

OUR WAR GRAVES YOUR HISTORY

BROOKWOOD MILITARY CEMETERY



Brookwood Military Cemetery is the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the United Kingdom. During the First World War, an area of land in Brookwood Cemetery (The London Necropolis) was set aside for the burial of men and women of the forces of the Commonwealth who had died. Many had died of wounds received in battle or of illness in hospitals in the London area.

This site was further extended to accommodate the Commonwealth casualties of the Second World War. There is a large Royal Air Forces plot (which also contains the graves of Czechoslovakian and American airmen who served with the Royal Air Force). A further plot contains 2,400 Canadian graves. In addition to the Commonwealth plots, the cemetery also contains French, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Belgian and Italian sections, and war graves of other nationalities all cared for by the Commission. The American Military Cemetery is the responsibility of the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Key CWGC features to look out for:

Brookwood Military Cemetery is the only CWGC cemetery to have two Crosses of Sacrifice and two Stones of Remembrance.

There are also two CWGC Memorials to the missing at Brookwood. The Brookwood 1914-1918 Memorial, and the Brookwood 1939-1945 Memorial. Combined, these memorials commemorate more than 3,600 service men and women who have no known grave.



Points of interest...

Commemorations: **8,765**
First World War burials: **1,601**
Second World War burials: **3,476**

Casualties from the following nations;

Australia
Barbados
Belgium
British Guiana
Canada
Czechoslovakia
France
Germany
Italy
Jamaica
Netherlands
New Zealand
Poland
South Africa
South Rhodesia
Undivided India
United Kingdom
USA
West Indies

Things to look out for...

A 15 year old South African **Thomas Knowles** in the First World War Section (Plot 7, Row A, Grave 8.)

Violette Szabo GC on the Brookwood 1939-35 Memorial (Panel 26)

Graves of 43 Canadian's who died as a result of the Dieppe Raid in August 1942 (Canadian section, Plot 38)

Discovering CWGC graves at Brookwood Military Cemetery



Brookwood Military Cemetery is divided into a number of distinct plots.

- The First World War plot contains small section of Indian Army and Muslim burials
- The RAF plot also contains a Royal Air Forces shelter building which houses the register of the names of those buried in the section
- There is a large plot of Canadian graves which includes the Canadian Records building, which was a gift of the Canadian government in 1946, and houses a reception room for visitors and other offices
- Additional plots exist for different nationalities, as well as a plot for Chelsea Pensioners, which is cared for by CWGC

Second World War Canadian Section

The Canadian Records building stands at the main entrance to the CWGC cemetery. The building was a gift to the Commission from the Canadian government. The building houses the cemetery registers, offices and an exhibition about the CWGC. Buried in Brookwood Military Cemetery are almost 330 members of Canadian forces who died during the First World War, and over 2,400 who died during the Second World War. The vast majority are in the Canadian Plot beside the Records building.

1

As you enter the plot, in Plot 33A, Row B, there are the graves of some of those who were killed when the Guards Chapel at Wellington Barracks in central London was hit by a German V1 flying bomb on 18 June 1944. The attack killed 121 soldiers and civilians who were attending the Sunday service. 14 of those killed are buried here. Look out for several musicians from the band of the Coldstream Guards.

2

In Plot 47, you will find the grave of Sergeant **John Rennie** GC (pictured). Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, as a child John Rennie travelled to Ontario with his family and grew up in the town of Kitchener. Rennie enlisted in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's) and was posted to England in the summer of 1943. On 29 October 1943, he was instructing recruits in the throwing of grenades when a grenade rolled back towards the group. Without hesitation Sgt Rennie dived on the grenade, saving the lives of the others. For his actions he was awarded the George Cross. The graves of George or Victoria Cross recipients have a carving of the medal on the headstone. They are the only headstones that have any physical distinction in design based on achievements. He was 23 years old. He is buried in Plot 47, Row D, Grave 8.

3

The graves in Section 51, Row F, are the entire crew of a Lancaster bomber from 424 (Tiger) Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force. On 5 April 1945, they took off from Skipton in Yorkshire to bomb targets in Germany. Their aircraft was badly damaged during the raid and on return they attempted to land at High Wycombe. During their final approach they clipped some treetops and crashed. The entire crew was killed, and they were laid to rest here side-by-side.

