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# The *Dash*

News and Views of  
[The Channel Dash Memorial Trust](#)

Volume1 Issue 5 August 2010



Editor J T Williams  
01843 297245

## 825 Memorial? **DONE!**



*And in style.....*

After the failure of the Replica Swordfish project, there were those who thought the Channel Dash Association, might not recover from such a bitter disappointment to its members and Committee.

**Wrong!!**

On February 12th 2010, surrounded by snow and members of the press, CDA Patron, Admiral the Lord Boyce GCB OBE DL carefully stripped away the white ensign to reveal a 'truly dignified and tasteful' Memorial to the brave young men of 825 Squadron RNAS (pictured).

The CDA chaplain, Reverend Peter Adams, led the service of dedication in the presence of dignitaries and several hundred members. The Memorial was thus unveiled, close to the entrance of the old Maritime Museum, as an excellent Royal Marine bugler completed the occasion with a perfect Last Post. A day to remember indeed and be proud of. There are more pictures on our web-site.

Resplendent in  
Remembrance

The new Memorial  
to 825 Squadron

## CHAIRMAN HONOURED



Peter enjoying a joke.

Our erstwhile Chairman, Peter Nixon has been elevated to the Presidency. Peter's hard work and enthusiasm played a major part in building the CDA *from scratch* and generating interest in it from all quarters. His untiring efforts to uphold the valour and sacrifice of all those who took part in 'Operation Fuller', have become a byword within the Association. There is an old show-business maxim about 'hard acts to follow' that certainly applies to Peter. A heartfelt 'Thank you and 'well done' Peter, from all of us.

**DIARY DATES:**

The next members meeting;  
7.30 pm 11<sup>th</sup> October RNA club  
Ramsgate. *Don't forget!*

**Editorial page.**

With John Williams (Left)

**In this issue:**

Seaplanes at Westgate 1914 – 1918

## **NEW CHAIRMAN ‘SETS THE AGENDA’**

**Our new Chairman, Jim Williams,** comes to the Trust with a long pedigree relating to the voluntary sector. His knowledge, in particular, of the finer points relating to charities and application procedures, has already proved and will continue to prove invaluable.

He has his sights firmly fixed on 2012 and the ‘Operation Fuller’ Memorial to be erected at Dover, hopefully during next year. Indeed, his enthusiasm is such that he has already completed much of the ground work. However, there is still a great deal to be achieved. Good luck Jim and welcome aboard!

The AGM produced only one other change. Yours Truly was duly ‘sworn in’ as Secretary. I hope dealing with ‘live’ issues will prove to be as interesting and rewarding as ‘dead’ ones (I am Archivist as well).

I will welcome articles and/or comments and ‘sequels’ for this news letter from any of you who have a story to tell. The email address to send them to is;

[john.willy1943@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:john.willy1943@hotmail.co.uk)

Or, my number is at the top.

We are very lucky to have retained the services of a proven expert on fund-raising, again this year. Malcolm Godfrey has a wealth of experience in the difficult and complicated field of event organisation. Continuing in his post of Vice-Chairman, Malcolm is looking to build on the excellent £6000 he raised for the CDA last year! Very well done to him.

We also keep the services of our very own Accountant, Sid Wyness.

Sid will continue to carry out the office and duties of Treasurer, as well as taking on the membership secretariat. Please send your subs, due always on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June each year, direct to him at;

189A Ramsgate Road

Broadstairs

CT10 2EW

Many thanks indeed to Dee Parkinson for signing up to the Committee for another tour. But we need more. If you feel you would like to help out ..... My number is at the top

Finally; If any of you want any CDA insignia, ties, or badges, etc. Mark Stanford (Stores Chappie) is the man to speak to, or Tracey, his wife. They can be reached, initially, through me..... My number is still at the top!

JTW

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SEA-PLANE BASE AT WESTGATE-ON-SEA,  
KENT

