

# VILLAGE'S OWN AIR SHOWS

Bekesbourne's flying past

by David Collyer

AT the end of World War I most of the equipment left behind at Bekesbourne Aerodrome was put up for sale by the Aircraft Disposals Board, and various private flying enthusiasts acquired aircraft cheaply.

It was not uncommon for an Avro 504 trainer to be sold for as little as £5, and among those who bought aircraft to fly at the airfield were Count Zborowsky, of Highland Court, and his mechanic Wigglesworth. The count is better known as the builder and driver of the original Chitty Chitty Bang racing car, his interest in aircraft being confined to experimental flights. A civilianised BE 2C (G-EAQR) was registered to Wigglesworth in January, 1920, and scrapped the following August.

Another interesting character who arrived at Bekesbourne in 1919 was Dr E. D. Whitehead-Reid, a former captain in the RAMC. He was later senior surgeon at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital.

Dr Whitehead-Reid bought two surplus RAF aircraft, a De Havilland DH6 trainer (G-EAPW), and a civilianised SE5 fighter (G-EAZT) from Wigglesworth. He bought the latter in August, 1922, but it soon nosed over on landing and was replaced with a similar aircraft (G-EBCA), which he also kept at Bekesbourne.

He used his aircraft for visits to his patients in outlying farms and so could be called the original Flying Doctor. The doctor's aircraft were maintained by his mechanic, Lee, and also included one of the ubiquitous Avro 504

company test pilot, recalls having to deliver this aircraft to Bekesbourne in October, 1927. He flew from Yeovil, but had to land at Farnborough overnight due to bad weather. The following morning he arrived at the aerodrome and, to his chagrin, the new owner insisted on a demonstration flight. Being a rather large man, he had to squeeze himself into the cockpit in front of Penrose, who had never carried a passenger before.

The take-off used up most of the length of the aerodrome but, on landing, the upwards slope assisted in bringing the aircraft to a halt just in front of the hangar doors without the slightest effect on the unruffled passenger.

Dr Whitehead-Reid flew this aircraft at air races and displays until October, 1930, when on the night of the 10th he had a call to a patient near Maidstone. The weather was misty and on approaching Detling Aerodrome he brushed the tops of the trees in East Sutton Park and crashed, wrecking the aircraft and killing himself.

Other aircraft flown from Bekesbourne at this time included another Avro 504 (G-EAAY), owned by L. R. G. Errington from July to October, 1919, and the DH 53 Humming Bird (G-EBXM) owned by Capt A. V. C. Douglas.

## ITS FLEET

In the late 1920s, Kent Aircraft Services, originally based at Kingsdown, arrived at the aerodrome and maintained its fleet of Avro 504 joy-riding aircraft (G-AAUJ, K & L, and AAWD), there during the winters.

About this time, the Kent Flying Club was formed by another local man, Mr Robert C. Ramsey, of Howlets, who was reputed to be the oldest pilot in Britain. He learned to fly at 71 and

bourne during an aerial treasure hunt before World War II.

By 1933, Janes' All the World's Aircraft listed the Kent Flying Club, and membership subscription was just £1/1/-. Unlike the Cinque Ports FC at Lympne, the aircraft used by the club for flying training were Miles Hawks and not the usual Gipsy Moths used by the majority of flying clubs then.

In fact, there, was friendly rivalry between the Cinque Ports Club and Kent FC to see who could train their pilots the quickest. The course at Lympne took an average of four to five hours, but did not include instruction in spinning, whereas on the Kent FC course one got instruction in spinning, but it took an extra two hours of flight time to complete.

The club advertised ab initio and advanced training, blind flying, as well as instructors' courses, and qualifications for both A and B licences could be obtained. Three Miles Hawk Trainers (G-ACHZ, DBK and DGJ) were used for initial training at £2 per hour dual and £1/10/- per hour solo, while advanced training on the Miles Falcon was £2/10/- dual, and £2 solo.

The chief flying instructor was Mr K. K. Brown, who had served with the RAF at Hawkinge and been employed as chief flying instructor at Lympne before joining Kent Flying Club.

Unfortunately, Brown was killed while flying from Bekesbourne in a head-on collision with a Hawker Horsley over Tilmanstone, the other aircraft being flown from Manston by a R Aux AF unit on annual summer camp.

With Brown's death, flying instruction was suspended for a time, but another chief instructor was soon appointed. He was Flt-Lieut Barrington,

an advert asking for owners to bring their Fleas to the aerodrome.

Two Fleas were connected with Bekesbourne, one constructed by a Mr Little and registered on December 13, 1935. This was flown, or rather "hopped" on August Bank Holiday Monday, 1935, when 3,000 people turned out to see the spectacle. The other machine was built in Canterbury by a Mr Brown and Mr Sowerbutts, and was registered G-AEBR in February, 1937.

