

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter No. 87

December 2004

Opening Thoughts

Inside this issue

Opening Thoughts	2
News & Views	3
2005 Programme	4
AGM Report	6
Musings of an old Aviator	7
FFA AuUstralian Tour	8
A Place in France	14
Advertisments	16

Editor, Publisher & Printer;

P.A.& R Stephens
Moor Farm
West Heslerton
Malton
North Yorkshire
Tel: 01944 738281
Fax: 01944 738240
Email: chix@farmline.com

© 2004 Paul Stephens

Cover photograph;

Nigel Charles (FFA No. 724) in his Europa. See his article elsewhere in this issue.

Chairman's Message

Another year has almost passed – as far as our Association is concerned I am sure it has been a successful one. Those of you who were able to get to the AGM and Middle Wallop visit would agree that it was an excellent finish to the year. Our thanks to David for all his efforts on that occasion, and to all those who during the year have helped to organise events, to ferry people around, and have given of their time and talents to make the Association the success it is. Without such a spirit of giving we would not be able to achieve so much.

Winter is now with us bringing problems of fog, low cloud and ice, hazards we may all encounter. I have mentioned on a previous occasion that I lost a friend in the Challenger crash at Birmingham Airport at Christmas 2002, when three commercial pilots, the company president and vice-president sales and marketing were all killed. The UK Air Accidents Investigation Branch has now made its final report.

Two pertinent points arise, the first being that frost contamination on the wings probably contributed to the accident, causing the aircraft to roll rapidly during take-off so that the its left wing tip struck the ground. The report cites the crew's failure to ensure that the wings were de-iced prior to take-off as a potential cause of the accident, but goes on to state that the crew's judgement may have been impaired by the combined effect of fatigue and jet-lag. The second pertinent point is that the pathologist's report states that both handling pilots had taken medicine containing the drug Diphenhydramine, a sedative antihistamine used in cough and decongestant remedies. What I find very disturbing is the statement in the report that Diphenhydramine is one of the commonest drugs found in pilots who are killed in aviation accidents. The report goes on to recommend that the FAA review its guidance given to flight crew about the dangers of using non-prescription medication.

There are several other recommendations in the report; one worthy of mention is that the CAA and aircraft manufacturers should ensure that, where appropriate, aircraft manuals contain the specific instruction that "wings and tail surfaces must be completely clear of snow, ice and frost prior to take-off" – a timely reminder to us all.

Christmas is about the spirit of giving – just make a note in next year's diary to do something for the Association!

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

John Golden

Editor's Notes

Unfortunately, this newsletter has been rushed a bit, as I only returned from the Austarlia tour in early December, but I still wanted it published this month. As you can imagine, the Australia tour was packed with interesting news and the Flying Farmer participants certainly did credit to Kodak, Fuji and nowadays Sony and other data card manufacturers, with the thousands of photographs and video footage taken. It was difficult to try and condense the experience into a few pages for this issue, so please accept my apologies if it has dominated the newsletter.

I am hoping to try my skills at computer editing to produce a 30 minute DVD from the 10 hours of footage which I took. If it's successful I will offer copies to members.

I was very happy to accept an excellent article with very high quality photographs from Nigel Charles about his place in France. I am always looking for member's experiences such as this to make the newsletter more varied and interesting.

Merry Christmas to all and lets hope for a prosperous New Year so that we can keep those aeroplanes airborne.

Paul Stephens

Committee Members

Dick Walgate	President	01472 371203
John Golden	Chairman	01725 552384
Paul Stephens	Secretary	01944 738281
David Corbett	Treasurer	01568 708351
Mike Cuttell	Events Secretary	01242 236770
Martin Gosling	Airstrip Advice	01787 269369
Anthony Kedros	Committee Member	01295 720876
Mike Ashmole	Committee Member	01738 627622

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION LIMITED

www.ffa.org.uk

A company limited by guarantee; registered in England No. 01166733
Registered Office—Ox House, Shobdon, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 9LT

Report from GACC

Single European Skies – proposed charging scheme.

Initial interpretation of the draft of the Charging Scheme put out by Eurocontrol indicated that all aircraft, regardless of size or type of flight, were going to be required to pay en-route and terminal area navigation charges. A great amount of work has been done by UK GA organisations, and to a lesser extent by their European counterparts, with the result that the final draft of the Charging Scheme that has now gone to the Single Sky Committee includes the following mandatory exemptions:

VFR phase(s) of mixed flights (for a/c over 2 MT)
All flights by a/c < 2 Metric Tonnes
State flights
SAR flights

Because these exemptions are to be mandatory, the states do not have to pay to Eurocontrol the equivalent cost of the services that are provided.

In addition, individual states may exempt flights in additional categories to the four listed above, but if they do, the states will have to pay the charges for those flights.

In summary, therefore, it appears to all concerned that the very considerable threat to GA set out in the initial draft of the Charging Scheme has now been lifted.

Mode S transponders

There are two phases to the introduction of Mode S transponders. The first, "enhanced", will be introduced from 2005, but this format is for use in defined airspace only and will not affect GA. An AIC about Enhanced Mode S was published on 11 November 2004.

The second phase "elementary", is due to be introduced from 2008. A Regulatory Impact Assessment is due to be published in 2005, and this RIA will set out the level of equipment to be carried by different classes of airspace users. However, it was made clear at the GACC meeting in late November that there are technical difficulties with the design of mode S elementary equipment (not least the well publicised wind turbine effect), and it is by no means certain that the problems encountered will have been solved in time for an introduction of the elementary system by 2008.

Safetycom

Following our report in the August 2004 newsletter, we can now confirm that a Safetycom frequency – 135.475 – has been approved, and we have no doubt that this facility will prove useful at FFA fly-ins in the future. Full details of the use of this frequency are published in CAP 413. FFA will obtain a copy of this CAP.

Review of Regulatory Arrangements at Light Aviation Airports

The CAA have announced their intention to embark on a review of the safety criteria to be applied at "Light Aviation" airports. GASCo have nominated David Corbett as their representative to this review, and it is to be hoped that this nomination will be accepted. Work will not commence until January 2005, but FFA members who run airfields that fall into this category are asked to contact David during December in order that he can coordinate FFA members' views.

David Corbett

Please note David Corbett's change of email address. It is now david.corbett5@btinternet.com

Aeroplanes are better than women because...

