Aviation group Events

Next Meeting

Wednesday January 28th 2026

Start 10-30 at The Tythings

The life and times of a Vulcan Pilot
A Talk by Bob Duncan a former Vulcan Pilot

February 25th

Bats to Red Arrows

David Hassard from the Hawker Association who will tell us about the evolution of the Hawker Aircraft Company

In Snipits this month

(Where applicable links are left in place)

Local events/Meetings

Comet 1 relocation to South Wales Aviation Museum

Heathrow's Third Runway Project

Future of Coventry Nimrod XV 232

Hawk to Red Hawk?

Gloster Gladiator returns to Norway to Fly

RIAT 2026

History of RAF Odiham – Part 4

UK Speed Record Project

A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all.

See you at the Tythings on the fourth Wednesday of the month

If you have stories, pictures or information you think may be of interest to Aviation Group Members

Please contact our leader Paul Cutting

The contents of our extensive library can be accessed on our webpage. We also have a number of aviation related DVDs for loan

There is also information how to borrow a book.

http://www.yateleyu3a.org.uk/cgi-bin/u3agroups.cgi?name=Aviation

What's on See websites for more information

FAST Simon Jarvis Lecture Theatre, Farnborough 6th Form College
Tuesday 24 Feb 2026, 7.30pm No 51 Squadron and Airborne Signals Intelligence
Presented by Air Commodore Bill Tyack CBE FRAeS

The talk describes the capability and operations of the Nimrod R SIGINT aircraft and the development of the capability throughout the Second World War. He will then cover the history of 192 and 51 Squadrons in the Cold War.

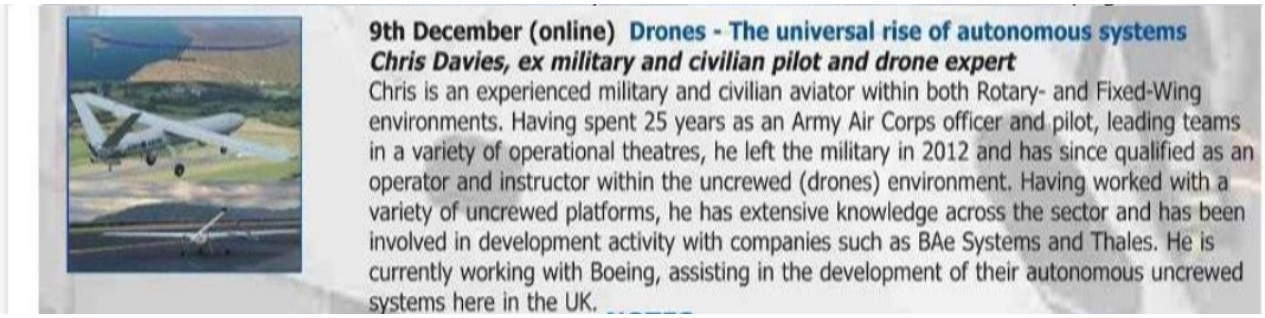
Admission to this popular talk will be by ADVANCE BOOKING ONLY
Please email distribution@airsciences.org.uk or phone 01252 679898 / 07746 957498

Blackbushe Heritage Trust Thursday 15 January 2026 19:00 21:30

"Flying Concorde" with John Tye
John talks about his experience of being part of the fairly small group of British Airways pilots who had the (today sadly unavailable) privilege of flying Concorde.
We expect John's presentation to last about an hour, which will mean that there's plenty of time for Q&A. He will also be signing copies of his book "From the orphanage to the edge of space" which covers his life in aviation flying for other airlines such as Dan-Air and also flying the 747 for BA.

Note 11 December An evening with Flt Lt (Ret'd) Colin Bell DFC - now sold out

Boscombe Down Aviation Collection At BDAC



Army Flying Museum Online Lectures | The Army Flying Museum
There is an archive of talks you can watch Online for a fee.

Royal Aeronautical Society – Farnborough College of Technology Lecture 19:30 - 21:00
No future events notified at present.

Source: Vintage Aviation News 6th November 2025

Last Surviving Short-Fuselage de Havilland Comet 1XB Transferred from RAF Museum Midlands to South Wales Aviation Museum

The last surviving short-fuselage de Havilland Comet 1XB, G-APAS, has been transferred from the RAF Museum Midlands at Cosford to the South Wales Aviation Museum in St Athan. While corrosion prevents the wings from being reattached, the fuselage will be preserved and displayed to share the aircraft's pioneering history with future generations.

