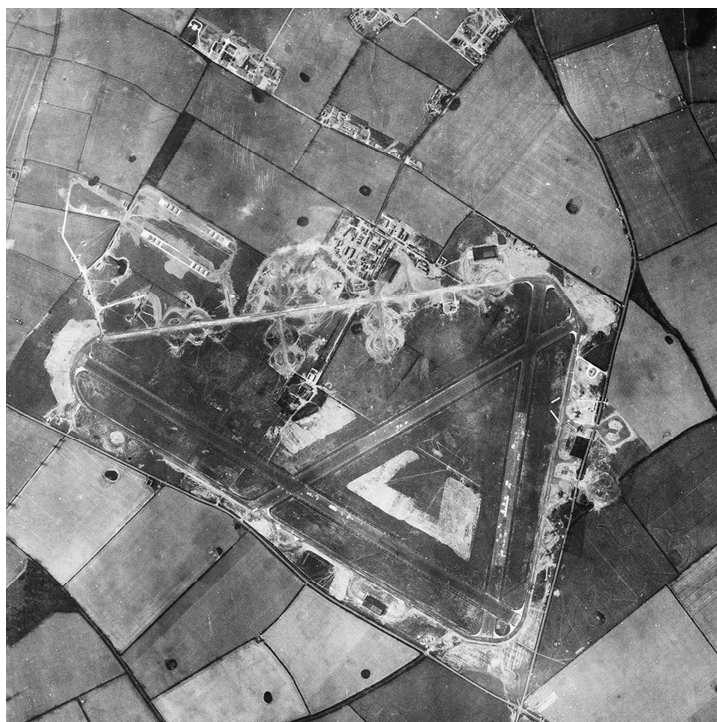


SCULTHORPE THE EARLY DAYS

JIM BALDWIN



With thanks to Bill Taylor , my relatives and Mike Bowyer.
Horace Judge and John Laing & Sons ltd.

Jim Baldwin has written a number of books on the history of
his home town of Fakenham and also on
RAF Sculthorpe, 50 years of watching and waiting.

It was Constable, Hart, and Co together with Bovis who built the aerodrome on the borders of Tatterset and Syderstone. They used labour from the Irish Republic. It was to take the pressure off West Raynham. It ended up about 1/3 of the size that you see today. The old A148 continued on its old course to Tatterset and Rudham while the even older road to the Creakes ran along-side the eastern perimeter of the airfield baring crashed aircraft and other military movements across the road.

Because of its location the aerodrome was called Tatterset but the GPO (post office) objected. Because of the way they worked it would need to be served by King's Lynn and the GPO did not have the manpower or petrol to do this and so it became Sculthorpe under the Fakenham office.

The first day that it was opened on May 15th 1943 three USAAF B17s landed there in some distress one had to avoid a bulldozer which had still to finish its work. But this did not prevent the Free French squadrons arriving from West Raynham.

In the centre of the aerodrome stood the ancient Brazen Hall farm. As soon as the occupants had moved out the RAF made use of it



Brazen Hall
Farm.

Sculthorpe closed in May 1944 after only two years of operations. It was to become a VHB aerodrome. It was extended over the old road to the Creakes road and then formed part of the roadway of the aerodrome leading to 'gate two'. The remainder of the road was kept open as far as the crash gate on the southern perimeter. The highway was not closed officially until 1963!

There were still aircraft at Sculthorpe in April 1944 when John Laing contractors arrived to carry out their work of modifying the runway layout to total five miles and to build a seven and a half mile perimeter track with all the required hard standings, as well as a new A148. Bovis were still there. In 1942 they were charged with building the sewerage plant and Nissen huts for living areas. One must presume that it took them two years to do this.

To start with John Laing had to level 750 acres of land using they used 14 scrapers, 12 excavators, 8 bulldozers and 3 trenchers moving 51,000 cubic yards of earth in one week!

Work started in May 1944 and aggregate was excavated and brought in from a 20 mile radius. Chalk was mined from nearby Broomsthorpe. 40 railway trucks of materials were emptied on a Sunday at Fakenham station.

