

## Sweethearts of the Flying Services by Simon Wilson

There are several differences between collecting Army sweetheart brooches (as covered in the first of these articles) and brooches to the flying services. There was only one Army for instance, where there were several flying services (some of which were part of the Army). There was the Royal Engineers Balloon Section, the Royal Engineers Air Battalion, the Royal Flying Corps (formed 1912), the Royal Naval Air Service, the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm. Each one, compared to the Army, was small.

This means that unless a brooch to the Royal Engineers Balloon Section or Air Battalion comes to light, there will be no Victorian or Edwardian brooches. It also means, due to the smaller numbers, that they will be harder to find and that the variety of units will not be available. It's possible to find Army sweethearts that were made for small units like Yeomanry and single battalions, but even then, you are looking at quite large numbers compared to a Great War squadron, which could have just 150 men in it. This is probably why squadron badges became popular after WW2, allowing men to show their service in what they considered to be "their" unit, but without the cost of making jewellery.

Added to that, you have the undoubted appeal of the pilots' wings. There are so many of them about, and so few other badges, you have to conclude that most people buying a sweetheart opted to buy wings even if they weren't a pilot. However, it's also true that there are some rare and interesting brooches to be found, despite the general lack of variety.

Even if you just collected pilot wings, there is a wide variety of wing style. Officially, the RFC pilot badge is modelled on the wings of a Swift, being crescent in form and curving down at the ends. The RNAS used the Albatross as a badge. It comes in a variety of styles, some of which are not very flattering. However, compared to the Eagle of the RAF, they aren't too bad. The Eagle doesn't look much different to the Albatross to me, and the wings used on brooches are all over the place. One set in the photographs looks positively dejected.



The first picture (*left*), shows three RFC brooches. One is on a celluloid flag, showing a nice set of down swept wings, one is a brass and enamel tie pin showing the RFC cap badge and the third is a set of wings with motto, though the wings, whilst decorative, are not quite according to the official pattern.



The second picture (*left*), shows two RNAS brooches. One is more like a lapel badge and shows a poor specimen of the Albatross and "RNAS". To be honest, it looks more like a goose. The silver-rimmed Mother of Pearl brooch, on the other hand, is well-modelled and is much more impressive, though it does seem to be

showing an Eagle rather than an Albatross. Ornithology was clearly not a strength of the designers.



The next photograph (*left*), shows two more Great War badges on white-fronted shields. It's a typical Great War design, and as we know from the newspapers, they cost 1/6 each. One is the cap badge of the RFC in coloured enamels, the other the Albatross of the RNAS.



That brings us to a group of WW2 badges (*left*). One, being set on a maple leaf, is clearly Canadian and the sterling silver RCAF crest that they use appears on other brooches too (see the photos of the Perspex brooches for another example of that). The centre badge is hallmarked 1944 and was produced in England, even if it is for a squadron in the RNZAF. Number 486 was, for a while, based at RAF Wittering as

a night fighter unit equipped with Hurricanes. They worked with No 1435 Flight, who flew Havoc Turbinlite aircraft. The Havocs found the enemy with radar and illuminated them with a powerful searchlight mounted in the nose of the aircraft. In theory, the accompanying Hurricane then destroyed the enemy. It was not an effective method of night fighting, accounting for only one aircraft destroyed, and was soon superseded by the next generation of night fighters. The aircraft they shot down was a Short Stirling of No. 218 (Gold Coast) Squadron returning from a leaflet dropping mission over France. There were no casualties until the two crews met in the Mess at Tangmere, when, it seems, things became heated.

Number 486, would go on to be a successful fighter squadron with Typhoons and Tempests. The other badge, also hallmarked 1944, is the crest of 56 Squadron, a well-known fighter squadron in both World Wars. A strange coincidence is that the two highest scoring Tempest squadrons of the war were 56 and 486 (NZ) Squadrons.



The next few photographs show a selection of pilot wings, ranging from base metal to silver and enamel types. In the first photograph (*left*), the wings show various styles, including, as previously mentioned, the rather dejected set in the middle of the second column.



After that is a selection of naval aviation wings (*left*), including a trench art example made from Perspex. Perspex is a typical WW2 material, normally used for the air forces and Fleet Air Arm (and always said to be made from the Perspex of a crashed aircraft). Perspex was used in many American sweetheart brooches and is generally known as Lucite in the USA – they are just two different trade names for the same thing.



The third photograph (*left*), shows various wings of the Empire (two SAAF, RCAF and RAAF).



The fourth (*left*), shows post-war Queen's Crown examples.



The next two badges (*left*), are half-wings – one for Signallers and one for Observers. The signaller's badge was introduced in 1944 for radar operators, but had "S" for signaller to confuse the Germans. One radar operator, in his memoirs, refers to the Germans being interested in his "S" badge and wanting to know

what it signified. They might have been better not having a badge at all if they wanted to keep radar secret. The Observer's badge was a WW1 design that was eventually superseded by other badges in 1942, as aircrew trades became more specialised. The comparative rarity of half-wings supports my assumption that most people bought wings, whether they were pilots or not. In theory, with bombers having one pilot and up to six other crew, half wings should be reasonably common compared to pilot's wings, but in fact they are a lot rarer. And with most of the RAF being made up of ground personnel, brooches with badges and crests should be much commoner than they are, compared to wings.



The next two photographs (*above*), show different ways of wearing the brooch – suspended from hangers, or mounted on wishbones and horseshoes. These are all commonly seen WW2 items.



The next picture (*left*), shows a variety of brooches made from Perspex. I am fairly sure that the wings with the “V” are commercially made as I have seen several sets that look identical. The same goes for the Canadian heart, as the silver RCAF crest is clearly mass produced and suggests that these were made commercially. Some of them may be hand-made one-off badges – particularly the Engineer half-wing, which has a lot of hand cut detail.



Mother of Pearl was used for flying badges too. Stylistically the wings shown (*left*), seem to be WW2.



The MIZPAH brooches illustrated (left), all appear to be WW2 varieties or later. The Fleet Air Arms wings have been soldered to a non-military MIZPAH, so fall under the trench art heading too. The brass brooch has the RAF wings stamped on one heart – I have not yet seen any with half-wings or the RAF badge on them. I suspect they may not exist, unless someone, like the maker of the FAA set, made his own set using parts from other brooches. The third brooch is post 1953, and, like a lot of later type brooches, is chromed.

It is a smaller collecting area than Army badges in many ways, though there is a large choice of styles. The variety of badges is very restricted compared to Army brooches, which makes it easier to collect a representative selection, but there are many variations and some real rarities to find.