

Sir George Dowty Memorial Committee – The Story so Far

by John Whitaker and Marion Udwin

It all started in January 2022 when Martin Robins, reflecting on nearly fifty years since he joined the company, put together his booklet: “Dowty Days Remembered”, recalling some of the key figures in the Dowty organisation:

- Sir George Dowty
- Sir Robert Hunt (Group Chairman 1975-1986)
- J.C. Bracher (Deputy Chairman 1981-1987)
- K.W. Browning (Group Personnel Director 1970-1985)

In October of the same year, Martin organised a reunion of former Dowty employees at Arle Court which had been the headquarters of the Dowty Group from its inception through to 1992. The response was such that the reunion had to be held over two sessions, morning and afternoon. This was billed as a last reunion. As it turns out, this was not a last reunion but a new beginning.

John Whitaker was invited along to speak about his grandfather, A.W. Martyn, the first chairman of Dowty's (1936-1947). His speech ended with his long-held belief that Sir George Dowty had never been accorded due recognition as a brilliant engineer, inventor and businessman, either locally or further afield. Little did he imagine that his comments would set in motion such an avalanche of interest and activity, not only from Dowty ex-employees but from eminent people in all walks of life.

It was decided that a Sir George Dowty Memorial Committee should be formed and

that Martin Robins was the ideal person to get this up and running. Martin was appointed as Chairman and Will Mundy (Dowty Rotol apprentice 1964 and then several key positions until retirement in 2011) and John Whitaker were asked to join the committee.

Martin's first step as Committee Chairman was to ask John Whitaker to write papers on the profound influence of Dowty engineering in the aviation and mining industries. These papers were written with technical input from a number of people with specialised knowledge and were published and then circulated to various influential people, first in Britain, then throughout America and beyond.

The first paper highlighted Dowty's significant contribution to the successful outcome of The Battle of Britain. Naturally, there were many factors involved: the skill and dedication of the pilots and their supporting the ground crew, the use of radar and the aircraft design. One aircraft component, the Dowty hydraulic undercarriage, that was fitted to every Hurricane and Defiant, ensured the safe landing of returning planes, preserving both pilots' lives and the planes themselves. What is more, no plane was ever grounded for lack of spare parts - an extraordinary record!

This Battle of Britain paper was sent to, amongst other leaders in their field, The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshall Sir Mike Wigston KCB CBE ADC, now retired. His response, on receiving the paper, was to act immediately and with great conviction. He delegated Squadron

Leader W. McMiken of RAF Northolt to support the committee in any way needed, resulting in an invitation from Mat Fuller of GCHQ, Cheltenham to set up a Dowty memorial stand at the 2023 annual RAF air show at Cotswold Airport (formerly RAF Kemble). This has become a standing invitation.

On display in 2023 was a bronze bust of Sir George, owned by his son, that inspired the idea of a much larger, public memorial. Stewart Davies very generously offered to fund not just one, but two identical, larger-than-life statues thereby saving the Committee a long and arduous fundraising task. Within just nine months the idea had become a reality.

The second paper was to highlight Dowty's involvement in mining, particularly coal mining, in the 1950s. Two people were asked to contribute their knowledge:

Allan Wilson C. Eng C. Mar. Eng. who, when employed by the National Coal Board (NCB), had hands-on experience of the Dowty Roofmaster and Pit props

Bill Reid, student apprentice at NCB, roof support engineer across Yorkshire and, now living in USA, founder of CoalZoom.com, an e-magazine for the mining industry with a world-wide circulation in excess of 140,000.

What came to light during research for this paper was the unbelievable reduction in deaths and catastrophic injuries in the mines since the introduction of Dowty hydraulic pit props to replace wooden ones and the Dowty Roofmaster that enables miners to work at the coal face protected by a hydraulic, advancing steel roof.

Bill Reid continues to publicise Sir George's name throughout America, where it is already highly regarded. CoalZoom.com is spreading the word across the world in its serialisation of the Dowty mining paper.

March 2024 saw the publication of "Dowty Group Innovators", compiled by Martin Robins, containing:

- An Appreciation of A.W. Martyn (first Chairman) by his grandson, John Whitaker
- Notes on My Father by George E. Dowty
- George E. Dowty's speech at Cotswold Airport, Kemble in July 2023
- My C.V. by Sir George Dowty, written in 1972
- Sir Robert Hunt, as remembered by Martin Robins
- My Working Life, Sir Robert Hunt's own recollections of working with the Dowty Group
- Notes on my Father, Robert Hunt, by Lady Jackie Heywood, taken from her speech to Safran in November 2023.

These insights into the energy and expertise that these people brought to the company can only serve to highlight the reasons why the Dowty Group was so successful.

In April 2024, Martin organised an organ recital in Pershore Abbey to launch the first, newly completed statue, believed to be the first of its kind in Britain, with its flesh tones to the face and hands and a light-coloured suit. Pershore Abbey was the chosen venue because Sir George was born in Pershore and had close links with the Abbey, including the funding of the restoration of the organ in memory of his twin brother, Edward, who died in a car accident which George survived. Edward had been organist at St. John's, Worcester. The recital was performed by the noted organist Simon Bell of Dean Close School, where Sir George had been a Governor.

The statue, created from a 1940's photograph of Sir George standing next to the landing gear of a Lancaster, was revealed by way of a photograph presented to everyone present at the Pershore organ recital on 6th April.

The statue was installed at Glebe Farm, Lower Stanton St Quintin, home of Martin and Eunice Robins, and officially unveiled on 1st June 2024 by James Gray (one-time MP for North Wiltshire). The ceremony was conducted by John Kett-White who had lived at Glebe Farm as a child when his father was stationed at nearby RAF Hullavington. The unveiling was also marked by the "Dowty Flight", a private flypast by two de Havilland Chipmunks, organised by Martin Robins.

