

June 2017

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Kent Strut*



Light Aircraft Association

Escape to the country... (and a bit more history)

This months meeting

...at least leave the golf club for the first of our summer meetings with a Fly-in / Drive-in and BBQ at Steve Solley's farm strip and ice cream parlour.

So bring cold boxes and buy some of the many flavours available.

Expect to see various vintage vehicles in attendance.

Map on page 7 for anyone unsure how to get there.

Last months meeting

While your editor was happily cruising down the Danube on a Saga holiday, member Ian Park has kindly sent me some notes on his take on the meeting and some thoughts on a discussion with our strut coordinator Gary:-

Kent Strut 27th May 2017 Meeting.

The speaker this month was Kent Strut Member Mike Negus, he whose niece gave such a good account of herself a couple of meetings ago, talking of parachuting.

Last year Mike Negus spoke to the Strut about his search for the places, including burial places, of The Red Barron. He was able to discover how an Australian ground-based machine gunner had mortally wounded Baron von Richthofen by firing into his aircraft as it flew past his position. Richthofen was given a funeral with full military



Nigel Read - Editor

29th June Meeting

BBQ and fly/Drive-in at Steve Solley's,
The Dairy, Ripple Nr. Deal CT14 8JL

www.laakentstrut.org.uk

honours by the Allies at the time of his demise. Later his remains were recovered and re-interred in Berlin.

His enquiries into the fate of The Red Baron led Mike to follow the lead onto another WWI flying hero, this time a man local to the Kent Strut area, a certain James Thomas Byford McCudden, Victoria Cross, Distinguished Service Order and Bar, Military Cross and Bar and Military Medal. There can be very few who were worthy of so many exemplary awards for military service right at the sharp end of conflict in a truly bloody war.

James McCudden was the middle of three brothers all of whom died in WWI. The family lived around the Medway towns, mostly in Gillingham and Sheerness. He joined the Royal Flying Corps as a mechanic and maintenance engineer and somehow taught himself to fly or was tutored when he was only twenty years of age.

His last flight was from New Hounslow where he went to pick up a brand new SE5. He crossed the Channel in increasingly dense fog and landed at Aix le Château to ask for directions but when he took off again his engine failed at 30 feet, his aircraft crashed and he was killed. That was on 9th July 1918. His tally for the war was 53 downed aircraft, the second highest of the war. His total flying time was 872 hours 40 minutes.

James Thomas Byford McCudden, V C, D S O and Bar, M C and Bar, M M is buried at Wavans Cemetery in France, a War Graves Commission cemetery on the Somme. Mike Negus and others are unable to understand why the Allies gave a military funeral to a sworn enemy of this country in Richthofen but did nothing to commemorate the achievements of one of our own. There may be reason for that but it is difficult to see it justified.

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Talking to Gary Smith after the speaker was done, he told me that he had just returned from a holiday flying to Menorca and back. From Farthing Corner he flew along the South coast to around Chichester and then due South to Caen for Customs clearance. He then flew down to the Med, turned right – or to starboard – and on until he was due North of Mallorca. The flight across water from near Barcelona to Mallorca took 90 minutes at 140 knots and was the most worrying part of the whole journey. Flight times were 6.1 hours going down and 6.3 hours on the return. His RV behaved flawlessly the while. That is a very commendable achievement I think.

As an LAA Inspector he is at present responsible for three G.A. aircraft being built around Maidstone, two RV7's and one RV8. Nice to know there are three more aeroplanes coming on stream.

Ian Park.

(July Newsletter will have Gary's article on Menorca and the strut fly out to Rougham in May, Ed)

A Wander Back Through Time Mike Negus

My talk on James McCudden at the Strut meeting in May was as much about the airfields as the man. I had been over to France and Belgium in April to do a bit of research and whilst I am no way attempting to be an historian with all the facts at my fingertips the result of my trip again with my chum, Geoff, confirmed my hopes on what could we find.

The object of the exercise was to find McCudden's final resting place together with one of his opponents Werner Voss, this being relatively easy as the Cemeteries for both men are easily found through a little research on the CWGC website and Wikipedia.

