



# AN ENGINEER OF THE OLD SCHOOL

James Allan chronicles the career of longtime LAA Inspector, Peter Murray

**F**ew, if any, LAA Inspectors can equal the length and breadth of experience which Peter Murray has built up during his many years with the LAA. Peter celebrated his 90th birthday on 20 June and is still to be seen hard at work, carrying out his LAA duties at Perth Airport most Tuesdays and Saturdays, providing encouragement and useful advice to our Association's members, newcomers and old hands alike.

Peter was born into a farming family in Inverarity, between Forfar and Dundee, and owes his initial interest in aeroplanes to his older brother, who had joined the Royal Air Force in 1937 and was posted to RAF Montrose in 1938. That year, he took Peter to see the RAF Leuchars airshow, which made a big impression.

When Peter left school, aged fourteen, he went to work in a Perth shoe shop and also joined the 38F (Perth) squadron of the Air Training Corps. One of his ATC instructors happened

(Above) Peter has LAA approvals for all construction types. Here he's undertaking a Permit inspection on Dave Burns' rare, single-seat Aerosport Scamp homebuilt, G-DAVB. (Photo: Wallace Shackleton)

(Below) Hillson Praga, G-AEUT, the aircraft which endeared Peter Murray to wooden construction. Sadly, it was written off in a forced landing in Italy in the mid-fifties. (Photo: Wikicommons)



to be an engineer who was working for Airwork at Perth Aerodrome. Peter's footwear career came to an early end when, to his great embarrassment, he was moved upstairs from the men's shop to work in the ladies' shoe department. When that happened, he immediately accepted an offer that his ATC instructor had already made to him, to start an engineering apprenticeship with Airwork.

However, before Peter could actually start his apprenticeship he had to be fifteen years old, so until then Airwork checked that, despite his short stature, he was tall enough to swing Tiger Moth propellers and then kept him busy refuelling and starting aircraft engines plus some other odd jobs.

Once he turned fifteen, in 1943, Peter started work as an engineering apprentice on Tiger Moths, Oxforbs and Ansons at Perth, but in 1945 his apprenticeship was interrupted by the call up for two compulsory years of National Service in the RAF.

## MEET THE MEMBERS

### RAF to NCR

After undergoing 'square-bashing' at Wilmslow, Cheshire, Peter was posted to RAF Watton near Dereham in Norfolk, where surplus de Havilland Mosquitos were being broken up. There, Peter found himself sorting out and cataloguing pieces of undercarriages and other aircraft parts for spares. His CO tried to persuade him to sign up to another three years with the RAF, but Peter said he'd rather just complete his National Service and return to Perth to finish his apprenticeship.

Peter did apply for an overseas posting but instead of being sent somewhere exotic, such as RAF Seletar, Singapore, or RAF Habbaniya, Iraq, he ended up a lot closer to home, at RAF Edzell near Angus. The Station Warrant Officer at Edzell asked him if he knew anything about publications and after Peter said yes, he finished his National Service working in the station's Technical Library.

Peter was one of the last National Servicemen to be issued with a demob suit and felt hat, but he then found Airwork had no immediate vacancy for him, so he went to work, temporarily, at the Royal Naval Aircraft Workshops in Almondbank, west of Perth. After six months there he was able to return to Airwork which, at that time, was obtaining RAF contract work in connection with the Cold War. One of those contracts took Peter to RAF Digby in Lincolnshire, where he worked for Airwork maintaining Tiger Moths. Around this time, Peter made his first acquaintance with an all-wooden aeroplane, the Czech-designed, Manchester-built Hillson Praga, G-AEUT, and he soon became a real fan of wood and fabric aeroplanes.

In 1953 Peter was sent to RAF Usworth, near Sunderland, at that time an Auxiliary Air Force airfield, to work on AOP Austers. That contract lasted until 1955, when Peter was moved by Airwork to the Royal Naval Air Station at Donibristle, Fife, where he had to tackle a variety of naval communications aircraft, including the de Havilland Rapide, Percival Prince and de Havilland Dove.

Peter then return to Perth, where he continued with Airwork until 1960. That year he was promised an interesting job, helping to transfer the Air Service Training technical school from Hamble to Perth but 'Pooch' Nugent, Airwork's boss at the latter, refused to let Peter go 'because he was needed in

the hangar'. So Peter decided to quit Airwork and go to work for National Cash Register (NCR) in Dundee, which had a shortage of engineers for its rapidly developing ATM business.

### Inspector duties call...

However, Peter didn't lose touch with aviation and soon became involved with the gliding activities at the Royal Marines base at Condor near Arbroath. He not only qualified as a glider pilot but, in 1970, was also authorised as an Inspector for the British Gliding Association (BGA). While visiting the gliding club at Aboyne, he was approached by the owner of a damaged Fournier RF4 who asked Peter why he didn't apply to become a PFA Inspector too, so he could work on powered aircraft as well as gliders and could help get his damaged machine back into the air. Peter applied for and was soon awarded PFA Inspector approval in 1973, with licence number 120.

Since that time, he's gone on providing engineering oversight and willingly given hundreds of PFA, and subsequently LAA, members a guiding hand and helpful words of wisdom from the wealth of aircraft experience he's gained during his long career in aviation.

Peter also became a qualified Senior Inspector with the British Microlight Aircraft Association (BMAA) in 1985. In the same way as he is by the LAA, Peter's authorised by the BMAA and BGA to work on all types of airframe construction (metal, wood or glass-reinforced plastic), power units, auto-pilots, instruments (including 'glass' cockpits) and other ancillary equipment.

*(Right) Peter inspects the elevator of a Van's RV at Perth Aerodrome. (Photo: Wallace Shackleton)*

Although Peter enjoyed being a glider pilot and has worked on a multitude of different types of powered aircraft, he never gained his PPL, for the simple reason that, despite having done so much to help so many other pilots fly inexpensively, he never felt he could afford to do it himself.

In 1977 Peter's career involved a return to work with Airwork as an instructor in the Air Service Training technical school which had, by then, been established at Perth Airport, and he remained employed by them until his retirement in 1993.

Happily, he didn't then retire from his other 'job', as an Inspector for LAA, BGA and BMAA, quite the contrary! Peter's continued as an Inspector right up to his 90th birthday and says he fully intends to go on, so long as he remains fit and able to commute between his Invergowrie home and Perth Airport by car.

In 2002 Peter was honoured by the LAA with the Frank Hounslow Trophy, for services to LAA Engineering. He enjoys gardening, playing bowls and often takes his wife out for lunch locally but is still more than happy to devote most of his Tuesdays and Saturdays to doing all he can – in his own time and without any financial reward – to assist LAA members, and glider and microlight pilots, to keep flying safely and affordably, not just at Perth but also at the gliding airfield of Portmoak and at RAF Leuchars. Private flying in the East of

Scotland owes a great deal to Peter's stalwart efforts. ■



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