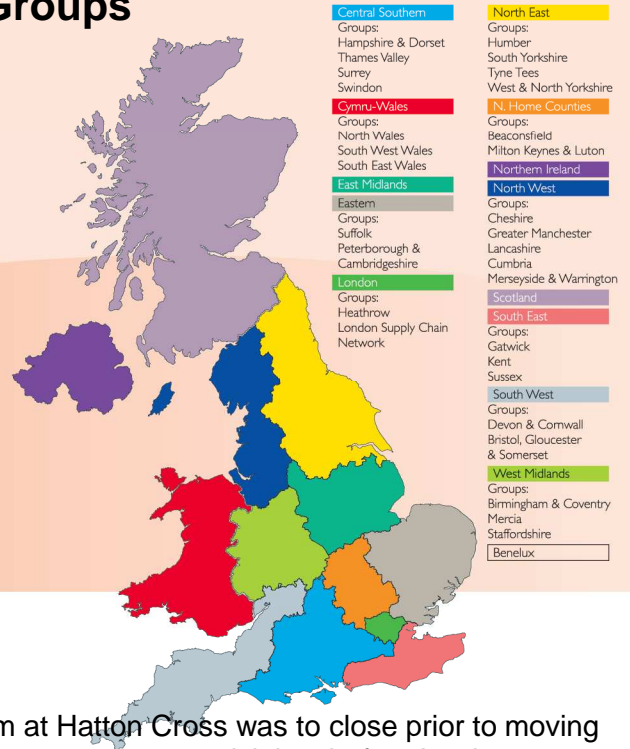


News from the Nations, Regions & Groups

CILT(UK) London Region Heathrow Group

8th February 2011

Visit to new BA Museum



When, last year, we heard that the British Airways museum at Hatton Cross was to close prior to moving to an as-then-unknown location, we quickly inserted into our programme a visit just before its closure. The artefacts were many and the building small, resulting in only a limited number of visitors being able to be accommodated. The curators said that when the museum was re-housed and ready for inspection by the public, a return visit would be arranged for those who could not be accommodated then.

The museum is now housed in British Airways' impressive headquarters at Waterside, near Colnbrook, and in a remarkably short time the exhibits have been packed, moved, unpacked and displayed in modern and more spacious surroundings. The Heathrow group visited the new site in February.

The old museum concentrated, as museums do, on the history of the various airlines which became today's British Airways: principally Imperial Airways, BEA, BOAC, and the short-lived BSAA. The new museum is not only a showpiece of British Airways of the past but also of today, and a part of the room is being set aside for what will be British Airways of the future, now that it has merged with Iberia: this part is in course of preparation. The new displays concentrate on the aircraft used and there are many models of the various types and liveries with their history. We were treated to a guided tour recounting the start and growth of each division of the organisation and a description of the routes, aircraft and conditions encountered (or endured) by crew and passengers, through to the present day.

Because aircraft models require a lot of space to avoid visitors knocking into wings or tails, some of the exhibits in the old museum are no longer on display. They still exist and are carefully stored for reference and it is hoped to obtain suitable stands and cabinets to display items such as menus, tickets, crockery, toiletries, bags and so on. The fascinating Empire flying boat flight plans are no longer on display but are available for inspection on request: these, like much else, need to be stored in acid-free covers to prevent deterioration. The Kampala Bell, used at Port Bell in Uganda to signal the departure of the Empire Flying Boat, (so much more romantic than a Tannoy announcement) is on display, but the spare Concorde nose cone, evident on our previous visit, has now been sold; nevertheless, offers of BA ephemera are unlikely to be refused in order to maintain a historic record of the airline.

We were shown round the old museum by Jim Davis; although he arranged this latest visit he could not be present as he was in Jamaica. His co-curator Paul Jarvis gave us a thorough review of what is now known as the BA Heritage Centre. Both work for love as unpaid volunteers and we are grateful to them both for giving their time not only to the centre but to our visit. We were invited to come back again to see developments and we hope to include a visit in the 2012/13 programme.

Michael Peacock FCILT
Chairman
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