



Three rare First World War aircraft land at RAF Cosford Museum

Cheers went up from staff and volunteers at the RAF Museum at Cosford as three rare fighter planes which played a crucial role in the First World War landed at the site.



[RAF Cosford Museum's Michael Beetham, conservation centre manager Darren Priday, centre, and his team with the newly delivered Bristol MC1, left, Sopwith Pup, centre and Sopwith 1 1/2 Strutter.](#)



Conservation centre manager Darren Friday, right, and aircraft technician and carpenter Ian Osborne with the newly delivered Sopwith Pup



The Sopwith 11/2 Strutter is unloaded at RAF Cosford

The Bristol M1c and Sopwith 11/2 Strutter replicas and genuine Sopwith Pup were delivered to the site earlier than scheduled on the back of two lorries which had travelled from Cosford's sister museum in London – sparking excitement among on looking staff, volunteers and engineers. They are believed to be three of the oldest planes in the museum.

They will be kept safe at the Cosford site's conservation centre until December when they will be moved to the museum's warplanes hanger to be part of the First World War In The Air exhibition.

In the meantime, staff and volunteers will check over the three planes for any defects and prepare for them for the exhibition.

Museum conservation centre manager, Darren Priday, said:

“The museum won a National Lottery grant of £900,000 to go towards a big display at London's RAF Hendon and we did not want to leave the West Midlands out.

Repair

“Three aircraft were sent up and we will start looking at them and repair any defects and prepare them for display but, generally, we won't touch them if nothing needs doing.”

The planes were designed and built before the Royal Air Force came into existence in 1918, with orders for the aircraft being taken by the former Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service.

Pointing to the genuine Sopwith Pup, Mr Priday said:

“Underneath you can see the grit and the dirt, flying was very dirty in those days.”

He added:

“Apart from it being a new display for people in the West Midlands to see there is always the educational side of it and we will develop plans to teach people about them. These are very, very early era planes. The main difference between the First World War and Second World War planes in these are made of wood and are lightweight.”

“We, typically, have not had these in the West Midlands museum, so it is an exciting time for us. The public, when they come, will love to see these aircraft and whenever we get anything delivered there is normally excitement among the staff and volunteers.”

Volunteer George Hewson, a volunteer from Stafford working on a German Dornier plane at the centre, said:

“These new planes are just about the oldest aircraft we have here so were very excited to see them being delivered.”

Museum marketing officer, Michelle Morgans, said the planes had been driven via the M1, M6 and M54 motorways yesterday . She added:

“Probably a lot of people passed them this morning on the motorway but did not realise what was in them.”

The planes illustrate the very early stages of the use of aircraft to fight wars.

And, inevitably, it was a dangerous **business**.

In the spring of 1916, casualties among Royal Flying Corps' aircrew began to mount as their aircraft were no match for the Fokker monoplanes used by the Germans and better fighting machines were desperately needed.

To meet this demand, the Bristol Aeroplane Co. designed a new single-seat monoplane incorporating much of the experience gained from earlier machines including the large low-drag spinner first used experimentally on the Bristol Scout D.

The new aircraft was said to have sparkling performance and manoeuvrability, Great things were expected of the M1 but a combination of prejudice against monoplanes, a dislike for its high landing speed and poor downward view meant it found little favour in the War Office and only 125 were ordered. Only five squadrons were partly equipped with the M1 for operational use although a number were issued to flying schools.

As expertise grew, so did aircraft complexity. The Sopwith Pup is thought of by its pilots as the perfect flying machine. It was used extensively by RAF predecessors the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps both at home and abroad.

The first Pups reached the Western Front in the autumn of 1916 allowing enthusiastic British pilots to maintain their hard-won domination until mid-1917 when newer German aircraft redressed the balance, although a British fighter ace said "no matter how good the German pilot was, when it came to manoeuvring, the Pup would turn twice to a Albatros' once".

The plane was also called the Sopwith Scout, with officialdom disliking the name Pup, thinking it undignified – although this did more than anything else to perpetuate the name Pup in history.

No date has yet been set by the museum for the start of the exhibition.

History of First World War flying machines:

The Sopwith 11/2 Strutter was a biplane designed in 1915 and first went into service that December

It was the first British designed two-seater tractor fighter and the first British aircraft to enter service with a synchronised machine gun

The Pup was named as such because it was seen as the smaller brother to the Strutter

It was very popular with pilots, being considered by many as the perfect flying machine

The Bristol MC1 was an early example of a fighter monoplane

It served in the Middle East and Balkans during the last two years of the war