

# Say a prayer for St George's chapel

The famous RAF chapel at Biggin Hill, spiritual home of The Few and one of the best Battle of Britain memorials in the country, is looking for a new owner.

From March next year, the RAF will no longer be responsible for St George's Chapel.

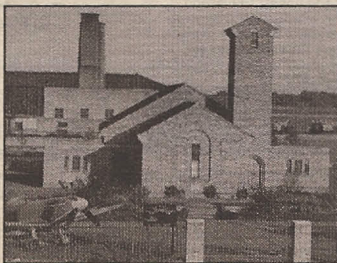
All administrative and ecclesiastical support will be withdrawn and the present custodians, led by Laurie Chester, will either retire or take directions from a new landlord, yet to be identified.

In order to preserve the heritage of this site, supporters from all over the country are hoping the future of the chapel can be linked with the proposed Biggin Hill heritage centre, which has been hit by a succession of setbacks and disappointments.

Only recently, Bromley Council rejected the latest architectural and business plans for the centre.

Gordon Wright, chairman of the Supporters' Club told me Bromley tightened the strings on their budget and came up with a different concept with the centre virtually piggy-backing the chapel.

He said: "However, it was not functional with no real main



**The new St George's Chapel was dedicated in 1954 with the guardians in place. The first memorial chapel burnt down in 1946**

central museum area, so we have submitted a new version of their concept which pulls all the space together.

"Meanwhile, I am working on a business plan that includes the financing of the chapel."

Of all the buildings associated with RAF Biggin Hill, St George's Chapel remains inviolate.

Built in rich red brick with a large barn-style roof in heavy terracotta, it is one of the best memorials in Britain to The Few.

Visitors have walked through the doors to experience the deeply moving reminder of the men who took us through the

most crucial five years of our history.

Oak panels contain the names of 453 aircrew who were killed in operations while flying from the Biggin Hill sector between 1939 and 1945. They came from 52 Squadrons and they represent the Commonwealth and 12 Allied nations.

The Foundation stone was laid by Air Chief Marshal the Lord Dowding and three years later the two best-known veterans of the war, the Hurricane and Spitfire, were dedicated as the gate guardians.

St George's Chapel, unique in RAF history, has been a regular place of worship for airmen and their families and, in recent years, for veterans, supporters and friends.

The chapel also contains 12 stained glass windows each representing a squadron that served at the airfield.

They were designed by Hugh Easton, best known for his Battle of Britain memorial window in Westminster Abbey.

Anna Soubry Minister of State for Defence, has told Caroline Spelman, Minister for the Environment, the MoD will do everything it can to assure the long-term preservation of the chapel's future.

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May I wish readers a happy new year and thank all those who help me each week to revive events and characters from the past.