

AIRSHIP HERITAGE NEWS

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EDITION NO.10



JUNE 2023

Welcome to the latest edition, of our Newsletter...



Signs o' the Times.

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, Bedford Creative Arts team, whom we worked with on the “Airship Dreams” project, have created four murals in the style of “Ghost Signs” will be appearing around Bedford and all depict historic and technical developments from Bedford’s past.

They have now been completed and the third piece by artist, Keith Hopewell and the “Cardington” sign can be seen along on the side wall next to the old Empire cinema building, walking towards the town centre.

This is conveniently sited close to the Higgins Museum in Bedford, and so if you are in the area or are taking a visit of the museum, do please go and see it.

Donated R101 Photos



Thanks to Rob Stepney for donating a series of original photographs which were taken by his father of the R.101 on the mast, and in flight on 1st November 1929. This was the third flight of the ship heading over Norfolk and the famous royal “Sandringham flight”. Rob’s father was a locum Excise Officer stationed near Bedford at the time, and was able to see the funeral at Cardington as well. Rob kindly donated 2.4x4.5in photos and a good condition crepe paper “memorial” keepsake to the AHT archive.

Often the personal photos, despite being small, show extra details, such as his father’s wonderful car in the bottom of the shot. Thank you, Rob!

Rain Stopped Play

By the time I write this, I had hoped to report on some spring cleaning activities. Despite a reasonably dry winter, the rain returned in nearly all of March and April, and the considerable bad and constant inclement weather has delayed the AHT’s volunteer force. Your President and Memorials Officer, Paul Ross and Chairman, Alastair Lawson’s various attempts at arranging dates for the cleaning of the R.101 Tomb have gone to pot. As you know, the AHT has taken responsibility for maintaining the R.101 tomb at Cardington, along with paying for its maintenance. We noticed that the paving around the base of the tomb was suffering from algae discolouration, and so have been waiting for a suitable clear run of “dry” weather to treat it. Cleaning products have been purchased, brooms are at the ready,

and we're just waiting, as they did in the 1920's for the Met Office to give us a clear run of fine dry weather.



Annual General Meeting 17th June 2023

As you would have received in your last edition of *Dirigible* Magazine, our annual General Meeting is scheduled for 2:00pm on Saturday, 17th June. As with previous years it'll be held online using Teams, and you'll need to register for joining by **2:00pm on Thursday 15th June.**

The agenda of the formal meeting in the last *Dirigible* along with a proxy form, has been set out and can also be viewed online on our website, along with copies of our [latest reports and accounts](#). If you cannot make the date then please submit your proxy voting form and return it to Roger.

After the formal meeting, there will be a short break and then there will be a talk on the **R 34 airship: First Double Crossing of the Atlantic.**

It's good to Talk.

The post pandemic years are starting to seem behind us now and people are interested in returning to their clubs and societies. This includes the need for talks. 2023 has seen the re-surgency of requests for "talks on airships" coming in via enquiries from the website. The Ipswich Transport Society hosted Alastair Lawson on 17th April with 40 members in attendance. Raising funds for the AHT along with sales of books. Despite the audience being a technical group, the general feedback was very encouraging that they knew lots of aviation subjects, but didn't know the lighter than air side of things and were enthralled.

Our members often have talks already prepared, and so if you have one which you would like to offer to give to our own members then please let Alastair or Roger know and we can look to arranging either in person or online.

Last Call... British Naval Airships – Brian Turpin

As you would have seen in *Dirigible* and on our website, [“British Naval Airships by Brian Turpin”](#) the definitive history of all airships designed for the Royal Naval Air Service 4 volume set Turpin is available for sale.

Illustrated with over 1,200 photographs, some 230 original line drawings and 19 colour plates set in a 4 volumes hardback set. Published by the Airship Heritage Trust in collaboration with The Fleet Air Arm Museum

The first edition print run was a limited first run of 50 edition sets, and since its release, the stocks are selling fast. Order yours now via the AHT website, or if you would like to reserve a set, then please contact Alastair Lawson email: alastairlawson1@gmail.com or tel: 07900 692 804.

