FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION

August 2026 newsletter no. 152



CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

It seems that every day on the TV, the smiling weather girl announces yet another climate record. Then comes the Climate Change lectures, interpreting these two words as being a man-made phenome. Climate change has been happening since climate started happening. What small proportion is due to human factors is debatable. Personally I think the biggest cause in this alleged human intervention to climate change, is the sheer size of the world population. If there was only one man on earth, he wouldn't have any impact on the changes in the weather. But we have 8.3 billion of us all making a small contribution - so the problem is caused by over population.

But farmers are the most sustainable and resilient of all the professions and it is our job to feed those 8.3 billion. After prostitution, we are the oldest trade on earth, because we learn to adapt to situations. We are up against it financially as not only are yields disappointing, but our neighbours to the north in Scotland still receive BPS. Likewise, 22 miles to the south, our Continental cousins still receive their BPS (transitioned to BISS – Basic Input Support for Sustainability). In fact every country in the world subsidises food production in one form or another, whilst we have diminishing ERM or SFI schemes to encourage weed growing, which are hardly worth claiming for and certainly won't feed the 8.3 billion.

Between the weather and DEFRA policies, we are adapting to survive. Spring cereal crops are on their way out due to droughting off before mature and winter crops are being drilled earlier before the land gets too wet. How long before we are growing Sunflowers and Soyabeans? We recently drove up through France and noticed the Sunflower fields appear to be progressing further north.

On the aviation front, I feel that we are also starting to adapt. We ask ourselves, as we reach a certain age, do we really need a Class 2 medical when a PMD (Pilots's Medical Declaration) will suffice? Can we even risk failing a medical as a PMD would then not be an option?

I am also considering a Czech aircraft classed as an LSA (Light Sport Aircraft). These can be flown under the LAA or BMAA without all the certification involved with the CAA. They are faster, more efficient on fuel and so much cheaper to maintain. But of course, come with limitations on MTOW and are generally 2 seaters. Modern technology in these sporty aircraft is amazing with glass cockpits and even come with a ballistic parachute. But instead of this parachute costing £18,000 to service every 5 to 12 years as on a Cirrus, the LSA aircraft would be £1,200!

So, we are in a changing world, some of it good, some of it not so good. But I guess we either sink or swim depending on our adaptability.

Interestingly, I inherited my father's book collection many years ago, consisting mainly of aviation books, its aircraft and famous pilots. One large book, nearly 2" thick, titled British Light Aircraft describes in detail with many photographs, aircraft built between 1920 and 1940 in Britain. In the introduction it states that this was the "Golden Age of flying with people from all walks of life taking up aviation with the civic authorities of almost every town in the British Isles clamoring to have their own municipal aerodromes" It features over 250 different light aircraft made between WW1 and WW2.

How things have changed, in fact I struggle to name one light aircraft that is now made in the UK, and it seems our municipal airfields are disappearing. Yet in Czech, unbelievably there are over 60 different types of aircraft made there, mostly Light Sport Aircraft, making them the 4th largest producer of aircraft in the world.

On a completely different note, we had an unusual fly tipping incident. My daughter spotted this lorry load of what she thought was garden waste tipped in a field. I got our man to go and load it up to 'compost' it, as one heap of rubbish soon attracts another. He started to load it and recognized the smell. He sent me a video of this substance which he said was cannabis. (Not sure why he is such an expert on this type of horticulture!) We reported it to the police who weren't particularly interested.

I was a little worried because, as we had tried to move it, we had in effect taken ownership of a Class B drug which carries a 5 year prison sentence for possession. I also thought that we would have to get it removed by a licensed collector (who would probably dump in someone else's field!) The police asked for photographs and the Sergeant said that they weren't bothered as it was just plant pots and compost with no viable cannabis.

We reported it to the council, but they said its on our land so we are responsible for it. So, taking the Police Sergeant's diagnosis, we have 'composted' it ourselves as according to them it is not toxic, which has saved me at least £1000 in professional disposal costs.

Paul Stephens

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FFA Committee Meeting – Tuesday 16th June 2026



The Committee met as usual for our summer get together. Our favourite venue is our President's home in Essex, which is not only a perfect venue with his immaculate runways and his beautiful orangery, but is reasonably central for us. The sun never ceases to shine at this venue, but this time there was a cloud on the horizon.

Martin had invited us to use his facilities but announced that firstly he would only get back from his Icelandic tour in his Robin the day before, but secondly Annette had to go in for a hip operation on the day of our meeting. But he insisted that this shouldn't put us off – just shut the door when we leave!

The day did indeed turn out sunny following a bit of morning low cloud in parts, but all 7 committee members were present. After the usual signing of the previous meeting's minutes, we went through a number of items on the agenda. Here are some of them;

1. Our web master has been instructed to add aircraft types to the membership list. There will be a reminder sent round for members to check their profiles on the membership list and update as necessary and include their aircraft types and registrations. There is a section headed My Profile in the members' section on the website.
2. We have seen a fall off in attendees at events and questioned whether this is a case of members' ages increasing with less activity, or members failing medicals, or new members being a bit shy to join in, or the type of events being held. One suggestion was for committee members to contact new members in their area to make them feel more welcome.
3. Our FFA clothing provider has gone out of business so Roz will be looking for another embroiderer and clothing supplier. At the moment there is quite a bit of stock, but all the wrong sizes of course!
4. Our membership Secretary, Andrew gave his report and announced there were now 402 members.
5. Our Events Secretary gave his report and explained why meetings have been a bit sparse this year. There were three meetings which had to be cancelled through lack of support or having to be rolled to next year due to other circumstances. The Chairman stressed that we should always remember the basic ethic of the FFA is to visit other members and look at farming in different parts of the country. On that point, Roger Bell had written after Alf and Gill Oliver's Wing Ding, which took attendees to local farmers in that area, claiming it was one of the best meetings he had ever attended.
6. David Keene has stood down as the Pop-In coordinator after setting up these informal meetings for many years. The committee want to continue these out of season meetings and want to keep them informal.
7. The AGM will be held at Kimberley Hall in Norfolk thanks to Robbie Buxton offering his venue. It will take place on 30th September and there will be no charge for members. A speaker will be arranged.
8. Our Treasurer, Andrew presented the financial budgets and accounts which were discussed and approved by the committee.
9. Before our President, Martin left with Annette for the hospital, he wanted to stress that he found it extremely disrespectful to both the host of a meeting and the organiser, when some members left a tour before the end. There is always a get home it is towards the end of a tour especially if the forecast isn't favorable. But you can imagine a situation where the host is expecting maybe 30 attendees and half have already gone home.
10. There was discussion about the CAA Class 1 and 2 medical cardio bulletin. This publication is unclear and will drive pilots, or at least those of a certain age, away from their yearly visit to an AME and resort to PMD's (Pilot Medical Declarations) for fear of having to spend thousands of pounds on stress tests etc. or failing a medical and therefore being unable to make a true representation on the PMD form. Andrew will delve deeper into this and hopefully circulate an email to clarify the matter.

We ended the meeting thanking an absent Martin and Annette for arranging someone to step in for the catering at our lunch break, wishing Annette well and then started departing, although we left the door open as Martin returned just as we finished.

Paul Stephens

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Cover photograph: Robert Burns Museum, Scottish Tour by Peter Gale

Joined Since December 2026

8871	W. Alldis from Epping, Essex
8872	A. Christie from Angus
8870	R. Hughes from Taunton, Somerset
8864	G. Solleveld from Buchlyvie, Stirlingshire
8838	teverson. R from Cambridge, Cambridgeshire
8862	D.J.W. Wynne from Exeter, Devon

Departing Members

509	J.D. Bally	Lapsed
771	D. Bell	Passed away
8703	R.P. Caley	Lapsed
645	G. Corbin	Lapsed
8709	G.F.H. Crabb	Lapsed
8558	N.C. Crighton	Lapsed
843	D. Cyster	Lapsed
729	H. Mason	Lapsed
543	B. Meade	Lapsed
8753	J. Padley	Lapsed
863	A. Peacock	Lapsed
8755	S. Richardson	Lapsed
8618	R. Thomas	Lapsed
147	R. Windley	Lapsed

Letters to the Editor

A field for your views with plenty of room to take off!
If you wish to receive feedback from the membership please request that your email address is included when submitting.

FFA Present and Future

Between the hay and the harvest, we enjoyed three days courtesy of Alf and Gill Oliver on their Wing Ding tour.

The Wing Ding was one of the best tours that I have been to in my time with the Flying Farmers Association.

We met interesting farmers who are doing great things with not much land compared to the usual visits to rolling acres with huge machines.

The level of debate, quality of information and general sharing of intelligence that was delivered gave many some satisfaction and pricked our curiosity about diversity.

Alf's contacts in the area and Gillian's organisational skills meant that we were able to gain access to a number of local farms who have taken a parallel course or increased specialisation to generate income.

On the Social side discussion between members about the problems facing farmers today was useful as it is at every FFA meeting.

As far as Flying into the venue is concerned there were two couples who drove which is surprising as the venue was close to the very centre of England.

Two intrepid flyers flew all the way from Aberdeenshire. The only disappointment was that there were not more new faces among our members. Many of the wonderful visits, tours and trips are patronised by the same hard core of determined Flying Farmers.

One of the comments which I heard during the tour was that the FFA is a lot more than just a farmer's club with aeroplanes. That is so very true; so how do we encourage more of our 400 members to join us on future visits and tours? Not every Flying Farmer is competent in conditions that are not perfect. There is no shame in jumping in the car and driving to a meeting.

You will be made welcome and feel free to bring a friend. Our guests and visitors all contribute to the value and interest of the day.

Let us see more drivers and guests in future please.

Roger Bell

The Thousand Pound medical is nearly here

Well I hope this article does not put people off as I have always tried to keep 100% legal when it comes to flying. As you are all aware we have to have a current CAA medical to be able to use all our privileges when it comes to certain flights we may want to undertake. For myself flying in Europe and the USA has been one of the greatest pleasures.

Crossing the English Channel in a light aircraft has always been my idea of heaven.

So I have always kept my class 2 medical which after sixty was an annual event which in my early sixties was very enjoyable as the CAA had not invented CELLMA yet and I used to go to a lovely old boy in a private house and have a thorough check up and be issued with my CAA class 2 medical and FAA Third class for under £200.

Then came Cellma, I believe I was one of the first to use this service, and as I have an Apple iMac computer, yes you guessed it, I ended up having to be a piggy in the middle with the Indian software contractor, the CAA, and my new AME. The end result being I used my Microsoft computer! but not before the CAA had extracted the sum of £11.67 which could be paid using, yes you guessed an online payment system.

So after mastering Cellma and visiting my new AME I was happy to travel further and have a great service. Then he gave up, so I moved to another recommended AME, and this is where, shall I say, prices started to creep up to £300.

So how did we get to a thousand pound medical,well I am 68 and sadly this is deemed to be old and requires when over 65 a QRISK3 if you score 15% or above (or on blood pressure medication) you then have to undertake an ECG Stress Test on a treadmill and just to add another fly in the ointment I wear hearing aids so also had to undertake a CAA Functional Hearing Assessment, this can be done in an aircraft or a simulator, I used my own plane and a local CFI.

Breakdown of the costs	
CAA CELMA online payment	£11.67
AME CLASS 2 MEDICAL EXAMINATION	£190.00
CAA Investigation	
Exercise stress ECG	£210.00
NHS Hospital fee	£72.00
Cardiology review	£230.00
FUNCTIONAL HEARING ASSESSMENT(flight)	
CFI	£50.00
Flight 1 hr C172	£130.00
Travel distance to appointments 160 miles	£44.00
Parking	£5.40
miscellaneous items printing/coffee/biscuits	£22.13
TOTAL	£965.20

...and then it dawned on me that is the exact figure of my monthly state pension

Oh yes I passed and have been issued a Class 2 medical but maybe it is time for a PMD.

All the best

Charlie Papworth
MainHall Farm Airfield
Cambridge

To All Members of the Flying Farmers Association,

As a former FFA member and airstrip owner, namely Milson, (my legacy to aviation) I have very reluctantly decided to fold my wings in the next few weeks when I complete the last line of my 24th PPL style log book. Flying has been my "passion" for the last 58 years, but medical issues, the cost, and other factors, have led to this regrettable decision.

However, I am now planning to write another small book about airfield and airstrip planning issues. Flying into numerous small airstrips over the years, I was shocked to learn that each one appears to have had a different experience when it comes to matters relating to planning rules and conditions.

It is my intention to write about the confusion and illogical way in which airstrips in particular are treated by local councils and planning authorities. There is no consistancy when it comes to planning and many Local "Planning Structure Plans" appear to give little consideration to aviation interests.

Hopefully with the help of AOPA, The GAAC, LAA, Local Government legislators and yourselves, I hope to put together a useful guide book relating to planning regulations and conditions for airstrips and airfields. Loss of any runway, once removed, like Coventry for example, is a loss to aviation for good. "NIMBY" is a possible title; and we all know what that means!

Can I please ask you all to help; if you feel brave enough to do so? I will not expressly reveal the actual location or name of any place unless you are happy for me to include your details etc. Initially, can you please email or text me on **thompsonmilson@talk21.com** or my mobile on **+44 (0) 7702077996**. Pooleys have already generously donated a 2026 airfield guide to help me get started.

Finally, can I also remind you that a second edition of my autobiography "Unfit to Fly?" is available from New Generation Publishing. This hardback version is somewhat overpriced at £27.99 but I hope to have a paperback one issued soon.

Kind regards to all, and thank you.
Hugh Thompson (UK CAA ATPL No 219649B)

IMPORTANT Membership Matters

Subscription Overpayments

Thank you everyone for your continued membership this year which we have had time now to analyse.

- Since we started GoCardless direct debit system 6 years ago, 20 members who have registered have forgotten to cancel their SO's and for 17 members this has remained unresolved since the beginning.
- 48 members have failed to raise their SO to £50 and no longer receive a newsletter
- 8 retired members have not cancelled their SO's [Never a problem with GoCardless]
- 10 continue to pay the old £5 from over 20 years ago of which 3 are current members.

This means we receive extra subscriptions from some members and the agreed policy 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.

Membership List

A number of members have asked about a paper copy of the membership list. We used to send out a bound booklet with members details but this was stopped after it became available as a PDF on the website.

- To download, go to the Members Area, click on View Members then "Download PDF". Please don't leave it lying around or lend it to anyone!
- At the bottom of the online list there is a slider. Use this to scroll right to see additional information which includes aircraft type
- It's also good to note that you can sort the online list (click on the heading) by postcode or county to find a member in your area or near to a place you need to fly to. Of course, always get PPR before launching.

Update your details

Members have always been able to update their details on the website but historically have not been very good at it.
We have recently changed the website to update aircraft type. You would not be surprised that we often get enquiries from members about who flies such-and-such an aircraft so they can exchange notes. For most members the aircraft type shown is the one they had when they joined and is way out of date.

To find a type easily you can sort the online list by aircraft type as well, but remember that a C172 might also be listed as a Cessna 172 so check the variations.

Can we encourage you please to use the "Edit your FFA Profile" service by clicking the "View Profile" button in the Members Area and update your aircraft and any other information that has changed?

The update page is a bit "clunky" but a soon-to-be-installed update will make the process much easier.

Please do not change the decimal latitude/longitude of your airstrip even if it has mysteriously moved or you know it to be wrong - rather email us at info@ffa.org.uk - this is the live data that flows into the Sky Demon airfields layer and any amount of chaos will ensue if you get it wrong. I am currently working on about 10 airstrips currently off the coast of Ghana with Coordinates of 0° latitude and 0° longitude, an open area of the Atlantic Ocean called Null Island. There is no land there—only water and a weather buoy. Mapping software uses this zero spot as a default error trap when a location is missing or invalid.

Are you receiving FFA emails?

We've noticed that quite a few members have become recently unsubscribed from the email system. While it is expected that some members will actively unsubscribe from the list, others have become unsubscribed automatically because of a temporary issue with their email provider or the member changing email addresses. This results in the emails being undelivered and as a result our system saying to itself "that email address didn't work so I'll stop sending". We can see this and where possible we tell members [by email] but then if the email is not working... We also try to phone members but more often than not the issue remains unresolved.

We use emails to send you important regulatory information, requests from members and most importantly, details of events and booking links, so if you are not getting regular emails from info@ffa.org.uk and you want them then please contact us on the website, info@ffa.org. uk or 01303 874251. If you don't want them, unsubscribe at the bottom of any email or contact us as above.

Treasurer's Telegraph

CAA Electronic Conspicuity Consultation.
The UK Civil Aviation Authority has launched a public consultation on its proposed approach to an Electronic Conspicuity (EC) mandate for all civil aircraft operating below Flight Level 100 in UK airspace.

1. The Political Narrative:
This airspace is used by many different types of flying including general aviation, commercial and specialised operations, military and emergency service flying, and a growing number of remotely piloted aircraft, as well as emerging aircraft such as electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.

Many of these activities take place in areas with no radar coverage and no air traffic control separating aircraft from one another. While voluntary use of EC has grown, take-up is uneven, and not all devices work well together. Where only some aircraft carry EC, or where devices are incompatible, the system-wide benefit is reduced so the Department for Transport has concluded that a national EC Mandate is needed. The CAA's current view is that voluntary approaches will not achieve the level of consistency and interoperability needed to support long-term airspace integration. While a potential unwelcome cost to many, it may reduce the need to keep different types of aircraft apart through segregated airspace [i.e. Temporary Restricted Airspace]

2. The Practical Narrative :
Crewed aircraft (General Aviation): would be expected to use ADS-B on 1090 MHz as the standard EC transmission frequency; and BVLOS drones and other unmanned aircraft would use ADS-B UAT on 978 MHz. Existing 1090ES transponders may already satisfy much of the requirement if they meet the final specification. Some CAP 1391 portable EC devices (Skyecho/Pilot Aware) may require software updates or replacement if they do not meet the new specification.

