



Volume 2 Number 13

Editorial.

(Brian Lloyd)

We are very pleased with the response from members who have completed Gift Aid forms. If you are a Tax Payer and have not completed one please send it in or obtain a form from Treasurer Alan Foskett, or from Membership Secretary Keith Freeman.

Chairman's Report

(Ken Fostekew)

Fourteenth Annual General Meeting held on 3rd October 2007.

The Chairman, Ken Fostekew thanked members for their attendance and recorded a vote of thanks to Rob Wood who had held the position of Treasurer and Company Secretary for a number of years. Also thanks to all of the volunteers who kindly give up their valuable time.

Visitor numbers had remained stable during the past twelve months.

The Treasurer, Mr. A. Foskett, presented the accounts which are in good health and his report was adopted.

The Chairman presented a report about the Museum extension construction programme and explained the re-siting of some of the exhibits, so that work could commence.

Election of Officers took place. Ken Fostekew, Chairman, Alan Foskett, Treasurer. The Committee were re-elected en bloc. Likewise the Trustees.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their continued support.

Publicity Report

(Brian Lloyd)

Costs are kept to a minimum. We rely upon word of mouth and the web site. Members continue to create interest amongst their own contacts and we appreciate their efforts and encouragement.

Engineering Report

(Geoff Etridge)

Progress continues with the restoration of the Miles Martinet, with the manufacture of the flaps and skinning of the centre section. The cockpit has been completed and the canopy removed to facilitate working inside the cockpit

The wing root ends were now recovered and the lower section almost finished. The bulkhead engine control linkages were being re-manufactured

An "English Wheel" (a device for the production of double curved ally panels) was built by the volunteers which enabled the complete skinning of the nose section of the Miles Student. The Museum is pleased with the progress on this project during the past year and work has now started on the rear end.

The Shop Report

(Margaret Etridge)

Progress with sales has been satisfactory and when the new shop is completed a review will take place of stock and plan new purchases.

Manning

There are, need I remind you, always vacancies on the Museum manning roster. The Museum is now operating on its Winter timetable for opening – but the visitors who come in still have to be sold tickets and generally looked after.

New Book. "Spitfire Women of World War II"

This is about the ATA and the women pilots. The author, Giles Whittell has tracked down more than a dozen survivors of this most exclusive wartime sisterhood and woven their stories into a riveting account of white knuckle flying, late nights, soaring hopes and

heart-rending loss. Many stories are new material. Forty photographs, many previously unpublished, 344 pages. Copies available from the Maidenhead Heritage Centre by collection at £17.99 or by post £19.99 to UK addresses. 3, Kingsway, King Street, Maidenhead, Berks. SL6 1EE.

On BBC on Sunday morning 14th October, Andrew Marr's Programme, he interviewed the author and one of the ATA ladies, Freydis Sharland. She explained the weather was their worst enemy, much more than the Germans, especially if they had to return to base. 154 ladies flew with ATA and 15 lost their lives. During the war they were awarded a pay rise and received £6.00 per week.

(BWL)

Handley Page and Miles Annual Reunion.

This happy occasion was held at the Museum on the 3rd July with fifty attendees, some of whom travelled a fair distance to be there. Jean Fostekew did her usual superlative job of organising the refreshments. The picture shows some of the members with the Tail-Plane of the Gyrodyne in the background. It has taken place for the past twenty years and it was unanimously agreed that it will now be an annually at the Museum.



Letter

I wonder how many of your members/visitors remember the Reading Sky Observers Club (RSOC) which used to meet in the late 1940s in a shed opposite the Miles Aircraft main gate.

The theme of the time was aircraft recognition. The clubroom housed relics of Miles aircraft including the fins

from the M39b-Libellulah. When Miles was on-the-rocks we took over the Junkers 52-3M for our clubhouse.

Around the Junkers we assembled various aircraft bits, some of which were taken from a hanger next to Miles farm. We had the mock-up of the M52, the high lift M18, fuselage from one of the M20s and the Hoopla flying bomb which we tried to tow in-to the air!

They were great days and I would love to hear from any of the old members, who knows, even a reunion in the Museum

Best wishes - Alan Peacock

peacokalan@eircom.net



1997 Land Rover Wolf 110, ex military - heavily strengthened. Served in 30 Signals Squadron in the 250 Gurkha Signals Regiment as a communications vehicle. Owned by Carleton Brown.

