FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION

August 2023 newsletter no. 143



CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

Harvest has come round again, as it always does in this country in one form or another. In a way it is sad that all the countryside that cereal growers have strived to keep green for as long as possible, all too quickly turns those mottled colours showing up varying soil types and droughting areas, and then turns to that magnificent golden colour which gets farmers motivated to charge up the combine battery.

For me, the best month of the year is May when everything is flourishing, the weather is (usually) improving and the days get longer. But come June, all those nasties start showing above the crop level. Once upon a time it was docks and thistles, then wild oats before more serious weeds transpired like brome, blackgrass and ryegrass which are becoming resistant to the few herbicides still available.

We recently visited Alf Oliver's farm near Nuneaton on a two day meeting which demonstrated huge differences in husbandry. Looking into some fields (NOT belonging to the Olivers!), the levels of blackgrass and ryegrass were disgraceful. But then in the next door fields belonging to Alf and his son Will, there is a zero tolerance of these weeds. In fact Will, who does all his own agronomy on 2000 acres of crops, says he can rogue the few plants remaining whilst he is crop walking. At one stage they were spraying out 60 acres of the dreadful weed. This turnaround has been achieved with excellent husbandry and crop planning, but not always aiming for the highest yield - rather the best margins. No wonder Will is arable farmer of the year.

As Flying Farmers, we are so privileged to see what I have just described in the first three paragraphs, from up above, giving a different perspective to what most see. The droughting areas show up clearly, and the areas of sprayed out grass weeds are very evident, plus of course the massive areas giving way to HS2 and new developments. Also as farmers, we are very nosey and can keep an eye on our neighbours to see the good and bad bits of their farming!

The FFA European Tour to France this year is reported later in this newsletter. As always, these tours are many things – challenging, interesting, enjoyable, educational and very sociable with a group of like minded people. Roger Bell organised this tour in his own unique style and we are extremely grateful to him for doing all the work behind the scenes.

Next year's 50th anniversary tour of the UK will be a huge challenge for our Events Secretary, Neville Stops. Having said that, he is treating the tour as a string of one or two day meetings, but never the less, he will be spending a lot of time bringing it together. One of the unknowns, apart from the weather, is how many participants to accommodate etc. When the particulars are released, please respond asap to make the planning easier - late comers might not get a place.

I haven't expressed my usual political thoughts – yet. I don't know whether I am getting more cynical in my 7th decade, but I feel that the press and public are getting so disrespectful to politicians and those that make a success. They make out that any top earner makes far too much money, doesn't pay enough tax and is often involved in sleazy sexual encounters – except if you are a footballer. One particular Portuguese born top ranker who we all know of, earns phenomenal sums, has been sentenced twice for evading tax, has been in court twice on rape charges and yet is treated as a God by football supporters.

Likewise, after TV presenters have slagged off some business man for tax avoidance, the daily give away of cars and cash up to £250,000.00 comes on - and it is tax free!

What's wrong for one is right for another!

Paul Stephens

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FFA Committee Meeting – Thursday 29th June 2023

The FFA Committee met on 29th June 2023 at our President's home in Essex. Those present were the President - Martin Gosling, the Chairman - Paul Stephens, the Treasurer and Membership Secretary – Andrew Cragg, the Events Secretary and Assistant – Neville Stops and Gordon Bellerby and the Newsletter Editor – Giles Abrey.

The weather on the day wasn't conducive to flying, so apart from Gordon who flew in the night before, the others became the Driving Farmers Association and did the safe thing.

Major points of relevance from the meeting, Giles has done a thorough investigation into the costs of the newsletter as it takes the largest share of the FFA subscription – approximately £15 for 3 issues a year of the £25 sub. Obviously costs have risen – labour, printing, postage and even the envelopes. He considered restricting the number of pages to keep the weight down and hence the postage. He has had various printing quotes and has secured a special discounted labour charge with Kirsten, who designs the layout of the publication.

The committee agreed that following the membership surveys that have been carried out, the newsletter is a very important part of FFA membership. Therefore, Giles should continue his good work and keep up the quality and content of this popular periodical.

Coincidentally, the Treasurer's report followed which, after studying his very detailed spreadsheet, it showed that for the last 3 years we are consistently showing a small loss on the accounts. But when we consider that in the 49 years that the FFA has been running there has only been one rise in sub from the initial £5 in 1974 to £25 in 1999, on the 25th anniversary of the FFA. Now we are facing our 50th anniversary next May and the committee are looking at a small rise in the sub, maybe just £10 to cover increasing costs of not only the newsletter but other essentials such as insurance. This will ensure that we stay viable and give good quality service to the members

This rise will be announced formerly at the AGM in September, which is proposed to be held on 27th September this year. Date and venue to be confirmed. We hope this increase doesn't lead to a drop in membership numbers as the decision hasn't been taken lightly and still makes the FFA one of the lowest cost Associations around and hopefully is good value for our members.

For those that have taken up the GoCardless means of paying the subscription (78% of members), the transition will not involve any clerical input on your behalf. For those that haven't, we encourage you to take the step into the modern world and ditch the old standing orders and pay by this electronic means. It will save our busy Treasurer a lot of time and effort.

In the Membership Secretary's report, he revealed that 105 new members have joined in the last 5 years! Where do they keep coming from? However, 89 have dropped off the database mainly age related. Talking of which, it is important to recognize any member that dies but we don't want to turn the newsletter into an obituary column. However, for those that have served on the committee or been very active members that many others knew, then we should make some mention for the interest of others.

On a happier subject, it had been suggested that we offer an FFA lightweight summer jacket. Andrew and Giles modelled some examples provided by the FFA clothing suppliers and one was selected. In fact both models said they would be buying them when available. An initial order will be placed for 30 to be able to offer a variety of sizes. See the clothing list for more details.

The Events Secretary gave a full report of the 2023 events and the plans for the 2024 FFA Anniversary Tour of the UK. This will be a major logistical event as members needn't take part in the whole 12/14 days, so can drop in and out more or less as they wish. A thought would be to land or even a touch and go, at 50 members' strips on the tour. Of course, this will be optional and strictly by PPR. It will all end in a dinner to celebrate the 50 years of the FFA. More will be announced at the AGM and the entries will open shortly afterwards so that the organisers can get a good idea of numbers for hotels and catering by mid November.

Many more trivial matters were discussed and the meeting ended after almost 5 hours at 15:30.

Paul Stephens

Joined Since March 2023

8798	G.K.O.M.P. Porchester from Newbury, Hampshire
8795	P. Stafford from Epsom, Surrey
8794	R. Williamson from Ipswich, Suffolk
8793	S. Smith from Mitford, Northumberland
8776	C. Connell from Auchterarder, Perthshire
8792	G. Parker from Sandwich, Kent
8791	A. Forrester from Alcester, Warwickshire
8790	R. Jones from Worcester, Herefordshire
8789	G. Ferriman from Notts, Notthinghamshire
8788	A. Hilton from Barnetby, Lincolnshire
8786	K. Amies from Blisworth, Northants
8785	P. Oglesby from Southampton, Hampshire
8784	P. Rothwell from North Moreton, Oxford
8783	C. Elliott from Waddington, Lincoln

Departing Members

423	P.R.H. Moore from Cheshire	Retired
716	I.T. Smith from Norfolk	Resigned
50	T.D. Gray from Suffolk	Passed Away
603	R. Fitzgerald from London	Resigned
8738	N. Houghton from Rutland	Passed Away
806	M.E. Falkingham from East Yorkshire	Passed Away
8690	K. Kelso from Cambridgeshire	Resigned
782	P. Young from Norfolk	Passed Away*
589	W. Shaw from Lincolnshire	Retired

*An active member and member of the committee 2010–2017

GAP – General Aviation Partnership Report 18th May 2023

Updates from the CAA on the 2022-23 work programme yielded little of any immediate interest to members while an update from the DTi, principally concerned the recent consultation on a new style online General Aviation Report (GAR). Many of us are already familiar with the current online GAR which works particularly well on platforms like Sky Demon. The new proposal is essentially more of the same but requiring more information and possibly a move to online only. The industry has already made the points about lack or loss of internet, and, how does giving the aircraft operators details help detect illegal entry when all travellers' passport details are already required? We suspect it's to do with linking into the Home Office computers to flag up "persons of interest" who are otherwise unaware of the fact. I suspect if I knew I was a serious "person of interest" then I probably wouldn't be filling in a GAR. Its a bit like "has anyone tampered with your baggage without your knowledge?" (How would I know?)

The more interesting part of the meeting was a presentation by GASCo out of which I can mention 3 things.

1. As a result of reported incidents, there have been no less that 3 safety recommendations to the CAA in 2022 as follows;
- Require ab-initio pilots to undergo training in,
- Provide detailed guidance on techniques for, (and promote their use by instructors).
- Update its GA safety promotions to include,

…Partial Power loss situations in single engine aircraft.

The examiner who routinely conducts my biennial flight review, knowing that I can adequately fly the aircraft to the required standard then finds exotic things to do to fill in the time. This has been one of them on a number of occasions along with engine failure at 5000' but you must land in THAT field and "what would you do if a bird destroyed your P1 windscreen?" The penetrating thought of uncontrollably flapping jowls kept the obvious answer at bay : fly from P2.

2. Recent Safety Sense leaflets published in the last 12 months (or so). We have brought a number of these to your attention while the complete list is, should anything peak your interest:

- VFR moving maps Devices
- Fuel handling and Storage
- Strip flying
- Loss of Control
- Ditching on water [Is there any other kind?]
- Flight under VFR
- Radiotelephony
- Distraction

They can be accessed by Googling "Safety Sense Leaflets" – it's top of the list.

3. Recent Clued-up magazines in 2023

- Rejected Take-offs
- Airspace refusal (for once, the message is "don't just accept it")

They can be accessed by Googling "caa clued up"

Andrew Cragg

General Aviation Awareness Council

Chairman Charles Henry

Turning to look at the past year, the most important challenge still facing GA Airfields remains their attraction for developers. The GAAC believes that it is essential for existing protections afforded by the current National Planning Policy Framework to be maintained and where appropriate strengthened in any new Government Policy.

One successful example of our work has been that carried out by close liaison with the DfT in the production of their recently published 'General Aviation Handbook' available via the link www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-aviation-handbook. It has been designed as a reference source for Local Planning Authorities, Developers and others. The GAAC is specifically mentioned as influencing and helping with the content. Both John Gilder and Ann Bartaby spent many hours liaising with those responsible for its production. It gives clear guidance to LPAs by stating: *Central to GA is the network of airfields, which provides the critical infrastructure to support […] the UK economy.* Unfortunately, the need for the DfT to liaise with other Government Departments, notably the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities revealed a conflict of interest. This led to considerable delay and a dilution of the message with the insertion of many caveats.

Another valuable relationship is that which the GAAC has with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for General Aviation. John Gilder is Chairman of the 'Airfields Working Group' and I Chair that for 'Tax and Regulation'. We are both helped by many Board Members of the GAAC. Due to the many changes in Government over the past year it has not been easy to establish top level relationships with the Ministers but we have pending meetings with various Secretaries of State. It would be wrong of me not to record our thanks to Grant Shapps for his support while at the DfT and Robert Courts for taking over from him at the APPG GA.

Many Airfields depend on Flight Training Organisations and it is with regret that several long-established Companies have closed, the most recent being Tayside Aviation after 54 years and FTA Global who entered administration. The consequent loss of revenue to airfields affected is serious. I have been fighting to have VAT on Commercial Training Zero rated for over a decade but, despite meeting the Chancellor many years ago and continuing efforts, the Government has failed to recognise that many of the UK Schools have migrated to the EU or other jurisdictions where VAT is not charged with the consequent loss to the UK economy. Sometimes the GAAC is criticised for not "sticking only to airfields" but the impact on operating costs has much wider implications and we need to address all aspects of GA which have an impact on the ability of airfields to survive. Another example is that our CAA Approved Air Training Organisations which are, according to the Department of Education rules not qualified to take Apprentices. This is despite enormous apprenticeship levies paid by airlines.

Another factor is the EU banning of TEL in 2025. The GAAC is seeking to gain Government support for the infrastructure needed to expand the use of unleaded fuels. AOPA has a facility on their website (www.aopa.co.uk) to check whether your Aircraft can use UL Fuels which must be supported in our efforts to 'green' GA.

Vice-Chair John Gilder

2023 is proving busier than ever with some projects finally making progress so our team has been far from idle.

Our 'client' list now stands at 118 with more than 40 active in some way or another and others holding a watching brief.

The current political situation appears to be easing a little and we are pressing for face-to-face meetings with the Secretary of State through Grant Shapps and the aviation minister via direct approach supported by Lord Davies. The main situations holding our focus currently are the following:

DfT Liaison. Weekly liaison has continued leading to the publication of a Planning Handbook designed to improve the attitude of Local Authorities by encouraging them to think aviation facilities as community assets not liabilities. However, beyond that there is very little new Gov't activity at present. We have written directly to Baroness Vere requesting a meeting. It will be interesting to see if/when this will happen as even the GA Advocate had to wait 6 months for his first monthly meeting and has not yet had a follow up.

The airfields dominating our workload are Denham, Gamston, Little Mongeham (Deal), Rochester, Swansea, Coventry, Addenbrookes, Wellesbourne and North Weald.

New White Paper: The new Gove / DLUC Proposals, published on 18 Dec, have a substantially different policy that is not helpful to GA but it is both preliminary and general with relevant detail still to be provided. The GAAC & DfT Planning teams are working jointly to review the Proposals and ensure both parties can present the best case for GA.

Strategic Network: We have yet to meet the Aviation Minister and we have been advised not to press for one with the new SoS until the current round of strikes is resolved.

Insurance: Chris Varley is looking into various insurance issues and cost savings that maybe relevant to GA. Please keep this service in mind, many policies no longer provide the scope of cover that people believe they do.

Emergency Heli's: The GAAC now sits on the UKSAR (Coastguard) and HELP (HeliMed) Working Groups. Initially advising on Safeguarding our role has steadily broadened as we become more conversant with their issues such as those arising from the introduction of larger helicopters.

APPG-A Update: A meeting of APPG-A chairs took place on May 22nd, Robert Courts is the Chairman. Each Sector Chair was asked to submit a specific topic for his consideration, mine focused on the need to educate Local Planning Authorities

Financial

Our bank balance continues to decline. Previous fundraising initiatives have been less than successful.

However, a trial period of six months being sponsored by an Independent Financial Advisor could prove beneficial to both parties. One of the conditions being that we upgrade our website www.gaac.org.uk, which can only be a good thing.

Anthony Kedros

GASCo

The General Aviation Safety Council

Nothing to report *Rick Holt*

GASCo Safety Evenings

Stapleford Airfield 19:30 - Thursday 14th September 2023
Email: pennyhodges@flysfc.com
LAA Bristol Strut - TBA - Tuesday 3rd October 2023
Email: nevilleparton@cantab.net
Goodwood Aero Club - Thursday 9th May 2024 Contact: TBA
Further details on GASCO website: https://www.gasco.org.uk/events/safety-evenings

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In the meantime, if you would like to receive a complimentary copy of Flight Safety magazine please contact the GASCo Office by telephone on 01634 200203 or email to: penny@gasco.org.uk

https://www.gasco.org.uk/flight-safety-magazine/subscribe



Strip Insurance

We continue to get enquiries about airstrip insurance.

While the Association has a special arrangement with Gallaghers (formerly Haywards) more and more members who insure with the NFU Mutual are finding that they can add public liability to their farm insurance with little or no cost.

Until recently, members had had little success and wild inconsistency with their local NFU in this regard. We contacted the NFU and were given the following assurance from a senior executive at NFU mutual :

"Just on the back of our conversation yesterday, I picked up with my Underwriting colleagues .They confirmed that the cover is acceptable to be added to the Public Liability of a farming policy, given that it meets certain criteria.

Our central guidance to our underwriting teams is clear and they are confident that should [NFU Mutual] agents from around the country contact their local teams that they should get the same answer .

Of course we can't guarantee that all will be accepted as there may be individual features that preclude this but overall your members should feel as if this is something that can be accommodated under their farming covers. "

Members who have since approached their local offices with this information have suddenly found that all is possible!

The way it works [with the NFU at least] is that for a farmer and landowner, the strip can be considered "ancillary use" i.e. just part of "what goes on" at your farm rather than a dedicated airfield operation. If you have an airfield "business" at your farm then "given that it meets certain criteria" [see above] may become important. How big that "business" needs to be to fall outside "ancillary use" will be another grey area within the gift of the underwriter but unless you are one of our members with a licensed aerodrome then there's nothing to lose by asking the question and presenting your situation truthfully.

For those not already insured with the NFU Mutual, even if you are a modest landowner, then it might be worth an enquiry.

Details of the Gallaghers scheme along with rates can be found elsewhere in the newsletter.

Andrew Cragg

2023 Renewal - FLYING FARMERS – PRICING MATRIX

SECTION 1 and 3 – PREMISES and PRODUCTS LIABILITY
Limit of Liability (any one occurrence and in the aggregate in respect of Products Liability)

Annual Movements of Third Party Aircraft (see INFO in the last year renewal schedule)	**GBP500,000**	**GBP1,000,000**	**GBP2,000,000**	**GBP5,000,000**
Up to 100	GBP420.00	GBP600.00	GBP780.00	GBP1,320.00
More than 100 up to 250	GBP480.00	GBP660.00	GBP840.00	GBP1,440.00
More than 250 up to 500	GBP540.00	GBP720.00	GBP900.00	GBP1,560.00
More than 500 up to 1,000	GBP720.00	GBP900.00	GBP1,080.00	GBP1,740.00
More than 1,001 up to 2,000	GBP840.00	GBP1,020.00	GBP1,200.00	GBP1,860.00
More than 2,000 to be agreed by Slip Leader	To be agreed by Slip Leader			

SECTION 2 – HANGARKEEPERS LIABILITY
Plus GBP210.00 for GBP500,000 any one occurrence, but limited to GBP75,000 any one aircraft.
Plus GBP420.00 for GBP1,000,000 any one occurrence, but limited to GBP75,000 any one aircraft.
Minimum premium in respect of mid term additions GBP145.00 in full, subject to AVN9A (applicable to the movements/limit banding).

If any members are interested further details can be obtained by contacting Gallagher directly (0800 612 3635).

Eventbrite and Flying Farmer events

I have been asked to write a few words about the Eventbrite booking in system from a point of view of a Flying Farmers' event organiser. As many of you are aware, Neville and I have been organising the 'Pop-In' events over the last couple of winters to run alongside the more 'traditional' Flying Farmer events that are generally organised during the spring, summer and autumn months. I am very aware that some members feel that there is little point in entering their details onto Eventbrite, especially for visits to active airfields or when, as with the 'Pop-In' events, there is no charge for the 'tickets'. However, when members do take the time to complete their details, the Eventbrite software compiles a mini database for each event. This database is then invaluable for a number of reasons.

First, when flying to an active airfield with a radio operation I am always asked a day or so before the event for a list of participants, captains name, mobile number, aircraft type, aircraft registration, point of departure and ETA. Eventbrite can provide all this information very simply in a quick e-mail. This then saves a significant amount of 'radio chatter' when, as is often the case with Flying Farmer events, there are a significant number of aircraft all trying to join at the same time! Airfield managers have often complimented the organisation of the Flying Farmers in providing this information prior to a visit.

