



## August 2002

Welcome to our latest Newsletter.

Please feel free to send us any items of interest and articles which may interest our readers.

### ENGINEERING UPDATE

#### MILES M.25 MARTINET RESTORATION PROJECT

By Ian S

Looking back at the preceding issues of our Newsletter is one way of assessing the true progress of this project. Time passes so quickly, we sometimes tend to underestimate our achievements.

The port side of the fuselage is now completely ply covered. Part of the starboard side will remain uncovered while we continue with some of the interior fitting out. This includes the control runs which have now been set out. The rudder bell crank and intermediate bell crank assembly have now been fabricated and fitted.

I suppose the big achievement for the year has been the drawing up of the tail plane, which is now under construction. The problem here was, as usual, the lack of original drawings, and to add to the confusion, three different shapes shown on plan views in the Air Publication manual. Luckily one of these compared very closely with a drawing in the publication compiled by A.H. Lukins "The Book of Miles Aircraft". The recent arrival at the museum of a very fine scale model of the Martinet by Tony B also uses this version of the tailplane.

The arrival of our "New Boy" Colin H, has been a great help and his apprenticeship (he insists he is my apprentice) is progressing well. Colin's latest effort has been to produce the ribs for the tail plane, (see photo), and Dennis H is now in the process of fitting these to the spars which are set up on the assembly bench in the workshop. I think we have also managed to capture Ted P back from the Mini Link Trainer project for a time, where in fact we have all been helping out during the year. John Kite will be putting in a full report on this as it now nears the last part of the control system stage.

Looking forward, I am hoping we shall soon be finishing the

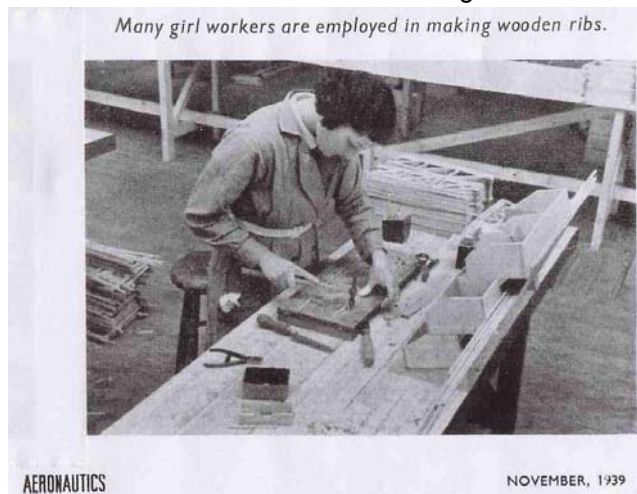


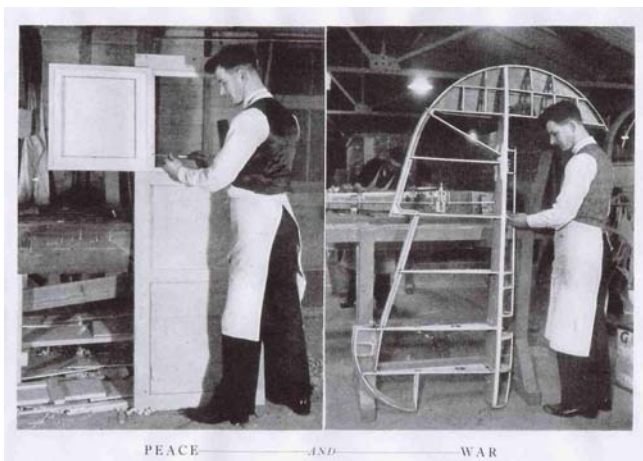
ply covering on the rear of the starboard side of the fuselage which in turn will allow us to put on the top ply.

The tail wheel and strut are now in position though they still need a bit of attention. My hope is to be able to lower the aircraft temporarily onto its' wheels perhaps by the end of the year. We will then know that we can move it around if necessary.

I have recently found some very interesting photographs that I think are worthy of being printed in our newsletter. The photographs portray workers who were helping with the construction of the Miles Master in 1939. It is especially interesting to see these, as they show some of the very items we have been reproducing. What a wonderful comparison they make.

The man working on the rudder is also shown in his peacetime occupation of cabinet making. Their skills were in great demand during the war years both by Miles Aircraft and de Havillands, where many were also helping to build the Mosquito.





## THE MINI LINK TRAINER PROJECT

By John K

The airframe is now fully completed and painted in its final livery of red fuselage with white stripes and white wings with red stripes and is mounted on the bomb trolley.

The 'trainer' was entered in the Woodley Carnival on June 8th, in the pilots seat we had Prince Charles and in the rear seat the Queen, who, as we proceeded along the route waved to the crowd.

