

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RAF BENSON



Let us be known by our actions

The Station Badge, granted in 1955, depicts a red lion rampant on a gold scallop. The lion signifies that the Station was built on the Manor of Bensington that once belonged to the Royal Duchy of Cornwall. The scallop is the traditional emblem of medieval pilgrims and symbolises the mobility of the service.

In 1937, with the RAF expanding, work began building an airfield near the historic village of Benson. On 1 February 1939, RAF Benson opened and accepted its first aircraft; 2 squadrons of Fairey Battle Bombers. The Battle Bombers left RAF Benson in December 1940 to be replaced by the twin engine Wellington Bombers and the Spitfires of No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, who, under RAF Coastal Command, establish Benson firmly in the forefront of the war effort.

From 1939 until 1995, the Station became the start point for many a Royal journey as initially the 'King's Flight', and then later the 'Queen's Flight' made its home at RAF Benson. The Queen's Flight remained at RAF Benson until 1995, when it moved to RAF Northolt and was amalgamated with No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron. Following the war, the station re-grouped under Transport Command to provide medium range tactical air transport.

In March 1992 RAF Benson began its association with helicopters as first No. 60 Squadron flying Wessex HC2 helicopters, and then in 1997 No. 33 Squadron flying Puma HC1 helicopters took up residence. This was followed by the Merlin Helicopters of No. 28 (Army Cooperation) Squadron in July 2001 and of No. 78 Squadron in January 2008 creating the home of the Merlin Force.

In November 2009, the Puma Force was united when the Pumas of No. 230 Squadron were rehomed from Northern Ireland to RAF Benson. As a result of Support Helicopter rationalisation across

Defence, the RAF's Merlin helicopters transferred to the Royal Navy. First to disband in September 2014 was No. 78 Squadron, transferring its Merlins to No. 846 Naval Air Squadron who remained at RAF Benson until March 2015 when it moved to Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton.

No. 28 Squadron was next and in July 2015 transferred its Merlins to No. 845 Naval Air Squadron who moved shortly thereafter to RNAS Yeovilton. No. 28 Squadron, however, did not disband and instead stood up as the joint Operational Conversion Unit for Puma and Chinook helicopters in October 2015, remaining at RAF Benson. Joint Helicopter Support Squadron, a tri-Service Joint Helicopter Command unit tasked with providing ground support to the Support Helicopter Force, arrived in 2016.

In May 2020, No. 22 Squadron re-formed at RAF Benson, providing operational evaluation, trials and testing of equipment and tactical training for the crews of all helicopter types flown by the Joint Helicopter Command.

Finally, RAF Benson is also home to the civilian National Police Air Service and the Thames Valley Air Ambulance which operate 24 hours a day.