



Hatfield Aerodrome From The Air

On 22nd July 2008 aerial photographs of the site of the former aerodrome at Hatfield, Hertfordshire, were taken for the de Havilland Aeronautical Technical School Association. The photographer was Tony Newton in a Piper Super Cub owned and flown by Maurice James, both being former company employees and one-time members of the Flight Development Department. (This department was based in the flight hangar, in offices now forming the conference suites on the top floor of the Hangar Hotel.) A selection of these photographs is presented in this article, preceded by some older images for comparison.



The de Havilland Aircraft Company purchased land at Hatfield in 1930 in order to expand the enterprise. The existing works at Stag Lane, Edgware, had become surrounded by houses which constrained any business development. First established at Hatfield were the de Havilland School of Flying and the London Aeroplane Club, followed over the next few years by a large new factory. The Engine and Propeller Divisions, later Companies, were established on the far side of the aerodrome. Development continued for well over fifty years, the last major new buildings directly associated with the business being an assembly hall for the BAe146 and a new restaurant. Later, the three large buildings of Bishop Square were erected on the site of the original 1930s factory; BAE Systems Asset Management staff now occupy one. British Aerospace ceased manufacturing work at the site in the end of 1993. The runway was closed in 1994 and dug up in 2001.

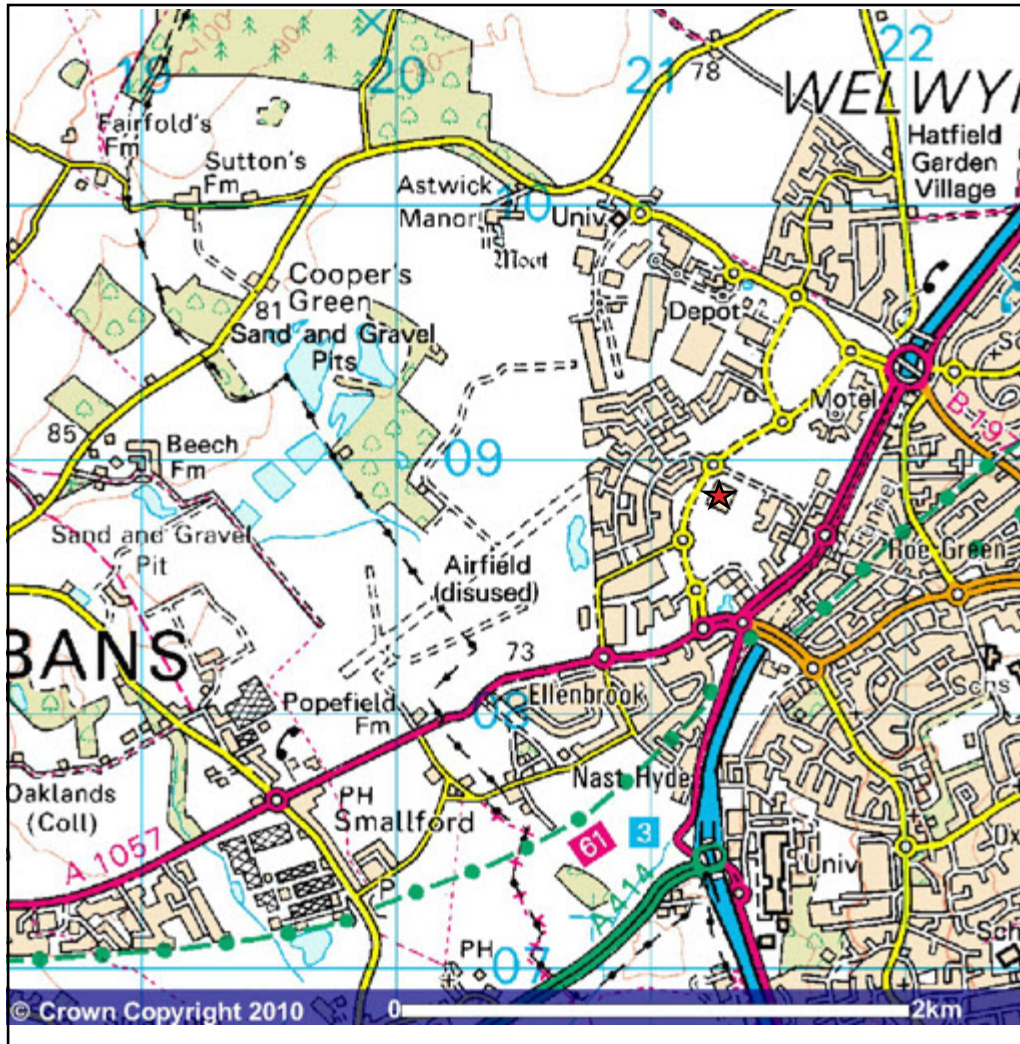
The aerodrome site is now home to the University of Hertfordshire, the Hatfield Business Park, the Hangar Hotel in the flight hangar, Hertfordshire Police Station in the administration block, Howe Dell Primary School and over 2,000 homes managed by the de Havilland Housing Partnership (Welwyn Hatfield District Council, construction partners Bovis and Bryant Homes together with Paradigm Housing and Aldwyck Housing Association.) Roads around the site have been given names commemorating de Havilland people and products: Cunningham Avenue and Fillingham Way, Mosquito Way and Gypsy [it should be Gipsy!] Moth Avenue to name but a few.



