

The latest moves in the redevelopment of North Weald Airfield have been related to making way for future building programmes – in particular the large data centre - and replacing existing infrastructure that will be affected by new buildings. Some of these developments might need to be recorded by the museum if not preserved.

Externally the new build control tower and fire service accommodation is complete. On September 1 the old Merlin Way entrance on the east side of the airfield, Gate B1 and B2, set beside the 1950s Control Tower, were taken out of service and a new entrance put in place off the roundabout by the site of Hangar 3. This is primarily constructed using container style portable buildings added to the existing Gate A. It does make heavy transport access onto the airfield a little easier and there may be less damage to the street furniture on the roundabout (but I would not be certain of that there are still plenty of clumsy drivers about!).

A few days later the replica Hawker Hurricane that was previously sited on the south side of the old Control Tower (see right) was removed from its plinth and is currently in storage pending the creation of a new support plinth on the west side of the airfield.

The actual fate of the existing buildings currently remains unstated but older buildings close to the old control tower, building 240, the Fire Station, are in the area destined to be part of the data centre and clearly for demolition in the future.



Meanwhile Hangar 2, on the west side of North Weald Airfield and looming over the M11 Motorway remains empty and awaiting new tenants. Historically this 29,519 sq. ft {2,742 Sq. M} hangar was used to convert Hawker Hunter fighter planes for export markets and undertake upgrades on the type. More recently it was used as a warehouse.



NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD FIRE FIGHTER — 75 YEARS AGO

At the 2025 Museum Open Day in September, we had the pleasure of hosting one of North Weald's National Service RAF tradesmen. He is now 92 and still has vivid recollections and of his time there and some interesting action photographs to support his memories! It is not unusual to find copies of groups of tradesmen and women, but identifiable action shots are rare.

Maurice Bennett served at North Weald from 1950 to 1954 as a station fire fighter, arriving as 72 Squadron were exchanging their Supermarine Spitfire fighters and North American Harvard trainers for the sleek new de Havilland Vampire. The transition from propeller aircraft to jets was, understandably, traumatic at times.



The fire fighters were still operating in the aftermath of the 1939-45 war so, compared with modern day fire fighters they were somewhat ill equipped to fight fierce aircraft fires. In particularly their protective clothing was of a criminally poor quality. Their helmets were simply the wartime tin hat and although a visor was available it was nowhere near good enough protection.



The clothing was standard uniform shirts and trousers, and it was customary to wear the shirts with sleeves rolled up. It looked smart on parade but was no protection for even a low intensity fire. The final item was calf length wellington boots-fires and rubber are not particularly good bedfellows! In colder weather the standard uniform tunics afforded better protection but as the surviving images attest the rolled-up sleeves were pretty much the standard garb.

Unfortunately, the early post war years were marked with a fair number of crashes so the fire crews at the various RAF stations were rarely able to take life easy. In those days the RAF had a lot of aircraft and the proportionate rate of 'incidents' was high.

On June 4. 1951 the pilot of a 72 Squadron Vampire jet, Sergeant 650278 Charles 'Chips' Harry Hunter, aged 29 and single and from Ulley, Yorkshire. was seven minutes into a solo flight intended to last between 45 minutes and one hour when the aircraft crashed, nose first, a few yards off Kiln Lane near the railway embankment of the London Underground line that then ran from Epping to Ongar.

He was seen to fly high and then to tumble from the sky. As the aircraft neared the ground it appeared that the pilot was back in control and was starting to pull out of the near vertical dive. The aircraft flipped over onto its back and went into a spin. At the bottom of the loop the Vampire apparently righted itself and struck the ground hard and broke apart. The Yorkshireman probably died in the impact but to all intents he was there to be rescued, and Maurice drove to the scene as fast as he was able and got out of the diving seat intent on attempting a rescue.



