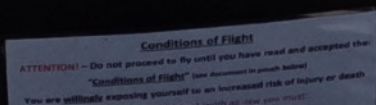




May 2026

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G-KTCH



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Cover photo credit: Inversion by Lawrence Spiller.

Welcome

Welcome to the May BRA magazine. Lots to report on this month, so let's get into it:

The 13th June is getting near... Please fill in and submit the Old Warden Record Breaker fly-in PPR form. It's important you do this!

We have the debrief of the Popham Microlight Trade Fair and BRA AGM.

Thinking of flying in Germany? Then note permission is required from the German authorities.

Member David Taylor reports on a visit to the Aces High event.

Member Allan Mackey tells us about taking two guests (is that the correct word?) for a flight, and they give us their report on the experience.

Tony Unwin gives us part 3 of his gyro flying history, telling us about flying in New Zealand and taking a Calidus for a swim!

I report on a visit to NATS in Swanwick.

Clive Rose has some words of wisdom on pre-rotator issues and building up rotor speed.

Spamfield 2026 is fast approaching, and here's what we can tell you.

Finally, don't forget to send your nominations by the 1st June for the BRA award for outstanding achievement in, or contribution to, the UK gyro community to:

nominations@britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk

Chris Rose

ed@britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk

Old Warden Record Breaker fly-in PPR request form

By Chris Rose, Editor

With less than a month to the Old Warden Record Breaker fly-in, we are on the final push to spread the word. So, please badger your fellow gyro pilots to make sure they know about it, and convince them to come along. It's open to all gyros, and there's no landing fee.

Let's try and break our previous record! If you are attending, or you're thinking of attending, then please can you fill in the PPR form which you can download from the BRA website event page:

<https://britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk/events/gyro-record-breaker-2026/>

It is essential that you fill in the PPR form!

The completed form should be emailed back to: tower@shuttleworth.org

Popham and BRA AGM debrief

By Kai Barnett, BRA Chairman

Photos: John Truman, BRA Secretary

The annual Microlight Trade Fair at Popham is seen as the traditional start to the flying season. Exactly which season though is up for debate as we've had frost and snow through to scorching temperatures over the years, and sometimes all on the same day. It would be fair to say that the weather influenced the attendance this year once again. However, the Saturday proved the better of the two days once the low cloud and fog had departed. Steve Paffett eventually arrived with the BRA kit

after being hampered by the weather, and we were able to set up our tent in the gyro village.



Gyros arriving



Gyros parking



Francis Moyle, Phoenix Aero

Once again the organisers had grouped the gyro community at the end of the show area and flight line, which enabled us to have an "L" shaped area beginning with Magni UK and AutoGyro completing the end. The BRA were in the middle with our own aircraft parking.

Andy and Steve from Magni were promoting their aircraft and offering air experience flights. Francis Moyle was promoting his single seater project (which will hopefully be cleared to test in the summer), and Gerry Speich and team with their products and also the Czech road-going Cavalon. This aircraft attracted a lot of attention from the aviation community and public alike and probably created higher footfall than might have been expected. Driven by electric motors on the ground, and a trusty Rotax in the air, it will be interesting to see if the British SVA regulations would enable one to be registered here.



Full tent at the BRA AGM



BRA tent

The BRA tent was the venue for the AGM on Saturday, the minutes of which have been circulated to the membership or will be soon.

In addition to the committee members reports Steve Boxall gave us an insight into work that he and other gyroplane examiners and

instructors are doing with the CAA to improve safety and training with regard to low G manoeuvres or situations. This stems from recommendations made to the CAA by the AAIB. The outcomes from this working group will be put into the training syllabus and promulgated to qualified pilots during revalidation training. Additionally, as aircraft are becoming more complex, it is felt that there is a need for greater, more formalised, difference training with regard to engines (turbocharging, engine management systems etc), propellers and cockpit systems e.g. autopilots.

Another outcome of AAIB reports and recommendations was the decision for the CAA to revisit BCAR Section T. Simply this is the design and manufacturing standard to which UK gyroplanes have to conform. This working group consists of the regulators, manufacturers and subject experts, and aims to enable the continued development of our aircraft to make them safer and potentially more usable. This includes heavier aircraft with more seats which would have to be Certified rather than Permit to Fly, and light single seaters. The CAA are being open minded about the possibility of a "Section T Light" where there might be the opportunity for a lighter touch to the regulations for single seat aircraft (not deregulated like SSDR). It's early days, but you have to bear in mind that gyroplanes are very niche in the aviation world, only a few hundred of us in the UK compared to the thousands of other permit aircraft, so we can't expect to be a high priority on the CAA's list of resource expenditure.

