

Porthcawl Roundel News

The Newsletter for Spitfire Society members and friends of the Porthcawl Roundel.



Editor: Ray Burgess
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Introduction

Well it's the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness again and soon Christmas Bells will ring in our ears.

At the AGM in May there were changes to the management team. Len Dickson retired as chairman and was replaced by David Evans. Alan retired as Secretary and is now involved more with Spitfire Enterprises. Ray Burgess and Paul Plummer were elected Vice chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively. Chris Brice continues to look after the Leonard Stillwell Bursary.

Flying the Flag for the Spitfire Society

Alan Cohen

Spitfire Enterprises Ltd has been out and about this summer flying the flag for the Society and raising significant funds by selling the range of memorabilia now stocked under its banner. The team of John and Kath Whatmore, aided by their grandson Ben, and also Alan Cohen, manned the Society's marquee at three important and successful events.

On Whitsun weekend we spent two days at the Abergavenny Steam Fair and were supported by members of the newly formed Abergavenny Roundel in setting up and striking the marquee. Sales returns were very reasonable and we will be there again next year with more ideas to attract purchasing.



Abergavenny

Mid July-11 saw the marquee again at the Swansea Air show supported by members of the Porthcawl Roundel whose assistance in setting up and striking was greatly appreciated.



Swansea Show

It was a very successful event, very well attended, and with significant sales returns. Our aim is to be there next time

in this biennial event. We are already planning for 2013!

As an after-event following Swansea Alan Cohen was approached by BBC Radio Wales and invited to be interviewed by Roy Noble to talk about the Spitfire and the Spitfire Society. The interview went out just after 3 pm on Tuesday August 2nd.

Then in August we were helping celebrate RAF Harrowbeer's 70th Anniversary event at Yelverton. This was the culmination of many hours of planning on the part of Mike and Lucy Hayes as well as their son Francis. A very well deserved thank you to Mike for his unbounded enthusiasm to stage this "one off" event. His reward was the huge crowds which attended on both days and our sales were not only brisk but very successful. Thanks go to members of the South Devon Roundel for their assistance in setting up and striking the Society's marquee.

During the second day Alan Cohen was interviewed by Plymouth Hospitals Radio to talk about the Spitfire Society and of course the Spitfire.

The planning has already started for next years' events and trying to select which ones to attend. The flags will continue to fly on our marquee for the Spitfire and our Society.

Three Spitfires Down

Philippa Hodgkiss

Most passers by asked to name a World War Two aircraft would say 'Spitfire!' Magazine Editors put a Spitfire on their covers as often as they can because it sells measurably more copies. Crowds at airshows thrill to the sight and sound of

the Merlin and television producers love them because they are good for ratings. This is why we have had a busy summer. Next year millions will switch on their TV sets and see a lot of muddy people carrying bits of twisted metal that once formed part of a graceful aircraft which had been reduced in an instant to scrap metal. Aviation Archaeology is the process by which television reveals to innumerable households the realities of warfare but without the grisly bits.

"Dig 1940" in 2010 was well received by the viewing public. It was equally well received by the Aviation Archaeologists because television money meant it was possible to tackle projects far beyond the reach of amateur resources. In that way parts of John Cock's Hurricane emerged from the shallow waters of The Fleet near Weymouth, major parts likewise of a Heinkel 111 of III/KG26 which just failed to reach its target at Avonmouth and those of a Dornier 17 down over eastern France in the earliest days of the war. Most desirable of all the Stuka that completed its last dive twenty feet underground to the entire disadvantage of its pilot.

Thus, encouraged by the ratings, the powers that be commissioned another series. The net cast was a wide one but the final short list consisted of three Spitfires . The first was to be in the Irish Republic, the second in Crewkerne Cemetery and the last in France, a Ila a V and a XII.

In these latter days the ease with which recoveries were carried out thirty years ago seems like a dream. Licences need to be obtained from the MOD, health and safety risk assessments carried out, Cadw

or English Heritage consulted and County Archaeologists placated, never happy at those outside the professional mysteries masquerading as archaeologists. Even Natural England where SSSI's are concerned. First find your Spitfire – the good ones have mostly been recovered in the past.

