



WAYPOINT INT

Newsletter of Priory Farm Aviators
www.flypfa.co.uk



Committee Members

John Fielding (chair), Bob Sage (airfield owner), Mik Horne (Treasurer),
Alan McNeal (WX station, R/T, Waypoint editor), Paul Jackson, David Brown, Richard Flagg (webmaster),
Paul Archer, Sean Simington (social events booking), Julian Campbell, Nigel Hall (Club insurance).

PFA AGM

The big event in January was the Annual General Meeting, held on 4th January at the PF clubhouse. Minutes below...

Present:

Bob Sage
David Brown
John Fielding
Mik Horn
Nigel Hall
Paul Jackson
Paul Archer
Richard Flagg
Sean Simington

Apologies for absence:

Alan McNeal, Julian Campbell

1. Financial. John gave Mik Horn the raffle money from the Christmas dinner and membership fees money that Bob had collected.
2. Club Treasurer Mik Horn gave a financial report. The largest single expense in 2022 was the purchase of a Defibrillator for the clubhouse at a cost of £1224. *(full financial report available to paid-up members on request)*
2. Membership supremo Bob Sage reported that membership had reached a very healthy 73 in 2022 and early signs were encouraging for 2023. So far, 23 members had already paid their club membership fees for 2023 - **so, those who haven't, pay up by bank transfer soon so the Hon. Treas. and Bob don't have to work for your subs!**
3. Club hut. David had prepared check lists for the club hut so that they could be regularly inspected and recorded. He would be contacting the electrician to inquire about the possible need for PAT testing. Bob reported that he would chase up the company that carries out the fire extinguisher inspection and service as it was overdue. David said he would put up another PIR flood light to cover the steps up to the hut balcony. David confirmed that he has been ensuring that the first aid kits are up to date and suggested amalgamating them into one box that would be in a more visible location, possibly next to the defibrillator in the main club area.
4. April club trip. John suggested Thorpe Abbots museum which was last visited by the PFA over ten years ago. Richard said he would explore the possibility. He was congratulated for keeping the website up to date.
5. Information from Alan (emailed to John). There had recently been a weather system outage due to broadband problems but it was currently working well and he was monitoring both it and the webcam.

6. Committee. All the committee members confirmed that they were happy to remain on the committee and for John to remain as chairperson. Julian and Alan emailed John to confirm their acceptance.

7. Christmas dinner. The committee thought the new venue: the Gamekeeper in Old Buck was a great success and good value. John confirmed that he had emailed the manager to book again for 2023. (This has been confirmed as booked.) John presented Bob, the winner of the 2022 John McLeod Trophy with his bottle of wine prize and his photo was taken in front of the trophy.

8. Winter meeting venue. Sean volunteered to take on the role of organising future venues and liaising with the membership. John would be assisting him through the process. The next meeting is on 1st Feb. Venue undecided.

9. Plumbing. Bob pointed out that one of the taps in the men's loo was not working. John said he'd ask Andy Laddell if he'd have a look at it as he'd kindly fixed one of the toilets last year. Bob reported that Charlie Lilley had recently fixed a burst pipe that had been damaged in the severe, mid December frosts.

10. Waypoint. There are a couple of members without internet access. Mik offered to print out and post them to them. *(Since actioned by Alan McNeal).*

11. Insurance. Nigel volunteered to take on the annual job of reviewing and renewing the club's liability insurance. He also mentioned that he had a computer controlled vinyl printing machine which the club could access when required.

End of Official Minutes.

Summary of our PFA Year, 2022.

From the Chairman, John Fielding

The airfield had started the year with 26 resident aircraft and there were now 32! The limit is normally 30.

Membership levels and interest in joining the club were at very high levels. In the past we've felt happy with a membership running at 60 ... so anything over 70 is phenomenal. I would like to thank all those 23 members who have already paid their membership, less than a week into the new year. It saves your committee volunteers a great deal of time when subs are paid promptly by BACS.

