

# UPDATE

## CONTROL COLUMN

THE E-MAGAZINE OF THE AEROPLANE COLLECTION

AVIATION PRESERVATION IN THE NORTHWEST SINCE 1962  
NUMBER 5 ISSUE 1 2014



Mike Daveys superb de Havilland Rapide replica at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Speke, Liverpool

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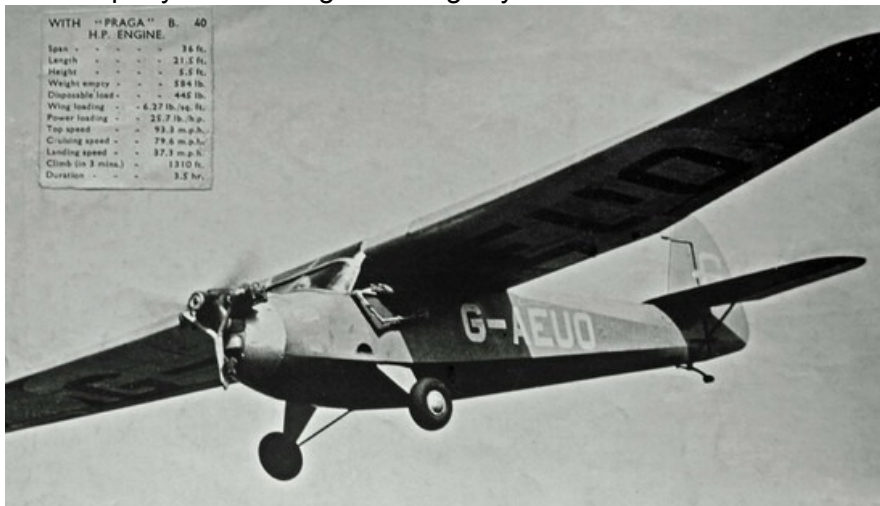
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**The Hillson Praga:  
A little known Manchester aircraft  
By David George - Member of the Friends of MOSI**



The firm of F. Hills and Co. Ltd who originally made furniture in the North East of England, were established in Trafford Park from 1937. The move seems to have been designed to take a share of the upsurge in orders for aircraft to train new pilots for any forthcoming emergency. The company was awarded a contract to produce 35 of a Czechoslovakian-designed aircraft called the Praga. This was an all-wood construction high-wing monoplane with plywood covered box sections for the fuselage. It was to have a cabin and the engines were initially produced by the Jowett Motor Company and later by Aeronca and also J. A. P. The wingspan was of 36 feet and the plane had an endurance of 3 ½ hours, with a ceiling of 11, 000 feet. The top speed was 90 miles per hour. Altogether 28 were completed and they were assembled at Barton Aerodrome. Northern Air services who had a flying school at Barton at one time operated 10 of this aircraft. Post-World War Two, the firm built several other types and carried out sub-contract work for example on sub-assemblies for the AVRO Anson. A number of wooden propellers were also manufactured. Probably their most important contribution in the late 40s – early 50s was the production of a number of Percival Proctors under licence, as this aircraft did go into service with the RAF as a trainer. The initial price of the Praga was £385 but according to the literature none now survive. Barton Aerodrome also figured in the early test flights of the Fairey Hendon bomber before the company built a hanger at Ringway in the late 1930s.



Both photographs at Barton via R. A. Scholefield

**Meetings and Events**

**Trustees Meetings at  
Castle Park Arts Centre  
off Fountain Lane  
Frodsham, Cheshire  
Last Monday each month**

**Hooton Park  
Open days  
Last Sunday each month  
1:00pm till 3:00pm**

**Social Evenings  
At Frodsham  
4 times a year  
Check with the Secretary  
For dates**

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## How to acquire Avian

By Colin Schroeder - Chairman

G-EBZM was unlucky; she had only just been repaired by Martin Hearn Ltd. at Hooton Park and returned to Giro Aviation at Southport after a landing accident, when an inconsiderate declaration of war prevented further pleasure flying for a long time. After the war she lingered until moving in the late 50's to Styal and then Ringway, where two Eagle employees hoped to rebuild both G-EBZM and Fleet Finch G-AEJY. Eagle moved, and the erstwhile rebuilders moved. G-EBZM & G-AEJY stayed. G-AEJY was metal and was beaten to death in an Altrincham scrapyard, whilst G-EBZM was given to the Ringway fire service and dumped in the old firing range amid sand and water.

