



EDITION: AUTUMN 2015



September was a busy month with the annual Museum Open Day on September 6, a great success with more attendees than ever and a grand show being put on on the grass around the memorial by the by the Havering motoring club.

The month also marked the weather induced arrival of Boeing B-17 Sally B for a short stay at North Weald after its an intended return flight to Duxford ended in a diversion to the west Essex airfield.



© Weald Aviation Matthew Smith

COMING SOON

Many will be familiar with the line of North Weald Airfield Museum lapel badges. All have retained the basic Hawker Hurricane silhouette used by the village as its emblem, any changes over the years being confined to the wording around the edges. Until now the colours have been variations on blue white and black.

Next year marks the taking over of a flat grass field near the village of North Weald Bassett to operate a handful of inferior biplanes in the defence of London and the South East. The field was taken over from the late summer of 1916 and within months the aircraft nonetheless scored significant successes against the bombing airships.

As we now know the airfield went on to play a massive part in the defence of England until the late 1960s and has played host to a large Warbird community since.

To mark the Centenary of North Weald Airfield there will be a new badge design. It is the same size and mounting as the original and makes use of the same materials. The wording, colours and central boss have changed significantly.

In place of the familiar Hurricane in the centre there are two aircraft, a RAF BE2 biplane and an airship. The idea is that the BE2 is above the airship, 'ascendant' to mark the victories of the type over the German airships from September 1916.

The biplane is black, the airship white and the boss red. The outer circle is blue giving the national colours, red, white and blue.

In a break from tradition the badge does not include the museum name. This allows the badge to have a wider acceptance across the airfield community although we do not yet know how wide that acceptance might be early indications are that there will be a ready market.

The standard Hurricane badge, and variations on it, remain available for purchase through the museum shop or on-line.

The badge project is the first of a number elements the museum will be exploring to mark the centenary of North Weald Airfield in partnership with a number of others on and near the airfield.



WHAT'S ON

20 September The Annual Royal Air Forces Association led Battle of Britain Church Service at wreath laying at the Parish Church of St. Andrew in the village.

With the finale of the museum's season fast approaching the final important date for your diary this year is the Remembrance Sunday Service at the Memorial and Debt of Honour outside the museum. This year we expect to have the new 1916-2016 badges on sale so that may be an additional attraction for what is always a crowd puller.

8 November Remembrance Sunday services. Towards the end of the museums opening period it will be opening early on the Sunday to work alongside the Parish Council to host the annual service in memory of the fallen of what is now 99 years. The museum expects to have supplies of its new and exciting 100 years commemorative badge on the day.

6 December. [Sunday afternoon] The Annual General Meeting of members of the North Weald Airfield Museum Association. Ad Astra House, Hurricane Way, North Weald CM16 6AA. Bona Fide current members only. Membership is just £12.50 annually and gives you additional access to the museum and its research facilities.

EPPING MARKET

Every Monday

www.eppingmarket.co.uk

Please come along and see us!

MUSEUM NEWS

A few days after the last issue was sent out and appeared on line the airfield was the recipient of a number of positive 'outcomes' associated with remembering and marking the Battle of Britain 75th Anniversary.

Three Norwegian's from the Bergen area and closely associated with museums in that area called in on the NW airfield museum as part of a mini-tour taking in such as the RAF Museum and a big Duxford air show.

Unfortunately, July 9th, their chosen day for a trip from Greenwich to North Weald coincided with a particularly successful London Underground strike that wiped out 100% of the service. But they made it through and spent a warm and sunny afternoon touring the museum, the memorial, the war graves in the graveyard of St. Thomas' Church and the airfield.

It was perhaps unfortunate that the numbers of Warbirds being prepared for the events over the following weekend was lower than usual but there was plenty to see including a Douglas Dakota owned by the Breitling watch company and fresh in from Switzerland. Something was happening at The Squadron and for the first time I noticed that the Nissen hut bar was sporting a new Breitling endorsement sign over the door between the squadron badges for 331 and 332 Norwegian Squadron's.



The following day the reason for the activity in the bar was disclosed by the arrival of two Hawker hurricane's and four Supermarine Spitfire's. The RAF Battle of Britain Flight [BOBMF] was back in town!

That morning the iconic fighters had performed a well publicised remembrance flight over The Mall and Buckingham Palace and dispersed. Most commentators assumed they had headed off to their home base at RAF Coltishall - but they were incorrect as there was need for a call in to their former home at North Weald and a corporate event being run by Breitling.

Sadly I was not able to get a programme let alone a ticket to this private indoor event so I cannot spill the beans on just how much tea was sipped!

Outside though it was another matter and it has been quite a while since anywhere other than Coltishall has been graced with seven of the BOBMF single engine fighters lined up together. Before they landed on the airfield and surrounding village were treated to the rare formation over-flight.



Community Day this year fell on Sunday 12th July – a date that related to the 75th Anniversary. The museum was open and ran a promotional shop on the airfield. The feedback from all attendees was that it was a great show and in many ways even better than last year.

It was a strange one. When the local Essex Police launched their new crime prevention baby 'Heritage watch' with an event at North Weald the first thing I thought, ah Heritage that's 'Museum' isn't it.... which one of us is going?

