



IWM Duxford is Britain's best-preserved Second World War airfield, with a fascinating history that dates back to the First World War. Duxford has been a witness to world-changing events over the past 100 years where ordinary people have had extraordinary experiences. Exploring state of the art exhibition halls and historic buildings, visitors walk in the footsteps of the men and women who served at RAF Duxford. Through the powerful stories of the men and women involved and the rich displays of aircraft we tell the story of the impact of aviation on the nature of war and on people's lives.

Brief history

- Work began to build Duxford during the First World War, in October 1917, under the auspices of the Royal Flying Corps.
- In April 1918, Duxford became No. 35 Training Depot Station and was used to train new pilots. Members of the US Air Service were also stationed here to train as engineers.
- Flying ceased in 1919 after the First World War ended but started again in 1920 with the opening of No.2 Flying Training School.
- In 1924, Duxford became one of the earliest operational Royal Air Force fighter stations.
- On 6 July 1935, to celebrate King George V's Jubilee Review of the Royal Air Force, Duxford hosted the Royal party for lunch at the Officers' Mess.
- By the end of 1938, No 19 and No 66 Squadrons, based at RAF Duxford, became the first RAF squadrons to be equipped with the new Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft.
- Duxford played a vital role in the Battle of Britain, one of the most significant aerial battles of the Second World War. Famous fighter aces such as Douglas Bader flew and fought from this historic airfield.
- In April 1943, the airfield was handed over to the 78th Fighter Group of the United States Army Air Forces 8th Air Force, flying fighter aircraft such as P-47 Thunderbolts and P-51 Mustangs.
- Serving as the headquarters of the 78th Fighter Group, Duxford provided air support for the Allied D-Day invasion on 6 June 1944.
- Post-Second World War, Duxford was handed back to the RAF. It then underwent a series of modifications to ensure that it was prepared to face a new kind of Cold War threat.
- In 1961, the station was regarded unsuitable for the next generation of Cold War supersonic jet fighters and was officially closed as an RAF base.
- For several years, Duxford's future was uncertain. In 1968, Duxford became famous as the location for the *Battle of Britain* film.
- In the early 1970s much of the site was semi-derelict. Imperial War Museums obtained permission to store aircraft onsite. With the help of a dedicated group of volunteers, the museum site began to evolve.
- In 1976, Duxford opened to the public on a daily basis. Since then, IWM Duxford has grown into a world-class aviation museum and heritage site.

Did you know?

- In the First World War, training to be a pilot was a dangerous business. Duxford trained 126 airmen in the final months of the war, but lost 13 to fatal training accidents.
- By the end of the First World War, No 35 Training Depot Station at RAF Duxford had a workforce of some 850 men and women, including members of the US Air Service, who helped maintain the aircraft.
- Duxford carried out its role as an operational fighter station for 37 years, from 1924 to 1961.
- During the Battle of Britain, skilled fighter pilots such as Douglas Bader and Brian Lane led squadrons flying out of RAF Duxford. In 1931, Douglas Bader lost both his legs in a flying accident, but, determined to fly again, he managed to convince the RAF to let him re-join in 1939. He went on to fly with distinction.
- Post-Battle of Britain, Duxford was used by the Air Fighting Development Unit. The purpose of this unit was to test aircraft. Much of their work involved assessing the strengths and weaknesses of new combat aircraft, doing comparative testing against similar aircraft already in service, and evaluating captured enemy aircraft. It was here, in 1942, that the Unit suggested to Rolls-Royce's Ronald Harker that fitting a Merlin aero-engine to a North American P-51 Mustang could greatly enhance its performance. As a result, this new long-range fighter had a much greater success rate at high-altitude and was able to compete with Luftwaffe fighters.
- The steam-heated brick buildings, including the famous Officers' Mess, at Duxford made for a much more comfortable station than many other American bases during the Second World War. American airmen dubbed RAF Duxford the 'Country Club of the European Theatre of Operations' due to these comparatively more luxurious living quarters and work space.
- During the Second World War, the Theatre Hangar, nicknamed 'Ye Old Barn' by the 78th Fighter Group, was used as an entertainment space. It played host to a variety of activities including boxing matches, roller skating, theatrical productions, film screenings and concerts. Famous stars that performed in this space include Vera Lynn (1943), Bing Crosby and the United Services Organization Show Troupe, Bob Hope and James Cagney (1944).
- A flight of captured German aircraft flew from Duxford during the Second World War where they were evaluated and then demonstrated to other Allied units. The unit was thereafter nicknamed 'Rafwaffe'.
- In 1968, the airfield was used as one of the locations for the film *Battle of Britain*. To simulate a German bombing raid, the Theatre Hangar was blown up. The site has been used as a film location for various Hollywood and British films and TV productions including *Battle of Britain*, *Monuments Men*, *Memphis Belle* and *The Crown*.

