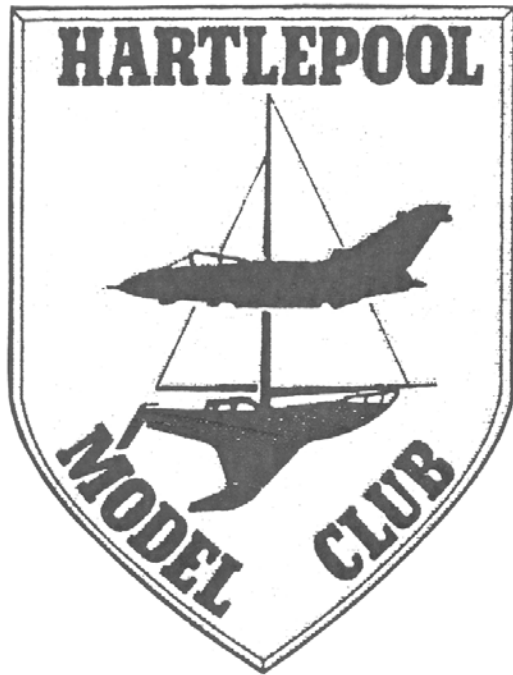


Hartlepool Model Flying Club

A Short History of The First 25 Years

Compiled by Mike Bell



1980



2005



Introduction

Today's Hartlepool Model Flying Club is not the only model flying club ever to have been created in the Hartlepool area. Model flying by individuals and groups of people has gone on in this area since the early part of the 20th century, but as far as I can tell, no other organised model flying group based in Hartlepool has lasted longer than ours.

The most important element of any club is the members themselves and in particular those few who take it upon themselves to look after the administration and financial matters and generally make things happen. Without these people clubs can't exist, so much of this account is dedicated to them.

The information given here has been taken from the minutes of club meetings and supplemented by the memories of the longer standing club members. It should be noted that the passing of time, sniffing of model fuels and glues and imbibing of alcohol may have blurred some of the memories, so suitable allowance should be made for any errors. It is a complement to the club officials over the years that the proceedings of club meetings have been diligently recorded and kept. Without such information this account could not have been written.

In the beginning

Many of our current members will know that the club was originally formed under the name Hartlepool Model Club. At this time the club represented the interests of three modelling disciplines, Boats, Cars and Aircraft. In the period just prior to the club formation there were a couple of groups of flyers using Dryden's Farm and Seaton Carew together with a group of boat enthusiasts using the lake in Ward Jackson Park. No one seems sure where the car contingent came from, but all the modellers of Hartlepool were, at that time, just informal groups of people.

Legend has it that the idea to form a club was spawned as a result of people belonging to these various groups bumping into each other in the local model shop, Hartlepool Model Centre, in Murray Street. This idea eventually became reality, largely due to the efforts of Jim Litherland (one of the flyers), when on the 10th of March 1980 the first club meeting took place in the Sporting Club in Whitby Street.

One important function of the first meeting was to elect club officials:

Chairman: Jim Litherland

Secretary: Kevin Bilham

Treasurer: Ken Robinson

Sub-committees

Aircraft: Jim Allen, Richard Atkins

Boats: Ken Robinson, Kevin Bilham

Cars: Peter Heaton, Peter Litherland

An enrolment fee of £1.00 was charged together with an additional £1.50 annual fee. A total membership of 68 was recorded.

The membership list for 1980 shows that some of our 2005 members are, in fact, founder members of the club. These are: Richard Atkins, Jim Allen, Paul Hewson, Les Noble, Gordon Gouge, Brian Thompson, Tommy Taylor. Several of these people can boast unbroken membership.

In the early days there was a monthly general meeting together with separate monthly committee and sub-committee meetings for the aircraft and marine sections. These extra meetings were a necessity in those days given that there were really three separate clubs operating under one banner. Meetings were also conducted in a much more formal atmosphere compared to recent years and it has been interesting seeing the different styles in which the minutes have been recorded.

It is difficult to know from the meeting minutes why or when the car section came to an end, but there is no mention of them in the 1981 AGM minutes, so it would seem that they never really got established.

