

## LOCAL HISTORY NEWS

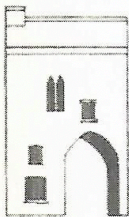
### Inside this issue:

The Man in the Iron Mask P.3

Dates for your diary P.4

### Special points of interest:

- Lectures alternate between Cartmel Institute and the United Reformed Church Hall in Grange
- Trevor Moore is our new Treasurer
- We would love to hear from you if you have personal stories about life in war time



## A Brief History of Cark Airfield By David Parkin

Before World War One the West Lancs Territorials had a rifle range just west of Humphrey Head. A halt was built at Wraysholme crossing, on the Furness Railway, which opened in 1911 for their use.

In 1916 Vickers Ltd. decided they needed a larger airship constructional facility than the one they possessed on Walney Island, at Barrow-in-Furness, and chose the flat area south of Flookburgh for the site.

Information on exactly how far the plan progressed is hard to come by, but I have managed to gather the following facts.

The construction firm was to be A. J. Main and Co. with Sir William Arkul as the contractor. Arkul's was a major engineering firm, responsible for, among other things, the construction of the Forth Railway Bridge.

More importantly, they had just finished the erection of an airship construction shed for Beardmores on the Clyde.

This project was completed at the end of September 1916 and probably indicates an early November starting date for the Flookburgh facility.

In late November 1916 the minutes of the Furness Railway Directors refer to 18-20 wagons a day arriving at Cark Station in connection with work at the airship site. They estimated that 45,000 tons of material would be required for the project.

Proposals for a siding costing £750 were discussed and,

shortly after, Vickers requested the construction of a branch line from Wraysholme crossing to the site at a cost of £1,400. In December 1916 a piling survey was undertaken to determine the state of ground.

A surviving ground plan shows the sheds were to be located south of Willow Lane with ancillary buildings to the north and south off the lane. A large hydrogen gas plant, capable of producing 50,000 cubic feet of hydrogen per hour, was to be located east of the hangers with two large gas holders. The shed, if it had been completed, would have been enormous, being of double size and measuring 900 feet long by 300 feet wide by 150 feet high.

Surviving photographs of the shed built for Beardmores, give a good idea of what the finished article would have looked like, although it was shorter and of single width. The estimated cost of the shed alone was £106,190.

The railway branch line was completed in May 1916, running through to what is now known as Ravenstown, with branches to the sheds and hydrogen plant.

The whole project was cancelled by September 1917 after the huge sum of £792,000 had been expended. Work probably never got past the foundations.

Various reasons were given for the cancellation, including

trouble with the foundations and the fact that the shed alone would have consumed 7,000 tons of steel for the framework and cladding, plus two very large wind screens.

The only part of the project to survive is the village of Ravenstown, formerly called the Flookburgh Model Aero Village, and Flookburgh West, which was constructed to house the workforce. Vickers completed some of the houses to house workers from Barrow.

Ravenstown was originally planned to be three times the size of the current estate, the contractors being J. Paknall & Sons of Rugby and Rainey Brothers.

Barrow Records Office holds an extensive file of documents relating to the construction of the , which cost about £400 each and were of dubious quality at first with many problems related to water ingress.

The village was completed in 1918 and all the streets are named after World War One battles. In 1919 the site was turned over to the Disposals Board of the Ministry of Munitions by the Admiralty as unsaleable. In 1921 it was handed over to the Office of Works.

I have, as yet, no information on what happened to the site between the wars, but at some stage the branch line was lifted.

In the early afternoon of the 30th June 1936 the giant German airship 'Hindenberg' passed over Flookburgh on its way to America. The *Barrow News* for 4th July 1936 reported:

'The Hindenberg,

The German zeppelin the 'Hindenberg' paid a surprise visit on Tuesday afternoon when it passed over the village at two o'clock. Flying very low, the low steady drone of its engines heralded its approach and indicated to the villagers that some unusual visitant was in the vicinity. The residents were quickly out of doors and in the streets to watch its progress. Flying low and steadily, an excellent view was obtained. Details of the hull and name were easily discernable with a bright sun shining on its silvery grey body it presented a wonderful sight.'

Due to the size of the Nazi party in Germany there was some concern about the possibility that the Hindenberg was spying and the member of Parliament for Barrow, Sir John Walker Smith, asked questions in the house on the subject. Previously, on May 22nd, the zeppelin passed over Morecambe Bay between Barrow and Morecambe.

RAF Cark was constructed in early 1941, over a fairly short period, to the standard plan of three intersecting runways with dispersals to the east and north-west. The domestic and technical sites were north of Willow Lane and west of Moor Lane.

The site was originally intended to support fighter operations in the north-west under 9 Group Fighter Command based at Bakton Hall, Preston. This never happened and instead the airfield was originally occupied by F Flight or No.1 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit (AACU) who used Hawker Henleys and Westland Lysanders to tow aerial targets for RAF and

Army gunnery practice.

