

MICK DAVIS DESCRIBES

# THE RAF'S FIRST AIRSHOW

*We are indebted to Rose Gibson of the Leeds Library and Information Service for the photographs that accompany this feature. The images are a selection from a set that appear on that service's website ([www.leodis.net](http://www.leodis.net)) and Rose generously made them available for use in this journal. The website, in addition to its aviation content, contains a wealth of fascinating material relating to the history of that city.*

**A**N AIRSHOW is generally expected to comprise flying displays, a static park and under cover exhibitions. Some of our oldest members will remember the Empire Day airshows, held at RAF stations throughout the country during the 1930s, and most will be familiar with the famous Hendon Pageants of the 1920s. Those did not, however, include the first such event staged by the RAF. That event, and the preparation for it, led to the survival to this day of two historic aeroplanes and it was staged in Newcastle.

The Agricultural Hall at Islington had been requisitioned for RFC and, later, RAF use and, by late 1918, housed a sub unit of 6 Stores Depot and a Plane Repair Park. It was used to house the captured enemy machines that had been examined and reported upon by the Ministry of Munitions. Many of those reports were published, for public consumption, in contemporary copies of *Flight* and *The Aeroplane*.

Those captured machines became the subject of a public exhibition, which was opened on 15 November 1918 by Lord

Weir of Eastwood, the Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force, and ran until 18 January 1919. The machines were lined up in the hall, with one arranged to represent a crash scene. Most were, however, partially stripped, to demonstrate their construction. Visitors could, for the admission fee of one shilling, examine, closely, the following types: Halberstadt Cl.II, Hannover Cl.III, Gotha G.IV reportedly assembled from the remains of eight such machines that had been brought down, AEG G.IV, Aviatik C.III, Rumpler C.V, DFW C.V, Halberstadt D.II, Aviatik D.I, AEG J.I, Junkers J.I, Friedrichshafen G.III, Fokker D.VII, Albatros D.I, Albatros D.Va, Fokker Dr.I, Pfalz D.III and a Pfalz D.IIIa arranged in a crash scene, complete with dummy pilot, to illustrate the result of being shot down from 6000ft.

Additional displays demonstrated engines (including that from von Richthofen's Fokker Dr.I 425/17), instruments and armament. There was also the fuselage of a further Gotha, to demonstrate the 'tunnel' for its downward firing gun and, for whatever reason, a solitary British machine, a DH9. Disabled soldiers worked to create souvenirs from the parts of salvaged machines and these were available for purchase by the public. All proceeds were to go to RAF charities and, with over 200000 people having attended by mid January 1919, these benefited by more than £10000 from admission fees alone.

The success of the event was such that the decision was made to take it to the north of England and combine it with one that

*The enemy aircraft exhibition at Islington contained some irreplaceable airframes, including Fokker Dr.I 144/17.*

*:via Harry Woodman*

