

44 Years and Counting

A Soaring Life

fondly recollected by

Paul Myers





After receiving the amazing honour of the "Service to the Club" trophy and Life Membership at the AGM, I felt very emotional and 'slightly' embarrassed myself, mainly because of the 'This is Your Life' presentation made by Ian. He said some very complimentary things and I thank him for that. You usually have to be dead before people say those sorts of things about you!

All of this got me thinking about my years at Chipping and, given that this year, Alison and I will be moving to our retirement house near Pitlochry (Scotland), I thought I would write down some of my recollections.

I wrote the initial draft of 'our brief history' years ago as a factual history, but this will be a more personal account. Some will remember the events and their memories may be the same or different. That doesn't mean they are wrong, or I'm right, but this is my personal recollection of things.

First Flight (in anything)

By the time she was 10, our daughter, Elizabeth had flown abroad several times, not to mention going glider and power flying with me. At the age of 19, I had never been off the ground, (apart from the odd tree). For years, I had day dreamed (mostly in school) about what it would be like to fly and finally in 1975 I booked myself on a holiday course at Walney, Lakes Gliding Club. I mentioned this at work in Burnley where I was an Apprentice Turner and was told, "There's a guy in Planning who flies gliders", so I introduced myself to Frank Gladwin, who was an instructor at Chipping. He immediately offered me a lift to the club and a flight. (I didn't have a car in those days). Frank had a share in a Kestrel 17, which was like a starship to me, compared to the T21, K4, Oly, and Swallow.

Frank is unfortunately no longer with us. He died, too young, ferrying a light aircraft to the UK from France. RIP Frank and thanks.

The day arrived and my turn came. We had an hour of hill and thermal soaring in the K13 (CRT) as far as Totridge and came back doing loops. I was ecstatic and well and truly hooked (and not at all put off when Frank was 'told off' for flying a "passenger" for so long) and I was pointedly told several times that "All flights are not like that you know". I even survived (just) helping Keith Emslie with hangar packing. "YOU - YES YOU - HOLD THAT WING - NO - NOT LIKE THAT". If I had not loved the flight so much, I probably wouldn't have come back. Keith was a good instructor who worked with Alison's dad in the wind tunnel at Warton. He was passionate about gliding but his frustrations earned him the name "Mr Angry" (Mike Brooks).

I did come back for a few flights before my course, getting a lift with Frank or borrowing my parents' car. Unfortunately, because I was just a passenger, these flights are not logged. Eventually I saved up enough from my apprentice wages and birthday money to join the Blackpool and Fylde Gliding Club, as we were then called.

First Solo

There was a gang of young, and not so young, people who would turn up at the club, Summer or Winter, on Friday night and stay all weekend. Initially I could only afford to come on Sunday and fly, especially now that I owned my first hot rod, a Morris

Minor 1000!!! But gradually, I started to join "the gang" and spent all my weekends at the club. I think the only other gang members still around are Frank Gill and Carrie Wright. Dave Brown, was also a solid gang member and he is now Chairman at Feshie. When we weren't flying, we would work on the field with John Todd (the original field guru) or Ken Fixter, or help refurbish the club house, which was then still a barn, and after work or flying, consume alcohol. Pernod and Lemonade became know as a PM special.

Anyway, we must have done some flying, because the great day came in November 1976 when Ian Hamilton was brave enough to send me solo in the K4 (horrible). The T21 was too valuable for early solo, to get my A and B badge. (Look it up).

In those days we often wore flying overalls and pilots' wings. Jack Aked (the club founder) ran "Jack's Shop" on Sundays, out of an old leather suitcase and when I asked him for my wings he said "You have to be solo for them young man." I explained that I had soloed on the previous day and he shook my hand and sold me the wings.

Shortly after, the K4 was broken when a P2 released the canopy instead of the cable at the top of the launch, (on Bob Pettifer), so I got to fly the club's T21 solo with the "Bomb" ballast in the nose, (lovely).

Ken Fixter

Ken was a massive asset to the club. He was a very good instructor and later, an inspector. He had grown up on a farm before his national service in the RAF. He was a mechanical genius and relished in keeping the club going on a shoestring. He rebuilt the gearbox on the original JCB and for years the club didn't need to buy engine or hydraulic oil. Ken 'provided' it.

A couple of stories come to mind: When the dumper truck needed a de-coke, Ken's favourite way of doing this was to feed oxygen from the gas welder into the air intake. It would rev like crazy and black smoke would come out of the exhaust, but it ran better afterwards. The undercarriage on the open Cirrus CVF was stiff. Ken found that it had been distorted and made very precise eccentric bushes which he fitted and it worked. Whilst this was ongoing, he needed a metric spanner and didn't have one, so he got an imperial spanner and hit it with a hammer "Now it's metric" he said - and it was! In both these stories Ken knew how long to let it rev or just how hard to hit it. He was definitely not a rough big hammer man. He saved the club a lot of money in the early years and kept us going. We owe him a lot.