Having all participants in these 'event mini databases' also makes contacting everyone so much easier, both for providing joining details but also for making contact at short notice in the event of a weather cancellation, for example. I try not to change dates at short notice, but if I consider the weather on one day in the week to be completely non-flyable for most participants and significantly better on an alternative day in the same week for most, Neville and I would consider

changing the day. If this happens, I need to be able to get hold of all participants. Any people not booked in with Eventbrite would not hear of the change in plan.

On another occasion, during the Covid pandemic, immediately after our Pop-In gathering, one event participant discovered that he tested positive for the virus and I needed to warn all the other attendees of this. Again, this was very easy using the Eventbrite software.

Some airfields have a limit on aircraft movements on any one day. As an event organiser it is highly embarrassing to arrange for this number of aircraft to attend an event, only then to have a number of additional arrivals that had not taken the trouble to 'book in'.

If you intend to drive to an event it is just as important that you use Eventbrite so that we not only know accurate numbers of those attending, but also we are able to efficiently pass on any last minute changes to our arrangements.

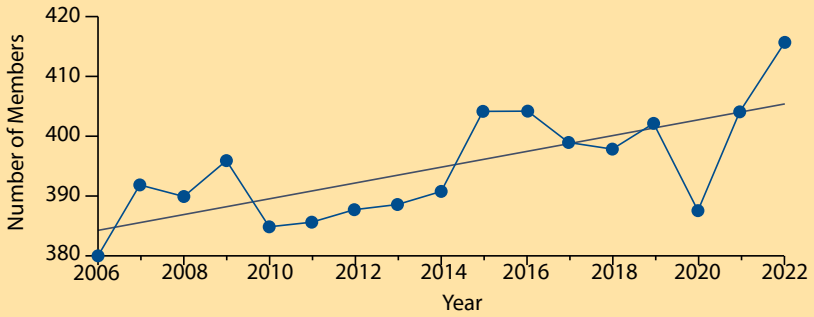
I could cite other examples of the advantages to event organisers of having all participants details booked into Eventbrite, but I think you have by now got the idea! So please do just take a minute or so to use Eventbrite. It really is worth it!

David Keene.

IMPORTANT Membership Matters

1. Membership numbers

Here is a graph of the number of members of the FFA since 2006. It is pleasing to note that the trajectory remains on the rise!



2 Change to Direct Debit – GOCardless - Duplicate payments

This Year, 37 members who are successfully signed up for Go Cardless have also paid by standing order and have paid twice as a result.

As a reminder, the agreed and widely promulgated procedure for duplicate payments is that **all who ask** for a refund within 12 months will receive one. Once we begin the next subscription year, all duplicate subscriptions for the previous year will go into FFA funds. Please check your standing orders. We cannot cancel them for you. If you find you are one of these then please - please - please, do not cancel GoCardless instead by mistake! The beauty of GoCardless is that, once setup, we can do the administration of the subscription from our end.

3 Member details on the website

A few members have commented that a mobile number is not shown in the grid when you look up a members details.
While the website is quite new, some of wheels and cogs behind it are original and with a sharp intake of breath, our website engineer said it would probably be complicated and expensive to change.

However, if the member has an airstrip then a mobile number is shown on the airstrip page. On balance, we feel that if you want to visit a members airstrip then you do have the important mobile number. If you just want to get in touch, then if the contact number shown in the grid is unavailable, you can always send an email. Meanwhile, more and more members are putting their mobile number as their "contact" number which will appear in grid accordingly.

4 Flying Farmers Emails

We now use emails to send you important regulatory information, requests from members and most importantly, details of events and booking links. 65% of our membership routinely open emails and while we contact those whose emails are undelivered we can do nothing about those that go to spam or an unused inbox. If you are not getting regular emails from info@ffa.org.uk and you want them then please contact us on the website, info@ffa.org.uk or 01303 874251.
If you don't want them, unsubscribe at the bottom of any email or contact us as above.

MEMBERS MISHAPS

ILAFFT (I Learnt About Flying From That)

A platform giving members the opportunity to submit any article about their flying career from which other members can benefit and learn from. If anonymity is required that will of course be respected

Several anecdotes re learning about flying! Part two

France: without fail any flight to this country resulted in a drama of some sort. On this occasion, flying an Aztec, it was yet another air traffic controllers strike. After two half hour phone calls to both the military and civilian controllers, I was advised to leave airways at Beachy Head and then proceed VFR low level to Toussus-Le-Noble. My Jeppesen area chart told me that the Orly zone in that area was 1500 feet on QNH so I cut the corner and tracked direct to the VOR and landed. Next morning I was summoned to the Tower where I was asked to show my Commercial Licence and Instrument Rating, this being the only time in 15 years flying that I was ever asked for it! I was also asked how I had approached the airfield and fortunately had been in the briefing room where I discovered that the Orly zone was from ground level but that there was an NDB (Holland) at the entrance to a free lane direct to Toussus. Two can play that game and I told my interrogator that I had come via the NDB which probably saved me a night in the cells. No doubt Orly radar had tracked me and were then told to recalibrate it!

Another occasion in France occurred on a diversion from Toussus into Orly itself which involved a long procedure on to their ILS to be presented at 400 feet with a rainy and completely unlit runway. On paying the landing fee they tried to charge me extra for "les ballisages (landing lights)". As they knew perfectly well they were trying it on I refused to pay which they had to accept as an American 727 had landed just before and they had turned them off. But France and aviation, no thank you!

While doing an air test on Smiths Industries DH Dove out of Staverton it was necessary in those days to actually feather one engine for the single engine climb. I duly feathered the starboard one and as the aircraft was heavy with a full autoland system and fuel, achieved the required 150 feet/minute minimum climb with judicious help from the orographic lift over Clee Hill. Whilst debriefing, the engineer I had had with me casually mentioned that, when cold, the port engine was "stiff to turn". The chief engineer remarked that there had been a bulletin saying exactly this and it was an indication of the main bearings fretting! The engine was immediately removed and found to be beyond repair. The Gipsy Queen engines were always considered to be fragile but what a delightful aircraft to fly.

There must have been others but where does one stop?

Warwick Banks

Threat and error management: Let the flyer beware!

I've never liked the term "threat and error management", it always seems a trendy new name for good old flight planning, but here it fits quite nicely.

In my C150 I always worry about short runways. Not so much the landings – I can usually find a way to get down, but for the take-off there's only so much power in there. However, I was on my own, so nice and light. Whoopee! A chance to go to Airfield X…

I had flown in there before, some years ago, with no problem. I rang them, and knew that a warm welcome awaited. It was the perfect opportunity because:

1. I was on my own, so I was light.
2. Wind was about 12 knots at the Departure Airfield, and X was only 12 NM away, and even the same distance from the coast, which suggested that any coastal effect would be the same for both airfields.
3. Based on the runway direction, the wind should be almost straight down the slot.
4. A pilot report suggested that the runway I would be using was the best because there no trees under the take-off path.
5. A pilot just returned from a flight reported that he had overflown Airfield X and that the runway had recently been mown.

Though it was a short runway, everything pointed to the perfect conditions for take-off. What could go wrong?

I took off into what, for C150 with one person on board, amounted to significant turbulence, which abated only above about 1200 ft. I used to break in horses for a living, so in the terms of the trade, I "don't mind a buck and a squeal". I wasn't going to let that put me off.

I overflew Airfield X and saw that some "landscaping" had taken place since I was last there, or maybe I had forgotten about it: namely a sizeable pond loomed next to the runway. Also, never mind the hedges, the trees alongside, and very close to the landing area, were now in their prime! In fact the runway threshold was only visible from certain angles. Google Maps even from 4 years ago shows the shadow of a tree halfway across the runway.

In order to keep control in the turbulence, and I think wind shear, I stayed well above the trees, kept the power and speed on, and left the flaps up. By the time I was clear of the trees and the pond (and I'm sure I glimpsed some unsuspecting fishermen) not much more than half of the 500 m or so runway remained. I wrestled with my bucking bronco at a safe distance above this, and at what seemed like a breakneck speed. To land was unthinkable. I announced I was "Going round", and then amended this to "Going home"!

Back at my departure airfield the wind was still obligingly almost "down the slot", and the landing uneventful.

So had my threat and error management really been so inadequate? Had I ignored or underestimated the warning signs? On reflection these were:

1. I was near the coast, and weather had suddenly turned very hot, creating a big difference between the land and sea temperature, which probably explained much of the turbulence.
2. The trees and greenery under and beside the runway at Airfield X would have increased the turbulence on approach, and the big pond may also have contributed its two-penneth!
3. The wind was not far off easterly that day, so I assumed the landing runway would be to the east. But when I phoned the strip owner (yes, I did do that!) prior to departure, he hesitated, and went twice to check the windsock, and then decided there would be a crosswind. Again the confused windsock and the difference in wind direction could have been due to the trees. Actually, when I set up the landing I was so busy keeping control that never even saw the windsock. Judging by my breakneck ground speed above the runway, I wouldn't be surprised if there were a tailwind!
4. The previous day's forecast for the day of the flight had included some strong gusts at an airfield close to my landing strip, though on the day these were not mentioned.
5. I had focused all my attention on how I would get off the ground again, and hardly given a thought to the landing.
6. Having retrospectively identified these risk factors, I could then have added an "unofficial" coefficient of, say, 10% for being so light! Yes, I have been previously alone and "all over the sky", desperately seeking somewhere I could get down, whilst listening on the radio to a C172 whose pilot seemed not to have a care in the world!

I once attended a Robinson helicopter safety course in California, taken by Frank Robinson himself. He stressed that he would not undertake a flight unless he had the self-discipline to abandon it if it became necessary. This would be my first aborted landing in 15 years – the last was at an airfield at the foot of the Hartz Mountains in a storm. But in the case of this seemingly innocent little Sunday-afternoon jaunt, I needed no self-discipline, the fear was quite enough, thank you!

Christina Belton

The highlight of my honeymoon in August 1979, same time as the tragic loss of life during The Fastnet Race

I had promised my parents that we would be back in time and take them to Heathrow for their return flight to Kenya.

We flew from the south of France to Dinard where we refuelled, cleared Customs and got the latest weather report. Things looked pretty grim at Southampton with cloud base down to 300ft and winds gusting 70 kts, but improving!

'Get home-itis' set in. So we had lunch in the smart restaurant, Lobster!

I thought that I would anaesthetise my wife (Boo)with a good bottle of Sancerre so that she would be oblivious to the bumpy ride to follow.

We took off and were IMC at 500ft, no problem as things were going to improve.

ATC were brilliant all along the route over the Channel Islands etc eventually handing us over to Southampton who gave us the works with a Radar let down etc. No other idiot was in the air!

I have never concentrated so much before because in the past I usually had a pilot mate beside me to share the load!

Anyway there we were on finals beautifully set up with ATC reporting how far to run and my height, which I concurred!

They then kept saying OCL/OCL to which I confirmed because I knew that it was 480 feet.

Failure to see the ground less than that would mean diverting elsewhere !!

I eventually saw the runway lights bang in front / below me @ 280 feet.

That was the highlight of my Honeymoon and Boo was oblivious to my performance!

John Milne

Flying Doctor mission – landing on a laterite road in Kenya at Night

Everyone knows what an amazing service The Flying Doctors provide. However in the sixties they didn't fly at night or on Sundays and only on recognized airstrips.

Consequently my Father who had a Cessna 182 based at Kisumu would regularly get called out. He would bare all the costs being a Private Pilot.

On this occasion I was on holiday when the phone rang at 6:30pm, it was dark! A young Mother was having serious problems with a 'breeched birth' and needed to have urgent attention. She lived on a Sugar Plantation which had a good road albeit with a camber to allow rain water to drain quickly. My Father luckily knew the road well so he instructed 2 cars to shine their lights. One car to shine its lights across the threshold and the other car to shine its lights down the road/runway approx 1000 yards away. Naturally I wanted to be part of the adventure so went along.

We got to the site in 10 minutes and flew over to check all was well. Then we did a dummy run to make sure of wind/length of 'strip' etc, All was well so we lined up with the headlights shining down the road and landed over the threshold car lights being careful to remain on the crown of the road – the camber being severe could easily drag one down to the verge!

We took one of the rear seats out so that we could place the stretcher, beside which sat the Girls Husband. An hour and a half later the baby girl was born in a Hospital in Nairobi.

Years later a pretty young girl made herself known to my Father and gave him a big kiss, she was that baby!

John Milne

I could go on-----such as when parking your plane on Safari----make sure that you put some thorn branches round your tyres. Lions like chewing them!

I Learnt about Flying From That

I have now stopped flying as Pilot In Charge but over the 50 years I have had a licence I have had wonderful fun and excitement but like many of us, perhaps I should say all of us, there were times of fear, regret and in this case absolute stupidity.

I started learning to fly in the 1960's mainly in Piper Cubs, Austers and older types, occasionally venturing into what was then the very sleek and easy to fly Cessnas and Cherokees. However I wanted to fly something just that little bit more exciting and sometime during the early 1970's I watched Neil Williams (the great aerobatic pilot of his time) display a beautiful old biplane at what was then called Booker. I loved the sound of the radial engine the shiny wings and fuselage painted in American Army Air Corps colours. I promised myself that one day I would have one and a year or two later I did and I bought the very Stearman that Neil was displaying. I would own it for 37 years.

Like most farmers I enjoy basic engineering and I like doing my own maintenance around the farm and this enjoyment extended to my aviation interests. A good friend who used to work in the RAE at Farnborough would help me with doing basic maintenance. I hasten to add I am not a Licensed Engineer and in those days I would call up a friend who was licensed and he would check over our work, sign it out and off I would go for another year. All very different today.

The propeller on my Stearman was a metal one and ground adjustable and had an Airworthiness Directive of every 100 hours This was a simple Magnaflux Inspection which would detect any flaws or cracks. Initially this was no problem for me to comply with and about every couple of years when I had done 100 hours flying I would remove the prop myself take it to a well known aircraft engineering facility close by my farm have the inspection done and legally signed out and replaced back on the aircraft. The engineer in charge would re-pitch the prop for me, I would give him £25 and I would be set for another two years of flying, all very simple. This lasted for several years but like all things easy they eventually dramatically changed. The Engineering Facility closed down my friendly engineer retired, I had to travel 100 miles to have the mandatory inspection done and it cost me £200 or more.

I used to regularly read everything I could on Stearman aircraft and browsing through one of my American magazines I saw an advertisement for a wooden prop which was suitable for my aeroplane, just the job or so I thought. I wouldn't have to remove the prop every two years and go through the hassle of inspection and testing. Cutting a long story short I bought the prop for $500 and bolted it on. All done and signed out properly.

It is at this point I should explain that I have an airstrip on the farm which is not the easiest one. The land slopes from East to West it also slopes North to South, there are trees at one end and an ambulance station at the other, it is 620 yards long and requires special care in landing and take off especially if the wind is not in the pilot's favour.

I waited for a reasonable day when the wind was favourable topped up the fuel, put a friend in the front seat and rolled down the strip at full throttle. We took off a little late and it wasn't until we started to climb away that I realised that we were hardly climbing at all. The trees loomed up at us at the far end of the strip and I shamefully admit that we touched some of the higher branches. The rate of climb was utterly appalling. We made it back and rather shakily I apologised to my friend in the front seat.

What had gone wrong ? I had checked weight and balance we were well within limits, there was plenty of power in the engine too. The obvious reason was the propeller. The steel prop was ground adjustable and I used to carefully check the pitch myself. I cannot remember the settings now but I had always set it to give me a good rate of climb rather than a fast air speed. The reverse is due on a wooden propeller.

What had I had I learnt ? Never assume that all will be well. Check and think and ask someone who knows what they are talking about. I should have realised all along that wooden propellers are not so efficient as metal ones. I certainly did not make the same mistake again. I was in too much of a hurry to try out a new toy without really thinking about what I was doing. I went back to using my metal prop going that 100 miles and paying the fee for inspection when it was due. I learnt about Flying from that.

Tony Poulsom

I Learnt about Flying From These

I learned to fly in 'later life', becoming a pilot at the ripe old age of 47. Following this, I purchased a 1/3rd share in a locally based Cessna 150, on which I really 'learned to fly', accumulating 200 hours in it in exactly 24 months. By this time, I'd had had enough of group ownership and decided to branch out on my own and purchased a Permit to Fly, 1946 vintage Cessna 120 taildragger and it was on this aircraft that I had my first 'ILAFFT' moment. I liked the 120 so much that, a few years later, I replaced my first, rather tired, example with a 'newer' one, of 1947 vintage ! though in considerably better condition with a slightly bigger engine than my first.

The 120 has a pair of simple, upward hinged bonnets, similar to old cars, that allow full access to the upper part of the entire engine. These are held shut on each side by two very simple over-centre catches attached to the lower cowling section, that effectively pull and hold the upper and lower sections of the cowlings together. Over the years, I had often noticed, after landing, that the upper link of the starboard forward latch had un-hooked itself and was hanging off its securing lug, on the upper cowl bonnet. This seemed nothing to me, so I would simply re-hook it in place and go flying….until, one day in March 2013, while climbing through 1,500' heading to Oxfordshire, the starboard bonnet burst open and began flapping around in the prop-wash immediately behind the propeller. Instant reaction was to pull the power right back and take stock.

Through a series of power adjustments and left/right manoeuvers, I discovered a 'sweet spot' that would allow the open bonnet to float relatively static and, nursing this situation, gingerly turned towards a friend's grass strip on my side of the River Trent, thinking that if it all went wrong at least I'm closer to home.

I flew as slow as I could to maintain height as, not knowing the extent of any damage, I

tried to keep the bonnet from flapping while I made a safe landing, at almost stall speed.

My lesson learned here was *listen to what your aeroplane is telling you* ! Clearly there was a fault with the latch, as it kept un-fastening in flight, but I had simply ignored it, until that fateful day when it came loose and the corresponding rear latch could not hold on any longer, the forward latch finally giving up and releasing the bonnet to wildly flap around. A secondary lesson was confirmed, that having a roll of gaffer-tape, in the small tool-box I carry behind the seats, was extremely valuable in effecting a quick field-repair to secure the loose bonnet, to allow a flight back to my own airfield, where a set of more secure latches were subsequently fitted.

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Never under-estimate the value of a roll of gaffer-tape

My second ILAFFT moment occurred in my second 120, in June 2017, on the hottest day of that year thus far.

I was enjoying fellow FFA member David Keene's generosity of allowing me to fly from his airstrip for a few days, my partner Donna lives close to David and it's so much nicer to fly down, taking only one hour from my home instead of a 2 hour 20-minute drive. On this particular day, I was flying a neighbour from Donna's village, a very sprightly 88-year-old lady, who had never flown in anything small and certainly had not seen her Oxfordshire village from the air.

