

THE HURRICANE

The Newsletter of the North Weald Airfield Museum Association

EDITION: SPRING 2016

This year is of course the 100th for the airfield and more of that in the months to come. Technically we will not start commemorating the 100 until the summer and autumn so it will carry on through into the early part of 2017 as well. This September we can expect to see a great deal happening around September as the effects of North Weald opening were played out in the skies over Cuffley and Potters Bar. What actually happens will of course be subject to the weather on the day – the Great War aircraft [real or replica] are well known for being frail and unable to operate in anything but docile metrological conditions.



There are other anniversaries that fall in this year, probably the most important of which for the museum is the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the American Eagle squadrons at North Weald. A lot has been written on the Eagle Squadron's and a good part of it is inaccurate – the San Diego Air Museum still insists that they served at Biggin Hill rather than North Weald and regular messages from us simply do not hit home so it is for us to somehow turn the public around to get the right story.

Another anniversary is that it is 70 years since North Weald set up and controlled the major flying operation that was the Victory Fly Past. Actually coordinated by the now disappeared control room at Blake Hall it was a major aviation event although perhaps placed in the shadow of history by the flypast in 1945 simply because that was the year of the cessation of war.

It is now a long time ago and already quickly fading from memory but North Weald was the recipient of some stirring sights last year including the Sunday 11 October final tour of the Avro Vulcan XH558 across England. The tour included and well publicised flyover of North Weald airfield that was to be recorded for posterity on hundreds of cameras in still and moving images.

Many times North weald has played host to the Cold War V-Bomber and its cohorts, the Handley Page Victor and the Vickers Valiant at RAF Open Days and the lamented Fighter Meet air shows over the years but this was to be the last chance for most of Britain to see one of them fly.

It was a major event for the airfield with large crowds turning up and in some cases unable to get through the main gates before the aircraft arrived so suitable vantage points in the adjoining



The final visit. Avro Vulcan over North Weald with a police EC145 helicopter from Lippitts Hill in the background [TJ]

roads and fields were soon taken up. The airfield museum saw a welcome increase in visitors both before and after the main event.

As the old lady herself hove into view on the horizon and skirted the perimeter of the airfield all eyes were focussed only on her. Silently at first the graceful delta form ran in parallel to the main runway for a single pass that was heralded by the rising sound of her four Olympus engines and then the 'tin triangle' was gone forever.

The Vulcan was to fly again in a final flypast and landing around and into Doncaster Robin Hood Airport, the future home of the aircraft as a museum exhibit with AeroVenture. It may, like the Victor at Elvington, York undertake regular engine runs and trundling down the runway but it is unlikely ever to fly again. As a growing airport the opportunities to live display will be significantly less than at Elvington.

For another old timer it was end of the road in another more permanent manner.

Until December 2015 a long time North Weald resident was the 1945 Douglas DC-4 four piston transport N31356 painted with military marks as 44-42914. Alongside a similar example, a Douglas **C-54Q Skymaster 56498**, the aircraft first flew in to the Essex airfield en-route for the making of a movie about the Berlin Airlift. Unfortunately, the movie was never made and the pair remained firmly grounded for many years at North Weald where the ravages of the weather took their toll.

The long expected demise of the DC-4 took place on-site at the hands of AERS Ltd., based at the airport in Southend-on-Sea Essex www.aircraftrecyclingsolutions.com

The complete nose of the transport was removed and transported off-site to preservation in Cheshire with the rest of the airframe reduced to produce.

Our new website www.nwamuseum.co.uk has now settled down and any real need to resurrect the old website address fades by the day. Too much time has now passed for us to gain from the 'customers' of the old address, the new has taken on a life of its own though not without the odd glitch on the e-mail and other elements. Thanks to Adrian Harrison our Webmaster for providing such excellent and cost-effective service.

At the start of this year a counter was added to the new site, more out of curiosity than anything, and we were amazed to find that the site was already attracting an average of 400 visits a month in the depth of winter when the museum is closed and not really attracting much attention.

Another job we finally completed in the winter was the achievement of Accreditation from the Museum & Galleries Commission, a regularly repeated test of the museum's worth and upkeep of standards. This is the third such test since we started taking part in it at the start of this century.