One thing I noticed at the show was that everyone was aware of the fact that this year is going to be difficult for recreational aviation. Costs are escalating due to the global instability so we will all have to look at our budgets and figure how we can continue to fly rather than give up. This is important because if we don't use our airfields and facilities we will lose them and we're losing enough of them to

planners already. So fly smarter, perhaps not so far to save the fuel burn, but DO buy tea, coffee and cake. Whatever you choose to do, fly safe.

Flying in Germany

By Chris Rose, Editor

As the summer draws ever closer, I suspect a few of you are considering flying abroad. Sometime ago, we stated that you could fly your UK registered gyro in Germany without any paperwork required. Well, in a conversation with Rupert Stanley, BRA Treasurer, where the subject of flying in Germany came up, he pointed out that permission is required by the Luftfahrt-Bundesamt (Germany equivalent of the CAA). I decided to clarify this issue and write to the Luftfahrt-Bundesamt, and this was their reply:

"Indeed you will need a permission. Please check our website https://www.lba.de/EN/Operations/EntryPermissions/Restricted_Authorisation.html?nn=623032 and send the listed documents to this email address" info.entrypermission@lba.de

According to Rupert, who has done this before, they are quick to reply, and it was a fairly straightforward process.

Gyro and helicopter fly-in at Aces High, Stevenston Airfield

By David Taylor, Member

Photos: David Taylor, Mark Hull, Members

Quite a chilly misty early morning in Stevenage. I'd promised my nine year old granddaughter Esmae that she could come but I was starting to

have second thoughts. Landing before 10:30am but not able to leave until 3pm means four and a half hours to entertain a hyper active child at a boring old airfield. I phoned her mum to express my concerns but Esmae insisted she was going. When I arrived at her house she was waiting with two pairs of trousers on and warm layers under her coat.

At Graveley the weather and visibility had improved a bit and there was a very light Easterly breeze which would be great for the flight but not so good for Graveley's North South 01 19 runway. By feeling the wind on our faces we decided that runway 19 was the best.

Takeoff from Graveley 19 requires back tracking 70 metres into the golf course next door then accelerating towards a concrete path that crosses over the grass. It was a bit bumpy but Esmae seemed ok with it. We circled back over the golf course then through the Luton Zone between Letchworth and Baldock squawking 7010 to avoid an infringement.

Once out of the zone the flight was Westward with a very light but helpful tailwind. Esmae requires a running commentary of how many minutes we have been flying and how many minutes to go. A bit like the donkey in Shrek. There were some interesting landmarks. A muddy lake/pond/pit south of Leighton Buzzard, Holmbeck Farm airfield, the long thin North South scar that marks the route of the HS2 train line workings. "Grandpa, What are those black things on the ground?". I couldn't see any black things. Cows maybe? Horses?. "They're everywhere! Black lines." Oh, I see them, solar panels. We don't notice the familiar things until they're pointed out by a wondrous child. She spotted solar farms everywhere and then saw panels on many rooftops. She spotted a princess castle which, to be fair, was pretty impressive. Turns out it's Victorian Waddesdon Manor and is open to the public.

Various aircraft were coming on Steventon Traffic but it wasn't easy for her to interpret the messages. She worked out there was a helicopter following us but couldn't see it. We made a nice landing on runway 09 and were marshalled to park some distance away from the main event. We were the second gyro of eight to arrive.



A WW2 jeep driven by Aces High volunteer Andy pulled up to transport us to the hangar. We were given a yellow arm band which entitled us to free food and drink all day! Esmae was cold and her teeth were chattering so the ladies sat her by the roaring fire to warm up.

The Aces High hangar is no-expense-spared quality with a flying condition Harvard, a full sized replica Spitfire and is filled with aviation artwork. It would make a great location for a gyro record breaker day. They also have a P51 Mustang in a different hangar. We sat in the auditorium section underneath a large mezzanine floor constructed in oak that looks solid enough to still be there in a thousand years and listened to a presentation by Staff Sergeant Richard Spreckley, a guy who had been in the military police in Afghanistan, about his exploits flying in helicopters transporting prisoners. It was very interesting with a rolling sequence of photographs showing the various helicopters, personnel and bases.



We got talking to the usual gyro guys, walked along the line of eight expensive helicopters and watched some helicopter flying displays, ate hot dogs and ice lollies and at no time got bored or wanted to go home. When that time came we got a lift in "Crunchy" the Jeep to the gyro but there was a problem.

