



Royal Navy Press Release

ROYAL NAVY CELEBRATES CENTENARY OF NAVAL AVIATION WITH FLYPAST OVER BIRTHPLACE OF BRITISH AND NAVAL AVIATION

The Royal Navy Centenary of Naval Aviation, will get off to a flying start on 1 May 2009 with a ceremony at the Pioneer Memorial at Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent followed by a Fleet Air Arm formation flypast over the island, the first home of British and Naval aviation.

The flypast of Harrier GR7 and GR9 Jets, Hawks and Falcon aircraft together with an historic Sea Vixen, will fly over Eastchurch paying an impressive tribute to the early beginnings of Naval aviation, where the first four Royal Navy pilots learned to fly in 1911. In the same year Eastchurch also became the first Royal Naval Air Station.

This year's Centenary of Naval aviation marks the decision by the Admiralty on 7 May 1909 to place an order for its first aircraft, His Majesty's Airship 1 and to embark upon a far-sighted development programme of Naval aeronautics. The new capability – Naval aviation – was to transform naval warfare as radically as had the gun and the steam engine.

“The historical importance of Eastchurch in the early development of Naval aviation is immense” said the Communications Director for Fly Navy 100, Commander Sue Eagles. “Not only were the first four Naval pilots trained at Eastchurch but the first Naval aircraft were also built there. Sheppey was a cradle of aviation in this country and the budding Naval aviators found themselves immersed in the wealth of pioneering aeronautical technology and endeavour being built up there.”

The Short Brothers established the first factory in the world for the series production of aircraft at Shellbeach on Sheppey in 1909 and moved production to Eastchurch in 1910. The pioneers of the Royal Aero Club, initially based at Leysdown, also moved to Eastchurch in 1910 and in a generous gesture by the Aero Club, the first four Naval pilots received their instruction in two Short biplanes lent to the Navy free of charge. 100 years later the Shorts' Tucano, the last aircraft type built by the company, serves as a pilot trainer with the Royal Navy and RAF today.

The core business of Naval aviation is operating from ships at sea and the early Naval aviators soon began putting their new found skills to use in the Fleet. The first take off from a ship underway, any where in the world, was carried out by Lieutenant Samson, in May 1912. Soon they were working out schemes for fitting floats to the wooden undercarriage skids developing the early seaplane, and experimenting with folding wings for parking and stowage on deck.



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1909 - 2009

Rolls Royce and Westland also grew from early beginnings at Eastchurch. The Honourable Charles Rolls, one of the early entrepreneurial experimenters, flew fifteen miles from Leysdown to Eastchurch in 1910 and the Petter Brothers, who took on the first Admiralty contract to build aircraft for the Royal Navy established their factory on a site called Westland Farm, which became the origins of Westland Aircraft Works.

Guest of Honour at the celebrations will be Admiral Sir Raymond Lygo KCB, Vice Chief of Naval Staff and First Sea Lord 1975-78 and former Group Deputy Chairman British Aerospace 1980, who will take the salute with Rear Admiral Simon Charlier, Chief of Staff Aviation and Rear Admiral Fleet Air Arm as the flypast passes overhead. The service will be attended by current and former serving members of the Fleet Air Arm, veterans, guests and local residents. The flypast will cross the Isle of Sheppey from east to west symbolising the historical passage of aviation across the island.

Speaking of the event, Swale Borough Council Executive, Cllr John Morris said "Swale Borough Council is proud to be supporting the Royal Navy during this historic celebration. The Isle of Sheppey is the birthplace of aviation in the UK with JTC Moore-Brabazon making the first powered, controlled and sustained flight by a British pilot in Britain at Leysdown in Sheppey and RNAS Eastchurch becoming the first Royal Naval Air Station in 1911."

ENDS

TIMINGS

1330	Service at the Pioneer Memorial Eastchurch
1400	Flypast of Royal Navy Harriers, Hawks and Falcons and an historic de Havilland Sea Vixen
1415	Reception and opportunity for interviews with Veterans including descendents of those who served at RNAS Eastchurch
1500	Event completes

NOTE TO EDITORS

Members of the media are invited to attend the event including the service at Eastchurch Memorial and to watch the flypast with local residents, guests and veterans. All media wishing to attend should accredit with Carolyn Jones, 01935 456530, carolyn.jones@flynavy100.co.uk Bid requests for interviews with senior Royal Navy officers including Rear Admiral Simon Charlier, Chief of Staff Aviation and Carriers should be made to Sue Eagles, Communications Director Fly Navy 100 on 01935 456036 or email sue.eagles@flynavy100.co.uk

BACKGROUND

The Isle of Sheppey is of rich historical aviation importance and interest. More detailed research on the development of Naval aviation could include viewing the many hangars and buildings on the island dating back to the foundation of the aviation industry in the UK, including the tethering points for the first airships and balloons, the stained glass window dedicated to the Hon Charles Rolls and Cecil Grace in the Parish church; and Muswell Manor, the beginning of the beginning, where perhaps the most famous aviation photograph ever, was taken 100 years ago, in May 1909, of the entire 'who's who' of early flight including the Short Brothers, the Wright Brothers, Frank McClean who provided aeroplanes free of charge for the first Naval officers to be instructed in aviation in 1911, and Claude Moore-Brabazon who made the first powered controlled and sustained flight by a British pilot in Britain. Local school children on the Isle of Sheppey are also celebrating the Centenary with an art competition on the theme of 'First Flight'.

EASTCHURCH MEMORIAL TO PIONEER AIRMEN

The Memorial at Eastchurch commemorates the historic events which took place at Leysdown and Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey during the formative years in the history of aviation in Great Britain 1909-1911. It was dedicated in 1955 in recognition of the spirit of innovation and adventure of the early pioneer airmen, the first factory for the series manufacture of aircraft and the first Royal Naval Air Station. The names of the first four Naval aviators who trained at Eastchurch are inscribed on the memorial together with twelve Royal Naval Air Service Technical Ratings.

The memorial is situated at the corner of the High Street and Church Road, Eastchurch and faces the fifteenth Century parish Church. Its position, at the junction of the two roads, one leading to Leysdown and the other to the site of the Eastchurch Aerodrome links the two sites of early aviation on the island. The Church bells will be rung by Royal Navy bell ringers.