



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS

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AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



Michael Dunkerly:

Can probably claim fame to Royalty which has led to a charmed life, on the earth, in the sky and on the ocean, possessing 'Saint' like qualities.

Michael grew up in the hey day of high society studying law and became a young Barrister with a Persil white wig, which he used as a duster around the house until it gained the required appearance of more than one court attendance. In these early days he had little money but the sun shone everyday and life seemed so much fun.

His father however rode National Hunt horses and this was something of a spring board for a promising career as a jockey. He purchased two horses which were trained by Jenny Pitman a well known race horse trainer of the day. Michael had his sights set on riding at Aintree in the Grand National,

which Jenny thought was not a good idea for a beginner.



Jenny said to Michael, why not compete in a lesser event, it is a much safer option.

It was a cold winter day, the ground was frozen and the venue was Kempton Park. "They're off was the cry" as the horses with other jockey's clinging to their steeds thundered away. Michael was doing very well until he got to the 4th fence where he promptly fell off.

He said afterwards the corners were OK, but the jumps required a bit of extra skill.

Sadly it was the end of his horse racing career.

Sometime later, Michael had occasion to appear on the BBC's 'This is Your Life' series hosted by Michael Aspel featuring Jenny Pitman as the guest of honour. Michael appeared wearing a pilots helmet and goggles.

Previously Michael had taken Jenny and her Vet on a flight to

to Ireland as they were going to look at a couple of horses in Ireland. After that she referred to him as 'Biggles'.

The next thing in Michael's athletic prowess was to be skiing with some friends in the Swiss Alps.



One of them was an RAF pilot and said to Michael you have a good understanding of weather, you should learn to fly. Especially on tail wheel aircraft.

As there are many altiports for skiing – the idea being that one could fly to the ski resorts, spend a day on the slopes and fly home again. The perfect solution to get the ski slopes quickly.

About this time Michael became involved with a Greek entrepreneur who was in the process of getting an oil rig constructed at Le Havre and Michael was employed to act in his law abiding capacity forming contracts with regard to obtaining financing of the said construction of an oil rig.

Finance was or could be available under some European Law to subsidise industry toward oil exploration, the up and coming technology of the time for the big

oil companies such as Shell, Elf, Agip, to get the best price for these companies.

It is interesting to note at this stage that the rig was constructed by the same people who designed and built the Eiffel Tower (the same company that is).

The rig would then be towed and anchored for the appropriate company to start drilling at locations around the Mediterranean

In the meantime, Michael had researched the possibility of flying and joined Sportair Flying Club at Biggin Hill and would travel from London, spending his weekends flying. Peter Hill was his instructor in those early days.

Following the required level of flying training he was on a solo cross country flight one day and made a hard landing at Lydd in a Fournier RF4. (29th Sept 1971) and the main wheel retracted.

Fournier's were quite good at landing with the wheel up and had two skids underneath the fuselage to protect the fuselage which also kept the propeller just clear of the ground. (The Fournier's had only one main wheel).

He would be rescued by Barry Mc Grath and John Harper who appeared on the scene with a Jodel Mousquetaire DR140 180HP.

Michael eventually bought a share in this flying machine and started to use it for business appointments. In the beginning it didn't have any radio and Michael wanted to upgrade the aircraft ending up as the sole owner.



The radios were completely upgraded including navigation aids. He also had a Baden Crouzet Auto Pilot fitted at their headquarters at a grass airfield 12 mile out of Deauville which was called Bernay (LFPD). It had pilot

accommodation, small one room en-suite units.



If you were doing business with Baden Crouzet, a small car would be provided for your personal transport to the town centre.

There too was a wonderful restaurant at the airfield which was run by a Madame Raymond.

A lovely roly-poly woman with a very pleasant manner, her cooking skills were superb and pilots came from all over France at weekends.

The editor spent many a night at this airfield.

AIRPORT CAFÉ BIGGIN HILL

Years ago 'Dillows' was the eating and meeting place at Biggin Hill and was open 7 days a week.

