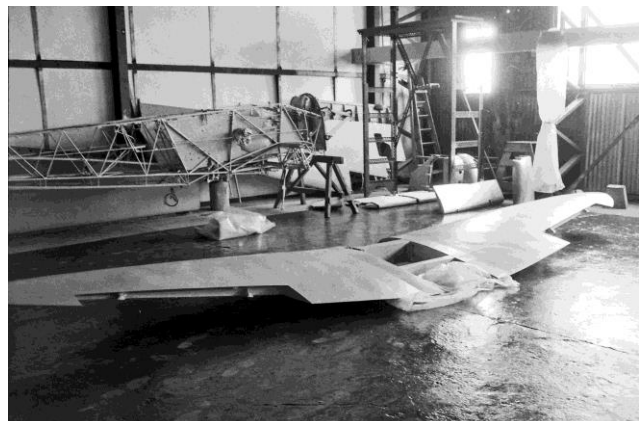


## The Story Behind the Photograph -8



*Moving John Isaacs' Spitfire from Southampton to Thruxton for assembly and flight test*

This piece is written in tribute to a great friend of Jim and me, from our school and University days, Bob Head. We got to know Bob well via the school ATC Squadron, particularly in our search for the missing parts of the Blackburn B2 that had been donated to the ATC during the War.

Bob and I went together to RAF Biggin Hill for assessment and medicals associated with applying for an RAF Flying Scholarships. Bob passed with flying colours, other than his thigh length being adjudged to be too long to allow safe ejection from a couple of types. I failed miserably, due to short-sightedness.

Bob travelled to Carlisle for his training and, by the time he left school was the proud possessor of a PPL. He joined the Aeronautical Engineering course at Southampton University, which may well have influenced Jim and me in selecting the same course in the following year. Bob flew with the University Air Squadron in his first year and then joined the Wessex Flying Group.

The Wessex Flying Group was formed around key members of the defunct Hampshire Aero Club, including Viv Bellamy, John Fairey and John Isaacs, together with some University staff and its own licenced engineer, Norman Powell, who worked in the wind tunnel workshops. Two aircraft were operated, Chipmunk G-AOUP and Tiger Moth G-ALNA. These were hangared at John Fairey's private strip and flown up to Thruxton for weekend flying operations.

Jim and I joined as non-flying associate members and flew with Bob in the Chipmunk and with other members such as John Isaacs who generously offered us passenger flying opportunities from time to time.

Bob's first year did not go too well and when we started our course in 1969, we found he was re-sitting the year and was now on the same course as ourselves. Bob and I also both continued on an MSc course on Rotorcraft and V/STOL aircraft, which eventually led me to PhD research and Westland, while he joined the low speed aerodynamics group in Hawker Siddeley at Hatfield.

Bob was a talented engineer and among other activities became one of the nominated drivers for the University Engineering Society's 1929 Dennis 'Toastrack' Charabanc – an ideal vehicle for a mass New Forest pub sortie on a summer evening.

He and the brilliant Pete Duck (now Professor of Mathematics at Manchester University) shared a cottage on the Chilworth Estate, initially with Jim and latterly with myself.

Bob's unbounded interest in flying extended to sorting out the gang of helpers (including Jim and I) to organise the move of the prototype Isaacs Spitfire from Southampton to Thruxton for initial assembly and test flying. He was also a regular participant in the work gangs that cleared Popham airfield of trees and tree stumps, followed by extensive stone picking to create the runway next to the A303.

Once at Hatfield, Bob joined the TK Flying Group and flew their Turbi G-AOTK. (As an aside, prior to being re-engined, a flight test reported in Vintage News described this aircraft as having a climb rate with two up best measured by an eight day clock, rather than a stopwatch! It was also said to have the handling qualities of a soggy wellington boot half-filled with water.)

Bob felt that the Hatfield low speed aerodynamics group was at the top of its field and had a major input into Airbus wing design, with far fewer staff than were deployed at Boeing on equivalent tasks.

I still remember cycling many times the 28 miles from Chilworth to Thruxton to fly with Bob, years before I myself learned to fly. I am sure that the experience gained in general handling of the Chipmunk stood me in good stead, when I actually began instruction in 1978.

Sadly, Bob lost his fight against cancer some years ago. He had a huge influence on the lives and careers of both Jim and myself. His extensive collection of aeronautical books and drawings was donated after his death to Mark Miller at De Havilland Support Ltd. RIP Bob Head, a much-missed contributor to British aviation.



Chilbolton Observatory (and airfield archaeology) photographed from around 5,000 ft from Chipmunk G-AOUP flown by Bob Head