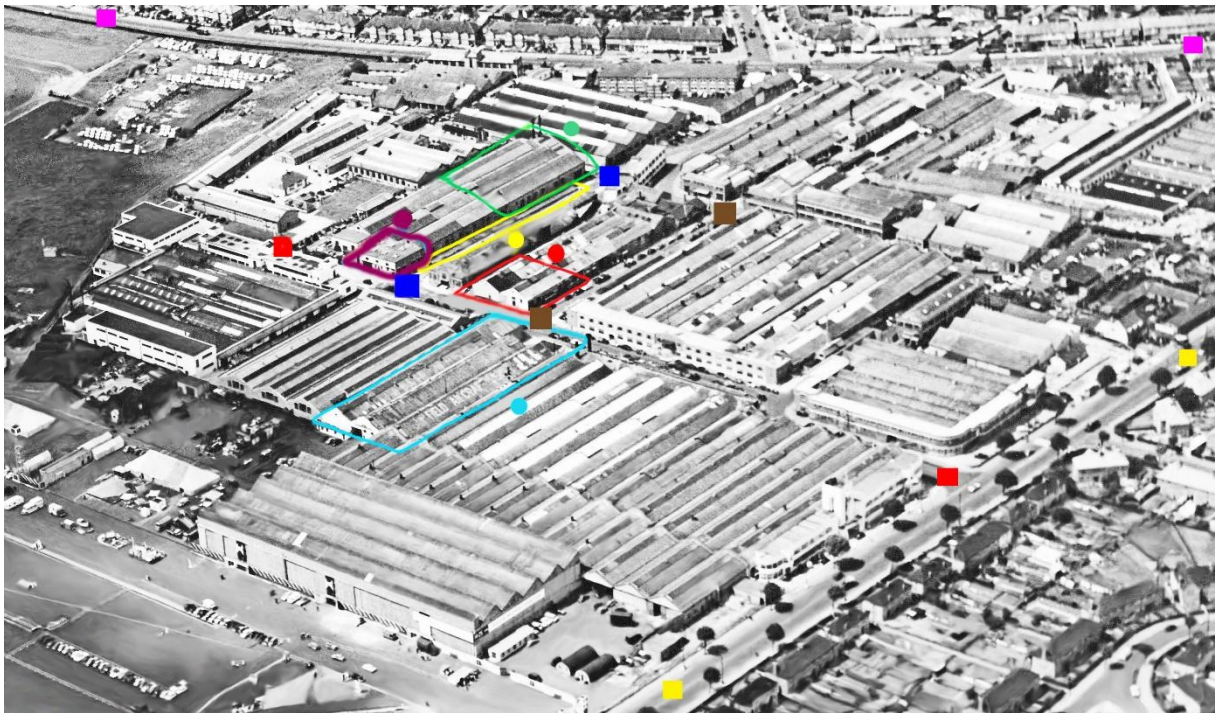


The National Aircraft Factory No.1, at Waddon, near Croydon.



One hundred years ago, construction started on a massive new factory complex, known as the National Aircraft Factory No.1 (NAF), on a green field site at Waddon, near Croydon, Surrey. The then existing roads, Coldharbour Lane, now Purley Way, and Stafford Road, formed the eastern and northern boundaries respectively. When built, factory roads, known as Kingsway (Kings Way), Queensway (Queens Way), Princes Way, Rothermere Road, Cubitt Street and Stone Street linked the large number of workshops, offices, canteens, hangarage, and training facilities, etc. A branch railway line within the NAF, was linked to the main Waddon – Sutton line about a mile away, allowing materials and components to be delivered easily from anywhere. The branch line featured a level - crossing across Stafford Road, which also carried tram lines. A tram siding was constructed at the NAF for the convenience of the workforce using that mode of transport.

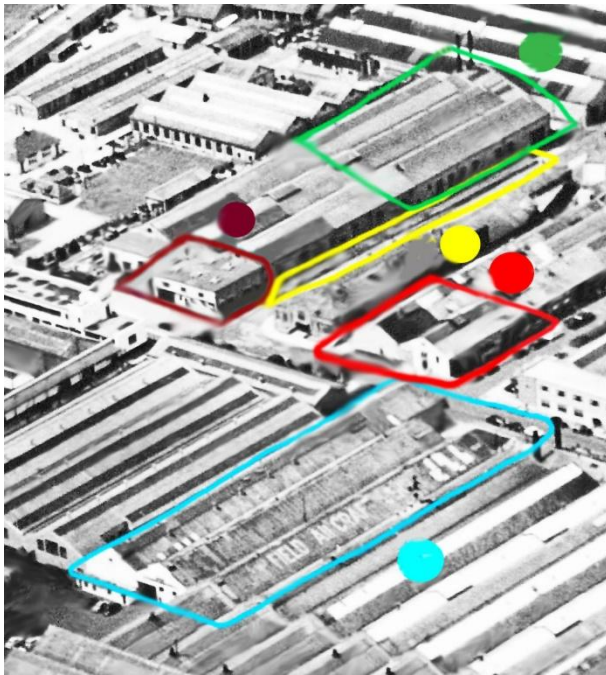
The main purpose of the NAF was the assembly and testing of aircraft, from components made elsewhere, for use in the Great War. However, some aircraft and components were also built from scratch at the NAF. Messrs 'Cubitts', who had constructed the NAF, also built Handley Page bombers there. Propellers were made on site. A dedicated building was used to fabricate the vital 'Constantinesco' propeller interrupter gear, which allowed bullets to pass through a rotating propeller, without damaging the propeller.

