

Severn Valley Microlight Club

1982 - 2012

**A short history of the Severn Valley
Microlight Club compiled from
original Club newsletters collected
by Gordon Gould who was member
number three in 1982**



The very first edition of Airscrew dated November 1982

AIRSCREW

Nº 1

THE SEVERN VALLEY MICROLIGHT NEWSLETTER

SOME MEETING THAT WAS! IT WAS GOOD TO SEE SO MANY PEOPLE TURN UP ON THE NIGHT, AND SO MANY OPINIONS VOICED! PARTICIPATION LIKE THAT CAN ONLY BE GOOD FOR THE CLUB.

BY THE TIME YOU RECEIVE THIS WE WILL OF HAD OUR FIRST "MEET" AT STOKE ORCHARD. I CAN ONLY HOPE IT WAS WELL ATTENDED AND THE WEATHER WAS KIND TO ENABLE THOSE OF US WITH "MIGHTS" TO FLY THERE.

DAVID PATERSON OF CHELTENHAM WISHES TO SYNDICATE HIS "EAGLE" TO A MAXIMUM OF THREE SHARES. ANYONE INTERESTED CAN CONTACT HIM ON CHELT 21022

PLEASE NOTE DARYLE PARSONS CHANGE OF ADDRESS:-

41, BRIMSOME MEADOW

HIGHNAM, NEAR GLOUCESTER (NO HOME TELE YET)

WORK (GLOS 652350)

IS THERE ANY MICROLIGHTERS OUT THERE THAT YOU KNOW OF WHO IS UNAWARE OF THE S.V.M.C.? IF SO, EDUCATE THEM AND BRING THEM ALONG TO OUR NEXT MEETING. (WHICH YOU HAVE ALREADY MARKED UP IN YOUR DIARY?) IF NOT SEE MINUTES!!

ALL CLUB MEMBERS WILL BE ISSUED SHORTLY WITH A FULL LIST OF FELLOW MEMBER NAMES & TELEPHONE NUMBERS.

WANTED SOMEBODY TO MAKE A MONTHLY DRAFT OF THIS NEWSLETTER!! (COPYING CAN BE DONE AT THIS END)

PLEASE CONTACT D. PARSONS.



Introduction

Club member Gordon Gould was one of the founding members of the SVMC. Over the years he has kept copies of every Club newsletter and edition of the original BMAA magazine "Flightline" all of which he recently passed on to the current Editor, Bill Austin. Gordon has written up the history of the Club for the first six years and Bill has trawled the later copies of *Airscrew* highlighting notable events and changes subsequent to 1988.

AND IN THE BEGINNING....!! "

Many years ago, 1982 to be precise, strange looking shapes started to appear in the skies around Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. To the uninitiated these things were hang gliders with noisy chainsaw or mowing machine engines attached. "Something must be done to stop them before a nasty accident happens." was the cry. There was an extended and passionate exchange of views in the local press between the flyers and one particular member of the public. Fortunately, others saw this as an opportunity to seek out the owners of these machines and to find out more.

In September 1982 a Micro-festival fly-in was held at Long Marston with trial flights in a dual seated Southdown Puma flexwing. The fly-in was the first opportunity for prospective amateur aviators to get airborne. This month also saw the introduction of microlight aircraft registration and pilot licensing.

With the introduction of registration and licensing one local pilot had the foresight to believe that a Club would help to bond and unite flyers into a responsible group of microlighters and help to quell the objectors. That pilot was Darrell Parsons. He put the following advert in the Gloucestershire Echo, The Citizen and the Sept-Oct 1982 edition of *Flightline* (the forerunner of the BMAA's "Microlight Flying" magazine).

Gloucester Microlight Club?

Microlight enthusiasts in this area are urged to contact Darrell Parsons, who is trying to form a Club. He is at xxxx

Some 25 people attended the inaugural meeting held on Wednesday 10th November 1982 at the CEGB, Barnwood. It was agreed that a Club was a great idea and that at the next meeting on Wednesday 8th December 1982 a name for the Club would be decided and a committee formed. This second meeting was also well attended and,

following a show of hands, the name of the Club was agreed as the **SEVERN VALLEY MICROLIGHT CLUB** and its newsletter would be called **AIRSCREW**. Darrell Parsons was elected Chairman and Gordon Gould Treasurer.