Our entry was well received by the spectators as indicated by applause as we banked round the roundabouts and levelled out for the straights !! We also had several people approach us and mention how nice it was to see something novel and original in the procession.

We are at present finalising the control system and the control electronics, this has caused us a few headaches but is now close to being finalised.

Our next big problem is room to operate. We don't have room in the hanger and it is most difficult to open the hanger doors to get the aircraft outside every time we want to operate. As a result, a mini-portable hanger, to be sited outside the museum, is being considered and the Woodley Carnival committee have been asked if they would help towards the cost of purchase.

Thanks are due to the following Wednesday Team lads who ably assisted in this project

Denis H  
 Ted P  
 Geoff E  
 Ian S  
 Dick G  
 Brian H  
 John H  
 Graham H  
 Frank J  
 John G  
 Alan F

Thanks are also due to Brian L for his machining capabilities.

We have had two requests from schools who asked if we could hire out the trainer to them for their school fete.

## ENGINEERING UPDATE

By Geoff E

The Gannet has now been painted in its original colours scheme and final markings are almost complete. If we get any decent weather this summer we can finish this part of the project.

Despite our best efforts the vandalised rear canopy was beyond repair. We managed to obtain a new canopy by swapping a surplus forward canopy with the chaps who are refurbishing their Gannet at Membury.

The next task is to restart the interior refurbishment. As you probably know, the forward cockpit instrument panel has already been rebuilt. We are hoping to make up the full complement of instruments by doing another swap with the guys at Membury who need some propeller blades, we just happen to have some spare.

The chaps have done a good job of cleaning the Gannet. The Herald lads have had a field day on their aeroplane and they both look very smart.

The chaps working on the Student are now back with us and are carrying on with their monumental task of remanufacturing and repairing parts of the aircraft which are either missing or damaged. This is all being done without access to any drawings. I must say that I think they performing miracles considering the little information that they have.

Unfortunately the Herald donation box was 'borrowed' in June. The box was eventually found outside the Museum, minus its contents.

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Margaret has been invited to the Woodley Open Day in Woodford Park on September 7<sup>th</sup>, and we are going to book a pitch in the marquee. This event, in conjunction with the Woodley Horticultural Society, is held to promote interest in local organisations. Lots of other local organisations display at this event. It is worthwhile attending to promote the museum and try to raise our profile in the community.

## **MARTINET AT WAR ... AIR FRAME MECHANIC**

**By L.A.C. Charles Ashton**

In 1941 at the age of 17½, I registered for military service at a church hall in St Albans, which was the nearest depot to my home town of Watford. Having witnessed some of the air action which took place in the sky around London, I stated my preference would be with the RAF. Of course being young and impressionable I volunteered for flying duties, and the first choice would be pilot.

Some weeks later, I received a travel warrant, and orders to report to Cardington for medical and aptitude tests for flying.

I was overjoyed to be told by the board that I had been accepted, but would be put on deferred service until later in the year. The snag was I was to attend the local ATC unit twice weekly for aircraft recognition, Morse and navigation. Then one night each week at the local tech school for advanced maths. These arrangements did not fit in with my social and love life as I had recently become engaged to be married.

The outcome being that later in the year I received a letter from

the RAF stating that because of my absence I would be C.TED (Ceased training) for flying, and to report back to Cardington in Jan 1943 to commence my proper service life.

After a spell at Blackpool, where we had the usual drill and weapon training, I was sent to Squires Gate, Blackpool, to train as a flight mechanic engines.

Our intake was told that after our 16 weeks training we would be posted overseas. So as I was still under 21 yrs old, I persuaded my parents to give permission to marry my fiancé, as I was 4 months short of 21, they did so, and we were married on Dec 27<sup>th</sup> 1943.

On my return to PDC Morecombe, we found that all married men were to be taken off the draft (which incidentally ended up in South Rhodesia) and I was posted to No 4 Air Gunnery School at Morpeth, Northumberland, where I was introduced to the Miles Martinet.

We had these aircraft on A Flight and they were used as drogue target towers and also to simulate fighter attacker onto the Anson aircraft of B Flight, crewed by the under training air gunners using camera guns.

A mixture of both RAF and WAAF technicians worked on these aircraft, and I do not remember having too much trouble with the Martinet.

A Flight was quite a long taxiway from the runways, and a mechanic always had to cycle to the end for an hour period to wait for the Martinet to taxi round, then stop, waiting for the mechanic to jump and place our body over the fuselage by the tailplane, whilst the pilot revved

up the engine to clear the plugs, before taking off.

On one occasion, I must have put too much weight on my hand when jumping and I cracked the plywood fuselage. After the pilot throttled back, I ran to the cockpit and reported, so that the flight exercise was aborted.

