

Post War

20 May 1946 Sport on Airport?

A report was made to Ilford Council by the Town Clerk as to the possibility of sport being played on Fairlop Aerodrome site. He did write to the Air ministry who were raising no objection providing that there were only goalposts and other things, which were easily removable. This was only a verbal report as the Air Ministry was reluctant to confirm this issue in writing.

May 1946 Fairlop is ATC Glider School

The Fairlop ATC gliding school which teaches young cadets to fly has achieved such an overwhelming success and popularity, that the Air Ministry are devoting full attention to strengthening this particular branch of flying, since qualified ATC Glider pilots will form the backbone of future RAF aircrew personnel. Another contingent of ATC boys including many from Ilford and Barkingside, qualified for their gliding "A" certificates presented by the Royal Aero Club at the Fairlop airfield on Saturday.



Photograph and Gliding Certificate of John West
(Dominic West)

ATC gliding lessons started at Fairlop during the war. The idea being to train the boys with a view to becoming operational aircrew. Training takes place at the airfield on Tuesday and Friday evenings and at weekends and is superintended by fully qualified instructors.

Fairlop is one of the most successful glider schools in the country because the training is kept up in all weathers whether it be maintenance, ground instruction or actual flying when weather permits. There are about 40 boys in a class of five weeks duration, the time it takes to learn gliding. All the lads are as keen as mustard and camp out on the 'drome at weekends, cooking their own meals, generally roughing it and thoroughly enjoying themselves. A special food permit enables us to organise a canteen. The complete training course takes from 4 to 6 weeks depending on the weather. The new recruits started with ground instruction, which includes taking the gliders to pieces and reassembling them. Next, the lads go through all the flying routine by moving along the ground in a glider and learning how to manipulate the controls and the general idea of flight. Gliders are fixed by a steel rod cable to winches at the other end of the airfield and as experienced operators wind up the winches, the glider moves across the airfield almost completely controlled by the winch. When the recruit has learnt to handle the controls, the winch is wound up a little faster and the glider leaves the ground in short hops. Thus, the gliding is taught in easy stages, higher and

higher until the instructor is perfectly sure of his recruits ability to handle the machine. When 100 per cent confidence has been achieved, then the lads are allowed to do their first small circuit of the airfield. As soon as the glider reaches a certain height, the pilot pulls a switch that releases the cable (he is helped if necessary by signals from his instructor on the ground whom he can clearly see), then the glider flies smoothly around the aerodrome until the pilot lands, always with perfect ease.



A Kirby Cadet as used by the ATC at Fairlop.

(David Martin)

All the ATC recruit pilots have a flying logbook, which records the hours of flight. The ATC cadets throng the Fairlop airfield in all weathers just waiting for a break. There is, however room for plenty more local boys whom they shall be very pleased to accept. A new glider course starts on the Fairlop Airfield this week.

June 1946. Sixty mile long air procession Victory Parade

Residents in the north of Ilford will have the best view of the Victory Parade celebration air pageant in which several Ilford Airmen will be flying.



An impression of AVRO Lancasters over Fairlop.

(David Martin)

The 600 aircraft of various types from 40 Squadrons will converge over Fairlop airfield and fly in a 60 mile long stream on a direct course for Buckingham Palace.

Those Ilford men taking part in the procession are: F/O Peaty of Clarendon Road, Seven Kings flying a Spitfire: Flt. Sergeant Toys of Otley Drive flying a Mosquito and W/O Thompson of Kingston Road also flying a Mosquito.

13 June 1946. Thousands of people in cars went to Fairlop Aerodrome on Saturday expecting to see the Victory Parade start from there. (as incorrectly reported in the Ilford Recorder).

Actually, they merely assembled over the airfield. On their way to Fairlop, 9 Vampire jet-propelled fighter planes flew over Ilford.

August 1946. A motor cyclist rode along a runway and into barbed wired died on scene. PC Ron Joyce, a motorcyclist from Barkingside Police Station attended. Because of nuisance of people driving around the airfield coils of barbed wire were placed at the junction of two runways. The unfortunate dead motorcyclist was found caught on the wire. It is not known how he died, but lack of skid marks suggested he had not seen the wire.

August 1946 No squatters at Fairlop -yet

Since a long caterpillar RAF convoy wound its way out of Fairlop airfield many months ago, scores of sturdily built Nissen huts scattered over the area have lain deserted and derelict. No longer do airmen's voices drift over the quiet country air.

No longer does a blue uniformed community eat, drink, sleep and laugh there. They did eat and sleep and most of them enjoyed it (barring perhaps, service discipline).



A derelict Fairlop.

(David Martin)

Many of these men have been demobbed, and several of them no doubt wish they were back at Fairlop again, this time with their families.

Having swelled the ranks of the National Army of the homeless, they are in many districts, revolting against the seemingly apathetic official response to their home-seeking efforts.