Alan Madden, then in the tower at Ringway phoned Peter Scholfield who persuaded Merseyside Group Aviation of Enthusiasts (MGAE) to mount a rescue. The fuselage and two surviving wings went to Liverpool - in particular to Bryan Heatley's garage. Inevitably this novelty became less than a good thing, and G-EBZM had to go to a hangar at Speke, where it cost money. This also was not good, so Peter Scholfield further conned MGAE into sending the Avian to Lymm Grammar School where he happened to be teaching. Rebuilding proved far too difficult, and he sold the remains to the new NAPS (one of whose founder members he was teaching) for a £5 donation to the School Aviation Society.

Having obtained G-EBZM at the beginning of November 1962, it became obvious that NAPS should search for other existing models and, if possible, obtain them. Research showed two other Avian's remaining in this country; G-ACGT & G-ABEE. The former, owned by Ken Smith, was not available, but the latter was. Correspondence with Peter Skinner at the end of 1963, persuaded the Selhurst Grammar School ATC Unit, Croydon, to part with same for £5. When John Kenyon, Paul Connatty & Ian Jones went south to view it, they noted in Peter Skinner's garden, the fuselage of G-ACKE parts from which had been used on G-ABEE.

To transport G-ABEE north and to move G-EBZM to the NAPS new Maveen Grove, Stockport premises from Ian Jones at Stretford, NAPS had the use of a Woodford Gliding Club's glider trailer. This was through the help of Peter Teagle, whose brother Jeff had provided his van to move G-EBZM from Lymm Grammar School. When the trailer was collected on 25<sup>th</sup> November it was found to contain a redundant glider. RA854, a Slingsby T.7 Cadet TX.1. A quick dash was made to Maveen Grove to deposit the latest acquisition. The wings were a bit tatty and the cockpit a little bare, but otherwise it was a complete aircraft. The trailer was then sent empty to Stratford, and G-EBZM tucked away that afternoon at Maveen



The following Friday night, two NAPS members were trying to get some sleep on the floor of a hired van speeding down the M.1 en-route to Croydon. Paul & Ian were also heading there on Paul's motorbike trying not to fall asleep. Both parties met next morning with the two-wheeled brigade looking the worse for wear. The first call was Peter Skinner's garden to collect the fuselage frame and scare the living daylight out of his neighbours. Then back to Croydon and Selhurst Grammar School. At an under-pass that was being constructed, the corners should have been made wider as NAPS almost added a set of traffic lights to the collection as they manoeuvred the long load.

They had planned to kip down in the trailer in the school grounds overnight, but this was not to be. Rather than tow the somewhat embarrassing load around they left it and the tried five bedded down in the van. The police were most considerate and left them in their country car-park while moving on the occupants of other vehicles whose windows had inexplicably become steamed up. Up bright and early on Sunday they returned to the school and set about getting together the bits & piece. The cadets assisted and soon they had quite a large pile of components, very tatty wings destined for G-EBZM, wheels, undercarriage units, two fuel tanks, windscreens, top-decking and cowls. An engine too, a Gipsy II now in Canada. A photo for the archive of the handover, and away home. It was an uneventful trip back, with only an unsuccessful attempt to knock down a pump at an M.1 filling station. So there they were two



