

MACH 2

Concorde magazine



BA's Flagship at 50
*Marking the 50th anniversary
of G-BOAC's maiden flight*

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 February, British Airways Concorde G-BOAC will mark the 50th anniversary since she made her maiden flight from Filton. This issue of Mach 2 is dedicated to this very special aeroplane, which was unique in the BA fleet for making the cross-over from the test phase of flying to passenger services. Not only did Alpha Charlie feature in some of the stand-out moments of the BA fleet's history, but she was also the Concorde with the longest flight career – making her last flight just a month before the end of all Concorde passenger services.

Once retired to the viewing park at Manchester, however, Alpha Charlie's story continued – first with a move into a purpose-built hangar, and then with the restoration work that saw her nose reactivated and some of her systems restored to life.

We hear from people involved with the aeroplane throughout her existence, from those who watched her being built to those who work with her today.

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BRITISH AIRWAYS' FLAGSHIP

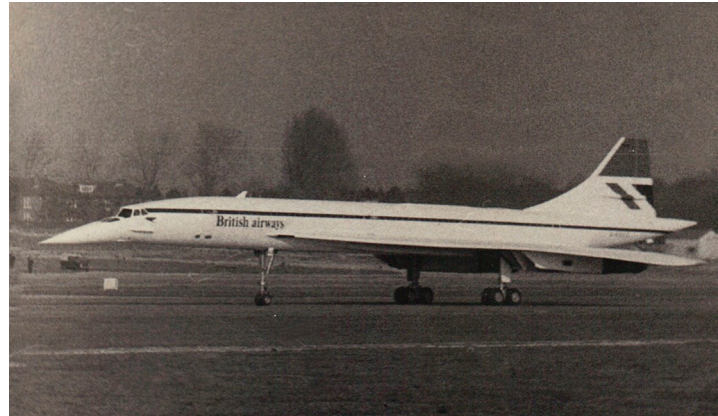
Almost 50 years ago, on 27 February 1975, Concorde G-BOAC, Alpha Charlie, made her maiden flight from Filton. In this feature, we look back at the long and eventful history of this Concorde, the flagship of the British Concorde fleet.

CONCORDE 204 (G-BOAC) was first registered to the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) on 3 April 1974. Her registration echoed the name of the company that had, until just a few days previously, been the British national long-haul airline: the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC). The new British state airline – British Airways – officially came into being on 31 March 1974, combining BOAC and the short-haul British European Airways (BEA); but the coincidence associated with this Concorde's registration would mean that Alpha Charlie would popularly be known as the “flagship” of the BA Concorde fleet.

28 years of flying

Uniquely among the British fleet, G-BOAC's career spanned both the test phase and the entry into passenger service. (Among the French Concorde, Alpha Charlie's counterpart F-BTSC (203) held a similar position.) Starting with her maiden flight on 27 February 1975, Alpha Charlie would continue in service for a total of 28 ½ years – making her the Concorde with the longest working career.

Her duties began with test flights for the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC), the British manufacturers of Concorde, for the aircraft to be awarded its Certificate of Airworthiness,



Maiden flight

27 February 1975: Concorde 204, G-BOAC, makes her first flight, transferring from Filton to Fairford to begin test flights and route-proving work before entry into service with British Airways.

Photo: Graham Ford / Air Britain Photographic Images Collection

and “route-proving” flights across the Atlantic and around the Middle East and South-east Asia. (See Mach 2, Nov 2019.) Once certification had been achieved, Alpha Charlie was returned to BAC to be fitted out for airline service. On 13 February 1976 she was flown to Heathrow to join her stablemate G-BOAA.

From that point, G-BOAC served the airline for the whole 27 years of the Concorde passenger services, finally making her last flight



Nose to nose

24 May 1976: G-BOAC and Air France Concorde F-BVFA make a parallel landing at Washington Dulles, then the two aircraft are parked nose to nose for a celebratory photo shoot.

Photo: Images in Industry



A unique formation

G-BOAC (second from front) takes part in the formation flight on Christmas Eve 1985, to mark 10 years of BA Concorde services.

Photo: Adrian Meredith

on 31 October 2003, to Manchester airport, where she is now on display. She had flown for a total of 22,260 hours 11 minutes, which included 6,761 supersonic flights.

Highlights of her career would include being the Concorde that launched BA services to the USA, making the inaugural flight to Washington Dulles on 24 May 1976 (see Mach 2, May 2016); participating in the spectacular four-Concorde formation flight by BA on 24 December 1985 (see Mach 2, Christmas 2015); and being one of the two BA Concorde to carry passengers on a flight to

follow the solar eclipse of 11 August 1999 (see Mach 2, Aug 1999).

A living exhibit

Over the winter of 2003, Alpha Charlie was parked by the runway at Manchester airport, while the new display area was being prepared. In spring 2004 she went on display, with guides from the Aviation Viewing Park (now the Runway Visitor Park) giving talks on her exterior and interior features.

Five years later, G-BOAC had a hangar specifically made for her. She was moved into position in January of 2009, and the hangar was finished around her, then the new display was opened in February.

Since then, the aircraft has been a highly popular attraction for tours and special events. Even more exciting, Alpha Charlie has been partially returned to life, thanks to the efforts of Heritage Concorde: in 2019, the ultimate was achieved when her famous droop nose was reactivated.

In this feature we hear from people who were involved with the aircraft at all stages of her existence – from construction, through route-proving, to her arrival at Manchester and on to the present day. With the love of Concorde still undimmed, the years ahead look good for Alpha Charlie.



The flight of a lifetime

11 August 1999: Concorde G-BOAC and G-BOAA carry passengers to chase the solar eclipse. *Photo: John Stillwell / Alamy*

Timeline: history of Concorde 204 (G-BOAC)

27 Feb 1975	G-BOAC (production aircraft 204) makes her maiden flight from Filton.
Summer–autumn 1975	G-BOAC is used for route-proving flights to Singapore, Gander (Newfoundland), and Melbourne. (See Mach 2, Nov 2019.)
1 Sept 1975	G-BOAC becomes the first aircraft to cross the Atlantic four times in one day, between London and Gander.
13 Feb 1976	After being returned to BAC and refurbished for carrying passengers, G-BOAC is delivered to British Airways for scheduled services.
24 May 1976	G-BOAC makes the first British Airways Concorde flight to the USA for BA, landing at Washington Dulles airport. (See Mach 2, May 2016.)
19 Dec 1985	G-BOAC sets the highest recorded ground speed for an airliner, reaching 1,488 mph (2,395 km/h).
24 Dec 1985	Flown by Captain John Eames, G-BOAC takes part in the 4-Concorde formation flight on Christmas Eve. (See Mach 2, Christmas 2015.)
11 Aug 1999	G-BOAC, with BA Concorde G-BOAA, carries passengers on a flight to follow the solar eclipse over UK and the Channel (Mach 2, Aug 2019).
31 Oct 2003	G-BOAC makes her final flight, from Heathrow to Manchester.
6 Apr 2004	G-BOAC, standing on a tarmac pad beside the runway, goes on display to visitors at the Aviation Viewing Park (now Runway Visitor Park).
12 Jan 2009	G-BOAC is moved into her new purpose-built hangar.
7–8 Jan 2019	After several years of restoration work, G-BOAC moves her nose for the first time since her retirement. (See Mach 2, Feb 2019.)

