Jabberwock

The Magazine of The Society of
Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum

No. 91
May 2018

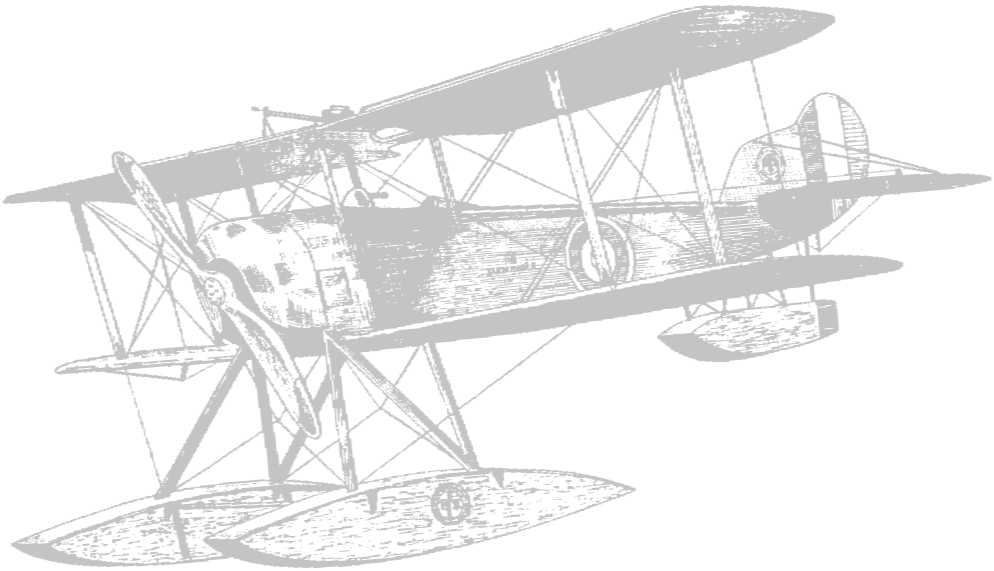
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS
FLEET AIR ARM
MUSEUM

In this issue

Plus all the usual features: News from the Museum, Readers' letters, Snippets from Council meetings, monthley talks programme, latest membership numbers etc.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ROYAL NAVY

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM



Patron: Rear Admiral A R Rawbone CB, AFC, RN
President: Gordon Johnson
FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM
RNAS Yeovilton
Somerset BA22 8HT
Telephone: 01935 840565
SOFFAAM email: fleetairarm.sof@nmrn.org.uk
SOFFAAM website: fleetairarmfriends.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 280725

The Society of Friends of the Fleet Air Arm Museum

Chairman
Graham Mottram
shalefan@btinternet.com
Vice Chairman
Ivan Childs
ivan.childs@tiscali.co.uk
Secretary
Malcolm Smith
smalcolm355@outlook.com
Treasurer
Martin Turner
martinturner111@yahoo.co.uk
Membership Secretary
Robert Heath
30 Royal Sands
Weston-Super-Mare. BS23 4NH
Mob: 07811 254955
soffaam.mem@gmail.com
Talks and Events Organiser
Rosanne Crowther
01935 822143
rosannecrowther678@btinternet.com
Editor
Malcolm Smith
T: 01935 478304, Mob: 07765 950806
5, St Michaels Close, Over Compton, Sherborne, DT9 4QR
smalcolm355@outlook.com

Printed by: Remous Limited, Milborne Port

Admission
Members are admitted to the Museum free of charge, on production of a valid membership card. Members may be accompanied by up to three guests (one guest only for junior members) on any one visit, each at a reduced entrance fee, currently 50% of the standard price. Members are also allowed a 10% discount on goods purchased from the shop.

Note: *These concessions are provided at the discretion of the General Manager of the Museum and could be removed at any time.*

Contributions
We are extremely grateful to all those who contribute articles and material to the magazine, even though it is not always possible to use every item!

CONTENTS

Westland Wasp, page16

Fairey Albacore, page32

HMAS **Albatross**, *page 6*

HMS **Biter**, *page 36*

Early days at RNAS Yeovilton, page 37

Westland Wyvern at Cobham Hall, page 24

COVER PICTURES

Main picture: One of the first batch of the UK's F35B Lightnings in Vertical Landing (hover) mode. 15 of the UK's initial order of 48 have now been delivered.

Inset: Two more of the first batch recently seen refuelling from an RAF Voyager tanker/ transport over Charleston, USA. Photos MoD

EDITORIAL

This issue carries a comprehensive illustrated review, contributed by member David Merrett, of the Fleet Air Arm Museum's reserve collection, housed in the purpose-built and climate-controlled building called Cobham Hall. The reserve collection is now larger than many other entire aircraft museums. The article gives an idea of the wide-ranging scope of the items in the collection, many of which are very rare or actually unique. The Museum provides regular opportunities to visit Cobham Hall: look out for announcements on the Museum website at fleetairarm.com

On the subject of websites, members are cordially invited to visit the Society's site at fleetairarm friends.org.uk. We have recently posted pictures from the New Year lunch there. Comments on the website are always welcome.

Also in this issue, we carry an article on "Early Days at RNAS Yeovilton" from founder member Denis (Den) Wood, as dictated to Jeff Turner. He was fortunate to fly in a Fulmar, also in a DH89A Rapide flown by Lieutenant Commander Ralph Richardson, the actor. Den is now aged 94 and tells us that he hopes to enjoy a flight in a Spitfire to celebrate his next birthday.

The Society's summer visit is to the SS *Great Britain* at Bristol. This takes place on 21 June and details are on page 9. The ship was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel for the Great Western Steamship Company's transatlantic service between Bristol and New York and was the first iron steamer to cross the Atlantic, which she did in 1845. This is bound to be a popular event, so those wishing to attend should apply promptly!

Another visit is planned for later in the year, with a provisional date of 6 September, to Aerospace Filton, more details to follow.

A new EU law, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) comes into force in May. All societies and organisations that collect personal data are bound to comply with this regulation. A brief article on page 12 explains how the Society plans to react. Members will see that we rely on your implied assent that we can store your data, while you can be confident that we will continue to ensure that such data is safely stored and protected..

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Richard Hufton, in his letter in issue 90 mentioned the time he spent at 6 FTS RAF Ternhill. During 1953-55 I spent 18 months of my National Service in said FTS in C Flight 2 Sqn as an Airframe Mechanic on Provost T1s. Before my call up at 21, I held delusions that the RAF would train me to be a pilot. Dream shattered at the pre-entry medical examination, when I was classed as, 'Grade 2', and Grade 2 does not fly. The reason for this grading was that I had flat feet. However this disability would not exempt me from any foot drill, square bashing, parades, pushing umpteen Provosts or odd visiting Anson across the apron etc. (No medical, either before or since that one, has seen anything abnormal with my feet.)

One institution at 6 FTS at that time, was that at 'lights out', the station radio signed-off by playing Doris Day singing, "I'll see you in my Dreams". We were awoken the following day with the radio blaring out, a very jazzed up version of, "On the Sunny Side of the Street". I think it might have been Tommy Dorsey's band, but if anyone knows how that can be confirmed I would love to know.

Arnold Prickett

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Dear Malcolm

I was servicing with the light blues at RAF Nicosia during the Suez Crisis of 1956 and saw considerable action at the airfield of Canberra and Hunter F5s movements at that time. Graham Mottram, in his excellent lecture in January entitled "The FAA at war in peacetime", implied that RAF fighters did not participate in the action due to their limited range. I would like to show that Venoms from Akrotiri did, in fact, take part. A very good account of the action in the air has been written by Brian Cull with others in a book entitled "Wings over Suez". He sets out the entire campaign and shows that in the early stages of the conflict RAF Venoms attacked airfields and other facilities in the Canal Zone while the FAA concentrated on airfields around Cairo and Alexandria. The Hunters from Nicosia were being used as top cover and as the Egyptian Airforce was effectively removed from any display of force, they did not see much action. This is no criticism of Graham, just trying to put the record right.

One event that took place at Nicosia at this time and which may be of interest to your readers concerned a Hunter. It had a problem with its undercarriage and made a wheels up landing. That would normally not have been a

problem but somehow the guns started firing. You have never seen so many personnel running for cover! Another incident that occurred was the crash of Canberra WT371. It was being flown back to UK after battle damage and lost an engine after takeoff. In trying to land on asymmetric power, the pilot misjudged his approached and in making a go around lost control. Unfortunately, all three crew lost their lives. Looking forward to receiving the next Jabberwock.

