



**A SHORT HISTORY OF
No.11 BALLOON CENTRE AT
PUCKLECHURCH 1939 to 1945
and
R.A.F. STATION PUCKLECHURCH 1945
to 1959**



John Penny

A Brief Chronology

09/08/1939 - Opened as No.11 Balloon Centre.

22/04/1945 - Became a sub-site of No.7 Maintenance Unit, Quedgeley nr. Gloucester for storage.

19/07/1945 - Became No.251 Maintenance Unit (Mechanical Storage).

25/02/1947 - Became No.22 Reserve Centre (Recruiting & Training personnel for RAFVR).

15/01/1951 - No.2 Ground Radio Servicing Squadron formed at Pucklechurch.

16/06/1952 - No.62(Southern) Reserve Group HQ established at Pucklechurch.

16/06/1952 - Station re-named RAF Pucklechurch.

08/10/1952 - No.22 Reserve Centre became No.62(S) Group Combined Reserve Centre.

01/10/1956 - No.62(S) Group Combined Reserve Centre moved to Barnwood, Gloucester.

02/07/1957 - Language School (Russian Element) from Wythall, Worcestershire, to Pucklechurch

25/09/1958 - Unit badge presented to RAF Pucklechurch.

28/10/1958 - No.7 MU sub-site vacated.

30/11/1958 - No.2 Ground Radio Servicing Squadron moved to Tangmere, West Sussex.

11/09/1959 - Language School transferred to Tangmere, West Sussex.

31/12/1959 - Pucklechurch reduced to inactivity basis.

23/03/1961 - Disposal of Pucklechurch RAF station temporarily suspended.

26/09/1962 - Western part of site transferred to HM Prison Service to build a Remand Centre.

RAF PUCKLECHURCH 1945 to 1962

The days of No.11 Balloon Centre were now numbered, and accordingly on March 15th 1945 RAF Filton took over 'Parent Unit' responsibility in connection with the Bristol University Air Squadron. The demise of the Balloon Centre finally came at 00.01 hrs on April 22nd when the station transferred to Maintenance Command, the administration of the Pucklechurch site passing to No.7 Maintenance Unit at Quedgeley, near Gloucester.

The station vacated was then earmarked as one of the centres for controlling and supervising demobilisation, and for post-war use as a sub-storage site for balloon equipment. Meanwhile

No.63 MTRU on the site continued to function, its motor transport repair personnel still being accommodated and messed at Pucklechurch.

During May 1945, No.7 MU carried out a survey of lands at Pucklechurch with the assistance of Mr.Hobson, Land Officer, No.12 Works Area. The resulting plan (Works Area Drawing No. BC 392) was to provide the majority of the information for the final Record Site Plan prepared for the Air Ministry's Directorate General of Works in October 1945 (see appendix). The Directorate General was a technical branch of the Civil Service staffed by civilians, and was responsible for supplying installations in accordance with the RAF's operational requirements.

No.7 MU were not, however, to remain in control of Pucklechurch for very long, for on July 19th 1945 the site was re-designated No.251 MU. At the time of change-over No.7 MU transferred 21 RAF and 20 WAAF 'other ranks', mostly police, cooks, and fire fighters to 251 MU, while a further 29 RAF 'other ranks' were temporarily attached from No.7 MU to look after the balloon equipment still stored on site.

On August 1st No.251 MU became fully self-accounting, and work went ahead to build up the formation as a Mechanical Storage Unit under the command of Squadron Leader F.H.Farthing. They were ready to accept their first vehicles on August 22nd, and by the end of the month had 9 Officers (including 2 WAAF's) and 243 'other ranks' (including 34 WAAF's) on their strength. No. 251 MU continued as a MT Store until December 31st 1946 when all its operations were taken over by No.7 MU at Quedgeley.

The station was now turned into an instructional facility, and on February 25th 1947 was re-named No.22 Reserve Centre, officially transferring to 62(Southern) Group, Reserve Command, which also controlled the nearby Filton airfield. A detachment from No.7 MU, however, still occupied a number of buildings at Pucklechurch, including the Balloon Sheds. The following month the Bristol Aeroplane Company also acquired some space on the site for use as a temporary storage facility.

December 12th saw 'D' Squadron RAF Police Training Wing take over a number of buildings at Pucklechurch, and on February 16th 1948 recruiting for Volunteer Reserve pilots started, with flying training scheduled to commence on April 1st. This was to be carried out in conjunction with No.12 Reserve Flying School which opened that day equipped with Tiger Moths and Ansons. The school was operated by the Bristol Aeroplane Company from its airfield at Filton, under a contract specially negotiated with the Air Ministry.

At the end of December 1949 the training of the volunteer airmen was being undertaken between 19.00 and 21.00 hrs every Thursday and Friday evening, and on the first and third weekend of each month; while in March 1950 No.22 Reserve Centre, with a staff of 7 officers and 74 'other ranks', reported 294 volunteers under training.

Consequent upon the decentralisation of the radio servicing commitment of the Radio Engineering Unit at Henlow, No.2 Ground Radio Servicing Squadron was formed at Pucklechurch on January 15th 1951. Its main duty was to provide third line servicing of telecommunicatons equipment, navigational aids and radar installations in South West England and South Wales, and as such formed part of No.90(Signals) Group.