GETTING OUT AND RECOGNISED

One of the tests included in the Museum & Galleries review is whether the museum is getting its message out to the potential market and there have been several areas in which the museum has come up trumps. Trustees undertake to give talks to groups such as Probus and of course in many ways this issue of *The Hurricane* is part of the mission to inform a wider audience about North Weald and its museums. In the past it has been restricted to members only but in the new era of 'information' there is a need to aim it at new audiences that might not naturally select an aviation magazine by choice.

An area of concern to many is the lack of local news media. In recent years' local papers and their staff have been decimated by a shift in the apparent needs of the people. New media has sprung up but it tends to be under resourced and ever more localised. This one remains in consideration and no one pretends that *The Hurricane* can in any way replace a regular local news organ.

Through the museum Trustee Eric Proberts the museum was able to put on and support a North Weald Airfield Museum display as part of the annual WW1 Exhibition at the Galleywood Heritage Centre near his home in Chelmsford on November 20.

The museum received valuable exposure and feedback from this prestigious event www.galleywoodheritagecentre.org.uk/



More recently the museum was at Tourism event at the Marriott Hotel in Waltham Abbey and then at the USAF Travel Show at RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk. Local Tourist Office staff members Vikki and Nicola, Tricia Gurnett from King Harold Day, Epping & Ongar Railway, Epping Forest District Council and Arthur Moreton our former Chairman had a great day with loads of interest in what the area had to offer.

Arthur, the Official Historian and Ambassador for North Weald Airfield, had loads of customers anxious to hear about the US volunteer pilots, (the Eagle Squadron), who came over in 1940 to join the RAF and were based at North Weald. Very appropriate for today's US airmen at Lakenheath and Mildenhall to learn about, especially as it is North Weald's 100th anniversary year. Hopefully the day spend going to them will result in them making their way to North Weald in the coming summer weekends.

For the record the American Museum at the Imperial War Museum facility at Duxford has recently completed a major refurbishment and re-opened in March. In terms of actual airframes, the contents are not drastically changed but how they are displayed and interpreted has changed.



FOR THE NEW SEASON

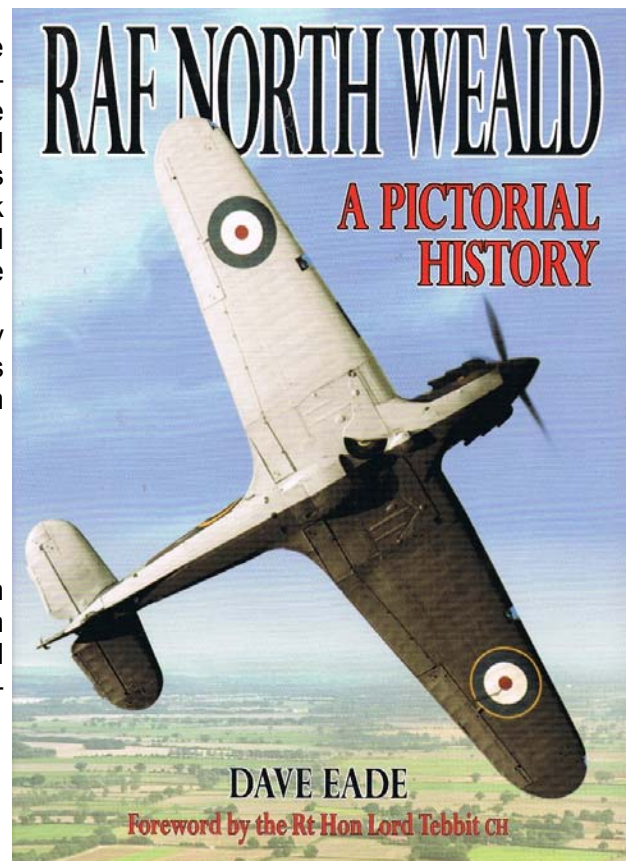
We once again have a long overdue reprint of new Entry Tickets to give to visitors guiding them around the rooms during their visits. This edition replaces an original designed by former Trustee Bill Aitken, and is a major change on the previous offering with larger plans available for older eyes! Bill set up the original museum website before moving the Australia some years ago. Although somewhat outdated it is still on-line <http://northwealdairfieldhistory.org/>

And do not forget to get your 100-year Commemorative Badge if you did not pick one up at the end of last season. They are available to purchase at various outlets on the airfield or from the museum by post at £5 plus postage.

