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Access to the museum, introductory talk and guided tour are dependent on volunteers being available. The Military Intelligence Museum is completely dependent on volunteers and displays key elements of the history of British Military Intelligence from the Crimean War onwards. Its central focus is the Intelligence Corps. The collection includes a great many objects and special exhibits about its history. There are two interactive, permanent displays, one focusing on Honours and Awards received by Corps members, the other paying tribute to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country, in the 'Name of the Rose' interactive.

The Medmenham Collection is devoted to aerial photography and image analysis. This highlights the use of 3D imagery, initially in the First World War and then again with huge success in later years, during the second conflict and the Cold War. Complementing these displays are two smaller displays covering the 'BRIXMIS' intelligence-gathering mission, based in East Germany during the Cold War, and the American radio operations that took place in Chicksands from 1950 until 1996.

**Date and Time:** Tuesday, 25 September. Meet at 10am in the Rowney Warren car park, Sandy Lane, Chicksands off the A600 Shefford to Bedford road. Although this is half an hour before the event begins, we need time to arrange cars and check-in with the site security. The visit commences at 10.30am, we expect to close the day at 12.30pm.

**Location of the Museum:** The Military Intelligence Museum, Building 200, Chicksands, Shefford, Beds (Sat Nav Postcode SG17 5QB).

**Where to Meet:** Rowney Warren car park, Sandy Lane, off the A600 Shefford to Bedford road. Catering: There are no catering facilities at the site, only a water machine.

**Disabled Access:** There is access to the museum, but no facilities.

**Cost and booking:** There is no charge for the visit, but a donation to the museum has been requested. The BLHA committee would like to suggest a donation of £5 per person.

**Access Requirements:** Please note that the museum is located on a working military site and therefore access is very restricted. Our party on the day is limited to 10 cars entering the site. Details of these cars along with the details of those visiting are required 10 days before the event takes place. We would like to arrange as much of this before the day as possible to make the event run smoothly. If you are willing to give a short lift to fellow visitors from the Rowney Warren car park to the museum, then please indicate this on the booking form. **On the day please bring your passport or photo driving licence as this must be shown.**

To secure a place, cheques must be received by **Wednesday, 12 September.**
Bedfordshire Local History Association
BLHA Autumn Event
A Visit to The Military Intelligence Museum, Chicksands

Booking Form
Please reserve.......place/s @ a suggested donation of £5.00 each for the BLHA Autumn event.
I enclose a cheque to the value of £...............
Cheques to be payable to: Bedfordshire Local History Association.
Receipt of the booking form will be confirmed by email.

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Are you willing to provide a lift from the Rowney Warren car park to the museum?
Yes/No
How many spare seats do you have in your car? 1 /2 /3 /4

Contact email:..............................................................................................................................

Contact Mobile telephone number:..................................................................................................

To which Local History Society(ies) Societies do you and your party members belong?:
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Please return the form with payment by Wednesday, 12 September 2018 to: Colin West, BLHA Committee, 14 Fieldfare View, Wixams, Bedford, MK42 6BL Telephone: 01234 743752; Email: colinjohnwest4@gmail.com
Richard Hugh Wildman (1947-2018)

Richard Wildman outside the then derelict Howard Chapel, Mill Street, Bedford, which he campaigned to save.

Richard Hugh Wildman sadly died on 28 July 2018, after a long illness, aged 71 years. He was an unparalleled expert on Bedford's history, prolific author, Archivist of Bedford Modern School and conservationist, protecting the town’s heritage.

Born in Bedford, the son of Sidney and Dorothy, Richard was educated at Bedford Modern School, with whom he retained life-long links, returning as BMS’s first archivist and OBM Club Secretary from 1999 to 2015. He took pleasure in renewing the school’s association with one of its most famous old boys, Christopher Fry, whose last play A Ringing of Bells, written for and dedicated to the school, was performed at the Olivier Theatre in 2001 (happily, on Richard’s birthday).

Richard attended Clare College, Cambridge, where he studied history and took a Cert Ed Teacher training course. In 1966 he was the runner-up in the final of BBC Radio 4’s ‘Brain of Britain’, having scored the same number of points as the winner, but other player won by having had more bonus points. After University, Richard taught history at the Holy Ghost School, Bedford (later St Bede’s), then Sharnbrook Upper School. He was a Labour Councillor on Bedford Borough Council from 1973 to 1976, before
opening his much-loved second-hand bookshop in Mill Street from 1978 to c 1988.

