



Rochester Avionic Archives Newsletter

From the Curator.

Life in Lockdown is challenging just trying to remember what day it is! However, most of the RAA Team have had a first vaccination and maybe we can visit the Museum again soon. (I imagined the rooms to be full of cobwebs!). This Newsletter has a number of items about the Company site at Rochester Airport and eventually I hope to put together a short history of the site.

If you have time do watch the Webinar about the RAA; sadly, the Q & A session was not recorded for privacy reasons but we had a lively discussion and there were about 40 people taking part. Finally, if you are interested in the history of the UK aircraft industry have a look at the AAI Survey 'The Guide to the Archives of UK Aircraft Manufacturers' www.aviationarchives.uk/page-5035109.html

Chris Bartlett, Curator

Pilotless Aircraft



If you look back at Newsletter 17 there is an article about Elliott's work on Pilotless aircraft and it mentions the trials with the Meteor at Llanbedr. Meteor U16 WK 800 was the last Meteor U16 in service at Llanbedr. (The Left-hand photo shows the aircraft taking off on a pilotless flight).

This aircraft was flown to Boscombe Down on the 11 October 2004 prior to the closure of Llanbedr airfield.

It was sold to Trevor Stone 14 August 2008 and it is now at the Boscombe Down Aircraft Collection, Old Sarum. This aircraft is the only one remaining in the UK and is fully equipped with the Elliott flight control system. The Right-hand picture clearly shows the Elliott Bros auto pilot fitted in the front fuselage. The rear row of equipment shows the three Rate Gyros Roll, Pitch and Yaw, next is the Roll Platform Unit, on the far side is the Auto-Pilot Junction Box. The middle row shows the Command Relay Unit designed and manufactured by Flight Refuelling and the Air Data Unit. The front row shows the Command Radio equipment. (Thanks to George Hobbs for this section)

150th Anniversary of the Institution of Engineering & Technology

This year (2021) is the 150th Anniversary of the Institution of Engineering & Technology which can trace its history back to a meeting of The Society of Telegraph Engineers held in May 1871. Elliott Bros has many links with the IET and in 1875 was keen to present its products at the retiring President's soirée or conversazione at the end of his one-year term. Elliott Bros exhibited Condensers (Capacitors), an Electrometer, a Replenisher used with a quadrant Electrometer, Platinum-Silver Resistance Coils, and Hearson's Patent Strophometer. (Details of these in a later Newsletter)

