

# OBITUARIES

## Paul Stuart Leaman 1929-2020

During his lifetime, Paul Leaman made an outstanding contribution to the study of First World War military aviation, both as an author and as a leading figure in Cross and Cockade. Perhaps his greatest achievement was the encouragement he gave others interested in the subject, and the support and guidance he freely offered to aspiring authors and fellow enthusiasts. Rather than paraphrase the many individual reminiscences we have received from those who worked closely with Paul, we have included all of them at the end of this obituary. There may be some overlap and repetition, but we feel that they offer a richer and more personal picture and, taken together, represent a fitting tribute to someone who gave so much to the Society and the study of early military aviation.

Paul was born on 15 December 1929. At the time, his father was serving as a junior NCO in the Royal Air Force as a 'fitter/rigger', but spending much of his time aboard ships in the Fleet Air Arm. Consequently, his childhood was spent in several different towns and he went to a similar number of different schools. Paul's father was posted to Canada in January 1940 and the family followed him that summer, sailing out in convoy on the Cunard-White Star Line MV *Georgic*. Again, they moved to a new house several times, as his father was promoted and posted to fresh stations. Paul's father, by then a warrant officer 1<sup>st</sup> class, came home to be commissioned in early 1943 and the family followed him home that summer. The journey back was not without incident. They should have gone by rail to Montreal and then down to New York to embark on the Queen Elizabeth but were removed from the passenger list and left stranded in Montreal for several weeks, finally returning to Nova Scotia and sailing on the Elders and Fyffes SS *Corallies*, a banana boat seeing service as an armed merchantman and thus part of the convoy escort. They landed in Liverpool and made their way by train down to Ipswich in Suffolk, where they stayed with Paul's maternal grandmother.

The family lived in central Ipswich for several years and Paul attended the Northgate Grammar School for Boys. After June 1944, several council houses that had been used for troops in the months before D-Day became available as the soldiers went to the beaches of Normandy and they were allocated one. Paul left school in 1946 at age 16, with no formal qualifications, and was hired as an apprentice in the drawing office of Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies – who in the First World War were aircraft manufacturers, but now had reverted to making agricultural equipment. He was a keen competitive racing cyclist and took part in competitions all over the country. He also developed an love of jazz music, a passion that would last all of his life,



*The smile says it all, Paul at home in the cockpit of the replica Fokker Dr.I at le Bourget in the 1980s.*

a settled home life, Paul restarted his tertiary education, successfully passing his Ordinary and Higher National Certificates and completing a two-year course in Industrial Administration in twelve months. He returned to his previous job as a draughtsman with Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies in Ipswich, making detail drawings of crop drier components, working there until he found a job with better prospects, at the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment (MAEE) at Felixstowe - twelve miles down the road.

With the demise of flying boats, MAEE became Royal Aircraft Establishment Workshops (Felixstowe), but was closed as such in 1958. Paul transferred to the drawing office of the Wind Tunnel Site of the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Bedford, living in rented property. He worked there until, having gained near-professional qualifications, he applied for and was promoted as a Technical Assistant to the Royal Ordnance Factory at Nottingham, where medium and large calibre guns and missile launchers were manufactured. From Nottingham, Paul moved to the Royal Ordnance Factory at Glascoed, an ammunition filling factory in Monmouthshire. He worked at Glascoed for five years, changing role in the last year from design, to development and workshops management. Paul then gained promotion to a senior engineering grade and moved to the Royal Ordnance Factory at Leeds, where Britain's main battle tanks were manufactured. He initially worked on production development before being moved to a managerial post in the production department. A year later, he moved into the design department and stayed there until applying for and gaining the post of Superintendent of Workshops at the Fighting Vehicle Research and Development Establishment at Chertsey. Paul and Rita initially lived in rented accommodation at Longcross, near Chobham, later buying a larger house in Cove near Farnborough. After several years, Paul reluctantly moved into the Future Main Battle Tank design team. Shortly afterwards, he was moved into a newly formed team whose role was the design and development of a series of Main Battle Tanks for the Shah of Iran. With the overthrow of the Shah, the early versions of this

with Chris Barber music chosen by him for his funeral. Paul was called up for National Service with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers between August 1951 and August 1953 and, after training, was posted as a gun fitter to 4 Royal Tank Regiment in the Egyptian Canal Zone. He was there from February 1952 until February 1953 (including a month in hospital with dysentery and a septic knee) when the regiment came home to Tidworth. After demobilisation, Paul married Rita. They had three daughters, Penny, Jackie and Gill. With



