

FIVE GO TO SEATTLE

Mike Lavelle joined the Preston Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Society during his stay at BAE SYSTEMS, Warton, from 1999 to 2002, when he assisted the Company on the Nimrod MRA4 project. After returning to Seattle, where he is now Training Manager on the Multi-Mission Maritime Aircraft at Boeing Integrated Defense Systems, he joined the Seattle Branch and recently became Hon. Treasurer. Earlier this year, he became a Fellow of the RAeS. He still regards Preston as his home Branch and highly respects all his buddies over here. He is highly revered among us, not only because of the captivating lectures he has delivered to the Preston Branch and NWHG as an aviation historian, but also because of his exceptionally hospitable character. A few months ago, Mike contacted me about our Newsletter and subsequently helped me write an article about the Seattle Branch (see the April issue). I asked Mike whether I could attend the Seattle Branch Annual "Joe Sutter" Dinner and I was amazed when he responded by inviting me to find some colleagues to come with me for some special tours around Seattle. Mike said we would have a 'great aeronautical event', but what unfolded certainly surpassed all our expectations.

WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER – FROM NORTHWEST UK TO NORTHWEST US

Early in the morning, our group assembled at Manchester Airport. My co-travellers were Alistair Brown, Fred Eckersley (father of a certain other group member, and retired from MBDA Lostock, formerly de Havilland), and two Manchester Branch friends: Dr Thurai and Mrs Eileen Rahulan. (Thurai taught me flight dynamics during my undergraduate studies at the University of Salford and furnished me with the discipline to use it properly.) Our first flight, on a KLM Boeing 737, carried us towards the rising sun to Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, from where we were to embark on the long westward voyage to Seattle. With some spare time at Amsterdam, we passed the Northwest Airlines McDonnell Douglas DC-10 that was to carry us onwards, and then followed Thurai's guided tour of Schiphol Airport. As we returned to the gate, Thurai presented us with a concise oral history of all the fatal DC-10 crashes. US security checks before boarding were rigorous, and when the immigration official looked through my passport I faced some unexpected questioning about my recent trip to the United Arab Emirates. We enjoyed a comfortable flight to Seattle Tacoma International Airport, with snowy views over Iceland, Greenland and the Canadian Rockies. Having passed immigration and customs uneventfully on arrival, we proceeded to the baggage collection area, where Mike Lavelle greeted us.

Mike took us to the Hertz office, where we picked up our Toyota Highlander. Then, with Thurai at the wheel, we followed Mike's car to the Motel 6 at nearby Issaquah. After a short rest, the evening began with my combined lesson on how to drive in the USA and how to drive an automatic. Mike led us to Snoqualmie Falls (taller than Niagara Falls), where he showed us the falls and then took us into the Salish Lodge for a briefing of the itinerary for the next few days. On the way back, Mike took us through Aldera, to see the house that had once belonged to Bill Boeing, after which we returned to Issaquah for dinner at the Red Robin.

THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER – BOEING TOUR, AIRCRAFT RESTORATION, AND DOWNTOWN

The next morning, we met Mike at 07:15 and followed him to the Boeing plant at Paine Field, Everett. Panos Samolis, an Airline Account Manager for the Boeing Company who began his career as a Flight Test Engineer, took us on a fascinating

ground-level tour of the production line. Wearing safety glasses, we started at Boeing's 43rd 777, at the end of its final assembly. Next, we came to the 42nd 777 at the stage called 'Final Body Join'. Insulation, wiring, structures for suspending baggage bins, and most items of cockpit equipment, were being fitted into the fuselage sections at this stage, while the sections were joined together and landing gear function was tested. The last 777 we saw was at 'Wing Stub Join Seal, Test & Paint'. The galleys were installed here, while the fuselage was still open, since they would be too large to pass through the doors later. Nose sections are manufactured at Boeing's Wichita plant and delivered directly to Everett by rail. Our subsequent stop was Wing Assembly for the 767, where a large automatic riveting machine, running on two outer rails and an inner 400 V live rail, would use 50,000 rivets to attach the stringers to the skin. The main spars are manufactured at Auburn and brought in on trucks. Finally, we visited the final assembly of a 747 freighter, which had 14,000 lb. weights suspended from the pylons to simulate engine loads. This aircraft was almost ready to proceed for hydraulic tests, after which it would be brought out to the painting hangar and then moved on for fuelling checks. It is said that, at any moment, around 300 747s are airborne, carrying at least 5% of the world's fare-paying passengers.

