

# Last surviving First World War aerodrome saved for nation

15 October 2013

Today, thanks to a £1.5million grant from NHMF, Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome Trust has secured Europe's only remaining unaltered First World War Aerodrome - Stow Maries in Purleigh near Maldon, Essex.

Image



Airside at Stow Maries' First World War aerodrome

Alongside the grant from National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), additional support was also obtained from Essex County Council, Maldon District Council and English Heritage.

Stow Maries is a unique survival. Of the 250 aerodromes built during the First World War, just ten still exist of which Stow Maries is the only one to have remained almost untouched since the war ended in 1918. There are over 24 original Grade II\* listed Royal Flying Corp operation buildings remaining including the original officers' mess; other ranks' mess; pilots' ready room; blacksmith's; ambulance station and morgue; motor transport sheds; and the aircraft workshop/ radio room.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of NHMF, said: "Stow Maries gives us fresh insight into the pivotal new role that aviation played in the First World War. The National Heritage Memorial Fund was set up as a memorial to those that gave their lives for this country and so with the Centenary starting next year, our Trustees felt

Stow Maries had to be secured now for future generations."

Stow Maries was built in 1916 as a direct response to increased attacks by German Zeppelin airships and later Gotha fixed-wings bombers on British mainland. An integral part of the UK's Home Front defence, it was home to the newly formed 37 Squadron, Royal Flying Corp led by the then, 19 year-old Captain Ridley. A corps of elite pilots, their story is less well known than that of the Spitfire pilots of the Second World War however they played a vital role in protecting the Capital and surrounding towns in what became known as the First Battle of Britain in 1917.

Key events at Stow Maries included:

- The last Zeppelin shot down during the war was by the 37 Squadron in June 1917
- The first mid-air collision of the war was recorded at Stow Maries in 1917
- In 1918, Stow Maries was the first British airfield to accept American squadrons following the USA entering the war

The purchase of the site not only secures the long-term future of the aerodrome as it currently exists, but also paves the way towards the phased on-going restoration of Stow Maries back to its former glory with permanent hangars and original First World War aircraft on display. An essential part of the project will focus on the start-up of an apprenticeship scheme to keep the heritage aviation skills alive.

Jeremy Lucas, Stow Maries Trust Chairman said: "The next five years will see a sustained commemoration at Stow Maries of the extraordinary human exploits and stories. This was the first war that was fought here at home through air-raids. By opening up this site, the public and particularly young people will gain a greater understanding of how as a nation we overcame it."

Essex County Councillor John Jowers, Cabinet Member for Libraries, Communities & Planning said: "The Stow Maries First World War aerodrome is a real treasure for Essex and I am delighted that the County Council could assist the trust to secure the heritage of the site."

Leader of Maldon District Council, Councillor Bob Boyce said: "Maldon District Council's foresight at saving Stow Maries will ensure it remains a unique and important piece of our national history I am extremely pleased therefore that the trust which has been created will ensure that this site is preserved for future generations to enjoy and I hope it will become a premier visitor attraction for the

District and the Country as a whole.”

John Ette, Heritage at Risk Principal for English Heritage in the East of England said: “Despite active and on-going conservation work, recognised by an English Heritage Angel Award last year, Stow Maries was at risk of being sold for redevelopment. We are pleased to have contributed our expertise as well as £50,000 grant towards the purchase of this nationally important site.”

For further information about the heritage site please visit [Friends Of Stow Maries Aerodrome website](#).

## **Notes to editors**

In 2012, Russell Savoury and the Friends of Stow Maries Aerodrome won an English Heritage Angel Award for their work to restore nine of the original 1918 buildings. The vast majority of the work was carried out by volunteers and funded privately by Mr Savoury and his business partner. View the [YouTube video](#).

## **Further information**

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