

BMFC AGM 2017 - Chairman's Report

Richard Sharman

I am pleased to report that 2017 has been a reasonably good year for the BMFC and for Model Flying at the Beaulieu Heath airfield. The weather this year has been moderately kind to us; the permit issuing and governing process has run well; our relations with the Forestry Commission have been good; we have been able to run a national F3A event; and no serious adverse activities have taken place. I will briefly amplify each of these. Then I have some news on other topics, and my suggestions for next year.

But first, I must mention a few of the sad events which have happened this year.

- Dennis Cross, a prolific model builder, inventor and flyer passed away in April. He will be remembered for his magnificent Sea King Helicopter which won the BMFA Nationals, but also for his often eccentric sport scale planes which usually flew, eventually.
- John Thompson, our Free Flight coordinator, who single-handedly ran the Free-Flight operations at Beaulieu, was a very experienced model builder and flyer in R/C as well as FF collapsed and died in May. He helped me personally in many aspects of the operation, history and relationships and will be sorely missed.
- Ron Claridge, a very well know flyer, instructor, and BMFA examiner has had to give up model flying for now owing to a number of impending medical operations which he has been advised to have.

There are others of course, so to all the, especially older, modellers who are either no longer with us, or who just aren't able to continue flying at Beaulieu, we offer our condolences.

Weather, Permits, Relationships, Events

Weather: This year we have had rain, cloud, fog, hail, frost, and wind in generous amounts, but there have still been a good number of flyable days. As an experiment I have kept a diary of my own flying this year and find that I have been out on no less than 80 days so far this year. I know some others who have done more than me, so that gives an impression that about a quarter, or perhaps a third, of all days are suitable for flying if you have the time, the determination, and the petrol, to get out to the field. The main drawbacks are of course wind and rain.

Permit issuing: The permit process has run well this year, again. The total number of permits issued had been decreasing historically, but in the last few years has turned around and is now increasing steadily. In 2014 we issued 245; in 2015 it was 300; in 2016 there were 309; and this year we have issued 328.

Most permits were issued via the internet web site, with a number also issued in person at the field, and a few by other means involving personal contact. We operate a secure database to record the names, address, BMFA numbers and so on, which generally I update on receipt of a valid application, sending out a confirmation email if needed. Mark then checks the data and issues the documents, membership card and other information and has done a fantastic job, using our specially acquired printer to make the cards. He has even earned some useful income for us by doing the same for some other clubs.

We have had a small number of delays, usually due to one or other of us not be available due to holidays, other commitments, or lack of resources. Your patience has been appreciated - we have worked as hard as we can on it. I shall say a little about the analysis of the permits later.

Relations with the Forestry Commission: I am pleased to say that we have had good relation with the Forestry as in previous years. It is clear that they understand what we do, and also appreciate our presence on the heath. We have reported a number of antisocial activities which they have noted and responded to. They have notified us about some, but not all, of the days when the heath is closed for a Pony Drift.

There have been personnel changes in their line of command and we are adapting to that. Most importantly, when we reported the deteriorating state of the access track they quickly inspected it and put a renovation process in hand. The track was closed for 3 weeks in September (it should have been 2 weeks) and substantial work was done to repair it, for which we are grateful.

Contact with the BMFA. To many of us the BMFA is just a shadowy organisation in the background, providing insurance but otherwise largely forgotten. Of course it is actually vital to the competition minded flyers, and runs the "Nationals" as well as represents modellers interests in government, politics, the media and other spheres. In order to understand it's relevance to us I have attended several "Southern Area" meetings and got to know some of the people involved (along with Roger Newman who represents the Free Flight community). The BMFA SA committee understands what we do and how we do it, and are keen to promote our activities and help us. In the world today every activity needs friends, so this is a good development.

BMFA Achievements Scheme - new examiner. Most of you will know that I passed the qualification to become a BMFA "club examiner" this year. The test was in January in freezing conditions, and the ratification came through a month or so later. I can now do A-certificates on demand, and with the help of another club examiner I can do B-certificates. I have done a few during tests this year, but the take up has been a bit slow. I appeal to all those who don't have the basic A-certificate to seriously consider doing it: it's not difficult and it would show an increasing level of competence which is useful if you go to fly anywhere else.

Events: Many years ago it was commonplace to have both local and national competitions staged at Beaulieu. These included pylon racing, aerobatics and scale events. Over the years these events either moved elsewhere or we stopped because of the impact on normal sport flying. For the last couple of decades there have been no competitions and the field has been used as a sport flying location only.

This year, however, we have broken with this tradition and hosted the GBR/CAA, the national body for model aerobatics, to hold a national event on September 9th with Ian Mould as the Contest Director. This went very well, the weather was extremely kind, and a great day was had by all the competitors, some of whom had travelled hundreds of miles to attend.

