

NOVEMBER MEETING

1st Speaker

Dover's Forgotten Aviation History

A Talk by Brian Flood, Vice Chairman, Dover Transport Museum

Reported by Alan Lee

Brian commenced his talk describing how dangerous the early days of flying had proved to be with a great many crashes. Between 1910 and 1917 at least 29 British aviators had died.

He then went into a more detailed description of our local airfields starting with that of Whitfield which in 1911 became Air Stations (Dover) Ltd. Before this most airfields were classed as "flying grounds". Also in this year they Whitfield cemented its' importance in aviation history when it was designated as the arrival and departure point for the cross Channel stages of the Circuit of Europe Challenge air race.

About this time Swingate Down was being developed as an airfield. It was here that Charles Rolls took off to complete the first non-stop double crossing of the channel.

Many famous early aviators at this time used the airfields around Dover as a base for their flights. There was great interest in flying at this time with many newspapers and wealthy individuals offering large cash prizes for many first time flights to various destinations.

In 1912 £45,000 was allocated for the development of Swingate Down as a military flying station. In 1913, the (Army Wing) RFC started the development of Dover (St. Margaret's), as Swingate was officially called. The airfield continued to develop and in 1918 following the merger

of the RNAS and RFC to form the RAF became the specialist station for training pilots in convoy and antisubmarine work.

Some 55 acres at Guston between Fort Burgoyne and the Duke of York's Military School had become Guston Road Airfield and by January 1915 No.1 Squadron RNAS had arrived. Known as the Dover Defence Flight they assumed responsibility for the defence of Dover Harbour.

In 1913 Guilford battery and the land around Moat's Bulwark was requisitioned for the 'RN Seaplane Patrol'. The base was finally set up in November 1914. By May 1915 some 15 planes were on station using the Short model 184 "Dover Type" plane.

The importance of aviation around the Dover area was shown when in 1914 the RFC mustered 60 planes to fly from here in support of the BEF.

1915 saw the creation of new airship station at Capel, partly located on what is now the site of White Cliffs Parks Leisure Homes.

In 1917 the "Walmer Defence Flight" was established at Hawkshill Walmer. A new aerodrome which occupied 57 acres of land between Walmer Castle and Kingsdown.

The full story of Dover's Forgotten Aviation History will appear in future editions of the newsletter