# FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION

**April 2026 newsletter no. 151**



# CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

When I sit down to write this Ramble, I am always conscious that by the time it goes to press, the world will have moved on and my message will be totally out of date.
This time it is more difficult than ever, as the world is very unstable and no one can predict from day to day whether the war in the Middle East will be over soon, with Trump basking in some sort of glory that he is putting the world to rights – or the fighting will go on with so many people being unnecessarily killed or displaced and our cost of living escalating beyond the Labour Party's fantasy of bringing prosperity to the 'working man'.

I can only dream that these mad men like Putin and Trump disappear and we can just get back to more stability and live a peaceful life – that's my fantasy!

On more important matters, the FFA continues to thrive with membership numbers actually increasing, with a new member joining every month. Despite my predictions ten years ago that we would become an extinct association as everyone was getting past it, it seems that the eighty year olds of today are apparently quite sprightly and more active than of yesteryear. One example is our President who continues his air racing and flitting around the world like a youngster – next trip is to fly his Robin to Senegal in April.

However, the young flying farmers of today are a rare breed. The new members tend to be in their late fifties - so we will be a forever older and wiser group. But then what of the future of general aviation itself?

It was very sad to see our safety council, GASCo folding. The CAA doesn't seem that interested in our type of flying and are happy to see important bodies like this disappear. They will let drones take over our airspace, and allow development and electric pylons to be built with total disregard for our airfields.

GAAC are the ones to stand our corner here. They too were looking a bit financially uncertain. However, they apparently have a new lease of life and are on our case again. We have therefore diverted some of the funds that were pledged to GASCo to this organisation bolstering our position as their biggest contributor.

My mother's wise words were – "Enjoy it while you can"

*Paul Stephens*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE


2 Chairman's Ramblings
3 FFA News/Calendar
6 Treasurers Telegraph **NEW**
8 FFA Safety
10 Programme 2026
14 Visit
18 Adventure
24 STOL
26 Adverts
28 Member profile


## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Martin Gosling | President | 01787 269369 |
| Paul Stephens | Hon Chairman/ Hon Secretary | 07711 201431 |
| Andrew Cragg | Vice Chairman/Treasurer/ Hon Membership Secretary | 01303 874251 |
| Neville Stops | Events Secretary | 01264 889678 |
| Gordon Bellerby | Assistant Events Secretary | 07802 948000 |
| Alf Oliver | Committee Member | 07860 165659 |
| Giles Abrey | Newsletter Editor | 07967 665470 |
| Rebecca Rayner | Committee Member | 01487 773282 |


FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION LIMITED
www.ffa.org.uk
A company limited by guarantee; registered in England No. 01166733
Registered Office: Brooker Farm, Newchurch, Romney, Kent, TN29 0DT

**Publisher & Editor:** Giles Abrey
newsletters@ffa.org.uk
**Art Editor & Production:** Kirsten Lee,
kirsten@leeillustrations.co.uk
**Cover photograph** London FFA Trip March 2026 by Roz Stephens


**Joined Since December 2026**
8866 C. Odwyer from Margate, Kent
8869 A. Anderson from Aberdeen Aberdeenshire
8867 H. Fleming from Blandford Forum, Dorset

**Departing Members**
690 C.H. Dobson Lapsed

## FFA Committee Meeting – Wednesday 11th March 2026

The FFA committee met after the London meeting when we visited Westminster Abbey on March 11th. All 7 committee members and our President were present. The meeting was held at the Munich Cricket Club just down the road from the Abbey.

Points arising from the previous committee meeting and the September AGM were run through, including Mike Cuttell's suggestion to have aircraft type listed on our web-based membership list. Although this can get out of date if members don't update their profile, he said it could be useful for those seeking advice about similar aircraft. It is also a useful guide as to the suitability of a member's strip for other visiting members. In other words, if a member has a twin or a Cirrus, there is a good chance it will be suitable for your 172. Conversely, if he has a STOL Huskey, it might not be suitable for your sleek retractable.

Alf Oliver was volunteered to look for a suitable landing site if you want to visit Cereals this year at Diddly Squat, hosted by Jeremy Clarkson. If he can find somewhere suitable, then it will be published on the FFA calendar, which means that the airfield operator will be covered by the FFA Airfield Insurance whilst the event is carried on.

We had complaints at the AGM that the acoustics weren't conducive to easy hearing. Neville has looked into buying a loudspeaker for our Tour Talk headset system. But it was pointed out that a loudspeaker probably wouldn't help as the problem was the poor acoustics. We will therefore make provision to use the earpieces in the future.

Dress code at our meetings was mentioned as we had some complaints that standards in this modern world are slipping. This doesn't give a good image of our Association when we are hosted at various events. Look out on the meeting instructions and you will generally see that the dress code is smart casual or more formal on some occasions.

Andrew, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary gave his Membership Report listing those that have resigned and departed this last year. It was heartening to see two of those that have left us have been replaced by their sons. A couple of those that passed away this year will have short obituaries in this newsletter as they were regular attenders at events and known by many members. This doesn't mean that anyone else is less important, it's just that we don't want to fill the newsletter with obituary notices.

Neville, our Events Secretary gave us an insight into the coming events which you can see on the Programme page. He had a feeling that attendance numbers were dropping slightly. One suggestion to get new members going at events was to give them a free pass for their first event.

A point raised in AOB was that GASCo used to organise the infringement safety courses. What will happen now?

The Chairman reported that Werner Brombacher – a well known character to those attending events 20 odd years ago, lost his wife Trudi this year. In recognition for all his help with assisting on those European Tours, we made him an Honorary Member. He has always kept contact with some of those tourers and we used to send him a newsletter for his amusement. This is now a more formal arrangement. When he received the invitation to join, he rang me as he was so overwhelmed to be asked and he felt so honoured.

Suggestions were made for a 2026 AGM venue and this will be firmed up at our next meeting in June.

Those were just a handful of subjects discussed at our 2 hour meeting.

*Paul Stephens*

## Calendar of Events 2026

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 14 – 19 April | Sun N Fun | Lakeland, FL, USA |
| 22 – 25 April | AERO Friedrichshafen 2026 | Friedrichshafen, Germany |
| 15 – 16 May | Private Flyer Show | Wycombe Air Park, Bucks, UK |
| 10 – 11 June | Cereals | Diddly Squat Farm, Oxfordshire, UK |
| 19 – 21 June | Real STOL Fest 2026 | Breighton Airfiled, Yorkshire, UK |
| 26 – 27 June | Private Flyer Show | Leeds East Airport (Church Fenton), UK |
| 27 – 28 June | Festival of Flight Air Show | Shuttleworth (Old Warden), UK |
| 20 – 24 July | Farnborough International Airshow 2026 | Farnborough, UK |
| 20 – 26 July | AirVenture 2026 | Oshkosh, WI, USA |
| 4–6 September | LAA Rally 2026 | Leicestershire Aero Club, Leicester Airport, UK |

## IMPORTANT Membership Matters

### SUBSCRIPTION OVERPAYMENTS

Thank you everyone for your continued membership this year.

Last year, 26 members who have moved to Go Cardless direct debit had still not cancelled their Standing Orders for £25 and 2 still pay the £5 subscription from 25 years ago! With the subscription date of 26th April looming, please look back over your statements or check your bank details. The agreed policy for the extra subscriptions is that they are held for a year and if the member does not ask for a refund then it goes irrevocably into FFA funds.

## Obituary Jim Anderson, 1937 – 2026



Three generations airborne

Jim was born in January 1937 in Leven, Fife. His mother had travelled from the family farm of Sauchenshaw at Netherley, to be with her family for the birth. He was educated at Cookney School then Mackie Academy, Stonehaven. He kept a low profile in school but did well in exams and test; this was to be the tone of his character throughout his life, quietly successful and never one to show-off. As he was an only child, he spent many summers visiting his uncles and cousins Bill, Peter and Anne in Fife or staying with his auntie Susan at Scatwell, a little way north west of Muir of Ord. Susan was the post mistress and Jim found gainful employment helping with the mail deliveries. Growing up, he was passionate about cycling and travelled all over the parish. He enjoyed shooting, but as vermin control rather than for sport. Although his father had ridden motorcycles in his youth, he did not wish to risk his own son in such risky pursuits and promptly bought him his first car after passing his driving test, an Austin A30 which he owned and cherished for a further 13 years.

Jim and Sheila met at a local dance in Maryculter, near where Sheila was working as a nanny. Their plan for a first date didn't go as planned, for even though he enjoyed shooting, on the day of the date he shot himself in the foot. But the wound did not deter them and at Drumoak Church, they were married in 1963 and began their life together at England Farm, Portlethen, bought in partnership with his father. Their love together was blessed with the safe arrival of Hamish, Douglas, Angus, Fiona and Isla. The arrival of a fourth child necessitated the purchase of a larger car and so commenced Jim's lifelong obsession with the Volkswagen Passat estate.

Exempted from National Service on account of his occupation, Jim instead volunteered to join the Royal Observer Corps, which he could attend simultaneously with his farming and family life. During his long years of service, he made friendships that were to last a lifetime. As part of his role within the ROC he took part in a surveillance flight in a Nimrod out of RAF Kinloss. This was during the Cod Wars with Iceland, and the flight involved flying over the sea at a height of 250 feet in order to record and photograph various fishing vessels. He was so enthusiastic about the flight that Sheila decided that a trial flying lesson would be a suitable birthday present, and this marked the start of his lifelong passion of flying and all things aviation. He began his flying training with Peter Forbes of Pegasus Flying Club at Dyce and qualified for his pilot's licence in 1977. Later on, he would have a certain twinkle in his eye when telling of how in the hot dry summer of 1976 and the poor national potato harvest, coupled with his fortune of having a relatively good harvest, permitted him to learn to fly at the rate of two bags of tatties for one hour's flying lesson! Those were the days!

Initially, he flew the club aircraft before forming a flying group that bought a 1947 Auster aircraft, registration G-AIJT. He subsequently said that the aircraft's undesirable flight characteristics instilled in him desirable flying skills! He absolutely relished flying and went on to achieve night and instrument flight ratings.

As Hamish and Douglas were leaving school the search for a larger farm began, to keep them busy. After three or four years of looking at farms, the timing was just right, as prices had fallen following the 1980s oil price crash, and he was able to buy a Ardiffery Mains, Hatton, taking up residence in 1987, where the family remained for a further 36 years. Coming from the coastal farm at Portlethen where the soil was thin and stony, the fields small and the wind and salt were harsh, Ardiffery, set in a hollow, surrounded by trees was like paradise. Many happy years he spent farming successfully there, with improvements made to the farmhouse, buildings and land, culminating with a swimming pool for Sheila, complete with a straw burner to heat it, the farmhouse and Hamish's adjacent cottage. A mobile phone mast deal was struck providing additional income, followed by wind turbines providing energy and further revenue. One of Jim's improvements became slightly controversial, when during painting the large grain store roof, he decided on the spur of the moment, to incorporate the farm name into the paintwork. The local council got wind of this and despite Jim's insistence that it was an aid to aerial navigation, he had to retrospectively apply for planning permission. Grudgingly, he went through the process, all the while insisting that he was not advertising anything!

Around 1991 South Ardiffery, the adjacent farm came up for sale. As any farmer knows, the opportunity to buy an adjacent farm is always an attractive proposition. But Jim was particularly interested in the long field, at the top of the hill, close to the farmhouse. Bids were submitted and the farm secured. Within a week of entry, the earthmovers arrived to do some slight modifications to the contours and Hatton Airstrip was established, much to Jim's eternal delight and pleasure. Hamish and then Angus subsequently attained their pilot licenses and were able to share his beloved Robin DR 400 aircraft.

Jim officially retired when he was 65 in 2002 and Hamish and Douglas were assumed into the Partnership. However, like all farmers he continued to work alongside his sons, providing both labour and guidance for as long as he was able. Jim continued to fly and took any opportunity or excuse to get airborne, taking neighbours and friends on pleasure flights, but also on business, travelling all over Scotland and the Isles to buy cattle. Once, he got airborne to help find a neighbour's cow that had become trapped in the nearby moss. He had joined the Flying Farmers' Association during the 1980s and flew to meetings and events all over the UK and for many years, all across mainland Europe, including Gibraltar and flying through the Alps, the mountains higher than the aircraft, to take part in their annual study tours. Over his 44 years of flying, he never had any accident or incident. He truly was an example of the oft-quoted pilot expression: a superior pilot who used his superior judgement to avoid situations that required the use of his superior skill.

