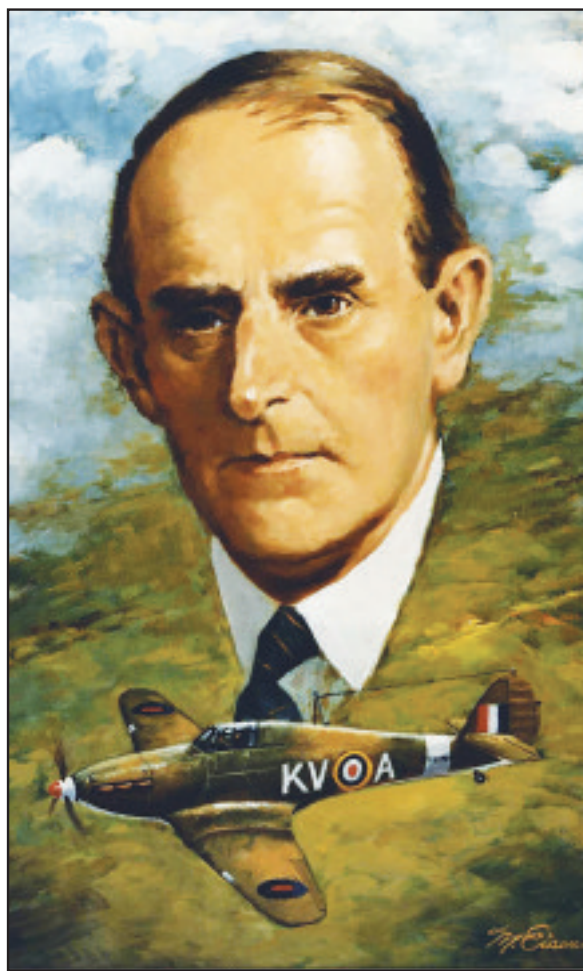
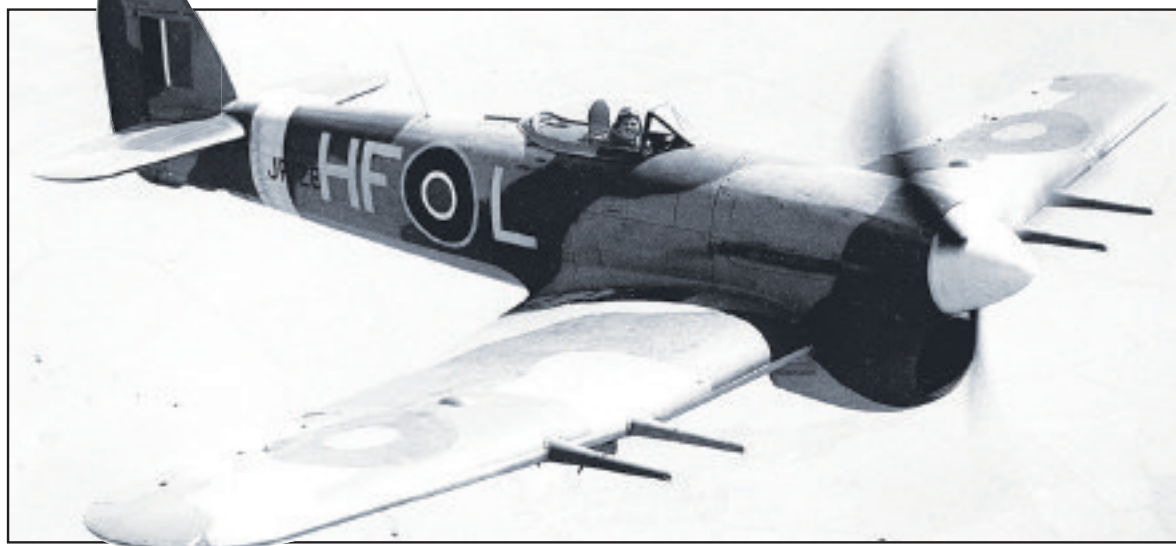




## the June Sampson feature



**Man and machine:** This portrait of Sir Sydney Camm and the Hurricane he designed hangs in the International Hall of Aerospace Fame in San Diego



**Guardian angel:** London owes a special debt to Camm, for his Tempest shot down most of the V1 flying bombs aimed at the capital during World War Two. "It was the only one fast enough to target these bombs. It got about 700, and without it thousands of Londoners would have been killed," says Bill Downey.