Five visits were made to Northern Ireland by the team before a County Donegal bog yielded its secrets. There was little enough evidence in terms of surface fragments but the Forster bomb locator showed there was more, much more, below. Now we have to go back to late November 1941 and a convoy patrol from the base of 133 Eagle Squadron at Eglinton, Northern Ireland. P8074 and its American pilot Roland 'Bud' Wolfe were in their last moments of their association as the engine temperature gauge rose to danger levels and he radioed base with his last message "I'm going over the side." Left to its own devices the Spitfire went into a dive that ended abruptly in a peaty hollow on a mountainside in the Republic of Ireland. The pilot, fortunately, had a more gentle landing but his flying career was interrupted by internment in the Curragh camp in neutral Ireland, where after a failed escape attempt he remained until 1943 when he was released to serve in the USAF as well as post war in Korea and Vietnam. He died in 1994.

Finding the crash site, which had eluded local less technology endowed searchers, was only part of it. The team were based in the North and although the site was visible from Londonderry across Lough Foyle it was in the South and there were diplomatic niceties and other protocols to be observed. An outcome was that the substantial remains would stay behind in

Ireland in a Londonderry museum. In 1941 the Irish authorities had retrieved two Browning 0.303's from the morass and finding them serviceable took them into use. On the day of the recovery armed soldiers of the Irish Defence Force were on site to deal with the expected remainder of the armament and to discourage any locals of a Political persuasion from doing the same.

We, the foot soldiers in this enterprise, were out on site early on Monday to guide in the two hired tracked machines, one normal sized and the other a giant with a forty two foot reach which could only travel on baulks of timber dragged and dropped in stages across the bog. This was a perilous and heart stopping process that was only just short of disaster but prevented by superb driving and judgement of the operator. We also marked out the outline of the aircraft and its armament on the quaking surface of the peat. The day's end saw the two machines crouched waiting like praying mantis by the bog side.

Back at the hotel within the walls of Derry the Television crew had arrived with Dan Snow who was fronting the programmes. An early start meant an early night. There is always some tension rather than frisson in these undertakings. The TV team had just had an unsuccessful but expensive expedition to film sunken U Boats out at sea and some nervous texts had been exchanged between diggers and filmers along the lines of 'we are going to find something aren't we?'

On Tuesday morning a trickle of locals walked along the hillside at this remote spot and ranged themselves beyond the barriers on a natural amphitheatre. The

land sloped away to the distant blue Atlantic, the sun shone, various dignitaries arrived and the Irish Defence Force prepared to do their duty. The writer noted with interest that their assault rifles showed much handling wear and the eagerness with which they fell on the six Brownings that were the first items recovered made me wonder whether this seventy year old cache might too see belated service! The next discovery was an ammunition box still filled with belted rounds in perfect condition, so good that apparently the soldiers were later able to fire some through a service rifle.

Typically a Spitfire in a high speed dive near the vertical will continue its subterranean progress until it hits something impenetrable, the quaking peat layer was about 8 feet thick, followed by clay and then a layer of stone. Here the Merlin had come to rest relatively slowly and relatively little damaged, with the rest of the aircraft, fin and tailwheel to engine bulkhead occupying about five feet stacked on the back of the engine. The rudder pedals carried the Supermarine logo and preserved in the anaerobic soil still showed the burnish of long stilled flying boots.

P8074 was the first of 20 presentation Spitfires paid for with monies from the Canadian millionaire Willard Garfield Weston and here was a piece of airframe with Garfield Weston No1 in 4 inch yellow letters down the side of what was once the cockpit. Most unusual and the subject of much veneration it is destined for descendants of the family in Canada, a small return for a magnificent gift. Below was the engine, a propeller blade and all the complex mass of pulleys, wires pipes and brackets and panelling that constitute

a Spitfire. It was a tired but happy party that supervised the back filling of the crater, cleaned up the site and as far as possible returned the mountainside to its former serenity. It was too late for a hotel dinner so a chip shop made an acceptable substitute.



