



# **The Hangars at Rochester Airport**

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## The Factory Hangars

In early 1934 Short Brothers laid the foundations for the first Hangars on the North end of the site but even so the construction of the two L17 aircraft 'Scylla' and 'Syrinx' had to be carried out in the open. Fig 1 shows a Shorts Scion with 'Scylla' being constructed with the steel work of the new shed going up beside it during the winter of 1933-4.

Local RAeS records allege that these Hangars were acquired from Cardington and were then reassembled at Rochester Airport by Redpath Brown (now part of Tata Steel). The design was said to be a twin, black apex roof pair. The story cannot be proven and the only link to Cardington is that Short Brothers originally established the Cardington site to build Airships and of course later built the factory at Rochester Airport. In addition, correspondence with the Airship Heritage Trust at Cardington gave the following response: "I can say though that with the sheds I know of at Cardington, there was nothing moved from the site, and also there were no other sheds, other than the two existing sheds, which are still there today, and far larger." A local Historian, Jim Preston, also states categorically that "I have heard this story, but there appears to be no documentary evidence to support it. By the way I have heard this for the Esplanade factory also. I think a lot of rubbish has resulted from myths. They certainly were not from Cardington, a story that probably is a mix up because Shorts built R31 and R32. The 1934 building has nothing to do with Kingsnorth." The Medway Archives do have a Building Application in their records for a 'Steel Structural Building' on Rochester Airport dated July 1934. The first Hangars are indeed apex roofed and are the two on the North side but it would appear that they did not come from Cardington or Kingsnorth. Redpath Brown records are held at Glasgow University and it is perfectly possible that they built the Hangar as new, but so far, the University has not been able to find any evidence of this.

In 1938 the looming threat of WWII saw massive expansion at Rochester Airport. Fig. 2 shows the construction of the low-level factory extension and the area in the foreground for the new 25' Hangar (apparently the Hangars are so-called by a measure of the height from the first-floor ceiling to the eaves). The Blueprint in Fig 3. is dated 1938 and shows the first two Hangars in place and they appear to have an apex (pitched) roof. The low-level extension and the 40' Hangar both appear to have been completed by 1938 (if the date on the old pictures is meaningful) and the 25' Hangar filled in the gap. (See Fig. 4.) It seems that it was this 25' Hangar construction that gave rise to the story that in June 1940 Stirling Bombers were being built inside it while it was being put up.

The local RAeS records again have the story is that the Hangar with the curved roof came from the Kingsnorth (Hoo) Royal Naval Airship Station. Again, the story is that this long Airship Hangar was basically reassembled in two halves side by side backing on to the South side of the 'Black Shed' apex roofed Hangar.

However, the curved roof Hangar at Kingsnorth was a German 'Parseval' shed dating from 1914 and it was constructed of wood, so it was not this one that was moved to Rochester.

The pitched roof Hangar at Kingsnorth was from Hill and Smith Ltd Constructional Engineers of Brierley Hill in Staffordshire. It was of steel construction some 555ft long by 109ft wide and 100ft high constructed with over 3000 tons of steel. Newspapers of mid-1938 to 1939 show this being slowly pulled down by an Erith scrap company called Mayer Newman who had acquired it. The Medway Archives do have a Building Application in their records for a 'Flight Shed' on Rochester Airport dated July 1939. However, the 40' Hangar at Rochester would appear to have been in place before the Kingsnorth one was demolished so it seems that this Hangar was probably also constructed as new.

Figs 5 & 6 show the Rochester Factory Hangars in 1967 and in the 1980s.

Fig. 7. Is an odd picture of the site around 1954 as it shows the Medway College to the East. Most of the buildings are camouflaged except for the low-level extensions which look like an artists

impression! Fig. 8. Shows an early picture c.1917 of Kingsnorth Air Station with the steel and wooden sheds and Fig. 9 & 10 are of the steel shed there being demolished in 1939. Fig.11. shows the Barn at St Mary, Hoo, purported to be the top third of one of the Kingsnorth Sheds.