# Legend of the skies

Sydney Camm was the greatest designer of fighter aircraft the world has ever known, whose genius saved Britain from annihilation by Germany, and changed the course of world history. So why is he largely forgotten? Why does his name mean nothing to the public at large? Why has Kingston, where he revolutionised aviation, and spent most of his working life, never seen fit to honour him?

It's a grievous omission. But now, 44 years after Camm's death, Kingston University is providing a memorial that would delight him: a learning resource centre (LRC) that is among the best of its kind in the UK, and will be formally opened at the Roehampton Campus on March 25, as the Sir Sydney

Camm Centre.

Camm, who had 11 siblings and left school at 14, was passionate about learning. He was also a driven perfectionist, noted for never giving out praise.

But he would, one feels, have found compliments for the project that honours his name. For it has been designed as the information hub of Kingston University's faculty of engineering, which encompasses aeronautical engineering (as well as the astro, automotive, motorcycle, mechanical and manufacturing varieties).

Dedicating it to Camm was largely the idea of Bill Downey, the faculty's information specialist and, like me, a devoted admirer of the great man.

"We thought the choice of

name was appropriate, as this is the very last link the Royal borough now has to aerospace, which played such a large part in Kingston's life during the 20th century," he said. "It also recognises Sir Sydney's achievements, which aren't sufficiently known or recognised outside aviation circles."

The new centre was previously a traditional library, largely based on the printed word.

Now its main area is a "managed learning space" with facilities for group study via 32 high spec computers with access to specialist engineering software.

"The entire space is wireless enabled, and has printing and reprographic facilities," said Bill.

But the printed word still

plays a part. The centre has thousands of textbooks and journals, plus access to the university's electronic resources. There is also a silent study area for those wishing to work individually, plus bookable study rooms with multimedia facilities.

"Since the unofficial opening, use of the centre has increased about 82 per cent," said Bill.

Former Hawker employees, some of whom worked for Camm, will be at the opening ceremony at 3pm. So will Kate Humble, grand-daughter of the late Bill Humble, Hawker's chief test pilot in the 1940s.

She will officially launch the centre and it is hoped that Elizabeth Dickson, daughter of Camm's only child, Phyllis, will also be there.



**Cygnet:** The Cygnet was Camm's first creation after he joined Hawkers of Kingston in 1923

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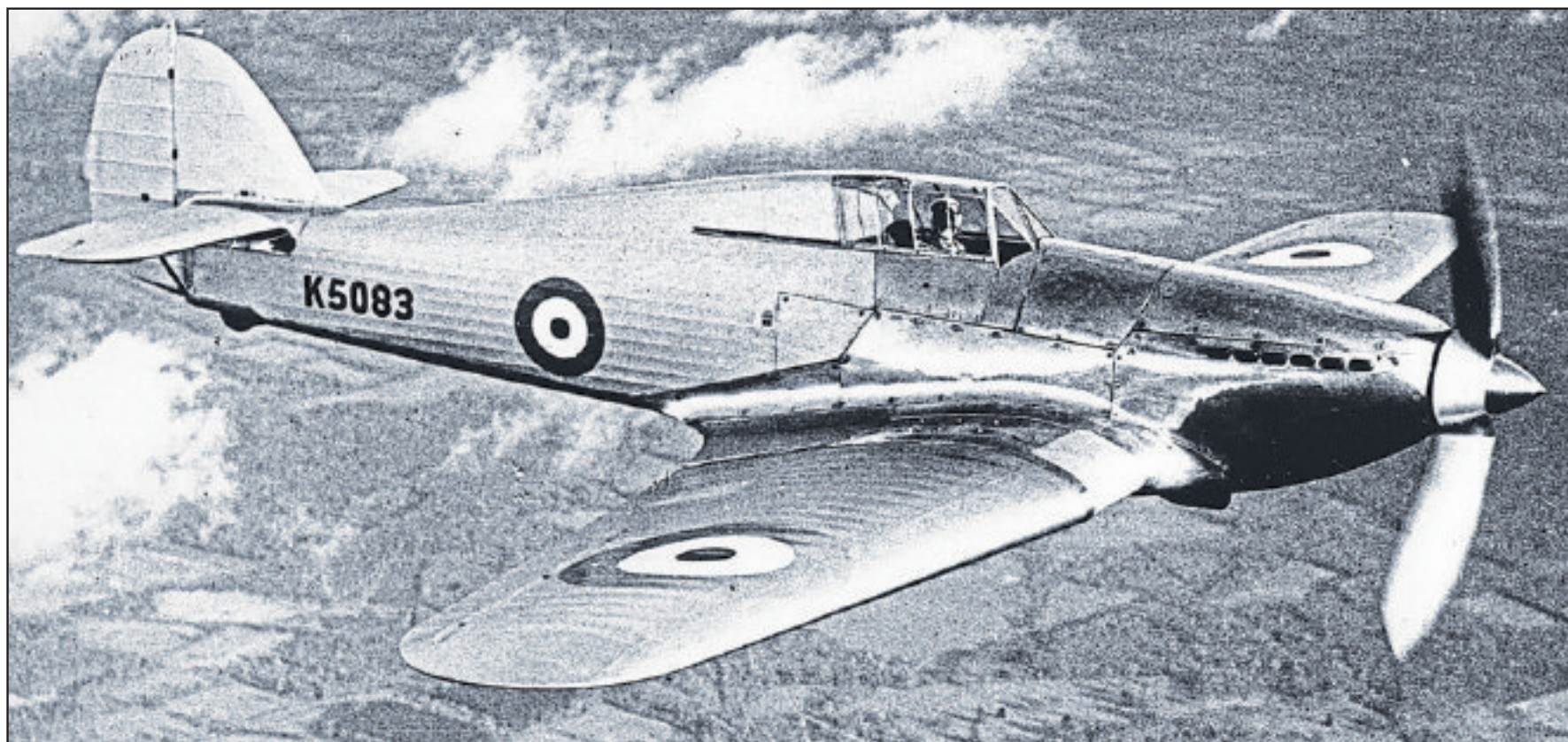
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**Star of the Battle of Britain:** The Hurricane prototype made its first flight in 1935 and it changed the course of World War II five years later