Esmae was feeling ill and nervous and wouldn't get in. She phoned her mum who tried to calm

her down but she was in a funk and still could not raise the courage to get in her seat. We started walking back so she could relax a bit and were spotted by Andy the Jeep who drove up and gave us a lift. She was given a bottle of water by the ladies in the hot dog van and then an amazing thing happened. Mark Dale, the organiser of the event, talked to her for a while and showed her a way to calm down by pressing on her wrist for one minute then after 30 seconds, some deep breathing. It worked a treat and after another ride in the Jeep she got in the gyro and we flew home calmly with her pointing out things on the ground.

We called Luton Radar to get a transit but the controller (Amanda) didn't hear us or chose to leave us hanging for a while. You know how it is. You wait for a lull in the radio traffic then make your introduction "Luton Radar G-CFCL" only to get hit by "Easy123 maintain 5DME on the localiser", or whatever in the language they speak, then they've got your full attention as you strain to hear for that scratchy "G-CFCL identified, squawk 4670, pass your message". Anyhow, I eventually got the transit just as we were arriving at Pirton VRP. We headed for the white cube of Lister Hospital, flew low overhead Graveley to get a good look at the limp windsock, circled round and made a no wind bumpyish landing on runway 19.

I took her home on my old CX500 motorbike and she said she had the best day ever so it's all good!

First gyro experience for two guests

By Allan Mackey, Member

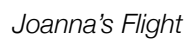
I took two people on their first gyro flights recently and asked them to provide a report on the experience. This is what they had to say:

Trevor and I spent the Autumn of 2025 teaching handbells to a group of people at St Mary's Church, Dymock, ready to play in a Christmas concert. At the concert I won first prize in the raffle which was a flight in Allan's gyrocopter. We chose a fine sunny (though very cold) April day for our flights. Allan had very kindly offered to take each of us up. We duly turned up at Berrow airfield for our very comprehensive briefing and introduction to the aircraft. I went first and had an amazing flight north over the Malverns towards Worcester and Tewkesbury. I found the clarity of the view incredible, especially the tractor tracks in the fields and the people walking on the hills, and the junction of the two rivers. Trevor went south towards Cheltenham and saw the missing link earthworks (A417) in all their glory. We wish to express our thanks to Allan for an incredible experience. It is obvious how passionate Allan is about flying his gyrocopter and it was a truly memorable experience.

Joanna and Trevor Morley

The flight was videoed and you can find it here: <https://youtu.be/mG-zFKKZpM8>

In this video I take Joanna on her first Gyro flight. We fly from Berrow and take in Ledbury, Great Malvern, Worcester, Upton-on-Severn and Tewkesbury. Then I demonstrate a gyro hover and a vertical descent, before returning to Berrow. The flight took approximately one hour and was great fun. At the end of the video you can hear what Joanna thought of the flight experience. Caveat: I am not a gyro instructor and nothing in my videos is meant to be taken as flying instruction. If you want to find out more about learning to fly a gyro, or to book an experience flight, contact your local flying school. Go on, I dare you!

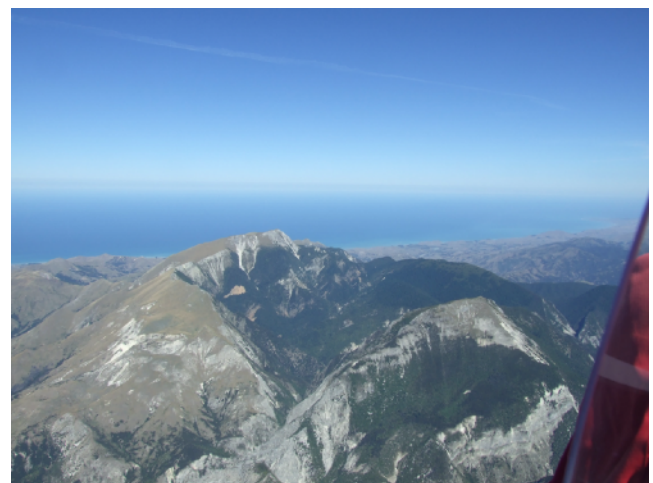


By Tony Unwin, Member

This is part 3 of Tony Unwin's fascinating gyro history and well worth reading if you've ever wondered what happens if you ditch a gyro in the water! Ed.

