

EDITORIAL

The months (and the years!) roll by and here we are in September once more. I do hope that you will find this edition of our newsletter interesting.

Sadly we have to report on the loss of three of our members. Herb Weber died on August 10th. Herb was a 356th FG veteran and was an enthusiastic member of MHAS and I have written an obituary in his memory. Dr Helena Hamilton, who was a Vice President and another great supporter of our Society, died on August 24th. Gordon Kinsey has kindly contributed an obituary for Dr Helena. Now I hear that Sid Hewitt has also died and Vicky Hall has written her fond memories of Sid.

Russell Bailey has organised summer trips for us to enjoy and these are reported on. Various other articles both humorous and serious are included. The poem is by a friend of one of our members.

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AN OBITUARY – DR. HELENA HAMILTON, VICE PRESIDENT MHAS

It is with deep regret that we have to report the death of one of our oldest and earliest Vice-Presidents, Helena. She was not able in the past few years to visit us as she had done especially when she was able to fly into Ipswich Airport in her beloved Hornet Moth. She loved all things Martlesham Heath and this came about through her reading a book entitled "Martlesham Heath" in which she was astounded to see a reference to her plane which had been stationed at the A.& A.E.E. during 1936. As P.6785 it had carried out trials as a communications aircraft before moving to the M.A.E.E. at Felixstowe, where fitted with floats it carried out similar trials. This endeared Helena to Martlesham and on her visits always remarked that the Hornet had come home. It was here on the last day of flying from the Heath, carrying its civil registration, G-AHBL.

One of Helena's prized possessions was a piece of the Martlesham runway which she purchased on the last day of flying.

Born in South Australia, she served on Mountbatten's staff in Burma, was attached to the Allied Staff at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, qualified in the medical profession, learned to fly in South Africa, and then took up practice in the Midlands. Her husband Tom died some years ago but she carried on her flying activities and was awarded several honours in the civil flying field. The Hornet Moth is in good hands in Norfolk.

We mourn the passing of a friend who loved Martlesham Heath and will remember her in many ways. Her last visit was to overfly the Memorials on the occasion of their dedication, and her visit later that day back by road from Martlesham to have tea with her great friend, Lady Joan Bader.

Gordon Kinsey – President.

AN OBITUARY – HERB WEBER

Don Kitt and I were in the lounge of an Ipswich hotel. It was the summer of 1995 and we had volunteered to show Herb Weber around what is left of his old Base. Herb was making his first visit to Martlesham since leaving in 1944. We had no description of him but when he entered the hotel there was no mistaking that military bearing. As we toured what remains of his old Base he confessed that he had until recently put his wartime experiences behind him and it was only now as the years had rolled by that he had felt that he must return. Herb spent many minutes turning the pages of the Book of Remembrance in the church of St. Michael's and All Angels and told us who, amongst those names, he had known. It was clearly an emotional experience for him and as he said, made all the more so because of the many years in between that he had chosen not to dwell on those times. Since that visit he became a great friend of the members of Martlesham Heath Aviation Society and has returned on two occasions when we have welcomed back members of the 356th Fighter Group.

In addition to his WW2 time with the 356th Fighter Group, when he flew P47 Thunderbolts escorting Eighth Air Force bombers, he later served in action in Korea where he flew F86 Sabre jets in the Fourth Fighter Interceptor Wing. He served as a Major in the Air Force in the Strategic Air Command until 1966, when he retired and settled in Brunswick to begin a second career as a Real Estate Broker.

Herb had a lifetime interest in aviation and had part ownership of a private aircraft which he flew until the age of 79.

Herb Weber died on 10th August at the age of 82 in hospital in his home town of Brunswick. I am sure that all of us here at Martlesham convey our deepest sympathy to his wife, Margot and to his daughters and family. Many of us here were privileged to meet a most sincere friend.

