

Notes of U3a HTW visit to Biggin Hill Memorial Museum and Chapel on 25th January 2023

15 members attended and all arrived promptly for a welcome cup of tea or coffee in the cafe. The introductory 15 minute talk by our Guide explained the long history of the development of Biggin Hill as an aerodrome from a relatively small area of farmland to the south of the main site which is now fully developed as a commercial airport with a long runway gradually extended from the short runways used during the second world war.

As we progressed through the main exhibition hall our guide was on hand to explain the story boards and interesting collection of WW11 items as questions arose or further information helped our understanding of the way wireless communications developed, the difficulty of flying early aeroplanes and the hardships those brave men endured. A map displayed the extent of the bombing and rocket attacks with locations where they fell. Many of the pilots and air crew were only 18 to 20 years old often flying several missions a day knowing the high risks involved. The numerous objects on display had been well preserved and documented.

The next room was dedicated to the women pilots who were crucial to maintaining the supply of aircraft transferring them from factory to bases and between airfields as the demand arose. Personal stories and models explained the operation and the skills they developed flying every sort of plane.

From there we proceeded into the chapel and sat whilst another guide explained its history and development into a dedicated memorial to those fliers who lost their lives carrying out fighter missions particularly in the Battle of Britain. The beautiful stained glass windows are of special note with individual story notes beneath. Names are recorded and flags displayed of the countries from which personnel are commemorated. The building and artefacts all so immaculately kept by the volunteers.

Everyone found the visit interesting and educational. The guides were excellent. So much local and national history on display. Worthy of another visit.

Lunch was available prior to a lecture about Winston Churchill in the afternoon.

Philip Boswell



