



February 2014

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Kent*

WWI and Military Engineering

WWI Kent Airfields

With the centenary of the start of the first world war this year your editor has been trawling the internet for suitable relevant information. There seems to be some confusion on dates and locations depending on source with different names applied and different services—RNAS, RFC and RAF using them. Several are Balloon stations and several are coastal for sea planes. Land planes back in the day would use large grass fields without the later invention of runways, simply avoiding the complication of cross wind take offs and landings by heading straight into wind. Clearly it was very easy for these fields to return to farmland after the war with many of the associated buildings being dismantled over the years leaving little sign of their war time use. Some were already used as flying fields before the war continuing afterwards as civilian airfields and of course many have now been built over. Here is a compilation of some of them:

Kent Airfields during the First World War

Dates and names vary depending on source, similarly named airfields may have slightly different locations.
Allhallows 1916-1935 WWI Class 3 Landing Ground
Bekesbourne 1916-1919 also during 1940. RFC 1916. Bekesbourne Airfield was a major WW1 fighter airfield. Originally opened in 1914, main occupant No 50 Squadron remained ready to defend London and south-east England against Zeppelin and later Gotha bombing raids. Between both World Wars it became a



Light Aircraft Association



Nigel Read - Editor

Contents

WWI Kent airfields p1

Royal Flying Corps p3

Stow Maries Talk p4

AGM p4

**New Committee
Member & Scotland Trip
p4**

**Royal Engineers visit
Pp7**

27th February Meeting

Cobtree Manor Golf Club, 20:00hrs

www.kentstrut.co.uk

popular civil airfield and was home to the Kent Flying Club. Interestingly, pilot E.D. Whitehead Reid, a Canterbury doctor, flew from here in the 1920s to attend to patients.

Biggin Hill 1917-1992 when the RAF departed leaving civilian flying.

Detling 1916-1919 and 1938-1959 (One time home of Kent Gliding Club)

Dover 1918-1919 Airships and Seaplanes

Dymchurch 1915-1920 Balloons and Aircraft

Eastchurch 1912-1947. Now HMP Stanford Hill but with some original Hangars remaining.

Frinsted 1917-1918 No 112 Sqdn.

Folkestone 1915-1918 Formally RNAS Capel-le-Ferne.

Grain 1916-1924 Airships and Seaplanes. Now site of the power station.

Isle of Grain Also called RAF Port Victoria which was an experimental aircraft depot produced a number of designs numbered P.V.1 - P.V.9 then the Grain Griffin a development of the Sopwith B1 bomber into a carrier based two seat reconnaissance aircraft.

Guston Down (north of Dover)1914-1919

Hawkinge 1914-1963 Alternatively Folkestone

Hunton (Maidstone)1916-1917 RFC near Yalding so could accommodate sea planes!

Joyce Green 1911-1919

Kingsnorth Isle of Grain 1914-1919 Formally RNAS

51° 22' 25" N 0° 36' 07" E, Airship station on the Isle of Grain. Not to be confused with RAF Isle of Grain 51° 26' 21" N 0° 42' 46" E!

Lympne 1916-1919 and 1940-1946

Manston 1915-1999 when the RAF departed. Latterly home of 617 Gliding School and Air Cadet Air Experience Flight.

Marden 1917-1919 Class 2 airfield

New Romney 1917-1919 and 1942-1944 Later Littlestone Airfield. (Two airfields with this name)

Penshurst 1916-1919 & 1940-1947. operating as Penshurst Airfield 1919-1936
Pluckley 1917-1919

Sheerness 1917-1918 Emergency Landing Ground. Also a balloon station 1917-1919

Shellbeach (Royal Aero Club's flying ground at the eastern end of Sheppy and near Mussel Manor, where the famous photo of the Short Brothers et al was taken)1918 Emergency Landing Ground. John Moore-Brabazon made the first official flight by an Englishman here in May 1909.

