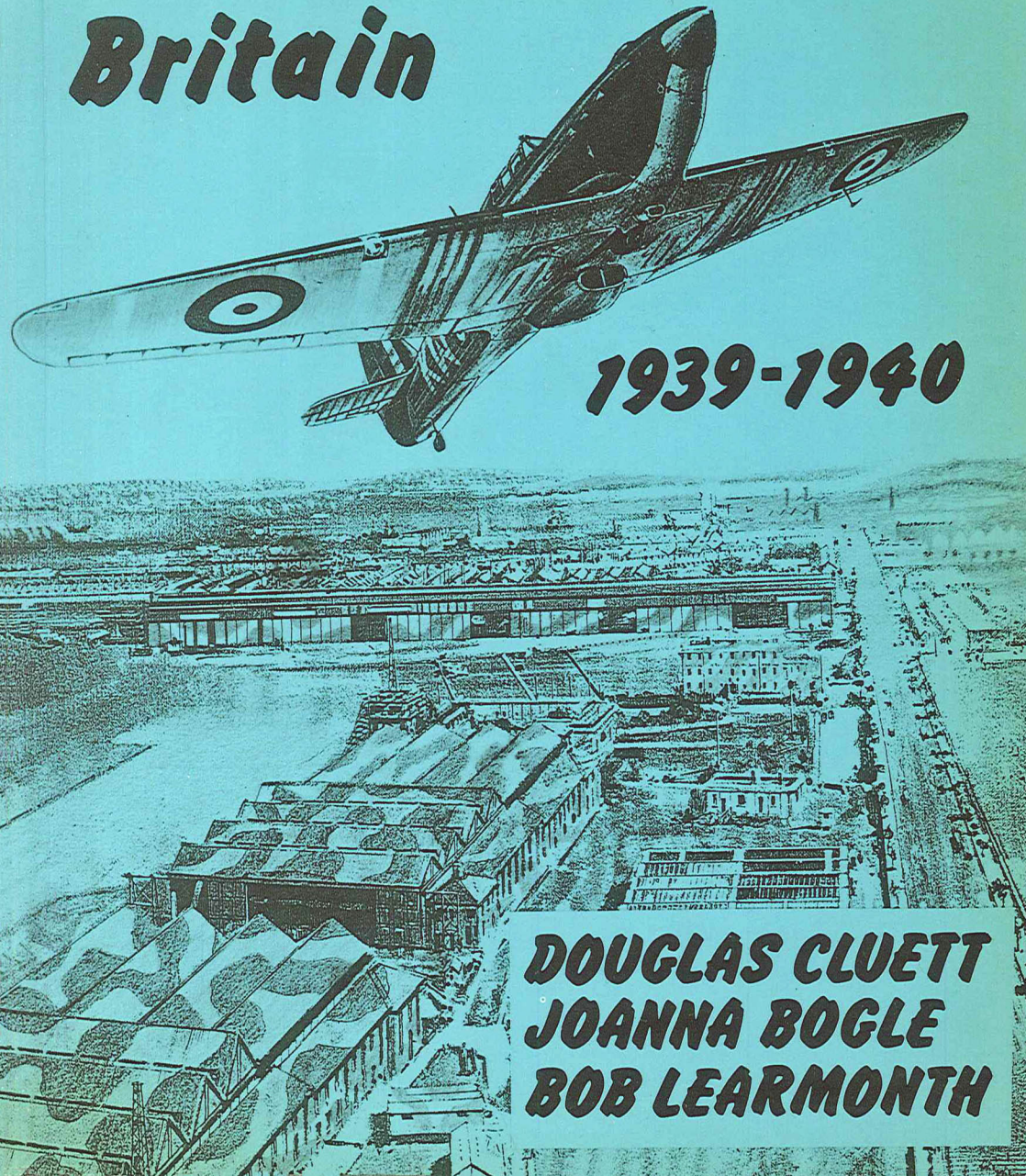


Croydon Airport and the Battle for Britain



1939-1940

***DOUGLAS CLUETT
JOANNA BOGLE
BOB LEARMONTH***

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FOREWORD

*By Wing Commander R.R. Stanford-Tuck, DSO, DFC (2 bars)
RAF Retd., Vice-President, Croydon Airport Society.*

When I first read through the manuscript of this book it brought back to me a flood of memories of my short period at Croydon in early 1940, when I joined 92 Squadron, recently re-equipped with Spitfires, to take over command of a Flight under the leadership of Squadron Leader Roger Bushell, who after being shot down and captured in Germany was later, in 1944, shot by the Gestapo when yet again he was recaptured by the Germans, having master-minded and organised what has become known as The Great Escape (from a book written by Paul Brickhill), which is an epic in itself.

