

A day in the life of

OLD WARDEN AERODROME

0730. Official opening time is still two-and-a-half hours away, yet there are already three or four cars waiting at the closed gate, an advance guard determined to bag the best spots closest to the

flight line.

In his eyrie atop the old blister hangar, the Shuttleworth collection's general manager Peter Symes mops his brow and welcomes me with a mug of tea. Through the window I see ground staff wheeling out the first of the Collection's aircraft, the Sopwith Pup and Brisfit, their outlines and colours softened by early morning mist to a watercolour vagueness. For a moment all is silent save for the metallic chink, chink of an early arrival stall holder erecting his scaffolding stand, and the clop-clop-clop of riders from the local stable making their way up the lane which borders the airfield. With a pinch of imagination they might be the sounds of a Western Front fitter doing some post-dawn patrol maintenance, or horse-borne soldiers from the Great War.

My idyllic musing is broken by the shrill of the office telephone. "Yes, there is a display today. The gates open at ten. Well, we think we have a good programme. We will be flying most of the Collection's aircraft, and if I tell you that the youngest aeroplane taking part will be a Shackleton, you'll gather that this will be a historic show. How many of you will be coming, and how? Good, we look forward to seeing you.

Our chat continues with frequent telephone interruptions, all calls from members of the public wanting to know if the display is on, how do they get there, what will it cost, can they get food, is there something to keep the kids amused, what facilities are there for the disabled, are dogs allowed . . . ?" Symes answers each with patient politeness, although as orchestrator of this extravaganza he must have more important things to do. Why not an answering machine, giving out the basic information? "They ask so many different things, and we like to provide the

answers personally."

The grass aerodrome at Old Warden is on the estate of the Shuttleworth family who made their fortune developing and manufacturing steampowered farm machinery in the mid-nineteenth century. The estate was inherited by Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth on his 23rd birthday in 1932. Young Shuttleworth was an accomplished racing driver and keen pilot. He had already begun a collection of historic vehicles with an 1898 Panhard Levassor, and soon bought his first aeroplane, a DH-60X Moth G-EBWD. Three years later he added a 1909 Blériot XI and a 1910 Deperdussin which had been stored for many years in nearby Ampthill. All are still in the Collection at Old Warden. The Moth has been based there without break for 58 years, and stakes claim to having lived at one aerodrome longer than any other aeroplane in aviation history

Richard Shuttleworth joined the Royal Air Force at the outbreak of the Second World War, but died tragically in the crash of his Fairey Battle in August 1940. His mother Dorothy established the Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth Remembrance Trust in his memory to provide an educational centre "for the teaching of the science and practice of aviation and of afforestation and agriculture . . . '

Behind the scenes at a Shuttleworth Trust Collection Flying Day, with Mike Jerram.

The Shuttleworth Agricultural College, housed in the former family home, takes care of the latter. For devotees of aviation and motoring the Collection is open every day of the year except the Christmas and New Year public holidays.

Flying days such as this are held on the first Sunday of each month, May to October, and there are flying evenings in June and July. Yesterday was the hottest in thirteen years, and according to Radio 4's weatherman today may get even stickier. A good omen for a large crowd? "Well, not necessarily," says Peter Symes. "We'll be competing with plenty of other attractions, the seaside, or just staying at home sunbathing.

The number of people who attend a Shuttleworth flying day varies from a high of around 8,500 to perhaps 2,000. "We have been trying hard to level out our shows, that is not to have big displays and small displays but to make them all about the same length, while varying the content along specific themes. It would be nice to have 6,000 for every show," says Peter Symes, "and to hit the magic six-figure number of 100,000 visitors a year. We got 92,000 last year, including those who visit the Collection on non-flying days.

The Collection has thirteen full-time staff, including four aircraft engineers, one vehicle engineer and a site maintenance man. On flying days that number is swelled by fifty or more volunteer helpers, mostly members of the Shuttleworth Veteran Aeroplane Society, who take care of collecting admission fees, traffic control, parking, selling programmes, security, aircraft marshalling, and helping in the souvenir

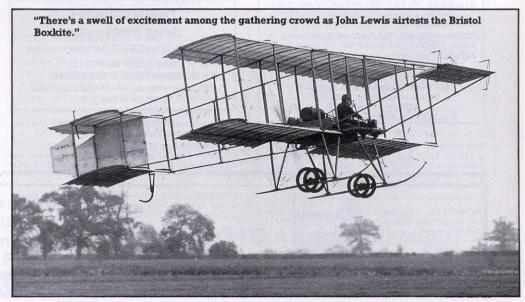
Down at the gate Dennis Evenden has decided to open up early. "We're all ready, and there's no point in letting a queue of cars build up" he says.

