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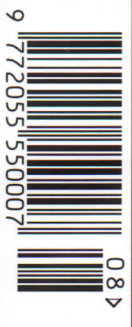
August 2017

# Lancashire

## & North West magazine

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**MAIN: Manchester Barton City Airport and Heliport from the air. The M62 is beyond with the A57 in the foreground. LEFT: The control tower at City Airport: opened in 1932 and still used.**

# The City Airport and Heliport at Manchester Barton

By Andrew Harris

Although surrounded by the M60, M62 and the A57 between Irlam and Eccles it is quite possible to drive past the City Airport and Heliport without noticing it. That is a shame because Manchester Barton – as it is known when flying – is a busy airfield for private and executive planes, a major visitor attraction, a flying base for two of the emergency services and will soon provide a centre to help ex-service personnel. It also has history. Lots of history!

The City Airport and Heliport at Barton is just 5 miles west of Manchester City Centre and was the United Kingdom's first purpose-built municipal airport. Work started in 1928 and used an existing tramway which had carried waste from the nearby Manchester Ship Canal in the late 1800s. More than 30 years later it helped to carry 300 tons of clinker and ash a week to enable the former Barton Moss to bear the weight of aircraft. The landing strip and the Pemberton Hangar – still used today – were

completed in time for the aerodrome to be opened on the 29th January 1930.

The control tower was completed in 1932 and remains in use today. Like the Pemberton Hangar it is a Grade 2 listed building and is thought to be the oldest continually operated control tower in Europe. From 1930 Imperial Airways – now British Airways – linked Barton – then known as Manchester Airport – with Croydon Airport in south London three times a week. 1935 saw the introduction of links to Liverpool, Blackpool and the Isle of Man. It was an exciting time for aviation.

Following the outbreak of World War 2 damaged aircraft were transported via the Manchester Ship Canal for repair at the Barton aerodrome which saw the production of about 700 Percival Proctor aircraft for military use. Barton also became a major centre for folding parachutes. The concrete bases from which barrage balloons were flown for protection can still be seen today.

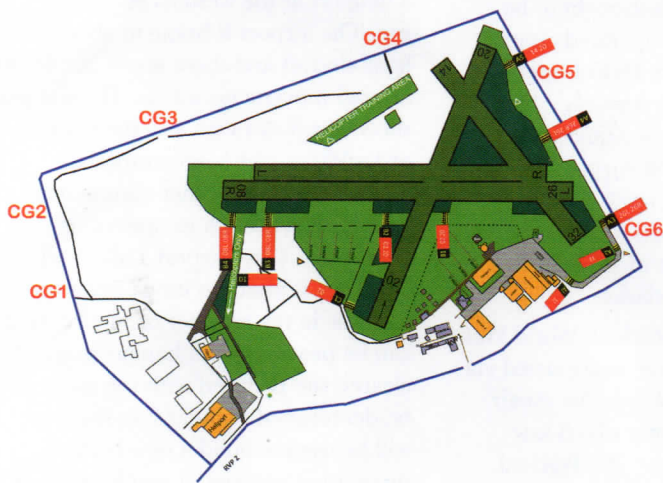
In post-war Britain the flying role of Manchester Barton went from strength

to strength. Since becoming wholly owned by Peel Holdings the airport has benefitted from major investment in upgrading buildings, improving ground conditions and the creation of a heliport at the western end of the site. The airport is home to about 100 light aircraft and there are about 48,000 aircraft movements a year. The site plan shows the 3 runways and the cluster of buildings which accommodate flying schools and other commercial operators. Through its operating company – City Airport Ltd – Peel Holdings is about to invest in a huge increase in the number of aircraft that can be provided with hangar space. The cleared site pictured with the soon-to-be-demolished Hangar 2 to the rear will be used to build a new hangar three times as large. A real investment in the future.

Although steadily growing as a base and destination for private and executive planes the greatest potential for growth is as a visitor attraction. The upgrading of the catering offer has been



**BELOW: The runways and buildings at the City Airport & Heliport. RIGHT: New for old: A hangar 3 times larger will replace Hangar 2 and also use the cleared site. ABOVE: Runway 26: a place for happy landings.**



achieved by creating 'Runway 26' which is well-worth a visit. With attractive cladding – as pictured – and a good range of food and drinks with a licenced bar it provides refreshments for pilots, visitors and many functions. Your columnist tested 'Runway 26' and can recommend it to you!

A successful visitor attraction depends upon activity.

