Seeking RAF Biggin Hill - Walking Trail: 1.6 miles

Kings Arms Pub
This pub is very popular with pilots stationed at RAF Biggin Hill. The building has a long story dating back to 1585. On 18th August 1940, the Kings Arms experienced a direct roof raid overhead. Customers Bill Blundell, Lou Deane and landlord Fred Horwood suffered injuries from the machine gun of a German Dornier 720, part of his leg, and tragically both Fred and Lou later died as a result of their wounds.

Vincent Square
Vincent Square used to be the married quarters for RAF personnel. It has now been developed for private housing. The remaining buildings date back to 1929. You will notice some gaps in the line of the houses – this is the aftermath of bombing during the Second World War where some houses were never rebuilt.

Barracks Block RAF
Here you will see red-brick buildings which were a part of the RAF West Camp facilities. They were mostly established during the post-1923 expansion of the RAF. They operated as workshops, barracks, hangars, offices and a mess. Some of the buildings are now in use by the Metropolitan Police.

Biggin Hill Memorial Museum
Here you can discover the story of Britain’s most famous fighter station through the personal experience of those who served there and the community that supported them. You will notice the Hurricane and Spitfire planes as gate guardians – they are replicas of actual planes of Geoffrey Wellum and Peter Brothers – pilots who both served here during the Battle of Britain.

Officers’ Mess
Behind the tall fence, just in front of St. George’s Chapel, you can see a red-brick building which was used as the Officers’ Mess. Dated around 1935, it is now used as a private residence.

St George’s RAF Chapel of Remembrance
The St George’s RAF Chapel of Remembrance which you can see now replaced a temporary chapel located on South Camp which was destroyed by fire in 1946. It was built in its current location in 1951 after a fundraising campaign led by Sir Winston Churchill as a memorial to the aircrew who died flying from the Biggin Hill sector during the Second World War.

Saltbox Hill
This was the site of The Saltbox Tea Rooms, a distinctive landmark for pilots returning to Biggin Hill. Originally two cottages, it became a cafe before the RAF took it over in 1936. It was the only residential building on the airfield side of the road. It was demolished when the road was widened in 1954. The name Saltbox derives from the salt box house – a building with a tall upright shape and a steep, sloping roof.

SAFETY NOTICE
Please be aware of other users of the road, especially cars. Also, be prepared for unexpected noise and gusts of wind as you walk around the edges of the airfield. It is not advisable to walk in poor weather or at night. Be prepared for unexpected noise and gusts of wind as you walk around the edges of the airfield. It is not advisable to walk in poor weather or at night.

Street names along the trail
Many street names in the area are related to the history of RAF Biggin Hill, commemorating pilots, personnel and places. A few examples are given below, but more detailed information can be found at www.bhmm.org.uk/trail

Dowding Road – Fighter Command Commander-in-Chief Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding (1882-1970) conceived and oversaw the development of the Dowding System - an integrated air defence system.

Henderson Grove – Air Chief Marshal Hubert Henderson (1913-2006) was one of the first three women in Britain to be awarded the Military Medal, for refusing to leave her post in the operations room at Biggin Hill after it took a direct hit during a German bombing raid.

Keith Park Crescent – Air Chief Marshal Keith Park (1901-1975) was the commander of 11 Group during the Battle of Britain. His first operational responsibility was to improvise plans for the evacuation of Allied troops from Dunkirk in May and June 1940.

Hanbury Drive – Air Commodore Felicity Hanbury MBE (Later Dame Felicity Peake, 1913-2013) was a founding director of the Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF).

Grice Avenue – Wing Commander Richard “Dickie” Grice DFC, was Group Captain at RAF Biggin Hill from 1939 and then Biggin Hill station commander from 1940. Every evening during the Battle of Britain he arranged a coach to take his pilots for a meal and to play a game of darts at the White Hart (See driving trail).

Street Memorial
This war memorial was unveiled on the 31st March 1923 to commemorate 32 people from Biggin Hill who lost their lives during the First World War. Later on, after the Second World War, 27 new names were added to the list in memory of those who lost their lives.

Black Horse Pub
The Black Horse pub played the role of ‘dropping off point’ for buses coming to Biggin Hill. It was a popular pub for locals, soldiers and airmen. The original building was demolished in 1908 and the new Black Horse was built, which you can see today.

Teapot Gardens (now demolished)
On this site stood one of the most famous tearooms in the area, it was known as the Teapot Gardens. A huge 4ft teapot was mounted on the top of a long pole. During the First and Second World Wars, units stationed at Biggin Hill organised ‘moonlight raids’ - competitions to remove the teapot from the pole and bring it back to the airfield as a prize.

