



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005

CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS

BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT SOCIAL CLUB LTD

In Ass. with BigginHillReunited.co.uk

ISSUE No. 97

www.bigginhillclub.co.uk

1st MARCH 2013

G. DOBSON SCHOLARSHIP



Not only an Icon of Biggin Hill, George was a well liked and respected pilot / instructor.

In his remembrance, a fund was set up to promote a Flying Scholarship.

This came to fruition through the kind and generous donations of George's many friends, former students, colleagues, his older sister and family.

The presentation of the "George Dobson Memorial Scholarship" on the 15th November 2012 at the Cutlers Hall in London by GAPAN (The Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators) was one of about a dozen awards, making it all the more personal to have George's Scholarship presented.

The picture above, column 2-3 shows Megan Foley being presented with the "George Dobson Memorial Scholarship" by the GAPAN's Captain O.W. Epton. We are sure that George would have been pleased with this award.



"George's flying biography started, as with many of his youthful contemporaries of the time, in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. His log book records his first flight on 20 Sept 1943 on a Bristol Blenheim light bomber to begin a course in gunnery qualification at no.1 AGS Pembrey. The course was completed on an Anson a/c, with George's qualification as a gunner.

He was then assigned to 1764 HCU (Heavy Conversion Unit) where he qualified as flight engineer on Boeing B-17(C) aircraft on 19 Dec 1943.

(It's customarily thought that B-17's were exclusively flown by the American Eight Air Force from the UK, however early in the war a

number were passed to RAF Coastal Command for, it was believed, more suitable anti-submarine duty.)

George became operational with the B-17s of B flight, 220 Squadron with his first flight on 1 Feb 1944 as a Flight Engineer. Their duties often took them to the Azores where they flew convoy escort duties and anti-submarine patrols. He recorded 2 sorties where U boats were sighted and attacks were made, one attack with the U boat returning fire before it tried to submerge.

In March/April 1945 George was transferred to 521 Squadron (still flying the B17 Fortress). 521Sqd then converted to Halifax bombers with George converting to this a/c in Jan 1946. His last recorded RAF

flight was on the squadron's Halifax "Z" on 9 Mar 1946.

It's interesting that he never got near a Sunderland Flying Boat, at least not as a crew member. (This is what I believe most of RAF Coastal Command was flying, and on which I remember him telling me he flew.) I suppose it was in his character, as it seems to have been for many of his generation with war experience, to parcel out only snippets of information or, or none at all from those years or, in this case, a bit of a red herring.

I suppose it was with this same nature that he responded to a friend of his, after being asked over a number of years in what crew position he flew in the war, by finally remarking that he was a gunner. Which, on the face of it, was true, but not indicative of his actual role on the crew.

George was demobbed in Dec 1947 having logged over 900 hours as a Flight Engineer on heavy four engined Fortress and Halifax

George received a CAA rating as a licensed aircraft maintenance engineer on 22 Dec 1948. He began flying commercially on Bristol type 170 aircraft from the mid 1950's, then regularly on Vickers Vikings from August of that year as a flight engineer in training, with Airwork Ltd shown as his employer. He gained his full certification with CAA Flight Engineer certificate on 3 Feb 1951. Their routes at the time included Malta, Nice, Tripoli and Basle.

George's initial pilot training commenced on 5 Oct 1952 at Wright Aviation Ltd of Liverpool, with his first lesson in an Auster J1N flying from Liverpool Speke Airport, his boyhood home, along with the very appropriately named instructor pilot, Wright.

He continued his private pilot training with Universal Flying Services from Fairoaks Aerodrome in a 1939 DH82 (Tiger Moth) that same November. He gained his private pilot's licence at Fairoaks Aerodrome on 27 April 1953, having flown in both Auster and Magister single engine trainers.

He garnered further pilot qualifications from 1957 flying from Fairoaks, Exeter, and Roborough, logging more time in the De Havilland Tiger Moth bi-plane, Austers, and a DHC 1 Chipmunk of Exeter Aero Club Ltd.

By May 1958 he was instrument rated and, from April 1959, he was flying as a commercial pilot with flights from Blackbushe Airport, in Hampshire, and within Europe on Vickers Viking 1B, and Viking 1A aircraft some registered under Airwork Ltd, and some under Pegasus Airlines.