Aircraft with no transponder or legacy Mode A/C equipment are likely to face the greatest cost because they may need new 1090 MHz ADS-B capability.

The move of drones to 978 MHz is intended to reduce congestion on the already busy 1090 MHz frequency but there is no interoperability between the two at present.

The consultation document CAP 3268 proposes that aircraft must carry CAA-approved EC equipment that complies with the new UK EC specification. This raises the point about foreign aircraft and how they may have a difficulty in meeting the future UK CAA requirements [that's their problem you say], but if Europe sets different standards…..

[At the recent GAP meeting, where this was discussed in some detail, there was politely heated disagreement about whether SkyEcho did, or did not meet the specification. I was surprised that around the table of General Aviation's great and good that this question needed to be asked at all – I hope they make their mind up soon – apparently it was something to do with "extended squitter"]

3. AOPA's comment from Martin Robinson:
The consultation effectively embeds the 1090 MHz/978 MHz split into the future UK surveillance architecture, and that technical decision will influence equipment compatibility, upgrade costs and interoperability for many years to come. I think the sporting and recreational community will be impacted the most.

I am concerned that the GA community is being asked to pay for infrastructure changes to enable a new airspace entrant which is looking at the commercial use of airspace (drone delivery) I will be making this point too as we are being told that no funding will be made available. The Drone community is beginning to argue that GA should pay infrastructure costs so we have a battle coming. There are three considerations; Political, Economic and Technical and where GA sits within those three areas.

4. Next move :
For the consultation [information] document simply Google CAP3268

For the consultation itself Google "caa ec mandate consultation"

FFA will be participating in due course and would welcome your views to inform our response. Email info@ffa.org.uk. The consultation closes on 22 September.

General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) 09/06/2206
The Civil Aviation (Consumer Protection and Regulatory Reform) Bill is currently moving through Parliament. Observers worry that the potential devolution of broader powers could give unfettered power to CAA with additional regulatory costs passed down to industry. Chairman Matt Wilkins met in Parliament with Lord Byron Davies, himself a private pilot while considerable and sensible opposition to the Bill during its passing through the Lords has been made. While the Bill contains extensive provisions relating to airline passengers, airport slots, consumer rights and airspace modernisation, it contains little explicit recognition of the general aviation sector. This despite the fact that GA aircraft, pilots and organisations in the UK far outnumber the airline sector, and GA in the UK is worth at least £4bn (and provides at least 40,000 jobs). Several peers highlighted this omission, arguing that government rhetoric around aviation growth risks overlooking the ecosystem that supplies future airline pilots and supports regional aviation activity. Critics of the Bill note that while ministers repeatedly referred to economic growth, competitiveness and innovation, there is no dedicated provision addressing pilot training capacity, flying schools or the long-term sustainability of grassroots aviation. Conservative peer Lord Moylan said: "With the great swathes of powers being granted to the CAA, I see no provision in the Bill for parliamentary accountability or, indeed, for any accountability of the CAA to anybody, including to the Transport Secretary. How can that be an acceptable way of making law and regulation for the future?. How is it that a bill with such an innocuous name can deliver such significant consequences. Nor does it seem to give much "Consumer protection" to GA community consumers.

National Planning Policy Framework
A Key priority for GAAC remains amending the National Planning Policy Framework glossary to prevent airfields from being misclassified as "brownfield" sites.

Planning & Aerodromes Update
- Cambridge: Marshall Aerospace sold airfield land to Homes England and Hill Group, with plans to vacate by mid-2029.
- Doncaster Sheffield: Reopening is delayed; there are issues including

[too few] passenger numbers, enough electricity to power both the airport and the projected homes nearby and a [crippling] 20% airport profit share to the owners included in business model. Cargo operations are now targeted for 2027 while the lease agreement between the council and Peel Group undergoes renegotiation.
- Fairoaks: Remains protected as an employment and aerodrome site in local planning.
- Military Sites: Disposal dates updated — Honington (2030), Henlow (2027), and Wittering (2031).
- Coventry : Coventry Airport is officially closed. Coventry Aero Club is relocating to Turweston, while other operators/facilities are re-siting elsewhere.

Ongoing battles persist regarding Development Consent Orders (DCOs), including Anglian Water's reservoir project near Chatteris Airfield which would swallowed it up whole.

CAA GA Policy Update.
The CAA looks to Government and specifically, the DfT for much of its strategic direction which at the moment places strong emphasis on growth, innovation, de-carbonisation, resilience, and consumer protection across the aviation sector. While these priorities are broadly aligned with General Aviation (GA) interests, the policy framework remains predominantly focused on commercial air transport, with comparatively limited recognition of GA's wider strategic value. The principal strategic concern remains that regulatory, airspace, and economic frameworks designed primarily around commercial airline operations could unintentionally marginalise GA activity through disproportionate compliance burdens, restricted airspace access, and escalating operating costs.

It was, therefore, no surprise that the Dft's General Aviation July Newsletter was entirely about employment, skills and careers. As I said in the last newsletter, you have to have an industry for these recruits to work in.

LAPL(A) Licence Holders.
There has been some confusion regarding the conversion of a UK Part-FCL LAPL(A) to a UK NPPL(A). Currently there is NO obligation for LAPL(A) holders to convert their licences to an NPPL(A). The ONLY obligation for LAPL(A) holders is that they must transition to fixed period validity and the revised revalidation requirements before 1st October 2026. The only real difference between an NPPL(A) and a LAPL(A) is that the LAPL(A) cannot include an IMCR, whereas a NPPL(A) may.

CAA Cardiovascular Risk Assessment.
The CAA has published updated guidance for assessing cardiovascular risk in pilots and air traffic controllers. The guidance includes a new flow chart for cardiovascular risk assessment which can be found on the website. Google "CAA Cardiovascular system general". Sadly despite tenacious lobbying from AOPA and others little has changed.

Have a look at AOPA's response to the updated guidance on their website. Go to AOPA Home, scroll down a little to "Current Hot Topics" and click on Pilot Medicals – it says it all.

Andrew Cragg

Calendar of Events 2026/27

3 October 2026	Flying finale	IWM Duxford, Cambs
4 October 2026	Race Day	Old Warden. Beds
6 – 11 2027	SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo	Lakeland, FL
26 July – 1 August, 2027	AirVenture Oshkosh	Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA



For Scottish members - closure of Leuchars LARS

LEUCHARS AERODROME (EGQL) REMOVAL OF LARS
From 1 July 2026, Leuchars Aerodrome will no longer operate Primary or Secondary radar.

The provision of a Lower Airspace Radar Service will cease from this date.

Obituary: Bob Beard

Bob joined the FFA in March 1999.

He and Richard Howard did their first tour in 2000 to Dresden and Saltzburg, and Bob was a very active member until he had his stroke 9 years ago. He has managed the farm, with the help of his wife Olive, until she sadly passed away in November last year .

Bob leaves a son Ian who runs the Truck spares business and a daughter Jane who runs the free range egg enterprise.



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

Aged farmer's flying experience



In 2005, I was in the USA fixing some engineering problem (AA, BA, AB, BB); i.e. upside down or the wrong way round. It was in Utah, not far from the Idaho border.

At the local airport was a Murphy Rebel for sale with 250 hours on the clock. It was moderately painted with an unfussy interior. The builder had fitted an unknown engine which on the test flying had low oil pressure so he bit the bullet and replaced it with one with a $12,500 ticket. I flew it for about 20 hours after work, liked it, bought it and shipped it back to the UK.

The Rebel, with its wide track aluminium undercarriage and tail wheel, is very stable on rough ground. It needs to be. In a previous model, I had been flying down the West Coast of Scotland but could not find the strips on the east side of Jura. Up-and-down we flew but we couldn't spot it. So off to Colonsay and its feudal Lord. It has a sort of a landing strip across the golf course with a little green hut to the side and a hill and fence to the East.

The wind was out of the West so in we went with a 15 kt tail wind, that's about 80 miles an hour over the threshold. Halfway down the number four fairway, about 250 yards in, we were rolling quite fast towards the fence and the hills. A go around was out of the question. I had raced quite a lot of side-car motocross so switched that bit of the brain on. Heavy left brake, stick back and I managed to slide off the last 30 miles an hour and stopped facing the little green hut. Try doing that in a J3 or a Pitts.

Jump forward to 2012, G-REBB is in the UK, rigged and running. We checked it out and decided to fit new struts to give it a max all up weight of 1650 lb plus the upgraded tail spring. Having my own shed and airstrip did help. That's why I live in the North East of England, there is room to do things. Also, willing to lose money, I have become a farmer, some say so I could join the Flying Farmers Association (FFA). I was also a gas safe plumber and later a woodburning biomass boiler troubleshooter (200 kW, heat a house, flat and cottage via a 60 meter heat pipe). I also play trombone in two street bands but not at the same time.

Independent observers might have spotted these things don't add up, not enough time.

Anyway, in 2017 after lambing, we got to work on G-REBB with the help of Noel Robinson (retired airline pilot and CAD expert) and Bob Harrison (retired CAA engineer plus Mustang dog house design designer and builder) we obtained a permit for the Rebel.

I did the test flying. I don't pretend to be an expert but my strip has its challenges. It faces Northwest/Southeast. You take off Northwest downhill at about 10° slope. You land uphill to the Southeast usually with a tail wind. A 440 V electricity pole lurks to the Southwest. The strip is 420 m long.

If you do a conservation of energy equation to the problem, that gives you about 600 m straight and level, enough for a DC3! (Children and young parents get your ONC Mech Eng granddad to explain this for you). There is also a farm with sheds in the valley about 200 m from the threshold. Overflying this, depending on the wind direction and velocity, strange things can happen. Let's just settle for 500 feet/sec up or down for a few microseconds. With no go around possible, you grin and bear it, hop over the fence and run up the hill. You never use more than 300m.

I don't encourage visitors. Harry, from Fishburn airfield, a retired granite worktop importer, would pop in. The soul stranger was Steve Parrish, the super bike racer, often on telly and a low hours pilot. He actually listened to my briefing, put those barn door flaps to max drag position on his 172 and kited down, using only half the strips length. That explains why he was British champion a few years ago. He picked up his daughter who was a student at Northumbria University and flew away to his dacha in the Deep South.

Students of grass cutting may notice the summer long grass length on part of the strip. I don't own the strip. The farmer, who once was in my rugby team, likes his grass. Grass is energy and sells at £35 a round bale (£50 in Surrey). So I cut two approximate 250 m strips, adequate for takeoff. Landings, with a tail wheel, are a bit different. Years ago, before fear intervened, I used to do tailwheel checkouts for pilots and got the syllabus down to 6 sentences, three for takeoff and three for landing.

So landing in (or on) long grass, over the hedge at 60 miles an hour (or 1.3 times the stall speed if you read lots of books) was number one. Keep it straight and fly 1

foot above the ground, number two. Then altogether stick back and flare and get those feet dancing on the rudder pedals, number three and keep it straight.

I modestly held my own record. A long time ago, still racing motocross (solo), and I owned an Avid Flyer, the first in the UK. It was a tailwheel model otherwise Newtonian laws (all three of them) would have ruined the exercise. I kept it at a local Laird's farm (I moved in high circles) in a Dutch barn. I would pull it by hand, with the wings folded, up the country lane to the hayfield. Unfold the wings and triple check the wing pins were in position along with their locking clips. (I often had nightmares of whizzing along at 80 miles an hour and 1200 feet and the wings folding, putting us both into kestrel diving mode with no happy ending).

Anyway, winter was a doddle, apart from puddles and cowpats, the grass was short. Come spring (that's May in the north) the grass would grow, just like lambs and children. My record in the silage field was 14 inches (356 mm) grass length for takeoff and landing. The Avid had a 582 two-stroke motor that peaked at 6800 RPM. Much higher than my Husky Enduro bike. Anyway, takeoff was full throttle, full flaps down, stick forward keep it straight with your feet and feel it off the ground. Great fun but you need to know your aircraft. I never took passengers, much too dangerous. Landing was as before, but with lots of stick back.

Back to the Rebel. September 2017 it got its first permit. I flew about 25 hours until September 2018. It then rested until March 2019 when we got it ready for its permit renewal. We had run it on a weekly basis over the winter. I realise this article is many months late but like Christmas, it's more fun if you wait awhile. G-REBB was sold on Afors, April, 2019. Why you might ask? Well, in the 40 foot container was something else along with 2000 feet of used 4 x 2 SME lumber. You may have to wait a while before all is revealed.

P.S. The average age of farmers is 61. All named people in this article are the wrong side of 70. Young people seem to find it more exciting to walk down pavements, looking at their phones and bumping into lamp posts.

HIM UP NORTH

He has a small farm near NE21, with a few Shorthorn cattle plus calves, cross bred sheep plus the odd litter of saddleback pigs. All are Pasture fed (not the pigs). He sells delicious well hung meat. Is he the only FFA member still alive in the North East?

Mike Stowe

There's something in the wind this year

I'm not superstitious, honestly, but there's been something funny with the wind this year.

Case histories: 3 aeroplanes, three airfields, all on the eastern side of the country, with roughly east-west runways and prevailing wind from the west.

1. My C150, a 10 minute flight to a neighbouring strip. Wind sort of northerly but favouring RW26, from which I took off. Arrived overhead strip B, wind still sort of northerly but favouring the eastern runway. Joined downwind, noticed that the windsock was now favouring the western runway. Turned round and landed to west, but with a scarily high ground-speed. A short runway so a bit concerning, but I survived. Departed to the west after carefully walking the runway to check wind direction.
2. The low-wing single engine aircraft of an acquaintance, went to land away, wind roughly from the north, windsock favouring the western runway. High ground-speed, and aircraft impacted the hedge at the end of the runway. (But to be fair, it *nearly* made it, only needed another 2m of runway!)
3. Visiting aircraft, wind roughly from north. Windsock undecided. Aircraft made 3 attempts at landing to the west. Really high ground-speed. Turned round and approached to Eastern runway. Landed very fast, tyres screeching, only just managed to stop. (To be fair, it was a speedy, slippery aircraft, and it *was* a shortish runway).

But what happened to our trusty westerly wind? What was it with all these near (or actual) landing accidents triggered by northerly winds, in the period April-June (2026)? Prosaic explanations:

- I guess we must just have fetched up in a different position relative to the pressure systems, and so the wind direction.
- When the wind is around ninety degrees to the runway there is more scope for "making the wrong choice" re. the landing direction.

I have considered Coastal Effect and windsock position, but can't see them as particularly relevant in these cases.

So any more sinister theories? Anyone else had a similar experience? I'm sure Global Warming must be involved somewhere. There is a Caribbean saying: "*When you know de cat eat de butter, you always blame he*!"

Well, in the end the wind nearly caught me out. There was the windsock, undecided as usual, dancing merrily, between 20 and 40 degrees off the centre line, but not strong enough to be threatening. So off I went, and just as I was lifting off a gust caught the into-wind (right) wing. The aircraft was at about forty-five degrees, with the left wingtip only a foot or two off the runway, as can be seen by its shadow on the ground - all caught on the CCTV!

Christina Belton



Photo (low resolution) from CCTV,

Programme 2026/27



This has not been an easy year for our events, either due to weather or events being cancelled! The First event this year was to London, which was an excellent day, thanks Andrew for organising the day, following on from that we had a Talk at Oaksey Park by Sir Glenn Torpy, Thanks Nigel

This was followed by a very interesting visit to Throws Farm. Due to the weather forecast all members that were booked in drove, and in one case the member drove 5.5 hrs.

As with the "Stage 1" of the Scottish Tour there were also a number of members that drove. One particular group, drove the Stage One Tour. They drove a total of 16 Hours home and back, where as another group living in the same village flew and theirs was a total of 7 hours flying, (I wonder what the fuel consumption was for each)!!

As with the Scottish Tour some members drove for the 3 Day Wing Ding, which was another excellent event run by Gill & Alf Oliver, I am sure you will read all about this in the newsletter. Sadly, Four other events had to be cancelled due to situations out of our control, it is hoped that these will be run next year, (2027).

Due to us being light on events this year, one that was going to run next year is going to be run early September. Details will be on the website as and when the date and the itinerary are confirmed.

After many years of being point of contact, David Keene is standing down from arranging the Pop-In events, thank you David, as they have been a great success which many members have enjoyed. They will continue, but we will be trying a different format; if any member has an airfield/strip near them, all we are asking is that member, just makes contact with the airfield/strip to see if they have a preference to which month and day of the week they are happy that we visit them, once this has been carried out, the date etc. will be put on the web site, and an email sent out.

This year's AGM is being held by kind permission of Robbie Buxton, at Kimberley Hall, his home, which is 8 nm SE of Norwich. Full details will be on the web site as with an Airstrip Plan. The last time we visited Kimberley Hall was when we visited the John Innes research centre 20th June 2018.

Neville Stops

List of FFA Events for 2026/27

- 30th September – 2026 AGM – Kimberley, Norfolk
- 3rd March 2027– Spring Meeting – Bow Street, London
- Date TBC – Tanks and Farming (1 Day), Weybourne, North Norfolk
- Date TBC – A visit to a Parachute Centre, Cockerham Green, Lancaster.
- Date TBC – Crossness Pumping station & ADM Oil Refinery (2 Day), Rochester
- Date TBC – A working Lifeboat station & Garlic Farm, Isle of Wight

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.

Pop-Ins 2026/27.

We would like to thank David Keane for arranging the Pop-in events over the last few years. David would like to step down now. As we know the Pop in Fly In's have been very successful and we would like them to continue.

We would like to encourage members with their airstrips to come forward and offer an informal GRASS ROOTS fly-in during the summer months. It could be a bring your own picnic idea or a BBQ.

Secondly we are looking for individual volunteers to suggest a more commercial airfield of their choice for a get-together. Naturally a hard runway would be advisable in the wetter months.

