

Skywritings

Newsletter of the Kent Strut of the



March 2021

Message from your new Co-ordinator, Steve Hoskins



At the Strut virtual Annual General Meeting on 28th January we learned that Gary Smith was standing down as our much-respected Co-ordinator and I was excited to be elected to take over the reins. We owe Gary a huge thank you for steering the Strut for so many years and are pleased to reassure everyone that he will be continuing to help as a Committee member.

Nigel Read also stood down as the hard-worked Editor of Skywritings, and he is also owed a huge vote of thanks for his work over many years. He has also agreed to remain as a Strut Committee member. As you will be aware, Ron Armitage has taken over as Editor of Skywritings, and, I know, looks forward to hearing from you all with articles for publication. Grateful thanks are also due to John Dean for keeping the Strut on an even keel whilst Gary has been incapacitated. Thank you all.

Naturally, all our activities at the moment are constrained by the Coronavirus regulations, but we are looking forward to a resumption of flying in due course and your Committee will do their best to ensure that we are working for the benefit of all our members. We are determined to advance the opportunities for fun flying, but this is *your* Strut and we need you all to help us by offering suggestions and by generally getting involved. The Committee are all happy to hear any suggestions you might want to put forward. Contact details are on the last page.

Message from your new 'Skywritings' Editor, Ron Armitage



I hope you enjoy your new look 'Skywritings' and thank those of you who have taken time out to provide much needed copy for this first edition under my Editorship.

In each of the following editions I hope to include a 'Meet the Members' section and in this issue it's about Nic Orchard, our new Committee member. I also intend to include a monthly quiz, a 'Sales and Wants' section and updates on our local airfields and strips.

However, it's **YOUR** newsletter. Please let me have **YOUR** views, **YOUR** stories and **YOUR** anecdotes. Let me know what **YOU** would like to read about.

There are many of you that I have not yet met. Please take the time to drop me a line to introduce yourselves, give a few details of your flying history (if any) and aspirations. Perhaps provide a photograph of you and/or your aeroplane. Do you have a favourite airfield? A favourite aeroplane? Contact details are on the last page, but you can always write to me at:
Holly Tree Cottage, Waldershare Road, Ashley, Dover, Kent, CT15 5JA, if you prefer.

Membership Matters

SOME GOOD NEWS! At the virtual Annual General Meeting on 28th January it was decided that Strut membership would be **FREE** to all existing members for 2021. Anyone who has already paid for 2021 will have their payment credited to their 2022 subscription.

MORE GOOD NEWS! A very warm welcome is extended to four **new members**: James Wood, Peter Stretton, Roger Pearson and Peter Adams. We look forward to seeing you when the COVID controls are relaxed.

Bonnington Strip

One of our new member, Peter Stretton, has his Eurofox based on his 450 metre strip at Bonnington. Like the rest of us, he is looking forward to getting back to flying and, luckily, got his permit renewed just before the latest lockdown.



Ripple Strip

Stephen Solley



Feb 2021

Things are still quiet at the moment as one would expect. Fortunately we are very free draining so as soon as the bad weather clears we should be able roll and cut ready for the season.

We hope that it will be open by April so watch this space and hope to have a fly in breakfast.

During the middle of the month I had a visit from Border Force. They came over to explain the setup for the Customs and Excise designated aerodromes for which we will need a Certificate of Agreement (CoA) to continue to handle flights once the transition period has ended on 30th June 2022. At the moment we operate under a blanket cover.

Update from Headcorn

David Smith

COVID 19, the Beast from the East, a new hangar and a wet and soggy runway sums it up!!

For those of you who know Headcorn, its main car park was turned into a COVID Triage centre last year. This continued until 2021, when we became a COVID Vaccination centre. I think Headcorn was the first in Kent to offer a “drive through” facility. Drive up to a marquee, wind down window, give name etc., receive jab, wind up window and off you go. All effortless unless you are driving and want the jab in your left arm!