In the very first newsletter published in November 1983 Darrell Parsons referred to a "meet at Stoke Orchard". He had successfully negotiated with Roy Savoury, the owner/farmer, for the use of the airfield at Stoke Orchard. (This small airfield was a major player during WW2, initially as a training airfield with Tiger Moths and later glider pilots and instructors. Today it is known as The Park.) In addition members also used fields at Sandhurst, Twigworth, Highnam, Wainlodes, Upleadon, Long Marston, Defford (now Croft Farm) and Preston Court (now Ledbury).

Further publicity for the Club appeared in Flightline on 1st January 1983:-

Severn Valley Microlight Club

Following an appeal in the Sept/Oct edition of Flightline, Darrell Parsons has now received sufficient local interest to form a new microlight Club called Severn Valley Microlight Club. The Club meets every second Wednesday at the CEGB, Hucclecote. Darrell is acting as Secretary, while Jim Deane is Chairman.

Initially the Club wanted to be involved in the training of new pilots so they accepted an offer of the free services of a local flying instructor, Chris Bishop, from Staverton Airport. He was a Group A pilot and training was initially given on a group A aircraft.

1983

The first AGM of the SVMC was held on 5th January. Among the founder members were Darrell Parsons, Gordon Gould and Colin Davies. During the year James Cairns-Terry and John Morris also joined and the Club affiliated to the BMAA. In May a microlight flew into Staverton Airport for the first time. Darrell Parsons took the opportunity to fly in and demonstrate his weight shift single seat trike at the Air Show.

An article in the Club newsletter for June reported that arrangements had been made with Shobdon for training on a dual microlight, a Chargus Titan 440 side by side trike. The price of a lesson was something in excess of £20 per hour, £1.50 airfield charge plus temporary membership of the Aero Club. The instructor was Jim Bowyer.



Before this Gordon Gould had tried dual training on a "normal" trike (tandem seating) at Long Marston and was not at all impressed by the experience. He had been seated in the backseat and had to reach forward over the instructor to be able to use the control bar (D bars had not yet been invented!).

From September, all Club meetings were held at Aeros Flying Club at Staverton Airport, the Club having been without an indoor venue for the whole of the summer.

In the December newsletter the Secretary noted that 70% of members needed flying instruction. However, members had expressed strong opposition to the Club buying an aircraft and selling instruction. There was a fairly even split amongst new members between preference for 3-axis and weight shift aircraft. To try and help, Simon Baker offered to bring his Puma aircraft to Stoke Orchard to give instruction. Attention was also drawn to the fact that from 1st July 1984 it would be illegal to fly a microlight without Type Approval and Permit to Fly.



From the very beginning the Club provided groundschool lessons for Club members. The tutors for groundschool were all Club members and the exams were supervised and marked by a BMAA Instructor/Examiner. For the next 18 months the Club continued with groundschool plus flying instruction at Stoke Orchard. During the year Rule 5 of the Club Constitution was amended to read "*Low flying, beat ups and other stunts are prohibited over the airfield*". The original rule was amended because of complaints about the noise of low flying over Stoke Orchard during church services on Sunday mornings.

1985

Occupancy of Stoke Orchard came to an end in 1985. For a while after the death of Roy Savoury his widow had allowed the Club to continue to use the field. Eventually the farm was taken over by Mr Savoury's brother-in-law who refused the Club the use of the airfield. By September the Club was using a field near Highleadon and arrangements were in hand for the mobile home used as a rest room to be re-located there from Stoke Orchard. During the year the Club records for distance and height were broken. Two members achieved a 140 mile round trip from Preston Court (Much Marcle) to Charterhouse in the Mendips and Colin Davies reached 5100 feet above Bakersfield.

An article in the local press concerning a proposal to sell a former flying school building at Staverton Airport to microlight enthusiasts was reprinted in the December Club newsletter. The article reported that microlights would not be allowed at Staverton Airport. The Airport Manager at the time said "*They were slow in the circuit and impeded other aircraft. There was very little income for the airport from microlight flyers and they really did not need an airport to fly from – they could operate from fields and farm land*". (What a difference from

today's welcoming attitude! However, bear in mind that today's aircraft are very much faster than those of the 1980s and fit in more easily with GA traffic.)

