

The Local Story of the Spitfire

7th September 2023 - Memorial Hall

Stephen Hoadley gave a very interesting talk about the local area's important contribution to the Spitfire's wartime success. In the 1930s it could be foreseen a war was coming and the Air Ministry put out to aircraft companies a specification F7/30 for a new prototype all-metal, four-gun fighter aircraft, capable of 250mph.

Aviation engineer, Reginald Mitchell, had been in the forefront of designing fast seaplanes for the renowned Schneider Trophy seaplane races held off Calshot. He worked for Supermarine at Woolston and his work on the Schneider Trophy seaplanes led him to design the prototype Spitfire to the Air Ministry specification that first flew from Eastleigh Airport in 1936. He wanted to call it 'Shrew' but it was thought this was not a suitable name for a fighter aircraft and a Supermarine company Director suggested 'Spitfire' after the nickname of his daughter who had a real fiery temper.

Subsequently, it went into production at the Supermarine factory at Woolston but in 1940 it was destroyed by German bombs but fortunately some important equipment had already been moved out. This led to Spitfire production being dispersed locally to garages, bus depots and laundries in places such as Salisbury that made individual parts to be assembled at nearby airfields. This was very important to the war effort while the country waited for a special dedicated Spitfire factory to come into full production at Castle Bromwich in the Midlands.

Stephen told of the Spitfire funds that were set up for communities to contribute money to adopt a Spitfire. The Hampshire Spitfire Fund was a prominent fundraiser. At this time, it cost about £12,500 to build a Spitfire and an organisation raising £5,000 was entitled to select the name.

At the beginning of the war Air Service Training (AST) at Hamble was appointed to undertake the repair of damaged or crashed Spitfires and was the largest Spitfire repair base in the country. The women of the Air Transport Auxiliary based at the airfield greatly facilitated its success with them ferrying the Spitfires to and from Hamble to their squadrons.

Stephen spoke about some of the well-known ATA women at Hamble and that for the first time ever there was equal pay for women as all ATA pilots were paid the same rate. He then spoke of the ATA memorial at the former airfield's entrance by Aquilla Way to the No 15 ATA Ferry Pool based in Hamble, where some of the surviving Hamble ATA women attended its opening ceremony in 2010.

Another Hamble company, Folland Aircraft, was a sub-contractor for Spitfire production and had major contracts to make Spitfire components including making wings for the Seafire (Naval version of the Spitfire). It developed a floatplane version of the Spitfire but not many were made as by the time they had been produced their need was no longer required.

Stephen concluded by talking about what is left today to commemorate the local contribution to the Spitfire's success such as the Blue Plaques at important Spitfire locations, monuments/memorials and the remaining Spitfires in local museums. The large audience enjoyed Stephen's talk and there was much follow-up chat afterwards.