

Newsletter No. 118 *March 2015*

Opening Thoughts

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The Imperial War Museum

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Chairman's Ramblings

Round the corner of another year – a bit of snow to make it feel like winter used to be (but not too much), a bit of frost to help the spring seedbeds break down, sunshine and milder temperatures outside as I write, to make it feel that spring is not far away, and the days lengthening. All these facts will help to raise our spirits and help us look forward to another year battling the elements, the markets and the bureaucrats! (Nothing really changes year on year – just the proportions)

Our first FFA event – to London – has been and gone, expertly organised and administered by our tame solicitor Tim Scorer who arranged a meeting at the Imperial War Museum – a fascinating place to browse and discover the horrors and heroics of conflicts past and present, from WW1 right through to the present day conflicts, and all in between including a most sobering floor devoted to the Holocaust. Lunch in the Museum canteen was followed by a coach journey to Lloyds of London where we were given a detailed briefing on the workings of the insurance market and an insight into where all our premium monies go and how and why.

It was great to meet up again with colleagues for the beginning of a new season for the Association. Rick Holt, our Events Secretary has yet again come up with the coordination of a wide ranging season of events – events predominantly put forward by the membership. These events are always popular and nearly always fully, or over subscribed, demonstrating the strength and commitment of the membership. After a year's absence, a study tour is again on the cards – this time to the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Finland and Sweden. I may be mistaken, but I believe that Finland is the only European country that the Association has not yet visited for one of its tours – so the completion of this year's tour will finally square the circle.

I remember early on in my membership of the Association, there was concern that if study tours were arranged which were too ambitious in their concept, there might be the risk of frightening participants off. This didn't really seem to be a big problem, but nowadays the opposite appears to be true. We have had tours to all the far flung corners of Europe and participant numbers seem to increase year on year. True it seems very much the same group of people that are the enthusiastic participants, but we do have one or two new travellers on this year's event. I also think that all those years ago, navigation was much more of a worry for the PPL than today – and that must be down to the quantum advance in GPS that gives so much information in such an accurate way (not, of course, that any of us use it for our primary means of navigation. Oh Lordy, certainly not). And for a very large percentage of us the wonderful Sky Demon navigation software is manna from heaven. Apart from general navigation, its instant warning of potential airspace encroachment as we travel along a route, its warning also of affecting Notams, and when flight planning initially, its ability to file both a flight plan and GAR on demand, just has to make it the most sensational piece of kit imaginable (and adds so much to the safety element in our flying because of it).

So let us enjoy our flying and comradeship in the season before us – and having said that Annette and I are just off to the Maldives, so look after the country for us while we are away. If you all decide to follow us, the last one out please turn the lights off.

Martin Gosling

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Editor's Notes

There are a number of members' strips that are being threatened by development - usually wind turbines planned dangerously near the owner's land and within their circuit. Thanks to the GAAC, some of these are being averted, but some developers are so obsessed with raking in the subsidies, they are prepared to put the users of these long established strips in danger.

Watch out - yours could be next! If so, please contact me as I have had personal experience and I can point you to the right people to get help. The first articles give some idea of the problems.

On a happier note, our member Chris Makin has bought RAF Church Fenton and intends to run a dynamic GA operation there. He has written a brief article telling us of the story so far. Or for something completely different, how about dead Avocado spotting in Florida? See page 8.

Paul Stephens

GASCo Report March 2015

As we look forward to a new season of flying activities just around the corner, it is maybe a pertinent time to reflect on the 2014 season. GASCo do collate and attempt to interpret accident, incident, and of course fatalities throughout the year as an integral part of their safety remit, and it is heartening to report that 2014 had a very good record. There were fewer fatalities than for several years including no gyrocopter fatalities for the third year on the trot, which must say something for the reliability of the newer machines and/or the quality of training these days.

The fatalities and serious accidents still (rather depressingly) tend to stem from two main causes, namely stall/spin and flying into cumulus granitus, both of which are so easily avoided. On the less serious incident front, loss of control features highly, and one cannot help but wonder if the lighter, twitchier machines that are starting to dominate the GA scene are contributing to this.

One issue that has reared its head quite a bit of late is that of canopies opening in flight, often leading to very nearly catastrophic incidents. It is worth noting that whereas an open PA28 door for instance will flap in the breeze somewhat and make for an interesting story, many LSA/microlight canopies if open will rip themselves off possibly damaging the tail feathers on the way and rendering the pilot at best open to a 100mph blast! All down to checks but easily missed (I've seen it at my home field twice in the last 12 months, both times at take off, successfully aborted).

The other issue GASCo are concerned about at this time of year is jumpstarting flat aircraft, which quite regularly results in damaged planes and hangers, if not worse

On a lighter note, you may or may not be aware that the Met Office have completely overhauled their aviation services including new iPhone/Android apps for their Get Met service. Entry level is free and well worth adding to your phone.

Without wanting to be seen to endorse a product too overtly, it is also of interest that SkyDemon is now linked to the Met Office for weather and to NATS for NOTAMS, RAT(S), etc, which gives the comfort of knowing any flight plan so generated is "legit" and does not need backing up from other, more official, sources. The ease of use of this software has got to make safe flight planning more convenient, which can only be a good thing.

My next meeting is at the end of March at Lasham, when Tony Rapson and Grant Shapps are meant to be attending, so it may prove to be an interesting meeting. If any members have any issues where they feel "the system" is getting in the way of safety (apart from wind turbines, I'm already on that case!), please let me know and I will attempt to raise it at the meeting (thorpefields@aol.com)

Mark Badminton

Letter from Jo Partridge to the CAA

This is a copy of a letter regarding St Merryn Airfield which many of you will remember, belonged to the late Bob Partridge. His son Jo, as an executor of his father's estate, is left with a battle to keep the airfield open, whilst being threatened with unscrupulous developers and authorities that don't seem to recognise basic principles.

