

Squadron Buzz



Fleet Air Arm Squadron
linking former, current and future naval aviators

Issue No 55
Sept - 2010



Picture by Helen Holliday

The Editorial Arrow, airborne from Ouessant, en route Quimper

In this Issue:

- 3 Editorial
- 4 Event News
- 5 Plus ça change Part 2
- 11 Book Review
- 13 Swansea Report
- 15 Painting the Porch
- 16 A lengthy stay in the South of France
- 20 Boscombe Report
- 23 Peter Lovegrove handover
- 23 Rotax Rubberings
- 24 Diary of Events





Mystery Airfield

Peter Lovegrove correctly identified What used to be RAF St Athen with his phone call at 0934 followed by emails from Ollie Dismore at 1022 and Peter Morehead at 1537. Well done chaps I thought this would be more difficult but you are all obviously getting good at it. On publication day I was away flying at Deanland with Chris Palmer who took all of 30 seconds to identify the new

home of the RN air engineering school, a very creditable performance. As you are all becoming very quick of the mark I decided to make this issue's mystery airfield a bit more challenging. The picture was taken by me on the way to a recent squadron event, (big clue). I remember doing some exciting circuits in Hawks here when it was owned by the RAF. The new owners delight in a much darker shade of blue. Apologies for the poor visibility but we had enjoyed a 'run ashore' the night before.



Buzz 55 Mystery Airfield? Answers to Ed please.
Email morsuepj@ntlworld.com or 07703162288 or 01243374681

From THE Editor

The September Buzz although slightly late is bursting with news and reports which I hope you will enjoy.



Page four has information on the last three events this year which look full of promise. My 'prayer mat' is at full chat to get rid of this awful weather before the Ireland trip and likewise for Wattisham in October. Hopefully a long September/October Indian summer will break out soon. Page five contains the second part of John Fords excellent article on the glorious Fleet Air Arm as was. made even more impressive by the picture of him arriving at the Yeovilton Barbeque in his single seat Rollason Turbulent all the way from Lashenden. Roger Richardson Bunbury delivers another immaculate book review on page eleven and is also looking for volunteer Obituarists which you will have seen hopefully from the email I sent you all. It is so much more meaningful to read the life story of someone recently departed written by a person who actually knew them. Henry Cooke delivers a colourful report of our visit to Swansea back in sunny May on page thirteen. This includes a picture of poor Roger Dunn's immaculate Mooney before it was crashed at Cannes the storey of which starts on page sixteen. I had almost exactly the same disaster in the Arrow a few months back when the main alternator output cable chaffed through to the engine frame and all electrical power was lost. Luckily my mobile phone had plenty of charge to warn the airfield of my problem so they could check wheels down on the flypast. Fortunately my emergency undercarriage lowering system only needs slight lever movement and a nod from 'Sir Isaac Newton' to be down and locked, and all was well. It just goes to show how important it is to know your emergency routines and procedures. Page twenty has a report by Nigel de Candole of our eagerly anticipated visit to Boscombe Down where no less than thirteen aircraft attended, a record I think. The boss records a thank you to our long suffering treasurer Peter Lovegrove who is being relieved by John Marriot on page twenty three where also Tony Ashmead records a perishing problem with his rotax rubbers

Happy Landings

P.S. If you want your Porch painted
turn to page fifteen

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Phil'. The signature is stylized with a large 'P' and a long, flowing tail.

Event News

By Phil Moore

France: Despite dismal weather to start with, the French Deployment this year was very successful with five aircraft taking part. Four of us routing through Dinard, Brest, Ouessant and Quimper with the Ashmeads missing out the second two for St Breuc instead. The Island picnic, crafted by the Hollidays, was superb as was their formation flying. A full report is promised in the next issue.



Ireland: Coming up in just less than two weeks as I write there are at least five aircraft in for the 'Guinness' weekend. Bernard Maslin is looking for a lift if you have space and it is still not too late to join in this exciting venture organised by Anthony Stevens.

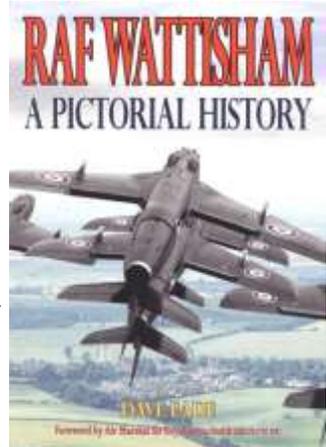
RAF Wattisham: Organised by David Ockleton for Thursday October 21st. The RAF have always looked after us very well during our visits to their air stations. Make sure you get to this one, before it becomes the victim of defence cuts

Annual Dinner: An event not to be missed, organised by our CO and his team, it is the premier squadron social event of the year. Fly into Lee on Solent, lunch at the Osbourne View, dine in style at HMS Collingwood



wardroom,

and you don't even have to drive home! This year we are to be entertained by Rear Admiral Terry Loughran who will update us on such matters as the new aircraft carriers, the National Museum of the RN etc plus a lot of jokes no doubt. Put Saturday 27th November in the diary now.



Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose, (Part 2) French Proverb 1849

By John Ford

The next quantum change in British carrier operations came with the Sea Harrier and STOL/VTOL but I left the Service before that day. Aerial navigation barely changed during the first 50



years of flight. A line drawn on the chart, compass and stopwatch as used in my 1952 Auster was still basically the same well into the jet age. The Scimitar flown operationally low level at 420 knots (7 miles a minute) had nothing better. It was only too easy to get lost if forced to deviate from the pre planned route and miss a check point, for serious map reading in a single seat aircraft flying at 100 feet did not encourage longevity. With such basic navigation tools those of us selected to be nuclear delivery pilots faced the prospect of attacking Murmansk dockyard. After a final 200 mile low level leg across featureless sub Arctic tundra the pilot/navigator, if the attack was to be successful, had to hit a pin

point I P travelling at 600 knots before tossing his weapon in the direction of the Russkies! It was also pretty clear that even with flight refuelling on the outbound leg there would be insufficient gas in the tank to return to Mother in the North Sea. The planners were slightly coy on this point and muttered something about ejecting over friendly territory. Could this ever have worked? Leave you to decide. Now early in the 21st century I sit in G-CM, a Piper Cherokee 180 with dual VOR receivers, ADF, DME, "S" mode transponder and the magical Garmin 430 in front of me.. Of course all these aids, and more are now available to the military but how much more operationally capable would we have been if able to dial in the GPS coordinates of Russian Naval headquarters? Air fighting in the Seahawk had changed little from tactics developed by Molders and Galland during the Spanish Civil War, then rapidly adopted by the RAF during the Battle of Britain. The universally accepted Finger Four for-



mation, height advantage, the quarter attack and the ability to control your aeroplane in a winding match hovering on the edge of the stall were still the demand of the day. An effective opening fire range of about 300 yards with 20 mm cannon was not much of an improvement over Spitfire and Hurricane machine guns. Successful ground attack lay in individual skill, keeping the correct dive angle and speed at release (45 degrees in the Seahawk, 30 degrees Scimitar) and offsetting the aiming piper a correct amount to allow for forecast wind. The weapons were unchanged from WW2, indeed the iron bomb and rockets came from war time stock.



4 Seakawks

I once watched 4 Seahawks from our companion squadron attempting to bomb large hangars at Almaza airfield during the Suez operation. All bombs fell over the target on to the hard standing perhaps due to stress from ground fire. During this short operational period strike aircraft called in by Forward Air Controllers to attack Egyptians positions just

across a street from own forces, did so with no more sophisticated direction than Typhoons had when chasing German armour towards Germany. The fear of a Blue on Blue incident was strongly in the mind. Tragically it did happen once and several Marines were killed. The British Phantom did not have guns nor did its high wing loading favour tightly turning combat, Missile arming time anyway meant the fighter had to stand off from his enemy. Air Combat Manoeuvring tactics were evolved through intellectual and scientific study using the particular characteristics of the aircraft; its performance, weight and the concepts of energy management. Frontline AWI's took these theories and proved them in practice bringing in the first real change in fighting since adversaries first met in the air. Now manoeuvring was more likely to be in the vertical than horizontal plane. A Phantom crew did not need to see their opponent in order to shoot it down. Radar lock on might be expected at 50 miles or more in head on interceptions and its Sparrow missile on the way at 18 miles, target still unseen. The qualities of skill and crew cooperation needed to do this successfully at closing speeds over 1,000 knots raised the game into a different league from my first experience in a first frontline Squadron. If a Seahawk were the sports racing car of aviation and its pilot an amateur driver then the Phantom a Grand Prix Ferrari, the crew in Schumacher's class? I have learnt something of the technological changes since 1975 by reading about the Falklands War,

also books such as the excellent “Joint Force Harrier” by Adrian Orchard, and from our Squadron’s fascinating visit to 800 Squadron at Coningsby. Tactical lessons learnt during the Phantom era were subsequently taken up and successfully adapted to the special characteristics of the Sea Harrier. The ability to launch weapons with pin point accuracy while standing off at high altitude, using laser guidance or GPS direction, moves the ground attack business into another realm. We never achieved such accuracy and were forced to come down to low attack heights where the dangers from AAA had already proved unacceptable in Vietnam. Methods of target marking and identification have surely improved but tragic mistakes do still occur. One aspect of operating aircraft at sea sadly did not change much during my time in the Service. Naval aircraft from British designers always seemed to have poor endurance. The critical path in fixed wing carrier operations was determined by the launch/recovery cycle. When I first joined Albion in 1956 Seahawks and Venoms worked a 1 hour 10 minute cycle meaning individual aircraft spent about 70 minutes in the air. This was usually about the absolute limit of their endurance and often ended up with some critically short of fuel. This put great pressure on the ship when non diversion flying. The cycle length slowly grew through Scimitar and Vixen days to a maximum of 1 hour 40 minutes for the Buccaneer and Phantom. While this did help deck operations it was balanced by longer turn round times for more complex aeroplanes. In fact fuel reserves in terms of endurance were hardly greater at the end of Ark Royal’s life than when jet aircraft first went to sea. Every Commander (Air) dreamed of a carrier aircraft capable of remaining airborne for 3 hours or more. The excellent Sea King proved this point by disappearing on task for 4 hours at a time only returning for a quick “rotors running” refuel and crew change before setting off on another 4 hour mission. It could otherwise hover alongside a frigate and pick up a re fuelling hose. 800 Scimitar Squadron did the “in service” flight refuelling trials poking into the basket 30 times a sortie. The primary concept was to extend transit range especially in support of a nuclear strike. A gross inefficiency in defending the fleet from air attack arose from the need to bring back a perfectly serviceable fighter every 1 hour 40 minutes merely to fill its tanks. It became standard practice in Ark Royal to launch a Buccaneer tanker first off, refuel two CAP aircraft in the air before it joined in on the end of the landing pat-