On June 16th 1952 a major re-organisation took place at Pucklechurch. The Administration and Air Branches of No.62(S) Reserve Group HQ transferred to the site, while the station was officially renamed RAF Pucklechurch, No.22 Reserve Centre being re-classified as a section of the station establishment, along with the other lodger units, No.2 GRSS, and the No.7 MU detachment, which was to retain its sub-site presence until the Pucklechurch site closed.

A further re-organisation took place on December 8th 1952 when No.22 and No.27 Reserve Centres were both closed. At Pucklechurch a new No.62(Southern) Group Combined Reserve Centre was opened to replace them, and all the personnel of the old No.22 RC were transferred to the new formation.

The requirements of the RAF Reserve were now becoming less, and on March 31st 1953, No.12 RFS at Filton closed, but at Pucklechurch life went on as normal, interrupted only in May 1956, by the arrival for a short stay of No.7847 Reserve Flight, under the command of No.62(S) (Reserve) Group.

On October 1st 1956, HQ No.62(S) Group and No.62(S) GCRC, transferred operations to the RAF Records Office at Barnwood, Gloucester. Pucklechurch, however, still had No.2 GRSS and the No.7 MU sub-site located on the station, while it retained 'parental' responsibilities for the motor transport unit No.61(Southern) Group M.TR & S, a Mobile Glider Servicing Unit and an Armament Servicing Party also located on the camp, as well as for No.36 Recruiting Centre in Bristol.

January 14th 1957 saw Pucklechurch temporarily transfer to HQ 61(Southern) Group pending disbandment of HQ No.62(Southern) Group and the transfer of responsibility for the camp to HQ No.90(Signals) Group which took place on February 1st. Late March saw the start of the move of the Language Training Unit from RAF Wythall in Worcestershire to their new home at Pucklechurch.

RAF Filton now closed, the facility being reduced to Care & Maintenance on April 15th 1957, and from that date, and for the next few years, RAF Pucklechurch assumed 'Parent Unit' responsibility for the inactive site. A little later, on May 1st No.61(Southern) Group M.TR & S disbanded at Pucklechurch.

Following of the conversion of various buildings at Pucklechurch to provide classroom and School Radio Workshop accommodation, the Russian Element transferred to the Language School on July 2nd 1957, and two days later training began. This was followed in October by the arrival of the Chinese Course.

In July 1958 a unit badge was finally approved for RAF Pucklechurch. It consisted of a Hind's Head in the foreground, with an open book behind, and the motto "Alert". The hind was a reference to the fact that the site was part of what was once a famous deer park, used as a hunting ground by the Saxon kings, while the book refers to the station's work as a language training centre. On September 25th the badge was officially presented to the C.O. by Air Vice Marshall L.Dalton-Morris C.B. C.B.E. who stated that the motto well described the work carried out during the War, when Pucklechurch was a Balloon Centre.

In the meantime it had been announced that RAF Pucklechurch was to close within a year, and the run-down started at once. The long established No.7 MU sub-site was the first to go, housed in a Balloon Hanger and Winch & Trailer Shed it departed on October 28th, the buildings being officially handed back to the unit on November 3rd.

No.2 GRSS was the next to leave, officially vacating the station at 23.59 hrs on November 30th 1958 when they re-located to Tangmere in West Sussex, the buildings being handed over on December 3rd.

In February 1959 the School Radio Workshops were moved from building B66 to the Radio Workshop in B9, which then housed the Station Signals Officer. Buildings 20, 25, 26, 27, 66, 82, 86 and 87 were then vacated and locked, responsibility for them passing to No.6 Works Area at Exeter.

During the Summer of 1959 the run-down continued and on June 9th responsibility for No.36 Recruiting Centre transferred to RAF Rudloe Manor, near Box in Wiltshire. A little later in the month, on the 23rd, Pucklechurch relinquished its 'Parent Unit' responsibilities for the old RAF facilities at Filton, RAF Colerne taking on this task.

The last unit to leave Pucklechurch was the Language School, the Royal Naval Detachment transferring to a new home at Tangmere in West Sussex on June 26th. The final departure, however, took place on September 11th when language teaching finally ended at Pucklechurch, No.8 Course resuming at Tangmere on the 21st.

September 14th 1959 saw the unit reduced to a Closing Down Party, and on the 17th all living personnel moved from their billets to the Station Sick Quarters, enabling most of the buildings to be handed over to the Air Ministry Works Department. As a result on October 1st RAF Colerne took over responsibility for the inspection and maintenance of fire precautions at Pucklechurch.

The end came in December, for on the 4th the site closed as a Signals Command Unit, and on the 31st the station was reduced to an inactivity basis. Following the closure of Pucklechurch the Air Ministry started the process of disposal, but due to an increase in East-West tension this was temporarily suspended in March 1961.

The reprieve, however, did not last long as on September 26th 1962 the western side of the site was transferred from the Ministry of Defence to HM Prison Service who were soon to construct a Remand Centre there, the first phase of which was brought into use in 1965. A second phase was completed in 1978, adding more living accommodation, an education centre, workshop and sports hall. The rest of the old RAF Pucklechurch is today used as an industrial estate where the three original Squadron Offices and Fabric Shops still survive.