A change of identity

The demise of the marine section is difficult to pin down to a specific date but there are records of correspondence during 1989 showing that some marine section members split off with the intention of forming a separate model boat club. The exact reasons are no doubt complicated but references to a formal marine section disappear from the records in 1990, although several members with marine interests continued their membership for some time after. The records also show a dispute between the breakaway group and those who stayed on regarding the stewardship of Ward Jackson Park Lake. The breakaway group eventually became the Hartlepool Marine Model Club in 1991.

A move to formally limit the scope of the club to aircraft only was made at the 1994 AGM. This, together with a proposal to change the name of the club to Hartlepool Model Flying Club, was officially ratified at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 18th May 1994.

The question of whether to affiliate to the BMFA (SMAE) cropped up at various times almost from the start, but it wasn't until March 1999 that the members were eventually convinced to take this step. Having made this move the club has had the opportunity for interaction with other local clubs, to take part in events and to appoint achievement scheme examiners.

Influential people

As mentioned earlier the club only exists because individuals are prepared to contribute their precious spare time. The club also benefits from those people who have special skills and talents that help and inspire others or who achieve successes that put the club in a good light within the wider modelling community. The ones mentioned here are my personal choices.

Jim Litherland. Coming up with the idea to form a model club is one thing, but someone has to actually do something about it. It seems that turning the idea into reality was largely a result of Jim's efforts. He had to move away from the area due to work commitments after only a year in office, but was quite rightly granted an Honorary Membership for life in March 1981 for his part in establishing the club.

John Snowden. John was active in both marine and aircraft disciplines and held various club official posts over the years. Above all this, John has always been an innovator and as such an inspiration to others. For example he was achieving remarkable success with electric flight long before it became mainstream. John was flying small, aerobatic scale models powered by simple buggy motors at a time when electric flight was, for most people, confined to motor gliders barely staggering around the sky. He went on to carry out aerial photographic work for English Nature using his home brew electric powered aircraft. John was also instrumental in the negotiations with English Nature, which culminated in our gaining a licence to use Seaton Common. Though no longer an active flyer, John continues to sail at Ward Jackson Park. John's son **David Snowden** must also be mentioned for his fine chairmanship of the club from 1982 until 1991.



Jim Williamson. Jim was Club Secretary for only a year but in that time was instrumental in creating the first Club Constitution and book of rules. He also raised the standard of club documentation and administration, largely due to having access to the then very novel, new fangled computer thingies. Jim also found time to launch the Club Newsletter in December 1984, which became very popular and continued to be produced by others long after he moved on.

Les Noble. Like most modellers in the '70s and '80s with an interest in R/C, Les had to learn the arts of building and flying by trial and error. He was among the first to tackle and master helicopter flying at a time when the models available were relatively crude and outside assistance non-existent. This pioneering spirit, his flying skills and high levels of workmanship has rightly earned Les much respect.



Just as important, he has always been very happy to pass on this hard earned knowledge to others.

Richard Atkins. Richard took on the mantle of flying instructor very early on. He has continued that role unbroken up to this day, and will hopefully continue for years to come. The records also show that he has held some kind of club post for most of our 25 years. There is no doubting Richard's commitment to the success of the club or for his enthusiasm for aeromodelling in all its forms.



Paul Hewson.

Many recently joined members will only know Paul as the big Chairman geezer whose monthly meeting report consisted of a grunted "Nowt". In fact his contribution goes much further than that. His larger than life character dominates any social occasion or flying session where he is present and he makes sure that none of us takes our hobby or ourselves too seriously. Paul has occupied many official club posts over the years and has been central to the organisation of many events, notably the Hartlepool Shows.

He has also been presented with a special award for services to mowing on the Seaton Carew site.

Wilf Goldsborough. Wilf was Treasurer for only two years, but in that time he transformed the financial standing of the club for the better by his determined fund raising efforts, especially at the Hartlepool shows. As well as his time and energy Wilf generously donated prizes of pleasure flights (piloted by himself). Ill health forced him to quit the position in 1994 and he passed away in 2004. He was a true gentleman and is sadly missed.



Nic Bell. Nic has been Secretary for thirteen years, over half the life of the club. This is remarkable not only because she is not herself a modeller, but also because her period in office has included some very difficult and stressful times. These include the facilitation of the licence with English Nature and later finding a new flying site when we were eventually forced to move from Seaton. There is no truth in the rumour that Nic keeps order in the club because everyone is scared of her. (She made me say that).