His wife and daughter are on duty with him. You'll find them here on most summer Sundays. "I've been doing this for the past twenty years. Not sure if I'll stick at it," he jokes. For him and the other volunteers being close to this unique collection of historic aircraft is its own reward. They are not paid, and for those who might consider sacrificing time for an occasional fantasy ride as the rear gunner in a Bristol Fighter or a circuit or two in an Avro 504K, sorry, there are no joyrides. No, not even in twenty years. "Just before Christmas each year we have a 'beer 'n bangers' evening here," explains Peter Symes. "We invite all the volunteers, all the pilots. That's our way of saying thank you . . . and an opportunity to ask for their services again next year."

0900. All of the Collection's aircraft which will fly today have been rolled out of the hangars and positioned along the perimeter fence. Visitors are already squinting into their camera viewfinders for contre jour shots of the Blériot XI and Bristol Boxkite, which are promised to fly late in the day if the present calm air persists. The Blériot, believed to be the oldest original aircraft still in flying condition anywhere in the world, should fly if at all possible, for this coming week sees the eightieth anniversary of the momentous Channel crossing.

By the control tower I find the ground crew taking a brief respite. Graham Case, Steve Young and lain Jones are three of a select band of volunteers who are permitted to move the Collection's aircraft around, refuel them, swing propellers and 'wing-walk' them over Old Warden's undulating grass.

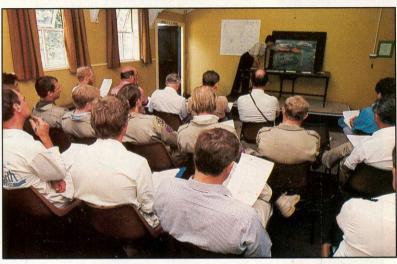
"It's a long day. We start early in the morning and don't get through putting the aeroplanes away until eight o'clock at night, but we count ourselves very fortunate to be working here,' declares Case. "Today we'll get called over to the fence several times by people wanting to know how to get a job. They think anyone can do it. But here there are only two ways of doing things—the Shuttleworth Way, or not at all. You can't just walk into the hangars and start pushing these priceless aeroplanes about.'





The marshallers also take care of visiting aircraft. Old Warden is strictly PPR, and since the introduction of the CAA's regulations on airshow safety a limit of 25 fly-in visitors has been imposed on flying days, dictated by limited parking facilities and the need to keep visiting and display aircraft separated. Today all slots have been booked.

Old Warden's grass runways are no problem for the experienced pilots of the vintage aircraft based here, but they have proved an embarrassment for a few trained on nose-wheels and limitless concrete. "If you've never been here before, don't be afraid to go around again," advises Steve Young, who flies a Tiger Moth and runs Sky Aeroclean, an aircraft valeting service in Sandy. "We once had a chap take a fence post and about fifty yards of barbed wire around the circuit behind his Cessna 310. And when you are on the ground, look out for the marshaller and do what he tells you. We do meet private pilots who clearly don't





Above: a visiting Miles Messenger; the pilots' briefing — "Please don't take any risks whatsoever"; ground crew waiting to wind up the Hawker Hind with a genuine Hucks starter. Right: white-shirted David Ogilvy with his "omnipresent clipboard . . . still juggling his running order". Below: start time on a busy show day. Note the overflow car park in the foreground: around 8,500 visitors may attend.



Mike Jerram

understand what we want them to do, even though we use the standard hand signals." Break over, they depart on a fleet of off-road minimotorbikes and other esoteric transports whic a provide ground support at Old Warden.

Oggo Today's show is the Pageant of Military

0930. Today's show is the Pageant of Military Flying. Planning for it began perhaps nine months ago, and is still going apace. Display organiser and airfield safety officer David Ogilvy is in the office, omnipresent clipboard in one hand, telephone in the other. He regrets not being able to spare me time for an interview before the show, and would prefer that I didn't pester his pilots until after they have completed their flying slots. The phone call brings bad news. One of the star attractions will not be appearing. Brian Woodford's Westland Lysander — a type well known locally since wartime days when Lizzies set off from nearby Tempsford for clandestine missions with the SOE in France — has gone unserviceable at its Dorset base. Ogilvy juggles with his display schedule, which provides for a continuous show from 1400 until 1635 with a five-minute break to allow for early departures. As well as orchestrating the day's flying, 'DFO' is pencilled in to fly two slots himself towards the end of the afternoon when the pressure will be off.

