



February 2011

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the **Kent**



Light Aircraft Association

*Spritley old bird
reaches 70*
See page 6



Mark Balding —
Committee Member

Biggin Hill and how this flying thing all started – By Mark Balding

How I found myself spending more money than sense on flying is beyond me, it wasn't my father or other intervening factor so it could have only been the passage of time. Until the age of 14, I lived in Keston under the final approach to runway 21 at Biggin Hill. The aircraft overhead must have had an effect on me as I often nagged my father to drive up to the viewing area. At the age of 11, I started at Charles Darwin School in Biggin Hill, which probably played the biggest part in my path to flying for fun and to think this could have been decided by a jobs worth at Bromley Council who placed me at that School. Anyway, this was good news as the playing fields were under short finals for runway 29.

When sports lessons coincided with the use of this runway attention to the game in hand was limited and this didn't go unnoticed in my reports. As luck would have it a fellow class mate suffered the same distraction and we soon became good friends and the best thing of all was his father owned a Jodel, fantastic. Well ok *fantastic* is a strong word but at the time it was an aircraft to me. As our friendship developed and with this new acquaintance I

February Meeting - Europa to Croatia and Morocco
Dave Watts

Thursday 24th, 20:00hrs Cobtree Manor Golf Club

www.kentstrut.co.uk

gained access past the rusty and faded but none the less very daunting "Authorised Access Only" signs on the airfield gate, a great feeling indeed!

As the days rolled by with countless threats of lines due to the distractions of aircraft from the third floor math's room window, my school days ended and whilst a career in insurance beckoned, (if only I could turn back time) my friendship with my class mate survived and soon after passing our driving tests our attention turned to how we would get our pilot licences. James had a huge advantage over me with hundreds of hours of passenger flying, not only in the Jodel but in his father's new machine, a Percival Proctor. For me, other than the odd flight from the hanger I saved what money I had and took short flights in the Southern Joyrides De Havilland Rapide G-AIDL. Eventually James and I persuaded the owner that he needed someone (s) to clean the oil off the engine cowlings and sell tickets when he visited air shows. So for a short while this added to the excitement at weekends during the summer.

James started his licence on an Auster, then without any warning incipient or otherwise

got distracted by girls which put him into a spin, stalling his flying for a number of years. By this time I could just about afford the £60 an hour in a Cessna 150 at Kingair Flying Club and completed my licence in 1987 over about 18 months. Trips with fellow students proceeded for a year or so before my buddy's love life hit the rocks and he returned to the flying scene with vigour and gained his licence in an Auster within a matter of months.

In the Pilots Pals Bar at Biggin Hill we decided to buy an aircraft together. The year was 1989 and a nameless Australian had started to import various American classics in from America I guess. His latest batch included a Star Duster 1, just one seat, a Luscombe-enough said and a lovely Taylorcraft BC12D. Having discounted the small biplane and the Luscombe a deal was struck on the Taylorcraft. The rest of the summer was spent cleaning and acquainting ourselves with this little peach and attending various events with other hanger inmates. Departures were often on mass with nine or so aircraft at a time and I quickly learnt it was not clever to line up behind the much larger and faster aircraft in the group. It was on trips such as this that you certainly

did not want to be assigned leader for the day and have the task of writing the flight plan and making the radio calls as air traffic insisted on recording each registration in the formation.

Whilst our nameless group acted with professionalism, the Biggin Hill controllers in the 1990's took a different view and we soon became known as the Cloth Airforce, The Ranch Biggin Hill. "Why the ranch" we asked and the Satco said we were all a bunch of cowboys. Well, despite the indignity of it all the name stuck and for a good number of years there was much fun to be had at Biggin Hill. There would always be someone at the hanger throughout the year and with no intention to fly you could quite easily find yourself airborne on the group's enthusiasm alone. After a days flying there were several flying clubs to frequent, the favourite being Surrey & Kent standing conveniently beside the hanger providing hot food and beer from 8am to as late into the night as you wanted.

After five years of being the last to arrive and my co owner discovering girls again, I



decided it was time to sell the Taylorcraft. A Jodel Sicile Record that had been kept and maintained in the hangar for many years became available and with a known accident free history a deal was done in May 1994. For the following six or seven years the Jodel departed Biggin Hill most weekends in the company of other ranch members to all manner of destinations, then sadly changes at Biggin Hill Airport brought an abrupt end to proceedings. Our engineer's hangar had been viewed for redevelopment and we all had to find alternative hangarage. After a fight with airport management, a new hanger was built but for some it was too late and alternative arrangements had been made at Rochester and Old Hay. The Jodel briefly found itself at Romney Street, but the draw of Biggin Hill and the camaraderie with good friends brought Yankee Zulu back to Biggin Hill.

