

RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL

“OC Workshops Sqn 1930-33”



Key Extracts from *‘War Amongst the Clouds’*
- a Granville-White Publication


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Introduction

RAF College Cranwell can claim with pride that many of its alumni followed in the footsteps of their parents and/or siblings, as recorded in our album 'Keeping it in the Family' at <https://www.cranwellian-ian.com/library-navigation/ewExternalFiles/Familiesv0.7JUL23.pdf>. This album pays tribute to the Granville-White family and, in particular, to the patriarch AVM Hugh Granville-White, CB, CBE, MIMechE, who, like many, transferred from the British Army of WW1 to embark on a highly successful career in the newly formed, independent RAF.

With the kind permission of Chris Granville-White and John Davies of Grub Street Publishing, we reproduce extracts from his biography describing Hugh's tour of duty as OC Workshops Sqn at RAF Cranwell, 1930-33. The full version of the book is still available through Amazon; try command+clicking {Apple} or control+clicking {MS Windows} on:



WAR AMONGST THE CLOUDS
MY FLYING EXPERIENCES IN WORLD WAR I
AND THE FOLLOW-ON YEARS 1920-1963
GROUP CAPTAIN CHRIS GRANVILLE WHITE

War Amongst the Clouds: My Flying Experiences in World War I and the Follow-On Years Hardcover – 12 July 2019
by AVM Hugh Granville White (Author), Gp Capt Chris Granville White (Author)
4.5 ★★★★★ 13 ratings [See all formats and editions](#)

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This is a personal account written by a man reflecting on his time as a young pilot with the Royal Flying Corps in France during the First World War, who eventually became an ace. It is a story of survival against the odds at a time when the conduct of air operations depended so much on individual skills, innovation, courage and luck. Hugh White flew F.E.2D Scout aircraft with 20 Squadron as a reconnaissance patrol pilot aged just eighteen. By his nineteenth birthday he was a flight commander and the most experienced pilot on the squadron. He then became a flight commander on 29 Squadron flying the S.E.5a which was Britain's best fighter aircraft at the time. During the two years of flying, he experienced and survived a series of escapades including a dramatic mid-air collision with the enemy. Told by Hugh in his own words, he gives a unique insight into war in the air. With the break-up of his squadron and being reduced to a substantive rank simply because of his young age Hugh's writing ends in 1919. From this point, the story is continued by his younger son Chris. He describes Hugh's life and RAF career from flying Bristol Fighters in India during the 1920s, undertaking engineer training at Henlow, to commanding 501 Squadron in the mid-1930s and becoming a full-time technical officer until his retirement as an air vice-marshal in 1955. This book includes a foreword by Air Marshal Sir Frederick Sowrey (Hugh's nephew) which puts Hugh White's early wartime service into context. It is a timely reminder, following the centenary of the end of the First World War, of the difficulties that young pilots faced at the time. A must-read for those interested in wartime exploits.

Read on and enjoy an insight into a remarkable career and way of life at the RAF College in the 1930s.

RAF College Cranwell 1930-1933

This Extract reproduced from 'War Amongst the Clouds'

On completion of the Henlow engineering course, on 1 July 1930 Hugh was posted to the RAF College Cranwell on promotion to squadron leader to command the Workshops Squadron. As a substantive squadron leader aged thirty-two he was now back to what had been his acting rank as a front-line squadron commander aged twenty back in 1919.

The Commandant of the RAF College at that time was Air Vice-Marshal Arthur Longmore. Hugh held Arthur Longmore in high regard and in time they became good friends.

Hugh's posting to Cranwell was an ideal combination for his engineering and flying qualifications. When his technicians had completed the repair and maintenance tasks in the workshops Hugh then flew the air tests. This was very practical and direct work to ensure that there were sufficient aircraft of the appropriate type available for the daily flying training of the flight cadets. As a part of his task it would have been crucial that the stores organisation at Cranwell always had available the correct tools and spares in stock for his team to use. This equipment and stores aspect would be an area in which he would be increasingly involved during subsequent appointments.

