

= Henry Allingham =

Henry William Allingham (6 June 1896 ? 18 July 2009) was a British supercentenarian , the oldest British man ever , First World War veteran and , for one month , the verified oldest living man in the world . He is also the second @-@ oldest military veteran ever , and at the time of his death , he was the 12th @-@ verified oldest man of all time .

Allingham was the oldest ever surviving member of any of the British Armed Forces and one of the oldest surviving veterans of the First World War . He was the last survivor of the Battle of Jutland , the last surviving member of the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) and the last surviving founding member of the Royal Air Force (RAF) . In 2001 he became the face of the First World War veterans ' association and made frequent public appearances to ensure that awareness of the sacrifices of the First World War was not lost to modern generations . He received many honours and awards for his First World War service and his longevity .

= = Early life = =

Allingham was born in 1896 in Clapton , County of London . When he was 14 months old , his father , Henry Thomas Allingham (1868 @-@ 1897) , died at age 29 of tuberculosis . Henry is recorded in the 1901 census with his widowed mother Amy Jane Allingham (née Foster) (1873 @-@ 1915) , a laundress forewoman , living with her parents and brother at 23 Verulam Avenue , Walthamstow . His mother remarried in 1905 to Hubert George Higgs and in 1907 the family moved to Clapham , London . Henry and his mother are recorded in the 1911 Census living at 21 Heyford Avenue , Lambeth , while his stepfather was lodging away from home working as a wheelwright . Henry attended a London County Council school before attending the Regent Street Polytechnic . Allingham remembered seeing the City Imperial Volunteers return from the Second Boer War , and also recalled watching W. G. Grace play cricket . On leaving school , Allingham started work as a trainee surgical instrument maker at St. Bartholomew 's Hospital . He did not find this job very interesting , and so left to work for a coachbuilder specialising in car bodies .

= = First World War = =

Allingham wanted to join the war effort in August 1914 as a despatch rider , but his critically ill mother managed to persuade him to stay at home and look after her . However , after his mother died in 1915 , aged 42 , Allingham enlisted with the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) . He became formally rated as an Air Mechanic Second Class on 21 September 1915 , and was posted to Chingford before completing his training at Sheerness , Kent . His RNAS serial number was RNAS F8317 .

After graduation , Allingham was posted to the RNAS Air Station at Great Yarmouth where he worked in aircraft maintenance . On 13 April 1916 , King George V inspected the air station and its aircraft . Allingham later reported disappointment at barely missing an opportunity to speak with the king .

Allingham also worked in Bacton , Norfolk , further up the coast , where night @-@ flying was conducted and was later involved in supporting anti @-@ submarine patrols . A typical patrol would last two or three days and would involve the manual labour of hoisting a seaplane in and out of the water by means of a deck @-@ mounted derrick .

During the preparations for what has become known as the Battle of Jutland , Allingham was ordered to join the naval trawler HMT Kingfisher . Onboard was a Sopwith Schneider seaplane that was used to patrol the surrounding waters for the German High Seas Fleet . Allingham 's responsibilities included helping to launch this aircraft . Although the Kingfisher was not directly involved in the battle (it shadowed the British Grand Fleet and then the High Seas Fleet) , Allingham still rightfully claimed to be the last known survivor of that battle and could recall " seeing shells ricocheting across the sea . "

In September 1917 , Allingham , by then an Air Mechanic First Class , was posted to the Western

Front to join No. 12 Squadron RNAS . This unit acted as a training squadron for other RNAS squadrons based on the Western Front . There is also some evidence that the squadron was involved in combat operations . When Allingham arrived at Petite @-@ Synthe , both the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the RNAS were involved in the Ypres offensive . Allingham also instrumented the very first reconnaissance aircraft camera during the First World War . On 3 November 1917 , he was posted to the aircraft depot at Dunkirk , France where he remained for the rest of the war , on aircraft repair and recovery duties . He recalls being bombed from the air and shelled from both the land and the sea .

He transferred to the Royal Air Force when the RNAS and the RFC were merged on 1 April 1918 . The creation of the Royal Air Force did not initially have a big impact on Allingham and he later remarked that at that time he still considered himself a navy man . In the RAF he was ranked as a Rigger Aero , Aircraft Mechanic Second Class and was given a new service number : 208317 . Allingham returned to the Home Establishment in February 1919 and was formally discharged to the RAF Reserve on 16 April 1919 . During the last few years of his life Allingham was recognized as the last surviving founding member of the RAF . Speaking with Dennis Goodwin of the First World War Veterans ' Association , Allingham said , " It is a shock as well as a privilege to think that I am the only man alive from that original reorganisation when the RAF was formed . "

= = Inter @-@ war years = =

= = = Career = = =

In addition to his military service as a mechanic , Allingham spent the vast majority of his professional life as an engineer . His employers included Thorns Car Body Makers , Vickers General Motors and H.J.M. Car Body Builders . He started his longest stretch of employment in 1934 designing new car bodies for the Ford Motor Company at their Dagenham plant which had opened only a few years previously in 1931 .

