



News and views about North Weald and the air museum

SUMMER 2019 EDITION



North Weald a D-DAY launchpad

The commemoration of D-Day in early June saw a flurry of activity and a great deal of visual evidence across social media. Of all the images marking North Weald part in the commemoration—a Douglas C-47 flanked by two Spitfires the example by Tim Salmon works well. The lower image was taken from the interior of the C47 of the escorting Spitfires on the first stage of the journey to Normandy.

North Weald airfield has seen many changes in recent months, a great deal of building and many plans for more to come. There is little point in setting out all the details here when the airfield continues to provide the day-to-day news on developments on its website and Facebook pages <https://www.facebook.com/northwealdairfield/photos>



©AM

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

In line with all this development and change, the museum has seen several alterations itself.

Thanks to significant funding from a Stansted Airport charity, in April the museum opened with extensive new displays for visitors to see.

The Wulstan Tempest room which covers the history of the airfield and West Essex in the period up to 1940 is now greatly enhanced by new visual displays that include a mix of new technology printed and electronic screens. Designed, produced and put in place over the winter closure period, they have been well received by the visiting public.

As new visitors are able to see the major alterations make best use of large printed panels in telling the aviation history of North Weald and the local area from before the Great War.

If you have visited before you will find a new slant on how the story is told, it is same story but employing different images from the museums large collection allowing a different and often colourful flow of information for the years up to the Phoney War in 1939-40.

The main cost of the changes has fallen to a grant from the Stansted Trust the London Stansted Airport organisation that funnels funding to groups and organisations close to the airport.

The next projects in this long term refreshment of the museum displays are in the Allies room and will see changes of the images relating to The American Eagle Squadrons, the Canadians, Czechoslovakians, Poles and Norwegians. New funding is being sought for these additions.

