We send our condolences to the families of the following absent friends:

Don Bassett  John Riley  Ian Stanley
Ted Tootel  Keith Warburton

(We have only recently been informed of the death of Captain Stanley, although he passed away in August 2013.)

People News:
One of the pleasures that I derive from compiling the newsletter is receiving letters from our older brethren, such as this offering from sprightly 95 year old Bob Lasham, who was inspired to write after reading Pat Dorehill’s obituary and Viv Gunton’s Heron article in the last newsletter.

Bob writes “I met up with Pat Dorehill at a symposium in 2012 at the Petwood Hotel in Woodhall Spa, which was once the Officers’ Mess for 617 Squadron. The event concerned the Ausburg Raid and Pat was kept very busy signing books for many of those attending. My entry to civil aviation career was similar to Pat’s; a “B” licence course at RAF Ossington ending with an endorsement for the Lancastrian aircraft which I never flew as the flying training was done on the Lancaster! Cliff Chatten (BEA) and Dick Canever (BOAC) were on the same course.

Then on to Bristol Whitchurch to convert to the Dakota and to join BOAC 1 line on secondment. A couple of trips followed to Cairo and back (5 days) and then to Northolt to operate European routes. Pat and I were among the “Famous 55” who, at the time of release from the RAF, were offered contracts to join BOAC, but were then head-hunted for the newly formed BEA. We were promised that we would never be worse off financially but, as time went by, it was apparent that we were! A committee was formed under the chairmanship of Captain H M Bailey and we took the Company to an industrial court (in 1957).” Supported by BALPA but financed by our own members, we won, much to the surprise of BEA Management.

Operating out of Northolt in the early days for BEA was like being back on a squadron – so many “bomber boys” around. The comments about the Heron performance (in Viv’s article) were interesting and reminded me of the Spring of 1947 when Channel Island Airways was nationalised. Three Dakota crews were wanted and myself, Bill Henn and Joe Cooper were the captains and Bill Benton, Graham Rice and Arthur Steel the copilots (Arthur Steel subsequently returned to the RAF and rose to the rank of Air Commodore with AFM and bar).
On arrival in Jersey we found that we were also going to fly the DH Dragon Rapide with a Radio Officer and, depending on their combined weight, up to seven passengers. When the MoA became serious about aircraft performance, the Rapide near max TOW had a negative rate of climb on one engine! Still a nice aeroplane to fly though. There can’t be many of us left who flew into Croydon and into the old grass airfield that became Gatwick which to us was long-haul on the Rapide. Most days were spent on inter Island flights Jersey/Guernsey/Alderney, 12 sectors per day, with an hour for lunch, which was hard work. During my time on the Dakota, which BEA later called the Pioneer with 32 pax, I flew over 5000 hours with only one engine failure. I returned to the Mainland in 1958 and finally retired from BEA in 1973 after flying the Viscount and Trident.

That was not quite the end though – through the old boy network I joined Air Bridge Carriers, a company set up by Nick Carter and Jimmy Arnold-Boakes, two ex-BEA captains. It was an odd set up: employed by ABC, paid by Field Aviation and flying Dan-Air Viscounts. It was good to know that I could still fly but not so good setting the alarm clock for 5.30am. I should have known better!

Thanks Bob, all good stuff.

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Nostalgia:

This fine picture of a BEA Heron landing on the beach at Barra should have accompanied Viv Gunton’s piece in the previous edition of the newsletter but, owing to your chairman’s lack of IT skills, it was temporarily replaced with an inferior picture from the internet.

Sorry Viv. It was worth waiting for!

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You may recall that a couple of articles about the Concorde were included, firstly in the Spring 2016 newsletter (from Ricky Bastin from a ground engineer’s perspective) and secondly in the spring 2015 edition (from Mike Riley from a pilot’s point of view). I quote again the second paragraph of Mike’s piece:

“As Mach 2 transports go, the Concorde was a miracle of user-friendly revolutionary design, and remains so. But everything, except simple up-down-left-right-fast-slow driving was more complicated and critical than for a subsonic airliner. The knock-on effects of many of the most simple failures were disproportionately dramatic and critical, with numerous things to be done immediately from memory in the right order, as there was not enough time to get the book out. At the same time, vital decisions had to be made (your life could depend on it) upon where to point the craft. One thing was normally certain; if anything went wrong you couldn’t necessarily go as far as the intended flight, usually exclusively over a wide ocean. And it went wrong quite a lot!”

