

RAE News The RAE “house” magazine was published monthly from March 1948 to the final (bi-monthly) issue of September/October 1991, when RAE ceased to exist, having transitioned to the Defence Research Agency. BAHG holds a complete set of RAE News in its archive. Mike Dobson, former Chief Superintendent, RAE Bedford, has reviewed every issue and has extracted some highlights relating to RAE Bedford. He has called this “RAE Bedford; Its Life and Times”. He has written a few words of introduction, see below.



While RAE Bedford had been conducting research from 1952, it wasn't until the August 1957 issue that Bedford first appeared on the front cover. This, and articles inside, reported the official opening of the 8ft tunnel and the rest of the Bedford establishment. The next cover was the October 1962 issue, with this splendid shot of a Gloster Gladiator (from Old Warden) alongside the Handley Page HP115 research aircraft during the 1962 SBAC Air Show.

Although RAE Bedford was officially described as an “out-station”, in terms of staff it made up about 20% of the whole RAE. So it is a little surprising that its work did not appear more often on the cover of RAE News. The next occurrence is July 1971, when Short SC1 XG900 was presented to the Science Museum.



RAE Bedford - Its Life and Times (by M.D.Dobson) The scientific achievements of the Royal Aircraft Establishment Bedford have already been largely catalogued in the two books “Wings Over Thurleigh” and “Wind Beneath the Wings”. However, while the Establishment provided the means, it was the people who worked there who were the actual achievers and any historical account could not be complete without a full recognition of this. Some reference is made to individuals within the two publications, but to confine their bounds, little reference is made to the strong, loyal and dedicated team of people which comprised RAE Bedford. Numbering some 1600 people at its peak, the close-knit family of skilled support staff, from engineers to administrators, were there to fully support the research scientists and engineers in the successful completion of the many and varied tasks placed before them. The esprit de corps within the Establishment was palpable and for those who worked there it was not only a privilege but very much a pleasure.

It has long been my ambition to plug this gap in the historical recording of RAE Bedford and the comparatively recent availability of documentation held within the BAHG Archive has finally inspired me to make the effort. Thus the year 2016 was spent in preparing a compilation of available historical documentation which I have chosen to call “RAE Bedford – Its Life and Times”. The main source of information has been the RAE house magazine “RAE News”. This Farnborough-based publication appeared monthly (later bi-monthly) from 1948 until the demise of the title “RAE” in 1991. A “Bedford News” page appeared in almost every issue, as did a number of individual articles about Bedford. The compilation extracts all Bedford entries from RAE News and to provide continuity to the narrative as a whole, a

brief commentary, as appears necessary, has been included. Interestingly (and fortunately), the lifetime of RAE News corresponded almost precisely with the lifetime of RAE Bedford!

Because the compilation runs to 624 pages (which in digital terms amounts to about 380MB), it is set out as a four-volume book, although it is only ever likely to exist in electronic form. Each volume covers approximately a decade with the four volumes following through chronologically over the period. An index, also chronologically arranged, covers the whole compilation and is provided to assist both manual and electronic searching.

Editor's Note It is planned to prepare the Index and the Volumes to make them available to anyone interested. Please contact us if you would like to know more.

Bedford Exhibition at Farnborough Our exhibition about the achievements of RAE Bedford held in the FAST Museum at Farnborough was open from the end of October until the end of January. It was very well received.

French Jaguar-Marine (by Gerry Shanks) I have been researching the RAE contribution to the development and application of Fly-by-Wire to aircraft design. While exploring the part played by the Fly-by-Wire Jaguar aircraft, I uncovered an interesting story concerning events at Thurleigh airfield associated with the French marine Jaguar.

Between 1970 and 1971 the prototype Jaguar M, the planned French navy carrier version, carried out trials at RAE Bedford. These trials used the only land-based catapult launch and arrestor equipment available in Europe, at Thurleigh airfield. Three periods of flight testing were completed at Thurleigh: in May 1970, June 1970 and October 1971. The photographs show the French Jaguar M.05 getting airborne from the raised catapult (*neg NAD2-5804*) and secondly in flight (*neg B2781F*). On



arrival for the third trial, the entente cordiale rose to a crescendo when the French team appeared with several motor vehicles and the aircraft painted in the tricolore's red, white and blue stripes! However, in 1973 the navy carrier version was cancelled by the French government in favour of the Super Étendard.

BAHG would welcome any further information on the Jaguar M series of trials, particularly photographs of the aircraft painted in the tricolore, Le Drapeau. There is nothing in our archive. BAHG would also be pleased to hear from anyone with material or photographs of the Fly-by-Wire Jaguar XX765.

BLEU Anniversary Sixty years ago, in the Spring of 1957, the Blind Landing Experimental Unit moved to RAE Bedford from its initial base at Martlesham Heath and Woodbridge, Suffolk. The official memorandum, dated August



1945, that established BLEU defined its role as being "responsible for the development of blind approach and landing of RAF, Naval and civil aircraft". Sir John Charnley recounted the history of BLEU in the 2006 Cody lecture at the Farnborough Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Society. After the transfer of staff and aircraft, the first automatic landing was made at Bedford in the Autumn of 1957, by Varsity WF417 (*see photo left, neg B3887*). Later demonstrations to the Air Staff and others were also given in Canberra



WJ992 in 1958. HRH the Duke of Edinburgh also asked for a demonstration. It was a nervous John Charnley who, on 4 December 1959, helped strap HRH into the right-hand seat of Canberra WJ992. Fortunately all went well and after several fully automatic, accurate landings HRH returned, beaming. Does anyone have any photos related to this visit by HRH?

With BLEU in place, 1957 saw the three major units of Naval Air Department, Aero Flight and BLEU fully operational on Bedford airfield, together with a brand new control tower.

Official Opening 1957 RAE Bedford was opened officially sixty years ago, on 27 June 1957. The next issue will cover this event in more detail. We would be pleased to hear from anyone present at the opening who can give us their recollections or who has any photographs or other memorabilia.

Talks A number of talks about RAE Bedford are lined up in 2017, at organisations including the Bedfordshire Local History Association annual conference, the Shefford & District Amateur Radio Society, the Rushden 41 Club and Friends of Bedford Cemetery.