



February 2012

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Kent*

Paddles Ahoy, me Hearty!



Light Aircraft Association



Nigel Read—Editor

February Meeting—"Medway Queen"

The paddle steamer 'Medway Queen' is the last estuary pleasure steamer surviving in the United Kingdom. She was built in 1924 on the River Clyde in Scotland but sailed in the estuary waters of the River Thames and River Medway. In WWII she was requisitioned and converted to a minesweeper.

Her finest moment came in 1940 when she made seven crossings to the beaches of Dunkirk during Operation Dynamo rescuing 7000 men. Her bravery and that of her gallant crew led to the title 'Heroine of Dunkirk' being bestowed.

After the war the 'Medway Queen' returned to pleasure steaming on the Rivers Medway and Thames, visiting Southend, Herne Bay and Margate, under her original owners, until withdrawal in 1963.

From 1966 the ship served as a marina club house and night club at Island Harbour on the Isle of Wight. She became a well known and popular entertainment venue.



23rd February Meeting

PS Medway Queen

Cobtree Manor Golf Club, 20:00hrs

www.kentstrut.co.uk

In due course she was replaced by a larger vessel, Ryde Queen, and fell into disuse.

In 1984 the Medway Queen was salvaged by a group of businessmen from the river Medina and towed on a salvage barge back to her home river in Chatham. Unfortunately this attempt failed and the Medway Queen was left to decay on the banks of the River Medway.

The Medway Queen Preservation Society was formed in 1985 to try and save her and in due course, purchased the ship in derelict condition for the sum of £15,000. She spent the following years at Damhead Creek on the River Medway while the society worked to get back to her original glory.

Despite sinking at her berth several times the members have been determined restore her and in 2006 the National Lottery Heritage Fund made this possible with a grant of £1.86million. This grant was for the complete rebuild of the ship's hull.

The hull is now being reconstructed at Albion Drydock Ltd in Bristol using the traditional method of riveting plates together rather than being of a welded

construction. Presumably 'elf n safety doesn't permit tossing around red hot rivets but some pretty hefty bucking bars and mallets must be involved! While work progresses in Bristol, it also continues in the Medway towns with MQPS volunteers working on all the recovered parts such as handrails, lamps, benches, vents, decking and much more including the reconstruction of the bridge using original parts. The Project office and visitor centre is located in Pier Approach road, Gillingham.

The work in Bristol and Medway is supported by the fundraising efforts of many people from across the World. In 2010 it was announced that the Medway Queen Preservation Society in collaboration with other European Partners would receive additional funding for Stage 2 of the Medway Queen's restoration through a joined project called 'Heroes 2C".

This includes a replica of the *New Belgica* which sailed for the Antarctic on 16th August 1897 and the construction of a First Rate 17th century ship *Jean Bart* as the centre piece of a history and leisure complex in Gravelines. <http://www.tourville.asso.fr>



Simon Pratt flying in the snow on 11th February. As everything looks white it easy to get lost!



Model of the Jean Bart

The projects are for educational opportunities and apprenticeships, Mid Kent College providing students for the Medway Queen.

Major tasks and fund raising remain to completely overhaul the ships engine.

The Hull is due back in Chatham this spring.

All the work of the MQPS, its members and friends as well as international partners will, one day, allow the Medway Queen to steam again.

<http://www.medwayqueen.co.uk>

Swiss Made (It) - Or how we completed a journey started 6 years before. *By Simon Pratt*

The year was 2005 and reading through the events list in the LAA magazine I saw that there was a fly-in at a venue in Switzerland. Mike Negus and I decided to partner up for the trip and as there were some other residents of

Beryl the Luscombe



the strip also interested in going, on the Thursday evening three aeroplanes took off in good weather to spend the night at Abbeville in order to get a "flying start" on Friday morning.

Friday dawned, breakfast was eaten and weather checked, it didn't look brilliant but it looked possible on paper so we took off to head down the eastern side of Paris to Troyes. About 15 minutes after take off we were back at Abbeville discussing what to do next. The decision was made to head South to Bagnoles de L'Orne, with Bernay as an alternate, so we took off again. About 20 minutes into the southbound flight one of the leading aircraft called to divert to Dieppe so we all followed, 10 minutes after landing at Dieppe the skies opened and we were really pleased to be on the ground.