Also back in stock is that excellent book by Dave Eade 'RAF North Weald – A Pictorial History.' Originally on offer at prices around £19 it can now be bought for just £10 from the museum or the local branch of RAFA. At the moment only the museum is offering a mail order service for this stunning book but this may change. Check out our website for mail order details or simply call in to the museum at the weekend.

The owner/publisher of the book sadly passed away and in a deal with the family all the remaining copies of this book have been bought up by Arthur Moreton and Bryn Elliott.

New displays for the In The Beginning/Wulstan Tempest Room are currently the subject of talks with the Heritage Lottery Fund and, all being well should appear around the time of the Centenary this summer.





The airfield and other local attractions being promoted at the USAF Travel Show at RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk. Local Tourist Office staff members Vikki and Nicola, Tricia Gurnett from King Harold Day and Arthur Moreton representing all parties associated with the airfield. *Images via Tricia Gurnett.*



Below: Still on sale the 100 years North Weald Calendar. Worth the cost for the artworks alone!

100 Years  **1916-2016**

North Weald Airfield

100th Anniversary Calendar 2016



100 years later a wide range of historic and General Aviation aeroplanes still fly from the Airfield, which continues to thrive

WHATS'S ON

- ⇒ **8 June 56 Squadron 100th anniversary.** Commemoration of this RAF squadron will be on the airfield
- ⇒ **18/19 June Air Britain Fly In.** The annual gathering of Air Britain members is open to all from 9am each day. Entry vehicle and driver £12. Additional entries £6 per person. Under 18s free. www.air-britain.com
- ⇒ **30 June Airfield Night Vigil** marking the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme at the Control Tower. <http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/>
- ⇒ **17 July Airfield Centenary Community Fete.** Not an air display but there will be aircraft coming and going throughout the day and plenty sitting on the ground for inspection and photographing. Standard entry fee gives attendees lots of free stuff and profits will be ploughed into charity. <http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/>
- ⇒ **7 August Nostalgaïr** operated by The Squadron.
- ⇒ **4 September North Weald Airfield Museum Open Day** www.nwamuseum.co.uk
- ⇒ **15 September Battle of Britain Film Night** at The Squadron www.northwealdflyingservices.com/
- ⇒ **17 September RAFA Wings Day** www.rafa.org.uk
- ⇒ **18 September Battle of Britain Sunday Services**
- ⇒ **13 November Remembrance Sunday.**

Also in mid-September – date to be announced – will be commemorations of the 100 anniversary of the shooting down of the airships attacking London. The locations at the centre of attention will be Cuffley and Potters Bar. We believe that these commemorations should include en-route flyovers of North Weald by Great War aircraft/replicas. As ever with these frail aircraft it will be weather permitting.

MEMBERSHIP DETAILS HOW TO JOIN

We accept all currencies in welcoming you to museum membership—becoming a Friend of North Weald Airfield Museum as long as it means the same as £12.50p!

You can join through the museum www.nwamuseum.co.uk

MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

The museum is closed for the winter until April 2016

When we open again entry will, as usual, be free for members.

Except on Special Event Days visitors will be charged standard rates for entry:

Adults	£2
Concessions	£1.50
Children [5-15]	50p

Group rates vary but generally there is a minimum charge of £50 per group.

As if those events were not enough the Epping & Ongar Railway [EOR] will be supporting various airfield events and holding its own special events during the coming year. The most recent were in February and March up for late April is the Spring Diesel Gala on April 23-24.

In May they have a couple of food based events – on the 7th it is the Cockney Sparrow Dining Train (Pie, mash & liquor) and on the 21st the Poppadum Prairie (Curry, rice and naan bread and of course poppadum & pickles) if that suits your dining aspirations!

C O N T A C T

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ADVERTISING AND THE HURRICANE

One way in which the NWAMA can earn income and to finance the production of hard copies of the Newsletter is advertising. Advertisers need circulation beyond the membership and they also need to know who is reading the Newsletter. If you pass this edition on please let us know who to so we can help finance your reading!

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The Hurricane includes artwork produced for it by Ian J Commin of Insight Design of North Burnham, Slough SL1 6DS. In some cases it may not be possible to indicate the source of this material directly associated with the images used.

100 Years  1916-2016

You may get confused in the coming year with the numerous '100 years' commemoration logos. The museum did not really expect to find that its 2015 designed logo would find favour to a wider

audience in being based on the accepted village sign and earlier commemorative badges and being first in the field. Even so none of us really expected that four different planning committees would seriously come up with four very different logo designs – the majority it seems designed this year!