Aeroplanes can kill you quickly—women take their time
Aeroplanes can be turned on by the flick of a switch
Aeroplanes don't object to a pre-flight inspection
Aeroplanes come with manuals to explain their operation
Aeroplanes have strict weight and balance limits
Aeroplanes can be flown any time of the month
Aeroplanes don't come with in-laws
Aeroplanes don't care how many aircraft you have flown before
Aeroplanes and pilots both arrive at the same time
Aeroplanes don't mind if you look at other aeroplanes
Aeroplanes don't mind if you buy aeroplane magazines
Aeroplanes expect to be tied down
Aeroplanes don't comment on your piloting skills
Aeroplanes don't wine unless something is seriously wrong
However, when aeroplanes go quiet, just like a woman, it's a bad sign!

Sorry if you've heard it before. It came up in the middle of Australia and one of our members also sent it in. I hope our lady readers have a sense of humour!

Welcome to New Members

Since 15th July 2004, the following have joined the FFA

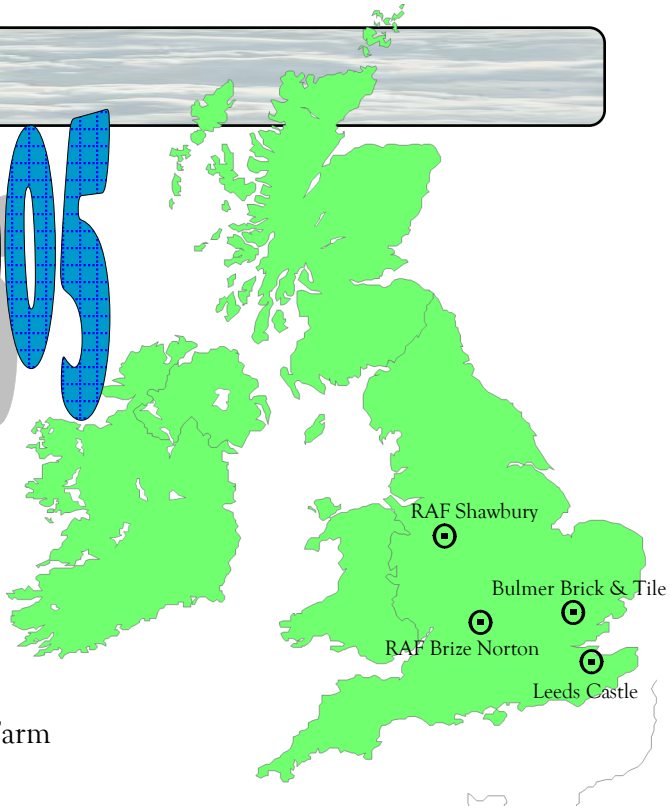
763	Steele Haughton, Cambridge
764	Bill Nelson, Chorley, Lancashire
765	Bryan Treadgold, Brigg, Lincolnshire
766	Graham Northern, Goxhill, Lincolnshire
767	Seamus Lyons, Stockbridge, Hampshire
009	Fred Burrow, Wahefield, W.Yorks. (re-joined)

Bye for now to

682	Martyn Smith, Henfield (emigrated to Australia)
079	B.N.C. Mogg, Dorset, (emigrated to N.Zealand)
429	A.G. Bailey, Blandford Forum (retired)
599	George Birks, Buckinghamshire (retired)
642	Anthony Bowles, Kirkudbrightshire (retired)
203	V.S. Bryan, Bridgnorth (retired)
007	Peter Breton, Cirencester (retired)

The total membership now stands at 362

Programme 2005



Wednesday March 9th	RAF Shawbury
Tuesday March 15th	RAF Brize Norton
Wednesday April 20th	Bulmer Brick & Tile, Essex
Wednesday May 18th	Velcourt, (venue to be decided)
Monday June 6th	Germany – Amazone, Leipzig and Berlin – 5 plus days
End June	Normandy – Farmers Weekly Farm
Wednesday July 20th	Leeds Castle, Kent

Mike Cuttell (our Events Secretary) writes:-

To start the season we have two visits two very active RAF stations. Neither have been easy to arrange, indeed in the case of Brize Norton I have been warned that it might be cancelled for logistical reasons at the very last minute. Their requirements must be followed TO THE LETTER in each case.

Wednesday, March 9th 2005. RAF Shawbury.

Shawbury has been a training airfield throughout its history, from when the first airfield opened there in 1917. Aside from flying training, Shawbury has also been home to the Central Air Traffic Control School since its earliest beginnings back in 1944. All of the flying training at Shawbury is now rotary winged, and was previously undertaken by No 2 Flying Training School. In April 1997, this became the tri-Service Defence Helicopter Flying School (DHFS) operating Squirrel HT1 (660 and 705 Squadrons) and Griffin HT1 (60 (Reserve) Squadron) helicopters. The unit also includes the helicopter element of the Central Flying School which uses the DHFS aircraft.

This visit is capped to 20 people. All visitors must have proof of identity. All those arriving by air must fill in the Civil Aircraft Booking Form (this will be sent to those accepted for this visit). All aircraft must have proof of £7,500,000 insurance cover. Those arriving by road will have to provide full vehicle details. Landing fees to be settled individually 1 tonne £17.02, 1.5 tn £25.53, 2 tn £34.04. The only fuel available will be Jet A1.

Programme:-

09:30 Visit the aircrew training facility.
12:30 Light lunch
13:30 Visit the ATC training facility
16:00 Depart

Our host will be Squadron Leader Martin Locke RAFR.
To cover our own administration charges and lunch, the cost will be £6 payable to Mike Cuttell.
Please consult Pooleys or similar for latest information.
Please fill in the enclosed reply slip and return to Mike Cuttell asap.

Events such as these set above are arranged by FFA members on a voluntary basis. It is accepted by those who participate that nothing undertaken by the FFA collectively or members individually shall be construed as establishing a duty of care nor in any way removing or modifying the duties, responsibilities or obligations of pilots or land owners in relation to any event and attendance thereat. All information provided in these programmes is purely advisory and should ALWAYS be verified from official sources.

