

# KENTISH FOLK

## Geoff Nutkins, aviation artist and museum curator

**Geoff Nutkins was born in 1951, in Barnhurst and has lived in Shoreham for the last 30 years.**

His love of art came from his father, Frank, who enjoyed illustrating, and would draw all manner of subjects and endeavour to sell them to advertising agencies.

“Unfortunately he never really got the breaks in his career,” said Geoff. “He went on to work as a print compositor. But aviation art was one of my father’s passions, perhaps that’s where I got it from!”

As a child Geoff suffered with asthma and so spent time while he was unwell, drawing and painting.

He left school at the age of 16 and following in his father’s footsteps got a job as a trainee illustrator. Then during the 70s and 80s became self-employed as an illustrator for advertising agencies.

Geoff also loved collecting World War II memorabilia and the hobby led to another fulfilling occupation. In 1988, along with other enthusiasts, he opened the Shoreham Aircraft Museum.

This, together with his love of art, gave Geoff the idea to produce watercolours to bring to life pictures that had only been captured in black and white during the war.

It took Geoff a great deal of research to ensure the colours were accurate. He researched RAF records, the Public Records Office (PRO) at Kew and even wrote to pilots asking them to confirm the finer details of colours for his paintings.

The paintings were a great success even gaining royal approval. Group Captain Hugh Tudor and Air Marshall Birdie Wilson visited the museum. Captain Tudor was so impressed with Geoff’s paintings, he decided to buy 12 original paintings to raise money for the RAF.

There were 525 limited edition prints made of each painting, each individually signed by some of the Battle of Britain Pilots and all proceeds from the



sales went to the RAF Benevolent Fund raising £100,000. Her Majesty the Queen Mother was given set number one and they are on display at Clarence House.

Geoff has also painted many commissioned portraits for the families of RAF pilots from treasured photographs and aviation commissions.

His latest painting commemorates the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain. “Local Hero” depicts Sergeant Pilot Trevor Oldfield of 92 Squadron in combat during the morning of 27th September 1940. That same day, Trevor was shot down and killed at Hesketh Park in Dartford. A memorial stone in Trevor’s memory was unveiled by the Shoreham Aircraft Museum in Hesketh Park in September 2007.

All proceeds from the sale of the print go towards the Museum’s ongoing Pilot Memorials Project.

“I think it’s really nice to have been able to share a hobby that has given so much pleasure to so many, including myself,” said Geoff.

“I have met so many wonderful people over the years and hopefully I, and the others at the museum, have done our bit to ensure our ‘nations finest’ are never forgotten.”

**Geoff’s original watercolours can be viewed at [www.aviartnutkins.com](http://www.aviartnutkins.com). There are limited edition paintings and prints signed by the original pilots who took part in the battles or flew the planes.**

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# SECRET KENT

## Shoreham Aircraft Museum: A hidden history

Possibly one of the best kept secrets in the Darent Valley is Shoreham Aircraft Museum. It is found nestled in the historic village of Shoreham which itself remains relatively unchanged since World War II.

The museum is also strategically situated just five miles from the famous RAF station at Biggin Hill and eight miles from Sir Winston Churchill's home at Chartwell.

It all started when a group of enthusiasts who collected memorabilia from World War II as a hobby and began regularly displaying their finds at Shoreham Village Hall.

As their collection grew it was apparent that a permanent site was needed to display the collection and, more importantly, to act as a lasting tribute to all those airmen who fought in the skies over southern England.



The museum opened in 1988 and no less than 15 former Battle of Britain fighter pilots attended the official opening. To date there are a diminishing number of pilots still alive but three do still attend on regular occasions to talk to the visitors about their experiences during the war.

On display is an array of collectables either found and restored from excavations, or donated from members of the public. Each piece is beautifully presented but more than this, each has a story to tell.



Over the years there have been exciting finds including a Rolls Royce Merlin engine which was hauled from a depth of 16ft from a field at Beltring in Kent where it crashed landed during a battle on 17th September 1940. It currently ranks as one of the best examples recovered.

The most challenging project to date is the cockpit of a JU88 Schnellbomber which was found in Russia and brought to the museum.

The restoration process is underway to bring it back to a full radio operator/rear gunner compartment. However, some parts are still needed and the team is asking for people to get in touch if they can help locate parts, so the project can be completed.

In 2006, the members of the Museum decided to erect stone memorials as a permanent reminder to all those Battle of Britain pilots who lost their lives within a ten miles radius of Shoreham. So far there are six.

The museum regularly donates to RAF charities and currently supports the RAF Bomber Command Memorial Fund.

Shoreham Aircraft Museum is open Sundays from 10am to 5pm, May until October. Refreshments are available in the Tea Rooms which open Saturdays and Sundays 10am to 5pm.

**For more information telephone: 01959 524416  
or visit [www.shoreham-aircraft-museum.co.uk](http://www.shoreham-aircraft-museum.co.uk)**