LETTERS

These two letters [well e-mails really] are from the owner of the artefacts the museum displays on Flying Officer R E P [Peter] Booker in the Battle of Britain themed room.

Hi Bryn

Thanks for forwarding the Hurricane for me to read. I thought you might be interested to know that recently I have been in correspondence with a chap from Holland called Fred Vogels, who has created a wonderful historical web site about the war, and is trying to keep memories alive. On the site I happened across a photo of my uncle taking off in a Typhoon on D Day that I had not seen before. When I mailed Fred, he said he'd like to make a personal story about my uncle and would be grateful for any information I had to help him. I forwarded copies of everything I had, and he has made a wonderful personal story about REP, and posted it on the website. Below is the link to it. I thought you might like to make mention of it in the next edition of the Hurricane, and hopefully it might encourage other families to follow suit.

<http://www.backtonormandy.org/personal-stories/>

Do let me know what you think
Best wishes
Malcolm Sutherland

And then...

Dear Bryn

I've just had a thought. I've been following up something that is written about in REP's personal story on the website Back to Normandy. Below is a section of text taken from the 1941 tab in his story

May 1941 the Germans made 71 major raids on London and 56 on other cities. On Sept 17 1940 Hitler postponed the invasion of Britain indefinitely - following the Battle of Britain.

Peter remained with 56(F) Squadron, at North Weald, becoming Leader of 'A' flight until 23 April 1941. He was officially promoted to Acting Squadron Leader on 20 April 1941. On leaving he was presented with his most appreciated medal - given to him by Bryan, WillyWicks' on behalf of the lads left behind in the old 56 Squadron. The presentation case, a Kensitas cigarette packet, contained a crudely made 'iron cross' suspended from a piece of deckchair canvas from a large safety pin. Peter seemed to value this higher than official awards.

I had discussions with my aunt, his sister, who confirmed that the "mock award" referred to above, was among his personal effects given back to the family after the war, and that she still has it. A photo of it, I find is truly amazing.



REP Brooker has no known grave. He died in his Tempest near Wittenberg in 1945 and is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial, Panel 264.

GREAT WAR RECOLLECTIONS

In the last edition we featured text from a 1978 letter by an unknown person recalling the Great War. Since then the final 5th page of this letter has been unearthed - all of two lines and a signature – and we now know that the writer was “A J Hyde” but know no more of the person or even where they may have lived.

LOCAL NEWS ON THE AIRFIELD

You can expect to see some changes on the airfield in the months ahead. As noted previously one of the Douglas DC-4 aircraft has now been broken up and ‘parted out’ after many years on the airfield. The nose section of this aircraft has been preserved in the north west it has gone to Burtonwood.

If you visited the airfield last year you may recall the incongruous detached house that was sitting on the concrete apron outside Aces High. The building has now gone away having served its purpose as a double glazing and insulation project.

A number of new mini-hangars have sprung up on the airfield and these mainly house modern light aircraft.



The £4,000 charity funds raised by last years 2015 Community event on the airfield were handed over in a ceremony in late February.

The recipient last year was the local branch of the Royal Air Forces Association [RAFA]. Grace Thomas who is a member of North Weald RAFA and the widow of Warrant Officer Len Thomas a bomb aimer/gunner with the Pathfinders and one time crew member of the Lancaster S Sugar preserved in the RAF Museum accepted the cheque from representatives of EFDC. Also in the line up were EFDC Vice Chairman Jean Lea, Arthur Moreton the Chairman of the RAFA and John Young from The Squadron.

The beneficiary for this years Air Fete 100th Anniversary Community Day on 17 July will be Voluntary Action Epping Forest.



THE MESS

Thankfully museum member Keith Jones, a professional installer of security systems, was able to further bolster the defences of the building by donating and fitting exterior cameras.

Thank you Keith!

We are now looking for more help in financing more cameras which he will again fit for us without cost.

© NWAMA/Dawn

On a negative note the tiled front of the museum was damaged by unidentified intruders who apparently used the covered area to gather. Repairs are in hand.

Meanwhile over on the north side of the airfield near Weald Hall and The Squadron Peter Teichman has announced that there will be changes to his small one-man fleet of Second World War fighter aircraft. He plans to dispose of both the Hurricane and P40 to allow his team to restore another Spitfire acquired from Russia.