*The C&C (GB) Committee, 1974. L-r: Peter Cooksley, Des Furze, Colin Huston, Jack Bruce, Paul Leaman, Brian Downham.*

product were sold to the King of Jordan and the final version to the British Army – to replace its aging Chieftain fleet. Paul’s responsibilities included the management of the construction of all prototype vehicles and their subsequent trialling plus overseeing bought-out items, such as the Rolls Royce engine and David Brown transmissions.

On separating from Rita, Paul lived with Christine in her maisonette in Farnborough, until her son was old enough to leave school. In 1983 Paul successfully applied for the post of Assistant Director of Design and Development at the Royal Ordnance Factory at Leeds, soon to become privatised as Royal Ordnance, Leeds. Paul and Christine then bought Cragg Cottage in Bramham, where Christine still lives. They married in 1986. Paul remained in his post at Leeds (shedding the ‘Design’ role) until Royal Ordnance was bought by their main UK competitor, Vickers Defence Systems. Within a short time, Paul and many of the staff were made redundant. After searching around, he was offered a post one grade down in the design and development department at Royal Ordnance, Nottingham where, initially, he took over management of the department’s support services. Maintaining the family home in Bramham, Paul rented a flat in Nottingham for use during the week. Shortly after that, the main board of Royal Ordnance decided to exploit its rights to the development of applique armours for military vehicles and he was asked to create and lead a team for that purpose. Building on work that had been carried out between Royal Ordnance Leeds and Chertsey, the team rapidly came up with workable solutions for both main battle tanks and lighter vehicles. The heavy version, a form of reactive armour, was sold to the British army and used to equip the Challenger I tank that it took to the first Gulf War. Paul remained at Chertsey until he retired in 1992.

Throughout his life, Paul was an enthusiastic aircraft modeller. He was an early member of the International Plastic Modellers Society (IPMS), formed in 1963, and was their membership secretary when he joined the ‘Cross & Cockade Essex Chapter’, the first overseas branch of Cross & Cockade – an American society dedicated to the history of First World War aviation (Cross & Cockade published its first journal in the United States in early 1960). The Essex Chapter produced their first newsletter in October 1967 and regularly each month afterwards until September 1968. From October 1968, its title changed to the ‘British Chapter’ which then altered to ‘Cross & Cockade Great Britain’ from January 1969. Following a break in the run, Harry Woodman produced the final three, two-sheet, duplicated newsletters in December 1969, February and April 1970, following which the first of the Society’s quarterly illustrated printed Journals was published. A tradition that has lasted for the last fifty years.

Paul was a hugely knowledgeable and prolific author on all matters to do with First World War aviation. As well as



*Paul and Christine at the celebration of his 80th birthday in the lovely Crown pub at Roecliffe, near Boroughbridge.*

numerous articles in both the IPMS Magazine and the Society Journal, Paul published several books, including *Fokker Aircraft of World War One* (2001) and *Fokker Dr 1 Triplane: A World War 1 Legend* (2003). He played a central role in the Society for half a century, initially as Membership Secretary, then Business Manager and (from 1976) Managing Editor – a post that he held for the next 25 years. Paul was appointed Executive Vice-President in 2004, Chairman in 2008 and, in recognition of his immense contribution to the Society, Life Vice-President in 2010. His long service to the Society is honoured by the commemorative Paul Leaman Lecture delivered, since 2010, at our Annual General Meeting. Paul’s latter years were interrupted by ill-health and mobility problems. He attended fewer and fewer Society meetings but remained an energetic e-mail correspondent and was still writing on First World War aviation up to his last few weeks. The Society intends to publish Paul’s final work, on the Royal Aircraft Factory RE8, in the continuing monograph series, as a tribute to an outstanding historian, a valued colleague and a good friend.

