

TSR2 – Work at Luton, by Tony Godbold

During 1960/61 I was in my last year of an Engineering Apprenticeship with Hunting Aircraft at Luton Airport. At this time, the newly created British Aircraft Corporation absorbed Hunting Aircraft. That year, I was working in what was called the Test Laboratory, which conducted structural testing and development of aircraft systems.

The project office at Luton was designing the flight trials instrumentation pack for the first TSR2 aircraft. This was to be installed in the weapons bay, which was subjected to extremes of temperature, in part from the heat from the Olympus engines situated immediately above the weapons bay and also from the extremes of temperature from the weapons bay doors during flight at high altitude and kinetic heating from high speed flight at very low altitude. This required the test instrumentation pack to be air- conditioned.

A small team, including myself, was tasked to use wooden models of the test instrumentation to measure the airflow and back pressure through the instrumentation pack to determine the air conditioning specification for this installation. Once completed I went on to other project work including the Hunting H107, which became the BAC 107 and finally evolved into the BAC 1-11.

On completing my apprenticeship, I moved to the Flight Test Department at Luton as a Flight Test Technician. Through the Flight Test "grapevine" during 1964 I became aware of some of the problems with the first TSR2 at Boscombe Down. Of interest to me was the complete failure of the instrumentation pack during early engine ground runs. This was due to the drain from the air-conditioning system freezing up causing a water build up from the water extractor shorting the power supply to the instrumentation pack!

After the first flight of XR219, I heard of the problems of undercarriage retraction but never knew of the cause at the time.

One of the post-scripts of the impact of the cancellation of the TSR2 in early 1965 was the closure of BAC (Luton) Division with loss of 2000

jobs including mine! This was despite the plant being in full production of Jet Provost T Mk4 and the ongoing development of the Jet Provost TMk5 and Strikemaster. All BAC 1-11 wings were produced at Luton up to this time. This work was taken from Luton and given to other BAC factories. A few of my flight test colleagues went to Warton – Ray Murdoch, Dave Crosier and Reg Stock (Reg was one of the test pilots at Luton). Another, Shelley Fey went to Wisley.

While visiting Duxford in 1996 and 2001 I saw XR222. It was looking very weather-beaten in 1996 on outside display. However, in 2001 it was inside being cleaned and some of the electric systems being rewired to make it "light up".

Tony Godbold

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