George flew Vickers Viscount 707's and Douglas DC6's with Cunard Eagle Airways Ltd in 1961-1963. He apparently had a stint of flying with Cunard Eagle (Bermuda) in the Caribbean in the summer of 1962, then was back to European flights including London and Innsbruck on Viscount 755's

Cunard Eagle then came back into full possession of its original owner, with a name change to British Eagle, in the latter part of 1963. With British Eagle, George was now beginning to fly a mix of Bristol 175 Britannia (series 312) aircraft from 1964 as well as the Viscount's. This led to more long haul routes, with George traveling between London and such places as Istanbul, Bombay, Singapore, Melbourne, Darwin, Colombo, Kuala Lumpur and New York, through 1966 and 1967. Before British Eagle ceased it's operations in Nov 1968, George had flown on

the last Bristol Britannia built, a series 324, registered as G-ARKB.

George continued to fly after the demise of British Eagle, now with Donaldson International on Britannia 317 series a/c with his last log book entries in April 1970.

Eventually George made his way to Biggin Hill where, from 1975, until a month before his death in Dec 2011, he had worked steadily as a simulator instructor, and a CAA certificated Radio-Telephony and HF radio examiner, first with Kingair Flying Club, which changed hands to become BHSF, and still later to become part of Cabair..



(George never missed a day reading the newspapers, adding to his vast political knowledge and in addition his laconic wit).

It's interesting to note, and very telling of the man himself, that George was still actively working at Cabair up until it ceased to function in November of 2011, a month before his own demise at the full age of 87.

It appears that George had become as permanent a fixture of the small Biggin Hill Airport community as is humanly possible, having worked there for those many years, and became part of the fabric. The outpouring of respect for him was

truly something to behold and his only surviving sibling, his older Sister, as well as nieces, nephews, and extended family, who were in attendance for his remembrance service at the RAF Biggin Hill chapel and following reception, could only marvel at the high regard in which so many people seemed to hold him. Both the chapel and the reception hall were filled to capacity.

George could often be found encouraging people of all ages to take up aviation, (apparently at least once while standing in a supermarket checkout queue).

For many years George enjoyed days out trips across the channel to France for a nice meal with a regular small circle of friends. He was well read, enjoyed history and politics and of course talking about aviation and aircraft. He'd never married and was absolutely content with his life and the many friends and colleagues he shared it with.

The George Dobson Memorial Scholarship, which was so generously gifted in large part by donations of George's friends, was awarded on 15 November, 2012 in the setting of the Cutler's Hall, London by the Guild for Pilots and Air Navigators (GAPAN). It was a fitting setting in this centuries old ornate building that is the ancestral heart of excellence in the British cutlery trade. Megan Foley, the young lady who was chosen to receive the scholarship to help provide her the means towards her private pilot's licence seemed more than capable of attaining the flying excellence intoned in this scholarship.

We, George's sister, nieces, nephews and extended family, wish to thank everyone who had a part in this, and we were most impressed by the GAPAN presentation ceremony, wonderful buffet meal, and inspired

conversations with the scholarship winners and GAPAN members."



L-R: Bob & Ann Ponchas (George's Niece) Megan Foley, Elizabeth Dobson, Cpt O.W. Epton

Below: is a copy of a letter written to Liz (George's Sister) from GAPAN office.

Dear Liz

Just to let you know, we've given authorisation today for Megan Foley to commence training at Prestwick Flight Centre as the award winner of the George Dobson Memorial Scholarship 2012.

Megan is an absolutely delightful girl from Epsom Downs, who is currently studying Geography at St Andrews University, Fife. She works hard at a bakery in St Andrews to help fund her time at university and since 2009 has been a VRT officer with the East of Scotland Universities Air Squadron based at RAF Leuchars, in university holidays she has raised funds for herself working as a chef. This year, however, she is remaining in Scotland during the summer to complete her flying training.

She joined the Air Cadets at 13 and attained the rank of Cadet Warrant Officer before going on to University.

We especially like Megan for her long term aims - she intends to be a flight instructor and a Geographical Survey Pilot; slightly more quirky

than the "I want to be an airline pilot" which is the usual clarion call. She is a natural teacher - and holds international ski teaching accreditation and has taught in both Canada and New Zealand.

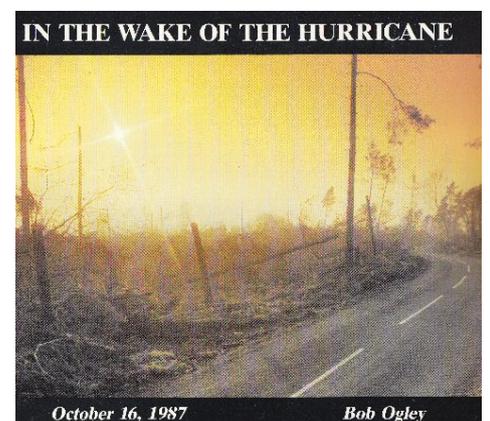
We thought that as it is her stated ambition to give something back to Flying and pass on her skills from the very start of her aviation career that she may well be someone, your Uncle could have related to. I hope he would have approved; and very much hope that you and all the people who contributed to this scholarship in memory of George Dobson will not only approve, but will have the chance to meet Megan at some stage in her flying care

The Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators

THE HURRICANE OF 1987



This was a night to remember for those of us who were caught out and wide awake literally, leaning on the wind.