PA11/08378 Treleigh Wind Turbine, St Ervan, Cornwall.

Further to a conversation with Stephen Slater of the General Aviation Awareness Council, I am writing to you to highlight the problem of wind turbine developers gaining planning consent in the vicinity of our unlicensed airfield by simply ignoring CAA aviation safety advice.

Wind turbine developers in our area are obtaining planning consent without consulting aviation stakeholders, as advised by the CAA, and without conducting any sort of aviation risk assessment pertaining to St Merryn Airfield. Local Planning Authorities are ignoring CAA aviation safety guidance and the mantra repeated by both Developers and LPA's is that "there is no statutory requirement" to follow CAA guidance in relation to unlicensed aerodromes.

The unfortunate effect is that aviation stakeholders are led to believe, through various CAP documents and generic warnings submitted by the CAA, MOD, NERL and others, attached to planning Applications, that Developers should contact aviation stakeholders, regardless of status, prior to making an Application. Similarly, CAP documents, reflected in Planning Policy Statement 22, indicate that LPA's should ensure that appropriate consultation has taken place before granting planning consent.

Our case is a clear example of a system that simply does not work.

St Merryn Airfield is located on the North Cornwall coast near Padstow. This historically significant aerodrome was established in the late 1920's by the widow of William Rhodes Moorhouse V.C., the first pilot to ever be (posthumously) awarded the Victoria Cross in the early days of WW1. The aerodrome was commandeered by the Royal Navy in 1937 and became the first ever Royal Naval Air Station, operational by 1943 and known as HMS Vulture. The MOD disposed of the facility in the 1960's and my late father, Bob Partridge, acquired the bulk of the facility in 1967 as part of his agricultural holding. Bob was a mechanic in the RAF in India during WW11 and learned to fly soon after acquiring the airfield. Bob operated the airfield and was flying right up until he was suddenly taken ill in 2011. Several vintage aircraft were restored at St Merryn during Bob's tenure, including the celebrated Grace 2-seater Spitfire. The airfield was approved as a gyrocopter training facility in the 1970's and for 25 years St Merryn Airfield was a home to a successful parachute club until 10 years ago. Flying has been continuous since Bob acquired the facility and a number of light aircraft, gyrocopters, microlights & motor gliders are resident at the airfield. Flying operations and future development plans are severely hampered by the uncertainty surrounding Treleigh turbine and it's effects, if constructed.

In July 2011, Windberry Energy Ltd (Windberry) applied to the LPA for consent to erect an anemometer mast at Treleigh Farm. The usual CAA warnings relating to consulting aviation stakeholders were attached to the Application and published on Cornwall Council's web portal. In particular the CAA stated on 10 August 2011 "I note the relatively close proximity of a number of aerodromes/airports and would anticipate the need for Council/Aerodrome consultation". In fact there is one airport close by, Cornwall Newquay Airport (owned by Cornwall Council and with whom St Merryn Airfield has a long-standing written agreement) and two airfields; St Eval, which is disused and covered with radio communication masts, and St Merryn Airfield, whose perimeter is approx. 750m from the proposed site.

Neither of the two owners of St Merryn Airfield were notified or consulted and planning consent for the anemometer mast was granted.

Windberry's second Application for a screening opinion in 2011 was accompanied by similar warnings, all ignored.

On 10 October 2011, Windberry submitted a third Application, for a 54m wind turbine at Treleigh Farm. Windberry ap-

pointed Savills of Wimbourne to conduct an Aviation and Communications Assessment and Savills maintain they employed an "aviation expert" to produce an aviation report. The report submitted and attached to the planning Application made no mention whatsoever of St Merryn Airfield, lying within clear sight of the proposed turbine site. Throughout subsequent correspondence, Savills maintained that their aviation expert had produced a report on St Merryn Airfield. Savills repeatedly refused to disclose the alleged report, citing "commercial sensitivity" and refused to explain why the St Merryn Airfield report was concealed from Windberry's submissions to the LPA. The CAA were not consulted in respect of this Application.

Bob Partridge was taken seriously ill during the planning process and died in February 2012, with no knowledge of the proposed turbine.

Cornwall Council, despite a significant number of objections from the public and the three local Parish Councils, granted planning consent for the 177 ft turbine in May 2012.

The Executors of the Estate of the late WR (Bob) Partridge first learned of the planning consent in August 2012 and immediately sought legal advice and advice from the CAA on 24 August 2012. An opinion was sought from a Barrister specializing in aviation issues. His advice stated that we were too late to apply for a Judicial Review, which is time-barred after 3 months following planning consent, and advised the JR Application would fail. The Executors nevertheless served Cornwall Council with the appropriate papers and predictably, Cornwall Council stated that they would oppose the JR Application on the grounds that the Application did not comply with the statutory time limitations. The Executors withdrew and had no other legal remedy available to them.

The Executors' solicitor wrote to Windberry complaining that CAA aviation safety guidance had been ignored and that the Windberry Aviation and Communications Assessment had failed to mention St Merryn Airfield, despite OS maps showing St Merryn Airfield as "Private" and despite specific warnings from the CAA pointing out that there was an airfield nearby, together with similar warnings from local Parish Councils. We pointed out that the wind turbine could be safely located elsewhere on the landowner's 200 acre holding. The landowner would have known that St Merryn Airfield was active.

Windberry's response – there is no statutory requirement to follow CAA guidance.

A series of legal letters were exchanged until Windberry instructed their solicitors to cease engaging with the Executors. Correspondence with Cornwall Council produced a similar impasse. The Executors informed Windberry that they would continue to oppose the construction of the turbine and that, in the event of an aviation incident involving Treleigh turbine, Windberry would be entirely culpable.

Windberry Energy Ltd did not erect the turbine in 2012.

