

Presentation to Ratcliffe College of Spitfire P9503

Tuesday 9th December 2014

During the early part of 2013, Richard Osgood (Senior Historic Advisor with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation) discovered and began organising an archaeological dig on the remains of Battle of Britain Spitfire P9503 as part of Operation Nightingale. In the research stage prior to the dig the pilot's identity was discovered to have been Paul Baillon, an ex-Ratcliffian pupil (1923-32).

Richard's team contacted us here at Ratcliffe College, in order to get a little background information about Paul, only to discover the incredible coincidence that the students were already well into a long-term extra-curricular project to build of a full-sized replica of Paul's Spitfire. When it came time for the excavation to start, near Upavon in Wiltshire, in September 2013, Head of Art and project leader, Dominic Berry, was invited to attend and be involved in its recovery.

Fast forward to December 2014, and the entire known remains of Spitfire P9503, having been to a number of talks with Richard and his team, and having been released by RAF Hendon, were brought to Ratcliffe College to be presented permanently to The Ratcliffe Spitfire project.

The event was attended by Rosemary Baillon, Paul's daughter who was born just three months after Paul's tragic death at the very end of the Battle of Britain. Also in attendance was George Mobbs, 95 year veteran of WWII, and childhood friend of Paul and his brothers. Many of the students who are involved in the project were also there, and were captivated by the story and the realisation that the project will now take on even more significance as many of the parts will be incorporated into the build.

The story surrounding Paul's death has a particular poignancy; he was involved in a dogfight off the Needles on the Isle of Wight when he found himself on the receiving end of an Bf109e, piloted by non-other than the Luftwaffe's leading aerial ace, Major Helmut Wick. Wick had distinguished himself to such a degree, that he was the youngest Major in the air force and held numerous awards. Wick lost his life in the same engagement when John Dundas shot him down. Whilst Wick's body was never found, despite being seen to successfully bail out of his aircraft, Paul Baillon is buried in Bayeux cemetery.

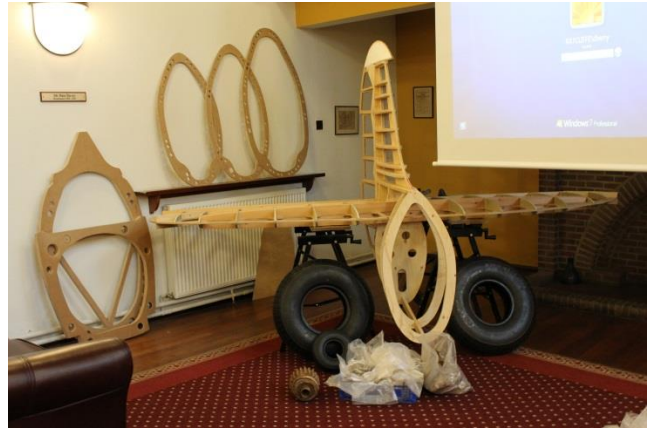
To see clips of local TV and Radio coverage of the event, see:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/b8934e87xguqtm8/AAAuLjfGPZ9FHbjg5WnmtZdea?dl=0>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-30395051>



BBC East Midlands interview Ratcliffe students working on the Spitfire Project



The Ratcliffe Spitfire so far...



Richard Osgood shows us some artefacts.



Richard gives Rosemary Baillon the cockpit release switch that her father used.