It did not take long to find that no one in the museum knew about it! The only reason even heard about it was through a neighbourhood watch message. An accidental rather than an intentional spreading of knowledge.

The Epping Forest District launch of 'Heritage Watch' took place on the morning of Tuesday 14th July at North Weald Railway Station. Unfortunately a couple of days after I set off for the USA. Cllr. Liz Webster, Chair of Epping Forest District Council, officially launched the District's participation in the Countywide scheme.

According to the official text Heritage Watch is an Essex Police led partnership between agencies that are committed to protecting our heritage, as well as encouraging members of the public who want to preserve community assets to join.

The watch group will look to exchange information and put in practice crime prevention advice in order to prevent heritage crime.

The scheme looks to maintain and preserve important places of interest, prevent any crime that may damage assets beyond recovery, which may lead to the loss of a piece of history.

Although it clearly included the Epping & Ongar Railway because of the profile it gave the event it seems the launch event was not directly aimed at heritage establishments as we had assumed.

Perhaps when the museum or surrounding structures are physically attacked there will be a letter inviting the museum along for a bit of Heritage Watch Counselling!



MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

— HOW TO JOIN

We accept all currencies in welcoming you to museum membership—becoming a Friend of North Weald Airfield Museum as long as it means the same as £12.50p!

You can join through the museum www.nwamuseum.co.uk

MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

The museum will close for the winter from the end of November until April 2016.

When we open again entry will, as usual, be free for members. Except on Special Event Days visitors will be charged standard rates for entry:

Adults	£2
Concessions	£1.50
Children [5-15]	50p

Group rates vary but generally there is a minimum charge of £50 per group.

C O N T A C T

NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD MUSEUM

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Hurricane Way

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Epping

Essex CM16 6AA

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www.nwamuseum.co.uk

Registered charity: 1081157

ADVERTISING AND THE HURRICANE

One way in which the NWAMA can earn income and to finance the production of hard copies of the Newsletter is advertising. Advertisers need circulation beyond the membership and they also need to know who is reading the Newsletter. If you pass this edition on please let us know who to so we can help finance your reading!



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The Hurricane includes artwork produced for it by Ian J Commin of Insight Design of North Burnham, Slough SL1 6DS. In some cases it may not be possible to indicate the source of this material directly associated with the images used.

ANNUAL OPEN DAY

As noted on the front page of this issue this year our Open Day was held on September 6.

6 September [Sunday] North Weald Airfield Museum Open Day at Ad Astra House, Hurricane Way, CM16 6AA on the edge of North Weald village and by the old entrance to the former RAF airfield. The museum was open as usual and in addition we had outside displays that included the museum shop, the Royal Air Forces Association, Police Aviation News and some delicious food outlets. As usual entry to the museum and extra displays were free on the day. We offered a limited number of 'taster' tours of the airfield and its environs. These hour long tours were a great hit and there were simply not enough seats at peak times for all those that wanted to go! No one was quibbling at the cost [£5 per person] either.

We received visits from The Mayor Cllr. Helen Kane the Portfolio Holder for Epping Forest District Council's Leisure and Community Services and Mayor of Waltham Abbey Town Council., her husband Sam and District Cllr Glynis Shiell.

All in all a great day bathed in the late summer sunshine and crowds that were significantly higher than last year thanks in part to the arrival of a car club.



Thank you to our neighbours Bassett Business Units for turning a blind eye to our short term use of their fence to put up the days banners and bunting! Bassett Business Units is on the site of the original Miles Collection Museum – just five minutes from the M11 they offer a mix of 250 sq. ft. and 500 sq. ft. units for office and storage use. They offer tenants parking, CCTV, a phone answering service, deliveries accepted while you are away. Tel: 01992 524111 or 01992 618000. Fax: 01992 524542. Email: b bu@bassettbusinessunits.co.uk Web: www.bassettbusinessunits.co.uk And Epping Forest Community Transport for the use of their vehicle for the airfield tours so ably driven by our very own super guide Steve Wagstaffe.

BASSETT'S RECOLLECTIONS – 1957

New in from a reader.

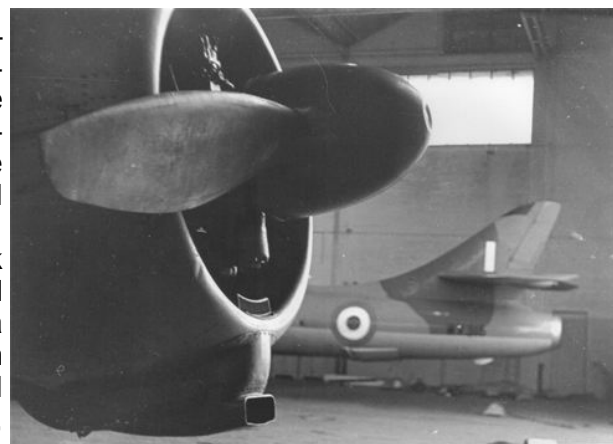
Just a few memories of my time spent at R.A.F. North Weald – from early 1956 to late 1957. Arrived as an Electrical and Instrument Storeman and was put in charge of the stores in the Signals Section which at that time was situated in the old Battle of Britain Control and Plotters Bunker. Wonder if anyone reading this and was there in Signals at these dates would remember Flight Sgt Roberts (top man)?

