



## THE RATCLIFFE SPITFIRE P9503

Supported by The Leonard Stillwell Bursary and The Spitfire Society  
THE WORLD'S ONLY SPITFIRE BUILT BY STUDENTS

12

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Firstly let me apologise for the lack of a Bulletin during the Summer Term, I hope that this one makes up for it! Last week we welcomed our usual new intake of keen students following the start of the new academic year. We had 19 attend, and I am pleased to say that they were all kept occupied...not an easy thing to achieve when so many skills need to be learned individually.

### The Build

The task now is one of 'dressing' each frame. More senior members are assigned a frame each and they in turn take two junior members under their wing and teach them what needs doing, and how to do it accurately. Carefully working from the blueprints, rivet lines and spacings are marked on, and then the holes drilled and epoxy glue mixed up. Small right-angled



aluminium tabs are made, having first produced templates, and these are then hammered to shape and fixed to the frames with rivets. Lightening holes are chamfered to give the illusion of pressed metal, and the edges of the frames are carefully sanded so that they appear to be made

of aluminium as well. This all seems quite easy, but with at best an hour and a half on the project each week,



only a handful of rivets go in on each session. I am looking to extend the project into one lunchtime, but the set-up and clearing time may well negate the usefulness of that.



## Ratcliffe – A Flying History

Following on from Bulletin 11's story of Mark Baillon, I thought it might be interesting on this occasion to look at the aerodrome here at Ratcliffe, now sadly very much unusable, but still retaining much in the way of historical buildings and landscape. I would like to express my sincere thanks to John Clifford for providing me with much of the detail for this article.

The aerodrome itself was begun in the inter-war period by brewery owner, local MP and passionate flying enthusiast Sir Lindsay Everard.

Not a pilot himself, he none-the-less acquired the land and opened Ratcliffe Aerodrome in 1930. The location is adjacent to the A46, just north of the college site, and is all but opposite to Ratcliffe Hall, Everard's beautiful home.



Everard had many connections within the aviation world, and when the aerodrome was officially opened with a Grand Air Pageant on 6th September 1930, the guest of honour (although an unofficial visitor) was none other than aviatrix Amy Johnson who, only months before, had received worldwide fame for her solo flight to Australia. With 5000 guests attending the event, it must have been quite a show for the boys and staff of the college at that time! If you have ever been into the Grand Hotel in Leicester, the foyer has some framed original posters and brochure from the opening – quite a surprise when I happened to be there for a training session last year!



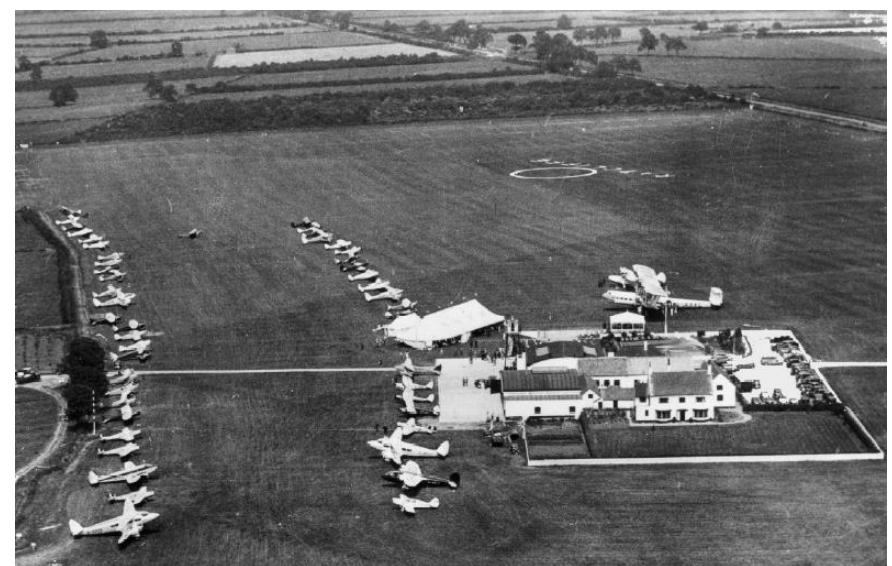
Everard employed a permanent personal pilot, the first of which was Winifred Spooner who, until her untimely death from pneumonia in 1933 would ferry him all over Britain, Europe, Turkey and the Middle East, be it on business, or often to enter an air race himself. She became the first British woman to earn her living as a private owner's personal pilot. Spooner was a much respected pilot in her own right, and took fifth place in the 1931 King's Cup. She and Amy Johnson were close



friends. If Wikipedia is to be believed, her British pilot's license was only the 16<sup>th</sup> issued to a female pilot, and her US one was signed off by Orville Wright himself! It was here at Ratcliffe, in January of 1933 that she caught a cold, which very quickly developed into pneumonia from which she died very soon after.



The picture above shows Spooner with Everard in 1932 looking at Nigel Norman. In June of 1933 Everard organised a trip to Germany with ten other private aircraft to enjoy the aero club hospitality, with Everard going along in his Dragon, G-ADXM. Accompanied by members of the Air Force, Army and parliament, they spent several days in Hitler's burgeoning state, even meeting the Chancellor himself along with



Hermann Göring. As a result of Everard's continued support of all things aviation related, he was knighted in 1939. To the left is a rather interesting aerial shot of Ratcliffe Aerodrome taken in 1937.

The onset of WWII put pay to the use of the aerodrome as a place of frivolity for

society types, and it became known as RAF Ratcliffe, where, as has been mentioned in previous bulletins, it was used by the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) and named No.6 Ferry Pool.

### New help



For a few months now we have had regular help from two local enthusiasts, Bob McLuckie and Robert Smith. Robert is a keen and very accomplished aeromodeller who can advise the students on techniques he has learnt. Bob has built his own aeroplane, as well as being ex-RAF from none other than 617 Sqn, Dambusters. As a layman, listening to Bob's stories of his flying days is fascinating, and there are many that I could recount here, and perhaps in future issues, and with his permission, I will, but his time as a Vulcan pilot, in the early days, when those huge delta-wing leviathans were painted stark white stand out to me.

The picture to the right shows Bob advising Jacob about the positioning of rivets on Frame 11 in order to 'dress' the front side in readiness for painting.

