

In his article "The Past and the Future", which appeared in the 1948 Club Annual¹, Keith Turner set out the view that the cheapest way for pilots to gain the flying hours needed to be able to thermal soar effectively was by hill soaring. This view was widely shared and the Club had organised expeditions to the Midland Club's site at the Long Mynd in the Winters of 1947/8 and 1948/9^{3,6}. During 1948 the Club had been, as Keith stated in his article, actively prospecting for a hill site to replace or supplement Lulsgate.

At the AGM on 31 March 1948⁴ Rex Young stated the intention to develop Halesland on the Mendips when national conditions permitted, and the importance of a hill site was re-iterated during a Committee meeting in August that year. It was proposed to use one of the Beaverettes and the Mk 2 mobile winch, which Tony Heron had nearly finished converting, to try out various sites when the recently purchased Ford V8 car was ready to take over launching duties at Lulsgate⁵. By September, the idea of using Halesland had been dropped although a start had been made some time earlier to clear the site of rocks³⁴, because the ATC had taken over the site⁶. Among the other sites then being considered - Nibley, Stinchcombe and Lansdown - was Roundway Hill, and a month later this site was the favourite⁷.

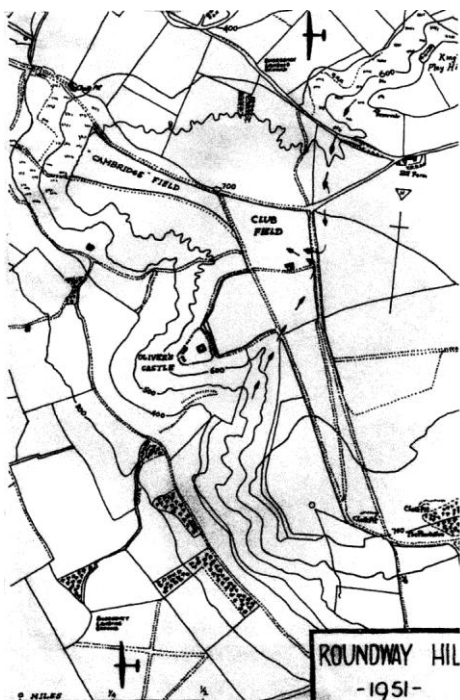


Diagram of site



Aerial View © English Heritage

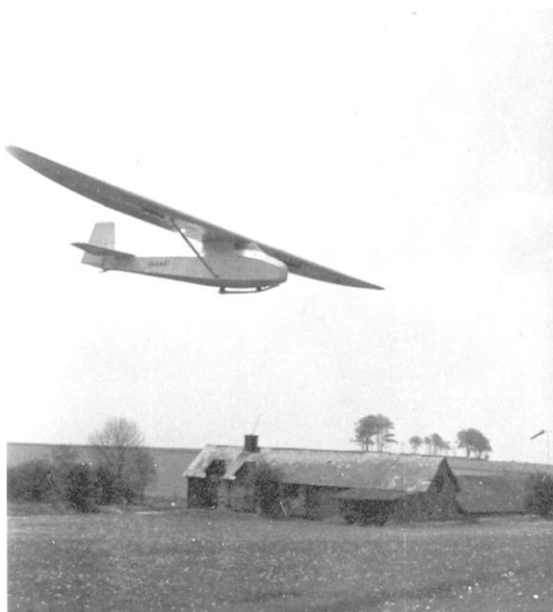
Roundway Hill is situated on the western edge of the Marlborough Downs about three miles north of Devizes, about 20 miles from Bristol as the crow flies. There is a steep predominantly west facing slope about a mile long to the west, though this is indented with a number of gullies. There are rather less steep slopes to the north and south. The land was owned by the Crown Agents and the part the Club was interested in was farmed by a tenant farmer. There were two derelict semi-detached farm cottages with outbuilding round three sides of a courtyard, which had the potential to be converted into a clubhouse, hangars and workshops. These were positioned at OS Ref SU 005,651.

Approaches were made to the farmer through Lyn Mcfarlane and his mother who both knew his nephew ³², and Keith Turner who had flown at the site before the war also was involved. A demonstration of flying was arranged for the farmer in January 1949 ⁸ and after almost a year of negotiations ² with him and the Crown Agents an agreement was concluded in August 1949 ⁹. The rent was £50pa and the Crown Agents agreed to lay on water to the cottages ¹⁰, though the memory is that water was obtained from a well by a hand pump in the middle of the courtyard⁴². The rent included the use of a kite shaped field to the west of the cottages. The longest run was about 500 yards in a north west direction, but a more typical run was about 300 yards. It was bounded by a hedge to the north and west, and by a track with wire fences to the east.



