

Biggin Hill During the Battle of Britain

Workshop Overview

Workshop statement

In this engaging and student-led workshop, KS2 learners will investigate the impact of the Battle of Britain on Biggin Hill and its community. Using role play and handling objects your class will learn about key job roles during the time and creative thinking to imagine how it would feel to live and work there in person.

Curriculum links

History

- A local history study.
- A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066 – a significant turning point in British history (Battle of Britain).

Design

- Use research and develop design criteria to inform the design of innovative, functional, appealing products that are fit for purpose, aimed at particular individuals or groups.

English

- Explain and discuss their understanding of what they have read, including through formal presentations and debates, maintaining a focus on the topic and using notes where necessary.

Laminated items: (One per class)

- Object Handling Activity - Ground Crew Engineer
- Object Handling Activity - Rescue Services
- Object Handling Activity - Operations Room/Fighter Plotter (Elva Blacker Painting)
- Object Handling Activity - Operations Room/Fighter Plotter (Rosa Derham)
- Object Handling Activity - Army

Printed items: (One per student)

- Object Handling Activity Sheet
- The 'Many' Activity Sheet

Biggin Hill During the Battle of Britain

Lesson Plan + Delivery Information

You will need:

- Critical pilot objects for initial discussion
- Pilot costume
- Pencils for students
- 4 items for object handling and matching interpretation cards
- Object handling activity sheets
- 4 tables covered in army blankets

Preparing for the session:

- Set up 4 tables
- Prep handling objects and their matching interpretation. See object handling list for the 4 sets of 'job items'

Learning outcomes

Understand that the Battle of Britain took place over months, not on a single day

Become aware of the different roles people played at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain

1. Welcome and introduction (5 minutes):

Q: What do we mean by the 'Battle of Britain'?

During the Second World War there was a series of huge battles fought in the air between July and October 1940. This was a fight between the British Royal Air Force (RAF for short) and the German air force known as the Luftwaffe.

Germany had already taken control of many parts of Europe, but Hitler knew that to defeat Britain they needed to take on the RAF.

Q: What was significant about Biggin Hill?

Many aeroplanes used in the Battle of Britain took off from the Biggin Hill airbase. The Luftwaffe wanted to stop aircraft taking off from airbases by destroying them. Biggin Hill was particularly important as it protected routes into London.

Q: What sort of aircraft was used?

Spitfires and Hurricanes – specifically designed for fighting and defending.

Q: What sort of jobs were people doing during the Battle of Britain?

Pilots, engineers, cleaners, cooks, telephone operators, electricians, medics, spotters, plotters, army, ambulance drivers, weather watchers.

Q: What sort of person would you need to be to become a pilot in the RAF?

Brave, fearless, tough, disciplined, fit and healthy, good at maths. Pilots were often very young, some only 18 years old, and they had to be trained up VERY quickly.

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Lesson Plan + Delivery Information

2. Pilot investigation (10 minutes):

Action

Show the whole group critical pilot objects. Ask the volunteer pilot to put the equipment on and talk about each item in turn.

Irvin Flying Jacket

Q: What is it made from? Sheepskin.

Q: Why do you think it is so thick?

Protection from cold and fuel/engine fires.

Q: Can you think of a problem with the jacket? Pilots found them too bulky, cockpits were very small.

Life Preserver Vest

Q: Why might a pilot need an inflatable life jacket? Floatation device if the pilot falls into the sea.

B-type Flying Helmet

Q: What is this made from? Leather.

It gave protection from the wind and cold.

Q: Do you think it would be noisy in the cockpit? Yes, noise from wind, engine and gun fire.

Goggles

Q: What do you think the pilot's eyes would need protecting from? Offer protection against shrapnel or even flames; there was big risk of the engine setting on fire during combat. There would also be lots of dust and grit flying around the cockpit, especially during fast manoeuvres.

3. Object handling (25 minutes):

Action

Split children into 4 groups. Each table should be prepared with resources and handling objects related to the 4 job roles: Ground Crew Engineer, Rescue Services, Fighter Plotter/ Operations Room and Army.

“ In teams, using help from your activity sheet and the job resources on your table, you are going to plan a short presentation.

In the presentation you are going to tell the rest of the class about your job. Maybe you could act out a scene.

Action

After 5 minutes handling time remind students to start planning out what they are going to say. After 10 minutes begin group presentations of the job roles.

4. The 'Many' activity (25 minutes):

“ There were many jobs to be done at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain: Cooks, engineers, cleaners, drivers, intelligence gatherers, machine gun operators and lots more. All these people had important skills to offer and played a vital part in the Battle of Britain.