With aircraft numbers reduced and costs increasing, 2004 brought the biggest change to the group. Those that remained saw flying hours reduce and enthusiasm to visit new places dwindle. Perhaps this was economic as Biggin Hill was becoming more and more expensive, there being no

Left – Biggin Hill

concessions for based aircraft so landing and hangarage fees took their toll, every flight had to have a purpose, so local flights after a day at the office were and still are out of the question.

With my guard down in 2006, I found myself married, I also moved house, changed jobs and became a father so naturally this was a very busy year and my log book recorded just 20 or so hours, a far cry from previous years. My new commitments put a strain on the flying budget, but as far as my wife Mandy is concerned the Jodel is part of the family. In a way a new chapter of flying has now started as for some reason my son Christopher seems to have an interest in Flying.

Whenever the flying bag comes out of the cupboard it became more difficult to leave the house as I always had a willing passenger. Planning Christopher's first flight though took time. I couldn't find anything on the internet about taking young children up in aircraft but soon the day arrived a month or two before his third birthday. With his car seat secured in the back of the Jodel, I went through the pre flight checks with greater attention than normal and happy with everything I checked my passenger was still happy and

departed from runway 03. All I could see on the climb out was a big smile and giggle, so far so good. If necessary the flight would have consisted of a quick circuit but happy I could venture further a field I headed towards Tonbridge. Not wanting to over do it on his first outing I returned for home only to find my passenger fast a sleep, waking up down wind and commenting that he had spotted a green tractor in the fields below.



This has certainly put a new aspect on flying, Christopher and his step brother Cameron have made further flights but I think it will be some time before we venture further afield than Headcorn for beans and sausages. If they continue to enjoy flying as much as I do then I guess I will have a co pilot for sometime to come. Ok tractors still appear to be an important part of Christopher's life, but I can never go flying South of Biggin Hill without over flying the house and should an

aircraft be heard at any other time, particularly one of the group returning to Biggin Hill or the strip down the road, Christopher runs into the garden.

So who knows what will be recorded in my log book in the coming years. With more regulations seemingly making it more difficult to get airborne, not forgetting the ever increasing costs, I feel for me it will be difficult to beat or even repeat the 1990's. Time will tell, but who knows what the future holds or what scenery will pass under the wings of the Jodel in the years ahead.

Taxiing out at Biggin



AGM

Gary did a resume of last year's meetings and showed video taken from a miniature camera mounted under his RV wing. John read through the treasurers report. Subs remain the same at £15. No change to the committee!

This years charity:-

British Disabled Flying Association now called "Aerobility"

Suggested Meetings and flyouts 2011.

- March: Possible drive to DeHaviland Museum at Colney
- April: 13-16 Friedrichshaffen
29th—2nd May Bank Holiday, Royal wedding, Microlight Fair Popham. Strut fly out on one of these days.
- May: 30th Bank Holiday Monday Sandown or Benbridge, lunch in Shanklin.
- June: 17-19 Aero Expo at Sywell
18th Party in the Park Old Warden
30th Strut BBQ Ripple, Drive/Fly
- July: 7-10 French RSA Rally, St Yan
28th Strut Summer BBQ venue TBA Drive/Fly
- August: 13-14 Shaffen Diest (Belgium)
Vintage Fly in Date to be confirmed. Headcorn Invicta Military Preservation Society
25th Strut Treasure Hunt by car
Fri 26-28 Tankosh (Germany) (29th Bank Holiday)
- Sept: 2-4th LAA Rally Sywell Drive/Fly
17th Duxford flyout for lunch (for aeroplanes with little wheels)
10-11 Watchford farm, Devon
Strut or Dunkeswell
- Oct: 1st Abbeville end of season lunch fly out.

Any members with alternative suggestions please contact a member of the committee.

Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday dear Beryl.....

Yep, 70 years young, an age many of us are looking up the road to, but she's made it. Beryl is the given name, more explanation later, for our group Luscombe Silvaire.

She was born, well more objectively constructed by the Luscombe Airplane Corporation at West Trenton, New Jersey officially on the 27th February 1941 although documents in our possession show some testing on the 26th but the Aircraft License was shown as the 27th. So without getting too anal 27th is the day.