G-BOAC's French test partner

Four weeks before G-BOAC first flew, on 31 January 1975, her French counterpart F-WTSC made his maiden flight from Toulouse. This aircraft is, sadly, best known for being destroyed in the crash at Gonesse on 25 July 2000; but before that incident he had a varied and noteworthy career.

First registered to French manufacturers Aérospatiale as F-WTSC, he was re-registered on 28 May 1975 as F-BTSC. He took part in the route-proving flights during 1975, focusing on flights to Dakar in west Africa and across the south Atlantic to South America. (See Mach 2, Nov 2019.)

On 6 January 1976, F-BTSC was leased to Air France. Later that year the aircraft would be used for a sales promotion tour to South-east Asia and on to Hong Kong, with a team including French flight crew and British engineers. (See Mach 2, Feb 2022.) He was then returned to Aérospatiale, until being re-leased to Air France on 11 June 1979. During this time he made his *début* on the big screen, being chosen and re-painted to “star” in the US film *The Concorde: Airport '79*.

Air France bought F-BTSC in October 1980. He had a rather interrupted career, though; from

1 November 1982 to 28 April 1986 he was stood down due to reduced Air France Concorde services, then from June 1998 to November 1999 he was out of service as he underwent a D check. He returned to service on 1 November 1999.



Route-proving phase

July 1975: F-BTSC in the old Air France livery.

Photo © Ken Rose (GNU Free Documentation License 1.2)

Concorde takes shape

Ricky Bastin, Senior Inspector, BAC / Senior Licensed Avionics Engineer, BA

I WAS TRULY HONOURED to be part of the Concorde story, both during the assembly and flight testing at Filton and Fairford respectively, first as a Senior Inspector at the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) and then at British Airways, eventually becoming a senior licensed avionics engineer. (I was also honoured to fly on this most magnificent of aeroplanes around 120 times.)

The aircraft was built at parallel assembly lines at Filton and Toulouse, the various sub-assemblies being flown between the UK and France on a Super Guppy freighter. The forward fuselage assembly, component 30, and the aft fuselage assembly, component 24, were all constructed at Weybridge, and then transported by road to Filton.

In the photo on this page, you can see G-BOAA on the left, in the 'low build' position with G-BOAC on the high build position on the extreme right. G-BOAB can be seen next to G-BOAC, with G-BOAD. More like a jigsaw puzzle than an assembly line, but it worked well. In the low build positions, components 24 and 30 were mated with the wing/fuselage sections, plus the fin. The majority of the electrical wiring would be installed at this stage as well. In the high build position, the French-built undercarriage would be fitted, plus the Olympus 593 engines, designed and built in Patchway, Bristol, together with the variable-geometry air intakes, designed and built in Filton, together with the French reheat and secondary nozzle assemblies; the Rolls-Royce primary nozzle being fitted between the two.

Once all was ready, external electrical power would be connected to the aeroplane, and the multitude of systems tested, external pneumatic power being applied to test the



Concorde assembly

The British fleet undergoing assembly in the Brabazon Hangar at Filton. G-BOAC (right) is nearing completion; G-BOAA (left) will be the next one to be finished; between them are G-BOAD (centre left) and G-BOAB (centre right).

Photo © Rolls-Royce plc

environmental control systems and secondary nozzles. The cabin would be fitted out at this stage also. The aircraft would then be painted.

Once all systems were tested, the aeroplane would be rolled out for engine runs. She would be towed back into the same position for any defects found during engine testing

to be rectified. Once all was well, this wonderful aeroplane would make her maiden flight, landing at the flight test centre at Fairford for test flights, and then – finally – she would be delivered to British Airways at Heathrow. And that, ladies and gentlemen is, in a nutshell, how we built Concorde.



Checking the accommodation

7 July 1975: G-BOAC's first visit to the hangars at Heathrow, seven months before being handed over to British Airways to begin passenger service.

Photo: Steve Fitzgerald

The first year of flying

During G-BOAC's first year, the aircraft was put through her paces with long-haul flights across the world. Richard Harris (Test Engineer, Flight Test) looks back at his experience of working with Alpha Charlie through those busy months.

NEW YEAR 1975 heralded probably one of the most intensive years of personal development in my Concorde life. Following our return from the 'hot trials' and Singapore rough runway trials with G-BBDG in the autumn of 1974 (see Mach 2, Feb 2021), and a spot of family leave, Concorde 204 was well advanced in its production and systems testing and functioning. As I had been on each of the previous aircraft, this time I was seconded to Production Inspection from my 'home' in Customer Support, with the dual objectives of familiarising myself with aircraft 204, G-BOAC whilst being assessed by the Quality Department for the issue of my Inspection Approval for the aircraft.

Systems tests and taxi trials

At this time the heavily unionised production organisation at Filton was still very much in the mode of rigid demarcation. All systems testing and functioning was undertaken by teams consisting of a minimum of three, consisting of a Test Engineer who would have originated each design-approved test schedule, a production electrician and/or mechanical fitter to carry out the physical tasks, and a Test Inspector, who would 'stamp up' the successfully completed Test Schedule.

Whilst I had worked on systems testing on previous aircraft, working now with Inspection exposed me to a wider range of systems being cleared than previously. Alternating between dayshift and nightshift, the momentum in the Assembly Hall at that time was considerable, with two production aircraft to deliver that year, together with the significant task of the endurance flying programme.

With aircraft 204 embarking on ground running and taxi trials, I was moved back to Fairford, whilst still working on Flight Inspection on alternating shifts again. This enabled an exposure to the diagnosis and rectification of systems flight defects, which then – from her first flight onwards – included aircraft 204 shakedown and early flight testing.

Endurance flying

At the beginning of April 1975, we were called to an Endurance Flying Planning Meeting and I was designated to be based in Bahrain (again). However, depending on how smoothly the operation settled down, I had to be available to fly with the aircraft, primarily to support en-route problems, including initially at Bombay (now Mumbai) and Kuala Lumpur. At the beginning of July, the aircraft was positioned to Heathrow; then, following a couple of return flights to

Damascus and Beirut, we all moved to Bahrain.

The first phase of endurance flying scheduled daily overnight flights from Bahrain via Bombay to Kuala Lumpur and return. Invited guest passengers were taken each time from Bahrain to Bombay and then offloaded for a new set of guests to fly with us to Kuala Lumpur and return, then picking up the original group to fly back to Bahrain. We used to get to the airport late afternoon for a 5.30pm take-off and, if all went smoothly, we would land back in Bahrain between 6 and 7 the following morning.

