

## EDITORIAL.

We look forward once more to some summer sunshine and to outings arranged by Russell Bailey. I have included an itinerary of proposed visits organised by Russell. I have also included a report on a visit to Lakenheath which should have been included in the January newsletter. My apologies to Russell!

We have a big day to look forward to on September, 23<sup>rd</sup>. In the morning the new museum in the control tower will be opened and in the afternoon there will be a Dedication Service for the aviation stained glass windows which will by then be installed in the church of St. Michael's and All Angels. It seems that we are unlikely to have a fly-past by the "Battle of Britain Flight" as we are told that they are committed in another part of the country on that day. However, we confidently expect to have a display probably by a Spitfire to top the day off. We look forward to the presence of some ex RAF Martlesham personnel and also some of our American friends on this important occasion. Hopefully there will be something of interest in "Runway 22" to everyone. Inevitably extraordinary stories of heroism and adventure relating to WW2 still continue to come to light. I am sure that they remain of great interest and will always feature them where possible. This newsletter is no exception!

The Walrus amphibian may have been well past its sell by date by 1939 and I could never see why something like the Catalina was not used in the role of Air Sea Rescue. I have included a piece by Mr Noel Langdon, who lives at nearby Woodbridge and who flew a Walrus from Martlesham during the war. After talking to him I can now see why the old Walrus was so invaluable. With its very low wing loading and low speed manoeuvrability it was able to alight on relatively rough seas that no other aircraft was capable of. I suppose that in the days prior to the helicopter it was the only aircraft capable of fulfilling a similar, if rather less versatile role. I have included a humorous article on the Walrus by dear Holly Hall which was written some time before he died. Also I have been tracing the history of the development of the Walrus and hope that this is of interest. A typical "Holly" cartoon to finish up with! Keep your interesting articles rolling in. If you can only manage a letter that's fine! We can start a "letter spot".

**ED**

## OUTINGS ITINERARY

Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup>. May. A trip to north Norfolk. Sheringham in the morning. Possible some members might like a short excursion on the restored steam engine line to Holt. In the afternoon a long promised visit to the Muckleburgh

Collection. This is a well known and comprehensive museum containing mostly military artefacts and memorabilia.

Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup>. June. Waddington Air Show.

Another proposed outing is to the D Day museum at Shoreham. Then on to Brighton and in the afternoon a visit to the famous Battle of Britain airfield at Tangmere. The date for this has yet to be set.

In place of our normal monthly meeting in August we have an evening visit followed by a pub. supper. The proposal this year is that we go to the museum of the USAAF 56<sup>th</sup>. Fighter Group at Holton, near Halesworth.

## USAF LAKENHEATH

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September last 36 members visited Lakenheath, home to the 48<sup>th</sup>. Fighter Wing. We enjoyed a guided tour of the base by S/Sgt. Davis. Our first call was to the 493<sup>rd</sup>. Fighter Squadron where we met pilot, Captain Russ Garner who explained the squadron's history and current operations. An F15c had been made available for our close inspection with the pilot in the cockpit to show us the controls and answer questions. This aircraft is the single seat fighter version of the Eagle, designed to achieve superiority in aerial combat. It has a speed of Mach 2.5+ and is armed with a combination of missiles and a 20mm cannon for close dog fighting. Great reliance is placed on its radar system to detect targets beyond visual range. Missiles are fired from information fed into a computer. All relevant data is projected for the pilot on a head up display.

We next proceeded to Air Traffic Control where we were given a fascinating insight to the radar controlled air space for which Lakenheath is responsible. We also went up to the cupola on the control tower (by lift!), where we were able to walk round the balcony and enjoy the marvellous views of the airfield and surrounding countryside. We then toured the flight line, administration and domestic areas. We also stopped at The Garden of Remembrance. Here were displayed three examples of aircraft (F4, F111 and F15) more recently flown by 48FW. All superbly mounted on plinths. Another area opposite was dedicated to the Battle of Britain, with a replica Spitfire in Eagle squadron markings also mounted on a plinth.

All in all a most interesting tour and thoroughly enjoyed by our party.

