

# **BRITISH CULTURE & SOCIETY I**

## **London Heathrow Airport**

London Heathrow Airport is a major [international airport](#) serving London, England, known as London Airport from 1946 until 1965. Located in West London, Heathrow is the [busiest airport in the United Kingdom](#) and the [third busiest airport in the world](#) (as of 2012) in total passenger traffic, [handling more international passengers](#) than any other airport around the globe. It is also the [busiest airport in Europe by passenger traffic](#) and the third busiest by [traffic movements](#). The airport [sustains](#) 76,600 jobs directly and around 116,000 indirectly in the immediate area. The airport is owned and operated by [Heathrow Airport Holdings](#), which also owns and operates three other UK airports. Heathrow is the [primary](#) hub for [British Airways](#) and the primary operating base for [Virgin Atlantic](#).



As the airport is west of London and as its runways run east–west, an airliner's landing approach is usually directly over the [conurbation](#) of London when the wind is from the west. Along with [Gatwick](#), [Stansted](#), [Luton](#), [Southend](#) and [London City](#), Heathrow is one of six airports with scheduled services serving the London area, although only Heathrow and London City are within [Greater London](#).

## History

Heathrow Airport started in 1929 as a small airfield ([Great West Aerodrome](#)) on land south-east of the hamlet of [Heathrow](#) from which the airport takes its name. At that time there were farms, [market gardens](#) and [orchards](#) there: there was a "Heathrow Farm" about where Terminal 1 is now, a "Heathrow Hall" and a "Heathrow House". This hamlet was largely along a country lane (Heathrow Road) which ran roughly along the east and south edges of the present central terminals area.

In 1925 Norman MacMillan, a young RAF officer, made an emergency landing. In his notes he wrote about how the land was very flat and suitable for an airfield. By 1928, Fairey Aviation needed a new airfield for the testing of new planes designed and manufactured at its factory on North Hyde Road, Hayes. Norman MacMillan, now Fairey's chief test pilot, thought back to the day when he made his emergency landing and put forward the case that Heathrow could be a great place to start a new airfield.

In 1929 Fairey Aviation started to secure the land around their new airfield by buying up 148 acres of farmland from four local landowners. In June 1930 the airfield was declared operational. The airfield went under significant development by the air ministry during WW2, when the war finished however, the work had not been completed. By this time the plans had changed from a military airport though to a commercial hub and international airport. The development continued. By May 1946 the airport was opened for use by the public.

During the 1950's further development continued with 3 more runways, expansion to the north and a building of passenger numbers to 1 million by 1953. By the end of the 50's there were two terminals at the airport. During the 1960's the runway was expanded and lengthened to help newer, larger aircraft to take off. A new cargo hub was also built which is almost another terminal except for the fact it carries goods and not passengers. In 1970 terminal 3 was not only built but expanded. Walkways across sections of the airfield, a first for a UK airport were employed. The Piccadilly Line was opened from Hatton Cross to Heathrow Central to help people get from central London to the airport.

By the 1980's the total passenger figures were topping 30 million, making it one of the largest airports in the world by both size and passenger numbers. Further expansion, building and tinkering was needed to cope with these figures. The M25 London Orbital route was also built to help car passengers get to the terminal. The current Conservative Party of the day privatised the airport in 1987.

In the 1990's development stopped slightly although planning for a new terminal 5 was being carried out and a new train line, the Heathrow Express was built. In September 2002 building work on terminal 5 began. Terminal 1 was extended and connections between parts of the Underground and train lines were created to help passenger flow. Terminal 2b was also created, not a completely new terminal but a significant expansion of terminal 2. Terminal 5 was completed at the end of the decade.

### Heathrow today

Heathrow Airport is used by over 90 airlines flying to 170 destinations worldwide. The airport is the primary hub of British Airways, and is a base for [Virgin Atlantic](#).



### [Concorde](#) G-BOAB in storage at Heathrow

Of Heathrow's 69 million passengers in 2011, 7% were bound for UK destinations, 41% were short-haul international travellers and 52% were long-haul. The busiest single destination in passenger numbers is New York, with over 3.8 million passengers between Heathrow and JFK / Newark airports in 2011. The airport has four passenger terminals (Terminals 1, 3, 4 and 5) and a cargo terminal. The new passenger Terminal 2 is due to open in 2014, replacing the previous Terminal 2.

[Full body scanners](#) are now used at the airport, and passengers who object to their use after being selected are not allowed to fly. These display passengers' bodies as a cartoon-style figure, with indicators showing where concealed items may be. The new imagery was introduced initially as a trial in September 2011 following complaints over privacy. Heathrow Airport has Anglican, Catholic, [Free Church](#), [Hindu](#), Jewish, Muslim and [Sikh](#) chaplains.

## Operations



The airport has been criticised in recent years for overcrowding and delays; according to Heathrow Airport Holdings, Heathrow's facilities were originally designed to accommodate 55 million passengers annually. The number of passengers using the airport reached a record 70 million in 2012. In 2007 the airport was voted the world's least favourite, alongside [Chicago O'Hare](#) in a [TripAdvisor](#) survey. However, the opening of Terminal 5 in 2008 has relieved some pressure on terminal facilities, increasing the airport's terminal capacity to 90 million passengers per year. A tie-up is also in place with McLaren Applied Technologies to optimise the general procedure, reducing delays and pollution.

With only two runways, operating at over 98% of their capacity, Heathrow has little room for more flights, although the increasing use of larger aircraft such as the Airbus A380 will allow some increase in passenger numbers. It is difficult for existing airlines to obtain landing slots to enable them to increase their services from the airport, or for new airlines to start operations. To increase the number of flights, Heathrow Airport Holdings has proposed using the existing two runways in 'mixed mode' whereby aircraft would be allowed to take off and land on the same runway. This would increase the airport's capacity from its current 480,000 movements per year to as many as 550,000 according to British Airways.

## Vocabulary Check

Write the English meaning for the following words taken from the text:

- a) handling \_\_\_\_\_
- b) sustains \_\_\_\_\_
- c) primary \_\_\_\_\_
- d) conurbation \_\_\_\_\_
- e) hamlet \_\_\_\_\_
- f) suitable \_\_\_\_\_
- g) expanded \_\_\_\_\_
- h) to put forward \_\_\_\_\_
- i) tinkering \_\_\_\_\_
- j) flow \_\_\_\_\_
- k) to object \_\_\_\_\_
- l) concealed \_\_\_\_\_
- m) criticised \_\_\_\_\_

## Comprehension Questions

Write the answer to the following questions in your own words with a sentence:

- 1) Why did Norman Macmillan suggest Heathrow as a new airfield (2 reasons)?

\_\_\_\_\_

- 2) Why was the runway changed in the 1960s?

\_\_\_\_\_

- 3) What 2 things happened to make it easier for people to get to Heathrow?

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- 4) After the 1990s, what 3 other changes happened at Heathrow?

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5) How has security been changed at Heathrow? How do they help?

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6) What will happen to passengers who refuse to use these?

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7) Why has Heathrow been criticised in recent years? What caused these problems?

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8) What has happened to solve this problem?

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9) Why can't Heathrow increase capacity? How has this affected airlines?

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10) What has been proposed to solve this problem?

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