

Kenley Revival

Evaluation Addendum 1



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December 2021

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Arts | Museums | Heritage



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1. Introduction

Kenley Revival was a National Lottery Heritage Funded project to revive interest, appreciation and understanding of Kenley Airfield. The project originally due to complete in April 2019, and was first extended to the end of 2019. It was further extended to resolve issues with thaumasite damage to the conservation works, and allow for the installation of interpretation. However, the delivery of the HF funded activity plan effectively completed as planned in 2019, and the project evaluation report by sam-culture was submitted at that time.

This addendum to the evaluation, produced for Kenley Revival, was commissioned to cover:

- The response to onsite signage which was delayed due to difficulties and delays in the production and installation.
- Activities delivered by the Legacy Officer, funded by the City of London Corporation to continue community engagement activities.
- Lessons learnt in the final stages of the project.

2. Onsite signage and interpretation: design and production

Kenley Airfield is the most intact fighter airfield from World War II. The image below indicates the extent of this historically significant site. Although many of the buildings associated with the WW2 airfield have been lost, the original fighter pens, Officers' Mess and NAAFI and other smaller buildings and structures remain. Onsite signage is important to allow visitors greater engagement with the location and its history and relevance as a site.



Heritage Fund Approved purposes

The Approved Purpose for the onsite interpretation as set out in the HF funding agreement were as follows.

Increased onsite interpretation focused on two key 'zones' in the areas undergoing most conservation, using narrative themes based around personal experience of those who worked on the common, related to 'Kenley and the defence of London', nature, recreation, and Kenley as a living airfield.

A Heritage Trail, 5 interactive panels, 28 interpretive signs and 17 way finding posts, a printed leaflet, and outlines of planes in the pens will unify the interpretation, supported by a website and travelling exhibition. Annual flypasts will take place.

What was delivered from the Approved Purposes

- 6 Large wings (information boards)
- 4 small wings
- 13 table tops
- A travelling portable exhibition that has been on display at Croydon Museum and the Battle of Britain Museum, as well as local venues

Signage has only recently been installed on site in 2021, due to the following reasons:

- **Interpretation design:**

Creating signage design and text should have been a less protracted process. Imagemakers exhibition design was sub-contracted by Allsigns to write and design the interpretation for onsite signs. Their scheme was based on access and a WW2 character-led trail more suited to a museum experience than a large outdoor space with multiple entry points.

Consultation and input from volunteers and Friends of Kenley Airfield led to a different approach focused on technical information and memorials to pilots and that also directed people to different parts of the Airfield.

A lesson learnt was that input from RAF military historians to fact-check text should have been woven into the process. It was important not to assume knowledge and to produce text suited to a reading age of 12, although this caused difficulties when describing technical details around aircraft and airfield equipment.

- **Planning permission issues:**

Planning and conservation officers initially questioned the approval of planning permission on the basis that the number of signs envisaged would clutter up the landscape and disrupt views of the site's features. Their suggestion for less signage would have led to their being fewer signs than the small number already there.

The planning application was then delayed due to the content and design work requiring more time than allowed for, and pending the need for a fully detailed design proposal for the planning application.

This delay and subsequent revisions led to changes to the Approved Purposes. The signage numbers were reduced from 50 in the tender to the following: 13 tabletops; 5 small wings; 6 large wings. The 17 wayfinding posts were deemed unnecessary due to the installation of a new perimeter fence. Smaller signs are now in place on focal points and more in keeping with an airfield rather than a countryside environment. Following a suggestion by RAF Head of History, signs are made of fibreglass rather than wood in the shapes of Spitfire wings that reflect the Airfield's history. These locations were fixed and reduced the risk of visual clutter flagged as an issue by planners

The Ministry of Defence owns the operational part of the Airfield and required changes to the locations of signs on their land as these would affect Kenley's operations as an active airfield to train pilots using gliders. The airfield is also used by Surrey Hills Gliding Club and for training RAF Air Cadets.

- **Production issues with the signs:**

The biggest production issue arose from a breakdown in the relationship between the primary contractor and their sub-contractor doing the design work

3. Onsite signage and interpretation: visitor response

What was delivered:

A new Heritage Trail. This signage provides information across the site, from the large Spitfire Wing signs at the entrances to the Common to the smaller Hurricane Wing signs identifying the WW2 remaining heritage features. Information about the stories of the men and women who served at Kenley and the historic events which took place there is shown on thirteen tabletop stands.