**NAPS** Northern Aircraft Preservation Society

**BAPC** British Aviation Preservation Council

**TAC** The Aeroplane Collection

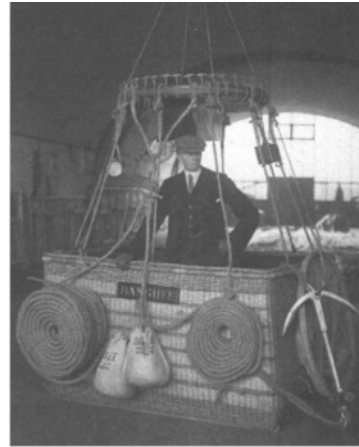
## Lighter than air machines around the Wirral – 1910 to 1936

By Colin Schroeder Chairman

At times in the early days of manned flight, members of the public might have looked skywards and been surprised to see the shape of a large object, moving slowly across the sky with hardly any noise being emitted from it. These were lighter than air machines, balloons and airship filled with a gas that enabled them to float off into the sky. Although not reliant on wings to keep them in the air like heavier than air machines, they do form part of the history of manned flight around The Wirral.

### **15<sup>th</sup> February 1910 – John Dunville, balloonist flies over The Wirral**

On Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 1910, Irishman Colonel John Dunville of Belfast, a well-known balloonist of the time, took off from the Dublin Gas Company's works in Barrow Street, Ringsend, in his balloon *St Louis*. Mr C.W. Pollock a well-known member of the Aero Club accompanied him on this flight across the Irish Sea. The gas works may seem a strange place to start a flight, but most balloons of that era used coal gas as a means of inflating the envelope. The local paper reported, '*comparatively few people witnessed the 10am start, and after the preliminary arrangements, which were carried out by Mr Short, of Short & Co., Battersea, an aerial navigation expert, the St. Louis was released and shot up with great speed*'. They drifted across the Irish Sea, at one point reaching a height of 10,000 feet where the thermometer showed 27 degrees of frost. They were sighted at the South Stack signal station at 12:30 and then passing over Holyhead, they were carried by the wind towards Chester. Their flight took them over the North Wales resort towns and the Clwyd range. Then over the River Dee and down the west side of The Wirral, passing Neston and Parkgate, eventually coming to earth at 3pm at the hamlet of Birtles, near Macclesfield having covered 160 miles at an average speed of 34mph. Very few people observed the landing, but in conversation with one or two who were present, Dunville said they had a terribly cold passage, and experienced one severe snowstorm. The aeronauts only stayed in Birtles two hours, in which time the balloon was packed and conveyed to Chelford Railway Station, where both boarded trains, John Dunville to join the Irish mail hoping to reach home by the morning, and Mr Pollock to London.



John Dunville in Banshee a balloon similar to St Louis in which he crossed the Irish sea

### **1915 to 1918 – 'Llangefni Pigs' off The Wirral's north coast**

During the First World War, anybody on the north shore of the peninsular, using a good telescope, could observe airships patrolling Liverpool Bay. From 1915 these airships were based at Llangefni on the Isle of Anglesey and were commonly known as '*Llangefni Pigs*'. They were part of a network of stations around the coastline whose duty was to look out for German submarines and if spotted attack them and call for surface ship assistance. From May 1917, '*Llangefni Pigs*' were involved in escorting convoys into and out of the Mersey ports. The area they covered was bounded in the south by a line west from the Llyn peninsular to Ireland and in the north, a line west from Morecambe Bay to Ireland.



The black dots represent shipping sunk by German submarines. Operational area for Llangefni Pigs is shown by the dotted lines. It ran across to Ireland, from Morecambe Bay in the north and the Llyn Peninsular in the south.

Of simple construction, they were a non-rigid type of airship. That is the huge cigar shaped envelope, 145 feet long by 27 feet in diameter containing 60,000 cubic feet of gas, had no framework to support it like the later R101 and Zeppelin's. Slung underneath, was the '*car*'. This was the fuselage including the wheels and skid, of a surplus aircraft, such as the Be.2c or Maurice Farman. The car held a crew of two, a pilot, and a wireless operator/air gunner. It had been modified to take a radio, bombs, and a long-range petrol tank, giving 8 hours duration with a cruising speed of 40mph.