When heading back towards David's airstrip at Cuddesdon, I was just overhead the point where the A40 road joins the M40, some 2 miles east of the runway at 800ft, preparing for my landing checks. I pulled carb heat and reduced power…and nothing happened, the engine was still merrily running at 2,450 RPM! I exercised the throttle once more, with no change, and instantly made my decision to leave things alone and, when on short final, cut the power by switching off the magnetos and making a dead-stick landing. My 120 has no flap, so I'm well practiced in losing height by using a forward slip, which I did on this occasion. We landed without drama and rolled out, managing a 180 degree turn on the runway before running out of momentum. Amusingly, my delightful passenger mentioned, after we landed, she suspected something had happened a minute before landing, as I had stopped talking.

My lesson this time was something we all should be mindful of… *make a decision and stick to it.* In the space of a second or two, I had run through the options available, deciding that, without knowing what had caused the lack of throttle control, any further attempts could render me with the throttle sticking at idle, instead of the cruise power I currently had. This decision was all the more critical as David's strip has an elevation of approximately 400ft, and, 2 miles out at 800ft height with an idling propeller, would have left me with precious little chance of making the runway.

The cause of the problem was easily found, the rubber grommet in the P-clamp holding the throttle cable in place had torn and come out, which meant any movement of the throttle lever in the cockpit did nothing more than flex the Bowden-cable without the inner cable making any movement of the throttle arm on the carburettor. All was soon rectified, in-situ on the runway.

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Safely on the ground back at Cuddesdon



The value of a small tool kit in the plane paid dividends this day, all back up and running in less than an hour





Main Picture; Shows the wonderful field surrounded by mountains and trees with the SAR helicopter in the background. **Inset;** Low level on the way back from Peterhead.

The Green Field

This is mainly a story about luck but with a hint of a little extra. When I looked up some memorable quotations about luck, what struck me as appropriate was a saying of Louis Pasteur who said, *"Chance favours the prepared mind".*

Sometimes in life events seem to go from bad to worse. You know the sort of thing….. the dropped piece of toast lands jam side down on your clean trousers. The line goes dead after you have been hanging onto your phone for forty five minutes listening to awful music to get to the top of the queue, etc, etc. But sometimes the ducks line up when it matters most.

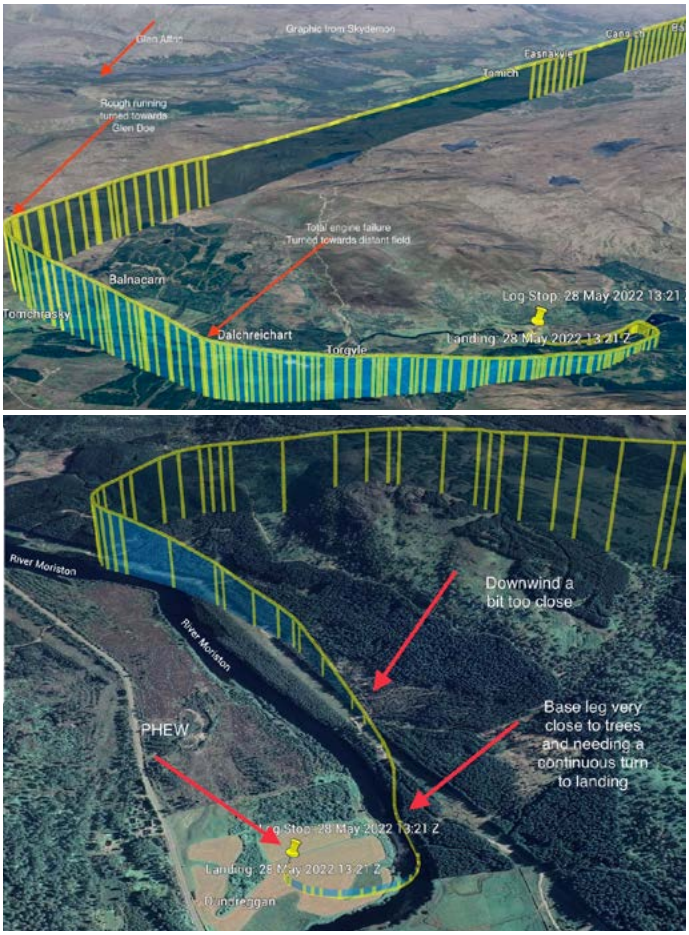
The 28th of May 2022 was going to be another good flying day. The season had got off to a great start the previous weekend with an excellent excursion in our lovely old Jodel D117 G-ARNY. We are a three - pensioner group which includes an LAA Inspector. Several of the Birnie Flying Circus of Easterton, of which I am a member, were off to a fly-out at the Buchan Aero Club at Peterhead. Lovely weather and a plan for three of us to return low-level down the coast back to Easterton. A very enjoyable tail-chase at minimum legal altitude, harbours, beaches, and rocky cliffs. (See photo above) All good fun and only a fleeting thought that it was not the best of places to have an engine failure.

After a cup of tea at Easterton, it was back to our airstrip at Knockbain Farm and a few practice glide approaches to end the day. In fact, I had been practicing glide approaches and PFLs on a very regular basis and, indeed, it had become a bit of an obsession.

Having our own airstrip means that all kinds of non-standard approaches can be done without the constraints of airport procedures, and we have two other fields with different topography where we can do full-stop landings. I have probably done hundreds of simulated emergency landings here over the past forty years. There's something about the 'Constant Aspect' technique that makes the PFL procedure quite easy and, ultimately, instinctive and it almost miraculously draws you towards the selected touch-down point while correcting for under/over shooting and wind, providing you maintain your full attention to the all important aspect - really an invisible cone in the sky which you can join at any point that is convenient, even as low as the final turn. There are several excellent articles on the subject. The main point is that practising away from airports can be done all the way to touchdown and I find it a wonderful and relatively cheap way to enjoy a tactile and finely judged end to a lot of local flights. Unfortunately, the full procedure does not suit the airport environment as you normally end up on a curved approach to short finals and, to do that, say, at Inverness, the base/final turn would be over car parks, terminals and aprons and this definitely tends to frighten the horses, as they say.

Anyway, back to the theme of luck. The following weekend there was a fly-in at Glenforsa, Isle of Mull. First of all, there was a little three ship formation in company with a Bowers Flybaby and a Mini Sport from Knockbain to Fearn Easter. The others flew back to their base, and I returned home (another PFL) and an early lunch before setting off for Glenforsa. Unusually there was a moderate North-easterly wind blowing so it seemed a no-brainer to fly to Mull at medium level rather than the usual low-level run down the Great Glen. First bit of luck. The GPS groundspeed progressively increased until it stabilized at 5,000 feet West of Cannich heading towards the remote and mountainous Clunie. Then a slight change of engine note and a sinister, unusual vibration.

Glendoe airstrip near Fort Augustus was visible in the distance about twelve miles away, so an immediate turn was made and the usual engine health checks, which were normal. I decided to leave the throttle alone as the slow descent looked adequate to make Glendoe, but it did seem appropriate to make a PAN call to Inverness. The PAN procedure did result in a bit of Q&A with ATC and, while explaining intentions there was an almighty BANG encouraging a rapid upgrade to a full MAYDAY. ATC very helpfully did not press for more information which helped with the need for some serious aviation and navigation to be done first.



Screenshots of Skydemon profiles.

The rate of descent rendered Glendoe out of range. Much nearer, there appeared to be a patch of green about 5 miles away in Glen Moriston, so a turn was made in that direction because everything else was mountain and rocks.

As the engine was of no further use, all the usual things were done to minimise the risk of fire, 7700 was set and the ELT beacon, which was round my neck, was activated, or so I thought, by breaking open the flap and deploying the antenna. As the green area was clearly now within range, I made a quick call to ATC with intentions, and they acknowledged without bothering me with further questions. I did hear the SAR helicopter say that they were on the way as they had heard the PAN and MAYDAY calls while exercising in the Moray Firth.

The Green Field was on Dundreggan Estate, Invermoriston, and the only place for miles around that didn't have pylons, bogs, rocks, trees, ditches or obstructions. More luck. It was a simple matter to "join the cone" with a little modification to correct for being a little high and a bit too close at one point, before re-joining the ideal base/final turn over the river. As usual the last straight part of final approach was only about three hundred metres, and a bit of extra speed allowed us to skip over a boggy looking bit and into the centre of the field. We came to rest.

At this point I checked that the ELT (Mcmurdo FastFind) was transmitting, only to find that there is a little button inside the unit which needs to be pressed after breaking open the flap. This is not normally visible, and you only know it is there if you read the manual. Once pressed, the entire global hemisphere is alerted, and the SAR helicopter was soon with me.

The engine had broken a crankshaft web and the flailing pistons and rods had punched some impressive holes in the crank case with the shock of instant stoppage bending the engine mounts and cracking the propeller boss. The only other damage was a broken canopy door caused by the airflow, having opened the door as part of the pre-crash checks while downwind.

I know this sort of story has happened thousands of times in the history of powered aviation, but the outcome has not always been good. What really helped was the sheer muscle memory of many practices which, vitally, removed most of the fear and allowed maximum concentration on the task. What cannot be denied is the massive amount of luck at being at a height which gave a lot of time (at least 2 minutes) to plan what to do, and a further three minutes to put the plan into action. I have no doubt that, without that practice, I would probably have failed to achieve a safe landing, but on the day, I was granted a favourable wind direction, altitude and that wonderful solitary field which I re-visited in May to say a little 'Thank you'.

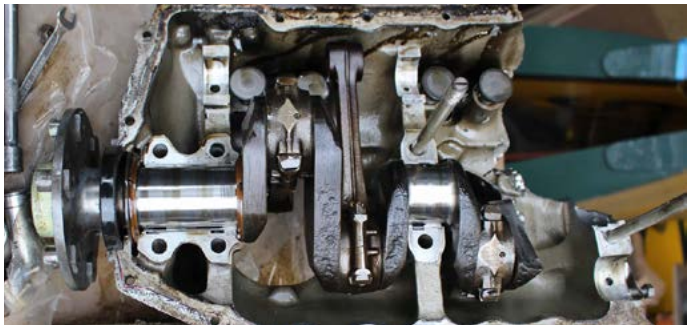
The engine had suffered a fatigue failure of the rear crankshaft web. There had been no advanced warnings, and despite a lot of hours, all the engine's vital signs had been good at the Permit renewal the previous month. Many thanks to LAA inspectors Alister and Paul who carefully dismantled the engine. No cause of the failure has been identified.

A couple of amusing points. The SAR crew (many thanks to Bristow Coastguard) heard my PAN call which apparently was prefixed with the word "PRACTICE" They added that the MAYDAY omitted the inadvertent practice prefix.

The attendance of the police to carry out the mandatory breathalyser test was made totally hilarious by The Law asking me for directions on my mobile phone. Having got themselves lost, the SAR crew flew off to find the blue light on its way towards the West coast and hover taxied over the car to ensure that the relieved pilot was in a sensible state.

Sad to say that the insurers wrote the Jodel off due to the cost of dismantling/ road transport and the probable re-assembly costs. Our little group now has a lovely but basic Vans RV6. The Jodel has found a good home as a rebuilding project.

David Lockett





Above; An unserviceable engine. **Below;** Serviceable pilot & SAR crew.

Programme 2023



By the time you receive this Newsletter all the events this year will have taken place, overall they have been very well attended and Eventbrite seems to be working well. For example, we needed to change two airstrips at very short notice and Eventbrite made this seamless. We wish to extend our sincere thanks for the alternative strips provided by two members at very short notice. We have updated the "Events Organiser's Guide" which is now in the events folder and is available to all organisers.

The AGM this year will be held on Wednesday 27th September at Old Warden (Biggleswade). Full details will be on the website.

Looking ahead to next year along with the "FFA's 50th Anniversary", we are compiling a programme of events that will announced at the AGM, including the "Planned Tour." ***Also looking towards next year, would any member be good enough to offer their own venue for the 2024 AGM? If so, please contact Neville at neville.stops@gmail.com or 07860 937933.***

I would like to extend sincere thanks on behalf of the Committee to the members and guests who have kindly hosted events this year-- this makes the FFA so very successful.

A huge thank you to David Keene who has organized our "Pop In" visits, they are so successful and enable us to meet up during the Autumn / Winter months. I know we all look forward for more to come.

Neville Stops

Events 2023

- 27th September 2023 – **The 49th FFA AGM, Old Warden**

Pop-Ins 2023. For all Pop-ins (unless otherwise announced) the intention is to meet at 12.00pm for lunch.

Events 2024

- 24 May, 2024 – **FFA's 2024 Study Tour (10–12 days) – To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Association**

If any members wish to offer their strips for informal gatherings next year, please do contact David Keene (david@davidkeene.co.uk) or Neville (neville.stops@gmail.com).

We would like to thank all the organisers of events for making these meetings possible. If you happen to see anything in your area that would form the basis of an interesting FFA visit, then please contact Neville Stops (neville.stops @gmail.com) or Gordon Bellerby (gordon@jgbellerby.com).

AS THESE EVENTS ARE CONFIRMED, THEY WILL BE PUT ON THE WEB SITE. WHEN THEY OPEN FOR BOOKINGS AN EMAIL WILL BE SENT OUT TO ALL DETAILING WHEN YOU CAN THEN BOOK THROUGH EVENTBRITE.

Eventbrite

When you book a place please fill in all sections, even if you put N/A. If coming by car, put this in under A/C, and the Reg under A/C reg. If you do not fill in all sections Eventbrite will not accept the booking.

If you are thinking of organising an event please contact either Gordon or Neville and we will send you the updated "Guide for Events Organisers".

Event Information: Joining instructions and attendee lists will go on the web site under that event.

Booking note: When booking on the home page next to general admission there is a drop down menu, please select how many people you are bringing.

Cancellation Policy: We will have to have a strict Cancellation policy. All events will be going through Eventbrite, and up until the closing date you will be able pull out and get a refund, BUT after the closing date you will be committed for the full cost. This is because coaches need booking, caterers need advising, and hotels rooms numbers need confirming.

This Policy will stand unless there are people on the waiting list or you can find a replacement.

Events such as these 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 anyway 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.

The 49th FFA AGM, Old Warden, 27th September 2023







The FFA Committee give notice that the 49th AGM of the Flying Farmers Association will take place on Wednesday the 27th September 2023 at Old Warden, Bedfordshire.

We will gather for tea/coffee by 10:30 and the AGM will start promptly at 11:00. We are being provided with a room, buffet lunch and speakers – A Customs officer and a member of Border Force will speak first followed by the chief pilot from the Shuttleworth Collection.

Although the FFA cover most of the cost of the day, we do ask members to contribute £20.00 per head and any guests they bring will be charged £30.00 per head, as the funds for the day are derived from subscriptions. We will leave it to your discretion how you classify 'guest', as the FFA membership does cover your family but some partners (or navigators as we now call them) can also be classified within the family membership.

The closing date for entries will be 13th September 2023.

The fee will cover your morning coffee, the room, lunch, the speakers and the landing fee (which includes entry to the Shuttleworth Collection on the day and a **free pass for 30 days after the event**). Those driving will have the same access to the Collection.

- 10:00 – The Shuttleworth Collection doors open
- 10:30 – Gather for tea/coffee
- 11:00 – The AGM will start promptly
- 13:00 – A buffet lunch will be available
- 14:00 – A talk by a Customs Officer and a member of Border Force
- 15:00 – A talk by the chief pilot of the Shuttleworth Collection
- 16:00 – Depart at will
- 17:00 – The Shuttleworth Collection doors close

It is the turn for Gordon Bellerby and Paul Stephens to stand down from the Committee in order, but both are willing to stand for election again. Rick Holt who has been on the Committee since 2007 and served as Events Secretary from 2010 to 2017, has decided to stand down to allow new blood to come in.

If you would like to nominate any full member (with their permission) or to nominate yourself (with a proposer) to stand for election as a committee member, then please send an email to Paul Stephens (chix@farmline.com) or by post to Moor Farm, West Heslerton, Malton, North Yorkshire YO17 8RU, nominating this person no later than 3 days before the date of the AGM. The letter should be signed by both the proposer and the proposed.

If you would like any items placing on the agenda, please send to Paul Stephens at the above email or postal address.

Look forward to seeing you on the day

Paul Stephens, FFA Chairman

FFA's 2024 Study Tour – To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Association

The Idea

10/12 day tour of the U.K. involving members along the route

The Plan

- Flying round the UK, anti-clockwise, beginning in the north of England and finishing in central U.K. Distance would be approx: 1,500 miles.
- We would aim to visit as many of the FFA's strips as we could on the route, either as an overnight or lunch time stop (BBQ?).
- Members who would like to take part could be involved with as much or as little of the tour as they wished - dipping in and out on their preferred legs.
- Those members who no longer fly can become involved in areas nearest to them (or even longer sections of the tour) by alternative transport.
- Possibility of including a Treasure Hunt, to add some further interest.

When

Start date 24 May, 2024

Route

• Yorkshire • Scotland • Wales • Hereford • Cornwall • Southern England • Kent • Finish Central UK •



Aim

We would like to have the involvement of 50 members strips within the tour - to celebrate the 50th Anniversary. If any member wishes to offer their strip up for us to visit along the route, either as a touch and go or a Coffee break, please contact Neville (neville.stops@gmail.com) and we will see if we can fit it into the programme.

Modern and Ancient 26th April: John Deere

Around 20 aircraft landed at Langar Skydive airfield for the 9am start to the Modern and Ancient Flying Farmers Association Day on 26th April 2023.

The first coach stop in the morning (the Modern part) was John Deere Ltd. UK headquarters just about five minutes drive from the airfield.

We met on the display floor where we were offered refreshments. Chris Wiltshire, the Marketing Manager, welcomed us to John Deere and gave an introduction to the day's visit.

We separated into two groups, as a very big turnout of 50 members and guests were present. Philip Selby, Manager of Parts Operations, Customs and Logistics took us on a tour of the Parts Department, explaining the overnight/same day parts delivery service. There are around 53,000 parts numbers which are scanned and placed in bins where they are picked by hand. The highest bins are accessed by a cherry picker. There are very few errors; this year, actually 0.3 errors in 1000 parts deliveries.

Stock deliveries come into Birmingham airport mainly from Germany using reusable plastic crates which have been found to be longer-lived than cardboard boxes. All parts have to go through John Deere dealers, not direct to customers. There are 120 dealers in the UK.

After the Parts tour, we assembled again in the Display area for more refreshments and a chance to sit in and get the feel of the magnificent machines on display. Photos below. The biggest tractor on display was the 8RX and the largest Forage Harvester was the 9500.

The second part of the morning was a talk on the history of John Deere given by Chris Wiltshire. Starting in 1837 when John Deere himself fashioned a plough from a broken sword. It is now the largest tractor company in the world.

John Deere's core values are always adhered to: integrity, quality, commitment and innovation.

Some facts and figures:

- The headquarters worldwide are in Moline, Illinois, USA.
- There are around 79,225 employees.
- Net sales are currently $52 billion.
- Globally there are 89 factories in 16 countries
- The first combine harvester was sold in 1927
- The most expensive giant combine now costs over $1 million

Thanks to Event Manager, Alison Yaxley's very efficient management, the morning ran like clockwork.

After the talk we were treated to a delicious hot lunch in the John Deere canteen before we took the coach on to Old Dalby for the afternoon visit which was the Ancient part of the trip.