Curator: Chris Bartlett, Deputy Curator: Ann Jackson, Secretary Geoff Harvey

Tel: 01634 203321

e-mail: info@rochesteravionicarchives.co.uk

Website: www.rochesteravionicarchives.co.uk

A story from the Ron Howard Collection

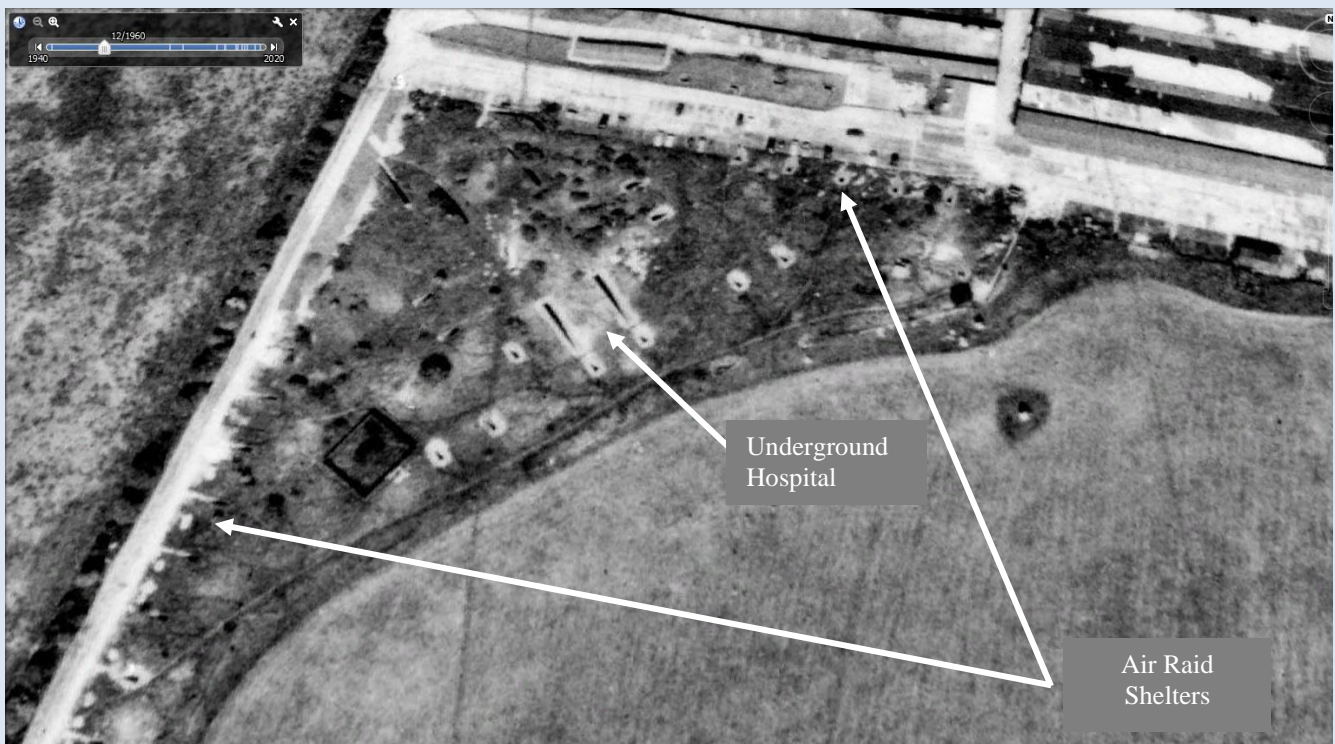


This story was sent to me by the son of one of Ron Howard's lifelong friends:

'Amongst his collection of Elliot Brothers instrumentation, I understand Ron had an early altimeter he bought in a junk shop in the 1970's. He figured he was in when the seller announced, 'it's not much good Guv' it's only got one hand.'
Ron reckoned it possibly predated the turn of the 19th century and was used for ballooning activities!
I think he paid a quid for it in the 1970's!'

The picture from our Collection C0939 is not the item Ron found but may be similar. The item is a Pocket Barometer & Altimeter, Elliott Bros, 1864 — 1886. The face bears the name Elliott Bros and is marked No.1254 and bears the legend 'Thousand Feet'. The instrument measures 4in. diameter and 1inch thick. The scale is adjustable by means of a pocket watch style winder. The mechanism inside the case has the date "20/12/15", preceded by "RB". The Altimeter could be from 1915 but the letters RB cannot be traced.

Underground at the Rochester site

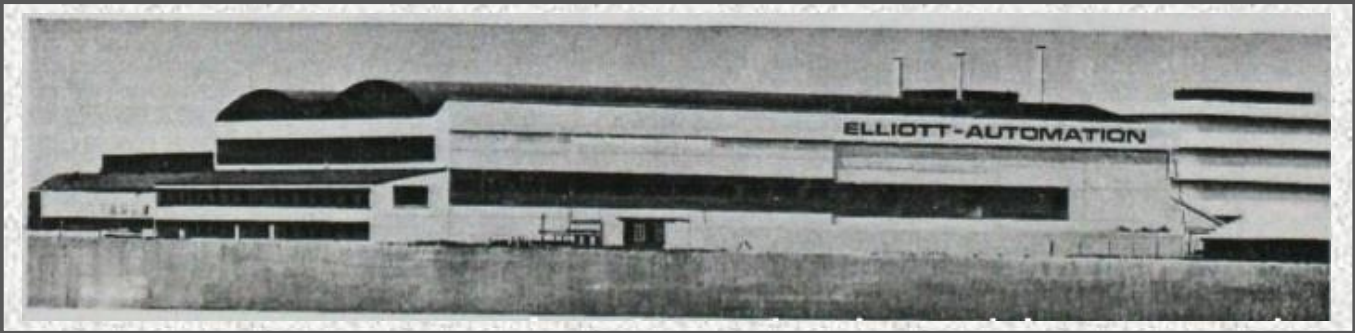


This is the South West corner of the Rochester site opposite what was the old Pobjoy Engine Factory and later became a modern factory estate. The road on the left is Laker Road and there is now a road across to the Rochester/Maidstone Road past what used to be Comet. This picture is from 1960 and shows evidence of Air Raid Shelters and what is believed to be an underground Hospital or First Aid complex. There are Air Raid Shelters at intervals along the South side of the road leading through the factory and along Laker Road.

