



BAHG Newsletter

Issue 7, Dec 2012



BLEU Comet XV144 landing in fog (B2466D Sept 1968)



Model W-wing in 8x8 tunnel (A10146 1994)

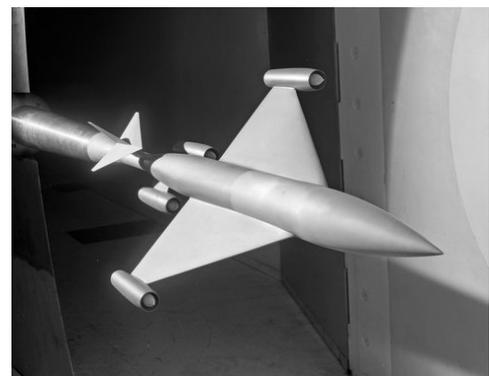
Stocking filler, anyone? All the hardback copies from the previous issue of Wings Over Thurleigh having been sold, we have embarked on yet another edition, this time in paperback. This is now available, priced at £15, plus £6 P&P. It includes all the photographs in the previous (Third) edition. Please contact us if you would like a copy.

Scope The interests of the Bedford Aeronautical Heritage Group primarily embrace the work of the Royal Aircraft Establishment (and its successor organisations DRA and DERA) at Bedford. The success of the RAE was due in large part to the team ethos and the contributions of everyone in the team – research scientists, technical support staff, hangar staff, air traffic, firemen, police and admin. Our “community” today, to whom we send this newsletter is strong in some areas (scientists) but weak in others (hangar staff). If you know anyone you think would like to receive the newsletter, please let us know or ask them to make contact. The Radar Flight Trials Unit (RFTU) moved from Pershore to Bedford in 1976/77 as a “Lodger Unit” managed from RSRE Malvern. However, as residents at Thurleigh, they are still within our scope. We will have some information on this in a future issue.

News We have been approached by the RAF Museum Hendon to see whether we would like to have some films surplus to their needs which deal with Naval aviation, including catapult launching and arrester gear trials at Bedford. The information about these films raises some questions. In the 1950s and 1960s, was Thurleigh the only airfield in the UK to have a shore-based catapult and arrester gear? If anyone can provide answers, please contact us.

Negatives Through contacts with colleagues at Malvern/Pershore we have been fortunate to acquire recently a box of some 60 glass negatives related to early days at BLEU Martlesham Heath. Checking them against our records we find that they fill a number of gaps (but not all). There are also 11 not previously listed.

Wind Tunnel Models Over the years, several hundred wind tunnel models were made and used at Bedford. Our photographic log books make reference to such models as 2250 (EFA) or 811 (Concorde) but we have no comprehensive record. We believe models numbered below 300 were used in any of the 3x3, 13x9 and 8x8 tunnels. Then some rationalisation took place to give 301-399 HSST; 401-499 13x9; 701-799 3x3; 801-899 8x8. Later, there was the 2000 series. We also have many photos (see examples shown) of models in workshops and tunnels for which the model number is not known. Some models have recently been loaned from Dstl and are stored by FAST at Farnborough. As a result, we are trying to build up our knowledge on all wind tunnel models. Can anyone help clarify, especially to identify un-numbered models?



Work in the Archive As well as giving talks and preparing this newsletter we spend significant time working to catalogue prints of the early construction, building up our database of negatives, scanning negatives, etc. We will give more details in the next issue.

Talks Over the past 2 months we have given talks to the Bedford Millennium Probus Club, Bedford Castle Rotary Club and to a Northamptonshire audience at Knuston Hall. We are also trying to expand our “outreach” to embrace local schools and organisations such as Air Cadets.

Web Site BAHG is preparing a web site which will go live in the new year. We hope this will enable us to make ourselves known to a wider section of the public, and encourage enquiries. The next Newsletter will give more details.