However, as much as anything I wanted see how much of the airfields these men flew from as books that I had read suggested a number were still identifiable and little changed in 100 years. Given that the aerodrome buildings were largely temporary structures comprising timber framed canvas Bessonneau hangar or makeshift wooden structures, none of which were deemed to be required permanently, just there for the duration. Similarly, accommodation for the officers, if farm buildings or a nearby chateau were not available it was wooden hutting and for the men similar hutting or bell tents. So, at war's end all this temporary infrastructure was largely cleared away and in most cases reverted to its original owners mainly farmers.

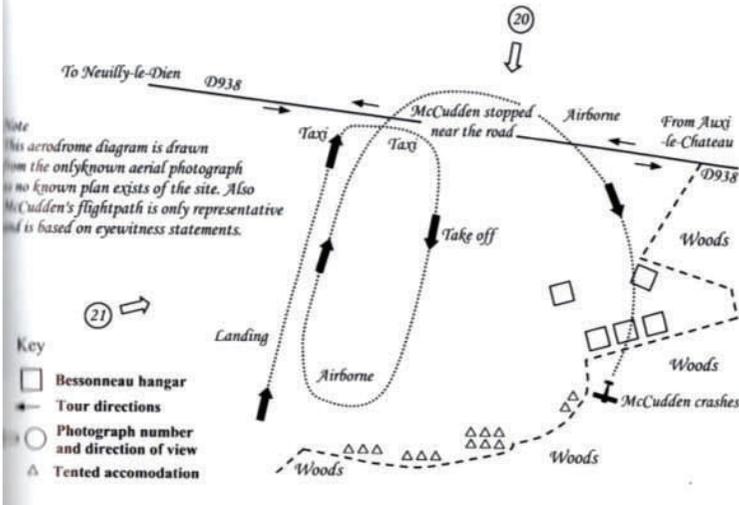
In the UK in WW1 a huge number of airfields sprung up mainly for training but also to counter the Zeppelin and Gotha bomber threat. Stow Maries is prominent of the remaining sites still in existence and most have disappeared but not quite lost to memory as the Cross & Cockade Society set out over a couple of years to catalogue all flying sites throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles. I digress and for the purpose of this article the sites we were looking for were;

- **Auxi-le Chateau** which was the aerodrome that McCudden had his fatal accident which is North East of Abbeville.
- **Vert Galand** an aerodrome used between 1915 and 1919 which coincidentally was where Albert Ball another great ace took off on his final flight and again has not changed and is easily recognisable by way of its positive location and 12 miles North of Amiens.
- **Marckebeeke** which was brought into commission in June 1917 and was occupied by Von Richthofen and his flying circus of which Werner Voss was a member. This site is close to the modern airfield of Kortrijk Wevelgem.

Auxi-le-Chateau ; We found the CWGC cemetery and the grave of James McCudden VC which was at Beauvoir Wavans not far from Auxi-le-Chateau and from there and following the directions of the book from which a lot of this information was derived we very quickly found the site of the aerodrome. The location is at the top of a hill and pretty easy to pin point, the woods in which the SE5a fighter McCudden was flying crashed were still there, as were the fields which acted as the flying and administrative site. Taking photographs gave the opportunity to compare against the 1918 sketch of the aerodrome although it is difficult at ground level to convey the exact layout.

Auxi-le-Chateau Aerodrome

This site was one chosen during the German advance of March 1918, when the RFC had to abandon some of its forward aerodromes. The first unit based here was No.8 Squadron, who arrived on 6 April 1918 with their Armstrong Whitworth Big Acks. They were joined by 52 Squadron on 30 June, operating the RE8.



