

**SOPWITH SNIPE 'E6655'**  
**MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER X006-0349**

Acquisition of a Sopwith Snipe had been a long-term aim of the RAF Museum, with a particular desire to mark the type's inter-war service as part of the colonial policing role then such a vital role for the RAF.

Through the fortuitous survival of a contemporary large-scale model made for founding RAF Museum Chairman of Trustees MRAF Sir Dermot Boyle by his ground crew, some well-recorded colour scheme details of an airframe with a known provenance were available. The model remains in the possession of his family, who kindly made it available for reference by the Museum.

2009

First components specifically acquired towards the planned rebuild; Original all-metal Snipe-type tail surfaces (fin, rudder, elevator (new build by Skysport) and horizontal surfaces) restored in the 1920s silver and yellow-doped scheme of the No 1 Squadron aircraft (E6655/B) originally flown from RAF Hinaidi in Iraq in 1926 by (later) MRAF Sir Dermot Boyle, first Chairman of Trustees of the RAF Museum, by Skysport Engineering, Hatch, Beds. These originated from Shuttleworth Collection Sopwith Dove G-EBKY, built from unused Pup parts and first registered March 1925 (now flying as Sopwith Pup 9917/N5180), to which they were fitted, in modified form, in May 1927 following a post-April 1927 crash rebuild by the Fairey Aviation Co Ltd using parts including spare fuselage supplied by Messrs H.G. Hawker Eng. Co Ltd. An overhaul in 1930 included the fitting of seven new ribs to this tailplane, and a new trailing edge and one rib fitted to the elevator. Photo as fitted to G-EBKY; Aeroplane Monthly November 1981 p.630.

The tailplane was removed from the Pup/Dove in a restoration in 1969/1970 and reverse engineered to their original Snipe standard. These parts were initially delivered to RAFM Hendon for display in the GWF on 14 May 2010, RAFM accession numbers X005-2747, 2750 and 2751.

The original E6655 was one of 150 Snipes ordered from Coventry Ordnance Works on 20 March 1918, of which E6537 to E6656 were delivered between 4 January 1919 and September 1919.

An important original component was the Bentley BR.2 rotary engine of the type fitted to the Snipe; built by the Humber Motor Company, this was RAFM accession number 72/E/466, ex Leicester Museum in 1972, formerly displayed at Manchester Air and Space Museum, the Shuttleworth Collection, and RAFM Cosford. It is fitted with an original Snipe propeller, RAFM 74/E/395.

Other original Snipe components held and accessioned by the RAF Museum and used in this restoration include a pair of port and starboard upper ailerons 72/A/484-5, acquired in 1972.

Also held was a pair of wartime-produced original lower ailerons, X005-2798-99, of unknown provenance. X005-2798 was an original starboard aileron, with most of its original fabric; X005-2799 is a starboard aileron converted to a port aileron by Skysport Engineering to make a handed pair for the intended composite restoration.

There were also incomplete port upper and starboard lower mainplanes 80/A/1807 acquired from a private donor in Bedford, also used in the restoration.

Other original Snipe components held at RAFM Stafford and mostly able to be incorporated in the reconstruction included unused wooden bearers for the main fuel tank and other fuselage vertical struts, plus two cabane struts, spar/wing rib fragments, six interplane struts including 78/A/1161-62 (these two Ruston Hornsby made struts originally being acquired from the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough) and a control column top grip, a switchbox (X002-3449) magneto and Thomson Bennett magneto switch, and several cockpit lamps.

The reconstruction of this composite Snipe was undertaken by the Vintage Aviator Ltd (TVAL) Wellington, New Zealand as part of an exchange deal. As detailed above, it was possible for TVAL to incorporate many original RAFM Snipe items into this static airframe incorporating new-build components (mainly for the fuselage) where necessary.

19 Nov 2010 Parts despatched to New Zealand by airfreight for assessment by TVAL arriving 29 November. Composite original components/new-build airframe, whose construction was well under way by January 2012, with fuselage frame and wings complete, but uncovered.

TVAL allocates nicknames to its aircraft during their build, pending agreement of the final 'identity'; the Snipe was known as 'Santana'

Completed composite airframe shipped to UK (container to Southampton Docks).

10 Aug 2012 Delivered by road to Shuttleworth Collection's Old Warden Aerodrome, Beds for initial reassembly and display alongside TVAL-built RE.8 (assembled first upon delivery) and Albatross D.Va, also for the RAF Museum. Assembly underway by 19<sup>th</sup> August. Photo as of 14 August – Aeroplane October 2012 p.6. Also WW1 Aero November 2012 pp.57 – 58.

- 29 Aug 2012 Formal unveiling at Old Warden press day. Photos – Flying M Autumn 2012 p.2; Air Britain Aviation World Winter 2012 p.192.
- 22 Sep 2012 On view at ‘Shuttleworth Uncovered’ event. Photo – Prop-Swing Winter 2012 p.41.
- 25 Oct 2012 By road to RAFM Hendon for display in Milestones Building, being assembled 29/30 October. Photo on display – Aeroplane February 2013 p.6.
- 16 Jul 2013 By road to RAF Fairford, Glos for BAe village pavilion display at Royal International Air Tattoo 20 – 21 July, returning to Hendon the following Tuesday, 23 July.

Original Snipes are rare. The fuselage of William Barker VC’s E8102 is preserved in the War Museum, Ottawa, and the Aviation and Space Museum, Ottawa has the complete Snipe E6938/B. Former Cole Palen airframe E8100/E8105, later passed to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC; it was the last original Snipe to fly, c. 1966.

**TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON**

**RAF MUSEUM 2013**