Richard had a passion for local history, playing an active role in several local societies. He was a long-standing member of Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society, serving as its President from 1996 to 2009. He was also a founder member of the Friends of Bedford Cemetery (Foster Hill Road), becoming its President. Richard was President of the Bedford Art Society.


Richard fiercely protected Bedford’s heritage. While still a student, he took on the Harpur Trust in defence of the Bedford Modern School building (by Edward Blore, built 1830–1833) when threatened with total demolition as the school prepared to leave the town centre. Thanks to his efforts, its façade remains as a noble frontage to an otherwise undistinguished commercial development. He also took part in the newly founded Bedford Society’s successful campaign to save Priory Terrace (1832), another of the town’s most distinguished buildings, to be sensitively refurbished by the architect Victor Farrar. Richard also campaigned successfully to save the former 1849 Howard Congregational Chapel (see photograph above), which stood opposite his bookshop in Mill Street. Bedford owes Richard a great debt.  

Bob Ricketts

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**Conference 2018**

This year’s Conference was hosted by Clapham Historical Society at Clapham Village Hall, Clapham on Saturday. 2 June. (All photos, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.)

This year is the 25th anniversary of the Association’s formation. However, as Martin Lawrence reminded us, there have been annual conferences of Bedfordshire local history societies held since 1988. Quite an achievement!
Preceded by the Association’s AGM, chaired by Mollie Foster, there were three sessions in the morning and three in the afternoon, interspersed by another superb lunch for which Clapham Historical Society is renowned.

Session 1 was given by Des Hoar (right) from Sharnbrook Local History Society, who outlined the enormous potential for local historians of the GIS (Geographic Information System) computer software and its application to historical research. This was inevitably quite technical but by using his own experience in creating and publishing interactive maps of Sharnbrook he was able to convey something of the ways in which information can be overlaid on historic and present day maps to convey graphically findings about an unlimited range of topics. The Sharnbrook project had looked at land ownership in the parish and the speaker showed how it was possible, using this system, to make comparisons across the county or even wider.

Session 2 was a fascinating, very-well-illustrated look by David Fowler (right, Chair of the Bedford Association of Town Guides) at three Bedfordshire men who were each outstanding in their various ways: Sir Joseph Paxton, Frederick Burnaby and John Whitehead.

Paxton rose from humble origins as a farmer's son in Milton Bryan to become an innovative gardener and
glasshouse designer of repute, who created, most famously, the incredible glass building in which was held London’s international Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, and which later was moved to Sydenham in Kent and was known as the ‘Crystal Palace’.

Fred Burnaby, whose father was a Bedford clergyman, was a larger-than-life Victorian soldier and adventurer (and possibly a British spy?). He flew gas balloons in his spare time and was the first to cross the English Channel in this way. When on leave he would take on incredibly long and arduous journeys into the Russian Empire and little-known Asian countries, often on horseback. He wrote popular books relating all these adventures and became famous as a dashing ‘Flashman-type’ character.

John Whitehead was a serial entrepreneur businessman and self-publicist who created a factory during the First World War to build some of the country’s first military aircraft and later went on, after many business failures, to create in Bedfordshire a ‘pyramid selling’ scheme under which he invited people to ‘invest’ in his large-scale Cox’s Orange Pippin apple orchards (the largest in Europe) at Cockayne Hatley.

For the third session, before lunch, delegates were offered a choice: staying at the venue for an illustrated talk by Pamela Birch (right), County Archivist, on one of Bedfordshire’s most famous architects, Sir Albert Richardson, or moving out of the venue to Clapham’s historic Saxon church for a well-informed village history talk by local historian, John Woods.

Because, perhaps, so many of those attending had had the chance to hear the village history talk before, on one of the three previous occasions when Clapham has hosted the conference, the majority stayed for the illustrated talk on some of the architectural drawings which have been deposited at Bedfordshire Archives from the Ampthill office of Professor Richardson, who was also a lecturer on architectural history and President of the Royal Institute of British Architects. The archive is of 230 bundles containing some 40,000 drawings, only 3,000 of which have so far been catalogued. Pamela Birch showed a wide range of drawings, some technical, some artistic impressions, of a wide range of Richardson’s buildings – commercial, domestic and ecclesiastical. All those attending will now spend the rest of
their lives looking for Richardson’s famously distinctive small round windows which were much loved by him.