The best information we have is that the Shelters and the larger complex were built in 1939 and with Shorts Aircraft Factory and the Pobjoy Works there would have been a lot of workers there.

The area is now a BAE Systems Car Park but may eventually be built over at which point we shall hopefully learn more about it. Incidentally, this entrance to the site was known as the 'Windsock Entrance'.

The Facelift for the site in 1967



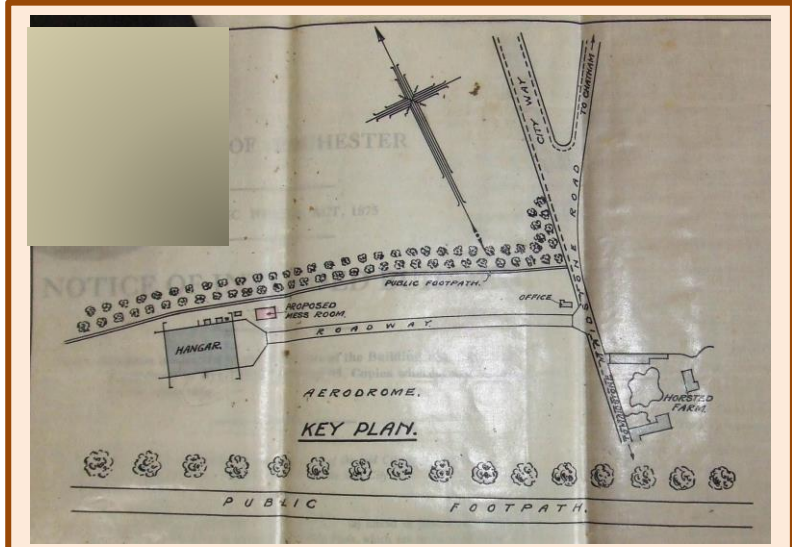
'As soon and the weather improves, the large factory buildings and works are to be repainted in a brand-new colour scheme designed to harmonise the old buildings with the much newer tower blocks.

An imaginative scheme shown in these pictures has been drawn up by Peter Bell Ltd to even out the broken outlines of the hangar and its associated outbuildings and pipework with a horizontal paint scheme in dark green and white. The plans even include the planting of a row of pine trees beside the canteen buildings in order to create a landscape effect, though this detail may meet planning objections.

Contrasting vividly with the rather even horizontal colour scheme, the ladder on to the roof of the main hangar will be painted orange; and one of the three metal chimneys will be painted yellow. The groups of transformers and water tanks along the side wall of the hangers matching the existing handrail between hangers and towers. Apart from the fact that the hangers are much in need of repainting, the new scheme will greatly improve the appearance of the factory as a whole and present a more homogenous appearance to visitors. The painting will probably get underway in about April'. (See EFA News M0257)



Peter Bell was a design specialist who designed the layout of the Control Panels for the VC10 and Concorde. I don't know if the scheme described here ever happened but the row of Pine trees certainly did not! (Ed)

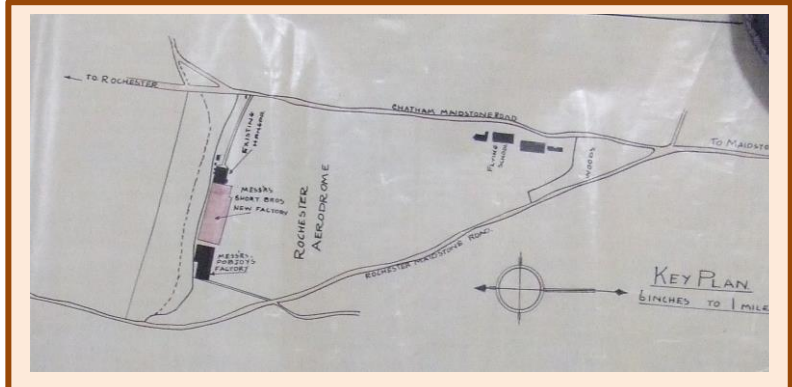


Rochester Airport early days

The top picture shows the early days of the Short Bros Factory with just the one Hangar and a proposal for an additional Mess Room beside the Hangar. The date is probably around 1936.