North Weald Airfield's

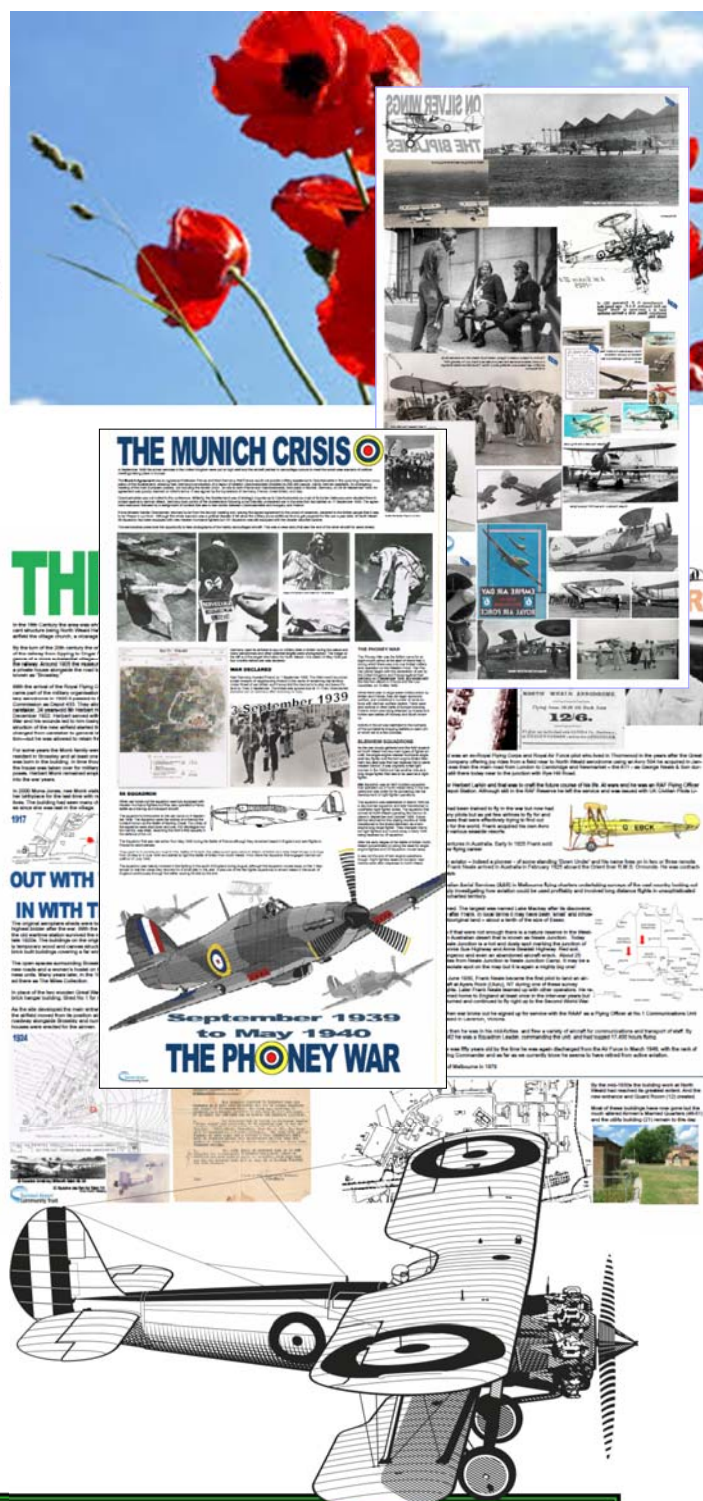


OPEN EVERY DAY - 930am to 5pm

EPPING MARKET

Every Monday

www.eppingmarket.co.uk
Please come along and see us!



ANNIVERSARY

With the 75th Anniversary of the Norwegian presence looming later this year they can perhaps be seen as the most urgent. From the museum's point of view though there are constraining elements including accuracy. The Wulstan Tempest Room took three years plan and set up – the various other elements will take time especially with new material arriving in the museum each month.



The family of the late Mrs Iris Vincent have been in touch with the museum with a story of her past that has connections with North Weald and the Norwegian fliers commemorated there.

Born in 1920 Iris Vincent was a local young woman from Buckhurst Hill. Still in her early 20s she married an airman, George Wilson, who was tragically killed in training at the beginning of the war and later married a handsome young Norwegian pilot Flight Lt Robert Hassel in August 1944. Unfortunately, Robert was killed in action on 14th January 1945.

A short lived romance cut short by war.



Robert was trained in Canada and served with several RAF and Norwegian squadrons. Although his length of service at North Weald was relatively short, he was something of a Norwegian Forces pin-up so we have more artefacts and photographic material on him than some others; thanks to Iris.

Iris worked for the air ministry at some point and recalled once seeing Douglas Bader. After the war she travelled to Norway to meet Robert's family and remained in touch with his sister, Tullun, for several years into the 1960s. The family continue to research a more detailed narrative. Iris passed away in December 2016 aged 96.

The museum is now looking after a substantial metal trunk and suitcase, both apparently issued to Robert Hassel in Canada after he arrived there for training. He will have left Norway with nothing early in the war and by the time of his death in combat these would literally be all his worldly goods. We also have a box of photographs that Robert and Iris collected during his relatively short service, many of which show other pilots and aircraft in wartime and a few of his family back home in Norway.

EAGLE SQUADRON

We have often heard of the strong connection of North Weald with pilots from Norway but less so the connections with American volunteers - the Eagle Squadrons. Most of the US perception of the story of these fliers is inaccurate and side-lines North Weald. A task in hand to try and reverse that.

By the spring of 1941, so many American pilots had made it to Britain, eager to do their part, that the RAF was able to form a further two Eagle squadrons, 121 and 133.



Andy Mamedoff was selected to lead a flight in 133 Squadron, the first American to be so honoured. Shortly before leaving for his new assignment, he also became the first of the Americans to take a war bride: Penny Craven, a member of the hugely wealthy Craven cigarette family. Fellow American pilot Vic Bono arranged for a flyby a few minutes after the wedding in Epping. Unfortunately, it was market day and the low-flying pilots sent pigs and cows scuttling in all directions, leaving the marketplace a wreck.

OUTREACH

The museum was represented at the Galleywood Heritage Group "Remembering 1918" with a display to promote the Museum set up by member and Trustee Eric. As well as displays featuring local people by the Galleywood Heritage Group, the event was attended by the Essex Branch of the Western Front Association and Dr Vivien Newman, author of books on women in the Great War. The organisers were pleased with the attendance of members of the public which at 120 exceeded last year's total.



In the same period a similar NWAM 'Outreach' took place when the museum joined forces with the Ray Sears Photographic Collection in a Waltham Abbey church hall. Ray Sears, was a museum member for many years. A collector and publisher of historical images mainly relating to Waltham Abbey he died a couple of years ago leaving an extensive archive of photographs to live on thanks to the efforts of friends and family.

The museum has an extensive archive of aviation related photographs, many of which remain to be researched.

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS HOW TO JOIN

We accept all currencies in welcoming you to museum membership—becoming a Friend of North Weald Airfield Museum as long as it means the same as £12.50p!

