

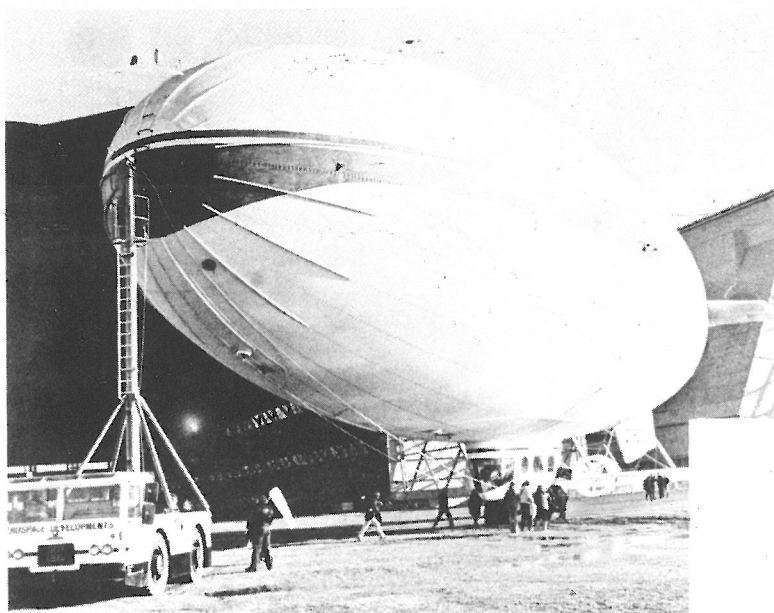
SKYSHIPS!

Top Left: AD 500 before her maiden flight, control surfaces and mooring photograph are now part of the museum

Left Centre: The AD 500 gondola being
R.A.E. Cardington.

Bottom: A close up of the gondola at C
Top Right: The SK 500-002 gondola as
shed No. 1.

Right Centre: The interior of the gondola
Bottom Right: SK 500-002 in flight.



The demise of Airship Industries has led to FOCAS acquiring a number of major additions for the museum collection including the gondolas from the AD 500 and Skyship 500-002. Other items include five SK 500 fins—four from the AD 500, the original A.I. mooring mast, a number of nose battens, an undercarriage leg and a number of air and helium valves.

A visit to Cardington in late January uncovered the Skyship 500 gondola inside the empty No. 1 Shed. A number of prompt telephone calls by our Chairman, Jarvis Frith and executive secretary, Peter Garth, to Slingsby Aviation secured the gondola for FOCAS along with anything else which might be of use. Slingsby's had bought the contents of the shed as part of their agreement with the A.I. receivers to take over manufacture of the present Skyship range. Having previously removed everything of value to them all that remained was to be disposed of, the gondola was saved in the nick of time!