The first couple of weeks were achieved reasonably successfully, with the exception of our Bombay transits, which became fraught with logistics problems. The ground equipment in Bombay was not particularly well maintained, and as a consequence the aircraft would suffer intermittent interruptions to ground power if we put in some step loads – and that, in turn, would shut down the refuel control units! This then had the effect of creating pressure locks in the transfer galleries if we were pumping fuel at the time, which required an operation on the Engineer Officer's panel to rectify.

Eventually then, even when the technical transit was completed the passenger handling team sometimes had difficulties managing our passengers and getting our guests back to the aircraft for boarding on time.

A challenge for the fitters

Our next major interruption to the schedule occurred in mid-August. G-BOAC was taxiing back to the dispersal after a landing, with a guest pilot under supervision, when the pilot responded late to the



Arrival in Bahrain

July 1975: Richard Harris, with G-BOAC behind him, at the start of the flight programme.

Photo: Richard Harris



Engine change in Singapore

Above and above right: G-BOAC required two time-consuming engine changes, including one that had to be carried out in Singapore.

Photos: John Dunlevy (with thanks to Norma Dunlevy)

marshal's turn signals and then, over-correcting, twisted the aircraft on the right-hand main undercarriage leg! Subsequent checks on the leg charging pressures over a period of time revealed that the leg was losing pressure at an unacceptable rate, thought to be caused by a distorted pressure seal. The decision to change the main gear leg in Bahrain was taken at the most senior level and the support team swung into action.

An RAF Belfast freighter was provided and loaded with a packaged leg, main aircraft jacks and necessary tooling. In parallel, Filton forwarded the complete Maintenance Manual chapters so that, in conjunction with the change operation, the Manual procedures could be validated and qualified.

On completion of the change, two slow retractions were successfully achieved, together with a normal retraction and standby lowering, all successfully. Two local flights were then undertaken the following day, and subsequently we returned to BAH-BOM-KUL and back the following night.

Mention must be made at this point of the ground crew fitters, including Alan Tye and the late John Dunlevy and Philip Cairns, particularly as they worked through the day in the 40°C heat on the wing top without even a break over the mid-day. The word 'heroes' does not adequately do justice to their contribution to this change!

Singapore and Australia

During the last week of July we lost a further four days to an engine change and then, during the first week of August 1975, we resumed flying again, but this time via Bombay to Singapore and back.

Based then for a short time in Singapore, the programme included a small number of return flights to Australia. These, however, were curtailed somewhat after flying the Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam

back to Singapore for dinner with Singapore's Chief Minister; G-BOAC promptly went unserviceable with another engine change! Whitlam sadly had to return to Australia with QANTAS.

With the aircraft again declared serviceable, we resumed flying the SIN-BOM-BAH return route again. The downside for me was that, during the flying down-time in Singapore, the 'Neddies in Charge' determined that I should be based in Bombay for this phase in an endeavour to improve the turnaround performance we had previously experienced in the earlier phase. This was achieved by examining the ground power units (GPUs) and pumping units available and selecting the best-maintained units for our use on our turnarounds, which resulted in me staying in Bombay for the remainder of that phase of the programme.

Entry into service

Having packed up in Bahrain and returned to Heathrow during the third week of August, the aircraft embarked on its transatlantic phase of endurance flying to Gander, and it was at this time that G-BOAC achieved the record of four transatlantic crossings in one day! (See Mach 2, Nov 2019.) I reverted to late shifts at Heathrow, clearing any defects occurring during this phase.

On our return to Fairford and Filton, it was confirmed that I would undertake my Electrical and Instruments Approval Courses and in consequence, saw little of G-BOAC again until she arrived on her first scheduled flight to Bahrain, where I had been positioned since before entry into service in January 1976.

For those who are unaware, having been designated 'Flagship of the Fleet', G-BOAC was returned to Filton after the route proving for an airline modification and upgrade, and the inaugural flights to Bahrain were undertaken by aircraft 206, G-BOAA, until she was joined by G-BOAC in the February.

Happy 50th anniversary, G-BOAC – a wonderful aircraft with few vices, even before going into service, and which inaugurated the Washington service in May 1976 and accumulated over 22,000 hours in her life before retirement.

The Gander connection

Throughout Alpha Charlie's working life, from initial route-proving to retirement, Gander airport was an important base for Concorde. The following article, by former air traffic controller Jack Pinsent, is reproduced by kind permission of the Gander Airport Historical Society and tells the story of this enduring association.



BEFORE THE INITIAL STAGES of the Concorde's first flight as a commercial aircraft, one of the concerns was the interaction with other subsonic aircraft in air traffic procedures on the North Atlantic. One of the problems to consider was the transition of the Concorde going from subsonic to supersonic speed and vice versa, and also while in supersonic cruise mode. As a result, the subject was discussed at a special meeting of the International Civil Aircraft Organization in the late 1960s.

One of the Canadian representatives at these meetings was Mr. Cyril Rowsell, Manager of the Gander Oceanic Control Centre. Mr. Rowsell recommended the Concorde should use Gander airport as a test bed to develop standards for air traffic control procedures and, in addition, to enable BOAC [the British Overseas Airways Corporation, then the UK's national airline] and Air France to develop commercial passenger accommodations during supersonic flight.

The recommended idea was pursued, and flight testing commenced in 1974 using Gander airport. Flights started in Europe carrying test passengers from Europe to Gander and return. Conversely, passengers from Gander were selected from the local population to experience return supersonic flights from Gander to England and France. Meanwhile, air traffic control procedures were being examined and proven. Without a doubt, on a per capita basis, the town of Gander had more of its population that traveled on the Concorde than any other town in the world.

September 1975: Concorde G-BOAC made two return flights to Gander, becoming the first airplane to make four Atlantic crossings in one day.

It was not uncommon to look up to see the Concorde on approach to Gander airport. After the Concorde went into commercial operation, Gander airport

Flying visit

1 September 1975: G-BOAC makes a swift turn-around at Gander during the day in which she made a record four transatlantic crossings. (See Mach 2, Nov 2019.)

Photo courtesy of Gander Airport Historical Society

was used as the alternate airport to JFK during the occasional conditions it was required. The Concorde was as common in the skies over Gander as a Boeing 747 from the 1970s up until its retirement in 2003. Truly an historic airplane that played an important role in Gander airport's history.

As a side note: a Gander resident and graduate from Hunt Memorial Academy, Mr. Campbell Pritchett, was transferred to JFK while working with BOAC in Gander, and became manager of BOAC North America Concorde operations.

The Concorde was retired after almost 3 decades of commercial air service in 2003. In recognition of its relationship with Gander airport, which played an essential role in their transatlantic operation, on August 6th of that year, the final Concorde flight at Gander, BA001 – G-BOAC, LHR-YQX-JFK – arrived at 2015Z with 100 passengers and 10 crew. It was a planned and special technical landing to honour Gander airport as part of the fleet retirement. The airport made its farewell to an outstanding airplane.