Yours sincerely

Mike Ashton
Langport

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

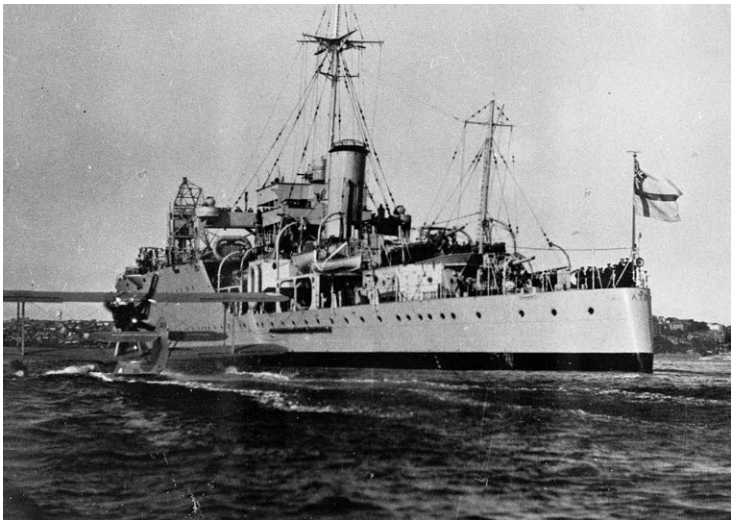
Hi Malcolm,

I am sure that by now you will have heard from many people – especially from the Antipodes. The photo on p.36 of Jab 90 is **HMAS** Albatross, and the aircraft is a Supermarine Seagull III from 101 Flight RAAF. **HMAS** Albatross briefly operated the Seagull V (which when bought by the FAA became the Walrus) before being handed over to the RN in 1938. Only when WW2 began did the RN find a use for **HMS** Albatross operating Walrus' of 710 Squadron FAA off East Africa and in the Indian Ocean.

Oh, and on p.38 the Sharks are Blackburn Baffins from 811 Squadron NAS RAF.

Cheers
Ian Burns

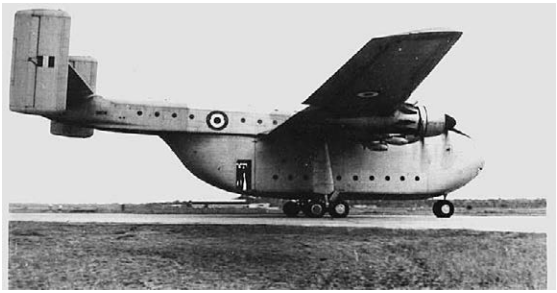
●●●●●●●●●●●●●



With a Seagull V [later designated Walrus I] taxiing to take-off alongside, HMAS* Albatross *departs Sydney Harbour in July 1938 for transfer to the Royal Navy in part-payment for the cruiser HMS* Apollo *[to become HMAS* Hobart*].

Dear Editor,

At Kevin Patience's March talk he recalled growing up near RAF Eastleigh, Kenya in the late 1950s and flights to Aden by RAF Blackburn Beverley transport. Flying in the opposite direction in 1960 was the aviation artist David Shepherd. He had painted for Westlands, including a print of Wyverns (of 830 Squadron?) flying over Mount Etna and had been invited to visit RAF Khormaksar, Aden by Air Vice Marshal Maurice Heath. He boarded an Australia-bound Comet at Lyneham for the journey via Tobruk. Back then Aden was our busiest outpost and home to eight squadrons including Shackleton MR.2s. He then flew down to Eastleigh in a Beverley on what turned out to be a life changing experience for the 29-year-old artist. Arriving in Nairobi the RAF asked him to paint scenes of Africa's wildlife, and a 21 Squadron Twin Pioneer being chased off a Kenyan bush strip by a rhino became his first venture into what would turn out to be his biggest seller – prints of Africa's wild animals, most notably the elephant.



Blackburn Beverley, pictured at RAF Katunayake in 1959. *Photo John Cooper*

He was subsequently commissioned to produce numerous high profile works for all three Services including the SAS. The subjects depicted ranged from historic battle actions to Cold War jet operations and these can be seen hanging in various officers' mess throughout the UK and abroad. A FAA Museum request to 'do something for them' saw him fly out to Malta in 1978 to join HMS Ark Royal. Wishing to make this carrier painting as realistic as possible he asked Yeovilton that the obligatory shadowing Soviet spy trawler join them and a signal was sent by Ark's Captain Anson 'Artist requests Russian guests be in attendence' but the Soviet's didn't show. During his week long assignment in the Med he witnessed the burial with full military honours of the ship's wardroom piano, which had reportedly been commandeered from the RAF in the first place, as it was catapulted off the bow! This fine naval aviation painting showing Ark Royal turning into wind is currently on display in the FAA Museum.

Chris Penney
Taunton

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

ICONIC AIRCRAFT AT THE FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM

A second evening of unprecedented access, exploring in and around some of the Fleet Air Arm Museum's most significant aircraft, takes place on Thursday 17 May at 6.00pm. This is an exclusive opportunity that is not usually available to the general public and the evening is just one of three planned this year. Visitors can see where history was made when they look inside the cockpit of Captain Eric 'Winkle' Brown's famous Vampire LZ551/G. This was the first jet aircraft to land on an aircraft carrier in 1945. Visitors can sit inside the cockpits of Concorde 002, Westland Wessex 5 and HAS3 Lynx Helicopter, inside the cabin area of 'King of the Junglies' Sea King ZA 298 and view into the cockpits of Harrier GR9 and Hawker P1127, to enable a comparison of prototype and last type seen in service. The evening includes entry to the main galleries (excluding flight deck) and a chance to see the museum at night. The experienced team of curators and volunteers will be on hand to answer questions and tell more of the secrets of the museum and the collection of aircraft.

The Fleet Air Arm Museum's General Manager Marc Farrance said: "This is the second of our special access evenings and our visitors love them. Feedback from our event earlier in the year was really positive. The chance to sit in the very cockpits where history has often been made is thrilling." Tickets for this privileged access evening are available from www.fleetairarm.com, £40.00 per person. Spaces are limited spaces and advance booking is essential. Sensible clothing and footwear must be worn. Access to aircraft is dependent upon your fitness levels and overall mobility. All visits are subject to a briefing by a member of the museum team. The aircraft line-up is subject to change.

●●●●●●●●●●●●

SOCIETY VISIT TO SS GREAT BRITAIN

Thursday 21 June 2018

SOFFAAM Member and one guest allowed

Please arrive at the Fleet Air Arm Museum Car Park by 0830. You will be allowed to leave your car at the museum for the duration of our visit. Depart the museum at 0845 prompt for the tour which commences at 1100. Lunch, tea and coffee are included in the price of the visit.

SS Great Britain is a museum ship and former passenger steamship, which was advanced for her time. She was the longest passenger ship in the world from 1845 to 1854 and was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel for the Great Western Steamship Company's transatlantic service between Bristol and New York.

PROGRAMME

10:30am to 11:00am – Arrival and free time to purchase tea or coffee.
11:15am to 12:15pm - Guided Tour Group 1
12:30 to 13:30pm - Lunch on board in Hayward
13:45pm to 14:45pm - Guided Tour Group 2
14:45pm onwards - free time to explore the rest of the attraction

After the tour (and a light lunch) you will have approximately an hour to yourself. The coach will depart from SS Great Britain at 16.00 with the anticipated arrival time at Yeovilton of 17.30.

For further information on the museum please view the website www.ss-greatbritain.org. Please complete and return the application form, together with cheque for £35.00 made payable to SOFFAAM, ideally to reach me by 5 May 2018. Tickets will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Please note that NO REFUNDS for non-attendance can be given.

Mrs Rosanne Crowther, St David's, 5 Church Close, Martock, TA12 6DS. Tel: - 01935 822143

Name:…….....……
Address…….....
.....Post Code.....
Telephone.....Membership number.....……
Name of guest .....

Please advise of any special dietary requirements in advance.

SNIPPETS FROM COUNCIL MEETINGS

From the March Meeting:

• *The Vice-Chairman opened the meeting:*

He welcomed the attendees in the absence of the Chairman.

• *The General Manager gave the following report:*

Bridge Repairs - The Museum has completed a structural survey and the tender process will start shortly. A similar survey will soon start for the Hall 2 roof.

Visitor Numbers - The Museum had an indifferent start to 2018, although the first few weeks of Jan / Feb returned an increased number of visitors in comparison to the same period in 2017, Visitor numbers remain strong for 2017/18 as a whole.

Events - Tours to Cobham Hall continue to be popular. Tickets are £12 and available now from the Museum website and Ticket Desk.

The Museum completed a very successful trial of an 'open cockpits' event on 18 January. Feedback from the public (30 in attendance) was fantastic with many pleased to get up close to the collection, the chance to explore the Museum at night (exclusivity) and also the opportunity to talk to knowledgeable curators and volunteers proving of particular interest.

The event will be repeated on Thursday 17 May as part of 'Museums at Night'. Tickets for this privileged access evening are available from www.fleetairarm.com, £40.00 per person.

