

## UK Shute weekend 23-24 September 2017

14 Shutists gathered for this weekend which was the eighth in this series of weekend reunions. We welcomed new members from the UK as well as those from the Netherlands and the USA. The location was the river Beaulieu in the heart of the beautiful New Forest area.

On Saturday the venue was Exbury House which was HMS Mastodon during World War 2 and the setting which features in *Requiem for a Wren*. Greetings were exchanged and after lunch our host was John Stanley who took us on a guided walk relating to the Junkers aircraft that was shot down on 18th April 1944. Shute saw the aftermath of this incident and incorporated it as a central theme in *Requiem*. John spent many years researching the shooting down and wrote his book about it, published in 2004. His walk took us via the house and through the grounds occupied by the Wrens and ratings with stops to unfold the story. We then walked down the long field to the actual crash site where the Junkers ended up in a boggy area close to the lane. Retracing our steps we went back to the house where John completed his excellent walk. Although some aspects of the mystery can be explained – why there were 7 crew on board – some remain and in Shute's own words "We may never hear the answers." Many thanks to John for his excellent guided walk which brought the whole incident to life.



John Stanley leads our guided walk



At the crash site of the Exbury Junkers

On Saturday evening we repaired to the Foresters Arms in nearby Brockenhurst for dinner. This was a busy village pub which accommodated us well with a good selection of food.

The venue on Sunday was Bucklers Hard, a unique 18th century village where warships for Nelson's fleet were built and was a hive of activity in the preparations for D-Day. There was time to explore the village and museum and a stroll down to the river before lunch. We then embarked for a boat cruise down the river which took us down as far as Needs Oar Point, past many fine moored sailing yachts and luxurious riverside properties. There was commentary on the history of the river and the wildlife that inhabits it. It was in this stretch of river that Nevil Shute and his DMWD team tested the Swallow smoke-laying glider in the early months of 1944.

Swallow aircraft on board LCT 2119 being prepared for a test flight. Feb 1944



This test was on the Beaulieu river near Needs Oar Point



The main street of Bucklers Hard



View of the River Beaulieu



On board the river cruise



At the conclusion of a great weekend

Back on shore we repaired to the Captain's Cabin Tea room for a cuppa with, of course, scones jam and cream. The sun had shone throughout the weekend but by the end of the day it had clouded over. Time for a group photo and farewells before we went our separate ways. It was a memorable weekend which I hope those who came enjoyed as much as I did.