The City Airport already offers much with the arrival and departure of planes and helicopters and training flights around the airport for new pilots. All can be seen from the Viewing Area – a pleasant grassed area with extensive seating. At a lower altitude a new climbing frame for children next to 'Runway 26' is imminent. This activity is always good on a sunny day but the big opportunities are provided by events. The airport operators are working hard at this. For details visit [www.visitcityairport.co.uk/events](http://www.visitcityairport.co.uk/events). The site is already known for monthly City Airport Car Boot events, a Pinked Floyd Tribute Show planned for August, an Autumn Aircraft Fly-In for September 23/24, Fireworks on Saturday November 4 and Children's Christmas Parties planned for December 3, 10 and 17. Additional non-flying events are planned and may include attractions such as Dog Shows, Music Shows and other community events.

The biggest opportunity has to be the Manchester Air Show. Last held at Barton in 2015 the Manchester Air Show –like all air shows - has been badly affected by the tragedy



**ABOVE: The viewing area on a quiet day. RIGHT: The Police Helicopter undertook 2,971 missions from Barton in just 12 months.**



at Shoreham when a vintage Hunter jet crashed with fatal results for many. As a result rules are being reviewed and tightened further. City Airport Ltd is aiming to organise a further Manchester Air Show in the hope that this can be held annually or every two years subject to the Civil Aviation Authority rule changes allowing. Such an event would be a major spectacle – as it was in 2015 – as the City Airport is much more local and accessible than other air show locations. It also upstages flying offshore at the seaside when all the activity is distant. This is an exciting prospect although

more car parking will be needed and better sight lines for joining the A57.

City Airport and Heliport is also the base for the National Police Air Service helicopter serving the north west – relocated from Warton - and two North West Air Ambulance helicopters. They have the use of 4 landing pads at the Heliport which is at the western end of the airport. This location enables the air ambulance and police helicopters to operate without disrupting any of the airports other movements. The National Police Air Service report that in



**ABOVE: A view across the City Airport.**  
**RIGHT: The southern elevation of the Pemberton Hangar with the Manchester City Coat of Arms.**



the 12 months to June 2017 the Barton-based helicopter assisted police forces with 2,971 tasks such as searching for missing people, vehicle pursuits, tracking and locating suspects and national responses to counter terrorism. The Heliport is also used by private helicopters and the airport is increasingly used by military helicopters which provide a dramatic sight for spectators. The Heliport Business Centre has been improved and is now fully let to aviation and other businesses.

The City Airport will soon be host to a further and much-needed activity. In 2015 Peel Holdings were approached by an organisation called 'Autocrowd' with a proposal to use the former Officer's Mess at the airport – a derelict building at the entrance – to create a 'Veteran's Garage' to rehabilitate veterans affected by combat stress. The project is charity and crowd funded to refurbish the building which has been leased to them for 15 years at a peppercorn or nominal rent with a likely extension to 30 years. The accommodation will comprise a vehicle garage, classrooms and restaurant. Activity will include the renovation of classic vehicles and help many ex-soldiers adjust to civilian life. More information can be found on [www.veteransgarage.co.uk](http://www.veteransgarage.co.uk)

The City Airport and Heliport is enjoying a steady increase in activity and income. Plans for the new and much larger hangar are well underway and should see the number of Barton-based aircraft increase by 25-30 producing yet more income from landing fees and the supply of fuel. This can then be reinvested into the runways and taxiways to improve their condition. The question asked by many is whether a concrete runway can replace the main grass runway. The answer is that the estimated cost is about £4.5million for the runway and associated infrastructure which is not economic for a small airport serving light aircraft. A more likely cost-effective

investment in the foreseeable future is the reinforcement of the grass runways with some kind of matting to stop the ground becoming soft and worn. Combined with the recent regrading work at the airport this could be very effective and successful.

Your columnist wishes the City Airport and Heliport increasing success and a higher profile in the future. To learn about both please visit [www.cityairportandheliport.com](http://www.cityairportandheliport.com)

**Andrew Harris ([www.andreweharris.co.uk](http://www.andreweharris.co.uk)) gratefully acknowledges the help provided by Tracy Williams and Mark Knowles of the City Airport and Heliport in the preparation of this article. The aerial picture and site layout are courtesy of City Airport Ltd; the police helicopter by NPAS; other pictures by your columnist. The planned article about Blackpool Airport was withdrawn at the request of the owner Balfour Beatty due to the company's plans for selling the airport.**

