

The Good Old Days by Keith Appleton

Time for a bit of nostalgia I think:

None of the following article is exaggerated or enhanced in any way, well maybe only slightly here & there - this really is the way it was then!

I joined DMAC in about 1980, Things were very different. The flying field was a lot smaller, & some models I had, struggled to get airborne even when taken off from corner to corner. A very small, very, very heavy, Cessna 172 & a "massively built" 63-inch Spitfire are but two models that were unsuitable for the small field we had then.

In those days, you always kept your eye on the planes! As today, we often stood around chatting in small groups, but our conversations were frequently interrupted by having to quickly leap out of the way from some unguided projectile! It is difficult for me to visualize the faces of some of the past members of DMAC, because at that time, when at the field, you spent nearly all the time looking up at the sky, & not always at the person you were talking to.

This was a time before even JOHN EVANS had learnt to fly,

I am forced to admit though, that since he became the DMAC club secretary, he has been responsible, along with others, for a lot of changes for the better over the years.

Including:

Creation & implementation of basic "common sense" safety rules

Generating a better quality of banter (or call it what you will) with his fellow members!

Persuading some members that it was not a good idea to fly at DMAC, without actually saying that, in so many words!

Making the field bigger -

This was done I think, because when he was learning to fly, shortly after he joined the club, he spent so much time looking in the long grass for bits of his crashed models in those days, I think he thought that it would be easier to find the wreckage if the flat bit of the field was bigger - !

I well remember that specific time period when JOHN EVANS first became the DMAC secretary, because the sky turned black, plague & pestilence spread quickly throughout the land, with a sudden sharp increase in the number of lemmings diving off cliffs, (even the mortally wounded ones, after their first unsuccessful attempt at suicide, painfully dragged themselves back up onto the top of the cliff, just to have another go!) rats & mice at the flying field suddenly started throwing themselves on the traps.

After John finally managed to learn to fly, & keep a model in the air for longer than one minute, he entered the club competitions, often making up the rules as he went along i.e.: "You cannot enter the competition without an undercarriage" - aimed at me with my "Fun fighter Spitfire" saying this to me, while bending the undercarriage of his "Super 60"

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absolutely as flat as possible in an attempt to get under the limbo ribbon - he didn't anyway! or the following year saying to me: "New club rule - if you win this year, you can't enter the competition next year so as to give someone else a chance"

The following year John wrote his well-known bestselling novel "Mein Kampf "

Then we had Graham:

Graham was a true pioneer of the 27-megahertz radio controlled model flying hobby, He even invented his own transmitter stick mode! not like anyone else's mode at all, sort of "upside down "mode. At the field, in all weathers, Graham would spend virtually hours, flicking his propeller, trying to get his engine to start, then eventually it would splutter into some kind of life (sometimes), after which it hastily became airborne for a short time only. Plummeting was Graham's special skill. We were asked to put on a flying display at a Brighthouse Gala. Graham had crashed his plane the day, before & so he sat up all night to repair, recover & repaint it, ready for the "display "at the gala. On the day, the paint was still a bit "tacky" in places. He had the usual engine problems of course, followed by a very short take off - hauled off vertically, with little airspeed, a stall, then a plummet into two boys in the crowd (Luckily, they were not badly hurt). The Brighthouse Echo front page headline the next day read: "PLANE CRASH HORROR STUNS GALA CROWDS" I still have the clipping somewhere at home. A while later were asked to put on another flying display at a school gala, Graham didn't actually plummet on this occasion, he flew straight into the school caretaker's house! At another gala he merely smashed into a small mill chimney with no ill effects other than scattering a few pigeons & crumpling his plane into small pieces. During a club limbo competition, he narrowly missed one of the cameramen who was busy videoing the competition event, even though he was sat a good distance away from the flying area!

