An aerial photograph showing a large-scale dogfight between Spitfires and Hurricanes over a patchwork landscape. A prominent Spitfire is in the foreground, banking sharply to the right. The sky is filled with numerous other aircraft, and the ground below is a complex pattern of fields and roads.

# The Battle of Britain in the Modern Age, 1965–2020

The State's Retreat and  
Popular Enchantment

Garry Campion

palgrave  
macmillan

The Battle of Britain in the Modern Age,  
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Garry Champion

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Garry Campion  
Great Doddington, UK

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*In loving memory*  
*Barry Edward Campion*  
*(1938–2018)*  
*Avidus aeris*

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## INTRODUCTION

As with many people, my fascination with the Battle of Britain stems from a childhood exposed over many years to a rich range of books, models, films, and comics. Growing up in the 1960s on a front-line RAF fighter base in West Germany, the Battle of Britain was already mythologised, being celebrated annually as part of the Few's legend. I remember my excitement at the first sight of a Spitfire at the Overloon War Museum in Holland, aged seven. Later, I also lived fairly close to several former Battle of Britain fighter stations as an older child including Catterick, Digby and Middle Wallop. These were captivating places for a young boy, as later were the many disused and abandoned bomber bases in Lincolnshire around which we were free to wander. Hendon's Battle of Britain Museum was also formative.

At various times relatives had also recalled their own experiences as young adults during 1940, sitting on the South Downs watching dog-fights high overhead ('it was exciting'); Peter Pound, who trained as a fighter pilot during the Battle of Britain, recalled being shot down by Me109s in a Hurricane over Tobruk in early 1941, and later flying Spitfires; or late wartime pilot training, as recounted by Ronald Stenning's widow, Brenda, of her husband's RAF career.

For many years, my interest ticked over at a modest level, but in 1997, teaching an undergraduate module on twentieth-century industrialisation led on to a renewed interest in Supermarine Spitfire production, then the Battle of Britain. With its sixtieth anniversary due to be celebrated in 2000, I initially developed an idea for a book about



its heritage. This led to a realisation that no one had previously written about the propaganda war focusing on the later 1940 air battles and Churchill's 'Few', hence the focus of *The Good Fight* (2009) with Palgrave Macmillan. This was a largely conventional account of the Battle, but from a different perspective. Researching this first book also revealed the critical role of the Air Ministry in first expertly managing the propaganda released about the 1940 air battles, but also the later war, and earlier post-war valorisation of the Few. Thereafter, my second book with Palgrave Macmillan, *The Battle of Britain, 1945–1965* (2015), explored the Air Ministry's primacy from 1940 to 1965 in both leading and shaping the way both the Few, and the Battle, are now understood. Also considered was the now eclipsed role of Bomber Command in attacking the invasion barges, and the parallel Nazi propaganda campaign about the later 1940 air battles.

This third book continues that chronological narrative and considers how the Battle of Britain was commemorated and represented culturally, from 1965 onwards. If the period 1940 to 1965 was very much shaped by the Air Ministry and State initiatives, developments during the subsequent 55 years have been largely driven by the enthusiasm and dedication of former Battle of Britain pilots, private individuals, and voluntary groups, the State far less active.

### BOOK AIMS AND STRUCTURE

This book seeks to understand the Battle of Britain's enchanted place in British popular memory since 1965, through its more recent historiography, popular culture, and heritage. A key element is the State's retreat during this period, the private and third sectors leading in establishing museums, heritage sites, monuments, and statues, the government—excepting the Heritage Lottery Fund—having declined either to take the lead or fund these initiatives. The Battle of Britain has also been extensively covered in broadcast media, books and other publications, and through commercial products.

This book does not take a conventional approach to its history, or seek to revisit the settled narrative. Rather, it aims to understand its revered place in British popular memory since 1965 as it has been shaped principally by the voluntary, or third sector, the BBC, commercial film and its commodification. Whilst the appendices confirm the vast range of cultural engagement with the Battle from 1965 to the present, some

elements focus on more recent developments such as its historiography which in turn confirms how important earlier histories have been in shaping the familiar dominant narrative.

