

The History of the Dalton Barracks Site

Dalton Barracks is located west of the market town of Abingdon-on-Thames. The area around the site is rich in later prehistoric, medieval and post medieval remains and in addition to the visible 20th century military presence, there are also a number of isolated historic farmsteads and houses within the area, including Dunmore Farm, William's Farm and historic buildings west of Abingdon-on-Thames.

Prehistoric

The earliest known evidence for a human presence within the area dates to the Neolithic period (c. 4,000 to 2,000 BCE) and includes several find spots (revealing diagnostic lithics). It is probable that during this time much of the area would have been covered by a swathe of woodland. By the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (2500-1600 BCE), pastoralist farmers would have started to clear the woodland to make way for small allotment-type fields and pasturelands for domestic livestock. It is possible that subsurface remains of later prehistoric settlement exist within the western section of the site.

A Bronze Age ring ditch (and an associated pit) are possible evidence of ritual monument, and further earthworks of unknown date may also originate from this period or from the succeeding Iron Age.

Iron Age to Roman

Evidence for occupation of the area during the Iron Age and Roman periods is present in the form of a number of enclosures, as well as various artefact finds.

Medieval

There are eight known archaeological sites in the area, many of which are earthworks including a fish pond and a moated manor site. There are also three buildings: a church, a barn and a house. Associated with several of these sites are probable subsurface remains that relate to the agricultural landscape of this period.

Post-medieval to Modern

The most visible historic landscape features in the area are the result of post medieval activity and development, either through the upgrading of the building stock within the surrounding villages and farmsteads or enclosure of the field systems during the latter part of the 18th and early 19th centuries. The building vernacular for the early part of this period (17th - 19th centuries) is distinct, using limestone sourced from local quarries to construct dwellings and farm buildings. One such former quarry site is located immediately east of Dry Sandford (now a Nature Reserve). Many of the post-medieval buildings within the area are designated as listed buildings and some feature timber-framing and early brick forms, suggesting an earlier, possibly medieval, origin for some of these.

Much of the network of roads and lanes which were present by the mid 19th century, and largely still present today, dates from the medieval period. The road network was upgraded considerably during the early 19th century, especially when the Turnpike Acts were in place, and evidence for this is witnessed by the various milestones that are found along the roadsides. During the early- to mid-20th century the airfield that officially became RAF Abingdon (by 1932) a small number of lanes and lane-sections were removed to make way for the airfield including Faringdon Road and Sandford Lane.

Dalton Barracks

There are two main phases of history for the Barracks: the RAF station phase, and the British Army phase. There has been a military presence in and around Dalton Barracks since the early 1920s, with the airfield built within agricultural land north and west of the village of Shippon.



Ordnance Survey map of 1922

The Site was initially occupied by the RAF who ran an operational grass-runway airfield known as RAF Abingdon. By September 1932, the facility was used as a training station for RAF Bomber Command.

Prior to the Second World War, the airfield was occupied by No. 40 Squadron who initially used the Fairey Gordon biplane light bomber as their primary aircraft. During the mid to late 1930s and until 1938, Hawker Harts and Hinds became the main aircraft in service at RAF Abingdon. These were replaced by 40 Fairey Battles; a British single-engine light bomber designed and manufactured by the Fairey Aviation Company. By 1940, RAF Abingdon was home to the Whitley bomber and the Avro Anson; the Avro Anson was used for dropping propaganda leaflets across Nazi-controlled Europe.