Things to look out for

- **Mark I Supermarine Spitfire N3200.** This Spitfire, on display in Duxford's *Battle of Britain* exhibition, was based at Duxford before the Battle of Britain. On 26 May 1940, this aircraft crash-landed on a French beach after shooting down a Junkers JU 87 Stuka dive bomber. In 1986, the Spitfire was rediscovered and fully restored before being gifted to Imperial War Museums in 2014.
- **The Boeing B-52 Stratofortress.** This long-range, subsonic, jet-powered strategic bomber was designed and built by Boeing. This particular aircraft took part in over 200 missions carrying a large number of conventional bombs for service in a tactical role during the Vietnam War. The aircraft has flown a total of 14,000 hours. You can find this aircraft in the *American Air Museum*.
- **Monty's campaign caravans.** Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery conducted his campaign in north-west Europe from these three command caravans. One served as his office, another as his bedroom and the last as his map room. These caravans can be found in *Land Warfare*.
- **Messerschmitt 109.** This aircraft crash-landed near East Dean in Sussex on 30 September 1940. Its pilot, Horst Perez, was captured and the aircraft was placed under armed guard. After its capture the aircraft went on a tour of North America to raise money for Britain's war effort; contributors could leave their mark on the fuselage. When IWM acquired the aircraft in 1998, parts of it were painted over to restore its original look and make the names less visible.
- **Letter home written by Maria Blewitt, a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force at Duxford.** The letter to her mother dated 11 September 1940 evokes a true sense of how real and frightening the threat of imminent invasion was for people in Britain during the Second World War.
- **1940 Operations Room.** Be transported back to the summer of 1940 when this building was the nerve centre of Duxford's Battle of Britain campaign.
- **The Hangar Base.** During the Second World War the Theatre Hangar was used as an entertainment space. In 1968, it was deliberately blown up to simulate a German bombing raid during the making of the

film *Battle of Britain*, leaving just the Hangar Base behind. It still remains unclear as to whether the Ministry of Defence had given permission to do this.

- Outside the *American Air Museum* stands a **memorial by artist Renato Niemis**. Each aircraft engraved on its glass panels represents a United States Air Force aircraft missing in action from Britain during the Second World War. 7,031 aircraft are depicted on 52 panels of glass.
- **Flying Aircraft**. IWM Duxford still remains an operational airfield. Historic and contemporary aircraft fly frequently in and out of Duxford.

- ENDS -

For further information and images please contact Esther Blaine in the IWM Duxford Press Office on ebtaine@iwm.org.uk or 01223 499 320.

IWM Duxford

IWM Duxford is Britain's best-preserved Second World War airfield, with a fascinating history that dates back to the First World War. Historic aircraft can regularly be seen taking to the skies from Duxford's wartime airfield. Duxford has been a witness to world-changing events over the past 100 years where ordinary people have had extraordinary experiences. Exploring state of the art exhibition halls and historic buildings, visitors walk in the footsteps of the men and women who served at RAF Duxford. Through the powerful stories of the men and women involved and the rich displays of aircraft we tell the story of the impact of aviation on the nature of war and on people's lives.

Open Daily: Last entry an hour before closing. (Closed 24 – 26 December).

Winter Hours: 10am – 5pm (23 October 2017 to 10 March 2018) – please note, from 4-5pm only AirSpace and the Visitor Centre will be open. All other hangars will close from 4pm.

Summer Hours: 10am – 6pm (11 March to 22 October 2018).

Admission*: £17.25 Adults; £13.80 Concessions (Senior, Student, Disabled Adult); £8.60 Child (5-16); Free Child (under 5); Family tickets available; Special rates for groups of ten plus. Free for members.

From January 2018, a 10% discount will be offered for advanced tickets booked online.

IWM Duxford, Cambridgeshire, CB22 4QR

T: +44 (0)1223 835 000

E: duxford@iwm.org.uk

iwm.org.uk / [/ @I_W_M / www.facebook.com/iwm.duxford](https://www.facebook.com/iwm.duxford)

* Please note entry prices include a voluntary donation, making a valuable contribution to the care and conservation of this historic site

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(From left to right)

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RAF Duxford viewed from the west (Royston direction), 1918

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Aerial Views of Duxford Airfield, IWM Duxford

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IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) **tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.**

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches which attract over 2 million visitors each year are **IWM London**, IWM's flagship branch that recently transformed with new, permanent and free First World War Galleries alongside new displays across the iconic Atrium to mark the Centenary of the First World War; **IWM North**, housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; **IWM Duxford**, a world renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; **Churchill War Rooms**, housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser **HMS Belfast**.

First World War Centenary

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM is marking the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the world. For more information visit www.1914.org

