

J. LAURENCE PRITCHARD

THE ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY has been singularly fortunate in those who have served it since its foundation on 12th January 1866.

Many on its Councils, and most of its members, during those first decades when the aeroplane was but a theoretical vision, kept the light of endeavour shining brightly despite the despairing winds of hope deferred.

Captain J. Laurence Pritchard was fortunate in being called upon to serve the Society during the vigorous youth of aviation, a youth which had already tried its fledgling wings in war, a youth which was eager for conquest, a youth which had tasted the savour of high adventure in the skies and had seen the earth beneath its gaze, after long æons of the world's history.

The Society may count itself fortunate too, for in Captain Pritchard it found a man who, during the years he served it, never lost that spirit of youth, one who looked ahead with a serene confidence in the future of aviation and of the Society.

Laurence Pritchard was educated at Dulwich College and Christ's College, Cambridge, where he passed the Mathematical Tripos examination. At Dulwich he was a contemporary of the brothers H. M. Cave-Brown-Cave (now Air Vice-Marshal) and T. R. Cave-Brown-Cave (Wing Commander) and of the late Harris Booth, who played a leading part in the development of the aeroplane for the Navy in the 1914-18 War and taught the future Secretary of the Society the mysteries of the flight of the boomerang.

After coming down from Cambridge Laurence Pritchard entered Fleet Street and wrote with the authority of youth on most subjects, including aviation. He wrote his first articles on aviation in 1909, that year which was in so many ways the most remarkable year in aviation, for it was the year the Wright Brothers flew in France and roused the imagination of the world, that Bleriot flew the Channel, that the great aviation meeting at Rheims was held, and the year when the Council of the Society issued a warning to the public against investing money in aeronautical companies without first making thorough enquiries into such concerns!

In February 1910, less than seven years after the first heavier-than-air flight, Laurence Pritchard wrote an article comparing the still fledgling aeroplane with the giant Zeppelin and firmly stated his youthful conviction that the "gas-bags" would not survive.

It was not until the First World War, however, that aviation fully claimed him. Although he had joined the Army, a chance meeting with Harris Booth brought about a sudden transfer above the Admiralty Arch and to the Royal Naval Air Service, in that famous Room 1,004 which did so much for the development of Naval aircraft under Admiral Murray Sueter, Commander Clark Hall, A. J. S. Pippard, Harris Booth, Harold Bolas, Tom Barlow, F. A. Bumpus and many others. Later, when the Royal Air Force was formed, he was transferred to it, and is one of the few people who has served with all three Services.



H. G. Conway

CAPTAIN J. LAURENCE PRITCHARD, Hon.F.R.Ae.S., Hon.F.I.Ae.S.

In those few years of war the Secretary learnt more about aviation, as indeed did everyone else, than during twice as many years of peace. And in those years he was bitten by that aviation bug which leaves behind it a fever, never cured, although relieved from time to time by strong doses of aviation medicine.

As a mathematician thrown among engineers Laurence Pritchard found life, if not to say difficult, at least exciting. To be asked to calculate the strength of an aeroplane from general arrangement drawings, when a blue print to him was a novel way of picturing an aeroplane and a slide rule was a mysterious way of showing twice two were four, was something without precedent in those days. That he must have succeeded may be inferred from the fact that he became, with A. J. Sutton Pippard, who had taught him all he knew, one of the authors of the original "Hand-book of Strength Calculations," the forerunner of the now well-known A.P. 970.

The names of Pippard and Pritchard were to become even better known in 1920 when they published "Aeroplane Structures," a book which for years was the aircraft stressman's bible in America as well as in Great Britain.

In 1919 Captain Pritchard became Editor of the JOURNAL of the Society which had been issued first as a Quarterly in 1897 and as a monthly in 1918.