I was on duty when in June 1957 two Hunters of 111 Black Arrows collided over the airfield, one crashed on the airfield and the other landed safely. One pilot was killed. About a month later another Hunter of the Station Flight crashed on the airfield, again killing the pilot. Later I was one of the pall bearers at his funeral. But it was not all doom and gloom, flights in the Station Anson and Chipmunk were two highlights not to mention all the laughs and dodging the night duties. Often wonder if any guys are still around who were there with me. A Cpl/Tech Peter Ward used to give me a ride home on his Norton Dominator, more scary than any Cpl /Drill Instructor.

Hope you find these notes useful. Look forward to hearing from you and visiting your Museum

All the best

John Bassett



I thought there would be a picture of 'The Anson' John mentioned somewhere in the archives but I was not as lucky as I thought I would be and found only the propeller and engine of the aircraft with one of the 111 Hunter aircraft in the background!

Does anyone have a picture of all of the Anson we can use in the next issue?

LOOKING BECK TO HOME LIFE

In the same vein more news from those with 111 Squadron connections.

You may recall that the last edition of The Hurricane mentioned and illustrated the team that flew to Zurich and brought back a Swiss cow bell. Reference was also made to images that Peter Beck a member and recent visitor to the museum had as a youngster living in the village.



Now we have the images [one slightly singed where the young man set fire to it!] we know that they were taken in Beamish Close, quite a way from the museum but known to be used as quarters for the RAF personnel. And that is 'Dads car' parked outside the house with a young Peter astride his tricycle.

His father, Flight Sergeant W B Beck, flew with the 111 Squadron display team, and was regularly photographed. The 111 Squadron collection of images [not a museum resource but accessibly] includes a number of images of Sergeant Beck and that trip to Zurich. The museum has the bell!



ACCREDITATION

The museum is currently undertaking a process of 'Accreditation' – a system of checks to ensure that it undertakes to put in place best practice in how it works as a museum.

This is nothing new and indeed this is the third time the museum has undertaken a similar series of tasks. Similar each time 'they' just change the name of the task and issue a certificate in a different colour.

Fifteen years ago the museum attained Charity Status and linked that to the initial 'Registration' under Resource both of which gave the museum fine certificates denoting its worth. That first certificate is still hanging in the museum hallway.

Fortunately the Charity status has been pretty static except for ensuring that the organisation based in Liverpool gets updates on the accounts and Trustee names. The same cannot be said of Registration and after a few years the Museum & Galleries Commission was swept away and it was back to grindstone and filling in yet more forms which appeared to be the same as before with a few extra words! This third tranche of the work is overseen by the Arts Council.

The upside of this work is that it provides the museum with status but the downside is that it takes time. All this paperwork looks fine and it is truly great acknowledgement that we are a charity and have met the standards required to be a museum but it does deprive us of valuable research and archive time.

RECENT VISITS TO THE MUSEUM

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

On 5th August 2015 North Weald Airfield Museum faced an entirely new challenge – a WALKING tour of the airfield, starting at Ad Astra House and ending at the war graves in St Andrew's churchyard. Not only that but it was also the biggest single group of visitors welcomed at North Weald for many, many years – 37! The party, from the East Essex Friends Rambling Group in Chelmsford arrived (by car) at 10.00am and were welcomed by Chairman Peter Gardner. After an hour in the museum they then set off for the airfield with Steve Wagstaffe at the head of the column.

The tour took in along the way the Gate Guardian, the Battle of Britain damage to Hanger no.1, the District Council's wheelie bin mountain, 257 Squadron's dispersal area, the filming locations for the 1968 film Battle of Britain and the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance en route to Weald Aviation where Assistant manager Ash gave the group a tour of the restoration hangers.

For lunch, due to the size of the group half ate at the Wings Café while the rest carried on round the peri-track to the Squadron [featured above]. The "Wings" party then re-joined the rest for a tour of the Norwegian Wing, NAAFI and the Blenheim dispersal bays.

Returning back round the airfield the tour wound up with an emotional visit to the St Andrews war graves to hear the stories of Montague Hulton-Harrup, the Essex Regiment Boy Soldiers and Sir Thomas Pike.

For the record the total distance covered was 6.8 miles!



FRIENDS OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

On 22 August a group of 16 attended and after a look around the museum they were taken on a tour that included insights of the Kennett and Weald Aviation collections on the airfield.

The following week Laura Whitman their Membership Services Manager was quick to send a 'Thank You' to the museum.

"I wanted to say a huge thank you for hosting us last Saturday and for all of the effort that went into organising our visit. It was much appreciated and Gordon had excellent feedback on the day e.g. "outstanding day", "keep arranging these great visits" so I think we can safely say that the Friends enjoyed themselves!

IAN ALLAN AVIATION TOURS

Another irregular visitor is Ian Allan Aviation Tours, they have been to the museum before and returned to partake of its many attractions in September.

The North Weald visit was part of a major group tour over a number of days. On the day [September 9] the tour started at Bentley Priory Museum in Stanmore for 9am and ending up in Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire in the early evening. The visit to North Weald is therefore something of a whirlwind tour over lunch time. The numbers were such that it was pre-planned that the group was split into two over two hours – lunch at The Squadron and a museum tour, turn about.



