

DIRIGIBLE

THE JOURNAL OF THE AIRSHIP & BALLOON MUSEUM

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FOCAS & CHILTERN REGION HOT AIR BALLOON RALLY : CARDINGTON 12/13 SEPTEMBER 1992

In support of our "Airship Appeal '92" to raise funds and give publicity for the Museum at Cardington, the Chiltern Region of the British Balloon and Airship Club is holding a Hot Air Balloon Rally on land adjacent to Cardington Airfield.

The Rally will take place on 12th and 13th September; the latter day will be publicised as a viewing day for the public. Cars will be parked on the Museum site and a significant number of spectators is expected to attend on the Sunday, when it is hoped that some 30 to 40 balloons will be launched at either 0600 hours or 1800 hours. Ascents in a tethered balloon will be available during the day, FOCAS and the BBAC will have display stands, there will be a draw for a free balloon flight and refreshments have been booked.

We hope that you will be able to come along and support FOCAS. In addition, we need volunteers to help make the Rally a success



and to raise the maximum amount of cash. Letter have been sent to all Associate Members living near Bedford to see if they could offer any help on the day. We hope to see you at Cardington, do come over to the stand and make yourself known - we look forward to seeing you there.

Appeal Hits TV and Radio

Thanks to a publicity idea by FUJI of filming the first ever airship flight by Albert Hunt (son of FS "Sky" Hunt and FOCAS Treasurer) in a WDL ship from Fairoaks airfield on 2nd July the Appeal gained a very worthwhile article on ITV's "Look East" programme. As well as some good archival film - interviews were broadcast with Les Murten, (the last surviving RNAS airshipman) and Appeal Director, Peter Garth.

Film Tribute to Cardiff Hero

A long forgotten Cardiff hero of airship pioneering days is to be the subject of a documentary by a film company.

Earnest Thompson Willows, son of a dentist, born on 11th July 1886, has been modestly honoured in his native Cardiff with a School and Road named after him. However, the film and television company Production Box believe that Willows deserves a high profile in the history books and national recognition for his great achievements.

Willows was the creator of six airships with the earliest models built at Pengam Moors, Cardiff. He was the first to fly Cardiff to London, across the Bristol Channel and perhaps his most celebrated flight across the Channel from London to Paris. Whilst he was feted in France and courted by the War Office, supplying the solution to Britain's air defences in World War I, Willows' engineering genius could not save him from bankruptcy and ultimately his tragically premature death.

At the end of his illustrious career, Willows was reduced to trading in fare-paying pleasure trips and it was at such an event at a Bedford Flowershow on 3rd August 1926 that Willows captive balloon crashed to the ground killing him and four passengers.

Production Box is seeking photographs, film and memorabilia on Willows, and would welcome any further contributions to their research, especially eye witness accounts and recollections.

Anyone who can help with this fascinating and dramatic story is asked to contact either Roz Morgan or Paul Reed of Production Box at 9 Williams Court or telephone them on Cardiff 342850.

Slingsby Aviation

Slingsby Aviation have continued their generous support of FOCAS by donating a demonstration Porsche engine and a complete set of manuals for the AD500.

Hindenburg Model

A superb 12ft model of LZ129, the Hindenburg and a suitable diorama of a landing site could be made available to FOCAS by the maker, Alan Hawkins of Scarborough.

The Elmhurst Papers

At their last meeting, Norman Peake was delighted to advise the Council that he had acquired at auction the Navigation Log of Tom Elmhurst for the minimal sum of £32!

These papers have not yet been examined, but as a forerunner of delights to be revealed the following has been culled from "An Aeronautical History of the Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway Region Part 2" by Peter Cannon.

Thomas Walker Elmhurst was born at Laxden, near Howden, Yorkshire on December 15th 1895. The fourth son of a clergyman he entered the Navy through Osborne and Dartmouth Colleges. Whilst serving aboard battle cruiser Indomitable he took part in the chase of SMS Goeben and Breslau, and was also present at the first bombardment of the Dardanelles. He was one of the first batch of twenty midshipmen who volunteered for "special temporary and hazardous service". An address to the group by Admiral Fisher, shortly afterwards revealed that this "service" was to be in airships.