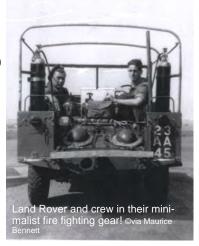
The forward cockpit section was the right way up and apparently intact but the heat and flames were simply too intense and his approach to the burning wreck was set back by an explosion – assumed to be the 20mm cannon rounds cooking off in the heat - so he resorted to getting some foam from the truck onto the fuselage to improve his chances of rescue. On this occasion he was wearing his standard tunic, so his arms were covered from the worst of the heat, but as the images of him fighting the fire attest he was not wearing a helmet or visor. In the event the tunic was so badly burned that it was thrown away.

That fatal accident stayed with him for the rest of his life. He often wondered whether some fireproof clothing might have given him some chance to get up close and rescue Chips Hunter. It was surmised that Hunter had blacked out at height and the aircraft had stalled. He may have come round during the vertical dive, but he pulled up too late to clear the ground.

The vehicles allotted to the North Weald fire party were a mix of wartime and post-war equipment, the newest being the latest military 'Jeep' the rugged Land Rover introduced to production in 1948. Others included the Fordson Foam Monitor and the Bedford QL 500 -gallon tanker.

Nearly a year later, on a beautiful April day, the sun was shining with a light breeze blowing. For a change Maurice and his colleagues were not the duty Airfield Crash crew, their role was being on standby looking after lesser tasks including undertaking maintenance at the fire section garage.

The Bedford Water Bowser had just returned from the MT Section after its maintenance, but they found it had a fault with the water



pumping motor on the rear tank, it kept cutting out. Maurice stripped it down and resolved the problem with the carburettor During the work over half of the water in the tank had been discharged during test runs and needed replacing before they were able to sign it off as ready for duty.

Maurice decided to road test it before the tank was refilled – it was but a ploy though. The plan was to pull up behind the Air Traffic Control tower and shout over the North Weld to Epping Road to the Kia-Ora café and get them to take an order for the regular mug of tea and a bacon wad. Being busy he had missed the NAAFI wagon as it did its round that morning. His stomach refilled he would then refill the bowser and declare the vehicle fit for service. It was not to be.

As he rounded the corner by No 1 hangar (the one that is still there by the museum building) he noticed a 601 Squadron Vampire racing up the runway at full throttle intent on a take-off. Before long though it became increasingly clear that the Vampire was not going to be leaving the ground anytime soon and the pilot was now aborting the take-off and braking hard to stop its progress towards the ever-closer end of the runway and the hedge beyond.

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 website www.nwamuseum.co.uk

MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

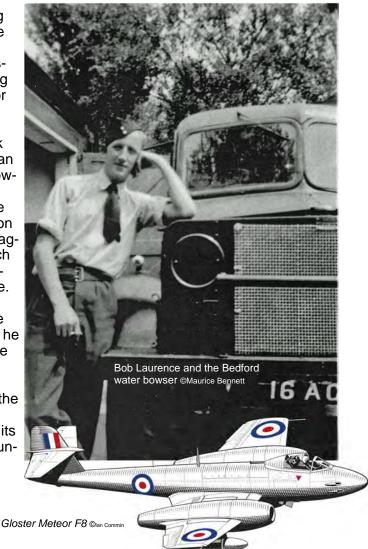
The museum season is April until November and it is closed for the winter

When open entry is free for members.

Except on Special Event Days visitors will be charged standard rates for entry:

Adults £5.00 Concessions £2.50 Children [5-15] £1.00

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



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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.

It duly reached the end of the runway and the undercarriage collapsed. The duty crash crew were aware and off in hot pursuit as the Vampire smashed through the hedge and ground to a halt. It was already on fire and smoking as it shot across the main road.

Along the main road running by the hedge was a deep drainage and anti-tank ditch. To facilitate the passage of emergency vehicles across the hazard a small wooden bridge had been added on the hidden side, and it was clearly marked by two yellow flags in the hedge.

As the crash crew approached it became obvious that someone had removed one of the flags and it was unclear where the safe gap was. The foam tender driver, who was in the lead of the responding vehicles made his decision as to whether the safe path was to the left or right of the remaining flag and – inevitably – made the wrong choice and went right and into the ditch at an angle! The crash rescue vehicle behind it was unable to get past. Fortunately, the vehicles in those days were relatively sluggish so it was a low-speed crash, and no-one suffered beyond a bump or two.