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SOCIAL MEDIA

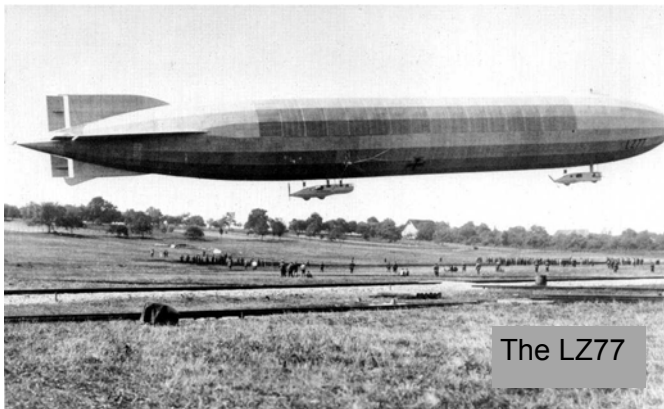
Reaching out: The museum has two Twitter account's which run in parallel. One is the original linked to the web site set up by Simon Chamberlain, our late Secretary, and largely maintained by his widow Lizzie. The other is the newer account set up last summer when we had difficulties untangling the existing accounts formerly run by Simon. The latter account achieved 1,000 followers in March this year and has now moved beyond 1,140 where the original account has nearly 900 followers.

The museum has a Facebook account that has over 1,100 likes on it so we are getting out to people who often cannot get to North Weald and through the museum door so easily.

There is strong evidence that many singletons and groups are attracted to visit the museum and airfield previously only enjoyed electronically so it is serving the museum and our neighbours on many fronts.

100 YEARS AGO

Another year needs to pass before we can mark the opening of North Weald as an aircraft landing ground assigned to the defence of London and the South East. That said one hundred years ago on the night of 11/12 September 2015 [an earlier 9-11 as it were] German Army Zeppelin LZ.77 bombed Wintry Park North Weald whilst looking for London.



The airship, commanded by Hauptmann Alfred Horn, approached the Essex coast at about 11.10pm, just north of the River Crouch. Already attracting interest from the few guns assigned to anti-aircraft fire the LZ.77 was over Ongar and North Weald Bassett at 1140pm. After wandering around for a further ten minutes the airship illuminated an army encampment below it and threw out sixty bombs. Even though four of the eight high explosive bombs hit the target it seems that each one still had its safety pin inserted and they failed to explode.



You can read the full story on the website at <http://www.iancastlezeppelin.co.uk>

ON THE AIRFIELD

August was a horror month for North Weald preserved aircraft community after two different locally based jet aircraft crashed in separate incidents at air shows.

Flags were already flying at half mast at North Weald as the Airfield mourned to loss of one of its pilots – Kevin Whyman – who was killed following an incident involving one of the based Folland Gnat's during an air display at the Carfest show in Oulton Park, Cheshire when the second incident took place.

Mr Whyman, nicknamed "Jester", was a member of the Heritage Aircraft Trust Gnat Display Team and married with a young daughter.

The former RAF trainer aircraft is believed to have got into trouble whilst inverted and low. The pilot had no opportunity to leave the aircraft before it crashed in open land a mile north of the site, with no-one else involved.

The Airfield Manager and Operations Team sent their condolences to his wife and daughter and the other members of the Gnat Display Team at this difficult time. The whole Airfield was in shock.

Few had come to terms with the loss of the Gnat in the north-west when an even worse accident took place at an air show on the south coast on 22 August.

The two day RAFA Shoreham Air Show air display was underway with the North Weald based Hawker Hunter T7 WV372/G-BXFI flying a display that it had undertaken flawlessly the previous year. This time the Hunter failed to pull out of a loop and crashed into a section of the A27 that skirts the north of the coastal airfield. Unfortunately on this occasion the crashing Hunter impacted on one of the main south coast roads at a busy time and it struck several cars and pedestrians and blocked the road with an initial death toll given as seven, rising all too quickly to eleven. Somehow the experienced former RAF Harrier pilot, Andy Hill, 51, survived the impact whilst still strapped in his ejection seat, fortunately the forward section of the fuselage broke away. He was seriously injured and dragged to safety by rescuers.

This was such a major media story with ongoing and far reaching consequences to the air show scene that there is little point in repeating the developing details here, they change on a daily basis.

WV372 was owned by Graham Peacock and based at North Weald Airfield alongside a Sea Fury. It carried the markings of No. 2(AC) Squadron when they were based at RAF Gutersloh in Germany. The Hunter has been active on the display circuit without incident for many years, first with Jet Heritage at Bournemouth before passing through several other owners and operators.

The repercussions of the accident, perhaps both accidents, are that vintage jet aircraft have been banned from flying manoeuvres other than straight and level passes over anything other than the sea. Good for seaside venues perhaps but no good for North Weald and others such as Duxford. It seems that aircraft powered by means other than jet are not affected by this edict. All examples of the Hunter in the UK are grounded until more is known about the reasons for the crash.



