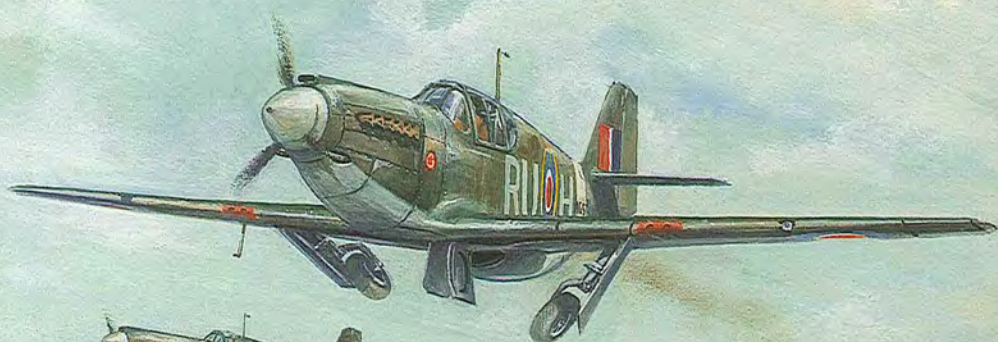


# SURREY AIRFIELDS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



**LEN PILKINGTON**

*Norm Doggett*  
97

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(AC) Squadron leaving Croydon airfield in 1942.

Map of the Surrey airfields by Trevor Yorke

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# INTRODUCTION



Surrey was always destined to become a front line county during the Second World War because of its proximity to London. But the county was no stranger to the aeroplane and indeed was already rich in aviation history well before the clouds of war gathered and increased in menace during the 1930s.

The association goes back to the first balloon ascent from Hurst Park on 1st May 1785 by James Sadler, using a hydrogen balloon which landed on the Isle of Grain. In 1902 Stanley Spencer flew a powered balloon or 'airship' from the Crystal Palace. It covered a distance of 22 miles, proving controlled flight was possible. In Germany the design of similar machines was already well advanced under the direction of Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin.

It was now thought that the struggle for flight would be won by these ships of the air but in 1903 the Wright Brothers in America demonstrated that powered flight by a heavier than air machine was possible and things were soon to change. In 1908 Alliott Verdon Roe made the first powered flight in England from Brooklands. From then on that site became the Mecca of aerialists who rapidly produced a succession of aeroplane designs. In 1909 Frenchman Louis Bleriot flew the Channel and the future of the aeroplane was firmly established. Germany exploited the military potential of the Zeppelin airships and produced many battle squadrons, but in England the newly formed Royal Flying Corps concentrated on the aeroplane. They needed landing grounds, and it is the story of the development of these airfields or aerodromes in the county and the part they played in the Second World War that is told here. The lives of civilians in a county at war are also recounted, with first-hand accounts of the bombing attacks that claimed so many lives.

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# SURREY AIRFIELDS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Surrey has been associated with aviation from its earliest days. The first powered flight in England was made from Brooklands in 1908 and, during the First World War, further Home Defence Aerodromes were built at Kenley and Croydon. During the last war, the county's proximity to London and to the coast of occupied Europe made it inevitable that it would be in the front line of Britain's defences.

At the height of the war, Surrey had seven major airfields and numerous subsidiary sites. They were involved initially with the defence of London and later with the huge air offensive for the D-Day landings. This book describes the history of each airfield and highlights the major operations carried out.

Civilians are not forgotten, for this was equally a people's war. The author describes their role as they worked alongside the RAF. Eye witness accounts recall the devastating raid on the Vickers factory in 1940, and the indiscriminate horror of Hitler's V1 and V2 campaign.

Len Pilkington's action-packed book will bring back vivid memories for many. It is a sharp reminder of the time when Surrey skies were criss-crossed with vapour trails by day, and the dark nights were filled with the boom of guns, the stab of searchlights and the glow of distant fires.

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