

July 2023

**It must have seemed to many in the summer of 1940 that the world was about to end.**

Much of central Europe had already been overrun by Adolf Hitler's forces and then, in June 1940, France fell. Over 300,000 British troops were forced to scramble home to safety from the beaches of Dunkirk. The rescue may have seemed miraculous, but it was necessary only because of defeat. The Luftwaffe began to attack from the skies. Everything now depended on the Royal Air Force.

It was in the terrifying late summer and autumn of 1940, as bombs fell on Coventry and Southampton, Cardiff and London, that the rubble of shattered buildings was carted onto farmland in the New Forest and rapidly tamped down to create an airfield, known from then on as RAF Ibsley.

**RAF Ibsley played a crucial role in the fight against Hitler's invasion of Europe.**

The Watch Office (or Control Tower) at Ibsley now stands derelict, a battered monument to the almost unimaginable courage of the men and women who saw off Fascism. In the late 1930s airfields were built as never before. Edwin Lutyens was called in to advise on the earliest designs, but with over 400 new airfields built during the Second World War, speed led to simplification. The Watch Office at RAF Ibsley, completed in early 1942, was a sparse slightly art-deco box of rendered brick with Crittall windows. The Landmark Trust has identified 20th-century military buildings as being at the very highest risk, and we have long been on the look-out for the right structure. We believe we have finally found it.

**With your support we can save this inspirational surviving wartime building.**

RAF Ibsley is set apart by a unique wartime history. In 1941, fresh from starring in *Gone with the Wind*, the actor Lesley Howard arrived here to direct a film designed to inspire the embattled British people. *The First of the Few*, starring David Niven and Howard himself, told the story of the invention of the Supermarine 'Spitfire', the small, fast and highly manoeuvrable fighter plane that it was hoped would give Britain air superiority. Serving personnel, including Squadron Leader Christopher 'Bunny' Carrant, appeared in the film, flying aircraft and filling minor speaking roles, with filming periodically interrupted when they were summoned to action. The film premiered at Leicester Square

*Please turn over*

**My gift to help the skilled restoration of RAF Ibsley Watch Office**

**Yes, I would like to make a donation of:**

- I enclose my cheque payable to **The Landmark Trust** or
- Please debit my VISA/Mastercard/Maestro/CAF Charity card (delete as appropriate)

Card No.

Start Date   /   Expiry Date   /   Maestro Issue No.

**X** Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*giftaid it* **Boost your donation by 25%, with Gift Aid, at no cost to you.**

- I would like to Gift Aid this donation to the Landmark Trust and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years.

I am a UK taxpayer. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations to charities or CASCs in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

**X** Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please share your wartime memories or reason for giving to the RAF Ibsley Appeal.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you prefer not to receive future fundraising appeals please tick here and return this form in the freepost envelope provided

For details of how the Landmark Trust use your personal data, please refer to the Privacy Policy on our website.

To change your communication preferences please email [dataprotection@landmarktrust.org.uk](mailto:dataprotection@landmarktrust.org.uk), call 01628 825925 or write to us at the address opposite.

in August 1942 to widespread acclaim. Its celebrated director was killed just a year later when his plane was shot down over the Bay of Biscay.

**A series of fighter squadrons were stationed at Ibsley, their Hurricane and Spitfire aircraft fuelled and at the ready to fly out over the English Channel to protect ships, attack infrastructure and intercept hostile aircraft.**

The United States Army Air Forces soon arrived and operated from the airfield for spells during the war. The Watch Office both directed movements and was used for briefing pilots: Canadians and Free French, Poles and Czechs as well as Britons, many barely more than teenagers. Some would never return. Most did, however, and would later remember the camaraderie of Ibsley – home to a large community of service personnel – with fondness.

**In the decades since the end of the war RAF Ibsley has been reclaimed by nature.**

First dug up for gravel, the airfield has long since become lakes and woodland. Amid all this natural beauty, the Watch Office stands abandoned and vandalised. The walls have been graffitied, the windows wrenched off and the metal railings have fallen from the balconies. Yet still the structure stands, rich with associations.

**With your support, we have the chance to save this monument to human courage.**

At the edge of a picturesque village the Watch Office could make a wonderful Landmark for eight. Its restored first-floor Control Room, with its windows on three sides and doors onto the original balcony, could become a light-filled open-plan kitchen and sitting room. The former Duty Pilot and Meteorological Officer's rooms, among others, would make bedrooms and bathrooms and access onto the roof would give glorious views of the New Forest and the wide skies above. Powered by renewable energy, fully accessible and decorated appropriately in its original green and cream paint scheme, it could be filled with family and friends – the very way of life the wartime generations were striving to safeguard.

**Your gift today will help rescue this precious fragment of our wartime history.**

Please consider joining us to help save the Watch Office from decay or demolition. Over half of the funding is already in place and if we can only secure the rest, we could start work next year.