I have previously written about a life in aviation and the wonderful experience it has been but as I trawl through years of photos I have hardly touched the surface. The flying in New Zealand

is spectacular, every journey is a memory of colour and challenge, terrain is either open paddocks, steep wild hillsides, acres of forestry or maybe vast seascapes and unforgiving rocks. I previously mentioned a Safari around NZ but in the fifteen plus years that I flew there the variety of experience is hard to adequately portray. Yes, I held an agency for Autogyro but I also imported Xenon from Poland and a Niki Kallithea from Bulgaria, an outstanding machine. I circled the crater of a volcano at 9000 ft amsl. and crossed the wild Cook Strait to and from South Island in an interesting mix of conditions and aircraft. The pilots I flew with taught me so much about people and professions from Sheep shearing world champions to Bucket List Cancer patients spending their last dollars, Experience in Spades! Thank you all so much.





So never a dull moment. Rotax have eased the jeopardy of flight enormously but issues do occur and I have been asked to recall an incident that happened that was no fault of the aircraft. I was asked to give an introductory flight to a helicopter pilot who was interested in getting into the world of gyroplanes. Nothing special and the guy turned up to fly in a Calidus, he said that he weighed a 100kgs although with a bulky coat on he looked quite chunky.

I did the usual walk around and briefing and with my potential pilot secured in the front seat I departed the hard runway for an standard introduction to the benefits that a gyro offers over other flying machines.

A fine sunny day and we settled down on a very scenic journey along the coast above a wide sandy beach and dramatic blue ocean. No issue "look how steady the aircraft is, no turbulence, nimble in turns and no stall even at zero airspeed". The routine patter. I should point out that in New Zealand it is legal to land on an open beach in fact this is often practised by flying clubs. With experienced pilots I often demonstrated an engine failure approach to a beach followed by a go around and climb away. On this day however there was a problem! The go around was initiated and the Rotax 912 responded with its full 100 hp but the altitude was not sufficiently nose up and my best efforts on the stick failed to create a climb. As you will be aware climb in the go around requires airspeed and attitude, we had neither so the subsequent sink resulted in controlled flight into water. The main wheels touched and stopped, the Calidus on full power kept going and toppled forward sinking its nose into the ocean. The rotation of the rotors ceased and the canopy disintegrated. It was time to get out so I released my harness and tried to undo the canopy before realising there was no canopy to release and that swimming was required. I always flew in an inflatable jacket although all flights were in gliding range of land, this buoyancy helped to keep us both afloat until the local yachties helped us on board.

Many hours of reliving this close call convinced me that the cause was a lack of room for the front stick to travel with its normal range, beware chunky pilots in the front seat! Another stick problem in a different model gyro occurred when a rear-seat passenger allowed a slack seatbelt to hook over the stick that had been brought aft during normal take-off, no

problem until you want to lower the nose after lift off! fortunately closing the throttle resolved an unforeseen issue without incident. I will try to show pictures of interesting scenery in NZ but they will be very inadequate, you must go and see for yourself, I have the contacts!

*Look out for part 4 in next month's magazine.
Ed.*

Visit to NATS in Swanwick

By Chris Rose, Editor
All photos courtesy of NATS

I regularly fly through Luton's airspace, all legally of course, as I have friends at Graveley airfield which sits just inside the Luton zone. I knew that the Luton Radar frequency I use to get a transit was actually based at NATS in Swanwick, so when the guys at Graveley said they were organising a trip to see NATS I jumped at the chance to tag along.

The journey kicked off early on the Saturday morning with a drive down the M1, M25, M3 and finally M27 to NATS Swanwick, just outside Southampton airport. Given the beautiful weather it'd have been an ideal chance to fly down there, although the £350 odd landing fee at Southampton airport would have put a stop to that! What also put a stop to that idea was my partner's suggestion that we do some sight seeing in the area whilst there. She was coming with me as she was also interested in seeing what goes on at NATS given she regularly has to listen to my radio babbling in the rear seat of my gyro.

Security to access the NATS site is pretty strict; this started a couple of weeks prior to the visit with having to submit full contact details, and getting briefed that photographic ID would be required once there.

09:45 found us in the carpark outside the security gate at NATS, and with security passes issued, we were directed to drive into the site and park down by the main entrance. There we would be met by our host for the visit, Simon Davison. We drove past a full size Harrier jump jet propped up a stand beside the road, and upon rounding a corner there was a huge staff car park that opened out on our left. I certainly hadn't expected they'd have so many staff!

Incase you didn't know, NATS Swanwick handles the radio communication with aircraft in the upper airspace over the UK, and the communication with aircraft in the airspace above and around the UK's major airports. Think of it like this, if you're a pilot of a commercial airliner flying in the airways above the UK, or descending into / or climbing out of an airport, then you'll be talking to someone in NATS. The ground, final approach, and initial climb out will be handled by the control tower at the actual airport, although there is an exception to this as you'll see later.

