



LORD, OF OUR MANOR

The first instalment of a two-part chat with Don Lord, longtime LAA member, film cameraman, Currie Wot builder and evergreen aviation enthusiast...

Welcome, Don, can you tell us about your early life?
In the thirties my Father had a large furniture factory in High Wycombe. He was a keen motorist so most weekends would include a trip out. I can recall going to Brooklands race track, where one meeting involved midget racers, mostly Austin 7s, which I'd get involved with later in life.

We also went to Hendon to watch the flying displays, where I saw Juan de la Cierva in his Autogiro and rows of Hawker biplanes – 1936, I think it was.

It was about this time that a German gentleman known as The Birdman would drop from an aircraft, spread his arms and legs, which had skins between them, and fly around for a few minutes, then parachute down. On one occasion his parachute failed to open and he was killed – the rumour at school was that he was a German spy and the military had sabotaged his chute.

We also went to see Sir Alan Cobham's air display, where a ride in a de Havilland DH60 cost four shillings (20p), which was about three months' pocket money so I didn't get to go up for a ride.

(Above) Don at the 1987 PFA Rally, with the Air Squadron Trophy he was awarded for Best Homebuilt, in recognition of his Currie Wot, which had taken him nine years to build. (Photo: Don Lord)

At the end of 1937 my Father's company collapsed and he took a job at Woodley Aerodrome for a couple of months, before joining a company called E Gome. I used to go with him occasionally – it made Jicwood, a highly compressed plywood which was said to be fairly bulletproof. I saw a stack of Mosquito main spars there, and remember that they seemed to be enormous.

My eldest brother went to work for de Havilland at Hatfield, where he stayed throughout the war. By then we lived on London Road in High Wycombe, and during the Battle of Britain we could see the vapour trails and occasionally hear the gunfire. When the Blitz started, we we could see the red glow of London burning.

In 1941 my second brother was called up and joined the RAF, working on Halifax bombers in the rather clandestine squadron

which dropped people and supplies in France and also towed gliders. He spent time in North Africa, supplying the SAS in the desert, and then returned to the UK to prepare for D-Day. His squadron towed the first troops to land in France, including the famous Pegasus Bridge operation and then Market Garden. After Europe he went to India, supplying the Chindits in Burma.

That same year my sister married a farmer whose land formed the south side and part of the west side of Booker Aerodrome where, for the remainder of the war, I'd spend most weekends and holidays watching Tiger Moths, Avro Ansons, Airspeed Oxfords and more.

Towards the end of 1941, our dining room was taken over as two gentlemen were billeted with us. These gents were from the Aeronautical Inspection Directorate and had come to work in Davenport Vernon's garage, where they refurbished Wellington bomber fuselages.

The fuselages would go back and forth past our house on Queen Mary trailers, often still with the guns on – they were so long that the tail would be over the cab and the cockpit end hung off the end by several feet.



(Above) Piltown, East Sussex, is famous for its 'Piltown Man' missing link hoax but it once hosted popular fly-in, on land owned by former Prime Minister, Sir Harold MacMillan. He's seen here discussing Jodels with Don in 1978, during the early days of the event. (Photo: Don Lord)

(Right) Don did a lot of aerial film work, shooting commercials and public information films. He's seen here filming a road safety campaign from an Alouette helicopter. (Photo: Don Lord)



Clearly, your Father's aviation enthusiasm and growing up during WWII was instrumental in kindling your interest, but did you have any other influences?

The first thing I can remember is, when I was five or six, my brother had a model aeroplane called a Frog which was sat in a box to wind its elastic-powered propeller. I wasn't allowed to touch it! It came to grief one summer holiday, when he tried to fly it across Cheddar Gorge – it didn't.

Also, during the war, High Wycombe was full of factories building Mosquitos – how could a youngster not be thrilled and excited?

What did you do, career-wise?

I was fifteen when the war ended, and we'd just moved to a small hotel in Brighton where, within two weeks I'd found the job I wanted, in electrical engineering, playing with electric motors. I started an apprenticeship, and went to college one day plus two evenings per week. My brother had a motorbike and, sometimes, he'd drop me off.