Michael would breeze in for a quick snack and afterwards jump into the beloved Jodel and head for Ouessant. (*the furthest western point of France*) where he had purchased a small stone built house with very thick walls designed to keep out the cold in winter and cool in the summer months.

30 years on he is a full time resident of Ouessant.

A FORCED LADING

1st August 1983 was a day of some calm decisions. Whilst on a test flight of his Renault engine Stampe, with the editor of the Bugle occupying the front seat.



We had been airborne for about 15 minutes when Michael announced the engine didn't seem to be producing enough power. My response was, give it a bit more throttle.

He replied, I have already applied full throttle, try it yourself.

Ah...!! It does seem a bit sluggish. I pointed out a local private grass strip below. Michael didn't like the strong crosswind component, so I suggested he chose another suitable field.

He makes a right turn and we are descending quite nicely, apart from some smoke coming into the front cockpit, the only concern I had was the fact that we appeared to be heading straight for a quarry.

I asked Michael if he had a good field and he assured me he had one in sight. All I have is the quarry..!

I asked him to point with the wingtip his chosen field.

He slewed the aircraft and placed the wingtip on his landing place.

He had chosen a very good flat field which I as an Instructor used regularly, but was aware at this time it had a very good crop of standing corn.

I advised Michael not to trip over the standing crop, knowing it would stop us very quickly.

We made a successful landing sinking into the corn which seemed to be about 4 feet deep. We were dragged to an abrupt stop, stripping the paint off all leading edges of undercarriage and wings as we sunk almost gracefully from view. We extricated ourselves from the aircraft and being adjacent to Victoria – Maidstone, railway line. A train came by, we saluted and the driver sounded his horn Pahh! Pah!



We wonder to this day, if the train driver, had realised, what he had witnessed, or not witnessed...!!

We had landed near Ightham in a field known as Normans Field, on the St Clere Estate.

After landing, we did not physically pull the aircraft to the side of the field as stated in the press report.

We first walked to the farm manager's house to advise him of our predicament, and could we phone our aviation expert, 'Cobby', who has a Land Rover and trailer designed to rescue downed aircraft from forced landings.

It was the Land Rover of Cobaircraft which towed the aircraft to the edge of the field so that we could dismantle the wings and pack the aircraft on the trailer, without further damage to the crop of corn.

The fact that Mr Ewence had stated to be the first on the scene, was because we led him to Normans field

Around 8 o'clock in the evening as we were leaving the field, the police arrived. They were a little disgruntled that they hadn't been able to find us, as we appeared out of the corn crop. They had been searching for one and a half hours and couldn't find us.

The Police asked the pilot Michael as to his occupation, he replied, 'barrister' whereupon they bade us good evening and departed the scene.



The aircraft was transported back to Biggin Hill and re-assembled.

The Renault engine was repaired at a workshop at Pau, an airfield at the foot of the Pyrenees, France.

BACK TO THE JODEL DR140

Following his skiing activities, Michael did actually fit skies to the aircraft and achieved his dream of flying to the ski slopes.

The previously mentioned Jodel, updated with many dials and navigation equipment, was needed to go anywhere at a moments notice, with regard to the oil rig contracts being managed by Michael.

These meetings took him all over Europe, he would arrive fresh and relaxed never explaining how he was there so early.

His contemporaries would often say to him during a long meeting late into the afternoon 'what time is your flight?' to which Michael would say, 'I don't have a flight to catch, I have an aeroplane, so I can stay as long as you want'.

This fact probably sealed many a contract, whilst some were obviously thinking, how do we get out of this one...?

Pilots have time on their hands with no schedule to keep.

I will be here tomorrow if you want. How brilliant is that..!

Michael did something like 3,600 hours in this aircraft.

He owned this aircraft from 1971 to 2008 finally selling it to an Englishman who also had property in France.

The editor had many a flight in this aircraft which he enjoyed immensely. The Mousqueterre was a wonderful aircraft to fly, so easy.

THE GRUMMAN WIDGEON

This amphibian aircraft owned by an American Ambassador, had visited Biggin Hill previously in 1972 and ferried to Mallorca in 1974 and stayed there until its return to the UK in 1981.

