

The return of a Pioneer

History is littered with examples of brave new innovations that quickly fell out of favour. A good example is Deurne Airport in Belgium; it was considered a futuristic facility when it opened, but for most of the rest of the 20th century it almost faded into oblivion.

The small airport serves the Flanders provincial capital Antwerp (Antwerpen in Dutch and Anvers in French) and is 31 miles (50km) north of Brussels. The town has a population of 512,000 and is the largest municipality in both Flanders and Belgium; the metropolitan population is around 1.2 million. Antwerp is a major economic and cultural centre and sits on the eastern bank of the River Scheldt, linked to the North Sea by the Westerschelde estuary, along which the city has built one of the largest seaports in Europe.

Famed since ancient times for its diamond-cutting industry, Antwerp is increasingly positioning itself as a major fashion centre and thanks to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, it has one of Europe's most important fashion academies.

History

The airport's background is closely linked to that of early aviation developments in Belgium, dating back to 1909, when the Aéroclub d'Anvers was established by Baron Pierre de Caters, the first licensed Belgian pilot. From October 23 to November 2 that year the Belgian city

The airport's terminal, designed by architect Stanislas Jasinski, opened on September 10, 1930, and remains in use – albeit after several renovations. (Wikimedia Commons/Ad Meskens)

Antwerp's Deurne Airport was revolutionary when it opened in 90 years ago. It has struggled to maintain traffic levels in recent years, but as **Luigi Vallero** discovered, its prospects are now brighter.

hosted the 'First Flying Week of Antwerp', on the military exercise field of the Kruis Hoek, later known as the Wilrijkse Plein.

In 1921 the Belgian Minister of National Defence, then in charge of aviation, started to purchase 198 acres (80ha) of farmland in the municipality of Deurne on the south-eastern outskirts of Antwerp with a view to building an airport and establishing a flying school. Completed facilities opened on May 25, 1923, titled Antwerpen Deurne Airport. Stampe & Vertongen aircraft workshops were also established and an old railway wagon, emblazoned with 'AÉROGARE' (air terminal) on its roof, became the first terminal building and was used from 1924 by Sabena (Société Anonyme Belge d'Exploitation de la Navigation Aérienne) passengers travelling on the airlines' Rotterdam-Antwerp-Brussels-Strasbourg-Basel route. A wooden chalet replaced the wagon in 1926.

A contract for the design and

construction of a new passenger building and installations was awarded to architect Stanislas Jasinski in 1929. It was a modernist design featuring an L-shaped terminal in the south-western corner of the airfield. The concept focused on the basic principles of speed, efficiency and rationality, providing for easy control of the passengers and freight flows through the building. Modular construction was adopted to allow for any further expansion and included a small seven-room hotel aimed at hosting 'stranded' passengers. A large hangar was annexed to the terminal, connected by a covered passageway.

The streamlined looking facility was built from reinforced concrete and had strip windows and canopies in translucent concrete, mouldings in

terracotta, steel window profiles and terrace roofs. It was completed in around nine months and was inaugurated as Deurne-Zuid (Deurne-South) on September 10, 1930, by Maurice Lippens, Minister of Traffic and Transport. During the 1930s the airport flourished, placing itself among Europe's best airports, on a par with facilities such as London/Croydon, Berlin/Tempelhof, Paris/Le Bourget and Hamburg/Fuhlsbüttel.

The German blitzkrieg of World War Two swept westwards in 1940 and flying was suspended as the airfield was heavily damaged by bombing. During the German occupation the airport was used as a base for the Erla factories where Messerschmitt fighters were repaired. Consequently, the Germans took control of the airport, expanding it, laying a concrete runway and building more hangars. As the Allies moved to liberate the city in 1944-45, it was struck by a large number of V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets - 43 of the weapons hit the airport.

After the war the Royal Air Force established a base and a British Army depot opened, but by 1946 the site was transferred back to the Belgian Government, which reduced its size to 376 acres (152ha). On October 6, 1947, daily flights between Antwerp and London by SABENA Douglas DC-3s resumed.

