

Depiction of airfields on Landranger 128, 1974-2018

Lez Watson



Airfields, both military and civil, are a feature of many one-inch and 1:50 000 maps of Britain. They have been depicted in varying degrees of detail. Two seminal articles on this were published in 2014 by Ronald Blake^{1 2}. They provided a fascinating introduction to key aspects of ‘charting the aeronautical landscape’.

Blake published a paper forty years ago on disused airfields as a planning resource³. He discussed East Midlands including four in Derbyshire on the 1:50 000 sheet 128. His study identified three types of potential – locational, structural and development. He deemed Darley Moor as having little potential, but proposed Ashbourne, Burnaston and Church Broughton as ‘requiring special planning attention’. Indeed, these are the Derbyshire sites that have fulfilled this potential to some degree. Fradley in Staffordshire can be added to this category.

Twenty years ago, John Nicolls wrote an introduction to airfields on Ordnance Survey post-war one-inch mapping for Sheetlines⁴. This provided an insight to the variation in aerodrome mapping detail. Around that time, I began to compile a publication history of my local Landranger map, including information about the airfields depicted. Later this listing evolved into a website page⁵.

This study covers thirteen airfields: one pre-war, seven RAF Second World War plus two associated landing grounds⁶, one army base, and four more airfields established in recent years (fig. 1). It considers whether openings, closures, changes and subsequent

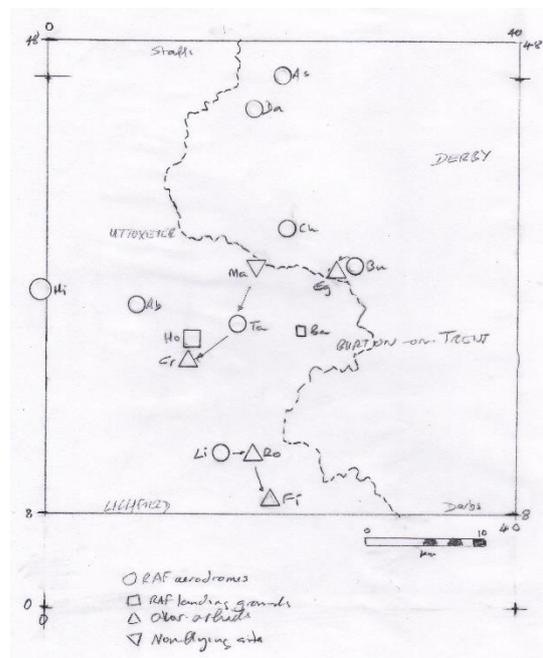


Figure 1

¹ Ronald Blake, 2014a. ‘Charting the aeronautical landscape – Part 1: depiction of airfields on Ordnance Survey one-inch maps from the birth of practical aviation to the aftermath of World War 2’, Sheetlines 99, 19.

² Ronald Blake, 2014b. ‘Charting the aeronautical landscape - Part 2: depiction of airfields on OS one-inch and 1;50,00 maps from the onset of the Cold War to beyond the millennium’, Sheetlines 101, 4.

³ RNE Blake, 1978. Disused Airfields as a Planning Resource, Trent Papers in Planning, Trent Polytechnic.

⁴ John Nicholls, 1996. ‘Depiction of airfields on New Popular and Seventh Series one-inch maps’, Sheetlines 46, 24-26.

⁵ See www.watsonlv.net.

⁶ For Staffordshire airfields see Ken Delve, *The Military Airfields of Britain – Wales and West Midlands*, 2007, and for Derbyshire see Ken Delve, *The Military Airfields of Britain – East Midlands*, 2008.

redevelopment of these airfields have been reflected accurately on the maps and in a timely fashion. Does this provide a good cross section of such facilities?

COMPILATION MATERIAL

No military airfields were shown on post-war one-inch New Popular Edition sheets in this area, in accordance with OS policy at the time⁷.

1:50 000 sheet 128 was compiled from One-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 plus part of 111 and overlapping with 121.

Eight airfields were shown on the one-inch Seventh Series maps used to create the 1:50 000 sheet 128. They had all originated as Second World War aerodromes, except Burnaston, whose beginnings lay in pre-war civil aviation. The other airfields had ceased to be of military use by the time of the publication of First Series Edition A, and most by then had developed some civil flying use.

