



## THE RATCLIFFE SPITFIRE P9503

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

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We have begun this new academic year with excellent students and a very positive and enthusiastic energy from those involved as well as the school, who are keen for us to move the project forward into the next phase; a space to assemble the fuselage... watch this space!

### The Build

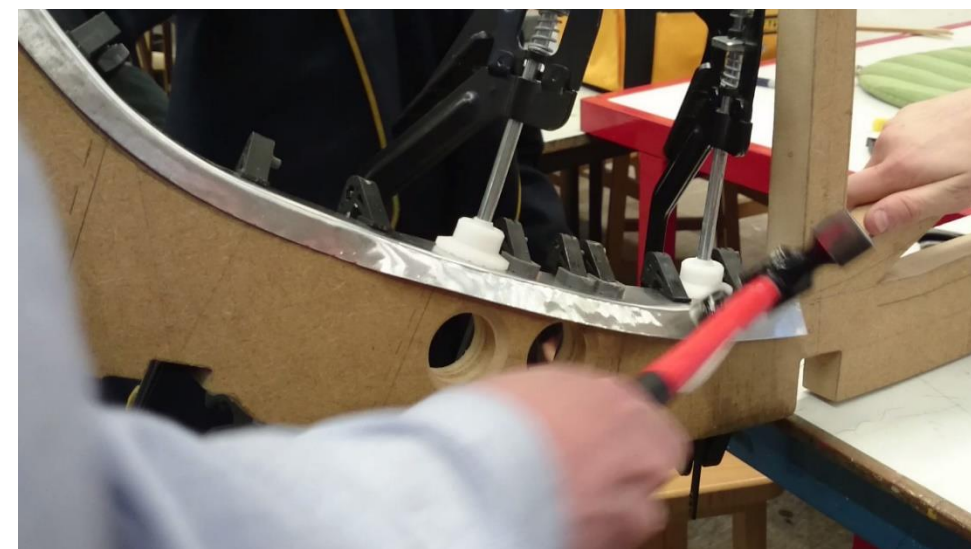


As is the case at the start of each new year, a certain degree of training is required to bring those new to the project up to speed. Having had an excellent intake last year from the Year 7s, I have been able to promote some of them to senior positions; a testament

to their skills and trustworthiness. Being a 'Senior' is dependent on those two things alone, and it is therefore not unusual to have a 12 or 13-year-old student in charge those older than them. With such a good cohort, I can delegate a significant amount of that training to the seniors who take charge of a particular job, or part of the build and are responsible for leading its development and guiding the juniors assigned to them. With much focus currently on the cockpit area and tail section, my seniors are as follows:

Frame 8 and Flight Simulator -Detailing is progressing well, and I have been particularly impressed with Jerry in Year 8 who has problem-solved the lower

longeron support brackets on the frame so well, drawn cut and bent them, and then fitted them to the frame. He was recently promoted to Frame 8 senior as well as Flight Simulator senior.



Metal folding and cutting - Zoe has proved herself to be extremely reliable and accurate when it comes to aluminium bracket manufacturing, so she takes the lead with that vital aspect. There are many different types of brackets needed on each frame, so it is also quite a logistical exercise to keep on top of the components list, numbers required, and locations needed.



Tail section - Zoe's older brother James is now in Year 12 but has been with the project since Year 7. He brings maturity, determination and a very good eye for detail to his senior position skinning the tail fin in aluminium. We use the correct-sized solid rivets here, and the thin metal is first drilled before being dimpled and finally riveted







together. Significant progress is being made weekly on this area of the build as James works with his father Gavin.

**Radio Aerial** - Like James, Jacob has been a senior for a while and his focus at the moment is on hand crafting the wooden aerial. He first drew out full-sized plans from the blueprints, and has since measured out and cut from a large section of timber. He has learnt how to use a plane, and is now close to completing the overall shape. When done, his next job will be to build to mounting bracket from aluminium, and then move on to the tail fin support for the aerial wire. This is a nice little project that is achievable for someone of Jacob's ability, who is willing to work to a high tolerance and only progress when things are exactly right.

**Frame 11** - Henry was appointed as senior on Frame 11 whilst he was still in Year 7; a real testament to his ability. He continues to drive this job forward and we are now approaching completion of this key part. It currently sits with a blast of cockpit green on it to entice us to get it completed. Just a few more brackets and bolts to go Henry!

A significant proportion of our time is now spent on metalwork fabrication. Brackets, fillets, and smaller parts are quickly consuming our supply of sheet aluminium. We are still progressing with some other areas, but it will be great to be able to tick some parts off a totally completed.

### The Few get fewer

Over the summer we heard of the loss of 3 significant members of the fighter pilot community, two of whom were Battle of Britain pilots, Tom Neil and Geoffrey Wellum. The third held a significance for us and the project, being the last surviving member of the ATA, Mary Ellis.

I met Geoffrey many years ago, at a book launch for his staggeringly good 'First Light'; if you have not read it, I urge you to do so, it is a real human story that brings an honesty to the pages of history. He was a charming and engaging man who was genuinely interested in what I had to say. Mary I knew of very well, and whilst I never met her, I passed her home on many an occasion on the Isle of Wight, and spoke to her on the telephone not that long ago about our project here. (See Bulletin 10). Time moves on inevitably, and first-hand memories from those pivotal days become increasingly fewer. The memories are so important for us to keep and pass on, and I hope that in a small way this project will be able to play its part in ensuring that we do just that.