Trained initially at Kingsnorth, after mastering the subject of "aerostatics" he moved to RNAS Depot Wormword Scrubs for instruction and practical flight in free ballooning. This accomplished, he returned to Kingsnorth for one instructional flight in an SS type airship and one solo flight whereupon he was declared competent and sent to Barrow-in-Furness to supervise the rigging of SS17 before its intended delivery flight to Luce Bay.

Elmhurst flew SS17 on July 3rd 1915, historically of note because this was the first successful flight of a Barrow built airship. Shortly after, he moved to Luce Bay with SS17 and was

appointed Senior Flying Officer. Amongst his many escort and anti submarine patrols he performed other varied duties such as that on November 26th 1915 when he gave two demonstration flights to three Italian Air Force Officers, Denti, Amari and Pirajno prior to them accepting four SS type airships then under construction at Barrow.

In August 1916 he left Luce Bay to collect the airship C19. Cannon does not say where Elmhurst went but the coasted C19 is known to have been based at Capel and Howden. However, he turns up again at Valley Anglesey, when as Flight Commander he set off in SSP5 on a return trip to Luce Bay, planning to call at Barrow on the way back. T.B.Williams who took charge of the station in his C.O.'s absence was in touch with him by wireless but lost contact for several hours. On the point of reporting to the Admiralty that he had "lost a boss" a telegram from Barrow-in-Furness arrived instructing him to "come and collect a bloody airship".

Thomas Elmhurst retired from the RAF with the rank of Air Marshall.

He died on November 9th 1986 aged 86. We look forward with great relish to pencilling in the gaps.

Presentation to Chiltern Aviation Society

On July 22nd Oliver Netherclift, accompanied by Ted Greenstreet, has been invited to give a presentation on airships to the lively Chiltern Aviation Society which numbers many professional aviators amongst its members.

Loss of Founder Member and Vice-President Frank Kiernan

The recent sad loss of Frank Kiernan, a Founder Member of FOCAS and our first Vice-President will be keenly felt by everyone associated with airships.

Frank came to Cardington in 1940, initially working on the detail of kite balloons under the guidance of Les Speed (himself on the R101 design team). Soon he was taking over responsibility for a wide range of design tasks such as skirts for Hovercraft, inflatable decoys and the design and testing of inflatable assault craft for our Special Forces and the Royal Marines. His development of lifting bags for the Fire Service has widespread application today including a device used by Thalidomide children.

The keeper of the original LTA Museum at Cardington, the source of much of the current FOCAS material, Frank worked tirelessly to show visitors round and satisfy the many enquiries on LTA matters of the use of fabrics to enclose gas or air.

For many years minutes secretary to the Bedford Branch of the RAeS, Frank was also secretary to his local PROBUS.

His loss will be felt deeply by all who knew him as a gentleman of great integrity and depth of knowledge for whom nothing and no-one was too much trouble. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Mabel, his wife, who we are delighted to say intends to retain close links with FOCAS. We know that his great hope and a most fitting memorial would be the establishment, as soon as possible, of the Airship and Balloon Museum at Cardington.



Frank Kiernan (sitting) at the 1991 FOCAS AGM

John Brancker 1910-1992

John William Sefton Brancker 1910-1992. The son of Sir Sefton Brancker who lost his life in the R1901 disaster, John Brancker was a founder member of FOCAS.

Like his father, he was educated at Bedford School and had a distinguished career in civil aviation serving mostly overseas in senior management positions for Imperial Airways, British Overseas Airways, British European Airways and the International Air Transportation Association.

THE OLD AIRSHIP MEN

A Series of sketches of Cardington Airshipmen

By E A Johnston

Part 1 - ANGLESEY

The three worlds that occupied my father's short and busy life -shipping, aeroplanes and airships - intersected in our home at Cardington. Every barnstorming pilot who operated in the neighbourhood was welcome at our breakfast table, from Percy Phillips with his lone Avro 504 to Alan Cobham with his giant circus. The price of the breakfast was usually a free flight for me. There was always a bed made up for the men of the sea, part of my father's roots who from time to time dropped in from far places and spun fascinating yarns. I was twelve years old when R101 was destroyed. My playmates were the children of the Royal Airship Works community to which my father belonged: Michael Fellowes, John Scott, Richard and Anne Atherstone, Albert Hunt, Lily Charlton, David Durston and Jimmy Uren in particular.

