



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS

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## THE APRIL SNOW SHOWERS

A little late in the year, but the



Hurricane gate guardian (seen covered in snow) appears to levitate above the ground outside the RAF St Georges Remembrance Chapel at Biggin Hill Airfield. **Below**, another rural country snow scene, not too far from Biggin Hill. Our roving photographer captured these recent scenes for this Bugle edition.



## A REAL ONE LINER CLASSIC

Following the recent aircraft accident at Farnborough village an Aviation journalist says, *"These newer aircraft are very clean and have efficient engines. Most of the noise around Biggin Hill will be from flying clubs"*. Is he for real, or is he just another wayward aviation expert. *(Journalist's name with held thereby saving further embarrassment, as we all roll around with laughter)* Perhaps he was drawing on his vague memory of some raucous evenings that used to take place in the flying club bars in years gone by. None of which

created any outside disturbance, other than very fond memories of those early pioneering days within the Biggin Hill airfield perimeter, with the noise being further stifled by the heaving mass of bodies that were compressed within the confines of a very crowded bar.

## WORK ON NEW HANGARS

Following the demolition of the Old Biggin Hill Flying Club building, and the closure of the Pilots Pals Bar, the 'last watering hole' on the airfield. Work has



begun on the two new hangars after almost a year. These hangars will change the perspective of the



airfield, and the wonderful view from this unique position will be gone forever. Let alone a great area for sunbathing during the summer, whilst sipping a nice cool pint with the background noise of the occasional aircraft.

## CLOSURE OF SHOREHAM

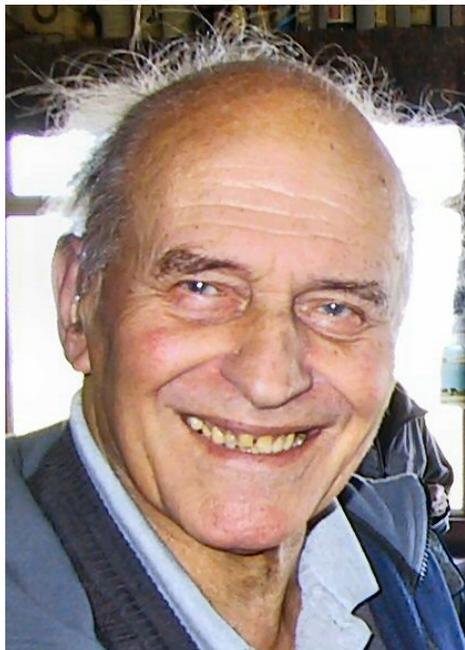
Shoreham airfield closed suddenly

on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2008 as the management group Erinaceous went into administration. **However the plight of the airfield was rescued the next day** by Albermarle Shoreham Airport Limited, which bought out the Erinaceous Group saying it was committed to regenerating the airfield. This firm already owns the commercial buildings at Shoreham, and this acquisition will reunite the airfield into a single control. It would have been a disaster to lose this magnificent old airport along with its Grade II listed Terminal Building built in 1935. These buildings were far better than anything Heathrow Terminal 5 could offer. The passengers entered the building, walked to the check in counter, their luggage was put on a trolley. The airport admin offices were situated upstairs, and there was a small tea room. The aircraft was prepared and you were airborne to Deauville, Calais, or Paris.



These were the glory days of airline travel, all contained within a simple efficient building. Fair Oaks airfield was also run by the Erinaceous group and suffered a similar fate. Although appears to be still operating.

## AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



Rex Nicholls claims to have been the first person to have landed at Biggin Hill on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1959 flying a Miles Hawk Trainer III (G-AKAS), following the closure of Croydon Airport. There were of course many others that followed, including the late Bill Webb in a DH Heron of Morton Air Services. Rex has remained at Biggin Hill for the past 49 years. Rex learned to fly with the late Jean Bird, a former ATA pilot in 1950, at Redhill Aerodrome. Other people were interested in learning to fly, hence the formation of the Experimental Flying Group, in which people could learn to fly without payment. It is a long story, so we will leave it there. The RAF Volunteer Reserve which occupied the site at Redhill at that time sold it off. The group (EFG) would move to Croydon. Without premises, they continued to operate, using the then Ministry of Aviation facilities, such as their briefing room, and other areas within their premises at Croydon Airport to the annoyance of the SATCO at that time. Having established his place at Biggin Hill, Rex would become an Instructor's Instructor as well as the CFI of EFG, a post he would hold until 1985. Aviation, being in its infancy in those days, was somewhat of a

unique dynasty.

If one had the necessary experience it was a formality to apply for a particular Rating to the Ministry of Aviation and it would be formally granted. Nonetheless, Rex would become a *'Top of the Tree' Instructor*, with a flying career spanning 57 years, and of course he was a PPL Examiner, granting many students their license and a career in aviation, or just the freedom to fly. Rex would continue in this role until an untimely accident to his leg whilst gardening in the year 2001 precluded his flying future. During his 57 years of flying, Rex amassed some 16,000 hours of flying, and probably instructed as many students. A highlight of his time at Biggin Hill would be as a member of the Kings Cup Air Race team in 1966 with Surrey and Kent Flying Club, which entered two DH Chipmunks. The pilots would be Rex Nicholls and John Miles (of 600 Squadron), who won the race in G-APTS, returning to Biggin Hill with the trophy. Rex has a very retentive memory and is able to quote many wonderful aviation stories. EFG also operated a Rollason Condor from 1967 – 1970 in which Rex flew to Benson in '67 to enable the Duke of Edinburgh to have some familiarization flying on the type. This aircraft was also flown in the Nationals by Rex at Tollerton August 1968, and in the Goodyear Trophy at Halfpenny Green in September 1968. Rex married Janet in 1972, they have 4 children, plus two grandchildren. *(Janet of course was a pilot, starting her flying career at the age of 15 when she joined the Womens Junior Air Corps –which later became the Girls Venture Corps Air Wing, and built up many hours flying experience, firstly at Croydon and then at Biggin Hill with EFG. After being awarded a flying scholarship in 1967, she gained her PPL (trained by Rex) flying Condors and Austers. Rex*

celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2007 at the 'Pilots Pals Bar,' Biggin Hill. This secret tumultuous event would be the culmination of his aviation prowess, arranged by his wife Janet and a few other unscrupulous aviation types sworn to total secrecy, even down to *hiding his shoes*, so that he couldn't go out unannounced and spoil the surprise party. In all 80 plus people attended this grand occasion with many bringing photographic memories of their flying activities over the years, most of which had some connection with Rex who had obviously played a major role in their flying career. Rex is still a regular visitor to Biggin Hill, maintaining his life-long interest in aviation. Finally, Rex would teach his eldest son Ivor to fly, who gained his PPL in 1991, ensuring the name of Nicholls would live on in aviation for many years to come.

### U.K. BUTTERFLY DECLINE

Following our butterfly report in the March issue of the Bugle, this year (2008) has become the worst for a quarter of a century for the breeding season of the British butterfly. Certain species are facing extinction because butterflies require relatively warm dry weather to survive their very fragile transformation of life. Butterflies are extremely sensitive to the environment on which they depend. Thereby, acting as an excellent indicator, to the health of the countryside.

### STANDY-FOR BARREL ROLL



Whilst the forthcoming Air Show 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> June 2008 will be spectacular can you imagine a Barrel Roll with this formation.