



Bedford Aeronautical Heritage Group (BAHG)

When the Bedford QinetiQ site on the airfield enclave was closing down in 2008 and there was a danger that many important records would be lost, a small group of former employees created BAHG with the aim of saving important material.

The main records of concern were the photographic and film archives dating back to the creation of the new Establishment in the 1950s.

BAHG began work in 2008 reviewing the negative collection (some 70000 glass plate and film negatives) and indexing the 16mm and 35mm movies (some 2000).

Taking advice from our colleagues at Farnborough, where the Farnborough Air Sciences Trust (FAST) had been in existence for many years, we became the Bedford “wing” of FAST. This provided BAHG with legitimacy to be custodians of the Bedford photographic archive.

Aims

BAHG’s aim is to preserve the scientific and historical legacy of the Royal Aircraft Establishment Bedford and its successors (DRA, DERA). It will do this through the retention and preservation of relevant artefacts and material relating to its activities throughout its period of operation.

The BAHG “Team”

Currently, the BAHG team of old lags working with the archive consists of

Gerry Shanks
Mike Dobson
Peter England
Reg Harlow

Tony Manning
Barry Moulang
Barry Tomlinson
Pat Albon (when he can)

Apart from Mike Dobson (the last Chief Superintendent of Bedford) who spent his early career in the 3 ft wind tunnel, all the team had previously worked on the airfield.

What Does BAHG Do?

The group’s activities, based on weekly meetings, have concentrated on reviewing and documenting the negatives and films. Our ability to scan photographic negatives of all kinds has been helped by the acquisition of a good quality scanner, with financial assistance from FAST. BAHG also gives regular talks, contributes to exhibitions and publishes books.

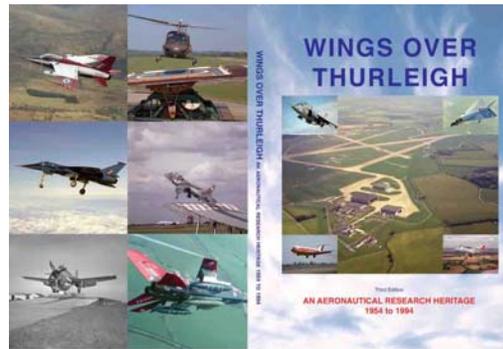
Talks. Our first public talk, in September 2009, to Sharnbrook Historical Group, has been followed by many more, including to a number of local organisations and also to branches of the RAF Association. So far, since September 2009, some 14 talks have been given, with one more scheduled in 2011 (to the Bedford Branch of the RAeS, on 14 Dec, *visitors welcome*) and two

currently in prospect in 2012. All these talks have drawn extensively on the photographic archive for both still images and movie clips.

Exhibitions Our first public exhibition, at Farnborough in 2009, was a set of display panels on Naval aviation research at Bedford, as part of FAST's contribution to Fly Navy 100, the celebration of 100 years of naval aviation.

We have also contributed photographs (and a movie) to exhibitions at the Bedford Museum, first to one called "Clocking On", dealing with the working day at major organisations in the Bedford area, and then to one in October 2010 about the R101 airship. This commemorated the 80th anniversary of its final fatal flight from Cardington, just outside Bedford, to crash in France on 5 October 1930. We have also helped the National Museum of Computing at Bletchley Park to provide information on the use of a TR-48 analogue computer as a Versatile Autopilot in RAE Bedford's Comet and BAC 1-11 research aircraft.

Books The book "Wings Over Thurleigh", first published in 2001, has been re-issued in a third edition (published November 2010) to meet frequent requests for a copy. To do this we have had to turn all text and pictures into digital format. The book is available to purchase from BAHG. We are pleased to say it is selling well.



Other We have established contact with the RAF Museum, both at Cosford, where six research aircraft from RAE Bedford are now on display, and at Hendon.

What Next? Among future plans under discussion is the creation of DVDs to capture some of the past research. We are also looking for more ways to publicise the major contributions to aviation made by RAE Bedford. As a small part of this, we have worked with BodyFlight, a local organisation using the former Vertical Spinning Tunnel, on the Bedford wind tunnel site, as a sky-diving simulator for public freefall experience and also for serious team training. We have provided photographs of, and information about, RAE Bedford research, to hang in the building's public spaces, eliciting a lot of interest from the public.

How Can You Help?

Do you have any material related to RAE Bedford? Such as photographs, reports, log books. Were you working at Bedford in the early years? We would welcome your recollections about the wind tunnels or the airfield in the early days. Please let us know. Are you interested in any photographs that may be held in the archive collection? We could possibly supply copies.

You can join Farnborough Air Sciences Trust (FAST) - see www.airsciences.org.uk . To do so supports us in Bedford as FAST provides financial assistance to BAHG – for which a 'Bedford' membership is important tangible evidence.

We would like to hear from anyone with suggestions for other things we could do.

Finally, if you would like to receive future copies of the BAHG Newsletter, to be published periodically, please send your email address to Barry Tomlinson (bahg-bt@hotmail.co.uk). "Snail mail" deliveries could probably also be arranged.