= = = Family life = = =

Allingham met Dorothy Cator (1895 ? 1970) in Great Yarmouth , Norfolk in 1918 . They married the same year in Romford , when she was 22 . They moved to Eastbourne , Sussex in 1960 and remained married until she died there from acute and chronic lymphatic leukaemia . They had two daughters , Betty (born 1920) and Jean (1923 ? 2001) . Jean emigrated to the United States and died aged 78 in 2001 . At the time of his death Allingham believed that Betty had died . He had lost touch with her in the 1970s following a family rift after the death of his wife in 1970 . In fact Betty Hankin was still alive aged 89 when her father died , and living in Stroud , Gloucestershire . In addition to his one remaining daughter Betty , at the time of his death Allingham had seven grandchildren , 16 great @-@ grandchildren , 14 great @-@ great @-@ grandchildren , and one great @-@ great @-@ great @-@ grandchild .

= = Second World War = =

During the Second World War , Allingham was in a reserved occupation and worked on a number of projects . Perhaps his most significant contribution was the design of an effective counter @-@ measure to the German magnetic mines . During his Christmas lunch in 1939 he was called away to help design a system that would neutralise the mines and open the port of Harwich , Essex . Nine days later , he had successfully completed the task .

= = Later life = =

After the Second World War Allingham continued to work for Ford until he retired in 1960 . After

Denis Goodwin of the First World War Veterans ' Association tracked him down in 2001 , Allingham took a prominent role in telling his story so that later generations would not forget . On 16 October 2003 , he helped launch the 2003 Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal with model Nell McAndrew aboard the cruiser HMS Belfast . He was quoted as saying " [The veterans] have given all they have got for the country ... I owe them ... we all owe them . "

A ceremony at the Cenotaph in Whitehall , London on 4 August 2004 , marked the 90th anniversary of Britain 's entry into the First World War . Allingham attended , together with three other First World War veterans , William Stone , Fred Lloyd and John Osborne . Allingham also marched past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday in 2005 and laid wreaths at memorials in Saint @-@ Omer on Armistice Day . That was the last time a First World War veteran marched past the Cenotaph and it marked the end of an era . No First World War veterans were present at the Cenotaph for the 2006 Remembrance Sunday Parade .

As the last surviving member of the RNAS , and the last living founding member of the RAF , Allingham was an honoured guest when the British Air Services Memorial was unveiled at Saint @-@ Omer on 11 September 2004 . During the ceremony Allingham was given the Gold Medal of Saint @-@ Omer , which marked the award of the Freedom of the Town . The group of RAF technical trainees that joined him at this ceremony continued to visit Allingham at his retirement home in Eastbourne , demonstrating the bond of respect that these men had for Allingham .

In November 2005 Allingham accepted an invitation from the International Holographic Portrait Archive to have his holographic portrait taken . His image was recorded for posterity in December 2005 . At the same time , an exhibition was being planned for London 's floating naval museum on board HMS Belfast , entitled the Ghosts of Jutland . A copy of this portrait was donated to the museum and HRH The Duchess of Gloucester unveiled the portrait to mark the opening of the exhibition .

Allingham was awarded the freedom of his home town of Eastbourne by the mayor on 21 April 2006 . He lived on his own until May 2006 when , one month before his 110th birthday and with failing eyesight , he moved to St Dunstan 's , a charity for blind ex @-@ service personnel , at Ovingdean , near Brighton . Aside from his poor eyesight , he was reportedly in good health , with visitors remarking on his memory and voice . Allingham attended the 1 July 2006 commemorations at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing . He did not attend the 2006 Remembrance Day parade on 11 November at the Cenotaph as he was in France at a wreath @-@ laying ceremony and to receive the Freedom of The Town of Saint @-@ Omer . He did , however , launch the Eastbourne Poppy Appeal before leaving for this trip .

On 18 April 2007 Allingham visited Wilnecote High School in Tamworth , Staffordshire to answer students ' questions about the First World War , after they wrote to veterans asking them about their experiences . In October 2007 he was honoured at the Pride of Britain Awards . Between his 110th and 111th birthdays Allingham made over 60 public appearances , including a visit to The Oval on 5 June 2007 , the day before his 111th birthday , where he was wheeled around the boundary in front of the spectators .

