

# SOPWITH AND HAWKER AT BROOKLANDS



On 1st February 1912 Tommy Sopwith started his first aviation enterprise, the Sopwith School of Flying, at Brooklands near Weybridge in Surrey

CG Grey wrote in the 'Aeroplane' magazine, "The latest move at Brooklands, is the opening of an aviation school by Mr TOM Sopwith. He has got a fleet of machines, .... with so great a variety he ought to be able to turn out much better pilots than the man who is confined to one type of machine.... The biplanes will be fitted with dual controls, ...with Mr Sopwith himself as chief instructor, and that prince of engine tuners, Mr Sigrist, to keep the machines in order the pupils ought never to lack either machines to fly or the best of tuition." Notable pupils were Major Hugh Trenchard, later to be founder and Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Howard Wright the English aircraft designer and, most importantly for the company, their young mechanic Harry Hawker.



Sopwith decided to embark upon the design of his own aircraft with Fred Sigrist building them and Harry Hawker flying them. All three contributed to the success of their designs

By the end of 1912 Sopwith Aviation was an established manufacturer and bought a Roller Skating Rink at Kingston for their factory. By 1915 Sopwith were expanding rapidly in Kingston and by 1918 employed 3,500 people. They still brought all the aircraft by road to Brooklands to fly them.



During the First World War large flight sheds were built at Brooklands which Sopwith Aviation's successor, Hawker Aircraft, continued to use throughout the 1920s and 30s



In this early 1930s aerial view the Hawker assembly sheds are at the bottom just inside the motor race track facing across to the large flight sheds

By 1936 the Hawker final assembly sheds were re-built to cope with large orders for the Hawker Hurricane



3,000 Hurricanes were built at Brooklands between 1936 and 1942 when the new Hawker satellite factory at Parlaunt Farm near Langley, Bucks was fully operational

The Hawker Aircraft Company Brooklands facilities were taken over by Vickers Armstrongs Ltd