

24 March 2016

‘Sir Alan Cobham’s Flying Circus: A life of a Pioneering Aviator’ exhibition now on display

Date: 24 March 2016 - 30 April 2017

Entrance: FREE

A brand new exhibition dedicated to a civil aviation giant is now on display at the Royal Air Force Museum Cosford. The exhibition entitled ‘Sir Alan Cobham’s Flying Circus: A life of a Pioneering Aviator’ focuses on one of Britain’s forgotten heroes, Sir Alan Cobham, a true aviation pioneer, both in the air and on the ground.

The display was officially opened by Lady Cobham on Wednesday 23 March during a private event and will run until 30 April 2017. Cobham was a long distance aviator and an aeronautical innovator who became famous for his exploits in the interwar years. This exhibition showcases his diverse flying career and the contributions he made to the world of aviation, most notably the ‘Air to Air’ refuelling technique, still used by air forces across the globe today. He inspired countless members of the public to have successful flying careers, including Shropshire born Spitfire ace Eric Stanley Lock.

Cobham learned to fly during the First World War and later went on to set many long distance aviation records. He became the first person to fly from London to Cape Town and back in 1926 for which he received the Air Force Cross. In the same year at the age of 32, Cobham was knighted by King George V after the successful completion of his Australia flight, where he famously landed his seaplane on the River Thames outside the Houses of Parliament. He won many notable aviation trophies including the King’s Cup air race in 1924 and the Britannia Trophy in 1923, 1925 and 1926. All three Britannia plaques are on display as part of the exhibition, along with a medal case which includes Cobham’s Knight Commander of the British Empire badge and star.

Cobham was one of the biggest celebrities of his day and was well-known for his series of flying tours of the United Kingdom, Ireland and South Africa, which became affectionately known as ‘Sir Alan Cobham’s Flying Circus’. These tours promoted aviation to the public and were a source of inspiration for countless pilots in the Second World War. Tours of the UK during the 1930s included several shows in the Midlands; Castle Bromwich Aerodrome in Birmingham, Harlescott Flying Ground in Shrewsbury, Stafford Common in Stafford and Kitchen Lane in Wednesfield, Wolverhampton were just some of the many locations to host the show.

Brave, visionary and innovative, Cobham was a record setter who inspired a generation. One such pilot who had his first flight with Sir Alan Cobham’s Flying Circus, was Spitfire fighter ace Flight Lieutenant Eric Stanley Lock who was born in Bayston Hill near Shrewsbury, Shropshire. He was credited with 26 confirmed victories and received the Distinguished Service Order for ‘his magnificent fighting spirit and personal example which have been in the highest traditions of the service’.

In the years that followed his circus success, Cobham went on to pioneer the aeronautical technique of air-to-air refuelling with his company Flight Refuelling Limited. So advanced was the technology he developed, his ‘probe and drogue’ technique is still used today in its fifth generation. His legacy to aviation lives on through his aerospace company which still continues to pioneer aeronautical technologies.

This exhibition is a highly visual display of Sir Alan Cobham's life and his many notable achievements, showcasing some of the 'treasures' from the collection including a Union Flag that was flown on Cobham's de Havilland D.H.50J biplane during his Cape Town flight. Other items on display include a flying helmet, log book and personal letters to his mother. The exhibition also features film footage that will show how he turned aviation into a breathtaking spectacle. Visitors to the Museum can now view the exhibition in the museum's Temporary Exhibition Gallery in Hangar 1 until 30 April 2017.

RAF Museum Curator, Daniel Albon said:

"Sir Alan Cobham was famous for saying "It's a full time job being Alan Cobham" and after curating this exhibition I certainly think he was right! This exhibition was extremely well received at RAF Museum London and I am really excited that it is now launching at RAF Museum Cosford. We have some brand new objects and panels in this exhibition that I'm sure will be well received by visitors at Cosford."

For further information please visit the Museum website www.rafmuseum.org/cosford or call 01902 376200. The Museum is open daily from 10am and entry is FREE of charge.

Ends...

Notes to Editors:

- All images used should be credited: By kind permission of Lady Cobham.
- For further information about Shropshire Spitfire ace Eric Stanley Lock, click here: <http://www.bbm.org.uk/Lock.htm>
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- Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, Shifnal, Shropshire, TF11 8UP
- Open daily from 10am
- Admission to the Royal Air Force Museum is free of charge.
- RAF Museum Cosford images & logo available at:
<http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/media-vault.aspx>
- For further information and all media enquiries please contact Michelle Morgans on 01902 376212 or email michelle.morgans@rafmuseum.org