After we emerged from the production hangar, Mike and Panos drove us up and down the Flightline, which was joined to the apron by a bridge across the freeway. We passed a China Airlines 747, a Japan Airlines 767, a Malaysia 777 and a KLM 777. The Everett plant is the world's largest aerospace manufacturing complex.

Returning indoors, we gathered in a conference room where Mike pulled out his laptop computer and delivered a thoroughly entertaining presentation on the *Early History of the Boeing Company*. Mike's presentation, detailed, well researched, interesting and amusing, covered more than enough material to fill this Newsletter, so only a few items are covered herein. William E. Boeing (1881-1956) came to Seattle in 1903 after having studied at Yale University without completing his degree. He started in the lumber industry, buying a large amount of land around his home in Aldera. The first flight in the Seattle area took place on 4 July 1910, and after Bill Boeing became interested in flight he received his first aeroplane ride in 1914. He then learned to fly in San Diego and, believing he could build better aircraft, bought a Martin T. A. seaplane from Eddie Hubbard and modified it. In 1916, Bill purchased a building from boat builder Edward Heath, to house his new Boeing Airplane Company; this building, the 'Red Shed', now belongs to the Seattle Museum of Flight. Two adroit leaders of the Boeing Company during its nascent years were Clairmont L. Egtvedt and Philip G. Johnson. After the First World War, Bill Boeing and Eddie Hubbard proved, by flying out from Seattle after the mail ship had departed and landing in Vancouver before the ship arrived, that aeroplanes could be used as a communication tool. The company consequently pushed for government contracts for mail routes, while also continuously improving their warplanes. In 1925, Boeing won the contract to fly mail from San Francisco to Chicago; the Model 40B could also carry up to four passengers, sitting on the mail bags, although the mail always took priority. The first aeroplane built purposely for passengers was the 1928 Model 80, which carried eight passengers. Ellen Church, a registered nurse, suggested to Bill Boeing that nurses should be put on board to look after the passengers. Bill accepted this idea and, since attendants on steam ships were called 'stewards', he named these nurses 'stewardesses'.

Mike's presentation covered the technical and historical aspects of all the Boeing models through the inter-war years, the Second World War, the entry into the jet age, onwards to the B-52 and 707, and up to the plans for the Supersonic Transport. After the presentation, we were introduced to Yvonne Aleson, Cathay Pacific Projects Executive and RAeS Seattle Branch Secretary. Finally, we had a quick lunch at the Boeing Canteen and visited the souvenir shop before leaving for the Seattle Museum of Flight Restoration Facility.

Tom Cathgardh toured us through the two hangars and the open-air section of the Restoration Facility. Of the forty or so aircraft that were being lovingly repaired and prepared for display at the Museum, some of the most prominent ones were the de Havilland Comet 4C, Boeing 727 and Boeing 247.

In the afternoon, Mike brought us into downtown Seattle and to Pike Place Market, the largest market in the USA, where we browsed the diverse stalls and watched the world-famous fish-throwing performance. Finally, we enjoyed dinner in West Seattle at Salty's, with a beautiful nighttime view over the Puget Sound to the city centre.

FRIDAY 19 NOVEMBER – A DAY AT THE SEATTLE MUSEUM OF FLIGHT®

Mike collected us at 06:30 and took us to a 'Dawn Patrol' breakfast meeting at the Seattle Museum of Flight, next to Boeing Field / King County Airport. This debate was chaired by the museum's President and CEO, Ralph Bufano, with guest speakers Capt. John Hutchinson, Capt. Adrian Thompson and Ricky Baston. John had been a British Airways Concorde pilot during its first fifteen years in service and Adrian during its last eight, while Ricky had been an Avionics Engineer on the airliner throughout its thirty years. John opened the discussion with a passionate condemnation of the errors leading to the crash at Gonesse on 25 July 2000 and the injustice of the subsequent grounding of the entire fleet. Adrian was the captain on Concorde's last commercial flight and had previously flown G-BOAG on its farewell flight at Manchester on 23 October 2003. On 24 October, as Adrian flew G-BOAG back to Heathrow, he landed in formation with flight 002 returning from New York on a parallel runway. The British Airways Concorde simulator has now been dismantled at Brooklands, to ensure that none of British Airways' aircraft can be flown again. However, it is believed that Air France still perform frequent engine runs on one of their Concordes. There is some speculation that they are preparing to fly the airliner again on a special occasion. So, maybe I was wrong when I said in our October Newsletter that we would never see Concorde and the A380 flying together...