1986

Apparently there had been a number of engine failures due to "incorrect carburation" and in the summer edition of the newsletter the Club announced that it had purchased some engine test equipment – gas analyser, carburettor balance kit, stroboscope, oscilloscope and a noise analyser. Members were charged 50p to use the equipment. Also in this edition was a list of 17 local airstrips available to members which included their latitude and longitude references. These were farm fields all requiring PPR from the owner and many were annotated "*Surrounding fields suitable for emergency landings*"! Another interesting point was that for 1986 the Club subscription was raised to £15 - it seems we have gone around full circle.

1987

At the January 1987 AGM a now familiar name appeared on the Committee for the first time – one John Hamer as Secretary. An Open Evening at the Gloucester Leisure Centre in February resulted in 28 new members being recruited immediately with a further 11 joining later in the year. The photo below appeared in the Citizen in February 1987 to advertise the Open Evening



According to John Hamer's memory (starting at the left hand end) they are:- 1. John Hamer, 2. Dave Read, 3. Rob Keene, 5. Ken Cole, 8. Graham Stallard, 10. Geoff Hoults, 12. Ralph Davies, 13 Andy Virgo.

Again the Club was forced to move its flying activities from the field at Newent because of friction with the local residents. Eventually the offer of Rob Keene's field at Hartpury was accepted. In the words of the Chairman, "*a most necessary acquisition from the point of view of focusing members' attention on a geographical area which, in turn, drew members' attention to each other's requirements as well as identifying the greater need for flying discipline - something we have yet to do efficiently*". The report of the Events Officer noted "*The staging of flying events represented a major aim of the Club. However, a significant number of people still view a microlight fly-in as a major display of civil disobedience and this together with other reasons made them difficult to organise*". The other reasons were: – 1. Poor and unpredictable weather 2. Availability of airfields and 3. Shortage of licenced pilots and permitted aircraft." On March 21st both Rob Keene and John Hamer both completed 100 hours of microlight flying within hours of each other!

1988

Club membership in January 1988 stood at 89 and in February the annual Open Evening saw over 200 people turn up at the Airport Inn, Staverton to learn about microlighting. However, the "Signing Up" night on 24th February for the groundschool sessions only produced 22 prospective pilots, including two females. In parallel with this, members were also training for their RT licences and some 14 had already passed the exams. Also progressing steadily was the proposal to make a promotional film about microlighting for the Club. It was at this time that Mainair invited John Hamer to be one of their team pilots to promote the firm's products by flying around the country giving displays and experience flights. Some familiar names were listed in the July newsletter as having passed their groundschool exams – John Cafful, Richard Webb and David Howell. August brought news that John Hamer had been appointed a BMAA inspector and check pilot for flexwings thus offering Club members a full service for the renewal of Permits to Fly – a service that John continued to provide for flexwings until a few years ago. In addition John later took over UK representation for the MiniMax single seat fixed wing aircraft under the auspices of the Popular Flying Association (now the LAA). It is also interesting to note that many of the accounts of flying expeditions contained references to landing to refuel in fields next to filling stations and to members running out of fuel when flying longer distances.

1989

The year started with the news that the Club had negotiated a three year lease for part of a field at Woolstone, north of Cheltenham, which would provide two runways and space for hangars. Rob Keene was flying in competitions with his young son Rees aged three as "co-pilot"! John Caffull, Denis Beale, Norman Frost and Andrew John all became aircraft owners. As usual there were a lot of fly-outs planned during the year. However, there seems to have been just a small core of pilots who regularly undertook longer flights. Balanced against this is the fact that Club members were actively encouraged to "back seat" whenever the opportunity arose. Over the years one Club member recorded more airtime as a "back seater" than most Club pilots had in their log books!

1990

This was a year when a large number of members went solo and others obtained their licences, both restricted and full. John Hamer was appointed BMAA Chief Pilot. In October at the "Passing Out" party for the newly qualified pilots each was presented with a long white scarf mirroring the image of the WW1 pilot. It was an acknowledgement of their achievement and hard work and an "initiation" into the Club as fully qualified pilots. There was a fly in at Woolstone in July and some 40 aircraft flew in - a large number for a Club event. The year also saw a lot of home builder activity with seven aircraft being constructed within the Club. November was celebrated with a firework party on the Woolstone airfield to which local residents were invited.