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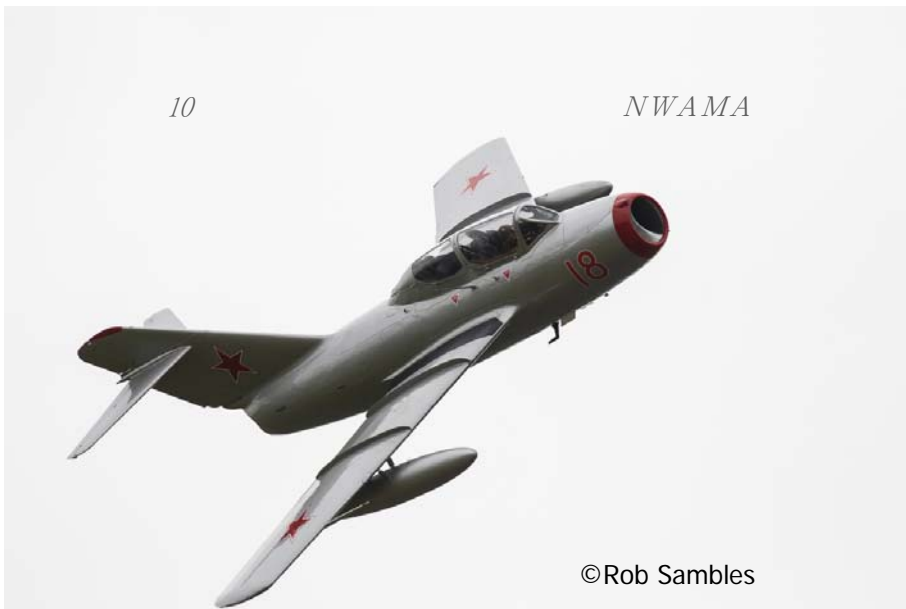
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The Squadron
 North Weald Airfield
 Merlin Way
 Essex
 CM16 6HR

SUMMER MIG

For the first time since the late 1990s the MiG-15, a Cold War classic jet fighter belonging to the Norwegian Air Force Historical Squadron, was displaying in the UK whilst based at North Weald.

The Mikoyan-Gurevich, MiG-15, was one of the first successful swept-wing jet fighters, and achieved fame in the skies over Korea, where, early in the war, it outclassed all straight-winged enemy fighters in most applications.



©Rob Sambles

The MiG-15 is believed to have been one of the most widely produced jet aircraft ever made. In excess of 12,000 were manufactured and licensed foreign production may have raised the production total to over 18,000. Some among them were Polish-built variants of which the Norwegian Air Force Historical Squadron's example is one. The MiG-15 is often mentioned, along with the North American F-86 Sabre, as the best fighter aircraft of the Korean War, and among the best fighter aircraft of all time. The MiG-15 remains in service with the North Korean Air Force as an advanced trainer.

The MiG-15 wears the markings of the aircraft flown by famed Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin before he became the first man to visit outer space in 1961.

Wings & Wheels Triumphs

The North Weald accidents may have placed a veil of negativity on North Weald but the show went on elsewhere.

In their end of show report on the Wings and Wheels event in Surrey over the August Bank Holiday the organisers wrote of sunshine, rain, sad farewells and poignant tributes all contributed to the overwhelming success of their eleventh event where over 38,000 people visited to support and celebrate the best displays in aviation and motoring.

A poignant tribute was held each day to remember those affected by the Shoreham tragedy as the Show paused for a minute's silence at the start of the air displays. The Kittyhawk flew gracefully across the aerodrome to signal the end of the silence and open what was the best air display the Show has had to date.

The event enjoyed North Weald based Mig 15 and for the first time the B-17 Flying Fortress The Sally B and unwittingly saw it delivered to North Weald when it was unable to return to its Duxford base.



©Matthew Smith

The show goes on.

NEIGHBOURS

A proposed processing plant for construction waste would pollute green belt land and homes, increase existing traffic problems and threaten a nearby hospice, it has been claimed.

A public consultation is being carried out by Essex County Council into the possibility of opening a new waste recycling depot in Hastingwood, next to junction seven for the M11.

The plan, which is being considered against several others, has met with opposition from North Weald Parish Council and some people living nearby.

In a letter to the county council, the parish council claims a calculation has shown "there would be

a minimum of eight large lorries entering and exiting the site every hour” to meet demand. It adds it would be “completely inappropriate” to open the depot next to St Clare Hospice, which provides care and support for people with life threatening and terminal illnesses.

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT MUSEUM

Many will be aware that our mentor museum, the Epping Forest District Museum based in Sun Street, Waltham Abbey closed two years ago, in October 2013, with the wholly publicly funded museum having transferred its outreach based service to a sister museum in Hertfordshire and less than accessible offices in Epping. The move was to prepare for ‘imminent’ upgrade works part paid for by a significant Heritage Lottery award. Unfortunately the work did not start on the expected date and the scheduled reopening earlier this year came and went.

The good news is that these extensive works finally started this year with a scheduled completion date of October [this year]. Enlarged exhibition and storage floor space and a lift are the main added features.

Before anyone starts getting ready to return to visiting the museum in the near future, it is fair to say that what may be presented to the staff at the museum at ‘completion’ of the works is no more than a rather impressive much expanded shell. The somewhat smaller original museum took a long time to reduce to a shell and refilling it will take a long time. We might expect that the Epping Forest District Museum will reopen early next year.



