vicinity, map ref: Sheet 122 SK563663.
Coastal Bombing Ranges

During the late 1920s the need for armament practice locations was recognised by the RAF. The flat sands and mudflats of the East Lincolnshire coast proved to be ideal locations, especially as the areas were sparsely populated but close to RAF bases. Three particular sites are worthy of mention in the East Lindsey area.

**Donna Nook**

**LOCATION / GRID REF:** Sheet 113 SK 431997

Initially opened as a relief landing ground to North Coates Fitties in 1927, Donna Nook provided a summer camp training operations for its parent airfield. During World War II this location was mainly used by 1 Group squadrons from RAF Manby. After a period of closure it re-opened in 1967. The Donna Nook bombing range is still actively used today, where the operations enjoy a careful relationship with the nearby seal colonies.

**Wainfleet**

**LOCATION / GRID REF:** Sheet 122 SK 525565

The bombing and gunnery school was established here in 1937 as part of 5 Group. Used extensively post World War II the site underwent several upgrades and stayed in continual use until November 2009. One of the final operations undertaken on the range was a bombing competition between two of the noted squadrons featured in this guide – IX(B) Sqn and 617 Sqn; this was to mark the 65th anniversary of the sinking of the German battleship Tirpitz by Lancasters from both squadrons – on this occasion the competition was won by 617 Sqn.

**Theddlethorpe**

**LOCATION / GRID REF:** Sheet 113 SK 470905

This location also had its own landing strip and was a satellite to RAF Manby, established in the late 1930s. During World War II the range came under the control of 25 Group, but it passed to 1 Group post World War II and saw a lot of use by aircraft from RAFFC Manby. The site closed in 1976 when the range area moved north to Donna Nook.

Anti Aircraft Defences

Following the establishment of the airfields post World War I, it soon became apparent that there would be a need to create a warning system to detect enemy air raids. The aim of the system was to give fighters as much time to get airborne and intercept the incoming aircraft.

The solution came in the form of Radio Direction Finding (RDF), or as we now call it, radar and by 1939 a network of RDF sites had been established. Called Chain Home (CH) these sites were located on high ground around the county. RDF Station 34 was at Stenigot, map ref: Sheet 122 SK256825. One of Stenigot’s distinctive 360 foot high transmitter towers still stands proudly today on the Wolds skyline as a silent reminder of its role in such an epic phase of World War II as the Battle of Britain. Gee navigation aid equipment was also installed at Stenigot.

To supplement these operations Chain Home Low (CHL) sites were also developed and an example in the district was at Skendleby, map ref: Sheet 122 SK438708; these sites were designed to detect low flying aircraft.

Post World War II saw a new generation of early warning radars evolve and they were integrated as part of a wider communications network. The remains of the distinctive ACE HIGH radar dishes can still be seen lying in close proximity to the Stenigot transmitter tower, which is itself still used to train aerial erectors from RAF Digby.
This jointly operated Visitor Centre is always a popular attraction, which allows close access to the BBMF aircraft.

Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Visitor Centre

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK215565; on Dogdyke Road in Coningsby Village, near the A153/A155 junction

ADDRESS:
RAF Coningsby, Dogdyke Road, Coningsby, Lincolnshire LN4 4SY

TELEPHONE
01522 782040

EMAIL:
bbmf@lincolnshire.gov.uk

WEBSITE:
www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/bbmf

OPENING HOURS:
Monday to Friday 10.00am to 5.00pm; hangar tours start at 10.30am and run throughout the day. Last tour 3.30pm (March-October) (3pm November-February). Normally closed Saturday/Sunday, Bank Holiday and two weeks at Christmas. For weekend opening please visit the website (Normal admission charges apply). Occasionally, due to RAF Commitments and stand down, we cannot guarantee public access to the hangar, or the presence of specific aircraft.

ADMISSION FEES:
Admission charges apply for guided tours please visit our website for more information.

A unique partnership between the Royal Air Force and Lincolnshire County Council provides the public with a gateway to the home of the RAF Battle Of Britain Memorial Flight at Coningsby, Lincolnshire. The RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight operates a Lancaster, five Spitfires, two Hurricanes, two Chipmunks, and a Dakota. The Visitor Centre provides the opportunity to see the Flight’s historic aircraft at close quarters and to observe the BBMF technicians working to maintain these magnificent aircraft in airworthy condition. The aircraft are no museum pieces, they are all still flying and can be seen at a variety of air shows in the summer months. Entry to the exhibition areas, shop and car park is free but access to the BBMF hangar is by guided tour only, for which there is a small charge. Hangar tours are led by knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteer guides, who give freely of their time and who, in some cases, have first-hand experience of the aircraft. (Tours last approximately one hour).

