

# 'Take Up Slack'



*A History of  
The London  
Gliding Club  
1930 - 2000*

EDWARD HULL

Published in 2000 by  
WOODFIELD PUBLISHING  
Bognor Regis, West Sussex PO21 5EL, UK.

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This book is No. .... of a limited edition of 500



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# BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE WOODEN SWORD	Lawrence Wright	Elek
ON BEING A BIRD	Philip Wills	Max Parrish & Co
SAILPLANE & GLIDING		British Gliding Association
LONDON GLIDING CLUB GAZETTE		London Gliding Club

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to many people who have contributed stories and memories to fill these pages. If I have omitted your name from the list below, please accept my apology.

M.Beach, M.Bird, G.Boswell, J.Cardiff, P.Claiden, R.Clear, L.Collins, L.Costello, J.Currie, A.Doughty, C.Ellis, A.Erskine, M.Fairman, P.Hearne, M.Hodgson, J.Jeffries, W.Kahn, P.Langford, B.Middleton, G.Moore, L.Moulster, T.Newport-Peace, G.Nixon, R.Pollard, F.Pozerskis, P.Ramsden, C.Richardson, M.Riddell, D.Ruffett, F.Russell, M.Russell, V.Russell, M.Simons, D.Smith, G.Smith, T.Southard, B.Stephenson, G.Stephenson, M.Thick, M.Till, S.Tomlin, P.Underwood, C.Vernon, R.Walker, A.Welch, R.White, C.Withall.

Extra special thanks to Laurie Woodage, Roger Barrett, Peter Parker and Tim Godfrey. Without

their devotion to putting my text and pictures on to computer disc, editing and generally advising on the production of this book, nothing would have come about.

Most of the photographs are from my own collection supplemented by those from Les Moulster, Les Collins, Chris Wills and Lou Costello whom I thank.

Front cover: THE OLD AND THE NEW  
Tony Hutching's magnificent picture of Robin May forming his AS-H 25 on Geoff Moore's SG-38 Primary.

Back cover: NOSTALGIA  
Eric Collins soaring the Downs in the Kassel 20 in 1933 watched by his wife and their dog.



# FOREWORD

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by Ann Welch OBE, MBE

*Ann Welch*

Pioneering days are always exciting, with their unexpected twists and turns, particularly if others involved have enterprise and determination even to the extent of pigheadedness. The early days of gliding fully explored this unknown route to the future, with the London Gliding Club at Dunstable in the forefront of any drama, confusion and fun that was going.

'Take Up Slack' is a history in anecdotes of the Club from its 1929 inception mixed with the embryo BGA, beginning with its search for a flying field for its (very) primary gliders. The first site that showed any promise was Ivinghoe Beacon after which came Dunstable Downs. Once having a home, even with the coldest, dampest bunkhouse ever (I slept in it!) enthusiasm was irrepressible. Pilots with all of 50 minutes total flying became instructors and any who could use a hammer built winches or repaired gliders. Everyone was kept fit - and hungry - by endless bungee launching. Kind people took on the bar and the catering. By the mid-thirties the Club's financial wizards had enough money to build the famous Clubhouse designed by Kit Nicholson.

By the start of World War Two the Club was well established and internationally famous. During the conflict Club members joined the forces, notably providing a competent nucleus for the infant Glider

Pilot Regiment. The Club site became a prisoner of war camp.

Post-war, as glider performance and speeds improved, the field had somehow to be relieved of its deep gulleys and cable-catching obstructions as well as becoming larger. The story of how this was achieved, again by its members, is a lesson for any other club with a similar site problem.

My first contact with Dunstable was in 1937 when I went on the Anglo-German Camp (not then called a course). I already had an aeroplane 'A' licence but without much money, and very few hours. A friend told me that gliding was cheaper, but another dismissed it as aerial tobogganing. However, for £16 for two weeks with everything included I ignored the derisory bit. I arrived at Dunstable station by train, walked to the Club and was hooked. Gliding had everything about flying that I liked and wanted. Out in the open with ever changing skies, watching the antics of other beginners, helping to mend gliders, listening to pilots talk about their hairy flights, going on retrieves to unknown destinations; trying to make a Dagling soar on the Hill for 5 minutes to get a 'C' and being promoted to the Grunau Baby took all one's concentration!

Ted Hull's book is divided into a chronological history of the Club and its members followed by a series of specialist chapters ranging from winches to ghosts. It is a very readable story about enterprise, both individual and corporate, in the 'gang' sense of that word. For the many people who have stayed with gliding for more years than they care to think about it will bring back happy memories. For new pilots it is a revealing glimpse of how gliding left its stone age.



*Ann Welch*

# INTRODUCTION

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**T**he old Rolls Royce teetered on the edge of the slope and rolled forward, gathering speed and rocketing from bump to bump as it plunged down the face of Dunstable Downs. In spite of having no driver at the wheel it kept a straight course, flattening the scrubby bushes in its way. Bursting through the last line of hedgerow, it reached Hangar Ridge and veered down the incline to finish with its nose high up in the bushes on the Lynchets pathway. Walter Neumark was the first of the London Gliding Club members to reach the vehicle and saw to his surprise an ancient lady seated in the back of the old saloon. In his soft spoken, precise English he politely enquired of her, 'Good afternoon madam, did you have an enjoyable ride?' Some time later a young man appeared, enquiring after the fate of the passenger. Looking for his inheritance, perhaps?

This is one of the fund of stories that old-time members of the Club bring out when their memories are jogged to recall events from long

ago. Before their recollections faded forever, it seemed to be a good idea to ask around and get them on record as a sequel to the early history of the LGC written by Dudley Hiscox. Much of it is trivia but then this all provides an insight into gliding during a bygone era. Different people, different machines, different methods. Those were the days when a cross country flight was a downwind dash without the aid of radio, GPS or mobile phone, when retrieve cars followed the presumed track of their pilot and phoned back to base hourly to see if or where he had landed. The days indeed when not many glider pilots were car owners and had to rely on a Club retrieving vehicle to get them back from an outlanding.

As the three little words 'Take Up Slack' signal the start of the adventure that is embodied in each and every flight in a glider, so let it open this collection of tales of epic flights, the records, the development of the London Gliding Club and of the characters that made it all happen.



## BEGINNINGS

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**T**he earliest reports of gliding take us back to the times of Greek mythology with the story of Icarus and his father Daedalus who constructed wings of feathers and wax and inspired many mediaeval attempts to conquer the air. Wings were strapped on and jumps made from church towers, usually with fatal results, as man tried to copy the birds. Around 1800, a Yorkshire baronet, Sir George Cayley, who built up an incredible record of invention and experimentation, turned his mind to the problems of aviation and within a few short years had reasoned out the theory and aerodynamics involved. He built model gliders derived from kites and established the classic layout of wings, fuselage and separate tail surfaces. By 1850 he had built full sized gliders, one of which carried a small boy, and in 1853 carried out the now famous flight carrying his coachman across Brompton Vale on his country estate. Little happened in this country for another forty years until Percy Pilcher, a naval lieutenant, built a series of hang gliders following the ideas of Otto Lilienthal. Structural failure of one of these terminated his career and his life in 1899 and while the Wright Brothers persevered in America, adding a motor to one of their gliders and achieving the first powered flight, little was done here with gliders until Jose Weiss's experiments in 1909.

It was the ban on powered flying imposed on the Germans by the 1918 Treaty of Versailles that directed interest there into unpowered flight and from 1919 onwards, meetings for gliding enthusiasts were held on the Wasserkuppe in the Rhon Mountains. Progress was swift, glider design and construction progressing very rapidly. As news of this spread, Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of the Daily Mail, seized the opportunity of stimulating interest in aviation in this country by offering a

£1,000 prize for the longest glider flight of over thirty minutes at a meeting to be held at Itford on the South Downs. Although thirty five gliders were entered for the competition, only ten materialised. As the days went on, longer and longer flights were achieved until a Frenchman, Maneyrol, in a tandem winged glider of his own design and construction, flew for three hours and twenty one minutes to take the honours. The event did not encourage any long term interest in gliding and it was not until 1929, when the stories of great flights being achieved in Germany filtered through, that 'Aeroplane' magazine organised a lunch for interested parties at the Comedy restaurant in London. No less than fifty six people turned up and of these, thirty seven ganged up to try and start up a gliding Club in the London area. In 1952 Doc Slater wrote up what followed in the London Gliding Club Gazette, and this is his report:

### ***'How the Club started'***

*by A. E. Slater.*

*The London Gliding Club was officially inaugurated on February 20th 1930, at a meeting in 'Dr. William's Library' 14 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, at 7.45pm This was my first contact with the Club. I had seen an announcement of the meeting in 'Flight' of February 14th, and wrote to the Secretary, S.O.Bradshaw, whose address was*



*J.R. (Toby) Ashwell-Cooke,  
founder member and first  
Chairman of the London  
Gliding Club.*

given. Fortunately, in his reply, the day of the week was legible because the date was not.

There was a crowd of about fifty people, and in the chair was J.R. (Toby) Ashwell-Cooke, who must have been in his early twenties and looked even younger. He was an active member of the Cinque Ports Flying Club at Lympne and owned a Moth. Several people from aircraft factories got up and said how they could use their position to further the interests of the Club, and I said I intended to go to a German gliding school and learn. This idea was welcomed because nobody appeared to have the slightest idea how gliding could be safely taught to beginners. I paid over my annual subscription of one guinea and entrance fee of half a guinea to Thurstan James, then on the staff of 'The Aeroplane' and now its Editor, and still possess my application form on which he wrote: 'I collected this money at the meeting and gave him a temporary receipt. Get him to sign this form or we shall be liable for injury, etc.' But as the next twenty one years have shown (touch wood) he needn't have worried.

This meeting was not, however, the beginning of the Club, for it already ran to headed notepaper and printed forms. In fact it would be difficult to date the Club's birth, because at the start it was inextricably mixed with the British Gliding Association. The famous Gliding Lunch of December 4th, 1929 was originally called to form a gliding club, not an association; but at the end of the lunch, after the fifty six people had started the Association, a show of hands revealed thirty seven of them willing to join a club in the London district. But it was on an undiscoverable date in January 1930 that some of them got together and set up a Provisional Committee. So, as the Kent Gliding Club had already been formed on the 4th January, ours was not the first.

Nor were we quite the first to get into the air for the Kent Club, under the direction of C.Lowe-Wylde, built a Primary glider in five weeks and hopped it for thirty yards at Detling on February 23rd. This machine was still in use when the war began.

Our own first flights were made on March 16th, 1930, at Stoke Park Farm, near the Guildford works of R.F.Dagnall. We had a German Zogling on loan from the BGA and Dagnall had presented us with a modified type of Zogling with the tail supported by four metal tubes instead of a 'five-barred gate'. Hence the name 'Dagling' for such machines.

Something went wrong with the publicity. Ashwell-Cooke had been to the Kent Club's show and had noted how the crowds had not only blocked the approach roads to Detling so densely that the glider was nearly prevented from getting there, but when they saw it make no more than a few miserable hops, their disappointment nearly led to a riot.

So we decided that not a word of our intentions should reach the press. Unfortunately a rather prominent aviator, who had been in trouble and evidently wished to rehabilitate himself in the public eye, got wind of it and informed the press that he could be seen flying a glider at the specified place and time. The resulting crowd was not unmanageable, but the pressmen were considerably surprised at their cool reception, and the Daily Mail man could be heard murmuring: 'After all we did for them in the past!' His paper had promoted the Itford meeting in 1922, and the 'Motor-Glider Competitions' in 1923.

The ground was a flat field, with the River Wey at the upwind end, ready to receive anyone who flew too far. But nobody reached it, although we were launching with twelve people on each bungee rope,



First meeting of the London Gliding Club, March 1930 at Stoke Park Farm near Guildford with a Zogling borrowed from the BGA and R.F. Dagnall's Dagling.



*after several abortive attempts to get the machines off the ground with fewer. Among those launched were Lord Semphill, E.C.Gordon England, Capt. Latimer-Needham, and Marcus Manton (one of Britain's earliest aviators, and my first gliding instructor); also Ashwell-Cooke, the only one who landed without a bump because he kept just above the ground throughout his flight. Finally, Dagnall himself was persuaded to fly his own creation. I remember hearing him ask: 'I suppose I wait until it starts moving, and then pull the stick back?' but nobody answered him. Evidently taking it that silence means assent he did precisely this, shot up to about 50ft and then came more or less to a dead stop, side-to-wind. A few moments later he was to be seen extricating himself from a heap of little bits of Dagling, covered from head to foot with a thick layer of alluvial mud.*

*The following weekend saw the commencement of training at our first 'permanent' site. Great efforts had been made to find somewhere on the south side of London, on the ground that communications were better there. But the various landowners failed to co-operate, though we very nearly fixed one at Westerham.*

*The site actually found was not far from our present one; it was in the Tring direction, a few miles north of Aldbury. Here, where a road runs up a dry valley, there are steep slopes on either side facing north east and south west respectively. They were just right for getting 'A' certificates, with the result that instruction was continually being held up by well-known airmen demanding flights down the hill. On our first day there Lowe-Wylde brought along his Primary and obtained the No.1 British Gliding Certificate.*

*As for us pupils, ground-slides had not yet been invented. My first launch was into a fair wind with four strong men on each bungee pulling their hardest, and I was up to 15ft in no time, never having been off the ground solo before.*

*We usually started each weekend with two Primaries and finished up with one or less. Their steerability was so distrusted that no 'expert' would be launched in one from the top until the other one had been cleared right off at the bottom. Once we boldly flung Latimer-Needham over the edge of Pitstone Hill into a westerly gale. The Zogling obviously wanted to soar, but he deemed it more prudent to push its stick forward and whizz down to the bottom with all wires screaming.*

*The gliders were housed, and tea was provided, at Down Farm near by. Here one could see people out*

*of the history books: I well remember the thrill of sitting beside Howard-Flanders and being passed the bread-and-butter by Handley Page. There were many such people from among the founders of British aviation who came along to recapture that pioneering spirit they had once known. No doubt the crashery helped to bring it all back to them.*

*After using the site for just over a month, we were turned off on the grounds that the noise disturbed the birds: Ashridge Park adjoined the flying ground. And about this time the annual subscription was raised to three guineas.*

*During this period the ab-initio pupils had made no real progress at all. Too often, on turning the least bit out of wind, they would allow themselves to be swung right around onto a wing tip. Being under the false impression that they knew what they were doing and couldn't help it, my erstwhile confidence began to ooze away. So I went off for five or six weeks to the Rossitten Gliding School in East Prussia, spent about £40, got forty six launches in all, and early in the second week fulfilled my ambition of becoming the first British ab-initio to get a gliding certificate. In those early days, everybody who was mixed up in gliding wanted to be the first to do something or other.*

*By the middle of May 1930, the Club had secured the use of Ivinghoe Beacon. Whereupon the LMS Railway Company put out a leaflet, headed, 'Please retain this bill for reference' (which I have done), and below that in large letters 'GLIDING at IVINGHOE'. Cheap tickets, it said, are issued from Euston to Tring on Saturdays, Sundays and Thursday (though Wednesday was our recognised mid-week flying day) at 6/8d First Class and 4/- Third. Firsts were allowed 120lb of luggage and Third Class 60lb. No doubt the Company thought that was ample, seeing that Octave Chanute's glider, the only one fully described in English textbooks at the time, weighed only 22lb.*

*I got back from Germany to find all the ab-initio group waggling the stick furiously throughout each hop, every movement being a violent correction of the effects of the one before. But one pupil, Graham Humby, soon drew ahead of the rest, and by the end of July he got his 'A' after a launch off the top of the Beacon into a frighteningly violent wind, in which he actually soared the Primary for nearly ten seconds. He thus became the first ab-initio to obtain a British gliding certificate. (Note the subtle difference between his priority claim and mine).*

*Meanwhile, early in June, the Club had taken part in a demonstration at Itford on the South Downs.*

*Here Robert Kronfeld did some magnificent soaring in his 'Wien' sailplane, with the stimulating result that a lot of new clubs were formed and our own membership leaped ahead. While there, Latimer-Needham soared a Prufling for eleven minutes and became the first British 'C' Pilot.*

*The next big event was our first Instruction Camp, held at Ivinghoe Beacon from July 26th to August 3rd inclusive. £2-10-0 was charged for instruction and tent accommodation throughout the period. Our two Primaries had been joined by a Prufling and a Poppenhausen two seater, while there were also a privately owned Prufling and 'the first sailplane of British design' the Albatross of Latimer-Needham, built by Halton apprentices.*

*These lads, by the way, used to bicycle over regularly from Halton but that institution, whose job should have been to inculcate air-mindedness, had forbidden them to fly. So we arranged that if any of them should suffer damage as the result of a Primary hop, it would be explained away as a 'cycling accident'*

*The camp started with a Prufling match between us and the Lancashire Aero Club; but it was never completed because one of their pilots flew the machine into the trees at the foot of the Beacon.*

*Another event at Ivinghoe was a visit by the Prince of Wales on July 18th, when Kronfeld soared his Wien and then demonstrated an up-hill down-wind landing in the Prufling.*

*Next, we were turned off Ivinghoe Beacon because it was National Trust property and we were spoiling its peaceful enjoyment by the public. Actually, until the public turned up in force to see us glide, hardly a soul had ever been seen near the place.*

*In October we earned good money by lending a glider for the shooting of a film scene near Lewes.*

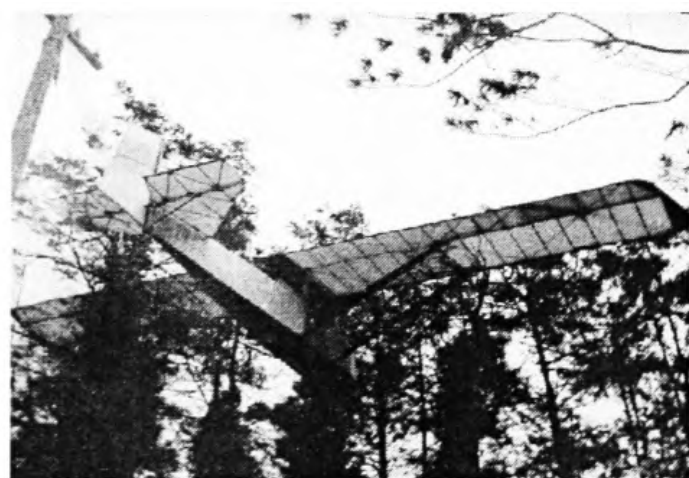
*The glider was supposed to 'crash' and Lupino Lane shot out of it and stood on his head; but the incident was eventually cut out of the film. There was also a further visit to the South Downs for an inter-club competition.*

*In that month, also, we began using a field on the west side of the Tring Road, with a gentle slope towards Totterhoe down which it was possible to glide for thirty seconds, from a vigorous launch. And a Club circular stated that negotiations were under way for a permanent site at 'Pascombe Pit'. You may be surprised to know that we are still there. Pascombe Pit is none other than our dear old 'Boul'.*

*By now, piloting skill was simply forging ahead, for in November it was announced that special instruction would be given to an 'advanced group'. And what was the definition of an 'advanced' pilot? Why, one who had already got his 'A' Certificate.*

*And now to summarise the first year's finances as announced at the Annual General Meeting on February 25th, 1931. Total assets were valued at £413-15-0. Expenditure for the year was £512-17-7, of which £233-7-11 went in 'repairs and maintenance of gliders, etc.' Subscriptions brought in £407-8-0, and flying money, gate money, etc. £87-17-7; donations £110; and from the film company £100 guineas 'fee' and £57-10-0 for 'expenses'. Total receipts were £767-5-7, giving an excess of Income over Expenditure of £254-8-0.*

*Concerning this hardly credible excess a sobering footnote explains, not in the best grammar: 'It must be specially noted that in the above account is credited certain recurring receipts, which result in a rather larger net balance than there may be in future normal years.' How true!*



*Lancashire Aero Club's Prufling in trees at foot of Ivinghoe Beacon.*



## ANCIENT HISTORY

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Going into a little bit of the history of the Club surroundings prior to its founding in 1930, the site lies alongside the Icknield Way, which was the ancient east-west trade route for some 3,000 years. It probably ran along the top of the Downs when the lower ground was forested. You can still see a diagonal path down the face of the Bastion to the south east corner, which was used as a drover's path for bringing stock down to water at the Wellhead and was built by the Romans.

Above the Bowl, which is known locally as Pascombe Pit, are the Five Knolls, a series of bowl and bell barrows, burial mounds from the Bronze Age 2,000BC. When excavated in 1928 a number of beakers and burial urns were discovered. Nearby was found a mass grave where the skeletons had their hands tied behind them and it was assumed this was an execution site.

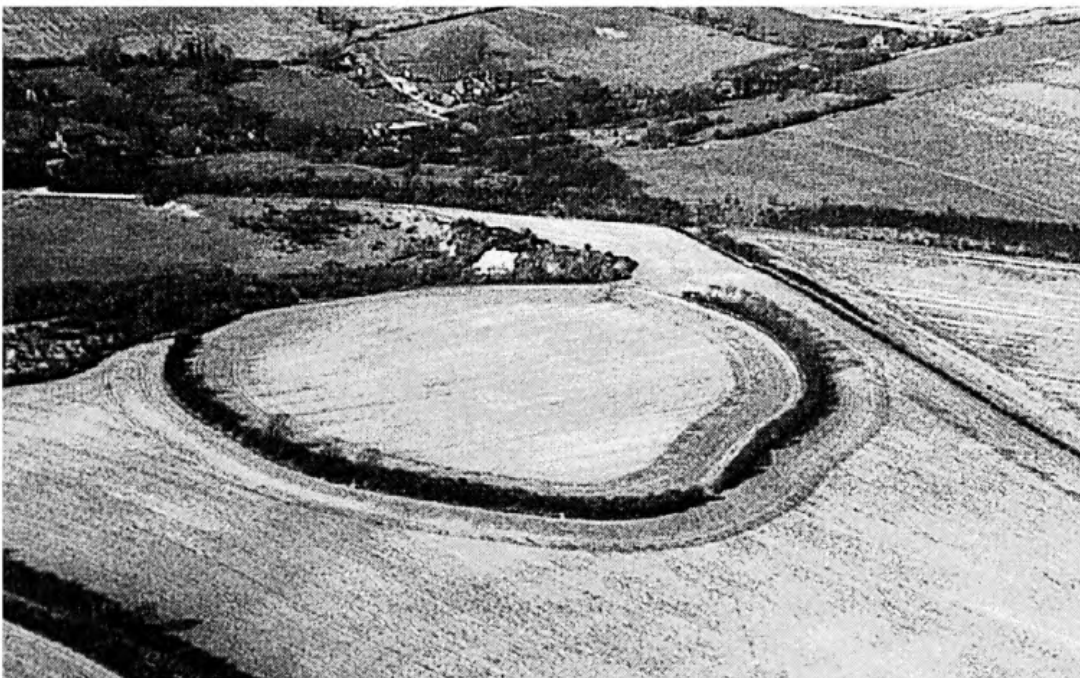
The name Pascombe is derived from the dark purple Pasque flower, a type of anemone, which used to bloom on the chalk Downs.

Two tumuli used to stand on the golf course and when these were opened up one revealed the skeleton of a crouching boy, the other a mother with her child in her arms. Also in the graves were

fragments of ancient British pottery, flint implements and fossil shells.

At the foot of the Bowl is a flattened chalk platform, which was a Roman amphitheatre. In the 1870s the Rifle Volunteers used this for shooting butts, and on old Ordnance Survey maps are shown the fire points at hundred yard intervals along the face of the Downs where platforms were levelled. There used to be a pub called *The Rifle Volunteer* at the junction of the road up to the Downs and the Tring Road. This was demolished in the sixties and a weird and wonderful roadhouse called *The Windsock* erected. This did not have a right angle anywhere in its construction and even the floors sloped. It disappeared from the scene at the end of the seventies after a large part of its roof blew away, and blocks of flats replaced it.

There used to be a ceremony every Good Friday afternoon when crowds of people gathered above the Bowl to roll oranges down the slope towards children clustered at the bottom, who would scramble for the fruit. The origins of the event seem to have been long forgotten but, according to the local history society, they certainly went back to Victorian times. It has been suggested that the rolling symbolised the rolling aside of the stone



*The Iron Age  
encampment  
Maiden Bower just  
to the north of the  
Club.*

sealing Christ's tomb but then, one would have expected the ceremony to take place on Easter Sunday. Who knows? The orange rolling was suspended during the war years due to non-availability of the fruit but recommenced soon after. It was stopped some twenty years later when the local yobs started pelting the onlookers with the fruit and the authorities cried 'Enough'.

From the air, you can see a long mound on top of the Bowl, which was originally considered to be a long barrow but is now thought to be a mediaeval rabbit warren. Rabbits were introduced as a food source by the Romans and were farmed in man-made warrens. Eventually, escapees spread across the countryside and became a pest.

If you look at photographs of the Club site and the Hill taken prior to the nineteen fifties you will see that the Hill had hardly any bushes on it at all. The Hill was a smooth grass-covered slope and this was because it was grazed by sheep and closely cropped by the large rabbit population. It was the epidemic of myxomatosis that virtually wiped out the rabbits and allowed the hawthorns and other bushes to get a foothold and spread over most of the slopes. Some years ago, a squad of Boy Scouts attacked the face of the Bastion and cleared a large stretch below the diagonal drovers' track. For several weekends they chopped and burnt the growth but it was too big a job to last and it was abandoned to nature once more.

Shown on old maps is a pathway which led from the Club gates up the now filled-in gully to the foot of the drover's way on the Downs, and was called Sweetway Bottom. Bedford Records Office holds the old tithe maps from 1848, which show the field systems and the names for each part of them. Our Hangar Ridge was known as Nutpath Hill and the caravan patch as Cole's Bottom.

About a mile to the north of the Club can be seen a large circular field on the edge of Totternhoe Quarry. This is Maiden Bower, an enclosure dating back to the Iron Age, some 2,500 years ago. It has not been established whether these sites were religious in nature or trading centres but it does seem they were not domestic settlements. Some forty years ago, in Spring, it was possible to see patterns in the crops growing inside the circle denoting ditches or perhaps storage hut sites, but now after years of deep ploughing, these are no longer showing up from the air. Totternhoe itself has its Castle Hill, surmounted by a Norman motte and bailey with the Roman camp site called Castle Yard adjoining. The deep ditch and embankment around it date from earlier times.

Other ancient sites near the Club lie on top of Ivinghoe Beacon where the faint outline of the earliest Iron Age fort in Britain can be seen, and to the north east is Ravensburgh Castle near Barton in the Clay. A Romano-British cemetery has been unearthed in the middle of Dunstable and the site of a very large Roman villa was found opposite the church in Totternhoe in 1923. It was partly excavated and then covered up again to preserve it.

Dunstable used to be the main supplier of skylarks (the feathered variety), to the food markets of London in Victorian times and trapping was a local occupation. There used to be a well-known expression 'Sings like a Dunstable lark' as these birds were caged and sold in those days. Loss of grassland has led to the demise of this attractive bird and it is very unusual to see one nowadays. Twenty years ago they were very common on the field. Perhaps our big tractors and gang mowers have something to answer for. Another now rare bird that used to be around was the Red-backed Shrike.



## THE THIRTIES & FORTIES

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**D**udley Hiscox, in his book *History of the London Gliding Club*, captured the spirit of pioneering and experiment that characterised the gliding movement in the nineteen thirties. To recount the happenings of the next fifty or so years it has been necessary to draw on the memories of later members of the Club and put them on record before they fade away. It also seems a good idea to enlarge on one or two historic and interesting events from the pre-war period that Dudley did not cover.

Charles Ellis wrote the following piece describing the scene in 1935 when he joined the Club:

*When I arrived at Dunstable in February 1935 the site was vastly different from its appearance today. The Club buildings consisted of a wooden ex-army hut that served as a clubhouse including kitchen and bar with a tiny bunkhouse at one end known as the Cumberland Hotel. This building still stands and says a lot for prefabricated building for temporary accommodation of troops and munitions workers of the 1914-18 War. Where the present*

*clubhouse stands were two wooden hangars with a small workshop at the rear, and next a corrugated iron hangar provided by Imperial College whose gliding club had a mutually beneficial reciprocal arrangement with LGC.*

*There was hardly a trailer in sight and those that existed were of open framework with canvas covers. There were two winches only, one of which was for launching and the other was fixed at the bottom of the Hill and drove an endless cable that went round a wheel at the top of the Downs and was used for pulling gliders directly up the side of the Downs. One recognised those members privileged to fly from 'the top' because they walked around with a length of thick rope round their waists. Having dragged their glider (none had wheels) beside the endless cable at the bottom of the Hill, they unwound this rope (about 8 feet of it), hooked one end to their glider and with considerable dexterity made two half hitches with the other end on to the moving cable. One waited for a pal to raise a wingtip before pulling the hitches tight when they bit the cable and the glider moved off at a walking pace up the*



*Peggy Thring ready for a launch in 1938. The rope around her waist was for hitching the glider on to the drag-line up the Hill.*

hillside with the pilot holding the tip. It was normal for two or three gliders to be on the cable at the same time, however a fourth was likely to stall the winch. Someone had to stand at the brow of the Hill to signal to the winch when the glider neared the top since this was out of sight from the bottom. After unhitching from the cable, gliders were carried about twenty or thirty yards further up for launching. This was done with a bungee normally using three or four men on each side but up to six if a two seater. A wingtip holder and one or two to hold the tail skid completed the launching team. Because of the rapid acceleration it was important not to move the stick back whilst the bungee was still contracting since this would result in the glider kiting up and releasing the bungee leaving the unfortunate crew to hurtle over the brow of the Hill in a horrid heap. I never had a bungee launch with a 'closed' hook until after the war.

The launching winch at that time had been made by the Desoutter brothers (Charles and Louis) and was the first I had ever seen. For some reason winch launching was not popular and considered a bit 'dicey' so the only launches I saw that year were also the most memorable ones. The occasion was a Bank Holiday Monday in honour of King George's Silver Jubilee but the wind was north east and light with lovely little cumulus but not suitable for hill top launching. Since 'ground-hopping' was now beneath me ( I had made my first soaring flight in a nacelled Dagling a few weeks previously) I retired to the knob of the Bowl to watch the antics with the winch. This was placed close to the hillside and two gliders placed at the end of the cable run by the far hedge. With such a short length of cable it was obvious they could not climb very high.

Nicholson's Rhonbussard took off, reached the top of the winch launch at about hill top height, flew along the Hill below the top, turned around at the

Bowl and flew back losing height all the while and landed. I was not impressed. The Club's Grunau Baby then took off with Eric Collins and achieved a height slightly above the hill top. To my amazement, he threw a circle and then another until it suddenly struck me that he was still at the same height. This interminable circling seemed to go on for ages and with the wind being light drifted him back only a little way before I realised his rate of climb and watched transfixed as he continued circling upwards into the blue. As he reached a height that I estimated to be 3,000 feet a small cumulus developed directly above him. This was most thrilling since I had not heard of anyone catching a thermal so low without the use of hill lift. Like winch launching, circling was a rare event at that time.

One flew in hill lift at any height just level with the brow ('gutter crawling' we called it) to a safe 600 or 700 feet from which one could use the full length of the ridge from Dagnall to the Bowl. Very few gliders had instruments that worked so that when one felt a surge, one did figures of eight to keep in it until reaching a height that was safe for a circle. This reluctance to circle was not without good reason. Hill soaring required a stiff wind so that a circle always resulted in one being carried down wind at an alarming speed and if started too low the poor penetration of those old gliders made it extremely difficult to fly upwind and regain the hill lift. The Golf Club collected a number of gliders in this fashion.

The Club fleet was never fully serviceable at any one time, the Prufling in particular seemed to spend most of its time in the workshop. The Falcon was considered the most desirable, very easy and safe to fly and it also soared most beautifully. To qualify, one had to acquire a total of two hours on the nacelled Dagling or Prufling which took ages



A Prufling is bungeed off the hill top 1934.



*because the weather in which you could soar these crude machines was very rare, or so it seemed to me. Fortunately you were able to count time spent in descending from the hill top in unsoarable conditions and thus my two hours comprised only three soaring flights of 15 minutes, 10 minutes and 6 ½ minutes, the rest being made up of descents of 1 ½ to 2 minutes duration. Oh yes, before flying the Falcon, you also had to demonstrate your ability to side slip in the Pruffling. But what joy on reaching the Falcon, not only was it so much easier to fly but the conditions under which you could soar arrived far more frequently and thus time in the air grew more rapidly.*

*Training was based on methods developed in Germany during the preceding decade and progressed from ground slides to low hops to high hops until your instructor decided it was safe to launch you from the top of the Hill. To acquire the 'A' certificate it was necessary to glide in a straight line for 30 seconds followed by a normal landing. Flown at a reasonable speed an open Dagling could keep airborne for 30 seconds from a hill top launch but a straight glide was not recommended because of power lines that ran from the Clubhouse to the foot of the Hill. A gentle 'S' turn was required and if you were really clever you steered for the lowest point of the gully and ended up on the ground beneath those power lines. Unless you had some previous experience of flying, learning by this solo method could be extremely painful as well as frightening and it is not surprising that more than half those starting soon gave up, although injuries were few. The primaries had no absorbent skid and cushions were considered 'sissy' if not actually dangerous so that thumping into the ground sitting upon a solid chunk of wood shook every bone from bottom upwards. With no instructor's hand there to guide you it was really a matter of trial and error under strict self discipline that sometimes broke*



*down under stress. Looking back, it is amazing how many people learned to fly by this method. It is instructive to realise also how stupid we were to follow the German method when an Englishman named Lowe-Wylde had already built the BAC VII two seater and demonstrated its instructional capability using autotow launching. I sometimes wonder whether things might have developed differently if Dunstable had been a smooth flat field instead of a grass covered roller coaster.*

Perhaps the most important event of the pre-war era was Geoffrey Stephenson's epic first soaring flight across the English Channel. On 22nd April 1939, having failed to get an aerotow out of Heston, Geoffrey trailed his Gull I up to Dunstable and took a winch launch into a strong north westerly shortly before 3.00pm. From hill top height, a thermal took him to cloudbase at 4,000ft, into a cloud from which he emerged at Hatfield. Passing over Abridge and Stapleford, Geoffrey crossed the Thames at Stanford le Hope with the help of a thermal and made his way over the Medway at 3,000ft. Lift was not very strong so he set off for Canterbury Aerodrome. Having got there with 2,000ft in hand, Hawkinge seemed a possibility. At 1,000ft over the airfield Geoffrey ran into strong lift, ten feet per second building to fifteen. Then when twenty feet per second showed after entering cloud at 4,500ft, a possible stab at the Channel crossing beckoned. Coming out of the cloud at 6,000ft over the sea, he headed for a scrappy bit of cloud that only produced ten feet per second down. This worry soon departed, and the Gull set off for France in normal sink at 35mph. Eventually Cap Gris Nez was passed one mile to the east at 2,600ft. As no field large enough for an aerotow retrieve could be seen, Geoffrey landed by the village of Le Wast, ten miles east of Boulogne, at 5.35pm. A phone call to Ann Edmonds (later Welch) brought an immediate response and she and Brian Powell set off from Reigate on a road and ship retrieve which took twenty four hours and cost £26. Geoffrey's fantastic achievement made headlines in all the national papers next morning and Lyons, the catering company, elected him Sportsman of the Month and presented him with an illuminated scroll. This used to be on display over the fireplace in the Club restaurant but it disappeared some years ago.

*Geoffrey Stephenson in 1939 was the first to soar across the English Channel.*

No history of the Club could be complete without relating the career of one of the most significant early pilots, namely G.E.Collins, who burst upon the gliding scene in January 1932 and exhibited an uncanny ability in the following period of three and a half short years.

After his first gliding hops he had, by the 1st of May, gained his 'C' certificate with a flight of forty four minutes in a Prufling. He bought a share in the privately owned Kassel 20 and put in many hours of slope soaring.

It was pretty well known that the way to go up in a thermal was to circle, but this had not really been tried in this country. Slope soarers dared not turn their tails to the wind for fear of being blown back into the curlover behind the hill and, of course, they were probably hill-scraping at much lower heights than we now fly. But in January 1933, Collins was seen to throw a full circle in the Kassel over the Whipsnade Zoo slope and rapidly climb to the base of a low rain cloud. That's how it all began.

Collins' next circling flight was in July of that year when flying a passenger in a BAC VII at Huish in Wiltshire. He got away in a thermal and flew six miles cross-country.

By trade, Collins was an instrument maker but he gave this up to glide, instructing full time and doing demonstration flights. He and his wife took a small cottage at Markyate to be near to the Club at Dunstable. With no variometer to help him, Collins had learnt to sense the difference in lift under his wings and turn towards the side that was lifting most. He used his professional skills to invent a variometer shortly afterwards.

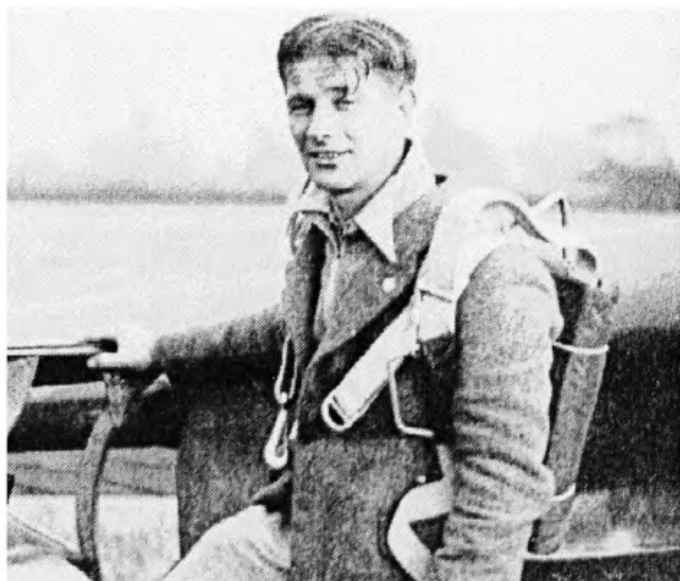
In 1934, Collins' wife put up the money to buy him the 'state of the art' sailplane, the German Rhonadler, and he immediately started breaking distance records. He gained the first British 'Silver C' certificate in April with a flight of fifty two miles to Rayleigh in Essex and then did a magnificent flight to Holkham Bay in Norfolk, ninety five miles in four and a half hours. He was at 3,000ft when he reached the coast so it was only the sea that prevented him going further.

*Eric Collins, who  
gained Britain's first  
Silver 'C' in 1934.*

In 1935 he was to have been towed by aeroplane from Reading to the Royal Aeronautical Society display at Hanworth but on the way, the towrope broke. Undeterred, Collins soared the rest of the way and arrived on time. After this, he performed aerobatics for Alan Cobham's Air Circus and it was at one of these events at Ramsey in Huntingdon that he was killed. He attempted to do a bunt in his Grunau Baby, which over-stressed the machine, and the wings broke away. For some reason Collins did not try to use his parachute, and so his short but brilliant career came to an untimely end. In the period of forty four months he flew one hundred and eighty five hours at fifteen different sites in nineteen types of glider, and the number of launches (including ground slides) totalled three hundred and seventy eight. One can only guess how much more quickly British gliding might have progressed had Collins lived.

Way back in 1930, the Poppenhausen two seater was trailed to the South Downs to take part in some filming and afterwards was lodged in a farmer's barn for the rest of the week. On going down to retrieve it, our members found that the farm had been quarantined because of an outbreak of cattle foot-and-mouth disease and there it had to stay for six weeks. When it was eventually brought back to the Club, advice was sought from paint manufacturers Cellon Ltd on what disinfectant would not react with the doped fabric, and they recommended the use of formaldehyde. As far as is known we have not had to apply that knowledge again since.

The early success of the Club was helped in no small measure by the dynamism of its first Chairman, Toby Ashwell-Cooke. He was a very shrewd operator and John Sproule summed him up as a person who, if entering a revolving door





behind you, would invariably come out in front of you.

Reading through the Committee minutes of meetings held during the formation years of the Club, one is made aware that the membership was composed of fairly affluent people. There was a distinct formality about the proceedings and one sees that in 1931, before ever a Clubhouse had been obtained, there was a 'House and Wine Subcommittee' in being. After a Committee decision to allow flying to take place between 8.00am and half an hour after sunset, a Mr Culver presented the Club with a brass cannon for time signals. Whatever happened to it? Again in 1931 there was a minute to the effect that a car park attendant was to be appointed 'complete with official hat'. There were so many sub-committees that it is a wonder that there were enough members to man them all. Discussion in Committee on the purchase of cars to use on the airfield resulted in approval to buy provided the cost was not more than £3.

In 1935, the Stag Lane Aerodrome at Cricklewood was being closed down as De Havilland transferred their factory and flying school operations to their new site at Hatfield. Several members of the London Aeroplane Club which shared the Stag Lane airfield were very unhappy with the proposed move and shifted their leisure affections to gliding. Thus it was that Hugh Bergel, John Saffery, Joan Price and the Cooper brothers came to Dunstable and became prominent members. Another London Aeroplane Club member who had earlier tried gliding was Mutt Summers who became test pilot for Vickers. Uffa Fox, the famous yacht designer, also appeared early on at Dunstable.

*Tim Hervey, first CFI Manager of the London Gliding Club 1935-40.*



When the Club started, the whole operation was on a voluntary basis and it was only the greatly increased activity in 1935 that prompted the Committee to appoint Tim Hervey as a paid CFI/Manager, the first in Britain. Tim had been a First World War fighter pilot who had made three attempts to escape from German prison camps and was instrumental in setting up gliding in Australia in 1930. On his first day on duty at the Club, a visiting power pilot started showing off with low level aerobatics over Hangar Ridge. After two loops over the hangar, he failed to pull out on the third one and the Moth piled into the tarmac outside the Clubhouse. Peter Underwood, as a seven year old lad, was sitting eating tomato sandwiches in the car park when all this happened before his eyes. He remembers a lady being pulled out of the front cockpit and put in an ambulance and believes she later died in hospital. The pilot survived.

The need for a permanent glider repairer was the next priority so Johnny Walker took on this onerous task coupled with being Club steward. In the fifties, regular course instructors supplemented the CFI during the season. Mrs Walker took over the bar, house organisation and flying accounts on the retirement of her husband, Johnny. Catering was looked after by Mrs Turvey.

Johnny Walker served the Club in two capacities. As well as being the bar steward, he doubled as a highly skilled glider repairman. He was said to

*Johnnie Walker receives the Dessouter Trophy from Carole Carr for his restoration of the Sky 'Elizabeth' in 1953.*





have been able to estimate the cost of a repair, purely from the noise generated by the crash. He was a superb craftsman and took on the rebuilding of the Sky sailplane that was smashed in the 1952 World Championships in Spain. He finished the job in 1953, which was Coronation Year, and the aircraft was christened 'Elizabeth' in honour of the new Queen. There was a launching ceremony and the popular singer Carole Carr did the honours with a bottle of champagne outside the hangar.

In 1937, Noel Quinn was taken on as a boy trainee in the workshop at a few shillings a week to assist Johnny Walker. He learnt his trade well and in 1941 when the glider pilot training programme got under way, Tim Hervey arranged for him to service the RAF gliders at Thame as an Airframe and Flying Mechanic. He had a very busy time involved in the development of Hengist, Horsa and Hamilcar gliders. Noel visited the Harris Lebus factory at Tottenham to get briefed on the first of the Horsas which were being built there and to his amazement came face to face with Johnny Walker who was working on them. Noel came back to the Club workshop after the end of the war and carried on until his retirement in 1962.

In the same year, celebrated long distance flyer Amy Johnson was attending a health farm near Tring and got a bit bored with the proceedings. She came over to Dunstable to have a look at the gliding and in no time had joined the Club and was a convert to unpowered flight. Tim Hervey remembered her as a very friendly person who was only too glad to find somewhere to get away from the pressures of press reporters. She soon bought herself a Kirby Kite and toured gliding clubs around the country with it.

*An apprehensive Amy Johnson being briefed for her first hilltop launch in the nacelled Dagling by Jack Rice.*



*Joan Price who flew aerobatics for Sir Alan Cobham's Air Circus in her Rhonbussard.*

In 1938, Charles Ellis went to fly at a meeting in Poland and at the opening ceremony found himself talking to a Pole who had previously been working at his London Embassy. While he was in England, he and his wife acquired an English setter which they took back with them to Poland. With it being an English dog, they thought it ought to have an English name. 'We call it Kummon,' said the Pole. 'Most dogs we saw being walked in Hyde Park seemed to be named that.' We wonder, had they brought two dogs, would the other have been called Kummeer?

A long-time benefactor of the Club was John Furlong. A fighter pilot in the First World War, John had the unusual experience of being sent to Russia with a Sopwith Camel squadron, and saw action in the area around Archangel. He joined Dunstable in

*John Furlong, Club President 1956-75, winch builder and great Club benefactor.*



the mid-thirties and had shares in various privately owned gliders including the Dunstable Viking. In the motor trade by profession, he gladly gave of his engineering skills to the sport of gliding. At Camphill in 1939 during the National Championships, Frank Charles was launched in his Petrel sailplane. Before he reached the possible maximum height he turned downwind and failed to release the winch cable. The slack in the cable was taken up and the glider piled into the ground killing Frank outright. This fatality inspired John Furlong and Len Ottley to devise the automatic back releasing hook we know as the OTTFUR.

In the late forties John generously bought a T.21 for use by the Club, and later provided a Tiger Moth for aerotowing and an air compressor for the Workshop. This was promptly named 'Edward' (Edward the Compressor). John served as Club President from 1956 to 1975.

Pre-war, pilots flying Primaries and Kadets along the Hill had instructions relayed to them by flag signals from the ground to advise them if they were flying too fast or too slow. Also there were signals to recall a pilot to land. This recall system was later refined whereby metal strips were laid out on the ground to form symbols or letters identifying each machine, both Club and privately owned. Whether it was ever used or not, it disappeared from the scene after the fifties.

In 1937, the Club was approached from Germany to run a course for sixteen youths. This was successfully carried out but had some repercussions three years later when local residents spread word that the course had been a cover for reconnaissance to select Luftwaffe bombing targets. After an air raid on the Vauxhall works at Luton, one of the attacking aircraft had been shot down in the vicinity and the rumour was that the pilot claimed to be a member of the LGC.

Another feature of the course was that when it came to settling-up time the Germans would only cough up half the amount owed, and it was Dudley Hiscox who persuaded them to give us a Reichmark credit for the outstanding sum. This was

used to purchase for the Club a brand new Rhonbussard from the Schleicher factory so everyone was happy in the end.

The training courses were much larger than those of recent times, probably to counter the exhaustion of each full day's launching with bungee ropes. Among the Brits making up the numbers on the German course was an enthusiastic young lady named Ann Edmonds. After being captivated by gliding, when war broke out she joined the Air Transport Auxiliary as a pilot ferrying Spitfires, Aircobras and other exotic warplanes around the country. Later, she was a leading mover and shaker in the British gliding establishment and you will know her as Ann Welch.

In the same year the Cambridge Club had pioneered a south west facing hill slope at Huish, just south of Marlborough, and LGC members took gliders down there and flew on several occasions. One day, Kit Nicholson flew his Rhonsperber, (yes, the same one that still flies at Dunstable) from the site back to Dunstable on a very unpromising day. Llewellyn (Bill) Barker nearly managed the same flight in his Scud III (the one now owned by Laurie Woodage), but confronted by poor visibility, landed five miles short. The present lady owner of Draycott Farm at Huish was approached in 1994 by the Vintage Glider Club to see if they could use the site again but she appeared to be anti anything to do with gliding, hang-gliding or paragliding and nothing came of it.

Again in 1937, the Committee declined to respond to an appeal for money from Luton Hospital. In their view, the hospital's treatment of injured glider pilots had been poor as qualified and experienced



*In 1938-40, the Club trained members of the Air Defence Cadet Corps, later the ATC.*



staff were not around on Sundays. There was no NHS then, of course.

For some reason, in 1938 the Cambridge Club enquired about merging with the London Club and negotiations were still going on when the outbreak of war in September 1939 called a halt. At about the same time, the Royal Navy Flying Club approached Dunstable with a view to affiliation.

Before the Second World War, Dunstable was also the home of the Imperial College of London Gliding Club and in 1994 a similar situation arose when the London University Gliding Club bought EDW one of the AS-K 21s, and utilised the Dunstable Clubhouse and launching facilities. This arrangement went on for two or three years but there was a clash of requirements and the LUGC took themselves off to another site.

The Air Defence Cadet Corps was formed in 1938 to encourage the youth of Great Britain to become air minded and provide a source of dedicated entrants to the RAF. Squadrons were set up all around the country, one of which was at Alexandra Palace in North London where Len Ottley, an LGC member, and another gentleman served as officers and instructors. They had a Dagling Primary, which was brought out to Dunstable for flying training and to give the lads a start in flying. After some time, there was a major falling-out between Len and his colleague with the result that Len resigned and declared that he would set up his own operation. This he did, naming it the Air Training Cadets, providing (or retaining) the Dagling and even providing the cadets with a uniform. However, with the outbreak of war, Len's business Ottley Motors was stretched to the limit overhauling lorries for the military and he could not devote enough time to continue the scheme.

Bill Manuel was a serving corporal in the RAF when he got interested in gliding and he set up the 'Wren Works' in a pantehnicon in a field adjoining the Club. Here he built several of his 'Wren' designs starting with the 'Golden Wren' and 'Willow Wren'.