The Germans were certainly aware of the Airfield's existence because on the 21st February 1942 an overflying reconnaissance aircraft photographed it. This picture, with accompanying annotated ordnance survey map and notes still survives. Fortunately business elsewhere prevented a visit by the Luftwaffe.

The aerodrome was only bombed once, unfortunately by the RAF when some practice smoke bombs went adrift, luckily causing no casualties. On 17th March 1942 the airfield passed to No.25 Group Flying Training Command and became No.1 Staff Pilot Training Unit to train operational aircrew as instructors using Avro Ansons.

RAF Cark was the only staff pilot training unit in the country throughout the war. By mid-1942 the airfield also hosted R Flight of AACU using Henleys and Boulton Paul Defiants.

On 15th December of that year F & R Flights became 650 Squadron using Miles Martinets as target tugs and also Hawker Hurricane MkIVs. 650 Squadron left Cark in November 1944.

There was an army camp in the south-west corner of the airfield where army gunners were based. At one stage they were equipped with new anti-aircraft guns. Unlike the previous weapons which were calibrated in inches, these new acquisitions were calibrated in centimetres. Consequently when they were first used the aircraft towing the target was surrounded by detonating shells while the following target was completely untroubled by exploding ordnance. A quick radio message was sent to stop the firing. The exact words used are not recorded, probably just as well! As flying training wound down the Mountain Rescue Team moved in. Their first job being

a crashed de Havilland Mosquito on Helvellyn on 10th February 1945.

On 15th September 1945 the base hosted an 'At Home' day with Mosquito, Tempest, Spitfire, Lancaster and Halifax aircraft on display.

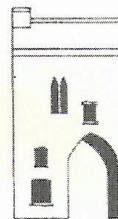
Several aircraft from Cark were lost in flying accidents during the war and an Australian crew had a lucky escape when they mistook a green signal light at Carnforth for one of the airfield lights and nearly landed on the station.

One of the station Commanders, Group Captain Gird, was apparently rather fond of kippers for breakfast and it was quite common for a Cark aircraft to develop a 'magneto fault' in the vicinity of the Isle of Man. The aircraft would land at Jurby, and the crew would wander over to the mess while the fitters attended. After taking off they would notice that a box of kippers had appeared in the back of the aircraft!

'Magneto faults' also occurred in aircraft flying in the vicinity of Blackpool, especially on Fridays, forcing a landing at Squires Gate. By great misfortune fitters were not in attendance at weekends compelling the unfortunate crew to have to spend the weekend in Blackpool. When the aircraft were checked on Monday the 'fault' had usually cleared allowing the aircraft to proceed back to base. RAF Cark closed on December 31st 1945.

Cark had its own bombing range situated on the marshes just south of Jenny Brown's Point, Silverdale. It had lights for night bombing and a triangular timber marker. One local described the smoke bombs overshooting into the woods, 'they were rotten shots', where he and other local lads would recover them and hide them until they cooled down, when they would return them for a reward. After a while the RAF realised what was going on and placed a guard on the woods. The same gentleman

*(Continued on page 3)*



also said that occasionally one of the target drones would come down in the area, whereupon it would be spirited away by the locals. Indeed his father made good use of the netting to protect his strawberries!

Bombing targets were also set up on the sands between Humphrey Head and Grange. Also in the area was RAF Grange which was the Cumbria Grand Hotel. This was the headquarters of No.1 School Technical Training which trained Stukes officers. An exam paper survives on which one of the questions is: 'could you quote the Kings regulations for the stoking of plywood'? I kid you not!

Even more bizarrely it housed the RAF School of Batmany.

The WAAFs of RAF Grange were billeted on Holme Island. A guard was placed on the causeway. Whether this was to keep the WAAFs in, or the RAF men out, is not clear.

After the station closed the airfield went back into private hands. Light aircraft still use it for parachuting and it also hosts an annual Steam Fair.

In 1970 the station flag returned and now hangs in St John the Baptist Church, Cark.

So what remains today?

The only evidence of the air-

ship station is the line of the branch railway curving away from Wraysholme crossing.

However, the remains of the World War Two airfield are extensive.

Despite the fact that the buildings were erected in a hurry for a short life, many survive and are still in use—from the control tower down to blast shelters and pill boxes.

The timbers of the bombing range at Silverdale also survive and can be seen from Jenny Brown's Point.

The dispersals at the east edge of the airfield are now listed buildings.

The RAF Millom Museum at Haverigg has photographs, plans, and documents on display covering RAF Cark, the airship works, and the Silverdale bombing range.