In early March, the Royal Air Force Museum announced its latest round of airframe disposals, affecting several historically significant aircraft on display at RAF Museum Midlands, Cosford. Among these was the fuselage of the last surviving short-fuselage de Havilland DH106 Comet 1XB, registered G-APAS, which departed Cosford on 9 September for its new home at the South Wales Aviation Museum in St Athan.

While the aircraft's wings were also relocated to Wales, severe corrosion has rendered them unsuitable for reattachment. As a result, the early-configuration Comet will now be displayed solely as a fuselage, marking the end of the aircraft as a complete entity.

Following repeated inquiries, the RAF Museum issued a statement on 16 September explaining the transfer: "The transfer of the Comet out of the RAF Museum's collection was approved by trustees in January 2025, as part of the museum's ongoing Collection Review and future display planning. This variant of the Comet was never operated by the RAF and carries a false civilian BOAC livery. The Comet is represented in the museum's collection by 950 other items, including photographs, archives, film, sound recordings, and fine art. Despite making a national offer for gifting the Comet, no interest was received. The museum therefore approached the South Wales Aviation Museum in St Athan, which accepted the offer. The aircraft will be placed on public display, ensuring its story is shared with future generations."

The museum added that a condition assessment revealed severe corrosion on portions of the airframe, likely caused by prolonged outdoor storage prior to its 2006 placement in Midlands Hangar 1. As a result, the wings and any irreparably damaged materials were removed, with salvageable components repurposed to help offset display costs.

G-APAS was the final aircraft of 21 Comet 1s built, making its maiden flight at Hatfield on 16 March 1953. Delivered to Air France on 22 July 1953 as F-BGNZ, it was withdrawn from service on 11 January 1954 following the grounding of the BOAC Comet fleet after the catastrophic loss of G-ALYP over the Mediterranean. Returned to the manufacturer in February 1954 for modifications, it entered storage before undergoing a conversion program in September 1956 at Broughton, Chester. The aircraft was re-registered as G-APAS on 29 November 1957 and subsequently used for trials and research, including infra-red weapon programs for the Red Top and Firestreak air-to-air missiles. Much of this work was conducted in an RAF Transport Command-style color scheme.

Struck off charge on 23 February 1968, the Comet was transferred to the RAF Museum later that year, initially stored at Shawbury before being repainted in BOAC livery and moved to Cosford in September 1978. Years of display and storage at Cosford followed, until its recent relocation to South Wales. The South Wales Aviation Museum, the largest independent aircraft museum in Wales, will now preserve the fuselage as part of its mission to protect aviation heritage and inspire the next generation of engineers and aviators.

DH Comet 1XB, G-APAS, seen at SWAM after its relocation from Cosford. Photo by Jamie Price/ JP Spotting.

Source: Construction News

Government goes for £33bn Heathrow third runway plan

The Government is backing Heathrow Airport Limited's (HAL) 'superhub' third runway expansion plans.

The £33bn proposals include £21bn for the runway alongside £12bn for associated terminal infrastructure.

HAL will also invest £15bn into the existing airport to modernise and upgrade current facilities- these works are independent of a third runway and will go ahead regardless of a planning decision for expansion.

The decision means rival expansion plans put forward by billionaire hotel entrepreneur Surinder Arora will miss out.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander confirmed the decision on Tuesday morning.

She said: "Following a comparative assessment of the remaining proposals for Heathrow expansion, the government's view is that the north-west runway scheme brought forward by Heathrow Airport Limited offers the most credible and deliverable option.

"Today is another important step to enable a third runway and build on these benefits, setting the direction for the remainder of our work to get the policy framework in place for airport expansion. This will allow a decision on a third runway plan this parliament which meets our key tests including on the environment and economic growth."

An application for development consent for a Northwest Runway will now be brought forward by Heathrow Airport Limited.

HAL said: “We welcome the Government’s support for our scheme to build a third runway at Heathrow – the UK’s gateway to growth. Expanding Heathrow will mean more connectivity, increased trade, improved passenger experience and a huge economic boost for the British businesses that will help design and build it.

“However, we still need further clarity as to how the crucial next phase of the project will be regulated. We need definitive decisions from the CAA and Government by mid-December so that delay to the project can be avoided and we can get on with delivering this vital project for our customers and for the UK.”

The winning scheme requires major works to the M25 costing £1.25bn.