As a GA pilot, you'll be talking to someone in NATS if you request a transit through the airspace around a major airport, so in my case, this would be when I request a transit through Luton's airspace on route to Graveley. This means that Luton Radar, and the similar at Stansted, Gatwick and Heathrow etc are not actually at their respective airports, they are in fact all in a room in NATS Swanwick in Southampton.

As a GA pilot, you'll also be using NATS Swanwick if you ever use London Information, or the Distress And Diversion 121.5 frequency. They are also responsible for issuing and maintaining the UK NOTAMs. More on all of these later.



Once inside the building it was a bit like going through airport security, with our bags going through a scanner, and us having to walk through a detector arch of some sort. With all of us safely through without triggering any alarms, we were briefed by Simon that no photography was allowed. If we wanted photographs then they would be supplied by NATS, so any photos you see from now on are courtesy of NATS. In fact, you can find the video I took a lot of stills from, and lots of other great photos here: <https://www.nats.aero/news/media-library/>

Simon took us upstairs through the interior of the modern, sunlit, glass roofed building. It felt very calm and quiet, and strange to think that somewhere in the building there would be the babble of ATC communications sequencing commercial airliners through the airspace above the UK. We went through the lovely staff cafeteria, and finally into a large meeting room.

Once seated in front of a large TV screen built into the wall, Simon introduced us to Amanda, a voice I'd heard many times as she was one of the main controllers for the Luton Zone. It was nice to actually put a face to the voice, and somehow it made the whole process of calling for a transit seem more human and friendly. I suspect that most of you, like me, worry about putting in such calls, frightened of screwing it up, and getting admonished by some angry voice on the other end of the radio. Amanda dispelled all those ideas, offering a very real, and very friendly and enthusiastic human perspective of what happens. She said that

they referred to her as "the bubbly fluffy one", and with her tattoos, jeans, and t-shirt, she is not exactly what I expected a controller to look like!

Amanda explained that her job was to guide aircraft in and out of the Luton zone, handing them over to the tower once established on final, or picking them up from the tower after they were airborne, before finally dispatching them into the upper airways.

On the large TV screen was a live view of the airspace around the Luton Zone, this was the view of the world Amanda saw as she sat at her station. Something I found interesting was there were no names of towns, or roads on her radar display, there were just lines marking out the edges of the zone, the runway, and what I assumed were the approach / departure tracks. So when you give your current position, saying you're over the lakes at Leighton Buzzard isn't going to necessarily help, as she won't know where that is on her display! Having said that, with having worked the Luton Zone for so many years, she's become very familiar with the places around the outside edge of the zone that GA pilots tend to use as position points. The official VRPs are marked on her display as you'd expect, along with the north / south transit corridor. I believe she can call up an overlay for other details like main roads if required. She sees us, and the commercial traffic, as dots on her display with squawk code, callsign, and altitude, depending on what type of information your transponder is putting out.

As an aside, just outside where Holmbeck Farm (my home airfield) would be on her display, there was a dotted, oddly shaped, ring. I asked her what that was? "Oh, that's Leighton Buzzard", she said. I queried this as no other towns were indicated like this or at all. Amanda went on to explain that Leighton Buzzard was very close to the flight path the Luton airport traffic takes, and so it was highlighted so she

could make sure traffic was routed around and not over the town to keep it's residence happy.



Typical view the controller sees

The guys at Gravelly were given time to ask her about things relating to them operating inside the Luton zone. They have a letter of agreement with Luton stating that they don't need to call up for a zone entry providing they are under 1,000ft QNH and squawking 7010, and coming in from, or departing to the north (closest to the zone boundary). Someone asked something that I'd also wondered: would she prefer that we called up for a zone entry? She said no, as long as you're sticking to the rules. However, she was happy for pilots to ask for higher than 1,000ft if they felt it was necessary. Again, it also sounded very human and friendly.

Although Amanda was on her break she still carried a pager in case she was needed back at her station. She finished her talk to go back to work, but said she'd try and catch up with us later if timings allowed.

We were then introduced to another member of the NATS team that handled NOTAMs. I have to admit, I didn't envy them as there were a few, how can I put it, words of discontent from the group. They expressed the usual complaints we all have like why are they so complicated. The complexity was down to the fact that they have to adhere to an internationally approved standard. They acknowledged that everyone uses SkyDemon these days, but it was pointed out that this was still not the "official" source of NOTAMs, and for that you should still use the

NATS website. I added my own little gripe about how hard it was to even access the NOTAMs from the NATS website, and a couple of other people said how difficult it was to even plan a route using the NATS information found there! In their defence, they did say changes were coming with something called Digital NOTAMs, so keep an eye out for that in the coming years... what ever Digital NOTAMs are? Whilst we are on NOTAMS, they said that there were about 50,000 of them issued each year!

