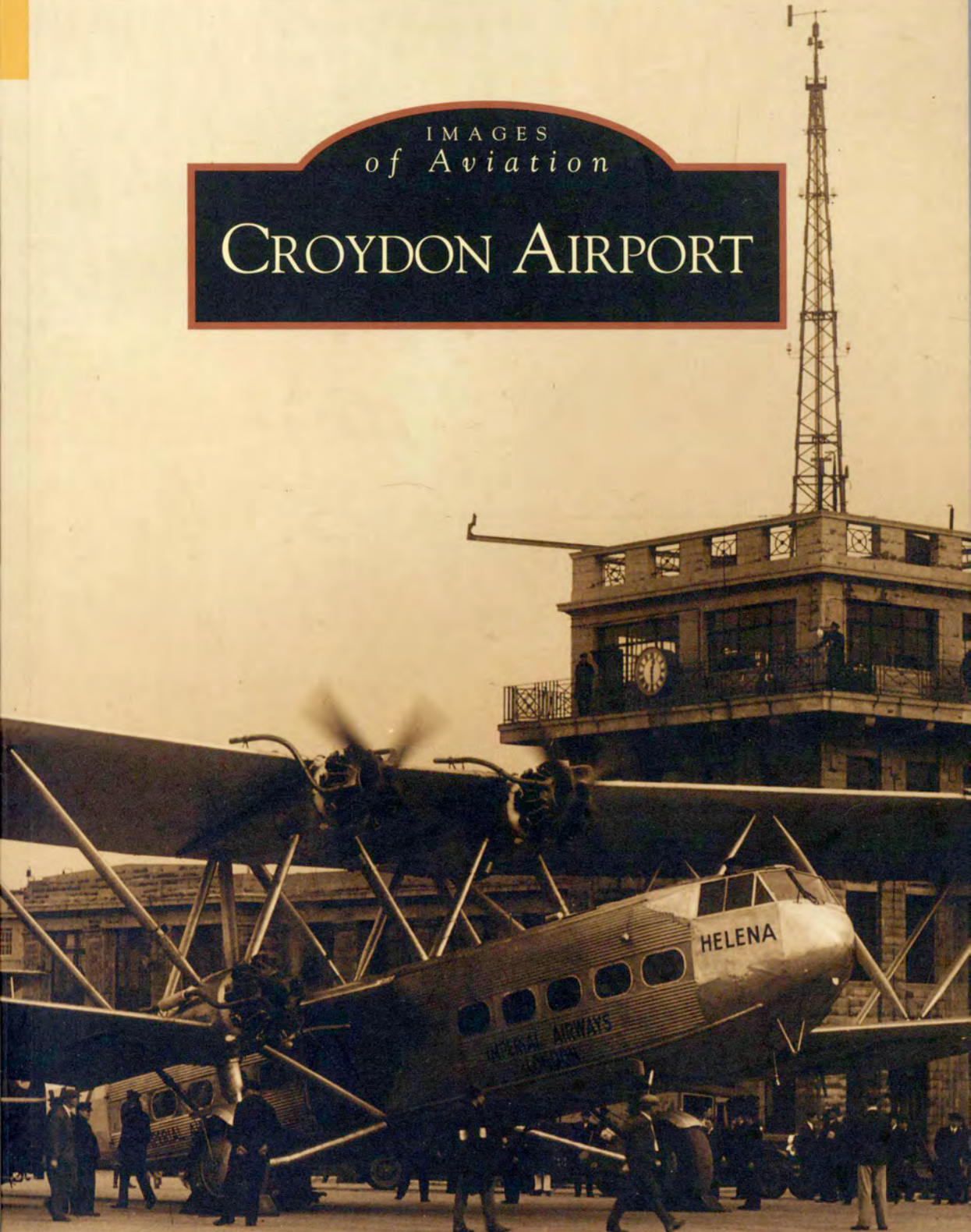


IMAGES
of Aviation

CROYDON AIRPORT



Compiled by Mike Hooks

Front cover illustration: The Handley Page H.P.42 was synonymous with Croydon; G-AAXF *Helena* is the centre of attraction, although the number of people wandering around would indicate that this was not a scheduled airline departure.

