

## ***Ron Neal remembers Ranald Porteous***

Having entered life in Rearsby (the home of Austers) in 1940; upon leaving school in 1956 at the age of 16 I obtained a 5-year apprenticeship with Auster Aircraft Ltd with the latter 4½ years of same spent in the Experimental Department. In view of the aforementioned I regularly came into contact with Ranald and as an apprentice I was usually given the task of assisting with the preparation of the aircraft in the Experimental Department for their Test Flights. Upon receipt of a Flight Authorisation Sheet we would have to weigh out ballast and secure it in the aircraft in the position as given, check and adjust the fuel contents of the aircraft as required, check the oil and tyre pressures and carry out an in-depth pre-flight inspection prior to the one that would be carried out by Ranald or alternative Test Pilot who may be Flying the aircraft. If it was Ranald he always appeared pleasant and extremely methodical, the latter of which was part of his job. I was not aware initially that he was also responsible for Sales and Customer Relations.

## **Rearsby days and first flights with Ranald**

The first time that I flew with Ranald was in July 1958 in the Auster C6 Atlantic G-APHT in the capacity of ballast during one of a number of test flights relating to the determination of the Flap positions. At the time there was no operational Flap system in the Atlantic, just a mock up flap lever in the centre of the cabin floor left over from the Farnborough Air Show static display of the aircraft. The flaps were the normal Auster split-flaps and they were positioned by means of a fixed stay between the central position on the flap and the wing spar. The aircraft was flown with various lengths of stay in order to determine the desired flap positions required for take-off and landing.



***Auster's ambitious but unsuccessful pitch for new markets – the C6 Atlantic on the stand at Farnborough 1957.***

The next time that I flew with him was in May 1961 in the Beagle A109 Airedale prototype G-ARKE in the capacity of passenger during its first flight away from base to Coventry Airport to attend what was known in those days as the Shackleton Sales Weekend.

On Monday the 4 August 1958 which at that time was the start of the Annual National holiday period (August Bank Holiday Week) there was only a skeleton staff working at the factory and I was working with a senior engineer in the Experimental Department on the prototype J/1U Workmaster G-APKP removing test equipment and unqualified modifications so that the aircraft could be transferred to the production line to enable it to be rebuilt to production standards and sold.

We were working at the front of the hangar with the doors wide open as we had just moved the B8 Agricola outside for collection by Crop Culture Ltd from the Isle of Wight to whom it had been leased and also moved the C6 Atlantic out of the hangar after preparing it for Ranald to fly same. The Crop Culture pilot had arrived to collect the Agricola and we noticed that he was waving one arm and pointing towards the airfield side of the hangar. We were just about to go and see what he was pointing at when Ranald appeared around the corner of the hangar looking quite frustrated. He told us that he had just landed the Atlantic and when taxiing back to the hangar he had just taxied over the track that crossed the airfield when the nose leg on the Atlantic had collapsed, resulting in the aircraft being positioned with its nose on the ground and its tail in the air. He also stated that he had difficulty in exiting the aircraft due to the door that he had been attempting to get out of being temporarily jammed. We then obtained help from two engineers who were working in the Repair and Service Hangar and along with the Crop Culture pilot recovered the aircraft.



*The Atlantic with collapsed nosewheel at Rearsby*

### **International flights and hot weather trials**

In the first week of July 1962 I was delegated to accompany Ranald along with Flight Test Technician Charles in the capacity of Engineer responsible for the serviceability of the Beagle

A109 Airedale during the carrying out of Hot Weather Trials in Seville in the South of Spain and Salamanca in the North of Spain. Initially we were to be taking two aircraft; G-ARKE the prototype/demonstration aircraft and G-ARKF the second prototype that was fitted with a Lycoming Test Engine. We were hoping to leave in mid-July.

