

HISTORY OF THE BRIGHTON RADIO FLYING CLUB. Arnold Murdoch's recollections.

Firstly I should mention my early interest in aero modelling, started when I was about five years old on seeing a rubber powered model, built by my Father, flying at Fishersgate recreation ground. It was high wing probably about 60 inches wingspan. This encouraged me to build one (with the help of my cousin) disaster from a flying point of view but was character building. Sometime later I began building 1/72 aircraft kits from solid balsa & hanging them from the ceiling of my bedroom . Model Aerodrome's in West Street, Brighton was owned by Mrs Smyth. I, as boy of 15 found her to be quite scary so avoided the shop when her bright green Jowett Jupiter sports car was standing outside. However, in 1979 the shop was bought by her daughter Oban. It's certainly a small world, as ten years ago she moved in next door to us. However, in 1952 I began working for an architect with an office in Cranbourne Street which was right opposite the shop. This encouraged me to visit the shop again & agreed with the manager to build some of their scale model kits for display in the window. The deal was for me to have an extra kit of each one I built, including tissue, dope, adhesive and paints for my use as my reward. The end result was the kits naturally got bigger & more complex, which completely killed my desire to build a further one. I recall a group of people who flew control line scale models from Locks Hill Park, in Portslade.

I married when I was 26 years & soon became interested again in the dreaded pastime. By taking up slope & thermal soaring all built from kits & plans. Being involved in high pressure work there was very little time for socialising. I then made friends with a neighbour who was really quite a loner. We then both purchased Magregor three channel radios. I then began building gliders for slope soaring & attempted to fly from Waterhall and the Devils Dyke meeting with Roger Abrahams, Martin Gould & Pete Champion (the aviation artist). I met, in passing, Pat Norris, the Secretary of the Worthing & Littlehampton Flying club, who always wore a hard hat having been once knocked unconscious by a power plane. Around about 1974 he introduced me, and my boys, Paul & Andy, to flying at Cissbury Ring & Highdown Hill for thermal soaring. I was, at that stage, more a builder, than a flyer due to my work commitments. Model sailing boats were very popular on Hove Lagoon with me and my sons participating. On one visit we saw a man sailing what appeared to be a radio controlled electric milk float, Piloted by the one & only Percy Wixler.



Andy Murdoch

Scale Day



Having always been interested, in powered scale modelling. I took steps to meet power flyers & visited Thirty Nine Acres flying site. It must be understood that the flying site was not for the club's exclusive use & was shared with dog walkers, young mothers with buggies & children. The flyers were not over friendly & with reluctance allowed me to fly my free flight Keil Kraft Chief glider. I was again reminded that. I must first obtain a permit, which are issued by the council, on a limited basis. I was also required to go to their next club meeting, which I did but then told that I have to bring a model for inspection. By now I became very frustrated & decided to go back to the slope soaring until about 1978.



ENOUGH SAID ABOUT MY RAMBLINGS. Now to the club matters:-

1978 I revisited the 39 Acres & immediately felt a change in attitude towards visitors. I then had the opportunity to meet Don Allwright, the Chairman flying a lovely scale Fokker D8. This encouraged me to take along my recently completed R.C. Amigo thermal glider & was allowed to fly it. I was then introduced to Fred Deakin, Don Moreman & a week later meeting Allen Houghton, Mick Skinner, Malcolm Holt & Andy Balenkin who were all keen to assist me and made suggestions as to what model might be suitable. This is at a time when buddy boxes were in their infancy & there was a lot of snatching it back from the pupil before the model smashes into the ground. I then started having lessons on the Progo club trainer with Fred Deakin (minimum height 100 feet). Other members let me "stir the sticks" on their models. By now I had completed my Telemaster with a Fuji 40 glow engine & took it along ready to fly. All agreed it was suitable to learn on. Andy Balenkin then took on the task of teaching me (I was anxious to please). I think they now felt I was not going to be a problem. Allen Houghton then took me on & encouraged me to do more than "straight & level flight" by saying things like "it's yours" when model was in a most awkward position like on a knife edge or inverted. It was all great fun! Much to my surprise Malcolm Holt allowed me to fly his immaculate Wot 4 at some considerable height. By now I had progressed to a Fokker Eindexer, semi scale model, purchased from Harry Brooks who assured me was suitable for a learner (it said it on the box). I now needed the services of Allen & flew it with his help & crashed it at the next scale competition. The majority of the members I met were most helpful & did not take things too seriously. In 1982/83 Don Allwright finally achieved his ambition by opening a small model shop in St Lukes Road. Most Saturdays I visited, along with my son Andy, then offered tea or told to make your own. We were often joined by Terry Johnson & Ray Sparks. Andy was asked to help assemble the BUG kit recently designed by Don & marketed through the modelling magazines, among other

