



Volume 2 Number 18

Editorial

(Brian Lloyd)

The Museum continues to thrive, thanks to the Committee and volunteers coupled with the full use of the Bob Hall extension which has made it more attractive and comfortable for visitors and volunteers.

Doctor K.G.B. Mitchell

We regret to report the death of Dr. Mitchell during the latter part of 2009. He always took an interest in the Museum for which we are grateful.

Engineering Report

(Geoff Etridge & Ken Fostekew)

During early 2010 work was interrupted by the cold weather.

On the Martinet some progress has been made to the rear lower cowling and more fuselage to tail plane fairings. Ian Simmons is fabricating the wing root fairings and the front cowlings have been painted and refitted

On the Student the rear Engine/exhaust frames and cowlings have been assembled on the air frame and painting has taken place. The wings will be taken from storage for assessment prior to restoration.

Work on the Magister continues and the newly produced left wing has been covered in fabric and undercoated and is being painted and is looking good. It will require two more top coats.

The Mini-Link Trainer continues to be very popular with children visitors.

Primary Trainer - The fuselage is almost complete; currently the tail plane is being covered. When completed it will be suspended from a roof beam to enable the team to commence work on the wings.

A new volunteer called Joe has started. He is an ex Lufthansa engineer and is working on the Herald.

News

(Brian Lloyd)

Reading a magazine the other day I noticed that on 14th December 1931 Bader flew from Kenley to Woodley where he had his crash in Bulldog K1676. Apparently he was goaded by an unpleasant comment on his departure from Kenley and he did not have a lot of experience on the type which he flew too low and the wing tip touched the ground. His log book for that day recorded – ‘Crashed slow rolling near ground. “Bad Show” He took command of 242 Squadron, a Canadian Unit and he produced some simple rules – If you have height you control the battle; If you come out of the sun, the enemy cannot see you; If you hold your fire until you are close, you will seldom miss. His accident also mentioned in Aeroplane magazine, March 2010 as part of an extensive article about The Bulldog.

In December 2009 the CAA team were still continuing their investigation into Captain John Fairey’s accident but preliminary findings indicated that it was initiated by a fatigue failure, possibly the result of corrosion pitting. This would be invisible to engineers during normal maintenance.

At the December 09 Committee meeting the Treasurer was pleased to report a not unsatisfactory financial position but of course more income is always welcome. More Crew members are welcome as their subscription is much appreciated to boost funds.

Donations in the Bomb for the year 2009 proved very encouraging, attracting £1559.00p.

Waitrose green disc tokens scheme in March will also help to boost funds – though we haven't seen the money (or even the amount) as yet.

During December and February some minor maintenance to the premises were carried out in shape of roof repairs and replacement of floor coverings in the toilets.

An appeal appeared in March edition of Aeroplane. If anyone has knowledge of any available parts please let Engineering Manager Geoff Etridge know.

Miles Messenger G-AJOE, owned by member Peter Bishop, has undergone some extensive maintenance work carried out by Classique Aero Services in Orbigny, France. The French Company will now turn it’s attention to Peter’s 1938 Miles Monarch which will undergo a thirty three

month programme. Not flown since 1963, G-AFJU saw RAF service based at Tolpuddle, Dorset. Only eleven of this type were built. We look forward to more news later on this year.

The Annual General Meeting, held on 21st April 2010, was well attended under the Chairmanship of Ken Fostekew. The President, Major Goddard was also in attendance.

The Chairman's report included a number of points including reference to the EoN Olympia Glider 465, built for the World Championships in 1965 which is now suspended from the roof of the extension. The volunteers have also cleaned the Tailfin of the Herald whilst equipment was on site and painting the rest of the aircraft continues in good weather.

Since September 2008 RBAS have held their meetings in the Museum and this has been well received.

In November "Radio Berkshire" presented their breakfast show from the Museum with an Armistice Day theme. This was the second visit, the first being in October 2009.

The Treasurer presented the accounts and reported that the financial position was not unsatisfactory with a good deposit in the Bank.

The Curator had created some new and attractive displays and reported that some of the Museum's pictures had been featured in the Public Catalogue Foundations lists of works of art held in public places in Bucks, Berks and Oxon. The book was

sponsored by Christies and the museum's pictures have been archived.