A typical Fly-in gathering

1993

Fabric testing on all microlights became mandatory

1996/1997

Rob Keene featured in the newsletter showing off the Gold medal and trophy he had won at the World Championships in South Africa and the Bronze medal in the solo flexwing class in Turkey.

1999

The March newsletter mentioned the fact that some members had e-mail addresses and this was seen as an economic, easy, quick and efficient way to contact members. An appeal for members to let the Editor have their e-mail addresses only resulted in two replies! In April, after a few years as a joint editor of *Airscrew* with John Hamer, Bill Austin assumed full editorship of the newsletter or rather one day John announced "*You're the Editor now!*". May saw the introduction of a requirement for separate logbooks for airframe and engine for every aircraft while in June the "Wednesday night is Club night" concept for weekly summer evening fly-ins was initiated. Perversely the first "Wednesday night event" took place on a Saturday! On those Wednesdays when it was not possible to fly to a venue there was a gathering at one of the pubs in Hartpur.

2001

There were no Club meetings in March or April and all flying stopped due to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. In May the CAA announced that they had put the complete register of UK aircraft on to the Internet while the November edition of *Airscrew* was the first to include colour in the headings and text but, as yet, no colour photographs.

2002

The January edition of *Airscrew* contained the first coloured photo - Chris Ball building his Eurostar.

2003

John Hamer, Club Secretary, was awarded the Royal Aeronautical Society's Certificate of Merit for his services to microlighting.

By this year microlighting was becoming firmly established as a sport in its own right. Subsequent developments - insurance requirements, single seat deregulation, changes in RT procedures, etc. - are familiar to most pilots and do not feature in this account.

