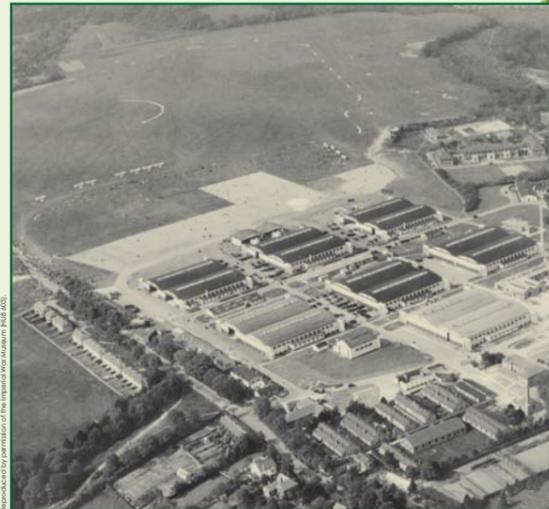


GROWTH OF AN AIRFIELD

Construction of the airfield began in 1917 because Britain needed more aircraft to fight in Europe during the First World War. It was built on farmland and on Kenley Common, which was owned by the City of London and being used as a golf course.

During the First World War the airfield was an 'Aircraft Acceptance Park', whose role was to prepare aircraft for service abroad. To house the planes, seven large hangars were built at the southern end of the airfield.



The airfield in 1934 showing its hangars and the landing circle (top left).

The years of peace

After the war ended in 1918, Kenley was kept as a permanent Royal Air Force (RAF) station and used by training and fighter squadrons as well as for leisure and cargo flights.



The crowd admires a Gloster Gauntlet in 1938. During the inter-war years Kenley Airfield was open to the public on Empire Air Day.

Preparations for war

When Germany re-armed and expanded its forces in the 1930s, Kenley was modernised to meet the renewed threat. Two crossing concrete runways and a perimeter track were built, so that aircraft could take off and land in all weathers. The new, faster monoplane fighters needed a longer take off run so three redundant hangars were removed to lengthen one of the runways. The airfield was enlarged by closing the old Hayes Lane, which had formerly split the airfield in two. 13 blast pens were also added, in which aircraft were dispersed around the airfield.

Fighter station

In 1939, at the start of the Second World War, Kenley was still being rebuilt. By spring 1940, the preparations were complete and Kenley became a fully operational sector of Fighter Command.



Reconstructive painting of Kenley airfield as it would have looked in 1945

Illustration by Stephen Conlin 2010.

Kenley Airfield today

None of the original hangars survives today, as three were destroyed in 1940 and the last burnt down in 1978. Other buildings have also gone, but most of the blast pens the NAAFI and the Officers' Mess are still here. These important features are protected as scheduled monuments and listed buildings.



Officer's Mess at Kenley 1939.



This board forms part of the Kenley Heritage Trail created and funded by a partnership between the City of London Corporation, Kenley Airfield Friends Group and Tandridge District Council.