Another time, an aircraft was being taxied back to the flight and ran off the tarmac into soft ground. So a two-six was shouted, and all the spare mechs went to push. I got under the wing and put my back into the main plane and pushed upwards. I felt something crack, and once again, I had damaged an aircraft so I was not very popular.

However, on many occasions, we ground crew, were allowed to go up with the pilots permission, when a fighter simulation exercise was being flown. This was good fun, because many of the pilots were on 6 months screening after a tour of operations. They really threw the Martinet around the sky, diving on to the Anson with the cadet gunners. The pilots tried to make us sick, but luckily I never was.

I enjoyed my 8 months at Morpeth, working on the Bristol engine and the crowd of people on A flight. I was also exalted to the high rank of L.A.C. whilst there.

In September 1944 I was once again overseas. This time I ended up in Wangjing, Burma, posted to 79 Squadron who operated the P-47 Thunderbolt. But that is another story...

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## FILM AND VIDEO ARCHIVE

By Alan L

Our video "The History of Berkshire Aviation and Miles Aircraft" which went on sale in the Museum Shop in March 2001 is selling well and we are selling our third batch of 100 copies. We have received several short publicity/recruitment videos from the R.A.F., without charge; these provide good viewing for our TV display in the refreshment area.

We have acquired several items of 16mm film equipment towards making a self-contained facility in the Museum.

a) A pair of good quality PREMIER rewind arms on a good baseboard. Donated by Bernard Bareham of the Reading Film and Video Makers.

b) An excellent 5 ft tripod screen as new. Donated by Mr and Mrs Sawyer of Caversham Heights.

c) An early model Bell & Howell 16mm sound projector in working order with many spares for a nominal £15. This was sold to me by a member of the Edinburgh Film Society but I had to collect it from Buckingham where it was left by said member.

d) A later Bell & Howell 16mm projector (in substitution for the earlier Rank-Cintel Auto-Load Model)

I am now seeking extra spare lamps Type A1/91 1000 watts, 240 volts for this machine.

During the year no more films have been acquired but Jack de Coninck, known to many members, donated 36 Low Band U-Matic video tapes of the early SPRITE trials which took place at White Waltham and

Hullavington. After several months of enquiries I located two early model SONY machines, Types VO-1810 and 1210 at St. Leonards-on-Sea for a nominal £10 each, both with Instruction Books but no guarantee as to working condition. I spent a day collecting these bulky machines kindly assisted by Bernard Bareham. Subsequently one proved to be non-working (reason not ascertained) but useful for spares. The other plays back and so I was able to start examining the SPRITE U-Matic tapes.

Then only a few days later I was virtually given two SONY late model machines Type 7404 for a nominal £5. Again one is in good running order and the other only partly working. However after making enquiries of SONY they very kindly promised to donate a full Technical Manual for the Model 7404. This was received on 17th April. This should enable me to service the second machine and then arrange disposal of the two early models.

Meanwhile I have received a non-working SONY Betamax machine donated by a member of the Caversham Heights Townswomens Guild. I shall attempt to get this working on low priority; we have no Betamax tapes awaiting attention. Examination of the 36 SPRITE tapes revealed that they were all of 30 minutes duration but that only two or three were recorded for their full length. There is a good deal of repetition because of the nature of many of the trials. I have spent several sessions at the Museum transferring all of this material to standard VHS so I can catalogue the contents as convenient at home. There are

about 5 hrs actual recording time.

The history of the SPRITE needs considerable researching as many M.L. Aviation records and much hardware were destroyed when they moved from White Waltham. However I have located and contacted three ex MLA staff concerned with the SPRITE programme.

They have all agreed to meet with me and they all have video tapes of the Sprite. The first of these; Professor Reg Austin, invited me to his home at Bracknell on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> June and I had a very enjoyable and most informative session with him lasting four hours. Reg had prepared an outline history for my files and talked me through the whole of the SPRITE programme; this was most informative. He has photographs of the early test beds and various versions of the SPRITE, which he will give me later at a second meeting arranged for September. All of this cooperation and information is most appreciated.

I hope to follow up with the other two contacts in due course.

I wrote to Ian Thirsk, Curator of Film at RAF Hendon, asking if there was any SPRITE material in their archive but they have none! Subsequently I received an enquiry from their Department of Research and Information asking if we had information as to what happened to MLA company records when, as they put it, the firm went under. We are unable to help; however they stated that they had received a "large collection" of papers from Marcel Lobelle in the mid 1970s but they did not state what the contents are.

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An enquiry to the Wessex Film and Sound Archive at Winchester also revealed that whilst they have a collection of aircraft material they also have nothing on the SPRITE.

Whilst I am waiting to gather in SPRITE information I propose to start work on a basic script for a documentary video on the Dart Herald. I shall base this on the well researched book by Cowell. We have thousands of feet of 16mm film of various Dart Heralds in different liveries and locations. The problem will be marrying the film sequences with the dates and locations in Cowell's book because unfortunately very few of 'the rolls of film have any information on the film or in the cans. Again patience is required.