Maurice was by now following up the rear of the duty crews and was able to avoid the blockage. He swung the wheel over and hoped for the best. It was close but the Bedford remained on the bridge with just a couple of inches spare and reached the roadway safely.

The Vampire meanwhile had come to a halt but was a mass of flames. The next task was to extricate the pilot as soon as possible. He braked and turned which was to have disastrous consequences. The water in the half-filled tank was below the baffles and free to wash about and that snatched control from the driver. The Bedford carried on in the right direction – but sideways. As with the other incidents it all happened in relatively slow motion and Maurice exited the cab and raced for the blazing aircraft.



He had his axe with him, but it was not needed as the cockpit was slightly open which allowed him to pull it open fully with both hands and set to extricating the pilot. First the ejection seat needed a pin inserted to stop it firing itself, the pilot and Maurice into the sky. Next to be disconnected were the harness, straps, parachute and dingy connector to free the alive but unconscious pilot from the seat. The smoke and heat were unbearable, but he managed to grab him by the chest and crotch of his flying suit and lifted the 11 or 12 stone weight out of the cockpit and onto his shoulders. He later marvelled that he had managed to lift him out but the conditionsno doubt drove him to a superhuman effort forged out of his training and supported by adrenalin.

EPPING MARKET

Every Monday

www.eppingmarket.co.uk Please come along and see us! He carried the pilot down the road to the RAF ambulance. They were on the ball and took him from Maurice and whisked him off to the care of the medics. It turned out that when he came around, he only had a few lumps and bumps.

His rescue task done he returned to his vehicle to find that it was so close to the blaze that the paint was blistering. He started it and got it clear of the fire.

Maurice himself had got away lightly with singed eyebrows, a red and sore face, chapped lips and a smell of burned nose hair that lingered for a week.

The burning wreck was dealt with by the foam tender crew – they ran hoses across the road to the Vampire and pumped hundreds of gallons on foam in the plane to quickly extinguish it.

Naturally a crowd arrived on scene from nowhere to watch the brave fire teams at work. That was when the crews started to unload the belts of 20mm cannon ammunition from the aircraft. It was hot steaming and clearly volatile and the audience soon decided it was a good time to go home!

He never did get the bacon sandwich and mug of tea from the Kia Ora that day but there were always other days.



Maurice never thought to get the details of the pilot or the aircraft on the day, it was just another day at work after all and aircraft accidents large and small, were a regular occurrence in those days.

The official report

'Just after take-off there was a loss of power....... pilot joined the circuit and made a bad approach with dive brakes out and full flap. Aircraft undershot and undercarriage collapsed on hitting a soft spot' 'Pilot showed extremely bad airmanship during approach. He could have made a good landing with 7500rpm, but he left dive brakes out... panicked in his cockpit procedure.'

Some 65 years later on a visit to the RAF Museum in Hendon with the Itchen & Hamble RAFA he was surprised to find that the de Havilland Vampire on display was captioned to say it had been involved in an accident at North Weald in 1952, been repaired but had only had a short flying career subsequently, having spent most of the rest of its time as an exhibit at various locations. The museum example was marked up in the colours of a previous operator 601 Squadron at North Weald.







Over the years the members of the museum have argued among themselves about what aircraft actually flew from North Weald. One section would insist that it was only the single engine fighter aircraft of the posted squadrons where others demurred and said virtually every aircraft the RAF have ever operated will have landed there at some time.

Diligent research has proved it was the latter view that prevailed as it became clear that several unexpected bomber and transport types were based there and many others used the runway as a diversionary landing ground. There are even reports of enemy aircraft, including Heinkel's, Junker's and Focke-Wulf's being on the airfield for official purposes ("meet the enemy").

One of the notable incidents during Maurice Bennett's career was fighting the engine fire on an RAF Boeing B-29 Washington. Engine fires on the B-29 were well documented and the blight of the type, the North Weald fire crew met one such aircraft that arrived streaming smoke and flame as it approached. They were alerted to it when it was sill a speck on the horizon running into approach. They met it on the runway (apparently not a usual procedure at the time) and doused it successfully. The aircraft, one of the largest to have used the runway over the years was WF444 of 115 Squadron based at Marham. The Washington was a stand in bomber while Britain developed its jet engine V Bomber types and only served for a few years. The one that landed to North Weald survived its stay with the RAF and returned to the USA in due course.