Hugh flew most days from the grass north airfield at Cranwell, usually on very short test flights of ten or fifteen minutes. His flying logbook lists the flying hours on the many different types of aircraft then at Cranwell (D.H.60 Gipsy Moth, D.H.9A, Bristol Fighter, Armstrong Whitworth Siskin III & IIIA, Armstrong Whitworth Atlas, Fairey Fox, Avro 504N (Lynx Avro), Avro Tutor, Hawker Hart). He also had a short solo flight one morning in a Westland Wapiti during October 1931, which may have been an opportunistic flight when a Wapiti pilot was visiting - to add to his types flown. It is interesting to note that having stayed in flying practice continuously since he began flying in 1916 there was never a requirement for Hugh to have a dual check on arrival at Cranwell or before flying the many aircraft types there which he had not flown before. Indeed, once he had qualified as a pilot in 1916, about the only dual checks he flew during his RAF career look to have been on his arrival in India in 1924 when he flew for fifteen-minutes in a Bristol Fighter for a 'Passenger flight in accordance with Regulations' and after spending four months at Lower Topa in India during 1927 when he recorded a ten-minute 'Dual check after absence over 4 months'.

After the first few weeks at Cranwell Hugh's clerk maintained his flying logbook so there are none of the usual informative or cryptic personal comments about the characteristics of aircraft which he was flying for the first time, or of any particular occurrences. However, with the number of short air tests flown most days it is no surprise that he delegated log keeping to his clerk. For example, on 13 November 1931 he flew thirteen separate air tests on three different types of aircraft (six Atlas air tests, five Avro air tests and two Moth air tests) yet was only airborne for a total of 3hr 15min. During these air tests he usually took a technician as passenger, which he told me was useful for checking the rigging adjustment because when a technician was flying the aircraft he would not automatically correct for anomalies in flying characteristics as a pilot would.

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RAF College Cranwell Annual Inspection in 1932. Hugh in step with the Commandant, Air Vice-Marshal Arthur Longmore, as he inspected the Workshops Squadron personnel.

RAF College Cranwell 1930-1933

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During Hugh's time at Cranwell two new training aircraft types were introduced at the College, with the Avro Tutor replacing the Lynx Avro as the basic trainer and the Hawker Hart replacing the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas as the advanced trainer. Through March 1933 he air tested thirteen Tutors with consecutive airframe numbers (indicating that they were new aircraft from the production line) and in April he air tested five Harts with consecutive airframe numbers.

The Military site at Cranwell had begun as a Royal Navy unit during the First World War to train navy pilots to fly aeroplanes and airships or to operate observation balloons. The story goes that a young Naval pilot had been tasked to fly around this part of Lincolnshire to look for a suitable large flat area which could be used for an airfield and training site. Apparently he flew over Cranwell which he described as 'quite admirable'. Whether this is true or not, during 1915 the Admiralty requisitioned 2,500 acres of farmland, mainly from the Earl of Bristol's estate, to build a hutted camp with hangars. Named HMS Daedalus, the Cranwell site comprised the RNAS Central Training Establishment and the Naval Boys' Training Wing (to train Naval air mechanics and riggers). When the RFC and RNAS were amalgamated to create the RAF in 1918, HMS Daedalus was re-named RAF Cranwell.

The RAF College at Cranwell was opened on 5 February 1920, as the world's first Military Air Academy and as part of Trenchard's vision to consolidate the RAF as a single, independent Service. The flight cadets completed a two-year course for officer and flying training to create a core of potential future leaders of the RAF. In the years to follow Trenchard said that he had chosen Cranwell because 'Marooned in the wilderness, cut off from pastimes they could not organise for themselves, the cadets would find life cheaper, healthier and more wholesome.' Indeed, his message to the first cadets left them in no doubt of his expectations '*We have to learn by experience how to organise and administer a great Service, both in peace and war, and you, who are present at the College in its first year, will, in future, be at the helm. Therefore, you will have to work your hardest, both as cadets at the College and subsequently as officers, in order to be capable of guiding this great Service through its early days and maintaining its traditions and efficiency in the years to come.*'

In 1922 work began to replace the wartime Naval huts with a permanent buildings. In time Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air, took the architect James West to visit Wren's Royal Hospital in Chelsea, and the design for the new College building reflected this influence.

