



A SALUTE TO ONE OF 'THE FEW'

THE LIFE OF FLYING OFFICER
PETER CAPE BEAUCHAMP ST JOHN RAF

SIMON ST JOHN BEER

A Salute to One of 'The Few'

Dedication

This book can only be dedicated to one person:
to Peter.

Had the times through which he lived been more tranquil,
I might have known him.

As it is, I got to know him and admire him at a distance.

*I've done my best
it isn't much,
I've had to feel
I couldn't touch,
But you're gone, so really, what's it to you?*

A Salute to One of 'The Few'

**The Life of Flying Officer Peter Cape
Beauchamp St John RAF**

Simon St John Beer

**But the past is just the same
... and war's a bloody game...**

Have you forgotten yet?...

**Look down, and swear by the slain of the War
that you'll never forget.**

'Aftermath'

**Siegfried Sassoon
March 1919**



**Pen & Sword
AVIATION**

First published in Great Britain in 2009 by
Pen & Sword Aviation
An imprint of
Pen & Sword Books Ltd
47 Church Street
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S70 2AS

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ISBN 978 1 84415 876 8

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Typeset in 10 pt Palatino by Mac Style, Beverley, East Yorkshire
Printed and bound in the UK by the MPG Books Group

Pen & Sword Books Ltd incorporates the Imprints of Pen & Sword Aviation, Pen & Sword Maritime, Pen & Sword Military, Wharncliffe Local History, Pen & Sword Select, Pen & Sword Military Classics, Leo Cooper, Remember When, Seaforth Publishing and Frontline Publishing

For a complete list of Pen & Sword titles please contact
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E-mail: enquiries@pen-and-sword.co.uk
Website: www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

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Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks must go to:

Monica Mullins, who gave me the key to start this tale.

Daphne Pratt, whose fond memories gave me the commitment, and whose good-natured teasing each 11 November gave me renewed determination.

Martin and Susie Mawhood for their time, hospitality, warm enthusiasm and blind faith.

John Freeborn, Peter's Flight Commander that day, who gave his time and memories.

Gill Cocklin, for her help and unending cheerful support.

And of course the three aviatrices in my life:

Amanda Barrell, who got me started and kept me at it.

Hazel Fricker, who taught me to fly at Biggin Hill, in the same skies that Peter fought and died in.

And Hannah Charter, for her valued advice, gentle ridicule, innate wisdom and warm sense of humour.

SB
Autumn 2008

CHAPTER ONE

How It All Started

History does not repeat itself;
at best it sometimes rhymes.

Mark Twain

In the final days of December 1998, I was wandering with a friend, Amanda, around the graveyard of St Mary's Church in Amersham. It was already quite dark, and very wet. In a far corner, we were drawn to a set of RAF wings at the foot of a grave. Amanda is a commercial pilot and I fly for fun, so the RAF wings were of interest to us both. Using a small pocket torch, I knelt forward to examine the headstone.

The inscription read:

In proud and unceasing memory of our darling
Peter Cape Beauchamp St John
Flying Officer RAF
Killed in action over England
October the 22nd 1940
Aged 23 years
Requiescant in pace

Those wishing life must range the falling sky
When an heroic moment calls to die

The date, 22 October 1940, defines the grave as the last resting place of a Battle of Britain pilot, Peter Cape Beauchamp St John.

I was born after the war (in 1952) but all my life have had a love affair with that most beautiful of aeroplanes, the Spitfire. I know a reasonable amount about the squadrons and aircrew who fought throughout that long-ago summer in 1940. In all, 2,917 Allied airmen flew operationally in what was to become known as the 'Battle of Britain'. At the time of course, it had no such name. Here then lay the mortal remains of a pilot who flew in that battle over sixty years ago.

By one of those odd coincidences, my middle name is St John (pronounced sin-jun); odder still was the fact that having read many books on the Battle of Britain, the history of the RAF, and just about everything ever written on the Spitfire, I did not recognise this name.

Amanda suggested that we should find out who this man was, why he was buried in Amersham and what led up to his burial in this quiet churchyard. And so my quest began; along the way I have read

many more fascinating books, and met some lovely people that I would otherwise have never known.

At first it was easy – we found Peter St John mentioned in an extremely detailed book *The Battle Britain Then and Now* by Winston Ramsey. This book records briefly one of his combats and the details of his final flight. After this it got harder. Peter it seemed, was just another airman killed in the defence of his country all those years ago. The more I tried to find out about him, the harder it became. There just didn't seem to be much information available on this man. Then Amanda, while flicking through the same book, stumbled across a picture of Peter's grave. The picture was probably taken in the late seventies. Now, at the turn of the century, a tree has grown to the right of the grave and time has taken its toll on the lettering. The hunt grew stale and time passed. Later, much later, I discovered a picture of Peter St John, once again in the same book, but not mentioned in the index nor is the picture in a position of any relevance. Ironically it is the only full-page photograph of a pilot in the book. Now the young man in the grave had a face. My library of books grew as I searched for any obscure detail I could find about this man. As is the way with these things, time passed and I wasn't really getting anywhere. Then in September 1999, Amanda suggested that we go back to Amersham and see if we could find out anything new. Well to be honest, there really wasn't anywhere to look. I even resorted to asking elderly people in the park whether or not they knew anybody whose surname was St John.

In the end, Amanda and I went to the presbytery behind St Mary's Church to inquire about any details of the burial that the church records might reveal – again, a blank. But the charming lady who answered the door suggested we try the local council, as they now held this type of detailed information. A 'phone call put us in touch with Ann, who could not have been more helpful. She told us all the details we knew and said that if I were to ring back in an hour, she would tell me what she had been able to find out. She tracked down the burial records and at last I had some real information, for instance, Peter's mother's name and address and the grave plot number. It wasn't a lot, but she also suggested that we tried the local museum in Amersham. Maybe they had some information on this long-dead airman?

In the High Street at Amersham, we discovered the museum. It was closed – more frustration – but on the door was the telephone number of the curator.

The next day I rang the museum and got hold of Monica Mullins, the curator. She told me that there was nothing in the museum about Peter St John. However, two years ago, somebody else had been inquiring about Peter. She hadn't been able to help him either. Monica probably sensed my disappointment; she came up with an idea. A lady of her acquaintance, who had lived in Amersham all her life, might recognise the name. Monica was wonderful, as good as her word she rang back with the name of Peter's cousin who still lived in Amersham. It is hard to describe my elation at hearing the news. For two years on and off I'd been trying to track down anything I could about Peter, and at last a chink of light had appeared. But with knowledge comes responsibility. Did I, a total stranger, have the right to ring somebody who may well not wish to be reminded of the events of 1940? I talked over my concerns with Monica, who kindly agreed to ring Peter's cousin, to see if my interest would be well received. The answer was that she would be delighted to talk about Peter; she was very proud of him. And so it was that I got to speak to Daphne Pratt.