By John T. Williams

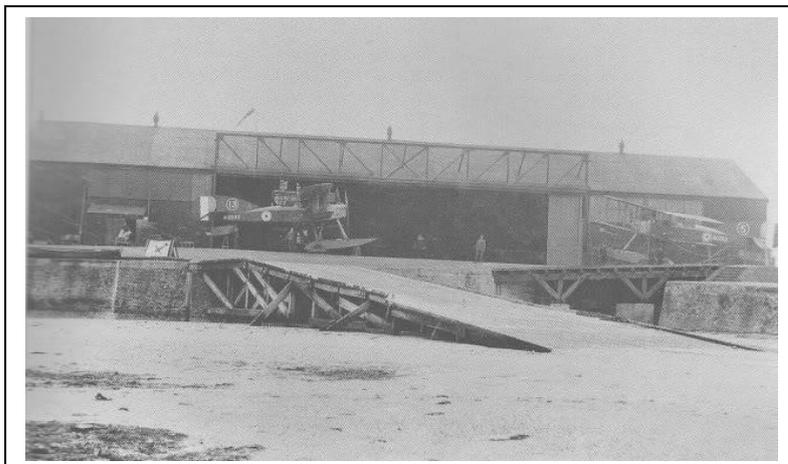
Before I start this short article on the history of the seaplane base at Westgate-on-Sea I should like to point out to the reader that quite a few very good publications already exist relating to the history of this unit, although the passage of time since they were printed may make them difficult to acquire now. Hence the requests from members for this article. Without doubt, Geoffrey Williams book 'Wings over Westgate' must be considered the bible as regards to operations, patrols, etc. If like me you require all 'the gen,' then this is a veritable 'must have' publication. 'Wings Over Westgate' was published by Kent County Library Service in 1985 ( isbn.0905 155557 2).

Another excellent source of information relating to the above, covers the air operations not only from Westgate, but from all of the Home Defence airfields and seaplane stations within the UK. The epic tome 'The Air Defence of Britain 1914-1918' by Frank Cheeseman and Christopher Cole was published by Putnam in 1984 ( isbn 0 370 30538 8).

Between 1912 and 1913 the government opened five Royal Navy Air Stations, from Cromarty in the north down the coast to Calshot, to provide cover and back-up the defences of Britain's east coast. The first aircraft to arrive at Westgate landed on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1914. Three seaplanes from the naval facility on the Isle of Grain had been allocated to the Fleet for exercises purposes, mainly operating in the role of observation machines. Westgate's leading resident, at that time, was Sir William Ingram, Baronet, the proprietor of the Illustrated London News. This gentleman placed at the disposal of the officers, and other ranks, the imposing block of the St. Mildred's hotel, those falling into the latter category finding themselves billeted in Beach House, on the sea frontage of the site. With war imminent it was judged that an air station located at Westgate would cover the Thames Estuary and provide aerial defences against German air operations directed against the naval bases of Chatham and Sheerness. The choice was sound; the Westgate site boasted a wide expanse of beach as well as property, which would make ideal accommodation for service personnel and additional land located on the cliff top to allow for any future expansion. The area also boasted a rapid rail-link with London and Chatham. After a brief stay the three aircraft departed on the 18<sup>th</sup> June. On the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914, units of the Fleet took up battle stations and made ready for the looming conflict with Imperial Germany. Aircraft of the Royal Naval Air Service were dispersed at Eastchurch on the Isle the Sheppey and the Isle of Grain. On the 29<sup>th</sup> July RNAS personnel arrived at Westgate, with the RNAS receiving the order of battle on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August, the same day that Flt. Commander J.T. Babbington arrived at Westgate in Short Brothers seaplane no. 120, his remit being to take charge of the Station and bring it up to a war footing. War with Germany was declared on the 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1914.

Flt. Commander Babbington's task had not been easy, one of his war-time duties having been to maintain patrols from Westgate to the North Hinder light ship in order to allow the safe passage to France of the men and supplies of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) The main body of troop and supply movements taking place between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1914. Babbington was full of praise for his 'highly skilled mechanics and carpenters' that maintained and repaired the unit's seaplanes under 'impossible conditions.' With the movement of the BEF to France, went just about every serviceable Royal Flying Corps (RFC) aircraft, leaving the country almost defenceless, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September the Admiralty was instructed to take on the responsibility of protecting the nation against German air attack. At that moment in time the RNAS had only 31 seaplanes at its disposal together with 40 land planes. It was fairly obvious that an urgent re-disposition of aircraft and personnel was indeed very necessary.