You can join through the museum web-site www.nwamuseum.co.uk

MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

The museum season is April until November and it is closed for the winter

When open entry is free for members.

Except on Special Event Days visitors will be charged standard rates for entry:

Adults	£2
Concessions	£1.50
Children [5-15]	50p

Group rates vary but generally there is a minimum charge of £50 per group.



NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD MUSEUM

Ad Astra House
Hurricane Way
North Weald
Epping
Essex CM16 6AA

Telephone 01992 523010 [24 hour]
E-mail secretary@nwamuseum.co.uk
Web: www.nwamuseum.co.uk

CONTACT US

ADVERTISING AND THE HURRICANE

One way in which the NWAMA can earn income and to finance the production of hard copies of the Newsletter is advertising. Advertisers need circulation beyond the membership and they also need to know who is reading the Newsletter. If you pass this edition on please let us know who to so we can help finance your reading!

Copyright Notice: The content of this publication includes items that are the copyright of others. The source of words and images will usually be indicated together with the source of additional information that seeks to enhance the original information.

The Hurricane includes artwork produced for it by Ian J Commin of Insight Design of North Burnham, Slough SL1 6DS. In some cases it may not be possible to indicate the source of this material directly associated with the images used.



©Simon Thomas

MYSTERY SEAL

Simon Thomas approached the museum with help identifying the story behind a 78mm x 75mm lead label he had acquired. It appears to be a crate identity plaque that is embossed North Weald R.A.F. has the number 3 stamped in the centre, M & W embossed to the right. Further date conclusive features pointing towards its vintage are a King George VI coin style is stamped to the left, a N.A.A.F.I. logo and the numbers '1940.'

If anyone has any ideas on what it might be please let us know and we will pass on the information.

Waltham Abbey

MARKET

8am to 3pm

TUESDAY & SATURDAY

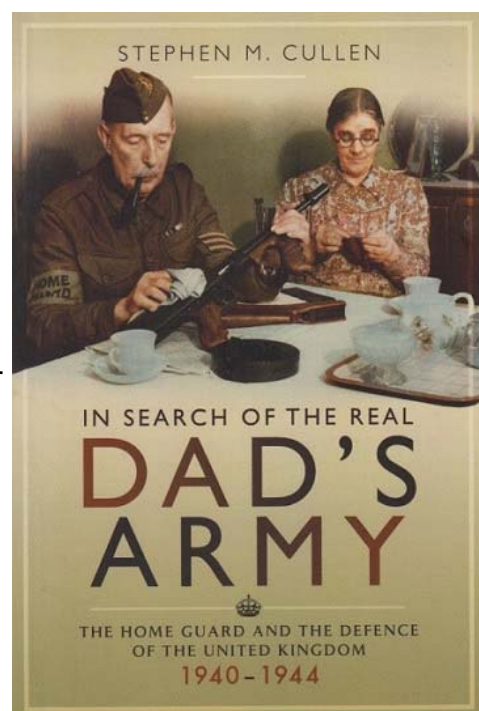
BOOK REVIEWS by Eric D Probert

In Search of the Real Dad's Army & The Home Guard & the Defence of the UK, 1940-44

US Air Force Bases in the UK since 1945 - includes Stansted, Ridgewell, Wethersfield and Andrewsfield in Essex and 9 bases in Suffolk.

In Search of the Real Dads Army

This 246 page illustrated paperback is subtitled "The Home Guard and Defence of the United Kingdom, 1940 to 1945". It is written by Stephen M Cullen, the author of many articles on twentieth century history including world wars, fascism and the Home Guard who is a senior research fellow at the University of Warwick. The author sets out to dispel the myths surrounding the organisation and to document the real contribution it made to the war effort. Extensive use has been made of sixty oral interviews with members of the Home Guard from recordings in the archives of the Imperial War Museum. The book is in five parts, in the first of which Stephen Cullen explores the background and considers the place of the Home Guard in the overall planning of domestic defence before focussing on pre-war groundwork. In Part II the crisis from May 1940 to June 1941 is initially described before considering the organisation in the period from June 1941 to December 1944. In Part III the author examines the roles and lives of young and old men as well as women in the factory yards and on the playing fields. Volunteers came forward in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man too and their impact is explored. Part IV considers the equipment provided for the Home Guard from rifles to rockets and cloth caps to steel helmets, including uniforms and vehicles. The final part V is concerned with understanding and remembering the organisation that was set to play a vital role in keeping Hitler out of the British Isles, particularly through TV programmes.