A three-course lunch in the Hall, including a choice of hot main courses, with attendees sitting at very-tastefully decorated round tables, allowed for chatting with fellow local historians from around the county. It’s this aspect of the annual conference which is so important and has members of societies attending year after year.

That and the opportunity for societies to set up stalls showing what they have been doing over the years and, often, the publications they have produced.
In the afternoon, Sue Jarrett (right) (Chair of the Eatons Community Association) of Eaton Socon presented a lively slide show on this unique settlement on the Great North Road which has been in two counties over its long history – Bedfordshire and (now, mainly, since 1965) Cambridgeshire. Its location on such an important highway, with its coaching inns, celebrity visitors and changing fortunes (with the creation in 1971 of the A1 bypass), provided the speaker with numerous anecdotes.

John Hele (right) (Ampthill History Forum) gave the last of the presentations – a look at the two great houses of Ampthill: Park House, still lived in but by four households, and Houghton House, thought of as the inspiration for the fictional ‘house beautiful’ of Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress, now an historic ruin. The story of these houses was one of wealthy landowners wanting to show off, of changing fortunes over time and aristocratic rivalry.

The final session to the day was an informal chance for society representatives, if they wished, to give feedback on what their societies have been up to recently or to make suggestions as to how BLHA might, as the umbrella organisation for the county’s historical societies, facilitate workshops which would help develop skills or share expertise.

Martin Lawrence (Vice-President of BLHA), as the leading person who set up the organisation, concluded the Conference by giving a historical perspective to the last 25 years. He thanked Mollie Foster and her Clapham Historical Society team who had so generously hosted this year’s conference (for the fourth time!) and the BLHA officers and committee for their on-going commitment.

Members are looking forward to the 2019 conference, which is to be hosted by a newcomer to membership of BLHA – Bedfordshire Gardens Trust. It will be held at Poplars Garden Centre, Toddington, LU5 6HE, on Saturday, 22 June 2019.

There was a combined total of 53 delegates, speakers and helpers at the conference.  

Stuart Antrobus

RAF Henlow

It was recently announced that RAF Henlow is to close by 2020 – 102 years since it opened.

I will try in these pages to give an outline of the history of our last local major Air Force base which has contributed so much to the engineering proficiency of the Royal Air Force since its inception.

In 1917 the then Royal Flying Corps acquired a site of 220 acres to the south of Henlow village to be used as an aircraft repair depot and the site was chosen because it was on flat land and near a main line railway (the Bedford–Hitchin line, later closed) a major road (A600) and close to an industrial town (Bedford).

On 10 May 1918 the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, the main repair depot for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), sent Lieutenant-Colonel Stapleton and 40 men to set up the new depot which was to be ‘No 5 Eastern Area’ to service the squadrons in that area.

Henlow opened as the first new base in the new RAF, which, of course, celebrates it centenary this year. By the end of 1918 it had overhauled and repaired a large number of mainly Bristol F2B Fighters⁴ and De Havilland DH4s.² The base employed a large number of local
people on these repairs including some 300 local women in the fabric repair shops and it became an integral part of the local community.

After the First World War many RAF stations were closed, units disbanded and aircraft scrapped or sold, but Henlow was saved by the purchase of another 160 acres of land to provide a grassed airfield for test flying and its designation as the Aircraft Depot for the Inland Area. For less than two years it was an operational fighter station when Nos 23 and 47 squadrons re-formed there.

In April 1924 the Officers’ Engineering School moved from Farnborough to Henlow and it went on to provide well-trained aero engineers for the next 40 years. It was later known as the RAF School of Aeronautical Engineering and was part of the small but very professional RAF in the 20s and 30s. The Henlow School was opened to non-RAF students in the 1930s by competitive examination and successful students were offered a permanent commission in the service.

