

Skywritings

Newsletter of the Kent Strut of the



February 2022



Ron flying Druine Turbulent G-BUKH

When I took over the Editorship of Skywritings, I promised to do it for at least a year. This I have achieved with help from Sandra, who has done all the typing and computer 'stuff', at which I am totally inept.

From day one, I have asked for you all to contribute in some little way with a story / photograph / anecdote / in fact anything that the membership might find interesting. I have also repeatedly asked for feedback: – What do you like? What don't you like? Can you help? Send me a picture of your aeroplane and I will put it on the front page ...etc., etc., etc.

Unfortunately, I have not had a single word of response from over 70% of our membership and have therefore decided that this will be my last issue.

I can't give up without thanking the following for giving their unstinting support There are others, but these have been there throughout the year. In alphabetical order:

Sandra Davis (again), Ron Loveday, Kevin Marks, Mike Negus, Nic Orchard, Roger Pearson, Stephen and Richard Solley

The others know who they are.

THANK YOU ALL.

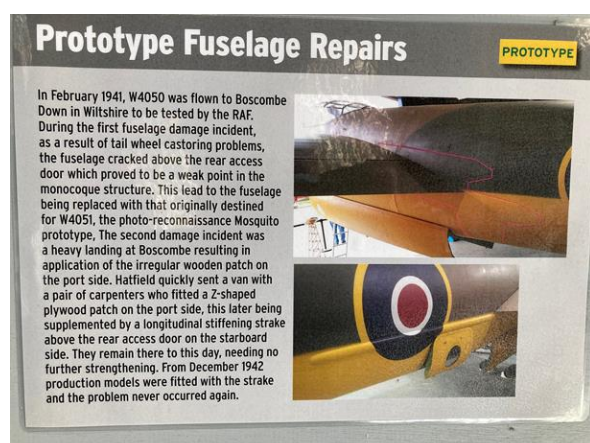
Both Sandra and I wish our successor(s) good luck and will give every possible help. Can we ask the rest of you to do the same, please?

Ron Armitage

On the 25th November 2021 I found myself at the de Havilland Aircraft Museum, Salisbury Hall, London Colney, Hertfordshire, AL2 1BU for a first visit to a museum that had escaped me until then. This happened unexpectedly when Gary Smith who was to attend an LAA Inspectors meeting there suggested it might make a good run out and needing no second bidding off we went. It was a freezing cold day and as we arrived we were ushered to the room where the seminar was due to take place and feeling a bit like a cuckoo in the nest I blagged a coffee and biscuit or two and made my excuse whilst they got on with their inspectors business.

People that know me are aware I can be a bit anal about old aeroplanes particularly those of the two world wars and take a keen interest in the preservation and restoration of particularly rare types and their operations during service. Ask Brian Hope about the Victoria Cross won over the bombing of the Albert Canal in 1940 or Rob Brown when we discussed the different types of tail wheel used on the Mk1 and Mk2 Hawker Hurricane.

Where is all this leading and what point are you trying to make, I hear you ask, sometimes all may not be as it seems. The de Havilland Museum boasts the only place in the world that displays three examples of the Mosquito including the prototype which interestingly took to the air 80 years ago on the 25th November 1940 and spookily it was on the 25th November Gary and I went. Being my first visit and seeing such an iconic airframe I took a keen interest in the well-presented display and artefacts to find out more about it. Something that I wasn't aware of was the fact that the prototype was fitted with leading edge slats to improve low speed handling but subsequently found to be of no benefit and they were locked shut and covered and taped over. When the airframe was restored several years ago this came to light and left exposed to show its original configuration and was not used on subsequent production aircraft being unique to the prototype.



That was one interesting fact that came to light, but I was drawn to one of the stands setting out some of the early testing and within the text indicated that there was a hint of Triggers broom about the airframe. According to the text W4050 was flown to Boscombe Down to be tested by the RAF and as a result of tail wheel castoring problems the fuselage cracked above the rear access door which proved to be a weak point in the monocoque structure. By all accounts the fuselage was replaced by a fuselage destined for W4051 which was to be the prototype for the photo reconnaissance

Mosquito, so on the face of it we have the wings, engines and empennage of THE prototype married to a replacement fuselage. Several other repairs and modifications were subsequently undertaken according to the notes. I spoke to one of the knowledgeable museum volunteers about this, but we agreed whatever happened it was a contemporary replacement with the serial number repainted and has remained thus for the last 80 years. We are very privileged and should be grateful for the foresight of some individuals that kept the prototype safe at Hatfield where it had been stored after the war. De Havilland left in 1947 and Salisbury Hall slipped into a derelict condition and in 1955 the Hall was taken in hand by an ex Royal Marine Major named Walter Goldsmith.

