

Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding of Bentley Priory

GCB GCVO CMG (1882 - 1970)



The Moffat Memorial to commemorate Lord Dowding's birth in the town was unveiled in September 1972. It was built as a result of an appeal instigated by Miss Irene Park MBE of Moffat, an ex-WAAF officer during World War II. Its objective, to which very many people contributed, was to recognise the contribution of Lord Dowding to the success of the Royal Air Force in winning the "Battle of Britain" in 1940 by defeating the German Luftwaffe.

Scott Sutherland, also responsible for the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge, executed the bronze plaque of Lord Dowding. The memorial includes the famous words of Prime Minister Churchill about the pilots of the RAF, the badges of Fighter Command and the fact that he was born in Moffat. The town motto "Nunquam Non Paratus" (Ready Aye Ready) is very applicable to Lord Dowding's life.

In 1988, as a result of a public appeal, the Dowding family home in Moffat, now known as Dowding house, was opened as Sheltered Housing for ex-RAF personnel and their families.

The family left Moffat for the south in 1897 and, after school, Dowding joined the Army and then transferred to the newly formed Royal Flying Corps, seeing much active service in the First World War. In the 1930s he was involved in the introduction of ground/air radio and subsequently in research and development of aircraft. At this time he also pushed for an increase in the production of the new Spitfire and Hurricane fighter aircraft. In addition, the development of radar and all-weather runways was a priority for him. It was an uphill struggle.

In 1936 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command and able to concentrate on the air defence of the nation in the face of the threatened war with Germany. His plans and ideas were not well received by his fellow officers but were, despite facing greater odds, to save the nation from invasion in a few short weeks in 1940 – "The Battle of Britain". The RAF lost 1038 aircraft and 544 pilots and aircrew. Recognition is due not only to the aircrew but also the ground crews, who kept the aircraft flying, the flight controllers, mostly WAAF, the radar personnel and the Royal Observer Corps. It was under Lord Dowding's guidance, leadership and control that this force was established and saved the nation from the Luftwaffe attack, which was an essential preparation for the German planned sea-borne invasion. Winston Churchill, in referring to his leadership at this time, stated, "We must regard the generalship here shown as an example of genius in the art of war".

During his memorial service at Westminster Abbey in 1970 he was designated "The Architect of Deliverance".