

RAF reservists unveil hi-tech memorial

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Supported by a grant of £10,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), this exciting project links the traditional memorial in granite with the very latest technology.

Members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force acquired a plot at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) in 2002 and built a traditional memorial recording the names of all the squadrons that had existed up to that time. Nature was not kind to that structure and it required a major refurbishment, offering the ideal opportunity to redevelop the site. A brick pillar was clad in black granite engraved with the squadron details as before but with the addition of QR Codes. These modern barcodes allow visitors to access a dedicated website, built just for this purpose, that turns the squadrons and those who have served on them from 2-dimensional letters into personal accounts, images and even videos.

A special ceremony was held at the NMA to dedicate new commemorative stones, available for purchase on behalf of anyone who has served in the RAF Reserves (as 'Auxiliaries' are now known). Attended by families and friends of veterans from the Battle of Britain to more recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the first 24 stones were unveiled.

Sitting in the very centre of RAF Wing at the NMA, the refurbished memorial glistens in the sun and will form the centrepiece of annual commemorations that celebrate the work of reservists, supporting their regular counterparts around the world in peace and war for over 90 years. Due to increase in size over coming years, the RAF Reservist usually has a traditional civilian job but is paid by the RAF for training at weekends and some evenings to train as Officer or Airman in the same way as full-time members of that service do. Comradeship and teamwork and vitally important to all service personnel and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force Foundation supports the work of increasing awareness of the RAF Reserves while developing ways to preserve their proud history. Combining these carious elements is increasingly reliant on technology so bringing together traditional memorials with QR coding is a logical progression of their work.