An election of Officers took place and the present incumbents were re-elected. Mrs J. Fostekew and Major Goddard were re-elected as Trustees.

Possible amalgamation with RBAS is still being researched and discussed.

The Wokingham Borough Council had levied business rates on the Museum for 2010/2011.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by The President to the Committee and volunteers.

Miles Gemini 1A *G-AKKB* was one of the last Aircraft to be built at Woodley in 1947 before Miles went into receivership. It has now changed hands to the ownership of David Gray a Lancashire Aero Club member. At one time this aircraft was raced by Fred Dunkerley in the Four Kings Cup. The new owner plans to visit a number of airshows and vintage fly-ins so hopefully some of our members will have the pleasure of seeing it. (*item courtesy of Aircraft Magazine*)



Royal Berkshire Aviation Society

RBAS meets on the first Tues-

day of the month (except August) at the Museum. All Museum Crew Members are very welcome to come to these meetings. Best way of learning what the subject will be on any particular month is to ask Jean Fostekew.

At the RBAS AGM, and again at the Museum AGM the subject was raised of RBAS and the Museum Crew Members organisations merging. Anyone having any comments on this proposed merger should put their questions or thoughts on paper (on in electronic form) and pass them to the editor.

Gift Aid Scheme

As many of you know if you pay income tax and/or Capital Gains Tax and fill out a Gift Aid Form the Museum can claim an additional 28% of your donations and/or subscriptions.

You are only required to fill out a Gift Aid Form once for us – but it is imperative that if your Gift Aid circumstances change you let us know as soon as possible.

In case you think it's hardly worth while I can point out that the Museum have claimed £412 for the tax year 2006/7 and £224 for 2007/8 from this source. Better we have such sums than they be spent on MP's expenses!

Airfields in Berkshire (Jean M Fostekew)

The earliest airfields in Berkshire were little more than convenient fields. The earliest site used regularly for flying was a field at Coley, Reading along-

side the River Kennet south of the present-day Berkley Avenue. Before the First World War aircraft used to land at Woodley at a site called the Hundred Acre Field where Woodley aerodrome would later be located. The earliest recorded flight there was in November 1913;¹ the aviator, Henri Salmé, used it to give “joy rides” in his Bleriot. Gustav Hammel landed there the following year. He is credited with the first air mail service. Other fields in the county may have been similarly used.



The First World War saw the construction of an airfield at Coley Park near Reading in 1916 where mechanics for the Royal Flying Corps were trained.

Peacetime saw another use for aircraft. In 1919 the Berkshire Aviation Tours Company was formed using the primitive Avro 504K flying from a field at East



Hanney, north of Wantage. The field adjoining the home of two brothers who owned the company was a typical example of the flat, unwooded areas used as airstrips at this early date. No trace of the airfield remains; it was probably situated on East Hanney Field alongside a former Roman Road. The site was ignored when the United States Army Air Force opened Grove

Airfield nearby in 1942.

Among the most surprising places used on occasions as airfields were two in Reading: Alan Cobham charged two guineas (£2.20) a flight for joy rides from a field near Northumberland Avenue; an even more unlikely runway was the Thames promenade at Caversham used by the Cornwall Aviation Company in 1920. Swallowfield Park hosted the Reading Air Pageant in 1928. It could hardly be called an airfield although many aircraft landed there.

Arguably the best known was “Reading Airport”, it was situated at Woodley, about three and a half miles east of the borough on land bought by Charles Powis to create a small airfield with a hangar and repair shop and was inaugurated by the Reading Air Pageant of 1929. An advertisement had appeared in the Berkshire Chronicle on 7th September, 1928 announcing that 'a large aerodrome will be opened near Reading'. On Easter Sunday 1929 a crowd, reportedly numbering 30,000, attended the flying display. Two years later the Reading Aero Club was formed welcoming such famous visitors as Amy Johnson and Douglas Bader, though it was only a grassed airfield with no hard runways. Woodley was the site of the crash in 1931 which resulted in Bader losing his legs.