The continued wet weather this year has meant the runway has been out of action (waterlogged) most of the time. A few maintenance flights have taken place. Even the helicopters are reluctant to fly.



The latest new hangar is progressing well and should be fully operational before too long. Concrete flooring, framework, two sides and a roof completed so far with the two end doors currently being fabricated. The beams (orange) are in place for hanging doors, planned for March. Two electric charging points to be installed for aircraft.

As you will be aware, Maypole Airfield has now closed and we have some ten ex-residents now at Headcorn. This will fill half the hangar.

Update from Lydd

Kevin Marks

Overcast at 500ft and rain, good for seagulls and the SAR chopper. The red and white AW189 lifts and hovers a few feet above the Bravo intersection. A few seconds later she's lost to the clouds, the blade whoomp the only evidence of a nearby presence. The silence and the seagulls return, all rather eerie.



Photographs courtesy of Steve Mallion, Lydd's Ground Ops Manager

Along with the Border Force Drone, only SAR and the seagulls are departing on 03/21. Lydd has been closed to all traffic from late December. The current reopening is Notam'ed for 1st March. Not that the weather has been flyable these last couple of months.

Lydd's Grounds Ops have provided booking slots for engine ground runs on the Monday of some weeks. So it has been possible to occasionally visit and pamper your flying machine. We are all looking forward to when the runway and tower come back to life, although the seagulls might be disappointed

Notes from Farthing Corner

Mike Negus

At the time of writing (Mid-February) we have just experienced the Beast from the East 2 albeit a little short lived and now starting an unseasonable period of warm weather, well that's the UK for you.



The picture says it all – freezing winds from the North-East!

Turning to matters nearer home, there is very little flying going on with only one or two movements for engine maintenance purposes and some periodic checks on the airfield with others taking advantage of socially distanced permit work. We are waiting for the return of our tailplane for the Luscombe which has been away for inspection and rebuild following some reports highlighted in the LAA mag recently of corrosion issues and, given the aluminium skins were not in the best shape, we agreed prevention is better than cure. Shown are the tailplane after the skins were partially removed and the finished article awaiting polishing.



Luscombe tail before...



Luscombe tail after!

The most exciting thing apart from this was a burst water pipe in the caravan used as our club house but one of our number with the requisite skills put that to right in short order. What a talented lot some of us are. So, with little activity I was at a loss on what to report but my memory was jogged about a previous snowy period almost exactly 9 years ago, funnily enough almost to the day, when some photographs were taken on the 12th February 2012 of one of our intrepid birdmen taking to the air under similar conditions.



Farthing Corner – February 2021



Farthing Corner – 9 years ago in 2012

Our group's Luscombe made a rather attractive addition to the wintry landscape as Simon Pratt, for it was he who decided to go aloft in these fairly unique conditions, and all without the aid of skis. Enjoy the photo, I think it is rather esoteric! Hopefully there will be a little more to report for the next newsletter, including hopefully the Luscombe reunited with its tail.

Update from Rochester

Kelvin Carr

Medway Council have given Kier the go-ahead on all the ground works for the new MAPS hangar, Hub building and Hangar. Since Kier have returned from the Christmas shutdown most of the levelling has been completed. Half the spoils have also been relocated to the area behind the old Toys R Us building. Kier have also laid a temporary road, so as to not damage the ground too much.

Hangar 3 (The Large hangar). The main hangar door steel works have been completed. The concrete base has been cut out and re-laid in readiness for the door runners.

You may have heard, the Department for Transport and CAA publicised an advisory development fund (ADF). This initiative from the DfT in conjunction with the CAA, is to support any development work with five days free consultation. Rochester Airport application was successful, following our first meeting it has been agreed they will look at our previous runway planning application, with particular emphasis on the EIA (Environmental Impact assessment), so we can ensure it meets the current legislation.