projects he always had in mind , one of which was an autogyro with five foot rotor blades. We took this up the field, in a high wind. The rotors built up to such a speed that he was no longer able hold it with he able to do nothing but falling flat on his back, he roaring with laughter followed by the rest of us following suit. I understand he tried many more time later but with no success. I must take this opportunity to illustrate what a kind man he was. My radio was becoming very unreliable but at that time, could not afford to replace it. He stepped and handed me a new Magregor & said. When can you afford it? I said I could afford it in three payments, over the next three months. Handshake & the deal was done with no paperwork whatsoever. He probably did this sort of thing for others, hopefully with no one letting him down. I do recall the time when The Metal Box Company employed a number of club members i.e. Fred Deakin, good organiser, Gordon Newbury, brilliant flyer, Les Hinton, Excellent builder of his own designs and plans, Barry Cook.

I was pleased when Gary & Sue his wife decided to join and both had help in flying with Malcolm Holt. Club competitions were taking place on a regular basis, one of which was in 1984 Thermals at Stanmer Park, which Andy came first. The following year a glider got stuck in rather high tree although it was no problem as Mick Skinner used to be a tree feller and retrieved it. An unusual one was 1986 Fun Fly at our field when Andy had a test flight with my pattern ship before the comp started & collided with the power lines. Unbelievably the tricycle undercarriage was cut clean off, but missed the prop, allowing the engine to keep running and landing undamaged. Allen was in charge and agreed due to shortage of entrants my model could be flown by myself, Andy & a very hung-over Dave Hampshire. BUT we were each given a very tight time to start engine, take off perform then land. Obviously we could not attempt the "touch & go" but in spite of that. The end result was 1st Andy, 2nd myself, 3rd Dave Hampshire, who eventually sobered up. The remaining competitors appeared to take it all in good part.

I was invited to join the club Committee and after a very short time our present Secretary was moving to another area and had to resign. I was asked to consider taking over the job which I quite happy to do so as at the time there were only about 12 to 16 regular flyers although I was not computer literate and prepared everything hand written then photo copied as my predecessor had. I served for two to three years. Most monthly meetings took place in one another's houses. At that stage Fred Deakin was elected as Chairman and myself as Vice chair. Some of the residents of Coldean were beginning to complain ab out engine noise although the flying took place some distance from their homes. Fortunately Don Allwright got on very well with Mike Griffin, the Director of Brighton Parks & Gardens who had sympathy for our situation and went about seeking land for our purposes. This encouraged a number of flyers to take up slope soaring as I had some time ago. We had available Devils Dyke, Waterhall and Ditchling Beacon, all suitable when wind directions were right. We then began to have competitions which were sometimes difficult due to flyers coming along from other areas.

Mike Griffin came back with a few options for a power field. Our final choice was Saddlescombe Road, which is where we are at present. I became involved in preparing drawings of the site boundaries. Brighton Councillor visited the site and watch some of flying (obviously it was most important to convince the councillors so the pilots were "hand picked") It appeared to go down very well with them. I then prepared further drawings showing the proposed parking spaces & the entrance off the road. Reg Bench, our solicitor (who was a very active aeromodeller) acted for us free of charge, in preparing a three yearly licence document & negotiated with the Council on our

behalf. At that time, at the request of Mike Griffin, we stipulated that all futures members must be residents of Brighton & Hove and held reserved places for a potential 20 further flyers. Originally the flying area measured 175 ft X 175 ft, at times surrounded by wheat or sheep which required us to erect an electric fence around the flying area. The farmer clearly did not want us there as the Council had reduced land available to him for our flying area, our access across the field car park. At one stages his actions caused us great concern when four men armed with shotguns arrived & sat themselves down at the high south end of the field, watching us with their guns cocked for about 40 minutes. I reported this to the police guns officer who said he would have serious words with the farmer. This behaviour was ineffective as the council eventually allocated us a much larger area, which we now enjoy and enabled us to erect a rabbit proof fence around the perimeter, nearly all the work was carried by club members. We did endeavour to get permission to erect a club house & I prepared drawings for a simple shelter & informally put it to the Councils Planning Dept but it was rejected and suggesting a shelter might be considered close to the boundary with the car park, which would really defeat the object. It is fortunate that the planners chose to “turn a blind eye” to what we already enjoy. Once a year we invited the Burgess Hill club along for an informal fun fly competition, which lead to many of them joining us later.



