

RAeS Loughborough Shuttleworth Collection Flying Day Visit 8th May 2016

Sunday 8th May dawned to be a glorious sunny morning with an almost cloudless sky. It was just right for an air display and doubtless much to the relief of the organisers of the Shuttleworth Collection's first flying display of the 2016 season. The result was a near record attendance of over seven thousand people, twenty-four of whom were from the RAeS Loughborough Branch.

All of the Loughborough contingent arrived by car, along with the vast majority of other attendees. I was impressed by the almost military precision with which the Collection's volunteer staff marshalled some two and a half thousand cars into their parking positions.

Our morning was spent viewing the Collection's static display of classic and vintage aircraft. The starting point was two replica Bristol Scouts (Fig. 1 and 2). Both were scratch built from the original drawings – no mean achievement both in terms of skill and dedication. One of them showed the distinct signs of flying such aircraft – a heavy oil deposit down the flanks of the forward fuselage.



Fig. 1 - Bristol Scout



Fig. 2 - Bristol Scout (second example)

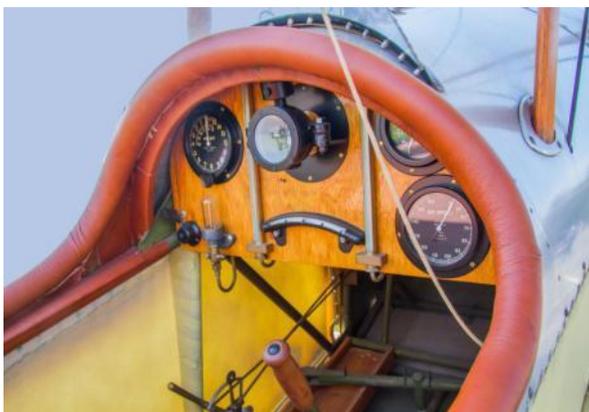


Fig. 3 - Bristol Scout Cockpit



Fig. 4 – RAF SE5A

The rudimentary, almost Heath-Robinson, nature of the cockpits of both aircraft (Fig. 3 above) brought home to us the almost "seat-of-the-pants" attitude to flying at the time, not to mention the skill needed to fly such aircraft.

Next in line was the RAF SE5A fighter (Fig. 4 above), one of the most successful fighters of WWI. It was produced by the Royal Aircraft Factory (later Royal Aircraft Establishment), Farnborough.

The developments in aviation which took place during WWI and in the immediate post-war years were apparent in the Collection's beautifully preserved fully operational example of the Gloster Gladiator (Fig. 5 overleaf). Its large Bristol Mercury radial engine gave it a top speed of 225 knots. It remained in service with the RAF right up until the early years of WWII, and was only superseded by aircraft like the Hurricane (Fig. 6 overleaf) which was a stalwart fighter aircraft of WWII. Later in the day we were to see these two aircraft flying in formation as part of the flying display.



Fig. 5 – Gloster Gladiator



Fig. 6 – Hawker Hurricane

A surprising member of the line-up was the Fieseler Storch (Fig. 7), a pre-WWII German communications aircraft. The large high wings of this aircraft gives it a superb low speed performance and a landing speed of only 45 knots. Both features were very evident during the afternoon's flying display when it appeared to almost hover in the sky and subsequently land very much in a STOL mode.



Fig. 7 – Fieseler Storch

Amongst the remaining aircraft in the display was one of the most iconic aircraft of WWII, the all-black Westland Lysander (Fig. 8). This aircraft was made famous for its Special Operations Executive's (SOE) operations during WWII. Its large high wings and very long oleo shock absorbing undercarriage made the aircraft eminently suitable for landing and taking off from short grass landing strips. Its Bristol Mercury engine (the same as used to power the Gloster Gladiator) made it relatively quiet in flight. The features of the aircraft were demonstrated during the afternoon's flying display. It was not difficult to imagine this large black brooding shape descending like a large moth into a woodland clearing lit only by moonlight and a few torches.



Fig. 9 – Westland Lysander

Other aircraft were located in nearby hangars. Of these, the most interesting were the Hawker Tomtit (Fig. 10) and the Avro Tutor (Fig. 11 overleaf). Together with the static display aircraft, these aircraft were representative of the wide range of aircraft manufacturers competing for business in the 1930s. Both aircraft played significant training roles in the immediate pre-



Fig. 10 – Avro Tutor



Fig. 11 – Hawker Tomtit (with visiting crowds behind)

The afternoon was dominated by the flying display. Numerous picnic chairs and rugs covered the grassy area bordering on the runway although I have to admit they appeared to be further away than in previous years. Perhaps this was one to the effects of the increased safety requirements following on from the accident at the Shoreham air display in 2015. Many families appeared to be enjoying the festive atmosphere in the bright sunshine.

The most significant flying display for many, judging by the “oohs and aahs”, was that given by the RAF Red Arrows display team (Fig. 12). Aircraft burst out of formations, executed barrel rolls round formations and carried out high speed crossing manoeuvres which had the crowds mesmerised. Having said this, the flying displays of both the aircraft already mentioned in these notes and other aircraft such as the Blenheim Mk1 (Fig. 12 overleaf), the Avro Anson and the Polikarpov Po2, a very long lived Russian training aircraft, from the early 1930s to post WWII , were all reminders of our aviation heritage which is, after all, what the Shuttleworth Collection is all about.



Fig. 12 – Red Arrows in formation overflying the airfield



Fig. 13 – Blenheim Mk 1 taking off at the start of its flying display

N.B. This aircraft is fitted with a newer version of the same Bristol Mercury engines installed in the Gloster Gadiator and the Westland Lysander.

Also part of the display were four Zlin aerobatic aircraft, which carried out many exhilarating manoeuvres including loops, barrel rolls and drives. They were flown by four champions of aerobatic flight.

The display ended at about 6 o'clock and we were all expecting a mad rush to our cars and a scramble to drive out of the single entrance. However, once again the excellent team of Shuttleworth volunteers was there to guide us. As a result we were all on our way within twenty minutes. Judging by the post visit comments, all those attending from the RAeS Loughborough Branch thoroughly enjoyed their visit and were enthused by our aeronautical heritage.

Visit notes by Colin Moss