The above booklet published by Bob Ogley is still available and worth buying. The cover shows the Seal road, previously a tunnel of trees.

It was 15th October 1987 and David Isaac and myself (JB editor) were flying from Biggin Hill to Cadwell Park and then onto Snetterton Motor Race Circuits (owned by Brands Hatch) on business.

It was a nice day with excellent visibility and smooth flying conditions.

We left Snetterton late afternoon and headed back to Biggin Hill and found the weather conditions were deteriorating the closer we got.

Not to worry, we diverted to Southend to wait for conditions to improve, which would surely come.

Prior to leaving Biggin Hill that morning I had paid 'Big' Ray (my personal car mechanic) £30 which left me with £5 and a FF100 note. David had given his wife £30 and he had a £10 note in his pocket – so now we are at Southend Airport waiting for an improvement in the weather, which by now had developed into heavy drizzle - **but no wind** – with our meagre finances we bought a light meal, spending every cent we had, which was not a problem, as we would be back at Biggin by airfield closing time of 21.00 hrs.

We telephoned Biggin to find that conditions had deteriorated further with conditions at Southend no better - **but, still no wind** - just drizzle..!

Whilst in the tower at Southend we studied the weather chart which showed 4 depressions, one North of Italy, one over France, one over the UK and the other over the North of Holland – which looked quite normal for this part of the world, we thought no more of it.

Decision time – armed only with credit cards (and FF100) we head for a Hotel owned by the Roue brothers adjacent to the airport.

We have a bottle of wine as a night cap and retire for the night.

I decide to watch TV for a while and fell asleep shortly after.

I was awoken around midnight by a howling noise. Peering through the curtains I observe a small tree straining against the wind, but thought no more of it, just a bit windy, (Bearing in mind that I am behind double glazed windows, and the sound outside is somewhat muffled).

30 minutes later I was now aroused by a roaring sound and looking out the window again I see the small tree is now flat on the ground and the paling fence also is on the ground.

Time to telephone Southend airport as I had left the aircraft (Aztec) parked on the end of a line of aircraft on the disused 33/15 runway without any chocks as weather conditions were such as not to expect any deterioration for the evening.

The Controller was in a bit of a panic, stating that six aircraft were upside down, and it was awful, could I please phone back ?

I enquired as to our aircraft explaining where I had left it – he assured me it was quite safe as it was well away from the other aircraft, a little puzzled I hung up and settled down in front of the TV once more.

The time now is about 01.15hrs on the 16th October.

01.50hrs – the noise outside has increased and is quite audible as a roaring noise through the double glazing.

I call the airport again and enquire as to the present conditions. “TERRIBLE, terrible” replies the controller, really terrible, the wind is blowing at 84 knots.

I ask him, shall I come to the airport? He replies, I think you should Sir.!

With that I went downstairs and ordered a taxi, which duly arrived – I could not believe the strength of the wind outside, fallen trees littered the road to the airport.

Arriving at the airport I proffered my FF100 note to the taxi driver for the fare – which the driver wouldn't accept at first, until I explained that it was worth twice the amount he was asking, all he had to do was go to the bank later on and in return he would get £10. He begrudgingly drove away. This was an emergency !

Entering the terminal building I was confronted by utter chaos – ceiling tiles all over the floor whilst others were fluttering down like huge butterflies in a stiff breeze which was blowing inside, and all the doors forced open by the changing pressures.

I immediately went out to the apron to how our aircraft was fairing under the conditions.



The wind outside on the open apron was something else, it was blowing at a steady 84 knots and you had to lean about 45 degrees into the wind, to prevent being blown over which made walking quite hazardous, combined with sheets of corrugated roofing iron flying from the buildings..!

However our aircraft had weather cocked and dragged backwards down runway 33 against the brakes.

We managed to find some more chocks and secured it where it was, well away from other aircraft.

There were several Cessna 152 aircraft which were weighed down by 12 x 5 gallon cans of water per aircraft (about 600lb) and every now and then a sudden gust would give each one enough flying speed to become airborne to about 8-10 ft and as the gust passed each would

stall completely and crash to the ground with a resounding thud.

