



May 2009

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Mid Kent*



Light Aircraft Association

Mike's Mutterings

Mike Negus -
Editor



Tank Museum

by Gary Smith

Whilst discussing various places for a "Strut Fly Out", the Muckleburgh tank museum at Weybourne was mentioned. "Bottlang" and the "Farm strip guide" had no mention of the airfield so I knew it was going to be an interesting place to visit. The strip is located on the north Norfolk coast between Cromer and Langham and the long grass runway (16-34 620m long) starts just behind the beach. There is a second grass runway (03-21 380m long), a mobile home, a windsock, parking for about 8 aeroplanes and precious little else. During the planning stages the committee failed



May Meeting

28th April 2009 - Cobtree Manor Golf Club - 8pm

Talk on Sun n Fun & Notams

to notice the “Great vintage weekend” was taking place on the same weekend so it was a slightly smaller group than expected who departed from Farthing corner on Saturday morning.

The route was basically a straight line north but most of us routed around Southend with the knowledge of “Chalkie Stobart’s” imminently arrive on his “South Africa - London - South Africa” world record attempt. A radio call confirmed his expected arrival at 11:42 local. A call to Wattisham confirmed that we do not fight wars at the weekend (no reply) but that did not stop one pilot (not in our group) having 4 attempts at requesting a “basic service”. After a while I got hacked off, keyed the mic and said “you are getting the very basic of services my friend, how much more basic do you want!”. It all went very quiet after that. Lakenheath just told us to keep out of their inner TMZ as they apparently don’t fight at the weekend either and within



50minutes I was at the coast.

The strip was a little tricky to find amongst the sand dunes and there is something unnerving about doing your circuit over the sea. Short finals over the beach, a 12kt head wind and landing uphill added to the excitement but

it all turned out fine. It’s worth mentioning that there are rabbit holes if you venture off of the prepared airstrip or parking area and you need to be aware of these if you have little wheels (like me).



Aero modelers began arriving at the field and by the time the fifth member of our group had arrived they reclassified Weybourne from “sleepy” to “busy”. The £5 landing fee was well worth the “air craft carrier” landing and with only a 5 minute walk to the Tank Museum it was an ideal location for an airfield.

Weybourne has had a military presence as far back as the Spanish Armada (1588), it was active in 1914 and became an anti aircraft site in 1936. In 1986, two hundred derelict buildings were removed to make way for the beginnings of the Muckleburgh collection and the RAF still maintains a radar station within the area. There are intact gun emplacements on the site but these are not open to the public. The collection is home to over 120 pieces of military hardware from all over the world and most have been restored to working condition. The collection performs a tank demonstration on Sundays at 2pm and during the school holidays

which take place behind the museum. It is possible to make a reservation and drive one of their tanks yourself, having wrestled with the tractor at Farthing Corner I don't think driving a tank will be any more challenging.

The collection has a host of other exhibits including an excellent restaurant and is well worth a visit.

Amiens or Bust!!

I had been looking forward to a bit of foreign travel, after what has seemed to be a long winter, so when I saw the invi-



tation to the centenary celebrations, at Amiens, I sent of an e-mail to say I would like to go. The general plan was that three planes from the Devon Strut, a Jodel 112, a Condor and an RV4 would fly up to Headcorn and we would try to time it so the Jodel D117 from Clippgate

Farm and the Jodel D120 & Jabiru 400 from Farthing Corner would meet up mid-channel for a mini invasion. The celebrations were to last three days and we were hoping to arrive on Saturday and return home after lunch on Sunday.

After buying a PLB and faxing a flight plan to Swanick, I was all set to go and optimistically turned up at the strip at 9am. The weather was lovely and four aircraft based at the strip had already departed for the microlight fair at Popham.

My friends rang up about 11.30am to say they had arrived at Headcorn, but unfortunately there was an occluded front sitting in the middle of the channel, which gave us good weather in the UK and rubbish on the French side. The bits you tend to forget about touring is just how much time we spend waiting for weather to improve, something the blonde calls 'wind-sock watching'. Well after 6 hours of no real change, the Popham contingent returned after a fully satisfying day and the upbeat stories that follow. The three planes from Devon made for home and the rest of us had another cup of tea and wished we had gone somewhere in England.

