



Issue 39 May - Jul 2017

# Contrails

## Newsletter of the Christchurch Aviation Society

CAvSoc

### Airspeed and de Havilland Test Pilot

In March Mike Phipp gave us a carefully researched talk on a subject of particular interest to our members – the test pilot George Errington who was at de Havilland in Christchurch for many years.



George Bertram Sainsbury Errington was born in January 1902 near Ware, in Hertfordshire and studied at Hamilton House Prep School in Bath. Initially working for Vickers Engineering he worked at Avro in Manchester in 1929 working on the 504 and qualified for his A licence on fabric and rigging of Avro Avians at the Lancashire Aero Club in 1929. He also ran his own business as an electrical engineer. Having qualified for his A and B Ground Licences he joined Comper Aircraft Company working as an inspector building and flying the Comper Swift and moved with them to Heston. He also rebuilt a crashed aircraft which he used for flying to visit friends and relatives.

George joined Airspeed at Portsmouth when Alan Cobham and Neville Shute were the directors and the company was doing well with its Courier and Envoy aircraft. Starting as an inspector in September 1934 he soon became a test pilot and then chief test pilot from 1935 as well as a delivery pilot. Notable flights were with an Envoy to South Africa in 1936. Whilst flying a Puss Moth in Africa he ran out of fuel and made an emergency landing in a remote place where the natives thought he was a god. Fortunately the local district commissioner heard about it and brought enough fuel to let George fly to an Imperial Airways emergency landing strip. A year later and he was off to China and whilst there was asked to test fly a Chinese designed fighter. On return to England he started flying prototypes and serious test flying which nearly cost him his life in 1939 whilst checking instability on a twin finned Oxford on spin recovery tests when the aircraft

took an inordinately long time to recover despite use of the anti spin chute. The first prototype was the AS.30 Queen Wasp, a target aircraft followed by the AS.39 Fleet Shadower, an ungainly looking aircraft designed for slow speed and long endurance, and the AS.45 Cambridge a single engined trainer first flown in Feb 1941 but all were cancelled. In September of that year George flew the prototype AS.51 Horsa towed by an Armstrong Whitworth Whitley at the Great West Aerodrome. Again test flying proved hazardous in learning the best way to operate. Now at Christchurch, the AS.57 Ambassador was a response to the Brabazon Committee requirements and George flew the prototype on 10Jul47 from the still grass airfield. He was fortunate to avoid the CofG test when Ron Clear ended with a heavy landing following poor elevator response when both engines separated from the aircraft. Work at Hatfield involved the Vampire, many being built at



Christchurch, and George also spent time in South America displaying and constructing shipped aircraft. Having flown over 100 different types of aircraft during his career it was an untimely tragedy that George died in June 1966. He was co-pilot in a Trident on a test flight when the aircraft entered a superstall and crashed near Felthorpe in Norfolk.

### A day in April 1937

The 12April2017 passed quietly enough for most but for a small group it was a significant day for 80 years previously Frank Whittle had run his engine for the first time. The group was treated to a tour around the GE factory to see the site of that historic run and afterwards sat down to a lunch at Brownsover Hall in the former office of Frank Whittle. Ian Whittle, son of Sir Frank sat alongside the son of Rolf Dudley-Williams who had initiated the funding of the engine.

### Meetings - at Druitt Hall commencing 8pm

Wed 03 May - AGM then Whittle and the jet Engine - by Steve Robson

Wed 06 Sep - Air New Zealand DC-10 crash in Antarctica by Dr James Mason

**Friends of the New Forest Airfields** has an open day on 21May (10 - 4) and Spitfire day on 28May at their museum at Sopley, via the new housing estate BH23 8EB, turn first left on entering the estate.