

A family enjoys the challenge of being a radar operator

A radar station, which helped win the Battle of Britain in the Second World War, reopens on Friday after a restoration made possible by National Lottery players.

On 24 September 1937, RAF Bawdsey became the first fully operational radar station in the world. The transmitter block acted as an early warning air defence system throughout the Second World War and continued to offer protection during the Cold War.

After the site was closed in 1991, the block fell into disrepair and was listed as ‘at risk’. Now, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, the building has been restored and a new visitor centre created to help more people explore the stories of this pioneering military centre.

Its pivotal role in saving Britain

A grant of £1.4million enabled the Bawdsey Radar Trust to share the site’s pivotal role in saving Britain from defeat and occupation. Radar technology gave the RAF an advantage in the Battle of Britain in 1940, allowing 640 Hurricanes and Spitfires to overcome 2,600 Luftwaffe planes.

[quote]“Now visitors can walk around the radar transmitter block and experience life on the front line. A big thank you to all National Lottery players for bringing this unique building back to life."[/quote]

One of only a handful of wartime structures to survive, the Grade II* listed transmitter block has been restored and updated with new, modern facilities. Visitors can learn the story of radar development and try their hand at being a radar operator through interactive displays.

Graham Randall of the Bawdsey Radar Trust, said: “Now visitors can walk around the radar transmitter block and experience life on the front line. A big thank you to all National Lottery players for bringing this unique building back to life and being able to share the global story of radar from the 1930s to the present day.”

Setting pioneering new standards

The restoration project captured the memories of former workers at the transmitter block. Radar operators at RAF Bawdsey were expected to maintain levels of secrecy similar to those at Bletchley Park. The base was also significant as the first place in the British Armed Forces where women lived and worked alongside men.

Bawdsey became a template for the other radar sites, and was the first of a chain of radar stations around the east and south coast, known as Chain Home. We can see the legacy of the pioneering work begun by Robert Watson-Watts in inventions such as GPS, weather forecasting and, of course, the microwave oven.

Plan your visit and find out more on the Bawdsey Radar website.



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