The most well-known graduate of the school was Sir Frank Whittle (left) whose experiments led to the development of the jet engine. After graduation at Cranwell he went to Henlow in August 1932 and passed out at the end of 1933. He then spent six months at Henlow supervising tests on aero engines before going to Peterhouse College, Cambridge, for a two-year course in engineering in which he gained first class honours. The rest of his career in the service was used to
develop his jet engine. When this became known in 1944, Group Captain Whittle became famous. He retired as an Air Commodore in April 1948 and was 89 at his death in 1996.

On 15 August 1947 the School of Aeronautical Engineering became the RAF Technical College. Complex modern aircraft and weapons systems needed a highly specialised and intensive technical training for officers who were to be responsible for them. The College consisted of the Headquarters and Basic Studies, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Weapons Systems Engineering Wings, and also a Cadet Wing for officer and general service training of cadets. It also ran courses on guided weapons, advanced specialisations and postgraduate studies. By the end of 1965 the College was amalgamated with the RAF College at Cranwell.

Just before the Second World War there were many other training courses in operation at Henlow. These included airframe riggers and fitters, flight mechanics, machine tool operators, drivers and cooks and also the reception of new recruits, but this last duty moved to Cardington in September 1937, where it stayed for many years and into the post-war period, then mainly for National Service, after the redundant airship field had reopened as an RAF station in 1936.

In April 1938 Maintenance Command was formed and the Home Aircraft Depot as it was known from 1926 had its name changed to No 13 Maintenance Unit and was placed in 43 Group. The main responsibilities were repairs to and modification of aircraft, making and fitting replacement parts and armament of aircraft.

Most training units had left Henlow by June 1940 and it was on a war footing and considered as an important target by the Luftwaffe. On 26 September eight high explosive bombs fell damaging two ‘Belfast’ hangars which were large targets: 540ft long and 30ft high. On 26 November incendiaries were dropped nearby and there were later raids in February 1941 and July 1942 without much effect.

The Hawker Hurricane,\(^3\) the mainstay of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, was the aircraft most seen at Henlow in the early war years. During the Battle of Britain it destroyed more enemy aircraft than all the other defences combined and continued to be developed into many other roles throughout the war. From January 1939 Hurricanes were being built under licence in Canada. The first aircraft from this arrangement arrived at Henlow in February 1940 and the No 13 Maintenance Unit had to assemble them and test them before they could be flown to operational squadrons. Over 1,400 Canadian Hurricanes were
built, about 10 per cent of the total production. In September 1944 the last Hurricane, named *The Last of the Many*, was assembled at Hawker’s Langley factory.  

*Hurricane Mk1, RAF serial R4118, squadron code UP-W, UK civil registration G-HUPW, at the Royal International Air Tattoo, Fairford, Gloucestershire. The aircraft was delivered new to 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron in August 1940. It flew 49 combat sorties from Croydon, destroying three enemy aircraft and damaging two others. Still painted in its original markings, R4118 is the only Hurricane from the Battle of Britain still flying. (Photo by Adrian Pingstone, July 2008, placed in the public domain.)*

During the war the control tower at Henlow was built from redundant aircraft packing cases but later rebuilt in a more substantial manner. The original tower and parts of the airfield were seen in several scenes in the 1969 film ‘The Battle of Britain’, as was nearby Duxford.

Henlow also had the Parachute Test and Training Section, which arrived in 1925, and supplied instructors for the Airborne Forces training school at Ringway, near Manchester, and specialist equipment for the Special Operations Executive and Special Forces. They first used obsolescent Vickers Virginia biplanes until 1941 when they changed to the equally unglamorous Armstrong Whitworth Whitley. The unit did modifications on them and on Dakotas (DC3s) and Halifaxes.

Irving Aerospace set up parachute testing at Letchworth in support of the Armed Forces because RAF Henlow was nearby.

At the end of the war the comedy writer and TV personality Frank Muir (‘Take it from Here’, ‘Call My Bluff’) was transferred from the Photographic Section at Ringway to Henlow. Here he met Arthur Howard (a character actor and the brother of Leslie Howard the film star) and Alfred Marks, a well-known post-war comedian. They produced shows on the base and Muir received his first payment for a script while there which, he later wrote, was ‘better than a pat on the back and a spam fritter in the NAAFI’!