The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Visitor Centre attracts visitors of all ages and interests, as well as aviation enthusiasts and the families of people who fought in the Second World War.
The Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre is the only Airfield Museum in the country recreated to its original design sited on an original WWII airfield. Here you get the atmosphere of what it would have been like.

It holds one of the rarest aircraft, an Avro Lancaster Bomber in its collection along with many wartime vehicles, including a Ford WOT1 Crew Bus, the only one of its kind known in existence. The Avro Lancaster, Just Jane, frequently performs four engine taxy runs, the only place in the world you can see this performed on an original airfield. They have retained the original 1940s Control Tower and the Hangar is built on the original wartime hangar base.

The museum is built up entirely around RAF Bomber Command but the exhibits and displays span many areas, such as The Home Front and Escape and Evasion, giving a wide perspective on wartime Britain and the trials and tribulations of the Second World War.

The museum is expanding every year and it is their common ambition to fully rebuild it to a complete original wartime airfield, preserving the memory of Bomber Command for many years to come.

Experience the sights and sounds of an original WWII bomber airfield at East Kirkby.

1. Lancaster NX611 ‘Just Jane’
2. Fred and Harold Panton on the control tower at East Kirkby
3. Taxy-ride briefing underway
4. Lancaster ‘Just Jane’ nestled away in ‘her’ hangar
5. Lancaster ‘Just Jane’ out and about on the East Kirkby landing-strip
6. Taxy-ride visitors preparing to embark on ‘Just Jane’

old wartime airfield of RAF East Kirkby. It was set up by two farming brothers, Fred and Harold Panton as a memorial to Bomber Command, and primarily as a tribute to their older brother, Christopher Whitton Panton; who was shot down and killed on a bombing raid over Nuremberg on 30/31 March 1944.
Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK215597; on the B1192 Woodhall Spa to Coningsby road

ADDRESS:
Woodhall Spa Road, Tattershall Thorpe, Lincolnshire LN4 4PE

TELEPHONE
01526 342249

EMAIL:
clare@thorpecamp.co.uk

WEBSITE:
www.thorpecamp.org.uk

OPENING HOURS:
Every Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday from Easter until the end of September
July to August every Wednesday from 1pm to 5pm

ADMISSION FEES:
Details on application

Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre was formerly part of No 1 Communal Site, RAF Woodhall Spa, and was built in 1940 with a planned lifespan of only ten years! The site included the Officers’ and Sergeants’ Messes, Airmen’s Dining Halls and the NAAFI building, together with ration stores, latrine and ablution blocks. Only the Airmen’s Dining Halls, the NAAFI and ration store are within the Centre’s boundary.

At the end of the war, when the RAF vacated the site, it was taken on by the Horncastle Rural District Council who converted it into temporary housing until the early 1960’s. By 1987 the site was completely derelict and overgrown. Part of it came within the area acquired by the Woodland Trust when they purchased the adjacent Carr Woods and it was their plan to demolish the buildings.

The Thorpe Camp Preservation Group was set up in April 1988 with the aim of restoring the site and creating a Visitor Centre to tell the story of RAF Woodhall Spa and civilian life during WWII. The Preservation Group leased the remaining original camp buildings from the Woodland Trust for 5 years, purchasing them in 1998.

The group has restored all of the war-time buildings on the site, including nissen huts, shower block and ration store.

Part of RAF Woodhall Spa lives on in the fabric of the popular Thorpe Camp Visitor Centre.
**Petwood Hotel**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK196634; on the Stixwould Road, in Woodhall Spa

ADDRESS:
Stixwould Rd, Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire LN10 6QG

TELEPHONE
01526 352411

EMAIL:
reception@petwood.co.uk

WEBSITE:
www.petwood.co.uk

The house was originally built at the turn of the last century for Lady Weigall. The name Petwood, derives from the fact that the site she chose was in the area of her favourite ‘pet wood’.

Despite a spell as a military hospital for convalescents in the First World War, the Petwood’s most notable appearance in wartime history is probably as the Officers Mess for the 617 Squadron. Requisitioned by the RAF in 1942, originally Officers of 97 and 619 Squadrons were based at the Petwood.

When it was decided that the 617 ‘Dambusters Squadron’ should be made into a special duties squadron which would work in isolation and secrecy, Woodhall airfield was selected as the operational base. So 619 Squadron was moved out of the Petwood and 617 Squadron was moved in. For Officers at war, the Petwood was fondly remembered as a ‘splendid place’ remote from battle.

Today, the Squadron Bar hosts a range of memorabilia and tributes to Guy Gibson VC, Leonard Cheshire VC and their Officers. In the grounds you will find a dummy practice bouncing bomb, as was used in the Dambusters raid and over the bar you will see the branch of a tree that was found impaled in the fuselage of a Lancaster.