I think it's safe to say that the happiest times of his life we spent at Ardiffery but unforeseeable circumstances in 2020 led to the unhappy decision by the family to sell the farm. A move was made to Ataraxia

in the village of Tarves early in 2023. This was to be the final chapter of Jim's life, but together with Sheila and Hamish, they quickly settled into village life, making new friends and finding new activities. Ataraxia afforded a peaceful, private setting, having the convenience of access to the village but located on the edge of farmland, where Jim could enjoy the view over the field of cattle to the countryside beyond. They celebrated 60 years' married life in 2023 and Jim was fair trickit with his card from the King and Queen.

As his years advanced, outwardly he appeared the same with his mind still sharp, but internally he became more and more affected by illness. Nevertheless, his family and circle of friends are grateful for all the time they had throughout Jim's long life.

*Angus Anderson*

**We would like to thank all of the FFA members who got in touch with their condolences and to share their memories of my Dad**




Italy FFA tour 2006.

## Obituary Trevor Williamson, 1943 – 2025

Trevor's family would like to thank the Flying Farmers for their friendship and adventures over the years and the many messages of condolences since his passing in November. They wanted to express their gratitude for those who made it to the funeral, including the wonderful flyby.

Trevor joined Flying Farmers in 2005, and took part in some fantastic trips, from vineyards to factories across Europe.

Through flying and the Flying Farmers Association, he made many friends and travelled far and wide with Lyn -The Jersey and Guernsey air rallies every year - they flew to France, Scotland, Spain, Gibraltar, and Germany. There was even a trip to Latvia in search of a couple of Spitfires beneath a lake.

Trevor was born in Kirby-in-Cleveland to Trevor and Rowena, the eldest boy of nine children, growing up at Kirby House Farm before the family moved to Lucy Cross, near Piercebridge.

Trevor was known for his inventiveness which was evident from an early age – often choosing to save his bus fare and cycle the 10 miles, there and back, to school at Barnard Castle instead.

At seventeen, Trevor embarked on his first big adventure – of which there were many. Travelling six weeks by boat to Australia as one of the £10 POMs he spent the next three years working for an agricultural business travelling across the country seeing clients. This was where he had his first taste of flying, obtaining his pilot's license - a passion that he returned to in later life.

He'd developed a love of flying at a young age, spending hours building model airplanes in his bedroom – a hobby he loved sharing with his own children and grandchildren.

After 3 years in Australia, he returned to help his father on the farm at Lucy Cross, and just three months later met Lyn at a Young Farmers do. They were married in 1966.

Together Trevor and Lyn built a family (five children and eight grandchildren at the last count!), a life, a business and several houses. From Lucy Cross to Brompton-on-Swale, to Barton, and finally to Hinkle Grange where some of you have flown in, landing on the grass strip. Trevor built the piggery and house in two years and, allegedly, took the following 50 years to finish the kitchen.

Trevor had a real talent for making and fixing machinery. From farming and pigs, he expanded into plant hire work, securing the Bobcat franchise, and eventually became Chairman of the Bobcat Dealer Group -work that took him across the world, from Florida to Jamaica. Always one to spot an opportunity he realised he could build attachments for the bobcats which he could then hire out…



he mended anything mechanical, and invented things no one else would think to invent.

Later, he returned to flying. After his family clubbed together for a lesson on his 45th birthday, he got his license back. Shortly after he got involved with a group restoring a Mustang and an old Luscombe, building doghouse and scoops for aeroplane owners, which involved a lot of explosives, and then shipping them off to America.

We remember Trevor with great fondness and look forward to Lyn and his son Charles, joining us on our upcoming trip that Trevor had started to organise before his health deteriorated.

*Thank you and best wishes from the family*

GASCo

General Aviation Safety Council

I attended the 307th and final GASCo Meeting of Council on Thursday 26th March 2026 held online by Zoom. Mike O'Donoghue, the Chief Executive, arbitrated that GASCo work was ended but Flight Safety was never ending. As you would expect it, a meeting of thanks to staff and members for their support and regret at the closure . All future commitments would be fulfilled, and the company would cease in an orderly manner. The Infringement Awareness Courses were expected to be continued by others. There was the usual Safety Information Exchange but of course no actions could be instigated.

The Chief Executive also referred to GASCo's founder, Squadron Leader John Ward MBE, noting his distinguished RAF career, which included Army co-operation flying Lysanders with the BEF, operational service during the Second World War and participation in the Berlin Airlift. He noted that John Ward had flown 47 aircraft types during his RAF service, later increasing this to 78 types.

He further noted that, following his retirement from the RAF in 1958, John Ward had founded the General Aviation Safety Committee in 1964 and had served as both Chairman and Secretary for 30 years, establishing the foundations of what would become GASCo.

The following report was presented by John Thorpe a Council member for 49 years! He is hoping to continue his Fatal Accident report.

**UK Registered GA Powered Aircraft Fatal Accidents 2026.**
So far in 2026 there have been three fatal accidents to powered aircraft.

**24 January** – Aerotechnik EV-97A Eurostar G-CCEM Nr Rushden, Buntingford Herts
The aircraft crashed four miles north of Buntingford killing the two occupants, (Source: ASN)

**3 February** – Cirrus SR20 G6 Premium Platinum G-GXYV Nr Littleborough, Grtr Manchester
The aircraft was on a flight from to Manchester for maintenance and could not maintain speed and altitude, probably as a result of airframe icing. The BPRS rocket parachute was deployed and the aircraft alighted on moorland that was heavily sloped with a very strong wind. The aircraft was dragged by the parachute along the ground and in the process inverted which is probably when the pilot and passenger were fatally injured. The parachute became entangled with an electricity pylon and deflated bringing the aircraft to a halt. (Source: ASN & private info)

**18 February** – Cessna 150H G-BBDT Hurst Wood Nr Marsham, Yorks
The aircraft based at Sherburn- in- Elmet crashed reportedly following an engine problem. The seriously injured pilot was air-lifted to hospital and died the following day. (Source: ASN

As Mike said in his opening remarks Flight Safety never ends

**The meeting was closed**

*Alf Oliver*

*NB. The GASCo Performance Calculator is still on their website. Find on google, add to your favourites bar, and it will work long after the webpage closes.*

# Treasurer's Telegraph

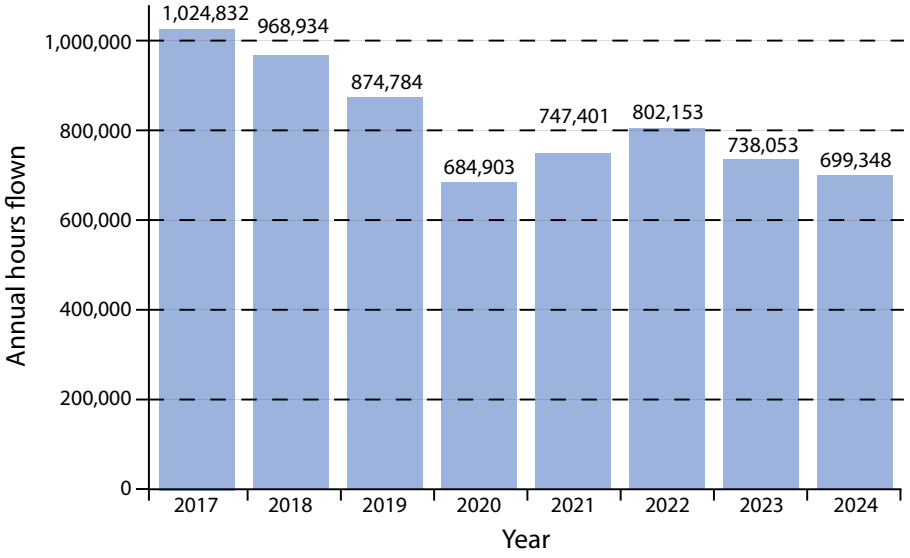
**There has been no GAP meeting (General Aviation Partnership formerly General Aviation Consultative Committee) since the last newsletter. The scheduled spring meeting was replaced with a "Safety Forum". While the CAA have indicated that GAP will continue, I suspect that this will be the replacement format and the last mechanism of group consultation with the CAA will be gone forever. I don't think many would disagree that this is the way government is going; informal consultation replaced with formal consultation where they set out what they're going to do, do it anyway and tick the box.**

This Safety Forum was uncannily like a GASCo meeting. With solemn faces the CAA staff praised GASCo for its past role and lamented its passing - You have read in the newsletter that GASCo ceased operations on 31st March 2026 – and then promptly plagiarised its format.

**First off, the accident statisitics.**
UK CAA has recorded 155 "occurrences" that have been classified as an accident or serious incident involving UK registered GA aircraft in and outside UK. Of these, 20 resulted in fatal or serious injuries. This figure has been below the 10 year average of 180 for the last 3 years but utilisation has also been falling so the rate of accidents per 100,000 flying hours has actually risen slowly in the last 3 years. Of these accidents, 76% occur during take-off (17%), landing (46%) or approach (13%) and of those, 38% is undercarriage related, 34% engine and 19% mis-handling (bounce, porpoise, hard landing, overrun, ground loop, gusts, crosswind, tailwind, low sun & turbulence)

**Utilisation.**
A sad tale… (see graph).
It appears COVID has a lot to answer for but despite a pickup in subsequent years, utilisation is 68% of what is was in 2017 and falling. We know why, regulation, expense and medicals. The decline persists despite a rise in utilisation of microlights over the same period. In other measures, the median (the middle of the range not the average) number of hours per aircraft has fallen from 35 to 21per year.

After that there were presentations from the British Gliding Association and the British Microlight Aircraft Association about their respective organisations and their approach to safety and finally a presentation from the **Airprox board.** In 2024 there were 208 reported airproxes (4 a week) of which 75 were risk-bearing. Of those 87% involved GA aircraft. Not that it




was said there, but the mandatory carriage of electronic conspicuity (EC) devices in all airspace is no longer a matter of if but when. It is only the technical lack of interoperability and the inconsistency that it delivers that is preventing it.

There was one little gem of advice. Airprox reports often indicate that a pilot, seeing conflicting traffic on an EC device then look towards that indication and delay avoiding action until the traffic is seen and often it is not. Far better to instigate avoiding action, likely a climb or descent, immediately. I get that.

**Back to Politics.**

In the heady days of the Conservative government when Grant Shapps was Secretary of State for Transport and led the charge with "I want to make the UK the best place in the world for General Aviation", the new General Aviation (GA) team created at the Department for Transport (DfT) grew to approximately 25 people in less than three months. The team was established to focus on supporting and building General Aviation and aviation skills, including safeguarding airfields. A separate Airfield Advisory Team (AAT) was also set up within the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) with support from the DfT to help private airfields navigate the planning system. "Hooray" I hear you cry. The new government has disbanded the AAT which barely got its feet under the table and reduced the DfT team to a few people promoting skills in the wider aviation sector. They have appointed 10 new Aviation Ambassadors for 2026–2027 "to inspire young people, particularly from diverse backgrounds, to pursue careers in the aviation industry". Surely a noble endeavour? Yes, but looking at the statistics above, we have one part of government trying to stimulate careers in an industry which every other part of government is doing its best to kill off. Great thinking.

**UK General Aviation Reports**

If you've heard that The OnlineGAR service has been withdrawn in February don't confuse this with the GOV.UK Submit a General Aviation Report (GAR) online system. OnlineGAR was an independent venture and has indeed been withdrawn and replaced by another, MyGAR.net. MyGar is an app for private pilots to create and submit international GAR/Gendec declarations, available for IOS, Android and Windows.

There is a website, don't search for it in Google, type "mygar.net" directly into the address bar. If you have a go with it then we'll be pleased to hear how you get on.

While we are on GARs, just remember that if you're going to Jersey and other Crown Dependencies the GOV GAR is good for the UK side but you still have to use the destination's GAR mechanism as well. Jersey and Guernsey/Alderney have different online systems and I believe you can also fill one out on arrival.

If you want to review the latest about going abroad, Google "General Aviation Guidance"

**GAAC**

I attended a meeting of GAAC in February and I am happy to report that the organisation continues with much enthusiasm. Sadly, the chairman reported that regular discourse with the DfT had stopped as was the case for all GA organisations but that they still have contacts and the ability to raise particular points on an ad hoc basis. Work does at least continue with DfT involvement on the subject of 100LL replacements, and the Strategic Aerodrome Network concept continues to be of interest to them at the moment.

For members who would like to subscribe to their periodic email updates, sign–up is on the front page of the GAAC website.