As if to endorse Mike’s comments, my good friend Geoff Mussett has written the following description of one of his more memorable Concorde flights.

Introduction: The Concorde flight profile, with a few variations, was quite straightforward – climb at Vno, subsonic cruise at M0.95, recommence acceleration and climb at Vno until reaching M2.0, then cruise/climb until descent at 350kts. Every take-off, no matter how light the aircraft, how long the runway, or how cold the ambient temperature, was a full power reheated affair. On a transatlantic operation ex-LHR, this was maintained for 80secs by which time 500 galls of fuel had been consumed and after which the aircraft staggered away at 250kts (which needed to be accurately maintained) until the magic “no speed restriction” call from ATC. Thereafter it was a matter of skimming the SID crossing altitudes whilst accelerating to hit the Vno of 400kts at 8000ft. The optimum subsonic level whilst over land and at this weight was FL260 which is where 400kts = M0.95 and was roughly minimum drag speed. In practice FL280 was used as this gave a smoother transition once full power and reheat was reapplied at the acceleration point over the Bristol Channel, near Lundy Island. Again, tucking the ASI needle under the half cut-out of the Vno pointer ensured best climb. When the Vno started to increase at FL330 the autopilot and/or flight director max climb mode tracked it up to 530kts, which it maintained until reaching M2.0 at about FL500 with the aircraft settling at about FL515 when the Concorde progressed across the Atlantic in favourable temperature conditions. During the acceleration phase mentioned earlier, the reheats were normally switched on at the accel. point for an average of 12 minutes (maximum 15mins. Flying Manual limitation) taking the aircraft to M1.7, thereafter continuing the accel/climb at full throttle.

All standard stuff except …… one evening, BA003 LHR-JFK, full load, minimum fuel with Newark diversion and warm air temperatures expected over the UK southwest approaches. All went well until during the acceleration off southern Ireland the air turned out to be several degrees above forecast and after the maximum permitted 15mins of reheat we had only reached M1.58. On switching off the reheats the aircraft started gracefully descending and decelerating whence we had come, somewhat akin to a snake on a snakes and ladders board. Of course, this also affected the flight engineer’s control of the C of G, which had to be controlled by fuel transfer within defined limits during the accel. Finally stabilising at M1.35 and FL390 and stuck in a high-drag regime, a quick manual check of fuel on board/fuel flow/groundspeed and distance indicated that we would be struggling to even make Gander with reserve (30mins) fuel.

Despite 166 emergency and abnormal procedures and 35 chapters of procedures and techniques, there was no reference to “Failure to attain M1.7 after 15mins of reheat” and none of the crew had ever heard of this happening before. Although permission was obtained from Engineering (via Speedbird) to reuse the reheats and cognisant that the reuse would increase fuel flow by 50% , we decided to see if the aircraft, now getting steadily lighter, would accomplish a non-reheated acceleration once we hit
cooler air. Meanwhile we had to inform Shanwick that we would be in breach of our oceanic clearance entry altitude and asked Speedbird Ops to inform JFK that we would almost certainly be techstopping.

Slowly, very slowly, the aircraft began to reaccelerate finally reaching M2.0, so that by 20W we were able to do a fuel check using our computer flight plan. The result was that all 12 mins of contingency fuel was gone, along with half of the EWR diversion fuel. Unlike subsonic aircraft, Concorde never “made” fuel but, being several tonnes lighter, we had hopes that we wouldn’t actually lose any more. By this stage there wasn’t much else to do but to enjoy dinner!

With fine weather all down the US eastern seaboard, making JFK was still a possibility, but arriving during the evening rush hour and the probability of speed control (an anathema to Concorde), together with limited near-diversion options on the normal inbound supersonic route, made it all a bit of a risk. However an overland subsonic routing with Newburgh and Bradley as boltholes was a better option, particularly as JFK were using R/W22L for arrivals. Subsonic flight carried a 20% mile-for-mile fuel penalty and the route was high workload with manual INS programming and deceleration planning was required, using nothing more sophisticated than the weather radar to determine distance from the coast!

