

# **FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **New exhibition marks the centenary of fixed wing naval aviation**

May 2011 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of four naval officers learning to fly fixed wing aircraft. Prior to this period, only airships and man lifting kites were used to gain aerial advantage. The naval officers Longmore, Gregory, Samson and Royal Marine Gerrard demonstrated enormous courage in trusting their lives to elementary aircraft which bore more resemblance to large propeller driven box kites than to aircraft as we know them today. Within another year, they had pioneered flying from warships of the Royal Navy.

On June 27, a new exhibition celebrating the bravery of the early pioneers of the Royal Naval Air Service will open at the Fleet Air Arm Museum.

In close proximity to a replica of the aircraft that they flew in 1911, the Short S27, are the WWI medals of Henry Allingham, the last survivor of the RNAS, who died at the age of 113yrs in July 2009.

Like so many of his generation, Henry Allingham had been reluctant to discuss the events of WWI and his role within it. It was only in his later years when he felt the responsibility to speak out against the tragedy of war and the need for global brotherhood.

Among Henry Allingham's possessions was his old tool box which had been found by his American grandsons, the Gray brothers, when clearing his home in Brighton. To their surprise and amazement they discovered his WWI Victory Medal and British War Medal lying at the bottom of the tool box.

The Gray brothers have given the medals to the Fleet Air Arm Museum for posterity and public display. Says Museum Director Graham Mottram. "The medals had been lying in the bottom of Henry's tool box for a very long time. They are battered and dirty and without their ribbons. We have taken the unusual decision to leave them in the condition in which they were found. Their

condition and the fact that they were found in his tool box are a poignant reminder that veterans from the Great War were not triumphalist; instead they just wanted to forget about it. We are honoured to have such a pertinent reminder of this important gentleman”.

Mr Allingham’s family have also given the Fleet Air Arm Museum his French Légion d’Honneur which he wore in recent years with an increasing sense of responsibility as he became an ambassador for his generation.

Henry Allingham was interviewed by the Fleet Air Arm Museum in 2006. Excerpts of the interview are on the Museum’s website and his medals and his silver WWI identity bracelet bearing the inscription “. R N A S. Henry W Allingham. AM1 CoE.” (Royal Naval Air Service. Henry W Allingham. Air Mechanic 1st Class. Church of England.) are now on public display.

### Captions

Rescued from his tool box, Henry Allingham’s medals, now on public display  
Henry Allingham. The last survivor of the RNAS died aged 113 yrs



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