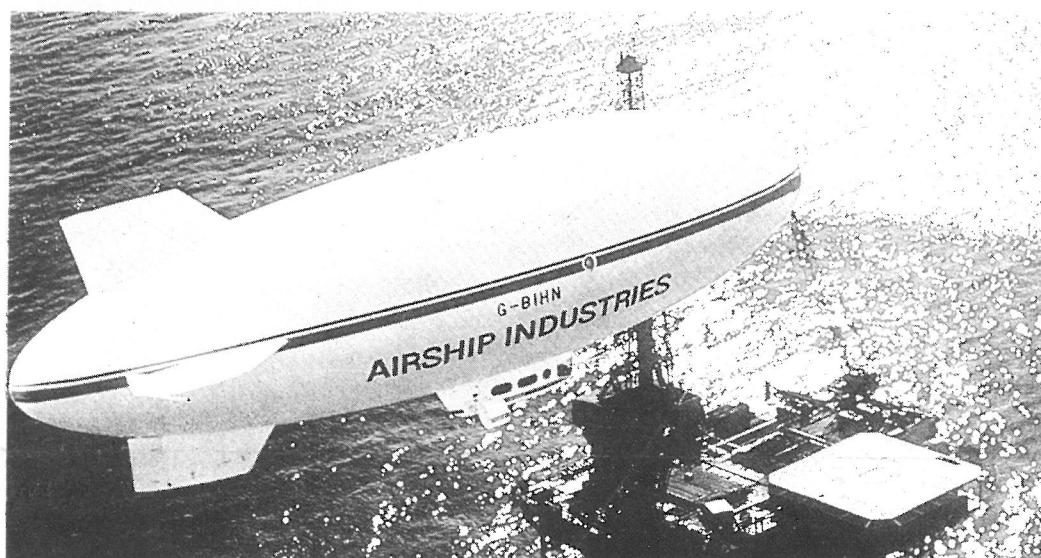
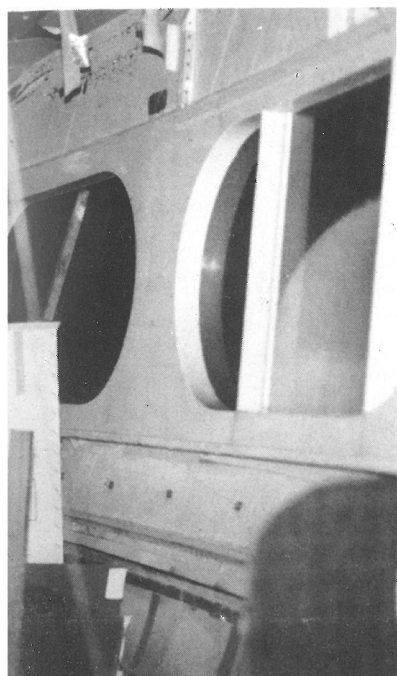
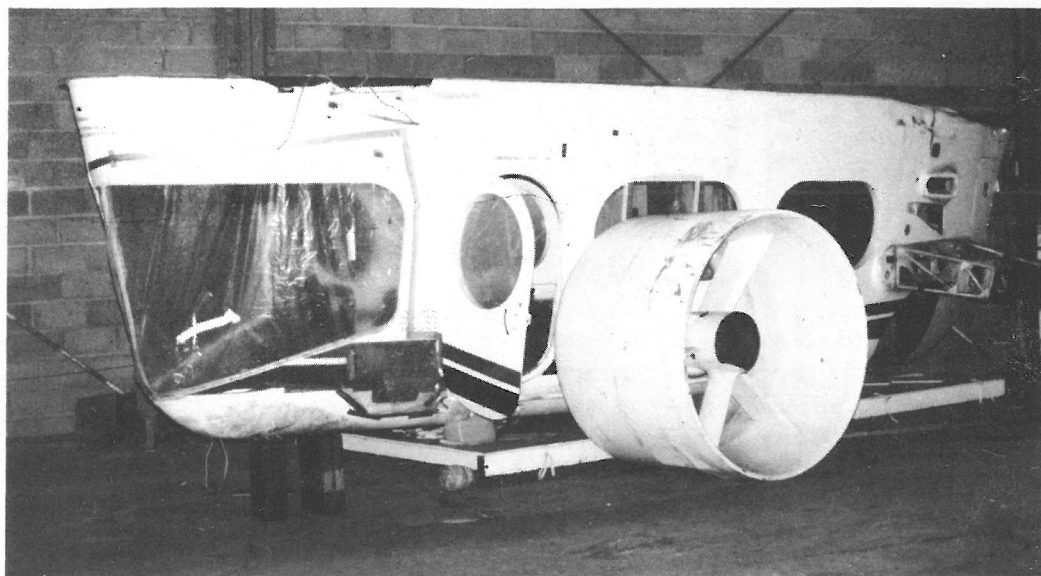
During discussion over the contents of the shed Slingsby also generously offered the AD 500 components which had been in storage at their manufacturing facility near York. The parts were duly transported to R.A.E. Cardington where they

are presently stored by kind permission of Wing Cdr. B. E. Dunford, the commanding officer.

Designed under the leadership of Roger Munk of the then Aerospace Developments the AD 500 was the predecessor of the Skyships and the first of the truly modern airships. She began her brief career with a highly successful maiden flight on February 3, 1979. The second test flight, a month later, was equally successful but proved to be her last. An out of limits wind directly across No. 1 Shed prevented her from being hangered after the flight and she was left moored out on the field to await more favourable conditions. Contrary to the forecast however the wind continued to rise, reaching force eight by the early hours of the following day. During the more violent gusts the ship had an unexpected tendency to ride forward against the mast and the nose cone began to fail under the compressive loads. A last frantic attempt to get the ship back into the shed was again beaten by the weather and her designer had the unenviable task of deflating her at the mast. The loss of the ship also proved to be the end for Aerospace Developments although most of the design team were to come together again when Airship Industries was formed.

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An initial survey of the gondola reveals surprisingly little damage was done during the deflation. A small hole above the main transparency being the only damage to the Kevlar reinforced plastic shell. The outriggers are present but the propellers and ducts are missing, the duct recovered from No. 1 Shed is almost certainly from a later ship but would be of the same design. Several side windows are broken but, most importantly, the main transparency is intact. The interior is complete except for seats which are available but promise to be expensive. Some metal items have rusted but should be easily cleaned once restoration is underway.

Skyship 500-002 was the next ship off the line, built by the newly formed Airship Industries. Differing in only minor detail from her predecessor she had a distinguished career lasting almost six years and beginning with a maiden flight on September 28, 1981. Much of the fine tuning of the Skyship design was done on this ship and she received full passenger certification in 1984. April 1986 saw her flying the first scheduled airship passenger flights for 49 years. The highly successful flights gave passengers a unique view of London and later other U.K. cities. As well as the passenger flights she continued to fly advertising

contracts and demonstration flights earning much needed revenue for the company.

