

Old Timers

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Old Timers | Peter R March

IF YOU HAVE AN OLD TIMERS STORY

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Looking towards the centenary of the RAF



PHOTO: PAUL FIDDIAN

With four years to go until the centenary of the Royal Air Force's formation on 1 April 1918, the official launch of a major partnership between the RAF Museum and BAE Systems was marked on 14 February 2014 with the formal unveiling of BAE's EAP technology demonstrator in RAFM Cosford's Test Flight Collection. The aerospace company is 'supporting the transformation of the Museum in advance of the centenary'.

As reported in February's *Old Timers* the EAP went on public display last December, joining the Jaguar ACT in a new exhibition highlighting the role both played in Eurofighter Typhoon development.

A second important aircraft, Hawker Siddeley Kestrel FGA1 XS695 (photo above) was moved into the Test Flight Collection at the end of January when it was taken out of the Michael Beetham Conservation Centre (MBCC) after a full restoration. Developed from the initial Hawker P.1127 V/STOL aircraft, nine Kestrels were ordered for the Tripartite Evaluation Squadron (TES) in 1962. The TES was based at RAF West Raynham and included pilots and ground crew from the UK, USA and West Germany. The organisation used semi-prepared runways and grass at nearby abandoned airfields for testing the aircraft's capabilities on unprepared sites, paving the way for the production HS Harrier.

Kestrel XS695 was first flown at Dunsfold in February 1965 and by November had flown 141 sorties with the TES. During 1966 the aircraft was assessed for its handling characteristics, used for training and made appearances at the Hanover and Farnborough Airshows.

XS695's last flight occurred in 1967, when it was badly damaged in a landing mishap while with the Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment (A&AEE) at Boscombe Down. In 1972 it was allocated to the Royal Navy Engineering College at Manadon, Devon and later used for apprentice training and to simulate aircraft handling and flight deck procedures. After being transported by



Now undergoing conservation work and being repainted at RAFM Cosford, the first UK-built Panavia Tornado MRCA, PO2 XX946

Old Timers | A round-up of historic aircraft display and restoration

→ road to RAFM Cosford in November 2001, the Kestrel was stored until late autumn 2012, when it was moved into the MBCC. XS695 has been painted in its 1965 TES colours, which include tri-national roundels and fin flashes. This is the only Kestrel preserved in the UK, although a number can be found in the USA, six examples having been shipped across the Atlantic after the tripartite trials for further evaluation.

Moving off display and into the MBCC for conservation work and repainting at the end of January was the first UK-built Panavia (MRCA) Tornado. One of four 'prototypes', PO2 serialised XX946 was flown for the first time on 30 October 1974 by Paul Millett. It was initially painted in a striking red/white colour scheme, but during August 1976 it adopted the standard RAF grey/green camouflage. Grounded in December 1985 the aircraft was used for ground instruction until it was delivered to the RAF Museum at Hendon in November 1994. It was dismantled and moved to Cosford and put on display in March 2003. After renovation in the MBCC it will be repainted in its red/white colours as per its first flight.

Also in the MBCC in February was the RAF Museum's Hawker Typhoon Ib MN235 (photo above), the world's only surviving



PHOTO: PAUL FIDDIAN

example of this important WWII fighter. Built by Gloster Aircraft in 1944 it was shipped to the USA for testing. Stored for many years it was presented to the RAFM in 1968 by the Smithsonian Institute in exchange for a Hurricane. It was dismantled at Hendon last October and moved to Cosford where it is believed that it will be prepared for possible shipment to Canada on loan.



PHOTO: MARTIN OVERALL

Spitfires in Bahrain

Two Spitfires were shipped to Manama, Bahrain before Christmas to appear at the Bahrain International Air Show at Sakir Air Base and the associated Great British Week with its Advanced Engineering & Innovation Conference at the nearby F1 track in mid-January.