John Rutter. John has never been short of ideas and, unlike most of us, he actually turns them into reality. He can turn an idea into a flying model quicker than most people can assemble an ARTF. John is a larger than life character (i.e. a bit nuts) whose presence you can't fail to miss and he has never been afraid to be different from the crowd. Over the last few years he has become a convert to electric and is something of an expert in electric motors, including their manufacture. He is a regular contributor to various magazines with more published designs to his name than you could shake a stick at.



Martin Bell. There is no doubt about it he is a very good pilot. Of course starting at age seven helped, so did having a gifted teacher (ahem, me). Martin has won two British Nationals titles and is currently into 3D aerobatics. He designs his own models with his main design philosophy being that the plane must look cool with the next priority being that it should fly reasonably well.



Bob Waugh. Bob has brought many attributes to the club. His high standards of workmanship and flying set a fine example (or make you sick depending on your viewpoint). Bob, together with Mike Bell, became a club examiner with the aim of raising the standards of flying skills and safety awareness. He is also the club webmaster. The club web site created and maintained by him is informative, witty and attracts complimentary comment from all over the world. This medium gives us a public face accessible across the globe. Bob is a teetotaler, but apart from that you can't fault him.



Of course, everyone who has accepted an official post has been an influential person so, lest they be forgotten, you can find them all listed in the table on the last sheet.

Flying sites

The first recorded official site was Ramsey Dryden's Farm, near Greatham where a local farmer had an airstrip for his full-size aeroplane. This arrangement lasted for a couple of years after which this field became unavailable. This might have been because the field was to be turned over to other uses, or it may have been associated with an unfortunate event involving a model flying into the farmhouse. Operations then shifted to Seaton Common, also known as the Snooks. The club occupied this site until 2001, although, as mentioned before, people had been using the fields around this area for years before this.

The Seaton Site had some very unique characteristics. It was reclaimed land criss-crossed by drainage ditches and dotted with mounds and hollows. The actual flying strip was surrounded by ditches and gave it the feel of flying from an aircraft carrier. The strip was very small and any inaccuracy in the landing approach was punished by an unflattering stop (or splash) in one of the ditches. While the limited landing surface and punishing surrounding terrain put a limit on the types of model that could be flown, the challenge it imposed made sure that those who flew there could land more accurately than many of those with more spacious fields at their disposal.

An unofficial site came into use by some club members and others on the former slag banks in Brenda road. This site had the advantage of flatter open spaces to land on and a shorter walk from the car, but the disadvantage of being closer to residential and commercial premises. Eventually, in September 1991, the club received a letter of noise complaint from Hartlepool Council. Because the site was used mostly by flyers not belonging to the club, we could not guarantee to be able to control the noise nuisance. In July 1992, after further adverse publicity in a newspaper article about noise from this site, the club voted for a voluntary ban on the use of this area by our members.



In 1992 we were approached by a warden from English Nature pointing out that the Seaton site was, in fact, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and as such we should not be using it. Fortunately the local top brass at English Nature were more reasonable than we could have expected and thanks to the efforts of a group of our members, a licence agreement allowing us to continue using the site was negotiated. Such agreements with English Nature are rather rare so this was no mean feat.

In February 1998 we were notified that Hartlepool Council were declaring an area including our site as a Nature Reserve. While this apparently had no immediate effect on our activities, it turned out to be the beginning of the end. During the course of 2000 we noticed that the flying strip seemed to be getting rather damp underfoot. It was then noticed that a couple of the larger drainage ditches had been dammed up. An enquiry to the Council revealed that this was a deliberate attempt on their part to raise the water table to encourage certain wild birds into that part of the nature reserve, and by the way we must cease to use the site by the end of the year!

With the loss of our only flying site the future of the club suddenly looked bleak. Hartlepool Council had sold off most of its land assets so had nothing suitable to offer us as an alternative. We would have to sort ourselves out, so out came the Ordnance Survey Map and every landowner in the near vicinity was identified and written to. Of the 30 or so letters sent out only a handful of replies were received and only one of those was positive.