A little bit of canine history was observed by Bill while watching a Dickson Primary being bungee

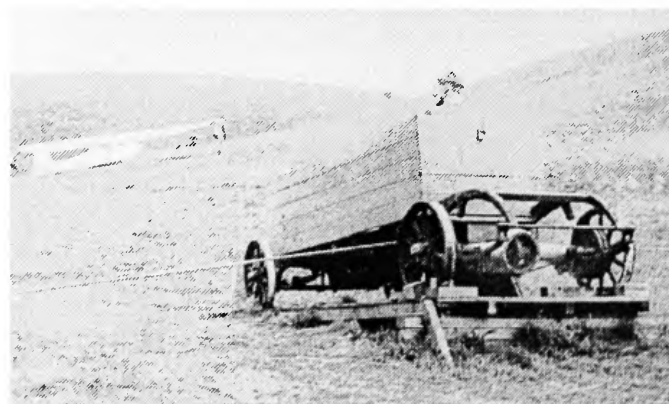
launched from the Hill top. When the dog saw his master disappearing into the blue yonder, he chased after the glider, leapt up and managed to clamp his jaws around a flying wire. The pilot sailed off completely unaware of his passenger and carried out a straight glide down to the airfield. It was a good job that it was not a soaring day or the outcome might have been more tragic for the dog, which hung on until the landing. The question arose as to whether the dog qualified for a 'B' Certificate. But as he was not in command of the aircraft, it was not awarded.

In the mid-thirties, training by ground slides and low hops was carried out with Primaries on the airfield, but soaring flights were launched by bungee from the Hill top. The considerable effort needed to drag gliders to the top of the Hill for launching was alleviated by the ingenuity of Club members. One with nautical contacts got hold of 1,000ft of hemp rope, and with the aid of a pulley wheel cemented into the Hill top and a car dragging on the cable, gliders could be pulled quickly up the slope.

Later, an endless rope system driven by an old Alvis car chassis ran up the face of the Bastion from the south west corner of the field. Gliders could be hitched on to this and pulled up to the launching area. A visitor to the Club recounted recently how in 1938 he was standing near the wooden box which covered in the top pulley wheel of the system. To his horror, he saw a toddler holding on the rope and being dragged into the box to emerge chuckling the other side, fortunately entirely unhurt. The child obviously thought this great fun and was all set to have another go when our visitor stopped him with a flying rugby tackle!

The open chassis of the winch was an invitation to vandalism and frequently suffered the attentions of local youths on mid-week nights when they took out the spark plugs and peed into the cylinders. To prevent this, a padlocked wooden box was built

*The drag-line  
winch that pulled  
gliders up the Hill.*



over the working parts (of the winch, not the youths) and this proved effective.

In 1938, some enterprising Club members found a site on the North Downs near Reigate which would enable hill soaring to be carried out in the southerly winds which so limited flying on the Dunstable field. In spite of several successful weekend expeditions during one of which Joan Price flew her Rhonbussard seventy six miles cross country to Frinton, the Committee decided not to split the Club operations between two locations and the operation was taken over by the young Ann Edmonds (later Ann Welch) who founded the second Surrey Gliding Club. Buster Briggs thermalled away from their hill one day in his Kite and realised he was not going to regain the ridge. A convenient Surrey golf club appeared below. He made his approach down a fairway and bellowed 'FORE' out of the cockpit in his best Guards officer style.

London Sailplanes Limited was established, separate from the London Gliding Club, in 1938 and negotiations took place in 1939 for Slingsby Sailplanes to set up a repair shop on land near the Club entrance. Arrangements were not completed before the outbreak of the war put a stop to them.

In the 1939-40 period, when all gliding had been curtailed by the outbreak of World War Two, Dudley Hiscox and others looked into the possibility of transferring the Club operations to Eire, which remained neutral throughout the conflict, but nothing came of it. With the fall of France, and with Britain under siege from mid

1940, more important priorities than gliding had to be addressed.

Many of the London Club members served in the armed forces during the Second World War and, sadly, as far as memories can recall, nine of them lost their lives in the conflict. Carr Withall, an Australian, and father of twins Carr and Peter, was a regular officer in the RAF flying Spitfires and was shot down off the Isle of Wight during the Battle of Britain, as were Laurie Davis, D.Greenshields and A.B.Wilkinson. Peter Davis went down over Arnhem. 'Buzz' Lacey lost his life in a Tiger Moth during an army exercise at Thame, G. Wardle in the Submarine Service, also another member named Burnett was killed in Malta flying a Hurricane. Bill Wilbur was a photo reconnaissance pilot and he was lost on a sortie over the Apennines.

In the village church at Chinnor there is a stained glass window dedicated to the memory of 'Buzz' Lacey. whose family was from the area.

When in 1940 Churchill ordered a parachute and glider force to be formed, the services were scoured to find experienced glider pilots. So when the first training school was set up, first at Ringway then at Thame, it was LGC members that made up the bulk of the staff.

Tim Hervey, pre-war Manager and CFI at Dunstable, was CO at Thame with John Saffery as Chief Tug Pilot. They were joined by Buster Briggs, A. (Buzz) Lacey, Roger Dixon, Toby Ashwell-Cooke, John Sproule, Lawrence Wright, Peter Davis, Robin Fender, Cyril Ruffle, Pop Furlong (brother of John) and Mungo Buxton. Later in the war, Tim Hervey went back to MI9 where he organised escape aids to be smuggled into prisoner of war camps in Germany. Lawrence Wright, with his experience as an architect, got involved in the preparation of models for briefing the airborne forces on D-Day and he ingeniously built a cine-



*Lawrence Wright,  
architect, author  
and film maker.*



camera gantry with which he simulated on film the approach to the Normandy landing fields. So successful was this that in the famous attack on Pegasus Bridge carried out in complete darkness, the three Horsa troop-carrying gliders all got down into a three hundred yard long field, one finishing up with its nose only feet from the bridge, which was duly captured. Buster Briggs, a pre-war Guards officer, concentrated on tugging. With only a civilian 'B' private licence, he flew the Thame Tiger Moths and converted to Hawker Hectors and Harts when they arrived. With no formal RAF flying training, he worked his way up the scale of tugs until he was commanding officer of a Halifax tug squadron. No mean feat. At Dunstable, he used to arrive with his batman who would help him rig his pale blue Kirby Kite and retrieve him when necessary.

The story of the LGC pilots and their part in wartime glider operations is beautifully described in Lawrence Wright's book 'The Wooden Sword', difficult to find but well worth the effort.

We know of at least two Dunstable members who flew gliders in Germany during the war and neither of them was in the Luftwaffe. One was Frank Pozerskis who talked his way into flying Grunau Babies while he was supposed to be working on the land. When Germany was on the point of collapse and the US Army was approaching, Frank's former employer told him to go up to the airfield and liberate anything useful. Not being a gliding type, he obviously had things like tractors in mind. Frank, however, was much more practical and sawed off all the fittings from a Primary. Putting them in a sack, he toted them on his back for many days while making his way to safety in the west. The other was pre-war member Ron

Walker, shot down in a Hampden bomber during a raid on Germany and imprisoned in a Stalag Luft on the eastern border. As the Russian front got nearer, the RAF prisoners found one morning that the guards had deserted, so the prisoners formed parties to go out into the surrounding countryside to scavenge for food. On one such foray, Ron came across a gliding site with a Grunau in the hangar and soon persuaded the locals to give him a launch. He was happily trying to hill soar when he was struck by a sudden thought. What the hell was he doing here in an aircraft with a swastika on its tail and with the possibility of Russian fighters appearing on the scene? He immediately landed and told the Germans who came up to assist that he was going off for transport and they should wait by the glider until he returned. He rapidly made off and for all he knows they may be waiting there still.

With pilot training being carried out from the start on Primary gliders, there was inevitably a lot of crashery to repair. Someone had the bright idea of installing a weak link in the landing wire fixings that would give way in the event of an excessively heavy landing. It was found that a four inch nail instead of a pin in the top of the pylon served very well, and would shear, protecting the main spars from compression failures.

There were some strange Committee decisions in the early days after the war. The Club had used Slingsby Kadets for solo flying and when they obtained a Tutor, it was decided to fit it with fixed spoilers to reduce its performance to that of the Kadet, presumably because it was thought that inexperienced pilots could not cope with 'performance'. Common sense soon prevailed and the spoilers were removed.



*Eric Collins holds wingtip for Dagling launch 1935.*

Just after the war, instruction was on Daglings with ground slides, low hops and then launches by winch. The winch was not all that effective and the winch runs were perhaps only half the length of our present ones. Some of the pundits, that is those with more than 25 hours total flying, got around this by dragging a winch over to the disused airfield at Cheddington. Here was the luxury of almost endless runway disappearing into the far distance, and many soaring flights were made after connection with lift at the top of the launch.

In 1949 Jeff Arnold, builder and maintainer of the winches, was flying the Blue Gull in the Nationals at Camphill on a task which took him across the Pennines when he heard a strange noise: 'Buzz Buzz'. The noise was getting louder all the time. At 1,000ft and approaching a large limestone quarry, the buzzing stopped and there was an almighty explosion. The Gull shook and shuddered and Jeff thought: 'This is it! The fabric must have all gone, the wings are breaking off and oh, there's a small strip I can get into.' Then came a second shattering bang but the Gull was still flying OK. Jeff put down into a narrow gap between stone walls and looked up to see two large white puffs of smoke ascending heavenwards. The Peakstone Quarry Company were carrying out their usual Tuesday afternoon blasting!

At about the same time, Jeff had been involved in another frightening incident when soaring the Hill in the Gull. The rear fuselage was struck by the wingtip of a T.21 flown by George Scarborough and somehow the elevator circuit got jammed. Jeff managed to fly straight ahead until he ran aground into some bushes, damaging the Gull still more. Vic Ginn in the workshop set to and restored the Gull to airworthy condition. On an expedition with the Gull, Jeff had his tow car's gearbox fail near the top of the Long Mynd but, being a brilliant

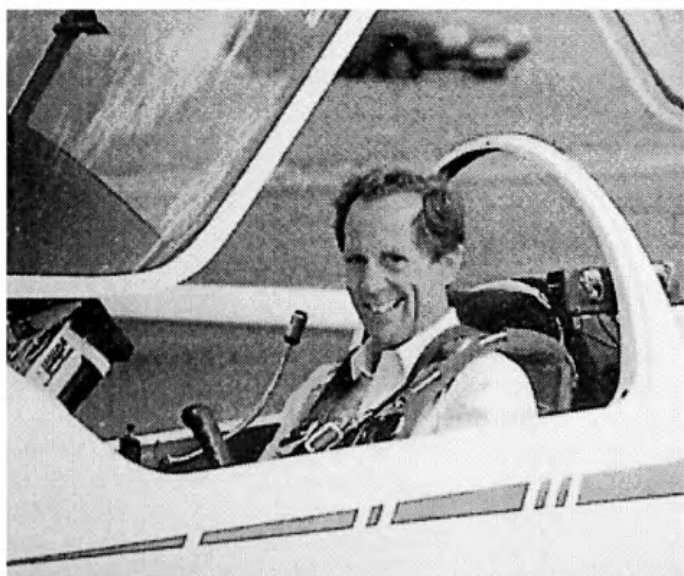
engineer, he stripped the box and repaired it by the side of the road. He had a garage in Sandy and in winter, used to have the Gull fully rigged in the car showroom as an attraction

There was no greater exponent of devotion to getting in some flying whatever the difficulties than John Jeffries. At the tender age of 17, John would set out from his home in Northwood at 3.30am to walk (yes walk!) the 22 miles to Dunstable, fly, and then walk the 22 miles back home again. Launches were 1/6d (7.5p in today's money) and there was a maximum charge of 6 shillings per day (30p). John recounts that nobody ever seemed to accumulate enough launches to qualify for the free flying. Things got a bit easier when he got a bicycle but he remembers stuffing the tyres with straw when he got a puncture. If he stayed at the Club overnight, John would avoid paying the few shillings for a bed in the bunkroom by sleeping in a haystack. At other times he slept in the fuselage of the Scud II which was stored in one of the Nissen huts. One doubts whether the youth of today would go to such lengths for their sport.

In pre-war days, anyone damaging a Club glider was liable to be asked for a contribution towards the cost of repair and there was a top limit of £3. This does not sound very much but did represent a sum well above the average weekly wage. In the fifties and sixties, there was a scheme whereby members could take out crashery insurance, which limited their liability to paying the first £20 of any repair bill. Recently, the charging of members for repair work has not been enforced in an attempt to get all damage, however caused, reported. In spite of this, often a DI reveals faults that nobody has bothered to tell anyone about.

In the early post-war years, car ownership was very limited, and so few members' vehicles had towbars that retrieves were always a problem. To try and get around this, in 1951 the Club offered a subsidy to encourage the fitting of towbars. John Currie was one of the first to take advantage of this scheme.

John Simpson was visiting China in late 1945 and came across a Chinese gliding magazine that had translated an earlier feature about the London



*John Jeffries, CFI /  
Manager 1966-87 has  
14,000 gliding hours  
to his credit.*



Gliding Club. The nearest they could get to the name Dunstable was 'DUN SH TA BAO' the meaning of which was 'The low walled pagoda of the honest scholar'.

In 1946 Prince Birabongse, the celebrated Siamese racing driver, asked John Furlong if he would help him get a Weihe he had just bought back to England from Brussels. They flew over to Belgium in Bira's 100hp Auster and had to hang around awaiting the arrival of the Weihe from Switzerland. It was towed in just before dusk so they planned an early departure next morning. What with obtaining customs clearances and persuading the airport officials that they could not possibly take off downwind they eventually got away at 11.00am and had to drop the undercarriage dolly which the Swiss wanted to retain.

Leaving at 1,000ft in pleasant sunshine and having failed in their rush to obtain a weather forecast, the pair were somewhat disconcerted to be confronted by a line squall with rain underneath and towering cumulus above. John had taken a torch with him for signalling but, with only a stiff on-off switch, it proved pretty useless. Bira picked the thinnest part of the rain and after a few hefty bumps they were through into sunshine again on the other side. A few miles further on the same thing happened, but conditions were more violent. This repeated itself some twenty times, forcing them lower and lower, one hill top being cleared by only 200ft. Rain streamed into the Weihe cockpit soaking John and when Bira's tug disappeared for some three or four seconds, John thought he would have to pull off. However, in between squalls the Weihe flew beautifully and after one and a half hours Calais appeared below. The original plan was to cross the Channel at 5,000ft but with one-mile visibility and low cloudbase, they pressed on at 500ft. As they

flew out to sea, John could see absolutely nothing except the tug and its towrope so realised he must concentrate on following the Auster and rely on Bira's instrument flying skills. Bira appeared to be swinging wildly to the left and right and then the speed dropped right back, which had John very worried for some 20 minutes. He was amazed to see a cross-Channel steamer apparently in mid-air on his starboard side but with something positive to focus on, he was able to re-orientate himself. Some time later he could see the Kent coastline and relaxed momentarily until he saw a solid wall of cloud and mist down to the faintly visible cliffs of Folkestone. Bira shut off power at this point and went into a steep glide. The Weihe, with less drag, started to overtake the tug, but with use of divebrakes and sideslipping John managed to avoid this without the ever-present chance of the towrope parting. They levelled out at 200ft and following the coastline, reached Lympne aerodrome where they landed.

Bira jumped out, full of relief and excitement, explaining that in the middle of the Channel he thought the towrope was parting. The rainwater streaming off the rope looked like strands unravelling, his looking round caused the S-turns and his anxiety not to lose his best friend and his best glider caused him to slow down. The next day, in attempting to launch the Weihe without its wheels, they broke the towrope five times and had to recruit a large pushing party before they could get on their way.

One of the more colourful members of the forties and fifties was Ladislav Marmol, a Czech pilot from the war years. Ladi was very keen on aerobatics and he imported a Zlin Krajanek, a fully-aerobatic machine whose abilities he exercised to the full. There were many stories of his flying inverted on aerotow to the consternation of the tow pilot. He would also soar the Downs and thermal inverted, even doing a loop around the power wires that crossed the field at that time. When duration records were still being sought, in 1947 Ladi flew the Kraj for 33 hours to establish a new one. During the night, cars lined the Downs with their headlights on to guide him. One fine day, a film company was shooting a period costume drama



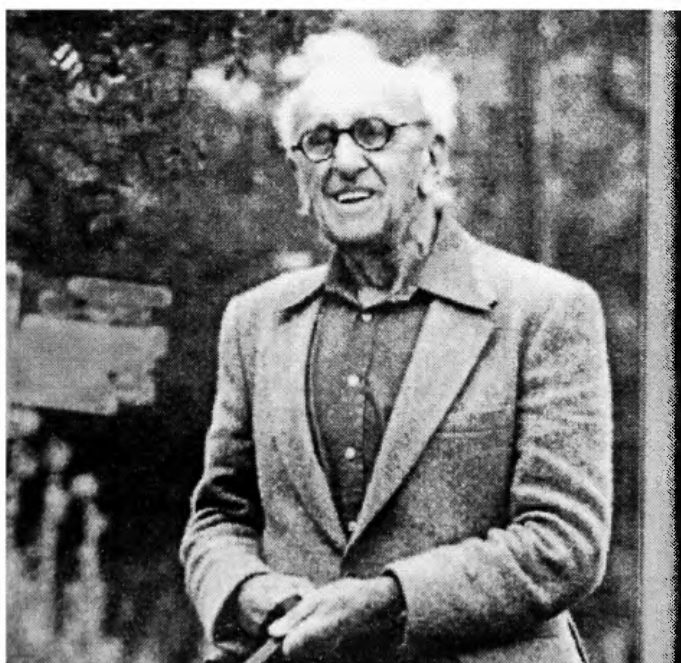
*Prince Bira in his Gull III with his dog 'Tich' who often flew with him.*



*Charles Ellis in Gull IV with Laurence Wright, 1939.*

above the Bowl and had a stagecoach up there. Ladi Marmol was hill soaring at the time and decided to take a closer look. Unfortunately his low pass, as low as only a Marmol pass could be, upset the horses which bolted with the stagecoach in tow. Luckily, their course took them along the top of the Hill and not down the slope. Another time, one of Ladi's beat-ups frightened a bus driver who finished up off the road. Ladi subsequently set up a crop spraying company at Southend which no doubt enabled him to continue his adventurous low flying.

One of the all-time great characters of the London Gliding Club was Doc Slater who died in 1988 in his 93rd year. Alan E. Slater studied medicine at St Thomas's Hospital, qualifying in 1922 just in time to dash down to Itford and see the great gliding competition organised by the Daily Mail. He was passionately interested in music, photography, meteorology, model trains, model aircraft and, not least, gliding. Joining the London Club at its inauguration in February 1930, Doc decided to



jump the learning curve by going on a gliding course at Rossitten in Germany where he became the first Briton to achieve a gliding certificate, his 'A'. In 1931, he got his 'B' at Dunstable and his 'C' after joining the Kassel 20 syndicate in 1932, when he flew in the first British Nationals at Furness. Doc took over the editorship of *Sailplane and Gliding* in 1933 and in 1946 edited the journal of the Interplanetary Society.

At every World Championship up to Australia in 1974, Doc was to be found taking notes. Being very short sighted, and wearing thick pebble-lensed spectacles, Doc would do this with his pencil about two inches in front of his eyes. He was an avid attendee of the International Vintage Rallies, often making his own way there by boat, train, bus, hitch-hiking or walking - all this in his late seventies. On one return trip from the Continent when Mike Thick dropped him off at a London train terminal at midnight, he found he had to wait several hours for the first train to Cambridge, his home. He decided to doss down on a bench but was rudely awakened by the Transport Police. Asked what he was doing, Doc, who had a bad stammer, tried to explain that he had been gliding. This was not well received and he nearly got arrested for vagrancy!

Doc was very talented musically, could play practically any instrument and could sing, when his stammer miraculously disappeared. He always carried a penny whistle (flageolet) in his inside pocket and needed no encouragement to launch into a spirited rendering of *Eine Kleine Nacht Musik*, always terminating with a vigorous shake of the flute to get rid of the accumulation of spit.

Ann Welch recounts how Doc could play on the piano almost any concerto or symphony by ear. On the way to a World Championships, he found a

*Man of so many parts, the much loved Doc Slater.*





*Philip Wills is bungee launched in his 'Hjordis', 1935.*

piano in a Swedish hotel at breakfast time and played through three concertos from memory to the amazement of the hotel guests.

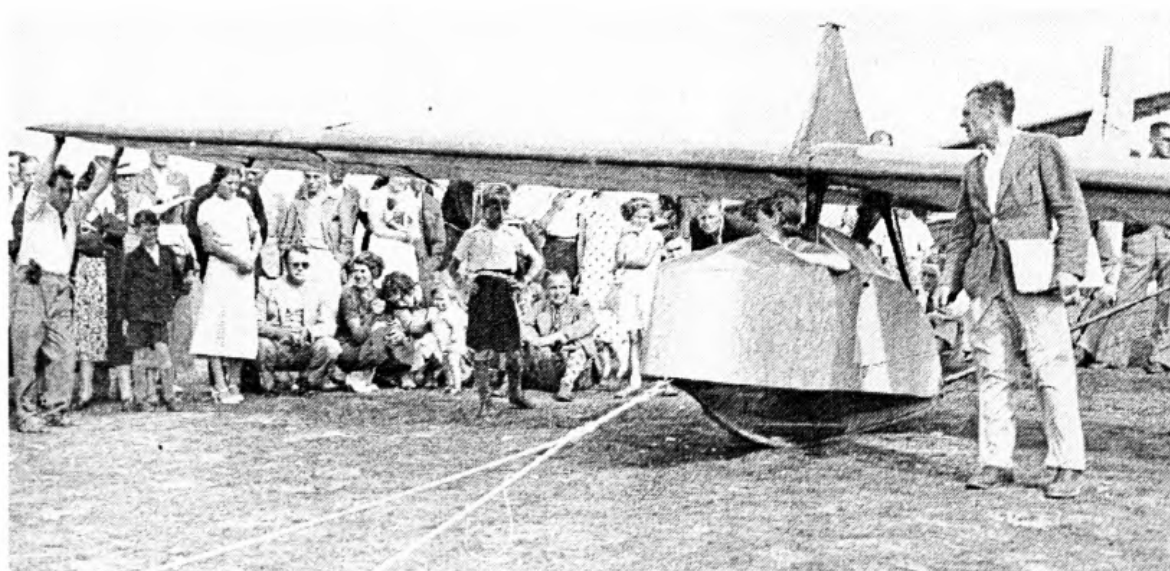
In his later years, when asked if he was still able to fly, Doc replied 'Oh yes, I can fly all right. I just can't see the b.b.b.bloody ground to land!'

To sum up Doc in one sentence, one can do no better than Mike Bird who wrote:

*This man who in the same day could compose a piece for piano, voice and any of 12 different wind instruments (all of which he could play), perform a tracheotomy to save the life of a child, design a flying wing that would do aerobatics under and over the hospital beds of his young patients, edit a magazine, formulate a new meteorological theory and observe an occultation of a planet by the moon, has only one serious deficiency - he doesn't*

*know the meaning of the expression too often heard among today's young 'I'm bored'.*

A mention should be made of the perennial peasants' question 'What happens if you land in the lions' den?' For a start, Whipsnade no longer keep the king of the beasts as they now concentrate on endangered species and secondly, the original pit was so small that gliders could probably only have got into it by diving vertically. Gliders have landed within the Zoo boundaries in the distant past. Lawrence Wright put down his Scud in the bison's enclosure and had to de-rig it single-handed - this really was dangerous. Ann Edmonds (later Welch) landed in a paddock and kept warm by running between the wing (which the wind was trying to lift over) and the tail (which Shetland ponies and goats were trying to strip of fabric and eat). The Zoo Superintendent gallantly came to her rescue.



*Tim Hervey briefs pilot for launch from the hill top 1938.*

## THE FIFTIES & SIXTIES

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In 1950, the President of the BGA was Viscount Kemsley, a newspaper tycoon. To stimulate gliding and cross country flying during the winter months, he put up 100 guineas for prizes for pilots and clubs achieving the best winter performances from aerotow, winch, or bungee launches between the 1st November 1950 and 28th February 1951. In the event, Lorne Welch of the Surrey Club won the aerotow class with a flight of 41 miles and Harry Cook the other with a flight of 45 ½ miles. The competition was extended into March and John Currie, whilst not winning, got a special mention for his flight of 59 miles from Dunstable to Forest Row in Sussex. In 1955, Kemsley introduced a scheme to subsidise impecunious young pilots and with the help of this, John Currie became a syndicate partner in a Meise with Arthur Cleaver, Mike Riddell and Alan Stagg.

It was in 1950 that the Zoo asked if Club members would not fly so low over Whipsnade as it was upsetting the parrots.

A story has recently emerged about how, in the early fifties, a murder suspect nearly became Manager of our Club. It seems that the post was advertised and one of the applicants who

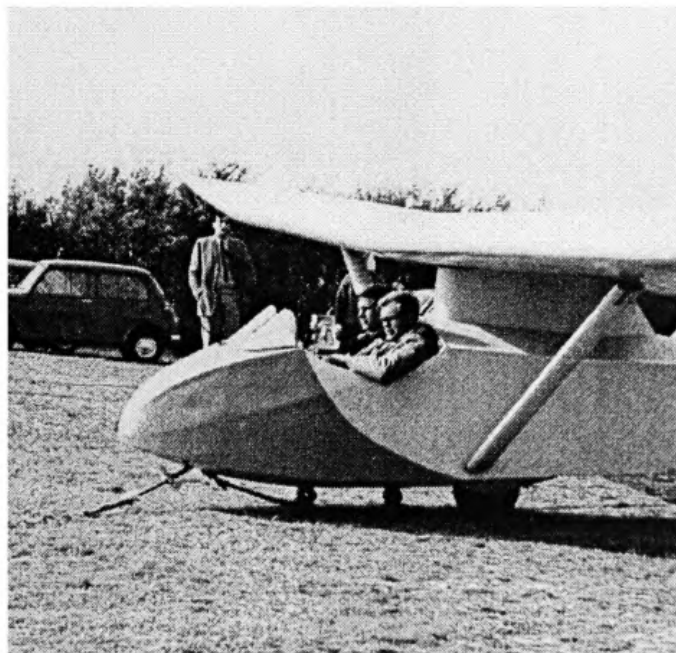
obviously had an aviation background as he held a private pilot's licence, was interviewed by Chairman Dudley Hiscox. Dudley did not take to him and he was turned down for the job. Some time later, there was a very high profile murder case where a Warren Street second-hand car dealer Stanley Setty was killed and his body dismembered. His various bits were bagged up and then dumped over the Essex Marshes from an Auster aircraft hired from a flying club in the London area. Unfortunately the dumping was done at high tide and the crime was very quickly discovered. Our applicant was arrested, subsequently tried but not found guilty. His name was Brian Donald Hume and he took himself off to Switzerland where he murdered a taxi driver and was gaoled by the Swiss.

Nowadays, two seater training on the AS-K 21 is followed by a first solo in an AS-K 23 or AS-K 21, but in the fifties and sixties things were different. The two seater in use then was the open cockpit Slingsby T.21, which was used exclusively for flying off a winch launch. Being large and draggy, the T.21 would have put too much strain on the engines of the Tiger Moths which were the then current tug aircraft, so there was no dual aerotow

*Slingsby Tutor, first solo aircraft in the years 1950-67.*



*Slingsby T.21, basic trainer 1950 - 67.*





training. A first solo was performed in a Tutor, again an open cockpit machine. The Club had a varied fleet of single seater gliders and there was a strict programme of progression up the performance scale. 'A' and 'B' certificates were gained by going solo, and then one had to achieve a 'C' flight. The requirement of a five-minute flight was not easy to do in a Tutor from a winch launch. Failing the ability to pick up a thermal straight off the launch it was necessary to soar the Hill, and the performance of the Tutor was such that a very brisk breeze up the slope was required to keep the machine up. The margin between its being strong enough to support the Tutor and too strong to risk the machine and pilot was very narrow and you could wait a long time for conditions to be just right. Ten hours flying on the Tutor was required before graduating to the Grunau Baby. And two hours had to be done on this before moving on to the Prefect. After five hours on this with an open cockpit, flight with a closed canopy was permitted and an introduction to aerotowing made. With no two seaters for aerotow instruction and the surroundings of our airfield being what they were, first aerotows were made in a Prefect at Luton Airport, long before it was a busy commercial airfield. In spite of Luton's relatively huge size, one valiant Prefect pilot managed to lose sight of the field when he was released directly over it, and made a field landing outside the boundaries.

When Capstan two-seaters came on the scene in the early sixties, the Club added one to the fleet. This enabled aerotow instruction to be given for the first time and also provision for conducting a 'closed canopy' check for early Prefect pilots. The Club had tried operating an Eagle some years previously but this was not really suitable for early hours pilots and was disposed of.

After 25 hours solo, one was permitted to go on to the Olympia, and at 50 hours the Skylark II. After this came the Sky and eventually the Skylark III. As can be seen there was always an incentive to get the hours in, and so make progress up the performance scale. These days, pilots seem to buy into a high performance machine at a much earlier stage in their gliding careers.

In the fifties, Lasham had made much of the fact that, having no hill to soar, they were very much more 'switched on' when it came to cross country flying and never ceased to advertise this claim. Meanwhile, Frank Foster, Geoffrey Stephenson, and Charles Ellis had been quietly promoting flying closed circuit tasks if only as a means of ensuring a timely appearance at work on a Monday morning instead of a bleary late arrival after an all night retrieve. The BGA instituted the Douglas Trophy to be awarded to the Club with the best flights by three of its members. To the consternation of Lasham, the London Club walked away with it

Tutors were very often caught out while trying to regain the Hill after thermalling back towards the A5. Peter Fletcher became very practised at golf course landings, as did Alan MacDonald who had landed in practically every field within a two-mile radius of the Club. The usual procedure when this occurred was for the glider to be manhandled to the road, lifted over the hedge and then bungee launched from the Hill top. Mac it was who one evening, attempting a hangar landing in a Ka 8, pulled on the release knob instead of the airbrakes. Failing to touch down on Hangar Ridge, his first contact with the ground was when his wheel hit the tarmac in front of the hangar towards which he inexorably continued. His starboard wing hit the Clubhouse just below the clock leaving a green

*Golf course outlandings meant manhandling machines to a bungee point on the hilltop. Here, Mike Garrod's Kite gets the treatment.*



paint mark and he disappeared into the hangar backwards. As he got out of the cockpit, he said ruefully 'I suppose this means I'm back on the two seater'. One of Mac's better efforts was when he managed a forced landing on a building site in the middle of Dunstable. Somehow he found a clear path through the piles of building materials, cement mixers etc and put the Club Skylark II down completely undamaged. David Jones was less lucky with one of the Club's Tutors when he hit one of the guy ropes holding up the windsock pole and put the Tutor out of action for several weeks.

Gerry Puritz came to the Club to glide. He had served in the Luftwaffe, and with many hundred hours of airtime, powered and gliding, he was shepherded into a Tutor for his first solo at Dunstable. Now Gerry, whilst flying a JU-52 over Sicily, had been bounced by a P38 Lightning and shot down, losing a leg in the process. During his winch launch in the Tutor, his artificial leg jumped off the rudder pedal and somehow got stuck behind it. Gerry struggled to get it free all the way up the launch without success and, after releasing, decided an effort with both hands was required. At the top of the launch, the Tutor was seen to pitch forward into an almost vertical dive and scream down towards the winch. It recovered, turned and then landed normally. The CFI pounded across the field to see why the Tutor was being treated like a Stuka dive-bomber. Following this episode, this delightful man Gerry had a clip made for his artificial foot which solved the problem. Just three weeks later, Laurie Ryan arrived at the Club also sporting a dummy leg, and was accordingly despatched off to Roehampton to have a similar device manufactured before he was allowed into a Club glider.

The prospect of repeating Geoffrey Stephenson's cross-Channel soaring flight was always at the back of the minds of pundits, and one fine summer day with a strong north westerly Philip Wills took a winch launch from Dunstable and set off towards Dover. Seeing a cloud street providing a possible route to France, Philip pointed his glider out to sea and crossed his fingers. Part way across the Channel, Philip realised that things were going to be very marginal, changed his mind and turned back. The following day, Betty Fairman (then Watson), was relating how she had winch launched a glider which then got halfway across the English Channel. 'My goodness,' was the response. 'That must have been quite a launch!'

One day, when John Westhorpe landed out near Ampthill, a few miles from the Club, he was approached by one of the local yokels. 'Aaargh,' said the yokel, 'You'm be brought down by *The Ampthill Airpocket*. It brought down a Zeppelin during the First World War!'

When the Club operated Tiger Moths as tug aircraft, the Gypsy engines had to be hand swung to start them, and this was a fraught procedure for the uninitiated. Art teacher Liz Hargreave had her hand badly smashed when a prop kicked back. And Charles Ellis recalls strict instructions being issued that a hat should not be worn when swinging a propellor in case it blew off into the arc of the blades and an impulsive grab was made for it.

The members' dormitory accommodation was either in the two huts erected in 1938 to accommodate lads from the Air Defence Cadet Corps (the forerunner of the Air Training Corps) or in the rear of the main Clubhouse building where

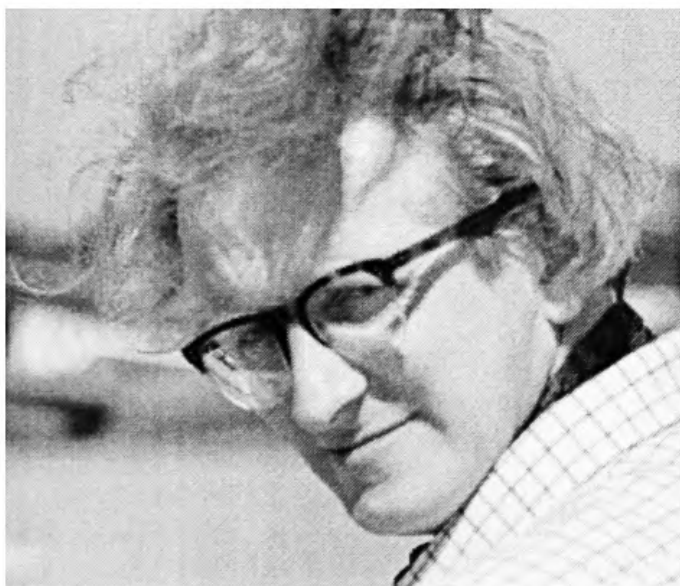


*Alan Macdonald managed a spectacular damage-free landing on a Dunstable building site in the Club's Skylark II.*



the showers are now. Incidentally, the per capita payment made by the Government for training each of these ADCC pupils enabled the cost of the huts to be recovered within 18 months. The subsequent fees were all profit.

The Clubhouse dormitory contained four double bunk beds constructed army style from angle iron. It was a desperately cold, damp cell of a place and one winter, when Jeff Butt was laid low by flu, a doctor had to be called. He looked around the dismal accommodation and sniffed 'It's a bit like Rowton House, isn't it.' (Rowton House was a hostel for down and outs behind Kings Cross Station and must have been equally miserable.) In spite of its austerity, bunks in there were always in demand because of the access offered to *The Flying Book*. This book was lodged in the bar, and in those days the Clubhouse was locked at night. The book had to be signed on arrival in the morning to determine the launching order for pupils and members. Sleeping in the Clubhouse had a great advantage as if you were locked out, entry had to be gained by either scaling the roof and descending the well shaft of the outside shower, or by climbing in through one of the toilet windows that had a defective catch. Wald Stack, a Polish member, whilst using the inside dormy, was nearly always the first to stir and get his name on the flying list. In an attempt to thwart this, one night after he had gone to sleep, blankets were draped all around his lower bunk bed space in order to stop daylight awakening him as usual. Unfortunately, he had to get up in the middle of the night and, blundering his way to the toilet, knocked all the blankets to the floor. Other nights were interrupted by another member who suffered violent asthma attacks and exploded into bouts of snorting and coughing whilst still apparently asleep himself.



One summer, young Albert Tarnow apparently upset a group of members who decided he needed to be taught a lesson. Accordingly, late that night, he was pounced upon in the dormy and, imprisoned in his sleeping bag, was carried on his bed across the field and dumped on the Hill. He took this in very good part and thought it all a great joke. Some of the straight-laced committee thought otherwise and tried to get the offending hijackers thrown out of the Club for ungentlemanly behaviour, conduct unbecoming, etc. Common sense prevailed however and the matter was dropped. Mike Riddell was accused of taking part in this dastardly event, but protested his innocence by claiming he could not have possibly been there, as at that particular hour, he was otherwise occupied with a young lady on top of the Bowl. He did not get thrown out for this either!

The ungentlemanly conduct clause in the rulebook warranting eviction from the Club was nearly invoked once before. A competition had been devised whereby a toilet roll was hurled down the Club staircase, unrolling all the time, and the aim was to bounce it off the wall and get it down to the lobby. Some staid committee member thought this was all too much, and made an unsuccessful attempt to get the players expelled.

Fifties member Derek Abbott (father of Geoff, the master glider model maker) was lead trumpeter with the Geraldo orchestra. One day, Walter Neumark persuaded Derek to take his instrument with him on a two seater flight, and they soared the Hill in the T.21 *Barge* with musical accompaniment. Incidentally, Derek provided the sound track when Kay Kendall mimed her wonderful trumpet solo in the film 'Genevieve'.

In the days before the London Control Zone was established it was possible to soar over the capital, and many cross countries were made south from Dunstable. In 1951 John Jeffries was flying the Scud II on a flight which finished up at Shoreham. On the way, he came out of cloud to find himself over the Festival of Britain site on the Thames South Bank. The same year, Jack Hanks landed the Camel in Battersea Park.

In 1955 Peter Langford was flying the Club Prefect on a Silver 'C' attempt to Lasham and in very poor

*Peter Langford, nicknamed  
'The Long-haired Retriever'  
in the sixties, made  
ballooning a career.*

visibility at 4,000ft thought he was approaching Bovingdon which was then an active airfield. When overhead he saw a cluster of Nissen Huts with large silver parked aircraft parked around them and a distinctive octagonal control tower. He immediately realised that this was not Bovingdon at all but the partially developed Heathrow. With little wind to help him get clear quickly and being somewhat mesmerised by the implications of where he was, he decided he would be less of a hazard if he landed and so set off across the runway to the south of the airfield. On the way, a Constellation airliner landed beneath him and a Stratocruiser took off. Peter landed on the grass near an Airtours hangar and phoned up the control tower to announce his presence. The controllers had not noticed his arrival and seemed only concerned how quickly he could remove himself and the Prefect. Peter's suggestion to have an aerotow retrieve went down like a lead balloon so he phoned up Dunstable for a road retrieve. The following morning, two national newspapers had got hold of the story of his landing and the Daily Mail ran the headline 'Glider nosedives into the ground at Heathrow'. Peter had to submit a report to the Heathrow controllers and this happened when the CAA were pressing to introduce licences for glider pilots. Up to this time, there was no formal instruction for early pilots on the techniques for cross country gliding, one taught oneself. Ann Welch was Chairman of the BGA Instructors Panel and put up a counter proposal whereby the introduction of the 'Bronze C' with its requirements for knowledge of Air Law would serve as a 'passport' for cross country flying. This was adopted in the early sixties.

One morning, after a very late return from attending the BGA Ball, several members were seen at the launch point still attired in their evening dress. These were pointed out by the knowing members of the public on the Hill. 'Ah, they must be the instructors' they said.

There is the story of Alan Yates who landed his glider on a school playing field at Monmouth and

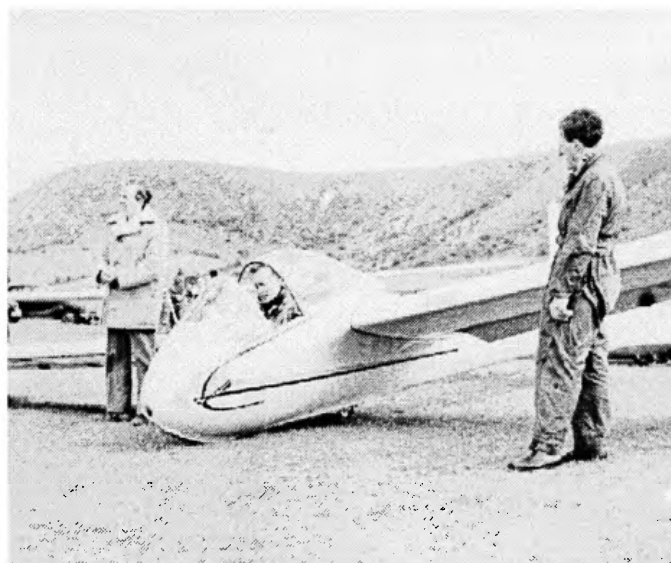
was entertained to a cup of tea by the headmaster's wife. 'I think people go in for such peculiar sports,' she prattled. 'This gliding seems silly to me. Sorry my husband isn't here, he's away caving'.

In 1956, the Suez crisis interrupted the supply of oil to this country and petrol rationing was introduced. Although winch launching carried on, there was an immediate stop to aerotowing and members experienced various difficulties in getting out to Dunstable from London.

One suggestion to save fuel was to winch gliders up and let them land on the Hill top and take bungee launches from then onwards. A T.21 duly made its Hill top landing and it was then found that the bungee was so clapped out that it would not move the two seater. It was then found also that the only suitable trailer was in pieces so there was no way of retrieving the glider by road. The solution found was to trundle the T.21 down the face of the Hill slope with many hands holding it back and others slashing down the scrubby bushes in the way.

From 1957 to 1960, Wing airfield had not been developed and the runways, although a bit rough, were free of chicken sheds. Advantage was taken of this and groups of Club members would take gliders over there by road and spend the day having autotow launches.

Shortly after the appointment of a new Club manager, an impressive new sign appeared on the office door reading 'Sqn/Ldr W.C.Chubb AFC, DFC (Retd), Manager, London Gliding Club' This formality was not appreciated by some of the irresponsible younger members, and that night the sign was swapped with another which had the simple inscription 'Gentlemen'. The shining hour



*Mike Garrod  
awaiting a launch  
in the aerobatic  
Jaskolka. John  
Jeffries to left and  
Don Gerrard.*



was not improved next day with a senior instructor walking into Chubby's office with the greeting 'Good morning GENTLEMEN!'

One day, launching was interrupted by the Aylesbury Hunt, which streamed down from the Hill and right across the airfield in full cry. Beryl Stephenson, who had seen a glider pilot killed when a dog had got mixed up with a winch launch, was highly incensed and seized the opportunity to remonstrate with the Master. As one Hunt member remarked some time later, 'She didn't half give us stick!'

To the south of our site is Bunkers Farm, which used to be a pig production unit. It no longer sends off meaty thermals that could be smelled right up to cloud base, and which did away with the need for a windsock to tell you that the wind was southerly.

F.O.Newley wrote:

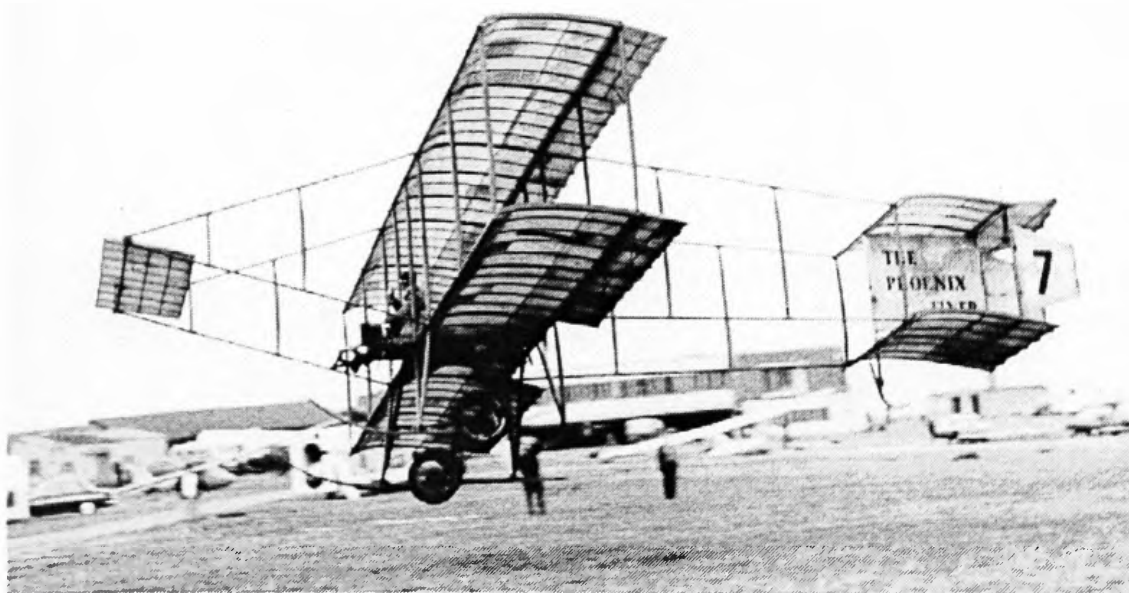
*The southern breezes waft a scent  
Which makes the presence evident  
Of creatures which (so people state)  
Conceivably might aviate.*

Occasional entertainment was provided by the car parking which was permitted along the whole length of the Downs. From time to time, someone would be careless with his or her parking brake and the car would run away down the slope. Usually the bushes would stop it coming all the way to the bottom but there were times when this did happen. The most famous occasion was when an ancient Rolls Royce saloon made its way down the slope, as mentioned before.

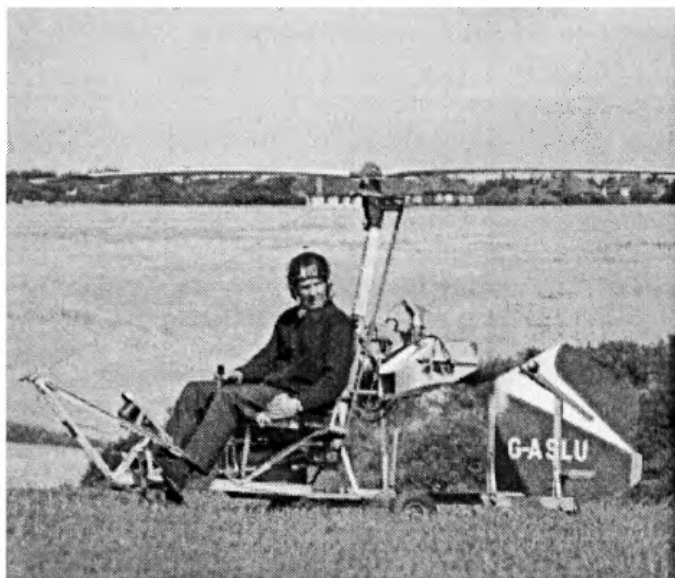
At the foot of the Hill was a line of iron railings, which provided an ideal seat for watching proceedings at the south west launch point. Halfway up the Hill above this point, a remote signaller was stationed to relay bat signals to the winch, which was over the skyline as seen from ground level. This was before radio communication with the winch was in use. In the sixties, John Argent, who did so much work on Club winches and transport, made what is best described as a mole plough, which he attached to the rear of our most powerful tractor. The hollow blade was used to feed telephone cable two feet below ground and with this device, phone lines were laid between each launch point around the field. The system did not prove reliable and soon signalling reverted to bats.

Field telephone communication between launch and winch points had been tried once before in 1948 and a local farmer had ploughed the necessary grooves in the grass to bury the phone lines. A drum of cable 1¼ miles long had been bought for just £1.25 to do the job but there is no record of how long it remained in use.

In the early sixties, filming of the epic 'Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines' was taking place at Booker and Henlow airfields. From time to time, the replicas of the ancient aircraft had to be ferried between the sites for the shoots and if there was a headwind, Dunstable was used as a mid-trip refuelling stop. Derek Piggott dropped in several times with the 'Phoenix Flyer', a superb recreation of the 1912 Bristol Box kite and treated Club members to a really low pass for the keen photographers.



*Derek Piggott  
demonstrates the  
Bristol Boxkite  
1962 after a  
refuelling stop.*



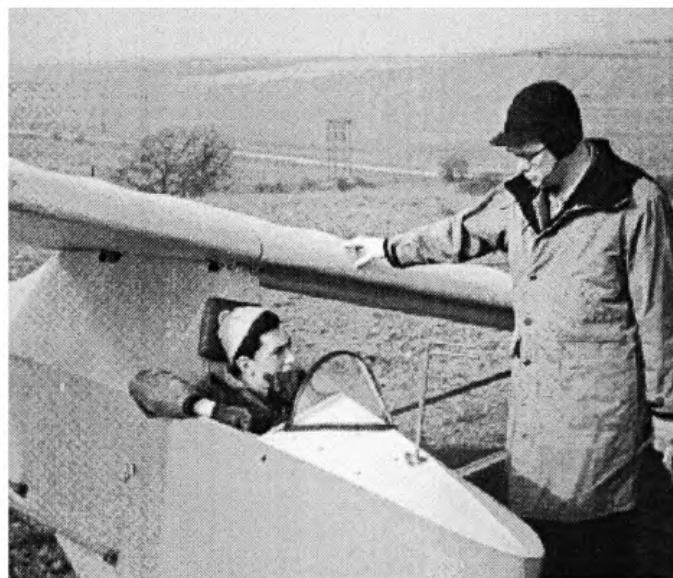
*Frank Pozerskis  
in his Bensen  
gyrocopter.*

Frank Pozerskis arrived at the Club one day in his Bensen gyrocopter, and after everyone had clustered round the machine and duly admired it, a procession started out across the field to the launch point for Franks's return flight home to Kettering. A photograph exists somewhere of the line of Club members, closely followed by Bob White and John Daniel carrying the stretcher that used to live inside the hanger entrance.