"Learn to fly DMAC way"

I have vivid memories of some classic events with one particular new member at DMAC. He would always turn up at the field in a taxi, unload his model & starting equipment - just fuel, glow plug clip & battery in a carrier bag, then ask someone to take his plane up. His "models" were unbelievable! One such model was a "Super 60", powered by a "Merco 35" very badly built, glue everywhere, & covered in unevenly cut patches of a nylon "lumberjack" pattern shirt, then painted with what looked like thick tar. (I think it was un-thinned coloured dope) The radio installation was even worse, each servo was held in place with a single large woodscrew, the type & size that you would use to fasten a door hinge onto a door! the battery sat in the bottom of the plane along with the receiver, just sat there, no foam or any attempt at packing at all! This particular day, someone took his plane off for him, gave him the transmitter, (as he told everyone he could fly, but not take off) he flew it very high, then it crashed into the top of the hillside by Earlsheaton! That was it for that day, he took his "write off" home with him.

The following week it was a bit showery, Martin Lynn & I arrived at the field to find him trying to start a control line flying wing model with a diesel engine in it. The model was covered in the same "lumberjack" style nylon shirt, as with the "Super 60", & painted with the same "tar effect", but to cap it all, for this one he had used the cuffs as well, complete with shirt buttons

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still attached! How he thought he was going to launch & fly a control line model single handed is anybody's guess! Anyway, first I held the model while he flicked away aggressively at the propeller - the engine refused to start. Then Martin held the model & he continued to hit the prop. By this time, it was raining again, & his patience was wearing a bit thin, he hit the prop so hard that the entire front end of the model broke off, ending up several feet away"!

Undaunted, he arrived back the next day with a friend, in a taxi, unloaded his friend, model & carrier bag, paid the driver, who then proceeded to turn around, accidentally backing the taxi over the wing of the "Super 60"!

Undaunted, the following week though, he was back! The repaired "Super 60" by now was a tiny bit worse for wear, although you couldn't tell really, having been crashed into the top of Earlsheaton, and the wing having been run over by a taxi. These days, a model like this would not be allowed to fly at all, anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances. The sequence of events on this day unfolded thus:

He asked me if I would take his model up for him, I looked at the state of it & refused several times. He pestered me so much, that in the end I gave in to him, mainly because he was a getting quite upset, muttering to himself, in fact, thinking about it, he really was a bit a strange, so was his friend! (not unusual at DMAC). His friend, he said nothing at all, not a word, even when I spoke to him! So reluctantly I finally agreed that I would take off the model for him, get it to a good height then give him the controls. I also said, "Whatever you do, you must not throw it about", mainly because the battery & receiver, were just laid in the bottom of the fuselage and were not secured in any way. I carefully took off, flying very gentle circuits until I got the model to a great height. I again warned him to be "gentle with it" then gave him the transmitter. What followed next could be said to be an impression of stirring two cups of tea at the same time in opposite directions, he simply rotated the sticks in a random fashion! the model followed suit, diving & stalling all over the place. I mentioned to him at this point, to stop doing that, but he carried on! Then the model suddenly stopped diving & stalling, levelled out, and just flew in a very smooth, very wide, left hand climbing circuit, engine set at about half throttle. Unfortunately, when I looked at him, he was still "stirring vigorously", blissfully unaware of the lack of any radio communication between his transmitter & the model.

I asked him how big the tank was, it was very, very big, so big in fact, that the "Super 60" on this beautiful summer day, kept on climbing for a full fifteen minutes. It was barely visible with the naked eye. As the engine finally ran out of fuel, the gentle left had turn ceased too. The plane was now flying in a straight line, heading over Dewsbury town centre at a great altitude. After about a further ten minutes looking at this "extremely small spec in the distance" his friend, obviously a master of the art of understatement, suddenly said: "It's high up innit?" This came as a shock! He could speak! All I said back to him was "innit"! After a further period of looking skyward, by now you could not even see the model, they both set off on foot to look for the plane. Thankfully, I haven't seen the plane, or either of them since!