"We have a cadre of pilots, on the whole test pilots by profession, although not exclusively," explains Peter Symes. They are headed by Chief Pilot John Lewis, who arrives from Bristol in his Minicab, and include George Ellis from British Aerospace, Angus McVitie from the Cranfield Institute of Technology, Stuart Wareing, and two non-test pilots, Tony Haigh-Thomas and Bill Bowker. "We are never short of volunteer pilots," says Symes, "but we are short of suitably qualified





people. And suitably motivated ones, because we ask a lot of our pilots. They have to give up at least one Sunday each month and we call on them on other days to give demonstrations away from here. They love to fly the aeroplanes, but it is an awesome responsibility, flying so many unique machines, a worry for even the most professional."

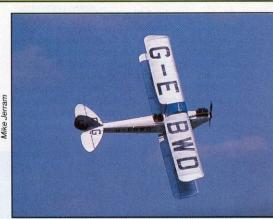
I'll say. A head count along the flight line and in the hangars reveals thirteen aircraft which are totally unique, including such gems as the 1912 Blackburn Monoplane and German LVG C.V, and at least a further half-dozen which are the only airworthy examples. Should they be flown at all then? I ask, sensing that I have committed a sacrilege even in pondering the point. "Oh, yes. And our philosophy is to keep on flying them. It was the intention of our founder to maintain the aeroplanes and vehicles in working order, so we have an obligation to his memory. We believe it is the thing to do if you've got well-qualified, well-disciplined pilots and a sound engineering base.







Left, from top: firing up the Spitfire in a burst of oil smoke; running up the Brisfit; 'DFO' taking off in the Miles Magister; and the Mainline Big Band giving Glen Miller their all. Right: the unique LVG getting airborne; steeply banked Cirrus Moth; Shackleton, a still operational antique, making a pass. (Mostly Air Portraits.)







Having those very much reduces the risks."

Nevertheless, down in the workshop the Collection's Avro 504K is dismantled and upended on trestles for rebuilding following an unscheduled off-airfield arrival when the rpm of its Le Rhône rotary engine decayed on final at a previous display. The damage does not look too serious, but engineer Chris Morris explains that the engine mounts have been badly bent, and with no engineering drawings from which to work it will be no easy task to make new ones.

The subjects of more protracted resuscitation efforts are to be found in the loft storage area, where racks of anonymous wings and dusty vintage engines await attention. Alongside is the ANEC II G-EBJO which was built for the 1924 Lympne Trials, once changed hands for £8, and last flew 55 years ago.

Out on the field the first fly-in visitors arrive, an Arrow and Safir from Sweden. Echoing Steve Young's words, a turbocharged four-seat retractable arrives hot and high, its pilot wisely making an

early decision to go-around and returning for a textbook short-field landing.

The hangars, emptied of aeroplanes, have filled with an assortment of traders offering their wares. There are the inevitable sloganemblazoned tee-shirts (F-111: Libyan Urban Redevelopment) alongside genteel pots of fuchsias and busy lizzies, slightly foxed aviation ephemera from byegone ages (who, I wonder, could make use of a Vickers Viking maintenance manual?), handsome brass desk models of historic aircraft. Disappointed to learn that the Vimy rudder leaning against a wall is an exhibit, not part of the bric-a-brac, I am redirected to the Shuttleworth Spares Sales stall. Here, from among a selection of timeworn instruments and pinking-sheared fabric patches lacking provenance. I am tempted out of £2 for an aluminium fin fairing discarded from Des Penrose's Arrow Active, now authentically restored to its original shape. This modest purchase draws derisory comments from my family when I get it home.

Left: Paul Warren-Wilson's Grumman Tigercat. Right: commentator Roger Hofling; and Mosquito and Comet Racer in formation.



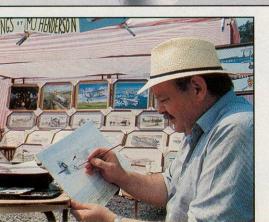
They are sceptical of my claim that it will become an heirloom because the Active thus configured was a favourite mount of the late Neil Williams, and flatly refuse to have it mounted on a coffee table as a conversation piece, so I put it in the loft.