Question Time - The Museum hosted Question Time on 15 February. It is always a great opportunity to showcase the Museum and gain publicity, as it was when the Museum previously hosted the programme in 2002.

The programme was filmed on the flight deck, with many of the Museum aircraft featured prominently on various camera shots. The collection was highlighted in a very positive manner and the result looked superb on-screen.

• *The Vice-Chairman gave the following report on behalf of the Talks and Visits Organiser:*

The details for the visit to the SS Great Britain and Bristol Aerospace will be confirmed on her return. She made suggestions on a number of items that were discussed later in the meeting. The meeting went on to discuss

other associated matters, as follows:

A special speaker needed to be identified for the major talk event this year. Council members are asked to give this some thought and give suggestions to Rosanne.

Rosanne has indicated that she will be giving up the coordination of talks and visits later this year. A replacement needs to be identified, hopefully to work in parallel with Rosanne before fully taking over.

• *The Membership Secretary gave the following report:*

Membership numbers have fallen quite heavily for the first time. New membership applications are no longer making up the difference and have significantly reduced in number. Why? For the record, five new applications have been received since the December meeting. Of these, 2 have been downloaded from the website and 3 are from the 'Join' leaflets in the FAAM.

Promotional – Many thanks to Richard Macauley for producing the new Join leaflet, which is distinctly different in its style to its predecessor and incorporates several updates, including Family Member application. Plans are now in hand, via Richard, to update the now ageing stand-alone banners. In conjunction with Richard, we want to talk to Marc Farrance to make best use of any other opportunities to make known SOFFAAM and its contribution to the FAAM. I have initiated contact with libraries in surrounding areas and counties, but unlike the previous occasion, not one has said 'Yes' to SOFFAAM displaying its Join leaflets. The reason given is the major library closure programme, which has resulted in no space available now.

• *Data Protection:*

*The Vice-Ch*airman gave a brief explanation of the new data protection regulations that come into effect on 25 May 2018 that will affect all organisations both large and small. The intention is to protect the personal information of members. The holding of such information has to be relevant and approved by the persons concerned. As far as the society is concerned the information must be stored securely and not divulged to other parties. After discussion it was agreed that various proposals would be adopted:

See the separate notice on Data Protection on page 12.

DATA PROTECTION

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679 is a regulation in EU law on data protection and privacy for all individuals within the European Union. The UK will almost certainly continue to comply with these regulations after Brexit.

The regulations come into force on 25 May 2018 and will affect the way we as a society obtain, handle and use your personal information. The information we hold has been taken from your application form and bank mandate, completed when you joined the society, and is stored on a computer that is password protected or on paper records that are kept secure. Details are kept by the Membership Secretary and not divulged to third parties unless there is a legal requirement to do so, for example to HMRC, where applicable, to claim back the gift aid element of annual subscriptions. Action to delete or shred records will be initiated when we are either advised of the termination of your membership or your annual subscription becomes at least two months overdue. In the case of gift aid forms there is a HMRC requirement to retain them for six years from the end of the financial year in which membership ceased.

For the majority, communication will be through the quarterly Jabberwock magazine, distributed by post or e-mail according to your wishes, and by sending you renewal membership cards. For those filling voluntary roles assisting in the activities of the Society there will often be a need to make contact by phone or e-mail.

Payment of your next annual subscription will be taken as your agreement to the arrangements quoted above. In short, we will continue to operate in the same way, albeit making sure your personal information is kept secure and is not misused

MEMBERSHIP

Standing Order Membership cards enclosed for May, June and July (Please note that receipt of a card does not confirm receipt of payment.)

Welcome to the new Members who have joined us since the last magazine issue:

3606 Mr P. Bowles	Somerset
3607 Mr D.C. Moore	Wiltshire
3608 Mr A. Broadley	Dorset
3609 Mr T. Fletcher	Somerset
3610 Dr N. Bray	Somerset
3611 Mr S. Dallimore	Dorset
3612 Mr G. Davis (Family)	Bristol

Annual membership £12
Family membership (Up to two adults and up to three children) £32
Life membership £180 (£90 for those over 60)

Members who pay by cheque are reminded to post their renewal fee to the Membership Secretary (see page 2 for his contact details) when it is due. To save on postage, we do not routinely send out reminders. To save this annual task, members are encouraged to pay by standing order.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORIC FLIGHT

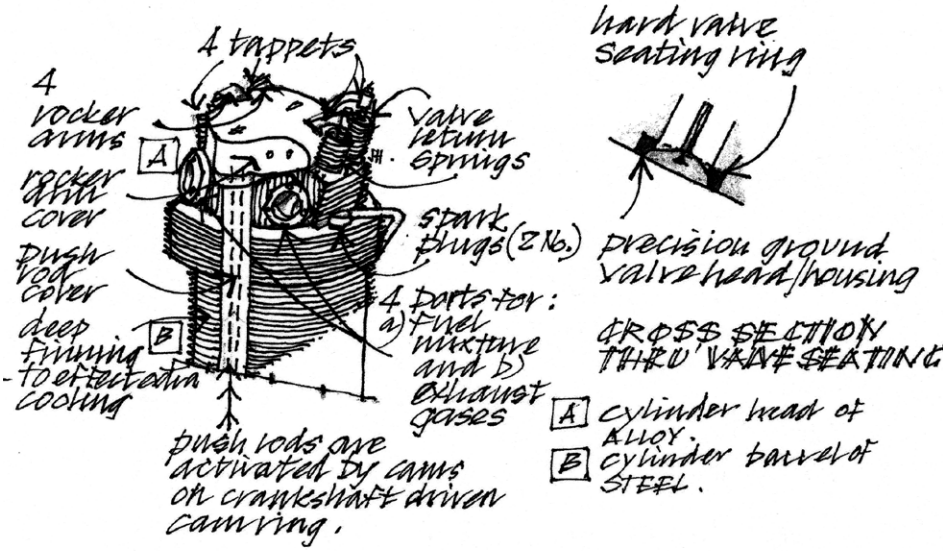
Swordfish WS 856 in flight. *Photo Lee Howard*

The second half of 2017 was a busy period for the team at the Royal Navy Historic Flight. As reported in the last issue of Jabberwock, VX281 the Flight's Sea Fury T10, returned from its rebuild at North Weald in September. Then less than two months later, on 8 November, Swordfish 1 W5856 returned to the skies, having been grounded since the summer because of faulty exhaust valves in the Bristol Pegasus engine. Providing new valves for the Pegasus engine is by no means an easy, off the shelf process. In W5856's case, a specialist company, based in Surrey, was commissioned to manufacture new ones. Manufacture included the all important grinding, ensuring a perfect fit for all valve seatings (see sketch detail).

W5856 is a very special aircraft. One of a batch of 415 rolled out in 1941 from Blackburn's works at Sherburn in Elmet Yorkshire, after that company took over Swordfish manufacture from Fairey Aviation, it is arguably the oldest of its kind in the world. Of just a dozen airframes that have survived, only three are airworthy. W5856 is a Mark I, LS326 its Mark II hangar partner at Yeovilton RNAS, and a Canadian Mark IV. With valve problems overcome, beset as they may be with other difficulties from time to time, the Society of Friends is nevertheless confident these iconic machines will continue to carry the commemorative Fleet Air Arm message skywards for many years to come.

BRISTOL PEGASUS CYLINDER HEAD

Schematic by Jim Humberstone



BRISTOL PEGASUS 9cyl. RADIAL ENGINE
~ TOP OF CYLINDER DETAIL ~ SHOWING VALVES.

All three RNHF Swordfish are powered by Bristol Pegasus engines. The Hawker Sea Furies operated by the Flight have Centaurus powerplants incorporating Bristol's quite different sleeve valve mechanism. Developed by Sir Roy Fedden.

Replacement Valves.
Exhaust valves in the Swordfish Pegasus engines are subject to intense heat, with temperatures up to 800 degrees. Valve stems have a sodium infill to aid cooling. Adding one further process to a combination of stages in manufacturing, which include forging, grinding, machining & hardening.

MONTHLY TALKS PROGRAMME

Talks are usually held in the FAAM Auditorium on the last Thursday of each month (except August and December) at 19.30. Entry price is £7. You can pay at the door, but note that these events are well-supported and total numbers are limited. To be sure of a place book your tickets on-line in advance at www.fleetairarmfriends.org.uk/monthlytalks, or buy from the Museum shop. Non members are welcome. The price includes light refreshments, including a glass of wine.