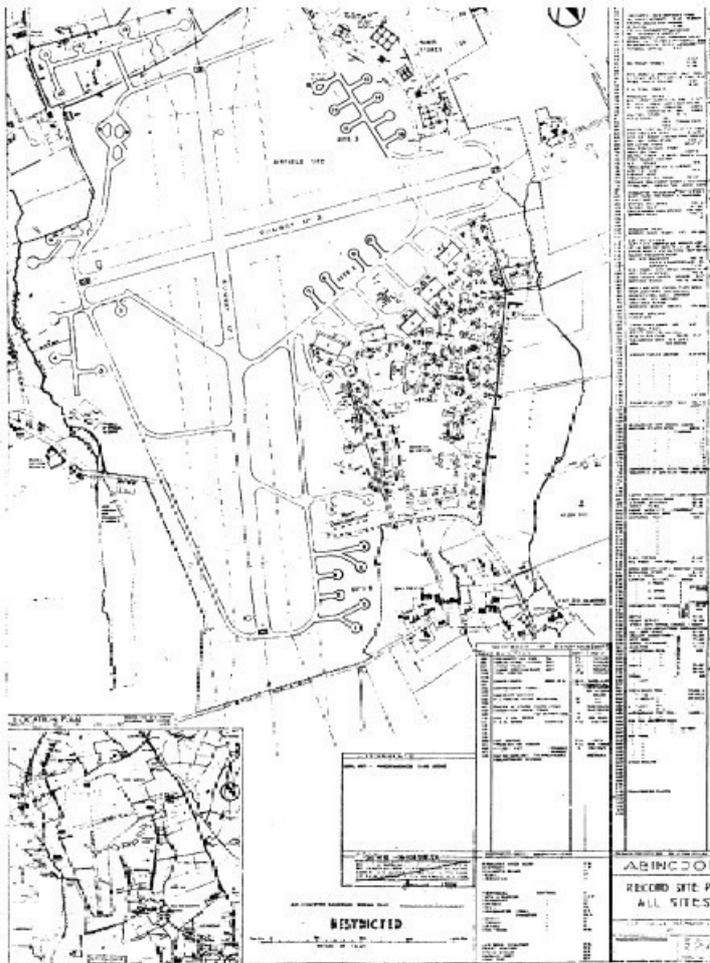
Aerial view of the airfield dated 1935

During the Second World War and until September 1946, No. 10 Operational Training Unit RAF was based at RAF Abingdon. During the early stages of the war, RAF Abingdon's station commander was World War I pilot and the 'Great Escape' escapee Herbert Massey. By September 1940, a nearby RAF station at Stanton Harcourt was used to assist RAF Abingdon to hold dispersed aircraft to assist in night-time training. It was at this time when the Whitley bombers at RAF Abingdon were replaced by the Airspeed AS.10 Oxford.



WRAFs outside the Site Headquarters, dated WWII

The airfield was bombed by the German air force on 12th March 1941, causing damage to buildings and several aircraft. Following the air raid, the airfield was modernised. This modernisation included the construction of a triangular concrete runway installed in March 1944. The runway layout incorporated a series of dispersal pads and this layout remained largely unchanged until the closure of the RAF station in the early 1990s.