When I was seventeen I bought a motorbike from a neighbour, which hadn't been used since 1938. We got that going and, most



(Above) While filming re-enactments of RAF 282 Squadron's six most noteworthy rescues, over the course of a fortnight, Don was winched in and out of this Sea King, on to and off ships, boats and wrecks. (Photo: Don Lord)

MEET THE MEMBERS

weekends, we'd go off to watch motocross racing. I got hooked on it so I saved some money, sold my motorcycle and bought a racing bike.

I then bought a cheap motorbike with a sidecar frame, to carry my racing bike on – it was a 1928 1,000cc V-twin Royal Enfield, which cost £10. A few of my first race meetings were at Brands Hatch – it was just a grass field at that time.

While at college, I met David Faulkner-Bryant, later to become the PFA's Chairman, who was also a motorbike racing and aviation enthusiast, and so began a friendship which continues to this day.

I completed my City & Guilds and Higher National Certificate, and eventually became a freelance electrical engineer. In 1955, during a gap between jobs, I had a phone call from the Labour Exchange, to see if I'd be interested in three days' work, running a generator for Brighton Film Studios on the sea front. The studio people were having trouble with the rented generator slowing down and the set lights going out. We got on well and, eventually, the studio took me on as a full-time electrician. Over time, I learned the tricks of the trade and became a cameraman.

The company specialised in commercials, and with my aviation interest, I became their cameraman when it came to filming from aircraft and helicopters. It was a fantastic job – I had a tremendous amount of fun.

When did you learn to fly?

What with motorbike racing, work, and the time and financial constraints of bringing up a young family, it was the early-seventies before I learned to fly, at Shoreham. I'd become involved with the PFA before that, though, having met up with DFB again in 1968. I'd been involved in the formation of the first Strut, in 1969.

Subsequently, I've been co-ordinator twice, treasurer, newsletter-writer, Strut rep at the National Council meetings, and was a member of the Executive Committee (*Ed: now the Board*) for five years.

I organised the Rally trophies for four years, and spent a number of years working in the Homebuilder's tent, demonstrating wooden aircraft build techniques.

Once I earned my PPL, in 1973, I knew that I'd need to have my own aircraft if I was going to make good use of it. So I've had an aircraft, of one sort or another, ever since.

(Right) A nice shot of Don about to go flying in his Currie Wot. (Photo: Don Lord)

(Below) Don's Jodel D11, nicknamed **Moby Dick**, at Ecuwillens in Switzerland during 1978. The airfield hadn't long been open and still had a grass runway. Behind Don's aircraft is former LAA Chairman David Faulkner-Bryant's Currie Wot. (Photo: Don Lord)



What aircraft have you owned?

I had a Jodel D11 for about ten years – I only sold it to buy a Tiger Moth, in 1983. I'm a great DH fan, am a member of the Moth Club and was a member of the Tiger Club when it was at Redhill. The Tiger, G-ALNA, had belonged to a big group, which I think included Doc Urmston, John Isaacs, three lecturers from Southampton University and twelve others. I had it for a couple of years but had to sell it when the bank wanted their money back!

I then bought a French aircraft, an Adam RA-14 Loisirs, which is a bit like a Piper PA-15 Vagabond. It was based at Kilkern, just south of Glasgow, and on the way back I had to divert into Carlisle due to sea fog. I waited a couple of hours then set off down the M6, but when I was level with Lancaster the crankshaft broke between the third and fourth big ends. I put it down in a field and all was well until, at the far end, I hit a dry-stone wall, which won.

I then flew various aircraft, including a long spell with a Pützer Elster B, G-APVF,

and then had a half-share in a Vagabond, G-ALGA, until June 1987.

I'd been building a Currie Wot and, after nine years, I finally finished it. Registered G-CWOT, it won Best Homebuilt at the 1987 Cranfield PFA Rally. It went on to win Best Homebuilt at the NVAV rally in Holland, and yet another award at the RSA Rally at Brienne. There's definitely a glorious feeling when you're flying an aircraft that you've built yourself.

I kept the Wot until October 1995, when I gave it to my grandson, and bought a two-seater again, the Vagabond I'd shared until 1987. I kept it until my first Kitfox 3, G-BVAH, in 2001. I then had a Kitfox 4, and then a Kitfox 5, G-LESZ, which had a Rotec radial. Unfortunately, it came to grief when the tailwheel locked at 45° on take-off and we went through a hedge.

I then finished and flew an Easy Raider project, G-CBXE, but since 2012, I've had a Rans S6, G-BWYR. ■

To be continued...

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