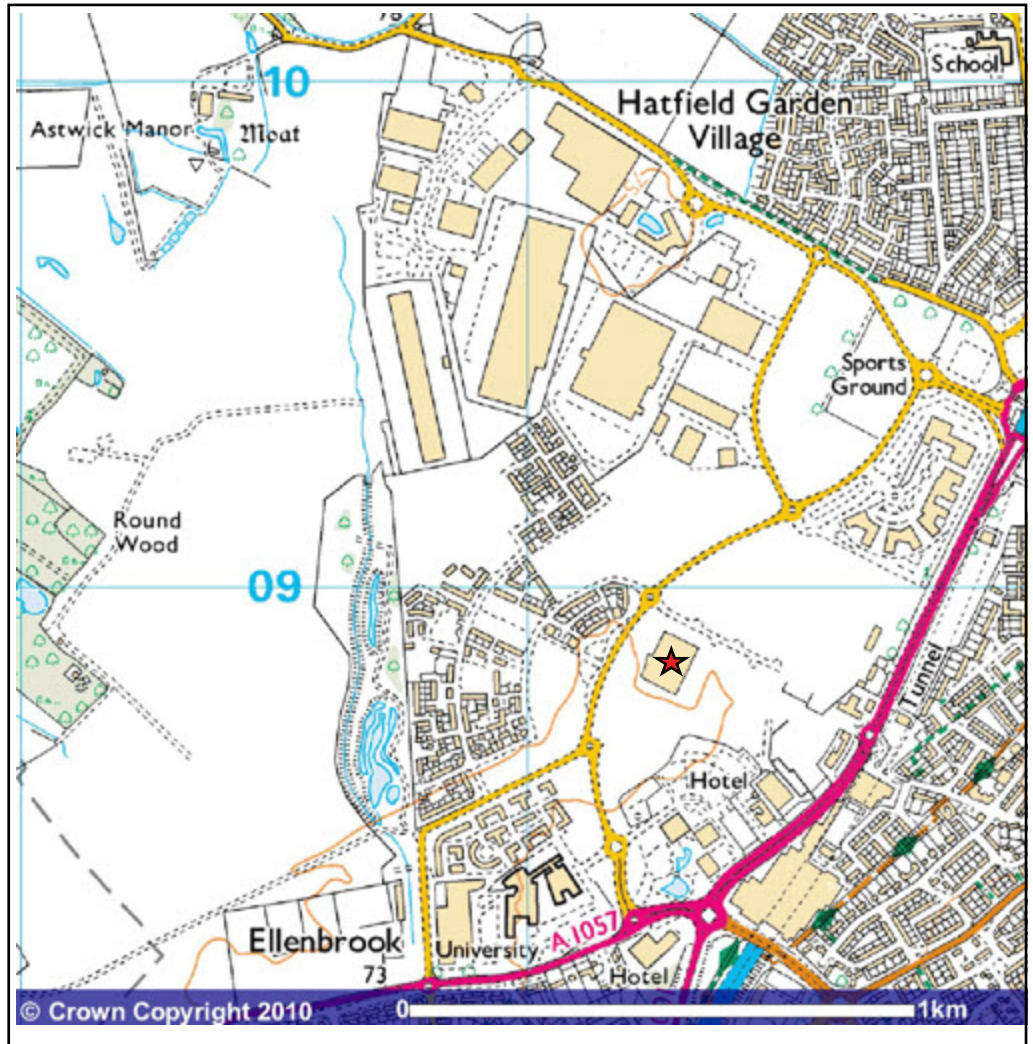
*This article was created as an exercise in nostalgia by Roger de Mercado.
17 January 2010.*