Bedford Aeronautical Heritage Group

Don't forget, to contact us with any news or comments, please email (bahg-bt@hotmail.co.uk).



Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year to All



Control Tower The plaque commemorating the official opening of the Control Tower at RAE Bedford is now in the BAHG Archive thanks to Mike Johnson. Mike happened to be visiting the Control Tower when contractors were removing equipment after the airfield had closed in 1994. Overhearing one of the contractors stating that he would “slip it into his van”, Mike took possession of the plaque himself, and it resided in his garage until he became aware of BAHG. Needless to say, we will be pleased to hear of any other items that may have been similarly saved from loss or destruction.

FAST Three people from BAHG (Gerry Shanks, Mike Dobson, Barry Tomlinson) visited the Farnborough Air Sciences Trust (FAST) on 20 Nov 2012, partly to hold general discussions and then to participate in the FASTA AGM in the evening. A current challenge for FAST is to achieve “accreditation” by the Arts Council as a museum. Once accredited, FAST will be in a stronger position to apply for grants and also to apply for recognition as a Collection of National and International Importance. Bedford is included (and identified) in the application for Accreditation, as part of FAST. There are no specific implications for BAHG that impact what we do. Readers may have seen the recent (11 Nov) broadcast of the BBC Antiques Roadshow from inside Farnborough’s historic wind tunnels. Part 2 of this event is currently scheduled for 24 Feb 2013. FAST’s web site (www.airsciences.org.uk) provides details of their current and future activities. We encourage you to join FAST. They have helped us financially.

Visit The FAST Museum at Farnborough is well worth a visit. We wonder if there would be interest from you, the readers, if BAHG were to organise a mini-bus trip to the museum. Please let us know.

RAE Aircraft In earlier issues we have outlined briefly the history of certain research aircraft – so far HP115 and Harrier 175 (Issue 2), BAC 1-11 XX105 (Issue 3) and Wessex XR503 (Issue 6). We would be pleased to hear more news on the lines of “what did they do” or “where are they now”. We have created a list, with tail numbers, of aircraft based at, and operating at, Bedford. If anyone has a similar list we would be pleased to exchange information.

XX105 - Not All Skipped (by Nick Cooke)

Issue 3 of the BAHG newsletter described the sad end of BAC 1-11 XX105. I am glad to report that a small part of it escaped the skips. Although still working, I find time to organise what I jokingly call Boys’ Days Out (BDO) with old colleagues; some would say that the word ‘Boys’ is inappropriate! In early 2011, one of the planned BDO’s was a visit to the Boscombe Down Aviation Collection (BDAC), as I knew that XX105 was part of this collection following its retirement from flying. Everything was in place for our visit when I was told by the curator that, for Health & Safety reasons, the collection was closed to the public.



XX105 ends its flying days at Boscombe Down. The ‘saved’ engine cowl is circled.

Later in 2011 I had an e-mail from BDAC indicating that XX105 was going to be scrapped at the end of 2011. Surely an aircraft with such a unique history, with many World firsts to its credit, was not going to end its life in a scrap yard! In an attempt to save the aircraft, I contacted several people at QinetiQ, Boscombe Down and also various aircraft museums, but received little interest. “It’s too costly to keep or move and it’s just another aircraft” was a typical response. The only success I had, after making numerous phone calls, was to make



contact with the man in charge of the scrapping process. I told him that I had flown in XX105 on many occasions and would dearly love a section as a memento. The response was “Yes, but it will have to be done officially”. Wondering which would be the best ‘bit’ to have, I asked “What about one of the engine cowls, as this has the registration number clearly shown?”. Amazingly the answer was “OK” and on 13 January 2012, I collected the port engine cowl from Boscombe Down, along with the official contract of sale. The sale price, by the way, was £1! According to those in the know, this is the only piece of XX105 to be saved.

Note: XX105, distinctive in its red, white and yellow paint scheme, can still be ‘seen’ on the Boscombe Down airfield if you visit Google Earth.

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