



A Royal Air Force oblique photograph of Horsham St. Faith taken on August 19, 1941.

Horsham St. Faith

STATION 123

Horsham St. Faith was officially opened as an RAF Station on June 1, 1940 as a Bomber Command airfield. It had been built pre-war and had five C-type hangars, permanent brick and tiled buildings with central-heating and a high standard of domestic accommodation.

Horsham's first RAF squadrons, Nos. 114 and 139, were equipped with Blenheim aircraft and two of the early visitors to the new airfield were the Right Honourable Neville Chamberlain (July 23) and General Sir Alan Brooke (July 30).

In August 1941, an aircraft from No. 18 Squadron flying from Horsham St. Faith en route to attack a power station at Gosnay, dropped a box by parachute over the south-west corner of the airfield at St. Omer-Longeunesse, containing a pair of legs for Wing Commander Douglas Bader (who had been shot down over France and had lost his artificial limbs in the process).

In December 1941, No. 105 Squadron arrived to begin training on Mosquito aircraft and from June 1942, the squadron carried out photographic and bombing missions over Germany.

In September 1942, the airfield was made available to the USAAF, initially housing an itinerant B-26 group, the 319th. This had departed by the end of the year and, on April 5, 1943, a P-47 Thunderbolt group, the 56th Fighter Group, moved in from Kingscliffe to commence combat operations. On July 8, the group had to move to Halesworth when work started on enlarging Horsham St. Faith (which was an all-grass airfield with a perimeter vehicle service road) for use as a heavy bomber station. The move was not particularly popular with the men of the 56th who had to give up the comparative comfort of Horsham's barracks for the Nissen hut accommodation of the new base.

The three Class A runways laid down were of the standard lengths — 2,000 yards for the main and 1,400 yards for the two secondary ones — joined by a perimeter track. Although fifty, heavy bomber hardstandings were constructed, six of the original dispersals remained which could be used. Extra ac-

commodation was also provided by building a few dispersed Nissen hut sites to the east of the airfield so that, in total, nearly 3,000 men could be accommodated on the station.

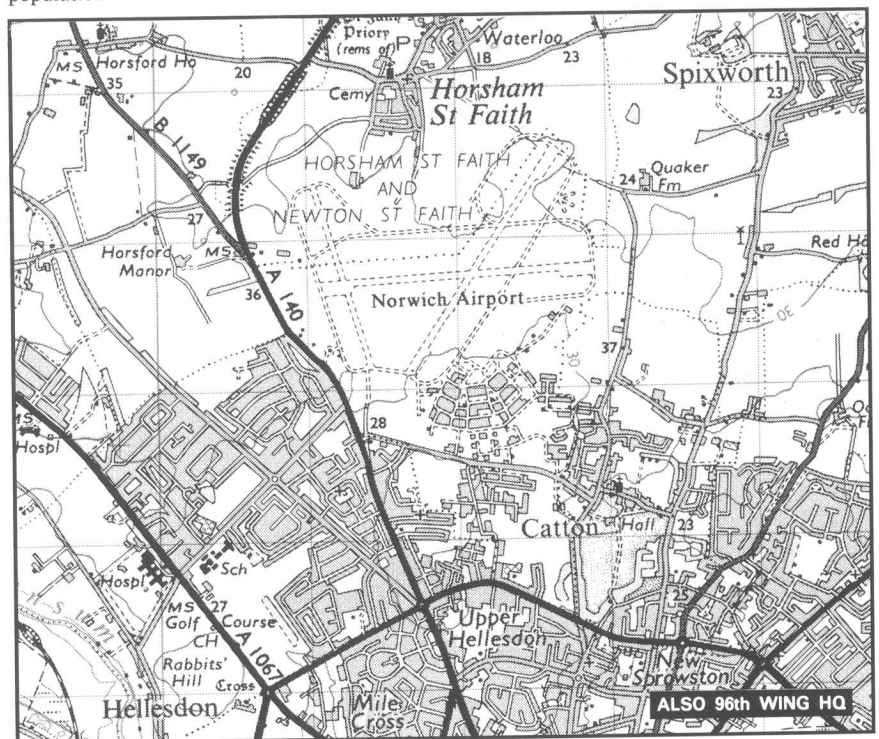
A Liberator unit, the 458th Bomb Group, arrived on the airfield late in January 1944 and flew its first mission on February 24. Up until April 15, 1945, 240 missions had been carried out by this group from Horsham St. Faith and, apart from the normal high altitude formation bombing, one of the Groups' squadrons carried out experimental single-plane sorties with Azon radio-controlled bombs.