The project team requested that Allsigns produced samples of the sign types to be used to discharge the planning condition. However, when these tabletop signs were installed onsite, they were found to be unfit-for-purpose: the tops split as they were not strong enough, despite having seemed so when inspected in the factory. Allsigns consequently strengthened the signs.

Regrettably, some of the new signs have been vandalised and damaged through public misuse as seats or for children's play: this required removal of the signs from the site for repairs and strengthening.



Meeting Heritage Fund outcomes and project objectives:

The quotes below have been collected by the Kenley Revival Legacy Officer from various Facebook groups and comments posted on the Kenley Revival website.

- Heritage will be better interpreted and explained:

'How amazing all the new information signs are around the aerodrome. We live in Halton Road, my 4-year-old loved the old signs, but these new ones sparked an amazing interest in the world wars and our local history with him. We have been fascinated by all the old aircraft and people and what used to be here. He now often tells our family about it. Thank you.'

'I was pleased to see the new information boards (wings) at Kenley recently. Along with the fence posters, they offer an interesting insight into the role of Kenley and the RAF personnel during WW2. They are a welcome addition to the airfield.'

- People will have learnt about heritage:

The Kenley Revival Legacy Officer reports positive feedback to the signage from onsite visitors and comments on the website. Visitors like the Q&A format: the personal stories of WW2 pilots and support staff featured on the signs are of particular interest and have created more awareness of these people.

'I see dads especially explaining who these pilots were to their families and sharing their knowledge about the war and how local streets are named after 'Kenley's Few'.

Visitors particularly value the opportunity to learn about:

- The role of Kenley Airfield in WW2:

'The combination of the fence posters and new 'wings' made for an informative walk that will help with our school history lessons. Clearly a lot of time has been spent on this. We hope people continue to respect the efforts of those in the past and also the present to keep the history 'alive'.

'The new information boards (wings) at Kenley recently. Along with the fence posters, they offer an interesting insight into the role of Kenley and the RAF personnel during WW2. They are a welcome addition to the airfield.'

- People stories – the different roles played by people on the airfield:

'The new signage and remembrance cards placed around Kenley's perimeter look terrific and serve as an appropriate tribute to all the servicemen and women who gave their lives in the summer of 1940. Having now read all the boards and tributes it really brings home the sacrifices made.'

'Over to Kenley Airfield to see the new displays about the airmen and their stories - prompting a conversation about how young pilots went up time after time until they were finally shot down and killed. My boys were shocked to read and learn about pilots that bailed out only to be killed when parachuting down, and pilots with no graves as they were lost at sea. They were surprised how many nationalities of airmen were involved at Kenley. They are 11 and 7 and keen to learn more because of the wonderful signs and work that has been done to bring the stories of these men and women back to life. Today has added to their curiosity about WW2.'

- The role of Kenley Airfield in the Battle of Britain

'I was blown away by the Battle of Britain 80th Anniversary memorials and the new information notices displayed, particularly the mix of both Spitfire and Hurricane wings as a backdrop. Brilliant work from all involved. The content is presented in a very thought provoking and informative way. If you haven't seen it yet it's a must see.'

- The local area is a better place to work, live or visit

'Kenley is now more than just for riding their bikes round.'

4. Legacy Officer: the value this role brought.

The HF project originally due to complete in April 2019. Although the project was extended to resolve issues with thaumasite damage to the conservation works, delivery of the HF funded activity plan effectively completed as planned in 2019.

The City of London Corporation agreed to fund a Legacy Officer to continue the community engagement work for a fixed period. The Legacy Officer supported volunteers (including those delivering school workshops), delivered guided tours and talks, researched and wrote material for the website, and delivered exhibitions and events.

The programme had the following reach. (We note that the data is incomplete, and that more events and activities were delivered than have been recorded).

	Attendance	Number of events delivered
Guided Tours	109	5
School Workshops	378	6
Events off site	121	2
Events on site	486	4
Mini Museum	240	3
Talks	180	6
	1,514	26

Over 30 events planned for 2020 had to be cancelled as a result of the pandemic. Work continued on the website and social media.

Guided Tours and Talks

Monthly themed public tours were delivered during 2019. The intention of theming talks, and holding talks at different times of day, was to widen the audience reach, and encourage repeat participation. This worked particularly with specialists and volunteers who came to multiple tours and talks.