Leaves from my Logbook. By Capt. George Meager. AFC.

(from The Airship quarterly. Starting Spring 1934. Some duplication of his book.)

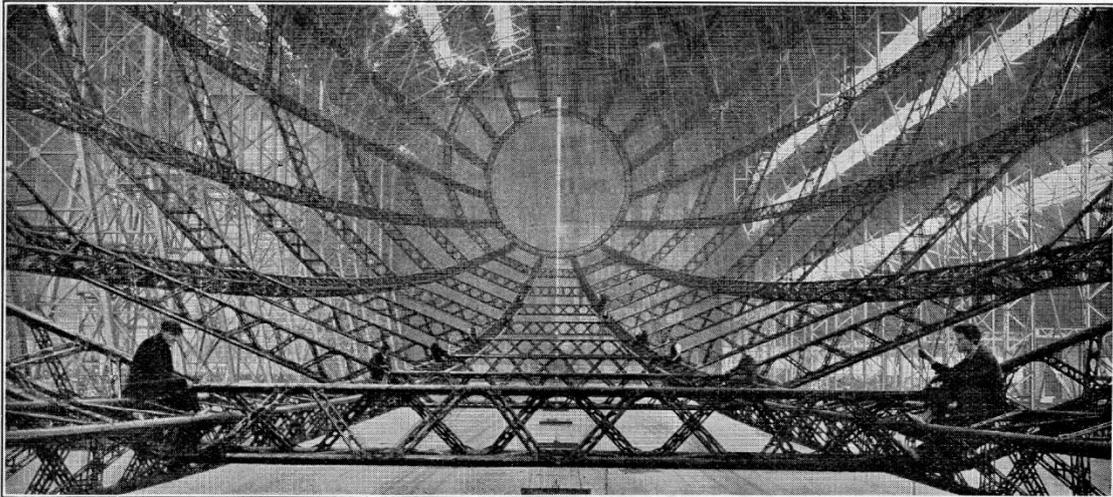
I do hope that most of our members have read this author’s descriptive book ‘MY AIRSHIP FLIGHTS 1915 – 1930.’ I notice my own purchase is dated 1st July 1971.

He was also a free balloonist, participating in the Gordon Bennett balloon races with his ‘father-in-law to be’, Griffith Brewer, then Secretary of the Royal Aeronautical Society.

Capt. Meager was 1st Officer on the R-100 airship, and he writes probably the most true description of what the R-100 was all about – warts and all. Another telling comment he made was when flying in the R 101, to ‘dip the nose’ at the RAF Hendon Display 1930

Our late AHT member Ron Oughton’s father was at the elevator helm of the R 101, and Meager noticed that Oughton was sweating with the exertion of keeping up the nose of the airship in level flight. First Officer Meager immediately let go a ton of water ballast from the nose, and Oughton found his task considerably easier. When reporting to Captain Irwin, Meager was told that the ballast should have been saved for landing!

Meager’s comment later: “I will only fly again in R 101 if ordered to – not otherwise.”



R 100 Under Construction at Howden.

By courtesy of "The Aeroplane."

LEAVES FROM MY LOG BOOK.

By Capt. G. F. Meager, A.F.C. (late R.A.F.)

It is strange how apparently trivial events can alter one's whole future. Had the Admiralty not decided, in the summer of 1915, to build a number of small airships to act as submarine scouts, I should in all probability have finished my days prematurely as an aeroplane or sea-plane pilot as did my friend Frank Toms, who transferred to the R.N.A.S. just before I did and was burnt to death in a crash at Chingford after he had just finished his training as a pilot.

