



NEWSLETTER

Join us at the Flying Breakfast on Fri 18 Oct 13 (See P7)

September Buffet Lunch

A total of 38 members and guests attended our September Buffet Lunch, with the usual gigantic spread created by Stephanie and her staff!

Geoff Hulett welcomed everybody including a welcome return of Des Richard and particularly welcomed our guests from the Woking Branch. Bill Hyland even found out during lunch he had worked at West Drayton with Bill Bawden for 25 years, however, as they were on different shifts they had not met (guess it was a big place!). *Pictures courtesy of Roger Miller.*



Members & guests were asked to remember Jack Easter and take home a 'doggy bag'



Our Chairman welcomes the 'Woking Mafia' and Stephanie Ball



Ian and Maureen Nelson prior to their move to Horsham

October Events

It is back to normal with an 11am start for our 'Members Meeting' on 16 October. We plan to kick off with Bill George telling how he met up with his Meteor instructor after a mere 50 years! As for the rest of the programme, you need to be there to find out!

As September was a bit of an eating month, why not keep it up and join us at Haddenham for a '**Flying Breakfast**' at The Rose and Thistle. This was set up many years ago by Ron Doble and it is a chance to meet our friends from the Oxford Branch

The date is **Friday 18th October at 12 Noon for 12.30pm** and details of tickets are on **Page 7**. **Closing date is 11 October**, so please get your orders and cheque to Graham Laurie, as soon as possible. If any of you have any special dietary needs just give Graham a call.

Jack Ball's Story - Part 5

I remember my fellow pilots fondly: Len Doward, Clem Koder, Sandy Lane, Geoff Perrott, Bert Hazell; Harvey Hewetson and Lloyd Hannah from Canada, Dave Mattingley and John Murray from Australia. The Brits among them had similar experience to my own: a couple of years spent training other aircrew.

The next day I was with my own crew on the Battle Order for a daylight attack on Eikenhorst, a V1 storage base in Holland, which we were to bomb from ten thousand feet. The V1 was the 'doodlebug' currently bombarding London. My gunners told me that when going for the 'ops' meal they were delighted to call out whose crew they belonged to. No telephone calls in or out were then permitted. After the main briefing when the target, route and special hazards were pointed out, the other categories went to their own briefings. We picked up our first aid kits, emptied our pockets of personal items and finally were conveyed around the perimeter track to the dispersal points where the aircraft stood. The ground crew were there to discuss any recent faults that had been corrected. Lofty Parsonson, the rigger, and Jim 'Sparks' Docherty were great friends then and many years later.

Then we set about loading the mound of brown paper parcels of 'Window'. These were the metallised strips cut to interfere with the enemy radar frequencies and the number of parcels varied with the length of the trip. On a long raid we hardly had room to move. The bomb-aimer was supposed to stuff handfuls out through a small opening, from approaching the enemy coast until we returned to the same point. This trip is retained in my memory because on my first sight of the strips, glinting as they flashed by, I thought they were tracer bullets. I was disabused of this idea when a large brown paper parcel came tumbling past.

We had two main aids for the navigator. Gordon was an absolute wizard with 'Gee' which was accurate over the UK, less so as you went away. The other was code-named H2S. This painted a picture of the ground below and could normally pick out towns, rivers and coastlines. Unfortunately, the night fighters could

home on to its transmissions, so we normally only used it over the target. Clamped to it was a camera that recorded the screen when the bombs were dropped. Similarly, Peter had a screen, code-named 'Fishpond', which was believed to show any night fighters attacking from underneath, but as the Germans could also home on that, we used it rarely. One of his jobs was to search the radio frequencies until he located the German Fighter Controller and then transmit on that frequency from a microphone in an engine nacelle.

I was in a Nissen hut with three other pilots. That winter was brutally cold on the Wolds and there was a temptation to keep your 'long johns' on whether flying or not. This had to be resisted. My crew, who shared a Nissen hut, had melded well, although some confided that they found Pat O'Malley's habit of oiling and exercising his suitcase hinges every night to be a trifle wearing. I paid them a visit to witness this but took no further action. Mike also told me that young Peter the wireless operator was very nervous, tended to sit on the main spar and recalculate the odds against us after each trip. I regret that I did not have the nous to discuss this with Pete and possibly avoid his later illness. He had a frightening task over the target, having to go off-intercom and back along the fuselage, carrying portable oxygen and a short length of broomstick, to ensure the six-inch diameter photoflash went automatically down its chute. This lit the target for the photographs that hopefully proved we'd been there.

