

Why a Short Sunderland flying boat factory was built at Windermere

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In November 1911, *Waterbird* made the first successful take-off and landing on Windermere. This led to the establishment of the first British seaplane school at Hill of Oaks on the shores of Windermere, and ultimately to a Royal Naval Air Station for the training of Royal Naval Air Service pilots between 1916 and 1917.

Oscar Gnosspelius was a pioneer aeronautical engineer, the only person at Windermere to design and fly his own hydroaeroplane. He was engaged by Short Brothers at Rochester in 1919 to take charge of the Experimental Department. Despite leaving Shorts in 1925, he continued to take part in their test flights into the 1930s.

During this period, Commodore (later Rear Admiral Sir) Murray Sueter recommended John Lankester Parker, a Windermere flying instructor, to Shorts for the position of a test pilot at Eastchurch. Parker became Chief Test Pilot for Shorts between 1918 and 1945.

In attaining the role of Chief Test Pilot, Parker succeeded Ronald Kemp, who had flown *Waterbird* as a landplane in June 1911 and *Gnosspelius No. 2* at Windermere in April 1912. Gnosspelius served under

Sueter at the Air Department. Gnosspelius designed a Gull aeroplane, which was built by Shorts at Rochester and test-flown by Parker in 1923.

Shorts began working on the Sunderland flying boat patrol bomber in the 1930s, and they intensified their efforts at the onset of the Second World War. Following a German bomber attack on Rochester in 1940, however, it was decided that part of Sunderland flying boat production should be dispersed.

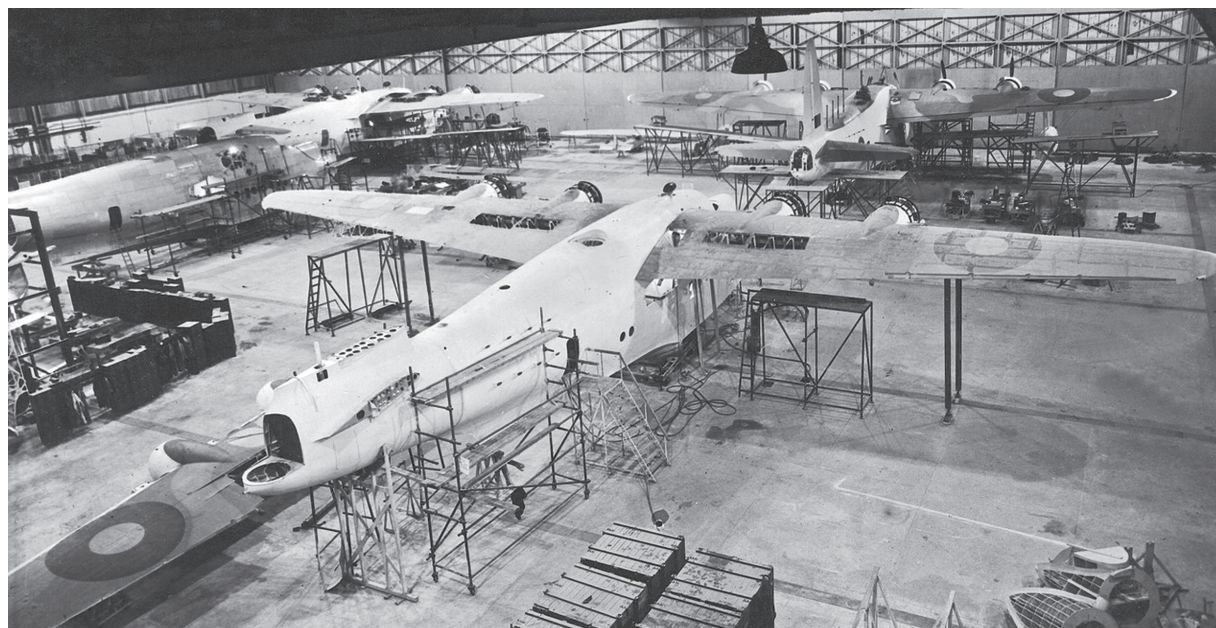
In deciding where the new factory should be sited, there was a significant incentive to draw upon the expertise of Gnosspelius, Kemp and Parker, and that is why a Short Sunderland flying boat factory ended up on the shores of Windermere. Gnosspelius was involved on behalf of Shorts in the local negotiations for siting the factory at White Cross Bay.

Today, it is odd to think that an aircraft hangar once loomed over Windermere. It is also surprising to realise how large the factory was. At its height it employed around 1,500 people, many of whom lived in a purpose-built village on site.

Between 1950 and 1952, the factory buildings were removed. The hangar was transferred to Kirkby, near Liverpool, to house a chemical works. The detail shop was sent to Newcastle, where it remains as Slatyford Lane bus depot. The office block went to serve a factory at Kendal.

In July 2019 and April 2022, archaeological surveys and digs were carried out at the Calgarth Estate. The estate that housed the factory workers is now the location of The Lakes School. In 1945, it was home to 300 child Holocaust Survivors.

More detail is at: <https://www.waterbird.org.uk>.



Above: Interior of the Short Sunderland Flying Boat Factory on Windermere