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● Mike Hooks, 1997

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A typical Croydon scene in 1938, the H.P.42 G-AAXC *Heracles* contrasting with the D.H.91 Albatross G-AFDI *Frobisher*. While the H.P.42 was renowned for its comfort, it cruised at only 95 mph, more than doubled by the D.H.91's 210 mph - not surprising when the large, strutted biplane was compared with the elegant, streamlined de Havilland airliner.

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Introduction

Any book on Croydon Airport starts at a disadvantage for the author; so many people were involved with the airport or have their own memories that it is impossible to please everyone.

This book, part of the *Chalford Archive Photographs Series*, is a pictorial record of the airport from its early beginnings to closure at the end of September 1959. It is not in any way a history - this has been extremely well covered in the series published by the London Borough of Sutton Libraries and Arts Services; details of these may be found elsewhere.

To do justice to the many personalities who passed through Croydon or who had some connection with the airport, would need far more space than this slim volume, so to anyone whose favourite flier or aeroplane is omitted, my apologies. Much has been written about the people and this collection is a personal choice - mainly of aeroplanes. Many photos will not have been seen before, while others may be old friends.

I have been fortunate in being able to use a number of photographs from the Croydon Airport Society archives and its members, in addition to my own collection accumulated over the years. Among the CAS members I would particularly like to thank Tom Samson, the press officer, for considerable help in making prints from old negatives, copying those prints for which the negatives have long since disappeared and for guiding me towards other possible sources. (See acknowledgements, page 128)

Now, a brief history of the airport to set the scene. In December 1915, the aerodrome was established as part of the Air Defence of London. The based aircraft defended the capital from night Zeppelin raids in the first quarter of 1916 and later attacked daylight raiders.

In 1918 the National Aircraft Factory was built on the eastern edge of the aerodrome and in 1920 Croydon succeeded Hounslow as the Customs Air Port (note, two words) for London. For seven years the old Royal Flying Corps buildings were used, but between 1926 and 1928 a new terminal was built to the east alongside Coldharbour Lane, which later became Purley Way. The new terminal was opened by Lady Maude Hoare on 2 May 1928 and continued in use until the airport finally closed on 30 September 1959.

But, to go back to the original airport where civil operations began on 29 March 1920 when Farman Goliath F-GEAB of Cie des Grands Express Aériens began an irregular, at first, London-Paris service. On 17 May a service operated jointly by KLM and Aircraft Transport and Travel linked London and Amsterdam. In April 1921 the Belgian company SNETA began a service from Brussels to London using Farman Goliaths, but it ceased in September when the two aircraft used were destroyed by fire at Brussels.

Services linking London with other European cities began to build up and more types of airliners began to operate from and into Croydon - Handley Page W.8s of Handley Page Transport, Instone Air Line's Vickers Vimy Commercial, D.H.34 and Vickers Vulcans, Daimler Airway's D.H.34 G-EBBS which flew five single trips between London and Paris on one day, Fokker F.III's of KLM and so on. Incidentally, the titles Instone Air Line and Daimler Airway as printed above are correct - singular and not plural. Daimler opened a service to Berlin in April 1923 in collaboration with Deutsche Aero-Lloyd and on 31 March 1924, Imperial Airways was formed to take over Handley Page Transport, Instone Air Line, Daimler Airway and British Marine Air Navigation Co. Ltd.

Alan Cobham, whose name was to appear many times in connection with Croydon, began a four month survey of possible civil routes over Africa on 16 November 1925 in D.H.50J G-EBFO, the aircraft in which he made a number of long distance flights which were to earn him a knighthood.

And so Croydon became busier as the pace of commercial aviation increased. New airliners were coming into service, still very boxy and ungainly in appearance - Handley Page W.9s and



The National Aircraft Factory at Waddon, on the corner of the aerodrome, was set up in 1918 to build D.H.9s, but when the war ended it became a salvage depot selling aircraft and parts. In the foreground are D.H.4s in various stages, including H5898 which became G-EAYS for export to the Belgian Air Force. In the distance are D.H.4s M-MHDO, 'HEA and 'HDN, plus two M-M registered Bristol Fighters, all for the Spanish Air Force, and G-EAYD, an Avro 548 conversion from a 504.

