

Welcome to another APSS Newsletter. It is some time since the last so it is good to be bringing you various items of positive news about APSS and NMS and the NMoF. It is hoped that the next edition of Fortune Teller will be along later in the year after the Editor completes his current arduous task of house moving.

LAA Chief Engineer visit / Strutter update by John White / Jim Mattocks

The construction of the Sopwith 1½ Strutter has reached the stage of being recognisable as an aeroplane. We have four wings, an empennage - and now a recognisable fuselage. So with appropriate timing our Chairman John White arranged a visit by Francis Donaldson, Chief Engineer of the LAA, the body which supervises home-build construction of aeroplanes in the United Kingdom. FD travelled up by train from the LAA base at Turweston, Northamptonshire to Berwick on Tweed where he was met and brought to East Fortune. He spent the afternoon inspecting our work and meeting some of the Strutter group and then returned next day to take a meeting with the Group and generally discuss the project.

Before the meeting the team had decided that the airframe should be as authentic as reasonable. This means we will continue to build as per the original plans and will finish it with a skid and without brakes, as in the original, and in the colours of 43 Squadron RFC. Dual control is still an option, and modern seat belts will be fitted.

The meeting was most informative and FD answered all the questions we could think of. The main topic was the suitability of the 150 hp Rotec 3600 engine which we have ordered and indeed paid a deposit on. Some doubt exists in view of reports from a similar project in North America that circa 200 hp may be required. FD understood there were one or more Avro 504s under construction in Argentina and he said he would enquire and come back to us on the engine subject. He said he would require drawings of any deviations from the original plans such as safety-belt anchorages, wheels and axles and dual-control, if incorporated.

JW has since thanked the ever-helpful Linda de Costa of NMS for arranging for Hangar 3 to be open for Francis to have a look at what we were doing in there, but the Engine Store unfortunately could not be made available.

We expressed our thanks to FD for taking the time to visit us and also to the LAA for their co-operation in our project, mainly for the excellent service and advice we receive from Tim Rayner, our local LAA inspector, who has been invaluable in the help he has given us.

JW has since received a letter from Francis Donaldson thanking us for our hospitality and expressing his view that the work we are doing is 'beautiful'. He says the Avro 504 in Argentina was actually fitted with a 5-cylinder engine not a Rotec but he has stated that he felt the Rotec 3600 would be sufficient for our project. He also said he would send us drawings of a Sopwith Pup front end to give us an idea of what we will need to do to the fuselage for our own engine installation in due course.

Beaufighter sees the light of day

The move of the refurbished Boeing 707 to H1 to join Concorde in a new Jet Age display has freed up space in H3 and the Beaufighter, acquired with public subscription many years ago, is finally on display there. This is a very welcome development. Hopefully plans to actually work on it will emerge before long.

Parachute Store - New Display building

Our former mess room has been opened as a new NMS display showing how it would have looked in its original role of the parachute store for East Fortune.

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“Woomera” Generator

Some years ago APSS inherited a motor generator set from Ferranti. The purpose of this piece of equipment was to provide a source of 3-phase electrical power at 400 Hz. Aircraft systems up until recently used electrical power at a frequency of 400 Hz rather than the 50Hz of normal power as found in the home. The set had been used by Ferranti for ground testing avionic systems at Turnhouse with the Ferranti Flying Unit. Ferranti had acquired the system from Australia, where it was manufactured and where it had been used at the Woomera test range.

Alex Duncan spent many hours getting the system up and running and then successfully used it to power one of our Blue Parrot radar systems. However, almost immediately the Museum decided the machine was a health hazard and banned us from using it on site. The system then lay in a corner of Building 22 for several years taking up valuable space until the committee agreed that we should try to dispose of it. It was offered to NMS for their collection but was not accepted, so the only alternative was to scrap it and try to raise some funds for APSS. With Jim O’Donnell’s help the unit was recently removed by a local scrap merchant - we wait to find out how much we will get for this rather large amount of steel and copper, but meanwhile the space occupied by the generator has now allowed the addition of a further two desks/workbenches for use by all members of APSS.

It's good to talk

During the course of 2009, active APSS members at East Fortune had become increasingly concerned that the quality and quantity of communications at all levels between the museum and the Society were deteriorating.

To some extent this was understandable and perhaps inevitable. We had enjoyed frequent and cordial dialogue with Amanda Jopling, the previous General Manager for the National Museum of Flight, but there was a gap of about six months between her departure in the autumn of 2008 and the arrival of her successor, Grant Mackenzie. And even then, Grant’s immediate focus had to be to get to grips with the operation of the museum and to ensure the smooth running of the 2009 WW2 Weekend and Airshow.

At NMS level, the scope and importance of the project to remodel the main Chambers Street site in Edinburgh was clearly a major involvement for the senior central management team that limited their time to spend on APSS.

The problem for APSS was not just that we felt that we were being “left out of the loop” but also that there were some potentially serious misunderstandings that might have damaged the longer-term relationships between the Society and our hosts and partners at East Fortune. And, of course, it also meant that there was no tangible progress on the crucially-important (for us!) discussions about the lease for our new home in Building 32, following our move from Building 27 to allow the creation of the new Parachute Room exhibition.