However, these "packing case" aircraft started to crash with alarming regularity and the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough, then discovered that at certain angles of flight it was impossible to pull them out of a dive. The Flea was banned in this country in 1936.

Another aircraft to end its days at Bekesbourne was the Martinsyde Racer (G-ABKH), owned by C. B. Friend, which crashed into a telegraph pole while landing on February 5, 1933.

Mr Peter Beechey, a former member of Kent Gliding Club at Lenham, joined the Kent Flying Club in the late 1930s, and remembers that training methods then were rather primitive, and sometimes dangerous.

As well as training pilots to fly, Kent Flying Club took part in, and organised, various competitions with other clubs. The favourite was the "Gawn patrol" which involved flying into another club's field first thing in the morning and landing without having your machine's registration letters noted by the home club pilots patrolling their airfield.

Air displays were another feature of the inter-war years, and for the Coronation of May 6, 1937, the KFC put on a display at Bekesbourne, following this later with an Empire



One of the planes flown at Bekesbourne during the 1930s was this Southern Martlet.

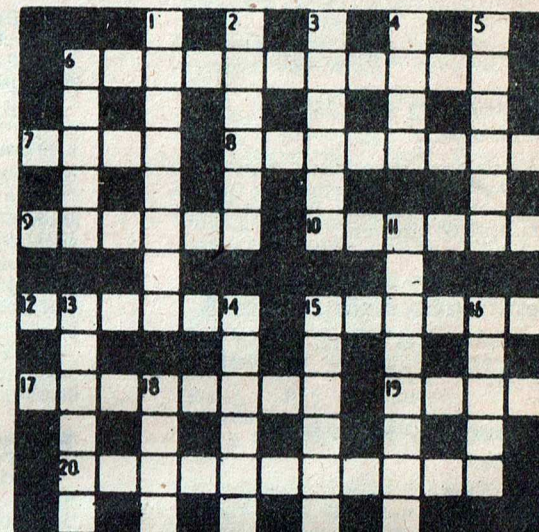
## CRIER CROSSWORD

### ACROSS

- 6 When you both cooked the Sunday lunch? (5, 6).
- 7 Broke something in the art gallery (4).
- 8 Giving each a tin, wrapped up, of leaves (5, 3).
- 9 Is very angry as had, perhaps, been forecast (6).
- 10 Very small time (6).
- 12 "House Guest," the winner of the long race? (6).
- 15 It's obvious the boy's name and age should go inside (6).
- 17 Admitting of examination by the doctor, very likely (8).
- 19 Reduce by a quarter, which is shrewd (4).
- 20 Do they rush about everywhere together? (4, 7).

### DOWN

- 1 How you regretted buying the unsweetened variety? (8).
- 2 Has for sale in the plants department (6).
- 3 Declare in a loud and resolute way?
- 4 She turned up with what



- 6 Tilt only to get the ball in (5).
- 11 Observing that it isn't the outside of the cake (8).
- 13 Having a right to quarrel about the price list (6).
- 14 A slight application
- again of the polisher? (6)
- 15 The resume is not quite exact (6).
- 16 Turn up the radio playing music (5).
- 18 Stake about 5p on the champion (4).

### Answers to Crossword 7.7.78

Across: Look down on, dull, limp, those (anag), rose, make clear, con-stable, pass, tense, a back

joy-riding outfits. He bought the prototype Avro 548 variant in 1922 and this lasted until 1927. The last aircraft bought by the good doctor was the diminutive Westland Wigeon II parasol monoplane (G-EBJT), built by the Westland Co at Yeovil for the Daily Mail light aviation trials at Lympne in 1926.

Mr Ramsey was a farmer and landowner and all his children learned to fly. His daughter served with the Air Transport Auxiliary in 1941 to 45, delivering fighters and bombers from factories to airfields. Tragically, his oldest son was killed while flying his Moth Major from Bekes-

bourne for at least one of his National Aviation Day displays and I have a programme of the events which comprised an auto-towed glider, parachute descent, autogiro demonstration, and a demonstration of continuous rolling of an aircraft. Formation aerobatics, an aircraft v speedway rider race and Sir Henry Seagrave's car, Golden Arrow, completed the programme.

### TAKE OFF

When he wanted to take out his aircraft he insisted that all other aircraft were moved out of the way so that he could taxi straight out and take off. This was a source of irritation to the other members, especially if their aircraft received a bump from the Hawk's wingtip en route.