B

Proceed now to the 1914-1918 section of the cemetery, going via the American Battle Monuments Commission Cemetery (ABMC).

A

Additional point of interest... Chelsea Pensioners Plot

The Royal Hospital Chelsea is a retirement and nursing home for veterans of the British Army. In the early 1960s, the pensioners began to be buried here. The Commission looks after the graves on behalf of the Royal Hospital.



Sergeant John Rennie GC

The 1914-18 Section

This section contains the graves of First World War service personnel from all six CWGC Commonwealth member government nations. It includes Australian, Canadian, South African and New Zealand plots, the original plot and a Muslim plot, which all date from the period of the First World War.

4

As you enter the section from the ABMC cemetery, you will see the original plot (Plot 13) on the right-hand side. The headstones are not arranged in rows and many are touching. At first, it was not known how many burials would be made here and therefore trench graves were dug. Therefore, some of the headstones in this plot bear the name of more than one serviceman as they were laid side by side, rather than in an individual grave. Buried in this plot, in row D is **Samuel Brown** from Barbados. He served with the British West Indies Regiment and died of tuberculosis at Grove Military Hospital in Totting in May 1918.

5

Opposite in Plot 15 are the graves of 46 German servicemen who died in the Second World War. Many were airmen shot down on bombing raids. After 1944, some were those who had died of their wounds while prisoners of war. Among those buried here are the crew of German aircraft shot down near Portsmouth in May 1944. The crew are buried together in a collective grave in Row D.

6

On the far side of the 1914-18 plot is the Muslim Plot (Plot 2A). The plot was created in the late 1960s when the burials from the Muslim Cemetery in Woking were transferred to Brookwood so they could be better maintained. Among those buried here is Naik (Corporal) **Fazal Khan** of the 93rd Burma Infantry who came from the Punjab. He has been wounded fighting in France in the autumn of 1915 and died of his wounds at a UK hospital.

7

Along the front row of Plot 7, the South African plot, is the grave of Private **Thomas Andrew Knowles** of Kimberley, South Africa. It is believed he was to be a bandsman in the 1st South African Infantry but died of Spanish Flu on 22 October 1918, just before the end of the war. At just 15 years old, Thomas is the youngest CWGC casualty in this cemetery.



Brookwood Military Cemetery

The RAF Section

The 480 graves in the RAF Section are arranged in six plots (Plots 20-25) directly below the 14-18 section. There are six Australian, four Canadian, 10 Dutch, six New Zealand and 456 United Kingdom burials here which date from the Second World War. There are also 20 Americans of the 'Eagle Squadrons'. These Americans served with the Royal Air Force before the American entry into the war.

8

As you enter the RAF Section, on the left, in the front row is Sergeant **William McDonald** (Plot 23. Row A. Grave 16). William died on 25 October 1942. He was serving as a rear gunner of a Lancaster bomber. On 24 October, his aircraft was part of a daylight raid on Genoa. During the raid, William was badly wounded by air-aircraft fire and died in hospital the following day. His parents, who lived in Chile, requested the personal inscription on his headstone be a line from a letter which he had sent to them.

'Mother, I've weighted the risks - which I prefer - to living in a world - dominated by Nazis - Bill'

9

On the opposite side of the section, in Plot 21 are two graves which belong to the Fitzgerald brothers. Sergeant **Joseph Fitzgerald**, who died 25 September 1941, aged 19, and his brother Sergeant **Leslie Fitzgerald**, who died on 31 March 1943. They were buried side-by-side in Plot 21. Row A. Grave 3. on the request of their family

At the far end of the section is the Royal Air Force shelter building, which is inscribed in latin with words which translate, 'Through adversity, to the stars'.



Brookwood Military Cemetery, RAF plot

Other national plots

10

Belgian Plot

Plot 26 contains 47 Belgian personnel, 26 of them Army, 20 Merchant Navy and one Belgian Air Force. There are two Belgium servicemen of the First World War commemorated here who both died in 1916.

11

Polish Plot

Plot 27 contains 67 Polish personnel, 58 of them Army, 18 Air Force, two Navy and five civilians. There are also 16 Polish servicemen in plots 30A, 31A and 32A.