Meet the Strut Members

Nic Orchard

I got into flying by accident. As I am the only flyer I know who, as a child, didn't have the nose pressed against the airfield fence, make models or gaze upwards whenever an aircraft flew over, it was an odd thing. My father had always wanted to fly, but his attempt to join the RAF in wartime was scotched instantly by his eyesight and he became PBI, so when, in the 80s, a gliding club set up operation quite close to the family, it seemed a good idea to buy him a flight for his birthday. He was ahead of me and had already joined the club. I went along to see what it was all about and was coerced into having a trial lesson. With hindsight, my reaction to the drama of the winch launch was somewhat understated. When asked afterwards what I thought, I replied 'It was all right'. Not exactly the usual reaction, as I later found out when conducting those flights myself. Cutting a long story short, I did keep on going, for what I can only think now must have been to fill an unknown void. I was a terrible student: when everyone else had progress sheets, I had a regress sheet. I was on my second such sheet before I went solo, 2nd October, 1986, in a Blanik. Somewhat unusually, I remember little about it except that the streetlights of the nearest village looked quite pretty in the pre-dusk gloom. I carried on, though and in time acquired a share in a Swallow (first solo in a single seater – more memorable, as I temporarily lost the airfield) then the Mucha 100 and an AEI rating, as it was then, getting to sit in the back of a Ka7 doing all the flying under 500'. Bliss.



Repeated trips to the wilder part of Florida made more friends and more gliding experience, but one day, it was too wet to aerotow and I was told to untie the Cessna. By the end of the week, I'd gone solo in the 150. Back in blighty, the only way not to waste this on a limited budget was to travel several times to Rufforth in Yorkshire, returning with a PPL (SLMG). I bought a T61A Falke and enjoyed some very economical flying in her for seven years. I took my humble licence to Manston to make it PPL(A), the only period in which I encountered the somewhat impersonal training world of white shirts.

Joining the Tiger Club, then at Headcorn, I got to fly G-BBYB, the best Supercub ever, usually commuting there by Falke. It was there that I met Richard Warriner and that led to a whole new world of fly-ins and gentle touring. Buying G-TECC, a rather scruffy Aeronca Champ, in 2003, made an article in the LAA magazine (How Not To Buy An Aeroplane) but I still have her and have no wish to 'upgrade'. She is my forever aeroplane.

The engine failure in 2008 proved that training – and perhaps gliding experience – is very useful. Had there not been a crack inside the starboard leg that was probably waiting to go, she could have flown out again, but the event did me a huge favour. 'CC' was virtually rebuilt, beautifully, by Brian Mayo and thus had interior inspections a 1946 aeroplane needed. She was rewarded by being invited to be in the static display at Goodwood Revival. It was good to get a peep into a different world and the weekend is a treasured memory.



In recent years, I have managed about 250 hrs a year, but this maybe says more about the addiction than anything else. Richard & I flew in loose formation to the KZ Rally in Denmark, Tannkosh in Germany and the RSA Rally in France, but much of our flying was to fly-ins here in the UK or, when we could, touring in France. It has been all the people I've met because of Richard's influence that have kept me flying, I'm sure.

When he was Chief Navigator to his strip-buddy Geoff's amazing entry in the Dawn to Dusk Challenge (3rd – they wuz robbed), I think another seed was sown and I wondered if a Champ could do such a thing, albeit slowly and with fuel stops. My 2017 entry taught me a great deal and I followed up with two more entries in 2019 and 2020.



*Nic receiving her Dawn to Dusk awards from Capt. Christopher Spurrier,
Master of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots at the Royal Air Force Club*

I've made all manner of mistakes and cringe at each one. Learning from each is not guaranteed, but one hopes so.

I've met some inspirational people, but despite my bias, Richard tops the list. Pat Hange and Jerrie Cobb in the USA should also feature. It is simply the community of pilots, often in the LAA world, that should be mentioned.