Another of Dunstable's characters was Walter Neumark. One weekend he brought a Lemoigne parachute to the Club for people to try. This was the first of the parascenders and, towed up behind a Land Rover, launches to 200ft were enjoyed by all. 'I felt just like a fairy!' cooed Barbara Deans. Walter worked for a company called Frankenstein, makers of rubber dinghies, and designed an inflatable rubber aeroplane for some Army contract. The story went that when he tried to test fly it, as the speed built up, the inflated wings folded upwards and trapped his head between them. One of these inflatables is in the Army Air Museum at Middle Wallop. A quirk of Walter's whilst instructing was, on finding a thermal, to tear up magazines and throw the pages out of the two seater. He reckoned that the soaring sheets of paper would show him where the lift was strongest. He directed his pupils to use copies of Picture Post and not aeronautical journals so that the public would not so easily recognise where all the litter was coming from.

The problem with a large club is keeping track of who is who. One day, the SW launch point was very busy as a young lad pulled a Prefect onto the line and was winch launched. After a shaky circuit he finished much too low by the Club gates and had to put down in Pratt's Field, which lies between the Lynchets and the Bowl. The Prefect trundled quickly down the slope and rammed its nose into the hedge breaking the drag spars and leaving the wings raked forward 45 degrees. The pilot, who turned out to be an ex ATC cadet, had decided to send himself solo, as he thought; 'This would show initiative'. He was shown the door instead!

On a good thermal day in 1960, John Costin was flying his syndicate Olympia the other side of Totternhoe when a column of thin cloud started forming and hanging down from the base of a very black cumulus. It was a genuine tornado and rapidly thickened and reached down towards the ground. Costin, being that sort of person, decided to fly through it after circling around and digging a wing into it to see if there was any reaction. Going straight at it, he received an enormous jolt as he passed through the column but fortunately it did not do the Oly any harm. All this was being watched from the Club, and it was later reported that several greenhouses and chicken sheds had been demolished in Totternhoe.



*Phil Jeffrey in  
Tutor with  
Chuck Bentson  
1959.*



In 1960, several 300km flights had been made from Dunstable but these had been downwind dashes. The first 300km triangle was completed by young Phil Jeffery who at that time was serving as an RAF apprentice at nearby Halton. He declared LGC-Lasham-Nympsfield-LGC and duly set off in the Club Skylark III. There was no radio in those days and as the hours went by, there were no telephone calls to report his outlanding. Hopes began to rise as we waited on the airfield. All of a sudden, there he was, coming in fast to complete the task in six and a half hours. A great effort! Phil now flies at Cambridge and is a respected Nationals competitor.

The land at the foot of the Lynchets used to be let off to a local farmer who ploughed it and sowed wheat. This proved a hazard in the case of an undershoot. During a competition Ken Wilkinson allowed one of his crew members to fly his Fauvette. Unfortunately, this pilot got caught in the down draught over the bushes and touched down in the corn, ground-looping and damaging the glider. On another occasion, a tug pilot got it wrong in a Tiger Moth and as the wheels touched, the aircraft was flipped over onto its back. Later, Geoff Nixon had the unfortunate experience of landing a Tiger Moth whose undercarriage collapsed, again resulting in an overturned aircraft.

In the Tiger Moth days, it was the practice to test fly the aircraft at the start of each day and there was no shortage of volunteers to fill the front seat as passenger. This idea was probably a hangover from RAF training. Another thing that used to be done was dropping the tow rope at the launch point before the tug came in to land. On the south west run, sightseers used to gather on the Lynchets in defiance of the tow rope rings whipping about their ears and they even used to drive their cars up the track and park them there. This track was

named on an old map as Worthington Smith Way, as a tribute to a Victorian local historian.

From time to time a young pupil would turn up at the Club and show exceptional talent. One such was a schoolgirl brought along by her mother who very quickly learnt to fly the T.21, the current trainer, very well indeed. On her 16th birthday, it was time for her to go solo and she was duly sat in a Tutor and given her briefing. There is always a bit of an atmosphere at the launch point when first solos are made and this time was no exception. The Tutor was winched up, came off the launch and soon started to circle. The thermal was a good one and the glider went straight up to over 4,000ft (you could do that over the site in those days) and it was over half an hour before it came down to land. The schoolgirl was Delphine (Delly) Grey-Fisk who later went on from gliders to power craft, became a commercial pilot, and finished up as a flight captain with Dan Air flying passenger jets.

Westerly winds seem to have been far more prevalent years ago than they are now and hill soaring more appreciated. If the wind was on the Hill, very early starts to flying were made and one morning, Archie Erskine did not waste flying time by getting dressed but ventured forth in his pyjamas to fly the Prefect. The Hill wind dropped away while he was at the Zoo end and he was forced to put down in a field just to the west of the Dagnall road below the Zoo Bowl. Hence the name of the Pyjama Field. Archie was described as one of those infuriating people who, after you had got a machine out of the hangar, DI'd it, got it to the launch point and left it for a moment to park the tractor, you would find sitting in the cockpit awaiting a launch. Remonstrations would provoke a plaintive 'Oh, I didn't realise anyone else wanted it.' Grrrrrrrrrr!

Archie (or Erchie Arskine as he was frequently referred to) had another claim to fame. When downwind dashes to Roborough were the fashion for claiming a Diamond 300km goal, invariably Archie would make a declaration every time he



*Archie Erskine,  
father of the 'Pyjama  
Field' legend.*

flew and many were the times when the office phone would ring with Archie requesting a retrieve from a few miles down the Chiltern ridge. This became a standing joke amongst other members but Archie got the last laugh. One very blue day when nobody had even thought about flying cross-country, late in the afternoon a phone call came in and it was Archie, who had achieved his ambition and got his syndicate *White Oly* to Plymouth Airport at long last.

Archie preferred sleeping in his trailer to sharing the bunkhouse with the riffraff. Late night revellers in the bar thought it would be a good laugh to take the trailer for a walk in the dark and, slipping a bolt through the door catch, they detached the trailer from the rack and started rotating it one way then the other. While they paused for breath, someone inadvisably undid the door whereupon Archie erupted from inside, seized the axe off the nearby winch and chased David Smith across the airfield. Life was certainly exciting at Dunstable in years past.

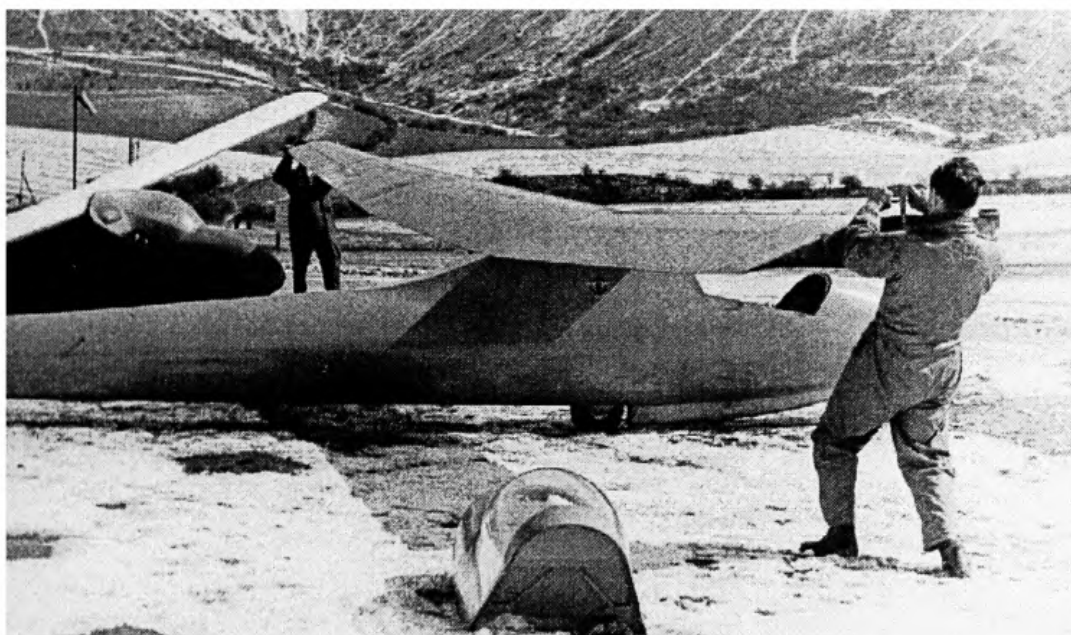
In 1947, a Club magazine was started up under the editorship of Hugh Wheatcroft. Under the title of 'LGC Gazette', 'LGC Newsletter' and 'Ups and Downs' it has appeared, with a few breaks, over the past fifty two years as a booklet, a duplicated news sheet, and currently as a glossy illustrated magazine. In the mid-eighties, we saw it as 'SPLODGE', (Spasmodic Periodic Literary Organ for Dunstable Gliding Enthusiasts) produced by Tim Godfrey, before it reverted to its more traditional presentation. A list of editors appears in the Appendix.

The LGC Gazette used to regularly feature articles on gliding technique and safety matters penned

under the name of Uncle Wilbur (Actually Lawrence Wright). The golden snippets of advice were buried in the reported flying antics of such characters as Harold Hardbottom, a hill squatter who never left the site, Willie Leavus, E. Undershott Baddely, Ernest Wagstick, Dashdown Windham and Fred Fumble. These articles evoked spirited response in the letters to the Editor from T.O.Prudder, S.P. de Caw and Eustace Hyeblastew. Another celebrated correspondent was Yerfdog Eel, not to be confused with the later Mit Yerfdog. One of the former's missives produced a response from no less than Fred Slingsby who maintained he had a great respect for Yerfdogs, a friend of his having been badly bitten in the Urals by one in his younger days.

In 1958, during a period when the traditional newsletter was in limbo, an attempt was made to introduce a weekly news sheet for Club members entitled *The London Flyer*. Its primary purpose was to acquaint everybody of all the jobs that needed doing around the Club, as this was a time when voluntary effort was the norm rather than the exception. The list of projects in the first issue was quite daunting, covering the preparation of car parking spaces, trailer bar installations, site clearing, weeding, building a children's playground, hedge pulling, boundary fence repairing, work on the Otley Building doors, tractor and winch repairs etc. etc.

An institution, long gone, was the *Kronfeld Club* located in a basement in Victoria. This was a social club for flyers, especially gliding people, which was open on weekday evenings with Wednesday night devoted to a talk by some well known personality. Prior to the talk, everyone contributed news of any outstanding flights carried out from



*Rigging a  
Skylark III  
1963.*



their clubs the previous weekend. It ran for many years from the fifties and the standard, range and quality of the talks was quite outstanding.

1963 was the year of the long cold winter when the Club was virtually snowbound for the first three months. Great drifts of snow piled up against the trailer racks and apart from one or two weekends, it was impossible to get cars up the entrance road. Skis and toboggans soon appeared on the scene and parachutes were attached to old tyres and sped across Hangar Ridge. During one sunny weekend lull in the bad weather, the Weihe syndicate made an attempt to drive to Yorkshire to deliver the aircraft, which had been sold. They got as far as Luton before a trailer wheel mounted the piled-up snow bank at a crossroads and the whole lot fell on its side. An oncoming bus slithered to a stop and the passengers got off to help roll the trailer back on to its wheels. About six feet of floor was dangling from the rear of the trailer but wrapping a towrope round this solved that problem, and the equipe was driven slowly back to the Club. The glider inside had been well fixed down and had suffered virtually no damage.

To encourage cross-country flying, in 1963 Charles Ellis and David Carrow devised an inter-club contest whereby a trophy, *The Collector's Plate*, could be claimed by a pilot on arrival at either Lasham or Dunstable. The 70km or so represented a significant task for the gliders in general use at the time, but this has become a bit too easy for modern GRP machines.

In pre-war days LGC members were predominantly wealthy businessmen or professionals such as doctors and architects. From old photographs, one sees that suits, collars and ties were normal wear and it seems that it was the practice to call each other by surname or perhaps a nickname.



*Sheila Tosh's bubble car  
tidily parked in the  
Clubhouse 1959.*

In 1959 it was suggested that there really should be a Club tie, and Guy Collinsplatt organised production of one with the Whipsnade Lion rampant over the winged badge. This seems not to have survived the ensuing forty or so years.

On matters sartorial ... In the fifties and early sixties you would expect to see practically everyone wearing a woolly hat and an ex-RAF grey flying suit. These were sold off at about 35 shillings (£1.75) from government surplus stores and it was only when the supplies dried up that anoraks became general wear. John Jeffries did sport riding breeches for one season of instructing but this was unusual. Also seen around would be a few Irvin sheepskin flying jackets usually worn by older members who had kept them from more exciting service times. In winter, 'bruin suits' could also be seen around. These were voluminous collar-less brown overalls with zips down the front and legs, and with thick kapok padding. They originated as inner warmers to go under flying suits of bomber crews during the war, and were certainly very welcome on chilly gliding sites. And not only on the field! One freezing winter's morning, Mike Bird was observed in the bunkhouse in bed, wearing his bruin plus a trilby hat.

Another winter's tale is of the time when Mike Bird and Roger Barrett had to wake someone in the ladies' dormy. Because the room was little used and had no heating, the blankets got very damp. On putting their heads round the door, Mike and Roger saw that each occupied bed had a plume of steam rising from it, reminding them of the Stieglitz 1890's photo of New York tramcar horses on a snowy day.

Talking of horses, when there were stables behind the golf club, one would often see a file of riders silhouetted against the skyline of the Bowl looking like a war party of Redskins shaping up for a raid. It would have only needed a few puffs of smoke signal along the Hill to complete the illusion. Happily, we all kept our hair on!

One section of the huts had been converted for use as the Members' Kitchen, in which all sorts of meals were concocted. Mike Bird again features in an event when he went out to fly, forgetting he had left a tin of steak and kidney heating in a saucepan of boiling water. Luckily there was nobody in the room when the tin exploded, coating the walls and ceiling with shreds of meat and gravy.

Another story about the Members' Kitchen concerns a group of impecunious members spending a week at the Club, who collected various tins of food which all went into a large cooking pot. Each evening, helpings were taken and the pot topped up. Towards the end of the week, the ladle came up with a sock dripping gravy etc. 'Ah!' said John Cardiff, 'My sock! I hung it up to dry and I wondered what had happened to it. Just as well I hadn't bothered to wash it'.

The last days of the Members' Kitchen came when the cleaners refused to touch it as its condition was so disgusting and the area was converted to bunk rooms.

One morning in 1960, the astonishing sight of a bubble car parked in the Club house foyer greeted everyone. A group led by Sid Tomlin thought it would be a bit of a wheeze to put the BMW Isetta belonging to Sheila Tosh on top of the bar roof. This proved to be too difficult, so the Clubhouse doors were taken off and the bubble car manoeuvred inside. Attempts to get it up the stairs to the restaurant proved fruitless, so there it stayed until Sheila's arrival. She seemed quite unperturbed, 'Oh, poor car,' she said, and then walked off to leave everyone to get it out again.

Some time later Ray Stafford Allen's Messerschmitt bubble car received the same treatment, finishing up perched on three stools in the bar.

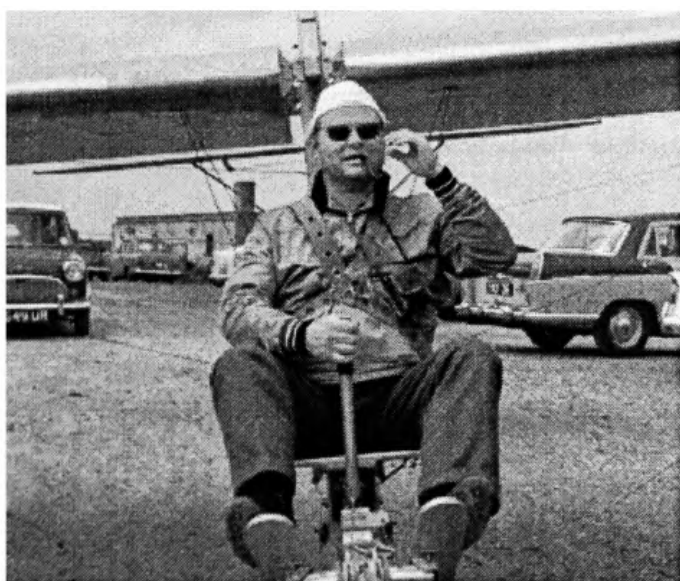


Table tennis was one of the recreations carried on in the restaurant but with a very odd twist. It was the custom for the loser of the game to have to jump out of the window on to a convenient heap of sand outside the hangar. Later, to while away the non-gliding hours, a syndicate was formed to operate a bar billiards table. This proved very popular, even at sixpence a go, and produced a healthy profit. At the end of twelve months, the syndicate turned over the table to the Club who then got the benefit.

The next craze to hit was twiddle football but this became very unpopular with the diners because of the noise generated by over excited players.

In 1959 there was a group of enthusiastic LGC members living in a flat in London's Ebury Street. With the impetuosity of youth, they had decided that the then CFI was way past his 'sell-by date', the main contention being that, at the advanced age of 50, he was too old to hold the post. They decided to mount a campaign to oust him and lobbied every Club member to give them support and sign a petition. They then called an extraordinary general meeting and gained enough votes to get their motion through. The poor CFI in question, Dan Smith, was devastated. He had put in so much good work for the Club over the years, even providing one of the Tiger Moths for tugging but all this counted for nothing. During a subsequent inquiry, it was found that many people had signed the petition without realising its implications and others found their names quoted as supporters when they were not, so the deposing became a somewhat hollow victory.

One of the stalwart members of the fifties and sixties was Peter Fletcher. In spite of always being short of money, he somehow managed to organise himself lifts out to the Club from London and to keep up his flying. He got hold of a Slingsby Kadet and this was his pride and joy on which he lavished attention. He was constantly trying out small modifications, like fairing the tubular struts, or fitting end plates on the wingtips for which he

*The unforgettable  
Peter Fletcher, Club  
member from 1947  
to 1980.*



made extravagant claims of increased performance at length in the bar. Then he extended and rounded off the wingtips and ailerons. This was reason enough for him to rename the glider the *Super Kadet*. One evening, John Jeffries was challenged for a five shilling wager to make a flight of over 100km and accordingly chose to make a goal flight to the Long Mynd. Now John's reputation for navigation was not of the best, and allowance was made for a flight of that length in any direction. This was just as well, for after a couple of hours conditions to the north west made progress problematical and John headed north then east. After a magnificent flight of over four hours, during which cloudbase at 6,700 feet was reached, the Kadet finished up at Cranwell having gone 210km from the LGC to Stratford on Avon and then Cranwell. Some time later, John claimed that he had never collected his five shillings, which provoked a furious reaction from Peter in the Club Newsletter.

In 1968, Peter Fletcher persuaded Short Aircraft's gliding club to let him have the *Nimbus*. This was a unique, large two seater, with low set gull wings. During its transportation by road and ship from Belfast the glider suffered a fair amount of damage from rough handling, and it spent a couple of years in the Ottley Workshop being worked on by Peter and Noel Quinn before it took to the air again. When finished, it proved to be an aircraft that thermalled beautifully but was a devil to put down, as its small spoilers and low set wing caused a tremendous ground float. Not a machine in which to go cross-country. The *Nimbus* eventually found its way to Mike Russell's 'Russavia' collection of aircraft at Duxford, and finished up in Short's Aircraft Museum at Belfast.



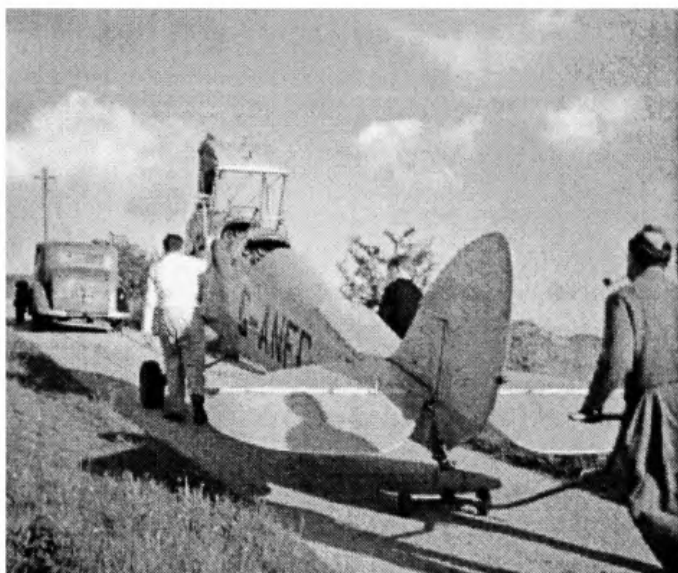
Looking through the Club Committee minutes from 1954, one boggles at an item recurring at every meeting. Apparently, an aldis lamp was obtained for use at the launch point and it was decided that a box was needed to keep it in. For versatility, the box should be on wheels and Peter Fletcher was delegated to organise the components. This he soon did but what he failed to do was unite the two parts. The constant repetition in the minutes of 'PF to fit wheels on box' eventually changed to 'Box lost. PF to find another'. After some more months: 'New box obtained but wheels now lost'. Then: 'Wheels found, second box now required'. Dan Smith obliged by finding another and eventually, after two whole years, the item disappeared from the minutes with a final entry 'Box now on wheels'. Probably by that time, the aldis would have been lost, stolen, strayed or broken and the need for the box long gone.

Ray Stafford Allen was returning to the field from an aerotow with a Tiger Moth when a retaining bolt on the spinner failed. As the spinner disappeared, it broke the tip of one of the propeller blades and the resulting vibration from the engine loosened the bearers. Ray had to put the machine down immediately and went into a small field at Stanbridge. The Tiger had to be retrieved by road, the fuselage being hitched to the back of Ron Watson's Bentley and trundled through Totternhoe.

During the time when Vic Ginn was running the Club workshop, he came in one morning to find that during the night some electric wiring had started a fire. But the heat had melted some polythene sheeting above the workspace and this had fallen down and snuffed out the flames. It could have so easily resulted in the loss of the whole Clubhouse complex. This would have happened about 1967.

Airfields are not the safest places for children and the tractors have always been a major attraction for youngsters. Chuck Bentson's son decided to try one out, and managed to run over Pat George's lad cracking his pelvis in the process. It was Pat George, a psychologist, who when asked whether he was a believer in corporal punishment by parents, replied: 'Indeed I do. But nowadays we call it Aversion Therapy.'

*Ray Stafford Allen in  
the Tutor, John  
Westhorpe by the nose.*



*Retrieving the Tiger Moth from Stanbridge by road.*

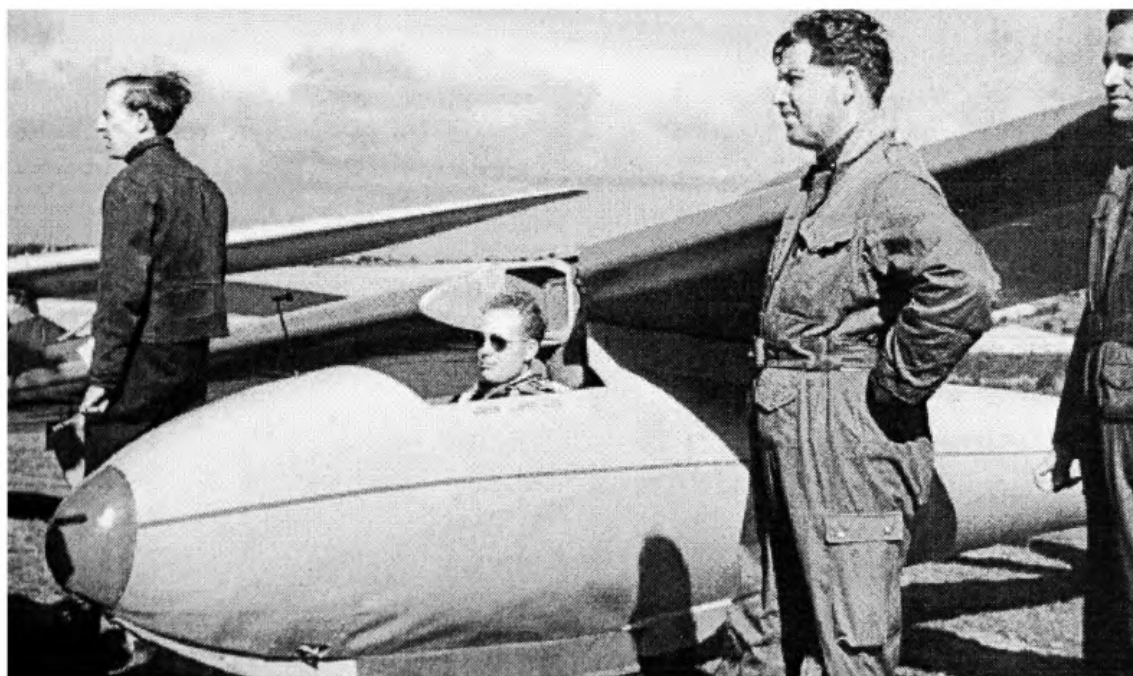
Pat George was down in the caravan site one day when he saw some suspicious-looking characters trying the van doors. At that time there had been a spate of break-ins by gypsies or travellers so Pat contacted the local constabulary who sent up a couple of Bobbies. 'How will we know who are gypsies and who are Club members?' they asked. 'Easy,' replied Pat, 'the gypsies will be the ones who are better dressed!'

A report in *Sailplane and Gliding* 1963 about Mike Bird's relinquishing the editorship of the Club Newsletter was somewhat diminished by the closing sentence 'On behalf of all Club members, we thank him.'

Club members often try to be helpful, especially when they have skills or facilities which can be tapped for the common benefit. Their efforts, however well intentioned, sometimes do not turn out as planned. One such member, thinking to improve on the use of tyres for parking gliders,

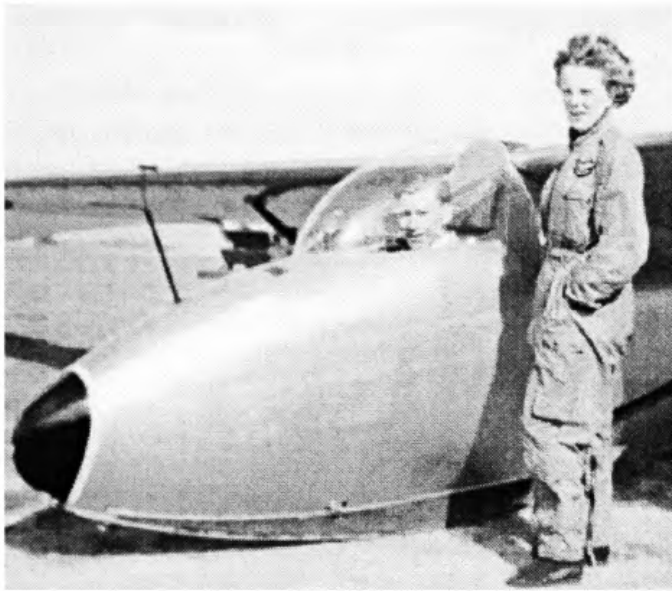
made up a large number of canvas sacks with compartments for sand weighting. These could be laid across wingtips to hold them down and could be rolled up for easy handling. Their portability proved to be their undoing. In the centre section of the Olympia was a locker for the barograph with access through a little door under the wing. Someone, bringing the Oly back to the hangar after flying, stuffed the wing weights into the locker and then forgot to take them out when he arrived. The inevitable happened and the next day the Oly was flown, the pilot complaining of weird handling. Investigation revealed, apart from a sloppy DI, all these weights concealed in the fuselage. Goodness knows what effect it was having on the centre of gravity but it was fortunate that the aircraft did not get into a spin that could well have been fatal.

The Olympia was a fairly rugged glider, but had one failing. With the weight of the pilot on board, the glider would rock forward on to its skid and a winch launch would bang the tail on the ground on the 'All out'. Donald Tapp had this happen to him one day. While he was soaring up and down the Hill he thought that the elevator response was very odd. He played it very carefully and landed back to see what was up. Everyone was horrified to see the rear fuselage had broken almost



*The Club Olympia with (left to right) John Jeffries, John Light in cockpit, Dicky Ruffett and Vic Tull.*





*Bob White in his  
Kite II with  
Sheila Tosh, now  
Ruffett.*

completely around the tail, which was only held on by the top longerons and the cables.

Another Olympia story is of the visitor who went off in one of the Club Oly's for a bit of local soaring. He got low to the north of Dunstable and, deciding he could not get back to the airfield, put down into a field near the AC Works. No one is quite sure whether he overshot or undershot, but he finished up spinning into the bottom of a chalk quarry which used to adjoin the old railway track. There was no fuselage left in front of the main bulkhead but, unhurt, he made his way back to the Club and arrived white from head to foot from chalk dust.

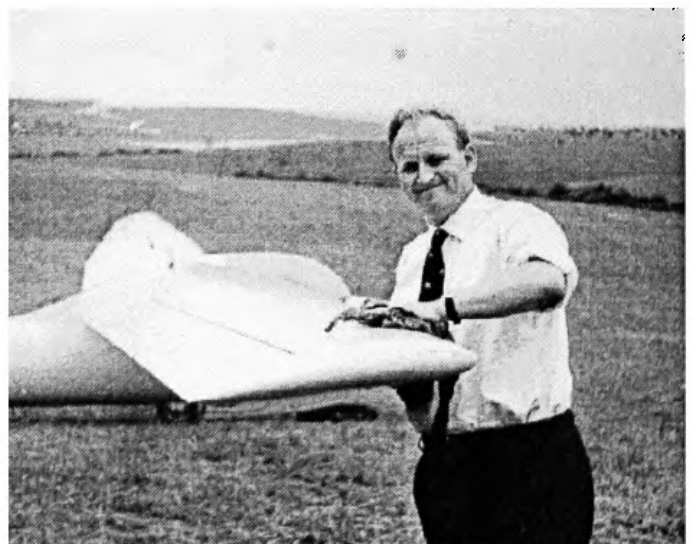
Bob White and Roger Pollard got hold of a T.21 one day and persuaded George Scarborough to give them an aerotow with a Tiger Moth. As they passed through 1,500 feet Roger said 'What about opening the spoilers and seeing what happens?' No sooner said than done and as the brakes were gently eased out George, who was a very switched-on pilot indeed, immediately sensed that something was not quite as it should be. As he tried to puzzle it out, his head was swivelling up, down, round and about. The brakes were eased in and everything returned to normal. With the two in the glider chortling away, Roger suggested trying it again. 'Hang on,' said the wily Bob, 'Let's wait until we are within reach of the Club before we have another go.' How right he was. In the interim, George had sussed out what they had been up to and as soon as Roger put out a bit of spoiler,

George's reaction was immediate. He pulled the cable release and dived away vertically, his left arm high in the air with the traditional vigorous two-finger salute!

Pat Holmes had a big laugh one fine day when she flew off eastwards in the Club Olympia and put down on the large American air base at Woodbridge in Suffolk. She was met by a jeep which roared up, pulled in front of her, flashed a big sign which said 'Follow me' and then drove off into the distance. Later, while she was being interrogated in the station guardroom, the Oly had a huge transfer of a swooping eagle applied to the front fuselage, the emblem of the resident attack squadron.

Pat was, to put it politely, quite a large lady, and this was emphasised by the fact that she drove one of the tiniest cars ever built. This was a Goggomobile and was a product of the bubble car era. It was driven with the utmost verve and determination to such effect that it was eventually overturned into a field and written off.

John Cardiff was a talented competition pilot at a very young age. Working in the film industry, his bouts of working were enough for him to sustain intense flying during the soaring season. From one of his overseas trips he returned with a pet bush baby. Trying to live on site in a caravan with this proved chaotic. After nightfall, the creature would



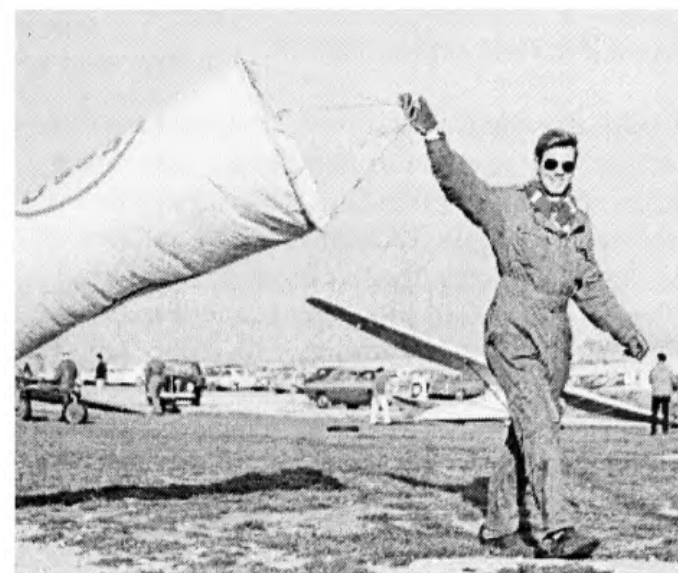
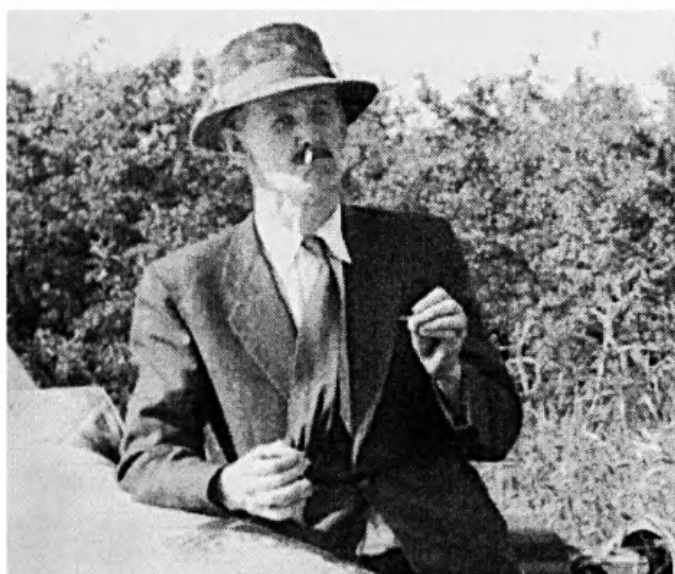
*George  
Scarborough.*

*Mike Till, Club staff  
instructor 1962-66.*

become highly active, rocketing around the van from perch to perch. It had the delightful habit of peeing on its fingers and scent-marking its territory by wiping them on the curtains and walls. John soon decided that the situation was not on. And the bush baby was relegated to the Quaker Hut, which lies behind the Ottley building.

About the same time as John had his bush baby, Jackie Cooper used to walk her pet gosling around the Club on a lead. Another member had a pet green monkey, which was a great attraction.

Cats were around too. One story that had a happy ending occurred in 1962 when the author took home an empty trailer to work on over a weekend. There was a very heavy frost overnight so I did not get around to opening up the trailer doors until the following afternoon and was then confronted by a stowaway. This was a very cool cat belonging to one of the Club's caravan dwellers, Roy Cracknell, and had obviously crept in unseen. After being taken into the house to thaw out and have a feed, the cat started exploring the room but, having never experienced walking on a carpet before, was high stepping and being very careful how it placed each foot. It had also had never been in a car before and, on its way back to Dunstable, was jumping around all over the place until confined in a cardboard box.



*Nightmare* was a well-known feline belonging to John Everitt, and later there was *Amyryllis* and then *Sydney*, a tomcat which adopted the Club and lived in the hangar. It disgraced itself on the Moswey's seat cushion once when the glider was lodged there overnight. This became so evident and overpowering during a flight on the following hot day that the pilot had to land.

Ron Watson was another of Dunstable's characters, never seen without a greasy brown trilby hat and a quarter of an inch of nicotiney dog-end glued to his lips. He was very gifted technically, both in terms of theory and practicality. During a dance in the restaurant one night, he noticed how the floor was visibly heaving up and down in sympathetic oscillation with the tempo. Next morning, there was great consternation when the centre of the beam over the hangar door opening had a great pattern of cracks radiating upwards. It was only close inspection that revealed these to be painted on, and Ron was traced as the culprit.

When the World Gliding Championships were held at South Cerney in 1965, an appeal was made to British glider owners to lend their machine to overseas competitors. Mike Riddell and Ron Watson accordingly offered their Skylark III which was taken up by an Israeli airline pilot. He was very grateful until he saw the retrieve vehicle, which was Ron's very ancient Bentley saloon which had been described by Mike Bird as nothing but a derelict mobile ashtray. The Israeli was absolutely

*Ron Watson,  
technical genius.*



horrified, and dashed off to hire himself a respectable Ford Zephyr instead.

In 1965, the Marconi Company contacted the Club for help with a project to see the extent to which gliders showed up on radar. Trials were carried out over Essex using the Club's Skylark III and one of the Tiger Moth tugs. Various types of passive radar reflectors were tried, some consisting of strips of aluminium tape stuck on to various parts of the aircraft. Mike Till, Colin Richardson, John Cardiff and Jim Wingett did the flying, mostly out of Colchester airport. The radar was at Rivenhall and would direct the glider to Wheeley Heath, a farmer's strip that they would use for the rest of the day, sometimes doing nine flights. On one occasion the glider release jammed while Colin was being towed up through cloud and they gained another 500 feet before he managed to free it. Mike in the tug spiralled down towards Wheeley Heath but found it completely clamped in so diverted to Ipswich. Colin told Rivenhall of the situation and they gave him a course to fly for Ipswich. He reckoned he had plenty of height to spare but he was still in cloud when approaching the estuary. The airport was quite a way over the other side and Rivenhall advised him to turn back if he had doubts. Colin did decide to press on, broke cloud halfway across the water and just managed to scrape into the airport without circling or using the airbrakes. The extra 500 feet before release had made all the difference. While they were flying out of Wheeley Heath, the farmer was grubbing up an orchard with explosives and every now and then there would be a shattering crash. They hoped he would not project an apple tree into their flight path on take off!

Mike Till recounts even more fraught situations that cropped up during the course of the trials. On many of the sorties, the glider was towed up to heights of 8,000 feet over the North Sea and on cast off, Rivenhall Radar gave a course to the east. Eventually instruction to turn back to land was given, but as many of the flights were carried out blind, complete faith in the controller's advice of location was needed. On one flight, sea fog had rolled in over Ipswich and on Mike's return approach he was really sweating until, breaking cloud at about 100 feet, he saw the runway numbers directly beneath him.

Piloting the Tiger Moth up to high altitudes in mid-winter was no joke either. The cold was intense in spite of many layers of clothing. The gap between top of flying helmet and top of goggles caused intense pain as it froze and Mike's solution was to

wedge in a pad of rolled up cloth. This worked well until it unrolled on one approach and blinded him. The whole test programme involved over 200 aerotows.

All flights were carried out with full co-operation of Air Traffic Control and briefings had been circulated to all airfields in the area including the military. However when on one descent through cloud, Mike came into an area of clear air several hundred yards long but still completely surrounded by cloud, a US Air Force Voodoo fighter suddenly appeared head-on at the same level. The Skylark and the Voodoo passed wingtip to wingtip at a closing speed of some 350 mph and Mike clearly recalls the face peering out from the bone-dome behind the perspex. An enquiry was held and as Mike entered the building where it was taking place, an American lieutenant colonel shouted across the hallway 'That's the guy', so clearly had he seen him. The Marconi operation was completely exonerated of any blame and it turned out that it was the colonel's third air-miss that year.

A story Mike Till told against himself was about the time they were preparing to tow out of Ipswich with a fair crosswind. The Skylark was hitched on to the Tiger, which was standing facing a parked aircraft. To turn a Tiger Moth into wind, it was the practice to give a burst of throttle with the stick held full forward and full rudder. This usually worked well but this time the crosswind prevented the swing around and the Moth trundled forward straight towards the parked machine. With no wheel brakes to slow it down, Mike switched off the engine and the metal prop had stopped when the Tiger came to rest, the engine cowling having bent the parked machine's tail fin. Mike and John Cardiff pushed the bent fin upright and as nobody seemed to have noticed, carried on and took off. Fortunately the damaged machine was a derelict so no harm was done and any altercation with authorities avoided.

Two course members were comparing notes on the relative merits of the instructors. 'I can't see any difference between John Jeffries and Mike' said one. 'I can,' retorted the other, 'JJ pulls much harder when we are getting the glider back to the launch point.'

Long time member Mike Garrod worked as a Met. Office forecaster and read the daily weather news on Radio Four or its then equivalent.

The mid-sixties to mid-seventies saw a dramatic increase in the flying activity at Dunstable. Under



*Tom and June  
Zealley  
inspecting their  
new Ka 6 in  
1961.*

the inspired Chairmanship of Tom Zealley and with the appointment of John Jeffries as CFI/Manager, things really took off. Within two years the number of launches leapt from around 12,000 to over 20,000 and gradually the composition of the glider and tug fleets was radically changed. Details of the aircraft involved are given in chapter 11.

In 1966, Hertfordshire County Council provided a subsidy to encourage schoolchildren to experience the joys of flight, and a series of evening courses was held at Dunstable. These were so successful that John Jeffries decided to extend the invitation to other groups such as Young Farmers, Rotary Clubs, Women's Institutes, sports clubs etc. By 1968, with publicity, evening flying became a regular feature of Club activity and a major source of income. In view of the somewhat inadequate winching facilities, most of the flying was done from 1,000 foot aerotows. By the following year almost 100% take-up of evening course places was the norm, some groups comprised of 30 or more participants.

The Club has regularly hosted groups of schoolchildren and has run sessions for speciality organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

On one evening course we had a coach load of disabled people who moved around in wheelchairs. They all had their air experience flights and then retired to the bar, where they held

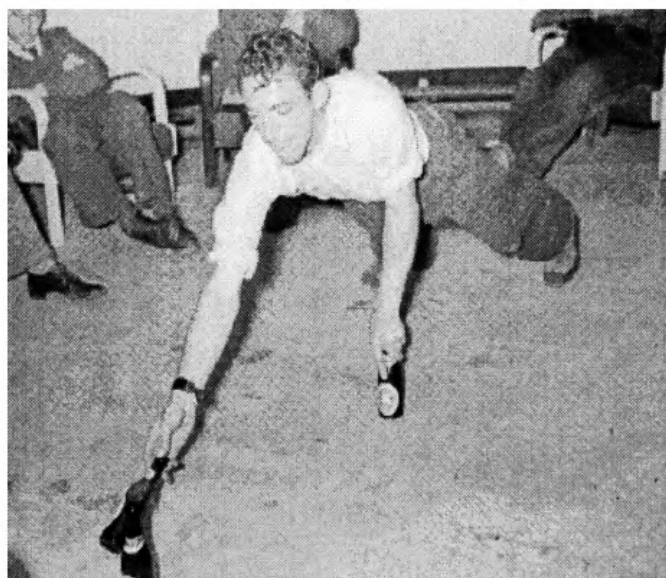
quite a party and knocked back a large quantity of alcohol. A lady member recounting this the next day remarked in all innocence "They were all legless when they left here!"

Consequent on LGC's success in this field of widening the interest in gliding, John Jeffries was invited to deliver a series of presentations to BGA management groups, and evening courses were generally adopted throughout the UK gliding scene.

1966 also saw the introduction of the 'Bronze C' qualification as a means of encouraging more training in cross country awareness before attempting flights for the Silver badge.

Philomena Delaney (Philly) was resident tug pilot during the 1968 season and was flying a Chipmunk on the NE run which used to involve towing out to the right of the windsock and over Hangar Ridge in front of the Clubhouse. This route could prove quite turbulent in the lee of the Bowl. One day the glider got too high and pitched the nose of the tug earthwards. Philly reacted very quickly, ditching the towrope, but could not get the nose up in time to avoid touching down heavily in Pratt's Field, bending the rear fuselage of the Chipmunk badly but at least enabling her to walk away unscathed.

One attractive feature of the Club bar that has long since disappeared was installed by John Hands. It



*Bar games were a  
feature of the fifties  
and sixties.*



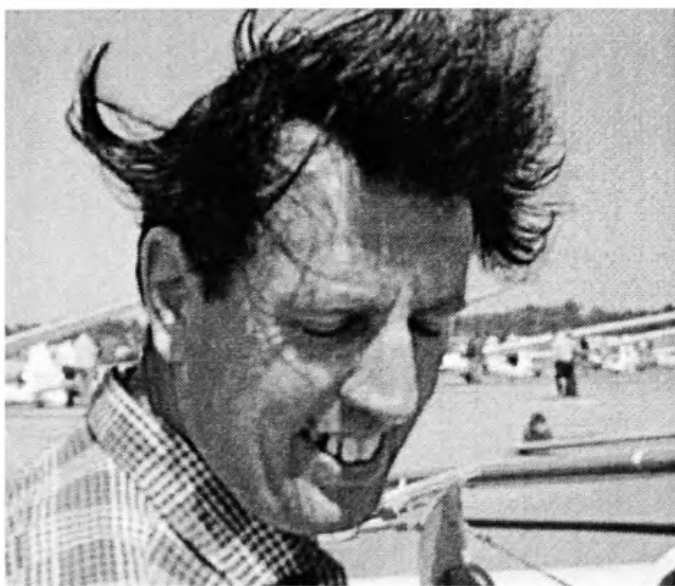
consisted of a large floor-to-ceiling panel just inside the glass doors, with a quarter inch map of the southern half of England on it. It made a superb focal point, all cross-country flights being marked on it with pins and coloured string. Nearly all the flights in those days were downwind dashes, and when Charles Ellis marked up a completed triangle one member loudly proclaimed that he did not believe it.

Styles of drink come and go into fashion and before red and white wine became normal fare, country wines especially elderberry and mead were consumed in the bar. This fad was followed by a movement to "Glug" a South African sherry of note.

Evenings in the bar were enlivened by various competitions. There used to be a bench seat under the windows, the supporting legs of which were not boxed in, and it was possible to squirm your way under its length. Timed circuits were a regular Saturday night event. Jousting on the tall bar stools was another, 'bottle-walking' and balancing on a plank over a bottle (called 'wobble boarding') were others. There are vivid memories of savage assaults with rolled up newspapers, blindfolded Ron Page and Johnny Morris playing 'Are you there, Moriarty?'

At one time a *Line book* was kept in the bar, and the more outrageous claims and utterances were recorded therein for posterity. At least that was the idea, but some twenty years ago the book went missing and has not been resurrected. Some of the entries are recalled below.

Geoff Kerr: 'I don't need crashery insurance, I'm too good.'



Harold Tarnow after an undershoot, was heard to blame the winch driver. 'If he'd given me another hundred feet, there wouldn't have been a problem!'

Peter Fletcher, discussing with John Everitt possible marriage plans, maintained he would have an inexpensive wedding in a registry office. With the money he saved he could buy a barograph. 'You don't need a barograph, Peter', said John, 'They take your word for it.' This prompted a letter to the LGC Gazette from John Everitt who denied he and Peter were getting married, they were just good friends.

Pete Rivers: 'Get up with the lark? We DI the damned thing'

Beryl Stephenson: 'Gliding would be lovely if it stopped. Then we could do something really interesting.'

An early solo pilot after a horrendous undershoot explained: 'It wasn't me John, it was the Tutor.' 'Ah!' said John Everitt with a leer, 'We'll have to ground the Tutor for a fortnight then, won't we'.

Martin Simons, when rebuilding a badly damaged Skylark II in the Ottley Building, remarked to Les Collins that because of the modified front fuselage he had had to put a kink in the stick to avoid ruining his prospects. Les, unimpressed, asked 'Wouldn't it be easier to put a kink in your prospects?'

Dave Campbell: 'VMC IMC? Why, conditions have got that bad that we have had to smash the glass on the instruments and come home by Braille.'

George Scarborough: 'If I had to learn to glide again, I'd choose myself as instructor.'

Mike Till: 'I'm not a very good soaring pilot but I think I know how to get away with it'.

Tutor pilot: 'Thermals? I don't bother with them they muck up my circuit judgement.'

*Les (Ho-Ho)  
Collins who spent  
32 years restoring  
a Scud III*

Chuck Bentson, seeing Mike Riddell and Mike Fairman about to fly a K 7: 'I don't know which of them I'd rather not be!'

One of the more experienced lady pilots was heard to say, 'It was so rough I was dropping both wings and didn't know which one to pick up!'

Lawrence Wright: 'In my old age, I will always look back on the long sunny days I have spent at Dunstable in the cockpit of a sailplane waiting for a launch!'

There were a number of traditional gliding songs composed over the years and these were sung with gusto to the accompaniment of the Club piano. Who ever hears a tune whistled or hummed these days?

### HYMN No. 119

All skies bright and beautiful,  
All thermals great and small,  
All tasks set are impossible,  
John Jeffries makes them all.

Each little twit that flies them,  
Each vario that sings,  
He made their tips all coloured,  
He made their flexing wings.  
The cold wind in the winter,  
The thermals in the spring,  
The ASI is twitching,  
Stuff down that bloody wing.

All skies bright and beautiful,  
All thermals great and small,  
All tasks set are impossible,  
John Jeffries makes them all.

### THE LAD'S PRAYER

Our glider which art in the Club's workshop, ASW  
be thy name. Thy bill will come, thou wilt be  
done on earth as it is in Sailplanes.

Give us this day our daily task and forgive us our  
trespasses into airspace as we forgive those who  
trespass in ours.

Lead us not into sink, but deliver us from cu-nims,  
for thine is the wingspan, the ballast and the glide  
angle, for ever and ever, landing out.