By comparison, for example, one-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 A edition, revised 1949-50, depicted Ashbourne, Church Broughton, Darley Moor, Fradley (officially RAF Lichfield) and Tatenhill aerodromes labelled “Airfield”, but with no details shown within the site. Burnaston was shown in detail as “Derby Airport”.

Sheet 120 B edition (revised 1959) showed details of runways, other tracks and buildings at all the former RAF airfields, described as disused except Tatenhill⁸. This aerodrome had been occupied since 1959 by Allied Breweries to stable their executive aircraft. Darley Moor had by that time become a popular venue for motorcycle racing, as it remains today. Some airfields were used by glider clubs and occasionally visited by light aircraft.

An interesting comparison may be made with the same aerodromes shown on 1:25 000 First Series published mapping. B editions of this series are contemporary, by and large, with early editions of the Seventh Series on the Staffordshire/Derbyshire area. Examination of these earlier series maps can tease out detail not shown out on the later series, for example at Hixon aerodrome where the site is bisected by the 0°E/W grid line. Here, the extract (fig. x)⁹ shows editions B of SJ92 (1952) adjoining SK02 (1961)¹⁰. This discontinuity, across the grid line is not an uncommon feature of the larger scale sheets and often misinforms the published Seventh Series depiction (fig 2).



Figure 2

⁷ See Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey Maps: a concise guide for historians*, third edition, Charles Close Society, 2000, 82. Comments on detail omitted from small-scale maps.

⁸ Ashbourne and Burnaston were treated similarly on B editions of sheets 111 and 121 respectively.

⁹ From the National Library of Scotland collection.

¹⁰ The equivalent of Seventh Series Sheet 119 edition ‘A’ and 120 edition ‘B’.

[Was the 7S revised contemporarily with the 25k 1st ?]

DETAILS OF SITE DEPICTION ON 1:50 000 SCALE MAPPING

The sites are ordered alphabetically by aerodrome, with satellite site and other fields inserted below (indented).

RAF ABBOTS BROMLEY

SK 075255. Authorised mid-1939, opened summer 1940, transferred to 21 Maintenance Unit May 1945, closed and released March 1949.

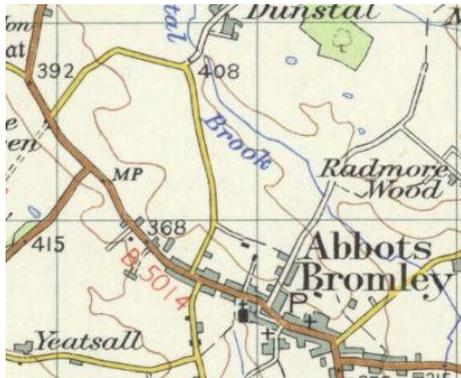


Figure 3

A small wartime grass airfield, subsequently returned to agricultural use. No evidence for it on the one-inch map (although possibly a hint of a Robin hangar on early editions).

The guard house stands in a ruinous condition off the main road.

The site is not shown on 1:50 000 mapping, although a few buildings are depicted at SK 073251 (fig. 3).

RAF ASHBOURNE

SK 195455. Opened in July 1942, transferred to 28 Maintenance Unit March 1945, released August 1954.

The one-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 A edition depicted the aerodrome labelled “Airfield”, but with no details shown within the site. The B edition of 1962 showed details of runways, other tracks and buildings.

A sky-diving club was operating in 1973 (at SK200450), but is not reflected on the map.

1:50,000 First Series Edition A deletes the label “Airfield (disused)” on the previous One-inch map. Some redrawing was made and buildings deleted. (On Seventh Series sheets 111 and 120.)

The sheet was redrawn for the Second Series A edition with the site relabelled “Airfield (disused)” [why?] and “Industrial Estate”. Redrawing for the series enabled detail of developing Industrial Estate on the former technical area on the south side of the airfield to be depicted. Edition ‘C’ shows the industrial estate extended further over airfield. The “Airfield Disused” label was removed once again [?] on edition D. Edition

'2/16' depicts further commercial development. No further development is shown on the current edition, '8/18'. The industrial estate covers about a quarter of the site.

RAF BURNASTON (Derby Airport)

SK 290305. Proposed 1935, in use from September 1938, closed and reopened by Derby Aviation June 1953.

On One-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 A edition, Burnaston was shown in detail as "Derby Airport".

On 50 000 First Series Edition "Airfield (disused)" retained.
By Second Series edition A "Airfield (disused)" had been deleted although the site was used by Derby Aero Club.