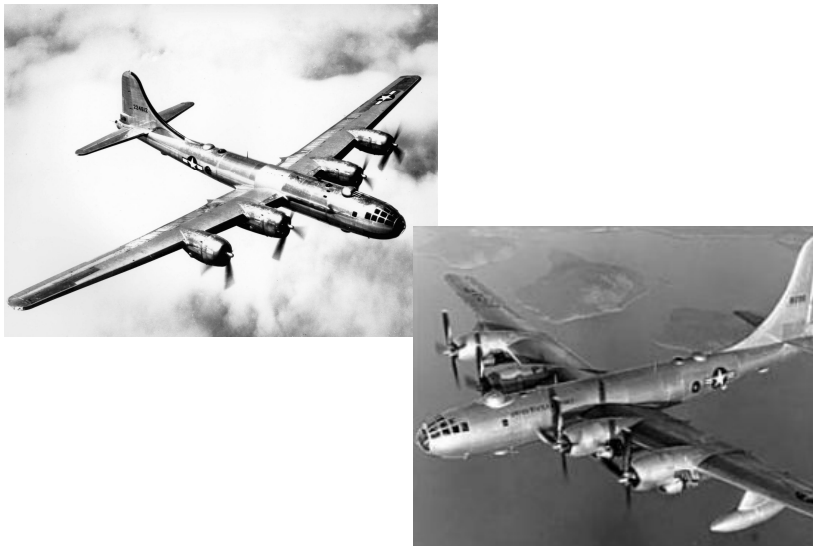


A new method of laying concrete was to be tried out but there seems to have been some difficulty in instructing the workers. A laboratory was built on site because it needed to be established what the mix of local aggregate should be. When all this was resolved 16 batching plants were constructed around the site using 120,764 tons of cement and allowing 700 tons of bags to go for recycling for the war effort. They were supported by 172 contractor's lorries.

The contract required an army of 1,400 men, 800 living on site. These had to be supplied with sick quarters, entertainment and postal services they also had to be fed and watered. This amounted to 1,5000 meals and 2,000,000 cups of tea and cocoa!

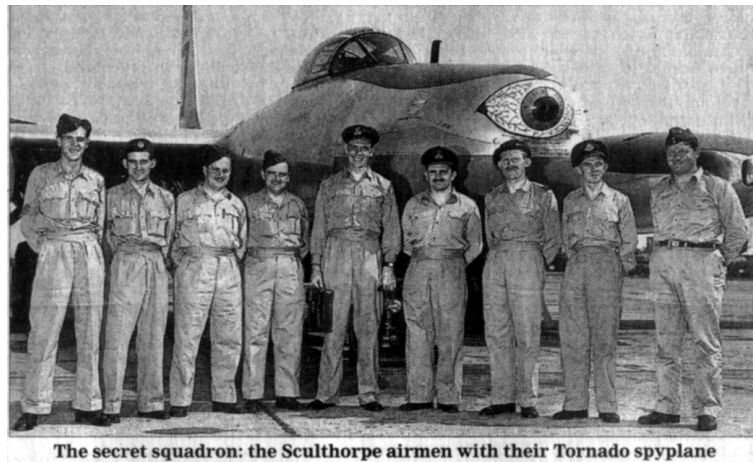
The contract finished in December 1945, photographs taken in January 1946 show areas of concrete still missing. However within a year or two Laings were back to finish the job and were then present for a number of years.

When Sculthorpe reopened in 1949 it was host to a mixture of B29 and B50 Superfortresses



Once Sculthorpe was up and running again in 1949 many variants of B29, B50 and C47s could be seen flying over Fakenham including giant B36s which blocked the sun out! Then came the C119 Packets with their twin booms. Eventually there were the B45 jets including those used by the RAF.

Travelling along the A148 these could be seen clearly with their RAF roundels and fin flashes parked beside the hangar nearest to the road. So much for secrecy!



The RAF formed a special duties flight at Sculthorpe using RB45s Tornados. They were to carry out flights over the USSR in aircraft marked with RAF colours.

The USAF was formed in 1948 but the legacy of the USAAF lived on at Sculthorpe when it was reopened. Personnel on their way there passed through Fakenham in trucks (!!!!) presumably after detraining at Norwich.

Occasionally a new blue USAF uniform would be evident but most were Olive Green and likely to remain so for some time so the change over to the new arm was gradual. It must be remembered that some functions on the 'base' would be undertaken by members of the US Army although, to begin with, the defence of the place was in the hands of the British Army and the place was occupied on a 50/50 basis with the RAF until they got fed up with the way that the Americans operated and pulled out !