Air to Air refuelling

tern. The fighters were then able to fly a double cycle. This was however only a partial solution to a fundamental problem. We had no restriction on radio transmissions from Albion during the Suez campaign. However "Cat and Mouse" electronic games later during escalating phases of the Cold War meant that a carrier force might want to go radio silent. Bear D's had a passive capability to detect the force from well beyond the range of seaborne radar. Satellites were beginning to have a detection role in maritime warfare. Aircrew flying from Ark Royal in realistic exercises had therefore to be prepared to work "Zip lip" They were given an updated ship's position on a blackboard held up alongside the catapult and some of the old Observer plot keeping skills came back into use. There was sometimes a concession for returning aircraft to make a couple of radar sweeps while still 100 miles away from the force but otherwise the whole sortie proceeded in silence. We also saw an evocative return to another example of earlier fleet practice when bringing back Flag "Foxtrot" to use, recalling old photographs of Fairey Flycatchers flying from H M S Furious in the 1930's. At the dip meant "I am preparing to operate aircraft", close up "I am operating aircraft". Now Phantom and Buccaneer aircrew returning to Ark Royal circled overhead waiting for the same visual "clear to land" signal. "Two people in an aircraft is one too many" This assessment has traditionally been the centre piece of fighter pilot belief. The benefit however of having a second crew member in an aeroplane has perhaps already been alluded to in this article. My first introduction to the twin seat world came during conversion to the Sea Vixen. The aircraft designer had incredibly entombed the second man below decks so depriving it of a fighter's most valuable asset – good lookout. This transition was a major heretical change for me but soon the strongly rooted fixation that our hero could conquer the world alone was swept aside by the obvious advantage that came from a shared task, mutual support and the extra range of equipment that only a second person could handle. In my view the move back to single seat fighter/strike aircraft, the Harrier and Joint Strike fighter, in spite of the sophisticated help available to its pilot, is a retrograde step. I suppose this is inevitable in a VTOL design dictated by considerations of weight, just as range and weapon load are also sacrificed by going this way. Looking back I well remember one occasion when the support of a second person in my aeroplane would have been truly welcome. Ark Royal was on passage north from Hong Kong under threat from an approaching Russian Kashin missile armed destroyer (H M S Ceylon). The squadron was ordered to find, fix, and strike her. First she had to be found so 4 Scimitars set off on a long range sea search, high level out to 300 miles and then a low level return. There was complete cloud cover at the end of the first leg and the aircraft entered cloud tops at 1,000 feet.

While gingerly descending through 300 feet the sight of a breaking wave close in front of the windscreen precipitated a pull for your life reaction which just averted the end of my aviation career. This was sea fog not cloud. When the pulse rate slowed sufficiently it dawned that the barometric pressure here far from where the altimeter had been set, was likely be quite different. That reassuring voice from the back seat, as experienced in later years, would surely have given timely warning. A few minutes later the port engine fire warning light came on sending the heart beat racing back toward its previous level. Any idea of ejecting so far from home and out of radio touch was less an option than hanging on and hoping. Back overhead the carrier Flyco politely offered two choices, a diversion to the nearest land or a single engine deck landing. The nearest land happened to be Taiwan for which no diversion briefing had been given, neither airfields or frequencies and the local lads were suspected of being somewhat trigger happy. The 4 X 4 inch map on the knee pad covering most of the South China Sea needed sharp eyes to spot Taiwan. Also Ark was heading away from the area so it was not difficult to decide that, with the possibility of long internment in a country not



Scimitar landing

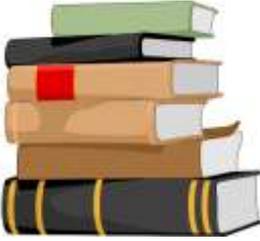
considered a good run ashore, the choice of a deck landing was the thing to go for. Perhaps in the company of a competent "O" with his fat nav bag the two alternatives might have been better balanced but not so for the simple airman. A single engine deck land-

ing in the Scimitar meant turning off flap blow because this took a lot of power from the engine. The book said increase the final approach speed by 12-15 knots, if I remember correctly. This was the one case when Pilot's Notes recommended going to full power on hitting the deck and was a bit vague about bolter performance. Happily it proved successful. There had not only been changes in equipment, tactics and the manning

of Naval aircraft. Aircrew themselves were changing as well. The average age of a fighter pilot in the late 1950's was probably about 22 years; only the CO and perhaps Senior Pilot were married, the rest carefree bachelors. By the early 1970's this had risen to a mature 25/27 years of age and married aircrew were much more common. The end was in sight for conventional fixed wing flying as Ark Royal was due for cremation before the end of the decade. In consequence the training pipeline had dried up with the result that in the last couple of commissions Phantom and Buccaneer aircrew were all highly experienced having done at least 2 front line tours. Their maturity, professionalism and experience created an Air Group of exceptional quality. In my judgement this aircrew ability, together with world class aircraft which the Service had at last acquired in the 1970's found the Fleet with its greatest ever striking power since WW2 and represented the Fleet Air Arm at a pinnacle of performance. While it is not relevant to this article I cannot close without listing my favourite aircraft out of 45 types flown. I pick from military aircraft that fun machine the Hunter GA11. For light aircraft a Chipmunk and Stampe in equal first place. Looking back over 58 years in aviation at the exciting changes which took place it is the pleasure which flying has always given me that remains a constant theme. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. "The more it changes the more it remains the same." In spite of decades of turmoil and change, both political and operational since the Fleet Air Arm first came into being one thing remains the same; the motivation and Esprit de Corps of this elite band of people continues as strong as ever. And a



