

## **MAPS, its origins and operation**

The Medway Aircraft Preservation Society — known today as MAPS — had humble beginnings in 1977 as the Aircraft Preservation Group within the Medway Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Society. Its founding motivation was an ambitious one: to bring a Short Sunderland flying boat back to its spiritual home here in Rochester. Though several serious attempts were made to acquire one of three potential aircraft, the mission ultimately proved impossible. But the group's determination to preserve aviation heritage found a new, more achievable target.

Spotting the deteriorating condition of Spitfire Mk XVI TB752 – then serving as gate guardian at RAF Manston – the group submitted a proposal to restore the iconic fighter to pristine museum condition. After months of negotiations and proof that the team could meet the high standards required, the RAF gave its blessing. The aircraft arrived at Rochester Airport in 1978, and the restoration was carried out in a small workshop behind Hangar 3. Completed in 1979, the aircraft now resides in the Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Building at Manston, alongside another of the group's early successes: Hurricane IIb LF751.

This marked the beginning of a series of high-quality restorations – ranging from aircraft and engines to historical aviation artefacts. The group's growing reputation for excellence soon extended beyond the local area into the wider aircraft preservation community.

Recognising the need for a more formal structure, the group incorporated as Medway Aircraft Preservation Society Ltd. on 1st January 1989. Though not a registered charity, it functions as a not-for-profit organisation run entirely by volunteers. MAPS's income is derived from restoration commissions, grants, and generous public donations. It actively welcomes visitors to its workshop and delivers regular talks to schools, clubs, and heritage groups.

Since its formation, MAPS has completed over forty restoration projects for the RAF Museums, heritage centres, and private collectors. Its portfolio includes: Five Spitfires; Three Hurricanes; A Harvard; A Piper Tri-Pacer; A Bristol Sycamore helicopter; a Fairey Battle; a Boulton Paul Defiant; and at least six Rolls-Royce Merlin engines – alongside many other rare aircraft and components.

The Society has been honoured for its contribution to aviation heritage. Notably, its founder and long-time Managing Director, Mr. Lewis Deal, received an MBE in 2003, followed by the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2010. Since 2011, the group has proudly enjoyed the patronage of Her Majesty The Queen (formerly HRH The Duchess of Cornwall).

In 2022, MAPS relocated to a new, purpose-built hangar at Rochester Airport, offering modern facilities and improved access for the public. Although the space is primarily a working restoration site, visitors are always welcome to see projects in progress when open. Our opening times can be found on our website, see below.

The volunteers — affectionately known as the MAPS Chaps – manage all aspects of the organisation: engineering, research, fundraising, finances, and operations. They're not just aviation enthusiasts tinkering with old engines. Many come from non-engineering backgrounds, learning new skills and sharing their own expertise. For retired members, it's a rewarding way to stay active; and for younger volunteers, it's a chance to gain valuable hands-on experience and broaden their career horizons. Even Her Majesty The Queen is proud to be a MAPS CHAP!