Addendum;

In early May; Mr. Mike Trickett of Geelong, Victoria, Australia very kindly sent us two Service Manuals; one for the SONY U-Matic player Type VP-1210, (one of our early acquisitions) and a Service Manual for our SONY Recorder SL-C7EC so hopefully in due course we shall be able to get one of our Betamax machines "up and running" on low priority. Thank you very much Mike; we appreciate your help

**THE NAVIGATION  
SYNTHETIC TRAINING  
DEVELOPMENT UNIT,  
WOODLEY**

The Navigation Synthetic Training Development Unit was formed by the R.A.F. at Woodley on 7th May 1941, and details of its activities were described in a report issued by the Officer Commanding the Unit, Wing Commander J.J. Owen, on 7th November 1941

(Ref. AIR. 29 770A). As Phillips & Powis were closely involved with this Unit, it is felt to be appropriate to quote from this most interesting document, in order to complete the story of the R.A.F. Units at Woodley:

**INTRODUCTION**

A little known R.A.F. Unit existed at Woodley Aerodrome from 1941. This Unit was called the 'Navigation Synthetic Training Development Unit' and, were it not for the valiant efforts of Josh Spoor, of The Miles Aircraft Collection, who was on the trail of the history of No. 8 E.& R.F.T.S. at Woodley, at the P.R.O., Kew for the Hon Gen Secretary of The M.A.C., he might never have stumbled across a most interesting document on the complete history of this Unit.

Reproduced here serialised form, this is probably the first time that this document will ever have been seen outside of the P.R.O.

**NAVIGATION SYNTHETIC  
TRAINING DEVELOPMENT  
UNIT.**

**SIX SYNTHETIC MONTHS  
FORMATION AND FUNCTION.**

1. Great importance having been attached to methods of synthetic training for some time past, Air Ministry decided in April 1941 to form a Unit within the establishment of H.Qrs. Flying Training Command, which should have as its aim the development of navigation synthetic training devices, with a priority for those devices applicable to basic navigational training. In the words of Air Ministry letter dated 30th April however, "in due course the work of the Unit should include the development of synthetic devices for use throughout all stages of navigational training".

2. The Unit, after consultation between Air Ministry and H.Qrs. Flying Training Command, was eventually established in part of Messrs. Phillips & Powis Ltd.'s factory at Woodley Aerodrome, the Company agreeing to provide accommodation, equipment, materials, labour, the services of a shorthand typist, and to carry out the necessary work in conjunction with and under the supervision of the staff of the Unit and to the satisfaction of the Commanding Officer. Payment for these services was to be made quarterly, based on the actual expenses incurred. These proposals were set forth in Air Ministry letter dated 26th April 1941.

3. In consequence of the above agreements, and after consultation between the C.O. and Phillips & Powis Aircraft Ltd., the Unit took possession of the available accommodation on the 7th May 1941. At this date, however, only the C.O. had been posted, and it transpired, therefore, that the work of the Unit began with the C.O., a shorthand typist, two tables, two chairs and a typewriter. Accommodation was plentiful, but the necessary equipment thereof conspicuous by its absence.

4. The first fourteen days consisted of necessity in acquiring furniture, paper, pens and tools, the introduction of the civilian typist to the mysteries of service filing procedure, in making certain contacts, and in learning the system of work within the factory.

5. At this time, Air Ministry visualised the life of the Unit to be six months, and it was hoped that the answers to navigational synthetic training would be produced in this period. The task allotted was undoubtedly formidable, the

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problems never having been seriously tackled before, and the requirements were therefore divided into four parts: (i) Map Reading, (ii) D.R. Navigation, (iii) Astronomical Navigation, including star identification, (iv) incidental devices, particularly in relation to furthering the aim of (i), (ii) and (iii).

6. By means of the "carte blanche" given to the Unit, and by the good graces and extreme helpfulness of Phillips & Powis on all occasions, a reasonable start could almost be expected. Further help was forthcoming, however, in that the majority of work for the Unit was carried out in the Experimental Section of the factory, and under an Air Ministry letter dated July 1941, extreme priority was requested.

#### **ESTABLISHMENT.**

7. Provision was made by the Air Ministry for the Unit to consist of Officers, i.e. one Wing Commander, C.O., one Squadron Leader Eng., and one Squadron Leader Nav. The Officers to fill these posts were notified in an Air Ministry letter dated 20th April 1941 and under Item 20 in the Minutes of the 13th Meeting of Air Ministry Synthetic Training Committee. W/Cdr. J.J. Owen was appointed as C.O. and he was posted to the Unit on 7/5/41. The other officers arrived from 25/5/41.

