

Hamble's Ensign Airliner

The "Ensign" was the largest land plane built in pre-war days. It was built for Imperial Airways Ltd and was a four-engined, high wing monoplane designed by John Lloyd at Armstrong Whitworth's Coventry factory. Its span was 123', length 114', height 23', the landing wheels were 6'3" diameter, maximum speed 210 mph and its range was 1,370 miles.

Twelve aircraft were ordered in 1935 and 2 more in 1937, to be known as the "E" class as all were to have names beginning with "E". Due to lack of space at the Coventry factories, it was decided to construct the aircraft at Air Service Training Ltd in the former Avro factory at Hamble, which was extended on two sides to suit. There were to be two versions, Empire version, which seated 27, and the western version, with seats for 40 passengers.

Somewhat late on the delivery date, the first aircraft "Ensign", taxied across Hamble Lane (approximately where the Fire Station is now) on two engines, from the former Avro factory to the airfield and made its first flight on 24 January 1938. It flew its first service to Paris from Croydon on 20 October 1938. By October 1939 eleven others followed and the last two were completed in 1941.

The aircraft was underpowered and eventually most of them were re-engined with American Wright "Cyclone" engines in place of the Armstrong Siddeley "Tigers", thus becoming "Ensign 2".

On the outbreak of the war in September 1939, they were camouflaged and moved to Whitchurch and taken over by National Air Communications, but transferred to BOAC in April 1940, when they were used for carrying food and supplies to France.

After the fall of France, they were used on a west to east service in North Africa and then on a Cairo-Calcutta service until 1945 when the survivors returned to Hamble and were put up for sale. As there were no takers, they were broken up on Hamble Airfield (in the area between the southern railway line and Hampton houses) with a large number of Spitfires.

Details of these aircraft:-

REGISTRATION	NAME	FIRST FLEW	FATE
G-ADSR	Ensign	24.01.38	Grounded at Cairo 1944, scrapped 03.01.45
G-ADSS	Egeria	25.06.38	Scrapped at Hamble 26.03.47
G-ADST	Elsinore	07.11.38	Scrapped at Hamble 28.03.47
G-ADSU	Euterpe	12.11.38	Scrapped at Cairo 03.46
G-ADSV	Explorer	02.12.38	Arrived at Hamble 25.02.46, scrapped 23.03.47
G-ADSW	Eddystone	11.12.38	Arrived at Hamble 05.06.46, scrapped 21.04.47
G-ADSX	Ettrick	27.02.39	Abandoned at Le Bourget 01.06.40, flown by the Germans with Daimler-Benz engines as VIP transport
G-ADSY	Empyrean	09.06.39	Arrived at Hamble 01.07.46, scrapped 26.03.47
G-ADSZ	Elysian	30.06.39	Destroyed on the ground by German fighters at Merville, France 23.05.40
G-ADTA *	Euryalus	19.08.39	Broken up for spares after crashing at Lympe 23.05.40
G-ADTB	Echo	30.08.39	Arrived at Hamble, scrapped 20.03.47
G-ADTC *	Endymion	05.10.39	Destroyed by enemy action at Whitchurch Airfield 24.11.40
G-AFZU +	Everest	20.06.41	Scrapped at Hamble 16.04.47
G-AFZV +	Enterprise	28.10.41	Abandoned in Africa, captured by the Germans 03.02.42 and used by them as VIP transport

* Built as VT-AJG "Emakulum" and VT-AJH "Etch" but did not fly as such.

+ Built as Mark 2.