Swingate Down (to the east of Guston Down)1914-1919 (RAF St Margaret's). A memorial to the RFC states that a contingent of the 1914 BEF consisting of Nos. 2, 3 4 & 5 squadrons flew from here to Amiens between 13 and 15 August 1914. 49 Squadron were formed at Swingate. On November 12th 1917 49Sqn flew out from Swingate to La Bellevue located SW of Arras.

Swingfield, about 5 miles north of Folkstone. 1916-1918 and 1942-1945

Throwley 1917-1919 RFC & RAF use continued to WWII according to some sources.

Walmer 1917-1919 RAF & RNAS

West Malling 1917-1918 and 1940-1969. Maidstone Airport in 1930. Home of 618 Gliding School until the airfield was sold for development. Now called Kings Hill.

Westernhanger (Folkestone Racecourse) 1919-1944

Westgate 1918-1920 or 1915-1916 RNAS (Mutrix Farm) Sea and Land planes

Wye 1916-1919. The King's Head pub, now run by Shepherd Neame suffered a freak accident in World War One when a low-flying aircraft based at Wye crashed into the establishment while mounting an impromptu flypast to celebrate a marriage. **Chiddingstone Causeway** possibly Penshurst above.

Sources: Wikipedia. For old maps <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/maps/> Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust <http://www.abct.org.uk> where more are listed with additional information such as units based there.

Royal Flying Corps

Whilst looking for information on Kent Airfields, I came across an interesting article on the RFC

The Royal Flying Corps 1912-1918 Source:- Richard Cavendish – History Today
<http://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/royal-flying-corps-founded>

The development of aviation in the early 1900s raised the possibility of using aircraft in war. Attention at first focused on employing planes for reconnaissance, to spy on enemy troop dispositions from the air and to help direct artillery fire. Aerial combat and bombing came later.

In Britain the Royal Engineers already had a unit that used balloons (formed in 1878) for observation and in February 1911 the War Office ordered the formation of a small air battalion, equipped with aeroplanes. Curiously the battalion was to come formally into operation on April Fool's Day. Pilots could come from any branch of the army but had to have a flying certificate from the Royal Aero Club.

Later in the year the Italians used aircraft in action against the Turks in their conquest of Libya. The Imperial General Staff in Britain set up a subcommittee, which in February 1912 recommended the creation of a new flying arm with separate military and naval wings. In April the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) was founded by George V. It would last until 1918, when it became the principal element of the Royal Air Force.

The air battalion of the Royal Engineers became the RFC's military wing, with both balloons and aeroplanes. Number One Squadron of the RFC manned the balloons. Numbers Two and Three flew the aeroplanes. By 1914 two more squadrons, Four and Five, had been created. The naval wing was separated off in 1914 as the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS).

The new organisation's motto was *Per ardua ad astra*, which the RAF would inherit. In July 1912 the RFC suffered its first fatal crash, on Salisbury Plain. The pilot and the observer were both killed, but an order was promptly issued: 'Flying will continue this evening as usual.' That began a lasting tradition.

The Germans invaded Belgium on August 3rd, 1914 and Britain declared war the following day. Around mid-August the RFC flew its aeroplanes across the Channel to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The RFC was hugely outnumbered by the French air force, but it quickly began to make its contribution and early in September the BEF commander Sir John French commented approvingly in an official dispatch on the vital help RFC reconnaissance had given his operations in Belgium. In that month the RFC began taking aerial photographs and in 1915 J.T.C. Moore-Brabazon of the RFC designed the first efficient aerial camera. The first RFC

planes had Union Jack badges, but in 1915 the roundel of three circles, red at the centre surrounded by white then blue, was adopted from the French air force badge, with the colours in reverse order.

The RFC became increasingly aggressive, especially under Hugh Trenchard, a former infantry officer who was its commander in France from August 1915. The casualty toll mounted accordingly. RFC planes had no parachutes. Dogfights between Allied and enemy pilots swooping about the sky in flimsy-looking biplanes became more common and Allied pilots took to strafing German troops and installations with machine guns or bombs. The word 'strafe' was coined from the German verb *strafen*, 'to punish' (as in *Gott strafe England*).

