



Making good progress, with the wings trial-fitted before covering



(Left) The scratch-made nose bowl, complete with wire edging as per the plans gratefully received from Peter Stoddart at Leicestershire Museum



(Above) Cleaned up and off for X-ray. I have used as many original parts as possible, subject to safety considerations.



(Left) Job almost done. This picture was taken at Durban in early May this year.



Project News Special

AN AUSTER REBUILD – A LABOUR OF LOVE

By Gerald Maddams

I am a member of the LAA and live in South Africa, so my rebuild story is perhaps a little different to the norm! I hope you find it of interest.

Back in December 2000 I collected the remnants of an aeroplane from Centenary, 120km north of Harare (previously Salisbury) in Zimbabwe. It was the start of an incredible life-journey during which I have met many, many wonderful people, and continually learned new things and developed new skills.

The aeroplane turned out to be a 1942 Auster Mark 1 (Construction No. 216) which was built for the Royal Air Force and joined 655 Squadron (carrying serial LB369) as an Aerial Observation Post in 1943. 655 Squadron went to North Africa that year and although the squadron record books have been lost, it is not impossible that my aircraft took part in North African operations. By 1944 the aircraft was back in England with 657 Squadron and was that year exhibited in an Army Equipment display in Birmingham; I have been fortunate to obtain five black and white pictures from the Imperial War Museum that feature my aircraft. These have been very useful in the restoration and application of the camouflage.

After the war the aircraft was de-mobbed and became G-AHHY on the civilian register. It joined the Lancashire Aero Club, later moving

(Above) My first sight of the Auster in Zimbabwe in December 2000 – a pretty sorry sight for sure

to Sivewright Airways, and then went through various private owners before being purchased by David Johnson, who flew it out from England to Southern Rhodesia in July 1958. It is at this point that I should remind readers that the aeroplane had only a single 10 gallon fuel tank; I would love to hear that story!

Unfortunately the aeroplane then suffered a groundloop and the wing and propeller were damaged. It languished at Mount Hampden airfield, just outside Salisbury, until it was dismantled for future repair.

That's where I come in. I have worked on the aeroplane for a total of 11 years, during which I lived in England for nearly four years from 2003 to 2006. During that time I met many of the folk that make the Auster Club the amazing group that it is, and I amassed a goodly collection of photos and parts that would assist in the restoration once back in SA. A block-type oil pressure gauge, a magneto and the wing struts were amongst the goodies I took back.

I have done virtually all of the work myself,

with only the upholstery, the new fuel tank, the engine rebuild and the propeller going to folk experienced in those crafts.

SA CAA have given me the almost expected hard-time, but very recently I was granted the registration ZU-MGM and those marks will be carried alongside the RAF livery into which I have restored her.

I have re-used all original parts wherever safety has allowed - the side and chin cowl look old because they are! They come from Australia – although why Mk1 cowls were in Oz I have no idea.

And the jury struts came from New Zealand! The wing tips are still a bit battered but are a lot better than they were on collection; I have subsequently learned a lot more about aluminium fabrication and would have improved them even more if I were to do them again, but the wings were rebuilt early on in the process. I had to make an entirely new nose bowl as the original vanished sometime around 1997. The English Wheel is a fabulous tool.

The engine has been run and it sounded really lovely; a new prop will arrive soon from Pieter DeNecker in Pretoria. I still intend to make new exhausts as the ones I got with the engine are all of different lengths.

There is still a way to go but the end of the task list is very close now. ■