On his 111th birthday , a Royal Marines band played to Allingham on board HMS Victory before he returned with friends and relatives to the Queen 's Hotel on the Portsmouth seafront for afternoon tea . Asked how it felt , Allingham replied , " I 'm pleased to be seeing another tomorrow . It 's just the same as it was as at any age , it 's no different . I 'm happy to be alive and I 'm looking forward to the celebrations . I never imagined I 'd get to 111 . "

On 1 April 2008 , the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Royal Air Force , Allingham was guest of honour at the celebratory events at RAF Odiham in Hampshire . By then , Allingham was the only surviving founder member of the RAF .

Allingham celebrated his 112th birthday with members of his family at RAF Cranwell , Lincolnshire as the guest of honour at a luncheon at the college . During the day the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight performed a flypast which was followed by an aerobatic display from two Tutor aircraft . In June 2008 , at his personal request , Allingham was taken on a guided tour of the Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft at BAE Systems in Warton , Lancashire , as part of the National Veterans ' Day celebrations .

On 23 September 2008 , Allingham launched a book about his life , co @-@ written by Denis Goodwin , with an event at the RAF Club in London . On 11 November 2008 , marking the 90th anniversary of the end of the First World War , together with Harry Patch and Bill Stone , Allingham laid a commemorative wreath for the Act of Remembrance at The Cenotaph in London . Allingham was invested as a Scout on 18 November 2008 , 100 years after he first joined as a youth . He said he was only able to spend six weeks with his local group as a boy . Allingham celebrated his 113th birthday on HMS President , at an event hosted by the Royal Navy . He received a signed birthday card from First Sea Lord Sir Jonathon Band and saw a Mark 8 Royal Navy Lynx flying overhead while he was sitting outside in his wheelchair . When asked the secret of his long life , Allingham said , " I don 't know , but I would say , be as good as you possibly can . "

= = Oldest living man = =

Allingham credited " cigarettes , whisky and wild , wild women ? and a good sense of humour " for his longevity .

Allingham overtook George Frederick Ives as the longest lived member of the British Armed Forces on 1 November 2007 . He was therefore the longest lived British First World War veteran to date .

Following the death of Tomoji Tanabe on 19 June 2009 , Allingham became the oldest living man . At his death , he was the oldest living veteran of the First World War , but not the longest lived member of any armed force in any conflict ; this record is held by Emiliano Mercado del Toro of Puerto Rico , who also served in the First World War .

Allingham was the oldest living man in England for several years . Official recognition by Guinness World Records came in January 2007 . On 8 February 2007 , when 110 @-@ year @-@ old Antonio Pierro died , Allingham became the oldest known living veteran of the First World War , and the third @-@ oldest living man in the world . After French supercentenarian Maurice Floquet died on 10 November 2006 , Allingham was the oldest validated living man in Europe . After Japanese man Sukesaburo Nakanishi died on 22 August 2007 , Allingham shared the position of second @-@ oldest man in the world with George Francis , an American man also born on 6 June 1896 , for more than a year until Francis died on 27 December 2008 . On 29 March 2009 , Allingham became the oldest British man of all time . With the death of Tomoji Tanabe on 19 June 2009 he became the oldest living man in the world ; after Allingham died , that title passed to Walter Breuning of Montana .

On 13 February 2007 , he became Britain 's second @-@ oldest living person , behind Florrie Baldwin , and on 29 March 2009 , he became the oldest ever British man , surpassing Welshman John Evans who died aged 112 years and 295 days . He was also the first ever verified British man to reach the age of 113 . On 18 July 2009 , Allingham died of natural causes aged 113 years and 42 days .

As the number of First World War veterans dwindled , calls grew to give the last remaining veteran a state funeral . The calls resulted in Her Majesty 's Government approving on 27 June 2006 a National Memorial Service at Westminster Abbey to take place after the death of the last known British First World War veteran . Prior to this announcement Allingham often said that he tried not to think about the prospect , but has also been quoted as saying " I don 't mind ? as long as it 's not me . " Allingham received a letter from Member of Parliament Tom Watson on 14 July 2006 explaining the reasoning for a national memorial service rather than a state funeral , as the intention is to commemorate the entire generation that fought in the war rather than single out an individual .

In Harry Patch 's book The Last Fighting Tommy , the author claims that Allingham planned to leave his body to medical science . In his own book Kitchener 's Last Volunteer Allingham confirmed that he was intending to leave his body to medical science . However he was persuaded by Denis Goodwin to change his mind , as he became a symbol of World War I to remind people of the sacrifices made during the conflict . To that end he agreed to a funeral and cremation .