I was lucky enough to be in a syndicate with Ken whilst we owned the Cirrus and the two Nimbus's. He was concerned about my experience level before I joined the Cirrus and so took me for a flight on a very rough day. We hit heavy sink on the approach and I slammed the brakes closed and lowered the nose to get the speed back. "I trusted you after that," Ken said.

When Alison was at University in Liverpool studying medicine,



Engineering Genius – Ken Fixter (right) and Peter Philpot, reaming Rhubarb and Custard's wing for oversize main pins.

she would get the bus to Preston on a Friday night and I would pick her up. Ken lived in Merseyside and would go out of his way to take her back to Uni. on a Sunday evening. A great mate to us both.

Ken at 85, is still a great asset to gliding and is flying in North Wales at Llandegla, inspecting their fleet and keeping the club going. Alison and I visited him at the club a few weeks ago (mid-April 2019) and he was in an old shipping container with a PW6 doing the annual. Older, but not changed a bit.

The Clubhouse

When I joined the club, the downstairs was the only usable part. It had an earth floor and only cold water. The floor was done, but the major job was the roof. It was clad in sandstone and full of holes.

Tommy Gornall was a local builder and organised a gang of us to slate the roof. I wasn't very good with heights and almost froze a couple of times, but you do get desensitised after a while.

Val Howells joined the club whilst the roofing was ongoing and was keen to be involved. Up to then, the women at the club had not really done physical work and I remember Tommy on the apron looking up in amazement and saying, "That's a woman up there!" Val continued to amaze us, making a point of doing anything that any of the men could do - a real woman!

Tractor Launch



The Club T21, (note the canopies), New Year's Day 1980, before it came to grief

An instructor, who will remain nameless, but has been CFI and Chairman, decided that it was too windy for the T21 to be out and a group of us set about towing it to the hangar from the top end. I drove the tractor and was horrified to see the thing launch itself with people dropping off. I was sat on the tractor with the T21, minus pilot, hovering about 30ft over my head - not healthy! I leaped off the tractor and ran, hearing a sickening

thud behind me. This was followed by silence apart from the wind and the tractor, still in gear, chugging down the hill. I had to chase it and render it harmless. The T21 was a write off.

First Glider

I loved the K6e that we had on site and wanted to save up and get a share in one, (they were about £5,000), but there was rumour about limiting the number of aircraft on site and the "White Oly" (Olympia 2b) was up for sale so, not wanting to miss a slot, Martin Moss, Roger Pye, Trevor Tuthill and I formed a syndicate in 1978 and bought it. The White Oly was the "club bike." Lots of syndicates owned it as their first aircraft, then sold it on to the next group as they progressed to something better.



A young Trevor Tuthill with the White Oly

Alison owned it 2 Syndicates later, along with a young future CFI, Ian Ashton, Darren Evans and Peter Coleman. I didn't regret buying the Oly. It was a very easy aircraft to fly but to get the best out of it, you had to be very accurate. It taught me to fly.

Our second aircraft, was a Skylark 4, BNQ. It had been owned from new by Peter Philpot, a Chipping inspector, when he flew at Nympsfield. It was painted bright yellow and red and nicknamed 'Rhubarb and Custard' or if unkind 'Blood and Puss'. I fell in love with big wings and have never returned to 15m.



Alison in the East Bowl in the White Oly, 2 Syndicates later.

Incidentally, the sages of the club said that the low 18m wings of a Skylark 4 (as opposed to the Skylark 3 we had on site) would cause it to ground loop all the time. Good job they didn't see the Open Cirrus and Nimbus 2b, (20.3m) and 2CS, (23m) in which I subsequently had shares.

Roy Greason

Roy was a very good wave and cross-country pilot. He initially had a share in the K6e that I envied and later his syndicate brought the Open Cirrus CVF onto site. Roy attempted a 300k in the 'Liver Bird' an Eon Baby, (similar to a Grunau Baby but built in the UK) donated to the club by Herbert Liver of Liver Building fame in 1956.



Roy with Open Cirrus CVF in which I later owned a share.

Unfortunately, he damaged it going into the inevitable field. Tommy had another rebuild on his hands. The glider is now in a museum.

