

York Veteran Ken Cooke Marks 100th Birthday

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York D-Day veteran Ken Cooke has celebrated his 100th birthday, receiving warm tributes from across the city and beyond for his decades of service, education, and community work.

Mr Cooke, a former Green Howards private, landed at Gold Beach during the Normandy campaign in 1944. Since then, he has dedicated much of his life to sharing his wartime experiences, helping to educate younger generations about the sacrifices of his comrades and the realities of the Second World War.

Last year alone, he attended 38 local, national, and international events, including commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy. There, he joined world leaders, visited the British Memorial Gardens, and scattered the ashes of fellow York Normandy Veterans.

Tributes poured in from community leaders, veterans' groups, and schools. Former BBC broadcaster Nicholas Witchell, founder of the Normandy Memorial Trust, described Mr Cooke as embodying "Yorkshire grit, British humour, and modesty." The Commonwealth War Graves Commission praised his ability to speak frankly and engagingly to children without glorifying war.

City of York Council's armed forces champion, Councillor Claire Douglas, called him "an inspiration," while Lord Mayor of York Martin Rowley referred to him as "one of the city's living treasures." York Outer MP Luke Charters said Mr Cooke "represents the very best of a remarkable generation."

Over the years, Mr Cooke has been honoured in various ways, including having a bus and a locomotive named after him. Hornby Models recently produced a miniature replica of the Rowntree factory engine he once drove.

Schools across York have hosted Mr Cooke for talks and Q&A sessions, bringing history to life for pupils. Teachers and headteachers have praised his ability to connect with young audiences, ensuring the events of D-Day are remembered in a personal and meaningful way.

Beyond education, Mr Cooke has supported fundraising efforts for York & Scarborough Hospitals Charity and maintained close ties with military museums, cadets, and community groups.

Despite reaching 100, he shows no sign of slowing down. Friends, family, and colleagues alike describe him as a gentleman, a storyteller, and an ambassador for remembrance. As one tribute put it, "Ken carries the flame for those who never made it home."