



Colin Hodgkinson in front of a Spitfire following a mission

pic011



Glencot House, near Wells, where Colin was born

pic009

Hoppy the RAF flying hero



Spitfires fly in formation with a Hurricane

pic012

LOCAL CRIPPLED FLYER TO BE A PILOT

SUB-LIEUT. COLIN HODGKINSON TO GET HIS WINGS

Sub-Lieut. Colin Hodgkinson, R.N. (Air Branch) who lost a leg and a foot in an air crash six months before the war, will probably get his pilot's wings this week. It was in May 1939 that Midshipman Hodgkinson was involved in a mid-air collision during a blind-flying exercise at night. He was coming in to land when his two-seater Tiger Moth biplane collided with another of the same type and fell into Cobham Woods. Colin, badly injured, was taken to Gravesend hospital for the double amputation—the right leg above the knee, the left leg below it. That seemed the end of his naval and flying career.

The outbreak of war found him slowly convalescing in the Naval Hospital at Chatham. During Christmas week 1940 Colin got his chance. He found he could walk perfectly well with his artificial limbs and he determined to go on flying. He was sent to a naval base as operations officer. But ground duties did not appeal to him and he joined the R.N.V.R. and volunteered for flying. He went on several important flights, including a trip to Brest as rear gunner.

Last year the Admiralty posted him to another elementary training school. The course completed he was promoted to sub-lieutenant and passed on to an intermediate flying training school. Now he has qualified to be a pilot.

Colin's father, who owns Wookey Hole Caves, served in the Royal Flying Corps in the last war, winning the Military Cross and bar. He is now serving as a Wing-Commander in the R.A.F. Intelligence Service.

Colin, who is 21 years of age, and well-known in the City, was educated at the Naval College, Pangbourne, and entered the Navy at 18 as a Midshipman, and served in the carrier Courageous. Early in 1939 he applied for transfer to flying duties and with other midgies was sent to the elementary flying training school at Gravesend Airport. It was while here that he met with his flying accident, which kept him in hospital for 18 months and appeared to have ended his flying career.

Photographer Jason Bryant looks into the life of a local hero who he spotted featuring in various editions of the Wells Journal from the time of World War II

Colin 'Hoppy' Hodgkinson was born at Glencot House near Wookey Hole in 1910. His father Gerard Hopkinson owned Wookey Hole caves.

His dad was also the Master of the Mendip Hunt from 1929 to 1932 and a decorated pilot with the Royal Flying Corps in World War I. In May 1939, having joined the Royal Navy, midshipman Hodgkinson was involved in a mid-air collision during a blind flying exercise at night, he was wearing a hood over his head at the time of impact. He was coming into land when his two-seater Tiger Moth biplane collided with a similar aircraft and fell into woods in Kent.

Colin was badly injured and was taken to Gravesend hospital for a double amputation – the right leg above the knee, the left leg below it. That seemed the end of his naval and flying career.

The outbreak of war found him slowly convalescing in the naval hospital at Chatham.

By Christmas 1940, he found he could walk perfectly well with his artificial limbs and was determined to go on flying. He joined the RNVR and went on several flights including a trip to Brest as a rear gunner in a bomber.

In 1941, the Admiralty posted him to elementary training school which he completed and was promoted to sub lieutenant and passed on to intermediate flying training school where he qualified as a pilot. In September 1942, he transferred to the RAF as a pilot officer and on the 19th of that month flew a Spitfire for the first time at Aston Down in Gloucestershire.

Hodgkinson's first mission over enemy territory was on February 3, 1943, with 131 Squadron. He was flying a Spitfire, one of 70, escorting 12 Ventura bombers to the marshalling yards at Abbeville. He shot down his first German fighter while he was in 610 Sqn under the command of Johnnie Johnson, who would become the highest scoring English pilot of the RAF in World War II.

Colin was on a combat air patrol over the east coast when he spotted four Focke Wulf 190s dropping bombs on to Brighton below him. He shot down one of these which crashed close to the end of Brighton Pier. His second victory came later in that year in August against another FW190, shot down during a escort mission of American Maulader bombers returning from an attack on Bernay airfield in France.



Colin shot down two Luftwaffe Focke Wolf 190s

pic007

PILOT-OFFICER COLIN HODGKINSON SAFE

PRISONER OF WAR IN GERMANY.

Pilot Officer Colin Shaw Hodgkinson, of Wookey Hole, who after losing both legs succeeded in becoming a Spitfire pilot, is a prisoner-of-war in Germany.

The first announcement that he had been captured came in a message read over the German radio, in which he said "Dear Mum, Sorry to give you so much anxiety. This is to say I am O.K. and well looked after."

The announcer said that Hodgkinson was injured when he was shot down but was now well on the way to recovery.

Pilot Officer Hodgkinson, who is a son of Wing Commander G. W. Hodgkinson, M.C., who was recently appointed the first Town Major of an Italian City, and Mrs. Hodgkinson, lost both his legs in a crash during a night blind-flying exercise in May 1939, before the war. For months he lay in hospital, but he had one thought in his mind—to fly again.

His determination won through. He longed to follow the example of Wing-Commander Douglas Bader, the legless pilot. The firm which made artificial legs for Bader soon had young Hodgkinson walking again. He returned to the Fleet Air Arm and by the end of 1941 was once again flying.