**Russell Bailey.**

## CONTROL TOWER MUSEUM

Preparation for the opening of the museum is progressing well with a lot of help from Society members. The whole of the top floor has been decorated and looks very smart. The previous tenants had removed the Emergency Exit signs and these have now been replaced. Ipswich Fire Service have inspected the building and have given it a clean bill of health.

We have had our first museum committee meeting in the Control Tower. A bit on the cool side as I had forgotten to put some heat on! We hope to have a quizz evening here soon to raise some extra cash and this will be advertised in due course.

Outside, we are working on the Signal Square. Many members have worked hard moving bushes, grass, soil and even trees from the area of the Square. By the time you read this the site should be hot tarred and black/grey chippings spread over to give an original effect. The outer wall of the building will be painted white. The Felixtowe ATC boys have been a great help and we are most grateful to them.

Tony Errington is working on the design for new display units and we have Neil Stephens creating a full diorama of the airfield. Derek Thorpe is in charge of a project to recreate an operations room. Many other schemes are under way!

This whole undertaking is possible mainly due to the generosity of our £356<sup>th</sup> friends and we are most grateful to them for their enthusiasm.

A big thank you also for so many of our Society members who have worked very hard to help get the project within site of completion.

As you will know, the Control Tower Museum will be formally opened on September, 23<sup>rd</sup>. The same day that the Dedication service for the commemoration stained glass windows will take place.

**Bob Dunnett.**

## STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Don Kitt and I travelled to Norwich recently with Canon Brian Lillistone to view and approve the final design for the windows. The Church Committee have not given approval for the rather beautiful inscription which was to have appeared on the bottom of the middle two windows. Apparently their objection was that the words were not from the bible. They have agreed that two plaques be placed under the windows on the inside wall. One will briefly

describe the significance of the windows generally and the second one specifically to explain the American presence.

All should be installed for our big day on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. and we must pray for nice weather!

**Alan Powell**

## HALIFAX AIRCRAFT ASSOCIATION, ONTARIO, CANADA

I have had the following request from our member, Frank Bright. Frank, who was trained as an engineer and spent some years in Toronto working for an architect. His Canadian contact is his ex employer, GE Wilson, OBE, a retired Squadron Leader Navigation, RCAF 1940-45.

Handley Page Halifax NA337 force landed on frozen Lake Mjosa in Norway during WW2 whilst on a mission to supply the Norwegian Resistance movement. When the ice melted the aircraft sank to the bottom. This aircraft was raised from its watery grave in September, 1994 and has since then been the subject of a painstaking and remarkable restoration project by the Canadians.

NA337 has a secret and this is the subject of Frank's request. Nobody has so far been able to solve this puzzle. There is a hidden mechanism under the tail gunner's seat. It operates like a push-pull throttle, yet nobody knows what it was for. Can any of our members help?

Incidentally the original battery from Halifax NA337, which had been under water for 50 years was refilled and recharged by the restoration crew in Trenton, Ontario. They hooked it up to a starter motor and IT WORKED!!

***I will pass the solution of the unidentified knob on to Frank! ED***

## SUPERMARINE WALRUS

I have recently been talking to a WW2 veteran who was at Martlesham and flew an Air Sea Rescue Walrus from Martlesham. Mr. Noel Langdon lives at Woodbridge and tells me that he was here from May, 1944 to February, 1945. Noel was actually in the Royal Navy and held the rank of Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. As I understand it, although RAF Coastal Command normally operated the Walrus as part of the Air Sea Rescue force, Noel was one of a number of aircrew, together with a number of Walrus amphibians loaned to the RAF by the Navy to boost the ASR Service during the invasion period. Initially they were under the control of Fighter Command!! Some time later they were moved to Coastal Command control.

Noel recalls that during his time at Martlesham there were about half a dozen Walrus amphibians and about the same number of Spitfire 2's, together with an Anson. The Walrus carried a crew of two and had been stripped of machine guns and radar equipment in order to save weight. The Spitfires carried an inflatable dinghy under the fuselage. The dispersal huts were where the Suffolk Constabulary Headquarters now is and the houses along Portal Way were used as office accommodation and sleeping quarters for officers. Noel told me that the mess was at the requisitioned "Martlesham House", which is situated at the top of School lane, in the old village.

