

The Scottish Aviation Preservation Society

30 Years of Aviation Preservation at East Fortune Airfield

By James Mattocks

How time flies! This year sees the thirtieth anniversary of APSS, and marks the time when a small group of aviation enthusiasts who had been gathering at East Fortune and elsewhere to pursue their hobby, had their first AGM in 1973. Among the founding and early members were Robert Whitton, Sandy Benzie and Don Storer, Mr & Mrs Esson, all of who are still members, as well as our redoubtable Robert Wilson, who was until recently Membership Secretary and is still active as our "works photographer".

At that time, East Fortune was used for general storage, by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. APSS members were influential in lobbying for and encouraging the concept of a Museum of Flight and this was helped by the donation of a Spitfire LF XVI (TE462), by the RAF, to Chambers Street Museum in 1971. Because of lack of space, this was aircraft stored at East Fortune. Shortly afterwards, the Sea Venom FAW.22, the Sea Vampire T.22 and Sea Hawk F.2, were acquired by Chambers Street from the then Fleet Air Arm base at Lossiemouth, again with the help and influence of APSS, who were then involved in re-assembling, cleaning and repainting the aircraft on arrival. So from the very start, APSS were involved in helping with the Museum's aircraft. This nucleus of a collection plus some further lobbying led to the formation of the Museum of Flight, as an outstation of Chambers Street, in 1974.

APSS grew steadily with pre-arranged meetings being held mainly at weekends. The Auster AOP.5 became available in 1974 and work started on it immediately in Hut 23, which was a former wartime crewroom, but now, sadly, has only the concrete base showing! The earliest minutes are lost, but at the 1975 AGM, the membership fee was already set at £3/annum, which makes our present rate of £10/annum seem very reasonable. Although we did not then have our own magazine, we had arranged for members to receive 'Control Column' a British Aviation Preservation Society publication and also "Wreck Review". By 1977 The APSS collection had started to build up and was listed as,

Auster AOP.5, (TJ472)
Reflector gun sight
Propeller – Firebrand
Propeller – Sopwith 1 ½ Strutter
Ejector seat – Martin Baker

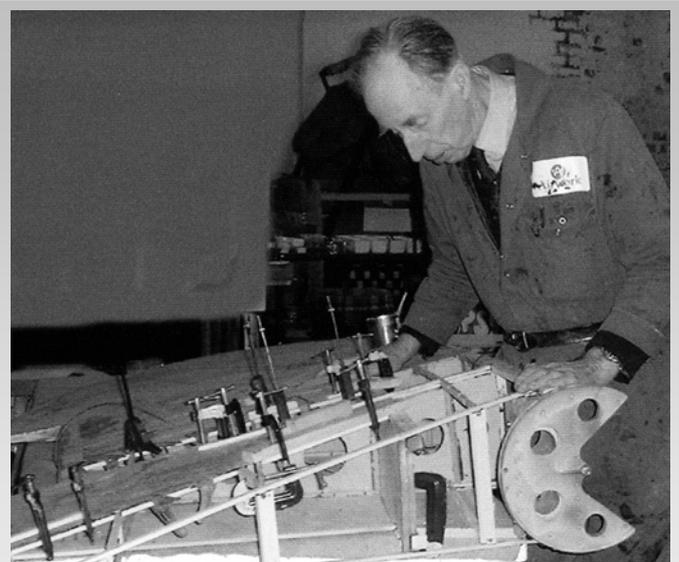
Following the early work on the three jet fighters, restoration work by members was mainly on our own Auster AOP.5, which had its wings stripped and rebuilt. Thanks to the expertise of Mr and Mrs Esson, the wings were recovered in fabric to the very high standard that can be seen today. Reflecting a growing partnership with the Museum of Flight, members were always available to help out the Museum at open days. By 1979, we had 68 full members and 32 associate members with the membership fee now at £5/annum. From time to time the Museum requested help from APSS, for example with the Buccaneer cockpit, the Avro Tutor and some engines. After the Auster AOP.5, the Brantley B.2B helicopter was acquired by APSS and rebuilt, and by 1983, work was being done on the Miles M17 Monarch. In 1985 all APSS work moved to Hut 47 reflecting the growing need for space. The work on the Monarch lasted altogether some eleven years but at the end we had an airframe which was an outstanding example of restoration and is now a prized exhibit on loan to the Museum in Hanger 4.



