



Issue 19 -Apr-Sep13

Contrails

Newsletter of the Christchurch Aviation Society

New Forest Remembers - Untold Stories of World War 2

Our March talk was by Gareth Owen of the New Forest Park Authority. A project of the title has attracted over £500,000 from the National Heritage Lottery to record personal stories of servicemen, servicewomen, civilians and to make archaeological surveys to discover hidden building relics from an important period when the New Forest's strategic location contributed to air defence and logistic support for D-Day. The project is urgent because people with personal knowledge are in their 80s and 90s.

A desk based assessment of current knowledge is followed by a general survey of the New Forest, interviewing witnesses to create an oral history. A LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) survey is used to discover archaeological artefacts. LiDAR uses a scanning laser beam to build up a 3d view of the ground and large areas can be surveyed rapidly and accurately using airborne equipment. Analysis of the data can 'see through' vegetation to reveal the profile of the ground and identify such things as remnants of walls and foundations of buildings long lost to normal vision. Airfields and their associated buildings are high on the list of sites of interest which now number over 3000. One such is a direction finding tower near RAF Ibsley where an octagonal wall has been found and researched and a computer generated image of the timber tower (long since vanished) created to give us an accurate picture of what it was like.



Typical of memories that bring such archaeology to life is the story of the cat that liked to sit on the warm electronic boxes and developed a sense of when aircraft needed the DF help before the service personnel became aware.

Ashley Walk, north east of Ringwood became a bombing range where the Highball bouncing bomb, a smaller version of the Dam Busters bomb, was tested.

Another story brought out is that of a 224Sqn Liberator from RAF Beaulieu, a Coastal Command station, which

attacked a submarine. A depth charge exploded prematurely having hit the submarine and severe structural damage occurred to the rear fuselage of the aircraft. The captain, Fg Off Sleep, along with his crew struggled to keep the aircraft flying but their landing at the closest airfield in Cornwall resulted in the aircraft crashing at the last minute. All the crew survived and were back on ops the



following day. On 224Sqn's departure a Czech squadron, 311Sqn, took over until Coastal Command had to vacate for the D-Day build up.

Amongst the huge amount of information shown were some colour pictures of RAF rescue launches which may never have come to light otherwise and shows the value of the whole project. Gareth provided a wealth of information pictures and videos which were much appreciated by our members.

Druitt Hall

A charitable company Druitt Hall Association Ltd has been set up to liaise with community groups and present a business plan for the project to the Council. Meanwhile the Council will operate the Hall until the end of June.

On 23rd April a public consultation was held to show plans and invite comment.

We believe the Hall will still be operating for our September meeting.

Meetings List

04Sep13, "Flybe Operations", by Capt Robert Heath - tbc.

06Nov13 "Flight Data Recorders" by Steve Leaper from Curtiss Wright (Penny & Giles).

08Jan14 "Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance"

05Mar14 "Vanuatu" a South Pacific Airport by Tom Kelly