In 2014, the Executors learned that Windberry had sold the planning consent for Treleigh turbine to a new developer, AG Renewables Ltd. We do not know if AG Renewables Ltd were made aware of our legal correspondence with Windberry and AG Renewables refuse to disclose details of their acquisition.

Michelmores, solicitors acting for the Executors, wrote to AG Renewables in August 2014 complaining that no risk assessment concerning the airfield adjacent to the wind turbine development had been conducted and that the proposed turbine contravened CAA guidance in relation to the distance from the airfield, the proximity to the take-off/landing funnels and the size of the turbine. Michelmores suggested that a smaller turbine would be less hazardous. Windberry stated that there was no statutory requirement to comply with CAA guidance and that their planning consent was "immune from challenge".

It should be noted that the Executors of the late WR Partridge's Estate are not aviation experts but are charged with the legal duties of protecting the Estate, including St Merryn Airfield. The Estate is currently held in a lifetime Trust for Bob's widow, my 93 year-old mother, Betty Partridge. After her death, the Estate will be distributed to the various beneficiaries named in Bob's Will, none of who wish to see flying operations curtailed. In the last 30 months the Executors have had to process 22 single wind turbine developments in the near vicinity of St Merryn Airfield. In each case CAA guidance was entirely ignored. Following our objection to a neighbour's proposal to site a wind turbine on the Airfield, the LPA sought written advice from the CAA and in 2013 Cornwall Council refused the Application solely on the grounds of aviation safety. A second proposal in 2014 was mitigated following our objections by the developer agreeing to install a smaller turbine. The remaining Applications, which we have not objected to, have been granted and, apart from the cumulative effect, which is rapidly reaching saturation, the remaining consented Applications do not contravene CAA guidance.

After a series of legal correspondence, AG Renewables agreed to attend an on-the-record meeting with two of the Executors in Cornwall on January 5th 2015. At that meeting, we showed a Powerpoint presentation outlining the clear hazards the Treleigh turbine presents to pilots flying to or from St Merryn Airfield. At the meeting AG Renewables revealed the contents of the aviation report on St Merryn Airfield conducted by Savills in 2011 that we had requested sight of in 2012 but were refused access to due to "commercial sensitivity". AG Renewables Ltd revealed that Savills aviation expert had (falsely) determined that St Merryn Airfield was "disused". Clearly, had St Merryn Airfield been described as "disused" in the published Assessment, there would have been a good chance that the planning office or one of the many local objectors would have been able to inform our family of the error, alerted us to the existence of the planning Application and afforded my father the opportunity to object to the Application before his sudden illness and subsequent death. AG Renewables Ltd re-stated that their planning consent was "immune from challenge" and "there was no statutory requirement" to consult St Merryn Airfield during the planning process.

AG Renewables confirmed by legal correspondence this week that, despite our safety warnings and a request that AG Renewables delay construction until they conduct their own aviation safety report, the turbine will be erected at the end of this month.

In November 2014, Betty Partridge wrote to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State regarding this matter, stating that in an era when a risk assessment is required for the professional use of a step-ladder, how can it be possible that a large rotating hazard can be placed within the flying circuit of an active aerodrome without any risk assessment conducted? 10 Downing Street's reply assured Betty that the matter had been placed with the Secretary of State and that a detailed reply would be forthcoming. No such reply has yet been received but we have been in contact with the Secretary of State's office and been informed that a reply is imminent. Further, we have contacted our local MP Dan Rogerson and the Rt Hon Grant Shapps, MP, to highlight the situation and in an attempt to gain a Discontinuance Order to halt the construction of Treleigh turbine, pending further investigations.

We hope that the CAA appreciate that anyone reading CAP 764, 428 or 168 are lead to believe that the above situation cannot happen. Indeed my late father was firmly of the opinion that no wind turbines could be erected in the vicinity of the Airfield without prior notice and consultation with both the developers

and the LPA, as promulgated by the CAA.

Unfortunately the CAA publications appear to be misleading. The Executors have expended considerable funds in believing that the advice with regard to developers, LPA's and unlicenced aerodromes was reliable and efficacious but have found the opposite to be true. In our opinion, the CAA should issue a clear caveat stating that "there is no statutory requirement" for developers and LPA's to follow any of the advice published in this regard. Without a realistic penalty for ignoring CAA safety advice, the safety warnings appear to be toothless.

The CAA and others warn wind turbine developers to pay attention to Articles 137 and 138 of the Air Navigation Order, where it is an offence to "recklessly or negligently act in a manner likely to endanger an aircraft". We hope that the CAA would concur that Windberry Energy Ltd acted negligently in not consulting St Merryn Airfield during the planning process, acted negligently in falsely establishing that St Merryn Airfield was "disused", acted negligently in concealing the report from the planning process and, despite clear and unequivocal warnings, mislead the planning Authorities by omitting St Merryn Airfield from their submissions.

Secondly, we hope that the CAA would concur that AG Renewables Ltd, having been furnished with a presentation that clearly identifies non-compliance with CAA aviation safety guidance, are behaving in a willfully reckless manner in erecting Treleigh turbine in full knowledge of the dangers we have alerted them to.

In short, unless the CAA use the power of the Air Navigation Order in this respect, it appears that wind turbine developers will continue to be free to erect rotating hazards in the path of low flying aircraft without fear of penalty. This situation is an aviation accident waiting to happen.

We therefore request that the CAA contact AG Renewables Ltd, Burlington Building, Fourth Floor, 19 Heddon Street, London W1B 4BG as a matter of extreme urgency and inform them that they will be contravening the Air Navigation Order if the turbine is erected at the end of this month.

Yours sincerely
RJC Partridge
(For the Executors of the Estate of WR Partridge, deceased)
by email.

