

South African Airways Museum Society

Our Location – Rand Airport



Rand Airport IATA code QRA. Rand Airport ICAO code FAGM

From the very beginning of civil aviation in South Africa, when most of the pioneering was being done by voluntary enthusiasts who formed light plane clubs the Rand provided the greatest material support for those who were opening up air traffic in South Africa. In 1929 when Imperial Airways made it known that they definitely intended to organise a service to South Africa, the energy and vision of the Municipality of Germiston (afterwards backed up by the Johannesburg Civic Authorities) laid the foundation of what would eventually become Rand Airport.

Germiston Aerodrome was officially opened on Saturday 24 August 1929. The aerodrome consisted of a grass-covered field and a hangar.

In 1931 the various Governments concerned concluded arrangements with Imperial Airways to run a service from London to the Cape. The Germiston Municipality was officially approached by the Union Government to provide an adequate airport capable of handling day and night traffic and of housing aircraft larger than any previously used in South Africa. As a result of the negotiations the Germiston Town Council voted £65,000 for the conversion of the old aerodrome into a properly equipped airport, and work started at once. One large and one small hangar as well as an administrative office building and workshop for Imperial Airways were constructed. A complete floodlighting system was installed and a number of cottages built for the staff of Imperial Airways. Also erected were wireless masts for communication with the Imperial Airways aircraft.

The Governor-General, the Earl of Clarendon, officially opened Rand Airport on Saturday 19 December 1931. Over 2,500 people drove, rode or walked to the aerodrome to attend the opening. The following day, 20 December 1931, the first Imperial Airways airmail from London arrived at Rand Airport.

In 1932 a full-time airport manager was appointed. Imperial Airways traffic, both mail and passenger increased rapidly. South African Airways, formed on 1 February 1934, moved its headquarters from Durban to Rand Airport in 1935.

As a result of increased activity at Rand airport a decision was made to improve facilities and a new air station was built to provide adequate control of the movements of aircraft from a properly equipped control tower, and to cater for the comfort of passengers by means of waiting rooms, baggage hall, Customs office and restaurant. Up till the time of the erection of the air station passengers' baggage was dumped on the ground and sorted in the open while friends meeting air travellers were obliged to stand about in the open in all weathers for indefinite periods.

In addition, a clubhouse for the Rand Flying Club, a house for a resident Customs official, and a meteorological station were erected. Previous to the building of the clubhouse, flying club members were accommodated in a small reed roofed shack which, owing to the rapid increase in membership, soon became too small for them.

For the second time His Excellency the Governor-General, the Earl of Clarendon, officially opened the New Rand Airport on Monday 5 August 1935. At the time it was considered that sufficient development work had been done at the airport to last for many years. This was not so. The introduction of the Empire airmail, the continually increasing activity of South African Airways, the greater interest in private flying, all necessitated further development.

Soon after the opening in 1935 seven more hangars were erected, a larger clubhouse built for the Rand Flying Club, the South African Airways administrative building was greatly enlarged, and buildings, temporary and permanent provided for the petrol supply companies and flying schools operating from the airport. Even this was not sufficient and in 1939 work began on constructing two further hangars as well as extensions to existing hangars and alterations and additions to the air station. A mess for South African Airways staff, a wireless workshop and engine workshop were also constructed.

The terminal building has remained virtually the same since it was built. The only noticeable change is the addition of a new control tower which was added on top of the existing structure. A special feature of the 1935 terminal building was the flat roof, which to this day is open to the public and gives a fine view across the airport.

For more information on the Rand Airport of today visit www.randairport.co.za