Having talked on the 'phone, Daphne agreed to meet me and I spent a wonderful time with her at her home, learning more about this young man who had made the ultimate sacrifice, from someone who had known him very well. Daphne was able to pass on the subtle detail that portrayed Peter as a fine young man. The years fell away and I learnt about his mother, his sister and their life together. I also learnt how the information I had gleaned from the burial certificate about their address in London had been subtly distorted by faded ink and indistinct handwriting. I had spent quite a long time investigating wartime maps of an area of London that doesn't exist any longer. It turns out it didn't

exist then either. I learnt of the St John family nicknames, the origins of most of which are lost.

~~Daphne also put me in touch with Martin Mawhood, Peter's sister's son, who now lives on the Isle of Wight.~~ I went to see him. It was a beautiful sunny morning as I crossed from Lymington on the ferry to meet Martin for the first time. He had kindly got out all the information he had about Peter and other members of the family. That afternoon, I had the most wonderful time. Martin is a jovial character, full of life, who obviously had the same high regard for his unknown uncle that I did.

And so I got to know and admire this young man, who died in a Spitfire, fighting for his country almost sixty years ago to the day; a man whose remaining family both loved and honoured his memory, a man we should all be proud of.

For my part, I don't want Peter to be forgotten. True, he was just one man out of the 544 pilots who died defending our country, in a featureless battlefield in the sky, between 10 July and 31 October 1940. But to me (and his relatives) he is very real; I know his smile and I know of his sense of fun. I know of the very real fear that he felt and the exhilaration of living against the odds. I have tried to put all the information that I have been able to find about his life and RAF career together in this volume so that other people may know and not forget. We do, after all, owe him and his colleagues a great debt.

CHAPTER TWO

To Set the Scene

I don't care for war,
there's too much luck in it for my liking.

Napoleon

It was the time when the German Air Force tried to wipe out the RAF, so that the *Luftwaffe* could control the skies over the English Channel. Once this control had been achieved, the German invasion barges, full of troops and armour, would have had an unhindered passage to their landing grounds around southern Britain. As I write this today, these events are very real to me. I have to remember that it was a time long ago, when our brave boys fought their brave boys to the very death. Following the awful winter of 1939 was a beautiful summer in 1940, with blue skies and warm sunshine, when high above the English Channel and the Home Counties, in the cold air up to 30,000 feet, a new type of combat was evolving.

In the years before the Second World War, huge developments had been made in the understanding and production of high-speed, highly manoeuvrable aircraft. In Germany, the gifted Willy Messerschmitt had designed the Messerschmitt Bf.109, which saw service in the Spanish Civil War with the Condor Legion. In the days when most air forces still had biplanes, the Bf.109 swept aside anything in its path. It was extremely fast and a very manoeuvrable fighter. Its primary role was to support the slow and less manoeuvrable fighter-bombers of the *Luftwaffe*. Despite determined opposition by courageous pilots in obsolete aeroplanes, the Bf.109 and the Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bomber and other twin-engine fighter-bombers swept their way across Poland, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway and France in a synchronised movement with ground armoured forces that the Germans named *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war). It was now Great Britain's time to fall. The *Luftwaffe*, the biggest and most technically advanced air force in the world, was unstoppable. The attacks on British airfields started on 10 July 1940. What happened next surprised everybody.

What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned upon us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the War. If we can stand up to him, we shall never surrender, and Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forwards to broad sunlit lands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister and perhaps more protracted by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, '*This was their finest hour*'.

He meant it, and everybody believed it. If the RAF could not keep the *Luftwaffe* in check, at least until the winter, then surely England would be invaded. Everything hinged on too few pilots with too few aeroplanes, who had very little, if any, battle experience. They were to take on the most heavily armed, well-equipped, modern, battle-proven air force the world had ever seen. The morale of the *Luftwaffe* was as high as it had ever been; they knew they were invincible.

On 16 July 1940 Hitler, after weeks of prevarication, finally made up his mind and set moving the train of events intended to culminate in the occupation of the British Isles by a foreign power for the first time in 874 years.

He issued his War Directive No. 16. It read:

As England, in spite of her hopeless military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I have decided to begin preparations for and, if necessary, to carry out the invasion of England.

The operation is dictated by the necessity to eliminate Great Britain as a base from which the war against Germany can be fought. If necessary the island will be occupied...I therefore issue the following orders:

1. *The landing operation must be a surprise crossing on a broad front, extending approximately from Ramsgate, to a point west of the Isle of Wight... The preparations... must be concluded by the middle of August.*
2. *The following preparations must be undertaken to make a landing in England possible.*
 - (a) ***The English Air Force must be eliminated to such an extent that it will be incapable of putting up any substantial opposition to the invading troops...***

The Spitfire

As so often in British history, the right men are in the right places at the right times.

In 1913, Jacques Schneider inaugurated a competition: a race for seaplanes. He was the son of a French armament manufacturer, who saw the seaplane as a great hope for the future. He also saw the vast areas of water over the earth's surface as providing potentially cheap airports. The Schneider Trophy, mounted on a marble plinth, shows a female figure sculpted in silver and bronze, diving to kiss a cresting wave. This first year, a Frenchman, at an average speed of 45.75 mph, won the race. The next year, 1914, Howard Pixton, flying a Sopwith biplane fitted with floats, won the event at an average speed of 86.78 mph: a new seaplane record. The First World War halted any other attempts for the Schneider Trophy.

The next race was not to be held until 1919, when Hubert Scott-Paine, the owner of a small aeroplane manufacturing plant known as the Supermarine Aviation Works Ltd, and his chief designer Reginald J Mitchell, decided to enter. They won. In 1920 and 1921, the Schneider races were held in Venice. There were no British entries. The Italians were successful in both races and if they won one more race, they would retain the Schneider Trophy for ever.

In 1922 Supermarine won again, with the Mitchell-designed Sea Lion II flying boat, at an average speed of 145.7 mph. In 1923, the Americans won at an average speed of 177.38 mph.

The speed was increasing rapidly.

1924 was a very busy year for Mitchell and Supermarine and it must have been so for the French and Italians as well, for the only entry for the contest was American, and they, very sportingly, agreed to postpone the race until 1925.