Sadly, many of the pilots mentioned in *Croydon Airport and the Battle for Britain* were later shot down and killed, and to my knowledge, of the original members of the Squadron when it was at Croydon, there are probably only four or five of us living today.

Being the most experienced Spitfire pilot in 92 Squadron, I was flying continually in order to impart to them as much as I could, and as quickly as I could, the tactics of air combat. It was an intensive experience for all of us, and fortunately they were an excellent bunch of pilots and cottoned on to the intricacies of high altitude fighter combat very quickly, and it was not long before the Squadron Commander, Roger Bushell, on my advice, was able to report to Fighter Command that he considered 92 Squadron fully operational with its new aircraft.

We were then moved to R.A.F. Northolt, where we engaged in daily routine patrols, with the occasional excitement of shooting down barrage balloons which had broken loose and were floating around at high altitude, usually with a nasty long length of wire cable dangling below them.

After a fairly short period we were moved East to Hornchurch in Essex at the start of the Dunkirk campaign, which proved for us to be a most gruelling and taxing period of combat over the beaches of Dunkirk, during which time, whilst our losses were heavy (we lost five pilots and I myself was wounded in the thigh) we inflicted considerably more losses on the assorted German aircraft attacking our troops on the beaches.

However, back to our days at dear old Croydon, which we all loved. I remember the wonderful evenings which we used to have in our Mess, which was the old Aerodrome Hotel; the wonderful days of flying which we used to put in; and lastly jumping in our cars and roaring up to London for a party, and then back to Croydon for some more intensive flying.

Lastly, I should just like to say that I consider this book should be read by all amateur and professional air historians, as I think a lot of the wonderful history contained in this story is little known and I congratulate all who are involved in the compilation and production of it. Well done.

AUTHORS' PREFACE

When we published *Croydon Airport: The Great Days 1928-1939* in May 1980, we said that the rest of the story would be published in a subsequent volume, and we set out to do this. It soon became clear that so much material existed relating to Croydon Airport in the Second World War that this merited treatment on its own, and we began to write "Croydon Airport: The Years of War". However, it then became obvious that the war period fell into two distinct parts: the first, Croydon's role as a fighter base, up to and including the Battle of Britain; the second, a gradual return to the Airport's more normal function as a centre of air transport services, albeit in unusual circumstances and with abnormal hazards. This book, therefore, covers the relatively short period until the Battle of Britain was won. This does not mean that we have abandoned writing-up the rest of Croydon Airport's war, or of dealing with the post-war period, and we are grateful to those people who have supplied us with information and material relevant to later periods, of which we still intend to make good use. We would, in fact, be very glad to hear from people stationed at, or with interesting experiences of, Croydon Airport in the remainder of its wartime, and immediately post-war, periods. Particularly, we need photographs relevant to Croydon Aerodrome from 1941 to 1946 (which would be copied and returned).

In the meantime, there are many people to whom thanks are due for this volume. First, we are very much indebted to Wing Commander Robert Stanford-Tuck for his excellent foreword, and for reading our book in draft and making helpful comments. Then we must thank, for help and advice throughout the preparation of the book, especially on technical matters; for sharing their research; and for reading and commenting on drafts of the book: Colin Brown, Peter G. Cooksley, E. J. H. (Ted) Crawforth and Brian Haines.

Major contributions to the book have come from Squadron Leader Christopher Currant, Wing Commander Robert Foster, Brian Haines and Robert Hall. We are very much indebted for hitherto unpublished photographs which they took at the time, to the late Albert E. Jessop and the late Leslie Penfold, the latter of whom also helped with written information.

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In addition, for information, material and illustrations, we are indebted to the Public Record Office (Kew); the Air Historical Branch of the Ministry of Defence; the Imperial War Museum; the Science Museum; and the RAF Museum, Hendon.



Squadron Leader Peter Townsend, DFC, who commanded 85 Squadron, was stationed at Croydon at the height of the Battle of Britain, and is seen here (right) with his rigger and fitter (seated on the wing of his Hurricane).

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