

*East of Scotland Strut of the Light Aircraft Association
January 2024 Newsletter*



Photo Dennis Penny

Chairman's bit

Christmas greetings to one and all. I do hope your digestions have recovered.

Apologies for the short Newsletter, Christmas and all that.

No meeting in January so will see you first Monday in February. Oh yes, and a Happy New Year. Justin.

Editor's bit

It's been a mixed year, with good things happening but the loss of some friends too, so here's hoping for a fresh start and lots of exciting times ahead.

Don't forget to support your Newsletter and don't keep news, good or bad, to yourselves otherwise I won't know and won't be able to share it. Andrew.

Cover photo

Happy memories of a time when it wasn't cold, raining and blowing a hoolie (like today).

Mike Wood comes in over the trees in his Minisport at our East Fortune East Fly-in during the summer. Another of Dennis Penny's beautiful photographs.



From the LAA

Hi Everybody, here is the news I know a lot of you have been waiting for...

I am very pleased to announce that, following agreement with the airport management team yesterday, the 2024 LAA Rally will be held at Leicester Airport over the weekend of 30th August to 1st September 2024.

I am really happy that we are going back to Leicester Airport and glad that the team at Leicester are just as keen as we are to make this a fantastic event - whether you are a pilot, owner or enthusiast. More information will follow in the new year.

Finally, on behalf of all the Staff and the Board, I would like to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy new year!

Simon Tilling, Chief Executive Officer

The next meeting is on...

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**at the Harrow Hotel
Eskbank Road, Dalkeith
at 8.00pm**

**There will be NO
meeting on January 1st
The next meeting will be
on 5th February**



About the Light Aircraft Association:
<https://www.lightaircraftassociation.co.uk>

With a history extending over 70 years, the UK Light Aircraft Association promotes safe and economical operation of sports and recreational aircraft. Representing the aviation interests of around 8,000 recreational pilots, amateur-builders and enthusiast members, the LAA oversees the operation of more than 2,500 light aircraft and the build of another 1,700, whilst providing sector-leading consultation and advocacy in aviation-related regulatory matters both in UK and Europe.

**This newsletter can also be viewed on
the Strut website:
eos-strut.org**

B21 first flight

Al Swegle saw a good article in Aviation Week that had pictures showing the first flight of the advanced Northrop Grumman B21 Raider as it flew from Palmdale, California, to Edwards AFB where it will be flight tested. Superficially it looks similar to the B2 Spirit which has been in service since the 1990s, but it is smaller and more advanced (of course) and is hoped to have more manageable running costs.

I couldn't find a link to the original article so here is a brief film clip, followed by another that explains some differences between the two.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=b21%20raider&mid=CE3FED6E28C97120B181CE3FE6E28C97120B181&ajaxhist=0>

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/why-air-force-only-has-20-b-2-spirit-stealth-bombers-35802>

'Lucky Again'

Ted Grossmith, long time friend of this Newsletter but sadly no longer with us, wrote the article alongside a year or two back for the De Havilland in-house magazine 'Pylon'. Thanks to Jim Prettyman for pointing it out and to Roger de Mercado for letting us use it.

You will remember from his previous articles that Ted flew Meteor Mk 3s during his National Service, an early jet whose structure had yet to catch up with the stresses of this new high speed and which killed over half of its pilots, through difficult handling or just breaking up in the air. Ted was so nearly one of those, as you will read, and once had an 'out of body experience' which he found hard to explain.

I HAD MANY unforgettable moments in the RAF. Among these were several close calls, such as the occasion when, with my Mark 4 Meteor's fuel tanks completely dry and both engines dead, I managed to glide it smoothly onto the runway and walk away as unscathed as the aircraft.

I gave thanks, as always, to the guardian Angel, my co-Pilot, who was equally supportive on another Meteor flight a few days after the dry-tank escapade. On this occasion I had just welcomed my friend Jack Mawer, an ex-de Havilland student and fellow national service Pilot Officer. On leave from Pakistan, he was visiting me at RAF Oakington where I was on 'all-weather' jet training. That afternoon I was scheduled to conduct aerobatics exercises. I had obtained permission for Jack to accompany me on this flight but at the last minute was told Air Ministry regulations precluded me from taking a passenger, for insurance reasons. I felt miffed about this late change in plans as I'd intended to perform a very thorough aerobatics session and show off on Jack's behalf. Somewhat disgruntled, I elected to disobey the order to perform aerobatics and instead took a slow, leisurely flight along the east coast.

