



Located deep in the Lincolnshire countryside, the hospital was an obvious choice for the RAF following the breakout of the Second World War.

In 1940, the Admissions Hospital - now Orchard House - was taken over for use by the RAF in April, with nursing staff supplied by the local Red Cross Society. On 20th June, the rest of the hospital was evacuated, with 523 patients, their beds and belongings all moved out to other areas of the Midlands within 48 hours.

Renamed RAF Rauceby, it quickly became one of the main RAF hospitals in the country, due to its locality within easy reach of many bomber and maintenance stations. The main hospital was designated for general purposes, with two verandas set aside as isolation units for increasing numbers of tuberculosis patients, while the Admissions Hospital served as a burns and orthopaedic unit.

At the height of the war, 1,000 beds were in use at Rauceby, with an additional 1,000 stored in case of invasion. Figures from the Air Historical branch of the RAF reveal 1943 to be Rauceby's busiest during the war years, with a total of 5,337 admissions and 18,650 outpatients during the course of the year. These numbers included Britain's service personnel, as well as those from as far away as America, Australia and South Africa.

The RAF Years

1939 – 1945



PIONEERING PLASTIC SURGERY

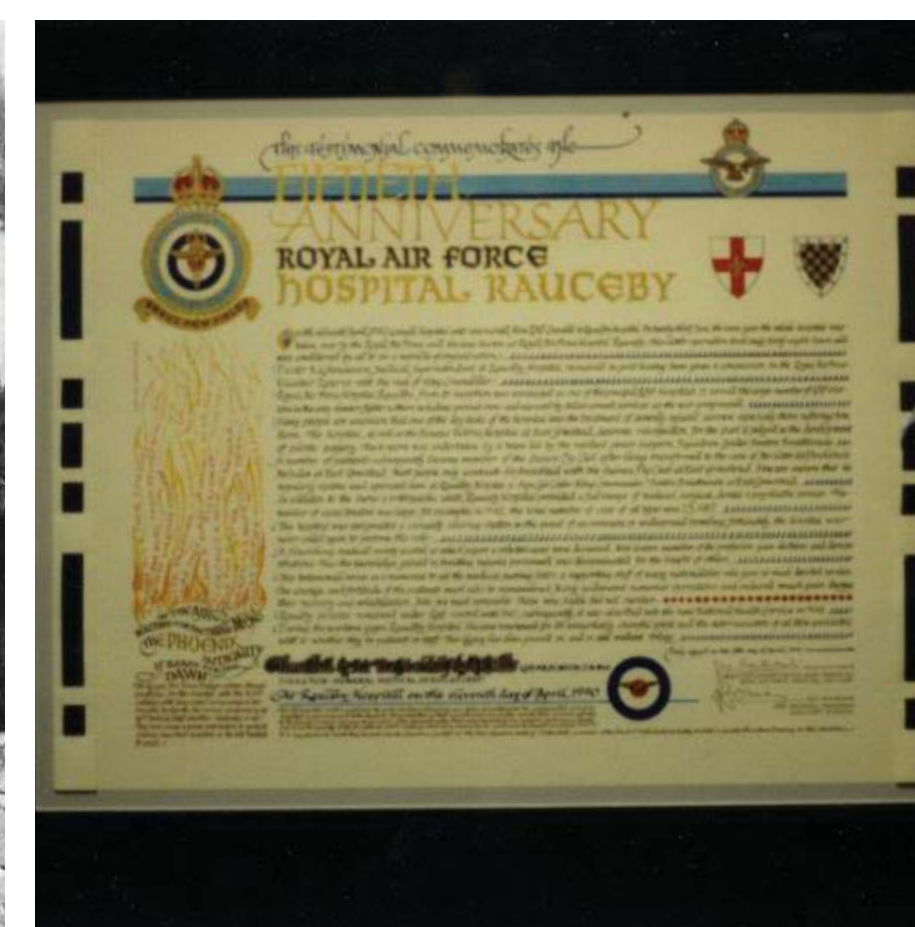
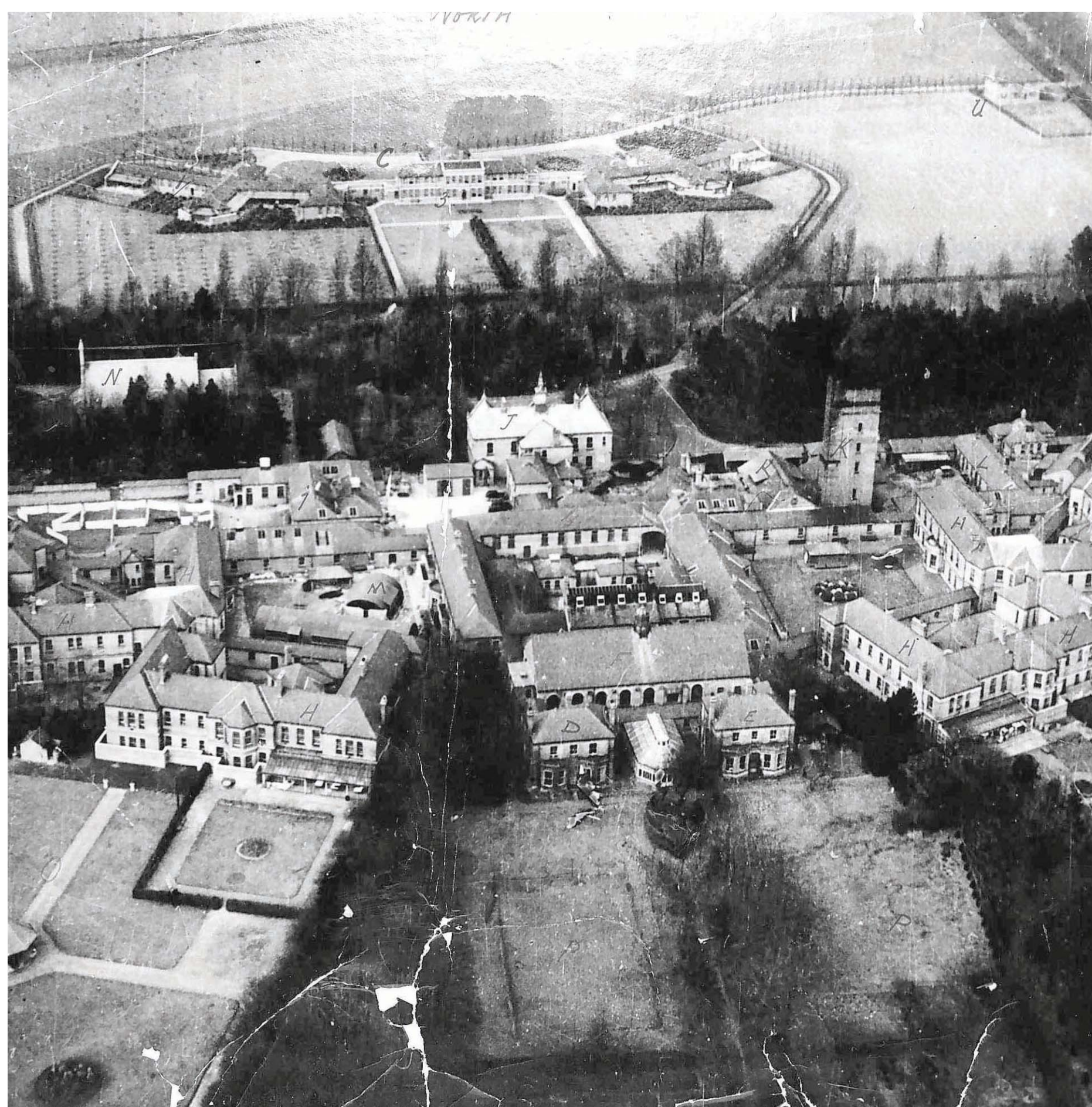
As a result of air warfare, many servicemen suffered serious burns, leaving them seriously disfigured and in great pain. The specialist Crash and Burns Unit set up at Rauceby proved to be pioneering, with resident plastic surgeon, Squadron Leader Fenton Braithwaite, and renowned plastic surgery specialist, Archibald McIndoe – later Sir Archibald – helping to rebuild the lives of those injured, despite the lack of sophisticated instruments and medication. As surgery of this kind was still in its infancy, many of the challenges they faced were completely new, leading patients who underwent reconstructive surgery at the hands of Sir Archibald to form a drinking club named the Guinea Pig Club. The skills of these outstanding surgeons can still be seen today, as the instruments they designed to improve treatments are still widely in use.

