











ST GEORGE'S
ROYAL AIR FORCE CHAPEL OF REMEMBRANCE
BIGGIN HILL
Memorial Service for
Commandant (Squadron Leader) René Mouchotte
Sunday 27th August 2023



The Strongest Link

Chaplain to the Chapel: Reverend Alison Newman BD Hons.
Organist: Mr Eric Johnstone.

Commandant (Squadron Leader) René Mouchotte

	Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur
	Compagnon de la Libération
	Croix de guerre 1939-1945 avec 6 citations
	Distinguished Flying Cross
	Croix de guerre 1939-1945, Tchécoslovaquie
	1939-1945 Star avec agrafe « Battle of Britain »
	War Medal 1939-1945
	Aircrew Europe Star



21 August 1914 - 27 August 1943

**'St. George's Chapel is a place of Prayer and Remembrance,
we bid you to pray to God whose presence fills it and
gratefully remember the few whose sacrifice inspired it.'**

Words on a plaque affixed to the Chapel door 1943

Please stand for Reverend Alison Newman

Chaplain:

Welcome

Please sit

We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

God our Father, we thank you that you have made each one of us in your own image and given us gifts and talents with which to serve you. We thank you for René as we honour his memory. Make us more aware that you are the one from whom comes every perfect gift, including the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

All: Amen

Please stand to sing

O Ruler of the earth and sky
Be with our airmen when they fly;
And keep them in thy loving care
Amid the perils of the air.
O let our cry come unto Thee
For those in who fly o'er land and sea.

Strong son of Man, save those who fly
Swift winged across th'uncharted sky;
Each anxious hour and lonely flight
Serenely challenged, day and night.
O'er land and ocean safely bear
All those in peril in the air.

O Holy Spirit, God's own power,
Give peace in sudden danger's hour
Bring calm of heart, and be Thou near
To those who watch and those who fear
To Thee will rise the grateful prayer
Of those who serve Thee in the air.

O Trinity of Love and Grace
True Guide of all who fly through space,
In peace and war, 'mid friend and foe,
Be with them wheresoe'er they go.
So shall our praise with Heaven's blend
And joyful hearts to thee ascend.

Please sit

Chaplain: René Mouchotte and St George's Chapel.

On 15th May 1943, two pilots flying from Royal Air Force Biggin Hill aerodrome, claimed the 1000th kill of an enemy aircraft. They were Squadron Leader Jack Charles, a Canadian and Commandant René Mouchotte, a Frenchman. This event was highly prestigious for the station and was celebrated by all. The action by the two pilots, together with the acknowledgement of how important the Battle of Britain had been to the progress of the war, three years previously, was the inspiration for a Memorial Chapel.

Although there was already a station Chapel in 1943, station personnel wanted a separate Chapel to honour those who had already lost their lives and those who would continue to do so throughout the duration of the war. To this end, three wooded huts were joined together, and a Memorial Chapel was born. It was austere with plain windows, wooden chairs, and a wooden altar. Either side of the altar were wooden boards with the names of the aircrew who had been killed flying from Biggin Hill Sector C, previously in the war.

On 27th August 1943, one of the two men, who in most part were the inspiration for the Memorial Chapel was killed in action. René Mouchotte was destined, never to see the Chapel dedicated on the 19th September 1943.

His name lives on and is inscribed on the Reredos with his compatriots of 341 Alsace Free French Squadron who died in the war.

We remember him today in St George's Royal Air Force Chapel of Remembrance, on the 80th anniversary of his death and give grateful thanks for his selfless and courageous service, so that we and others might live in safety and freedom.

**Jan Leeming: A poem by Owen Leeming, a New Zealander,
who visited the Chapel on 25th May 1959.**

Memorial Chapel

Five hundred memorial names
With flags behind God's altar
Glass stained full of wings
Gold leaf cut into oak
Five hundred memorial names.

Bob and Titch play jazz
Ack-ack plays outside
Gold leaf holds their harmony
Till Sector Office rings
Bob and Titch play jazz.

Scramble of twenty-year heroes
Wing-tip touching wing-tip
Pride before flight or fall
Grab black cat and St Christopher
Scramble of twenty-year heroes.

Life a cabaret of nightmares
'Freddie got a chop over Dover
Jimmy hacked down over Deal
Praise me, sweetheart, love me'
Life a cabaret of nightmares.

They slew two thousand Huns
Blast off their pig-dog wings
Plummeting sticks of fire
Litter our field with swastikas
They slew two thousand Huns.

Five hundred memorial names
In the church like a prefab hut
Gold in the oak breaks promises
Wings in windows throw shadows
Five hundred memorial names.

