



Newsletter

Number 2

Winter 2023–4

THE VOICE OF HOOTON PARK TRUST • ELLESMERE PORT • CHESHIRE

Notes from the front office

Hooton Park is now closed to the public until April when we aim to have the whole of Building 16 open. That does not mean nothing is happening around the site. There is plenty of work to do to achieve the April deadline and Neil Hutchinson has prepared a schedule based on Hooton Park's needs. This will be joined by TAC, Griffin Trust and CH21 programmes as they are all involved in Building 16 displays.

Work on projects is also continuing. TAC have finished the restoration of 'HUI', a great effort by Steve P. and Ian. Steve E. and Rob are pressing on with the Parker 'FIU', and Jon H. has been cleaning up 'LPU' prior to its going on display in the North bay. Behind the screens in the North bay, Stewart T. and crew have been working on the Vampire wings which are now being painted. Alan P. continues his labour of love on the Meteor canopy while our new recruits have really pushed WH132 forward with the nose section re-joining the centre section. Work has also begun on the rear fuselage of 'IGP' thanks to TAC for the woodwork supplied.

A quarter section of an original door has been beefed up and is being prepared by Griffin volunteers for display and Dave B. has been helping with lifting and supporting sections using the GT fork lift.

Rob Jones and team continue to make great strides with Chester No.4 tram, and the stairs and upper deck are now in progress.

Our volunteers have also been busy on building maintenance tasks on B.18, reorganising the workshops, realigning paths and creating an escape route from the North bay.

All that remains now is to thank all at HP for their contribution throughout the past year, and to wish everyone a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from us all.

—Graham Sparkes, HPT Board Manager

ID badges to be worn on site from 2024

Many people on site have filled in volunteer forms in the past, but can we ask that you complete the new ones available at the signing-in point? The new forms and ID badges are for everyone's safety and security – and they look very positive as a team! Please complete what you feel you can and return with a passport-size photo to Sam or Bob via the HPT pigeon-holes. You can also email them to samhootonpark@gmail.com. If you have no photo, ask myself or Bob Frost to take your photo on the phone. Your new ID badge



Section of original door for display.



Meteor cockpit rejoined to centre.

will have your name and group name with photo in the front and a 'First Aider' card on the back if relevant. These badges can also be used to obtain any concessions that HPT put in place. Photo IDs can help our visitors recognise staff for information, concerns and First Aid response, and help the Duty Officer with site entry and emergencies. The forms include ICE details. 'Qualifications & Work Experience' help HPT and your own group to identify the right person for tasks. You can add into the 'Help with' box any mobility or learning needs and any medical concerns you may have so you can get the right help from HPT and the First Aid staff. Contractors will carry a pass via the D.O. on site.

All forms are paper only, not stored digitally and are kept in a secure drawer in a locked office. First Aid Training will be held in the New Year and their names be clearly displayed at the signing-in point, Building 27. HPT may email you regarding any concessions, training or events. Thank you in advance.

—Sam Mellor & Bob Frost (Directors) on behalf of HPT



*Season's Greetings and best wishes for
the New Year to all at Hooton Park*



Then and now at Hooton

The second in a series by Neil Hutchinson of 'Then and Now' photos of life at Hooton Hangars



Then ...

de Havilland DH-84 Dragon probably G-ADCP being serviced at Hooton in the 1930s. The newspaper masks the Isle of Man Air Service logo on the side of the fuselage.

Isle of Man Air Services operated a fleet of Dragons on scheduled services from Ronaldsway Airport near Castletown to airports in north-west England including Blackpool, Liverpool and Manchester.

Now ...

The Aeroplane Collection's de Havilland DH89A Dragon Rapide, a more powerful development of the Dragon. G-ADAH was built in 1935, and used by Hillmans Airways who were based at Stapleford Tawney in Essex and used DAH on the London, Liverpool, Isle of Man service for several months and later with Allied Airways based at Aberdeen until shortly after the end of WW2. She was withdrawn from use in 1959. Having spent many years at MOSI she looks at home in Hangar 16 sitting beneath the Belfast trusses like her predecessors.



Hooton Park Hangars – a brief description



The Hooton Park Hangars site is managed by The Hooton Park Trust (HPT), which was formed in 2000 with the aim of creating a Trust to oversee and manage the restoration of the remaining WWI hangars on the former RAF airfield at Hooton Park, Cheshire. The long-term aim is to provide a multifunctional site, as well as restoring the buildings and the site itself as valuable historic artefacts in their own right. The buildings will then provide the perfect environment for the projects and initiatives that are planned.

