

Airfields of Wales

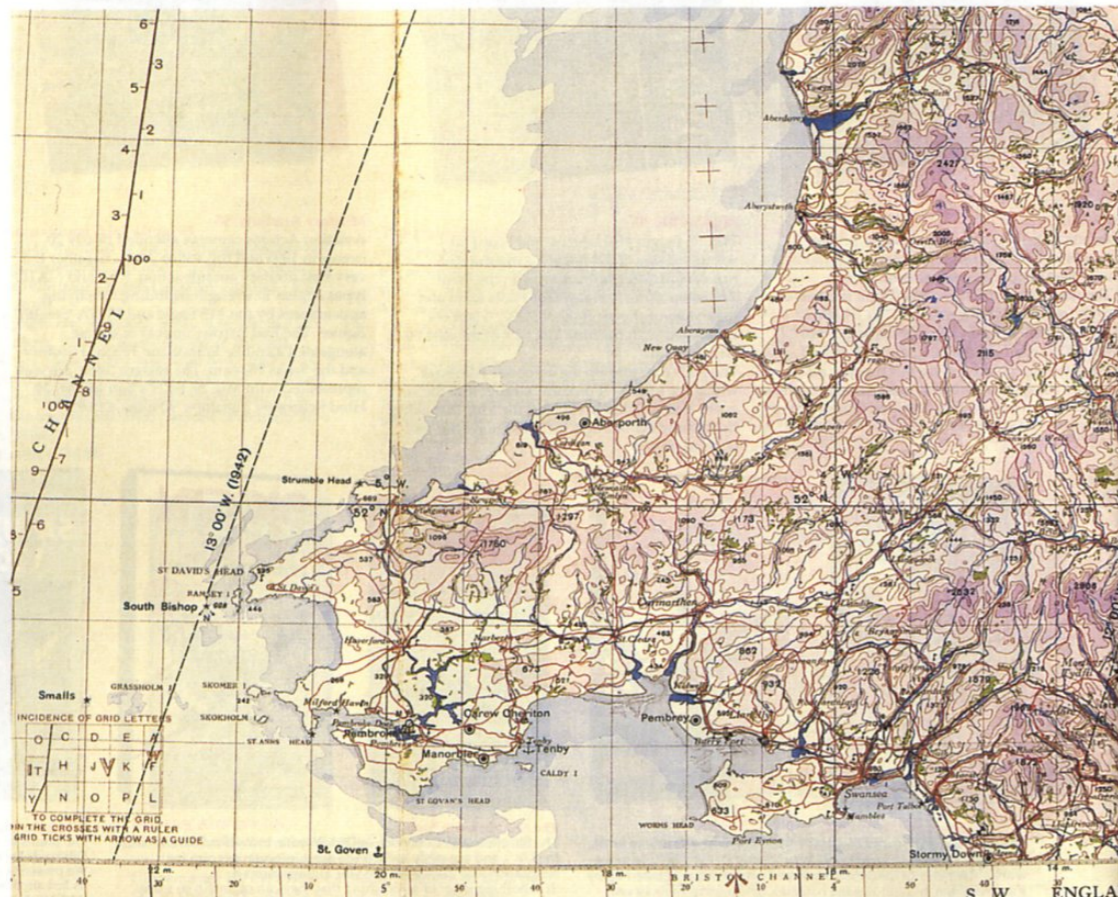
During World War Two most RAF aircrew spent a few weeks at one or other of the many training bases in Wales; whilst operational squadrons flew anti-shipping and maritime patrol missions from Wales.

IN THE FIRST part of our World War Two airfields gazetteer (FlyPast August 1995) we looked at the airfields of Scotland, with the conclusion that training and maritime operations were the primary functions of the 92 bases listed. The same conclusion can be drawn concerning the airfields featured in this part — for the same basic reasons; firstly, that these airfields were remote from the main German attacks and thus safer for flying training (as well as freeing up stations in the main combat zone); and, the need to base maritime patrol aircraft at suitable locations to cover the Atlantic convoy routes, coastal shipping and also anti-submarine operations over the Bay of Biscay. The other significant use of Welsh airfields was by Maintenance Units (MUs) for aircraft storage and preparation. As can be seen from the map on

page 59, the majority of airfields were around the coast — the interior of Wales being hostile terrain for aircraft, as evidenced by the many wrecks in such locations as Snowdonia.