### THE SHOBDON SHAKE - By Peter Banting

The rope tightens, the adrenalin flows,  
Wing tip runner knows how it goes,  
Rudders are kicked and ailerons flicked  
But weather cocking glider has us licked.  
Tug slew's left, I go right  
What am I doing here, its only first light?!

A few days of this and make no mistake  
You soon develop the Shobdon Shake.  
John calls it a holiday but have no doubt  
It's breakfast at 6 a.m. and no opting out  
It's daft and its crazy, so don't be late  
It's Shobdon and JJ, it's bloody great.

Wow  
Peter



## THE SEVENTIES & EIGHTIES

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**T**he need for a mid-field signaller on the north east run was brought home forcefully one day when Dick Sherwin took off in a Rallye tug. As he breasted the rise, he met a Jaguar taking the direct route from the Clubhouse instead of driving around the field edge. As the two hit, the wing was completely torn off the Rallye which slithered along the grass, fortunately without turning over and happily leaving Dick unscathed. The Jaguar was a complete write-off. Now you know why we drive the long way round to the north east launch point.

During the course of a fine summer afternoon in the early seventies, it became evident that there was wave about and soon gliders were seen above the site at ever-increasing heights in VMC. More and more joined in and moved out towards Aylesbury to get clear of the airway. Here it was working really well, and Frank Pozerskis wound his way up to 11,500 feet in his Skylark IV. Roger Pollard was sitting at 8,500 feet when he saw an Andover resplendent in bright red Day-Glo pass him by, later finding out that it carried Princess Margaret on a Purple Airways flight. Nobody had thought that the NOTAM nominating those flight levels was relevant to our normal operations.

Wave conditions had been experienced at Dunstable in the thirties but then, of course, it was a mystery phenomenon. Sailplane and Glider occasionally carried reports of strange areas of lift

encountered beyond the Tring Road which allowed flights to be extended to fifteen minutes or more in south easterlies. Doc Slater attempted to explain what was happening with diagrams of the shear effects of winds coming down off the Downs conflicting with those creeping around the Zoo Bowl. In the fifties and sixties people were much more aware, having cut their teeth on wave flying at Portmoak, Sutton Bank and The Mynd, but it was in the last twenty years that John Jeffries really explored the area in higher performance machines and realised how local wave really could be exploited. In September 1978, he had a magnificent flight to 12,500 feet between Dunstable and the Thames Estuary, getting back to the Club with 6,000 feet in hand.

In 1972, hang gliders made their appearance and it was not long before some started to use the Hill as a jumping-off point. The Rogallo wings of those days had an abysmal glide angle and many an intrepid beginner found himself impaled on the spikes of the hawthorn bushes on the lower slopes. Our own John Cardiff tried his luck but soon an injury made him relegate his rolled-up machine to the back of the hangar where it rested for many years. John took up the sport again in the nineties and won an award for being the most promising ab initio pilot.

Hang gliders were very unpopular with the Club because of their habit of gliding down into Pratt's

*1972 wing torn off Rallye tug when it collides with Jaguar car.*



*The sorry remains of the Jaguar.*



Field right across the approach path of our gliders using the south west run. Dunstable Council tried very hard to get hang gliding banned from the Downs but a court case failed and the hang gliders stayed. Eventually their club and the LGC came to terms and relations are now quite amicable. The vast improvement in the performance of the modern machines enables them to soar well and on a brisk wind day as many as a dozen hang gliders may be seen over the Hill at any one time. Some of the hang glider pilots have come down from the Hill and joined the LGC, Pete Harvey (one of their champions) and Dick Perry, to name only two.

Paragliders are the latest manifestation and look very graceful floating up and down in the lightest of airs.

Malcolm Humphries, resident tuggie in 1978, found the cockpit of the Chipmunk he was flying was filling with smoke. He made an emergency landing successfully, but in a field right next to a housing estate. Not daring to leave the machine unattended, he spent three nights sleeping under a wing until a new engine had been fitted and the aircraft flown back to the Club.

In 1982, one fine June afternoon saw the approach of a cu-nim and all gliders were hurriedly got to safety except for five at the launch point. As the storm developed, a whirlwind was seen to come across the airfield, and in no time at all there was chaos. An AS-K 18 was hurled into the air leaving its wingtip still pinned to the ground. The Ka 6c number 175 was a complete write-off. An AS-K 13 disappeared inverted and finished up on the central reservation of the Tring road. Paul Davey tried to sit out the storm in the cockpit of the Kranich III and saw a glider falling almost on top

of him, striking the Kranich's wing about two feet out from the fuselage. Peter Underwood was in the cockpit of his K 6 at the front of the take-off line. He also sat out the storm without realising the mayhem that had occurred behind him, and was absolutely amazed when he opened the canopy and saw all the wreckage strewn around. Pat George's Prefect lost its nose and had its port wing broken in half but Adam Downey has since rebuilt it. All in all it was a very costly afternoon, and a grim warning as to how quickly the weather can change.

There was some interesting helicopter activity at the Club when the chapel at Ashridge was having a new steeple fitted. The traditional building methods had bowed to modern technology and the new structure was a cone made of GRP. It was decided that the easiest way to erect it was to lower it from a hovering helicopter and this was duly done, using LGC as a base of operations.

Commercial photographic sessions are quite often held on the airfield, particularly by car firms, but there was one which was a bit different. John Jeffries, the Manager, did a deal with 'Health & Efficiency' Magazine for them to photograph nude models with a gliding background. He was quite successful in keeping the news about this event from the majority of Club members and arranged the shoot at a quiet part of the airfield down by the Lynchets. JJ of course had to supervise the operation to ensure no harm came to our precious glider. The AS-K 18 was wheeled down and a buxom wench was flashing her more-than-ample bosom for the cameras when, what's this? Two workmen wearing white overalls and carrying a long ladder between them are making their way down the slope. Workmen? Hardly. They are none other than Dave Cornelius and Len Cross making sure that they are not missing anything! The AS-K 18 was sold off to another club the following weekend and when the pictures eventually appeared, the other club suffered the notoriety.

When the film industry tackled the great story of the 1944 airborne attack on Arnhem, the expertise of John Cardiff was called upon in the making of 'A Bridge Too Far'. For some of the flying sequences, John flew a Blanik with a camera mounted in the



*Clearing the wreckage  
after the 1982  
whirlwind.*



nose on tow behind a Dakota. He also did some camera work from the astrodome on one of the Dakotas. Considering that there were no Horsas left in existence when the film was made, the result was surprisingly effective.

In the mid seventies the Club was adopted by a bird of the feathered variety, which turned up one day and proved to be not only completely tame but a dipsomaniac as well. If the bar was open, it would fly inside and wait for someone to buy a beer and then try and scrounge a drink. It was a starling and would perch on anyone's finger if it was outstretched or on a shoulder if outside the building. After a few sups of beer it would become decidedly squiffy and start staggering around, which was all very well except that it would then defecate all over the bar. Ron Humphries, who had the bar concession at the time, eventually got fed up with this and took the bird in his car to the middle of Dunstable, releasing it back to the wild to plague someone else.

Late one night during the winter of 1974, a farewell party for the caterers the Harmandian family was being held in the restaurant when someone dashed upstairs shouting that the hangar was on fire. The response he got was not what he expected, and with difficulty he persuaded the partygoers that he was not joking. Although there were only about a dozen of them, they managed to empty the hangar in less than ten minutes and get at two Tiger Moths at the back, which were blazing. They were manoeuvred outside and the fuel tank of one of them exploded. None of the gliders suffered any damage at all and the Tigers got away with just three of the wings being burnt beyond repair. The source of the fire was a mystery but it was almost certainly arson.

After landing in a field one afternoon, Frank Pozerskis was asked by one of the locals where he came from. Frank, perhaps not so aware of the subtleties of the English language that give totally different meanings to 'Where *have* you come from?' and 'Where *do* you come from?' replied, 'Lithuania'. This prompted a very reverential: 'What, today? Cor!'

One of John Jeffries' interesting flights was when flying with a pupil in an AS-K 13 somewhere out near Edelsborough, they saw a wall of fog forming up between them and the Club. Attempting to get back to the airfield John realised that the visibility had become zero, so he flew at minimum speed in a gentle circle hoping he would see the ground before he hit something. As he circled, he could

hear the traffic on the Tring Road but could see nothing at all. Then the ground appeared just below his wingtip, so he straightened out, opened the brakes, and managed to get down in to a field. Just as the glider stopped rolling, he saw the outline of a brick building no more than six yards ahead of him - a very close thing indeed.

On another occasion, John took a bungee launch from the south west launch point and tucked in close into the Hill at a height of only some twenty feet. He got into the up-draught and crabbed around the Bastion, gaining height all the way until he soared above the Hill top and got away. It was a fascinating demonstration of what can be done in a Ka 8.

The Golden Jubilee of the Club was celebrated in February 1980 with a grand dinner held in the Sculpture Gallery of Woburn Abbey. Two hundred and fifty guests attended the event, which was superbly organised by Annabel Ellis. Many of the early members of the Club from the thirties turned up and the speakers were Godfrey Lee, past Chairman, John Sproule and Peter King, current Chairman. Two of the youngest members of the LGC made a special point of attending so that in the year 2030 they would be able to attend the 100th Anniversary as old codgers and reminisce about the 'good old days' of 1980!

October 1987 saw *The Great Storm*, when winds of hurricane force swept the south of England. Dunstable did not escape unharmed and several trailers and aircraft got damaged. The shed in which the AS-K 16 lived in winter time was completely demolished and the fragments distributed from the Clubhouse trailer rack down to the Lynchets. On their way, the larger bits of the roof and walls struck several trailers: damaging the Capstan, Weihe and Oly 463 inside them. The Kite trailer was speared by a length of four by two timber attached to four square feet of roof, but it penetrated the only bit of the trailer without any part of the glider in it. The floor of the shed remained where it was, with the AS-K 16 fuselage sitting on it virtually unscathed apart from a broken canopy. The wings too had hardly any damage: a few tears in the fabric and a small break in a trailing edge.

In 1987 my Moswey was having attention to the sealing of its canopy, which was a large perspex bubble moulding. A strip of fuzzy foam was coated with Araldite, placed into position at the front of the cockpit aperture, and then, to hold it in place while it was setting, the canopy was locked down.

This done, I was horrified to see two cracks radiating up across the front of the perspex from the point where the sealing had been put. The immediate remedy was to drill two one-sixteenth inch holes to stop the cracks spreading further, and then help was sought from the Workshop. The canopy would have been hideously expensive to replace although it was thought that the mould was still available in Switzerland nine years after the Moswey had been bought there. Dave Richardson took a long look at the canopy and then casually wiped off the cracks, which were no more than thin strands of Araldite that had trailed across it! The glider was eventually sold back to its homeland and the Swiss will probably puzzle for evermore why there were these two holes in the canopy (unless they read this, of course).

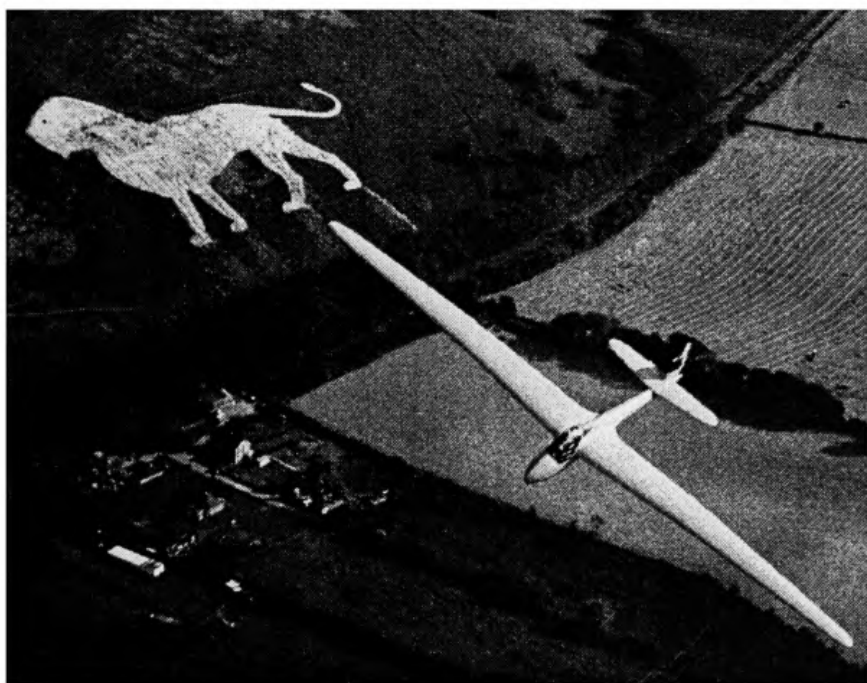
At the end of the eighties, the Leighton Buzzard area and surrounding villages were terrorised by a series of rape attacks, and supplies of door bolts, locks and security devices became unobtainable in local hardware stores. The perpetrator nicknamed *The Fox*, eluded the police for eighteen months. A tremendous effort was mounted to try and catch him including the use of helicopters, dog patrols and the following up of any suspicious reports of sightings. A young lad was winch driving at the Club at the time and, having overslept one morning, got a lift and was dropped in the lane opposite the Club gateway. Someone reported seeing a figure run across the Tring Road carrying a large plastic bag, and in no time at all a police helicopter landed by the Clubhouse, sundry patrol cars roared up the driveway with a dog van in attendance, and the whole place was swarming with the constabulary. Ron Grey, who was running the restaurant then, knew a number of the

policemen and, leaning out the window, invited them in for a coffee! *The Fox* was eventually captured in London more or less by accident when, stopping him for a traffic offence, the police looked into his car boot and found the mask and other gear the he used in his attacks.

Then there was the story of *The Dunstable Hi-jack*. A very junior young lady on a course took a fancy to the current tug pilot but he warily kept very clear. A week or so later after the end of the course the girl turned up again at the Club and asked where she could find the tuggie. It so happened that he was attending with two others a dinner thrown by Barbara Deans in her caravan, and the proceedings were rudely interrupted by the van door being flung open and the diners ordered outside at the point of Daddy's 12 bore shotgun. It was a terrifying situation and whilst attention was being focussed on the tug pilot, others jumped the girl, grabbing the gun which went off blasting a huge hole in the ground. The police came to take the girl away and, although under-age, she was detained. As someone once said: 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!'

One or two week gliding courses had been a feature at the larger clubs since the 1930s but these were universally for training ab initio pupils or just for holiday makers. When John Jeffries bought a high performance Caproni Calif two seater in 1974, he started giving cross-country instruction to the less experienced pilots. In the following year he had the brilliant idea of 'Lead and Follow' where a group of private owners would accompany him on a task and, theoretically at least, if one of them got low John would spiral down and try and guide them to a thermal source and so enable them to

continue their progress. This appeared to work very successfully, and John extended the idea to use a Club AS-K 13 as lead ship with Ka 8s as followers. By 1976, this form of cross country instruction had proved itself and, once again, JJ was asked



*The Swiss built Moswey IV soaring over the Zoo in 1988.*



to present his ideas to the gliding movement at large with the result that BGA coaches and several of the larger clubs introduced 'Lead and Follow' to their syllabus.

In 1989, a loan appeal was made to Club members to fund the purchase of a AS-K 13 for air experience flying and to supplement spinning instruction for which the AS-K 21 was not so suitable. Many coughed up the necessary £100 and the glider was duly put into service. The income generated by all those evening courses enabled the loans to be repaid after two seasons.

Beat-ups of the airfield have always been strongly discouraged for very good reasons but there was an interesting one carried out at the end of the eighties. This was a low-level run at the north east launch point, from the south west. Laurie Woodage was strapped in the Pheonix ready to be aerotowed from the front of the grid, when the top six inches of the fin and rudder of the Ka 6 parked immediately behind him was removed by the 'beating up' glider's wingtip! The other wingtip brushed the leg of a visiting photographer and left a burn mark on his trousers. It was sheer luck that a ghastly accident did not occur. The offending pilot is still flying gliders, but not at Dunstable!

The arrival on site of the AS-H 25 marked a period of tremendous cross-country flights by John Jeffries in this aircraft which he shared with Mike Thick. Under the most unlikely-looking conditions, John would take a launch, disappear from the site and return many hours later having worked his way to the Welsh mountains and back in weak wave. Several of his flights were written up in the Club Gazette or Sailplane & Gliding and the following graphic account by Ron Parsons is typical, showing the almost uncanny skills employed by JJ.

*This article will hopefully interest mere mortals (like me), not that select minority of real pundits whose knowledge and ability separates them from the rest of us. The experience is almost indescribable to glider pilots and impossible for the less fortunate.*

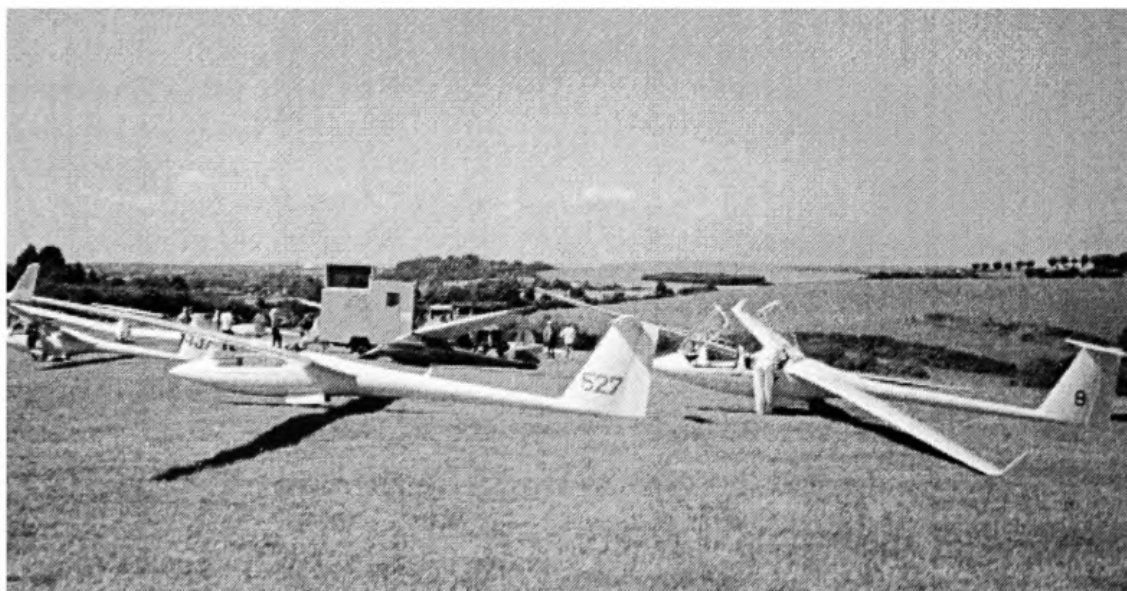
*The simple logbook entry records: September 18th 1988, AS-H 25, 315km O/R Monmouth: 7hrs 25min.*

*A wire launch towards 8/8 low cover promised a typical JJ flight in conditions believed unsoarable by others. The only radio contact during the initial couple of hours was with pilots many miles west of the front enveloping Dunstable. The launch allowed an exciting dash to the Halton ridge, headwind at this height was probably 25-30 kt.*

*To optimise the ridge lift in the westerly and counter the rain now present, we shifted to the Chequers ridge but the associated short beat and the direction of approaching grot encouraged John to return to Halton.*

*The next decision opened Pandora's Box. A dash north west to a line squall as vicious in its black appearance as in its subsequent behaviour, in which traits of cu-nim turbulence added excitement to a cloud climb in heavy rain. Nevertheless, this climb was the key to the day as it enabled connection with cloud streets behind the front, under which we battled against an approximate 45kt headwind. Bicester, Upper Heyford and Enstone passed by very slowly to leave an unpromising 30km stretch ahead where streets did not exist and thermals appeared to be scruffy and unworkable.*

*A 'normal' cloud climb (if connection half a mile upwind of an elongated cu marker is normal)*



*The Big Boys - Schleicher AS-W 22 and AS-H 25 awaiting a tug.*

*provided the launch platform for a very marginal glide to just clear the crest of the Cheltenham ridge and reach its associated security on its west facing slopes. From here, another relatively easy cloud climb over Cheltenham put us within reach of our goal.*

*Eventually, after innumerable cloud climbs in attempts to connect with wave, when the very elusiveness of our goal appeared to be our master on this day, wave suddenly became our ally. Over the Forest of Dean, just west of the Severn Estuary, we climbed to 14,700ft. After a radio check of Dunstable conditions, reassurance to our retrieve crew and a sunset time check, the latest permissible departure time for home was established. Monmouth and Eastbach airfield were hidden below cloud but the telecommunication (defence?) dishes at Marstow, Ross-on Wye and parts of the Severn assisted a fix. Then we got greedy.*

*Whilst seeking wave, followed eventually by a climb in silky-smooth conditions, we both had been admiring a 'lennie-like' lump in cloud still further upwind. Inevitably, with 14,000ft on the clock and our reasons for returning to Dunstable long since dismissed, we agreed to press on. After rapidly losing 6,000ft and still short of our target, we were happy to start a new climb in wave not as strong as the one sacrificed. Wave or road retrieve were now our only options, thermal activity having died.*

*The 77nm/142km final glide home was started from 12,000ft. Minimal topping up was possible in wave along the way (still evident at Aylesbury incidentally) but in principle the Peschges VP3 continued to reflect the 8km cushion JJ added to my distance measurements and a 5,000ft insurance for the risk of wave sink. We returned in 57 minutes at 149 km/hr, the wind having now veered. As we neared home, the lights of identifiable towns below*

*compensated for the lack of a map reading light in the rear seat (a complaint!).*

*Friends had organised a precautionary car headlamp flare path and according to my sunset table we landed just in time. In the bar we were greeted with a £17 bill for the flare path car fuel, my limbs demanded a whisky mac and John sipped his customary white wine.*

*As JJ remarked during the flight; 'Gliding is a privilege' and we agreed that the man in the street could not possibly comprehend. This flight had everything; it surpassed a 300km of anabatic wind ridge soaring in the Sierra Guadarrama earlier in the season. 'Thank you, John, for your kind of magic'.*

A measure of the impressive performance afforded by super ships like the AS-H 25 is the record of No 13's achievements during 1989 in the hands of Robin May, Mike Bird and John Jeffries. In the 395 hours flown, 22,125km were flown cross-country, that is an average of 273km in 3.6 hours. In January, the glider was flown from Sleaf in Shropshire, climbed in wave to 14,000ft over the Conway valley, pressed forward 50 miles to within 12 miles of the Irish coast at 10,300ft, but was prevented by failing daylight from going further. In April, Robin May took the glider to Austria for practice in preparation for the World Championship, completing flights of 425km, 565km, wave climb to 14,000ft and a total of 72 hours. In the contest itself, No 13 flew 3,445km and 51 hours in the air. Robin completed a 576km task at 119.2kph, his fastest 500km ever and only came in 19th place! On his best day he came seventh, and he finished nineteenth overall.

June and July produced another 3,384km mainly in the hands of Mike Bird and at the end of July, Robin won the Open Class Nationals. Not content with this, shortly afterwards he set a new two-seat 100km-triangle record with a speed of 123.99kph. In mid-August, a 750km-goal task was attempted with a turning point at Duns, just south of Edinburgh, but rain forced a landing a few kilometres short.



*Robin May, prolific record breaker and competition winner.*



## THE NINETIES

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In 1990 the Club held its Diamond Anniversary celebrations, having completed 60 years of existence. The event went off in great style with a weekend get-together. It was planned to launch a cavalcade of gliders starting with the earliest that had flown at Dunstable, the SG-38 Primary, scrolling through the years to the newest, the AS-H 25. On the day however, high winds prevented the older machines taking to the air and a static ground display was reverted to. A photographic record of the 60 years lined the open hangar and in the evening, a dinner and dance with the Glenn Miller style Rod Blake Big Band was put on in the tug hanger. Many ex-members turned up to join in the festivities and the whole show was a big success.

Various functions at the Club such as annual dinners have been enlivened by the appearance of small bands, groups or discos but some of the most memorable have been events put on by the members themselves. We have seen some superb reviews signalling the organisational and lyric writing skills of Tim Godfrey and 'Reb' Rebbeck and in 1992, they presented a costume drama 'A Night on the Spanish Main' where the audience entered the spirit of the occasion by attending in fancy dress as pirates.

The following year we were treated to a magic show presented by Peter Banting, a long time member of Mike Hodgson's Tutor syndicate, and he successfully bamboozled the Mayor of Dunstable who was our guest that evening.

Rex Moorey ran into problems when the band he was organising for the last evening of a competition was cancelled at the last moment. While he was bemoaning this in the bar, a lady course member suggested Rex should contact her husband who ran a group. So it was that the Horace M. Smith Jazz Band performed in the new hangar and was such a terrific success that they came back for a repeat performance the following year. Another great evening was organised by Alan Garfield who brought in an 'Oompah' band, much appreciated by all.

Mike Beach, whose life has been tied up with the preservation and rebuilding of historic aircraft and gliders, looked into the possibility of setting up a National Glider Heritage Centre at

the Club. The name was carefully chosen to avoid the word 'Museum', so suggestive of dusty exhibits that never fly. As a start, in 1991 he formed 'The Historic Sailplane Group at Dunstable', an informal association of those with veteran gliders on site, with a view to promoting the exhibition, flying and dissemination of news about their machines. The Club Committee of the day agreed in principle that if, and when new buildings could be financed and built, the Nicholson Clubhouse could be used as a vintage information centre with the old gliders displayed in the hangar. Mike had a number of classic gliders at the time including Prince Bira's Gull III, a Hols der Teufel, a Rheinland, and later, a Falcon I and the Willow Wren. Since then, these have been dispersed and would no longer provide such a focus.

One day in 1992, a band of 'travellers' moved on to the Club land and established themselves in the field below the caravan patch complete with mobile homes, lorries, kids, dogs, scrap metal and general squalor. With our security uppermost in mind, immediate moves were made to get them to leave but without success. The police were useless, they opted out of any action as they claimed it was a civil matter and not their concern. The Club had to get a Court Injunction for eviction but because it was needed over the weekend, it cost a hefty £600. Then the eviction notice had to be served. Ray Stoward as Club Chairman took this on but enlisted the support of myself and Colin Anson as backup. Shades of 'High Noon' were overlaid by the realities of 'Last of the Summer Wine' as the three of us trekked down past the caravans to confront the intruders. When we got there, there were only



three women , some children and dogs around as their men-folk were out pillaging the Bedfordshire countryside. The eviction notice was accepted without comment they had obviously seen this many, many times before - and later that day Ray went back with some muscle in the form of Bryan Middleton on our biggest tractor and told them they had until morning to get out. They had gone by later that evening.

The strangely named *Buttocks Trophy* commemorates a most popular late member of the Club, namely Jeff Butt. If you ever wanted to find Jeff, the first place to look would be the Ottley Workshop where he spent most of his time fettling away on some project or another. Among his many interests, he was a keen aeromodeller and, come the Fifth of November, he would produce some flying machine with rockets attached and frighten the populace. The spirit of competition caught on. Many other Club members produced designs of their own and contests were arranged each year. Rex Moorey took on the mantle of organiser when Jeff sadly died, and he instituted the *Buttocks Trophy* in his memory. The ingenuity of members has been stimulated to produce the most weird and wonderful creations. In 1990 there were no less than 33 entries for the competition which was judged on concours d'elegance, height, duration and memorability. This last category really meant how many spectators got scattered by the projectile coming straight through them. Since very few entries actually managed to get airborne for more

than a couple of seconds, this commanded the largest proportion of the marks.

Motor gliders were few and far between in the sixties and it was a novelty when the AS-K 14 arrived at the Club. A trailer that had been built extra-wide to accommodate a Jaskolka was available to house it in. An AS-K 16 arrived on the scene, in the hands of a syndicate of five members. As a side-by-side two seater, its width precluded its being kept in a trailer, quite apart from the effort and manpower that would have been required to rig and de-rig it each day. A shed was constructed behind the Ottley Building to keep it in during the winter months and it lives outside under waterproof covers during the soaring season. It has recently been joined by a Dimona.

Various other offerings were made to bring more motor gliders on to site but the then Manager, John Jeffries, who was very much a gliding purist, vigorously opposed this. As development of self-launching sailplanes progressed, some were bought by Club members, but strict limitations on the number of launches permitted was imposed. Some pilots choose to take aerotows and then use the motor when well clear of the site, thereby reducing noise pollution, which can so annoy our neighbouring residents.

JJ's antipathy to engines was not sufficient for him to refuse the offer of John Marshall's Motor Ventus for a day's soaring. Late in the afternoon and



*Jeff Butt with the Club Skylark III in 1960.*



sinking off the Halton ridge, he admitted defeat, unfolded the engine and tried to start it. No go. He had to land on Halton Airfield and it was only then that he found out there was no fuel in the tank. This only confirmed his disgust for power.

In the early nineties at a Junior Nationals at Dunstable, Edward Morris was flying a Club AS-K 23 in the competition. At the end of the day, the weather was fine, and he decided to picket the aircraft out rather than hide it away in the hangar. Some evil colleagues including his elder brother Henry hatched a plot. The glider was spirited away out of sight and replaced by the smashed remains of similar machine provided by George Jackson from the Club workshop. Next morning when Edward went out to DI the machine he nearly had a heart attack. This was not helped when Derek Sear the CFI who was in on the scam, delivered a blistering for damaging a Club glider. Poor Edward!

Peter Claiden and I were flying the AS-K 16 motor glider at around 4,500 feet in the Milton Keynes area, dodging about between snow showers, when Peter cried, 'Hey, there's a rabbit down there'. After remarking that my eyesight was not that good, came the realisation that there was indeed a bunny but it was in the cockpit. It wriggled its way down the front and lodged itself behind Peter's rudder pedals. A few pokes with his toe shifted it down the other side of the cockpit until it wormed its way under the seats and into the area where the undercarriage mechanism sits. We had both been following the antics of the animal and, looking up, saw wall-to-wall greyness and the windscreen being obscured by snowflakes. It was then decided that Peter would concentrate on flying the aircraft and I would deal with Bugs Bunny. Peter, an AAIB inspector, was visualising accident scenarios with the official reports putting the blame on a rabbit. The animal, which was not fully grown, was not very lively and seemed to be a victim of myxomatosis. I managed to pin it down under the seats with my heel until landing back at Dunstable when the animal was restored to the hedgerow. Looking round the AS-K 16 afterwards, it was realised that a hole around the tail wheel had been

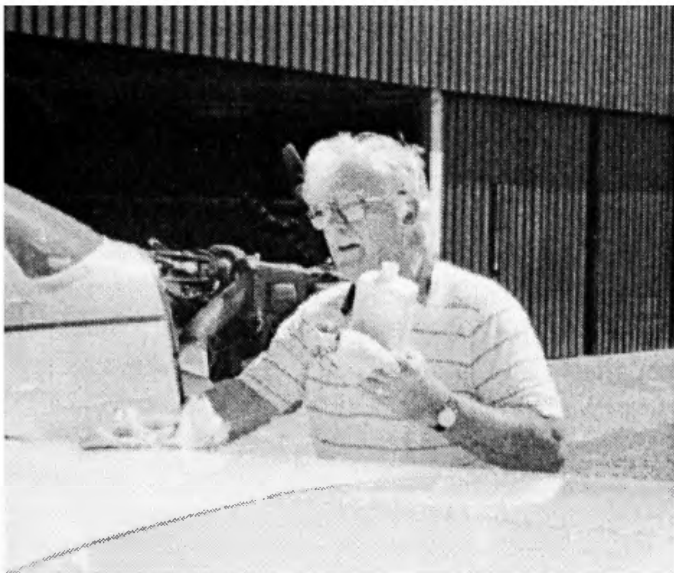
big enough to allow the rabbit's access to the rear fuselage and it had worked its way forwards. A new check was added to the pre-flight inspection routine after this.

While flights of 750km have been carried out from Dunstable, the magic 1,000km distance has so far only been flown once in Britain and that was from Bicester in 1995 by the two Christophers, Rollings and Pullen. However, Mike Bird managed it not once but twice in the course of four days during a visit to Minden in Nevada the same year. Mike (he of the oh-so-readable Platypus column in *Sailplane & Gliding*), flew his AS-H 25 down the Pine Nuts and White Mountain ranges, 8-14,000ft high, on the Nevada/California border. The flights were carried out with oxygen of course, working between 10,000ft and 17,000ft ASL having taken off from Minden, itself lying at 4,700ft. On the first of them, Mike had to work very hard indeed for the opening 200km, scratching and slope-soaring until he reached the White Mountains and turned south at the little mining community of Basalt. Here conditions were fabulous, and Mike carried out four runs of 150km in more or less continuous lift, only pausing to circle on four occasions, two of which he later considered unnecessary. The GPS showed ground speeds of 120 - 140kts (230-260kph) dependent on the wind speeds and altitude. On leaving the Whites, every little bit of thermal had to be exploited and it was a struggle to get back to Minden some eight and a half hours after launching.

Then - disaster! The wrong bit of Basalt had been photographed and the turning point was not acceptable for the 1,000km claim. So, it had to be done all over again. After two days waiting for thundery conditions to clear, Mike set off again.



*Mike Bird. In 1995 he was the first Dunstable member to fly a 1,000 km task.*



*Duggie Stewart, the Club's most handy man in the nineties.*

The second flight bore no comparison to the first. On the leg to Basalt, strong thermals speeded Mike on his way, but straight and level runs along the White Mountains were not possible and Mike had to just make do with 8-10 knot thermals for the 600km. On his return from the Whites the sky ahead on course looked pretty dead so a deviation of 90 degrees was made to a cu-nim about 100km from home. This bore the AS-H up to 17,000ft and from this height a steady run at 55kts had it made in ten minutes less time than on the first attempt. On this occasion, all the paperwork was in order and the champagne corks popped in earnest.

Lasham members got a surprise one day when Geoff Moore's SG-38 Primary appeared in their circuit, did a twirl or two above the Dan Air hangar, and then landed to claim the Plate. It was all a bit of a cheat really, as Geoff had taken an aerotow all the way from Dunstable to 5,000 feet over Basingstoke. But he got the Plate for his well-deserved survival of hypothermia. Other inter-club trophies were instituted between Dunstable, Nympsfield and Husband's Bosworth, but did not catch members' interest. Raiding parties occasionally sallied forth from Nympsfield and Dunstable to seize artefacts from the other's bar, but this died out. Just as well perhaps, as someone had dreamed up a scheme to kidnap Jackie Horridge, a spectacular Nympsfield redhead!

*The biggest aircraft seen at Dunstable, Rory Ellis brings in a Dakota 1992.*

Member Tony Hutchings, a professional photographer, organised a spectacular shoot involving Geoff's Primary and an AS-H 25. Both were towed up to 3,000ft and released. The AS-H 25 did a series of runs, pulling up in a banked turn around the Primary which had a camera fixed to its starboard wingtip. Tony triggered this by means of a radio signal from the back seat of the AS-H when he reckoned they were in picture. About ten runs were carried out, the last being at fairly low altitude over the Hill, and the result you can see for yourself on the front cover.

During his term as Club CFI, Derek Sear got very interested in weather forecasting and developed his skills to such an extent that he was able to set up the Gliding Forecast Service which was available to all gliding clubs via FAX. This meant a very early start in the morning, getting the data from the Met Office and then interpreting it, putting it through his computer and presenting it in graphic form, finally distributing it to clubs by 0800 hrs each day. Derek also provided his service for competitions and his detailed pictorial projector charts were much appreciated.

In an effort to make waiting around at the launch point more comfortable for air experience customers, Duggie Stewart put in a great deal of effort to renovate an old caravan which was then parked out each day to provide some form of





shelter. The next innovation was a mobile control tower, which must have started its life at some RAF airfield. This was fitted out with radio, seating, writing desk and racking for all the ancillary bits and pieces that are needed at the launch point. Instead of the log-keeper wandering around the gliders, a high viewpoint was available and launching instructions by radio to winch or tug aircraft were introduced.

In 1997, Duggie was towing the winch out to the north east launch point when, at the top of Hangar Ridge, he saw a large feline animal come down off the Hill, walk along the hedge and then disappear into the bushes by the Lynchets pathway. At this point all the rabbits shot out of the bushes, stopped, and sat up on their hind legs looking back into the cover. The cat was a tawny colour and about the size of a large Labrador dog. The Zoo was telephoned but said they were not missing anything and, in any case, they did not keep that sort of cat. So... another mystery panther or puma sighting for the record books. In 1998 it was seen again by Richard Cooper in the caravan site.

In 1998, the Open University came to Dunstable to shoot film footage for a programme on, of all things, mathematics. Ian Johnson, member of the Borders Gliding Club and a lecturer at Edinburgh University, had persuaded the OU that gliding could provide an interesting background with all the number crunching that goes with polars, glide

ratios, wing loadings etc. After six days of filming competition aspects at Le Blanc, the BBC team arrived to get some contrasting material showing how glider performance had improved from the 1926 designed SG-38 Primary, through the 1936 Rhonsperber and 1960 Ka 6CR to the current Discus. Bungee launches from Hangar Ridge of the first three of these machines provided some nice pictures and a great deal of exercise for a team of students from Oxford. Then the four gliders were aerotowed up above some spectacular streets of cumulus and filmed against a brilliant background of clouds until the cameraman lost his sunglasses, and his lunch, out of the back of the Super Cub.

Ann Welch acted as presenter conducting interviews with myself, Don Porter and Lucy Withall on the characteristics and performance of the gliders. I was expounding on how pleasant the Rhonsperber was to fly when, at that stage, I had not even sat in it, let alone flown it. Not that it mattered as they did not use it in the finished programme. The resultant half hour film, whatever it did for mathematics, turned out to be a super documentary for gliding in general and it is a pity that its showings seem to all be in the wee small hours of the morning.

The biggest aircraft we have seen at Dunstable appeared during the 1992 Regionals when Rory Ellis brought in an Air Atlantique Dakota. Apparently he called up Luton Air Traffic Control to tell them of his destination, and they called him back three times to verify that he really meant Dunstable and not Luton. The Dakota was parked up behind the tugs outside the Clubhouse while Rory had tea, and then departed on the west run, getting airborne before reaching the line of the trailer rack.

Graham Smith entered the Australian Nationals in 1998 in an LS-8. On the second day he was thermalling fairly near the start line when there was a terrific bang and he was struck from behind and below by an LS-6 piloted by a Japanese competitor. Graham's head burst through the canopy and the glider pitched violently nose-down. He did not hang about but immediately abandoned the



*Graham Smith,  
competition pilot and  
inadvertent parachutist.*

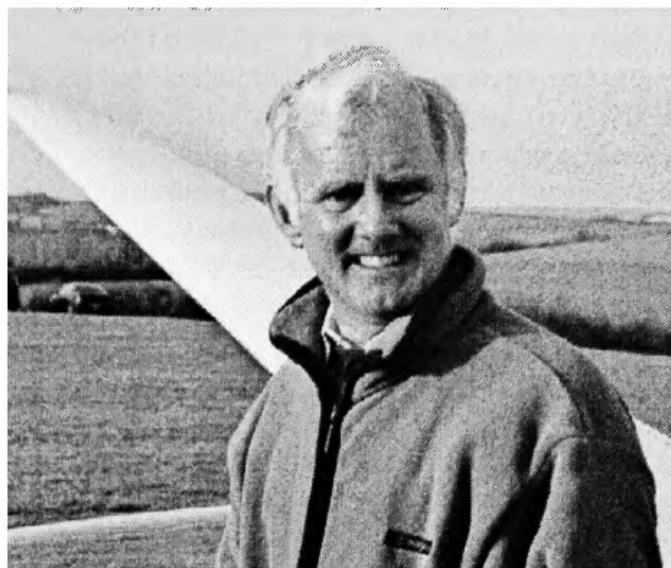
*Peter Goldstraw, victim of the 1999 lightning strike which demolished GPB, our Club AS-K 21.*

aircraft, parachuting successfully to safety. The other pilot was not so fortunate, the nose of his glider being smashed downwards, and he is thought to have been killed by the impact.

Summer 1998, on Sunday mornings on the airfield could be heard the very faint sound of bagpipes wafting on the breeze from the direction of Totternhoe. More ghosts? No. Further investigation revealed a piper in full Highland dress, strutting his stuff on the lane to Totternhoe whence he had been banished to avoid annoying his neighbours.

In 1998 during the Nationals, a rash of posters and leaflets appeared around the Club premises demanding the resignation or sacking of the Manager, Bob Bickers. This was all done anonymously under the signature of the *Rebel Committee*. Three days later, another round of missives appeared together with giant lettering on the face of the Hill saying 'Sack Bickers'. Later still, some three-quarters of the Club membership received a questionnaire through the post on the same theme. The 'Rebel Committee' still anonymous, claimed to be composed of seventeen disaffected members and in the covering letter made a number of libellous, scurrilous and frankly untrue claims. At an open forum to discuss the situation, these goings-on were roundly condemned and a universal vote of confidence in the Manager was given. With the public show of solidarity, no more was heard of the so called Rebel Committee whose identity remained a complete mystery.

An open day was held in 1999 to try and encourage recruitment to the Club and to sell courses. This proved to be quite successful and variety was provided by demonstrations of hang gliding and paraglider flying, several lucky children being towed across Hangar Ridge controlled by ropes. A falconry group brought some of their wonderful owls, hawks and eagles which proved a great attraction. Dunstable pilots have been keeping a good lookout when flying in the Whipsnade area as the Zoo have been teaching a young golden eagle to fly off the Lion slopes.



Tony Danbury was instructing in a AS-K 13 when there was a sudden bang and the rudder locked hard over. Hooking feet behind the pedals did not produce any improvement, so Tony managed to side-slip off his height until he was able to put the glider into a field successfully. It was found on inspection that the eye of a turnbuckle in the rudder circuit had failed a previously unheard of occurrence.

Soon after Harry Middleton took over managing the Club he received a phone call purporting to be from the Highways Department of Dunstable Council. He was advised that a repair job on the road outside the Club gates had just been finished and there were a few barrow-loads of spare tarmac on offer for £30. Harry agreed to its being spread on the frost damaged car park area and departed back to his home near Husbands Bosworth. Next morning a large tipper truck arrived and deposited its load of bitumen on the car park which was then spread and rolled smooth by three workmen. These men then came into the office and demanded £6,000 for the job. 'Yes, £6,000! £30 per square yard, Guv, that's what was agreed.' Harry was contacted by phone and the so-called 'Dunstable Highways' boss man made threats against Harry and his wife and also threatened to come back and torch the Club if the bill was not paid. The police were called in and security patrols were mounted at night for some time but fortunately nothing else transpired.

April 1999 and Peter Goldstraw was running a one day course with pupil Graeme Cooper. At around 5.00pm, on their sixth flight of the day, they were at 2,500 feet making their way back to the field in a gap between big cumulus clouds when suddenly there was a tremendous bang as lightning struck the AS-K 21. The outer wings disintegrated leaving



remnants of mainspar and aileron pushrods still attached to the fuselage which broke into three pieces. The force of the blast perforated one of Graham's eardrums and he hardly heard Peter's urgent instruction to 'Get out'. The canopy had already gone and, freeing their seat straps, they took to their parachutes amid a shower of white plastic fragments. Peter, whose neck had been singed by the blast, landed badly and broke an ankle. Graham landed safely but on the tin roof of a disused petrol filling station in the village of Northall. A passing builder untied the ladders from his van and helped him down. The parachute descent had been seen from the Club but it was assumed that a mid-air collision had occurred. Two trailer loads of debris were collected from the surrounding fields and taken to be analysed by the AAIB at Farnborough. The wreckage was laid out in a hangar with the bits in their relative positions. It appears that the lightning strike travelled down the aileron push rods from one wing to the other, on the way blasting out the whole of the top of the fuselage centre section. The event has attracted wide interest among accident investigators around the world.

It is perhaps interesting to note that Peter was well known for his comprehensive pre-flight briefings which had been known to provoke sarcastic comments from duty pilots impatient to clear their launch queues, but this day his meticulous practice more than paid off.

They say that lightning never strikes twice in the same place but perhaps 'they' are wrong, as for the glider that Peter Goldstraw was flying, it was its second contretemps with a cu-nim. One day, AS-K 21 Golf Bravo Papa was being flown on an AFI flight by Geoff Boswell when a winch launch was taken under a dirty looking lump of cloud.

Near the top of the launch as Geoff reached for the release knob, there was a flash of lightning and the pupil noticed that the release cable was arcing to its guides at each point it passed through them. Geoff released from the launch, observed that the vario was off the top of the clock, and then they were into a heavy deluge of rain and could not see a thing. The vario then hit the bottom stop and Geoff flew the circuit more or less by memory, squinting out of the clear vision panel and managing to get the whole outfit down on to the field safely. They had obviously flown into a highly charged area which had earthed via the winch cable, fortunately without harming the glider or its occupants.

Expansion of operations in the sixties and seventies meant an increase in flying staff with the appointment of a regular winch driver and tug pilot and in the Office, extra ladies (some part-time) helped with the administration ably supervised by Margaret Clarke whom many will remember during her 27 years employment. In the mid-nineties, the number of staff, full and part-time, reached the all-time high of 15 but this has since dropped slightly.

Since 1966, flying operations have been supervised by a professional CFI or CFI/Manager supported by paid staff instructors but there was a major change in policy in 1998 when Club member Bill Craig took over the CFI post on a voluntary basis. He instituted an intensive campaign to recruit Club members to train as instructors and offer a pilot development programme. This system was a great boost to pilot enthusiasm besides offering a measure of relief to hard-pressed Club finances. After getting the scheme running smoothly, Bill stepped down and passed the baton to Andy Roch, again unpaid but very keen to keep up the impetus of change for the good.

## SOARING INTERRUPTUS

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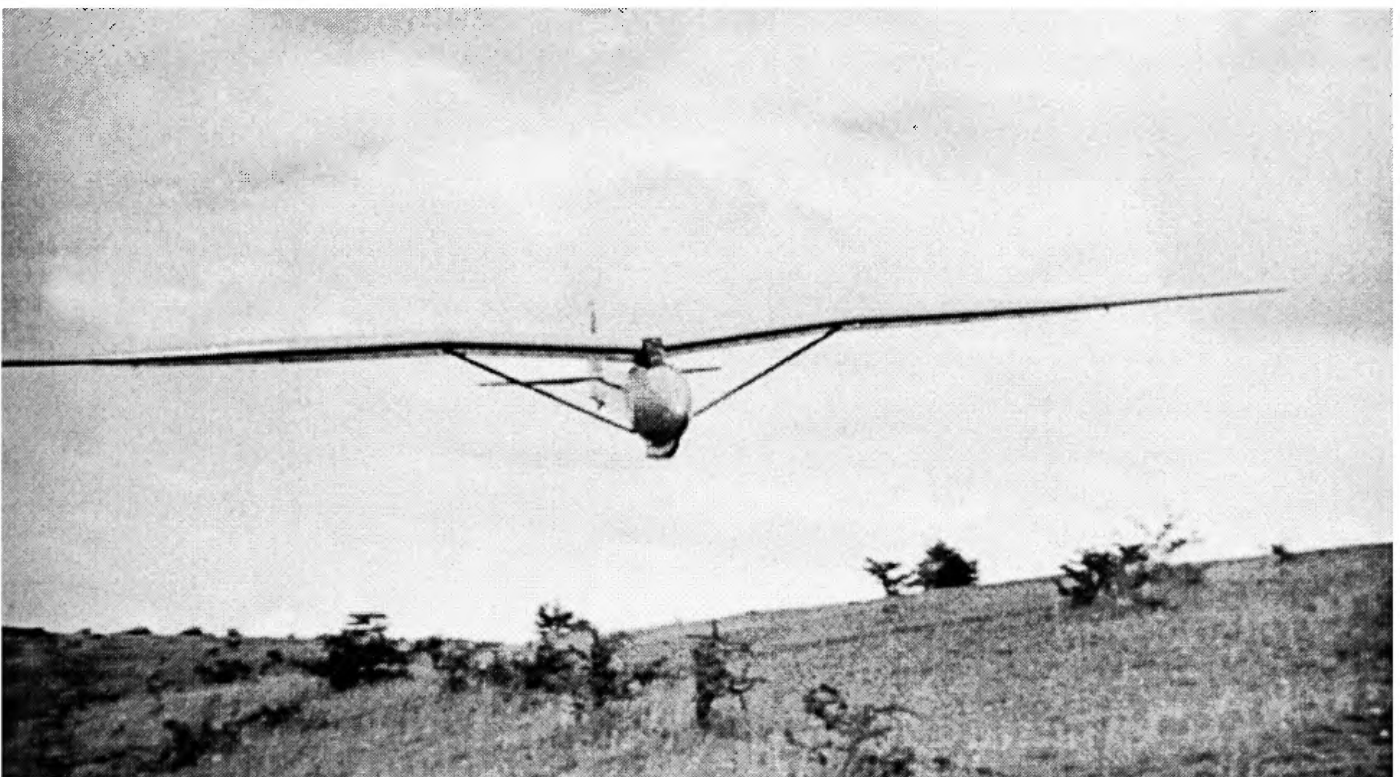
**T**he activities of couples on the Downs have provided a ready source of interest over the years and occasionally a great distraction if you are Hill soaring.

A visiting Surrey Club member named Hatch was flying a Tutor one fine day when he observed something going on in the bushes below. Human nature being what it is, he was tempted to go lower and take a closer look, so he did a low beat-up. Too low it turned out and, catching a wingtip in a bush, the Tutor cartwheeled, finishing up inverted with Hatch unhurt in a pile of wreckage. With presence of mind, and being a golfer, he had shouted 'Fore' just prior to hitting the ground. A large gentleman approached and Hatch thought he was coming over to offer assistance. Not a bit of it! This chap was not only very irate, he was also

unzipped, and yelled at Hatch 'You b\*\*\*\*\*! You did that on purpose.' That was not quite the end of the story, for the noise also flushed two other couples out of cover in a similar half-dressed condition.