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The portions of Ordnance Survey maps below are not quite up to date in that they do not show the buildings now on the site of what was the main factory area. They also appear to be of slightly different revision standards, e.g. the 1:50,000 map shows the new buildings where the Flying Club once was, east of the Flight Test Hangar, now the Hangar Hotel and marked with ★. The runway, aligned 06/24, extended further to the north east than shown on the 1:50,000 map. The original runway was 6,000 ft long, later extended by 500 ft at each end. The extensions had asymmetric turning circles designed with just enough space to allow a Trident to turn round in its smallest radius – the offset nosewheel resulted in different radiuses left and right.



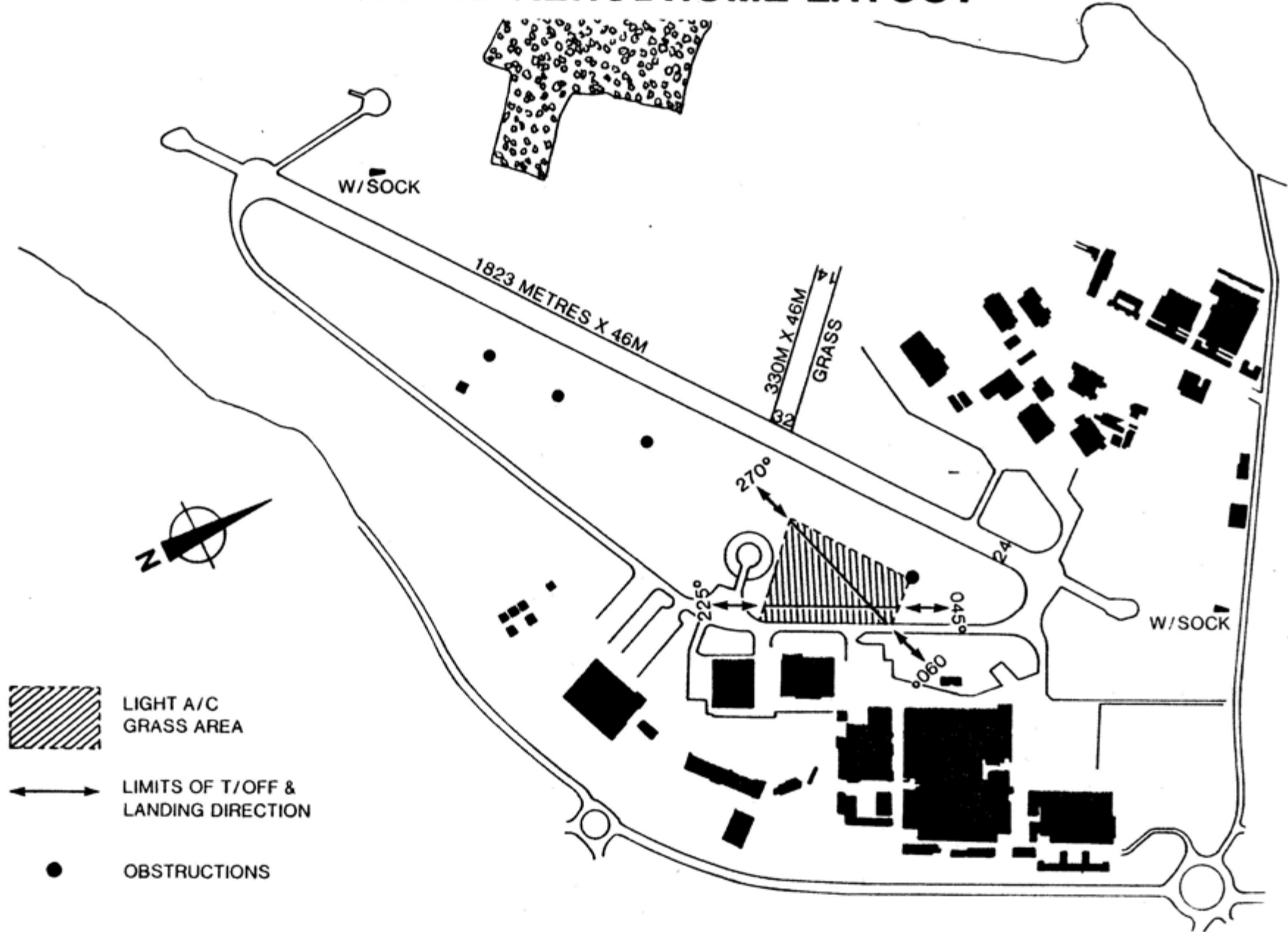
1:50,000



1:25,000

Images produced from Ordnance Survey's Get-a-map service on 14 Jan 2010. Images reproduced with permission of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

HATFIELD AERODROME LAYOUT



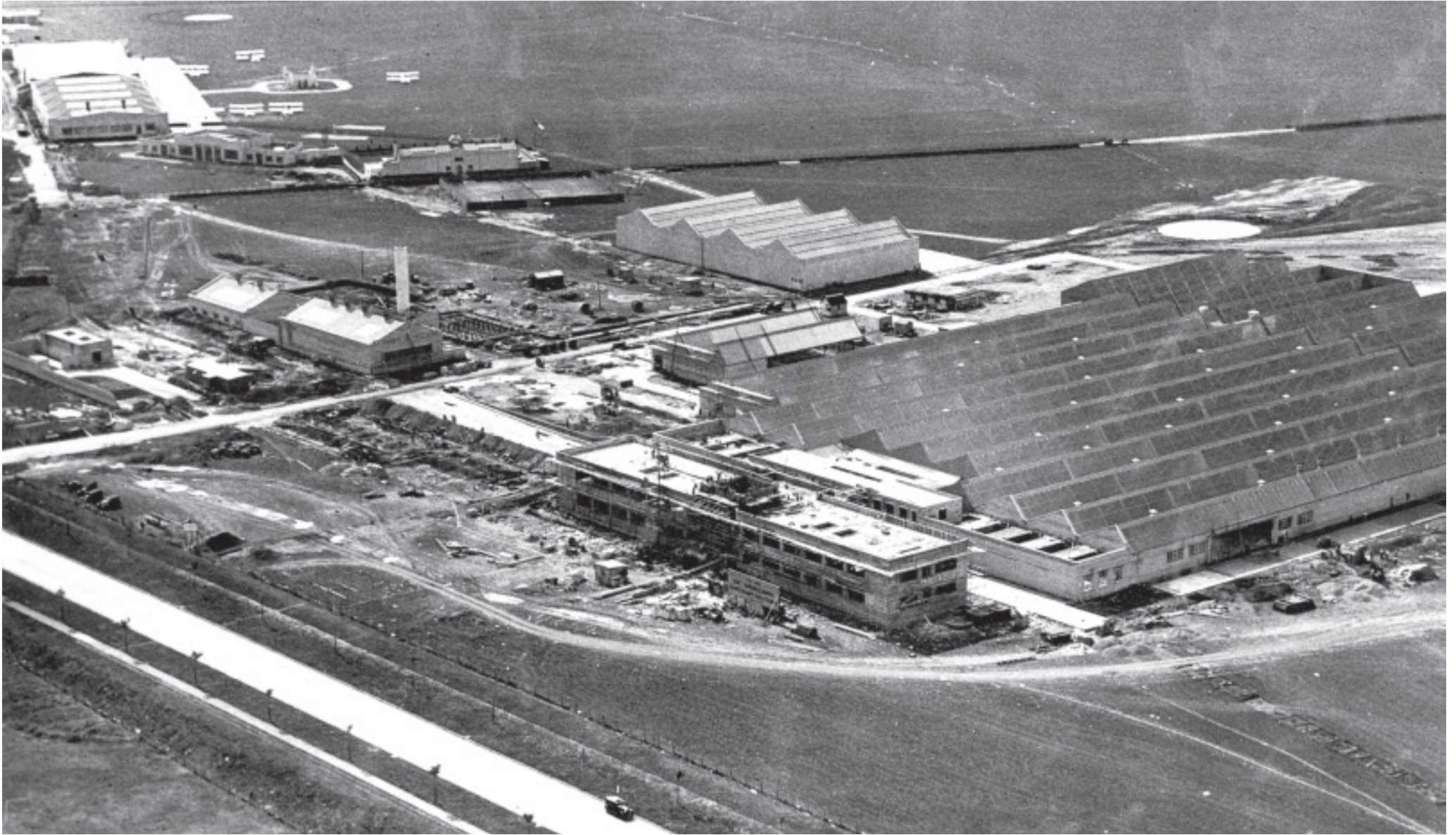
“Light Aircraft Grass Area” map from the Hatfield Aerodrome Manual, 1988