David Farrar & Barry Leight in cottage kitchen in January 1949

Basil Meades, trustee of the Kemsley Flying Trust, visited the site soon after and offered a loan to support its development, but the Club felt that it was unable to take on any further debt, and so the development was made using the Club's own resources ¹¹.



Grunau approaching from the east



Cottages/barn from the north east

The cottages were in a poor state of repair with leaking roofs and boarded up windows with rotten frames ^{28&25}. A formidable amount of work was done in the face of post war restrictions and shortages of materials, and with limited finances. The majority of the work was done by Club members under the leadership of Bill Gotch. The Crown Agents helped by providing various materials including window frames and glass¹², and by April 1950 the access track had been treated with 20 tons of cinders²⁵ and the first cottage had lighting working, powered by a 12volt generator¹⁴ thanks to Dennis Flack¹³.

Work continued on the essentials throughout 1950 and 1951, by which time the two cottages had been interconnected and electricity extended into the second cottage, drains laid²⁶, the kitchen equipped with water, sink²⁷, calor gas rings and stove^{17&18}, a bar installed¹⁶, and the roof repaired²⁰. Second hand furnishings were donated by Club members¹⁴. Throughout this time groups of enthusiastic members more or less camped out in the cottages at weekends, with greater attendances for bank holiday camps. With the basics dealt with, less essential work was continued over the next two years. Ration allocations were obtained for the site and Mary Martyr organised the catering¹⁸.



Cottages from courtyard



Buildings from the south east



Outbuildings from south west



Entrance to barn used as workshop and hangar

Access to Roundway was more difficult than to Lulsgate. Few members had their own transport and although petrol came off the ration in 1950, it was a 30 odd mile journey from Bristol on 1950s standard roads. For those unable to arrange lifts, there was a bus service to the centre of Devizes, which had to be followed by a walk of 5400 of "Dusty Miller's paces"²⁵ from the bus station.

The equipment kept permanently at Roundway included a Tutor BGA497³³ (without spoilers), the Heron winch and a Beaverette. The Club Olympia and Grunau (later replaced by the Prefect) and privately owned gliders visited for periods from time to time and the T31 flew there in 1953²². The gliders were kept wholly or partially de-rigged as the out buildings were not large enough for a fully rigged glider.³⁸



Rigging the Tutor and Grunau

Launch heights of only 400 to 500 feet were obtainable from the original field^{33&38} but for periods, when the farmer did not require it for agriculture, the Club had the use of the field to the north west of the cottages, known as the Cambridge field. This was a narrow field about 600 yards long running from the other field towards the edge of the hill. This allowed a longer winch run and greater launch heights but needed a relay of signallers because of the undulating nature of the surface²¹.

A problem at Roundway was the chalky nature of the top soil throughout the district. In wet weather, this turned into slippery mud, making driving over the field almost impossible. On occasions the only way to position the winch on the far side of the field was to pull the cable out to the winch point by hand, secure it to a gate post, and then engage the winch engine to pull the winch itself into position³⁸.



Pulling the Forbes trailer through the mud



View towards the slope with more mud

An instructors' rota was established, with the "Duty Instructor" being in charge of flying at Roundway⁴¹.

However, flying got off to a good start with Dusty Miller completing 5 Hours in the Grunau on 15 March 1950 and several other pilots making soaring flights on the same day. Later in the same year 36½ hours were flown on a 5 day Easter camp by the Tutor, Olympia and two visiting Olympias.^{25&29} Many other good flights were made, and also many quick circuits from low launches which did not find lift. The south slope was soared in November 1950²⁶. Given the size of the field, the very low level of experience, particularly of the Tutor pilots, and its lack of spoilers it is surprising how few approach

accidents there were. (Ken Brown for example was passed out to fly the Tutor at Roundway with only 1½ hours and 42 flights solo)³⁸.

However the Tutor was written off in August 1951 after a pilot got out of position after a low launch. It crossed the field from the south with the wind behind it, passed over the hedge, clipped a strut on a fence post at the north side of the next field, leaving the strut behind, and flew out over the valley. It finally hit a tree with one wing and ended up upside down in a small paddock. The pilot was unhurt.^{35&38}

The Olympia was spun in on a low circuit after a cable break in April 1952³⁶ and the Grunau was damaged in Aug 1953 after being briefed to land in a field, which turned out to be unsuitable, to position it for a bungee launch. Investigation of the damage showed that its glue had deteriorated and this glider was also written off^{37,22&23}.