Then he asked to be transferred to the R.A.F. and eventually he qualified as a fighter pilot.

Pilot Officer Hodgkinson, who is 23 years of age, was educated at the Naval College, Pangbourne, and entered the Navy at 18 as a midshipman, serving on the carrier Courageous. Early in 1939 he applied for transfer to flying duties and was sent to an elementary flying training school at Gravesend. It was while here that he met with his flying accident, which kept him in hospital for 18 months, and appeared to have ended his flying career.

Last May Pilot Officer Hodgkinson opened Street's Wings-for-Victory Week.

able fen-ross car-ppy feet, of was and not-not-him. cat front ross ight into ided not at front the red, said, to did. give of ecio-the sok. put urn-kept use y." ton-

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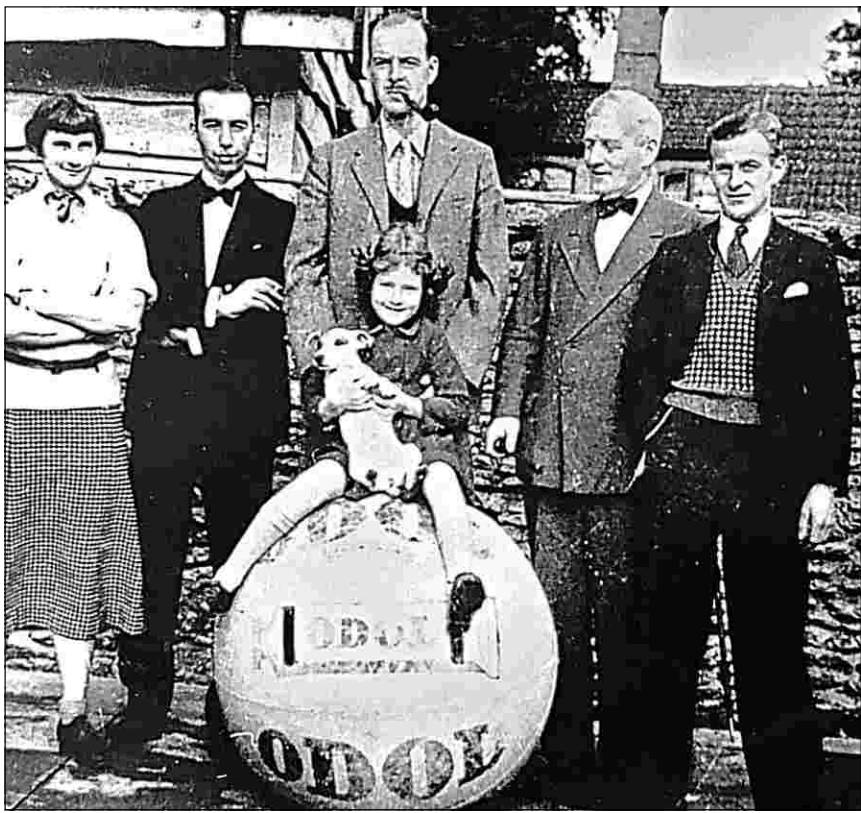
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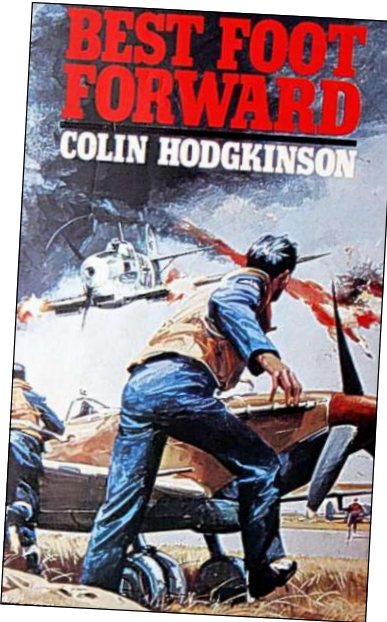
The Wookey Hole Pushball Team at the newly opened swimming pool in Easter 1935, featuring owner Gerald Hodgkinson, Colin Hodgkinson's dad

pic014



The Tiger Moth crash that claimed the life of the senior pilot and which led to Colin Hodgkinson having his legs amputated

pic002



Published in 1957, Colin's wartime story

pic001

New Limbs for Legless Pilot

WIRELESS APPEAL FROM PILOT OFFICER HODGKINSON

There has been a prompt response to the appeal of Pilot Officer Colin Shaw Hodgkinson, of Wookey Hole, the legless fighter pilot for a pair of artificial limbs and six stump socks. The appeal was made one night last week by wireless from the German camp where Pilot Officer Hodgkinson is a prisoner-of-war, and at once the Ministry of Pensions got in touch with the limb makers at Southampton.

A spare pair of legs was found to be available, and these will be sent out through the Red Cross.

After losing his legs in an air crash Pilot Officer Hodgkinson longed to fly again, citing the example of Wing-Commander Douglas Bader, the ace pilot, and for nearly a year was with the County of Kent Spitfire Squadron.

It was Pilot Officer Hodgkinson who demonstrated before 200 M.P.s and Mr. Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour, how well he could walk and move about by the aid of artificial legs.

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