At the time I obtained my Commission in the R.N.A.S., I had no idea England possessed any airships at all, although I remember when playing football as a small boy, having seen the "Nulli Secundus" fly quite close to us at Mill Hill Park on her journey from Farnborough to St. Paul's and the Crystal Palace, in 1907. This did not, however, fire my enthusiasm for airships, in fact I remember later on a conversation with Fr. John Talbot of the Oratory, when he said he thought the aeroplane was the thing of the future and not the airship, so that when I was instructed to report at Wormwood Scrubbs Airship Station, I went to the Admiralty

and asked them if there had not been some mistake as I wished to serve with the aeroplane section. I was told to clear out and go where I was sent, and thus it was that I entered the Airship World in which, if one does a fair amount of flying one becomes smitten with airship disease which seems to be incurable.

Another seemingly insignificant occurrence, to the final result of which I certainly owe to the fact of still being alive, occurred during 1927 when I was Officer-in-charge at Pulham Airship Station. I received a letter from Squadron-Leader Booth saying that he and I had been given the choice of which ship we should be appointed to R 100 or R 101. I replied that I wished to be appointed to whichever ship was expected to be the first to fly. He apparently was of a like mind, and that is how we became designated for R 100, he as Captain and I as First Officer, for at that time there appeared to be no question at all as to which ship would be completed first. As it turned out, ironically enough, R 100 was not the first to fly, for R 101 left the shed on the 12th October, 1929, and carried out her

first flight from the Cardington Tower on the 14th of that month as against R 100's first flight from Howden to Cardington, on the 16th December, 1929.

R 100 was apparently so far advanced towards completion at the end of 1927, that in January, 1928, the late Major Scott told Booth and myself that we should have to take all our leave for that year before the end of May.

It was not until May, 1929, that we finally reported to Howden in order to get a thorough knowledge of R 100 during the final stages of her construction. Such was the blind optimism of both construction staffs that as late as the first week in May, 1929, the dates for inflation of the ships were 15th May for R 101, and 21st May for R 100 (I except Mr. Garish, the Shed Manager at Cardington, from hallucinations as to completion dates—he is the only man, except Booth, connected with airship construction or repair who would give a date for the completion of a job, and have the job finished on or before that date. Incidentally he took 10/- off Booth and myself who had months earlier rashly laughed at him when he said R 101 would be out first, and he had asked us to back our opinion for this amount).

Squadron-Leader Booth and I reported at Howden on the 22nd May, 1929, and found the ship nowhere near finished. In fact no job ever seemed to get definitely clewed up, and we began to think that the ship would soon deteriorate faster than she could be completed, as the shed leaked like a colander, as also did the outer cover on the ship, with the result that to add to labour troubles, corrosion was discovered in one of the main girder-tubes, which meant that an enormous number had to be tapped and re-inspected.

It was not until July 30th, that inflation began, and this was really much earlier than need have been, chiefly, I think, because the Howden people wanted to be able to say they had commenced inflation the same month as R 101, which had commenced inflating on the 10th July.

By this time we had our nucleus crew with us at Howden. This consisted of the Chief Coxswain (Flight-Sergt. Greenstreet), Chief Engineer (W.

Angus), Assistant Coxswains Long and Hobbs and Chief Engineers Stupple, Mann and Watts, with some first class youths who were just through their apprenticeship at Rolls-Royce works. The majority of the men allocated to the crew of R 100 were men working on the airship in the employ of its constructors the Airship Guarantee Company Limited. These men did not actually become pukka members of the ship's crew until we took her over from the Company. With the exception of the young men from Rolls-Royce's, all the nucleus crew had had previous experience in inflating rigid airships so that we were of material assistance to Mr. Willis and his assistants during the inflation.