The owner was coerced by his girl friend, to make a landing on Bough Beech reservoir.

This all went rather swimmingly after a hard landing which ripped the bow off the amphibian which promptly sank in 30ft of water.

The girl friend had recently been presented with a very expensive mink coat costing \$1.600 and she was frantic that someone rescue it.

The Bough Beech water authority insisted the aircraft be removed before the reservoir was polluted.

The late Mark Campbell was the expert in removing it from the water to dry land.

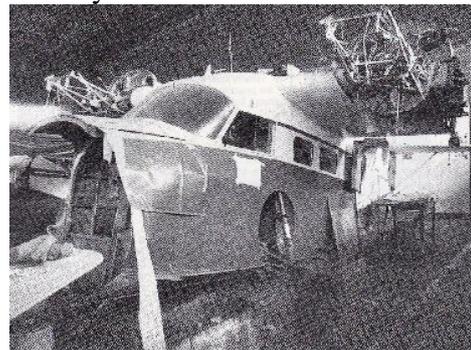
It was transported to Biggin Hill to Cobaircraft where it would be painstakingly restored by Brian Roberts an ex RAF airframe engineer.

His expertise in metal work was second to none.

The editor helped Brian to place many hundreds of rivets with each rivet being blessed personally.

Brian was a devout Jehova Witness and firmly believed we could all live with wild animals.

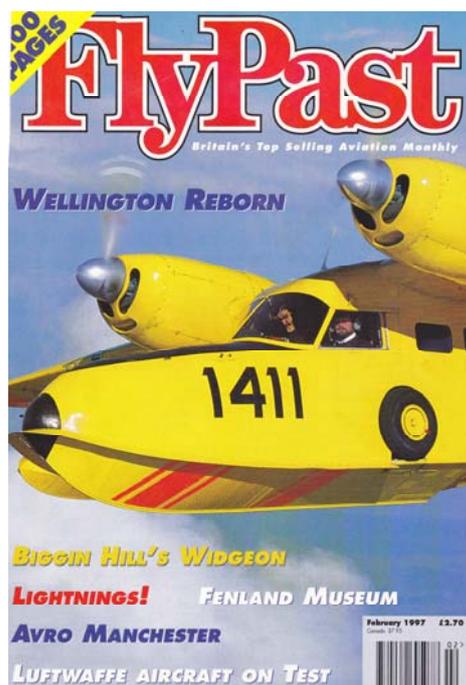
After each rivet being hammered home, Brian would try to educate the editor into the ways of Jehova. It is lucky we don't have lions roaming around the Kent countryside.



By 1985 the aircraft was ready for flight testing and acquired by Michael.

What colour to paint it – Michael chose a basic yellow and red scheme similar to the Canadair Rescue Services and Fire Fighting water bombers.

The paint scheme was undertaken by a company at West Malling Airfield, which sadly became a housing estate soon after.



The Editor and Tony Habgood fly the Grumman Widgeon for a cover page photo shoot, flying in a circle to get the best lighting conditions for a FlyPast cover page.



Michael, and a colleague preparing to get airborne in the Widgeon. He also exhibited the aircraft at many air shows around the UK and abroad to many seaplane bases in Holland and France,

He also did some filming in the



Mediterranean, with no lesser stars than, Jane Seymour and Anthony Quinn. Michael was to be killed off at ending seemingly flying over a hill and exploding.



Launching from a ramp into the water at Texal, Holland. Sea planes or amphibians are not encouraged in the UK.



Finally Michael flew the Widgeon to Canada where there are many lakes. He flew up the Hudson Bay to a place called Churchill.

The aircraft remained in Canada and eventually sold.

During this period of owning the Widgeon, Michael had purchased a very nice Harvard. Which got the nickname of 'Mr Shiny'



This too attended several air show with Michael and is seen here on the south apron at Biggin Hill.

Next picture shows Michael discussing a display at Le Touquet, with one of the Directors of the airport.

The editor photographed the event.



Note the highly polished reflective fuselage.



The next day, taking the sun at West Malling, in Kent. UK.