Mr Harold Thompson of Hartmoor Farm invited us to view his field and subsequently we agreed to have a trial fly on a date between Christmas and New Year. On the agreed date there was six inches of snow on the ground and a freezing gale blowing. Such was the desire to secure our new site that around half a dozen turned out to fly. The wind was so strong that Kev Downes' Wots Wot broke up in mid air. I think Mr Thompson must have thought we were nuts when we turned up in those conditions but the result was we could use his land on a trial basis and eventually we came to an agreement on an annual rent.



Meeting the Public

In the very first year of our existence the club sought participation in the Hartlepool show which persisted until 1996. The turnout of boats and aircraft for static display was often quite impressive bringing all the usual questions of how much do they cost and how fast do they go etc. On a couple of occasions an R/C flying slot was arranged. One of these apparently went quite well until a mid-air between a Barnstormer flown by Richard Atkins and Jim Allen's Gangster 52 brought Richard's aeroplane down on a house roof. No harm done but attempting to fly in such an area these days would seem unthinkable. On another occasion a demo was flown out of the arena, which entailed the crowd having to stand aside at one end to allow the planes to take off. Again this sounds really scary now, but those were more innocent times. In later years any flying slots were thankfully restricted to control line, but even then you could guarantee that at least one of the local little angels would dive under the barrier and give the poor pilot a heart attack. Probably the best form of flying we ever put on at that show was electric round the pole which allowed youngsters to have a go in complete safety.

Of course the models could not be left alone overnight so intrepid volunteers stayed over to protect them. Anyone suggesting that this was a shallow excuse for having a barbecue and drinking beer would probably be right. Numerous memorable nights (and not so memorable mornings) were had. There are many stories and a couple of the more memorable (and printable) bear repeating.

Paul Hewson (actually many of the stories feature him) is known for liking hot sauces with his barbie sausages, so while he wasn't looking a sausage was hollowed out, filled with mustard and presented to him in a bun. Paul then amazed everyone by eating the whole thing and pretending nothing was wrong, for a while at least. My other favourite Paul moment was waking bleary eyed and hung over on the Sunday morning and watching Paul doing a kind of ballet re-enacting the moment when a caterpillar pupates then emerges as a butterfly. Grace personified it wasn't.



Then there was Jim Allen who having been at the Bacardi and cokes all night had a rather bizarre accident. He was walking back to the barbie from his caravan when he realised he was in the path of an oncoming stationary vehicle. Desperate to avoid being hit, Jim dived to one side right into the path of another stationary vehicle that unfortunately could not avoid him. (He also lost his false teeth while being sick down the chemical toilet but we don't mention that). You will occasionally hear him being called Bacardi Jim, now you know why.

On a slightly more cultural note the club attended several fetes at St Francis School, English Martyrs School (static and flying) and supported events at numerous other locations around town. From 1995 to 1998 the club performed at Clarences Community Farm where one of the more exciting performances was seeing Kev Downes being carted off to hospital after turning his ankle on the rough ground. This may have been a consequence of his being sober at the time.

In 1995 the club was invited to take part in a flying demonstration at Raby Castle in conjunction with a number of other local clubs. The only catch was that B certs were required and none of us had them. However, this spurred on a number of people to go for the B cert and in the end all six applicants passed and were able to take part in the display. Raby Castle has many magnificent, old, large trees and some participants made the most of the opportunity to hit or land in several of them.



Having the B cert has since allowed some of the holders to take part in events at other club displays at places including Blackburn and Teesside.

The competitive spirit

While the marine members had regular, well supported regattas, the flyers have never been very competition minded. Despite this a few events have been arranged over the years including chuck gliders, R/C power assist gliders (where it was generally accepted that John Snowden would win and it was a matter of who came after that), fun fly and a couple of concours type of events. It is a pity that such events have not been run more often because when they have gone ahead, everyone involved has had fun. Perhaps this is something to address during the next 25 years.



While the general membership has shied away from competition, one member in particular has bucked the trend by winning two British National Championships. Having watched the Fun Fly competition at the Nats as a spectator, Martin Bell was convinced that he was as good as most of those competing. Of course his club mates didn't let him forget that boast so in 2000 he was cajoled into putting in a last minute entry into the Class 2 Fun Fly event which he won at the age of 17. He has continued to compete in the Class 1 event, eventually winning that in 2004 despite having very little time for flying due to being at University.