The proximity of the airfield to the city of Norwich — it was four miles to the north but close to built-up areas — meant there was always some risk of heavily-loaded bombers crashing and causing considerable damage and loss of life amongst the civilian population. Six crashes did occur in built-up

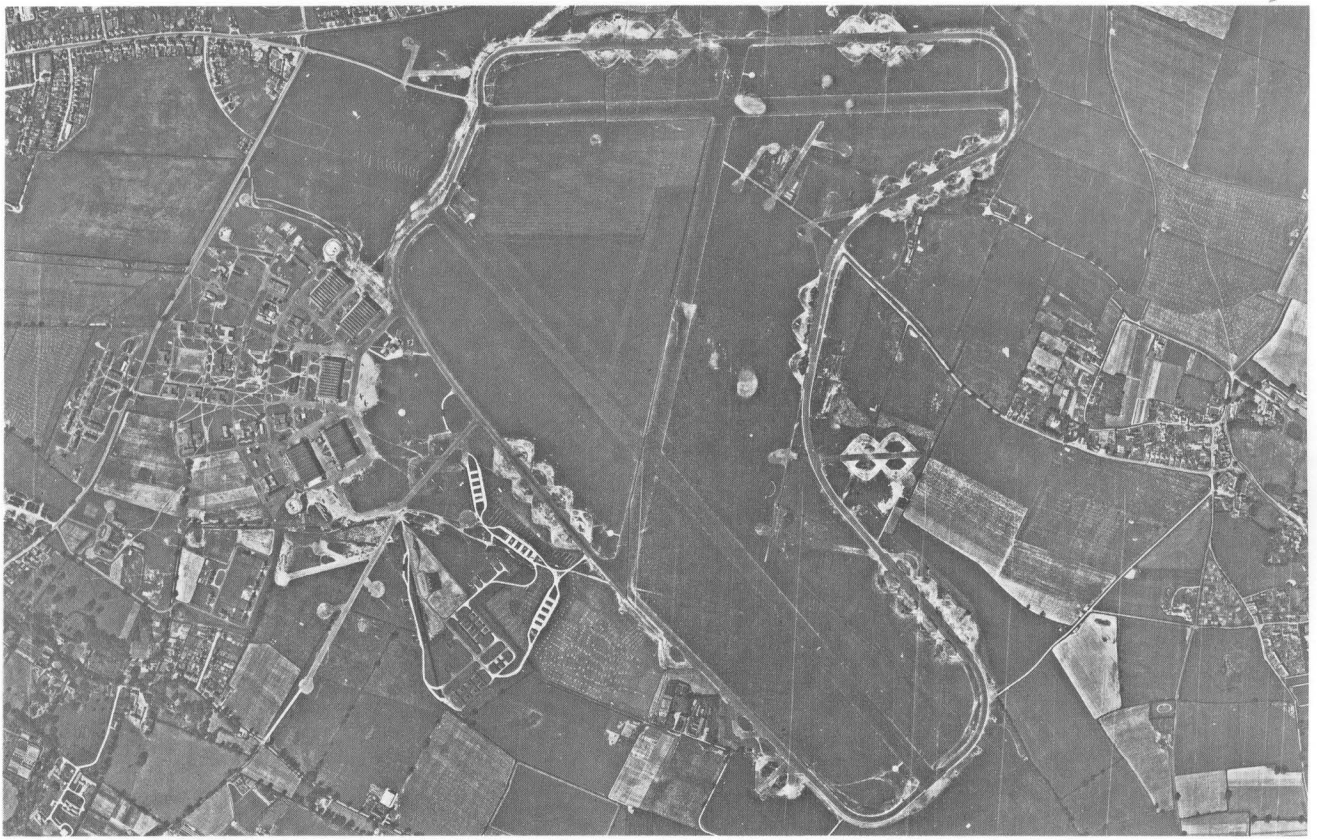
areas and in one instance two children were killed. Another B-24 blew up with its load of bombs while on its hardstand after an accident in which a gunner in a neighbouring aircraft had accidentally discharged his guns into the bomb bay of the aircraft that exploded.

The airfield was transferred to RAF Fighter Command on July 10, 1945 when it was occupied by four Mosquito Squadrons one of which, No. 307, was entirely composed of Polish personnel. Meteor jet aircraft arrived during 1946-48 and in June, an echo of the airfield's former occupants was provided by a visit from a Swedish Mustang squadron.