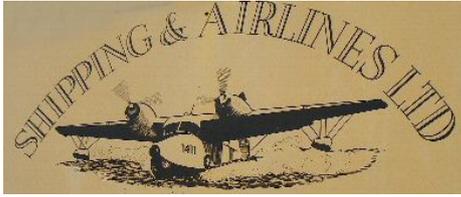
(Cobby Moore, Michel Dunkerly with Tony Habgood and Lorna).

Are these people really aviators.

MICHAEL & BIKINI MODEL



SHIPPING & AIRLINES



Was started by Phillip Mann, who had a collection of old aircraft and needing somewhere to keep them He built a hangar at Biggin Hill and eventually sold it all to Michael in 1983 who in turn developed it into a maintenance organisation.

It is now owned by Peter Greenyer.

PILOT / SAILOR ALL AT SEA



Whilst Michael's aerial activities are in full swing he is now the now of a boat called a Nicholson 32, a good fast cruiser for its day.



He sailed it around Brittany and then down to Bilbao where he was working with the previously mentioned Oil Rig.

The North Spanish coastline is like Brittany with lots of little fishing harbours, but not many yachties.

Afterwards he sailed to Bordeaux and from there sailed through the Canal du Midi to the Mediterranean, taking the yacht to Mallorca where it remained for the next two years.

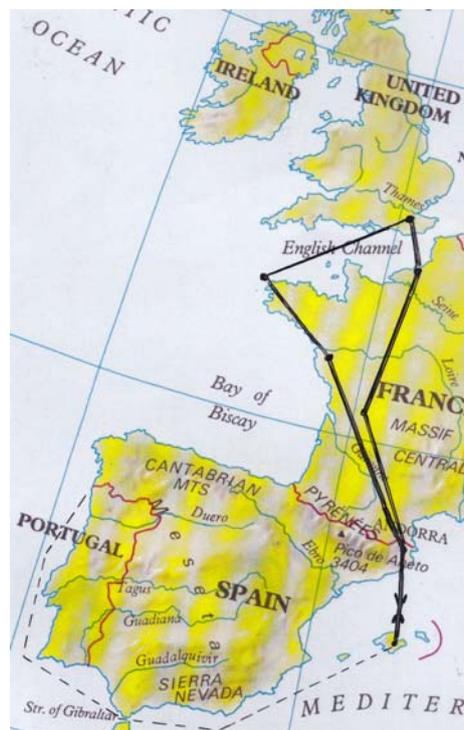
During a bad storm this boat along with the whole harbor and pontoons was washed out to sea and lost.

Following this disaster Michael attended the Boat Show in London where he met a lady called Ann Melrose who had done the Trans Atlantic Race from Plymouth to Newport with a friend in a boat which she had named 'Mother Goose' (a 40 foot yacht) It was now June 1990.

The editor receives a phone call from Michael on 3rd June to proceed to Ouessant in his Jodel G-ARLX. The indispensable JB



arrives overhead the small airport on Ouessant, where Michael meets him. Repacking the aircraft they depart for Nantes.



They arrive at Nantes and file 5 flight plans for the editors return journey to Biggin Hill for tomorrow (4th) via Gerona, Son Bonet, Mallorca, Gerona, Poitier, Deauville, Biggin Hill.



On arrival at Son Bonet a taxi is waiting for Michael to take him to the harbour.

The editor departs for Gerona to refuel, then leaves for Poitier.

On the way across France the editor is aware of many sporting activities on the ground, but thinks nothing of it, as today is Monday.

On approaching Poitier he is unable to raise them on the radio and calls Bordeaux Information.

After a short period they say the customs are coming but the penny hasn't dropped.

Landing at Poitier the only place open is the fuel depot, so the Editor re-fuels and waits.

The Police del Air arrive en force. It is only then he realises that today is a 'Vacance Nationale' an aircraft arriving from Spain they are very suspicious of the pilot.

Fortunately the editor had his licence / log book / 5 flight plans – duly stamped / aircraft journey log book / aircraft documents.

Fortunately one of the Police del Air officers recognises the editor as Capitaine Haddock and all is well.

Michael will sail his new boat to Coruna in Portugal and the editor will wait for another phone call to collect Michael from Santiago in Portugal.

