

All set for a busy season at Hooton Hangars



A tremendous amount of work has been undertaken across the site in recent months to prepare for the new season which opens on 28th April with the Spring Open Day, and grateful thanks go to all who have taken part in any way to make this reopening possible. Graham Sparkes writes on behalf of the Hooton Park Trust Board:

‘Anyone who has been in Hangar 16 during recent weeks cannot have failed to notice that it looked like bomb had gone off, as the plans for opening both sides advanced. Meteor and Vampire jets have been assembled and several aircraft moved to different display positions.

‘The plastic sheeting between the two parts of Hangar 16 has recently been removed, opening up the huge space visually and adding a whole new dimension to the building, with the magnificent arches soaring to the trussed heights. The revamped shop and cafe are now operational, and UV filtering film has been applied to the south bay windows, and with the completion of that work we should very soon be able to announce a delivery date for the Comper Swift which is coming on loan from the RAFM at Cosford.

‘Improvements have been made to the boating lake and groundworks along the roadway, which will enhance the entrance area. Finally, the new Museum of Printing is now open in what was the admin office in Building 27; if you love solid old technology and can get over the twitchy-thumb syndrome, then this little pearl is a must-see.

‘On a sadder note, CH21 have decided not to continue to base at Hooton Park. We would also like to take the opportunity to thank the members of the group for all the help and assistance while they were with us and wish them luck in the new home at the Boat Museum.’

Hooton Park public events 2024

Building 16 with the aircraft displays will be open to the public on the following Sundays, 10am to 4pm, throughout the season:

- 26th May
- 30th June
- 28th July
- 25th August
- 29th September
- 27th October

Guided tours of the exhibits, together with a history of the site, are also available on these dates.

On 11th August we are holding a Bus Running Day from 10am to 4pm, with resident and visiting buses of many kinds on display and taking visitors on free rides.

Hooton Park will also be open on 7th and 8th September from 10am to 4pm as part of the annual Heritage Open Days.

Special Spring ‘Open Day’ edition

Chester No. 4 tram restoration



Work continues unabated on Chester No. 4, the only surviving tram from the Chester fleet. With the temporary closure of the tram museum in Birkenhead, a number of experienced tram restorers are now helping at Hooton Park. The result of these extra hands has been a rapid progress improvement in the restoration.

After four years of visitors to Hooton Park looking at a single-deck tram, it's come as a shock to some that stairs are appearing, with handrails on the roof. Chester No. 4 had an upper deck when built in 1903. This tram apparently had no roof on the upper deck as rumour has it that the authorities feared it would blow over when crossing the Grosvenor Bridge.

Since the last newsletter the team has decided on the final shade of green for the livery and it's starting to be painstakingly applied, all by hand-brushing. The samples of green that survive on the 1903 bodywork are of uncertain provenance.

A milestone for the team was the installation of the seating in the lower saloon. The original patterns were copied from a surviving section and transferred to the new seats. This required the drilling of more than 5,000 holes in precisely the correct place. The resulting seat design is tramways jewellery, an object of beauty and surprisingly comfy. The good news is that we now have somewhere to sit to eat our lunch!

Less obvious details are added continually and include leather ceiling straps, final beading trim in the saloon, installation of eight safety-glass windows, and headlight frames.

The project has managed to obtain a trolley mast and pole which, once restored, will be installed on the roof in their original position.

Despite the near-zero temperatures in the Hangars during the winter, the restoration has shown no let-up in progress or enthusiasm. Please drop by and see for yourselves.

—Tony Smith



Rob Jones on the newly-installed steps.



Seating for the lower-deck saloon.

Hooton Park Hangars – a brief introduction



The Hooton Park Hangars site is managed by The Hooton Park Trust (HPT), which was formed in 2000 with the aim of creating a Trust to oversee and manage the restoration of the remaining WWI hangars on the former RAF airfield at Hooton Park, Cheshire. The long-term aim is to provide a multifunctional site, as well as restoring the buildings and the site itself as valuable historic artefacts in their own right. The buildings will then provide the perfect environment for the projects and initiatives that are planned.