100 YEARS another anecdote

My memories of the 1914-18 War – an unsigned letter from August 1978 that was clearly collected decades ago by either The Miles Collection or Epping Forest District Council. It includes a brief reference to the bombing of North Weald in 1915.

My memories of the 1914-18 War seem to become more vivid as the years go by. I was only a lad at that time.

I well remember the German prisoners of war who were held in a farm building at Coopersale. In the mornings they were marched through the village to work on the local farms. There were two armed guards with them. We village children used to watch them and occasionally handed them sweets as they went along. One morning the guards allowed them to go into the village shop. When they came out one of them handed a large bag of sweets to the children who had gathered around. They were not bad chaps really. They each had a red patch in the middle of their jackets, and a blue patch on one trouser leg.

One thing I remember very well, was one morning I was cycling to Epping and as I passed under the railway bridge at Coopersale I noticed the tail-plane of an aircraft sticking up among the trees about half way between the railway bridge and the Ongar road. This was one of our planes from North Weald which had crashed after its encounter with the raiding German aircraft during a raid in the night.

I also remember seeing some incendiary bombs that were dropped on the army camp near Thornwood Common.

Of course the most memorable thing of all was the Zeppelin raids. Night after night we saw them passing over on their way to bomb London. They were picked out by the searchlights, and were so high up that they looked no larger than a cucumber.

The London anti-aircraft gun barrage was a deafening noise and was going continually all night at times.

Of course the most spectacular thing I remember, was the Zeppelin [sic] that was brought down in flames at Cuffley. We had seen it in the searchlights for some time and the guns were really giving it a hot time. Suddenly what appeared to be a Very Light was seen. Immediately the guns stopped firing, and the searchlights switched off. For several minutes nothing seemed to happen. Then what looked like an orange glow appeared, and remained so for a few seconds. Then suddenly we



saw flames, small at first, then becoming a giant bonfire. By this time we could see the whole of the Zeppelin [sic] being burned. It began to descend nose first and accelerated very fast. When it appeared to be about halfway down it broke in two pieces, and the impression one got was was of two flaming parrot cages. Of course from Coopersale we could not see it hit the ground but we knew when it did, a tremendous flash lit the sky. Many people were heard cheering but I remember several people saying, Poor Devils, they're being roasted alive, but that's war. I also... [the rest of the letter and the signature are missing]



The Miles Collection includes this painting of a 25 Squadron Blenheim

25 Squadron and North Weald and Boxted Airfields by John Camp

25 Squadron had a few notable years with the Blenheim before moving, post war, to Boxted airfield in North Essex.

The squadron was formed at Montrose on 25 September 1915 flying the FE2b, a two seat pusher fighter bi-plane operating mainly in France during the Great War.

In 1938 it converted to from the Gladiator bi-plane fighter to the Bristol Blenheim Mk IF whilst based at Hawkinge, Kent and was designated a night fighter squadron on 3 September 1939 before moving to Northolt on 4 October, from where it carried out night patrols over London. From January to June 1940 it was based at North Weald alongside the Hurricane squadrons. In September 1940 the squadron returned briefly and with marked success.

The Blenheim IF was a fighter conversion of the twin engine light bomber aircraft and some 200 were produced from conversion kits manufactured by the Southern Railway's Ashford factory. There was an additional gun pack below the forward fuselage containing four Browning machine guns to supplement the single fixed forward firing Browning of the bomber version. For their role as night fighters they were fitted with Airborne Interception [AI] later known as radar. Although they lacked the speed necessary for the interception of bombers they did have their successes and played a considerable part in pioneering the development of airborne radar.

During its time at North Weald the squadron undertook trials with types to replace the Blenheim including the Westland Whirlwind and the Bristol Beaufighter.

In the Battle of Britain, a New Zealander, Pilot Officer Michael Herrick, destroyed a German He 111 and a Dornier 17 on 4 September 1940, followed by a further He 111 the next day. The squadron also operated a detached flight of Blenheim out of Martlesham Heath from August to November 1939 in "airborne early warning" trials and in October all the aircraft went there, finally breaking the link with North Weald.

There is a sole example of a Blenheim flying anywhere in the World operated by the Aircraft Restoration Company out of Duxford. It is a Canadian built Bolingbroke version of the type but with a short fighter nose built in Britain by an Avro factory (on behalf of Bristol).

The story of this nose is rather interesting and bears a plate showing it was part of L 6739 which was allocated to 23 Squadron on 2 September 1939 and served in the Battle of Britain before being damaged in a landing accident at Wittering and struck off charge on 30 December 1940. The nose survived in good condition in Bristol's scrap-yard and was obtained by one of the workers,



© John Camp

Ralph Nelson who turned it into a battery powered car which he drove around Bristol until 1957. In the early 1990's he donated the car to the Blenheim project and the wheeled nose sat at Duxford for many years.

Fortunately Ralph never threw anything away, keeping all the fittings he didn't need when he built the car. However, about 70% of the outer shell had to be remade and the seat from the Mark IV nose reused. The engineering challenges of fitting an Avro built nose to a Canadian built airframe were considerable but the completed aircraft first took to the air piloted by John Romain on 20th November last year, after over 11 years work. The aircraft appears in the 23 Squadron markings of L 6739 YP-Q and was flown by a number of pilots. It is painted in standard green/brown camouflage with black under surfaces.