Fairlop may be deserted with as yet no sign of communal civilian activity.

Growing resentment is felt by homeless or badly housed folk in the Hainault area at the site and a well situated ex-American Army camp, opposite Hainault Station.

It is deserted except for the watchmen who patrol night and day.

One of the watchmen said that dozens of homeless people visited the site in the past few weeks giving the place the once over.

Last week engineers from Ilford Council severed the main electricity cable nearby cutting off the camps power supply.

The two large brick buildings in the camp, at present consisting of unused drying rooms, wash houses and a boiler house have now been locked with strict instructions not to hand the keys over to anybody.

Since the army left this camp earlier this year, floorboards have been removed and transported away on lorries.

Before that, the camp seemed perfectly suitable for family occupation.

Water and sewerage systems are installed and throughout the camp and there is a communal cookhouse. Watchmen work three day and night shifts.

Meanwhile, the camp rots.

September 1946 Siam Prince use Fairlop runways for motor racing trial.



Flying Prince Bira of Siam
(Getty Images)

His Royal Highness Prince Birabongse Bhanudej Bhanubandh of Siam (1914 to 1985), died at Barons Court Underground Station on the Piccadilly Line.

A world famous racing motorist who was educated at Eton has, for months past, used the runways at Fairlop Airfield as a secret motor racing trial ground and has provided the nearby squatters with spectacular free entertainment.



A Maserati 8CM racing and hill climb car, formerly owned and driven by Prince Bira of Siam in the years prior to WWII, being demonstrated in Prince Bira's original livery at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2012.

(Wikimedia Commons file)

On odd afternoons in July, August and September, including last Saturday, the Prince has piloted his Auster aircraft 250 miles from his Bodmin home, touched down at Fairlop two hours later, then hurtled along the runway his Maserati racing car in spectacular fashion. Afterwards flying back to Cornwall.

A reporter who spotted the secret trial, was present at Prince Bira's Fairlop trial on Saturday morning. The Prince, clad in a dark blue 'zipped' motoring suit, light 'zipped' leggings and a crash helmet was chatting with his cousin 37 year-old Prince Chula, who himself owns the three racing cars used in the international motor racing contest.

At 9am, a lorry arrived from Prince Chula's Hammersmith garage and two mechanics guided the blue and yellow 3000cc, 24 horse power racing Maserati car down two planks onto the runway of the aerodrome. After an engine test and wheel changes, Prince Bira climbed into the cockpit while his cousin Prince Chula stood with an upraised starting flag half a mile away along the runway.

'Water OK?' Prince Bira demanded.

The mechanics nodded.

With a roar the car shot off, gaining momentum until he was hurtling along at over 100 miles an hour. Wheels of different sizes were changed after each lap and the two princes held a 10 minute consultation on the car's performance.

In between trials, Prince Chula exchanged information, the Prince discussing recent international car racing successes and displaying great interest while the reporter gave him an insight into the nearby squatters camp activities.

An hour later, Prince Bira drove the Maserati to a standstill near the lorry and climbed out. Whilst mechanics pushed the racing car back into the lorry, the two princes explained. 'Every race we've won this year has been due to engine-test racing trials at Fairlop. We won the Ulster trophy in Ireland on the 10th August. However, we've won 20 races of the 68 races completed in pre-war and we've been second or third in 40 or 50 of the others. Our racing cars were laid up during the war, but we hope soon to have two brand new cars. Our Maserati here which can speed at 140 miles an hour is competing in the Brighton free trials this afternoon, and we are travelling to Brighton immediately.'

Prince Chula and Prince Bira walked to waiting limousine climbed in and with friendly waves of their

hands drove off in the direction of the airfield gate.

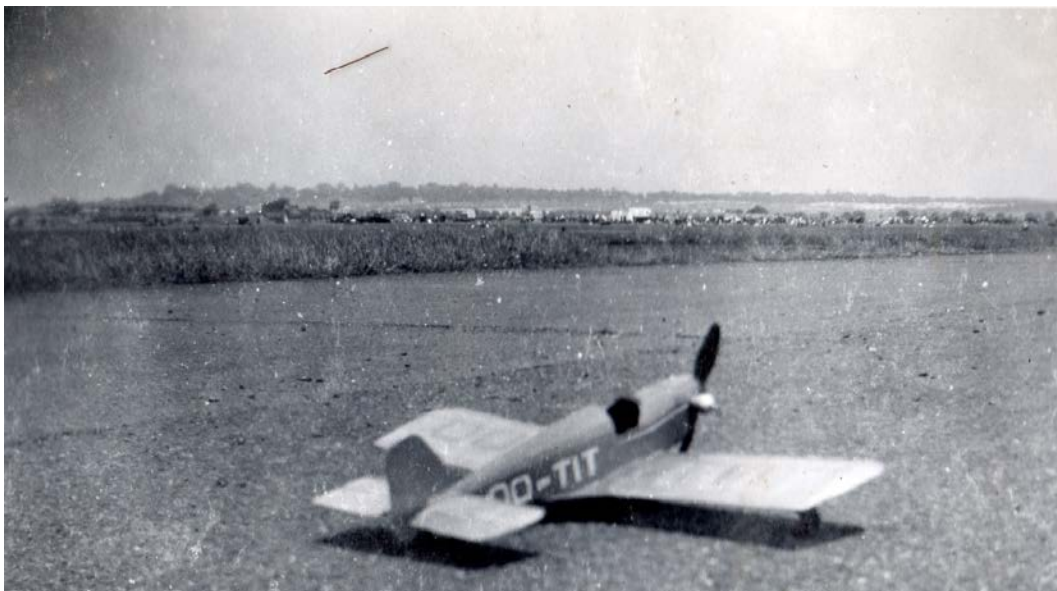
A mechanic had the last word. He explained. 'Prince Bira won many Grand Prix in pre-war days. Both Princes used to return to Siam each winter before the war, until, becoming used to the English weather they found they could not stand the tropical climate. The Fairlop runways are good motor racing trial grounds apart from the nails which tyres pick up along the tarmac.'