Please tell Neville Stops so the Pop-in can be added to the Events in the FFA Magazine and write a small paragraph with your telephone and email address and email to info@ffa.org.uk to be sent to all members. Eventbrite may still need to be used as some airfields require aircraft details.

I will be organising a Pop In at Conington Peterborough airfield in November. Date to be announced and email will be sent out.

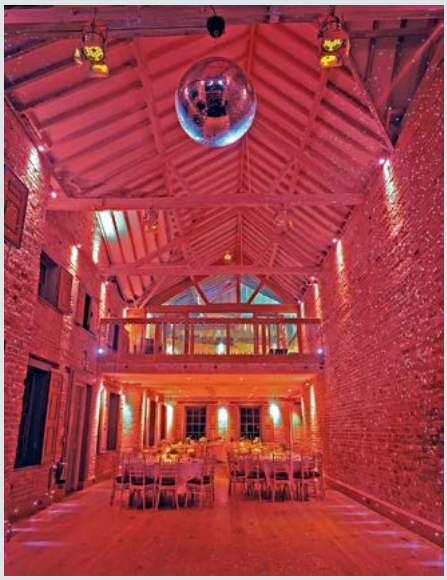
Rebecca Rayner

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!!

The 52nd FFA AGM, Kimberley Hall, 30th September 2026





The FFA Committee give notice that the 52nd AGM of the Flying Farmers Association will take place on Wednesday 30th September 2026 at Kimberley Hall, Norfolk by kind permission of Robbie Buxton.

We will gather for tea/coffee by 10:30 and the AGM will start promptly at 11:00. We are being provided with a room, buffet lunch and a speaker is being arranged.

Although the FFA will cover most of the cost of the day, we do ask members to contribute £30.00 per head for any guests they bring, as the funds for the day are derived from members' subscriptions. We will leave it to your discretion how you classify 'guest', as the FFA membership does cover your family and some partners / 'navigators' can also be classified within the family membership. Landing fees are free, thanks to Robbie Buxton, owner of the airfield.

- 10:00 – Arrival
- 10:30 – Gather for tea/coffee by this time
- 11:00 – The AGM will start promptly
- 13:00 – approximately, a buffet lunch will be available
- 14:00 – Speaker
- 15:00 – Depart at will

In turn, Giles Abrey and Paul Stephens will stand down from the Committee in order, but both are willing to stand for election again.

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

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

Look forward to seeing you on the day
Paul Stephens, FFA Chairman

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.

When booking onto an event it would be helpful to have the details of the passenger rather than the lead booker twice. This information is used to generate name labels amongst other things. When booking on using Eventbrite please check that you haven't already booked onto the event. Whilst we are able to refund duplicate orders these do incur the booking fee, therefore refunds for duplicate bookings will be refunded less the booking fee amount.

Emma Gorman
PA to the Treasurer Andrew Cragg

Save the date for the Spring Meeting 3rd March 2027

It is proposed to have a private tour of the Bow Street Museum in the site of the old Bow Street Police station and magistrates court, the oldest police station in England, the home of the bow street runners and forerunner of the modern Metropolitan police. It hosted Mrs Pankhurst, Oscar Wilde, the Kray twins and General Pinochet and is a fascinating insight into the evolution of modern policing.

Then, lunch at the Bow Street Tavern a few door down. After lunch, whilst not organised formally, there is the opportunity to have a guided back-stage tour of the Royal Opera House opposite or visit the London Transport Museum a few 100 meters away.

Full details will be released in due course via the usual Eventbrite booking system

Tanks and Farming 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.

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

Parachute Centre TBC

- 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.

Independent Life Boat station & Garlic Farm TBC

- 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)



****** IMPORTANT ******

Deadline for articles for the December newsletter is 30th October 2026

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..

Pop-In, Oaksey Park 15 April



The day dawned as pretty non flyable but as often happens it brightened remarkably by the time we arrived at 1030 which allowed Charlie Papworth to arrive by air and the other 24 all came by road.

Oaksey Park is an immaculate private airfield with an immaculate single strip, a thoroughly decent clubhouse with excellent facilities and many home based aircraft. My colleague and I did have an opportunity to look into one hangar as we arrived but it was clear that they would prefer not to allow casual visitors to wander freely inside anywhere else.

As promised the mobile caterers were in attendance and some of us took advantage of that prior to our lecture.

Our talk took place in a building normally used for photographic work. It had been decked out with some white fabric which presented a quite dazzling scene as we went in. The backdrop offered a superb screen for Sir Glenn's photographs but , sadly the acoustics were not as good as one might have hoped for a lecture theatre but easily rectified I suspect.

Our guest speaker was Sir Glenn Torpy who started his flying after leaving university in 1974. His first few hours were undertaken in a Chipmunk and he told us that instructors would be able to identify potential pilots within the first two hours of starting the course. He moved on to the Jet Provost in which he completed 170 hours granting him his wings - it was a big jump from the Chip he said. From there he went on to the Gnat in which he did about 70 hours, again a big step because this was a swept wing aeroplane - a joy to fly but could be unforgiving of sloppiness.

This led him on to the Hunter and the use of tactical weapons. He has good memories of the 50 hours he flew in these at Brawdy. Moving on again he was stationed at Lossiemouth for three and a half years of tactical navigation in Jaguar fighters before moving to Coltishall where he enjoyed up to 60 hours per month which led to a period in Norway. He told us that in that country they do not clear fallen snow and ice but coated it in chippings.

He described the Jaguar as a very reliable aircraft which was followed by the Hawk described as a lovely aeroplane.

Finally he flew with the Tornado squadron at Honington. Much of this was done at ultra low level where they relied on radar seeing up to 7 miles ahead (which at their speed was essential). He recalled a notice at RAF Bruggen which read " The task of this station in peace time is to train for war- don't you forget it". What an apt statement don't you think ..

Glenn undoubtedly has some wonderful memories of this period of his career in the RAF which included a 35 mile long procession of aircraft for the Queens Jubilee Flypast incorporating a diamond formation of 16 aircraft..

As you will have seen in the Final Reminder issued by our very own Neville, when he stopped flying he went on to take a myriad of impressive administrative positions at the very top level.

I won't put into print his feeling about where we are today with our armed forces but he is clearly anxious about our vulnerability.

Curiously his senior officer joined our party to hear this fascinating lecture but speaking to that man afterwards he said he was only his senior for a very short time.

We have to thank Sir Glenn for sparing the time to give us this fascinating insight into the workings of the RAF and to Nigel Edwards for arranging this event. As a result a contribution has been made to the Air Ambulance service.

A nice end to the winter 'fly ins'.

Mike Cuttell

Firs Farm Fly-in 18th July

On 18th July, The Firs Farm hosted its annual fly-in. It was a very successful day, with over 65 planes visiting and many FFA members attending.

We raised £675 in landing fees for the Thames Valley Air Ambulance.

The pilots were also offered the hog roast and salads for lunch, that were prepared on site. A great, relaxing day, with stunning weather.

Thank you to everyone who attended.

Nigel Brown







Agri Research Centre, Throws Farm 13th May 2026

Our Flying Farmers visit to Throws Farm near Dunmow in Essex was unusual in that nobody was able to fly in to the event due to weather, but it shows the dedication of our members that the full compliment of 18 people arrived at Throws Technology Centre for a truly exceptional day as guests of Agrii. Members came from all over the country, Roger Bell from Lymington, Neville and John Milne from Stockbridge, Alf from the Midlands, and many others made long journeys but special mention must be made of the Parry's, who drove for 5 hours from Lancaster. While we couldn't get into our flying machines we seemed to have travelled in time machines after our day at and beyond the cutting edge of agricultural technology.

Two of our number, John Milne and Mike Walker had worked at Throws between 1969 and 1972 for RHM. They found the site unrecognisable. When they took over in 2013 Agrii more or less flattened the site and spent around £5 million on the rebuild of the facility, producing a cutting edge, state of the art centre for agricultural trials. Our host for the day was Jonathan Trotter, Field Trials Manager, and what a brilliant guide he proved to be. After tea, coffee and biscuits we headed for a newly built addition. £1 million had been spent recently on building a new glasshouse and poly tunnel. Don was our guide here and for the first trial in the polytunnel we saw strawberries, lovely red succulent fruit hanging down from growing benches, however there were strict instructions not to eat the berries, we didn't want to skew the trial results! There were also trials for potatoes and carrots in pots, the plants were inoculated with rhizoctonia and various biologicals and growth stimulants. Agrii have a big focus on testing the latest bio stimulants, around 600 so far, although trailed as the latest wonder product (a lot variations of seaweed), most are just versions of snake oil, however some, such as Serenade turn out to be beneficial.

Then we moved on to the glasshouse, a truly impressive building with five separate stand alone sections, each temperature and light controlled, with fully flooding benches, where it's possible to compress two growing seasons into one. Jonathan then introduced us to Hyperspectral Imagining (a combination of imaging and spectroscopy which captures a wide range of wavelengths in the electromagnetic spectrum). Jonathan explained that light is fired into plants and what comes back is recorded at pixel level and is analysed to determine plant health and disease levels. At field level this would be invaluable to agronomists, as well as fast tracking results in the lab.

Richard Collins then gave us an insight into the work that he is doing in the amenity sector, for Origin, the parent group of Agrii. This sector is huge and combines factors unheard of to most of us. Ball speed influenced by different turf quality, the look of the turf and even using wetting agents and adjuvants to disperse water on the greens so golfers don't get their feet wet! He is actually testing summer wetting agents that are sprayed on playing surfaces so when it rains the droplets surface tension is broken down leading to better absorption. A lot of this information is passed onto the agricultural section, again helping Agrii agronomists.

Lucy Cottingham then lead us into the world of mysteries that is Digital Technology Farm Trials. Lucy is evaluating many machines and platforms that collect data for use in agronomy and farm biological status across five sites up and down the country. The first was BioScout that collects disease spores, identifies the spores and uploads that information to a dashboard. The next machine was from Paul-Tech billed as "giving soil a voice". Probes analyse a whole host of information about the soil, giving an excellent picture of soil health. Lucy then showed us OptiGene, a diagnostic tool to identify bacteria and viruses. Plant material is placed in a cartridge and depending on the different cartridges, tests are done on the DNA of diseases. The last was BirdWeather, a machine that can be strapped to a tree and records and identifies birds from their calls. Those of us with the Merlin App were very interested in this one. It will give a very good picture of the species of birds present and Lucy was particularly pleased that it had identified kingfishers in the brook at Throws. All these tools come under the heading of digital technology and Lucy is evaluating these, amongst others to see where they can best be used in the agricultural sector.

On the way to lunch John Miles showed us around the other buildings and machinery associated with the trials. The Sampo trial plot combine was particularly impressive, a small machine, obviously, compared to some of the enormous field machines, but with a price tag approaching a quarter of a million pounds, it is very much designed for the exacting requirements of plot harvesting. John shared some of the complexities, with sites from Kent, Lincolnshire, Wiltshire and Throws all needing to be cut at the same time! With much of the measuring equipment high up on the combine (meaning a very high centre of gravity), John said that driving it along small Fenland roads was a real challenge, not to mention the feeling of being seasick! Much of the specialised machinery in the barns for handling the produce of the trial plots was deigned for a fast turnaround of results and a pathology lab had now been installed for instant results. A couple of our number were amused to see RHM signs still in the back of the shed.

There was then time to take a breath with an excellent buffet lunch supplied by Agrii. Time to let all that information sink in and to catch up with old friends.

After lunch Lucy took us through her work at the Revesby Estate in Lincolnshire with digital technology. Field 23, a field of winter wheat, was split in two equal halves. One side " a field of tomorrow", the other with a more traditional farm approach. The first operation was to use SkippyScout with technology from Rhiza to analyse nitrogen requirements and target accordingly with variable N applications. Rhiza is another firm in the origin family, specialising in digital technologies. The traditional farm side had the usual applications. Tissue samples were taken along the way. The previously mentioned BioScout was used for targeted fungicide applications. A gross margin analysis was carried out with a £137.63 per hectare advantage for the field of the future with a 10% return on investment.

Then it was back to Jonathan again with a section about the future of agronomy and this was where we got a further glimpse into the future, after a morning of looking at what is actually available today. Drone prices, serviceability and battery life have improved exponentially over the past few years and Jonathen took us through what will be possible in analysing and treating fields of the future. A secure, weather proof cabinet could stand at the corner of several fields. The cabinet opens, either at preprogrammed times or when the drone decides, releasing the drone that analyses the crop, decides on a treatment plan, goes back to the cabinet picks up a tank and treats










the crop. Human input would still be needed to fill up the tank with fertilisers or pesticides! As pilots we had quite a discussion about drones, particularly those flying beyond line of sight.

Ben Foster brought things together as the last speaker of the day. He highlighted that in the past we had a larger workforce, generally cheaper costs and smaller kit with fairly reliable weather windows. Today things have changed with all those. Agrii now has Rhiza, providing digital agronomy, precision farming and soil mapping services. This allows them to produce Contour a digital farming platform. This platform will allow Agrii's 200 plus agronomists access to smart connected farming. He told us about a Canadian firm Telus Digital , who are bringing together lots of digital strands present in the food chain. This $40bn Canadian firm are thought to be the market leaders in field to fork. For instance they have acquired Gatekeeper and Muddy Boots, software companies that farmers rely upon considerably. The information they provide will allow Contour to make giant leaps in farm advice. He said that only 30% of farms are using digital technology at present, a number that can only grow very quickly in the future. The platform can also deal with farm compliance particularly around NVZ's, which he stated were running around 49% non compliant, mostly around the records needed to be kept to comply. With the number of inspections due to increase the Contour platform should help considerably.

Our day at Throws Farm proved to be a fascinating look into the future of farming and how things are changing, sometimes at a quite alarming pace. All our speakers were engaging and explained some very complex ideas and processes in terms that their audience could easily understand. We all came away with a better understanding of what might be possible in the future, slightly daunting for those of us who started with a eighteen foot Ransomes Cropguard sprayer attached to a Massey Ferguson 135!

John Milne led us in our thanks to everyone who had contributed to our marvellous day at Throws, we were very well fed, had some exceptionally interesting presentations and all came away better educated about what could be possible in the future.

Robert Osborn

Alf & Gill's Bosworth Wing Ding 2

Day 1: Farm Tour 30th June



Alf and Gill managed to arrange an amazing number of farm diversification visits, all within close proximity to their farm. I think we were all impressed with how many small family farms in the area were making good livings, having diversified their businesses.

Alf and his family have more than embraced diversification and have a very impressive spread of income streams from lots of rental units next to the runway, to glamping, solar, quarrying and a very impressive poultry unit, as well as real farming.

The poultry unit was build recently after Alf's son Will returned from university. It is a very impressive and well laid out site that is purpose bult on a green field site, showing what can be done when you are able to start with a blank sheet of paper and put everything in the right place.

The business is run by Alf and his 2 sons Will and Rory along with John, the site manager, who has been with them since the start. Together they achieve some very impressive results. The absolute attention to detail from managers like John are one of the keys to achieving good physical and financial performance from a unit like this, which is clearly the case here.

The 4 sheds now house 160,000 birds at the recently reduced stocking rates required by UK supermarkets. The unit operates with approximately half the birds being taken at 31 days and the reminder at 40 days. A quick turnaround muck out (by a very professional contractor) and wash down is followed by restocking to enable them to produce around 1.2m birds per year.

Home grown wheat is fed in conjunction with bought in ration, with the wheat being milled by a mobile contractor and blown into silos to be automatically blended with the bought in ration. Ground source heat pumps generating some valuable RHI are used for heating which all helps to produce a rewarding financial performance from a very impressive site.

Charles Course

Gospall Farm Pub

We had a very different evening out for dinner. Will Oliver was waiting for us outside the hotel reception with a tractor and trailer to take us to a unique pub. After passing through Bosworth's iconic centre the journey continued along narrow country lanes with hardly any traffic for about 8 miles to the farm entrance. There was no sign of a pub visible. The very smooth and long farm drive meandering through undulating grass fields to end at our venue. An open sided barn opposite a group of traditional farm buildings is the main hub with a bar at one end and stage the other end, with lots of benches inside and outside where our evening meal awaited us by mobile catering trailers. A choice of pizzas or Indian- or both-on offer.

This farm diversification including a glamping site and childrens play area has been created by the Lain family. They had the opportunity recently to buy the farm which had been part of a large estate.

Entertainment was provided by a local beef farmer Jack Lawton as part of his diversification. He is a very talented singer with a wide selection of genres. The pub is usually open on weekends. Alf and Gill had arranged for us to go on a weekday and had also invited many farming neighbours and families.

The atmosphere was electric. It reminded us of our young farmer's nights out with so many people with the same interests to share our tales.

There were quite a few empty beer barrels parked outside when we left and we had a very pleasant ride back to the hotel courtesy of Rory Oliver.

A tremendous amount of time and effort from the Oliver family.

Richard Hall



Day 2: Rugby School Wednesday 1st July

On the second day of Wing Ding 2026 we visited Rugby School. The highly prestigious public school is situated in the heart of the beautiful town of Rugby in the West Midlands county of Warwickshire. The school moved to its current site in 1750. The first impression is of red brick Victorian buildings, some castellated and some with highly patterned brickwork and mullioned windows. It is described as "a stunning blend of 18th-century Georgian and High Victorian Gothic architecture." The 440 acres of grounds are beautifully manicured and have many majestic old trees.

We were welcomed by Julie and Angus who were to be our tour guides for the morning. They were both very knowledgeable and had lots of amusing stories to go with the facts.

We set off on our tour from a bronze age mound (tumulus) in the grounds originally used by pupils for revising and lounging but historically used as a retreat for the boys during the 1797 Rebellion. We were told about the Great Rugby School Rebellion when a schoolboy bought gunpowder and caused chaos in the town. A local shopkeeper reported the student, so his fellow students wrecked his shop but when the school boys realised they would have to pay for the damage in the town, they rebelled. The Riot Act was read for the first time; boys over 5 years old were birched and many boys were expelled.