Alan Powell

AN OBITUARY – SID HEWETT

Sid Hewett died on Tuesday 21st August, aged 81, after suffering ill health for some time. He was a quiet and humble man who served as steward in his local Methodist church. The lifelong love in his relationship with Doris and the loving support of his family was a pillar to his innate strength of character. As an ex POW he worked quietly and unceasingly to get recognition from the US government of the lot of POW's.

He learnt to fly on Stearmans and graduated to P-47s. Coming to Britain, he was stationed at Goxhill, North Lincolnshire, where the crated aircraft were assembled and test flown. Sid arrived at Martlesham Heath with "Clarkie" in late 1943 and flew many missions until he was shot down over Germany in

May 1944 and subsequently captured and imprisoned. More recently, he was flown over the crash site and actually met the pilot who had shot him down.

Sid and Doris generously opened their home to Holly and I in 1989 on our first trip to America. Such men as Sid thought much of what they did for peace in WW2 and of their activities at Martlesham Heath. They were overwhelmed by our interest, which fostered the links for future contacts. From such seeds sprang the reunions between the 356th FG and Martlesham Heath Aviation Society.

Sid contributed financially to the Control Tower and the Stained Glass Windows and was a founder member of the American Aviation Museum at Duxford. We have lost a great and yet humble friend in the passing of Sid Hewett, my unsung hero. A loss that all he knew him will feel deeply and none more than I.

Vicky Hall. Hon. Vice-President and Programme Secretary, MHAS.

LEST WE FORGET

The picture, which appeared in our last newsletter, of the mural of St Francis of Assisi painted on the end of an old pump house, prompted me to investigate further. I knew from Gordon Kinsey's book, "Martlesham Heath" that it had been executed by an American serviceman who was stationed at Martlesham. Gordon had stated in his book, which was written in 1975, that, "unfortunately now, the ravages of time have played their worst with this beautiful mural". He also stated that it is situated beside a small lake "which is now a large rubbish disposal unit".

The good news is that the area has been completely restored. The lake is now stock with fish and the pump house is in good condition with the mural looking as good as the day it was painted. A road leads down to an extensive site for sand and gravel extraction but the pump house is protected by a strong fence. How good to know that someone has recognised the historical significance of that mural and has been prepared to save it for posterity.

Another example of "Lest we forget" can now be seen in the middle of Woodbridge Golf Course. A P47 piloted by 2nd Lt Richard Warren was returning from what I understand was a relatively incident free escort sortie to Brunswick when Richard Warren's aircraft attempted to cross under another P47 of 359 Squadron of the 356th Fighter Group. The date was 26th April 1944. 2nd Lt Richard Warren crashed on Woodbridge Golf Course and was killed.

One of our members, who is a member of the Golf Course, has persuaded them to erect a plaque in memory of that young man and

today it acts as a reminder to all those golfers who pass by, that it has not always been the peaceful place it is today.

It is heartening to know that, as in the case of the restoration of the mural at Kesgrave and the recent plaque on the golf course, that these acts of remembrance are still taking place.



Alan Powell

After 57 years! Photo taken 2001



The plaque on
Woodbridge Golf
Course

CONTROL TOWER MUSEUM

Bob Dunnett tells me that the number of visitors who have so far visited the museum is now approaching 3000! This is a great achievement and reflects enormous credit on all those who have been responsible for assembling and running it. I have to admit that I was sceptical that so much investment in a museum that is open only for a while on Sunday afternoons was a risky venture but I am pleased to say that I have been proved so wrong.

Bob has promoted the project very vigorously and also arranged for several parties, including groups of schoolchildren, to come and view the aviation history of Martlesham Heath. Roger Freeman lives on the Suffolk/Essex border and as we know, is a highly respected aviation author. He recently

brought a party of Americans from the Birmingham, Alabama Flying Club. Roger said how impressed he was by all the work of our members. The Control Tower Museum is open for members on Wednesday mornings and this is also proving popular. Volunteers arrive to work on improvements and other retired folk drop in for a coffee and a chinwag.

