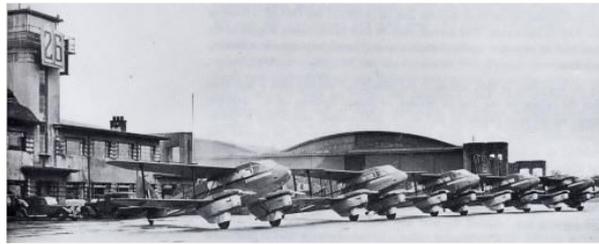


## Air Ambulance Memorial



The Scottish Air Ambulance Service is an important part of Renfrew's history. Not far from the corner of Newmains Road and Sandy Road, where the Air Ambulance memorial sits, there used to be an airport. And before that, the flat fields around Renfrew were used by early flyers of the 1910s to practise their take offs and landings.

Moorpark Aerodrome was formed at the outbreak of World War 1 when the Ministry of Munitions took over the fields between Renfrew and Arkleston and created an airfield where newly built aircraft could be tested. By the 1920s the Scottish Flying Club had made its base here and by 1933 Renfrew Airport had begun operating scheduled domestic flights.

It is thanks to the skilled pilots of the 1930s and their strong sense of community spirit that the Scottish Air Ambulance Service (SAAS) was formed. With travel between Glasgow and the Highlands and Islands being long and sometimes difficult, if a sick person needed urgent medical attention, the Ambulance Service of the day would get in touch with their nearest Flying Club or Air Base if they needed a plane in a hurry.

The first such recorded flight in Scotland was from Renfrew to Islay on 14 May 1933. The pilot was Jimmy Orrell and the patient was seriously ill fisherman John McDermid. John needed a stomach operation urgently and it is unlikely that he would have survived the long sea and road journey to Glasgow. By coincidence, Mrs Ferguson, a nurse from Glasgow, was on holiday on Islay at the time John took ill. She offered to travel back on the plane so that she could nurse John during the flight. Thanks to both the skill of the pilot and the medical attention of Nurse Ferguson, 90 minutes after leaving Islay John was having a life-saving operation at Glasgow's Western Infirmary. From that chance coming together of pilot and nurse, an idea was formed that a trained nurse from the mainland became part of each future Air Ambulance flight. By WWII, this service was being provided by the Southern General Hospital with nurses being awarded a brooch in the shape of silver wings upon completion of ten flights.



From this dramatic beginning in 1933, the SAAS came into being and connections between the town of Renfrew and some of Scotland's most remote communities was forged. Read more about the aviation history of the SAAS as well as the courage of the men and women involved, in Iain Hutchieson's fascinating book.

Throughout the 1950s, public desire for foreign holidays grew rapidly and Renfrew Airport was becoming too small to handle the extra demand. Renfrew Airport closed on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1966 with all services transferring to what is now Glasgow Airport. The Scottish Air Ambulance Service continues today from Glasgow Airport providing vital medical links for remote communities.

### Sources and further information:

- Hutchieson, Iain, "Air Ambulance: Six Decades of the Scottish Air Ambulance", Service, Kea Publishing, 1996