The actual move is not thought likely to take place this season but you should bear in mind that when they are sold they may leave the UK 'forever' so this could be a last chance for you to inspect them here.

The unique Mk IIB 'Hurribomber' presented in the colours of RAF 174 Squadron returned to the skies after restoration in January 2009 and became a regular sight over the Epping Forest and it flew on tests and on way to numerous UK and Europe air events.

Following the end of hostilities the airframe was sold off to the private sector, as were many surviving RCAF Hurricanes at that time, often becoming much needed 'hardware stores' donating their parts to keep the tractors and machinery running on the many enormous farms of the Canadian prairie. Teichman's aircraft was lucky and remained substantially whole and was acquired by collector Jack Arnold in the 1970's. After passing through the hands of other collectors she was purchased by Tony Ditheridge of Hawker Restorations Ltd., and returned to the UK awaiting restoration work which began in Suffolk during 2005. The project made steady progress until it was acquired by Hangar 11 Collection in 2007 and re-registered as G-HHII marked as BE505.

The Curtiss P-40M, serial number 43-5802, was manufactured in October 1943 and assigned to a RCAF squadron as serial no. 840. She subsequently flew with a number of RCAF squadrons, amassing a total of only 732 hours in military service. The aircraft was retired in 1950 and moved to Oregon State University to act as an instructional aircraft. Following a long period of storage at Troutdale Airport, Oregon, she was acquired in the late 1970's by well-known P-40 expert Tommy Camp, based in Livermore, California. Fortunately, the airframe was found to have survived in remarkably good condition and was suitable for a restoration to flying condition. This was sympathetically carried out in the early 1980's and she flew again in 1982.

Today, the aircraft represents P-40N-1 Warhawk 44-2104590, "Lulu Belle", flown by 2nd Lieutenant Philip R. Adair, a pilot with the United States Army Air Force's 89th Fighter Squadron, 80th Fighter Group of the 10th Air Force in the Far East. <http://www.hangar11.co.uk>

Management changes on the airfield have led to alterations within The Squadron/North Weald Flying Services. Alan Crouchman is no longer working for the company and has retired.

North Weald Flying Services is a CAA licensed engineering company authorised to carry out general aviation maintenance in accordance with approvals held and until recently Alan Crouchman, was the director responsible for the day to day running of the site. As well as being the public face of The Squadron Alan is well known for his love of the Martin Marauder and being the local 387th Bomber group Historian. The 387th was the unit posted to the former USAF base at Chipping Ongar – now mainly returned to agriculture.

The café and engineering base we now know as The Squadron is located on the site of the former base of one of the Norwegian Squadrons 331/332 and therefore is the natural centre of interest for them whenever they are in the UK. The modern complex of huts moved to the site from elsewhere only opened in 1989, in those days it operated under the stewardship of Anthony Hutton.

At the time aircraft owners expressed their desire to fly in formation and so Anthony Hutton, leader of the Harvard Formation Team, devised a course available to pilots with a minimum of 30 hours. The course originally involved Harvard's and Chipmunk's but this later included the 'new' Yak 52s, Extras, Yak 11s and other aircraft. A variation on this scheme continued into recent times.

A LIVING AIRFIELD

Occasionally visitors the museum express surprise that the museum has no aircraft and have to be directed to the real wealth of our position in having a living historical airfield on our doorstep. Far from having static exhibits sitting in a hangar we have the joy of real living and breathing exhibits accessible just across the fence. Some are new but most are of an age and a significant number [like the Teichman collection] are breathtaking and quite likely to roar into the air just by our back door.

What happens on the airfield today? Well the easy answer is 'lots' – North Weald is definitely very much a living airfield and the number of days that nothing is happening can be counted on one hand. Even when it is clamped in with fog and visible flying aviation apparently grinds to a halt there are aircraft to be repaired and crews to be trained. And the North Weald based air ambulance is both part of the regular air traffic and at the centre of training for the greater good.

The founder of the first paramedic unit in Europe, Prof. Douglas Chamberlain, spoke to an 85-strong audience of doctors, paramedics, nurses, students and other emergency services personnel at the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust's monthly Clinical Governance Day held at North Weald Airfield in mid-March.

Prof. Chamberlain, who has dedicated his career to pioneering the resuscitation techniques that are now common place amongst the emergency services and save lives every day, was invited to speak at the event hosted at North Weald Airfield - home of the Herts Air Ambulance.



