

The Free Czechoslovak Army Memorial,
Jephson Gardens
Royal Leamington Spa



Harrington House

Harrington House in Newbold Terrace, Royal Leamington Spa was commissioned by a Major Seel 1869, cost him £27,000, an enormous sum in those days. Through lack of funds he was unable to complete the furnishings, and never lived in the house, which became known locally as Seel's Folly.

During World War II it became the HQ of the Free Czechoslovak Army (FCA) in UK, Josef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš were based there before their intensive training to parachute with 5 others into The Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich the feared and hated Deputy Protector.

Harrington House was demolished in 1967, to make way for the new Royal Spa Centre, built in 1972, and still standing on the site today.

Within the Jephson Gardens, Royal Leamington Spa stands the only memorial to Operation Anthropoid in the UK, the The Free Czechoslovak Army Memorial.

It commemorates the actions during WWII of the more than 4,000 members of the FCA based in Leamington Spa in the years after 1941, following the invasion of their homelands. The memorial commemorates in particular the Czech and Slovak parachutists who took part in Operation Anthropoid, a dangerous and daring undercover mission during which officers of the FCA, who had been trained by the British Special Operations Executive in England and Scotland, were parachuted in to occupied Czechoslovakia, where in Prague they successfully executed a plan, which had been developed at their Leamington headquarters, to assassinate SS Obergruppenführer Reynhard Heydrich, Heinrich Himmler's deputy in the SS, military governor of the region, and one of the architects of the Holocaust. While lodging with the Czechoslovakian underground in the city for several weeks, the men of the FCA worked out the details of their assassination attempt. On the morning of 27 May 1942, Heydrich's car was ambushed as it slowed to negotiate a sharp bend, and Sgt Josef Gabčík tried to open fire with a Sten gun, which jammed. Sgt Jan Kubiš, who was acting as backup, threw one of two modified anti-tank grenades he was holding at the open car, where it exploded, seriously injuring Heydrich, who died of the resulting septicaemia on 4 June 1942.

After a fierce fire fight, the two Czechoslovak soldiers managed to make an escape, and were taken into hiding in a series of safe houses by the Czechoslovak underground organisation, Jindra. Eventually Gabčík and Kubiš found themselves sheltered in the crypt of Prague's Church of SS Cyril

and Methodius, together with two colleagues from the FCA who had been involved in their plot, and three members of the FCA who had been parachuted into the area on previous missions. Their location was betrayed by a fellow Czechoslovak paratrooper, and on 18 June 1942 the church was surrounded by up to 800 SS and Gestapo troops. The seven men bravely held off their attackers for several hours, as long as their ammunition lasted, but all died either by enemy fire, or by their own hands when the cause was finally lost.

These seven men of the Free Czechoslovak Army – Jan Kubiš, Adolf Opálka, Josef Bublík, Josef Gabčík, Josef Valčík, Jaroslav Svarc and Jan Hruby – are named on the memorial fountain in Jephson Gardens in Leamington Spa. The memorial was commissioned in the 1960s by the Association of Czechoslovak Legionnaires. It was designed by John French, lecturer in sculpture at the School of Art in the Mid-Warwickshire College of Further Education in Leamington Spa, and made by craftspeople at Hornton Stone Quarries in Edgehill, where the stone was obtained. Specialist carving was carried out by Ron Robbins. The memorial was set up in Jephson Gardens in Leamington, a riverside public park laid out in the 19th Century remodelled in the early years of the 20th. The fountain, which is accompanied by a cast bronze memorial plaque, was unveiled on 26 October 1968 by General Liska, former commander of the Czechoslovak Army. It is a Grade II listed memorial

The memorial takes the form of a fountain, with a wide, shallow, seven-lobed bowl standing on seven clustered piers, representing the seven men commemorated. The piers carry a carved rampant lion, the contemporary symbol of the then Czechoslovakia. From the centre of the bowl rises a water feature in the shape of an open parachute, with water emerging at the apex, and running down the 'seams' of the parachute into each of the lobes of the bowl below. The running streams of water resemble the cords of the parachute. This feature carries the names of those commemorated, one on each section. The water runs out of the lobes of the bowl via carved channels, and falls into a shallow, circular pool at the foot of the stem, which is fashioned in roughly-hewn stone. The pool is lined in Hornton stone paving with brick sides, and blue brick capping. The pool is surrounded by granite setts laid in concentric circles.

Alongside the fountain is a bronze memorial plaque, about 0.9m x 0.75m, set on a block of rough granite. The plaque reads:

IN TRIBUTE TO ALL CZECHOSLOVAK SOLDIERS, AIRMEN AND PATRIOTS WHO FELL IN
WORLD WAR II.

FROM ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA, IN 1941, VOLUNTEERS FROM FREE CZECHOSLOVAK
FORCES STATIONED IN THE TOWN, WERE PARACHUTED INTO THEIR HOMETOWN TO RID IT
OF THE TYRANT "PROTECTOR" S.S. GENERAL HEYDRICH. TWO OF THEM - JAN KUBIŠ AND
JOSEF GABČÍK - ACCOMPLISHED THEIR MISSION IN MAY 1942. THEY AND THEIR
COMPANIONS LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES FOR FREEDOM.