The unmistakable sound of a Merlin at high power has me rushing outside. Nothing. No Spitfire, nor Hurricane. Yet I can still hear it, swooping down on the airfield, the Merlin's growl reverberating off the hangar roof and . . . And then I see the hi-fi speakers and the sign advertising stereo records of famous aircraft sounds.

I slink sheepishly to the far end of the flight line towards a Lone Star State flag, expecting to find the Bedfordshire branch of the Confederate Air Force encamped. Instead I discover Mr. Contributing Editor Bramson, baseball-capped and wielding a silver tankard, playing host to a reunion of his chums from No. 1 Basic Flying Training School Association, who all trained at Terrell, Texas during the war. The arrival of the Harvard Formation Team evokes some nostalgic murmer-







Left: close look at the Hawker Hind; and artist M. J. Henderson at work on the same. Right: Stuart Wareing in the Brisfit about to attack the LVG; and the Harvard Team's 'Hollywood Zero' going down in smoke. (Air Portraits.)





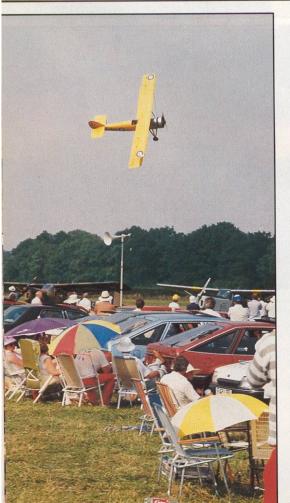


Left: Gloster
Gladiator. Right: wide
circuit by the 1910
Blackburn Monoplane.
Below: in the storage
area, the ANEC II
which last flew 55
years ago; and a
selection of engines
awaiting airframes.
Bottom: Avro Tutor
and serous picnickers;
and Des Penrose's oneand-only Arrow
Active.





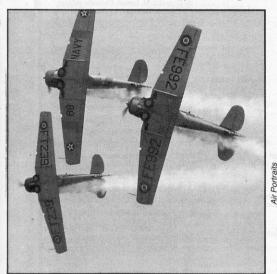






ing among these veterans who all learned to fly on them half a century ago. "They're not nearly so noisy as I remember," says one retired airline captain as five Pratt & Whitney Wasps rasp by. "Nonsense. You're a lot more deaf than you used to be," scoffs a contemporary.

There is a swell of excitement among the gathering crowd. Chief Pilot John Lewis is to air-test the Bristol Boxkite replica. Built for *Those Magnificent Men*, the Boxkite flies rarely, only in the most benign conditions, and then only just. Even with a modern 90 hp Lycoming it only just defies gravity and can manage perhaps 30 mph at full throttle. Those wise enough to have arrived early are rewarded with a sight of it ambling around the circuit, disappearing from view behind the trees on the eastern boundary for what seems a worringly long time before Lewis, perched amid the explosion-in-a-harp-factory of bracing wire





that holds this aerial birdcage together, enormous control column held chin-high, emerges and plops it back over the hedge.

Over in one of the hangars the Mainline Big Band strikes up a medley of Glenn Miller favourites, drowning the 33 rpm Merlins. An artist is painting a picture of a Hawker Hind: the Collection's pristine example, gloriously restored in XV Squadron's colours, sits opposite for inspiration. Picnics are spread out, sandwiches and flasks for some, collapsible tables, wine coolers, crystalware and wicker hampers packed with delicacies for others. The less well prepared form enormous queues for burgers, 'jacket spudz', ice cream and cold beer. Normally reticent but parched airshowgoers take to thrusting fivers into the hands of total strangers who have edged further up the line than they with a "get us three pints of lager while you're there will you mate, and have one yourself"

Harrier wizard John Farley clatters in with the PT Flight's Ryan PT-22 'Maytag Messerschmitt', bemoaning the uncooperativeness of authorities at a military field down south who would not allow the team to leave the base (at which they had

performed the previous day) on Sunday morning to fly to Old Warden. The Flight have thus been scattered hither and yon for the nightstop — Farley to Goodwood, the Fairchild PT-23 at Thruxton and founder-leader Bob Mitchell in the Vultee BT-13 'Vibrator' back home to Coventry. On his flight suit Farley wears the squadron patch of a Soviet Navy Yak-38 Forger VTOL unit. Have you flown it? I ask. "That comes next," he replies enigmatically, and generously offers a share of his display fliers' lunch — a bag of crisps.

