

Cirencester Science and Technology Society

The March lecture jointly with the Archaeological and Historical Society, was given by Nicholas Jones of Quanta Films on Whittle---the Jet Pioneer. He showed extracts from a film which included interviews with Whittle in 1985.

Whittle was born in Coventry in 1907 and joined the RAF as an apprentice in 1924, and exceptionally was accepted as an RAF cadet at Cranwell in 1926. Here he wrote a thesis arguing that to fly higher and faster, the piston engine and propeller should be replaced by a turbo jet engine. Whittle was categorised as an outstanding pilot.

The speaker explained the difficulties that Whittle faced in developing his concept in view of the scepticism of the Air Ministry and industry. In 1932 he patented the gas turbine jet engine. By 1935 limited funding enabled Power Jet Ltd. to be established at Lutterworth to develop a prototype engine and later testing was carried out at BTH Rugby. In 1936 Whittle patented the use of a turbo fan for the gas turbine which has formed the basis for all subsequent jet aircraft.

In 1939 the Air Ministry contracted the Gloster Aircraft Company to build the body for the twin engine Meteor. In May 1941 the prototype E28, the first British jet was successfully flown at Cranwell. By October the Americans became interested and within a year had built their version of the Meteor under licence. The production of the Meteor was delayed by lack of engines with Rolls Royce taking over production from the Rover Co. The first Meteor flew early in 1943 and it became operational in 1944.

The speaker believed that Whittle was the father of jet aviation and a German aeronautical engineer said that if the UK Government had taken up Whittle's ideas with greater urgency, the Battle of Britain would not have occurred. Whittle retired as an Air Commodore in 1948 and was awarded £100k for his inventions. He received the KBE and later in 1986 the Order of Merit. From 1976 he lived in the USA. Mr Jones said that by 1986 when he interviewed Sir Frank Whittle he had mellowed but remained bitter about the delays in bringing his concept to fruition.

The next lecture will be given by Professor John Jefferson QinetiQ Ltd on "Nanoelectronics" at the Ashcroft Centre at 7 30pm on Wednesday 9th April. Further information from www.cirensience.org.uk or ring Geoff Richards 01285 651972.