Piece of cake

In the morning was the washing off of the recovered items when more mud obscured treasures were discovered, all of it in superb condition.



Most remained in Ireland but the crew brought away what Steve Vizard would call a few 'trinkets', reminders of a long summers day with its connections to far off, less happy times.

Gifts of War

David Evans and Ray Burgess

In World War II many countries made gifts of war to Britain. Basutoland, now Lesotho, made a disproportionately high contribution. With a land area equal to that of Wales, a population of only 400,000, and yet almost no natural resources, it supplied funds to purchase 24 Spitfires for the RAF.

These Spitfires were allocated to No 72 Squadron, which was designated 72 (Basutoland) Squadron, in which our recently deceased member Tony (Red) Weller served as a Spitfire pilot. 72 Squadron was formed on the 28th of June in 1917 at Upavon and was disbanded in Baghdad on 22 September 1919.

The Squadron was reformed at RAF Tangmere on 22 February 1937 and in 1939 was equipped with the Basutoland Spitfires, each aircraft carrying a Basuto name. The Squadron still exists as a training squadron operating Tucanos, preparing newly qualified pilots for fast jet training on Hawks.



Prince Seeiso and Wing Commander Bedford

A string of events led to an invitation to meet His Excellency Prince Seeiso Bereng Seeiso, the High Commissioner of Lesotho in London. 72 Squadron Association invited us to meet the Squadron at RAF Linton-on-Ouse for the Prince to make personal contact. The visit was planned to coincide with the 72 Squadron Association annual reunion.



Flying the Flag

The RAF laid on a superb flying display with a nine ship formation of Tucanos followed by two Tornados, the PR 19 Spitfire from the BBMF.



BBMF MK XIX

This was topped-off with hands-on in the ultra-realistic Tucano simulator.

The Squadron historian maintains an astonishingly comprehensive collection of squadron records and the Tucanos still carry the names originally given to the gifts-of-war Spitfires. There is much to say which is better said in the three

volumes by Tom Docherty "Swift to Battle" but the main message is that we, the beneficiaries, do not forget those who helped us so selflessly in our country's hour of greatest peril.



Tucanos flown by Instructors of 72 sqn

Prince Seeiso was invited to become an Honorary Member of the Spitfire Society and we are delighted to report that he has accepted with pleasure.

The Prince was Guest of Honour at the Officer's Mess guest night attended by about a hundred members of 72 Squadron, both retired and serving.

Welsh Spitfire Museum Opens

Ray Burgess

The story so far. In September-07 purchased JG668. December-09 placed temporary building at Haverfordwest airfield. February-11 decided to have our official opening on 27 May-11 and so we did and 600 visitors came along to watch our Patron Margaret Frost cut the Blue Ribbon and announce the Welsh Spitfire Museum open: piece of cake.

It is almost customary when arranging anything in aviation to have bad weather but on this occasion the Sun shone on us and a great day was had by all.



A sweet moment

Throughout the summer the museum was only open on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. We shall try to stay open during the winter at weekends but this will depend on our volunteers. Our hard work has been rewarded with a steady stream of visitors. We have a 50 minute video of the opening which is available from the museum.

Project Propeller

Margaret Frost and Ray Burgess

It was into a clear blue sky on the morning of 12 June 2011 that Cessna 172XP climbed out of West Wales airport under the command of John Greer. Onboard were ex ATA Spitfire Pilot Margaret Frost, Tony Hyde, and his wife Sue. Their destination was Wickenby airfield in Lincolnshire which this year was playing host to Project Propeller (PP). The aim of PP is to get private pilots to ferry ex aircrew to a meeting place for a light lunch with some of their old friends and comrades. The total distance was just over 200 nm with a refreshment stop at Wellsbourne Mountford; near Stratford upon Avon.

It was noon when they landed at Wickenby and just in time for lunch with the 150 aircrew who had flown in. Margaret and her friends stayed for three hours during which they were entertained by displays from a variety of aircraft and concluded with The Red Arrows.