For the next six years, as Editor of the JOURNAL, Captain Pritchard was also a member of Council and during those years he helped in the taking of certain steps which were ultimately to have a great effect on the prestige and power of the Society. The first of these was the institution of examinations for Associate Fellowship, which came into force in April 1922. A member of the Examinations Committee for many years, the Secretary did everything possible to encourage the raising of the standard until now the Associate Fellowship examination is a qualification widely recognised.

It had been expected when the 1914-18 War was over that aviation would go ahead fast and that all the world would be flying in a few years along the great air routes which had been visualised. Unfortunately interest in aviation lessened. The membership of the Society, which had reached well over 1,000 by the end of 1918, began to decline, despite all the efforts of the Council, which included the holding of the International Air Congress of 1923 organised by the Council and so ably run by Lt.-Col. Lockwood Marsh. By the end of 1924 it was clear that drastic steps must be taken to conserve the Society's resources, Captain Pritchard was asked to take over the Secretaryship in an honorary capacity on 1st April 1925.

In 1925 the Council issued rules for the formation of Branches and the first English Branch under these rules was founded at Coventry. From that small beginning there are now nineteen Branches of the Society in Great Britain and Canada and Divisions of the Society in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The Branch membership has risen from some 200 in 1926 to well over 5,000 at the present time.

The year 1925 saw a real turning point in the Society's long history. During that year Harry Guggenheim visited the Society's headquarters and as a result of his inquiries into the work of the Society the Danial Guggenheim Fund made a grant of \$5,000, a grant which was renewed for the next four years. On the advice of the Secretary much of this sum was spent on improving the JOURNAL, issuing a consolidated Subject Index of the first thirty volumes and a catalogue of the books in the library. An appeal was also issued for an Endowment Fund to enable the Society some day to acquire a home of its own.

Both the Air Ministry and the S.B.A.C. helped the Society with grants. Laurence Pritchard visited the leading firms in the Industry, stressing the importance of a strong and flourishing Society to the future of the Industry. Many firms, as a result, agreed to pay the examination fees for successful Associate

Fellowship candidates as well as the first year's subscription, a gesture which added greatly to the Society's membership.

In 1927 the Society and the Institution of Aeronautical Engineers were amalgamated and Captain Pritchard was appointed full-time Secretary.

During the two years he had served in an honorary capacity the membership had ceased to drop, and the Council were able to plan ahead with some confidence. The work of drafting new rules, editing the *JOURNAL* and other periodicals and the beginnings of a technical index had all been carried out by the Secretary.

A prominent part was taken by the Society in the 1929 Aeronautical Exhibition held at Olympia. For it Mr. J. E. Hodgson, the Honorary Librarian, in a most generous fashion put at the disposal of the Society his remarkable and unique collection of historical prints, books and MSS, since acquired by the Society. With his ever-ready help, Captain Pritchard continually fostered the historical side of the Society and during the years which followed never lost an opportunity of acquiring additions to the Society's now unique collection.

In 1930 the Secretary visited Canada and the United States of America, a visit which was fraught with far-reaching consequences for the Society. In Canada he assisted in the founding of Branches of the Society in Ottawa and Montreal.

In New York the Secretary attended a dinner given to him by Major Lester Gardner, Edward Warner, J. C. Hunsaker and other leaders of American aviation and, at their request, outlined to them the work and organisation of the Royal Aeronautical Society. Out of the advice and help he then gave came the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences. A chain was forged then, the links of which have grown stronger with the years. Through that 1930 visit more and more close Anglo-American friendships are being formed yearly and in 1947 there took place the first of the meetings between the two bodies which are now being held biennially in London and New York.

Following his visit to Canada and the United States, the Secretary in 1931 inaugurated lectures to the public schools and other educational centres and with immense energy himself gave over 100 lectures in less than three years to drive home the gospel of the air. He also prepared a number of these lectures, complete with slides, and induced many members of the Society also to give them. In those three years the name of the Society became widely known and in 1935 the membership reached 1,500 for the first time. That year the first Annual Garden Party was held.