The Mosquito Prototype W4050 returned to become the first aviation exhibit housed in a hangar behind Salisbury Hall, saved for posterity by Bill Baird and Walter Goldsmith under what was then known as the Mosquito Appeal Fund. Walter had discovered the Mosquito link with Salisbury Hall, and approached Bill Baird, who was desperately trying to find a home for this priceless aircraft,



to save it from a November 5th bonfire. Walter contacted many of the original WW2 Mosquito sub-contractors requesting funds to erect a hangar to house the Prototype, since it would not last long in the open. A suitable Robin hangar was found nearby and moved to Salisbury Hall, inside which the Prototype was

assembled. Members of the Committee included Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, Constance Babington-Smith who discovered the V-1 rocket in a reconnaissance photo of Peenemunde, the aviation author Charles Gibbs-Smith, John Cunningham, a senior representative of the RAF Benevolent Fund, Lord Erskine as well as Walter and Bill Baird. Save to say that the museum has expanded since then with more de Havilland types and should be on your list for a visit, having found it I returned for a revisit in January. www.dehavillandmuseum.co.uk

New Member

Ron Armitage

We give a warm welcome to another new member, Martin Leusby. Over the past year Martin has managed to wangle copies of Skywritings and has been very successful with the competitions. Having won a bottle of wine in the Editor's Christmas quiz, he has quite properly decided to join us. He is seen here receiving his prize on a very dismal day at Rochester Airfield.



For two pins...

Nic Orchard

In a moment of grand ambition, I thought I'd enter the Dawn to Dusk Challenge a second time, despite having not the slightest clue about a theme I could exploit. Eventually, having torn up a notebook of half-plotted routes, I abandoned all reason and decided to exploit that. Follies. Those products of, typically, late eighteenth century eccentrics, some philanthropic, some patently not. I would fly about the country, spotting these wondrous edifices that were designed to be seen from the ground. Complete folly. A skinny obelisk can be quite well camouflaged by just about everything except the sky, which just happened to be where I'd be looking *from*.

Nonetheless, I set off one fine morning, aiming to wiggle around the south, pausing at Sandown for fuel before the next leg westward. It seemed to be working out all right and the forecast remained good. Richard, my partner, had met me there to provide TLC and encouragement, which translated into refuelling my Champ and buying the tea. I set off for the next chunk with anticipation and a fairly healthy caution as there were regions less travelled to examine. Firstly, off to get a photograph of Hoy's Monument on the south of the island and St Catherine's Oratory, a 14th century pepper pot-cum-rocket, then back to the mainland to zig zag around Southampton and Bournemouth airspace. Bouncing like a pinball against the edges, I was slightly surprised the listening squawk elicited no call, but hey, they had the chance. Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset...and into Devon.

As I shut down at the pumps at Dunkeswell, I'd ticked off twenty-nine waypoint follies, over half of the total and was feeling reasonably confident that the planning was working. Richard appeared, helped refuel and while I went to buy tea, he pushed 'CC back onto the grass. Errr, something's not right. The tailwheel hadn't broken out, it was free castoring. What? We wiggled it and yes, that's what it was doing. Using Richard's Mend Your Aeroplane Anywhere Tool Kit as a useful box on which to rest an aeroplane, we took the load off and examined the tailwheel assembly. He took it to bits and found two broken pins. Baffling, but whatever the cause, they had sheared. I'd been gentle with the old girl and couldn't recall doing anything that might have hurt her. The MYAATK didn't contain pins for a Maule tailwheel, not surprisingly as the aeroplane in question was a Rans S6. At this point, with an aeroplane tail propped up and a couple of people looking stumped, one might think the local heroes would wander over to offer assistance, but despite the plethora of little LAA-ish aeroplanes and people, we were left alone. For two pins, I'd have been flying.

Dunkeswell has hard runways. Long ones. On that day, I would have to taxi all the way around to take off, which didn't sound like a lot of fun without the steering that came with the aeroplane. A fix really would be preferable.