Arnold Murdoch
(front left of line)

Around 1992 we all agreed that it was necessary to become affiliated to the BMFA to be adequately insured. This certainly made us more aware of the dangers of being too casual with our flying habits.

A major problem arose when “travellers” became interested & eventually moved in with caravans etc: They had gained entry by lifting off the metal entrance gate. This required the flying to cease for about two weeks and requiring the involving the employment of Reg Bench, our solicitors, who dealt with it free of charge. I believe court costs were in the region of £500. The committee then agreed that steps must be taken to avoid a recurrence of such a situation & Les Call along with other members assisted in having R.S.J’s erected along the Northern boundary to prevent vehicles entering the site from the adjoining field. Members were informed that the field gate must be locked shut at all times. Many improvements were made to the field over the years, such as felling of some trees along the Eastern boundary, formation of a pedestrian path up to the Club house. The club, at it’s peak had 92 members.

Some members were interested in club outings and I clearly recall the visit, in the early 80’s, to the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden when Colin, who was a continental coach driver, took us

there for the day in a 32 seat coach. It was wonderful weather which enabled permitted virtually everything to fly from a Bleriot to a Sea Fury. Finishing the trip with, a stop off for a pint on the way home.

Another good day was had at "Wings & Wheels", (In the early 90's, in a 12 seat mini bus driven by Les Call). The only problem was when some members bought more than they should, leaving us with little space for sitting making it an uncomfortable ride home, but all for a good cause! About the same time Bob & Jackie Hobbs used to invite us to the Sussex Radio Flying club's open days. Very hospitable with well organised barbeques etc.

We were also invited along to the monthly Shoreham Airport flying which was only allowed after full size flying finished for the day, followed by retiring to the bar & having a BBQ outside , weather permitting. I and Derek Sephton being regular visitors, he flying his 1/5 scale Tiger Moth & me with my 1/6 scale Avro 504K (which I eventually donated to the Visitor Centre for display). This encouraged us both to fly at other Clubs, when invited. Such as Ardingly College Club on their open days when on one occasion we both wrote off our new models. He with his recently completed Top Flight Harvard crashing in the stream & me with a 1/5 scale Citabria, due to being overweight & underpowered.



Followed by visits to Sussex Flying Club, together with Hastings Flying Club & came back in one piece. Subsequently we were invited through Colin Hammond to become members of Hastings Club, which we readily accepted as the field was so spacious with very few obstructions. A few of our other members became involved in flying away from home such as George & Dave Yates although some felt it was disloyal to do so.

There were annual flying displays at Plumpton race course. There was always excellent commentating from Dave Bishop sitting on platform, on top of his custom van. He was always able to make feel like a family affair. Models of various descriptions were flown, the most unusual of which were delta models of 5 to 6 feet span powered by pulse jets motors which were about 2 feet 6 inches long. I don't think these were available or legal at that time. They were fuelled by Kerosine & compressed air but no spark plug air, or throttle control, which was on the lines of the German Doodle Bug. I would guess they flew in speeds in excess of 200 mph. They were incredibly noisy,

probably about 3 minutes duration, at the end of which the motor glowed, red hot. Only flown at show by a Joe Couling, from Belgium. This was only allowed, when all other models were grounded. I'm quite sure it must have frightened the horses. Dave Bishop also commentated at many other airshows.

Patcham Community Centre always held an annual Fete. Our club attended & set up our own stand to display models and answer any questions asked by the visitors. There was an occasion when one of our members was attempted to display an aerobatic model which crashed through the metal railings on the edge of the field. Fortunately, the only casualty was the model.

In the winter months the members were entertained with demonstrations from Allen Houghton & Mick Skinner on nylon covering & doping of airframes plus brazing & soft soldering (both no longer allowed under Health & Safety rules). Chris Foss talks on airframe construction. Dave Wyatt explaining application of lettering & myself explaining how to read, and understand, technical drawings.

There was a "Concour de Elegance" at least once a year which encouraged us all to research and improve standards. This was of course prior to the availability of accurate ARTF models. Indoor flying was also encouraged with rubber motors or simple chuck gliders.

Manufacturers were often willing to show their wares & offer special discounts on some items.

Chris Foss and Ricky Shaw, sometimes, came along to the field to give us aerobatic flying demonstrations.

Colin Hammond was a prolific scale model builder for himself & others. He, for a period of time spent many hours on improving the flying area together with maintenance work on the mower etc: but later went and joined the Hastings Club.