Anthea Brown







Richard Fenton's vintage collection









After the gleaming paintwork and modern shiny buildings of John Deere's Langar facility it was a treat for some of us to continue to Richard and David Fenton's collection to look at some very impressive real machinery. We had been promised some treats and we were not disappointed.

On arrival we parked next to a shed with some large cultivation machinery neatly put away, including a very impressive Ransomes 6 furrow hexatac plough and a good selection of other subsoilers and cultivators.

Around the corner out in the yard was then an impressive collection of 'real' tractors starting with a pretty unique county conversion trencher, designed to be attached to an anchor tractor and winched along to install field drains – it would have been quite an impressive site to see, and hear, working.

A lovely selection of some of my favourite classic tractors with International 955, 1056 and 1455 all in the proper original International shape and in good original working condition. Alongside this was another great original classic of a John Deere 4755 that was one of Richard's favourites, although as the tour progressed he did seem to have a few favourites!

Next was one of the stars of many shows with the International BTD20 crawler tractor with Rolls Royce engine, that started instantly and sounded perfect. This is regularly used at working events along with the Ransomes Hexatac plough; which must be an impressive sight working.

Richard gave us a running commentary on almost every tractor in the collection, recalling exactly where each had come from, when he bought it and what has been done to it; which is pretty impressive with so many tractors in the collection.

Next we saw Richard's son David's very original BTD6 crawler complete with side covers. Followed by the Farmall International and Ford shed. I was beginning to wonder exactly how may tractors there were in this collection…. All are in good working order and well cared for.

Equally fascinating was a quick description of their soil business, which appears to involve being paid to clear soil from development sites, which they bring home and cultivate, power harrow and grade and then sell back to landscapers for the gardens of the new homes once they have been built. This looks like a great example of recycling and re-use and of a business that gets paid at each stage of the process and certainly appears to have worked well for Richard and David.

After this we were invited to walk up to the other end of the yard for tea and cake and a few more tractors. A 'few' turned out to be 'quite a few' and in even better condition than the impressive collection we had already seen. First came the line up of white David Browns, many in great condition but not as shiny as the David Brown Aston Martin, another of Richard's favourites in its own shed.

Finally and probably in prime position next to the house were some rare valuable and immaculate concours tractors including a very nice set of MF 175, 165 and 135's all with original cabs, a Ploughmaster 6/4, County 1184, County 1124 and rare 4wd International 634.

The line up ended with some older, but equally immaculate examples of a contractors version Field Marshal, Standard Fordson, E27N, triple doe and quite a few that I didn't manage to take pictures of.

The whole visit was fascinating with so many interesting and well cared tractors to look at and learn about. It was sealed as a memorable visit with delicious home made cakes with the obligatory photograph orchestrated by Roger Bell and the thanks and presentation of the famous FFA clock.

Then back to Langar for the rush to depart that seems to be a feature of flying farmers visits with aircraft rapidly lining up and taking off so that he air was soon full of flying farmers – which I got a great view of as one of the few aircraft that backtracked to the threshold to take off! All in all a great day out.

Charles Course

Weaving Farm Machinery & Spetchley Park Estate 3rd May



Our group with Simon Weaving in centre

Introduction

This event came about because we had known Katy Baggott for many years and then she became the estate manager at Spetchley and volunteered to arrange a visit knowing that we were Flying Farmers looking for an interesting day trip.

It then came to pass that she met Simon Weaving and they were married last year. So it seemed a good opportunity to have a joint visit. I already knew Simon because I had purchased several machines over the years.

When any of us plan to organise an event including flying and a date is set, we immediately cross fingers and hope for the best.

On this occasion we were lucky as we woke to a clear morning with light wind.

The previous Wednesday had been another decent day at another FFA visit to Langar airfield which is where I met some of our colleagues. Rick informed me that he had been unable to fly from his home airfield at Croft Farm due to the ground conditions not being favourable at all with areas of waterlogging. Although this wasn't a surprise due to the nearly non stop rain over the last two months, it did mean a change of plan was necessary because the plan had been to use Croft Farm for our planned event. The area is renowned for being wet as it is where the river Avon meets the river Severn.

It was beginning to look like having to use Gloucester as our fall-back, bringing with it expense and delay to our plans, as do all larger airfields.

Fortuitously there was another of our members at Langar who has a strip at a similar distance from our planned venue. When Stephen Watkins heard of our plight he immediately offered the use of his field, with the assurance that no matter how much more rain came it would be usable.

So that is what we did, and there had been a lot more rain during the week.

Stephen sent us a good description of his field with useful advice to land uphill even with tailwind, which it turned to be. To land the other way would mean negotiating a 60 ft. tree and downhill. That's ok when you are used to your own strip. In true flying farmer style we all landed safely and Stephen organised parking with some at each end.

Our grateful thanks to Stephen for all he did for us.

The coach was on time, and we were on time, so on to our first venue.

Weaving Farm Machinery

Simon was there to greet us where the coach parked on the spacious new concrete yard with rows of new and 2nd hand machines neatly arranged in rows. We were led into one of the new buildings to check in for health and safety.

In Simon's introduction he outlined how his mum and dad began by buying and selling and repairing machinery then gradually expanding to design and manufacturing.

They make a wide variety of equipment. Security gates, hedge-cutters, toppers, cement mixers and more.

He outlined that their company's main enterprise being to construct machinery providing the least soil disturbance possible.

Cultivation and seeders are made to a wide variety of sizes and specifications. You could say Bespoke (Alfie Oliver's description).

Influenced strongly by customer feedback they design and adapt.

Discs, tines, coulters, even pigtails can be incorporated depending on soil types. Wide choices of seed hoppers and fertiliser options with many multi seed application possibilities.

We saw some new examples fitted with latest hi-tech electronic equipment giving very accurate control of all functions. Especially useful when seeding another crop between an already established crop.

Now we moved to another new building with a row of welding compartments at the end of which is a large shot blasting chamber through which all sizes of components are placed on a moving track and slowly pass through being shot blasted by up to 12 high power nozzles all at different angles to ensure a clean finish. This leaves the metal with a shiny pitted surface which Simon explained helps the paint with better adhesion. We then were able to study in detail the quality of the welding, which is all done by skilled workers. Simon said they have a new technique and welding equipment that uses less energy than conventional methods. Energy use is an important issue. They have a large number of solar panels and can use that power during the week but not at the weekend. The power can't be fed into the grid due to there being a large A D plant nearby taking all available capacity. Therefore they plan to have battery storage in the future and are exploring the latest types. Another big investment.

The paint booths, if that is the correct description, are at the end of this large building. We could look through a small glass window to see painting taking place. Again not fully automated but with an operator making sure of adequate cover-


Before shot blasting (inset) and after shot blasting


Detail of welding

age especially of the areas known by their experience to need an extra coat.

Simon emphasised this point. The better quality of the paint finish results in machines lasting longer and holding higher second hand values. As a high percentage of their machines are traded back in with new deals, they are then re- furbished or adapted ready for re-sale.

All sales are direct to the customer. No dealerships involved. This explains why we don't see them in dealers yards.

At the end of our tour we saw the very modern parts department. It has what I can only describe as a giant dispenser unit. You dial in the part required and then it is delivered in a large tray near the bottom of the unit. The parts, if large, can then be taken off with a forklift.

With giving our thanks to Simon it was time to move on to the next venue.

Peter Gale's Summary: So good to see a family developed and run business and nice to see the interaction with their customer requirements, and not afraid to continually re- invest in up to date manufacturing technology.

Spetchley Park Gardens

Katy was waiting to guide our coach and lead us through the entrance to the old coach houses, part of which is converted to the cafe where she had organised our lunch. A wide choice of sandwiches, soup, cakes, tea and coffee satisfied us all.

In the courtyard outside Katy introduced us to the owner of the Spetchley Estate, Henry Berkeley.

He gave us a fascinating account of his family's occupation and their history.

His ancestor was a wool merchant and banker and bought the estate in 1606

The gardens were developed by Ellen Willmott (who was sister to Rose Berkeley), and continued developing over the years. They contained walled gardens, a melon yard, herbaceous borders, rose borders, specimen trees, with plant treasures from all over the world. It still contains the original greenhouses, a Victorian conservatory, architectural follies and lakes.

Before a walking tour Henry showed us a well preserved coach which is on display in the nearby building. Next to it there is a collection of fearsome looking spears or lances which someone asked about. Henry wasn't sure what the bunches of cloth fixed to the shaft were for. However Roger was able to explain that it is there to soak up the blood of the unfortunate victims so that blood did not run down to the end which could cause the operator to lose their grip. Henry just smiled and said. Well you learn something new every day ! He then pointed to a nearby pool which in the days of horses and carriages had been designed to wash the horses legs and the coach wheels when returning back to yards, also to help keep the wooden wheel spokes from shrinking. The pond having a hard bottom and slope into it (I couldn't help thinking about the nearly continuous flood at the end of our lane due to lack of highway maintenance, which has inadvertently served a similar purpose for our muddy wheels after field work).

In two groups we set off on our walking tour of the gardens, some with the head gardener whom we were advised knew more of the Latin names of plants, the others following Henry.
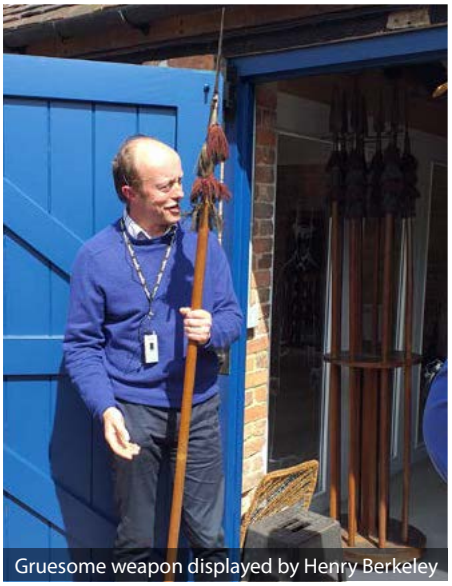
Along the pathways are the borders containing a wide variety of plants including the largest private collection of peonies. Coming to the Garden Cottage we learned that this was where Edward Elgar stayed regularly after having attended the Roman Catholic school here when young. The pine trees surrounding the property had inspired some of his music writing and the pines are still known today as Elgar's Pines. In another part of the mature woodland Henry asked us to look up at one of the


Group in front of Spetchley House

magnificent Cedars which had some missing branches on one side. These had been damaged by an aircraft crashing into it which became lodged there, although its pilot not seriously hurt. He had been trying to impress his mates and misjudged the manoeuvre. He had been one of the USAAF 8th Air Force who were staying on the estate to recuperate after D Day.

Spetchley House had in 1940 been earmarked as the refuge for Winston Churchill and his Cabinet if London had become too dangerous or taken over by the Germans.

Reaching the parkland the house came into view. Built in 1811 to replace the earlier which had been burnt down during the Battle of Worcester, it is of brick and clad in Bath stone. It stands with a magnificent view of the park and lakes, and looks in good order.


Gruesome weapon displayed by Henry Berkeley

At this point Henry outlined his hopes and ambitions for the future. First plan is to plant a large number of trees to shelter the estate from wind but also the increasing noise being close to main roads including the M5, also a main line railway. But more significant is the nearby development of 10,000 new homes. Another plan is to create Reed beds and catchment ponds to filter the run off water from the nearby developments which have silted up the existing lakes. Then they can be restored.

Explaining some more recent family history he told us that he and his brother inherited two estates, the other being Berkeley Castle, now owned by his brother. They get on well with each other now, but when younger not so well.

After describing his competitive battles of playing cricket with his brother when young at the spot where we stood he pointed to a field in the distance which has now become the replacement field for the local team. He would like to invest and upgrade this to a level whereby it would become a top level cricket pitch attracting professional players.

After our walk back through several paths and borders and large walled garden we arrived back in the courtyard.

With our thanks and gift of our special clock it was time to leave.

Henry seemed genuinely delighted with the clock and promised to share it with Katy in their joint office.


Time to say goodbye

Behind The Scenes

I must just mention the behind the scenes support that we get from our committee in organising an event like this. The many phone calls with up to date information on attendee numbers and finances and the new booking system has made it easier for me, also the members who monitor it for us. Making sure that a cup of tea coffee biscuit etc is available to restore us after our sometimes challenging journeys. Then there is the marvellous improvement in being able to hear our hosts clearly through the intercom systems that are brought along to these events by our extremely helpful members.

Richard Hall

Visit To Air Salvage International, Kemble, Wednesday 14th June 2023

This was a fascinating morning providing not only a mass of information on the civil aviation industry, but also a story of successful entrepreneurship to create a very unusual world-wide business.

On a perfect June day I was anticipating a gentle stroll in the sunshine, but Neville had different ideas and press-ganged me into being scribe for the day, so I had to pay attention, as there was a lot to take in. A 10am flypast by three retiring Hercules aircraft was expected but they decided not to visit Kemble. So the tour started with our group assembling in a hangar where a rather tired looking high cycle ex China Airlines Boeing 737 was being disassembled. Mark Gregory, the dynamic founder and managing director of the Air Salvage Group of companies then gave us an introductory talk. He told us that his background was flying with Dan Air as a flight engineer for 15 years. In 1996 Dan Air was in administration, and he decided to take redundancy pay. He then started in 1997 bought and dismantled a Hawker 748 aircraft. From that starting point the business has been able to grow to its present size without any external equity, debt or bank finance.

Today group companies include ASI, which is now one of the largest independently privately owned dismantling companies in the world, GCAM, a maintenance company, Skyline, a parts trading company, Southern Airframe, covering parts, maintenance, repair and overhaul, Cotswold Aero, which covers the light aircraft sector, and Plane Station which sells aircraft fittings and fixtures and other aviation memorabilia around the world. The latter includes complete cockpit sections which can be used as simulators. Mark is also a founder member of AFRA (Aircraft Fleet Recycling Association), which has 42 members including Boeing and Rolls Royce, and which looks at new solutions for the aviation industry in the future. The group employs a total of around 70 staff, and has dismantled over 1,000 aircraft world-wide.

Kemble airfield was built in 1936, was a main base for ferrying air transport auxiliary aircraft, and in 1983 housed the Red Arrows. More recently the airfield has acquired new owners, one of whom is resident in New Zealand.

Covid had a major impact on the business. At one stage 63 aircraft were parked at Kemble including 19 Boeing 747s, the parking space required for this including the main runway. At the



beginning of 2020 there was a total of 4,530 wide body (Boeing 747, 777, Airbus A340, A380) operating world-wide. By September 2021 this figure had been reduced by 30%, meaning that over 800 wide bodied aircraft had been withdrawn from service. Following Covid the Russia/Ukraine war has also had a significant impact. Despite a rush to get aircraft out 400 aircraft worth almost US$10 billion are still immobilised in Russia.

ASI's customers include aircraft owners, airlines, lessors (a major proportion), parts companies and aircraft loss adjustors and insurers. Whilst aircraft fatigue and obsolescence account for many dismantlings, a key business driver is the fact that once aircraft reach around 50% of their expected life their value may be more if broken up for spare parts, rather than further extending their flying life. Another strong driver is that engines, typically, will account for around 80% of the value of a used aircraft. Before Covid ASI broke up around 40 to 50 aircraft a year, but this number reduced to 24 last year, mainly due to a much reduced demand for parts.

When an aircraft arrives at Kemble it may either be prepared by GCAM for lease return, or moved across to ASI for dismantling. Engines are the first systems to be removed, followed by APUs, avionics, fuel systems, hydraulic systems, and finally the landing gears. Parts go not only to refurbishing for further aviation use, but also to trading companies, film companies, schools and colleges as well as to private collectors for art, memorabilia and furniture. At the final scrapping and recycling stage a Boeing 737 or A320 will take 2 hours to produce 30 tons of which 80-98% is recycled. A Boeing 747 will take 2 days to produce 120 tons, with 80% being recycled.

The group works world-wide: it has had some interesting assignments including a Concorde dismantle and move, and recovery of the BA's Boeing 777 that crashed at Heathrow. Carbon fibre and composite materials now extensively used in the Boeing 787 and A350 produce their own disposal problems.

Mark then went on to talk about some of the environmental issues and developments in the use of hydrogen power, sustainable aviation fuel and electricity. An interesting statistic is that it takes 9 tons of CO_2 and 245,000kg of mined material to manufacture a 450 kg electric car battery! Basically none of the alternative fuels at present have the same weight/energy output as current aviation fuels. Inevitably ESG rears its head, as does greenwashing and the wish of environmentalists to see carbon rationing. Overall it is important to put the world's aviation industries pollutant output in context as compared with fireworks and bonfires, power station outputs and shipping. Mark concluded with some interesting statistics, including the fact that between 60 and 70% of the world's aircraft are leased, that the Boeing 747 family of aircraft has flown more than 5.6 billion people, equivalent to around 80% of the world's population, that a Boeing 747 is made up of around 6 million individual components, that on landing carbon brakes can go from minus 40^0 to plus 400^0 in under 5 seconds, and that a 2014 delivery of a Boeing 747 which had been operating in and out of Columbia, had US$4 million of cocaine on board hidden behind a washroom panel.

Following Mark's wide ranging talk the group inspected some of the parts removed from the China Airlines 737, learning more along the way – typical airline tyres can be remoulded 11 times, on the Jumbo 747 the brake unit can cost up to £45,000 per wheel. Tyre and brake wear can be significantly affected by how the pilot handles landing and braking. Passing a Boeing 757 cargo aircraft which is being prepared to go back to work, and a Portugal Airlines A319, the group arrived at the Belfast apron, where the break-up area is. The group walked past a number of aircraft awaiting break-up together with two cockpits sliced off for building into simulators. The line-up included a Boeing 727 which had been kitted out as a luxury executive jet for operation in the Middle East. This included the obligatory fornicatorium in the form of a large separate bedroom taking up a fair proportion of the 727's internal space! There are currently two British Airways 747s at Kemble awaiting break-up, and when they have been scrapped ASI will have scrapped a total of 19 BA Jumbos, leaving not a single BA747 in operation. Walking underneath them one cannot fail to be impressed by the imposing size and complexity of the landing gears,and by the multiple flap design which must almost double the wing area as well as bringing the landing speeds back to tolerable ranges. Whilst the Jumbo in the dismantling area already looked rather forlorn, the second aircraft awaiting destruction still looked clean, tidy, and capable of being flown again. With Concorde being in a different category,the scrapping of these magnificent emperors of the sky, which dominated the global civil aviation fleet for so long, flew so many passengers, and totally changed the economics of flying, cannot fail to evoke nostalgia tinged with sadness as they meet their final end. As with humans, so with aircraft; sic transit gloria mundi …

This was a really informative and interesting visit. These tours are very popular and are already booked up until the end of 2024, which is not surprising. To round the day off an excellent lunch was enjoyed at the Aviate Restaurant before the group dispersed. Well done the FF organisers! £290 has been donated to the Wiltshire Air Ambulance.