I purchased my Cirrus share from Roy. He later rented the club farm house and he had many claims to fame, but a couple were: First, the Cresta Run. In the days when he was tight for cash, to save fuel, he would drive to the top of the hill on the way to Chipping and then coast all the way to the Sun Inn car park. This became a great sport that we all followed. The trick was to keep the speed up through the S bends.

Second, his 1800 Marina served him well, but one winter the battery was unreliable, so he would park it outside the office and roll it to where the BBQ is now to jump start it. One day it didn't start, so he got a tractor to pull it back up the hill and have another attempt. He was on his own, so when the rope broke he jumped off the tractor to save his car. He didn't make it and the car ended up in the wall. The tractor, which was still in gear, reached the drop into the trailer park and before Roy could stop it, it went over.

SD3/15T

John Gibson and Keith Emslie had been involved in the design of the BG135, a metal, 13.5m V tail glider. This became the SD3 and they owned one. Because 15m and T tails were more fashionable, the design was developed into the SD3 15T and the club purchased one. It was not very well built and not liked by everyone in the club. I liked the performance, because it was a lot better than the Oly and I flew it quite a lot. Dave Brown took it on his Silver Distance attempt heading North. Unfortunately, he landed in a tree at Windermere. The owner of the tree was an ex-RAF pilot and Dave was given a genuine Irvin sheepskin flying jacket (lucky ... err person?) When he got back with the write-off, the powers that be didn't know whether to tell him off or thank him.



SD3/15T with me flying it.

The SD3/15T was replaced by a Pilatus B4, always well liked.

New Winch

The winch was getting a bit the worse for wear and it was decided we needed to build a new one. I was working at BAe Samlesbury at the time and after months of negotiation, I managed to buy an old bowser as a scrap sale. The winch gurus were over the moon, as the Bedford chassis was ideal.



The New Winch!

One Saturday, I got permission for a gang and a tow truck to enter Samlesbury and it was ours. It had been full of diesel and Ken Fixter thought that the fuel was worth more than we paid, but unfortunately BAe had it drained before we collected it.

After a lot of work by quite a few members, including Alister Murray, a great engineer, we had a new winch that performed well until the Skylaunch arrived.

T21/ YS53 'Beast'

Just before I joined the club, Dave Brown (pre solo) and Frank Gladwin had "landed" the original club T21 on the hill. (Jack Aked started the club at Blackpool Airport with this glider. It is in all the early photographs). The wreckage was purchased by a large private syndicate and it sat in the club hay barn, (what is now the upstairs lounge), waiting to be rebuilt. I was offered a share for £100 and this generated some motivation.



Dave Brown, Tommy Gornall, (sometimes Roy Greason) and I, used to meet on a Wednesday evening, work on the glider and then go to the pub. We would also work on it when we had spare time at weekends. Alec Lunn, who supervised the rebuild, was an ex-RAF senior Inspector and Tommy, who also had his inspectors' ticket, was a fantastic

Tommy – a great friend and one of life's characters woodworker. Tommy and Alec are sadly no longer with us.

Eventually it was finished. It flew again in November 1984 and won the Vintage Gliding Club rebuild of the year. It flew at Chipping for a number of years, eventually being sold to Canada.

In 1987 the syndicate had spare funds and a YS53, without a CofA, came up for sale at North Hill. We bought it for £1,100. It was in a poor state and the



Tommy and me – T21 first flight after rebuild



major refurbish

was finally completed by pretty much the same gang in 1994. The glider workshop in those days was the old farm Bull Pen, now the entrance hall, and we spent many a happy, (cold) hour in there.

The YS53 earned its nickname 'Beast' because of its aggressive spin characteristics and it would "bite", drawing blood every time we rigged it. It also had a habit of eating weak links and rings (and small children). We did look for the Comp. Number '666' but it is taken.

Again, this glider was flown at Chipping, Feshie, and in the 2-Seater Comp. for many years. My daughter, Elizabeth, had her first glider flight in it from Chipping, in June 2006. Finally, in November 2016, it was donated to the Gliding Heritage Centre at Lasham, where it is the only YS53 still flying.

Elizabeth, looking nervous before her first Glider Flight – and after, big smile.

Silver Distance

To help with the dreaded Bronze, Bob Pettifer ran a night school class in Gt. Harwood. Quite a few Chipping pilots attended and we all passed the exam.

It was now time to think about Silver. I did my 5 hours at Portmoak in a K8 in 1978.



Silver at last – Rhubarb and Custard at Harrogate

It was free, because I was on a course. Later that week I flew their K6cr, a lovely aircraft.

I wanted to do my Silver Distance in the Oly before we sold it and waited for the right day. "If I can get to 2,000ft I will set off," was agreed with the Duty Instructor, so I did. Unfortunately, the cloudbase didn't go up enough to get over the Pennines and I landed at Skipton. This was 1979, so I did it in the Skylark the next Summer, landing at Harrogate.