Source: Vintage Aviation News 25 November 2025

Nimrod Preservation Group Announces Urgent Plans for XV232 “The Mighty Hunter”

The Nimrod Preservation Group has announced urgent plans to secure the future of Nimrod XV232 “The Mighty Hunter” following a notice to vacate Coventry Airport by 9 May 2026. The group is exploring relocation options and appealing for public support to preserve the iconic maritime reconnaissance aircraft.

On November 9, 2025, the Nimrod Preservation Group announced urgent developments regarding the future of Nimrod XV232, affectionately known as “The Mighty Hunter.” Earlier this week, the group received formal notice from Coventry Airport and other tenants that all operations at the airfield must cease by 9 May 2026. The notice has prompted immediate action to determine the aircraft’s future. “This is a shock to everyone involved,” said the group. “We now face a number of critical decisions in a very short period of time.”

A veteran of the Falklands War, XV232 in 1982 set a distance record for a reconnaissance flight that has yet to be beaten. Supported by in-flight refuelling assets, the aircraft covered 8,453 miles (13,609km) in 18h and 50min while monitoring the South Atlantic for Argentinian naval activity.

The group is urgently exploring options for relocating XV232 to a safe and suitable site. Key considerations include identifying a potential new location, assembling a team to carefully dismantle the aircraft if necessary, and arranging transport to an alternative

facility. Without a viable solution, the group warns that the aircraft may be at risk of being dismantled at its current location—a scenario all involved are determined to avoid.

“Our primary goal is to preserve XV232 as a lasting memorial to the UK’s impressive maritime reconnaissance legacy,” the group stated. “We are calling on the public, aviation enthusiasts, and anyone with knowledge, contacts, or ideas to help us find a solution.” Despite the uncertainty, the Nimrod Preservation Group plans to continue limited operations at Coventry Airport. Current fuel supplies are expected to allow displays to continue into February 2026. Members of the public are encouraged to check scheduled run dates and visit the aircraft whenever possible. The group expressed heartfelt thanks to supporters for their dedication over the past 13 years. “Your support has made it possible to display XV232 and keep her legacy alive,” the statement read. “We will continue to provide updates as developments occur.”

For further information or to offer assistance, please contact the Nimrod Preservation Group directly, visit www.xv232.com

Source: Bfbs Forces News 19 November 2025

It could be a case of Hawk out, Red Hawk in as plane-making trio court the RAF

A T-7A Red Hawk (with red tail) and BTX-1 prototype fly together over Edwards Air Force Base – but the T-7 could end up flying over RAF Valley too (Picture: US Department of War)

The RAF is phasing out the Hawk – but could be replacing the fast jet trainer with another aircraft with a similar name if BAE Systems, Boeing and Saab have their way.

The three companies have teamed up to offer the Boeing-Saab T-7 Red Hawk to the RAF, with BAE Systems leading the activity, which would include UK-based final assembly.

The American–Swedish jet is currently in service with the US Air Force, replacing the Northrop T-38 Talon as its advanced jet trainer.

Need laid out in SDR

The requirement for a new advanced jet trainer was set out in the 2025 Strategic Defence Review.

The T-7A Red Hawk is designed to train aircrew on fourth-, fifth- and sixth-generation aircraft – which would mean the Tempest, should the RAF agree to fly the type.

In addition to the Royal Air Force, the Red Hawk is being offered to the Japanese Air Self-Defence Force and the Brazilian air force.

According to Boeing, the T-7 has a maximum speed of Mach 0.975, a range of 990 nautical miles, a service ceiling of 50,000ft and a limit of 8g, seemingly making it an ideal choice for its intended role.

Like the F-35, the Red Hawk has a conventional twin-tail design.

Trio present a "compelling offer"

Simon Barnes, the group managing director of BAE Systems' air sector, said: "Our new collaboration with Boeing and Saab will enable us to present a compelling offer to the UK Royal Air Force and our global customers."

He said the package would leverage the latest technological innovation in training systems and a "world-class jet trainer aircraft".

"We're committed to ensuring this solution offers the best overall outcome for the nation to support the UK's combat air readiness and deliver economic benefit," he added.

It's a red Hawk, but not a Red Hawk – the BAE Systems Hawk has served the RAF and other operators very well over the past half-century (Picture: MOD)

Hawk ages out after 50 years

News of the current Hawk's retirement was announced in June by the Prime Minister.