With the company AIRINC message confirming 22L in use the decision to replan via the subsonic route was clear and the request was passed on by Moncton to Boston. The first contact with Boston gave “cleared direct to JFK” so we were even disposed to give a small buffer on the potential coastal boom clearance (well, why spoil a good evening!) and once established in subsonic flight we were at last able to do a realistic fuel check. JFK was still on, but with no diversion and as long as the clearance held good. In fact we ended up with having to ask for an extra mile to make a quasi base leg, landing with enough fuel for a radar circuit plus reserve fuel having taken an extra 17mins flight time over the planned 3hrs 23mins.

On phoning the NY Tracon supervisor from BA Ops to thank them for their considerable assistance, he said “it was a pleasure, we could see that you were in trouble”. Well, I guess they don’t get too many friendly targets entering their 3000 mile radar shield at 900mph.

As they say, just another interesting day at the office!

Thanks Geoff. Nice one.

Flights to Remember……or Forget.

Iberia Caravelle, EC-BDD, 4th November 1967, near Fernhurst, West Sussex.

Ray Howell kindly sent me his personal recollections of this CFIT accident near Haslemere.

“Some of the recent fascinating articles on aircrash incidents have reminded me of one which I was very remotely connected with. The background to it and events somehow seem every bit as horrifying as other crashes with far more victims because there seems to be more unexpurgated information available than even more recent accidents.

When I was 17, about 18 months before I entered the College of Air Training, I was attending an utterly miserable, drizzle sodden Guy Fawkes bonfire show in Horndean just north of Portsmouth. A jet passed low overhead unseen, but very loud. Looking back nearly 50 years, this sort of event was extremely unusual, and I commented to my girlfriend about how very odd it was for a jet to be that low in an aviation backwater. The next day the news was out, IB062, an Iberia Caravelle (EC-BDD) flight that night, 4 November 1967, en route from Malaga, had crashed just after 22.00 on the 900’ Blackdown Ridge of the Southdowns, just southeast of Haslemere and near Fernhurst. ETA into Heathrow was 8 minutes later at 22.10.
Amongst the 37 victims (all of those on board) were June Thorburn, a famous actress of the time from 'the Cruel Sea' and 'The Dickie Henderson Show', Donald Campbell of the Campbell Aircraft Company and John Clarkson, VP of Coventry City FC.

Seven years ago I thought I'd research deeper into this accident as historical aviation matters interest me. There are available on the internet the Police reports of the officers on the scene, and they are horrifying. The aircraft had flown into a large flock of sheep on the Downs and bounced. Of the flock of sheep, many were destroyed in the impact and many more set ablaze by burning fuel. A man in Blackdown House just retiring for the night was looking out of his bedroom window to see the sky full of fire heading towards him. The debris hurtled a few feet over his roof leaving damage and destroyed the garage. Most of the aircraft came to rest on the road after going through trees and hedges. The first motorbike policeman on the scene thought he was attending a fireworks incident because of the brightly lit scene and report of an explosion. His torch had failed and he found himself stumbling in the fog and darkness over burning sheep running around screaming or dying, and metal debris, whilst he was trying to work out what had happened. He then found parts of bodies and clothing. Standing under a tree, he was dripped on by bodies in the branches. He never recovered from the shock of the event.

It seems so strange nowadays the way the accident was handled. None of the Police received any time off or counselling for PTSD, yet to be invented yet! The use of vomiting teenage Air Cadets the following day to collect body parts and clothing seems outrageous! The details do illustrate the true horrifying and hidden facts behind what can come across as just another dry accident statistic. How the aviation scene has changed in our careers from basic navigation with dreadful instruments to inertial navigation, sensible instrumentation and automatic terrain warning/collision avoidance! Would we have done better than pilots of those days? I certainly hope so! Training was the key to improvement of these statistics. 5 years later on 07/01/72 Iberia lost another Caravelle EC-ATV with 104 fatalities in a CFIT in the circuit at Ibiza.