We were then taken by Simon and another staff member to see the huge room where all the controllers sat. Just outside the room we stopped to allow people to use the toilet, and it was pointed out we were outside the emergency room which is only occupied in the event of some major incident. Looking through the glass I could see a large desk surrounded by chairs, several monitors, and lots of phones, some worryingly coloured red as you'd expect the Prime Minister to have in the war room!

Before we entered the room where the controllers sat, we were shown an area of desks with computer terminals on them. The desks were mostly empty except for a couple of people. Simon explained that these were workstations that people could use to get up to speed on the current situation before starting their shift, a pre-shift briefing for themselves so to speak.

Entering the huge room that contained all the controllers we were greeted by a calm quiet atmosphere. No windows, just low level lighting, but definitely not dark and gloomy. It was explained it looked like this no matter what time of day or night you walked in, and always the same temperature. There was the gentle murmuring of voices and the background sound of air-conditioning. In front of us there were two large groups of desks, each with different coloured furniture, splitting the room into two sides like each had been furnished independently by separate interior designers.

The two sets of photos below show the difference. It was explained that they were split into the upper and lower airspace.



Lower airspace



Upper airspace

We walked around the outside of each of the upper and lower airspace sections, peering in between the gaps in the desks. Each desk had

it's own display which I strained to see what was on it, but they were too far away for me to pick up any details. Not every desk was occupied by a controller, and some had a few controllers grouped around them. I wasn't able to discern what was being said by the controllers, but none of it sounded... urgent, or agitated. I guess you need that level of calm to do the job, and as you were sat next to another controller, the last thing you want to be doing is shouting!

It was pointed out that Stansted and Luton zones sat next to each other, which made sense, as they could confer with each other without picking up a phone to talk. Apparently, when you hear a controller saying "I'm just on the phone", it is literally just that; they've picked up a phone handset and pressed a button to call a controller on another desk. Simon explained that the desks were all arranged like this so that the desks were next to each other from a geographical point of view.

In what seemed to be the back corner of the room was a small section in which sat London Information. What you need to understand is that they aren't watching you on a radar screen like the other controllers, although there was some kind of display. They rely on your position, route and timing reports to know where you are and track you from these. I'm sure I saw a big paper map on the wall with lots of pins stuck in it that represented the various flights. Unfortunately I didn't get chance to ask if that was the case. It seemed a long way from the numerous desks of the upper and lower airspace.

There was a separate side room off the main floor, manned by the RAF 78 Squadron, which housed the Distress and Diversion team. This was a long desk with a row of monitors and telephones. In the event you use the 121.5 frequency, it is this team who'll respond to you. You may also get passed to them if you start your radio call with another frequency and it's deemed appropriate for Distress and Diversion

to take over. Although they had a similar radar view of the country as the controllers next door, they also had their own displays which showed the various RAF danger zones and airfields. Their separate listening network will triangulate your position based on the radio transmissions you make, and from that they can guide you or alert emergency services to your location.



Distress And Diversion

They explained that if someone starts squawking 7700 or 7600, they get an alarm, and as if on queue this actually happened. An alarm sounded and the operator moved to a monitor which highlighted an aircraft with a 7600 transponder code. A quick phone call and it turned out this was aircraft with a non emergency technical issue which the associated airport knew about.

It was surprising to also see the RAF guys using the likes of FlightRadar 24 apps to get more information on aircraft as these offered more information than their own systems. Like all the other controllers we met on the day, it's a comfort to know there are friendly humans behind the frequencies we use, who are there to help in a non-judgemental way. If you haven't done a practice PAN, then the next time you are up flying, call up 121.5 and ask for one. Obviously don't do it if they sound like they are busy dealing with an actual emergency!

It's worth mentioning that Farnborough East, West and North aren't based in NATS, they are,

I believe, actually based at Farnborough, although they use the NATS services.

For those of you who don't know, London City airport does not actually have a manned control tower! They have a tower of sorts, but it consists of a load of cameras which relay a view of the airport and surrounding skies to the controllers at Swanwick. Sadly, we weren't able to see this room. It's incredible to think that everything is done so remotely from the airport. From what was explained to us, I understood the controllers can even zoom in on a patch of sky. When the need for a new tower arose, it was easier to move the "tower" to Swanwick than try and build a new one. Allegedly, access to the old tower was through the airport kitchen and up some back stairs!