For this race, Mitchell designed the revolutionary S4, a completely new concept in aeroplane design. Incredibly sleek with a huge Napier Lion engine, the fuselage was a monocoque construction, a self-supporting structure like a metal tube. It was fitted with a cantilever wing, requiring no bracing wires. This was the beginning of something special. Unfortunately, the pilot Henry Biard lost control and crashed. To everybody's immense relief, he survived.

The loss of the S4 resulted in the 1925 Schneider race being won by an American, at an average speed of 232.57 mph. In just over ten years, including the Great War, the speed had increased from 40 mph to 232 mph – a remarkable achievement.

Mitchell was too busy to enter in 1926 and so had no part in the contest. The Italians won again at a speed of 246.5 mph.

However, 1927 was different. Mitchell and his team had been working hard, ultimately giving birth to the Supermarine S5, a more polished development of the S4. This year also saw the involvement of Sir Hugh Trenchard, Marshal of the RAF.

Sir Hugh Trenchard, the founder of the RAF, had seen the failure of the British Schneider attempt in 1925 and he appreciated that a lack of team organisation had played its part in the defeat. He knew the RAF could remedy this defect. Consequently, in May 1927, when the Air Ministry had finally agreed to finance and organise the British entry, the RAF High-Speed Flight was formed to operate and fly the British aircraft in the race.

The RAF High-Speed Flight consisted of five pilots. A bond of respect and admiration grew between these men and Mitchell, whom they affectionately christened 'Mitch'. This was a familiarity never afforded by Mitchell to his colleagues at Supermarine, where he was usually referred to as 'RJ'.

Great Britain won the race with Mitchell's S5 flown by Flight Lieutenant Webster. The average speed was 281.66 mph – not only a world speed record for seaplanes, but for land planes as well. Mitchell was proving to be a truly world-class designer.

In 1928, the rules of the race were changed. It would now be held every other year. So it was not until 1929 that the latest Mitchell-designed, Supermarine thoroughbred, the S6, powered for the first time by a Rolls-Royce engine, won the trophy once again for Great Britain, at an average speed of 328.63 mph. In 1931, an S6B won the race for the third and last time, achieving a speed of 379.0 mph.

RJ Mitchell, at the age of thirty-six, had designed all the British Schneider Trophy winners since the end of the Great War. The Schneider Trophy would now remain in Britain for ever. The increasing speed over the fifteen years of the race had taught aeronautical engineers much about metallurgy and aerodynamics. RJ Mitchell had stood out as a man destined for great things.

In 1928, Supermarine had been taken over by Vickers, under the leadership of Sir Robert McLean. Vickers needed a first-rate aeroplane designer, and they recognised this in RJ Mitchell. By taking over Supermarine, they were effectively buying the services of Mitchell and his experienced design team.

Under the Treaty of Versailles, drawn up at the end of the First World War, Germany had been forbidden to have an air force, but ran a civil airline, Lufthansa. In 1922, an agreement was signed with Stalin in the Soviet Union. This enabled Germany in 1926, quite unbeknown to the Western powers, to set up a secret air base at Lipetsk in Russia, some thirty miles north of Moscow. It was here that Germany built military aeroplanes and trained pilots. This was where the 'Black *Luftwaffe*' was trained. To maintain secrecy, the German airmen did not wear their uniforms but strolled around in shirts and shorts as though they were on holiday.

The chief test pilot at Vickers, 'Mutt' Summers, was a source of much useful and disturbing information about the German aircraft industry in the 1930s. Summers had many personal contacts in Germany, men holding high positions in German aviation. He ensured that Sir Robert McLean and I

Mitchell had a good idea of what was going on in Germany. They all recognised the need for Britain to re-arm, if they were peacefully to threaten possible German expansionist ideas. They realised that the one weapon that was sorely needed was a modern fighter aircraft.

In 1930, the Air Ministry issued a specification (F7/30) for a frontline fighter and Vickers produced a mediocre gull wing aircraft that was a great disappointment to all involved. Sir Robert McLean felt that his design team could do much better by devoting their abilities, not to an official experimental fighter, but to a real killer aeroplane. After unfruitful discussions with the Air Ministry, Sir Robert and his opposite number at Rolls-Royce, AF Sidgreaves, decided that Vickers and Rolls-Royce would jointly fund the building of such an aircraft. To quote Sir Robert: 'The Air Ministry was informed of this decision, and was told that in no circumstances would any technical member of the Air Ministry be consulted or allowed to interfere with the designer/

These were indeed strong words and were to have great historical importance. They clearly show Sir Robert's confidence in Mitchell and his team to produce the required aircraft. Rolls-Royce must have shared this confidence, as they undertook to design the famous Merlin engine with no official backing – a very costly undertaking.

Together, Rolls-Royce and Vickers pressed on and designed the Type 300 aircraft. Everyone who saw it knew it was a winner.

Sir Robert had clearly stirred things up at the Air Ministry. On 1 December 1934, the Ministry issued a contract for £10,000 for the new fighter. The specification (F37/34) was received by Supermarine at the end of December 1934. It was the Vickers specification for its Type 300 fighter re-written as an Air Ministry document. Sir Robert McLean had won and the Air Ministry had committed itself to the development of an exceptional aeroplane.

In March 1935, the world was shocked to learn that Germany's proposed concept to rebuild her air force was an accomplished fact, and not a paper exercise as had been assumed. The Germans had flagrantly broken the Treaty of Versailles. Unquestionably, Mitchell understood the urgency of the task ahead.

On 5 May 1936, Mitchell's unpainted and still unnamed prototype aircraft, with the registration K5054, was flown by 'Mutt' Summers for the first time. So matter-of-fact was this flight that not a single photograph was taken to mark it. Later, Sir Robert McLean bestowed the name 'Spitfire' upon their new creation, in honour of his daughter, whom he referred to as 'his little Spitfire'.

Reginald Mitchell, however, was a very sick man. He died of cancer at noon on 11 June 1937, just forty-two years old. He undoubtedly realised that this aircraft was his finest achievement. It was the only aircraft to remain in production throughout the entire Second World War. During this period, the Spitfire continued to be developed, Rolls-Royce pushing its research and development on the famous Merlin and later the Griffon engines, ultimately doubling the available power. Mitchell's remarkable airframe was able to absorb this power. The Spitfire's maximum speed increased by 100 mph and its rate of climb by 80 per cent. It was to serve in every theatre of operation in a variety of different roles including those of high- and low-level reconnaissance, high-altitude interceptor, bomber and tactical fighter.

After Mitchell's death, the design team, under the very able ministrations of Joseph Smith, introduced new versions of this remarkable aeroplane and gave our pilots the tool that was to be feared by the *Luftwaffe* in the coming years.

