

How Hull could have had its own international airport - thanks to 'Mr Aviation' Neville Medforth

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By Will Ramsey



BIG PLANS: Neville Medforth dreamed of bringing an airport to Hedon

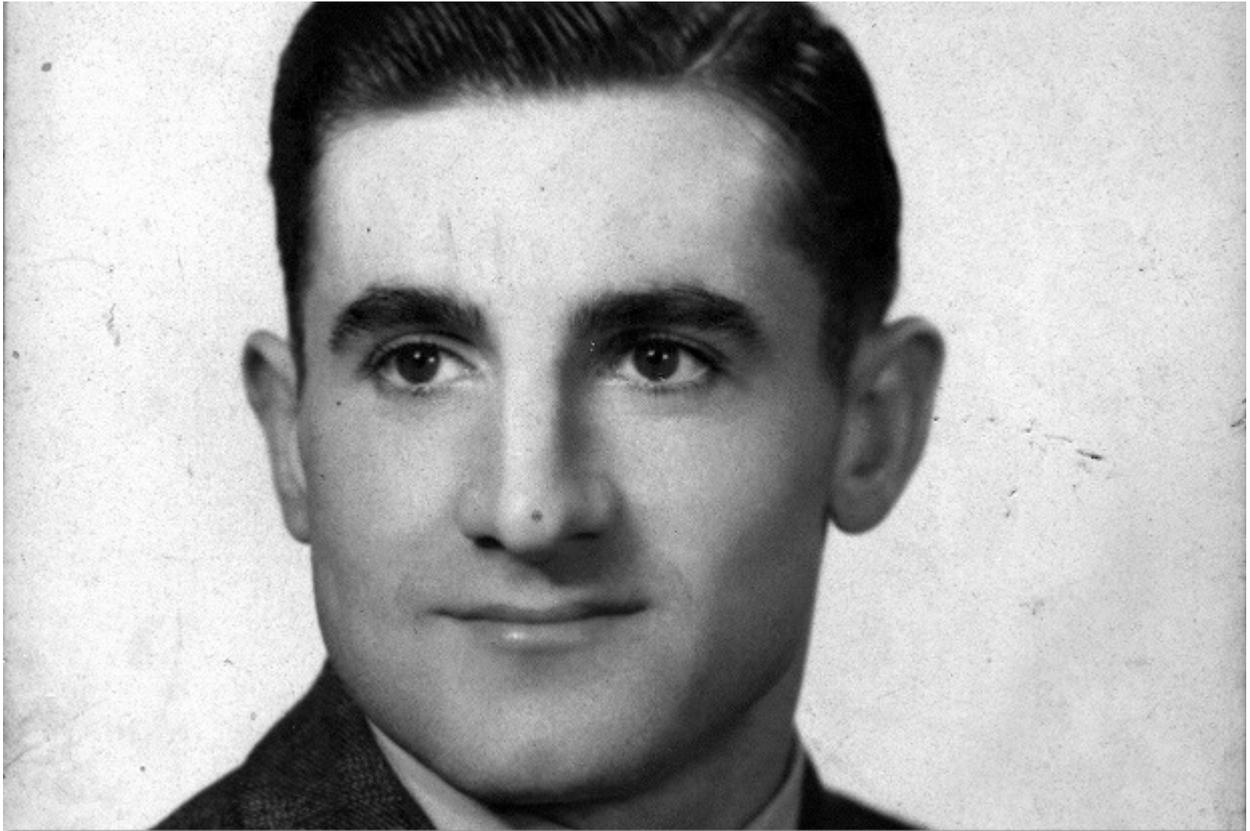
He was a man in love with flight, ever since, as a five-year-old, he'd seen a airplane display at Hedon Airfield. The life of Neville Medforth – dubbed "Hull's Mr Aviation" by the press – was shaped by a dream of bringing a commercial airport to the city.

On the same expanse of land where he'd seen the flying display during his childhood, Neville imagined a busy hub with flights connecting Hull to destinations around the globe.