THE DAMBUSTERS

The decimation of German dams at the hands of the Dambusters – No. 617 Squadron of the Royal Airforce – is one of the Second World War's most famous success stories. Following the mission, three of the squadron's living legends were treated at RAF Rauceby: Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC, Flight Lieutenant REG Hutchinson DFC and Flight Sergeant John Hannah, who was awarded the Victoria Cross at the age of 18.

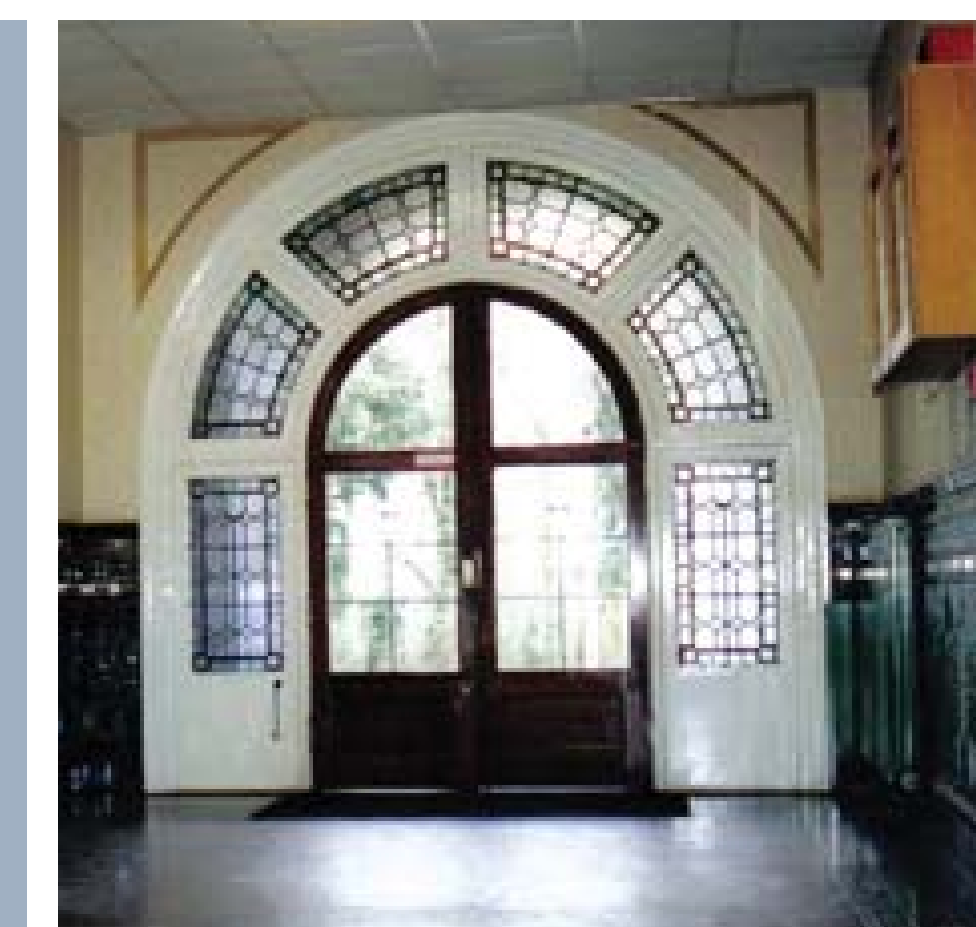
ENTERTAINING THE TROOPS

Keeping spirits high, a roll call of well-known names from the 30s and 40s visited RAF Rauceby during the wars years. With Elsie and Doris Waters, Stainless Stephen and Pat Kirkwood all providing entertainment for patients, Sunday evenings quickly became a highlight of life at the hospital. The hospital also had own band, The Medicos.



COMMEMORATION

On 8th May 1995, the 50th anniversary of VE Day, a plaque commemorating RAF Rauceby and the Crash and Burns Unit's contribution to the Second World War was unveiled by Theatre Nurse Corporal WAAF, Mrs Maggie Masters. After the closure of Orchard House in 2011, this plaque was loaned to David Wilson Homes and is now on display opposite; to further commemorate the brave patients and staff of Royal Air Force Hospital Rauceby.



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