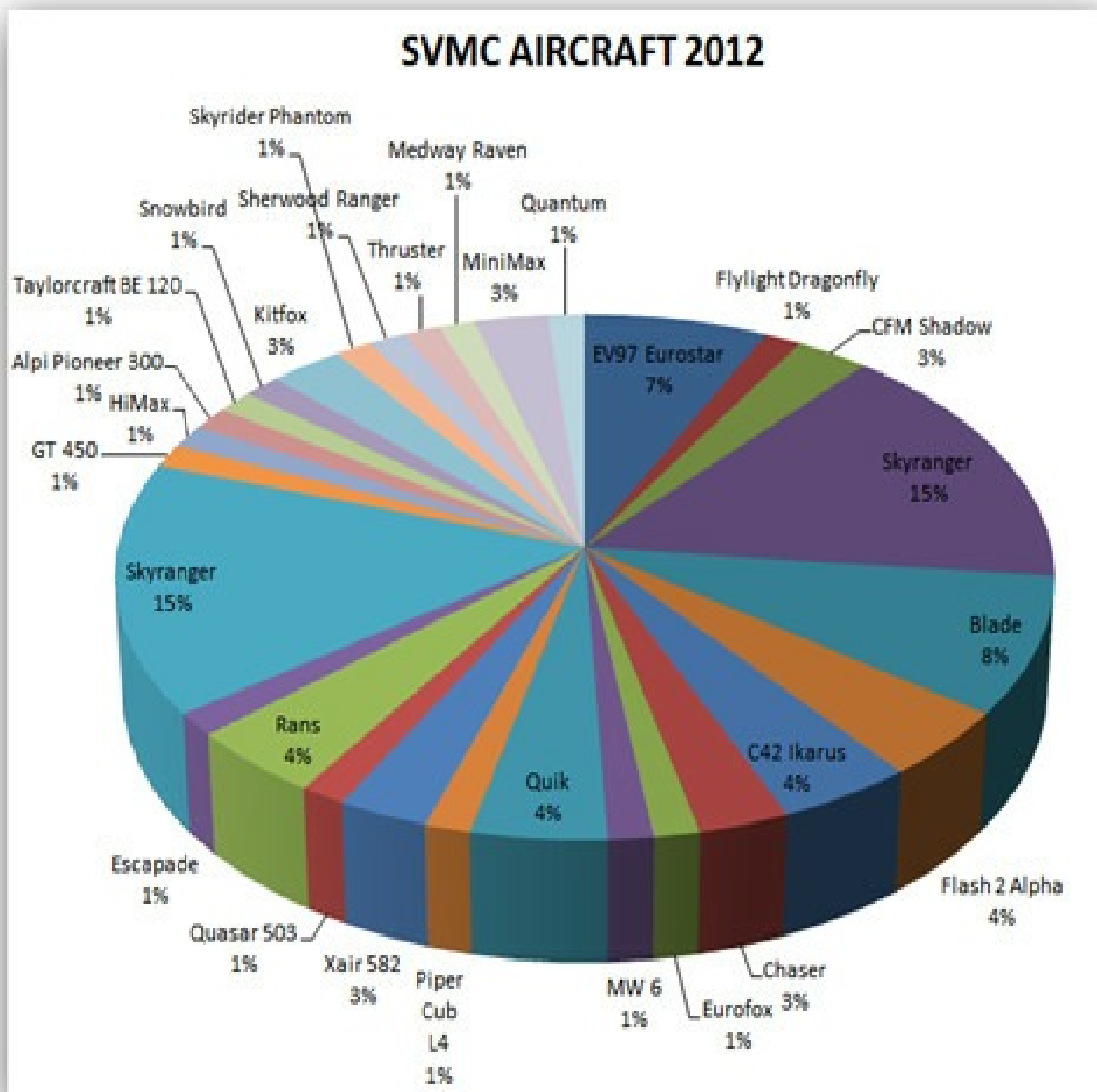
Final comments

One point of interest arising from reading the early editions of the Club newsletter is that there were many more articles submitted by members. Perhaps this was inevitable as pilots "spread their wings" further afield, pushed the existing technology to its limits and more airstrips became available. Manufacturers were constantly improving existing products and introducing new ones. To be a microlighter in this period was exciting and pioneering!

Towards the end of the 1990s and at the turn of the millennium members were pushing the boundaries of flight even further by undertaking ever longer flights including crossing the Channel to fly in France. In many cases these flights turned out to be "hair raising" adventures - flying at low level because the cloud base slowly reduced, running out of daylight or running out of fuel. A number of the articles for *Airscrew* were long enough to be serialised in up to three successive editions of the newsletter. Mandatory passenger insurance has meant that casual "back seating" has now disappeared - in some ways a backwards step since it is no longer possible or legal without insurance to offer a flight on the spur of the moment and, perhaps, introduce someone to the thrill of flight.

In May 2011 John Hamer resigned as Club Secretary after 24 years. The occasion was marked by the Club giving him life membership of the Club and appointing him Honorary President.

The chart below gives some idea of the development of microlighting as seen in the variety of aircraft owned by members. The types of aircraft shown in the chart have all been owned by Club members in 2012. It is noticeable that flexwing aircraft are now very much in the minority.



It is a fact that the summer season Wednesday evening fly-ins have contributed in a big way to the success of the Club and and this has been reflected in the increase in membership. Many members joined following an invitation to attend a fly-in. In no small way the winter programme of speakers has served to keep the enthusiasm for flying alive when the weather often prevents flying on a regular basis. The use of e-mail to circulate the newsletter and to keep members informed of other events has also increased the contact between members and reduced costs. Over the years this has helped to reduce the Club membership fee to its present level of £15 per annum.

Conclusion

The Club newsletters have always reflected the life of the Club and its members. Flying was, is and always will be a priority and the concept of regular summer fly-ins on Wednesday evenings has become firmly established and very popular. Woolstone field was eventually given up when the District Council refused planning permission for the hangars which had been erected and flying then was dispersed to individual private fields scattered across Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Worcestershire and into Wales. At the time there were fears that the loss of this facility would reduce the Club's ability to continue with members dispersed over such a wide area. However, it was treated as just another problem to be overcome and things continued much as before. In recent years a number of Club members have decided to forsake the microlight, but not the Club, and obtain their Group A licences. As one member who had taken this path commented *"I can now go further and faster but I have to fly further and more often to keep up my hours plus it costs me more!"* Nevertheless the Severn Valley Microlight Club continues to thrive with some 77 members in 2012 and is looking forward to the next 30 years!