RFC personnel won shoals of decorations and some fighter aces became national heroes, including Captain Albert Ball VC, who crashed and died in 1917; Captain Lanoe Hawker VC, who was killed in 1916 in a dogfight with the German ace Baron von Richthofen; and Major Edward 'Mick' Mannock VC, killed in action in his Sopwith Camel in 1918. Those who survived to play leading roles in the Second World War included Hugh Dowding, Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, Charles Portal and the Canadian ace Billy Bishop VC. Other RFC figures included the cricketer Jack Hobbs, who joined up as an air mechanic in 1916; *Biggles* author W.E. Johns; and the ballroom dancer Vernon Castle, who was killed in a crash in 1918.

On April Fool's Day 1918 the RFC and the RNAS were reunited into the Royal Air Force, under the newly created Air Ministry. By the end of the war the total RFC, RNAS and RAF casualties were more than 9,000 killed or missing and more than 7,000 wounded.

Stow Maries Talk (BAE Systems)

Whilst on the subject of WW1 airfields, the Medway Branch of the Royal Aeronautical society have arranged a talk from Roger Smith, curator of Stow Maries on Wednesday 21st May at BAE Systems at 7pm. Owner Russell Savory spoke to the Strut in April 2012 and that month's *Skywritings* has details. Quite a few of us have flown into deepest Essex to visit.

AGM

The AGM was held at our usual venue, 17 members attended, outnumbering the committee again, three of them going away with prizes from the free raffle—Wine, Chocolates and a year's strut membership! The committee went away with a new member, Frank Lissimore who replaces Martin Payne. Thanks to Martin for his help over the years. I understand he has found another love! (A lady).

New Committee Member

Frank Lissimore flies a Jodel from Biggin Hill and has kindly sent an article on his aircraft and a recent trip around Scotland in it:-

I'm Frank Lissimore and I recently joined the committee - by trade a solicitor - for pleasure a Jodel 1051 pilot. Having been a member of the Kent strut for 11 years, I thought it was about time I contributed something- not sure what - but I will try!

LAA lesson number one was that I should have listened to the members who almost unanimously at my first visit to an evening meeting advised me to avoid a Potez engine- evidently I didn't listen as I was romanced by the beauty of G-BLKM , built

in 1963 , no 519 with just 2300 hours and 90 on what was supposedly a zero timed engine.

The last article I wrote for *Skywriting*, was the sorry tale of woe about our Potez engine! - That was 10 years ago - now I am happy to say that's History and our 0-200 has now logged over 500 hours.

KiloMike is hangered at Biggin where we have the benefit of the experience of Cobbie to look after her, treating her just like one of his own fleet! - Although expensive Biggin is all weather and with it two hard runaways is a blessing as KM does not like crosswind on tarmac!

KM has taken us all over Europe, including Corsica, Denmark (three times), Berlin and many trips to France. In 2012, KM enjoyed the heights of the Pyrenees with a flight down to San Sebastian, followed by a trip long the mountains, landing in various Gliding sites and then back up the Rhone Valley. The previous year's Corsica trip was amazing - we could see the island from 95 miles away. (a good thing as our old GPS decided that Corsica didn't exist (we were carrying a map of course!)

Last year was a really special trip - finally after a number of abortive attempts thwarted by poor vis, we flew clockwise around the coast of Scotland. The trip in June, took is to Blackpool then over the Lake District to the Isle of Islay. Our arrival was not the most relaxed as we had chosen to arrive the weekend of their annual beach Rugby competition. Finding accommodation for the night involved calling over 20 places and we still couldn't find a room. Eventually to be helped out by someone in the tourist information who "phoned a friend" and we were given the use of a 3 bedroom holiday home for the night!