Until circa. 2000, most of the 1917 NAF buildings remained, although there had been some losses by bombing during the Second World War, rebuilding and new development. Individual units were Let to a great variety of companies such as 'Visco Engineering', who used the former canteen, 'Field Aircraft Services' and 'MSL'.

A major site clearance and redevelopment took place from 2000, so that in 2017, the area consists of car showrooms, distribution centres such as 'Amazon', 'Jewson' and 'UK Post'.

Business Parks, such as 'Spitfire Business Park' cater for smaller businesses. A manufacturer and designer of stage scenery and exhibition displays, 'Scena plc', has a large presence. Stand-alone offices, such as 'Merlin House' and a block of high-rise flats 'Croydon House' are also present.

Only a few remnants from the original NAF remain in 2017. Some are incorporated into modern structures and may still exist, hidden behind cladding. Little is obvious upon a casual survey by the inexperienced eye.



A) [RED] 1917 Buildings on N side of Queensway (CR0 4BD).

Location: Junction of Queensway and Rothermere Road.

Description: A pair of coupled building ends which were formerly parts of a much longer double row.

Present Use: Electricity Sub-station.

2.

Use by NAF: 'Electric Power' (Western part and some of Eastern part), 'Electricians' (Eastern part).

Condition: Roof windows (lanterns) have been near collapse at times. Occasional repair work undertaken. Pigeons tend to occupy the premises.

Remarks: There are remnants of a staircase on the west side, which may lead to a basement.

(B) [LIGHT BLUE] 1917 Buildings on S side of Queensway (CR0 4BD).

Location: On Queensway immediately to West of Hawker Road (CR0 4WD).

Description: Three coupled buildings somewhat shielded by other buildings to the front.

Present Use: Used as workshops/storage by 'Scena plc'.

Use by NAF: 'Woodworking Shop'. Bays 12, 13, 14 out of the row of 18 Bays originally built (numbered from Purley Way end).

Condition: Good.

Remarks: The buildings in front may be NAF related. A part view of Bay 12 is from Hawker Road.

(C) [BROWN] Possible 1917 Buildings on W side of Princes Way (CR0 4RD)

Location: At the S Junction of Queensway and Princes Way.

Description: Flat roofed building of 'unusual' architecture.

Present Use: ? Data-storage business.

Use by NAF: Kilns for Propeller Shop.

Condition: Good.

Remarks: May not be of 1917 vintage. A smaller flat-roofed building to the W may be originally a 1917 transformer house.

3.

(D) [GREEN] Clad 1917 Building on W side of Princes Way (CR0 4RD)

Location: Approx. mid-way along Princes Way from Queensway on W side.

Description: Modern cladding over original 1917 3-bay building.

Present Use: Furniture Storage and Removals business - 'Steve Frieze Storage'.

Use by NAF: Propeller Shop (part).

Condition: Good.

Remarks: Some of the original 1917 walls, window frames, roof trusses, etc. are believed to remain within the cladding.

A partial view of the roof can be had from the Stafford Cross Business Park (First left along Stafford Rd after leaving Kingsway).

(E) [YELLOW] Platform along W side of Princes Way (CRO 4RD)

Location: Along W side of Princes Way from Queensway e.g. alongside 'Steve Frieze Removals' business.

Description: A platform raised above road and pavement level.

Present Use: Occasional outside temporary storage. Access to 'Steve Frieze Removals' office.

Use by NAF: Not known. Being investigated 2017. May not be original. Another platform (original) was opposite and is now the foundation of another business. The NAF branch lines carried loads for unloading at various platforms on the site.

(F) Clad Buildings on Princes Way to N and S of 'Steve Frieze Removals'(CRO 4RD)

It is not known whether any 1917 remnants remain within the cladding of these buildings. The southerly one was part of the NAF Propeller Shop and the northerly one was once the NAF 'Constantinesco' interrupter gear machine shop.

Construction and operations of National Aircraft Factory No.1 1917

Management of site was under Holland, Hannen and Cubitt Ltd. Greenfield site covering 240 acres. Approvals received for the site by R.F.C., Air Board and Lands Board on 16th September 1917. Site work commenced on 20th September 1917. Part of the site was the testing airfield known as Waddon Aerodrome that later became London Croydon Airport.

Factory completed in eight months and contained 645,483 square feet of floor space in fifty-eight separate buildings constructed with five million bricks, 250,000 square feet of glass, 2,000 tons of steel, 90,000 feet of timber and half a mile of double railway track.

15th January 1918 power was turned on with first de Havilland D.H. 9 aircraft completed on the 14th March 1918. By March 1919 Capital and Production had cost £1,880,912 and had produced 241 airframes and 3,000 interrupter gears. 2100 people were employed at the factory with the majority being women.

11th January 1919, 1500 of the factory workers were dismissed with the remaining workers having wage cuts. The factory was re-designated National Aircraft Depot No.3 responsible for dismantling of surplus aircraft stock, parts and engines.

In April 1920, the National Aircraft Depot No.3 was sold to Handley Page's Aircraft Disposal Company Limited for £1,000,000 and was one of six factories re-purposing surplus aircraft.

Further info in "The First Croydon Airport 1915-18" by Doug Cluett, Joanna Bogle and Bob Learmonth. ISBN- 0-9541370-0-0