September 23rd is the anniversary of the opening of the Control Tower Museum and the dedication of the stained glass windows in the church of St Michael's and All Angels. **Therefore we are holding an "Open Day" on Sunday 23rd September and wish to extend an invitation to all who may like to attend.** The museum will be open from 10.30am and a flypast of the full "Battle of Britain Memorial Flight" has been booked for 2pm. We are hoping to organise the appearance of one or two other vintage aircraft. "Martlesham Brass" will be present and we have booked a "Chuck Wagon" to dispense hot food and drinks. Military vehicles from the Vintage Vehicle Association will be on show. A local model aircraft club will give demonstrations of their sophisticated radio controlled models. Geoff Pleasance is one of our very talented members and will be selling prints of his wonderful aviation pictures. Another of our members, Mike Gunnell, will draw caricatures of those who dare to sit for him! We expect also to have a person who can do face painting. It is a Fun Day and we hope to see many local people present.

Alan Powell

MORE MARTLESHAM MEMORIES

My first visit to Martlesham Heath was in 1946 with 54 MU (Maintenance Unit) Newmarket, to take a Lincoln apart. As 54 MU was a salvage and repair unit we also did the same at Sutton Heath. This time it was a Lancaster. Sutton Heath was a crash 'drome during the war.

On arriving back in the Country from Mauripur, Pakistan I was posted to Martlesham on 29th August, 1950 and assigned to "A" Flight BLEU (Blind Landing Experimental Unit). One of my first jobs was over at Sutton Heath. Before the Americans came we had an Oxford that we had to service but I never did see it fly! There was a cable up the centre of the runway and the Oxford would taxi down along the cable "hands-off" on instruments only. There were also two Devons on the Flight and they had instruments that enabled them to land in thick fog.

We had a prototype Canberra which was painted light blue and had a large P on the side. Unfortunately it crashed just outside Sutton Heath when the Americans were there. I had to go out as Guard Commander for a week to look after the wreck. We lived in a 15cwt truck and did our own cooking. After two days a couple of American MP's came to give us a look. They said

that we were welcome to use their mess, which we did, in shifts. I shall always remember the size of their steaks!

On the Flight was a Lancaster and also a Viking and a Varsity and a two seater Meteor which I was lucky to be taken up in by Ginger Slater.. I also flew with him to Coltishall in one of the Devons to a static air show. We also had a Sea Otter in the corner with its wings folded back. The only time I saw it fly was when they made the film "The Sea Shall Not Have Them".

I also remember going for a flight in the Ashton from "B" Flight. The BBU (Bomb Ballistic Unit). I believe at the time it was the only one flying as its sister ship had crashed at Farnborough..

I was on the Heath when the east Coast floods came. I had to go to Canvey Island to fill sandbags! I also had the job of going to Felixtowe drying the houses out with blower machines.

There were two incidents that I remember well in relation to the Lancaster. We had to do a lot of work on it before it was sent away to become an air tanker. While this was being done a bright electrician touched a switch or pulled a lever which jettisoned the fuel from the tanks. We had to get the aircraft out of the hangar very quickly and then out came the brooms and we had a very clean hangar floor. The other incident with the Lancaster was when we had finished the work on it and it was time for a test flight. We were asked who was going up with her. I thought, why not and with my mate Lofty Radbron among others, we drew our parachutes and off we went. My mate got a 'chute which fitted on his chest. We made a beeline for the bomb-aimers position as soon as we had taken off. It all went well until we were coming in to land. We had to get out and be behind the pilot but Lofty being a big chap still had his 'chute on his chest and the ripcord fouled on something and out it came. It cost him 2 shillings and sixpence to have it re-packed!

We had a load of Auxiliary WAAFS come over from Ireland on their summer camp. They certainly livened the place up and the Red Lion did a roaring trade.

How many remember the Demon Barbers when the AOC was coming? DC Jones and myself did a roaring trade. I know the SWO will remember me, also a lot more.

