



RAF Locking

RAF Locking Camp was a training station situated about a mile from Weston Airfield. Although many people assume the two are the same unit, they were initially two separate RAF establishments. RAF Weston-super-Mare, the former civil airfield, was requisitioned in 1940, whereas RAF Locking Camp was opened in around 1939 as No. 5 School of Technical Training.

The station was responsible for training new entrants in the trades of aircraft mechanics, airframes and rigging, as well as fabric working and carpentry. Many aircraft in service at the start of the Second World War were constructed from wood, and covered in cotton fabric painted with a coating called dope, which stiffened and tightened the fabric.



A view of the station © Weston-super-Mare Library

They also trained marine craft personnel. The RAF had a large marine craft section for rescue and other duties with seaplanes and flying boats. Two famous types were the Short Sunderland and the PBV Catalina. Landing on water they were used for rescue and anti-submarine purposes.

In 1948, the station became responsible for training recruits in the trades of radio and radar, becoming No. 1 Radio School. The No. 5 School of Technical Training closed in 1950.

In 1952, the training of Radio and Radar Apprentice Technicians was moved to RAF Locking from RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire.



The entrance gates at RAF Locking © Weston-super-Mare Library

Radio and radar, both on the ground, and in the air, were relatively new technologies and the training was constantly updated to reflect the introduction of new equipment. All equipment at this time used valves; a valve is rather like the old glass light bulb, but with more internal parts.

RAF Locking trained regular airmen, National Service conscripts, and apprentices.

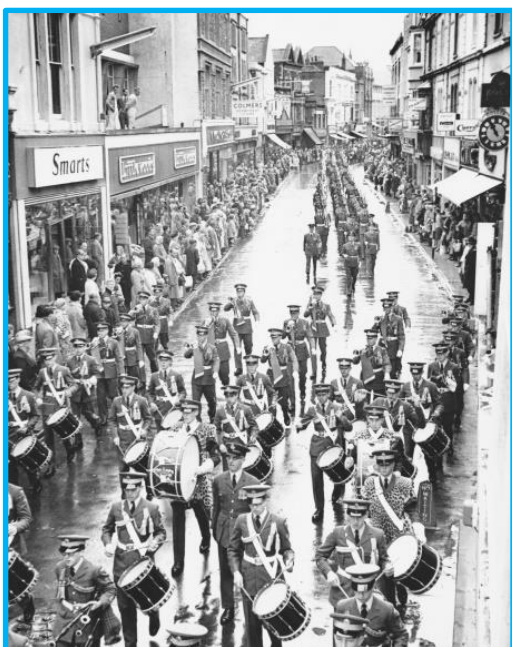
In 1964, the apprentice scheme introduced two levels of training: a two-year Craft Apprentice course, and a three-year Technician Apprentice course. In 1965, all aircraft electronic courses were moved to RAF Cosford in Shropshire. As well as apprentice training, regular adult servicemen completed their Mechanics and Fitters courses in electronics at the camp.

Lord Trenchard, known as “father of the Royal Air Force”, introduced the RAF Apprentice scheme in 1920 and the trainees were known as Trenchard’s “brats”. The airmen at Locking were known as “boggies”, because their old accommodation was built on the boggy ground of the base.

The camp had five large training buildings, each with its own purpose. Also, there were several large Radar setups and Airfield approach aids on the site to practise on.

The Technician apprentice scheme was short lived, as part of their designated future was to become diagnostic specialists on the TSR 2 aircraft system, which was cancelled in 1965.

The apprentices were a common sight in Weston, either in uniform, or mufti (everyday civilian clothing), consisting of grey flannel trousers, blazer, white shirt and RAF tie. They were often a target for local youths with some rivalry between the RAF and Weston lads.



RAF Locking Freedom March, 1964 © Weston-super-Mare Library

In 1956, the Station was given the Freedom of the Borough of Weston-super-Mare and would parade through the town. The apprentices would lead the parade and had a pipe and drum band, with a Shetland pony mascot, holding the honorary rank of Corporal. One was called Hamish McCrackers!

A succession of aircraft were deployed as "Gate Guardians" outside RAF Locking and in the 1960s a Spitfire carried out this task for several years. It has been fully restored and is now an active member of the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, which can be seen at air shows around the country.

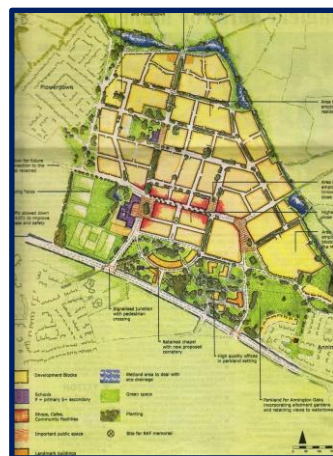
As well as British Forces, the camp trained many servicemen from other countries, including, Malaya, Jordan, Germany and countries of the Commonwealth.



The site of RAF Locking after demolition © Steve Pemberton

In 1976, all apprentice training ceased. RAF Locking continued to train technicians on specialist courses until the 1990s saw the introduction of multi skilled technician courses. Electronics had now changed from large valve powered equipment to the small devices we all use now, with integrated circuits. In 1985, the camp trained young people under the YTS initiative, a short lived Government sponsored training scheme.

In 1990, No1 Radio School was moved to RAF Cosford and the station was gradually closed down and demolished. A housing estate would take its place.



Plans for housing on the former RAF Locking site © Weston-super-Mare Library

