

## **THE HUNDRED PARISHES SOCIETY**

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Many of us wait anxiously for the outcome of the recent public inquiry into a possible increase in the passenger cap at Stansted Airport, yet the local community's love-hate relationship with Stansted Airport is only the latest in a series of significant aviation events that have occurred within the Hundred Parishes.

In a field at Standon Green End in the parish of Thundridge, a monument marks the spot where Italian balloonist Vincenzo Lunardi landed in 1784 after completing the first manned flight in England. He took off from London beneath a balloon filled with hydrogen.

In 1913, Bentfield Hucks was the first Englishman to loop-the-loop in his Bleriot aeroplane. He was born in 1884 in Bentfield Cottage, Stansted Mountfitchet and thus acquired his unusual forename.

Duxford airfield, now the site of Imperial War Museum, Duxford, first became operational in World War I. Some of its buildings, constructed by German prisoners-of-war, still stand. In 1938, Duxford was the first airfield to take delivery of Spitfire fighter planes. Frank Whittle flew regularly from here while he was developing ideas that eventually led to the invention of the turbojet engine just before the end of WWII.

Altogether, twelve military airfields operated within the Hundred Parishes during WWII. Andrewsfield, straddling the parish boundary between The Salings and Stebbing, was the first American-built base in Europe, becoming operational in 1943. Stansted was another American-built airfield. Thousands of Americans were based in this area; many never saw home again.

Many of us have enjoyed the relative peace that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to our skies, in particular discovering the joy of walking in the countryside. It is sad that it has taken so many deaths to remind us of the quality of life that exists right here, without the need to fly.

Ken McDonald, Secretary.