Farewell to Gander

6 August 2003: G-BOAC visits the airport for the last time.

Photo courtesy of Gander Airport Historical Society

To learn more about the history of Gander Airport – the birthplace of transatlantic air travel in North America – and their association with Concorde, see their website:
ganderairporthistoricalsociety.org

How to catch a Concorde

When the BA Concorde fleet was retired in October 2003, G-BOAC was allocated to the Aviation Viewing Park (now the Runway Visitor Park) at Manchester – thanks to a campaign by the late Peter Hampson, Airfield General Manager for Manchester Airport. His account of the process is reproduced here by kind permission of The Aviation Society, Manchester.

How it all started...

I have a very clear memory of sitting in front of a TV in our family living room at home, with my parents and grandparents all gathered around watching something very special happening on the black and white screen in front of me.

“She flies!” proclaimed Raymond Baxter, the BBC’s celebrated aviation correspondent, who was reporting live from the edge of the runway at Toulouse in southern France.

We immediately broke out into cheers and a spontaneous round of applause, looking on in amazement as the roar of 4 giant Rolls-Royce Olympus engines came alive and lifted this incredible piece of advanced engineering into the skies, shimmering through the heat haze and looking more like a fast jet fighter rather than a civil airliner, as she reached for the skies.

The date was 2nd March 1969 and the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC)/Aérospatiale joint British and French designed aircraft known as Concorde had just flown for the very first time.

I had no idea then that I would become so fascinated with this aeroplane in the years ahead. Indeed, some 30+ years later I would actually be responsible for acquiring one.

Back in ‘69 I had been an aviation enthusiast (plane spotter) for several years, and like many boys of my age I frequented the terraces at

“She flies...”

The first flight of prototype Concorde 001, on 2 March 1969 – the start of an astonishing history for both the supersonic aircraft and Peter Hampson.

Photo: Municipal Archives of Toulouse / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Ringway [now Manchester Airport], by bus or pushbike, as often I could. Whilst aircraft movements were few and far between compared to later years, the excitement of seeing a new aircraft or airline visit Ringway for the very first time was one which would without doubt bring a smile to my face. I had a great sense of achievement as I underlined the registration in my Civil Aircraft Markings book or took a picture, which I later developed in my home photo lab – a piece of hardboard placed over the bath!

We were coming to the end of the sixties. The smoky and charismatic piston-engined airliners were slowly but surely being replaced by noisy jets. Fast and Loud was the name of the game! OK, they still produced plenty of smoke, but the pure jet engine was the future of air transport and Concorde was going to be the leader of the pack.

The “talk of the terraces” was all about Concorde. Who had seen the pictures live on TV? Would it ever

come to Manchester? Should it be spelt with a “d” or an “e”? When was the British one going to fly? Would it be at Farnborough Airshow? What about Woodford – surely not?

At the time our state-owned airline, British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), had already placed an initial order for 7 Concorde. They were to be registered G-BOAA to G-BOAG. For the registration collector the Concorde became something special as the first “out of sequence” airliners to be placed on the British Aircraft Register. Even the first prototype Concorde was allocated the registration G-BSST (Great Britain Super Sonic Transport). But amongst those other Concorde allocated initially to BOAC (which would later become British Airways), one aircraft clearly stood out: G-BOAC, whose registration actually carried the letters of the airline (BOAC) within the aircraft registration. Naturally, this aircraft was to become the “Flagship of the Flagship Fleet”,



The author's favourite

G-BOAC in flight, May 1986.

Photo © Edouard Marmet / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

used whenever possible on trade missions to “fly the flag” for British industry or perhaps carry our senior royals on overseas visits.

On a very personal basis, Concorde G-BOAC also became my “favourite” aircraft and I guess gave me a huge sense of pride each time I saw her departing Heathrow or operating into Manchester.

As the years went by the Concorde story unfolded: the trials, the tribulations, the politics, the countless records being broken and a desire by almost every person on the planet to fly on her!

All of these stories have been very well documented elsewhere and still make fascinating reading today. However, how on earth did a Concorde – indeed, not just any Concorde but the “Flagship of the Flagship fleet”, G-BOAC – end up being put on permanent display at Manchester Airport?

Well, that young boy who witnessed Concorde depart for the very first time remained passionate about aeroplanes and of course Concorde.

Some 34 years later...

10th April 2003: I was sat in my office (Airfield General Manager – Manchester Airport) deep into budget planning for the coming year when our department Graduate Trainee, Steve Mellor, came rushing through the door. “Have you heard the news about Concorde?”

“What news?”, I said, looking puzzled at Steve and thinking this better be important!!

“British Airways and Air France have just jointly announced that they are to permanently withdraw Concorde from their fleets at the end of October and they are saying that they will never fly again”.

“Wow!” or words to that effect, I said – knowing that the real reason



Steve wanted to tell me this was that one of our business areas at the time was the Aviation Viewing Park (AVP) – something myself and the airfield team had taken a lot of pride in creating. We were actively looking for more aircraft exhibits, having successfully obtained the Avro RJX for display (the last British civil airliner to roll off the production lines not only at Woodford but in the UK). “Thanks for that, Steve, looks like we better put pen to paper! Could you find out a contact for me at BA and I’ll try and get something off today”.

By 5 o’clock that evening I had received the “OK, why not” from the CEO and sent a detailed letter to British Airways on behalf of Manchester Airport. Our interest in acquiring a Concorde had duly been expressed.

Unfortunately, after our initial excitement, the days and weeks went by and we heard nothing from BA. However, lots of rumours were circulating that every Tom, Dick and Harry from museums and airports, and wealthy individuals from all over the world, had written similar letters to mine. Hope was beginning to fade and the Airfield Ops team began to think that our letter had gone to the bottom of the pile, or worse still, been lost in the thousands of applications.

Then, one morning whilst sat in a team meeting in the office, Beryl,

my PA, buzzed me on the intercom, saying “I’ve got a man from BA at Heathrow on the phone who wants to speak with you quite urgently about Concorde, should I put him through?”

“Oh, yes please, Beryl!” says I, trying to remain calm and professional and not show my real excitement underneath!

The man from BA explained: they had received an extraordinary number of applications for a Concorde and as such an apology was given for the late response. However, they had entered into a comprehensive selection process during which they had thinned the applicants down to a final 20 (for seven Concorde). He then asked a rather critical question along the lines of “are Manchester still interested?” I said “we most certainly are”, to which I got a very reserved “oh, that’s good” in response.

The race is on!

“So, we would now like you to proceed to the next phase... we are going to ask all of the final 20 applicants to put a presentation together as to why you think you should have a Concorde and what would you actually do with her? Quite simply, why should we give a Concorde to Manchester? We will set a mutually convenient date in about a month’s time and you will come down to London and deliver your presenta-

tion. Based on this the BA Board will make a decision”.