Richard Lawrence's Turbine Threat

If you are on the FFA email news list (if you're not, please let Paul Stephens know), you will have received an email asking for your support to stop the turbines that threatened the use of Richard Lawrence's airfield. These have now been withdrawn - for the time being. This ties in with the article about similar problems at the other end of the country in Cornwall.

Below is a letter of thanks from Richard to those that supported him.

The application to build two turbines in the field at the end of my runway has now been withdrawn. Please pass my grateful thanks on to all members who were good enough to write to the planners to point out how dangerous the turbines would be to aircraft using the airfield. Without such help I am sure the developer would have pressed on.

I am told that the developer is going to try again with an application for a single turbine but a bit bigger than the last pair. I do not see how they could fit one in without causing turbulence on the runway or the approach/ departure line but the developer or the owner of the land have never contacted me !!!

I expect to have to fight them again at some time in the future.

Richard Lawrence

Dick Walgate's annual FFA shooting party taken in November 2014. Left to right - Chris Kitchen, Zoe Burtwistle, Gordon Bellerby, Paul Burtwistle, Martin Gosling, Robert Laming, Tony Fisher, Dick Walgate and Warwick Banks. Photo sent in by Tony Fisher.



Programme 2015

Programme 2015

4th February	Imperial War Museum and Lloyds, London
14th April	JCB, Uttoxeter (Fully subscribed)
13th May	Gilbert Greenall's Estate, Exmoor (Fully subscribed)
22nd - 31st May	FFA European Tour to Finland (Fully subscribed)
9th June	Wilkin & Sons, Essex
8th July	New Forest & Esso Refinery, Southampton
3rd September	Eggers & Beamish Museum (Provisional)



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.

Wilkin & Sons Ltd (Tiptree Jam), 9th June 2015

This event is organised by William and Jane Procter.



Fly in to William's strip at Stows Farm, Tillingham, Essex.

Visit to Wilkin & Sons Ltd, the makers of the world famous range of Tiptree jams. You might be surprised at the scale of this operation! The visit will include a tour of the factory and a visit to the farms.

Numbers limited to 30. Cost per person - £25 to include transport and lunch. More details will be sent to those enrolling.

New Forest & Esso Refinery, Fawley - Wednesday 8th July 2015

The morning visit is organised by Roger Bell

09:00–10:00	Arrive Newtown Park Airstrip
10:00	Talk by National Park Authority on New Forest
10:45	Farm walk with manager of Newtown Park
11:30	Visit Tank Park in Newtown Park Farm Buildings
12:00	Bus to East End Arms for a New Forest Plough man's lunch (drinks extra)
13:00	Coach to Esso Oil Refinery, Fawley, Southampton

The afternoon visit is organised by Neville Stops

Fawley Refinery and Petrochemical Plant is the largest in the UK. Opened in 1951, it produces almost one fifth of the fuel used on the country's roads.

16:00	Coach to Newtown Park airfield
16:30	Depart

Cost of the day is £30 pp. £10 landing fee payable on the day.

Numbers restricted to 40.

Please bring photo ID for access to refinery

Please send completed reply slip found in the March newsletter with aircraft details and a cheque made payable to JR Bell Collection Account.

Proposed Trip to Eggers, Hexham, 2nd & 3rd September 2015

I (Mike Ashmole) have had an invitation from Eggers, largest timber processor's in the North of England, for a FFA visit. I would suggest that to make the trip more palatable to our southern members, it should be an overnight trip with a visit to the Beamish Museum next morning.

I have approached the gliding club just to the west of Newcastle and they are happy to let us use their strip.

Please return the reply slip to Mike Ashmole to show your interest.

London Meeting - February 4th 2015

Tim Scorer, the FFA tame solicitor, volunteered to organise our annual London meeting. Tim's plan was to meet at the Imperial War Museum and then have a conducted tour of the Lloyds (Insurance) building in the City. The meeting was restricted by the Lloyds guides to a party of 36.



At 10 am, the majority met at the Imperial War Museum for a free couple of hours to take in the exhibits on show, including the very well presented First World War exhibition.

Some of the party were delayed by a fatality on the rail near Reading, but an £80 taxi fare made sure that 2 determined members were not going to miss out.

Lunch was in the museum café, after which we had a mini scenic coach ride going over Tower Bridge to arrive at the impressive and futuristic Lloyds Building. For those that followed Star Trek, it reminded me of the Borg Collective that floats about in space.

We were split into 3 groups of 12 to have conducted tours of the building. Our guide, Peter Fletcher - a retired broker, took great pride in relating the story of Lloyds and how it has become the world renowned organisation that it is now.

Founded by Edward Lloyd in his coffee shop in Tower Street in 1688, mariners would moor their boats on the banks of the Thames and come to his 'coffee' shop to drink a little more than just coffee and talk about shipping news. Lloyd's quickly obtained a monopoly on maritime insurance, related to the slave trade and shipping, based in this coffee shop. They eventually moved to new premises in Lombard Street and then to the Royal Exchange on Cornhill as The Society of Lloyd's.

After several more moves, Lloyds has now been established at 1 Lime Street since 1986. Lloyd's is not an insurance company; it is an insurance market of members. The building is rented out at a rate per square foot to the insurers who set up their 'boxes' (a term derived from the original coffee shop) and brokers come to talk to these underwriters and traditionally sit on 'stools'. There must have been over 100 insurers on the one floor, some with different boxes for their different departments.

Peter demonstrated where the term 'underwriter' came from with the aid of an insurance card from the Titanic. The insurance risk was split between many different insurers who elected to take varying amounts of stake in the risk. The underwriters are the insurers who are listed in order of risk, under the name of the main insurer. Hence underwriter.

