

Trustee Annual Report 2022

Unlike January 2021 when we were still in the throes of a Covid-19 full lockdown, January 2022 was reckoned to be the start of the Society making a full recovery and getting back to doing what it had been doing for the last 50 years and so it was decided at the January 'Board' meeting that we would hold the 2022 AGM at the Maze hangars but restrict the numbers attending to 40 maximum, as there were still some Covid restrictions persisting.

There were many positives on the horizon but, there were two surprises ahead that no-one could have foreseen! Being the go-ahead Society that we are, January saw us take the initiative whenever the IWM (Imperial War Museum) at Duxford were looking to "Gift" a Kirby Cadet glider and a Grumman Avenger from the American War Museum to a suitable Collection, and since both types had operated here, we applied for both! Sadly we missed out on the Avenger but were fortunate enough to get the Cadet glider. Within a few weeks it was the turn of the RAF Museum at Cosford to announce they were looking to "Gift" around 20 airframes – again to suitable homes. Again, we applied for two – a Bristol Sycamore helicopter and a 'modified' Gloster Meteor T7 – the reason for the choice was again straightforward, both had connections to the Province - the Sycamore type had served here during the 50's/60's whilst the Meteor had been one of the principle test aircraft for the Martin Baker Company. We were made to wait some months before we were told we had been successful in our bid for both airframes but it wasn't until December that they actually arrived here at Long Kesh.

With no new aircraft due immediately work continued on the Gannet, Sea Prince, Wildcat, vehicles etc but there was to be major changes in some display rooms which included - 'New' Library, WWII room, WWI room and the re-location of no less than three ROC rooms into one large room. This latter move would leave three small rooms available for various future displays – to be decided.

Despite all the positives there were two negatives early in the year. (1) A group had penetrated the MLK site and got as far as entering the prison from where they began to show live video on Tik Tok, the incursions continued for quite a while and caused the MLK security quite a headache thankfully however, there were no intrusions into our premises. (2) As part of our Library refurbishment we applied to HLF for a £12K grant most of which would go towards making some 30 new bookcases however, the application was refused on the grounds that it did not fall into their "inclusivity" box! As a result, we went ahead and paid for the bookcases ourselves.

March 2022 was an incredible month. During the preceding few months we had been visited by a film company "scout" looking for a hangar location and possible 'set' pieces. To cut a long story short, in March we signed an agreement with the film Company which meant six low-loaders taking some of our aircraft and equipment to Ballykelly (for filming) and then some weeks later bringing it all back to Long Kesh. We signed a "Confidentiality" Agreement with the Company which is why I have omitted their name but you will see from the Treasurers Report it turned out to be a very lucrative partnership. It was certainly the busiest period ever in the Society's history.

Also around this time we had a visit from UTV to film an episode of "Hidden NI" produced by Alison Fleming, it was a great chance to showcase the Society and the Sea Prince team helped tremendously by fitting the aircraft's rudder during filming. The BAPNI project had been dormant for over two years due to Covid and again it was time to try to re-ignite interest amongst schools by having an 'Open-Day' however due to schools still being affected by Covid combined with Exam pressures, the hoped for re-ignition did not take place!

At the end of March we added yet another addition to the Collection - a Tornado composite cockpit replica complete with trailer which was formally transferred from the Air Training Corps at Liverpool, where it had sat uncared for, for a number of years. We were also 'gifted' a Learjet test airframe "TA-05" by Spirit Aerosystems which arrived at Long Kesh 26th March. A collection of smaller items was offered to us at this time but it wasn't until August that we actually purchased the collection from a reputable author in the Republic of Ireland. The collection consisted of memorabilia belonging to the "Glass sisters" one of whom, Mabel, was one of the early ATA women pilots. The collection amongst other things included her flying log-book and various Cups etc which the sisters had won both here and in South Africa, quite an amazing collection which we are keen to put on show, hopefully some time in 2023.