School fees are now around £60,000 pa for boarders. Schol-



arships and bursaries are available and up to about 29% of students are in receipt of these. There are Rugby Schools across the world, including Thailand, Japan, Nigeria etc. There are 15 boarding houses, now all co-educational (55% boys) with pupils from 13 to 18 years old. Girls were admitted in 1975.

The novel of Tom Brown's School Days by Thomas Hughes (1857) is set at Rugby School in the 1830s. Hughes attended Rugby and based the book on his own experiences, featuring much bullying (Flashman) which was common at boarding schools in those days.

The Queens Gate with the Latin inscription (Orando Laborando) was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1967. The inscription on the gate means 'by praying, by working' and is the school motto. We were told a very funny story about the Duke of Edinburgh's comments when the Queen broke the new key in the lock. He is reputed to have said, In his usual blunt manner "You messed up there woman!".

William Web Ellis is celebrated as the inventor of the new game of rugby as a pupil when he took the ball in his hands and ran with it during a game of football in 1823. He was disciplined for this but he stuck with it and eventually the rules were changed and the game of rugby was established in 1845. He is known as the 'Founding Father' of the game of rugby.

Thomas Arnold was headmaster of the school between 1828 until his death in 1842. He believed that education was improved through sport and he introduced many improvements such as making sure each boy had their own bed. Previously it had often been 5 to a bed. Thomas Arnold believed that sport would get the boys away from bad habits such as drinking and poaching (which was particularly poorly thought of). The boys previously boarded in Ale Houses round the town. Many new subjects were introduced to the curriculum. Bad boys (Flashman bully types) were kicked out. The headmaster who was also the Chaplain was much revered and is buried in the crypt of the chapel.

The chapel is obviously very important in the life of the school. Nowadays, pupils are expected to attend services several times a week with a full one hour service on Sundays. There are several stained glass windows, some of a William Morris design. Early pupils had their own chairs with their names engraved on the back which can now be purchased. Marriages can be carried out in the chapel for ex. pupils and staff (with special permission).

Memorial plaques for some of the many famous old pupils can be seen on the walls of the chapel with quotes from their works. For example:

- Lewis Carol – Author - Alice in Wonderland
- Arthur Ransome – Author - Swallows and Amazons
- Rupert Brooke – war poet - best known for his five patriotic sonnets titled 1914 including his most celebrated work which idealizes English sacrifice in the first world war:
- The Soldier – "If I should die think only this of me: That there's some corner of a foreign field that is forever England…"
- Rupert Brooke died of sepsis on a ship offshore in Greek waters and his younger brother Alfred Brooke died in action in northern France, just seven weeks after his brother in 1915, at the beginning of the first world war. Rupert was buried on the island of Skyros and Alfred in France but their families thought so much of Rugby School that they removed the wooden crosses from their graves overseas and brought them back to Rugby where they are now on display in the chapel.

For the final visit on the tour we saw the formidable Birching Tower where pupils were punished for misdemeanours. Thomas Arnold (the good, kind Headmaster at the time) limited the strokes to 7. Older boys took the lashes across the shoulder. There was no punishment for bullying at the time – pupils were encouraged to learn to deal with it themselves!

We finished in the well-stocked museum and shop.

A thoroughly fascinating and enjoyable journey into the development of a highly rated top class public school which is very much part of the history of England and world famous for establishing the game of rugby.

Anthea Brown









Triumph Motorcycles Visitor Experience 1st July



Our visit to Triumph Motorcycles just took in the visitor experience centre as the motorcycles are now manufactured in Thailand, and sent to the factory at Hinckley 95% assembled. It is here that the bikes for the UK and Europe have their fuel tanks, seats, handlebars, and any country-specific parts fitted, ready for distribution.

The Visitor Centre focuses on Triumph Motorcycles' history and their diverse range of machines over the years. The first motorcycle was built in 1901. A bicycle with an engine fitted.

From here, things progressed, and in 1908 Triumph entered the TT and won at an average speed of 40 MPH.

The Triumph factory in Coventry profited from WW1 and in 1915 had supplied 30,000 single-cylinder motorcycles to the Military. In 1927 the factory employed 3000 people and built 30,000 bikes.

In the 1950's and 1960's Triumph produced some excellent motorcycles. The Tiger 90, Tiger 100. Tiger 110, and particularly the Bonneville. Named after the famous Bonneville salt flats in America where speed records are set.

America went mad for Triumph motorcycles helped in part by Stars such as Steve McQueen, Elvis Presley and Marlon Brando using them in Movies.

The Triumph Daytona 500 was built in 1967 and had a lot of success in racing. The Triumph Triple was introduced in 1968. In the 1970's Japanese motorcycles started to dominate the world market. With electric start, high-revving multi-cylinder bikes and also small,cheap motor bikes. The British Motorcycle industry did not modernise fast enough, and brands like BSA, Norton, Royal Enfield, and eventually Triumph fell by the wayside. In 1983 the Triumph factory at Meriden Closed.

John Bloor, a Midlands entrepreneur, bought the rights to manufacture Triumph Motorcycles, and in 1987 opened a new factory at Hinckley.

In 2002 there was a major fire at Hinckley, so a new factory was opened in Thailand to manufacture the motorcycles. In 2014, to celebrate 110 years of Triumph, they had annual sales of 50,000 Machines worldwide. Also in 2014 the Triumph Daytona 675 was voted the best British Sport Bike ever.

In 1921 a Triumph Scrambler 1200 was used in a James Bond film *No Time to Die*.

Triumph now sell 60,000 Bikes a year and has 2,400 employees in the UK and Thailand, and has 750 dealers Worldwide.

The Triumph Motorcycle Visitor Experience is a worthwhile look into the history of a famous British motorcycle manufacturer, and how it is developing bikes for the future, even electric motorcycles.

Frank Ward

Day 3: Sheep stud, florestry and cheese dairy 2nd July





On the last day of the 2nd Bosworth Wing Ding we visited nearby Matt and Ellie Harding's Suffolk ram breeding farm and farm floristry business. The 3rd generation family farm of 180 acres is a specialised niche business. Matt (who previously worked for Innovis) showed us their pedigree Suffolk rams and Aberblacks and herbal ley grass rotation system. Pedigree Suffolk rams are sold every year, many to repeat customers. Performance records have been kept for many years and using NZ genetics has resulted in much improvement. Improved traits include lambing ease and vigour, good feet, clean backends and ability to hold condition and all fed on forage only.

Next we visited the delightful flower area of Ellie's floristry business. English cottage garden flowers are produced fresh from April to September. They are cut sold to order – wholesale and direct to customer, and dry flowers in the winter. Ellie combines this with workshops and demonstrations in their traditional farm barn fitting it all in around running a family.

We then travelled 5 minutes to the next village of Upton where we visited Sparkenhoe Farm, home of David and Jo Clarke where they make hand made Red Leicester cheese from their own pedigree Holstein cows. They diversified into cheese

making in 2005 when the cheese dairy was built. Raw milk is pumped daily from the milking parlour directly to the cheese room. Apart from the traditional red Leicester, other artisan cheese are made including Sparkenhoe Blue and Shropshire Blue and they have recently increased their range of artisan cheeses with their new Turkish guy cheesemaker. Arla collect milk which is not used for cheese making and the system works well as David notifies them of the quantities available. David farms in a very sustainable way not having used fertilizer for years, and calves all year round. To make their cheeses requires raw unpasteurised milk and many hours of labour setting the curd, controlling the temperature separating the curds and whey, cutting into blocks and turning daily by hand. Batches are knocked out, trimmed, bound in muslin cloth and ironed and stored in a regular weekly routine onto wooden shelves. 50-55t of Red Leicester is produced annually and10t blue cheese and sold to cheese mongers, delicatessens and farm shops in the UK and abroad. They have won many cheese awards including recently the World's Best Artisan Cheese. At Sparkenhoe Farm there is a welcoming tea room and cheese shop.

Rosemary Woodfield

Greenfield Butchery 2nd July











Greenfield Butchery Clockwise from top left - Everybody boarding the bus, Family owners Becky and Mary, Martin & Ben's presentaion, shop counter, BBQ lunch,

Day 3 of Alf & Gill's 2nd Wing Ding. Another lovely day with sunny blue skies and the promise of more tasty treats and fascinating stories.

Our penultimate visit was to Greenfields Farm & Butchery on Norton Farm, Twycross where we were warmly welcomed by owners – Martin & Mary Greenfield their son Ben and daughter Becky.

On arrival Martin and Ben explained a brief history of the farm. Explaining how the family, having always been a sheep farm began wholesaling their lamb to local butchers and selling at Farmers Markets etc to building the butchers shop on site and selling direct to the public.

Ben had always had an interest in the butchery side and after returning from travelling in New Zealand, took control of the butchery. Sales took off during covid and since then shop opening has increased from one day a week to now opening every Thurs, Fri & Sat.

This enables Ben and 3 other staff members to prepare stock and set up the rest of the week.

The family have recently started organizing BBQ events. Aided by monitored social media, championed by Ben and Becky, these events are proving to be very popular.

They now also have an alcohol licence and pride themselves in serving local British fare.

The lamb is all home reared, the beef supplied by a neighbour and beers and wine are from Melton Mowbray and Atherton, just down the road.

We were then treated to the most amazing BBQ lunch, hosted in the cleanest ever lambing shed! A choice of Lamb, Beef or vegetarian burgers was offered, freshly prepared and cooked by Ben with table service provided by Becky, Martin & Mary.

Each served with a tasty potato salad and garnish. The meat was excellent, succulent and perfectly cooked…Enjoyed by all!!

After lunch we were given the opportunity to visit the butcher shop, purchase some of the wide variety of products and chat with the family and staff.

We then boarded the bus, very well fed and extremely impressed by the Greenfield family's hard work and dedication to British Farming.

Our next stop was just along the road to neighbouring Culloden Farm where farmer Tony Thorp and daughter Jo run Dreamy Cow Ice Cream Farm Shop.

The family own a herd of 100 Freisan cows and in 2007, as a result of falling milk prices and a surplus of milk, Dreamy Cow Ice Cream business was born. One of the farm buildings was refurbished and transformed into the now very busy ice cream shop. Upwards of a dozen flavours are on offer, all made on site using local produce and ingredients. The shop leads out onto a beautiful outdoor seating area with incredible views of surrounding countryside with benches, tables and children's play area .

We all enjoyed some delicious ice cream, be it a cone or tub, sitting in the glorious sunshine!

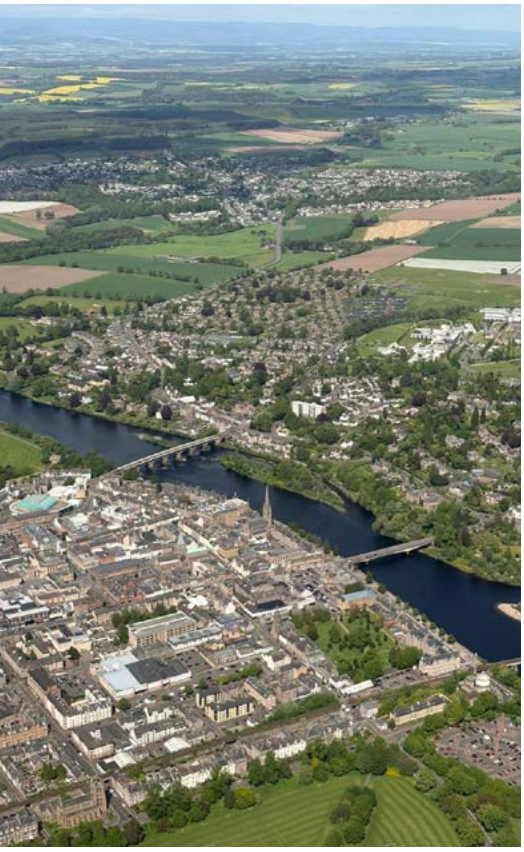
Alf then gave thanks to Tony & Jo for providing the perfect end to a great day and we set off back to Fenn Farm to bid our farewells and head off home to our various parts of the country.

An excellent trip all in all!!

Bill Miazek

Tour of Scotland 2026, 20th–25th May
Stage 1 – Northumberland and Scotland

To Scotland!



Neville asked me to write a few words about the flying as we headed north.

Helen and I set off from Elmsett for Carlisle with Rebecca, who had driven over the night before in her motorhome, along with Helen's 4 suitcases… as she was heading off on holiday immediately from the end of the trip – so the 206 was well loaded. The forecast for Carlisle showed some low cloud with the hills covered. We decided to take the 206's preferred approach of climbing to FL80 and getting on top of everything. This resulted in a very smooth straight line from Elmsett to Carlisle with a few military jets around us as we progressed up the east coast.

We heard that some others had headed to Blackpool and then flown up the coast at low level below the cloud. As we approached Carlisle it was reassuring to hear other flying farmers on the radio heading in and landing, despite the lowish cloud and reduced vis. We started watching them on TCAS as we descended into the cloud as we were definitely not VMC. The flight ended with a relaxed straight in approach followed by the longest wait any of us had ever had for a coffee at the café that had hardly any customers! But this gave a relaxed wait for others and the coach to arrive.
A simple but rewarding first flight.

Our next flight from Carlisle to Perth was over some stunning scenery and in pretty clear weather, giving us some great views. We had a short debate about whether to take the short active runway or the longer runway with a crosswind landing. We opted for the longer runway and keep eagle eyes out for others cutting in front of us both for the longer runway and the active shorter one…

Robert and Anthea had driven to Carlisle and then to Perth to join the trip due to issues with either their plane or pilot (I cant remember which!). We offered them a lift to Kirkwall and managed to persuade others to take some of Helen's 'extra' suitcases…

The forecast for the flight from Perth to Kirkwall was good but with some turbulence around. I opted for my preferred FL100 but Robert was a bit nervous about his asthma at this level and wanted to stay lower so we set off at about 5000' or 6000' This gave us some beautiful views as we left Perth and headed out towards snow capped mountains. We hadn't gone far before we found the first turbulence – which was a bit bumpy. Robert quickly decided that higher would be better and flying from the right seat he climbed for a very smooth flight over the tops of some beautiful mountains – I think I heard Robert say he had never been so high in a small plane. My view is always that higher is better and I think I now have another possible convert. Kirkwall was a bit breezy on arrival and we were given a few last minute vectors to avoid the calibrator that was calibrating the ILS, but soon got vectored in for a nice landing with a pretty stiff breeze on the nose.

Kirkwall back to Perth was pretty much a reverse of the flight up with Robert getting some more practice flying the 206 and G1000 – now converted (or at least I assumed he was) to flying higher rather than going round things at low level. A nice simple flight into Perth to drop off Robert and Anthea and then over to Glendoe over some very impressive snow capped mountains and descending from FL80 down the great Glen for a straight in approach to Glendoe. It was good to have heard from those ahead of us (who had flown there directly from Lamb Holme) that despite the general wind direction the wind was indeed blowing up the Great Glen for a straight in approach to the sloping runway on the side the mountain rising up from the loch. I always find myself concentrating hard on challenging arrivals like this, but having got lined up on the runway the actual landing worked out fine.

The next leg was the shortest one from Glendoe to Glenforsa and a nice scenic flight with some low cloud as we flow below cloud along the water between the mountains to another runway with the wind blowing straight down it at Glenforsa

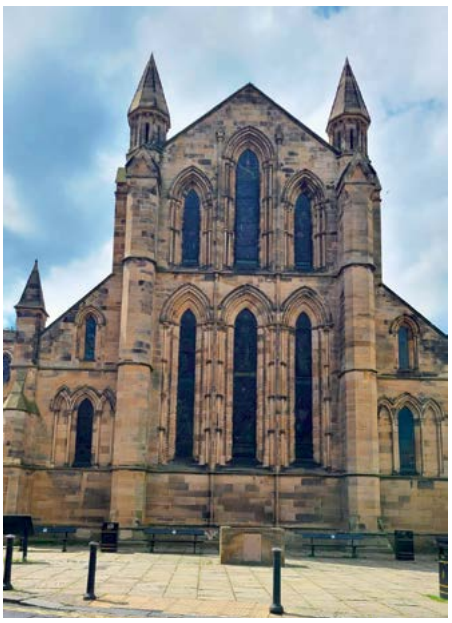
Leaving Glenforsa we were lucky to find the wind had gone round and we now had wind favouring the runway away from the mountain. Another short flight to Oban to refuel (where the fuel is even more expensive than Elmsett) and then Rebecca flew the next leg directly from Oban back to Elmsett with a very straightforward transit of Glasgow controlled airspace and another FL80 flight over the mountains. Some good IFR practice for Rebecca and a smooth landing back to Elmsett to unload all the baggage.

A great trip with some fascinating visits to places Helen and I would otherwise not have visited so thank you to Peter and Judith for all the hard work organizing it.

Charles Course



Hexham 20th May – A first FFA Tour at 80!



Charles Wheeldon FFA membership number 824. What should that tell me?

I don't know what number the latest member is; it seems a long time ago since I joined the Flying Farmers Association, but I cannot remember when. Born into a farming family with an RAF bomber pilot father who owned a Hornet Moth, a family member by marriage to Dick Walgate, and a pilot's licence since 1963, the runes aligned for me to become a Flying Farmer.

Sadly, over the years I have attended very few FFA events, although I have occasionally availed myself of farm strips, much more readily accessible now on SkyDemon. But an FFA Tour? The reports of exciting trips to far-flung destinations in Europe and beyond made exhilarating reading, and friendships struck with like-minded people from around the country were most appealing, but my wife and I never seemed to have enough time to take a fortnight off, or the spare cash to finance it.

Hang on though! Northumberland and Scotland 2026? A tour starting (almost) on our doorstep, and run in two halves? Now that seemed doable, or at least the first part, with a very interesting itinerary. Having failed on several attempts to fly to Orkney I thought the second part rather ambitious, and once again we didn't have the time, so we decided to give that a miss. Of course, I was proved wrong, and those who did go enjoyed great visits and interesting flying!

