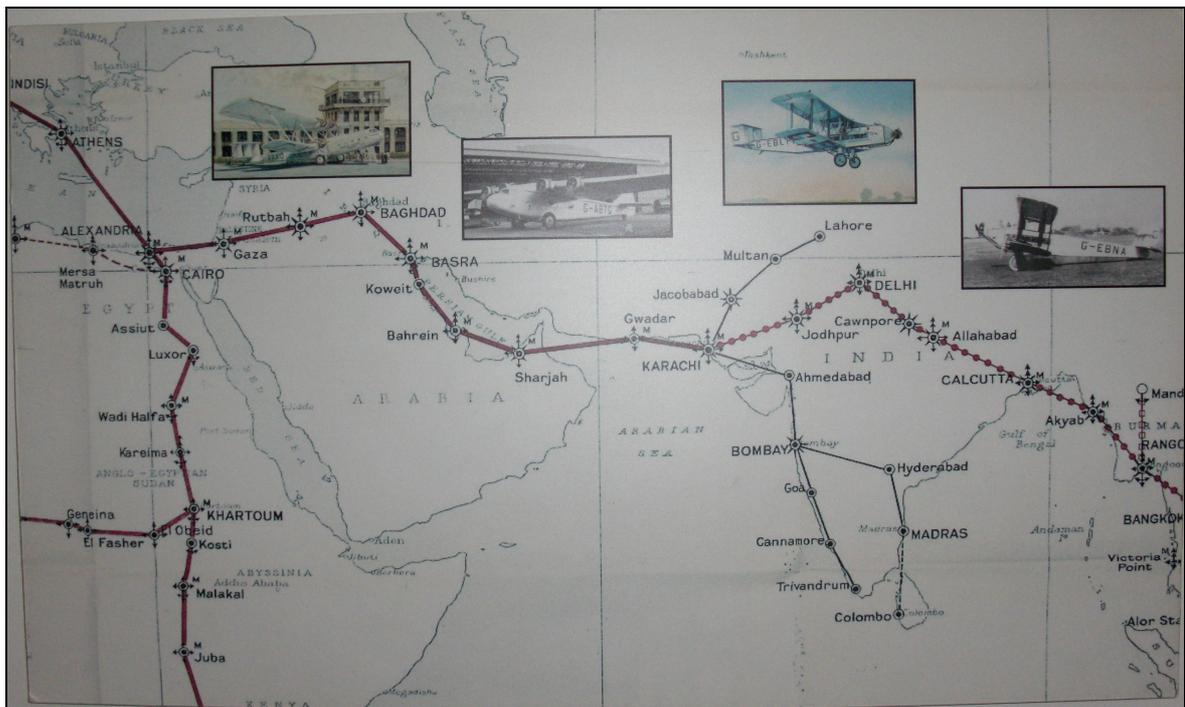


SHARJAH – AN INTERESTING VISIT

I am very fortunate that my job, as a Boeing 747 Flight Engineer, takes me to some interesting and not so interesting places. In January 2010 I found myself operating around the Middle East and Asia. During a mandated day off in Dubai I decided to seek out what remains of RAF Sharjah.

Sharjah started life in the early thirties as a transit stop for the Imperial Airways route to India and on to Australia.



Imperial Airways route Map to India and on to Australia

A fort like structure was built to house the staff and the passengers during the night stop.

That fort still exists and is the basis for the Al Mahatah Museum.



Entrance to the Musuem grounds

The original salt flat runway was improved when the RAF entered the picture and RAF Sharjah became a well know fixture. Today the runway is now King Abdul Aziz Street

The original fort building consisted of many single bedrooms. Today, the interconnecting walls have been removed and archways constructed so that one can walk the length of the building inside. The original doors are strictly for show. One side of the fort is dedicated to the Imperial Airways/RAF time at Sharjah, the opposite side is used for Aviation technical subjects and a very interesting hands on interactive display by Air Arabia (Sharjah's low cost airline) that can be used by students to learn about airline operations.



Inside the fort, the individual bedroom doors can be seen.



The Fort Main Entrance on the Airfield Side



Originally a Volleyball Court

The Fort building has two additions since the RAF days. The first, a hangar, is close to the north end of the building and houses early Gulf Aviation (now Gulf Air) aircraft.

An Anson, Dakota, Heron and Dove are featured. Also displayed is a BOAC Comet 2 nose and a unique fuel bowser.

Sadly no RAF aircraft are there and the museum needs more photographs of RAF activity. There is plenty of room in the Hangar for a Hawker Hunter which I believe were based at Sharjah. Any ideas?



