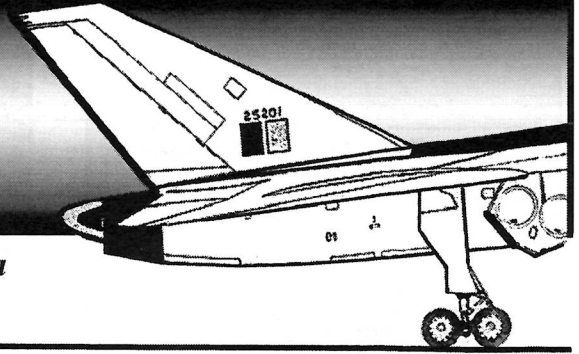


Pre-Flight



*A Publication of the Aerospace Heritage Foundation of Canada
P.O. Box 246, Etobicoke "D", Etobicoke ON M9A 4X2*

Vol. 27, No. 1

27th Year of Publication

January - February 2016

Looking Back



10th Anniversary of A.V. Roe Canada Limited

Not even the most elaborate combination of recording equipment and photographers could have captured everything that went on during the December 1 dinner celebrating the tenth birthday of A.V. Roe Canada and the instant of birth for the Ten-Year clubs of Avro Aircraft and Orenda Engines. There were the calls of greeting in the entrance hall as men who once worked side by side (and now may work nearly a mile apart) spotted one another. There were chuckles as men recalled incidents only they could recall, laughter at pungent descriptions by founder Sir Roy Dobson and first employee Fred Smye of events which often hadn't seemed funny at the time, bursting applause when Crawford Gordon Jr., as chairman mentioned this name or that. And sometimes there was total quiet, not a chair scrapping or a cup rattling, as when parts of Walter McLachlan's thank-you speech to Sir Roy struck extra close to home.

Founded 1989

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Seen here is Jack Hilton with chairman and host Crawford Gordon Jr. president and general manager of A. V. Roe Canada since joining the company in 1951. Jack is seen here presenting to him honorary memberships in the Avro and Orenda Ten-Year Clubs.

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Between 7:00 p.m., when the reception lines formed, and quarter to 12:00, when came the first (but not quite the last) goodnights, there were these and many other moments whose only possible record is in memory. But when words and scenes could be caught on paper or film, this was done, and this booklet containing some of those words and some of those scenes may help you now, or years from now, to remember the rest of it.

Who was there? Once during Sir Roy's speech, the main one of the evening, he referred to himself and the other Ten-Year clubbers as "we hoary-headed old so-and-sos". It would have been hard for a stranger to find anyone to fit that description, but the 300 veterans – among them 10 women – who were the dinner's guests of honour accepted the designation with laughter. They showed by further laughter and applause that they were with Sir Roy as he went on to say that, himself included, they'd be the last to think that they alone brought the company to its present state, "but we are very, very proud, mind you, of being there when it started. And whatever these young so-and-sos do that follow us, we'll take a good lot of the credit for what is achieved." Among the guests were a few of these "young so-and-sos", chiefly men who have been particularly important in guiding the company through latter years when the promise of its founding has been fulfilled. Other guests included the heads of Canadian Car and Foundry, Limited, and Canadian Steel Improvement, Limited, which now with Avro and Orenda make up the A.V. Roe Canada group.

Chairman and host was Crawford Gordon Jr. president and general manager of A.V. Roe Canada since he joined the company in 1951. In

his easy and informal handling of the program. He kept the main focus always on the people who had been there since January 1, 1946, and earlier. And when, near the end of the evening, Jack Hilton presented him with honorary memberships in the Avro and Orenda Ten-Year clubs "because the security and happiness of all the people that you see here before you are represented in the things that you have helped us to do," Mr. Gordon said, "Jack, you know, you made me mad, but you also make me very proud . . . I really had hoped six years from now to get these pins, after having won my spurs." Accepting the pins, he asked to be allowed to do so "on behalf of the group as a whole, because without the complete and utter support of everybody I would be completely useless."

This was part of the distinct tone apparent in all phases of this gathering. Perhaps this tone would not be as noticeable to people within the company as it was to an outsider, such as the writer of this account, who could only conclude that such comradeship probably is natural among people who have come a long way together in a short time. The telegrams and cables that poured in from Canadian industrial and government leaders, and from as far away as England and South Africa, unmistakably reinforced their own recognition of what had been done. And, finally, the way Sir Roy and Fred Smye spoke, saltily and without reserve, of the troubles and triumphs of the formative days, contributed greatly to the remarkable intimacy of the whole affair. Yet in an evening which nominally was devoted to looking backward, in every word spoken there also seemed to be a real sense of the excitement of the future—what Walter McLachlan called "the spirit of adventure and confidence" with which the companies within the group now look ahead.

During the introduction of the head table guests there were many spontaneous asides which brought laughter and applause. But the really solid business of the evening began when Crawford Gordon presented Fred Smye with his Avro Ten-Year club pin and said, "Now I think it is most fitting that the first employee of this organization should introduce the founder of this organization."

