

## Sunderland Farm

In 1939 Sunderland Farm in Docking was requisitioned to build a satellite for Bircham Newton aerodrome; it would provide dispersal and relief landing. There was little infrastructure, a control tower/watch office, a squadron office, a battle HQ, everything else was dispersed off-site. Officers were housed in the old farmhouse with their mess in a tent! But the site did have running water and electricity as well as a sewerage system which is more than the village had at the time.

To begin with, Sunderland became a Decoy site with the Army taking charge of defence. It was realised that the grass runways were better than those at Bircham even though one at Docking had a 'hump' in the middle. Docking then became operational in tandem with Bircham but more facilities were needed so a technical site was constructed. A fuel supply was added, a bomb dump and even a bicycle shed!

Docking had eight blister-hangers and one large hanger which one schedule lists this as a type T2 (this may be an error because one source says it was an A1 type hanger). Servicing was carried out at Bircham - any damaged aircraft were taken there by road through the village (ordnance and fuel may also have gone that way). With Docking fully operational, a number of RAF and Naval squadrons passed through during the war years. Some operations were shared with Bircham, in particular those that involved night flying.

Bircham's other satellite at Langham had paved runways and so it remained in use for many years after the War. Bircham itself assisted Sculthorpe when it reopened and was then used by the RAF until it closed in 1965. Following the end of the war Docking became 'home' to airmen who were waiting for their demob and the airfield was finally vacated in September 1946.

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