



April 2008

# SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Mid Kent*



Light Aircraft Association

**Mike's Mutterings**

Mike Negus -  
Editor



## The Year of the Aeroplane

Well may be bit ambitious to expect astrologers to create a calendar, which dedicates a whole year to flight, but as each progressive season approaches I get this feeling that this year will be a good one. I fully expect good weather and hope to visit a whole load of new destinations as well as some familiar ones.

How much GA flying was there last year? We know the weather could have been more cooperative and it is well documented to the amusement of the 'unkind' that I never got to most of my intended destinations, but I did manage to go and come



*Quiberon*

**April Meeting - 24th April 2008 – Golf Club at 8pm**

**Ken Craigie**

LAA Chief Inspector

although maybe not exactly when or where I had hoped. There are many airfields deserving a visit and this year why not try to go somewhere a little more adventurous. I have developed a philosophy that if the weather is good and the plane is working, you have to go to the 'mountain' as it isn't going to come to you.

For the second bank holiday in May, if you would like a special destination a gaggle of us are going to Berlin. No bad intentions, but a visit to Templehof.



*Templehof*

Early in the season (May 17<sup>th</sup> / 18<sup>th</sup>), we will all get a chance as our committee has selected Amiens as the venue for a weekend strut fly-out. The airport has a long tarmac runway, customs facilities and although I have not been into the town, I am told there are quaint restaurants alongside a pretty river. Come along!

I am going to make another suggestion for anyone looking for an alternative to Rochester or Headcorn, not quite on

the doorstep, but not too far either. Try Troyes! Those of you that tour extensively and will be quite familiar with this customs airfield, which has a restaurant, an excellent met office on site and a hotel (expensive) about 100 metres away. There is a tarmac runway as well as two-grass runways, parallel and across. I still say, Try Troyes! Not just the airport, but also the town itself. Last time I was there I shared the ramp with a Tiger Moth, a Dragon Rapide and a Firefly, all G registered, so the secret is out!

The town is situated on the river Seine and has its origins in Roman times although many of the buildings around the centre were built around the time Chaucer was making his way from Southwarke to Canterbury. If you like 'Olde Worlde', you are in for a treat. Expect to pay about £12.00 each way for the taxi ride, with hotels ranging from £25 per night upwards. I stayed at a two star one near the centre for £32.00. The town hall is situated in part of the pedestrian areas, with the familiar 'Liberete, Egalite, Fraternite ou la Mort', written high up. Those 'dedicated followers of fashion' amongst you probably already know that Troyes is headquarters of 'Lacoste'. You will find restaurants from McDonalds to posh and everything in between. As I had slummed it the night before with pizza, I ate posh, 'La Mignardise' details of which can be

**'OLD' is when you are  
cautioned to slow down by  
the doctor instead of the  
police**

found on the Internet. If you fly direct from Kent it's about 2.15 hrs, although I clear customs at Abbeville and routed down the East of Paris past Soisson, making a journey time of about 2.40 hrs.

I am told that we are in the year of the 'Rat', the lawn will have to wait, and the car can do without a wash, as once again for me this is the year of the aeroplane!

### Fly Out to Amiens

Dear members, your committee have loosely planned an "LAA Mid Kent Flyout" to Amiens for the weekend of 17/18 May. The initial plan had been to either rendezvous at Abbeville (12:00 French) or fly directly to Amiens and meet at 3:00 pm Local. We have just been advised that the RAC (Royal Aero Club) will be running an air racing event at Abbeville during that weekend so please don't just blunder into restricted airspace to do your customs. You might just be turning finals when 20 aeroplanes race past at VNE heading for the finish line

We have contacted Amiens Airport who say we pre book customs with them 24 hours in advance. There has been no hard and fast organisation to this event but we know there is a collection of hotels close to the airport (5 minute walk) and we intended to go into town for an evening meal. Amiens airport is officially closed at the weekend but "club fliers" should be around to man the fuel pumps, but please carry sufficient fuel on board in case there is a problem. The Amiens local customs office require :- Aircraft registration, number of passengers, departure airfield,

destination airfield (Amiens of course), date of arrival and estimated time of arrival. For outbound customs they require the same details.