The same specification (F37/34) was taken up by Hawker where the ever-practical Sidney Camm, later Sir Sidney Camm, produced the Hurricane. The Air Ministry, when forced to decide which of the two aircraft to order, decided to order them both – a wise decision as it turned out. The conventional built Hurricane, a fine solidly constructed aircraft that was both easy to manufacture and repair, entered service long before the Spitfire. The Hurricane was built using well-tried technology

principles but was, in reality, at the very end of its development path. By contrast, the Spitfire was primarily at the first stage of its development. The fabrication techniques were so new that the Spitfire was still a hand-built aeroplane. Now it had to be turned into a mass-produced machine. The dedicated design and manufacturing teams worked non-stop on the production details. Their efforts paid off and by the outbreak of war, the aeroplane was in squadron service.

This then was how the RAF came to be equipped with its two most important fighters by the autumn of 1939. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, the man charged with the air defence of Great Britain, refused to commit large numbers of aeroplanes to France. He specifically refused to send a single Spitfire to the French campaign, a theatre of war that he believed to be a lost cause. This was to lead him into conflict with the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, forcing Churchill to fly to France to explain the position.

At the outbreak of war with Britain, the *Luftwaffe* claimed to have more than 4,000 aircraft of a variety of types in service, whilst the RAF had 3,555. Britain's main fighter defences still consisted of more than 500 hopelessly outclassed biplanes: 347 Hurricanes equipped a total of sixteen squadrons, whilst the 270 Spitfire Mk Is so far produced equipped five squadrons. Based at Duxford in Cambridgeshire, 1 Squadron was the first squadron to be equipped with Spitfires on 4 August 1938, followed by 66 and 41 Squadrons at Catterick in Yorkshire and finally, 74 and 54 Squadrons, both at Hornchurch in Essex. Two other squadrons were in the process of re-equipping with Spitfires. The RAF still had many squadrons of outdated, obsolete aeroplanes. These aeroplanes and the dauntless aircrew flying them were to become easy prey for the Spanish Civil War battle-hardened German pilots, with their modern aircraft and well-defined fighting tactics.

So it was that when the German Air Force came to wipe out the RAF, we had just a few of the right aircraft to stop them.

The Protagonists

Sir Hugh CT Dowding

In 1936, Sir Hugh Dowding became the first Commander-in-Chief of the newly created Fighter Command. Known affectionately by his pilots as 'Stuffey', he was not particularly well liked by either the Air Ministry or the politicians. A highly experienced First World War fighter pilot, he remained in the RAF between the wars, ultimately becoming the Air Member for Supply, Research and Development, where his practical understanding of the role of the RAF proved invaluable.

A hard-working individual, Dowding knew more about Britain's inadequacies in air defence than most, but he also knew how to exploit the tools at his disposal. It was Dowding who had commissioned the radar defences around Britain. He had fought the political battle for high-speed, modern, monoplane interceptor aircraft, which ultimately led to the production of the Spitfire and the Hurricane. He knew also that we were woefully short of both aircraft and aircrew.

Dowding was being supplied with intelligence from Bletchley Park, the home of the highly secret radio interception and decryption specialists. They were able to pass on all the *Luftwaffe* decoded signals, often before the *Luftwaffe* unit commanders had even received them.

A brilliant tactician, Dowding was heavily criticised for using fighters in 'penny packets', small groups of fighters that harassed the German bombers. But he reasoned that this was both an efficient use of the aircraft at his disposal and a way of encouraging the Germans to believe that he had very few aircraft available for the defence of Great Britain. His tactics totally misled German intelligence.

As a direct result of this strategy, on 15 September 1940, the *Luftwaffe* made its last massive daylight raid. Believing that the RAF had a total of 350 fighters left scattered throughout the British Isles, the German bomber pilots had been assured that they would meet very light opposition. Dowding, observing the development of the battle from his headquarters at Bentley Priory near

Stanmore in Middlesex, saw more than 400 Spitfires and Hurricanes position to meet the bombers the first opening moves of the battle. As the German aircraft pressed on, more and more Spitfire and Hurricane squadrons rose to meet them. Wave after wave of British fighters swarmed all over the German bombers and dealt the *Luftwaffe* not only a mighty physical blow, but a bitter psychological blow to their morale, from which they never recovered.

At three o'clock in the afternoon on 15 September, Churchill was watching the battle unfold with Air Vice-Marshal Sir Keith Park, Commander of 11 Group, responsible for the defence of London and south-east England. This Group was to see most of the fighting during the Battle of Britain. Churchill turned to Park and asked, 'What other fighter reserves do we have?' Park looked at him and said 'None!' a dramatic, if rather misleading answer.

Dowding's other two most able commanders throughout the battle were Sir Quintin Brand, Commander of No. 10 Group protecting the west of England, and Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, Commander of No. 12 Group to the north of London. These men asked for and received the dedication of the Wing Commanders, Squadron Leaders, Flight Commanders and pilots, both Pilot Officers and Sergeant Pilots (of whom there were many more than commissioned officers), not to mention the ground crews (both men and women) who kept the aeroplanes flying. It was not going to be so easy for the German Air Force this time. However, it was to be a very close-run thing.

Dowding's son Derek was to start his RAF career in July 1939 flying Spitfires with 74 Squadron Hornchurch, fighting alongside Peter St John. Derek Dowding (affectionately known as 'Scruffy' Dowding because of his rather unkempt appearance and his father's nickname 'Stuffy') shot down many enemy aircraft in various theatres of war, and survived to retire from the RAF in 1956.

At the outbreak of war, the American ambassador to the Court of St James, Joseph Kennedy (the father of John F Kennedy, later to become President of the United States), declared that Germany would win the war against Britain in days. He promptly moved into the countryside to avoid the bombing.

Germany believed she would sweep Great Britain aside. After all, the German armed forces had done this many times now. *Führer* Directive 16 planned for the placement of troops and barges around the coast of France and Belgium, ready for the invasion of Britain.

On the other side of the English Channel, in France, the wrong man was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering and the Luftwaffe

Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering or 'The Fat One', as he was rather irreverently known by the pilots of the *Luftwaffe*, was ready. Goering, a flamboyant man, in his self-designed, pastel-coloured uniforms, bedecked with self-awarded medals, had had a remarkable career. As an infantry officer, he went into action within the first few hours of the outbreak of the First World War at the age of twenty-one.

He proved himself resourceful, courageous and capable, with plenty of initiative and daring. While he was in hospital suffering with rheumatic fever, his former comrade Bruno Loerzer visited him. Loerzer had just been accepted as a trainee pilot for the new air service, part of the German Army. Goering immediately applied for a posting to a flying school. His request was refused. Ignoring orders to return to his unit when fit, he wrote himself a transfer document and reported for flight training instead.