Much still remains of the Hooton Park airfield and its buildings. Three original, Belfast-trussed, hangars dominate the landscape, surrounded by the original access roads, taxiways and numerous outbuildings and offices, all steeped in the colourful history of this one-time Royal Air Force airbase.

Some of the runway also exists. All manner of aircraft types have operated from this aerodrome, for example Austers of the Army Air Training Corps, Supermarine Spitfires of 610 Sqn, and, during the postwar years, classic jets such as Gloster Meteors, De Havilland Vampires, Venoms and much more.

The site, as well as being of interest in its own right, is now also home to many organisations, details of which will be found in the panel on the back page.

Progress on FSM Spitfire MkIX

I was reminded recently that it's a whole year since a group of us dismantled the full-scale model Spitfire in a garden on the outskirts of Carlisle, I'm pleased to say we are now finally putting it back together! First, though, a little background for those not familiar with the story of its construction and acquisition.

It was built by David Price, a retired builder who has written several history books regarding aspects of World War 2 and was looking for something more hands-on to do; five years later he had a full-size Spitfire IX in his garden. David was later informed by his wife that it was time for the Spitfire to go so she could have her garden back, and it was consequently advertised on various sites for purchase. It seemed a great opportunity for Hooton to acquire a Spitfire, albeit a Mk IX rather than the more appropriate Mk I that 610 squadron flew at Hooton prior to their departure in 1940 to play their part in the Battle of Britain.

The fibreglass exterior conceals an internal frame of ply and some minor steel elements. It is very heavy, so dismantling was no easy task – it took seven of us to move the wings and get them onto a trailer. The fuselage was then craned onto a lorry and driven down the M6, unfortunately losing the rudder which the vehicles behind ran over, reducing it to matchwood; David has since made us a replacement.

Reconstruction is now under way, the aim being to depict a Mk IX used by 611 squadron in 1943 when they were based at Biggin Hill. The aircraft chosen is FY-B (EN133). Like 610 squadron, 611 were formed as an Auxiliary Squadron at Hendon in 1936 before moving to their permanent home at Speke in the same year. Post-war they returned to Speke followed by spells at Hooton Park and Woodvale where they are still based. The aircraft will be displayed in its 1943 scheme including a Churchillian Bulldog symbol on the side of the fuselage. Sadly, this specific aircraft was shot down in March 1943 near Hardelot, being flown by Wg Cdr James Hogarth Slater AFC who died and has no known grave. He is, however, commemorated at the Runnymede Memorial. Wg Cdr Slater was an unusual figure in 611 as he was attached to the Squadron but not officially part of it. Back in January 1943 he was placed as temporary CO of 453 Sqn at Southend in lieu of its actual CO who was on a fighter tactics course for three weeks. He then went to Biggin Hill as supernumerary and flew with 340 Free French and 611 Sqn. Once complete, the Spitfire will act as a



Removing the wings in David's garden.



First wing back on and codes rubbed down ready for repainting and a new identity.



Garth Slater left of centre in light pullover.

memorial to Wg Cdr Slater, and the current 611 squadron at Woodvale have shown an interest in promoting the project through their role as a General Service Support Sqn using professional media officers who serve with the Unit. We look forward to inviting them to Hooton Park to view the completed work in due course.

—Neil Hutchinson

Recent progress in The Aeroplane Collection (TAC)



The underside of the Vampire's two wings have been primed and painted with two coats of silver paint. The serial numbers have been applied to the two wings, as have the RAF roundels. Undercarriage locks were fitted to both main legs, so that the undercarriage could not collapse when it carried the weight of the aircraft. In addition, gags were made and fitted to the sliding part of the shock absorber of each leg. We were assuming that the shock absorbers were no longer pressurised, so the idea of the gags was to prevent the sliding part moving too far inside the cylinder as the weight of the aircraft was taken by the undercarriage.

On 16th February a crane arrived on site to lift the wings and assist in fitting them to the fuselage. The first job for the crane was to lift the fuselage from its support in order to deploy the nose undercarriage leg and wheel at the front, and a steel support structure at the rear. Deployment of the nose leg proved difficult because certain parts of the mechanism had been disconnected and other parts had rusted over the years and seized solid. However, eventually the job was completed and an undercarriage lock was fitted.

