

Relatives to see airmen honoured with plaque

HISTORY

Relatives from across the UK and as far afield as Canada are to make a poignant pilgrimage to the north-east hill where three RAF aircrew died more than 60 years ago.

A plaque bearing the names of the three airmen who died in two flying accidents will be unveiled on Bennachie, 73 years after the first tragedy.

Pilot Officer Ellard Cummings from Ontario in Canada and Leading Aircraftman Ronald Stewart died as they flew north from Wigton.

James Mackay, a founding member of hill guardians group the Bailies

of Bennachie, said: "The Canadian pilot was 23 years old and his gunner aged 24 when their Westland Wallace aircraft crashed in foggy weather on September 3, 1939 – the very day that World War II

"The Canadian pilot was 23 years old and his gunner aged 24"

broke out." The biplane had been heading for Evanston in the Highlands when it crashed to the south-east of the Aberdeenshire hill's 1,733ft Oxen Craig peak.

Mr Mackay, of Boat Croft, Kemnay, has spearheaded the renovation of a cairn

believed to have originally been put up on Bennachie by RAF personnel called in to recover their comrades' bodies and clear wreckage from the slopes.

Work on rebuilding the cairn with the help of the Bailies and Forestry Commission Scotland was carried out at the weekend.

Also commemorated on the memorial will be 22-year-old Pilot Officer Brian Lightfoot, who was at the controls of a Gloster Meteor when it hit Bennachie in a February snowstorm in 1952.

About half a dozen relatives of the Canadian pilot are travelling to the north-east to attend an unveiling and service on Bennachie on September 2.



MEMORIAL: Four of the volunteers – Sergeant Gus Gurney from RAF Kinloss, Phil McKay, Jackie Cumberbirch and John Nicol – work on the cairn. Picture courtesy of James Mackay