Leading UK aviation and automotive companies and universities highlighted education, engineering, technology and innovation at the events. BAE Systems sponsored RAF Museum Cosford's Spitfire XIX PM651's journey. Students from the Gulf Aviation Academy in Bahrain helped assemble the Spitfire ready to go in the static display for the start of the airshow.

Historic Flying Ltd's Spitfire T9 G-CCCA/PV202 (seen with McLaren MP4-12c Spyder in photo above) was specially prepared at Duxford last November, with a new paint scheme. Back in 1941, Bahrain, through the Fighter Fund financed the purchase of ten Spitfires to aid the war effort. All sections of the community in the Arabian Gulf raised a total of £50,000 and six aircraft carried the name BAHRAIN. One of these Spitfires, W3632, a cannon-armed Mk VB – which was first flown at Eastleigh on 15 July 1941 and allocated to No 54 Squadron at Hornchurch – provided the paint scheme for HFL's T9. It was put through a spirited display routine at the show by John Romain.

Night-Fright coming to Membury



Travellers on the M4 motorway in Berkshire will be familiar with the TV mast and service station at Membury, but few will realise that this is the site of a WWII airfield. From March 1944 it was home to the USAAF's 9th Air Force 436th Troop Carrier



Group (TCG) that played an important part in the Normandy landings, dropping paratroopers and towing Hadrian and Horsa gliders. Following the closure of RAF Membury in 1946 there has been limited aviation activity at the airfield and its past has largely been forgotten – but that is about to change. The Walker family purchased the Membury Estate in May 1993 and six years later moved the family business, Walker Logistics Ltd – which specialises in warehousing, distribution and transport – to the site, occupying some of the original wartime T2 hangars and new purpose-built facilities. It was only a matter of time before Philip and Charlie Walker took an interest in Membury's wartime history. Commercial pilot Charlie set about finding an aircraft type that had once flown from Membury. It was inevitable that his sights would soon be set on the USAAF's Douglas C-47 troop carrier.

With the help of Tony Bianchi and Tom Woodhouse from Personal Plane Services an aircraft was located in Arkansas USA. It was surveyed by DC-3 specialists Frank and Glen Moss of Shell Creek Aviation at Punta Gorda, Florida and as a result of a positive report, Douglas DC-3 N308SF was purchased by Walker Logistics in November 2012. Built for the USAAF as a C-47A-65-DL (serial number 42-100521) at Long Beach, California in October 1943 it was handed over on 2 November that year. Allocated to the European Theatre it was fitted out with military equipment at Fort Wayne, Indiana and flown to England to join the 436th TCG at Bottesford, Nottingham. Assigned to the 79th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS) and with the crew captained by 1st Lt William K Watson, the C-47 moved with the 436th to Membury on 3 March 1944. During the intensive work-up in preparation for D-Day the aircraft had the code S6 and nose art *Night-Fright* applied. It was flown operationally for the following twelve months before the

436th moved to France on 25 February 1945.

The newly acquired DC-3 had not only flown from Membury but had far more

provenance than could ever have been imagined. The owner's plan is to have the aircraft fully restored and returned to the UK to operate from its original wartime base as a flying memorial. There are further plans to build a museum at Membury as a memorial for the five troop carrier airfields in the area. The pilots who flew *Night-Fright* for the majority of its missions in Europe are in touch with the project and have sent photographs and memorabilia.

Charlie Walker takes up the story: "This restoration project is a three-stage process: paperwork, mechanical work and finally restoring the aircraft's original features. Before we could really begin, the correct paperwork had to be sought and completed. This was a time consuming and complicated task, but thankfully the main documentation is now in order. Following a ferry flight from Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, the mechanical work is being carried out by Glen and Frank Moss at Punta Gorda.