When his regimental authorities learned of his self-discharge from the hospital and his self-transfer to the air service, he was ordered to report to his unit for duty immediately. Any ordinary officer would have been frightened into compliance, for he had already committed court-martial offences. But Goering was no ordinary officer. He reacted by telegraphing his godfather, who was well

connected in royal circles in Berlin. His godfather pulled strings. Instead of a court martial, Göring was ordered by Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, son of the *Kaiser*, to join the German Fifth Army Air Detachment in northern France.

Nicknamed 'the flying trapezist', he was awarded the Iron Cross First Class and became a legend in the German air services because of his bravery. He went on to command Richthofen's Flying Circus after the death of the Red Baron. He was awarded many medals including the coveted Blue Max.

At the end of the Great War, Germany was in turmoil. Göring, a career officer with no armed service to serve in, hated the mess that Germany had degenerated into. His life was aimless until, in November 1922, he found Hitler. Hitler welcomed Göring with open arms. His name, rank and position gave Hitler and his Nazi party an aura of respectability. He was not only a member of the Officer Class but a famous and highly decorated airman with friends in high places. Hitler immediately put him in charge of 10,000 *Sturmabteilungen* (storm-troopers). Göring turned the mob from a uniformed mob into dependable, smooth-working commandos.

In 1923, the Nazis tried to take over the government of Bavaria. In a skirmish with the German Army, Göring was shot twice – one bullet in the hip and one bullet in the groin. The excruciating pain led him eventually to morphine addiction.

When the Nazis won 108 seats in the *Reichstag* (Parliament) in September 1930, most of the credit for the party's ninety-six-seat gain belonged to Göring.

His rise continued, until by the outbreak of war, he was Commander-in-Chief of the most highly technical of Germany's armed services. His technical knowledge was, to say the least, severely limited. He made ill-informed technical decisions, with far-reaching consequences, such as shelving the long-range bomber project and allowing his dive-bombing obsession to get out of hand. He would brush aside the advice of capable generals and sometimes take personal charge of operations for which he had no training and minimal understanding.

Göring's High Command career was a catalogue of miscalculation and disaster. His sybaritic lifestyle had taken its toll. He was intoxicated by his desire to command. Glory he regarded as his divine right. He demanded and basked in the credit for his creation, 'My *Luftwaffe*', and its stunning early successes. But he had a serious character defect: he truly believed he was a genius. This led him to reject both military intelligence, and the advice of his highly experienced pilots, if it did not concurred with his blinkered view of reality.

On the one hand there was Dowding with his meticulously planned strategy, as yet untested. On the other was Göring; his *Luftwaffe* had more operational experience but he was personally more concerned with his own political advancement.

Göring's tactical decisions during the Battle of Britain comprised one calamity after another. He three times changed his battle tactics, never persevering long enough to achieve the desired result. His fighter pilots ridiculed him. By ordering his single-engine fighters to escort the slower bombers by tucking in close, he effectively robbed his fighters of the ability to defend the bombers, resulting in very high bomber losses. The fighters should have been allowed to range freely over the bombers, to give an effective umbrella of support. He neither understood nor listened to his outstanding senior fighter pilots – instead, he preferred to label them cowards, which they undoubtedly were not.

Day after day the German aircraft came, and day after day the Spitfires and Hurricanes rose to meet them. The early days saw dreadful losses on both sides. The outdated British tactics based around First World War formation-flying, and equally outdated aircraft (sedate biplanes and the relatively more modern machines, such as the Fairey Battles and the Boulton Paul Defiants, being slow and heavy) were easy pickings for the German Bf.109s. At the same time, the Ju 87 *Stuka* dive-bombers and the Me.110 fighter-bombers were hacked to pieces by the Spitfires and Hurricanes.

Unwittingly, in the excitement and confusion of battle, both sides were making unrealistic claims for aircraft shot down. In England, it was relatively easy to count the wreckage of crashed German aircraft, which gave the British planners a more realistic assessment of German losses. The German High Command, however, did not have this luxury, and had no option but to add up the list of all the aircraft their pilots claimed had been destroyed.

German intelligence underestimated the number of Spitfires and Hurricanes in service with the RAF. They also underestimated the speed at which these aircraft were being produced. This was bad enough, but they overestimated the damage the *Luftwaffe* had inflicted on aircraft on the ground during its attacks on British airfields and worse, by accepting without question the uncorroborated claims for aircraft shot down by its pilots, they totally underestimated their opponents. German military intelligence was completely wrong-footed; it seemed inconceivable that the British could continue to mount a significant airborne defence. Yet, day after day, the Spitfires and Hurricanes were there to meet the *Luftwaffe* and continued to inflict serious losses upon it.

The German High Command was losing patience with, and faith in, the *Luftwaffe*. This was not the pushover that Göring had promised. When Hermann Göring asked General Adolf Galland, one of the most experienced German fighter pilots, what he needed to defeat the British, he replied, 'A squadron of Spitfires' (a light-hearted quip for which he was never really forgiven).

The fighting continued. The losses of British men and machines were high but manageable. And then, it was intended that a mighty concerted effort by the *Luftwaffe* on 15 September 1940 would finally, once and for all, clear the few remaining British aircraft from the skies over the Channel. This was to be Göring's last chance. Every aeroplane he could muster set off to bomb London. The number of British fighters that rose to meet 'his' *Luftwaffe* exceeded his worst nightmares. The ferocity of the British aviators' fighting stopped the German Air Force in its tracks. The *Luftwaffe* had failed. On 15 September 1940, Hitler quietly cancelled Operation *Sea Lion*, the invasion of Britain. In Britain, as the winter approached, the threat of the invasion slowly diminished.

At the end of October 1940, the Germans changed their battle tactics again. They gave up trying to destroy the RAF and started to bomb the cities instead. Callous though it was, with the German Air Force bombing the cities, the pressure was off the RAF. They had time to lick their wounds and re-equip. Hitler, having been forced to postpone the invasion of Britain indefinitely, had bigger things on his mind, namely Operation *Barbarossa*, the invasion of Russia.

And so the war moved on, without the invasion of Britain. The period between 10 July and 31 October 1940 became known as the 'Battle of Britain'. And 15 September will always be remembered as Battle of Britain Day.

Every pilot who flew with the RAF and took part in the Battle of Britain was awarded the Battle of Britain Clasp for the 1939–45 Star.

The gratitude of every home in our island, in our empire, and indeed throughout the world, except the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen, who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in the constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

Winston Churchill, 20 August 1940

CHAPTER THREE

To Robert and Edith St John, a Son: Peter Cape Beauchamp

There is no cure for life and death, save to enjoy the interval.