In this final task you are going to work with a **partner** to see if you can think of a good job to suit their skills.

Action

Give out 'Many' Activity Sheets to all students. Encourage students to think about their partner's special qualities.

Object Handling List

Ground Crew Engineer

- WW2 Air Ministry tools
- Uniform

Rescue Services

- Medical bag and set of bandages
- WW2 tin helmet
- Stretcher
- Guinea Pig club badge

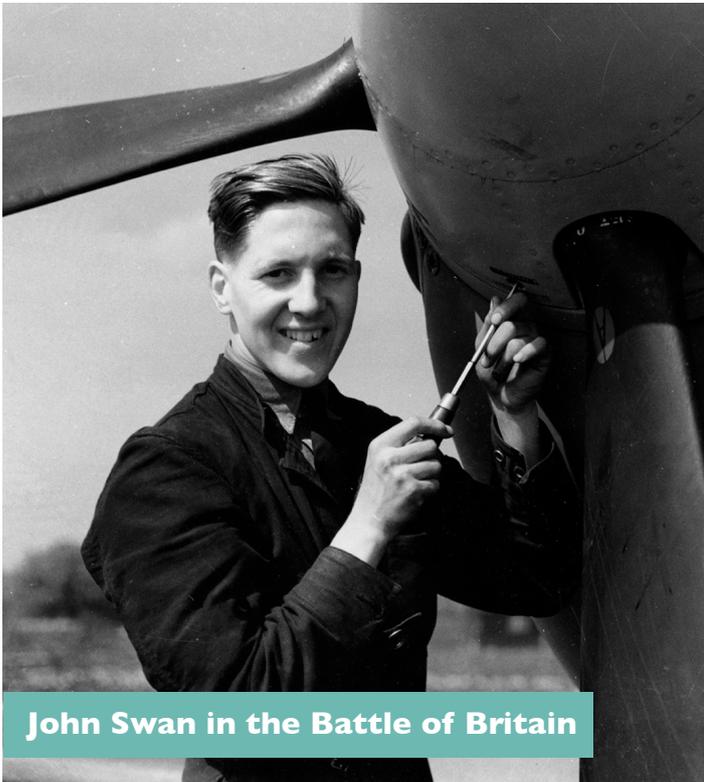
Operations Room/Fighter Plotter

- Replica pole
- Replica plotter tabs

Army

- Collar tab
- Military webbing
- Field telephone

Ground Crew Engineer



John Swan in the Battle of Britain

Name: John Swan

Job: Ground Crew Engineer

Where: Biggin Hill

Here's what **John Swan** said about his job:

"We had to clean up the aircraft and make sure the cockpit was clean and check that they started correctly."

"If they wanted to test the aircraft, six of us had to sit on the tail of the aircraft while the flight sergeant ran it up. So you've got a 4 bladed propeller terrifically running and blowing you all over the place and you had to hang on for dear life!"



John Swan in 2018

"We had to be ready at all times. When we started the engine you had to plug it in first from the starter unit and push the button after the thumbs up from the pilot."

"You used to sit and wait in the bays and clean up the area if it was required to do so, and then you waited until they returned. You were crossing your fingers that they'll come back."

Rescue Services



Ambulance driver refuels

Name: Joyce Staples

Job: Ambulance Driver

Where: Biggin Hill

Here's how **Joyce's daughter** described the job:

"When planes came back, often they were on fire which was pretty awful and she used to have to drive her ambulance down the runway and pursue the planes as they tried to come in.... She would drive the pilots all the way down to East Grinstead to the burns hospital."

At East Grinstead, pilots were cared for with special burn treatments that could last for months or even years. This hospital was one of the first to use salt baths to successfully treat badly burnt skin. The injured pilots sometimes needed a type of surgery called a 'skin graft'.

The patients at the hospital formed their own social and support club called the Guinea Pig Club.



Operations Room/Fighter Plotter



**An Operations Room,
RAF Biggin Hill.**
Painted by Elva Blacker

Operations Room/Fighter Plotter

Name: Rosa Derham

Job: WAAF Plotter

Where: Biggin Hill

Here's how **Rosa's** husband (Sgt David Derham) **described the job:**

"...I met my wife at Biggin Hill. She was a plotter, with the sticks. Top level was the controller, middle level was deputy controllers, down in the pit-kind-of-thing was the big plotting table and all the WAAFs around it with plotting sticks."

David Derham

WAAF – Stands for
Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

What did a Plotter do?