Described shortly in Chapter 1, by adapting historian Fernand Braudel's work on the Mediterranean, where he argued that history could be divided into three movements—'what moves rapidly, what moves slowly and what appears not to move at all'—it is suggested that the Battle of Britain's history and place in British popular culture reflects this model, but within a much narrower time frame—1940–2020. The first element, moving rapidly, was the Battle of Britain as an event, its accompanying propaganda war, valorisation during the period up to 1947, and the unveiling of the Battle of Britain window in Westminster Abbey; the second, moving more slowly, was its commemoration and commodification from later 1947 until 1965; and thereafter, its history appearing not to move at all, from broadly Churchill's death through to the present. These three elements also reflect a transition from journalism and nascent history (1940–1947), to an increasingly settled history (1947–present), thence heritage (the 1970s to the present).

Where my first two books almost wrote themselves, this has been more difficult to undertake. On the face of it, the subject is quite straightforward—the Battle of Britain's transition from history to heritage—but in taking this approach one then must decide where the balance lies between the representation of the Battle itself, how it sits within wider cultural and political history, and how much to say about the latter. My approach has been to provide an overview of these in Chapter 1, but thereafter to focus on aspects of the Battle of Britain in themed chapters. Divided loosely into three parts—history (Chapters 1 and 2), heroes (Chapters 3 and 4) and heritage (Chapters 5–7)—individual chapter focus and content is as follows.

Chapter 1: *The Battle of Britain in Society and Culture 1965–2020*. Understanding the Battle of Britain's primacy in popular culture and memory is approached through the prisms of history, heritage, memory and identity, themes which underpin this chapter and provide a conceptual shape to the book. These refract perceptions of the Battle as it is experienced by society at large. Beginning with an overview of Fernand Braudel's historical work on the Mediterranean as one model for understanding its transition from history to heritage, the chapter then explores the Battle through heritage, memory and identity, in addition to defining these. The chapter's second part provides a historical and cultural

context for the Battle's commemoration and commodification by discussing major events from 1965 to 2020.

Chapter 2: *The Battle of Britain in History 1965–2020*. The Battle of Britain's history was being written even as Merlin engines cooled on RAF fighters following dogfights. Quickly laying the foundations for what became the dominant narrative in British popular history and memory, this settled view has remained resilient over eight decades, despite 'revisionist' challenges to it since 1958, also considered. This chapter assesses the two key historical elements of the Battle of Britain: the struggle for air supremacy, and the symbiotically linked invasion threat, Operation *Sea Lion*, arguing that the Battle's current historiography remains indistinguishable from that of decades ago. An adaptation of Fernand Braudel's historical work on the Mediterranean is suggested as one new interpretative approach.

Chapter 3: *Leaders, Heroes and Memorialization*. The Few were rapidly heroised during wartime, those surviving the war enjoying public appreciation for their contribution during the Battle of Britain. In three parts, this chapter firstly considers Churchill's role, then the wartime and post-war roles and reputations of Dowding and Park as key leaders, and those of other Group commanders. Second, the formulation of the Few as an elite is explained, followed by examples of their post-war lives including attitudes to the Battle, how it affected them, fellow pilots and careers, and how many remain alive by 2019. Portrayals of the Few in print, film, and radio are also included. Third, monuments and memorials to the Few and Battle of Britain are discussed, including the involvement of the Few in bringing these about. Memorials to Bomber Command are also briefly considered.

Chapter 4: *Battle of Britain Culture and Commodification*. The representation of the Battle of Britain through popular culture and commodification has ensured its primacy in popular memory. In two parts, this chapter focuses upon the Battle's popular culture, and as a vehicle for commercial products. Firstly, cultural media has been significant in the representation of the Battle since 1965, film, television, radio, novels, 'what if' counterfactuals, aviation art, and latterly, the internet, omnipresent. Secondly, the Battle has been commodified through commemorative plates, trinkets and other commercial ephemera. Airshows, Spitfire flights, and flight simulators have also brought the past closer. The chapter also considers how what is represented now, clearly mirrors the dominant wartime Battle narrative of the Few preventing invasion.