Further detail of the peri track shown on edition B.

The site of airfield replaced completely by a Toyota car assembly plant on edition B1. The base was visited occasionally by light military aircraft during the conflict. Addition of the car plant detail represents the first major airfield redevelopment on this sheet (fig 4).



Figure 4

Solar panels to west of the Toyota site, within aerodrome site appear on edition 8/18.

EGGINTON

SK259291. A new grass surface airfield was established west of Egginton village in the mid-1990s to accommodate Derby Aero Club's light aircraft operations. Edition B1 depicted "Derby Airfield" and buildings added. The adjacent lake/gravel pit amended on edition. 8/18, with new woodland at west edge of site.

RAF CHURCH BROUGHTON

SK 215320. Built 1941, opened August 1942, closed 1946.

In active use 1942-46, the site was later used by Rolls Royce for jet engine research until the 1960s.

One-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 Edition A depicted the aerodrome labelled "Airfield", but no details shown within the site. The B edition of 1962 showed details

of runways, other tracks and buildings at the former airfield, described as ‘disused’. The airfield was often used by glider clubs and occasionally visited by light aircraft.

The “Airfield (disused)” label was removed on 1:50 000 First Edition A as the site was probably no longer occupied by Rolls Royce.

Redrawing for Second Series Edition A resulted in runways shown ‘narrow’ style, with “Gliding Club” added at the south. This label was deleted on edition B and two runways removed (correctly) in redrawing. Broiler huts at north end of remaining runway added.

Commercial development began to appear on edition C, with more appearing on subsequent revisions¹¹. It is now only possible to identify half of the former wartime facility on the current edition, although detail is depicted on larger scale mapping (see fig. xx. A planning process is in place for further construction in the area marked E5.

RAF DARLEY MOOR

SK 175420. Opened 1942, closed February 1945, released 1954.

One-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 A edition shows the aerodrome labelled “Airfield”, but with no details within the site. Details of runways, other tracks and buildings are visible on the B edition of 1962 and described as ‘disused’. Darley Moor had by that time become a popular venue for motorcycle racing, as it remains today.

On 1:50 000 First Series edition A the label “Airfield (disused)” was deleted, [Why? For a different reason than Church Broughton?] with some redrawing carried out and the unclassified road crossing site infilled yellow. All the runways were deleted on edition ‘B’ (except the exception at the east end) to allow addition of the motorcycle racing track detail. [Specifically, ...] The runways survived intact ‘below’ the racing circuit. - see <http://www.darleymoor.co.uk/>

Part of the perimeter track was drawn back in on edition C (farm track). Edition D saw the “Airfield Disused” label removed, and labelled “Motor Cycle Race Track” on D3. No further changes are shown on subsequent editions.

Darley Moor continues to be a popular motorcycle racing venue, with the southern part of the airfield used for paragliding, construction industry storage, and agriculture.

FRADLEY¹² (RAF LICHFIELD)

SK 145130. Opened March 1940, became 27 Operational Training Unit in April 1941, closed April 1958.

¹¹ Editions D, D2, D3 and 8/18

¹² Known locally by its parish name.

One-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 A edition depicted Fradley (officially RAF Lichfield) aerodrome labelled “Airfield”, but no details shown within the site.

The B edition of 1962 showed details of runways, other tracks and buildings at the former RAF airfields of Fradley, described as ‘disused’. Airfields were often used by glider clubs and occasionally visited by light aircraft at this time.



Figure 5

“Airfield (disused)” was deleted on 1:50 000 First Series edition A. Extensive redrawing carried out, with buildings and dispersal tracks deleted to west and south of airfield. Detail greatly simplified in redrawing for Second Series edition A, with runways drawn in the ‘narrow’ style. Areas of woodland redrawn (site of the wartime bomb store) on Edition B. The area was cleared and tidied up (made safe?) in the 1980s.

Extensive commercial development of site began on edition C. Further commercial development added, and sections of runways deleted or redrawn over the next three editions. A roundabout added at south-west corner of site (SK 140128) on edition D3. Edition 8/18. Depicted more housebuilding.

Figure 5 shows that the former airfield is packed with commercial development, and the Fradley South ‘village’ housing development to the east. The original aerodrome technical area is evident at SK 145124. Curborough Sprint Course and a Karting track sited on aircraft dispersal areas are depicted to the west. [So how much of airfield stuff still depicted?]