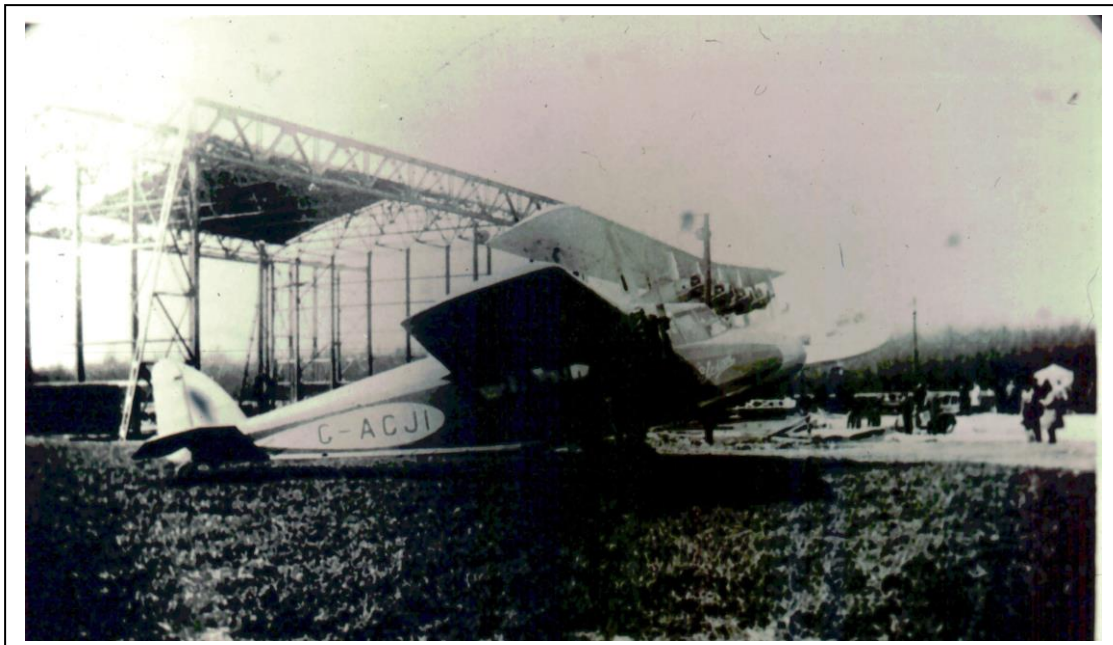
### **The Airport Hangars**

The Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VIII) briefly visited Rochester Airport in June 1934 on his way to Maidstone and he returned in June 1935 to formally open the Airport.

In 1938 The No. 1 Hangar was built at the South end of the Airport and by early 1939 No. 2 Hangar was also completed at the South; both were paid for by Short Brothers but were for the future use of the RAF and Navy student pilots.

The Air Ministry decided that two more Hangars should be provided for twin engine aircraft training so in 1939 the No.3 Hangar was built and this is still the present Flying Club Hangar. It is believed to be an ex-Admiralty Seaplane F Type hangar taken out of storage for the expansion plans of this period for extra training facilities.

It is believed that the first No.4 was built in mid to late 1939 and dismantled by July 1940. This Hangar was replaced by the small Blister Type hangar which collapsed in 1987 due to the weight of snow that winter.



**Fig.1** This 1934 picture shows a Short Scion in the foreground and ‘Scylla’ being constructed at the same time as the first Hangar is being built beside it.