The Silver milk run in those days was to land near the Golf Balls on the way to Harrogate - big fields and about 65k away. Unfortunately it is now through the Leeds Bradford zone. Mike Larvin had a Skylark 4 and his trailer must have been out of action because the picture on the right shows my car and trailer retrieving him.



Mike Larvin, having just done his Silver Distance, with the golf balls in the background. Mike was Entertainments Director on the Canberra Cruise Liner. He got a long, paid holiday, during the Falklands War.

On his Silver Distance, Garry Wynn landed to the North of the A59 in MOD property. He was taken to the guard room, where they said, "Didn't you see the signs?" "They are a bit difficult to read from 2,000ft" was the reply. It didn't win him any friends. When we found the glider, it was behind a gate onto the A59, with a heavy chain and massive padlock. The guards were even less impressed when we simply lifted the gate off its hinges, drove in and set about de-rigging the glider.

Feshiebridge

Tony Knight, who instructed at Chipping and various other clubs, came to Chipping and showed slides about a new club he had been to, called Cairngorm Gliding Club at Feshiebridge. The following year, (1980) we arranged a visit and I have been going back there ever since. It is a wonderful and exciting place to fly. He also introduced me to Cumrew near the ridge to the north of Eden Soaring and Connel which then had a gliding club using 3500 Rovers for reverse-pully autotow. Great fun!

In 2014 I got to 26,446ft at Feshie, in wave, to win the BGA's De-Havilland Trophy.

Passenger Rating

After gaining my Silver, unknown to me, Bob Pettifer (then CFI), had plans for me. In retrospect, he had coached me a fair bit and spoke to me about my lack of maturity holding me back. I needed to grow up. I was still living with parents, earning more money, driving a sports car and had a share in a lovely Skylark. In short, I was enjoying life. I replaced the sports car with a Morris Marina (see above picture with Mike), so that I could tow the Skylark. That took the smile off my face.

Eventually, Bob asked me if I would like a Passenger Rating, as a lead up to Instructing, (a great honour at the time). I could only say "Yes". After gaining my passenger rating, I held off flying anyone until my Dad could get to the club in April 1982. He was my first passenger.



Dad – First passenger flight, he doesn't look too scared and subsequently loved flying, especially aerobatics!

Instructor

I did my instructor course in 1983 at Portmoak, with Ken Stuart as Coach. Ged Terry and Geoff Guttery were on the same course. In those days the Coach tended to be stand-offish to put you under pressure. "RIGHT YOU LOT - BRIEFING ROOM!" was his 'good morning.' He emphasised that we were responsible for ensuring we could get back to the field at all times. We were flying a Falke, but a telling off would have been far worse than a land out. On one flight, he asked me to do a spin some way from the field. I said I didn't think we had enough height. "WELL I DO – GET ON WITH IT" was the reply. I observed on a D Module last year run by Ged and Simon Adlard and it's a lot more friendly now.

When I came back to Chipping, I was the youngest Instructor. I remember being very under-confident and struggled a lot at first, not with teaching, but with launch point management; saying "NO", or more importantly, knowing when to say "NO".

Romance

The gang was not my first encounter with the fairer sex, but it helped. Later, after a friendship with a girl from work, (then British Aerospace) had ended, I met Alison at the club at a party organised by Margaret Wooller. She is 9 years younger than me and was about to go to University. She joined the club with her brother Phil Greening and Ian Malley, with Geoff Wilkinson giving them a lift from St Annes. I don't think either of us thought it would last, (Alison's parents hoped it wouldn't), but it did and in June 1989 we were married at the White Church in Lytham. I had secretly arranged for our gliders, Nimbus, EAM and DG200, 191, to be rigged in the Church Yard whilst we were in the ceremony. It was the first time Alison had seen 191, which had only just been purchased after being rebuilt by Southern Sailplanes. Jim Gibson, (Best Man), Darren Evens, (syndicate partner) and I had collected it the day before the wedding and Jim and I were in deep trouble for being late for a rehearsal. When we emerged from the church and I told Alison that I had done the acceptance flight, she swore at me!



The Syndicates - L to R Alison (DG), Me (Nimbus), Ken Fixter (Nimbus) Barrie Purslow (DG), Darren Evens (sat in DG), Tony Evans (Nimbus), Martin Moss (DG). Martin sadly died in the Motor Glider accident.

John Mitchel still reminds me that he wasn't invited to the wedding, but he did fly his Silver Distance that afternoon as compensation.