The text is backed up by comprehensive notes detailing the information sources and there is a listing of original source material as well as secondary publications and an index. There are also 32 black and white illustrations depicting members of the Home Guard, their equipment and recruitment posters.

A well researched and easy to read book providing a fascinating insight into what it was like to be a man or woman in the Home Guard in war torn Britain in the 1940s. The book will appeal to all historians with either a family member interest or an interest in voluntary work during wartime.

Published by Pen & Sword and available at the rrp of £14-99 from Pen & Sword Books, 47 Church St, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS (Tel: 01226 734555, email: enquiries@pen-and-sword.co.uk), Web: <https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/>), However the book may be obtained at a significant discount (up to 30%) from online booksellers.

US Air Force Bases in the UK

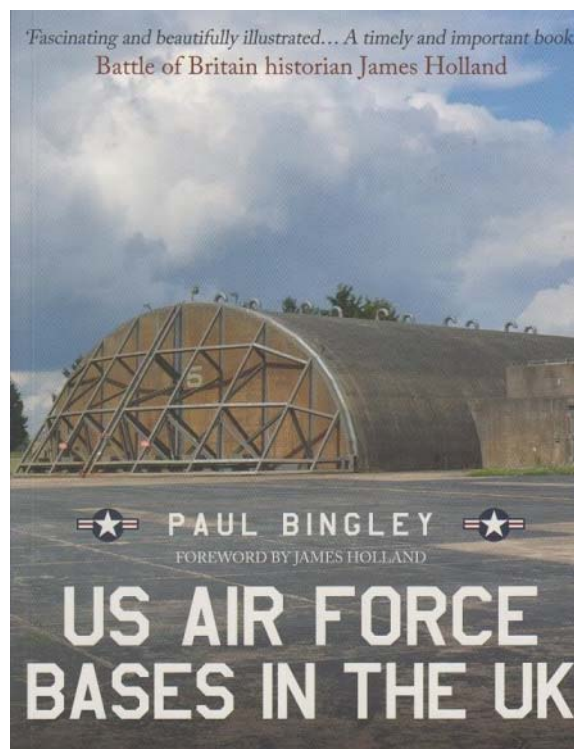
Paul Bingley who has worked in the aviation industry for over 30 years and is Chairman at Ridgewell Airfield Museum, Essex (see <http://www.rafcamuseum.co.uk>) which commemorates the history of the 381st BG USAAF operating B17 Flying Fortresses, is the author of this 94 page paperback. It is a history illustrated with colour and black and white photographs of airfields used by 8th and 9th US Army Air Forces during WW2 and several of which are still in use today by the US Air Force.

The author does not set out to cover all airfields used by the Americans but he sets out to chronicle the circumstances in which the airfields were built and what has become of them since 1945. In all fifty airfields are detailed in which those in Essex and the neighbouring counties of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk are represented.

The first Chapter is entitled "First Footings" and is devoted to the history of the construction of the airfields during the 2nd World War. A total of about 450 new airfields were built in the UK for

WW2 and of these, 12 were in Essex hosting the medium twin engined bombers of the US 9th Air Force plus a further 3 hosting escort fighters. The US 8th Air Force flying the heavy four engine Flying Fortresses and Liberators had a further 42 airbases. The second chapter emphasises the special relationship that exists between the US and Britain and is aptly titled "A Concrete Presence". It features particularly the existence of US transport aircraft on the WW2 bases in the 1960s. Concentrating on the decades after the 1960s, the third chapter describes the deployment of Phantom fighter aircraft at Bentwaters, F111 fighters at Upper Heyford, Hercules transports at Woodbridge, stealth reconnaissance SR71 aircraft at Mildenhall. Boeing 707 tankers at Greenham Common, B52 heavy bombers from Fairford and F15 strike aircraft at Lakenheath. The fourth and final chapter comprises brief potted histories of the airfields with, in many cases, aerial views in colour of the airfield as it is today and in some cases surviving buildings too. In brief there is reference to the Essex airfields of Stansted and Ridgewell whilst Wethersfield and Andrewsfield command more extensive coverage and also featured are the airfields of Woodbridge, Bentwaters and Bassingbourne just beyond the borders of Essex.

An interesting and informative review of the legacy of landscapes left by the Americans following their UK based varied military aviation operations during WW2, the Berlin Airlift and, more recently, "the war on terror". Available at the rrp of £14.99 from Amberley Publishing, The Hill, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 4EP (Tel: 01453 847800, email: info@amberley-books.com, Web: www.amberley-books.com).