Sir Keir Starmer confirmed the move to BFBS Forces News during a visit to RAF Valley, where the Hawk is used to train the next generation of fighter pilots.

While the Hawk has provided excellent service to the Royal Air Force, it is getting long in the tooth, having first flown in 1974 and being introduced into service two years later.

A T-7A Red Hawk flies with a P-51D Mustang painted as an aircraft operated by the Tuskegee Airmen in WW2 (Picture: US Department of War)

Red Hawk, red tail

The T-7A is in part an homage to the Tuskegee Airmen - known as the Fighting Red Tails - a mainly African American unit whose aircraft were renowned for their red painted tails during the Second World War.

The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 15,000 sorties in Europe and North Africa, and were often specifically requested for bomber escort duties.

The US Air Force said: "The T-7A Red Hawk's design and name are a tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen and their legacy, their bravery, resilience and excellence, which set the standard for today's warfighters."

Comparison Red Hawk and Hawker Siddeley Hawk

General characteristics	Boeing/Saab Redhawk	Hawker Siddeley Hawk
Crew	pilot and instructor	pilot and instructor
Length	46 ft 11 in (14.30 m)	40 ft 9 in 12.43 m
Wingspan	30 ft 7 in (9.32 m)	32 ft 7 in 9.94 m
Height	13 ft 6 in (4.11 m)	13 ft 1 in 3.98 m
Empty weight	18000 (8,165 kg)	9,880 lb 4,480 kg
Gross weight	22,000 (9,979 kg)	20,000 lb 9,100 kg
Fuel capacity	4,500 pounds (2,000 kg)	
Powerplant	1 × General Electric F404-GE-103 afterburning turbofan, 11,000 lbf (49 kN)	1× Rolls-Royce Turbomeca Adour Mk. 951 turbofan with FADEC, 29 kN 6,500 lbf 29 kN
Performance		
Max speed	Mach 0.975	Mach 0.84 (1,028 km/h, 639 mph, 555 kn) at altitude
Range	990 nmi (1,140 mi, 1,830 km)	1,360 nmi, (1,565 mi 2,520 km)
Service ceiling	50,000 ft (15,000 m)	44,500 ft (13,565 m)
G limit	8 *g*	

Source: Scramble 16 November 2025

Gladiator returns to Norway to fly!

Norwegian Gloster Gladiator 423

Friday 14 November 2025 was a glorious day for Norwegian historic aviation when a Gloster Gladiator project returned to the country. The Gladiator biplane with serial 423 is a long term restoration project of the little known Norwegian Gloster Gladiator 423 Foundation.

With financial support of the Norwegian government the foundation has been able to take up the restoration of this original WW II fighter. After the initial phase, a substantial part of the restoration was done by Retro Track & Air of Cam in the UK.

For the final phase the Gladiator has now been repatriated to Kjeller, the homebase of the Gloster Gladiator 423 Foundation. The plane was loaded onboard of Royal Norwegian Air Force C-130J serial 5601 from 335SKv at Cotswold Airport on 13 November. It was flown to its destination one day later where the restoration of the Gladiator to flying condition will be finished by the volunteers of the foundation.

Gloster Gladiator 423 is a veteran of the 1940 battle against the German invasion of Norway. Gladiators equipped Jagevingen (Norway's only Fighter Wing) was based at Fornebu for the protection of Oslo. On the morning of 9 April 1940, Lt. Dag Krohn took off in Gloster Gladiator 423 to meet an armada of German bombers. An uneven battle between the seven Norwegian Gladiator aircraft and over 70 German fighters and bombers unfolded in the air over Oslo. Despite the numerical supremacy of the Luftwaffe,

Lt. Krohn was very succesful that day, as he scored two kills, a Dornier Do-17 and a Heinkel He111 bomber. But within days the Norwegian Fighter Wing was reduced to only one operational Gladiator, and as such 423 became the sole survivor. It was then, together with the rest of the Norwegian Army Air Force, formed into a single unit at Vangsmjösa.

The end of 423 came on 21 April, when Sergeant Per Waaler took off in it to reconnoitre Gardermoen airfield to see if it was in use by the Luftwaffe. North-west of the airfield his engine misfired and the aircraft struck the tops of a line of trees. He managed to restart the Mercury and struggle back to the lake. When he returned it was found that a branch of a tree had been forced between engine and propeller, and that one wing-tip had been sheared off, effectively putting an end to the Norwegian use of the Gloster Gladiator. But 423 has survived since then and is on its way back to the skies!