1230. Briefing. David Ogilvy presides. He reminds everybody that the ČAÁ's new airshow regulations apply in full, that Shuttleworth pilots flying the Collection's aircraft are allowed to come 25 metres closer to the crowd line than other mortals, and that each pilot's display authorisation awards him an individual minimum height restriction which must be strictly maintained. "The CAA have hammered a number of pilots already this season, though not here, so watch it." Someone asks if a CAA inspector is present today? "I don't think so. If there was I would have introduced you, but please behave as if they are here. One thing I would like to make very clear: Safety before Spectacle must take absolute top priority. If in doubt, keep out and all that. Please don't take any risks whatsoever.

Chief Pilot Lewis calls the time check and the meeting dissolves. With just over an hour to go David Ogilvy is still juggling his running order. Paul Warren-Wilson phones to request a later slot for the Old Warden debut of his Grumman Tigercat, which will be an overhead arrival from its base at Duxford. "Not a problem," says Ogilvy. "I can swap the Tigercat with our Tiger Moth — I only need to change half a word!"

Out in the sunshine the 'no more cold drinks' signs are going up at the refreshment kiosks. Along the lane freeloading spectators are gathering in the ditches to watch the show, many clustering around the extended centreline of dis-

Noisy break by the Harvard Formation Team; and Tony Haig-Thomas's Grumman TBM Avenger.

play runway 04/22. This potential hazard has been mentioned at briefing, but there is little the organisers can do. At last month's show celebrating the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Royal Naval Air Service a Sea Harrier pilot backed his aircraft down there, gave them a blast of vectored thrust Pegasus and told the tower: "I've just fixed your non-payers."

Just time to scale the ladder alongside the control shack to catch commentator Roger Hofling, berched on the roof in a swivel chair, before he greets his public. Hofling is something of an institution at Old Warden, where he has been commentating for sixteen years. His work extends far beyond the Shuttleworth Collection, though, and he is much in demand as an organiser as well as commentator at major public shows such as the annual USAF Air Fête at Mildenhall and for specialist military trade events.

Hofling's commentaries are informed, fresh, seasoned with I-never-knew-that-facts. How much research does he do? He opens a thick loose-leaf folder. A script? "I never read my commentaries. These are my research notes, and I like to do all the research myself. For an aircraft type new to me I'll do about eight hours of research to build a basic set of notes. Obviously some historic types require an enormous amount of research, but even with a very new type — a modern light aircraft, say — I never like just

reading out the manufacturer's booklet. When I've written my own notes I can look down the paragraphs and say, 'Well, I'll talk about *that* today'. For Shuttleworth displays I'm always looking for a new way to present it, but today I have to recognise that the Military Pageant is the one time many people visit the Collection each year, and they will want the basic stuff." He shows me some notes he has made about two little- known formation display teams from the Central Flying School who flew Avro Tutors and Miles Magisters. "I'll be using those later when they fly, and do you know while researching this I discovered that Tutors were licence-built in Poland?"

Roger Hofling has presided over some 330 aviation events in eighteen years. "About thirty to fifty days a year are spent actually commentating, but there's much more to it than that. I also have to be in the insurance business. If the weather goes horribly wrong . . . or worse," (he means if there's a crash, but leaves it unsaid) "I like to have something else to talk about. I won't commentate at, much less get involved in organising anyone's display, unless they agree to a meeting about emergencies. I want key people around a table talking 'what if', because I have to pretend that I know what is going on in those crucial two or three minutes when there isn't time to confer. I've had to talk over about seven or eight people being killed in crashes, and one person being murdered, but I have never made any mention of those things. That's the way I like to play it."

What is so special about Old Warden? "It is probably the most *intimate* flying display, because the audience can see the people who are doing it, marshalling it, maintaining it, flying it, as well as seeing the aircraft very close to. It has this splendid setting which is a timeless one. And because it has so many aircraft that are otherwise just entries in textbooks, it is a great magnet — a page out of history. And now, if you'll excuse me ... Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Shuttleworth Collection Pageant of Military Flying."

An 8 Squadron Shackleton bears down on us, calling in on a protacted airborne early warning patrol from its distant base at Lossiemouth. On the flight line Stuart Wareing and Angus McVitie mount the Brisfit and LVG for their Western Front setpiect. Hofling asks motorists who have their hatchbacks open to close them if you please, they are blocking the view of spectators behind. Can he mean me? I fear he does and hurridly change camera lenses and clam up like a good citizen.

