



LAND OF THE FANNS

Teacher Briefing

RAF Hornchurch Heritage Centre

From, Land of the Fanns Online Resource

RAF Hornchurch Heritage Centre

119-121 Suttons Ln,

Hornchurch RM12 6RU

<https://rafhornchurch.com>

Summary

- Hornchurch Country Park is located on the site of an old military airfield.
- In the First World War it was called RFC Suttons Farm and in the Second World War it was called RAF Hornchurch.
- https://www.havering.gov.uk/info/20037/parks/699/hornchurch_country_park

What might we see

There are several World War II defences within Hornchurch Country Park:

- The main car park at Squadrons Approach was an aircraft dispersal bay used to protect Spitfires and their ground crews.
- Well-preserved pill boxes
- Very rare Tett Turrets.
- Lots of wartime items in the Heritage Centre

History

- The northern part of Hornchurch Country Park is on the former land of Suttons Farm.
- In 1915 the War Ministry was concerned that the River Thames was a landmark for enemy military aircraft that could guide them straight into the heart of London. It wanted to create a nearby airfield to send aircraft to fight off the enemy.
- The Ministry chose Suttons Farm to become an airfield that could help protect London. It was called RFC Sutton Farm (Royal Flying Corps Suttons Farm).
- On the night of 13th October 1915 aircraft took off from Suttons Farm for the first time to fight against enemy airships.
- They had their first success on the night of the 2nd September 1916. Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson took off from Suttons Farm to look for the attacking Airship

SL11. He spotted the airship and attacked it with explosive ammunition, after which it crashed in flames near Cuffley in Hertfordshire. It was the first aircraft to be downed over British soil.

- Leefe-Robinson was awarded the Victoria Cross.
- After the end of the First World War, RFC Suttons Farm was closed and turned back into farmland.
- But in the 1920s, the Royal Air Force started to expand and bought the land, which became RAF Suttons Farm.
- In 1928 the site changed its name to RAF Hornchurch to make it easier to find on public transport.
- RAF Hornchurch played a major part in the Second World War, as it was used as a fighter station and equipped mainly with Spitfires. It was due to this that it played a major role as a front line station during the Battle of Britain and many famous pilots of the time flew from here.
- The airfield remained open at the end of the war, but was mainly used for training. Numerous training and selection centres were set up at Hornchurch, including the air crew selection centre.
- During the 50s and 60s, the Royal Air Force was decreased and RAF Hornchurch was closed in April 1962.
- In the 1970s the technical area with the hangers and workshops was developed into what is now the residential Airfield Estate. The estate shows the area's proud heritage through the use of Hornchurch pilots' names in its streets.

Reading and images

- <https://rafhornchurch.com/history/>