

# A collective memory failure

Mrs M wonders why one of the RAF's greatest wartime heroes is so little celebrated



**Today, September 15, will be a day of** celebration for the people gathered for the marriage of two friends. It is his second and her third, so by now they should know how to throw a party, and I'm sure it will be a day we remember.

Some 67 years ago, in 1940, September 15 became a day of celebration for millions. This day is now commemorated – albeit decreasingly so as that generation dies out – as Battle of Britain Day. The largest concentration of enemy aircraft ever seen came across the English coast that day, but was defeated by the Royal Air Force's Fighter Command, whose airmen had been so famously praised by prime minister Winston Churchill a few weeks previously: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Last time I referred to a historic figure in this column, Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804), I mistakenly called him Thomas. The only good outcome was that many of you wrote in about it, and it was good to "meet" you all. Many Americans owe much to Hamilton, not least those who work on Wall Street – he helped found the Bank of New York and promoted the development of the New York Stock Exchange. It is no surprise that there are many statues to him, one of the finest in Central Park.

Here in Britain, we are not quite so good at commemorating our heroes. In my opinion there were three principal architects of the historic victory that was the Battle of Britain: R.J. Mitchell, Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding and Sir Keith Park. Mitchell designed the Spitfire, the legendary aircraft, and there are many tributes to him, including statues in Stoke-on-Trent and at Solent Skies museum in Southampton; busts at Southampton

university and the RAF Club, London, and a memorial stone on the site of the Supermarine works, Woolston. There is also my favourite statue of him, by Stephen Kettle, at the Science Museum in London.

Dowding is commemorated by the famous statue in the Strand, outside St Clement Danes church, where my friends' wedding reception will be today. I commend it, and its inscription, to those of you who have a spare moment. (Goldman Sachs in London – you're nearby. Now that the markets have slowed down and there are fewer pressing deals to be done, why not walk up and take a look?) There are also memorials in a park in Moffat, Dumfriesshire, the town of his birth; in Royal Tunbridge Wells where he died; and there is a bust of him at Winchester College, where he went to school. His ashes are interred in Westminster Abbey, and the Dowding Centre at the School of Fighter Control at RAF Boulmer is named after him.

But what of Sir Keith Park? A New Zealander by birth, who had survived two of the bloodiest battles of the first world war, he is, in my opinion, perhaps the most influential of the three. I am not alone. In 1947, Lord Tedder, then in

charge of the RAF, said: "If any one man won the Battle of Britain, he did. I do not believe it is realised how much that one man, with his leadership, his calm judgment and his skill, did to save not only this country but the world."

What memorials are there to this man, whose marshalling of men and machines ultimately put paid to Hitler's goal of invading Britain? Well, there's an aviation collection and a school in New Zealand, a road named Keith Park Crescent in Biggin Hill, Kent, and... er... that's it. I think this is a disgrace, and before Sir Keith Park's memory is extinguished, let us correct it. I see that the personal interests of our current Air Chief Marshal, Sir Glenn Torpy, include military history (as well as hill walking and cabinet-making), so perhaps I should try to meet him and press my case. I'll keep you posted.

As far as I am aware, apart from the crescent in Kent the only UK memorial to Sir Keith Park is locomotive number 34053, one of the Battle of Britain class, commissioned by the Southern Railway in 1947. After a series of owners, and being sold at one point for spare parts, it is now safely in the hands of Southern Locomotives Limited, a not-for-profit organisation that restores, maintains and runs steam locomotives.

Southern Locomotives sells shares in individual locomotives, so I am buying shares in the Sir Keith Park, at £250 each ([www.southern-locomotives.co.uk](http://www.southern-locomotives.co.uk)). This may prove an even more illiquid investment than a US sub-prime

mortgage derivative, but will give much more enjoyment as I follow the progress of the restoration – which I will try to visit on or near September 15 each year. [mrsmoneypenny@ft.com](mailto:mrsmoneypenny@ft.com)

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**WHAT MEMORIALS ARE THERE TO THIS MAN, WHOSE MARSHALLING OF MEN AND MACHINES PUT PAID TO HITLER'S GOAL?**