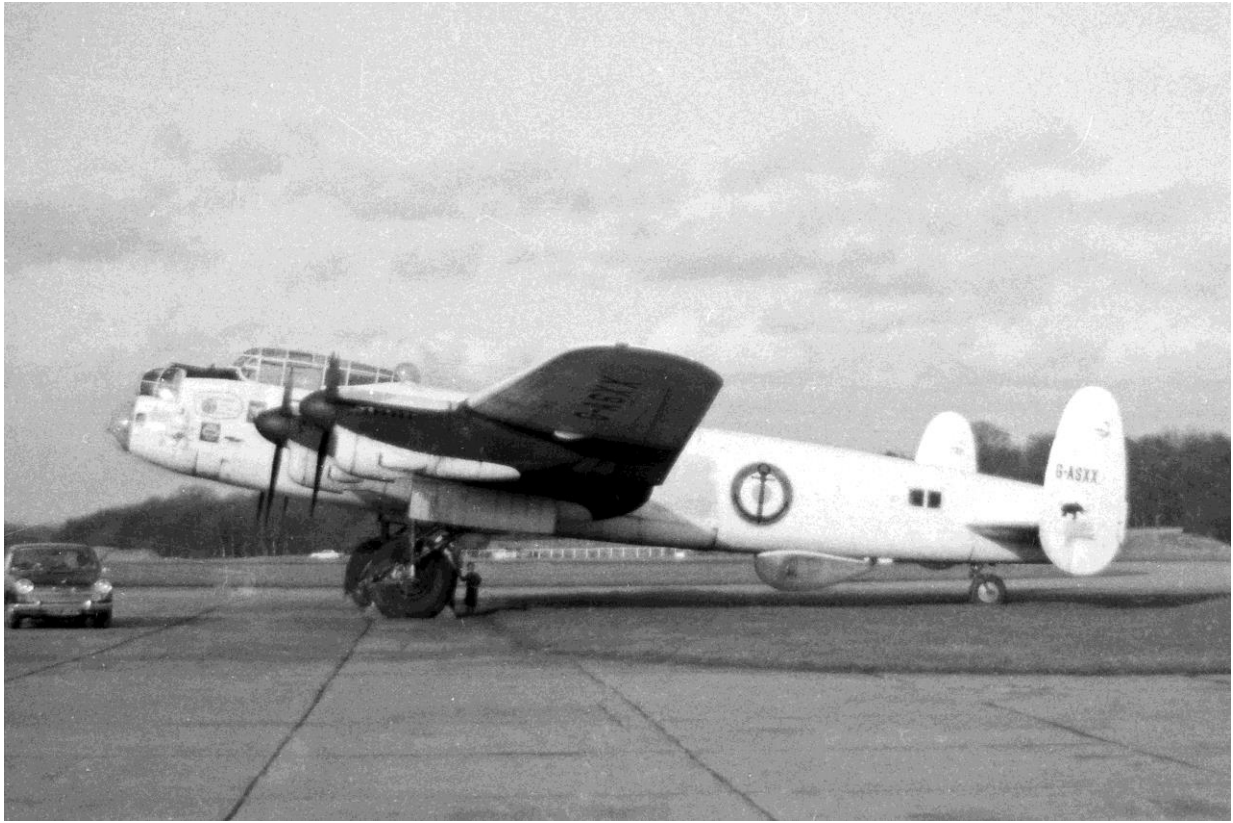


The Story Behind the Photograph -4



G-ASXX at Biggin Hill in May 1965

My twin brother Jim and I began taking aircraft photographs whilst at school in Surrey from around 1964 onwards. The school was in striking distance by bicycle from Biggin Hill, Redhill and Gatwick all of which had interesting resident and visiting aircraft. The airfields were notably much more accessible to lads on bicycles than they are today.

From the very start, our focus was on anything old, or that that we couldn't immediately recognise, beginning a fascination with rare and obscure light aircraft that continues to the present day.

The school used to pipe a feed from Radio 4 (equivalent of the Today programme) to the dormitories to assist the morning waking up process. In May 1965, we heard a piece about the imminent arrival of an airworthy Lancaster bomber that was flying in to Biggin Hill from Australia to be preserved in the UK. Naturally, this was a magnet for us and the photograph above was taken at the first opportunity.

The aircraft had been operating with the French Aeronavale from New Caledonia as 'WU-15' in the maritime patrol role. It was withdrawn from service in 1964 and sold to the Historic Aircraft Preservation Society and registered as G-ASXX in October 1964 for its ferry flight from Mascot Airport Sydney to Biggin Hill, arriving there on 13 May 1965.

It passed through a number of hands before being loaned to RAF Scampton as a gate guardian, painted as NX611 YF-C. In April 1988, it was delivered by road to East Kirby, where it is maintained by the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, where it regularly runs its engines and taxis (including fast runway runs) as 'Just Jane'. Plans to restore the aircraft to flying condition are well in hand.

In those days when Biggin Hill was far more accessible than it is today, it was possible to cycle around the perimeter track to all the hangars. Memories include seeing such types as:

- The one-off Miles Aries G-AOGA
- Prentices parked by the small control tower
- Fournier RF3 motorgliders anticipating the later establishment of Sportair as a flying school and agency for Sportavia-Putzer
- Britannias awaiting scrapping
- Omnipol L40 Meta-Sokols with their unusual 'reverse tricycle' undercarriage
- Yellow and blue Chipmunk and Hornet Moth of Surrey & Kent Flying Club
- Auster J5V-160 G-APUW
- Messenger G-AKVZ, which is still based on the airfield
- Morton Air Services Heron
- Grumman Widgeon N444M, then wearing a two-tone green colour scheme

The above list covers the normally resident and visiting aircraft and doesn't begin to reflect the variety of old and new that could be seen at the regular Biggin Hill Air Fair events. There one could see rare airliners, brand new light aircraft, and French homebuilts as well as military formation teams and fast jets.

The photograph below captures the sort of aircraft that sparked our interest then and still remains close to my heart. This is the General Aircraft Cygnet G-AGBN seen in the 'far hangar' at Biggin. From there, this aircraft moved to the Sir WJD Roberts collection and museum at Strathallan, where it acquired a faux RAF camouflage scheme. It is still preserved and forms part of the Scottish Museum of Flight collection at East Fortune.



Rare bird: General Aircraft Cygnet G-AGBN at Biggin Hill

photo Jim Smith