Lieutenant Noel Langdon flying Martlesham Walrus HD926 was involved in a particularly dramatic rescue on the 16<sup>th</sup>. September 1944. A Halifax of 420 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force, had been part of Bomber Command's attack on Kiel on the night of 15<sup>th</sup>. September. The crew had just taken delivery of a new Halifax and had promised the ground crew that they would try and look after it! However, they were hit by flak over the target and started to lose fuel and hydraulic fluid. They were about half way across the North Sea before they were forced to ditch. They had lost Verey pistols and flares but were all safe although violently seasick! Suddenly, at about 5pm on the 16<sup>th</sup>, three Halifaxes were heading straight for them at low level with bomb doors open. Three smoke bombs were dropped. They could see that the 'planes were from their own squadron. Two life rafts and some supplies were also dropped. By this time they had drifted far to the east and were not too far from the Dutch coast.

It was dusk before the Martlesham Walrus arrived and managed to land in the rough conditions. With the sea that was running, a Walrus crew of two and eight other airmen it was impossible to take off. Noel later explained to the crew that he had been circling and waiting for a launch to arrive. However, a dinghy in the sea is difficult to locate and it was getting dark and he could not risk losing them again. They began to taxi home! Eventually a Motor Torpedo Boat located them and the crew were transferred to it. They set off once more and were towing the Walrus behind them. Soon a German E-boat put in an appearance and fired a star flare which lit up the whole sky. The poor old Walrus was cut free and the MTB opened up as only an MTB can! They arrived at Gt. Yarmouth at about 2am on the 17<sup>th</sup> and returned to their base on the afternoon of that day. Their gear had been stowed away and a new crew had occupied the beds!

The abandoned Walrus was not found by the Germans and was rescued the next day and flown back to Martlesham to fight another day.

*Details of the Halifax crew rescue from the book, "Another Kind of Courage", by Norman Franks*

**Alan Powell.**

## IN PRAISE OF THE WALRUS

Just because it was equally at home on land or sea was no reason to call it the "Seagull". Anyone who watched it wallow from the water and waddle up the slipway on its own two spindly legs must surely have doubted its claim to being a beautiful bird!

More realistically it was renamed the Walrus, but was affectionately known throughout its service life as the "Shagbat"! The dictionary provides no definition for the word, which somehow conjures up a vision of struts and wires, of a rickety engine with a propeller at the rear and a look of press on regardless determinati

We had close acquaintance with the ancient amphibian when a pair took up residence at Martlesham early in WW2 as part of an Air, sea rescue, (ASR) Squadron. Several ATC cadets flew in these aircraft, although on those occasions I always "missed the boat"! On top of the rear fuselage was a circular hole, technically known as a hatch, which could be opened in two halves to form a gun position. One foolishly put his head out and was horrified to discover the close proximity of the huge four bladed propeller churning round only inches from his nose, with all the valves and push-rods banging up and down, totally exposed to the weather.

It was during No. 18 Squadron's time at Martlesham in 1940 that an ASR flight was formed with the Squadron's Hurricanes in an effort to locate ditched pilots for rescue by patrol boats. Soon Walrus and Lysanders took over the task, with the faster Lizzies marking the spot with smoke flares so that the Walrus could follow and alight to pick up survivors.

Later Spitfire 2's and Defiants joined the group, now known as 277 Squadron, but still the Walrus was the mainstay of the actual job of rescue.