The large grassed airfield at Henlow was also used by the Special Duties squadrons 138 and 161, based at Tempsford. Their crews would
practise dropping supply containers used to support resistance organisations in enemy territory. While undergoing this training one of 138 squadron’s Halifaxes collided with a tall chimney at Arlesey brickworks and all eight of the crew were killed.

The De Havilland Mosquito⁶ (right), the famous mainly wood twin-engine fighter bomber and the Hawker Typhoon,⁷ a much more powerful single seat fighter, then appeared at Henlow.

No 13 Maintenance Unit received Mosquitos built in Canada and flown across the Atlantic via Greenland. Ninety aircraft were built there in 1943 and some 400 in 1944, eventually increasing to over 1,100.

Henlow was under the control of the Ministry of Aircraft Production during the war – its main purpose being aircraft assembly, even though still in 43 Maintenance Group. In addition to 13 Maintenance Unit, No 6 Repairable Equipment Unit as well as a number of dental units and the School of Aeronautical Engineering were also based here.

RAF Henlow historically played an important part in the development of military communications systems. In 1947 the Signals Development Unit (SDU) was moved from West Drayton to Henlow. Their work was mainly to service, modify, manufacture and install communications equipment, including construction of radio vehicles and associated equipment. The original workshop facilities were used and the old foundry cast wheels and many other items.

The RAF Signals Engineering Establishment grew from three Signals Groups formed during the Second World War: No. 2 Group in Bomber Command, with world-wide responsibilities for communications and airfield facilities; No 60 Group in Fighter Command, which handled ground radar; No 100 Group in Bomber Command and also No 80 Wing which both specialised in air and ground Radio Counter-Measures. At the end of the war these functions combined to form No 90 Group. In 1958 the Group was given Command status, but this was removed when it was incorporated into the newly formed Strike Command in a resources rationalisation in 1969. In 1973 the title was changed to the Royal Air Force Support Command Signals Headquarters.

In 1953 RAF Henlow was raised to Group status and commanded by an Air Commodore.
A number of pre-WWII aircraft were flown into Henlow in the 1960s for preservation for the RAF Museum. In September 1964 the film ‘Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines’ was filmed at Henlow, with aircraft from the Shuttleworth Collection, including the replica Bristol Box kite. RAF service personnel wore period costumes as extras. In September 1965, the BBC came to Henlow to film ‘Pilots and Planes’ and, in April 1968, Spitfires, Hurricanes, Messerschmitts and Stukas landed to film the ‘Battle of Britain’.

The RAF Officer Cadet Training Unit, moved to Henlow from Feltwell in 1966, and undertook initial training of over 60 per cent of newly commissioned officers entering the service. RAF and WRAF officers were trained for all ground branches, as well as aircrew. Unlike Cranwell and the Aircrew Officers’ Training School at Church Fenton, the unit provided only the basic training common to all RAF and WRAF officers. When the course was completed successfully, newly commissioned officers underwent specialised professional training at other units before taking up their first duties.

During the mid-1970s, the Officer Cadet Training Unit was responsible for 80 per cent of initial officer training. In 1977 it was decided that initial training of officers would be better if entry could take place at a single place and so the unit left Henlow on 24 April 1980. Since then, all officer training takes place at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell. While the unit was at Henlow it is estimated that more than 10,000 officers were trained.

The most complete group of early buildings on the station are the five hangars which, although they have been altered over the years, are the most complete set of hangar buildings on any British airfield for the period up to 1923. Because of the Belfast-type trusses used in their roof beams they are sometimes known as the Belfast Hangars. The airfield also has a golf course. During the 1930s, the married quarters, situated across the B659, to the south, were built in the Garden City style and the barrack and office buildings which date from 1933 to 1935 have a unique architectural treatment for an air base. The best building is said to be the officers’ mess.

No 616 Gliding School was formed at RAF Henlow in 1958 to provide gliding training and experience for local Air Training Corps and Combined Cadet Force cadets. The Central and East Air Cadets Headquarters was formed in January 1969 at RAF Oakington and moved to Henlow in December 1974.
On its 50th anniversary in 1968, RAF Henlow was given the freedom of Bedford.