Initially on trips I carried my revolver in a holster, but soon got tired of this and left it in the hut. Thereafter I just flew with a gas mask case on my chest like a horse's nosebag, full of sultanas made freely available by a Dominion government. We were equipped with various escape items: a compass in the form of a trouser button, a knife in the top of a flying boot (to reduce them to a pair of shoes) and a map printed on a silk scarf. We had passport photos taken dressed in a sports jacket and tie. The idea being that, having contacted the Resistance, new documents could be rapidly made. Naturally, only one jacket and tie seemed available to the photographer. The Germans revealed after the war that they could usually tell which squadron prisoners belonged to by the pattern of the tie.

Looking back through my logbook, it seems that we flew on most days. If there were no operations scheduled for us, we were away to the bombing range or on fighter affiliation.

On a trip to Calais to attack the heavy guns that were bombarding Kent, the targets could not be seen through cloud. We had a Master Bomber there who ordered us to take the bombs home. This was a new experience, rewarded by the sight of the first pilot home landing too fast with his wheels up and sliding through the far fence. This was a man reputed to smoke two cigarettes at a time. The rest of us landed cautiously. I found that my smoothest landings were those made with a full bomb-load aboard.

On October 5th we went to Saarbrücken, but on the way home were diverted to Coltishall in Suffolk because of the weather. The Americans there turned out new beds and mattresses and gave us a meal of ham and peaches. We flew back to the delights of Kelstern the next morning.

On daylight raids, contrary to our lonely missions at night, we flew in a 'gaggle', confident of our fighter escort. The 'gaggle' was due to our lack of recent formation practice. Three aircraft from each group had brightly-painted rudders and other aircraft would formate as close as comfort dictated. Later, instructions were given that over the target the leaders would throttle back to merge with the 'gaggle', in order to reduce the risk from radar-guided flak. No crew were keen to be the aiming point for the German gunners and I remember an occasion at Cologne when the leaders reduced power but so did everybody, even lowering their wheels to keep station.

On the 7th we went off to attack Emmerich. It was a bright autumn day (my mother's birthday) as we flew in a great 'gaggle' of some three hundred and fifty Lancasters towards the target. Over to starboard a similar force of Halifaxes was attacking Kleve, from which a huge column of smoke and dust arose. There are conflicting accounts for the reasons we went there. One states that both towns were on the

route from which a German counter-attack against the flank of the Allied armies might come, although my recollection is that the garrisons were holding up the Allied advance. Suffice to say that the towns were left impassable. I was struck by the incongruity of the scene at 3pm on a sunny Saturday, at a time when people in England were going about their business, perhaps to a football match or the weekly shopping.

In the early hours of 14th October we were called from our beds at 0300 and briefed to attack the Thyssen steel works at Duisburg in the Ruhr. Watching Lloyd Hannah, a young Canadian pilot, ahead of me taking off, I took my turn on to the runway just as the dawn sky was ripped apart by a huge explosion and pyrotechnic display dead ahead. We knew immediately that he had gone in with his nine tons of bombs. Engine failure on take-off was the dread of any pilot. It was a successful attack but, as we left the target, the flak got our starboard inner engine and it had to be shut down.

At Kelstern we were briefed to go back to Duisburg that night, but this being a 'maximum effort' target, there were no spare aircraft. This clearly put the ground crew on their mettle. I understand they set a new record for a Rolls Royce Merlin engine change and we finally took off some time after the rest of the squadron.

I cannot remember details of this raid, perhaps because of the wealth of incident this day. Suffice to say that we were late back, and as we touched down, I was asked to clear the runway quickly as there was an aircraft in trouble behind me. It was a Wellington from a Polish squadron that crashed in flames on the runway, but with no casualties. The 'double Duisburg', as it became known, was officially 'Operation Hurricane', an attempt to persuade the Nazis that their situation was hopeless. Over a thousand bombers took part in each raid, with other attacks by the US 8th Air Force during daylight.

Ed: *We continue more details of Jack's story next month. How nice it was to see Steph at the Lunch*

Captain W E Johns

Ed: *During the summer holidays I took my 9 year old grandson to the RAF Museum at Hendon. I was instructed that he wanted to start at the First World War aircraft as he had just finished reading four books by Captain W E Johns about 'Biggles' of course. But that got me thinking who was Captain W E Johns, I had met him in the 1950's at the 'School's Own Exhibition' at Olympia.*

In 1913, while living in Swaffham, and working as a sanitary inspector, Johns enlisted in the Territorial Army as a private in the King's Own Royal Regiment (Norfolk Yeomanry). The regiment was mobilised in August 1914 and was sent overseas in September 1915, embarking on RMS Olympic. The Norfolk Yeomanry fought at Gallipoli until December when they were withdrawn to Egypt. In September 1916 Johns transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. While serving on the Macedonian front in Greece he was hospitalised with malaria. After recovering he was commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in September 1917[and posted back to England for flight training.

Johns undertook his initial flying training at the short-lived airfield at Coley Park in Reading, flying the Farman MF.11 Shorthorn aircraft. He was then posted to No.25 Flying Training School at Thetford in Norfolk, closer to where his wife Maude, and son Jack lived.