Source: Airshow News

AIRSHOW NEWS: RIAT unveils 2026 Theme – ‘Fighter Meet’

Next summer a series of fast jets will soar through the Gloucestershire skies as the Royal International Air Tattoo confirms next year’s show theme is ‘Fighter Meet’.

Every July, RAF Fairford transforms into a hive of activity as the Royal International Air Tattoo attracts thousands of visitors to the Cotswolds for the aviation showcase. This year, event organisers announced the show had attracted a record crowd of over 178,000 people, following a year that saw ticket sell at a record pace for the third year in a row.

RIAT26 will have an operational theme of ‘Fighter Meet’ highlighting the aircraft used throughout the last century for air-to-air combat and hope to include examples of modern fighter aircraft used across the globe. In addition, 2026 also marks 30 years since Royal

status was granted to the event, and in recognition of this next year's event will have a sub-theme of Royal Flight, which will be marked with a gathering of aircraft used for VIP transportation.

Speaking on the theme announcement, Head of Air Operations, Peter Reoch said: "*Our Fighter Meet theme is an exciting opportunity to showcase a myriad of aircraft types, particularly fast jets, which are always popular with our visitors. As always, our aspiration is to provide an eclectic mix of aircraft from around the world for our visitors to view in July*."

All proceeds from the annual aviation showcase are donated to the event's parent charity, the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust (RAFCT), whose purpose is to inspire young people to fulfil their potential in STEM, with particular focus on air, space and technology.

In the last three years, grants from the charity have enabled over 750,000 young people aged 5 – 25 years to be engaged in STEM activities, which have been delivered by leading UK charities and powered by the airshow's sustained popularity. In addition, the show's flagship ground attraction, the Techno Zone® will again be a hive of activity with a range of interactive activities for entertain visitors of all ages.

Aircraft participation is set to be announced early next year, with tickets available via AirTattoo.com.

Arrivals 15 , 16 July

Main Show 17, 18 July

Departures 20 July

Parking Arrangements

The Royal International Air Tattoo continues to thrive, drawing in more and more attendees. With inspiration at the core of our mission, we are eager to harness this growing audience to ignite the passion of the next generation through breathtaking air displays and immersive activities.

To satisfy the demand, we are pleased to introduce a new Park & Ride facility at South Cerney operating to RIAT on a dedicated shuttle bus route to avoid event congestion. The new Park & Ride facility will help us alleviate some of the pressure on the local road network, and will be free of charge for all users.

We understand that planning your visit to the showground is important to you, and we want to make your experience as smooth as possible. To ensure a safe and efficient entry, we will conduct security and ticket checks at our Park & Ride facility before you arrive at the showground. You'll also find toilets and refreshments available on-site, along with our friendly Air Tattoo Crew members who are there to assist you with any questions you may have.

In order to support the new Park & Ride facility, we are introducing a daily parking fee of £15 per car and £7.50 per motorbike for those who choose to drive to and park at the event. We appreciate your understanding as we make this adjustment.

For more information about our Fast Track Park & Ride at South Cerney, click here.

Source: Aircraft, Airfields and Airshows Written by Richard Hall

RAF Odiham
From Biplanes to Helicopters

Part 4

Post War

In October 1945, No. 271 Squadron left Odiham, which allowed the airfield to be transferred to the RCAF. Early November saw the arrival of 120 (RCAF) Wing, who took control of the site and also RAF Down Ampney. No. 437 Squadron RCAF arrived with their Dakotas on the 15 November, leaving a detachment at B56 Evere, with No. 436 Squadron RCAF, also with Dakotas, arriving on 4 April 1946. The scheduled flights continued until the two squadrons were, without much notice, disbanded on 28 June. The airfield was then handed back to the RAF, becoming part of No. 11 Group Southern Sector.

The war may be over, but a new type of hostility became apparent, the stand-off between East and West. This became known as the Cold War and continued well into the 1980s. Odiham was to play its part and also in other future conflicts. The two sides never came to blows militarily, but they did fight proxy wars, such as in Vietnam and Afghanistan, which again cost many lives, both military and civilian. The power of the atom bomb kept the two sides from attacking each other, as a nuclear war would have resulted in the destruction of both sides, something known as Mutually Assured Destruction, the acronym MAD being very apt.

