

Newcastle International Airport

Newcastle Airport started life in 1935 as a grass strip runway and wooden terminal building, but in 1952 began expanding rapidly. It never stopped.

From 5,500 passengers a year and a handful of destination, to over 5 million and a global reach of around 80 locations, we chart the airport's phenomenal growth to become one of the UK's major international airports.





Beginnings

In July 1935, the local authority of the City and County of Newcastle took over the aerodrome at Woolsington in Northumberland from the Newcastle Aero Club. It was given a licence to operate as the Woolsington Municipal Airport and initially managed by the club. The initial cost was £35,000.

At the time the ‘airport’ was a wooden club house, a grass runway, a hangar and a garage. The first scheduled service, operated by North Eastern Airlines, was between Croydon and Perth, stopping at Newcastle. In July 1937, the first overseas service was introduced to Stavanger in Norway, by Allied Airlines. However this was halted by World War II when the Air Ministry took over the airport for the Royal Air Force, returning it in 1947.

A pivotal moment came in 1952 with the appointment of Jim Denyer as Airport Manager. He was instrumental over the next 37 years in moving the airport towards what it is today. At that time there were flights to London, Northern Ireland, Dublin, Amsterdam and Dusseldorf carrying 5,500 passengers per year. Package holiday flights

to the Isle of Man, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands began and in 1954 there were 35 flights per week with passenger numbers increasing to 43,000 per year.

Passenger numbers reached 100,000 in 1960 but the airport was still operated from wooden huts. There was no Customs desk and buses and taxis dropped people at the edge of the runway.

The Airport Takes Off

By 1963, £4m had been spent on further development. This was without any government assistance but, in the same year, sensing the airport's potential, the North East Regional Airport Committee was set up. It





comprised the seven local authorities at the time: the five county boroughs of Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, South Shields and Tynemouth, and the two county councils of Northumberland and Durham. In 1974, the Newcastle boroughs were replaced on the Airport Committee by Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County Council.

In the mid 1960s the Committee doggedly worked to remove the corrugated tin roof image, overseeing an ambitious programme of a longer runway, new control tower, cargo buildings and car parking. They were completed in 1966 at a cost of £2m. A new £2.5m modern terminal, opened by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1967, completed the transformation to a regional airport.

The increase in sunshine holidays, mainly to Spain, saw passenger numbers grow rapidly to 400,000 by 1970. In response the improvement of facilities continued with more car parks, standing areas for aircraft and an extension of the terminal building at a cost of £4.5m. Jet travel was introduced by package holiday firms such as Thompson, Horizon, Global, Wings and Airtours, some having their own airlines.

Matters were still very different from today, for example the runway was actually open to curious motorists and even cyclists. The majority of airports in the UK were still municipal, i.e. controlled by local authorities, but they were increasingly concerned at the cost of

extensions to runways and terminal facilities. Locally there was competition between Newcastle and Teesside airports as to which should be recognised as the regional airport.

In 1978 a Government White Paper proposed that Newcastle receive backing and be appointed as a Category B Regional Airport to handle short and medium-haul scheduled international services. Passenger numbers of 1million per year were reached in 1980 and 1.25million in 1985, with 21,000 aircraft movements. In 1984, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines became the first foreign carrier to operate scheduled flights out of Newcastle. This was followed in 1987 by a service to Toronto, Canada by Wairdair, using a Boeing 747 Jumbo jet.



NEWCASTLE AIRPORT

Significant operational changes were affecting the airport from 1985. The Airports Act required it to become a stand-alone company, which began trading on 1st April 1987 although still under overall local authority ownership.

With continued growth, a new £2.8m parallel taxiway was built alongside the 2,300m long runway, with Jim Denyer piloting the first aircraft to use it on his last day of service in 1989. Passenger numbers increased to 2million by 1991 and, in that same year, the Metro system was extended to serve the airport. On its opening day, 10,000 people used it to visit the airport as the North East's newest tourist attraction. Having financially contributed to extending the Metro, it proved an important investment for the airport in attracting new airlines.

In 1992 a new modern fire-station was completed at a cost of £1.7m and in 1994, a further improvement to the terminal building (£5.7m) was unveiled by Princess Anne, along with an increase in parking spaces from 1,800 to 4,200. The same year saw completion of the freight village to the south of the airport (£4.5m).

Passenger numbers reached 3million in 2000 with 32 airlines serving 20 destinations. A major extension to the passenger terminal, costing £27m, was opened in October of that year by Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Access was now available to the major hubs of Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris as well as Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. The airport's reach stretched from Edinburgh to North Yorkshire and directly provided 3,300 jobs from 69 companies.

Despite the growing success, Newcastle Airport actually ran at a loss every year to 1979, being subsidised by the local authorities to support regional development. The change of emphasis to a more commercial approach started with airport fees (to airlines) becoming more



competitive (i.e. not subsidised). Another major step was taking duty-free sales into airport control – the forerunner of today’s commercial activities. Direct employment increased, as did profits, which supported the services of the local authority owners.

Going International

Throughout the 1990s, pressure was exerted by Government to privatise the municipal airports. Many perceived it as a quick debt reduction scheme. Newcastle Airport continued to provide dividends to its local authority owners and reinvested profits. In 1997, Government allowed airports to borrow money as any other commercial company and, subsequently, in 2001, the local authorities realised a significant capital gain of £195m by selling 49% of ownership to Copenhagen Airports. The airport management was streamlined and, for the first time, run as a truly commercial venture, with the local authorities sharing in its success under a 50-50 partnership with Copenhagen Airports, which has a 15 year contract for technical and administration services including operations, terminal planning, runway surfaces and security.

Newcastle joined the low-cost flight revolution in earnest in 2003, with the introduction of easyJet, who took over the operation of Go, formerly British Airways' low-cost carrier. The same year saw the dawn of 'Newcastle International Airport'. Emirates Airlines began direct flights to Dubai in 2007, giving connections to over 100 long distance destinations.

Emirates Airlines sponsored the new £8.2m 45m high control tower in 2007, one of the most modern high-technology towers in the UK. The money raised is used to train air traffic controllers locally, and the Newcastle Aviation Academy, a partnership of the airport with Newcastle College and Kingston University, provides courses in aerospace and allied engineering, as well as cabin crew training.

By the mid-2000s, passenger numbers reached 5 million to 86 destinations and work on a new business park and 4-star hotel started.



A state-of-the-art Instrument Landing System was introduced in 2009 to assist poor visibility landings. This proved crucial in maintaining 97% of operations during the severe winter of 2009/10 and having a punctuality rate of 80% - the highest of any UK airport. A £4.3m scheme to resurface the whole runway illustrated the continuing cost of keeping the airport as a high standard facility.

Newcastle International Airport is now a major transportation facility in the North East. From flag carriers, such as British Airways and KLM to low-cost and charter airlines, it has expanded into a truly global operation.

The airport's success has been helped by its transport links. From the direct connection to Newcastle city centre and the rail network, via the Metro, to the dual carriageway link to the A1 Trunk Road, its accessibility has maintained its strong regional ties.

It has been a major element of the North East economy for over 75 years and can look forward to even greater achievements in the future.

More information on the airport can be found at www.newcastleairport.com

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