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

31 May 2018
DEVELOPMENT OF THE GLOSTER METEOR
Rod Dean, Aviation Consultant

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

21 June 2018
VISIT TO SS GREAT BRITAIN **(see page 9)**

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

28 June 2018
Phil Rowles BEng(Hons) CEng FRAeS
Vice President of Engineering
Recent Developments in Martin-Baker Ejection Seats

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

26 July 2018
Mr Jack Froelich, BA, FRAes, Stocklinch Aviation
1967 – 1968 "The Caribou" in Vietnam

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

27 September 2018
AUTUMN SPECIAL IN THE SWORDFISH CENTRE
Paul Beaver, FRSA FRAeS
CAPTAIN ERIC (WINKLE) BROWN'S BIOGRAPHY
Our greatest pilot"

●●●●●●●●●●●●●

Note that talks start promptly at 19.30. Entry is via the lower (wheelchair) access. Latecomers should ring the bell at the left of the gate to gain admission

MONTHLY TALKS REVIEW

Summarised by Robert Heath

FEBRUARY 2018 TALK "Royal Navy Wasp Operations" by Cdr Larry Jeremy-Croft

How time flies. It is now 18 months since we enjoyed the previous talk by Larry Jeram-Croft. On that occasion it was 'Lynx Operations during the Falklands War', which was a very hands-on picture of exciting day to day events at that time. The talk tonight continued with the same pace and level of direct involvement - but this time with Larry's reflections on the very nimble Wasp, most definitely a sports car equivalent in its nippy handling characteristics.

Privately-owned Wasp XT781, at Kemble in 2003. *Photo Adrian Pingstone*

Larry joined the RN in 1970 as an Air Engineer Officer (AEO). Subsequently he was selected for flying training and in 1978 joined 814 Squadron, flying Sea King helicopters in the Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) role. Later, around 1980 Larry progressed to Lynx operations. However, before going into detail on where the Wasp time fitted in, he explained that he was still involved in flying the Wasp today, through his connection with Tony Martin, who owns and operates Wasp XT787 on the private register. XT787 is one of just three Wasps still flying worldwide and Larry decided to write a book on the subject of tonight's talk to be published soon, from which the proceeds will go directly to help keep XT787 flying. There is devotion for you.

First of all we were given some history to paint a background to the origins of the Wasp. There were many aspiring rotary wing pioneers, but one of the most renowned - and successful - was Count Juan De La Cierva, a Spanish civil engineer, who built in 1922 the Cierva C.4, the first autogyro to fly successfully. Success was not immediate. Instability was a major problem and several modifications were incorporated including flexible hinged rotor blades which,

to Cierva's great satisfaction, eliminated instability. Several other designs were developed from this such as the C90, which generated interest within the armed services and led to the creation of the British Cierva Autogiro Company in 1926. After WW2 the Cierva Air Horse prototype was manufactured to fulfil a role very much like that of the Chinook today, but it was too far ahead of its time. It used three separate rotors powered by a single Merlin engine. Sadly it crashed and in due course all the development contracts were transferred to Saunders Roe (Saro), including the Cierva W.14 Skeeter. From this latter concept Saunders Roe produced the Skeeter for the Army Air Corps in the 1950s and in due course replaced the de Havilland Gypsy Major piston engine with a turbine. The result was the private venture Saro P531, which became a new design rather than a straightforward development of the Skeeter, as originally intended. In the meantime, at around 1960, each of Britain's helicopter companies was merged and absorbed into Westland Helicopters.

From the Royal Navy's perspective, what drove the development of the Wasp? A key factor was the ability of warships to detect submarine targets, but not do much about it, because they were beyond the range of their weapons. This had to be overcome with a longer-range weapon, namely one carried by a small helicopter, small enough to operate from warships such as the Tribal or Leander class frigate. The helicopter needed to be simple and reliable and unlike a fixed-wing aircraft, would not need the ship to manoeuvre into wind for take-off and landing, hence the interest in an aircraft the size of the P531.

In July 1958, the P531 made its first flight and in 1961 the 'Sea Scout' as it was then known, was ordered. In 1962 the Wasp emerged and made its first flight. It is unimaginable today to think that an aircraft could be proposed and then enter service just a few years later. Counting in decades rather than years is more appropriate now. Originally the prototypes flew with 325shp Turmo 603 turbine engines, but after acquisition by Westland, the power was doubled to 635shp using the Nimbus engine and later still to 685shp. Even more power would have been welcomed, but the transmission was a limiting factor and would have necessitated complete re-design. Originally the P531 and early Wasps inherited many parts from the Skeeter, including the wooden tail rotor blades. It was found that in certain circumstances that aircraft could enter a 'death spiral', which entailed it spinning on the spot until it eventually crashed. The solution was achieved by replacing the wooden blades with metal blades.

Larry quoted a general

specification for the Wasp as follows: Speed in the order of: 100 - 120kts; a four-wheel long stroke undercarriage; deck tie-down with pilot release for take-off; powered flying controls; floatation gear; the ability for the aircraft to be stowed in a small space; a capability to carry weapons ranging from 2x Mk44 (later Mk46) torpedoes, SS11 and AS12 visually wire-guided missiles, Mk11 depth charge, a nuclear depth charge or reconnaissance flares.

It was interesting to learn that, before the introduction of the wheeled undercarriage, various options were tried, including skids with suction pads so that when the helicopter arrived on deck, the suction was applied to hold it down. Not entirely surprisingly it was not adopted. From our point of view though as spectators, we enjoyed the film and photographs showing deck landing trials on the shore-mounted tilting platform, as well as the various undercarriage configurations.

Early in the development programme, it became apparent that the aircraft had very poor “ditching” characteristics, in other words, it would be difficult for the crew to escape before the helicopter sank if it crashed into the sea. This led to the addition of flotation gear – two inflatable bags that were intended to keep a ditched aircraft afloat and upright in the water. The flotation gear brought out strong feelings in Larry. It had a dreadful effect on performance, rendering the 120kt speed unattainable and it often failed to work properly, which made things worse. On ditching, crew members were expected to punch out the glazed panel over their head, which was a lot easier said than done. Typically, the doors would be removed for flight over the sea instead. Another shortcoming was that the Nimbus engines were professed to last for 800 hours, but a Mean Time Between Failure (MTBF) nearer 250/300 hours was far more realistic. Very little was covered in, so maintenance, particularly of the engine was not a problem. Likewise the Wasp in itself did not incorporate complex systems, such that Larry quoted a start-up to airborne time of one minute being achievable..

On operations the Wasp always remained under the control of its parent ship. The Medium-range Carrying Helicopter Anti-submarine Torpedo (MATCH) role typified this. It was a co-ordinated anti-submarine warfare operation, in which the ship would launch the helicopter and direct it to the target submarine. The helicopter would dispatch its air-dropped weapons, return to the ship under navigation direction from the ship if necessary, then re-arm ready for the next attack.

As ever, my words cannot do justice to this talk, because every few minutes another anecdote would be woven in. One that did tickle me was the novel idea in the

design of aviation facilities in the very modest confines of the Tribal class frigate, of making the landing pad the roof of the hangar. It was very simple: land on the roof, fold the rotor blades and retract the roof into the hangar and slide over a protective cover. It worked - except on one occasion, despite 'failsafe' procedures, something went wrong and the Wasp was raised inside the hangar before the hangar cover was moved. The pictures showed us the poor Wasp squashed into an almost unrecognisable shape.

Larry delighted in the Wasp's manoeuvrability and with an autorotation descent speed of 2,500 ft/min, practice was required to correctly judge when to apply the high nose angle to flare the aircraft to slow it down for a soft landing. This was a dramatic, but very satisfying manoeuvre when it worked as planned. The list of operations in war zones is quite extensive and started as far back as the Cod Wars (remember them?), when Iceland in 1958/59 decided to extend its fishing limits to 25 miles, then in 1972 to 50 miles, then in 1975 to 200 miles. The British fishermen didn't like it, so we sent out warships to protect our own trawlers. Wasps were flown off the warships to search for British trawlers. The RN then would protect our trawlers from the Icelandic patrol boats, who were not in the least scared to confront and chase away the intruders. In response, a tactic was developed to fly a Wasp very, very close to the bridge of an Icelandic ship to ruin their communication due to the roar of the Nimbus and thrashing rotor blades. Meanwhile, a second Icelandic ship sneaked up alongside with the intention of squashing the Wasp between it and the other Icelandic ship. It would have worked, except the Wasp crew had grasped the intention and at the last minute climbed away leaving the two ships to collide!

The next major operation was in the Falklands where the Wasp was heavily engaged and most memorably fired missiles into the Argentinian submarine Santa Fe. These hits prevented Santa Fe from diving and caused the crew to surrender the boat while it was tied up and tilting alongside a jetty in South Georgia. It is believed that this successful guided missile attack was the first ever by the Royal Navy. Meanwhile, the Wasp was featured in several other operations in the Falklands, many of which were described by Larry in detail.