The Falklands War brought great activity to the base to support the conflict. A Task Management Squadron was formed to co-ordinate the efforts of the Radio Engineering Unit which manufactured secure speech systems for use in the UK and at Ascension Island and they also provided modification kits for Puma and Chinook helicopters; radar and radio communications for Port Stanley Airfield, which included different types of radar; and radio links for HF, VHF and UHF with their control units, aerials and masts. Some 20 Henlow personnel were sent out by air to install the radio links.

The Joint Arms Control Implementation Group, the UK’s Military Arms Control Verification Centre, has been at Henlow since May 1996. They implement a variety of international arms control treaties and related agreements, to which the UK has been a party since the end of the Cold War. The agreements try to enhance security and promote confidence and openness in military matters amongst nations. The overall effect of all these agreements is to reduce the risk of future major conflicts in Europe.

The Headquarters of the Provost Marshal moved to Henlow in November 1998 from RAF Rudloe Manor where it had been since 1975, to be known as ‘Headquarters RAF Provost & Security Services’. On 1 April 2005 the policing and security functions were reorganised as the new ‘HQ PM( RAF)’ and an operational wing – No 1 (Specialist) Police Wing (SPW).

The RAF Centre of Aviation Medicine was founded on 1 December 1998 from the amalgamation of the School of Aviation Medicine at Farnborough and the Aviation Medicine Training Centre at RAF North Luffenham. The Centre expanded in 2000 when the RAF Medical Board moved from the Station Medical Centre at Henlow to the Centre’s site and came under its command and control. In June 2000 the RAF Institute of Health moved from RAF Halton to Henlow. The Centre currently consists of four Wings.

On 6 September 2016 the then Defence Secretary announced that more than 1,200 hectares of surplus public sector land was to be released across the UK to provide land for up to 17,000 new homes to contribute to the government’s target of building 160,000 new homes by 2020. All of the money generated from land sales would be invested into meeting the needs of the Armed Forces.

The land included the golf course at RAF Henlow, and also one at Southwick Park, after the then Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon,
questioned the need for them during a speech on defence reform, when he confirmed that the estate optimisation strategy would aim to reduce the size of the defence estate by 30 per cent over 25 years.

In June 2017 it was announced that world’s first commercial space and deep-sea research and training centre is to be developed at RAF Henlow. The £120m facility is part of a multimillion-pound plan to develop a science, innovation and technology park at the base to include the world’s biggest 50m deep pool which could test offshore technology for the oil and gas industries as well as submersibles, aiding exploration in ‘extreme environments’. An hotel and astronaut training centre are also planned. The ‘human performance centre’ will enable divers, astronauts and top athletes to perform at the peak of their potential. The site has been designed by the architect of London’s Gherkin, Robin Partington. It is hoped work will start at the end of 2018 and will begin operating in 2019, bringing about 160 permanent jobs, including a specialist diving team and operational staff.

DH 82a Tiger Moth

As part of the celebrations of the RAF Centenary on 3 July 2018 Henlow took part in the RAF Baton Relay. A Tiger Moth, built in 1945 by Morris Motors and piloted by an RAF veteran carried the baton from Henlow to the Shuttleworth Collection.

So, in its centenary year RAF Henlow has a new future as a site for space exploration and new housing. It remains to be seen how these quite different uses can come together. There will have to be investment in infrastructure and hopefully a plan to bypass the congested route through
Henlow village to Biggleswade on the B659 in view of the extra traffic that will be generated.

The best of RAF Henlow’s architecturally significant buildings must be preserved, including the hangars, and new uses found for them. The station has a rich history and, although it has not been in the front line like Biggin Hill and Kenley or Hornchurch, without Henlow they would not have had the aircraft and trained personnel to ensure Britain’s survival in 1940.

References
Edwards, Richard, and Edwards, Peter J: Heroes and Landmarks of British Military Aviation: From Airships to the Jet Age (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2012) (NB the word ‘Military’ is omitted from the jacket and spine blocking but appears on the title page.)
Blue Abyss: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-40407574
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duxford_Aerodrome
https://henlow-pc.gov.uk/raf-camp/
www.flyer.co.uk/mod-to-close-chalgrove-colerne-and-henlow-airfields/
www.henlow-pc.gov.uk/raf-henlow-to-close/

Notes
1. The Bristol F2 Fighter: a two-seat biplane fighter and reconnaissance aircraft of the First World War developed by Frank Barnwell at the Bristol Aeroplane Company, often just known as the Bristol Fighter. Intended to replace the pre-war BE2c reconnaissance aircraft, but the new Rolls-Royce Falcon V12 engine gave the performance of a two-seat fighter. The F2B version was agile and able to hold its own against enemy single-seat fighters. Remained in military service into the 1930s and many registered for civilian use which were popular.