Our route would take us from Wickenby to Carlisle, then to Perth, and return to Wickenby, some four hours in the PA28 Dakota, so we weren't expecting any difficulties with airfields.

The forecast in the week up to departure was looking decidedly dubious, and I had agreed with my wife Jenny that if the weather was not going to let us fly, we would drive to Hexham. Ironically, this would have taken less time than flying, although it wouldn't have helped with the next leg to Perth, when the weather was forecast to be good, or the return home, which would have been six hours+ by car on a bank Holiday Monday.

We agreed to make a decision by 0900 on Wednesday which would leave both options open. In the event the weather was clearing from the south-west, and the flight was on. There was the little matter of crossing the Pennines, but it looked as though we should be clear by heading almost due north, keeping to the east of the range, and turning over Hexham to follow the A69 to Carlisle. All was well until some 15 miles out when we could see cloud sitting over the hills on our route, and in the valley ahead. Should we not be able to get through we had the option to divert into Currock Hill, a glider site near Hexham, which I had been into before, and wait for the weather to improve.

We were talking to Joe who was being very helpful on the radio at Carlisle, although when he said he would put the landing lights on at full power it was not too encouraging! However, judging that the cloud was gradually lifting, after three orbits we were able to follow the road through the valley and emerged to clear weather on the other side.

We landed just after Peter and Judith, followed by the other aircraft that had all flown up the West coast without too much trouble, except George and John, who had set off later and had to take temporary refuge at Blackpool, and Charles Course who had flown IFR (of course) in a straight line from Elmsett.

As newcomers to the tour, Jenny knew no one, and I had only met the president briefly a couple of times, - he didn't remember! - and Neville Stops, who had flown with the Auster Club to France on the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Realising that our first afternoon on Wednesday 20th May gave us three hours free time in Hexham, I had suggested to organiser Peter Gale that I could get my cousin Hugh Dixon, a renowned local historian, to arrange for a guided tour around the historic town. This Peter agreed to, and Hugh was delighted to offer his services - until his wife told him he was needed elsewhere - so he kindly arranged for two lady guides to take his place. The group were divided into those who took the tour of the Abbey with Liz, for whom there was much praise, and the smaller group lead by the knowledgeable Charlotte who took us around the old parts of the town that revealed its memorable history.

Visit to Hexham Abbey.

Gaynor writes: Those of us who chose to visit Hexham Abbey were privileged to have a very special guided tour

We learnt that there has been a church on the site of the Abbey for 1350 years, since the then Queen Etheldreda gave the land to the Bishop of York around 674. Only the crypt remains from the original church. Today the Abbey comprises mainly of building from the 12th. and 13th. centuries. However, the remains of the cross dedicated to the Bishop of Hexham in the 8th. century is still to be seen along with the Flavinus stone that is almost nine feet high, dedicated to a Roman Standard bearer, which is about 2000 years old, dating from the Roman domination of this part of England.

The Abbey houses one of the largest collections of medieval wooden panel paintings in the Country, having survived the Reformation. The outstanding glass windows were installed from the 19th. century onwards. There are so many more fascinating features of the Abbey dating across the centuries making a visit a wonderful experience.

Jenny and I hadn't had the opportunity to meet many people on the coach or tour of Hexham, but settled at the Derwent Hotel, and having been joined by those who had driven up, we began to become acquainted with other members.

I can't speak highly enough of the superb arrangements by Peter and Judith, who had obviously put a huge effort into organising very interesting visits with quality accommodation. Dunkeld House is high on the list to revisit! We were made very welcome by the group, many of whom were obviously long-standing friends with shared FFA experiences. These visits are reported elsewhere in this magazine, but what Jenny and I appreciated just as much was the friendship and camaraderie that prevails in the FFA, and that on tour is where it can be found at its best. It has been suggested that due to the ever-increasing average age of members, with its implication for medicals and licences, that shorter trips closer to home may become the norm. This would certainly suit this 80-year-old with his 80 year-old Auster, and Jenny and I look forward to renewing contact with the FFA members on Tour 2026, as well as new acquaintances, at future events.

Charles Wheeldon

Beamish – A Journey Back in Time 21st May













One of the highlights of this year's Scottish tour was undoubtedly our visit to Beamish Museum on 21st May. Many of us arrived expecting a museum in the traditional sense of the word, but within a few minutes it became clear that Beamish is something quite different. Rather than looking at history through glass cases, visitors find themselves walking straight into it.

From the moment we stepped off the coach, there was a sense of being transported to another age. Trams rattled past on cobbled streets, vintage buses carried visitors around the site and the smell of coal smoke drifted through the air. It is that smell, more than anything, that immediately creates the illusion that you have travelled back a hundred years.

The scale of Beamish is astonishing. What appears at first to be a collection of historic buildings soon reveals itself as an entire community. The area covers 350 acres in total, streets, houses, shops, churches, farms, tramways and railway buildings have all been recreated with extraordinary attention to detail. Wandering through the 1900s town a stop at the pub was required and a pint of traditional ale had to be consumed! All the shops were stocked as they would have been back in the day, and the 1950s town shops were stocked with many items we remembered from our childhood.

What makes the achievement even more remarkable is that almost every major building has been carefully dismantled from its original location and reconstructed at Beamish. Knowing that these are genuine buildings, rather than replicas, somehow makes the experience even more impressive.

One of the most memorable parts of the day was a visit to the drift mine. Descending underground gave us a glimpse of the conditions faced daily by generations of miners. The low roof, damp passages and subdued lighting made for a sobering experience and provided a stark contrast to the open countryside we had been travelling through during the rest of the tour. Workers enjoyed the benefit of a house whilst employed by the mine, but if they became unable to work for whatever reason or worse died, the house had to be vacated within two weeks.

Back above ground, we explored more of the museum using the wonderfully preserved buses and trams that are included with admission. For many visitors these are attractions in their own right. The opportunity to travel around the museum on vehicles that would once have been part of everyday life adds greatly to the authenticity of the visit.

As a group with a natural interest in machinery and engineering, many of us were drawn to the transport exhibits. The beautifully restored buses, trams and commercial vehicles are a credit to the people who maintain them. Seeing these machines not simply displayed but actually working and carrying passengers around the site is particularly satisfying.

What also stood out throughout the day was the number of volunteers helping to bring the museum to life. Whether operating transport, demonstrating traditional skills or simply answering questions, their enthusiasm and knowledge were evident everywhere. Alongside the museum's staff, they play an enormous role in creating the atmosphere that makes Beamish such a special place.

Perhaps that is why Beamish feels so different from many museums. It is not only the buildings, vehicles and exhibits that have been preserved, but something of the spirit of the communities they once served. By the end of the day, most of us felt we had experienced history rather than merely observed it.

After a full day of exploration, a well-earned refreshment provided an opportunity to reflect on what we had seen before continuing our journey north. Beamish proved to be an excellent addition to the tour and was enjoyed by everyone who attended. For those Flying Farmers who have not yet visited, it comes highly recommended.

George Stops and John Biggin



John & George enjoying a pint

Farne Islands and Holy Island, Northumberland 22nd May






The Farne Islands.

On the third day of our Northumberland and Scotland tour, we set off on the coach from the Derwent Manor Hotel in Allensford, County Durham to head for the traditional seaside town of Seahouses where we caught the boat from the harbour for our tour around the Farne Islands. As we left the protection of the harbour and emerged out on to the North Sea, it was icy cold on the boat deck where most of us stood to catch a clear view of the seabirds and the basking grey seals on the islands.

As it is seabird breeding season we couldn't get too close, nor land on the islands, but we could see thousands of seabirds packed close together on the rocks including: Atlantic Puffins; Razorbills; Shags; Guillemots; Kittiwakes and all sort of gulls. The grey seals were basking in shallow water on the rocks as the sea broke over them. The seals breed on the Farne Islands but they produce their pups later in the year in October and November.

The Farne islands are home to the largest UK colonies of Atlantic Puffins which burrow into the grassy surface to lay their eggs. Shags and Kitiwakes and others nest mainly on the sheer rock faces, some on bare rock and some on carefully constructed nests in nooks and cranies. The Farne islands provide a safe breeding haven from ground predators.

It was fascinating to watch the puffins with their multicoloured beaks bobbing up and down on the water and then diving down to catch fish under water and flying back to the rocks with beaks full of small fish.

The islands are occupied between 8-9 months of the year when national trust rangers stay at the Longstone Lighthouse to observe the wild life populations. Grace Darling and her father, William, set off from this lighthouse on their famous rescue after the leaking boilers on the steamship Forfarshire failed completely on a voyage from Hull to Dundee.

Grace was born in the nearby village of Bamburgh on the mainland and grew up in isolated lighthouses. She helped her father, the lighthouse keeper, watch for wrecks and helped him rescue passengers and crew from boats in trouble. In September 1838 the captain of the Forfarshire steamship misjudged the lighthouses and headed for the wrong one in the storm with gale force winds and heavy rain, and the boat foundered on perilous rocks. Grace saw the wreck from her bedroom window and she and her father set off across the wild sea to row a mile to rescue the survivors.

Grace became a heroine and she and her father were awarded medals including a Gold Medal of Bravery from the Royal Humane Society and a Silver Medal for Gallantry from the RNLI. The Grace Darling museum in Bamburgh is dedicated to Grace's memory.

Anthea Brown

Holy Island/Lindisfarne

After our morning visit to the Farne Islands we set off north for the short journey past Bamburgh Castle to Holy Island (Lindisfarne) which is off the Northumberland coast just a few miles south of the England/Scotland boarder. The island is only accessible from the hamlet of Beal on the mainland at low tide via a metalled causeway and the ancient Pilgrim's Way (walk). It is vital to take notice of the tides, as when the tide is high both the causeway and the Pilgrim's Way are under water. Although there are refuges along the way, it is expensive to be rescued!

After our safe crossing by coach on the causeway we arrived at the Holy Island village (also called Lindisfarne) to much warmer weather.

The Priory was one of the earliest centres of Christianity in Anglo Saxon England and is still a place of pilgrimage. The Monastery was founded by St Aidan in AD635 but St Cuthbert is the most celebrated of the holy men of the island.

Unfortunately Viking raiders found the island easy prey and St Cuthbert's remains were eventually removed to Durham cathedral for safety, where they are housed today. St Aidan's remains were transferred to a pilgrim shrine on the island.

Continued on next page...





Continued from previous page...





Credit: Northumberland photos by Judith Marcham and Helen Cobb

We headed for the Castle, which is sited on a volcanic mound known as Beblowe Crag which can be seen for many miles around. It was originally built using stones from the demolished Priory in the 1550s. In 1901 it was bought from the Crown and converted to an Edwardian country house by the owner Edward Hudson of Country Life magazine. The refurbishment was planned by the eminent architect Sir Edwin Lutyens with the walled garden created by the legendary gardener Gertrude Jekyll, his longstanding co-designer, in 1911. They were both leading lights in the Arts and Crafts movement. The garden now has been restored to the original plans and is a riot of colour in July and August. After many tumultuous years, the castle is now owned by the National Trust after being gifted by the owner Sir Edward Stein and his sister in 1944.

The island was just pleasantly busy as we were there before the main tourist crowds who arrive later in the summer. We enjoyed a tranquil and relaxing afternoon on this beautiful island which was warm enough to enjoy lunch in the café garden out in the sunshine.

Anthea Brown

Machinery collection Hexham 23rd May

We visited John Bramwell's farm at Horsley near Newcastle to see John's vintage collection of cars, tractors, trucks, Land Rovers, farm machinery and a steam engine.

This collection filled shed after shed. It is quite incredible that it had to be moved during certain times of the year to make room for his commercial farming operations.

He runs a successful, modern and viable beef and arable business which was a pleasure to see in its own right.

You would be unsure of the correlation between many of the exhibits until you listened to John -every item has a personal story connecting it to him or his family's past. John is such an endearing character to listen to, and his descriptions brought the whole collection to life.

The group were particularly entertained when Charles Course declared he was the underbidder for his Massey Ferguson baler.

It was a privilege to be permitted to view his very private collection.

Alf Oliver



Highland Games, 24th May 2026

On Sunday 24th May we were blessed with fine weather and visited the Highland Games at Blair Atholl, Perthshire.

The Atholl Gathering and Highland Games are held annually at Blair Castle. The Castle grounds form a natural amphitheatre to host the Games and the magnificent Atholl Highlanders Parade dressed in full Scottish attire.

We watched Tug of War, Wrestling, Tossing the Caber and weight throwing events whilst the bagpipes played continuously. A magnificent Scottish band played and competed in races. The relay race was particularly amusing. The youngsters, both boys and girls competed at Scottish dancing.

Some of us took the opportunity to visit inside the stunning Blair Castle and its 9 acre restored Hercules walled garden.

It was a splendid day and watching the Games in the unique Scottish setting was a first for many of us.

Rebecca Rayner



Tossing the Caber at Blair Atholl Highland Games

Tour of Scotland 2026, 25th May–1st June
Stage 2 – Scotland





J&S Hay, West Coast of Orkney 26th May

On day two (Tuesday 26th May), we visited contractors J&S Hay of Birsay rooted on the west coast of Orkney. It's a tight-knit family business owned and operated by Marty (our guide), Dunky (sprayer operator) and Stevie who maintains their impressive fleet of machinery. They farm 230 acres of their own and 320 rented acres, contract arable farm around 2500 acres and contract silage making on another 3000 acres.

They have a herd of 110 suckler cows - Charolais and Limousine at the moment but partly changing to Aberdeen Angus; there are 22,000 cows but only 19,000 people in the Orkneys! All cattle are shipped off the island and sold as stores - very little is fattened on the island as there is currently no slaughterhouse on Orkney.

Of conventional crops, they normally grow only spring barley and oats, but some winter barley is being tried. They are Orkney's biggest grower of Bere barley, milled in the only operating traditional water mill on the island. It's poor yielding and quality but is a heritage variety 5000 years old and in much demand – so the high price / tonne makes it worthwhile.

On the island, the average annual rainfall is 40 ins, with around 15 ins in the summer months. Normally, April and May are dry and it then tends to get wetter mid summer onwards. So they're happy/relieved to harvest cereals at 25% moisture and have run at as high as 40%, using propionic acid.

All their machinery looked in almost new condition despite some combines being more than a decade old. The salt air and strong winds are a real problem requiring everything to be stripped down and corrosion-proofed each year.

Keeping bang up to date with agri-tech, they are exploiting AI on their new 15m sprayer from Soil Essentials. Using three cameras across the width of the boom, the machine spot-sprays docks which are a bane of pastureland in that region. They are seeing significant savings in chemical usage.

The only other important factor is they are heavily subsidised by the Scottish Government still retaining the Single Farm Payment and Beef support scheme.

All in all, a fascinating and enjoyable visit – thanks to Judith and Peter for organising it via the local Massey dealer!

Patrick Peal and Ed Howard






Top left; the farm is on the west coast – behind the 'coo' is Kitchener's monument on the hilltop. **Top middle;** Orkney is wide open space, grassland and no trees. **Top right;** the gaggle of old fishing boat huts on the foreshore were fascinating. **Bottom left:** The ten-year-old combines look 'as new' after careful stripping and anticorrosion every year. **Middle:** John Deere also features heavily. **Rght:** Soil Essentials Sprayer with separate concentrate and water tanks.

Orkney 27th may



For our second day on Orkney, we were met at our hotel by the lovely Lee Inkster for a guided tour of Orkney. We weren't really sure what to expect but it turned out to be a fascinating day taking in the beautiful scenery of The Mainland and learning so much about its history.

Who knew that there are more than 70 islands in the Orkeny's, many of them tiny and uninhabited, some joined by a causeway to the Mainland and only accessible at low tide. Our first stop was at the Broch of Gurness which dates back to more than 200 BC. A Broch was essentially a village, from the remains you can clearly see the layout of living rooms and storage.

From the Broch of Gurness we continued round the coast stopping at Birsay and walking down to the causeway which joined The Mainland to one of the many islands. Birsay is also known for the Kitchener Memorial, which remembers the sinking of HMS Hampshire in the first world war, when it hit a mine that had been laid by a German U-boat with the loss of 737 lives.

When we had been at J & S Hay's farm the previous day, we had learnt about the growing of heritage Bere barley which was sent to the watermill for milling into flour which was then baked into sweet and savour biscuits. We stopped for a look at this watermill as we headed to Orkney Brewery for lunch and a beer tasting.

Our journey continued to HMS Tern or Royal Naval Air Station Twat, one of four airfields on Orkney during the second world war. HMS Tern had four runways, mainly used as a training facility for the Navy, it also accommodated the aircraft from the fleets aircraft carriers when they were in harbour. We were shown in to an air raid shelter, round the cinema and museum and given a talk on the various cameras that were used during the war to record data.

We left HMS Tern to continue our tour of the island, stopping at the Ring of Brodgar, a Neolithic henge and stone circle, with 36 of the original 60 megaliths (stones) still standing. As we followed the road round the island we came to Scapa Flow, a vast sheltered natural harbour. Scapa Flow played an important part in both world wars. In June 1919 the German High Seas Fleet was scuttled by its crews to prevent the ships being divided among the Allies. In WW ll it was used as a Royal Navy base but was exposed as being very vulnerable when a German U-boat entered the bay and sank HMS Royal Oak. Churchill barriers were than created to block off access to the eastern end of the harbour.



After a full day of learning the history of the Orkneys, we headed back for our last night at the Merkister Hotel on the edge of Loch Harray.

The coach collected us from the hotel at 9 o'clock on the 28th May, dropping some of our party at the airport at Kirkwall and taking the rest of us on to Lamb Holm to collect our planes. We all enjoyed the flight (at various heights) down The Great Glen to Fort Augustus, landing at Glendoe for the next part of the tour.