Tuesday March 15th, RAF Brize Norton

RAF Brize Norton is the largest RAF Station in the UK. It is the nerve centre of the RAF's air transport capabilities. Opened in 1937, the Station was used to train airborne forces, before being handed over to the USAF in 1950. Strategic Air Command based B-29 and B-47 bombers at Brize, before the RAF reclaimed the Station for use as a tanker and transport base. Currently based at Brize Norton are the 11 VC10 C1Ks of 10 Squadron, the 8 VC10 K3 and K4 of 101 Squadron, the 8 Tristar K1, KC1, C2 and C2As of 216 Squadron, the 4 C-17s of 99 Squadron and No 2624 (County of Oxford) Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment Field Squadron and sister RAuxAF Squadron, No. 4624. Also based at Brize Norton is No 1 Parachute Training School, which includes the RAF Parachute Display Team, the Falcons.

Brize is an extremely busy base and I suspect that many of their missions fall within the official secrets act. I hope that we will see maintenance, logistics and ATC. The 5 parameters that apply to Shawbury apply here too. Please provide Mike Cuttell with all the information by return when he sends you the form after your application is accepted. You cannot get in without it!

At present they cannot guarantee that we can all arrive by air and may put a limit on the number of arrivals. We need to make a tidy presentation.

Programme:-

10:00 – 10:30	Arrive
12:30	Light lunch
15:00 – 15:30	Depart

Our host will be Flt. Lt Lewry. Please consult Pooleys or similar for latest information. If arriving by air call them 20 miles out.

To cover our own administration and lunch, there will be a charge of £6, payable to Mike Cuttell. Please fill in the enclosed reply slip.

Wednesday April 20th, Jim Lawrence Traditional Ironworks & Bulmer Brick and Tile Works, Essex.

Jim Lawrence Traditional Ironworks.

Jim Lawrence was a struggling small farmer on 100 acres with a few livestock, when in 1993 a neighbour asked if he could make him a garden lantern. This request was the catalyst that started him on the road to his very successful ironwork business which now employs over 40 staff and makes all manner of metal-based items such as lamps, door and window furniture, curtain poles, fireside equipment, garden seating, tree guards, and many more items either catalogue based or bespoke. The methods he employs vary from handcrafted items to some fairly sophisticated computer operated machinery.

His most recent addition to the catalogue is a range of ready-made curtains that are complimentary to the poles he makes.

In the last eleven years his business has grown from this single garden lantern to in excess of a £1 million turnover business, and this immensely successful diversification has won him the small business of the year award in Suffolk - (and he has just started to learn to fly at Earls Colne!).

Bulmer Brick & Tile Company.

The Minter family have run this small hand-made brick company since the 1930's, when it was bought as a going concern. Carbon dating of materials on site confirms that bricks have probably been made there since the Fifteenth century.

The last war saw the demise of nearly all these traditional brick-makers as their open topped kilns had to be shut down lest they become a beacon for German aircraft. The family had a small 50 acre farm at that time and the brickworks were kept going only by farm labour until, in the 1970's it was realised there were very few people left who had any idea of traditional brick making, and Peter Minter, who owns the business with his wife and two sons, realised he had the necessary skills to satisfy the increasing demand for traditional bricks.

Prior to the war the works were turning over about 3 million bricks a year – but it is now steady at about 300,000. This figure is limited by the capacity of the one kiln, which works at full stretch all year round. Planning permission has just been granted for another kiln, which may be under construction during our visit.

The works draws its clay from on site and this clay is unique in the country. Demand for the bricks is for all manner of buildings, but national heritage sites make up the majority. Buckingham Palace and Hampton Court are but two of it's customers (and myself, of course!!).

The farm extends now to about150 acres, not in a ring fence, and the farming is contracted out.

Programme:-

Fly to Stones Farm airstrip – 4.6 miles North of Earls Colne.
Arrive between 9am – 10am.
Bus leaves for Jim Lawrence Ironworks by 10.30 (30 minutes)
Lunch in a local hostelry (20 minutes)
Bus leaves lunch for Bulmer Brick & Tile (10 minutes)
Return to Stones Farm 16.00 – 16.30 (5 minutes)
Tea and departure at will

Numbers will be limited to around 40 places since both places are small and cannot accommodate large numbers. The visits will be not much more than an hour at each place.

The cost for this trip will be £20/head to include transport and lunch.

Payment and reply slip to R.M.Gosling, Stones Farm, Wickham St. Paul's, Halstead, Essex, CO9 2PS please.

Details and reply slips for the remaining events will be published in the March newsletter

Reports on the AGM Meeting

The 30th Annual General Meeting was held on 8th October 2004 at the Museum of Army Flying, Middle Wallop, by invitation of the Director Army Aviation, Brigadier Richard Folkes OBE ADC.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Association, a dinner was held at the Grosvenor Hotel, Stockbridge on the previous evening, 7th October. On a gloriously sunny



afternoon 7 aircraft flew into Thruxton, and their crews were taken by coach to the Grosvenor Hotel. A total of 56 members and their guests enjoyed an excellent dinner, followed by an illustrated talk by Dick Richardson (who has been general manager of Popham airfield for many years) about his time working for Sir William Roberts, owner and founder of the Strathallan Aviation collection. After our chairman, John Golden, had brought the formal part of the evening to a close with a vote of thanks to our speaker, Dick asked whether we would like to hear the story of the collection from Canada of the Strathallan Lancaster – and the whole room then enjoyed a further half hour's fascinating talk with some spectacular slides.

Friday 8th October was another glorious day. The 7 aircraft that had parked overnight at Thruxton flew into Middle Wallop, and were joined by a further 8 aircraft, some from as far as North Yorkshire. All aircraft were parked on the grass immediately outside the Museum; only one aircraft was prevented from arriving by very localised bad weather in the Aylesbury area – and that crew arrived by road. Members, including those who lived locally and who had arrived by road, gathered in the Museum for coffee. A total of 60 people attended the day.



The formal proceedings of the day began with a presentation on the state of Army Aviation by the Director, Brig Folkes, who gave a very entertaining and in-depth illustrated presentation.

The AGM followed the Director's presentation; although some members subsequently commented that the AGM was a bit rushed (for which the day's organiser duly apologises!), all the business was completed and no significant matters were raised under "any other business".

Immediately after the AGM, the Museum Director, Brig Edward Tait, and the Curator, Lt Col David Patterson, gave a brief presentation on the Museum, and members were then split into two parties for a quick guided tour of the principal areas of the Museum. An excellent finger buffet was then served by the Museum's caterer, Marie Martin in the Hayward Hall, and at 1300 hrs we all boarded a double decker bus to be transported to the operational side of the airfield.

