

# Vital influence of the Blohound

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THE excellent news that the Lottery Fund has agreed to support the foundation of an aeronautical museum at Filton, will mean that from being the idea of a few, will become the reality of the many and will provide a record for those who follow us, of the remarkable things that were designed and manufactured there in the 20th Century.

Most of the public attention has been focused on it being a home for the last flying Concorde but its history took up a relatively short part of the 100 years of activity at Filton. That aircraft and many other advanced engineering products were conceived and made there and may not have happened at all in Bristol, if events had been slightly different.

In the 1950s, as a result, of the need in the second world war to produce a large number of military aircraft, the British aircraft industry consisted of a considerable number of independent manufacturers.

The government at that time, recognised that the UK economy was not able to support such a diffuse arrangement and put in hand a programme to force a rationalisation of the industry.

As far as the airframe manufactures were concerned two large companies were formed, the British Aircraft Corporation and the Hawker Siddeley Group. The British Aircraft Corporation consisting of the amalgamation of the aircraft interests of Vickers Armstrong, English Electric and The Bristol Aeroplane Company the shareholdings being split 40, 40 and 20 per cent respectively. Consequently the influence that the Bristol element had in the new Company, when it was formed in July 1960 was not very significant, particularly as the financial state of the Bristol Aeroplane Company was not at all healthy after the difficulties that the Britannia aircraft had imposed on the company. Rolls Royce had acquired this holding when it bought the Bristol Aeroplane Company in 1966 in order to acquire the interests of the Bristol Siddeley Engine Company.

There were those in the new company who, particularly as there were no shortage of airfield and production facilities in the new conglomerate, would have liked to close the aircraft activities at Filton and transferred the work on the supersonic civil aircraft and defence activities to other sites, along with the key personnel involved in these enterprises.

However there was a jewel in the Bristol financial position, in that, due to the remarkable work that had been done by the guided weapons division led by David Farrar in producing the Bloodhound anti-aircraft missile system, which just at the time of the amalgamation had made some significant overseas sales, that had resulted in considerable financial advance cash payments which strengthened the overall Filton site position.

In addition the guided weapons management team were a tough lot with good connections with the various ministry departments and were able to keep a significant guided weapons function at Filton and consequently were instrumental in protecting the whole Bristol aerospace activity. I believe that without the Bloodhound influence, the airframe activities would have been run down in the mid 60s and only the engine company, which had been amalgamated with Armstrong Siddeley in the consolidation of the industry would have remained at Filton.

It is interesting to conjecture what might have happened if the aerospace activities had come to an end then, as at that time prior to Nationalisation, the air field and runway was still government property and as Bristol Airport was still in its infancy and there was no Bradley Stoke, would Bristol Airport now be at Filton ?

B.E.J. Blestowe