On 1 April 1918, Johns was appointed flying instructor at Marske-by-the-Sea in Cleveland. Aircraft were very unreliable in those days and he wrote off three planes in three days through engine failure – crashing into the sea, then the sand, and then through a fellow officer's back door. Later, he was caught in fog over the Tees, missed Hartlepool and narrowly escaped flying into a cliff. Shooting one's own propeller off with a forward-mounted machine-gun with malfunctioning synchronisation was a fairly common accident, and it happened to

Johns twice. The Commanding Officer at Marske was a Major Champion, known as 'Gimlet', a name used later by Johns for the hero of a series of stories. Johns served as a flying instructor until August 1918 when he transferred to the Western Front.

He performed six weeks of active duty as a bomber pilot with No. 55 Squadron RAF, close to the average in the latter part of the war. This squadron was part of the Independent Air Force, a section the Royal Air Force that had been formed for the purpose of bombing strategic targets deep inside Germany. On 16 September 1918, he was piloting one of a group of six De Havilland DH4s, that were to bomb Mannheim. Johns' aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and was forced to drop out of formation. He jettisoned his single 250-pound (110 kg) bomb and turned for home, but was attacked by a large group of Fokker D.VII fighters. During a lengthy, furious, but one-sided battle, Johns' observer and rear-gunner, Second Lieutenant Alfred Edward Amey, was badly wounded and the aircraft shot down. The victory was credited to German pilot Georg Weiner, the commander of Jagdstaffel 3. Johns and Amey were taken prisoner by German troops. Johns received a leg wound during the battle and was slightly injured in the crash; Amey died of his injuries that day. Johns was a prisoner of war until the end of the war.

After the war, Johns remained in the Royal Air Force, with the substantive rank of Pilot Officer. His promotion to the rank of Flying Officer was gazetted on 23 November 1920. Johns worked in central London as a recruiting officer and, notably, rejected T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia) as an RAF recruit for obviously giving a false name, but was later ordered to accept him.

By 1923, his RAF commission had been extended a further four years and he had moved to Birmingham, again working as a recruitment officer. On 15 October 1927, he was transferred to the reserves. Four years later, on 15 October 1931, he relin-

quished his commission.

W.E. Johns was a prolific author and editor. In his 46-year writing career (1922–68) he penned over 160 books, including nearly one hundred Biggles books, more than sixty other novels and factual books, and scores of magazine articles and short stories.



After leaving the RAF, Johns became a newspaper air correspondent, as well as editing and illustrating books about flying. At the request of John Hamilton Ltd, he created the magazine Popular Flying which first appeared in March 1932. It was in the pages of Popular Flying that Biggles first appeared.

The first Biggles book, *The Camels are Coming*, was published in August 1932 and Johns would continue to write Biggles stories until his death in 1968. At first, the Biggles stories were credited to "William Earle", but later Johns adopted the more familiar byline "Capt. W. E. Johns". The rank was self-awarded; his actual final RAF rank of Flying Officer was equivalent to an army (or RFC) Lieutenant.

Johns was also a regular contributor to *Modern Boy* magazine in the late 1930s as well as editing (and writing for) both *Popular Flying* and *Flying*. He was removed as editor at the beginning of 1939, probably as a direct result of a scathing editorial, strongly opposed to the policy of appeasement and highly critical of several Conservative statesmen of the time.[12] This opposition to appeasement is reflected in some of his books. For example, in *Biggles & Co* (1936) the storyline revolves around German preparations for conquest. Even more advanced in his thinking, for that time, was the story *Biggles Air Commodore* (1937)

which alludes to Japanese preparations for conquest of British colonies in the Far East.

Besides his Biggles books, Johns also wrote eight other books of juvenile fiction, twelve books of fiction for adults, and eight factual books, including several books on aviation, books on pirates and treasure hunting, and a book on gardening, *The Passing Show*.

Unusually among children's writers of the time, from 1935 Johns employed a working-class character as an equal member of the Biggles team – "Ginger" Hablethwaite, later Hebblethwaite, the son of a Northumberland miner. However, readers never learn his real Christian name, and he proclaims himself a Yorkshireman once or twice.



Biggles

Ed: *On the visit to the Museum the aircraft that really had a lasting effect on Leo was the Lancaster. He wanted to know everything about it and what it was like to fly? Alas I could not help but I know some people who could! So come on guys what about some contributions to 'Flying the Lancaster'*

BA Takes delivery of Super Jumbo

Some British Airways passengers flying between London and Los Angeles will recently have noticed something new (and big) when they board their plane. The British airline received its first Airbus A380, the world's largest commercial passenger aircraft, in July and began flying it between LAX and Heathrow on Sept. 24. The carrier's super jumbo jet can accommodate up to 469 passengers in four classes. Here's a look inside.