That night was spent in a hotel in Dieppe after a pleasant meal and quaffing several litres of beer.

Saturday came upon us and we woke to a much brighter day. The airport was having an event that day so we got going as soon as we could, once the water spout just off the coast had been photographed, and this time we made it all the way to Bagnoles and had a good night there followed by an uneventful flight home the next day. A number of years passed with the Swiss Francs burning a hole in my pocket.



Mike getting the Sound of Music vibe

Catalina crew after a long day

Now it's 2011, there's another fly-in advertised in Switzerland, this time at Ecuwillens near Fribourg wherever that is. The fly in and air show was called RIO 2011 and was the 20th event organised by L'Aerotique Oldtimers Foundation based on the airfield. Looking at the map showed that this one could be reached by using only the North-West France chart. Asking around at the strip it was found that nobody else wanted to join us on our epic journey so we planned it to go alone in our beautiful little Luscombe. A registration form was filled in on line with a photo of the aeroplane as requested, and the route planned.

This time there was not the luxury of a Thursday get away so the planning had to be done to get there in a day on the Friday. We decided to leave at about 0800 local which, depending on wind, meant arrival at Abbeville around 10:20 local. As is to be expected in our sort of flying we got to take off at 08:25 and had a good flight meaning we arrived at 10:40. The flight plan was closed and

fuel taken on so the only things left to do here were to have a coffee and make ourselves comfortable for the flight ahead - a necessary part of the flight planning in Mike's case.

The next stage was a 2 hour leg to Troyes on the eastern side of Paris, the fuelling here is by credit card in a machine but if you need to use steps they are released the same way as a supermarket trolley but having no coins between us we managed by getting Mike to do the filling as he's quite tall. The fuel cost is on a par with everywhere else and the landing fee was only 8 Euros.

By now it was lunch time. We had spotted a G registered Piper Sport on the apron and on entering the main building we bumped into Marc Lhermette who was on his way out after what he described as an expensive lunch so we went back outside and sat on the grass to eat a picnic of some sandwiches thoughtfully brought along by Mike.

The next leg was a straight run down

Dessert trolley at the airport

to Besancon Vise, there are 2 airfields at Besancon and we had been advised by one of our frequent flyer friends that there is no customs facility at the other one so as this was our departure airport to Switzerland we needed customs. This was where it got a bit more interesting, firstly because the circuit takes you very close to the trees on the side of a small mountain and the runway doesn't look very long as it's a very wide field but Mike got us down successfully. Getting fuel was no problem as the words "essence" and "plein" are easy to remember. With the fuel and comfort sorted out we then had to do the flight plan. Asking the gentleman who did the fuel where we should go to file a flight plan he gave us a gallic shrug and said something in French that we didn't understand. In the office there was no sign of computer, fax or flight plan paperwork so I got out my netbook and dongle and tried to go on-line, I couldn't get a connection. The next idea was to find an English speaker on the field, there were quite a few people around but nobody would admit to speaking anything other than French. I noticed that there was wi-fi in the cafe but couldn't get the password to connect to it. Finally we spotted a list of interest-

ing 'phone numbers on the wall and called Lille info to file the flight plan and also did the customs by phone.

From here we were only about 20 minutes away from the Swiss border and there was a little hill of 5000ft that we had to go over. I know it's hard to believe but the 65hp engined Luscombe climbed beautifully straight over the top. The scenery then became just as you would expect of Switzerland with snow capped mountains in the distance, small villages dotted around and log cabins to complete the look. The rest of the flight went smoothly until we inadvertently did a right hand circuit when it should have been left, but nobody seemed to notice.

On landing we discovered apart from the 'Plane Sailing' Catalina and crew booked for the event, we were the only Brits there and of course the Luscombe caused a lot of interest it being such a beautiful machine and all.

We registered with the helpful Fly-in staff, received our beer and food tokens VERY gratefully and knocked back a few whilst taking in the ambience and congratulating ourselves on a safe arrival after a long gap.

The evening drew on and we were taken to our nearby hotel at Fribourg by the Cat crew bus and what a jolly fine



Or possibly trying to fly sans Deryl

bunch they turned out to be, fine company.