I remember asking who the competition was – but was told that he couldn't say. Which was a shame, albeit the answer I expected! With that the call ended and the work truly began.

Our management team meeting took on a new agenda item and went on late into that evening. My super-enthusiastic Ops team truly embraced the “Get Concorde!” project. Suffice to say the flip chart was well used and we concluded with what we hoped was a pretty robust plan. It was going to be a busy few weeks!

One of the first jobs of course was to gain approval from the Airport Board as potentially significant investment was going to be made. A sound business case had to be made. Whilst enthusiasm and passion for the project was high, that alone would not provide a viable return.

All members of the Airfield Management Team were very familiar with this type of work, although to be honest it was usually pulling a case together to justify a new apron, taxiway, fire engines or ATC equipment ... I remember well the Airfield Policy and Planning Manager, Debbie Riley, saying that of all the business cases she and the team had compiled she never thought she would be writing one to justify acquiring a Concorde! Mmmm, not something many people do every day I guess? The Concorde business case was duly written and then successfully tested by independent financial consultants.

Basically, there would be a number of revenue streams: public visitors, educational visits (schools and colleges), and corporate events. The aircraft would be housed in a purpose-built hangar during the winter and brought out for special “photo days” in the summer. Revenue would also come from hire of the hangar for special events, conferences and even weddings. In fact, if things went really well it could become a

The plan for the hangar

An artist's impression of the intended hangar, with a front that could open so Concorde could be pulled out for open-air displays. Source: *The Aviation Society*



7 day a week operation with events also taking place at night.

In terms of expenditure: well, we already had the Aviation Viewing Park (somewhere to exhibit her), which was slowly but surely becoming a valuable asset. We had just acquired our first aircraft, the Avro RJX, and had won awards for its display. We would use a similar ‘runway’ concept, which was now tried and tested, and simply build the hangar around it. There would be lights, heating, office space and toilets required for the hangar. With respect to staffing, a successful tour guide operation had already been in place

“Anyone want to be a Concorde guide? You bet!”

for years at the airport. Anyone want to be a Concorde guide? You bet!

We had been advised that the Concorde would remain under the ownership of BA but we (Manchester Airport) would be responsible for its upkeep and maintenance. So whilst we had to commit financially to the project our figures showed a healthy return in just 5 years.

It sailed past (or should that be flew past) the Airport Management Team and was then presented to the Airport Board.

Fortunately, the Airport Board gave their unanimous approval and the next step was to reach out to gain the support of external organi-

sations from the North West on the basis that we would use Concorde both as an educational exhibit and also as a catalyst to bring in tourism and business to the region... and yes, why not via the airport?

Manchester and Salford Universities were quick to support the project (in writing), as were local schools and colleges. The Museum of Science and Industry jumped on board with us, as did Marketing Manchester and the City Council. Local industry including several aerospace partners, BAE Systems (Avro) and many smaller engineering companies were all only too happy to show their support. Wherever we went, we found the magical attraction of Concorde kept shining through.

We also wanted to emphasise the Manchester connection, as such research quickly demonstrated that Concorde had operated more times out of Manchester than any other UK airfield except Heathrow. Special supersonic charter flights round the Bay of Biscay or to Barbados had taken place from and to Manchester over the years.

Manchester was designated as Concorde's primary diversion airfield if Heathrow became unavailable due to adverse weather. The helping hand in its hour of need had been accepted on many occasions. The airport was the first in the world to develop special Concorde procedures in conjunction with the community. Not only did this

A welcome visitor

G-BOAC on one of the many visits that she made to Manchester during the years of passenger services.

Photo: The Aviation Society

involve special noise abatement procedures for the Concorde crews but also advertising in advance to the airport's neighbours whenever Concorde would be planning a visit. The purpose of this was that the local residents would be ready to expect a louder than normal noise on that day – it worked as noise complaints dropped to almost zero!! In fact, we would always get more compliments than complaints as people just wanted to see it!

Throughout its operational life Concorde had visited Manchester many times, but on each visit it was made very welcome by the staff and public. To say it was “a crowd puller” is an understatement. The spectator terraces were always filled to the brim, and any available viewing point around the airport would always be fully occupied on a Concorde day.

The reason we emphasised this in our proposal was to clearly demonstrate the interest in Concorde from the people of North West England. In fact, it was as strong today as it was when Concorde first flew. Manchester Airport had even incorporated the shape of Concorde into its own logo!

So we had the Airport on board, we had business on board, we had educational establishments and museums on board and we had politicians on board – all backed up with interesting facts, figures and a solid business case. Next came two critical players: the public and British Airways (Manchester). Through The Aviation Society (TAS), a petition of support was launched and quickly gained several thousand signatures as members of TAS volunteered each weekend to collect signatures from visitors and passengers at the airport.

Next, it may seem strange now, but at the time British Airways had



a very active base at Manchester Airport offering both long haul and European routes. The base was operated as a separate commercial division of BA – who, after a chat or two over a coffee, confirmed that they could and would support the Manchester Airport bid. After all, we were used to working in partnership with them on route development and we had just opened a new terminal (3) primarily for BA.

Time to put your best suit on

So, that month quickly passed by. The homework had been completed and a presentation duly formatted. Before I knew it, I was sat on my own, on a plane with my laptop and presentation, heading down to Heathrow. The day was one of those murky low cloud base mornings. CAT III operations were in force and as a consequence there were holding delays and even diversions. Just as if I didn't have enough to think about!!

As it happened I'd given myself plenty of time. Although the Boeing 757 landed a little later than scheduled, I arrived on time at the BA board room at Waterside – the BA headquarters.

It really was an intense interview with nothing given away. Yes, I thought the presentation went well from my side and I was able to answer all the questions. (As you can imagine we had undertaken several “dry runs” back at base – in fact I'm

sure Steve, our Graduate Trainee, quite enjoyed asking his GM difficult questions!)

One of the key selling points of our bid was that we could of course take “immediate delivery”. The funding was guaranteed by the Airport Board and we already had a runway capable of accepting Concorde. I had decided to emphasise this on the basis that we thought our competitors may struggle in these areas. In fact I said “Should you wish the aeroplane could literally be flown into Manchester on retirement day, as such, we could accept it tomorrow!” Whoops, I thought... hope I didn't go too far with that remark? Even though it did bring a few smiles from the panel.

At the end of a very intensive two hours, we all shook hands and I left with the famous words “Thank you, we will be in touch” echoing in my ears.

On arrival back at Manchester, for some reason everyone wanted to speak with me. “How did you get on?”... “OK, it seemed to go down well, but I don't honestly know?” was my truthful response. I'd been given no encouraging signs whatsoever; it was all very, very formal. Yes, without doubt I'd been put through my paces and I still hadn't got a clue who the competition was. There wasn't even anyone else in the waiting room.