8. In addition to these Officers, the Unit was to consist of one shorthand-typist and draughtsmen as required, it being agreed that Phillips & Powis Ltd. should supply the personnel. After certain development work, authority was also given for the engagement of one landscape artist. Air Ministry letter dated 31st. May 1941 refers.

9. After the Unit had been working for a short period, it

was apparent that there was always sufficient work to keep one skilled workman fully employed, in addition to the jobs carried out in the Experimental Section of the factory. Phillips & Powis Ltd. therefore agreed to allot one of their experimental aircraft erectors to work solely for the Unit, and in this connection Mr. H. Harris was appointed on the 7th June 1941.

#### **DEVICES DEVELOPED.**

11. As stated in Para. 5 above, the requirements for development were split into four parts: the brief descriptions that follow are therefore of the devices produced to meet these requirements, and are taken in the same order. In all cases, however, it is important to bear in mind one of the chief difficulties in producing suitable devices, namely, to instruct a large number of pupils at the same time with one instructor. Considerable efforts have also been made to keep the devices as simple as possible, easy for rapid erection and production at low cost.

##### **(a) MAP READING**

###### **Air Navigation Instructor**

12. Experience has shown, and reports received from Operational Commands confirm, that one of the chief weaknesses of air crews is their ability to map read under all conditions. This weakness is further complicated by the fact that Empire-trained and Allied crews are strange to the peculiar topography of this country, and can only be instructed in this country. The need for some device was therefore urgent, and recourse was immediately given to existing devices or some device which could be adapted for the purpose.

13. The first line of

investigation was the A.M.L. Teacher. After examination, however, it was apparent that the A.M.L. could not be adapted for navigational purposes, and it was therefore decided to design a device which would suit this particular branch of training. It should be noted here that work proper on this device did not begin until mid-June, the Unit being limited in staff, and not up to full strength until 1st August 1941. A further reason was the production of the D.R. Instructor, details of which will be found in Paras.19-25 below.

14. The device was built round the principle of projecting on to a horizontal surface a true representation of the ground, to a number of pupils that comprised the largest class of the training establishments within Flying Training Command. At the same time, the device was to be elastic, in order to cater for loss or greater numbers. The device was named the Air Navigation Instructor, and during its development it was found that it fell into several component parts, these being (i) the projection system, (ii) the transparencies which represent the ground, (iii) the method of simulating movement of the ground, and (iv) accommodation to house (i), (ii), (iii) and the pupils.

15. It is not intended to detail the very considerable research work that resulted from this commitment, but answers were eventually found, the results of which are that a class of anything up to 25 pupils may be instructed, any course may be steered, any winds utilised, the speed range is from 60 to 600 m.p.h. or in any ratio of 10 to 1, map reading may be given from six heights, namely, 2,500', 5,000', 10,000', 15,000', 20,000' and 30,000', and by regulating the light, daylight to dark may be simulated. Cross country flying

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may be carried out in triangular form, straight flights, or over long distances - in fact, if transparencies existed that encircled the globe, a flight round the world could be carried out. Additional experiments are in hand, and it appears that it will be possible, by using filters, to represent seasonal changes, and to carry out such problems as interception of aircraft and ships. The device may, of course, be utilised for bombing, but, as in all such devices, only one man can bomb at a time. A further advantage is that providing suitable accommodation is available or built, a gallery may be placed round three sides, so that should there be an exercise proper in progress, the gallery may be used for further instruction.

16. The necessary mock-ups of the device were made and experimental transparencies produced. In addition, the question of housing the device was investigated, and a model erected by the 16th September 1941. In this respect, the device may be erected in any hangar providing overall dimensions of 32' x 38' x 30' high are available. On the 17th September 1941, a demonstration was given to H.Qrs. Flying Training Command, and a further demonstration to Air Ministry on the 23rd September 1941, a preliminary booklet having been produced and distributed prior to both demonstrations. The result of these demonstrations was that the Air Ministry called a conference which was held at the Unit on the 29th September 1941. The conference agreed that the device was a requirement for navigational training, and its decisions are recorded in the Minutes of the Conference, dated 1st October 1941.

17. After discussion between Air Ministry and H.Q.F.T.C., it was decided that the prototype A.N.I. should be built at No.8 E.F.T.S., Woodley Aerodrome, and thus be under the direct supervision of O.C. N.S.T.D.U. This was most convenient, and fitted in with the existing policy of placing the device at E.F.T.S.'s, as confirmed under Item 9 of the Minutes of the 18th Air Ministry Synthetic Training Committee Meeting, which stated that the device was a requirement for navigation training at E.F.T.S.'s, A.O.S.'s, S's of A.N. and G.R. Schools.