Avro Anson

My very first air experience flight at Cosford was in an Anson



De Havilland Dove



Douglas Dakota (DC3) Gooney Bird



De Havilland Heron



BP Fuel Bowser

On the south end of the building is a very nice exhibition of aviation from dinosaur-like flying animals through modern aviation. There are two working wind tunnels to teach Bernoulli's principle. The guide said the exhibition was designed by a UK company. It is pitched at teaching youngsters about flight.

Close to the North end of the fort is the original ATC Control Tower which is not open to the public.



The original ATC Control Tower

An interesting part of the tour was a film made in the thirties showing a Imperial Airways HP42 arriving at Sharjah, its subsequent servicing, and it's departure the next day.

Do you remember watching the films about the HP42 when we were in I.T.S. at Cosford?



HP42 Model in the fort

Here are two maps of Sharjah:



Before



Today

Some more pictures of Sharjah today:



This was the Runway! Looking North



Looking South



Current Local Map



The ramp area shown in the aerial photo was over here

Some Information Boards in the Museum

تاريخ كرويدن - أول رحلة طيران History of Croydon - The First Flight

يقع مطار كرويدن في جنوب شرق لندن، وقد افتتح في ٢٩ مارس ١٩٢٠م. كان هذا المطار أو منفذ جمركي رسمي في لندن ونقطة وصول ومغادرة الرحلات الدولية.

في العشرينيات كانت تستلزم الرحلة من لندن إلى الشرق الأقصى التوقف في العديد من المحطات لإعادة التزود بالوقود. وكانت الشارقة واحدة من تلك المحطات. أقلعت طائرة أول رحلة نقل ركاب من كرويدن متجهة إلى الشارقة في ٥ أكتوبر ١٩٣٢م.

في بداية الحرب العالمية الثانية باشرت القوات الجوية الملكية إدارة المطار واستغلته لأغراض عسكرية. صار مطار كرويدن مطاراً مدنياً مرة أخرى في عام ١٩٤٦م. ولكن وتزامناً مع هذه الأحداث فقد وقع الاختيار على مطار هيثرو كمطار لندن الرئيسي نظراً لصغر حجم مطار كرويدن لاستيعاب الطائرات الأكبر حجماً وسرعة. واصل مطار كرويدن عمله كنقطة انطلاق للرحلات القصيرة إلى دول أوروبا. كما استخدمته نوادي الطيران الخاصة حتى إغلاقه في عام ١٩٥٩م.

Croydon Airport in South East London opened on 29th March 1920. It was the first official customs airport of London and point of entry and departure for all international flights.

In the 1920's, the long journey from London to the Far East required many refueling stops. Sharjah was one of these stops. The first passenger flight from Croydon to land in Sharjah was on the 5th October 1932.

At the beginning of World War 2, Croydon Airport was taken over and used by the Royal Air Force (RAF). In 1946 Croydon became a civil airport again. However by this time Heathrow had become London's premier airport. Croydon continued to be used for short flights to Europe and by private flying clubs, until it closed in 1959.

تاريخ المطار (المحطة)

The History of Al Mahatta



مع دخول القرن العشرين ازدادت أهمية الشارقة وتوسع حجم المطار مستخدماً أبناء الشارقة للعمل فيه وداعماً للاقتصاد المحلي. قامت القوى الجوية الملكية البريطانية في عام ١٩٤٠ بزيادة طول مدرج المطار كما استخدمت القلعة منذ عام ١٩٥٠ كمركز لقوة كشافة عمان المتصاحبة والتي كلفت بحماية الأمن في المنطقة الواقعة ما بين السعودية وعمان. أضيف بناء جديد في الستينيات وأصبح المطار قاعدة التدريب الطيارين.

ثم افتتح المطار الجديد في المنطقة الداخلية من المدينة . لكن ماذا حل بالمطار القديم؟ ارتفعت أبنية ضخمة في المنطقة المحيطة به وانضم المدرج القديم لشارع الملك عبد العزيز. يتكون متحف المحطة الرائع اليوم من قلعة الشيخ سلطان القديمة ومن مرآب للطائرات وبرج للمراقبة.

As the twentieth century advanced Sharjah grew in importance. The airport grew in size, employing Sharjah people and helping the local economy. In 1940 the British Royal Air Force lengthened the runway. From 1950 the fort was used as the headquarters of the Trucial Oman Scouts, who policed the area between Saudi Arabia and Oman. In the 1960s a new terminal was built, and the airport became a base for training pilots.

In 1977 a new airport opened further inland. What happened to the old one? Tall buildings sprang up around it on the salt flats. The runway became incorporated into King Abdul Aziz Street. Today Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqr's old fort, together with the hangar and control tower, form the fascinating Al Mahatta Museum.

الحياة اليومية في المحطة Daily Life at Al Mahatta

يخدم الرجال العسكريون لمدة سنة واحدة في سلاح الجو الملكي بالشارقة حيث يقيمون في ثكناتهم المكيفة.