Judith Marcham



Visit to Glendoe Hydroelectric Plant 29th May

Our second day at Fort Augustus involved a visit to the fabulous Glendoe Estate, generously hosted by the resident
long time FFA member Greville Vernon who's hillside airstrip we landed on coming from the Orkneys.

The coach took us into a descending tunnel to the underground power station, 250m below ground level. It is a very impressive industrial structure, built under a mountain & somehow reminded me of the archetypal villains lair from a Bond movie - except that this time it's purpose was good.

Construction took place from 2006 to 2009, followed by major tunnel repairs after a 2009 collapse, returning to full operation in 2012.

Water drops 600 metres from the reservoir through a 5m diameter tunnel to the underground turbine, making it the most efficient conventional hydro scheme in the UK.

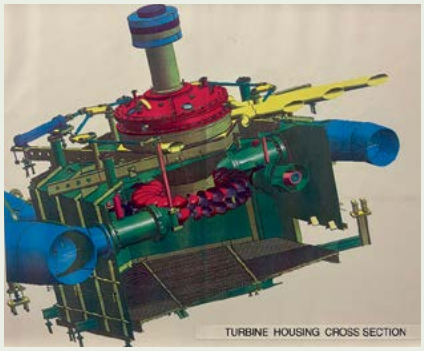
We learned that it can produce 100MW which is equivalent to 134,000Hp & £30,000/hour at domestic electricity rates.

Cutaway view of 100MW turbine, 6000psi water jet fires into the red cups & drives the 16000 volt generator above. The turbine can respond quickly to short term electrical demand & provide essential grid stability which compensates for energy fluctuation from solar & wind generation unlike nuclear power which can only be adjusted very slowly.

The project was carried out by SSE (Scottish & Southern Electricity) & the main contractor was a German company Hochtief who ended up paying £100M rebuilding costs after the initial tunnel began to collapse. Apparently a weakness in the geology had been identified during initial construction but there was a financial incentive to complete the project on schedule and necessary reinforcing work was not carried out.

Roger Sheridan





Robert Burns Museum 31st May







On Sunday 31st May we visited The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum housing collections relating to the life of Robert Burns, Scotland's national Bard. It is run by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and is located within Alloway in Ayrshire, the village where Burns was born.

A Burns based museum has existed in a form since 1903 as the Burns House Museum, and Burn's Cottage has exhibited Burn's related artefacts as early as the 1820's.

Robert Burns at Alloway, opened in the form it is today in 2009, with £23 million being spent on the project. This NTS project was supported by Professor Robert Crawford of The University of St Andrews, participating in the Scottish Governments 'Homecoming 2009' scheme to boost Scottish tourism. Professor Crawford published a book, The Bard, Robert Burns, A Biography (2009), as the culmination of this research project. The museum houses more than 5,000 Burns inspired artefacts, including original written manuscripts.

We visited the cottage where burns was born and the memorial garden.

Peter Gale



Culzean Castle 31st May

The penultimate day of the tour was very relaxed, visiting first the Robert Burns Museum before travelling on to Culzean Castle, another Scottish National Trust (SNT) property.

The journey itself had magnificent views over the Firth of Clyde – we could see Ailsa Craig which provides the granite used to make curling stones. We also drove down the Electric Brae with Derek our driver demonstrating the optical illusion with the coach. Vehicles appear to defy gravity by rolling uphill, an illusion created by the surrounding landscapes slopes.

Culzean Castle is approached by a long drive from the main road, you have no idea what to expect. What we arrived at was a magnificent castle built from sandstone on the edge of the Firth of Clyde.

I particularly wanted to see inside the castle. A beautiful building with many interesting features. Designed by the architect Robert Adam between 1777 and 1792 for the 10th Earl of Cassillis, it incorporates a large drum tower with circular saloon overlooking the sea and grand oval staircase. The castle was gifted to the SNT in 1945 to avoid inheritance tax. The one condition of the gift was that Dwight D Eisenhower be allowed to continue to use the top floor apartment as a private residence when he was in the country. From the imposing entrance hall with one of the largest collections of flintlock pistols, brought from the Tower of London, you move on through the reception rooms with highly decorated ceilings climbing the amazing staircase to look out over the sea before returning to the basement where you will see the kitchen with its array of copper pans and range cookers.

The grounds are a particular feature of the castle covering over 200 acres and including formal gardens, parkland and coastal frontage. In one cove you will find the Gas House, used for the production of town gas for the castle in the 19th and early 20th centuries, There are many outbuildings which have now been converted for the use of SNT, some of them can be rented for a holiday.

One of the finest castles I have viewed in a long while and definitely worth a visit if you are in the vicinity.

Peter Gale and Judith Marcham







The Hillhouse Quarry, Troon 1st June



Our last visit of the 2026 Scottish tour was to the Monday 1st June and we arrived at the Quarry Headquarters near Troon to be welcomed by Mark Munro MD and Craig Kirkland the Commercial Director.

Craig did a brilliant presentation of how the Hillhouse Quarry Group is one of the largest suppliers of quarry materials in Scotland. Established in 1907 at Hillhouse Quarry near Troon with the Quarry Group helping to assist building in Scotland for almost 120 years, Hillhouse Group remains a family business today. The company was founded and has been continuously owned by the Vernon family. Over the generations, the business has transitioned down the family line, operating as a third-generation family firm. Today, Andrew Vernon serves as the company's chairman, and the wider parent entity, Hillhouse Estates Limited, remains fully under the control of the Vernon family.

The particular rock profile that has driven the immense success of the original Hillhouse Quarry is a highly durable olivine-basalt.In geological classifications, the site is so uniquely significant that it serves as the official "type locality" for the Hillhouse type of olivine-basalt. This specific rock profile offers distinct commercial and physical advantages

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We then boarded our coach and did a tour of the vast site viewing loading from the quarry face, crushing, ready mix concrete, road Tarmac production and concrete block formation. We also viewed the test laboratory where they check the specification of the concrete, and tarmac.

The visit which was arranged by our member Greville Vernon, concluded with a superb buffet lunch and Goody Bags to take home. Our president Martin Gosling gave the vote of thanks and presented Craig with the infamous Flying Farmers clock.

The only downside and embarrassment of the visit was that only 6 of us represented the Flying Farmers, the rest leaving the tour two days before to avoid the forecast IFR weather.

Peter Gale

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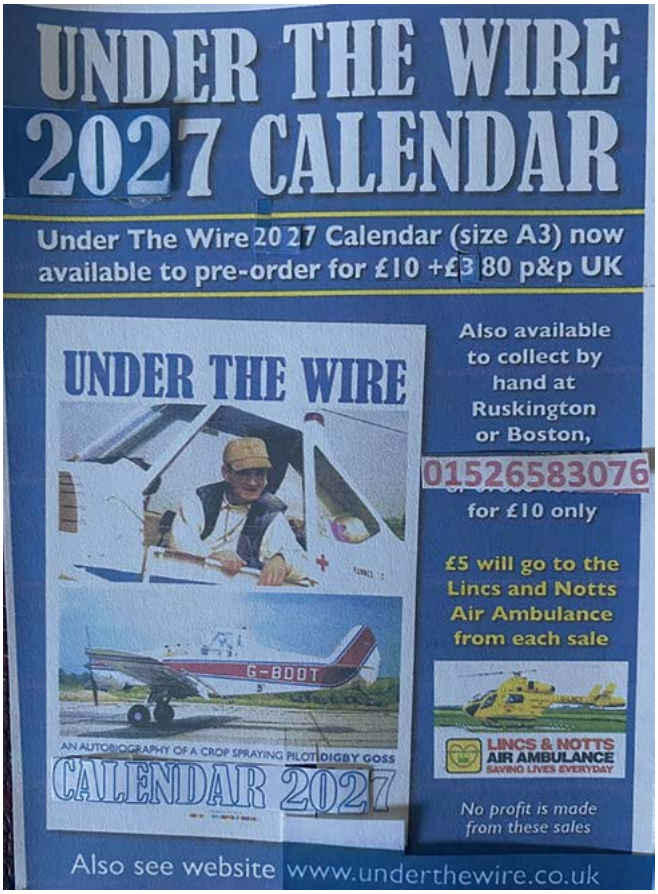
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Morocco and Around Senegal 8–25 April 2026



In the middle of 2025 a message was sent around the Air Squadron Membership to see if anyone might be interested in a flying adventure to Senegal the following year. Being the mug that I am, I immediately stuck my hand up without having the faintest idea as to the distances and difficulties involved. In the event over 10 people stuck their hands up to take part, later to be whittled down for various logistical reasons to 5 participating aircraft. The reason Senegal was suggested was that one of our members had a holiday property there and felt that she could make an interesting tour out of it.

And so, the detailed planning began in the background whilst we participants were initially unaware of the complexities involved in organising an aviation tour to a relatively remote part of bureaucratic Africa. Apart from the massive bureaucracy involved in flying around Africa, and the permissions required for every airfield, fuel was clearly going to be the biggest issue of all since very few airfields had fixed installations and therefore barrels of fuel delivered in advance were going to be the order of the day. It was only later in the year as planning became more advanced and each participant was asked to calculate their fuel requirements at each of our destinations along the route, so that barrels could be ordered, that the enormity of the flight became apparent to me – such was my geographic ignorance. It was going to be a flight of over 6000 miles.

Christmas came and went, and details were a little sparse in coming through. Quizzing the organiser about the minutiae of the requirements, we were advised that tourism to Senegal was a bit thin and so if we wore shorts that would not be advisable since we would really stand out as tourists. Also that mosquitos were around with the risk of malaria, so that long-sleeved shirts would also be sensible (Bad advice!)

As for fuel, notably, we still hadn't had confirmation from the organisers about the fuel supplies being in place, and the clearances for all the Senegal airports, as well as the over-flight clearance for Mauritania which still hadn't come through. January turned into February, and then on February 28, the world oil supplies were turned upside down by Trump's invasion of Iran. It looked like our trip was now in great jeopardy – or at least going to become extremely expensive. We had just six weeks before we were due to depart, but within a fortnight organisers had confirmed that all the fuel supplies for the Senegal and Moroccan part of the trip had been ordered pre-invasion and paid for, and would be in position.

As the autumn progressed three of the original group of 10 aircraft had to cry off for aircraft unserviceability problems, and after Christmas we had the news that our organiser would have to pull out because her husband had had a serious operation,

but she appointed another to take her place. Just 3 weeks before departure he also had to pull out as his father-in-law had died - so now we were down to just 5 crews, one of whom had been on the initial recce, and so he stepped into the breach as reluctant tour leader.

Friday, April 10th was the day planned for everybody to meet in Marrakesh. Terry, my copilot, and I decided that we would need a couple of days, weather permitting, to get through France and Spain and arrive on time in Marrakesh to meet up with the other participants.

We left Stones Farm on the Wednesday morning, routing via Le Touquet for customs clearance, where we discovered the newly applied customs arrangements for us Brits to get into Europe would involve much increased delays with facial recognition cameras and fingerprint requirements the order of the day. The fact that all of our passports had biometric chips attached to them seemed to count for nothing.

Refuelling with my newly acquired Total card made life much quicker and simpler, before a three hour and 50 minute journey to overnight at Carcassonne. Thursday was to be a flight across Spain to Jerez stopping at Castellon, a nice little parachuting airfield almost on the beach, for refuelling en route. This airfield didn't look the same as it did some 10 years previously when we were there - and indeed it wasn't because although it had the same name as the one we were now at, it didn't have the same ICAO code, and so we were now some 13 miles NW of where we thought we were! It was much more grown up with handling and landing fees to match its size! More unexpected dosh out of our budget and we weren't even out of Europe yet.

Jerez was our customs stop out of Europe, and is an incredibly busy training airfield for wannabe airline pilots, needing great attention to accurate flying with training aircraft whizzing around all over the area. Safely down and with the obligatory handling agents and refuellers taking their share of our remaining wealth, we set off to meet up with another crew who were also clearing customs out of Jerez and with whom we spent a very pleasant evening.

Friday saw us out of Jerez by mid-morning and finally on our way out of Europe ready to make battle with the African bureaucracy. Marrakesh, 400 miles distant, was our meeting point for the start of the main adventure, and the Moroccans have very strict VFR routes which you must fly down - and they certainly don't go in straight lines. Luckily SkyDemon is good at this sort of thing so it wasn't actually very difficult, but the requirement from ATC is that they need ETA's at every turning point for no good reason that we could see, except it indicated that they probably didn't have any radar coverage (so if we wandered off track, so what?). SkyDemon is good at turning point ETA's as well, so ATC must have thought we were pretty clued-up pilots!

An unremarkable flight except for following the 18 designated VFR waypoints until suddenly at FL065 my phone pinged and an urgent message came through to say the Senegalese had discovered that my ARC, which I had sent in over 6 months ago with the required paperwork for the trip, had expired and that I must immediately send my new one before the London office closed in an hours time - otherwise the trip would be cancelled! With enormous good fortune, I was able to locate the new one in my flight case on the back seat, photograph it, and WhatsApp it back to the organisers. Meanwhile back in the UK frantic messages were going back and forth to my family, my maintenance organisation and the CAA offices to locate copies. One problem averted by the skin of our teeth - but our permissions to enter Senegal still hadn't as yet come through - and we were due to cross their border in 2 days time!



Massive hailstorm at Hotel Tameslouht, Morocco

Marrakesh turned out to be a very busy commercial airfield. The handling was efficient, getting us parked and refuelled and taken to the nicely air-conditioned terminal in fairly short order. But now we were at the start of African bureaucracy. Nothing happened for a long time until we were finally called into the admin: office and invited to pay for our fuel and handling. The final list came to: Ground Handling; Concession Fees; Airport Fees; Payment Fees; Communication Fees and Administration for a total of €322 for the handling - plus Fuel Supply; Uplift Admin Fee; Hookup Fee and Low Fuel Fee for a further €701. Thus for the privilege of landing and refuelling at Marrakesh, they removed a mere €1023 from me and even larger amounts from the other larger aircraft, (and we still hadn't got to the start of our main excursion).

The overnight hotel was 3/4 hour away and was a very delightful place in Arabian style owned by the friend of the organiser who laid on an excellent meal followed by singing and dancing entertainment in which we were encouraged to participate. Those of us who were wise realised the party was coming to an end and sloped off to bed, leaving the rest of us to dip our hands into our pockets to 'appreciate the entertainment'. Soon after arriving at the hotel, the sky turned dark and angry, followed by a torrential rain and hailstorm. The roof leaked and we had to adjust all our seating arrangements to avoid the rain coming through, with some of the bedrooms suffering as well (luckily not mine).

Driving back to the airport the following morning, the roads and fields were all flooded, and the skies had not yet cleared to the expected VFR. Flight plans filed, the handling agents took us to our aircraft, and I duly called up for start-up clearance which was promptly denied because the weather was below VFR minimums. We all hung around our aircraft waiting and watching the weather gradually improve and an hour later I called up for start clearance again. This time it was denied because our flight plans had not been accepted, but they gave no reason why. We called the handling agents to come out again to take us back to the office, where they said their flight planning system would not accept turning points with Lat/Long positions


Lots of sand

(as determined by SkyDemon). We all laboriously filled out our flight plans again in the traditional European way, handed them in, and they were promptly rejected again. This time they said they couldn't accept a Flight Plan with the different VFR points separated by the abbreviation 'dct'. So we did it all again this time without the 'dct' - and they were rejected for a third time. The planning office now had pity on us and summoned a man down from the control tower who filled out one plan in the way that was to satisfy them, and this was duly copied down by the rest of us. Two hours later back at the aircraft the weather had cleared and off we set to our next destination, which was Layounne, a military base in the middle of nowhere but where we were going to test our refuelling skills from barrels for the first time.

Layounne had a rather confusing runway layout with 02 and 04 runways both starting at exactly the same point so it was important to concentrate to ensure you used the correct runway. We all parked up and we were waiting for transport to the terminal when the controller suddenly realised that we were there to refuel and the barrels were 300 yards away. So back into the aircraft again and taxied onto a different apron where the refuellers dealt with the barrels, whilst we all went indoors to deal with all the required documentation including showing every item of the aircraft documents and filing another flight plan for our next flight to Dakhla.

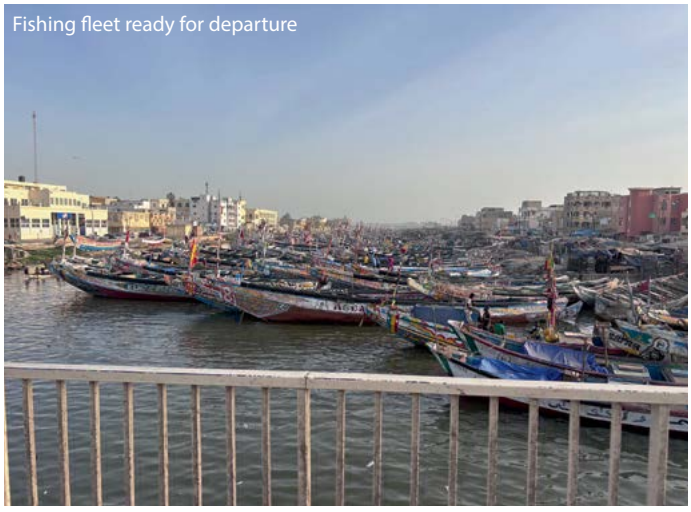
After a two hour flight, and we arrived at Dakhla, our jumping-off point for Senegal in the morning. Sky Demon does not work beyond Morocco into Africa. We had no Senegalese maps with us, but all the relevant points had been given to us as coordinates which we were able to put onto Sky Demon blank pages. At this point I also realised that my Garmin equipment did not have the African database! This flight to Saint Louis was to be nearly 500 miles long and navigation was simple because we kept the yellow bits on the left and the blue bits on the right and it was difficult to go wrong. It also overflew the whole of Mauritania, a country we were advised to avoid and for which we all had an over-flight clearance which had to be inserted into the Flight Plan. During this flight we heard one of our members being berated by the Mauritanians because his over-flight clearance was not valid (it actually was valid) and he must leave Mauritanian airspace immediately. Being a seasoned long distance traveller himself, rather than argue about it, he turned west, went out to sea for 30 miles until he was clear of Mauritanian airspace, then turn south until he got down to Senegalese airspace, and then turned inland again direct to St. Louis. Problem solved!

