

## **Report on R-2004 York 15th-16th May 2004**

### **John Anderson**

#### ***Planning.***

Planning began just before Christmas 2003 with the idea of holding a weekend reunion meeting for Shutists following the great success of UK 2003. The concept was to have a weekend meeting, entirely self-financing, for 10-20 people with a dinner, short presentations and possibly a visit. A weekend event would also not encroach on the working week. The choice of venue was between Oxford and York and I contacted Balliol College Oxford, who have Conference facilities (and an impeccable Shute connection). They could not accommodate us on dates suggested and after further researches I made contact with the York tourist information centre who supplied a list of hotels that could meet our requirements.

The Gateway to York hotel was selected after phone calls and a visit. They had suitable accommodation, a conference room and competitive prices for the event as a package. The idea was that attendees would book with, and pay, the hotel directly, rather than the organiser handling payments and bookings etc. The other attraction of this Hotel was its proximity to the Yorkshire Air Museum which houses the Barnes Wallis Collection.

The meeting was publicised in the monthly newsletter, on the Website/Discussion board and also by letter to those who could not come to UK 2003 but who might like to attend this event. The outcome was that we had 18 attendees and almost no-one who expressed initial interest and then dropped out. A pleasing outcome was that, in addition to those who came to UK 2003, we were delighted to welcome newcomers, as well as Roger and Ginny Stark and Laura Schneider from the USA.

#### ***Programme***

I stuck to the plan of running the meeting from Saturday lunchtime to Sunday afternoon the idea being that it would give people time to travel and return. In the event a number of people extended their stay either by arriving on the Friday or leaving on the following Monday or Tuesday (or both!). After very helpful guidance from Steph Gallagher the programme that emerged was:-

Saturday - afternoon visit to Museum, tea, reunion dinner.

Sunday - presentations, discussion, lunch, depart.

#### **Day 1 Saturday 15th May.**

The morning was spent setting up displays in the Conference Room. Such is the enthusiasm and willingness of Shutists that we rapidly filled several tables with displays. Andy Burgess kindly provided several models, issues of Model Engineering as well as a display of micrometers, gauges and tools. John Wilcox provided files of newspaper cuttings, conference tapes from Albuquerque, hymns from Shrewsbury school and much else. Steph Gallagher brought the entire UK lending library which she is handing over to David Dawson-Taylor who will be running it from now on. In addition House of Stratus kindly provided copies of their Shute paperbacks, catalogues and order forms. I provided a display of photographs relating to Shute's projects at the DMWD.

After a sandwich lunch we set off in several cars to the nearby Yorkshire Air Museum, a wartime RAF station which has many aircraft on display including a Halifax bomber. Peter Rix chairman of the Barnes Wallis Trust gave us a guided tour of the Barnes Wallis collection, housed in its own building. Here we saw items from the R100 including parts of its structure, a Y-V joint, models and photographs. Naturally the collection covers all Wallis' work and has a bouncing bomb and much on the Dambusters raid. One item that particularly impressed us were the oak panels from the R100. There was time to wander round and look at the aircraft and displays, even volunteers dressed as World War I Royal Flying corps officers.

After tea with the obligatory scones, jam and cream there was time to view the displays before drinks and our Reunion Dinner. I proposed the toast to NSN and Steph gave us an amusing analysis of a typical Shutist. Four teams competed in a Nevil Shute quiz with questions based on his novels. Many blank looks and head-scratching told me I'd made the questions too hard and I was rescued from total embarrassment by moving on to Bob Adderley who listed many of the flights listed in the novels and asked us to choose which ones we would have liked to be on.

## **Day 2 Sunday 16th May**

We had a lot to get through so I kicked off at 9:15 with a talk on the wartime projects Shute was involved with at the Department of Miscellaneous Weapons Development, illustrated with photographs and extracts from the files at the UK National Archives. These included Flame Throwers, Rockets, Target Gliders and the Swallow Glider project.

John Wilcox, a long time Shutist, then presented a talk on "What did Nevil Shute actually believe?" He gave us food for thought with Shute's Christian upbringing and the religious and spiritual aspects found in many of his books. John's paper of the same title is on the Website and well worth reading.

After coffee Andy Burgess, himself a keen model engineer, talked about Model Engineering, a hobby which Shute pursued actively, probably as a relaxation from writing. Andy had pictures of Shute's models, copies of Model Engineering (on which the Miniature Mechanic is based in "Trustee") and talked about the tools and machines that Shute would have used.

Next came Ken Deacon, a local historian who lives in Howden, giving us a slide show on the history of the Howden Airship Station, including detail of the R100 construction. Ken also brought along copies of the book he has recently published on this topic.

Finally, with time running out, David Dawson-Taylor gave a first hand account of the launch that he, wife Kate, and Martyn Dryden attended in April for the publication of John Stanley's book "The Exbury Junkers" David brought with him signed copies for those who had ordered them. Again there is a written account by David on the website.

Being over-ambitious about what could be squeezed into the morning, the 45 minute session I'd scheduled for "Open Forum and Discussion" turned into 5 minutes! Steph was kind enough to propose a vote of thanks and present me with a bottle of champagne for organising the event.

We finished with a buffet lunch, then it was time to break up the party. Some headed home while others stayed on to sample the many delights of York.

## **Some final thoughts.**

UK Shutists seem to be distributed throughout the UK from the south coast to Scotland so that meeting for an evening get together for supper and discussion is just not feasible. A weekend is about the minimum time required to allow for travelling and the above programme was probably slightly ambitious for the time allocated. The fact that many people extended their stay means that a future event could run for a full 2 days.

The cost for the event of 90 pounds per head including dinner and hotel room, breakfast and Sunday lunch was pretty good value - at least I heard no complaints about the cost. The idea of paying for the package complete and paying the hotel direct worked well. It eliminated the need for the organiser to handle conference bookings and payments separately from hotel room bookings.

18 attendees was just about the right number for the venue. This event shows that something between the US "Chapter" style meetings and full-blown biennial Conferences can work well.