

MEDALIST FOR 1959

For a lifetime devoted to the design of military and commercial aircraft, culminating in the successful introduction into worldwide commercial service of the first turbine-powered propeller-driven aircraft.



SIR GEORGE EDWARDS

Destined to become one of the world's foremost aircraft designers and administrators, and to be knighted in 1957, George Robert Edwards was born July 9, 1908, in Highams Park, Essex, England. He received his technical education from the South West Essex Technical College and London University, and in 1935 joined the design staff of Vickers-Armstrongs, a leading aircraft manufacturing concern. At the outbreak of World War II he became Experimental Manager at Vickers, and the projects of which he was in charge included some of the first British pressurized aircraft.

In 1945 he was appointed Chief Designer, with responsibility for Britain's first post-war transport, the Viking. More than 160 Vikings were built, and production of the Valetta and Varsity military version brought production of Vickers's piston-engined transports to a total of 585.

Even as the Viking was coming into service, Edwards was talking of it as the "last of the piston-engined line." He was sure, while many others were still lukewarm, that a turbine-powered transport must be the next move in civil aviation. Under his direction Vickers built for the Ministry of Supply a special Viking powered by two Rolls-Royce Nene jets. In July 1948 this aircraft, the first jet transport to be built anywhere, flew to Paris in 34 minutes and seven seconds, at 385 miles per hour.

At the same time another Edwards aircraft, the Viscount, was also beginning its flights trials. The Viscount 630 prototype, powered by Rolls Royce Dart propeller-turbines, introduced the world's first scheduled airline services by a turbine-engined aircraft, on July 29, 1950. The project encountered many doubts and obstructions, and it was not until 1953 that the first production-model Viscount 700s were delivered to British European Airways.

Daniel Guggenheim Medal

The first major sale of British airliners to North America came in November 1952, when Trans-Canada Air Lines placed an initial order for 15 Viscounts. Edwards personally headed the sales team. By this time, with his Vanguard, big brother of the Viscount, and his Valiant 4-jet bomber also flying, he was acknowledged on both sides of the Atlantic as a foremost aircraft designer and was appointed General Manager of the Vickers-Armstrongs Aircraft Division. In 1953 he became Managing Director.

In June 1955 he was appointed to the Board of Vickers, Ltd. and also became Managing Director of the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) and Chairman of the four operating subsidiary companies, Bristol Aircraft, English Electric Aviation, Hunting Aircraft and Vickers-Armstrongs (Aircraft). BAC was also a partner in the international projects for Concorde (for which Edwards led the British team), Jaguar and the Panavia Tornado.

A fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Sir George was a Member of the Order of the British Empire (1944), a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1952) and winner of the British Gold Medal for Aeronautics (1952). He was knighted in 1957, and served as President of the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1957-58.

Sir George was made a member of the Order of Merit in 1971, and was awarded the Royal Medal in 1974 for his distinguished contributions in the applied sciences. He retired from BAC as Chairman in 1975. On March 2, 2003, Sir George died in Guildford.