**Travel Insurance**

I wonder how many members think about travel insurance when embarking on an FFA tour? All the same risks apply, cancellation, medical treatment and repatriation and most policies will not cover you if piloting yourself. The NFU Mutual used to have an annual travel policy; I say "used to"; they are not writing any new policies but existing policyholders can renew. In the same way that the NFU was inconsistent in its policy towards covering airstrips in the Farm Select Policy, we discovered the same with "piloting yourself" in their annual travel. For members who still have NFU Annual Travel then it must be endorsed to cover piloting yourself and that endorsement should not be unreasonably withheld. For other policies, do please check.

We would be interested to hear from any member who has anything to add about travel insurance.

**Fire Extinguishers**

Just a reminder about these. You should not be carrying a halon fire extinguisher in your aircraft after 31st December 2025, it doesn't affect the airworthiness if you do but you'll have to answer to the DEFRA if you do. You only have to carry a fire extinguisher if your plane is over 1200kg, and either way, EASA have stated that unless your aircraft is **type certificated** with a permanently installed fire extinguisher [typically complex and commercial aircraft] then you can fit a non-approved one provided it is safe to the occupants and securely fitted. The statement is based on their own regulation NCO.IDE.A.100 (b)(5), stating safety equipment such as emergency axes, first-aid kits, etc., do not require approval, and that the same should then apply to fire extinguishers. CAA is expected to follow this line. Don't be persuaded to buy anything expensive just yet!

*Andrew Cragg*

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**

## Insurance

The recent article on betterment was perfectly accurate but there is a much bigger trap lurking.

The cost of engines, props and repairs have risen so steeply that some, perhaps most aircraft are worth more as parts than they are as an airworthy whole. Many aircraft have had money spent on modifications often avionics. These upgrades can represent a significant proportion of the hull value. I saw a broker advertise, not unreasonably an £80k aircraft as 'buy the avionics the airframe comes free'. Most owners have unrealistic ideas of their aircrafts value not helped by the significant difference between advertised asking prices and the sales value achieved.

My own aircraft has had a truly ludicrous amount invested in upgrades and I tried to insure it for towards £200k against the more typical value range of £100 to £130k. Rather surprisingly the insurers refused and it was eventually insured for £120K. This proved to be a financial win after I experienced a gear collapse. This is a twin so with two of everything it was a no brainer for the loss adjuster to declare it beyond economic repair but consider some indicative numbers for an SEP.

Assume an older aircraft value circa £100k. Anything involving a prop will cost £20k, a shock load will cost £25k. Assuming you can find anyone willing to repair significant damage say £40k labour and small parts. Figure on the repair taking a year. If your engine is near the end of its calendar life it will be at best irritating to strip it all down and not do a full overhaul. I know the whole concept of calendar life is of doubtful engineering validity but it's still what affects sales value. The smallest Lycoming now costs £85k to zero time and a bigger engine will cost over £100k.The cheapest way to replace a single VP props assuming a hub too corroded to reuse or a new blade is to buy a pair on offer under an STC and give the other one away!.

I suggest that the best outcome from any accident, unless it's very minor is to write the aircraft off. The insurers will generally prefer this if the cost estimates approach 80% of the insured value. They have long experience of estimates being wrong, always on the low side. They usually offer the salvage to the owner at 10% of the insured value. If you know you have put a lot of avionics in your aircraft then 10% is likely to represent very good value indeed. It's not just avionics. My aircraft had recently had a 1000-hour recurring AD performed with cost of £30k in parts alone. It should be easy to recoup far more than the notional salvage value with a little effort. Alternatively, if you love your aircraft and want to rebuild it you can do so in your own time with an engineer of your own choosing. Perhaps you can economise by seeking out used serviceable replacements or incorporate upgrades while it is anyway out of action.

All this means there is a sweet spot for insured value. Generally, this tends towards a lower number without taking this to extremes. Let's say you insure your £100k aircraft for £100k and have a gear up or ground loop and flip over. Say £35k for repairs £45k for the prop and engine. It's a marginal case and maybe the insurers will insist on a repair. Insure for £90k and an economics write off is fairly certain. £9k gets you the salvage. You can probably recoup this just for the engine as a core.

My insurer or rather the loss adjuster was excellent. My engineer had prepared some rough estimates, 15 minutes and a three-way discussion at the aircraft and the settlement was agreed. There were some quite detailed forms and I did have a moments trepidation as currency, ratings validity etc. were checked but at no time did I get the sense that they were trying to avoid liability. The money was in my bank account within days. As it happened my wife had her car stolen the next week. There was more administration for that claim for about 10% of the sum involved with the aircraft. Let's hope you don't have any reason to benefit from this advice.

*Jim Thorp*



# Not me this time!

Some years ago I was kindly allowed to camp at a certain strip, with my C150 parked nearby.

Wake up time, and a leisurely breakfast with a selection of birds in attendance haggling for scraps. Suddenly a chunky 4 x 4 (not the strip owner) comes roaring up and parks near the hangar. The hangar doors are opened and a sleepy aircraft is dragged out. With no further ado the pilot jumps in, the engine roars into life and the aircraft immediately sets off for the runway.

A few minutes after I hear it take off, another vehicle draws up. I am told that the pilot has discovered he does not have his tablet, flight log etc. He had put it on the wing and it must have fallen off as he set off. The vehicle disappears to search the runway.

I have other plans. I remember the mighty roar of the engine as it started, and wander over to the place it was parked. Sure enough the prop wash has deposited the tablet and paperwork on the grass – hopefully without it hitting the tail. I hand it over to the driver of the support vehicle. Being a polite sort of person I neither look at it nor make any comment, though it would have been interesting since I am told the reason for the panic was the complicated schedule involving several different professional people to be picked up and deposited around the country over the course of the day during this, err, private flight.

Perhaps a quiz would be appropriate here to identify all the things that could have been done better…But then who am I to judge?

*Christina Belton*

# Carb Heat can save you from a Crash

I have owned a Cessna 172 for 2 years and for my PPL learnt to fly on a C172. We learn about carburettor icing and pulling out the carb heat knob frequently – it seems a bit alien, almost old fashioned at first when learning to fly.

A month ago I flew to Conington Peterborough for the classic bacon roll experience.

My plane flew beautifully there and the bacon roll was delicious. There were planes out and about and so departure was a bit hurried but the usual power checks were done.

We sped down the runway but due to the noise of tarmac I couldn't hear anything unusual like the classic signs of engine roughness.

At 500ft I heard a drop in engine power. I started looking for a field to land. My co -pilot pulled out the carb heat knob and after a second or two we had full power again and started to climb. He pushed the carb heat knob in and again after a couple of seconds the power loss returned.

He pulled the carb heat knob out a second time and the engine powered up again. We kept the carb heat knob out and circled the airfield to ensure we had smooth engine running.

What surprised me was that we had had a super flight over and the weather was warmer and drier on our return flight but still had power loss from carb icing. Carb icing happens at ANY TIME…

We are all taught that carb icing causes engine roughness, power loss, or failure. It is easy to forget not to do regular checks.

**On average, carburetor icing causes or contributes to two fatal accidents per year.**

*Rebecca Rayner*

## 2026 Renewal - FLYING FARMERS – PRICING MATRIX

**SECTION 1 and 3 – PREMISES and PRODUCTS LIABILITY**
**Limit of Liability (any one accident 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 100 | GBP517.00 | GBP726.00 | GBP858.00 | GBP1,452.00 |
| More than 100 up to 250 | GBP583.00 | GBP803.00 | GBP924.00 | GBP1,584.00 |
| More than 250 up to 500 | GBP655.00 | GBP869.00 | GBP990.00 | GBP1,716.00 |
| More than 500 up to 1,000 | GBP869.00 | GBP1,089.00 | GBP1,188.00 | GBP1,914.00 |
| More than 1,000 up to 2,000 | GBP1,018.00 | GBP1,232.00 | GBP1,320.00 | GBP2,046.00 |
| More than 2,000 to be agreed by slip leader | To be agreed by slip leader | | | |

**SECTION 2 – HANGARKEEPERS LIABILITY**
Plus GBP259.00 for GBP500,000 any one accident, but limited to GBP75,000 any one aircraft.
Plus GBP517.00 for GBP1,000,000 any one accident, but limited to GBP75,000 any one aircraft.
**Minimum premium in respect of mid term additions** GBP190.00 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).

**Nb: Members might already be covered under their farm Public Liability insurance. PLEASE CHECK!**

# Programme 2026




As I am sure we are all aware it has been the wettest winter on record, but so far we've only had one Pop-in cancelled. If you sign up and are unable to attend please let the organiser know, so they can inform the Airfield & Cafe, it is also important that you sign in, even to show an interest, so if the airfield we are using have any joining instructions, these can be sent out.

I would like on behalf of the Committee and myself, to say a big thank you to David Keene and other members that have put on the Pop-ins last winter

I hope that this year's events that the members have put together for us all, will be well attended,

When the events are confirmed they will be put on the web site ( so keep an eye on the site), and as soon as they open for bookings, an email will be sent out. Please keep an eye on your spam box as some emails end up there. Please ensure you book early, and before the closing date, so the organiser can confirm transport & catering. We are looking for a Venue for this year's AGM.
If any member has got any suggestions, please contact me by email:
neville.stops@gmail.com

Happy & Safe flying in 2026
*Neville*

**A brief summary of these events is shown below**.
The Tour for this year (2026), has been put together on home ground to allow those with restricted licences to participate.

**List of FFA Events for 2026**

- 13th May – One day visit to Agri research Centre – Stebbing, Essex
- 6th June – Kimberley Hall, Cornucopia – Wymondham
- 10th June – Cereals 2026, Diddly Squat Farm, Oxfordshire, Alf Oliver.
- Mid June TBC – Tanks and Farming (1 Day), Weybourne, North Norfolk
- 17th June – A visit to a Parachute Centre, Cockerham Green, Lancaster.
- 30th June – 2nd July – Second Bosworth Wing Ding, Alf & Gill Oliver
- Date TBC – Crossness Pumping station, Rochester
- Date TBC – A working Lifeboat station & Garlic Farm, Isle of Wight

**FFA Tour 2026**

- 20th May – 1st June – 2026 Tour of Scotland, Peter Gale /Jude

**As events and itinerary are confirmed, full details will be put on the Website and an email will be sent out.**

**Pop-Ins 2026. For all Pop-ins (unless otherwise announced) the intention is to meet at 12.00pm for lunch.**

- 15th April – Oaksey Park (EGTW) where we will have a very interesting speaker, "Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Lester Torpy,G-CB,CBE,DSO," retired Royal Air Force Commander. Glenn will give a talk about his amazing career in the RAF.

***Please note that some of these dates may change but will be updated on the website.**

**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)**

The Committee and I would like to thank all the organisers for making these meetings possible, also those that have attended, in some cases driving 2-4 hours to get to that event. Sometimes we are called the Driving Farmers not the Flying Farmers!!

**SAFETY NOTICE;** 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.

## 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 they 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 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 hotel room numbers need confirming.
This Policy will stand unless there are people on the waiting list or you can find a replacement.

## Agri research Centre 13th May

**Based at Throws farm / Earls Colne airstrip**
Topics on the day to include:

- Tour of Agri's flagship research facilities
- State of the art glasshouse with hyperspectral capabilities
- Biological research
- Soft fruit research
- Amenity research
- Digital Technology Farm (hear and see the latest in agri-tech)
- Latest in disease detection technology, soil sensing technology and environmental monitoring
- Drone technology update (research + agronomy)
- Digital agronomy on farm
- Demo of Contour and the future of agronomy
- Jonathan Trotter and Lucy will be on site to talk through any updates on the drone side of things. The rest of the talks will be from others within the research or digital team.

## Kimberley Hall, Cornucopia 6th June

**We have been invited to Robbie & Iona Buxton's home on the 6th June – A Festival of Artisan & Epicurean & Musical Delights.**

**About Cornucopia**
'This is our first year of Cornucopia, a celebration of all that is wonderful about East Anglia and beyond – a festival of artisan and epicurean, & musical delights, hand-picked stalls and a programme of live music throughout the day set in the magnificent parkland and terraced garden of Kimberley Hall.

We can't wait to welcome a fabulous variety of artisan producers and small businesses to Kimberley Hall and introduce them to members of the public who want to discover and enjoy what they have to offer. We are dedicated to promoting and supporting sustainability, especially in agriculture, fishing, food and drink production, looking after our land and the sea.

We look forward to seeing you at Kimberley and hope Cornucopia will be a fun day out for all the family, a celebration with something for everyone, possible Mini Air display.

2026 will be our first year and hopefully the first of many to come.'

