

Aviation Group Day Trip

Destination – The Helicopter Museum, Weston-Super-Mare.

A small party of aviation enthusiasts set out to visit the award-winning Helicopter Museum, Weston-Super-Mare. Graciously the traffic Gods were in our favour for a smooth journey unburdened by the gazillion cars that roam wildly on our country's road network and at just a five minute drive from junction 21 on the M5 it was easy to find. On arrival the staff had been expecting us and we were given a warm welcome with an explanation of all we had to do. Orders for lunch was the first task and this was given to Kim in the Café who stated on completion of our tour lunch would be ready. On tour completion hot and cold meals were there for us on entering the café.

We met with our tour guides, Martin and Martin, then split into two groups to have a comprehensive and very informative tour of the museum. With over one hundred rotary wing aircraft (helicopters to the layman) gathered from all over the world there was much to see. From the Benson B.8 Gyroboat (below left) towed with a water-ski rope behind a speed boat. This wooden wonder would get airborne under its own unpowered rotor at about 15mph and had a landing speed when the tow cable was slack or disconnected of 8mph. (heaven forbid ...!). The Bell 47G Sioux, made famous by MASH (below right)



The Westland Wessex of the Queens Flight, still highly polished today and looking magnificent. This would have flown Her Majesty, Prince Philip and "airmiles" Andy among other royal dignitaries (below left).



The Russians were there in numbers with their highlight being the Mil Mi-24D 'Hind' attack helicopter (above right). This beast can be equipped with numerous things that go whiz, bang and kill people with anything murderous controlled by the assassin sat in the front seat and the pilot sat above and behind. It entered service in 1970 and has been used in many theatres of war including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, 1991 Gulf war, Kosovo, Chechnya, Crimea and in Syria. In 1975 a modified version

set up a new world speed record of 228.9mph (368.4kph for those metricated souls out there) which stood until 1986 when the current record holder a Westland Lynx, G-LYNX, broke the record at 249.09mph (more metrication 400.87).



Not everything was large or fast and at the other end of the scale was the itty-bitty Westland WG33 two seat observation helicopter (you better be good buddies with your compatriot in this one) (see above). This wee machine had a top speed of 98mph and a range of 69 miles, just far enough to get within range of the enemy. At the other end of the scale was the French Sud Aviation Super Frelon. This big beauty was one of the largest helicopters of its day and would carry 34-37 civil passengers. The particular helicopter shown below was operated by Olympic Airways and utilised for operations between the Greek mainland and various offshore islands.



There is so much more that could be mentioned, from the restoration projects to the friendly and helpful service, to any number more exhibits. This really is a must-see for anyone who has any inkling of interest at all in aircraft where the wings rotate above your head rather than stuck to the side of the plane.

If you have any interest in aviation why not pop along to our **aviation group** meeting, 3rd Wednesday of each month 10am-12noon at Primley Church Hall, Primley Rd, Sidmouth. We are a friendly bunch and would love to see you there.