This stimulating discussion continued for two hours, with happy and sad tales told and plenty of questions presented to the guest speakers. After the meeting, Mike provided us with free entry into the Museum of Flight and introduced us to Robin Hodgkins (formerly from de Havilland). With a prime view from the balcony, Robin described in detail all the exhibits in the Great Gallery and then led us on a guided tour of the World War I and II displays in the Personal Courage Wing. When the tours were complete, we returned to the Great Gallery and browsed at leisure through its abundance of aeronautical treasures. We encountered some of the world's oldest and newest aircraft, the slowest and fastest,

and the most famous and most mysterious. Next, we looked in Bill Boeing's Red Shed (now relocated) and then wandered across the road to the open-air exhibits in the Airpark. The main outdoor attraction was, of course, Concorde G-BOAG. This aircraft was flown into King County Field by Capt. Mike Bannister and Capt. Les Brodie one year ago, after Ralph Bufano had successfully negotiated its acquisition by the Museum of Flight from British Airways. Since then, G-BOAG has already received 165,000 visitors.



Above Concorde G-BOAG, new spearhead of the Seattle Museum of Flight collection
Below The Red Shed, from where the Boeing Airplane Company blossomed



Other outdoor exhibits were an Air Force One Boeing 707, a Boeing 737 prototype, a 727 and a 747. We spent many hours strolling around the different displays at the museum, before finally dragging ourselves away in the afternoon. In the evening, Mike took us out for dinner at Newport Hills. A minor drama unfolded when we were following Mike's car and became very startled as we encountered a roundabout; an uncommon sight in the USA. We were so startled, in fact, that by the time we had come off the roundabout we realized we had lost Mike. Eventually I pulled over at an animal hospital and asked for directions, while Thurai took my cell phone and tried to find out where Mike was. Anyway, we finally became reunited and arrived at the Calcutta Restaurant at Newport Hills, where we enjoyed a meal with a beautiful view over Seattle from the east.

SATURDAY 20 NOVEMBER –
RAE'S SEATTLE BRANCH 3RD ANNUAL “JOE SUTTER” DINNER

While Mike joined his colleagues and helped them prepare for the dinner, our bunch of five headed east on the freeway into the mountains. In a surprisingly short time we had left the city behind and were passing through vast evergreen forests, climbing into stunning snow-capped mountain scenery. We arrived at the Western Summit of Snoqualmie and found a peaceful little ski resort, where we stopped for a light lunch.

Returning to Issaquah in the afternoon, we made a short walk around the picturesque Lake Sammamish and then returned to the motel to don our eveningwear for the Black Tie Dinner.

The dinner was held at the Museum of Flight, and during the jazz drinks reception we had plenty of time to mingle with the other guests while wandering among the exhibits in the Great Gallery. Mike introduced us to Joe Sutter, known as the ‘father of the Boeing 747’, and Capt. Brian Wiggle, the first Boeing 747 test pilot. I approached them with a model of the 747-400, purchased from the Boeing Store, and with a permanent pen I asked Joe and Brian to sign it for me. (That was a great idea by Mike.) Despite Joe Sutter’s exemplary history of achievements, he is a strikingly modest gentleman.

The dinner was opened by an address from the Seattle Branch Chairman, John Hope, who presented an introduction to the Royal Aeronautical Society and the history of the Seattle Branch, founded in 1999. Keith Mans, RAeS Chief Executive, then delivered some encouraging words. On the Boeing Company, he said:

“For those of us that live outside Seattle, the headquarters of the Boeing Company may have moved to Chicago, but we feel the heart of the Company is still here firmly in Seattle.”

Keith presented the 2004 RAeS Prize to Yvonne Aleson, for her dedicated service to the Seattle Branch as Hon. Secretary since its foundation five years ago.

Peter Gardner, President and a founder member of the Seattle Branch, introduced Joe Sutter and then the guest speaker, Sir Ralph Robbins, former Rolls-Royce Chief Executive. Sir Ralph presented *Striving for Perfection*, enthusiastically covering every product in the history of Rolls-Royce, since its inception through to the present day and the contract award to power the Boeing 7E7. F. Henry Royce had been raised in a poor family, but his entrepreneurial endeavours enabled him to establish his own company in Manchester in 1884. He began in the electrics industry and then went on to become the leading designer and manufacturer of motorcars. Charles S. Rolls had been educated at Cambridge and was one of the best aviators of that time. Henry Royce and Charles Rolls drew up a memorandum of understanding on 4 May 1904, with their joint venture initially focusing on motorcars. Their business moved to Derby in 1908, and with Royce being the perfectionist and Rolls being focused on customers, the synergistic pair founded the company that is still a thriving success today.

