

NEWSLETTER 11

(October 2020)

'THE BEST LAID PLANS OF ...'

Like the whole of the U.K. we have been affected by the cursed virus and like most we have been sensibly self-isolating. There were plans to give several talks, spreading the SHORT word, and all but one are on hold until Spring 2021 (hopefully).

We did however manage to venture onto the Isle of Sheppey in August at the invitation of Howard Mason, the BAe Systems Heritage Officer, to give a talk and presentation to the residents of the Shellbeach hamlet at the eastern end of the island, just beyond Muswell Manor. This is where in 1909 Short brothers built their first successful aircraft factory before moving to Eastchurch a year later.

On the tennis court in the open air we put up one of our exhibitions and Liz talked to a group of 40 residents who proved to be an interested audience. Many knew little of the important events, at the start of the 20thc. that happened less than a mile away or about the three Short brothers who did so much to advance the design and production of successful powered flight before, during and after their time on the Island.

The Society 'gained' £256 for funds by book sales and donations and we felt that the word had been well spread. Our thanks go to Howard and Tish Mason for their kind invitation and their hospitality.



Further documentation from a Shellbeach resident, Mike Pattinson, whose grandfather worked for Shorts at Rochester and this photograph was loaned to the Society along with some technical papers. The photograph is of the Mayo Composite taking to the air from the River Medway, unusually, seen from the opposite bank to the Seaplane Works.

It is signed by the pilots of both the aircraft in the composite –
John Lankester Parker and Tom Piper.

Photo, courtesy of Mike Pattinson, was edited
by Air Commodore (rtd) John Puckering.

Ongoing Project. The Short Brothers 1900 -1903...

We have embarked on a fact finding 'mission' concerning the days before the Brothers became immersed in powered flight. In Hove, Colonel Gouraud, Thomas Edison's European agent, employed Horace Short to assist in the laboratory's early experimental work on acoustics. Horace's two younger brothers built their first balloon in the attic at The Mento Laboratories and launched it from the Pleasure Gardens at St. Ann's Well in the town of Hove.



Balloon, - St Ann's Well Pleasure Gardens, Hove.

An abridged newspaper report of the event reads as follows...

BALLOON ASCENT AT HOVE.

Many persons in Mid-Sussex were interested on Saturday evening in watching the passing of a balloon over the district. The silken balloon ascended from St. Ann's Well about 7pm, the party in the car consisting of Mr. Eustace Short, Mr. George Bevan and Mr. Ben Parker of Hove. The balloon used was a new one made at Brighton by Mr. Short [ed: and Oswald] with a capacity of 38,000 cubic feet... it sailed inland over Preston Park and on to Falmer and Lewes, and then over Plumpton towards Chailey and Horsted Keynes ... **the descent, lasting and** hour and a half, being made near Violet Cottage. The balloon came down perfectly steadily and when terra firma was reached once more, the members of the party retained their seats and chatted for some minutes before getting out and returning to Hove by train. The atmosphere was perfectly clear throughout the trip... In the course of the trip the balloon soared to a height of a mile and a half.



A further press report...

BALLOON VOYAGE. FROM HOVE TO WILLINGTON

Mr Eustace Short, the aeronaut, made a second successful ascent with his balloon from St. Ann's Well, Hove on Thursday evening. The balloon, which had been inflating in the grounds for several hours, made its ascent, with Mr. Short and Mr. William Johnson, about 6.45pm. There was a good current of air along the coast, but it was deemed advisable to keep the balloon low, on account of an upper current blowing out to sea. Just before reaching Newhaven, while at a height of about 1,000feet, the aeronauts got into a whirlwind, and for about three minutes there was a terrible shaking of the balloon. About eight o'clock, when reaching Willington, Mr. Short threw out the grapnel, which trailed behind for about half-a-mile and the descent was made in the garden of Messrs R. Willard and Sons, market gardeners. About fifty willing hands seized the trail rope and assisted to bring the balloon to earth, which was accomplished without any mishaps. Some Eastbourne people saw the balloon in what they believed was the neighbourhood of Ratton.

A more recent research...

SEBRO – The Shorts Wartime Civilian Repair Organisation (C.R.O.).

Following recent contact from Dr. Mark Elliot, the curator of Cambridge University Anthropology Museum, we took an opportunity to meet him and a colleague and visit what is left of this Madingley Road, Cambridge, wartime repair factory – the canteen. Presently used as a store for the museum it is due for demolition in a few years' time, when an impending move to new premises is completed.

We were shown around by Dr. Elliot and took photographs of the building. The main structure is there but obviously much different to the surrounding modern university buildings and well into old age.

The factory was associated with what was then R.A.F. Bourn and about 5 miles separated the two facilities. Damaged aircraft landing at Bourn airfield and were taken, on trailers known as 'Queen Mary's, to the factory in pieces to be mended or parts cannibalised to complete repairs to other damaged (and much needed) Short STIRLINGS.

We understand that it was the job of the foreman to remove all traces of blood and body parts before the female workers were allowed near the aircraft.

Our good friend Lou Brown was a Short Boy whose first encounter with Shorts was at this factory. He has many fond memories of his time there and thankful that as an apprentice he studied metallurgy as he later became a lecturer in the subject. Oswald Short insisted all apprentices studied metallurgy.

The land was requisitioned from St. John's College, Cambridge, Merton College, Oxford and Storeys Charity, a major Cambridge aid organisation, amid a GREAT deal of opposition as industrial development of any sort was energetically opposed. Interestingly the main hangar was still there in the 1960's when the site was taken over by the U.K. government and a part of it became the H.Q. of the British Arctic Survey agency.

It is with sorrow that we record the passing of two Shorts Boys – **Hilda Roe** and **Dorothy Spry**.

We met Mrs. Roe several times. Hilda was firstly a 'doper' and then a 'dolly girl' at Shorts Seaplane Works in Rochester as she was able to take the riveting dolly inside the floats due to her diminutive size.

We were delighted to have met Mrs. Spry at our Rochester Guildhall talk after she had bussed, walked and train journeyed from Margate at the age of 94. Dorothy went to work on Short Stirlings at Rochester Airport at the age of 18. She worked on 'details', shaping small parts for Stirling bombers. When the Airport factory was bombed, she moved to the Strood Extension factory and became a chargehand in the riveting department.

It is with sincere hope that you...

STAY SAFE and STAY HEALTHY

Liz & Barrie Walker, Rick Heys and Jane Harvey