

Tatenhill Airfield, Staffordshire

On the B5234, 4 miles W of Burton-on-Trent (SK 1575 2406)

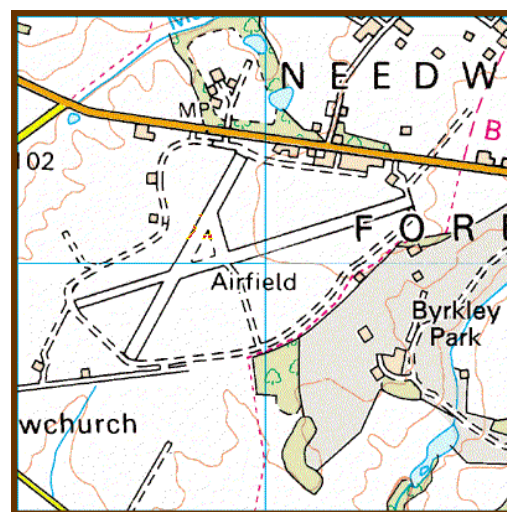


Tatenhill airfield is a few miles away and the nearest aerodrome of Second World War date to my home¹. My interest in Tatenhill aerodrome started when I was about 14 (circa 1968). My school friend Garry and I would cycle up to the airfield and 'trespass' at high speed along the peri-track pretending to be Graham Hill and Jim Clark in the British Grand Prix at Silverstone. Gaining the permission of the farmer, my Dad taught me to drive on the disused runways before

by 17th birthday. I've visited the site many times over the years. In the 1990s my wife and I walked the footpaths of the Needwood Forest and so I continue to be reacquainted with the site that today.

Following the post-war release of Tatenhill aerodrome by the RAF to the Duchy of Lancaster's tenants in c1953, it was disused for a few years. The Burton-Newborough road (B5234), which traverses the site, had been closed 'for the duration' and was reopened in May 1954.

In 1959 the Ind Coope brewery at Burton upon Trent (later Allied Breweries), who had a fleet of executive aircraft based at Burnaston airfield, acquired the lease to Tatenhill and transferred its operations there. On the north-east side of the perimeter track the company erected a remodelled, re-used Bellman hanger with a new control tower and office suite attached. At first only the eastern two-thirds of runway 08/26 was used. The other runways deteriorated rapidly and were used only occasionally. Runway 16/34 became disused very quickly while 14/22 was soon suitable for light aircraft only. Runway 08/26 was later extended to its present length of 1200m (1312 yds). A radar facility was erected at the convergence of 08/26 and 16/34 to deal with the dense winter fogs encountered over the Needwood Forest.