As it was a bank holiday some of us could give it another go the next day. In the morning the forecast for the French side was slightly better although, not much. After all the hanging around of the previous day and a bit of 'encouragement' from the blonde, we decided to 'give it a go'. We had what you might call a 'sporting' departure from the strip with the stiff breeze at 80 - 90 de-

grees, but the north-westerly gave us near RV performance and a ground speed of 117 knots. Door to door the whole flight was 1hr 10mins with a great flight both ways.

In spite of the main event being on the Saturday night we were welcomed in true French fashion, no landing fee of course and were even given 20 litres of avgas free, just for attending. Compared to some events it was more low key with some interesting planes, cars and models. We sat down for a BBQ lunch and the music of the live band.

Something I found quite interesting was that the public were paying 30 Euros each for a flight in the clubs 5 Robin's, captained by club PPL's. At 90 Euro's per flight I am not sure whether this gave them free or subsidised flying. There must have been at least 50 people in the queue waiting for their 20 mins. You can just see that happening here, ('elf & safety').



There are a variety of hotels 10 mins walk from the airfield. For those of you that haven't stayed at the Premiere Class chain, rooms are 42 Euros and you can cancel without charge until 6pm the same day. Expect small, but free WIFI and TV. Managing to get

a lift into town we visited the impressive cathedral, the outside of which looks immaculate, with the inside being a mixture of recently restored and original. It being early evening it was time to settle down for a few beers and dinner at one of the restaurants by the canal. We found out from other Brits who had arrived on the Friday that the cloud base had stayed at 300ft all day Saturday and most of the morning.

The next day we took off into a bright but cloudy 1200ft, but as we flew further north where a cold front had passed the base rose to over 5000ft and at our 3000ft we could see the cliffs of Dover from about 20 miles SE of BNE, which for me was a first. Despite all the extra rules and regs being imposed on us, even a short hop like this makes you realise how lucky we are, its hard work getting and maintaining that licence, so don't give it up.

Bowling Evening

We are looking at combining the Strut and PAFRA on a bowling evening. Places are necessarily limited (no reason for not coming to spectate however!) so if interested contact details below. AMF bowling centre in Maidstone (59-71 King street, opposite the Stoneborough centre car park) for Wednesday 24th June to bowl at 8:00pm for 30 people. It appears they have a special deal for mid week bowling so instead of getting 2 games for £12.40 (the original quote) we now have to pay just £10 each for unlimited bowling (as many games as your arms can take) between 8pm and 11pm. How much better can thing As mentioned before the Strut will take 10 places leave the remaining 20 for PAFRA. If we use up our 10 spaces I will

come back to John/ Terry of PAFRA and see if there are any other spaces left so that all 30 spaces are used.

If anybody has any further thoughts please contact Gary Smith by e-mail or phone (01795 422426 or mobile 07849169905

Visit to the Uxbridge War Rooms

The Mid Kent Strut are trying to arrange a visit to the "war rooms" at Uxbridge sometimeduring this summer.

Basically the "War Rooms" is the name collectively given to the underground bunker(s) from where the Battle of Britain was commanded. There are all the original fixtures and fittings, the large map of our corner of England with the croupier sticks and areoplanes scattered around. I have been before and it was really fascinating, you have seen the room in the films but to actually be there is really something else.

So the trip would be during the week on either a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. The tour can be either 10:30 or 1:30 and lasts about 1.5 hours. The visit is free but they ask for donations to keep the exhibit in good order. A group of 25 to 30 people gives a good ambience and I am looking for people who would be interested. I envisage people car sharing (organising this themselves) and making their own way to Uxbridge (not far from Heathrow) and making their own way home afterwards. Uxbridge have to have names on a list prior to the day and people will have to bring along identification (passport etc).

If anybody is interested in a visit to this unique genuine scene where history was made contact Gary directly on gary.james.smith@btinternet.com

Invitation to Fly into Thorney Island - June 6th & 7th 2009

Strut members have been invited to this Fly-In at the airfield at Thorney Island which is not normally open to visitors.