Glebe Farm, a private residence, was chosen as the site for the statue where it can be viewed by the public but protected from vandalism. It is hoped that the second statue, on completion, will be installed in a military museum. Negotiations are underway.

Interestingly, Martin's research revealed a family tie between Sir George Dowty and the Rev. George Dowty (1817 to 1889) who had been rector at St. Mary's Church, in the village of Stockleigh English, Devon in the late 1800s. Sir George had visited the church with his son in the 1970s and was presented with the Reverend's well-thumbed, tattered prayer book which remained in an attic until recently, when it was lovingly restored and gifted back to the church by George E. Dowty. It now stands on the altar in a hand-crafted, oak and glass display case, accompanied by an explanatory notice titled with Rev. Dowty's mantra, "Thankful, Trustful, Hopeful".

The presentation of the prayer book was combined with the harvest thanksgiving service at the church on 13th October 2024.

Stockleigh English resident and active parishioner, Martin Lamb, is the son of Mrs Christian Lamb, an ex-naval officer, who was recently awarded the Légion d'honneur by the French government for her contribution to the liberation of France in WW2 through her involvement in the planning of the D-Day landings. On 20th May 2025, Mrs Lamb was invited as guest of honour to the Dowty Annual Luncheon held at Syrencot House, Wiltshire in the very room where Operation Overlord was planned. Martin Robins had contacted the BBC and they considered this event sufficiently significant to send a photographer and camera crew to film and interview Mrs Lamb. The interview was broadcast and added to the BBC news website, further honouring both Mrs Lamb and Sir George Dowty. At the lunch, grace was said by John Kett-White and speeches were given by Martin Robins, Viscount Adrian Buckmaster and George E. Dowty.

The guest list comprised:

- Mrs Christian Lamb and her son, Martin Lamb
- Martin & Eunice Robins
- George E. Dowty Viscount Adrian Buckmaster & Lady Elizabeth Buckmaster
- Lady Jackie Heywood & Sir Peter Heywood
- John & Elizabeth Kett-White
- Caroline Flippance & Peter Flippance
- Sir Andrew McAlpine
- Stewart Davies
- John Whitaker & Marion Udwin
- Auriel Glanville (Sir George Dowty's daughter)
- John & Judy Mustoe
- Alan & Audrey Moulds

- Will Mundy & Joyce Hill
- George Watkins & Joyce McDonald
- Ian & Lynette Slatter
- Bridgette Mann
- Juliet Sykes
- Richard Shuttleworth

In March 2025 Sir George's diaries from 1919-1975 were brought to light from storage at his son's home and Caroline Flippance, Sir George's last secretary, was asked to transcribe them. This proved to be a challenging task; some years were missing or dog-eared, and others were difficult to decipher having been written in pencil, now faded, or in Sir George's own shorthand. These diaries, as well as being a valuable historical record, provide a fascinating insight into his energy, dedication and passion for a diverse range of interests in both his business and personal lives.

On completion, the book "Diaries of Sir George Dowty" was launched on 9th June 2025, at a function held at Worcestershire County Cricket Club, where Sir George had been President (1964 & 1965). The launch was attended by several local dignitaries including:

- David & Julie Hemmings (Mayoral Consort and Pershore Mayor)
- Matt Lamb (Mayor of Worcester)
- Zoe Cookson (Mayoress of Worcester)
- Kashan Pervaiz (Mayor of Tewkesbury)

Again, this event received extensive press coverage and was widely praised by all who attended.

The next event, still in the planning stage, will be a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Sir George's passing.

Timeline

Jan 2022 Publication of "Dowty Days Remembered", including the autobiography of Sir Robert Hunt CBE, Group Chairman 1975-86

Oct 2022 Dowty reunion at Arle Court

2023 Calendar

Apr 2023 Publication of "Dowty and The Battle of Britain"

Jul 2023 Dowty Memorial Committee and guests invited to Cotswold Airport

Nov 2023 Publication of "The Contribution of Dowty to the World of Mining"

2024 Calendar

Mar 2024 Publication of "Dowty Group Innovators"

Apr 2024 Launch of the Sir George Dowty Memorial Statue at Pershore Abbey

Jun 2024 Official unveiling of the statue at Glebe Farm

July 2024 Second Dowty reunion at Cotswold Airport

Oct 2024 Presentation of the Dowty Prayer Book at St. Mary's, Stockleigh English with accompanying booklet containing a history of the church

2025 Calendar

Mar 2025 Transcription and editing of Sir George's diaries

May 2025 Dowty annual luncheon at Syrencot House celebrating Mrs Christian Lamb and the 80th anniversary of VE Day

Jun 2025 Launch of "Diaries of Sir George Dowty" at Worcestershire County Cricket Club

July 2025 Third Dowty reunion at Cotswold Airport

Dec 2025 an event to mark the 50th anniversary of Sir George's passing.

Not included in this list are the numerous talks to history societies and press releases, articles, interviews and photographs that have appeared in national, regional and trade media.

As can be seen from the timeline above, the George Dowty Memorial Committee, with the assistance of numerous interested and influential people, has achieved so much in such a short space of time. The committee is extremely grateful to these individuals for their considerable contributions. Particular accord should be awarded to its Chairman, Martin Robins, who, through his tireless research, meticulous planning and his extraordinary ability to connect people, places and events and bring them together, has generated a growing interest and promoted Sir George Dowty's legacy across the world.

June 2025



2022 Reunion: Arle Court -Dowty H Q in Cheltenham-



2025 Book Launch :Worcestershire County Cricket Club - Sir George Dowty Diary book.