Visiting the scene, there is no memorial or anything to commemorate the event where the fuselage came to rest on the road. About 19 victims are interred at Brookwood Cemetery in Woking where there is a memorial. I believe the remains of June Thorburn were never identified. A horrifying story, yet I believe as a profession we should be aware of the consequences of a moment's lack of attention, or even a simple misunderstanding. I hope it makes us better pilots.

"Thanks for this Ray."

Now a BAC 1-11 story, sent to us by Dave Smith.

This will bring a few tears of laughter, joy and nostalgia to those who were heavily involved in this long-lasting story at Heathrow many years ago. As with all aviation tales there have been numerous versions of this story but this is the true, unexpurgated version by one of the Heathrow ATC stalwarts - one of the best storytellers in the business. He knows - he was there! Funnily enough his name is - - Mike Romeo!!!

Having seen in late 2000 that the BAC-111 G-AVMR had been withdrawn from use I thought it was about time that the definitive story of this infamous 1-11 was aired.

I was the Heathrow North Radar Director when G-AVMR (the "County of Tyne and Wear") was instructed to leave BNN heading 250 degrees for an approach to runway 10L. It was a shuttle standby that day, hence the callsign. I dropped him to 3000 feet and handed him to the No.2 Director - Mr AW (no longer in ATC). Many, many minutes later Tony, having the flight progress strip in front of him, deigned to contact Mike Romeo but there was no reply.
Then came the chilling words: "Mike Romeo, where is he? He's not talking to me". Being the final director he had a short range set up on his radar display and Mike Romeo has gone "off the screen" and it was apparent that I had not transferred the aircraft to the No.2 Director. I scanned my radar from Booker... to Henley... to Reading and westwards... there he was, happy as a sand-boy, heading 250 degrees at 3000 feet and way below CAS. Lyneham were getting interested!

That feeling that engulfs you took over and I wondered if I could speak without trembling. Worse still - could he still hear me? "Golf Mike Romeo, turn left heading 070o, you'll just go through in the turn, and establish on 10L". He read the whole lot back without question - I couldn't believe it. "Can we descend with the ILS?" he said. "Affirmative" I agree, not adding that he'll hit the glidepath in about ten minutes time! I reckon about 5 or 6 aircraft had beaten him and turned onto the ILS before him. On that day 15-20 years ago a pact was made - Mike Romeo would never suffer again and AW and I were the original co-chairmen of the Mike Romeo Fan Club.

Whenever Mike Romeo was inbound or outbound to/from EGLL and A Watch was on duty we looked after him; some other watches sort of looked after him although some really poo-poohed the whole idea.

Inbound with the stand allocation system (BASIS) a callsign could be easily converted into a registration. Outbound our "brill" binoculars were essential but our highly trained lighting operators could easily pick out the "County of Tyne and Wear" even in LVPs!

I still recall GMC one dark night really "going it" and desperately trying to hang on - "Ground, Speedbird 925 vacating 28L following the greens". I gave the usual reply: "925 follow the greens, right on the inner, stand will be B25 but it's occupied and the outbound hasn't started yet". The evening gridlock was building nicely: should get a mention in the Capital Radio traffic report! I looked out of the window and saw a 1-11 doing as I'd asked, then I looked at the BASIS - "BA925 - G-AVMR - HOLD B15". Composing myself I intercomed my lighting operator, who was working harder than me: "That 925 is Mike Romeo; see what you can do". Now this LO was trained to drop everything when Mike Romeo was around and he immediately asked Apron Control if there was an alternative stand for 925.

Apron were really good about it, especially on our watch, and they risked life and limb for this cause - especially that night. "Give him Hotel 34" the LO shouted. "Speedbird 925, next right, follow the greens, new stand Hotel 34". I said, "Err 925, we're a 1-11 and we think we're for the Bravos or Charlies". I retorted: "You're Mike Romeo are you not?" "Yes, but, errr..." he stumbled. "Then it's definitely Hotel 34". The 1-11 ambled into the Hotel stands and parked amidst the long-haul Tristars and 707s.