The Miles Monarch in Hangar No.1 Picture: APSS

1987 was an important year since it marked the formal acceptance by the Chairman of the Trustees and the Director of the Royal Museum of Scotland of an offer of partnership by APSS to do maintenance work on the museum's aircraft - in addition to our own aircraft. This offer specified aircraft, engines and help on public days and was written up in a formal memorandum. This year also saw the start by the Society of History and Model Sections. The partnership concept was further confirmed in 1997, in the National Museums of Scotland Operational Plan for the period 1997 – 2001. This document highlighted the important role of the "independent and voluntary body " ie APSS in "having provided valuable assistance to the Museum of Flight since the early 70s with maintenance, conservation and restoration of aircraft and also in the preparation of new displays and cataloguing". The document lists the hours worked by APSS and states that, "Continued support is anticipated from the APSS and opportunities to improve and develop our relationship will be pursued in the future. APSS are being encouraged to widen their membership base and promote themselves as the body for anyone interested in Aviation in Scotland. This will be of great future benefit to both the Museum and APSS". APSS have, I believe, fully lived up to the expectations of that document!

Much of this impetus stemmed from the arrival of Roy Corser, who joined in the early 1980s. Work on what was by this time was recognised as the National Collection of Aircraft, increased with the arrival of Colin Richardson, ex-RAF with experience on airframes, to join Robert Wilson, Nigel McPhee, Robert Simpson, Douglas Gillies, George White, and others. Work further accelerated with the appointment of Jim O'Donnell as Chief Engineer of APSS from 1979, until his retirement to the "back benches" in 2001. In 1989 Jim proposed to the then Curator, Sqn. Ldr. Bob Major, that APSS should repair the Slingsby T.12 Gull glider which had been in Hangar 1 but was



Jim O'Donnell working on the Anson rudder.

now damaged and in poor condition. Partly as a result of the very high standard of work being done on, for example, the Monarch, this was agreed and the glider was extensively repaired, recovered and repainted, and can be seen today suspended in Hanger 4. At the same time, agreement was reached to restore the Tiger Moth D.H.82A, and over a two year period the aircraft was fully restored to the near flying condition it can be seen in today in Hanger 4. From then on the list is endless and includes not only airframes but also a growing amount of restoration work on engines. Indeed it can be said that whatever a visitor to the Museum of Flight sees today in the way of airframes or engines, is largely the work of APSS. During this period, our then Chairman, Gordon Watson, with his knowledge of and long professional experience in the British Aircraft Industry, played a most important supportive role in building up the professionalism of the Society and in promoting the Museum of Flight in Scotland, and in the UK as a whole.



A typical group of the APSS Working Members, May 2003. Picture : APSS

It would be interesting at this stage to examine the record and achievements of APSS in some detail. Fortunately, APSS has very detailed records from the mid 80s onwards and in October 2002 this exercise was actually done, and was printed as a memorandum. It makes interesting reading!

It showed that the number of Working Members regularly attending had risen, for example, from 12 in 1996 to 31 in 2002 and that 19,459 man-hours of work had been put in the year up to June 2002. The main Museum of Flight projects being worked on were the Avro Anson C.19, Bristol Bolinbroke IV (Blenheim), Avro Vulcan B.2, de Havilland Comet 4C, engines (Nomad, Sea Lion, Hercules, Beardmore), together with the Radio and Radar exhibition, History Workshop, Sopwith LCT ½ Strutter and building maintenance. Some work had been done on the newly acquired Beaufighter before this project was "frozen". Altogether, we have done restoration work on at least 27 Museum of Flight aircraft at East Fortune, including the Miles M.18 Mk 2, de Havilland D.H. 82A Puss Moth, Scottish Aviation Twin Pioneer, Waco Hadrian, Westland Whirlwind HAS.7, Messerschmitt Me 163B-1 Komet, English Electric Lightning F.2A, Blackburn Buccaneer, Supermarine Spitfire XVI and of course the three early Lossiemouth aircraft and the Sopwith LCT 1 ½ Strutter. A total of 12 engines have been restored. Miscellaneous tasks include window repair, steps and barrier construction, models and moving and hanging aircraft.