The foundation stone for the College building was laid by Lady Hoare, wife of the Secretary of State for Air, on 29 April 1929 and the building work continued throughout Hugh and Joy's three years at Cranwell. Indeed, they would often walk across the grass airfield from their married quarter at weekends to see how the construction of the new college building was progressing. This impressive new brick building with Portland stone facing was finally completed in September 1933, a few months after they had left for the next posting. It was opened formally in October 1934 by the then Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII.

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RAF College Cranwell 1930-1933



[DH 60M Gipsy Moth](#)



[DH 9A Trainer](#)



[Bristol F2b Fighter](#)



[AW Siskin IIIA](#)



[AW Atlas](#)



[Fairey Fox](#)



[Avro 504N](#)



[Avro Tutor](#)



[Hawker Hart](#)



[Westland Wapiti](#)

"Hugh's Aircraft"

Reproduced from the CHS Album 'Aircraft Through The Ages':

<https://www.cranwellian-ian.com/library-navigation/ewExternalFiles/TrgAcv2.0.pdf>

RAF College Cranwell 1930-1933

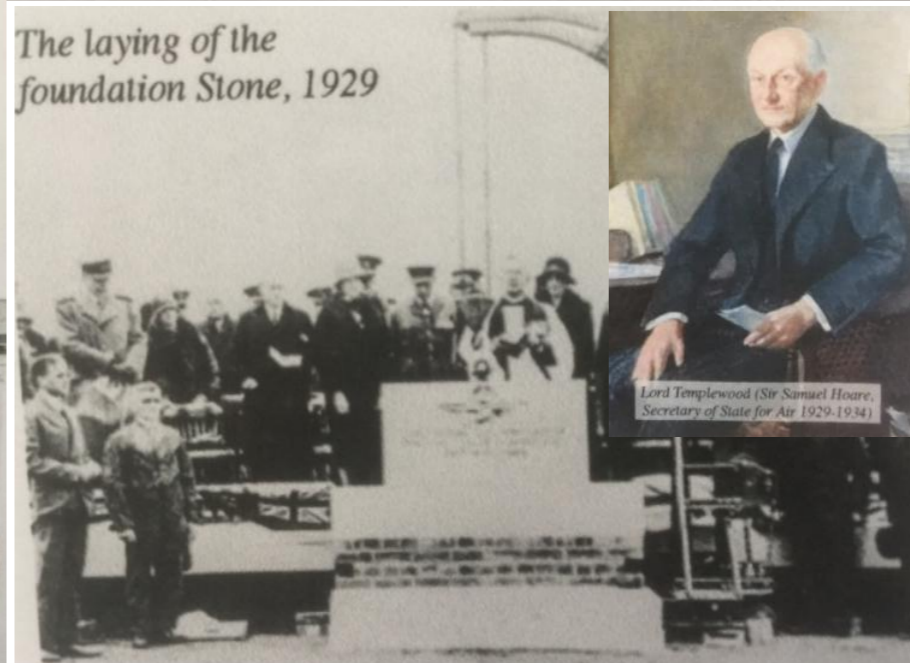


The College Hall architecture conforms to English tradition, being built of "rustic and moulded brick work with the more important features in Portland Stone". It was based on St Pancras Station and the Royal Hospital, Chelsea.