The following gazetteer of airfields covers only those active during World War Two (and it is worth noting that many were in use BEFORE their official opening date). It is intended only as a brief introduction to the location and basic role(s) of the airfield. Whilst a small number, such as Valley and St Athan are still active RAF airfields and others are thriving civilian airports, such as Rhoose (Cardiff), the vast majority have returned to the agricultural land from whence they were constructed.

Even amongst these disused sites there often exists evidence of their former usage — a stretch of runway, a building or two — and many are well worth a visit in order to try to visualise the scenes of 50 years ago. However, with a few exceptions, they are now private land and if you want to get a closer view (than



Extract from a wartime map showing the airfields in the southern part of Wales before the major building programme that saw many new locations open up in 1941.

that available from a public road) then it is essential to get permission from the landowner. To help the reader determine the location of the airfield, each entry includes a map reference for use with a 50,000 scale Ordnance Survey map (such as the Landranger series) which are readily obtainable from book shops and some newsagents. For those who are not sure how to plot the co-ordinates, there is an explanation on the side of the Landranger maps.

The best single reference remains Action Station No 3 (Wales), by David Smith and published by PSL.

For decades of abbreviations (although most are included in the text where appropriate) and for Orders of Battle, the best reference is The Source Book of the RAF by Ken Delve, published by Airlife.

(NOTE: Similar gazetteers will be published for other regions of the UK and overseas in FlyPast during 1996 — if you have photographs that can be used for these features then the Editor would be delighted to receive them!)



217 Sqn Tiger Moth MW-4 (N6839) at Cereu Cheriton in early 1940. (Andy Thomas)

1. ABERPORTH (map 145- SN255495)

Opened December 1940 for use by Anti-Aircraft Co-operation units in association with the nearby gunnery ranges of Cardigan Bay (a role still performed today). By mid 1942, Air Observer Schools were running detachments from the airfield. Like so many of these coastal airfields, Aberporth also received a fair number of lost or 'sick' aircraft. Major units - 595 Sqn.

2. ANGLE (map 158- SM860015)

Planned as a deployment base for 10 Group aircraft, Angle opened in December 1941. Convoy protection and offensive *rhubarb*s were flown by the various detached units. Some use by Coastal Command and Fleet Air Arm (FAA) units, as well as airborne forces from January 1943.

Major units: 32, 152, 263, 312, 412, 421, 615 Sqs, CCDU (Coastal Command Development Unit).

3. BEAUMARIS (map 114- SH610775)

Never a major airfield, Beaumaris was used by Saunders-Roe as a 'safe' location at which to carry out modification work on newly delivered Catalinas.

4. BODORGAN (map 114- SH385685)

Opened in September 1940 for the Queen Bees of 1 AACU in association with the Ty-Croes range. As with most of the Welsh airfields, Bodorgan hosted a number of other temporary detachments. From spring 1941 the airfield was used

by 48 MU for aircraft storage. Major Units: 1 AACU, 577, 650 Sqs.

5. BRAWDY (map 157- SM850250)

Although a well-known postwar airfield, Brawdwy played little part during World War Two, not opening until February

1944 for use by 517 Met Squadron — although the landing ground had been used previously by units from St Davids. Major unit: 517 Sqn.

6. CAREW CHERITON (map 158- SN055030)

Having been used in the prewar period the airfield was officially opened in summer 1939 for use by Coastal Command. As such it became an important base for long-range fighter patrols by Beaufighters over the Irish Sea. July 1942 brought a transfer to Training Command plus additional use by an AACU unit and as an Armament Practice Camp (APC). Another change in October saw Carew Cheriton transferred to Technical Training Command.