The starboard wing was lifted by the crane and very carefully turned over, so that it was the right way up. It was then offered up to the fuselage and secured to it by means of three wingpins. We were fortunate to have a very competent crane driver with us to carry out the lifting and turning process. The job was difficult, but he skilfully achieved it without damage or injury. The port wing went onto the fuselage on 20th February.

Having fitted the wings we could see that the aircraft was not sitting level. This was because sliding part of the shock absorber of one of the main undercarriage legs had moved to a position determined by the gag as it took the weight of the aircraft, but the other hadn't. It was found that the starboard shock absorber



Lifting the Vampire's wings into position.



The Vampire reassembled.



The Dart engine.



Parker fuselage.

still had some pressure in it and this was preventing the undercarriage moving. Somewhat gingerly, the shock absorber was depressurised by draining off the hydraulic oil followed by venting the compressed air. The sliding part of the leg then moved and the aircraft sat level.

The two booms have been fitted along with the tailplane and rudders. The next stage is to fit the elevator. Once that has been done work will start to strip the paint from the top surface of the wings and repaint them in silver.

The Miles Messenger is now finished. TAC members have covered and painted the Martin Hearn built glider.

The Parker has had one wing/aileron covered and also the tailplane. These are now in the process of being painted and will be fitted to the fuselage shortly.

The Parker fuselage has had its final paint coat and is awaiting final finishing. It is expected the project will have been completed by Easter.

Miles Gemini parts have arrived at Hooton Park and restoration of this will start shortly.

Work on the Dart engine is nearly complete. It has been transformed from its dirty and rusty state on arrival at Hooton Park into a well-cared for, very well-presented exhibition piece. The propeller spinner has been sourced from an aircraft group in Blackpool and delivered to Hooton. It is hoped that the propeller will be fitted onto the engine soon.

—Stewart Turner

Some things never change!

Graham Sparkes recently came across this letter about ID badges which was printed in the *Hooton Independent* in November 2001.

Dear Barry X,

First of all Barry, I want you to ask yourself a question. Why are the nice people at the Hangars asking you to wear a pass in the first place?

The answer is clear. Its to protect the site from unsavoury types who may have an eye on your tools, your car or even that designer gear you are so proud of.

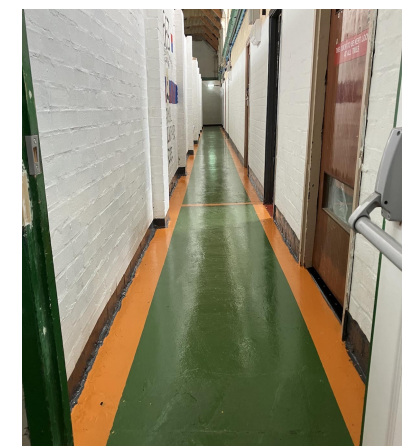
My advice is to make your pass a fashion accessory. Choose purple cloths or even perhaps a pair of blue matching shoes to go with your pass. Why not have a blue rinse ccasionaly? It will cover the grey and your pass will then stand out as an important compliment to any outfit you want to wear whilst on the Hangar premises.

Before you know it you'll be a trend setter and your friends and neighbours in Rock Ferry will all want to be seen with an HPT pass to accessorise their shell suits and the like!

—Serene Moreton

A lick of paint for the public corridor

Gerry Bateman has done a grand job over the winter in repainting the 'public corridor' on the far side of Hangar 17 to make it presentable for the reopening.



Who would have thought?!

As I strolled into B.16 on Sunday 4th February, I was excited as I knew that the day before, parts of The Aeroplane Collection's latest project, a Miles Gemini, had been delivered.

There it was – and what a surprise, for lying there on the floor were the fin and rudders from VH-BOB which I saw 20 years ago to the day at Brooklands, a farm strip near York, Western Australia.

As an active TAC member at the time and having been involved in the acquisition of the Miles Collections Messenger and Gemini projects for TAC, on scouting around prior to visiting family in Perth, I came across a stash of Miles bits at this provincial airfield, in the care of Lyndon and Dianne Foster who assured me I would be made welcome if I wished to visit.

Having been made welcome as we were, I dragged Margaret along as we were on holiday. We had a couple of hours rummaging and looking at various projects of Lyndon's – a pair of CAC Winjeels and a very nice Boeing Stearman as well as the Miles Collection.

