

The Story Behind the Photograph -7



De Havilland DH87B Hornet Moth G-AELO at Biggin Hill

In 1964, we were able during our school summer holidays to visit our parents, then living in British Guiana. Prior to this trip, we had been bought cameras so that we could have some lasting memories of the trip. Once back home and back at school we started to use the cameras to build up a collection of aircraft photographs, mostly taken at Redhill, Biggin Hill and Gatwick Airport, each of which were within practical cycling distance.

Somewhat to our surprise, the documented collection resulted in our winning the school's Hobby Prize for 1966! The collection continues to grow to the present day, my half of it occupying 93 foolscap Lever Arch files used as albums and running to some 40,000 images.

The heading photograph shows DH Hornet Moth G-AELO in the blue and yellow colour scheme of the Surrey & Kent Flying Club at Biggin Hill, probably in around 1967.

Jumping forward nearly 30 years, it is 1994 and I am working at British Aerospace, based at Farnborough. I had learned to fly in 1978 and at the time owned a 1946 Luscombe 8A. Returning home from a Christmas visit to my in-laws, I had an idea for an entry in the Dawn to Dusk competition. This requires making a 'meritorious' flight involving a minimum of 8 hours in the air in the hours of daylight on a single day. One also has to write a report explaining the purpose of the flight and giving details of its conduct, to be submitted within 21 days of the flight.

My idea was to fly around England in a suitable British-built aircraft over locations where aircraft used to be built. Lacking a suitable British aircraft, I mentioned the idea to my colleague Colin Dodds who said "I'm up for that. You do the planning and I'll sort out the aircraft."

Colin, who is well known in the DH Moth Club managed to borrow Hornet Moth G-AELO for the event from its then owner David Wells. I completed the flight plan and on the agreed date, we met at Little Grandsden and Colin flew the aircraft to the gliding site at Pocklington, where we had arranged hangarage and accommodation in the club house to await the right weather forecast.



The next photograph is an evening photograph at Pocklington, where we waited 6 days before the weather was suitable for our flight. In the event, we completed at 625 nm flight on a route with more than 40 turning points. Rather to our surprise, we also won the Dawn to Dusk trophy.

Ownership of this beautiful aircraft passed to Mark Miller in 1998 and the aircraft has been a frequent sight at UK fly-ins and events such as the DH Moth Club rally at Woburn Abbey.

G-AELO waiting for the weather at Pocklington in 1994

My final photograph takes us forward another 20 years to August 2014. On 23rd August 2014, the Wessex Strut held a Vintage Wings and Wheels event at Henstridge airfield. The star attraction, at the end of the day, was the flypast of the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster PA474 in the company of the Canadian Warbirds Heritage Lancaster 10MR, built by Victory Aircraft Ltd in 1945 and painted to represent KB726 VR-A of RCAF 419 Sqn.

Perhaps less glamorous, but with a more personal association, I was glad to see DH87B Hornet Moth G-AELO arrive, in tricky crosswind conditions and depart in the early evening. This is an aircraft that I have photographed over a period of more than 50 years and have had something of a flying adventure in, whilst winning the Duke of Edinburgh's Trophy in the Dawn to Dusk competition.



Mark Miller departs Henstridge in DH87B G-AELO in August 1994