Our first port of call was to the hangar in which all the Apache Longbow helicopters used for conversion training are kept. Here we all gathered round one aircraft and were given a detailed briefing about this amazing battlefield attack helicopter, and a lucky few were able to climb aboard and sit in the cockpits.



Following the close examination of the helicopter itself, we walked to the new purpose built Apache training centre run by Aviation Training International Ltd. Here we were split into three parties and were shown the four principle aspects of the training facilities used for the conversion to type of flight and ground crews for the Apache.

A more detailed description of the Apache follows – with thanks to our member Ian Weston, himself an Army Air Corps helicopter pilot for many years.

The Association would like to thank the Director, Brigadier Richard Folkes, most sincerely for inviting us to use the facilities at Middle Wallop for our AGM, and for allowing us such a privileged and interesting insight to the Apache helicopter and the associated training facilities. We would also like to thank Brig Edward Tait and Lt Col David Patterson for hosting us in the Museum, and all the other Middle Wallop personnel who, in one way or another, helped to make our visit such a success.

David Corbett

Musings of an old Army Aviator

A nostalgic visit to Middle Wallop for the FFA AGM. Must brush up on radio procedures and be slick as there are normally forty plus aircraft in the Wallop circuits.

Arrive at five miles receive joining information otherwise deadly quiet, where are the military? Hear some slick procedures from inbound Flying Farmers but no military. P2 sights a yellow machine on the runway, a firefly, and then another in the circuit – only two military. Of course stupid me the majority of training is now at Barkston Heath and Shawbury.



Roger Bell at the controls

What a pleasure to do a peaceful circuit and of course a perfect tail wheel landing, really should be in a chipmunk for landing here. Something definitely has not changed, the state of the runway is still as bad as it was forty years ago.

Taxi to the museum, new since my time, a lot of old friends (helicopters and fixed wing) are incarcerated here. The curator is a contemporary, hope I do not look as old!

Now for the piece de resistance of the day, the Apache. First impression this is a large and very ugly machine with little attempt at streamlining. The only exception is the main rotor blades which seem to be designed to help overcome retreating blade stall. A clear succinct briefing from a Warrant Officer class 1 pilot, this machine can carry a fearsome load of weapons. Stubby wings provide hard points from which to hang rockets and antitank missiles, any combination available depending on the mission profile. Also the ability to fit drop tanks for long fast deployment. Under the nose is a chin chain gun with incendiary and high explosive anti armour rounds. Amazingly the chin gun is linked to a monocular on the pilot's helmet – where he looks the gun looks. Hope the Brits are better trained than the Americans who had one or two nasty accidents when first using the look and shoot chin guns.

Also in the nose cameras, image intensification and infrared equipment. Looking back aft on the fuselage electronic counter measures equipment and flares. This machine has it all but how does it make the systems effective?

The Longbow radar is the key to the Apache weapons systems. Above the rotor blade is a doughnut containing the radar equipment. Positioning the radar here enables the Apache to remain hidden until engagement takes place. So it's a radar but with a phenomenal difference. The radar is capable of acquiring a hundred or so targets, analysing those that pose a threat to the helicopter and selecting the most suitable weapons system to deal with and engage the threat, no pilot input!

Now to see what it is like inside, into the front cockpit but it definitely needs agile youngsters capable of bending to get in! Once in very comfortable, but the only recognisable things are the cyclic, the collective and the engine start controls. Three flat screens and a large and varied selection of switches and knobs plus weapon sights, and to think in our day the only instrument was a piece of wool on the bubble as a turn and slip indicator. This is the computer age and the Apache is stuffed full of computers feeding every conceivable piece of information to the screens. Must take ages to navigate the systems, so a visit to the simulation building is a must once I have extracted myself from the cockpit – nearly made a major error and jumped failing to realise how high off the ground the cockpit level is.

The training and simulation building was state of the art. New arrivals start with one screen and build up their expertise so that they can control/navigate the input from all the screens and become capable of using all the controls around the cockpit and on the cyclic and collective. Then the full simulator, no pilot reaches the full simulator until he/she has done a minimum of a month of ground school. Failed to ask how long it is before the trainee gets his/her hands on a real machine! The Middle Wallop simulator can portray a one or two ship mission, front or back cockpit, and be linked to simulators at Wattisham and Dishforth to enable a six ship mission to be flown. Definitely the crème de la crème of boys' toys.

Down on the ground floor of the building is the ground crew simulator for rearming and refuelling the machine. The final phase being done in total darkness.

Conclusions: the Apache is a fearsome weapon system if the crew is highly trained. Downside, high tech requires high maintenance and never never land on soft ground because the wheels sink in and the chin gun joins the front pilot in the cockpit.

Conversation between old Army aviator and old RAF aviator, both FFA members. "Do you think you would pass the course now?" Doubt shown by both!! An excellent day very many thanks to the Treasurer.

Ian Weston

The FFA Tour of Australia 2004

Having done a couple of flying safaris with GOANA in previous years with other FFA members, the thought came to me that we should ask Mal (the principal of GOANA) to arrange a special FFA tour, concentrating on learning a little more about the different types of farming in Australia. Mal took the idea on with enthusiasm and between us and with the use of email, we came up with a tour that would last about 12 — 14 days and cover around 2500 nautical miles.

The tour had to be restricted to 7 pairs, each provided with a 172 and together with the tour director would make a fleet of 8 aeroplanes. I advertised the tour in the August 2003 newsletter and quickly became oversubscribed.

Planning that far ahead, it seemed that the day would never come, but it gave the participants time to plan extensions before and after the flying part, to either visit relations, holiday or whatever. One couple set off in September, not planning to return home for 5 months. Others combined the tour with visits to New Zealand, Malaysia, China and Thailand.

Eventually the day to meet up in Brisbane arrived (November 6th) and most of us (Jim and Angus Anderson would arrive the following day and Bill and Wendy Burton arrived too late) gathered for a group dinner.

So, David and Penny Corbett, Ian and Marion Weston, Richard and Joyce Hall, John Dunford and Tony Fisher and Paul and Roz Stephens together with the afore mentioned comprised the team of 14 who were to embark on an amazing adventure.

The tour turned out on the day to be dominated by a mixture of good and bad luck. First the bad news - Mal wouldn't be able to conduct the tour himself for personal reasons and secondly, one of the stations [farms] where we were to spend two nights, was in the process of being sold and had to cancel our visit. Thirdly, Brisbane was being hammered with quite a thunderstorm not due to clear for a few days.