Much still remains of the Hooton Park airfield and its buildings. Three original, Belfast-trussed, hangars dominate the landscape, surrounded by the original access roads, taxiways and numerous out-buildings and offices, all steeped in the colourful history of this one-time Royal Air Force airbase.

Some of the runway also exists. All manner of aircraft types have operated from this aerodrome, for example Austers of the Army Air Training Corps, Supermarine Spitfires of 610 Sqn, and, during the postwar years, classic jets such as Gloster Meteors, De Havilland Vampires, Venoms and much more.

Gerry's story

I became a Volunteer at HPT in 2016 when I came across the hangars by chance. The Duty Officer was Graham who invited me in and gave me a tour and history lesson; he then asked me if I wished to become a volunteer! My respect for the history, heritage and memory of the young men who took to the skies to protect us was a big yes!

I have done voluntary work for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, I am also a member of TAC, CH21, and support all when I can, including marshalling events. I was privileged to be nominated to be part of the wreath-laying party in Liverpool on Remembrance Sunday and carried the thoughts of all my volunteer friends and staff at HPT, as well as the cemeteries, memorials, graves and landscapes in CWGC care in 23,000 locations.

—Gerry Bateman



Gerry (right) with Graham Sparkes.

A full list of contacts for the Trust and for the specialist groups operating within the site can be found on the back page.

Chester tram restoration



Here is the Chester tram outside 'Our Cottage' in Broxton (it's now all gone). Inside the tram is Harry Dibdin's mother. It's a really detailed and useful picture to help us get all the details as right as we can.

The latest update on restoration work is that the seat backs have now been meticulously drilled out – there are four of them and each one took five hours. The green paint has now been decided on after about four different attempts

Wirral Amateur Radio Society

We will use the winter months to undertake a major service to our generator – a Dale dm/12/dxm, 12 KVA 3 phase 9.6 KW unit. Its origins are from the public sector and it has been in our possession for the last 30-plus years. Our in-house skill base will ensure that come 2024 it will be ready to operate during our 24-hour competitions that we undertake in the radio calendar. The unit will need servicing as follows: the unit needs to be cleaned on the inside as well as the outside; the road wheels, brakes, soundproofing, and the electric distribution, control and metering system all need attention. It will go through a servicing procedure to ensure that it will meet the standards that are needed to provide a back-up off grid system that we have relied on for the past 30-odd years. As the project progresses, we will record it and let you know what we find. However, if you would like to be involved, please contact us via email secretary: g3nwr@virginmedia.com. Along with radio tuition we can provide a diverse range of activities. We meet on a Tuesday and Wednesday evening from 7pm to 9pm and throughout the week during the day: times vary.

—Bill Davies



Recent work at TAC – The Aeroplane Collection



Miles M.38 Messenger.

Work on the underside of the Vampire's two main wings continues. Each wing now has its undercarriage leg fitted and each leg has its wheel on. All the dents in the wings have been filled and sanded smooth. The ailerons have been fitted and they respond to movement of the control cables. The next step is to prime the underside of the wings and then apply the top coat of paint. Once that is done the serial numbers and RAF roundels will be applied. A little further ahead in time, the wings will be lifted by means of a crane, turned over and reunited with the fuselage.

The Messenger project is drawing near to completion. The aircraft has been fitted with stub wings, because space is at a premium, and stands proudly on its undercarriage. All the woodwork has been completed and the aircraft has been fully fabric coated, a tremendous achievement by the team working on it. It is now ready for painting.

It is possible, in the fullness of time, when the Messenger has been moved to its final position in the north side of B16, that full-length wings will be fitted. However, a Percival Proctor and Miles Gemini are due to arrive at Hooton Park fairly soon. Both of these aircraft are largely made of wood and are in a bad state, so they may well occupy the Messenger team for quite a long time.

The Parker restoration is moving ahead very well. The wings have

been fitted and secured with metal stays to the fuselage.

The Dart engine and propeller have been returned to TAC from another aviation museum, which had them on loan. When it arrived, the engine was found to be in a very dirty and, in places, rusty state. Work has continued to clean the engine and repaint it, so that it can go on show on the museum. The engine, which was used on a Vickers Viscount aircraft, is starting to look really good and well cared for.