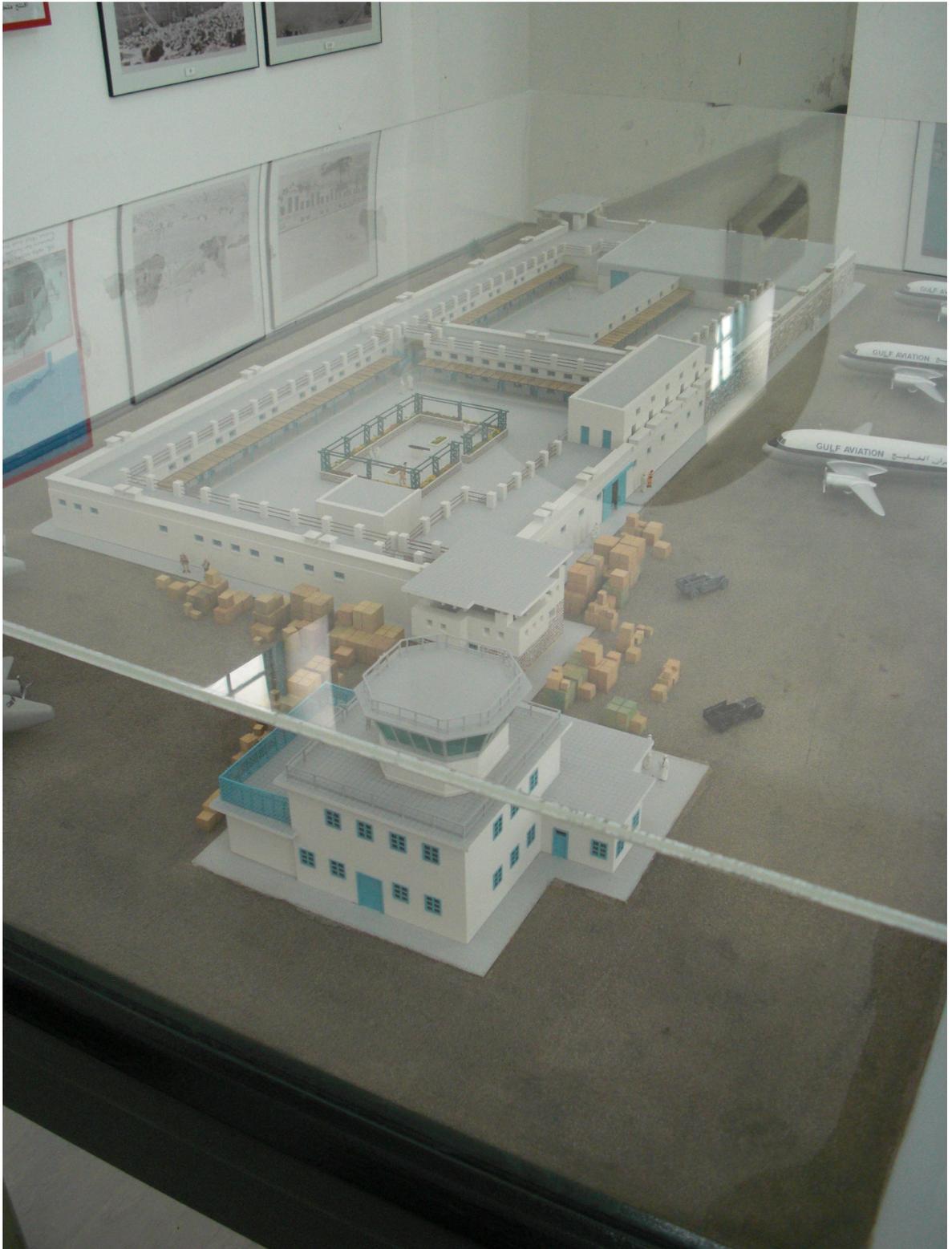
يتناول الجنود طعامهم معاً في جو ممتع «على الرغم من أنه كان يتم حفظ البيض بطريقة تجعل مذاقه كعشب بحري» - ن بيلى، ١٩٦٧م.

يقضي الرجال أوقات فراغهم في القراءة وكتابة الرسائل والإبحار في خور الشارقة والسباحة في المسبح. يتطلب الذهاب إلى نادي الإبحار السير عبر الشارقة وسط أبراج الرياح والسوق. يقوم الرجال بالذهاب إلى شاطئ منطقة الخان على متن حافلة حيث يقومون بالسباحة والانطلاق للغوص من زورق محطم. تتوافر وسائل مواصلات في أيام الأحد إلى دبي عن طريق تتبع مسارات في الرمل القائمة على حركات المد والجزر وفي بعض الأحيان كانت سيارات لاندروفر تستأجر من السلاح الجوي الملكي البريطاني مع قائد محنك للقيام برحلات في الصحراء.