ITALE NIEWSTEITTER OF ITALE NORTH WEALD AURFLELD WUSEUW ASSOCIAITION

Lord Tebbit, who died recently aged 94, was the President of the North Weald Airfield Museum for many years. The connection was that in the 1950s he served as a pilot with the Royal Auxiliary Air Force at North Weald.

He was far better known as a political bruiser who proved a highly effective Cabinet minister for Margaret Thatcher, to whom he was devoted. Norman Tebbit might have held one of the great offices of state but for the IRA's bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the party's 1984 conference. The outrage severely injured Tebbit and left his wife Margaret paralysed for life. He left the government prematurely in 1987 after a stint as party chairman to spend more time with her until her death in 2020.

Over the years he was a regular visitor to the museum and in 2008 unveiled the commemorative window in the front of the museum.





If you scroll down the list of those killed whilst serving the nation during the 1939-45 war you will find the name of Acting F/Lt. J H Coghlan who died flying from North Weald in the summer of 1940 "Battle of Britain".

John Hunter Coghlan was born in Shanghai in September 1914, the son of Henry Hunter Coghlan who was working in the shipping industry.

He arrived on the 'Empress of Britain' on 22nd September 1932 at Southampton and the family settled in Southsea, Hampshire. JH Coghlan attended the Imperial Service College at Windsor from 1927-33. He is recorded as sitting the Indian Police Service exam in 1934 but actually joined the RAF in early 1936.

After completing his initial flying training, he was posted to No 1 Squadron based at Tangmere in late October of that year. From there he served briefly with No.72 Squadron before returning to No.1. After the outbreak of war, he was posted to 56 Squadron at North Weald flying the Hawker Hurricane.

Late 1939 and a line-up of the pilots of 56 Squadron F/O L Eriminsky, F/O P Down, F/O I Soden, F/O J Coghlan, F/O P Illingworth, F/O F Rose, F/O ML Hulton-Harrop, F/O E Holden Museum Collection



In mid-May 1940 'A' Flight of 56 was operating in France by day and returning to North Weald at night. During engagements with the enemy he damaged two Messerschmitt Bf109s fighters, probably destroyed a Heinkel He111 bomber, shared the destruction of another He111 and went on to damage two Junkers Ju88 bombers before the squadron was withdrawn to Digby to rest.



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After a few days, on 5th June the squadron was posted to North Weald again and Coghlan was appointed 'A' Flight Commander. During air battles in July he claimed a Dornier Do17 bomber destroyed, he also probably destroyed a Messerschmitt Me110, damaged two Bf109s and went on to claim the destruction of a Junkers Ju87 Stuka dive-bomber and yet another Bf 109 destroyed.

While engaging other Stuka dive-bombers over the English Channel his Hurricane, N2402, was damaged in an attack by Oberleutnant Fszs of 4/JG51, and Coghlan was slightly wounded.

On 30th July 1940 he was awarded the DFC and then posted to the Parachute Practice Unit at Ringway (now Manchester Airport) on 7th August. It seems strange in hindsight why an experienced and successful fighter pilot with a handful of victories to his credit should be transferred out of Fighter Command at a time of increasing strain. The set up at Ringway was primarily about parachute training and transporting spies to now occupied Europe.

Coghlan returned to North Weald shortly afterwards but not to join 56 Squadron in the ongoing fighting in the Battle of Britain, he settled briefly into 419 (Special Duties) Flight, on the other side of North Weald. They were equipped with Armstrong Whitworth Whitley bombers and Westland Lysander army cooperation spotter aircraft. The latter were no longer spotter planes; they had been modified for inserting spies into the tiny fields of France in the dead of night. All activities were swathed in secrecy. Although he was an experienced and successful fighter pilot Coghlan is believed to have had only some 30 minutes time flying Lysanders prior to joining 419 Flight. Henri

Leenaerts was a Belgian Air Force reservist who had escaped to England.