"The aircraft has been put through an approved FAA maintenance programme. However, we are going much further than this, such as building and installing an original set of brakes and original 'paddle blade' propellers etc. With the mechanical work completed we are restoring the aircraft as closely as we can to its original specification. After its war service *Night-Fright* was sold to a civilian operator in October 1945, spent 22 years from 1963 operating with the French Navy, before returning to civil use in the USA as N308SF in 1985. Most of the original fittings and instruments have long since been removed although there are several reminders of the aircraft's past such as the formation lights and 'flat-back' C-47 tail cone remaining. The process of tracking down all the items that would have once been fitted to the aircraft and re-installing them is a serious challenge. Glen has, to date, successfully sourced – amongst other things – a cargo floor and paratroop side benches. On the outside the big job of stripping the aircraft's paint back to bare metal has just been completed and planning the application of its WWII paint scheme is in hand. Hopefully *Night-Fright* will be flying back to its D-Day 'home' at Membury before too long." www.night-fright.com

Report & photos via Charlie Walker

Above: C-47A N308SF at Arkansas in 2012 and (inset) wartime nose art and pilot Bill Watson, in 1944

Top left: *Night-Fright's* regular crew, including 1st Lt William K Watson (left in photo)

Below left: taken at Membury in 1944, *Night-Fright* wearing 436th TCG and 79th 'S6-D' markings



Ashton made mobile

Staff and volunteers at the Newark Air Museum have given mobility to the rare Avro Ashton fuselage (photo above). This involved fixing specially designed wheeled rigs to the wing attachment points on the rear of the fuselage, enabling it to be lifted off the ground for the first time since was delivered to the museum in 2003. Subsequently a nose wheel rig was fitted, allowing the fuselage to be towed to a different location on 5 February. At the Southfield site it will also be easier to undertake the much needed restoration and rebuilding work on the fuselage.

The fuselage of Ashton WB491, which is listed as 'significant' on the National Aviation Heritage Register, was donated to the Newark Air Museum in March 2003 and was recovered from Woodford near Manchester. WB491 is the only remaining significant airframe part of the six Tudor 8 jet airliners (WB490-494, WE670) which were produced by Avro at Woodford as Type 706 'flying laboratories' in the early 1950s. Described as an 'engine and systems test-bed' the last Ashton was retired in

1962, the type having undertaken a range of engine and systems research and development programmes for aero-engine manufacturers, various government departments and external agencies.

The museum is now trying to locate the missing panels and instrumentation for the cockpit area and front fuselage, which were stripped out before the exhibit came to Newark. Photographs that the museum has available from its early days at Rhoose in South Wales seem to indicate that this area was complete and undamaged prior to its move to Woodford.

Several leads are already being pursued, with some Avro Ashton plans and the AP (Air Publication) having been located; and also with some new photographs being secured. However the museum trustees and volunteers are keen to pursue any fresh leads or sources of information. If you can help please make contact through the museum website www.newarkairmuseum.org
Report & photo Howard Heeley

Falklands 'survivor' on display at Aeroventure

An Aermacchi MB-339A that was flown by the Argentine Navy in the Falklands War is now on display at the South Yorkshire Aircraft Museum (SYAM) in Doncaster. Six of the Argentine Navy's ten new MB-339As were flown to Falkland Islands' Port Stanley Airfield on 24 April 1982. One of these Esquadrilla de Ataque jets subsequently flew into a hill and another was shot down by the British Army.

After the war one of the three MB-339s captured was shipped to the UK and put on display at the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton. This aircraft 0767/4-A-116, which was fitted with the



Above: captured Argentine MB-339A 0767/4-A-116 exhibited after the Falklands War at the Fleet Air Arm Museum is now in the care of the South Yorkshire Air Museum (photo left)

nose of 0761/4-A-110, was withdrawn from the museum in 1988 and went to Rolls-Royce at Filton. Here it was used for installation trials of the Viper 680-582 engine for the unsuccessful T-Bird II bid for the US JPATS competition. By 2002 the airframe was with Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust in store at Derby. Now with Aeroventure at SYAM it is the only ex-Argentine MB-339 preserved in the UK. www.southyorkshireaircraftmuseum.org.uk