How did Larry come to know the Wasp so well? At a time when he was enjoying flying the Sea King, an appointment came up. He was to apply his skills by going off to test Wasps. It was a culture shock. From big and very capable helicopters to small, unsophisticated and let's face it, very sporty helicopters. It was a different, but invigorating world, with lots of new experiences, including

the very demanding engine-off landings, height test climbs to 12,000ft without oxygen, including worrying moments when an engine surged at 8,000ft, etc.. Larry believes he may be the last person to actually 'rogue' an aircraft. One Wasp constantly displayed flying anomalies that it was impossible to resolve, so it was 'put aside', so to speak!

Larry Jeram-Croft really knows the Wasp and has endless amusing and breathtaking tales to relate. If you would like to know more, then do get along to the talks, or in this case, look out for the forthcoming book written by Larry and available soon in a shop near you, e.g. the FAA Museum shop. Not only that, but you will help to keep XT787 flying! This was another excellent and well attended evening. Thank you to Larry and to the backroom boys and girls.

●●●●●●●●●●●●

March 2018 Talk

"Griffons, Merlins and Spitfires" by Kevin Patience

This is obviously a popular topic, because we had close to a full house and it was well worth it. The title of the talk conjures up a variety of images and for the next hour or more, Kevin Patience took us through his connections with these lovely pieces of engineering in a way that most of us are unlikely to have experienced. Kevin was born in Kenya and joined the RAF in Nairobi, serving for 12 years in a ground engineering role in the many delightful locations the RAF thinks fit. To Kevin, the Spitfire with its Rolls Royce engine was always a magnet that irresistibly drew him, also as he was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s friends and family fed his urge with copious aviation magazines. On top of that the Mau Mau uprising was taking place in Kenya, resulting in the RAF sending four squadrons of Avro Lincoln BII bombers to RAF Eastleigh in Kenya. For Kevin it was a joy to hear their Merlin engines and to see the aircraft flying; perhaps more than expected, because they had to transit to Aden to collect their bomb loads.

The first time Kevin actually saw a Spitfire was when his family flew back to London in 1957 in a BOAC Argonaut, which, as you are all bound to know, is really a Douglas DC 4 with the radial engines replaced by – yes, you guessed it, Rolls Royce Merlins. The journey took a staggering 48 hours in total, roughly 24 hours flying and 24 not. Meanwhile, Kevin's parents decided that his education would benefit from visits to some of London's museums. To Kevin's delight, never mind the wondrous artefacts on display at ground level, at both the Imperial War Museum and the Science Museum, suspended high in the ceiling, each had a Spitfire

– paradise. At this point, Kevin reminded us that the Spitfire first flew in March 1936, a total of 20,351 were built, in 24 different Marks.

From our perspective, Kevin's RAF postings centred on the Gate Guardian at the base, as you will see. For example, what we learnt about his posting to RAF Cardington in 1961 was that the Gate Guardian was a Spitfire Mk 21, LA255, then a posting to RAF Cosford for air radar mechanic training, followed by a posting to RAF Uxbridge with its Spitfire Mk 22, PK624. It was around this time that Kevin started diving with the RAF, in a slate quarry of all places. The significance of this becomes apparent later in the tale.

A posting to Bridgnorth in 1963 followed, where there were two Spitfire Gate Guardians, then on to RAF Valley, equipped with Vampires. Somewhere in between Kevin found himself at Coley's scrap yard in Hounslow where he spotted a number of aircraft tucked away, including a Swift, plus to Kevin's joy, a Hurricane IIc, PG499. While he was engrossed in taking it all in, a gentleman wearing a flat cap, obviously part of the establishment, said Kevin could take away the Hurricane for £20 cash. Interested? What a silly question, however in reality scratching together the money would be hard, but probably possible, whereas finding somewhere to put it was just not possible in his circumstances. Oh, if only!

More Gate Guardians, shown in a compilation of 6 pictures. In 1967 a new life and return to flying condition, or at least display condition, arrived for most of the Gate Guardians mentioned. The film 'Battle of Britain' was being made and it was hungry for the resurrection of as many WW2 aircraft as possible. What a blessing. Just think if that film had not been made many of these aircraft would possibly have disappeared forever. 1967 was also a conspicuous year for Kevin when he was posted to Malta and joined the diving club. In 1942/43, Malta had been a major battleground, because of its position as a base for defending allied convoys through the Mediterranean against attacks from German and Italian forces. The prospect of finding wrecks and relics was promising and it was not long before Kevin found the wreck of a Martin Maryland in a bay near Hal Far. Inside the wreck, Kevin recovered a DF set with a big hole punched in it. Subsequently he met the crew member sitting at the set at the time the aircraft was attacked and the man related how the shell just missed his hand as it struck the set. Throughout the talk, it was apparent that Kevin was skilled at tracing people "who were there" for many of the wrecks and artefacts he came upon. From his point of view, he was keen on tracking down the history and sequence of events leading up to the demise

of the aircraft. This was very commendable and time-consuming research that benefited more than just Kevin's own curiosity.

On another occasion, Kevin was asked to find a Spitfire on the seabed in Dwejra Bay on Gozo Island. In 1943 it had run out of fuel and the pilot bravely elected to land it on the cliff top. This was despite the hazard of numerous walls running across most fields on the island, and many a pilot did not walk away from such a collision. The belly-landing was successful, but the Maintenance Unit decided that recovery of the aircraft was impractical and so it was pushed over the cliff into the sea. Kevin made his diving exploration, found the aircraft and salvageable parts were recovered in due course. The aircraft was a Spitfire Vb, EP122 and like so many others, it is now flying again. How much of the original aircraft goes into these restorations is perhaps open to conjecture, but I do respect the people that spend immense time and money putting historic aircraft back in the air, for all to see and enjoy.

On 8 July 1942, two Spitfires fought with two Me 109s, as a result of which one of the Spitfires was hit and the pilot flew towards the coast at Marsalforn Bay on Gozo, to ditch just offshore. He was quickly picked up by a fisherman and taken to a cafe to be warmed up with alcohol! In the process of his leaving the cafe, his parachute snagged on a door and all the silk spilt out on the floor and vanished in no time behind the flashing blades of the ladies' scissors. Once again, it was suggested to Kevin that he should dive on the wreck, but on this occasion it could not be found despite several searches. A month later, having more or less given up that search, Kevin was leisurely pottering around in a boat, when a lady friend pointed to a strange shape on the sea-bed. That was it, the aircraft had been found with little more than a propeller tip protruding above the sea-bed. Subsequently Kevin undid the Dzus fasteners holding a wing panel and took it the surface. On it could be seen the serial number 108, but nothing more. Searches revealed that there were half a dozen or so Spitfires on Malta around that time with a serial number ending 108. Would it be possible to narrow it down to be positive about which aircraft it was? Kevin's thoroughness soon revealed an eyewitness to the crash who saw white 'smoke' streaming from the engine before it crashed. This confirmed that the aircraft found was most likely the same one, because the glycol tank had a bullet hole through it, which would result in the gushing white trail. Later, while talking to an ack ack gunner who remained on the Island after the War, Kevin asked if he could recall more exactly the date when he saw the aircraft. At that point, the

man's wife said she knew when it happened because their child was born about that time and (more than that) she also produced a piece of parachute silk that she laid hands on at the time! That pinpointed it to Spitfire BR108, shot down on 8 July 1942. Kevin went on to say that in 1974, this aircraft was recovered and moved into the Malta War Museum. From his dive on BR108 Kevin recovered several pieces, most of which went to the museum, plus the compass, which he held up for us to see. It still works and contains its original alcohol.

I have only scratched the surface of the diving yarns Kevin had on his Malta posting. If you want to hear more, then you must attend one of his talks. Other aircraft he came upon on the sea-bed included Wellingtons, Mosquito, Seafire, Blenheim, and a bit older still, the cargo of a 2,200 year old Phoenician wreck. The local museum was very pleased with that find and the recovered artefacts

How do you follow an experience like that in your career? Well, it is obvious. You get posted to RAF St. Mawgan and join a Shackleton III squadron. Kevin was back in the land of living, growling Griffons. The last of these memorable aircraft was retired on 23 September 1971, we were told. From there Kevin spent some time with the Battle of Britain Flight, before ultimately retiring from the RAF and becoming a professional diver – which is another story. As ever, facts and figures accompanied the talk (as did plentiful pictures and film, of course) and some I managed to note:

• The Merlin was a 12 cylinder engine of 27,000cc; 16 different Marks were built; power was increased from the original 1030hp to 2060hp; and it flew in 43 different aircraft types.

• 112,000 Merlins were built in the UK, of which Ford built 23,000

• Packard USA built 37,000.

Ford revolutionised production as soon as they became involved. They quickly discovered from the initial sample engine they were given, that components were 'fettled' to fit where they were installed. They were not interchangeable either within the engine or with another engine! As a result of the input of Ford, common components became interchangeable, so that an engine could be repaired in-situ, whereas previously any engine fault required a complete engine change, so that it could go into the workshop. As a result the cost of an engine reduced from £6,500 per unit to £1,200. Production of Merlins stopped in 1950.