Club activity over the year 2022. (Months given may not be entirely accurate!)

January. The AGM featured a terrific, illustrated presentation by Alan McNeal regarding radio procedures on visiting FISO and Air/Ground airfields. This was followed by one of Paul's highly imaginative quizzes. Somehow he conjures up a different format every year.

February. The club's long standing treasurer and member Bill Scott resigned from the club. **Mik Horn**, aided by his wife **Helen**, kindly stepped into the breach. There was a club fly-out to Cromer Northrepps airfield.

March. On **Trevor Villa's** suggestion the club bought a defibrillator which Bob mounted in the club hut.

April. There was a club expedition to RAF Marham's Aviation Heritage Centre organised by **Richard Flagg**. It was hosted by two extremely experienced and knowledgeable RAF people, making it a highly entertaining evening.

May. The summer barbecues started and were all well attended. We had the share-a-seat day and the club became aware of the proposal for pylons to be placed possibly close to the airfield. **Paul Jackson** stood down as Waypoint after many generous years as editor. **Alan McNeal** kindly took on the role and is now producing a highly professional, informative and enjoyable monthly publication. The

member profiles have been an excellent addition.

June. The Father's Day fly-in was blessed with good weather and was the best attended fly-in in recent years. 27 aircraft visited with the furthest coming 110 miles from Shenstone in Staffs. Thank you to all the members who gave their time to make the day work. **Alan** on the radio, **Mik & Helen** on catering, **Johnny D** on fire, **Keith Sowter** on marshalling ... and of course **Bob** on everything.

July. Tea and coffee in the clubhut became officially free. Many members flew out to the wonderful Heveningham Country Fair. **Paul Jackson** was rightfully given a lifetime membership for his years of service to the club.

August. There was a fly out to Beccles where lunch was enjoyed in their excellent airfield restaurant overlooking a nearly constant stream of parachutists. Having already been maintaining and improving the club hut's first aid facilities, David Brown took on the mantle of overseer of the club hut facilities.

September. Members **Paul Archer, Julian Campbell, Nigel Hall** and **Sean Simington** joined the club committee. Sean has kindly taken over my time consuming role of winter meeting venue/ attendance organiser. **David Brown** agreed to a vital role - that of overseeing the club hut and the toilet block for their condition & function.

December. A new insurance company was (eventually) found to provide liability insurance for the club run facilities. A waste of club money ... but priceless when needed. A lightning strike caused problems with the broadband and Davis weather system. The Christmas dinner was held away from the gliding club for the first time. The Gamekeeper in Old Buck proved to be a great success and was attended by 38 guests. It's been re-booked for 2023. This year's worthy winner of the John McLeod trophy was Bob. (Note: as Bob was unable to be at the Christmas Dinner, I presented it to him at the AGM.)

A special thanks to those who regularly fixed things for the benefit of club members in 2022. **Mik Horn** and **David Brown** on the PIR lights. **Andy Ladell** - plumbing. **Alan McNeal** - water heater, Davis weather system and Waypoint. Apologies to those good people I've missed. Thank you, all!

John requested questions or observations from the floor. There were none.

John requested a motion to re-elect those members of the 2022 committee who had indicated a willingness to serve in 2023. This was proposed by Chris Barnes and seconded by Tony Moore.

The AGM finished with an imaginative, illustrated quiz created and hosted by Paul Jackson. The contestants had to provide the year for each aviation related event. It was won, for the second year running by aviation whizz Chris Barnes who was awarded the star prize of four cans of beer. Runner up was Michael Gibbs.



Bob points to his name on the 2022 John McLeod Trophy and Chris Barnes clutching his cans of beer for winning yet another quiz!

Membership News

Two recent new members - Steve Brownlow and Steve Cattermole. Welcome fellas! *(Please let the Waypoint editor have your phone numbers so we can have a chat about you and your flying backgrounds).* Josh Brownlow leaves us for pastures new.