I then bumped into Steve Hayman whom I knew from Dubai, he too had become stranded for the night. We began to organise all the aircraft on the apron and turn them into wind making sure they were as safe as could be.

It was then that some bloke came along in a blind panic – it seems that he had parked his Volvo car in a hangar on the otherside of the airfield, which by now had no roof at all, and to add insult to injury his car was now underneath an aircraft within.

He wanted help to get his car out – he was told in no uncertain terms where to go..!

The only aircraft we could not move was a HS748 of which no one knew anything about it – so it was left as it was out of wind.

The control surface were crashing and banging and this continued throughout the night. After the height of the storm, these control surfaces were now making awful graunching and crunching noises.

Around 04.30 hrs the wind at Southend reached an incredible 104 knots and the noise was horrendous.

I was standing against the chain link fence (with a concrete post at my back) which surrounded the base of the control tower to prevent being hit by big lumps of wood that were being blown around the corner. Surprising, how any old piece of wood can fly, given enough energy.

Whilst standing here, there was a Boeing 737 in front of me 90 deg out of wind – the wheels were chocked with steel chocks and sand bags – without warning this aircraft weather cocked into wind flattening the chocks and its nose is about 4 feet from my nose – what a surprise..!

There followed some excited shouting from those exposed to

these outdoor elements. Don't get underneath it, leave it...!!

During the night we had all been watching the previous low pressure systems described earlier, the French Meteorology Services were the only ones who saw what was going to happen, whilst the UK officers ignored the warnings.

Remember Michael Fish of TV meteorological fame who said nothing would happen...!!

05.30hrs the Control Tower Electrical Circuit Board caught fire. The Fire Brigade arrived within seconds and put a hose through the window, and that was that, fire extinguished.

With that I walked to the other end of the main concourse to have a coffee with some other friends.

About 06.30hrs I was returning toward the tower and met another friend heading back the other way saying their roof had just been blown off and they were now homeless, so to speak.

Meanwhile the HS748 with its crunching controls was still making some awful noises, whilst the wind was still blowing at 85 knots. It was now beginning to get light.

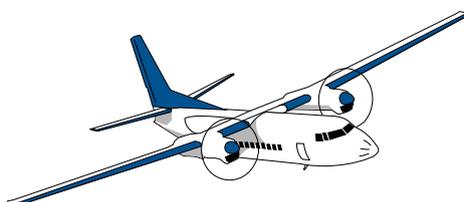
07.00hrs my colleague David Isaac arrived – when I left the hotel in the early hours I had merely left a message at the desk to say where I had gone.

He had slept through the whole event and knew nothing until he went down for breakfast.

When he arrived, I said to him, "Shall we go?"

He replied "what, and be the first back"?

By now there was no electricity at the airport, so we sat and waited.



About 08.00hrs the crew from the HS748 arrived in their smart uniforms, apparently oblivious to the events which had occurred during the night. They missed the magnificent fire work display on the railway line nearby as the sheets of corrugated iron were shorting out on the overhead power cables – we were now looking for a display of flying skills.....!!

No one, but no one mentioned the crashing/crunching control surfaces as they boarded the aircraft, shutting the door behind them.

They started up, taxied out and took off. We often wondered what happened to that aircraft on its next inspection.

A short while later, a single pilot arrived, climbed into the Boeing 737, started the engines, straightened the nose wheel, and he too taxied out and took off, and went low level to Gatwick.

With that I turned to my colleague David and said, "We won't be the first back now," to which he agreed and we too departed.

The wind was still 55 knots!

David lived in Sittingbourne and was concerned about a 300 year old barn on his property – it had miraculously survived the storm, but some schools and other buildings had their rooves strewn over the fields nearby, we then flew back toward Brands Hatch to see what damage had been done there. Up till now we hadn't noticed any trees being blown down, because everything was so green.

It was only on short finals to runway 29 at Biggin Hill that we noticed round holes in the ground ahead of us. They were where the trees once stood.

Arriving back at the hangar, David Isaac hastily gets in his car and departs. A few moments later he returns, "why have you come back" we ask? 'The road is full of trees'.



The previous year we had deep snow which came up to the top of the street lamps, now we have trees filling the roads.

We decided to go flying again, and have a good look around, as we are now more aware of the trees that have been blown down.

The devastation from above was widespread.

Ashdown Forest was completely flattened, Toys Hill and the area around Seal was devoid of trees. This road through Seal up to this moment in time, had been covered by a huge canopy of trees.