Full details at:-

www.myweb.tiscali.co.uk/midkent/Thorney.doc

Henshaw Challenge by Nick Hampton

Anyone who rejects this flight out of hand has no idea of the difficulties Chalkie Stobbart faced. He started planning this flight as early as 1992 when he was flying his Fairchild F24 from South Africa to Oshkosh. Initial impressions of the Osprey G.P.4 are of a very small aircraft with a cramped cockpit. The seat had virtually no cushioning (I couldn't detect any by feel) because of height restrictions. Anymore padding would have had his head against the canopy. I would not have liked to have sat in it for more than 30 minutes. With the huge ferry tank fitted in the R/H seat, it was claustrophobic. Visibility forwards is very limited, much like the Mew Gull. The 195 H.P. Aero-sport Power engine with straight through exhausts is also noisy, and on his return to Cape Town Chalkie complained of being deaf in one ear. To further complicate things, the ergonomics of the Throttle Prop and mixture controls make it awkward to operate. Also difficult was the programming of the Garmin G.P.S. which was on the right side of the aircraft, forward of the

Ferry tank. Getting his right hand behind him to fetch things from the baggage compartment behind him, was nearly impossible.

Logistical problems like arranging fuel in places like Kano, are not to be underestimated. Here is what the plan was:

Cape Town depart 20:00 7th May - Brazzaville arrive 06:15

Brazzaville depart 07:15 8th May - Kano arrive 13:10

Kano depart 14:10 8th May - Algiers arrive 22:45

Algiers depart 23:45 8th May - Southend arrive 05:00 Saturday 9th May.

All assume one hour turn-around, perhaps arrive Southend a bit earlier if tech-stops are quicker.

Depart EGMC after 14 hour rest, actual departure time depends on actual arrival time.

Southend depart 19:00 9th May - Algiers arrive 00:15 10th May.

Algiers depart 01:15 10th May - Kano 09:50

Kano depart 10:50 10th May - Brazzaville 16:50 refuel and sleep 40 minutes.

Brazzaville depart 18:20 10th May - Cape Town 04:30 Monday 11th May.

3 Days, 8 Hours, 30 Minutes.

Record: 4 Days, 10hours, 16minutes.

Unlike Henshaw, overflight permissions, and diplomatic clearances are now a bureaucratic, time consuming nightmare. As anyone who has toured in a light aircraft will know, this is now a minefield of regulations. It was done by the professionals at a cost of nearly £8000. On the plus side, is the fact that South African experimental category aircraft are allowed to file I.F.R., so night flying and weather would not stop the challenge in its tracks, in theory.

Nevertheless the Cape Town departure was delayed by three hours due to fog. Runway visual range was 200 metres with

a vertical visibility of 100 feet. Fortunately this delay did not affect the elapsed time to be achieved, but did add to the anxiety and pressure of a planned thirty six hour period of ground activities and flying. He got airborne at 23.04Z to begin the adventure.



About ten days before the attempt, he was giving a radio interview and when he was asked if there would be any flight tracking facility, he had to admit that this was one obstacle that he had not been able to overcome. Listening to this broadcast was a chap called Tim Jackson, who promptly contacted Chalkie and said he may be able to help. Both Tim and his wife, Jules, who is an internet “genius” set to work immediately to make it happen. Tim obtained a device used for tracking elephants in the bush that was adapted to fit ZU-CLC, while Jules set up the tracking website. A week later, after very little sleep, it was up and running. Apart from the ability to project Chalkie’s position on a Google earth map, they also had Alex Henshaw’s position, assuming they had both taken-off at the same time. It was still being adapted during the flight with Tim’s ticker being added to explain events as they unfolded. I found it addictive watching how

events were unfolding, at least every hour or so.

In the end there were over 11,000 visitors and Tim's web host contacted him to find out why there was such a massive increase in activity on his account!

A little about Chalkie the man. Now 60, he joined South African Airways as an apprentice technician almost 42 years ago. Having been passionate about motorcycles and how to make them better and faster, the flying bug bit and he became a Flight Engineer on Boeing 727 & 747 and Airbus A300. This led to a First officer position and now he is an Airbus A340 training Captain. That progression requires ability and a massive amount of determination.