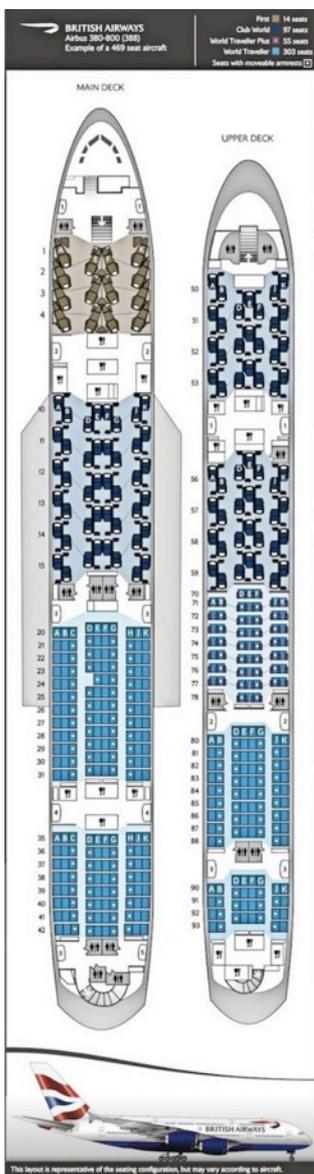


For those with money - 1st Class



Economy...but upstairs or downstairs?

I have been lucky enough to travel in an A380. in my case with Singapore Airlines. The experience was wonderful and I remember one thing above all others, hearing the floor above my head 'creak' as passengers on the Upper Deck, moved around!



BA Layout of A380 Pax Cabin



It is big! A380 (G-ALEA), seen with A318 (G-EUNA)

East Grinstead & The 'Guinea Pigs'

The town of East Grinstead was famous for its links with the plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe, who treated so many badly burned aircrew during and after the 2nd WW.

He encouraged his patients to still wear their RAF uniforms and he encouraged local residents to welcome them to their homes. There were 649 Guinea Pigs by the end of the war and approximately 60 are still alive.

East Grinstead. 'the town that never stared' has commissioned a sculpture by Martin Jennings, whose own father was treated by McIndoe.

Fund raising is in full swing and the **Chiltern ACA has made a donation**. If anyone would like

to make a personal donation the details are as follows:

Donate via '**mcindoememorial.com**' or by sending a cheque payable to McIndoe Memorial Account to: Jacquie Pinney, The Blonde McIndoe Research Foundation, Queen Victoria Hospital, Holtye Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3DZ.



Model of proposed 7ft statue

The Rose & Thistle, Haddenham HP17 8AJ

Friday 18 October 12 Noon for 1230pm

English Breakfast

Eggs ,beans, tomato, bacon, sausage, mushrooms & toast

Rolled chicken breast

Stuffed with fig and feta, served with mash & gravy

Apple & Cinnamon Roulade

With raisins and honey drizzle served with ice cream

£15 per person Coffee or Tea at £1pp

a." Cheque payable to 'The Rose & Thistle' plus menu choice

**b." Send to Graham Laurie, 19 High St, Prestwood, Gt Missenden, Bucks
HP16 9EE**

Programme

All events at 1030 for 1100 at Greenacres unless advised (*)

16 Oct Member's Meeting

18 Oct Flying Breakfast, Haddenham* 1200 Noon

20 Nov The Lightning - Alan Merriman

18 Dec Christmas Lunch* 1200 Noon

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Welfare

Well that was a good lunch even if there was twice as much as we needed!!! Enjoyed meeting the Woking lot and I've been in touch with Tony Boxall and Bill Bawden, who thoroughly enjoyed the affair. Small world syndrome, but quite fortuitous as I've put Tony back in touch with our old Squadron Association (85) and recruited Bill to join the occasional Chiefs reunion at White Waltham.

Little news this month as I seem to have been quite busy. (**Ed:** *Tell me something new Bill!*) However, nice to report that Walter Cooper has overcome most of his problems of the last few months, which he wished to keep quiet about, and is now able to get on with various projects that have been on hold. Unfortunately for us, one of those projects is an impending move to the Wantage area. He still intends to see us occasionally if visiting his old haunts in Wycombe. We wish him all the best and will be sorry to lose a regular at our meetings.

Gerrard Norwood has also had problems which resulted in a spell of intensive care in Watford General. The last we had was that he was on the mend but I haven't managed any contact at his home address.

Bill

Membership Secretary

Sorry I could not be with you at the lunch but I was away on holiday for the week. As you will see elsewhere a couple of people are on the move, Ian Nelson and Walter Cooper but I am pleased to say both intend to try and see us occasionally.

Some sad news just in, former member **John Bingham** who attended our September buffet lunch passed away on 25 September. He is survived by his wife Bea. No details yet available of his funeral but Tom Payne will be the first to get them.

Gerry