I went to find out where the maintenance operation was based and given progressive taxi instructions which came down to a long walk around the perimeter as it was on the opposite side of the airfield. Clutching tailwheel, we walked and jogged around. 'Err, any chance you have any of these?' was the gist of our enquiries. The helpful chap said he would have a look and went off to rummage. That's good, I thought. After a few minutes, he returned. 'Sorry, no.' On learning it was a Permit aeroplane and well, something similar might work, he went for another look. For those unfamiliar with Maule tailwheels, those two pins are small, straight and utterly simple. They are also made of unobtainium. He tried, he really did but nothing was thin enough or long enough. Richard examined the assembly carefully. 'What if I put them in the other way?' he asked. 'There should be enough there to hold'. The appropriately certified helpful chap nodded. 'Can't see why not'. That was good enough. We

jogged back across the airfield, where two stone cold mugs of tea guarded the tail. Richard reattached the tailwheel, gave it a few test whirrs, lifted the back end, I removed the tool kit and the tail was lowered gently. We pushed and pulled 'CC about and the theory seemed good. My personal hero had done it again.

Surprisingly, I'd lost only about forty-five minutes and a cup of tea, so off I went to try to complete the mission. Two more legs to complete before dark, some stunning scenery to relish and only a rather brisk easterly wind to help and hinder. By the time I was on final at Bodmin for the next refuelling, my thoughts were back to the tailwheel. Would the pins hold? Was this where I'd end the day? The landing went well. A familiar Rans was already parked up as I manoeuvred carefully down to the fuel. No problems. I'd not quite shut down fully when a hand came through the side window, holding out a mug of tea.

I did complete the day, eventually and we overnighted at Oaksey Park. The rest of that day is another story, probably best left to the official entry it became, but that one part of it remains one of my strongest memories. And those pins held until the new ones arrived from the USA.

.....

Tailwheels take an awful lot of punishment, as can be seen from these recent photos of Nic's Champ following an outing at Headcorn. Tailwheel assemblies need very regular maintenance, especially in these current conditions. (Ed)



Defunct Kentish Airfields – Bekesbourne

(continued from last month)

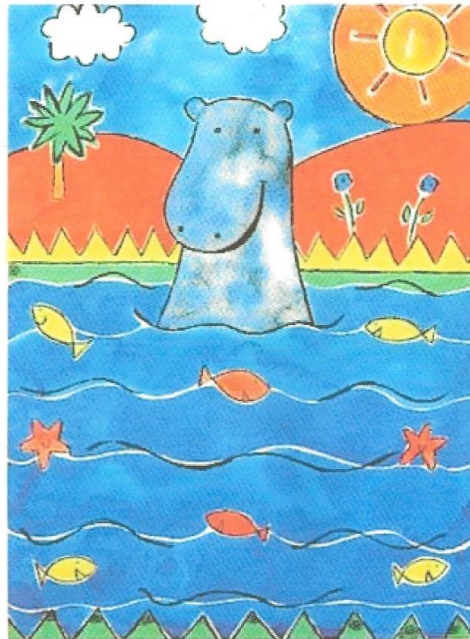
Simon Pratt has kindly written to say that our own Bruce Alexander was probably the last person to fly from Bekesbourne Aerodrome in his Rotorway Executive G-ZHWH. Bruce, of course, lived on the old Aerodrome site until his move to Devon.



“Stuff”

Ron Armitage

Having been flying for fifty years or so, I have managed to amass a huge amount of memorabilia, or as we would normally describe it – ‘stuff’. Lots of it relates to so-called achievements, but what takes pride of place on the study wall is a picture of a hippopotamus produced by a young lad with the help of his grandma, given to me as a ‘thank you’ present, along with the photographs (reproduced below).



Thank you very much for the airplane ride!

It's also signed and dated.

For many years, Sandra and I were able to spend a lot of time in central Florida, where we had access to a little Cessna 150, which we flew for many hours. At the end of the day, it was our wont to enjoy a meal at the ‘Reef and Beef’, where it was possible to obtain the very best ‘Filet Mignon’ that I have ever tasted (and I have tasted a lot of them). Another attraction of the establishment was that it had a bar, where I would imbibe the odd beer or three, even though the Americans in the south have yet to discover what ‘real’ beer should taste like ... but I digress.