The first day was initiation day when we were transferred to Redcliffe (1 on the map), about 25 miles north east of Brisbane, for our check flights and pre tour briefing. The GOANA team ran through the simple workings of the Cessna 172s, the Lowrance 500 GPS Airmap and basic Australian aviation law, especially the use of CTAF and MBZ airspace around airfields. A CTAF is like a 5 mile ATZ requiring a call to other traffic on a unicom frequency and an MBZ is a 15 mile zone. Oh, and a minimum height of 500 feet at all times. It is noteworthy that we never spoke to an air traffic controller throughout the 12 days of the tour — we were on holiday!



The Burtons surveying the plains

The rain relented long enough for us all to do a circuit at Redcliffe. For those that hadn't been with GOANA before, this was a quick check with their staff to make sure they could get the thing back on the ground without doing too much damage. For those that were on return visits (three couples), it was a quick check to refamiliarise with the old 172. We stayed the night in the local motel with dinner at a Chinese take away!

Good luck kicked in next day with enough clearance over the Dividing Range to set off to our first destination — King's Plain Castle (2 on the map). This was an easy hour and a half flight playing follow my leader whilst flying over green rolling countryside, which is in fact called New England. We all settled down with the unfamiliar aircraft and tried to read the very small digits on the GPS. The strip was dirt with tall weeds and looked as though it hadn't been used for a while. However, the castle was a most unusual building for Australia looking like something out of Scotland, which the original settlers (the Kings) had built to remind them of home. Originally the station was 60,000 acres and wealth was built up on the sheep's back. However, times move on, the sheep aren't so profitable and the station complete with castle has been bought by a neighbour, who has some sapphire prospecting on his land, expanding and now leasing out the castle to an enthusiastic couple who do bed and breakfast.

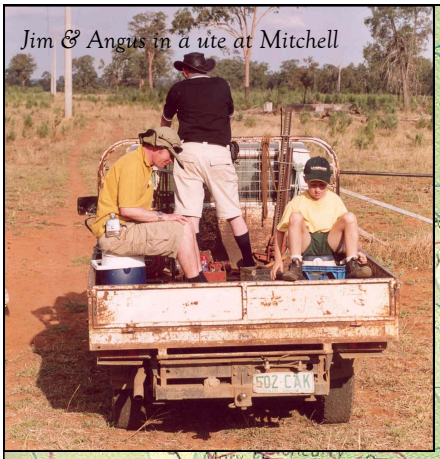
The owner took us on a tour of this and his home station, showing us the original shearing shed, his sheep and tried to find a kangaroo but to no avail. Flies were tiresome and some



King's Plains Castle



Explaining to John about the microns



Jim & Angus in a ute at Mitchell



A Case header at Parkes



Departing Bundaberg



The line up at Birdsville



Pecan nut orchard, Moree



Neil Unger's grain store

bought fly nets to keep the little blighters off their faces. Dinner at the castle was very good rounding off our first day.

Day 3 was a quick hop down to Moree, a commercial airfield. Our stop here was to see a Pecan nut orchard and the largest cotton growing area in Australia.

The Pecan nut orchard was set up by an American organisation on a very large scale, so that they could get a continuation of supply with their northern hemisphere set up. It was neatly laid out and needed a tremendous amount of water to literally flood the whole orchard.

The cotton is a very profitable crop, planted into ridges. The fields are laser levelled in order that the irrigation can run down the rows over very big areas without ponding. Water is stored in vast lagoons and runs down dykes from which it is siphoned into every row. There is concern that these type of crops are taking far more water than is really sustainable.

By day 4 we were getting into the routine of breakfast at 7.00, bus to the airfield at 8.00 and airborne by 8.30 so that we arrived at our destinations before lunch and before the heat built up. This day we were to fly to Parkes, about two and a half hours flying time, to land at Neil Unger's strip. We parked the 172's in his vast grain store, took a short bus ride to the Parkes radio telescope, which is the largest in Australia. It was instrumental in picking up those immortal words from the moon when Neil Armstrong took his first step.

After lunch it was back to the Unger's farm to start an entertaining tour. Some readers might recognise the name from his column in Arable Farming magazine. He comes across in his article as a hard up Australian arable farmer with a very dry sense of humour. He was just the same when we met him, although he was waiting delivery of two new Case AFX8010 headers [combines] with 37 foot fronts [headers] and was due to start harvest the next day making use of a vast new grain store . He farms around 15,000 acres and is a leading light in Australian arable farming. He explained that they have had four years of drought and the ground reserves were gone, but this year they got a few opportune rains and he'd used a fungicide for the first time. His crops were certainly greener than his neighbours and looked promising. A normal yield is around a tonne of milling wheat, but he was hoping for over 1.5 tonne this year. He runs some enormous machinery with just himself and his son with part time help.

He joined us for dinner that night with his family and continued with his hard up tales. He's even selling his Beech Baron for a homebuilt!

A short flight next day to Haddon Rig for nights 5 & 6. Even in this short distance, the countryside started to change, looking drier with less cropping. By now there was getting to be much more banter on our chat frequency whilst flying, with comments like "roos at 86 nm to run" and "hold that heading while I get a bit closer for a photograph".

There were two dirt runways each over a kilometre long at Haddon Rig. In the hangar was a Bonanza. The station is run by George Falkiner who is the third generation of his family maintaining the world famous Merino stud. We stayed in the former Jackeroo [male trainee station worker] lodge. After lunch we set off in 4 x 4's to see some of this 100 square mile station. First we headed to the arable area where the wheat harvest was in progress. Three John Deere combines were just murdering the wheat at a rate of 450 acres per combine per day. They call them headers and they certainly were just taking the heads. They were using a chaser bin which tipped into a massive 60 tonne mother bin in the field which in turn unloaded into the three semis [artics] which ferried the wheat to an eleva-

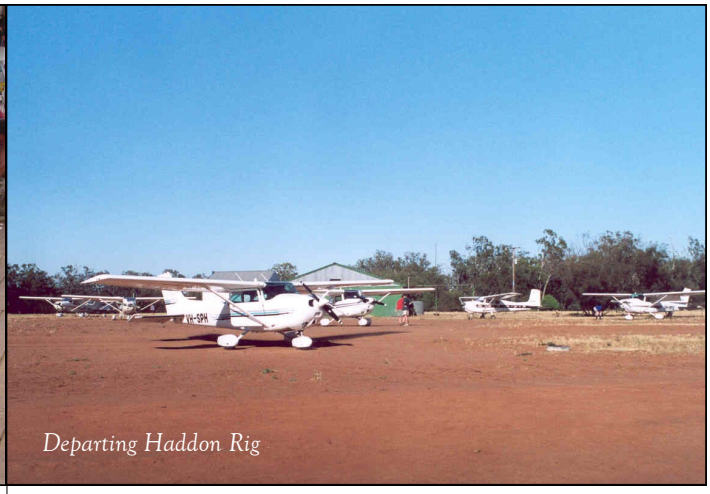


A 37 foot header at Haddon Rig



From the mother bin to a semi


A horned teddy bear


Departing Haddon Rig

tor [corn store]. We'd flown over some of these stores where they not only have large sheds but have massive outdoor A shaped heaps on the floor, sheeted down.