18. At the time of going to press, the necessary portions of the prototype are rapidly taking shape, the projection system is completed, the carriageway is under construction (these are being built by the Unit), one transparency is finished, and the Unit merely awaits two things - the lenses and the building. Regarding the former, this is a slow and ticklish job, but the first three should be ready in 14 days' time. The building appears to be the main difficulty, although part of it is available, a portion of an existing hangar being used. Pressure is, however, being brought to bear, and it is hoped that the prototype will be available for demonstration in 4 to 5 weeks time.

*To be continued .....*

The Hon Gen Secretary of The Miles Aircraft Collection, Peter Amos, hopes that the reproduction of this history will revive old memories and perhaps, who knows, even further recollections from ex members of the Unit. In fact, anything appertaining to the activities of the other R.A.F. Units on Woodley Aerodrome would be very gratefully received.

## **PILOT OFFICER FISKE, Royal Air Force - 601 Squadron**

Battle of Britain Pilot – Killed in Action, 17th August 1940.

The proceeds of the Annual Draw - 2002 at Tangmere Museum Trust will go towards the refurbishment of Pilot Officer Billy Fiske's Memorial Stone, in the churchyard of St Mary & Blaise, Boxgrove, Sussex.

At present the Memorial Stone is illegible, it needs re-cutting or maybe an exact copy of the original family stone made. If we can raise the required funds during 2002 this work can be completed in conjunction with the Church of St Mary & Blaise; it would be most gratifying if we could also achieve an ongoing maintenance fund and also be able to improve the Billy Fiske exhibit in the Museum.

Remember Winston Churchill's immortal words:  
"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few". Pilot Officer Billy Fiske was one of the few.

Read on for a more detailed story.

In the south-east corner of Boxgrove graveyard there is a fine headstone to the memory of Pilot Officer Bill Fiske. On either side of his grave lie two soldiers, a Sapper in the Royal Engineers and a Corporal in the East Lancashire Regiment. Fiske's grave is distinguished by a small Stars and Stripes flag. This was the man whom Lt Col J T C Moore-Brabazon (later Lord Brabazon of Tara) honoured with the words in a newspaper tribute, "We thank America for sending us the perfect sportsman. Many of us would have given our lives for Billy."

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So who was Billy Fiske, and why is he buried in Boxgrove churchyard, and what made him so special that on the 4th July (Independence Day) 1941 a tablet in his honour was unveiled in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral? At the unveiling, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air, said "Here was a young man for whom life held much. Under no kind of compulsion he came to fight for Britain. He came and he fought, and he died." As simple as that!

In September 1939, more than two years before America entered the War, Billy Fiske, an American citizen, joined the Royal Air force, pledging his life and loyalty to the King, George VI. At Tangmere, nearly a year later, aged 29, he redeemed that pledge. In those 29 years, Fiske, second American serviceman in the RAF to lose his life in action, had always lived life to the full. He died a hero's death, surely the way he would have wanted to die, fighting the enemy in the form of a patrol of Junkers 87 about 12,000 feet above the Sussex countryside, at the controls of a Hurricane P3358.

Fiske was born on 4 June 1911 in Brooklyn, New York, the son of a wealthy banking family whose ancestors had gone to America from Suffolk in the seventeenth century. He attended school in Chicago and followed his family to France in 1924. He went to Trinity Hall, Cambridge in 1928 where he read Economics and History. Billy packed a lot into the few years between his stay at Trinity Hall and his return to England in 1938 for a spell at the London office of Dillon, Reed & Co, the New York bankers.

He was an accomplished sportsman, well-known on the Cresta run at St Moritz and for many years the unbeaten

champion. He led the bobsleigh team for the USA in the Winter Olympics of 1928 at St Moritz, and at the 1932 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid. At this event, he carried the flag for the Americans at the opening ceremonies, presided over by Governor Franklin D Roosevelt of New York. He was invited, but declined to lead the bobsleigh team in the 1936 Winter Olympics. The Billy Fiske trophy is named for him, the youngest Gold Medal winner, at the age of 16, in the sport.

He was also a keen golfer, and at Cambridge and Mildenhall he became a well-known figure driving to the golf course at high speed on the long straight roads, in his 4½ litre open Bentley, in British racing green, complete with bonnet-strap and projecting supercharger. He also managed to fit in a bit of film making in Tahiti.

He learnt to fly at an aerodrome near London and married Rose, the former Countess of Warwick, at Maidenhead in 1938. She remembers "the big day when he was allowed to take me in an open two-seater (aircraft) in a flight to Le Touquet which terminated at Deauville because of an oil leak that splattered over the windscreen and so hindered navigation.