Each guest at the dinner received a copy of a book covering the first 100 years of Rolls-Royce, from 1904 to 2004. Mike suggested that every guest on our table should sign every other guest’s book, thereby making this a more personal and memorable souvenir of the evening. In addition to Mike, Thurai, Eileen, Alistair, Fred and myself, the other guests on Table 11 were Panos Samolis, Pam Valdez, Ray Woods and Raleigh Rasmussen. Pam used to be Mike’s boss when he worked on the F-22, and he often says she is ‘the best boss in the world’. In recognition of our British culture, Mike led our table to a toast to the Queen, which we reciprocally extended to George W. Bush.

At the end of the dinner, Peter Gardner invited Thurai, Eileen, Alistair, Fred and myself to come up onto the stage and offer a few words of appreciation to Mike for the enormous generosity that he had shown us during our visit to Seattle.

Alistair handed over to Mike a gift from the five of us: a 1/100 scale resin model of the Nimrod MRA4, kindly purveyed to us by Andrew Harper of the NWHG, with the help of Brian Sargeant. Mike was thoroughly flattered by this presentation, and later he asked all of us to sign the model for him.



Above

Right to left: Eileen Rahulan, Raleigh Rasmussen, Fred Eckersley, Mike Lavelle, Alistair Brown, Thurai Rahulan, Pam Valdez, Ray Woods and Craig Eckersley

Below

Mike Lavelle, holding the gift he deserved many times over; on the right, John Hope



Before leaving the dinner, Mike introduced us to Capt. Suzanna Darcy-Hennemann, the first lady pilot on the Boeing 747, who is now a leading 777 pilot. Consequently I obtained another priceless signature on my 747-400 model.

SUNDAY 20 NOVEMBER AND BEYOND

On Sunday it was time for Alistair and the Rahulan couple to return home, while Fred and I still had another six days to go. We brought the trio to SEA-TAC Airport and then headed to the Hertz office to return our hire car, which had displayed a couple of warning lights on the way to the airport. Hertz provided us with a suitable replacement: a Mitsubishi Montero Sport.

The next day, Fred and I made a two-day trip to Vancouver, British Columbia. This was a pleasant and cosmopolitan city, exhibiting an amicable fusion of Chinese, Mexican and North American cultures. However, maybe we made a mistake in our choice of motel. It was only after nightfall that we realized we had unwittingly arrived at a particularly seedy area, full of tramps and XXX shops.

On Wednesday we made a southward journey and circumnavigated Mt St Helens. Although we could not come close enough to see the volcano, shrouded by clouds, we enjoyed a long drive along winding mountain roads through beautiful coniferous forests, eventually coming as close as the road permitted to Windy Ridge Viewpoint.

Thursday, Thanksgiving Day, was very peaceful in Issaquah. Persistent rain dominated the morning and early afternoon, but blue sky eventually broke through the clouds and then a full moon prevailed during a tranquil night. The passing of Thanksgiving appears to signal the premature start of Christmas celebrations in the USA.

On Friday, as our successful holiday neared its end, Panos treated us to a comprehensive tour of Seattle in his jeep. He showed us all the affluent suburban communities and marinas, from Bellevue through Kirkland to Mercer Island and across to West Seattle, as well as through downtown. We caught a glimpse of the Boeing 737 production hangars at Renton, from across Lake Washington, and on the way back to Issaquah we also briefly saw Bill Gates's house.

This was really an astounding and memorable visit to Seattle, and I sincerely thank Mike for his tremendous kindness, as

well as Panos Samolis, Yvonne Aleson, Tom Cathgardh and Robin Hodgkins for their support. I also thank Thurai, Eileen, Alistair and Fred for coming with me and making up such a good bunch of enthusiastic fellow travellers. I am sure that we at the Preston and Manchester Branches and the NWHG would all love to welcome Mike to visit us here again soon, and we will definitely make sure he enjoys his visit.

And, now that this excursion has turned out such a success, where shall we go next? The Dubai Airshow 2005? Australia in 2006? I welcome suggestions from interested fellow travellers. →

FURTHER E-READING

www.boeing.com
www.museumofflight.org
www.rolls-royce.com
www.roughguides.com

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