

BREIGHTON

Brighton Airfield isn't that prominent in most peoples minds, in fact most would say 'where's Brighton', however it does occasionally get into the spotlight, sometimes for good reasons, some for bad ones. As I write this article, today's Evening Press reported the theft of a F3 racing car valued at around £100,000 and bringing the racing career of it's owner to a very abrupt and unwanted end. The early evening news also featured an 82 year old lady doing aerobatics from the airfield for the purpose of raising funds for a charity - very brave at any age, let alone 82!

Brighton has been the home of Selby and District Motor Club since 1969 when we rented an ex RAF building. The building, together with a substantial piece of surrounding land was purchased by the club during the early 1980's.

Ownership of the clubhouse gave the members the incentive to convert, improve and modernise the building and it's facilities by an ongoing process over the years resulting in the clubhouse we know today.

So what was happening at Brighton before Selby and District Motor Club arrived to take up residence?

Imagine going back to 1939, (horrifying thought, that was my birth year), the war with Germany had broken out and there was an urgent need for airfields to house both fighter and bomber squadrons to protect us from a take over by Hitler.

Many airfields quickly emerged particularly in the Eastern half of Yorkshire, one of these been Brighton which was officially opened in the January of 1942. Brighton was built as a bomber station with 3 runways in star fashion, the remnants of which can still be seen on the ground and also on OS sheet 105. A perimeter track encircled the airfield, passing within a few feet of what was to become our clubhouse.

Within days of the airfield opening, the first squadron of twin engined Wellington Mark VI bombers arrived from Huntindonshire. 460 Squadron's first operation was on the night of 12/13th March 1942 when 5 Wellington's went to bomb Emden. 460 Squadron was to become one of the RAF's premier outfits dropping a greater weight of bombs than any other unit. Unfortunately, the cost of this was that they would suffer some of the highest casualties, losing around 100 aircrew over the next few months. The first of the casualties involved an all-Australian crew and was on the night of 28/29th April when one of the Wellingtons was shot down during a raid on Kiel.

Later in 1942, 460 Conversion Flight was formed to convert the squadron from Wellingtons to the heavy bombers, namely the much larger Halifax. The Conversion Flight soon moved to the airfield at Holme-on Spalding Moor and quickly found that the then new Lancasters would replace the Halifaxes. So, with 460 squadron now flying Lancasters, they made their first operational flight in November. The squadron lost it's first Lancaster during a raid on Stuttgart, three of it's crew evaded capture, the others becoming POW's.

The next disaster for the squadron came on 4/5th January 1943 when all seven of the Lancaster crew were lost during a raid on Essen. Two weeks later, following a raid on Berlin, one of the Lancasters ran out of fuel and was abandoned over Flamborough. Just two nights later, a night fighter downed one of the squadron Flight Commander's aircraft over Holland after a raid on Dusseldorf.

The situation was to get even worse, in just a few short weeks between 26th March and 5th May, 460 squadron lost 12 Lancasters and all 84 crew members. Interestingly, one Lancaster delivered to 460 squadron on 22nd October 1942 was to survive 90

missions before being donated to the people of Australia where it now resides in the War Museum in Canberra.

The airfield at Brighton belonged to No.1 Group which comprised mainly of Lincolnshire airfields, and on 14th May 1943, 460 squadron moved to the Lincolnshire airfield at Binbrook and Brighton was transferred to No.4 Group. On 16th June 1943, number 78 squadron moved from Linton on Ouse to Brighton. Watch this space for more of what was going on at Brighton over 50 years ago and some of the exploits of 78 squadron.

Information for this article has been obtained from the book 'Yorkshire Airfields in the Second World War' by Patrick Otter and has the kind permission of the publishers, Countryside Books of Newbury Berkshire.

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