



## Early Days at Marshalls

The Rotary Club of Cambridge was regaled with stories of the excitement of the early days of flying, and the development of Marshalls, by Terry Holloway. Terry was the former executive assistant to the company chairman and now is the official historian of the Marshall Group – and finds time for flying most days.

It is difficult to think of an age without aeroplanes. David and Arthur Marshall were there from the start. Marshalls first became involved with aviation in 1912 when their mechanics repaired the engine of a British Army airship that had landed with engine trouble behind Marshalls' garage in Jesus

Lane. Involved with the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War, David arranged, after the Armistice, a celebration lunch on Parker's Piece for 21,000 people of Cambridge. Since then the family has been committed both to flying and to Cambridge.

So Arthur grew up with planes. Born in Cambridge, educated at the Perse School, Tonbridge School and Jesus College, where he was an engineering student, Arthur in 1928 learnt to fly (in secret so as not to alarm his parents), then bought his own plane and became useful at conveying his father to horserace meetings. He later apologised for not attending the first powered flight by the Wright Brothers in 1909, but he was only two years old at the time. Originally he had no interest in the Aviation business, but found that other enthusiasts wanted to own a plane; so he bought a few and sold at a profit. He also had the opportunity to mix with many of the early inventors in the industry.

Arthur spent time in the RAF and noted how inefficient their methods of training were, using only the most senior pilots. By the early years of the war, after much opposition, he had persuaded the RAF to use more recently qualified pilots, trained specifically to be instructors. Marshalls trained some 20,000 pilots during the war, a sixth of the British total.

In the early days the small planes used fields in which to land and take-off. Having no field large enough near Cambridge, Arthur bought Whitehill Farm and created the small Fen Ditton Airport. Here the public were first shown the new spitfire aeroplane which had been built at Duxford. As war approached he and his father bought another 470 acres to create Cambridge Airport. We all know how the Company then became the largest repairer of aircraft in the country. In the eighties some small airline companies flourished for a time, including at Cambridge Suckling Airways, with planes which could only employ a stewardess under five feet tall; but the issues surrounding the disaster of 9/11 undermined their viability.

Terry ended on a more sombre note, expressing concern at the developing misuse of drones and the criminal attacks on the Police and Air Ambulance helicopters with laser pens. He also explained why it was now unlikely that Cambridge would develop into a major airport as, unlike competitors, it had nowhere to build a full scale terminal.

Terry said Marshalls had been a happy company – one could see why, with the infectious enthusiasm, sense of proportion and loyalty of staff. Loyalty to Cambridge has also continued, even taking special care to try everything possible to avoid nuisance and unnecessary noise disturbance.

David Salisbury