



## **Hampshire is ready for take-off in RAF centenary year**

Hampshire can stake a strong claim to have been at the very forefront of the formation of the RAF, in 1918.

Farnborough, in the north east of the county, is where the Army established its Royal Engineers Balloon School in 1906. It also happens to be where the 'daring-do' pioneer pilot Samuel Franklin Cody made the first successful powered flight in Britain in 1908; where one of the forerunners of the RAF, the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), was created; and where the so-called "Father of the RAF", Hugh Montague Trenchard commanded the Military Wing in the RFC HQ.

Now named Trenchard House, the earliest building on the site of the Royal Aircraft Factory, is where the first British Army RFC aircraft squadrons were established in 1912 – in a meeting-room which has been restored which the public can visit by invitation. Largely dedicated to operations over The Western Front, the RFC would later merge with the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) to become The RAF in 1918.

It's fair to say that no other single location in the world has contributed so much to the development of aeronautical science over such a long period of time as Farnborough. From the first airborne cameras and flying clothing, to high altitude 'space suits', night vision aids, head-up cockpit displays and the first carbon fibre experiments - the list of Farnborough's aerospace contributions is endless.

Farnborough Air Sciences Trust (FAST: <https://www.airsciences.org.uk/index.html>), standing on the very same site in Farnborough, commemorates all of this - and more - in its wonderfully eclectic Museum.

Which also helps to make Hampshire one must-see locations in the UK as the nation prepares to mark the centenary of the RAF in 2018.

While FAST is planning a special exhibition for next year to celebrate the Centenary of the Royal Aircraft Establishment, formerly the Royal Aircraft Factory, 2018 will also see the return of the hugely popular Farnborough Airshow to Hampshire from July 16-22 2018 (<https://www.farnboroughairshow.com/trade/visiting/public-show/>).

Hampshire itself is one of the few counties of Britain to lay claim to historic links with all three major services: The Army, Navy, and Airforce.

Its aviation history is especially eye-catching, having become the Royal Engineers' venue of choice in 1906 when the Army was looking for a base for their balloon operations. A balloon shed, workshops, and hydrogen generator were quickly established on Swan Plateau in Farnborough, next to The Swan public house (<https://www.swanfarnborough.com>), which operates today a modern gastro-pub.

As operations expanded the Army Aircraft Factory, as it was initially known, became the Royal Aircraft Factory in 1912 when the Royal Engineers started to put their growing scientific and technical knowledge to better use to design and construct more stable aircraft. In the years leading-up to the outbreak of WWI, many of the country's leading technicians, and most of the nation's leading test pilots, started to ply their new trades at Farnborough.

Amongst them, the colourful former Wild West Showman Samuel Franklin Cody also made quite a name for himself - not least by making the first successful powered flight in Britain, on October 16, 1908. Visitors to the FAST today will find his statue at the entrance to the Museum, and can learn more within The Cody Pavillion, which houses a replica of the plane in which he recorded his epic flight.

Like so many other pilots of the era, Cody died when his plane crashed, in 1913.

But while there was always a steady stream of brave volunteers to become test pilots, there was a serious shortage of planes and a workforce to build them at the outbreak of the First World War. The recruitment drive which ensued brought a workforce of 5,000 to the Hampshire HQ, amongst whom 3,000 were women - filling the roles of chemists, physicists, and mathematicians.

Aviation was becoming a science, Hampshire was at the heart of it, and the Royal Flying Corps, built up by "Boomer" Trenchard to raise the number of new squadrons from his target of 12, to sixty, on the orders of Lord Kitchener, was one of two airborne services protecting Britain from the German threat.

Towards the end of the war, Field Marshal Jan Christiaan Smuts was asked by the British Imperial War Cabinet to look at ways of combining the work of the RFC and the RNAS. His review of the British Air Services, which came to be called 'The Smuts Report', concluded the treatment of air required a separate force, and in 1918 the Royal Air Force was formed.

FAST Museum is dedicated to Farnborough's proud aviation heritage and significant contribution to air science and research, and offers an important educational resource as well as an entertaining and stimulating day out for anyone interested in aviation history and scientific progress.

Located in and around the former Royal Engineers Balloon School, it is open to the public every weekend from 10am to 4pm, and by arrangement for pre-booked groups from Tuesday to Thursday. Free to visit, it is run entirely by volunteers. And while it has

been in existence since 1992, it has been based in Trenchard's former HQ for the past 10 years.

Its incredible archive contains more than half a million items, with just 0.5% of them on show in its Museum. What its 11,000 visitors a year (many of those from overseas) also discover is that it also contains enough atmosphere and enthusiasm to inflate the biggest of balloons ever made here.

The Museum is located on a hill overlooking the runway at Farnborough Airfield - so that modern planes can be seen in the air, as well as historic planes on display in and around the Museum building.

It houses a small, eclectic and absolutely fascinating display - both for those with an interest in aviation, as well as for family groups. Many of the artefacts are, quite literally, priceless. And as well as celebrating its historic links with the RAF, FAST also proudly show-off its contribution to aviation advances - from the jet engine, to the supersonic Concorde.

A highlight for many, meanwhile, is a pre-booked tour to see its original wind tunnels.

For full details, visit <https://www.airsciences.org.uk>.

And for all other tourist information about Hampshire, go to <https://www.visit-hampshire.co.uk>.

Twitter: [@visithampshire](https://twitter.com/visithampshire)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/visithampshire](https://www.facebook.com/visithampshire)

Instagram: [Instagram.com/visit\\_hampshire](https://www.instagram.com/visit_hampshire)

**Ends**

Visit Hampshire is managed by the Economic Development Team at Hampshire County Council