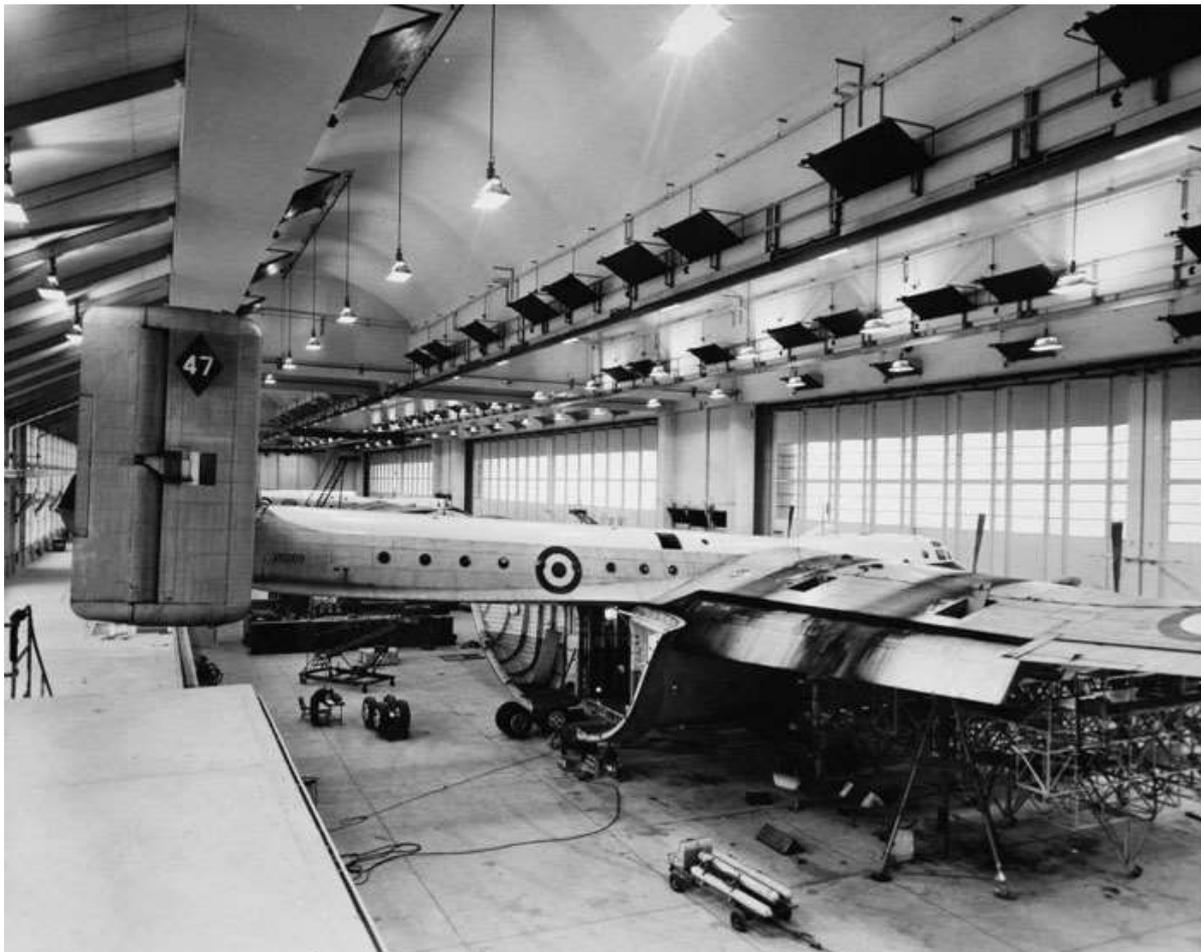


1946 Airfield plan showing the layout following the 1944 modernisation, including concrete runways, dispersal pads and airfield buildings.

Following the end of the Second World War, No. 10 Squadron was disbanded and the airfield was handed over to RAF Transport Command from 1947, operating the Avro York, Douglas Dakotas, Handley Page Hastings (troop- carrier and freight transport aircraft) and Vickers Valetta (twin-engine military transport planes) aircraft. From 1950, RAF Abingdon Transport Command was accompanied by No. 1 Parachute School (from Upper Heyford) and, in 1956, No. 53 Squadron.



Blackburn B-101 Beverley heavy transport aircraft, operated at RAF Abingdon from 1956 to 1967



Maintenance of the Blackburn B-101, Beverley probably within Hangar F



External view of Hangar F (rear elevation), looking north



Gable end of Hangar F, looking SSE



Northern gable end of Hangar F, looking south -west



Hangar located immediately north of Hangar F, looking south-west

RAF Abingdon was extensively used during the 1960s and 1970s but was eventually handed over to the British Army in the 1990s when it was renamed as Dalton Barracks.

Historic buildings within Dalton Barracks

Dalton Barracks (formerly RAF Abingdon) has been occupied from the early 1920s. The majority of the buildings date from 1930 during the inter-war period when the current airfield layout and buildings were constructed. Typical of most British military installations, many historic buildings within RAF Abingdon were, over time, adapted and added to, rather than demolished and replaced.

The Officers' Mess

The Officer's Mess was constructed during the inter-War period. The building retains several original features from this period including timber panelled doors, an oak staircase and timber sash windows. The outside of the building is largely unaltered, appearing as it would when it was constructed during the inter-war period. The first floor is predominately used to provide living accommodation with the ground floor providing dining and catering functions.



The Site headquarters and attached control tower

The Regimental headquarters was built during the inter-War period. The building retains several original features including its original window frames. Photographs dating to the Second World War show the building in active use when the base was used as an active RAF station. To the rear of the Regimental Headquarters is a former control tower used during the Second World War. It retains its original spiral staircase providing access to the upper floor of the control tower. The control tower reportedly played host to briefings and addresses during the Falkland Islands conflict.



Building 125

Building 125 was constructed in the 1930s during the Inter-war period. The building is currently fitted out with cellular type office accommodation and mess facilities. The building would appear to be one of the earliest buildings within the site boundaries of the 1932 airfield. The building may have been used as an indoor firing range with an adjoining building used as a munitions store. The property is one of the few remaining examples of this building type in its current condition.



Building 140

Building 140 was constructed during the interwar period and is currently utilised as a laundry.