In the Sixty-ninth Annual Report of the Council, the President and Council put on record "their profound appreciation of the work of the Secretary, Captain J. Laurence Pritchard, who has not only rendered the greatest service to the Society as in previous years, but has identified himself generously with every movement that appertains to its benefit and prestige."

In the Seventieth Annual Report of the Council there appeared the following: "This Report would not be complete without a tribute of thanks to our Secretary, Captain Pritchard, for all his work, advice, and energy in the interests of our body. This is no mere formal acknowledgment, but one of real thanks to one we look upon as almost the human embodiment of the Royal Aeronautical Society."

The end of 1935 saw the Endowment Fund reach £10,000 and a further drive in preparation to achieve the object which had constantly been held before the members, the acquisition of a building worthy of the rapidly growing prestige and influence of the Society.

The Council now felt justified in looking for new premises, although it was nearly three years before they were found. During that period the Secretary visited and reported on numerous possible buildings.

Late in 1938 No. 4 Hamilton Place was acquired, was occupied on 25th March 1939 and formally opened on 16th and 17th June 1939. In 1938 the membership had reached 2,000 and by the end of 1939 it was close on 2,500.

Less than three months after the formal opening of the first home of the Society the Second World War had begun.

During the whole of the war No. 4 Hamilton Place was kept open to its members. Immediately on the outbreak of hostilities arrangements were made for an emergency headquarters in the country in case the bombing of London made it impossible to remain. The historic records of the Society were transferred there for safety, as well as irreplaceable books and records. It is no longer a secret that the country headquarters of the Society was the Secretary's own home. Both No. 4 Hamilton Place and the Secretary's house suffered severely from bomb damage before the war was over, but without loss of any of the Society's records.

For the Secretary those were days of strenuous endeavour. Upon his shoulders fell much of the burden and responsibility for running the Society at a time when it was difficult for the Council and its Committees to meet.

During those early days of the war the work of the Society actually increased, as did the membership, and that work had to be carried on with a heavily reduced staff. Although the lecture programme, with the exception of the Wilbur Wright Lecture, was cancelled both on account of security reasons and the heavy demands made upon all in the Industry, the Council, with the consent of the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Production, arranged a number of secret week-end meetings on subjects of importance to the war effort.

These meetings involved the most careful preparation and organisation by the Secretary, with the ready help of many firms in the Industry. They were arranged in order to link together the experiences of various R.A.F. Commands, Fighter, Coastal, Bomber, Maintenance and the Fleet Air Arm, with the work of the designers and producers in the Industry. For the first time producers and users were brought into direct contact at a time of great value to both, and there is no doubt those meetings were among the most valuable the Society has ever staged.

In addition to those meetings secret technical Committees were appointed on Structures and Aerodynamics, to reduce the great mass of information on both subjects into useful form for the Industry. The Secretary of the Society, officially, is secretary of all Committees of Council, and during those urgent days of war, when Captain Pritchard had no one to assist him, that meant a considerable strain.

In addition to running single-handed those special Committees and meetings and the normal routine work of the Society, Laurence Pritchard was secretary of the Advisory Committee of the Council, which from 1941 to the end of the war prepared memoranda on highly secret matters and reported directly to the Ministers of Aircraft Production. Many of those memoranda had to be prepared in the first instance by Captain Pritchard from notes given to him by members of the Committee, on subjects which were of a highly specialised character.

During the whole of the war period the protection of the Society's building was in the hands of the Secretary and his staff under conditions which were extremely difficult at times. Bombs dropped near No. 4 Hamilton Place on seven different occasions and blew in windows and doors. Throughout those days, however, none of the work was delayed, work which apart from that already mentioned was greatly increased by the rapid increase in membership. From September 1939 to December 1945 the membership rose from 2,200 to over 5,000. During the greater part of the war a duplicate register was kept in the country in case of total destruction at headquarters.