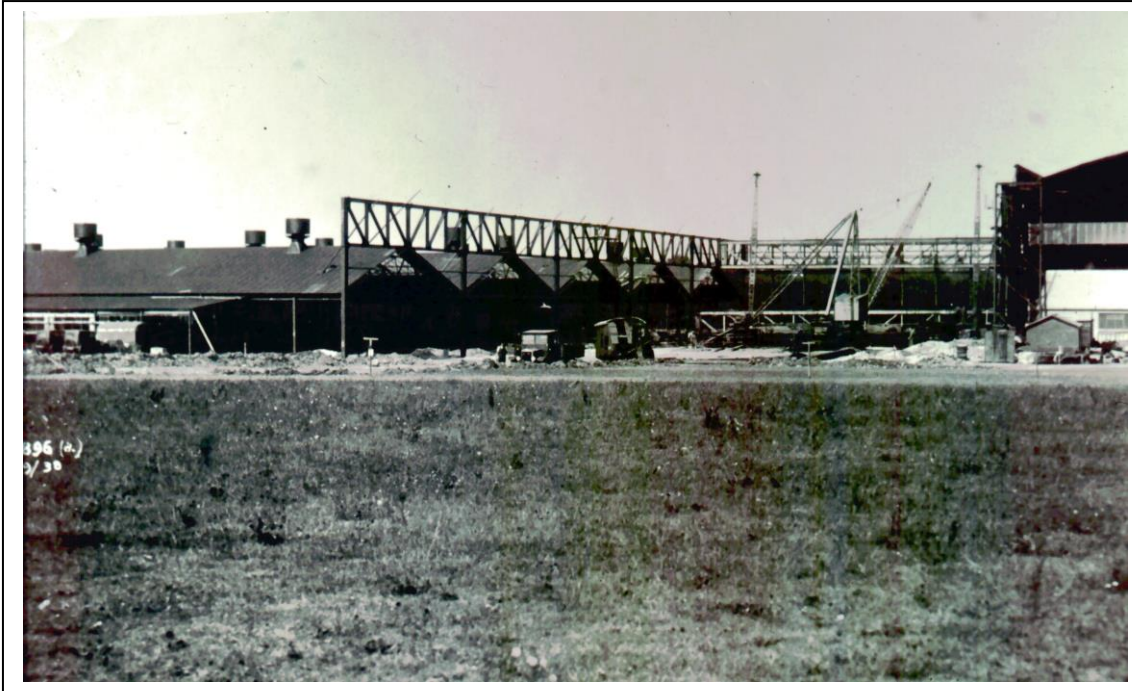


**Fig. 2.** This picture is looking East in 1938 showing the extensions being built for construction of Stirling Bombers and in the foreground the foundations for the 25' Hangar.



**Fig. 3.** A Blueprint of the first two Hangars at Rochester dated 1938





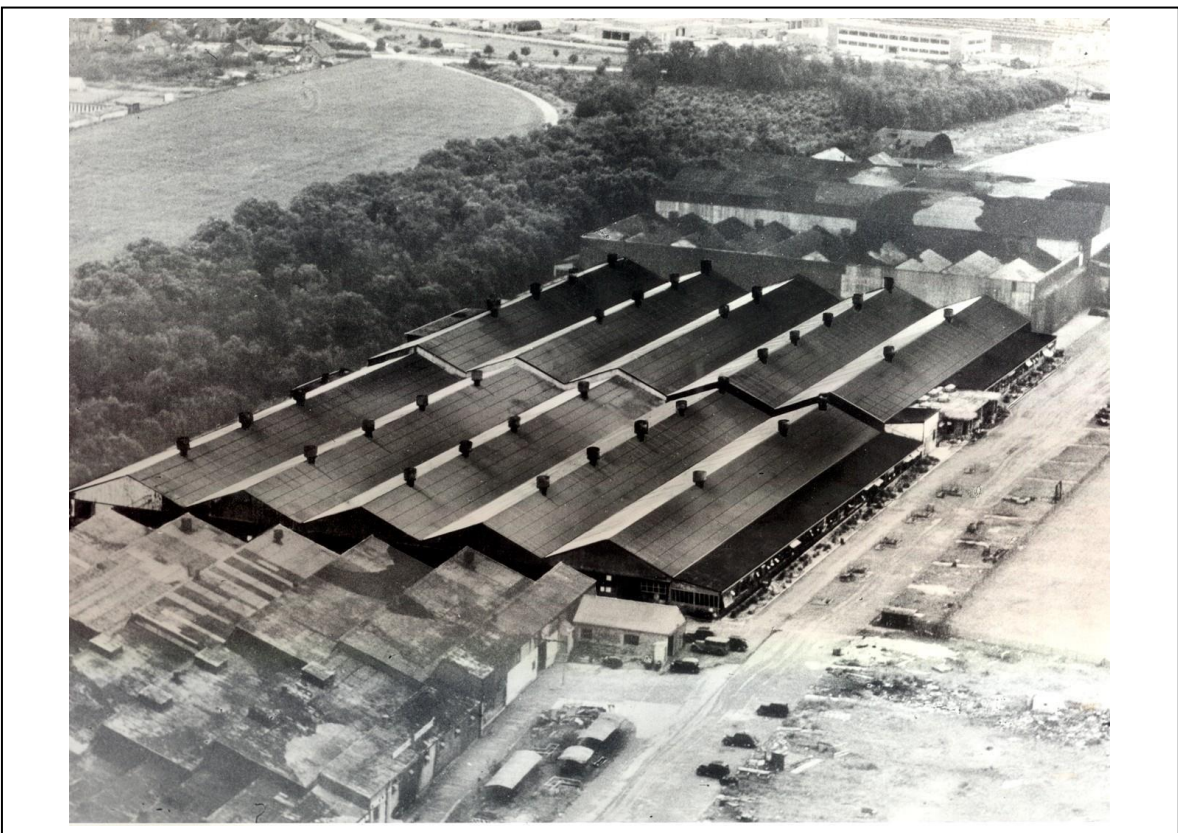
**Fig. 4.** This picture is looking North in 1938 showing 25' Hangar extension being built for construction of Stirling Bombers. The 40' Hangar is already in place