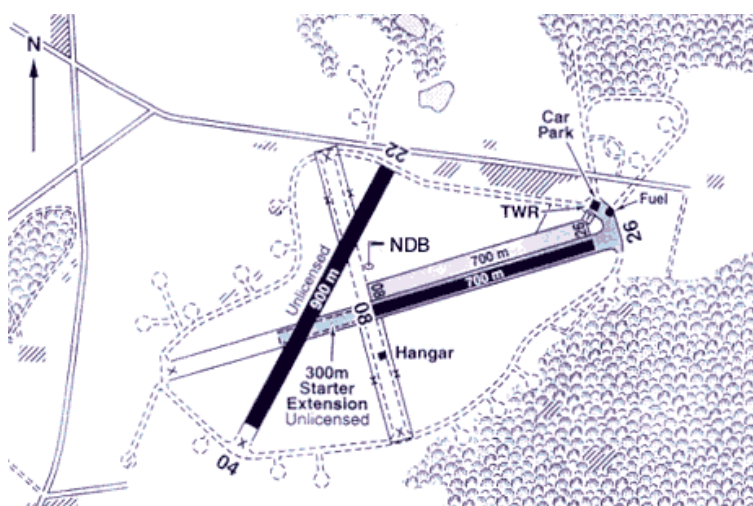


At commencement of operations, Ind Coope transferred Captain David Lancaster (ex-RAF Fighter pilot) from Manchester to Tatenhill to become Chief Pilot. Captain Wally Evans DFC was appointed as his no. 2, with Chief Engineer Terry McCarthy completing the team. In 1961 Dave Moon replaced Terry McCarthy and he remained as Chief Engineer throughout, taking retirement in 1985. The team were joined by Captain Laurie Walford (ex-RAF) in 1968, who went on to become Chief Pilot upon David Lancaster's retirement. At its height the company had five pilots on site. At various times the brewery owned several executive aircraft based at Tatenhill including: G-APCZ de Havilland 104 Dove, G-ARDE de Havilland 104 Dove 6, G-ASNO Beech B55 Baron, Beech B 58 Baron S-ASIU Beech B65-A80 Queen Air, G-ASXV Beech B65-A80

Queen Air, and G-BCUZ Beech King Air 200. By the end of its operation the company had a Beechcraft King Air 90 and a Beechcraft King Air 200.

A highlight for all the staff at Tatenhill was a visit by HM the Queen in 1982 who, after visiting the Duchy of Lancaster estates in the Needwood Forest, flew out from the airfield in a Royal Flight aircraft. Laurie Walford, Dave Moon and other members of the team were presented to her before she departed.

The wartime watch tower became derelict during this period and was considered structurally unsafe. Concern was expressed that children using it as a playground might be injured and it was demolished in 1982/3.



The years 1984-5 saw cutbacks at Allied Breweries which resulted in the closure of operations at Tatenhill in July 1985. The workforce, including Laurie Walford and Dave Moon, were made redundant and the aircraft sold. Thus, ended a period of over 25 years private flying from the airfield.

A couple of years later the site came into the hands of Merlin Automatics Ltd, operating as an unlicensed airfield. The airfield became licensed by the CAA for commercial flying in

1997, after the company became Tatenhill Aviation. The second runway, 04/22, became disused sometime after 2003.

The 21st century has brought a new development to the site. Due to the airfield's strategic position within the midland counties, the Midlands Air Ambulance have stationed a rescue helicopter (G-EMAA) on the northern peri-track west of the control tower and and flight operation buildings (see www.midlandsairambulance.com/).

Airfield history

UNIT/OPERATOR	FROM	DATE IN	TO	DATE OUT	NOTES
		late 1940 (?)			Construction of RAF Tatenhill authorised
		Spring (?) 1941			Construction started - as satellite for Lichfield A/D
16 EFTS	Burnaston	'summer' 1941	Abbots Bromley	'late 1941'	Possibly, evidence unclear.
27 OTU, 'B' Flight	Lichfield	2 November 1941	Church Broughton	October 1942	
		October 1942		7 November 1942	Care & maintenance
15 (P) AFU	Leconfield	7 November 1942	Grove	4 May 1943	
5 (P) AFU, 'E' Flight	Calveley	4 May 1943		disbanded February 1944 (?)	
21 (P) AFUv	Wheaton Aston	28 January 1944	Seighford	26 January 1945	

		27 November 1944			Explosion at 21 MU RAF Fauld
21 MU	Fauld	26 January 1945		disbanded January 1947	
RAF School of Explosives		October 1945		January 1947	
		January 1947			Aerodrome closed to flying
		January 1947		(probably) 1953	(Care & maintenance)
				(probably) 1953	Site returned to Duchy of Lancaster's tenants
		May 1954			B5234 road re-opened to public traffic
Ind Coope (later Allied Breweries Ltd)	Burnaston	not before 1959		July 1985	Private airfield
Merlin Automatics Ltd		circa spring 1987			
Tatenhill Aviation Ltd (1)		1987		end of 1996	Unlicensed airfield
Tatenhill Aviation Ltd (2) (www.tatenhill-aviation.co.uk/)					
		end of 1996		present	Licensed airfield
Midlands Air Ambulance Charity (www.midlandsairambulance.com/)	East Midlands airport	March 2008		present	Air Ambulance helicopter base

Land at the field on YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGVWjtUrjRg

A tabulated history and photographs here (www.controltowers.co.uk/T-V/Tatenhill.htm).

For more information: (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatenhill_Airfield)

January 2020

¹ See Delve, Ken "The Military Airfields of Britain. Wales and West Midlands", Marlborough 2007 (www.crowood.com).