2. The Airco DH4: a two-seat biplane day bomber in the First World War. Designed by Geoffrey de Havilland (hence ‘DH’) for Airco it was the first British two-seat light day-bomber to be effectively armed. Intended for aerial reconnaissance and day-bomber missions and tried several different engines but the best one was the 375 hp Rolls-Royce Eagle. There were a 0.303 Vickers machine gun for the pilot and a 0.303 Lewis gun for the observer. It could carry either two 230lb bombs or four 112lb bombs. First flew August 1916 and on operations in France by 6 March 1917 with RFC 55 Squadron. Most were built as general-purpose two-seaters in the US for the American expeditionary forces in France. After the War, many were sold, often to civil operators.

3. The Hawker Hurricane: a single-seat fighter of the 1930s and 40s, designed and mainly built by Hawker Aircraft for the RAF. Overshadowed by the more glamorous Spitfire in the public mind but in the Battle of Britain in 1940, it inflicted 60% of the losses sustained by the Luftwaffe and then fought in all the major theatres of the Second World War. It came from discussions in the early 1930s between the RAF and designer Sir Sydney Camm for a monoplane derived from the Hawker Fury biplane. The Air Ministry showed no interest, but Hawker continued to work on the idea, taking in several innovations for wartime fighters, including retractable undercarriage and the more powerful Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. In
late 1934, the Air Ministry placed an order for an ‘Interceptor Monoplane’ and on 6 November 1935, the prototype Hurricane, K5083, first flew. Ordered in June 1936 it entered service on 25 December 1937. Conventional construction eased production and enabled squadrons to do most major repairs themselves. The Hurricane was built rapidly prior to the war and by September 1939, there were 18 Hurricane squadrons in the RAF to defend Britain against the Luftwaffe. It later evolved as bomber-interceptor, fighter-bomber and ground support aircraft in addition to a fighter. The Sea Hurricane was modified enabling ship operation – some as catapult-launched convoy escorts. By the end of production in July 1944, 14,487 Hurricanes had been completed in Britain and Canada.

4. As to the assembly of the last Hurricane, Smith, op cit, merely states that the last Hurricane was produced in 1944 and named The Last of the Many: he does not state that this was at Henlow, though a reader might have assumed that. The Last of the Many serial number PZ865 first flew at Langley, Bucks, on 22 July 1944. It was then retained by Hawker Aircraft for trials work. It moved in 1950 to Hawker’s factory at Dunsfold and was given the civil registration G-AMAU on 1 May 1950. It was flown into second place at the 1950 King’s Cup Air Race by Group Captain Peter Townsend. It was used as a chase plane during the Hawker P127 trials. (The Hawker P127 and the Hawker Siddeley Kestrel FGA.1 were the experimental and development aircraft that led to the Hawker Siddeley Harrier, the first vertical and/or short take-off and landing jet fighter-bomber.) The aircraft appeared in the 1968 ‘Battle of Britain’ film and then was refurbished in 1972 and presented by Hawker’s successor company, Hawker Siddeley, to the RAF’s Battle of Britain Memorial Flight then based at RAF Coltishall, reverting to its RAF identity. In 2010 the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight rebuilt it.

5. Duxford was also used as one of the locations for the Battle of Britain film. On 21 June and 22 June 1969, an original World War I hangar was blown up in stages for the filming (without permission from the Ministry of Defence) and a realistic bombing sequence was spectacularly filmed from the air. Ironically this was the nearest it came to being destroyed as no significant wartime raids reached the aerodrome. The French château, seen at the beginning of the film, was constructed on the south-west corner of the airfield.