37719 Flight Lt. John Hunter Coghlan DFC was killed in Lysander R2625 "C" on 17th August 1940 when it was lost over the Channel on an agent-landing sortie. The Lysander and occupants had arrived at

Manston airfield in Kent during daylight hours on August 17, 1940, probably from North Weald. This failed mission was almost certainly the first attempt to land an agent in continental Europe. It is believed that Henri Leenaerts, a Belgian Air Force reservist who had escaped to England was to be landed in the Nord department of France, near the border with Belgium and that he was to take a wireless set to a person in the town of Momignies just across the border.

The aircraft is believed to have crashed into the English Channel, reason unknown, but may have run out of fuel. The fate of his passenger Henri Leenaerts is not known. Coghlan's body was washed ashore on 23rd September 1940, and he is buried in Boulogne Eastern Cemetery. He was 25 years old and one of "The Few".

Lots more detail on this pilot, the clandestine flying and the creation of the secret flying operations after they moved from North Weald can be found at these links.

https://bbm.org.uk/airmen/Coghlan.htm

https://martinaviationpages.com/night-of-17-18th-august-1940/

BEDSHEET BOMBER - film star left to rot.

Regular visitors to North Weald Airfield will undoubtedly recall that over the years various airframes have been parked up and left to rot. In the main they were past film stars or set to be included in films that just failed to make the grade. The most recent of these are the Douglas C-54/DC-4 aircraft destined for a film about the Berlin Airlift that never went into production. Both aircraft were dismantled and are long departed from North Weald.

Long before this pair there was another longer serving aircraft that was involved in film work that is – against the odds – currently being restored to static condition off North Weald.

North American B-25J-25-NC 44-30861 was delivered on March 5, 1945, as one of the many late war production B-25s that was allotted to the Training Command in the United States. In early 1954 she was reassigned to the 3700th Military Intelligence Wing at Lackland where she was used as both a proficiency aircraft and as staff and command transport. She was retired to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona for storage in December 1958.



The aircraft (the RAF called them Mitchell's) was sold from storage at Davis-Monthan AFB to private ownership, probably as a personal transport. Eventually she was sold to Aero Associated of Tucson, Arizona where she was modified into a camera ship and given the name of "Moviemaker II". Several modifications were made to her at this time including a bomb bay fuel tank which was used for a flight to England as well as various internal changes for camera work. She arrived in England in 1961 where she served as the photography platform in the film "War Lovers". In 1963 she was used again for the filming of the movie "633 Squadron".

After these two films she was based at Biggin Hill where she sat, eventually became a derelict airframe. She was rescued in 1966 when acquired by the British Historic Aircraft Museum. In 1967 she was transported to Southend Airport and put on display with the other museum aircraft. The British Historic Aircraft Museum closed after a short period of time, and she became the property of another museum in the same area called the Southend Aviation Museum. The museum did some restoration work to her by adding a top turret and giving her an RAF colour scheme representing a Mitchell III of No.98 Squadron RAF at Dunsfold circa 1944. She was given the squadron code of VO-A and the RAF serial of HD368. She remained on display for the next 15 years. The Southend Museum closed in 1983 and the aircraft in the collection were sold. She was acquired by Aces High of North Weald, and initially moved to Duxford.

In October 1988 she was moved to North Weald, where she remained for several years. The British registration of G-BKXW was applied for but was never formally used. She was given a USAAF olive drab colour scheme and the name "Bedsheet Bomber".



In 1996 she was obtained by the Imperial Aviation Collection and moved to North Coates in northeast England, few at North Weald expected less than a scrapyard somewhere. She was planned for display at an old airbase, but the museum ran into financial problems, and she was again sold. In 2006 she was obtained by the Wycombe Air Park and moved to a new location.