At this time we were stood round the Lutine Bell which came from HMS Lutine. She sank off the Dutch coast in 1799 with over a million pounds worth of gold and silver (that was the value in 1799!) which the Lloyds insurers paid out for within 2 weeks. Despite many attempts to salvage the cargo, only the bell was recovered and part of the bullion. The Bell used to be rung by the 'waiters' (a term going back to the coffee shop days) when a ship was lost. Nowadays, it is only rung on ceremonial occasions.

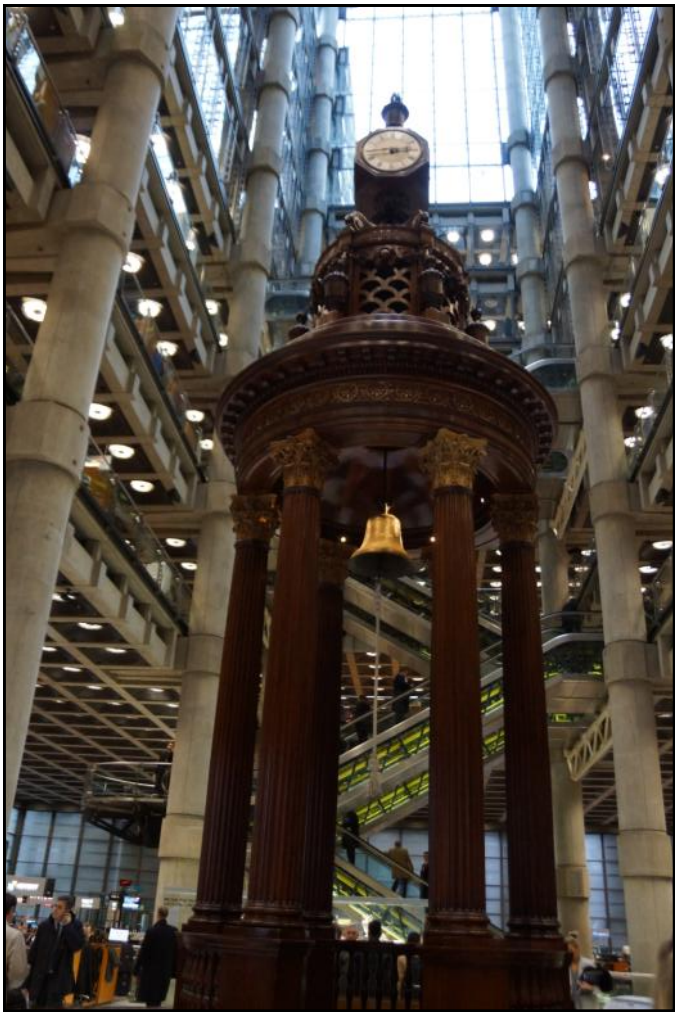
We were then taken upstairs to see the old boardroom which had been moved from older premises and some fascinating paintings depicting special occasions at Lloyds.

In the meantime, the other FFA groups were having an insurance talk in the Kennedy's building nearby, where Tim Scorer is now employed. The committee also held their biannual meeting in this building.

By the end of the day, we had all had a very interesting visit, thanks to Tim. Even he admitted at the end that he had derived a lot of satisfaction bringing the meeting together and contributing something to the FFA.

Thanks Tim, from all the participants.

Paul Stephens



Inspecting Avocado Trees in Florida

As one of the top destinations for a holiday for anyone from these shores, Florida is probably best known for Disneyworld, Kennedy Space Centre and its wonderful beaches. It is also the 6th top agricultural producing state in the USA, however, contributing to over €6 billion GDP to the US economy.

Possibly of more interest to us in FFA is the fact that almost 30% of the state's entire land area is taken up with agriculture, with over 44,000 farms in the state, covering some 10.2 million acres (4.13 million hectares). The State's most important crop, and the ones for which it is most famous, is citrus fruit, with nearly 80% of America's oranges and a similar proportion of the nation's grapefruits coming from Florida fruit orchards.

The place has a special significance for me too. Florida was my first taste of America as a teenager, back in 1980. I learned to fly there seven years ago and my partner Donna, also a pilot is from Florida, as are the children. I go back each year to get my fill of aviation and relaxation, usually renting a Cessna for a few days touring before flying to the annual 'jamboree' which is Sun 'n Fun, a massive aviation mardi-gras held in Lakeland, around Easter time. Dubbed 'Spring break for pilots', it is well worth a visit if you ever have the chance !



Eyes need to be peeled at all times, there are many obstructions to catch out the un-wary.



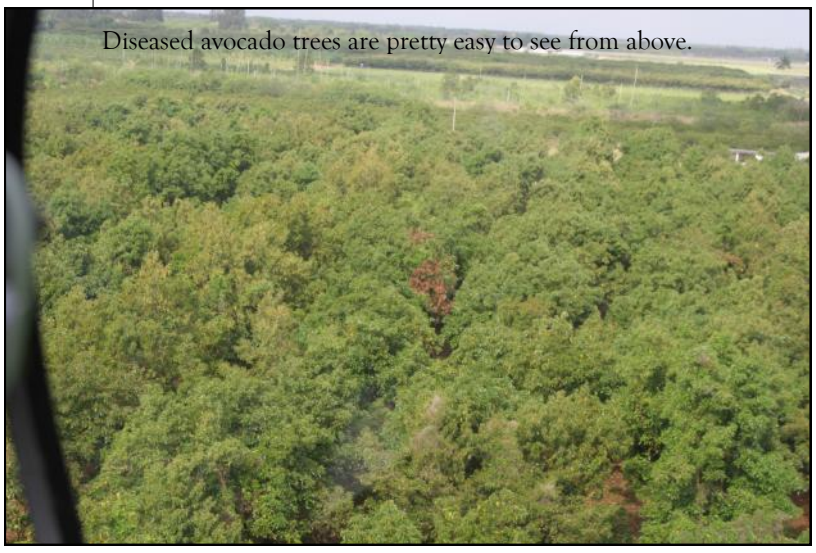
Our 'mount'; for the morning, pontoon float-equipped Robinson R44

Last year, my return home was to be a long-trip, via Canada, travelling first to Vancouver then eastwards, visiting many of our John Deere dealer clients across the country, before flying out of Toronto back to the UK. This arrangement allowed me one extra day in Miami, which was gainfully filled in the company of a long-time friend, Graham Harward, a CFI and free-lance contract helicopter pilot who, over a drink or two the evening before had invited me to join him next morning, for what he described as a fun couple of hours after breakfast.