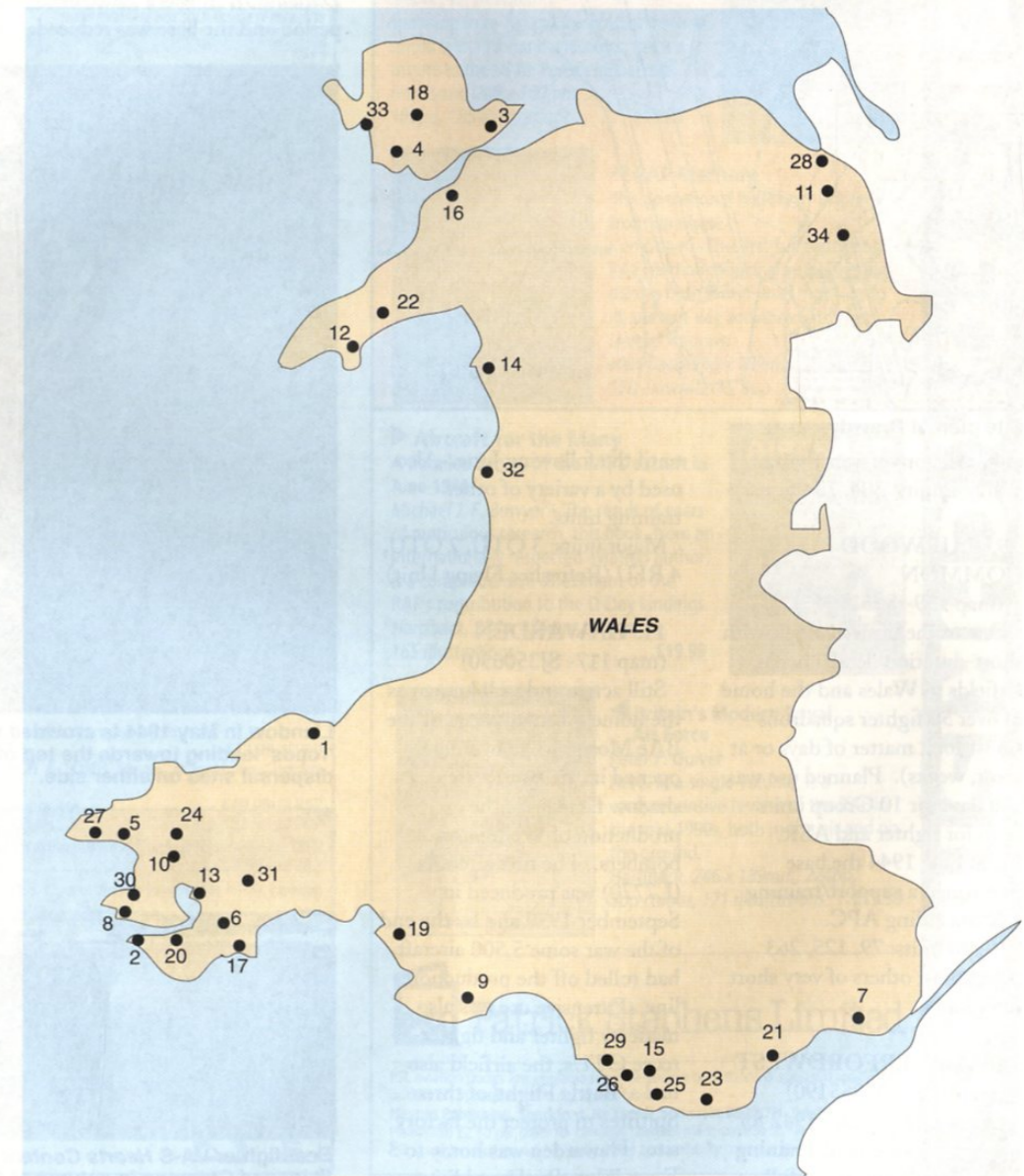
Major units: CCDU, 217, 236, 252, 254, 320, 321 Sqs.

