

Peace in a place of war

ONCE a crucial part in Britain's fight against Nazi Germany, RAF Ibsley Watch Office is now the focus of the Landmark Trust, which has launched a fundraising campaign to save the building. A 'vital link' in Britain's air defences, the Hampshire watch office is now derelict and stands on the brink of collapse; the Landmark Trust hopes to save and sensitively restore the building to its former 1940s glory. As well as being an airbase for the RAF and USAAF, the base was also the location for Leslie Howard and David Niven's *The First of the Few*, a film that showed the exceptional qualities of the Supermarine Spitfire and thus inspired confidence that Britain could prevail.

The building was a late evolution of Second World War design, says the Landmark Trust, and is a rare survivor of its type. Significant architectural features include its slender



concrete viewing balcony and the Meteorological Section, where the Women's Auxiliary Air Force collected vital data on weather. However, the structure's large Crittall windows have rusted and fallen in and the ceilings are rapidly collapsing. According to the Airfield Research Group, it is among the best most-at-risk of buildings of its type.

'RAF Ibsley Watch Office is a wartime monument to human courage,' says Dr [Anna Keay](#), director of the Landmark Trust. 'It played a key role in the fight against Hitler and is set apart by Leslie Howard's acclaimed *The First of the Few*. Yet, today, the Watch Office is in

great peril, and rescue by the trust is its last hope. With help, we can save this fragment of history, remember the brave people who once worked here and ensure it stands proud for years to come.'

Half of the money needed for the building's restoration has already been secured, but the charity still requires a further £1.374 million to save and restore the structure. It's hoped that work could begin during 2024 for an opening in 2025, 80 years since the end of the Second World War and on the 60th anniversary of the Landmark Trust. To find out more, visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk/raf-iblsley

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