

New Forest Airfields: **East Boldre**

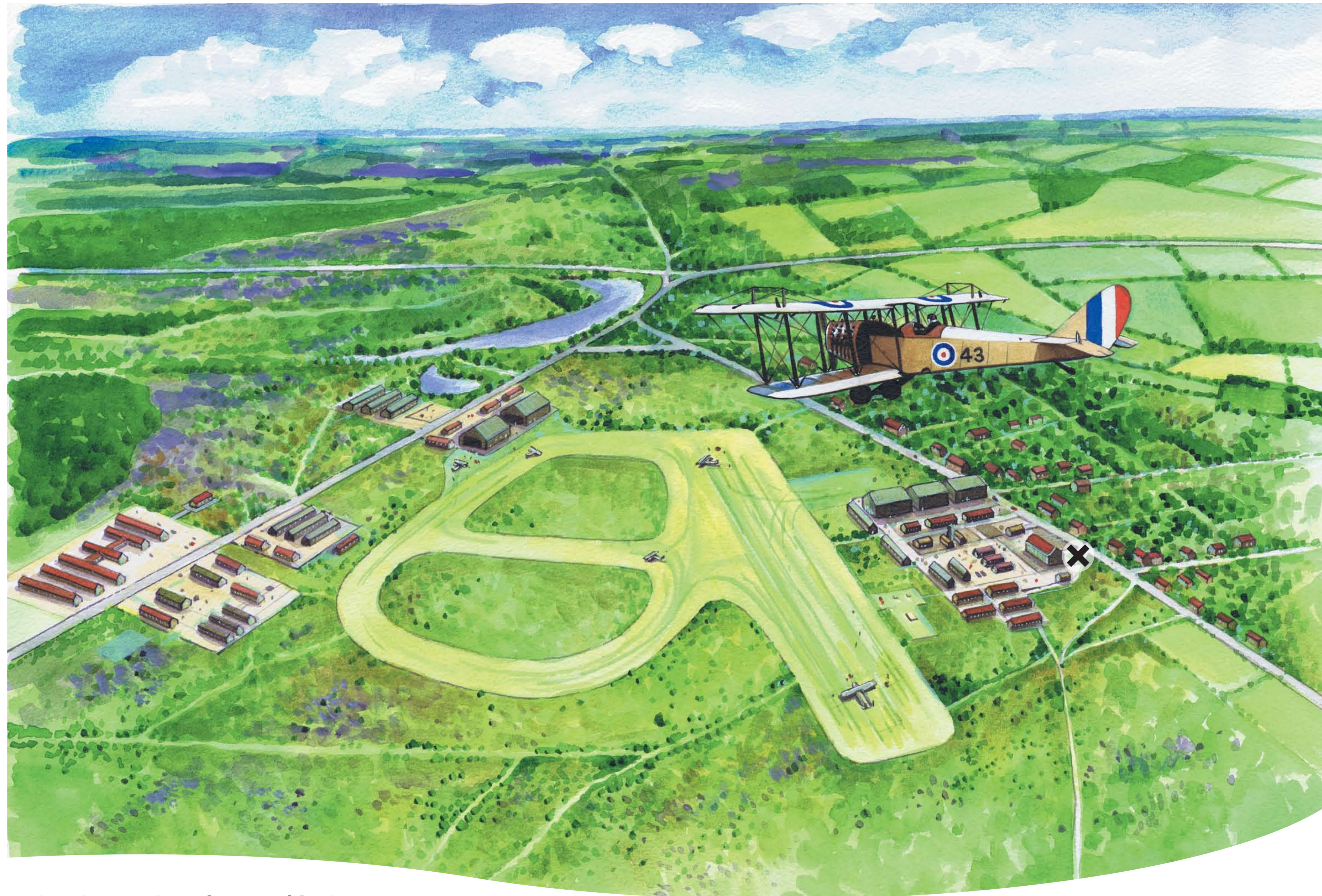
It's hard to imagine that the area around this village hall was one of the first airfields in Britain, used as a flying school and later as a training ground for the First World War.

The New Forest Flying School was started in 1910 by two aviation pioneers, William McArdle and the wealthy American John Armstrong Drexel. The runway was a strip of heath cleared of bushes and a flying course cost £80. Aircraft such as the Bleriot XI and the Farman biplane were flown here to the delight of the early pilots and no doubt wonder of the local people.

The school closed in 1912 but in 1915 the First World War prompted the Royal Flying Corps (now the R.A.F.) to take over the airfield for training pilots, ground crew and observers for the Western Front. Aircraft such as the Curtiss Jenny and Sopwith Dolphin were flown. This village hall was built in 1917 and was both an Officers' Mess and a YMCA.

In 1918 the airfield was enlarged again with accommodation buildings, aircraft hangars, officers' camp and separate camp for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force all built along the Lymington to Beaulieu road.

In 1919 flying ceased. The airfield was not used in the Second World War but a much larger base was built on nearby Beaulieu Heath. Between 1945 and 1950 the Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment used East Boldre as a parachute dropping zone.



The X on the illustration marks the position of this panel.

Artist's impression of East Boldre in 1918

Visit www.newforestnpa.gov.uk
to find out more.

With thanks to Alan Brown and the
Friends of the New Forest Airfields.

Illustration: Tim Bernhard
Design: Pangea Design | www.pangea-design.co.uk

