



THE RATCLIFFE SPITFIRE P9503

Supported by The Leonard Stillwell Bursary and The Spitfire Society

May 2014

Dominic JH Berry

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It has certainly been a busy time since Bulletin 5, both in terms of our project, but also with the academic year being in its busiest phase. The layout of the bulletin has changed slightly due to the footer now carrying the logos of the companies who are, or have supported the project. If you would like to become part of this unique venture, please do get in touch with me; we have a wish list of exciting parts that you could sponsor! The bulletin now also carries our new logo taking its place at the top of this page. Speaking of the logo, you may notice that the Spitfire used in it carries the correct tail number, P9503, (if you can see that well!) It also carries the right squadron codes of PR, but the individual letter code is currently a guess. Until we can find otherwise, I will stick with 'B' for Baillon as I can't find the B used on another 609 Sqn Spitfire during that period, and it is looking more and more likely that we may never discover the actual code P9503 carried on Oct 27th 1940.

Defence Archaeological Group

I have now had confirmation from Richard Osgood, Senior Archaeologist with DAG, that RAF Museum Hendon do not require any of the finds from Exercise Tally Ho, the dig on Salisbury Plain last September, and he has very generously decided that Ratcliffe College should become the recipients. This is quite a responsibility, as it means that we will be the custodians of all the known original parts from Spitfire Mk1 P9503. (Some of the personal items discovered have quite rightly been given to Rosemary Baillon). Whilst the vast majority of the pieces that were excavated are small, twisted pieces of aluminium, there are parts that are recognisable, and we aim to incorporate as many of these as we can into our build. Richard, and we hope, a number of the team who were on the dig from The Rifles, will come to the College in the autumn to give a talk about DAG and the excavation, and present us with the parts. When a date has been confirmed I will send out the details should you wish to attend.

Dunlop Aircraft Tyres

Mr Stuart Hawker, Marketing Manager from Dunlop Aircraft tyres, came to the College on Thursday 28th November 2013 to deliver the three Spitfire tyres Dunlop had agreed to donate to The Ratcliffe Spitfire project. Mr Hawker was able to see the progress of the project and also gave a very interesting talk about modern manufacturing in Britain.



His talk was illustrated with a variety of props, including sections from large tyres as well as a raw sheet of rubber which he claimed couldn't be torn; in fact, he was so confident that he offered a five pound note if anyone could do so. Unfortunately for Mr Hawker, he hadn't counted on the super-human strength of Dominic Baggott in Year 7, who promptly relieved our guest of a crisp blue/green note from his wallet. To be fair to Mr Hawker, the rubber did have a small tear in it already, which Dom took clean advantage of! It was also rather interesting to find out that during WWII, German planes flew with Dunlop tyres. This scared the life out of a Spitfire pilot when he went with his CO to find the wreck of a plane he'd claimed to have shot down. On finding the tail wheel marked with Dunlop, his first thought had been that he's accidentally shot down another Spitfire. As it turned out, Dunlop had a sister company in Germany which, during the war was obviously requisitioned by the Nazi regime to help with their efforts.

There were a good number of students and some staff who attended, and some very pertinent questions were asked; Charles Grattan in Year 11 was interested in market share percentages, and Kit Jackson in Year 7 seemed keen to know more about how Dunlop test their tyres by exploding them with extreme pressures of water! The event was rounded off with a number of photographs being taken, and the boys who also help with the Spitfire project showed their appreciation to Mr Hawker for the very generous donation.



CAD Works
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DUNLOP
AIRCRAFT TYRES

HOMEBASE



Fathers and Sons

I am extremely grateful that the project has now been joined by a number of enthusiastic and skilled parents. This has allowed me to be able to delegate some responsibilities, as well as providing the students with a much greater involvement as smaller groups can now be guided more personally. I am indebted to the following: David Smith father of Toby, who was the first parent to express an interest in joining and has been a stalwart with the tail, ribs and stabiliser parts. Gavin Howling father of James has taken over the rudder manufacturing, and has devised ingenious methods to problem solve and make the engineering parts needed for the hinges, and Mick Summer father of Joe, who supports Gavin, and is himself a very accomplished pilot of radio controlled aircraft, so has a good understanding of flight characteristics. All attend weekly, and there are a number of other parents who do so when they can, including at our termly or bi-termly Sunday Spitfire Workshops. The contribution they make to the project has meant that we have begun to really pick up the pace...progress is being made.



George Mobbs

On Monday 18th November 2013 Ratcliffe College welcomed a very special guest; George Mobbs, aged 94 visited with his friend Bill Vernon. George and Paul Baillon were close friends growing up together and he knew all four of the Baillon boys well. It was just by chance last September, when George happened to catch the One O'clock News on television that he heard the story of a dig on Salsbury Plain to recover a Mk1 Spitfire that had crashed in 1940; and the pilot's name was Paul Baillon! George enjoyed reminiscing about his time growing up with the Baillons, and of his own very interesting time in the army during the war where he became an expert at aircraft recognition whilst part of the home defence. He also presented the project with a wonderful book about the Spitfire which includes a lovely inscription on the inside.



Homebase

Whilst discussing our need for more tools and materials with Andrew Yell, the College's Development Director, he mentioned that an Old Ratcliffian, Richard Ashton was a senior figure within the Home Retail Group. I dropped him an email asking for his help, and sure enough he was extremely obliging, putting me in touch with the local Homebase store manager, and before I knew it, we had a very generous pile of kit waiting for us! A huge thank you to Richard and the team at Homebase for helping us out.

