

The Story Behind the Photograph -5



Blackburn B2 displaying at the Moth Club Rally at Woburn Abbey in August 2015

The Blackburn B2 has a place in my heart as the first vintage aircraft on which Jim and I had any hands-on working experience. The Blackburn B2 was a side-by-side all metal training biplane with fabric-covered steel wings developed from the Blackburn Bluebird. It was powered by a Cirrus Hermes IVA engine and competed with the Tiger Moth for the contract for an RAF basic trainer. Although losing that contract, some 42 were built mainly for the civil market, of which three were, to some extent, still extant after the War.

We were at school at the time and members of 574 Sqn ATC at Caterham School. In mid-1942, the RAF had donated a Blackburn B2 G-ADFV to the squadron. This aircraft arrived by road and was then 'rigged'. After engine runs, it was taxied round the school playing fields before being left in the open on a hillside behind the school assembly hall.

In the late 1950s, a new ATC hut was built and with renewed interest, the aircraft fuselage and engine were moved alongside. The wings were left on the hillside. The rear fuselage was removed as it made the aircraft too long to fit in the hut. The centre section tank and struts were also removed.

With our good friend Bob Head (about whom I shall pen another article in due course), we determined to see what could be done to resurrect the machine. At the time, the forward fuselage was in the hut, with the engine on the floor and the propeller mounted on the wall. The wings, rear fuselage section and centre section were missing, their location having been long-forgotten.

We managed to reinstall the engine, its cowlings and the propeller and found evidence that the rear fuselage had been destroyed. After quizzing the Physics master, who had been in charge of the ATC when the aircraft arrived, we eventually managed to locate the corroding wing structure, with its

aluminium slats and embrittled fabric. The fabric was still painted with camouflaged upper surfaces and yellow undersides.

The wing parts were moved to the vicinity of the ATC hut, but were subsequently trashed by the school groundsmen who unceremoniously dumped what, to them, was rubbish when they wanted to cut the grass outside the hut. The whole story was written up in more detail by Jim and myself in the Autumn 1970 edition of the VAC magazine *Vintage News*.

Despite this failure, we had learned a lot about aircraft and engines and the B2, in particular. All three of us went on to Southampton University to study aeronautical engineering, gaining post-graduate degrees and becoming private pilots. Bob Head was a great enthusiast, who is no longer with us and is sadly missed.

BAE Systems continue to own G-AEBJ, under the auspices of their Heritage Team, the aircraft being based at Old Warden and maintained in immaculate condition. It is fully aerobatic and is often displayed quite vigorously to the delight of all that see it.

Having left the school in 1969, I have no direct knowledge of the present state of G-ADFV.

The third post-War survivor spent time at Dixon's scrapyard, but I was delighted to find its fuselage displayed, still in its wartime scheme, displayed at Doncaster Aeroventure. Its slightly battered and engineless condition was an instant reminder of our efforts with G-ADFV.

My peripheral association with the type continues in that I work on a voluntary basis with the BAE Systems Heritage Group and was part of their team supporting an exhibition at the DH Moth Club Rally when the accompanying photographs were taken.



Spirited display flying by G-AEBJ at Woburn Abbey