'10s, Armstrong Whitworth Argosys and the de Havilland Hercules, the last-named for use on Middle East routes.

On 29 May 1927 great crowds welcomed Atlantic flier Charles Lindbergh in his Ryan NYP NX-211 *Spirit of St Louis* when he arrived at Croydon from Paris. Bert Hinckler set a light aircraft non-stop distance record when he flew Avro Avian G-EBOV from Croydon to Riga on 26 August 1927, and the following February the Australian pilot flew from Croydon to Darwin in 15½ days in the same aircraft, setting new records. Avian G-EBUG, flown by Lady Heath, landed at Croydon on 17 May 1928 after the first solo flight from South Africa. Another celebrity, Juan de la Cierva, flew his C.8L autogiro G-EBYY from Croydon to Paris-Le Bourget on 18 September 1929, the first autogiro to cross the English Channel; it is preserved in the Musée de l'Air at Le Bourget.

When the new terminal came into operation in January 1928, work began on demolishing the old buildings and Plough Lane, the entrance to the original aerodrome, was closed to permit both sides to be used as the new airport. The cost of the new installation was said to be £225,000.

An important event was the opening on 30 March 1929 of a Croydon-Karachi service operated in stages by landplane, flying boat and train. It took seven days and the single fare was £130.

Sabena's Fokker F.VIIB/3m monoplanes were to become a familiar sight at Croydon from 14 April 1930 when they began a night mail service to Brussels, which achieved 100 per cent regularity during the first four months. A fatal accident to Deutsche Lufthansa Junkers G.24 D-903 just after leaving Croydon on 6 November 1929 claimed seven lives, but a red-letter day came on 11 June 1931, when Imperial Airways began operating the Handley Page H.P.42 to Paris. The big four-engined airliners became synonymous with Croydon, their 95 mph cruising speed was slow but stately and they earned an enviable reputation for comfort and safety. They were also used on routes to India and the Middle East.

More personalities were in the news in 1930. On 31 April the Duchess of Bedford arrived back from Cape Town in Fokker F.VIIA G-EBTS following a ten day record flight from the Cape, and on 3 May Amy Johnson left Croydon in her D.H. Gipsy Moth G-AAAH *Jason* for Australia, becoming the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia when she landed at Darwin on 24 May. Not to be outdone, Mrs Victor Bruce in Blackburn Bluebird G-ABDS and with only 40 hours solo experience, left Heston on 25 September 1930 and returned to Croydon on 20 February 1931 after a round the world flight; the Tokyo-Vancouver and New York-Le Havre sectors were covered by sea.

Various record-breaking flights followed and on the commercial side Imperial Airways introduced their first monoplane, the Armstrong Whitworth Atalanta on the Croydon-Brussels



The first airport resembled a compact village. Plough Lane and the level crossing enabling aircraft to taxi from the hangars to the airfield are prominent, as are the buildings of New Barn Farm. The only aircraft visible is Handley Page W-8B G-EBBG, registered in June 1922 and destroyed in a crash at Abbéville on 15 February 1928.



Farman Goliath F-FARH of Compagnie des Messageries Aériennes (CMA) parked in the 1920s. CMA had at least sixteen Goliaths and these were taken over by Air Union when it was formed in 1923.

route for a short time in September 1932 and later on Basle and Zurich before the type entered service on the Empire routes for which it had been designed.

Tighter control of airspace came on 19 November 1933 when the Croydon Control Zone was introduced, pilots having to get radio clearance before entering the specified area around the airport. The following month saw the progressive installation of radio range along some of Europe's busiest air routes, including that from Lympne to Croydon and, on 2 November 1935, a German-developed Lorenz blind landing system was installed at Croydon.