With your support, the Landmark Trust could give it a new life as a place where the ingenuity of its age could be celebrated, the beauty of its resurgent landscape enjoyed and tales of the bravery of those who knew it first, retold.

*Anna Keay*

Dr Anna Keay OBE  
Director

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW  
Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Website [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)  
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205



118 Squadron, shown in front of a Spitfire at RAF Ibsley, where they served between 1942 and 1943.



How your gift today could support this future Landmark.

**£500** could help replace lost and damaged Crittall windows with energy efficient equivalents

**£125** could support repairs to the unique concrete viewing balcony

**£60** could support the sensitive repair of crumbling and damaged brickwork


**£30** provides a tin of paint to replicate the wartime decorative scheme

## Ways to give



[www.landmarktrust.org.uk/raf-ibsey](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/raf-ibsey)

**By Phone**   
Call 01628 825920

**By Post**   
Complete and return the donation form overleaf



# Last hope for this wartime monument to human courage





**RAF Ibsley Watch Office once played a crucial part in Britain's fight against the dark forces of Hitler's planned invasion of Europe. It now stands derelict and in peril.**

Our project aims to rescue and restore the Watch Office at the former Second World War airfield at Ibsley, near Ringwood in the New Forest.

From 1941 to 1944 both the RAF and USAAF saw active service at Ibsley. From its runways airmen flew out into hostile skies to defend Britain with great courage and at huge personal cost. And here during the punishing first years of the war Lesley Howard and David Niven made the seminal war film *The First of the Few* – designed to inspire confidence that, thanks to the exceptional qualities of the Spitfire, Britain could prevail.

The Watch Office itself is a rare surviving example of its type, with a Meteorological Section, large Crittall windows and a slender concrete viewing balcony. Its survival is remarkable, but it is in a state of extreme dereliction. Badly vandalised, with its structure crumbling after many years of neglect, it will soon be too late to save the Watch Office.

**You can help give this fragile remnant of wartime history a new future.**





RAF Ibsley was one of twelve Second World War airfields in the New Forest. It was part of a network of defence structures across southern and eastern Britain hastily constructed in the early years of the war as Europe fell to the Nazis with terrifying speed.



*“Although it had a very short life, what a life it has to tell as both an RAF Fighter Station and United States Army Air Force Fighter base... what a magnificent contribution Ibsley made to the defence of England in those turbulent wartime days.”*

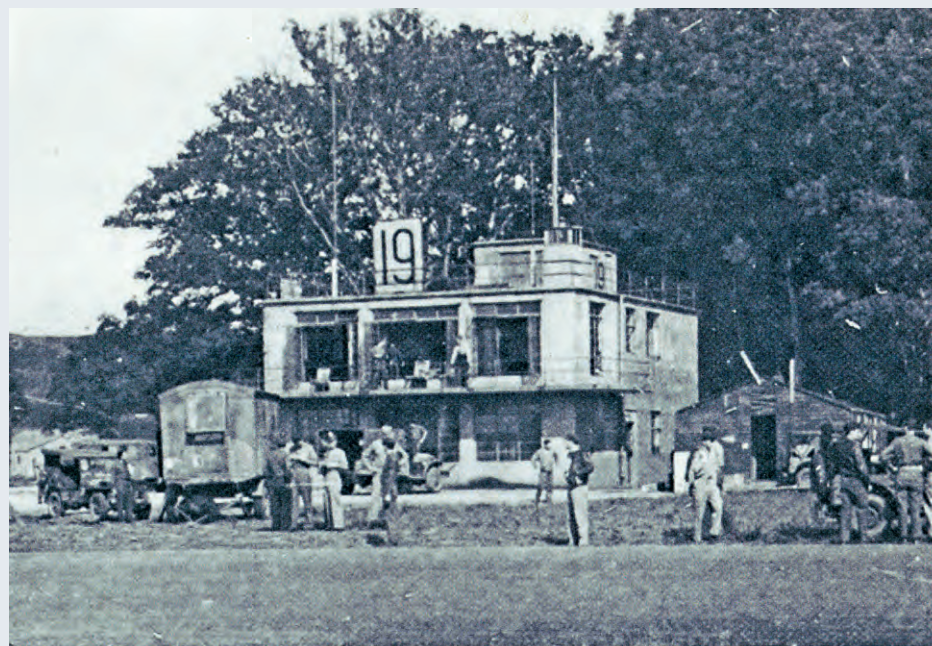
Wing Commander Christopher ‘Bunny’ F Carrant, (1911-2006) DSO, DFC and Bar, Croix de Guerre, Station Commander at RAF Ibsley 1941-42

A series of squadrons were stationed at Ibsley throughout the war. It began as a fighter station for Spitfires and later for American P-47 Thunderbolts. Aircraft were fuelled and squadrons were at the ready to fly out over the Channel to protect ships, attack infrastructure and intercept hostile aircraft. The airfield had a dramatic impact on this rural area.