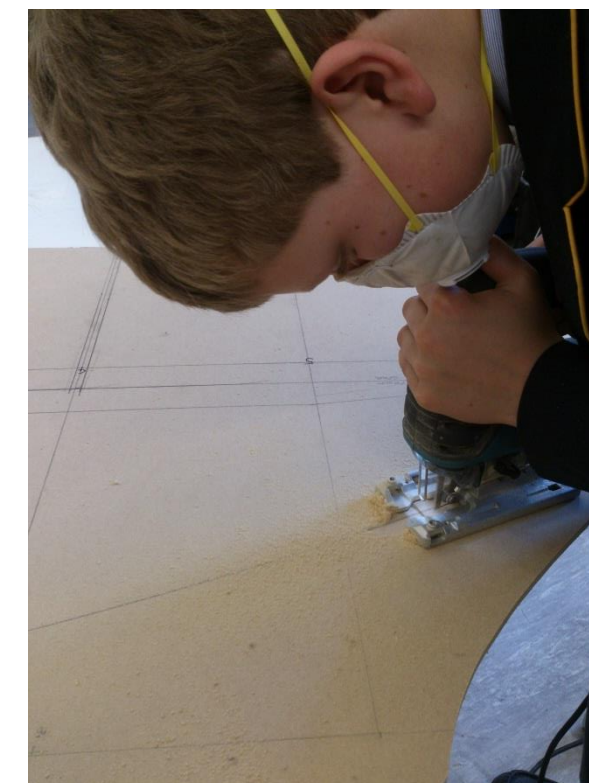
The Spitfire Aircraft Co. Ltd

I contacted Russ Harmuth, owner of SAC in California having seen his website. What Russ does is rather unique in the Spitfire world, he builds kits for the ordinary pilot to purchase, that will create a full-sized flying replica of a Spitfire. There are quite a few kit

companies out there that will provide you with a replica at ½ or ¾ scale, but they just don't quite look right in my mind. The canopy is usually out of scale to the fuselage, or the wings look out of proportion, or something. Aesthetically, anything other than Mitchell's full size design somehow just doesn't seem to work. Russ also manufactures new-made airworthy parts and lists them on his site, and has put me in touch with guys in New Zealand who do the same. Russ has been very generous and is supporting our project as much as he is able to. He has sent us an instrument and has others that will make their way to us in time too.

Spitfire Workshop - February 8th 2014

On Sunday 8th February we had another of our Spitfire Workshops. This saw a record number of parents attending to work with their children, I think around 8 in total. It was also lovely to have a number of the old gang of students turn up who, for one reason or another, had not been able to attend the weekly sessions. The extra-curricular program here at Ratcliffe College is a very busy one, and at times, students simply can't do it all. A great deal was achieved in the 2 ½ hours of the workshop. The Summer term now has two of these scheduled, on the 18th



May and 22nd June respectively. By that time we anticipate that the rudder will have been mated with the tail, and we will be working on the horizontal stabiliser and elevator. (The elevator is actually almost the equivalent of a double rudder built as one piece...Gavin, you up for that?!)



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Spitfire Workshop – Thorntons

Since the start of this venture, I have been looking for a home for the project. There is a limit to the amount of work that can be achieved within an active classroom, two and a half flights of stairs up from the ground floor. The project is also slowed by the fact that time must be set aside to recover the classroom back to its former use before each workshop session is ended. The project requires accurate setting-up in order to work from a horizontal datum, and this is time-consuming but needs to be assembled and dismantled repeatedly for each occasion. We were fortunate to be allocated a workshop space within the grounds in the autumn, and we look forward to making use of that now that the better weather is upon us. I say this because the workshop we have been given is prone to damp, so we need to be careful that our moisture-sensitive wooden airframe is not affected detrimentally by this. IN the next bulletin we will have photographs of us in there!

Port Elizabeth South African Air Force Museum (PE SAAF Museum)

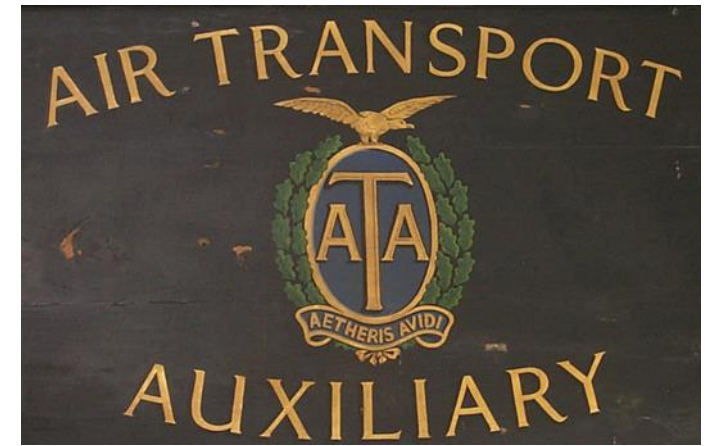
Another contact I have made fairly recently is in South Africa. There are members of the Port Elizabeth South African Air Force Museum who are also building a wooden Spitfire, and I thought it might be interesting to tell them of our project. It will be interesting to see how their project develops; they are ahead of us by quite some way. A link to their project can be found here: <http://saafmuseum.org.za/category/projects/>



Port Elizabeth's Spitfire Project

Maidenhead Heritage Centre and the ATA Association

I got in touch with the ATA section of the Maidenhead Heritage Centre in Berkshire to let them know of our project as well. It seemed pretty fitting seeing as a good proportion of the reason that we are doing this is because of the strong historical links we have with the ATA. In reply I received a nice answer from the Secretary of the ATA Association. He was enthusiastic about the project and it may well be that in the future we will be hosting a special visit from some of the surviving members of the ATA. What an honour that would be.



I will leave you with some more images of the project and our students hard at work on it, and apologise for the lateness in getting this bulletin out to you.

