

From Colin Hambidge, BAC Weybridge Flight Test Instrumentation

I worked at BAC Weybridge from March 1961 until March 1972, initially when it was still Vickers Armstrong. I worked in the Instrumentation Department of the Design Office engaged on the design of Flight Test Instrumentation in Flight Test aircraft, and I eventually became Principal Instrumentation Design Engineer (Mech.). At the time I was mainly working on the VC10 aircraft, but the majority of the Department was working on TSR2. The department consisted of approximately 30/35 design engineering draughtsmen supported by a Technical Department of 10/15 Technical Engineers.

I only worked on the TSR2 project for about 9 months, as I was transferred (promoted) onto the BAC1-11 flight test aircraft on the resignation of a senior engineer. My role on TSR2, as on the other aircraft types, was the mechanical/structural design of flight test instrumentation installation in the initial 14 prototype aircraft. This involved the installation of various instrumentation equipment in the monitoring of all the aircraft systems and structure e.g. straingauging of critical structure elements of the aircraft, pressure measurement of aircraft systems (hydraulics,air etc), positional measurement of moving systems, aircraft controls, etc, etc. In addition was the design and installation of the recording equipment (precision instrumentation tape recorders).

It was a sad time when it was becoming daily news that the project was in danger of being scrapped. A large demonstration was arranged in London and I took part in the march to attempt to get the Government to change its mind but it turned out to be in vain. The Labour Government was determined to kill off the project once and for all time. Eventually, the decision was made and it was a major blow. The flight aircraft was grounded. Most of the remaining aircraft that had not flown and were at various stages of build, were taken from the hangars onto the runway and were cut up and destroyed with oxy-acetylene torches under the instructions of the Government. The jigs too were destroyed. I saw many men, who had been involved in the build of the aircraft, crying, and with no attempt to hide their feelings. In my department and in all other Design and Technical Departments, all the drawings and technical data were removed and collected by security personnel. We believe these were all destroyed, but I have no real knowledge if this is true. By its actions to scrap the aircraft, manufacturing jigs and design data and drawings, the Government was taking every step to ensure that the project was killed off completely with no hope of a re-start in the future.

From my own point of view, I never understood why the Labour Government took all these actions. Even if the project were to be cancelled because of costs, it surely would have been beneficial for the first 2/3 aircraft to continue with a limited flight test schedule at least to gain some information from its trials, so that some critical data could be obtained from the multi million pounds which had been spent. As it

was, the amount of information from a short flight test programme was of minimal value.

Colin Hambidge