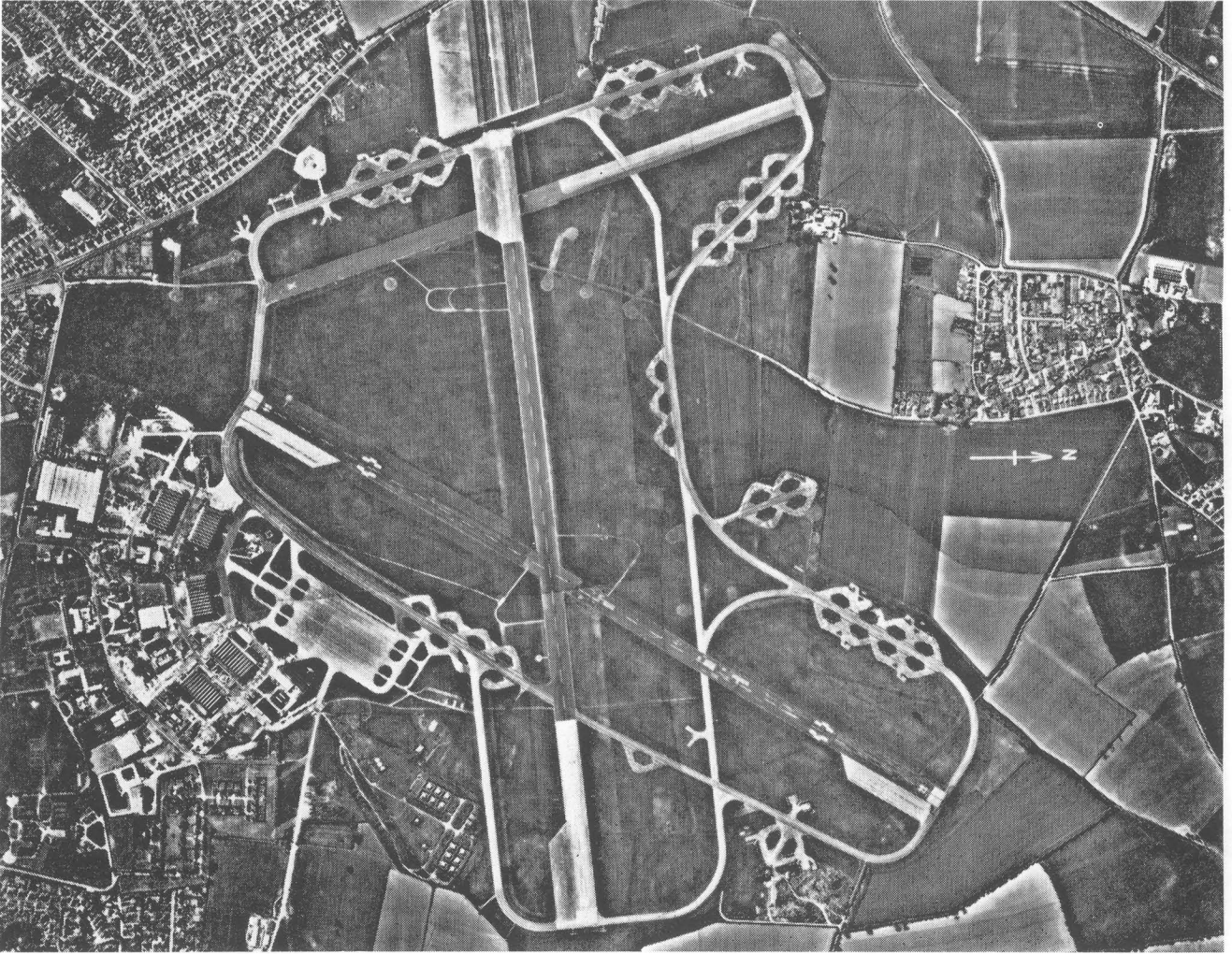
As a front-line RAF station, Horsham St. Faith squadrons participated in many post-war exercises and at one, Exercise Stronghold in September 1956, the airfield acted as both a 'friendly' and 'enemy' base. Earlier that year, on May 25, the secondary E-W runway was



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Above: Horsham St. Faith as it was one year after the end of the war (Crown Copyright) and (below) the layout of Norwich Airport today.





Above: Christmas Eve 1944. Liberators of the 458th Bomb Group follow the assembly aircraft lined up on the SW-NE runway for the biggest Eighth Air Force operation of the war. *Below:* This is no longer the main runway at Horsham St. Faith as it was switched to the E-W in 1956 to avoid overflying the Norwich suburb of Hellesdon (see map page 132).

opened as the new main runway. This had been extended to switch traffic from the Hellesdon suburb of Norwich to more open country.

No. 12 Group HQ was located at Horsham until 1963 when it was disbanded to be replaced by HQ12 (East Anglia) Sector which was formed at the airfield in 1963. However this unit moved the following month and the station was inactivated on August 1, 1963.

The Royal Air Force left Horsham on March 24, 1967 and, during the following two years, the major part of the airfield and buildings were sold to Norwich City and County Borough Council, a small part being retained by the service. It has now been re-opened as Norwich Airport and Industrial Trading Estate.



Below: The airfield, now in use as East Anglia's major airport, photographed on August 2, 1977, looking north-west shows the two 2,000ft runways currently in use, 10/28 and 04/22.