The next item is always a guaranteed crowdpuller. And sure enough, as the beat of six Merlins grows louder and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight trio sweep into view, they all rise. Yes, even the most dedicated five-courses, wine-andliqueurs picnickers, the I'm-only-here-becausemy-husband-drags-me-along knitters, the prostrate peeling sun-worshippers, the afternoon snoozers under newspapers, all on their feet. A toddler, whose grandparents look scarcely old enough to remember the air battles of 1940, casts around for a suitable weapon, and improbably lights on his soft toy Spot the Dog. Gripping all four legs he aims Spot's snout at the Spitfire. Tackatacka-tacka. A quick burst of canine cannon and the ace celebrates his victory with a swig of chocolate milk.

Next on is Shuttleworth pilot Tony Haig-Thomas, "large, ungainly, and difficult to manoeuvre—oops, that's the aeroplane", today in the role of owner-driver in his newly acquired Grumman Avenger torpedo bomber. The sea-blue TBM rumbles around in portly contrast to the flashing twin-engined Tigercat, which proves that LeRoy's Iron Works didn't just build them hell-for-

stout, but pretty too. Suggesting to a fellow spectator that the Tigercat may just be the most beautiful twin ever, I am sharply reminded of the de Havilland Comet racer and Mosquito, and feeling like a traitor I make appropriate *oohs* and *aahs* when he shows me his pictures of the wonderful wooden pair over Old Warden a few weeks earlier.

Major White and his Auster team give a spirited STOL display of AOPery, the PT Flight — sans boss Mitchell who hasn't made it in the 'Vibrator' — fly the Stars 'n Stripes, and the Harvard Team buzz-saw aloft for leader Anthony 'Banzai' Hutton in the Hollywood Zero to bounce the mother ship Twin Beech and despatch it with a few quick bursts of gas gun. He does not long enjoy the spoils of victory, but is sent spiralling down behind the trees trailing smoke. Spot the gun-dog's owner is looking pleased with himself.

The finale is exclusively Shuttleworth. Angus McVitie and George Ellis evoke nostalgic sighs for the pre-war RAF Hendon shows in the Gladiator and Hind, John Lewis skips lightly about in the delightful Sopwith Pup, and David Ogilvy, at last able to put down his clipboard and don flying suit, gives sprightly performances in the Tutor and Magister trainers, taking pains to display their topsides for the photographers who congregate at the 'kink' in the diplay line. "RAF Central Flying School at Wittering once operated a formation display team of these aircraft . . ." intones Hofling. Last off is Lewis again in the clipped-wing Spittire Mk.VC, to close the show and afterwards join up with the Collection's Chipmunk for an air-to-air photo session for the 1990 Shuttleworth Calendar.

1700. The fly-in visitors start for home. Only fourteen of the 25 allocated slots were taken, the remainder deterred by poor visibility en route. Many of the ground-borne spectators stay on to finish off their picnic baskets, take more photographs, browse among the hangar exhibits, and in the increasingly vain hope that the Blériot and Boxkite may fly. Alas, the news comes that the air is too choppy for these fragile veterans, but Stuart Wareing goes off for his first solo in the Hind. Not all of the Shuttleworth pilots are checked out on each aircraft: airframe and engine hours — minutes — are precious, and few can be spared for training or familiarisation flying, so this is a special occasion.

1900. Only a dozen cars and a few traders loading their cardboard boxes and trailers remain. The hangar jigsaws of aeroplanes are slowly being reassembled by the ground crew. Over at the Shuttleworth Veteran Aeroplane Society headquarters volunteers whose work is finished gather for a barbecue. Peter Symes comes by. A good day? "Yes. A good day. We didn't have to use the overflow car parks, but very satisfactory."

2030. Goodbyes and see-you-next-months are being exchanged. After thirteen hours I realise that there are still things I have not seen, people I should have spoken to, photographs I ought to have taken. As the Shuttleworth motto goes: *Time Flies at Old Warden*. It really does.

The Blériot, oldest original aircraft still flying in the world, is only 'hopped' in the calmest of air.



NEW BRITISH CIVIL REGISTRATIONS

from lan Burnett * Used imported aircraft ". Aircraft restored to the register ". Re-registered British-owned aircraft + Surplus military aircraft ". Re-registered British-owned aircraft + Surplus military aircraft