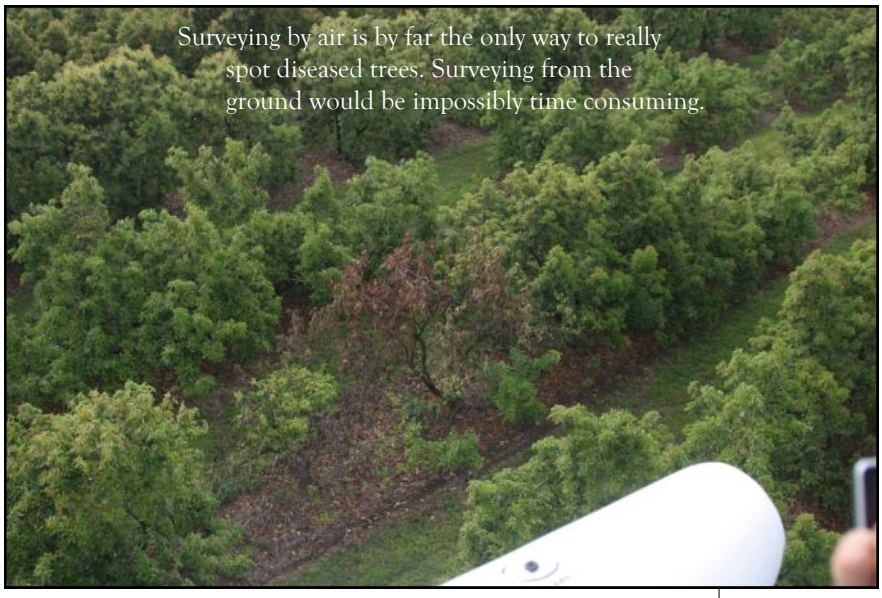
Three or four times a year, Graham is contracted to fly on behalf of the Florida Avocado Administrative Committee and Don Pybas, as the Committee's Laurel Wilt Co-ordinator, has the responsibility to inspect the many acres of avocado orchards in the Homestead region, SW of Miami and I was invited to come along and experience this first hand, sitting in back of the float-equipped Robinson R44.

Don's job is to conduct detection and suppression activities, including periodic aerial surveys via helicopter. Use of a helicopter versus a fixed wing aircraft allows survey from very low altitude, sometime within 60 to 80 feet of the trees, but most often around 150 feet, at relatively low speeds. Aerial surveys are carried out in 4 flights to cover each quadrant of the industry acreage approximately every 6 to 8 weeks, each lasting around two hours in duration. Any suspect or symptomatic trees for are recorded with GPS co-ordinates and photos for later ground examination with orchard owners/managers, to confirm the disease in the tree. To date over 50 flights have been conducted.

The South Florida avocado industry is located almost exclusively in South Miami-Dade County, about 30 miles south of Miami, Florida where, currently, approximately 7,200 acres of large green skin avocados are grown. The region's specialty is the West Indian and Guatemalan varieties or crosses, not to be confused with the smaller rough skinned, almost black Hass avocado from California, Mexico and some other Latin American countries. Sadly, this economically important region is suffering a serious infestation of Laurel Wilt (LW). This infestation is caused by the fungus Raffaelea luaricola and is transmitted to host trees by the Redbay Aambrosia



Diseased avocado trees are pretty easy to see from above.



Surveying by air is by far the only way to really spot diseased trees. Surveying from the ground would be impossibly time consuming.

Beetle (Xyloborus glabratus), or RAB for short). This exotic beetle was introduced into Georgia in 2002, via infested solid wood packing material and since then has spread, thanks to the movement of infested wood throughout the southeastern USA. The un-welcome pest has so far spread to 29 counties in Florida and is systematically eliminating other native members of this insect family.

All trees in the Laurel family are threatened by laurel wilt. In January 2010, the RAB was detected approximately 10 miles from the edge of Florida's primary commercial avocado production area in southeastern Miami-Dade County, and, by February 2011, Laurel Wilt infestation was confirmed in dying swamp-bay trees in the same area and has since been confirmed in several commercial avocado groves. Despite intensive research since 2006, no economically viable chemical control measures have been found to combat the situation.

On-going research is promising and has provided scientists with the basis for suppression of RAB and the spread of LW. Thus, detection and immediate suppression of outbreaks of LW within the avocado production area is viewed as the most appropriate method for the Laurel Wilt management strategy.

Each positive tree is mapped and an ongoing record in Google Earth format is maintained, with document records of how many trees have been removed from each orchard, which, to date total more than 3600 trees removed due to LW. Compounding the issue of limited life history of endemic ambrosia beetles (17 species exist locally, 4 of which are now carrying the LW fungus and are prevalent in avocado trees), the original Red Bay Ambrosia Beetle has not yet been found in avocado, but has heavily infested the native Bay tree population in the Everglades ecosystem and adjacent wetland areas. The fungus can be moved via the roots from an infected tree to an adjacent healthy tree. With the threat of multiple vectors, this pest/disease is challenging but progress is being made.

Some interesting research evaluating various lures, traps, fungicide infusion or infection, trenching to control beetles and/LW fungus movement continues and this extensive work has been supported by industry and government funds.