John Ford arrives at Yeovilton for the Squadron BBO 4 September 2010



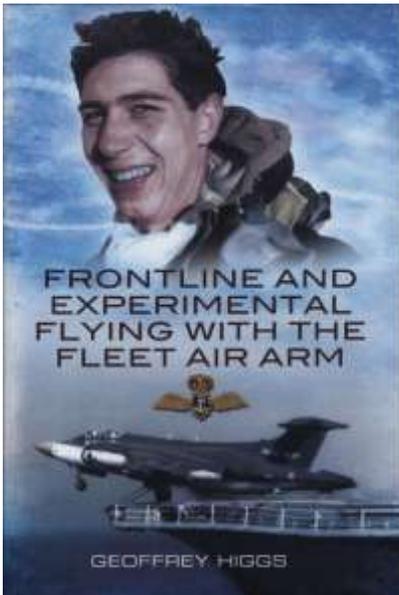
Book Review

By Roger Richardson Bunbury

Higgs Geoffrey Cdr. AFC RN. **FRONTLINE AND EXPERIMENTAL FLYING WITH THE FLEET AIR ARM ~ "Purely By Chance"**. Pen & Sword 1st 2010. 272pp ill. apps. ind. 165x241 Hardback £25

Geoff Higgs joined the navy at the beginning of 1944 under the 'Y' scheme. After HMS *St Vincent*, where unusually he concedes that the dreaded CPO Wilmott was liked by some, his flying training was in Canada flying the *Cornell & Harvard*. On return to the UK he was sent to the Fighter School at Yeovilton to fly *Corsairs* (the then 'glamour' machine and clearly a favourite of his), with a short detachment to the Naval School of Air Warfare at St Merryn. His first operational appointment was to 891 Squadron at Eglinton flying the night fighter version of the *Hellcat*. With the end of the war in the Far East a planned embarkation in *Ocean* was cancelled and in accordance with the terms of Lend Lease the *Hellcats* were dumped in the sea. Offered an extended 4-year commission he exchanged his wavy RNVR stripes for straight ones and was appointed to 846 Squadron operating *Corsairs*, part of the 14th CAG, aboard *Colossus*. He joined in Colombo after taking passage in *Devonshire*. *Colossus*, as many ships at that time, was being used as a temporary troop ship and after returning to UK the *Corsairs* went the way of the *Hellcats*. Higgs converted to *Seafire III*s and joined 804 Squadron, again part

of the 14th CAG, and embarked in *The-seus*. Showing the flag in the Far East in conjunction with *Glory* led to an intense social programme, a lack of continuation flying, and high attrition of the embarked aircraft. This is all vividly described, runs ashore included. From 804 he was appointed to CFS to train as an instructor and then to Syerston to train naval pilots, before being sent to Henstridge to train as a Deck Landing Control Officer, and going back to sea in *Illustrious* as the junior batsman. He seized the opportunity during a refit of doing a jet conversion course, and adding to the number of piston types he had flown. *Illustrious* was used for trials and training and he became involved in the former as well as



the latter, deck landing the *Gloster Meteor* and battling the *Supermarine Swift*, for which the wind over the deck had to be 50 knots! With an above average flying assessment he was an obvious candidate for ETPS where he duly arrived, after a spell as Deck Landing School Chief Instructor, and a period at sea in *Rocket* to earn a watchkeeping ticket. From ETPS he went to the Experimental Flying Department at RAEs Farnborough and Bedford. Although in the latter part of the 1950s there was gloom at the number of golden bowlers it seems in retrospect a halcyon time for the Fleet Air Arm with a number of exciting, and at least one outstanding, aircraft coming into service or already in service. However some were not so good and Higgs first involvement at RAE Farnborough was with the *Wyvern*, to correct the cause of engine failures after catapult launch. Moving on to Bedford he was involved in investigation of the blown flap *Sea Venom* and clearance of the *DH110* for carrier operation as the *Sea Vixen*, also the *N113 (Scimitar)* and assessment of the *Short Seamew*. Next came the Squadron Command Course followed by appointment to the *Scimitar* IFTU and then Senior Pilot of the first *Scimitar* Squadron (803) where he succeeded Cdr Des Russell as CO after the latter was drowned leading his squadron aboard *Victorious* (the wire his *Scimitar* hooked broke because of an incorrect setting on the arrestor gear). Later appointments included student at the RAF Staff College Manby, the US Armed Forces Staff College, SAACLANT in Norfolk Virginia, and taking over from Mike Crosley as CO of the Naval Test Squadron at Boscombe Down. His penultimate, and last flying, appointment was as CO of RAE Bedford. He was fortunate to have a large number of flying jobs, even if these were detrimental to his promotion prospects in the long term, and in the course of his service he flew close on 100 types. It is a rewarding account of a full and satisfying career and highly recommended for those who lived through the period the book covers; it should also make rewarding reading for present day naval aviators interested in FAA history. The indexing is deficient, in the main text I found the names of an appreciable number of people whom I knew but who don't feature in the index. There are also a number of obvious typos but these are minor blemishes in an otherwise excellent book which usefully records an epoch in the Fleet Air Arm's history which in retrospect seems golden.



