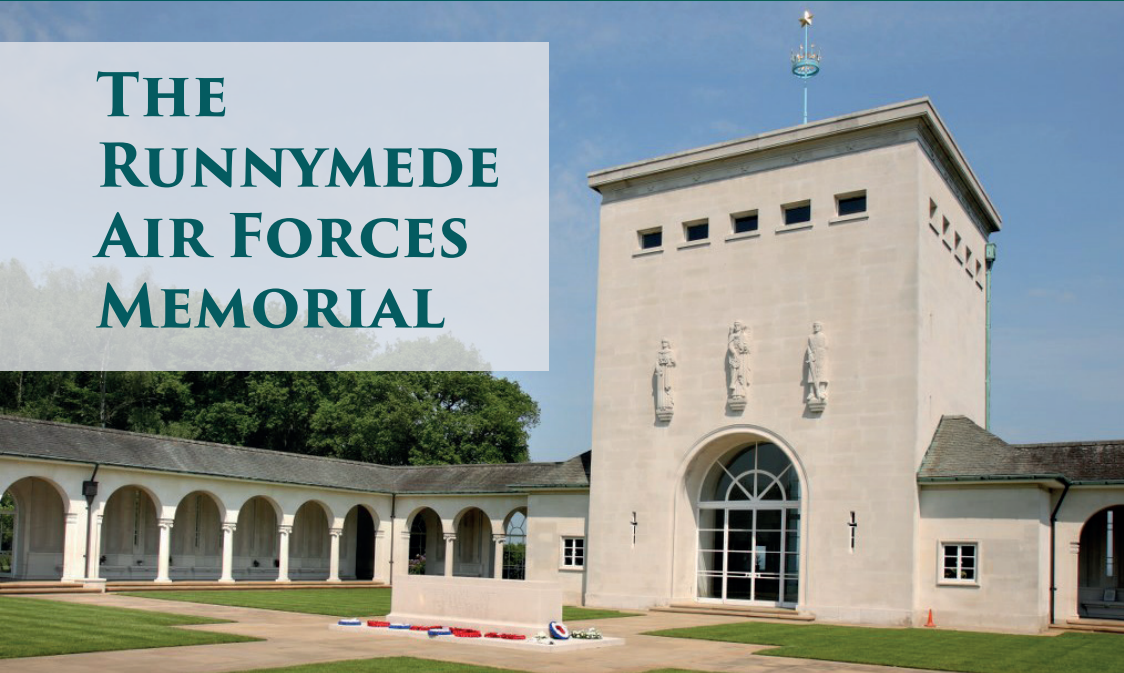


OUR WAR GRAVES YOUR HISTORY

THE RUNNYMEDE AIR FORCES MEMORIAL



The Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede commemorates by name over 20,000 men and women of the air forces, who have no known graves. They were lost in the Second World War during operations from bases in the United Kingdom and North and Western Europe. They served in Bomber, Fighter, Coastal, Transport, Flying Training and Maintenance Commands, and came from all parts of the Commonwealth. Some were from countries in continental Europe which had been overrun but whose airmen continued to fight in the ranks of the Royal Air Force.

The Runnymede Air Forces Memorial stands upon the crest of Coopers Hill overlooking the river Thames and the field of Runnymede - a site steeped in history, where in 1215 King John affixed his seal to the Magna Carta.

Unveiled by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, on 17 October 1953, the memorial was designed by Sir Edward Maufe. He was the Commission's Principal Architect for the United Kingdom after the Second World War. His aim was to create an atmosphere of quiet and intimacy for those visitors who come to remember the missing.

Key CWGC features to look out for:

The memorial was designed by Sir Edward Maufe with sculpture by Vernon Hill. The engraved glass and painted ceilings, depicting the coats of arms of the Commonwealth countries, were designed by John Hutton, and the poem engraved on the gallery window was written by Paul H Scott.

From the north end rises a tower, evocative of an airfield control tower. The top offers spectacular views out across the Thames Valley towards Windsor Castle, Heathrow and London. The tower exterior has three stone figures representing Justice, Victory and Courage. Inside the tower is a shrine or chapel, a place of quiet reflection. Engraved on the great north window of the shrine are words from the 139th Psalm, sometimes called the Airman's Psalm.



Points of interest...

Commemorations: **20,275**

Casualties from the following nations;

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Australia | Norway |
| Belgium | South Africa |
| Bermuda | South Rhodesia |
| Canada | Sri Lanka (Ceylon) |
| Czechoslovakia | Undivided India |
| Greece | UK |
| Ireland | USA |
| Netherlands | West Indies |
| Newfoundland | |
| New Zealand | |

Things to look out for...