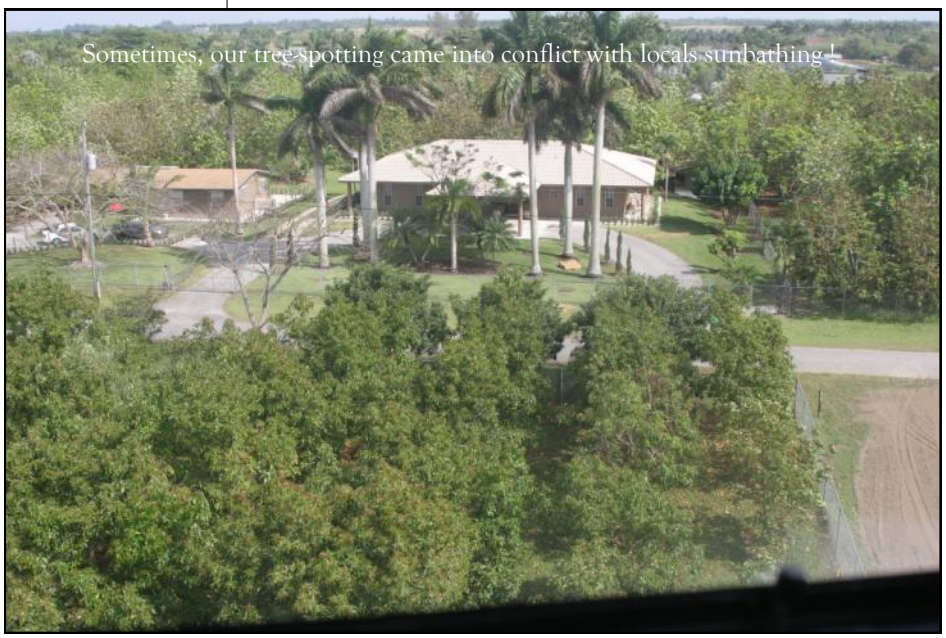
We met at Tamiami airport, a regional GA and executive airport on the outskirts of Homestead at about 10am and the forecast winds were to get stronger as the day went on, so we wasted no time. We hover-taxied to the edge of the ramp and were quickly given clearance to cross one of the runways and transit south to our first survey area. ATC knew of our activities, although at the very low level we would be operating at we would not be any conflict to their traffic patterns. I was amazed at the agility of our diminutive helicopter and caught myself grinning a lot of the time, such was the fun of the event, although as the 'tourist' in the back this would always be the case when skimming around at tree-top height....legally !

Once Don explained exactly what he was looking for, it became easier to understand the activity, I even began to recognise the look of an avocado orchard, the ragged tree tops making a distinctive contrast to the many neatly cultivated bushed and shrubs in this important market garden farming region. Within each avocado orchard, any sick or dead trees were easily seen, their usual lush-green foliage having turned a dull green and, eventually, fading to brown as the disease takes effect. Don explained that once a tree becomes infected, it effectively begins to shut itself down, to prevent the spread of the disease within, effectively committing suicide.

During the morning, a few domestic residents did look on us with slight disdain, their facial expression and body language being easy to see at our height, but mostly we were flying over commercial growing fields with the local labour force so used to our activities that they hardly gave us a second glance. The work-load for Graham was often very high, needing to understand where Don wanted to go, as well as keeping a very wary eye out for obstructions, radio masts and the many power lines and electric cables that festooned the area, it being a particularly American thing to string everything above ground, unlike here where much of our services are buried !

Survey over by 12 o'clock, we routed back to the airport with a short diversion for Graham to gain some enjoyment from the trip, with a 'touch and go' into a local reservoir, dunking the pontoon floats on the surface for a second or two, before heading back to Tamiami. So ended a most enjoyable, very interesting and informative morning, now it was time to finish the packing, get the head out of vacation mode and get back to work .....in Canada !

© Graham Robson February 2015



Sometimes, our tree-spotting came into conflict with locals sunbathing !

Chris Makin's Dreams Come True

As an introduction to the story below, some of you will remember in 2010, the superb day that we spent with Chris Makin and his family at Sutton Grange near Leeds, looking at his huge soft fruit and wharehousing operation.

We landed on his strip at the farm and over lunch, Chris told us of his intentions to buy a jet aircraft! But, where would he operate it from?

This is his story so far.

The journey towards owning my own airfield goes back to 2008 when I flew my Beechcraft Bonanza into Genève Airport to the European Business Aviation Convention Exhibition. My heart was set on one day owning my own jet and I had been looking at different aircraft for about a year.

I had tried the Eclipse in London/Oxford Airfield but felt that it was not for me.

I went to Doncaster to try the Cessna Mustang but found it slow and in my opinion it was not cost effective.

So I found myself in Genève. My intention for going there was to look at the Embraer Phenom 100 which was being launched at the EBACE.

Much to my surprise another aircraft being launched there was the Honda Jet. I had been scrutinising all the press releases and was keenly watching its progress.

This was definitely my favourite!

By the end of the day I had placed my order with a deposit of $75,000 US dollars. Another Brit by the name of Jenson Button was also very impressed with the aircraft, and he placed his order for two!!

On my return home my friends were asking "where are you going to keep it? Will it take off from your grass strip?" My local aero club runway was too short. I needed 1000 meters of tarmac!!

The guaranteed date for delivery was 2013.

The summer of 2013 came and went. The Honda Jet had been delayed. This was due to an engine modification. An engine complication had arisen when testing it at a medium speed by throwing a frozen bird into the engine. This was to delay the engine certification by 9 months. Honda fixed the price at 2013 value. The new forecasted delivery date was 2015.

Autumn 2013 brought rumours that RAF Church Fenton was coming onto the market. My agent contacted the M.O.D and I first went to look at the site in early December 2013. It had been ticking over for the past 6 Months and its final days of flying finished Christmas 2013.