London City's "tower"

Then it was time to head back to the meeting room where the morning had started, but there was one more thing to point out as we exited the room full of controllers. Stacked against a wall there were what looked like the dinner tray racks you'd find in a self service restaurant, you know, the ones where you're supposed to return your dinner tray and all it's used crockery too. Instead of trays laden with dirty dishes, there were trays on holders, about 20cm wide and 2cm high. In each holder was a strip of colour coded paper which contained flight details. These were the backup plan should the NATS system go down. Instead of the computer screen displaying the flight details, these trays would be wheeled out to the controllers so they could record and track the flights by

writing the details down on these paper strips. If you've ever been up in a traditional old school control tower you will have seen these strips in action. The tower at Rochester airport is a good example of this.

Once back in the meeting room, Simon apologised that we were now going to get the briefing they'd normally give visitors at the start, but today timings, and Amanda's shift pattern, necessitated doing things in reverse order.

We were given an overview of NATS and what it does. I learned some interesting facts about them:

- They are a private company contracted by the government who also hold a stake in NATS.
- They are funded by the government, and by airlines and airports, to provide the services they do.
- If you fly a commercial airliner across or into the UK airspace, then you will get billed as an airline for making use of the services NATS supply.
- They have to price their overfly prices to encourage airlines to make use of the UK airspace. If they are too expensive airlines will choose to fly around the UK and NATS will lose revenue.
- They not only do the airspace and the controllers, but they also offer their engineering experience should you want to install an ILS at your airfield. For a fee of course!
- NATS have somewhere well north of 4,000 employees. That'll explain the huge carpark!
- Scheduling the work rosters can be problematic: You don't just need one controller, you need further people to cover a position in case of sickness and allow for breaks etc. Shift changes are done so that the busy periods don't occur at the end of a shift when controllers are tired - think of all the international flights that arrive in huge numbers at the start of a day, you don't want a tired controller during that period.

- It takes a full 12 months to train a new controller, and even then, they aren't let loose on the radio straight away. They also need to achieve ratings to allow them to undertake certain aspects of traffic control.

Here's some pretty infographics as an overview of NATS:



And there's this amazing YouTube from NATS of the London Airspace: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGMVI3y8GxI>

It is worth noting that Simon, and a few of the other members of staff we spoke to that day, are also all GA pilots. It's reassuring to know that NATS is staffed by people who understand what we as GA pilots experience as we fly around and through controlled airspace. As they reiterated several times during the day, they are there to help you and keep you safe. They may not always be able to give you the service or the route you request, but they will always be working in your best interest. Behind

the scenes there's most probably a good reason for them giving the instructions they do, even if to you it seems to not make sense. They have the overview of the entire situation, and it may be that out of your eyesight there's about to be string of aircraft arriving or leaving that they need to make space for. And just because the frequency is quiet, it can be because the controller is busy negotiating with another desk. So, be patient, and don't be upset if your request is denied, it's all done to keep you and the commercial aircraft safely separated.

We finished up not long after 14:00, and after handing in our security passes at the exit gates, my partner and I headed off to do some fossil hunting in the Lyme Regis area. I'm not sure why she wants more fossils when she has me! We both commented that we'd found the visit really enjoyable and interesting, which surprised me as I thought she'd be bored by it not being a pilot herself. If you ever get a chance to visit NATS then seize the opportunity to do so, I'm sure you'll find it just as interesting as we did, and come away realising that there's a huge network of approachable, friendly, human controllers looking after all our safety.

Rubber side down

By Clive Rose, Safety And Training

During my PPL(G) training, my instructor briefed me on how to build Rotor RPM in the event of a problematic pre-rotator. We saddled-up and began the lesson. Line up, pre-rotate and, at the agreed rotor speed, "Stick all the way back. Let's go!". Stick back, release hand brake and add power. As we set-off along the grass runway the gyro chopped a parmesan-sized chunk off the top of the rudder and called a halt to the lesson.

So, when Julian called me this week and asked what speed he could bring the stick fully back, you'll understand my concern. My aborted

lesson took place on a bumpy grass runway. He was planning to take-off from a fabulous hard runway. But still...