22nd June a phone call is received, the editor heads for Quimper for customs and fuel and leaves for Santiago where Michael is waiting.

Customs and fueled, they head for Nantes, then onward to Ouessant.

MOTHER GOOSE

For the none sailing fraternity this new yacht is a 40 foot boat which



(Another long day in G-ARLX)

is manufactured of a foam sandwich and partly water ballasted, light weight construction. Michael entered "Mother Goose" for the 'ostar' (*observer single handed transatlantic race*) he got there in 28 days.

Following this successful voyage he then sailed down the East Coast of the USA. The Caribbean & Venezuela sailing back via Guadeloupe, where he picked up a hitch hiker who had a habit of removing all her clothes when out of sight of land. Michael told her she was prettier with her clothes on.

She didn't speak for the next two weeks and on arrival at the Azores they parted company.

4 years later Michael entered the same race again but felt bad halfway across and returned to Ireland and the Azores leaving the boat there. Returning to France by airline.

He returned later in the year with a friend to collect it and they sank halfway to Brest in appalling weather with wave tops of 60 feet and the boat was laying down

(*sailors dialogue*) (*not applicable to dry land sailors - like the editor*).

The boat was breaking up and taking on water.

Time to send a Mayday:

They were rescued by a very large Swedish freighter on its way to Newfoundland, which pulled alongside to shield them from the wind during a hazardous rescue.

Michael would open the sea cocks before leaving the boat.

This Swedish ship had a very good film library, but they were now going the wrong way.

The next boat purchase would be a 50 foot aluminium boat of French manufacture he found in Fort Lauderdale and sailed it back to France via Burmuda, Cabot Strait starting with 3 friends, reducing to two and finally one, himself.

He arrived back in Ouessant after 17 days.

Michael by now can walk on water so he sets forth to Ireland and during the night is run down by a huge super tanker, taking off the bow of his boat.



The tanker was so large it seemed to take a couple of days to go by, and it hardly scratched the paintwork, or made enough noise as to attract the attention of the small crew.

Luckily he was rescued by another super tanker a couple of hours later and taken to Fawley.

Michael is not finished with sailing just yet, because he found another lovely fast boat, as he describes it built in clever wood.

He sailed this boat around Brittany for two so called summers.

He then went to Mallorca sailing via the Azores, South Portugal, Gibraltar, Ibiza.

Michael went to lunch and sat next to a man who had bought a sextant

and never used it in anger. Michael bought it off him and did a theory course in Falmouth in December last year (2012) and is now planning a practical this summer.

The course is to be 600 nm in a straight line and 50 nm out of sight of land using a sextant and compass only.

The editor (*an experienced dry land sailor*) has proposed a course, 50 nm south of Malta to 50 nm south of Cyprus.

L'ÎLE D' OUESSANT FRANCE



Michaels abode on this rugged island, where he lives with the lighthouse keeper's daughter.

This small island is only 5 x 2 Kms with a small airport.

It is the furthest Western point of France and many French people come to visit on the daily ferry boat. At the dockside there are hundreds of bikes for hire, as there are no buses and not many cars.

The island is famous for its many ship wrecks in days of old.

The coastline has some treacherous rocky outcrops and strong currents which accounted for many disasters around its coastline.

The people of Ouessant would salvage the spoils of any ship wreck if there no survivors – or render assistance as the case may be.



Following one British ship wreck, the people of Ouessant turned out in force to rescue the crew from the perils of the sea.

Queen Victoria was so grateful, that she built a church for the people of Ouessant.

The island is famous for its many lighthouses built under arduous conditions, bit by bit, at low tide, until they were above the high tide water line, at which point things became easier, but it was still quite treacherous if the sea became rough.

There is an excellent museum on the island portraying the history of the many light houses around this rugged coastline.

The editor visited the museum and took some sneaky pictures.



This picture shows the cable system to supply the lighthouse keepers who could be marooned for several days of bad weather.



It is hard to imagine how much light could be visible from a single Candle so to speak through these highly polished prism lens.



