



out of the STORES

PERCIVAL AIRCRAFT COLLECTION

The National Museum owns various large technology objects including aircraft. Two of the most interesting and historically important aircraft in the collection relate to Edgar Wikner Percival. Born on 23 February 1897 in Albury, NSW Percival was educated at Richmond Grammar and left school at 15 to begin an engineering apprenticeship. He later studied at Sydney Technical College and the University of Sydney which, from 1915, offered a short course in aviation engineering

Following service in the Royal Flying Corp during the First World War, Percival returned to Australia in 1919 and bought two Avro 504Ks and a hangar at Richmond aerodrome, NSW. Here he ran a successful general aviation business carrying out charter work, providing joy-rides and flying instruction.

Percival then turned to aircraft design, combining his flying experience with drawing and designing skills while working for a shipbuilding and engineering company. In 1923, Percival won the light aircraft design competition run by the local branch of the Australian Aero. With a top speed of 74 miles (119 km) p/h, this aircraft was still flying in 1938. He acted as the Australian representative for AV Roe Ltd, before accepting a position as a test pilot for the Bristol Aeroplane Co. in England in 1929. There he designed and manufactured the Percival Gull, a three-seater, low-wing cantilever monoplane whose success was immediate. Percival Gulls were successful in King's Cup air races, recording the fastest time each year from 1934 to 1938, with Percival at the stick in four of those successes.

In 1934 the Percival Aircraft Co. Ltd established its own manufacturing facilities at Gravesend Airport in Kent, where a new model was built with a single-strut undercarriage, revised cabin top and entrance doors and fitted with a 200hp Gipsy Six engine.

This model, which was known as the type D-3, or Gull Six, became very popular – it was flown by Edgar Percival when he became the first person to fly from England to Africa and back in one day, by Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith and Bert Hinkler on historic flights from England to Australia and also by aviatrix Amy Johnson and Jean Batten.

The Percival Aircraft Company contributed importantly to the British war effort in the Second World War, delivering many Airspeed Oxfords and Mosquito fighter bombers to the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Commonwealth air forces. Above all, the Percival Proctor, a military adaptation of the Gull, was adopted as a trainer aircraft for the RAF. Such famous wartime aircraft as the Spitfire, Hurricane and Mosquito drew heavily on the Gull for their design.

Edgar Percival was ousted as Managing Director of the Percival Aircraft Co in the first few weeks of the Second World War, however he remained active in other companies connected with aviation, including his own Percival Power Units Ltd. Post-war, his career as a designer and expert in aeronautics lay in the United States although he did design and build a Percival aeroplane at Stapleford Tawney in Essex – the EP9, specially designed for agricultural work in Australia.

Edgar Percival's accomplishments were recognised world wide – the United States Congress awarded him US citizenship by an Act of Congress. He was a fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, the Institute of Marine Engineers and the Royal Society of the Arts and was a founder member of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators. He never married and lived in Curzon Street, London until his death on 21 January 1984.

The Museum is lucky to own an example of a Percival Gull and a Percival Proctor. The Gull (G-AERD, Type D3, Gull Six) is a three-seat cabin monoplane with a 200hp de Havilland Gipsy Six in-line air-cooled six-cylinder engine. The aircraft, from the Jensen Collection, was built at Gravesend and probably assembled at Luton, where the Percival company moved in December 1936. In January 1937, D65 was sold to Miss Ariane Dufaux of Geneva, Switzerland and registered HB-OFU. Based in Geneva the Gull flew frequently throughout France, until the outbreak of the Second World War. In June 1942 it was involved in an accident and did not fly again until August 1946, after repairs had been completed. After the war, HB-OFU was acquired by Alfredo Habib who continued to keep the aircraft at Cointreau, Geneva. The last Swiss owner was J Augsburger.

After 40 years in Switzerland, HB-UFO returned to England in 1977 and was passed into the hands of well-known aircraft restorer, Cliff Lovell, registered in Britain and given the letters G-AERD. (These marks, suitable for the Gull's vintage were not allocated back in 1936 because ERD was a radio call sign.) G-AERD was restored and admired on the air show circuit. On 30 May 1981 the Gull was badly damaged after a take-off at Thruxton, Hampshire, with major damage to the rear fuselage nose, undercarriage, fin, engine bearers and propeller. Fortunately, no one was injured. After extensive repairs during which time the rear seat was exchanged for a bench-type seat, the Gull was flying again in March 1983. Shortly afterwards it was purchased by Neil Jensen, who had previously owned a Proctor and the Gull was then located at Redhill, before it was purchased and relocated to the National Museum of Australia.



The Museum's Percival Proctor Aircraft MK1, (VH-FEP, Mr F W Edmunds Collection) is an all wood construction, has a wing span of 39.5ft and is powered by a 210hp Gipsy Queen Series II engine. A four-seat sporting plane, the Proctor was able to fly at more than 280kmh and reach a height of nearly 4500 metres.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Percival Vega Gull, the military version of the Percival Gull, was chosen by the British Air Ministry for conversion to service use. Renamed the Proctor, it was produced in seven service versions and remained in use by both the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy as a trainer until well into the 1950s.



This particular aircraft was manufactured in 1942 for the RAF and saw active service until 1946 before being transferred to disposals. John Dyer, a former RAAF pilot bought the aircraft and flew it to Australia, via Bangkok, where it was damaged in a crash landing. Purchased in 1947 by George Lewis of Kalgoorlie, proprietor of Goldfields Airways, the Proctor was restored to flying standard and again flew in 1953. During this time, Mr Lewis made his aircraft available to the Royal Flying Doctor Service and carried out numerous mercy flights for injured miners, pastoralists, station wives and children.

In 1954, the Proctor was sold to car dealer and farmer William Dermody and in 1956 changed hands again, this time to Midland Brick executive, Ric New, where it was used for launching gliders at Cunderdin, WA.

The aircraft changed hands again several times, eventually becoming a total wreck and languishing in a disused hangar in Perth until 1978 when Fred Edmunds and his partner became joint owners. Mr Edmunds spent the following five years (over 3000 hours) and \$35,000 completely restoring the aircraft, replacing the panelling of its all-wooden fuselage and rebuilding its engine. It was test flown and received a Certificate of Airworthiness as VH-FEP and in 1985 was sold to the National Museum of Australia.

The Museum is also fortunate to have a large supporting archival collection relating to the Percival Aircraft company and Percival himself.

Maria Ramsden
Collection Operations