It was during this period of hectic re-distribution of forces that the aircraft and service personnel at Westgate were withdrawn and posted to other air stations throughout England. Westgate was now put onto a 'care and maintenance' footing under the command of Lt. Bertie Ingram the son of Sir William Ingram and at that time commissioned as a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. An interesting aside from that period is the cost of maintaining personnel in billets and hostels. In October 1914 the manager of the St. Mildred's Hotel submitted the account to cover the cost of accommodation for the pilots of the Westgate Unit's seaplanes for the month of August. The bill showed that 12 different pilots had spent time within the hotel, this and the total of 155 man-days came to a total of £159, a sum paid by the Admiralty. Another interesting facet of air operations during those early weeks of the Great War is that the seaplanes based at Westgate had in August flown a grand total of 1,800 miles, which represented, approximately, some 30 patrols of 60 miles each. Before the end of 1914 the Home Office was concerned about future attacks on the homeland by German Zeppelins. But it was not to be a Zeppelin which was to drop the first bomb on British soil; a lone aircraft was to claim that honour on the 24<sup>th</sup> December, the missile landing near Dover. This event led to the re-activation of the Westgate base by the Admiralty. Two seaplanes were based there and held in readiness, while patrols were stepped-up in an attempt to combat any future incursions by enemy aircraft. Over on the opposite side of the English Channel, the Imperial German Air Service and elements of the German navy had established a seaplane base at Zeebrugge, which had four seaplanes on its strength by the latter part of 1914. This unit was given the title Flanders One and it was to become a thorn in the side of British and Allied shipping and aircraft throughout the conflict. On the 27<sup>th</sup> December, Wing Commander F.R. Scarlett, carrying the imposing title of "Inspecting Captain of Naval Aircraft," paid Westgate a visit as part of his duties to oversee and inspect any viable sites for home defence airfields, from which sorties could be mounted against German airships and aircraft. Two sites visited in Thanet were deemed to be unsuitable, before a site adjacent to, and just inland from, the Westgate seaplane base was chosen. The first aircraft to use the new airfield was a Morane, serial no. 941, flown by Flt. Sub-Lt. Marsden on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1915, Marsden being forced to use the site after his aircraft had developed engine trouble. A few weeks later a detachment of ground crew was posted in and on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1915, the aircraft and related personnel of 'A' Flight, No. 2 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service arrived. 'A' flight was made up of four aircraft together with four pilots under the command of Flt. Commander A. B. Gaskell. A few days after its arrival at Westgate the unit was in action. A single German aircraft attacked the explosives factory located at Faversham on the 16<sup>th</sup> April. Flt. Sub Lt. Bettington and Flt. Sub Lt. Mulock managed to take off in Avro's 1013 and 1010. They unfortunately lost contact with the enemy raider and further sorties flown by Flt. Lt. Buss also tried to intercept but to no avail. The German aircraft dropped its bombs on Sittingbourne and Faversham before returning to its base across the Channel. Regular patrols were maintained from Westgate over the Thames Estuary and the cold waters off the French coast and a similar pattern of operations was in place for the remainder of 1915.



#### Left:

Shorts seaplanes of 219 squadron. preparing for antisubmarine patrol. They were often intercepted by enemy aircraft from Zeebrugge

On May 17<sup>th</sup> 1915 Zeppelin LZ38, in company with LZ37 and LZ39 crossed the coast to drop bombs on Ramsgate, the first town in Thanet to be so bombarded. Aircraft from Westgate were made ready and one such machine piloted by the young Canadian John Mulock who had unsuccessfully chased the Faversham raider on the 16h April the previous year, took off to intercept the Zeppelins but once again without success. A few days previous to this, Westgate had suffered its first 'night alert' when Zeppelin LZ 38 had flown over the estuary, and during the course of that incident, Mulock and Flt. Sub Lt. Bettington had carried out the very first night take-offs from the airfield. On the night of the 31<sup>st</sup> of May LZ38 returned once more, but yet again the attempt to intercept the raider proved to be abortive.

June of 1915 saw the introduction of anti-submarine patrols and the intercepting of enemy seaplanes over the Channel. Changes were put in hand on the site in the shape of a new 200ft. hangar, plus a wooden ramp which ran down from a concrete hard-standing in front of this to the beach. Westgate suffered its first flying casualty when Flt. Sub-Lt. Reginald Lord was killed in an accident when his aircraft crashed on returning from operations. The 23 year old airman from Newcastle-upon-Tyne was trying to land in pitch darkness on the night of Monday August 10<sup>th</sup> 1915 when the accident occurred, and he was laid to rest with full military honours in Manston Road Cemetery, Margate. The 20<sup>th</sup> September saw the arrival of a new Squadron Commander, Robert Peel Ross, and within the next few weeks more pilots were posted to Westgate. During the following weeks and months the operational life of the station was made up of more patrols and alerts, and for a more detailed look at the various actions one should consult 'Wings Over Westgate,' where the research of Geoff Williams gives a very good and worthwhile glimpse into the daily life of a front-line unit.