If you are interested in attending please go to www.kimberley-hall.co.uk to book tickets or just turn up on the day, There is a Private Airstrip no landing fee, just an entry fee which you can pay for at the gate.

See Airfield Plate: https://kimberleyhall.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Kimberley-Airfield-Plate.pdf

More details will be on the FFA website soon.

## Tanks and Farming Mid June

**TBC**

Proposal is to fly into Weybourne ( 717x17 16/34 and shorter cross runway) on the North Norfolk Coast to visit Muckleborough collection of military vehicles and memorabilia, which is adjacent to the airfield. You can also drive a tank for £170 if you wish .

Then ,to visit a nearby dairy farm that has one of the earliest biodigesters and diversified into making the famous Binham Blue cheese.

## Cereals 2026 10th June

Dear All
Fly to Cereals 2026 Diddly Squat Farm host Jeremy Clarkson 10th and 11th June 2026.

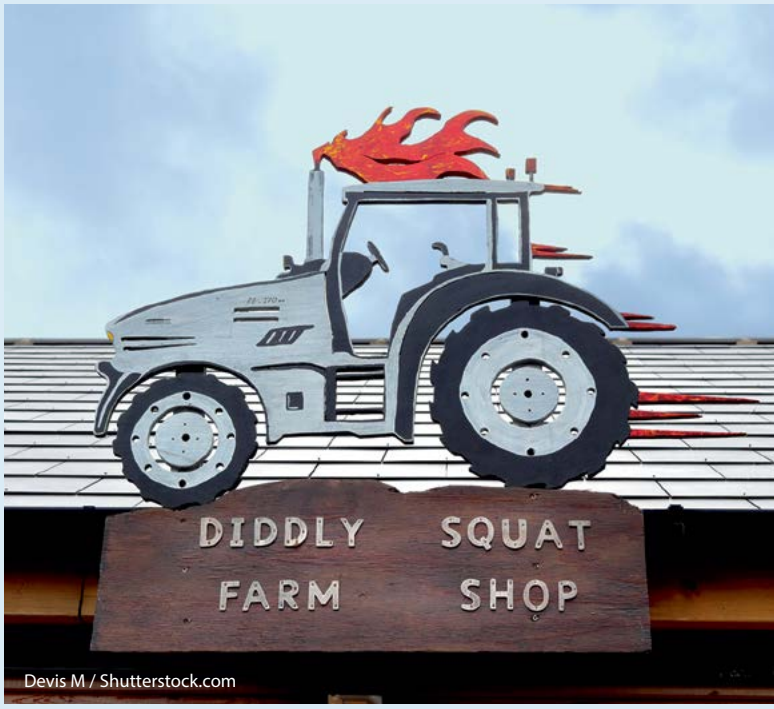
I am organising a fly in and transport to this event. This will be a Flying Farmers event.

Numbers will dictate which airfield we use and type of transport.

Cereals 2026 will be a busy event; tickets will be limited to those registered for Cereals 2025 in the first instance.

Would you kindly log your interest by return to this email with preferred date, aircraft type and pob.
Closing date to show an interest will be the 7th APRIL due to the fact of organising transport

Alf Oliver



Devis M / Shutterstock.com

## Parachute Centre 17th June

- Landing at Cockerham 9:30am/10am
- Meet at Black Knights Parachute Club for coffee and biscuits
- Talk and tour of parachute center with Paul Yeoman
- Tour around Patty's Barn holiday cottages, cabins and event spaces
- Trip around Cockerham Green Energy 500kw anerobic digester, producing electricity from agricultural waste. Also, using the waste heat for drying wood and doing research work with Lancaster University
- Lunch at Patty's Barn (any dietary requirements to be confirmed, latest 1 week before please)
- Leave approximately 1pm for a 25 minute coach trip to Butlers award winning cheese producer, also on-site Wild Fox gin distillery, small batch artisan gin, and possibly if time allows, visit round their modern dairy unit, milking 500 cows in a rotary and they also milk approximately 1000 goats and make their own goat ice cream (Rosy Goat Ice Cream).
- Leave at TBC to return to Black Knights for tea, cake and departures.

# Tour of Scotland 2026, May 20th–1st June

**(Fully Booked)**

## Stage 1 – Northumberland and Scotland




**Wednesday 20th May**
- Meet at Carlisle airfield EGNC
- Coach departs for Hexham
- Free time in Hexham
- Coach departs for Derwent Manor Hotel
- Group dinner

**Thursday 21st May**
- Coach departs for Beamish
- Day at Beamish Living Museum
- Coach departs Beamish for hotel
- A la Carte dinner in main restaurant

**Friday 22nd May**
- Coach departs for Seahouses Harbour
- Boat trip to Farne Islands
- Return to coach and drive to Holy Island
- Free time on Holy Island
- Coach departs for hotel
- A la Carte dinner in main restaurant

**Saturday 23rd May**
- Check out and depart hotel
- Visit machinery collection Hexham
- Depart for drive along Hadrians Wall
- Arrive Carlisle airfield
- Fly to Perth Airport EGPT
- Coach transfer from Perth to Dunkeld House Hotel
- Pre ordered dinner in hotel

**Sunday 24th May**
- Coach departs Dunkeld for Blair Athol Castle
- A la Carte dinner in main restaurant
- Blair Athol Highland Games
- Coach departs for hotel
- Dine in hotel

**Monday 25th May**
- Coach transfer to Perth Airport
- Leave for next destination

## Stage 2 – Scotland

**Monday 25th May**
- Depart Perth Scone Airport for Orkney Lamb Holm Island
- Coach transfer to Kirkwall Free afternoon in Kirkwall
- Coach transfer to Merkister Hotel, Harray Loch
- Dine in hotel

**Tuesday 26th May**
- Coach transfer for farm tour at Birsay
- Free afternoon in Stromness
- Coach Transfer to Merkister Hotel Dine in Hotel

**Wednesday 27th May**
- Tour with guide around places of interest on Orkney Island
- Dine in Hotel

**Thursday 28th May**
- Coach transfer Kirkwall to Lamb Holm Island
- Arrive at Glendoe airfield.
- Coach transfer to Fort Augstus
- Free afternoon
- Coach transfer from Fort Augusta to Clansman Hotel, on Loch Ness
- Dinner in hotel

**Friday 29th May**
- Coach pick-up
- Tour of hydro electric power station and Glendoe Estate by invitation of Greville Vernon
- Transfer to Loch Ness visitor centre for unaccompanied tour
- Coach leaves for hotel
- Dinner in hotel

**Saturday 30th May**
- Transfer to Glendoe airfield
- Free flying day. Refuel at Oban EGEO (North Connel) Taxi or bus to Oban town. Or Fly to Glenforsa or Plockton for lunch?
- Land at Prestwick EGPK
- Own Taxi transfer to Weston House Hotel, Ayre, KA8 0HA
- Dinner in hotel

**Sunday 31st May**
- Coach pick up for transfer to Robert Burns Visitor Centre
- Coach pick up for transfer to Culzean Castle
- Coach transfer to Weston House Hotel
- End of Tour Dinner

**Monday 1st June**
- Check out of hotel and coach transfer to Hill House Quarry Complex. Tour of quarry by invitation of Greville Vernon

# 2nd Bosworth Wing Ding – Tuesday 30th June - 2nd July

## (Fully Booked)

At the moment my plan is to highlight **Rugby School Tour** (taking in the history of the school and history of Rugby, Football and other sports introduced at the school), and **Triumph Motor cycle visitor experience**. Wrapped around these visits we want to showcase as many **local farm diversifications** as possible.



Wendy lucid2711 / Shutterstock.com

- **Tuesday 30 June** collect passengers from Fenn Lane Farm Upton CV13 6BL around late morning/midday and take to **Poplars Farm shop** CV11 6JG for lunch then onto Elms Farm Watling Street Hinckley LE10 3EE for a tour of A H Oliver's **poultry unit** before taking to Bosworth Hall Hotel CV13 0LP around 4-4.30. Evening tractor and Trailer ride to Gopsall **Farm Pub** and pizza evening.
- **Wednesday 1st July** collect from Bosworth Hall around 9.15 and take to Rugby School CV22 5DP, possibly collect around 12.30 and call at **Garden Barn** Lutterworth LE17 4HS for coffee and cake and a stroll around their lifestyle emporium .Then around 2.15 To Triumph Visitor Experience LE10 3BZ before returning us to Bosworth Hall Hotel around 4.30. Hope to get a speaker for the evening.
- **Thursday 2nd July** collect from Bosworth Hall around 9.15 and take to Lodge Farm Fenny Drayton to see **farm floristry** and **sheep stud** , then to Sparkenhoe farm Upton CV13 6JX for a tour of **cheese dairy** and coffee, onto Greenfields Farm Shop Norton Barn Farm Twycross CV9 3QF for **farm butchery** and BBQ and then Dreamy Cow Farmhouse **Ice Cream shop** CV9 3QJ before finally returning everyone to Fenn Lane Farm CV13 6BL.

# Crossness Pumping station & ADM Oil Refinery TBC

- Fly to Rochester.
- Pm coach to visit to Crossness Pumping station
- Crossness Pumping Station is a former sewage pumping station designed by the architect Charles Henry Driver for the Metropolitan Board of Works's chief engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette. Constructed between 1859 and 1865 by William Webster, as part of Bazalgette's redevelopment of the London sewerage system, it features spectacular ornamental cast ironwork, described by architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner as "a masterpiece of engineering – a Victorian cathedral of ironwork". It was decommissioned in 1956. Subsequently the building has been extensively restored and was opened to the public in 2016.
- Coach to Hotel in Bexleyheath. Group Meal in Evening.
- Am visit to ADM Erith Crushing plant
- ADM Agriculture's Erith factory in South East London, is the largest combinable crop processing plant consuming over half of all the rapeseed processed in the country. The equivalent of over 1,000 hec of growers crops every day.
- If possible, also visit rapeseed oil bottling plant next door.
- Coach return to Rochester after lunch

# Independent Life Boat station & Garlic Farm TBC

- Early September Date to be confirmed, spaces limited
- Land at Sandown, mini bus to the " Fresh water life boat station " visit and demonstration Tea / Coffee on arrival, lunch at a local hotel, then a mini bus to the "Garlic Farm", then return to Sandown ( Depart )



Image supplied by The Garlic Farm; The Garlic Farm Organic Harvest ©

# Westminster Abbey 11th March 2026


Westminster Abbey



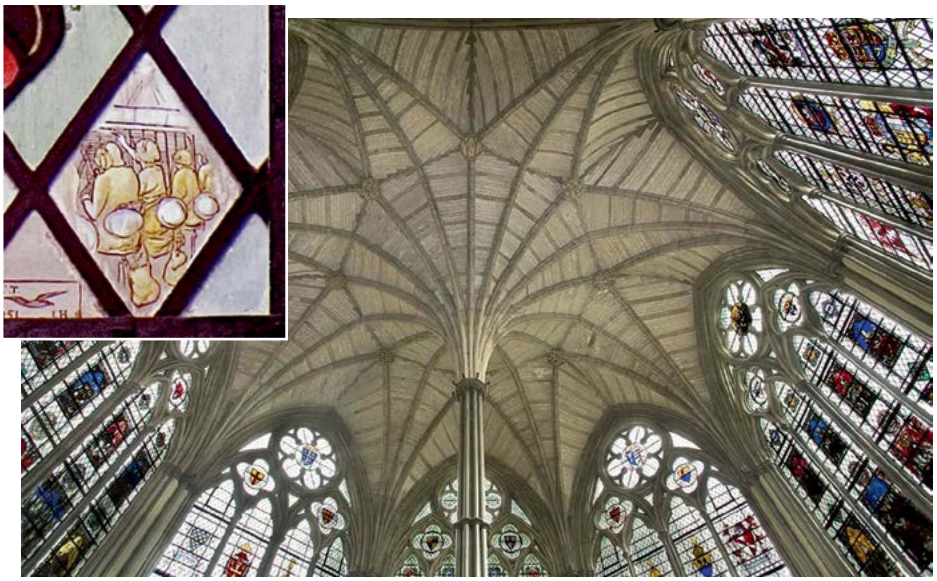

Group gathering in front of the RAF Coastal Command

34 members assembled at Dean's Yard exit to be greeted by our two special guides, Tony and Darryl, resplendent in their light blue gowns. Armed with our trusty Tour-talk earpieces we were split into two groups and began with an introduction, sitting in the south cloister, appropriately enough in front of a memorial to RAF Coastal Command, dedicated by Queen Elizabeth II in 2004. One of many here, this wall plaque in light grey Carrara marble is an alluring piece showing a curving horizon line with a threatening grey sky above and a stormy sea below.

