THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT

CORPS MEMORIAL GARDEN – THE STORY

at the RBL National Remembrance Gardens (formerly the National Memorial Arboretum)

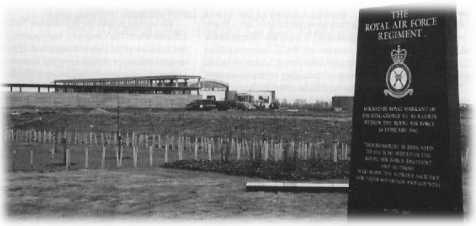


MISSION: The Mission of the Corps Memorial Garden shall be to provide the principal, RAF Regiment-wide Memorial and Commemorative focus for the Corps.

The RAF Regiment Corps Memorial Garden (CMG) is situated within the Royal British Legion's (RBL) National Remembrance Gardens (NRG) - formerly known as the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) - at Alrewas in Staffordshire. The original NMA's inspiration was, in fact, driven by the concern of the late Group Captain Sir Leonard Cheshire VC, who felt that something positive should be done to remember forever our debt to those gave so much to defend our freedom.

It then fell to a retired Royal Naval officer, Commander David Childs CBE, to address that concern and his inspiration was the US Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington County, Virginia, just across the Potomac River from Washington DC. While the NRG is not, and never will be, a cemetery, it was established formally in 2001 as a British site of national remembrance, whose objective is to honour the fallen, recognise service and sacrifice, and foster pride in the British Armed Forces and civilian community. The NRG is run by the RBL with its main funding provided principally by the UK Ministry of Defence, the RBL and public donations. Entry to the NRG is free, although donations on departure are clearly welcome and needed. The NRG is a 'must-do' visit for any involved with the Services.

The Corps Memorial was dedicated on 5th April 2001 as one of the first Service Memorials at the NMA and thus has 'Founder' status within the NMA/NRG organization. The Inauguration Day was exceptionally wet and windy, with the NMA site – bereft of trees in the beginning – pictured as a Somme-like sea of mud. However, it failed to dampen the Dedication Service attended by the then Commandant General, Air Commodore Richard Moore, and some 300 serving and veteran Corps members, together with their partners and friends. And so the Corps Memorial Garden was born.



From the time of the muddy inception of the CMG, the NRG has grown and matured beyond recognition. The initial 90-acre site has nearly doubled in size and there are literally hundreds of dedicated Memorials now in place, with more being added on most months. The **Corps Memorial** remains one of the more impressive memorials there; although there are bigger and more ornate memorials there, the **Corps Memorial** has a quiet, understated but imposing dignity befitting the Corps' history, recognising the part played by the tens of thousands of its members since 1942, together with the RAF Regiment's antecedents in the RAF Armoured Car Companies (1921-46) and the RAF Ground Gunners (1940-42).



Since the CMG was established, the lawn, trees and hedges have matured, a new Drystone Wall – replacing an early brick backdrop and reminiscent of the vista on the Catterick Training Area in North Yorkshire - has been built. Immediately in front of the Wall is an evocative ***'Fallen Gunner'* Memorial**, reminding us of the ultimate sacrifice paid by Corps members over the decades since it was established in 1942.



The original T-shaped pathway has been extended by a **'Hollow Square'** from the Corps Memorial up to the Drystone Wall, where significant RAF Regiment and RAF Armoured Car Companies' Theatres and campaigns and the associated 27 Battle Honours, are commemorated. More recently, all of the Commandant Generals are reflected. There are also developing 5- and 10-Year Plans to enable further improvements to be made in the coming years to enhance the whole CMG experience and to educate and inform the visitors, many of whom have little or no previous knowledge of the Corps.

Another facility is that of the **Memorial and Commemorative Stones**, placed in the pathway of the CMG, on which inscriptions record individuals, Corps formations and events. Individual Memorial Stones may be commissioned for any former (ie RAF Regiment Flash-badged) and passed member of the Corps. A list of those individuals so honoured are listed under the Roll of Honour webpage. A more recent provision has been the addition of *'Reserved Placement'* stones, whereby an individual

may ‘plan ahead’ and reserve a particular position in the pathway – perhaps with old friends, comrades or in a unit cluster?
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Although the CMG is the venue for many Corps and individual-related commemorations and celebrations each year, its principal event is the **Annual Corps Memorial Commemoration Service** held **on Armed Forces’ Day** on the last Saturday of June. This is a highly popular event, normally attended by the Commandant General of the RAF Regiment and graced with the presence of **The King’s Colour for the RAF Regiment**. One for the Diary each year!

There is the facility to stage bespoke Commemorative and Memorial Services, sponsored by suitable organisations and individuals; details may be viewed on the [Events webpage].

Recognising the need to put the CMG on a more formal footing, it was decided to associate the CMG with the RAF Regiment’s registered charity arm, *The Centurion Fund*. From the 1st May 2020, an **Executive Council** (Exco) was established, through its Constitution, as an associate of the Fund, *“to formulate the CMG policy, execute facility management, ensure its efficient running and maintenance, and maintain at all times the dignity and gravitas required of the Corps’ dedicated Memorial and its environs.”*

The Exco comprises a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, with further members representing Memorials, Grounds, Historical Advice, Royal Bodyguards, Serving and Veteran Members Families and the various RAF Regiment-related associations. It is also affiliated to the *RAF Regiment Heritage Centre* with its Curator also a member of the Exco. Primary funding of the annual maintenance costs fall to *The Centurion Fund,* while the various projects may be funded, variously, by *The Centurion Fund*, the associations, through crowd-funding and by private subscription within and beyond the Corps family. ”. The Exco membership may be viewed at the [Exco webpage].

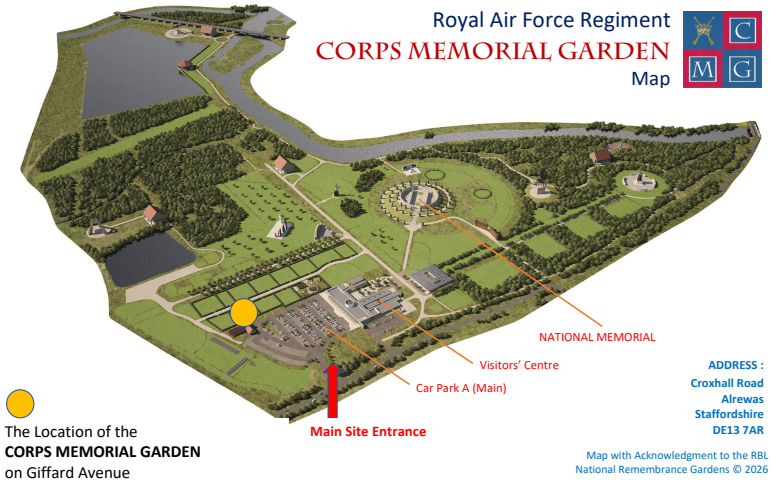


Details of the **Individual Memorial and Reserved Placement Stones** – and how to order - may be viewed and downloaded at the [Memorial Stones webpage]

The CMG and NRG is located at: Croxall Rd, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire, DE13 7AR. [SatNav: DE13 7AR]

The Garden itself is located near the end of Giffard Avenue, on the left, near to the Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) building.





CMG: THE JEWEL IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT'S CROWN