The cost of each of these early airships was about £2,550 and they were given the designation of 'SS', which stood for either Sea Scout or Submarine Scout. Five of these airships were based at Llangefni



The SS Llangefni Pig were augmented by the SSP with a larger envelope and a more powerful engine. The 'P' stood for pusher. The car used here is a modified Maurice Farman fuselage with the engine in 'pusher' mode. The crew consisted of a pilot, wireless operator/air gunner and an engineer

Later the 'SS' were augmented by three 'SSP' (P for pusher), a modified version of the 'SS' with a larger envelope and bigger pusher engine. They could carry a crew of three, the additional member being an engineer. These were subsequently replaced by the 'SSZ' which became the standard patrol version with 77 being produced. The 'SSZ' had an endurance of 16 hours at 50mph or 40 hours at 20mph, the car was specially designed so that it could float in the water in an emergency.

Although they were rather primitive, they were an effective deterrent. Being large, they were easily spotted by a submarine, which would dive below periscope depth so that it could not be detected. This in turn had the positive effect that the submarine could not attack shipping whilst it was avoiding detection below periscope depth. It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of these patrols, but on the days that the airships were not on patrol due to bad weather or other operational reasons, the attacks on shipping did increase.

On 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1918, 'SSZ35' flown by Flight Lieutenant's Williams & Faring with air mechanic Rawlings as wireless operator attempted an endurance record. They left Llangefni and flew to Northern Ireland then on to Scotland the Isle of Man, Blackpool, Liverpool, and back across the north coast of The Wirral to the North Wales coast. They had been air born for 26 hours and 10 minutes. Bored the crew decided that they would bomb an off shore rock, but unfortunately they were flying too slow and too low and splinters from the 'attacked' rock tore a hole in the envelope causing the crew to make a dash back to base. At Llangefni it was discovered that the crew had only used half the fuel they had on board.



Air-Britain Photographic Images Collection © Chris England

Above: At Wales Aircraft Museum, Cardiff in 1982  
Below at Long Marston in 2012

## THE WAY WE WERE

By Peter Schofield - Past Chairman TAC

It is hard to remember how amateur we were in those early days. Mention of the Meteor WL332 brought to mind the actual collection of same. We had handed over our hard-earned £50 to the City Council and duly arrived at Moston Technical College to find the aircraft in excellent condition in a low-roofed building. Separating it behind the nose section, the fuselage and wings were duly pulled out. The long crane jib was then used to hold a sling around the nose aft of the cockpit in order to lift and pull. Meanwhile the nosewheel supported the weight - including that of the 400 pounds of lead ballast forward of it in the nose cone. Careful study of the mechanics of this arrangement, with diagrams if necessary, will reveal a basic flaw. Unfortunately the nose section noticed the flaw at the same time as we did and began gently to lean sideways. Several members set up new records for a standing backward jump as the whole nose crashed to the floor. Luckily no-one was injured, although a Vampire boom lying nearby suffered irremediable shape change and had to be exchanged from one of our stock. The Meteor seemed unscathed and was subsequently delivered and assembled at the Royal Umpire Museum, Croston. This was a remarkable museum of rural life, with Meteor and Vampire for good measure. It often resounded to bucolic curses as we fought with Vampire wing bolts - but that's another story



Air-Britain Photographic Images Collection © Chris Hall

## Bahrain Twin Pioneers 1967

### By Terry Parker - TAC Member

It was October or November 1967 at RAF Muharraq which is on the island adjacent to Bahrain Island in the Persian Gulf (or Arabian Gulf depending upon who you were).



We had orders to remove various components from several redundant Ex 152 Sqn Twin Pioneer aircraft from Sharjah. The flap and slat mechanisms were to be removed and the inlet, or was the exhaust, manifolds from the engines. It seemed daft since no other aircraft type was likely to be able to use these bits. Even the ancient pneumatic autopilot had to be removed – for what reason I do not know. I guess it was to ensure that the airframes were totally unusable.