Margaret Wooller was again involved in our future when she told us about a plot of land for sale, through her job at a local architect's. We built our house there. Dad helped a lot with the house and I promised him that we wouldn't have the house warming until he got back from holiday. Unfortunately, he died abroad, so I kept my word and we didn't have one. However, we did manage to invite a lot of the club round for Elizabeth's Christening party. She was born just as we were completing the house.



What a beauty, the glider isn't too bad either!

Diamonds are a pilot's best friend

I had done my Gold Height in April 1980 at Chipping in the Skylark, climbing from 600ft on the downwind leg to 13,100ft. Not a bad gain! After landing, I let Peter Philpot fly it as a reward for finding it for us. He had been one of the original owners. He also had a good wave flight.

I was now keen to complete my Gold with a 300k. Bob Boyd had done the first Gold Distance from Chipping, landing at Dunstable via Wetherby in his K6e. A good effort. I wanted the first Diamond Goal.

I managed it in the Open Cirrus CVF in May 1985 after a couple of failed attempts, flying to Derwent Reservoir, near Newcastle and Wetherby race course and back, (that's the difficult bit!) I'd had a 'pee arrangements' failure and needed a shower on landing, feeling very unclean after 7 hrs 38 minutes, most of it with wet jeans!

My Diamond height was done at Feshie in 1986.

I have always wanted to do a 500km from Chipping, but ended up being a traitor and doing it on the first attempt in Nimbus EAM from Hus Bos in 1995, taking 7hrs 13mins. I must speed up!

CFI

As I said, Bob had plans for me and he encouraged me to gain, my Full Cat. This was done at Chipping in November 1985, with Regional Examiner John Humpherson, who was incredibly laid back. He would suck on his pipe and say, "Sure" to most questions. In spite of not having previously flown at Chipping, he gave me the mother of all launch failures from the top end and I had to do a dog leg to get in. I mentioned 'SPEED' a lot and it must have impressed him.

In 1987, Bob, supported by John Gibson, (Chairman) asked me to take over. He was taking on Regional Examiner duties.

I found it VERY intimidating, as still the youngest instructor, leading a group who had taught me to fly and that I had massive respect for. Anyway, they were all, (all but one, but that's another story) very supportive and a great team. I owe them a lot and so does the club.

Cross country weeks

As CFI I was very keen to promote cross country from Chipping and proposed that, in addition to the normal club weeks, we hold a cross country week. The committee



*Darren Evans and me landing CRT in the arranged field
– so far so good!*

agreed and we had lots of fun, landing in a pre-arranged field in the west bowl. To my relief, no one crashed. Letting a P2 fly a field landing when the field has disappeared under the K13 wing is very "exciting" instructing!

We even landed out on the sands at Pilling, a microlight strip and did a fair bit of X/C. Alan Roberts gained his Silver on one week. As usual for Chipping, we had varied weather. On one week after a flight to Penrith, I came back with ice on the leading edge after flying through snow. When

the BGA came to run their X/C course on the last day, Chris Rollings flew the BGA DG500 and landed a few fields short of Portmoak, where it was flying the next week.

Chris also flew the DG500 in convergence over the Pennines and said it was some of the best flying he had done in the UK; even suggesting a record may be possible.

Unfortunately, the X/C weeks received some negativity, because I had said they would be primarily for cross country and no ab-initio training would take place. We already had 3 club weeks for that. I think "elitist club for CFI's mates" was mentioned.

Club Fleet

When I became CFI, the club fleet was 2 x K13's, a Swallow (fantastic fun), an Oly 2b (still at the club as a private glider) and a Pilatus B4. We had a 5-year plan agreed by the instructors' committee to update the fleet and just needed the cash.

The Pilatus was damaged, not badly, but was an insurance write off, because it was under-insured. B4's had become very popular and their price soared. This provided an opportunity, so I proposed a risky plan to the committee.

The plan was:

1. Get the insurance money from the B4 write off, then buy back the wreck.
2. Use the insurance money from the B4 to buy two K8 gliders from Germany, where they were cheap, (good exchange rate) and in good condition.
3. Get the B4 structure repaired as cheaply as possible, then respray and refurbish it for sale at a good profit



4. Use the profit gained from selling the B4 for its market value, (after buy back and repair costs were deducted), plus funds from selling the Oly and Swallow, with a small input from the club, to buy a glass single seater, Astir DSU.

The Committee was brave enough to support the plan but making it happen was down to a lot of people:

John Mitchell (Treasurer) for buying the B4 wreck and badgering the repairer who was cheap, but slow.

