The Messerschmitt fighter-bomber crash on Coulsdon Court Golf Course in 1940.

From July until September 1940 the Luftwaffe started attacking the RAF’s Fighter Command to attempt to gain air superiority as a prelude to invasion. This involved the bombing of English Channel convoys, ports, RAF airfields and supporting industries. This was the start of the blitz when the Luftwaffe concentrated on daytime attacks. However, the Luftwaffe's poor intelligence meant that their aircraft were not always able to locate their targets, and thus attacks on factories and airfields failed to achieve the desired outcome. As a result of this and other factors, Germany then switched to night time bombing of London and the major cities in Great Britain.

In the early morning of Friday 6th September 1940, Squadron Erprobungsgruppe 210 bombing raid escorted by ZG 26 Messerschmitt Bf110’s (twin-engine fighter-bombers) and Junkers Ju88s took off from the Calais-Marck airfield. The raid was a repeat of a similar attack of the 4th September and they were using the Calais airfield it being close to the English Channel. The squadron flew to Cap Gris Nez where they climbed for 14 minutes and then set a course of 298 degrees to Brooklands.

The squadron was stationed at the Abbeville Airfield at Picardie, Northern France. This airfield was a major German fighter base and home to Zerstörergeschwader (Destroyer Squadron)26 which was a wing of the Luftwaffe during World War II. The wing operated the Messerschmitt Bf 109 in the early phases, then the Messerschmitt Bf 110’s for the duration of the war.

The squadron attacked and hit the Hawker works at Brooklands Surrey, resulting in some damaged buildings and three German aircraft were lost.

At Brooklands, Hawkers was making Hurricane fighters and nearby Vickers was producing Wellington bombers. Although the factories had been camouflaged and the famous race track hidden by netting, the railway line and its triangular junction made it easily visible from the air. After the attack they set a course of 132 degrees which would take them to Boulogne and Safety.

On their way back to France they were attacked by the 111 Squadron from Kenley, one of the aircraft, a Messerschmitt Bf 110 (U8+CL) suffered damage, possible from Peter J Simpson in his Hurricane. The pilot tried to break away, and flee for home as machine gun bullets struck his aircraft. The wireless operator was wounded in the hand and the bombs were jettisoned. There was an explosion on board, probably caused by AA fire from the Lewis gunner stationed at the TA Drill Hall at the top of Marlpit Lane. The aircraft went into a spin, the wireless operator managed to bail out, and the aircraft crashed on Coulsdon Court Golf Course at 9.33am.

Nearby, a crew had finished their searchlight duty and witnessed the crash. The plane came down at a very steep angle ground resulting in almost total destruction as it impacted on the hard surface of the golf course, with its clay and the underlying chalk subsoil.

A warden was posted to stop souvenir hunters as there was lots of aluminium debris and cartridges, one onlooker saying there was also a strong smell of aviation fuel. Unteroffizier Egon Neuss, the wireless operator, who had been wounded in the hand, bailed out at 800 feet. He was captured by the searchlight crew, and taken prisoner of war. The wireless operator would give no indication of his unit or aircraft lettering. The Feldpostnummer was unknown, but an ID disc number, previously encountered with the crews of 3M+AA, U8+BB and 3U+EP had an undated relay list headed '3 Staffel J/ZG26' containing the names of the crew.

Unteroffizier Christoph Kiehn the pilot, was killed in the crash and was buried in nearby St John’s Churchyard, the remains were then transferred to Bandon Hill Cemetery, Wallington. In an agreement in 1967 between the UK and German government, a new cemetery was constructed in Cannock Chase to house German graves. He now lies at rest in Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery, Plot 5, Row 3, Grave 65.
The first page from the Death Certificate showing that Christoph Kiehn was aged 26, born in Saarlantern, now known as Saarland. His Squadron Zerstörergeschwader 26 was also known as the Horst Wessel wing. Horst Wessel was a far-right German gangster who joined the brown shirted street-fighting stormtroopers of the Nazi Party. The Horst Wessel Lied song also known “Raise the Flag” was the anthem of the Storm troopers and the Nazi Party.
Here is the well-known photo of the crash site. With the line of the boundary hedge and the Round Lodge, this gives us a good position of the crash site, which is just behind and to the right of the third green. Today there is a prominent line of poplar trees along the line of the hedge, these were planted later. The shadows show the time to be about mid-morning, there is a spade on the ground, the bystanders include 2 ARP wardens, 2 or 3 schoolboys and a man wearing RAF overalls. During the war Coulsdon Court was commandeered by the RAF as a mess and leisure centre. The Grange in Cannon’s Hill was used as an operations centre for Fighter Command Kenley, so the 10-minute walk between Coulsdon Court and the Grange would take you past the crash site.

Permission Red Kite Publishing.

Not much remained of UB+CL or its pilot after it plunged into Coulsdon Court Golf Course. The carefully placed blanket in the hole tells its own story.

The Round Lodge was built in Victorian times as a gatehouse to the Grange and was situated in Grange Park on the Coulsdon Road. It was used as an air-raid wardens’ post in WW2, and demolished in 1947.