EHAAT opens its doors to the wider healthcare and emergency services community each month. An open invitation goes out to all those with an interest in pre-hospital critical care to share its governance meetings. Every event is themed around an element of emergency care and, as well as case presentations, audits and journal reviews, include presentations from expert speakers from a variety of clinical backgrounds.

Another group regularly meeting on the airfield is one concerned with fighting crime. The Cross Border Liaison group is an initiative that draws together representatives from the Metropolitan Police (Waltham Forest, Redbridge & Enfield), Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Hertfordshire Constabulary, Suffolk Constabulary and many other law enforcement agencies for an Epping Forest District Council sponsored quarterly meeting in the Hunter Conference Room, Control Tower, North Weald Aerodrome.

WATCH YOUR WATCH

There may not be much in the way of uniformed police people to watch walking down the street these days but Essex Police have been doing their darndest to confuse us with a whole plethora of schemes to get us to do the job of law enforcement ourselves!

A recent document suggests that we have a breath-taking line up of Watch groups – not all of which are yet in service and a fair few that have failed to catch on with the potential members.

Neighbourhood Watch – the old original, to which thanks to a variety of police forces we can add such as Allotment Watch; Business Watch; Caravan Watch; Church Watch; Dog Watch; Faith Watch; Farm Watch; Forest Watch; Park Watch; Countryside Watch; Golf Watch; Heritage Watch; Horse Watch; Hospital Watch; Hotel Watch; Industrial Watch; Junior Watch; Litter Watch; Marine Watch; Pub Watch; Plant Watch / Trailer Watch; School Watch; Shop Watch; Speed Watch; Taxi Watch; Youth Watch.

There may be more to come of course and I have no doubt that a competition will soon bring in a whole string of possible names.... stopped watch, don't watch, can't watch... you know the sort of thing! Oddly there is no Airfield Watch although such groups as Air-Britain already undertake activities that could be assumed as being next best thing. In both the UK and USA the plane-spotter fraternity are encouraged by authorities to report anything suspicious as they do their own thing seeking out aircraft to photograph and record.

ANOTHER LOCAL PLAN

Plans to carve up the lush green lung that the vastness of North Weald Airfield are never far away it seems. Even if the plans to build thousands of houses on the airfield have been temporarily thwarted there will always be a temptation to overturn that in time. The last plan was overturned in part by a genuine desire by local people to maintain the aviation heritage locally. As more housing is built this is liable to be diluted by new residents with less aviation and local connections.

The most recent move by the NW Parish Council is to interest local residents in the North Weald Neighbourhood Plan

The 7,000 local residents were invited to a special meeting in February to help the parish council decide whether to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan. The 'council was already concerned with the poor level of support with very few residents actively engaging in the process and expressing support for such a plan.

A Neighbourhood Plan must be genuinely community led, and its success relies on public involvement. The parish council is looking for residents who are willing to give up some of their time to dedicate towards the tasks and activities needed to create such a plan.

As with all such projects, there is a cost implication to the Parish however if there are enough professional people and residents within the Parish (such as planners, urban designers, printers, architects, developers etc.) willing to be involved offering their expertise, the cost can be greatly reduced.

www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk email ourplan@northweald-pc.gov.uk.

■ 132 pages ■ 245mm x 170mm (9½in x 8½in) ■ Perfect-bound (square spine)

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HOW LONG?

Aviation history is set to be made in the UK this summer when, in a major air show 'first', the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II, the Joint Strike Fighter, makes its much-anticipated international display debut.

Visitors to the Royal International Air Tattoo at RAF Fairford will be the first outside the US to see the stealthy, supersonic aircraft's state-of-the-art capabilities when it displays on all days of the air show in July. Air Tattoo organisers anticipate that examples of the F-35B, the short take-off/vertical landing version, will demonstrate the Harrier-like 'hover' capability required for operation from austere land bases and aircraft carriers. Plans to speed up the purchase of 24 of the multi-role combat aircraft will still only see them arriving by 2023—some seven years away!



© Jamie Hunter

That marks a major historical contrast. The aircraft of stick and string days barely lasted a 2-3 years in service and even that legend the Spitfire flew in 1936, was fighting a war in 1939 and obsolete in about seven-years. This modern aircraft has been in development since 1996, first flew in 2006 and entered service in the USA in 2015 and yet we in the UK are still going to be waiting for it seven years later!