As the days and weeks went by with no word back from BA, our

hopes and dreams began to fade. Ah well – we’d given it our best shot, I guess?

Things in the office had got pretty well back to normal, “managing the airfield” and dealing with the weekly crises which inevitably arrive on a Friday afternoon.

Then the telephone rang again. Beryl introduced him again as Mr British Airways, which had by now become something of an in-office joke.

“Aah, good afternoon, Peter, how are you?” “I’m very well,” I replied. Thinking: what was coming next? The words that followed are ones which I will never forget...

“Peter, if I were to offer you a Concorde, which one would you like?”

Moments pause whilst Peter picks himself up off the floor!! I didn’t need asking twice... I opened my mouth and the words “Alpha Charlie” came out at twice the speed of sound. “Good choice,” said Mr British Airways... “CONGRATULATIONS... she’s YOURS!!” At that point I wanted to run to the top of the ATC tower and shout out to the world: “Yes!”

Shssh..

Alas, that was not to be... “Unfortunately, Peter, we want you to come down to Heathrow early next week, sign a confidentiality agreement and a formal loan contract. I’m afraid I must ask you not to tell anyone until after our own team have completed the process and made a formal announcement at a press conference. This will be held before the end of October. You may of course inform the MD, CEO and Chairman of the Airport Board. However, should the news creep out you would be in breach of our contractual agreement, which may then become void. The loan agreement will not come into effect until we have made the formal announcement.” This was serious.

But, wait a minute... was this really happening? I’ve just been offered the Flagship Concorde. G-BOAC is coming to Manchester... but I can’t tell anyone!!

Mr British Airways then continued. “I just wanted to say the Manchester presentation was excellent – the best!” We thanked each other and I put the phone down. At that point Beryl (my PA) shot through into my office, quickly followed by Debbie (Policy and Planning Manager), followed by Steve (Graduate Trainee). “Well?” They almost all said in unison... “Well”, I said, “we are still in the race and BA are going to make an announcement before the end of the month”. I really wanted to say more. At that point I asked Beryl to make an appointment for me to brief the MD and Group CEO today if possible and book a ticket for me to fly down to Heathrow next Tuesday. This was done and the wheels were set in motion. But keeping this one quiet was going to be a hard one.

The following week I was back at Waterside and welcomed to a totally different atmosphere. Champagne

and lunch was the order of the day, and the official contracts were signed – where else, but on the wing of a large model of Concorde G-BOAC.

In the weeks that followed, if I had a penny for the number of times I was asked “Have you any news?” I’d be a very wealthy man.

BA then made an announcement. But not the one we had hoped for... They were going to undertake a “Farewell Tour” of Britain with Concorde during the week before its retirement. Tickets would be offered to their staff, special customers and the general public via a draw.

Manchester was one of the Concorde destinations included on the tour. However, the clock was ticking and the pressure was intensifying for BA to break the news. Everyone wanted to know where the Concorde fleet was going to retire.

All the airports and BA were advertising the flights as “The Farewell Tour”, which enabled the public to come and say “Bye, and thanks for the memories” to Concorde. However, this was a bit tricky for “the few who knew”. So, we agreed with BA that for Manchester we would say that the flight from Manchester would be the very last Concorde departure from the airport, but we hoped that it would not be the very last arrival. A very clever PR spin!

And so on Wednesday 22nd October 2003 Concorde G-BOAG touched down on Runway 06 Left at Manchester on its farewell tour. As usual it brought the airport to a standstill and the great British public had turned out in their thousands. The AVP, multi-storey car parks and every spare piece of land with a view of the airfield was occupied. Concorde Alpha Golf was placed on static display for a short time outside the Aviation Viewing Park (now the Runway Visitor Park) prior to her being made ready for the final Concorde departure from Manchester.



Final departure from Manchester

22 October 2003: Concorde G-BOAG, with Peter Hampson aboard, leaves Manchester for Heathrow during the Concorde fleet’s Farewell Tour of the UK.

Photo: The Aviation Society



Just after lunch those glorious Rolls-Royce jet engines were ignited for the delight of the Manchester crowds for the very last time. This really was the last flight of Concorde from Manchester. She roared down Runway 06 Left and took to the skies. I'm sure I heard Raymond Baxter's commentary "She flies" as my head was pushed back into the dark blue leather seat. Yes... I had been given a ticket (but don't tell anyone). This was to be a special flight in more ways than one.

As we reached our cruising level, passing through the sound barrier, and headed off at twice the speed of sound towards the Atlantic, our Captain came over the PA with a special announcement. "In a few minutes' time, ladies and gentlemen, we will be joined by the evening New York – Heathrow Concorde in an attempt to perform the first, and only, Concorde parallel landing at Heathrow. It's our intention to remain in formation throughout the descent all the way down to Heathrow." Next came those wonderful words – "Those of you on the right-hand side of the aeroplane can now see Concorde from Concorde!"

In no time at all this very special flight had come to an end. It was back on a sedate 757 to Manchester and time to start preparing for what

was happening next. The following week was going to be the big one.

This was the week of Concorde's retirement. Yet still no public announcement had been made. However, the focus of the press was on Heathrow, where all the Concorde were to land on their final flights into the airport... landing one after each other. I was fortunate enough to attend the celebrations as a guest of BA. In fact, it was at that reception where I was offered Trident 3 "Zulu Kilo"... but that's another story.

Got her!

BA then advised that they would be holding a major press conference on Thursday 30th October. At the conference (planned for 10 am) they would advise where the Concorde fleet would be going. Manchester Airport had to arrange a similar conference at 10.15. I think the balloons and "Got her" banners probably gave the game away as the press assembled at Manchester? However, the news was finally out – with one little surprise. BA had taken me at my word. The Flagship of the Flagship Fleet, Concorde Alpha Charlie, was going to Manchester and it was going tomorrow!

What??? The plans we had made for the "Farewell Tour" were quickly dusted down and reactivated. Friday 31st October was going to be a very

An emotional homecoming

Concorde G-BOAC touches down for the very last time, on Runway 06L at Manchester. Thousands of spectators surrounded the airfield to welcome Alpha Charlie to her new home.

Photo: Michael Hilton
michaelhilton.org.uk

special day in the history of Manchester Airport, and it was.

The crowds once again came in their thousands, not only to see the very last Concorde arrival at the airport but to welcome Alpha Charlie to her new home. And so, Alpha Charlie touched down on Runway 06 Left. This was not only a last flight into Manchester but also the last flight ever of an iconic aircraft. I remember wiping a tear from my eye as she taxied on to Stand 1, passing through a very respectable fire service water cannon salute.

After a few precious moments on stand, Alpha Charlie's engines were shut down for the very last time. Welcome home, Alpha Charlie.

Mike Bannister, the Concorde Fleet Chief Pilot, left the flight deck, but not before signing the flight deck door with the rest of the crew. He walked down the steps and duly presented myself on behalf of Manchester Airport with the official aircraft documentation.

