

# THE SOPWITH AVIATION COMPANY 1912 TO 1920

## Brief History

Thomas Octave Murdoch Sopwith taught himself to fly in 1910 and by early 1912 had his own school of flying at Brooklands. His innovative engineer Fred Sigrist built them an aircraft which was purchased by the Admiralty.

Needing a factory to build further orders, Sopwith Aviation moved into a Roller Skating Rink in Kingston with less than 20 employees. Their brilliant Australian pilot, Harry Hawker helped to design and test the aircraft.

Mostly in their 20s, the innovative Sopwith team developed better and better aircraft eventually employing designers including Herbert Smith.

They could not keep up with demand despite their factory in Kingston having expanded to cover 51/2 acres. In 1918 Sopwith leased a huge new government factory just north of Kingston.

By 1918 Sopwith employed 3,500 people in 14 acres of factory buildings.

In 8 years Sopwith Aviation designed and built 40 different aircraft types.

Some 3,000 aircraft were built in the Kingston factories and flown from Brooklands.

14,700 more Sopwith aircraft were built by other companies, including 4,200 built in France.

Sopwith designs accounted for 25% of all the British aircraft built in the First World War and 60% of all the single-seat aircraft.

In 1920 with no prospect of large new military orders, the Sopwith Aviation Co paid all its creditors and went into voluntary liquidation.

In 1920 Thomas Sopwith started again in Kingston with a few key employees naming the new company after their pilot/designer Harry Hawker.



## Some notable achievements



Britain's first flying boat and the world's first amphibious aircraft



The first two-seater fighter with fixed forward-firing gun and observer's rear gun



The world's first triplane fighter



The most successful allied fighter in World War I



The standard RAF front line fighter until 1926



The first British aircraft to win a major international air race



The first British fixed-gun single-seat fighter



The first aircraft to land on the deck of a ship at sea



The world's first four gun fighter



Britain's first carrier based torpedo bomber

- Sopwith Bat Boat
- Sopwith 11/2 Strutter
- Sopwith Triplane
- Sopwith Camel
- Sopwith Snipe

- Sopwith Tabloid racing floatplane
- Sopwith Pup
- Sopwith naval Pup
- Sopwith Dolphin
- Sopwith Cuckoo