

KENLEY - A LIVING AIRFIELD

In 1959 Kenley was closed as an operational base of the Royal Air Force (RAF), bringing to an end its many years of service for powered aircraft. However, it remains an active airfield and is now used to train the pilots of the future, using gliders.

English Heritage identified Kenley as 'the most complete fighter airfield associated with the Battle of Britain to have survived'. Unlike other fighter stations that were modernised, Kenley has retained its original runways, giving visitors a true flavour of its historic purpose.

Nowadays, several organisations are custodians of the land on and around Kenley airfield, working to protect and conserve its important features.



Heritage Information Boards Heritage Walk Path Active Runway Barriers Metal Barriers Yellow Line

There is no public access to the airfield during glider operations. For your own safety, please stay outside all barriers and keep to the outer edge of the perimeter track. The safe route round the outside of the airfield is marked by a Yellow Line.



Royal Air Force

The Ministry of Defence owns the airfield, including the runways and the remaining buildings. The RAF uses it at weekends to train the 615 Volunteer Gliding Squadron Air Cadets, who come from London and the south-east region. www.615vgs.com

Surrey Hills Gliding Club

This private club leases the airfield on weekdays. They provide 'experience' flights and training for civilian glider pilots. www.southlondongliding.co.uk

The Kenley Airfield Friends Group

This group represents the local community and those with an interest in or historic tie to the airfield. The Friends are working to secure the long-term preservation of Kenley and to inform people of its historic use. www.kafg.org.uk

The City of London Corporation

The City owns and manages the open space surrounding the airfield, known as Kenley Common. www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/openspaces

English Heritage

As the government advisor on England's historic environment, English Heritage protects and promotes Scheduled Monuments, such as the blast pens on Kenley Common. www.english-heritage.org.uk



Photograph Courtesy of Andrew Scott

Famous aircraft flown at Kenley

Kenley is an active airfield, used by the Royal Air Force (RAF) for over 90 years. During that time, it's been home to a wide variety of aircraft, some more famous than others. The story of Kenley mirrors the history of the British aviation industry and the airfield has played host to these four well-known aircraft.

Sopwith Camel 1917 - 1921

The Camel was made by the Sopwith Aviation Company. This biplane had a rotary engine that could power the aircraft to 115mph. Being a single-seat fighter, it was very manoeuvrable, but it was difficult to handle and notorious for stalling and spinning out of control. It was one of the best aircraft of the First World War.



Gloster Gladiator 1937 - 1945

Manufactured by the Gloster Aircraft Company Ltd, the Gladiator was also a biplane developed for the Second World War from earlier aircraft. With a more modern radial engine and a metal propeller, it was capable of speeds up to 257mph. However it was still made from stretched fabric over a metal airframe. It was the last biplane to equip RAF squadrons.



Hawker Hurricane 1937 - 1944

The demands of the war saw the development of faster monoplanes by companies such as Hawker Aircraft Ltd. The Hurricane, a single-seat fighter with a composite wood/metal fuselage and a powerful supercharged Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, was capable of speeds around 340mph at high altitudes.



This very adaptable and effective aircraft was the main fighter of the RAF and used in a variety of roles throughout the Second World War.



Supermarine Spitfire 1938 - 1961

To counter the fighters of the Luftwaffe, the Supermarine Aviation Works developed the all-metal Spitfire with a supercharged V12 Merlin engine and a unique wing design.

The Spitfire single-seater fighter aircraft could reach speeds of 378mph. This revolutionary aircraft was to remain in production after the Second World War.



This board forms part of the Kenley Heritage Trail created and funded by a partnership between the City of London Corporation, Kenley Airfield Friends Group and Tandridge District Council.