

New models added to the Heritage Centre display

Two new models have been added to the displays in the Heritage Centre.



Together, they make up a Short Stirling Mk.IV and a Horsa Mk.I glider combination, a common sight in the New Forest skies in early 1944, during the training for D-Day in June 1944 and later in the year, for Operation Market Garden (Arnhem) and Operation Varsity (the Rhine crossing) in March 1945

The Stirling's career as a bomber was limited by its original specification and the bomb bay design, which only allowed bombs of up to 2000 lb weight to be carried. In addition, with a maximum service ceiling was 16,500 ft, it was vulnerable to flak, but the thick wing, which contributed to this weakness, enabled pilots to out-turn the Ju88 and bf110 night fighters, which they encountered. Many missions were flown as low as 12,000 ft.



The aircraft depicted is a 295 Squadron aircraft, 'The Saint', which was based at Holmsley South and in the run up to D-Day, at Hurn, as seen in the wartime photograph below.



From 1943 onwards, it was realised that the aircraft would make an excellent glider tug. Mk.III's were converted to the Mk.IV, to be used with the Horsa and heavier Hamilcar gliders, flying from Holmsley South, Stoney Cross and Hurn and Christchurch.

Horsas were built of laminated wood, by furniture manufacturers, all over the country, before the parts were transported by road, to be assembled at Christchurch (and Brize Norton). Once assembled, they were towed off for pilot training at other airfields. Both aircraft were a vital part of New Forest operations in WWII and are rightly part of our proud local aviation history.



The Airfix Stirling Mk.I/III and Italeri Horsa Mk.I models are 1/72nd scale 1970s period mouldings, which hold up well, considering their age. The Stirling kit was converted to a Mk.IV, by the removal of the nose and mid-upper gun turrets and adding scratch built glider towing apparatus.