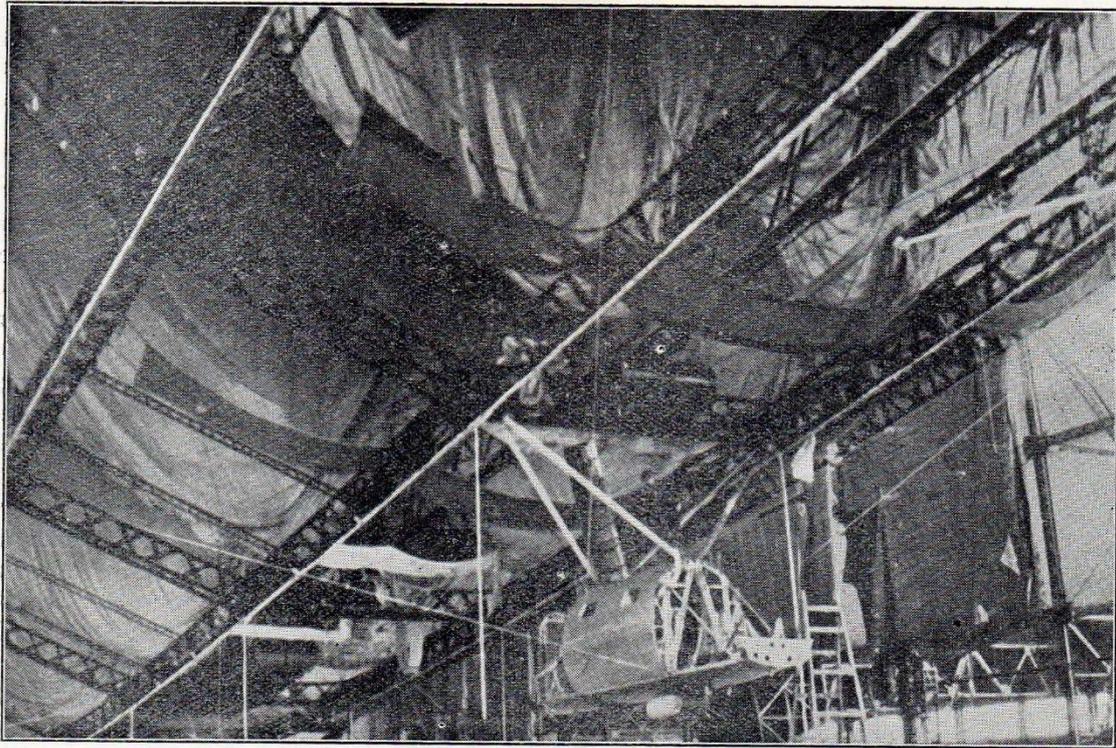
At first we experienced some difficulty in communication between the top of the airship (where it was essential to get the bags positioned exactly) and those superintending matters at the bottom of the ship, but Mr. Wallis quickly devised a method of passing messages down a speaking tube from the catwalk at the top of the shed. Another difficulty experienced in the early stages of the inflation was that of slowing down or stopping the inflow of gas. We were inflating with silicol gas which came direct from the generating plant into the ship, and this meant that once a charge had commenced we had to take all the gas generated by that charge, whether we wanted it or not. Inflating from a gas-holder is a much simpler business as you can take a little or a lot of gas at will, the supply being regulated by a hand valve. Inflating direct from a silicol plant, if you stop the gas flow you run the risk of blowing up the gas plant. However, Major Teed, who was in charge of the gas plant, soon devised a means of slowing down the generation of the gas if necessary, and this greatly facilitated our work at the top of the ship in getting the gas-bags correctly positioned. For this job we had at one end of the bag Mr. Norway (who was at that time Chief Calculator to the Airship Guarantee Company and later became their Chief Engineer) and with him a very experienced airship man in Assistant Coxswain Long, and at the other end, Mr. Horrocks (the Chief Draughtsman) and myself, with riggers to assist in hauling the bag into position. On the centre girder which was threaded

through a tunnel in the fore and aft axis of the bag were stationed Assistant Coxswain Hobbs, and A.G. Company's charge-hand Rigger Deverell and Riggers Wiseman and Williams. Until the bag was just over half full there was a great strain on the bag at the tunnel due to the ends drawing to the centre of the girder. We wondered sometimes in the early stages whether the girder would buckle or the bag carry away but we got through without mishap in this respect. At the same time it is worth bearing in mind, if bags of this type are used in future, to design the tunnel to allow for this drawing to the centre of the flat ends of the bag.