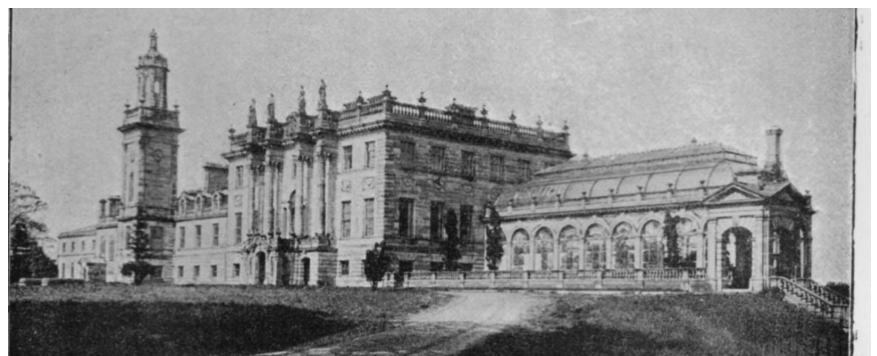
—Stewart Turner

Hooton Park to the rescue

Early November saw the arrival of fully restored 1895 Liverpool Horse Tram from Birkenhead. The tram was found in Grassendale Liverpool in a front garden in the 1970s and taken to Green Lane Liverpool for restoration (and then subsequent MTPS locations). It is one of only four Liverpool trams in the world and the oldest. The photo shows the car in the garden where it was used as a summer house for over 70 years. Second left is Eric Vaughan, who later became treasurer of the MTPS, third left is Arthur Hayes who was MTPS chairman at the time, and on the right is young member Bob Killop who worked in the Midland Bank at Derby Square where the MTPS banked. He later moved away to work in its Isle of Man branch. (Thanks to Terry Martin for additional information.) —Rob Jones



A glimpse of old Hooton



Hooton Park, together with the ancient little estate of Rowacre or Rivacre, extends to about 1,000 acres and is of very great beauty, finely situated on the banks of the Mersey, commanding extensive views of the river and the Cheshire hills, and ornamented with timber of greater size and age than is to be found in any other part of the Wirral Hundred. The Hall has, unfortunately, been dismantled and untenanted for several years. An ancient heronry is still maintained, and there is in the park a holy well, known as St Helen's Well, over which Lady Maria Stanley erected a little well house, now converted into a cottage.

—Philip Sulley, *The Hundred of Wirral*, 1889

The Griffin Trust

Our exhibit of Shell's eco car will be returned to our workshop for a bit of TLC. The model aircraft 'Solar Film' covering on the nose has deteriorated and is looking decidedly tatty. In agreement with the original builders at Shell Thornton we are intending to recover the nose and tidy up a few other details.

In addition it is intended to provide a display board explaining the relevance of it in our museum. As far back as the 1930s Shell at Stanlow carried out research into fuels, both for aviation and transport. One important contribution to the second world war was the development of lubricants for the new jet engines, some of which finished up powering the Meteors of 610 Squadron stationed here until the MOD finished with Hooton Park in the late 1950s. Shell's Thornton Research Centre continued testing fuels and used the runway and the motor transport sheds as a base.

At the time, most large trading companies had their own film promotion departments, and Shell was no exception. These films were freely available to hire to schools, colleges and most often car clubs.

One such film has come our way as it features Hooton Park showing them on site. This film is shown in full during the presentation given by John Morris. John very kindly took a few screen grabs off it and I have printed off some stills to display on the board acknowledging Thornton's connection to the site.

As part of the continuing research into fuel performance and economy by all petrol companies, Mobil ran their Mobil Economy Rally in the late 1960s. The relevance of such 'on the road' trials waned and mileage challenges became more engineering challenges competed for by universities, motor companies, R & D departments and our own Shell Thornton here at Stanlow – hence our eco car.

It is good to acknowledge and record the contributions made and the uses to which Hooton Park has been put over the centuries.

— Mike Foulkes (Griffin Trust)



Stills from the Shell film described in the text.



Kestrel residing at Hooton

Graham Sparkes has taken this great photo (and more) of a kestrel that seems to be staying around at Hooton Park. Kestrel sightings are not uncommon, but this one seems to have taken a fancy to the site!