LETTERS

Have just been looking at the photos of 1950s RAF North Weald. There was one of a Beverley and I can add a few details.

My father was armaments officer there from 1955-58 during 111s Black Arrows days and was involved in experiments to make smoke for their displays including one where underwing tanks were trialled. One Hunter trialled the installation by flying over and starting the smoke from the tanks. However owing to a cross connection the tank was also dropped on the airfield like a smoking bomb. The only time a Hunter bombed North Weald. Eventually smoke was created for displays by injecting oil into the jet efflux. The underwing installation was to try and avoid plumbing for oil tanks etc. that would make the Hunters non-standard. Remember in those days display teams were not a separate unit like the Red Arrows But were part of a squadron. But back to the Beverley. It was one that was came to take ground crew and spares support for 111 when they displayed overseas.

I went in one on the ground that provided support for a Brussels display. For the period it was a cavernous aircraft. Whether it was that one or not I don't know.

One other anecdote my father told (whether pulling my leg or not I don't know) was that he walked in the woods behind the Officers Mess and found what looked like parts of the venturi of a V2 rocket. He said it could have come off the one that landed near Epping or it could mean there is an unexplored V2 buried in the woods there. □

Hope that info is of some use or at least amusing.

Grahame Clark

Editor: Having flown in a Beverley just once [from Abingdon to Germany] I can testify that for its time the Beverley was an apparent giant among aircraft – but of course dwarfed by modern equivalents – and proceeded at a leisurely pace through the sky. It kept its passengers out of the way



up in a tail cabin reached by a ridiculously tall set of air stairs.

This period was one in which several jet aircraft types were seeking to emit smoke for display purposes, and it was the eventual solution for all of them to inject oil into the hot exhaust plume.

Former USAF pilot Bill Hunter contacted the museum seeking information on an RAF pilot he worked with briefly in the 1950s. Thankfully we were able to help him.

He knew that Les Mersham had been an RAF exchange pilot who arrived Stateside with his wife Roma in the 18th Tac Recon Squadron, 363rd Tac Recon Group at Shaw AFB, Sumter (in the swamp), South Carolina probably late 1953 or early 54. He outranked Bill [a First Lt] by a few steps & perhaps outranked Lt/Col Wilson, the Squadron Commander. Nevertheless he didn't seem to have official squadron duties other than to fly standard training missions alongside the rest of the pilots and to observe the day-to-day operations.

For the 18th it was a period of transition from the straight wing Lockheed RF80-A Shooting Star into the swept wing Republic RF84-F Thunderflash. They were flying the RF84-F through most of his time there, although he probably managed a few hours in the 80-A.

Although now one of the largest bases operated in the United States the base was a bare concrete strip, 300' wide and 10,000' long in the boondocks [remote areas] of South Carolina. It had been abandoned and levelled after WWII. There were no structures of any kind, only the runway and many tents.

In the early 1950's USAF could not deploy a single squadron and the 18th was given the task of determining what additional support: medical, security, quarters, mess, maintenance, ground transportation, etc. a squadron would need to operate independently of the Group and log at least 1,000 hours on the new aircraft over 30 days. Les was present for the study.

Very personable, he and Roma were well-liked by all and both enjoyed a good party in the best fighter squadron tradition. Les had some of the best jokes that any of the Americans had ever heard and could put on English and Irish accents that entertained greatly.

They had a son a little past the toddler stage and a daughter was born at the base hospital in May 1954. Bill's wife Joanne was in the hospital giving birth to Carla at the same time Roma was in, and the two wives got on well.

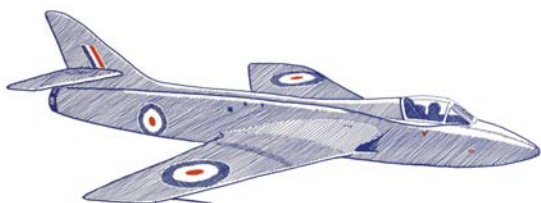
Bill had heard that Les was killed in July 1957 but was short of the details. The museum was able to fill in the detail of the accident at North Weald based on some research undertaken 25 years ago.

July 30. 1957.

On July 30, 1957, Hawker Hunter F6, XF510 attached to the Station Flight, was involved in a fatal crash at North Weald.

The Hunter was some 44 mins into its sortie, at 1407 hours, as the aircraft came into land after practice GCA approaches.