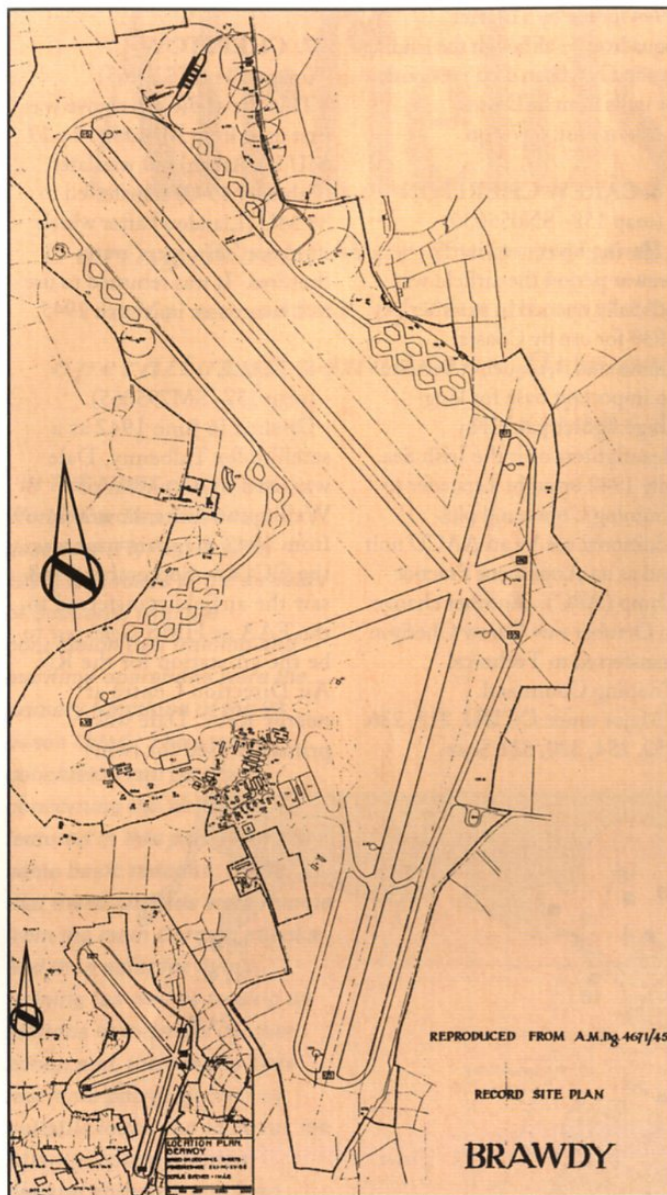
7. CHEPSTOW (map 171- ST520965)

This site at the racecourse was first used from May 1941 by 19 MU (St Athan) but was later (February 1942) transferred to 38 MU (Llandow) after which its major 'customers' were Spitfires. It was returned to use as a racecourse in March 1945.

8. DALE (map 157- SM795065)

Opened in June 1942 as a satellite for Talbenny, Dale was used by a number of Wellington units; however, from 1943 the main user was the CCDU. September 1943 saw the airfield transferred to the FAA as HMS *Goldcrest* to be the air station for the RN Air Direction Centre at nearby Kete. Dale was primarily used for twin-





Site plan of Brawdy.

engined conversion flying. Major units: 304, 794 Sqns.

9. FAIRWOOD COMMON
(map 159- SS570915)

One of the busiest, albeit with short-duration detachments, airfields in Wales and the home of over 50 fighter squadrons (most for a matter of days or at most, weeks). Planned use was as a base for 10 Group units both for fighter and ASR. From June 1944 the base performed a support/training role, including APC.

Major units: 79, 125, 263 Sqns; most others of very short duration.

10. HAVERFORDWEST
(map 157- SM955190)

Opened November 1942 for use by 3 Operational Training Unit (OTU) but not in full use

until the following June. Also used by a variety of other training units.

Major units: 3 OTU, 7 OTU, 4 RFU (Refresher Flying Unit).

11. HAWARDEN
(map 117- SJ350650)

Still active and well known as the home for many years of the BAe Mosquito, Hawarden opened in the late 1930s as a shadow factory for the production of Wellington bombers. The first aircraft (L7770) was produced in September 1939 and by the end of the war some 5,500 aircraft had rolled off the production line. Extensive use was also made by fighter and fighter-*recce* OTUs; the airfield also had a 'Battle Flight' of three Spitfires to protect the factory site. Hawarden was home to 3 Ferry Pilots Pool in addition to

a variety of other short-term visitors, including FAA squadrons, on training detachments. In June 1944 the factory began Lancaster production.

12. HELL'S MOUTH
(map 123- SH270285)

Opened in 1937 for Armament Training Camp (ATC), but the poor weather factor caused its early abandonment. It was later re-opened as an RLG (Relief Landing Ground) for Flying Training Command, being used by 9 OAFU at Penrhos.

