



'Inspiring generations, remembering the Few and honouring the Many'

PRESS RELEASE – embargoed to 09:00 on Thursday 20th February

Biggin Hill Memorial Museum announces 80 events to mark 80 years since the Battle of Britain

One year after opening, Biggin Hill Memorial Museum announces an ambitious public programme to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain and the 75th Anniversary of VE Day. From May to November 2020, the Museum will stage 80 public events focusing on **Nostalgia, Remembrance and Legacy**. In keeping with the museum's ethos, the programme will remember these events of global significance through the rich personal stories of the people who lived and served at RAF Biggin Hill, the country's most famous fighter station and Churchill's "strongest link" during the Battle of Britain.

The commemorations will include a **spectacular drop of 80,000 poppy petals from the Spirit of Kent Spitfire** over St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance next to the Museum on Remembrance Sunday, 8th November 2020. A nostalgic **VE Day 1940s street party** will take place across the Museum site on Saturday 2nd May to mark 75 years since the end of WWII. There will be vintage vehicles, 1940s games, refreshments, a Make do and Mend stand, a 1940s hair and makeup stand amongst other activities. **A temporary exhibition, Battle of Britain 80: 80 Days, 80 Objects, 80 Memories** opens at the Museum on 10th July telling the story of the Battle of Britain through 80 objects and images.

Community events include an **installation of 80,000 handmade poppies** on the outside of St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance from 15th September. The poppies will be made by the community including Cadets, schools and local groups but we will need all the help available so please contact the Museum if you'd like to be part of this moving commemoration. **Cooking the Books** will explore wartime recipes from different aspects of WW2, such as catering in the services to a family cooking on rations. Each month the group will cook a dish together and the best recipes will be selected to create a small book produced for the Nightingale Café at the Museum.

Other events include Family History Workshops, a *Summer of Spitfire* Family Programme, Services in St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance and concerts marking the beginning and end of the Battle of Britain. Throughout the programme, there will be opportunities for visitors to meet World War 2 veterans and witnesses and to hear first-hand accounts of their experiences of life at RAF Biggin Hill, the Battle of Britain and VE Day.

Katie Edwards, Director of Biggin Hill Memorial Museum, says: "The skies above Biggin Hill were the frontline of one of the defining battles of the 20th century. We are therefore delighted to announce that Biggin Hill Memorial Museum will be marking the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain throughout the summer, concluding with our stunning poppy drop on Remembrance Day. This year it is particularly significant we share the life-changing and often moving personal experiences of those who served at Britain's most famous fighter station and the community that supported them. The Museum's focus on the human experience enables us to tell personal and local stories of global significance. These accounts help define our national identity; it is vital that they are remembered for generations to come."

Geoff Greensmith, who lived at Biggin Hill throughout World War 2, says, "The contribution of RAF Biggin Hill was fundamental to the Battle of Britain and the outcome of the war. The servicemen in the air and all those who served at the base, both army and RAF, served and died for our freedom. Today, Biggin Hill Memorial Museum is working hard to become a focal point for younger generations to keep these stories alive."

One of Britain's oldest aerodromes, RAF Biggin Hill was described by Winston Churchill as the "strongest link" during the Battle of Britain. In July 1940, two Squadrons 32 and 79 flew from RAF Biggin Hill to carry out coastal defence flights guarding shipping convoys around the southeast coastline. Throughout the summer, they were augmented or relieved by other squadrons including the famous 92 Squadron. The airfield was a senior sector station guiding the defensive fighters based at four other airfields to protect London and the south-east from aerial attack and bore the heavy concentration of assaults by the German Luftwaffe. The sector had endured 'The Hardest Day' on Sunday 18th August 1940, which was the hardest fought day of the Battle. Pilots from RAF Biggin Hill also played a major role on Sunday 15th September 1940, later known as Battle of Britain Day, during which more than a thousand aircraft took to the skies. RAF Biggin Hill sustained extensive attack during the Battle of Britain and in a three-week period was hit every day, sometimes twice a day. In October 1940 enemy tactics changed from attacking airfields to focus on London and Biggin Hill went on to defend London during the Blitz.

To mark the 80th anniversary, Biggin Hill Memorial Museum has also developed a new schools programme about the Battle of Britain with the aim of using primary and secondary historical resources to encourage learners to explore what it was really like for the men and women of

the Royal Air Force during their 'Finest Hour'. For further details visit <https://bhmm.org.uk/visit/battle-of-britain-80/>

"...it's not about medals, it's not about thank yous, but it's nice to be remembered...that's all we ask, to be remembered."

Geoffrey Wellum, Battle of Britain veteran 1921 – 2018

Notes to Editors

Biggin Hill Memorial Museum was opened in January 2019 to tell the story of Britain's most famous fighter station through the personal experiences of those who served there, and the community that supported them. Its high altitude and strategically important location between London and continental Europe led RAF Biggin Hill to become the most important airfield of the Battle of Britain. One of Britain's oldest aerodromes, RAF Biggin Hill is still internationally recognised as Sir Winston Churchill's 'strongest link'.

Biggin Hill Memorial Museum is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the London Borough of Bromley.

Biggin Hill Memorial Museum

St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance, Main Road, Biggin Hill, Kent, TN16 3EJ
01959 422414; hello@bhmm.org.uk;
www.bhmm.org.uk; @BigginHillMMT Facebook/BigginHillMMT

Open Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 5pm, Saturday 9am to 5pm, closed on Mondays.
Adult admission from £7.50, concessions available, children under 5 free.