And that, as they say... is how to catch a Concorde!

Epilogue

I left Manchester Airport in 2005 to form an International Aviation Consultancy and Training company (Airport Solutions Ltd) with Debbie Riley.

Beryl retired, but had very happy memories of her time with the airfield team (and knew how to keep a secret!).

Steve was a brilliant graduate trainee and went on to become an Airbus A330 pilot with Thomas Cook. I met him recently and we reminisced about catching Concorde... what else?

Alpha Charlie now resides in her purpose-built hangar. Sadly,

Retirement with honour

G-BOAC's flight crew flies the Union flag as she taxis to a halt.

Photo © Ken Fielding / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

the plan to bring her out in summer didn't quite materialise. But the revenue targets were well and truly achieved... well before the 5 years!

Would you believe she's still pulling in the crowds. In fact more people visit her today than they did in the years immediately after her arrival at Manchester.

Finally, Raymond Baxter has a lot to answer for!

The Aviation Society

To find out more about The Aviation Society and their activities and events, visit their website: tasmanchester.com



Peter Hampson: a life in aviation

This obituary from TAS tells how Peter Hampson played a pre-eminent role in the life of Manchester Airport and the aviation viewing parks from the start of his career until his death in May 2022.

Peter had always been passionate about aviation after being taken to the viewing terraces at Manchester Airport by his Dad in the 1960s. This appetite for aviation grew and at the age of 16 he got a job as an administrative assistant at Manchester Airport but went on to greater things, finally becoming General Manager of the airfield.

He formed Airport Solutions Ltd, an international aviation consultancy, in 2004, working around the world providing advice and training for the likes of Dubai International, and OR Tambo Airport in Johannesburg, along with amazing adventures in countries such as Iraq, Iran and South Sudan.

His interest in aviation did not stop with his professional life – through The Aviation Society (formed by Peter and some friends 46 years ago) he became involved in numerous activities such as the organisation of international trips abroad, aviation events and raising monies for various charities and good causes through TAS activities.

Peter never did anything by half; he threw himself into everything 100%. His achievements over the years are too numerous to mention, but some significant ones include lobbying Manchester Airport for the development of the first Aviation Viewing Park at the south side (volunteers

from TAS helped to clear the site). When this was threatened by the construction of the second runway, Peter was fundamental in its relocation to its current position.

He secured the first aircraft at the Runway Visitor Park (RVP) (then the Aviation Viewing Park) – the Avro RJX. But his most important acquisition was that of Concorde G-BOAC. Despite the mammoth task and bids from museums and airports around the world, Peter's enthusiasm and determination never wavered – he secured the Flagship Concorde.

The new commentary box in the RVP was also Peter's brainchild; it is being set up as an Air Traffic Control tower.

Custodian of Concorde

Peter Hampson (right) receives Alpha Charlie's official documents from BA Chief Concorde Pilot Mike Bannister.

Photo: The Aviation Society



Alpha Charlie gets a new home

Sue Williamson, former Concorde Administrator at the Runway Visitor Park

CONCORDE ALPHA CHARLIE, G-BOAC, the flagship of the British Airways Concorde fleet, made her final flight from Heathrow to Manchester Airport on Friday, 31st October 2003. Flown by Captain Mike Bannister, BA9020C touched down at 10.53am on Runway 06L and taxied slowly onto Stand 1, after passing through the customary Airport Fire Service double water cannon salute.

In the end, her 27 years of spectacular supersonic adventuring had ended very modestly with a short 28-minute subsonic flight, but that didn't deter the thousands of well-wishers who gridlocked the roads around the airport and packed the fields along the perimeter fences, all eager to catch a final glimpse of the 'Queen of the Skies' from any vantage point they could find.

Once the initial furore had died down, Alpha Charlie was moved to Stand 70 on the airport's west apron. There she was surrounded by a security fence as British Airways' engineers commenced a lengthy decommissioning process. Whilst batteries, oil and fuel were removed, all carpets, seating, instrumentation and the engines were left in place, exactly as they always had been, so anyone visiting the aircraft in the future would see her in a 'ready to fly' condition.

Meanwhile, at the Aviation Viewing Park (now the Runway Visitor Park), work was commencing to construct a bespoke runway for Concorde. The plan had always been to build the runway and in the fullness of time, to construct a hangar around it. This involved moving an existing exhibit, the Avro RJX (the last civilian airliner to be built in the UK), to a new parking area at the rear of Concorde. Although the RJX is a historic aircraft in her own



right, there was clearly only ever going to be one star at this show!

The start of the tours

Friday 6th April 2004 was to be Alpha Charlie's launch day. The Viewing Park was closed to the public until 2.30pm when enthusiasts with season tickets to the Park were allowed entry. Prior to that, 250 VIP guests, including local councillors, representatives from various airlines, airport officials and celebrity Jason Leonard OBE, a rugby union player, were invited to witness the proceedings as a marching band and fireworks hailed Alpha Charlie's arrival into her retirement home and her new life as a tourist attraction.

Tours were initially scheduled to run on selected dates in 2004, typically one weekend per month. They were to be operated by guides from the Airport Tour Centre employed by The Aviation Society, an organisation for enthusiasts founded by the late Peter Hampson.

Initially the tours were very basic, just 10 or 15 minutes, but always with flight deck access, which was unique at the time. Of course, it was always envisaged the tours would be popular but I think it's fair to say that the demand for tickets took everyone's breath away. And it

Twilight of an icon

2 November 2003: G-BOAC is parked on the airfield before being moved to her display position.

Photo © Dale Coleman / Wikimedia Commons (GFDL 1.2)

wasn't only members of the public who wanted to come. Local schools wanted to bring their pupils; U3A groups, Women's Institutes, brownies, guides, scouts, coach companies wanted to include it in their itineraries. The tsunami of emails and post just kept coming and over the summer additional staff were recruited, some as tour guides and other non-technical team members, myself included, to help with the administration of the tours and the allocation of tickets. My goodness, we were busy!

By the end of the year, the tours were running most weekends and had evolved into something more similar to those you can see at Manchester today. The standard classic tour was lengthened to accommodate a bigger group, and, in response to repeated requests from colleges, universities and visiting flight crew, a longer and more technical tour was developed. The emphasis here was to be on the engineering, with an open engine bay and longer flight deck visit.

At their peak, our tours ran from 9am to 8pm or even 9pm in the evening. As timekeeping was critical, we often ran with seven guides per tour – one designated as Crew Chief, responsible solely for keeping the tours running to time. An advertising agency had been engaged to produce tour leaflets, tickets and promotional items. The slogan ‘Come and Have a Nosey’ was selected with a traditional red, white and blue background palette; this slogan was changed in 2008 to ‘Where Legends Have Landed’. This was to compliment the new Three Aircraft Tour – which, as well as Concorde, included the RJX and a new exhibit, the Hawker Siddeley Trident G-AWZK, which was opened to the public in the summer of that year. The leaflets were distributed around the country via tourist information offices and this generated even more interest in both the tours and the Viewing Park.