We then passed hundreds of acres of land destined for cotton, but because of the lack of rain the reservoirs had no water so the cotton wasn't planted. A big loss as it's a very profitable crop. To finish the day we went to the shearing shed where a gang were crutching Merino lambs. Whilst there the heavens opened and the rain just lashed down for a while, stopping the harvest for the next day.

At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month (UK time!), whilst dining at Haddon Rig, the GOANA party (all wearing poppies provided by David Corbett), together with our host George Falkiner and the two ladies who looked after us, stood for one minute's silence.

We had two nights at Haddon Rig and next day we were shown the pedigree Merinos which are kept inside during the heat of the day then let out at night. We saw the embryo transplant facilities and returned to the shearing shed where Merinos this time were being fully shorn. They certainly aren't easy to shear as they are big animals and like woolly teddy bears with horns.

Day 7 dawned and we were airborne again heading to Commeroo Station. The countryside was now changing to pure outback. Vast areas of wooded land and less and less homesteads. On landing at the station strip, we were greeted by a very unusual site — a camel drawn cart to take us to the homestead!

This station is around 100,000 acres of red soil with around 600 head of cattle and 23 camels. Our host, Bruce Sharpe is also a collector of traps, ranging from mouse to gin to man traps, all displayed in a Nissan hut style building. He had amassed them by use of the internet and e-bay! His wife, Chris cooked us a barbie [barbeque] while we looked at his collection and all the vintage tractors in need of restoration outside. After a tour of the station some went to the spa — a tub in the middle of nowhere using hot artesian water. Bruce also showed us his 172 XP complete with terrifying klaxons fitted to the struts, which he uses for mustering the cattle.

The accommodation was converted caravans and wooden buildings. Our younger Scotsman did comment that he wasn't too happy about the number of "wee beasties" in his accommodation! At dinner, cooked in a camp oven below ground, Bruce entertained us with poems and amusing stories.

The next leg was the longest — about 4 hours to Birdsville, refuelling at Thargomindah. Although it looked on the map to be a potentially tedious journey, it turned out to be fascinating watching the country change as we approached the Simpson desert. We flew all that time and saw no more than two homesteads, yet there were always fence lines and roads stretching in straight lines as far as the eye could see. It was interesting to fly at different levels — low down spotting Emu's, Kangeroos, Brumbies [wild horses], wild pigs, wild camels and when there was a waterhole there were Pelicans, Black Swans and large Cockatoos. Then you could climb up to 6 or 7 thousand feet and see this vast country stretching a hundred miles in each direction without a sign of habitation.

As we approached Birdsville (population 100) we started seeing the sand dunes of the Simpson desert. We flew over the world renowned Birdsville racecourse which has one race a year and transforms Birdsville. We were supposed to visit the working museum of old farm equipment, but the museum keeper had left to chase after his errant wife. Another attraction is the outback art gallery but it was closed as not only was it Sunday,


Airport transfer, Comeroo



The group at Windorah



Final for Birdsville



The Birdsville Pub, our hotel

but the owner who we met, had packed up all the art and was leaving for an exhibition. We thought we'd go to the filling station to buy an ice cream — guess what, it was closed. However, it was fascinating to visit this quintessential outback ghost town and it was soon time for dinner in the Birdsville pub. They certainly know about large portions and the steak was delicious. The pub owner gave us a rundown on her life in Birdsville, talking of a 7 hour drive to get provisions as being a trip to the village shop!

Next flight was a couple of hours to Windorah, now heading east. Again the flight was fascinating and when we landed the pub landlord was there to meet us at the airfield and ferried us to his accommodation. The temperature was in the mid thirties which was relatively cool. They are normally in the high 40's and have been as high as 61 deg C.!

It was while we were stood having a beer that this tramp like figure was circulating amongst us with his large floppy hat and extremely gruff voice. He turned out to be the world renowned Sandy Kidd. He has a million acres of cattle country with another station further north in the Gulf. He was awarded the OBE for rescuing a stockman with a burst appendix from a sand dune during the floods with his 172. Nobody knows how old he is because he just lies about his age, but he is reputed to have done more than 20,000 hours mostly in the outback and mustering cattle with the 172. He is constantly battling against bureaucracy and he had to leave us to attend a meeting, flying off in his aeroplane.

At his homestead, there was nothing to indicate the scale of his operation. The house and buildings belied the scale of the station, but there was a brace of Robinson R22's parked in the yard which his son uses for mustering.

The amazing thing about this part of Australia, the Channel Country, is that its very flat with sand dunes stuck up. All the water that falls over the west side of the Great Divide runs towards the centre of the country to Lake Eyre. About 10 days after the heavy rains, the creeks flood and expand up to 80 kilometres wide despite them not getting any rainfall themselves. This is prime cattle country and the livestock moves onto the sand dunes during the floods.

Tony Fisher commented regarding this tour, "its a great way to meet the descendants of the early agricultural pioneers" The last three stations we had been on were only third or fourth generation descendants from the original pioneers.

Now heading north east, our next destination was Longreach which is best known for its connection with the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service (QANTAS). Our first visit was to the Stockman's Hall of Fame. This is a very modern museum all about the pioneers and the stockmen. It's extremely well done and most appropriate to visit as we had spent the last few days in this huge area which is nothing but cattle and sheep country.

As a special treat, because our Avington Station visit was cancelled, Mal had laid on a very special dinner. QANTAS have their founders museum here, built around the original hangar in which AVRO aircraft were built under licence. The main part of the museum is another modern building with some of the original types on display. After the museum had closed, we were given free rein to tour the artefacts and displays, culminating in a superb dinner, served in front of an Avro 504K.

