

Redlynch & District Local History Society

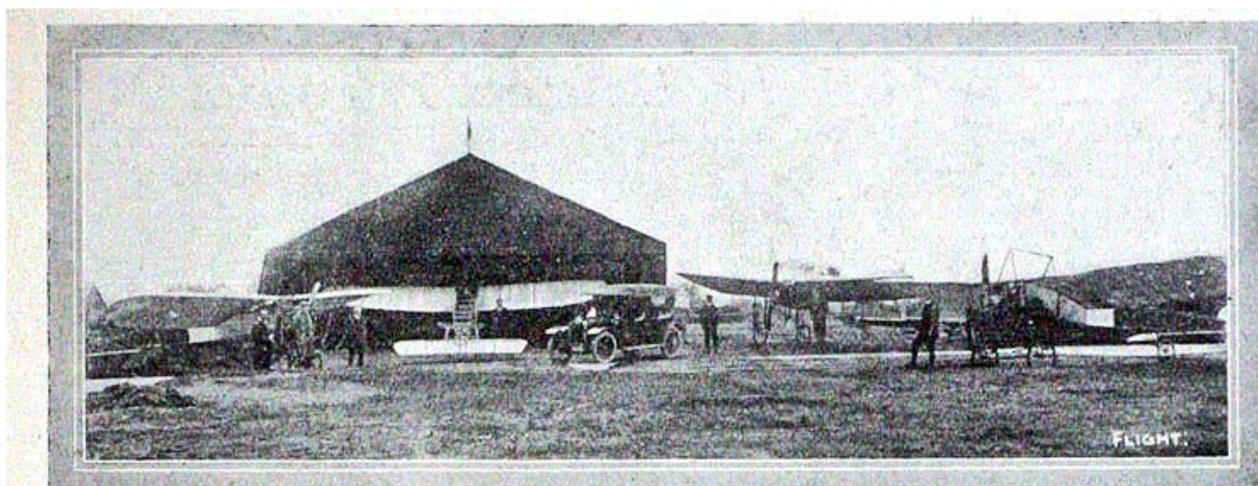
Beaulieu Birdmen and Other People by Henry Cole

The story of the New Forest Flying School and the Bournemouth Air Festival of 1910

The New Forest Flying School was the 5th in the world to issue Pilots Licences but little trace of their activities remains now apart from “Beaulieu” in large letters near the Beaulieu – Lymington Road close to Hatchet Moor Enclosure. The airfield was on the opposite side of the B3054 to the better-known WW2 airfield.

The first flight across the New Forest was by hydrogen balloon by Jean Pierre Blanchard in 1784. The first heavier than air powered flight was by the American Samuel Cody in 1908 and by the first British person John Moore Brabazon in 1909. William McArdle, who ran a car showroom in Holdenhurst Road, Bournemouth was interested in learning to fly and was acquainted with local cabinet maker William Gould. Gould built licensed copies of the Bleriot monoplane with McArdle supplying the engines. McArdle travelled to France and gained his pilots licence, in the course of which he met J Armstrong Drexel, son of a millionaire. They decided to jointly set up a flying school in the New Forest with behind the scenes encouragement of Lord Montague of Beaulieu.

The East Boldre site was selected in 1910, with the airfield on the Turf Cutters Inn side of the road and the sheds on the other side of the road. The first flight by Drexel was on 1st May with 400 people watching him gain his official licence. In doing so he claimed the world altitude record of 1019 feet, such was the speed of progress at the time. Cost of learning to fly on one of the school’s aircraft was £80, a substantial sum in those days. (See photo below from [The Real New Forest Guide](#).)



MESSRS. McARDLE AND DREXEL'S NEW FOREST AVIATION SCHOOL.—The flying grounds extend to 500 acres, and already there are seven Blériots installed at the School.

Bournemouth held a week-long air festival in July 1910 at Tuckton where many large financial prizes were available to encourage participation. Unfortunately, during the course of the events, Charles Rolls (of Rolls Royce fame) was killed in the first fatal crash in Britain, nevertheless the event was a success, McArdle gained a prize for the longest flight from East Boldre to the Needles and on to Tuckton. Another early aviator Claude Grahame White flew 21 miles in 25 minutes to the Needles and back. Drexel set another record by flying a passenger from the air festival to East Boldre, this is believed to have been the first true passenger flight in the UK between two sites.

In 1912 the school’s usage dropped due to the establishment of new competitors in more convenient locations; and by 1914, it had gone leaving only the name cut into the turf. The site was occupied by the RFC during WW1 for a flying school with many permanent buildings; however only the officer’s mess survives as East Boldre village hall.

Our next talk on Tuesday 3rd April at 7:30pm at Morgan’s Vale and Woodfalls Hall, is “Walls that Talk - Graffiti in the Cathedral” by Steve Dunn. All welcome.