As well as the guided tours, which were going from strength to strength, we were also busy with private tours, group visits and educational visits. The breadth of interest in the aircraft was astounding and our visitors not only came from all walks of life but also from all over the world. We tried never to turn anyone away. How could we say no to somebody who had come all the way from Perth, Australia, to propose to his girlfriend on board Concorde? And when a gentleman and his son turned up in our reception area, straight off the American Airlines flight from New York, no ticket and no booking but they had come hoping to do our tour because their ‘local’ Concorde on the *Intrepid* wouldn’t allow them on the flight deck ... well, how could we refuse? Incredibly, they were taking the same aircraft back home that day, a round trip of over 6,500 miles! Their AA aircraft had a two-hour turnround, so we treated them to a whistle-stop tour, a seat upfront at the sharp end and a free ride back to the airport courtesy of tour guide Ross. What a privilege it was to be able to make people’s dreams come true in this way.

Concorde on the move

For over four years Concorde had remained outside at the mercy of the elements. There had been much talk of the hangar, and from time to time a new drawing would appear, each one scaled down slightly from the one before it. Cost was clearly an issue and there were also environmental concerns with the park itself. Eventually, in the spring of 2008, a design was agreed that was acceptable to all parties. It didn’t have the high level viewing veranda that was originally envisaged and it certainly didn’t have a fully opening frontage, but it was within budget, perfectly functional and would do the job nicely.

We were all keen to get started. Alpha Charlie being outside had never been much of an issue to our visitors and the tours had been a tremendous success, but there was huge potential for weddings and also for corporate

business and we clearly needed to be under cover to tap into those. The original agreement with British Airways had assumed some sort of cover over the aircraft and to be perfectly honest, for those people accessing the aircraft every day, the Manchester weather was living up to its reputation a little too often and even a delta wing couldn’t provide enough shelter from a sudden down-pour or a biting crosswind.

Work began in the summer of 2008 to construct a temporary hard standing for Alpha Charlie. Situated directly in front of her runway base, the plan was to tug her forward into position, where she would remain until the steel framework of the hangar had been erected and the ‘sails’ were in position. The hangar is a temporary structure that can be dismantled and rebuilt at another site if necessary. The steel framework is covered by massive PVC ‘sails’, huge sheets of PVC which in some parts go from the base at one side, over the roof and down to the opposite base. Once these were in place, it was deemed safe for Concorde to be rehomed and for the internal build to carry on around her. It was also decided that tours could continue throughout on the temporary hard standing and also in the partially completed hangar. Well, never let it be said that Manchester tour guides don’t enjoy a challenge!

On 23 October 2008, a Swissport ground crew from the airport towed Alpha Charlie forwards by about 17 metres, thus freeing up her ‘runway’ for construction. There was much activity in the park that day. As we looked around, we could see trees and bushes being cut with chainsaws and massive steel stanchions being winched into the field by the gate. Two or three diggers were lined up outside on Sunbank Lane and everywhere you looked there was somebody wearing a hard hat. It was a bitterly cold day, the wind was icy and as the light faded, it began to rain. There was a chapter closing, I think we all felt it, and it was quite clear to all of us in the park that day that things were never going to be quite the same ever again.



Preparation for work

23 October 2008: G-BOAC is towed from her display area on to the temporary hard standing.

Photo: Sue Williamson

Construction of the hangar

The hangar was to be built over the patch of 'runway' on which Alpha Charlie had been standing since 2004.

The first stage was to move the aircraft forwards on to temporary hard standing, so she would be clear of the work while the hangar frame was being built; amazingly, the guides continued to run visitor tours through the winter, while the aircraft was in this position.

Once the frame and side walls were complete, on 12 January 2009, she was moved back again, under cover for the first time since she retired. The end wall and the front glass wall were then added.

Mach 2 thanks former RVP tour guide Vince Chadwick for details of this project.



Temporary base

A view of the hard standing created to hold Alpha Charlie while the hangar was being constructed.

Photo: Vince Chadwick



The show goes on...

Alpha Charlie still open to visitors; the volunteers continued to keep the aircraft open and conduct tours while the work was being done. *Photo: David Watkins*



Back under cover

12 January 2009: Alpha Charlie is carefully manoeuvred into the partially completed hangar.

Photo: David Watkins



Enclosing the space

The frame for the end wall of the hangar can be seen just behind Alpha Charlie's tail. *Photo: Vince Chadwick*



Finishing the job

Workers just in front of Alpha Charlie's nose build the glass wall to go at the front of the hangar. *Photo: Vince Chadwick*

Re-awakening

Once G-BOAC had been moved under cover, the range of activities possible with the aircraft increased. Most significantly, work began on restoring some of Alpha Charlie's systems to life; Katie John looks at the maintenance and restoration projects carried out in the last decade. This work continues today.

This restoration work was done by Heritage Concorde and supported by the Runway Visitor Park (RVP) and The Aviation Society (TAS).

For several years, certain maintenance and restoration jobs including re-inflation of the tyres had been carried out as needed. However, from 2018 Heritage Concorde embarked on the major task of restoring movement to the famous droop nose – as they had already done with great success on G-AXDN at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford. TAS – in particular, Peter Hampson – gave financial help for the project, and American Concorde supporter Emma Rasmussen helped to raise funds. Exxon, manufacturers of Concorde's M2V hydraulic fluid, donated all of their remaining stock. A former British Aircraft Corporation engineer donated a power supply, and a hydraulic power pack was acquired from Hydraulics Online.

Heritage Concorde volunteers Graham Cahill and John Dunlevy began work on 7 January 2019. Just the next day, they tested the nose for the first time since 2003 – and it worked perfectly! Further details and film of this project can be found in Mach 2, Feb 2019, as well as on Heritage Concorde's web page: heritageconcorde.com/project-boac

The nose reactivation was completed in time for the festivities to mark the 50th anniversary of the Concorde prototypes' maiden flights in 1969. Just as importantly, the ability to move the nose now made it possible to replace the broken right-hand windshield, which had been shattered several years previously. This major repair was completed on 24 September 2019.

Details of the work can be found in Mach 2, Nov 2019.

Other restoration works on G-BOAC have included reactivation of lighting on the flight deck instruments and in the cabin, refurbishing the exterior lights, and restoration of the Mach number display in the cabin. Work on G-BOAC still continues today, to give visitors a taste of Concorde as she was in her prime.

To find out more about Heritage Concorde's work, visit their website: heritageconcorde.com

To learn more about G-BOAC or to book a tour, visit the RVP website: runwayvisitorpark.co.uk

Restoration work

Above right: the late John Dunlevy removes the broken right windshield. Right: the new windshield in place. Below: RVP volunteer John Hepple (centre) with John Dunlevy (left) and Heritage Concorde leader Graham Cahill (right).

Photos: Heritage Concorde