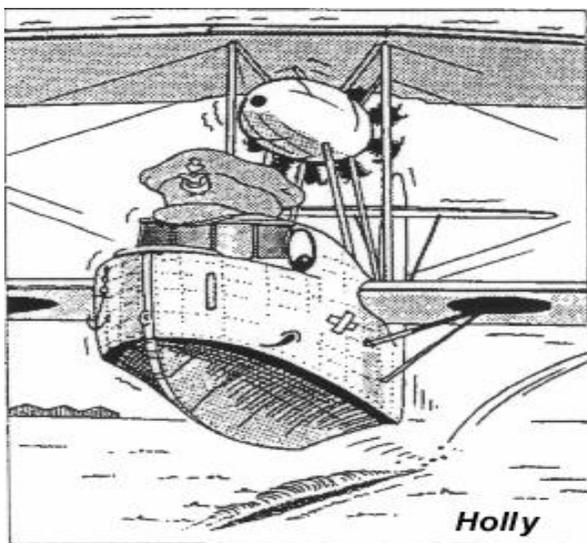
My diary says, Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup>. February, 1943, after standing for nearly an hour in a queue, we all had a very good NAAFI dinner for 9d. Absconding from the lecture about sparking plugs, I climbed into the pilot's seat of a Defiant, AA290/BA-H and flew an imaginary sortie! The four guns in the rear turret were pointed straight. Under the port wing was a dinghy and under the other were four smoke-floats. A surprised sergeant removed me from the seat using my collar as a handle and I was despatched to the ASR crew room. Here we heard a tale of a Walrus which had taxied for seven hours after rescuing a bomber crew from the North Sea. (*Not the same incident as the one involving Noel Langdon- Ed*).

Coltishall joined Martlesham as an ASR base and four Ansons with invasion stripes and gun turrets, alternated between the two bases. Hanging from the roof inside the Martlesham hangar was an illuminated sign. When the hooter

announced a “scramble”, either the letter W or S (or both), was lit up, so that the ground crew knew which aircraft, Walrus or Spitfire, to start up ready for the pilots.

Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup>. January; never mind the hot shots, the Typhoons and Thunderbolts, roaring off to do battle elsewhere. The Walrus too was ready and willing. My diary says; Two Walrus (BA) took off from the runway, closely side by side. Unusual.....wheels up, still together, they careered around at high speed, dodging between the buildings. One bounced its hull on the grass, leaving a neat furrow such as a plough would make. In a vertical bank it flew a 360 degree circle around the hangar, then landed, wheels down and ran across the runway. We could here it chuckling all the way back to the crew room.

*This article by the late Holly Hall and kindly given to me by Vicky. ED*



### **A POTTED HISTORY OF THE WALRUS.**

The Supermarine Company had supplied the RAF with maritime patrol aircraft since the First World War and the development of the Walrus began soon after this. RJ Mitchell was appointed Chief Designer to the Supermarine Company in 1920 and in 1921 he took a second look at an experimental aircraft which had been developed for the Admiralty in 1918. A Napier Lion engine was installed to drive a pusher propeller and the new ‘plane was known as a Sea Lion. The Board of Admiralty, with a lack of foresight typical of the inter-war years had no member with any practical air experience. This

remained the case for several years and was probably the reason that we had no modern carrier based aircraft available in 1939. The Sea Lion was fitted with the more powerful Napier V engine but after some evaluation was deemed to be of no practical value to the Navy. Fortunately the Australians could see potential in the design and in 1925 ordered six Supermarine Seagulls, as they were now known. The Royal Australian Air Force were pleased with the Seagull and drew up a specification for a reconnaissance amphibian that could be catapulted from a warship. So here was an aircraft capable of being catapulted from an aircraft to search for enemy ships or submarines and then return to alight on the sea and be winched aboard. By 1933 the Seagull now had a metal hull and the power unit was the Bristol Pegasus radial engine. A retractable undercarriage had been developed and this was now a true amphibian.

Supermarine Chief Test Pilot “Mutt” Summers flew the new Seagull V, (later to be renamed the Walrus), to the SBAC show at Hendon in 1933 and proceeded to amaze the crowd when he performed a low level loop!! That a Walrus should be capable of aerobatics seems hardly credible. A certain HJF Lane, who had originally trained as a fighter pilot, found long patrols rather boring and was not averse to doing the odd loop or roll off the top! He gave up the roll “due to the disconcerting habit bilge water had of pouring down his neck”! The new aircraft was sent to the MAEE at Felixtowe and the A&AEE at Martlesham for evaluation.

