

PERCIVAL PRENTICE T.1 VS618 /G-AOLK
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER X005-0834

One of 349 production standard Percival P.40 Prentice Tiger Moth replacement two-seat basic trainer aircraft built for RAF service as the RAF's first side-by-side trainer, and delivered 1947-49, serving as trainers until late 1953 and for training air signallers until mid-1956. Built under sub-contract at the Blackburn Aircraft factory at Brough, serials block VS609 – VS758. Contract No 623. Constructor's number PAC/225. A total of 483 Prentices were built including some for Argentina and India.

- 5 May 49 First Flight, at Luton.

- 13 May 49 Awaiting Collection.

- 18 May 49 To No 22 Flying Training School (FTS), RAF Syerston, Notts. Used to train Royal Navy personnel as pilots. Carried fuselage codes FCL-V until 1951, and then O-D. This unit used the Prentice until November 1953.

- 26 Oct 53 Accident, Cat. 2 damage, caused undercarriage damage during landing by student. Repaired.

- 9 Mar 54 To No 9 Maintenance Unit, RAF Cosford, Salop for storage.

- 17 Aug 55 Declared non-effective aircraft.

- 25 Apr 56 Transferred to civil register as G-AOLK.

- 11 May 56 Sold to Freddie Laker's Aviation Traders Ltd at Southend, Essex. Aviation Traders purchased from the Ministry of Supply an eventual 252 of the RAF's Prentices for civil conversion, making them nominally the 8th or 9th largest air force in the world at the time, with the aircraft ferried from RAF Maintenance Units at Cosford, High Ercall and Shawbury, all in Shropshire, to Southend as 'Operation Prentice' with RAF markings painted out and civil registrations crudely painted over them. Between April and July 1956, 33 pilots ferried 92 Prentices to Southend and another 58 to Stansted.

Only 28 of these Prentices reached civil certification, with only 19 actually being sold, being fuel-guzzlingly expensive to operate and outsold by imported American types, the rest being dumped in heaps and scrapped at Southend and Stansted in the early 1960s. Those Laker did sell were generally painted silver-grey, upholstered in grey vinyl with red trimmings, with a bench seat for three behind the pair of pilot's seats, initially selling at £2000 (later £1500) including a four-channel radio.

- 1958/1960 Registered to Aviation Traders (Engineering) and held in long-term storage awaiting conversion for the private/executive/charter role; it was the last civil Prentice conversion, between June and December 1960.
- May 61 Purchased by A.S (Bert) Wright at Hornchurch. t/a Air Touring Club, Biggin Hill
- 6 Nov 62 Registered to Bert Wright (Aviation) Lt Crayford.
- 7 May 64 Offered for sale in Flight International magazine with six seats and long –range fuel tanks for ‘£1,760 or offer’.
- 28 Jul 64 Registered to Mr Alan Hilton Smith, Crayford, the owner for most of the next 45 years.
- 4 Jan 71 To Hilton Aviation Ltd.
- 8 Jul 82 Registered to Alan Hilton, Gravesend.
- 1971-82 Registered to Hilton Aviation Ltd, Southend, Essex, still owned by Alan Hilton; flown in a variety of purely civil colour schemes over the years, including one in October 1991. Photos – On the Wings of a Gull (Air Britain) p.269 and colour section p.IX.
- Not flown 20 October 1993 – 21 March 1995. Also grounded 10 October 1998 – 15 October 2000, but aircraft kept serviceable and taxied at regular intervals. Then grounded until 23 May 2001 following overhaul.
- Still airworthy 2009.
- 14 Sep 77 New CAA Aircraft logbook issued. By this date the aircraft had flown 2554 hours. It received regular overhauls and maintenance at Biggin Hill Airport, Kent, and at its home base of Southend Airport, Essex.
- 1 Jan 95 Certificate of Airworthiness expired.
- 24 Sep 2009 Flown from temporary storage at North Weald, Essex, (where it had arrived on 13 December 2008) to Shuttleworth Collection’s airfield at Old Warden, Beds, and from there to Henlow, Beds for some fabric repair work.
- 4 Oct 2009 Flown on five separate flights totalling 4.40 hours at White Waltham airfield by Ben Cox in formation with the only two other airworthy Prentices, VR259/G-APJB from Coventry and G-APPL from Biggin Hill. Photos – Aircraft illustrated December 2009 pp. 8-9. Further 1.5 hour penultimate flight the following day.

Photos in flight around this time – Flypast December 2009 p.6;
Aeroplane December 2009 p.5; Wrecks and Relics 22nd Edition.

9 Oct 2009 Following purchase by RAF Museum, flown by Ben Cox from
Coventry to RAFM Cosford for restoration and display. This 45
minute flight gave a total aircraft flying hours of 3045.45.

Fist publicly displayed at MBCC open week November 2009.

9 Feb 2010 Cancelled from civil register.

Jun 2010 Repainted by MBCC staff into original 22 FTS colours.

17 Aug 2010 By road to RAFM Hendon for display. Photo loading at Cosford –
Flypast October 2010 p.8.

9 Oct 2010 Registration cancelled.

One of some 17 Prentice survivors worldwide.

CAA Aircraft logbook 14 September 1977 – 9 October 2010 with DoRIS at Hendon.

TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON

RAF MUSEUM 2013