Our trip took us on to Barra where we landed on what is the only official beach runway in the world. Luckily the daily flight from Glasgow had just landed, which made our landing easier as we could just make out the track of that aircraft on the beach and it gave us a clue as to where to land - as it just looked like one big runway!- A word of warning if you do fly to Scotland - the airfield opening hours

are very limited and although it is possible to get permission to land outside their opening hours, they do like you to tell them your plans in advance if possible. A permit can be obtained through the HIA airport authority for a small fee and it covers a reasonable number of airfields. Almost everywhere is PPR.

We then flew on to Oban for lunch and later that day to Glenforsa, Mull, which has to be one of the most idyllic airfields anywhere, with its grass runway alongside the

Oban airport



Landing at Glenforsa with interesting prop effect!



water, no landing fee and a very reasonably priced hotel and restaurant within 100 yards!

The next day took us to the tiny strip at Plockton (where the wind seemed to come from every direction at the same time) and then up to Stornaway on the Isle of Lewis where we refuelled (fuel was mega expensive everywhere in Scotland).

The landing was interesting as the runway had two windsocks- and they were pointing in opposite directions

Our next stop was Kirkwall in the Orkneys, and our route took us north along the coast and then east. All along on



Landing at Stornaway

the trip we had had glorious hot sunny weather - suddenly as we turned eastward, gloom appeared and we were pleased to be landing at Kirkwall as the weather closed in. Talking gloom - what a gloomy place Kirkwall was - no more need be said. We left first thing the next morning and enjoyed the spectacular flight down to Peterlee - via Aberdeen airport. At Peterlee (which is a parachute club) - we were made very welcome. That night we took a taxi to a hotel in Durham and enjoyed an excellent evening there.

With the weather closing in and a poor forecast we dashed back down south , with a quick coffee stop at Fenland then back to Biggin, getting there a few minutes before it was clamped in.

This was the first trip where we had used Sky Demon as our GPS nav aid - on a Mini iPad - brilliant!

All in all a brilliant flight and a great example of what you can do with a 50 year old LAA registered aircraft - happy flying—*Frank Lissimore*

Royal Engineers Museum

The strut held a 'scramble' on the 15th February. In view of the dreadful weather a road visit seemed the most suitable. The museum features military engineering through the centuries coming right up to date with work in Afghanistan. Special displays included a Brennan torpedo, sections of the Berlin wall, V2 rocket (in the background below), numerous military vehicles and a Harrier Jet. From early aircraft experiments an aircraft model and 'Cody' wing are displayed along with a board describing "Colonel" Samuel Cody who worked on aircraft development with the Royal Engineers. He was the first person to fly an aircraft in Britain and in 1903/4 the war office trialed his man carrying kite. After working on airships, in 1908 he allowed the RE to conduct powered flying experiments with his aircraft. Funding from the War Office ended in 1909. Cody continued racing aircraft, becoming a British citizen in 1909. He was killed in 1913 when his aircraft broke up. Featured exhibitions at the moment are a photographic exhibition displaying early photographs taken by Royal Engineers



Some of the members that visited the Royal Engineers Museum

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with typical cameras and the history of Rochester Bridge. There have been several bridges dating back to Roman times. In 1381 the Roman Bridge was swept away. Between 1387 and 1391 the medieval replacement was constructed. 1648 saw a clash on the bridge between the Royalists and Parliamentarians. Replaced in 1856 by one designed by Sir William Cubitt which originally used cast iron support arches underneath. The medieval bridge, modernised in 1824 by Thomas Telford, was blown up by the Royal engineers in 1857. A swing section at the Strood end was quickly rendered redundant when an adjacent rail bridge was constructed without an opening section. Following numerous collisions by ships the damage was eventually found to be quite extensive. New support arches were added on top with those underneath being removed—leaving more clearance for ships but perhaps not such an elegant structure. This became known as the Old Bridge (the London bound section now) and this year is the centenary of it's opening by Lady Darnley on 14th May 1914.

Like many visitor attractions, tickets are valid for a repeat visits for a year and get a £1 off the cost of entry to Chatham Dockyard!

Strut meetings for your Diary

27th February	28th August
27th March	25th September
24th April	30th October
29th May	27th November
26th June	Christmas Dinner
31st July	December TBA