

Exhibition Evaluation: Foxtrot Hotel

Foxtrot Hotel is a site specific exhibition inspired by Swansea Airport's aviation history. The title comes from the airport's original aircode, immediately linking the project to its historical context. Swansea Airport was assigned as my site, and the aim was to design an artwork that could only exist in this particular location. My concept focused on one of the airport's abandoned RAF buildings, which played a crucial role during World War 2, when Swansea Airport was responsible for the air defence of South and West Wales, including Bristol and the St George's Channel. Today, the building/airport is largely unused, occasionally serving as a film set, but rarely seen by the public. This contrast between its historically significant past and present neglect became central to the project. With Foxtrot Hotel, I aimed to reconnect the site with its history and draw attention to the hidden stories within this overlooked space.

When I first visited Swansea Airport, the abandoned RAF buildings immediately caught my eye. Many structures were old, but these buildings stood out due to their isolation and historical significance. Their past importance was evident, yet their current neglect made me feel they deserved attention. Exploring further, I realised that the airport has a rich history that is rarely shared with the public. There was very little on site information, particularly regarding its role in air defence during World War II. This lack of recognition motivated me to bring these forgotten stories forward.

Focusing on the abandoned RAF buildings made the project genuinely site specific. By incorporating archival materials and historical information unique to Swansea Airport, the exhibition became something that could not exist elsewhere. The site's layered history shaped the entire concept, and the neglected yet meaningful atmosphere of the buildings made them the perfect focal point for the work.

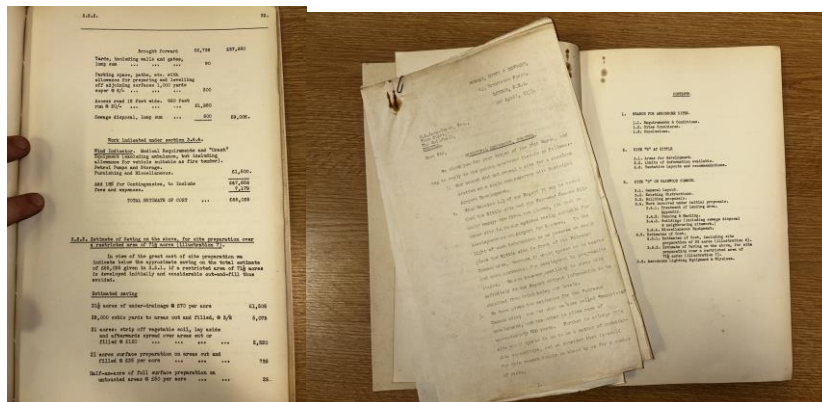


Research

I began at Swansea Archive, where I found planning documents, cost records, historical photographs, old videos, and interviews with people who worked at the airport in the 1940s and 1950s. These primary sources formed the foundation of the exhibition, allowing me to embed authentic historical details into the work.

During site visits, I photographed the RAF buildings extensively, capturing both interior and exterior details to show the building's past use and remind viewers of its wartime significance. A planned rooftop time lapse was intended to emphasise the passage of nearly 80 years since the building was operational, while hanging paper aeroplanes, covered with archival research, would point toward the timelapse, creating a visual link between past and present. Monochrome images of the RAF building displayed on the walls were designed to guide viewers and highlight its history.

My research combined on site exploration, archival investigation, and online resources to ensure the exhibition was historically accurate and site specific. At the airport, I studied the space, textures, lighting, and architectural details, planning where installation elements would be placed. Observing how light changed throughout the day informed both the rooftop timelapse and the overall visitor experience. Online sources, including the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust and the National Archives' RAF records, provided additional historical context about Swansea Airport and its role in regional air defence. Combining these approaches allowed me to create a work that is immersive, historically informed, and unique to its location.



Development of the Work

I was initially confident in my concept and planned to include both the rooftop timelapse and hanging paper aeroplanes. My group agreed on the original locations for each piece, and I envisaged my installation on the planned spot. However days just before installation, I had to rearrange my work due to limited space and miscommunication. I was moved to a smaller wall near a corridor leading into the cafe, which made it impossible to include the paper aeroplanes and prevented the timelapse from pointing toward the roof. The area received too much natural light, reducing the projector's impact. Reflecting on this, I realised that time management, planning, and communication were key challenges, and that my original location may have conflicted with a peer's work.

Despite these challenges, I adapted creatively to the new space. I positioned the images so that, from outside, visitors could see the exterior of the RAF building, and from inside, they could see the interior. Some research material was placed between the images, which were arranged to face opposite directions, creating a dialogue between past and present. Working collaboratively with my

team ensured the installation was set up effectively, reinforcing the importance of planning and communication in a group exhibition.

Interestingly, the new location had unexpected benefits. Its position near the cafe encouraged conversation and drew attention to the black and white images, as visitors naturally passed by. This still highlighted the story of the RAF building and aligned with my original intention of engaging viewers with the site's history. Overall, while time management and spatial planning were challenges, adapting creatively allowed me to maintain the core concept, enhance visitor interaction, and learn important lessons for producing site specific work.

Exhibition Considerations

Working with materials presented practical challenges. I used Photoshop to edit the black and white images, ensuring they clearly conveyed the contrast between the building's past and present. The images were printed on sticky vinyl, allowing them to be mounted directly on walls and easily adjusted to the available space. Hanging the paper aeroplanes required careful planning to ensure visibility without obstructing movement, while the rooftop time lapse projection had to contend with natural light entering the room. However, the timelapse and airplanes were scrapped due a lack of communication.

Outcome and Reflection

I was pleased with how Foxtrot Hotel turned out, particularly in terms of engaging viewers with the hidden history of the RAF buildings. Many visitors especially older cafe customers, stopped to view the work, showing interest in both the images and the archival materials. Several shared personal memories and stories about the airport, reinforcing the relevance and impact of the exhibition. Seeing the research spark curiosity and conversation was particularly rewarding, as it connected the audience directly to the site's history.

If I were to develop the exhibition further, I would make it even more site specific and immersive. One idea would be to integrate the cafe into the artwork for example, placing archival content on menus, tablecloths, or tables. So visitors could engage with it more interactively. This would make the work more prominent, while still highlighting the airport's history.

The exhibition largely achieved its aims. Visitors engaged with both the visual and historical elements, and the work successfully drew attention to the neglected RAF building. Some planned elements, such as the paper aeroplanes and timelapse, could not be implemented, but the black and white images and research materials compensated, creating meaningful engagement.

Overall, my work in Foxtrot Hotel successfully revealed overlooked aspects of Swansea Airport, reconnecting visitors to its hidden RAF stories. Reflecting on the exhibition has provided valuable insights into how site specific art can engage audiences visually, conceptually, and experientially, while highlighting the importance of planning, collaboration, and adaptability.