Early in 1939 Billy was recalled to his firm's New York office shortly before England declared war on Germany on 3 September. An English friend, working in New York, Mr W P Clyde, an RAF reservist and a member of 601 (County of London) Auxiliary Air Force Squadron, talked him into sailing back to England with him on the Aquitania on 30 August. In his diary Billy Fiske records that "I believe I can lay claim to being the first US citizen to join the RAF in England after the

outbreak of hostilities." He did not realise he was writing his epitaph. He also knew when he sailed from America that, as the regulations stood at the time, "no person, not a British citizen and a son of British citizens, could be eligible for any position whatsoever in the Air Force". So he worked out a plan to pass himself off as a Canadian of Canadian parentage. But, even so, he found that joining the RAF was harder than he anticipated and it was luck and knowing the right people which eventually got him an interview with a high-ranking RAF Officer. We know he was nervous before the interview as he records in his diary that he played a round of golf at Roehampton to give himself a "healthy look". He notes, "Needless to say, for once, I had a quiet Saturday night - I didn't want to have eyes looking like blood-stained oysters the next day."

He passed his interview and full of the joy of life went on to No 10 Elementary Flying Training School, Yatesbury, Wiltshire. After Yatesbury, Billy moved to the Flying Training School at Brize Norton, Oxfordshire and with his wife took a small house at nearby Minster Lovell. At Brize Norton on 12 April 1940 he became Acting Pilot Officer Fiske and on 12 July he was posted to No 601 (County of London) Auxiliary Air Force Squadron at Tangmere. This Squadron was variously known as the Legionnaires and the Millionaires Squadron, for it had been at White's Club, St James's in 1924 that Lord Edward Grosvenor selected members of the Club to serve under him in 601. Billy now had one month to live.

At Tangmere there was some apprehension in 601 about taking "this untried American adventurer ..." but Billy made no pretensions about his flying skill



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and was soon accepted. With typical gusto he threw himself into his training and on 20 July he undertook two operational "take-offs" in quick succession in Hurricane L1951 late in the afternoon. An American, radio commentator said in 1942 that Billy Fiske, during his fleeting service with 601 destroyed six enemy aircraft, the first being a Heinkel. Billy enjoyed flying Hurricanes. No doubt the aircraft, with 100 gallons of petrol tucked away in tanks close to the pilot seat and an engine capable of taking it up to 335 mph reminded him of his Bentley.

Then came the last flight. On 16 August Tangmere aerodrome was singled out for attack by German dive-bombers. The Operations Record Book of No 601 Squadron records that he took off in Hurricane P3358 at 12.25 pm. Squadron Leader Sir Archibald Hope Bt led the Squadron and they were ordered to patrol over Tangmere at about 12,000 ft.

The dive-bombers, Junkers 87, were seen to cross the coast east of Selsey Bill. When the Stukas, as they were called, started to dive on Tangmere and after several sharp individual combats, known as dog fights, the enemy were eventually chased out over the coast around Pagham Harbour.

When the Hurricanes started to land back at Tangmere, Billy Fiske's Hurricane was seen "to glide over the boundary and land on its belly." The Operations Record Book stated, "Pilot Officer Fiske was seen to land on the aerodrome and his aircraft immediately caught fire. He was taken from the machine but sustained severe burns ..." He was taken to the Royal West Sussex Hospital in Chichester, but died 48 hours later from shock.

The funeral took place on 20 August 1940. As the coffin, covered with the Union Flag and the Stars and Stripes, was borne on a bier to Boxgrove Priory Church, the Central Band of the RAF played funeral marches. Overhead, the Battle of Britain raged on. The coffin was borne into the churchyard by six members of the ground staff at Tangmere. Billy's comrades, although they did not land back at Tangmere until late that day, came with him on his last journey to Boxgrove.

Pilot Officer Billy Fiske, Royal Air Force, Sportsman, golden boy, fighter pilot is rightly honoured as the first American Airman in British Service to die in the Battle of Britain. Many Americans followed him. By 1941 there were enough American pilots in the RAF to form three Eagle Squadrons, Nos 71, 121, & 132.

#### LECTURES AND VISITS

The following talks and visits have been given and arranged by Jean. Thanks Jean!

- 1<sup>st</sup> March*, Visit, Hants & Berks Motor Club
- 11<sup>th</sup> March*, Talk, Gosbrook Road, Caversham
- 18<sup>th</sup> March*, Talk, Thatcham Historical Society
- 5<sup>th</sup> April*, Visit, Mathematical Association
- 8<sup>th</sup> April*, Museum open for Miles and Handley Page Reunion
- 14<sup>th</sup> May*, Talk, Emmer Green, Emmer Green TWG
- 6<sup>th</sup> June*, Talk, Woodley, Woodley TWG
- 16<sup>th</sup> September*, Talk, Embrook, Wokingham TWG
- 24<sup>th</sup> September*, Talk, Wokingham A TWG St Pauls
- 7<sup>th</sup> October*, Talk, Woodley Women's Club
- 26<sup>th</sup> November*, Talk, Wokingham Wok Afternoon TWG