Chapter 5: *The RAF Museum and the Battle of Britain Hall, 1978–2016*. Initially driven forward as a voluntary initiative by luminaries including Douglas Bader, the Battle of Britain Museum—then Hall—became a part of the government-funded RAF Museum soon after opening in 1978. It remained broadly in its original guise for some 36 years, its closure in 2016 to reuse its ‘industrial shed’ as part of the new RAF Centenary remodelling, ending the significant official commemoration of the Battle, and dispersal of its unique collection of aircraft. This chapter charts the Hall’s history, including the abandoned attempt in 2010 to build a Battle of Britain Beacon at the museum site. Following Centenary remodelling the Battle is now represented in a much more modest display in the Bomber Hall.

Chapter 6: *Battle of Britain Museums and Heritage Sites*. Other than airfields, Fighter Command headquarters including Bentley Priory, the Uxbridge 11 Group bunker, radar/RDF sites, and aviation museums on former fighter stations such as Duxford, are the primary means of engaging with the Battle of Britain through its built heritage. Many museums and heritage sites were established through third-sector commitment from the 1970s onwards, the Heritage Lottery Fund a now vital source of funding for these. Chapter themes include the wide range of museums and heritage sites, their third-sector roots, conservation challenges, display approaches, and authenticity. Also discussed is how the Battle’s historiography has shaped interpretation. There is also some focus upon the contribution of Polish and Czechoslovak aircrew in heritage displays.

Chapter 7: *Battle of Britain Airfields*. RAF Fighter Command airfields were central to Britain’s defensive response during the Battle of Britain, now providing a rare physical historical link to its air battles. Many have undergone dramatic change since 1940, often built over with housing, industrial units, or simply returned to agriculture. Several have been formally protected, whilst others are the site of memorials to those who fought in the Battle. This chapter describes the physical layout, buildings, and organisation of an operational fighter station, with a more detailed assessment of RAF Hawkinge in Kent, a front-line airfield during the Battle. Also considered is the significance of airfields as they resonate with aviation enthusiasts and popular memory.

The other factor considered as appropriate is the eclipsing of the ‘Battle of the Barges’, the RAF bomber attacks on German invasion ports and shipping. The historic context for this was discussed in my second book, but it remains the case that despite a rebalancing of

the Battle's history, Bomber and Coastal Commands' contribution to thwarting Operation *Sea Lion* remains obscure to many, and is also underrepresented in museum and heritage interpretation.

A comment should be made about the time period covered by this book, which effectively concludes on Battle of Britain Day (15th September) 2020. Its writing was completed by 7 June 2019, with a view to the book being published in time for this anniversary. It was not therefore possible to include details of media coverage and other events, unless these had been announced before this writing deadline.

### A NOTE ON SOURCES

Unlike my previous two books there is a greater reliance upon internet sources, not least because any discussion of heritage sites and related subjects cannot avoid them. Examples include museum and heritage site web pages, details about lottery funding, commemorative activities, and online archives. In many instances this material is not available in a physically published form, and cannot therefore be referenced as such. Readers are asked to bear with references comprising web pages. The vast majority are sponsored and managed by organisations such as the RAF Museum, Imperial War Museums, Heritage Lottery Fund and other creditable bodies. Websites lacking peer review processes have been avoided, except where they illustrate a point about the representation of the past. Clearly, because of their nature, some web pages cited will no longer be accessible—for instance those relating to planning or shorter-term situations. All this said, it is the case that the Battle of Britain has been afforded a new lease of life through the World Wide Web.

