

## Tockington Manor



*The Manor, as it was at the time*

Tockington Manor, which belonged to the Salmon family, was taken over as BAC Engine Division's Project Technical Office in 1939, for design work on new engines. According to minutes of a Director's meeting in December 1940 Mr Fedden stated that he had been in touch with Messrs Sims of Nottingham in connection with supply of huts at Tockington Manor available in 3-4 weeks time to house the whole Design Offices in one place. However, the cost of £9000 was considered excessive. As a result the main Engine Design Office was housed at what had been Fry's Confectionery Factory at Somerdale.

The staff at Tockington Manor numbered up to 70. Accommodation at the Manor included some apartments for senior staff or visitors and Roy Fedden lived there for a time after his house in Bristol was bombed on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1940.

Tockington Manor has significance as the site where Bristol's first gas turbine engine, the Theseus turbo-prop engine, was conceived and designed. Preliminary design started in July 1941 after a meeting of Roy Fedden, Chief Engineer and Frank Owner, then Head of the Project Office, with Frank Whittle. By May 1943 component research had started and early in 1944 Sir Stafford Cripps authorised start of production of five engines. Frank Owner (by then Chief Engineer) later wrote "I must digress to describe an incident

which demonstrated the spirit of our small team so well that it made my eyes water: on my return to Tockington Manor (our dispersal office) the following day, there was a large Union Jack on the door, drawn on paper because no flag was available."

The Theseus design led eventually to the Proteus engine which powered the Britannia airliner.

Through the war period the Tockington Manor gardening staff continued with their duties of maintaining the gardens and growing vegetables to supply the kitchen. Emergency supplies for 40 to 50 personnel were held in the cellar. Local men were employed to provide 24 hour security cover.

Close House, Upper Tockington Road, became a Bed and Breakfast lodging for several of the Project Design Team.

Between September 1944 and mid 1945 what was by then called Turbine Design was moved back to Patchway and the Manor was returned to the Salmon family. In 1946 the estate was sold and the Manor was bought by Major and Mrs Tovey who converted it into a private school. It continues in that role to this day.

## Tockington Quarry

Adjacent to the grounds of Tockington Manor and in shared ownership with the Salmon family and Olveston Parish Council exists a disused lime stone quarry. In February 1941 Roy Fedden promoted a proposal to use this quarry as an Engine Development Test Site for the Centaurus engine in view of its proximity to both the Tockington Manor Project Design Team Offices and the main Patchway site. He also claimed that it would be convenient for provision of power, light and water. In the event, Fedden was over ruled by the Directors and a quarry at Failand was selected. Development engine manufacture and assembly moved to an underground quarry at Corsham, Wilts. Tockington Quarry was left unused and is now a tranquil nature reserve.

## Woodhouse (Manor)



Woodhouse, on Fernhill, on the outskirts of Tockington, belonged to the famous composer Basil Harwood, although he had by then moved away and the estate was occupied by tenants. The house was leased from Mrs A Stratton from 23 November 1942 for £366-14s-2d pa and used by the Aircraft Division of BAC to store documents. It is recorded that the cost of £22 was incurred to blackout the windows.

## The Elms, Church Road, Rudgeway



*photographed shortly before the War*

This house, now called "Pypers", is the home of Sir George White Bt, great grandson of the founder of BAC.

It was used for storage of cockpit seats and documents. Sir George tells us the cellars still bear markings of aircraft tyre sizes. Records show expenditure of £200 for alterations to meet storage requirements.