

## Spitfires at Hamble

Hamble made a significant contribution to the wartime success of this famous aircraft and some of our older residents played their part while working in the village's aircraft factories.

AST (Air Service Training) with its associated company Armstrong Whitworth were appointed in October 1939 to undertake the repair of damaged or crashed Spitfires. At first Hamble was the only place in the country undertaking this work but it was soon realised there would be a danger in having all Spitfire repairs under one roof, therefore AST acquired an additional site at Exeter. It also dispersed its Hamble activities, locally acquiring premises at Netley bus depot, Swanwick basket factory, Locks Heath Solent Court Farm and Titchfield Priory Garage.

Damaged Spitfires used to land for a quick repair and refuel and during the Battle of Britain an average of 15 per a week 'fly-in' repairs were returned to the Royal Air Force. Due to Hamble's close proximity to the Spitfire's manufacturer Supermarine, parts were easily transported to Hamble for assembly and ferry flights. The ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary) undertook these ferry flights including flying in damaged aircraft for repair and then returning them to their bases. By the end of 1941 most of the Hamble ferry pilots who flew the Spitfires were women.

Another village company, Folland Aircraft, was a sub-contractor for Spitfire production and had a major contract to produce 3,500 Spitfire ailerons and another to make wings for the Seafire (Naval version of the Spitfire). They also developed a floatplane version of the Spitfire but not many were made as by the time they had been produced their need was no longer required. By the end of the Second World War AST was the largest Spitfire repair base in the country and had repaired 2575 Spitfires at Hamble plus many more at Exeter. It was sad to see the airfield full of Spitfires ready to be scrapped but some AST employees made good use of the parts, using scrapped Spitfire canopies as garden cloches to grow their plants and wheels for their wheelbarrows or boat trailers!

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