The airport's runway was short; less than 5,000ft (1,524m) and could not be extended. This was a severe problem



The airport's short runway has proved a hindrance to jet operations; however, as Sabena Boeing 737-229C OO-SDP (c/n 21139) illustrates in this May 1976 image, some jets visited ANR, although only on short-distance flights. (AirTeamImages.com/Carl Ford)



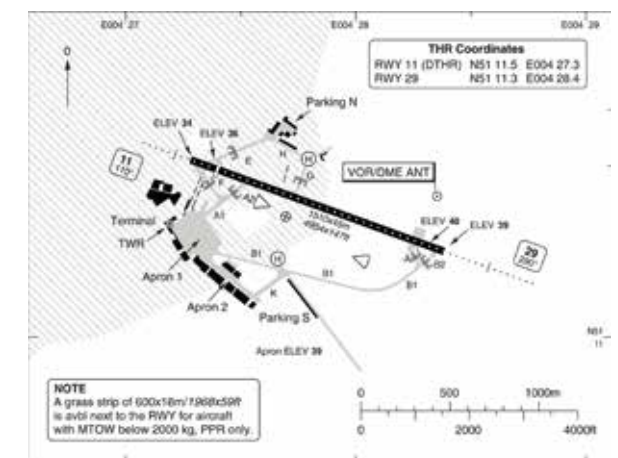
CityJet Fokker 50 OO-VLP (c/n 20209) shares the Antwerp apron with Conrail Aviation Gulfstream G550 N372BG (c/n 5038). (All photos author unless stated)



Airport Statistics

ICAO Code:	EBAW
IATA Code:	ANR
Location:	51° 11.22' N, 004° 27.37' E
Elevation:	39ft (12m)
Runway:	11/29 4,954 x 148ft (1,510 x 45m)
	11/29 4,970 (1,515m) Grass
Frequencies:	Tower: 135.2
	Ground: 121.8
Website:	www.antwerpairport.be

▼ (Not for airborne/operational use - Navtech Aerad)





since the new jet airliners arriving on the scene during the 1950s could not use it. The resultant decline in traffic was so significant that in 1963 the Ministry of Traffic and Transport considered closing the airport, a threat only averted with the support of the local Chamber of Industry, the Burgomaster and City Sheriff.

Fortunately, the Ford Motor Company began using Antwerp Airport (ANR) for regular corporate flights to Southend Airport in the UK, close to its Dagenham factory. In 1966 six new companies, including a bank, three shipping agents, a transport company and Delta Air Transport (DAT), began using ANR, which gave new vitality to the business. Specialising in air taxi and charter services, DAT initially used a fleet of three Cessnas (one Skymaster, one 210 and a 206), before launching a scheduled feeder service with two Beechcraft Queen Airls to Amsterdam, on behalf of KLM, on September 19, 1967. The Dutch flag carrier became a 33.3%

▲ A VLM Fokker 50 taxis for departure at Antwerp in July 2009. The aircraft is wearing the Air France/KLM and CityJet logos after VLM's sale in December 2007. (AirTeamImages.com/Serge Bailleul)

▼ The CityJet check-in area. Note the artwork commemorating Baron Pierre de Caters who established the Aéroclub d'Anvers on the site in 1909.

stakeholder in DAT, which was soon using DC-3s and DC-6 as well as Convair CV-440s, and for a short period a Boeing 720, on charters for KLM, SABENA, and BIAS. The link to Amsterdam continued until 1997 with up to four daily rotations. In 1986, SABENA acquired a 49% stake in DAT and eventually bought out KLM's share, thus making DAT a wholly-owned subsidiary. In 1997 DAT's headquarters moved to Brussels and the carrier was rebranded as DAT Belgian Regional Airline. After the bankruptcy of the Belgian flag carrier in 2001, it was DAT that morphed into the present-day Brussels Airlines.

Previously, on May 18, 1969, the first landing of a SABENA Boeing 727 took place during celebrations marking 60 years of aviation in Deurne, organised by the Royal Antwerp Aviation Club. In 1973, passenger numbers had risen to 192,598 and, to cope with the resurgent traffic, work began to expand the apron while an arrivals and departure hall was



The close proximity of the aircraft stand to the terminal is apparent in this photo.

added to the terminal. In 1977 SABENA launched a scheduled 737-200QC service to London Heathrow.