The locals were very friendly and a very jolly time was had there, encouraged by the barmaid, Liz, whom we got to know quite well. Now, most of the people in Arcadia are far from wealthy and Liz was no exception. She worked as a nurse during the day, a barmaid in the evening and supported her grandson whilst living in a ‘trailer park’. Not at all uncommon in this part of the state. Whilst chatting one evening, it became apparent that the lad had never had the opportunity to even look at an aeroplane close up, let alone fly, which would have been way outside their financial means. We determined to do something about it.

I can't describe the joy on the lad's face when we returned, and as he described in great detail his flying experience, which just happened to include a couple of touch and go landings at adjacent airfields. Nor, for that matter, can I describe Grandma's pleasure at his safe return.

MATTHEW'S 1ST PLANE RIDE
02/10/2004



Matthew is all smiles when he steps into the plane.



One last look before heading for the sky.



This is the tiny plane he is flying in.



See the tiny dot in the sky....that is my baby!



Matthew and Rocket Ron.
I found out about the rocket part after the plane ride.
Matthew spent over an hour flying around Desoto County.

Over the years, I have given hundreds of people their first flying experience, but none have shown the gratitude of these folks. And no I couldn't persuade Grandma to try it!!

Oh, and how did they know I had an interest in hippos? The photograph below might give you a clue.



The T21 again

Ron Armitage

For those of you who haven't read my little book, 'Rocketeering', I should say that one of my stories was about my very first glider flight, winch launched in a T21. Although I subsequently spent many years of my life as a gliding instructor, I really did not enjoy that first flight very much and it took a lot of persuasion to get me to repeat the experience.

I have just sold the last copy of my book to a gentleman in Warwickshire and, to my surprise, received a charming letter, which is reproduced here:

Thank you for sending to me that precious last copy of your book "Rocketeering", I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and will no doubt do so again. It will adorn my bookshelves amongst my other well thumbed books on aviation.

Your account of your first winch launch in what I imagined was a T21 glider, contrasts considerably with my own. In the 1950's, at a time when Coventry Gliding Club operated from Coventry Aerodrome, I joined as an Associate Member. As an impecunious engineering apprentice, I couldn't afford full membership. The club had an arrangement with the airfield, where they launched parallel but alongside the active runway. If there was an incoming or departing aircraft to deal with, they simply lit the runway lights. We would then suspend activities until that was cleared. On the day of my first launch, we were launching alongside runway 23. Unlike you, I was thoroughly enjoying the experience of climbing into the skies at what seemed to be an awfully steep angle (this was great!). It did not last long, I remained blissfully unaware of anything amiss until my pilot said, "don't worry, I have everything under control."

His confidence was misplaced it seems, because the winch cable had broken. He successfully, released what was left of the cable still attached to the glider and put the nose down in order to effect a straight ahead landing. Time was against him, because we were rapidly approaching the not inconsiderable airfield hangars, which the wind was carrying us towards. These hangars had metal roofs and on a hot day could provide useful lift. On this day there was no lift to be had. Somehow, the pilot managed to avoid landing on the roof and found a safe haven between the main hangar doors and the fuel pumps. We arrived apparently silently, much to the surprise of the engineer who was refuelling a small monoplane.

It was a few moments before the ground crew arrived in one of the cable tugs. These were accompanied by the club secretary, who proceeded to have a heated argument with my pilot. I am afraid the points being raised were well beyond my gliding knowledge to understand. You will be glad to know that the experience did not put me off and I remained a member for a couple of years. I never took any pilot exams or tests, simply because I could not afford to do so. At the time a winch launch was a whole two shillings and sixpence (2/6) whereas an aerotow was an outlandish 4/6. Nonetheless I was an enthusiastic cable tug driver only occasionally breaking the weak link. I concur with your assertion that winched flight times were measured in minutes rather than hours

On one very hot day the whole club were entertained by one of the expert fliers in the club, doing aeros above the hot roofed hangars in the very T21 in which I took my first flight. I would not have believed that such a machine could have performed such a variety of mind numbing tricks. I was fascinated, but at the same time glad that I was not aboard the aeroplane.

My fascination with flight has been with me throughout my life. I did fly a lot in my later life as a businessman, but that palled somewhat as commercial flights in long metal tubes became much like catching a bus or a train. Although some of them were a bit hairy. I did manage one flight which sticks in my mind, a 172 flight to Silverstone and back where I was nominally PIC (of course I was nothing of the kind). Now I am an impecunious pensioner in my eighties, so enjoy my flying vicariously through the writings of others. In that, please accept my thanks for committing your experiences to paper in order that I and others can continue to do so.