Buildings 47, 27, 22, and 15 have been extensively repaired and restored by APSS, including windows, re-flooring, electrical services installation and re-decoration. Museum of Flight Open Days support shows that we provided an average of 14 members spread over Hanger 2, Radio and Radar, engine bay, outside aircraft, electrical services, and the Strutler. Above all, APSS were instrumental in creating the maintenance workshop complex based on Huts 25 and 28 which is now the backbone of the of the Museum of Flight conservation work.

APSS has always advocated a "live" aviation museum with what has elsewhere been described as having a "Wow" factor. To this end we are enthusiastically pursuing the Sopwith LCT 1½ Strutler project and will continue to expand the interactive elements in the Radio and Radar Exhibition. We are also advocating that the Percival Provost T.1, Fiessler Storch and the Avro Anson C.19, be brought up to taxi standard

The question of just how qualified APSS are to carry out these tasks has been raised and that also has been analysed. A check through the membership in December 2002, showed that we have, in addition to a wealth of industrial management and commercial experience, 11 airframe engineers (both civil and RAF), 4 engine engineers (RAF), 2 electrical engineers (RAF), 11 chartered professional engineers, 2 electronics and IT engineers, 1 metallurgist, 6 miscellaneous technical professionals including at least 4 who admit to having Doctorates, and 11 qualified pilots, either power or glider and mostly current!

On the financial side APSS has raised and contributed to the Museum of Flight a total of £6,600 since 2001, and of course we continue to produce our magazine Fortune Teller twice a year to which both APSS and Museum staff contribute. This magazine is now widely accepted in the UK, not only as the Society's journal, but also as an important medium for the publication of aviation preservation articles.

Work on our own aircraft and artefacts, as opposed to support work for the Museum, has always continued and is seen today in our History of Radio and Radar project, and in the restoration to flying condition of the Slingsby T53B/C (DHG) two seat training glider. This will be flown by a membership syndicate at Portmoak, for the benefit of the all the members (and Museum staff)! Similarly, the Sopwith LCT 1 ½ Strutler Replica project is entirely the work of APSS, supervised by the PFA.

The APSS collection has increased since the early days when we had only one aircraft and, in addition to our Radio and Radar artefacts, our miscellaneous aviation artefacts and our growing archive section, we now have five complete airframes. The total list of APSS aircraft, as opposed to Museum aircraft, restored, is seven. These are, the Auster AOP.5, Brantley B.2B, Miles M 14 Monarch, Bensen Autogyro, Flying Flea, (the last two now returned to owners), Slingsby T.38 and the Slingsby T53 B/C.

The Society continues to grow from strength to strength. In 1977, we numbered 25 ordinary members and 6 student or associate members. As of today, we have 118 members of whom 63 are Working Members and 6 are Honourary Life Members. In recognition of the growing maturity and widening interests of the Society, the name was changed from "Aircraft" to "Aviation" and we opted in April 2002 to become a Scottish Charity with the stated aims of advancing the education of the public in aircraft and aeronautical heritage.

We are proud of the work we have done over thirty years for the Scottish National Collection of aviation heritage, of our own collection, and of the well established partnership between the Society and the Museum of Flight, as set in the 1997 National Museums of Scotland Operational Plan, and we look forward to continuing this partnership into the future



The author wishes to thank Sandy Benzies, Jim O'Donnell, Bob Simpson, Harry Westwood, Gordon Watson, Bob Wilson, Robert Whitton, and others.