It is the plan to do this again once more in 2018. I would be happy to see a scale event in 2018, if someone would like to organise it. However, we have to be very careful to inform ordinary permit holders and not to impact the standard sport flying activity.

Drones, Multi-rotors and others: This year we have had a significant number of flyers, many of them new to Beaulieu, who have expressed an interest to fly multi-rotor craft. After much discussion we have allocated a separate area for drone operation further down the runway and I am pleased to report that many of the drone fliers have used it successfully, so thanks to them for being considerate and cooperating. Clearly drones and planes do not mix well so separating them seems the best policy at present. The expected "drone-armageddon" didn't materialise, but I think drones are here to stay despite what we think about it. We will keep this under review and may have to adapt to new conditions if they arise.

Antisocial activities: In the past we have had some severe disruption due to anti-social activities. This often involves the racing of motorbikes and cars on the runway combined with subsequent damage to the barriers, signs and gates. This type of activity has been reducing over recent years,

but still occurs. The Forestry are very concerned about it, and when they have evidence, or are themselves involved they do take action.

We can help by reporting these incidents. So if you see activity which shouldn't be happening, you must report it - preferably by an email or text message to me, but also to the Forestry direct where appropriate.

Some other topics

Analysis of permit information. The information you give when applying for a permit is held in strict confidence and never divulged to any third party. It is there as a legal record of who has permission to operate on the heath which is Crown Land governed by numerous By-laws. However, it is also useful for the committee to help understand the nature of our interests. We also have a very limited access to the BMFA records so that we can validate insurance and other records.

Of the 328 permits issued, it emerges that 69% are MFA Country Members (i.e. not direct members any other flying club) and therefore 31% are affiliated through some other club. So our largest group seems to be independent flyers who come to fly, probably on an ad hoc basis. This is fine, and we are happy to cater for that type of person who otherwise would find it very difficult to operate a model aircraft safely.

The BMFA show us information about the level of status of all our flyers under the Achievement Scheme. This shows that 69% (again) of our flyers have NO achievement scheme level; 17% have an A-certificate in some discipline; 12% have a B-Certificate; and 2% have an E-certificate.

A further analysis of the data shows that we have permit holders from 42 other clubs, the main ones being SMAC, WMAC, Christchurch and Bournemouth. Of the members of other clubs, only 41% have no certificate. Among Country Members the figure is 80% having no certificate.

This is a little disappointing as it suggests that the majority of flyers, who may be very skilful and competent, don't have any proof of that. Were some authority to ask what we are doing to improve the standard of flying, and therefore safety, while operating in an area frequented by the general public, we would not have a terribly convincing story to report.

Suggestions for 2018:

My suggestions for next year are as follows. I would appreciate comments and feedback on these from everybody:

- ***Achievement scheme days:*** I feel it would be an important advance were more Beaulieu Flyers to gain at least an A-certificate in the BMFA Achievement Scheme. It is relatively easy, it is a useful statement of achievement and collectively would enhance our reputation. As a BMFA examiner I am on hand to do A-tests on demand, and with notice can do B-tests (for which a second examiner is needed). I appeal to all permit holders who do not already have an A-certificate to consider doing the test in 2018.
- ***New signs.*** There is no doubt that when we erect signs it does act as a deterrent to members of the general public who otherwise might wander onto the runway, or alongside it, creating a possible safety risk while planes are landing and taking off. The current signs are a little battered, so I recommend obtaining new ones for 2018, at minimal expense and offering them to frequent attendees.
- ***Weather station.*** we all complain about unsuitable weather restricting our flying, and despite the most diligent pursuit of weather broadcast on TV and Radio, and attention to the numerous weather websites on the Internet, it is still hard to know if a trip to the field is

justified, or will result in disappointment due to excessive wind for example. We have a member who lives less than a mile away from the airfield and might be prepared to host a sophisticated weather station which would report local conditions to a website on the internet. I hope to follow this line of enquiry to see if it is viable to set up a local weather observation post which we can all access before making the journey.

- ***History appeal.*** Our older members are very much aware of the history of flying at Beaulieu, but many of our more recent members are not. If you have any information on flying at Beaulieu of a historical nature then I would appreciate seeing a copy of it. This could be old photos, reports in local newspapers, letters, notices or other material from local authorities, or even old permits. If you have anything which might be useful, please let me know.
- ***Newsletters.*** I have received many delightful comments about the occasional newsletters that I have put out during the year. Of course, it is quite an effort to do these, but if they are helpful then I will continue. If you have items you think should be covered, then please let me know and I will try to add them in at an appropriate point.

Well done to everyone who has had successfully flown models at Beaulieu this year, and best wishes for 2018.

regards, Richard Sharman, chairman BMFC