The origins of the modern abbey date from the 1040's when Edward the Confessor established his royal palace by the banks of the river Thames on land known as Thorney Island. Close by was a small Benedictine monastery founded around 960AD which Edward chose to greatly enlarge, building a large stone church in honour of St Peter the Apostle. This church became known as the "west minster" to distinguish it from St Paul's Cathedral (the east minster) in the City of London. Unfortunately, when the new church was consecrated on 28th December 1065 the King was too ill to attend and died a few days later. The only traces of that building to be seen today are in the round arches and massive supporting columns of the undercroft and the Pyx Chamber in the cloisters where we went next. It takes its name 'Pyx' from wooden boxes in which silver and gold pieces were kept secure to await the "Trial of the Pyx" - melting down the measured silver content as a way of showing that the coinage was pure, a system established in 1281.

Edward's Abbey survived for two centuries until the middle of the 13th century when King Henry III decided to rebuild it in the new Gothic style of architecture. [This was the great age for cathedrals: in France, Amiens, Evreux and Chartres and in England, Canterbury, Winchester and Salisbury] Unfortunately the king died before it was less than half complete and the old Norman nave remained attached to the far higher Gothic build-


The Chapter House



Main picture; Chapter House vaulted ceiling. Inset; stained glass, WW2-telephonists

ing for over a century until more money became available to finish it off. We could see it to a line; the earlier interior stone work is very ornate while the later work was plain probably due to the fact that Henry's successor, Edward I spent enormous sums of money elsewhere on wars, particularly in Wales, Scotland, and France.

The Chapter House so called, we were told, because it was the place where the monks gathered with the abbot to 'hold chapter': to pray and read from the rule of St Benedict. This beautiful octagonal structure with an imposing central pillar, fanning out to a vaulted ceiling dates from Henry III's re-building of the Abbey. Wall paintings from that time still remain in many of the arches and depict scenes from the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation. The floor is original and remains one of the finest medieval tile pavements in England. The Chapter House was also the place where the King's Great Council assembled in 1257. This was effectively the beginning of the English Parliament. Later on, the House of Commons met here for a few years in the 14th century before using the Abbey Refectory for meetings. (Fitting perhaps that much of today's business in parliament takes place in the many bars there – so I heard…) Much of the stained glass here was damaged during air raids in the Second World War but some was salvaged and re-used in the post war glazing scheme. In the south west window, the coats of arms of sovereigns, nobility and major benefactors of the Abbey are displayed but looking carefully in the corners of each panel there are small ghostly images depicting wartime scenes and activities such as falling bombs, aerial combat, fire-fighters, WVS workers, Home Guard, air raid wardens, telephone operators and surgeons at work.

In the covered entrance to the Chapter House you can see what is claimed to be the oldest door in Britain, believed to date back to the 1050s.

The Abbey has been the setting for every Coronation since William the Conqueror with the exception of Edward V (one of the Princes in the Tower) and Edward VIII neither of whom were ever crowned. We saw the ancient Coronation Chair in St George's Chapel. It is one of the most precious and famous pieces of furniture in the world made by order of Edward I [Hammer of the Scots] in 1296 to enclose the famous Stone of Scone, which he brought from Scotland to the Abbey in 1296. It has been the centrepiece of coronations for



Coronation Chair

over 700 years when it is moved to the centre of the Abbey, in front of the High Altar. [The stone went back to Scotland in 1996 you remember but they did lend it back for Charles' coronation]

The back of the Chair is covered in graffiti, the result of Westminster schoolboys and visitors carving their names in the 18th and 19th centuries. [Westminster School occupies buildings all around, and is closely associated with, the Abbey. Indeed, our guide Tony was a pupil there]

A (relatively) new addition to the Abbey was the glorious Lady Chapel built by King Henry VII, which has a



Lady Chapel


Blue and gold ceiling of the choir screen


Choir stalls

spectacular fan-vaulted roof. The chapel was consecrated in 1516 and since 1725 it has been associated with the Most Honourable Order of the Bath and the banners of the current Knights Grand Cross surround the walls above the pews where they would sit. [Bath? named after a medieval knight-making ritual where candidates were literally bathed, symbolizing spiritual purification and cleanliness before taking their vows.]

I think what surprised many of us was a) the size of the place and b) the number of people buried or commemorated there numbering about 3300. There are an estimated 18 monarchs starting with Edward the Confessor through to George II. Most monarchs after George II have been buried in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. In Poets Corner we have Geoffrey Chaucer, the first poet buried here, establishing the tradition and Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Ben Jonson. Shakespeare was not although he is honoured with a prominent monument. In the science corner (this is starting to sound like a boxing match…) we have Isaac Newton, Stephen Hawking, Charles Darwin, Michael Faraday and Ernest Rutherford. In addition we have any number of politicians, including Winston Churchill of course, and members of the armed services including the unknown warrior. In 1920 a WW1 army chaplain wrote to the Dean of Westminster asking if an unknown soldier could be buried there. In November a number of unidentified bodies were placed in a chapel in France and one was chosen at random. Great care that had been taken to ensure that the identity of the Unknown Warrior would not be known. He might be a soldier, sailor, or airman and might equally be from the forces of the United Kingdom or one of the British colonial territories. It was brought from France with great reverence to the Abbey where it was buried in a moving ceremony. One hundred holders of the Victoria Cross lined the nave as the procession approached the grave, the Warrior was lowered into the ground and the King sprinkled earth from a Flanders battlefield onto his coffin. Reveille was sounded in answer to the Last Post heard at the Cenotaph earlier.

One of our members, John Milne found he had a connection with the Abbey and explained afterwards:

*"I was particularly interested because my Great Uncle Captain Geoffrey Cooke was Captain of HMS Barham the Battleship that was sunk on 25th November 1941 with the loss of 868 lives. A battle group of 3 Battleships plus a number of Frigates etc. was sent out from Alexandria to sort out the Italian Fleet. An undetected German U Boat managed to deploy 3 torpedoes which sank* HMS *Barham. My Great Aunt Constance ( Wife of Geoffrey-above) took upon herself to form an association to look after the deceased wives and Families. She also Commissioned two 8 foot gilt candlesticks plus 2 smaller candlesticks to be placed by the main Altar. Being the time of Lent they were not on show. After lunch I still had my wristband so I managed to be shown the candlesticks and also a magnificent 'Roll of Honour' beautifully gilt embossed. All very moving! Up until recently when the last surviving crew member died a service was held in the Abbey on the 25th November"*

Now brutally filled with fascinating facts we retired to the Munich Cricket Club, a few hundred meters away. This Bavarian hostellerie had absolutely nothing to do with Cricket but did provide benches, ample beer served by lederhosen-clad waiters and a buffet lunch of schnitzel, Bavarian sausages, port knuckle, sauerkraut and chips. Disappointingly there was no live Oompah band which is probably why not dancing on tables was not observed.

*Andrew Cragg*


Munich Cricket Club

# Pop-In, Sherburn Defies the Forecast 21nd February






A mixed weather forecast threatened to dampen spirits ahead of a planned Flying Farmers pop-in at Sherburn-in-Elmet on 21 February 2026. By Friday, all but two aircraft had cancelled after studying the charts, leaving the event looking uncertain.

Nevertheless, We arrived at Sherburn at 10:15 on Saturday morning, hopeful that at least a couple of determined crews might still press on. Chris Belton had departed Strubby in her Cessna 150, a journey of approximately 58 nautical miles. Watching her progress on FlightRadar told its own story. The headwind was clearly biting, with groundspeed reduced and the possibility of a return to base clearly present. A 180-degree turn would have been entirely understandable... It never came.

After just over an hour from departure, Chris and Simon joined the circuit at Sherburn and landed safely. Their perseverance and sound judgement had paid off. I met them at the flight desk to offer a warm welcome before everyone made their way to the café.

There was an unexpected bonus. Richard Howard had arrived by car a few minutes earlier and, having been spotted by Am, was quickly ushered to join the table. For Am and I, it was a first meeting with Chris and Simon, whose flying tales and experience made for engaging conversation. Simon's depth of knowledge added further insight, while it was equally good to see Richard looking well.

The gathering grew again when a local friend, Andy, joined the group, adding to what quickly became a lively and convivial atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Paul Stephens, who had been planning to fly his DR500, had earlier reported that weather at his home airfield had deteriorated. He continued monitoring conditions and, once they improved, decided to make the trip, arriving in time to refuel and join the group before departure. His later arrival was warmly received.

After around two and a half hours of food, tea, coffee and aviation conversation, the group dispersed. FlightRadar once again told the story of the return leg. With the earlier headwind now a helpful tailwind, Chris and Simon were back on the ground at Strubby in around 40 minutes, approximately 20 minutes quicker than the northbound flight that morning.

Recent heavy rainfall had left many grass strips waterlogged and unusable. Sherburn's hard runway proved invaluable, allowing straightforward operations while others found themselves grounded on softer surfaces. In late winter conditions, it was a timely reminder of the practical advantages of a sealed runway.

While numbers were smaller than originally hoped, the spirit of the day was very much intact. In flying, good decision-making always comes first, and those who chose not to depart made the right call for their own conditions and comfort levels. That is part of responsible airmanship. For those able to make it, the gathering became a reminder of what makes these pop-ins so enjoyable….. shared stories, safe arrivals, and good company around a café table.

Roll on summer.

*Winston Lee*

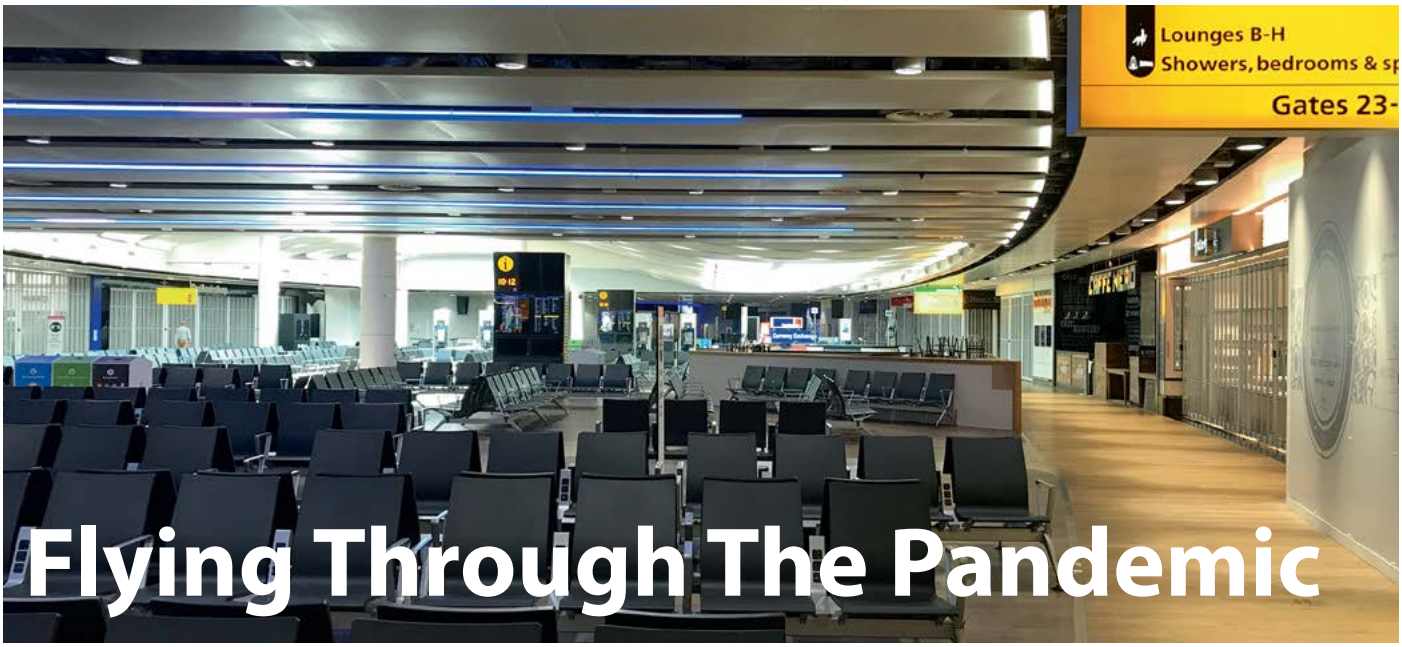
# Pop-In, White Waltham 21st March

Over the past years I have been quite surprised that often the weather has allowed most of our winter Pop-Ins to go ahead. However, this winter, as I'm certain we all remember, has been a grey, wet, mild and windy time with few good flyable days and, even when the weather was flyable, often our strips were too wet to operate from, if not for some, actually under water!