Into the Jet Age

As the war came to a close, jet aircraft began to be seen in the skies, the most successful of which was the Luftwaffe's Messerschmitt Me 262 in its combat record. The British had developed the Gloster Meteor, and although it had never met the 262 in combat, it is difficult to conclude which aircraft would have prevailed in a dogfight. The 262 was more advanced and faster than the Meteor, but its Junkers Jumo 004 B-1s turbojets were notoriously unreliable.

The Meteor was more manoeuvrable and had a higher ceiling, but the 262 was faster in the climb and so on, inevitably; in the end, it would probably have come down to the quality and skill of the pilot. The early jets lacked thrust, and engines were unreliable, but the die was cast, and jet power was to be the future of powered flight.

Development of the piston-engine fighter was coming to its conclusion as velocities were near to reaching the speed of sound, something not suited to propellers. However, there were some very potent propellor driven fighters in the post-war period, some of which came to Odiham.

In July 1946, No. 54 Squadron (recently renumbered from No. 183 Squadron) flew into Odiham with Bristol Centaurus powered Hawker Tempest IIs and No. 247 Squadron with De Havilland Vampire F.1 fighters (the first squadron to fly the type), both units making the short trip from RAF Chilbolton. They were joined by No. 130 Squadron, who brought their Spitfire MK.IXs from RAF Manston in Kent.

No. 54 Squadron departed for a short time to RAF Molesworth before returning to convert to Vampire F.Is along with No. 130 Squadron, the third squadron to do so. No. 54 was to become the first unit to fly the Vampire in the night role operationally. No sooner had No. 130 Squadron completed training on the Vampire it was disbanded and renumbered as No. 72 Squadron. The familiar sound of piston engines at Odiham, present for two decades, was replaced by the whine of the de Havilland Goblin, as the jet age was ushered in.

Hawker Tempest II PR536 - Image Richard Hall

de Havilland Vampire F.1 VF301 - Image Richard Hall

Odiham was now home to the first Vampire Wing in Britain and, during 1948, received the improved F.3 variant of the type. In July, No. 54 Squadron made the first Atlantic crossing by jet aircraft, embarking on a goodwill tour of Canada and the USA led by Sqn Ldr R W Oxbridge DFC.

On a reciprocal course later in the month, 16 Lockheed F-80A Shooting Stars from the 56th Fighter Group USAF flew to Odiham, no doubt to promote the virtues of their latest jet-engined fighter.

Lockheed F-80A Shooting Star - Image warbirdsresourcegroup.org

At the conclusion of 1949, the Wing upgraded to the F.5 variant of the Vampire, with No. 72 Squadron leaving for North Weald in March 1950.

Replacing No. 72 Squadron at the airfield were No. 421 Squadron RCAF, who trained for the next ten months on loaned RAF Vampires before converting on to the North American F-86 Sabre back in Canada.

In the first half of 1953, both Nos. 54 and 247 Squadrons converted to the Gloster F.8 Meteor, at the time the RAF's principal single-seat day fighter aircraft.

Gloster Meteor F.8 WH364 - Image Richard Hall.

During their time flying Meteors from Odiham, the squadrons took part in many RAF and NATO exercises, but it became apparent in the Korean War that the Meteor was an obsolete design when pitted against the likes of the swept-wing MiG-15. New designs for the RAF were in procurement and would, in time, appear at Odiham, but more of that later. Around this time, the east-west runway was extended to 6,000 feet in length, with an additional T.2 hangar provided to replace six wartime Blisters. In addition, a new

hardstanding was laid, which would prove useful in the coming months, along with operational readiness platforms at both ends of the main runway.

A Royal Review

In the spring of 1954, Nos. 54 and 247 vacated the airfield to allow the staging of the Royal Review of the Royal Air Force by Her Majesty the Queen, which took place on the 15th July.

Such an event took a great deal of organising, and 3,000 officers were brought in to carry out preparations, along with a vast tented area for accommodation. On the day, 1,200 personnel took part in the parade, and 318 aircraft were seen on the ground, representing every RAF Command and some Commonwealth units.

Overhead, 47 formations flew at 30-second intervals, starting with a single Bristol Sycamore and, in conclusion, a Supermarine Swift, with 600 aircraft in between, quite a feat.

The Royal Review - Image www.mediastorehouse.com

One person who attended the Review was Paul Ridgwell's late Grandfather. Paul has kindly provided the images below showing the Review programme's front cover and the aircraft taking part in the flypast.