There were no immediate plans to do anything with the Miles bits. Sadly, Lyndon died a couple of years later, which is how the Miles bits eventually found their way back to England.

The following day was our 32nd wedding anniversary, and guess what – a Tiger Moth flight across Perth, and north along the coast was a great present from Margie flying from Jandacot. That was followed by even more aeroplanes as we met up with Doug Muir who was the then owner of Comper Swift VH-ACG which was up for sale at the time.

—Graham Sparkes

Photos from top: large section of VH-GBB on the right with bits of VH-BOB to the left. Fins and rudders VH-BOB 20 years ago. Me with Doug Muir and Rusty at his home. Back to 2024 at Hooton.

A full list of contacts for the Trust and for the specialist groups operating within the site can be found on the back page.

Volunteers are always welcomed to help with the many and varied tasks at the Hooton Park site. Please email us in the first instance, or make yourself known to members of the Hooton Park community.



Making a Baby – Sopwith, that is!

Neil Hutchinson gives an update on work-in-progress

Work has been progressing on the Sopwith Baby in Building 16 for some time; we've recently been able to finally give the aircraft back its 'face' with the installation of an engine, cowling and prop plates, and we thought some information on how this has been achieved would be of interest.

The replica is being rebuilt to represent s/n 8188, built in 1915. This aircraft was in the final batch of this plane built by the Sopwith Aviation Company and was fitted with the Gnome 100hp Mono-soupape nine-cylinder rotary engine. When production ceased at Sopwith and moved to the Blackburn Aeroplane & Motor Co. Ltd, Fairey Aviation Co. Ltd and Parnall & Sons, these later planes were fitted with a 110hp or 130hp Clerget engine instead.

The aircraft at HPT had no engine and as either an original or brand-new Gnome engine was clearly well out of budget we looked to alternative options (the engines are still being made by a company in New Zealand and sell for approx. £30,000). Replica WWI rotary engines have been made from wood, foam (e.g., the Sopwith Schneider at Brooklands) and, more recently, plastic via 3D-printed. Working with Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) we first identified the appropriate STL files for the engine. As the spark-plugs were not included in the files a WWI-era one was 3D-scanned and added to the CAD suite. Overall, 93 separate parts were printed on Prusa MK3S printers using PLA Pro filament. Total printing time was about 270 hours and used approximately 15kg of material. For example, each of the nine cylinders was printed in two sections taking over 22 hours. Even though most of the engine will remain hidden behind the cowling, every effort was made to make the engine look as authentic as possible, e.g., the heads on modern bolts were filed to remove any markings.

Following assembly the engine was painted, some oil-stains added, and as a final touch the spark-plug wires

were attached.

The 3D-printed engine was made with support from the CW4.0 Innovation Support Programme by a dedicated 'DIGIT' team based in the Faculty of Engineering and Technology at LJMU, with special thanks to Thomas Byrne.

Replacing the missing cowling proved harder than expected. We obtained an 'original' drawing which was scanned and overdrawn in CAD, only to find that the dimensions and shape bore little relationship to the aircraft or photos. After much head-scratching a series of full-size paper templates was cut out and posted to the maker, Profile Panels Ltd in Taunton, who specialise in complex panels for restoring antique sports cars. The templates were used to form a 'buck' – the term was new to me but is basically a formwork over which the metal cowling sheet could be formed. The metal is formed using an English Wheel (a metalworking tool that enables a craftsman to form compound double curves from flat sheets of metal), the cowling being formed from a number of pieces that are then welded together.

The completed article was collected from Somerset and then fettled on site to fit the depth of the engine and clear the prop. It still requires final polishing, and hopefully Andy can be dissuaded from his plan to spot-burnish it!



Fitting the engine and cowling has surpassed our expectations, and anyone who remembers the Baby will know the sorry state it was in when it first arrived. Work is now progressing on floats and struts, so very soon the aircraft will look complete again; we can then move on to final fabricating and other details.





Two Manx trams come to Hooton

Two Birkenhead-built horse trams – Douglas Bay horse trams No. 11 (built by Starbucks in 1886) and No. 47 (made in 1911 by Miles Voss) recently arrived at Hooton Park Trust from the Wirral Transport Museum, for their restoration to be continued here.