The same sort of thing happened near the bungee point when Duggie Bridson veered off line during a launch. His arrival in the bushes precipitated a rapid evacuation by an amorous pair.

Courting activities were not confined to the hillside of course. Barbara Deans had to make a field landing one day in one of the Club's Ka 8 gliders. As she rolled to a halt, a scantily dressed couple erupted from the long grass by the nose of the aircraft. Whether Barbara's profession of girl school headmistress enabled her to cope better or worse with the situation is a matter of conjecture.



*A low pass on the Hill by Buster Briggs in his Kirby Kite in 1939. Note how few bushes.*



## FIELD DEVELOPMENT & BUILDINGS

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### The Land

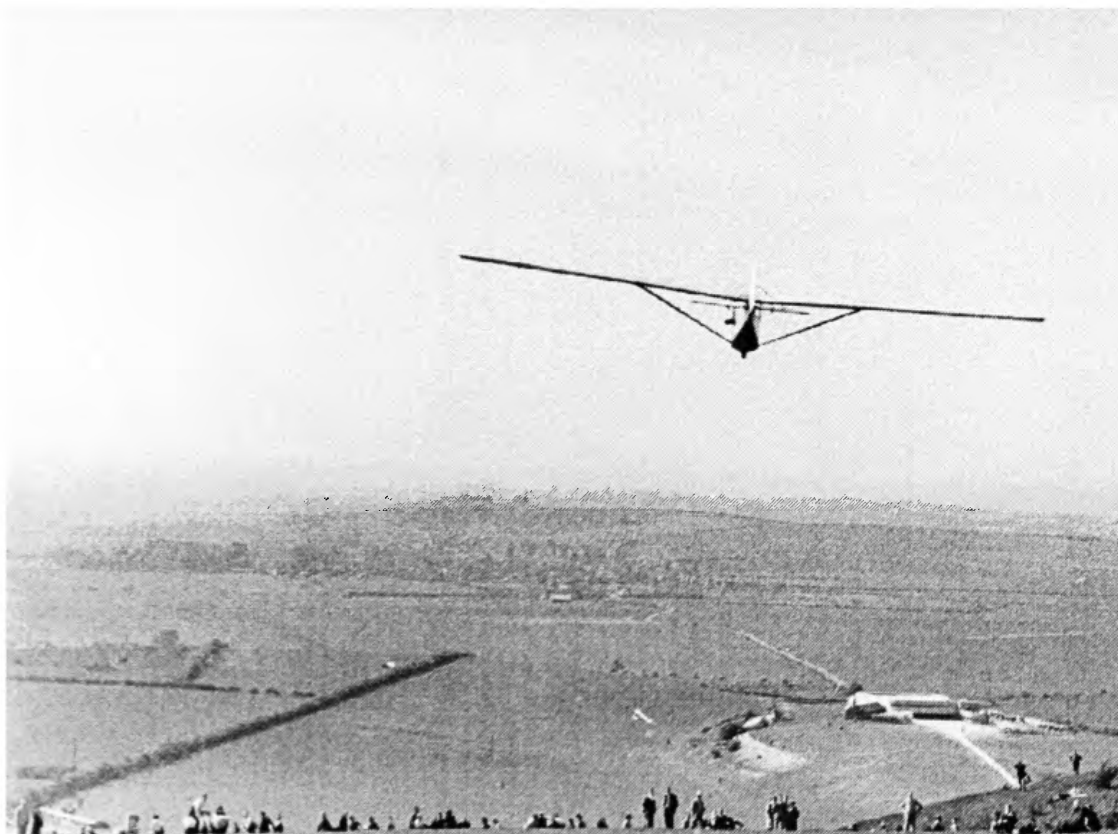
The original 112 acres of land purchased by the Club in 1933 included a section of the Hill above the west wind launch point known as the *Bastion*, where bungee launching was carried out. The site is still there and available, should conditions be right and we have a serviceable bungee rope.

Dudley Hiscox recounts how the land purchase came about. With the increase in Club activity encouraged by the erection of two wooden hangars, Farmer Pratt sensed opportunity to try and increase the rent for the field and started to put on pressure. Espin Hardwick, a wealthy financier from Birmingham, who had a hunch back and did not look like your typical gliding enthusiast, got into his Rolls Royce and, taking his young daughter with him, drove down to Totternhoe village and called on Farmer Pratt. He told him who he was and that he fancied speculating on the new sport of gliding by buying the land they were flying from. Pratt, to play for time, admitted he might be interested, but stated he never did business on a

Sunday. 'That's fair enough', replied Espin, 'but while we are here, can my little girl have a look around your farm?' They came across a litter of sheepdog puppies and his daughter begged her father to let her have one. 'You had better ask the farmer,' said Espin and Mr Pratt, when approached said, 'Yes, you can have it for £1.' This was promptly paid over. 'Aha!' said Espin, 'I thought you said you didn't do business on a Sunday, so what about that land?'

The deal was clinched there and then at £9.10 per acre, total cost £950. Espin Hardwick then rented the site to the Club at 5% of his outlay with the option of buying it from him at the same price at any time the money could be raised. This was achieved when a Government subsidy was obtained in 1935.

In 1948, there was a proposal to bulldoze the Lynchets and part of Pratt's Field and level the northern approaches to the airfield. A costing of £280 had been received for this but after pressure from locals it was not proceeded with. The



*A Falcon I is bungeed off the Hill. The deep gully can be seen to left of the Clubhouse and also the hedge limiting the southern side of the field.*

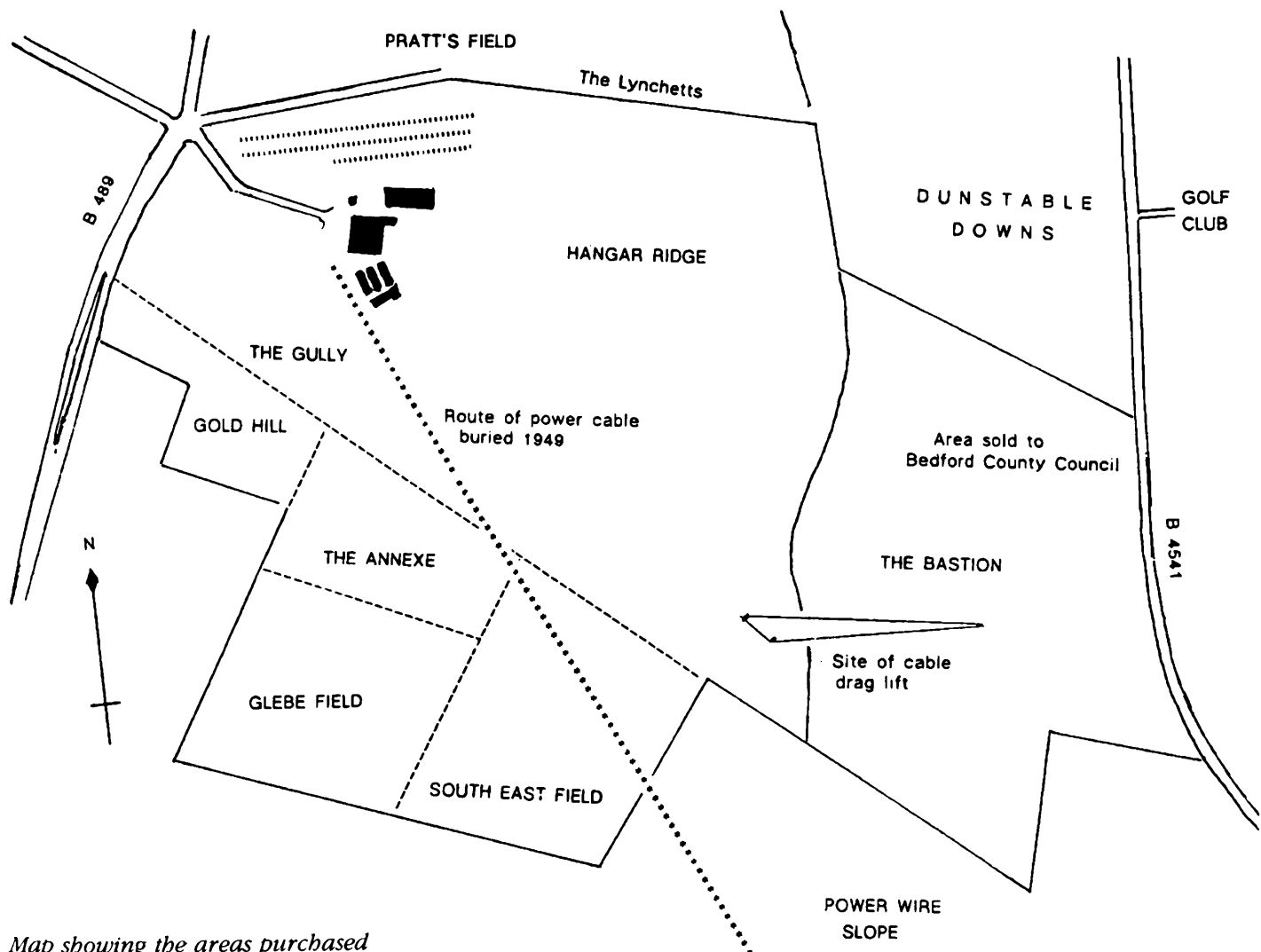
Dunstable archaeologists probably also had a big say to protect the ancient features.

Up to 1949, a 33Kv electricity supply line ran from the power wire slope diagonally across the fields to the westerly corner of the Club buildings. These power wires were very vulnerable to having cables dropped across them, and on the day that the Golf Club was officially opening its new clubhouse, a lady named Miss Fox-Strangeways managed to do just that from her Grunau Baby winch launch. With a mass of VIPs on parade on the Downs, the proceedings were disrupted when the electricity supply disappeared. Our relations with the Golf Club were rather strained as a result: not a welcome situation, as glider landings on the golf course were a not infrequent occurrence when poor penetration prevented the Hill from being regained from a weakish thermal on a windy day. With a view to extending the winch run, it was planned to put the electricity cables underground. It so happened that the father of John Hurry belonged to the same London club as the chairman of British Calender Cables. With a bit of wheeling

and dealing, the LGC got the required length of expensive oil-filled cable at a very good price indeed and the cable was duly buried, opening up the field for winch launching into easterly winds.

The power wires running across the field had always been a hazard and Charles Ellis claims to have been the only winch driver to have dropped the cable over them twice!

In the mid fifties, the Club wanted to extend the airfield towards Ivinghoe. But before negotiations with the farmer were initiated, Dan Smith went through the deeds of the original sale, and found that a field we later called the *Annexe* was, in fact, part of the deal, and this had not been realised. Johnnie Walker was instructed to prevent the farmer from spring ploughing, but Dan received a phone call to say that it had already been started. He immediately dropped what he was doing at his business and drove out to Dunstable and stopped operations. Once the intervening hedge was grubbed out, the way was opened for a much longer winch cable run to the south west.



Map showing the areas purchased to extend the airfield.



Following this, 5.5 acres of fields known as *Gold Hill* were bought for £500 in 1958 and these are where the east wind aerotows start. Behind the hedge adjoining this area was a line of boarding kennels for dogs. One afternoon Alan Stagg, trying to cope with a cable break, ran the T.21 *Barge* into this boundary. There was a second of silence after the sound of splintering wood and then the most tremendous outburst of barking shattered the peace.

The third extension of the airfield was the 12.9 acres of the *Glebe Field*, which enlarged the *Annexe* down to the present hedge at the north east launch point. This was purchased in 1959.

Finally, in 1968, 29 acres of church land - the *South East field* - were bought from the Vicar of Eaton Bray, part of his 'living'. This field filled the area between the *Annexe* and the field at the foot of the Power Wire Slope, and forms the right hand side of the north east landing field. There were no deeds to this property and the Club had to take out an insurance policy for 15 years of cover in case anyone turned up to claim ownership. Fortunately no one did. By 1972, the Club had repaid all loans connected with land purchase and owned the airfield.

To the south of the Clubhouse complex and behind the short trailer rack the ground fell away very steeply to a gully which ran down to the Club road entrance. Halfway down this slope was a Lynchet (a pre-historic cultivation terrace). Along this ledge were two huts used for accommodation - first the Foster Hut belonging to Frank Foster and his wife Pat, and secondly a road man's hut mounted on great iron wheels of the sort that would be seen being towed behind a steam roller some 40 years ago. This belonged to Dennis Ratcliffe, a local policeman. Further along still was the pump house, a small wooden structure covering the Club's water supply wellhead. The electric pump occasionally had to be switched on by hand, and in wet weather it was quite a dangerous operation to slide down the slope and clamber up again.

Just to the south west, the sloping field was used in the fifties for autocross racing before it was levelled. Club member Dr. Pinkerton was a leading light of the *Sporting Owner Drivers' Club*, otherwise known as The *SODs*. He owned a beautiful Alvis with a polished aluminium body, and under a reciprocal agreement in 1952 their members came to fly gliders and were allowed to use the airfield for their car events. Pairs of cars raced each other around the slippery grass track and many well-

known faces were seen, including Graham Hill who raced a Dellow special.

In 1967, a pipeline carrying cement slurry from Rugby to London was laid along the northern boundary of our field below the Lynchets and up and over the Downs. A nominal wayleave payment had been arranged, when inspection of the Club deeds revealed that the part of the Downs where the pipe was buried was our property. Compensation was claimed and the cement company paid up over £2,000. Since then, the pipe has been relaid and the route up the Downs above Hangar Ridge fenced on both sides.

Around 1968 there was a great shortage of tipping facilities in south Bedfordshire, and the opportunity was taken to establish a tip to fill the gully and give us a greater flat area for flying operations. Lorries started dumping earth and rubble behind the Clubhouse and trailer rack, working out towards the south west. This became a major undertaking with a constant stream of heavy vehicles carrying all sorts of scrap lumber, concrete drainpipes, junk metal, furniture, old cars and plastics. You name it, it was there. The Tull brothers salvaged enough aluminium from the dump to make all the fittings for their new Diamant trailer. The wear and tear of all this heavy traffic was damaging our entrance road, so the contractors built a new one in parallel. You can see this threading through the bushes on the right as you enter the Club. It is now somewhat overgrown and makes a nice nature reserve for the rabbits. Tipping went on for sixteen years and a large level area was created between the Clubhouse and the east wind launch run. It is reckoned that three quarters of a million cubic yards of material was dumped in 75,000 lorry loads! The Club finances benefited from a levy on the tipping contractors, and sundry bits of resurfacing on the entrance road and a hangar apron was also laid. The main trailer rack was sited on this new ground, and Colin Kruse put in a lot of hard work concreting in the hitch posts, with a power point for electricity supply.

Later, Colin came up with an ambitious scheme to extend the airfield even further. The idea was that he would buy the land between the pig farm and our airfield and establish a tipping operation to fill in the whole of the low ground. It would have been an enormous undertaking and would have been very profitable, well over and above the cost of the initial purchase. The scheme never got off the ground as it would have had to be approved by the Chiltern Society, an environmental group

with strict ideas about changing the face of the countryside.

At one time there was a plan to get one of the services' airfield construction units to conduct an exercise on our field whereby the west run would be skimmed and the spoil dumped below the south west launch point to further fill in the gully. This would have given us a virtually flat airfield. The scheme never happened as it was feared that, being in public view from the top of the Downs, such an operation might invite awkward questions about the use of armed forces for benefit of a private club. The idea had arisen after the Newcastle Club had their field improved by such attention, but their site being in such an inaccessible part of the North Yorkshire Moors, it was hidden from public view and attracted no comment.

In 1974, Bedford County Council took over the administration of Dunstable Downs from the Totternhoe Conservators, and wanted to limit car parking, build public toilets and generally clean up the surroundings. They wanted to buy the land we owned and after protracted negotiations they did so. We extracted various concessions for retaining use of the bungee slope and adjoining landing area, and also the right to charge for car parking on two days in each year. We have made use of the bungee facilities since then, but not of the car park provision. We could not justify charging unless we were putting on some really spectacular event, and this is no longer possible under current very stringent air show display requirements.

Another profitable time for the Club was when the Bedford County Council planned a road widening scheme outside the Club gateway. The Highway Authority wanted to put a compulsory purchase order on our piece of land for construction of the dual carriageway. But some high powered negotiation resulted in a proper sale netting some £2,500. A further deal was made for the surplus

spoil to be dumped elsewhere on our field for which we received another payment. All these earthworks resulted in some unsightly barren slopes around the entrance area and a grant of over £2,000 was negotiated for a tree planting scheme. A working party of members put in a considerable effort to do this themselves and as the embryo trees were obtained free of charge, a worthwhile profit was made.

At the top of the entrance drive, a large bulk container for liquid propane was installed by the London Balloon Club for easy refuelling of the balloons' gas cylinders. This became redundant in 1985 and disappeared from the site, leaving only the concrete access steps to show where it stood.

The terminus for the buried electricity supply cable was at a pylon behind the Club workshop where the power wires continued above ground. During the tipping operations, as the ground level was raised, the wires and transformer became perilously low and everything had to be jacked up for safety reasons. The whole installation seemed to be highly susceptible to lightning strikes and we lost our electricity supply many times over the years. In 1998, the local electricity board decided to put all the cables over Club property underground at no expense to us, and they built a shed behind the transport workshop to contain the transformer.

## The Clubhouse

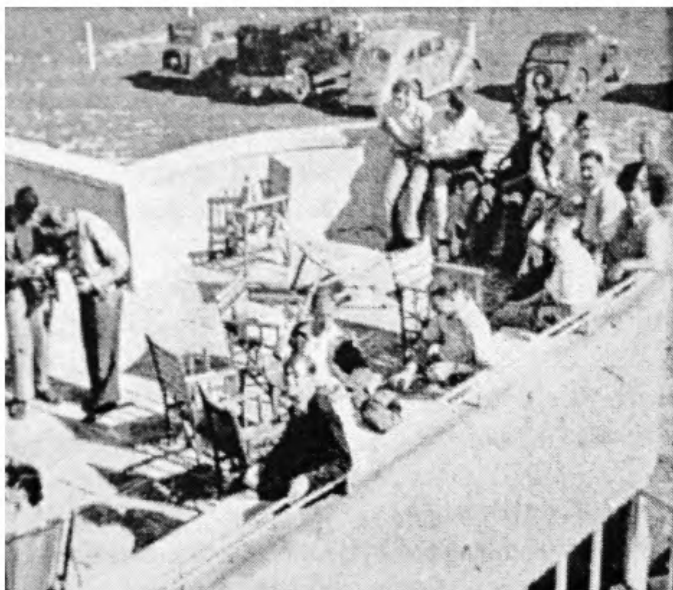
Ulli Seegers, a frequent recent visitor to the Club from Germany, remembers seeing in a Berlin library a proposed design for a gliding club in England dated 1935, and wondered at the time if it had ever been built. Years later, he visited Dunstable and saw that it had been.

In the early thirties, the Club had operated with three hangars, two wooden and one of corrugated iron. Without the need to rig gliders each day before flying, the membership was flourishing and it was felt that a Clubhouse was needed. Toby Ashwell-Cooke, the then Chairman, found a sectional hut of First World War vintage and £150



*The original  
1932 Clubhouse.*





*The popular Tea Terrace over the clubhouse bar in pre-war days. John Sproule is in the foreground.*

saw it erected on its present site to the south of our present Clubhouse. A bar, kitchen and members' lounge was quickly built into it.

A couple of years later, word got around that the Government of the day was going to offer a subsidy of £5,000 per annum to the gliding movement. There is a story about this subsidy which involved a war between Dunstable and the British Gliding Association lasting nearly two years. At about the same time as the LGC was formed, the BGA came into being with aviation pioneer Gordon England as its chairman and set about trying to obtain a government subsidy for gliding, establishing itself in palatial London offices to impress all and sundry.

On the premise that the BGA was there to promote distance flying and competitions and to encourage others to donate money and prizes, Lord Wakefield

put in £1,000. But Doc Slater, after attending several meetings, got the impression that many well known aviators were tagging along to 'see what was in it for them' and relying on rank and file gliding enthusiasts to do all the hard work. The prospective subsidy was earmarked by the BGA for setting up a gliding school but they had spent all Lord Wakefield's money and were bankrupt.

The London Gliding Club objected to the organisation being run by non-gliding people and not looking after the interests of the many clubs around the country and resigned from the BGA with the aim of forcing the Royal Aero Club to withdraw their delegation of control of gliding to the BGA. The Air Ministry said they would not award any subsidy to gliding unless the two sides made up their quarrel. By this time, besides being broke, the BGA had as chairman a regular flying member of a club, Espin Hardwick, and agreement was reached that the constitution would be altered to give control to gliding clubs. So the London Gliding Club rejoined and had a major say in the organisation.

The proposed subsidy of £5,000 per annum which was scheduled to run for seven years became fact, and London Club members got their act together



*The Clubhouse under construction in 1935 with the wooden scaffolding then in general use.*

*Italian prisoners of war  
in 1943 outside one of  
the Nissen huts.*



very quickly to secure funding for a new Clubhouse and repayment of the airfield purchase loan. This rapid wheeler-dealing prompted criticism from some of the other clubs and when 'Flight' magazine published an accusatory letter from a Miss Sinclair, Secretary of the Kent Gliding Club, the LGC promptly sued her for libel. Possibly frightened by the legal cost that might be involved, the two sides settled out of court when Miss Sinclair agreed not to repeat her claims.

Club member Kit Nicholson, a Cambridge don, was a very talented architect and had drawn up a superb plan for a combined Clubhouse, glider hangar and workshop – the very one that we still have today. Banks, brewers, Slingsby and various Club members put up guaranteed sums of money and construction of the new complex started. Then the subsidy was announced officially and Dunstable's bid enabled 75% of the cost of the buildings and the airfield to be covered. The resultant Clubhouse was a triumph and won great acclaim in the architectural world. In the restaurant, the wooden tables, travertine marble fireplace and even the light fittings were all part of the Nicholson art deco as were the special high stools in the bar. Pevsner, the architectural historian, rated it as one of the two outstanding aviation-associated buildings of the thirties, the other being the Shoreham Airport terminal. In the nineties it has been accorded Grade 2 listed status, which should ensure its preservation for future generations of glider pilots.

The cost of the new Clubhouse was just over £3,000, which sounds a paltry sum today. At the time, though, this represented the cost of some ten terraced houses and projecting this to current house prices equates to perhaps £750,000. Total membership of the Club at this time was 185.

The day that the new hangar was habitable in 1936, all the gliders were moved into the new accommodation. Fate must have been smiling on the Club because that very night a storm hit with such ferocity that the old wooden hangars were

completely demolished. That these were still well-insured was an even bigger bonus, as we also saved the cost of dismantling. After the wreckage was cleared away, farmer Tom Turvey built himself an implement shed with the scrap timber.

If you look at the lintel over the north side doors of the hangar near the shop, you will see 'The Evans Workshop 1937'. As the Clubhouse was being completed there was a tragedy when two young Club members were killed. Tony Evans and his girl friend Molly Goldney, the niece of manager Tim Hervey, were driving back to London one night when they ran into the back of an unlit lorry on the A5. In their memory, the Evans family donated the cost of erecting a workshop, a storeroom, an office and a hangar extension. The other landmark donated by the Evans family is the clock over the Club entrance. These additions cost £1,250.

The original heavy wooden doors of the hangar have been replaced with the current steel framed aluminium sliding doors, and a fire escape stairway for the restaurant had to be built to comply with regulations.

A feature that used to hang on the wall above the fireplace in the restaurant was a beautiful five feet wide relief model of the airfield and the Downs, constructed by architect member Laurence Wright who, on observing the treatment it was receiving from the poking fingers of Club members, attached a notice that said: 'Please destroy more slowly'. This model was rediscovered lurking in one of the derelict hut rooms and was brought into the Ottley building with a view to finding someone to restore it. Someone's mania for clearance resulted in its disappearance within a couple of weeks, so it was lost forever.



Another piece of vandalism recently revealed was the loss of a leather folder from one of the derelict huts. This contained the architect's drawings for the prisoner of war camp that the LGC became from 1940 – 1945, and showed the layout of a series of Nissen huts built across the area now occupied by the tarmac apron in front of the hangars. Attempts to locate photographs of the Club in use as a POW camp have proved pretty fruitless, even the Imperial War Museum photo library failing to identify any. But research by Bob White turned up the fact that the RAF had carried out photo surveys of the whole country in 1945 and 1947. A trip to a records office at Swindon produced vertical shots of the field, and viewing them with a stereoscope revealed a high tower on a building standing in front of where our tug hangar is located. John Jeffries remembers this as a laundry facility with a high-mounted water tank. When in 1947 a cable was hitched to this tank to pull it down with a tractor, to everybody's glee, not only did the tower come down, but also the whole building moved

sideways and fell off its damp course! The photographs also show the perimeter fencing of the compound erected out on Hangar Ridge. Lengths of telegraph pole were sunk into concrete to support a double line of barbed wire fencing, and the footings can still be seen as you walk out to the south west launch point. When flying recommenced in 1946, gliders had to be manoeuvred through a gap in this fencing, which had yet to be removed.

When the Club was requisitioned by the War Office as a camp for Italian and then German prisoners, farmer Tom Turvey converted one of his barns at Totternhoe for use as a clubroom. Throughout the war Mrs Turvey provided snacks and teas for Club members who gathered at weekends to talk over old times. Lawrence Wright was stationed at the Glider Training School at Thame with many other ex-LGC members and he relates in his book 'The Wooden Sword' how he and two others decided to visit the Club and see how our property was being

THE LONDON GLIDING CLUB, DUNSTABLE

THE REOPENING OF THE CLUBHOUSE

by a V.I.P., in a short ceremony at the tea table at 4 p.m. on Saturday, January 1st 1949, will be followed by a HOUSEWARMING PARTY at 8 pm with DANCING, DRINKING, EATING, MOVIES ETC.

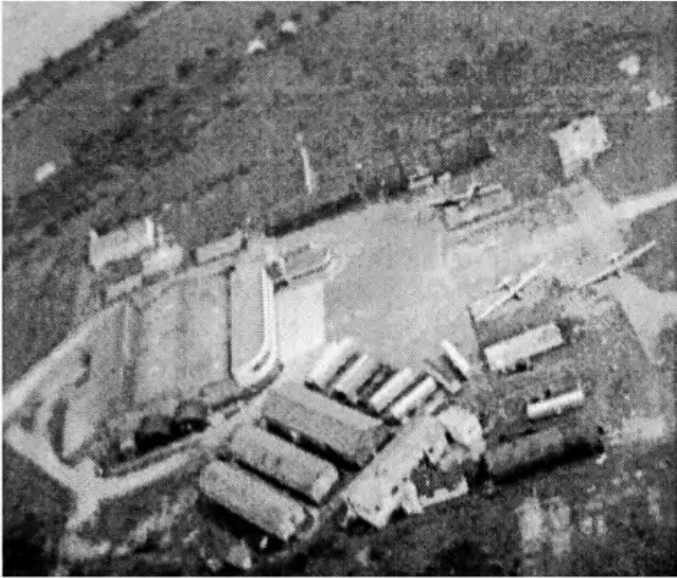
There will be NO CHARGE except for refreshments. All past and present members and their guests are welcome at both ceremonies. ( Come before dark and see the large club fleet in action. )

EVENING DRESS for ladies; not for men, but clean collars should be worn.

ALL who intend to come are asked to return the slip below, before December 14th ( or go hungry. )

A SPECIAL BUS will leave The Aviation Centre, Londonderry House, Park Lane, W.1. at 12 noon on Saturday 1st Jan. for Dunstable, and will leave Dunstable at midnight for London. Seats must be booked in advance: return fare 8/6d.

*Poster advertising re-opening of the Club in 1949.*



*The Club in 1947 with foundations of Nissen huts across the hangar apron area.*

treated. In civilian dress, they drove up to the gates and the driver bawled at the sentry in German something to the effect that they had come to plan a mass escape. The non-plussed guard opened the gate and directed them to speak to the sergeant. He too was ignorant of German and there were no officers on site so they took a look around, noted that the place was obviously suffering and took their leave, cursing the sentry in German for not saluting them

While the Club had the use of the hangar from 1946, the rest of the Clubhouse was not handed back until two years later. German prisoners of war were being repatriated and Luton Council came up with a proposal to retain the premises to house Irish construction workers. Fortunately this did not come about, and after a lot of restoration work the Clubhouse was officially reopened in January 1949 with a big party.

Behind the bar, the building was extended to provide a secure drinks store, and a wooden stockade was erected to hide the refuse bin area.

Even the most mundane article seen around the Club can have a story behind it. Take for instance the small wooden platform jutting out from the roof girder in the main hangar. It is in the centre, just behind the low ceiling entrance. How many people know that this was installed at the instigation of Dudley Hiscox in the nineteen fifties. It served as a perch for a dummy owl, no less, as an attempt to dissuade the hordes of sparrows and pigeons that roosted in the hangar and caused such

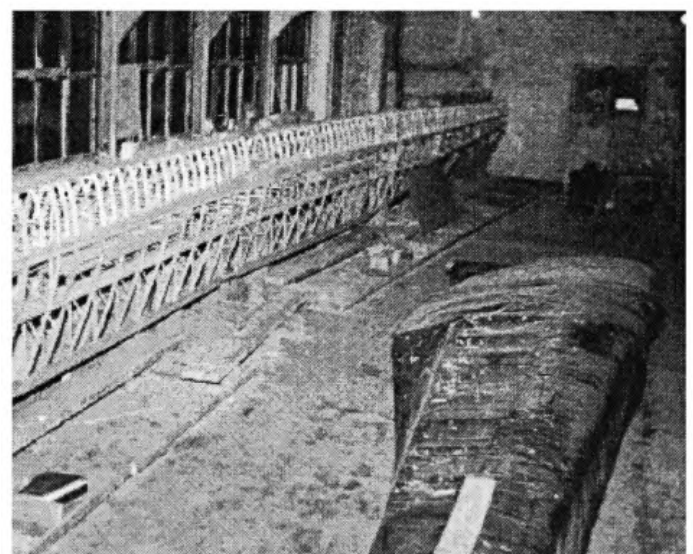
a major guano pollution problem. Did it work? Well, we don't seem to be affected by that trouble nowadays so perhaps it did.

The original wooden Clubhouse building still stands (in 2000) together with the Air Defence Cadet Corps huts behind it. They are all pretty derelict and have been used for storage for many years and for the accommodation of tug pilots. They have not yet been demolished, as it is easier to obtain local planning permissions for replacing existing structures than for building anew.

In 1994, proposals were put forward for an extension to the Clubhouse to be built on the site of the wooden huts. This would house a new bar upstairs and toilet facilities, plus a parachute store below, and would be linked to the restaurant by a covered-in bridge. Members who thought that the wrong priorities had been addressed challenged the proposals and as no funds were available anyway, the project was put on 'hold.' Current thinking has moved towards erection of a new glider hanger on this location.

## The Ottley Building

The private owners' workshop is known as *The Ottley Building*. It got its name from the time when it was used as a workshop by Len Ottley, who with John Furlong, a past president of the Club,



*The Tull Brothers' Skylark III wing under construction in the Ottley Building 1962.*



designed the Ottfur back-release hook. The Ottley Building was built as the camp cookhouse and bakery in prisoner-of-war times. In the fifties, Freddie Phelps used the premises as a workshop for his model aircraft business before moving down to Doolittle Mill. In 1953, plans were put in hand to build four apartments into it for use as 'married quarters'. This did not actually happen.

Ron Watson and Chuck Bentson negotiated with the Derby & Lancs Club and obtained from them a four feet high coke burning stove. This was transported down to Dunstable and duly erected just inside the Ottley door. With a bit of persuasion it could be brought to a glowing red heat, which was a godsend on cold winter days. It must have increased the fire risk by an enormous amount but there was never any incident.

Part of the Ottley was used to store some Link Trainers, one of which was brought into working order by Dicky Ruffett in the end room of the old wooden Clubhouse. It was fitted with glider instruments and could have thermal strengths fed in by an instructor via a screw-in valve on the end of a suction pipe. If one lost control and resorted to pulling out the airbrakes, a little flag with the word 'HELP' on one side and 'MUM' on the other popped out of the nose. The ingenuity and lateral thinking of glider pilots never ceases to amaze and the way that Dicky Ruffett got the Link into action is an example of this. Something in the mechanics of the Link required an audio tone of 500 cycles per second to be set up and Dicky had no signal generator to hand. He spotted Doc Slater in the Clubhouse and asked him whether he, as a talented musician, could give him a 500cps note on the piano which lived in the restaurant. 'Of course,' said Doc, and he opened the windows and banged out the note. Unfortunately, it could not be heard in the Link room at the far end of the wooden hut so Dicky enlisted the help of Valerie Crown who stood halfway singing the note to relay it. It worked! Alongside the Link was a table on which the 'crab' traced the course flown by the pupil. The cross section of a typical thermal could be pencilled onto the map with the appropriate thermal strengths decreasing from the centre. As the pupil 'flew' into the thermal, the instructor fed the strengths in to the cockpit vario and watched

as attempts were made to centre. Dicky noticed that the pundits of the Club were not the best at doing this as they almost invariably made their circles all round the edge of the thermal. As this did not reflect their expertise in real-time flying, it may have had something to do with the differing variometer lags in the Link and in their gliders. The Link required a lot of maintenance to keep it going and was eventually sold to Lasham together with the spares.

The end of the Link story came to light recently. At Lasham it was looked after by Dave Oliver who, when the room it was installed in was required for something else, dismantled it and stored it in his garage. He used bits of it to maintain the Link at Stanmore Park until one day two RAF bods, who had been searching the country for a Mark I Link with a wooden control column, turned up. And so the Dunstable Link now resides (or at least the original wooden control column does), at the RAF Museum at Hendon.

When the Ministry of Defence de-requisitioned the Club after the war, the sum of £5,000 to cover dilapidations was paid over on condition that the Club demolished any unwanted buildings itself. The first move was to get rid of a line of Nissen huts standing across the hangar apron.

## Huts & Sheds

In 1954 it was decided to demolish several more of the buildings which had been put up when the Club was turned into a prisoner of war camp. Where the tug hangar now stands was a large black Nissen-type hut that prisoners had used as a chapel. Outside the Ottley Building was another



*The Club workshop in 1948.*

Nissen hut. These were all dismantled to lower the rates payable to the local council.

There is a small brick building behind the Ottley Workshop known as *The Quaker Hut*. It acquired this name as it was originally used as a meeting room for the committee, and the surrounding area of Bedfordshire was the stamping ground of the Quaker movement. It also housed the Club library of aeronautical books until they disappeared. The hut was renovated in recent years and now serves as a store.

One other survivor from the wartime era is the brick-built tractor shed near the entrance. This was originally the detention block for the prison camp, and the partition walls between the cells were removed to open up the interior. As late as 1960, there were still graffiti on the back interior walls in German, showing days of sentence marked off as having been completed. *The Guard Room* is now serving as a secure paint store.

This room, before it was used for storing inflammable paints, served as a store for fuel and was usually kept locked. Inevitably, the person with the key went out on to the field or was flying when something needed refuelling. Johnny Walker thought he would solve the problem by attaching the key to a large lump of very heavy chain. This worked well for some time but, sure enough, the day came when someone took it with him to the launch point. You can't win with gliding people!

## The Workshop

One of the Club buildings which was used commercially after the war was the workshop (now London Sailplanes). Hawkridge Aviation took it over for some time when they were building Daglings, Grunau Babies and, the *Venture*, a two-seater somewhat resembling a T.21. Les Moulster, later a Club member, served an apprenticeship in the workshop which stood him in good stead when he helped Jeff Butt restore the *Primrose Kite* in 1957.

There was a very unusual activity in the London Sailplanes workshop at a later time. Frank Costin, an ebullient character who rebuilt and flew a Scud I in the forties, had teamed up with a man called Jem Marsh to produce the Marcos sports car. The Marcos was unique in that it had its chassis constructed from wood and Frank used the

expertise of the workshop to build some of these very light, strong structures. 'Ah, wood', said Frank, 'marvellous stuff – it's nature's plastic!' An aerodynamicist by profession, Frank had been involved with Lotus in designing low-drag bodies for their sports and racing cars. He designed the all-enveloping bodywork for the highly successful Vanwall Formula One team cars. Also, with Peter Davis, he built a two-seater glider the *Condor* which first flew in 1953.

The Club workshop facilities changed over the years. The tiny office in the north east corner of the building has now tripled in size and a retail shop has been incorporated. The lean-to part of the workshop at the western corner, which was originally a garage, has had access put through to the main workshop and woodworking machinery installed. A new separate paint spraying booth has been built and oil-fired space heating has replaced the old coke-burning iron stove. In the roof space, storage rooms have been built and an instrument calibration facility incorporated. The workshop now has a full range of metalworking and welding equipment, and has acquired a good reputation for its standard of repair and maintenance work.

## Tug Hangar & Offices

One of the most enthusiastic tug pilots, Terry McMullin, had for many years campaigned to have a separate hangar built to house the tug aircraft. Fiddling tugs into the existing Clubhouse hangar via the door on the north east side was so time consuming and damaging to the aircraft that eventually plans were drawn up for the present tug hangar and office complex. Office work was previously handled in the one small room at the back of the shop office.

After several years of procrastination by the Committee, work on the new building started in 1979 and was completed in 1980, helped by a hefty grant from the Sports Council. All of the new facilities: dormy rooms, toilets, showers, and office and workshop space, to say nothing of the tug hangarage have made a tremendous contribution to the easier running of the Club. It is interesting to note that the Club treasurer of the time was vehemently against the whole scheme, which he reckoned would take 20 years to pay off. Fortunately he was proved wrong and in eighteen months, the whole of the £140,000 had been cleared.



# GHOSTS

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There are some local tales of hooded horsemen haunting the Hill and of 'Shuck', a glowing eyed big black dog, but the immediate surrounds of the Club are not particularly spooky. There have been a few supernatural happenings reported for what they are worth. The first event dates from 1951 when someone was working under a car in the garage workshop. As he was wriggling his way out from under the vehicle he saw the legs and feet of someone walking past him. And as he got up off his knees he saw it was Jack Hanks, the staff instructor, who said nothing to him but just smiled and went out of the door. As he followed him out a few seconds later, the member was aware of a commotion and people rushing up the hillside. There had been a mid-air collision and one of the machines involved was the Camel, flown by Jack, who was now lying dead in the wreckage. How do you explain that? Early in the 60s Jim Wingett, the resident instructor, was living in the staff accommodation in the old huts and, together with

Ann Seabrook and two others, decided to try and hold a seance with an ouija board and a tumbler. Sitting around in the dark, after some minutes things started happening with the glass shooting around all over the table. They all took fright at this and took refuge in the Clubhouse.

Another event was in 1995 when Peter Firth was staying over in one of the office block bunkrooms. During the night he got up to visit the gents and saw a figure dressed in World War One flying gear standing in the entrance foyer and looking at the notice board. The lights were on and he saw him quite clearly. As Peter turned into the toilet entrance the figure came towards him, passed by and then disappeared through the solid end wall of the building. Peter claims he had not been on the bottle and found it extremely disturbing. The Club site has no First World War associations at all although it must be recalled that Tim Hervey, our first manager, had served in the Royal Flying Corps and had died four years before this apparition.

## CATERING

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**F**rom the earliest days of the Club, eating had been organised by Mrs Turvey, wife of the farmer who had later lent his barn for use as a Clubhouse when our field had been requisitioned for use as a prisoner of war camp. Mrs Turvey ran a very tight operation in the restaurant. Near the entrance door she had a Victorian style clerk's desk at which she stood to take the money for teas, and no-one got in without paying. She had a sideline at home, not in the restaurant thank goodness, and that was the breeding of white mice for medical research purposes. Her masterpiece was a strain of albinos that did not have the usual red eyes.

Johnnie Walker was employed as steward and doubled up as a glider repairer keeping the Club fleet in the air. Johnnie's wife took over the bar in the mid-fifties when Johnnie retired. Also by then, Mrs Linney was running the restaurant helped by her henchwomen from Totternhoe (the Totternhoe Mafia). The teas offered by Mrs Linney were really excellent. For the sum of one shilling (5p in today's money) one could feast on piles of newly baked bread, butter and jam, cakes and unlimited cups of tea.

Many older members will recall the exquisite pastry and treacle tarts cooked by Emmie, one of Mrs Linney's helpers.



*Mrs Linney, Club caterer 1955-66.*

The ladies from Totternhoe relied on being picked up and taken home each day in the Club Land Rover and a rota had to be organised for drivers to run the service.

1966 saw the arrival of the Harmandian family, who organised our eating and drinking for eight years until they departed to open up a cafe in Ealing where they are still. The Harmandians lived on site in the original



*The Club restaurant in 1938 with uniformed waitresses in attendance.*



Clubhouse hut, so the Totternhoe bus service faded away.

They were followed by Ron Humphries whose sons Andrew and Malcolm became glider pilots and Malcolm spent 1977 as resident tuggie.

There was an inter-regnum period around 1980 between professionals looking after the inner needs of Club members. Dilys Yates stepped into the breach and, together with a band of helpers, ran a very successful snack service at weekends.

The next caterers were the Pollards, then Ron Grey and Max McDonald. From 1990 to 1994, the Billington family looked after us very well; they returned for a second spell after Jim and Jill Barton left us in 1997.



*Geraldine and Geoff Billington, our popular restaurateurs 1989-93 and 1996 to the present.*



*Francis (Lofty) Russell, connoisseur of gliders old and new, comprising LS-6, Glasflugel 604, Rhonsperber, Weihe, Grasshopper, and Minimoa.*

## CLUB GLIDER & TUG FLEET

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**A**n earlier chapter mentioned the wide variety of glider types operated by the Club at Dunstable, and the experience that had to be gained by a pilot to progress up the fleet. When John Jeffries took over as CFI/Manager in 1966 he set out to effect a standardisation of two seat and single seat types, a task which took twenty one years to achieve and involved the sale of 27 machines at various times. The first to go were the T.21P and T.21C, which were not really suitable training aircraft, and with the phasing out of Tutors, Prefects became the first solo machines. Then the T.21Bs were superseded by AS-K 13s and shortly afterwards Ka 8s took over from the Prefects. Progressively the Olympias, Skylark II, Sky and Skylark III were replaced by five AS-K 18s. The Capstan was also sold.

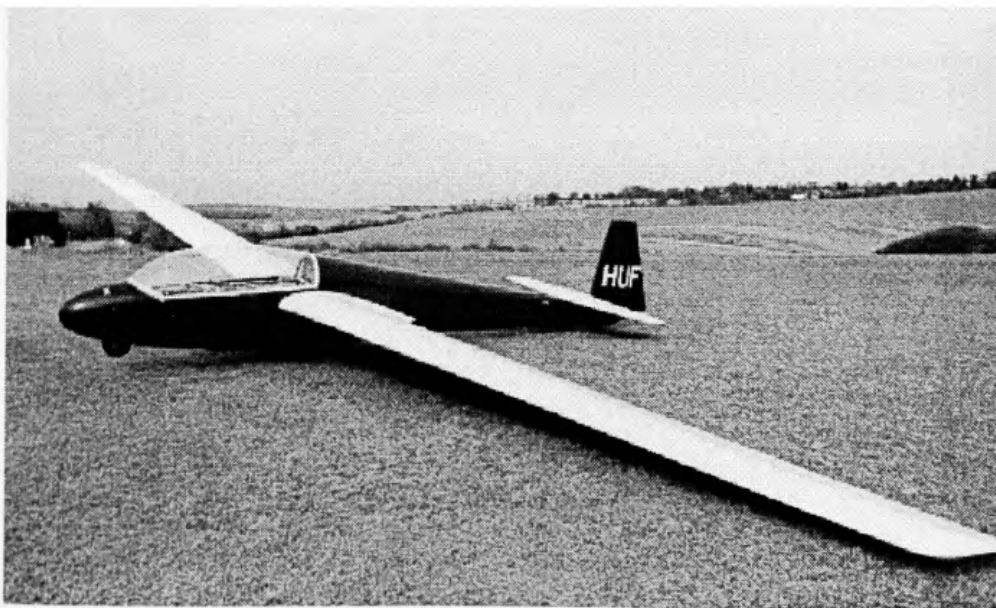
The big jump then was to move to a glass fleet. Out went the AS-K 13s and in came AS-K 21s, followed by AS-K 23s and an AS-W 19B replacing the AS-K 18s. An IS-28B for high performance training and the AS-W 19B were sold off and another AS-K 23 purchased.

By the end of 1987 the Club was standardised with four AS-K 21 and five AS-K 23 machines. Since then two of the AS-K 23s have gone, and there have appeared a Pegasus, two AS-K 13s mainly used for spin training and AEI flying and, in 1998, a Duo Discus, one of the highest performance two seaters available.



*In 1968, the Club operated four Tiger Moths in the tug fleet.*

In the post-war years Tiger Moths were the standard machine used at Dunstable for tugging, and in 1966 the Club had four of them. Suggestions for replacement caused a never-ending field of argument for successive general committees, and a succession of differing types of aircraft were tried. These included Rollason Condor, Auster (privately owned), Rallye Commodore, Minerva, 150 Piper Cub, 180 Super Cub, Chipmunk, Wilga (on trial only), Robin and Citabria (on short-term hire and trial). John Jeffries reckoned the most successful



*Schleicher AS-K 13, basic trainer 1967-86.*



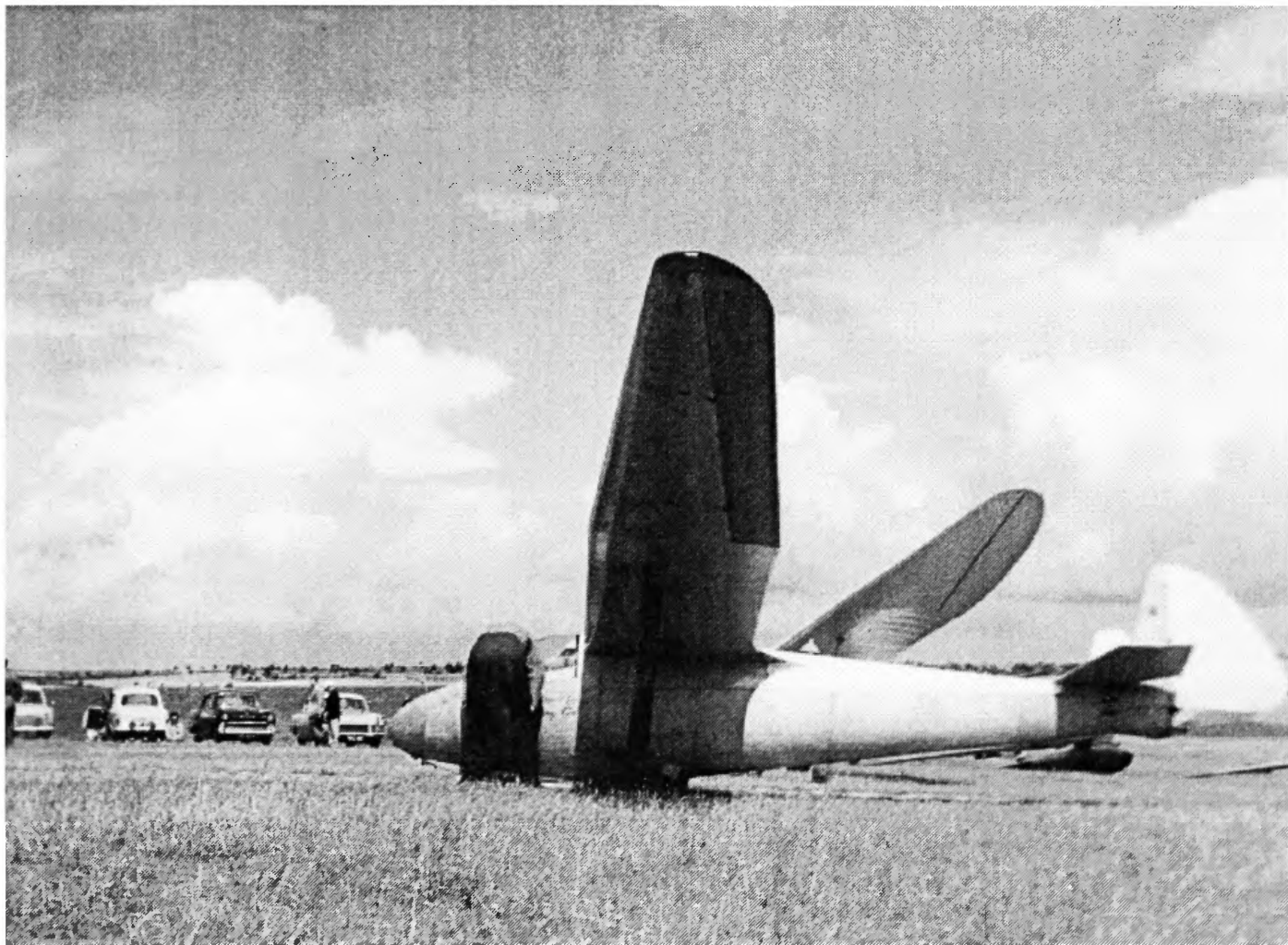
period was when three 180 Super Cubs were operating. With heavier gliders loading themselves up with water appearing on the scene, Robins were introduced to cope and by 1998 there were two 180 Super Cubs and three Robins giving excellent service. One of the Robins was sold to the Ulster Club and one of the others caught fire at the launch point and was burnt out. As part of a plan brokered by Richard Abrahams, two out-of-hours Robins were bought cheaply in France, ferried to Dunstable and then painstakingly restored to immaculate condition by Aiden Waters, who was greatly assisted by Duggie Stewart. The idea being that the sale of one of them would finance the restoration of the other to be retained for Club use. And it happened just as planned.

