

MONUMENT NUMBER

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36351

NAME

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WORLD WAR II FIGHTER PEN, COLD WAR BLAST WALLS AND ASSOCIATED REMAINS AT THE AIRFIELD FORMERLY KNOWN AS RAF COLTISHALL

FILE REFERENCE

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AA 44876/1

SCHEDULING CATEGORY

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NEW

PRENOTIFICATION DATE

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25/06/2007

DATE TO DEPT

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04/03/2008

SCHEDULING DATE

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07/03/2008

NOTIFICATION DATE

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PREDECESSOR

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SCALE OF CAPTURE

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1:10000

COUNTY

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NORFOLK COUNTY

LOCAL AUTHORITY

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NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT

PARISH

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SCOTTOW CP

MONUMENT DESCRIPTION

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The monument is located within the former World War II airfield known as RAF Coltishall. It includes a single fighter pen and eight pairs of blast walls and is defined by two areas of protection.

The fighter pen lies at the north west boundary of the runway perimeter track, and includes the attached air-raid shelter and two hardstandings. The blast walls lie approximately 460m to the south east, and include hardstandings and a section of runway which links them.

Planned as a bomber station, construction of 'Coltishall Aerodrome' started

on approximately 500 acres of farmland in Scottow parish in 1939, but in May 1940, it became a fighter station. It remained so throughout its active life, initially for day fighters and subsequently night fighters. The base was, from time to time, home to some of the noted flying aces associated with the Battle of Britain and the first German loss is credited to a Spitfire from No 66 Squadron based at Coltishall. However, the base was not directly involved in the Battle of Britain and arguably had a more crucial role in the battle of the North Sea as the Royal Navy's Swordfish and Albaco aircraft flew from Coltishall to attack E-boats off the North Norfolk coast. During 1945-46 the base was designated RAF Coltishall (Polish) owing to the large number of Polish pilots who had flown from the base during the war, until the withdrawal of the East European forces. After 1951, RAF Coltishall was re-equipped with the new Meteor and after the extension of the runways in the mid 1950s, re-equipped with Javelins becoming the first Javelin Wing in Fighter Command. The base has since maintained its association with jet engine fighters, becoming home to Lightnings and Jaguars in succession, the latter being deployed in the first Gulf War. RAF Coltishall was due to close in November 2006.

During World War II, fighter aircraft were considered to be very vulnerable when on the ground either from air attack, or, during the early years of the War, from possible ground attack, and elaborate precautions were taken to prevent the loss of, or damage to, essential aircraft when not in action. As a result, fighter aircraft were often held in dispersed pens located around the perimeters of airfields which, nevertheless, had easy access to the main runways.

This monument includes the buried and standing remains of a fighter pen and eight pairs of blast walls. The fighter pen is known as a type A which was constructed in accordance with Air Ministry drawing 11070/40 and housed a single-engine fighter such as a Spitfire or Hurricane. It is the only remaining fighter pen at the base and remains substantially intact, and unusually, without associated earthworks. The roughly 'E'-shaped pen comprises a single tarmac floor for a single-engine fighter, a central wall and enclosing walls in an arc which stand some 3m high. Unlike other designated fighter pens, constructed from dwarf walls with earth banks over, the Coltishall fighter pen is a very unusual example constructed of sand-bags, now vitrified. It has an opening width of 20m, an air-raid shelter and former brick storage shed to the front. Two hardstandings to the south-east of the pen are associated with the shelter and pen and are therefore included in the scheduling.

The blast walls date to the 1950s and are built of concrete. They lead from the runway to the south east of the fighter pen. Eight pairs of walls provided shelter for jet aircraft and have adjacent concrete hardstandings for crew huts. These hardstandings are included in the scheduling, although the huts themselves are no longer extant. The tab of concrete between the walls was for parking a fuel browser, the fuel pipes passing through the circular openings in the adjacent walls and the metal hooks on the walls were for the fuel pipes. The concrete slab was for missile handling and preparation for crew buildings.

#### ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

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The importance of defending airfields against attack was realised before the outbreak of World War II and a strategy evolved as the war went on. Initially based on the principle of defence against air attack, anti-aircraft guns, air raid shelters and dispersed layouts, with fighter or 'blast' pens to protect dispersed aircraft, are characteristic of this early phase. With time, however, the capture of the airfield became a significant threat, and it was in this phase that the majority of surviving defence structures were constructed, mostly in the form of pillboxes and other types of machine gun post. The scale of airfield defence depended on the likelihood of attack,

with those airfields in the South or East of England, and those close to navigable rivers, ports and dockyards being more heavily defended, but the types of structure used were fairly standard. For defence against air attack there were anti-aircraft gun positions, either small machine posts or more substantial towers for Bofors guns; air raid shelters were common, with many examples on each airfield; and for aircraft, widely dispersed to reduce the potential effects of attack, fighter pens were provided. These were typically grouped together, usually in threes, and took the form of 'E' shaped earthworks with shelter for ground crew. Night fighter stations also had sleep shelters where the crew could rest. For defence against capture, pillboxes were provided. These fortified gun positions took many forms, from standard ministry designs used throughout Britain and in all contexts, to designs specifically for airfield defence. Three Pickett-Hamilton forts were issued to many airfields and located on the flying field itself. Normally level with the ground, these forts were occupied by two persons who entered through the roof before raising the structure by a pneumatic system to bring fire on the invading force. The position of the Pickett-Hamilton forts at RAF Coltishall could not be detected. Other types of gun position include the Seagull trench, a complex linear defensive position, and rounded 'Mushroom' pillboxes, while fighter pens were often protected by defended walls. Finally, airfield defence was co-ordinated from a Battle Headquarters, a heavily built structure of which under and above ground examples are known.

Defences survive on a number of airfields, though few in anything like their original form or configuration, or with their Battle Headquarters. Examples are considered to be of particular importance where the defence provision is near complete or where a portion of the airfield represents the nature of airfield defence that existed more widely across the site. Surviving structures will often be given coherence and context by surviving lengths of perimeter track and the concrete dispersal pads. In addition, some types of defence structures are rare survivals nationally, and all examples of fighter pens and their associated sleep shelters, gun positions and Battle Headquarters closely associated with defence structures are of national importance.

The archaeological remains of the Cold War are the physical manifestation of the global division between capitalism and communism that shaped the history of the late C20. Military airfields, housing fighter-interceptor aircraft represent one element of a complex air defence system, including radar, visual reporting and control facilities which were needed to identify hostile aircraft and mount an interception. The most significant technological change made after the end of World War II was the re-equipment of the frontline fighter stations with jet aircraft - Meteors and Vampires, and later Javelins and Jaguars. The effect of the introduction of this technology on airfield infrastructure included the laying of long concrete runways and operational readiness platforms at their ends, dispersal areas and aircraft servicing platforms. Concrete hardstandings were needed to counter the backwash from the jet engines. Many airfields were also provided with new control towers and specialised servicing facilities for aircraft avionics. The armament of post-war jets differed little from that of their wartime predecessors but from the late 1950s, with the introduction of new aircraft types, pre-loaded gun packs and guided missiles began to demand their own servicing and storage infrastructure. The comprehensive survey of Cold War monuments has identified the principal post-war fighter interceptor airfields in England, including RAF Coltishall. Structures have been selected to reflect the development of post-war military airfield architecture to meet new technological needs and those that had a specifically operational Cold War role. The group of eight pairs of blast walls and their associated concrete aprons are well preserved examples of 1950s airfield defensive features. They were probably constructed in about 1956 and coincide with the introduction of the Javelin and the UK's first operation air to air missile, Firestreak. They both reflect the development of blast pen design since the end of the war and contemporary threat assessments which foresaw that the Soviet air force had the capability to attack UK airfields. Furthermore, the blast walls mark the move from gun to missile technology and the first phase of weapons that made the

generational transition from modified wartime weapons to weapons specifically designed to fight the Cold War.

Despite limited modification, the World War II fighter pen and Cold War blast walls at Coltishall are outstandingly well preserved. The associated structures providing for crewing, maintenance and organisation are all represented. All of these monument types are rare nationally. The survival of the original layouts of all the various structures in their complexes with stretches of perimeter track linking them is exceptional. These remains represent well the development of airfield design in response to the intense and changing pressures of a critical period in the history of Britain. In particular, they are good examples of the provision for fighter units having been built for this purpose and used as such throughout the history of the airfield.

AREA SUFFIX	ARCHAEOLOGICAL IDENTIFIER	CLASS	PERIOD
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01	161002	MILITARY CAMP	MODERN
02	161001	MILITARY CAMP	MODERN