

# Wallace Charles Devereux, C.B.E. Fellow

## 1893 - 1952

WITH THE DEATH of Wallace Charles Devereux aviation has lost one of its most brilliant figures, and a host of people a great friend. Of all his personal characteristics, indeed, the one which stood out above all others was that of friendliness, for there was a readiness in his smile which belied the greatness of his mind. In aviation he was widely known for his work in the development of aluminium alloys, for his insistence on the importance of research, for his technical knowledge. Yet many will remember him for many other lesser, perhaps, but more important reasons. My own most vivid memory of him is that of one spring evening in 1941. I was talking to one or two friends in his house when Devereux came in the room, his eyes all lighted up, waving a copy of *The White Cliffs* by the American poet Alice Duer Miller, which had just been published.

"Listen to this," he cried, and he read those moving last few lines,

"I am American bred,

"I have seen much to hate here—much to forgive,

"But in a world where England is finished and dead,

"I do not wish to live."



*The Aeroplane*

And then he read line after line at random, chuckling with the pleasure of his new found discovery. I learnt afterwards that he had bought hundreds of copies to give away, so that others could share his delight. It was then that I learnt how well read he was, how his hail-fellow-well-met air, his *bon viveur* attitude towards life, hid an unusual mind, that of a man who felt deeply of spiritual things despite his realistic light material outlook. Once, afterwards, I sent him other verses, and he wrote back to tell me how he had wept reading them.

Devereux was a great friend of the Royal Aeronautical Society. Elected an Associate Fellow in 1933 and a Fellow four years later, he served on the Finance Committee for ten years and was its Chairman for seven. During this period he was one of the leading spirits in helping to raise the Endowment Fund, and to put the finances of the Society into sound shape. It was during this period, too, that he

played a leading part in enabling the Society to acquire its present headquarters, in face of much discouragement. A man of great vision in all he did, his name will be high in the annals of the Society which claimed so much of his time and affection. He attended the dinner following the Wilbur Wright Memorial Lecture on 29th May and I was acutely aware of the abounding vigour and charm so soon to be lost to us all.

Born on 9th March 1893 he was educated at King Edward's Grammar School, Aston. His astonishing ability was revealed in the First World War when, in his early twenties, he became superintendent of National Aircraft Factory No. 1. Following the end of the war he became works manager at Peter Hookers where he began to realise the increasing value of light alloy forgings and castings. In 1927, with the backing of John Siddeley, he founded High Duty Alloys at Slough. From the beginning of his work at Slough he insisted on the vital importance of research and technical supervision at every stage of the development of the light alloys. The standards Devereux set were so high that he gained the confidence not only of industry in this country but in many countries on the Continent where he was a popular and well known figure.

Devereux believed in himself and his work with such sincerity that his reputation stood high wherever he went and he had access to factories which were normally not easy to enter. Following such a round of visits to aircraft factories in Germany in the late thirties with Sir Roy Fedden, himself a keen observer, the two sent in a report to the Government of the day which foretold an expansion for war on an almost unbelievable scale. Devereux made sure that his own works should be as capable as possible and in 1939 he acquired the most powerful power-hammer in Europe, and in twelve months doubled the output of his factories.

With the outbreak of war Devereux became Director at the Ministry of Aircraft Production to control light alloy forgings and castings, and in 1941 he became Controller of North American Aircraft Supplies, in which post he was responsible for the reception and assembly of American aircraft and engines.

Following the end of the war Devereux turned his attention to the possible use, on a much larger scale than had yet been the case, of light alloys. In 1945 he formed Almin Ltd., and in two or three years he had made it one of the leading companies in the structural uses of aluminium and its alloys. One of his widely publicised structures in aluminium was the Dome of Discovery, and another the now well known telescopic gangways at the Ocean Terminal, Southampton. The aluminium hangars at London Airport are due to his work. In the same year as he founded Almin Ltd., Devereux founded the Fulmer Research Institute which has already taken a high place in industrial research.

A man of great energy in many directions, Devereux found time to take up farming in his spare time. In this he was as thorough and as successful as he was in the aircraft world. The technique he used for improving the breed of light alloys he used for improving his breed of pigs and cattle. Research and control and records were part of his method so that he knew exactly not only how to get the best results but why he got them. He found time to hunt and became Master of the Old Berkeley Fox Hounds. He was very proud, too, when he became Hon. Colonel of 114th (County of London) Regiment, R.E.(T.A.). Made a C.B.E. in 1949, he was Vice-Chairman of the Royal Aero Club and a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers.

Wallace Charles Devereux was taken ill at Ascot on 22nd June and died the same day. For many reasons, in many ways, his work and his kindnesses, his energy and his ability, his affections and his enthusiasms, that amalgam of virtues and faults which made him so much liked and disliked, will remain in the minds and memories of all those who knew him even if it were only for a few passing hours, or for many years. For "Dev" was one of those who would not have wished to live where England is finished. For there was so much in him that *was* England.—J.L.P.