

Royal Air Force Bircham Newton



50th Anniversary Event on 30 September, 2012

To celebrate the distinguished history of
RAF Bircham Newton
and to mark the

50th anniversary of its closure in December 1962

The background to today's celebration

The main purpose of today's event is to celebrate the distinguished history of Royal Air Force Bircham Newton, which was continuously operational for 44 years from early 1918 until the end of 1962. When the RAF station first opened, during the final year of the First World War, it became the home of the RAF's first four-engined bomber, the giant Handley Page V/1500. It then continued as Norfolk's only flying station for most of the inter-war years, hosting a multitude of flying units who introduced many new aircraft types into service.

In 1936, the RAF station was transferred to Coastal Command, and it performed critical maritime operations throughout World War Two, including air-sea rescue. In the post-war period, Technical Training Command took over the station and it became the home of the Officers' Advanced Training School (OATS), later to be renamed the Junior Command and Staff School (JCSS). From the late 1950s, the station also hosted the RAF Administrative Apprentice Training School (AATS).



The station eventually closed in December 1962. The closure was marked by a final graduation parade of the RAF administrative apprentices and a 'Beating Retreat' ceremony conducted by the Central Band of the Royal Air Force and the Queen's Colour Squadron. The Reviewing Officer was Air Marshal Sir Alfred Earle, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Technical Training Command. One of the honoured guests was Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Tedder, who had commanded one of Bircham Newton's squadrons in the early 1920s. At the conclusion of the ceremony, trumpeters of the Central Band sounded the 'Last Post' as the RAF ensign was lowered for the last time. To mark the 50th anniversary of the closure, we will replicate the final act of the closing ceremony here today during our 'Sunset Ceremony'.

Programme of Activities

- 2pm - 5pm: Viewing of RAF Heritage Room and other exhibits, including military vehicles, aircraft models and art by local school children
- 3pm - 4:30pm: Popular and military music played by the Fakenham Town Band
- 3pm (approx): Weather permitting, there will be a flypast by a Tiger Moth (flown by Alan Fines), Hornet Moth (flown by David Read) and Chipmunk (flown by Malcolm Purvis) from Felthorpe Flying Group



- 3:15pm - 4pm Illustrated talk on the history of RAF Bircham Newton by trustee David Jacklin
- 4pm - 4:30pm: Judging of the School's Art Competition followed by the award of prizes
- 4:40pm - 5pm 'Sunset Ceremony', including the playing of the 'Last Post' during the lowering of the RAF Ensign

This event is held with the kind permission and support of our hosts, ConstructionSkills/National Construction College (NCC)

Distinguished Guests

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham
and Lady Beetham
Sir Michael Oswald and Lady Oswald
The Director of the National Construction College,
Mr. Andrew Walder



Royal British Legion
Royal Air Force Association
National Service (RAF) Association
The Air Training Corps
RAF Administrative Apprentices Association
Fakenham Town Band under Musical Director Danny Wakefield
Docking & King George VI Primary Schools
Docking Heritage Group
Great Bircham War Graves Group
Friends of Langham Dome
Norfolk Military Vehicles Group
Tony Nelson with his Model Air Force
Steve Marsh with his Bomb Disposal exhibit
St John's Ambulance
Parking provided by Magpie Event Support, Heacham

The event was organised by the RAF Bircham Newton Memorial Project, a charitable trust established to preserve the history of RAF Bircham Newton and its satellite airfields. The Trust has created the RAF Heritage Room and two permanent memorials to those who served at Bircham Newton and the satellite airfield at Docking

Follow signs to National Construction College from A148/B1454/PE31 6RB