The next day was a day off flying, and we visited the Dudjoudj National Park, the 3rd largest bird sanctuary in the world and which sits on a tributary of the river Gambia. The park entrance was an hours drive out of town and had no other visitors when we arrived, and they didn't seem ready for us. The booking office was shut and locked and nobody seemed to know where the key was. After half an hour of hanging around and finally deciding they would have to break the door down to take our money, the key magically appeared! Two peaceful hours of cruising slowly along the river watching a multitude of birds, we arrived back at the jetty to find a large display of local trinkets all laid out to tempt us with - but no-one was tempted, much to their disappointment. This National Park has around 8000 visitors a year (a minimal number) and yet it boasts no less than 50 guides and 12 admin staff. Obviously jobs for the boys to keep unemployment down.

A two hour tour around the city to look at all it had to offer, including goats running loose down most of the side streets and their enormous fleet of smallish fishing boats jostling for parking space between their morning and evening fishing sessions.

Back to St. Louis Airport where we filed flight plans for our onward journey to Simenti, a gravel strip in the middle of the bush, and where we were staying for a couple of days at a game farm. The plans needed filing in the control tower which sat atop a tall building of about eight stories. Surprisingly, there was a lift in this tower, but it started at level three and finished one level below the control tower – the logic of this arrangement baffled us all.

This flight to Simenti heading east further away from the coast was extremely hot and it was difficult to keep the oil temperature below the red line. Only by step climbing in 1000' segments were we able to achieve this. The gravel strip was plenty long


Fishing fleet ready for departure



Filing our flight plans with the ATC Controller at St Louis)

enough and we all parked the planes in the searing heat where they would remain at the mercy of the game park for two days. A 3/4 of an hour drive in Land Rovers that had long since seen their best days along rough tracks brought us to the delightful Nioko Lodge sitting overlooking a river, where we would be for the next couple of days. Our rooms were air-conditioned, but if you woke in the middle of the night feeling hot, you would discover that they had rather sneakily turned off the air-conditioning at midnight and it didn't come on again until six in the morning! The thermometer on the balcony of our hut showed 47.2°C at 6 pm in the evening, with a maximum of 52.7°C during the day, and the minimum in the previous 24 hours only down to 42.3°C!

A small swimming pool at the Lodge was a most welcome relief after the days game drive. The game park was a rather low-key affair with just a smattering of deer and not much else, but nonetheless a relaxing couple of days.

Back at the airstrip we were delighted to find that our aircraft had been untampered with, and we set off for the short flight to Tambacounda where we were to refuel - again from barrels - and then give some local children experience flights in our aircraft supplemented by giving them air squadron badged footballs as a memory. (Senegal is even more besotted by football than the Brits).

Kedougou was our next stop, an airstrip with no ICAO code and no radio frequency, and it was important that we identified it in time because if we overshot by a few miles, we would have found ourselves in the country of Mali or Guinea-Bissau, both countries being pretty unfriendly. Fortunately, it was very easy to find and we were transported to our next lodgings which could generously be described as basic. Little round huts with no air-conditioning, hard beds, very little furniture, and showers which produced only a trickle water of a predetermined temperature. Eventually, fans were found for each little hut which really only served to stir up the already hot air.

After copious cold beers and waiting for the evening temperature to cool down a bit from the high 40°C to the low 40°C we set out to see the local Bedik tribe. The Bediks are a very small ethnic minority who have their own religion which is part Christian and part animalistic. There are only about 2000 supporters of this religion worldwide and they live a curious existence. Their settlement is up in the hills which required quite serious climbing skills to get to which rather got the better









Clockwise from top left; Niokola game park gravel airstrip, Hydration break, Nioko Game Lodge overlooking the river Gambia, Pool at the Lodge requesting lions not to share it!



Bedik community settlement in the hills

of some of our less agile pilots! However after about 20 minutes of climbing over a serious rocky terrain we arrived in their village which consisted of about 250 inhabitants and none of the amenities that all of us take for granted. If they needed any food or drink, they had to clamber down the hill and find their way to the local town to buy their necessities and then climb back up again to their village. This included everybody from young children, pregnant women, and the oldest of the inhabitants. We felt a little uncomfortable intruding on their lifestyle, but it didn't stop them taking advantage of the tourism aspect, because as we finished our visit to them they had laid out a mass of trinkets and home-made knick-knacks to tempt us with.

A nice dinner was laid on for us and after a fairly uncomfortable night we flew back to Tambacounda to refuel and then back to Kedougou airfield where we gave more experience flights to another 15 selected children. I had three young children in my aircraft and the front seat passenger was a young, slightly built girl of about nine or 10 years old. From the moment I opened the throttle she was consumed by terror and the grip on my arm and subsequently my leg was so intense that I had difficulty flying the plane and I had to virtually wrestle her off me for the landing. After speeches of thanks for the flights for the children, each child came up to their respective pilot to thank them, and the young girl I had in the front of my plane came to me, curtsied, and shook my hand. It must've been difficult for her having hated the flight so much, but it brought tears to my eyes to see her polite gratitude.

Now we were heading west back to the coast again to Cap Skirring, but first we dropped back into Tambacounda to pick up the last of the fuel that had been positioned there for us. We had with us a couple of 20 litre Jerry cans and a 25 litre hard plastic can to take as much of the spare fuel as we were able. Now pretty much at, or above, max all up weight and considering the very high temperatures, we had some concerns about performance, but the take off was drama free, although the climb to height was another struggle with top of the range oil temperatures making step-climbing essential. En route, my co-pilot Terry idly commented that there seemed to be a bit of a smell of fuel which I also smelled, which we put down to having the cans in the back.

Cap Skirring, on the west coast was very much more back into normal civilisation, and we shared the approach with a local 737. Parking up away from the jet blast of the commercial traffic (the apron was fairly limited for handling larger aircraft), my co-pilot Terry came round and said we had a problem. There was fuel running out of the luggage bay, and on investigation, the plastic can had expanded and contracted in the heat and the altitude changes, and had cracked, near the bottom. A rapid transfer of the fuel left in the can to my wing tanks saved what little was left - the remainder within the fuselage would hopefully evaporate before if softened the glue holding the plane together…!



OAT up against the stops


Sting Ray with its wicked stingy tail ready to pounce


Cooking oysters grown directly on a pole

Our hotel here in Cap Skirring was an altogether much nicer affair - certainly 4 star and fully air-conditioned. After a very comfortable night we were to go on a fishing trip in the morning followed by a seafood lunch. The road from town to the boat boarding area was a mix of smooth tarmac and then sections where the tarmac surface was completely absent with gaping potholes. All the traffic from both directions would be desperately trying to find parts of the road that would do the least damage - and that including using the opposite verge if necessary - regardless of oncoming traffic. Road repairs are clearly not high on their list of priorities.

We boarded three traditional fishing boats with four of us per boat plus the owner. We were all issued with a fishing rod laced with fresh prawns and then we cruised to a likely spot where we hoped to catch some barracuda. These barracuda were noticeably absent, but we did catch a couple of small fish followed by some slightly larger ones and then we found some stingray on the end of our rods. We kept a respectful distance from these until the captain produced a wicked looking pair of pincers and smartly removed the stingy tail bit before attempting to remove the hook. After a couple of hours, we pulled the rods in and motored for another 3/4 of an hour until we came to our lunch venue where we began with oysters that had been grown on a pole, and the whole pole was cooked over a fire. They were delicious and surprisingly only one of our group suffered any ill effects from this rather primitive way of eating them.

After lunch we were treated to a traditional dance from the locals, which was quite intense and involved everyone from the village down to the smallest two year-old. The loos in this place were worthy of note because there were two cubicles side-by-side and in the partition wall there was a square hole just above the eye line in which sat the loo roll. It appeared that this was a shared roll, and whoever grabbed it first got first go at it! One would only hope that having used it, that first person remembered to put it back in the square hole! An hour cruising back down the river to our road transport ended a lovely day with an evening to ourselves.

The following day we arrived back at Cap Skirring airport where we flew the last 17 children in our goodwill flying episodes, and distributed the last of our logo'd footballs, before flying one hour north to a small air strip with the delightful name of Put Put. This was an eco lodge set up in the middle of a marshy area with 15 eco lodges, all very comfortable and, surprisingly, with moderate Wi-Fi coverage. The flight was another extremely hot occasion with the oil reaching critical temperature early in the flight and the usual step climbing initiated to mitigate it as much as possible. After a late lunch and lots of cold beers we were all very enthusiastic to cool off in the pool. At this point I discovered that I had left my swimming trunks drying on the balcony at the game lodge some five days earlier, so throwing modesty to the wind, skinny-dipping it had to be!

We would've liked to have stayed an extra day or so at this very pleasant venue, but we had a meeting scheduled with the


Djilor (Put Put) eco lodge airfield


Monument de la Renaissance

British Ambassador in Dakar the next day, with a sightseeing time in and around Dakar first. The main attraction in Dakar is the enormous Renaissance Monument which was built in 2009 by the North Koreans and stands taller than the Statue of Liberty (eat your heart out, Donald) and cost £26 million to build. A rather fragile lift that took just three people at a time rattled its way up to the head of the statue where one could peer out at the city all around.

Sightseeing completed we returned to the hotel to smarten up for our visit to the Embassy where were to meet the Ambassador for cocktails and light refreshments. Arriving on time we found no official to greet us, although the Military Attaché turned up slightly flustered about five minutes after we arrived, and apologised that the Lady Ambassador wasn't around yet because she was giving her 11-year-old daughter a music lesson! That perhaps showed we weren't very important in her eyes! A few minor dignities of one sort or another were there to mingle with us and were very interested in our visit. The obligatory speeches from both sides wrapped up the evening by 9.30 and we returned to our hotel for an early night before our long flight north out of Senegal and back into Morocco tomorrow.

This upcoming flight was the one that had concerned us more than any of the others because in order to overfly Mauritania it was a 500 mile leg, and the seasonal winds in that area are always from the north east, which meant a headwind all the way. This meant that we could easily be seeing a flight of 5 1/2 hours or more which would leave us with very minimal reserves and no airfield alternate. In the event, the Windy weather app: showed us that provided we climbed to 8500 feet, the wind actually turned in our favour, so the decision was made that we would almost certainly have enough reserves. So after everybody took a short journey to St. Louis for refuelling for the last time in Senegal, we all filed direct for this longest leg.

Battling the Dakar rush-hour traffic, we arrived at the Dakar flying club to find that all of our aircraft had been washed of their desert dust courtesy of the flying club, and for which they would take no payment. A lovely gesture.

Saying goodbye to the President of the Dakar flying club who had been so helpful in facilitating the whole flying program, we flew north for the short leg back up to St. Louis for refuelling before onwards to Dakhla at the southern tip of Morocco. St. Louis had the usual bureaucratic nonsense of bag checking, Passport control and customs clearance taking up valuable time, but we had taken the precaution of filing our flight plans the day before to save time. Before the trip started, and worried about the long leg North over Mauritania, I had arranged for landing clearance at Noukschitt in Mauritania should we need it. I therefore put this airfield into my flight plan as an alternate which seemed a good idea at the time. This upset the Mauritanians who couldn't understand why we had done it and so they rejected all our flight plans, which didn't go down well with my fellow pilots! Phone calls between Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco then ensued trying to resolve the problem which seemed too much for any of them, so I created another plan without Noukschott as an alternate, but now this was deemed too late to change and the original flight plan had to be resolved. After an hour of interminable international phone calls, the problem seemed to have been resolved so we all went to our aircraft and asked for startup. Ah, wait, there was still a problem with two of the five flight plans. Now our leader was losing patience and decided that the three cleared aircraft were going to go anyway and "bonne chance" to the two of us left behind! By the time us two got all the way back to the planning office again the problem seemed to have been resolved, so we ran back to our aircraft and rapidly caught up with the others as they took off.

A four hour flight at 8500 feet in still air and with, as it turned out, plenty of fuel reserves, and this time keeping the yellow bits on the right and the blue bits on the left, we arrived back into Morocco and stayed the night at the Dakhla South Bay hotel again, where we had stayed on the way out. The following day



Determination not to leave any precious fuel behind!







Clockwise from top left: VFR Navigation: Keep the yellow bits on the right and the blue bits on the left!; Yours truly trying to remember his riding skills!; Zealous customs officer at Jerez

we routed into Layounne again for fuel before onwards to Essaouria down the obligatory Moroccan VFR routes for the last barrel refuelling and overnighting before returning to Europe. The Layounne controller gave us a comprehensive briefing about an active danger area on the way and gave us an equally comprehensive briefing as to how to avoid it. That was no problem to us, but the Casablanca Controller got quite agitated about the possibility of us wandering into his danger area and spoiling his war games, and said if it was OK with us, would we please stay out, and when we did, he thanked us all profusely as he sent us on our way! All very polite and civilised!

Landing and refuelling in Essaouria for the last time from barrels, some airport officials advanced on us and asked when we were leaving, because our Moroccan overflight clearance was due to run out at midnight. That was a worry because we were not leaving until the next day. Much shrugging of English shoulders ensued and then our original organiser, who gallantly flew out to Dakhla to join us on the last two days of our trip, stepped up with her fluent French, and managed to negotiate a comprise where we would have to pay for an extra 24 hours. Fearing a typical African ransom figure, we were pleasantly surprised to find that it was only €3/aircraft. We paid up rapidly before they realised that they perhaps could have thought of a higher figure!

We had all made our own decisions about accommodation in Essaouria, and we had found ours via booking.com. Our taxi driver found it quite difficult to identify our lodgings down an extremely rough road, but eventually a lady leaned out of an adjacent balcony and announced that it was indeed she that we were looking for! There was no name on the front of the building for the searching tourist and we discovered that the couple who now owns this place had taken it over just six months previously, and luckily for us, had also been handed our booking over with the keys. They were the most delightful young couple you could ever hope to meet. They had not prepared any dinner for us, but seeing us looking crest fallen rushed out to the shops for us and within an hour had produced the most delicious Chicken Tagine for us.

During the evening several neighbours passed by whom they all greeted, including a guy with a donkey who started chatting to us and then invited me to have a ride on this donkey. I used to ride in my youth and so I was not fazed by the idea, but I was wholly unprepared for the lack of stirrups, and the saddle secured by a single strand of baler twine. After 50 yards, prudence took over and I bailed out before my lack of balance saw me end up on the road - and then of course there was the obligatory outstretched hand and the announcement that he had got a large family to support! The owners didn't live in this property and said they wouldn't be around for our fairly early departure the next morning, so would we please enjoy our own breakfast which they left for us, turn the lights out, and lock the doors when we left!

From Essaouria the next day we crossed by Gibraltar on our way to clear Customs back into Europe via Jerez again where the customs felt need to inspect our luggage, and then had an overnight stop at Casarrubios in central Spain staying in a most curious hotel which was all locked up with no reception, and required a phone call to the owners, who were in some obscure place, and who gave us a code over the phone, but not until we had given them all our passport details, to gain entry. All extremely basic when inside with no reception and no facilities or WiFi whatsoever and definitely not recommended! From there we passed into France and overnighted with a very good friend and neighbour of ours from near home in Essex who had a holiday house in Auch, a short distance east of Biarritz.

24 hours later we saddled up again and via a refuelling and a Customs stop in Poitiers, and another 3 hour flight, arrived back at Stones Farm after a 6000 mile journey. It was a magnificent experience taking in everything from an Embassy visit to 4 star air-conditioned hotels, extremely basic mud huts, typical African bureaucracy and 55 hours of trouble-free flying.

Any regrets? Yes, that I was persuaded by the organisers that we shouldn't take shorts with us! It was seriously hot every day.

A new sport has arrived. We've been flying it for fifty years. By Ed Smiley-Jones

A new organisation, STOL UK, has been formed to govern short take-off and landing competition in this country. It has become a member of the Royal Aero Club — the first new air sports body admitted in more than thirty years — and it has worked with the CAA to establish a framework of rules, procedures and airfield training so that competitions can be run to a consistent and approved standard. In February, the FAI formally recognised STOL as a competitive discipline, which opens the door to European and World Championships in due course. Competitions ran in France, the Czech Republic and Denmark this summer alongside UK events.


National STOL

The first UK season has not been a smooth one, and I will leave others to write that story. But I have been paying close attention, because I think this matters to us more than it matters to almost anyone else in British aviation.

What a STOL competition actually is

Nobody invented this. It was assembled out of skills that already existed.

Bush and backcountry pilots — in Alaska principally, and then across the western United States — have always had to get in and out of places that were shorter, rougher and more obstructed than anything a runway offers. Gravel bars, ridge tops, sandbars, strips of tundra. That is not a sport; it is how the aeroplane earns its keep, and the technique was developed over decades out of plain necessity, exactly as it has been developed here.

What the Americans then did was formalise it. They took those skills out of the wilderness, where nobody is watching and a mistake is a long walk home, and put them into a marked, briefed, marshalled environment where a pilot can test himself and his aeroplane against a measured standard, against the man in the next aircraft, and above all against his own previous attempt — in conditions considerably safer than the ones the technique was learned in. The Valdez fly-in in Alaska is generally regarded as the grandfather of the whole thing. Everything since has been organisation built on top of it.

The format we would recognise today came out of a series called National STOL, running in America since 2020. Its 2026 season comprises eight events across the country between April and October.

The principle is simple to the point of severity. A line is marked on a grass strip. The pilot takes off from that line and the distance to the point where the wheels leave the ground is measured. He then returns, touches down on the line, and stops as short as he can — and that distance is measured too. The two are added together. Shortest combined distance wins the class. Pilots get two attempts, and the whole thing is scored against a painted mark on the grass by people standing beside it with a tape.