Job done but BA were cursing - one of their 1-11s had parked in the Hotels and there was a big, big bussing problem!

It was similar outbound... He often had the usual boring slot time but that was easily overcome...

The pilots never quite understood; they knew there were big perks to be had when flying Mike Romeo but they were not sure why. When there were inbound delays and they were told to hold they would tentatively say "If we say we're Mike Romeo would it help?" Would it help??? "Return to LAM and leave heading 270 degrees" was the standard reply. Of course, it was known for some naughty pilots flying other 1-11s to ask the same question and get the same priority. Once this happened and the crew thought they'd got away with it... until the real Mike Romeo piped up with "But WE are Mike Romeo". The offending crew was told in no uncertain terms that if they tried it again they would be diverted!
E Watch had their monkey at London Zoo; we had our boring but lovely 1-11. Happy Days. I was actually presented with a little plastic Mike Romeo on my 50th. It's treasured and flown on hairy circuits by my grandchildren. I pretend not to worry - but I do.

Some of us oldies have kept tabs on Mike Romeo at Hurn. I've personally illegally stumbled on it at the back of the European hangar in OKADA colours but when I saw that it was permanently withdrawn from use last Nov/Dec I realised that it was the end of an era.

THANK YOU all those fellow controllers at EGLL who participated. You will all be remembered, never fear!

Thanks Dave.

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Dave Baker, who joined Icarus last year, has had an interesting post-BA career and I’ve leaned on him to put pen to paper to describe his exploits. In fact his exploits are so varied as to run to five pages, so I will serialize his offering in the next few editions of our newsletter. Here’s the first part entitled “Y55 XBA?”

Well, in March 2003, when I threw my BA uniform on a pile of discarded items in Uniform Stores, I have to say that I was upset. My career in BA that I loved so much was being unceremoniously taken from me at what I considered to be a ridiculously young age. I felt like doing something to cheer myself up, so I decided to buy a new car and …. a personalised number plate. I was trawling through the DVLA website looking for BAK, as in my surname ‘Baker’, when I came upon the XBA suffix. Then I saw it, and ‘it’ completely encompassed how I felt about the whole BA retirement issue. Y55 XBA (?). I’ve had it on my cars ever since! (sadly, without the question mark).

I decided that I would like to carry on flying; I didn’t have to do it, I enjoyed doing it. I had lived in Scotland since moving there in 1975 to fly the BAe 748 or ‘Budgie’ as it was fondly called. My family and friends were now all there and I didn’t want to move South or commute. I had done that during my last three years in BA when I was on the B777 fleet.

On my licence I had the PA28, PA23, B55 Baron, Trident 1&2, HS748, BAe ATP, B757, B767 and B777. My choice was realistically confined to the three Boeing aircraft.

As luck would have it, a new charter airline was starting up in Scotland - Air Scotland.com. The outfit was being set up in collusion with an airline called ‘Electra’ based in Athens. The aircraft would have ‘AIR SCOTLAND.COM’ on the fuselage and a Saltire on the tail fin. It looked very good. Air Scotland did not hold an AOC so Electra was the operating airline.

I contacted them and was called for an interview. The owner was an Iraqi, as was the Electra Chief Pilot who told me that he used to be one of Sadam Hussein’s personal pilots (some of the stories he told me subsequently were bizarre). “I see from your CV that you have management experience Captain”. I had (foolishly, as it transpired) stated that I was involved in technical management (an FTO on the Budgie/ATP fleet). “Well Captain Baker, it seems you are well suited to be the Fleet Manager on the Scottish Base, can you start straight away?”

Eh, pardon me? Fleet Manager? If I’d had any inkling what the future held, I would have walked out there and then. A leap from a nice cosy career bubble in BA straight into a position of authority in a third level start up nightmare – what was I thinking about! Needless to say, the learning curve was rather steep!
Eventually, we managed get operational. I was tasked with interviewing potential pilots who had been shortlisted by the Electra Chief pilot, presumably on their ability to stand upright and know their name. Anyway, from such a disparate bunch I did manage to choose some guys that turned out to be ok and in one case in particular, far more than just ok (he is now one of Etihad Airways’ youngest B777 captains).