The author extends his thanks to Paul for providing this fascinating insight into the day.

E II R

CORONATION REVIEW

OF THE

ROYAL AIR FORCE

BY

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

ODIHAM HAMPSHIRE

15TH JULY 1953

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

ALL PROCEEDS TO BE GIVEN TO THE ROYAL AIR FORCE BENEVOLENT FUND

Registered under the War Charities Act 1940

Back to the Day Job

After the Royal Review, Odiham returned to its usual role, adding a night fighter squadron to its Wing with the reformation of No. 46 Squadron on 15 August 1954, equipped with a mixture of Gloster Meteor NF.12 and 14s. Within a year, the day fighter squadrons received Hawker Hunter F.4s and, in 1957, the Hunter F.6.

As with all fast jet flying, there is always a risk. On 13 March 1957, Hunter F.6 XF427 of No. 54 Squadron took off from Odiham to carry out a practice diversion to RAF Manston. The pilot was asked to pass details of the weather at Andover and Selsey Bill, which he did as briefed. After this, nothing further was heard from the aircraft. The next time it was seen, the Hunter was diving from height, crashing on the Isle of Wight in poor weather conditions. The pilot, Flt Lt Michael A Crook, aged 23, died in the crash from what appears to him being rendered unconscious from either anoxia or from a pre-existing condition, which he had experienced two years before.

Gloster Meteor NF.12 WS739 - Image Richard Hall

Hawker Hunter F.6 XF375 - Image Richard Hall.

At the end of 1957, defence cuts saw the disbandment of No. 247 Squadron, while No. 46 re-equipped with Gloster Javelins, a T-tailed delta-wing subsonic night and all-weather interceptor, armed with four 30mm Aden cannons and de Havilland Firestreak missiles. The Squadron were the first to operate the type and flew the FAW.1 and later FAW.2s variants.

Gloster Javelin FAW.1 XA564 - Image Richard Hall.

On 12 June 1956, No. 46 Squadron lost its Commanding Officer, Wg Cdr F E W Birchfield OBE AFC, along with his navigator Fg Off Brian Chambers, when their Javelin FAW.1 XA570 crashed on approach to Odiham during a GCA night time let down, The night was one of slight rain with thunder heard to the south of the airfield. The pilot called approach at 22.59 hrs and commenced his let down. At 00.07 hrs, his radio transmissions ceased after advising he had the runway in sight at 1.75 miles. At 1.5 miles from touchdown, the Javelin hit the ground in a small wooded hillside, the wreckage being located at 05.00 hrs by a SAR helicopter. Both crew were killed instantly, with the aircraft being written off.

On the night of the accident, Wg Cdr Birchfield was not flying with his regular navigator. During the subsequent enquiry, it became apparent that the pilot often had to prompted about his speed and height on approach by his regular crew member. Could the reason for the accident be that the stand-in rear seater did not feel it his place to correct such a senior officer, which resulted in both their deaths? Such an occurrence is not unique and has been known to have occurred before and in future accidents. Often a subordinate officer will not question the senior, even if something is going wrong and they know it, with the results as seen above, but we will never know for sure if this was the cause. The above two incidents with the Hunter and the Javelin go to show even in peacetime, tragic accidents occur with the loss of crew and the inevitable impact this has on the families of those involved.