**Long-range flyer:** Camm's Horsley design first flew in 1928 and set up a new world distance record of 3,420 miles. But within hours the record was snatched by Charles Lindbergh and his 3,590 mile solo Atlantic flight.

Camm initially trained as a carpenter, like his father before him. But his spare time passion was making model aeroplanes, and in 1914 he joined the Martinsyde aircraft works at Brooklands. There he showed such skill that he was promoted from shop floor to drawing office in one exceptional leap.

In 1923 he came to Kingston as a senior draughtsman at the HG Hawker Engineering Works in Canbury Park Road. Two years later he became chief designer, a post he held until becoming chief engineer in 1959.

The story of the Hurricane, Camm's most celebrated achievement, began in 1933, when he began developing a high performance monoplane fighter to succeed the Fury, launched by Hawker's in 1919.

The Air Ministry was told of the project, and officials came

regularly to Kingston to inspect the timber mock-up being constructed by Camm and his team.

Finally, in February 1935, the ministry placed an order for "one high-speed monoplane K5083", and in October the prototype was loaded on to a lorry and taken to the Hawker sheds at Brooklands for final assembly and tests.

It made its first flight in November with Hawker's chief test pilot, George Pullman, at the controls.

There were no spectators; for no one could have guessed that K5093 would save Britain and change world history as the Hurricane, the name chosen by Camm.

Tests of the future Hurricane, still known prosaically at K5083, were so successful that in March 1936 Hawkers made a bold decision: with war on the horizon, and rumours of a

large Government contract in the pipeline, it began work on a thousand aircraft without waiting for an official production contract.

It was a blessing it did. When the Government ordered 600 planes in June, not only was work well in hand, but hundreds of extra aircraft were ready for action when Hitler launched the Battle of Britain in 1940.

It was due to the Hurricane that this battle was won by the UK. For it brought down more enemy aircraft than all the other fighter planes and anti-aircraft defences put together.

Yet, perversely, it was the Spitfire that caught public imagination, and which is still popularly seen as Britain's airborne saviour in 1940.

Ironically, the centenary of Camm's birth in 1993 coincided with the demolition of the



**Bombs away:** The Hart made its first flight in 1928 and became the most widely used fighter bomber of its kind

great British Aerospace works in Kingston.

This had evolved from the Hawker Company and would not have been built but for Camm. It was also because of Camm that Kingston remained a world-renowned centre of aircraft design and production for so long. It was his genius that resulted in the building of more than 27,000 planes, and some 50 distinct designs.

Camm never retired. He continued working until the day before his sudden death in 1966 while playing golf in Richmond Park.

Bill Downey has tracked down brilliant archive pictures of Camm and of the aircraft designed by him and his team, for display in the new centre. Some are shown here, with more to come in next week's Comet.

□ [surreycomet.co.uk](http://surreycomet.co.uk)



**Study:** The new Sir Sydney Camm learning resource centre at Kingston University would be after its namesake's heart since he was passionate about learning