"Communication Skills"

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Previously, there had been an accident at the club one day, when a member's hand was badly injured by an "out of control" model, in the "pits" area, after this, the member whose plane it was that caused the injury, suffered from "safety paranoia" - he built a big silver box thing with flashing lights, warning signs & megaphone type loudspeakers, for people to sit behind. One "useful" attachment was a "CB" radio type microphone, - John Evans would often shout over the megaphone system, at a member, who was busy flying his plane, "Don't fly over the cricket field" or something similar! aaarrggghh! After a short while offenders usually got the message, they didn't get many more messages though, as they were probably stone deaf! However, by popular demand, the megaphone period soon subsided. John did not require further amplification.

I had some quite good plummets myself, one of the best being with a "Piper Cherokee" that I persuaded Eric Smith to sell me. I used to throw this about all the time in the air, it did a "tumbling" manoeuvre that I have never managed to recreate in any other model. But, one afternoon, the wing dowel came loose mid-flight & I have it on video, as I rolled inverted, the fuselage separated from the wing & smashes into the old mill roof at full power - I never thought at the time to close the throttle! The wing comes down slowly like a sycamore leaf!

I had two mid-air collisions in as many weeks, one minor mid-air, with my trusty Magnattila, which had been repaired with much Epoxy Resin after Eric Smith accidentally flew it through one of the big trees between the flying field & the cricket field! But the best one was with my "Mick Reeves" Spitfire & Chris Burton's Pattern Ship. Chris Burton & I had to argue at the time, about who's bits were who's, as the wreckage was spread far & wide - total carnage. I found my Webra "Speed 61" engine on the riverbank, although the impact was over the area that we now use as the car park! At about this time I left the club, because amongst other things, like having a young family to bring up without the risk of them being killed by a model aeroplane, it was getting very silly down at the flying field! I took up "Coal Fired Live Steam" instead, it doesn't matter how heavy you build model locomotives.

I re-joined DMAC 15 years later.

Things are much better now

There were very few sensible rules at that earlier time, you could fly anywhere (except over the cricket field) - you could taxi about in the pits area, even accidentally chop up your flight box with your propeller! - you could stand wherever you wanted on the field to fly your model, Graham could plummet without prior notice being given! It is a miracle that people weren't killed on a regular basis at the flying field. Although you could take the "SMAE" achievement tests as a few of us did, it was not then compulsory to have an "A" certificate before you could fly unsupervised. The "BMFA" achievement tests & the accompanying rules and guidelines must have saved a lot of injury & damage (or worse) over the years since they were adopted by the many model aero clubs up & down the country. A minor point for any members re-joining DMAC after a gap in membership, when I re-joined the club, I was told by JOHN EVANS that my old "SMAE" certificate was not valid, owing to my membership of DMAC having lapsed. An email to the "BMFA" & a reply from them saying that this is nonsense & is not the case, once you get a certificate, it stays active, while ever you are alive!

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Some members who were regulars that I remember from those earlier days of RC flying:

Graham (I miss his hyper - enthusiasm)

Martin Lynn (Used to like to fly his Wot4 below ground level at great speed down the old dried up mill stream bed & down the river Calder)

Eric Smith (let's have a go with your Magnatilla Keith, - oops! Oh dear, I have just inadvertently flown it though that large tree,")

Jim Kirkham (He showed me the first principles of how not to hold "permanent up elevator" when I was first trying to fly a model aero plane)

Donald Berry (He once backed his car over my brand-new video camera case on the day I bought it)

Chris Burton (Possibly the best mid-air collision with my Spitfire & his Pattern Ship that I have ever seen!)

Mick Illingworth (Still one of the best flyers in the club)

Mick Illingworth's dad (He used to build & fly very good models - no A.R.T.F. in those days)

Geoffrey Gannon (He used to fly a trifle erratically to say the least & once went out with my mother years ago, long before she was married - scary!)

David Rourke (I taught him to fly on "Mode 1" when he was a fully unemployed ex - student (with sideburns & a newly obtained degree in aeronautical engineering) then but he moved away & changed to "Mode 2")

Granville (He very nearly got hit with a model whilst adjudicating at the club competition - that is on video too)

John Evans (Got his way in the end - a safe model flying club - I doubt if we would still have the site if things carried on the way that they used to)