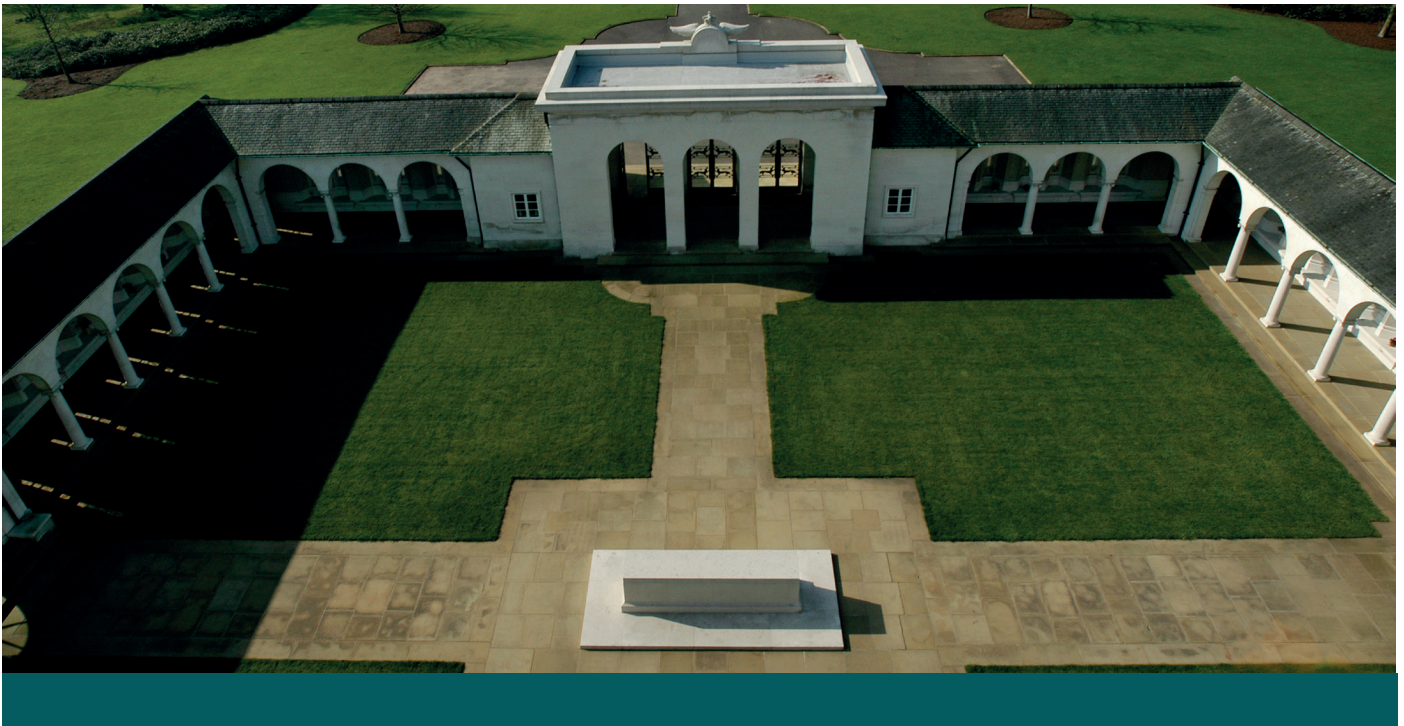
Chaplain **Cecil Pugh** who was awarded the George Cross for his bravery in 1941 on board SS Anselm (panel 29)

Wing Commander **John Dering Nettleton**, who was awarded the Victoria Cross in April 1942 (panel 118).

Flying Officer **William Smith** was the last of several men who died on 11 November, he was an early casualty of the jet age, dying in a Gloster Meteor jet in 1946 (panel 285).

RAF Air Cadet **Joseph Smith**, who is the youngest casualty commemorated on the memorial, aged 15 (panel 288).

Discover the men and women commemorated at Runnymede



The names of the missing are carved in stone around the cloister walls of the memorial. The names are grouped according to the year of death, then by service, descending by rank, alphabetically by surname and then initials. The names are inscribed on the stone reveals and mullions of the narrow windows giving the impression of partly opened stone books. If two men have identical rank, surname and initials then the service number is added, for example Sergeants Walter George Kirby 1316020 and William George Kirby 1385246 on panel 156.

Battle of Britain casualties

The memorial is the largest single site for commemoration of those who fought in the Battle of Britain in 1940.

Flying Officer **Richard Lee** DSO DFC (panel 6) was Lord Trenchard's godson, and flew an aircraft through a hangar in a stunt for a George Formby film in the 1930s. He died when his Hurricane fighter aircraft was shot down in August 1940.