September 1946 Aircraft at Fairlop again - models

Fairlop Airfield used during the war as a fighter station will be having other aircraft on it from Sunday model aircraft. The airfield will be the flying field on the newly revived Ilford Model Aero Club. On 23 August, 33 keen aero modellers of all ages met and brought the club into being again. Until the war broke up the club, it was the most flourishing of its kind in southern England, having a membership of nearly 100.

The inaugural general meeting was held at the Ad Astra Restaurant, Clements Road, Ilford, the hall premises have been lent free of charge by the proprietor.

After the elections of officers, a comprehensive constitution was drawn up and membership fees decided. Difficulty was experienced when it came to deciding upon a ground for the flying meetings, but since the meeting, permission has been granted from the Officer Commanding RAF Station Hornchurch to use the aerodrome at Fairlop. Weather permitting, there will be a display of flying at model aircraft at Fairlop Aerodrome on Sunday morning and spectators are welcome.



Model aircraft on the runway at Fairlop in 1946. What is interesting is the number of people who can be seen in the background. It must have been very popular venue.

(Geoffrey Goldsmith)



Model aircraft at Fairlop in 1946.

(above Geoffrey Goldsmith)

(below David Morris)



December 1946. A Motorist was killed when the car he was driving crashed into a tank trap by Fairlop Station.

1950's



POW's and displaced persons still in camp, (Site No 20), mainly Russians and Polish.

The German POW's, still in camp during 1951, were a friendly bunch, virtually everyone a football fanatic.

One owned an Alsatian dog who could understand commands in German and English.

No.1 Communal Site later used for community uses.

9th Ilford North Cub and Scout Group used it as HQ under leadership of George Seabridge who later married 'Rikki', Valerie French.

(see Memories of Valerie Seabridge)

In 1967 this became a permanent site for Gypsies opened by Yul Brynner. (born 1920, Vladivostok, in the Far Eastern Republic (present-day Primorsky Krai, Russia) It is now the North View Caravan site.

The bomb shelters on both sides of Forest Road fell into disrepair. These consisted of grass mounds, sometimes with the original brick blast screen at each end. The interiors were dark and very often smelly!

The dispersal bays were a delight to cycle off, if you dared, but a great breaker of front forks. The curved hangers could be climbed (just) with a running start, and they also provided quantities of 1-inch Whitworth nuts and bolts, which were must the thing for filling with gunpowder. Two bolts, one nut, which were thrown into the air with a large bang resulting upon reaching the ground. Motorcycle enthusiasts raced up and down the runways, occasionally with disastrous consequences if others had removed manhole covers. The thrill of racing was not confined to the young. One parent, who drove his car a 1937 Chrysler Q six cylinder 3 speed saloon, along the runways at high speed, said to be 60-70 mph, accompanied by his young son.

Model aircraft flew at the Airfield until closure in 1953. A man died whilst watching a modelling display. An Auster Autocrat made an emergency landing which is thought to have induced a heart attack. The modellers flew control models on wires, free flight and later radio control.

P. T. Reid commenced gravel extraction, and then Steetleys took over sand and gravel extraction, followed by Brett Lafarge.

In the 1980's LB Redbridge granted a developer a 125-year lease. In the late 1990's the developer holding the lease applied to LB Redbridge for planning permission to build an all weather racecourse.

This prompted ten year battle by local people and other interested parties to prevent development on Green Belt land. At the Public Inquiry held in 2001, the Planning Inspector allowed the developers appeal against the decision by the Council to reject the application. But in the summer of 2002 the Deputy Prime Minister overturned this decision. There followed threats of a Judicial Review, but in 2005 the developer went into administration.

The future of Fairlop Water was finally resolved when LB Redbridge bought back the lease in 2006.