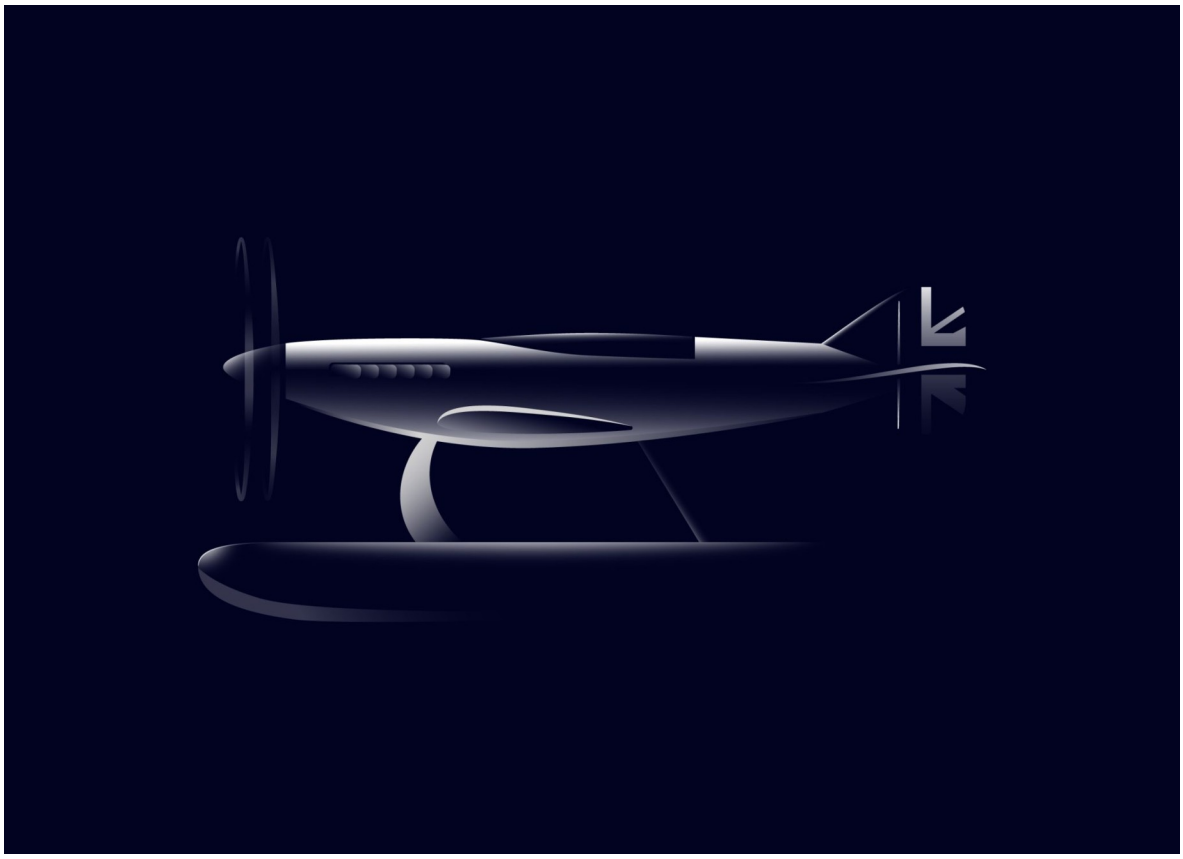
Two contemporary photos are shown below, kindly supplied by Tony Dowland. Taken circa 1956/57, Tony was with the Royal Observer Corps, and this was one of their official visits to Odiham. Photo Credit - Roy Knight.

In 1959 it was decided to close Odiham as a fighter station. Accordingly, on 15 July, No. 46 Squadron departed for RAF Waterbeach, and No. 54 went to RAF Stradishall. The airfield was then placed under Care and Maintenance.

A New Lease of Life The story will continue in the New Year

Source: Pilot Web 6th November 2025

Speed record project launched



While visually similar to the Macchi MC72 (the speed record holder), the Seablade would have fewer bracing struts and a clean carbon fibre surface

Reclaiming a ninety-year-old speed record for a piston-powered seaplane is the aim of the team behind the Seablade project, a Community Interest Company (CIC) that was set up by a group ‘inspired by the UK’s great aviation heritage’.

The last British aircraft to hold the speed record was RJ Mitchell’s iconic Supermarine S6B in 1931. However, it is the 1934 record set by the Italian Macchi MC72 that the Seablade team now hopes to honour – and surpass – by reaching the 500mph mark.

A high-level concept design has already been completed by Professor Andrew Rae of the University of the Highlands and Islands, who is to serve as Director of Design and Engineering. The company’s founding Director Peter Thomson described the project as being of “near national importance when considering the history, culture and heritage of the halcyon days of Schneider Trophy racing and the Spitfire’s subsequent development”. Fittingly, the project was launched this year at the Imperial War Museum Duxford during the 85th anniversary commemorations of the Battle of Britain.

As with the S6B, power will come from a Rolls-Royce engine – in this case, a fully restored Griffon 87, driving contra-rotating propellers. A STEM education programme will accompany the initiative in order to encourage uptake, inclusion and promotion of tech

skills across the UK, notably by bringing together academia, the military, and civil organisations across the aerospace sector.

While the shape of the Seablade is similar to the Macchi MC72, it will have some key advantages over the Italian design. Thomson explained: “The power plant might be one advantage. In addition, there would be fewer bracing struts and wires, and of course clean carbon-fibre surfaces.”

Further details are available at www.seablade.co.uk