The RAW at Cardington was a very tight little world. The aim of this series is to record the impressions that it made on a small boy. When I was born at Stranraer in 1918 my father, Major Ernest Livingston Johnston AFC RAF, was in command of the Airship Station at Luce Bay. Since he was at the very centre of the relationships at Cardington which I shall sketch, his history must be told in some detail.



Flight Commander E.L. Johnston at RNAS East Fortune

He was the scion on his father's side of a dynasty of Fife shipmasters, one of whom had married a Tynemouth girl at the end of the Napoleonic Wars and settled there; his mother belonged to a dynasty of shipmasters who had migrated from the Forth to the Wear during the depression that followed the Union. At the age of 14 Earnest was, in the fashion of his forefathers, apprenticed to a North Shields shipping firm and for the next nine years, with the exception of one or two voyages back to his home port, sailed East of Suez in deep-sea bulk freighters crewed by Lascars. In the

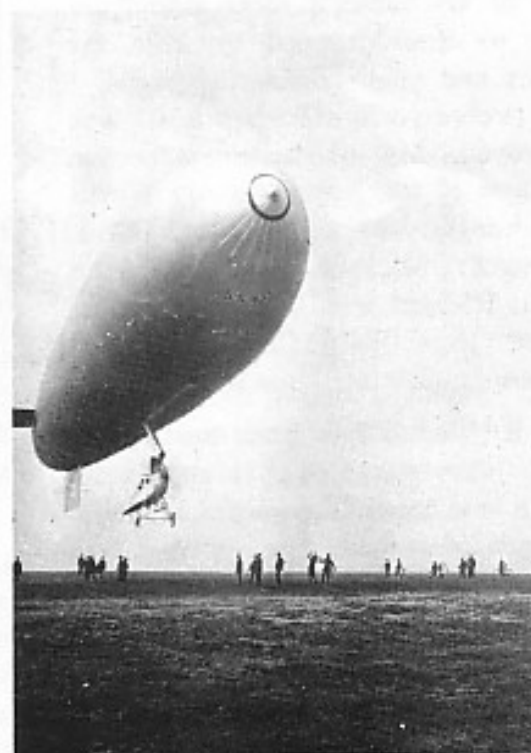
middle of 1915 he arrived back in home waters as Chief Mate of one of the firm's crack ships; within a fortnight he was a junior watch-keeping officer pacing the bridge of a Royal Navy Torpedo-Gunboat employed on minesweeping duties out of Harwich. His talents as a navigator came quickly to the fore; he was appointed ship's Navigating Officer and promoted to full Lieutenant RNR.

Gregarious, breezy of manner and fiery of temperament, he was a dashing, handsome young man, ruddy-faced and blue-eyed under a thatch of dark brown hair. Walking, he had the seaman's roll that comes of placing the feet widely to balance on a heaving deck. He was masterful by breeding as well as training. Always alert to the potential of new ideas and an eternal enthusiast, his imagination was fired by the blimps which he frequently saw patrolling coastwise from Kingsnorth and Pulham. He took the first opportunity to volunteer for training for "special and hazardous duties" in airships of the Royal Naval Air Service and early in 1916 he went to Wormwood Scrubs for basic airship training under Major Tim Waterlow, who had begun his airship career on "Nulli Secundus" under Capper and Cody in 1907. After completing ground school, Earnest did 20 hours of free ballooning at Hurlingham under the tutelage of Lieut. Commander Pollock, a gentle man very much in the sporting ballooning tradition who held Aeronaut's certificate No.1. From Pollock, Johnston acquired a taste for landing in the grounds of noble country houses where the hospitality was invariably of the best!

