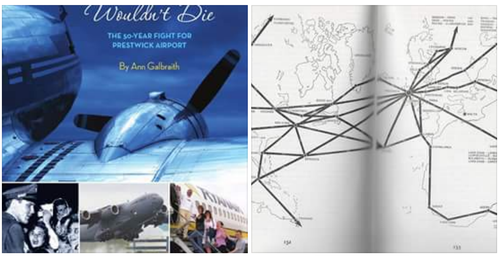
Alycia Hayes shared **Annie Harrower-Gray**'s **post**.
June 25 at 4:11 PM ·



Annie Harrower-Gray added **2 new photos.** December 16, 2017 at 9:41 PM ·

THE PRESTWICK AIRPORT ROBBERY

Annie Harrower-Gray

Prestwick Airport offers not only uninterrupted access to the Western hemisphere, it sits where the cold air of the surrounding low lying hills meets the warmer air of the sea and the resulting uprising bores a hole through mist and fog. It's Europe's only all year clear weather airport. Heathrow on the other hand, suffers constant delays and cancellations due to bad weather. These facts alone, beg the question – why is Prestwick not the UK's second major international airport?

In 1933 little was known about the effects of extreme cold or lack of oxygen on planes and pilots but two Scots, the then Marquess of Douglas and Clydesdale and Flight Lieutenant David F MacIntyre ignored the unknown dangers and flew over Mount Everest in two tiny bi-planes, a Westland and a Wallace, their wings held together by struts and wire. On their return the two men, together with the Duke's brother, the Earl of Selkirk, founded Prestwick Airport in order to realise yet another dream. Planned by experts, Prestwick was to be the greatest international airport in the world.

In the thirties, under the management of David MacIntyre, Prestwick was designing and building planes intended to become the ordinary man's bus on which, he could travel to the ends of the earth for 3d a mile. One plane, the 'Prestwick Pioneer' was designed to meet the specific needs of the Highlands and Islands and carried the sick to hospital on the mainland. After the second world war it was denied a license to fly in the UK but sent by the UK government to carry guns in the jungles of Malaya instead.

Prestwick was using skilled labour at a time when unemployment was high in Scotland . Figures for 1935 showed forty nine percent unemployment in Airdrie, and 42% in Port Glasgow. In comparison, Birmingham had an unemployment rate of only 7%. The high unemployment figure was due to the dependence on heavy industry in these areas and an unbalanced economy where most of the lighter industries were distributed throughout England . The airport's extensive plans included trade booths for Scottish manufacturers. Scotland had become air minded early on and Prestwick was well on its way to becoming a World Centre of Air Transport. Its accomplishments were far in advance of London Airport where they were still trying to disperse the fog with 'Fido' flame jets.

Scots had high hopes that a white paper on Civil Aviation published in 1945 would promise a bright future for Prestwick. Instead, neither the airport nor Scotland received as much as a mention in the document.

It was a rare event in that Scottish politicians from every party joined forces to fight for their country and Prestwick. In a House of Commons debate on 29th March, 1945, every available Scottish Member of Parliament signed the motion. Alexander Sloane (Labour:South Ayrshire) opened the debate quite eloquently, though perhaps his speech did not endear the entire house to his cause. For the benefit of those MPs south of the border Sloane explained that Prestwick Airport was situated next to the 'Barns o' Ayr' where William Wallace experimented with the very first incendiary bombs. He razed the barns to the ground after tying up the English inside.

Next on his feet was Lieut-Colonel Sir Thomas Moore (Scottish Unionist :Ayr Burghs) he praised Scotland, something we would not hear a Scottish Tory do today.
"We are not greedy in Scotland. We realize that the capital of the United Kingdom must necessarily have the No 1 terminal airport for world air traffic. All we do insist on, is that Prestwick should be the alternative and secondary trans-oceanic and Trans-Atlantic Airport . Moore questioned the refusal of the Government to approve an airline service in Scotland before going on to praise the skills of the Scots:

"We have long been seized of the dramatic, indeed the almost miraculous, potentialities of air transport and in this we are many generations in advance of England. Just as for generations we have built the best and biggest ships in the world, so we are determined to handle this new form of transport in the same way and built the best and biggest aircraft in the world. Why not? We have the best scientific brains, the most expert designers and the most highly skilled craftsmen, except for those who are at present loaned to England. "

One by one the Scottish members took the floor each making a solid case for Prestwick to become the UK's second international airport.