Some of the aircrew

Amongst the many friends Margaret met were Mary Ellis and Joy Lofthouse; both ex ATA pilots and with whom Margaret has been friends for 70 years. Among the aircraft at the airfield was a DH2 replica that was built at Haverfordwest. With a forecast of storm clouds appearing Margaret and her party left at 3 pm for Wellsbourne Mountford where they had a very friendly reception which was topped off with more tea and cakes; sadly we have no pictures of this feast: and the culprits are not talking!



DH2 Replica

It was to a peaceful summer Sun set that Cessna G-BPWR landed at West Wales airport to what had been a long and memorable day out. As day became night thoughts turned to next year and visits to pastures new.



Margaret: Definitely on instruments

Air Transport Auxiliary Museum Opens Ruth Tarplee and Ray Burgess

As mentioned in the last copy of the Spitfire Journal the ATA museum was to be officially opened on 19 October 2011 by their Patron HRH Prince Michael of Kent.

The museum is at 18 Park Street in Maidenhead and close to White Waltham; the ATA HQ during WWII. Among the ex ATA pilots celebrating this historic event were Margaret Frost, Joy Lofthouse, Mary Ellis, Mary Rose, Ruth Russell and, all the way from Canada, Jaye Edwards



L-R Jaye, Margaret, and Joy

Margaret and Ruth had travelled to Maidenhead on the Tuesday and the photograph above is before formal lunch. At the formal lunch at White Waltham airfield and more walks down memory lane.



Margaret with Mary Ellis

This was a special event for the Spitfire Society which had via the Leonard Stilwell Bequest contributed to the Museum. The Society was represented by David Evans, Chris Brice, and Steve Williams.

Bloody Silly Name

Ray Burgess

Sadly we have to report the death of Annie Penrose on 4th October 2011. Spitfire Annie was an honorary member of the Spitfire Society. Annie Penrose's father, Sir Robert McLean, Chairman of Vickers Aviation Ltd and of the Supermarine Aviation Works (Vickers) Ltd. named the aircraft after his "little Spitfire" of a daughter! Mitchell on hearing this news commented "Its the bloody silly sort of name they would give it" Annie had a lifetime connection with the Spitfire and has know all the principal characters in its story. At her funeral the cortege included an escort of RAF Officers Guard of Honour from St Mawgan and on the coffin were two photographs; one of the Spitfire and the other of her receiving a Medallion

from our society. She will be sadly missed.
3 July 1911 to 4 October 2011

The One That Nearly Got Away

Ray Burgess

During the fly past over Ira Jones's Graveside on 18 April-11 the Bulldog was followed by a Hawk from 19 Sqn at RAF Valley: also doing a flypast. The old dog finally got him in his sights.



Intruder from north Wales

The Gifts of War

Ray Burgess

It was 15th September 1940 that became known as Battle of Britain Day. 71 years later we returned to the White Cliffs of Dover to visit the National Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-le- Fern to launch the Society's Gifts of War project: which will acknowledge, among others, the sacrifices by the citizens of Basutoland, now Lesotho, to present funds for 24 Spitfires in our hour of need.



3,000 Names of the few

At midday His Excellency the High Commissioner of Lesotho, Prince Seeiso Bereng Seeiso and his son Bereng arrived at the Memorial. Patrick Tootal, Trustee of the Battle of Britain Memorial Charity, escorted the prince on a tour of the memorial. The Prince was shown the engraved 72 Squadron Badge which is at the base of the statue of the airman in the centre of the memorial. It was to 72 sqn that the Lesotho Spitfires were posted



The Badge of 72 Squadron

Following his tour Prince Seeiso was taken on a flight in a helicopter of Action Stations and flew in formation with Charley Brown in Spitfire MK 5B BM 597 over Capel-le-Fern and the White Cliffs of Dover.



Charlie at work

The flights were organised by Steve Burt of Action Stations to whom we are most grateful. The whole event was filmed and next year there will be several programmes with a mixture of flying scenes.

At the end of the day the Prince and his son returned to Capel-le-Fern for a final visit to the memorial: as he will be returning to Lesotho in December for a new appointment.



Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow



Day over

That's all folks

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