George Santayana

25 May 1917 is another wet day. The newspapers today are full of news of the war. They have been so since 4 August 1914, when Great Britain declared war on Germany. It should have been over by Christmas that year. Yet nearly three years later, both sides are still hoping for victory. The Somme offensive that had seemed to offer so much for the Allies, has ground to a standstill five months after it started. The high hopes of July last year – drowned in the November mud. The German retreat in March had carried on very slowly until April and is now stalled against the Hindenburg Line. On 6 April, America finally joins the Allies and declares war on Germany, three years after it had started. President Woodrow Wilson tells Congress, ‘The world must be made a safer place for democracy.’

Today, the British Prime Minister Lloyd George, has issued a statement warning of the submarine threat to the food supply. In the first four months of 1917, approximately 2,400,000 tonnes of shipping has been lost and consequently food shortages are anticipated.

Last night the hospital ship *Dover Castle* was torpedoed twice and sunk, mercifully with the loss of only six people. A mass German bombing raid on the south-east coast of England (the newspapers are deliberately vague) was successfully attacked and three of Germany’s huge Gotha bombers were shot down. It was a big raid – the bombs killed ninety-five people and injured a further 192. Just fourteen years after the first heavier-than-air machine was flown by an American bicycle manufacturer, the aeroplane has become the newest weapon of war. The pilots are intrepid heroes on both sides of the trenches.

In Russia, dissatisfaction with the government, and particularly with the way the war against Germany is being prosecuted, is growing. The German General von Hindenburg triumphs again and again over the poorly armed Russian troops. Tsar Nicholas II is worried. Opposition is becoming more vociferous. Reports from the Petrograd Conference, where the Bolsheviks are plotting, indicate that Lenin’s paper ‘Resolution on measures to cope with economic disorganisation’ has been exceptionally well received by the people. How long the Russians can carry on fighting the German Army on one front, and these Bolshevik troublemakers in their fields and factories, is anyone’s guess.

Meanwhile, in a quiet English village, life goes on as usual. For Margaret Hutton, the landlady of the ‘Blue Ball’, a large, old and in its way, rather beautiful country pub at 34 Blucher Street, Chesham, near Amersham in the county of Buckingham, it has been a long night. Margaret’s daughter Edith and her new husband Robert have lived at the ‘Blue Ball’ since they became Mr and Mrs St John almost a year ago. With this new dawn, Edith and Robert’s lives have changed for ever, for they have become parents. This for Edith is her first child. Robert already has a daughter, Dorothy, from his previous marriage, his first wife having tragically died young. On **25 May 1917**, Robert and Edith a

delighted to have been blessed with a child, a healthy, noisy little boy, who shortly will be christened Peter Cape Beauchamp St John. Edith looks at her son, this painfully delivered, joyous tiny pink boy, her child, her hope, her future, this gift of life, this perfectly formed miracle of biology now sleeping quietly in her arms. Looking at him, his name seems so big for such a small bundle of humanity – a life to live up to. Later he will be given a nickname, a simpler name; to his family he will be known as ‘Flam’, a nickname that he will keep for life.

As Europe struggles to find its future, Robert and Edith pray for a better world for their children.

Robert Henry Beauchamp St John, Peter’s father, is a stockbroker’s clerk. For the duration of the war he is a Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve Officer, serving in the pay corps. Peter’s mother, Edith, is a strong matriarch who runs the family. As Catholics, Robert and Edith have Peter baptised within a few days of his birth. Peter keeps his faith for the rest of his life and it will give him great strength as an adult.

The early days of Peter’s life progress as with any child. For his mother, life revolves around her newborn son and Dorothy, her stepdaughter. The Great War, the war to end all wars, slowly draws to its end. In **November 1917**, Allied troops finally capture the ridge at Passchendaele. Sir Douglas Haig’s aim of dislodging the Germans from this stretch of high ground has been painfully achieved. The battle should have lasted two days. It has taken three terrible months. In Russia, a local uprising by hungry and frustrated people has been mercilessly put down by troops ordered to fire on the populace by the Tsar, Nicholas II.

The troops, who forcibly put down this uprising, are appealed to by the people and ultimately rebel. They shoot their officers and join the people in revolt. German intelligence, hearing of this upheaval in Russia, contacts Vladimir Lenin, a Russian living in Switzerland, who leads a small group of dissenters known as the Bolsheviks. German intelligence and Lenin make a deal. Lenin is to travel in a sealed train from Switzerland across Germany to lead a new revolution in Russia. Germany, although at war with Russia, guarantees Lenin’s safe passage across its territory. On his arrival in Russia, Lenin joins forces with Leon Trotsky and, following the works of philosopher Karl Marx, they rapidly take over control of the country, offering peace, land and bread to the people. The speed with which the revolution spreads across Russia takes everybody by surprise. By and large, it is peaceful. It is a revolution heartily supported by the people. For the moment, nobody outside Russia is sure what has happened to the Tsar or any other members of the royal family, the Romanovs.

In France, the people are also hungry; they are also dissatisfied with the military leadership. The muttering of the people is clearly heard by the government. Stupidly uttered threats of sending people to fight at the front lines are jeered at. Most of the hardened demonstrators are women, for whom the threat is unenforceable. Parts of the French Army openly defy their military leaders. French troops are being executed for mutiny. The ostentatious displays of wealth, by people who have got very rich from this war, this war that has brought such misery to so many, is causing not only the working people to be restless. Disquiet is spreading upwards through French society.

Across the Channel, in England, things are not much better. The awful realities taking place in France and Belgium along the 450 miles of frontline are becoming common knowledge. The happy adventure of a war that was to be over by that Christmas, so many years ago, has now turned sour. People do not understand why so many talented and brave young men are dying. The sacrifice no longer seems worthwhile. British soldiers are dying in their thousands, while at home people are asked to work harder and sacrifice more. Finally, the miners go on strike. The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, mindful of what has happened in Russia, fearful of what is happening in France, instructs his negotiators to try and persuade the miners to go back to work – but if this fails, to give them everything they want.

There is a very real fear that if this war does not end soon, Russia will not be the only casualty

revolution.

As ~~1917~~ comes to an end, **1918** brings hope. It is not over yet: Germany is running out of raw materials and America is slowly tipping the balance. The British people dare to believe that the end of the war is in sight. Then, in March 1918, comes the awful news that the Russian government, now the Soviet government, has agreed to a peace treaty with the Germans and Austrians. It is duly signed in the city of Brest-Litovsk in Belarussia. Germany's dealings with Lenin have paid off. German troops can now be moved from the Eastern Front to carry on fighting on the Western Front. Germany is not finished yet.