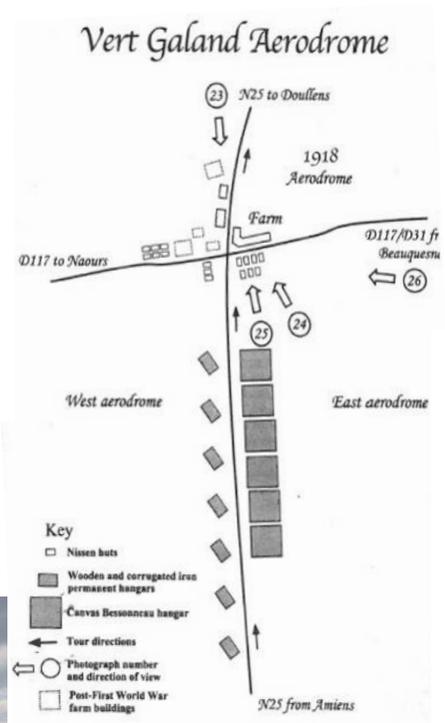
Auxi-le Chateau



Vert Galand ; Next stop was to find the cross roads across which this airfield was straddled. From Amiens we followed the N25 toward Doullens until the intersection of the D117 from Naours to Beauquesne which was the site right on the crossroads. Again the farm buildings visible in contemporary photographs are still very much in evidence and of course several modern sheds have been added over time but

without doubt this was it. The flying site was situated either side of the N25 and was known as the West and East aerodrome with the hangars and accommodation split between and housed a number of squadrons over the years.

Auxi and Vert Galand were very well documented and the sites easily identifiable but we thought Marckebeeke may be a little more difficult.

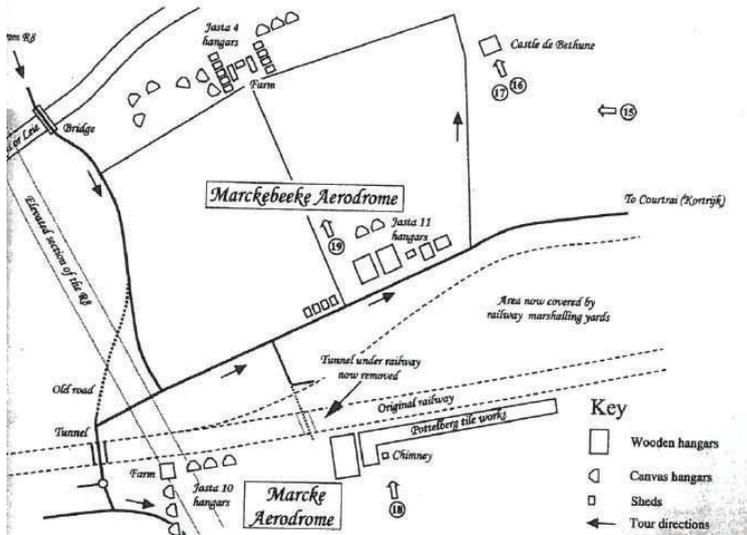


Source of much of Mikes information and line drawings -
Airfields and Airmen by Mike O'Connor
and In The Footsteps of the Red Baron
by Mike O'Connor and Norman Franks

