

# THE JACK BRUCE COLLECTION AT THE RAF MUSEUM

by Julian Hale

As the post of the RAF Museum's Cross and Cockade Curator will end in November 2015, it was felt that a report, giving the members of the Society insight to the position's work, was appropriate.

## THE JACK BRUCE COLLECTION

The main duty of the position was to digitise and catalogue the Jack Bruce Collection, an archive of over 20000 photographs of First World War aircraft, of which 18142 are British. Adding to this are 173 photographs representing British personnel, airfields and equipment, making 18315 in total. The remainder of the Collection is made up of Canadian Curtiss, American, Russian, Italian, Austro-Hungarian, German and French aircraft.

The photographs in the Collection are stored in archive boxes in the Museum's Photograph Archive. The majority of the photographs, (17796), are mounted, using archival corners, on card or stiff paper, which is now elderly. The photographs themselves are a mixture of original photographs, photographic copies and postcards. The Collection includes anything from very small 'snapshots', some of which are of indifferent quality, through 3x5s to large high quality photographs, often taken for official purposes, i.e. by aircraft companies or testing establishments. A few of the photographs, approximately 5% and usually those processed by Kodak in the 1970s and 1980s, are displaying signs of slight deterioration, i.e. a yellowing around the reverse edges.

The Collection includes a small quantity of German photographs of captured aircraft, which are usually of high quality.

Some photographs have, to a lesser or greater extent, information on the reverse, all of which was checked before cataloguing. This information, by no means all of which was written by Jack Bruce, can be proved to be incorrect.

## CATALOGUING THE COLLECTION

Initially, the photographs were checked to ensure they were in a logical order and then annotated with their accession numbers. Jack Bruce had left the Collection in a very coherent sequence. For instance, the British section was in alphabetical order, beginning with A.D. and finishing with Wright-Forge. The arranging of manufacturers was usually chronological, for example, after the early Sopwith types, the Collection moves on to the 1½ Strutter, then the Pup, the Triplane and so on. In the case of the Royal Aircraft Factory, the ordering is by series: AE, BE, CE, FE, NE, RE, SE and TE. Each type is then broken down, for example the Sopwith Camel:

Sopwith F.1 Camel prototypes; RFC/RAF Sopwith F.1 Camel squadrons in numerical order, (including captured aircraft); RNAS/RAF Sopwith F.1 Camel squadrons in numerical order, (including captured aircraft); Sopwith F.1 Camels belonging to training units; unidentified F.1 Camels; crashed and wrecked F.1 Camels; F.1 Camels involved in experiments; detail views of F.1 Camels; Camel 'Comic' night fighters; Camel two-seaters; the Camel TF.1 'trench fighter' and Sopwith 2F.1 Camels.

The photographs were then scanned at a high resolution (around 65 – 70mb) in colour and the contrast was usually altered before the image was put into Grayscale in Adobe Photoshop. Excellent results were obtained using Photoshop, which revealed subtle details on aircraft and even, on occasion, previously invisible serial numbers.

The photographs were then transferred to the Collection Management System, where they were catalogued and annotated. If there was doubt concerning the identity of a particular aircraft, this was noted. Words such as *probably* or *possibly* were used where appropriate and any other aircraft or personnel in the photograph were noted.

A few examples should suffice to give an idea of the Collection.

