

# Planespotting in London

An aviation museum near Heathrow traces the timeline of commercial flying, with a section on India's transatlantic history

Fareeda Kanga  
 mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com  
 TWEETS: @MumbaiMIRROR

I've always been fascinated by the roar of a jet engine and the smell of aviation fumes hanging in the air. An ideal pastime for me as a kid was driving to Sahar airport in Mumbai and watching these gleaming giants take off and land. I was therefore thrilled to discover a tiny museum, The Heritage Centre, that one could visit 'by appointment only' located at Waterside, close to London's Heathrow Airport.

Aircraft enthusiasts prepare to be enthralled, for within the four walls of The Heritage Collection you will find captivating infographics highlighting the history of air travel via maps, memorabilia, records and artefacts belonging to companies such as BOAC, BEA, BSAA and the pre-war Imperial Airways, the early British commercial long-range air transport company, operating from 1924 to 1939. For aviation geeks like me, it is a priceless experience as I was lead around by Paul Jarvis, the curator whose knowledge and love of aviation is nonpareil. Starting from the memorabilia that highlights the first scheduled international flight from London to Paris on 25



The Imperial Airways Empire "Flying-boat" in the mid 1930s



1936 Imperial Airways ad



BOAC national crew uniforms during 1950s-60s

**In the early days, flying was a luxury reserved for the rich who normally travelled by cruise ship**

August 1919 by Aircraft Transport and Travel Ltd (AT&T), we stroll past sepia-tinted alleys and model aircraft showcasing nearly 100 years of airline history.

**A NOISY POSH**  
 "In the early days, flying was a luxury reserved for the rich who normally travelled by cruise ship. Those early aircraft — Argosies, Atalantas, HP42s and flying boats — were slow and noisy, flying at no more than a few thou-

sand feet above the ground and at around 100 miles an hour. They could not fly more than 300 miles without refuelling. But the aircraft interiors were luxurious and service standards were high," Jarvis explains. Despite the drawbacks of limited technology, the ability to turn a 6-week cruise into a 10-day flight meant the aircraft garnered a lot of support from HM Government for ferrying its diplomats and celebrities around — aside from its postage.

With World War II, civilian transport took a back seat, but it

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 41



First class cabin of BOAC in 1960s



Arrival of the first flight at Delhi on January 8, 1928

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

was a boom time for the development of the aircraft in terms of technology, an era that famously led to the jet engine. One display showcases the Air Transport Auxiliary, the civilian body that flew aircraft from factory to airfield. During the war, over 300,000 aircraft were delivered, a staggering number come to think of it. It was equally thrilling to see the amount of space devoted to the inaugural

India service from London to Delhi in 1929, a journey that took 7 days, 4 different aircraft and 20 stops! (See box)

**WHAT YOU'LL FIND HERE**

The best part about The Heritage Centre is that it is manned by volunteers, whose dedication, combined with the benevolence of staff and former colleagues who lent precious artefacts, has built the collection to what it is today. Aside from memorabilia, the collection comprises an extensive document archive

**THE INDIA CONNECTION**

Did you know that Imperial Airways' first landing in India was on 8 January 1927, when a de Havilland DH66 Hercules landed in Delhi after a journey that started at London (Croydon) on 26 December 1926? The passengers included the UK's Secretary of State for Air (Sir Samuel Hoare), the Director of Civil

Aviation (Sir Sefton Branker) and Imperial's Managing Director (George Woods-Humphrey). To honour the occasion, the aircraft was named City of Delhi.

Imperial Airways inaugurated its first subcontinental service from London to India (Karachi). The route was London

(Croydon)-Paris-Basle by Argosy (by air), Basle-Genoa (by train), Genoa-Rome (Ostia)-Naples-Corfu-Athens-Suda Bay (Crete)-Tobruk-Alexandria by Calcutta (by flying boat), Alexandria-Gaza-Rutbah Wells-Baghdad-Basra-Bushire-Lingeh-Jask-Gwadar-Karachi by DH66 Hercules. The planned

zill-air route could not be operated as Italy would not allow British aircraft to enter Italy from France, and flying over the Alps then was not considered practical. The London-Karachi journey time was seven days and the single fare £130. By December, the service had reached Delhi.

recording the formation, development and operations of airline companies such as British Airways. Over 400 uniforms from the 1930s to the present day are preserved here, along with a large collection of aircraft models. A historically important library of thousands of photographs is also available and is probably the most complete set of aviation posters in the UK.

**HOW THE SARI TOOK FLIGHT**

Because flying was the prerogative of the rich, much attention was given to the uniforms of the crew. One of the museum's more popular archives is the one that showcases the uniforms of air hostesses. A lovely bit of trivia is that BA launched the sari for its stewardesses long before Air India! In 1958, BOAC became the first inter-

**BRITISH AIRWAYS HERITAGE COLLECTION**

- » Waterside, Speedbird Way
- » Harmondsworth, Middlesex
- » UB7 OGA
- » The museum is open Mon-Fri and the best way to arrange a

visit is by emailing them at [ba.1.museum@ba.com](mailto:ba.1.museum@ba.com). No admission charge. If arriving by public transport, you can use the staff bus from Heathrow airport.

continental airline to introduce Indian stewardesses on its services — again before Air India — and it adopted the sari as the stewardesses' official uniform in the air.

BOAC, and subsequently British Airways, cabin crew continued to wear the saris until mid-2005, when the new 'kurta suit' replaced the new uniform.



The Indian crew's sari uniform during 1930s