

## Langham

The airfield at Langham is outside the village on the Cockthorpe road it was built for the RAF at the beginning of the second world war. The nearest railhead was 5 miles away in Holt, the amount of equipment and materials needed to build and aerodrome must have been a challenge for such a small station however, some distance away was Sheringham where there was a much larger station. The small basic harbour at nearby Blakeney would not have made much of a contribution but, further along the coast was Wells Next The Sea which had a substantial commercial harbour.

This scenario would be repeated as we shall see later.

Langham opened in 1940 as a satellite of Bircham Newton, with a grass runway and in July 1942 it became an independent, full station within RAF Coastal Command. With its close proximity to the coast it was ideal for maritime operations with both RAF and Fleet Air arm units using it. Langham also offered target facilities and also ASR facilities with the new Vickers Warwicks. To begin with there were next to no facilities, save the battle headquarters, and so the airmen probably had to make use of canvas or perhaps, Air Ministry type B huts! 1941 saw the introduction of the Nissen hut and, in the years that followed a number of Nissen hutted living quarters were dotted around the village. In the village, Langham Hall was requisitioned as a medical centre.

Towards the end of 1942 Langham was closed for expansion and runway laying. John Laings were busy on this as well as preparing to go to Sculthorpe, the trainer dome was installed at this time and a T2 Hangar was also installed. As well as additional facilities, the runway was extended and given a hard surface and two additional runways were laid down with some hardstandings. Over 100 buildings were then available for use. After the rebuilding and joining with 16 group, two Antipodean squadrons (455 & 489) moved in with their powerful Bristol Beaufighters, they formed the Langham Strike Wing. They stayed until the autumn when they were replaced by a squadron of Warwick ASR aircraft.

During the last year of the war and part of the first year of peace Langham was offering Met services in the form of 521sqn with their fortress 2s. After a short stay by 254 sqn the station was closed until July 1946 when the Royal Netherlands Airforce arrived, they stayed until the end of 1947 when the station was put on Care and Maintenance.

1953 saw the arrival of the Marshall's operated Civilian Antiaircraft Cooperation Unit, from their first home at Lt Snoring together with another similar civilian unit, the US Army were also there flying drones for gunnery practice. Later the 49<sup>th</sup> Air Division from Sculthorpe occasionally deployed a T26 target tower there. All this must have been a challenge for the local ATC at the station. The CAACU brought Langham into the jet age by introducing Vampire 5s, 9s & 11s to supplement the Spitfire 16s and Mosquito 35s in use at the time. The Beaufighter 10s were long

gone although the elderly Oxford was still operational. The unit supplied more than just target towing facilities.

When all this activity had ceased the station was designated an emergency landing ground for Sculthorpe although there is no evidence that it was used as such.

Langham was sold off in 1961.