This month's flying article is one I wrote some 20 years ago for Popham Airfield, which also appeared in Waypoint several years back. The subject is the unforgettable experience Adrian Hall-Carpenter and I had nearly forty years ago in ML407 - The Grace Spitfire.

The main reason for running the story again right now is to commemorate the life of Carolyn Grace who has lost her life age 70 in Australia last December in a car crash. Her death is particularly sad and poignant as her husband who rebuilt ML407 back in the early 1980s also died in a car crash in 1988. A strange coincidence? Carolyn Grace was the only British (nee Australian) female Spitfire pilot, who learned to fly the aircraft as a tribute to her husband after his death and became the aircraft's principle display pilot for some years. This famous aircraft is flown today by various well-known warbird pilots, including the Grace's son Richard.

Some of you will remember the article, but I hope it merits a re-read and the new members we have been fortunate to gain over the last few years will not have seen it before, so - enjoy....

The day I (we) flew a Spitfire!



Apologies for the crappy picture quality. These pics are frame grabs from 1980s VHS video!

It's bleak chilly day in 1985 at Bruntingthorpe airfield near Leicester. A small group of people are hanging around waiting for the unmistakable sound of a Merlin engine, because some of us are going to experience something most pilots would give their right arm for - a flight in a Spitfire!

The aircraft is ML407, a Mk 9 that had just been rebuilt from several truckloads of bits into a complete, airworthy aircraft. It's now known as the 'Grace Spitfire'. Since that time many hundreds of people have had the thrill of the 'Spitfire experience' in this aircraft and a number other Spits which have been converted to two-seaters.

Back in those days, there was ML407 and maybe one other two-seat Spitfire, so the experience was a very rare one indeed!

How did it come about? It's a longish story. I will abbreviate. The man behind it was Paul Layzell. Some of you will know him as the owner of Old Buckenham Airfield twenty odd years ago. Back in 1985 Paul was Managing Director of BMW GB and a keen pilot, so the company had an Aeronautical Society open to staff and some company suppliers. One of those staff members was Adrian Hall-Carpenter of this airfield, owner of Auster J1N G-AHHH. Back in the 80s Adrian was BMW's National Used Car manager and a member of the Aeronautical Society. As a supplier of film and photography to BMW, I was also a member.

Paul managed to persuade Nick Grace to offer rides in ML407 to a select few members of the society, some of whom were PPLs like Paul, Adrian and me.

Back to Bruntingthorpe. After an anxious wait and thoughts of 'maybe he won't come after all', a speck appeared to the south soon followed by the growl and crackle of a Rolls-Royce Merlin. That was the moment when adrenaline levels went up - as did heart rates!

After a short break for the pilot, the much missed Nick Grace, we were entertained by a series of take-offs, fly-bys, aerobics and landings by this wonderful aircraft as each of us waited for our turn to fly.

The history of this fabulous aircraft is well documented on the Ultimate Warbird Flights website - www.warbirdflights.co.uk.

Nick spent five years meticulously restoring the aircraft to flying condition, keeping the two seat configuration from its days in the Irish Air Guard and completed this incredible project in 1985, when, on the 16th of April, the aircraft flew again, with Nick Grace at the controls.

He went on to fly it at many air displays, films and TV shows, including 'Perfect Lady' and 'Piece of Cake' until his tragic death in a car crash three years later. A short while later, in his memory, his widow Carolyn Grace, already a PPL decided to learn to fly the Spitfire. They made a TV film about it - 'Going Solo'. She went solo in the aircraft in 1990, gaining her Display Authorisation in 1991, and adding Aerobatic and Formation qualifications to that since. These days, her son Richard flies this aircraft and many other famous warbirds.

Back to our big day! Adrian has his turn. When he got out, the skip, the huge grin, "wow", "fantastic" and "incredible" said it all!