All showing CHOM under construction c.1932



The laying of the foundation Stone, 1929



The New College - What Hugh And, His Wife, Joy Saw Emerging

RAF College Cranwell 1930-1933

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A few months after starting his tour at Cranwell, Hugh spent some days during October 1930 on board the battleship HMS *Barham* from Invergordon off the north-east of Scotland. It is not clear why this visit took place, which included operating at sea with other Naval ships. HMS *Barham* had been built many years earlier and had taken part in the Battle of Jutland during the First World War. Some years after Hugh's visit HMS *Barham* would be in the Mediterranean Fleet during the Second World War. However, as reported by Pathe News HMS *Barham* had a tragic ending in November 1941 when she was hit by torpedoes from a German submarine. As she capsized the main weapons magazine exploded killing 860 sailors - two-thirds of her crew.



Hugh on HMS *Barham* October 1930

When Hugh and Joy first moved to Cranwell with their small son John, they lived in a small terrace bungalow married quarter on what was known as 'Harmony Row', a small cul de sac at West Avenue not far from the College riding stables. These 'period' quarters were still there when I arrived at Cranwell as a flight cadet in 1959, but by the time I returned as a flying instructor a decade later they had been demolished and replaced by modern 1960s quarters. Although Hugh and Joy were very happy in Harmony Row, in due course they moved to a larger brick married quarter near the old airship concrete mooring blocks across the north airfield by Bristol Wood reached via the aptly-named Lighter-than-Air Road.

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Joy remembered their time at Cranwell as a settled and happy family period, with plenty of riding and hunting for them both, including riding in a RAF Point to Point. They enjoyed a good social life at Cranwell and during some long weekends with the Longmores and others on the Norfolk Broads. In the years after Cranwell Hugh and Joy stayed in contact with Arthur and Marjorie Longmore as family friends. Indeed when Sir Arthur Longmore visited Cheltenham on business some twenty-five years later when I was at school there as a teenager, much to my surprise he took me out to lunch and quizzed me on my growing ambition to join the RAF.



The Belvoir Hunt moving off across the airfield from the meet at the Officers' Mess, RAF College Cranwell. Passing Lynx Avro training aircraft 1931.

RAF College Cranwell 1930-1933

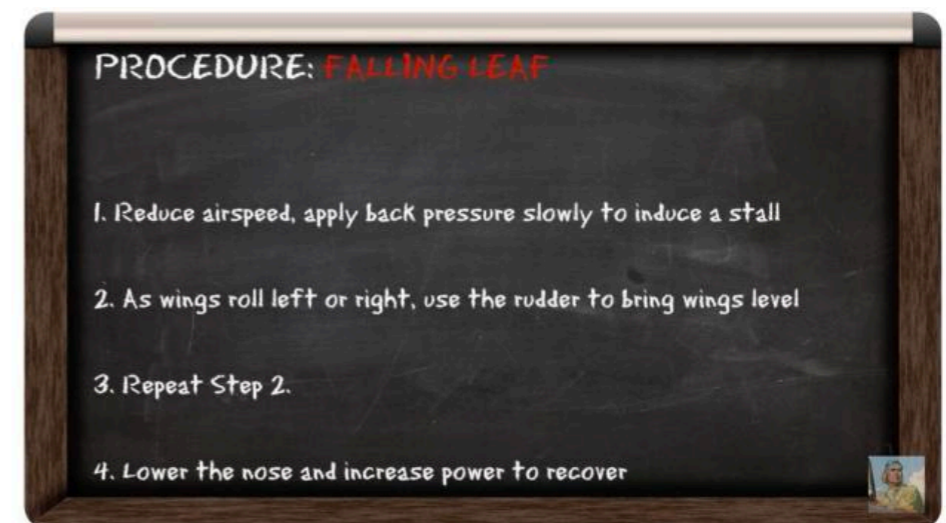
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AVM Longmore's Blackburn Bluebird 2-seat (side-by-side seating) biplane. Joy flew as a passenger in this aircraft with Arthur Longmore during which he demonstrated the 'falling leaf' manoeuvre – as she recounted with relish in later years.



AVM Sir Arthur Longmore GCB, DSO, DL



'Falling Leaf' Manoeuvre