An inaccurate weather forecast was once again to prove the downfall of the ship when she and SK 600-001 were caught moored out on the Cardington airfield when the hurricane of April 1986 struck. In the force twelve winds, twice the strength predicted, both ships were deflated in an attempt to minimize damage. For SK 600 it worked, damage was light and the ship was flying again within weeks. Sadly 500-002 did not fare so well, during the deflation the gondola overturned and was heavily damaged along the upper rim and at the rear. Most of the windows were broken including the main transparency. Combined with other damage repair was not considered economical, she was put into storage and has ultimately become part of our growing collection.

When restoration gets underway initial efforts will concentrate on the AD 500 being the most complete and historically important of the two gondolas. SK 500-002 will require a thorough survey to determine what will be required for restoration and then a decision can be made as to how she will be displayed.

SIDNEY HERBERT DUKE A PIONEER OF EARLY AIRSHIP FLYING

by
Ted Greenstreet

Sidney Herbert Duke (Sid) was born in 1897, the son of a farmer in the Steeple Morden area who died when Sid was only eight years of age. This was a tough start in life but he succeeded in obtaining a place at the Hitchin Grammar School. On leaving school he took up an apprenticeship in motor engineering at Baldock before moving to Vauxhall Motors and when it appeared inevitable that he would be conscripted, decided that as things were a little more than risky on the ground he preferred to fly, volunteered for service in 1916 and enlisted in 1917. He went to the Crystal Palace and it was only after an engineer officer had queried the fact that he had been mustered unskilled that he was re-mustered as a mechanic and posted to Peterhead with C-10, a Coastal type airship carrying a crew of four. Further postings were to Selby and Howden where he joined the R 29, made trial flights and flew with the ship up to East Fortune. The R 29 carried a crew of 18 and was skippered by Lieutenant Thomas (RN) and was of course the only British rigid airship on active service during the war. She undertook two or three day patrols over the North Sea and incurred no damage due to enemy action. Some of her activities were "submarine chasing" and she was instrumental in the German submarine UB 115 surrendering to the Navy in 1918. Prize money was duly paid to the ships company and Sid received the princely sum of eight shillings and nine pence as his share. A never-to-be-forgotten experience was his flying in the R 29 over the German fleet at its surrender in the Firth of Forth in November 1918.

Sid was duly demobbed in October 1919 having in December 1918 married a charming young lady, Elizabeth, at St Saviours Church, Hitchin. They had taken up residence at East Fortune whilst Sid was still based there and upon demobilisation they returned to Hertfordshire where Sid continued with his motor engineering, starting up his own business which unfortunately failed in 1929 due to the depression. After a spell of three years managing a garage at Hawkhurst in Kent he returned to Halton as an Engine Instructor and took up residence with Elizabeth in Tring. In 1945 after 8 years at Halton and Henlow he was made redundant and returned to his old love of motor engineering, making up old cars for a private

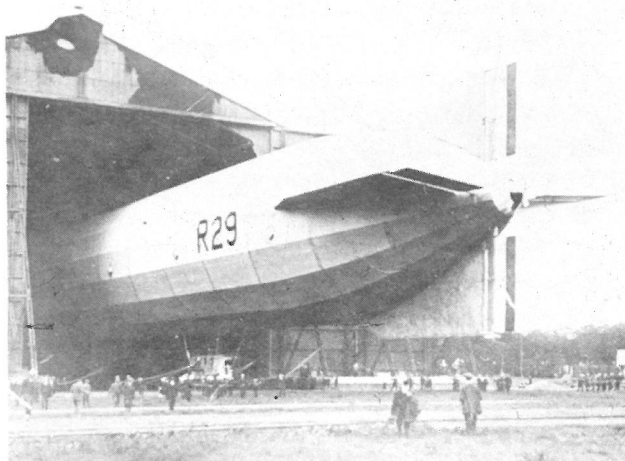
enthusiast. This lasted for some 11 years when he moved to Redifusion on simulators, retiring in 1970.

Altogether a very chquered but interesting lifespan with never a dull moment. Sid and Elizabeth still reside at Tring and it gives one great pleasure to sit and reminisce with one of the few surviving pioneers of rigid airships.

Left: The R 29.



Above: Mr. & Mrs. Sid Duke on his 92nd Birthday.



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■ The objects of FOCAS are to foster and promote the study of the history of airships in every aspect, and to present the results of such study to the public, and to stimulate public interest in the role of Cardington as an airship base and in the conservation of the principal buildings thereof, and in particular to promote and assist in the formation and operation of a museum and study centre devoted to the airship.

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