Royal Berkshire Aviation Society

A full programme of meetings is promised over the coming months.

Jan 8: The Museum Honours Board (Jean Fistekew)

Feb 5. AGM + Surprise

Mar 4. Arlines and airliners (Brian Lamb)

Apr 1 Moscow and more (Brian Madge)

All Museum Members are very welcome to come to any of these (and future) meetings.

Miles 'Rammer' Fighter Project of 1939

Michael J.F. Bowyer wrote an article on R.A.F. wartime ramming fighter

aircraft ideas, which was published in the AIRFIX annual for 1982. In this fascinating article, Michael described various assorted and novel schemes, which were submitted to the British Government during the second World War by well-meaning citizens.

However, prior to this article being brought to my attention by Joe Cherrie of the National Museums of Scotland, I had no idea of the existence of such schemes. I must, therefore, thank Joe for bringing this to my attention and also give due acknowledgement to Michael for his research into the background of this particular 'least known of the exotic ideas' which were submitted.

Extracts from the article, reproduced by kind permission of Michael Bowyer, follow:

Rammers

One of the least known of the exotic ideas concerned the 'rammer'. As with many way-out ideas employing an aeroplane to bring down another by ramming, it had its roots in the aerial collisions of World War 1.

During the bad days of 1940 tales abounded of how pilots - particularly Czechs and Poles - sacrificed their lives by hurling themselves and their aircraft into the foe. There is little substance in these tales, although some pilots on both sides did occasionally ram their enemy. The custom-built rammer, though, remained an untried concept.

Official interest in the idea increased a few months before the war began. Previously, there had been discussion of the ramming concept at the Air Ministry. A British inventor, Mr. I. Shamah, proposed such a craft to Phillips & Powis Aircraft Ltd of Reading at the start of May 1939. Where design theory was concerned he had done his homework, and devised a form of pilot ejection seat, an item untested in Britain until 1944.

He claimed Patent No.8566 for his idea, proposing a light high-speed monoplane which could ram an enemy machine after the pilot had ejected. Shamah envisaged a specially built aircraft, although his notions could have

been wedded to any existing fighter.

The cockpit would be sited well aft. The pilot's controls would have been strangely placed to one side of the cockpit. His seat was to be built on a strong frame held on runners located on bars extended to the front of the aircraft, probably the engine firewall. In the fuselage side was an easily removable panel which could be opened by a cable release, or which flew open as the pilot's seat shot forward. A seat lock would be released by the pilot prior to action. Forward normal momentum would retain the seat in place, but collision with another aircraft would immediately hurl it forward, ejecting the pilot to safety through, it was envisaged, the open hatch. A small spring fitted into the upright portion of the seat would give the pilot additional momentum, although it could cause him serious injury. The pilot's parachute would open automatically or by hand, and he would fall to safety whilst his specialised aircraft rammed the enemy.

Ahead of the propeller hub, and on the wing tips, steel rammers would be sited to ensure maximum destruction. Attack would ideally be from astern. In a frontal attack the pilot would escape by forcible ejection prior to impact, although debris might engulf him.

The proposal was that rammers were ideal for the protection of valuable targets. They would have a serious psychological effect upon an enemy knowing that certain death was his even after eluding conventional defences. Loss of one rammer for the destruction of a relatively complex enemy aircraft seemed worthwhile. Rammers might be normal aircraft in disguise.

Specially designed rammers would be cheap and easy to build, needing neither armament nor radio, especially if a rammer flight was led by a fully equipped fighter. Pilots could be easily trained and needed no gunnery experience. Civilians would know they were safeguarded by aircraft almost certain to make a kill.

Phillips & Powis, ever open to revolutionary concepts, forwarded the suggestions to the Air Ministry Director of Technical Development, Mr. W.S. Farren (later Sir William Farren and war-

time Director of the Royal Aircraft Establishment). Group Captain R. Saundby examined them and recognised ideas which had already been discussed officially when the projects which became the Hurricane and Spitfire were under review.

Technically the ideas were acceptable, but tactical implications needed consideration. The Air Staff saw the problem of fighter defence as one of being able to destroy as many enemy aircraft as possible with available resources without over-complication. The question was - would rammers or Miles 'Rammer' Fighter Project of 1939

The rammer seemed certain to achieve a high success rate. Standard .303-inch rounds needed to hit vital parts to be effective. Cannon with lower fire rates would need very accurate aiming. Use of rammers simplified maintenance and removed repair problems following combat.