It was a great talk. Thank you Kevin Patience. It was an absorbing evening with a completely different approach to the destiny of aircraft and crews.

TREASURES OF COBHAM HALL

Text and photographs by David Merrett

General view of the main hall

Over the past few years it has been my privilege to visit Cobham Hall, humbly referred to as the "reserve collection" at the Fleet Air Arm Museum (FAAM), several times. The building itself is to be admired, purpose built with sophisticated environmental control systems, it is strong, safe and a fitting place for some of the nation's naval aviation treasures. And treasures there are in abundance. I have marvelled at the reserve airframe collection for some time but recently discovered that one could also visit the document archive and small items collection so went there as soon as possible. The full potential of collections of any kind are determined by their management and in this FAAM excels. The curators are passionate and exceptionally knowledgeable. I found their enthusiasm contagious and would have stayed all day if they had let me. In this brief note it is impossible to give a definitive list of what can be seen, indeed, one of the great advantages of Cobham Hall is that it allows a dynamic management of the entire collection with rotation of exhibits and themed displays. I have chosen a few of my favourite things to share with you but I do recommend that you visit the reserve collection yourself and make your own list.

Wasp and Lynx: Two of my favourite things, together the

most aptly and evocatively named aircraft in the collection, the Wasp and the Lynx. The Wasp, small, busy, buzzy with a sharp and lethal sting. It does look about the most fun thing to fly ever built – an

Westland Lynx - "long and sleek". This model is armed with a Mk44 lightweight torpedo

extension of the pilot's own arms and legs perhaps. The Lynx, long, sleek, she looks fast just sitting there. This type was the holder of the rotary craft speed record at one time after all. Both of these aircraft played important roles in the Falklands conflict.

Okha: Rocket powered and

Yokosuka Okha. Rocket-powered air-launched suicide plane

dropped from a bomber, this aircraft was small, fast and had a long (one way) range. Once launched it was almost impossible to stop so a good deal of effort was made to negate the mother aircraft. Imagine being seated in one of these as the rudimentary cockpit was screwed down and you were slung under a vast, vibrating bomber, setting off on a one way trip with nothing but a painted headscarf for protection. At the other end, imagine the trepidation if you were unlucky enough to see one of these things coming at you. With a tiny frontal area you didn't have much of a target to shoot at. Not a thing of beauty in my opinion but an important reminder of how frightening armed conflict is for all sides.

Westland Wyvern: A simply beautiful aircraft, this example

Westland Wyvern. This early variant was powered by the 3,500 hp Rolls Royce Eagle piston engine

being in polished bare metal finish. It is easy to forget when

looking at illustrations and pictures how big these aircraft really are. The huge contra-rotating propellers simply exude power and it is easy to imagine the noise, vibration and smell that must have accompanied every take-off and landing. It must have been quite an experience for the deck crew as these magnificent aircraft powered in to attempt landings on the tiny footprint of a moving carrier deck.

Westland Wessex Mk 3: A famous veteran of the Falklands

Veteran of the Falklands conflict, this Wessex Mk 3 was nicknamed "Humphrey"

War, how "Humphrey" got his name is now a matter of some conjecture. It might have been a reference to the dipping anti-submarine gear or the influence of contemporary television advertisements promoting fresh milk. Whatever, the amount of damage clearly visible on him demonstrates two things, the toughness of this particular type and the consummate bravery of the crew who flew him repeatedly into the war zone. Like all large rotary winged aircraft close up – it simply should not fly. It's not aerodynamic and it looks very, very heavy. Nonetheless he did fly, playing several key roles in the conflict. A rare and humbling opportunity to experience a wonderfully preserved and protected piece of history.

Supermarine 510: The first swept wing jet to land on an aircraft carrier, VV106 is a heavily modified Supermarine Attacker. She retains the tricycle undercarriage with a tailwheel from earlier designs which caused

Supermarine 510

issues with the jet blast potentially damaging ship's decks. The solution – a vectored jet pipe pre-dating those of Harriers and the Lightning II by some considerable period, good ideas always have to start somewhere. I think that one can clearly see the beautiful, embryonic Supermarine Swift waiting in the wings.

Agusta 109: Everything in Cobham Hall has an interesting history but this Augusta 109 helicopter's lineage is stranger

Agusta 109. You might wonder why this particular aircraft is there...

than most. You might wonder why an aircraft that was never part of the fleet is there. You will have to visit to find out and may be "impressed". She is in impeccable condition and beautiful to see close up.

Fairey Barracuda: A work in progress. The FAAM is currently restoring a Fairey Barracuda predominantly from crash sourced fragments. More Barracudas were built for the RNAS than any other type yet not a single complete example exists. This project is a mammoth challenge of discovery, recovery, restoration and reconstruction. It is a wonderful example of innovative and active museum-ship. If something no longer exists, find some battered bits and fix them to get as close as you can to the original. A long term endeavour which I sincerely hope will be completed in my lifetime, I want to see it finished please.

"Crash-sourced fragments" of the Fairey Barracuda

"World's first aircraft carrier'": One of the world's first aircraft carriers, dating from WW1. Rescued from destitution serving as a coal barge on the River Thames in London, this lighter is undergoing a sympathetic restoration to bring her back to her original functional glory. She was originally designed to be partially flooded in order to load

The salvaged lighter, now cleaned and restored

a Curtis seaplane, re-floated and then towed with her potentially offensive passenger into the thick of the action. Aircraft popping up miles from any airfields or bases were a significant strategic advantage and these lighters were soon adapted to allow Sopwith Camels to take off whilst they were under tow. The concept was proven, and now look at the sheer scale and effectiveness of her direct descendants.

Archive Document Store.
A relatively hidden part of the

The archive document store, holding "priceless treasures"

reserve collection but in truth, an absolutely huge archive. The document store actually exudes as much history and heritage as the most imposing airframe in the collection. For me, there is the same excitement as the transfer boxes are opened as running my hand over the leading edge of the H.P.115's wing. All manner of records bring to life both the people and the machines they worked with in a way that only the original papers can. The environmental control system that preserves these priceless treasures does more than just that, it preserves the "feel" and "look" and the intrinsic "reality". This is yet another example of how FAAM treasures and preserves the originality of all of its artefacts, be they large or small.

Small Items General.
Meticulous quarantine procedures

Racks containing "Small Items General", consisting of quality rather than quantity

ensure that nothing nasty gets in to threaten the unique assets already stored in the collection. Incoming pieces are checked,

catalogued and then frozen to get rid of pests and moisture. The essence is quality rather than quantity and the excellent management of the collection at this critical point is essential in building and maintaining a valuable and historically relevant range of items.

Small Items Flying Helmets

The sheer range of different and often eclectic items in this part of the collection is staggering;

The collection of flying helmets, "from old to new"

personal items, uniforms, medals (many, many medals), "trench art", models, flags, trophies, the list is seemingly endless. I particularly liked this collection of flying helmets, from old to new and from all over the world. Every single one has its own story but together the gestalt is clear, the evolution from the earliest leather cap to state of the art avionics is there to see. A unique and palpable piece of aviation history.

Small Items Miscellaneous

FAAM has inherited and integrated the Airship Heritage Trust, in itself a historically important archive and many pieces are on the shelves together

Small Items Miscellaneous, including items from the Airship Trust

with more familiar objects like these ship's bells. Yet more examples of where the real history jumps out at you and fills your senses; who was the last person to ring that particular bell and why?

Airframe Specific Documents - Concorde

The collection contains much

Aircraft-specific documents, showing a selection of data concerning Concorde 002

original documentation relating to specific airframes and marks. This engineering DNA is simply priceless and would allow the future construction from scratch of a number of aircraft and other components. Woolly mammoth or Westland Whirlwind? My eye was drawn to the Concorde section, full of the supporting data for 002. As a young boy I saw her take off on her maiden flight from Filton to Fairford so she has a special place in my heart. To see the notes that would have been made on that exact day relating to her performance was very emotive.

1960s Defence Review

A final, rather depressing image, a complete copy of the 1960's Defence Review documentation. This was the review that scuppered many fine engineering projects. It "killed" the TSR2, the Fairey Rotodyne and much more besides so it has a particularly notorious place in British engineering and aviation history. I found it rather chilling to see it sitting there on the shelves. Together with the flawed decision to amalgamate the nation's post war aircraft manufacturers, it effectively ended Britain's dominant influence in world aviation. It might be argued that its intrinsic impact was far wider and as a nation we have suffered to this day with an on-going failure to attract our best young talent into engineering and innovation.

The collection includes a complete copy of the 1960s Defence Review documentation

In conclusion, Cobham Hall provides a literal treasure house of often unique items which are being properly cared for and made accessible to the widest audience. This is a shining beacon of success in contrast to our often woeful failure in the past to conserve our cultural and engineering heritage. Please visit, you won't be disappointed.