Christopher Moore



Bosworth Wing-ding – Day 1, 20th June
Visit to Statfold Seed Oil Ltd, Tamworth

We were welcomed by Alf and Gill Oliver at their Fenn Lane airstrip at Upton in Leicestershire. A coach was ready to take us through beautiful villages and country lanes with much historic interest varying from ancient churches and pubs to the Bosworth Battlefield and Richard III.

We arrived at Statfold Seed Oils headquarters to be greeted by Graham Lee, the charismatic 80 year old owner. Statfold was originally a 2000 acre farm with a beef herd, 700 ewes and arable land, now diversified to the Seed Oil business and also a Leisure Park, complete with narrow gauge railway and children's amusements, plus a café with a wonderful museum of vintage trains, cars and agricultural machinery lovingly collected over many years.

Graham and his family acquired the 2000 acre farm 40 years ago. Starting in 1992, oil seed rape was the first crop they pressed on the premises for the oil. The plan was to diversify into alternative crops. Successful discussions with Anita Roddick of the Body Shop led to many years of collaboration, and the development of beauty and nutrition products. Graham and his family had an excellent business relationship with Anita and the Body Shop, who were pioneers, of course, in organic beauty products not tested on animals.

Now at Statfold they press a huge variety of seeds including lavender, borage, flax and even strawberry seeds for cosmetics. Some of the residue after pressing is used in exfoliates in soap. Dog products are also available.

A fully equipped laboratory is staffed by highly qualified chemists who develop organic products and food supplements. Many raw ingredients are now imported from across the world (including Argentina; Kazakhstan, Ukraine (before the war), as local involvement didn't take off as expected. Black seed is used in products especially required by Muslims.

In all, 250 different oils are stored in the warehouse away from ultraviolet light. Bottling and labelling is also carried out on the premises, much of it still by hand.

A thoroughly enjoyable and informative visit to the seed oil processing plant led by Graham, who had many stories and anecdotes to keep us amused along the way.

Anthea Brown



Statfold Barn Railway

After seeing his oil manufacturing business Graham Lee showed us his other great passion the railway and museum. The track which runs around his country park is layed out to two foot gauge which allows the majority of his stock to run. While building the garden railway his engineering company acquired Hensley Engine Company in Leeds, the manufacturer of the last industrial stream loco in the UK (1971). Graham subsequently negotiated the return of TRANGKIL NO.4 and in July 2004 travelled to Indonesia to arrange shipping. This visit enabled Graham to visit other sugar mills and witness the great variety of early 20th century European stream locos and mill machinery, some still working today. This further led to the establishment of a substantial workshop on the park now run by Graham's grandson Nick Noon, and the Statfold Narrow Guage Trust to ensure the future of this unique collection.

We first visited the Roundhouse museum where most of the stock is housed indoors, it was raining that day. This gave us a flavour of how it has developed over the last 20 years. Graham boarded several locos to give us fascinating stories of his travels around the world. Just a word of caution don't jump down to inspect the underneath before checking for snakes and scorpions first.

We then boarded an open sided carriage for a trip around the estate. The attention to detail left us amazed and took our minds off our wet bottoms! On returning to the museum we were seated for a substantial buffet. Fortunately Graham gave me an excellent guide book (6th edition). If anyone is interested it is well worth purchasing or you can see mine.

To round things off Graham told us more stories about the railway and his family, a truly remarkable man. One concern of his is the lack of coal mines and the restrictions on burning coal. He thinks that in ten years time children won't know what a piece of coal looks like.

Laura Holt





Above left to right: Martin Gosling and Richard Hall enjoying the train ride around the estate; Laura Holt viewing the historic trains

Day 2, 21st June
Bringing the Battlefield to Life



Battle of Bosworth being brought to life . One of many artefacts, a 30mm Ricardian Boar badge.

We arrived at the airfield from the hotel by coach at about 10.00 am to be introduced to Richard Mackinder a local historian and detectorist. He pointed out that the airfield and surrounding area was believed to be the actual site of the Battle of Bosworth in spite of being in the parish of Upton. Battles were often named after the nearest towns or landmarks, even to this day.

It was fought on 22 August 1485 between the reigning Plantagenet king Richard III and the challenger Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. Briefly: Richard with 12,000 men planned to intercept Henry's force of 5,000 men who were marching from Milford Haven towards London. On the face of it, Richard was in a strong position with his larger force. However, the wild card was Sir William Stanley with a force of some 4-5,000 men who, nominally the King's man, was uncommitted. As the battle progressed Stanley decided to support the Usurper and ensure Henry's victory.

Mackinder, who had given us an after dinner talk the previous evening at our hotel (without giving much away) is interested in the archaeology of the site and the battle. He has found Neolithic and Roman artefacts which indicate that the area had been inhabited for centuries. He recovered round shot – fired from primitive but lethal guns manned by Richard's Burgundians – varying in size and material (lead, stone and iron). Other artefacts included a 30mm Ricardian Boar badge.

He was keen to impress upon us the importance of the battle which, with the last death in battle of an English king, ended the Wars of the Roses and the Plantagenet dynasty and heralded in the Tudor era.

Roger Bell thanked our speaker and presented him with an FFA wall clock. We then took the coach to the Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre at Sutton Cheney which was followed by an excellent pub lunch.

Anthony Kedros

www.bosworthbattlefield.org.uk
Bosworth – the Archaeology of the Battlefield by Richard Mackinder
www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Bosworth-Hardback/p/20150



Group photo infront of aircraft at Fenn Lane Farm



Above left to right: Alf and Gill's Son giving us a guided tour of their lake and machinery shed; Rabbits Warren glamping tent; inside a luxurious glamping tent

Farm Diversification, East Farm Wiltshire 28 June





The fly in to Lower Upham farm was good despite the cloud base being a little low, a good field to drop into and many thanks to Peter and Judith for arranging this.

A number of members made the decision to drive in due to the weather not being ideal for all to fly in. However, for those who did fly in, the air strip was easily found just minutes from the M4. Upon arrival, we were welcomed with tea and biscuits and had a friendly meet and greet with all the guests. We then endured a comfortable coach journey to East Farm, admiring the beautiful Wiltshire countryside along the way, including the well-known Broad Hinton White Horse.

Once we arrived at the farm, we were welcomed by Robert Cooper and yet more tea and biscuits! Robert told us some history of the local area and introduced his family; Laura, his daughter, who breeds and looks after the Boer goats and White Park cattle, her husband James and foster daughter, Sally. Robert then commenced a tour of the 800-acre farm, starting with a walk around the stunning farmhouse garden.

The Cooper family are famous as a national dairy cow breeder and the well-known Noremead prefix. We then took a walk around the farm where Robert showed us around the old part of the farmyard where his father started with 30 cows, back in the 1940s and the old grain store, now used as a warehouse for Wayfair. He entertained us with many fascinating stories about the history of the farm and in particular his trip to Canada in 1962, aged just 19 when he was sent to collect a bull named Reflection Sovereign, which was among the early live animal imports for breeding.

We continued our tour by hopping back on the coach and taking a drive through the wheat and barley fields (both grown for seed), as well as the cattle fields, where the Coopers farm over 200 White Park cattle. Off the coach, we took a walk though the beautiful scenery whilst Robert explained how as a farm, they have taken an active role in the Space for Nature scheme since 2012. With 36 wildlife sites on the Downs, the family have invested in the necessary infrastructure to improve the habitat for their local wildlife, including butterflies, bees, farmland and birds such as the tree sparrow. Once back at our starting point, Robert's son in law, James, kindly gave a short talk on his poultry business.

Starting in 1985 with just 1 acre of land, the Stonegate company began with just egg production. In 2008 the company sold that part of the business, including the Stonegate brand. They



continued under the new name of Ridgeway Foods producing both eggs and meat, the only company to do this. They currently farm 2 million chickens!

For lunch was a delicious homemade goats meat pasty and salad, followed by some lovely goats milk ice cream; a first for many of the guests.

After lunch, herd manager and Laura's left-hand women, Zoe took us on a tour down to the female goats field. Of the 250 Boer goats on the farm, there are 100 breeding females. Zoe explained the crucial role in breeding and keeping a large heard in order to maintain a viable commercial goat meat business. Which is fortunate since goats typically give birth to twins and can kid up to twice a year! Laura and her team take pride in nurturing their doe to encourage strong mothering instincts, so that their kids grow healthy and create a strong bond with their mothers. Doe and their kids are only kept in the barn for approximately 48 hours before being taken out into the fields. Although this does not sound long, it is enough time for mother and kids to create a strong bond. Laura operates the farmland on a no fence policy. This means, rather than restrict the goats access via fencing, they are equipped with battery powered collars that are controlled by an app. This allows Laura or Zoe to dictate where barriers are put in the field. If the goats approach the barrier, they hear a high-pitched frequency, which increases as they get closer. For those goats daring enough to venture closer, they receive up to 3 electric shocks, which then

wards them away from the barriers. As well as the Boer goats, Zoe looks after the White Park cows on the farm, all of which are currently in calf. White Park cows play a key role in diversification. White Park are one of the oldest cattle breeds in the country originating in the 13th century.

We headed back to the farm shop and gathered outside as Laura then discussed some of the key products and their target audience. From meat, cheese, soap and socks, the Gourmet Goat Farmer sells a wide variety of goat products, available in their shop, online and at their local markets. They buy in the products not grown or made on the farm from nearby producers, this includes the milk and cheese that is sold. Whilst goat meat does not seem a commonly eaten meat amongst the British, in various parts of Asia and Africa, it is the most popular type of meat, making non-British festivals a key target. Goat meat is a particularly healthy choice, being lean and low in cholesterol.

After more tea and cake, we boarded the coach for Lower Upham where the weather had improved for our journey home. Everybody was in agreement that it had been a fascinating day learning about farm diversification, in particular goat farming for meat (rather than cheese or milk).

Georgina Elliott (Members Guest)

Wilkin & Sons Jam, Tiptree, 5 July







The trip to Wilkin & Sons Jam farm and factory was blessed with a sunny day and a light westerly wind, with a few clouds and an occasional isolated shower nearby. The event was a team effort organised by Michael Pudney and William Procter. Michael and Jane Pudney took over the host strip requirements from William and Jane Procter as the latter were attending the funeral of Peter Pilch. Peter had been a Flying Farmer for many years who sadly passed away a few weeks before. William Procter was intending to fly to Sussex early on the morning of the event to pick up Peter and bring him to the jam factory tour. William and Jane Procter had to miss the Wikin Tour to attend Peter's funeral in Sussex they did however manage to get back to West Newlands Farm to join Michael and Jane Pudney in waving off the departing planes (11 plus a helicopter) after the tour was over.

It was very kind of Michael and Jane Pudney to welcome the attendees of the event at their home airstrip on West Newlands Farm especially as it clashed with their 52nd wedding anniversary. Congratulations and our thanks to them. Jane refreshed the crews with tea, coffee and biscuits and it gave us a chance to admire their splendid garden and flowers before we set off in a brand new coach across the arable lands of the Dengie Hundred peninsula to Tiptree for the visit to the Wilkin fruit farm and jam processing plant.

On arrival at Wilkin's site in Tiptree we were welcomed by their MD Chris Newenham who made us welcome and gave a few words of introduction about the Company and the business. The Wilkin family began farming over 300 years ago and established fruit 160 years ago, moving into jam production relatively recently, only 138 years ago.

One of the most interesting things about the structure of the business is that Peter Wilkin, the last of the Wilkin of the family who still owned the business, realising that there was no family to succeed in the ownership, about 30 years ago set up an Employee Beneficial Trust and gave the workers voting rights in the running of the business. On the tour we often felt that the workers had a genuine interest in the future success and prosperity of the place, showing a potentially good way forward for many other businesses.











Chris then handed over to his team to do the tour and first of all they gave us a tour of the farming side of the business on a tractor and trailer ride around the farm tracks to the various sectors and poly tunnels. The guide for this tour was Dan Waskett whose knowledge of the business was very broad and his tales and anecdotes were very enlightening. As we trundled past some mulberry trees he told us how a long while ago they had planted a set of mulberry trees that would be colonised by silkworms so as to compete with the imported Chinese silk trade. Unfortunately they chose the black variety of mulberry instead of the red sort. The black mulberry has coarse leaves and the silk worm doesn't like these very much and the silk is uneven and produced poor silk so the idea was a complete failure. They now have the red mulberry to produce their mulberry jelly. No silkworms. Mulberries are very rich in their pigment colouring and pickers get a stain on their hands that doesn't wash off even with soap, and makes scrumping of the fruit rather obvious, hence the expression "being caught red handed!"

This was my second Flying Farmer visit to the Wilkin farm, if I remember correctly the first visit was in 2015. Several changes were notable. Mostly the way of growing the Little Scarlet strawberry that the Wilkin jam is famous for. Little Scarlet is a tiny strawberry similar to a wild or Alpine strawberry and the Wilkin farm is the only commercial grower in the world. It was introduced from the US in the 1900's by C J Wilkin and being such a tiny fruit is difficult to pick, doesn't keep well and needs to be processed as soon as picked. The good thing about the variety is that a small jar of the jam is delicious and it contains many whole berries. On our first visit in 2015 the Little Scarlet were the only berries not grown on raised table top trays as they were an established field of strawberries and looked poor compared to the raised trays of other varieties under cover, but we were told that was the only way of producing them. The managers wanted to try to produce the variety on raised table top trays, but Peter Wilkin insisted that it wouldn't work. Perseverance paid off and they were allowed to try it in a field close to Peter's house so that he could keep a keen eye on progress. At the time of our visit the crop was in the middle of its short picking season and they did look in full health and the trial is a complete success. The raised trays are grown in the open rather than under poly tunnels, I think because the season of Little Scarlet can't be extended enough to make it worthwhile. Picking is a whole lot easier though and weed control no longer an issue.

Some of the fields near the factory that were rented out to neighbouring farmers to grow cereals have been brought back in hand and there was evidence of archaeological survey work having recently been carried out. Wilkin & Sons have permission for their own Solar Farm covering an area of about 25 acres. To be built in two phases, the first will house about 10,000 panels and produce about 4MW at full capacity and the second phase of about 5000 panels that will make total capacity just over 6MW. Since the energy price increases of 2022 their annual costs for running the plant has gone from less than £1m to between £3m - £4m, so the solar farm will pay for itself very quickly.

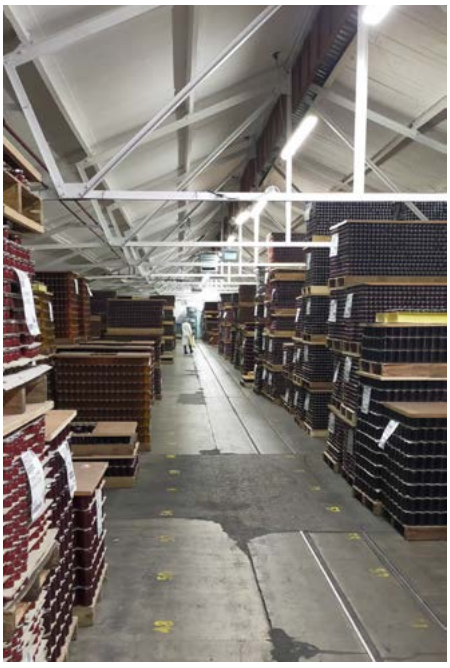
The farm has a series of about four reservoirs that are all interconnected for servicing the fruit growing. The rain runoff from the poly tunnels is drained down into the reservoirs and they expect all storage to be full by the end of the winter making them self-sufficient in water and they only need mains water to run the jam production unit.

Some facts and figures:

- 77% of business is in the UK, 14% EU and 9% rest of the world.
- Turnover 2022 was £48m and operating profit of £1m down from £3.6m in 2021.
- There are 10 Tea Rooms. 9 in Essex and one in Southwold in Suffolk.
- They have about 1 million strawberry plants producing about 1,400 tonnes a year.
- They have a 225 tonne freezer for storage of fruit.
- They now make fruit gins, rums and vodkas. The Tiptree Christmas Pudding Rum Liqueur sounds fun.
- Mulberry trees take 25 years to bear a useful crop of fruit.
- Since Brexit they have fewer Polish, Hungarian, Bulgaria & Lithuanian pickers but more from countries like Nepal, Serbia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan & South Africa.

After the farm tour we were settled into a marquee behind the museum and enjoyed a relaxing lunch provided by the Tiptree Tearoom staff. It gave us a chance





to chat to one another and catch up on farming news from other members.

After lunch we were split into small groups for the tour of the jam factory. Wilkin & Sons are very good at accommodating tours for the general public around the fruit farm and their museum but they rarely let people see the inside workings of the jam production buildings themselves. We were very fortunate to be able to have a guided tour of the facility. We all had to wear white protective coats, hair nets and safety glasses. All jewellery had to be removed including rings and watches. Those of us wearing shorts were given over-trousers. We unfortunately weren't permitted to use the radio hearing devices that make FF tours so easy to hear the guides when on tours. Inside the factory was quite noisy especially the bottling and jar filling parts. There were two active fruit sorting lines with staff hand dressing out the imperfect fruits.

Once we had seen the production facilities there was of course an opportunity to visit their retail shop to purchase some of their products and needless to say there were several jars and bottles leaving West Newlands Farm stowed safely in the baggage areas in our planes.

The whole visit to the Wilkin site had been thoroughly interesting. The Company is very much a big part of the town of Tiptree and Essex and they serve the community in all sorts of ways. There is an obvious synergy to this ethos and the feel good factor was very apparent. Much to be learnt from this by others I feel.

The Wilkin & Sons tour was complete after the factory visit and we mustered for a group photo in the yard before we mounted the coach once more for the return journey to West Newlands Farm for our departures home.

The strip is inside the Southend Control Zone and therefore requires a zone clearance before getting airborne. Michael Pudney was onto this straight away and managed to sweet talk Southend ATC into giving us all a group clearance so long as we all departed with the next hour. This was very helpful indeed, because going through the procedure separately for each plane would have been rather a palaver.

Our thanks once again to Wilkin & Sons for their hospitality and also to Michael and Jane Pudney for theirs too, and to William and Jane Procter whose initial planning with Michael helped to set the event off in the beginning.

Wilkin & Sons have a very good website for those who wish to delve further, or perhaps make some online purchases, https://www.tiptree.com/blogs/about-us/our-history.

Rob Giles



FFA European Tour 2023 – France

Roger's Tour de France





Full of anticipation we commenced Roger's French adventure from our home base, to file our flight plan and top up the fuel we then called into Popham airfield. All loaded and life jackets on we headed off to Le Touquet via south of Gatwick. Good flight although a little turbulent until Hastings, where we coasted out to cross the channel. Not long after that we saw the French coastline and soon were handed over by the French controller to Le Touquet.

Called Le Touquet..... Silence! Of course, it was "Le dejeuner de duex heures " therefore gave blind calls. The wind direction favoured R/W 13. Having established on left base for 13, we received a call from a taxing aircraft who intended to depart on R/W 31...Phew!! L/H base for 13 quickly turned into R/H downwind for R/W 31. Incident averted but resulting in a tailwind landing. After all we are in France now.