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Seeking RAF Biggin Hill - Driving Trail

St Mary Cray Cemetery
This cemetery, also known as Orpington Cemetery, was used during the Second World War by RAF Biggin Hill. The majority of its 59 war burials are of airmen. The average life expectancy of a Spitfire pilot during the Battle of Britain was four weeks.

Towerfield
The operations room and Met Office Headquarters were relocated to Towerfield from Biggin Hill airfield after severe bombing in August 1940. The Met Office was able to move back to the airfield from Towerfield in late October 1944. Currently, the building is not publicly accessible.

51 Leaves Green Rd
At this place, Dornier Do 17 Z-2 was shot down by Hurricanes from 111 Squadron on 18th August 1940 – known as the hardest day of the Battle of Britain. The Dornier was part of a force sent to attack RAF Biggin Hill and RAF Kenley. Later it came under rifle fire from the 4th Battalion, Chislehurst, Kent Home Guard causing additional damage.

The Old Jail Pub
The building is 1863 but it had become well-known by the 1930s thanks to Archibald McIndoe and his pioneering plastic surgery techniques and holistic approach to the treatment of allied aircrew during the Second World War. McIndoe treated airmen who had suffered severe burns when the fuel tanks in their aircraft caught fire. The unprotected hands and face of the pilots were usually the most severely burned and these injuries became known as ‘airman’s burn’. McIndoe is probably most well-known for his pioneering treatments, including the introduction of saline baths and the use of tube pedicles for skin grafts. He also arranged for patients to visit the White Hart pub to help them relax and mix with the locals. Due to the experimental work performed on the men, patients became known as ‘McIndoe’s guinea pigs’. The injured airmen established the Guinea Pig Club (a support group) in 1937.

The White Hart Inn (Brasted)
The White Hart pub in Brasted was a favourite ‘watering hole’ during the war for the pilots from Biggin Hill. Many pilots deemed The White Hart to be Biggin Hill’s second officers’ mess. The famous blackout panels with pilot’s signatures are now proudly displayed at The Shoreham Battle of Britain Museum. Katherine Preston, the landlady of the White Hart Inn at Brasted, shared her memories of war time in the form of the book “The Inn of the Few”.

Queen Victoria Hospital
The origins of the hospital can be traced back to 1863 but it had become well-known by the 1930s thanks to Archibald McIndoe and his pioneering plastic surgery techniques and holistic approach to the treatment of allied aircrew during the Second World War. McIndoe treated airmen who had suffered severe burns when the fuel tanks in their aircraft caught fire. The unprotected hands and face of the pilots were usually the most severely burned and these injuries became known as ‘airman’s burn’. McIndoe is probably most well-known for his pioneering treatments, including the introduction of saline baths and the use of tube pedicles for skin grafts. He also arranged for patients to visit the White Hart pub to help them relax and mix with the locals. Due to the experimental work performed on the men, patients became known as ‘McIndoe’s guinea pigs’. The injured airmen established the Guinea Pig Club (a support group) in 1937.

Drive trail - even further:
Biggin Hill acquired a reputation as the most famous fighter station in the world, primarily through its associations with the Battle of Britain, the first time in history that a nation had retained its freedom and independence through air power. Biggin Hill was part of I Group, Sector C with its sector stations at West Malling and Manston, with the former customs airport at Lympne serving as a landing strip. Like Kenley, it was sited within a 2 mile radius of the former airbase. The operations room and Met Office Headquarters were relocated to Towerfield from Biggin Hill airfield after severe bombing in August 1940. The Met Office was able to move back to the airfield from Towerfield in late October 1944. Currently, the building is not publicly accessible.

Chartwell
Chartwell was home to wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill from 1924 until his death. Now the property is under the care of the National Trust. Visitors can see Churchill’s study where he penned his wartime speeches.

About the walking and driving trails
These trails focus on places that are closely connected with the history of RAF Biggin Hill. Locations on the walking trail are within a 2 mile radius of the former airbase, and for the driving trail - even further.

There are many remains from the former RAF aerodrome at Biggin Hill but they are now on private land or access to them is very limited. We felt it was important to point out the buildings which still exist, even in modified form. In some cases, non-existing places are mentioned, but only because of their direct connection to RAF Biggin Hill.

Other interesting spots
You can go off the trail and explore other interesting places. Please be aware of opening times and admission fees before you plan your visit.