In the evening we took in the bustle of the street market and enjoyed fresh cooked noodle sitting outside and then more walking before settling in to a jazz bar for a couple of nightcaps and then back to the hotel.

Précising the days events we had lots of interesting aircraft, a fine air show and about 40 E-type jags as it was the 50th anniversary of the marque. The evening culminated in a great goulash cooked on a WW 1 vintage field kitchen, more beer, a band and more beer.

Sunday dawned hot and clear, as it had been, if you remember the Summer

in June and down there and for most of our trip we had temperatures around 30 degrees. Again much help with the flight planning and off on the first leg out of Swiss airspace to Montparlier a short hop of 40 minutes. Despite continually calling Geneva to open the flight plan we could get no response but when we closed through the assistance of a helpful soul at the French side. All was well and we proceeded on our way back to Farting Corner in time for tea.

Throughout the trip my admiration for Don Luscombe's finest further cemented my love of type given 65 hp lugging two not so slim Jims in high temperature at higher altitudes than Kent, Beryl did us proud.

New Aerobility HQ at Blackbushe where Gary Smith (right) and John Dean (left) presented Brian Catchpoole with a cheque for £366-40 on Tuesday 17th Jan, raised by members of the LAA Kent Strut in 2011.



All of this took only 5½ flying hours each way so it's somewhere I'll seriously consider going again and would recommend it to others apart from the fact this was the last RIO (or is it, hints were dropped it may become an occasional event).

Look familiar?

The 2012 Aircraft Spruce catalogue has a picture on the cover of the Varieze owned by Strut member Mike Roper and Steve Brown! The cover is a tribute to Burt Rutan featuring some of his other designs.

Not to be out done, Gary's RV9 is featured in this years RV calendar, available for \$7 from Vans.



January AGM

Eight members and six committee members were present. Gary Smith, Strut Coordinator, gave a resume of 2011 meetings and flyouts, John Dean gave the treasurers report and explained how costs to the strut were increasing and those who receive the printed newsletter would have noticed the printer is failing again after being repaired last year. It was proposed in committee to send email versions of the newsletter to members who have printed copies where we also have their email address in addition to sending a printed copy but more importantly from next year only email newsletters will be sent. A small number of copies will be printed for promotional use and some will be available at strut meetings. If you are unable to receive email copies contact a committee member. There was also a vote on increasing annual membership to £20 which was passed unanimously. Membership sec is down

under but reports 90 members. See new membership map on website!

The Phil Banyard Memorial Trophy, affectionately known as the 'strut screw' was awarded to your editor, which of course should be shared by my all too few regular contributors, all I do is lay it out and fill in the gaps!



The Phil Banyard Trophy

Propeller Safety

A recent and sad accident to LAA Coach Al Mathie at Priory Farm on exiting a Cub would serve as a reminder of the dangers of propellers.



As an enthusiastic and active member of the Auster Club, Al was well-known around the UK and beyond.



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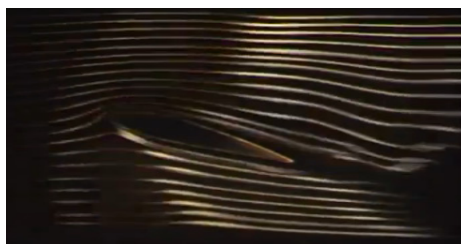


www.solleysicecreams.co.uk

How wings really work

So it's not done with invisible wires, smoke and mirrors, although the smoke is visible in this video from Cambridge University!

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/how-wings-really-work/>

**Dates for your Diary**

- 22nd Feb Modern Pilot Training Tbc
 BAE Systems 19:00
- 23rd Feb Strut Meeting
 PS Medway Queen
 History, Restoration and return to the River Medway.
- 21st Mar Helicopter Flight
 Controls, BAE Systems 19:00
- 29th Mar Kent Battle of Britain
 Museum, Hawkinge
 Talk from Dave Brocklehurst
www.kbobm.org
- 26th Apr Stow Maries
 Talk on WWI airfield by
 Russell Savory
- May Bank Holiday weekend (tbc)
 Fly-in to Stow Maries
- 9th June Duxford LAA bonus day