

SOPWITH AVIATION COMPANY – THE FIRST WORLD WAR COMES TO AN END



The 1918 Sopwith Snipe was the successor to the Camel with a more powerful Bentley rotary engine. It was the RAF's front line fighter until 1926

The Sopwith Camel had its shortcomings, including poor upward view for the pilot. In 1917 Herbert Smith designed its successor with the pilot's eye-line level with the top wing giving uninterrupted forward and upward views. Sopwith leased a large new National Aircraft Factory in North Kingston to build huge numbers of Snipe. The Snipe was very successful in France for the last few months of the war. Over 2,000 Snipe were built and after the war they served in the Home Defence role and overseas, remaining in RAF service until 1926.



The 1918 Sopwith Salamander TF 2 was an armoured ground attack fighter developed from the Snipe

Hundreds of these aircraft were being built alongside the Snipe in Kingston when the war ended earlier than predicted and all un-started orders were cancelled. A few Salamanders did reach France before the armistice.



The 1918 high performance Sopwith Dragon was a Snipe with the promising ABC Dragonfly radial engine which proved to be very unreliable



The Sopwith TI Cuckoo torpedo bomber, just too late for the war, was retained post-war as the only RAF torpedo aeroplane which could operate from aircraft carriers

Sopwith developed the Cuckoo from their B1 Bomber to meet an Admiralty requirement to attack the German fleet in its home anchorages. All but the prototype were built by sub-contractors, Sopwith being too busy satisfying the huge demand for its fighters.

The Sopwith team produced an extraordinary range of experimental prototypes

Orders for individual prototypes continued after the war, creating work for the designers and the experimental department but not for the main factory workforce.



By 1919 Sopwith Aviation had developed a range of civil aircraft from their successful military types in an attempt to generate more orders

The Sopwith Grasshopper was a personal runabout as was the Sopwith Dove, a low powered Sopwith Pup. The Gnu, Antelope and Wallaby were three seat 'airliners'. With war surplus machines readily available, there was little demand for new aircraft. Some were bought for air racing and most were sold to Sopwith's agent in Australia.



The 1919 Sopwith Atlantic was flown by Harry Hawker and Lt. Cdr. K Mackenzie-Grieve in an attempt at a non-stop Atlantic crossing

In 1913 Daily Mail had offered a £10,000 prize for the first non-stop crossing of the Atlantic. Sopwith's single engined 'Atlantic' contender took-off from Newfoundland on May 18th 1919, nearly a month ahead of the eventual prizewinners Alcock and Brown. With 1,100 of the 1,900 miles completed in bad weather the Rolls-Royce Eagle overheated and the flight had to be abandoned. Hawker achieved a successful ditching, both men were rescued receiving a 'hero's welcome' in London.



In 1919, a production line was set up to build 200 ABC motorcycles a month but it made no money

From a peak of 3,500 employees, numbers were down to 1,400.

By September 1920 with no prospect of large new orders, the Sopwith Aviation and Engineering Company paid all its creditors and went into voluntary liquidation.

That would not be the end of the aviation industry ambitions of young Tommy Sopwith and his loyal team. They hired part of the factory and started again with just a few key employees.

In recognition of Harry Hawker's previous contribution, the Company was named the H. G. Hawker Engineering.