The referencing of newspaper and magazine articles has been exercised with some restraint. In the course of over two decades' research for this book, a very large number of newspaper articles and smaller pieces were collected covering many aspects of the Battle of Britain. Indeed, it featured quite regularly in some titles such as the *Daily Telegraph*, including the remaining Few, their obituaries, and commemorative events. On the latter, many other national newspapers followed suit in 2000, 2010 and 2015, including *The Guardian*, *Observer*, *Times*, and the popular tabloids. The 1940 threat of invasion was a frequent subtext to articles. Generally, these articles are referenced in the text where they lend clear value to the point being made. Many of these articles are available on major newspaper websites, which again reinforces the Battle's continuing popular fascination with readerships.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
AHB	Air Historical Branch
AI	Airborne Interception Radar
AM	Air Ministry
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
ARP	Air Raid Personnel
ATA	Air Transport Auxiliary
AuxAF	Auxiliary Air Force
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBFA	Battle of Britain Fighter Association
BBMF	Battle of Britain Memorial Flight
BBMT	Battle of Britain Memorial Trust
Bf109	Messerschmidt 109 fighter (Me109)
BNP	British National Party
BOBHS	Battle of Britain Historical Society
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CASA	Construcciones Aeronáuticas SA
CD	Compact Disc
CFS	Combat Flight Simulator
CGI	Computer-Generated Imagery
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CO	Commanding Officer
CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport



DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DFM	Distinguished Flying Medal
DG	Director General
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group (EU)
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTS	Elementary Flying Training School
EU	European Union
FAA	Fleet Air Arm
FCBS	Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
FO	Foreign Office
G	'G' force
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GPO	General Post Office
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
HQ	Headquarters
IBCC	International Bomber Command Centre
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ITV	Independent Television
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LMF	Lack of Moral Fibre
LP	Long-Playing Vinyl Record
LWT	London Weekend Television
MBE	Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire
Me109	See Bf109
Me110	Messerschmidt 110 twin-engined fighter
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoI	Ministry of Information
MP	Member of Parliament
MRAF	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
MT	Motor Transport
NAAFI	Navy Army and Air Force Institute
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NHMF	National Heritage Memorial Fund
NMA	National Memorial Arboretum
OKW	German Forces' Supreme Command

PA	Public Address System
PO	Pilot Officer
PoW	Prisoner of War
PR	Public Relations
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFA	Royal Air Force Association
RAFM	Royal Air Force Museum
RDF	Radio Direction Finding (radar)
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
SHLAA	Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer
SOE	Special Operations Executive
TV	Television
UAS	University Air Squadron
UK	United Kingdom
ULTRA	Decrypted German Enigma messages
US/USA	United States of America
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USAF	United States Air Force
UXB	Unexploded Bomb
VC	Victoria Cross
VHS	Video Home System Cassette
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
WRAF	Women's Royal Air Force

## CHRONOLOGY OF BRITISH-FOCUSED EVENTS

- May 1963 Last servicemen to be conscripted in November 1960, left Britain's armed forces.
- 1964 Britain's Air Ministry is merged with the Ministry of Defence.
- 24 January 1965 Sir Winston Churchill dies.
- September 1965 Royal Mail Battle of Britain twenty-fifth anniversary stamps issued.
- 1969 Wright's *Dowding and the Battle of Britain* published, igniting a dispute about Dowding's treatment in 1940. Battle of Britain exhibition in Madame Tussauds tie-in with 1969 *Battle of Britain* movie.
- 15 February 1970 Lord Dowding dies just short of the Battle of Britain's thirtieth anniversary.
- 12 March 1970 Lord Dowding's memorial service in Westminster Abbey.
- 22 April 1971 Lord Portal, C-in-C Bomber Command during the Battle of Britain, dies.
- 1972 RAF Museum opened at former RAF Hendon airfield, London.
- 6 February 1975 Sir Keith Park dies in New Zealand.
- 1975 Unveiling of Lord Portal statue, Victoria Embankment.
- 1976 Imperial War Museum Duxford opened.
- 1978 Battle of Britain Museum, later Hall, opened at the RAF Museum.
- 1981 Establishment of the Kent Battle of Britain museum at former RAF Hawkinge, a front-line station.
- 5 September 1982 Douglas Bader dies.