**Fig. 5.** The Hangars from the South in 1967 showing the round topped pair.

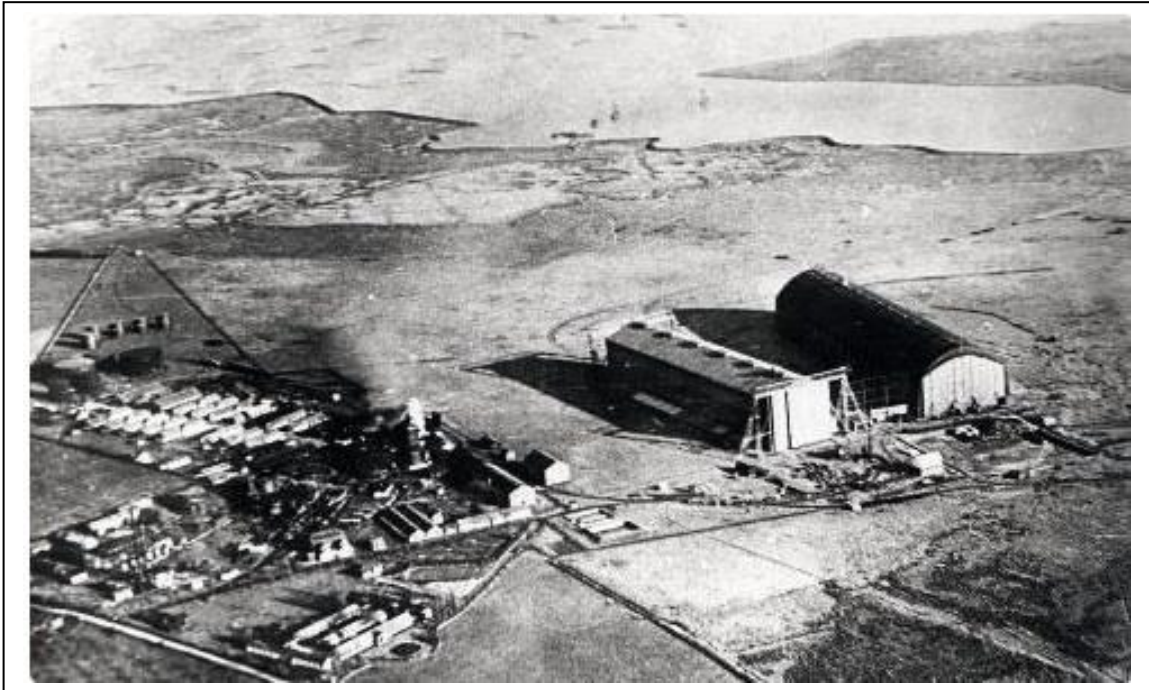


**Fig. 6.** The Main Site Hangars at Rochester Airport showing the apex roof pair to the North of the round topped pair



**Fig.7.** The Short Brothers Factory mostly camouflaged but with the low-level factory looking very new! This picture is around 1954 when the Medway College was opened.





**Fig 8.** Kingsnorth RNAS Station c.1917



**Fig.9.** The Steel Hangar at Kingsnorth being dismantled in 1939



**Fig. 10.** The Steel shed at Kingsnorth being demolished in 1939



**Fig. 11.** The Barn at St Mary Hoo said to be the top third of one of the Kingsnorth Sheds.