Meeting places and social events

The main requirement for meeting places over the years is that they should be free of charge. This specification has always been fulfilled with the exception of the Hartlepool Indoor Bowls Club for which there was a charge of £1.50 per meeting. This was apparently one of the plushest venues we have ever had for the meetings and one where a dress code was in force. Most of the other venues have been rather lower key.

The list of venues, all in Hartlepool is as follows

- The Sporting Club, Whitby Street
- Hartlepool Indoor Bowls Club
- GEC club (became the Clarendon)
- The Lion
- Hartlepool Cricket Club
- North Eastern
- Queen Victoria (became the Dagmar)
- Blacksmiths Arms
- Causeway
- Woodcutter
- Stranton Social Club
- Burn Valley Association Club (became the Burn Valley)



The main full club social events have been Christmas Parties which have been held at several of the above venues. Some of the earlier ones were quite lively affairs sometimes involving fancy dress. In recent years they have become much lower key, probably more a result of us slowing down due to old

age rather than just becoming more sensible. Other opportunities for socialising have been camping visits to certain shows, notably Woodvale and the Nats as well as full size airshows. As with the Christmas parties, the shenanigans at these camping events have become less outrageous over the years, although Mr Hewson can usually be relied upon to provide some entertainment.

The indoor (R/C) revolution

Revolution is probably not too strong a word in this instance as it seems that out of nowhere micro r/c systems became available and specialist kits such as the IFO appeared. Our first exposure was seeing demo flights of IFOs at the Nats and soon after became aware of indoor flying at Nunthorpe School, hosted by the Cleveland Indoor Group. A small group of members experimented with models at this



venue and a core of indoor interest was established. This interest became our only mode of flying for many months in 2001 due to the foot and mouth disease epidemic that shut virtually all outdoor venues down.

With the growing interest in indoor flying it was decided to find a venue of our own and the newly built Brierton Sports Hall seemed ideal. The first event here was held in February 2003 and has been repeated several times a year since. The sessions regularly attract visitors from other clubs and are a welcome relief from those dreary winter weekends with nothing to do but watch the wind and

rain.

The rapid advance in motors, batteries and helicopters etc has been difficult to keep up with. Perhaps the only danger is that the models, both fixed wing and helicopter, seem to be getting bigger and more powerful. Eventually a line may have to be drawn to prevent this most enjoyable phenomenon becoming a victim of it's own success.

The next 25 years

All clubs develop a certain character. For sure this depends to a large extent on the people involved but it is also shaped by other factors such as its size and location. HMFC has always been a fairly small club, certainly small enough so all the members know each other reasonably well. Because of that there has always been a kind of family atmosphere and relatively little internal conflict. The facilities have always been pretty basic too. Our flying sites have always had small, relatively rough flying surfaces and while this has no doubt limited the type of models that could be flown to the frustration of some, it has definitely presented a challenge. I personally hope this doesn't change significantly. Big clubs with big facilities have to be run as businesses, need strictly enforced rules to ensure good disciplines and inevitably the members split up into a number of sub groups with their own preferences and agendas. Cosy and informal is so much less stressful.

Aeromodelling, especially r/c, is currently enjoying a bit of a boom, largely because of the availability of cheap almost ready to fly (ARTF) models. This increased interest is good for the future of the hobby, but it does put pressure on flying sites and the training resources of all clubs. Already we have to balance the fact that our terms of use of the site include a limit on the numbers of flyers, against the fact that we now get more applications for membership than ever before.

The availability of flying sites will continue to be the biggest challenge for all clubs. Losing our flying field is absolutely the biggest threat to the continuing existence of HMFC. We know only too well from recent experience that suitable, available land is extremely scarce. If there is to be a 50 years celebration of HMFC then every member must act in a way that ensures that our landlord and the other users of the land have no cause to complain about us.

Finally, the next time you turn up at the field anticipating an enjoyable flying session, just remember that it is only possible because someone has put in their time and effort to make it possible. Maybe you will consider doing your small bit to ensure the club can celebrate its 50th anniversary. Fly safe and don't hog my airspace.



Photographs throughout this booklet were provided by: Mike Bell, Richard Atkins, Les Noble, Paul Hewson