It was a joy to meet up with Rick and Laura in the terminal. We all piled into a taxi and set off to Le Grand Hotel where the advance party had already arrived. A good supper that evening was enjoyed by all. Following morning we all set off on foot to find a highly recommended cafe in Le Touquet called, as we were informed, "The Opium Den!" sounded promising. We requested directions from some bewildered locals only to find the name was "Opaline Cafe!" – we enjoyed an excellent breakfast which set us up for the next leg of our journey to St.Cyr L'ecole.

A limited taxi service necessitated Robert and Neville enjoying a brisk walk back to the airfield in order to refuel the A/C before the refuellers took the regulation two hour lunch break.

We all departed in turn for St.Cyr L'ecole-- not a straightforward route given the airfield is inside the Paris TMA and can only be approached by specific entry / exit points at a specified height on arrival at the visual reporting point. It was extremely busy with local and FFA traffic, helped by the fact it consisted of two parallel grass runways without runway markings! To add to pilot overload the air traffic controller was giving ambiguous instructions to the circuit traffic.

All very confusing, however, due the skill of the FFA pilots all aircraft landed safely.

"C'est la vie- Il et France"

Neville & Gaynor


Helen Cobb and Charles Course

FFA First timers tour

The conversation went like this ….

Charles: *There is a flying farmer trip coming up.*
Me: *Really? Why don't you go?*
Charles: *Hmm its for a week and I'm not sure I can afford the time away.*
Me: *Oh, you surely can take some time away from your desk, where are they flying to?*
Charles: *France*
Me: *I think you should go, you deserve a break, do you know the farmers who go?*
Charles: *Yes some of them, their wives and partners go too.*
Me: *Oh really, why don't we go??*
Charles: *They are visiting the Claas factory*
Me: *Hmm maybe I could visit the shops??*

And this is how we joined the group of flying farmers in Le Touquet for our very first flying farmers trip together.

We haven't afforded much time to go flying during the past two years as we have both been so busy with various work commitments.

Landing into Le Touqet we headed to the little airport restaurant for a quick bite to eat, sole which was swimming in salted butter and garlic with new potatoes, we are off to a good start, good food is a passion of ours.

Clearing customs and then off again to Paris which I have visited many times before but had never managed to make it to the palace of Versailles.

A fairly short journey to our hotel, nice reception – tick …. Stylish bedroom – tick …. Modern bathroom –tick, Clarins toiletries tick tick ! this was starting to feel more like a girls kind of holiday than a farmers get together.

A quick shower and down to the bar to meet the rest of the group, not knowing what to expect as I haven't ever done any of these flying farmers visits and this is when the real essence of the trip gripped me.

As we walked into the dining room a couple

of the ladies introduced themselves, smiles, warm happy faces welcoming us as a couple into the group, I was struck by how welcoming everyone was. It was clear that there were some very tight friendships which had been made over the course of time but everyone made the effort not to exclude us by introducing themselves.

The following morning we were up promptly, a quick breakfast and then a walk to the palace of Versailles, with our flying farmers hats and listening devices we all set off for the guided tour around this ornate palace. And then out into the hot sunshine to walk the gardens and listen to the viennese waltz partnered with dancing water.

A fabulous day finished with an amble back to the hotel and out for dinner with the rest of the group.

Another prompt start in the morning with a coach drive to the airport. We had been warned that the bus waited for no one on these trips !

Bon voyage gay Paris, fifteen light aircraft took to the sky, how much fun it was listening to each pilot over the radio, trying to decipher who it belonged to .

This group of interesting warm and friendly people became our companions for the rest of the trip, I laughed, debated, ate good food and drank possibly too much wine, it was delightful, I truly cannot wait for the next trip .

Helen Cobb







Day 1 – Versailles

Chateau Versailles, as the French call it, is ostentatious, immense, built to impress from 1661 by Louis XIV and exert pressure on the parliament and its nobles to vacate Paris and instead live and work at Versailles. It reflects how Louis XIV to Louis XVI lived there. The main staterooms are open of the 2300 rooms it contains and they have been restored to their former glory. For the ceilings think of the Sistine Chapel as they are works of art -the wall coverings, furniture, carvings, marble…never mind the iconic Hall of Mirrors that took 6 years to complete with its 351 mirrors. We started a guided tour in the late morning with our fantastic sound system-vital as Versailles expects about 30,000 visitors a day! It was a lovely summery day and the numbers meant we only got a flavour of the artefacts on display. Our excellent guide explained each room and its purpose and we ogled at the sheer extent of the opulence displayed.

After leaving our guide we went for a walk in the gardens. Whilst the horticulturist might have been disappointed (lack of flowers and variety of plants) the sheer size and layout with its fountains and vistas made for an enjoyable afternoon although by then it was rather hot! Many of us tried to find somewhere to have lunch and incorrectly hoped that the furthest away would be quieter- yes and closed! However some of us managed to find something to eat and drink before exploring the gardens again.

At the bottom of the large rectangular lake was another lake where boats could be hired.

It was much busier and more had been restored than the last 2 visits I made ten and twenty years ago. There was much more to see-more rooms, more working fountains and the gardens seemed bigger or perhaps we missed them!!

It had been a thought provoking visit-the French royals certainly knew how to live!

Laura Halt





Left; Chairman Paul in front of the only large tapestry-French and exquisite, Right; A magnificent ceiling.



Taken by Roz Stephens towards the end of the tour showing how grand its occupants were!

Day 2 - The Flight from St-Cyr to Angers – Monday 29 May

We realised on approaching St-Cyr L'Ecole 2 days before, that the controllers were a little stressed as 13 British aircraft approached their area and they tried to slot us in with the other airfield traffic in this fairly complicated airspace with many no go areas.

After a few misdemeanour's by some of our group due to poor runway markings and confusions with left and right grass runways with taxiways between, I thought it best to make a swift departure on the Monday morning, before they got too stressed again. The departure was no problem and we stayed below 1500 feet for the first few miles to keep out of all the controlled airspace above us. The rest of the 50 minute journey to Angers was straight forward.

On approaching Angers, we felt a totally more relaxed atmosphere from ATC and requested a top up of fuel. We didn't have a card (which we thought meant BP or Total), so someone came out to show us how to use the self service station with an ordinary credit card as the WI-FI was not working. Fuel was €2.78 a litre. This extremely helpful person turned out to be the fuel attendant, the baggage handler, the fireman and probably the coffee maker as well. It was Bank Holiday Monday and the airport was deserted apart from one person on the radio, this helpful all rounder, the follow me truck driver and the FFA contingent. The restaurant was shut along with the GA museum and most everything else.

However, our bus arrived on time, but there was one aircraft missing – our organiser! He had apparently diverted into Le Mans for what we understood to be a fuel stop, but was actually a comfort stop as he had Rebecca Rayner in the passenger seat and was too modest to use the on-board facility – or that's my take on the situation!

Paul Stephens



For our second stop on the French trip we flew to Angers, landing at Angers Marcé airfield. We arrived at a pleasant hotel conveniently situated next to a tram stop. After a good lunch in the hotel bistro we were left to our own devices for the afternoon. A visit to the Chateau d'Angers was suggested.

After an easy downhill stroll through narrow streets, past ancient houses, the Chateau (castle) comes into view on a rocky promontory overlooking the River Maine. The Chateau is spectacular with 17 round towers of dark schist or slate rock, alternating with pale limestone each standing about 30 metres high. The site has been a settlement since the Neolithic period with various uses that included a prison, a military enclosure, royal residences, and an administrative centre.

The walk on the ramparts gives views over the river, the town rooftops and the castle garden. The gardens include medicinal and aromatic plants which were very important in the Middle Ages.

A highlight of the visit was a view of the Apocalypse tapestry which is the oldest surviving set of tapestries of this size (100 m). The tapestry was commissioned in 1375 and made entirely of wool. It was considered to be an object of great beauty in 1480. However by the late 18th century it was thought to be old fashioned and was severely mutilated. It's true value was appreciated in the mid 19th century and after restoration it was returned to Chateau d'Angers where it is housed in a specially commissioned gallery.

The tapestry illustrates the Apocalypse and the struggle between good and evil, according to St John's Revelation in the New Testament. After plagues and other catastrophes, which are depicted, eventually Christ emerges triumphant and there is a peaceful ending in the Heavenly Jerusalem on earth, symbolising Paradise.

Anthea Brown



Day 3 - Class Tractor Factory – 30th May

It was 05:15 and the telephone alarm burst into life. It was Tuesday morning and the day of the Class Tractor Factory visit. Roz muttered something about having to get up at this early hour to go to yet another tractor factory, whilst getting dressed as dawn was breaking. Looking out of the hotel window the Angers pavements were being washed with high pressure washers mounted on a truck. We were impressed with Angers, its castle and quaint streets.

Breakfast was good, as the 29 half awake Flying Farmers started petit dejeuner at 06:00 in time for the bus at 07:15. The journey to the factory at Le Mans was about one and half hours with Roz still wondering why we wanted to see Class tractors being made after all the many more popular brands we had seen being manufactured on previous FFA tours.

We were greeted in the reception area at the factory with a drink and a biscuit amongst vintage Renault tractors. Prior to the Class buyout in 2003, Renault used to build tractors on this site as the FFA witnessed on a visit back in 1998 when Rob Chapman organised a short tour in France. Outside, in a line, stood the impressive new Class range of tractors from 120 hp to 450 hp.

Now for the facts and figures. The site covers 21 hectares, 7 of which are under cover. There are 900 employees with an average age of 39. They get 6 to 7 thousand visitors a year. Their biggest market is France itself, but they are shipped worldwide. All tractors are made to order with about 6 months lead time. As the tractors progress through the factory, each one is individually built to the customer's specification. So a 450 hp model could be followed by a 120 hp version on the line.

Class are very conscious of keeping the workforce happy. 20% of the staff are female. They just work the one shift a day from 07:00 to 15:30 with a couple of 10 minute breaks and a 35 minute lunch break, 5 days a week. There are TV screens throughout the factory showing the production targets and actual numbers of tractors crossing the finish line, which was set at 50 on the day of our visit. If they dropped behind slightly, the workers agree to do maybe another 10 minutes work at the end of the shift for a few days to try and recover the target.

We saw the initial assembly of the axles, engine, gearbox and back end, to which are added all the ancillaries before going through the paint shop. Here were the only three robots in the factory, doing the chassis cleaning and paint spraying the underside of the unit. Manual workers sprayed the top and easier parts. We guess this was because the French workers do not want to be denied a job even if the robots could do it better and quicker.

The chassis progresses along the line to be fitted with more oil lines, wiring harnesses and all the individual extras that customers have requested. There are many jobs that I am sure would have been done more efficiently by robots, but they appear to have happy workers which is so important.

Finally, the cabs which are assembled at the far end of the factory, are merged with the chassis. All the pipes and wires are joined up, the oil is added, a splash of diesel, the engine is started and everything tested to make sure it works.

Quality control is next, before the tractors go outside ready for delivery.

By the way, the microphones and earpieces that the FFA have invested in are an absolute God send, not just on this tour but on every occasion when we have a group visit. Our guide for the day, Elisa, made the tour very interesting for our group and had a great sense of humour.

Asking Roz what she thought of the visit at the end, it was a very different response to the early morning comments. We both genuinely enjoyed the tour, the atmosphere at the factory and the entertaining way that making a tractor was put across to us.

Will I buy a Class tractor? – maybe not, but this aspect, the sales side, was never put across to us. It was all about how Class run their factory and look after their workforce, which was impressive.

Back on the bus and as preparations were underway for the famous 24 hour race at Le Mans. The bus driver, who is a keen motorcyclist, didn't take much persuading by Roger to do a detour, taking in part of the road track that was open. We went down part of the famous Mulsanne Straight where the race cars reach 220 mph. Unfortunately, the bus was limited to 62 mph.

We had lunch at Arnarge where we were a bit confused with the identity of the food. We were served some pate of dubious origin and we could go and help ourselves from a salad bar. Then these rather handsome looking entrecôte steaks with chips were served and I thought that this was very generous for our group until we tried to cut it. It was impossible to extract any meat from the sinews and as was pointed out by our leader later, there was no marbling of fat and we then realised it was cheval rather than boeuf and a poor one at that. Most of it was left on the plate but it didn't matter as we were generally eating very well and we could quite honestly have skipped lunch.

Paul Stephens









Bejo Plant Breeders

Bejo Plant Breeders, Beauchene near Le Mans breed 40% of the world's vegetable seeds and are the largest independent seed company in Europe. The name Bejo comes from the original two families who merged in 1978, Cor Beemsterboer and Jacob Jong who specialised initially in breeding of cabbage, carrots and onions but now market 40 crops and a 1000 varieties of cauliflower, broccoli, rooted crops beetroot, Alliums , tomatoes, and leaf crops including lettuce etc.

Bejo also research and market seed treatment coatings, hybrid seed, retro crossings and phytopathology looking at disease resistance and tissue technology.

Bejo employs 2200 staff and distributes into 31 countries from North America to Africa via dealerships. HQ is in the Netherlands, and there are satellite stations in France (1600ha, 40 ha greenhouses, 13ha of organic) Italy, Australia, Argentina, China, Poland and South Africa to help research in the different climates and help speed up multiplication as it can take 10-15 years for a new variety with 3 years of marketing, production and processing.

We met with Stephanie Bevis, Head of Export Sales from Elsoms Seed, Spalding, Lincs who import Bejo seed into the UK and MD Yannick Chevray to give us the guided tour including a poly tunnel and the Seed Cleaning building.

We visited a fennel crop growing in a poly tunnel which had rows of male and female Fennel awaiting flowering. Different pollinating insects would be released including honey bees, bumble bees and certain flies to help with fertilisation. Bejo were proud of their bee-keeping operation as it was an essential part of the business.

Laurent took us around the cleaning and drying facility processing 1000t, starting in July with Cabbage, Red Beet and in September alone, 500t of onion, coriander, parsnip were made ready. All the dressed seed went on to the Dutch HQ for marketing.

We saw pre-cleaners, dryers, sieves, and gravity separators. Clean down vacuuming and maintenance work was going on as our group walked round.

It was a very interesting tour.

Rebecca Rayner

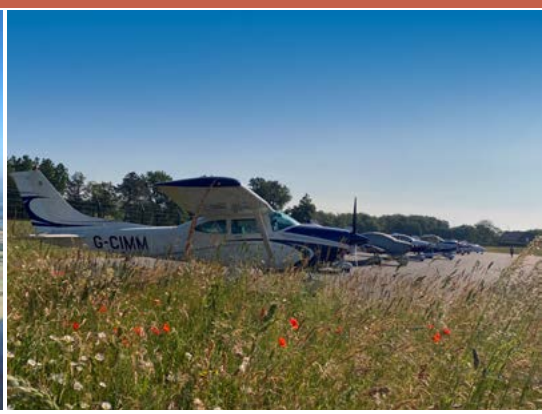




Day 4 - The Flight from Angers to Bordeaux Saucats 31st May







A relaxing 1 hour twenty minutes flight from Angers to Saucats, which is just south of the main Bordeaux Airport, in perfect flying conditions.

Personally, we just stayed at 1400 feet and out of the Cognac military airspace en route and observed the farming, vineyards and countryside. We monitored the various information frequencies as those that wanted to fly higher were directed up and down to stay clear of airspace, although I believe one IFR pilot in our group did get a clearance through.

We were told by our leader to expect French only at Saucats and this was confirmed on the plate for this club airfield with a hard runway. We dug out Roger's crib sheet and called Vent Arriere and Final 03 in Yorkshire French. As we happened to be the first to arrive, an Englishman came on the radio with a hand-held and guided us to a parking place. Others called me in English to confirm the runway in use until we got stern words from someone in the circuit to speak French. We never did see the Englishman.

Lunch had been pre-booked by Roger and was a good Caesar Salad in the busy airfield restaurant. The next bus journey caused our leader some stress as the Mercure hotel that was booked on the water front in a central location was going through some repairs and we had been moved to another Mercure in town. Panic was setting in because there didn't appear to be any beds for us – until he found there were 6 Mercure Hotels in Bordeaux - it was finding the correct one.

Paul Stephens

Visit to Chateau Leoville Barton



After an extraordinary caesar salad at the restaurant on the airfield at Leognan Saucats, the coach took us to the Wine Estate of Leoville Barton, a 2nd Grand Cru Classé Saint-Julien in the 1855 classification*. Along with Mouton-Rothschild, this is the longest-standing family winemaker in Bordeaux Haut Medoc.

While Mr Bell had been tempted to take the credit for getting us into one of the premier winemakers of the Bordeaux, the reality was nearly as good : it was a good friend who is one of the very few, if only, non-French wine negociant in Bordeaux who facilitated this privileged visit.

We were greeted by Lilian Barton Sartorius, the 9th generation of Barton Winemakers. She told us a little of the history of the family and the estate and we were surprised to learn that Ireland figured more prominently in the story than France!

The founder of the dynasty, Thomas Barton, left his native Ireland and the town of Curraghmore, County Fermanagh at the age of 27. When he arrived in Bordeaux in 1725, he developed an interest in wine and decided to create a wine merchant company. By 1737 he had already made a small fortune and was highly regarded by the Bordeaux locals who nicknamed him ''French Tom". At this time, French law stated that all assets belonging to a foreigner who passed away in France would become the property of the French Crown. It is for this reason that he never purchased vineyards in France. This had to wait until 1821.

Under his grandson, Hugh, the wine merchant company continued to flourish right up until the middle of the French Revolution in 1793. By this time Hugh had married Anna Johnston, the daughter of another Anglo-Irish family in Bordeaux. On the 14th October 1793 Hugh was arrested and incarcerated along with other British nationals living in Bordeaux. Their assets were seized and their future looked uncertain. The story goes that in December 1793 Anna visited Hugh with women's clothes concealed about her person and they made their escape back to England with Hugh dressed as a woman.

Hugh was able to re-build the business after the revolution and purchased Château Langoa in 1821 and then the Léoville domaine in 1826. He also purchased land in Kildare County, Ireland in 1835 upon which he built Straffan House which would serve as the family home for the following generations and in which Anthony Barton, Lillian's father, was born in 1930.

After Hugh Barton, three generations followed at the head of the family's two Bordeaux properties although they spent the majority of their lives in Ireland rather than France until Lillian's father, Anthony, moved to the estate in 1951. Chateau Mauvesin was purchased by the family in 2011 where Lillian's daughter Mélanie, the family's 1st Oenologist, took on the role of Technical Director in 2013. Her son Damien divides his time between the family's properties and other wine related projects.

Lillian had to depart at this point so we were then left in the capable hands of our guide for the rest of the visit, Alexandra who went on to show us the juicy parts of the business. In the last few years the winery has undergone extensive refurbishment. For an estate so steeped in history, the winery has a very modern feel whilst retaining many architectural nods to the past. And now, the wine making!

During the harvest, the grapes are brought to the vat-house where they are de-stemmed before being sorted on an optical sorting table and then transferred to temperature controlled wooden vats. The imposing vat-house is the perfect illustration of the traditional approach to wine making at Château Léoville Barton.