PHOTO: PHILIP COLE

Seeing Britain from Above

Two Aerofilms camera operators sandwich their pilot in an AIRCO-converted DH9A



PHOTO: RAF MUSEUM

invaluable contribution to the war effort, as part of the Central Interpretation Unit at RAF Medmenham, Bucks. The Aerofilms Collection of over one million oblique aerial images was acquired for the nation in 2007 by English Heritage and its partners. In 2010 funding was secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Foyle Foundation to help conserve, digitise, catalogue and make accessible the earliest part of the Aerofilms collection under the 'Britain from Above' project. Over 95,000 images dating from 1919 to 1953 are available to explore online at the project's dedicated, interactive website: www.britainfromabove.org.uk.

The completion of the Britain from Above project is being celebrated with a series of exhibitions across the UK with the first of these open to the public at the RAF Museum from 20 February 2014 to 1 March 2015. Jointly presented with English Heritage, visitors can see the changing face of Britain in the 20th century through Aerofilms' unique aerial archive. This exhibition also includes aerial cameras, a fighter reconnaissance Spitfire (FR XIV MT847 from the Manchester Museum of Science & Industry) and Aerofilms' own A5 Autograph machine that was used to take accurate measurements from photographs in order to produce maps which proved invaluable to the Air Ministry in WWII.

In the area where the RAF Museum now stands in Hendon, North London, Aerofilms, the world's first firm of commercial aerial photographers, was established in 1919. For the next eighty years the company captured Britain's villages, towns, cities and landmarks from the air, providing unique views of the development of Britain's rural and urban landscape throughout the 20th century. During WWII the company was requisitioned by the Air Ministry and using its aerial interpretation skills made an



PHOTOS: FAAM

Kamikaze puzzle?

which the Museum is seeking help with translation. The markings are found in two places. On the left-hand side of the aircraft and on the hatch cover which would have been opened to arm the 1.25 tons of explosives in its nose. Another marking on the side of the aircraft is a cherry blossom, from which the Ohka takes its name – a Japanese symbol of flowering and rebirth.

First flown in 1944, the rocket-powered piloted 'missile' was designed to be carried on the underside of Mitsubishi G4M 'Betty' bombers to a height of 12,000ft and released in a steep dive. Once free of the Betty,

The former Japanese Navy Yokosuka MXY7 Ohka 11 piloted flying bomb, which has been hanging from the rafters of the Fleet Air Arm Museum for over thirty years, has been removed in preparation for a new display to commemorate the War in the Pacific.

Coming under the close scrutiny of the Museum's Curator of Aircraft, Dave Morris, the kamikaze aircraft has revealed some intriguing markings for

three solid fuel rockets would be ignited enabling the aircraft to reach speeds of up to 475mph and travel distances of 21 miles before reaching its target. Over 750 Ohkas were built but had only limited success against the US fleet during the invasion of Okinawa in April-May 1945. Of the fifteen surviving Ohkas today,

four are with museums in the UK. The FAAM's example will eventually undergo a detailed forensic process during which the paint applied after the war, will be removed layer by layer to return it to its original paintwork and markings. If you are able to assist in the translation of the Japanese insignia on the Ohka, please email Dave Morris at davem@fleetairarm.com.



Right: mystery markings found on the FAAM's Ohka

Fledgling takes shape in The Stork's Nest



In the small rural town of Fetsund north of Oslo there is an aircraft workshop known as The Stork's Nest. This listed building dating from 1889 was in continuous use by the Norwegian Armed Forces until 2000, except through the German occupation during WWII when it was a military depot. Not surprisingly one of the aircraft under restoration here is a relatively rare breed of German designed aircraft – a Fiesler Fi.156C Storch.