Cobham Hall is opened to visitors on regular occasions through the year. Visit the Museum website at fleetairarm.com for more details

THE NARES DYNASTY - GENERATIONS OF NAVAL SERVICE

By Graham Mottram

(Continued from Jabberwock 90)

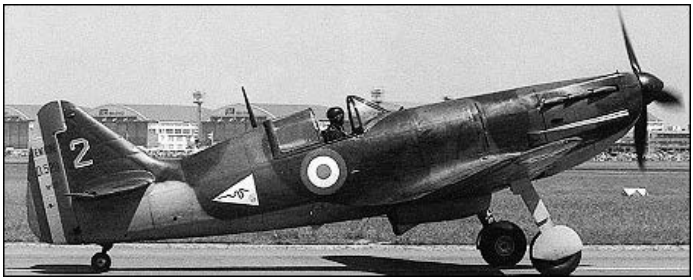
Activity aboard the carriers supporting Torch began before dawn, with aircrew receiving

Happier times. Aircrew from HMS* Glorious *at Dekhelia, Alexandria in 1939. Back row (L-R) Ransford Slater, "Toothy", Pilot. Centre "Jimmy" Nares. Front "Happy". *Photo FAAM*

their final briefings while the air gunners in the Albacores checked their equipment. Eight Albacores of 822 NAS were launched from *Furious* and, around 0600, slowly joined up with their escorts, six Sea Hurricanes of 800 NAS from *Biter* and another six of 804 NAS from *Dasher.* Amphibious landings had been going on for some hours and the French forces knew they were under serious attack. La Senia airfield was heavy with aircraft of many types but the ones to be most feared were the fairly modern Dewoitine D520 single seat fighters, which were a close match for the Sea Hurricane, and significantly faster and better armed than the Albacore. The airfield must have received reports of the British raid crossing the coast and twelve D520s scrambled to meet them. The French fighters were at a higher altitude than the Albacores but 804's top cover was nowhere to be seen. The Albacores strung out into line astern to go into their bombing dives, and fierce anti aircraft fire opened up on them from the airfield's defences. The D520s dived into the melee and the next few minutes were full of frantic and violent action.

Sub Lt Mike Crosley flew with 800 and reproduced his diary notes in his book "They Gave Me a Seafire". "We asked Bill Bruen (their CO) what the chances were of the French fighters coming up against us. He replied that the French Navy was determined on revenge and their Air Force would back them

up. La Senia airfield was at the eastern end of a 25-mile long dried up salt lake. It was about five miles from the coast and south of the town of Oran. The dawn raid was intended to make it impossible for French aircraft to attack our fleet or invasion barges. If we struck before dawn they would be caught on the ground. I was not at all confident in my night flying ability. I had only done six hours night flying in my life and only two of those in Hurricanes.



Dewoitine 520. "A close match for the Sea Hurricane." The French fighter first flew in November 1939. *Photo Aviastar*

Here we were escorting slow old biplanes from some other carrier, in darkness, never having seen an Albacore at close quarters before and flying into a possible hornet's nest of DW520s.

Lt J Nares was leading the Albacores. Bill had said at the briefing that he knew him well as an excellent strike leader with vast experience. He had told Nares that he would position our six Hurricanes in the dark part of the sky during the approach to the target so that he could silhouette the enemy fighters against the dawn sky if they came in to attack the Albacores. This, we all thought, was fabulous stuff. Not only had Bill taken the trouble to brief us on what he was doing, but he had also told the Albacore leader of his outline plan before we had even sailed from Greenock." (Bill Bruen must have been seeking to instil confidence in his own relatively inexperienced team and was a little dishonest in his portrayal of John Nares as an experienced strike leader. As a straight-laced pre-war RN aviator he may well have known John Nares for some time, and even been well aware of his experience as an observer but Nares had never had the opportunity to lead anything other than practice strikes. That inexperience would show when the operation was properly underway.)

Crosley's diary :

"We got up at 0430 and were given a few last minute orders and climbed into our aircraft. It was pitch black when we got up on the flight deck to man our aircraft and we thought it would be a matter of luck whether or not we managed to find the Albacores taking off from *Furious* that we were supposed to be escorting - close escort. Six Hurricanes from *Dasher*

(all from 804) were doing the top cover. We climbed through a thin layer of cloud, still not seeing a thing except, down below, the wakes of a few ships here and there. (It was now that Nares's inexperience showed. The Albacore had a comfortable cruising speed with its normal warload of about 115 mph but, probably

Albacore being prepared for launch. Note the contemporary TORCH markings, including the American-style star. Photo FAAM

with the understandable intention of keeping his attack formation together, Nares chose to fly so slowly that his escort was compromised. With La Senia's defences given a measure of early warning, his slow transit south from the coast gave the French fighters more time to gain altitude and take up a strong tactical position.) "The CO got the Albacores silhouetted against the lightening sky in the east and we went after them. ..... We had about 200 feet difference in altitude between us as we weaved, trying not to overtake the Albacores which seemed to be flying at about 75 knots to our slowest safe speed of 160.

Sea Hurricane of 800 Squadron in HMS **Biter,** *also in TORCH markings.* Photo FAAM

The top cover then arrived, very ropey indeed. One of them saw Bill on his

own and tried to form up on him. He broke R/T silence to tell him to b.... off. The "apple cores" went so slowly I thought we should never get there at all.

After the first 45 minutes there was still no land in sight so we started to economise on the juice a bit. It was getting a bit lighter now. We arrived over the target after about an hour's flying, without any opposition, when I looked up and on the port bow, and beginning a dive down on the Albacores ahead - who were just turning right into the hangar area of the target - and I saw what might have been Seafires from *Furious.* I called on the radio and slammed the throttle lever forward just in case they weren't Seafires. There were about ten of them and they were easy to see against the light sky. Then one or two of the leaders started to fire yellow tracer at something. I pushed the nose down to get a better look and saw another light coloured fighter getting in behind an Albacore, already in its bombing dive. So I turned sharp right and followed him down. Before I could get in range I saw another yellow looking aircraft on my port quarter above me. He fired and I could easily see the tracers, little yellow blobs chasing each other, as they passed me by to my left. I turned left steeply so that they passed me harmlessly behind." Crosley out-turned that Dewoitine and shot it down, and shot a second one off the tail of another Hurricane a few minutes later. The airfield was now a mass of flames away to his south west. He waited for his wingman to extricate himself from more French fighters, the two joined up and headed back out to their carrier. After a chaotic further 24 hours of flying and landing on different decks, 800's pilots were back on *Biter* and able to take stock

Lieutenant J V Hartley, the pilot of Nares' Albacore

of the La Senia raid. Crosley noted, "Three Albacores had failed to return but two of the crews were safe. The leader had, however, gone down in flames in his first dive. They had set the hangars on fire and there were a lot of extra explosions.

On capturing the airfield at La Senia on "D+1", and the seaplane base at Arzeu, the troops found that all of the 46 French aircraft destroyed had been fully armed with torpedoes

or bombs. Had not our raid against La Senia succeeded so well, our two assault carriers would have presented them with a fairly easy target if they had been found in the poor weather, for the Seafire defence was mostly providing CAP over Tafaroui in the early morning". Although the bombing raid by the Albacores had achieved substantial success, it was at a massive cost to 822. The lead aircraft carrying John Nares had been hit and burst into flames. It appeared to complete its bombing run before crashing in the north east corner of the airfield. All three occupants lost their lives. In addition, another six Albacores were hit, three of them crash landing with their crews being taken prisoner, but they were all released within days as the invasion progressed. Four aircraft eventually made it back to *Furious* with varying levels of damage. The wreckage of the Albacore was very badly damaged in the fire and the crash. When American troops occupied La Senia they found the wreck and removed what human remains they could find. Along with American troops who had been killed in the fighting those remains were buried with full military honours at Arzew cemetery on 11 November 1942. A few days later Hal Tibbetts visited La Senia and was informed of this action by an American general, and he used the information when his sad task, as Acting CO of 822, was to write letters of condolence to the three families. Post war, the Americans revisited Arzew Cemetery and exhumed the earlier burials for relocation. Non-American remains were reburied in Oran Cemetery, now known as Le Petit Lac by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. During the exhumation process at least one body was identified as Royal Navy and assistance to identify it was requested from the Admiralty. There appears to have been no response to that request and so the reburial had to be anonymous. It seems that even this limited information was not properly conveyed to the Imperial War Graves Commission at the time and so it had no alternative but to record Nares, Hartley and Dixon as having No Known Grave. Their names were accordingly engraved on the Lee on Solent FAA memorial. John Nares's son Anthony James was born six weeks after the death of his father. Marguerite remarried in 1945, to David Buchanan-Dunlop, who had won the DSC during the war and went on to become a Captain RN. He died at the age of 74 in 1985. Sadly, in addition to having endured the deaths of two husbands, Marguerite also had to cope with Anthony's passing. A successful businessman and an enthusiastic and skilled skier, he was killed in an avalanche at Klosters in 1996. Marguerite died the following year at the age of 85. With her died the last direct link with four generations of gallant and loyal service in the dark blue by the Nares family.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