The terminal underwent refurbishment in the early 1990s, but the short runway remained a hindrance to growth. The proximity of the R11 Krijgsbaan (road) at the end of Runway 29 meant there was no room for a Runway End Safety Area (RESA). Building a road tunnel was suggested by the Flemish Minister of Traffic and Transport, Johan Sauwens, but at the time nothing came of it.

In 1993, two new companies began flying from ANR - Airventure, offering air taxi services, and Vlaamse Luchttransport Maatschappij (VLM) - Flemish Air Transport Company). VLM was a new commuter airline which launched scheduled Fokker 50 flights in May on multiple daily commuter links to London City, thus competing with existing Heathrow (Sabena) and Gatwick (CityFlyer) services. The carrier subsequently added routes to Rotterdam, Frankfurt, Hannover, Munich, Geneva and Manchester, before being bought by the Air France-KLM Group in December 2007, which merged it with Air France's CityJet subsidiary while simultaneously moving its headquarters and main interests and development focus away from ANR.

In the mid-1990s the height of the ATC tower was increased, the runway and taxiways were resurfaced, a hangar big enough for a 737 was built, the check-in hall was renovated and a new ring road completed.

The new millennium had an indifferent start - in 2001 a record 273,208 passengers were handled, but flag carrier SABENA folded, casting a shadow on the airport's future. However, with around 25,000 companies in the Antwerp district, a master plan was drawn up in 2000-2001 to allow ANR to handle 500,000 passengers a year. Major alterations to the original terminal started at the end of 2004 and were completed in June 2006. In the years that followed, a new high quality brasserie-style restaurant and a terrace were opened

Today's airport

Despite the close proximity of Brussels and its two airports, just 35 minutes away by road, the Flemish Government is supporting ANR for the foreseeable future, mostly because the facility supports the needs of the business traveller. Its compact size, closeness to the city centre, check-in just 20 minutes before departure and exit within ten minutes of landing, underlines its usefulness to businessmen.

During an interview with *Airports of the World*, Airport Commander Wim Verbist confirmed that work for the long-awaited tunnel of the R11 (Krijgsbaan) was under way and is due for completion by the end of the year. This will enable a suitable RESA to be installed for optimum utilisation of the full length of the runway. The tunnel will have two levels; one for airport-bound traffic and the second for through traffic.

FLYINGGROUP Cessna Citation Mustang LX-FGC turns off the 4,954ft (1,510m) runway after landing. The resident company offers a range of charter, maintenance and ground handling facilities. (AirTeamImages.com/Serge Bailleul)





▲ Flights from Manchester were introduced by bmi regional in late 2012 using Embraer ERJ-135s.

Art and a museum

There is a permanent exhibition of ceramic works in the terminal, linked to the aviation and travel theme, by Flemish artist Magda Van Holsbeeck, while works from various artists are displayed in the offices and public spaces at the airport.

Among the more interesting attractions is the Stampe & Vertongen Museum, which opened on May 26, 2001, as a tribute to Antwerp aviation pioneers Jean Stampe and Maurice Vertongen. The two men started a flying school at the original airfield and they later added a factory where Stampe SV.4 trainer biplanes were built from the early 1930s. Some remained in service with the Belgian Air

Force until the late 1970s!

The museum preserves various specimens of the Stampe, in both replica and original status, and every May the 'Stampe Fly-in' attracts historic aircraft from across Europe. Also on display at the museum are several military aircraft as well as examples of the notorious German V1 flying bomb, along with photos, documents, dioramas and scale models illustrating the history of the airport.

Challenges remain

The primary issue facing ANR is the development of new routes. Marketing And Communications Manager for



► The small departure lounge is never crowded because passengers can arrive at the airport with barely half an hour before departure and be whisked through to their aircraft.



▼ Unmarked (CityJet) Fokker 50 OO-VLY (c/n 20181) stands beside the former VLM hangar at Antwerp.



Acknowledgements

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▲ An air-to-air study of Stampe SV.4 D-EODN taken during the Stampe Fly-in during May 2007, which clearly shows the close proximity of the R11 Krijgsbaan roadway at the 29 end of the runway. A tunnel is being built to accommodate the road and allow for a RESA to be added. (AirTeamImages.com/Serge Bailleul)