



Control Tower, Dec 1975 (neg B3856A)



Part of the BAHG Archive

**Control Tower Tales** (John Holton) During my many years in the control tower at RAE, I witnessed lots of trials, and the resulting tribulations, with considerable interest. It must have been the best posting in Air Traffic Control at the time. Some of the trials were quite demanding. So many to remember, but one sticks out, involving the DH125 and a Concorde. The 125 needed to sample the turbulence behind the SST and asked to be vectored across the wake from three or four miles away, crossing close astern. The first runs were a bit timid in their proximity, and the 125 complained they weren't close enough. So I vectored it straight at the Concorde, reasoning that the 125 wouldn't actually collide with it, for pilots usually have a strong sense of survival. The blips on the radar merged satisfactorily. Long pause. Have I cut it too fine, I wondered? The blips separated. "Was that better?" I anxiously enquired. A muffled and multi-voiced reply indicated some flight-deck difficulty, and eventually the pilot said that was a bit too close, so much so that some of the flight deck roof lining had come adrift! On another quiet Autumn afternoon one of our Royal Navy pilots got airborne in a helicopter for some "Continuation Training" around the airfield. After half an hour or so he asked if he could go down to Cranfield, if they were not too busy, to play around the airfield there. Bedford ATC had a direct line to Cranfield, so the request was made, and yes, they would be happy for the helicopter to come. I passed on the message, and off they went. Some twenty minutes later a very angry tower controller rang and said, in effect, "That b\*\*\*\*y chopper of yours has caused a lot of bad feeling here! It's been OK in the circuit, but it has now landed on the grass, the crewman has got out and he's picking our b\*\*\*\*y mushrooms!"



**Work in the Archive** As we remarked in the last issue, as well as giving talks and preparing this newsletter we spend significant time in the archive working to catalogue prints of the early construction, building up our database of negatives, scanning negatives, and so on. What do we actually have in the BAHG Archive? The biggest elements are the collection of original negatives, some 70000, glass plate to 35mm (see below Right), and about 2000 movie films, both 16mm and 35mm in cans (below, Left). For the negatives and the 16mm movies we are fortunate in having the original photographers' Log Books. We have scanned these so that we can keep referring to them without physically wearing them out (See example, Left). The 16 books amount to some 1300 pages. From these books we are progressively building an

electronic database of the contents. We are also scanning significant numbers of negatives. We use these pictures in our talks and publications. Of the 2000 or so movies, we have so far reviewed several hundred for content and interest. We are also creating a catalogue of several hundred loose prints showing the early construction of the Establishment, in the period 1947-1953. The content of the archive is available as a resource for research by interested people.



**Catapults** In response to the query in the last Newsletter, Tony Smith (formerly NAD and BLEU) writes “Referring to the matter of catapults and arresting gear; yes the catapults and arrester gear operated by NAD (from 1954 until about 1970) were the only such shore-based equipment in the UK. The raised catapult was the prototype steam catapult, installed at Bedford after initial trials in Portsmouth harbour where it was attached to the flight deck of a WW2 aircraft carrier. In addition to the two steam catapults there was a cordite-powered catapult at the proving base.”

**Web Site** BAHG is preparing a web site which we hope will go live in the Spring. This will hopefully enable us to make ourselves known to a wider section of the public, and encourage enquiries. More details in the next Newsletter.

**RFTU** The Radar Flight Trials Unit moved from Pershore to Bedford in 1976/77 with more than 20 aircraft. As a “Lodger Unit” RFTU was managed from RSRE Malvern, not by RAE. However, as residents at Thurleigh, they are still within our scope. We will have some information on this in a future issue.

**RAF Element** (Wg Cdr Roger Beazley RAF ret'd, served Bedford 1982-85) Military personnel attached to the RAE came under a Unit called the RAF Element which had its HQ at Farnborough and was run by an RAF Admin Branch Squadron Leader and 3 support staff. Technically the Element was a RAF Support Command "station" and COEF, as CO of RAF[E], attended the various command functions and conferences held at RAFSC Brampton. The Unit at Farnborough wrote a monthly RAF Form 540 to which FSS and RRS at Bedford contributed - the record made no distinction between RAE and RSRE activities at Bedford since (wrongly) FSS and RRS were seen as "squadrons". In 1988, the RAF Element at RAE, by then re-named Royal Aerospace Establishment, was recognised as an established unit and awarded a Unit badge (shown). The motto “Scientiae Auxilium” may be translated as "helping science" although some would have preferred "sorting out science"! Finally, to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RAF, the Element was awarded the Freedom of Rushmoor Borough (Farnborough & Aldershot) on 15 April 1988 - so we could "march through the town with drums beating and bayonets fixed" - had we had either!



**Editor's Note** On Wed 13 March 2013, Roger Beazley will be giving the Sir John Charnley Lecture at the RAeS Bedford Branch, on the subject “Flight Test – the End of an Era?” at the ARA Bedford, 1900 for 1930. Visitors are welcome. On 10 April, again at the ARA, 1900 for 1930, Harry Nelson (former Bedford Test Pilot and now with Airbus) will give a talk “Learning From the Positive”. The talk will take a fresh view on learning from accidents, by taking three accidents that had a successful outcome and studying them for common areas of excellent system behaviour, to seek out clues for a new way forward in the field of accident prevention.

**“Those Magnificent Machines”** Fifty years ago, on 26 March 1963, the unique Hunting H.126 “Jet Flap” research aircraft, XN714, made its first flight, at Thurleigh. Built (at Luton, so Bedfordshire’s own aircraft) to explore novel ways to reduce flying speeds, it flew successfully but did not lead to major advances. It was demonstrated at the Paris Air Show on 19/20 June 1965, having crossed the Channel in company with the HP115 (see photo courtesy Clive Rustin, flying the HP115 in the background). They took 6 legs to achieve this Bedford-Paris flight. Dizzy Addicott, Hunting’s test pilot, flew the Jet Flap. XN714 conducted its last research flight, at Thurleigh, on 9 Nov 1967. It is now on display in the RAF Museum at Cosford.



**Help** Does anyone have a copy of this report “The application to civil aviation of an automatic landing system” by J. S. Shayler, RAE Technical Note No. BL47 (1958)? If you do, we would like to borrow it, for scanning.

**Good Home Wanted** The archive holds a near-complete collection of RAE News (which was issued from March 1948 to Dec 1991). Having conducted an audit of the collection, we now have a significant number, largely from the period 1958-88, surplus to requirements. If anyone would like to give them a good home, or would like single issues, please get in touch. No charge, but a donation to BAHG funds would be welcome.



**Acknowledgement** We are delighted to be able to scan some photographs from the Open Day of 1957 taken, and loaned, by John Selby (ex 8ft). The example left shows the Boulton Paul BP111A delta, VT935, and FD2 WG777.

*Bedford Aeronautical Heritage Group*

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