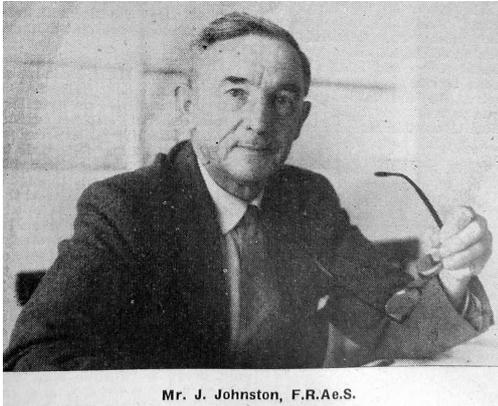


# Mr. John Johnston

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By Carl Whiteley



Mr. J. Johnston, F.R.Ae.S.

**Had it not been for a casual conversation, the whole life of Mr. John Johnston, F.R.Ae.S., design office manager at the de Havilland factory, Christchurch, might have been totally different.**

That conversation influenced him when, at the age of 22, he was about to take up a post with a German firm of aerial roadway makers. He would have trained at Leipzig before being sent out to work in one of the British colonies.

This would probably have led to Mr. Johnston being interned by the Germans during the whole of the 1914 – 18 war.

Mr. Johnston had travelled to London from his native Edinburgh and after an interview with the German firm stayed overnight with a Scots friend at Wandsworth.

"My friend said he wouldn't carry on with the job in Germany if he were me and said he knew a Mr. Low who had just opened a drawing office at the Maxim gun factory at Erith, Kent. I didn't go back to Edinburgh but went down to Erith the following day and got a job," said Mr. Johnston, who found himself one of the first draughtsmen in this country to be engaged on aircraft.

**In 1911 he worked on the Vickers No. 1, 2 and 3 and when he retires in September his career will have coincided with the life of the conventional type of military aircraft .**

Mr. Johnston describes the progress in the aircraft industry as phenomenal but believes that the life of the fighting aircraft as we know it today is coming to a close. He visualises the future aircraft as a missile-type without wings but with some sort of fin on top.

The Vickers No. 1, recalled Mr. Johnston was a French R.E.P. monoplane modified, and either the No. 2 or 3 was a dual control machine.

## "THE PEPPER BOX"

"In the absence of anyone with aircraft experience, or for that matter, stressing experience, the mechanism was designed with gas piping, and so heavy that to lighten it we drilled holes freely, from whence the scheme took the facetious nickname "the pepper box."

After his long innings in the industry, he still considers the little R.E.P. monoplane—called after Robert Esnault Pelterie, patentee of the joystick—the "nicest of aeroplanes".

**Towards the end of 1911 various members of the Vickers group were transferred to H.M. Balloon Factory at South Farnborough and at this time a Mr. de Havilland was demonstrating an aeroplane of his own design. He crashed this aircraft and was then engaged as a designer at the factory which is now known as the Royal Aircraft Establishment.**

Mr. Johnston was a junior draughtsman there, working with Mr. de Havilland, who was later to become Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, chairman of the de Havilland Company.

They worked on the original B.E.2 aeroplane and it was in this aircraft that Mr. Johnston had his first flight over Farnborough Common in May, 1912, the pilot being Mr. de Havilland.

**"If we got down safely in those days we lived to fly another day," said Mr. Johnston, who has since flown in every aircraft on which he has worked, with the exception of the Sea Vixen.**

When the 1914-18 war broke out he was sent from Farnborough as a technical representative to the motor industry to assist firms in the change-over from car to aircraft production. The companies were D. Napier & Sons, Acton, Coventry Ordnance Factory, Siddeley

Deasy Motor Co., Coventry, and the Austin Motor Co., Birmingham.

Shortly after returning from this work he was connected with the design of the D.H.4, 9, and 15, at the Aircraft Manufacturing Company at Hendon. During the design of the D.H.9A in 1917 he was sent as the company's technical representative to the Westland Aircraft Works, Yeovil.

#### DEPUTY PRODUCTION ENGINEER.

After the war when the Aircraft Manufacturing Company closed down and the aircraft industry became almost "dead", Mr. Johnston became deputy production engineer to J. Tylor & Sons, internal combustion engineers of New Southgate, London.

This was followed by an appointment with the British Thomson Houston Co., at their switch-gear works, Neasden, London, in charge of compound filled H.T. circuit breakers.

By 1925 the aircraft industry was opening up again and Mr. Johnston went down to Yeovil as chief draughtsman to the Westland Aircraft Company. Here he worked on the Wapiti, Wessex. Widgeon, auto-gyros and various other prototypes under the management of the late Mr. R. A. Bruce, and chief designer A. Davenport.

He also worked on the Pterodactyls with the late Capt. G. T. H. Hill and the Lysander and Whirlwind with Mr. W. E. W. Petter.

**In 1939 Mr. Johnston joined Airspeed Ltd., Portsmouth, as chief draughtsman and moved with the firm to Christchurch. He became design office manager in 1951 when the factory was taken over by the de Havilland Aircraft Co. Ltd., and has worked on Vampires, Venoms, Vampire Trainer and the Sea Vixen.**

He has also worked with the Bristol and Handley Page companies.

Mr. Johnston became a student of the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1912, an Associate Fellow in 1918 and a Fellow of the Society in 1946. Fellowship of the Society is reserved for those "who shall have acquired a considerable degree of eminence in the profession of aeronautics".

#### TRANSPORT.

Now aged 70, Mr. Johnston does not agree with those who say that all types of aircraft of today are finished. "Aircraft will go on but more as a means of transport." And he believes that the helicopter is a type of aircraft with a good deal of development in front of it.

Married in 1915 at Edinburgh, Mr. Johnston and his wife live at "Penetang", Vincent Road, New Milton. They have two sons and one daughter.

His spare-time interests are gardening and travelling. He does not go to the cinema very often, but prefers to visit the live theatre.

During his career in the industry, Mr. Johnston has had hundreds of draughtsmen and technicians under his control, many of them now in various parts of the world.

#### "THE HUMAN TOUCH"

When he leaves in September he will be missed by his many colleagues at Christchurch, for it was once said of him by an old chief: "He has the rare gift of being a good disciplinarian without losing the human touch—a combination conducive to the production of maximum effort".

Mr. Johnston came in with the first aircraft in this country but although the military aircraft era to which he has devoted his career is rapidly fading he will be remembered as one of the pioneers who paved the way for the pioneers of the future.

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# Robert Esnault Pelterie



## В.Е.2