HOOTON PEOPLE No. 1 –

Mary Hunter (Air Transport Auxiliary)

It is easy to forget as we go about our various activities at Hooton Park that the site has been used by numerous people before us; the purpose of this article, which hopefully will be the first of many, is to bring a few of them to our attention and remind everyone of their contribution. This article concerns one of the many Air Transport Auxiliary personnel who played a key part in ferrying aircraft to where they needed to be, thereby freeing up much-needed pilots for combat duty.

Mary Corbett-Lowe was born on 17th December 1913 in Bromborough and she was educated at Howell's School, Denbigh, and went on to become a dance teacher.

The early entries in Mary's Log Book suggest that she learnt to fly at Hooton from 1938 onwards using a Tiger Moth similar to the one in Hangar 16. Her flying training was supported by the Civil Air Guard which was established by the British government in July 1938 to encourage and subsidise pilot training as the prospect of war loomed. Many of the female flyers like Mary went on to join the ATA which took over the aircraft transfer role on 1940, one in eight of all ATA pilots being female. She married David Ronald Hunter, the son of Revd and Mrs Hunter of Childwall Vicarage on 30th March 1940.

During her flying career she flew most types used by the RAF, from small fighters like Spitfires, Tomahawks and Mustangs to larger twin-engine types like the Anson, Blenheim and Hampden and even on one occasion a four-engine Stirling heavy bomber. It wasn't all plain flying and she was involved in four accidents: on 17th December 1941 she stalled a Hurricane in cross wind and damaged the wing; on 3rd October 1942 she damaged a Tomahawk; on 2nd September 1942 the undercarriage leg collapsed when landing a Tomahawk; and on 29th January 1943 her Spitfire IX was hit by a tractor!

Mary's ATA career came to an end when she discovered she was pregnant, giving birth to David in October 1943.

Her Commanding Officer remembers her as 'a keen and hard working pilot' and it's worth noting the significant contribution all ATA members

made to the war effort by delivering a staggering 309,000 aircraft of 147 types.

—Neil Hutchinson

Mary (top centre) learning to fly in the Civil Air Guard, taken in 1938 at Speke Aerodrome.



RECORD OF						
Date.	Aircraft.		Engines.		Journey.	
	Type.	Markings.	Type.	H.P.	From.	To.
DEC:						Brought forward
28	HURRICANE	Z.5545	MERLIN	XX	SEALAND	HAWARDEN
JAN. 1940	"	"	"	"	HAWARDEN	"
2	SPITFIRE	P.7447	"	XLV	CONLEY	TERNHILL
5	"	N.3525	"	"	"	WARRER HESFORD
17	HURRICANE	AG.267	"	TH	HENLOW	SHERBURN
24	"	AG.200	"	"	HENLOW	STH MARSTON
25	"	"	"	"	STH MARSTON	ASTON DOWN
26	"	AG.111	"	"	HENLOW	HATFIELD
						Carried forward

RECORD OF						
Date.	Aircraft.		Engines.		Journey.	
	Type.	Markings.	Type.	H.P.	From.	To.
						Brought forward
1/5/38	D. H. TIGER MOTH		GIPOY MAJOR	130		
1/9/38	"	"	"	"		
18/9/38	"	VARIOUS.	"	"	HOOTON.	
20/9/38	"	"	"	"	"	
22/9/38	"	"	"	"	"	
29/9/38	"	"	"	"	"	
11/10/38	"	"	"	"	"	
						Carried forward

Early Extracts from Mary's Log Book.

Eddie's fish & chip van

Mid-1939 and war is looming, but for 50-something Fanny Porter there is a more pressing issue: her husband, a shepherd, has died and there's very little to fall back on, so what's a girl to do? Well, she orders a fish and chip saloon (they were always saloons) from A. W. Watkin Ltd of Biggleswade. The body was built on a 3-ton Bedford M Type chassis with a coal-fired two-pan frying range by Preston and Thomas of Cardiff in the back. It was registered on 4th December 1939 and went to work serving the villages south of King's Lynn in Norfolk for the next 31 years, during which time it changed hands twice but always maintained the same routine due to the fact that both subsequent owners had driven the van for Mrs Porter and were almost family.