Herman "the German" Simon, for sourcing the K8's in Germany. He is now in his 80's and visits Dave Brown at Feshie every year. For his 80th birthday, I bought him a Bowland Forest GC sweatshirt, to replace the Blackpool and Fylde one he still wears.

Dave Brown, for using his motor caravan to pick up K8's FNA and FNB with me from Germany. We purchased a lot of duty-free booze and had parties at the club on return to pay for the trips.

Reg for offering advice on the phone when the symmetry check Dave and I did in Germany was not as expected. (The Germans had never seen this done before).

The inspectors for CofA-ing the K8's and putting them onto the BGA register, (before EASA).

Alan Roberts for providing paint, lots of filler and respraying the B4 prior to sale.

Dave Andrews, (Chipping inspector who has since left), for looking at lots of Astirs with me until we found the right one.

A memory that will live with me forever is of a very large customs officer in, I think, Luxemburg, with an equally large gun, sitting in Dave's camper with us around a large pile of beer, arguing with Dave about paying VAT for the glider and claiming it back as we left the country. The Germans had claimed VAT back on selling the glider and the easy way would have been to pay a shipping company for paperwork to show we were importing to the UK, but that cost money. Anyway, after arguing for 30 minutes he got exasperated with Dave and told us "JUST GO!"

A Double Diamond Works Wonders

Mike Cuming, a BGA Regional Examiner from Hus Bos, had written an article in S&G suggesting that Diamonds were too easy and proposing 'Double Diamond' 1000k, 600k triangle and 33,000ft. John Mitchell, (Mitch) wrote to him and said if he thought it was so easy, to come and do a single Diamond from Chipping.

So, he came. He must have liked it, because he got a contracting job at BAe Warton and flew with us in the summer of 1991, joining in on the X/C week in his LS4 (very nice to fly). He was great fun and enjoyed flying with us. He never did manage the 1000k though, or a 500 from Chipping. We had a big party when he left and he is now an Airline Training Captain.

Borrowing BGA kit

During my time as CFI, I had great support from the BGA. Bill Scull, Mike Cuming and Chris Rollings all visited Chipping. Chris even ran a BGA Cross Country Course from Chipping, (attended by quite a few friends from Feshie). The nice thing about being on "the BGA map" was that, at that time, they had lots of nice toys to play with. Over the years, we had the demonstrator Puchacz and SZD55, the BGA 'C' Falke, Janus C, Discus (lovely glider) and the 22m DG500 (several times), all put to good use on our then accepted soaring weeks. I still have nightmares about landing the DG500 in a small field in the Settle valley!

The Tug

The idea of improving soaring opportunities from Chipping started discussions about a Tug. I looked at leasing initially, but that was a non-starter, so the committee approved a plan and John Mitchell was instrumental in gaining a Sports Council Grant. One issue was that Chipping was prohibited by planning condition from operating powered aircraft. So, we first obtained planning permission for a motor glider and then, a couple of years later, enhanced it to temporary planning permission to operate a tug. We even flew in a Pawnee, with a 4-blade prop, from Tatenhill, to demonstrate how quiet it was to the planners.

Walney were good enough to train me as a Tuggie and we found Guy Applebeck, who owned Scanroe Aviation at East Winch, a grass strip near Kings Lynn. He had been a



Dave Masterson (right) talking to Guy Applebeck, checking out G-TOWS ("This is where they crack"). Notice the red dye penetrant crack detection fluid.

crop sprayer in South Africa. He had an overseas import Pawnee to refurbish as a tug. It was the 'B' model, which was important, because it was approved for Mogas (petrol) and with 235hp engine, had the grunt to drag gliders out of the mud! Mitch, Barrie Purslow, Dave Masterson, (a very experienced PFA - now LAA and Chipping BGA inspector) and I, went to his hangar several times to check him out.

Dave once using his Jodel to ferry Barrie and me, during the build to inspect progress. He was happy with the ongoing work.

We had the Pawnee fitted with a 4-blade prop and silencer hush kit. Because we were the first in the UK with this particular full set up, it had to be test flown and the paperwork took ages to clear the CAA. It was very quiet. We also had it fitted with balloon tyres for obvious reasons.

We found the out-of-sequence registration, G-TOWS, was still available, but John Mitchell wouldn't approve the club funding the extra, since it was a "nice to have" so Darren Evens organised a whip round. John said "If you can get Bob Pettifer to donate, I will double it." Much to his annoyance, Bob donated £10 and we had the double enjoyment of seeing John donate £20 of his hard-earned and getting the registration we wanted.