What a contrast then was the weather for our March Pop-In. A preceding week of fine weather allowed our strips to dry out a little and the day itself dawned fine with an excellent forecast for the rest of the day. A couple of crews were delayed a little by early morning mist but the rest of us flew in a beautiful blue day with almost limitless visibility. One or two others were unable to attend due to overrunning maintenance issues, but the rest of us enjoyed a very convivial time and the excellent food and facilities that the White Waltham airfield offers.

*David Keene*






# Flying Through The Pandemic

**March 2020 was my standby month, so I was at the mercy of crewing and where they would send me. Up until then, the media had only spoken about COVID-19 in Wuhan, mainland China, with a few isolated cases in Europe, mainly centred on a few Italian ski resorts. I was called to fly to Hong Kong, which was under a soft lock down; non-essential businesses had been asked to close, but apart from seeing a few shops shut and more people out and about, nothing had really changed. Hong Kong was one of my favourite destinations. It had everything: nightlife, amazing food ranging from Michelin-starred restaurants to street food made in oil drums, and the hustle and bustle you'd expect from one of the most densely populated conurbations in the world. Over the last few years, I've done a lot of hill walking in Hong Kong after picking up "The Serious Hiking Guide to Hong Kong" in a bookstore at one of the night markets. Many locals loved hill walking and I was always amazed that you could be no more than a few miles from densely populated areas yet feel miles away from anywhere, lost in dense forests of lush vegetation; however, the hum of the city never waned.**

**Above:**
An empty Heathrow

**Below:**
A crowded Hong Kong bus, with the first signs of face masks.



It was March 10th. Over the previous 24 hours, the threat of COVID-19 had truly begun to feel like a game-changer. The news had started discussing travel restrictions, border closures, and lock downs. That morning, I woke up and set out to begin the Maclehose Trail, a 100-mile route that starts in Sai Kung and follows the hills east to west above the New Territories. It took two hours by public transport to reach Sai Kung National Park, the start of the walk, giving me plenty of time to consider what might happen in the coming weeks if COVID-19 did escalate. I'd been here before; with over 25 years in aviation, I'd witnessed 9/11, Gulf War II and SARS. Each time, it resulted in job losses, downsizing, and restructuring, but the industry always seemed to bounce back quickly. I spent the day walking, with little mobile phone service, blissfully unaware of what was happening back home. I walked, listening to music and podcasts, trying to forget what was going on in the world.

After about 8 hours in the hills, I started heading back to the urban sprawl. With Hong Kong in a soft lock down, many more people were out walking. As I approached the bus stop to return to Sai Kung, my phone picked up a signal and my device pinged into action. I received numerous messages from friends and colleagues: COVID was now a major concern and the UK was heading for restrictions, with a likely response being a lock down. I found a restaurant, ordered some food and beer and wondered what was around the corner.

The flight home marked the turning point. We had only 58 passengers, when we would typically be full. The crew were obviously worried, were there going to be job losses, would the airline survive, how long could this last? Before the flight, I gathered everyone together, I wasn't quite sure what to say. I was also wondering if I would still have a job when I returned to the UK. I started by telling everyone that we needed to focus on our loved ones and concentrate on this one flight, and there was little we could




do to change what was happening globally, so our only option was to get home. As I walked down the jet bridge to the aircraft, it crossed my mind that this might be my last flight for quite some time and after landing back on 13th March, Boris Johnson announced lock down three days later.

Once back, it was clear things were going to change. Borders were closing, but people needed to return to the UK. In the following days, additional flights were arranged, as crew and passengers were required to return to the UK before the borders closed. After a few days off, I received a call from crewing.

"We need you to position out to Atlanta as soon as possible and operate a flight back tomorrow"

Atlanta was not a route the Boeing 787 usually flew, so it was quite a surprise.

"Ok, but how come a 787 on the Atlanta?" I asked.

We were going to be one of the last flights out of the United States and with crews scattered across the US, Atlanta became a central hub. The plan was to get all the crew and as many passengers to Atlanta for the return flight.

When we arrived in Atlanta, the crew hotel was full of crew members who had flown in from all over the US, mainly Florida, but also from other parts of the US. The mood was very sombre; no one talked, many staff passengers who had used their concessionary travel for holidays were desperately trying to return to the UK. There was a real spirit among people willing to do whatever it took to get back.

The flight home that evening was bedlam. If there was a seat, we filled it. Rules were slightly bent to fill every available seat, with flight crew sitting in the spare jump seats in the flight deck. Spare cabin crew seats were used to reposition cabin crew back, to maximise the number of people returning. If it was legal, we did it. Every seat, including all the crew jump seats were full. It was the most passengers I have ever had on a 787; nobody complained, everyone was just happy to be heading back to the UK.

During the return flight, the First Officer confided in me that his wife had just given birth to a new baby, they had bought a house and because he had been with the company for less than six months, he feared for his job. I couldn't say it would be alright, we knew it wouldn't be. The only piece of advice I could offer was that, in previous downturns, the airline industry had recovered much more quickly than analysts predicted. I told him not to make any rash decisions and to keep his options open, in case the company needed him back quickly, but this situation was very different.

In the coming weeks, the company became a cargo-only operation. With airlines not flying, the cost of moving air freight reportedly jumped 10-fold. Seeing London Heathrow with no passengers brought it home, not quite a zombie apocalypse, but not far off!

China became the leading destination, bringing large amounts of PPE back from Shanghai, Beijing and later Guangzhou, although I never went to the latter. As time went on, we expanded to new destinations, many of which we had never flown to before. Since we couldn't stop in China initially, we operated what were known as 'ultra-long-haul trips': three pilots on the outbound sector, while

**Above Left:**
That was my last passenger flight for nearly six months.

**Below left and right:**
An empty London Heathrow.






four slept for the return. The outbound crew would relax and sleep whilst the crew who had been positioned out and had hopefully slept operated the return flight. We also had several cabin crew members onboard for 'fire watch'. To maximise space, the company not only filled the aircraft's belly with cargo but also loaded two boxes of PPE onto each economy seat.

There was a great camaraderie and we quickly settled into a routine. The business-class cabin was used for relaxation, and was generally left in darkness to help us sleep. In contrast, the premium economy cabin served more as an office and a place to watch TV. I know one FO who completed his Open University degree on these flights. The economy cabin was affectionately known as the gym, with many of us walking around to get our steps up. Joe Wicks' HIIT classes being conducted in the back galley. I can confidently say I've walked the length of Mongolia, but it was at 37,000 feet, or to be more precise, 11,300 metres, as they use metric altimetry!

Standards slipped, not in safety, but with regards to uniform. As soon as the doors closed, we often changed into more comfortable clothes and why not, considering we were on the aircraft for 28 hours. Soon afterwards, a company memo circulated asking us to wear the company uniform when at the controls and on duty… pulling onto the parking stand in joggers and a T-shirt was not the best idea! The marshaller's surprised face as he waved us onto the stand was something I'll never forget.

Hong Kong initially had very relaxed COVID-19 rules, while the UK was under full lock down, Hong Kong was essentially open. The crew loved visiting because they could go for a meal, a beer, or even get a haircut! The hotel we stayed at in Hong Kong had a crew room and was known for great parties. The night Virgin Australia (VA) went bust was epic. As sad as it was, people knew airlines would fail, so if you lost your job, why not go out with a bang? That night, VA crews were figuring out how to get home. If an airline goes bust and you're away from your base, you'll have to find your own way home. Thankfully again, the solidarity and camaraderie shone through as other airlines came to the rescue - QANTAS and Cathay Pacific allowed VA staff to travel on their flights at no cost.

Within a few months, everything changed in Hong Kong, as it went into full lock down. As crew, we were tested on arrival and couldn't leave the airport until the results arrived, we had to sit in a holding area for about three hours waiting for our results, where the tables and chairs were arranged in rows with two-metre spacing; it reminded me of sitting my A-levels. One day, a BA Cabin Service Director (CSD) walked into the holding area, he shouted "silence in the exam room", which prompted much laughter, I also saw a crew member doing a jigsaw puzzle and knitting… anything to pass the time.

Sometimes it felt like the human element had disappeared from our work life, walking into hotels and being immediately shown to rooms, effectively locked in for 24 hours until it was time to go home.

One day I will never forget. It was a very uneventful flight, as most were, and we arrived at the airport hotel in Hong Kong, having grabbed a beer from the 7/11 convenience store in the terminal. I have to say, I lost it mentally. I couldn't face going straight to the room; I just wanted to sit and have a beer with my colleagues before being locked away for another 24 hours.

I spoke to the receptionist and told her we needed a debrief after an incident on the flight. She was not happy but reluctantly allowed us to sit in the lobby bar area. We talked about nothing, anything; it just meant we weren't locked in our rooms straight away. We even had the audacity to open the beers we bought at the airport shop. Twenty minutes later, the receptionist came over with three more beers, which we hadn't ordered. She gently put them down and said, "it looks like your debrief is not quite finished." That small act of kindness at the time was such a massive gesture for which I will always be grateful.

Gradually, other destinations opened up for us to fly both cargo and "must travel" passengers, mainly diplomats, government workers and military personnel. Each country adopted a different approach to COVID rules and even within the US, attitudes varied from state to state and were influenced by

**Below:**
These shipments became the mainstay for the next several months.














political leanings. If a state was staunchly Republican, it was almost a crime to wear a mask, whereas in more Democratic states, the rules became much stricter. Hotels did what they could for us as aircrew, our New York hotel divided the bar into three sections for each airline staying there, separated by large sheets of plastic, with small signs indicating which cubicle belonged to each airline. If you were in a staunchly Republican region, you could walk to the local restaurant and get beer and food. Compare this to China and India, where we couldn't leave the rooms until checkout.

Short-haul cargo also became part of the daily routine of flying, and having not flown short sectors for nearly 20 years, Heathrow to Brussels (only 20 minutes airborne) was a shock to the system! We visited many places across Europe, such as Leipzig, Cologne, Dresden and Frankfurt, sometimes at night, hanging around airports and grabbing what food we could while the aircraft was being turned around.

Another night, another airport - in Tel Aviv, waiting for the cargo to be loaded."

Gradually, things returned to normal, with more passenger flights resuming. At first, there was a big rush to get away, especially for holidays, with some of the busiest routes initially including destinations in the Caribbean. Cargo flights continued for a while, alternating with passenger services. The cargo shifted from PPE to more specialised shipments, transporting vaccines and other vital pharmaceuticals worldwide. As time went on and the rules relaxed, flights filled up, but it took about two years to get back to a point similar to pre-COVID.

I look back on this time with mixed feelings; this article had remained largely unfinished on my desktop for nearly a year, and completing it has been quite cathartic. I can't say this was an ideal period in my career. Good friends and kind people lost their jobs. Being confined in a hotel room for several days negatively impacted my mental well-being, and having to wear full PPE to travel between hotels, along with some of the testing regimes, now seems quite draconian. Still, I have to think of those who lost their jobs and 'identity' as aircrew during this time.

With the benefit of hindsight, there were some real positives during this period. While my best friend lost his job for six months, he now views it as a time when he was able to spend quality moments with his young family and realises that he would not have had this time off if COVID had not happened.

Many cabin crew and pilots initially worked in supermarkets, and as delivery drivers, many also went on to work in the COVID-19 testing programme. It filled me with great pride to see three of my colleagues working at the local COVID-19 testing and vaccination centre, telling them they were all working hard to restore the airline to normal, whilst they did their part.

I'm pleased to say that most people returned to the airline, although many used this opportunity to retire early or to start a new life outside of flying. Another important aspect of this period was the camaraderie and the can-do attitude across the entire airline, which kept us moving vital cargo around the world and supported the global distribution of the vaccine.

Personally, it brought new challenges and enabled me to fly to destinations I would not have otherwise visited. Additionally, during a time of social distancing and separation, shared experiences with my colleagues and crews, having spent many hours in hotels and airports, have fostered deeper friendships and lifelong memories. Still, I'm in no rush to bring these times back!