The customs fax number from UK is 0033 3 22 46 85 39, don't forget to carry all of your required documents as the LAA Mid Kent committee don't do "prison visits". Please try to come along, if you have not been over the Channel before or can't remember what to do or would like some body to pair up with then please contact one of the committee members.

We will be announcing this trip at the next Strut Meeting so feel free to ask questions or buttonhole one of the 'Experten' after the guest speakers talk which brings me nicely in to the next meetings topic.

### April Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> April 2008 Visit from Ken Craigie LAA Headquarters

Always a popular visit and an opportunity to hear and speak to the L.A.A. Chief Inspector , a very important person , so if you wish to put any questions about your project , current or impending opportunities like this only come up but occasionally. Ken is obviously well up on the Associations current goings on so we look forward to an interesting and informative meeting. Talking of which...

**'OLD' is when an 'All-Nighter'  
means not getting up to use the  
bathroom**

## Last Months Meeting

Probably one of the most interesting guest speakers we have had and an evening I think that was well received by the members who turned out in a good number to hear first hand from Des Page on wartime glider operations from the Horsas mouth as it were. As World War 2 fades in to the history books talks from these veterans becomes more and more valuable particularly on the slightly offbeat sections of the conflict. Due to the short lived operational life of the Glider Regiment hearing from someone like Des is fairly unique.



We heard in some detail some very amusing anecdotes regarding the selection and training of these highly versatile soldiers, as this is what they were principally, their duty not only to get their charges safely to the target but then to become part of the fighting troops. As we were to hear in some graphic and sometime harrowing detail the actual landings were a very dicey affair with many lives lost before

**'OLD' IS WHEN .. 'Getting a little action' means you don't need any fibre today**

the defences were overwhelmed as happened at the Rhine crossing which is what formed the crux of the talk. In Des' words 'we won that battle' whereas Arnhem was a different kettle of fish where our side came out with a distinctly bloody nose. Des survived 8 days fighting in close combat situation at Arnhem and lived to tell the tale and perhaps he will make a return visit to complete his incredible story.

## Looking Ahead

In May we have a talk by the operators of the mighty AN2 Russian designed biplane which if you have seen it in the flesh leaves one with quite an impression. The speaker gives a fully illustrated talk which from what I have heard is hugely entertaining so make a note of the 29<sup>th</sup> May.

June 26<sup>th</sup> will see a return to Ripple and Steve Solleys strip near Deal which can accept suitable strip experienced aircraft / pilots and given the proximity of the longest day will make a flying visit practical. Visitors by road will be more than welcome as many of us have been there over the years and the offer of a Bar-B-Q with the chance to purchase some of the excellent Solleys Ice Cream should be reason enough to put the date in your diary. This is always an opportunity for the membership down in this part of the County not to have to drive too far.

**'OLD' IS WHEN .. Your sweetie says, 'Let's go upstairs and make love,' and you answer, 'Pick one; I can't do both!'**

Rochester Airport on the 31<sup>st</sup> July is our Annual Bar-B-Q which traditionally has always been an opportunity for friends and family to join with the members with the chance for some of the reasonably local based aircraft to fly in. Perhaps we will try and encourage the Modellers with whom we have made contact to provide some aerial entertainment of the miniature kind if we can.

August 28<sup>th</sup> as the evenings draw in sees us inside at the newly refurbished Airport Café for an informal meal and a chat with your fellow Strut Members and guests.

Further dates for your diary will be published in subsequent newsletters and I promise not to even mention Christmas.