When the time came to do the acceptance flight in November 1991, I went to East Winch. I was given a good briefing and had read a good bit about flying Pawnees. (The Pawnee is single seater, so no check flight). By the time the weather cleared, it was going dusk. It felt like a large aircraft and it was light and very powerful. I caught up with it at about 1,000ft, turned but couldn't see the strip. I was "slightly concerned" about the prospect of a field landing at dusk on my first flight! After circling for 5 minutes and looking for the roads we had used to drive there, (no radio), I found it and landed, (with heart pounding) as the light was fading.

We then had to wait for paperwork and a suitable day to fly it across the Pennines.



G-TOWS arriving at Chipping, a very proud moment

Reg Wooller took me over once or twice, using his company car and BAe fuel, but the weather let us down. Eventually on 8th December 1981 there was a brief slot and I persuaded Tony Evans to fly me over in his Taifun motor glider. The Pawnee is a fuel guzzler and we were unsure if I would get it to Chipping without stopping for fuel. We flew back in loose formation and about half way, I decided I would make it and arrived at Chipping to a great welcome after a fly past to show off the rate of climb.

Shortly after I landed, Tony arrived back in his motor glider. He had flown to Blackpool, where it was based, but couldn't get the wheels down. He came back to Chipping to land wheels up on the grass after first stopping the engine to avoid damage to it and the prop. After a JCB lift, we got the wheels down and parked it in the hangar whilst the minor damage was repaired.

Ron Graham had built us a fuel bowser that we could tow to Longridge and fill with petrol, a quite regular trip. The garage loved us! We also built the "Bowser Houser" to keep the fuel secure. It is where the spades and mower are kept now.

The planning permission limited us to a certain number of tows in a day, but John Mitchell's philosophy as treasurer was that as long as the club was making enough money overall, the tug did not necessarily need to turn a profit and could be viewed as a service to improve club facilities - Very forward thinking. The committee were good enough to support this view. By this time, we had 3 Chipping tug pilots, me, John Wood and Jeff Johnson.



G-TOWS earning its keep

The tug was successful and did improve soaring, but there were members who thought the club was becoming expensive and didn't want the tug to replace winching. I was very keen to use the tug to maximum effect, but to still provide winch launches to those who wanted them, so we tried to run the two operations together, (VERY bad idea). We were also trying to save time and fuel when flying from the top end in light winds, by landing reciprocally up the hill. In other words, I was trying to do too much, too soon.

This resulted in my worst ever flying experience. When I returned to the field after a tow into the East Bowl, I flew into a descending winch cable at about 300ft. This is usually fatal. The only other person I am aware of to survive it, ended up in a wheelchair. Anyway, I did survive with minor whiplash, mainly due to the strength of the Pawnee. We made a rule that we would never again fly the tug, unless the cable was wound in at the winch. I was very upset when this rule was changed or ignored some time later and the motor glider picked up a cable, resulting in the death of two members. If we don't learn from our mistakes, we are destined to repeat them!

The tug was rebuilt, but when it came time to renew the planning permission, we were refused. The club spent a lot of money and primarily John Mitchell and I spent many hours preparing for an appeal. We briefed a barrister and had support from the BGA. Bill Scull even came to give evidence at the hearing, but unfortunately, we lost.

On one planning visit to take noise readings, it was very windy. Tommy Gornall, who was a great talker, was there. The tug was so quiet that they had to ask Tommy to shut up to get a reading. One of the objectors complained that it was "too quiet." Mitch said "I thought that is what you wanted"!

At least we were able to sell the tug to Lasham and Mitch got permission from the Sports Council to reallocate the money to purchase one of the early Skylaunch winches. Mitch and I went to the Mynd to view it and were very impressed by it compared to our home-built winches.

Our relationship with some locals was strained by these events and so, to reinforce our link to the area, the membership agreed to change the name to Bowland Forest Gliding Club, enabling us to still use the initials BFGC.

Politics

The club went through a period of change and the committee I had worked with throughout my period as CFI were replaced, (not a bad thing, that's democracy), but there were accusations of vote rigging and attempts to spin against some on committee who had supported me and done a lot of good work. Against advice, I felt I had to do something to support them and came out of it badly bruised - and demotivated.

I have always felt that we should leave politics to those in Westminster. It is negative energy and often results in as much damage as good. I am really pleased that this episode in the Club's history appears to have left us. Thanks to our recent and present leadership BFGC is once again a fun place to be.

In all my time at Chipping, I have found that, in general, those who work for the club, be it maintaining the aircraft or vehicles, working on committee, instructing or being CFI, volunteer their time, not because they are power hungry control freaks, but because they want to put something back into the club and the sport they love. Sure, they gain some satisfaction in seeing their efforts and achievements make a difference, but they are not self-serving and certainly not paid for their efforts, in fact most make a loss. So, let's continue to treat each other with respect and avoid energy sapping negativity.