The two Douglas single-decker horse trams, one an open ‘toast-rack’, and the other with a roof and bulkheads, had been withdrawn for decades and were in open storage at a transport museum in Jurby, Isle of Man, and were in danger of becoming total wrecks. They were donated to the MTPS for preservation, but shipping them to Heysham and then by road to Birkenhead cost the MTPS around £3,000 in May 2021. Work on them was halted in April 2023 when all restoration and maintenance at Wirral Transport Museum was stopped.

—Terry Martin

Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society moves into Hooton Park

Readers may have seen the arrival of the three horse trams in Hangar 18 late last year, being relocated from the Tramway Museum in Birkenhead as being surplus to requirements by the new lessees.

January saw the arrival of the MTPS Archives in many boxes. MTPS have come to a commercial arrangement with HPT for two rooms for storage. The new lessees at Birkenhead have no space in the new museum for the MTPS artefacts and tramway ephemera.

MTPS want to work with HPT and hope it will be a mutually fruitful relationship. MTPS is a registered charity dedicated to the North West's tramway history and for nine years ran the Transport Museum and Heritage Tramway at Birkenhead which was terminated last April.

A bus stored at Hooton was used to move all the stuff, filled both decks and driven by John Nolan.

—Rob Jones

Wednesday Eastham Volunteer Group

Jacque and the team from Eastham Day Care Centre that do voluntary work at Hooton Park on Wednesdays have put together some words of what they gain from working on the site. The team has been volunteering here for nearly two years. We came not knowing what to expect, and what we found was a great gang of volunteers, who have welcomed us warmly.

During this time we have contributed to projects such as fixing pathways, painting rooms, clearing and tidying areas. We have also been planting flowers in and around the park. We have found great friends who have gone out of their way to explain what is happening across the park. Everyone has taken time to show us projects they are working on, explaining what they are doing and keeping us upto date on progress, which we enjoy hearing about and seeing the progress made.

People have gone the extra mile, picking us up from the centre and taking us to the park on the restored historic buses when we have had transport issues. Feedback from our people we support is that they love a ride on the old buses.

Everyone from Eastham centre would like to thank everyone at Hooton Park for the kindness and care shown to us.

A person we support (GH) who volunteers at the project also would like to add, ‘I like working at Hooton with our staff and like talking to the men that work there.’

MB would like to add, ‘I love the buses.’

VW & JM: ‘We love the digging.’

JM is over the moon with his new lightweight wheelbarrow.

JS: ‘I love the buses and having rides on them.’

—Toni Denham

Tragedy at Hooton

I cannot recall when I first became interested in aircraft but it seems to be something that has always been with me from the day I assembled my first Airfix kit. I imagine that several of the readers of this article will have spent many contented hours cutting out their balsa frames and stringers with Uhu adhesive over their fingers and perhaps the odd cut from their Xacto knife.

Fortuitously my school on the Isle of Man was situated adjacent to the runway of Ronaldsway Airport where in 1954, as a twelve year old, I could watch the DC3 ‘Dakotas’ and the Dragon Rapides of British European Airways taking off and landing. Occasionally we would get a more unusual visitor such as the Bristol Freighter or the DH86, a four-engined big brother to the Rapide.

Living in Upton on the Wirral, it was not surprising that the annual air show at Hooton RAF station was a compulsory event, and thus it was that on Saturday, 18th September 1954 my friends and I bundled into my father's trusty Rover 90 and set off for the day. I recall that Jimmy Edwards, a well-known celebrity and comedian, was giving the commentary over the loudspeakers, which added a certain air of frivolity to the occasion and seemed to forecast a fun-filled day

for all concerned. Jimmy had himself been a pilot in World War 2 and was piloting his Dakota when it was shot down at Arnhem a mere ten years previously.

The resident 610 squadron were equipped with Meteor F8s and we eagerly awaited their display which was scheduled for later in the day. In due course the time arrived for 610 to perform, and after various opening manoeuvres they formed up to overfly the airfield in a ‘follow the leader’ format. I seem to remember that there were about seven or eight aircraft in the line, and all seemed well until, right opposite our vantage point, the Meteor in about third place simply rolled over on to its back and plunged vertically straight into the ground.