During instructor training at Rufforth, eons ago, I repeated the slow rotor exercise and Phil, in the back seat, told me to bring the stick all the way back. Not only did we not hit the tail, but the rotor behaved impeccably and accelerated to flying speed as we gently increased power in a prolonged Rotor Speed Build Phase. Single seater boys will be chortling as they read this - it's something most of them do on every flight - but to us FBG pilotes we're used to pre-rotating to 200rrpm (higher if you have no mechanical sympathy) before we set off. When the pre-rotation doesn't work as spec'd what are we to do?

First up: park, drink tea, revisit your DI checks and investigate the issue. Depending on your aircraft, is your pre-rotator belt on its last legs? do you have grease/oil on the pulleys? do you have leaky pneumatics? has your pre-rotator cable stretched and needs adjustment? were you squeezing hard enough? were you using the correct engine rpm during the process? Get a second set of eyes on the problem! Having exhausted all immediate remedies, is the aircraft safe to fly? and do you have recent experience building from slow rotor rpm on this aircraft type? on this type of runway? And is the runway long enough? What's your technique?

Four years ago, Crusher very kindly loaned me his aircraft to attend The Record Breaker at Old Warden. His pre-rotator did its occasional trick of running out of steam early. Having encountered this issue before, I brought the stick halfway back and slowly set off. To my great relief, the rotors accelerated to 200rrpm as we progressively built speed along the runway, whereupon I was able to bring the stick fully back and complete the take-off.

The Record Breaker was a brilliant full-on day – so enjoyable, in fact, I forgot all about the pre-rotator. Until I climbed back in the machine to come home. Another take-off on grass with a slow rotor? In Crusher's machine! "Charlie" was so pleased to have participated in the Record Breaker she pre-rotated all the way to 200rrpm for an uneventful take-off.

Rotor Management is The Most Important skill in your PPL(G) pocket and slow rotor speed build-up is one of the tools that dulls the most without regular practice. You may roll your eyes at the frequency I advise hooking up (platonically, of course!) with your instructor but currency on this stuff really can make the difference between getting home safely and having to arrange recovery and repair for an aircraft you've just broken.

I've been deliberately vague about the safe rotor speed at which you can bring the stick back. [The last thing I want is for you greet Luke/Vroni/whomever with "But Clive said..."] It's different on every machine and it depends on the runway surface and your technique as much as on an absolute number. If in doubt, park it! If you don't have currency on this exercise, park it!

In 2013, a pre-rotator failure was just one incident in an action-packed day out that nearly caused me to miss babysitting my new grandson (see November 25 newsletter). After our call this week, Julian safely coaxed his slow rotor through take-off, to reposition his machine and land Rubber Side Down at home. And he's booked it in for a pre-rotator service!

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Spamfield 2026

By Chris Rose, Editor

The date for Spamfield 2026 is fast approaching. This year it's on the May bank holiday weekend 22, 23, 24 May. As usual, it's at Sandown on the Isle Of Wight, a great venue

with onsite camping, toilets, showers, cafe, and bar.

Please see the BRA website page:

<https://britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk/events/your-event/>

Whilst Spamfield isn't a BRA event, it does attract gyros, and we're always keen to promote it for both the BRA and Sandown. So get your tents ready, pray for good weather, and hopefully we'll see you there!

Upcoming events:

You can find the BRA calendar which details all our events, and many others you might be interested on our website. You can find it in the [Events](#) section of our website. Click on the Events Calendar button.

If you have any events you'd like added to our calendar, then please feel free to send an email to: events@britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk

Keep checking back as we'll soon be adding new official BRA events.

Record-Breaker 2026

13th June, 2026, Old Warden

Get this date in your diary now for the 2026 gyro record-breaker where we attempt to beat our previous record.

The Aston Martin owners club will be in attendance, the connection being James Bond and Little Nellie. Last time I think we had 300 Astons show up. Relatives of Ken Wallis will be bringing the original Little Nellie.

No landing fee.

You need to PPR for this event by filling in the form you can download from this page:

<https://britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk/events/gyro-record-breaker-2026/>



BRA Sandown, Isle Of Wight fly-in

5th & 6th September

As per tradition, the BRA will be holding their annual fly-in at Sandown on the Isle Of Wight, on the weekend of September 5th and 6th.

Sandown is a fabulous location as I'm sure anyone who'd been will agree, with onsite camping, toilets, showers, cafe, and bar. Dan, the airfield manager, normally plays the perfect host and looks after us really well. So, come along and enjoy the fun!



For Sale:

Got a gyro to sell? Or maybe a gyro related item? Please contact:

events@britishrotorcraftassociation.co.uk

They will put your items on the BRA website For Sale area until you tell us it's sold. It will also appear in this magazine for one issue.

Advertise your gyro or gyro related stuff for sale here for free!