Swansea May 22nd

By Henry Cooke

Its 0730 and already there's a text from Doc at North Weald: "Socked in, might not make the bus". To get to Swansea on time we need to take off by 10.30. Should be OK, there's plenty of time and it might clear up in the east in time for Doc and Helen to make

Swansea lineup, seen through the late landing Arrow



it. Time to leave for the airfield, and the car won't start – pressure is beginning to build. We arrived at the hangar in Yeovilton to find a hive of activity – we weren't the only ones leaving it until after the last minute. The odd nod of acknowledgement, but all are too busy on their pre-flight for chat. With some tweaking the aircraft is ready to go. Engines crackling to life around us and it really does feel like a squadron. Then our old radial coughs into life and the noise drowns out everything else so we are in our own little Piston Provost world again, at one with our aircraft. We like this..... Weather is improving everywhere and we are treated to a gorgeous day even if a little hazy. We cross the Bristol Channel below controlled airspace at 1,000ft. The section in Pilot's Notes under ditching wasn't too encouraging – it said "Don't". The view is fabulous however, as the Welsh coast stretches away from us. Approaching Swansea there are lots of Squadron aircraft on frequency. We're overtaken by Roger Dunn in his lovely Mooney – very swish (Me jealous? Never!). Lining up as number 5 on final we can see Doc and Helen's bright yellow RV on the ground already. As long as they attend Squadron meets, no one will have trouble finding the airfield! They had to cope with some ugly clouds but managed to find a way through – all in a days work according to Doc. Is that a runway in front of me or the wrong end of a ski jump? Swansea's runway managed to claim one victim by causing wheel shimmy on the nose wheel of a Jodel (Tim and Fiona Nicholas flown in from Sleaf by some friends) damaging a spat but other than that the Squadron was soon gathered as an eclectic rather than motley collection of aeroplanes. Great, the bus is ready. Not so the driver unfortunately, but eventually he shows up cheery enough and we drive to Clyde gardens only 10 minutes away. Best laid plans and

Shimmied nosewheel from Sleaf



Immaculate Mooney, pre crash!



all, the head gardener doesn't show up and we gather he has the time wrong. Hmm. Luckily for us Clare Cooke has the symbols "Dip Hort Kew" after her name so she is hastily recruited as the garden guide for the day. A little unfair as this is a garden of mostly rhododendrons and azalias and other acid loving plants. Clare hasn't studied these for a while as our garden is on clay, rather alkaline, soil.

Impressively she knows her stuff. Mind you, if she made them up, only Eve Bonham-Cozens would have known! Clyne gardens were fabulous. Absolutely the right time of year for visiting them. We followed some orange markers in a wide circle around the gardens with some off-road adventures for Jill Ashmead in her wheel chair. I'm not sure she enjoyed it, but we did! On the way we were treated to some incredible displays – handkerchief trees were at their most resplendent and it was obvious how they got the name. But the colours of the azalias and rhododendrons were really spectacular – and I'm a bloke! *Cercis silequastum* (Judas tree) was in full purple colour, there was a lovely magenta primula 'Miller's Crimson' as well as the Giant Rhubarb (*Gunnera manicata*), and an impressive collection of trees planted by 'The Admiral' who owned Clyne in the 1920's. By this time the sun was shining strongly and the verdant and colourful display in the gardens was so well worth the visit. Strolling around gave time for catching up, enjoying the place and some amusing banter. Entrance is free as the gardens are run by the local council for the public. We managed to herd the cats back on to the bus for the next drive to the Mumbles. We were all taken aback by the beauty of it as we drove along the coast of the Welsh Riviera here. We could have been in the south of France with Swansea standing in for Nice in the distance. The sea even looked inviting as we wound round the cliff edge towards lunch.

The restaurant "Castellamare" at Mumbles is a rare combination of stunning location and actually decent food. With a name like that it's Italian, but run by a family, and we were served efficiently and some of us were able to imbibe in non-alcoholic beer, fitting with the sunny day. Phil and Sue Moore joined us here, having been partying too late the



Lunch at the Castellamare

night before to get to the gardens on time. We sat overlooking the sea and surrounding cliffs, watching kids playing in the rock pools far below with yachts and boats littering the bays. Coffee out on the terrace staring out across the channel, soon gave way to that familiar restlessness when the collective

Clare & Henry Cook in their Provost



aviators silently conclude it's time to think about the flight home. I don't know how it happens, but suddenly everyone is focussed on their return flights, so getting folks back on the bus is relatively easy. The new Boss is still talking of course, but an un-subtle shove and we are driving back past the beaches to the airfield. Quick goodbyes, and we return to the pre-flight and the gaggle is quickly off and scattering to the corners of the UK. Our trip home treated us to a stunning crossing of the channel, past Cheddar Gorge and into Yeovilton in only 30 minutes. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly we can hop from one world to another like this. I look forward to exploring the coast west of Swansea again, hoping everyone else has had an equally agreeable trip home....



A blonde teenager, wanting to earn some extra money for the summer decided to hire herself out as a "handy-woman" and started canvassing a nearby "well-to-do" neighbourhood. She went to the front door of the first house, and asked the owner if he had any odd jobs for her to do. "Well, I guess I could use somebody to paint my porch," he said, "How much will you charge me?" Delighted, the girl quickly responded, "How about \$50?" The man agreed and told her that the paint brushes and everything she would need was in the garage. The man's wife, hearing the conversation said to her husband, "Does she realize that our porch goes all the way around the house?" He responded, "That's a bit cynical, isn't it?" The wife replied, "You're right. I guess I'm starting to believe all those dumb blonde jokes we've been getting by email lately."

Later that day, the blonde came to the door to collect her money. "You're finished already?" the husband asked. "Yes, the blonde replied, and I even had paint left over, so I gave it two coats." Impressed, the man reached into his pocket for the \$50.00 and handed it to her along with a \$10.00 tip. "And by the way sir, "the blonde added, "it's not a Porch, it's a Lexus."

A Lengthy Stay in the South of France

By Roger Dunn

“Roger, I have a problem with your aeroplane”!