In April, the news breaks that Baron Manfred von Richthofen (the Red Baron), the German fighter pilot responsible for shooting down more than eighty Allied pilots, is himself dead. In the eleven years since the Wright brothers first flew in 1903 to the beginning of the Great War, aeroplanes have come a long way. Since the start of the war in 1914, development has been rapid. Every year of the war has seen an increased understanding of aviation technology by both sides. Now, in 1918, the balance of knowledge see-saws backwards and forwards, with German aeroplane manufacturers perfecting one idea, only to be leapfrogged by British designers introducing their latest technological twist, who then turn lose the edge to the Germans again. This quest for technical domination is never-ending. Both sides know they have to win this race.

On **25 May 1918** it is Peter's first birthday. He is a happy child who smiles a lot. Already his character is becoming clear. Edith as a young mother is learning. For her, it is a joyous experience watching as her son changes from a demanding baby into an amusing infant. His sleeping habits are established now and she is at last beginning to feel rested and alive again. The clouds of war, which have for so long hung over the land, are thinning. Food, although not plentiful, is sufficient and life is becoming easier for the new family.

In July, news from the Soviet Union reaches the West that the royal family of Russia, the Romanovs, have all been killed. The news is stunning; the Romanovs have ruled Russia since 1613. In general, the revolution had been bloodless, enhancing the tragedy. The Russian royal family were well liked by the English aristocracy. It is a sad and worrying time for everyone. The British royal family could possibly have offered the Romanovs asylum. But with them may also have come the seeds of the revolution the Romanovs were escaping – a revolution that the British government so fears.

At last, after four years of demonic destruction, on **11 November 1918** the cruellest, costliest war in European history has finally come to an end. The Armistice has been signed at eleven o'clock the next morning. The guns that have thundered over the Western Front for four long years fall silent. Instead church bells are triumphantly ringing in the peace. The Great War has claimed 8.5 million dead, with many, many more seriously wounded. Casualties are mainly young men, including many young officers, creating a shortage of leaders for the next generation. Many children will grow up without ever knowing their fathers. Peter's lucky – he's part of tight-knit, happy family and his father, within a year, will be a civilian again.

For England, the war has ended just in time. From September 1915 Great Britain has been paying America for all the purchases made by Russia and Italy. And since May 1916, Britain has paid for all the French military purchases as well. Britain's stocks of gold have been almost depleted. By the spring of 1917 the situation is desperate, Britain has just under \$800 million of gold and securities left. Wartime expenditure has been running at \$80 million a week. America finally agrees to help. The Americans have been lending \$180 million a month to the United Kingdom's war chest.

The United Kingdom had a national debt of £650 million in 1914. Today it has risen to a staggering £7,435 million. The interest alone accounts for approximately 40 per cent of the United Kingdom's budget.

Now that the war is over, Britain must start repaying her debts.

Peter's growing up now; he is two years old. His happy laugh accompanies him as he causes mischief around the house. On **30 April 1919**, Robert and Edith's family grows bigger, with another child, a baby girl named Margaret Mary St John. Peter has a baby sister, and Dorothy a half-sister. Robert, their father, is away a lot. Edith however, with the support of her family, enjoys bringing up her three children.

All the children have nicknames. Dorothy, is 'Do Do' (it's easy for the younger children to pronounce). Peter is 'Flam', and the new baby, Margaret, is 'Molie' (because her skin is soft as a mole), although as Peter grows up he sometimes refers to Margaret, with affection, as 'Stink'. The nicknames add to the sense of family cohesion.

The weeks after Margaret's birth turn into months and the children grow up; they are all very happy and immensely enjoy playing the fool. It is a family of high spirits where everybody plays practical jokes on each other. As a family, they share a bond of love and affection for each other. The children thrive on this and grow strong and self-confident. They have their fights – just childish squabbles but the rather frightening matriarch is always there to sort things out.

On **14 June 1919**, history is made. A Vickers Vimy aircraft crash-lands at Clifden on the west coast of Ireland, having flown non-stop from St John's, Newfoundland, taking sixteen hours and twenty minutes. The pilot is Captain John Allcock, a well-known British war hero. His navigator is Lieutenant Arthur W Brown. They flew through the fog and snow, comforted by coffee, beer and sandwiches. They become national celebrities, pioneers of aviation.

Germany has lost the war. On **28 June 1919**, Germany's representatives sign the peace treaty in a railway carriage at Versailles. The terms of the 200-page peace treaty are severe – perhaps too severe. The French have been cruelly hurt. The fighting has taken place on her soil. There are houses to be rebuilt, villages to re-coalesce, roads and railways to be re-planned and all of this work to be undertaken by a country, most of whose young working-age men have been killed in the conflict. Now it is their turn to hurt back. The Germans are forced to sign a treaty that demands payment of 2 billion gold marks and 70,312 sq km (27,150 sq miles) of land has to be surrendered to neighbouring states. German and Austrian unification is forbidden. The German population of the Sudetenland is placed under Czechoslovakian rule and East Prussia is to be separated from the rest of Germany by a Polish corridor to the Baltic at Danzig.

The German people feel let down, betrayed by their leaders. Germany is made to pay for the war. The price is high – very high. Soldiers in Germany, returning from the trenches, are complaining. They have fought and they have fought hard. They have fought bravely, in terrible conditions, and now, Hindenburg and Ludendorff have surrendered. What have they been fighting for? It has been a terrible waste and now the terms of the treaty offer them no future. It will lead to a bankrupt German state.

Amongst the German troops returning to their homeland is a nineteen-year-old corporal. As a child his life had been very difficult; as a soldier it had been worse. He has been gassed and wounded twice and has fought through some of the worst battles of this Great War. Yet in the army he has found purpose. He has discovered that he is a natural orator. His name is Adolf Hitler. The end of the 'War to end all Wars' has set the scene for things to come.

The European fear of revolution is real. In Italy in **1919**, a new word is being used to define a woolly political doctrine. That word is 'Fascism'. Derived from the Italian word *fasces*, a bundle of twigs tied tightly together, it comes to represent a tightly bonded populace, guided by strong leadership. The head of the new political wave is Benito Mussolini, a sheet metal worker turned politician, who was expelled from school for stabbing another boy. He is a bully: an extremely brutal bully. He takes the Roman symbol of an axe enwrapped in scourging rods, a statement of the power of compulsion and punishment carried by the *Lictors* when escorting Roman councils and senior magistrates, as his political emblem.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler joins a political party. Having intended to start his own, he realises that it is easier to hijack an existing group and mould it to his requirements. He quickly becomes enrolled as the seventh member of the management committee of the German Workers' Party. Soon he will change the name of the party and it will become known as the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or the Nazi party for short.