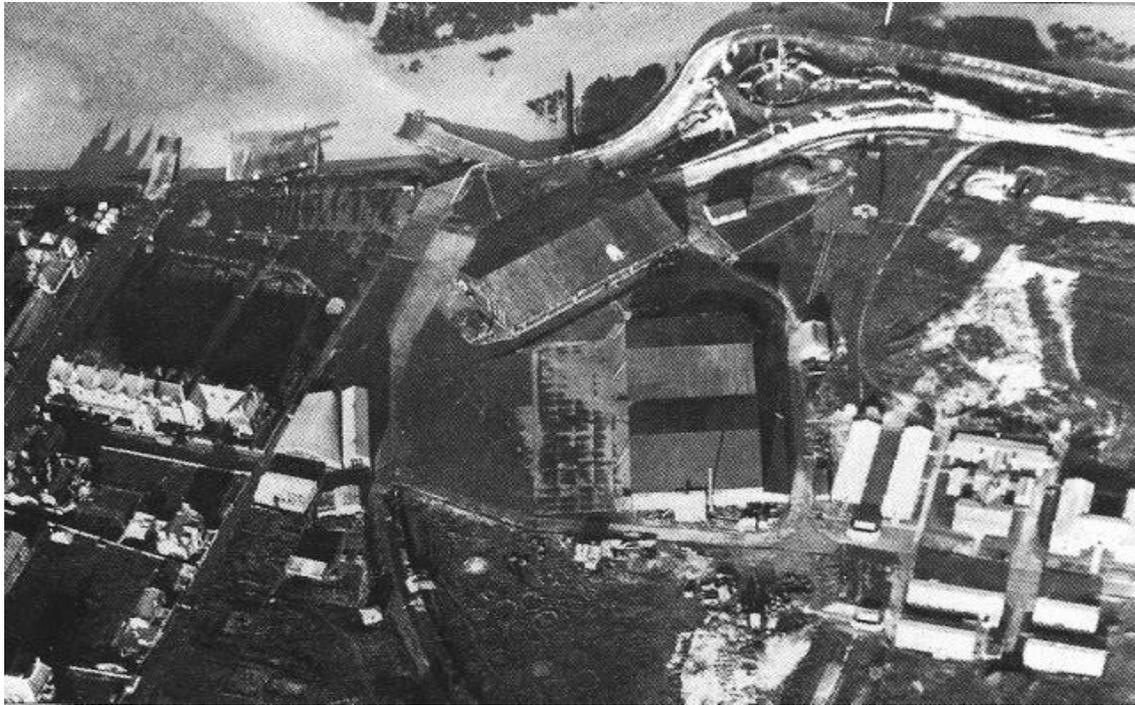


[Above;](#)

Sub Lts H A Butts, A B Gaskill and R H Mulock of 'A' flight 2 sqn RNAS,  
Relaxing In front of airbase buildings. Circa 1917

Below:

An Aerial view of the Westgate base. December 1918



In the spring of 1916 twenty acres of land at Manston Court Farm were requisitioned by the Government, and facilities were put in place there to enable the site to operate as a 'night landing ground.' The very first airman to land there was Flt. Lt. Horace Austin Buss in a Be2C, serial no. 1159, which had taken off from Westgate in an attempted interception of a possible Zeppelin reported off Margate. Having found no sight of the enemy Buss landed his aircraft on the new landing ground.

Within a few short weeks Manston began to take shape, and further operations and personnel, together helped to establish the base. Aircraft from both Manston and Westgate continued to defend the Country against aerial incursions by Zeppelins and Gothas (fixed wing twin engine bombers) and also against the growing menace of U-Boats operating against cross-channel military traffic. A visit to local churchyards will enable one to see the sacrifice made by the airmen of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service. Geoff Williams included a 'Role of Honour' in his publication I think this will stand as a sound testament and tribute to those young aviators who gave their lives.

Flt. Sub-Lt. Reginald Lord 9/8/1915  
 Flt. Lt. J.D. Hume 10/12/1916  
 Chief Petty Officer W.E. Bradley 10/12/1916  
 Leading Mechanic Ernest Rawson 13/3/1917  
 Flt. Sub-Lt Roland Birks 13/3/1917  
 Flt. Lt. A.F. Brandon 26/10/1917  
 Air Mechanic F. Wainwright 28/11/1917  
 Lt. L.A. Thrower 18/7/1918  
 Lt. J.A. Pegram 18/7/1918  
 Lt. J.G. Farrall 18/7/1918  
 Lt. J.A. Vowles 18/7/1918

7.

Today there is no trace of the air field that was once located on the cliff top at Westgate and the land which had been requisitioned in order to establish it, was returned to civilian use in September 1919. With the final release of the land occupied by the sea plane base, the site's five year history came to an end.

Property developments, made during the ensuing years, now cover the area which once housed the station, and one of the hangars dismantled at Westgate and transported for re-assembly at Manston, were it remained in use until comparatively recently, has now also gone to make way for the new airport development. With the closure of the Westgate base much surplus equipment was sold off by auction, and notices in the local press informed the public of those sales. Even Manston itself has now ceased to be as a military airfield, after remaining as a front line base with many units and training personnel operating there throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, forming part of Fighter Commands defences during the Battle of Britain and beyond during the second major conflict.

J T Williams Archivist CDA/CDMT