

## A Brief history of Bristol and the Two Airports

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The city of Bristol has a long history associated with the aviation industry. It was in 1910 the Sir George White moved into the aviation industry. He was already involved in transport, and used redundant tram shares at Filton to form his company called the British and Colonial Aeroplane Co Ltd. His first plane called the Bristol box kite was soon in production. Later, other planes were added, the Bristol Scout and the Bristol fighter, this proved popular plane and in excess of 5000 were built. Later the company was renamed the Bristol Aeroplane Company. Later between the two world wars, another famous plane was launched, it being the Bristol Bulldog, a military machine. There is a Filton Enthusiasts Website with a comprehensive collection of aeroplane pictures and data.

This brings us to the conception of Whitchurch airport. It was during 1929 when the government of the day encouraged municipal airports, soon around 290 acres of land, for 1000 yard takeoff and landing runway in any direction were acquired. The task of clearing the site and building of the clubhouse showroom and hangar with the necessary approach drives and apron proceeded. The grand opening for the airport was the 31st May 1930. Prince George, the Duke of Kent arrived by air at Filton Airfield and was driven to Whitchurch to open the airport. At this time, one could produce a single seater aeroplane for £400 and the two seater aeroplane for £600 and as three seater aeroplane with cabin for £850

For those people who are familiar with the area, the very large original hangar can still be seen together with its extensions, built during the Second World War and form part of the Whitchurch sports centre. The public house at the junction of the new Airport Road, and Wells Road, was called Happy Landings, because of its proximity to the new airfield. Later, Bristol planning committee agreed to accept an offer of £16,386 for the land plus £100 per year for the use of the clubhouse, from the Bristol and Wessex aeroplane club. Because of the large cost saving, it was agreed the aeroplane club should manage the airport on behalf of the city council. 1936 was an important year for Bristol airport, new radio equipment had been installed and many airlines were now using the aerodrome. Weather reports, including Whitchurch, were broadcast on the 1200 Metre Band. This Radio Station was housed on the north side of the airfield, and information was relayed by a land line telephone. During 1937 -1938, Bristol Council, together with Government money, installed boundary lights and improved drainage. It also paid for the land around the airfield to be bought to prevent any high obstructions being erected.

1939 Saw the outbreak of the Second World War and Whitchurch played it's part. The airport was handed back to Bristol City Council after the end of the War, and finally ended being an airport in 1957. After this time, the main runway and perimeter roads were used as a games field. Eventually Bristol City Council changed the name to Hengrove Park. AMARC has had the use of this public park for nearly 45 years.

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