During World War II, this island was occupied by the Germans who used the forced labour of many POW's from Russia and the Balkans to build harbours, and many other structures of concrete and stone, re-inforced with steel bars which remain to this day. Gun emplacements are gradually being demolished.

It is hard to imagine how much stolen concrete was put onto this island for the sake of one big gun that could shoot way out to sea.

The names of some of the prisoners remain etched in stone.

Following the surrender of Germany, women were castigated for fraternising with the Germans.



This mural is painted on a building showing the free roaming sheep and the big lighthouse the most powerful around these parts.

Today the island is a peaceful place where the sheep roam free and the wind blows from the west and fog

is prevalent most mornings and the air is clear to breathe.

THE MOONEY AGENCY



Flemming Frandzen appeared on the scene with a Mooney Agency in the offing, but he didn't have a hangar to operate from so Michael struck a deal and they sold a Mooney Ovation to Pedro Machin, a Spaniard who had just learned to fly on a C172 so the indispensable editor instructor was commissioned to fly to the Canary Islands with Michael and Pedro to further his knowledge of handling this fast aircraft.

The Canary Islands are about 65 miles apart and Pedro at this stage was two islands behind the aircraft. The editor did a mornings training session at Ouessant, then flew over to Brest where they had a small strip especially for light aircraft with a full stop landing each time to teach the importance of a positive approach and landing technique well into the afternoon.

The next day we depart Ouessant direct to Seville where we rested for the night.

In the morning we flew on to Grand Canaria – El Berriel where Pedro had learned to fly.



The editor at El Berriel where he spent another two days of training with Pedro – this too was a short strip on the coast requiring a positive approach to land.

After a short period, Pedro sold the aircraft back to the Mooney agency

and the editor was dispatched to Gran Canaria to fly it back to Biggin Hill via Ouessant all in one day arriving at the island just as it was getting dark for a lovely meal cooked by the lighthouse keepers niece.

Michael by now was the owner of a Beech Baron 55 which he had on the island.

The early morning fog the next day was thick as we both departed with an interval of safety and climbed into the cloudy sky bound for Biggin Hill.

Pedro by now has decided that a twin engine aircraft would be better for him.

He came to the UK and did a short course at Bournemouth to get his twin rating and departed with Michael to El Berriel with a Beech Baron 55. Michael would check him out at El Berriel. Not so easy.



The editor / indispensable pilot is requested to fly immediately to Gran Canaria to rectify a positive checkout.



The runway at El Berriel is north/south about 20ft amsl at the threshold. To aim at this point is a little disconcerting with the rocky cliff so close, although the rocks are lower which creates an optical illusion. The actual threshold is flat to start with then becomes downhill, so one needs to be well established on the flat ground, otherwise braking becomes hard. It took a few days to get Pedro to

place the aircraft at the very beginning at the correct speed.

Michael with his Beech Baron 55, on the runway at Lile d' Ouessant, France during a photo shoot.



TILTING AT WINDMILLS

Tilting is jousting 'Tilting at windmills' derives from Cervantes' Don Quixote – first published in 1604 under the title *The ingenious Knight of Mancha*. The novel recounts the exploits of would be knight 'Don Quixote' and his loyal servant Sancho Panza who propose to fight injustice through chivalry. It is considered one of the major literary masterpieces.

"Take care, Sir" cried Sancho "Those over there are not giants, but windmills. Those things that seem to be their arms are sails which, when they are whirled around by the wind, turn the millstone.

It is hard to imagine that one could fly through a wind farm and only lose a couple of wingtips.

Now that is tilting.....!!!

COLD MARCH WINDS

Our weather has gone mad this year, bringing snow and ice so late in the year.

March is meant to be windy but pleasant, not like the polar regions.



Snow in Tatsfield.



An icy road at sunset in Kent.

A MUSICAL SALUTE

Reflective memories;



This picture will bring back many memories for those who helped in saving Britain in desperate times.

This musical evening on 17th August will have a huge stage at Biggin Hill with special effects of magnificent magnitude.

Make this a special date in your diary now you will be amazed at the stage performers, including the Central Band of the RAF.

JW will publish more precise details in his monthly newsletter.