

Hi everyone

Welcome to the September newsletter.

The September edition of the "Bugle" from JB is now available on the web site at <http://www.pilotspals.co.uk>

Just click on the Newsletter link on the home page as normal...

In the light of the closure of the bar at Biggin (see below), JB and I have discussed the future of the Bugle, and it has been decided that, with some modification to reflect the more general airport nature (rather than related only to the Bar) it will continue to be produced each month, and that I will maintain the current Pilots Pals web site, including publishing JB's Bugle on that site each month. JB will obviously change the focus of the Bugle to reflect the more general airport nature of the magazine, and would seek any help from airport staff and users to provide items of interest for inclusion. The tone and style of the items will obviously change as well, in order to reflect the more general airport nature of the newsletter.

On the same subject, clearly it is even more important that I maintain the Biggin Hill Airport Users Database and communicate with everyone regularly, less the airport community dies with the closure of the bar. I will therefore continue the email database of course, and send out these Newsletters. If you change your email address, please let me know on john@bigginhillreunited.co.uk

Similarly, if you know anyone who is a past or present Biggin Hill Airport user and who does not receive newsletters from us, please either send their name and email plus the organisation they are/were associated with, to the same email address, or get them to do so directly. I have a number of previous database members whose email addresses send back "bounced - unavailable" reports, so please do check with friends and colleagues that they have updated us and they are still getting messages from us.

Many of the older Biggin Hill'ites amongst you will remember Chris De Vere - he had an Aero Commander at Bill Webb's and Bernie Fell's hangar that was being rebuilt for many years - Graham Jackson did a test flight on it subsequently, only to be overtaken on take-off by one of the aircraft's mainwheels, which parted company with the aircraft just after he lifted off!!!! His son, Chris Jnr, is a member of this Users Database, and sent me the following link, which I am sure may interest members, particularly those who were also at Croydon Airport before the move to Biggin Hill when it was closed. It may bring back a few memories for some of you:

http://www.geoffbeckett.com/website%20pages_files/Page998.htm

By the time you read this, the current Airport Bar - Pilots Pals Club - will have

closed for good. Joe Merchant, who departs these shores on the 4th for Spain, will have left the airport, and that era will have ended. Joe has made arrangements for your membership cards to enable you to use the Biggin Hill Squash Club in Jail lane at no cost to you until the end of the year (see the item below)

Now is the time for a new era - and it is up to all of us to try to persuade the Airport Authority to allow us suitable flight line premises at a manageable rent to enable a new club to be formed and run for the airport users benefit. We all appreciate that Biggin Hill Airport is changing - nothing stands still or it will certainly fail. Jet traffic is on the increase, and it is clearly important for Biggin Hill to move with the times in order to survive. But, having said that, with the exception perhaps of Heathrow and Gatwick (and possibly the odd other airport in the UK) virtually every airport has a "Private Members Club" where airport workers, supporters, and pilots, can drink and socialise together. In the main, such people are not simply seeking a place to have a drink, but more to meet like minded people and talk about their favourite topic - aviation - outside the hearing of members of the public. Hotels and their bars of course have a place, and we will all use such drinking establishments from time to time, but they do not, and never will, replace the Private Members Club environment.

It is also very important for there to be that social focus point in these times of major expansion - new airport staff moving into the area really do need to have such focal points where they can meet new colleagues and enable them to more rapidly integrate into the airport's community. This must surely be a major factor when airport organisations are recruiting, as it is difficult for people to find their feet if there is no means of meeting those similarly involved.

We all appreciate that the airport management may have had differences of opinion with the Pilots Pals Club, but their 570 members themselves did nothing to offend the airport and surely deserve to be considered when planning any developments at Biggin Hill. (we are all aware that there were large numbers of people that were unable or even unwilling to use the Pilots Pals Club for one reason or another, and one would hope that past differences would now be put aside and that they would return to a suitable social club were one to exist under different arrangements and management. If that were the case, I feel certain that membership of a new club would almost certainly increase and strengthen). It is also a good breeding ground for airport supporters to counter local area opposition, given the right environment.

So, whilst I appreciate the airport managements concerns must be to make money - that is, after all, why they are in the business - but if they read this, I would beg them to consider both the history of the airport and airport people, and their need for a focal point where they can relax in similar company. If the airport feels they cannot allow an outside organisation to run such a club, then perhaps they could give consideration to working with the Committee and members of the club that is no more, to run such a focal point for the

airport, possibly offering some form of suitable franchise arrangement to us to manage it on their behalf? Perhaps such a club would be suitably integrated into the airport's planned "Visitor Centre" area?

Where do we meet now?

With the closure of the bar, we all need somewhere that we can go to drink and meet airport friends and colleagues. There is, unfortunately, nowhere currently on the airport where we can do this.

As a result of Joe's financial arrangements with them, we have been invited to use the facilities of the Biggin Hill Squash Club that is located in Jail Lane, immediately opposite the Charles Darwin School entrance. I appreciate that this will not give us the lovely views of the airport that we are used to, but there is a large car park, and the bar is large (there are two areas actually) - and two snooker tables plus a pool table, darts, table tennis, as well as squash courts. They have confirmed that anyone holding a Pilots Pals Club Membership card will be able to use the Squash Club bar until their membership expires on 31st december. Accompanied children are welcome, but obviously may not sit at the bar itself - OK within the bar area though - nor may they play at the snooker tables, although they are permitted to play on the pool table. Pilots Pals Club members must carry their Pilots Pals photo membership card (which we may have to show until we are recognised by the club's staff), and should sign the visitors book on arrival, but there will be no charge to use the bar.

JB and I have been to the club and looked around - it seems to us an excellent location for us all to meet up when we want a drink or to spend time with our friends. Not only are the facilities there significantly better than we are used to, but there is a full kitchen that serves meals every lunchtime and evening. The food ranges from sandwiches through to steaks, and there are daily specials - all at very attractive prices. The staff there we met were exceptionally friendly and expressed what appeared to be genuine interest in welcoming the Pilots Pals Club members into their midst. JB and I have decided that, in the absence of anything on the airport, we will certainly make use of the club facilities, and hope that it will become the regular haunt of our many members until hopefully suitable facilities are available at the airport to replace our old club.

It may not be ideal in terms of location, but it will at least give members somewhere locally where they can drink, that is not a "pub" with the associated problems that seem to occur in pubs nowadays, and where they MAY find other airport people. We are grateful to Kim at the club for allowing us this facility, and hope that you will all make use of it while it is available and until we can regroup elsewhere.

Special Pilots Club evening

To help to introduce members to the Squash Club, there will be a get together on Friday 7th September 2007 between 19:30 and 21:00 - all Pilots

Pals Club members are welcome (bring your membership cards to prove eligibility) - and there will be sandwiches and snacks to welcome you to their club.

Directions

You can find the club by leaving the airport at the club exit, turning left at the roundabout - then turn first left into Jail lane. Follow Jail Lane until past the second right (Old Tye Avenue) - 150 yards further there is a traffic island just before the Charles Darwin School entrance (which is on the left) - approaching the traffic island indicate right, and make the right turn into the Squash Club just after the traffic island but BEFORE the entrance to the metal works. There is lots of car parking space at the rear, and the club entrance is at the back of the building too.

JB and I hope to see many of you there....

Members should feel free to use the club at any time - please do not feel that you need to wait until the special evening on the 7th - you will be made most welcome - just be prepared to show your Pilots Pals membership card if asked.

that's it for this month

John Willis
Biggin Hill Airport Users Database