

Grumpy Old Men's Club update

Our September outing was to the Imperial War Museum Duxford which is, to quote the guide book, "a museum like no other".

Duxford is renowned as one of the world's leading aviation museums, housing an extraordinary collection of historic aircraft. It is, however, much more than that - Duxford stands apart from other aviation museums because the site is an exhibit in itself.

The airfield has a history that stretches back to the First World War, with most of the original hangars to prove it. It served as a base for many of the Spitfire and Hurricane pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain and then later in the Second World War it was the base for American Thunderbolts and Mustangs that took off to carry the fight deep into Hitler's Germany.

Given the size of museum we opted to visit two of the main exhibitions, one at each end of the site. Firstly, we visited 'AirSpace' which has interactive galleries and many famous aircraft including a Spitfire, a Vulcan Bomber, a Lancaster and a Concorde.



We were fortunate that we were able to see inside this Concorde. G-AXDN (101) was a British Pre-Production variant used for testing and development. It had its maiden flight on 17th December 1971 and was piloted by BAC's chief test pilot Brian Trubshaw and co-pilot John Cochrane.

In March 1974, this aircraft achieved a speed of Mach 2.23 (1,450 mph) at an altitude of 63,700 feet. This was the fastest speed ever flown by a Concorde but the altitude record was subsequently beaten when another Concorde reached 68,000 feet. On the 7th November 1974, this aircraft flew from RAF Fairford to Bangor USA in 2 hours 56 minutes which is the fastest ever East-West crossing of the Atlantic by a commercial aircraft.

On the 20th August 1977 G-AXDN arrived at Duxford on its final flight, once again with Brian Trubshaw and John Cochrane at the helm. Concorde entered commercial service on 21st January 1976 and flew for nearly 28 years until being retired at the end of 2003.

Our second port of call, after the obligatory coffee stop, was the 'American Air Museum' at the far end of the site. We were treated to various aircraft landing and taking off as we walked to the 'American Air Museum'. The highlight, however, was the Spitfire and Mustang which lined up side by side before taking to the air – a most impressive sight and sound!



The 'American Air Museum' follows the story of Anglo-American co-operation from the First World War to the present day. The hangar is full of impressive aircraft, most of which are suspended from the ceiling.



Some, however, are too large to be suspended, the Lockheed Blackbird sits menacingly on the hangar floor....



whereas the B-52 Stratofortress just dwarfs everything else in the hangar!



There was much speculation as to how this aircraft ever managed to be fitted into the hangar, it stretched almost from back to front and side to side.

Other exhibits include 'Flying Aircraft' where historic privately owned aircraft are restored and maintained; 'Historic Duxford' which tells the story of RAF Duxford and the lives of the people who lived and worked there; 'Battle of Britain' which tells the story of the Battle of Britain and Britain's wider air defence from the First World War to the Cold War, to name just a few.