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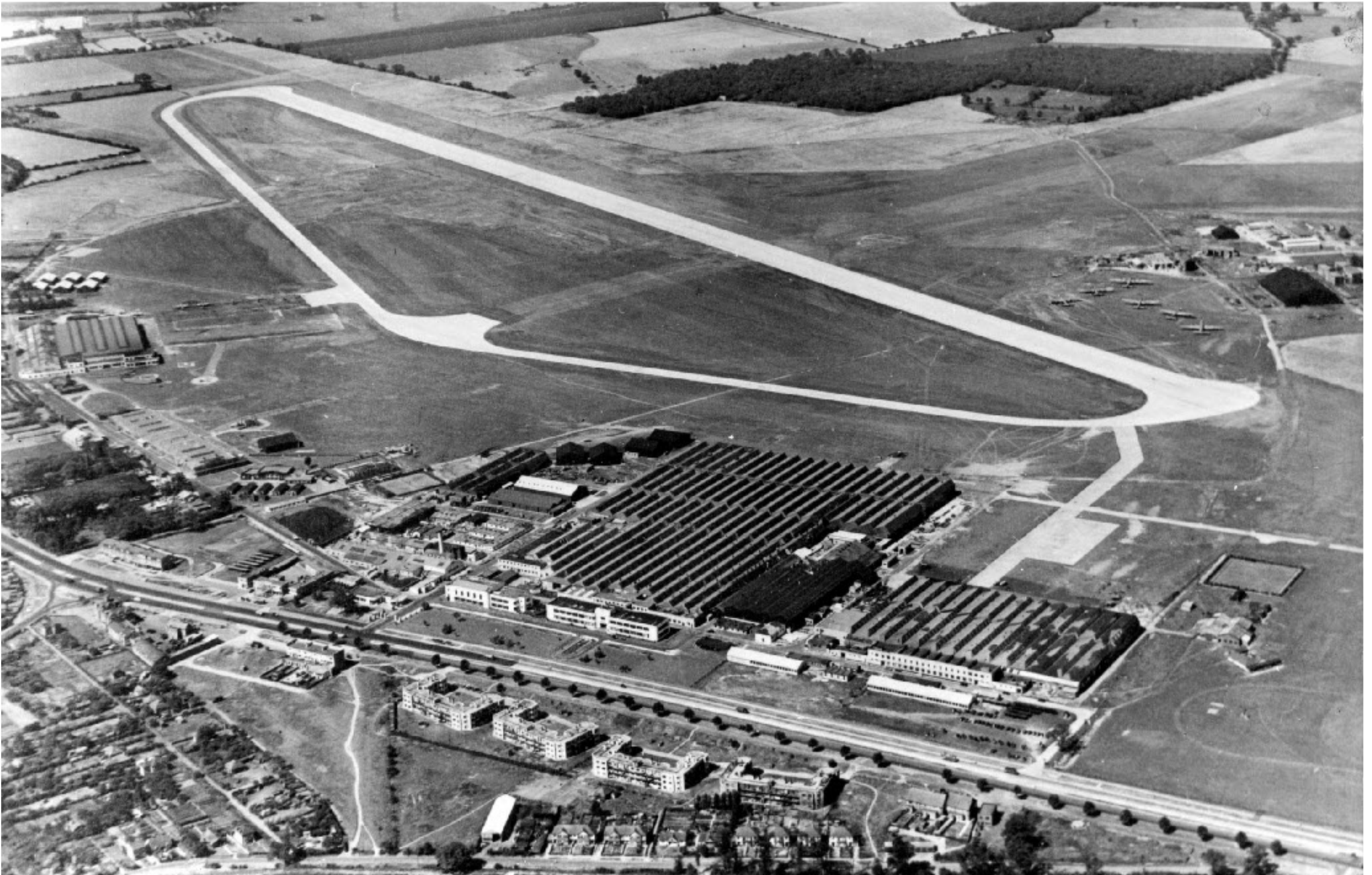
The London Aeroplane Club in the early 1930s before the new de Havilland factory was built, and even before the Club had its pool and squash courts. Harpsfield Hall and Sinclair's Farm are in the distance. See also the article "Hatfield Aerodrome 1935" on www.dhaetsa.org.uk *Photo courtesy R G Willoughby.*

