

## THE KENT COUNTY SHOW

The South London Branch for the first time had a stand at The Kent Show which was held over the three days from Friday the 4<sup>th</sup> July until Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> July at The Detling Showground just outside Maidstone. Our stand was within the "Hobby" tent, and we took along the Millenium escapement models, examples of restored painted dials and various



other horological items for attendees to view. The show was well attended, and we had much interest and numerous enquiries from the public. The stand was manned at different times by Brenda Allen, James Marten, Peter Rendle, Norvin Simpson, and Barnaby Smith.

Historically this was an activity covered by the Kent Branch but we took over the event from them. Attendance at the show is recommended and in future years it is hoped that more of our members will be able to attend.

## FREE ADVERTISING FOR BRANCH MEMBERS

If you wish to place an advert in our newsletter, contact Bill :-  
01543 506195 or [electricwilliam@gmail.com](mailto:electricwilliam@gmail.com)

[www.slbbhi.co.uk](http://www.slbbhi.co.uk)



## South London Branch British Horological Institute

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Branch No 25. Founded 1978

*Meetings are held on the 1st Thursday of each month  
At The White Hart Barn (Godstone Village Hall)  
Godstone Surrey RH9 8DT at 7.30 p.m. for 8 p.m.*

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FOR SALE

RIP  
MICHAEL  
McDONNELL

KENT COUNTY  
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*"The key is in not spending time, but in investing it" Stephen R. Covey*

**NEXT MEETING  
4th SEPTEMBER 2025.  
The Beresford Hutchinson Lecture.  
Duncan Greig.  
John B McLemore.  
The Guilmet Mystery Clock Escapement.**

Twenty-Five years ago, John B McLemore sent me his 71-page dissertation on the study he made off the Guilmet mystery clock escapement. until that time, I had not seen, nor have I seen since, such a detailed study. John did not want his work published but he shared this information specifically for horologist's that need to know.

John B has been well documented, particularly with the S town podcast, where sadly he took his own life. The purpose of my talk tonight is twofold. Principally to explain the mysteries of the Guilmet escapement, share the information that I have, and ask for your constructive criticisms.

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I must thank Owen Gilchrist of the Bristol branch who insisted that I must come back and give that branch another talk. I pointed out they had already had my prepared lectures but scratched out an idea, to now share the information that I have, and how to put it into a constructive lecture.

I spoke to another friend, not a horologist, who has suggested, and I raise the question is it not possible to apply for a posthumous master's degree or doctorate. I look forward to hearing comments from my fellow horologist's.

Duncan Greig.

## LAST MONTH'S MEETING.

### The Forgotten Heroes of Aviation

Our chairman, Trevor Keast, opened our July meeting announcing the death of committee member Micheal Mc Donnell for whom we held a minute's silence.

We welcomed South Branch member David Rooney, writer and curator, with his latest work THE BIG HOP, which is a true story of the first flight across the Atlantic and the ordinary heroes who risked their lives in pursuit of progress

Most of us think of the Charles Lindburg who was the first aviator to make a nonstop flight singlehanded across the Atlantic but Davids talk was on the forgotten heroes of Aviation and the First Non-Stop Transatlantic Flight.

In the early days of aviation, a remarkable story of courage, innovation, and adventure unfolded - a tale that has been largely forgotten by history. The story of Jack Alcock and Arthur "Ted" Brown's groundbreaking transatlantic flight in 1919 is a testament to human ingenuity and the pioneering spirit of early aviators.

#### The Dawn of Aviation

The journey to conquering the Atlantic began with the Wright Brothers' secret flights in 1903. These initial 12-second flights near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, went largely unnoticed by the public.

all the while looking at the figurines grinning at him from the mantelpiece. His fondest memory of that day was getting a smile from the lovely Bunny Campione and with his dapper style and Irish charm, who could blame her. Michael enjoyed a satisfying retirement (although I'm not sure he ever fully retired): City breaks, Country Shows, The Goodwood Revival, Glyndebourne and good restaurants. He was great company, calm, humorous, knowledgeable and a good listener.

Once, while on holiday in Prague, James had the great idea of walking to the zoo, which according to 'The Rough Guide to Prague', was easily reached on foot. it was a done deal, or so James thought. After what seemed like hours, they reached a sleepy town with no sign of the zoo. But as they sat having a well earned coffee, Michael spotted a little sign with a picture of a car on it. 'Motor Museum' it said. Michael's eyes twinkled. "Let's have a look, it won't take long, I'll pay the entrance." They entered what looked like a dilapidated old shed. It was like the Tardis, two stories high, filled to the roof with everything automotive. Michael was in heaven. Four hours later he was happy and James knew what a kubelwagen looked like. Michael will be sorely missed not only as a good friend but as a branch member who sat on the Committee and acted as our auctioneer for a number of years.

Michael is survived by his son James, older sister Clare and younger brother Francis and several members of the younger generation.

Mick Welch with many thanks to James McDonnell.

# Michael Joseph McDonnell.

**31 December 1938 – 30 June 2025**

At school, Michael was neither academic nor a rugby player, his escape was cycling. He cycled everywhere & looked after his bike, modifying it to improve its performance. This was the beginning of an interest in all things mechanical.

His happy memories were of holidays spent with his beloved Auntie Clare & Uncle Tom at 'The Grange', their farm in Ireland. Cutting & baling the hay, collecting the eggs, learning to drive the tractor & trying to catch the wily old pony that pulled the trap to take them all to Sunday Mass.

A farmer at heart, he studied agriculture at Merrist Wood College near Guildford, but at that time it was hard to earn a good living in farming. He decided to follow his interest in cars and started trading in them, gradually building the business that enabled him to support his wife, Sandra, and their young son, James.



