

15 January 2015

Chocks away for 'First World War in the Air' exhibition at Cosford

Today the Royal Air Force Museum Cosford officially unveiled a brand new exhibition area celebrating the achievements of Britain's air services, the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and Royal Naval Air Service along with the contributions made by the West Midlands in the race for the sky during the First World War. The exhibition entitled 'First World War in the Air' has been made possible with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) with support from BAE Systems and is now open for visitors to enjoy.

The exhibition was officially opened by Brendan Connor, Deputy Chairman of the RAF Museum Trustees in the presence of Fi Stephens, Grants Officer from the HLF and Directors from BAE Systems, with key partners and invited guests. The '**First World War in the Air**' is a new permanent exhibition that will enable visitors to discover and explore the unique and often overlooked role of air power during the First World War through the incredible stories of the men and women who served and protected our nation in the earliest days of military aviation in Britain's air services.

The exhibition uses the RAF Museum's world-class collection of aircraft, documents, film and photographs to reveal how aviation changed the character of war forever. Set amongst the Museum's collection of warplanes, three iconic First World War aircraft; the Sopwith Pup, Sopwith 1 ½ Strutter and the Bristol M.1c form the centre piece of the new display. The Sopwith Pup was used extensively during the First World War by the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps and considered the perfect flying machine by its Pilots. The Bristol M.1c and the Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutter are full scale reproductions.

Displayed alongside the aircraft are the personal items of Second Lieutenant Kevin Robert Furniss of the RFC, who lived only a few miles from Cosford in Wolverhampton. Donated to the Museum in 2013 by his great niece, Kevin's belongings included documents ranging from baby photographs and school reports to obituaries and memorials, telling the story of Kevin's tragically short life. Artefacts on display include Kevin's RFC flying helmet and wings, a complete wash kit and a letter to his father all returned to his next of kin following his death. The personal letters between Kevin and his family and friends provide an insight into the personality of this brave young man and his experiences during the First World War.

Karen Whitting, Director of Public Programmes at the Royal Air Force Museum, said:

"It is incredibly important for the Museum to share these First World War stories and experiences with the local community here at Cosford, particularly when considering the 'local heroes' from the West Midlands area such as 2nd Lt. Kevin Furniss. The exhibition also marks the beginning of an important phase for the Museum as it gears up to celebrate the RAF's centenary in 2018."

Fi Stephens, Grants Officer at the Heritage Lottery Fund said:

"It's fantastic to see the opening of this new exhibition which, thanks to Lottery players, will mean the RAF Museum will be able to play a full part in marking the centenary of the First World War, bringing to the fore an important but currently less well known aspect of the war."

Chris Boardman, Managing Director of BAE Systems Military Air and Information, said:

"The evolution of the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force from 1912 to the present day is closely linked with BAE Systems and its predecessor companies. We are delighted to be supporting the opening of this new gallery and the ambitious plans to redevelop the site over the next four years to inspire future generations of engineers and entrepreneurs."

Today also marks the launch of a brand new First World War workshop for school groups entitled 'Life above the Trenches'. Year 6 pupils from Albrighton Primary School attended the opening event and took part in a variety of activities throughout the day, including readings from Writer in Residence Tom Palmer based on the letters of Second Lieutenant Kevin Furniss (RFC). This new workshop will help children understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed using a range of artefacts. Focusing on the life of a Royal Flying Corps (RFC) pilot, interactive activities will introduce children to the history of the RFC with the opportunity to examine First World War artefacts including uniform, maps letters and aircraft in order to build a picture of the life of a pilot. Any schools interested in the 'Life above the Trenches' workshop can book their place now by contacting the Museum's Access and Learning team on 01902 376243 or email learning-cosford@rafmuseum.org.

A linked online resource includes the digitisation of and wider public access to historical documents such as First World War Casualty Cards, Casualty Forms and Muster Rolls, that tell the story of the men and women of the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force. These can be accessed at www.rafmuseumstoryvault.com

In December 2014 the RAF Museum successfully opened a major new 'First World War in the Air' exhibition at its London site and today's exhibition opening at Cosford marks the first step in a joint transformation of the Museum at both its sites, in advance of the Centenary of the Royal Air Force in 2018.

The First World War in the Air exhibition was made possible with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Museum would also like to thank BAE Systems for its support for the exhibition.

The Museum is open daily from 10am and admission is free of charge. For more information on the Museum, visit www.rafmuseum.org or call 01902 376200.

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Notes to Editors:

- The 'First World War in the Air' exhibition at RAF Museum London and Cosford was designed by Ralph Appelbaum Associates
- www.rafmuseum.org
- Follow us on Facebook – The Royal Air Force Museum, Cosford
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- Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, Shifnal, Shropshire, TF11 8UP
- Open daily from 10am

- Admission to the Royal Air Force Museum is free of charge
- RAF Museum Cosford images & logo available at: <http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/media-vault.aspx>
- For further information and all media enquiries please contact:
Michelle Morgans on 01902 376212 or email michelle.morgans@rafmuseum.org
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About the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF):

From the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife, we use National Lottery players' money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about. To date, HLF has awarded over £60million to more than 1000 First World War Centenary projects – including £16.8m to 103 projects in London. We will continue to support as many applications as we can afford that want to commemorate the centenary. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on twitter @heritagelottery #understandingWW1

About BAE Systems:

At BAE Systems, we serve the needs of our customers by delivering a wide range of advanced defence, aerospace, and security solutions that provide a technological and performance edge. We work together with local partners to develop, engineer, manufacture and support the innovations that sustain economies, increase defence sovereignty and safeguard commercial interests. With some 88,000 employees in six continents, our story is about talented people who are relentlessly committed to creating solutions that protect and strengthen nations, commerce, communities, and people. That's work that inspires us. That's BAE Systems.

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