



Rochester Avionic Archives Newsletter

From the Curator

Welcome to this first edition of our Newsletter. We intend to produce the Newsletter quarterly to tell you about the activities in the RAA and something about the objects we hold in the collection and archive.

The RAA was established to record the history of the Rochester site of Elliott Brothers through all its names to BAE Systems.

The RAA has come a long way from its days in a room at the old Flying School end of Rochester Airport via a secret room within a store on the main site thence to a room on the Ground Floor of Tower 3 and finally to much more space in the Corsair Building. The Corsair area consists of an Office, a Media room and the Main Store and the purpose is to act as a working area and store. Our new display cabinets in the Company Main Reception have been populated with exhibits and these will be regularly updated.

Please have a look at our Website and if you spot an item without a description we would love to have more information about it. Just e-mail on the address below.

Chris Bartlett



Early days in the new Corsair Building room

Latest acquisition



The Crosswind Casting Computer was offered from a colleague in Germany as a result of a chance enquiry about a Skyshadow Computer he had rebuilt. The unit allows the mighty C-5 Galaxy to perform a fully automatic landing in strong crosswinds. We would love to know more about the unit. It was built in about 1968 at Rochester.

Ongoing work

The Website is in place and the data about the collection is nearly up to date. However the Media collection still needs a lot of work. Currently the films are being scanned onto DVD and the Videos also need to be scanned although this is less urgent while there are still VHS Players around. Newspapers are one of the most valuable assets and a full photographic scan needs to be done. In the background we are busy scanning the hundreds of Brochures which provide vital descriptions of many of the exhibits. Then there are the Books, Pictures, Negatives and a whole host of odd things like Awards and even a collection of flags and ties!

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The Film Archive



The RAA hold a collection of several hundred 16mm films and we were very lucky to find a an Eiki Projector hiding in a cupboard so that we can relive the experience of watching films with the clackety-clack from the film gate mechanism as accompaniment. However we have just commenced a contract to scan the films onto DVD because it is incredibly slow watching them on the old film projector.

We were very short of projection spools so the Curator searched eBay and headed off to Enfield where a real treasure trove of old cinema equipment was found (including two Wurlitzer Cinema Organs) and brought back about 50 reels.

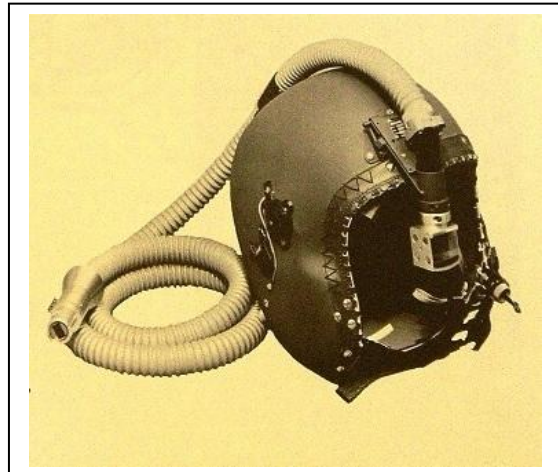
A few gems have emerged in the films including a very early film about manufacture of the Blue Steel Guidance system. There are a lot of promotional films about the company equipment and the various aircraft it has been fitted to over the years. The F-16 figures strongly in these films with titles like 'The Hot Performer' and 'Bird of Prey'.

Many of the films are test sequences such as Bird-strike tests on Head Up Displays and aircraft canopies or Wind-blast tests on Helmet Mounted Displays. These films are from high speed cameras used to record in slow motion a few seconds of activity. Another large group are rather dull collections of flight symbology. However one such film of Buccaneer and TSR2 HUD symbology was taken from the window at the old Lewisham site and includes some buildings and traffic scenes from over 45 years ago.

Sadly most of the company film archive seems to have been destroyed many years ago so this collection is a rare glimpse of a different era.

Once these films have been scanned a still clip will be inserted in the Website and at some point in the future we may be able to have short clips hosted on the Web

From the Collection-The Pipelite



The box on the left is all we have of an interesting Helmet Mounted Display system. The box contains a Cathode Ray tube and drive electronics and the CRT face was coupled into a coherent fibre-optic bundle that conveyed the image up to the helmet. A simple beam splitter block combines the view of the outside world with the CRT image. However it is not known if there was any form of Head Tracker used with this system to ensure that the synthetic image and the real world were correctly aligned.

The system was delivered to the then RAE at Bedford in 1979 and was used in a series of blind landing trials in helicopters and about 40 sorties were flown.



These Newspapers are a really valuable resource. Not only do they have business news but they have personal news too. This 'EFA News' from 40 years ago tells us that the Maritime Aircraft Controls Division has won an order for the Autopilot and Autostabiliser for the WG-13 Helicopter which became the well known Lynx. To many people EFA will mean European Fighter Aircraft but this is Elliott Flight Automation.

The move of Airborne Computing Division to Rochester shows the recognition of the development of digital systems rather than analogue in all the avionic systems.

