

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Random Modelling Notes

INDIANA EDMONDS AND THE WALL OF DOOM

(When too many kits is barely enough)

(February 2013)

This is the first time I've been to an analyst in a few years. Do you still do things the same way, I lie on this couch and you sit over there taking notes? You do. Good. I'll just lie down here, make myself comfortable. And try to stop shaking.

Where to start. Perhaps it began when my parents gave me my first Airfix kit, a Hawker Hurricane IVRP, and I discovered that it was possible to buy and build my own personal air force. At least that's how I first thought about the act of buying, building and building up a collection of little aeroplanes. It's a common enough story, I suppose, little boys getting addicted to Britfix glue and through it, addicted to the inexpressible joy of making little aeroplanes out of bags or boxes of odd shaped bits and pieces..

Perhaps another beginning was in the 1990s when circumstances led me to do a course in museology. At the time I thought of it as a good way of improving my skills as a historian, but it also planted in my mind the idea of a collection of scale models as a scale model museum. At that time I went weekly to work - perhaps play might be a better word - at the major aviation museum in Western Australia which proudly boasted that it had a collection of something like 30 aeroplanes, the biggest of which was an Avro Lancaster. I did not think this was particularly remarkable, after all, I had a much larger collection of aeroplanes than that, and many much bigger (in real life) than a mere Lancaster. Thus the idea of a collection of scale model aeroplanes as a museum formed in my sometimes fevered mind.

Next came the idea of a collection policy, something that all museums have. The basic theme for this conceptual museum became the history of the second or third most important nation in aviation history, France. There were, of course, other interesting themes to also explore; the US Navy, airliners, bombers, fighters, light civil aviation, aeroplanes of historical interest, to name but a few. In my original conception of this plan, a good scale model museum might have a thousand or so exhibits representing all the major aeroplanes in the areas of the collection policy. An improbable dream, perhaps, but not impossible and, what's wrong with dreaming anyhow.

What probably put this dream into the realms of impossibility was the development of all those cottage industry kit makers. When the plan first came to me there were so few kits of French aeroplanes, or many of the other themes, that I did not expect to end up with a really large collection, but then modellers discovered resin and how to use it in making limited run kits, in particular the genius of Jean-Pierre Dujin. After that came the internet as a source of modelling kits and the various swap and sells that take place around Victoria. Like many modellers, there was always more kits than there was time to make them, and so the backlog of kits to be made gradually grew. Some people are able to keep their backlog in one place but in the past few years mine has been spread around in various rooms and houses in a veritable state of chaos. I had a database of what I'd bought and made, but no idea of where everything on that database was. There were kits in boxes and bags,

on shelves and in cupboards, and in dusty piles on garage floors and in corners, all over the place.

Things might have gone on in this state for a long time, but recently the opportunity came to go and spend some time house-sitting for a friend in Hobart. Tasmania is a place that we have only visited once, and then with little opportunity for sight seeing, so the opportunity to spend a month or two living in Hobart was too attractive to turn down. They say that Tasmania is a very popular tourist destination these days so there is apparently a lot to see during the day, but how to fill in the evenings? I know that most people would think, but for dedicated modellers the obvious answer is to make scale model aeroplanes, of course.

Although we're taking the car so space is not a serious problem, it still seemed to me that instead of taking a pile of easy-to-make kits, it made more sense to take a few kits that would be very time consuming to make, and there are no more time consuming kits than vacforms. I've got a lot of them stored up for future construction but at the moment I'm completing a beautiful Latecoere 631 flying boat so, what better kits to work on than other flying boats. I have kits for several beautiful inter-war flying boats including the Sikorsky S38 and S42 and, most attractive of all, the Short 'C-Class' flying boat. I also liked this idea because the C-Class plays a major part in my PhD thesis and several academic articles I've written in the past decade or so. I have a Welsh Models kit of a Qantas Empire Airways C-Class, according to my database and memory, which will require a lot of painstaking work to put together well. But, where was it? I looked at my database and there was nothing in the field telling me in which box the kit should be. At first I dashed about looking here and there, diving into boxes and shuffling around in cupboards, with a frustrating lack of success. After a while I decided to get methodical..

