

## THE TRAGEDY OF THE AIRSHIP R101

The R101, a British rigid airship was commissioned in the late 1920s and built at Shortstown.

At 18:36 GMT on the evening of Saturday, 4th October 1930, the R101 left Cardington for Karachi (then in India) with one intermediate stop scheduled at Ismailia in Egypt. On board were 48 crew and just six passengers. The weather that night was bad with strong headwinds and heavy rain. Soon after 02:00 on Sunday morning, 5th October 1930, the R101 had reached Beauvais in northern France when it went into a shallow dive, recovered and then grounded near the village of Allonne. The airship immediately caught fire, resulting in the deaths of 48 of the 54 persons on board – including all six passengers. Of these, 18 were residents of Shortstown. The 6 survivors were residents of Shortstown at the time of the crash.



The bodies were brought back to London and lay in state in Westminster Hall. A memorial service was held in St Paul's. They are buried in separate coffins in a mass grave in the cemetery of St Mary the Virgin in Cardington.

The scorched ensign of the R101 held by two French firefighters. It is now framed and displayed in Cardington church.

A public enquiry was set up on 22/10/1930. No-one was blamed, although the design had many faults and the trial flights had not been fully completed. In addition the weather conditions were poor. There had been considerable political pressure to hasten the departure date to coincide with the first Imperial conference in October 1930. The tragedy ended the UK airship building enterprise. The R100 which was smaller and had flown successfully to Canada was dismantled. HOWEVER, the site of Shortstown continued to be active under the RAF Cardington until 2000.

## SHORTSTOWN 2024

The hangars are still in use. Shed One is leased to Warner Brothers. Batman, Star Wars, Scared of the Dark and Inception are amongst the most famous movies filmed there.



From a small housing estate built in 1917, the town's population has grown from 2,392 in 2016 to 4,838 in 2021... and rising! The Shorts building was restored and extended in 2021 for flats, businesses and a children's nursery.

