

The History of Lydd Airport

The Duke of Edinburgh officially opened Lydd airport on the 5th April 1956. It was the first new post WWII airport in the UK.

At this time, a decade or so before the era of mass vacation travel and as wartime frugality was becoming a thing of the past, vehicle air ferries were gaining popularity. Several entrepreneurs realised that converted wartime bombers could transport both vehicles and their owners to Northern France, where they could commence leisurely motoring vacations, and that flying them there would avoid a long wait for sea ferries.

Naturally these air-car ferries quickly became popular. One of the first pioneers was wing-walking commander Taffy Powell who set up Silver City Airways. On 7th July 1948, Taffy made the first British civilian flight carrying a car from Lympne to Le Touquet, thereby opening a fascinating and innovative new chapter in British aviation.

Silver City quickly became popular and it became apparent that a more suitable location needed to be found. Silver City quickly relocated to Lydd, which it called 'Ferryfield' airport basing its fleet of Bristol 170's there.

Between 1953 and 1957, 137,000 cars and half a million passengers flew with Silver City out of Lydd on their European adventures, making it one of the busiest airports in Britain.

Transporting cars by air soon became unattractive when rapid cross channel hovercraft services, in addition to competitive roll on – roll off sea ferries rendered airfreight between the UK and France uneconomic. The last Bristol Freighter flew from Lydd in 1970.

Over the last three decades the airport has enjoyed mixed fortunes under various owners, principally as a General Aviation airport, for which it has built up a strong reputation. LAA has carried on its excellent tradition of catering for private and business aircraft.

Over time Lydd's significance faded. But we've come full circle and air travellers are again looking for the local airport with the local touch. The expansion proposals came just at the right time to tap into a growing market.