



Decline & Fall

Sir Frederick & the demise of Handley Page, 1960–70

50 years ago the last vestiges of the once-mighty Handley Page company, established by Sir Frederick Handley Page in 1909, went into liquidation, largely as a result of a decade of political wrangling and a reluctance by Sir Frederick to merge his illustrious company for the sake of government policy, as **Prof KEITH HAYWARD FRAeS** explains

SIR FREDERICK HANDLEY Page (FHP) was one of the most influential founders of the UK's aerospace industry; indeed, his eponymous company is recognised as being the first British company to be devoted solely to aviation. Its products included one of the world's first strategic bombers; a series of pioneering inter-war airliners; the wartime Halifax bomber and of course the innovative Victor nuclear "V-bomber". He was also a technical innovator, with several important aviation engineering patents to his name. In short, he was one of the great British "hero designers"; a group of original aerospace engineers who built manufacturing companies in their own names and whose presence continued to dominate the post-1945 industry.

By the late 1950s there were few of this ilk left in positions of real influence; but, in Sir Frederick's case, he still controlled his company

and resisted the government's attempts to force consolidation and rationalisation on the industry. However, his dogged opposition to the merger process contributed to the ultimate collapse of the business. The story of the decline and fall of the Handley Page company centres on the implementation of the "Two Group" policy formulated by Duncan Sandys as Minister of Aviation in 1960 as part of the merger process.

Handley Page vs Avro

Handley Page had tried to re-enter the civil market with its piston-engined Herald in the early 1950s. In 1954 a request from the manufacturer for government aid was turned down, as policy demanded that industry must finance its own airliner projects. Handley Page continued with its own money, achieving some success in overseas markets. However, by the late 1950s airline thinking had shifted towards turboprop-



OPPOSITE PAGE Sir Frederick Handley Page CBE, one of Britain's great captains of industry, in the 1950s. Born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, on November 15, 1885, Frederick was a shrewd businessman and, reputedly, raised the capital for some of his early aviation experiments by playing poker on commuter trains into and out of London.