

Aviation at Hamble

8th & 15th November 2018 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

The Society's chairman, Ian Underdown, gave another of his extremely popular talks, this time about 'Aviation at Hamble'. Aviation enthusiasts from the surrounding district joined members and there were so many that not all who wished to attend could be accommodated, therefore, a repeat meeting was organised for the following week.

Ian said the history of aviation at Hamble started within 4 years of the first flight in this country when the Daily Mail newspaper based its seaplanes at Hamble Point for a promotional tour and demonstrations around the coast in the summer months. On 2nd July, 1912, visitors thronged from morning to night to see its seaplane at Hamble and the next day Miss Trestrail was the first lady to make a passenger flight in a waterplane in this country.

Hamble's location, as well as its traditional local boatbuilding skills which were appropriate for the construction of the early wooden aircraft, made Hamble a natural place for an aircraft industry to develop, especially seaplanes. Local boat builder Luke & Co even built its own seaplane the HL1.

The ability of Hamble to provide facilities for both seaplanes and land aircraft attracted aircraft companies Avro and Fairey Aviation to the village in the First World War. During that war Avro produced nearly 9000 Avro 504 trainers and Fairey Aviation designed and manufactured a number of aircraft including the Hamble Baby. The Admiralty chose Hamble for its No 1 (Southern) Marine Acceptance Depot.

After the war Avro concentrated on development of the experimental and prototype aircraft with chief designer Roy Chadwick and test pilot Bert Hinkler playing a prominent role. Fairey developed its own aircraft and went on to export large numbers of seaplanes to countries all over the world. 40 different types of aircraft made their first flights from Hamble between 1919 and 1926.

In 1926 Juan de la Cierva, the inventor of the autogiro, the world's first practical rotary-wing aircraft, came to Hamble from Spain to develop his rotor system with Avro on its aircraft. Air Service Training (AST) came to Hamble in 1931 to train civil and military pilots from all over the world and it became known as Britain's Air University. Armstrong Whitworth took over the former Avro factory to build the Ensign, a new civil airliner that was to be the biggest airliner ever produced in Britain at that time. Another company British Marine Aircraft chose Hamble to build a factory and an adjacent housing estate for its employees in the grounds of Sydney Lodge to construct flying boats. It soon ran into difficulties and was taken over by Folland Aircraft.

Ian explained in detail Hamble's contribution during the Second World War when AST was the largest Spitfire repair base in the country and Folland a sub-contractor for Spitfire production plus various bomber aircraft. Fairey worked on its own aircraft

throughout the war, particularly producing major components for its new Firefly monoplane.

AST continued to develop after the war offering courses to British and foreign students. In 1950 its airfield was the busiest in the country with more flights than Heathrow and by 1956 it had taught students from 72 countries since it had started.

Folland undertook sub-contract work until it decided in the early 1950s to concentrate on smaller aircraft and it designed and built its own Folland Midge and Gnat aircraft. The Gnat jet trainer went on to be used by the famous Red Arrows aerobatic display team.

In 1960 the College of Air Training took over the airfield to train pilots for the National Airlines BOAC and BEA, which were later to become British Airways. It had an excellent reputation for its high standards of training and eventually had 50 aircraft. Due to economic reasons it closed in 1984.

The Folland factory changed its name over the years as it became part of larger companies during which time it worked on aircraft such as the Harrier vertical take-off jet and for companies such as Airbus and Boeing. Today GE Aviation owns the factory and continues to be an important part of Hamble's life being a major employer and multi-million pound manufacturer of aircraft parts for companies such as Airbus and half its production is now made of plastic composites.

Ian showed what is in Hamble today such as memorials, public art and road names to commemorate the importance of the village's aviation industry.

A very comprehensive and excellently illustrated talk again by Ian and at the end people were saying how much they enjoyed it and would recommend others to attend when it is given next time. Comments were made that they did not know how important Hamble was in this country's aviation history and they enjoyed finding out about the flying incidents particularly the crashes involving the early aircraft.

A booklet about the history of 'Aviation at Hamble' has been produced. See the 'Publications' section for details.