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As a Project P1B contributor, we hope you'll enjoy monthly updates on the restoration. Sit back and follow the journey from barn to feature attraction, back to an era where men and machines pushed the limits of possibility.

Monthly NEWSLETTER

PART OF THE CALLSIGN COLLECTIVE

Project P1B **Honouring XA847**

Firstly, a huge thank you for purchasing "Lightning Volume 4 "A tribute to the P1B". When you read the book hopefully all will become clear as what the purpose is and why your contribution is so valued.

The United Kingdom built 345 Lightnings of various marks between 1954 and 1968 just 14 short years that shaped the future of modern fighters. The first two prototypes (P1A's) were pure research aircraft, and it wasn't until April 1954 that the distinctive shape of what was then known as the P1B first took to the skies. Known as the P1B XA847 was soon christened "LIGHTNING" and the legend was born. The book goes into greater detail, however for the past two years a small team of people have been attempting to breath life back into this iconic aircraft.

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Unseen from public gaze for over a quarter of a century XA847 lay in a barn deep in the Suffolk countryside. Preserved from the elements and properly dismantled this aircraft of significant historical interest was crying out to be restored and placed on public display once more.

The team behind Project P1B wanted a location and venue in the UK that would re-ignite the public's passion for Cold War jet fighters in a way that was both unique and fitting.

Without stealing the project's thunder we decided to pick a brief moment in time during XA847s life as a start point – That date is October 1958 – more of which will be covered in future newsletters.



Here's what you'll enjoy **as part of Project P1B**

1

Be Part of History

Track each milestone as XA847 is painstakingly restored.

2

Support the Cause

Opportunity to subscribe to the Callsign Collective to receive exclusive P1B merchandise. More on this coming soon...

3

Share the Experience

Be part of a growing group dedicated to preserving and celebrating the Lightning legacy.

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Sept / Oct update...
And so it begins!



17th September sees the team on site to start the initial work that comprises of the following tasks...

1. Cockpit – The cockpit is 97% complete and original with just 3-4 main instruments missing. By a miracle the high value items that might have been “misaid” have survived. The control is in place as are the throttles and the iconic Air Speed indicator – The very one that first recorded Mach 2.0 in a British Fighter.
2. The cockpit is rather sparse compared to later models and retains it’s well patinaed black paint. For those familiar with the later Lightnings the P1B lacked a radar display and the then futuristic strip speed air speed indicator.
3. The P1B is nearly 70 years old, so due to cost and safety, there are no plans to make this airframe airworthy. Which is a shame as it comes with the original Rolls Royce Avon engines. Ironically the aircraft only flew 200+ hours in 400 total flights, so it probably used less than 10% of its potential life.
4. The ejector seat is an original Martin Baker Mark IV but currently lacks it’s parachute and survival pack. At some stage the upper face blind handle was changed for a later horseshoe style black and yellow grab handle.
5. Where possible any stencil markings and other insignia will be retained as original.

6. The radome is original, but manufactured in metal as opposed to the later choice of fibreglass, which allowed the radar signal to penetrate better. An interesting discovery was made during the preliminary work, where it was discovered that in place of a radar and radar dish the P1B was fitted with a full replica of the cockpit instrumentation along with a 16mm cine camera to record all the flight parameters. That’s how early telemetry of the 1950s was recorded. Fingers were crossed when the radar was first opened after 50+ years that everything would still be in place, but dissappointingly - it was empty.
7. The first airframe survey revealed several missing components and two were effectively show stoppers. The Lightning undercarriage is very complex affair. The nose leg rotates forward against the airflow whilst the main gear is a marvel of British engineering. There was no room in the fuselage to mount the gear, so it had to be placed in the Lightnings wing. This posed two major issues. Firstly, the wing was very thin and secondly the wing was where the majority of the fuel was housed. This meant the gear was a long main assembly with large thin high-pressure nitrogen filled tyres. The main gear was, simply put, pushed down and locked and pulled up and locked. The main leg was rotated back into the wheel well by a device known as the radius arm – These were both missing on the P1B! A cast item it would be extremely difficult and costly to replicate and so the hunt was on to find two rods. An option might have been to simply rob an existing aircraft but without the rods the Lightning can’t sit on its gear.

Continued...

A couple of Lightnings are displayed from ceilings in the UK. Dyson have XM172 in their Café, RAF Cosford Museum have XG333 hung from the ceiling in a dramatic vertical pose and Vanguard storage have XP745 beautifully display in their Bristol facility.

Sadly, none of these had rods to offer up and the search was widened. The only possible location of spare undercarriage parts was in South Africa at the now dormant Thunder City. The entire fleet had been sold along with a vast collection of spare parts – could there possibly be a set of radius rods? Thanks to their generosity (and a bottle of scotch!) The current owners of Hangar 51 Jay and Shaun allowed Project P1B to search for the elusive parts.

Having sent our trusty South African rep on the needle in a haystack mission Alex a former storeman at Thunder City knew where to look and soon the Radius Rods were found. The team's excitement grew with the news that our project was on track, but we were even more delighted when we found that the elusive parts were in fact brand new stock that had lain in wait for nearly 65 years – Antiques Roadshow would be proud.

Our next task will be to collect the heavy items from Cape Town where they are safely stored.

8. Further work in September will see the collation of all the missing parts and the start of the delicate polishing process. XA847s last trial took place at RAE (Royal Aircraft Establishment) Farnborough in the late 1960s after which it was placed in the RAF Museum after storage at RAF Henlow. At some stage having sat outside the silver Lightning was polished and then for better worse covered in a thick varnish / lacquer.

It is assumed that this was done to preserve the shine but over the years this has hardened and turned yellow making removal quite difficult. It has however preserved the Aluminium surface. Work was carried out in June 2025 to assess the best way to carefully remove this and begin polishing the surface without causing damage.



Hopefully this monthly newsletter will give you some background history to this iconic aircraft and how the team progress with restoration.

With an end date of September 2026 our aim is to send 1 newsletter a month giving updates on the restoration and information on any new products available from our partners that will help towards the costs.



So for now...
THANK YOU!



Next steps?
Coming soon...

Exclusive gifts for subscribers – every sign-up fuels the P1B project.

Join the Callsign Collective with a paid monthly subscription to receive exclusive P1B gifts not available anywhere else. More details coming soon - in the meantime, subscribe to this free newsletter to stay in the loop!

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