

# **A Visit to the Midlands Air Museum**

**August 2017**

At its heart, the Midland Air Museum celebrated the life and work of Frank Whittle, the inventor of the turbo-jet engine on which the aircraft industry relies so heavily today for both commercial and military purposes. Unfortunately, his initial attempts to persuade the British Ministry of Defence that his design for a turbo-jet engine was worthy of further development was rejected. It was considered to be impractical and not worth the financial risk. Although he had taken out a patent for the initial design, in light of the government's lack of interest in funding any further development it was allowed to lapse. Subsequently, the design work for the engine became more widely publicized and it was only when a German manufacturer started to take an interest in developing a turbo-jet engine that the British Ministry of Defence woke up to its potential as an alternative to propeller-driven aircraft, given the superior power of the jet engine for military purposes.

A lengthy film charting the course of Frank Whittle's involvement in the subsequent development of the jet-engine for both military and commercial purposes gave a fascinating insight into the struggle that inventors must face when huge amounts of money are required to (quite literally!) get an idea off the ground. Moreover, it was not until 1948 (some three years after World War Two ended in which the jet engine played such an important role) that Frank Whittle was honoured with a Knighthood for his unique contribution to aeronautical engineering.

Apart from the hundreds of both small and large aircraft models and associated memorabilia displayed in the covered part of the Museum itself, there were possibly a further 30 'mothballed' aircraft shells in the grounds outside, including a Vulcan bomber manufactured in the 1960's, which at that time was an all-important part of the U.K.'s strategic airborne defence system. Sitting in the confined space of its cockpit would have been five crew members (pilot, co-pilot, two navigators and a flight technician). Only 16 of these magnificent aircraft still exist today but, sadly, none of them airworthy.

Thank you to Colin for organizing yet another interesting day out.

*Janet Cato,*

*August 2017*

[Museum website](#)