

## Queen's Jubilee Issue

### BAHG Newsletter

Issue 5, June 2012



*Thurleigh airfield under construction, June 1952, showing the new alignment of the main runway*



*Tunnel site, before move of water tower, April 1952, with steel sections of the 8x8 ft tunnel*

**Queen's Jubilee** With the nation celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II, we thought it appropriate in this issue to review connections between RAE Bedford and the Royal Family. The top photographs are a reminder of work in progress in constructing NAE/RAE Bedford when the Queen came to the throne in 1952.

**Wind Tunnel Jubilee** The first wind tunnel to be completed at RAE Bedford was the 3ft x 3ft supersonic tunnel. It conducted its first calibration runs on 29 April 1952. When the 25th anniversary of this event was celebrated in 1977 tunnel staff sent a loyal message to congratulate HM the Queen on the 25th anniversary of her accession to the throne, also noting the 25th anniversary of the commissioning of the wind tunnel, the first of the post-war facilities to be completed at Bedford. A reply from Buckingham Palace expressed the Queen's thanks. This exchange of letters has recently emerged in some papers donated to BAHG. The circulation of our newsletter has stimulated donations of several sets of papers like this from former staff.

In 1952, of course, the Bedford establishment was still known as the National Aeronautical Establishment, but its "Royal" nature was affirmed in December 1955, when the NAE label seems finally to have been dropped and the Royal Aircraft Establishment label applied. "Royal" was finally lost on the formation of the Defence Research Agency in 1991.

#### Royal Visits

At this time of the Queen's Jubilee we look back at Royal Visits to Thurleigh Airfield and the Tunnel Site. The first visit was on 6 July 1944, during WWII, when Thurleigh airfield was operated by 306 Bombardment Group of the US Eighth Army Air Force. Her Majesty the Queen (at that time Princess Elizabeth) christened one of the Group's B-17's "Rose of York". She was accompanied by her father, King George VI, and her mother, Queen Elizabeth. Sadly, "Rose of York" failed to return from its 63rd bombing mission on 3 February 1945.



In the early 1950's, Lord Mountbatten (Prince Philip's uncle) visited Thurleigh, at that time still the National Aeronautical Establishment. Although we have a number of photos of his visit, we have not been able to establish the exact date. Does anyone know? We think it may have been 1955, as one of the visit photographs shows the sign for Air Ferry passengers, which still refers to NAE: "All passengers from the Air Ferry who are not proceeding to NAE Main Site (Twinwoods) should report to the administrative officer Thurleigh".

On 4 December 1959, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, flew in BLEU's Canberra WJ92 (pictured), piloted by Flt. Lt. Alfie Camp, to experience at first hand several fully automatic landings. John Charnley, then Superintendent of BLEU, reported that he felt somewhat nervous arranging the royal flight, as the aircraft equipment fit was a single 'lane' military system with no redundancy back up. Fortunately all went well and after several fully automatic, accurate landings HRH returned, beaming with a delighted grin of achievement.



Prince Michael of Kent visited the airfield and Tunnel Site on 30 October 1984. The first picture (left) shows Prince Michael being welcomed to Bedford in 1984, with the Control Tower in the background (Left to Right: Ron Newbery, Mike Dobson, Prince Michael, Geoff Pope, Roger Beazley).



After a flight in the BAC 1-11 flying laboratory (right), Prince Michael visited, and flew, the Aero Flight research simulator (below left).



During his visit to the tunnel site, Prince Michael was briefed by Cyril Taylor (photo above). We believe Prince Michael made at least one other visit to RAE Bedford, but we haven't been able to find any other evidence. Can anyone help with further information, please?

### Harrier 175

While Harrier XW175 was at Cranfield (Jan 1984 to mid-1986) undergoing its first major engineering change to create the "VAAC" research aircraft, Prince Charles looked in to inspect progress (photo right – does anyone have a better copy?).



If we have left out a Royal visit of any kind, please let us know.

### Some Local News

The Museum located on Thurleigh airfield devoted to WWII and the 306 Bomb Group, run by Ralph Franklin, will be holding a major event on 8 July 2012. Among other things, the memorial to the airmen of the US 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force, hitherto located in Thurleigh village, will be unveiled at its new location next to Ralph Franklin's museum.

### Contact Us

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