‘Double Oscar’, the Super Cub, was privately owned by Terry McMullin. After his tragic death in a car crash, the tug was bequeathed to the Club and named ‘Terry Mac’ in his memory.



*Standard Club trainer from 1986, the AS-K 21.*

From time to time, the BGA Motor Falke would spend a period at the Club to give an opportunity for teaching field landing techniques to pre-Bronze C trainees and for honing instructor skills. In 1999, the LGC acquired its own motor glider in the shape of an ex-RAF ‘Venture’, a Falke derivative. Almost immediately, six instructors added the motor glider category to their qualifications.



*The Gull I, in 1939 the first glider to soar the English Channel.*

# THE TEST GROUP

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During the second half of 1957 the BGA decided to formalise and extend its Flight Test Groups. The idea being to ensure a degree of uniformity in methods of testing, (mainly handling) for certification of new and modified glider types including foreign imports, while at the same time spreading the burden of carrying out and reporting on such tasks.

Group No 3 was set up at LGC with Dan Smith nominated as Chief Test Pilot. Cedric Vernon took on much of the flying and almost all the organisation and reporting, although many other pilots also took part, especially when additional opinion was deemed necessary and for two-seater tests. The gliders' owners were charged only the cost of launches, the relevant paper work being provided free.

Weight and balance information for the glider to be tested was sometimes available, but quite often not. In the latter case the glider was first weighed and its CG determined. For tests at the forward C of G Dan usually flew the glider. For those at the aft C of G limit, Cedric usually flew with some ballast (adjusted to the nearest pound). This was secured externally to the rear fuselage just ahead of the fin by a crude but effective device made of chair webbing, bolts, wing-nuts and locking wire, plus layers of carpet felt to protect the glider structure and skin.

When it came to the Schweizer 2-22, built by Slingsby as an exercise in metal construction, the tail-ballast device was inadequate because of the very wide CG range, and the aft CG condition was achieved by flying solo from the back seat with some ballast bolted to the front seat.

In some cases, for example second-hand imports, no position error data was available, and when it was considered essential to know what the corrected speed was, measurements were made with a trailing bomb shaped sensor. This was mounted on a specially-designed carrier attached to one wing. Its 50ft rubber pressure tube, whose

upper end was passed through the DV window and was connected to an additional airspeed indicator, secured the bomb. A wooden fairlead screwed or clamped the tube to avoid applying a load to the canopy. Before take-off the tube was figure of eight looped beside the pilot, who had to hold it in one hand braced against the fairlead, to hold the device against its brackets. It was lowered bit by bit during the aerotow. This required care but was not difficult. When the test was complete it was hauled in again. This was more difficult, but not so much so as it sounds. The test consisted of flying at a series of speeds, at each one reading both ASI's as simultaneously as possible and noting down the results. One started just above the stall, increased speed in stages to about 90% of maximum permitted, and then reduced again in stages. It was important to lock on each stage quickly, a knot or two different from the target value not being important.

The tests carried out varied a lot and most concerned handling. Brief descriptions of a few examples follow.

Among the simplest were the Kite 1 and Scud III which had been fitted with spoilers. Opening and closing the spoilers at various speeds to check trim effects, plus a few stalls and spins at mid CG were sufficient, but the opportunity was taken to run quickly through the new British Civil Airworthiness Requirement then in preparation. Each glider took about an hour and a quarter.

Full handling tests, which sometimes involved development flying, were of course longer, e.g.

Swallow	5 hours
Jaskolka	9 hours
T.21C	7 hours
Capstan	15 hours

In these cases the CG range was explored fully.

As regards the Capstan, the wing design had been modified following tests on the prototype at Lasham.

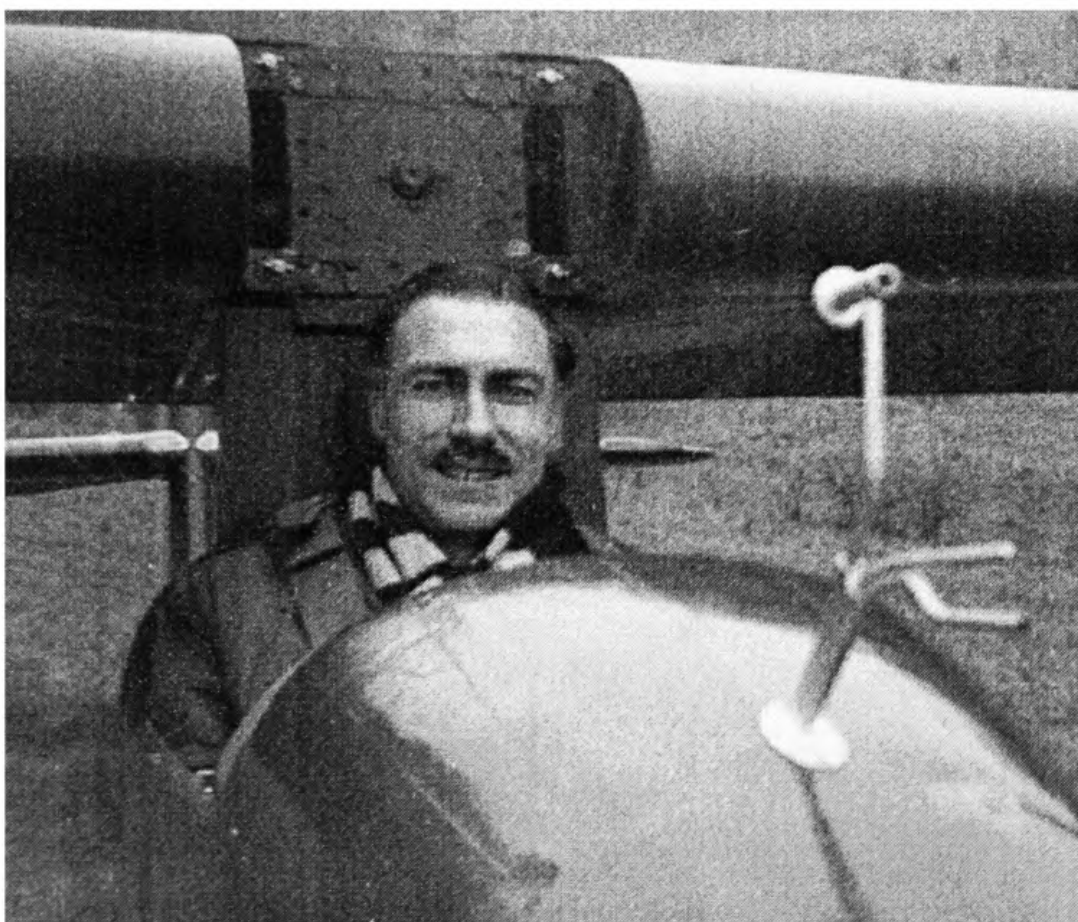


One test that was expected to be very simple turned out not to be. Peter Fletcher acquired a Kadet and requested an aerotow clearance. Slingsby said that the structure was OK, but no flight tests had been done. The glider was located at Elstree, and the plan was to do a circuit on tow and then, if all was well, to continue the flight and deliver the glider to Dunstable. This was done, but not without a problem. On the take-off and circuit all went well except that the ailerons were found to be very heavy. However during the transit flight a lateral oscillation occurred whenever a wing-drop following turbulence was corrected. It was undoubtedly pilot-induced, a heavy two-handed stick force being needed which it was difficult to reverse quickly enough as the low wing came up. Coarse use of rudder helped considerably. The standard practice at the time was to rig the ailerons of Kadets and Tutors with one trailing edge thickness of droop. However the thickness on this particular aircraft was some five-eighths of an inch! The ailerons were promptly adjusted to nominally neutral on the ground, and this eliminated the problem.

One of the most interesting jobs was the measurement of the Skylark 2 performance, requested by the BGA. Cedric Vernon and Roy Williams rigged up an additional easily-removable panel with altimeter, ASI, stopwatch, a vibrator consisting of a small electric motor and eccentric weight, and an electrically-operated camera taking

pictures every four seconds. Test runs were made at seventeen speeds for 1 ½ minutes each, and the results were analysed to yield the polar curve and lift and drag coefficients. Each speed was checked five or six times on different days, and the results meant, to eliminate any scatter resulting from small-scale wave motion. The tests had to be made on days of minimum thermal activity, in air as calm as possible. Including position error measurement they took 16 ½ hours spread over about eight weeks. The vibrator gave up on the last day. The expected maximum glide ratio of 28 was not achieved; the measured result was 25.7. This was rather disappointing, to the manufacturer especially, but it applied to a club aircraft, which was wiped clean before flight but not gap-sealed or polished as it would have been by a private owner.

Occasionally vertical terminal velocity dives with brakes out were needed to check that the type complied with the Standard Class specification and the airworthiness rules of the time. One such case was the Skylark 2. Cedric was towed up to 7,000ft by George Scarborough, taking some 35 minutes. After a look-round circuit he entered the dive from a steep stall with brakes open. The speed was about stabilised after 2,500ft had been lost, and after another 1,000ft had gone (in 5 seconds!) pull out was initiated at 3,500ft. When a steady glide was re-established a marked vibration was noticed. Had something come adrift? A quick wriggle confirmed that all controls were working normally,



*Cedric Vernon,  
leading light of the  
BGA Test Group.*



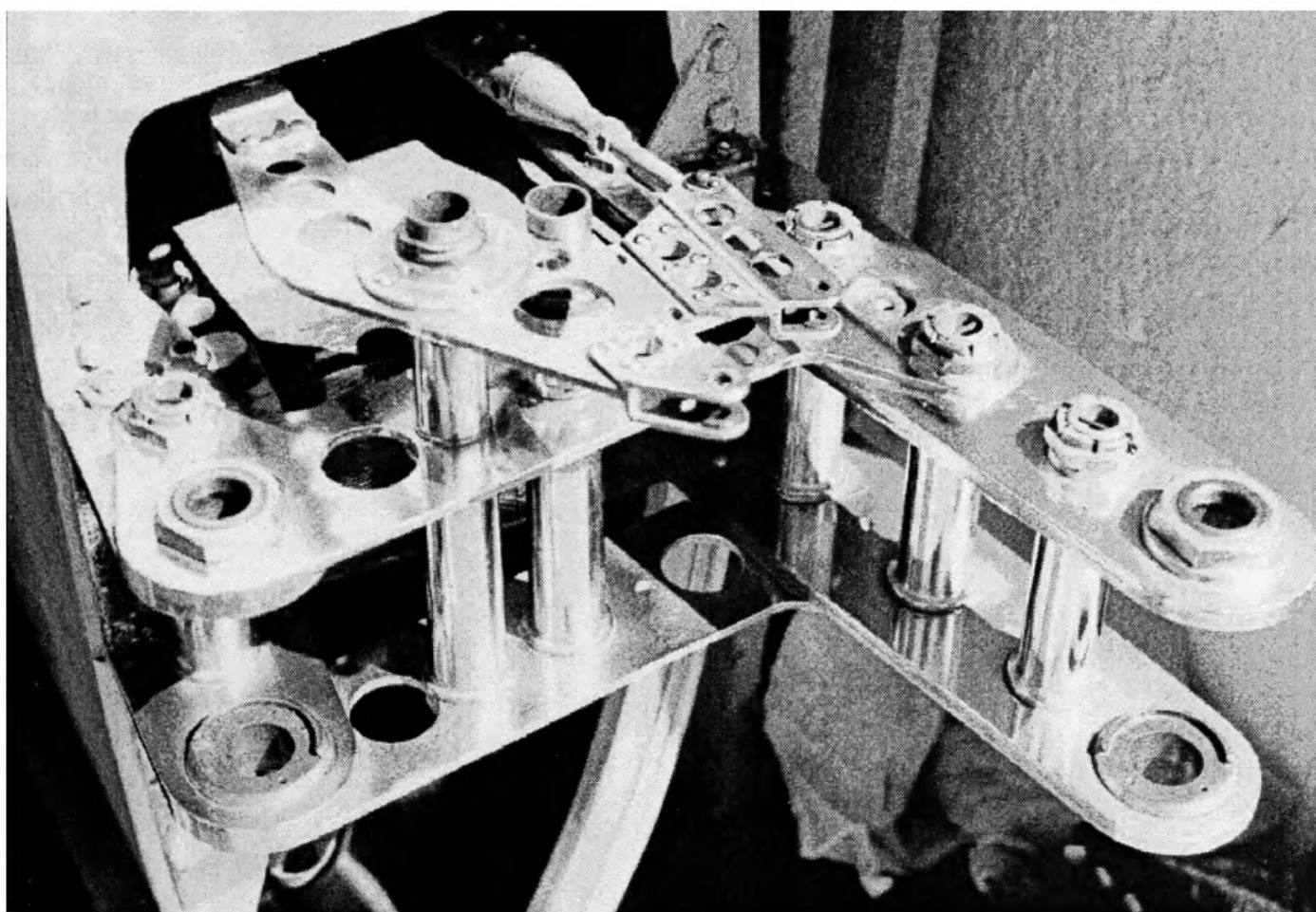
but the vibration was still there. Big worry. Then it was noticed that the brakes were still open. After retraction all was well. Panic over!

When the first K 7 arrived at Dunstable, Cedric, with Geoffrey Stephenson in the back seat, went up to check on the speed-limiting effect of the airbrakes. They took a high tow, peeled off, and as the speed built up the airbrakes were operated. There was a very loud bang, and on inspection after they landed, they found cracks radiating from the corners of the brake boxes on each wing. It was the violent 'suck-out' of the brakes that was the problem.

When the Swiss Moswey arrived at Dunstable, Cedric carried out the BGA acceptance checks and almost got caught out by a very unusual occurrence. The Moswey's cable release knob was

ahead of the airbrake lever, which was mounted on a central structure in the cockpit. Cedric was wearing very heavy leather gauntlets that day and, having completed his cockpit checks and locked the airbrakes, he accepted the towing cable. In doing this, unknowingly the cuff of his gauntlet tripped the over-centre lock on the airbrakes which fully deployed once the glider was on tow. The glider & tug combination got off the ground OK, but staggered around the circuit hardly climbing at all. Another tug pilot, seeing what was happening, took off and gave chase and managed to formate on Cedric who was having great difficulty maintaining his position behind the tug. Wild gesticulations conveyed the necessary message. The brakes went in and all was well.

The Test Group remained active until 1985, after which testing was mainly carried out elsewhere.



*The Moswey IV flew for 17 years at Dunstable in the hands of the author, Dave Adams and David Slobom. It was the 'Bugatti' of vintage gliders and this polished metal alloy wing fitting shows the superb quality of its Swiss design and craftsmanship.*



## WINCHES

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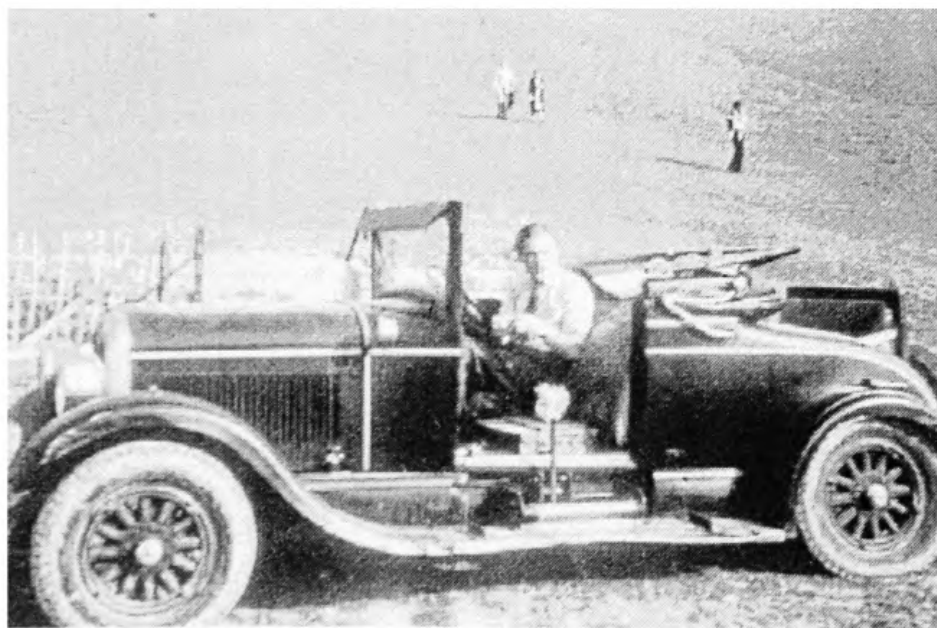
**P**re-war, winch launching was started up at Dunstable with an old high-powered American car, a Graham-Paige. This was jacked up and a cable drum bolted to one of the rear wheels, the cable being led forward through a set of rollers bolted to the front bumpers. Molten solder had been poured into the differential casing to lock everything solid, but the car was still driveable around the field. With the limited field lengths available at the time it is unlikely that much more than 300-400ft launch heights were achieved. This was quite enough to get on the Hill in a westerly but not very good for other wind directions. After serving the LGC for some years, the Graham-Paige was bought by the Portsmouth Gliding Club for £5.

The first post-war winch was mounted on a two wheel trailer. It was quite small with a single drum and no protection for the operator who stood behind it. There was another problem with the outfit: if a glider pulled back too hard, the front part of the winch lifted and it was dragged several yards.

At many auctions of ex-government material, barrage balloon winches came up for sale, and as their trailer chassis were in demand it was usually only the winch mechanism and operator's cage that finished up in the hands of the gliding fraternity. At the London Gliding Club, Johnnie Walker, ever the

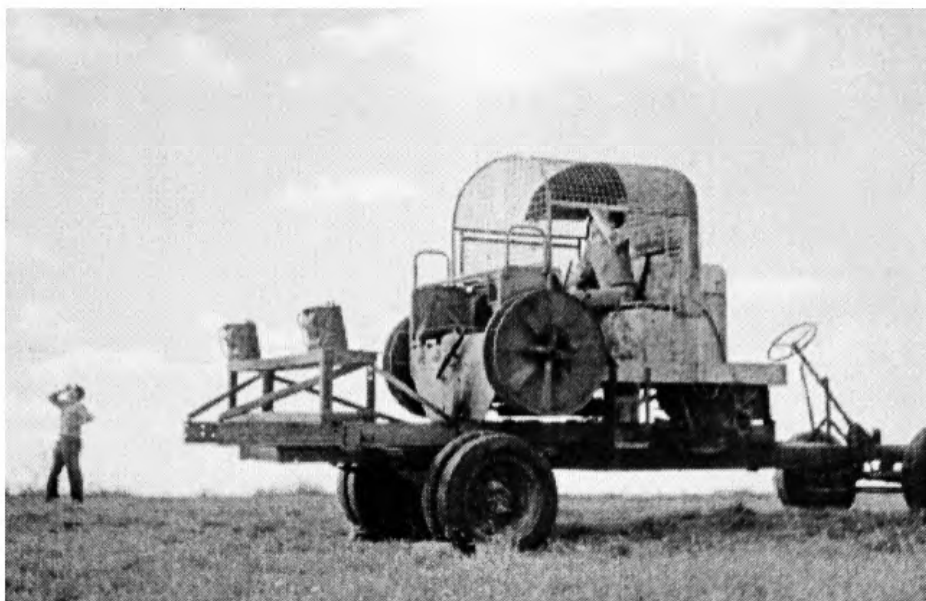
entrepreneur, bid £200 for twelve of these which some remember sitting in a long line outside the prison building. He immediately sold half of these and recovered the full purchase cost. The balloon cable was no use, being too heavy for gliders, but the Ford V8 90 hp engines had gearbox, clutch and drive to the cable drum. It would be no exaggeration to say that post-war gliding in this country was founded on ex-balloon winches.

Phil Ramsden, Geoff Nixon and others got heavily into winch design and construction and No.2 was a balloon conversion, single drum and mounted on a very heavy lorry chassis. The object was to make it readily mobile but it achieved almost the opposite. The old cars used as field vehicles could not pull the skin off a rice pudding. As a result, tractors had to be introduced to cope. This No.2 winch was equipped with a cable guillotine which was both awe-inspiring and terrifying to anyone who had not served in the war close to large calibre artillery! It was driven by large springs which had to be cocked with a long lever, and a cable in the cab triggered it: An arrangement that did not allow the operator to plug his ears with his fingers when he pulled it. It worked OK but it was decided it was just too dangerous to left to the tender mercies of Club members and the stand-by axe came back into favour. By 1956, this winch had been fitted with a second cable drum and another winch of similar design had been constructed.



*The Graham-Paige  
winch 1937.*

*Winch No2*  
1956.



Normally two winches were used on the field, the four cables being towed out behind a tractor. Problems occurred when the cables rolled together so that during the subsequent launch, the active cable would carry up the adjacent one making a right royal mess of prickly wireball in the middle of the field. There was an occasion when George Scarborough, who was quite heavy, reckoned he could solve the difficulty by standing on the end of the unused cable. Geoff Nixon has a vivid memory of seeing George in a horizontal pose, two feet in the air! Next, someone (thought to be Ron Travell), dreamed up an 'improvement' and made up a hefty bar with footrests and grab handles welded to it which could pin the cable to the ground. All went well until one day the winch took up tension on

the wrong cable just as he was inserting the spiked end into the ground. The foot of it pulled out and, rotating smartly around the grab handles, smote him a mighty blow on the head and put him in hospital. It was not used again at Dunstable but the system is still used at Camphill.

Winch No. 4 was the creation of John Furlong. It had two drums, the drive to each being selected as required, its unique feature being that the drums were narrow and four feet in diameter. This resulted in very smooth launches but the bigger torque and inertia overstressed the drive shafts and the bind of continual replacement led to its premature retirement. Another innovation of John's was the use of stacked ball races as cable guide rollers but the source of cheap bearings eventually dried up.



The difficulty of moving the winches around the field previously mentioned had an immediate effect on operations and an evolutionary effect on design of the next generation of winches. Often the winches had been left out overnight, maybe from one weekend to the next, very much exposed to wind and weather, which did not do the ignition systems much good. A lot of energy had to be expended in getting the winches going at the start of a flying day and, at the lonely SW corner of the field, they eventually attracted thieves and vandals. The next best thing was to bring in the petrol and batteries after use, which was done. All in all, life

*John Argent.*



*The six drum  
Munster winch  
1987.*



got tedious and it can be seen why the winches No 2 and 3 were named *Delilah* and *Jezebel*.

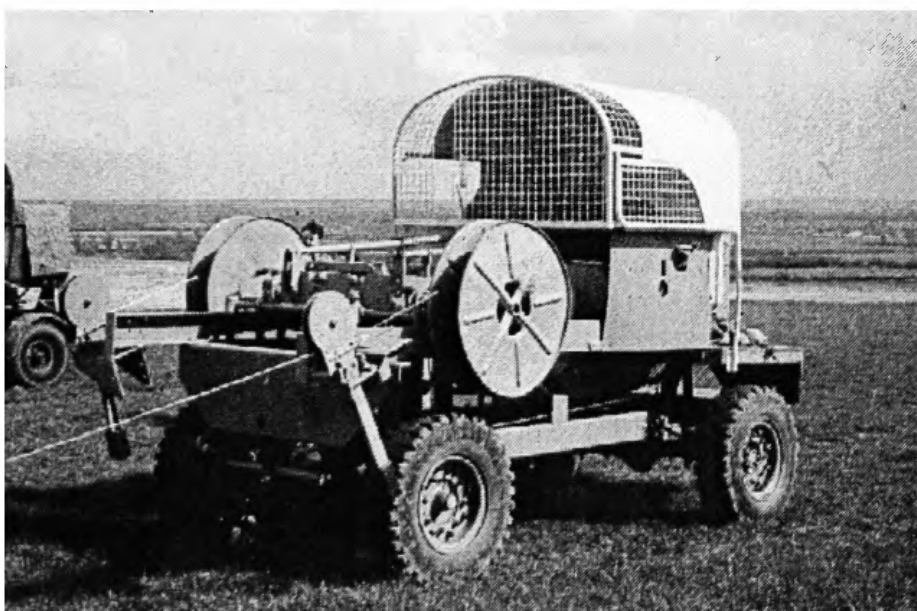
At the back of the bunkhouses was an old Fordson lorry, probably ex-military, which at one time had been used for trailer retrieves but was now derelict. Sad though it looked, that old Fordson combined with the pain of bogged-down winches gave birth to the idea of self-propelled winches.

The concept was that a winch could be checked out, fuelled and started, all in the comfort of a garage where all tools, fluids and manpower were close at hand, then trundled out across the field under its own power arriving at the chosen place already warmed up and ready to go. This was the vision that materialised into *Lady Chatterley*, winch No.5. Saying 'materialised' sounds as though self-propulsion appeared by magic which is hardly fair to the many people whose creative thinking and industrious workmanship brought it about. Geoff Nixon remembers jacking up the winch unit to what seemed a terrifying height in order to slide

the old Fordson chassis under it. It was balanced precariously on 40-gallon oil drums before bolts could be put in place to hold it safely. Apart from self-propulsion, *Lady Chatterley* had another milestone innovation the rocking pulleys.

Material and manufacture of cable guide rollers had been causing problems. When observation showed that the top cable roller was doing 90% of the work, some severe brainstorming and experimentation resulted in use of a grooved pulley wheel pivoted so that it could accommodate sideways drifting of a glider just one moving element instead of four. The first cast iron pulley wheel (found in the tipping spoil in the gulley) proved to wear out too quickly and was replaced by a Nixon-designed one with a case hardened steel rim. The rocking pulley was a 100% success and is now seen on many winches.

The winch builders could not rest on their laurels. By 1962, gliders were getting heavier and faster and the automotive clutches of balloon winches



*Winch No 5, 'Lady  
Chatterley'.1960.*



*Don Gerrard.*



*Dick Cooper.*



*Phil Ramsden and Geoff Nixon.*

were taking a pounding. Coupled with the fact that all winch drivers were then amateurs, the future of smooth launching was seen to lie in grafting a fluid coupling to the drive train. After long consultations with a company named Crofts, winch No.6 was built with fluid drive, disc brakes and friction clutches for the selection of drums, all on a Bedford 4-wheel drive lorry chassis. A consequence of launching heavier, faster gliders was that the old Ford V8 engines were blowing up more often, partly due to over-revving. Club members John Cotton and John Barrow, both of whom worked for Bedford Commercial Vehicles, solved the problem by obtaining 4.9 litre ex-test bed engines which had served their time, and were still in excellent condition, but about to be scrapped by the Company. Winch No.6 was followed closely by No.7 to similar specification.

At this time, the closure of Napier's Flight Test Establishment meant that both Phil Ramsden and Geoff Nixon moved away from Dunstable. It was John Argent, with his great energy and workshop experience, who took up the mantle and completed winches Nos.6 and 7, keeping the Club machinery in such excellent condition for many years until the Munster winch came on the scene.

Before the Ottfur back-release hook was introduced in 1939, several pilots had been killed by the launching cable failing to release at the top of the launch. It was the practice to have a sharp axe ready at the winch so that in the event of a hang-up, the cable could be quickly chopped. Modern winches have built-in guillotines to cope with the problem just in case the back-release hook were to fail or the cable gets caught up on part of the aircraft.

In Holland, the Gliding Club of Nijmegen designed and built a most impressive winch which was equipped with no less than six cables. A German crane-building company, Munster GmbH, went into production with this design and Dunstable bought the first off the line. The immense power from a supercharged DAF bus engine demanded a complete rethink of launching techniques, and every Club member had to be checked out on launches to ensure safe operation. On some of the first launches, pulling back too hard on lift-off resulted in near vertical climbs and immediate steps were taken to curb this practice. Being the first production example, the winch had more than its share of teething troubles, but on the whole it has given sterling service over the last thirteen years. Solving our problems was, of course, a great help to the manufacturer who went on to land a big contract for equipping the ATC.

Accommodation for housing and repairing winches was always a problem, particularly when the Nissen huts were demolished, and in the mid-fifties Jeff Butt proposed building a garage/workshop adjoining the hangar. Sporadic work on this continued for several years, with various people digging foundations, laying the concrete floor and cutting steelwork for the structure. Eventually the workshop was finished and a large up-and-over door built to keep the bits in and the members out.

In recent years care of the winches and tractors has been in the expert hands of Dick Cooper who has also been the professional winch driver for many seasons. His uncanny ability to play a glider on the end of the cable like a fat trout on the end of a fishing line is appreciated by all. Before Dick, we had many years of devoted launching by Don Gerrard whom many will remember.



## TRACTORS

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All sorts of old vehicles were used on the field for retrieving, and in the early fifties they had a Model T Ford saloon. For some reason it was decided to remove the roof and the bodywork was attacked with hacksaws. With hindsight, what an act of vandalism! A collector these days would give his eye teeth for a car like that!

Other old vehicles pressed into service on the airfield included a Fordson van, a pre-war Morris Oxford, an Austin Heavy 12/4 that had a crash gearbox, and a vast old Chevrolet which was fitted with artillery wheels. There was also a 15 cwt Bedford truck, probably ex-army, which used more oil than petrol. On one glider retrieve, a garage was knocked up late at night for a five gallon drum of oil to get the outfit back home.

In the immediate post-war period ex-government Beaverette vehicles were available very cheaply, and gliding clubs usually had one of these for pulling out cables and field retrieving. They resembled armoured jeeps and originated for use as military scout cars. The Beaverette was fitted with a removable cable spreader bar and this had to be taken off after each day's flying to enable the vehicle to be put away in its garage. The half hour taken to bolt it back on again each morning could

have been better devoted to more flying, so Wally Kahn and others decided that by cutting a slot on each side of the garage entrance they could do away with the dismantling and simply drive in. This they duly did, and were amazed to receive a rocket from the Committee for not seeking official permission!

Like the winches, the Club tractors all had names, and *Marigold*, *Daffodil*, *Buttercup* and *Dandelion* served their time on the airfield.

When new fields were purchased, the first thing that had to be done was remove the surrounding hedges, and working parties were organised to tackle this very back-breaking chore. One effective tool was an ancient Fordson tractor known for some reason as *The Killer*. Later we found out why it was so named. Although the chassis and engine were of normal size, the device was fitted with very small fat wheels. With a loop of chain attached to it, bushes could be grubbed out quite handily. Driving it one day while clearing Gold Hill, a member named Simons was happily demolishing a line of hedge when the tractor hit a large bump, tossing him out of the seat and on to the offside rear wheel. It threw him forward on to the ground and then promptly ran over him, leaving him with zigzag tread marks over his chest



*A Beaverette  
field vehicle  
with John  
Hands at rear.*

and three broken ribs. After he came out of hospital, his wife ensured he did not visit the Club again.

Seeking the ultimate in low running costs and reliability, the London Gliding Club invested in two David Brown horticultural tractors. These were weird-looking vehicles with a fore and aft 5 inch diameter tube forming the chassis, the steering axle hanging from the front end and driver and little diesel engine dangling off the back. With spreader bars to tow out a pair of cables, these tractors ran for many years without trouble, until eventually the bumpiness of the field fatigued the chassis tubes and the tractors bit the dust. Back to second-hand Fordsons and Massey Fergusons, until two new

Marshall tractors joined the fleet. Then, In 1986, a massive second-hand machine of Czech origin was purchased to help get the 7 ton Munster winch into position when the airfield was wet. It was nicknamed *Chernoby!*

The latest arrivals on the transport scene are golf buggies for retrieval of gliders from the airfield. After having one on trial over the winter of 1998-9 and finding it could cope with pulling an AS-K 21 up the Hangar Ridge slope when wet, three more were obtained for the 1999 season. They have proved very popular with Cadets wishing to gain driving skills and are much less damaging to the grass than our previous heavy tractors.



*A poem in varnished ply and clear doped fabric – Mike Beach's replica of the Falcon I of 1928.*



## TRAILERS

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**T**he Ottley building (the private owners' workshop) has been used for some very ambitious projects over the years. The sixties saw a spate of trailer building as more and more privately owned gliders arrived at the airfield. From 11 in 1958, 16 in 1960 and 29 in 1964, the number of private aircraft had reached 60 by 1978 and is standing around 80 in 2000.

The appearance of trailers was different forty years ago. Club member Peggy Mieville fixed a deal with the Wander Company for trailers to carry advertisements in huge blue and white lettering for their product Ovaltine. A local signwriter, Mr Rice Jones, popularly known as *Rice Pudding*, used to turn up at the Club with a three-legged stool and a box full of tins of paint and would spend long hours working on the trailers. The Kirby Kite trailer received special treatment in red, yellow, blue and black proclaiming the benefits of 'Ovaltine Chuckles baby's first biscuit.' Syndicates received no less than £20 per year for this enterprise, which was very welcome as it more than covered the cost of annual insurance in those days.

The commercially built trailer of the fifties was generally of pretty massive wooden construction with half inch boarded floor and a covering of hardboard. It was very heavy and required a Land Rover or largish car to move it around. As time

went on it would get heavier as the hardboard absorbed more and more water before disintegrating into a soggy pulp.

Chuck Bentson, an American engineer member, thought this could be improved on and came up with a design for a lightweight monocoque structure of 4mm plywood with no chassis as such, all bending loads being absorbed by the vertical ply sides and hooped roof. With a torsion bar axle, the total weight of the trailer came out at around 8½ cwt (430 kg) about half that of the old designs and this meant that even a Morris Minor or VW Beetle could tow it satisfactorily. In 1960, such a trailer could be built for £120.

An almost endless succession of trailers emerged from the Ottley doors, and sometimes there were two trailers under construction at the same time. An entertaining hour could be spent observing the efforts of some of the more amateur builders. On one particularly special occasion Tom Sheppard, John Jeffries and Stuart Beck had spliced together three sheets of plywood to form a complete trailer roof but had got the grain running the wrong way. Now trying to get an 8 foot section of roof glued and clamped into position is quite enough to tackle, but to manage a 24 foot piece is just asking for trouble. A gang of helpers was recruited, hammers and tack strip distributed and glue

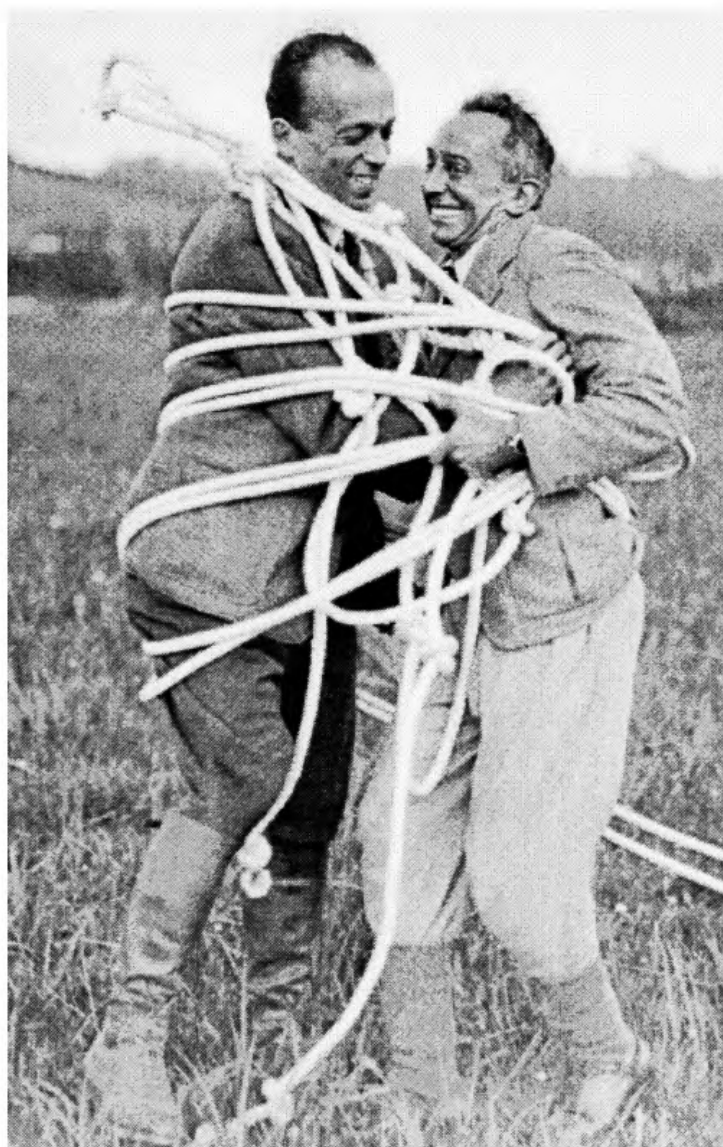


*A typical Skylark trailer of the sixties and seventies with its Ovaltine advertisement.*

applied to the frame. It was chaos. The wood would not bend over the hoops and more and more ropes were wrapped round the trailer to hold it down. One of their mistakes was fixing the whole of one side of the roof first rather than working along it. Trying to persuade the other side into position found them with a great big bulge of ply roof in the middle, which looked as though no efforts would be capable of subduing. Deft application of a large handsaw cured this. Someone called for a hammer and one was tossed over the trailer roof. The catch was missed and the hammer hit the only vulnerable thing in the workshop – a large glass container of glue which oozed all over the floor. At this point, John Cardiff wandered into the building with a somewhat vacant expression on his face. He did not see the mess on the floor and so left a great trail of gluey footprints down the length of the workshop. The pace and the language got hotter and hotter before the roof was

finally hammered into place, but by this time most of the onlookers were helpless with laughter. It was this same trailer that provided another gleeful occasion. When it was being inched out of the workshop door, it had just reached the critical point where the fin box was almost touching the doorframe when someone broke a bundle of wood across their knee. The splintering noise caused an absolute panic among the trailer builders who dashed to the rear of the trailer to look for the non-existent damage.

The Tutor trailer of Mike Hodgson is unique. Not only is it constructed from the rear fuselage of an Avro Lincoln bomber, but the actual aircraft had its own special place in history. Rolls Royce used it as a test bed for the Tyne turbo-prop engine, which it had installed in the nose. There was a wonderful photograph in *Aeroplane Monthly* of a very low beat up at the 1956 Farnborough Air Show.



*The pioneer Robert Kronfeld and Capt. Rattray play 'silly beggars' as they wind up a bungee rope.*



## THE WESTHORPE TRAGEDY

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**T**he most devastating event in the Club's history took place in 1959 when a T.21 came off a winch launch and then dived vertically into Hangar Ridge, killing instructor John Westhorpe and his course pupil Peter Carter. John was a tremendously enthusiastic character who was popular with everyone and lived for gliding. The subsequent enquiry into the crash revealed that, unknown to anyone else, John had suffered from epilepsy in previous years, and had been under medication for the condition. It appears that having been free from symptoms for a long time, a false sense of security led him to reduce his dosage of medication. It was assumed that he had suffered an attack in the course of the launch, and that he froze on the controls with disastrous results. This tragedy led to a review of health requirements for gliding activities.

Whilst on the sad subject of fatalities, it must be recorded that the Club has suffered several others.

In the thirties, a Mr Lander was taking a launch in his newly acquired Scud when he pulled up too steeply, stalled and was fatally injured in the ensuing crash. Another casualty was course instructor Reg Kearney in 1939. He walked into the propellor of a BAC Drone when Tim Hervey was conducting an engine run outside the hangar.

In 1951 Jack Hanks, a club instructor, was killed after the Camel he was flying along the Hill was in collision with an Olympia. This was followed in 1955 by the death of 'Brandy' Hennesey attempting a landing at a golf course at Barnet. 1974 and 1975 saw the loss of John Bentley and Don Searle in outlanding accidents.

The eighties and nineties saw five more tragedies, with Freddie Taub losing his life when a glider upset his tug, Richard Jennings in a Ka 8, Carol Jarvis in an AS-W 20, Dan Smith in 1994, and John Southeast, a Lasham visitor, in our AS-K 13 in 1998. All sadly missed.

*John Westhorpe on right with Harry Simler and the Club Grunau Baby in 1958.*



# AEROBATIC COMPETITIONS & AIRSHOWS

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**O**n a more cheerful note, let us look at the introduction of the series of aerobatic competitions that the Club started up. These and the air displays offered an attraction to the general public and helped the Club's finances.

People have always enjoyed throwing gliders around the sky so a National Championship was held at Dunstable in 1957 to give people a chance to show what they could do. A panel of Royal Aero Club judges included test pilot Bill Bedford, himself an accomplished glider pilot. They sat at a long table in front of the Clubhouse while competitors went through their paces finishing with a spot landing contest. The winner was Dan Smith in an Olympia. As a side show, there was a height judging competition for the public and a display of parachuting. This last event went somewhat wrong however, when British champion Mike Reilly landed on the Clubhouse roof and knocked himself out. Fortunately there were ladders in position as some of the commentating had been done from the rooftop. Freddie Phelps was first up, and smothered the parachute which was threatening to drag Reilly over the edge. Within minutes, ropes had been found enabling the St John's Ambulance people to lower a stretcher to the waiting ambulance. An amusing sideline to this story concerns the 'Doctor in Attendance' named in the printed programme as Club member Tudor

Edmonds. Nobody had told him about it until he arrived at the Club that day. And when Bob White opened Tudor's 'little black bag' on the rooftop, the only contents were a large pair of flying gauntlets, a packet of sandwiches, a sandwich from the previous weekend, a copy of the News of the World and a solitary one inch gauze bandage: hardly a survival kit!

Another entertainment was when John Everitt in a gorilla suit ran out of the crowd, jumped into the Club Grunau Baby, was launched, and did a wild, crazy flying exhibition. On landing, he was collared by ostensible Whipsnade keepers and led away with a rope round his neck – all good stuff. These contests continued annually up to 1962, when air displays and open days with more variety were developed which brought in large crowds. The air shows included joyriding in gliders for the public, aerobatic displays by gliders and Tiger Moths, air races for light aircraft, side-shows for the children with pony rides, a balloon race, a miniature railway for passenger rides, a Primary glider on a tripod mounting for simulated flying, height judging contests (usually with Peter Fletcher attired in a top hat piloting his Kadet glider), parachute drops, vintage car, and aircraft and glider ground displays. It all took a lot of organising and Club members put in an enormous effort to make it all a success.

Geoff Kerr was given the job of flying a press photographer at one of our air displays to get some shots from the T.21. 'Can you get further to the left?' asked the photographer, so Geoff went round again. As they straightened up, the cameraman said 'That's great, STOP!'



*Parachutist Mike Reilly  
being rescued from the  
Clubhouse roof 1957.*



At a time when sonic bangs used to be heard in Britain, a stunt was attempted at one of the Club's air displays which did not quite come off, or go off as expected. Godfrey Lee flew the Club Skylark II low across the airfield at VNE while at the critical moment Archie Erskine was supposed to touch off a drum of petrol vapour to simulate a sonic bang. Instead of a loud explosion, there was only a dull 'whoof'.

One of the attractions was to be a fly-past by powered aircraft from the Luton Flying Club but, in the days before radio was in general use, control of events by the organiser was a bit haphazard. The Luton Club's arrival was somewhat sudden as they came at treetop height from Kensworth and dived down over the Hill. Unfortunately, just at that moment Ralph Chesters was demonstrating a low-level loop in the Jaskolka and was upside down in the middle of his manoeuvre when half a dozen aircraft whizzed by just underneath him. John Hands, who was in charge of the airshow flying that day said 'Never again!'

In 1966 we had hydrogen balloons as the major attraction. Anthony Smith, who came to fame by flying his balloon *Jambo* over the East African game reserves, brought it to Dunstable together with Gerry Turnbull and his RAF-owned balloon. A huge lorry loaded with hydrogen cylinders was brought on to the field to inflate the gas bags. It cost the Club over £300 for the gas to inflate the two balloons! Not a cheap operation.

Roger Barrett was one of the lucky passengers who set off in *Jambo's* basket, but at 1,500ft over Aylesbury there was an ominous creaking from the basket bottom which started to separate from the wicker sides. The crew retreated to sitting on the basket rim for the rest of the flight and all was well.



These displays were full of incidents. Also present in 1966 were two hot air balloons. One was a three-quarter scale replica of Montgolfier's first ever aerostat. This was beautifully decorated in blue and gold and was inflated over a somewhat smoky heat source. It was let up from the foot of the Hill by a winch sited near the south west launch point and the balloon rose into a sharp easterly airflow. Once it got above hill top level it caught the full force of the wind and broke its tethering cable. It careered across the airfield towards the Clubhouse, all the displays, parked aircraft and the crowd. It hit the edge of the tarmac apron and by sheer luck missed everything and everyone. Tim Godfrey was one of a number of Club members who rushed across to the collapsing balloon to try and secure it but, grabbing the metal gondola, found it still extremely hot and yelled out in pain.

After this excitement, inflation of the second balloon was started. This balloon was a home made effort by a schoolmaster and pupils from a Bolton school. It was constructed of panels of clear polythene sheeting stuck together with, they claimed, three miles of cellotape. The flight loads were taken from the basket into the canopy by string netting over the whole canopy, the 'basket' being made of Dexion. Inflation was by an agricultural weed killer flame gun wielded by the schoolmaster inside the balloon. At his first attempt, the flame touched the plastic and the balloon split from end to end. 'Ah well' said the schoolmaster, 'Back to t'drawing board,' and at that he got on to his hands and knees and started taping up the panels again.

The second attempt to inflate was successful and the balloon reared up to an impressive height. The Dexion cage was attached and as free flight was not sanctioned, the balloon was tethered by a length of sash cord to a Land Rover. After a few lurches around in the wind, the rope parted and the balloon took off with two young lads dangling by an arm from the basket. Fortunately they dropped off immediately or they could have been seriously hurt. The schoolmaster was crouched in the Dexion cage looking for all the world like a monkey as he shot off skywards. The balloon rose swiftly to about 1,500ft heading for Totternhoe and

*Roger Barrett in 1965, later to become BGA Chairman.*



*Montgolfiere  
replica balloon  
crashes on  
tarmac during  
1966 Air Show.*

looked magnificent with the sun shining through it. It sank earthwards to the fields then there was a bright blue flash as it hit the high tension wires, cutting off the public address in mid-sentence, and all power supplies to the surrounding villages as far as Tring. We heard later that this balloon's first flight (ours was its second) was little more successful, as at Bolton it rose swiftly to 1,000ft and then fell straight down into a reservoir!

For these airshow events the whole area now occupied by the trailer rack and east wind launch point was devoted to parking, and many hundreds of cars arrived on the day. On one occasion, a visiting pilot misjudged his take off on the north east run and bounced his aircraft's wheels on the roof of a car in the parking lot. It broke the car's windscreen but did not damage the aircraft.

At the time, the gully had not been filled in and there was a steep slope just beyond the windsock. A visiting aircraft made his approach over Hangar Ridge too near to the Clubhouse. Geoff Kerr who had rather a posh voice was commentating from the rooftop thus: 'We have a visiting Cessna coming in from the north and I must say that he's going to

be rather near the windsock. He's going to be a bit surprised when he sees the gully in front of him..... oh... Ker-rist!' At this point the Cessna's nose wheel collapsed and it flipped over onto its back. Fortunately nobody was hurt.

Godfrey Harwood provided another diversion. He had brought his Motor Tutor to the show and was flying it gently up and down the Hill. He obviously flew it a bit too gently, for a wing dropped and he spun in to the hill top missing all the onlookers massed there. As John Hands remarked at the time 'The pilot simultaneously ran out of height, speed, control and ideas!' The Tutor was a write-off and Godfrey was taken to hospital to have his bruises looked at. A little while later, someone came down off the Hill bearing a set of false teeth he had found in the wreckage. Rika Harwood took them



*Geoff Kerr and  
Sid Tomlin 1960.*



with her when she went to pick up her husband. 'Ah Godfrey' she cried, 'I've got your teeth here.' 'Then what are these then?' grunted Godfrey flashing a full set of choppers. One wonders under what circumstances the original set came to be under the bushes on the hillside.

In 1996 the *Airfun Fair* was held. This great promotional event was dreamed up and organised by Tim Godfrey and is thought to have been the first-ever exhibition setting out to present literally all the different ways of using the air for recreation

at the time of writing still the only one. Some 20 organisations participated with stands and demonstrations covering activities as widely varied as aeromodelling, kite flying, gliding, hang gliding, parafoil flying, ballooning, fixed-wing and rotary power flying, ATC cadets and helicopters of the Army Air Corps. Even Whipsnade Zoo took part with a stand featuring their birds of prey. A beautiful silver remote-controlled airship 26ft long was inflated with helium in the glider hangar, and Per Lindstrand attended with the pressurised gondola in which he captured the World absolute altitude record of 65,000ft. A start was made on air experience flights for the public until rough conditions became too severe. The event was also attended by Sir David Madel MP, who gave it his blessing.

There was a terrific response from Club members to the appeal for helpers and all looked forward to a very successful day. But the best laid plans are still at the mercy of the weather and the day dawned with heavy rain and high winds. It was estimated that around a thousand people braved the elements but in spite of all the enthusiasm the day was a financial loss. Nevertheless in terms of publicity and goodwill generated and morale boosting for the Club, the Committee pronounced it a success.