Plotters worked in the Operations Room. After receiving a call about an aircraft location, plotters would place a coloured marker to record the position of the aircraft on a large map. Because the map was so huge plotters had to use wooden poles to push the markers around.

Wooden blocks were also used with coloured markers placed on top to represent a group of aircraft. With each update of location, plotters had to adjust the marker position on the map.

This would have been a tense and stressful environment, lots of information was coming in quickly and the plotters had to update the map at a fast pace without mistakes.



Rosa Derham

Army

Corporal Banting



Name: Walter John Banting

Job: Corporal of the Guard

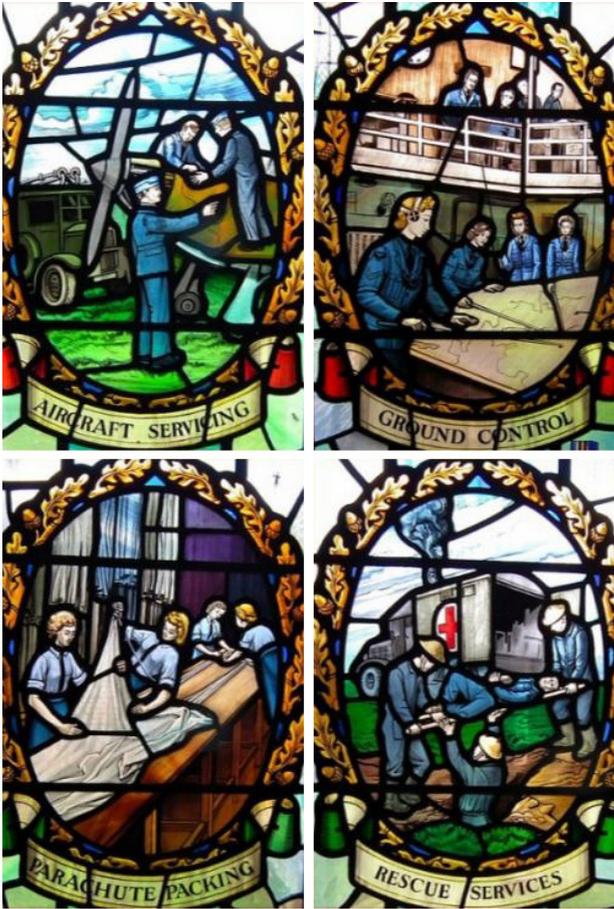
Where: Biggin Hill

The Army had an important role to play at Biggin Hill, one element of this was looking after **security and defence** at the airfield.

Walter John Banting served at Biggin Hill providing airfield defence. As Corporal of the Guard he was in charge of one of the Gate Guardrooms which was used to house Prisoners of War.

Walter chatted to a German Luftwaffe pilot who spoke perfect English. When Walter asked where he had learnt such good English the Officer confided he had attended Winchester College. This was Walter's home town.

When the prisoner was taken away to a Prisoner of War Camp, he removed this badge from his uniform and gave it to Walter as a memento for the kindness he had received.



Look at the information cards and resources to find out as much as you can about this job.

Your group task is to tell the rest of your class what you have discovered.

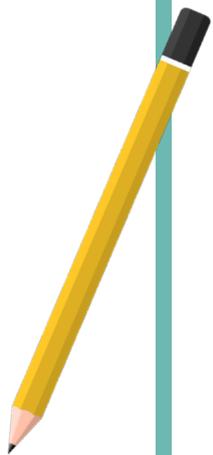
Pick just 1 or 2 items to talk about.

Maybe you could **act out a scene** showing what this person might have done.

Maybe you could describe some key facts.

- Why was this job important?
- Who would have done this job?
- How would the objects on your table be used?
- How would you feel if you had to do this job?
- What difficulties might they have faced?

What are you going to say or do in the presentation? Write your ideas here:



There were many jobs to be done at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain: Cooks, engineers, cleaners, telephone operators, electricians, medics and lots more. All these people had important skills to offer and played a vital part in the Battle of Britain.



Working with a **partner**...

What do you think your partner is good at? List all the skills and best qualities you can think of. Some ideas might be: making people laugh, always looks smart or brilliant at drawing. Write your ideas below:

.....

.....

Think of a 'Battle of Britain' job that would be suitable for your partner and would match their skills. It could be a job you have learnt about or you could invent a role that you think might have been useful.

My partner's job would be:

.....

Design a **uniform** suitable for the job...



Think about what it would be made from, what colour would it be and would it need any special equipment?