Squadron Leader L T Mersham with a total of 1978 flight hours in his logbook appears to have undertaken an incorrect fuel drill for Mk6 allowed engine to die at critical point on the airfield threshold. Although he ejected on impact, possibly involuntarily, he died. He is buried at North Weald.



Les is second standing from the right in the photo. It might appear that he was keeping bad company but at least one of his companions here retired as M/Gen and another logged time in the SR71 before he retired.

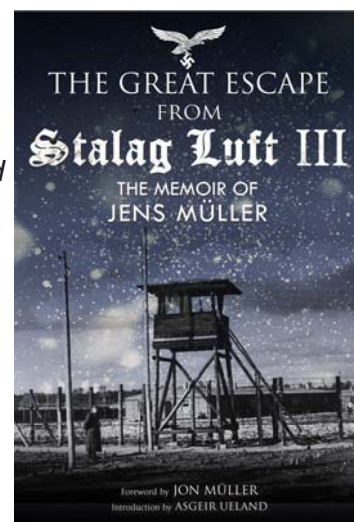


Michael Leventhal a Finchley based publisher - <https://www.greenhillbooks.com> - of history books has produced a new edition of Norwegian pilot Jens Müller's memoir.

Jens Müller, one out of only three who made the home run in The Great Escape, flew his last sortie from North Weald before he was shot down and taken prisoner of war.

A long-lost 1939-45 Spitfire flown by a pilot who was also part of the "Great Escape" has been found almost entirely intact on a Norwegian mountain – 76 years after it was shot down.

The discovery is the first time for more than 20 years that a substantially complete and previously unknown Spitfire from this period has been found anywhere in the world. Its pilot was captured and ultimately executed for taking part in the war's most famous prisoner-of-war breakout from Sagan. The wreck was located on a mountainside, 56 miles southwest of Trondheim.



BUILDING WORKS

Over on the airfield some major changes have taken place. The cross runway will be closed to landings and take-offs when the police base comes on line later this summer. It is expected to simply serve as a taxiway to a number of new mini-hangars and two large hangars for the emergency services.

Work started on the police hangar in the New Year. Construction of the National Police Air Service (NPAS) airbase at North Weald Airfield is expected to run until autumn, with the first flights taking off before the end of 2019. The structure is now visually complete.

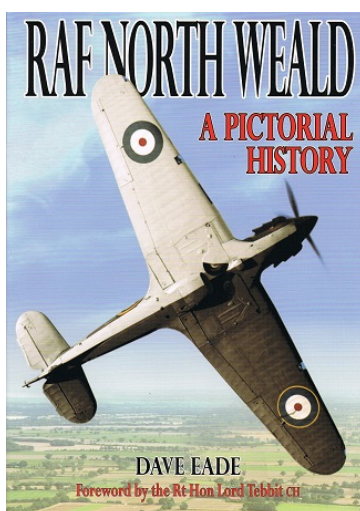
Police helicopters and police planes will be able to fly from the base which will operate 24/7, 365 days a year, and primarily serve London and the South East and will replace the existing facility at Lippitts Hill.

Philip Stuart, Senior Quantity Surveyor, from Kier Group; Ollie Dismore, Temporary Accountable Manager of the National Police Air Service; Councillor Richard Bassett, Chairman of Epping Forest District Council; Mark Burns-Williamson, Police and Crime Commissioner of West Yorkshire and at the site of the new NPAS North Weald base.



EVENTS COMING UP SOON

The museum is open every weekend and Bank Holidays from 12pm until 4pm. In addition special opening times can be arranged for groups but a minimum charge applies.



On September 8th the museum will have its annual Open Day when additional displays are brought in alongside the normal museum displays including classic cars and food and drink.

And do not forget the shop. Open during museum hours of course but also offering a mail order facility throughout the year for such unique items as the Dave Eade book *RAF North Weald—A pictorial history* at just £10.

Our Shop Manager, Dawn, has recently taken delivery of 60 museum history DVD's *North Weald Airfield—Flying for freedom*. At just £14.99 it is believed that these will be the last that will be available in this format. With the growing popularity for Internet downloads, it is not clear yet whether the unique video footage will be available in the future, or in what form. Now is the time to buy!



It is fifty years ago that the epic film Battle of Britain was released, it was filmed at several airfield locations including North Weald.

The upper images are of scenes taken from the film where North Weald was the backdrop.

The three lower images come from the museum's Alan Church Collection of a CASA Buchon variant of a Bf109 at Duxford and a number of Spitfires [a mix of real and replica] on the western hardstanding at North Weald near what is now Hangar 4.