Hours now: 3780 (power)

Aircraft: Blanik, Ka7, Ka13, Schweizer 2-22, 1-26, Slingsby Swallow, Puchacz, T21, Bocian, Pilatus, Mucha 100

Slingsby T61A, T61F, Cessna 150, 152, 172, 170, PA18, J3, Super Dimona, Piper Dakota, Decathlon, Aeronca 7AC, Citabria, Rans S6, Tiger Moth, Jodel 120, Pioneer 200, Robin 400

My fantasy hangar has three aeroplanes inside: a DC3 (any model, or a DC2...), a Lysander and at the front, G-TECC. I'm not greedy.

I enjoy flying around at about 1,000', looking at the world below. This is how I get started on mini history projects. The sedate speed of the Champ, with that useful sliding window make a near ideal aeroplane for photography. There are a couple of things on the bucket list but they're not going into print.

Zooming about from A to B for a burger can be fun, but wiggling about for the heck of it can be funner. If I can continue doing that, plus get into fly-ins, large and small, without scaring others and all those super people I've met can still tolerate my presence, I'll be happy.

A Blast from the Past

Ron Armitage

During the third lockdown I was kindly sent a batch of old flying magazines to complement my already overflowing library. In one of the issues I was reminded of a story relating to the DC2 and DC3 series of aeroplanes (known in the UK, of course, as the Dakota).

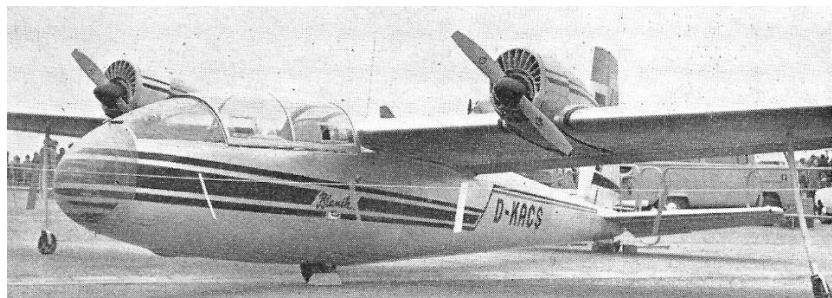
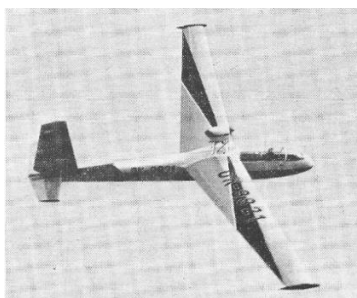
The DC2 and DC3 were very similar in appearance, but the DC3 had a wider fuselage and a wingspan some twelve feet longer. Now the story is that a Chinese DC3 was hit by Japanese bombs which destroyed the starboard wing. It was not possible at that time to get a new wing, but one was obtained from a DC2 (which fortunately had the same attachment points) and was fitted. It was some five feet shorter than the original, but the pilot said there was little change in its flying characteristics. Unsurprisingly the aeroplane was dubbed the DC 2½.



This reminds me of the days before I bought the Channel Gliding Club. They were flying Blanik gliders in those days and managed (mainly through sheer incompetence) to damage them on a pretty regular basis. For quite a while I flew one with the wings of another and the tailplanes of a third. Photograph below...

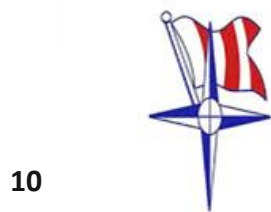


And, thinking of Blaniks, does anyone remember the motor glider versions? One had an engine mounted above the fuselage, whilst another was a true 'twin' with an engine mounted on each wing. And if you don't believe me, here are a couple of old photographs.



Strut Monthly Quiz Subject to your response, we aim for this to be a regular feature.

I have been lucky (some would say unlucky) enough to have flown with all these British airlines, bar one. All you have to do is name them.



For Sale and Wants

This is a free service for members. Just let us know what you want to buy or sell and provide a photo (if you can) together with your name, email address and/or telephone number and we will do the rest. Info to the Editor, please, and don't forget.....it's **FREE**.