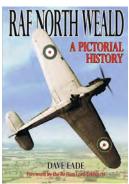


After several more years of neglect, she was acquired by the current owners Wings Museum, West Sussex where restoration to static display is currently underway. There are major corrosion problems as well as other factors to the airframe that would require a great deal of time and finances to complete any airworthy restoration. It will be finished as an aircraft of one of the Royal Air Force B-25 squadrons that operated from Dunsfold during World War Two. Content from B-25 History.org

PRICE RISE

As a result of a recent book order from France it has been necessary to hike up the price of EU/World postage on the website. In the current inflationary state, it has been difficult to keep tabs on the movement in postal rates. It was £8.50 and is now £12 as it was found that sending one of the books to the EU was a minimum of £10.

Earlier this year the museum took the decision to raise the price of the book "RAF North Weald: A Pictorial History" by Dave Eade ISBN: 9780946958559 from £10 to £15 when it was realised that the stock of the long out of print book was down to one box.



"RAF North Weald: A Pictorial History" is a great book and still good value at £15 new. It must be good value as Amazon is currently offering the self-same book at £74 for a used item. That price no doubt reflects the lack of availability! Currently the book is available at the museum in person or by post or in person from Epping Forest District Museum, Waltham Abbey, or the Tourist Information Service also in Waltham Abbey, Essex. These are all new books from the original 2010 print run. When the publisher went out of business the limited remaining stock was bought up by the editor and the late Arthur Moreton.

MEMBERS LETTERS

Thank you for your recent mail with a copy of The Hurricane and my latest membership card. It now resides with all the others dating back to 2014. my, how time 'flies'.

I'm sorry to hear about Mike Batt, I do hope he makes a full recovery. It was my 90th birthday on July 15 this year and luckily, I'm pretty much as fit as a fiddle. I aim to at least exceed my dear Dad's innings of 94.

I will never forget Simon and I have kept copies of all both our emails back and forth until his tragic and untimely death. It's strange how you can never actually meet someone in person and yet form a bond with them.

The reason for getting in touch is one which I hope will benefit the museum. My sister-in-law in Hornchurch passed away a few months ago and my niece has delivered a load of photo albums to me and amongst them are photos taken of me and pals at North Weald in 1955. There are a few at RAF Kirkham where I did my technical training as an armourer and I have included them just for reference. Up to that point I thought there were only two of that time in existence.

A call from a newspaper was wrongly routed to the armoury phone and one of the lads who answered, not knowing who it was, said a few words which were reported in the press as 'an Air Ministry spokesman.

William Roe

Editor I have excluded the RAF Kirkham photos, but they are in our collection. R.A.F. Kirkham was located between Preston and Blackpool. In the 1950s was a trade training camp mainly for armourers.

Photo - RAF North Weald 1955 tea break on the grass outside the station armoury, facing station flight hangar and in the far distance a Meteor of 601 County of London squadron outside their hangar.

Photo - outside the H block billets with pals Me, Mick Les, Sandy, Cpl Derek 'Webby' Webster - looks like a night out at the pub.



Photo AOC's inspection 1955 I ended up in the sick bay after dislocating a finger 'bulling up' for the inspection then got 2 weeks sick leave. AVM Patch realised how I had done it, winked, but all out of sight and sound of the retinue of other officers.



On the airfield a row emerged after a local resident revealed that Epping Forest District Council were charging the local air ambulance £95,500 a year to use the airfield. The amount was described as "utterly crazy" by Robert Born, the resident who exposed the cost. The fees were first publicised by local media Everything Epping Forest, which cited data in a Freedom of Information request made by Mr Born.

Essex and Herts Air Ambulance paid the fee - which included £91,500 rent and £4,000 in landing fees - to North Weald Airfield, run by Epping Forest District Council. Born called for the authority to follow airports in Luton and Norwich and waive the charity's costs. The data also revealed the National Police Air Service (NPAS) was being charged annual rent of £108,000 to use the airfield, with landing fees of £40,000.

In responses from local councillors there was a mixed reception. Some agreed wholeheartedly with the view held by Mr Born while others demurred. Conservative councillor Tim Matthews said it was a "fair charge" for an "excellent service".

He added that it would be great in theory to make its facilities free for both the air ambulance and police helicopter...But, in practice, that would mean the council tax payers and residents of Epping Forest district subsidising the service for several million people across London and the south reast. That would be unfair to local residents.