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Conspicuity Grants

Glen Everett

“The CAA still have a lot of money left for conspicuity grants and time is running out”

The grant of £250 is available per “Pilot” not per aircraft, therefore if anybody is interested in having an aircraft transponder for their aircraft, they can club together their rebates/grants to offset against a transponder. Realistically speaking, it's possible to get a mode S transponder for half price (especially if you combine with your flying mates or you have a syndicate).

Note the grant can only be cashed in once, and closes on 31st March 2022

For more info please contact me or visit the CAA website

Rocket's Rant (again) continued



Ofcom say that they are making communications work for everyone what absolute drive!

Following my rant in the last Skywritings, I have heard from two Committee members, Nic Orchard and Steve Hoskins, that their experiences were very similar to my own.

Looking at various forums, it is clear that there are many others and Richard Shone sent the following:

'In reply to your article in Skywritings regarding Ofcom, I think you got off lightly!

Here's what happened to me:-

I tried to renew my Radio Licence on-line. This is a two stage process where you confirm you want to do it, they then send you an Invoice number which you use to make the payment.

However, in the fullness of time said Invoice number was not received so I emailed them. Waited a few more weeks, nothing. By now its getting close to the renewal date (October 2021) so I rang them and obtained the magic number and then paid for the renewal on-line. Sometime during this "process" I received a communication from Ofcom saying that they would not issue a new licence but I should keep a printed copy of the email confirmation that I had paid, together with my old Licence as proof I had renewed. I then received the same letter as you, stating that Ofcom were going to cancel my Licence due to non-payment. Cue second telephone call to Ofcom who admitted that lots of people had been sent this letter in error and said I should ignore it. Christmas comes and goes, we roll over into 2022 and surprise, surprise, I actually do receive a new radio Licence by post!

You couldn't make it up!'

Further proof, if it was necessary, that the system is not fit for purpose.

BUT IT CAN PROBABLY ONLY GET WORSE.....

On receiving the British Gliding Association newsletter, and then the AOPA one, I see that Ofcom have a proposal to vary Aircraft and Aircraft (Transportable) Radio Communication licences. They say they have asked for comments and the deadline for providing comments on the proposed changes is 20th February 2022.

I can't help but wonder just whom they have asked.

Details are on the Ofcom website.

The Oldest Strut Aeroplane continued again

Simon Pratt has written saying that the birthday of Luscombe G-BSUD was April 24th 1941. So over to you now, Jim Wraight can you let us know when G-BREB came off the production line, please? Does anyone else in the Strut have an aeroplane of this age or older?



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Lydd

Kevin Marks

Lydd welcomed the New Year with some interesting news:

The Airport announced plans to build a new 3,000 sq m hangar, which will be available mid this year, 2022. Lydd Customer Services are inviting enquiries, so should you be interested, check the website for contact details: <https://www.lydd-airport.co.uk/new-hangarage-available>.

HM Home Office have taken over part of the original terminal building as a “triage site” for asylum seekers found and rescued along the Kent coast. This secured section of the Airport will be used during operational hours to provide a medical assessment area, change of clothes, food and COVID testing, prior to them being taken to Tug Haven in Dover.

One of the DC3/C47 is undergoing some winter power plant work so both will be in tiptop condition for the summer season.



DC3 power plant change

Photos from an aviation amble about Kent on 17th January. It was a beautiful day, calm winds, smooth air and delicious in-flight catering:



Deal Castle and pier



Lydd, joining overhead LH-21 Dungeness power station and the danger area range to starboard

Headcorn

Nic Orchard was kind enough to forward these photographs showing the huge amount of progress on the new hangar. The southern end seems complete with the hydraulics working, whilst the door on the northern end is coming on well.



Still 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



Rocket's February Quiz

The weather is forecast to be dreary for February and so I thought I would give you a little quiz to do whilst waiting for March! All you have to do is identify the type of aeroplane in each picture. The member with the most correct answers gets a bottle of wine. (Some particularly nice aeroplanes may appear more than once.)

Answers to: ron_armitage@lineone.net



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4



5



6



7



8



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10



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The Editor would like to thank all those who so kindly took time to contribute to this edition of Skywritings. Thank you.

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“I said kick OFF drift, Hoskins.”

With thanks to

Roger Bacon

and