EARLY DAYS AT RNAS YEOVILTON

By Dennis (Den) Wood, as disctated to Jeff Turner

In 1939 as war was breaking out my father Edward Bevan Wood worked for the Ministry of Labour and we were living in Swindon. After a Handley Page Harrow had a forced landing in a field near Ilchester, the powers that be decided that it would be a good place to site an airfield. The Navy had been looking for an airfield to house their land-based aircraft. My father was then in charge of securing labour to build the new aerodrome, having done the same at South Cerney, Kemble and Ullavington airfields. The field was off the A30 (now the A303) entrance from Pyle Lane. Two conveniently placed farm houses were commandeered by the Navy. A building in Pyle Lane was owned by the Westland Aircraft company, and development of the Westland Whirlwind, twin engine, single seat fighter was mainly done from the new aerodrome. This was quite separate from the Naval flying. As time developed the extension to the aerodrome included several hangars being built and on the other side of the lane, the church and cinema. In addition much personnel accommodation was developed from the Main Gate, to the west. Later, the Main Gate was moved towards Ilchester. As Naval carrier based aircraft became available they were based at Yeovilton for eventual dispatch to the aircraft carriers. Close liaison occurred between the other naval aerodromes in Sussex and Hampshire, and near to Portsmouth, at Lee-on-Solent and Ford. Speckington Manor, near Yeovilton was largely commandeered by the Navy to carry out their navigation training. Three wheel bicycles, which had been used for selling ice cream, were converted for use as radio receivers, with pedal pushing would-be pilots having to navigate back blind to the imaginary carrier hut, guided in by radio. I used to cycle to Speckington Manor, where the farm still operated, and I remember the farmer warning me about the low flying aircraft coming in over Speckington Lane as they approached the airfield.

In 1941 Air Training Corps were being set up for under age boys interested in aircraft. Squadron Leader Draper worked at Westland and he was able to form number 1032 Yeovil ATC, of which I was a founder member. We used Westland premises for Morse practice in their experimental shop, where we saw the future Fairey Barracuda aircraft being built in the erecting shop. The squadron used local air maps for

map reading and meteorological training. We also had regular Sunday morning meetings at Yeovil School for marching practice and Sunday morning service. In the afternoons most of us got on our bicycles and cycled to Yeovilton, a matter of 5 miles, where unannounced access to the airfield was obtained by lifting the bikes over the fence from Pyle Lane at Limington - adjacent to the flying huts which had been conveniently erected on the airfield perimeter. Those men in training were happy to give free flights in their two seater training aircraft such as the Fairey Fulmar. On one occasion, on 15th September 1942 my luck was in, and a tall red-headed Canadian – Sub Lieutenant Richardson, laughingly said to me "Guess you can fly, as you look so keen" and I had to agree – I was ! He quickly strapped me in to the back seat of a Miles Master on which he was to do an air test. This was a rare bird for me and I never saw another with Royal Navy markings on the tail. He shouted before starting the engine "I will do take off, and leave the rest to you". As the Rolls Royce Kestrel engine (predecessor of the Merlin) roared, we raced down the runway. I was in fear and trembling. We lifted, and waving his hands above his head he shouted "Undercarriage up – she's all yours !" Fearing the worst, I pulled gently on the stick and we climbed anxiously into the sky; me thinking "this is easy!". Unintentionally, I pushed the stick to the left and the wing dropped violently - so much so that I pulled it back to level out and from the front cockpit came a comment "great – you've been doing this a long time". Talk about thrilled! I was amazed that I had actually been at the controls, for about 20 minutes, with the pilot pointing out Yeovil as we circled round. I suppose it was a relief when he calmly said "test done, undercarriage down, I'll take her in" and we landed back

Seafire being refuelled from a towed bowser at Yeovilton in September 1943. Photo Lt E A Zimmerman

at Yeovilton and trundled back to dispersal. I was one very happy ATC cadet, knowing now where my future lay.

I also remember on 12 April 1942 as an ATC cadet, I had a Sunday morning air experience flight in a DH89A Rapide flown by Lieutenant Commander Ralph Richardson, the actor, who had flown up from Sussex in the Rapide.

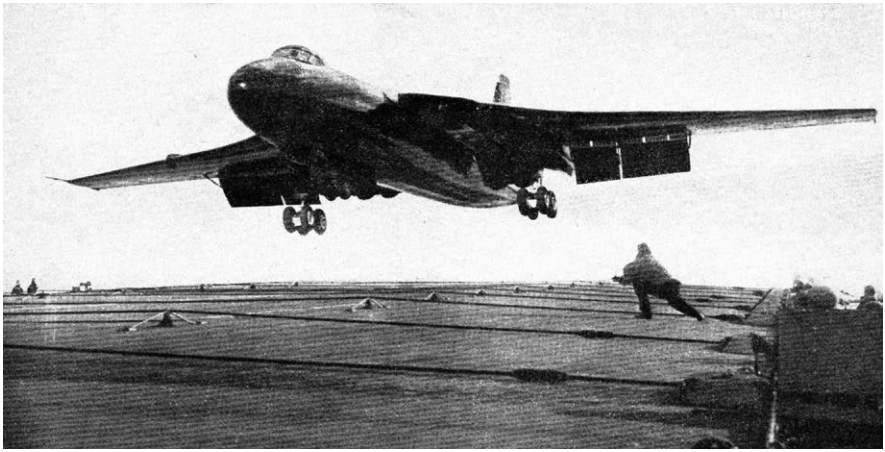
I recall that on 23 January 1943 a Wellington bomber on a night training flight overshot the runway at Yeovilton and crashed and burned out in a field at Limington. There was only one survivor, the rear gunner, who was pulled clear from the wreckage by a council employee who lived nearby. He was well rewarded for his bravery, I think with a medal. We inspected the wreckage the next day. The crash didn't deter me from flying the next day in a Fairey Fulmar. My flights with the ATC included flying in a Blackburn Skua dive bomber on 20 July 1941, a Rapide (Dominie) on 12th April 1942 and four flights in a Fulmar. My last flight with ATC was on 28 February 1943.

Summer camps were held for ATC cadets from neighbouring districts which didn't have an airfield. This was held at Podymore Lane, next to Speckington Manor in a disused cow shed, with temporary sleeping accommodation for about a dozen cadets. Everything was done in military style and we helped around the Yeovilton airfield for example by pushing aircraft to where they were required. I remember how easy a Seafire was to push compared to the heavy Fulmar. When the weather was bad the Navy would sometimes find a speaker who had been on active service to give a talk to the excited boys in a hall.

I joined the RAF in April 1943 and after various training establishments in the UK I went by ship to Africa and then Egypt, flying Wellingtons and Liberators. I didn't return to the UK until 1947. In later years, around 1963, my memories of ATC talks and those early wartime days at Yeovilton inspired my plans for the formation of a society for wartime personnel and others who may be interested. Our first meeting had 63 attendees and I became membership secretary of the Society of Friends, and as I listed the members in alphabetical order I became member 63, which I still am today at the age of 94. There are now over 3,500 members. We also arranged the preservation and restoration of old aircraft at the airfield which had been rusting in a field. These planes were moved into a disused hangar and became the first of what has now become a very popular collection of planes at the Fleet Air Arm Museum.

●●●●●●●●●●●●

TAILPIECE



Many thanks to member Roy Cargill for bringing this picture to our attention. It was published in "The Aeroplane" of 23 December 1955, and the caption reads:

NAVAL DEVELOPMENT *- Until this picture was specially released, we had no inkling that the Vickers Valiant was undergoing evaluation trials with the Royal Navy. It is seen here about to touch down on HMS* Ocean *in the course of these trials - made, it will be noted, without the benefit of an arrestor hook.*

We have been unable to find any context for this extraordinary picture, even the usually dependable Google and Wikipedia are silent on these supposed trials. It has all the hallmarks of a publicity stunt - we liked the batsman apparently signalling the "cut"! As the wingspan of the Valiant was 114 ft 4 in (34.85 m) it would have been a tight fit on the flight deck of a light fleet carrier.

The aircraft was the first of the V-bombers to enter service, in January 1955. Fatigue problems saw its early retirement in December 1964.

In 1956, shortly after this photograph was taken, *Ocean* took an active role in the Suez crisis. In the first ever large-scale helicopter borne assault, Westland Whirlwind and Bristol Sycamore helicopters from HMS *Ocean* and *Theseus* landed 425 men of 45 Commando and 23 tons of stores into Port Said in 90 minutes.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●