Photographs taken by me of the surviving structures on the airfield can be seen on the web site

'20th Century Defence Architecture' by Russell W Barnes [Http://www.huttonrow.co.uk](http://www.huttonrow.co.uk)

If anyone has any items or information connected with aviation at Cark, especially the airship works, I would appreciate it if you could contact me on 01524851637.

David Parkin.



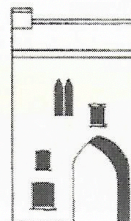
The Hindenberg



Pill box at Cark airfield



Parachute store at Cark airfield



## THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Westmorland, in the 17th century, was a remote land devoid of good roads with access more by a route over the sands. Just the place to disappear from the busy towns and public gaze. It was to this area, in 1698, that a stranger came to live in Cark. Obviously of French descent, he assumed the English surname of Rigg.

'Mr Rigg' had a wife and son and admitted to having a connection with the French court. During the time he resided at Cark, he was visited each year

by 'Charles Seymour' 6th Duke of Somerset (1662-1748). Seymour was a great friend of Queen Anne, and he treated 'Mr Rigg' with great respect, always standing in his presence, removing his hat, and opening doors and gates for him. The question was who was Mr Rigg?

At this time Louis XIV was the King of France, his reign embodied the example of perfect monarchy. It was also rumoured that he was actually a twin, and that his twin brother Philip had been mysteriously

banished or removed to a prison cell. In order to hide his true identity it had been deemed, or ordered, by a higher authority to have his face encased in an iron mask. The rumour grew and was embellished, as rumours usually are. One has it that the stranger in Cark was really the twin brother of Louis XIV who had escaped from France to lose himself in the vast countryside and mountains of Westmorland.

(continued on p.4)

**Cartmel Peninsula Local History Society**

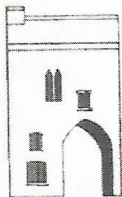
Dr Ruth Hughes  
Secretary

3 Devonshire Place  
Kents Bank Road  
GRANGE OVER SANDS  
Cumbria LA11 7HF

Phone: 01539 532591  
Email: ruthhughes@uscalf.co.uk

We are now on the web at  
[www.cartmelpeninsulalhs.org.uk](http://www.cartmelpeninsulalhs.org.uk)

*Local History News*



Cartmel Peninsula Local History Society was established over ten years ago under the name Cartmel and District Local History Society. Three years ago the Society changed its name to reflect more accurately the historical interests and area that our members encompass. Our aim is to cover as broad a spectrum of historical enquiry as possible in order to reflect the interests of members, and to interest and include non-members in what is, we feel, a very exciting and enjoyable subject. One of the ways we plan to further this aim is through the pages of this newsletter and by having and maintaining a presence on the World Wide Web.

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2006:**

26 January: Talk at the United Reformed Church Hall by Dr Rob David on Cumbrian Ice Houses

23rd February: Talk at Cartmel Institute by Dot Bruns on the Portable Antiquities Scheme in the north-west

23rd March: Talk at Cartmel Institute by Janette Fairer on the use of quilting in armour

27th April: Talk at the United Reformed Church Hall by Ron Mein on the Dolly Blue Mills

*(continued from p.3)*

In the 17th century Christopher Rawlinson was the owner of Cark Hall. At breakfast one morning it was discovered that his cousin, Kate Rawlinson, was missing. It subsequently turned out that she had eloped with the son of the stranger 'Mr Rigg'. The Rawlinson family were enraged at first, but eventually became reconciled to the elopement.

'Mr Rigg' promised his wife and son that, before he died, he would reveal his true identity, but died before he he passed his identity on. To this day he has never been identified.

In 1868, a paper belonging to Mrs Feronside of Poulton le Sands was discovered amongst the Rawlinson papers describing all the events relevant to this mystery.

There are, of course, many variations of this story, for example, he was the son of Anne of Austria, the illegitimate son of Charles II etc., or a french nobleman of high

rank.  
Enter Hollywood! In 1939 the film 'The Man in the Iron Mask' depicted him as Philip, brother of Louis, based on a story by Alexander Dumas. In this film Philip was rescued from his prison cell, the roles reversed, and all was put to rights. Perhaps if the man's true identity could be unravelled it could lead to a Hollywood sequel—'The Man in the Iron Mask II!'

Extracts taken from 'The Land of Cartmel' by J.C. Dickenson.

Trevor Moore.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Mrs Barbara Copeland  
Chairperson  
Tel: 015395 33165

Dr Ruth Hughes  
Secretary  
Tel: 015395 32591

Mr Trevor Moore  
Treasurer  
Tel: 015395 38912

Mr Stewart E Allen  
Dr Malcolm Arthurton  
Mrs Gail Swanson  
Mr Trevor Moore  
Dr Peter Le Mare

Articles for publication in this newsletter are always welcome. Please contact either Barbara or Ruth on the above numbers.