Microlight enthusiasts who previously flew from Fradley aerodrome moved their operations to a landing strip at Roddige.

RODDIGE

SK 173130. Second Series edition D depicted a new microlight “Landing Strip” and layout. On the edition of 8/18, the site is still labelled although club had moved to Fisherwick (SK 187090) in the autumn of 2017.

RAF HIXON

SJ 995265 (SK 000268). Approved April 1941, opened May 1942, transferred to 16 Maintenance Unit July 1945, closed November 1957, released 1962.

First Series edition A depicts a short length of peri track at the eastern margin of the site¹³. Second Series edition A shows some evidence of technical area, while edition B reveals a short length of peri-track and buildings. New commercial development was added by edition D, with no change on edition 8/18.

Active 1942-57, 98% of the airfield, including the label, was on One-inch sheet 119 and is now on Landranger 127. Across the editions of sheet 128 industrial/commercial building have appeared. Virtually nothing of wartime date remains.

RAF TATENHILL

SK 160240. Authorised October 1940, opened November 1941, transferred to 21 Maintenance Unit late 1944, closed January 1947, released 1950.

A wartime aerodrome, Tatenhill has enjoyed life as an active civilian airfield. Having been used for open-air bomb storage from November 1944 to January 1947, it languished until returned to the Duchy of Lancaster's tenants in 1953. Ind Coope (later Allied Breweries) occupied the airfield, homing its company aircraft from about 1959. In 1987 Merlin Automatics (now Tatenhill Aviation) occupied the site as an unlicensed airfield, becoming licenced in 1996. Due to the airfield's strategic position within the midland counties, the Midlands Air Ambulance stationed a rescue helicopter on the northern peritrack in 2008.

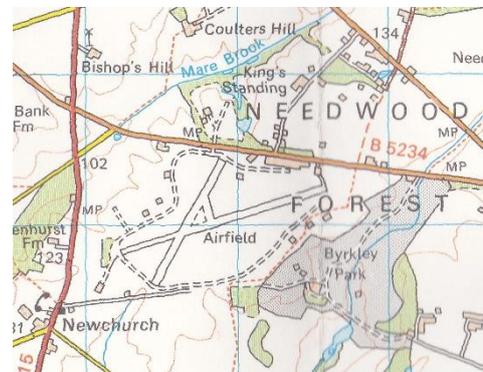


Figure 6

One-inch Seventh Series sheet 120 edition A depicted Tatenhill aerodrome labelled "Airfield", but no details shown within the site. B edition of 1962 showed details of runways, other tracks and buildings at the former RAF airfield. The aerodrome was occupied by Allied Breweries to stable their executive company aircraft.

On First Series edition A, the label "Airfield" was retained, but some runways were redrawn. [Specifically, ...] Redrawing for Second Series edition A had emphasised the two runways in use. The third runway is not drawn although still extant (fig 6). The main runway was partially redrawn on edition B to reflect contemporary use. [Specifically, ...], while on edition D3 a small area of commercial development was added north of the B5234. [So how much of airfield stuff still depicted?] The National Forest Way was added along southern limit of site on edition 2/16. Edition 8/18 shows no further change, although there is recent development, i.e. the Midland air Ambulance station.

¹³ Hixon aerodrome is centred at grid reference SP 995265. The eastern edge of the site extended into the neighbouring 100km grid square to alongside Stow Lane, running north of the village.

RAF BATTLESTEAD HILL and RAF HOAR CROSS

Battlestead Hill. SK 210230. Opened April 1941, closed July 1946.

Hoar Cross. SK1128232. Opened August 1941, closed June 1945.

A Relief Landing Ground was established during the Second World War at Battlestead Hill (in Branston parish) and a Satellite Landing Ground near Hoar Cross. No sign of these are evident on one-inch or 1:50 000 mapping. They returned to agriculture soon after the end of the conflict. A large housing development appeared at the northern edge of the Battlestead Hill site on edition 8/18.

USAAF MARCHINGTON and CROSS HAYES GLIDING CLUB

USAAF Marchington. SK 148304. In use 1943 to 1945, transferred to British Army [POW camp] in 1960s, released 1980.

Second Series edition B depicts Marchington “Gliding club”, at the site of the World War II US Army base. The base had been visited occasionally by light military aircraft during the conflict. The “Gliding Club” was deleted on edition D as the club moved their operations to Tatenhill airfield..