The point of impact was just beyond the main runway, and to this day I can visualise the massive fireball that erupted, and the feeling of sheer disbelief and horror that we had just seen what had in fact happened. Of course the event was then called off, and it was a very subdued group of boys who made their way home that afternoon.

The pilot who lost his life that day was Flight Lieutenant Richard James (Little Robbie) Robinson and it occurs to me that on 18th September this year it will be exactly 70 years since that fateful day, and perhaps HPT might find a space for a small plaque in his memory.

—Paul Gilling, TAC



Wirral Amateur Radio Society

The Wirral Amateur Radio Society (WARS) is a very active group of folk who meet regularly at Hooton. It is a long-established society that has been in continuous operation since 1936.

We are able to introduce radio theory to beginners in the hobby from all around the world, and run regular training courses and exams at all levels (including the amateur licence), participate in contests, host special event stations as well as practical and on-the-air evenings.

Phyl Fanning, G6UFI, has arranged with Wallasey Yacht Club to provide the Special Event Station GB0SCA which is being run by Wirral Amateur Radio Society, G3NWR, for the Seabird Class Association 150th Seabird Half-Rater Regatta.

The class owes its inception and inspiration from the design by Herbert Baggs in collaboration with W. Scott Hayward. The first eight boats were built by Latham of Crossens at a cost of £34 17s 6d each. The boats were named after Seabirds and their ratings were assessed at 0.5, hence the term Half Rater.

The first race was sailed off the Southport Pierhead on 13th June 1899.

The present-day fleet is based in North Wales at Trearddur Bay and Abersoch and on the Mersey at Wallasey. 1979 saw recognition by the *Guinness Book of Yachting* that the Seabird Half Rater is the oldest One Design Class still racing in Britain and the Liverpool Maritime Museum hold the Association documents on loan.

Ellesmere Port Model Boat Club

Visitors to Hooton Park will have noticed that a new fence has gone up around the lake, together with a hard standing area for the model trucks to run on as we are planning on integrating the boats and trucks for shows.

No. 11 RDFs Botha L6290 fatal crash at Hooton Park



On Thursday 27th May 1943, Sergeant Frank J. Spillane was flying Botha serial number L6290 (coded 46) at 5.40pm on approach to Hooton Park, about 1,000 yards behind an Anson aircraft which had cut in on the approach. At about 700 feet, with the air speed at 100 knots, he decided to go round again and opened up with both propellers in fine pitch giving maximum power. The starboard engine cut, causing the good engine to pull the aircraft into a flat spin. Spillane closed the throttles which steepened up the spin and applied anti-spinning procedures. Eventually the controls began to take effect, but by this time the aircraft was at 200 feet.

Flight Sergeant Denny Spillane tried to pull out of the dive, but nothing happened until the aircraft was at 100 feet and the aircraft hopped over Rivacre Road and crashed into the trees in Hooton Woods, Overpool. This was in the same area where a Halifax bomber had crashed.

The rest of the crew consisted of Sergeant J. T. R. Bazire the ASV instructor, Flight Sergeant Russell Charles Denny RAAF, an ASV pupil; and Sergeant Austin. Following the crash, Denny was taken to the hospital at RAF West Kirby where he died of his injuries the following day. He is buried in the church yard of St Paul's Eastham; he was just 20.

Sergeant Bazire (RAFVR) also died of his injuries two days later. He is buried in St Mary's churchyard, Middleton-in-Tees dale. Spillane suffered back injuries and was treated at RAF West Kirby hospital and recuperated at Hoyle Aircrew Convalescent Depot (ACD). Sergeant Austin received only superficial injuries.

Denny was one of thousands of Australians who fought in World War 2. His father, Charlie Denny, had emigrated to Australia in 1912 where he had five children – four girls and one son, Russell, who was born on 4th January 1923 at Broomehill, Western Australia. He worked as a Labour before enlisting in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 1st February 1942, at No. 4 RAAF recruiting Centre, Perth. On completing his training as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner on 12th November 1942, he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. He left by ship for Britain from Melbourne on 15th January 1943, arriving in the UK on 17th March. On 24th April he was posted to No. 11 Radio Direction Finding School (RFDS) at Hooton Park, and on 12th May was promoted to Flight Sergeant.

