

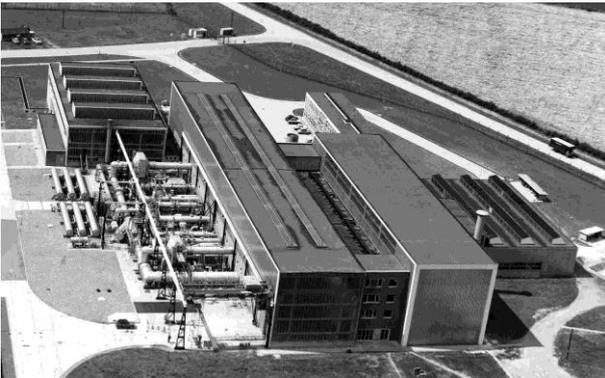
Happy Christmas to all our readers

Fire Drama at RAE Bedford's Wind Tunnel Site The former wind tunnel site at Bedford, now known as Twinwoods Business Park, saw a major drama on Friday 1 November 2019, when a significant building caught fire at around noon.



The Twinwoods site at the Height of the Fire (Images Reg Harlow)

Two major buildings were destroyed, including what had housed the 3x4 supersonic wind tunnel, formally known as the High Supersonic Speed Tunnel, HSST. The tunnel was dismantled some time ago, leaving only the control room, much of the building being used by a self-storage company providing public store facilities. The picture below shows the tunnel complex shortly after completion, alongside the state of the building after the fire. Fortunately, the wind direction prevented the fire from spreading further.



The HSST in 1961, from North (neg C6568)



HSST Buildings after the fire, Main Compressor Hall in front, with tunnel working section in building to the left (Image, from South, Barry Tomlinson P1120105)

Several fire engines from Bedford, Cambridgeshire and Northampton attended the blaze. Supplies of water were pumped from the river Ouse about 1 mile away, requiring the A6 main road to be closed.

The BAHG archive was very fortunate not to be affected. It had been housed for four years in part of the HSST complex, but moved to a new location in the 8x8 tunnel office block in 2015. The previous archive store was badly damaged in this fire, so we are very relieved to have moved.

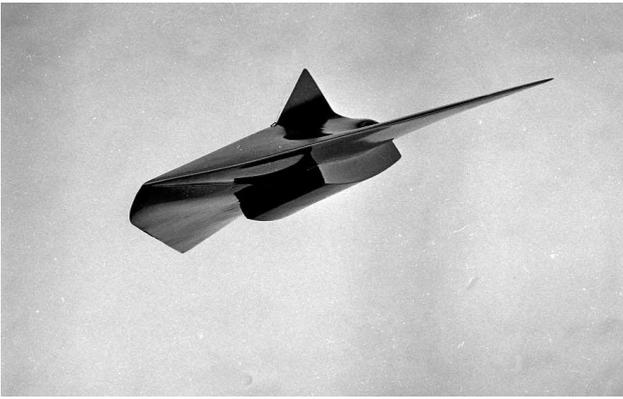
To provide the context, the picture here shows the Twinwoods wind tunnel site, with the HSST buildings in the foreground (*neg A6557, Aug 1961*).



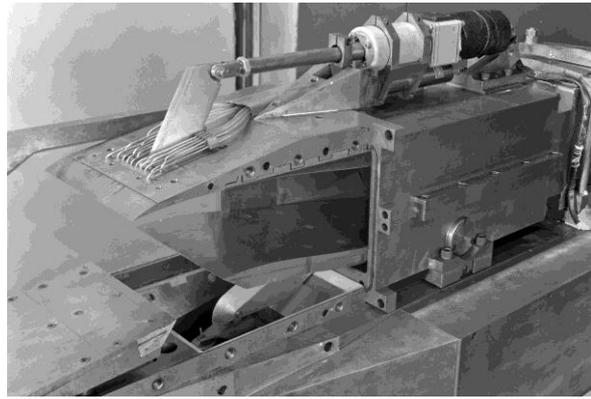
HSST History The HSST was the last tunnel to be completed at Bedford, in 1960, with a formal opening in 1961. It ceased operation in 2001. This tunnel could operate from Mach 2.5 up to Mach 5, thus complementing the speed range of the 3x3 and 8x8 supersonic tunnels, and was used extensively for testing missile models and for research on engine intakes, including for Concorde. Early work also included studies of "waveriders", a concept for a Mach 4 airliner.

Bedford Aeronautical Heritage Group

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



Mach 4 "Waverider" airliner concept tested in the HSST
(neg C9694B 1964)



Concorde intake, Model 350, ready for testing in the
HSST (neg C16037 1972)

The HSST was built to be versatile, with several removable model support sections, which enabled models to be rigged and prepared off-line, and then inserted into the tunnel when required – see pictures below.



HSST Model support section (neg CL29 1963)



HSST Working section (neg CL26 1963)

The diagram below shows the complete HSST complex (neg C12203).

