RAF’s unsung heroes will have their story told

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That is now set to change with an interactive information point at the National Memorial Arboretum thanks to a £5,100 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

For much of the 20th century, aircraft apprentices passed through the Royal Air Force’s No.1 School of Technical Training at RAF Halton, near Wendover in Buckinghamshire. The scheme was founded in 1922 and, by the time it ended in 1993, some 40,000 apprentices had been trained.

Among them was Frank Whittle, who went on to be knighted for inventing the jet engine. Many others were the recipients of gallantry awards for their work in keeping the RAF’s aircraft airworthy during World War Two and other conflicts. Others became aircrew and one of their number, Thomas Gray, was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Halton Grove, at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, was designed by former apprentices as a Millennium project and opened just over ten years ago. The Grove has recently been upgraded but now will be enhanced further by the addition of an interactive information board that will feature a range of visual, audio and written information so that visitors, especially schoolchildren, can find out more about the Halton apprentices and their important work.

Anne Jenkins , Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: “The National Memorial Arboretum attracts some 300,000 visitors annually who will soon have the chance to learn about the RAF Halton Apprentice Scheme and its contribution to the nation’s heritage.”

Duncan Grant of the RAF Halton Apprentice Association and project co-ordinator, said: “ For too long we have been modest about our achievements. The grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the support of the Arboretum team will help to redress this gap in the history of the nation and ensure our young citizens in particular are aware of the sacrifices made by Halton apprentices so that they may enjoy the freedoms we have today.”

Notes to editors

The RAF Apprentice Training Scheme at Halton was initiated by Lord Trenchard, Marshal of the RAF, in 1922. Between then and 1993, when the scheme ended, more than 40,000 young men had graduated. The Apprentices came from a range of nations, as well as from Britain, including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Burma and Poland.

Further information

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