

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

SOPWITH 5F.I DOLPHIN C3988
Incorporates rear fuselage 77/A/475

The Sopwith Dolphin single - seat fighting scout served operationally from Jan 1918 to July 1919; at its peak in Oct 1918 it equipped five RAF Squadrons, mainly in France and including a handful with No.141 Squadron on home defence duties. A total of 1,778 were built in Britain 1917-19, with possibly a few others in France; 1,055 remained on RAF charge at the end of Oct.1918. Production ended in August 1919 and the type was declared obsolete 1 Sep 1921.

- 67 The late Doug Bianchi of Personal Plane services at Booker advertised in 'Exchange & Mart' for old aircraft parts; one response offered him a collection of Sopwith Dolphin components.
- Jun 67 This collection of Sopwith Dolphin components was purchased by the RAF Museum from Mr J.S.Liming of St.Leonards, East Sussex. These comprised nose, top, and under cowling; (two identified in 2006 as probable Bristol F.2b) main fuel tank; two radiators; header tank; gravity petrol tank, section of bulkhead, three wheels, one with half axle; two centre section struts, fin, two metal fittings, maker's name plate and engine data plate and sundry struts. Accessioned as 68/A/409 A-N, March 1968.
- These components originated with Hooper & Co Ltd, London SW.I built Dolphin D5329 from the serial batch D5201 - D5400 built to contract A.S.17566 dated 28 Jun 1917, serials allotted 19th December 1917 and delivered between March 1918 and 10 May 1919. The late Jack Bruce suggested that D5329 was probably completed during the week ending 26 Oct 1918 and may have been delivered straight into store without ever having an engine fitted; this is supported by subsequent research which records no known history for this airframe.
- 68-70 Construction of Dolphin replica using the above components underway at RAF Henlow, although still recorded as a box of components in 1989.
- 73 Restoration work again underway
- 74 Restoration work suspended with the move of the Museum workshops from Henlow to Cardington.
- c.Apr 77 Six foot length of rear fuselage framework purchased from Kent Arms Sales at Bexley. Accession number 77/A/475. This bore a data plate with the serial no. C3988 from the serial batch C3777 - C4276 ordered from the Sopwith Aviation Co Ltd at Kingston -on-Thames, Surrey on 29 June 1917 to contract A.S.17137, with serials allotted that same day, and delivered between

Nov.1917 and 20 April 1918. This was the largest single order received by the Sopwith Company up to that time.

The late Jack Bruce suggested that C3988 was delivered week ending 26 January 1918, and may have served with a training unit, although the surviving maker's plate on C3988 carries the date 1919. Subsequent research indicates that it was tested at 7 AAP (Aircraft Acceptance Park) at RFC Kenley on 1st February 1918, by Acceptance Park test pilot and instructor Lt (later ACM, D.F.C.) Leslie N. Hollinghurst who recorded the aircraft/flight in his logbook as 'dud'.

97 Restoration underway at Cardington using the St.Leonards components, and the rear fuselage section serialled C3988, from which the identity of this reconstruction is taken.

An original set of horizontal tail surfaces including elevators (78/A/1262) was also incorporated into the restoration - this was donated by the Shuttleworth Trust, and was worked on during the year. The original top fabric cover for the main tailplane has the faint traces of stencilled serial number C4033 on it, this airframe being completed as a direct-drive Hispano Suiza powered Dolphin III with no recorded history. This was from serial number block C3777 – C4276: ordered as 500 Sopwith 5F1 Dolphin I built by the Sopwith Aviation Co Ltd to Contract AS17137 dated 29.6.17, with serials allotted that day. Order fulfilled 20.4.18.

Just to add to the pot, the original elevator covers acquired with the main tailplane are stencilled with yet another serial, D3725, a Dolphin I also with no recorded history, from serials batch D3576 – D3775 : 200 Sopwith 5F1 Dolphin I built by the Sopwith Aviation Co Ltd to Contract AS35977 dated 29.11.17, with serials already allotted 22.11.17. Order fulfilled 1.6.18.

Further work in 1997 included assembling and rigging the fuselage fame, which had new ash longerons machined and fitted.

Photos of completed fuselage frame, with John Chapman MBE, the Cardington Technician who oversaw this renewed phase of restoration - Aeroplane Monthly Mar 98 p.11; Windsock International Mar/Apr 1998 p.24. Further photos of completed fuselage frame - Aeroplane Monthly Jun 98 p.8; Flypast Jul 98 p.15; The Flying M Yearbook 1998 p.28;

2000 Moved to temporary RAFM Restoration Facility at RAF Wyton, Cambs. Photos at this stage of restoration; Flypast February 2000 p.68; Flypast January 2001 p.26; Aeroplane February 2001 pp. 71-73. The rear fuselage incorporates original side/horizontal frame members and stern post and two centre section struts are original but the rest of the wood structure is new build.

27 Nov 2001 By road to new RAFM restoration centre at RAF Cosford due to impending closure of RAFM facility at RAF Wyton. Photos at Cosford; WW1 Aero May 2003; Wrecks and Relics 19th Edition; Aeroplane December 2010 p.8. Restoration completed 2012. Photos of restoration at Cosford – Flypast July 2010 p.22 and May 2012 pp.38-40; Wrecks and Relics 22nd Edition; Aircraft Magazine December 2011 p.11; Aeroplane February 2012 p.6 (trial rigged). Work included fabrication of ammunition case, radiator shutter mechanism and cowling support frames and instrument panel, with significant input by Aerospace Society volunteers. For full account of restoration, see The Sopwith Dolphin in RFC, RNAS, RAF and Polish Service (Cross & Cockade 2012) pp. 169-176; Flightpath Vol 23 No 4, 2012.

The project uses an original 220 hp Hispano-Suiza engine (70/E/337) No.100131 which was purchased as one of a pair from a private vendor in New York State, USA, in 1969 and shipped to the UK in 1970. Other contemporary components incorporated include pilot's seat, streamline wires and propeller (74/E/396).

13 Feb 2012 Completed aircraft rolled out for photography at RAFM Cosford. Photos – Aeroplane May 2012 p.6; Flypast May 2012 pp.7/39.

29 Feb 2012 By road to RAFM Hendon; assembled for display 5-7th March, and formally unveiled 16 March. Photos of unveiling; Windsock Worldwide May/June 2012 p.4. Photo on display; Flypast July 2012 p.10; Wrecks and Relics 24 Edition (2014).

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