In 1993, a new way of marketing the Club facilities was found by taking a stand at the Leisure Exhibition at the Shopping Centre at Milton Keynes. A fully rigged AS-K23 was displayed on the central concourse and a rota of Club members explained our sport and sold bookings for AEI flights and one, two, and three day courses. This was highly successful and has been repeated each year since with a rigged Primary glider adding to the interest and offering contrast with the modern GRP machine. In the course of talking to the public, one comes across all sorts of fascinating people. Ex-LGC members, ex-Slingsby workmen, and often ex-servicemen with breathtaking experiences of perhaps flying Waco gliders into clearings in the Burma jungle, and then being snatched out with a load of casualties by a swooping tow hook equipped Douglas Dakota.



*Selling Club courses at the Milton Keynes Holiday Exhibition.*

## RECORDS

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The 18th March 1934 was a cracking day, and Eric Collins had carried out several flights with passengers to heights of 1,700ft in the Kassel two-seater. With his next passenger, a Herr W. Exner, he contacted a strong thermal over the Bowl which lifted him to 3,800ft under a cloud street over Luton. He crossed a blue gap to a second street but then ran into soft hail which stuck to the wings and struts. They maintained a steady 3,700ft but then had to deviate to the next promising looking cloud. They were bombarded with heavy hail and got frozen in the open cockpit, so completed the flight with a downwind glide to land at Little Waltham, just north of Chelmsford, thus establishing a British multi-seater record of 46 miles. Herr Exner then returned to London by train!

On the same day, Philip Wills took the Professor 55 miles to Latchington in Essex experiencing the same heavy hail under the clouds. He had no variometer to help him and relied on a hand-held barograph to judge his height, the recording barograph being tucked away out of his sight. It is doubtful if anyone these days would set off cross country with a u/s vario and no altimeter so you have to hand it to the pioneers. Philip's flight gave him the British distance record of 55 miles and height gain record of 3,800ft.

Two pre-war record flights were made by Philip Wills in his Minimoa. In April 1938 he made the

first 300km cross-country in Britain when he flew 209 miles to St Austell in Cornwall, not starting from Dunstable but by aerotow launch from Heston Airport. With a north easterly filling the sky with cloud streets, Philip made his way down to the West Country. The flight was notable for the use he made of a sea breeze front off the coast by Lyme Regis which took him safely to Torbay and Devonshire. The flight was graphically described in Philip's classic book *On being a Bird*, essential reading for any glider pilot.

In July 1939 Philip set up a British national height record of 14,170ft. He launched at 3.30pm into a north-westerly with some frontal cumulo-nimbus clouds forming to the north. After local soaring for an hour, Philip climbed to 3,500ft over Dunstable and headed off to a wall of dark cumulus forming over Luton. Entering this cloud, the variometer reading went off the clock and the barograph later showed a climb of 2,200ft per minute. Philip kept up a rate 2-3 turn (a circle every 30 seconds) with the speed fluctuating between 40 and 50mph. The barograph showed the last 10,000ft of climb taking only seven and a half minutes, and when the air got too turbulent, Philip straightened out on a north east heading, coming out of cloud over St Albans. A straight course back to Dunstable would have meant braving the rough air again so Philip diverted via Welwyn and Stevenage before landing back two and a quarter hours after starting his flight.

In 1922, the World Duration Record of 3 hours 21 minutes was set in a single seat glider during the Itford Competition, and it was not for another 15 years that the British figured in another World



*Philip Wills, World  
Champion 1952 and  
holder of many records.*





*Bill Murray and John Sproule  
set a 22 hour two-seater  
duration record 1938.*

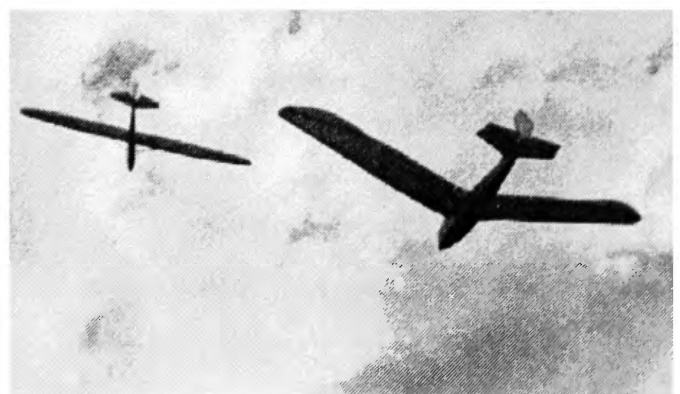
record. Bill Murray, a serving flight lieutenant in the RAF and John Fox, both LGC members put up the first two-seater duration record at the Hornberg in Germany. They flew for 9 hours 48 minutes, to be beaten by the Germans the following year with a flight of 21 hours 2 minutes.

With the promise of a good westerly for 48 hours, Bill Murray and John Sproule decided to have a go at beating this, and were duly launched over the Downs at 04:09 hours in a Falcon III on Saturday 8th July 1938. The conditions were very rough and Sproule was airsick when he was not doing the flying. Things calmed down somewhat and the pair nearly got sunk at the Zoo end, coming back all the way below Hill top height. The 1938 Nationals were being held at the Club at the same time and the Falcon III was joined on the Hill by the competitors during the day. By the afternoon, there were frequent heavy showers blowing through and Bill Murray had an uncomfortable time with rainwater seeping down inside the collar of his flying suit. When they realised that their last pack of sandwiches had disappeared into the rear

fuselage, a note was dropped asking for replacements. Shaw, in a Grunau Baby, flew over the top of them trailing a package on the end of a long string, but whenever they got near the drag wires running from the nose of the Falcon to the top of the struts would slide the sandwiches out of reach. They flew on into the evening and, not having any idea of what the previous record stood at, dropped a note announcing they would land at 22.00. This caused frantic signalling from the ground by Morse and with loudspeakers telling them that they had to continue until after 02.13 to beat the record, so they flew on into the night.

By this time, the BBC had put out news of the record attempt and crowds of people turned up. With the aid of car sidelights lining the top of the Hill and a fitful moon, sometimes obscured by thin cloud, Murray and Sproule flew on. Someone unscrewed their car headlight and played it on the windsock on the Hill top and a searchlight on the Bar roof illuminated the one on the airfield. Sproule had been flying during the twilight hours but Murray carried on through the hours of darkness leaving Sproule refreshed for the landing on the airfield with the aid of car headlights, having completed a flight of over 22 hours 14 minutes

Philip Wills joined the London Gliding Club in 1932 already holding a power licence, but soon revealed an aptitude for gliding. With Kit Nicholson he shared a Scud II as his first aircraft, and was soon putting up noteworthy flights. He persuaded Mungo Buxton to design a high performance machine for him and Slingsby built the *Hjordis*



*Attempts were made to  
lower sandwiches from the  
Grunau Baby during the  
record attempt.*

with which he won the 1937 British National Contest. For the 1938 Rhon meeting at the Wasserkuppe he flew a King Kite, which had earlier given him anxious moments whilst testing it for Slingsby. Philip tried to bale out of it when it failed to respond to spin recovery action and it was only the forward shift of CG when he was thrown over the aircraft's nose that enabled him to get it back under control and land safely.

As the leading competition pilot, Philip led the British Team for the 1952 World Championships at Quatro Ventos in Spain, which consisted of 5 Slingsby Sky sailplanes flown by Wills, Forbes, Stephenson, Foster, and Welch. From 17th position on the first day, Philip achieved second on the next two days and first on the 4th and 5th days. During the final day's goal race a cu-nim on course had to be negotiated and in this, Philip reached a height of 24,000ft giving him a Diamond for his 'Gold C'.

His barograph failed to register the peak of the climb, otherwise it would have stood for a British Height Record.

The Brits did very well in the results with Wills winning, Forbes third, Welch ninth and Stephenson eleventh. Frank Foster unfortunately damaged his Sky badly on the first day, being caught in the curl-over from a line squall and breaking off a wing at the root, which put him out of the competition.

Years of competition flying had honed the skills of such pilots as John Jeffries and Robin May to such effect that when ultra high performance sailplanes like the Calif A21 and the AS-H 25 became available for them to fly, they seized the opportunity to have a crack at the various records and were extremely successful. The table of members' gliding achievements shows just how well they accomplished this.

Date	Achievement	Detail	Pilot	Glider
1930	First gliding certificate in UK	C certificate	Latimer-Needham.	Zogling
1930	Believed to be the first pilot to carry out a soaring flight in Britain since Itford 1922.	1 hour 2 minutes	Fl Lt Edward Mole	Scud I
1931	UK duration record	3 hours 28 minutes	Major Henry Petre	Professor
1932	First UK cross country flight UK distance record	22 miles to Bignals Corner	Eric Collins	Professor
1933	UK height record	1,750 feet	Eric Collins	Professor
1934	UK height record	3,800 feet	Philip Wills	Professor
1934	UK duration record	8 hours 20 minutes	Fl Lt Edward Mole	Falcon 1
1934	UK multi-seat distance record	46 miles to Little Waltham, Essex.	E.Collins & W.Exner	Kassel
1934	UK distance record	55 miles to Latchington, Essex.	Philip Wills	Professor
1934	UK distance record	93 miles to Norfolk Coast.	Eric Collins	Rhonadler
1934	First British Silver C	International No 26.	Eric Collins	
1936	UK distance record	105 miles to Pakefield, Suffolk.	Philip Wills	Hjordis
1937	World multi-seat duration record.	9 hours 48 minutes.	Bill Murray & John Sproule	Falcon III
1938	UK height record	10,180 feet	Philip Wills	Minimoa
1938	UK multi-seat duration record	22 hours 13 minutes.	Bill Murray & John Sproule	Falcon III
1939	First soaring flight over the English Channel	LGC to Le West, France	Geoffrey Stephenson	Gull I
1939	UK height record	14,170 feet	Philip Wills	Minimoa
	First British Gold C	International No 3.	Philip Wills	
1947	UK duration record	33 hours	Ladislav Marmol	Krajanek
1952	World Gliding Championship win	Spain	Philip Wills	Sky
1953	UK National Championships win	Camphill	Geoffrey Stephenson	Sky
1956	World Multi-seat Championships win.	France	Frank Foster and Nick Goodhart	Eagle
1956	National 100km triangle record	59.9km/hour in Poland	D.Smith	Jaskolka

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1957	National 100km triangle record	74.5km/hour	F.Foster	Skylark II
1959	UK National Championships win	Lasham	Geoffrey Stephenson	Skylark III
1960	First 300km triangle from Dunstable	LGC - Lasham - Nympsfield	Phil Jeffrey	Skylark III
1962	National 100km goal record	70.7km/hour	M.Bird	Skylark III
1964	National multi-seat 100km record	66.5km/hour	G.Camp & D.Grey-Fisk	Eagle
1974	UK multi-seat record, 100km triangle	83.5km/hour	J.Jeffries & G.Love	Calif A21
1974	UK multi-seat record, 300km triangle	81.1km/hour	J.Jeffries & G.Case	Calif A21
1974	First 500km flight and 500km triangle from LGC	71.46kph LGC - East Retford - Mynd - LGC	F.Pozerskis	AS-W 17
1975	UK multi-seat record, 400km triangle	68.4 km/hour	J.Jeffries & G.Love	Calif A21
1975	UK multi-seat record, 300km O/R	81.9kph	J.Jeffries & N.Foster	Calif A21
1975	UK multi-seat record, 500km triangle	88.4kph	J.Jeffries & G.Case	Calif A21
1984	UK record, 300km triangle	102.2km/hour.	Robin May	AS-W 20
1988	UK multi-seat record, 300km triangle	92.12km/hour	R.May & T.Stuart	AS-H 25
1988	UK multi-seat record, 500km O/R	74.29 km/hour	R.May & P.Stamell	AS-H 25
1988	UK multi-seat record, distance O/R	520km	R.May & P.Stamell	AS-H 25
1988	National multi-seat record, O/R	712 km in Finland.	R.May & S.Jones	AS-H 25
1988	UK multi-seat record, 100km goal	132.5km/hour.	R.May & D.Brook	AS-H 25
1988	UK National Championships Open Class win	Lasham	Robin May.	AS-H 25
1989	UK National Championships Open Class win	Lasham	Robin May.	AS-H 25
1989	UK multi-seat record, 100km triangle	124.1km/hour.	R.May & E.Morris	AS-H 25
1990	UK National Championships Open Class win	Lasham	Robin May.	AS-H 25
1990	UK multi-seat record, 300km O/R	104.3km/hour.	R.May & J.Berringer	AS-H 25
1990	UK multi-seat record, 200km. triangle	119.07km/hour	R.May & P.Townsend	AS-H 25
1990	UK multi-seat record, 600km triangle	94.94km/hour.	R.May & S.Lynn	AS-H 25
1993	UK multi-seat record, 200km goal	121.1km/hour	R.May & H.Rebbeck	AS-H 25
1995	National multi-seat record 500km o/r	135km/hour in USA	R.May & N.Hoare	AS-H 25
1995	National multi-seat record, Goal distance	892.1km in USA	R.May & P.Rackham	AS-H 25
1996	UK multi-seat record 500km triangle	116.8km/hour (unofficial)	R.May & D.Standon	AS-H 25
1996	UK multi-seat record, 300km triangle	119.1km/hour (unofficial)	R.May & D.Stewart	AS-H 25
1996	UK National Championships Open Class win	Enstone	Robin May	AS-H 25
1999	European Women's Championship Standard Class Win	Poland	S.Harland	AS-H 24

## THE LONDON BALLOON CLUB

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1967 and another air show, enlivened this time by a replica 1916 Vickers Gunbus and a Fokker E1 re-enacting First World War dogfights over the field. This was also the year in when we were visited by Don Piccard and his family from America. Don had just gone into production with hot air balloons and had brought over his *Golden Bear* as a demonstrator. He spent a week prior to the air show flying everyone interested. Very late one evening in the crowded bar, Don suddenly said 'Let's go and fly!' It was a completely calm night, and once the balloon had been laid out and inflated on the field, Laurie Ryan and Ron Page were directed to get in the basket. They naturally assumed that Don would join them and control the balloon but NO! 'Burn' he said. Burn they did and up they went to about two hundred feet. With no

wind, they did not drift away and under Don's direction they came safely down to earth again and the next pair had a go. For a first flight to be solo was a bit unusual even in the early days of the hot air ballooning renaissance.

A consequence of Don Piccard's visit was that a balloon group was formed at Dunstable under the leadership of Roger Barrett - the London Balloon Club. Ten members of the London Gliding Club bought *London Pride*, a Piccard balloon with a red and blue canopy. Although it was based at the Club, it usually flew from sites further away from the Luton Control Zone.

The only other successful hot air balloons we had seen at Dunstable were *Red Dragon*, a Piccard balloon imported by Leslie Goldsmith which was the first modern hot air balloon to operate in the UK, and *Bristol Belle*. This latter was built by Malcolm Brighton who had previously built the airship featured in the film



*Night inflation of hot air  
balloon by London  
Balloon Club 1968.*



*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and who later had the melancholy distinction of being the first person to lose his life attempting a balloon crossing of the Atlantic. Members of the Bristol Gliding Club who named themselves the Hot Air Group commissioned *Bristol Belle* from him. One of them, Don Cameron later founded Cameron Balloons, currently easily the largest balloon manufacturer this side of the Atlantic if not in the world.

One of the London Balloon Club's most enthusiastic members was Tim Hervey, in 1935 the first CFI and Manager of the London Gliding Club. At 79 years of age he mastered the skills of lighter than air piloting, gained his licence and held it until at the age of 90, although perfectly fit, he was refused a medical renewal because his doctor feared for his own credibility if he had granted it.

The LBC financed all its flying by getting paid for appearances at country fairs, fetes, carnivals and other events, and from the proceeds also managed to buy three more balloons of varying size and manufacture. Competition from the burgeoning balloon groups around the country and more importantly from sponsored balloons (see the next paragraph) reduced the opportunities for paid appearances, and the group disbanded in 1990.

By starting with only the third modern hot air balloon in the UK, Dunstable-based London Balloon Club members became very influential in developing the sport here. At one time they boasted over half the qualified balloon pilots in the country and their founder, Roger Barrett, went on to become Chairman of the British Balloon and Airship Club, the movement's governing body. Later he became Chairman of the BGA.. Another member, Tim Godfrey, became founder Chairman of the BBAC's Flying and Technical Committee with responsibility for overseeing all aspects of airworthiness, pilot training and safety under delegation from the Civil Aviation Authority. This Committee negotiated a change in the law allowing sponsors to display their names on balloons, possibly the single most important influence on the expansion of the sport. When pressure of work necessitated splitting the flying and technical functions another LBC (and LGC) Member, Peter Langford, became Chairman of the BBAC's Technical Committee. Peter's work subsequently earned him a Royal Aero Club Gold Medal.

The first flying examiner appointed by this committee was Laurie Ryan, another stalwart LGC member, and until his recent retirement, the longest-serving examiner in the movement.



*The 1935 Rhonbussard which flew at Dunstable from 1976 to 1998.*

## COMPETITIONS & EPIC RETRIEVES

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Before the days of GPS there was turning point photography to prove nominated spots had been rounded but before then, observers had to be stationed to take the competition numbers of gliders as they passed. Pilots too, would make a note of other gliders rounding the points in case confirmation was needed for scoring purposes. Long hours lying in a field waiting for gliders to appear was a pleasant way to pass time and Colin Richardson and Ann Seabrook returned from one observing duty to announce their engagement.

Radio was not in general use and it was the practice for retrieve crews to telephone back to Control at regular intervals to see if there was any news of their pilot landing. This usually worked quite well unless a pilot, particularly on a long distance task, deviated from his planned direction of flight. Then his crew might drive many, many miles before finding out where their man was. This could be critical if, heading to the west, the crew went into Wales while their pilot disappeared down into Cornwall.



In one competition where the task was achieved distance along a line drawn through Dunstable and a point to the west, Charles Ellis, ever an innovator at interpretation of contest rules, flew the reciprocal course to everyone else and finished up in Essex with his trailer heading ever westwards. I cannot recall that this gained him any advantage though.

Before 1950, the Club had for retrieving an old ex-London taxi named *Fifi*, which still had magneto ignition. Arthur Doughty tells of the time that he received a phone call on a Sunday afternoon from Ron Travell who had landed at the West Essex Golf Club. Arthur hitched up *Fifi* to a Rice trailer and set off only to have the trailer rear door fall off in the middle of Hatfield. Nailing it back on, he reached Ron and loaded up for the return journey. Once again Hatfield proved an unlucky place and *Fifi* died outside the gates of Hatfield House. Hand cranking produced no more than sporadic misfiring so the trailer was detached and a rolling start tried, but without success. Arthur phoned back to Dunstable for help but everyone had gone home except Jack Hanks, the resident instructor, who could not get out until the following morning when he turned up with a serviceable magneto. Arthur and crew had meantime spent the night with the glider. The 19 hour retrieve was completed at 1.00pm on Monday. Arthur had another shambolic retrieve when he reached Halton to collect an Olympia only to find that he already had one inside the trailer!

*Donald 'Doc' Greig on right  
with Geoffrey Stephenson  
and their 'Grey Kite' 1937.*



Up to about forty years ago, a look at the programme for a competition would list not only the pilots' names but also the entrant of the aircraft. This was a hangover from the practice in horse and motor racing, and stewards and marshals would also be named. Nowadays we have a starting marshal as probably the only reminder of those days. In one of the Nationals at Lasham, a Foka glider flown by Derek Piggott had as an entrant the well known racehorse owner the Hon. Edith Paget.

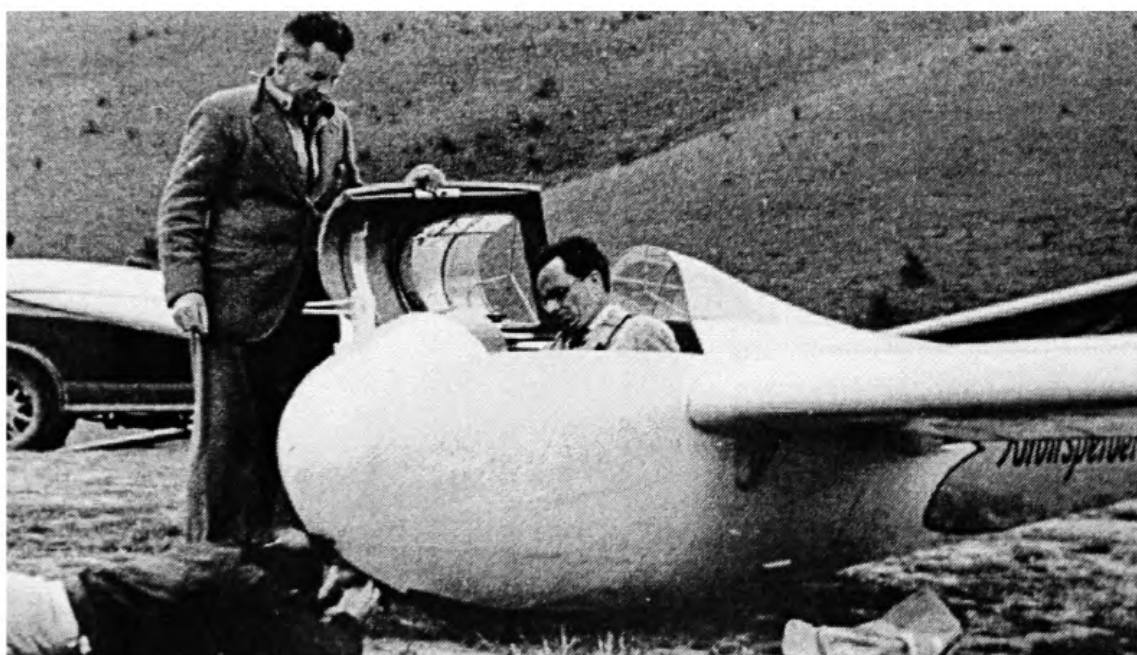
With the introduction of GPS, electronic barographs and loggers, it might be as well to recall how it was done before they came on the scene. Mechanical barographs such as the Winter had a clockwork driven drum on which was clipped either a paper chart or a piece of aluminium foil. Impinging on this was a lever tipped with either an inked pen nib or a sharp pointer, which left the appropriate height trace as the drum revolved. Foils had to be smoked over a candle or oil flame to give an overall soot covering. To make the trace permanent, it was necessary to fix the trace by spraying it with an aerosol hair lacquer or dip it in a tray of cellulose dope. Mike Bird once used a piece of foil which had been coated with a film of paint before he smoked it. On his attempting to fix it, the whole trace floated up to the surface of the dope tray and dissolved before his eyes. Luckily, it was not a badge or competition flight.

The first post-war world contest was held at Samaden in Switzerland in 1948 and in the British team were two renowned Dunstable members: Kit Nicholson and Donald (Doc) Grieg flying the new Slingsby Gull IV sailplanes.

If you read Philip Wills' graphic account of the event in his book *'On Being a Bird'*, you will learn

how, on the eighth day of the competition, our two pilots crossed the Maloja Pass from the good conditions of the Engadine into the dead air of the Italian Como valley. With the mountain tops concealed by cloud, the gliders tested each craggy crevice and crept southwards. Near the village of Era, a cable had been strung across the valley to bring logs down and into this Doc Greig flew, losing a wing and spiralling to his death on the mountain slope. Kit Nicholson had got a bit further on his route but in exploring a complex of gullies on Mount Bellinghera, he was enveloped in rags of cloud forming below him, stalled, and crashed on to the spine of the ridge. He called for help and by an extraordinary chance was heard by a nearby shepherd who got him down to an isolated chapel. By the time an ambulance had got him down to the hospital at Ravenna, Kit had died. Two pilots were killed within two hours and two miles of each other and from two totally different causes. In pre-war days, Doc Greig had partnered Geoffrey Stephenson and John Dent in the Grey Kite and, being a very large man, had to have a special open canopy made to accommodate his broad shoulders.

Geoffrey Stephenson flew a Slingsby Sky in the 1956 World Championships at St Yan in France. One day there was a goal race set to another airfield, which meant crossing three mountain ranges. That would have been all right except that cloudbase was lower than the mountain tops. This did not deter the intrepid competitors. They slope soared the mountain face and then cloud flew until they reckoned they had enough height to clear the ridges, and then set off on course. 'It was the only way,' said Geoffrey. Water ballast and high wing loadings were not on the menu in those days. Lightness was thought to be the thing and, in an attempt to lighten the Sky, Geoffrey took out the



*Kit Nicholson, designer of our Clubhouse with his Rhonsperber and Sebert Humphries 1938.*

oxygen equipment. This could have been fatal, as on one of his cloud climbs he reached nearly 20,000ft. How competitions have changed!

Once light-weight trailers were introduced minimal towing vehicles appeared on the scene, and Mike Bird entered the 1961 Nationals at Camphill with a Skylark III outfit towed by a diminutive Austin A35. The trailer was noteworthy in the spirit of improvisation, in that one side was painted white with green mudguards over a 13 inch wheel, while the other side sported grey paint with black mudguards and a 12 inch wheel. He later found out that the place not to economise on weight was in the towbar department which let him down by breaking.

In the fifties and sixties the favourite 300km task was a goal flight to Roborough, Plymouth's municipal airport. But to achieve the necessary distance meant being released from aerotow over Houghton Regis to start the flight. When the Spring north easterly blew, a stream of Skylarks, Olympias, Kites and Gulls headed south west on downwind dashes to be followed later by the retrieve crews. With no motorways and less efficient tow cars, a retrieve from Roborough meant a return to Dunstable at about 6.00am if you were lucky and then, if conditions were still suitable the glider would be re-rigged for an attempt later in the day by another Club or syndicate member.

On one attempt at this task, Frank Pozerskis got well on his way but ran into trouble by trying a direct flight over the middle of Dartmoor instead of working his way around the lower southern slopes. Forced to land, he saw a playing field within reach and put his Skylark down on a football pitch which turned out to be within the walls of Princetown Prison. All was well however and he was allowed out. On another occasion he landed on our local



Cheddington Airfield, which at the time was used as an atomic weapons store by the US Air Force. He was immediately surrounded by machine gun toting militia and escorted to the guardroom. Now Frank has a pronounced Russian accent and that, coupled with his name, had the Yanks seriously worried. They asked him if anyone could vouch for him so Frank suggested they contacted Stuart Frazer-Beck at the Club. Stuart, ever a practical joker, claimed he had never heard of anyone called Pozerskis. The Americans went ballistic and locked Frank in a cell. Stuart meanwhile hitched up the trailer and eventually got Frank released. What a friend to have!

Around the same time, Mike Fairman and Sally Jeffries were driving to Plymouth to retrieve someone who had managed to complete their 'Gold' flight and, passing through some village, they were held up by the local Salvation Army band marching down the middle of the road. 'Isn't it funny how some people spend their Sundays' was the comment made by Sally.

Imprisonment when landing out was not confined to American Air Force bases as Martin Simons found out to his cost. Pressing on towards a turning point at Leicester in a Ka 8, he found himself in difficulties and decided to turn back to Bruntingthorpe airfield, which he had overflown shortly before. The huge runways there were a magnet but he ignored them and put down on the grass by the control tower. He was immediately collared by security men and ensconced in the guardroom where he was given a severe grilling. He was allowed to telephone for his trailer crew but no way were they going to allow a tug to rescue him. Martin did not know why they were making so much fuss and they did not seem inclined to enlighten him. When his crew arrived, they were surrounded while they derigged the Ka 8 and, with Martin, were promptly ordered off the site. Repairing to the nearest pub to recover, they were informed by the locals that Bruntingthorpe was the emergency diversion airfield for the nuclear V-bomber force and it was, after all, at the height of the Cold War. All this great secrecy on the base did not get any further than the nearest local though.

*Frank Pozerskis  
with his Skylark IV.*



Things we now take for granted were at one time the exception. Closed-circuit tasks are a case in point, for it was as late as 1960 when Geoffrey Stephenson gave a talk at the Club to encourage pilots to have a go. A tremendous boost had just been received when young Phil Jeffery, at the time an apprentice at Halton, flew the first 300km triangle from the Club in a Skylark III: Dunstable - Lasham - Nympsfield - Dunstable, the flight taking 6 ½ hours. The following week, Phil took the Skylark to 15,500ft in a cloud near Duxford.

In 1960, over-subscription for the UK Nationals meant that a rating system had to be introduced, with pilots qualifying for entry by competing in Regionals.

It was in the 1962 Nationals at Lasham that Dan Smith had a frightening experience when flying the beautiful blue and white Skylark III that he shared for so many years with Dudley Hiscox. He had left the rigging of his machine to his crew members who were well-experienced. After launching, Dan found himself with no aileron control. With great presence of mind he opened the airbrakes, which were very powerful on the Skylark. This put extra load on the wingtips, flexing them upwards and so giving him effectively more dihedral and lateral stability. Unable to turn, he rapidly lost height and soon found himself crashing through the treetops of a plantation of young fir trees. This was his salvation, for their whippy trunks cushioned his descent and he finished up with the nose of the glider on the ground but barely damaged. The glider was on the launch grid the following morning.

What had happened was that when rigging, the fork at the top of the aileron push rod in the fuselage centre section had been misaligned so that

the pip-pin only half engaged. In flight, this had become detached although on DI the ailerons apparently operated satisfactorily.

A very lucky escape, but what was even more amazing was that two years later, Dan had exactly the same experience in the same machine and once again got away with it. After that, he changed his crew members!

To encourage cross-country flying, the *Club Ladder* was instituted in 1965. Points could be earned for distance covered, goals declared and speeds achieved, all subject to the handicap of the glider concerned. These flights could be entered for the *National Ladder* contest, and over the years Dunstable pilots have acquitted themselves exceptionally well.

The *Inter Club League* is a popular competition offering a chance for Club members to gain contest experience during a series of weekend events between clubs. Each team consists of a novice, an intermediate and a pundit, and the opportunity is there for different team members to compete in each of the competition rounds.

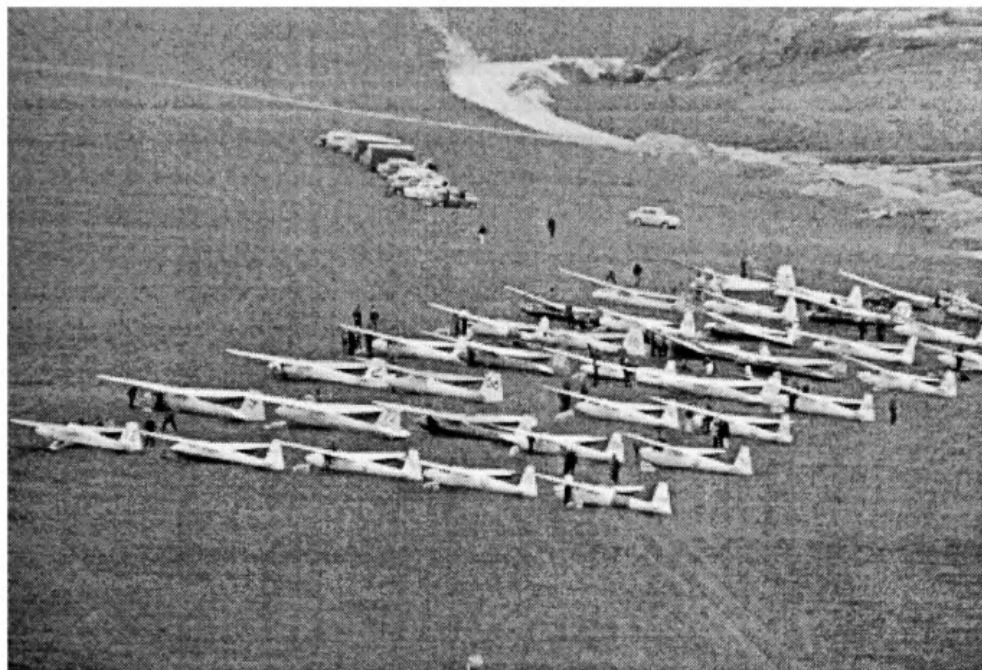
In 1967, the need to have observers at turning points on a task was overcome when the use of photo recording by Kodak Instamatic cameras in the gliders was made mandatory. This meant having a developing facility on site during a competition. In the Clubhouse, the dark cupboard housing the clock mechanism was utilised, having a ready supply of water from the tank in the roof above.

In 1969, radio was made mandatory for competitions and in 1992 the global positioning revolution began. Loggers became compulsory soon afterwards.

During an Easter competition, a landing report was received from Mike Bird after a rapid deterioration in the weather. His Kestrel was in a field at Hockliffe, only four miles from the Club, but the message said 'Bring plenty of helpers.' Veronica, Mike's wife had no difficulty in rounding up a



*Dan Smith, Club Chairman  
and President, in the Club Sky.*

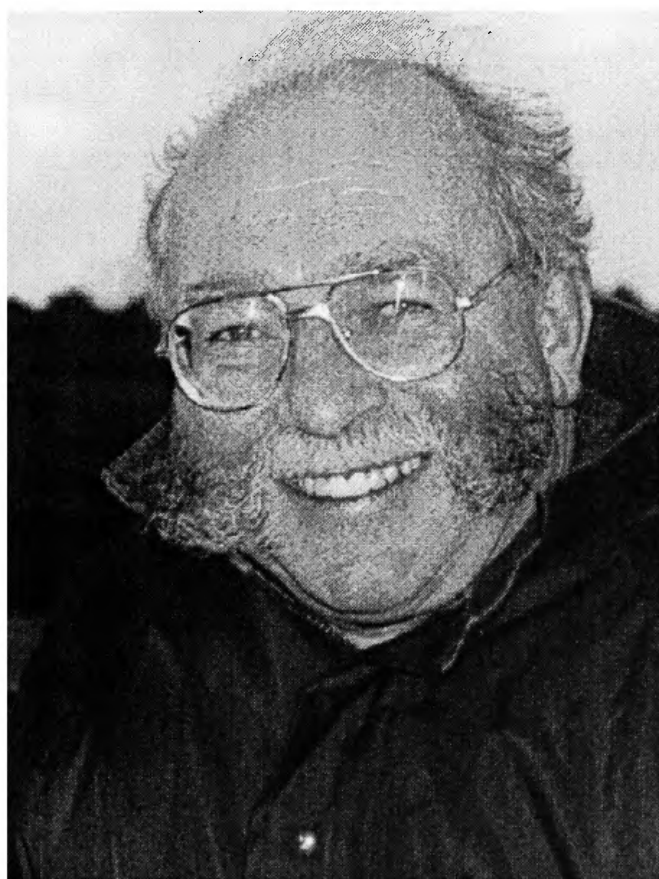


*Competition grid  
in the sixties.*

dozen people to cope with such an 'easy' retrieve, and a train of cars plus trailer set off in good spirits. On reaching the farm, problems became evident. The only gate into the field had a 30ft long sea of deep, sticky mud blocking its exit. The glider was dragged to the edge of this and quickly de-rigged but there was no way the wings were going to be ferried across the bog. So they were carried to the boundary of the field and handed across a high hedge studded with barbed wire into a field of wet, sticky plough. By this time, the wind was really strong and freezing and it had started to snow. Enthusiasm was declining rapidly as the crew struggled to get the wings back to the trailer. Then it was decided that with 12 people available, it should be possible to drag the fuselage across the mud and through the gate. It wasn't! As the crew heaved and hauled, tempers frayed and the language got worse and worse. Veronica by this time was almost hysterical with laughter, which did not improve things. Mike Bird found that he had lost one shoe and sock in the clinging, freezing mud, and was not a happy man. His bare foot was absolutely blue and seemed a ripe prospect for frostbite. It took an hour and three-quarters to get the glider into its box and a very unhappy band arrived back at Dunstable to thaw out in the bar. A week later, they all cheered up when Mike put on a magnificent thank-you dinner.

Retrieves still go wrong. In the 1992 Regionals Bryan Middleton landed his Lak 12 at the village of Oakley, 4 miles north west of Bedford, and holed up in the Bedford Arms to wait for his crew.

The crew hitched up the trailer and with an 'Oh, I know where Oakley is', set off westward. On the way, they were flagged down by a passing car who told them that smoke was pouring out of the trailer axle. It was a bearing which had failed, so they crawled onwards only to find that there was no Bedford Arms to be found. Checking back, they realised they had got the wrong Oakley, and



*Bryan Middleton 1999.*



contacting Bryan, arranged to trail carefully back to Dunstable to borrow the other Lak trailer. This was being loaded up with relief supplies for the poor of Lithuania, and was about to be taken on a trip to collect a new aircraft on the way back. The syndicate were eventually contacted and agreed to co-operate. By the time the trailer had been emptied and they were on their way it was near closing time, and Bryan was still trying manfully to cope with dehydration. Eventually all was well, the glider de-rigged, loaded and returned to Dunstable. It then had to be put into its own trailer and the loaned one repacked with all the goods. Bryan got to bed at half past three in the morning having landed the previous afternoon at four thirty.

As a postscript, Bryan arrived at the Club in the morning to find that a gale was blowing and a hired Jodel tug aircraft, carelessly picketed behind the hanger, had rolled backwards down the slope colliding with a car and narrowly missing an occupied tent.

Bryan had another adventure in 1999 when he landed his LAK in mature rape near the Bedford brick works. His retrieve crew found the field, but in trying to drive along the headland got a trailer wheel over the edge of a deep ditch. The whole outfit slid sideways off the track at an angle of 45 degrees. The farmer could not get a tractor out that Sunday evening to help him and as Bryan was driving Dorniers at work the next day, the retrieve had to be postponed until the Tuesday evening when a posse of eight people was rounded up to help.

After a half-mile trudge through fields, the white front of the trailer was spotted poking up at a drunken angle. The farmer arrived with what must have been the biggest tractor ever built - it was more like an earthmover and it flattened a six feet wide swathe right through his crop. Fortunately the trailer tow hitch was still above the track-way and Bob King's Shogun was successfully hooked on to it. A very hefty chain was looped around the trailer axle, pulled at an angle by the giant tractor. With the combined efforts of Shogun and tractor, out the trailer came.

Another quarter-mile into the field, there was the LAK tail peeping above the densely-matted rape. The aircraft had not got away with it. The crop had pushed the wingtips back, separating the root wing skin from the drag spars. It de-rigged successfully but needed all eight people to carry each wing out of the crop. Not the easiest of retrieves, and the promised pint did not materialise as the Club bar was shut when the crew eventually got back. The farmer was very helpful and seemed well-pleased with a bottle of Bryan's best malt whisky.

During a Nationals at Dunstable sponsored by the brewers of Arctic Light beer, Ron Humphries found that he could not sell it in the bar. Nobody seemed to like it, and he wondered whether the name 'Light' was putting people off. He feared he was going to be left with several kegs on his hands, but solved the problem easily. He changed the names over on the beer pumps, and everyone drank it quite happily, apparently without noticing any difference.



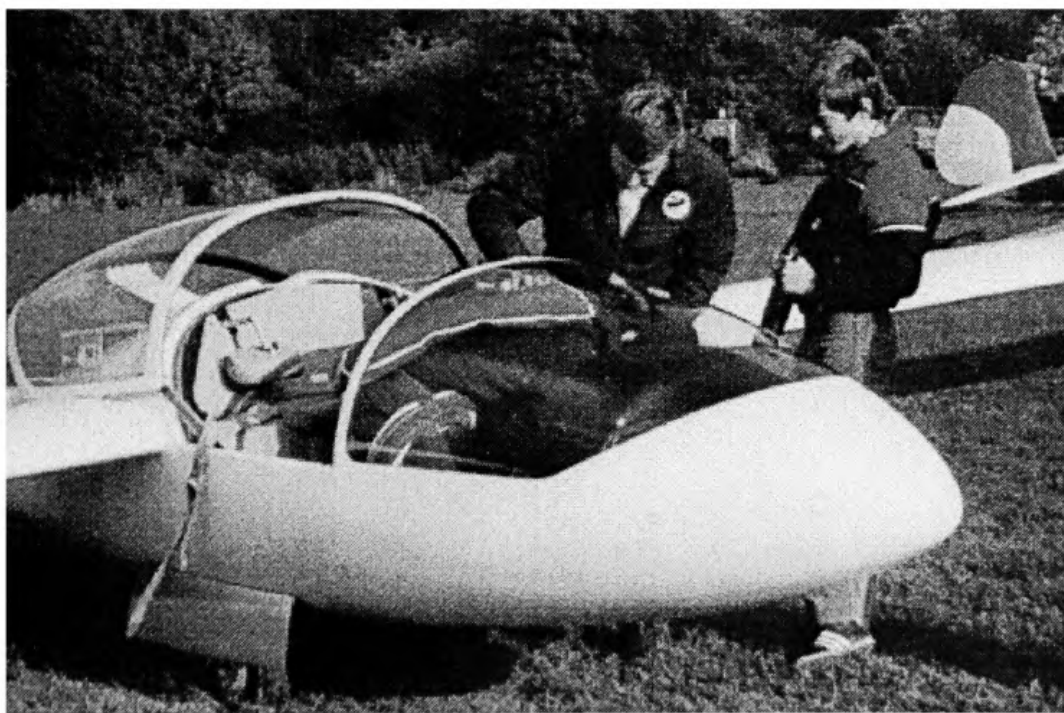
*Bryan Middleton's LAK trailer being retrieved from ditch 1999.*

When they were very young, the four Rebbeck sons created mayhem in the Club restaurant to such effect that Ron Humphries, who ran the catering at the time, surcharged Reb the sum of 50p every time they ate there simply to cover the cost of clearing up afterwards. The lads have now grown out of it (or a least, we think they have) and are well established as very promising competition pilots. Jay, the youngest, competed twice in European Junior contests, flew for Britain in the 1997 World Air Games and won the South African Nationals in 1999. Brother Luke competed in the World Junior Championships and Henry twice in European Juniors, in the World Air Games and came second in the 1996 Standard Class nationals. Including Matt, the family has notched up seventeen entries in Junior Nationals - some record!

Trevor Austin and David Wild had an exciting day in 1989. They had been sampling the attractions of the Vale of Evesham, flying the syndicate Caproni two seater out of the Avon Soaring Centre at Bidford on Avon. It was a cracking day with cloudbase of over 5,000ft and 8-10 knot thermals everywhere. Returning to Bidford with 120 knots on the clock, Trevor slowed down to 110 knots and was just preparing to slow right down to position for circuit when things started happening fast! Violent pitch changes pulling 4-5g finished with a very high G nose-down movement and a



rapid roll to the right. The right wing and tailplane had detached themselves, and resorting to parachute was the obvious next move. Air pressure prevented the canopy from being jettisoned and Trevor, after unstrapping, found himself thrown forward and trapped under the fixed windscreen. Some violent action with knees, elbows, legs, arms, feet, etc, managed to extract him from this situation and he found himself in free fall with the glider spinning around above him. Trevor says this was even more frightening than being in the Caproni, but after he pulled the rip-cord, the chute deployed very gently, and he made a textbook landing with bits of the glider raining down all around him. Dave also got down safely and they were quickly surrounded by people, dogs, horses, police, helicopters, tugs, ambulances, etc, and were plied with large slugs of medicinal Scotch. This was a salutary lesson on the need to look after one's parachute.



*Caproni Calif.A-21, record breaker in the hands of John Jeffries in the seventies.*



Another occasion on which a Dunstable member had to take to his parachute occurred when Mike Thick was involved in a mid-air collision during the 1984 15-Metre Nationals at Lasham in his AS-W 20. This same aircraft had previously been involved in what could easily have been a fatal accident. Mike's partner, Peter Bourne, a Roman Catholic canon, found on a winch launch that the Hotellier connection on his elevator had become detached and he had lost his pitch control. With great presence of mind he recalled from the pilot's handling notes that the flap setting had an effect on pitch, so he used this to bring the aircraft down safely, landing straight ahead near the pig farm and not risking a turn. Everybody reckoned that Peter had a direct line to 'Him Upstairs' and was obviously in favour!

Mike's adventure was even more dramatic. Gliders were milling around in atrocious visibility (one competitor had refused to be launched under those conditions) and were awaiting the opening of the start line. At 3,500ft, around cloudbase had it been visible, Mike's machine was struck from below and behind demolishing one of the flaps. The glider flipped inverted and plummeted earthwards,

travelling so fast that Mike was unable to dislodge the canopy, breaking a finger in the attempt. He then used his feet to jettison the canopy, got free of the aircraft and pulled the rip. Someone took a photograph of the falling glider with a small dot leaving it and by this time his height was only about 400ft! Mike landed in trees without further injury and was helicoptered back to Lasham. The other pilot also baled out but without so much trauma. It says much for the closeness of the gliding fraternity that no less than five gliders were offered to Mike to carry on with the next day's task.

1999 saw a cracking success for our lady pilots in the Women's European Championships when Sarah Harland, lately of LGC, Gillian Spreckley and our own Lucy Withall came first, second and third in the Standard Class against a very strong German team challenge. Lucy is, of course, the third generation of a Dunstable gliding family. Her grandfather, Carr senior flew here 1937-39 and as a regular RAF officer pilot was killed in the Battle of Britain flying a Spitfire. Grandmother Beryl Stephenson flew here in the late thirties and father Carr junior is well known to us as BGA Airways Representative and LGC Committee member.



*Try this with a Nimbus! Author and Peter Fletcher demonstrate the low weight of the Scud II, 1976.*

## AIRWAYS

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With its location north of London, the institution of airways meant that Dunstable found itself under the old *AMBER TWO* airway with a base of 2,500ft above the site. Another airway, *AMBER ONE* over Aylesbury, left a triangle of free airspace over Cheddington and Wing airfields giving the opportunity of limited cloud climbs. This could not last however, and total coverage of the area ensued.

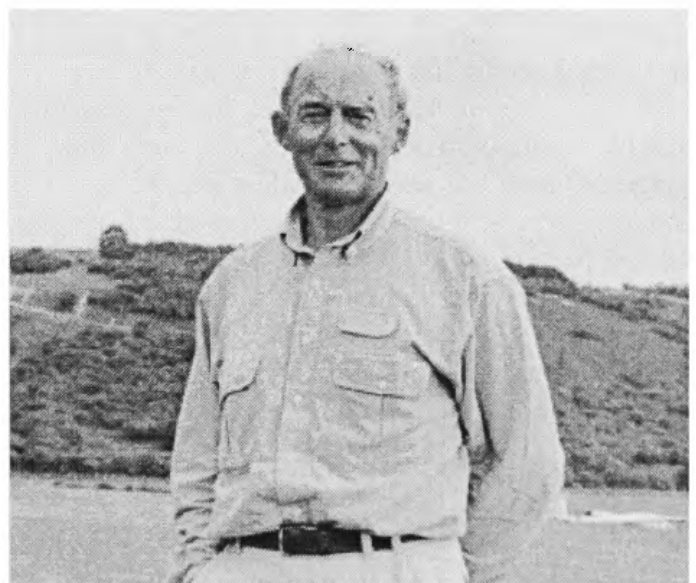
The BGA fought long and hard for freedom for gliding, and the LGC got involved in long discussions with Luton as the airport developed as a commercial terminus. In 1956 our negotiations resulted in the boundary of the London Control Area being shifted clear of Dunstable and the airway base being raised to 3,000 above our site: a great help, but it must be remembered that previously flying in airways was permitted in VMC and climbs to over 6,000ft could be achieved over the Club. Alas, no more. Gradually the surrounding areas have come under the air traffic umbrella. Our relations with Luton Air Traffic have been very amicable and good co-operation has resulted in commercial flights being routed away from the Club where possible, but it has meant strict control of Club pilots and swingeing penalties for any infringement of airspace in order to maintain our operation.

In the mid-sixties, a threat to the continuing existence of the London Gliding Club arose with the proposals for siting the third London airport within a few miles of our site. Luton was not

considered suitable for major development but one of the main contenders was the building of a giant complex covering Wing and Cublington. The London Club was one of the major objectors and many Committee hours were spent in preparing our defence in co-operation with local protest groups. The battle raged over several years and eventually Stansted was the chosen location. This did have an effect on cross-country flying to the east, but fortunately this was a minor concern compared with the probability of a total shutdown in a Wing terminal manoeuvring area.

In 1993 the US Air Force gave up their use of Upper Heyford, and the removal of their Radar Advisory Area opened up a very useful soaring area for cross-countries westward.

Carr Withall is the current BGA Chairman of the Airways Committee and in 1997 he organised a series of conferences where members of the Guild of Air Traffic Controllers and glider pilots could learn more about each other's problems. A well-attended event was held in the Club restaurant and was considered to have been well worthwhile. Charles Ellis injected a point to warm up the discussion by saying that if the controllers were claiming they were over stretched, it was their own fault for demanding more and more airspace to be put under their jurisdiction when it was often completely unnecessary.



*Carr Withall, 1999  
Chairman of BGA  
Airways Committee.*



## EXPEDITIONS

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In a re-enactment of the LGC activities of 1930 in April 1957 the Scud II, the Gull I and an Olympia were trailed over to Ivinghoe Beacon and bungied off to soar the north slopes. They all eventually landed at the bottom, but when Norman Preston went to open the gate for his trailer he found a large notice that said: 'Beware of unexploded missiles'. That part of the Beacon had been used as a mortar range in wartime and had not been 100% cleared afterwards.

In a 1961 copy of the LGC Gazette, Peter Fletcher recounts how he, Pat Holmes and Ron Watson took the *Super Kadet* on a bungee expedition to Amberley Mount on the South Downs. Besides being the abode of Pat, this hill was the site used by the gliding pioneer Jose Weiss when experimenting with his tail-less machines in 1909. Before actually venturing off the top, Peter decided that in view of the scratch bungee team they had recruited which included several children, a few practice launches on a flat meadow might be a good idea. The results were a bit marginal so their standby method was brought into play. A hefty stake was driven into the hillside and 200 feet of steel cable threaded through a pulley secured to it. The shock absorber and Ottfur rings were attached to one end and the bungee rope to the other. This was then stretched by Ron's old Bentley at 45 degrees to the flight line. At full stretch, the tail holder let go and the glider sailed off into the air. Several flights were carried out but the wind strength was not really adequate. Each time the glider arrived at the bottom it had to be de-rigged and carted up the hill again for a re-rig: all very hard work. Eventually the obliging farmer decided that his young corn was suffering too much and suggested they use another landing site. Peter Langford was next to fly, and putting down in what looked from the hill top to be a suitable area, ran into a claptrap and had the fuselage skewered by some 8 inch high stakes concealed in the grass. A moral was learned here always to inspect a potential landing field from the ground if at all possible.