Themes include

- Pilots and Pets: this tour was popular with dog-walkers, who brought their own pets along. It attracted press attention from BBC Radio London, who interviewed the Legacy Officer on the JoAnne Good show.
- Women at War: this tour attracted groups such as the local Women's Institute

- **Air Defences:** this tour was led by a Veteran Armourer, and included topics such as ordnance, gun emplacements, landscape and how landscape affected strategies and positioning of defences. This tour attracted people with more specialist military knowledge, who appreciated the expertise that the tour guide brought.
- **Voices from the Past:** this tour introduced written material from people associated with the airfield, read at appropriate locations. Hosted on a Saturday evening, the tour attracted a mixed audience.

One of the aspects of the tours that people appreciated was that they were conversational and interactive – people with experience within the audience were encouraged to tell their own stories. For example, a veteran of the Malaysian campaign talked about his experiences.

There is evidence that the tours provide material for other activities and resources. For example, a videographer used material from Voices from the Past for one of his recordings; a writer included material from the Women at War tour in an audio series she was writing.

The Legacy Officer has also delivered talks to local interest groups, such as the local U3A and Sutton Humanists.

School Workshops

School workshops were delivered by the Legacy Officer and three experienced volunteers. One volunteer is a supply teacher in local schools, so has good links and relationships; a second is a retired teacher; and the third is a local resident with excellent story telling skills. The three volunteers will continue to deliver school workshops, once current Covid concerns are alleviated.

Workshops are tailor made for schools. Example workshops include

- **How many people does it take to get a pilot in the air?** Children are invited to role play all of the various personnel who were involved in the process, including roles such as riggers and mechanics. The children are given the hat and equipment of the person they are role playing. The activity gives children the opportunity to understand the wide variety of roles that were needed, and which roles women were allowed to undertake, and which they weren't. They are taught about how much work went into supporting one flight, which delivered 15 seconds worth of ammunition. Finally, the children are invited to take an envelope which tells them whether the pilot lived or died. Stories of real pilots who lived or dies are enacted, which introduce their family members, and draw up real written testimonies, such as a mother's letter from the Canadian air force about the death of her son.
- **Remembrance:** Children make poppies, and write a letter to an individual pilot, who they learn about. They go to find his grave, and leave the poppy there as remembrance. Children learn about the different headstones for people of different nationalities, and the difference between headstones for those who died in combat, supplied by the War Commission, and those who died from other means, supplied by families. Children can go into St Luke's church to see the bomb damage.

Two aspects of the school workshops have particularly resonated with local children. One is the message that their generation 'will one day be in charge of the world, and that they should put all their efforts into keeping peace and making the world a better place.' This has particularly resonated with children from SEND schools, who are inspired by the concept. The second has been exploring stories of the contribution of different nationalities, for example, the Polish, Czech and Belgian squadrons, which has resonated with children from those origins.

Other activities and interactions with schools have included:

- An informal arrangement with a local SEND school, who often drop in for quick 10-minute sessions.
- Field Days for secondary schools, where students have a talk, followed by volunteering activity led by a ranger, such as scrub clearance. The local boys' school are keen to repeat their field day.
- Remembrance Assemblies at local schools.

Research, oral histories and website

The lockdown periods gave the Legacy Officer and two volunteers the opportunity to conduct more research and add more content to the website. This included

- Phone interviews with a Battle of Britain Veteran, Douglas Bader's secretary and a national serviceman. These interviews have been written up as articles for the website and approved by the interviewees.
- An oral history recording with local resident Norman Skinner, which is yet to be edited.
- Memorials: 219 individual entries memorialising the individuals whose deaths were associated with the airfield. The team believe this is the most comprehensive record of everyone whose death was associated with Kenley – with around half a dozen army personnel still to 'find'.
- Research around New Zealand pilots associated with the airfield.
- Further research around the buildings and structures on the airfield.

The emerging research has been valued by family members, enthusiasts and researchers alike. Unseen photographs have been shared with family members, and family members have used the website entries to share comments and further knowledge. An unseen photograph of Pilot Officer Mudie was shared with the Battle of Britain Monument team.

Activities have also led to new knowledge and links. The Legacy Officer told us this story:

She had been looking for information about a child who was killed in a bombing raid in the area. While she was delivering a workshop at Hillcroft school, a child said that he knew that children from the school had been killed. No-one believed him, but when questioned further, he said his grandfather had told him. The details from his story were similar to the ones that

she had heard about – shopkeepers pulling children into shops as the bombing happened. She could now locate the bombing raid to Chaldon Road, and make links with other pieces of archive material, with help from the Bourne Society. This led her to find two members of the family of a boy who had been killed in the bombing, who contributed photos. Residents from the road wanted to maintain his grave, and were able to locate it with her help. They have since planted a rose bush at the grave in remembrance.

