



WAYPOINT>

The Priory Farm Aviators' Newsletter – October 2021

Monthly meetings are held on the first Wednesday at 7.30 PM.
Summer venue (May to Sept): Priory Farm; Winter venue (Oct to April): Various

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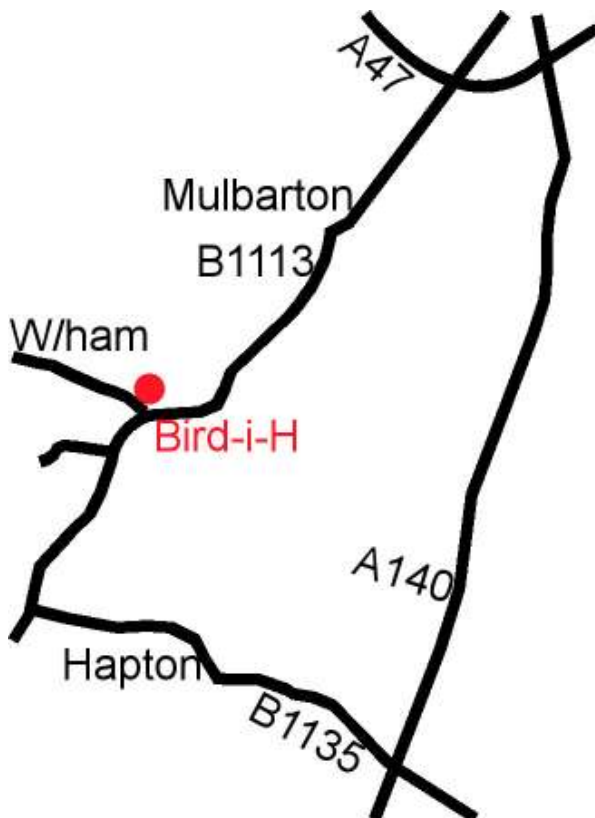
Wednesday, **6 October** starts our Winter schedule with a meeting – and, if you wish, a meal – at the *Bird in Hand*, Wreningham. The Committee will congregate from 6:30 PM, while the main ‘noshing and/or drinking’ event starts at 7:30.

If you intend to come, please e-mail the Chairman ASAP so he can warn the management of an impending spike in demand. There’s no penalty if you suddenly find you are unable to attend.

As the map shows, the pub-cum-restaurant is on the B1113, South of Norwich (not in Wreningham village). Post code NR16 1BJ and ample car parking.
<https://birdinhandwreningham.com>

On **3 November**, we plan to dine out in similar fashion at *The Old Ram*, which is on the A140 between Dickleburgh and the Pulham Roundabout.

The Christmas Social will be held in the Gliding Club in Wednesday **1 December**.



Meet the (New) Members

Michael Gibbs



I was born in 1949. My early flying was at Croydon and Redhill in my father's Tiger Moth. I learnt to fly in

Scotland on Chipmunks and had a brief spell with the Edinburgh University Air Squadron.

Most of my flying has been on Tiger Moths, Chipmunks and other tail-dragger aircraft and I've flown in the USA and New Zealand. I used to own Tiger Moth G-AOBX and did three years with the *Diamond Nine* Tiger formation team. I have been a long-time member of the Tiger Club at Redhill and Headcorn and had Chilton G-CDXU built for me by Vic Long and Roger Burrows. In total I have flown around 1,300 hours.



Minutes of the

PFA Committee Meeting

held at Priory Farm on 1 September 2021

Present: Alan McNeal, Bob Sage, John Fielding, Mik Horn, Paul Jackson

Apologies: Bill Scott, John Barker, Richard Flagg

- 1. Electrical work.** A number of jobs have been completed by David Ramstead, electrician: new water heater in the kitchen, new wall mounted electric heater in the main area, new LED strip lights in the club hut and three new PIR floodlights outside.
- 2. The bank balance** is currently standing at nearly £24,000.
- 3.** Alan has been spraying the **external walls** of the club hut with a mould remover so that they can be painted, hopefully before the Winter.
- 4. Ideas for other improvements** to club facilities. The committee discussed additional cameras for the webcam but it was felt that the benefit would be marginal.
- 5. Fly-out.** There is a fly-in at Hinderclay on 2 October and John is going to investigate the idea that members could combine Hinderclay with a drop in visit to a club member's airstrip.
- 6. Donation** to the Air Ambulance. John confirmed that a £2,000 club donation had been made.
- 7. Meeting location** for October and November: The Bird in Hand in Wreningham – 6 October
The Old Ram in Tivetshall St Margaret – 3 November
- 8.** Bob asked John to email members to let them know about the **road closure** being carried out 13 - 15 September.