RAF Ibsley is considered one of the best surviving and most at-risk examples of a Second World War Watch Office by the Airfield Research Group. It combined air traffic control with the collection of meteorological data. Weather balloons were released from the roof and readings, typically taken by the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), informed aircraft movements at Ibsley and the national Met Office.



Briefing the pilots of 66, 118 and 501 Squadrons in the Watch Office at Ibsley.



The Watch Office in July 1944, in use by the 9th Army Air Forces USAAF, 367th Fighter Group.



Aerial view of the runways at Ibsley, January 1944. The Watch Office is marked near the top right hand corner.



WAAF meteorologists releasing a weather balloon.



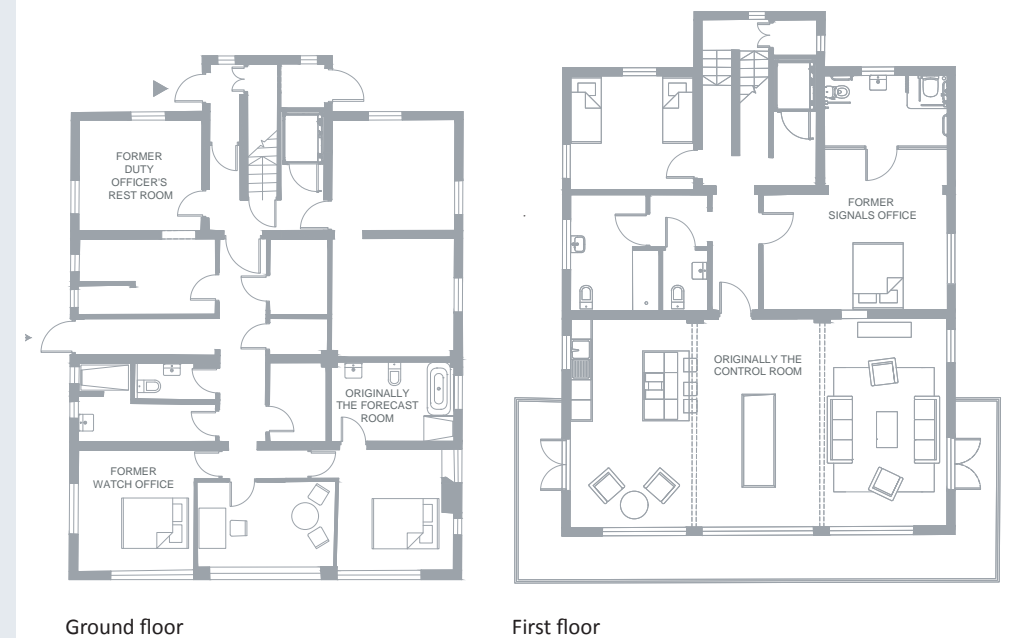
**‘The First of the Few’ or ‘Spitfire’**

In summer 1941, Hollywood came to Ibsley when *The First of the Few* or *Spitfire* as it was also known, was filmed at the airfield. Screen idol Leslie Howard directed and starred as R J Mitchell, designer of the Spitfire, with David Niven as the courageous test pilot. The film vividly evokes life at the airfield with cameo appearances on the ground and in the air by serving pilots and officers, including Sqn Ldr Christopher ‘Bunny’ Carrant. Filming was often paused while the officers were summoned to action for real missions.



With your support, the Watch Office can be saved from dereliction to become a comfortable, thought-provoking place for 8 people to stay.

INDICATIVE PLANS OF THE LANDMARK



Ground floor

First floor

*‘The airfields of the New Forest played an absolutely crucial role during the Second World War, yet so little remains to tell the story of the aviators who flew from places such as RAF Ibsley. Landmark’s tremendous track record in saving historic buildings means I have no doubt the future of RAF Ibsley will be safe in their hands.’*

Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston KCB CBE ADC, Chief of the Air Staff (2019-2023)



Rescue by the Landmark Trust is the last hope for RAF Ibsley Watch Office.

With your help, we can still bring this important fragment of our wartime history back from the brink of collapse, remembering the brave people who once worked and flew here and ensuring that it never again falls into disrepair.

While the airfield has long since become scenic lakes and woodland, the Watch Office is now in critical condition. Your support now will enable a skilled and careful restoration to begin. If we are successful, a new Landmark rich with stories of courage and heroism could open in 2025.

Over half of the funding for the project has already been donated, thanks to some wonderful early supporters, generous gifts in wills and a grant from the H B Allen Charitable Trust. Your gift today could help this inspirational building stand proud for many years to come.



Find out more, and donate now at [landmarktrust.org.uk/raf-ibsey](https://landmarktrust.org.uk/raf-ibsey)



## The Landmark Trust

Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW  
Telephone 01628 825920 [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)  
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205