

Airship Hangar at Middleton

Paul Davies : Aviation Historian

I am an Aviation Historian and wrote about this some time ago after researching it's origins and sharing some images online.

The Airship shed was made there as well as one across at Walney Island, Barrow-in-Furness area in order to protect the Barrow shipyards of WW1. U-Boats were prevalent in WW1 and would have wreaked havoc had they been allowed to sink, or report the movement of new warships as they came out of the shipyards owned by Vickers into Morecambe Bay and the Irish Sea area patrolled by U-Boats of Germany.

The airships were smaller than Zeppelins and had a smaller crew able to report or to bomb U-Boats or ships threatening this area.

The huge Airship sheds that still exist at Cardington are larger but this type of airship shed is also quite large and is rare-the other one at Barrow has long gone.

Post WW1 and WW2 it was used for various purposes in connection with the nearby ICI and Industrial plants and at some time was used to store products as Mr Moss states such as fertiliser, often used in bomb making and explosives-may be a reference to the explosives manufacture of the ICI plant in its service life?

Referring to the ICI site: as a small child, sometime in the early 1970s I saw a gap in the fencing for the old ICI plant and sneaked in to look around, what I thought were empty site buildings. To my immense joy, a helicopter took off, I always was interested in flying, (Later becoming a pilot in 1983) and crouched near the fencing to watch it as it flew slowly around the perimeter fencing. First going away from me, then turning at a corner and travelling all the way around until it started heading my way and I realised it was looking for an intruder - me! The noise of a tractor starting up startled me and I saw two men hanging on the back of this one with a third driving it in my direction-no doubt through communication with the helicopter crew? I got out and ran like mad for where I was staying

with my family on holiday, just down the beach from there, as seen in your images. I never dared tell my mum what I had been doing! I found out why it was not empty and closed down in the 1970s, as it appeared to be to me, through reading your article just now.

Thank you for filling in the gaps and realising how serious a trouble I could have been in.

The Airship shed I am hoping to visit this year and get some images taken inside as I know the security company and they will ask the owners for permission as once this is knocked down some day, it would be good to have a record. The top part of the shed has a series of runners or guides usually to help guide the airship out on runners attached to the top of the balloon, which is shaped like a cigar in order to keep it from snagging, due to wind or movement when re-entering the shed or leaving, causing damage to the delicate material. This top part appears to be a long smaller shed with roofing fastened to the top of the huge curved roofing structure, similar to an oversize Nissen hut from WW2. This airship shed, once owned by Vickers of Barrow in Furness was operational in the 1914-18 war but little information exists. I once saw the name TOBY painted in the top part, which may have referred to the affectionate nickname, often given to balloons.

I will write again with my original article and the research with more information I discovered a few years ago. I shared the story with the BBC, who I have worked with for 3 projects- and also with Aviation Historical sites including one connected with Cardington who were fascinated this still existed.

Paul Davies

Paul Davies frtca CiM