Sandra died in 1999 and it was hard on both Michael and James. But they were equipped to survive the knocks life brings. Michael joined clubs, made new friends, developed his hobbies (clocks & classic cars) and enjoyed a new found interest in cooking. With Delia Smith by his side, he created all sorts of lovely meals to share and also enjoyed making his yearly supply of excellent marmalade.

It was about this time that our paths first crossed as we both enrolled at a clock repair evening class run by Francis Brodie.

At one point Michael went with a friend to the 'Antiques Roadshow' at Polesden Lacy. Clutching 2 china figurines, handed down from his mother saying "Jamie, I think these could be worth a few bob". Michael waited in the ceramics queue. On examining the figures, the expert proclaimed them to be "in the style of Meissen, probably worth £40 or £50 pounds on a good day."

Ever since it's been a running joke that every time said 'expert' appears on the show, Michael would say 'I don't know how he got the job, the man doesn't know what he's talking about',



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It wasn't until November 1906, when Brazilian aviator Alberto Santos Dumont made public flights in Paris, that the world began to take notice of this revolutionary technology.

Britain was late to the aviation game. The first official British flight didn't occur until October 16, 1908, when Samuel Cody took to the skies above Farnborough. The early days of aviation were characterized by incredible enthusiasm and a sense that anything was possible. Newspapers like the Daily Mail played a crucial role in promoting aviation by offering prizes for remarkable feats.

## The Pioneers

David's talk introduced us to several key characters in this aviation saga. Harry Hawker, born in Australia, was a mechanical prodigy who was obsessed with machinery from the age of three. He helped Harry Houdini with his airplane engine during Australia's first flight and eventually made his way to England to pursue aviation.

Jack Alcock emerges as the central hero of the story. Born in Manchester to working-class parents, Alcock was a natural mechanic with an unbridled passion for aviation. At 18, he was already experimenting with airplane construction, working with local entrepreneur Charlie Fletcher to build their own aircraft. His thick Lancashire accent and ruddy cheeks made him instantly likeable, and his technical skills were exceptional.

Arthur "Ted" Brown, Alcock's navigator, was equally remarkable. An American-born engineer working in Manchester, Brown had served in the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. His navigation skills would prove crucial to the transatlantic attempt.

## The Transatlantic Challenge

The Daily Mail had offered a substantial prize of 10,000 pounds (equivalent to about a quarter-million pounds today) for the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic. This prize became a beacon for aviation pioneers in the aftermath of World War I, offering hope to an industry facing potential collapse.

Multiple teams prepared for the challenge. Harry Hawker and Matt Greave from Sopwith, Fred Raynham and Charles Morgan from Martinsyde, and a Handley Page team led by retired Admiral Mark Kerr all converged on St. John's, Newfoundland, ready to make history.

**The Dramatic Departure**

On June 14, 1919, Jack Alcock and Ted Brown prepared their Vickers Vimy bomber for take-off. The morning was challenging, with repair work on the aircraft's undercarriage and gusty winds. The take-off itself was heart-stopping - the aircraft barely cleared the end of the field, with spectators holding their breath as it seemed to scrape past fences and trees.

**The Flight**

The 16-hour journey was nothing short of epic. The aviators faced numerous challenges:

- Dense fog that made traditional navigation impossible
- A malfunctioning wireless set
- An engine part bursting, sounding like machine-gun fire
- Ferocious black storms engulfing the aircraft
- Multiple engine issues

Brown's exceptional navigation skills and Alcock's piloting expertise were pushed to their absolute limits.

**Historic Landing**

At 8:40 AM on Sunday, June 15, 1919, Alcock and Brown landed near a Marconi wireless station in Clifden, Ireland. Their landing was so smooth that Brown later joked about his "fancy navigating," to which Alcock simply replied, "Very good," and shook his hand.

When officers approached and asked where they were from, Alcock casually responded, "America" - a moment that captured the understated heroism of these pioneers.

**Legacy and Significance**

This flight was more than just a personal achievement. It was a pivotal moment in aviation history, demonstrating the potential of long-distance air travel and helping to establish the concept of civil aviation. The flight took just under 16 hours, covering approximately 1,890 miles at an average speed of about 118 miles per hour.

Alcock and Brown's achievement predated Charles Lindbergh's more famous solo transatlantic flight by eight years. Yet, their story has been largely forgotten by popular history.

**A Broader Context**

The talk emphasizes that early aviation was a remarkably egalitarian field. It didn't matter who you were - your social class, background, or even gender was less important than your passion and skill. Pioneers like Hilda Hewlett, who established the first flying school, exemplified this spirit of innovation and opportunity.

**Conclusion**

Jack Alcock and Ted Brown's transatlantic flight represents a pivotal moment in human achievement. It was a triumph of skill, courage, and determination - a testament to the human spirit of exploration and innovation.

Their story reminds us that history is full of remarkable achievements that often go unrecognized. It challenges us to look beyond the familiar narratives and appreciate the extraordinary individuals who pushed the boundaries of what was possible.

As aviation continues to evolve, the spirit of Alcock and Brown lives on - a spirit of adventure, innovation, and the relentless human desire to explore the unknown.

After questions we thanked David with some clock oil and many members were able to obtain a copy of the Book.

## [For sale Myford ML7B lathe 240v £650](#)

The lathe is in full working order on a metal stand with drip tray and jacking blocks fitted with a 3phase motor running from an inverter (giving speed control).

Comes with a 3 jaw and a 4 jaw chuck plus a Jacobs tailstock chuck and a screw cutting gearbox.

Lots of other accessories including face plates and catch plates, 4 way tool post, solid and revolving centres, morse taper sleeves, stop attachment, oil gun, sawing attachment, vertical slide, hand book, and cutting tools.

For pictures see last month's newsletter.

For more information contact :-

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