

## The Farnborough Society Honours Sir Geoffrey de Havilland



Soaring temperatures couldn't dampen spirits as some 40 members and guests of The Farnborough Society gathered to honour Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, aircraft designer and test pilot, with the unveiling of a blue plaque at his former home in Alexandra Road on Saturday. Sir Geoffrey lived there from 1910 till 1913, while working at the Army Balloon Factory, which was renamed the Royal Aircraft Factory in 1912.

The unveiling ceremony was performed by Sir Donald Spiers, who, following an illustrious career, has served as President of the Royal Aeronautical Society, the Popular Flying Association, Dynamics (UK) and TAG Aviation (UK), and is currently Chairman of the Farnborough Aerospace Consortium and of the Farnborough Enterprise Hub. Sir Donald served his apprenticeship with De Havilland Aircraft Company and was therefore able to speak from a particularly personal perspective in his opening address.



The Mayor of Rushmoor, Cllr Steve Masterson spoke of his pride in Farnborough's aviation heritage and his hope that this blue plaque will be the first of a series that will eventually provide the basis of a network of heritage trails to connect to those being developed in Aldershot. Leo Docherty, MP, spoke of Farnborough's continuing international importance in aeronautics, attracting new investment to the borough, such as the recently opened conference and exhibition centre and the proposed Gulf Stream facility. Rushmoor Borough Council Leader, Cllr David Clifford, himself a pilot, spoke of the enormous debt we all owe to pioneers like de Havilland, who risked their lives in the development of modern aircraft.

Following the unveiling ceremony, The Farnborough Society hosted a buffet lunch, provided by local social enterprise Vine Dining, where guests could learn about the life and career of Sir Geoffrey de Havilland with a display created by the society's Secretary, Barbara Hurst, and a selection of artefacts directly related to de Havilland on loan from BAE Systems, whose collection is housed in Farnborough's famous 'black shed'. Items included his passport, pilot's certificate (numbered 12), log books, photos, RAE records and a price list for the Tiger Moth dated 1933. Perhaps most interesting was the dedication his mother wrote in a book of British moths that she gave Geoffrey for his fifteenth birthday: that book inspired the name of his moth series of planes.

## The Life of Sir Geoffrey de Havilland

Captain Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, OM, CBE, AFC, RDI, FRAeS was a British aviation pioneer and aerospace engineer. His Mosquito was probably the most versatile warplane ever built, and his Comet was the first jet airliner to go into production.



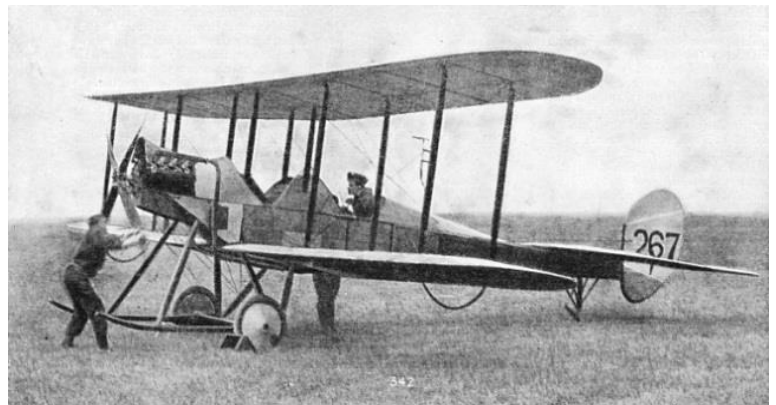
*First successful flight, Newbury: 1910*

Upon graduating from engineering training, de Havilland's career initially included design and construction of bicycles, automobiles and omnibuses.

Borrowing money from his maternal grandfather, de Havilland constructed his first aircraft using bicycle wheels, piano wire and canvas sewn by his wife, working from newspaper photographs of the Wright Brothers' plane, since he had never actually seen one! It took two years to build but crashed during its first attempted flight in December 1909. Unhurt and undaunted, de Havilland built a new biplane, making his first flight in it from a meadow near Newbury in September 1910 achieving a distance of 20 yards at a height of 3-4 inches; a memorial plaque marks the event.

In December 1910, de Havilland joined HM Balloon Factory at Farnborough, which was to become the Royal Aircraft Factory. He sold his second aeroplane (which he had used to teach himself to fly) to his new employer for £400. It became the F.E.1, the first aircraft to bear an official Royal Aircraft Factory designation. For the next three years de Havilland designed, or participated in the design of, a number of experimental types at the "Factory".

In 1912, an aircraft of his design, the B.E. 2, established a new British altitude record of 10,500 feet (3.2 km); his brother Hereward was the test pilot.



*The BE2, designed and built in Farnborough: 1912*

In 1914 he became chief designer at Airco, in Hendon. He designed many aircraft for Airco, all designated by his initials, DH. Large numbers of de Havilland-designed aircraft were used during the First World War, flown by the Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force.



*Mosquito: 1946*

Airco was shut down shortly after being acquired by Birmingham Small Arms Company and de Havilland formed de Havilland Aircraft Company with former Airco owner George Holt Thomas. Alan Butler became Company Chairman and provided the capital to buy Stag Lane Aerodrome, Edgware, where the Moth family of aeroplanes was developed. One of de Havilland's roles was as a test pilot for the company's aircraft.

In 1933 the company moved to Hatfield Aerodrome, in Hertfordshire, and, in 1934, the de Havilland Comet Racer won a race from London to Melbourne in under 71 hours.

At the outbreak of WWII, de Havilland Aircraft Co was manufacturing the Tiger Moth, the Dragon Rapide and the Mosquito. The Tiger Moth was used by the RAF for training. The Mosquito fighter/bomber, probably the most versatile warplane of its time, was faster than the Spitfire and could outfly virtually anything in the air.

Altogether, 33% of Allied air strength and 95% of all American wartime production were planes designed by de Havilland.

The world's first commercial jet airliner was the de Havilland Comet. The first prototype flew in 1949 and the aircraft entered service with BOAC in 1952 on the new route between Heathrow and Johannesburg. The plane was capable of carrying a maximum of 36 passengers at 450mph over a distance of 2500 miles. Following two fatal early accidents as a result of weaknesses with the square windows, the design was amended to the rounded windows we know today.



*Comet 1 Prototype: 1949*

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De Havilland controlled the company until it was bought by the Hawker Siddeley Company in 1960.

A statue of de Havilland, sculpted by Keith Maddison, was unveiled by the Duke of Edinburgh in 1997, at the University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield.



*Sir Geoffrey de Havilland*

Geoffrey de Havilland married Louise Thomas in 1909 and they had three sons, two of whom died as test pilots in de Havilland aircraft. His youngest son, John, died in an air collision involving two Mosquitoes in 1943. Geoffrey Jr carried out the first flights of the Mosquito and Vampire and was killed in 1946 flying the jet-powered DH 108 Swallow while diving at or near the speed of sound. Louise suffered a nervous breakdown following these deaths and died in 1949. De Havilland remarried in 1951, to Joan Mary Frith (1900–1974). They remained married until his death.

De Havilland was made an OBE (Military Division) in 1918, a CBE (Civil Division) in 1934, was knighted by George VI in 1944 and appointed to the Order of Merit in 1962. He was awarded the Air Force Cross in 1919.

In 1979, de Havilland's autobiography, *Sky Fever*, was published by Peter (his surviving son) and Anne de Havilland.

The de Havilland Aircraft Heritage Centre is in London Colney, Hertfordshire