National STOL

Classes exist because a Cessna 180 and a heavily modified experimental are not competing at the same thing. The current American structure runs Standard classes bracketed by certification type and gross weight — Touring, Wilderness, Backcountry, Adventure — alongside an Unlimited class for the seriously modified machinery, an Exhibition class for heavier singles and twins, and, tellingly, a Rookie class that carries no points and no prizes and exists purely so that newcomers can be mentored through their first competition without embarrassing themselves.

The winning distances are startling. The best pilots in the lightest aircraft are off the ground in well under a hundred feet. But look at how they get there and there is nothing mysterious about it: a highly modified aeroplane, minimum fuel, no passenger, no baggage, every unnecessary pound stripped out, and a headwind if the day is kind. Then technique — and an enormous amount of practice.

You have been doing this for years

Read that description again and tell me it is unfamiliar.

A short paddock. A six-foot Leicestershire hunting hedge at one end or a Lincolnshire dyke at the other. A wind that is rarely down the strip. Grass that is long in June and greasy in October. An honest assessment of what you are carrying, what the surface will give you today, and where you will put the aeroplane if it does not go to plan.

That is short field flying. Most of the members of this association do it several times a week and have done for decades, and almost none of you call it STOL, because you do not think of it as a sport. It is simply the price of operating from home.

When I put my own strip in, I marked it out with small flags: a touchdown point, a landing zone I wanted to be down and settled within, and a set of markers further along that told me to go around if I had not got the first part right. It was not a competition. It was simply the only honest way I could think of to find out whether what I believed about my landings was true. I would be surprised if I am the only one — I suspect a good many of you have paced out a field and put something in the grass to fly at, and never thought of it as anything other than sensible.

I should be straight about where I am standing while I write this. I am new to this association, which means I am not claiming fifty years of accumulated judgement about a particular field in a particular county. What I am claiming is that I have spent this year



Aviat Aircraft, Husky A1-C

looking hard at something new arriving in British aviation, and that it belongs to you more than it belongs to anyone else.

I want to be careful not to overstate the overlap. Competition STOL is a stripped, optimised, adrenal version of the thing — flown light, flown to a line, flown for a score, in a controlled environment with a briefing and a safety officer and a fire cover plan. Our version is flown at working weight, into a field with obstacles, usually alone, with no marshals and no second attempt — and carrying a good deal more fuel, rather more baggage, and one or two English breakfasts too many from the café at Fenland. Nobody is stripping the seats out of a working aeroplane on a Sunday morning. Some of us could not strip much out of the pilot either. They are not the same activity and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise.

But they draw on the same experience: aircraft capability, ground condition, weather, human judgement, and repetition. The competition scene has simply done what we never have, which is to measure it, write it down, and put a number on it.

Where this gets interesting for us

Here is what struck me at SleapKosh this year, and it is the reason I am writing this rather than something about propellers.

My Husky spent the weekend on the Hartzell stand — as far as I could tell the only short field, backcountry aeroplane on display anywhere at the show — which meant I spent the weekend standing beside it answering questions. That turns out to be an education. You learn very quickly who is actually interested, because they are the ones who come back a second time with a better question.


Aviat Husky A1-C – Brad Crawford



Aviat Husky A1-C – Brad Crawford



Aviat Husky A1-C – Jeremey Clements



Aviat Husky A1-C – Jeremey Clements



Aviat Husky A1-C – Jeremey Clements

The people who kept coming back to the Husky were young. Not exclusively, but overwhelmingly, and in a mix of young men and young women that you do not see in most corners of British general aviation. What was pulling them in was not the licence, not the touring, not the idea of a share in something at a licensed aerodrome. It was this — off-airport flying, short strips, technique, and a sport with a visible ladder in it.

STOL UK's own chairman has made the same point publicly: against a general decline in light aviation, this is one of the few things clearly attracting a younger audience, and giving pilots a long-term purpose and a social focus.

Now consider what our organisation actually owns. Not aeroplanes — strips. Grass, obstacles, real terrain, working conditions, and the largest concentration of genuine short field experience in the country, held by people who have been doing it since before most of these newcomers were born.

We have exactly what the incoming generation wants and cannot get. And at present we are not offering it to them.

Let's get thinking – how can the FFA help?

I had a longer list than this, and I have cut it deliberately. Two ideas, both of which this association could actually deliver.

The first is an open day. Not an airshow, not a competition — a working day at member strips, for pilots who are curious about farm strip, short field and backcountry flying and currently have nowhere to go and ask about it. See the aeroplanes. Walk the strip. Stand at the hedge end with somebody who has operated off that field for thirty years and listen to how they read the surface, the wind and the light. It costs an afternoon, some mowing and a willingness to have strangers on the place.

I can think of one or two strips in this membership that could hold something like this comfortably — the space is there, and I cannot see the insurance being the obstacle people will assume it is. But whose strip, and whether they want a hundred visitors on it, is emphatically not for me to decide. It is the cheapest thing we could do, and I would wager it is also the most effective.

The second is the larger one. In my last article I wrote about the Recreational Aviation Foundation in the United States — what it has achieved by treating airstrips as infrastructure worth defending, and access as something to be actively created rather than passively hoped for. I said then that we have no equivalent in Britain. I would put it more strongly now. We have no equivalent, we are losing strips steadily, and there is finally a generation arriving who would use what we still have. A UK foundation along those lines is a serious undertaking and would take years. It is also the only idea on the table that would still be working long after all of us have stopped flying.

One is a Saturday. The other is a legacy. I am not in a position to tell this association what to do about either, and I would not presume to — but I would very much like to hear what the people who have been doing this far longer than me make of it.

The strips we fly from will outlive us only if somebody younger wants them.

Edmund Smiley-Jones (aka Instagram @hinterlandpilot)

STOL UK's First Competition Lands at Popham 25–27 September 2026





It's official – this September, the very first STOL UK short take-off and landing competition comes to Popham – one of the best-loved airfields in the country. Whether you fancy testing the farm strip skills you've been honing all summer, or simply want to watch it unfold from the sidelines, there's every reason to make the trip. This is the event we've been waiting for: a proper, well-organised national STOL competition, built by pilots who live and breathe backcountry flying.

Built by farm strip pilots, for farm strip pilots

STOL UK has been founded by a group of passionate farm strip and backcountry pilots who wanted to create a national skills competition for anyone who loves the craft of getting in and out of tight spaces. Working closely with the CAA and the Royal Aero Club (RAeC), they've built something with real foundations behind it. STOL UK is now the official governing body for STOL competition in the UK, recognised by the Royal Aero Club – and the first new air sports organisation to join the RAeC in over 30 years. Given the Royal Aero Club was a founding member of the (Fédération Aéronautique Internationale) FIA, the world governing body for sport flying, this recognition puts STOL UK firmly on the map from day one.

Safety and standards, first and last

The mission is simple: a well-organised, safe environment for pilots, marshals and spectators alike. STOL UK's specialist team also supports airfields wanting to host their own events, covering the rules, processes, safety requirements and equipment, along with training for designated judges and marshals.

Every competitor completes a skills test and a safety, rules and regulations briefing before receiving their STOL UK competition licence – delivered by the in-house team or the official training partner. Briefed, vetted, licensed: nobody flies a run until they're ready.

A class for every aircraft

STOL UK wants every pilot to be able to compete against similar machines, so the classes span everything from warbird to homebuilt to tourer – enough to cover just about every aircraft on our members' strips. The classes are based on aircraft type and mirror those used by established competitions such as National STOL in the US, grouping aircraft of the closest performance so that the result comes down to pilot skill – the fairest test there is.

Heavy Touring: (gross weight 2,301–5,800 lbs): C180, 182, 185, 206 & 210; Maule M6, M7, M9.

Backcountry: (factory-built, 1,320–2,500 lbs): PA-12, 14, 18 & 22; Citabria, Husky, American Champ, Scout, Super Cub (pre-1949 registrations may compete as Classic); C150, 152, 170, 172, 175 & 177; Maule M4, M5.

Adventure: (homebuilt, 1,320–2,500 lbs): Carbon Cub FX & EX; X Cub; KFA Expedition & Safari (incl. XL); SuperSTOL XL; Murphy Rebel & Elite.

Sport: (LAA-registered, non-microlight, under 1,321 lbs): SuperSTOL & Highlander; Escapade; TLAC Scout; Carbon Cub SS & UL; Eurofox; CH701 & 750; KFA Explorer & Bushbaby; Rans S7; Kitfox.

Microlight 3-Axis (BMAA/LAA-registered, under 1,321 lbs): Escapade, Kitfox, Sky Ranger, C42, Swift, Jabiru, Maverick, EuroStar, CTLS, Rans, Bobcat.

Microlight Flexwing: any wheeled machine – no other restrictions.

Vintage, Classic & Military: (open gross weight): any aircraft built before 1950.

Flying something that isn't listed, or unsure where you fit? Just get in touch.

Fancy a go?

A few competitor places remain for this first event. If you'd like to put those hard-won farm strip skills to the test, email will.n@stoluk.org to enter.

Not competing? Come and spectate – Popham always puts on a good show. Either way, get 25–27 September 2026 in the diary now.

Licence and skills training: to sharpen up and earn your competitor's licence ahead of the event, contact STOL UK at will.n@stoluk.org. For skills training and licensing, contact Matt Coles at info@farmstripflying.co.uk.

STOL UK

For sale

MTV-6-D propeller

MTV-6-D propeller removed from G-ONIG as part of an engine upgrade. 268 Hrs Hub TT, 11 Hrs on new blades since hub inspection. Suitable for some Continental engines or others with hub modification or replacement

Please contact Nigel Smith
Email: mobile@airnig.co.uk
Tel: 07768 348727

Price £5999 ovno

See website for more details



For Sale

Druine Condor D62B Aircraft

Built in 1970 by Rollason Aircraft, this highly original aircraft has been operated by the current owner since 1992. Fitted with a RR Continental 0200 engine, 400hrs since zero-time rebuild.

G-AYFD is an exceptionally well documented aircraft, with a long and impeccable racing heritage, most notably as a Schneider Trophy race winner. Prior to it's current ownership it was operated by the Tiger Club. It is in excellent condition, and comes complete with Rollason's original factory drawings, plans and manuals.

Fitted with a Trig 8.33 radio. Located in South Shropshire. Please call or email for further details.

chris@milsonairstrip.co.uk
Chris Jones : 01584 890486
Offers around £25000

See website for more details



For sale

Aviation Mobile Fuel Bowser Trailer 950 -980L

Complete Fuel delivery system – 950- 980L Hard polyethylene inner plastic tank bunded with Stainless steel outer bund. Bowser. Fully U.N. certified for the storage of fuel.

Used once for Jet Fuel– easy conversion to Avgas/ similar. Made by Trailer Engineering Ltd, UK Company so parts available.

TRAILER: Single axle A frame galvanised steel (car) towable trailer. Front Sliding Prop Stand And Rear Support Stand, Battery with plastic weather cover. Trailer can be offloaded with forklift with extended forks will be required, to offload a curtain sided vehicle. Four lifting points and two fork sockets (for when the tank is out of the chassis).

INNER FUEL TANK: Constructed from translucent heavy-duty polyethylene, with a capacity of 980 litres. 2" filler with cap and chain. 1" manual vent valve, top-mounted 1⁄2" BSP suction and return connections. Ball valve in base of tank, to pump. Pressure relief valve in the top of the tank.

FUEL CONVERSION?: Facet Coalescer Fuel Filter already fitted for Jet Fuel and new filter in box (£485 Plus VAT) if wanted to convert fuel eg Avgas. Ie flush out (a very small amount of) Jet Fuel at bottom, rinse, install new Avgas cartridge and fill up. Avgas stickers can be purchased.

OUTER BUNDED TANK: contains 110% to hinge line. 4 lifting eyes on corners of tank, fork truck sockets for use when tank out of chassis only. Inside lockable rear door with pump delivery system. PUMP: K1 semi rotary hand pump c/w in line 'Y' strainer, 15' of 1" fuel hose & trigger nozzle stowed on bracket. With battery Electric Pump, Non Resale Flowmeter.

Always kept inside.

DIMENSIONS Appros: HEIGHT: 1.528m (60"), LENGTH: 3.175m (125"), WIDTH: 1.448m (57"), UNLADEN WEIGHT: 535kg, LADEN WEIGHT: 1280kg approx. – 1500kg max

£14,000 plus VAT

LOCATION: on airstrip near Huntingdon Cambs

Contact: Rebecca Rayner – 07808 066655
Email: rebecca.rayner@glebefarmfoods.co.uk



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!

FLYING FARMERS ASSOCIATION





Summer Jacket with fold away hood

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)

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

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

Key Tags

Metal Key Tag available in Red, Blue or Black
£4.00 each plus £1.50 p&p
Email Key Tag to :- mervyn.white@icloud.com
for more details and to order.



Profile: Charles Wheeldon from nr Wickenby, Lincs

By Rebecca Rayner



Charles and Jenny Wheeldon with his Dakota

I met Charles and Jenny on the Scottish Tour in May this year. I am sure, like me, you will find Charles' profile very interesting.

Charles , tell us about your early days..

I was brought up on the family farm at Buslingthorpe, near Market Rasen, in Lincolnshire that my grandfather on my mother's side had taken on in 1912. She met my father in 1940 when he was based nearby at Binbrook, flying Fairey Battles and Wellingtons in 12 Sqdn. So although technically a service child, I grew up as a farm boy, but benefited from the Boarding School Allowance to fund a private education. It was, as a member of the ATC at Felsted school in Essex that I applied for a Flying Scholarship, gaining a PPL in three weeks at the old Skegness airfield in 1963 at the age of 17.

and about your career in farming…

As was often the case, my father did not speak much of his war experiences, and I learned more from articles written about him in various publications over the years. He obviously piqued my interest in flying, and applying for a scholarship, although I never had any intention of joining the RAF. I had a fall-back plan of civil aviation via the then funded training for BOAC/BEA pilots at Hamble, but decided to take a place at a university with an Air Squadron, where in those days cadets were paid to fly 40 hours a year. Unfortunately, after nine months 'back on the farm' before going up to Nottingham University, even the prospect of flying and women(!) did not outweigh that of studying modern languages for the next three years, and I returned to the fold. I worked for my grandfather for three years, and in 1967 my brother and I took on the 650 acre farm in partnership when I was 21. I continued farming the land in one form or another until I took the ELMS retirement option in 2022, when the members of our joint venture, Flagleaf Farming, agreed that after 25 years it had outlived its original purpose. I had run a small commercial grain store specialising in OSR on the farm since 1984, and ran a fleet of mobile grain driers that operated over most of Lincolnshire and into Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire. In 1996 we built a poultry unit for the Cherry Valley Duck company, which they chose subsequently to become their genetic unit. When Cherry Valley sold most of their business to Avara, they retained the 'golden egg', the breeding division, by then a world leader, providing a large percentage of UK and European breeding stock, and complementary to the vast Cherry Valley operation in China. Cherry Valley was founded after the war by Joseph Nickerson, who farmed next door to my grandfather, but the British operation is now wholly owned by the Chinese company. Another sign of the times is that the 40,000sq ft of farm storage is now occupied by a Lithuanian timber import company, generating far more income than it ever did in agriculture, but sadly not to my account!

How about your flying days…

I did my ab initio training on AusterJ1N aircraft, of which at the time there were four at Skegness, used both for instruction and pleasure flights for the happy campers at nearby Butlins Holiday camp, where I was billeted for three weeks for the princely sum of 2/6 per day, all in. Of those, I only flew AHAL once, on 13/9/63, but it lived at Wickenby for 30 years until it was sold last year, and I have it in my logbook again on 13/12/96.

Not having flown since the end of the war, on one of his final postings at Bentley Priory, my father had bought a Hornet Moth G-ADKC which he would fly home to land in a small field on the farm, a skill he acquired flying Tiger Moths around France in the Communication Squadron during the Phoney War. On one occasion we shared the circuit at Skegness one day when he brought Mother over to visit during my training, but once he had moved back to Lincolnshire he sold KC before I could get my hands on it!

Father became an AFI at Lincoln Aero Club, then based at Kirton Lindsey, which also ran Austers, and in those early years I accumulated some 10 different Austers in my logbook. However, affordability - I was earning £7 10s a week, aircraft hire £2 10s – accessibility – inability to book an aircraft – the club losing its home – and other distractions lead to my giving up flying at the end of 1970 with a paltry 70 hours in my logbook.

My farm office lay just outside the Wickenby, ATZ under the flightpath of runway 33, and 25 years later, business established, school fees a thing of the past, and a little more time available, watching aircraft in the circuit at Wickenby, I thought that if I didn't start flying again then (I was 50), then I probably never would.

Already holding a PPL, I was told by the CAA that I would need to take all the flying and written exams (nine as opposed to three I had originally taken - we didn't have radios in the '60s), but in view of my previous experience they would accept 20 hours of training. It took 50!

Training was in C150/152s, and over the next eight years I pootled about in the Club 152s and 172. In 2004 I had the opportunity to join a group flying a fairly tired Cherokee 6, a major step up. Subsequently we had it zero-houred, new 3-bladed prop fitted and resprayed, when it became a very desirable aircraft, only to see it sold at rock-bottom price in 2013 during a downturn in GA.

However, the next year I had the opportunity to buy into another Wickenby based aircraft, PA 28 Dakota G-DKTA, which I have been flying for the last 12 years. In 2015 I bought a half share in Auster AOP 9 XP241, which after ten years restoration flew for the first time in 2016, 53 years since its last flight in 1963. I sold my share in that in 2025 to buy into Auster Autocrat G-BRKC with namesake but no relation Oliver Wheeldon, and later that year a part share with a group of Wickenby members in Auster J1N G-ARRL. The circle is complete.

CRW, FFA no 824, June 2026