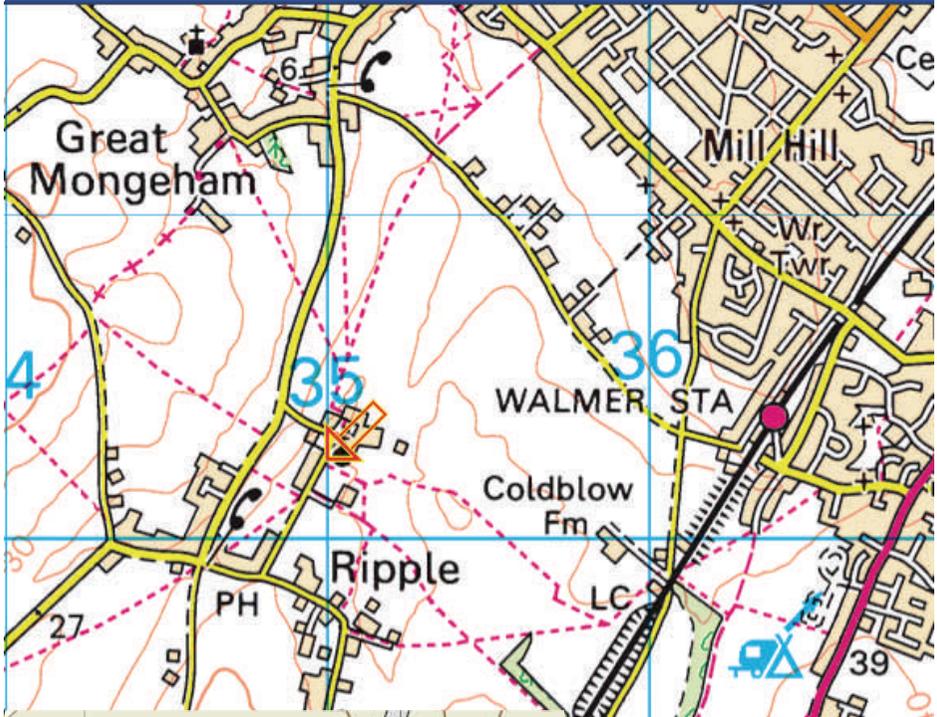
Marckebeeke ; The site is now trapped amid the expanding industrialisation of this part of Belgium. In 1917 a railway ran to the South of the site and the River Lys. We approached Kortrijk along the R8 before coming off at the appropriate junction. The railway has now expanded in to a large marshalling yard but the river is still there with a metal bridge over and it was for this we were trying to find because from there we could identify from photographs of the time the site. Having arrived and got our bearings we could safely say the site remained largely intact with the farm buildings readily identifiable again with some modern additions. Across the field was a line of trees which have certainly grown in the years between but otherwise largely unchanged. We had found a WWI aerodrome from which Manfred von Richthofen and his Jasta's operated.

Marckebeeke Aerodrome

Marckebeeke today is an oasis amid the expanding industrialisation of this part of Belgium and is trapped between the very large railway



As a footnote we were due to go on the fly out to Amiens which would have taken us within a mile or so of Auxi-le-Chateau and would have been a great opportunity to photograph the site from the air but alas we were thwarted by the weather but flying over Northern France will always bring about a sense of history as apart from old forgotten airfields traces of the trenches are easily observable from a couple of thousand feet.



Location of Ripple

Driving

From Mongham Road, turn up Mantles Hill and left into the drive near the top. Follow the drive round to the right and park at the bottom.

Flying

If flying in, call Steve Solley for instructions and note the runway is only 350m. **07836 653257**

Other places of interest if making a day of it: Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge, BoB Memorial at Caple-le-Ferne, Dover, Deal or Walmer Castles or the Roman Fort at



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Rotax Engine Thefts

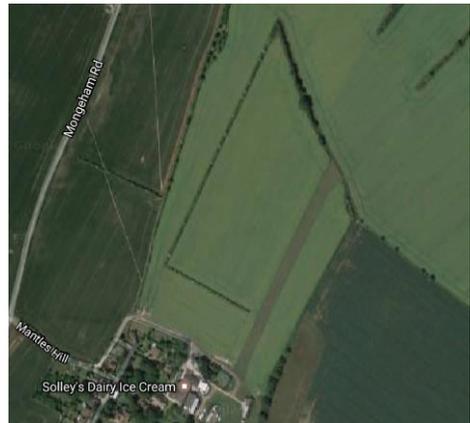
Four more 912 engines have been stolen in Devon, mid June, from South Hams Flying club at Helwell a microlight site near Plymouth.

“Surgically” removed apparently.



www.solleysicecream.co.uk

*Google view of Ripple Strip
(crops may appear different)*



Richborough.

Weight and Balance

Following on from last months newsletter, Kevin Marks has compiled instructions for more complicated loading using Skydemon and his Maule as an example. As it amounts to 8 pages it is a little too long for the newsletter but if you are interested, request a copy by

Dates for your Diary

29th June Ripple BBQ

30th July Rochester EGTO, BBQ
and Rolls Royce Enthusiasts Club

This is a Sunday!