In the UK the Battle of Britain had been won and even in these early stages of the War thoughts were turning to the offensive. The United States had yet to be persuaded to join the allied effort although Lend Lease was under way. Private flying was still being undertaken in the States although suspended for the duration over here. So nearly 10 months before Pearl Harbour private flying was still burgeoning with the likes of Piper, Cessna and Fairchild together with Luscombe competing for their market share.

Our aeroplane was built as a Model Type 8C Serial No 1679 with a Continental A75-9J

engine and registered as NC37018 and started its flying career with a new owner in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

In August 1944 the log book shows an entry with repairs after a landing accident led to damage of the undercarriage, propeller and right wing tip. Flying continued with a number of owners, mainly in the Mid West and Oklahoma City. At some point around 1955 the registration dropped the 'C' and she became N37018 with 888 hours booked. Around the late 1950's she was re-engined with a Continental A65-8 which technically converted her to a Model 8A. In 1946 The Luscombe Corp started production again in Texas after producing airplane parts for the war effort. Initially the rag wing model 8A with the 65 hp engine which was then produced in 1946 / 47 with the new all metal wing. This followed by the more powerful Model 8E with an 85 hp engine.

The last logged flight in the U.S. was in Florida in January 1978 before Cliff Lovell imported her and many like it in the late 80's and early 90's. She arrived a little bit worse for wear and in September 1990 needing some TLC was registered G-BSNT. First UK owner was based up in Northumberland where she

underwent a thorough rebuild including the recovering of the wings in Ceconite. It was during this period the aeroplane gained the moniker 'Beryl' after the mother of the owner who apparently helped out on some of the work. The name has stuck and during the most recent refurbishment and respray the decision was taken to keep the name, so Beryl she is.

Following several ownership changes latterly with an RAF Hawk pilot, which is how we have two non standard control column grips which look remarkably like they have gun buttons on them, the aircraft was identified for sale and the current group of Bruce, Simon, Paddy and Mike were looking for a new mount. A visit and test flight concluded the deal and she has been based at *Farting Corner* ever since. We recently took her out of the air for a year during which she acquired a smart coat of paint and recovered wings, now the scheme reflects how she would have left the factory in 1941 given it would have been natural aluminium finish instead of the base white. Looking back through the log book she has been to France and the Channel Isles, Holland, Belgium and Headcorn, to name a few. Perhaps not as well travelled as

some of the other residents but with care and attention she can look forward to another 70 years to infinity and beyond. No woodworm here!



Another Birthday

Panshanger Aerodrome, in association with the Historic Aircraft Association and the North London Flying Club has been chosen as the venue to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the de Havilland Chipmunk, without doubt, one of the most popular little warbirds. As the primary trainer for combined military services and the mainstay of the Air Cadet and University Air Squadrons Air Experience Flights for many years, it has been flown by more people than most types. Sunday 22 May 2011 is the 65th anniversary of the Chipmunk's first flight. To celebrate this, Panshanger are proud to host a celebratory fly in on that day. Everyone is welcome. Chipmunk pilots, owners, veterans and enthusiasts are encouraged to attend the only celebration of this event this year. Chipmunk owners contact:-01707 391791 or sue@northlondonflyingschool.com

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

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

Treasurer:

John Dean 01892 822776
john@jmdean.co.uk

Membership Secretary:

Graham Hammond 01622 891466
grahamandshirley@tiscali.co.uk

Newsletter Editor:

Nigel Read 01634 362375
skywritings@tesco.net

Committee Members:

Mike Negus 01634 364396
 Mark Balding 01580 851112
 Brian Hope 01795 662508
 Stephen Solley 01304 374337
 Simon Pratt 07973 402986
 Martin Payne 01474 853181

Web Master

glen@flyingadverts.co.uk



www.solleysicecreams.co.uk

Weather Forecasts

Have you seen Simon Keeling's regional forecasts with up to seven days planning at this address?

www.awis.org.uk

Includes forecast cloud, winds and visibility. Scroll down and click on Essex, Kent & E.Sussex etc.

Welcome

A new member to the strut is John Stevens. John is a friend of Martin Payne and has a Gruman AA5 based in France. If Lydd and Oxford can call themselves London, why not extend the Kent strut to France!

Dates for your Diary

Feb 24 Talk by Dave Watts
 March 31 Glyn Richards, Tiger Club
 Manager & LAA Assistant Coach
 April 28 Peter Kember A/F planning
 May 22 Chipmunk 65th Birthday at
 Panshanger



No, not quite like this

Farthing Corner

Hangarage available for a suitable aircraft at an LAA friendly 550m airstrip in North Kent. Outside parking also available. For more details please telephone John on 07880 748064.