*Alan Powell.*

### **MONTHLY MEETINGS ROUNDUP**

Our January meeting was certainly not depleted by the ‘flu bug!. Another good attendance to hear a talk by Mr. Phil Darby of his wartime experiences flying Wellingtons and subsequent POW adventures. Phil’s Wellington was an earlier edition with Bristol Pegasus engines. After seeing action over France they were ordered to Malta. This was via St. Mawes in Cornwall for refuelling and then to Gibraltar and on to Malta. They were then sent to Kabrit in Egypt to strengthen 70 Squadron. After seeing some action in the desert the “Wimpey” was finally shot down. It was difficult to fly whilst wearing a parachute so Phil was faced with the task of putting his on whilst preventing the aircraft from falling out of the sky! Fortunately one of the crew helped him on with it before baling out. Unfortunately the ‘chute was on upside down and he landed heavily and fractured his spine. Italian soldiers shot at him at the same time! In hospital in Benghazi the spine gradually healed. He was able to feel his toes again and he was once eventually able to walk once again.

The second half of the evening was a fascinating tale of a determined escapee. The first attempt was to abscond from the hospital and cycle with two others to a nearby aerodrome. They actually boarded an aircraft but were unable to start it because a battery accumulator was flat. Other escape attempts followed. He was sent to a camp in Poland and then as the war ended swam a river to be rescued by Americans whilst being shot at by some Russian soldiers.

A vote of thanks was given by Gordon Kinsey who said that it was a remarkable tale of adventure and courage.

In February one of our own members, Norman Rose, gave a talk entitled "Runway Construction in the Seychelles". Norman, who is now retired, started his career with public works contractors more than 50 years ago with the construction of the runways at Bentwaters. He showed us a slide of the cottages called "Bentwaters" which were demolished at the time and after which the aerodrome was named.

After showing a variety of slides ranging from visits to Washington, New York and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of the Wall at Berlin. Norman then described a visit to the D Day landing area. Norman's time in the Seychelles was from 1970 to 1971, where he was involved in the construction of the first permanent runway. Prior to this runway aircraft were landing on the coral sand beaches. The Seychelles were very under-developed at that time and I am sure that if Norman visited the area today he would not recognise the place!. A vote of thanks was given by Gordon.

March and our speaker was scheduled to be a return of Lindsay Peacock of "Jane's All The World's Aircraft". Unfortunately Lindsay was unable to be present and Gordon Kinsey stepped in to the breach to give a typically entertaining talk which he entitled "Going East"

The footballer, Stanley Matthews had just died and Gordon recalled that Cpl. Stanley Matthews was a PT instructor during his initial training period at Blackpool. After further training as a engineer Gordon volunteered to be sent to Scotland on a "hardening up course" prior to being attached to a new unit called the CSE, (Commando Servicing Echelon). After briefly being posted to Newark where he was able to be with his new wife it was time to board a troopship, (the former P&O liner, Strathaird). Around Africa stopping at Freetown, Sierra Leone then to Durban and on to Aden. Across the Indian ocean and they eventually disembarked at Bombay. Soon they were on their way again. This time across India by train to the Ganges plain and an aerodrome 90 miles from Calcutta. Gordon was assigned to a Dakota supplying Major General Orde Wingate's "Chindits" in neighbouring Burma..

The Chindits were formed in 1941 from detachments of British, Myanmar and Gurkha Commandos. They were responsible for daring guerrilla raids behind Japanese lines and played a vital role in the defeat of the enemy in Burma. The RAF were kept in India to oversee the peaceful transition of India to independence but Gordon was eventually sent home on board the MV Britannic. A vote of thanks was given by Bob Dunnett.

April was the occasion of our AGM. Our Chairman, Martyn Cook was able to report another good year for the Society. 40 new members joined during the year and total membership is now 279, including all executive officers and American members. Martyn looked forward to the opening of our new museum in the control tower and to the Dedication of the aviation stained glass windows in the church of St. Michael's and All Angels. These events will take place on 23<sup>rd</sup>. September next and this will coincide with a reunion of ex Martlesham Heath RAF personnel and, of course, hopefully many of our American friends once more. The Committee was reinstated en-block!

After the break we had a spot of fun with our Annual "Holly Hall" Photographic Competition. The subject this year was American aircraft and the clear winner was a great shot of a P51 in flight which Kevin Ling had taken in Florida. Runner up was Alan Powell with a shot of the Duxford P47 climbing away.

***ED***