12

Czechoslovakian Plot

Plot 28 contains 45 Czechoslovakian servicemen all of whom served with either 310, 311 or 312 Squadrons of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. In Row E is Pilot Officer **Emil Fechtner** (pictured). Fechtner was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for his gallantry during the Battle of Britain, before being killed in an air crash in October 1940.

13

French Plot

244 burials were made in this plot during and after the Second World War. Many of these men were based in Britain after the fall of France in 1940, and most fought with Free French forces. They died of illness or of wounds received in action and accidents. At the rear of the plot is a memorial wall which commemorates French servicemen who have no known grave.

14

Italian Plot

During the Second World War large numbers of Italian troops were taken prisoner in North Africa and brought to Britain. Following the Italian surrender in 1943, the status of these Italian POWs became more complicated. 100,000 Italians volunteered to work as 'co-operators'. Conditions in the camps were generally good and very few POWs died. Those few who did were buried in local cemeteries and churchyards. After the war some were repatriated to Italy, while those who remained were reinterred here in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There are now 339 Italian personnel buried in the Italian Plot. Most (318) are army, but there are also 14 sailors, three airman and four civilians.



Pilot Officer Emil Fechtner

Brookwood Memorials

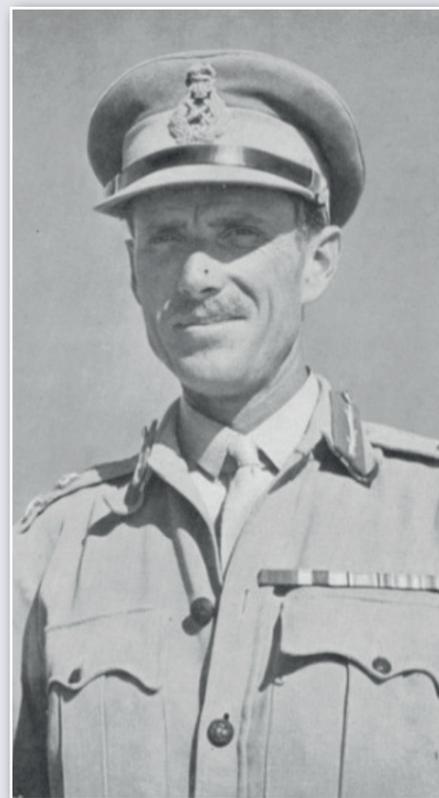
15

The **Brookwood 1914-1918 Memorial**, built in 2015, commemorates those who died in the UK but for whom no grave has been found.

Most of the casualties commemorated by this memorial are servicemen and women from the land forces of the United Kingdom, who subsequently died in the care of their families. They were not commemorated by the Commission at the time but, through the efforts of relatives and research groups, these casualties have since been identified as war dead. There are still many cases to be resolved and more names added.

16

The **Brookwood 1939-1945 Memorial** commemorates nearly 3,500 men and women who died during the Second World War and have no known grave. They include those who died in the campaign in Norway in 1940, or in the various raids on enemy occupied territory in Europe such as Dieppe and St Nazaire. The memorial also records the name of the most senior British soldier to be killed in combat in the Second World War – Lt General **Herbert Lumsden** CB, DSO, MC (pictured). He was killed in action during a Japanese kamikaze attack on the USS *New Mexico* on 6 January 1945. He was serving as the Special Representative to General Douglas MacArthur (Panel 1).



Lt General Herbert Lumsden



Violette Szabo GC

On Panel 26, you will find the name of **Violette Szabo** GC (pictured). Violette originally joined the Women's Land Army and later the Auxiliary Territorial Services. In July 1940, she met Etienne Szabo, an officer in the French Foreign Legion. They were married after just five weeks and they had a daughter, Tania, born in June 1942. Four months later Etienne was killed in North Africa. Shortly after, Violette was recruited into the Special Operations Executive (SOE) whose agents went to occupied France to work against German forces. After a successful mission in early 1944, she returned in June, just after D-Day. Three days into this mission she was stopped by a German patrol. She fought off the Germans, allowing others to escape, but was captured when she ran out of ammunition. She was taken to Ravensbrück Concentration Camp but never gave away any information. On 25 January 1945, she was executed. For her courage and selflessness, she was awarded the George Cross.