

Hi to all members of the Biggin Hill Airport Database.

Apologies for the long delay since sending the last Newsletter, but after the fiasco where someone was clearly impersonating me with database messages, I felt it would be better initially to stop all future newsletters. However, as has been pointed out to me, I shouldn't let an irresponsible idiot stop the database that has apparently been welcomed by so many over several years. So - here we go - and this is really coming from me (not someone pretending to be me!).....

Two sad passings to make you aware of:

The first, which happened some weeks back, was the death of another one of Biggin Hill's old faces - Brian Bennett - formerly from EFG - that's the original Experimental Flying Group (The one from Redhill, Croydon, and subsequently Biggin Hill).

Brian was around in those heady old days at EFG in the early 60's when I was a very young lad, scrounging flights, before being old enough to start learning to fly! Brian was always a smart and well spoken chap (often with an attractive young female on his arm). I personally last saw him at the funeral of the late Peter Elliott when we all got together after the service at Croydon Airport in the old Control Tower building. Not known to many current airport users, Brian was always a friendly and active member of that early community at the airport, and he will be missed by many of the real old Biggin Hill'ites.

The second, which came to me via Bob Needham in Australia just a week or so ago, is the announcement of the death of Roger Hardy, another name from the 60's that some will remember.

Bob says: "You may remember that he (Roger) was a member of the Biggin Hill Flying Club in the 60s and used to fly the Tiger G ANKB and the Auster G AMTD. I (Bob) introduced him to flying as we were actually old sailing buddies before that. You may also remember that he sported a beard (who didn't in those days?) and used to drive around in a vintage Black Label Bentley (called the Beast) and also a vintage motor cycle."

Bob apparently re-made contact with Roger relatively recently, after 38 years, only to find that Roger had pancreatic cancer and had just six months to live. Bob was in contact with him only a month ago before Roger went on a trip to Ireland.

So two more old names leave us for that great resting place in the sky.....

Joe Merchant

For many of you who have asked, Joe merchant is now settled into his new home in Spain, and is enjoying life out there in the sun. I spoke to him on the

phone in mid-October, and he was very happy there and, although obviously missing his many friends from Biggin Hill, said he certainly never expected to come back to the UK and our naff climate. He is currently not on email, but once he is, I will let you know so those of you that want to remain in touch can do so. Good luck Joe - have fun.

#### The Old Pilots Pals Club

As a result of the problems mentioned above, JB and I, who have effectively been financing things (the web site, and the Newsletters and database) for some time, had finally had enough of the attitude of just a few members of the old Pilots Pals Club. No reflection on Joe, but the only reason we carried on trying to support it was to keep Joe's old club name alive. So finally, on the 2nd November, we decided "enough was enough" and discontinued both the club website and the Bugle, which many of you have asked about. This also meant of course that any future negotiations to try to gain access to premises at the airport would cease, as no club would exist to make that move.

Unfortunately many good people have had to suffer because of just one idiot and a few supporters, but that is, of course, the way of the world, and is probably what that individual set out to achieve anyway. Nevertheless, several old members have been applying friendly pressure on JB and I to try to resurrect something and try to keep the old spirit of the club alive in some way, and to try to get new airport premises for them. They say, I guess quite rightly, that throwing in the towel is not in the best interests of the "real" Biggin Hill'ites, who had actually done nothing wrong and, in the main, felt the same as we did about the actions of just a small minority.

I should perhaps explain that, prior to the problems, JB and I had already formed a Limited Company called "Biggin Hill Airport Social Club Ltd" - ready for moving forward into the new year. That was set up to give us the vehicle that can be used in the future to bring in finance for a new club at the airport, and for others (like, for example, Jill Minter and Gary Merchant) to come on board to help run things. The original concessions that I negotiated for the old club have, with one exception (The Grasshopper), agreed to renew for 2008 if we should go ahead, meaning that the restaurants, garages, hairdressers, and also free Air Show entry (only for airport based people!), which was initially resisted very heavily by ADI, would still be available for airport related members (including families, if that category of membership was taken up) if we restart in the new name.

To avoid the problems experienced before, membership would of course be by a very strictly controlled "invitation only" - proposing and seconding, plus management vetting (Clearly those responsible for the past problems would not be amongst those considered suitable for membership!) But otherwise current members, members of other airport clubs, and employees of airport based firms, would be eligible for membership (Although it is considered only fair that this should include the non-airport people who have continued to support the old Pilots Pals club through thick and thin, no new "off airport

people" would be acceptable - there would, however, be a restriction on such members access at the air fair, which has been forced upon us for the better good of the rest).

As an aside, whilst we realise that some airport people would prefer to use some of the local pubs (which we do understand, of course) and this may not be relevant to you personally, the Biggin Hill Squash Club has agreed to allow the new club's members (if we go ahead) to continue to use their facilities under a new bulk membership arrangement, thus avoiding the need for any of the new club members to join that club separately.

But, more importantly, if we do restart the club for 2008 and onwards, even on this limited basis, we are still able to continue the negotiations that have been ongoing with the airport for new premises there in the future. If the club does not continue to exist even in this new form, then it becomes extremely difficult to keep the negotiations going, and therefore the likelihood of ever gaining future access to new airport premises becomes less likely.

Contrary to popular opinion, JB and I do not actually want to own or run a club, but it seems, unless we continue to take the initiative no one else does anything. In that event everything we have always known at the airport, from a social point of view, is very likely to cease and everyone will drift apart. If we allow that to occur, then the idiots will have won, and I for one would not like that to happen. But it is really down to you all.

Please let us know what you would like us to do. Shall we let it all go, or should we try to keep some semblance of a club running so we can keep endeavouring to get new premises up there where we can all eventually meet again socially.

It would be our intention, if we are able to do so, to have the club run exclusively for the benefit of its members, from a financial point of view. JB and I are not seeking to earn from this in any way (just not to be out of pocket)! Any membership fees would be retained within the club to meet club costs only, and to build up a fighting fund. Clearly though, it would be important that any future investors have an opportunity to earn from their financial investment, so any future club would have to be run on a profit making basis to facilitate that.

If we are able to restart a new "Club", albeit currently with no airport premises, would you want it, and would you support it (assuming the membership fee remained as last year until premises can be obtained on the airport). Is it worth you paying £10 per year each (or the £15 couple/ £20 family rate as applicable) to have:

- a) the use of the Squash Club until premises can be obtained at the airport (this could well take some time, of course)
- b) restaurant and local services concessions against the photo ID card that would form a part of the new membership
- c) free air fair entry (airport users and families only - not for non-airport old members who decide to support the club on an ongoing basis)

d) Club events from time to time to use up any surplus funds generated from the membership fees, if they are not required to go towards acquisition of premises at the airport or for any form of fighting fund.

It is over to you and for obvious reasons we need to know urgently - if enough people want us to try to keep something going and keep pushing at the airport for premises, then we will do so. If not then it will probably all just fade into history.....

regards

John Willis (and JB)

For the Biggin Hill Airport Users Database