- 1988 Unveiling of the statue of Lord Dowding outside the RAF church, London.
- 1989 Wynn's *Men of the Battle of Britain* published giving individual biographical details of the Few.
- 1992 Last RAF unit leaves Biggin Hill airfield in October.
- 1993 Opening of the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capelle-Ferne, Kent.
- 1995 Creation of the Battle of Britain Historical Society.
- 2000 *Spitfire Summer* temporary exhibition at Imperial War Museum London; *Battle of Britain* permanent exhibition at Imperial War Museum, Duxford; *Finest Hour* exhibition at RAF Museum.
- 2001 *Dark Blue World* movie released.
- 2005 Battle of Britain Monument unveiled on the Embankment, near the MoD HQ. Monument to the Women of World War Two, London, unveiled.
- 2008 RAF Bentley Priory, Dowding's headquarters, sold by the MoD for luxury flats.
- 2009 Park's statue sits atop the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square for six months from 4 November. Polish Armed Forces Memorial, National Memorial Arboretum, unveiled.
- 2010 Keith Park statue unveiled in Waterloo Place, London; RAF Museum proposal for Battle of Britain Beacon, but unable to secure funding.
- 2012 Queen Elizabeth II unveils the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park, London on 28 June. *Battle for Britain* short film released.
- 2013 Bomber Command Clasp to 1939–1945 Star confirmed in February. Bentley Priory Museum opens. In June the RAF Museum lifts a Dornier Do17 from the Goodwin Sands in the Channel.
- 5 January 2015 St George's Chapel of Remembrance, Biggin Hill, faces closure threat as MoD withdraws funding, leading to efforts to secure it.
- 18 March 2015 Chancellor announces budget funding for St George's Chapel, Biggin Hill.
- Summer 2015 Seventy-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Britain and issues of Royal Mint fifty-pence coin, and Royal Mail stamps.
- October 2016 RAF Museum permanently closes the Battle of Britain Hall.
- 2017 *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* movies released.

- 2018 Battle of Britain Bunker Exhibition, Uxbridge, opens 16 March. International Bomber Command Centre, Lincoln, opens 12 April.
- Summer 2018 RAF Museum opens Centenary exhibitions. *Spitfire* and *Hurricane (Mission of Honour)* movies released.
- July 2018 Publicly prominent Battle of Britain fighter pilots Geoffrey Wellum and Tom Neil die almost within a week of each other.
- November 2018 Biggin Hill Memorial Museum opens.
- September 2020 Eightieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# The Longest Enchantment?: The Battle of Britain in Society and Culture, 1965–2020

### ADAPTING BRAUDEL

The basic premise of this book is a simple one: that the State’s muscular championing of the Few’s prowess during the Battle of Britain was a mantle eventually assumed by the voluntary sector from the 1970s, which has remained significant to the present time.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the State—namely the government, and the Air Ministry—were active in establishing and promoting the Battle of Britain as a decisive wartime event into the later 1950s, thereafter official interest fell away even before Churchill’s death in 1965. The reasons for this are not wholly clear but were in part shaped by a sense that the Few—an elite—had had considerable adulation since 1940, and others—the Many—deserved credit too. Thus, during the 1960s and 1970s both Conservative and Labour governments shied away from any further official commemoration of the RAF’s fighter pilots through monuments and memorials.<sup>2</sup>

The period from 1965 to 2020 therefore witnessed the transition from history to heritage, this becoming more apparent during the 1970s with the establishment of the Battle of Britain Museum at the Hendon RAF Museum site—initially a voluntary initiative—and other nascent museums established by individuals and groups. Except for the RAF Museum which has benefited from some State funding, private groups, or individuals in the voluntary, or third sector, have established all monuments, memorials, museums, and heritage sites during the last forty years or so.<sup>3</sup>

To understand this transition, we should briefly consider the eighty years since 1940, which is also explored in more detail in the latter part of this chapter. Culturally, the Few’s valorisation and subsequent legendary fame in private and popular memory<sup>4</sup> evolved in three key stages: the first was the journalism and propaganda of the event itself during 1940; the second, from 1941, its wartime propaganda and post-war history up to the mid-1960s, when historical accounts simply repeated earlier narratives; and the third, its progression from history to heritage,<sup>5</sup> more evident from the later 1970s to 2020. These three dimensions intertwine and overlap each other, much in the way that the influential and celebrated French historian Fernand Braudel<sup>6</sup> argued that ‘[H]istory may be divided into three movements: what moves rapidly, what moves slowly and what appears not to move at all’.<sup>7</sup> It is useful here to consider this model further (Fig. 1.1).

