

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

ROYAL AIRCRAFT FACTORY F.E.2b 'A6526'

(Incorporating nacelle frame 84/A/450)

c.1917-18 Nacelle built by Richard Garrett & Sons Ltd of Leiston, near Lowestoft, Suffolk. This long established engineering firm received a contract - No. A.S. 34281 dated 14 Nov 1917- to supply 60 complete 160hp Beardmore powered F.E.2b aircraft serialled D3776 - D3835, delivered between weeks ending 1 May 1918 and 12 October 1918. These were a follow on from building 250 fuselage nacelles under sub-contract for Boulton & Paul built F.E.2d's serialled A6351 - A6600. These were completed and erected by Boulton & Paul at Norwich to contract 87/A/658 and delivered between week ending 20 Jan 1917 and w/e 18 Aug 1917, with A6571 - A6600 actually completed as F.E.2bs except for A6572.

Boulton & Paul had been requested to assist Garrett and other East Anglian manufacturers into aircraft production, helping them to take over production of the F.E. 2b.

Garrett had also received one order, contract No. 35a/285/C.255 dated 3 April 1918, for 50 160hp Beardmore powered F.E.2b aircraft serialled E6687 - E6736 which were later cancelled.

There was also a cancelled order from Garrett for 100 230-hp Siddeley Puma powered F.E.2h aircraft serialled F9296 - F9395 - contract No.35a/1192/C.1126 of 17 August 1918 - another possible explanation for a 'spare' F.E.2 nacelle at the works if construction had actually started prior to cancellation, since it was later reduced to an order for 25 aircraft only and then following the Armistice cancelled on 18 February 1919 with no deliveries made. Examination of the nacelle by restoration contractor John McKenzie in 2000 revealed that it had never been completed, and was missing various drill holes etc.

c. Apr. 76 Nacelle frame loaned to RAF Museum by Richard Garrett Engineering Ltd.- it may have originated with the Boulton Paul contract or one of the cancelled contracts but was never delivered. At this time the old established Garrett company had just been taken over by a Saudi Arabian Group and finally closed down in 1980.

Bare nacelle frame stored at RAFM Reserve Collection & Restoration Centre, RAF Cardington, Beds.

- 30 Apr 77 Displayed to the public for the first time. Photo - Cross & Cockade GB Vol. 8 No.2 (1977) p.74
- Nov 87 Project for construction of reproduction wings, wing struts, tailplane, undercarriage and other components including scratch built radiator, oil tank, 3 fuel tanks, and pilot's seat underway by John McKenzie (Trading as Aircraft & Weapon Reproductions) of Shirley, Southampton, Hants following RAFM approval of the project in April 1986 - it had originally been proposed in April 1985. Mr. Mckenzie had previously completed the framework of the RAFM BE2b reproduction now displayed in the Bomber Hall and following completion of this project early in 1988 he began machining new metal parts for the FE2B late that year.
- The completed aircraft incorporates these new build components, the original nacelle frame and the fully restored 160hp Beardmore engine purchased in 1992 and displayed in the main aircraft hall from early 1993, later moving to RAF Wyton and RAFM Cosford. The engine originated in the Auckland area of New Zealand
- Spring 2000 Nacelle to new RAFM temporary restoration facility at RAF Wyton, Cambs.
- Sep 00 Successful trial fit of engine to nacelle at RAF Wyton.
- Oct 00 Nacelle moved to John McKenzie at Southampton for conservation and construction of missing parts; completed wings, centre section and tailplane moved to RAF Wyton for storage. Photo at Southampton; Aeroplane August 2007 p.6.
- 30 Oct 01 Wings and tailplane to RAFM Stafford via RAFM Cosford.
- 10 May 07 Contract with John McKenzie brought to a close and Nacelle and other remaining components transferred from Southampton to RAFM Cosford.
- 15 Apr 08 Following tendering process, components including engine and propeller moved from Stafford/Cosford to Guy Black's Retrotec Ltd at Westfield, Nr Hastings, East Sussex. They completed the last 10% of construction, restored the engine, assembled the aircraft and then fabricated and painted it, with the representative FE 2b serial number 'A6526'. Colour profile – Cross & Cockade International Summer 2009 Vol 40/2 rear cover.

The original A6526 was with No. 148 Squadron by 2 April 1918, moving to No 58 Squadron by 14 May 1918, 102 Squadron 28 September 1918, damaged hitting shell hole in forced landing on night bombing sortie 8 October 1918, and deleted 16 October 1918.

26 May 09 Completed aircraft delivered to RAFM Hendon for assembly by Retrotec staff over the following week, with formal unveiling 1 July 2009. Photos being assembled and on display – Flypast August 2009 pp.42 – 45; Aeroplane August 2009 p.4; Cross & Cockade International Summer 2009 Vol 40/2 front cover; Scale Aircraft Modelling August 2009 p.30; Wrecks and Relics 22nd Edition; The Flying M Spring 2012 p.15; RADAR Issue 4, Winter 2014 p.26.

Sept 2014 Dismantled and moved to Grahame White Factory for display in new WW1 exhibition opened December 2014, being placed on suspended display – suspension date October 2014.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

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