Mini-Museum

Mini-Museum began as an experiment to see if activities hosted at the City of London Corporation office, a mile or so down the road from the Airfield, could attract visitors. Three Mini-Museum events were held in the classroom space, and included the pop-up exhibition which was created during the NLHF project period, artefacts and object handling, re-enactors, and activities for children (including dressing up). One of the events focused on archaeological finds and was attended by MOLA and Historic England.



All three events were well attended, with between 50 – 100 people at each.

Other activities

Other activities have included:

- Attendance at Brookwood Military Cemetery's open day. The Legacy Officer gave a tour of graves associate with Kenley, and volunteers manned a stall. The event was attended mainly by military enthusiasts

- A manned exhibition at Kenley Airfield to accompany the annual flypast from Biggin Hill commemorating The Hardest Day. The outdoor exhibition featured information about pilots from both sides who lost their lives in the Battle of Britain. The flypast typically attracts around 250 people from within and outside the local area.

Volunteering

During the Legacy Officer's tenure, over 60 days of volunteer time have been contributed to the project, from approximately 10 volunteers. Volunteers have been involved in delivering events and activities, research and website content development, transcribing oral histories and working with archaeology finds.

Conclusions – the value the Legacy Officer role brought

The Legacy Officer role has enabled the delivery of a programme that has reached over 1,500 people. While there are skilled and enthusiastic volunteers available to deliver distinct activities, such as school workshops, having a paid member of staff has provided the resources and infrastructure necessary to deliver a coordinated programme.

The officer was a visible ambassador for the project – people know her, and continue to contact her about Kenley and the work that happens there, even though she is no longer in a paid position.

5. In hindsight: advice to inform further projects

A reflection session with Andrew Thwaites, Kenley Revival Project Manager, identified lessons learned by the Kenley Revival Project which can be shared to support other projects.

➤ The pitfalls of positivity/optimism bias

A Heritage Fund project presents an organisation with the opportunity to make a difference, so people approach planning and delivery with a positive and optimistic mindset - a 'can-do attitude.' Whilst 'optimism bias has advantages it can also influence decisions on the project delivery through overestimating positive progress and underestimating risk and negative factors.

Project managers need to recognise that inevitably things will take longer, cost more, teams will change, and the original vision will shift and evolve during the lifecycle of any project.

Effective and pragmatic risk assessment is essential early in the planning stage, to consider project costs, time schedules and to anticipate potential risks and complications that may emerge. Informed estimates are essential and using techniques like three-point estimating will lead to more realistic predictions and avoid the pitfalls of setting timescales and budgets purely on optimistic estimates.

➤ The importance of defining scope

The early adoption of project management techniques such as a requirements analysis is essential to allow a detailed work breakdown structure (WBS) to establish the scope. Realistic forecasting for each task in the WBS can then be forecast, looking ahead rather than working backwards from a pre-determined date, timeline, or cost estimate. In any complex project timescales are likely to become more complex and interdependent as a project progresses.

➤ **Recognise issues of organisational buy-in**

Innovation and change within any organisation are essential to continuous improvement but require leadership and management to ensure the smooth delivery of a project. In instances where there is resistance to change or a department, individual or stakeholder is unwilling to commit to the project or take any responsibility for delivering it, the project team leader should acknowledge the situation and deal with it. This is not something to be skirted around as it could potentially be the most harmful factor affecting any project. Document any challenges in writing to allow for changes in personnel and circumstances.

➤ **Set criteria for partnerships**

Partnerships should be properly set up to clearly define expectations and establish clear lines of communication.

➤ **Understand experimental and bespoke elements take time**

Staff time and a clear budget should be allocated to developing and testing new ideas, interpretation, or signage. Anything experimental, even if considered low risk, will take resources to be successful.

➤ **Formal milestones and design stages**

Build in formal handovers between design and construction phases. As you move between stages, re-present the next version of the project plan as a new document / plan with the names of those responsible clearly displayed. Be mindful that during delivery, new milestones might need to be added, dependant on subcontracted work. Ensure the main contractors are on track to deliver the key milestones.

➤ **Human resources and skills development**

Be realistic about the human resources available for the lifetime of the project. People may be employed to deliver one aspect of the project plan, but the core team will have the same time and resource allocation throughout the project.

Be aware it can be difficult to combine the project manager responsibilities of overseeing construction and conservation type elements with those focused on engaging people. Both elements require different skills and must be fully resourced.

The Kenley team report they have developed core skills though managing a National Lottery Heritage Fund project, including people management skills, organisational and planning skills, event management, presentation skills, time management, problem solving, and evaluation methodology.