The cost of keeping the Blenheim flying is supported by the Blenheim Society, www.blenheimsociety.org.uk, whose membership comprises both veterans and ordinary people. There are regular events including a Blenheim Day. Annual membership is £15. The Society has a stall at many aviation events where a range of goods can be purchased.

At the end of the war 25 Squadron was retained as a permanent night fighter unit flying Mosquitoes. It was on 11 January 1946 that the squadron returned to an Essex airfield, this time to Boxted, near Colchester, which had been Station 150 of the USAAF for the bulk of the war variously flying the B-26 Marauder, P51B Mustang and P47D Thunderbolt.

There is a museum at Boxted airfield consisting of an original Nissen hut from the airfield plus a modern equivalent which serves as a visitor centre, selling souvenirs and light refreshments. The museum is well worth a visit and includes a panel on the RAF usage of the airfield featuring 25 Squadron's stay at Boxted. There is a photograph of them participating in the flypast down the Mall on 15 September 1946 to mark the Battle of Britain. Additionally, there are showcase containing a wide range of items relating to the USAAF at Boxted and lots of documents and items relating to the airfield and its history, including an airfield plan and models of aircraft. Also exhibited on open days, is the tail section of a B26C Marauder 41-35253, RJ-S, "Mr Shortly", which flew from nearby Earls Colne. It represents the largest remains of a Marauder in the UK. On the far side of the airfield at the roadside, about a mile away by car, is a memorial to all those who served at the airfield.

The museum is open on the last Sunday of each month from March to October inclusive. The hours are 10.00 to 16.00. There is a website at www.boxted-airfield.com. The museum is located off Langham Lane, Boxted, near Colchester, Essex C04 5NW.



This may not be familiar but if you have been to the museum you will have seen it. Another picture clue and the answer on the next page!



Recognise it now?

Its straight across the road from the museum and known as Leader Lodge, occupied by the family of Squadron Leader Arthur Pratt in 1939. It is currently undergoing some major refurbishment so it will be interesting to see what features survive the makeover.



SOMETHING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT

With 'a hundred years' as a theme over the coming months I make no excuses for including this only marginally aviation related item simply in the context of history and preservation. There is a parallel, albeit tenuous.

In my lifestyle I get around various parts of the world and occasionally time fill with visits to places off my normal radar and as such I ended up trundling to Galveston from my temporary base in Downtown Houston, Texas.

To me Galveston was previously only ever a place mentioned in a Glenn Campbell song and I never knew nor cared where it was or even what state it was in. Well that changed in July 2015. Now in my experience it is an oil industry port on the Gulf Coast, it has substance but it is pretty darn ugly and not somewhere to rush back to – except perhaps for the USS Texas.

I guess even as aviation orientated people we all know a little about the preservation of ships, HMS Victory of course and maybe some of the other more famous stuff including the Warrior, Cutty Sark and maybe even the Vasa in Sweden. We sort of know the issues of rotting wood and flaking steel and perhaps even marvel that any of these survive. We even understand that not everything can be preserved. Somethings are too big, too old, too ugly or too pointlessly expensive to preserve. A perpetually flying Avro Vulcan for instance.

It was in that mindset that I took on board the news that the State of Texas had preserved a Dreadnought, the USS Texas, and it was moored in Galveston and open to the public.

But that was a Great War era battleship and prior to that news I believed no-one had preserved such a thing, even if they had surely two wars would have put paid to its existence and it would have been melted down to make newer faster ships to serve at the front. Surely being allowed to go aboard a Dreadnought would be the stuff of dreams.

North Weald Airfield's



OPEN EVERY DAY - 930am to 5pm

It was a jaw dropping moment to see the vessel from the not too crowded car park, I knew nothing of US naval architecture but the shape that greeted me was somehow very familiar – at least from my history books. The colour of the ship is another surprise. I was told she was dark blue and I thought that odd, but the colour has an odd blue hue and clearly not all naval vessels are slate grey.

As I plodded across the lush grass in the 98 degree heat those familiar features of the vessel started to make sense and I worked out where I had seen them before. The upper works of the vessel zoomed into my minds eye from the history books as the central image of the carnage after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Many of the other Dreadnought era ships of the US Navy, having similar upper works to the Texas, had clearly perished on that day.



USS Nevada was a victim at Pearl Harbor

It must cost a fortune to look after Texas but access is just \$12 – or \$6 for an oldie like me – clearly not enough to pay for anything worthwhile in the way of a preservation programme and way less costly than boarding the far younger HMS Belfast in London or getting into Duxford. But of course getting to Galveston tends to inflate the price somewhat!

Texas was built way over 100 years ago, laid down in 1911 as what became known as the New York class she was commissioned as the Great War started in Europe, but you can still see the classic lines of the typical Dreadnought in the vessel. Typical? Well for a non-naval person it was always the 'small' calibre guns sticking out of the side, that halfway house between the Victory and the developed turret mounted battle-ship. There were originally 21 of these 5 inch guns but most have now gone; but you can see where they were.