= = = Milestones = = =

6 June 1996 ? 100th birthday

20 July 2003 ? Oldest verified living British veteran of the First World War upon the death of Jack Davis

6 December 2005 ? Oldest man living in Britain upon the death of Jerzy Paj?czkowski @-@ Dydy?ski

6 June 2006 ? 110th birthday

10 November 2006 ? Oldest living man in Europe following the death of Frenchman Maurice Floquet

13 February 2007 ? Second oldest person in Britain upon the death of Aida Mason

1 November 2007 ? Oldest ever member of any British armed forces , surpassing George Ives who died in 1993 aged 111 years and 146 days

13 March 2008 ? Oldest ever English man , surpassing John Mosely Turner who died in 1968 aged 111 years and 280 days

29 March 2009 ? Oldest ever British man , surpassing Welshman John Evans who died in 1990 aged 112 years and 295 days

6 June 2009 ? First British man to reach the age of 113

19 June 2009 ? Oldest living man in the world following the death of Japanese man Tomoji Tanabe

18 July 2009 ? Died aged 113 years 42 days , the second oldest man ever to die in Europe , behind only Joan Riudavets of Spain who died in 2004 aged 114 years and 81 days .

= = Awards = =

= = = War medals and awards = = =

Allingham was awarded four medals , two of which were medals from the First World War . The Gold Medal of Saint @-@ Omer was awarded to Allingham on 11 September 2004 when he was given the Freedom of the Town of Saint @-@ Omer . He was also awarded France 's highest military honour , the Légion d 'honneur , in which he was appointed a chevalier in 2003 and promoted to officier in 2009 . The remaining two medals are British Campaign Medals from the First World War : the British War Medal and the Victory Medal ; those two medals are colloquially known as " Mutt and Jeff " . These two medals are replacement medals supplied by the Ministry of Defence after discovering at a recent cenotaph parade that Allingham 's original campaign medals were destroyed during the Blitz of the Second World War .

= = = Honorary awards = = =

As well as the above @-@ mentioned decorations , Allingham won several awards and honorary memberships . Examples include the Pride of Britain award , and a position as an honorary member of the Fleet Air Arm Association .

Although not formally qualified he was recognised by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) who presented him with a Chartered Engineer award on 19 December 2008 .

Allingham had the following to say about the award :

Since entering the engineering profession I always hoped to become a chartered engineer , but when I was younger we just couldn ? t afford it . It ? s something I never thought would happen for me , so to receive this honorary certificate from IMechE is a lifetime ? s goal finally realised . I am very grateful to the Institution for presenting me with the award .

This was followed on 22 May 2009 with the award of an honorary doctorate in engineering at the Southampton Solent University by the university 's chancellor , the former First Sea Lord Alan West , for his contribution to Britain and its allies during two world wars and his continuing charity work , especially connected with veteran servicemen and women .

= = Death and funeral = =

Allingham died of natural causes in his sleep at 3 : 10 am on 18 July 2009 at his care home , St Dunstan 's Centre in Ovingdean near Brighton , aged 113 years and 42 days . After his death Walter Breuning took over as the world 's oldest man .

Allingham 's funeral took place at St Nicholas ' Church , Brighton at noon on 30 July 2009 , with full military honours . His coffin was carried by three Royal Navy seamen and three RAF airmen . The service was preceded by a half @-@ muffled quarter peal on the church 's bells , rung by local ringers and members of the RAF and Royal Navy change ringing associations . Among the mourners were the Duchess of Gloucester , representing the Queen , and Veterans ' Minister Kevan Jones . Senior Royal Navy and Royal Air Force officers , including Vice @-@ Admiral Sir Adrian Johns and Air Vice @-@ Marshal Peter Dye , represented the two services of which Allingham had been a member . Allingham 's surviving daughter , Betty Hankin , 89 , attended the funeral , with several members of her family . The funeral was followed by a flypast of five replica First World War aircraft ; British and French buglers played the Last Post and Reveille ; and a bell was tolled 113 times , once for each year of his life .

The BBC commissioned Carol Ann Duffy , the Poet Laureate , to write a poem to mark the deaths of Allingham and Harry Patch , who died one week after Allingham on 25 July 2009 . The result , Last Post , was read by Duffy on the BBC Radio 4 programme Today on the day of Allingham 's funeral . A tree was planted , and a commemorative plaque unveiled , at the Eastbourne Redoubt on 22 May 2010 to mark Allingham 's residence in the town .

= = = Autobiography = = =

Allingham , Henry ; Goodwin , Denis (2008) . Kitchener 's Last Volunteer . Mainstream Publishing . ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 84596 @-@ 416 @-@ 0 .