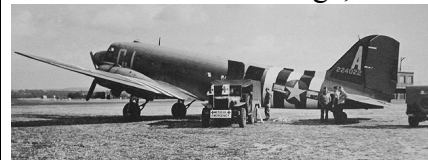


The firm of Phillips and Powis was joined in 1932 by the de-

signer F.G. Miles² and their aircraft were successful in many air races. During the Second World War thousands of aircraft were built at Woodley. Field Marshall Montgomery landed in France in the D-Day landings in a Miles aircraft.



Many other small airfields and strips in Berkshire became important during the war. RAF training took place at Woodley from 1935 to 1951 and at Theale from 1941 to 1948. Both had grassed runways. Other airfields used for training included Shellingford (RAF Flying Training School 1931-1948) and Watchfield (blind-landing training). New airfields with paved runways and hangars were constructed between 1940 and 1942 at Aldermaston, Greenham Common, Membury, Hampsted Norreys and Welford³. Bombers flew from Abingdon, Hampstead Norreys, Greenham Common (with the longest runway in Europe) and Harwell. The county was of tremendous importance for the D-Day operation. With limited range, most



wartime aircraft used for landing in France had to fly from southern England. This was especially true of planes towing gliders, they had to reach the drop zones and return to base. For a few days in May and June 1944 airfields all over Berkshire were

crowded with aircraft painted in the D-Day stripes of black and white. American Air Force gliders flew from Aldermaston, Greenham Common and Membury.

Throughout the war several grassed airfields in Berkshire were identified as emergency landing grounds: at Bray Court, Maidenhead, Waltham St Lawrence and Winkfield. Other airfields had different uses: Abingdon and Newbury Racecourse for storage, Smiths Lawn in Windsor Great Park for training and assembling bombers, Watchfield as the RAF School of Air Traffic Control⁴. Inside the post-1974 county Langley played a crucial role as a base for the Hurricane bomber designed by Windsor-born Sir Sidney Camm.

Most of these airfields have long since closed. The site at Aldermaston, temporarily a civil airport, became the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in 1950 and flying ended at Kingston Bagpuize four years later. During the post-war years Greenham Common was rebuilt as a major United States bomber and missile base during the cold war. Both Aldermaston and Greenham witnessed anti-nuclear and anti-war demonstrations. Membury was used as a test site for gyrocopters until the mid 1970s but is now better known as a service station on the M4. Welford re-opened in 1955, acting for a time as a logistics base for the United States Air Force, served by the Lambourn Valley railway station at Welford Park⁵. The site of the airstrip at Theale, Sheffield Farm, has disappeared with the extraction of gravel. Aircraft production at Woodley ceased in

1962, some of the site being acquired for light engineering and the rest for housing. Woodley is now one of the largest suburbs in the greater Reading area. One or two airfields survive, the largest being White Waltham, once the largest grassed airfield in England (256 acres). Despite the return of some of the land to agriculture it is still large and the only substantial airfield in the county with a thriving Flying Club and a large number of aircraft movements. A small, well-maintained flying strip at Brimpton is used by small, private aircraft. There is still some flying from Welford which is also used to store weapons and a number of private owners have permission to use various suitable fields.



Summary

RAF & USAAF Airfields

Abingdon, Aldermaston, Greenham Common, Hampstead Norreys/Norris, Harwell, Kingston Bagpuize, Membury, Welford, White Waltham, Woodley.

Small grass fields used by the RAF

Bray Court, Bush Barn, Henley-on-Thames (actually at Upper Culham in Berkshire), Shellingford, Smiths Lawn, Theale, Waltham St Lawrence (a large field used only for a few weeks), Watchfield, Winkfield.

War-time decoy airfields

Beedon, Kingston Warren, Warfield

Civil Airfields

White Waltham (and Smiths Lawn used for royal flying)

Notes

1. Archives of the Museum

- of Berkshire Aviation
2. Adwest archives
3. Thames Valley Airfields in The Second World War: Robin J Brooks
4. Ibid.
5. Babbie Group Industrial Berkshire

Further Reading

Thames Valley Airfields in The Second World War: Robin J Brooks (Countryside Books)

Military Airfields in the British Isles: S. Willis & B Hollis (Enthusiast Publications)

Wings Over Woodley: Julian Temple (Aston Publications)

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