### Visit Air Traffic Control Initiative May 2008

You can visit a number of ATC units during the month of May including London City , Leeming , Edinburgh and RAF Waddington to name a disoerate few. Information can bee gained by c h e c k i n g o n t o [www.airspacesafety.com](http://www.airspacesafety.com) and you must pre register and be a pilots licence holder . If this is your bag then log on and make a booking and don't forget to let the newsletter know what the experience was like.

### Early Aviation in Dartford - Some Observations by John Knight

As we approach the Centenary celebrations for the first powered flight in

the UK John has been digging up some interesting information on the early site at Dartford so read on ( Ed )

While visiting the cemetery in Watling Street, Dartford, I noticed a row of graves bearing RFC and RAF emblems dating back to around about the time of the first world ward. After a bit of searching on the Internet I found a WEB site run by the Dartford museum, which explained that there had been an airfield in Joyce Green during the early part of the century. [http://www.dartfordarchive.org.uk/technology/engine\\_vickers.shtml#top](http://www.dartfordarchive.org.uk/technology/engine_vickers.shtml#top)

I would like to try and find out more details about these men, how they came to their end and if it was at Joyce Green Airfield The Dartford museum says that certainly one of them was and that he was Australian. Meanwhile we have been kindly given permission by the museum to publish their article in our newsletter subject to acknowledgments and copyright.

#### VICKERS: THE BEGINNING OF POWERED FLIGHT - INTRODUCTION

Dartford played an important role in the early history of a mode of transport, which has revolutionised the lives of people throughout the world. Powered flight has transformed our world into a 'global village'.

#### DARTFORD SALT MARSH

Following on from Hiram Maxim's experiments with flight, the Crayford based firm of Messrs Vickers Ltd decided, in 1910, to get more actively involved in the pioneering field of aviation. The company purchased land at Dartford Salt Marsh in 1911, with a view

to constructing a rudimentary airfield suitable for the testing of prototype aeroplanes. The site they chose comprised a number of small fields, separated by drainage ditches. It was bounded on the west by River Darent, and on the east by Joyce Green Lane, which led to the embankment of the River Thames and Long Reach Tavern. No proper runway was constructed: instead, aeroplanes were expected to take off from grassy fields. Drainage ditches, which constituted dangerous obstacles, were boarded over, opening up a large expanse of grassland for take-off and landing.

### FIRST TEST FLIGHTS

The first aircraft tested at this river-side airfield was a monoplane (single-winged plane) built under licence at Vicker's Erith works to a design by the French aviation pioneer Robert Esnault-Pelterie. Unlike most aircraft of this period, very little timber was used in its construction; timber was restricted to the skids, which formed part of the undercarriage, and the wings. This radical design feature proved unpopular with a number of potential customers, including the Admiralty. Vickers offered to supply one Pelterie-type monoplane, at a cost of £1,500, with a framework initially constructed of steel; they intended to substitute a much higher alloy, Duralumin, in subsequent versions. Admiralty chiefs were not impressed with this proposal, and did not place an order. However, Vickers failed to be disheartened and

continued to construct aircraft using these 'advanced' methods. The maiden flight of the No 1 Monoplane - as it was called - took place in July 1911 under the skilled control of Captain Herbert F Wood. Wood had been appointed Manager of the Aviation Department of Vickers in March 1911. His inaugural test flight was the first of many carried out from this Dartford airfield until 1919.

Experimental work was not devoid of danger. The first victim was claimed on 13 January 1913 when a Vickers No 6 Monoplane, which had been converted into a biplane, crashed into the River Thames. Both the pilot, Leslie McDonald, and his mechanic, Harry English were killed. At the official inquest held at Dartford, the coroner concluded that the accident had occurred as a result of a sudden loss of power to the engine.