At last it was my turn. I was helped into the cockpit and strapped in. It was dominated by the enormous control stick topped with the famous 'spade handle' and gun button. Once belted up and settled, I looked around. Being in the rear cockpit with the real pilot between me and the massive Merlin engine and the ten foot diameter four blade propeller, the view is pretty well limited from three quarter front to three quarter rear on both sides.

The first thing that struck me was the sheer size of the wings. They fill most of the view left & right. No wonder the Spitfire could out-turn the ME109! A quick scan of the instrument panel told me little at first - most of the gauges being somewhat unfamiliar to someone who usually flies modern spam cans, but after a few seconds some of it looked familiar. I was jerked out of my instrument appreciation exercise by a crackle from the RT. "You OK back there? My name's Nick, what's yours?" Equipped with my moniker and an assurance that I was ready to go - off we went! Within a few seconds we're thundering down the runway and into the air. Before you can say 'Douglas Bader' the undercarriage has whined into the wings and we're reaching for the sky.

For a brief moment you try to tell yourself this is Southern England 1940, or Northern France in 1944! What is definitely true - undeniable and real - you are flying in a Spitfire!

Right, let's get down to brass tacks. What was it really like? I was about to find out. The RT crackled. "OK we're at 1200 feet. You a pilot?" Given the affirmative, with some apprehension since I felt nothing like a pilot at that moment, Nick said, "OK, I'll look after the power - you have



Gulp! I instinctively make sure everything is centred and wait for a few seconds....not quite sure whether I have control of not. Crackle. "Try & keep it within site of the field". That shakes me into action. I really do have control – or some of it at least!

Where's the field? Ah, there - over my right shoulder. Better turn back that way. Here we go. Stick over to the right. I barely move it and the right wing's down 45 degrees! Hold it there! Where's the ball – oh there it is. Just as well I bothered to scan the panel. Bit of rudder to keep it in the middle. Wow, we're going round really nicely. Field's just off the nose to the left now. What speed are we doing? 250 miles an hour! We're soon over the field at an angle so another turn's called for – the other way this time. Amazingly this goes just as well. I can't believe this – it's really easy to handle – well, that's if you don't count the engine management, the landing & take-off and trying to shoot at an enemy and avoid being shot at, that is!

Back the other way, still at 1200 ft. I'll try a tighter one this time. Round we go. A bit more back pressure this time. Keep the ball in the middle. Still doing 220 knots – still at 1200 ft, and level out. A few more basic manoeuvres from me – some climbing turns followed by gentle dives and more climbing turns and the RT crackles again. "That was neat. D'you want to do some aeros?" "Affirmative!" "OK, I have control". The power went up, then the nose went up and we went up into a half loop with a roll off the top. Down and up into another one followed a full loop and some aileron and barrel rolls, then a run & break down the runway for the audience and it was all over – bar the landing, which followed as sweet as you like.

As I fumbled my way out of the cockpit, head in a daze, trying to remember not to put my foot through the wing on the way down, I knew that I was wearing the same ear-to-ear grin I saw all on all the others and I used all the same superlatives they did as well. Nick must have been knackered. He'd flown about ten people in the day, but he'd given us all a priceless experience that's still vivid nearly fifty years later!

On reflection, of course the Spitfire had to be reasonably easy to fly. After all, it was flown by youngsters with only 200 hours, about what I had at the time, without the RAF training of course. However, the Spitfire for its relative docility was also a deadly weapon in the hands of an expert fighter pilot. I suppose that's where the genius is - designing an aircraft that doesn't kill the novice, unlike the ME109, but can be lethal in the right hands. As for me, I was just delighted & thrilled that I could handle it at all.

There's no doubt that the Spitfire is an exceptional aircraft. We all know that from its war record and all the millions of words that have been spoken & written by people who know what they are talking about, but now I have a tiny inkling of what they all meant. That's the privilege. How lucky was I to even get this small the chance to feel it for myself? Very lucky and I know it!

Alan McNeal



Nick Grace



Carolyn Grace

In memory of two great aviation people. Blue skies to both