

2 February 2016

## Spitfire legends honoured at 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary event

**Date:** 5 March 2016

**Time:** Talk 1 – 11.30am

Talk 2 – 2.15pm

**Cost:** FREE

**The Supermarine Spitfire, the most famous British fighter aircraft in history first took to the skies on 5 March 1936 and won immortal fame throughout the summer months of 1940 by helping to defeat the German air attacks during the Battle of Britain. The Royal Air Force Museum Cosford will be marking eighty years since the first flight of the Spitfire on Saturday 5 March 2016, with a day of special talks.**

The talks will pay tribute to Spitfire creator RJ Mitchell CBE and Vickers Supermarine test pilot Alex Henshaw MBE and the men of the Battle of Britain.

In the first talk entitled '**R. J. Mitchell CBE, the Spitfire and the Battle of Britain . . . Their Finest Hour**', Tony tells the story of Staffordshire born R. J. Mitchell CBE, the creator of Britain's most iconic aircraft and some of the men who flew Spitfires in the Battle of Britain. The Spitfire, an evolution from the Schneider Trophy Races, first flew in 1936, remained in production through the 1940s and in service throughout the 1950s. Hear stories from some of the men who fought the Battle of Britain, including a distinguished Luftwaffe ace in interviews recorded with Tony. The talk will commence at 11.30am lasting approximately one hour.

The second talk of the day entitled '**Alex Henshaw MBE. . . The Flight of the Mew Gull and Sigh for a Merlin**' includes video footage of Alex Henshaw telling his own story. He won the King's Cup Air Race and achieved a record-breaking solo flight from London to Cape Town and back in four and a half days with just a compass, a chronometer and a set of maps - a record unbeaten for more than 70 years. He served throughout the war as Chief Production Test Pilot for Vickers Supermarine, personally testing more than 2,000 Spitfires and the occasional Lancaster at both Southampton and Castle Bromwich (now the Jaguar factory). He finished his flying career marketing aircraft in South Africa where he flew his last epic flight. During the video footage, Alex recalls memories of his heroic tales including flying an aircraft down the centre of Broad Street in Birmingham when asked by the Mayor. The talk will commence at 2.15pm lasting approximately an hour and 15 minutes.

The talks will be presented by Tony Edwards, a friend of Alex Henshaw. Tony has enjoyed a comprehensive career within the aerospace industry, commercially, within the Ministry of Defence and Academia. He is a keen supporter of the Royal Air Force Museum and a former Trustee.

Both talks will take place in the museum's lecture theatre inside the National Cold War Exhibition and are suitable for all ages.

Don't forget, that of the 1,566 Spitfire I's that were built, the RAF Museum Cosford is home to the world's oldest surviving example of its type. Especially for this 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary event, the canopy will be opened and visitors can get an up-close view of the cockpit. The Spitfire is displayed alongside the Hurricane in the Museum's War in the Air hangar and viewing will be available all day.

The Museum is open daily from 10am and entry is FREE of charge. To book your place on the FREE talks, please visit the Museums website [www.rafmuseum.org/cosford](http://www.rafmuseum.org/cosford). Keep up to date with the latest news and event information by following us on:



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Ends...

### Notes to Editors:

#### About Tony Edwards BSc MBA CEng FRAeS

Tony is a Rolls-Royce apprenticed engineer who has led a number of engineering-based companies in the USA, Denmark, Canada and the UK: – General Electric (USA), Motorola, Bombardier / Canadair, Lucas Aerospace and Messier-Dowty. He put together the latter as the only European-based aerospace equipment company with a global market share of more than 50%. Later, he was seconded to the MoD where he served as Head of DESO (Defence Export Services Organisation).

He is a Freeman of the City of London, Warden to the Court of the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers, Liveryman of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Engineers.

He gained an engineering degree from the University of Birmingham and later an MBA with Distinction from the Harvard Business School. He then joined the Harvard Faculty as a Lecturer. More recently he was a Visiting Professor at the UK Defence Academy, Shrivenham.

He served as a trustee for a number of charities connected with military aviation: the RAF Museum, Battle of Britain Memorial Trust and Fly Navy Heritage Trust. He has been responsible for raising several million pounds for these charities.

He is President of the British Aviation Preservation Council and, uniquely, he was elected President of the SBAC (Society of British Aerospace Companies), President of the Royal Aeronautical Society and Chairman of the Air League. HRH the Duke of Edinburgh presented him with The Air League Gold Medal for Services to the Cause of Aviation.

- 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](mailto:michelle.morgans@rafmuseum.org)
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