We discussed these issues informally with the NMoF team and also with NMS Director Gordon Rintoul and some of his senior team. As a direct result, we have restarted with Grant the regular monthly meetings that we used to hold with Amanda, and have also set up new quarterly liaison meetings with Alex Hayward, Keeper of Science and Technology at NMS.

These quarterly meetings are an important initiative, and have already shown their value. One of the problems at East Fortune is that the museum is many things to many people. It is a unique collection of aircraft and artefacts, which fall under Alex’s direct management and professional responsibilities. But it is also a scheduled Ancient Monument; a visitor attraction; and a significant employer. The direct responsibilities for these aspects fall into different management channels at Chambers Street, which has made communications difficult for us. But Gordon Rintoul has recognized the issue, and has asked Alex to act as “lead” for all the management lines in the museum’s ongoing relationship with APSS.

So far, things are going really well. Alex is clearly “someone that we can do business with”, and we sense that he feels the same about us. He has certainly been impressed

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with the scale and the quality of our work across all the exhibits, and also with the Strutter – and as he just happens to be an expert on WWI aero engines, we have started to pick his brains for advice on the next stage of that project!

New exhibitions open at East Fortune

Two major new exhibits have opened at East Fortune as the summer season begins, both with strong APSS links.

Firstly, our former home in Building 27 has been restored to its former status as the airfield parachute store – a vital but rather unsung asset that was used to dry, inspect, repair and repack parachutes that had been deployed.

And secondly, The Jet Age – a new display alongside Concorde in Hangar 4 including the Trident cockpit, several jet engines, and, as the centrepiece, the newly-refurbished Boeing 707 forward fuselage, looking resplendent in the colours it wore in the 1960s. This has been an interesting project: partly conservation and partly reshaping the exhibit as a visitor experience. Two APSS teams did much of the conservation work, in the cockpit, the luggage hold and on one side of the passenger cabin, while NMS staff stripped down the fuselage and external contractors were commissioned to incorporate displays about the aircraft's service and also a screen to show videos of the 707 in action.

Gordon Rintoul officially launched the new exhibitions at a recent ceremony in Hangar 4, to which a mixture of VIPs, media, museum staff and all other helpers – including all APSS working members – were invited. Gordon paid tribute to the quality of the work and the insight behind the design of the exhibition, and thanked the whole team – led by Alex Hayward as project director and including museum and conservation staff, external contractors and APSS volunteers – for their input.

T53 granted its C of A for another year

The APSS-restored vintage glider, the Slingsby T 53, has just received its Certificate of Airworthiness (C of A) for 2010/11, and is operational again at Portmoak. In fact on Tuesday 20th April, the first full flying day after certification, the aircraft logged four separate flights amounting to 3¼ hours. Not bad for an old timer!

This annual examination of the airframe is a CAA requirement which requires the aircraft to be de-rigged, wings and tail plane removed, and all aspects of the structure and instruments examined. Apart from a few rivets which had to be replaced, the old lady passed the test with flying colours, for the fifth year in succession, which is surely a tribute to the restoration work of APSS members.

New Gliding members

Two further APSS members have joined the gliding group at Portmoak. Ken Sharp and Len Hart are now under training for their wings, bringing the APSS Working Members active flying group to eight, with another one threatening to join. Together with non-working members, there are now about twenty members of APSS actively flying and working towards gliding qualifications.

Radio and Radar signage

A subject of discussion with NMS in the new regular meetings has been the question of acknowledging the work of APSS. A good response to that has been the appearance of the APSS name on the latest Radio and Radar sign.

Anson / asbestos

Work on the Anson has been on hold for some time first of all because prime movers Ian Hutchison and Jack Wilson have had to retire but also because asbestos was found in a site survey. That has been removed by specialists and work on the Anson fuselage should recommence now that APSS are not working on the 707, starting with refitting of engine cowlings, stabilisation of the cabin lining panels and renovation of the cabin window surrounds. In the meantime APSS workers have been included in NMS asbestos training courses.

Bolingbroke progress

The skilled work required on the Bolingbroke is progressing steadily and restoration of the intricate cockpit glazing and metalwork is now well advanced under Mel Williamson and his APSS team.

Subscriptions for the current year

Our 2010-2011 membership year started on 1st April and we hope you will continue your essential support for APSS and its projects by rejoining at the current subscription rate of £15. Thank you to those who have rejoined without reminder already. We hope to hear from everyone else soon by post to the address below. We know there is a recession on but we think what we are doing is important and we struggle to meet our costs at present income, including for example the cost of mailed Newsletters. If you get a mailed copy and have an email address PLEASE give it to us. **Many thanks.**

Web site and other contacts

Our website is <http://www.apss.org.uk> . Keep checking it for news if you have internet access. If you don't you can probably log on to the APSS site through your local library and they will help you to do that.

With all good wishes,

Alan Manning Membership Secretary email: membership@apss.org.uk

Post: c/o National Museum of Flight, East Fortune, East Lothian EH39 5LF



Strutter fuselage progress



Parachute store



APSS mention



Glazing the Bolingbroke cockpit



Beaufighter cockpit

Produced by Brian Wilson, April 2010.

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