6. The de Havilland DH98 Mosquito: a twin-engine shoulder-winged multi-role combat aircraft. The crew of two, pilot and navigator, sat side by side. It served during and after the Second World War. Its frame was constructed almost entirely of wood and was nicknamed ‘The Wooden Wonder’ and also known affectionately as the ‘Mossie’. Designed as an unarmed fast bomber, it was adapted to: low to medium-altitude daytime tactical bomber; high-altitude night bomber; pathfinder; day or night fighter; fighter-bomber; intruder; maritime strike aircraft; and fast photo-reconnaissance aircraft. In 1941, it was one of the fastest operational aircraft in the world. It entered service in late 1941, as an unarmed high-speed, high-altitude photo-reconnaissance aircraft – later versions continued this role throughout the war. The first Mk B.IV bomber entered service with 105 Squadron on 15 November 1941. From mid-1942 to mid-1943, Mosquito bombers flew high-speed, medium or low-altitude daylight missions against factories, railways and other pinpoint targets in Germany and German-occupied Europe. From June 1943, Mosquitos were formed into the Light Night Strike Force and used as pathfinders for Bomber Command’s heavy-bomber raids and also used as ‘nuisance’ bombers, dropping Blockbuster bombs from high-altitude at high-speed so that German night fighters were powerless to intercept. As a night fighter from mid-1942, it intercepted Luftwaffe raids on Britain and, from July 1942, raided their airfields. Flown as a night fighter and as an intruder supporting Bomber Command heavy bombers reducing losses in 1944 and 1945 and the fighter-bomber was a strike aircraft in the Second Tactical Air Force (2TAF) from 1 June 1943 to prepare for the invasion of Europe in 1944. After joining 2TAF for D-day training, it also attacked Vi flying bomb launch sites. On D-Day three Mosquito FB.VI Wings flew close air support for the Allied armies. The Mosquito FB.VI went on special raids, and Coastal Command Mosquitos attacked U-boats and intercepted transport ships from 1943. It flew with the RAF and other air forces in the
European, Mediterranean and Italian theatres and with the RAF in South East Asia and the Royal Australian Air Force in the Pacific. In the 1950s, it was replaced the English Electric Canberra jet.

7. The Hawker Typhoon: a single-seat fighter-bomber, produced by Hawker Aircraft intended to replace the Hawker Hurricane, but design problems were found so it never completely satisfied this requirement. It was originally designed to have twelve .303 Browning machine guns and to be powered by the latest 2000 hp engines. Its introduction in mid-1941 was plagued with problems and for several months it faced a doubtful future, but, when the Luftwaffe brought in the Focke-Wulf FW190 in 1941, the Typhoon was the only RAF fighter capable of catching it at low altitudes, so it then had a new role as a low-altitude interceptor. It also became established as a night-time intruder and long-range fighter. From late 1942 it was equipped with bombs and from late 1943 ground attack rockets. With those weapons and four 20mm Hispano autocannon, the Typhoon became one of the Second World War's most successful ground-attack aircraft.

8. The plans were revealed at Cranfield University attended by representatives of the European Space Agency, Romanian cosmonaut Dumitru-Dorin Prunariu (a non-executive director of Blue Abyss, the developers) and representatives from central and local government.

9. The Centenary Baton Relay was one of the events in 2018 to celebrate the RAF centenary. A specially designed baton visited 100 sites associated with the RAF in 100 days. Students of the No 4 School of Technical Training at MOD St Athan submitted their baton designs to the Chief of the Air Staff. The designs highlighted materials used in past, present and possible future aircraft manufacture. Sir Stephen chose a design made of brass, wood, aluminium, steel and carbon aerofoil wing cross-sections, symbolising aircraft construction through the ages. The design featured LED rings of red, white and blue to illuminate the baton, to symbolise the RAF roundel and also included the RAF crest and RAF100 logo. The relay began at the Royal Courts of Justice on 1 April 2018 and ended 100 days later on 10 July on Horseguards Parade – the fly-past day of 100 RAF aircraft over Buckingham Palace. The baton was carried by volunteers connected with the RAF and in 100 days visited 100 sites associated with the service. On 1 July it was at RAF Brampton and IWM Duxford and arrived at Henlow on 2 July via Luton Schools to go on to the Joint Intelligence Command base at Chicksands via Shuttleworth in the Tiger Moth mentioned in the text.

Ted Martin

Publications Received


To be reviewed in our Winter issue.