

HALTON BOYS

The RAF Halton Aircraft Apprentice Scheme was the brainchild of the late Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Trenchard of Wolfeton, commonly known as the father of the Royal Air Force. He took the 'traditional' idea of an Apprenticeship and interpreted it in a novel way. The scheme contained significantly more than the seeds for the future growth of a skilled workforce and a fundamental building block of the service. It had a strong and important public-facing aspect to it with an offer of a good education to 15 and 16-year-old boys from less privileged backgrounds, promising solid prospects in their service careers and, later, in civilian life. Meritocracy in the new air service was very much a favourite project of Trenchard who arranged that the top apprentices from each intake should be awarded cadetships to the RAF College at Cranwell to prepare them alongside the entrants from public schools and universities for full careers in the service, with promotion prospects to the highest ranks.

Apprentices distinguished themselves in WWII. They took part in all of the major campaigns. Sadly over 2000 gave their lives, over 10% of the school output at the time. Their names are recorded in a Roll of Honour on display in St Georges Church. Over 1200 apprentices were decorated for gallantry with one winning the Victoria Cross.

When the scheme ended in 1993, 40000 boys had graduated from Halton and another 12000 from the other smaller apprentice schools. Of these, over 20% were commissioned with 110 achieving air rank. One of these became the Chief of the Air Staff and several others served on the Air Force Board. Seventeen were Knighted and countless others awarded state honours. In later life many made huge contributions to the country as policemen, doctors, surgeons, lawyers and test pilots as well as in the church and education.

A book 'Halton Boys' that seeks to tell their story through the individual accounts of the people who were there, will be published in September. Written by author and historian Sean Feast, in close co-operation with former apprentice Group Captain Min Larkin, this 100,000-word hardback includes an appreciation by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Armitage, also an ex apprentice, and a foreword from the current Viscount Trenchard, grandson of the founder.

The book will be published by Grub Street at £20.