TV Personality

In March 1999, Sally Naden from the BBC TV "Out and About" programme came for a flight. The field was very wet, but we managed to get her in the air and Geoff Guttery flew the cameraman in the other K13. One of the few bits of me speaking was when she said on the approach "I think I will close my eyes," to which I replied "Don't do that, you'll miss the best bit," followed by a camera shot of the K13 disappearing in a cloud of mud. Unfortunately, I didn't get the Oscar.

Our Chairman, commenting on my Northern accent on TV, said "My wife said you at least made gliding appear to not be an elitist sport". I am not sure it was a compliment!

Hand over

When I became CFI, I was told my primary responsibility was to find a suitable successor. Barrie Purslow and I agreed that the job was too big for one person and he volunteered to take on the role of Deputy. Later, Martin Moss, a very good cross-country pilot, also became a DCFI to further progress X/C in the club. They both helped a lot, but unfortunately, they were not interested in taking on the CFI role. So, basically, I failed.

I had a young daughter and a career that badly needed some attention and after 12 years, it was time for a change. It was Bob, then Chairman, who again influenced things and persuaded Geoff Guttery to take over in 1999. Thanks Geoff!

Record Breaker

In April 2000, Peter Philpot had asked me to fly Edwin Shackleton, an ex-BAe Filton work colleague of his, in the YS53. Edwin, who has recently passed away, is the Guinness record holder for flying in the most types of aircraft. The YS53 was his 700th type. He had flown in balloons, home builds, helicopters, microlights, warbirds and military/civil jets and reached 879 types. At the time, he had flown in 29 gliders but the 46 minutes in the East Bowl was his longest glider flight.

Hunter in the West Bowl

As a 50th birthday present in June 2006 Alison paid for me to have a flight in a Hunter T7 (side by side 2-seater) out of Warton. After some fantastic aerobatics, the two places I wanted to visit were Chipping and Elizabeth's school.

We were able to coordinate our arrival with Geoff Guttery, (he actually answered us on the radio) and I was able to share it with those at the club and soaring in the bowl. John Mitchell's hens did eventually start laying again!

Elizabeth and her friends also were let out of school to see us fly by.

Ged Terry flew the Hunter the next day. The full write ups are in a previous BFGC club newsletter, or send me an email and I will send mine to you.



Over the Clubhouse at 350kts - What a flight

Recent years and the Future

I had to spend more time focusing on work if I was going to achieve anything in my career and thankfully this was rewarded. I also had a daughter, a wife, and various pets, (finally ending up with a horse - Alison and Elizabeth both enjoy riding). A lot of my friends had taken a break from gliding during this phase of their life, but I didn't want to do that.

Alison still has a third share in our Ventus, but mainly flies when on trips rather than at Chipping. So, since I had less time to spend flying, I did more flying with Alison, away from Chipping, in Spain, flying in the Pyrenees. (Thermalling at 12,000ft just above unlandable mountains is a real eye opener!) I also flew at Feshie, where I have once again become a tug pilot, flying their Robin DR400, a lovely aircraft and latterly at Eden Soaring, running some of their flying weeks.

I enjoy flying at Chipping and still get a lot of satisfaction out of instructing and cross country flying when the weather permits.

I have great respect for those who followed me as CFI. I believe the role is now more demanding than ever, with the constant EASA influences and concerns about litigation. This makes it less fun. Support your local Sheriff (sorry CFI). Without them, none of us would fly.

Alison and I are about to start a new phase in our life, moving to a house overlooking Loch Tummel near Pitlochry. We have always loved Scotland and are looking forward to getting the house refurbished. I had been considering what type of BFGC membership to maintain after moving North. I have made a lot of friends at Chipping and staying in touch is very important to me. The fantastic award of life membership has resolved this issue and I will visit Chipping whenever I can.

BFGC is a great place to fly and the training gained at Chipping enables you to fly anywhere. I am privileged to have spent the last 44 years flying at Chipping. When we move North, our primary club will be Feshie.

If any of you want to come and experience Feshie, I will give you a warm welcome (and a check flight) and when we get the house finished, we may even be able to offer a bed.

Bob Pettifer

Unlike a lot of people I have mentioned, Bob is still very much with us. At his recent 80th Birthday, Alison and I sent him a card thanking him for being a massive influence on our flying lives. I think after reading this you will know what we meant. For us, Bob has always been part of Chipping and a great asset to the club and its pilots. I have no idea how many pilots owe Bob a lot for their training, but his contribution to BFGC has been immeasurable.

Thanks for all you have done Bob.

Paul Myers – Always a Chipping Pilot (April 2019)