The storm had taken a track from Bognor Regis - Shoreham Airport where 21 aircraft were over turned. Wisley, toward Ashdown Forest - Sevenoaks (Knowle Park) - Biggin Hill - then along the North Downs to Challock and then toward Southend Airport, flattening all the trees in its wake.

Many roads in Kent were blocked by fallen trees. Electricity cables were down and many places were without electricity – I personally had no electricity for 9 days and no telephone.

Fortunately the hangar was unaffected so I was able to take a shower daily.

Air Touring Services of Biggin Hill had several aircraft damaged and blown over despite being tied down to the concrete – whilst Gary Duncans 152 was not tied down, but had the brakes firmly on, it only moved 12 inches, amazing..!!

During the night Gary tried to get to the airfield, but had to turn back for fear of being crushed by falling trees. He would eventually get to the airfield about midday to find his G-BNAJ undamaged whilst all around it were flattened.



L-R: Mark Palmer, Richard Chippendale, Gary Duncan and Mich Parsons (Matt Munro's son) who sadly died young.



These aircraft were all firmly tied down ending up in formation upside down.



G-BNXX TB20 which the editor had flown from Tarbes on the 14th October, had a lump of concrete blown from the roof of the club house which went straight through the fuel tank.



Imagine if a plane could talk...! Picture column 2.

I will come back and fill up when I'm feeling better..!!!

The 17th (the day after the storm) we flew from Brands Hatch to Snetterton to view the damage to the Pit Lane Garages and some of the caravans which belonged to some of the Race Marshalls



One unfortunate Marshal was sleeping peacefully and woke up outside on the grass in the middle of a severe gale without a home and his belongings scattered to the wind. Several caravans were wrecked beyond description, being rolled over and over.

AFRICA CALLS AGAIN

With the onset of winter in the UK and a request to ferry an aircraft from Lanseria to Germany after Christmas gives me enough time to enjoy a few weeks holiday in the sunshine of Africa before Xmas and the New Year with my friends. We venture down to Harrismith to visit relations for Christmas.

HARRISMITH RSA (1987)

Reaching the suburbs one is impressed by the wide tree lined streets, the centre was even better.



No parking problems here...!

Everyones back yard has a wonderful view of the rugged surroundings.



The country around Harrismith is unique and beautiful, all in one. Returning to Jo'Burg for the new year for another week before heading north again.

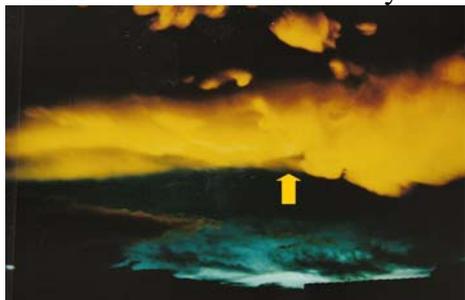
JOHANNESBURG WEATHER

The weather at Jo'burg is often subject to instant storms which can be just down the road and nowhere else. (January 1988)

One afternoon around 15.30 this fluffy white cloud developed near a place called Florida (note the hill).



Take note of the spot arrowed which was about 6 miles away.



From this apparently harmless Cumulous cloud within 10 minutes had developed into a very cold

Mamutus cloud formation with the temperature dropping rapidly as the cold air mass sank rapidly



It is now 20 minutes and this cloud had become a very dense wedge of air mass. It went quite dark from our observation point, whilst behind us was a clear blue sky.

Johannesburg can be seen to the extreme left 10 miles away remained clear of the ensuing storm.



Our vantage point was spectacular, a little bit scary as you could feel the electricity in the air which made your hair stand on end.

As suddenly as this local storm developed, it totally dissipated, reverting back to a lovely blue sky. Total storm time 25 minutes.

LANSERIA TO GERMANY

10th January 88 I depart Lanseria with a Beechcraft BA35.



Waiting to refuel at the Bujumbura Flying Club (Burindi) before departing for Agadez in Niger.



Early morning sunrise climbing out of Agadez for Ghardaia in Algiers.



The hotels here are State owned and the staff, poorly paid.

No sooner had I settled into my room than the man on reception was knocking at my door wanting money for his sick mother.

Not only did I ask him to go away, he had the audacity to confront me again whilst having dinner which annoyed me and I got very angry. Only then, did he go away.

The rest of the flight was uneventful, and was the only time I ever experienced a total tailwind all the way to destination, averaging 192 knots ground speed.

ROGER'S MEMORIAL



A large contingent from Biggin Hill attended this service held at Warrington on the 8th February. Also just announced a mini reunion at the Crown on 3rd March 2pm.