The fermentation process generally lasts a few days during which the juices are pumped over the top of the vat twice a day in order to keep the cap of skins moist and enable the juices to absorb the colours, tannins and aromas. The next stage is running off the wine i.e. transferring the wine to French oak barrels in which it will be left to age for 18 months. 60% of the barrels used each year are new oak and sourced from a range of different coopers for about €800 each. (After two years they are sold on to the whiskey making industry for about €100. If you work it out the barrel cost alone is €1.55 per litre or £1 per bottle) To clean a barrel, they burn a sulphur pellet inside



Barton vat house


Neville enjoying the wine tasting


Barrels of wine in the wine cellar


Bartonwine tasting

the barrel suspended on a hook.

Several different procedures are carried out during the 18 month ageing process, the first of which is topping up. This involves keeping the barrels full in order to prevent the wine from coming into contact with the air. The next stage is racking the wines. This process is carried out every three months using the candle method which has remained unchanged for several generations. The aim is to separate the clear wine from the sediment (lees) that form in the bottom of the barrels due to gravity.

The last traditional intervention is the process of fining the wines using egg whites using between three and six egg whites per barrel. This technique takes place 14 months through the ageing process. The proteins in the egg whites attract the floating particles and clarify the wine. A special post-fining racking is performed after 45 days to remove the egg white and sediment. The yokes are discarded unless employees want to make something out of them – I bet a load of crème brûlée's get made around that time!

The alchemy of blending is usually complete by the end of January. It is at this stage that the tasting profile of the vintage is determined in the tasting room. The bottling takes place at the château in June using their own facilities.

But what of the grape varieties themselves? There is a high proportion of old vines to ensure optimum quality. Typically 40 years old, the oldest is 60 and one vineyard recently pulled up was planted in 1900.The planting ratio of the three properties is typical of the Medoc region; majority Cabernet Sauvignon, a variable amount of Merlot and sometimes a splash of Cabernet Franc.

And finally, the tasting. We were invited to taste examples of the wine from each of the three properties. Strong and robust, these were suitable for hand-to-hand combat and preferably with a red meat dish.

Interestingly, they sell the wine "en-primeur" which means they sell each vintage while it is still in the barrel. Its reputation ensures that there are ready buyers for the wine at an advantageous price, two years before it is available in bottles with favourable cashflow for the winemaker. A 2022 Chateau Langoa Barton from Fine Wine Direct will set you back £213 and be delivered in 2025 – except it's already sold out!

Thanks were made and we made our way, dozy and disorderly, back to bus for onward transport to our hotel in Bordeaux.

THE 1855 CLASSIFICATION

The 1855 classification was initially established with the aim of presenting the wines of the Gironde at the Universal Exhibition of Paris at the request of Emperor Napoleon III. The responsibility of writing the classification was given by the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce to the Association of Trade Merchants of the Bordeaux Stock Exchange. Its mission was to devise an official classification based on many years of experience and according to the quality of the Terroir and the reputation of each Château.

The Classification was published on the 18th April 1855 and represented the realities of the market and its evolution over more than a century. Almost 160 years later, the 1855 Classification remains a key reference point and an authority in the wine world.

Andrew Cragg

Day 5 - Go with Roger and see the world!



"Make your way to the riverside quay by noon for a river cruise and lunch" he told us.

This would have been a short walk had we been staying at the hotel close to the river that had been booked, but Mercure Hotels had bumped us into the station hotel for the second time on our tour. The obvious solution was to use Bordeaux's excellent tram system. With Rebecca pushing the buttons and Tony Fisher's credit card our small party got tickets and Rebecca shepherded us onto the appropriate tram. With one change of tram we arrived close to the Garonne River.

"No he can't have fixed that" was my first thought as we left the tram, for there before us the magnificent cruise ship "THE WORLD" was towering above everything. Bordeaux is one place where cruise ships moor in the heart of the city.


Pont De Pierre Bridge

"No ours is over there" says Roger but when I looked where he pointed all I could see was a wreck sticking out of the mud on the far bank. When we got to the embankment, below us we could see Bateau Sicambre a lovely 250 seater river cruiser. Once on board we were greeted with a glass of bubbly before being seated for a scrumptious four course french lunch.

We cast off and headed up river to see the Pont de Pierre, a beautiful bridge with Napoleonic roots but not completed until 1863 which marks the boundary between the port section of the river and the upper reaches. Having loitered by the bridge to give us all a good view our captain took us downstream though the port area. On our way we had a good view of the riverside city, mansion houses and converted warehousing stood adjacent to modern builds. La Cite du Vin, a 2016 structure built to celebrate Bordeaux's history at the centre of the global wine trade had us all intrigued Next to that was a boat repair yard with a slipway designed to launch or recover vessels from the water sideways. The river banks were festooned with craft of all different shapes and sizes, cruise ships, racing yachts , catamarans and working barges. There were carrelets designed to lower large square nets which had been baited with liver into the water in the hope of catching scavenger sea life- crabs, lobster, crayfish and the like. Carrelets line the Gironde Estuary at sixty miles, Europe's longest. The Garonne and The Dordogne join to form the estuary at Bordeaux and are tidal at this point.

Next we passed under Le Pont Jacques Chaban-Delmas a unique feat of engineering. The centre 110 metre long section of this bridge, built to carry traffic from the ring road into the city, can be raised 53 metres rather like the ramps garages use to service cars. The counter-balance weights are housed inside the bridge legs. Raising the bridge allows big tall ships upriver to moor in the city port.

We cruised on downstream enjoying our lunch and turned around close to the point where in December 1942 Herbert Hasler and his team of canoeists attached mines to German Merchant ships waiting to unload cargo in Bordeaux. 5 canoes and ten men were launched in the Atlantic from a submarine and paddled at night up the estuary for over 60 miles to attack the ships. Sadly only Hasler and his number two Sparks survived to make it home. The efforts of the team are commemorated lower down the Gironde Estuary on both the north and south banks.

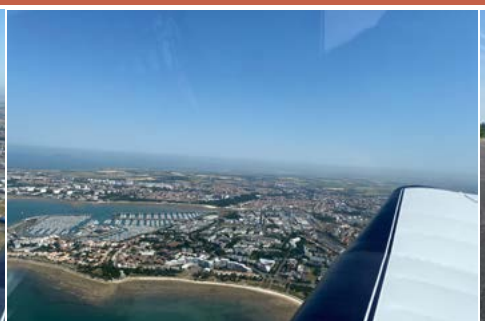
As we made our way back to the point of embarkation it occurred to me the only wild life I had seen was one seagull, cause for concern!

During our meal there was a commentary on the tannoy but we were enjoying our cruise so much that our chatter made the information inaudible in the saloon area.

The river trip was a very smooth operation and for me one of the highlights of the tour. Our luncheon cruise lasted three hours.

Richard Lawrence

Day 6 - The flight from Bordeaux Saucats to La Rochelle 2nd June


We returned to the airfield at Saucats to find that there were no landing or parking fees! Also no ATC, so it was just a matter of a couple of calls, in French of course, and we fitted in with the few local aircraft in the circuit. This short 45 minute flight heading north was lovely with hardly any turbulence in a cloudless sky. On calling La Rochelle, in between all the French speaking pilots, the British team came on with their best English. Personally, we were given the option of a circuit to the south following the coast or a more formal northern circuit reporting at various points. We took the scenic route to the south with lovely views of the city and the Ile de Re, then a simple right base join for 09. Fuelling was straightforward, much like a self service car fuelling station where you just put your credit card in, it validates it, then you remove your card and fill up with fuel which was €2.54 a litre.

Whilst we were refuelling, a Ryanair 737 struck up on the apron, so some of the later arrivals had to orbit while he took off. It was then into the flying club for a beer in the glorious 28 deg C sunshine, whilst everyone else refuelled. We left air-side by a double security gate and whilst waiting for our transport, 3 Douanes turned up asking loads of questions about where we had come from etc, but were happy when they found that our passports had been stamped into France and they agreed to meet us at the security gate on Sunday morning ready for our departure to the U.K. for those that were going direct.

Paul Stephens

Bonnain Oysters

After a lovely smooth flight from Bordeaux to La Rochelle, we piled into three mini buses with volunteer drivers and headed out to the Bonnain Oyster farm.

The farm was established in 1959 and is now run by the 4th generation of the family, with the help of two translators we were guided round by Melissa Bonnain and her father. The farm was previously a salt farm changing to oysters when salt production became unprofitable. The oysters are cultured and have been since 1850, before that there would only have been wild oysters. They are grown on a collector with the cultures being collected from May to August, the temperature of the water needs to be 20 – 21 degrees centigrade (the water in England is too cold to cultivate oysters in this way). They are graded by size before being put back into a bag which is returned to the sea, being checked at least once a month. After another year they are re-classified for the size and returned to the sea in their bags for another year. They are harvested at three years, when they will be brought back to the oyster beds and will be collected to order.

The beds are cleaned regularly to prevent the build-up of algae which suffocates the oysters. The beds will be left to dry to kill the algae before being re-filled with fresh sea water. Some years there is zero production from the beds, due to bacteria and virus which the small oysters cannot survive. Fresh water is pumped into the beds once a month to keep them fresh and healthy.

The fresh oyster, which we enjoyed with a glass of wine, should have soft delicate flesh with a faint taste of hazelnuts. For those not keen to try the freshly shucked oysters there were little pots of sardine rillettes and plenty of crusty French bread.

Yet another informative tour with benefit of being able to sample the produce at the end of it!

Peter Gale



A coastal dyke near the oyster farm



Young oysters on the rope that they have been hanging on while growing in the sea. They are about to be put in the mesh bag on which they are lying and placed in the oyster bed.



Every high tide there is a sluice which allows water to enter the beds when required.



Flying farmers, looking into an oyster bed



We were treated to a gourmet meal of oysters in the farm buildings after the tour. Here is our host with one of the interpreters.

Écomusée Du Marais Salant. Île De Ré



On arrival we were met by Clare our guide for the morning.

Firstly we were assembled in a mini theatre area and given a short talk on the history of sea salt production on the island down through the ages.

It first be again in the 17th century and developed over the years until the 19th century when it reached its peak with over 1,000 sauniers (salt producers) harvesting 30,000 tons annually. Today there are around 100 sauniers producing 3,000 tons per year covering an area of some 400 hectares.

We were shown a model of the site with evaporation ponds stretching some one and a half kilometres with the sea water taking approximately a week to gravitate from source to the final pond. By then the water is heavily saturated with salt which then crystallizes. It is said by the locals to be like a layer of caramel on a crème brûlée on the surface of a very thin film of water. It is then harvested by carefully raking it off into piles on the bank to dry in the sun.

We were then taken for a tour of the ponds with Clare explaining each step of the process as we went around. Plenty of sun and wind are needed for the evaporation, the slightest shower can ruin an entire harvest, as a consequence harvesting mainly takes place between June and September.

After a harvest, new sea water is introduced through a sluice at high tide and the process begins again.

Most of the sauniers belong to the Cooperative île De Ré Sauniers and sell the salt through it. It is sold both locally and around the world.

The salt is coveted by top chefs for its purity, because it is so pure there's no bitterness.

It melts slowly on the tongue and provides a delicious crunch as it enhances the flavour of the food.

After purchasing various forms of salt on passing through the small shop we assembled out side for a vote of thanks to Clare where she was presented with a FFA cap.

We then departed to explore the island before returning to our hotel.

Gordon Bellerby







Day 7 - The Flight from La Rochelle to Yorkshire 4th June

Yet another cloudless sky greeted us for our return flight home. Sky Demon makes what was once an almost impossible job of filing a flight plan by the notorious French Minitel into a simple click of a button whilst in the hotel. It must have been too easy as within 2 minutes of me submitting the Flight Plan, a French number was ringing my telephone. In perfect English, this Frenchman confirmed that I had indeed filed my Flight Plan but my journey time was 4 hours and I only had 2 hours 20 minutes of fuel declared on the Flight Plan. I apologised and asked if I should refile, but he said no problem, he would alter the endurance to 7 hours.

The other form made so easy on Sky Demon is the GAR form to alert Border Force of our arrival at home. This is also a simple click on a button after putting in the date and ETA as all the rest is pre populated. One thing that does surprise me is that our strip is already listed as a destination, yet I haven't done the application for us to be officially a place to land in the UK.

On arriving at the double gate to go air-side, were the customs officers as promised. These were a more light hearted man and lady who stamped the passports. Our flight routing over the Cherbourg Peninsula was delightful. What did surprise me, even on the Information frequencies, was the amount of French being spoken. I'm sure it was just small airfields where French was the common language and even then, English was still tolerated. I never seem to remember so much French as English is the international language of the air. Is it since Brexit?

As we called Rennes Information to declare coasting out, from 5000 feet we could actually make out the white cliffs of The Needles at the Isle of Wight. That's approximately 60 miles clear visibility. Almost as soon as we were over the sea, we were handed over to London Information and that reassuring English voice came on. The danger areas were not active in La Manche / English Channel, so it was a direct route, then after changing to Solent, we progressed north and round about Nottingham, we saw the first cloud since we left the UK 8 days ago.

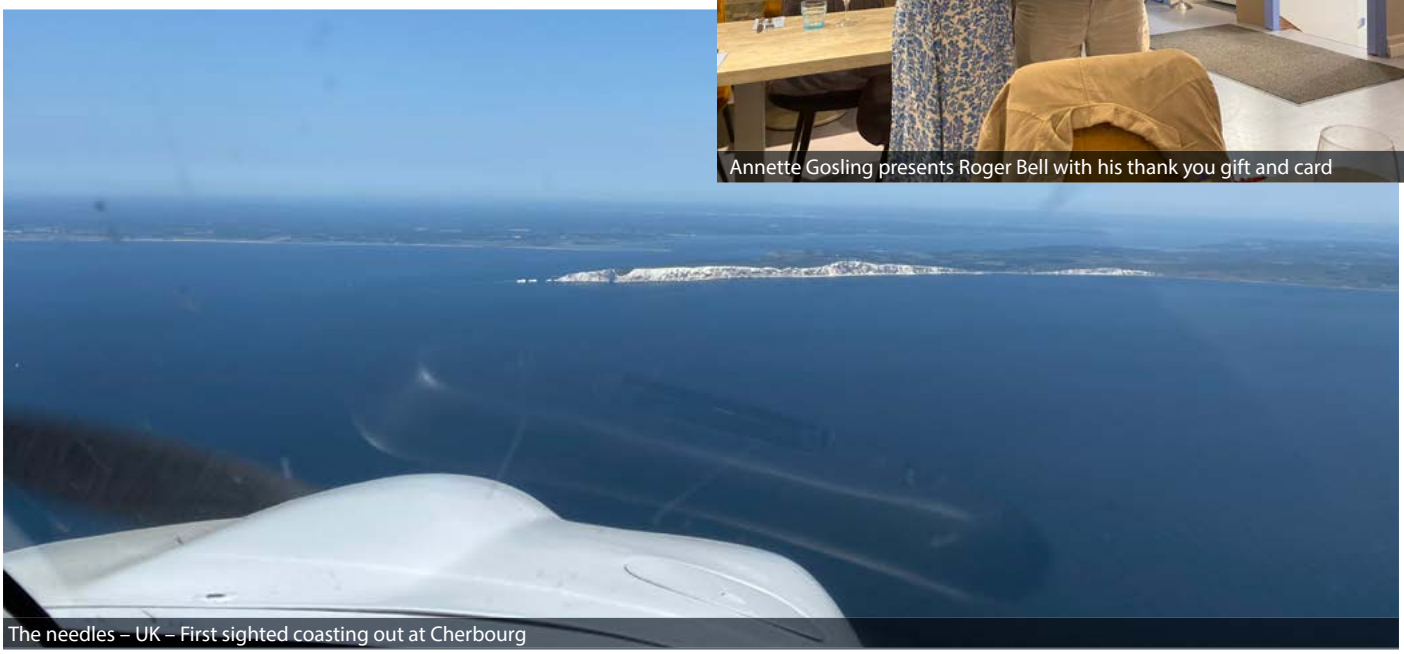
By the time we crossed the Humber, we had a dense layer below us and letting down, we broke cloud at 2000 feet and when we opened the canopy on the ground, the 28 deg C that we set off with dramatically changed to 12 deg C with a gusting wind. It was June 4th and felt like a day in February.

A special note to our organiser, Roger Bell. A sincere thank you Roger for putting on this tour. We all enjoyed it very much, appreciating the work you had put into it and look forward to your next one!!

Paul Stephens



Annette Gosling presents Roger Bell with his thank you gift and card



The needles – UK – First sighted coasting out at Cherbourg

Pop-In – White Waltham 18th March

Where I live, in a village near Aylesbury, the day I was to host the Flying Farmers "Pop In" on behalf of David Keene, who was double booked, dawned grey and damp. It was unlikely flying weather as, apart from the low cloudbase, the visibility to the west across fields and hedgerows was about 700 yards. In fact I couldn't even see the HS2 works which are despoiling the countryside round here.

Never mind, the weather usually improves as I cross the Chilterns heading towards White Waltham. But today it didn't and I arrived at the former home of the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) in the same sort of murk not expecting any flying farmer to join me. But I was wrong and soon I was advised by the staff that a large Piper was inbound (this was Paul Birtwhistle IFR in his PA32). He was followed by 6 others (with 11 crew) plus 4 others in 2 cars as the weather showed signs of improvement. The ladies of the ATA who used to deliver new aircraft to operational squadrons during WWII would probably have found our weather at White Waltham wholly acceptable. Nevertheless, all the FF who made it were of the same ilk and arrived to a warm welcome. Sadly 7 aircraft were forced to cancel.

The airfield is entirely grass and has 6 runways so there's always something into wind. Moreover, the Clubhouse, which is the original and largely unmodified ATA headquarters, is spacious with a large lounge/café/bar area, all the usual offices and, most importantly for a FF Pop-In, a large room adjacent to the bar which can be booked for such an event. The kitchens are large, too, and can produce good food quickly.

So, after a lot of chat, a good lunch (or snack) and a 100LL top up, the event drew to a close with departures in all directions. Job done!

Richard Butler

Pop-In – Leeds East 8th April

It is always a great pleasure for me, for a number of reasons, to fly in to Leeds East Airport, or to me better known as RAF Church Fenton. In 1973 I was fortunate to be based here for four weeks for a very short course flying the Chipmunk. I well remember walking along the large apron on the airfield, past up to forty Chipmunks, looking for the aircraft that had been allocated to me! It is good to see the airfield now in the safe hands of Flying Farmer Chris Makin who is breathing new life into the airfield that was, until recently, looking rather sad.

We were fortunate with the good weather over the majority of Britain on the day of our meeting, enabling 24 members and guests in 14 aircraft to attend. This number of people caused a bit of a wait for food, but we were all eventually served in the very convivial atmosphere of the Fenton Café & Grill.

After lunch we visited the very impressive new terminal building which also accommodates the dMb Collection of classic and supercars. On display was a superb collection of Ferraris, Porsches, plus a few Aston Martins, Jaguars, Bentleys, a Lamborghini and a McLaren. Looking around these vehicles made the ownership and operation of a 50 year old aircraft rather more of a modest and affordable option!

Leeds East airport is an interesting place to visit. All of those who attended this last Pop-In of the winter season enjoyed some great flying and good conversation. Just the reason that we organise these events.

We hope to organise Pop-Ins again, each month in the coming winter season.

David Keene.







