

Tibenham, Shipdham, Hethel & Metfield: A busy 12 weeks recording airfields

Our community archaeologist and a number of local residents, airfield enthusiasts and volunteers have been very busy over the last 12 weeks, recording four airfield sites in Norfolk and Suffolk with a total of over 140 volunteer days racked up. It's the busiest time of the year for building recording on airfield sites mainly because of the lack of undergrowth during this cold time, nettles and brambles are an airfield archaeologist's nightmare!

The recording at Shipdham, Tibenham and Hethel in Norfolk, and Metfield in Suffolk identified surviving structures that even local residents weren't aware of. The buildings were photographed, measured and recorded using the most basic building recording skills and identified using the 1945 official Air Ministry site plans, that give us very handy information- i.e. what type of building we are recording and what its function was.

We looked at the airfield and the structures around the runways but also the "dispersed sites"- the living quarter sites and communal sites used by the airmen and women that are sometimes located over a mile away from the airfield itself. A number of the dispersed sites have since gone but the concrete pads the buildings once stood on still survive below inches of leaves and soil. Tapping through the soil with ranging poles and grid irons we were able to find the edges of the concrete pads, where we then took an Ordnance Survey grid reference and again identified what once stood here using the 1945 official Air Ministry site plans.

Control towers and dining rooms, Nissen huts and Orlit huts; all were recorded so the information can be added to the relevant County Council Historic Environment Record (HER), an online database of historical sites and buildings that can be accessed by everyone through the "Heritage Gateway" website or the County Councils own "Heritage Explorer" websites. If you would like to learn how to record your own local airfield or want to help out in future archaeology events then just let us know at info@8theast.org