Our next destination was Emerald (named after the green hills), another 3 hours east. This entailed crossing the Great Divide where there was a bit of weather, in fact quite heavy rain in places. I think the Flying Farmers were a lot more used to these conditions than the tour director so it didn't prove too much of a problem. Our visit here was to go down a sapphire mine and do a bit of fossicking. This was a bit of fun and our guide down the mine was a little treasure herself. She was a real character who certainly kept the Flying Farmers in their place. A few of us bought a bucket of 'wash' afterwards and we were shown by the little treasure, in a very detailed manor, just how



Can't remember where



Emus from 501 feet with a good zoom lens!



Routing round Rainbow Beach



The Westons, GOANA 5

to find the sapphires in amongst the ancient riverbed sand and gravel. A few were found and after inspection by the expert, some would be worth cutting.

The 11th day of the tour took us through some very contrasting country, heading south for a couple of hours to Mitchell. We flew back through the mountains picking valleys to fly down which reminded me very much of Spain.

Mitchell (population 1100) is the largest town in this wheat and cattle country. We were met at the airport by the enthusiastic motel landlord who had organised a couple of visits for us. Being a farmer once himself, he had gone into hostelry to try and raise some more funds to get back into farming.

We went to a family pig farm, a little unusual this far west, but in a useful place as he supplied the local area with pig meat. The farmer was an ex pat who had emigrated from London and settled in this part of Oz. He had about a 100 sows with progeny taken to pork on an accredited basis. It was really good to get onto a genuine family farm and see the level of management that he was achieving.

In the afternoon the group split up a bit, some wanting to relax in the spa whilst others were taken on a visit to a very different station belonging to the landlord's cousin. I'm not sure that Gavin even knew we were coming, but greeted us very warmly and after opening the cold slab [tray of beer cans] that the landlord had brought along, we set off, stood in the back of a couple of utes [pickups or utility vehicles] to tour the station. It was a brilliant afternoon out, taking in the countryside, the kangaroos, emus, bush turkeys, cattle and even tried to find some koalas as they had been seen, but to no avail that day.

As we flew east again to Bundaberg, the end was coming in sight. The scenery changed very dramatically as we neared the coast and we started to see civilisation again. But then it was questioned which side of the Dividing Range that civilisation really was. We had met some lovely people in the outback who really appreciate life, where as we neared the mass population again we wondered if this was where we'd really rather be.

Bundaberg (population 40,000) is in the sugar cane growing area. Our first visit was to the cane crusher and distillery to see how the Bundaberg rum is made with a few tasters afterwards. Our bus driver then took us to his family farm of 220 acre where we heard from him and his brother how the sugar cane farming is going downhill very quickly. We tried to reassure them that as long as the distillery is there, then surely they'll be needed, but they were despondent and it seemed they would take offers for their farm or they lived in hope of the town expanding to cover their land. Sounds a bit like home!

The final day had come all too quickly, although we had lived out of small suitcases for a couple of weeks with only one stay of more than one night. We headed towards Redcliffe down the coast, spotting dolphins, turtles and sea cows and vast areas of jellyfish. This was only a shortish flight and we arrived all too quickly back at base to be greeted by Cocky the cockatoo, waddling out of the hangar shouting "hello, hello".

We had flown between 27 and 30 hours, depending on how people log their hours and how much weaving about they did en route. We had been lucky with the weather, the thunderstorms arriving in the afternoons and the temperature in the outback being about 10 deg. C lower than their normal 40 +.

Unfortunately one bit of very bad news was that the future of GOANA is in the balance. The weakness of the US$ being part of the problem. We hope that they will continue so that the list of people I have got who would like to go next year aren't disappointed. We will be kept informed, but the Goana operation will certainly be cut back to basics in order that they can carry on.

Paul Stephens



The last leg, at 501 feet of course



Back at Redcliffe

Owning an Air Park Property – Fly direct to your holiday home

If someone had told me 3 years ago that I would buy land in France and build a property I wouldn't have believed them but that is what I have done. I speak very little French having scraped through 'O' level French some 30 years ago. Horror stories of English people buying dilapidated French properties and spending a fortune getting them renovated came to mind. However one day I saw an advertisement in the back of Pilot magazine for a property at Vendee Air Park. The vendor was English and he was selling due to ill health. I got the details but soon realised that unless we sold up in the UK we were never going to make this dream a reality. Neither myself nor my wife were prepared to emigrate. However we were interested enough to spend a few days in the Vendee finding out a little more about the area and the aviation connection. The Vendee Air Park is one of about half a dozen airparks in France. The idea has been suggested several times in the UK but the combination of a shortage of land and restrictive planning laws means that it has never progressed any further. The Vendee Air Park was the idea of local developer Pierrick Anonier. His vision and drive, combined with knowledge of the French legal system, turned his dream into reality. It was started in 1995 and now there are 50 plots with 46 properties built. Having completed the project he turned his attention to another site 25 miles away. An ailing aero club was in need of investment and there was also land available in the grounds of a nearby chateau. Pierrick bought up the land and eventually the chateau as well. The land was divided into 28 plots varying between 0.75 and 1.5 acres with the chateau as the centrepiece. This became known as the Atlantic Air Park. Needless to say the plots sold very quickly. By the time I was interested they had all been sold. When I met up with Pierrick at the North Weald Aerofair in May 2002 I found out that two of the plots had become available for resale. It didn't take us very long to take the plunge and two years later our holiday home is nearing completion.

Why France and why the Vendee area in particular?

Many people look further south for improved weather conditions. The La Rochelle area has an average temperature about 4 degC higher than the south of England but more importantly has as much sunshine each year as the south coast of France. It even exceeds the figures for Biarritz. In mid summer it is bearable whereas the Mediterranean can become rather hot especially for light aviation. In winter the nearby Atlantic Ocean keeps the temperatures from dropping too low. If like me your light aviation is limited to VFR, access to the airpark during the winter months by air becomes more difficult. Also there are times when carrying bulky and heavy loads means that the occasional road and ferry journey becomes essential. The Atlantic Air Park



is 5 hours from Cherbourg and just over 4 hours from Caen. Catching the overnight ferry gets you to the airpark by lunchtime the next day (still quicker door to door than flying using airline services). In good weather we fly there from central Wiltshire in about 3 hours at an average of 110kts. Although landing at a Customs airfield is normally required sometimes Nantes Customs allow the flight continue direct to destination from the UK once contact has been established with Nantes ATC. However we usually like to break the journey with lunch at either Cherbourg or the Channel Islands.