The aircraft were in fair and complete condition with radios, batteries, etc. I remember sitting in them with power on and feathering propellers. You almost feel them trying to fly in the high winds/sand storm we had at the time (apparently a “shamal”) but fortunately they were picketed, ie; tied down. None of us knew anything about Twin Pioneers and of course the manufacturers had never intended the flap and slat mechanism to be removed anyway. The inlet and exhaust manifolds were intertwined and the engine chap reckoned the only way to remove the inlet manifold was to saw them off. Perhaps because the manifolds would normally only have been replaced with an engine removed from the airframe.



So we set to work. Our engine lad, a young LAC, was wearing denims since it was no longer actually hot. He set up two Safety Raisers under the port engine, one either side of the vertical propeller blade, and started dismantling things. Later I went up on the outboard side perhaps to help or maybe just to view the work, I can't remember which after nearly 50 years, whilst he was on the inboard side. The denims we had were those awful ones with rubber buttons, and whilst he was reaching across to get at something a button snagged on something. No doubt he tried to pull free but finding he was still caught up he looked to see what it was stuck on. It was a Bowden cable and he unhooked himself. Then he looked to see what the cable was and discovered that it was the cable that fired the starter cartridge. And that the starter breech was still fitted with a live cartridge! “Don't assume – Check” is what they tell you and we had all assumed that these scrap aircraft would have been made safe. It seems as if after their last flight they had been just been parked up, picketed and forgotten.

Had he tugged harder it would have fired rotating the propeller, the prop blades would have chopped into the safety raisers probably knocking them and us over. It could have all been quite nasty. I wonder if they had magnetos and the engine might have started!



Our new sign

Typical the Secretary leaning on the job again



## **WISDOM FROM FLIGHT TRAINING MANUALS**

### **BY WILLIAM TURNBULL**

'If the enemy is in range, so are you.'  
-Infantry Journal-

'It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed.'  
- US.Air Force Manual -

'Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons.'  
- General Douglas MacArthur -

'Tracers work both ways.'  
- Army Ordnance Manual-

'Five second fuses last about three seconds.'  
- Infantry Journal -

'Any ship can be a minesweeper. Once.'  
- Naval Ops Manual -

'Never tell the Platoon Sergeant you have nothing to do.'  
- Unknown Infantry Recruit-

'If you see a bomb technician running, try to keep up with him.'  
- Infantry Journal-

'Yea, Though I Fly Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I Shall Fear No Evil. For I am at 70,000 Feet and Climbing.'  
- Sign over SR71 Wing Ops-

'The only time you have too much fuel is when you're on fire.'  
-Unknown Author-

'When one engine fails on a twin-engine airplane, you always have enough power left to get you to the scene of the crash.'  
-Multi-Engine Training Manual-

'Without ammunition, the Air Force is just an expensive flying club.'  
-Unknown Author-

'If you hear me yell; "Eject, Eject, Eject! the last two will be echoes.'  
If you stop to ask "Why?", you'll be talking to yourself, because by then you'll be the pilot.'  
-Pre-flight Briefing from a Canadian F104 Pilot-

'What is the similarity between air traffic controllers and pilots?  
If a pilot screws up, the pilot dies; but If ATC screws up... the pilot dies.'  
-Sign over Control Tower Door-

'Never trade luck for skill.'  
-Author Unknown-

The three most common expressions (or famous last words) in military aviation are: 'Did you feel that? What's that noise?'  
and 'Oh S...!'  
-Authors Unknown-

'Airspeed, Altitude and Brains. Two are always needed to successfully complete the flight.'  
-Basic Flight Training Manual-

'Flying the airplane is more important than radioing your plight to a person on the ground incapable of understanding or doing anything about it.'

- Emergency Checklist--

'You know that your landing gear is up and locked when it takes full power to taxi to the terminal.'  
- Lead-in Fighter Training Manual -

As the test pilot climbs out of the experimental aircraft, having torn off the wings and tail in the crash landing, the crash truck arrives. The rescuer sees the bloodied pilot and asks, 'What happened?'  
The pilot's reply: 'I don't know, I just got here myself!'