Because of his age, and seniority, Johnston was then sent to Anglesey as First Lieutenant for Flight Commander G H Scott, who was in command of the flight of Submarine Scots; there he learned to fly airships

"on the job" On July 13th 1916, under the tutelage of Flight Sub. Lieut. Underhill, he made his first flight in one of these delightful little dirigible balloons, SS18, no greater in gas capacity than the "Charlieres" that he had been flying at Hurlingham. During the following days he made four flights as navigator on war patrols, and then after seventy minutes instruction from Lieut. Plowden in SS18 he made his first airship solo flight in SS25 on July 19th. Thereafter he clocked up time as pilot in command until, in the middle of September, he acquired the necessary 56 hours to be signed up as a "qualified practical airship pilot" by Flight Commander Hartford (later Captain of R24 during 1919 mooring trials at Pulham). Shortly afterwards he had to return to Wormwood Scrubs to sit his final theory exams before Major Waterlow could issue his Pilot's Certificate No.22.

After Flight Commander Scott left to take command of Naval airship No. 9,



SS42

the first rigid to fly, Johnston's administrative duties as First Lieutenant under his more demanding successor Squadron Commander Corbett Wilson somewhat reduced the intensity of his flying; nevertheless when SS33 arrived in February 1917 she was one of the ships with the Maurice Farman "pusher" cars - he made it his own, and instructed the other pilots on it, including Flight Sub Lieut. T B Williams. By the time he left Anglesey in April 1917 he had clocked up 175 hours.

Johnston had already turned out to be a natural airship pilot and an outstanding air navigator, constantly applying his lively mind to devising new techniques. This led to his being selected early in 1917 for full flying duties in the larger Coastal airships operating over the North Sea from East Fortune.

At Anglesey he was a remarkably popular Officer despite being a tough disciplinarian, and when the Anglesey Old Boys' Association was formed shortly after the war he was elected its first President. The second President was Major Scott and the last was T.B. Williams.

Part Two: East Fortune Adventure
will be in Dirigible No.12

Congratulations to Gr.Cpt. Johnston for being elected a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) from Member.

K88

Our apologies for the delay in in some members not yet receiving their copy of the K88 painting - this, unfortunately was due to circumstances beyond our control and the paintings have now been sent out. Once again our apologies. If other members require a copy of the painting please contact the Editor.

FOCAS Ties are also available at £6.50 from, Albert Hunt, Treasurer, 9 Willow Road, Bedford, MK42 OQS

Sir Peter Chairs the AGM

The well attended Annual General Meeting, chaired by FOCAS President Sir Peter Masefield, was enhanced by the latest of George Ambridge's splendid scale model airships. This time it was a magnificent 12ft LZ127, "Graf Zeppelin".

After a formal luncheon, at which guests included the Station Commander of RAF Cardington, Dr Martin Levitt from the USA, the Bedfordshire Museums Officer and Mabel Kiernon, the President opened the meeting with his address. He paid tribute to Frank Kiernan whose loss will be felt keenly by all who know Cardington and to the work of the Chairman and Council to further the aims of FOCAS and the establishment of the Airship and Balloon Museum. In particular he once again extended members' thanks to our Patron, Mrs Doreen Rope for all her support during the year.

In his report, Chairman Jarvis Frith announced the appointment of Peter Garth as Director Designate, Denis Burchmore as Honourary Curator and Heather Sanderson as Honourary Registrar of the Museum. He also thanked George Ambridge for attending the AGM and bringing the latest of his breathtaking models and also Bruce James and the staff of the RAF museum at Cardington for all their assistance.

The formal business of the meeting was followed by a resume of the progress of the Appeal by Peter Garth. Since the meeting 2 donations of £2,00 and £1,000 have been received from the Clothworkers' Foundation and The Lady Hind Trust respectively.

A Copy of the President's speech is available on request from: Peter Garth, 5 Orchard Close, Brampton, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE18 8TF

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The objects of FOCAS are to foster and promote the study of the history of airships in every aspect, and to present the results of such study to the public, and to stimulate public interest in the role of Cardington as an airship base and in the conservation of the principle buildings thereof, and in particular to promote and assist in the formation and operation of a museum and study centre devoted to the airship.

Full membership of FOCAS is limited to persons who, having a particular interest in or knowledge of airships, are approved by the Governing Council, the Trustees, who are elected by members from among their number. There is also provision for Associate Membership, which is open to the public generally. Further information and application forms can be obtained from:

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