Having rebuilt a Fairchild F24, the opportunity to fly it from S.A. to Oshkosh presented itself in 1992. After that, being handy with his hands, he purchased a Vans R.V.6 kit with the intention of flying that to Oshkosh as well. He went over in 2003 in recognition of the beginning of powered flight with the Wright brothers. You can see a pattern developing here with this long distance flying, into which the Henshaw challenge fits perfectly.

Back to Chalkie's flight. The first leg was 10 hours from Cape Town to Brazzaville 01.04L departure. Having departed late, he was then prevented from leaving because the whole airport was closed for the Congolese President's departure, adding another hour to the turn around. One of the biggest obstacles was avoiding all the massive thunderstorms in the International tropical convergence zone. As you may know this is the birth place of all the tropical storms that spin off across the Atlantic towards America in the northern hemisphere summer and some of these storms have been recorded as reaching 66,000 feet in height. To help cope with these he had a

storm scope, which failed on the northbound leg. Electing to continue on the southbound leg, he had to rely on the moon to see and avoid these monsters.

To make his life interesting and stop him falling asleep, he had to fly the aircraft every second of the way, particularly early in the flight, with fuel in the ferry tank in the seat next to him. The G.P.4 is a high performance sporting aircraft with neutral stability and with the C.G. close to the aft limit, it was very sensitive in pitch. The Autopilot could cope with roll, but he had to reprogram the M.G.L. E.F.I.S. to remove the pitch channel, which can be done in flight. This pitch sensitivity had another unintended consequence, making him throw up, something that hasn't happened in well over 20 years! Fatigue played its part and towards the end of the northbound leg, having been in the "saddle" for well over 30 hours, he found it took more than the normal effort to maintain cleared altitudes. One of the advantages Steve Noujaim may have in October when he makes his attempt, is that the R.V. is easier to fly.

As if there were not enough challenges, coming across the channel, Chalkie experienced Comms. failure and had to squawk 7600. During the Southend turn around, his U.K. team had to change oil, plugs and filter and to try to rectify the comms problem and the failed storm scope. This meant having to remove the canopy, seat and Ferry tank to try and get to the instrument panel. Eventually a ground run was made by Steve Noujaim at about 19.30L. At 03.05, early on Sunday morning, after approximately 10 hours in the sack, Chalkie departed Southend on the southbound

Committee Contacts**Co-ordinator: Gary Smith**

Tel : 01795 422426
gary.james.smith@btinternet.com

Treasurer:

John Dean 01892 822776
john_dean@tiscali.co.uk

Membership Secretary:

Graham Hammond 01622 891466
grahamandshirley@tiscali.co.uk

Newsletter Editor:

Mike Negus 01634 364396
 57 Ploughmans Way
 Rainham, Kent, ME8 8LH
mike.negus8@blueyonder.co.uk

Committee Members:

Mark Balding 01580 851112
 Brian Hope 01795 662508
 Nigel Read 01634 362375
 Stephen Solley 01304 374337
 John Knight 01322 529079
 Simon Pratt 07973 402986
 Derek Browning 07885 298484



www.solleysicecreams.co.uk

leg. Most of the flight was at or around 10,000 feet altitude and over France he had to cope with ice and freezing rain, resulting in having to descend, which of course reduced his true air-speed. The rest of the trip south went as planned with much of the thunder-storm activity in the I.T.C.Z. moving away to open up a corridor for him to fly through. Unanticipated was the stronger head wind on the long Brazzaville/Capetown sector with the support team having to arrange fuel and help in Springbok, Northern Cape province for a possible diversion. In the end he was able to make it all the way, landing at 16.20L, completing the trip in 3 Days 15 hours 17 minutes. Having broken the record by 18 hours and 59 minutes, Chalkie has in fact established a "new" record, according to the F.A.I., because it was not done originating from London, a fact which makes no material difference. This record is yet to be ratified.

Dates for your Diary

May 28	Sun n Fun & Notams
Jun 24	Ten Pin Bowling
June 25	Tea at Ripple
Jul 30	BBQ
Aug 27	Treasure Hunt
Jul 25	Rochester Hangar Dance