Across Europe, the new forces of Communism and Fascism start to flex their muscles. They are political opposites. On the one hand is Communism, with its belief that power should be exercised by the people, for the people, in an open society. And on the other is Fascism, with its extreme nationalism and its romantic view of history, coupled with the need to secure social unity, if necessary at the expense of the individual, in order to prevent the collapse of the state.

Edith's sister, Olive, gives birth to a daughter, Daphne. They are a happy community of family and they all know each other well and enjoy each other's company. As a family they are all lucky. The flu epidemic that is killing indiscriminately leaves them unscathed. So many have survived the Great War, only to die in their millions from this virulent virus that is sweeping across Western Europe.

January 1920 sees an amendment to the American Constitution. It is the 18th Amendment, which prohibits the making, transporting or selling of alcohol. Prohibition has arrived in America.

In **February 1920**, the first council meeting of the League of Nations takes place in London. This international organisation has been set up to settle arguments between countries and keep the peace. Although America refuses to join the League of Nations (America does not want to be involved in other countries' land disputes), it is still hoped that the organisation will be strong enough to keep the international peace. The League of Nations does however, get off to a very bad start, with many countries still disagreeing over the boundaries imposed on them under the Treaty of Versailles.

On the day before Peter's third birthday, **24 May 1920**, the Olympic Games open in Antwerp, Belgium. By now the social fabric is recovering as best it can. People have had enough of the hard times; it is time to start having fun again.

In the early **1920s** in America, United Artists and Warner Brothers start releasing films. Soon big cinema entertainment comes to Great Britain. Agatha Christie, a mystery writer, is taking England and America by storm. The French clothes designer Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel has launched her latest success, a perfume, Chanel No. 5, named after her lucky number.

In the **summer of 1920**, Hitler, a frustrated artist, is becoming a master propagandist. What the Nazi party lacks is an emblem, a flag or a symbol, which will express what the new organisation stands for. It has to appeal to the imagination of the masses. It has to be a banner for them to follow and to fight under. After many attempts at various designs, he hits upon a flag with a red background and in the middle, a white disc on which is imprinted a black swastika. The hooked cross, borrowed from ancient times, is to become the frightening symbol of first, the Nazi party, and then Nazi Germany.

In general though, people are trying to forget politics. In London, Handley Page and Imperial Airways are awarded a £25,000 government subsidy to resume flying between London and Paris.

The RAF establishes the first regular airmail service between London, Cairo and Baghdad.

In **August 1920**, the Ottoman Empire is finally broken up, when Turkey signs the Treaty of Sèvres. Turkey loses 80 per cent of its empire, and Greece gains a lot of land. An uneasy peace exists between the two countries.

In **January 1921**, one of the most expensive films ever made hits the silver screens. About an accident-prone tramp, the film is called 'The Kid', and stars Charlie Chaplin in his first feature-length film. It is a huge success.

In Bavaria, in the summer of **1921**, the committee of the National Socialist German Workers' Party takes advantage of Hitler's absence on a fundraising trip to Berlin to challenge his increasing power.

inside the party. Hitler's fellow committee members are beginning to feel that he is getting too big for his boots. Sensing a threat to his position, Hitler hurries back to Munich to quell the intrigues of the 'foolish lunatics'. He offers to resign from the party. This is more than the party can afford, as the other members of the committee quickly realise. Hitler is not only their most powerful speaker but also their best organiser and propagandist. Moreover, it is he who is now bringing in most of the organisation's funds; from collections at the mass meetings at which he speaks and from other diverse sources, including the Army. The committee refuses to accept Hitler's resignation. Now, emboldened by the power of his position, Hitler forces the committee members to capitulate. He demands that the committee be abolished and insists on dictatorial powers for himself, as the party's sole leader. There is uproar. But after a legal wrangle, Hitler wins. In doing so, he establishes the leadership principle that is to be the first law of the Nazi party and then the Third Reich. The *Führer* has arrived.

Meanwhile in Canada, Frederick Banting and Charles Best lead a group of scientists at the University of Toronto. They have succeeded in extracting insulin from dogs and perfect an effective treatment for the killer disease diabetes.

On **6 December 1921**, a treaty is signed in London that creates the Irish Free State. The six counties in Ulster, Northern Ireland, remain part of the United Kingdom. It is an unhappy compromise that nobody is very comfortable with.

On **10 December 1921**, a young man, Albert Einstein, is awarded the Nobel Prize, in recognition of his contribution to physics.

1922 sees the opening of the hugely ambitious hydro-electric power plant on the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls. Peter, who has never heard of the Niagara Falls, learns a bit more about geography and physics. Meanwhile, in Italy, Benito Mussolini comes to power. He swears to defeat the Bolsheviks, the Soviet Communists.

In November, the archaeologist Howard Carter, working with Lord Carnarvon, unearths the long hidden tomb of an Egyptian pharaoh. This pharaoh ruled nearly 3,200 years ago and his name was Tutankhamun. It is a spectacular find and for five-year-old Peter the stories and pictures are fascinating.

In France, a political polarisation is taking place. Communist sympathies are sweeping across the country. After all, are these not the dreams of the French Revolution re-manifesting themselves? Oddly, however, in England, the strangely tolerant society openly debates the political merits of the new doctrines, from Bolshevism and other forms of Communism, to Socialism, Liberalism, Conservatism and Fascism. The emergence of elected local government in the 1880s, coupled with women winning the right to vote in 1918, has encouraged the development of two mass parties. Now that everybody is able to vote, political debate is both open and free. This has allowed a new class of political thinkers to emerge. The principle of power through the ballot box holds and the threat of revolution in the United Kingdom is slowly diminishing.

However, in other parts of Europe, political friendships are being formed.

In **April 1922**, whilst attending a conference in Genoa in Italy, the Soviet Union and Germany agree to establish trading and diplomatic links. The Treaty of Rapallo is signed. The treaty has a secret clause, which allows Germany to build weapons and carry out military research on Russian territory. Such actions are specifically forbidden under the Treaty of Versailles.

In **1923**, Peter starts attending Kingsley House Catholic primary school in Woodside Road, a short walk away from home. He is just an ordinary boy, good-looking, high-spirited and not particularly interested in education. From an early age, Peter exhibits signs of mechanical aptitude. He is good with his hands and he likes tinkering with things. He is very bright. In the fields, steam engines are used for harvesting. After school, Peter and his friends enjoy being around the big hissing contraptions. They learn about pistons, steam regulators, fireboxes, triple expansion cylinders and the

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