*Paul Stafford*
*787 Captain*

**Above top Left:**
PPE in the cabin.

**Above top right:**
Photo Our PPE uniform for travelling to another hotel for room confinement.

**Above lower right:**
Another night, another airport - in Tel Aviv, waiting for the cargo to be loaded."

# Solo to Hahnweide and back to England

**In January 2025 I decided to fly my Tiger Moth G-APAL to the Hahnweide air show in Germany in September. To my surprise, the organisers accepted my offer to fly to them to be a static exhibit for their airshow. Places are usually very limited, I so was fortunate to be invited.**

**Now, you just do not get into a 1939 vintage aircraft without doing a lot of extra maintenance. I spent the spring and early summer months getting G-APAL ready. Sadly, I could not take a passenger as the front cockpit was full of oil bottles, two spare magnetos and a tool kit, whilst the luggage locker was filled with aircraft chocks and my personal luggage and other bits.**

**On Tuesday afternoon, 9 September 2025, I flew down from my base in Lincolnshire to Headcorn. Looking back, that was in the smoothest air I experienced in the whole trip.**

**Wednesday 10 September.** This day was going to be eventful. A taxi delivered me to Headcorn Aerodrome, having spent the night in local accommodation. One of the ground crew helping me get the Tiger Moth out of the hangar said, "If I were you, I would get going as we have had a forecast for bad weather!" That was enough for me. It was life jacket on and I was away, calling London Information to activate my flight plan and starting a steady climb towards Dover I could tell there was quite a bit of energy in the atmosphere. Reaching Dover I called when coasting outbound. The Tiger Moth purred her way across the Channel, making landfall at Cap Griz Nez from where I called Lille to inform them, but because I had no transponder they did really want to know unless I could return a squawk. As I flew along I could tell by the speed of rotation of the wind turbines that I was flying into a fair headwind and my ground speed was tragic.

After two hours I called Albert only to be told the grass runway was unavailable because, would you believe it, the Club's Tiger Nine were getting ready to depart when returning home from Switzerland. Albert did offer me the hard runway but I declined so held for nearly 20mins until at last I was given permission to land on the grass. I could tell as I approached this was going to make me work. Thankfully, Albert grass is wide so I angled into wind as much as I could and we were down. With the help from Albert's firemen acting as wing walkers I managed to get to the fuel station, completed formalities quickly and we were wing-walked back to the grass. Flight time from Headcorn to Albert 2hrs 18min.

Next on to Reims Prunay and after 1hr 10min I was on approach to their lovely wide grass runway. It was late afternoon now and taxiing-in was not such a drama. I refuelled and made G-APAL secure for the night before retiring for the evening. Flight time Albert to Prunay, 1hr 18min.

**Thursday 11 September.**
Waking up I could tell by the speed the clouds were moving that it was going to be a lively day in the air again. For the next leg of this trip to Sarreguemines Neunkirch, I would have a substantial tailwind to my first waypoint. The VOR MMD. I had a ground speed of over 90kts but then had to change to a more south easterly heading towards my next turning point of Thionville. The ground was more undulating and because the French Military had imposed a limiting height of 800ft AGL, it made for a very, very rough ride indeed. Several times I thought to myself, "can a vintage Tiger Moth take this sort of punishment?" But she did, and after 1hr 38min we were on the ground.

Sarreguemines Neunkirch: what a lovely airfield! All grass, 230m wide and 714m long, apparently established by the Germans during the First World War. Although expecting my arrival, nobody was around when I taxied in. The chairman of the local gliding club duly arrived and informed me that they used to have a Tiger Moth tug back in the 1960s which he could just remember as a boy. I refuelled and after taking loads of photographs we shook hands and I was back in the air heading towards my destination, Hahnweide.

The terrain around the Stuttgart zone is again quite undulating so the Tiger Moth and her pilot were experiencing a bumpy ride, but still she purred away. We were getting near Hahnweide so I called them with my entry number as I had been briefed before quoting my registration. Nothing was heard in reply so I carried on until eventually I was given permission to join and land. The wind was bang down the runway and I landed with little drama. After taxiing in I shut down and sat for a few moments taking in what I had just achieved. I was quite proud of myself. Time from Sarreguemines Neunkirch: 1hr 37min. Total for the flight out from England, 8hrs 5min.

**Monday 15 September.** After a very enjoyable weekend spent at Hahnweide seeing some very rare aircraft up close, and watching fantastic flying displays, Monday morning arrived and the journey home began. I taxied out asking air traffic to activate my flight plan once air borne, which they agreed to do. As I climbed away immediately because the ground rose quickly, I realised the wind and turbulence were going to be as bad as when I had arrived. I climbed steadily but the wind got stronger and my ground speed fell below 40mph. I opted to stay at 500ft as at that height I was achieving a ground speed of 50mph. This was going to be a very uncomfortable trip but on we went. How much buffeting could this Tiger Moth take? These were the worst flying conditions I have ever experienced.

As I struggled along it was getting really hard to keep the Tiger Moth and the world the right way up and to add to my problems cloud was beginning to form on top of the hills. I began to think I had to get out of this situation before it was too late, then




**Above:** Wednesday 10 September and safely on the ground on the expansive grass at Reimes Prunay for a night-stop, only the second landing after leaving Headcorn.

I noticed a small valley opening up and leading out towards the Rhine valley. so that is where I pointed the Tiger Moth and once into the Rhine valley proper, the turbulence disappeared and all was calm which was an enormous relief for me and the aeroplane.

Approaching the airfield of Haguenau I called on the published frequency but got no response so I joined the circuit and landed, again a nice landing but with no one to witness it. I taxied to the fuel station and climbed out giving G-APAL a good inspection. How does she stand all this?

Everything was where it should be. Eventually someone appeared and could speak English. He gave me the telephone number for Strasbourg so I called them to close my flight plan only to be told it had been filed but never activated. If I had gone down in the hills nobody would have known.

After refuelling and a chat, I noticed that the hills I had just flown over were now all but covered in low cloud and on the French side too, so that was that for the day. The chairman of the aero club duly arrived and insisted that we put the Tiger Moth in the hangar for the night. One thing I noticed on this trip is that people in France and Germany are very kind. A hotel was booked for me just across the road from the airfield. Flight time 1hr 21 mins.

**Tuesday 16 September.** The weather looked promising but I would have a strong headwind again. Today's targets were to be Chambley and Albert and as earlier I had been provided with the combination for unlocking the main gate and hangar door at Haguenau, I pulled G-APAL out, started her up and flew away. Not a sole was about.

A steady climb to clear the hills on the French side of the Rhine valley and again I was having to fly dog legs on my track to avoid controlled air space and also the built-up areas around the city of Metz. The turbulence was bad but not as violent as previously. I approached Chambley calling them repeatedly all the way in but received nothing in reply. The wind was straight down the main runway but again I preferred the grass.

Chambley is the size of a small town so I picked what I thought was the grass runway as it certainly appeared to be marked as such but when I touched down I was told by a voice over the radio that I had landed in the wrong area and he was going to call the police. I immediately replied that I was sorry but I had been calling him for the last 15 minutes with no reply. This response was met again with complete silence so I continued to the fuel station, taxi-walking the Tiger Moth, controlling the direction by body pressure on the fuselage and speed by hand using the loose throttle.

This time no one arrived to help. I noticed the fuel was Air-Total but I did not possess a Total card. However, there was a telephone number which I called, and the voice answered in French, but got the message that I required fuel, and help duly arrived. In the meantime another voice was broadcast from a speaker situated within the fuel station and apologized for the radio response I received when I landed, and declaring the owner of the voice was very interested in the Tiger Moth. I think he had not been listening to me on the way in so, as they say, less said soon is mended. Flight Time 1hr 48mins.

Airborne again, heading for Albert and avoiding controlled air space. As I continued across France, more and more wind farms appeared, and boy, were those sails turning at a rate! Again, my ground speed was worse than tragic. After what seemed like hours we slowly saw Albert Zone appear on the electric map. I called them and received an immediate response giving me permission for a straight-in approach for the grass. The wind was strong but at least was blowing down the runway. After about five minutes the controller called me to get an update as he could not see me. I informed him I had a very poor ground speed but eventually was on finals and despite the wind made a textbook landing. I am sure I rolled only a few metres before I stopped. My friends from the fire crew arrived to wing-walk me to the fuel station. Now I decided to call it a day as a telephone call to Headcorn advised me to stay put as their weather was very poor.



**Above:** Tiger Moth G-APAL wearing full RAF markings, surrounded by a host of classic contemporaries at Hahnweide. (Peter Foster).

The Albert airfield manager arranged with the aero club to put G-APAL in the hangar, booked me a hotel, and ordered a taxi. Now that is what I call service. Flight time 2hrs 35mins.

**Wednesday 17 September.** After a very pleasant night spent in Albert, I phoned Headcorn to check their weather. They informed me conditions were not good, as they were experiencing a very strong, gusty cross wind, so I decided to stay another day, as it is better to be on the ground wishing you were in the air, than in the air wishing you were on the ground. I spent the morning visiting the First World War museum in the town, which I found very moving and humbling. I spent the afternoon at Albert Airfield checking over G-APAL, and watching a huge Airbus Industries' freighter load with cockpit assemblies and depart. What a sight.

**Thursday 18 September.** Following another splendid evening spent in Albert, Thursday morning arrived with a promise of better flying conditions, so the prospect for a departure looked hopeful. After filing a flight plan and completing the Border Force Declaration things began to look better all-round and I arranged for a 1030Z take-off. But low cloud and mist were reported in the English Channel, so I postponed the departure. Problem. If you have already submitted a GAR and change your departure time, you have to wait another two hours before you can actually depart, so I waited until the man in the Tower informed me that he had activated my flight plan.

Arriving at Headcorn I reported to Control, only to be told the GAR man could not wait around for me and had gone home. What a farce is our Border Control. Flight Time 1hr 52min.

Having refuelled I took off on my last leg, arriving safely home at Ranksborough. Flight time 1hr 31min. I taxied-in and shut down, sitting for a few minutes listening to the Tiger Moth's exhaust ticking as it cooled, thinking to myself, had I really done that trip, out and return, in this lovely old Tiger Moth? Would I do it again? If my time allows, of course I would.

*Philip Shotbolt*

# Could This American Idea Save Britain's Farm Strips? By Ed Smiley-Jones

## What the **Recreational Aviation Foundation** is doing in the United States, and why the Flying Farmers Association should take notice.

Let me start with a simple question: who protects a farm strip once the person behind it is no longer there to fight for it?

Not just the runway itself, but the right to use it, the knowledge around it, and the future of the place. Because when nobody is actively guarding these things, they do not usually survive by accident. They are neglected, restricted, sold, developed, or simply allowed to fade away until closure begins to feel inevitable.

That is why I have been looking closely at the Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) in the United States. The RAF was formed by pilots who could see recreational airstrips being lost and decided to organise before more disappeared. Its mission is clear: to preserve, improve and create airstrips for recreational access.

What makes the RAF worth studying is not simply that it talks about the issue. It acts on it.

This is not just a nostalgic flying club lamenting lost strips over coffee. It is a structured, practical organisation. It helps identify land for new airstrips, supports projects that create or improve access, produces educational material so pilots can argue their case more effectively, and works with other aviation groups and lawmakers to make sure recreational aviation is seen as a legitimate and valuable use of land.

In other words, it has created a framework for action.



RAF Aviat Husky – Erin White

That, to me, is the real lesson.

Too often in Britain, when a strip or old airfield comes under threat, the response is late, fragmented and emotional. People care deeply, but they are usually reacting after the fact. Ownership changes. Development pressure arrives. The economics shift. A runway becomes less used, the grass gets longer, and what was once an active piece of aviation infrastructure starts to look like a patch of land waiting for another purpose. By the time anyone tries to defend it, the case has often already weakened.

The RAF suggests a different way of thinking: not reactive, but organised. Not sentimental, but practical. Not simply fighting closure, but building stewardship before a crisis arrives.

Its beginnings are telling. The organisation came out of a small group of Montana pilots who had experienced the freedom of flying into remote strips with little or no infrastructure. They recognised that those places would not remain available unless somebody stepped up to protect them. Their guiding question was simple: If not now, when? And if not us, who?
That question feels highly relevant here.

The American landscape is obviously different from ours. They have scale, wilderness and public land on a level we do not. But the underlying issue is much the same. Here in Britain, farm strips, private airfields and old wartime aerodromes are also vulnerable - to planning pressure, changing farm economics, ageing ownership, liability worries and simple inertia.

And once they are gone, they are rarely recovered.

That should matter to the Flying Farmers Association, because our members are not bystanders. In many cases, we are the custodians of exactly the sort of places most at risk. Farm strips are not some marginal footnote in British aviation. In many parts of the country they are the living edge of it: practical, rural, useful and often deeply tied to the life of the land itself.