However, during the preparation of G-ARKE, during a night shift, the aircraft caught fire while being re-fuelled by hand to check the connections of the Port Fuel Tank for leaks after it had been removed, repaired and reinstalled. The tank overflowed and the excess fuel ran down the top of the wing as well as down the tank filler neck drainpipe, over the wing trailing edge and onto a lighted hand lamp laying on the floor, the hot bulb burst when contacted by the cold fuel and the fuel then burst into flames. Fortunately, the fabric on the inboard underside of the wing did not burst into flames due to it being doped with flame retardant butyrate dope but became badly scorched and disintegrated. The Port side wheel fairing suffered a similar fate with the resin burning out of the fibreglass moulding and the remains of the fibreglass just disintegrating when tapped. The Port side of the fuselage was badly burnt from the engine firewall to the forward edge of the Port side aft cabin door, but due to the fact this area of the fuselage was all metal panels the fire was extinguished before any serious damage had occurred. G-ARKE did not fly again.



***Prototype Airedale G-ARKE being demonstrated by Randal***

Due to the aforementioned situation now being delayed it was decided that only one aircraft should be taken on Hot Weather Trials and this would be G-ARNR Construction No 504 which had just been completed in the Experimental Department to production standard. The Lycoming Test Engine and associated equipment was removed from G-ARKE and installed in G-ARNR. In view of the revised arrangements Charles, the Flight Test Technician, would fly out to Seville by airline and arrange the Hotel accommodation. I was to follow by airline two days

later, but Ranald had already left in G-ARNR with his wife as the trip was to be combined with his honeymoon. After completing the Hot Weather Trials, I removed all the Test Equipment from the cabin and stowed it in the Airedale luggage bay and Ranald with his wife flew off to Portugal to visit the Portuguese Government Aircraft Factory where they were building Austers under licence, then on to Morocco, prior to returning to the U.K. and Rearsby. Myself and Charles flew back to the U.K. by airline.

### **Sales trips and an “amazing display”**

Shortly after returning from Spain, I again accompanied Ranald and a Beagle sales representative, Mike from Shoreham, on a sales trip to the Belgian Army A.O.P. headquarters in Braaschat. Ranald flew out with Rearsby Sales representative Eric in Beagle D5/180 Husky G-ASBV and I flew out with Mike, the sales representative from Shoreham, in Beagle A61 Series 2 Terrier. Ranald gave an amazing display in the Husky by flying over obstacles that had been set up by the Belgian Army but unfortunately on the following day Mike the Shoreham sales representative overturned the Husky while demonstrating short field landings on a strip on the outer edge of the airfield. This resulted in the two sales representatives returning home by airline and I flew home with Ranald in the Terrier. This trip involved outings to night clubs where Ranald appeared to be quite familiar with such surroundings, but that is a different story.

The last time I spoke to Ranald was after the Beagle closure, when I believe he was working for Britten Norman on the Isle of Wight prior to moving to Scotland and I was working at Leicester Airport. One of the aircraft owners who based his aircraft at Leicester Airport was the owner of the village Inn at Rothley situated approximately 5 miles from Rearsby and where Ranald used to lodge while working at Rearsby. He mentioned that he had found one of Ranald's old pilot's Log Books in a trunk in the skittle alley and was I able to contact him. I contacted him and he decided that he would collect the Log Book from me, but due to circumstances he subsequently decided that I should mail it to him which I did.

My last indirect contact with him was when two of his friends who he had worked with at Rearsby visited him in Scotland. They were Gordan Hallam and Eddie Worral; Gordan lived quite close to me and I was in regular contact with him. Gordan showed me the photographs he had taken while visiting Ranald, but unfortunately, he has now passed on.

I was aware that his wife was involved in the presentation of the awards at one of the A.G.M.'s and her photograph was in one of the magazines, but I cannot find which one. I was unable to attend at the time as I was abroad on holiday.

I am aware that I have given you little information on Ranald, just my memories of when I was with him, but I have a few images of the C6 Atlantic that I have extracted from one of the Clubs publications. He once told me this was by far the nicest Auster he had ever flown.