



Spiritual Birthplace of the Royal Air Force, Saint-Omer (France) Celebrates the 100th Anniversary of This British Institution

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The world owes its freedom to the RAF, thanks to the exploits of its pilots during the Battle of Britain during the Second World War against Hitler's planes. What is much less known is that the Saint-Omer airfield is considered the spiritual birthplace of the Royal Air Force.

The history

It was in Saint-Omer (northern France) that the legendary air force was set up during World War I. Indeed, during the war, the British army's headquarters were based in Saint-Omer, close to the front line but in an area spared by fighting.

The first squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps (RAF predecessors) made Bruyères aerodrome their home in 1914. Three squadrons of the RAF themselves have very strong links with the region: Squadron 9 was created in December 1914 and Squadron 16 in February 1915, while Squadron 41 bears the twin-bar cross of Saint-Omer. On 20 September 1918, Squadron 41 left Bruyères aerodrome, ending the RAF's four-year presence in Saint-Omer.

But the links have never been broken between the RAF and the “city of the cauliflower”. That's why Henry Allingham, the last surviving veteran of the war, went to Saint-Omer every year until his death in 2009 at the age of 113.

In 2018, Saint-Omer commemorates 100 years of the RAF with different events.

The programme of celebrations

The celebrations will begin in June with two exhibitions.

The first, entitled the “Centenary of the Royal Air Force”, will be available to view from June 2018 to June 2019, at *La Coupole*, at the Dome in the history centre and the 3D planetarium. It will showcase British aviation's presence in the skies of northern France between 1914 and 1945.

The second: “1918-2018: Royal Air Force, born in Saint-Omer” will be on display from 9 June to 30 September, at the Chapel of the Jesuits in Saint-Omer.

A bus tour with an English guide will also be offered from this summer to celebrate the legendary pilot Douglas Bader, who had incredible adventures in Saint-Omer (*see attached document*).

An official event is scheduled for 20 September at the Bruyères aerodrome with shows, bus tours and animations.

Further information

Website: <https://www.tourisme-saintomer.com/en/secteur/centenary-of-the-raf/> (<https://www.tourisme-saintomer.com/en/secteur/centenary-of-the-raf/>)

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