This is the telephone call that owners and flying instructors dread. Having been an instructor, I immediately listened the tone of voice. It was not good. The situation was clearly serious, but at least the pilot was able to talk to me. “Where are you?” I asked, “In the Gendarme’s office with the French Air Accident Investigators.” “Where is the aeroplane?” “On the runway. They have closed the airport!” “Which airport?” “Cannes!” I eventually established that the pilot had made a wheels-up landing and that nobody was hurt. However, the wheels-up landing had had been deliberate after the pilot had been unable to lower the gear. He took off from Cannes with three passengers with a view to having lunch in Calvi. According to his report, about ten minutes after take-off a red OVER/ UNDER VOLTAGE alarm was displayed. He checked the ammeter, which was hard against the positive stop. The JPI engine monitor was flashing BATTERY OVER VOLTAGE. He called Cannes and advised his intention to return. Shortly after turning back all electrical power and communications were lost. On reaching the airfield he selected gear down, but there were no lights and he did not know whether he had been successful. He asked his passengers to use their mobile telephones to call the tower, but this was not successful. An attempt was made to lower the gear using the emergency system, but this was also unsuccessful. A decision was made to land on the grass runway, alongside the main runway. This was a good decision and was well executed as can be seen from a photograph taken by the airport authorities. A few days later I found myself on an Easyjet aircraft heading to Nice in the company of David, the Global Aerospace surveyor. He proved to be a very knowl-

edgeable and experienced engineer who was also a pilot and owned a share in an aircraft. This was to be the test of whether I had chosen the right insurers. Would they meet their reasonable obligations under the policy or would they wriggle and try and avoid paying out? I chose Global after receiving positive references about their claims performance, but that was many years ago. We duly arrived at Hangar 6 at Cannes to find the aircraft in the care of AERAC. It looked forlorn with its mangled propeller. Were AERAC capable of repairing it? Amazingly, everyone at AERAC seemed to speak fluent English. The chief engineer, Yanick, arrived shortly after us, flying a customer's Cessna 210. In minutes, it was apparent that Yanick was both a competent engineer and an enthusiast. An impressive Part 145 certificate was produced. I quickly concluded that, if the pilot of my aeroplane must crash in the South of France, he had chosen a good place to do so. The next task was to examine the damage under Yanick's guidance. Apart from the propeller, the external damage seemed minimal. However, Mooneys are very busy below the floor. They do not use wires and pullies. Everything is properly engineered with positive links. What we found, when we crawled underneath, was a tangled mess of tubes. If the pilot had simply forgotten to lower the gear, the situation would have been very different. Unfortunately, he had managed to lower the nose wheel partly, so that it was the first item to hit the ground. The weight forced the wheel back into its housing with devastating consequences. The nose wheel is lowered by the action of two long tubes that connect to an actuator near the trailing edge. The tubes had been subjected to compressive forces way in excess of their capabilities. They had buckled and bent everything in their path. The aircraft had skidded along on its fibreglass belly panel and external damage was limited to minor damage to the flap, gear doors and the step. I flew back to England in a more positive frame of mind to await AERAC's quotation. David stated that he would like me to place the order for the repairs and Global would reimburse me. Provided I was kept in funds, I was happy for this arrangement. I would have more control over the repairs and I could make sure that no short cuts were taken. I would also have David's expertise to fall back on, if required. A quotation for €36,000 (£30,000) duly arrived. This was within the range that Global were expecting. However, AERAC were requesting an up front payment of €25,000. Global were adamant that they would not accept this. They would pay for parts purchased and work done, but nothing more. AERAC were equally adamant that they should have the cash in advance to purchase the parts. We were at stalemate. Repatriating the aircraft to the UK is an





unattractive option with a Mooney, because it has a one piece wing and almost all the perfectly functioning services have to be removed or disconnected. Eventually, it managed to negotiate that I would purchase the parts and deliver them to AERAC and that AERAC would receive an appropriate handling fee in

lieu of the margin they would have earned on the parts. I opened a special Euro account and a large sum of money was quickly deposited in it by Global. Ordering the airframe spares from Mooney was straightforward. Yanick produced a detailed list and Lasar, a helpful Mooney service centre in the USA, gave me some good prices. The new McCauley propeller was ordered from the local agent, but I did not achieve the discount I was aiming for. The engine was a much more complicated matter. AERAC had proposed to use an Italian firm to carry out a shock load inspection. I did not feel comfortable with this, although Yanick spoke highly of them. What would happen, if I had a warranty claim? How would I deal with additional work that may be found necessary when the engine was stripped? I did not think that Global would be willing to pay for the cost of my return trips to Italy to sort these things out. I decided that if the engine had to be loaded onto a lorry it may just as well drive to England as Italy. Who to choose and what to have done? I decided to obtain quotes from three UK part 145 approved engine shops. Their prices were all within 10%, but there were important differences in the terms of the warranties that they offered. I decided to visit all three establishments. The first was the cheapest but the chief engineer only visited the place one day per week, the warranty conditions were not impressive, the business was loss making and liabilities exceeded assets according to the latest accounts filed at Companies House. However, I was impressed by the personnel and the facilities. They were a possibility, but I would need some assurances from the owners. My second visit undermined my faith in the Part 145 approval process. The premises were appalling. The place was untidy and dirty. I could detect no organized system of working. Scrap parts did not seem to be segregated from serviceable parts. However, it was run by an extremely knowledgeable engineer, who would probably produce a good result despite the circumstances, but not on my engine. The third visit was to Nicholson McLaren at Wokingham. They had excellent facilities and an impressive team. Many of the team were from the former CSE engine shop, which had previously overhauled my engine in 1999. Their

