

I started as an engineering apprentice with Bristol Aircraft Limited (as it was known then) in September 1962. I have recently taken early retirement after 43 yrs. service with B.A.L., B.A.C., B.Ae, BAE SYSTEMS, Airbus UK etc etc ! as a design engineer. I have always had a great interest in aerospace in all its guises, probably as a result of my father being a career serving RAF officer, so I guess it got in my blood that way.

As part of the apprenticeship I moved every three months to different departments within the Bristol organisation and back in the summer of 1964 found myself in our Guided Weapons assembly area. This was the most security sensitive part of our factory at Filton and was primarily for design, manufacture and assembly of the Bristol Bloodhound guided missile, but was also the site of a 'special offload' work package from Warton. This was where we manufactured the bomb-bay doors for the TSR2, I remember that the jigs and fixtures for the doors were positioned to enable assembly of the doors like butterfly wings i.e. each pair of doors vertically. You can imagine that the size of the doors was significant because the bomb-bay on the aircraft was the major part of its length. I felt highly honoured to have been involved with assembling the dark green protectively treated parts and was the envy of my mates for being in the right place at the right time when the completed doors were removed from the jigs and packed up for shipment to Warton.

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It (the receipt of a photo of TSR2) inspired me to think of the moment that I heard of the actual cancellation of the project. As mentioned before I was an apprentice at Filton and I remember being on the shop floor in

our Brabazon hangar (the enormous three bay building built specifically to assemble the Bristol Brabazon in the late 1940's) at the time. We were involved with the maintenance, modification and painting in the low level grey /green camouflage of the Vickers Valiants of the ' V ' force and had recently been hit by the blow that because of spar fatigue all Valiants were to be scrapped where they stood, I guess there were about four aircraft at Filton at the time. The team of fitters that I was working with were filled with doom and gloom at the time of the TSR2 cancellation announcement, there were groups stood around in the hangar with faces of disbelief on the afternoon of the 1965 budget statement. The impact of this announcement on our aviation industry could not have been imagined at the time !

For me there was a sort of double irony as my father was stationed at 232 OCU RAF Gaydon at the time which was an operational conversion unit for Valiants and Victors so with half his career focus being removed and my future in the aviation industry now somewhat more tenuous the mood in the family was not good. Incidentally it was a Gaydon Valiant that had a major in flight failure of one of its spars, eventually leading to the fleet being grounded.

Many years later Filton was involved with the 'depot maintenance' of the USAF's UK-based fleet of General Dynamics F-111s, it appeared to a substantially built aircraft but I don't think had the same performance capability as the TSR 2 potentially did.

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I can remember that on the day of the budget announcement (April '65 ) the fitters that I worked with were listening to a little transistor radio on a workbench for the impact on their pockets of any petrol, beer or fags rises (I think this was an annual ritual on budget day!) the cancellation announcement seemed to take them all completely by surprise .

BoB Chappell,