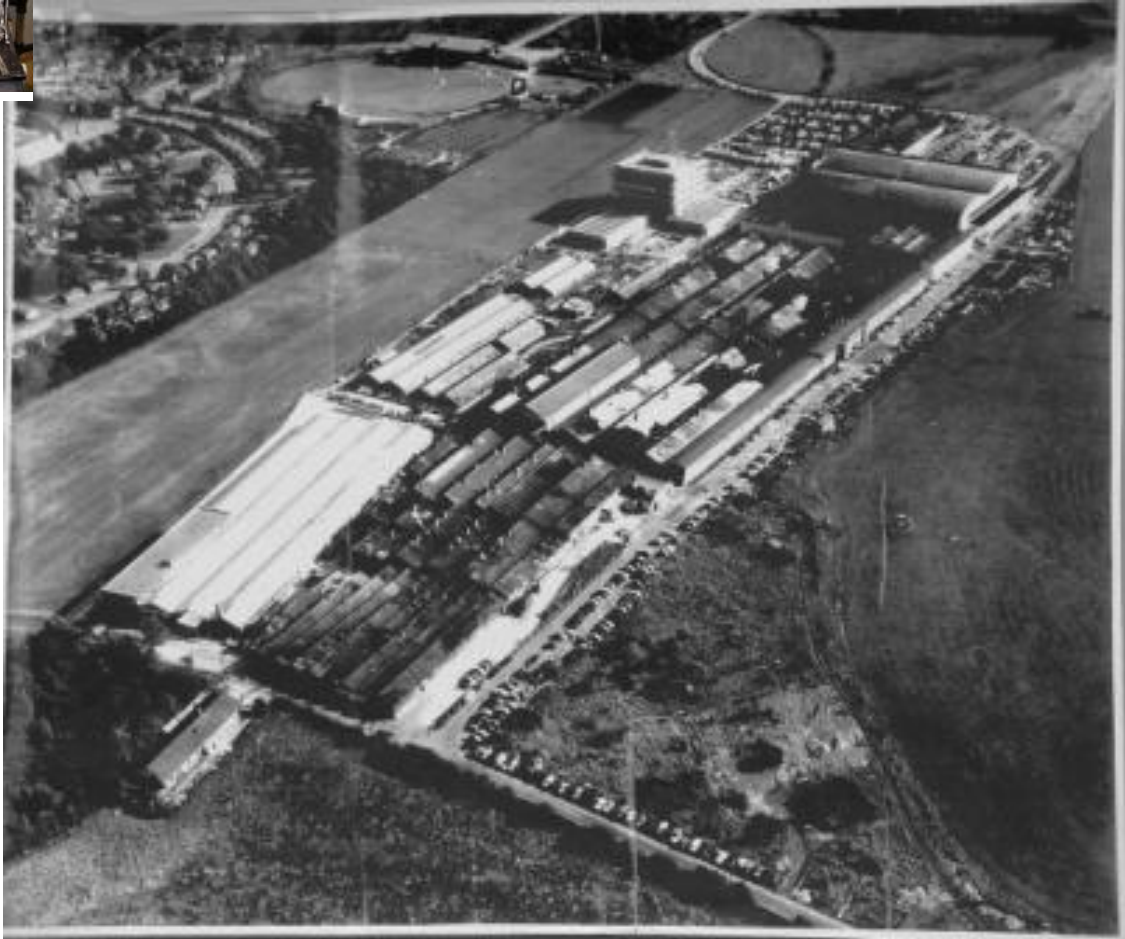
The combined display stand for Elliott Automation and English Electric is shown as this was the year after the two companies had merged and in a brief interval before GEC came on the scene and absorbed them both

In addition to this business there is a stern warning to wear your company Badge or you may not be allowed on site. Then of course we have the picture of the girls on duty at Farnborough!!

Inside will typically be found details of Sports events, Marriages, Obituaries and the important 25 year awards. A real snapshot of life in EFA which was of course a very family centred firm with several generations employed there.



Negative Archive



The Archive of Negatives has around 10,000 film and Glass Plate negatives from the early 60's onwards. There are known to be more recent archives held in the Company Library but the RAA holds the earliest from the Rochester site. The RAA even has the camera used to take these photographs! The pictures are recorded in hand written notebooks so it is a major task to derive a searchable computer database from these. We are considering whether voice input software might be the best method.

This is the Factory in about 1962 and already around 1,750 people were employed by Elliott Bros. Note that one Tower Block of the three is finished but there is as yet no Falcon, Corsair, Phase III building or even the Fuel Flow Laboratory on the Airfield. You can see the Dog Track in the top of the picture opposite the Tower and the kink in the entrance road (Marconi Way) built to allow a longer runway.

The buildings to the bottom of the picture date back to the Pobjoy Aero-engine works and Short Brothers factory in the 1930's and the wartime camouflage can just be made out. The Short Brothers Hangers are clearly seen and this is still recognisable as the factory where they made the Stirling Bombers during WWII

Help needed

There are many things on the Website that we simply don't know about. Please send us in information about them or your reminiscences about the products or perhaps about the company, people or events in the story of Elliotts to BAE Systems. If there is room we will publish any letters in future copies