Pilot Officer **Frederick King** DFM (panel 9) was the gunner in a two-man Defiant fighter, his pilot, Squadron Leader **Philip Hunter** DSO, is commemorated nearby (panel 4).

Pilot Officer **Douglas Shepley** (panel 10) was 22 years old when he died on 12 August 1940. His family raised funds and paid for "The Shepley Spitfire" to commemorate his life.



Francis Victor Beamish

In 1942, Group Captain **Francis Victor Beamish** DSO, DFC, AFC (pictured) (panel 64) who had flown in the Battle of Britain as Station Commander of RAF North Weald, died flying the Shepley Spitfire after being shot down over the Channel.

Aircraftman 2nd Class **Norman Jacobson** (panel 27) was one of the youngest men killed during the battle, aged just 18 years old. He was part of the crew of a Blenheim night-fighter aircraft that was shot down on a night patrol in August 1940.

The last veteran of the Battle to be killed in the war may well have been Wing Commander **Richard Brooker** DSO, DFC (panel 264). He survived the Battle of Britain and went on to fight in the defence of Singapore and in Europe after D-Day. He died in a Tempest fighter aircraft on 16 April 1945, three weeks before the end of hostilities.

The Commonwealth Contribution

Almost a quarter of the names recorded at Runnymede are of men from the Dominions. Flight Lieutenant **Alick Mewa** (panel 262) a pilot of a Mitchell light-bomber, was believed to be the first man of Indian descent to gain a commission in the Royal New Zealand Air Force. His RNZAF colleague, Flying Officer **Mervyn Mills**, a Spitfire pilot, is recorded on panel 114. He was killed aged 19 in 1942.

The largest contribution of Commonwealth airman was from Canada. Wing Commander **John Fulton** DSO, DFC, AFC nicknamed 'Moose' (panel 64) was the commander of No.419 Squadron, whose badge and motto still remembers him today. Canadian brothers, **Gerald and James Drennan**, (pictured) both sergeants and both recorded on panel 61, died in the same aircraft, a Hudson bomber of No.407 Squadron on a shipping patrol.

There were men who came from the Caribbean to fight for the RAF, Sergeant **Leslie Gilkes** (pictured) (panel 150) travelled from Trinidad to serve with No.9 Squadron RAF before losing his life when his Lancaster bomber was shot down in August 1943.

Flying Officer **James Howatson** (panel 283) was the last of approximately 1,400 members of the Royal Australian Air Force recorded here to lose their lives, his death coming just three days before VE day in a Coastal Command Liberator long-range aircraft.



Gerald and James Drennan



Leslie Gilke



Noor Inayat-Khan



Amy Johnson

Women at War

There are just over a dozen female personnel recorded on the panels at Runnymede. A group of them represent one of the most inspiring examples of courage and endurance. These are the five women who originally joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) before transferring to SOE, the Special Operations Executive. After their rigorous training they were transported to occupied Europe to support the work of resistance groups who were continuing the fight against the German forces. Eventually all five Section Officers were captured, interrogated and executed in Nazi concentration Camps. **Noor Inayat-Khan** GC (pictured), **Diana Rowden** and **Yolande Unternahrer** (panel 243) died in 1944, whilst **Lilian Rolfe** and **Cecily Lefort** (panel 277) died in 1945.

Amy Johnson CBE (pictured) demonstrated a different form of courage in her pre-war exploits as a record-breaking pilot. Her most famous flight was in 1930 when she became the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia in her aircraft 'Jason'. In 1941 Johnson was serving with the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), delivering aircraft from factories to operational squadrons. She died when she parachuted from her aircraft into the Thames Estuary after becoming lost in bad weather (panel 228).

The Air Forces

Most names at Runnymede are from men who served in three operational commands: Bomber, Coastal and Fighter Commands. Within these commands' men were undertaking many different types of operations. Within Coastal Command for example they carried out convoy escort, anti-shipping strikes and photo-reconnaissance roles among other tasks. Airman served on Air-Sea Rescue duties, both in the air and on the sea. Among those commemorated here is Australian, Flying Officer **John Richard Loessel Hill** (panel 67) who was the skipper of an RAF High Speed Launch. He lost his life when his launch was sunk during the raid on Dieppe in 1942.



RAF HS Launch

There are people remembered here from Flying Training, Maintenance, and Ferry Commands. Additionally, men from Balloon Command, (both on land and at sea) and Army Co-operation Command are commemorated. There are also men who were travelling to overseas commands when they died who are recorded here. Also commemorated here are eight members of the British Overseas Airways Corporation – a forerunner to British Airways, including a BOAC crew killed in a friendly fire incident in February 1942 (panel 288).