13. LAWRENNY FERRY
(map 157- SN010062)

Operating as a seaplane base under the control of Lee-on-Solent from mid 1941, although it was not until the following February that it became HMS *Daedalus II*. It was a short-lived period and the base was reduced

to Care & Maintenance in October 1943.

14. LLANBEDR
(map 124- SH570260)

Opened June 1941 as a forward airfield for fighter detachments to counter German bomber activity around the Irish Sea area. However, initial use of the airfield was by detachments of the AONS, the first fighter unit eventually arriving in October 1941. Llanbedr's location adjacent to the Cardigan Bay air-to-air ranges made it ideal for detachments using those ranges, and as such, the airfield was usually home to a short-term detachment, including USAAF units.

15. LLANDOW
(map 170- SS960715)

Although the airfield had limited prewar use it only came into its own in April 1940 for use as an aircraft storage unit by



Llandow in May 1944 is crowded with aircraft, note the two 'roads' leading towards the top of the photograph as both have dispersal sites on either side.



Beaufighter VA-S *Hearts Content* of 125 (Newfoundland) Sqn at Fairwood Common in autumn 1942. (IWM via Andy Thomas)

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Pembrey was home to a number of squadrons on temporary detachment; here, an 83 Sqn Hampden visits the airfield in September 1939.

38 MU. However, from July 1941, 53 OTU ran a detachment at Llandow and this training role became increasingly important. July 1943 brought 3 OAPU (Overseas Aircraft Preparation Unit) to the airfield and opened a two-year association with Coastal Command aircraft.

16. LLANDWROG (map 115- SH435590)
Opened January 1941 for 9 AGS (Air Gunnery School) along with a variety of other detachments. By June 1942 it was in use as a satellite to 9

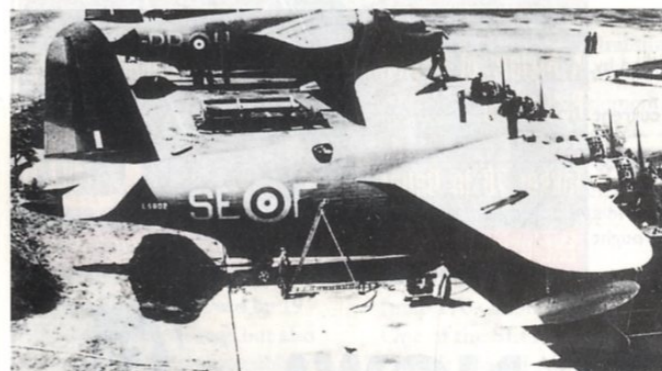
(O)AFU Penrhos. From mid 1943 it was also home to the RAF Mountain Rescue Service.

17. MANORBIER (map 158- SS075975)
Opened prewar for AACU use but weather problems tended to limit its use. It was also home to the Pilotless Aircraft Unit (PAU) throughout the war. Major unit: PAU.

18. MONA (map 114- SH410760)
The original plan for Mona to be the home of 6 AGS was changed when, in December



July 1, 1942, and an Air Officer Commanding's inspection of 209 Sqn at Pembroke Dock.



Sunderland L5802, 95 Sqn, at Pembroke Dock, May 1941. (Andy Thomas)

FlyPast December

1942, 3 AGS arrived with their Blackburn Bothas and assorted other aircraft. However, this unit was soon replaced by 8 (O)AFU who then became the major users of the airfield. Other residents included a detached flight of 776 Squadron.

Major units: 3 AGS, 8 (O)AFU.

19. PEMBREY (map 159- SN403035)
Opened May 1940 for use by fighter detachments, the first of which was 92 Squadron who



Hurricanes of 'B' Flight, 312 Sqn, at Penrhos in December 1940. (Andy Thomas)

arrived in the June. Activity increased in June 1941 with the arrival of an AGS and during the remainder of the war many hundreds of aircrew trained at Pembrey. The most famous incident was June 23, 1942, when an Fw 190 landed at the airfield; Fw 190A-3 of III/JG2, flown by Oberleutnant Arnim Faber, had taken off from Morlaix to intercept a Spitfire raid but then fell victim to a gross navigational error. This RAF prize was given the serial MP499 and was used by the RAe on tests.