During the course of the inflation, the gas-bag test called for by the air-worthiness authorities, was carried out on No. 5 bag which was the bag over the passenger quarters, and so when inflated did not fill the entire bay down to the corridor. As

apparently no special bag had been stipulated to be tested, the A.G. Company were quite within their rights in choosing the bag which best suited them, though to my way of thinking, it looked as if they rather evaded the issue which was to test the strength of the hull and the efficacy of the slack bulging wire system when a bag was fully inflated, with empty bags at either end, and it would have shewn their absolute confidence in the structure if say bag No. 7 or 8 had been chosen for the test.

We only had one set-back during the inflation and that occurred when No. 4 bag was being inflated; a huge rent, fifteen feet in length, was torn in the bottom of the bag owing to the line anchoring the bottom of the bag to the corridor not having been cast off or slacked out as the bag filled out. However, Chief Coxswain Greenstreet set to himself and, with the able assistance of Assistant Coxswains



Hull, Gas Bags, and After-car of R 100.

G. F. Meager.

Long, Hobbs and Moncrieff, completed a magnificent repair by 7 p.m. the same evening, the tear happening at noon.

After this little set-back, inflation went ahead with a swing, two bags a day being inflated, so that within ten days of commencing inflation we had completed as far as No. 14 bag. No. 15 bag was left uninflated until just before the ship was ready for air-borne trials.

The huge airship, weighing over a hundred tons, was now floating in the air, being held down by crates full of weights and by large oil drums full of earth, slung through blocks in the roof thus acting as balancing weights. Although the airship was air-borne, the bridles to the roof were not entirely cast off from the top of the ship in case they should be wanted in an emergency.

The engines were being run whenever possible preparatory to the air-borne engine trials which eventually commenced on the 25th September, 1929. For these trials the airship had to be well and rigidly held to the shed sides and floor, the nose being buttoned into a socket in the door, while the doors at the after end were opened to allow free exit for the rush of air. During a preliminary run the doors had been only partially opened with the result that the stream of air struck the doors, hit the roof and then fell in a cascade on to the top of the fins, thus beating the tail down in an alarming manner so that the engine being run had to be stopped immediately, to prevent the rudder fin hitting the ground.

The air-borne trials consisted in running each pair of engines at three-quarter speed for an hour and a half, the final five minutes of which was at full throttle on both engines, and then the after engine only was run astern for half an hour. (For those who may be unfamiliar with the power unit arrangements I might add that R 100 carried six Rolls-Royce "Condor" engines of 700 h.p. each, driving separate propellers and fitted tandem fashion in three cars—two wing cars and one on the centre line further aft.)