Paul’s leadership, passion and dedication will be greatly missed. Our thoughts and condolences go to Christine and to all the family, which includes nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

*Air Vice-Marshal Dr Peter Dye,  
President,  
Cross & Cockade International*

#### INDIVIDUAL MEMORIES

##### **Peter Green:**

*Paul’s triple bypass enabled him to continue enjoying his ham, 2 eggs and chips at the Cross Keys, Thixendale.*

##### **Paul Hare:**

*To me Paul was always the face of the Society; from my first joining back in the dark ages though queries over damaged journals, and on to my first submitting articles for consideration he was the point of contact. Not only did he review my first book, but he kindly showed me what he had written before publishing it, a kindness I will always remember. I was proud to collect an award on his behalf when I attended ‘Aerodrome 92’ in Alabama. The Society, and the world will simply not be the same without him.*

##### **Colin Huston:**

*After Paul joined Cross and Cockade in June 1968, where he was the IPMS membership secretary, and I was running the Leicester branch, he very quickly*

persuaded me to join the British Chapter of C&C, as it then was, which as a keen WWI aviation modeller I was very happy to do. John Barfoot and friends had been printing a foolscap duplicated monthly newsletter from 1967, and our membership gradually began to build up.

With Paul as our Membership Secretary, from well before we published Vol 1 No 1 of our quarterly journals, the society continued to flourish and his title altered to Business Manager in November 1971. Paul remained as our Business Manager until he took over the position of Managing Editor in 1976, and some years later the task of actually pasting up the pages for each issue, which he then managed to do superbly for some 25 years.

His Managing Editor title can never explain the marvellous work which Paul carried on doing for our Society throughout those working years, e.g. I will never forget our after-work drives up to his flat in Nottingham when he was at the Royal Ordnance Factory there, to exchange typesetting and collect the galley pages etc which he had finished pasting up for the next journal — and how he got quite addicted to Cow Gum, which is what we used in those far off days of fond memory. Sadly few now will ever really appreciate the amount of work which Paul put in to preparing every journal from those myriad rolls of typeset articles, which he first had to carefully trim [tricky] so he could make up each page — but I'll always remember, as I'd done it too!

Paul continued as our 'Managing Editor', until he was appointed Executive Vice-President on 24 April 2004. He later became our Chairman in 2008, and then Life Vice-President from 2010. We did a huge amount of work together, for our society and our journal in those early years, so I will certainly miss Paul, as it was he who got me involved in this Society those 52 years ago.

#### **Andy Kemp:**

It was Paul who recruited me into the Society way back in 1974, on the Society stand at an early summer Old Warden show. I have a vivid memory of this tanned, dapper, sun-spec wearing chap chatting to me about Triplanes and Camels in the shade of the hangar — and sixteen years later recruiting me to the committee. That was 1991 — I recall leaving Paula and Christine's house in Bramham, laden with responsibility and his trust, and with a boot full of card index files and carefully written notes. There were so many shared car journeys from Yorkshire to Kew, and lunches in the PRO canteen, chatting about society business and the latest research project — and then on to central London for society or committee meetings. So many society meetings at York, poring over a pile of photos with a pint of ale and a plate of ham, egg and chips — and long discussions over the phone — he was a good friend. It's hard to believe he's gone. For so many years Paul simply WAS the Society.

#### **Neal Stride:**

I've been casting my mind back to the early 1980's when Paul first came to our meetings in York. I'd only recently taken over organiser responsibility from Derrick Simpkin as our office premises was blessed with a basement cellar and coffee making facilities. These were days before first the pub across the road, then our eventual venue of choice, The Ackhorne were discovered. Paul was still working for Vickers near Leeds (something to do with tank armour) and I clearly remember him turning up one February looking neat, trim and suntanned amongst the rest of us pasty white lot. I asked him where he'd been, naively thinking enviously of winter breaks in the sun, but no. 'In the desert' Paul said. Me: 'Who with?' Paul: 'The Army'. Me: 'What were you up to out there?' Paul: 'Can't really say...' And the conversation reverted to our shared interest with WWI aviation.