En route, and skimming over our low-level flying area, I spotted a passenger train racing along the southern boundary. It was travelling upon a high embankment, a necessity in the low-lying Fens laboriously reclaimed from the sea. I let down with air brakes, and with flaps deployed, throttled back to near stalling speed. I came up from behind the train into its plume of smoke and slowly passed the passengers at eye level and just a few feet away from my wing tip. I have always considered steam trains as the most tranquil of all modes of travel. One can thoroughly relax whilst gazing at the ever-changing views of the countryside, lulled into a soporific state by the hypnotic cadence of the wheels. That afternoon as I crept slowly by, passengers were roused from their lethargy. Numerous wide-eyed faces were pressed hard against the windows, clearly displaying incredulity and excitement. I know if I'd been aboard I would have greatly enjoyed such a dramatic interruption of my reveries.

In a happier mood, I reached the coast and, just above the waves, lifted over the piers, waving to holidaymakers on the beaches and cliffs above. I turned inland at King's Lynn and followed the River Ouse, my old fishing haunt, leapfrogging its many bridges. I had a scare at one bridge; a cable had been installed since my last jaunt there in a Harvard and I was only just able to lift over it in time. There were many such daily thrills but I recall the details of this flight better than most, not for what I have just recounted but for what followed.

Jack was waiting for me at dispersal beside his little red MG sports car. I landed, had the plane refueled, and handed it over to my course mate who shared this plane with me. I waved him off as he left to perform the same aerobatics exercise I'd been ordered to do. Jack and I then motored happily south to the seaside resort of Brighton for the weekend.

Upon my return, I learned the plane had broken up during aerobatics and my friend had been killed. Although saddened, I was nevertheless very glad I had ignored orders or it would surely have been me who would have gone down with the plane, which had no ejection seat. It was a relief for Jack, too, when he learned he could have shared this same fate. The



Ted in his Meteor Mk.3 EE414

extreme gyrations I'd planned just to impress him would undoubtedly have overstressed the fuselage.

The Meteor was the earliest production jet fighter and during that year (1952) 108 jet fighters crashed in the UK. Fifty years ago metal fatigue was an unknown hazard and all such mid-air break-ups were blamed on pilot error. For most pilots perhaps the only error they made was to fly a flawed aircraft. It took the Comet disasters in 1954 and de Havilland expertise to identify and quantify this most unpleasant phenomenon. In retrospect, however, I remain very pleased that my Squadron Leader had so closely complied with Air Ministry protocol!

Rainbow clouds

John Whitfield saw this beautiful night sky and took over 30 photographs of it but his camera failed to pick up the rainbow colours that were also there.

That same evening the event was seen throughout the country and it was believed to be a rare sighting of Nacreous clouds.

These need temperatures below -78C to form and are only found in the stratosphere at altitudes of around 15-25km.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-67815569>

John also managed two flights over a snowy East Lothian (see next page) in a brief break in the recent poor weather.





Photo John Whitfield

The first German air raid on Britain during WW2

Jim Prettyman shares a couple of anecdotes

'I took my usual stroll today around Lauriston Castle looking over the nearby River Forth Estuary, the scene of this raid. In doing so I was chatting with a young couple. After exchanging our pleasure of the fine day and the beautiful scene across the estuary, I continued 'If you had been here on 16th Oct 1939 this scene was far from the tranquility before you today'. Then I told the story and I added two anecdotes.

The first was about the railway signalman on duty at the north end of the Forth Rail Bridge. He phoned Waverley Station, describing with frightened voice the scene before him and telling them to stop further traffic. The chap at the other end of the phone told him to calm down and asked if he was sure because there had not been an air raid warning. On hearing this the signalman held the telephone outside so that the cacophony of bombs exploding, machine gun and Ack Ack reached him convincingly down the line. Passengers on a train halted at the south end of the bridge witnessed it all - what a frightening experience!

In the event the bridge was not damaged. The RAF performed well that day and one of the pilots was the father of a fellow Officer in the RN. Duncan MacKellar and I were both serving our National Service, he in submarines myself on aircraft maintenance.

My second anecdote is about the involvement of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh. His home was at nearby Portobello. As our Spitfires pursued the raiding German Ju88 aircraft across the roof tops their stray gun fire damaged the Provost's prize china vases on display. He removed the bullets from his display cabinet and sent them to RAF Turnhouse. The parcel contained his terse note, 'I believe these are yours!'

<https://www.historypod.net/10/16/16th-october-1939-first-german-air-raid-on-britain-during-ww2-took-place-when-bombers-attacked-rosyth-naval-base-in-scotland/>



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