He was to push tirelessly for the project during the 1950s and while it eventually floundered – slapped down by officialdom and competing commercial interests – he was never a man to quit.

"I respect him for the tenacity he put into trying to fulfill his dream," said his grandson, Alex Slingsby. "It didn't work at Hedon, so he tried at Paull. A lot of people would probably have given up but he didn't – he soldiered on.

"He was at least able to establish an airfield at Paull, albeit for a brief period. He was able to do something – that was the main thing."



'MR AVIATION': Neville Medforth.

Alex, a 23-year-old from Beverley, has spent the past two years writing a book about Neville's exploits. While Alex was close to his grandfather, listening avidly to stories about the war years and his schooldays in Hull, this part of his life had always remained unmentioned.

"I think it was something which was very disappointing to him," Alex said. "His passion was flying, and in his mind he wanted it to be open for flying, which is probably why he never spoke of it.

"It was sad for him because it never worked out."



ENTHUSIAST: Neville Medforth in the cockpit of a Tiger Moth.

It was only when Alex discovered a box in the family garage in December 2014, piled full of his late grandfather's letters and documents, that he uncovered the story. The Hedon Aerodrome Saga: Death of an Airport, Alex's book, has been shaped by the 1,500 letters and documents he discovered in the box.

Among the leaves of paper were 20 typewritten pages – Neville's start at writing his own story. Alex said: "I wanted to finish it off for him, so it has felt good to bring it back to living memory, so to speak.

"I knew at the time I was writing the book that this was a piece of history that could otherwise be forgotten.

"It has brought everything together – there were bits and pieces on Paull Airfield and Hedon Airfield but there was never any connection between them. As somebody whose grandfather was involved in them both, I thought it was good to get that out there, instead of second or third hand information."

Neville was a trained teacher, who'd served with the Duke of Wellington's regiment during the Second World War. After returning from military service he took his flying licence with Skegness Aero Club, then the nearest facility to Hull.



A photo showing Neville Medforth at Hedon in the 1950s.

He alighted on the idea of reviving Hedon Aerodrome, which had been used as a speedway track in the post-war years, as an alternative to the long trips back and forth to the Lincolnshire coast. From there came the germ of the idea to transform the 200 acre site – a mere 20 minute drive from Hull – into a functioning airport.

It was a status which the site had briefly enjoyed during the 1930s, with commercial flights to Amsterdam and Grimsby, before the war had put a hold on any further development.

Neville was certainly enthusiastic about the project. The dilapidated hangar, used by a farmer as a foldyard for his cattle, was piled two foot deep in manure which had to be shovelled out by him and his friends. Electricity and water was also laid on for what became the newly founded East Yorkshire Aero Club.

But while Neville pushed his arguments for the aerodrome revival, gaining widespread coverage in the press for his efforts, the local authorities remained unswayed with the chemical works at nearby Salt End also raising concerns about safety issues.

Eventually he turned his attentions to a piece of land at Oxgoodes Farm in Paull. In 1968, this former strip of farm land became operational as Paull Aerodrome. Although it never attracted commercial flights, it remained the headquarters for the Hull Aero Club until 1983.



A photograph of Paul Airfield in the 1970s.

Any thoughts of a Hull airport were ended in the 1970s, with the establishment of Humberside Airport on the South Bank - but Alex's book reminds us of a forgotten champion for commercial flight in the region. Neville died in July 2007, at the age of 82, after being admitted to hospital following a stroke.

Among his late grandfather's writings, Alex found these words – a fitting epitaph for his airport dreams.

"Of Napoleon, it was said on his heart would be written 'Waterloo'. If this is possible then on my heart would be inscribed 'Hedon Aerodrome'."

The Hedon Aerodrome Saga: The Death of an Airport by Alex Slingsby is available on Amazon, and through order at bookstores.

Read more at <http://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/how-hull-could-have-had-its-own-international-airport-thanks-to-mr-aviation-neville-medforth/story-29708060-detail/story.html#dQCCulwpDxo6gdMg.99>