—Colin Schroeder

Bicycles and the RAF

Despite the popular image of the dashing young RAF pilot in his sporty MG, the standard means of getting about wartime Britain was the bicycle. Some bicycles were actually RAF property, often marked with a stamp on the front fork.

These bicycles issued from the equipment stores had to be signed for tended to be rather heavy, often lacking gears and brakes but were still deemed necessary for the efficient operation of an RAF station. Buildings on war time airfields were well spread out for safety as an air-raid precaution, and not all staff lived on site. Members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) were often billeted with civilians away from the airfields and needed bicycles to get to and from work at all times of day or night and in all weathers.

A rather more surprising use of the bicycle during the Second World War was during pilot training. Some fighter squadrons did interception training using bicycles fitted with dummy wings on the handlebars. Another, more amusing sight would be 'squadrons' of Wall's Ice Cream tricycles being 'flown' by cadets with the radio receivers fitted where normally the ice cream would be carried. These cadets would be learning to keep in a formation and the radios enabled the instructors to give commands to turn left or right from the control tower.

Perhaps though, for most staff, access to a bicycle became essential transport for recreation when an RAF station was perhaps a few miles or more from the nearest town or village. Many personnel would have brought or had sent their own bicycles from home as a bike enabling them to ride to local hostelry or dance hall.

The plan at Hooton is to have restored bicycles from every period of Hooton's RFC and RAF history on display in building 16, so pre-1917 to 1957. We currently have bicycles from 1922, 1933, plus bikes from the 1940s and 50s ready for display. It's also planned to display a range of lamps including carbide, oil, battery and dynamo each typical of the period. Future plans include the display of an example of a motorised bicycle so popular in the early 1950s as an alternative to public transport.

—John Sinclair

The Museum of Printing opens its doors as a working museum



After almost two years of gathering dust (and the unavoidable pigeon droppings) under the tall arches of Hangar 17, the type and presses of the Museum of Printing are being moved into their fitting new location in the former office of building 27.

As the twenty-first-century inkjet and laser printers were moved out of the office, the first of the old-style printing presses – an 1874 Albion hand-press – was re-erected in its new and eminently suitable and attractive home alongside dozens of beautiful cases of traditional metal and wood type.

Next to come over was the 1920s Pearl treadle-platen press, closely followed by the 'modern' 1950s flatbed proofing press.

Then the 1863 Albion was installed, a fine partner to its smaller cousin across the room. Both Albions are from former Merseyside printers, so have their roots in the area, and are on long-term loan from National Museums Liverpool.

Still to come are the late-Victorian 'Arab' press – another, much larger treadle-platen which will need careful dismantling for it to fit through the doors – and the huge Columbian or 'Eagle' hand-press, the oldest (c.1820s) and grandest press of them all, standing at about nine feet tall and almost eight feet long. This is another local press which will undoubtedly be the focal point of the new museum space.

This working museum is a re-creation of a typical high-street printshop as it would have looked throughout the long period of letterpress printing until the introduction of computers for typesetting in the 1970s, and of digital printing more recently.

'Copy' was hand-set by skilled compositors using metal type and assembled into pages. Proofs of the job were then read by the proof-reader, corrections made to the type-page, the type placed on an appropriate press, and the required number of copies were then 'run off' by the pressman.

Type is stored in special cases with compartments for all the characters used in the English language. Each typeface and size requires its own unique type-case: 12-point Times Roman, 24-point Times Italic, 48-point Times Bold, etc. Hence the Times typeface family would need about sixty cases of type.

Illustrations required the making of 'blocks' by photo-engraving – a process still used today to produce modern photopolymer blocks for letterpress printing.

Printing was done on traditional hand-presses such as the 'Albion' or 'Columbian', or for longer runs on treadle-platens such as the 'Pearl' or 'Arab'.

Letterpress printing is experiencing a strong and healthy renaissance today as folk are rediscovering its versatility in producing prints with a tactile feel not available with modern digital methods.