Increased secrecy regulations, paper, labour and other restrictions handicapped severely the editing of the JOURNAL by the Secretary, but it appeared throughout

each month with a constantly increasing circulation. It is of interest to note that the JOURNAL is bought by the government departments of many countries and is subscribed for in most countries throughout the world.

Laurence Pritchard had always held that aviation was international and he took every opportunity to encourage that outlook so far as the Society was concerned, always urging closer links with other aeronautical bodies. It was during his term as Secretary that the British Empire Lecture, at the suggestion of Mr. George Dowty, was founded, the Bleriot Lecture was inaugurated, the Anglo-American Aeronautical Conference was begun and finally, the Divisions of the Society came into being in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

The great majority of present-day members of the Society have known no other secretary than Captain Pritchard, and few who have joined the Society in the past twenty years can be aware that he gave up a successful career as an author when he accepted the Council's invitation to become the Secretary.

At the end of the 1914-18 War Captain Pritchard had returned to Fleet Street and began to write detective stories and quickly became widely known. Altogether thirty novels came from his pen, a number of which were published first as serials in the London *Daily Mail*, *Evening News* and other daily papers. In another genre Captain Pritchard wrote many novels and stories for weekly magazines making a special appeal to women.

Inevitably the energy and time he gave to build up the Society took away from those formerly given to fiction.

Some measure of the astonishing energy and variety of his interests, largely unknown save to his closest friends, may be gauged from the fact that in the years between the two world wars he not only edited the JOURNAL of the Society, lectured widely on aeronautics on behalf of the Society he was running and wrote over thirty novels and close on a hundred short stories, but he was the science editor of the "Universal Encyclopedia" for which he wrote many of the science articles, the technical editor of the "Wireless Encyclopedia," the technical editor of the "Handbook of Aeronautics" and the first author of the section on Structures, an associate editor of the "Household Encyclopedia," the author of the "Book of the Aeroplane" and a text book on "Broadcast Reception in Theory and Practice," and an authority on criminology, on which subject alone he has written half a dozen well-known books and many hundreds of articles.

That might well be enough for one man but in the early twenties Captain Pritchard not only designed and built his own house, starting from a bare field in the heart of the country and finishing with the completely furnished article, but he took over a thousand photographs of the work in progress to show others how it could be done.

In addition to those many accomplishments he is an authority on the line-engraved stamps of Great Britain, and on Anglo-American poetry.

His other literary activities include a history of the Society, which was published in connection with the 80th Anniversary of the Society, and he is the author of all the programmes for the Society's Garden Parties, in verse and prose. Because of his witty and amusing pen the Garden Party Programmes are becoming "collectors" pieces.

That, briefly, is a history of the career of Laurence Pritchard, but it is also the history of the Society during the past 30 years, for during those years it climbed to its present eminence largely through the activities of one man—the Secretary. Presidents and Councils have come and gone but the Secretary has been the continuing link. During those years the name of Laurence Pritchard has become synonymous with that of the Society. As Council so aptly said in 1934-35 "one we

look upon as almost the human embodiment of the Royal Aeronautical Society"; and how much more true it is in 1950.

Mathematician, author, poet; a man of boundless energy and spirit and of infinite variety; such is Laurence Pritchard. His capacity for work and his ability to work quickly, grasping immediately the essentials of whatever he is doing, is astonishing—as is his memory. Quick to make up his mind on some things, he will ponder for long before taking any far-reaching decision but once his mind is made up and he believes his decision is right, he is immovable, whatever the cost to himself. Unconventional, and unorthodox in his attitude to life in general, he is a man of high principles and integrity, a staunch and loyal friend and has a sense of humour that, at times, is devastating. Never happier or more alive than when he is fighting battles, but never for himself; a quick, alert mind absorbing knowledge of every sort, a ready sympathy for the troubled and unfortunate, but impatient with the blind and foolish, a sturdy belief in aviation and an unquenchable faith in the Society, what it should stand for in the world and in the Industry—and what its members owe to that Society; these are some of the qualities which have kept him younger in spirit than many a man of half his years, made him difficult to understand at times to some, but gained him many friends.

