National Lottery helps Solent Sky Museum revive British history

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A £50,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund is helping Solent Sky Museum (Aeronautica at Southampton) revive one of the major achievements from Great Britain's aviation past.

The 80th anniversary of Great Britain winning the world famous Schneider Trophy is marked on 13 September 2011 and help is needed finding people who remember that moment.

This air race not only gripped the nation during the depression but also shaped the development of the Spitfire and influenced the design of aircraft for many years after.

Inaugurated in 1913, the bi-annual Schneider Trophy contest was originally intended to foster the development of fast but safe seaplanes. However, contestants soon abandoned safety in favour of speed, turning the event into the world's premier aviation competition.

By 1931 the air race attracted 500,000 spectators, lining the shores between Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, to watch futuristic planes flying at almost 400 miles an hour -twice as fast as a modern Formula One car and at a time when milk was still delivered by horse and cart.

The winning aircraft, the Supermarine S6B, was designed by RJ Mitchell and built in Woolston, Southampton. The technical lessons learnt during these races helped him develop the Supermarine Spitfire which was so instrumental in the years to come.

The museum's project 'Air, Sea and Speed' will be based around a new travelling exhibition with an original Supermarine S6 on display and can be seen at Goodwood Revival and Calshot Activity Centre.

Also included in the project is a film presentation, vital oral history recordings and an educational programme. Key artefacts within the museum's collection are also to be conserved. In 2012 'Air, Sea and Speed' will be installed as part of Solent Sky's permanent displays, alongside the Supermarine S6 aircraft that took part in the 1929 and 1931 races.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "In addition to enhancing the museum's permanent display the project's touring exhibition will reach out to a much wider audience. The gathering of personal reminiscences will also encourage local people to share their recollections of these seminal events in Britain's aviation history."

Notes to editors

Call for assistance: Do you remember the Schneider Trophy races? Solent Sky Museum is launching an oral history project and wants to hear from anyone who may have any connection with the Schneider Trophy races. If you were involved with the teams or were a spectator, or if your family history involves any connection with these events, Solent Sky Museum is keen to record your story for posterity.

Further information

Contact Solent Sky Museum in Southampton on 023 8063 5830 or email aviation@spitfireonline.co.uk.