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The new de Havilland aircraft factory about 1935. The main works are complete and the Administration block is under construction. The London Aeroplane Club now has its beacon, swimming pool, squash and tennis courts. *Photo courtesy R G Willoughby.*

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The airfield in 1947 after completion of the concrete runway. The grass runway, 14/32, can clearly be seen. It was maintained and usable for many years, although unpopular because of the discontinuity where it crossed the main runway. The gun butts, where aircraft armaments was tested, were on the edge of the woods towards the top left of the photo, at the end of the track leading from the Engine and Propeller Company site. *Photo courtesy B V Rowe.*

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This British Aerospace photograph, taken in May 1990, was reproduced in the DHAeTSA Pylon Magazine in August 2003 by kind permission of BAE Systems. The new Assembly Hall for the BAe146 can be seen next to the Flight Hangar. The old squash courts have been made into the Sales Centre, just beyond which is the new single-status restaurant; the original London Aeroplane Club restaurant has recently been demolished. The site of Bishop Square has been cleared ready for construction.

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The site on 3rd August 2005. The turning circle at the south-westerly end and part of the taxiway towards it were still visible. The former paths of the runway and taxiways have been drawn in. *Photo by Tony Newton from Mark Miller's DH89A Dragon Rapide G-AGJG.*

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Looking north-west. The Police Station, formerly the Administration and Canteen blocks, is in the centre.

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Looking towards St Albans. Building work is in progress in the centre, on the site of the main factory area from the 1940s onwards.

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Looking towards Welwyn Garden City. University buildings are in the left foreground, with Bishop Square to the right.
On the extreme right is the Galleria Shopping Centre above the entrance to the A1(M) tunnel.

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Looking towards Welwyn Garden City, with end of Runway 06 visible and taxiway to the right leading the eye towards the former Flight Hangar. Popefield Farm is right of centre, on its own.

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Looking towards Welwyn Garden City. University buildings in foreground, Bishop Square beyond.

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Looking towards Hatfield. Housing in the foreground, beyond that the Hangar Hotel and Fitness Centre.

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Looking south-east towards Hatfield. The road running from Bishop Square on the right and passing in front of the Hangar Hotel is Mosquito Way.

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Hatfield Town Centre. To help those who left the area many decades ago, the black cross marks Tingey's Corner, at what was then the junction of St Albans Road, Wellfield Road and French Horn Lane. The teardrop marks the site of the Stonehouse and the Comet is just visible, circled at the top of the picture. Know where you are now?