Seven different types of monoplane were produced by Vickers before the company decided to build its first biplane. This was known as the Experimental Fighting Biplane 1, or EFB1 for short, exhibited at the Olympia Air Show in February 1913. The appearance of this prototype attracted a great deal of interest, particularly since it was the first purpose-built plane to be armed with guns, and to fulfil a 'fighter' role. The plane earned the nickname 'Destroyer'. It was designed as a 'pusher type' aircraft: the engine and propeller were positioned behind the pilot at the rear of the aeroplane, thus pushing it forward. This configuration greatly resolved the problem, later solved by the invention of an 'interruptor' mechanism, of hoe to fire through the arc of the propeller without destroying

**'OLD' IS WHEN .. You don't care where your wife goes as long as you don't have to go with her!**

it! The EFB1 (eventually abbreviated to FB1) was the forerunner of the well-known Vickers 'Gunbus'.

Among the many designed initiated by the Drawing Office at Vickers was one that became known as the 'Hydravion', based on the notion that an aeroplane should be able to take off from water as well as from land. Floats, made of the alloy known as Duralumin, were apparently made at the company's Dartford works and tested in the nearby River Darent. Archives retained at the company headquarters imply that the Hydravion would be difficult given that at that time the Dartford factory was only producing explosives and projectiles.

#### AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION IN WORLD WAR ONE

Experiments with variants of the Fighting Biplane continued apace. The last of these variants - the FG5 - eventually emerged as the Gunbus. With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the works at Crayford took over the production of Vickers aircraft. Two of the first batches of FB5s were sent to Joyce Green to be based at the Royal Flying Corps airfield, established close to the Thames at Long Reach. The Gunbus first saw action on Christmas Day 1914, when one of the planes took off from Joyce Green airfield to intercept and presumably destroy a German Taube monoplane. It is believed that the Gunbus successfully completed its mission. Experimental work continued during the war. Perfection of the basic Gunbus led to the emergence of the FB9, known as the 'Streamline Gunbus'.

In 1917 Vickers were approached to produce a twin-engined bomber. This was achieved by utilising designs produced in 1915 by Rex Pierson, who worked in the

Drawing Office. The prototype aircraft FB27 flew at Joyce Green on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917, piloted by Gordon Bell. Various types of engine were used to power the prototype before a decision was made in April 1918 to utilise the Rolls-Royce Eagle engine. The aeroplane went into production that month and was known as the Vickers Vimy. Ironically it was never used operationally in the First World War.

On 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> June 1919, in a Vickers Vimy, captain Jack Alcock and Lieutenant Arthur Whitten-Brown made the world's first non-stop trans-oceanic flight, across the Atlantic. Ross and Keith Smith flew a Vimy all the way to Australia at the end of 1919, thus highlighting the possibility of organising scheduled flights to far-off lands.

#### COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION

Possibilities stemming from civilian flights had been considered by Vickers as early as January 1919. Consequently a civilian version of the Vimy was designed, with a larger capacity fuselage than the military version. The fuselage was oval in section. No less than ten passengers could be carried in the new 'Airliner'! The test crew objected to the idea of an enclosed cockpit, which impaired their vision and deprived them of fresh air, so the 'Vimy Commercial' had the same kind of open cockpit as the military version. The plane first flew from Joyce Green at Dartford on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1919. It was designed to double as a freight carrier and once the seats were removed it was possible to carry 2,500lbs of cargo. The Vimy Commercial was the last plane to be test-



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flown at Joyce Green, because in 1919 Vickers transferred their aircraft operation to Weybridge in Surrey and the adjacent airfield at Brooklands. Joyce Green had been used for eight years to test aircraft built at Bexleyheath, Crayford, Dartford and Erith.

In the early days, aircraft built in the various factories were dismantled, taken by road to Joyce Green, re-assembled and tested. By 1916, finished aeroplanes were flown from open land at Crayford to Joyce Green, the field used by Vickers at Joyce Green still exist toady but are now used for farming.

**'OLD' IS WHEN .. 'Getting lucky' means you find your car in the multi storey car park**

**Dates for your Diary**

Apl 24	Ken Craigie, LAA
May 17	Fly Out to Amiens
May 29	AN2 Talk
Jun 26	Tea at Ripple
Jul 31	BBQ