Historic Aircraft Returns to Northern Ireland

15/12/2010

The return of the Canberra PR9 is part of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported project to conserve and explore the heritage of the aircraft, which was manufactured by Short Brothers and Harland Ltd in the 1950s. With the aircraft's arrival at the society's base, a scheduled World War 2 hangar on the former Long Kesh airfield, it has become only the second complete Canberra PR9 on display in a UK museum.

Over one hundred Canberras of various marks were manufactured locally for use by air forces throughout the world, from Argentina and India to Sweden and Australia. The PR9's primary function was to conduct strategic reconnaissance and photographic mapping sorties. In the UK, the Canberra PR9 remained in active service until the RAF retired its remaining three in 2006. The Canberra entered the history books in 1951 when it became the first jet to make a return non-stop, un-refueled transatlantic crossing from Aldergrove.

Commenting on the Canberra's homecoming, Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, said: "The arrival of the Canberra PR9 in Northern Ireland is testament to the hard work and dedication of the Ulster Aviation Society. It's fantastic to think that Northern Ireland will be one of only two places in the UK where people can see this aircraft on public display and shows once again the huge importance of Northern Ireland's industrial heritage, not only at home, but on the international stage."

Paul McMaster, Honorary Secretary of the Ulster Aviation Society, said: "The Society is delighted to be able to bring this important aircraft back to its birthplace and is very grateful for the generous support provided by HLF and others. When it is restored and placed on display next year the Canberra will provide a marvellous focal point within the Ulster Aviation Collection and help us tell the story of local skills and engineering prowess to future generations. We are already aware of keen interest among the general public and we are sure it will prove a very popular exhibit."

Ernie Cromie, Ulster Aviation Society Chairman, said: "The recovery of this Canberra PR9 by the Society is nothing short of a triumph and demonstrates just what can be achieved by well-led voluntary initiative and enthusiasm in pursuit of a worthwhile goal. In this case, essential and inspiring leadership of the work parties involved was provided by the Society's Vice-Chairman, Ray Burrows, and I pay tribute to him for that."

In addition to the acquisition and conservation of the Canberra, the project will research the history of the aircraft, including the memories and experiences of local people involved in its production, maintenance and flying. Up to twenty volunteers will be involved in a series of outreach activities including the delivery of illustrated lectures and tours. The publication of a booklet and educational leaflets and the production of a DVD is also planned to share this heritage with the wider community and raise awareness of its importance.

Notes to editors

First established in 1968, the Ulster Aviation Society is a charitable association of volunteers whose aims are to educate the general public in aviation matters and promote the preservation of aircraft and aviation-related artefacts for public benefit. The Society runs the Ulster Aviation Collection which is Northern Ireland's largest dedicated aviation museum and is based in a World War 2 hangar on the Maze/Long Kesh regeneration site near Lisburn.

www.ulsteraviationsociety.org

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage.

Since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £135million to projects across Northern Ireland.

Further information

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