



# The R101 Airship in Shortstown

Shortstown is named after the Short Brothers who built airships in Bedford from 1916. The Government took over the running of airships just three years later, but the name stuck.

The R101 was a famous airship that was built in the Cardington Sheds, (the giant hangars), in 1929 by workers who lived in Shortstown.

The R101 was part of the Imperial Airship Scheme, a government plan for airships to fly from Bedford taking travellers all around the world.

Airships are filled with a gas that is lighter than air which makes them float, like a boat floats on water. The R101 used hydrogen which is very light but highly flammable. After a few test flights, engineers decided the R101 wasn't lifting very well and decided to extend the ship. This made it the world's longest flying aircraft at the time.

The R101 had a sister ship called the R100 which flew successfully to Canada from Cardington on 29th July 1930.

## The sad end of the R101 Airship

The R101 was supposed to fly to India in September 1930 but high winds delayed the flight. After pressure from officials to fly the ship, the R101 eventually took off from Cardington on 4th October 1930 and started its flight to Karachi. However, winds were still bad and not all pre-flight tests had been completed...

On 5th October the airship crashed in Beauvais, France, bursting into flames shortly after hitting the ground. Sadly 48 of the 54 people on board lost their lives.

The crash was a national tragedy. Those who lost their lives were laid in state at Westminster, London before being brought to Cardington to be buried. There is a memorial in Cardington in the cemetery of St Mary's Church.

The government decided not to continue with the Imperial Airship Scheme and dismantled the R100 airship, selling it for scrap.