Swissair began a regular Zurich-Croydon service on 1 April 1935 introducing the Douglas DC-2. The route was via Basle and the DC-2 soon made the older airliners look outdated. The type was also used by KLM, who lost PH-AKL on 9 December 1936 when taking off from Croydon in fog; it crashed into houses, killing fourteen people and among the fatalities was Spanish autogiro pioneer Juan de la Cierva.

British Airways had formed in 1935 with the amalgamation of Hillman, Spartan and United Airways, and in February 1936 began a service with D.H.86s to Malmö with intermediate stops. In March they introduced Fokker F.XIIs on the Paris route, replacing them in July with D.H.86s. American and German equipment followed - Lockheed 10s on London-Paris and Junkers Ju 52/3Ms on night mails from Croydon to Berlin.

A newcomer in 1937 was International Air Freight using Curtiss Condor biplanes between London and Amsterdam on cargo services, and a new type for Croydon was the four-engined Focke-Wulf Condor, introduced irregularly on the Deutsche Lufthansa Berlin route from June. The following month, Danish Air Lines inaugurated a Croydon-Copenhagen service with Condor OY-DAM, the first Danish airliner to fly to the UK. Two new types, both four-engined monoplanes, entered service with Imperial Airways in 1938 - the Armstrong Whitworth Ensign G-ADSR arrived on 5 October and the first D.H. Albatross on 17 October.

Short-lived newcomers to Croydon were Air France Bloch 220s, twin-engined monoplanes resembling a scaled-down DC-2, used on the Paris route. On the declaration of war on 3 September 1939 all civil flying ceased, but some services were reopened for a time until the German advance in Europe caused them to be withdrawn. The last Lufthansa departure was Ju 52/3M D-AXOS on 31 August; by this time the Imperial Airways fleet, many of them

camouflaged, had been dispersed to Whitchurch, near Bristol, and Exeter.

On 2 September, the Gloster Gladiators of No. 615 (County of Surrey) RAuxAF Squadron arrived at Croydon and were joined by Hawker Hurricanes of No. 3 Squadron, Biggin Hill, then 17 Squadron, also with Hurricanes. This was a time of constant moving; Bristol Blenheim 1Fs of 92 and 145 Squadrons, Gladiators of 607 (County of Durham) and Hurricanes for 145 Squadron on conversion from Blenheims.

No. 1 Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force arrived in mid-1940, also with Hurricanes, as was 111 Squadron. On 15 August 1940 a force of Messerschmitt Bf 110s from Erprobungsgruppe 210 attacked Croydon in mistake for Kenley, losing six aircraft to 111's Hurricanes. Considerable damage was done and there were more than sixty civilian fatalities in addition to six airmen, as many bombs had fallen outside the airport. A further high level raid by Dorniers three days later caused no Service casualties and little damage.

As the war progressed, Croydon dropped out of the front line and in August 1941 the RCAF formed No. 414 Squadron as an army co-operation unit with Westland Lysanders and Curtiss Tomahawks, re-equipping with North American Mustangs the following year. Nos 302 and 317 Polish Squadrons with Spitfire VBs arrived in mid-1942 for a few weeks and the airfield hosted several other squadrons and No. 1 Aircraft Delivery Flight, before the formation of No. 147 Squadron with Dakotas in September 1944. On 13 November, Railway Air Services began a regular service from Croydon to Belfast via Liverpool with D.H.86 G-ACZP, camouflaged and with windows blacked out for security reasons. When the war ended other companies moved into Croydon, including Scottish Airways, Jersey Airways and Morton Air Services.



Following his exploratory flight to Burma and India, Alan Cobham secured sponsorship for a similar flight to Cape Town. He left Croydon on 15 November 1925 in D.H.50 G-EBFO loaned by de Havilland, returning on 12 March 1926, here being pursued by autograph hunters!



Handley Page H.P.42 G-AAXE *Hengist* was the seventh built for Imperial Airways and its Certificate of Airworthiness was issued on 10 December 1931. This event was the departure on 8 December 1934 of the first regular weekly air mail service to Australia. *Hengist* took the mail as far as Karachi from where it continued to Darwin in an A.W. Atalanta, arriving on 18 December. *Hengist* was burnt out at Karachi on 31 March 1937.