At about the same time as this was going on Valma and I decided to watch all the Indiana Jones movies, or at least the four that we have in our collection. For my money, the first and third are the better ones, there are less interesting plots in the second and fourth and the special effects are expected to carry the movie instead. Of course, the best special effect in the first movie is the closing scene where the Ark of the Covenant is sealed in a box and wheeled into an apparently infinite warehouse to be lost for all times, the same warehouse that we visit again in the fourth movie. I have to say that my search for my own holy grail - the Welsh Models C-Class - made me identify with Indiana, not that I have a whip, run across strange looking tanks in the desert or travel in Ford Tri-motors around the world. Still, I could empathize with him when it comes to trying to track down seemingly ancient artefacts in hidden places.

When we moved from Raglan Street I packed a lot of kits into some large moving boxes and sealed them. Most are still sealed and I worked on the assumption that my C-Class is not in any of them. However, there were many other boxes that I'd since opened and taken kits out of, and put other kits into. I got all those boxes together and started piling them up. I also began gathering up kits from all over the place, dusting them off and putting them into more boxes.

More often than I care to admit, things turned up that weren't on my database including, for example, three of those Tupolev TB-3s with I-16s dangling under their wings (two in 1/72 and one in 1/144). All I can imagine is that people have given up trying to make this kit (our club president finally put one together after an epic struggle) and instead sold them at swap-n-sells where I could not resist temptation. (I gather, from the evidence before me, that I am not good at resisting temptation when it comes to many of the exotic model kits.)

There are also a lot of large 1/72 kits that I have lost interest in since I've become interested in 1/144 scale airliners, including things like B-47s, An-24s and B-24s. How I came into possession of a resin 1/72 B-32 is also quite beyond my comprehension. A lot of it will probably be sold off

in due course, but not until I've finally got it all together and organized. And while I looked through all these kits I kept hoping that my C-Class would turn up in the next bag or box that I opened. But nothing, and I was starting to get worried.

There are enough kits in enough boxes to stock a reasonable model shop, but not Hobby HQ I hasten to add. With the exception to special aeroplanes like BAC Lightnings, Vought F-8s, Boeing 747s, DC-8s and a few others, there is only one kit of most aeroplane types and people looking for Spitfires, Bf109s, P-51s and that sort of thing would be disappointed if my collection were to be sold. But if they were looking for obscure inter-war French light aeroplanes or French experimental fighters, I would have just the kits they wanted.

Over the space of a few weeks the collection gradually came together, carefully dusted off, stacked, put in boxes and catalogued so that, in theory at least, I can find any kit in my possession with relative ease. It's not quite as bad as the warehouse in which the Ark of the Covenant was stored, but it feels like it at times. Discovering that my collection of unmade kits is large enough to form a real wall of doom has been edifying and alarming, but it explains why I find little of interest on tables at swap-n-sells or on eBay. I've already got one of just about anything that interest me in my Wall of Doom.

So, after days of work all the kits I own were in boxes, stacked up neatly, and my database was as complete as human error allows. There was still no sign of my long sought-after C-Class, but I'd seen it listed on my database so it had to be there somewhere. I asked my computer to list all the kits that did not show up as being in one of the boxes and it showed me a dozen entries, but the C-Class was not among them. I was getting desperate by this stage and thinking that my memory must be playing tricks but, just to check, I looked up the full table entry for all kits and models, and there it was. This time, however, the entry told me that the kit was stored in Box 11, one of the boxes that was still sealed. I went, opened the box, and there was the kit sitting on top, waiting patiently for me to get around to making it. I swear that previously that field had been empty, which was the reason why I'd gone to all the trouble of bringing the collection together in the first place.

I can hear you sniggering. That's not nice. What! You're not sniggering, this is too serious for that. I can hear someone sniggering, you're sure it's not you. It's not! Do you believe in the Modelling Gods. You do? It must be them laughing at me. What did I do to deserve this?

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