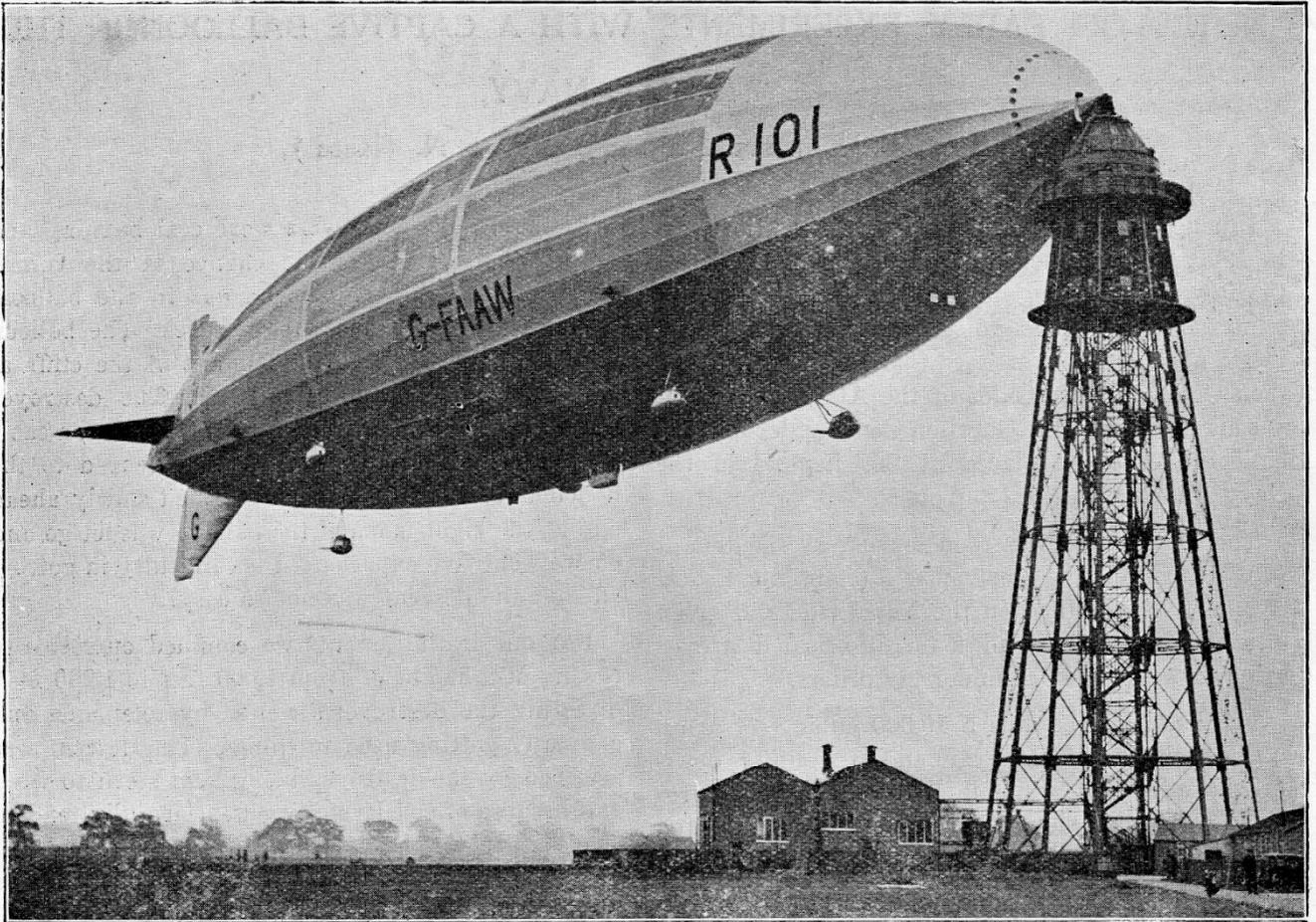
The noise inside the shed during these trials was simply deafening—you could shout at the top of your voice into a person's ear and not be heard,

in fact you could shout to yourself and not hear yourself whispering. One alarming sight early on in these trials was the static electricity generated by the propellers which were only a few inches from the concrete floor of the shed. I, personally, thought at first that it was blue smoke from the exhaust which was following the swirl of the slip stream. At times in addition to the blue spiral from the floor aft of the propeller there would be a blueish halo to the circle swept out by the propeller tips. This static effect was overcome by spraying water on the floor in the vicinity of the car. We then saw the phenomenon of miniature cyclones or tornadoes being whisked up off the floor.

A far more alarming occurrence happened while the port engines were doing their run—this was a split in the fabric outer cover of the airship abaft the port car. It started as a split of about eighteen inches and before the attention of those running the engines could be attracted by observers on the floor the cover had split the entire distance between two frames. It is an ill wind that blows *no* good and this was no exception for it had the effect of ensuring a better liaison between observers on the ground and those running the engines in the car, for always, after that misfortune, someone was stationed in the control car to keep a constant watch for signals to stop from observers watching the trials. He would then immediately ring through on the engine telegraphs to stop or slow down.