Never stop training… by Ed Smiley-Jones

To become an aviator, it is often said that you should never stop training and this is particularly true with the type of flying I'm passionate about - Backcountry / STOL

I have watched multiple videos and read many books, all with the goal of improving my backcountry flying skills. However, as much as I practiced and my landings got shorter, my knowledge grew but I still didn't know if I was any good at it?

This prompted me to reach-out to flying schools, instructors and pilots in an attempt to get backcountry training recommendations here in the UK. Unfortunately, after much research and contacting potential sources, I couldn't find an instructor or organisation to teach me the skills for the backcountry flying adventures I was seeking.

This situation presented me with only one option… check-out the USA, the home of backcountry flying.

After much investigation, I decided to sign-up for the TacAero tailwheel training programme in Fredericksburg, Texas. The courses TacAero offers range from a basic tailwheel transition course through to intermediate, advanced tailwheel along with STOL, backcountry and mountain flying courses.

Going to Texas gave me the added benefit of seeing the Lone Star state's hill country landscape along with some of the state's vast cattle ranches, multiple breweries, vineyards and wineries - what a treat!

I arrived two days before my training programme was due to start, which gave me time to get some relaxation in, check-out the town of Fredericksburg and the surrounding area.

My home for the week…

Fredericksburg is the seat of Gillespie County which was founded in 1846 by German settlers. The town has a population of circa 10,000, this is a similar size town to Oakham in Rutland which has a population of 12,000.

Above: Turning right base to land at Gillespie Airport in a Carbon Cub FX3 on a beautiful 35C sunny Texan day















Top row left to right: The Hangar Hotel is a 1940's inspired hotel for pilots at Gillespie Airport, Fredericksburg - well worth a visit!; Traditional cowboy outfitters, Fredericksburg - a great place to buy your next boots and Stetson hat!; Bavaria or Texas? Fredericksburg is extremely proud of its breweries and Germanic heritage; Fredericksburg and the surrounding area is renowned for its vineyards, wineries, fine wine and dining. **Lower row left to right:** Pioneer Memorial Library was constructed in 1881/2 from locally sourced stone, it served as a courthouse until 1939; Pioneers' wagon used by the early German settlers dating back to 1846; Texas Jacks is a fine example of a traditional outfitters offering traditional clothing, leather goods, saddles, spurs and firearms

The major difference is it's very spread out, which gives the town a real feeling of space. Most of the buildings are single storey and are a combination of old settlers' houses, 1930's dwellings and more modern housing, built throughout the town's 175 years history.

In the residential areas just off the main street it was all very calm, with shade provided by the mature trees away from the near 90 degree spring heat. The main street was pleasantly busy with an abundance of shops, restaurants and retailers selling Stetson hats and cowboy boots. A friend of mine who's based in Colorado and is a huge foodie insists that Fredericksburg is the place to visit.

There's still a very strong German essence about Fredericksburg which you see in the food, multiple establishments serving beer, the local culture and along with this, I also heard a few German speakers too…

In the centre of the town there is a park where the Marktplatz (Market Place) is located, along with many old settlers' buildings, wagons and memorabilia. Along with this, the National Museum of Pacific War is situated on the main street. Within a few miles of the town there's multiple ranches and the Enchanted Rock National Park Area, which I discovered later in the week, acts a good flying land mark.

What a fantastic surprise…

On my first day in Fredricksburg, I decided to check-out Gillespie Airport where my flying course was located. The airport is on the edge of the town and a handy 5 minutes drive from my accommodation.

Gillespie Airport is a county-owned airport which boasts a 5,000ft runway, the 1930's styled Hangar Hotel and a 1950's diner, and many maintenance building all of which are in immaculate condition. As you approach the airfield there's a wartime Dakota displayed which is a delightful sight.

Arriving at the airport, on my 'reconnaissance mission', I had the most exciting of treats as the T6 owners annual Formation Flying gathering was in full flight. I witnessed these magnificent 600hp radial engined flying beasts taking off in groups of four, flying and landing in formation. What skill these pilots have and what a magnificent rumble came from those radial engines - it gave me the shivers!

I spent the afternoon talking with the pilots, learning about the T6 planes (which I knew very little

Below: T6 formation flying training event is an annual gathering at Gillespie Airport which draws pilots from many states









about) and understanding the American's views about flying. It became apparent very quickly that flying a plane in the USA is part of the infrastructure, no different to driving a car or riding a horse. Pilots are welcomed, the airports are cherished, facilities are outstanding and along with this, AvGas is $3.30 a US gallon!

Back to school…

Monday morning arrived and I was full to the brim with anticipation, excitement and a shade of nervousness.

I drove my white Dodge Charger (I asked for a VW Golf at the rental station but they laughed and replied, "You're in Texas, you'll have a V8 Charger") cautiously to the airfield, meandering my way along the roads close to a cattle ranch on the edge of the town in the pleasant morning heat. As I drove along the main road, surveying the area to the airfield, I noticed how many pick-up trucks there were on the road all towering way above my vehicle. I reckon about 70% of the vehicles were pick-up trucks either towing open-topped cattle wagons, carting large machinery or running a trip to the shops.

On arrival at TacAero I was warmly welcomed by my instructor Kris who was the CFI - this kick-started my week of flying. Kris spent some time briefing me, discussing what I wanted to get out of my training along with understanding my skill level.

I explained to Kris, I fly an Aviat Husky from a short home strip, I've had no formal STOL training and thus I was unsure if I should be taking the intermediate, advanced STOL course or even the backcountry course. I have never been able to benchmark myself against other pilots to ascertain my skill level and competency.

Kris explained, I would have an assessment in a Cub Crafters Top Cub and following this he would decided what's best for my flying and which training programme was right for me. He went on to explain that experienced, backcountry and military pilots all have this assessment before the course starts… as pilots' appreciation of their own skills can be sometimes be over-stated!

I was allocated the Cub Crafters Top Cub - this reminded me very much of the Piper Super Cub I learnt to fly in, especially the heel brakes. I spent the following two hours familiarising myself with the Top Cub, flying at slow speed, stalling, steep turns, Dutch rolls and landings with and without power and particularly enjoying the experience of landing on the 31" bush tyres.

On my return to Gillespie Airport, Kris said, "You've taught yourself well and you'll be taking the Backcountry flying course". Wow! This was brilliant news as we would now be heading off to the backcountry later that day. Along with this, his words gave me a significant confidence boost that I was a fair pilot. I put much of this down to having landed on a home strip which is less than 800 ft long with sheep and hedges to avoid and lots of practice, not to forget the variable wind directions and speeds on top of my Leicestershire hill.

Kris continued to say that pilots sometimes over estimate their ability and it's important that they have the different layers of skills required to fly the backcountry and off airport. If the student doesn't



Above Left: Cub Crafters Top Cub resting on a sandbar on the Llano River after a hard morning's work
Middle: TacAero - training elite aviators in the Texas backcountry
Right: 31" Alaskan Bush tyres are a must for landing and taking-off on this deep sand
Lower Right: Sand damage to the propeller after a days backcountry flying, landings and taking-off on sandbars and beaches



Left: Low and slow, hunting sandbars to land on along the Llano River

have the prerequisite skills for backcountry flying, TacAero will focus on those areas required such as; power control, slow flight, hitting your spots - much of which is covered in a 3 day STOL course, along with many other aspects of flying. Once the CFI is happy with your progress you can move on to other courses such as backcountry or mountain flying.

It's worth mentioning, later in the week I flew the Cub Crafters Carbon Cub FX3 which was fitted with extended Acme Aero suspension, 31" Alaskan Bush Wheel tyres and a glass panel and also the Cub Crafters EX model which was designed for greater comfort and endurance. They were both fantastic planes which I loved flying - the Acme Suspension took away the rebound you normal get from bungees, so every landing was smooth.

While I am on the subject of kit, I will also say, what a delight the 31" Alaskan Bush Wheel tyres were. They made the most punishing hard landing impacts comfortable and seemed to smooth out the rough terrain that we were found ourselves on each day, whilst giving the propeller extra clearance from the sand and stones.

We headed off to another City-owned Municipal airfield located close to the City of Llano where we we going to practice; STOL, emergency landings, wheeler landings, cross-wind a taster of dragging and much more….

Llano was yet again an immaculately maintained airfield which had two runways, one asphalt of 4,202 x 75ft and a turf runway of 3,240 x 150ft. The turf runway and run-off area was so wide you could land across the runway, I'll come to this later…

To give you a perspective of this airfield's size, I saw a photo of a 2016 STOL fly in where they had 250 taildraggers parked along the edges of the runway wing tip to wing tip - what a day that must have been!

An added surprise - the airports offer free courtesy cars so you can go to the town for lunch or buy provisions… they love an aviator in Texas!

A slight digression but as I'm talking runways. Later in the week I was flying low and slow over the Texas Hill Country being extremely nosey looking at ranches and enjoying the vastness of the country when I spotted a runway. Kris (my CFI) informed me, 'It's a private 6,000ft asphalt runway, the guy owns a jet or two!'.

Practice makes perfect…

TacAero were extremely thorough with their approach to training and they wanted to give me all the skills and experience they could before we went off airport. The reason for this was, later that week we weren't just going to land on a well manicured farm strips, but we were building-up to sand bars, beaches and rough backcountry landings. These included many obstacles on the approach and take-off such as trees, power cables, narrow entrances along with canyon walls, deep sand, tree stumps and river beds to mention a few!

Thus day two at Llano was all about practice and repetition, honing my skills, getting extremely comfortable with the plane, compressing the landings and take-offs, managing the power, consistently hitting my spot and creating different scenarios to deal with.



Above: Coming into land on Garret Island, Lake Buchanan. The lake was formed following the construction of a 2 mile dam in 1939 creating a 22,333 acre lake.
Bottom right: Cubcrafters Top Cub - an adept modern-day version of the Piper Super Cub, ideal for the backcountry

I also practiced emergency landings which included the Impossible Turn. Take-off, at 500ft the power is pulled, you push the nose down, complete a 180 and land back on the strip… sounds so simple. The CFI explained that TacAero do not advocate this type of emergency landing but when you are in a canyon you only have one choice so you need to practice this manoeuvre.

However, this day we had a crosswind and during my first attempt I turned to my left (as this was the circuit direction I got used to) however, I drifted away from the runway with a tail wind… how stupid, I didn't take this into consideration! My next attempt was spot-on,180 turn to the right, through the wind with a nose down attitude (which felt like a dive) and then trim for landing - success!

In conversation my CFI mentioned, 'In the States we follow processes and procedures but when there are poor weather conditions and situations where safety is paramount, then the rules can be flexed and you need to call-up and ask the question'. As we had an extremely strong cross wind that day this led to the following, a landing across the runway - that was a first!

Once my CFI was happy with my progress I then had the chance to stretched my wings, part of which was to fly into the backcountry, low and slow to spot potential landing sites. But before we set off I had a briefing about the the conditions to expect.

This included flying low - the backcountry is littered with power cables, poles, telecom towers at different heights which you need to attune your eyes to. Looking out for houses was a good tip as as they are a great indicator of power cables close by. One had to be especially careful of the cables which span the rivers as they are difficult to see against the sand, moving water and trees.

When we were looking to identify a landing site we broke it down in to the following processes,

- High pass at circa 75/100ft to see if it's suitable - no trees, cables, approach and landing distance is okay.
- Low pass at about 30/40ft to see if there are any rocks, tree stumps and diverts. It's surprising, at 100ft it looks like a tennis court and 30ft it's a rough as sandpaper.
- Once happy you then drag the strip. This is where you roll the tyres along the ground with your tail wheel up to judge the surface condition as you need to check - will the sand take the weight of the plane, are there any obstacles in the way, will you have enough take-off distance?
- Once you are happy then you make the landing on the next approach.

Kris did point out, there's no pressure to land, you can do as many passes as you like and if you're not happy go and find somewhere else better.

Landing on sand acts like a drag anchor so you need to decided which landing format you're going to make, a wheeler or three pointer? When you manoeuvre on the sand you need to keep the power in, otherwise as soon as you slow and momentum reduces you'll sink into the sand. Getting the momentum back takes a lot of power, the sand damages your propeller and the tail feathers very quickly - to the point the leading edge of the propeller looks like its been sand blasted!

Once landed it doesn't stop there, firstly get your plane to a safe place just incase a fellow pilot needs to land. You must also consider the best parking place, so when you depart it is done with ease, a single fluid movement from stationary to lining-up and take-off with out stopping as any power reduction with cause the plane to sink into the sand and extra power will be needed to get going again.





Next you'll walk the area you landed to see what the ground conditions are like - remove any offending rocks and debris such as tree branches.

You'll see your wheel tracks in the sand so you can measure your landing distance, workout your route out. Once you have cleared the runway you can then calculate your take-off distance place a marker (a pile of wood) at a point where you want to have the tail-up and ready for rotation.

In my humble option these landings would be impossible to perform in these conditions if it wasn't for the 31" Alaskan Bush Wheel tyres - they were astonishing. They gave you huge amounts of flotation on the sand and reduced the impact of a hard landings… I highly recommend them to anyone who wants to fly off airport… they pay-off of losing 5/8mph of cruise is worth it every time.

The rest of my week was putting the above into practice. Low and slow flights along the Llano River at about 100ft height, occasionally bobbing up and down to miss the power cables. I also had the opportunity to take these new-found skills and fly to Lake Buchanan to land on Garret Island - an avocado shaped island (about the same size too!) which had a small sandy beach littered with old tree stumps. This island landing allowed me to test other new found skills - whilst dragging the beach in a wheeler configuration steering around the odd tree stump like a ballet dancer and then full power at the end of the beach and take-off over the water… exhilarating!

Wrap-up…

Over the 5 days, which included 16 hours of flying and 8 hours of ground school, much friendly banter, flying anecdotes and meeting other backcountry pilots and instructors, I learnt an immense amount about flying and my own flying abilities - more than I could have ever learnt here in the UK.

The biggest compliment I was given from Kris (my CFI) was when he said, "You're an aviator not a pilot!', he continued by saying, 'We've taught you all we can, it's now up to you to practice what you've learnt'.

My resolution for 2023 was to become a better pilot and the only way I could do this was training and spending time with other experienced pilots. Hence my trip to TacAero in Texas as part of this.

During 2023 I have gained an IRR and CRI ratings, along with this backcountry flying course and practicing at every opportunity possible to hone my new skills. I'm planning another trip to Scotland later this year to experience another environment and as I've firmly got the training bug I'm keen to arrange another trip with TacAero to complete a mountain flying course in the Ozark mountains.

I'll sign-off by saying, my time in Texas was the most liberating flying experience I have ever had - completely unbelievable and finally using TacAero's sound words once again, NEVER STOP TRAINING!

If you would like to experience some of my Texas flying please take a look at my videos on Instagram @hinterlandpilot

Above: A typically vast Texas ranch nestled in the Texas hill country, located close to the Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, 17 miles north of Fredericksburg

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The price of FFA New Style jackets has risen considerably and once the current stock has run out the new price will be £85.00 plus postage and packing.

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION

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Deadline for articles for the December newsletter is 30th October 2023

To help us to edit and produce the newsletter in a timely fashion ***please could the event organisers collect all write-ups including videos and pictures and provide all together*** within three weeks of the event taking place.

Please email newsletters@ffa.org.uk

NEW **Please note change in newsletter email address; newsletters@ffa.org.uk**

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Bowser Wanted

Based up in the Highlands and am looking to purchase an Avgas bowser (Newhall Mains). I was wondering whether any FFA members have a second hand one they are looking to sell.

Please contact Euan Ramsay at ramsay.euan@googlemail.com

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Profile: Charles Course, Elmsett Airfield Suffolk

By Rebecca Rayner

Some of you may have had the opportunity to go on Charles's FFA invitation to Elmsett this year. I personally met Charles and Helen on the FFA France tour who were both good company.

Hi Charles, tell us about your early days…
I was brought up on a small arable, pig and poultry family farm in North Bucks in a close and loving family where a strong protestant work ethic was instilled in me, which I have always appreciated hugely.

Did you pursue a farming career…
I was a keen young farmer and competitive ploughman and still enjoy ploughing now when I get the time. Sadly, the farm was too small to support sisters and cousins, so we have all pursued our own careers, but I have very fond nostalgic memories of working on the farm evenings, weekends and school holidays. This nostalgia has been a key driver in my collection of vintage and classic farm machinery; where I have tried to recreate my teenage years buying examples of machines I used. I do have to keep building sheds to put things in as combines seem to take up quite a lot of space!

What career path did you take….
I got a First degree in Agricultural Economics at Reading University and an MSc in Agricultural Business Management at Wye College. I was lucky to work for Professor John Nix after I finished my MSc and also taught at Wye College. I was then a farm manager for Silsoe College. At the same time I also taught at Silsoe and Shuttleworth Colleges and on Cranfield's Plantation Management MSc programme in Malaysia

I joined Bidwells in 1990 and worked hard to be the first non surveyor to become an equity partner, but then resigned to start Material Change in 2003; as I wanted to prove to myself that I could start something from scratch.

Material Change now employs 190 people, operates 6 compost sites and 10 Anaerobic Digestion plants and moves and processes over 900,000t of various organic materials. We also employ a further 200 staff in the sister companies and I'm lucky to chair Brett Vale Farming Company which keeps me in touch with real professional farming.

Tell us about your family …
Helen and I met 13 years ago and so I have 2 great step children. Oscar has finally taken an interest in tractors (as well as horses) but Olivia finds living in the middle of a field a bit quiet and prefers to be out and about in Norwich. Helen is the perfect Flying Farmer's wife, able to lamb sheep, drive a tractor, provide wonderful shoot lunches and loves flying. She is currently finishing renovating our holiday house in Norfolk to rent out and is keen to offer a 10% discount to FFA members (www.seaview-manor.co.uk) we are both shamelessly commercial so couldn't resist trying to get some free promotion! North Repps airfield is just down the road.



Charles Course, stood in front of G-MCAD his Cessna T206H

When did you start flying and getting your PPL…
I started hang gliding when I was 15, which was in the very early days of hang gliding. I got a PPL (M) in 1988 and flew a weightshift microlight. I've flown fixed wing for more than 30 years and have an IR since 2003. I really enjoy the challenge, precision and rigour of IFR flying. So it was quite a novelty (and a bit scary) flying VFR in France, on our first FFA tour, with 15 FFA members converging on a grass strip (mostly) speaking French!

How did you get to know about the Flying Farmers Association?
I've been a member for a long time but not been very active. I then joined Tony Fisher's vintage extravaganza a few years ago and really enjoyed it. I've been on a few of these which are wonderful events, getting to visit some amazing private collections. Being able to come to France with Helen and meeting such a welcoming group was fantastic, so we are now keen to join more tours and FFA events.

Do you have any other interests other than flying?
I run my own small farm and airfield, collect vintage and classic combines tractors and farm machinery. I'm a keen shot and am treasurer of Hadleigh Farmers Agricultural Association which runs a wonderful traditional agricultural show and also treasurer of the Wye College Agricola Club. Although time is always short, I also love to spend time with Helen, mow grass, dig ditches, cut hedges, restore and use vintage farm machinery, explore history, read and listen to Pink Floyd. I'm curious about the world and love to learn.