warranty terms were straightforward. They were 250hrs or one year for a shock load inspection and 500 hours or two years for a complete overhaul. The next question was whether to have a shock load inspection or a full overhaul. My engine had run for 850 hours since its last overhaul. The remaining 1150 hours should be more than adequate for the remainder of my flying career. However, an aircraft with 850 less hours would be much more saleable when the time came to stop flying. The decision was clear when I visited Nicholson McLaren to inspect the dismantled engine. There were various items of wear and tear, and a new camshaft was required. The extra cost of taking the engine to a full overhaul would be around £5,000. This was in line with the likely increase in the value of the aircraft and would provide the added comfort of knowing the engine was in tip top condition. Insurance companies have to protect themselves against unscrupulous owners who may be tempted to engineer a prop strike in order to obtain a cheap engine overhaul. The policy wording is drafted with this in mind, but it also provides less reputable insurers the opportunity of wriggling out of their proper liabilities. It was necessary to obtain the confirmation of the insurers that they would still pay the full quoted cost of the shock load inspection, if I instructed Nicholson McLaren to take the engine to a full overhaul. Agreement came back by return. My confidence in the integrity of Global Aerospace was confirmed. At the time of writing work is in hand on all fronts and I am hoping to be back in the air in October. I have learnt some valuable lessons from this experience. This must be the aeronautical equivalent to a ship being lost for a halfpenny worth of tar. All that was necessary to prevent this accident was to open one alternator circuit breaker when the over voltage alarm appeared, as set out in the emergency procedures. The battery had more than enough energy to provide communications and lower the gear on arrival at Cannes. There was a second opportunity to avoid this accident. The Mooney has a simple and rugged emergency system for lowering the gear. It is engaged by a lever and then operated by a handle, rather like that used to start some lawn mowers. Initially, one needs to move the handle slowly with pressure on the lever, until the mechanism clicks into engagement. Twenty more pulls on the handle completes the operation. Engagement was not achieved on this occasion and much energy was wasted pumping the handle. There was a further opportunity to minimize the damage to the engine and propeller by turning off the fuel and stopping the engine prior to touch down. This does not seem to have happened.



Boscombe Down Visit 2nd June 2010

By Nigel de Candole

It wouldn't be allowed nowadays but during flying training, if one let the aircraft's approach speed drop below the 'book' figures, one could expect a rap across the knuckles from the instructor. By the same token, the instructor expected you to keep such a good lookout that you knew the whereabouts of every other flying machine within visual range. Coming back from the Squadron visit to Andrewsfield in September with Bob Turner, such good training turned out to be a real boon. We were skirting



Boscombe Lineup

around Middle Wallop concentrating on avoiding their traffic when a quick check ahead indicated the massive bat-like shape of Avro Vulcan XH558 blacking out the sky about 1 mile ahead, heading towards us about 100 feet above. A positive dive

to starboard soon put us out of harm's way. And so it was on Thurs 02 June as I and Mike Wills in our diminutive Jodel headed towards Salisbury for the Boscombe visit. Our eyes were out on stalks scanning the skies. All those warnings about aircraft carrying out high energy manoeuvres at all altitudes in the Boscombe AIAA area had been well and truly heeded. This was the 'Big One'. The FAA Squadron was formed about 14 years ago and the holy grail had always been a visit to A&AE Boscombe Down. No success for 14 years until Wing Commander Clive Rustin ETPS, RAF Joined the Squadron. As a result of his good offices, large hangar doors were opened and a visit to this important airfield was at last secured. As instructed in the Op Order, we called up Boscombe at 15 miles and were invited to join for the main runway. Eyes were now in overdrive looking out for perhaps a test pilot working out the flight envelope for a Mig 21 or some other exotic species. Nothing! Boscombe was like the aviation equivalent of the 'Marie Celeste'. It looked as though ATC had wisely cleared their native traffic for the Squadron's allocated 30 minute landing slot. So joining for a straight-in on 05, we were greeted with the most enormous runway we had ever seen at 3212 metres long. Wide enough to land a whole squadron in echelon port and we could not even see the far end! To taxi



Lunch in the Mess



about 2 miles would have probably worn out our tiny tail wheel so we air – taxied to the turn-off point and along to No22 apron under the control of attentive marshalls. Within about 30 minutes under glorious blazing sunshine, 13 Squadron aircraft were safely parked and shepherded into a coach by our host. We all

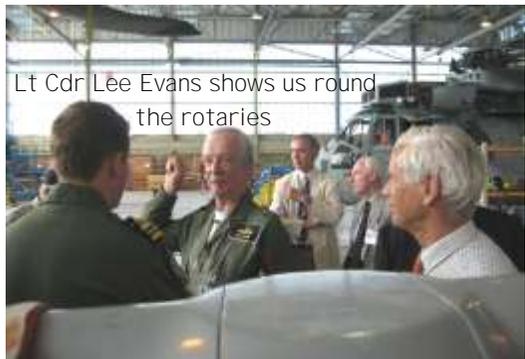
assembled in the Empire Test Pilots' School (ETPS) where we were joined by a healthy number of Squadron members who had arrived by road. Once settled in the School we were welcomed by the CO, Cdr Mario Carretta R.N. who introduced us to Lt Cdr Tim Eldridge who gave a comprehensive talk on the history and philosophy of ETPS. He explained that ETPS does not actually do test flying but instead, trains up experienced pilots to become test pilots. The course is extremely expensive and consequently there is a very strict selection procedure for candidates who come from the UK military, overseas military and a small number of civilians. The course lasts for one year and comprises an intensive programme of ground school and flying where students are taught techniques to develop an incremental approach to test flying. The success rate for UK students is extremely high but slightly lower for other students. ETPS was formed in 1943 at RAE Farnborough to cope with the vast and rapid development of military aircraft for the war effort. In 1967 it was moved to A&AE Boscombe Down where it remains today. The school has so far trained 763 pilots and produces about 9 pilots a year. During the presentation, Tim showed a video of a series of test flying disasters from the early days. It included a selection highly spectacular and some gut-wrenching incidents of flights that went badly wrong. Needless to say, the audience was spellbound. After the presentation, the guests were driven over to the Officers' mess for a delicious buffet lunch with a wide and varied selection of dishes. Judging by the numbers who went 'round the buoy' it appeared to be very well received. A visit to the ETPS hangar followed in which the very chatty engineers showed groups of visitors around the aircraft. Examples included Tornados, Gripen, Alpha jets and a Hawk. Few of the aircraft were actually what they seemed. For example, the Hawk is a 'Varistab Astra'; the only 'fly-by-wire' Hawk whereby the aircraft can be programmed for different aerodynamic characteristics. Tornados normally require two crew but one of the ETPS Tornados had been adapted for single seat operation, the rear seat having been rebuilt to allow the operation of UAVs (drones) by the rear seat crew. The engineers