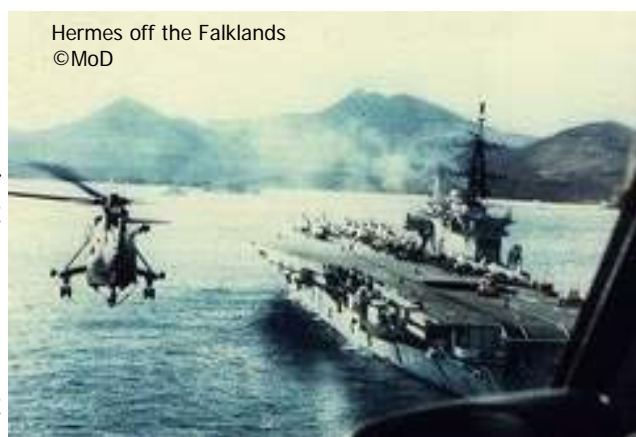
Who knows, it may still be around in fifty years – after all the USA still has not got rid of its B-52 bombers!

In a similar vein, what do you do with a decommissioned aircraft carrier? The British had an answer back in the 1980s when they sold the former HMS Hermes to India but what do the Indians do with it now they have finished with it some 25 years later?

The usual expectation is scrap but the Americans have turned them into floating museums, or sinking with a view to them becoming hulks to dive on – or even coral reefs.

The INS Viraat is the world's oldest operational aircraft carrier it was in the service of Britain and India over a 60-year operational span, INS Viraat is currently making its last cruise as a part of the Indian Navy. It's bound for Mumbai where it will be decommissioned in June.

It is proposed that the old ship will not die even now. There are plans in place to turn her into a tourist attraction – a hotel with 500 rooms and a conference hall to seat 500 people. It all seems so perfect – it comes with its own heliport and surely the people will flock to look around it?

Hermes off the Falklands
© MoD

Meanwhile the salt of the sea eats into the metalwork and weakens the hull and there will come a time when the vessel will simply become dangerous [remember the USS Texas [in the last edition?]]. Still that is a problem for their children's children!



Sadly this year will be another watershed for air displays and we may never see the big shows we recall from our youth ever again. Every so often an air accident at an air show moves the goal posts and unfortunately last year's crash of the North weald based Hawker Hunter at Shoreham is proving to be just that.

The aircraft was taking part in a flying display at Shoreham Airport during which it conducted a manoeuvre with both a vertical and rolling component, at the apex of which it was inverted. Following the subsequent descent, the aircraft did not achieve level flight before it struck the west-bound carriageway of the A27. Eleven people on the ground were fatally injured. Although a number were clearly observing and enjoying the show for free none of them were actually at the show. In September the air accident investigators issued an interim report [Bulletin S3/2015] about the accident and in December a further Special Bulletin, [S4/2015], came out to highlight findings about ejection seat safety and the maintenance.

In October the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) published its Review of Civil Air Displays which pointed the way to making air displays safer and some will say boring. This was followed up in later January with a document that sets out actions that impact on UK civil air displays in 2016.

Like all activities in life we carry on until clearly there are problems and the AAIB seem to have identified areas in which the people running the Shoreham display did not have as much control of what happened as they perhaps should have done.

It appears that although the Hunter flew the majority of the aerobatic manoeuvres (including steeply banked turns) away from the crowds and the airfield there were numerous instances where it was flying other than straight and level over areas of population and congestion nothing to do with the airfield or the show and therefore outside the control of the display organisers. As a result fourteen Safety Recommendations have been made and many potentially thrilling air events will simply not stay viable because of their surroundings. Old aircraft – and even the Hunter is at least 40 years old – will likely have to behave like old aircraft. Why would we expect a 70 years old aircraft like a Hurricane or Spitfire that was originally designed to have a flight expectancy of weeks to be twisting and turning in the peaceful skies above us like its pilot was in imminent danger?

https://assets.digital.cabinet-office.gov.uk/media/56e178f240f0b6037900001b/S1-2016_G-BXFI.pdf



That recent crash has had a very negative effect on attitudes to Hawker Hunter aircraft, air displays and North Weald in some quarters but it was not always so. Forty years ago the area was proud to be the home of the 111 Squadron Black Arrows display team. Seen here planning a sorties are the 1956 team of Beck, Garrett, Topp, Teppenden, Goodwin and Aird.