

CLUB LUNCH held on 15th AUGUST 2024

This month's talk was given by Guy Bartlett on a topic of: "Flying Past: A History of Aviation in Kent".

Guy started his talk by saying that as his father had been in the RAF, his interest in aviation history originated from his father's experiences.

In 1880 the first significant development in flying was by the Royal Engineers from St Mary's Barracks in Chatham, Kent. In what is now the Royal School of Military Engineering (RSME) the engineers were developing the concept of tethered observation balloons which they trialed from a field some six miles south of the barracks which was also conveniently close to the pub at Lidsing called the Harrow which still exists today.

The next stage of aviation in Kent was defined by the Short Brothers (Oswald, Horace and Eustace) who started in 1897 when they bought a second-hand coal gas ballon and started a company in Battersea to develop and manufacture ballons. In 1902 the brother's offer ballons for sale operating from their London site which was conveniently next to the Battersea gas works. The demand for their ballons increased dramatically in those early years mainly from members of the Aero Club of Great Britain (later Royal Aero Club) to an extent that in 1909 they had to relocate and started the construction of new workshops on unobstructed marshland at Leysdown near Shell Beach on the Isle of Sheppey. From this new location they were also able to develop their interest in the early fixed wing aircraft inspired by the flight demonstrations carried out by the Wright Brothers in the US and France.

Due to the company's success, following the World War 1 the increasing number of seaplanes being produced the brothers consolidated their production facilities on the banks of the River Medway at Borstal, near Rochester in Kent which besides the new workshops also had a slipway for launching planes ready for takeoff in the river. Between the two world wars Shorts produced a range of flying boats for both civil and military uses, culminating in perhaps the most famous "Sunderland" which was used extensively for both anti-submarine and air sea rescue roles.

Talk went on to mentioned all the second world war airfields built in Kent to help defend against air attack and finally about the air flights of "Concorde" taking off from Manston in Kent with some great video's of this spectacular aircraft.

We thank Guy for his interesting talk which kept members thinking about all the aeronautical achievement's that have taken place in Kent.