emphasised the increasing importance of UAVs and showed a number of aircraft including a commercial light twin Diamond DA42 aircraft which were being trialled in this role. Helicopters that were available for the rotary wing students included a Gazelle, Lynx, Sea King and A109. The final visit was to the Rotary Wing Evaluation

Squadron hosted by Lt Cdr Lee Evans. This unit has a range of current military helicopters which are used to evaluate new equipment. The workload is currently extremely high as a result of the high priority for modifications to assist in the Afghan war. The visitors were invited to inspect all the aircraft and judging by the continuous barrage of questions, interest was extremely high. As with all previous cutting-edge visits, time was all too short. Squadron members had to be prised out of the hangar, lured by a cup of tea and biscuits back at ETPS. The day was rounded off by a talk by Cdr Mario Carretta who outlined the relationship between Qinetiq, the operators of Boscombe Down and the Aircraft Test and Evaluation Collaboration or ATEC. He explained that owing to the extreme complexity of modern jets requiring highly specialised engineering back-up, test equipment and highly trained crew, it was not economically viable to duplicate these resources both at operational bases and at Boscombe Down. As a result, test flying of such aircraft as Harriers and Typhoons is now done by operational pilots at the front line bases supported by the relevant expertise from Boscombe Down and the manufacturers. Cdr Carretta also outlined the revised structure for the introduction of new equipment. In times past, the manufacturer would carry out its own test flight programme. After these trials, the aircraft would then be handed to Boscombe Down for the military test flying programme. Finally an Operational Flying trial would be formed for intensive in-service trials. In an effort to reduce the lead-time for new equipment and costs of all these trials, an integrated test and evaluation system had been introduced to streamline the whole process. The Squadron C.O., Michael Ryan thanked Cdr

Carretta and all his staff for a fascinating day. Once again the party ventured out into the blazing sunshine, the ground party taking to the road while the air party manned their aircraft and departed at around 17:00hrs in their usual well-disciplined manner to their home airfields.



Peter Lovegrove Hands Over The Treasury

By Michael Ryan, CO FAA Squadron

When the Fleet Air Arm Squadron was "commissioned" Peter took over the task of treasurer and has been doing that job ever since. We are very grateful for his work and attention to detail. However as Peter tells me being now in his 80's he feels that someone else should take over. This month he will be handing over to John Marriott who will also be looking after Membership Joining matters and associated details. So on behalf of the Squadron thank you Peter and we look forward to seeing you flying in to future events. Whilst writing I would also like to introduce a change in our method of collecting annual contributions to Squadron Funds. We have found that many forget their renewals and they take up a lot of time to chase. So to help Members remember and John Marriott and others time in collection all contributions towards annual membership will be by Standing Order from November this year. Those who are still behind, and there are a few, will be asked to catch up on their Standing Order renewal. Because Standing Orders tend to be forgotten once in place I propose that this system will be in place until November 2012 when it will be reviewed. In this case I propose to change the minimum contribution to £25 a year.



Rotax 'Rubberings'!!

Tony Ashmead reports: I have had repeated trouble over the last year with the rubber mounts of the Rotax's carburettors; a potentially serious problem. Oh! said Mr Rotax, we have had continual problems with the supply of rubber parts and we have changed the spec. You need Part No 267789, not 267788. Naturally both mine were 88's and nice Mr Rotax replaced them for over £100. I am absolutely disgusted that LAA did not issue a warning to 912 owners but left it to them to find out via the complicated Rotax internet site. I'm not sure we have enough 912 owners in the Squadron but if there are any please be advised that 88 mounts should be changed for 89's or at least 88's should be inspected for failure inside the bore on the bottom at 50 hour intervals (more often in my experience).



Diary of Events 2010

September 24th-27th

Ireland Long Weekend *

(Anthony Stevens 01430441766 & Michael Bonham-Cozens)

October 21st

RAF Wattisham *

(David Ockleton 01935706602 & Brian Hamilton)

November 27th

Annual Dinner at HMS Collingwood

(Michael Ryan 01935812470)

Members of the FAAOA living in the area will be invited by the Squadron to join in the asterixed events above



The Squadron Buzz is the quarterly "Newsletter" of the Fleet Air Arm Squadron. The editor invites contributions including photographs from all members (e.g. Reports, Letters, News, Anecdotes, Flying Information etc.). Please submit for Buzz No 56 by the deadline date of Friday 26th November 2010 to :

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