The opening of Heathrow in 1946 marked the beginning of the end for Croydon, by then too small for the larger breed of airliners, the DC-4, Constellation, Stratocruiser, Hermes and the like, but the airport was still busy with smaller companies flying such types as D.H. Rapides, Airspeed Consuls and Avro Ansons. There were also a number of flying clubs and aircraft overhaul businesses, the largest of which was Rollasons. This company, owned by Norman Jones, specialised in the conversion for civil use of surplus RAF aircraft, mostly Tiger Moths, and in the 1950s a considerable number of these were ferried in from RAF Maintenance Units with roughly scrawled ferry registrations over their Service marks. Rollasons also built the French-designed Druine Turbulent and Condor light aircraft, their own Rollason Beta racing aircraft, and were agents for the French Jodel series.

Croydon was always interesting for the visitor, with a large number of aircraft in transit, since Heathrow did not - and still does not - welcome small aircraft. Some of the visitors were however, quite large, including such diverse types as the Bristol Freighter, Vickers Viking and Consolidated Catalina - the latter of course in its amphibious form. Occasionally, new aircraft for export passed through, such as Percival Provosts for overseas air forces or a gaggle of Austers for Iraq, but as the closure date approached the locally-based clubs and other organisations began to move out to other locations, including Redhill and Biggin Hill. Then the final flight on 30 September 1959, piloted by the appropriately named Captain Geoffrey Last, took off for Rotterdam in Morton Air Services Heron G-AOXL and Croydon passed into history. A reminder exists inside the terminal: Tiger Moth T7793 is suspended in the reception area together with a large-scale model of an H.P.42, while outside on a plinth is Heron G-ANUO, painted to represent G-AOXL. All three symbolise the spirit of Croydon.

Commercial flying in Britain began after the First World War, but Croydon Aerodrome had been in use since December 1915 when it was established as part of London's air defences; aircraft from Croydon attacked Zeppelins in 1916. The aerodrome was west of Plough Lane and the site was used from 1920 when Croydon replaced Hounslow as London's Customs airport. The original RFC buildings were used, but in 1926 construction began on a new terminal which opened in 1928; the extended area was required for the new airliners coming into operation.

The new terminal and buildings were to become famous throughout the world as air transport developed during the 1930s. With much larger airliners required after 1945 and the need for long, paved runways, Croydon closed in 1959, by which time London's new Heathrow Airport was well into its stride.

Many famous people passed through Croydon in its heyday and many aircraft types were to be seen there. It is impossible in a book of this size to illustrate everything, but encapsulated here is the spirit of those bygone days when flying was more of an adventure and so much less bureaucratic than it is today. If your favourite aircraft or personality is not included in this fascinating collection of over 220 photographs - apologies! The selection is a personal choice, so sit back and reminisce!

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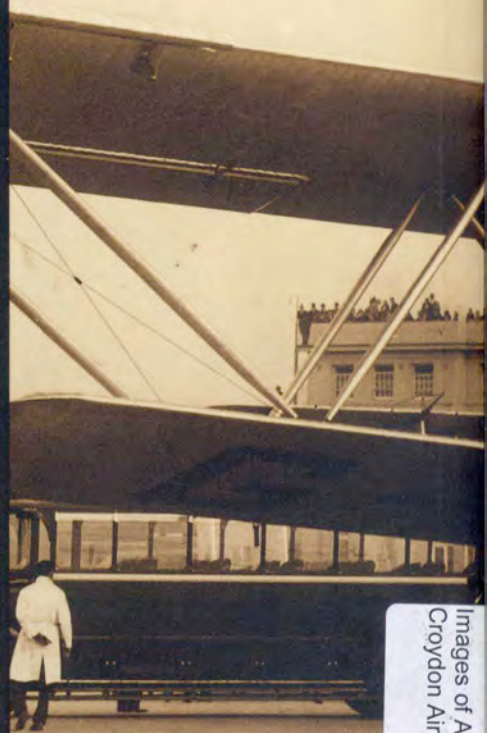
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