Against this, every rammer used effectively would inevitably be lost, whereas it was estimated in 1939 that interceptor fighter losses would be about one in 20 of those operated. It would be difficult for the pilot to estimate the impact speed needed, and there could be no ramming practice, only highly risky trials. Rammers might be lost after inflicting insufficient damage on the enemy. As the rammer closed it would represent an easy target to a gunner. Re-gathering rammer pilots after combat was complicated, especially for rapid re-deployment.

On balance, though, the rammer was an attractive device, yet if sufficient fighters could be produced rammers might be a costly venture, and the aircraft had only one role. Unarmed, they would be vulnerable in air-to-air combat, although a rammer might achieve success after damage even if the pilot was wounded. Whereas the efficiency of a standard fighter in combat was set at about 50% the rammer looked likely to have a 90% chance of making a kill.

Of most concern was the high wastage rate, assessed for a normal fighter as one per 45 sorties. A fighter squadron was expected to mount a hundred sorties weekly and thus lose about two aircraft. If a rammer squadron success-

fully intercepted on even half its weekly sorties a squadron would lose getting on for 50 aircraft, apart from normal wastage. Thus, rammer losses would be over 20 times greater than those of normal fighters, which meant that 20 times as many rammers would be needed. To produce as much success as one conventional fighter about 11 rammers would be needed, thus the cost of 11 rammers needed to equal that of one conventional fighter.

In early June 1939 rammers had been dismissed for the present but on June 14 1939 the Air Council informed Phillips & Powis that the idea was still under consideration. However, by early August they had decided against it.

On being told of this project, Bert Clarke checked his name index file and found that one of the first people from overseas to join the Phillips and Powis Aircraft (Reading) Ltd, School of Flying in January 1933 was one I. Shamah. Bert had also discovered that he was an engineer who was then employed by Phillips and Powis in that capacity. He had obtained his aviator's Certificate in October 1933 and was still, presumably, employed by the firm when he suggested the rammer conception in the late 1930's.

**Extracted from "Notes from my logbook" by Air Marshal Sir Anthony Selway, KCB DFC
(©Tangmere Logbook)**

Anthony Selway, as a Pilot Officer, was newly posted to RAF Tangmere after training at RAF College Cranwell. This was among his reminiscences of that time:

What I did to the Martlet

In those days a number of us were very keen on getting in as much flying as possible in any aeroplane, at any time, anywhere. It was a thing we wanted to do more than anything else. Some of us were lucky in being able to borrow aeroplanes at that time. I was able to do this later on but was too new at the game to have the right contacts. One of the arch borrowers at Tangmere was Flying Officer Halliburton Leech, who

was universally known as Girlie Leech. There was nothing girlie about him except that when he got tight he used to giggle in a very high-pitched voice which made us all laugh. He was a very brilliant pilot and a great borrower of aeroplanes of any and every type. He took me over to Shoreham many times to see a friend of his called Miles.

F. G. Miles was an aeroplane maker in a very small, one-shed sort of way but later on he became an aircraft manufacturer in a big way and was responsible for many training aircraft which were used by the services in the War. He was at that time busy modifying and re-building a very small biplane called an Avro Baby. Only one or two of them had been made by A. V. Roe & Co. and then abandoned as a project. Miles had taken this machine and made it into a single-seater and put a Genet engine into it and called it a Miles Martlet.

Girlie Leech used to go over to Shoreham and test-fly this machine for Miles and he was allowed to take it away at times. On 9th March he brought it to Tangmere and he let me have a go in it. It was a delightful aeroplane to fly and wonderful for aerobatics and I greatly enjoyed flying it. Later on we all went off to Hamble Aero Club and there Girlie Leech made a spectacular arrival in the Martlet; we of course having gone by car. We repaired to the clubhouse and met all the local members and after this Leech went up in the Martlet and gave a very good display of aerobatics as low as possible and perfectly executed. The local club members were very impressed, as usual, for their club was only equipped with De Havilland Moths and the scope for aerobatics was limited. So that when an RAF pilot came and volunteered to put up a show of aerobatics for them they were always pleased. When Girlie Leech had landed he said to me "Would you like to have a go?" and I replied "Certainly, I'll have a go!" And — this is the snag about competitive flying — I made a resolve to do even better. I did not care to recall at that moment that my total flying hours amounted to exactly 152 hours in the air on all types. Leech of course must have done at that time at least five times that amount. But pilots who have done anything up to 500 hours always

believe they know everything there is to know and I was no exception to the rule. It is after 500 hours and a fright or two that you begin to take a little more care in what you do.