Presumably because it was helping feed the population it was never requisitioned, although the Air Ministry took an obviously posed picture of the van in 1940 with an unknown woman 'serving' a queue of people including an old woman, a land girl and a boy. The last operator was Mr George 'Paddy' Staines who, with his wife and two daughters, traded with the van from 1963 to February 1971 – at which point, with the prospect of this new 'funny money' [decimalisation] looming, he drove the van into the garage, switched it off and retired.

Some twenty years later and in poor condition thanks to time and vandals, but still with the beef dripping in the pans, she went to auction and raised a pittance which didn't even cover the cost of transporting her there. The successful bidder was a haulier who intended to break her for spare parts but on inspection decided to keep her as she was in better condition than she looked. Unfortunately one day jumping from the cab of his lorry he stumbled and fell into the path of a car and the van was in need of a new owner. This was a lady from Huddersfield who, having bought the van also did nothing to it before



she too passed away. In April 1996 the van was put in the hands of a car dealer in Huddersfield for disposal – which is where I come in. It began with a 'phone call from a friend along the lines of 'Have you seen this advert?' followed by 'Fancy going to see it?'

Three and a half years later I finished the restoration and her first rally was to the Malpas Steam Rally in September 1999. In August the following year we took her on a 750-mile round trip which saw us at Somersham in Cambridgeshire for a Bedford Gathering, then north-east to take her 'home' to the Norfolk home of Paddy's daughter where the local paper and a number of family and former customers turned out to see the old girl, one of whom was Mr. Tom Porter the 90-year-old son of the original owner. From there we headed south for the Great Dorset Steam Fair and on the way diverted to Biggleswade to the recently

closed down premises of A. W. Watkin Ltd for a photo taken outside the very doorway she had driven out of 51 years before. We got there just before the demolition men moved in. We came away from Dorset with a large cup and 24 cans of beer having been judged the best commercial in show out of 350 entrants. In all those miles she didn't miss a beat. She didn't miss many petrol stations either, but that goes with the territory! The following years found us at many rallies along with static roles in two TV dramas, and she now lives in Hangar 18 at Hooton where she is undergoing a second restoration which is taking for ever due to me being forced to stop at regular intervals for cups of tea – much against my will of course!

I'm at Hooton most Saturdays, so if you fancy a guided tour just pop into Hangar 18.

—Eddie Doig

The tribulations of a bus preservationist!

Those of us who love to see vehicles restored can admire anything from a bicycle to a steam locomotive, but for me bringing back to life the type of bus I grew up with has particular resonance. It is a London Transport RT, the predecessor of the more widely known Routemaster. RT2291 first saw London's streets in 1949, a year in which post-war austerity still saw widespread rationing but was also the year of famous British films such as 'The Third Man' and 'Kind Hearts and Coronets'.

These buses were built of steel, aluminium and timber, a combination which provides the ideal breeding ground for corrosion. Sadly, for 2291 this was made worse by several years spent in a field as a hay store after the bus was withdrawn from service in 1971.

Despite considerable work done by the previous owner, which saw the bus rallied in the south at events such as the 60th anniversary of the first RT and even Le Mans, we are currently working on elements of the structure, in some cases completely replacing parts. It's slow work, often frustratingly so, but on the plus side the interior of the vehicle is now complete with new seat moquette, de-rusted and repainted seat frames and stairs, and new timber floor sections. The cooling system had been completely blocked, the air system had proved ineffective and gears initially were slipping. All now work a treat.

Among other work carried out have been shot blasting and repainting of wheels, fitting of new tyres, repainting of the cab interior, re-silvering of stair mirrors, overhauling of diesel injectors and fuel pump, fitting of original style headlights, replacement of exhaust, indicator ear rubbers, wheel arches and window sections as well as welding of the front wing.

Among the huge number of screws that have had to be replaced on the bodywork all but a handful had to be chiselled or drilled out. It goes to show what faces anyone taking on a vehicle which, after all, will be 75 next year.

The bus has appeared in one film and a TV series – none of which would have been possible without the help of other preservationists. A massive debt of gratitude is due in particular to Glyn Plevin, Nigel Massey, Keith Baynton and Tim Hines. All are owners of buses at Hooton. Tim's RT2629 sits next to 2291 and will eventually be a concours restoration.

—Nigel Pittman



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Home Guard CH21

"CH 21 would like to thank those volunteers and all from other groups who have supported us this past year and wish them a very happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year"