Can be seen in the centre of the photo.
Local schoolboy, Derrick Smith, was on his way to Purley County School, Old Coulsdon when he witnessed the crash:

“One morning as we climbed the unmade road from Lodge Lane to Old Coulsdon we heard the crescendo whine of a plane coming down and looked up in time to see a Messerschmidt 110, a twin-engine fighter-bomber, diving vertically at tremendous speed out of the cloud above us. It disappeared behind the trees and as we ran in that direction, we heard the explosion and presently saw a plume of black smoke. The plane had nose-dived into the ground behind a house on the edge of Coulsdon golf course and there was little to see by the time we got there: a shallow crater of fresh earth in the green grass, a few lumps of twisted machinery, a great many small pieces of metal and fabric scattered everywhere and a pervading oily smoky smell. We had not seen any parachutes descending and presumably the two-man crew had perished. There was no way of knowing.”

Here is another account.

“I found out a bit more about the ME110 crash from an old friend last night.” These are his words. “How strange I lived in Cannons Hill, Old Coulsdon, our house backed on to the golf course. We were second house from the top. After the war another house was built at the very top, making us third. In 1940 a Messerschmitt 110 crashed half in our back garden and half on the golf course. It was damaged returning from London and was said to be finished off by the Lewis grounder of the search light unit at top of Marlpit Lane drill hall. The observer/rear gunner was captured in the recreation ground by members of searchlight unit. The pilot and both engines were still buried until golf course committee finally gave permission for a dig about end of 1970s. When we dug in the garden, bits of aluminium and bent cartridges always used to surface.”
A major recovery and excavation took place in 1976 by the London Air Museum, North Cray Road Bexley by its founder Mr Tony Graves, with the permission from Croydon Council. A Daimler-Benz DB 601 engine was excavated together with propeller boss, both undercarriage legs and tyres, tail wheel oleo, complete armaments, cockpit instruments, first-aid kit, pilots parachute and a port tail fin still bearing traces of Swastika marking. The site in Bexley was closed by the authorities due to lack of visitor facilities and the items were taken to the Tangmere Military Aviation Museum, Chichester.

In 1984 the site was re-excavated by Chris Bennett. The other Daimler-Benz DB 601 engine was removed, a propeller boss and blades unearthed together with both engine badges, another wheel oleo, pilot’s diary and parachute, together with first-aid kit, seat harness and cockpit instruments.

These 2 photos were taken in 2021 at the Tangmere Museum; the undercarriage may have been connected to the wheel oleo, an oleo strut was a shock absorber, this may have come from the Coulsdon site, the authorities there could not confirm this. There is also an engine from a Messerschmitt 110.
In April 2020 a group from the Lashenden Air Warfare Museum, Ashford used metal detectors to scan the area behind the 3rd. Green. Here is a small piece of the Messerschmitt fuselage found. This confirms the site is close to grid ref 51°18'34"N. 0°7'7"W. OS Grid Ref TQ 31236 58389.
A report from Dennis Knight’s Battle of Britain Sketchbook.

During 1940 Dennis Knight witnessed the dogfights taking place above his home on the outskirts of South London. In the 1960’s the historian and artist was one of the first people in Britain to undertake serious research into the Battle of Britain, along with a few other like-minded friends, Dennis travelled around the English countryside talking to eyewitnesses, making notes and drawing sketch maps to record what happened in that dramatic summer of 1940.

“On the morning of 6th September 1940, a Me110 crashed at Coulsdon Golf Course. Surrey. An artistic historian has reconstructed hundreds of Battle of Britain aircraft losses in accurate drawings after spending years travelling the English countryside researching the wartime events. Dennis Knight visited villages where stricken RAF and Luftwaffe planes met their end and tracked down surviving eyewitnesses to get first-hand accounts of the incidents. The 85-year-old combined his testimonies and local records to help him accurately recreate the downfall of hundreds of World War Two bombers and fighter planes in his colourful drawings.”

The drawing shows the stricken Messerschmitt about to crash, the wireless operator is shown as having bailed out, and in the distance, the crash site with a plume of smoke. The eyewitness accounts indicate that the plane was coming down at a much steeper angle than shown. The Girl Guide Hut is mistakenly shown as the Scout Hut. Two houses are mentioned, number 11 called Glennifer, where the owner in 2020 says he found some corroded metal in the back garden that looked like plane parts, and number 9 called Durban, where structural damage was discovered during re-roofing of their garage thought to be “bomb damage or something similar”. The owner of number 7 Canons Hill reported that in 1940 a Messerschmitt 110 crashed half in our back garden and half on the golf course. “When we dug the garden there were always bits of aluminium and bent cartridges to be found.”
This ariel photo has no date, put probably 1966.

The line of Lombardy Poplar trees along the boundary between the golf course and Bradmore Green have not yet been planted, this ties in with the photo of the crash site.

References
Red Kite Publishing. Nigel Parker's 'Luftwaffe Crash Archive' Volume 3
Tangmere Military Aviation Museum, Chichester.
Kenley Revival. Chris Burton kenleyrevival.org
Wingleader.co.uk. Dennis Knight’s Battle of Britain Sketchbook.

Coulsdon Manor Golf Course is not common land and there no rights of way passing near the third green. Please be aware of the dangers on a golf course.
Chris Watts 2023