Major units: 32, 79, 92, 238, 248, 256, 316 Sqn.

20. PEMBROKE DOCK (map 158- SM960040)
An important flying-boat base that opened in 1930; by 1939 it was home for two Sunderland squadrons. It remained a major base for such aircraft throughout the war and as well as its RAF units it hosted various other detachments, including the Catalinas of VP-63.

Major units: 10 RAAF, 95, 119, 209, 210, 228, 230, 240, 320, 422, 461 Sqn.

21. PENGAM MOORS (map 171- ST215770)
Opened 1931 as Cardiff Municipal Airport but then taken over by the RAF for wartime use, initially for 614 Army Co-operation Squadron. From February 1940 used by 43 MU for aircraft preparation and this remained an important aspect of Pengam Moors throughout the war. Various other units and detachments used the airfield from time to time, including an AACU from November 1940.

22. PENRHOS (map 123- SH335335)
Another of the Welsh airfields associated with training, Penrhos opened in February 1937 for 5 Armament Training Camp, using offshore targets for bombing and gunnery. From September 1939 it was home of 9 Air Observer School (later 9 B&GS, later 9 [O]AFU!); it also received a number of fighter detachments.

23. RHOOSE (map 171- ST064674)
Opened autumn 1941 for 53 OTU who were in full residence by the following April. After a hectic period of aircrew training, the unit left in May 1943 and Rhooose was quiet until the following February when 7 AGS began to use it as a satellite field. From November the airfield was also used by 40 Group for storage.

Major units: 53 OTU, 7 AGS.

24. RUDBAXTON (map 157- SM970205)
Another airfield that suffered a poor weather factor and so saw less than the planned usage,

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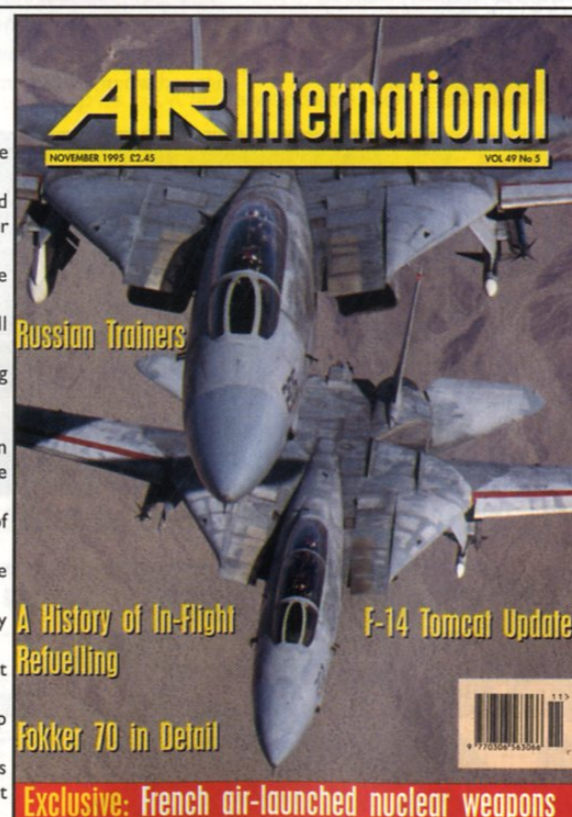
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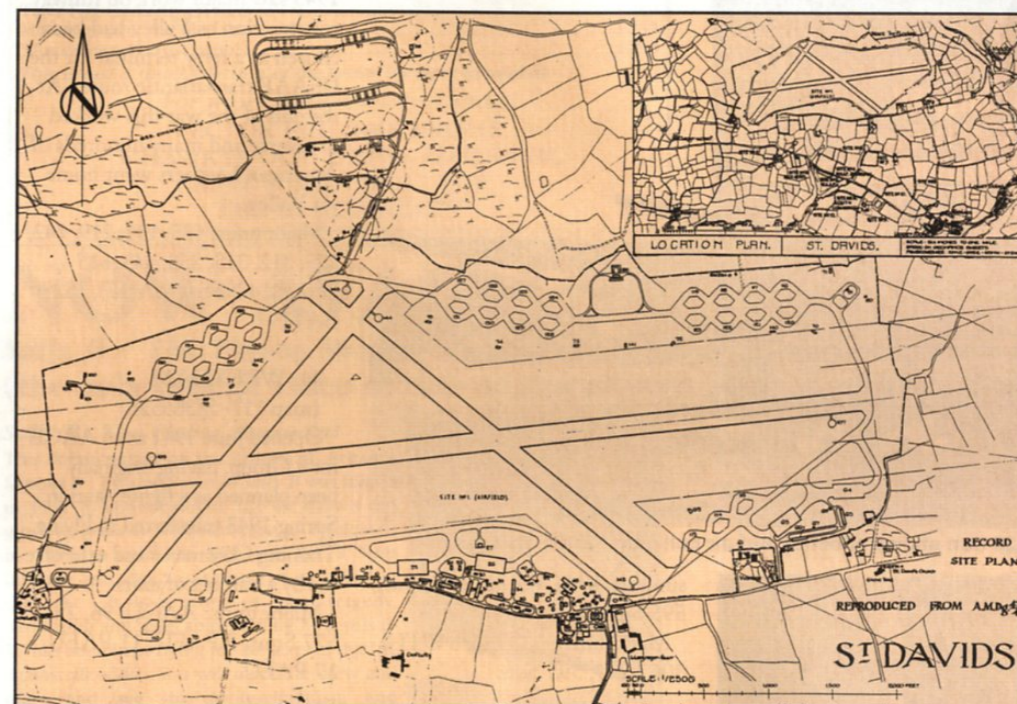
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FlyPast December