Edition D2 saw the arrival of “HMP [Dovegate] Prison”. New woodland planting is added at the site’s south edge on edition 8/18.

Cross Hayes. SK124218. Adjacent south of landing round Hoar Cross.

Second Series edition D shows details of new Gliding Club relocated from Tatenhill airfield, but not labelled. The gliding club originally located at the disused Marchington army base later moved to Cross Hayes (the former RAF Hoar Cross, [near Hoar Cross Hall], before moving again in 2016 to the former RAF Snitterfield aerodrome near Stratford-on-Avon. Detail is not shown on edition 8/18.

CONCLUSION

[The current ‘August 2018’ edition of Sheet 128 depicts only two operational airfields (Tatenhill and Fisherwick). Of the rest, three were never depicted and have left no trace, while parts of the others can still be discerned among redevelopment ...]

Is 128 typical?

e.g. Location of Fradley and Church Broughton – large, level, brownfield sites adjacent to trunk roads (A38 and A50) in the centre of England – has made them ideal sites for

the big sheds that increasingly dominate distribution of goods for internet and shops ... Burnaston: a single car plant ... Ashbourne ... etc etc

change uppercase to lower case 'edition'?

Fig 7.

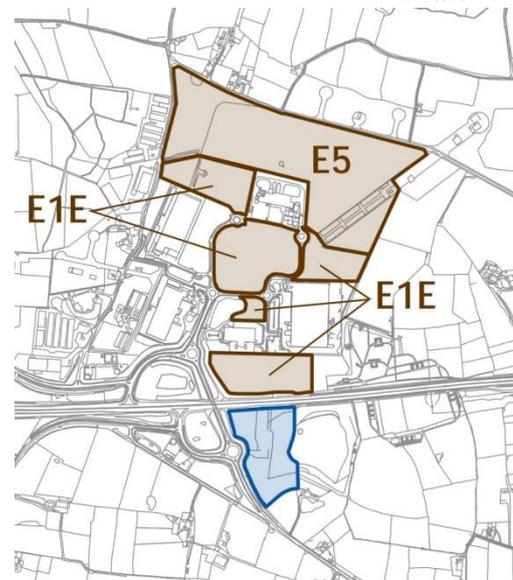


Figure 7

Appendix. Map editions consulted.

One-inch				1:50,000			
Ed	Revised	Partially revised	Published	Ed	Revised	Partially revised	Published
<i>Sheet 111 (part)</i>				<i>Sheet 128</i>			
1" NP 1036	1916	-	8/1947	1A	1959-60	1972	03/1974
1" NP 1200	1916	-	-	2A	1975	1976	12/1977
1" NP 1261	1916	-	-	2A/*	1975	1978	01/1979
1" 7S A	1949/50-1	-	11/1973	2A/**	1975	1981	01/1982
1" 7S A/	1949/50-1	1956	-	2A/**/*	1975	1983	12/1983
1" 7S A//	1949/50-1	-	-	2A/**/*/*	1975	1985	11/1985
1" 7S B	1958-60	1961	6/1962	2A/**/*/*/*	1975	1977	10/1987
1" 7S B/*	1958-60	1966	11/1967	2A6	1975	1989	07/1989
<i>Sheet 120</i>				2B	1989	1990	11/1991
1" NP 1045	1917	-	4/1947	2B1	1989	1993-94	05/1996
1" 7S A	1949-50	-	2/1954	2C	1994-95	1997	07/1997
1" 7S A/	1949-50	1956	-	2C1	1994-95	1998	03/1999
1" 7S A//	1959	-	-	2D	2000	2001	08/2001
1" 7S B	1959	1961	1/1962	2D1	2000	2001	03/2002
1" 7S B/*	1959	1968	1/1969	2D2	2000	2004	10/2004
1" 7S B/**	1959	1972	4/1973	2D2/	2000	2007	05/2008
<i>Sheet 121 (part)</i>				2D3	2000	2009	04/2009
1" NP 20046	1918	-	-	2D3/	2000	2011	03/2012
1" NP 1238	1918	-	-	02/16	05/2015	02/2016	02/2016
1" 7S A	1950	-	8/1954	08/18	08/2018	-	09/2018
1" 7S A/	1950	1956	-				
1" 7S B	1958/59	1961	11/1962				
1" 7S B/*	1958-9	1965	1/1966				
1" 7S B/**	1958-9	1971	12/1971				