As Fred Smye went about introducing Sir Roy, here was a speech with a rare combination of humor and memories deeply felt. Many of the men listening, who had worked at the crown owned Victory Aircraft

plant before A.V. Roe Canada bought it from the government, had not known until this moment some of the behind-the-scenes events Fred Smye described – "of the birth and before the birth of this company". He asked them to cast their minds back ten years to the war and immediate post-war atmosphere in which the company was founded, told them how Sir Roy after a visit to Canada in 1943 "liked Canadians, had respect for their ability, became inspired with a great feeling for the future development of Canada," and felt that one prime necessity in that development would be a basic aircraft industry – from design to production of both aircraft and engines – which Canada never had had. He delighted the audience with anecdotes of early trials before this came to pass, told of 90 days spent in a suite at the King Edward "with three chirpers" Sir Roy sent late in 1945 to help in setting up the new company. He told of the attitude in the aircraft industry at that time, when most companies "were engaged in a kind of competition to see who would be liquidated first" and of the incredulous reaction when men in these companies heard about "this crazy Englishman who was going to start where they were going to stop."

He told of the lack of encouragement Sir Roy received from almost everyone, except C.D. Howe, and in his summing-up tribute said: "This man was at that time at the apparent peak of his career. He had established for himself a world-wide reputation because of the part he played in the production of the Lancaster. Everyone recognizes that it was one of the greatest factors, one of the greatest weapons, in the hands of allied forces in the war. He had made a terrific contribution to the allied cause and in recognition of this he had been knighted by the King. (Applause). So when this man assessed and weighed up all these things with regard to starting this company in Canada he knew that he had nothing to win – and he didn't – but he had everything to lose, and he knew this. But he held to his ideals . . . He told me, 'This is a long-term interest which we have in a principle, something we think should be done in the interest of Canada and the British Empire'.

"In closing, there is one thing which I would like to convince you tonight. That is that without Sir Roy's vision and courage and faith in our country and in the principle that this country should have a basic aircraft industry, there would be no CF-100, no Orenda engine,

no C-105, no PS-13, and you would not be here tonight reflecting and reminiscing on the things which have taken place here in this company in the last ten years.”

To great applause, Mr. Smye then presented, on behalf of Avro and Orenda, pins in both Ten-Year clubs to Sir Roy, and also presented him with a silver cigar and cigarette box, inscribed in memory of the occasion Sir Roy unwrapped it, read the inscription, and said slowly, “You shouldn’t do these things. You know that. However, I am very grateful to you. It is nice, of course, when some old guy like me is told, ‘Well, we’re pleased with what you have done.’ But as I will tell you a little later on, it is really not me that has done it. You have done it yourselves.”

Sir Roy then presented Ten-Year club pins to John Tory, “friends and members and guide through all the early years and even today as a director of all our companies.” Then Sir Roy asked all other Ten-Year club members to “put up the pins with me. I hope you’ll wear these pins and be proud of them.”

Where Fred Smye had told of Sir Roy’s early part in the founding of the company, the trips to and from England, meetings with T.C.A. and the RCAF and with Mr. Howe, Sir Roy went back even further – and gave an hilarious account of his first trip to Canada, in 1943, in a brand-new York. With him was Sir Frank Spriggs, now managing director of Hawker Siddeley of England. A.V. Roe Canada’s parent group. They were dogged with bad weather all the way from Manchester to Prestwick to Iceland to Goose, where bad weather made them go back to Bluey West One at Greenland. Finally they made it to Dorval. One of the purposes of the trip had been to be present when the first Lancaster rolled off the line at the Malton plant, then operated by Victory Aircraft. The delays had made them too late for that, but they did have a good “cross-section look-see at Canadian industry – and I was very impressed.”

Referring to his decision to establish in Canada, Sir Roy said: “Fred makes out that it was an awful gamble and all that sort of thing. Well, I don’t agree. I think it was just common horse-sense. You see, here was the way I looked at Canada . . . I saw a great country full of natural resources, all kinds of metals, all kinds of minerals and oil, all kinds of capacity for growing wheat and other kinds of food, and yet it seemed to me that it might be lacking in the finer engineering

developments and the finer developments in things like aircraft, aircraft engines and so on. And I couldn’t possibly imagine a nation with this sort of potential carrying on without demanding --- not just asking, or thinking about it, but demanding --- its own aircraft, its own aircraft industry, its own engine industry and indeed a lot of other industries too. But of course I was an aircraft man and so I said, ‘All right. That’s my field. I’m going to have a go.’ And so, well, we had a go.”

He told of the beginnings, when the road looked rocky (“Although I had firmly in my mind what we would do”) and of a change in the attitude of the R.C.A.F. because a new chief of staff began to guide the thinking of the air force. “He was determined to have an industry behind his air force. He was determined that his air force should grow. He was quite sure that it was a factor for safety in defence, not only the defence of Canada but of the whole western world . . . In other words, he took the real long and strong view. That man is our vice-chairman who is sitting on my left now, Air Marshal Curtis. (Applause). I shall always feel a debt of gratitude to you for what you did in those very dark and troublesome days, Wilf. And indeed I think that not only we but the whole of Canada should echo those sentiments. (Applause).”

He told of how the Jetliner flew --- “the finest jet transport in the world then, and I believe it is today.” He gave this little-known sidelight on the acquisition of Turbo-Research: When the government decided that a private company should take over from where this crown-owned research organization left off, it was suggested that Sir Roy get three others of the world’s most famous aero-engine companies in with him to do the job. “Well I didn’t like the sound of that. But nevertheless I carried out my part of the deal and I personally approached each one of these companies. Well, in plain language they told me not to be a ruddy fool, Canada had never built an engine, it had never designed an engine, never would. “Not only that,’ they said, ‘but we’ll supply all the ruddy engines that Canada ever needs anyway.’ Well, you can only imagine what I said to that. They didn’t know the potential of Canada. But I think they know it now.”

Sir Roy continues with his presentation to those gathered, it is contained in the March-April 2016 issue of Pre-Flight.