Even though the Texas has clearly had some work done over the years the basics, those side guns, remain and you are able to get hands on and see how they worked, to see that like the wooden ship days they were not individual turrets that images suggested but simply multiple guns on decks just like in Nelson's time. The difference is that they are surrounded by decaying iron rather than rotting oak. Not what I expected.

The Texas served operationally in the short period the USA was in the Great War and in World War2 was no depot ship. Her main armament, 14inch guns, were already pushing middle age when they played their part in bombarding fortress Europe [Morocco and Normandy] and in retaking the Pacific islands from the Japanese. Throughout, we are told she punched out 19,000 shells but took just one fatality. She is also credited with the introduction and innovation of advances in gunnery and radar as well as aviation.

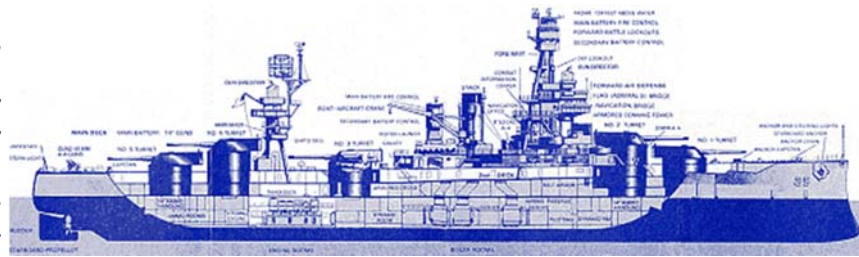
The aviation connection is that she was the first US battleship to launch an aircraft and she supported the drawn out crossing of the north Atlantic by Curtiss NC-4 seaplanes in May 1919 – a month before Alcock & Brown flew non-stop in a landplane - as well as carrying spotter aircraft of her own. Unfortunately the latter are rare so the display does not include one sitting in the blazing sun on her catapult. Neither does any part of the comprehensive display mention Alcock & Brown! Somehow, as an Englishman standing on the decks of a foreign nation's warship, it was still an awe inspiring experience to be there. Hours before to my mind such a ship simply did not exist



and yet here was a vessel that flagged up all that bland information the history books had put in black and white pages and here it was unfolding before me in 3D. Here was an example of the wooden decks that were no real protection against the plunging shells and bombs of the Japanese in 1941. Time, a lack of funding and disrepair mean they are not as pristine as they were in service but, like the guns in the sides they explain the words in the books in far more detail.

The passage of two wars have added to Texas. Her once sleek decks and hull are now scarred by the needs of war. There were virtually no aeroplanes when she was launched and no-one thought that these frail stick and string craft might be a threat to such a strong vessel therefore little call for anti-aircraft guns. Later in life her survival depended upon the addition of dozens of guns of all sizes to her upperworks. Along her waterline are deep armoured belts designed to deflect the blast of torpedoes - again not an element of war that was at the forefront of designers when she was conceived and quite clearly an ugly but necessary addition to her once sleek lines.

Below decks is a place I do not care for. Low cramped decks and steep gangways with every corner hiding a projection upon which to bang my head is not a friendly environment for any six-footer casually walking within her bowels - the additional consequences of being a tall crew member running to action stations while preparing for enemy action is perhaps beyond belief. The heroes who lived in these conditions in all weathers, let alone fought in them, deserve every accolade heaped on them.



Out of service by 1948 Texas somehow survived to be designated a National Historic Engineering Landmark in 1975. It is difficult to see how long she has left. She sits in warm salt waters supported by massive structures but the steel of her construction is inevitably dissolving year by year, thinning and weakening, reverting to the base material she was formed from. Restoration, or at least the stemming of the inevitable decay, already costs far more than she was constructed for. There will be a future generation that will not have the joy of experiencing her. The clock is ticking. www.texasstateparks.org

Where this story has a parallel at North Weald is the need to interpret. Unlike Stowe Maries further east in Essex the sands of time, mainly later architecture, have pretty much eradicated the 100 year old parts of North Weald Airfield and interpretation is confined to telling the stories of the people and perhaps pointing to the places where long lost artefacts have been obliterated by change. The museum building is probably the oldest around the airfield, originally built around 1908 but clearly the regular updating has pretty much destroyed much of the original structure with the brick walls now rendered and windows replaced. Whether there will be an airfield in place when the surviving aviation architecture reaches its centenary in 2027 remains something for another generation to wrestle with.



Denys Favre, 97, of Highfield Place in Epping, applied to join the RAF with thousands of other men after war broke out in September 1939. He failed through a combination of competition and high blood pressure, but managed to be one of the first recruits to the new Air Sea Rescue, which aimed to save the lives of pilots shot down by German gunners.

He recently visited the museum with Royal British Legion member Derek Berwin, 82, and his grandson Edward, 18, and they met up with the local MP Eric Pickles and told tales of an adventurous war.

One incident was on the Duchess of Athol, a troop ship, coming from Cape Town that was torpedoed about 1,500 miles off the coast of West and quickly sank. Denys made it to a lifeboat but quickly worked out that being so far from the nearest coast made rowing a difficult prospect. The following morning they found themselves accompanied by a German U-Boat and feared the worst. They survived the sinking only to face the prospect of being machine gunned. Fortunately that was not their fate and they were picked up by a friendly ship a few days later.