I had two engine boxes in the corner of the hangar and a chair just right for cutting hair. The rest of our business was done in the Barrack Block. Jones and I had a sealed tin which the lads put in whatever they could afford and we had a share out at the end of the year.

I would just like to mention that we did have a sailing club with two boats. One for the officers and one for the men. They were at Waldringfield but there was not a lot of interest and only about six used it.

I was at Martlesham for about four years

BOMBER CREW

*Out of the truck, over to the kite.
There she stood in the fading light.
It looked so dark and awesome there
Waiting to leap up into the air
We climb inside, she's cold and wet
Each one of us to our positions get
Lead from the engines shows up white
Clearly seen in the oncoming night
All ready to start, called the ground crew
Starter button pressed, rotating airscrew
One by one the engines burst in to song
Start our checks; hope there's nothing wrong
Switch off one mag, a short fall in power
Little enough to stop the take off hour
Nav does his checks before the flight
Engineer calls; oil pressure's all right
Bomb aimer and wireless op. all working fine
Gunner; during the flight I'll check mine
Taxi round the peri tracks, so very small
We sometimes think its not there at all
At the end of the runway waiting to go
A green light' we are starting off slow
From slow to speeds of a hundred and more
Kite, bombs and us lift up off the floor
And all below us fades away from sight
In a steady climb, in the darkness of light
Just one of the crews of so many were we
Praying in the morning, old England to see
W.L. BALL*

VISIT TO EAST KIRKBY AND CONINGSBY

On the 10th of May 53 of our members visited the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre and also the home of the "Battle of Britain Memorial Flight".

We were very impressed with the various displays at East Kirkby, the centre point of which is, of course, the Lancaster which has been restored to taxiing condition by two farmers. This has been achieved by the farmers as a tribute to their brother who was killed on operations during World War two. The aircraft is housed in a genuine hangar of the period and was specially erected on site and surrounded by a multitude of complementary exhibits.

The control tower has been completely renovated and depicts its actual use during the war, with many authentic artefacts in realistic settings.

Another building holds the "Escape museum" which shows the history of various attempts at escape by captured airmen from their P.O.W camps and also those who evaded capture and were helped by escape organisations in the occupied countries.

There is a Memorial Chapel with, on opposite walls, a Roll of Honour for each of the two squadrons, No. 57 and No. 630, who operated from East Kirkby. Each name is engraved in gold lettering and is sobering to reflect that so many were lost from just one base.

There are displayed various military vehicles, the most prominent being a "Queen Mary", which is sometimes used to take visitors on a tour of the airfield. Of course there is a cafeteria and gift shop and all in all a huge range of exhibits which, in our limited time we were unable to do justice – perhaps another visit may be required!

Following this the "Battle of Britain Memorial Flight" proved somewhat disappointing, as their main aircraft were otherwise engaged in Jersey. Nevertheless we were given a comprehensive guided tour of the remaining aircraft and often interrupted by the sound of the resident Tornados overhead.

As this particular visit was rather limited we decided to look at the Memorial dedicated to 617 (the Dambusters) Squadron in nearby Woodhall Spar. This, appropriately, is shaped as a dam and is in a delightfully picturesque setting in the town centre. So ended a very enjoyable day out.

Russell Bailey.

VISIT TO OLD WARDEN

Its always a real pleasure to visit Old Warden on a flying day and see some of the beautifully restored old aeroplanes of not only the Shuttleworth Collection but also other vintage planes that have been specially flown in. Russell Bailey had once more organised such a trip on Sunday, 1st July. The coach was almost full when we set off on a very warm and humid day for the Summer Air Display.

As we arrived the sky seemed full of vintage aeroplanes and it was difficult to decide what to do first! The flight line of those marvellous aircraft from the Edwardian era and the 'planes of the 20's and 30's made the visiting Spitfires and the resident Sea Hurricane look positively modern! Members of the MG

Sports Car Club had driven their equally fascinating old cars for us to enjoy and all the time very old cars from the beginning of the last century put-putted their way along the flight line.

