WORLD WAR ONE (WWI) MILITARY AIRFIELDS

At the start of WWI there were fewer than 10No. airfields in the UK. The threat of aerial bombardment for the first time during WWI meant that the UK's aerial defence required urgent reinforcement. Military airfields were rapidly established, primarily concentrated in the south and east of England. By 1918, the number of military airfields in the UK had risen to over 300No.

Many WWI airfields were established temporarily and some never had permanent features or facilities. They often comprised little more than a grass landing ground, aircraft sheds, huts for technical operations, and canvas tents for accommodation. Some bases, such as airship stations or seaplane bases, would have specialist moorings for their aircraft.

WWI airfields were used by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), who merged towards the end of WWI to form the Royal Air Force (RAF).

After WWI, many airfields were considered surplus to requirements and were dismantled, leaving little trace.

Aerial view of RFC Hounslow, 1917

Example plan of a WWI airfield, 1918

Aerial view of RAF Waddington, 1919

Bomb and munitions stores at airfields would store combinations of practice and live ordnance, and components such as fuzes, detonators, and gaines. Munitions stores also often held Land Service Ammunition (LSA), such as grenades and mortars, and Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) for airfield defence or training exercises.

Small arms ranges were provided for training the troops involved in ground defence of the airfield. Ranges were typically only for use with live or blank SAA, though LSA may have been used on some larger ranges.

Munitions disposal frequently occurred at operational military airfields, either in an official facility or in a burning or burial pit located away from aircraft operations and buildings. Disposal was typically for aircraft ammunition and LSA, although it is known that HE bombs were occasionally disposed of via burial at airfields.

Practice bombing would often take place on the landing ground of WWI airfields. Practice bombs were typically used, although it is known that live bombs and munitions could also be used.

Hazard

On any military airfield, potential sources of UXO relating to former airfield activity may remain. The type of UXO that may be present depends on the layout and features present at the airfields, and its operational history.

Every effort has been made to identify the original source of images. Any breach of copyright is unintentional. If you are the proven originator of any image, we would be happy to remove the image on request.

Tel: 01993 886682
Email: uxo@zetica.com
Web: www.zeticauxo.com

Zetica House
Southfield Road, Eynsham
Oxfordshire, OX29 4JB