By the end of March we also had a set programme for our "Events" team :-) Veterans Event Coleraine (March), Shane's Castle (May), RUAS (May), Newcastle Airshow (June), Armed Forces Day Banbridge (July), Ulster Flying Club Open Days (July), EHOD (September) and finally the NI Airshow at Portrush (September). It was going to be another incredibly busy year, or so we thought. The Veterans Event was cancelled, the Newcastle Airshow was cancelled, following an accident at Newtownards just days before their Open Days they too were cancelled and

finally with the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II the Portrush Airshow was also cancelled as a mark of respect. What had set out to be a busy year for events turned out to be exactly the opposite. As in years past though there was a surprise outing for us (not the RAF Battle of Britain dinner, which was also cancelled) but to coincide with the release of “Topgun 2” we were invited to spend the week 23rd-29th May at the Boulevard, Banbridge with our Tornado cockpit complete with “Maverick” painted flying helmet.

Around June our sole Editor (Ron) was feeling the pressure and so we advertised within the Airmail for assistant Editor(s) – we got two responses from two very capable members and it was quickly decided that the pressure would soon be off – it did however take some six months before the assistance was realised and due credit must be given to Ron. Elsewhere, within the Society after just three months of being open, we had already exceeded the total number of visitors for the whole of 2021 and membership was still rising towards the 700 mark

At the end of June we received two “gifted” Tornado engines which were for installation whilst the third was being kept for display purposes.

In mid-July we were once again working with the film industry, this time, it was a BBC film crew who not only wanted to use some of our exhibits but also to film within the hangars. For two days we had the pleasure of having international film celebrity Pierce Brosnan with us and some members of the Society even managed to appear in the film! During the two days filming we probably got the PR photo of the century when 007 (Bond) posed with our very own 007 (F4 Phantom). Thanks here to both Alan Jarden and Edgar England for snapping some fabulous photos for our scrap-book.

In September our Patron AVM Harv Smyth was promoted to Air Marshall becoming 2 i/c Ops for the RAF and it was my pleasure to send him a congratulatory message from the Board of Trustees and every member of the Society. We also sent congratulations to ‘Elizabeth’ at Paul Trimble Printing who was retiring and who had looked after the Society membership for over 10 years, Elizabeth’s retirement was the precursor to a major change in both printing and distribution of the Society magazine. This was something the Board had thought about ‘on and off’ for many months but had never acted upon it however, when we were informed that we would have to do the membership ourselves we were left with no choice and so the major change was set in motion.

The death of HM Queen Elizabeth II was a major shock and led to thousands of events either being cancelled or rescheduled. EHOD was still taking place throughout the UK so the Board took the decision to open 10/11th September. By the end of September we had welcomed some 3000 visitors to our Collection, which at first sight might not seem a lot however, if you consider that each of those visitors received a two and a half to three hour guided tour that equates to someone talking all day for every day we were open!

Unlike previous years, in 2022 we remained open until November 30th and we took on a fairly major project to be held on October 15th. This was the dedication of our Bulldog aircraft to the memory of Sqn/Ldr Bob Burge who was the CO of Queen’s University Air Squadron when he was killed in a flying accident on 16th October 1992. The ceremony was a tremendous success not from a PR perspective but from Bob Burge’s family’s perspective as every single one of them left the Society’s hangar with a changed outlook on NI, the people who live here and of course the UAS. The Society made lots of new friends that day.

December was supposed to be a winding down month but typical of UAS we ended up going to the RAF Museum at Cosford twice, first time to dismantle the Meteor and secondly to load both the Meteor and the Sycamore – it was a very busy month, but both aircraft arrived safely at Long Kesh and both were eventually moved into Hangar 2.

Looking back at everything we did and achieved in 2022 I believe it was, without doubt, the busiest year to date in the Society’s history. A remarkable year with special thanks to our guiding team who eventually welcomed 4000 visitors to our Collection. Special thanks also to our hangar volunteers who produce incredible exhibits and to all our members who collectively make the UAS something unique. Special thanks too to all our benefactors, sponsors and supporters and finally to your Trustee Board members who have served throughout 2022 with unrivalled dedication. We are still a shining example of volunteering at its very best, here’s to a great 2023.

Ray Burrows MBE

(Chairman)