Braudel had developed this approach in response to his assessment that ‘time moves at different speeds’, and specifically, the problems of reflecting this in his magnum opus on the Mediterranean during the

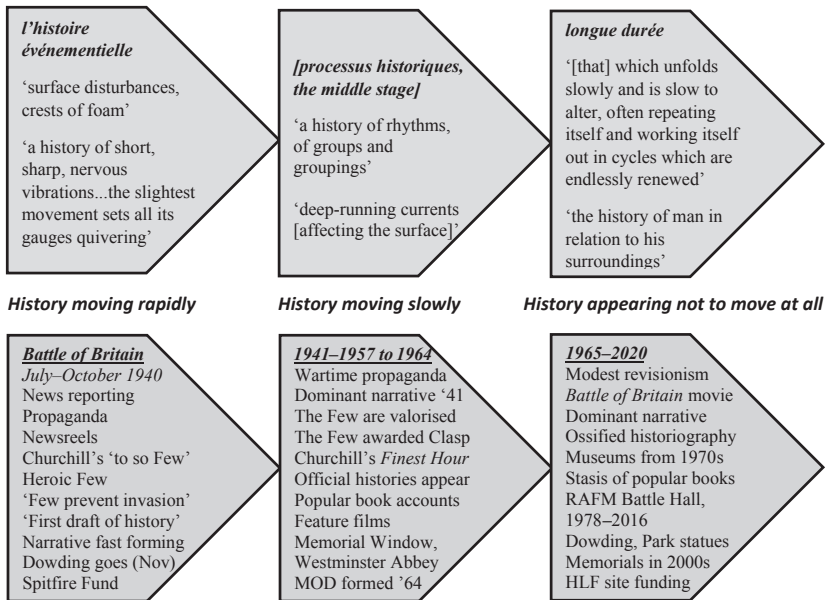


Fig. 1.1 Adapting Braudel’s historical structures framework (Compiled by the author)

age of Phillip II.<sup>8</sup> Therein, Braudel favoured an approach acknowledging the *longue durée*, or longer-term historical structures of underlying significance. This could be characterised, he suggested, as ‘the history of man in relation to his surroundings’, and that ‘which unfolds slowly and is slow to alter, often repeating itself and working itself out in cycles which are endlessly renewed’.<sup>9</sup> The intermediate aspect in Braudel’s model was social history as it related to change or stasis within populations and economies over long periods of time, perhaps centuries.<sup>10</sup> Braudel likened this aspect to ‘a history of gentle rhythms, of groups and groupings, which one might readily have called social history [as originally understood by the term]’.<sup>11</sup> Here, ‘economies and states, societies and civilizations’ acted as ‘deep-running currents’ affecting the surface, but more, how these might come into play within the context of war through actual conflict and emerging military technologies.<sup>12</sup>

His final, more familiar element in historical practice is the history of events, *l’histoire événementielle*. Here, evental history, often the preserve of the journalist or chronicler recording and analysing short-term events, focused upon specific dates and personalities, and was central to the narrative, often involving politics. This aspect is that which corresponds most closely to the Battle of Britain as an historic event. Interestingly, Braudel viewed this latter aspect of history as ‘surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs’,<sup>13</sup> and ‘[A] history of short, sharp, nervous vibrations ... [where] the slightest movement sets all its gauges quivering’.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Braudel believed that in order to fully understand the historic context of an event, or series of events, it was essential to consider it from different temporal perspectives, yet which were connected within the broader spectrum of the warp and weft of history.

Given the relatively short span of time since 1940 it is clearly not possible to apply Braudel’s model in the manner he developed for his work on the Mediterranean over several centuries, but these principles can be adapted to explain how the Battle of Britain became such a significant event in British popular history and memory. For instance, if we instead modified Braudel’s model so that his *l’histoire événementielle* refers to the initial period of the Battle’s official history, namely the propaganda war from July to October 1940 based upon air communiques and journalism, this is clearly a period ‘where the slightest movement sets all its gauges quivering’, not least in the claims for aircraft shot down by either side. This is history moving ‘rapidly’, itself capable of being divided into separate phases in tandem with the shifting elements of the air war.<sup>15</sup>

