

Building Winkton Landing Ground

The following tale is collated from several e-mails from Bill Winchester. Bill served with 4768 Flight, 5004 Squadron ACS and helped construct several airfields including Winkton Advanced Landing Ground

I have read the 60th anniversary special D-Day Edition of Fly Past magazine and found it most interesting as it included articles on the ALG's in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire. I was a member of 4768 Flight, 5004 Squadron Airfield Construction Squadron that worked on Woodchurch, Winkton, Coolham and Chailey in that order.

When we were building Winkton we were based at RAF Ibsley and used two RAF buses to and from the site. We arrived at RAF Ibsley in late March or early April from Woodchurch in Kent. The one memory that is quite clear is the felling of several very high pine trees to clear obstructions from the approach to the North runway. There is a gap on the corner opposite the Lamb Inn at Holfleet that is just about where the tall pines were, and in line with the runway. The trees were taken to a wood yard in Christchurch and cut into various sizes to be used for buildings on site.

The Lamb Inn was run by a Miss Cox and her sister, who refreshed us each morning with a large jug of lemonade. The pub was on the opposite corner to the trees on the road which led to the radar station at Sopley. It wasn't long before one of our sergeants found out and accused us of stocking up the pub with logs. Would we do such a thing, of course we would, but he didn't catch us?

Apart from tree felling we spent days clearing scrub and smaller trees, possibly around the Clockhouse Copse area, but those names meant nothing to us at the time. Winkton was not the best site for us, an early breakfast, bus to the site, stale bread sandwiches and watery cocoa for lunch, bus back to camp and some sort of meal about 7pm. We worked hard there and thanked God for the NAAFI Van. Sometimes we thought we were not very organised at all, but I suppose it made sense to those in charge in the higher echelons of the service. We did seem to be the first on sites, we were at Woodchurch, and as far as I recall at Winkton and Coolham.

Our Flight was made up of groundsmen, the NCO's, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, steel erectors and a plant operator. We did do some grading with the caterpillar tractors and graders and had dumper trucks to clear it all away. We were all labourers, and we did always seem to be tasked with the initial ground clearance work. We did get to lay the Sommerfeld tracking as well, hammering in 2- and 3-foot iron pickets every few feet of runway and perimeter track, mostly at Coolham. Swinging 7lb hammers all day kept us very fit, and tired.

We never completed a site anywhere, we always stayed for a few months, then went on to another site, to start it or continue it. We worked hard but we were happy to be out in the

country on our own and not have the restrictions of a RAF station, except at Ibsley. It was a great disappointment to me that my Flight was never to see one of our airfields operational.