Eric Johnstone: Prelude in C Major for Piano by JS Bach

The French composer Charles Gounod was inspired by this iconic work and adapted it for one of his most well-known pieces, "Ave Maria".

Margaret Wilmot: Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3: 1-8

There is a time for everything,
And a season for every activity under the heavens:
A time to be born and a time to die,
A time to plant and a time to uproot,
A time to kill and a time to heal,
A time to tear down and a time to build,
A time to weep and a time to laugh,
A time to mourn and a time to dance,
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
A time to search and a time to give up,
A time to keep and a time to throw away,
A time to tear and a time to mend,
A time to be silent and a time to speak,
A time to love and a time to hate,
A time for war and a time for peace.

Please kneel or sit

Chaplain: Prayer for the foundation of the Royal Air Force

Lord God, we remember the courage and dedication of those, who in past days took to the air, and pioneered the Royal Air Force we know today. Especially we remember the sacrifice of the few, for the many in times of war and strife. Grant that, being inspired by their example, we may follow them in their endeavours to work for a world in which peace and justice reign supreme, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **All:** Amen

Saint John Henry Newman's Prayer

May the Lord support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in his mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and holy rest, and peace at the last. **All:** Amen

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.

Please sit

Colonel Xavier Rival, French Air Attaché

Eulogy

René Mouchotte occupies a very special place in the Pantheon of French Air Force fighter pilots who died in action. Resting alongside Georges Guynemer, Antoine de saint Exupéry and Edmond Marin la Meslée, he fought to liberate France by serving exclusively in the Royal Air Force. René Mouchotte is also unique within the Royal Air Force. Indeed, although many have described what they may have experienced during WWII after the war, very few have been able to find the time and energy to do so while they were fighting. René Mouchotte's diaries are absolutely remarkable in this respect.

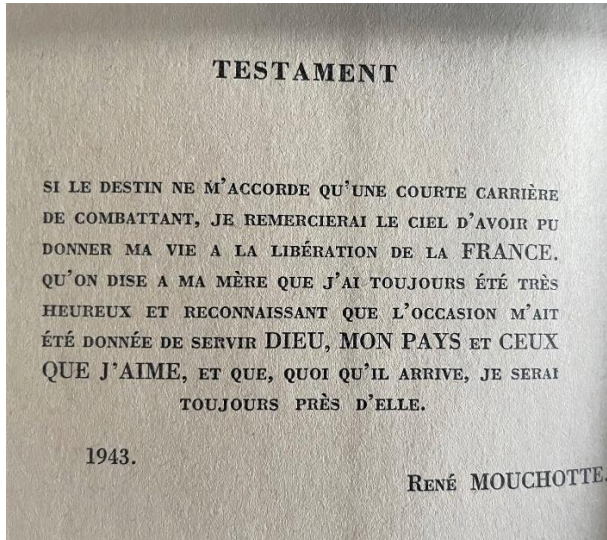
René Mouchotte obtained his military pilot's license in 1937 and was appointed instructor at Avord before being sent to North Africa in May 1940. He refused the armistice and seized an aeroplane to reach Gibraltar and then England, where he arrived on July 13. He familiarized himself with British equipment and procedures and took part in action for the first time during the height of the Battle of Britain, flying Hawker Hurricanes.

Reading his famous notebooks published after his death, we discover a pilot animated by the permanent will to do battle with the enemy. He never wants to be far from the fight and he even wrote to Winston Churchill asking that his squadron be sent to the front... and a week later he resumes fighting over the English Channel.

An exemplary leader endowed with great humility, recognized by his British brothers in arms, he continues today to inspire the youngest generations of airmen especially regarding coalition operations, which are, more than ever the *sine qua non* of high intensity engagements.

René's Testament

If fate allows me only a brief fighting career, I shall thank heaven for having been able to give my life for the liberation of France. Let my mother be told that I have always been very happy and thankful that the opportunity has been given to me to serve God, my country and those I love, and that whatever happens I shall always be near her.



Please stand to sing

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.

Please sing

The French National Anthem La Marseillaise

Allons enfants de la Patrie
Le jour de gloire est arrivé
Contre nous de la tyrannie
L' étendard sanglant est levé !
L' étendard sanglant est levé !
Entendez-vous dans les campagnes,
Mugir ces féroces soldats?
Ils viennent jusque dans nos bras
Égorger nos fils, nos compagnes !

Aux armes, citoyens !
Formez vos bataillons !
Marchons ! Marchons !
Qu'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons !

Chaplain: The Blessing

May the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All: Amen



*The cross of Lorraine is a symbol of
free France during WWII*



*The last known photograph of
Commandant René Mouchotte.*



*On 15 May 1943 Biggin Hill claimed its 1000th enemy aircraft destroyed.
Commandant René Mouchotte 341 Alsace Squadron is seen shaking hands with
Squadron Leader Jack Charles 611 Squadron jointly claiming the event.*

ST GEORGE'S RAF CHAPEL OF REMEMBRANCE

Royal Air Force Biggin Hill is no doubt the most famous fighter station in the world. The station crest shows a sword encircled by a chain, Biggin Hill was a link in the chain of RAF stations protecting London in the Second World War. The airfield was very heavily bombed, but the station did not give up. The Station Commander, Group Captain Grice, ordered the complete destruction of the last remaining damaged hangar, in the hope that the Luftwaffe would see everything had been destroyed and would stop attacking the airfield.

This Chapel was built in 1951, replacing an earlier station church destroyed by fire in 1946. Its simple style and size are similar to the original church. Padre King and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, (who visited Biggin Hill on his journey to Chartwell), led a public appeal for funds, to build a permanent Memorial Chapel. Winston Churchill said, "for as a nation we have short memories, and it is well that Memorials such as this should bring to our remembrance the cost of our victory in the days when one of our fighter pilots had to be worth ten. They died without seeing the reward of their efforts; we live to hold their reward inviolate and unfading".

The public responded well and with government funding, St George's RAF Chapel of Remembrance was built. The foundation stone was laid by Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding in 1951 and the Chapel was later dedicated by the Bishop of Rochester.

The names of 453 aircrew of the 52 squadrons of the Biggin Hill Sector who made the supreme sacrifice in World War II are inscribed in gold lettering on the reredos, which is the actual memorial. Flags of the Commonwealth and Allied countries whose pilots served in the Biggin Hill Sector are each side of the altar. The altar frontal is embroidered (as in 1943) with emblems of the British Isles and Allied countries and bears the quotation from Psalm 63 "In the Shadow of Thy Wings Will I Rejoice". A decorated Remembrance Book was created, and a page was turned daily by the Orderly Officer, a practice which continues today with Museum staff.

Over time, the plain windows in the Chapel were replaced with twelve beautiful stained-glass windows by Hugh Easton, the designer of the RAF Memorial Window in Westminster Abbey. The theme is a *cloud of witnesses*, and each depicts the winged spirit of a young pilot embracing a badge in his arms. The badges are of the seven squadrons operating from Biggin Hill from 10 July to 31 October 1940 - The Battle of Britain, Fighter Command, No 11 Group, the Station crest with its motto "The Strongest Link" and portraits of a Spitfire and Hurricane. Some windows were donated by companies and others by individuals with emotional inscriptions.

The Aircrew Association (ACA) Memorial Window, above the entrance, shows their badge of a three-bladed propellor within the RAF roundel with the inscription "Dedicated to British, Commonwealth and Allied Aircrews".

In St George's Room, (now part of the Museum), is the Battle of Britain Memorial window illustrating the symbolic victory of St George, our patron saint, over the forces of evil. At the top are the badges of the squadrons at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain, and the army, a reminder of its invaluable support. Four other stained-glass windows depict ground support activities, so vital for the air victory. The scenes are ground control, rescue services, aircraft servicing and parachute packing. You might notice something strange about the descending parachutist!

In the war only six Military Medals were awarded to the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Three of these Military Medals were awarded to WAAFs serving at Biggin Hill in the Battle of Britain and are depicted in the Ground Control window. Roads in the Married Quarters were named after the WAAFs: Flight Officer Elspeth Henderson, Sergeant Joan Mortimer and Sergeant Helen Turner.

RAF Biggin Hill still has two Gate Guardians, a Spitfire and a Hurricane. The presence of two is unique and indicates the importance of Biggin Hill as an RAF station. In the 1960s, they were aircraft that had flown to the airfield. When their true historical value was realised, they were replaced by two replicas from a film set, which were certainly not made to withstand the weather. Following extensive repairs which did not last, the Chapel Council decided to replace them.

It took years and many letters to receive permission from the RAF to change the Gate Guardians for purpose-built full-scale models. At one time the engine numbers were requested by an RAF Unit! An appeal was launched by the Friends of St George's Chapel and the public donated enthusiastically. Two aircraft were chosen of pilots who had survived the war and flown from Biggin Hill in the Battle of Britain. The replicas were installed in 2010 - a 92 Sqn Spitfire K9998 QJ-K flown by Pilot Officer Geoffrey Wellam and a Hurricane P2921 GZ-L of 32 Sqn flown by Flight Lieutenant Peter Brothers. The Gate Guardians continue the duty of guarding St George's Royal Air Force Chapel of Remembrance today.



Services are held here every Sundays at 9.30am. Everyone is welcome.