The flying programme started promptly at 2pm with a threesome made up of the Sea Hurricane, the Shuttleworth Gloster Gladiator and a Spitfire. A crazy flying display is something that air displays between the Wars would always feature. So, sure enough, Denny Dobson threw his De Havilland Tiger Moth around as if it would crash any moment! Miles Magisters, De Havilland Chipmunks, Boeing Stearmans, a Hawker Tomtit, DH Moths and other aeroplanes too numerous to mention all strutted their stuff. The unmistakable smell of castor oil was in the air as the Great War aeroplanes, with their Rotary Gnome engines, took to the air. The little replica Bristol MC1C 1917 monoplane was apparently never approved for production because the French aerodromes did not possess runways that could accommodate it. As a monoplane it was somewhat revolutionary for the time and perhaps this was more in the minds of the authorities because as it flew above us it seemed quite fast. The famous Great War fighter, the Sopwith Triplane, flew alongside the Bristol and as they came in to land the pilots blipped the ignition on and off as this is the only way of controlling the engine and regulating the revs! The last flight of the day was a touch and go flight of the 1910 Deperdussin but the Bleriot proved to be too temperamental and we were deprived that particular experience.

So everybody enjoyed a great day out and we thank Russell for his work involved in organising the outing. Only “proper” aeroplanes and not a “blowtorch” in sight!

Alan Powell

RAF REGIMENT MUSEUM, HONINGTON

On 3rd August our annual evening outing was a visit to this Museum and no fewer than 59 of us attended. Our guide for the evening was Flt Lt Mike Leaman who showed us around a surprisingly large museum. He explained the layout, which followed the history of the Regiment and stopped at various points to explain various aspects. Afterwards we were free to tour the museum at our leisure.

Apparently the Regiment, although officially formed in 1942, has its roots in the 1920's when the RAF undertook the task of “policing” various trouble spots, which threatened our interests in places like the Middle East and the North West frontier of India. Current responsibilities entail the defence of airfields and other related military sites against ground and air attack. Their squadrons are divided between these two separate roles. The former are equipped with light tanks, armoured personnel carriers and a variety of hand

held weapons. The main protection against low-level air attack is provided by the latest edition of the Rapier ground to air missile system.

The exhibits range from items as small as medals to examples of the various guns and wheeled and tracked vehicles. Some of these larger exhibits were displayed in imaginative dioramas with many other artefacts and memorabilia around the walls. One particular exhibit, which at first glance seemed rather strange, was a broken engraved crystal glass decanter. Evidently a Warrant Officer was due to present this to the Queen when she paid them a visit. Unfortunately he dropped it just before it could be presented. He must have wished the ground would open up before him! The notation made no reference as to whether this had affected his promotion!

Since moving down from Catterick a few years ago Honington is now the main base for the RAF Regiment. All new recruits join here for their initial training and the museum plays a useful part in showing the recruits the proud history of the RAF Regiment.

After our visit we called in at “The Fox” at Honington for a pre-arranged buffet supper. A small marquee had been erected in the garden but when the lighting failed we dined by candlelight! Despite this most people seemed to enjoy themselves and the museum is certainly worth a visit although, unfortunately, only by prior arrangement.

Russell Bailey.

MONTHLY MEETINGS ROUNDUP

May and an extremely well attended meeting to hear Mr George Stebbings give an illustrated talk about the prestigious American 65th General Army Hospital which was situated in the grounds of Redgrave Park near Diss. This was an elite medical unit which was initially staffed by doctors and nurses from Duke University, North Carolina. Redgrave Hall was in a state of complete disrepair and the hospital was located in Nissen huts and tents. There was a capacity of 1400 beds and surprisingly tents made up nearly a quarter of the covered area. George Stebbings has always lived locally and has collected many slides and much information about the hospital that he knew as a boy. He has visited the University Hospital in North Carolina and his American hosts have been able to tell him of some of the pioneering operations that were carried out there. It was not unusual for pilots, whose buddies were in the hospital to receive a visit in the form of a low flypast! On one occasion a P38 Lightning fighter accidentally released a supplementary fuel tank, which narrowly missed one of the wards.

