

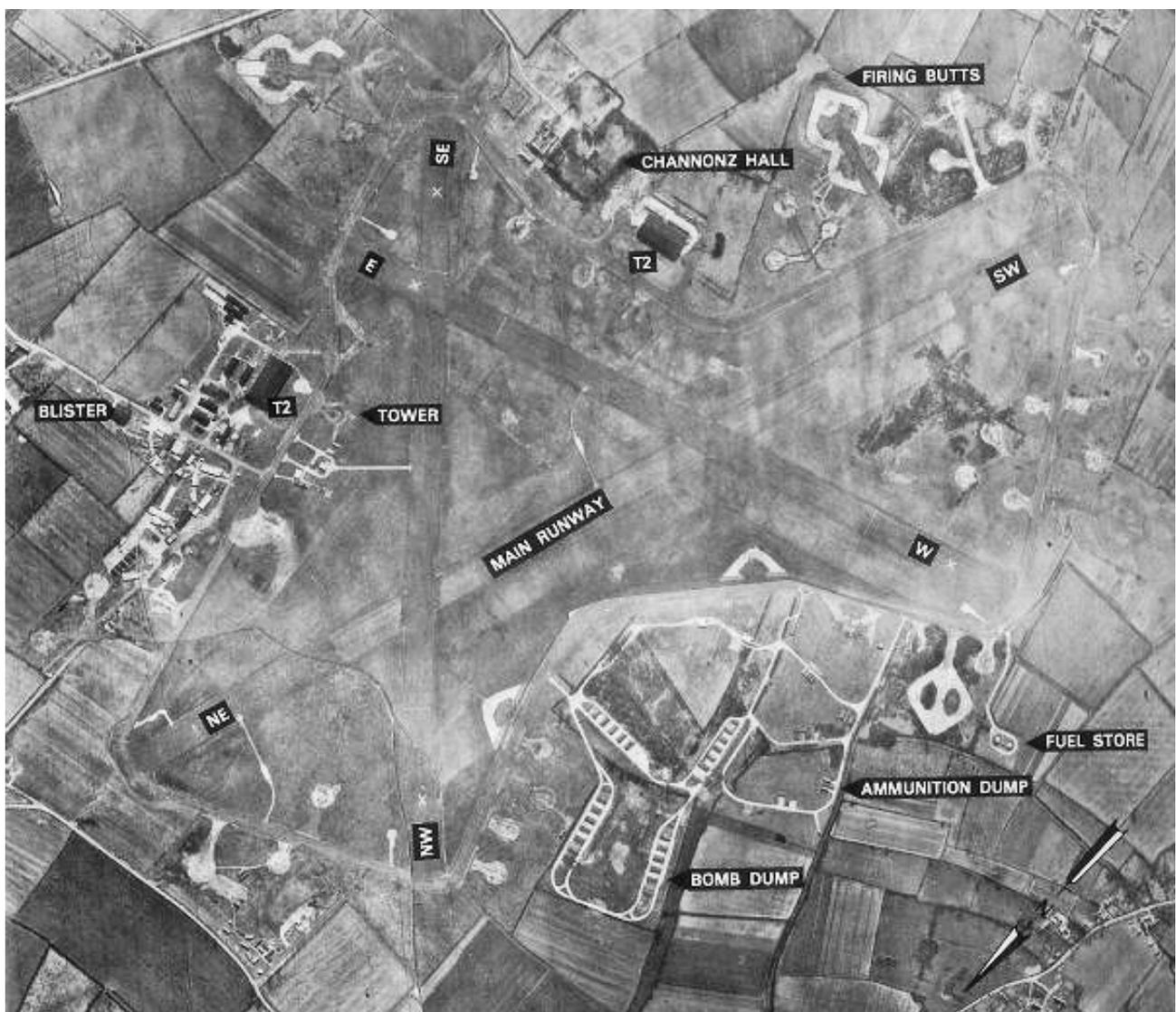
Tibenham by Kevin Fairgrieve

Three times a year I take the short 7 mile journey from my home to the Norfolk Gliding Club at Tibenham.

Formally the home of the USSAF 320th medium bomb group flying Martin B-26 Marauders and later the B-24 Liberator.

It then passed to the 445th Bombardment Group (Heavy) again flying the B-24 Liberator. One of its most famous pilots was none other than James Stewart the Hollywood actor. He flew 10 operational missions with the 445th Bomb Group before being transferred to the 453rd Bomb Group at Old Buckenham.

The Americans left in late May 1945 and on 15 July the airfield reverted to the air ministry becoming a Maintenance Unit satellite.



RAF TIBENHAM 1945

Although part of the airfield was sold off in 1952, the main runway was lengthened in 1955 for possible use by jet aircraft. However it was never utilised and Tibenham was closed in 1959.

