



Local History Collection

10 - The History of Fifield Airfield - Part 2

(known as Maidenhead Aerodrome)

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With thanks to the Maidenhead Heritage Centre for photos

As the Maidenhead Town Council had approved the airfield in May 1929 and accepted an invitation to the grand opening at 2.30pm on Saturday 8th of June 1929, the Mayor of Maidenhead, Councillor W. Archer, officially opened the airfield by cutting a tape attached to the tail of an AVRO aeroplane. The airfield was just a flat field of grass and in places fairly rough with tents for cover.

Over 1,000 people were present at the opening and many stopped on the local roads trying to get a glimpse of an aeronautical machine. There were 14 planes on the airfield that day including 'Moth' type and monoplanes and huge crowds formed around each plane as few people had ever been close to an aeroplane.

One of the Maidenhead council members and Ex-Mayor, Alderman Cox, at the age of 89 was loudly cheered by the crowd as he was the 1st official passenger to take a flight from the aerodrome accompanied by the deputy Mayor. The plane left the ground and circled over Maidenhead and the surrounding areas before landing safely back on the aerodrome field. Both passengers enjoyed the flight and especially seeing Maidenhead from the air. After this 1st official flight there were 2 planes that took any paying passengers for 5/- (shillings) on the same route and were kept busy during the rest of the afternoon. The experience of one such passenger commented that as they sat tucked up in the cockpit, the word contact was used and the engine roared terrifically, the ground faded away alarmingly and they're over hedges, trees and fields, the noise made speech impossible and suddenly they are 1,000 ft above Maidenhead and looking at the world below from a different perspective with miniature houses and roads and as sunlight spread the whole panorama was one of beauty but weird fascination.



The 'Magnificent Men'

Capt.
Davis

Capt.
Broad

Capt.
de Havilland

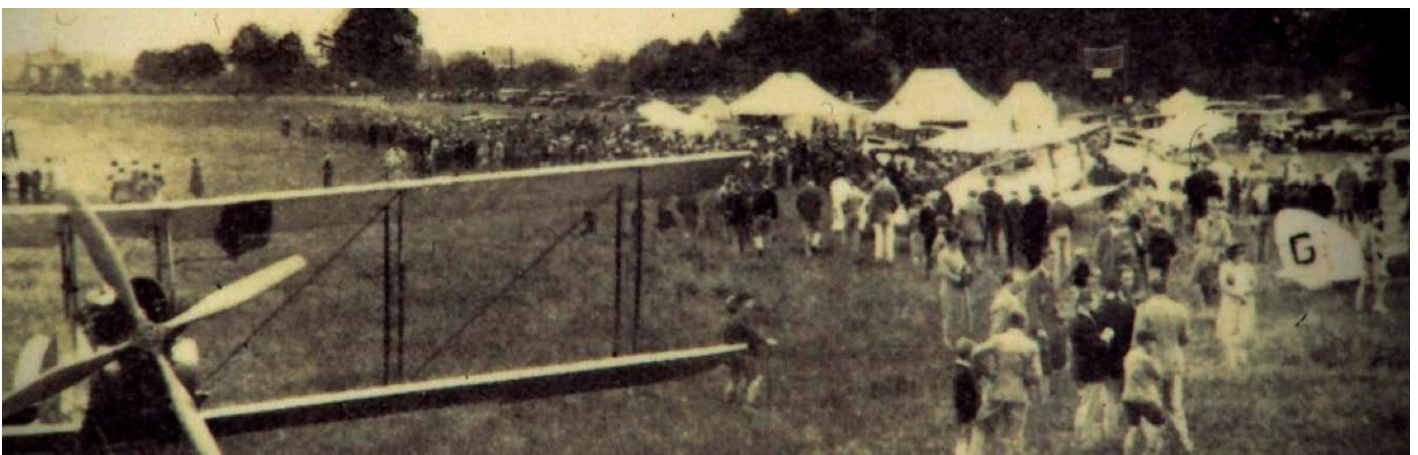
Mr Stevenson
Organiser



Many of the 'Magnificent Men' were present that afternoon with their own flying machines and included Captain G. De Havilland O.B.E. (designer of the Moth light aeroplane), Captain Broad(Chief test pilot for De Havilland), Captain Davis, Pickthorn and Jones who were instructors for the Brooklands School Of Flying.

These pilots entertained the crowds during the afternoon with their daring flying stunts and the youngest pilot was only 19 years old (George Murray) who completed 6 consecutive loop the loops and a number of spiral nose dives. The finale was a parachute jump made by John Tranum. John Tranum was a well-known Danish dare devil parachutist who held the world record for 7 parachute descents from a plane at 1,000ft in 33 minutes 45 seconds. He leapt out of the plane at 1,500ft headfirst and somersaulted part of his descent, the crowd held their breath as he didn't open his parachute immediately, instead he wanted the crowd to experience the thrill and practice of a parachutist, he was applauded by the appreciative crowd. John Tranum offered the experience to others in the crowd but found 'no-takers' for a parachute jump that afternoon!

During the afternoon a car driver found himself needing a car part that could not be sourced locally and he asked Mr. Donald Stevenson, the entrepreneur behind the Aerodrome if he could assist. Captain Broad was despatched in his plane from Maidenhead Aerodrome to fly to Hendon (an 18 minute flight) to collect the part and returned in good time, averting a few days delay in getting the repair completed.





The Opening day was a huge success. However following court action the Aerodrome was closed only 4 months later due to complaints from locals who were unhappy about the noise, disturbance and safety of the aeroplanes. The last major event at the aerodrome was when Sir Alan Cobham (an English aviation pioneer) landed a 12 seater De Havilland Moth to give rides to school children to improve and promote air flight.



The Aerodrome was used as a Glider school during WW2 for air cadets(155 Sqn ATC Bray Gliding School) and a Relief Landing Ground (possibly known as RAF Bray Court). There were several relief landing grounds locally and included Smiths Lawn, Windsor. Several Tiger Moths were relocated temporarily in 1940 to the Maidenhead Aerodrome when the White Waltham airfield was 1st bombed. Some private flights were recorded until the end of 1945 and then as the airfield was grass it was returned to being just a field in the early 1950's and the Gliding school was transferred to RAF White Waltham.

