The ‘Aviation Tales’ Newsletter: January 2025.

Take the leap of faith

Recent Aviation News.

To take my mind off the two recent, really bad passenger aircraft accidents overseas, I spent some time browsing around for recent aviation related achievements of a more positive aspect here at home.

Firstly, the Pratt and Whitney Engine Centre based at Christchurch has recently announced that they will be expanding their engine repair capabilities to carry out repair work that was previously outsourced.

And secondly….

Dawn Aerospace has made history with the successful supersonic flight of its Mk-II Aurora rocket powered aircraft, one of the fastest privately-developed aircraft around.

This achievement signifies a major step toward operational hypersonic travel and daily space access, establishing rocket-powered aircraft as a new class of ultra-high-performance vehicles.

Aviation Personalities.

Sir Robert (Bob) Lickley

Born in Scotland during 1912, this gentleman attended the High School of Dundee and the University of Edinburgh to study Civil Engineering, going on to the Imperial College London, where he studied Aeronautics on a Caird Scholarship.

After WW2, he was appointed Professor of Aircraft Design at the new College of Aeronautics at Cranfield, in Bedfordshire. In this appointment he brought through many able young engineers who later made their mark throughout the industry.

These were fortunate people, as their professor had up-to-date and wide experience of aircraft design, development, and production and was thus able to impart to them all the lessons he had learned in his previous years with Hawker.

However, an opportunity beckoned in 1951 to become Chief Engineer and Technical Director of Fairey Aviation. There he showed great skill in building up a team of mostly young engineers comprising mathematicians, aerodynamicists, structural, and aero-elasticity specialists, together with development engineers and test pilots.

Thus equipped, Fairey's were able to cope with a wide range of aircraft projects including the new Fairey Delta 2, a supersonic delta-wing experimental aircraft which in March 1956 smashed the world's air-speed record by the huge margin of 300 mph, reaching 1,132mph over a measured course off the Sussex Coast.

The engineering team of designers, draughtsmen, and specialists were housed in a new, but modest, building at the Hayes, Middlesex, headquarters of Fairey Aviation.

It was remarkable that the planning and preparations for the world air speed attempt by the FD2, to be piloted by Peter Twiss, was confined to those few directly involved and was unsuspected by those others who worked in the same small building!

It was a tribute to Bob Lickley's ability to impress upon his staff, and to sustain this pressure, of the need for secrecy, mainly to 'catch out' the Americans, then holders of the record.

The triumph which secured the aircraft's enduring fame and earned Twiss an OBE the following year came about almost incidentally.

"As we were developing the Fairey Delta 2," Twiss recalled many years later, "we realised that we were flying virtually every day at speeds above the current world air speed record".

A record attempt was therefore logical, if not central to the aircraft's intended purpose, and Twiss was instrumental in persuading his employer Sir Richard Fairey to back it.

"There was no sensation of speed," Twiss remarked shortly after setting the record.

He hadn't been particularly comfortable aloft, for although the outside temperature at altitude was 60 degrees below zero, air friction over the aircraft's skin at the phenomenal speed caused the temperature in the cockpit to reach more than 100 degrees.

Bob Lickley and Fairey's suffered a severe disappointment when their new RAF fighter project was still-born by the ill-advised policy of Duncan Sandys as Minister for Defence, and then Aviation, who opined that "the day of the manned fighter is over and that guided missiles would reign instead"!

Fairey had won the competition with a design based on the successful FD2, so the cancellation very adversely affected the company's fortunes and also those of the British aircraft industry.

Restoration News.

The Westland Whirlwind. P7056, restoration project.

This exciting restoration project has been quietly underway for many years now over in the UK.

The primary aim of the “Whirlwind Fighter Project” is to reproduce a single (and the world's only) example of the Westland Whirlwind Mk 1 twin-engine single-seat fighter-bomber aircraft.

It is intended that the project will result in far more than another 'replica,' and P7056 will therefore be a complete but non-airworthy reproduction of the Westland Whirlwind.

A reproduction aircraft which is indistinguishable inside and out from an aircraft in Squadron service during the Second World War.

As sections are completed, they are put on display for the purpose of public education in the Kent Battle of Britain Museum, Hawkinge.

Available for public view since June 2024 are the fully-equipped cockpit and rear fuselage sections incorporating top-secret radar identification systems not displayed in-situ within any other collection and the exposed cannon arrangement in the nose.

Alongside is an alternative experimental cannon configuration and the remains of an excavated Whirlwind that includes the only two known remaining Rolls Royce Peregrine engines in the world.

The better of the two recovered RR Peregrine engines.

The Whirlwind, Serial No. P6966, the first production aircraft, crashed to earth in a field at Lanton Farm, Stenhousemuir (Scotland).

During his descent, P/O McDermott was circled by a Spitfire, and, on landing, McDermott sprained his ankle and was captured by the local Home Guard who mistook him for a German!

Although well-armed with 20mm cannons, the aircraft proved unpopular with the RAF and Fighter Command considered the aircraft to be underpowered. They also disliked the fact that its Peregrine engines tended to be temperamental and required frequent servicing. The Whirlwind was soon withdrawn from RAF service.

Interestingly, The RAF pilot on the wing of 'their' Whirlwind is a New Zealander, Flt Lt Bob Beaumont, grandfather of Jeff Beaumont, who, by sheer co-incidence, is a member of the 'Whirlwind' team and that P7056 was his Grandfather's regular Whirlwind during his time with 263 Squadron!

Nice work so far.

The 'non-airworthy reproduction' Whirlwind is progressing well with front and rear fuselage moving along as shown below.

Tailpiece.

A rear view of WG777 showing the variable area tailpipe.

- **Do you have any interesting aviation topics you would like mentioned in future newsletter editions?**

- **Do any of the articles you have read in this newsletter edition require further explanation?**

Then please contact me 😊

This month's motivational statement:

"Imagine if we treated each new dawn of each new day with the same reverence and joy as we do each new year."

Angie Lynn

The 'Aviation Tales' newsletter is produced monthly

For further information and services

Please contact:

Johnskene66@gmail.com

or via

www.aviation-tales.com