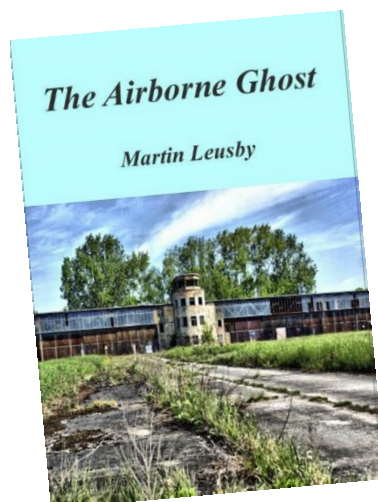
'Rocket' Ron's entertaining yarns



"I am glad 'Rocket' Ron Armitage sent Pilot a copy of his self-published book and that he took 'the liberty of signing it', because it is a very entertaining and amusing read. Essentially a collection of vignettes from the author's long career in aviation, much of it spent as a gliding instructor, it comes across as a series of bar room tales of the best kind - the ones that are both genuinely witty and substantially true - the kind of thing you want to dip in to and savour, rather than being in too much of a hurry to arrive at the end (it's not a long book)."

'Pilot' magazine, September 2020

Copies available from the author for £5 plus £1.50 postage.



Rochester-based novel for Pilots and others!

Martin Leusby has just published his first novel (or novella - as it is a 19,000+ word paperback). It is described as "An aviation tale of our times" and is very relevant to the situation we find ourselves in today. Starting at Rochester, most of you will recognise many of the characters and (*author's note*) hopefully enjoy the adventure.

If you would like a copy, please contact Martin by mail to martinleusby@outlook.com. Each copy is just £5 plus £1.50 postage, or if preferred, it could be left in the tower at Rochester for you.



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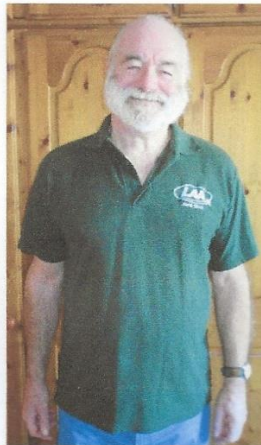
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Mobile: 07768 984507

Email: hoskinsltd@outlook.com



For Sale

Continental A65 Engine for possible rebuild ex Luscombe G-BSNT together with log book.

Continental A65 Engine bottom end c/w crankshaft plus 2 cylinders, no log book.

Contact Mike Negus for further information:

mike.negus8@blueyonder.co.uk

Wanted

'Dinky' toy aeroplanes in any condition for restoration (not for resale) and installation in my collection.

Tel Ron: 07802 157141 or

email: ron_armitage@lineone.net



For Sale

'Stanley' Tools Professional Grade 13 piece combination wrench set. One quarter inch to seven-eighths inch.

As new £20



Complete set of four Continental/Lycoming cylinder base wrenches (Light Aero Spares ref: ATS 2882-5.)

As new £25



Churchill Universal Adjustable Puller (Ref: 811774S & 186 1400)

£20



Tel Ron: 07802 157141 or email:

ron_armitage@lineone.net

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Dates for your Diary

Thursday 25th March. The monthly Strut meeting by Zoom. Mrs Nicky Merchant, Senior Air Traffic Control Officer at Lydd.

Thursday 29th April. The monthly Strut meeting by Zoom. A simple flying/aviation quiz for FUN, presented by Nic Orchard.

18th September Meet the LAA Day at Headcorn

We are doing our best to provide entertainment during these difficult COVID times. Hopefully we will be able to let you have some flying excursions in the not-to-distant future.

Skywritings

In future Skywritings will get to you on or about 7th of each month and articles for inclusion should be with me before the end of the previous month. Each addition will have a For Sale or Wants section so now is the opportunity for you to clear out your unwanted flying stuff. Remember this service is FREE and the newsletter is read by many other LAA Struts.

I look forward to hearing from you all with your stories and photographs.

Editor