

# RAF Hospital in Ely



## Why do we have an RAF Hospital?

In the late 1930s, with the threat of War once again looming, the Royal Air Force was looking for more sites to build new airfields. With good areas of flat ground and its relatively close location to the Continent, East Anglia was a logical choice and soon new airfields were being planned. and built there.



These bases needed a complex network of supply depots and support facilities, including hospitals equipped with the latest medical technology. In 1936, as it was quite central to many of the planned airfields, Ely was selected as the site of one of two new RAF Hospitals.

Over the next couple of years the planned hospital was enlarged and by the time war broke out in September 1939 construction was well underway.

The Ely RAF Hospital was finally ready and officially opened in July 1940. As the War progressed and the RAF continued to grow, with more airfields and many more aircraft flying from East Anglia, the Ely Hospital needed to grow as well and by the summer of 1943 the number of beds had increased from 230 to over 500.



When the Second World War finally ended in September 1945 the RAF began closing many wartime airfields and facilities, but with its modern equipment and good location the Ely Hospital, or RAF Ely as it was known, was kept on. For over 50 years the hospital treated countless members of the RAF, and the public, as well as being an important training facility for medical personnel.



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Alongside the patients serving in the RAF and their families, the hospital also treated many local civilians, especially those needing emergency treatment. The number of local people treated at Ely varied, depending on how busy they were with patients from the RAF.

In 1959, for example, it was reported that over the last year RAF Ely had treated more civilians than any other RAF Hospital, having treated nearly 1000 local civilians!

In 1987, RAF Ely was renamed The Princess of Wales Royal Air Force Hospital, Ely; however the RAF was now a very different organisation from the one it was when the hospital had first opened in the 40s. In 1992, with far fewer airfields, planes and personnel in the area, the RAF closed the hospital, but after much work by local groups the facility was taken over by a local NHS Trust as a hospital, replacing their smaller facility in Ely known as the Tower Hospital.



Since it was first planned, RAF Ely has had a big impact on the city of Ely - from the initial money and employment from the construction, to the thousands of staff it has brought into the area over the years it was open.

It has also provided care and medical treatment for thousands of local people who otherwise would have had to travel to Addenbrooks or further and now, even though the RAF is no longer there, it continues to look after the residents of our ever growing city.



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## Royal Visitors



The out-patient and casualty departments at the hospital were opened by the Princess Royal in April 1963

Princess Alexandra, who is Patron of several medical research charities and Patron of the Florence Nightingale Foundation, which provides scholarships for nurses, midwives and health visitors, visited the hospital in May 1971.



Following a visit to the hospital in July 1987 by Diana, the Princess of Wales, the hospital was renamed the 'Princess of Wales Royal Air Force Hospital'