Kyrle Probus 19 March 2015

The inspiring story of how work by a brilliant design engineer contributed crucially towards victory in both the Battle of Britain and the Falklands War entertained members of Kyrle Probus Club on Thursday (March 19th).

They heard how Stanley Hooker also swept away doubters as he fought for development of the Whittle jet engine and the all-British Harrier jump-jet, the first vertical take-off fighter, which achieved international triumph. Then he was brought out of retirement to save Rolls-Royce when the iconic company faced bankruptcy.

Club member John Taylor, who enjoyed a 42-year career in the aircraft and water industries, gave his inaugural slide presentation to reveal the behind-the-scene dramas behind Hooker's determination to secure the jet engine's commercial success.

He was 'a man who I believe had a major influence on the development of the Merlin engine that powered the Spitfire during the Second World War,' said John. 'The test pilot who tried the new Merlin reported the look of astonishment on the face of a German pilot as the Merlin soared up past him.

'The contribution made by Stanley Hooker increased the power of the Merlin by 1000hp at the beginning of the war to 2000hp at the end. It was considered that without these improvements we would not have won the Battle of Britain.'

John said that 'every engine that fought in the Battle of Britain was made at Derby,' where Hooker was based. 'Few believed the jet would be powerful enough but Hooker proved the doubters wrong when the Gloster Meteor became the first plane fast enough to shoot down the flying bomb in 1944.

'It was the first aeroplane ever to exceed 600mph. Stanley Hooker was probably one of the first people to recognise the full potential of the jet engine..'

Hooker was also called in and appointed technical director when Rolls-Royce were running out of money by 1970. He formed a so-called 'war cabinet' to boost morale before retiring second time. He was knighted in January 1974 for services to the aircraft industry.

'Albert Einstein was said to be a genius,' said John. 'I think Stanley Hooker was also a genius. You do not see many of them in a generation.