



SUSSEX AIRCREW ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN 2013 NEWSLETTER

Monthly Meetings

Numbers in the Branch remain at the mid 60's level but regrettably attendances at some monthly meetings have been round the 20 mark. The committee have been seeking speakers over the last few months and have been successful in having found several offering interesting topics which will, we hope, boost numbers. Of course if we use outside speakers this normally means payment plus expenses. We are therefore naturally very keen to have our members on the platform - most of you have many stories to tell and we would love to share your experiences if you haven't done so already.

In August Jim Barnes enthralled us with his talk on 'Woman at War'. September brought an ex BombAimer/Navigator, Harry Hacker, to the Conservative Club and spoke of his life in what was then Tanganyika, (now Tanzania). Malcolm Burwood gave us another geography lesson at this month's meeting with his adventures in Venezuela under the title 'Los Conquistadores'.

Committee Matters

Bob Osborne took over the Chairmanship just under 5 years ago and feels it is time to hand the reins to a new driver - we would prefer a volunteer rather than using a press gang! Shaun Casey is contacting several members in the hope we shall have a replacement named before the next Committee meeting in January. Regrettably Mike Nash has had to resign from the Committee due to ill health but we hope he will continue to attend our monthly meetings.

At the last Committee meeting it was decided the annual membership fee should increase to £15 annually from 1st January 2014. The main reason is to cover the expenses of using outside speakers at our meetings.

Branch Trips

At the end of this month Malcolm Burwood hosts the trip to Kent. We wish all those travelling good weather for an enjoyable few days.

Malcolm has also been planning a return to Normandy to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings but, as you will have seen from his email, he has had to bring forward the date due to all hotels and guides having been booked over the 6th June. Do let Malcolm know asap if you are interested as there is much planning involved.

Pub Lunches

Shaun Casey continues to organise these well attended events but some members feel a change from the Woolpack occasionally would be more popular. It has also been agreed to vary the days of the lunches ie the 3rd Tuesday, 3rd Wednesday, 3rd Thursday each consecutive month to save clashing with other club/society functions.

Christmas Lunch

Helen Keeling has sent an email to all members with the details of the Christmas Lunch at the Oak Barn Restaurant, Burgess Hill (adjacent to the Burgess Hill Golf Centre). It would be nice to have a good turnout for what is always a convivial event. Please return the reply at your earliest.

West Sussex Aircrew Branch

For those interested I have sent a separate email with the latest from our friends in the West Sussex Branch. Unfortunately I could not include it as an attachment to my Newsletter due to its format. Again, I emphasise the attachment of the other email is from the West Sussex Branch Newsletter.

Orford Ness

In a previous Newsletter I included a short history of RAF Martlesham Heath. Closely associated with Martlesham is Orford Ness which again is steeped in aviation history. As this edition of the Newsletter is fairly short I hope you will find the following of interest.

10 Miles from Martlesham lies Orford and across the River Ore is Orford Ness. Although it is a peninsula of marsh and shingle, the locals refer to it as an island. The War Office procured the Ness as an experimental establishment in 1914. It's remoteness has seen secret trials through WW 1 and 11 and the Cold War until the 1990's. In 1993 it was acquired by the National Trust and is now designated a National Nature Reserve.

The first unit to be based on the Ness was the Armament Experimental Unit which moved from Upavon in 1914 and in 1916. 37 Squadron was the first to be based there. At this time there were two airfields on the Ness with several large hangars. Martlesham and Orford worked closely with aviation testing but all the ballistic drops were made at Orford. Sir Barnes Wallis is reputed to have visited the Ness for trials of his Tallboy bomb but there are no reports or documents which confirm this.

In the 1930s Orford Ness was the site of the first purpose built experiments on the defence system that would later be known as radar. Robert Watson-Watt proved that the technology was feasible on Orford Ness but his team moved to nearby Bawdsey Manor and further developed the Chain Home Radar System which became invaluable in the Battle of Britain.

The Ministry of Defence conducted many experiments on component systems of weapons for all manner of explosive ballistics including nuclear device detonators although no fissile material was tested on the site. Many of the buildings remain including the distinctive 'pagodas'.

In 1967 the British and US Governments agreed to develop the top secret Cobra Mist Project, an Over the Horizon Radar, to see as far as Western Russia and China. Although costing between £25-£35 million the scheme was a failure due to many reasons but reputedly interference was the main problem. The massive building remains at the northern end of the Ness and is now used as a medium-wave broadcasting facility including the BBC.

'The Hidden History of Orfordness' by Paddy Heazel, published by the History Press in Association with the National Trust gives a full and illustrated history of the Ness. The only access for visitors is by National Trust ferry from Orford Quay, with boats crossing regularly to the Ness between 10 and 2 only. See the National Trust annual guide for more information. A visit is highly recommended.



[The Pagodas on Orford Ness as seen from Orford Quay](#)

Joe Overy