Yet many are more fragile than we perhaps care to admit.

Some depend entirely on one individual. Some have no obvious succession plan. Some are one ownership change away from closure. Some are tolerated rather than truly protected. Others may simply fade from regular use until their loss hardly causes comment beyond a small circle. We tend to notice only when the gate is shut.

**Case study: Ryan Field, Montana**

Ryan Field, near West Glacier, Montana, offers a powerful example of what long-term strip stewardship can look like. Ben and Butch Ryan faced a problem that will feel familiar to many farm strip owners: there was no clear family successor to inherit the airfield and protect its future. Rather than leave the strip vulnerable to closure, sale or gradual decline, they chose to donate it to the Recreational Aviation Foundation in 2004.

Their aim was not simply to preserve a runway, but to ensure that the land, the flying and the spirit of the place would outlast them.

That decision turned Ryan Field from a private strip with an uncertain future into a protected aviation asset with structure, stewardship and continuity. Today, it remains under RAF ownership and is managed as a recreational airfield with clear operating procedures, mandatory pilot safety briefings and facilities for visiting aviators.

For Britain's farm strips, the lesson is obvious. When there is no next generation ready to take over, preservation does not happen by accident. It requires a plan, a custodian and a framework that can carry the strip forward. Ryan Field shows that, with the right structure, an airfield can be preserved not just as ground, but as a living aviation legacy

.

*https://www.theraf.org/raf-podcast-7-the-ryan-field-story*

What the RAF has understood is that access does not survive on sentiment alone. It survives when people organise around it.

That means identifying which places matter. It means understanding which strips are vulnerable. It means building relationships with landowners, pilots, local communities and policy-makers. It means having the language and confidence to explain why these places matter before someone else defines them as expendable. It also means helping owners think not only about current use, but about future stewardship.

One especially interesting part of the RAF model is its focus on landowner confidence. In the United States it has supported efforts to reduce liability concerns for private strip owners who allow non-commercial public use. The legal details may not transfer neatly to Britain, but the principle certainly does. If owners feel exposed, uncertain or unsupported, access shrinks. If they feel respected, informed and part of something wider, access has a better chance of surviving.

That feels directly relevant in the UK.

Here, one of the biggest threats to strip continuity is often not open hostility, but friction: planning uncertainty, insurance anxiety, family succession, legal ambiguity, or a sense that keeping a strip going may one day become more trouble than it is worth. These are exactly the sorts of pressures that close places down quietly, without ever becoming a national aviation story.

Which is why the FFA sits in such an interesting position.

This Association is close to the ground truth of the issue. Its members understand land, continuity, practicality and responsibility. A strip is not an abstract policy argument to a flying farmer. It is a real place on real land, with real operational and family decisions behind it. That gives the FFA both credibility and, potentially, an important role.

I am not suggesting we simply copy the American model and pretend Britain is Montana. We are not. Our legal environment is different, our geography tighter, our planning culture more restrictive and our ownership patterns more complex. But the central idea still travels well: pilots and landowners taking organised responsibility for preserving access before it disappears.

That could start modestly. A conversation. A working group. A simple register of vulnerable strips and legacy airfields. Guidance for owners thinking about succession. Better understanding of planning risk. A clearer public case for why these places matter before they come under direct pressure.

The point is not to begin with grand declarations. The point is to begin.

Because if we do not, the future is easy to picture. More strips disappear quietly. More old airfields are chipped away or lost altogether. More local knowledge dies with the individuals who carried it. And more of Britain's rural flying culture becomes something we speak about in the past tense.

That is why the RAF is worth studying. Not because America has all the answers, and not because Britain can copy and paste its model, but because it proves something important: pilots do not have to be passive spectators while access is slowly eroded. They can organise. They can advocate. They can educate. They can build partnerships. And they can act before the loss becomes permanent.

For the Flying Farmers Association, that may be the real question.

Not whether the RAF is admirable. It clearly is.

But whether we are prepared to ask what a British version of that effort might look like - before more of our own flying infrastructure slips away.

*Edmund Smiley-Jones* (aka Instagram @hinterlandpilot)

**If you'd like to learn more about The Recreational Aviation Foundation please visit www.theraf.org**

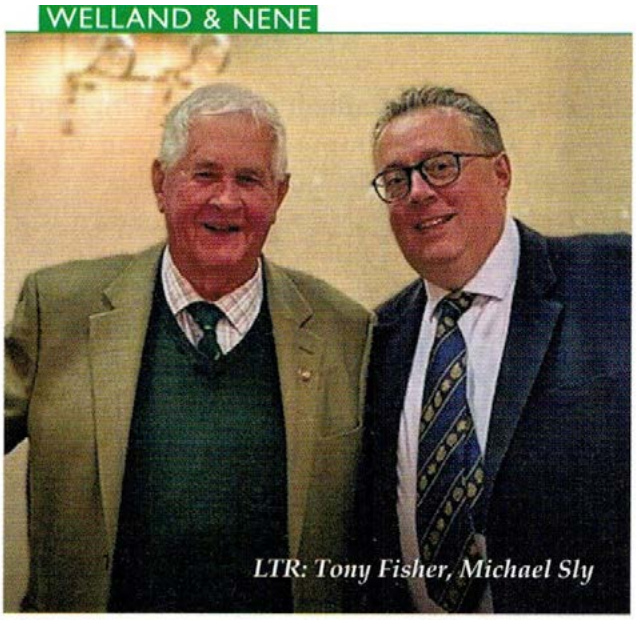



'RAF Supports This Airstrip' –Ken Summers

## Retirement: Tony Fisher

North Level District IDB

One of our longest serving Board members, Tony Fisher, who farms in the Thorney area, stood down last year after 37 years' service to the North Level District IDB. Tony joined the Board in January 1989 filling a casual vacancy and became a much-respected member of the Board, with a keen interest in the River Nene and the Nene Washes adjacent to his farm. To mark the Board's appreciation, Tony was presented with an engraved decanter by the Board Chairman, Michael Sly MBE.




## Deadline for articles for the August newsletter is 1st July

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**

**Event organisers will now receive a newsletter check list as well as an event organisers guide when planning an event. This will just help editing the newsletter in knowing running order, expected write ups, photos etc..**

## Wanted

**Avgas fuel bowser**

Description: Looking for either a towed or fixed base AVGAS bowser,
Hughie Urquhart; Contact number: 07586 304869
Email address: hughurquhart@gmail.com




BIGATMO™
Sunglasses with altitude



Bigatmo sunglasses are designed for aviation. Our lens development program focussed on the extreme high contrast environment of the cockpit. Our lenses are made from Trivex/NXT, have excellent optical properties and mechanical strength. The lens technology provides excellent colour acuity, especially important when reading flight deck instrumentation, and our specific tints help to keep your eyes relaxed. The sculpted titanium frames will fit your head, stay in place and be extremely comfortable – even after long periods or when using a headset. Genuine flight deck/pilot feedback was used throughout the development process and continues to be listened to as we make improvements and refine future designs. Many of our customers need prescription sunglasses and eyewear. We make varifocal and single vision prescription eyewear, so if you'd like our help or advice, just get in-touch and we'll be very happy to chat with you about some possible choices:

15% DISCOUNT ON SUNGLASSES WITH STANDARD LENSES (CODE FFA15)
10% DISCOUNT ON SUNGLASSES WITH PRESCRIPTION LENSES (CODE FFA10)

Email: info@bigatmo.com or call +44(0)1622 844030

**Tested and trusted by pilots.**

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION





Summer Jacket with fold away hood

For all orders contact Roz Stephens **07773 052001** or **chix@farmline.com**

## FFA Clothing

| Item | Logo | Sizes | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jackets - last few | | M, L. | £40.00 |
| Jackets - New Stock | | L, XL, 2XL, 3XL. | £65 |
| Summer Jackets | | S, M, L, XL. | £65 |
| Lined Fleece Jackets | | S,M | £30.00 |
| Body Warmer (old stock) | | M, L | £28.00 |
| Body Warmer (new similar style) | | XL, 2XL, 3XL. | £50 |
| Sweat Shirts (discontinued) | | S | £14.00 |
| Sweat Shirt | Old style | S | Half price £7.00 |
| Baseball Caps | | | £8.00 |
| Ties | | | £15.00 |
| Clocks | | | £30.00 |
| Pens | | | £2.50 (postage) |

*ANNIVERSARY PEN*

Free of charge to members who request one. As there's a limited number this will be on a 'once they are gone they're gone basis.

**Email: info@ffa.org.uk**

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION




Last chance to grab a free pen inscribed with the FFA logo and the 50th Anniversary 1974–2024

## NEW FFA name badges

**£3.00 each plus £1.50 postage and packing.**

**To order please email: charliepapworth@gmail.com** with the name you would like on your badge and the address if you require it to be posted.











# Profile: John Milne from Stockbridge, Hampshire

## By Rebecca Rayner




John and Boo Milne (with G-MILN, Cessna 182), having just landed at Cherbourg, half of the runway in thick mist!

**A few years ago John and I organised a flying farmers' fly-in to my airstrip near Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire to see a hemp farm which was a bit quirky! John has been a long-time flying farmers' member with a rather impressive membership number of 78.**

**John, tell us about your early days…** My Father was in The Colonial Service and I was born in 1944 in Jos, Northern Nigeria, "The white man's grave". I was christened by the Archbishop of West Africa in a church specially built in Enugu and was the first on the Register. All my friends were African, I understood the local dialect better than English. School didn't exist and I killed my first snake, a puff adder, when I was 4. I had a huge collection of butterfly specimens which were sadly eaten by white ants. At 8, in 1952, I was sent to prep school in Scotland and then on to Rossall School, Fleetwood, before attending Wye College and Cirencester.

**Tell us about your family...** I married Boo in July 1979 and honeymooned in France. We flew back in my Cherokee 180 during the storm that caused havoc and loss of life during the Fastnet Race. We were IMC all the way back to Southampton with a 75 knot cross wind! Highlight of The Honeymoon was seeing the runway lights at Southampton below the OCL! We have a son Guy who got his PPL at Melbourne during his Gap year and a daughter Kate (a Harpist)And 4 Grandchildren. My Father was not only a keen Mountaineer, but also a PPL Instructor with over 10,000 hours-many of which were carried out on 'Mercy missions' in Kenya when Flying Doctors were not allowed to fly!

**When did you start flying and getting your PPL...** In 1969 I saw an advert "Obtain your PPL for £250 at Stansted if you pass your GFT in 35 hours" - which I did. After ferrying a Cherokee 180 to Kenya with only a NDB operational, I took my week long Instructors' Course in Guernsey in 1975. My first plane was a Rallye Club, based at Andrewsfield in Essex - a grass strip and hangar which I helped lay down and which is now a busy airfield. Moving to Hampshire I bought a share in G-AWIT, a Cherokee 180, before finally buying a Cessna 182 which I put on the UK register as G-MILN. I've flown 2000 hours in 50 years.

**Your career....** I have had various jobs before graduating including driving "Tiger One" - a breakdown van patrolling the M6 from Holmes Chapel to Knutsford. In 1967 my first job was as a graduate trainee for RHM with Watts of Banbury. Promoted to Assistant Arable Marketing Manager, Throws Farm. In 1972 I formed my own mobile feed business, Feed Ranger Ltd. Sold out to J & R Finzel Ltd and made a director of Red Hen Farm Eggs Ltd. After purchasing my own broiler breeder unit I returned to RHM, (producing pre-basic seed) where promotion took me to Hampshire as Arable Specialist South of England. I later joined Faulkner and Partners and sold out to Masstock Arable (UK) Ltd in the late nineties. I also set up a small aerial photography business before 'retiring'. I now run my own business, Meon Hill Farms (Stockbridge) Ltd, renting out units for offices/light industrial.

**How did you get to know about the FFA...** In 1973 the Editor of The Farmer's Weekly, a pilot, suggested in an article that as there were a number of farmers who flew light aircraft and they should get together. I went to the first meeting and became member no. 78. Over the years I have helped and organised over 15 fly-ins. All great fun and interesting. A HUGE Thanks to The Committee past and present.

**Do you have any interests other than flying...** Sport in general, squash being my most successful, and golf being my most recent, though no longer on account of arthritis. I love shooting, running various shoots and becoming an instructor and loader. I am involved in many charities including RABI, FCN, Free Church of Country Sports, 12-20 Club, Farms for Schools, Operation Propellor, Rossall Foundation, GWCT, World Pheasant Association, LEAF, CLA, CA, NFU, and Stockbridge Growmore Club.