St Athan became a major aircraft storage site — and, as seen here, graveyard for unwanted airframes.



Site plan of St Davids.

Rudbaxton opened in April 1941 as an SLG for 38 MU (Llandow). By late 1942 it had been decided to abandon the airfield and it was duly de-requisitioned in July 1943.

25. ST ATHAN

(map 170- ST005685)
Opened in September 1938 for 4 SoTT (School of Technical Training) and rapidly became (as it still is) one of the major RAF airfields in Wales. Used by 19 MU for aircraft storage but also from spring 1941 responsible for SLGs at St Brides and Chepstow. Very wide range of

aircraft types in store, often hundreds at any one time; 32 MU was in residence for aircraft conversion and preparation work. Various detachments by training units but the MU work was (and is) the most significant element.

Major units: 11 Gp Fighter Pool, 4 SoTT, 19 MU, 32 MU, School of Air Navigation, 12 Radio School (RS), 14 RS.

26. ST BRIDES

(map 170- SS900735)
One of the SLGs for St Athan, it opened April 1941 for storage dispersal but never given major facilities. (Robin hangars

erected in 1944.)
Major unit: 19 MU.

27. ST DAVIDS

(map 157- SM790255)

The original plan was for a US Navy facility but when St Davids opened in September 1943 it was taken on by Coastal Command and used for anti-submarine detachments. The following February a satellite field was opened at Brawdy, a reflection of the importance of the ASW role from this area.

Major units: 53, 58, 206, 220, 502, 517 Sqs.

28. SEALAND

(map 117- SJ230700)

Having seen extensive use prewar, Sealand became a fighter OTU during World War Two; however, its role as home to a number of MUs was of vital importance, work by 30 MU included the 'slip wing' Hurricane. By January 1941 the training role had taken on greater significance with a variety of units, including 24 EFTS training naval pilots.

Major units: 5 SFTS, 30 MU, 36 MU, 47 MU, 19 EFTS, 24 EFTS, 6 AACU, 577 Sq.

29. STORMY DOWN

(map 170- SS840795)

During its period as home of 9 ATC the site was known as Porthcawl but in 1940 it took on the title of Stormy Down. Primary role remained that of training with target towing for air-to-air gunnery. The airfield was also used as the ITW (Initial Training Wing) for French airmen.

Major units: 9 ATC, 7 AOS (later 7 B&GS), 40 ITW.