George Buchanan (Labour) asked in his speech, 'We read of great things being accomplished by Scotsmen. Our people constantly say this – and it is difficult to answer them: Is our greatness always reserved for the battlefield and the glories of war; have we no great capacities for the glory of peace production?"

The member for the Glasgow Gorbals received his answer later in a patronizing speech from Sir Stafford Cripps (Minister for Civil Aviation)
" I do appreciate very full the pride of accomplishment that Scottish men and women feel in the aircraft industry and in their own contributions to air services and training. They have played a very distinguished part in the course of the war, and I have taken many opportunities of going to Scotland in order to inform them of the appreciation of the Government and Department in the work they have done. I believe that this type of what we may justly call local patriotism is of the very greatest importance in the proper development of our nation as a whole,...."

The underlying message was clear. Prestwick had been allowed quite graciously, to contribute to the war effort but that was their lot.

The protests from the Scottish People, the undisputable facts and the debate were all ignored, Sir Stafford Cripps would not change his mind - Prestwick was not going to be allowed to set foot on the great highway of the air. The government would back Heathrow, which had twice been turned down as unsuitable. The Scottish people, the industrialists, the financiers and others must organize themselves said Cripps . An uphill struggle, as the government undermined Prestwick's every effort to realize its potential. Investors in light industries waiting to move into Prestwick would now withdraw as they would be unable to obtain licenses to go ahead with production. Previously in 1935, Prestwick made an application for permission to build and extend the airport. It was refused, because in the opinion of 'experts' it was 'exceptionally unsuitable from the flying weather aspect'. Later, authorities at Prestwick who applied to go to the Havana Conference of Air line operators were refused exit permits by the Westminster Government.

The Scottish people were right to suspect that in the their treatment over Prestwick they were being well and truly screwed. Sloane warned that Westminster refusing to give the airport its place in the sun could well mean the parting of the ways for Scotland and England.

Clement Attlee and the Labour party ousted the Tories from government in July 1945 but it made no difference to Prestwick. In 1946 Group Captain MacIntyre received a letter from the Minister for Civil Aviation 'any aviator taking a plane from Prestwick airport will incur the penalty of a £2,000 fine and/or twenty years imprisonment '. Prestwick was being paralyzed. It was not to compete with London Airport and show it in an unfavourable light for London was to receive a grant of £30 million, some of it Scots taxes.

In the years that followed, it mattered little what party was in power at Westminster. Labour and the Tories shared the same policy – keep Prestwick in a state of strangulation, ensuring that all the wealth to be accumulated from civil aviation stayed firmly in the South East of England.

In 2013, the Scottish Government bought Prestwick from its private owners Infratil after it having been on the market for eighteen months. Only a small part of aviation, development and planning of airports mainly, is devolved to Holyrood. The regulation of aviation is reserved to Westminster. With the airport in public ownership and plans recently revealed for a £65 billion, manufacturing site near the airport, we may yet see the dreams of its founders realized in an independent Scotland, free from London interference. To quote Lieut-Colonel Sir Thomas Moore " Scots have imagination in their minds and a spirit of progress in their blood, which are often lacking in those of our compatriots South of the Border"
Perhaps Nicola Sturgeon's vision for Prestwick goes far beyond just saving an airport struggling under private ownership from closing.

Like Comment Share

10

9 Shares

Donna Mcnaughton
I have been sharing this for ages..dont know how to share on Twitter though x 1

1 mo Like Reply More

Stuart Mckenzie replied · 1 reply

Alycia Hayes
I'll have a go. 2

1 mo Like Reply More

Write a comment...