Built at the Morane Saulnier factory at Puteaux, near Paris, towards the end of the German occupation, it was given the *werke no 1816*, but being completed by the French as an MS.500 they too issued a serial No 43. Making its first flight on 23 November 1944

it was put into French Air Force service where it continued in the liaison and training roles until it was withdrawn and struck off charge on 5 May 1960. Allocated French civil registration F-BJQB it passed to the Aero Club D'ille Vilaine at Rennes until at least 1967, and appears to have made its last flight as such on 5 November 1969. At this point Doug Bianchi, Personal Plane Services at Booker, intended to purchase the aircraft and it was registered as G-AYKI on 2 October 1970, but during its ferry flight to the UK it made a forced landing in France, suffered damage and was quickly cancelled from the UK register in November 1970. It was then purchased by an American who shipped the aircraft to the USA during October 1972 and rebuilt the Storch to flying condition, making its 'second' first flight on 9 March 1973.

The Storch continued flying until the late 1980s, but in 1989 it suffered a ground collision with severe damage to the port wing. Stored for a while, it was then purchased by Richard Cayo who intended to rebuild the aircraft as 'BM+DC' of Jg54 and work was indeed started with wings being restored and covered in 1992. The fuselage was never completed and some thirteen years later the project was purchased by Erich Laetsch at Reno, Nevada. Tor Norstegard, who had been searching for a Storch rebuild project for some time, struck a deal with Erich, and the aircraft was shipped to Norway arriving at Fetsund in November 2007. It is intended to complete the Storch to represent an example from IV/Jg5 as 'H3+BF' that actually served in Norway during the German occupation. www.storch.no **Report & photo Peter J Cooper**

Americans at Duxford

The IWM Duxford has received a grant of £980,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the American Air Museum (AAM) redevelopment project. Built at Duxford in 1996-7 at a cost of £13.5million, the American Air Museum presents the biggest collection of American military aircraft outside the United States. It tells the story of American air power and the integral relationship between the US and the UK.

In releasing details of this major project the IWM states that there are three main aspects to the redevelopment project. The first is a dynamic website based around The Freeman Collection, a compilation of approximately 15,000 photographic prints and slides assembled by Roger Freeman (1928-2005), a highly respected aviation historian. The Freeman Collection shows the many and varied experiences of the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) in Britain during WWII. Images depict the different roles undertaken by members of the USAAF, as well as off-duty leisure time, the aircraft, the combat missions, events and the local communities in which the USAAF served. 'We will be asking people to help us uncover the stories behind the photographs by logging on and telling us what they know'. The second part of the project 'will be refreshing and re-energising the AAM. We will be displaying our key objects in new ways and redeveloping our existing displays and bringing the exhibition up to date with material covering the last two decades, looking at the personal stories and political context of the period.'

The third and biggest part of the redevelopment will be detailed conservation work on the aircraft and objects in the AAM to ensure that they are kept in good condition. This will involve lowering suspended aircraft from the ceiling, taking out the large plate glass wall and removing all eighteen aircraft from the building. This includes the only Boeing B-29 Superfortress in



PHOTO: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

'Monuments men' Matt Damon, Hugh Bonneville and George Clooney pictured on location at Duxford, the former RAF station's buildings also having a role in the film

Europe, the mighty B-52 Stratofortress, an F-111 that flew nineteen missions in the Gulf War and the high-flying, high-speed SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft - the only one that can be seen outside of the USA.

Another example of Anglo-American co-operation at Duxford came with the release in mid-February of the Hollywood film *The Monuments Men*. Directed by George Clooney – who is joined on screen by an all-star cast including Matt Damon, Cate Blanchett and Hugh Bonneville – the WWII thriller was partly filmed at Duxford. The big operation, involved several of the leading actors and some 300 extras over a nine day period. Filming took place across the museum, including the north side of the site which houses IWM's collections within historic buildings that made up the domestic side of the RAF fighter station. WWII aircraft and vehicles were brought to the museum to act as props and set dressing for the scenes. IWM Duxford's historic buildings, control tower and airfield significantly featured in the filming. See the film trailer at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czYqP1jbPTk>