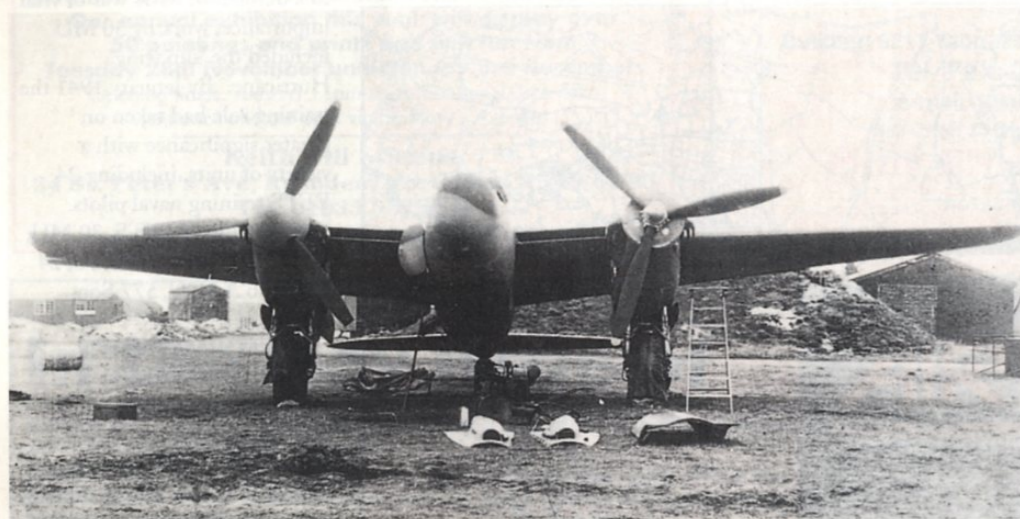
Admiralty Type F aeroplane shed still surviving at Stormy Down in 1982. (Paul Francis)



Talbenny in May 1944 looks almost like a building site, although most of the dispersal areas have occupants.

30. TALBENNY
(map 157- SM835110)
Opened May 1942 for 19 Group, Coastal Command for ASW operations over the Bay of Biscay; as such it had an intensive year of operations before being transferred, in October 1943, to Transport Command. Its location also meant that Talbenny received a large number of diverted aircraft.
Major units: 248, 304, 311 Sqn, 11 FTU, 303 FTU, 4 APC, 3 OADU.

31. TEMPLETON
(map 158- SN100110)
Opened in January 1943 for 306 FTU with its task of ferrying Coastal Command aircraft. Other users included 3 OTU's Anson flight and, from



Valley February 1944; Mosquito of 125 Sqn shows effect of mid-air collision. (Andy Thomas)

summer 1944, the glider-towing 595 Squadron.
Major units: 3 OTU, 8 OTU, 306 FTU, 595 Sqn.



Valley as seen on May 11, 1944, by a 105 OTU aircraft.

32. TOWYN
(map 124- SH575015)
Another AACU airfield, Towyn opened autumn 1940 with the standard equipment of Queen Bee target aircraft of 1 AACU. In May 1945 the airfield was transferred to Technical Training Command but was closed two months later.
Major units: 1 AACU, 1605 Flt (later 631 Sqn).

33. VALLEY
(map 114- SH305755)
Still a major RAF airfield, Valley opened in February 1941 as a 9 Group sector station for fighter detachments covering industrial cities in NW England. Numerous day and night fighter squadrons rotated through the base and there was usually an ASR unit also in residence. 1943 saw major work on runway construction as Valley had been chosen as a ferry terminal for the USAAF transatlantic route. At the end of the war this worked in reverse and many hundreds of American bombers went home via Valley.
Major units: 125, 131, 219, 242, 275, 312, 315, 350, 445, 615 Sqns, 414 NFS (USAAF), 1528 BATF.

34. WREXHAM
(map 117- SJ365525)
Opened June 1941 as an AACU for 9 Group, having originally been planned as a fighter station. Spring 1943 transferred to Flying Training Command and extensive use by a number of units.
Major units: AACU, 96, 285, 577 Sqns, 5 PAFU, 11 PAFU, 17 PAFU.



Beaufighter of 96 Sqn at Wrexham May 1942. (Andy Thomas)

The airfields of Northern Ireland will be featured in the February issue of FlyPast - we ran out of space this time!

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