Paul was always generous with sharing his knowledge, but never dominated proceedings. This extended far beyond the Fokker Dr.I, of which he was a well-recognised published authority. They were good days of enthusiastic banter which only improved when the office relocation forced a permanent transfer of meeting venue to the Ackhorne. Paul was always there, invariably beating me to the door at midday to secure a large corner table by spreading a selection of books and documents for discussion as the afternoon progressed and members turn up. There were times when just about the entire journal editorial team would be sat round a laptop poring over future copy, whilst Paul would be quietly savouring a beer in conversation to one side. Happy days!

#### **Ray Rimell:**

Paul and I go back a long way to the early days of Cross and Cockade in this country when it was an Essex chapter of the American parent, produced by John Barfoot. Paul and I frequently met at the old London IPMS Friday evening

meets which was a great eye-opener for a mad keen schoolboy who had followed Paul's pioneering Airfix Magazine features on the Fokker Triplane and had made many models based on those early articles. It was great to receive his direct personal feedback on my primitive efforts to render the Aurora Triplane into the Voss machine, and I took Paul's observations to heart. We had kept in touch over the years and were fortunate to have him contribute to Scale Models from time to time and he was very helpful during the early years of Windssock. His passion for the Fokker Triplane, RE8 and other WWI legends led to a number of memorable articles and books — one on the way! — and his indefatigable work on the behalf of the Society is well known to us all and both it, and the journals, benefitted from his extensive knowledge and untiring enthusiasm. I shall treasure my memories of Paul and recently going through some lively correspondence between us and Harry W in the good old days brought those good times sharply back into focus. He will be a hard act to follow...

#### **Bill Vandersteen:**

My memories of Paul go back to the very beginning of Cross and Cockade, probably the 1960s when we were called a 'Chapter' of the original American C&C. We would meet in London in the early evenings. A few of us decided we didn't like the way the meetings were organised and decided to split away from the American C&C and set up our own version as Cross and Cockade Great Britain. There was Paul and Les Rogers also myself, but I cannot now recall the names of other members. That done, we continued to meet in London. A lot of us met up in one of the restaurants before the meetings and chat away about WWI aviation. One such was Alex Revell who was researching for his book on 56 Squadron and would tell of his latest discoveries. They were great days.

#### **Greg VanWyngarden:**

In January 1977 (my senior year) I was lucky enough to take a month-long overseas college course in London. I made contact with Peter Wolfe and he was gracious enough to take me to the monthly London Meeting of C & C.G.B. There I was, a star-struck know-nothing kid from a tiny town in Iowa, surrounded by not only several real-life WWI airmen who attended the meeting, but many of the 'great names' whose work I had already been admiring for years: Peter Cooksley, Alex Revell and of course Paul Leaman. All of them were very kind to this long-haired college kid from the states, but Paul was especially gracious and supportive. We began a correspondence and friendship that would last for over 40 years.

At that time Paul was the managing editor of C & C. However, I was even more impressed with him due to his articles for Airfix Magazine describing German WWI 'lozenge' camouflage and providing his own precisely-drawn templates for modelers to use in painting their models and his a three-part detailed study of the Fokker Dr.I, illustrated with his own precise and impressive scale drawings and profiles presented in 1/72 scale. His work was groundbreaking and incredibly accurate for its day and he continued his study of the Triplane for many, many years.

I will always remember Paul for his kindness, his insight and generosity. I looked forward to getting the annual Christmas card from Paul & Christine every year; that's the kind of man he was. I already miss him dearly.

#### **Mick Davis:**

Some 40 years ago, at an AGM, Paul asked for the assistance of a draughtsman to produce scale drawings for the journal. I volunteered but had no formal training. Paul took me under his wing and explained about matters such as line-weighting and then left me to it. That demonstrates his willingness, if he thought it correct, to give journal contributors the opportunity to show what they could produce. Later, he allowed me to take over 'Hangar Notes' and, again, gave me more-or-less free rein. It's that trust that I will remember him for because it extended to the time when I first began helping out with journal layout — the days of paste-up sheets and cow gum referred to by Colin. After a trip to Bramham, I returned home with a boat-load of articles in typescript, a box of past-up sheets and Paul's verbal instructions about how to go about the job. He was prepared to trust a complete journal issue to me. But that was Paul; I do believe that he was one of those gifted people who had the ability to bring out the best in those he worked with and did that in his own quiet, un-assuming way. Like everyone else who knew him, I will mourn his passing.