

Charles Rolls Memorial Trust

Tragedy at Air Pageant – Famous Aviator Dies

This might have been the headline 100 years ago when the first Englishman to die in a motor driven aircraft accident crashed at Southbourne on 12th July 1910 during an Air Pageant on the flat area of which the current Broadway road is a part.

The Pageant had been organised to celebrate the then Centenary of Bournemouth in 1910. Part of the competition had been to land as close as possible to a touch down point. Rolls had tried to improve on an earlier attempt but the tail of his aircraft, a Wright Flyer (with a tail modification) failed at a critical moment and the aircraft plunged to earth from about 80 feet. So died Charles Rolls, at the age of 32, whose partnership a few years earlier with Henry Royce created the famous Rolls-Royce Company in 1906.

Already an established adventuring aviator and balloonist Rolls was a pioneer of aviation in England and had met the Wright brothers. For example he had used his Wright Flyer for a non stop return trip across the channel in June 1910 so as to improve on the achievement of Bleriot's single crossing.

It is arguable that Charles Rolls' legacy of Rolls-Royce and its Merlin engine, combined with the fighter aircraft it powered and the Dowding infrastructure of command and control, were the saviours of Britain during the Battle of Britain. It was fitting, therefore, that a Spitfire performed a display, and later a flypast, as part of the Charles Rolls commemoration organised in July 2010 at Southbourne as shown below:

9th July - Spitfire display and later a flypast at the unveiling of the memorial, refurbished by Rolls-Royce plc. RAF Central Band evening commemoration concert at St Peter's School.

10th July - Presentation to St Peters School of Charles Rolls Statuette at commemoration Dinner Dance.

11th July - Parade of Rolls-Royce cars and a Service of Dedication.

12th July - Dedication at the hour of Charles Rolls death (12:55).

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The memorial plaque in the grounds of St Peter's School



The inscription on the face of the original stone reads:
This stone commemorates the Hon Charles Stewart Rolls who was killed in a flying accident near this spot on the 12th July 1910 the first Briton to die in powered flight.

The inscription around the bevel edge reads:
A pioneer motorist and co-founder of Rolls-Royce Limited, a balloonist and aviator. The first man to make a double crossing of the English Channel by air.

The new base reads:
This memorial was refurbished by Rolls-Royce plc 12th July 2010 to commemorate the centenary of the death of The Hon Charles Stewart Rolls.

The memorial plaque is sited in the school playing fields of St Peter's School