Church Fenton eventually came onto the market in August 2014. The agents were Lambert Smith Hampton of Leeds. 200,000 sq. feet of hangers, offices, buildings and accommodation, 120 acres of tarmac runway and taxi ways, plus 275 acres of grassland.

There was very little information offered on the site, so it was up to me to do my homework. The tenders had to be submitted in weeks, and they were only allowing three days viewing. There was no guide price!!!

The site was huge!!! It was daunting. But I felt it was full of opportunity. We set to work inspecting the buildings and sampled the soil. I got a team of experts together, planning consultants, as the site was brownfield. We had a highways survey and met the local District Council which was Selby. We wanted to get their views and thoughts on what would be a suitable use for the site in their opinion. (They kept their cards very close to their chest)



Chris at his Revival Fly-in where 250 aircraft dropped in!



We employed a Barrister to sift through the finer details and a rate specialist as the rateable value was $350,000 per annum. Which was certainly a major issue!!!

Having gathered all information together and looking at all the positives and the negatives, I was serious - I wanted to OWN CHURCH FENTON!!!

The tender date was the 31st October. Myself, my professionals and my family made our final discussion on October 30th and our tender price was decided. All we could do was wait. Had we overpriced it - or under-priced it??

On November 7th I was informed that I had been successful. We entered into the legalities and we took over the site on the 22nd December 2015.

Having had a bad fall off a horse just before Christmas, and being out of action, I decided on the 29th December that we would hold a Church Fenton Revival fly in on the 3rd of January.

With the help of my daughters, Annabel and Sally and my son in law to be Alex, we put it on social media i.e. Facebook, and in the local press.

Unfortunately the weather forecast was predicting strong winds and rain for Saturday the 3rd so I made the decision to cancel it and put it back to the Sunday 4th January.

This was a worry as we were not sure how many aircraft would be coming on the Sunday. We had expected between 50 and 75 on the Saturday. We also hoped we would get a few locals through the gate.

With a cost of £10 landing fee and a complimentary. bacon and egg sandwich, tea and coffee, the aircraft started to arrive.

Air to ground radio and the marshals were kept busy. At one point my wife said "It's busier than Heathrow!"... We had Aircraft landing every 30 seconds.

It exceeded all expectations. Over 250 aircraft landed. 700 people came through the gate. It was the most wonderful sight, the atmosphere was electric!!!

It really was an amazing day!!!

We have all sorts of plans and ideas for the future.

We look forward to hopefully welcoming you the Flying Farmers to Leeds East Airport at Church Fenton in the very near future.

The airfield opens officially on Friday 28th February 2015. Please use safety com on 135.475 until we get our own frequency.

The situation with the Honda Jet is that we should have a demonstration at Church Fenton in May this year with a new delivery date in the first quarter of 2016.

For those that would like to use the airfield, please see the details below:-

Following on from our fly in at the beginning of the year, we are pleased to advise that the airfield is now open for use from Saturday 28th February 2015.

Should you wish to visit the airfield please contact us on the numbers below as prior permission will be required to book in.

There are VRP's to follow on approach and departure.

Please note that landing fees are: £15 single, £25 twin (cash only).

Many thanks for your support and we look forward to welcoming you Leeds East Airport.

Best regards

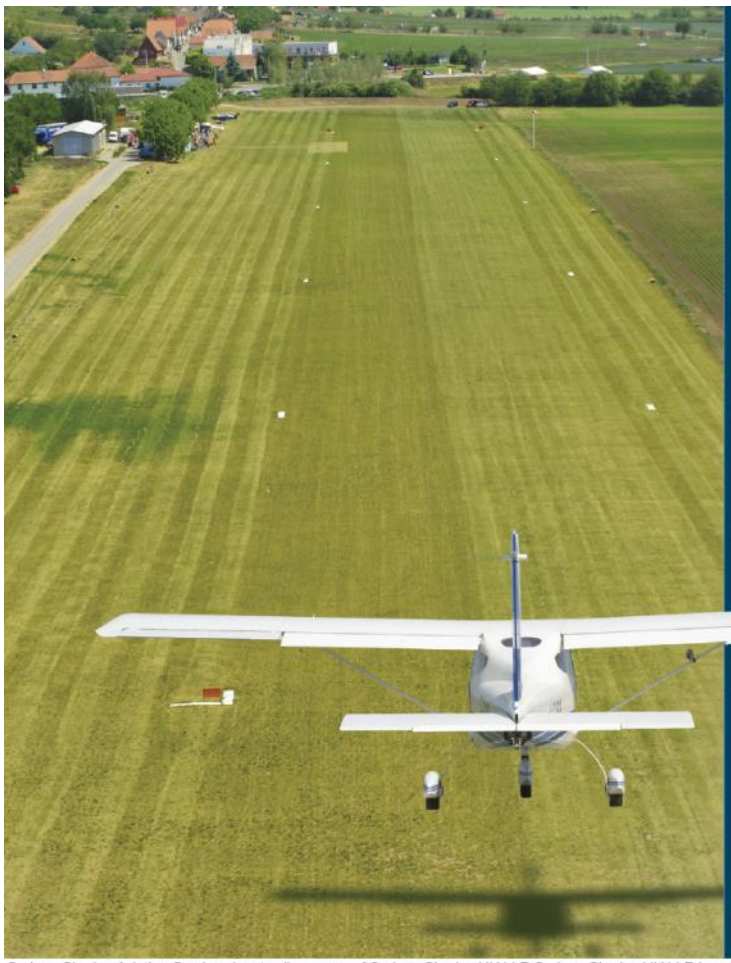
Michelle Godley

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A very good video of most of the landing aircraft at the Church Fenton Revival Meeting can be seen on YouTube at

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lc78R4kZzeI or put in the search - Church Fenton revival video



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