At about the same time, the *Primrose Kite* syndicate ventured north to explore the then new Portmoak

site. The airfield had a dogleg halfway down and at the corner stood a steel telegraph pole, around which was laid the winch cable. On launching, the cable ran up the pole and twanged straight once it had cleared the top. This was quite undetectable in the glider and the system survived until the adjoining field was bought, enabling a straight run down the airstrip. Both the west-facing Bishop and the north-facing Benarty Hills could be reached fairly easily from a winch launch. However if it looked as though a certain paler rock patch on the face of the Bishop was not going to be reached, one turned back and took another launch. The Kite put in many hours over a ten-day stay including two five hour duration flights at about 3,000ft. A minor excitement one day was when the Grunau Baby from the Aberdeen Club landed near the summit of Benarty and had to be manhandled a quarter of the way down the hillside before a suitable bungee site could be found. Then, when landing at the bottom, it had to be ground-looped to avoid a solid Scottish stone wall, and broke its skid.

On one of the expeditions to Shobdon, John Jeffries was flying AS-K 13 with Jane Jones in the front seat. On getting very low near Abergavenny, a suitable field for landing was selected and an approach started. Suddenly they ran into 4 knots sink and John decided to go into the field on the undershoot. 'Look out, John,' cried Jane, 'There are wires'. John dived underneath them, but there was a bright flash as they were struck by the wing leading edge and the canopy. But a safe landing was made. The canopy, however, had a film of copper deposited on it, and of course, the locality had lost all its electricity supply.

In 1985 my Kirby Kite was taken to a vintage rally at the Midland Gliding Club on the Long Mynd. In four flights it flew eight hours, durations being limited by the uncomfortable seating position and the creaky hips of the ageing pilot. Notably, the flights were initiated by four different launch methods as the wind strength increased during the week. The first launch was by aerotow, the second by winch, the third by bungee and the fourth by shoulder launch. This almost unheard-of method,



*Shoulder launch of a Kirby Kite.*

meant rigging the glider and strapping in the pilot in the lee of the hangar, then manhandling it with a large team of helpers to the bungee point on the crest of the slope. Here, the tail was lifted to remove the dolly wheels. Then, with one person on each wingtip and one at each of the wing struts with their shoulders under the wing leading edge, the glider was walked forward. In a 25 knot wind there was practically no weight on the crew, and as they moved forward the glider lifted off. With a pull on the top of the struts, the glider was flying straight and level and as the ground fell away in front of it, the wind gradient took over and it was away with no sense of acceleration or movement. Fantastic! It was a pity that nobody thought of trying an autotow that week; then we would have used all five launch methods.

Other expeditions went far afield. Ken Barton with his wife took the AS-K 16 to the Continent several times, the last time going down to Spain. Another syndicate took a glass ship there but there was a spirited altercation when one partner failed to lower the wheel on landing and left a long white deposit of gelcoat down the middle of the hard runway. His share in the glider was re-purchased on the spot, an air ticket was bought for him and he was on his way back to England before the dust had settled.

Malcolm Murdoch also ventured overseas with his wife in their Grob motor glider, this time over the short sea crossing to the Scilly Isles. On the way home, they had engine failure shortly after take-off and had to ditch. The landing was successful, the machine floated well and the hapless crew were able to sit on the rear fuselage and keep their feet dry. After a helicopter had winched them to safety, a lifeboat took the Grob in tow back to the Scillies where it was beached. Incredibly, Bryan Middleton,

who was piloting a Twin Otter on the Plymouth–Scillies–Bristol run observed this operation from the air. The aircraft had to be stripped and dried out and the salt neutralised but it was back in the air reasonably quickly. Funnily enough, the Grob's registration was G-WAVE!

In the past, taking a glider on an expedition was a big thing, but in this affluent age it has become more or less the norm. Every year, syndicates hop on the cross-Channel ferry and make for Continental centres where there is a promise of superb soaring conditions. There is a well-worn groove in the AutoRoute to Sisteron and the Alps Maritimes but there is a move in progress away to the delights of sunny Spain. This has been encouraged by the stropic attitude of the French authorities, who have been demanding French medical and flying checks on Brits because we do not have a national licensing system. Those of our pilots who hold private pilots licenses or commercial power licences are not seriously inconvenienced by their antics but many lesser mortals have, on principle, refused to bend to Gallic demands and have chosen other countries to visit.

The other LGC members who have taken gliders to the Continent are those of the Vintage Glider Club, whose annual International Rallies rotate around sites in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary. One year, the International was held at Elmira in the United States and while some people crossed the Atlantic, the cost of transport put them off taking a glider as well.

At home, expeditions have gone regularly to the wave sites at Aboyne, Shobdon, Talgarth, Dishforth and, more for thermal flying, to Sutton Bank, The Mynd and Camphill. Abroad, visits have been organised to Le Blanc, Challes les Eaux, Gap and Sisteron in France, Saal, Soest and Minden in Germany, Zell am See in Austria, and Fuentemilleros and Cerdanya in Spain. Individuals have gone to the USA, South Africa, Australia, Switzerland, Poland, and New Zealand.

In 1996 there was an ambitious trip when Robin May and Edward Downham took a AS-K 21 to France, with Joe Rise and David Starer towing with the Robin 'X-Ray India'. Retrieve crew and second pilots were Jules Hodgkinson, Paul Rackham, Doug Lingefelter and Reb Rebbeck. A series of cross-country flights took them over France, across Switzerland and over (or through) the St Bernard Pass to Aosta in Northern Italy – a fantastic effort all round.



## THE VINTAGE GLIDER CLUB

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In 1973 Christopher Wills, son of Philip, LGC member and 1952 World Champion, started up the Vintage Glider Club which many Dunstable pilots enthusiastically joined. Rallies were held around the country and on the Continent, at the Wasserkuppe and Gruyeres in Switzerland. In 1976 the International Rally was held at Dunstable, the organisation being taken on by Angus and Valerie Munro.

After a welcoming speech at the opening by Club President Dudley Hiscox, the field was well and truly beaten up by a Hawker Sea Fury from the Navy museum at Yeovilton, this in spite of very low cloud cover. Later in the day the weather opened up dramatically and so it stayed for the next eight days. 1976 was the year of the big drought and gave us superb soaring conditions. One day, a task was set for a goal flight to Husbands Bosworth 80km away, but the weather was so good that a Swiss Spalinger covered the course three times: not bad for a 1943 glider with about Olympia performance. We had no less than four Minimoas dating from 1938 (five if you count a five foot span model). There were six gliders from Switzerland, four from Germany and two from

France. The Weihs from Switzerland and Germany arrived on open trailers. Both had been damaged in transit in exactly the same way: their wingtips had been run into. Jeff Butt immediately took charge of repairs, got them into the Ottley Workshop, set to and had them both airworthy by next morning, a truly valiant effort.

Jost Frei, the elderly Swiss owner of one of them, had occasion to make a field landing one day. But before he could leave the field to seek help, Terry McMullin landed the tug alongside. Rory Ellis, then about 12 years old, got out to hold the wingtip, and the glider was back in the air within minutes. The Swiss were staggered by this efficiency and it was for them an exceptional event, as towing out of a field was not permitted in their country.

The week was also notable for the parties that were held. The Germans had brought over many crates of beer and they stacked these in the showers and left the water running to cool them off. Unfortunately



*Opening of 1976 International Vintage Rally with a display by a Sea Fury from the Royal Navy.*

*LGC pre-war pilots' lunch 1993. (L to R) Dan Smith, Ladi Marmol, John Sproule, Beryl Stephenson, Ann Welch, Geoffrey Stephenson, Buster Briggs and Charles Ellis.*



our water supply, particularly because of the drought conditions, could not cope. Our tanks ran dry and it took a long time for the supply to recover.

An amusing incident happened on one of the VGC's overseas excursions. Uta, a young German girl was anxious to practise and improve her English and spent a fair amount of time with the Dunstable group. Ever willing to learn, she was told how the Brits were very fond of the use of nicknames and treated it as an honour to be so addressed. It was explained how Francis Russell, because of his six foot something height was called 'Lofty' and Mike Boxall, because of his lesser stature had another nickname. Uta obviously learnt her lesson well for that evening she came up to Mike at the barbecue and coyly addressed him. 'Hello, Short-arse'. One hears the expression 'His jaw dropped' but to see it happen under those circumstances was hilarious. Mike was absolutely lost for words, but later saw the funny side of it himself.

Dunstable has many Vintage Glider Club members and has always had more than its share of older type of gliders. In 1999 there were 19 machines over 30 years old with four of them, the Rhonsperber, Rhonbussard and two Scud III's all over 62 years old and still airworthy. In recent years Mike Beach used

to fly his immaculately restored Scud II, Falcon and Hols der Teufel here, and generously allowed several pilots to sample their delights. One well-known hill squatter hanging around anxious to have a go, enquired at large: 'What does one have to do to get a flight in a machine like this?' 'Build one', came a bystander's terse response. Exit left the hill squatter!

In 1993, a lunch was held in the Club restaurant to which were invited pilots who had flown at Dunstable in pre-war years. Among them was Michael Maufe, a Cambridge Club member who had flown his Silver distance from the Club in 1938 and, chatting at the dining table to his neighbour, asked him if he knew whether Geoffrey Stephenson was still alive. 'I think I am.' replied Geoffrey!

The Vintage Glider Club has continued to grow, and is probably the largest aviation related club in the world. Many national and international rallies are held, and the membership extends across 34 countries. A truly international organisation.



*Edward Mole, founder member of LGC and the gliding movement in Britain with David Underwood on left and the author. Among Edward's records were 147 consecutive loops in a glider, 148 different aircraft types flown and 149 women he had 'known'! Wow!*



GLIDERS

When the Club started in 1930, the only machines available were Zogling Primaries or the 1926 designed SG-38. R.F.Dagnall of Guildford built some of these for the burgeoning gliding clubs in Britain and then revised the rear fuselage from a wooden 'five bar gate' appearance to a system of braced steel tubes. This was the 'Dagling' which remained in production more or

less unchanged until 1950. A streamlined nacelle could be added which enabled the machine to soar the Hill at Dunstable on occasions. The Prufling, a secondary glider of rather better performance was added to the Club fleet to support the Poppenhausen, a two-seater nacelled Primary type. Listed below are the types the Club operated at various times together with the privately owned machines.

Year	Club Machines	Private Machines	Owner
1930	Zogling open Primary Prufling Poppenhausen (2 str.)		
1932	Professor Dagling open Primary Prufling Poppenhausen	Hols der Teufel Kassel 20	Hiscox Collins
1936	Falcon III (2 str.) Falcon I Rhonbussard Grunau Baby I Grunau Baby II (x 3) Poppenhausen Dagling open Primary (x 3) Dagling nacelled Primary (x2)	Hjordis Scud II Scud II Scud II Crested Wren White Wren Green Wren Golden Wren Blue Wren Rhoadler Rhonbussard Rhonsperber Kassel 20 Westpruessen Kite I Cambridge Hols der Teufel Keebling Tern Falcon II	Wills Denton, Brown, Wills Green, Barker Dent, Fox, Armstrong Thomas Morland Slazenger Smith, L.Slater A.Slater Collins Nicholson, Cooper, Dewsbury Nicholson, Dewsbury, Cooper Ivanoff, Dent Enser, Hiscox Hiscox Slazenger Baker Keeble, Pringle Little Hardwick
1939	Falcon III (2 str.) Rhonbussard Grunau Baby I Grunau Baby II (x 2) Kite I (Imperial college) Falcon I Tutor Kadet Dagling nacelled Primary (x 3) Dagling open Primary (x 5)	Minimoa Rhoadler Rhonsperber Rhonbussard Rhonbussard Gull I Gull I Scud II Scud II Scud II Camel Green Wren Tern Kassel 25 (2 str.) Viking I	Wills Fox, Edmunds, Davis Dewsbury, Nicholson, Cooper Pasold Price, Cooper, Baker Hiscox Greig, Stephenson, Dent Horsfield, Wright, Furlong Briscoe Wood Sproule, Ivanoff, Davies Read Brothers Gardiner Toth Edmunds, Furlong

A brief description of the more noteworthy types of glider operated or seen at Dunstable over the years follows, some of which are of great historic interest. (Listed in alphabetical order).

### **AS-H 25**

Two AS-H 25s have been flying from Dunstable since the late eighties. With its twenty five metre wing span, this two-seater is one of the world's top performing gliders and in the hands of John Jeffries and Robin May has set many UK speed records.

### **AS-K 13**

Tandem two-seater which served as the basic training aircraft for twenty years from the early sixties

### **AS-K 21**

From 1986, this GRP two-seater has served as the basic trainer aircraft at Dunstable. Fully aerobatic, it has good cross-country capability when required.

### **AS-K 23**

Introduced at the same time as the AS-K 21, this rugged single-seat glider has proved its worth as a Club machine.

### **AS-W 12**

At the 1965 World Championships at South Cerney was an exotic creation by the Darmstadt University Akaflieg called the D36. This embodied all the state-of-the-art technology of the then new GRP construction. Schleichers the great German manufacturer, came out with their AS-W 12 based on the D36 and John Jeffries, ever in the fore, formed a group with Stewart Frazer-Beck (The Baron) to operate one from LGC. This glider had the then phenomenal glide ratio of 1:47 but, instead of airbrakes, was fitted with a tail parachute only for a landing aid.

### **AS-W 15**

Schleicher's first glass glider had greatly superior performance to the Ka 6 series which it replaced.

### **AS-W 20**

One of the most successful competition machines of the seventies, the AS-W 20 could be flown in the 15m Class or with tip extensions for even higher performance.

### **AS-W 22**

This 22m machine was developed from the AS-W 12 and AS-W 17, both thoroughbreds in the gliding world.

### **Camel**

John Sproule and Sacha Ivanoff designed this small 11.4m sailplane in 1939 and had it constructed by Scott Light Aircraft in Dunstable. With an enclosed cockpit, it had wings which could be folded back against the fuselage for hangarage. Sproule reckoned he could have saved 50lbs. weight had he not built in the folding system. It flew up to 1951 when it was destroyed in a fatal collision with an Olympia over the Hill.

### **Discus**

Schempp-Hirth's Standard Class sailplane is highly competitive and there are several examples flying at the Club (2000).

### **Foka IV**

Mike Fairman and Mike Riddell imported one of these exotic gliders from Poland in 1964. Notable for its extreme reclined pilot seating, it was described by Frank Irving as 'A small boy's idea of what a glider should look like.' Its wing loading was, perhaps, a bit high for British thermal conditions and as its ground clearance was almost non-existent it was very vulnerable to outlanding damage.

### **Grunau Baby**

Designed in 1932, more GBs have been built than any other glider, mostly in Germany of course. A Grunau I was home-built by Club member Desoutter before the war and many privately owned GB IIs have been on site. The Club operated a Hawkridge Aircraft-built Grunau for many years from 1948 and it is still airworthy at Lasham. Two examples live at the Club now. The one owned by Laurie Woodage was built by the Royal Navy at RNAS Fleetlands in 1947 using a pair of NSFK wings, and sports a rounded Kite empennage. At one time it was fitted with a pusher engine on a pylon above the wing. This was removed after a test flight at Boscome Down had required almost the entire length of the runway to get airborne! The other GB is a German pre-war model owned by Dave Kahn.



## Hols der Teufel

A significant glider of the pre-war era was the Hols der Teufel. Dudley Hiscox imported a kit of parts for £40 in 1933, and got the wings assembled free of charge as an exercise by the apprentices of De Havillands. The rest was built in the drawing room of Marcus Manton in Cricklewood, supervised by Harry Bolton, a Handley Page craftsman.

The Hols was a larger version of a Nacelled Primary but it had the ability to soar, many Club members seizing the opportunity of building up their sum of soaring minutes in it. Dan Smith was bungied off the Hill top and managed to spin it in, but as he said, his total gliding time at that point was all of three minutes.

In 1935, Dudley commissioned an 'improved' version of the Hols and this appeared with a very streamlined nacelle, a wheel on the stick for aileron control as the very narrow width precluded lateral movement of the stick and, believe it or not, a twin tail arrangement. By pressing on both rudder pedals at once, the rudders would both move outwards to act as an airbrake. The machine rejoiced under the name of *The Dunstable Devil* and since Dudley disposed of it in favour of one of the first of the Kirby Kites very quickly, one must assume that it was not much of a success.

In 1991, Mike Beach completed construction of a Hols der Teufel and brought it to Dunstable for its proving flights, which it performed successfully. Later that summer, Mike was probing around the foot of the Bastion with a metal detector when he found a gold medallion inscribed 'WGCGC 1936 LADIES CHAMPION'. It did not take much thought to realise this was a golfing trophy, and researching the files of the Welwyn Garden City local paper revealed a Mrs Baker as the winner that year. The incredible coincidence is that Mrs Baker was the last owner of the pre-war Hols and her medallion turned up 55 years later when the next Hols arrived.

## IS-28 & IS-29

In the mid-seventies, the Club had the agency for the Rumanian all metal ICA-Brasov gliders, the IS-28 and IS-29. Syndicates operated four IS-29s, one of which included the great actor David Jason, and the Club ran an IS-28 two seater for several years. It will be remembered, if for nothing else, for the extreme weight of the tail end if it had to be lined up for launching.

## Jaskolka

From Poland in 1959, a group led by John Jeffries imported a Jaskolka sailplane, which was fully aerobatic. Many pilots tried their hand at flying it and one visiting pundit managed to crack the ply on the wing top surface by over-stressing it during inverted manoeuvres. Another had the canopy slide open during aerobatics and got damaged.

## Ka 6

The 'CR' and 'E' versions of this classic wooden sailplane have delightful handling characteristics and did well in competitions during the sixties.

## Kestrel

Vic Ginn, an expert woodworker, started construction of a two-seat glider designed by a Pole, Mr Lesniak, and which was based aerodynamically on the Olympia but with sharply raked-forward wings. These wings he built at his home at Luton, but due to lack of space they had to be built up the staircase. The fuselage was built in the Club workshop. Before it was completed, Ron Dodd and Jeff Butt took over the project, and by 1969 they had completed the job. They took the glider to Enstone for its first flight, which was carried out successfully, demonstrating pleasant flying characteristics. It flew at the Club for many years before departing to Cranfield, and now flies at the Borders Club. Other gliders bearing the same name were the 1934 Dunstable Kestrel, a development of the Willow Wren, and the Glasflugel and Slingsby-built GRP machine of the 1960s.

## Kirby Kite

Long time residents at Dunstable were two examples of Slingsby's great success, the Kirby Kite. The prototype had been bought in 1935 by a well known speedway rider, Frank Charles, who took it to the Lakes Gliding Club site at Barrow on Furness, had himself bungied off the hill top and literally taught himself to fly on the way down! He named the Kite *Cutty Sark*. The aircraft was acquired by Mike Garrod in 1954 and brought to Dunstable. The other Kite was bought in 1957 by Jeff Butt and Les Moulster, who carried out a rebuild and fitted spoilers to it. It was known as the *Primrose Kite*. Several ever-changing syndicates cut their soaring teeth as private owners on these two gliders, and very many Silver 'C' legs were flown. The prototype has since fallen to pieces due

to careless storage but the other, after 24 years in the hands of the author, went to a new owner at Halton where it lives rigged in a heated hangar. This should preserve it in flying condition for many more years.

### **Libelle**

A first generation GRP sailplane now outclassed in competition but very popular now as a private owner machine. The longest resident Libelle at Dunstable is '504' (*Lucy*). This glider was purchased by the *October Eight* syndicate led by Dilys Yates and has been on site since new.

### **LS Series**

Few of the early Lemke Schneider aircraft were seen at Dunstable, a position reversed when the LS-4, LS-6 and LS-8 appeared on the scene. They are now highly thought of.

### **Minimoa**

In 1971, Les Moulster found a Minimoa sailplane in Holland whose owner had died. A syndicate of eight was quickly formed and an offer made for the machine. This was accepted. One very stormy day, an intrepid Dutchman set off from Deventer on tow behind a Rallye in rain and with cloud base only 200ft. Battling into a strong south westerly, it took them four and a half hours to get to Luton where they arrived at dusk. They had been towing at 90 knots and, to ease the control loads, had six bungees hooked between the top of the stick and the instrument panel. Terry McGee was an HM Customs officer at Luton at the time. As it was too late to clear the aircraft that day, the Minimoa was pushed into a hangar under the wing of a Britannia airliner for the night. Next day, the paperwork was completed and the Mini was towed back to Dunstable where it soared for an hour without variometers before landing. On C of A inspection, it was found that the elevator cable was half frayed through! The Minimoa, a classic glider from 1937, has been under spasmodic restoration for the past twenty years but one day, perhaps, it will be seen again gracing the skies above the Downs.

### **Nimbus**

Schempp-Hirth's answer to the AS-W 17 and AS-W 22. The Nimbus II was a regular competition winner and was followed by the III and IV of even higher performance.

### **Petrel**

In the fifties, a syndicate operated a 1939 Slingsby Petrel at the Club. This most beautiful of gull-winged sailplanes was a classic of the pre-war period and was aerodynamically based on the German Rhonadler. As a light wind soarer there was nothing to touch it. Now flown from Husbands Bosworth, it is occasionally seen attending vintage meetings at Dunstable.

### **Rhonsperber**

Perhaps the most renowned of the historic sailplanes at Dunstable is the Rhonsperber that Kit Nicholson and Doc Dewsbery imported in 1936, and in which they carried out many great flights. Kit flew it to second place in the 1938 National Championships and won with it in 1939. The Sperber did no more flying for 40 years, a long retirement during which damp ravaged it, and when Rodi Morgan rescued it in 1977 only the fuselage and one wing were in reasonable order. Using the remaining wing as a pattern, a new one was built and the whole aircraft restored to fly again in 1980. After Rodi died in a power flying accident, Francis (Lofty) Russell brought the Sperber to the LGC where it continues to be the centre of vintage attraction.

### **Rhonbussard**

Another twelve-month project was carried out in 1991-92 when the author restored a 1935 Rhonbussard. A previous owner in Germany had reduced the length of the ailerons by 50 per cent which made the handling on take-off somewhat problematic, although it appeared to handle well enough when airborne. Once again, a jig was built in the Ottley Workshop, this time of Dexion to hold the wings rigidly in position while new ailerons were constructed and fitted. In 1999 the Rhonbussard departed to the USA where it will soar the skies of Oregon. There had been three previous Rhonbussards flying at Dunstable before the war, one owned by the Pasold brothers who were from Czechoslovakia, and another by Joan Meakin (later Price) who aerobatted it at Cobham's Air Shows around the country. In the fifties Frank Foster owned this glider, and it still exists in the hands of Chris Wills having undergone a major rebuild of the wing spars.

### **Scud I**

Two of these diminutive gliders have flown at Dunstable since 1945. Frank Costin and John Ellis



rebuilt the first of these over a period of twelve days in a blitz effort in the late forties. The wing plan had been modified during the work and larger tail surfaces had been provided. The second was owned by John Jeffries. Shortly after he sold it, the aircraft was destroyed in a garage fire at the home of its new owner. In recent years Mike Beach has built a replica from scratch, but before being flown it was purchased by the Brooklands Museum.

## Scud II

Another early machine was the Abbott Baynes Scud II belonging to John Jeffries. This glider with its distinctive diamond shaped fuselage and parasol wing carried John on many magnificent flights, on one occasion reaching Shoreham on the South Coast having over flown London a superb source of thermals, said John. This aircraft too was rescued by Mike Beach and restored to its 1934 appearance.

## Scud III

In 1957, Les Collins (known to everyone as *Ho Ho* from his habit of singing this refrain as he worked) brought the later Baynes-designed glider, the Scud III, to the Club, and after fitting spoilers flew it for three years. He then decided to renovate it, spending 16 years on the job. Just before it was finished, an empty Blanik trailer blew away in a gale and landed across the middle of the Scud trailer crushing the aircraft inside. Les spent another 16 years of sporadic work without finishing it. In 1992 the author bought it from him and spent the winter rebuilding the starboard wing. The rest of the glider had been restored to an incredibly high standard so it was soon flying again in the spring of 1993. At this stage it had a total of 80 hours in its logbook covering its life of 58 years! The glider was originally equipped with a 250cc Villiers motorcycle engine which folded away into the fuselage just like on a Turbo Ventus. In 1936 the aircraft was launched on the engine into an easterly from in front of the Clubhouse. It did get off the ground but got caught in the Hill curlover and spun in, completely wrecking itself. Ron Clear, later a De Havilland test pilot, bought the remains and spent four years rebuilding it with no drawings to work from. Stretching the remains to the extent of the control cables and then filling in the intermediate gap determined the length of the rear fuselage. He completed it in 1940, and test flew it at Winchester Hill successfully but was arrested on landing for illegal flying in wartime. He and his crew spent the night in Winchester Gaol.

In 1997, Laurie Woodage brought the second of the two Scud III's to the Club. This had also spent a period at Dunstable, when in about 1953 it belonged to Bob Swinn. It had been sold without an engine fitted (as originally intended), but Bob decided to see what could be done about that. He followed the original design and fitted a 350cc Villiers motor, slightly bigger in capacity than the prototype. Sensibly, he decided that Dunstable's rolling field was not the place to test fly, so he and Colin Rogers trailed the Scud up to the deserted wartime airstrip at Wing. Bob made two or three lift-offs down the runway, but the rate of climb seemed so abysmal that he was not prepared to try a circuit and put the machine back down each time. Colin then had a go and did manage to coax it around, but there was obviously not enough power to carry on safely. The engine was taken out, and finished up exhibited at the Science Museum, South Kensington, with a caption 'The smallest engine to have flown a heavier-than-air machine'. The engine is no longer on display and is in storage at Wroughton, its claim probably having been supplanted by those of powered hang gliders. To have both Scud III's built in 1935 airworthy and flying from the same site is quite remarkable.

## Sigma

In the sixties, a consortium was formed to design and build the ultimate performance glider, and was named *Project Sigma*. This exotic device could vary its wing area by retracting its trailing edges, but troubles with sealing the gaps prevented it ever showing its potential. The Sigma had a span of 21m and was very heavy indeed. It had to have a tripod and gantry to enable the wing centre section to be rigged. It was brought up to Dunstable one weekend, but because of the nature of our field it was not flown here. It is now in Canada where more development work was undertaken.

## Skylark II-S

Martin Simons decided in 1966 that the only way he could afford a glider of reasonable performance would be to rebuild a wreck, and accordingly got hold of a badly smashed Skylark II. This was the one which Derek Piggott flew in a storm cloud to over 21,000ft and suffered several lightning strikes, the damage from which was only discovered during the rebuild. After a lot of very hard work in the Ottley Workshop and with the help of Vic Ginn with some of the critical bits like splicing main spars, Martin incorporated several modifications to pep it up. The wings were lowered six inches, the

angle of attack reduced and span extended to a full 15 metres. The leading edge was modified to a Wortmann profile and the wingtips reworked to reduce vortex drag. Finally a Dart canopy gave the completed machine a more streamlined appearance. Named the *Phoenix* and designated a Skylark II-S by the BGA, it was extremely quiet and nice to fly. After being owned by many syndicates and for many years reposing unwanted in its trailer, it has now been rescued and is being brought to airworthy condition again.

### Skylark III

The Skylark III was the great British competition glider of the late fifties and early sixties and there were some half dozen flying at Dunstable at that time. Perhaps the most ambitious construction effort was by the brothers Vic and Ron Tull, who from 1960 to 1963 built a Skylark III from scratch in the Ottley Building. A wooden jig ran the whole length of the right hand side of the workshop and on this the three-piece wing was assembled. The workmanship was superb and the resultant aircraft was a real beauty. Vic had built the glider for competitions. Unfortunately construction took so long that by the time the glider was finished, glider development had moved on and the Skylark was becoming outclassed. After a few seasons, the brothers themselves moved on and bought one of the first successful glass ships, the Swiss 18 metre Diamant, which they flew for many years before acquiring a Kestrel.

### T.21P (*The Barge*)

Over the last forty years or so Dunstable has seen some interesting and even unique gliders, including the prototype T.21P which Slingsby built in 1944. This differed from the production aircraft in that it had a removable fairing covering one's legs and feet and which contained the instrument panel. On warm sunny days it was pleasant to fly the machine without this fairing (flying in the nude as it was referred to), sitting on the flat decking and thermalling by the seat of the pants.

### T.21B

This was Slingsby's production two-seater and the mainstay of British gliding training from the forties to the sixties. The Club had at least five examples over the years and in 1957 John Everitt and John Hands flew one in the two seater class at the Nationals. One privately owned T.21 is still operated by Mike Stringer's syndicate in 2000.

### T.21C

Slingsby tried a development of the T.21 by lowering the wing to shoulder position and fitting a closed canopy. Known as the T.21C, only one example was made and the Club bought it, flying it during the seventies mainly for joyriding. It earned the nickname of *The Dragmaster* and is now awaiting rebuild in Holland where its nose was written off.

### Vulture

An ambitious big project was a two-seat 20 metre machine called the *Vulture* which was designed by Jeff Butt and Ron Dodd, and was to have its wings built using the Tulls' jig. A syndicate was formed and work commenced. All the wing ribs were made and wood cut for the wing spars before a halt was called. The project was abandoned when an Eagle sadly in need of restoration was obtained, and seen as a quicker way to getting into the air. A lot of work was done on this Eagle including lowering the wing mounting, extending the span, altering the leading edge profile and the wingtips and, of course, moulding a new canopy to suit. Jeff Butt confounded his critics with their never-ending refrain of 'It'll never fly' by actually getting it airborne by his promised date, but he then returned it to the workshop for painting and finishing. It never did get completed as, sadly, Jeff's health deteriorated and he could no longer work on it.

### Weihe

In 1961, two Weihe sailplanes built in 1942 were bought from Sweden and arrived at Harwich Docks on an open railway truck covered only by a tarpaulin. They had not suffered any damage in transit and the two fuselages were squeezed into the Sky trailer, the wings being lashed to a Queen Mary trailer. They were brought down to Dunstable for their new syndicates headed by John Cardiff and Roger Barrett. The latter's glider received a blue and white paint job the following year and moved on to the Newcastle Club. Delivering this to Leeming Airfield was not without event. It was during the very severe winter of 1962-63 that the syndicate set off via Luton where they planned to collect the glider logbook. At a crossroads, the nearside trailer wheel mounted the snow piled up by the roadside and there was an almighty crash as the trailer rolled over onto its side. A bus slithered to a stop and the passengers helped to get the trailer back on its wheels to reveal about six feet of the rear floor hanging down on to the road. A towrope wrapped around it solved that problem



and the whole outfit was taken back to the Club to await repair. There was hardly any damage to the glider as everything had been well tied down inside.

The next Weihe to come to Dunstable was the Surrey Club's famous one that Philip Wills had rescued from the Wasserkuppe at the end of the war, and which had completed a cross-channel flight to Brussels flown by Lorne Welch. Lofty Russell's syndicate flew this for many years until it was wrecked by an Alpine thunderstorm while attending the Vintage Rally at Thun in Switzerland. A Weihe constructed in 1953 by Focke Wulf replaced it.

### **Willow Wren**

In the roof of the hangar used to repose the bits of one of the earliest gliders built in this country - the Willow Wren, designed and built by Bill Manuel in

1932 and owned by the Read brothers. During its time of construction in Dunstable, Bill Manuel was living in a second-hand pantechnicon parked in Farmer Turvey's field adjoining the Club. Kit Nicholson was one of the shareholders in the Willow Wren and he managed to spin it into the Hill top at Dunstable without hurting himself. In the pre-war film *Plane Sailing*, the Wren can be seen on another occasion spinning into the slope at Sutton Bank. It had some washout incorporated into the wingtips when Bill rebuilt it for the Read brothers and it did not spin again. All the time it sat in the rafters, nobody showed any interest in it until eventually Norman Jones of the Tiger Club took it away in the early seventies and restored it to show condition. After many years in storage, the Wren was acquired by Mike Beach who carried out one of his superb restoration efforts on it. Before it was quite finished the Brooklands Museum acquired it so, sadly, it will not be seen in the air again.

## 2000 AND ONWARDS

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As the new century opens, one's hope is that the London Gliding Club will continue to flourish and offer the supreme pleasures of soaring flight. This hope is tempered by the threats of ever-increasing bureaucracy, extension of air traffic restrictions, fears of liability claims and the insidious introduction of 'harmonisation' within the European Union. 'Harmonisation' sounds a benign word but it masks changing British practices to conform to Continental ones, never the other way round.

The ever increasing diversity of leisure activities has seen a steep decline in the number of younger people coming into gliding and one only has to look around the Club restaurant at lunchtime to see the high proportion of grey heads among the membership. In an effort to reverse this trend, the Dunstable Cadet Scheme was introduced in 1995 whereby half a dozen 16 year olds were accepted for training with very reduced subscription and

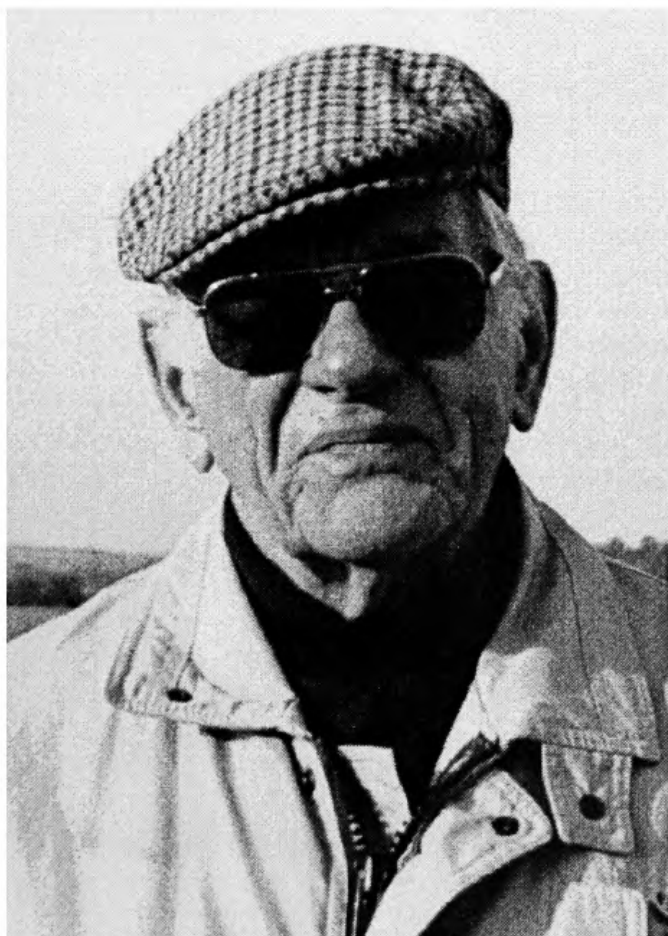
flying rates. To join this scheme, the pupil was expected to put in some hours each weekend helping out on the field or in the office and so far, it appears to be working well and the number of cadets accepted each year increased to eight.

An uncertain future has never inhibited progress of the Club in the past when, despite the proposition of a third London airport threatening our very existence, our Club fleet was radically improved. Today, a pupil is trained on two seaters and flies first solos on gliders with performance superior to that of the top competition aircraft of the fifties: a reflection of the tremendous progress brought about by the introduction of GRP construction and modern airfoil sections.

Immediate plans for the LGC include renovation of the Clubhouse and revision of the toilet and kitchen facilities. The biggest project will be the replacement of the derelict wooden huts with a new hangar complex, which should give a worthwhile boost to the Club.

So, the future is bright, stimulating new ideas abound and one can only guess what the next seventy years will bring.

One thing is sure. We will still get asked 'What happens when the wind stops?'



*Colin Anson, Club  
President from 1998.*



# CLUB OFFICIALS

## PRESIDENTS

1935-56	Capt. Lamplugh
1956-75	John Furlong
1976-88	Dudley Hiscox
1988-94	Dan Smith
1994-98	Tom Zealley
1998	Colin Anson

## CHAIRMEN

1930-32	Toby Ashwell-Cooke
1932-38	Major Henry Petre
1938	John Fox
1939	Philip Wills
1949-52	Dudley Hiscox
1953-57	Dan Smith
1957-62	Godfrey Lee
1962-64	Charles Ellis
1964-77	Tom Zealley
1977-82	Peter King
1982-88	Alan Garfield
1988-91	John Spencer
1991-95	Ray Stoward
1995-99	Bob King
1999	Robert John
1999	Mark Newland Smith

## CHIEF FLYING INSTRUCTORS

1931	Marcus Manton
1933	Sebert Humphries
1935	Jack Dewsbury
1935-40	Tim Hervey
1945	Ron Reid
1948	Cyril Ruffell
1948	Dan Smith
1954	John Free
1957-59	John Everitt
1959	Dan Smith
1959-63	Ray Stafford Allen
1964-66	John Hands
1966-87	John Jeffries
1987-97	Derek Sear
1997-98	Jed Edyvean
1998-99	Bill Craig
1999	Andy Roch

## MANAGERS

1935-40	Tim Hervey
1947-55	Johnnie Walker
1956-62	Ray Stafford Allen
1962	W.S.Chubb
1964	John Barrow
1966-87	John Jeffries
1989-90	Jack Butler
1991-92	Liz Vesey
1992	Mike Stringer
1992-93	Angus Stewart
1993-96	Tony Danbury
1996-99	Bob Bickers
1999	Harry Middleton

## STAFF INSTRUCTORS

1949	Hugh Wheatcroft
1950	Jack Hanks
1951	George Scarborough
1954	Eric Pope
1954	John Everitt
1957-59	John Westhorpe
1959-64	John Jeffries
1961-65	Jim Wingett
1962-66	Mike Denham-Till
1964	Ian Burgin
1964-66	Jan Mikulski
1966-67	Geoff Naylor
1967	Keith Chard
1967	John Morris
1968	Len Norman
1972-87	Derek Sear
1974	Barry Foster
1978	Dave Richardson
1981-83	Steve Tomlin
1983-85	Eric Hamill
1985-87	Pete Johnson
1987-88	Steve Bennett
1989-90	Liz Vesey
1989-90	Jeremy Beringer
1989-90	Mike Driver
1990-92	Julie Angel
1991-94	Colin Watt
1991-94	Andy Beatty
1991-95	Rod Ward
1995-96	Geoff Boswell
1996	Alex Hartland
1996-98	Phil Foster
1997-98	Jamie Halstead
1999	Clive Thomas
1999	Paul Robinson

## STAFF TUG PILOTS

1969	Tom Harding
1975	Robert Lee
1975	Dick Sherwin
1977	Malcolm Humphries
1977	Philomena Delaney
1978	Stuart Goldspink
1978	Tim Barnby
1979	Martin Germann
1980	Peter Tawse
1983	Russell Gamill
1984	Duncan McPherson
1985	Robin Chrisp
1986	John Edwards
1987	Adam Downey
1988	Paul Warner
1989	Nick Hoare
1990	Joe Rise
1991	James Mustarde
1992	Richard Barber
1993	Andy McIntosh
1994	Alan Rappaport
1995	Paul Ford
1996	Sherrif Meneisy
1997	Mike Gibbins
1998	Claire Bradley
1999	Andy Jude
2000	Andy Jude

## GAZETTE EDITORS

Hugh Wheatcroft
Robby Robinson
Alex Ivanov
Peter Fletcher
Tony Walker
Gordon Camp
Martin Simons
John Light
Barbara Deans
Dilys Yates
George Locke
Tim Godfrey
Ken Maynard
Susie Mooring
Richard Cooper
Mike Bird
Dave Starer
Veronique Russell

## ANNUAL TROPHIES & AWARDS

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There are a dozen or so trophies which are awarded annually to deserving Club members.

The ADRIAN HEATH TROPHY for the most promising young pilot was presented by John Heath in memory of his son Adrian.

The CELLON TANKARD for the best ab initio pilot is the oldest trophy having been presented to the Club in 1930 by the paint and dope manufacturers Cellon.

The JOHN BENTLEY SHIELD is awarded for the best Silver 'C' of the year and commemorates a very keen pilot who flew here in the seventies.

The JOHN HANDS CUP is in memory of John who was very active as an instructor, committee member and marshal at many competitions. It is awarded for the best new instructor.

The FRANK FOSTER BOOMERANG. Frank was a commercial pilot who died in an accident in the Mediterranean. With Nick Goodhart, he won the two-seater class in the 1956 World Championships in France. The Boomerang is awarded for the best out and return flight.

The REGIONALS CUP is for the best performance by a Dunstable pilot in our Regionals.

The STAFFORD ALLEN TROPHY. This is a bronze model of a Capstan and is given for the best flight in a two-seater. Ray was Club Manager 1956 – 62 and became the BGA Chief Technical Officer.

The DESSOUTER CUP was presented by Louis Dessouter, one of three brothers who ran a power tools and artificial limb company. Louis built a Grunau I in the thirties, renowned for its beautiful construction and the cup is awarded for the best constructional effort.

The DENT CUP commemorates a member who invented a variometer and whose brother partnered Geoffrey Stephenson in the Grey Kite in the mid-thirties and is awarded for the most meritorious flight.

The DERRY TROPHY is a wonderful mounted bronze replica of the Cambridge sailplane and was given in 1937 to the Club by Cyril Derry, the business partner of Dudley Hiscox. It is awarded for the best contribution effort to the Club.

The DENTED CUP was presented by Ted Coles for the 'hairiest' retrieve during the year.

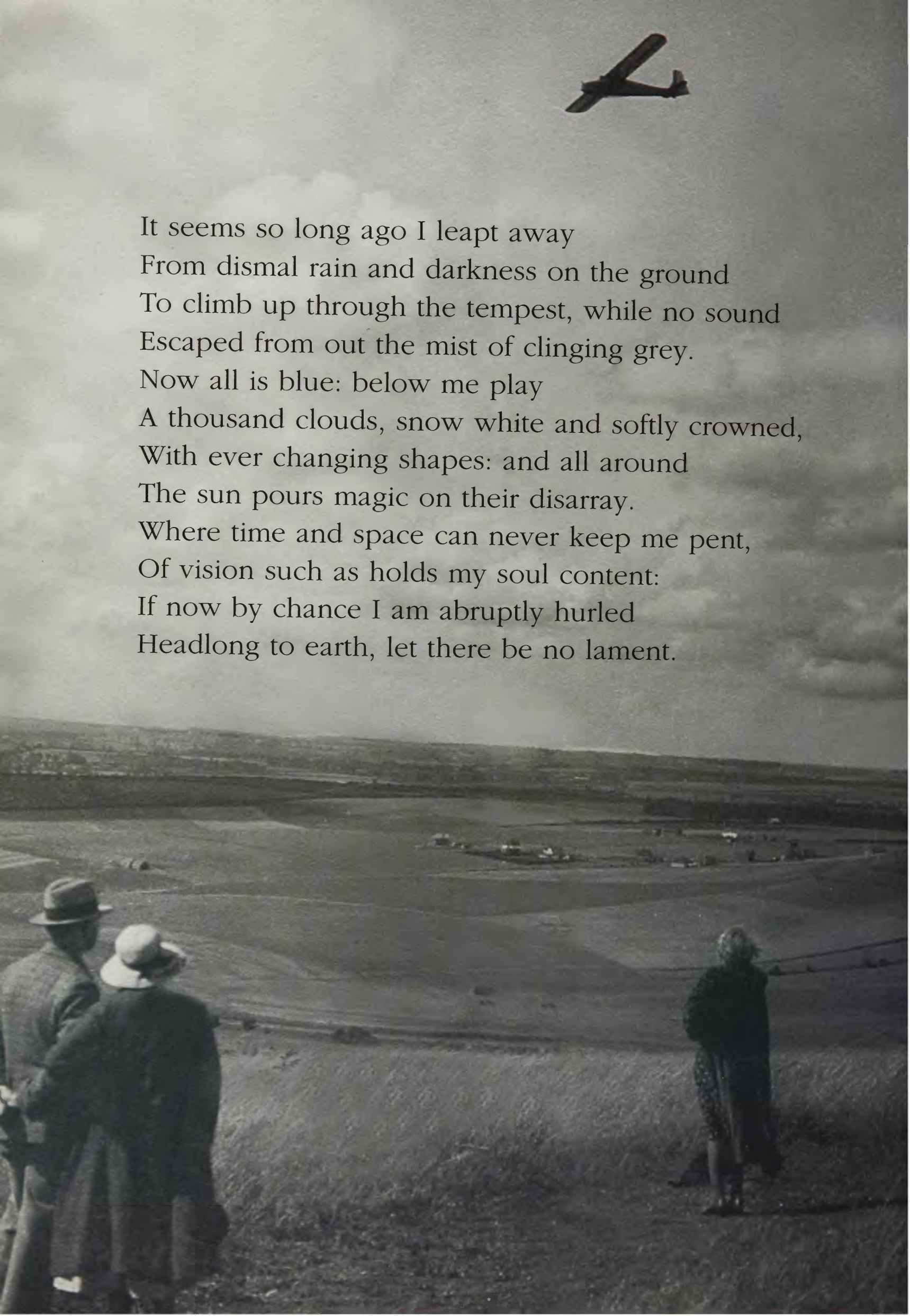


## APPENDIX III

# MAJOR COMPETITIONS HELD AT DUNSTABLE

<i>Year</i>	<i>Competition</i>	<i>Winner</i>	<i>Aircraft</i>
1938	Nationals	C.Nicholson, J.Dewsbury	Rhonsperber
1957	National Aerobatics	D.Smith	Olympia
1958	London Region National Gliding Week	A.Gough	Olympia 419
1959	National Aerobatics	B.B.Sharman	Olympia 419
1960	London Region National Gliding Week	P.Scott	Olympia 419
1960	National Aerobatics	D.Bridson	Skylark II
1961	National Aerobatics	D.Piggott	Olympia 403
1963	London Regionals	P.Scott	Olympia 419
1963	National Aerobatics	D.Bridson	Olympia 419
1964	London Regionals	J.Firth	Skylark III
1965	London Regionals	C.Bentson	Skylark IV
1966	London Regionals	P.Nielson	Skylark III
1967	London Regionals	C.Withall	Skylark IV
1968	National Sport Class	I.Strachan	Ka 6E
1968	Standard Class	I.Strachan	Ka 6E
1969	National Sport Class	C.Greaves	Ka 6E
1969	National Standard Class	I.Strachan	AS-W15
1970	National Sport Class	J.Williamson	Libelle
1971	London Regionals	C.Wills	Libelle
1972	National Sport Class	H.Orme	Std Cirrus
1972	National Club Class	L.Hood	Ka 6E
1972	Daily Telegraph Euroglide Open Class	J.Williamson	Kestrel 19
1972	Daily Telegraph Euroglide Std. Class	B.Fitchett	Std Cirrus
1974	National Open Class	G.Lee	AS-W 19
1974	Standard/Sport Class	R.Sandford	Std Cirrus
1975	Euroglide Open Class	B.Fitchett	AS-W 17
1975	Euroglide Standard Class	J.Williamson	Std Cirrus
1976	Euroglide Open Class	B.Fitchett	AS-W 17
1976	Euroglide Standard Class	C.Rollings	PIK 20b
1977	National Open Class	S.White	Jantar 2a
1977	National Standard Class	A.Stone	Std Cirrus
1977	National 15m Class	C.Rollings	PIK 20b
1979	National Open Class	B.Fitchett	AS-W 17
1979	National 15m Class	D.Watt	AS-W 20
1979	National Standard Class	N.Hackett	Std Jantar
1980	National 15m Class	B.Spreckley	AS-W 20
1981	National 15m Class	D.Watt	AS-W 20
1982	National 15m Class	M.Wells	Mosquito
1984	National 15m Class	J.Cardiff	AS-W 20
1985	London Regionals	T.Stuart	AS-W 20
1988	National Standard Class	M.Wells	LS-4
1988	London Regionals	J.Cardiff	AS-K 21
1989	National 15m Class	P.Sheard	Ventus A
1990	Junior Nationals	M.Young	Discus
1994	National 15m Class	J.Wills	LS-6
1996	National Standard Class	D.Campbell	Discus B
1997	National Aerobatics	S.Kwicien	AS-K 21
1998	National Standard Class	A.Davis	Discus 2
1999	National 15m Class	J.Wills	AS 27
1999	London Regionals	J.Spencer	LS-8



A vintage black and white photograph serves as the background for the text. In the upper right, a biplane is captured in flight against a cloudy sky. The middle ground shows a wide, open landscape with rolling hills and a small cluster of buildings in the distance. In the lower left foreground, three people are seen from behind, looking out over the scene. They are wearing hats and coats, suggesting a cool day. The overall tone is nostalgic and contemplative.

It seems so long ago I leapt away  
From dismal rain and darkness on the ground  
To climb up through the tempest, while no sound  
Escaped from out the mist of clinging grey.  
Now all is blue: below me play  
A thousand clouds, snow white and softly crowned,  
With ever changing shapes: and all around  
The sun pours magic on their disarray.  
Where time and space can never keep me pent,  
Of vision such as holds my soul content:  
If now by chance I am abruptly hurled  
Headlong to earth, let there be no lament.