The next building, shown in the lower drawing, was the Pobjoy Engine Works at the West end of the site followed by Short Brothers 'New Factory' between the two. The second Hangar application was made in 1939.

Horsted Farm was on the East side of the Chatham/Maidstone Road opposite the entrance to the Airfield. It is now a new Housing Estate but a farm building existed well into the 1980s becoming increasingly derelict. The Farm was at the East end of the original Airport Runway and flying in on that very short strip was always exciting. (I recall Don Moore-Searson claiming that you needed a Bus Timetable to make sure that you did not meet a double decker coming along as you were landing. Ed)



RAA Webinar

This event was organised by the Aviation and Aerospace Archives Initiative and was presented on the 2nd February. It began with a pre-recorded talk given by Chris Bartlett of Rochester Avionic Archives, located at BAE Systems' Rochester site. Chris told the story of the establishment of the collection of objects and archival material by a group of ex-employees, who now manage both on a voluntary basis. He will also discuss how they have become an important resource supporting the company and business of BAE Systems. activities of the Aviation and Aerospace Archives Initiative.

The Webinar is now on Youtube <https://youtu.be/qjYUnmJuCng>



Javelin F (AW) Mk 1, XA 568, at the College of Aeronautics. Cranfield colours were Orange Day-Glo air intakes and fin.



A Gloster Meteor NF11

I was contacted recently by Alan Jackson who sent this picture. He added; *"I thought you might be interested in the photograph, which I took way back in April 1963, while learning to fly at Cranfield. As you will see, it shows a Javelin, with which we shared the airfield. We also shared the airfield with many other interesting types, including BOAC Boeing 707s practising radar-guided precision approaches - and with one of which I once shared the circuit, though his circuit was bigger than mine! My recollection is that Elliott's was using the Javelin for testing of its blind landing equipment. We also had the Ministry of Aviation's Varsity (G-ARFP), simultaneously being used to test Smith's 'Autoland' system.*

Other interesting types there at the time included Avro Lancaster PA474, now with the BBMF, which was, I believe, being used to test a Handley Page laminar flow wing (mounted on the rear fuselage. See Thumbnail above). I remember particularly that the aircraft sported what looked like a spray rig, though whether this was to emit smoke for airflow observations, or water for icing trials, I know not; and it appears that I failed to photograph it. There was also a Morane Saulnier Paris, used by College of Aeronautics students. Among other static types for the students to play with were partly completed components of the Hawker P1121 prototype, the first prototype Saunders-Roe SR-A1 flying boat fighter, a Percival Q6, and the Westland Wyvern now safely preserved at the FAA museum. Happy days!"

By coincidence I was also contacted recently by Andy Foster from Cranfield asking for information on the flight trials with the Javelin. He noted that the trials started with their Meteor NF11 and that the Javelin had a Flight Director to OR946 on test in 1957.

Message from Hank Kalbach

Hi Chris, Great to hear from you. Always happy to get info (the newsletter) about Rochester. I must have made about 2 dozen trips to Rochester during my 21 years with GEC.

I joined GEC in 1978 as QA Manager. I had lots of interaction with Alan Dane, John France, and Geoff Taylor. In 1987, I was promoted to VP of Operations and after that included Basildon and several Divisions in Scotland in my itinerary. When the Atlanta facility was closed in 1999, I opted to retire and not accept the offer to relocate to Austin, Texas. I did some contract work for several years before turning to volunteer activity (SCORE), and 7 years with the Georgia Aquarium.

At 82, I am doing well but not up to working or doing volunteer work. Please keep me on your distribution list and say hello to any that may have been around 20+ years ago.