

LOCAL VOICES FROM KENLEY'S PAST

On this embankment, during the Battle of Britain, stood anti-aircraft guns, pointing skyward, ready to shoot down enemy aircraft flying over the village of Whyteleafe. Some of the men and women who fought in this conflict lie buried in the cemetery of St. Luke's Church, visible below.



A powerful 40mm Bofors gun.

Cost of War

The two World Wars had different impacts on the local community. Many men left the area during the First World War, to fight and die abroad. In contrast, allied pilots arrived here during the Second World War, to fight against Hitler.

Some of those who gave their lives are buried in the airman's corner of the churchyard. Roads around the airfield are named after famous Kenley airmen, including the approach road - 'Victor Beamish Avenue'.



Photograph Courtesy of Aviano Scott

Home front

As the Second World War progressed, people joined their local Observer Corps, watching out for enemy activity in the air and relaying this information to the Operations Room.

At Kenley, local people constructed the airfield and also worked in the kitchens and hospitals. Some took service-related roles, such as air raid wardens and fire crews.

"I tried my best with dried eggs, milk, sawdust sausages and margarine - at least we did not starve. We were more concerned for our pilots than to worry about petty complaints about food that were beyond our means to resolve."

(Frances Cherry, WAAF, based at Kenley).



Council lorry loaded with equipment to deal with the aftermath of enemy action and associated rescue personnel. Purley c. 1940.



Nurse Judkins and Matron Backhouse. Caterham c. 1940.

The presence of the airfield resulted in the area being a major target for enemy attacks, putting civilian lives and property at risk. Despite the pressure on the local communities, war time accounts are full of a sense of camaraderie, and of people 'pulling together' towards a common goal.



Bomb damaged house in Coulsdon 1944.

A boy's own Kenley

Kenley aerodrome was a magnet to the boys living locally. The aircraft were often parked so close to the edge of the field that every detail of their design could be seen:

"I once had the pleasure of helping to prevent a Hawker Hart from colliding with a hedge. Some airmen playing football nearby realised he was not going to be able to pull up in the ground he had left to him. We brought the machine to a stop not within 6 inches to spare from the hedge which separated the field from a house. The pilot looked decidedly shocked." (H.L. Martin; Courtesy of the Bourne Society).



A boy watches airmen as they service biplanes.



Salvation Army Base at 'The Drill Hall', Godstone Road, Caterham. Group 9 Canadian personnel with 2 vehicles outside the building. 1942.

New friends

The rising prominence of Kenley as a fighter station caused influxes of Allied service men and women. The structure of the community changed as foreign and Commonwealth pilots, particularly from Poland, Canada and New Zealand, made their homes here.



A.C.W. June, a 21 year old New Zealand W.A.A.F. was one of the first official 'Post Mistresses' for the R.A.F. at Kenley 1943.