The Petwood Hotel extends a warm welcome to visitors who wish to view the Squadron Bar and memorabilia. However, please note that the Squadron Bar is occasionally booked for private parties and you may wish to telephone ahead to confirm availability.

**The Cottage Museum**

LOCATION / GRID REF:
Sheet 122 SK196634; on Iddesleigh Road in Woodhall Spa

ADDRESS:
Iddesleigh Road, Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire LN10 6SH

TELEPHONE
01526 353775

EMAIL:
info@cottagemuseum.co.uk

WEBSITE:
www.cottagemuseum.co.uk

OPENING HOURS:
Open daily, Easter through to Remembrance Sunday

ADMISSION FEES:
Details on application

The Woodhall Spa Cottage Museum opened its doors in 1987 and has so far welcomed over 32,000 visitors. It is a small, independent, community museum managed by volunteers and is housed in ‘The Bungalow’, as it is affectionately referred to by local residents. It is itself a major exhibit being constructed of corrugated iron laid on a timber frame and is situated in its own quiet grounds.

The museum is a result of the vision of John Wield, who foresaw that one day visitors to the Spa would ask about the origins of the village and so set about photographing and recording Woodhall Spa in its Edwardian heyday. His photographs form the core of the museum’s collection and his family lived in the bungalow until 1965.

Having recently been the recipient of a major heritage lottery award, the bungalow and its outbuildings have undergone major refurbishment. New exhibitions have been developed reflecting the wide and varied history of the village from Victorian times to the present day, as well as reflecting the Wield’s family home. Themes reflect the war time importance of the village, as well as the stories of local characters and the development of the Spa as a major tourist attraction.

A memorial stone “To the men who left Woodhall Spa to fight in the battle of Arnhem” was dedicated in September 2010. The museum also houses the Tourist Information Centre.
Memorials in East Lindsey

East Lindsey’s rich aviation heritage is as a result of the high demand for airfields near to the coast during World War II. Unfortunately having such a high concentration of airfields in the district resulted in a large number of casualties over the years. To remember those men and women who lost their lives there are a number of memorials throughout the district.

Many of the memorials relate to individual RAF bases and have been featured earlier in the booklet, whilst some are located at a particular crash site.

For example, there is a beautiful memorial in place in North Thoresby which commemorates the loss of the entire crew of the Lancaster EDS83 on 4 October 1943. Having taken off from RAF Waltham on a test flight the Lancaster suffered structural problems and came down on the village of North Thoresby, destroying the Methodist Church and nearby cottages. Fortunately none of the villagers were injured but sadly the entire 8 man crew all lost their lives.

Throughout the district the number of memorials is increasing all the time. The leaflet ‘RAF Memorials in East Lindsey’ includes information relating to all the memorials that we were aware of and were in situ at the time of publication.

If you would like further information on RAF memorials in East Lindsey, please contact the Tourist Information Centre on 01507 601111.

There are many other great places to visit in East Lindsey, from traditional resorts with their friendly family spirit and all weather attractions, or quieter resort towns and villages with their charming, tranquil ambience... or travel inland to discover historic market towns, mills, golf courses and wonderful walks. There are also a host of events and festivals throughout the year, so you will never be short of something to do.

The great places to visit in East Lindsey are equally matched by the great places to stay. There’s a wide variety of quality accommodation to suit everyone’s needs, from large hotels to smaller guest houses, quaint self catering cottages to friendly camping and caravan sites, all offering the warmest of welcomes.

For further information - www.visitskegnessandmablethorpe.com or www.visitlincolnshire.com

Or contact one of our friendly Tourist Information Centres, details right.

Tourist Information

- **Horncastle**
  Wharf Road, Horncastle LN9 5HL
  Tel: 01507 601111
  Email: horncastleinfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk

- **Louth**
  Cannon Street, Louth LN11 9NW
  Tel: 01507 601111
  Email: louthinfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk

- **Mablethorpe**
  High Street, Mablethorpe LN12 1AF
  Tel: 01507 474939
  Email: mablethorpeinfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk

- **Skegness**
  Embassy Theatre, Grand Parade, Skegness PE25 2UG
  Tel: 0845 674 0505
  Email: skegnessinfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk

- **Tattershall**
  Butts Lane, Tattershall LN4 4NL
  Tel: 01507 601111
  Email: tattershallinfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk

- **Woodhall Spa** (Open: Easter to October)
  Cottage Museum, Iddesleigh Road
  Woodhall Spa, LN10 6SH
  Tel: 01526 353775
  Email: woodhallspainfo@e-lindsey.gov.uk