Our June meeting was another very good attendance to hear a talk by Col. Bob Tipper. Bob has recently moved to Suffolk from France and gave a most interesting talk of his military experiences. A most energetic man in his

eighty's, Bob joined the Cheshire Regiment before WW2 and was posted to India where he learned to fly with the Bombay Flying Club. The social life in "British India" at the time suited Bob very well! In 1942 he became a Horsa glider pilot. He narrowly missed piloting a glider on the Rhine crossing. It was decided at the last moment that an airborne assault was not required. Post war excitement included a "proving flight" from Palestine to Khartoum when the towing Halifax was forced to release them over the desert because of engine overheating problems. They made a safe landing and torched the Horsa before being rescued.

July and Mr Maurice Rowe entertained us with his life story as an aviation and automobile photographer. Maurice came all the way from Hertfordshire to talk to us, started his career with the Temple Press and became a photographer on the staff of "Aeroplane". His photographs revealed some exclusive "scoops", including the crash of the Vulcan "V" bomber that crashed at Heathrow when returning from a trip to Australia. Also photographing the cockpit area of the Russian TU104 jet airliner. Apparently he was mistakenly allowed on to the flight deck by a naïve Russian official whilst other members of the press were being briefed about the prestigious new airliner! The gentlemen of the press were given a firm "niet" when they requested to see the flight deck so it must have been a shock for the Russians when the photographs appeared in "Aeroplane"!

August, and in place of our usual monthly meeting in the Community Hall at Martlesham we always have an evening visit arranged by Russell Bailey. This time we visited the Royal Air Force Station in the heart of Suffolk, at Honington. The aerodrome remains fully operational but is nowadays the home of the RAF Regiment. We were greeted by Flt.Lt Mike Leaman who showed us around and explained the way that it is laid out according to the history of the RAF Regiment. Afterwards we were free to wander around at our leisure. The Regiment was officially formed in 1942 but has its roots in the 1920's when the RAF were based in the Middle East and on the North West frontier of India, to protect our interests in those areas. New recruits are drafted to Honington and a principal use of the Museum is to show them some of the history of the Regiment.

TRUE STORIES – PART 2

Our last newsletter contained extract of recordings between pilots and control towers around the world. They proved popular, so here are a few more!

PSA was following United, taxiing out for departure. PSA called the tower and said, *"Tower, this is United 586. We've got a little problem so go ahead*

and let PSA go first!". The tower promptly cleared PSA for take-off before United had a chance to object to the impersonation!

Tower, *"Eastern 702: cleared for take-off. Contact departure on 124.7"*. Eastern 702: *"Tower, Eastern 702 switching to departure... by the way, as we lifted off we saw some kind of dead animal on the far end of the runway .* Tower, *"Continental 635, cleared for take-off; contact departure on 124.7; did you copy the report from Eastern? "635 cleared for take-off.... and yes, we copied Eastern and we've already notified our caterers"!"*

And the following extracts are from F700's recording pilot reports on aircraft unserviceability and engineering personnel's rectification comments.

Pilot, *"Dead bugs on canopy"* - Engineer, *"Live bugs on order!"*

Pilot, *"Test flight OK except Autoland very rough"*. Engineer. *"Autoland not fitted to this aircraft!"*

Pilot. *"Number three engine missing"* Engineer. *"After brief search, engine found on right wing!"*

Pilot. *"Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick"*. Engineer. *"That's what they're there for"!*

Pilot. *"Evidence of leak on right main landing gear"*. Engineer. *"Evidence removed"!*

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