

## World War 1 aerodrome on Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common

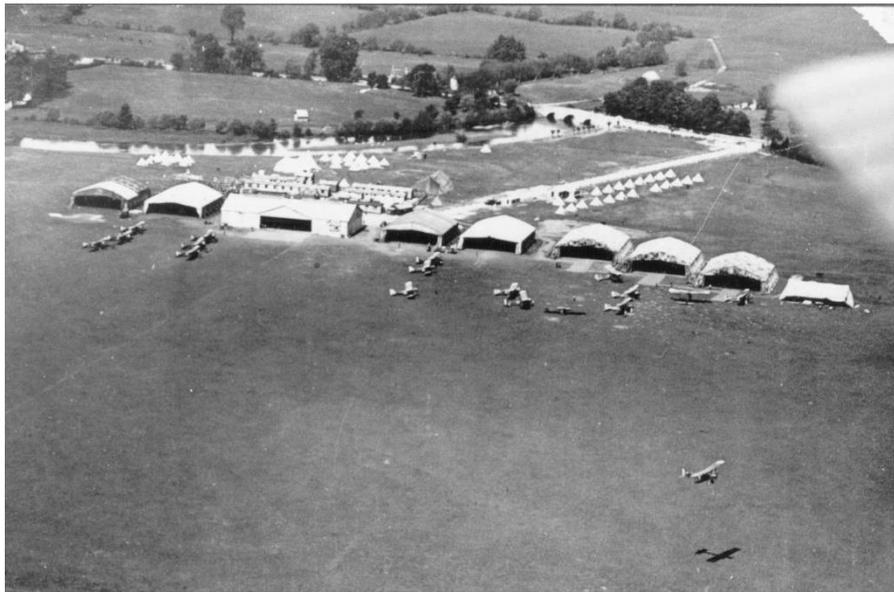
### - The Wolvercote WW1 Aerodrome Memorial Project

I represent a local community project Committee, formed in January 2015 to create a new memorial to fatal casualties of flying accidents associated with use of the aerodrome during WW1. Thank you for the opportunity to brief you about this project today.

- Members of the project Committee include two former Lord Mayors - Ann Spokes Symonds & Bryan Keen (who also held the office of Sheriff), representatives of the Wolvercote Commoners and Oxford Freemen, 2 local historians and a local researcher (in the Chair). The project enjoys the support of the current Mayor, Sheriff & local councillors
- This project has 2 objectives:-
  1. To raise local awareness of the aerodrome during this national WW1 centenary commemoration period, through events, articles and talks, and, most importantly
  2. To visibly recognise by way of a new, permanent and local memorial the ultimate sacrifice made by the 17 young airmen who died. We are aiming to have this in place by November 2018, and preferably sooner
- Members may already be aware that the wartime role of this aerodrome was to train new pilots and observers, but the associated fatalities are generally little known locally. Despite there being up to 10 large canvas hangars and several other buildings accommodating several hundred personnel at its peak, there are very few physical remnants of the aerodrome now, except for the "Target" structure (which the WCC wish to see preserved in some way) and parts of the access road
- The Committee (& many local residents) feel it would be appropriate to commemorate their loss visibly with a memorial, in the same way as the 1912 RFC aeroplane crash was with its plaque on the Toll Bridge at Wolvercote
- The 17 men were trainees, instructors and experienced pilots alike, some combat veterans, who were killed in training or other accidents while serving their country based at or visiting this aerodrome during WW1
- 15 of the 17 were killed locally, 2 near Ascot. Most were aged in their early twenties and 4 had gallantry medals. One was a recognised Ace who had shot down 21 enemy aircraft and who, aged 20, died after refuelling on a cross country flight. Others died training through pilot error, structural failure or mechanical fault
- Statistically, we understand more pilots were killed training at home than by enemy action, a reflection of how dangerous flying was. We think there may have been between 80 and 120 crashes associated with this airfield over 2 years. While most of them were not fatal, 12 were. We know of 18 serious injuries
- 8 men are buried in Wolvercote cemetery<sup>591</sup> in Botley, 2 in Ascot and the others repatriated to home town locations across the UK – in Wales, Scotland & England

- We have a lot of background information on all 17 and are in contact with living relatives of 7 so far - residing in Canada, America, South Africa and Australia, as well as within the UK. There was/is a truly international human flavour to this aerodrome
- In terms of where we are with the project;-
  1. the Committee has agreed on a **preferred design** – a granite plaque (potentially the same stone as the 1912 plaque) set within a stone cairn -, & a **preferred location** – on one of the concrete bathing hut bases near the Wolvercote car park, adjacent to the aerodrome site but, significantly, not on the Meadow itself. We feel an interpretation panel is also required, and potentially some works to the concrete bases.
  2. We need to **undertake pre-application consultation** with your planning department (& possibly other organisations) to ensure our preferred design & location are feasible. We **may consider an outline planning application** prior to fund raising, if considered necessary to provide some certainty
  3. We then need to **get firmer estimates** for all the work. We have approached 3 stonemasons around the memorial itself (with 2 initial responses so far) and think the full package of work (including the interpretation panel and other works to the base) could be between £7,500 and £10,000.
  4. We recognise **fundraising** will be a challenge, however we feel there is a groundswell of community & hopefully political support for this worthwhile cause - a memorial to as yet unrecognised local casualties of WW1. We will be opening a bank account shortly, and are developing a fund raising strategy to include social media, and possibly crowd funding. All potential sources of funding will be considered.
  5. To help **raise awareness**, the aerodrome specifically featured in the BBC WW1 At Home digital archive series last year (an 11 minute item) broadcast locally, and our researcher has published several articles in the Oxford Mail and Oxford Times & does local talks. Committee members have also run a stall at local community events in Wolvercote in June & West Oxford earlier this month to promote public awareness & support. Straw polls at other community events have been unanimous in support for this project.
- The Committee is very keen to progress this project, and is pleased with and enthused by the positive feedback from residents and others so far. What we'd like to ask of your Council is:
  1. Are Members supportive of this project (& would you like regular updates?)
  2. Can Members [the Council] assist in terms of facilitating pre-application feedback and helping us progress & promote this project
  3. Are there any specific issues, concerns or suggestions Members may have that we need to be cognisant of and/or that may help this project
  4. [Is this Council able to support the project financially]

Wolvercote WW1 Aerodrome Memorial Project – Annex



The aerodrome in May 1918



Five of the seventeen fatal casualties



One of the eight casualties buried in Wolvercote Cemetery

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