Well, up I went and I put up much the same sort of show as Girlie had: loops, slow rolls, half-rolls-off-the-top and so on and at the end of the show I thought of something that Girlie hadn't done and that was a "bunt". A bunt — for the uninitiated — is a reverse loop, that is, you fly level, slowing down a bit, and you then push the control column forward firmly and hold it there until you have dived over onto your back with your head on the outside of the loop rather than on the inside. This of course throws your whole weight into your shoulder straps and you get a little red in the face. Having got to the upside down position you roll out of it to your right side up position and away you go. You had to do the bunt with the engine throttled back as no engine of that type would run in the inverted position. And so I followed this routine right over the centre of the airfield. All went well and I was congratulating myself on having successfully performed a bunt before the public, when I discovered that on opening the throttle to fly neatly away, nothing happened. The propeller became a motionless stick before my eyes and I had to do a little quick thinking. I had never had a real forced landing before, only practice ones, and I seemed to have selected the very worst possible conditions in which to make my first one. Low down over a wood, down wind and no engine. But needs must and I came down in a slithering sliding turn trying to get into the wind before encountering Mother Earth. In front of me lay a very unattractive ploughed field (it would of course be ploughed!) into which I put the poor little Martlet. Up we went onto the nose, breaking the propeller, bang went the undercarriage and wheels came into my horrified gaze through the lower wings. And I sat there waiting for an irate Leech to appear, which he did, and as soon as the look of anxiety left his face when he found my unworthy self was undamaged, he asked me in words that I do not like to recall how I thought he was going to explain to the manufacturer how his borrowed aeroplane came to be in its present unflyable condition.

All very awkward but I did meekly enquire why the Genet engine had failed when it had gone perfectly well for him. This remained a mystery until it was found that when inverted the oil in the crankcase smothered the plugs and bridged the points, thus failing to produce a spark. I could not but help wish it had been Girlie who had made this vital discovery. But I had learned something which I never forgot, which was never to trust an aeroplane not to let you down, especially at the most critical moments.

I also learned something about human forbearance, for when we reached Shoreham by car late that night to explain to Miles that his one and only aeroplane, his personal invention and brainchild, had been wrecked by an inexperienced pilot officer who had no right to be flying it, we found him to be geniality itself and all he apparently wanted to know was "whether the undercarriage radius rods had given way in the crash". In point of fact it did not take long for him to make the necessary repairs.

*The above was part of what appeared in the **Tangmere Logbook Autumn 2007** and is reprinted here with their kind permission.*

High Wycombe's Contribution to Aviation

by Dave Scott & Ian Simmons

A carefully researched work about aviation activity in and around High Wycombe and those involved, dating back to 1911.

- The birth of Geoffrey de Havilland at Terriers Green.
- The earliest aviators including Cody, flying around High Wycombe
- Airfields at Saunderton, Burne End, Lacey Green and Booker
- Famous aviators residing in the area, including Amy Johnson and Louis Bleriot
- George Holt Thomas whose company, Airco, produced one third of all allied aircraft in WW1
- The start of the Wycombe Aircraft Constructors Ltd.

•Involvement of the furniture industry in aircraft production during both World Wars, helping to build two of the fastest aircraft in the world at the time, the DH4/9 and Mosquito

•The flying circuses of the 1930s

•USAAF and RAF Headquarters. Top secret Hughenden Manor.

The book is available from Ian Simmons, 154 New Road, Booker, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP12 4LA.

Price is £10 plus P&P (£2.50 UK, £4 elsewhere).

All profits made by the authors of this book will be donated to the Thames Valley and Chiltern Air Ambulance.

Committee Members Information

Chairman & Curator Ken Fostekew:
jean.fostekew@care4free.net

Treasurer Alan Foskett

Engineering Geoff Etridge:
m.retridge@homecall.co.uk

Publicity & Press Brian Lloyd:
brianlloyd@redwood32.freemove.co.uk
01628 661 005

Museum Manning: Jean & Ken Fostekew:
jean.fostekew@care4free.net

Membership Keith Freeman:
museumberksav@gmail.com

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Web Site

<http://www.museumofberkshire-aviation.co.uk/>