Confirming the predictions of earlier 'Hangar Door' columns, the miniMAX G-MYDF and 'Canadian' Auster were both removed by road during September and now reside at private addresses.

The day I flew a Spitfire

A never-to-be-forgotten occasion, recounted by Alan McNeal

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 IX 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 several 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 someone well-known to you, Adrian Hall-Carpenter, of this airfield and owner of many aircraft over the years. Adrian was BMW's National Used Car manager and a member of the Aeronautical Society. As was I, as a supplier of film and photography to BMW.

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 adrenalin 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, aeros and landings by this wonderful aircraft as each of us waited for our turn.

The history of this fabulous aircraft is well documented on the Ultimate Warbirds website: www.warbirdflights.co.uk.

Nick spent five years meticulously restoring the aircraft to flying condition, keeping the two-seat configuration, and completed this incredible project in 1985, when, on the 16 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 after, in his memory, his widow, Carolyn Grace 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.



The two-seat 'Grace Spitfire' ML407 is still available for the public to fly in—prices currently begin at £2,750

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 threequarter front to threequarter rear on both sides.

The first thing that struck me was the sheer size of the wings. They fill most of the view left and right. No wonder the Spitfire could out-turn the Me 109! 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 intercom. “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 headphones crackled. “OK we’re at 1,200 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 control!” Gulp! I instinctively make sure everything is centred and wait for a few seconds, not quite sure whether I have control or not. Crackle. “Try to keep it within sight 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 knots! 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 and take-off and trying to shoot at an enemy and avoid them shooting at you.

Back the other way, still at 1,200 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 1,200 ft, and level out. A few more basic manoeuvres from me—some climbing turns followed by gentle dives and more climbing turns and the headset 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-and-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 over 35 years later.

On reflection, of course the Spitfire had to be reasonably easy to fly. After all it had to be 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 Me 109, but can be lethal in the right hands. As for me, I was just delighted and 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 and 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!



You can’t have too many pictures of Spitfires. Another shot of the aircraft in which Alan flew over the Leicestershire countryside

HINDERCLAY Mk II FLY-IN

The proposed fly-in at Hinderclay Meadows on 2 October was abandoned before it began because of an adverse weather forecast. Nothing daunted, it was hastily reorganised for Sunday 3rd, when plans for a PFA fly-out to there were reinstated with equivalent haste. The Chairman, John Fielding reports:

Our fly-out kicked off at 10.15 when Bob Sage and I set off in my Skyranger preceded by Michael Day in his Eurostar, heading for Michael's Oak Farm airstrip 2½ miles west of Seething. A short while later, we were joined by Clive James in his RV9 and Chris Barnes in his Groppo Trail.



Oak Farm's busiest day? Four aircraft on the ground prior to setting off for Hinderclay

After refuelling on cake and coffee, we launched for Hinderclay. Crossing the Suffolk border, the clouds parted, the sun beamed down and we were able to land in perfect weather, followed by Dot Matthie in her Auster with her friend, Lynn.

Burgers and drinks supplied by a very cheerful couple in a catering trailer, were

devoured and followed by a totally unposed group photo (below). Mid-afternoon, we set sail for Dot's airstrip at Burgate, three miles east of Hinderclay.



The Hinderclay visiting team: John, Michael, Lynn; Clive, Bob, Dot and Chris

By now the wind had got up and was fiercely gusting nearly 20 knots, making for interesting landings on the 390 metre grass strip. More cake and more coffee in Dot's kitchen before the final flight, back to Priory Farm.

All in all, it was a fabulous day ... shared with some lovely people. Now then ... if only I could find a petrol station which still has some over-priced premium unleaded to sell me.