Although Hooton Hangars features mainly aircraft, bus, commercial vehicle and other transport displays, printing facilities have traditionally been an important adjunct to transport facilities with their need for printed matter of many kinds, including schedules, posters, maps, notices, programmes, tickets, itineraries, publicity material and many other administrative items.

This museum sets out not only to help preserve what remains of traditional printing equipment, but to use the type and presses for demonstrations and to produce quality printed work of all kinds.

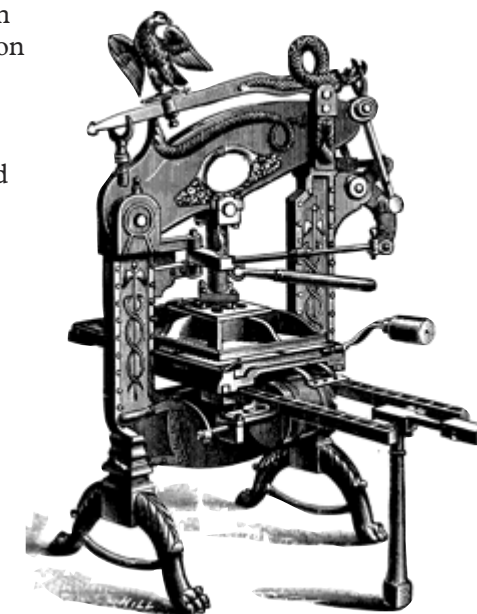
All presses are in working order and will be used regularly to print a wide range of work, much of it relating to Hooton Hangars and the community established here.

I will be happy to do demos for visiting groups with prior arrangements. And if you see the 'Museum open' sign displayed outside the museum, do come in to chat and watch work-in-progress, for this is truly a working museum.

The new Museum of Printing at Hooton Hangars has been made possible through the kind gesture of the Board of Hooton Park Trust, for which I give grateful thanks for making this exciting venture come to life.

—Ken Burnley

The 'Columbian' hand-press due to be reassembled in the Museum.



65 years a pioneer!

Terry Morris reviews Wallasey No. 1's 65th birthday event



Friday 8th December 2023 was 65 years to the day that Wallasey Corporation made transport history by placing the first Leyland Atlantean, No. 1 (FHF 451), into service on Service 1 from Seacombe Ferry to New Brighton via Seabank Road, and this was followed by another 29 in the next three years.

A short outing was made on the day when No. 1 ran from Seacombe Ferry to New Brighton, again with four people aboard as the actual 65th anniversary couldn't be missed, Photos were taken at the Ferry, Town Hall and New Brighton,

Sunday 10th December had been announced as the official birthday run and this was to leave Hooton Park around 10.30am. A decent turnout saw No. 1 head to Seacombe Ferry with a pick-up at Woodside, then to Seacombe Ferry to pick up a few more folk. Seabank Road called and then saw No. 1 in Virginia Road, New Brighton, which until early 1991 was the terminus for bus services.

Then onto the Promenade for a photo where the shelter for service

19 used to be, and then to Wallasey Beach at Harrison Drive which was the other end of the Promenade Service 19. A quick run up to the site of the former Derby Bathing Pool showing Service 20, and this enabled me to get a contrasting photo in the same place as I got No. 1 in December 1993 in the freezing rain.

Next it was off to Wallasey Village and Moreton (Burrell Drive) via Leasowe Road, Leasowe Castle and Moreton Cross. A few shots with Leasowe Castle in the background, then at Leasowe Station with Merseyrail 507023 heading to West Kirby and as the crossing barriers lifted to allow No. 1 to continue.

Burrell Drive was on the edge of the County Borough until 1st April 1974 with just beyond the terminus being Birkenhead. Then it was back to Wallasey Village and Grove Road Station approach for a photo of No. 1 showing Service 2 Seacombe which was one of the original three routes. A 508 was also caught in the background here. The Ferry then called via the 2, and then a 16 to New Brighton

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via Liscard and past the site of Seaview Road Garage and a final run back to the Ferry as a 14 via Rake Lane.

No. 1 returned to Hooton for just before 4pm and had behaved impeccably for a pensioner and never missed a beat.

Big thanks to John Nolan and Graham Foulkes for No. 1's two birthday bashes, and to Ken for the posters displayed on the two days.