These trials must have been a great anxiety and a big responsibility for those in charge (Mr. B. N. Wallis and his staff), and it speaks volumes for the thoroughness and efficiency of their arrangements when it is realised that between the top of the airship and the shed there was only about three feet clearance, while the tips of the propellers cleared the ground by little more than a foot. It must have been nightmare enough to those responsible, but to describe the airship as surging up and down and the cars as leaping and straining at their drag wires is, from my recollection, exaggerated hyperbole, straining yes, but leaping, decidedly no.

The engine air-borne trials having passed off satisfactorily we were now looking forward to the final completion of all the odds and ends of the



By courtesy of "The Aeroplane."

R 101 at Cardington.

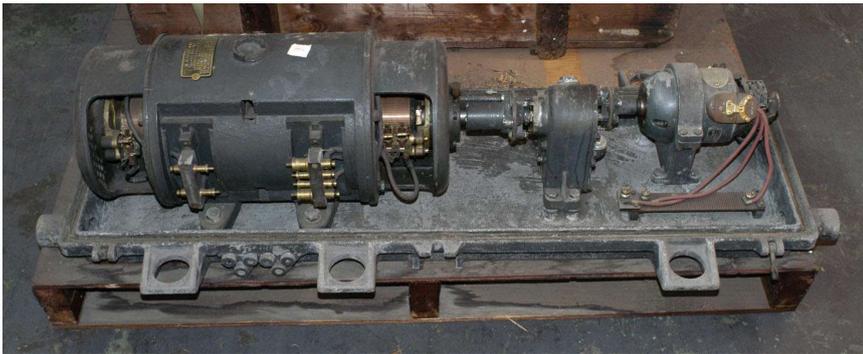
ship so that we could finally take her over. In the meantime R 101 had been completed and flew her first trial on October 14th, 1929, Squadron-Leader Booth being an interested observer on board. Shortly after this I had to go to Cardington in connection with stores and rations, and while there was offered the opportunity of a trip in R 101 during her next flight. So as not to miss this I slept two nights in the airship and found it exceedingly cold and draughty. The airship finally left the shed at 5 a.m. on the 1st November, 1929, and was secured to the Mooring Tower at Cardington. At 9.40 the same morning she was released from the Tower and flew for eight hours. In the course of

this flight we gave the King and Queen a "salute" at Sandringham, and were very "bucked" to see Their Majesties come out on the gravel path to look at the airship. Amongst those on board was Sir Samuel Hoare, and as a tribute to him, the airship was taken over his home near Sheringham. Among other familiar places visited were Norwich with its beautiful Cathedral; Pulham, St. Mary the Virgin, where we had a few years earlier flown R 33; Cambridge and Newmarket. It was a very quiet flight and nothing exceptional was tried. My general impression of the ship was that she steered well but was somewhat sluggish on her elevators.

(To be continued).

Many thanks to John Baker for the copies of 'The Airship.'

Recently from RAF Hendon. Radio generator unit from R 100. *(Any info welcome please)*



This does not look like it was driven by the AC car engine, to give the electricity for the cooking and heating. *(Cover removed in above photo – name plate on cover.)*

Please do telephone and arrange to visit us – even if you are on the way to somewhere, and can only stay a few minutes.

0115 933 4795 or 07973223111

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/airshipblimpzeppelin/permalink/6348776931876799/>

Try this – wonderful photos from a zeppelin

OFFICE ADDRESS IS: ST. JAMES BUSINESS PARK
RADCLIFFE ON TRENT, NOTTINGHAM NG12 2JP

Located off the A52 between Radcliffe and Bingham opposite to the Saxondale village turning, 12 miles from the A1 or 1.5 miles from Radcliffe Railway Station.

Can you help...? Do you get time off from work as a charity initiative like member Andy Millington, if so the AHT needs you!

Also – please do keep searching wherever you are, for 'Airship' related items.

2023 should see exciting times for us all, so do 'Stay safe' everyone,

Looking forward to meeting you all, and we can offer coffee too

Cheers,




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