What does it cost?

Depending on the individual plot size and situation about £70,000 secures a plot with water, telephone and electricity and use of the airfield and there is also a tennis court. Avgas is avail-








No. 3 ATLANTIC AIR PARK NEARING COMPLETION

able by arrangement with the aero club. An annual maintenance fee of about £800/year keeps the site and airfield in good condition. Building costs are similar to the UK. I budgeted about a further £70,000 for a two bedroom gite making a total capital investment of about £140,000. Later we intend to build a bigger property with hangar which will cost about £250,000 leaving the present gite for guests and rent out. From Spring 2005 my gite will be available for rent for visitors by road or air. Be advised that this is a private airfield and permission by fax has to be granted for visitors by air at least 48 hours in advance.

Building a house

There are UK based architects who specialise in managing building projects in France. This does overcome any language difficulties for the customer but requires regular visits by the architect which can be more expensive. This is partially offset by tax advantages. We decided to use a local builder who was familiar with the local contractors. Local builders speak little or no English. This was overcome by regular face to face meetings. The combination of my wife's passable French and my drawings ensured our wishes were understood. Building contracts in France are very detailed so the breakdown of costs is very easy to ascertain once the text is translated. Contracts are signed with each tradesman and their invoices are paid direct once the builder is satisfied that the work has been completed to a satisfactory standard. The attitude to building work is that of a craftsman, and with the builder overseeing the work, there seems to be few problems with quality of workmanship. Occasionally progress is achieved a little slower than one would like. Planning restrictions ensure that the properties integrate well with other local building styles and their size in proportion to the amount of land around the chateau.

How it works for me

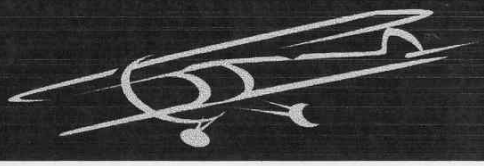
I own a Europa which helps keep my aviating costs to a minimum. Annual maintenance costs of about £300/year and a fuel consumption of about 15-18 litres/hour of either unleaded or Avgas help to make for cost effective travel. On top of that there are insurance and engine life considerations. Central Wiltshire to either Cherbourg or Guernsey takes about 1hr 10 mins and burns about 19 litres of fuel. A further 1hr 50 min and 29 litres gets me to Lucon/Chasnais (the airfield name for Atlantic Airpark). Applying the fuel duty drawback I claim 49pence/litre on unleaded for a full tank of fuel (75 litres in my case) when I depart the UK. This means that I can fly from Wiltshire to Lucon and virtually back to Guernsey again for about £23. Going back via the Channel Islands helps to keep the fuel costs down. Even with the increases on crude oil, the price of Avgas at Guernsey airport last summer was 59pence/litre. Landing fees in France are much cheaper than the UK. Many small fields do not charge and even a significant sized airport like Nantes only charges about 4 Euros. Cherbourg is relatively expensive at about 10 Euros. These are typical figures for light single engined aircraft.

Nigel Charles





TENAX
Grass Protection Mesh



Low-cost reinforcement for grassed taxi-ways and runways

TENAX Grass Protection Mesh is a heavy duty extruded polymer grid for protecting and reinforcing grassed areas. Simply rolled out and pinned down, the grass will grow through the mesh providing a stable surface which will support the weight of light aircraft.

Slingsby Aviation successfully reinforced their grass runway enabling it to be used for safe takeoff and landing all year round.

For further information and sample of Grass Protection Mesh, contact the address below or download the Slingsby Aviation Case History from our website.

Tenax UK Limited, Ash Road, Wrexham Industrial Estate, Wrexham, LL13 9JT
Tel 01978 664667, Fax 01978 664616

Email info@tenax.co.uk, Website www.tenax.co.uk

CAA Approved, Highly Visible Dayglow Orange Polyester

Windsocks by McWilliam Technology Ltd

McWilliam

McWilliam Windsocks came to the market 30 years ago and set new standards of visibility, long life and service for pilots and airfield operators.

Our Windsocks are successfully in use at many airstrips, gas & oil rigs, industrial sites, heliports, RAF, all the British Aerospace Airfields & most major UK Airports including London Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton. Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Liverpool, Norwich, East Midlands, Leeds, Humberside, Bournemouth, Isle of Man and the Highlands and Islands also use McWilliam Windsocks.
All our steel structures are galvanised after manufacture for long life. Nylon is avoided because of it's unsatisfactory Ultra Violet resistance in sunlight.

21 Satchell Lane, Hamble, Hampshire SO31 4HF
TEL 00 44 (0)23 8045 5255
FAX 00 44 (0)23 8045 5275
WEB www.windsocks.co.uk
E mcwilliam@windsocks.co.uk



THIS TRACK RECORD IS THE BEST ASSURANCE OF YOUR SATISFACTION

Please note that M.P.Bolshaw Ltd has been taken over by Hayward Aviation Ltd.

HAYWARD AVIATION LIMITED
HAL

Harling House, 47/51 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0BS
Tel 0207 902 7800 Fax 0207 928 8040

The Flying Farmers Association have negotiated special discount rates for fixed and rotor wing insurance placed with Hayward Aviation Ltd.

For more details telephone **0207 902 7800** or email

Tim Proctor TProctor@haywards.net
Darren Smith dns@haywards.net

PLEASE ENSURE YOU MENTION THAT YOU ARE AN FFA MEMBER WHEN ASKING FOR A QUOTE

New batch of baseball caps just arrived



New style FFA ties are now available at £8.00 each, including post and packing from;

David Corbett fax 01568 708177 or email David.Corbett@fwi.co.uk

FFA lined fleece jackets (£25), fleece waistcoats (£16), sweat shirts (£14), polo shirts (£12) and baseball caps (£5) all plus postage and packing, available in various sizes from;

Roz Stephens telephone 01944 738281 or email chix@farmline.com

FAR NORTH AVIATION

WICK AIRPORT,
CAITHNESS, SCOTLAND

LOWEST DELIVERED PRICES FOR ALL AEROSHELL PRODUCTS, GO TO

www.farnorthaviation.co.uk

Tel: 01955 602201
Fax: 01955 602203
Email: andrew@farnorthaviation.co.uk