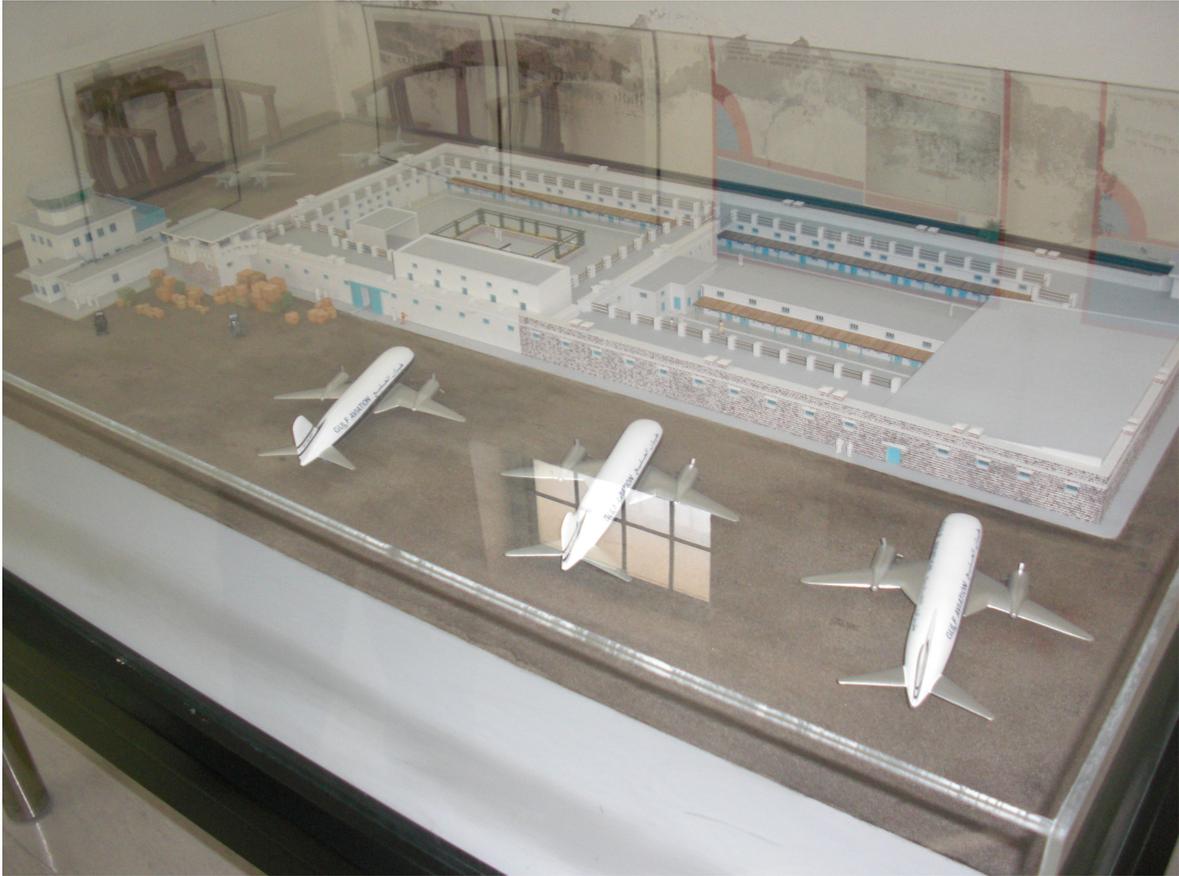
A tour of duty was for a year with the men usually staying in the comfortable air conditioned 'W' blocks.

Engineers worked a two shift rota. On alternate weeks one duty would start from early morning till afternoon with the second shift working on until all aircraft had been serviced.

Leisure time was spent reading, writing letters, sailing on Sharjah Creek and swimming in the pool. The walk to the sailing club went through Sharjah village with its wind towers and souq. One day a week the men travelled in the back of a lorry to Al Khan beach where they swam and dived off a wrecked tug. On Sundays transport was provided to Dubai following tracks in the sand that were dependent on the tides. Occasionally a Landrover was hired from the RAF and with an experienced leader trips were made into the desert.



A model of the Fort and Control Tower



Another view of the Fort and Control Tower Model



Another view of the ATC Tower & Guard Tower, note high rise buildings close to the old runway.

This completes my RAF Middle East tour. I was in Bahrain and Aden in the sixties during the Rhodesia UDI. In the 70's, Masirah with 57 Victor Tankers. Now I've made it to Sharjah which I evaded during my service.

I'm sure that the museum would welcome any pictures or input from Ex-RAF types:

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The Al Mahatah Museum is one of 16 Sharjah Museums.



In closing, What is this from? A Rapide? (Domine) Has a wood structure under seat



The author, Mike Young, (808 40th BE) with the museum guide.