#### RECOLLECTIONS OF THE APRIL 1949 CRASH OF THE FAIREY JET GYRODYNE PROTOTYPE

**John R. Ward, Canada**

In April of 1949 I was 15 years old and living with my parents in Armour Hill, Tilehurst. I was a student at Woodley Hill Grammar School in Earley, as was one of my best friends, David Jones, the son of the postmaster in Theale. I often cycled to Theale for fishing and swimming expeditions in the Kennet river and in the gravel pits south of Theale. (That area is now decimated by the M4!) On this particular day in April of 1949 (I seem to remember it as being a Sunday morning) I had cycled to Theale just for the pleasure of the ride and had not met up with my friend as I often did.

I stopped on the Theale railway bridge to watch the trains (Steam trains were still in use then.) I remember the Fairey Gyrodyne passing almost directly overhead, flying west, at a height that I would guess at around one thousand feet or a little more. It seemed to be following the A4 road. In those days helicopters were not a common sight and I watched its flight with interest. When the helicopter was about two miles away I remember seeing the craft suddenly start to spiral towards the ground, where it disappeared from sight behind trees. This was followed almost immediately by the appearance of black smoke.

After a few minutes a yellow Automobile Association roadside repair van (very typical of the time) happened to come along and I waved the driver to a stop and explained what I had seen. The smoke from the crash was very obvious by this time. I believe the AA man then made a 999 telephone call from

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a phone box close to the bridge and Theale station. (I think there was still a station there). He then offered to put my bicycle in the back of his van and drive me to the crash site, which we did.

The Fairey Gyrodyne had crashed in an upright position in the middle of a field close to the A4, and there were many motorists who had stopped by the road or driven into the field, probably in the hope of rendering assistance. My AA driver also drove right into the field where the wreckage was. It was burning fiercely and the two crew members were obviously unconscious and possibly already dead, although still strapped into their seats. It was impossible to get close to the wreckage. One rotor blade was missing. It was several minutes before any emergency services arrived. The fire brigade were able to subdue most of the fire and remove the bodies of the crew, but not before they had been badly burnt. Some policemen started searching the woods nearby and soon discovered the other rotor blade which had obviously become detached in flight.

Although I am writing this fifty-one years after the event, these details have always been clearly etched in my memory. It was quite a traumatic experience for a 15-year old.

## HELP !

### By Trevor H

The Museum is on the lookout for new helpers. Got any spare time during the weekends? Even if you can spare 1 day a month we would be pleased to hear from you.

Main tasks would be either admission or shop duties. Don't worry if you feel that you don't

know much about Miles, Handley Page or Fairey Aircraft, we offer excellent on the job training !

Helping out at the Museum is a great way to feel involved and you get to meet some great people.

If you are interested or want some more information please feel free to contact me. With this newsletter you should find the latest manning roster.

Trevor  
Email  
[MuseumofBerkshireAviation@fly.to](mailto:MuseumofBerkshireAviation@fly.to)

## SCIENCE MUSEUM EVENTS, WROUGHTON

### Heritage Open Days

Saturday 14 & Sunday 15  
September 2002

England's biggest and most popular voluntary cultural event, the museum and collections will be open, showing off some of the World War II architectural heritage of the site. The airfield was opened in April 1940 to modify and prepare aircraft for front line stations. During the war years 62 different types of aircraft were handled here. With supporting experts from English Heritage, guided tours of the airfield, hangars and collections are available. Enjoy a walk in nearby Clouts Wood. Flying and static model aircraft displays by SMAC, including scale competition on Sunday. Display by Royal Observer Corps Museum Trust. Free vintage bus service from STEAM museum, Swindon.

## End of School Half-Term Opening

Saturday 26 & Sunday 27  
October 2002

A last chance this year to visit the museum. Find out more about the 140 tonne Wood printing press from Fleet Street, restored and re-assembled at Wroughton, join in the family events and marvel at the vast array of unique and incredible objects from the furthest reaches of the national collections. Tractor and stationary engine demonstrations by members of National Vintage Tractor & Engine Club (NVTEC), and model aircraft displays by SMAC. Free vintage bus service from STEAM museum, Swindon.

## Science Week Open Weekend

Saturday 15 & Sunday 16  
March 2003

Join the weekend of hands-on activities celebrating 100 years of powered flight as we come to the end of another busy National Science Week. Visit the air transport, aero engine, rocketry and firefighting collections. Model aircraft displays by SMAC. Free vintage bus service from STEAM museum, Swindon.

*Enquiries:* Science Museum  
Wroughton Tel 01793814466

## THANKS TO .....

Sony United Kingdom Ltd., for donation of Technical Manuals for the SONY 7040 U-Matic tape recorder.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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