Since 1960 the airfield has been used for peaceful recreation by the sailplanes of the Norfolk Gliding Club. In civilian hands most of the wartime airfield buildings were demolished, however, there are a few derelict huts and other structures on some of the dispersed sites which lay to the east between the airfield and the main London-Norwich railway line. Most of the main runway with its postwar extension still exists, along with both secondary runways. The perimeter track and various hardstanding, however, have been removed for hardcore.

The control tower was used until 1975 as a club house by the Gliding Club. Later that year the club moved into a new home which was constructed nearby. It was said that the old control tower was haunted; and at least four members of the Gliding Club were afraid to enter the building, even in daytime. It was reported that a person in flying clothes, similar to those worn by the USAAF combat crews, had been seen on several occasions wandering through the darkened rooms. The old control tower was demolished in 1978 after the new clubhouse came into use.

The reason for my visits is to attend the RC model aircraft fly ins that are organised by Phillip Goff, now most if not all of you should have read Phil's account in the BMFA news of how he became a fly in organiser. It is a good read spread over two issues and includes some of my photos (more of that in a while), and if you have not read it, go back and do so.

So three times a year Phil arranges for us model flyers to "take over" Tibenham. The three events are usually in May, July and September.

The May event is a VE/D-day event and celebrates the day peace was declared in Europe on 8th May 1945 and also the events of 6th June 1944 when the allies invaded Europe in Operation Overlord.

The July event is a Salute to the 445th Bomb Group.

September of course is the Battle of Britain event.

At midday we take a moment to reflect on the sacrifices made by all sides so that we may fly our toy planes in peace. We also remind ourselves of the many model flyers who have left us in the preceding years.

All events are open to anyone with a minimum of an "A" certificate and there is always a good cross section of disciplines on show, although it is not a show. Just a bunch of like minded people who like to have fun, and fly in good company and enjoy a bit of "banter". It costs £10 per pilot and a suggested donation of a couple of golden nuggets for spectators. Not bad when you consider that it would cost you £15.00 to get into Wonky Wheels (Wings and Wheels) at North Weald. And there is the fuel costs on top! Tibenham is almost on your doorstep.

Many varied types of aircraft fly at these events and you may also get to fly in the company of some of the best display pilots in the UK.

Someone who almost always turns up is Dean "Deano" Coxen who was twice UK freestyle masters champion, along with his dad Pete, who you will probably know better as "tbobborap1" on YouTube.

Jan Hemkens a 25 time Dutch national champion has also been in attendance.

Ali Machinchy, before his stateside move often turned up. I once parked next to him and it was as if I were one of the boys. He treated everyone the same, top show pilot or like me lowly club flyer.

The first time I flew at one of these events it was with my trusty Flair Puppeteer powered by an O.S.48FS, and yes I still have it. It was a great pleasure to fly in the same slot as some of the "Dawn Patrol" flyers with their 1000hr master pieces.

Also over the years Phil has managed to pull off some rather fancy full size visits as well. These include a Sea King from Wattisham, Marinell the P-51 Mustang that was owned by Maurice

Hammond who landed after a spirited display and allowed us to crawl all over her (metaphorically speaking).

A low pass by a Tornado from Marham, so low in fact that when he emerged from the cloud he immediately pulled up and disappeared again, yes the cloud was that low. But my personal favourite has to be the three passes from the BBMF Lancaster.

Many members from BMFC also fly at these events including, James Ladell, Mark Hinton, Craig Lipsett, Mike Reider and of course myself. If you have not been before I can thoroughly recommend it, even just as a spectator.

As some of you may know my “other” hobby is photography. Many a time I have turned up flown maybe once or twice and on occasions not at all, but you can guarantee that my camera will be in full swing.

So to go along with this ramble a few pictures to put it all in context. As I have been attending these events for well over 10 years I have quite a few to go through so please bear with me.

Pictures 1

I have selected 24 of my photographs that show the variety of aircraft flown at our Tibenham meets. They also reflect my own development as a photographer since 2010.

To do the photographs justice they have been reproduced in a high resolution format. To help downloading them to view, they are grouped as one pair of pictures for each of the twelve years I currently have available.

Click on the image below to go to the library:



Pictures 2, photo libraries 2010 - 2022

Still interested?

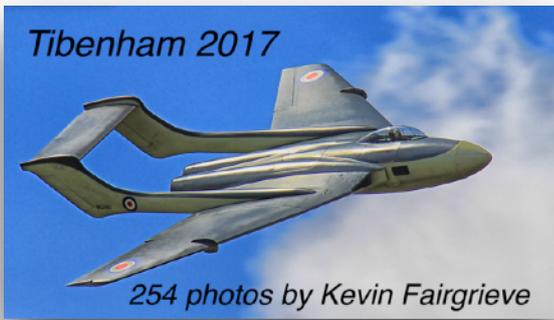
The image buttons below each link to a specific year of Tibenham photographs taken by me. The display quality is not bad, but is a compromise to ensure that the library pages open readily for most users.

Click on an image to view each collection:



Sadly, Kevin lost all of his 2012 Tibenham pictures





(Maybe we can persuade Kevin to add additional photos as the years go by, ed.)