Noted above, the central period of the Battle's evolving history was from 1941 to the mid-1960s, though the foundations for this period had already been laid by the later 1950s. Adapting Braudel's model for this middle phase, 'a history of gentle rhythms' affecting the surface, it is evident that even by war's end the popular view of the Battle had already settled, subsequent histories not disturbing this interpretation. Of this period, one can confirm that it appeared to move 'slowly', not least in that even by 1957 the narrative established in 1941 was already dominant. Braudel's the *longue durée*, which 'is slow to alter' and 'endlessly renewed', can be equated to the latest phases of the Battle's historiography, from the latter 1960s to 2020, where heritage, building upon the dominant narrative, reaffirms the key elements through sites, places, memorials, and monuments. With few exceptions this period's history 'appears not to move at all'. Unintentionally, the author's books follow this pattern: *The Good Fight* reflects *l'histoire événementielle*; *The Battle of Britain, 1945–1965* captures the middle period when the historiography moves slowly; and this current volume addresses the *longue durée*, which includes the Battle's heritage.

## HERITAGE AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Heritage is essentially the physical representation of a historic event or events through places, sites, artefacts, and other dedicated media.<sup>16</sup> Inevitably, heritage evolves from history in the sense that an event must first be identified as significant through its historiography, thereafter being eventually represented through the former examples.<sup>17</sup> In some instances the memory of a site may be more valuable or evocative in popular or private memory than the physical site itself, the Nazi death camps an example.<sup>18</sup> Returning to Braudel's adapted model, his the-*longue durée* (that period reflecting longer spans of time where history 'appears not to move at all'), best reflects the Battle's settled, mostly uncontested place in popular British history. At the Battle's eightieth anniversary, in addition to its extensive—if narrowly focused and calcified—historiography, it is also necessary to explore its heritage within this wider paradigm, whether through a conserved airfield, visitor attraction or other media initiative to represent it.

A key factor is the Battle's steady transition from an event familiar to the wartime generation, thence through popular memory to those born during the war, and finally, to one which as time passes, is properly

absorbed into ‘history’—in the same manner that the First World War is now perceived. In other words, historiographically, the settled view remains dominant, subsequent revision making little further impact upon how an event is perceived in popular memory. This is not to say that the heritage relating to a specific historical event can only evolve once its historiography has attained a mature, rather unmoving state, but it is fair to say that one generally follows the other. Numerous examples abound of this relationship, especially relating to significant battles throughout British history, now portrayed through visitor and heritage centres within or associated with those historic sites.<sup>19</sup> Chapter 6 explores the context and nature of heritage sites associated with the Battle.

We should also consider what is meant by ‘heritage’ at the more individual level. For the generation who fought in or directly witnessed the Battle, this was of keen interest in the post-war years, and indeed for those post-war generations familiar with these narratives. Here, this is not so much concerned with its academic and theoretical dimensions, but more, how we *personally* experience the past which we have inherited, through landscapes, buildings, and objects. Self-evidently, the longer one lives, the greater is the distance between childhood, young adulthood, and the present; and the more therefore one is likely to notice change in (once) familiar landscapes, and perhaps be sentimental or regretful as one reflects. It is arguably when that change imposes itself upon individual consciousness that heritage becomes a more tangible concept, and one asks questions about what should be preserved, and why.

A personal example offers an illustration.<sup>20</sup> During the late 1970s the former RAF airfield at Swinderby, eight miles to the south of Lincoln, was known to the author as a quite familiar site when travelling up and down the Fosse Way, the course of the earlier Roman road. Being a member of the Air Training Corps once included taking part in a parade in front of the airfield’s large hangers and control tower. These buildings were all clearly visible, including those in the technical and domestic sites, then used for RAF recruit training. It was one of the more impressive RAF airfields still in use in Lincolnshire—‘Bomber County’—in addition to Scampton<sup>21</sup> and Waddington.

Closed by the RAF in 1993, a visitor familiar with Swinderby airfield, and returning to it in 2018, would be struck—perhaps slightly astonished—by the almost total clearance of the former base during the intervening twenty-four years, with virtually all former buildings demolished, including the control tower.<sup>22</sup> Two hangers remained in 2018, though