

ULSTER AVIATION SOCIETY (UAS)

ANNUAL REPORT: 1ST JANUARY 2023 – 31ST DECEMBER 2023

This is the eighth Annual Report for the Ulster Aviation Society, approved by the Society's Trustee Board on 26th October 2024.

2023 began with a flurry of activity, whilst the recently "gifted" Sycamore helicopter required virtually no work done to it, the Meteor aircraft which was in three major parts required considerable engineering expertise and a lot of time. Apart from this 'practical' activity, we had to bring the management of the Society's 700 strong membership 'in-house' after our membership admin contractor suddenly and unexpectedly decided to cease this piece of work in late 2022. As well as this, the Board decided it was best not to split membership and magazine production as both were closely allied – so the Society now undertook responsibility for both printing the monthly magazine and for its distribution. This turned out to be a mammoth task, taking a great deal of time from three Board members and it was almost a full year before the new computerised system was understood and 'tweaked' to suit the Society's requirements. Despite the upheaval and all the changes, we managed to retain annual family membership at £26. Also, to begin a new year we had a new Library operational, holding up to 6,000 aviation books and countless aviation magazines, together with a new Editor, who's first edition of "Ulster Airmail" appeared in February! Other 'projects' taking place around the hangars, included the move of three Royal Observer Corps rooms which would be combined into one larger room, the setting up of a new "simulator" room and a concerted effort to get the NI Schools 'Build a Plane' project going again. There is no doubt, that with the beginning of 2023, the Society was working 'flat-out'.

The one thing still missing, from what would be a 'normal' year was monthly members meetings. In April, the Board decided to reintroduce these meetings albeit 'every other' month. The first meeting since Covid (a Quiz night) was held at the Long Kesh hangars on 28th June with a further meeting at the hangars in August, the venue then transferring to CIYMS (East Belfast) for the October and December meetings. All were very well attended.

April 1st seen the 2023 AGM being held in the Long Kesh hangars and it was very encouraging to see some 50 members in attendance. Society business was quickly dealt with but, sadly we had to say goodbye to a Board member who had served passionately and enthusiastically for several years. April also saw the end of remedial repair work on both hangars, some of which had been extremely disruptive to exhibits and visitors alike but as this work finished, there were rumours that work would soon start to replace the front doors on hangar 2! In fact, the work began during May and continued throughout the summer, finally being completed in November.

With the ROC having vacated three rooms, the Board decided to make one a Simulator Room, another an 'Art Studio' whilst the third, would be used as a temporary storeroom. At the end of 2023, we had one simulator up and running whilst the 'Art Studio' was still being designed.

Elsewhere around Hangar 1, improvements were made to the Engine Room, WWII Room, Polish Room and the Sir Philip Foreman Room.

Whilst there were no rooms to be refurbished in Hangar 2, the last few months of 2023 were used to 'top out' the west side plinths with imitation grass. These were then used to set up a long overdue display featuring WWII aircraft "Wreckology". Items which had been recovered in the mid 1980's and 1990's were at last put on display.

Thanks to the RAF Heritage team, our promised 'Red Arrow' Hawk T1A aircraft arrived on site on Monday 15th May courtesy of the JARTS (Joint Aircraft Recovery & Transport Squadron) team, who put it together for us.

Our second new exhibit in 2023 was our Jaguar GR1 which necessitated a Society 'working party' going to RAF Cosford near Wolverhampton, to complete the dismantling process to allow transportation home – this project took place during November.

As well as receiving new exhibits during 2023, major restoration work continued apace on the following projects:- Gannet, Sea Prince, Wildcat, Meteor, Devon cockpit and the AEC Matador vehicle. We also managed to have both Tornado engines installed.

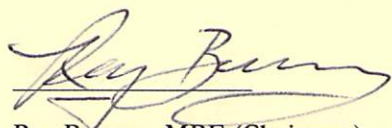
The "NI Schools Build a Plane" (NISBP) project which had ground to a halt due to Covid took flight again, albeit in a reduced capacity. Starting in January there were 5 pupils from RBAI (Royal Belfast Academical Institution) who attended the hangars on a Wednesday afternoon for the fuselage build, whilst the wings were transported to Limavady to be assembled by pupils from both Limavady High School and St. Mary's Grammar School.

With progress on the build being extremely slow (estimated at another 2 years to complete), it was agreed by the NISBP Board that the project should be offered to the Belfast Metropolitan College, where the pupils would have a much better understanding of aeronautical engineering – the College accepted the offer and agreed to start work on the project in early 2024.

As in past years, we lost members during 2023 due to illness, but it was a particularly sad and cruel year as we said goodbye to some very long standing and extremely active members: David McKelvey, Jimmy Lappin, Mervyn Johnston, Michael Clarke and George Grace. RIP.

As a totally voluntary Society, we are dependent on donations from both the public and our own members. To interact with the public, we once again attended various outdoor events including Shane's Castle Steam Rally, Armed Forces Day, Lisburn Mayor's Fun Day and the Royal Agricultural Show at Balmoral. Again, this year we were able to open seven days a week for public visits/tours but the highlight of the year was the two day European Heritage Open Days (EHOD) in September at which we had some 3,500 visitors. Total visitor numbers for 2023 was a staggering 9,200 which is more than double the 2022 figure of 4,000!

Taking the overall visitor numbers, combined with membership numbers officially reaching 770+ by the years end, 2023 was certainly one of the busiest, if not the busiest year in the Society's history. Once again special thanks to our 'Tour Guides' and 'Volunteers' who give so freely of their time and without who's input we would not accomplish our aims. Mention must also be made, of the Companies and Members whose generous donations have enabled us to raise our standards and profile. Finally, special mention of my fellow Board members without who's dedication and hard work the Society simply would not be where it is today – recognised as one of the top 10% visitor attractions in the world and having one of the best aviation Collections in the UK.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Burrows', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Ray Burrows MBE (Chairman)