"Everybody would stand to attention," recalls Mr Beechey, "waiting for the crash, including the CFI. He would potter around the countryside, frequently getting lost and upon arrival back at the aerodrome would taxi right up to the hangar regardless of whose aircraft was parked in the way."

Sir Alan Cobham used Bekesbourne for at least one of his National Aviation Day displays and I have a programme of the events which comprised an auto-towed glider, parachute descent, autogiro demonstration, and a demonstration of continuous rolling of an aircraft. Formation aerobatics, an aircraft v speedway rider race and Sir Henry Seagrave's car, Golden Arrow, completed the programme.

Also there were passenger flights which gave many people their first taste of flying and whetted many a youngster's appetite for service with the RAF. These flights could be taken in a Desoutter Monoplane, a side-by-side seat Bluebird, a glider, or even an autogiro.

Bekesbourne did not escape the Flying Flea craze of 1935-6 and one home builder even towed his Flea from his home in Princes Risborough to Bekesbourne when he saw

As war became imminent, it was decided to set up an organisation to train pilots to prepare for service with the RAF should the conflict break out. Mr Beechey and Mr Pembroke joined this organisation, known as the Civil Air Guard, and Peter Beechey recalls: "Air Commodore Chamier, head of the Air League of the British Empire, was a great patriot. He reckoned that things were getting to the same state as they are now with the run down in the forces.

"He could see what was coming, and he did everything to encourage people to learn to fly to get a nucleus of pilots in case war came. Anybody who joined the Civil Air Guard had to promise that they would serve with the RAF if there was an emergency and war came."

### ON LOAN

Various types of aircraft were flown from Bekesbourne during the immediate pre-war years. Kent Aircraft Services had been replaced by Air Sales and Service, who had an agency for Miles aircraft so these types predominated.

However, various other training aircraft were flown, including the little Topsy Monoplanes (G-AFRT and -AFVP), which were used by the CAG. The Czech designed and built Praga monoplane was demonstrated by a former pupil, Mr Wesson, on June 17, 1937, while on loan to the club.

Another example of the up-to-date equipment used by the KFC was the DeHavilland DH 94 Moth Minor (G-AFMZ) registered to the club in July, 1939.

When war eventually came several of the club's aircraft were pressed into service with the RAF, including the Moth Minor, which became AW151, Miles Hawks, DGI (AW150), CTO (AW152), Mr Ramsey's Hawk Major, DCY (BD141), and Falcon Major, EVA (DR612), plus both Topsy Trainers.

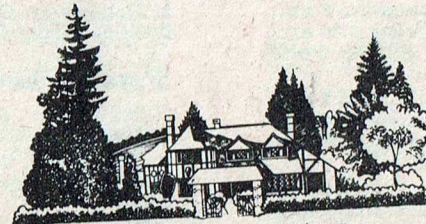
fishing (4).  
5 Witness a set-back in a race (6).

Down: L-o-lita, skipper, port-a-l, an-go-ra, under, flush, e-on, has-his-h, s'aloon (rev), or-nat-e, sh-err-y, licked, stabs.

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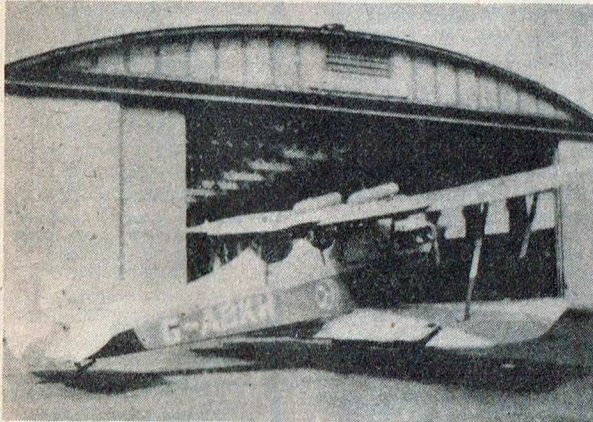
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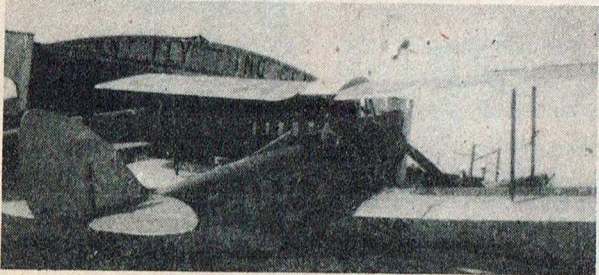
**CANTERBURY 54754**



**A Martinsyde racer photographed at Bekesbourne in February, 1933.**



**A DU 60 thought to have been photographed at the village during the Cobham Air Circus.**



**A Tiger Moth at the village.**