The affection and esteem in which he is held in the United States were warmly demonstrated at every opportunity during the second Anglo-American Conference in New York in 1949. And the many letters received at the Society since the news of his retirement was announced, show the high place he holds in the Industry and among the members of all grades of the Society who pay tribute to both his well-known and lesser-known qualities. Many members have cause to be grateful for the generous assistance and unbiased advice he has given on many occasions. To have worked with him and for him at any time in the past 30 years has been both a privilege and an education.

The Society has been nobly served and has been fortunate indeed in having in Laurence Pritchard one of the outstanding personalities of aviation as its Secretary.

“The Council of the Royal Aeronautical Society feel that all those who have the privilege of membership of the Society, as well as others who are active in many branches of aviation and have knowledge of Laurence Pritchard's work over the past thirty years, would wish to raise a testimonial to him for presentation on his retirement in recognition of the high esteem in which he is held.”

The above paragraph is quoted from a letter which has been issued and signed by the President, Sir John Buchanan, and the five Past-Presidents now on the Council. The letter is given in full overleaf.

J. LAURENCE PRITCHARD

**TESTIMONIAL TO THE
SECRETARY OF THE ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY
J. LAURENCE PRITCHARD, Hon. Fellow**

DEAR SIR,

The Secretary, Captain J. Laurence Pritchard, is retiring in the near future.

Laurence Pritchard was appointed Editor of the JOURNAL of the Society in 1919, Honorary Secretary in 1925 and Secretary in 1927.

In his twenty-five years of service as Secretary he has seen the membership grow from 700 to over 7,000; the subscription income from £1,900 to £21,000; the formation of Branches, now totalling 19, in Britain and Canada; Divisions in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; the inauguration of an Endowment Fund; and the acquisition by the Society of a house of its own for the first time in its history.

The growth of the Society, its present wide influence and high reputation; the range of its activities from the issue of monographs and data sheets to the Anglo-American Conferences; and annual Flying Garden Parties, owe much to the work of Laurence Pritchard over the years—and to his great personal qualities.

The Council of the Royal Aeronautical Society feel that all those who have the privilege of membership of the Society, as well as others who are active in many branches of aviation and have knowledge of Laurence Pritchard's work over the past thirty years, would wish to raise a testimonial to him for presentation on his retirement in recognition of the high esteem in which he is held.

Your contribution is invited and it will, we feel sure, interest you to know that the Society of British Aircraft Constructors have already agreed to send a donation of £500.

Cheques should be made payable to the Royal Aeronautical Society and crossed "Pritchard Testimonial" and addressed to the President at 4 Hamilton Place, W.1.

On behalf of the Council,

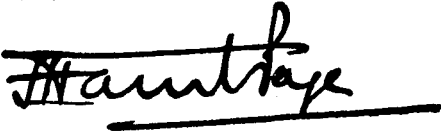
Yours faithfully,



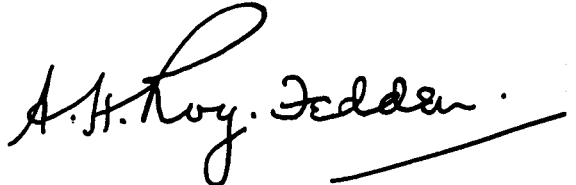
(President 1947-49)
DR. H. ROXBEE COX



SIR JOHN S. BUCHANAN
(President 1949-50)



SIR FREDERICK HANDLEY PAGE
(President 1945-47)



SIR A. H. ROY FEDDEN
(President 1938-40, 1944-45)



SIR ARTHUR GOUGE
(President (1942-44)



LORD BRABAZON OF TARA
(President 1934-36)

(Members of the Council 1950)