The idea behind Air Scotland was sound and had the operating airline been better, it could have worked well. However, the owner of the charter company had some issues, which caused cabin crew to leave in droves. The engineering management was dire, although the actual daily maintenance was done by a company which did exceptionally well under the circumstances.

The airline had two B757s, one based in Glasgow and the other in Edinburgh. The Glasgow machine was ok and gave us little trouble, but the Edinburgh one was due for the scrap heap. The problem was that we could not get Electra to supply or fund the spares we needed. We were carrying multiple ADDs, which required some fairly ‘artistic’ interpretations of the Minimum Equipment List. Because of an engine driven generator failure, we were flying the Edinburgh aircraft with the APU running permanently. One day, I was on the crew bus travelling into Edinburgh and while I had a spare moment, I phoned the engineering manager in Athens on my company mobile to find out why a new generator was not forthcoming, only to be told that there was no money to buy one – oh dear!

Shortly after this, I was due to fly the Edinburgh aircraft again. During its previous flight, some other MEL critical items had failed and I had no option other than to ground it. It never did fly again under the Air Scotland livery. Eventually it was patched up and repatriated to Athens. In fact, the engineering manager was right - there was no money, some board members had high-tailed it with the company dosh and Electra airlines went bust.

Luckily, the owner of Air Scotland was an astute businessman, who had obviously seen the writing on the wall and had already been in contact with another airline to operate his charters. Air Holland fell into the breach. The Owner negotiated for Air Holland to take on three of the Scottish based Electra pilots, including myself - I appreciated that. I was able to revert to a line pilot (thank the Lord) and the three of us were dispatched off to Schiphol Airport to begin the Air Holland conversion course. Now, whilst the Dutch accepted our JAR flying licences, they do not accept the British Aircraft Performance “A” qualification.

Imagine my horror, when faced with taking the Performance A exam again, thirty years after first sitting it. Luckily, we were given refresher lessons by an AH captain whose first name was Harm. He was very pedantic and by the end of the course, we couldn’t wait to ‘get out of Harms way’ .. tee hee!.

The operating standard of AH was good and I thought that I would enjoy working for them. We flew some of the Schiphol based routes before moving back to Scotland to operate two of their aircraft, now resplendent in the Air Scotland livery, on the AS routes. This time, with operations, crewing and engineering run from Holland, the whole operation ran smoothly. One day, I saw the ICAO code JIB on my roster. This was a new one to me and on investigation discovered it to be Djibouti. It transpired that the AH/AS partnership had negotiated with Daallo Airlines to operate their Gatwick-Charles de Gaul- Djibouti route for them. Not many people have heard of Daallo Airlines. It is a Somali-owned airline based at Dubai Airport. This trip involved night-stops for the crews in both Paris and Djibouti. Paris, of course was ok, Djibouti? Well, bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea? Lets just say the shopping wasn’t that great. There’s another story here, but let’s just say happiness was passing FL200 heading North – I felt a bit uneasy even then! The passengers on these flights were exceptionally messy and rude. How the cabin crew ever dealt with that situation I will never know.
It all seemed too good to be true (apart from Djibouti!), and of course, it was. In the winter of 2011, we heard that Air Holland was in trouble and the AH/Air Scotland partnership ended. Subsequently, we heard that the owner of Air Holland was using the airline as a money laundering device for his other, somewhat dubious, businesses in Holland. Whatever the truth may have been, Air Holland folded…………….(to be continued next time).

Thanks Dave. To be continued.

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The following fully paid-up members have retired from BA in the last six months:

Geoff Leask  Rob Meyers  John Shaw

We hope that they will be able to come to our meeting for their presentation.

The committee look forward to welcoming you all to the Spring Meeting at:

Royal Ascot Golf Club, SL5 7LJ, 01344 625175 on Thursday April 6th at 1930.

The Club is situated just off the A330 Winkfield Road, to the east of the Racecourse.

Should you not be able to attend this time, make a note in your diary that the next function will be an evening meeting on Thursday 12th October 2017.

Best Regards,

STEVE WAND on behalf of the Icarus committee.