Rex Young briefing a Tutor pilot

A limited number of aero-tows were made from Roundway. The first, on 20th May 1951, was with Doug Jones in the Olympia towed behind the Bristol and Wessex Aero Club's Auster flown by John Cochrane using a 50 foot long rope. The take off from the original field was to the south east. The Technique was to run up to full power stationary and with flaps up. The brakes were released and when the tug was about 50 yards from the fence the flaps were lowered to become airborne and climb away³⁹. An attempt was also made to aero-tow the Grunau on the same day, but it had a problem with the drop wheels and skid on the bumpy ground and the launch was aborted⁴⁰. Current records do not show whether any other aero-tow launches were made from the site.

After the first enthusiasm, attendances at weekends tended to drop off, even though instructors were rotated for the site, and on occasions when the weather was soarable, there were not enough people to be able to operate. However, camps organised for bank holiday weekends were well supported.³⁸ At the Easter camp in 1954 when the finishing touches were being put to the clubhouse³⁰ it was announced that the farmer had terminated his agreement with the club. He said that flying might continue after the grass season, though he would require the use of some of the out buildings during the winter⁴³. In the event, because of the impending loss of Lulsgate to Bristol Airport, and the need to prospect for a new home, the last flight at Roundway was on the 1st May 1954⁴⁴. The last of the Club's property was removed from the site in the Autumn of 1955²⁴.

During the four and a half years the site was operated, 200 hours were flown in all, with 1300 launches, 12 C certificates and 8 silver legs being gained³¹. Untold hours of work were put in also. Running two sites had however been less successful than had been hoped, largely because of the distance to Roundway but also because for the people who made the journey there was no guarantee that there would be enough people there to operate. Also the better standard of training following the introduction of the two seater at Lulsgate and the higher launches achieved by auto-towing with piano wire there helped to make the journey seem less necessary. If the experiment had not been entirely successful, at least it was by no means an abject failure³⁸.



Tutor returning from the slope



And landed

References to Section 5

<u>Source</u>	<u>Location in Computer</u>
1 Past and the Future - Keith Turner Annual 1948	<Bulletins> b Annual 1948
2 Back room ballast - Rex Young - Annual 1949	<Bulletins> b Annual 1949
3 Committee meeting 16 Nov 1947	<Min1> 1-105 to 1-109
4 Annual General meeting 31 March 1948	<Min1> 1-125 to 1-131
5 Committee meeting 29 Aug 1948	<Min1> 1-163 to 1-169
6 Committee meeting 30 Sept 1948	<Min1> 1-170 to 1-176
7 Committee meeting 29 Oct 1948	<Min1> 1-177 to 1-181
8 Committee meeting 5 Jan 1949	<Min1> 1-188 to 1-192
9 Committee meeting 5 Aug 1949	<Min1> 1-231 to 1-236
10 Committee meeting 2 Sept 1949	<Min1> 1-237 to 1-242
11 Committee meeting 7 Oct 1949	<Min1> 2-1 to 2-6
12 Committee meeting 14 Nov 1949	<Min1> 2-7 to 2-11
13 Committee meeting 15 March 1950	<Min1> 2-29 to 2-35
14 Committee meeting 14 April 1950	<Min1> 2-43 to 2-47
15 Committee meeting 12 Dec 1950	<Min1> 2-84 to 2-86
16 Committee meeting 23 Feb 1951	<Min1> 2-92 to 2-96
17 Committee meeting 8 April 1951	<Min1> 2-106 to 2-110
18 Committee meeting 17 Aug 1951	<Min1> 2-125 to 2-127
19 Committee meeting 14 Sept 1951	<Min1> 2-128 to 2-130
20 Committee meeting 23 Nov 1951	<Min1> 2-135 to 2-137
21 Committee meeting 12 Sept 1952	<Min1> 2-165 to 2-168
22 Committee meeting 13 Oct 1953	<Min1> 2-214 to 2-219
23 Committee meeting 20 Nov 1953	<Min1> 2-220 to 2-223
24 Committee meeting 19 Sept 1955	<Min1> 2-296 to 2-300
25 Bulletin Jan 1950	<Bulletins> b Jan 1950
26 Bulletin Nov 1950	<Bulletins> b Nov 1950
27 Bulletin June 1951	<Bulletins> b Jun 1951
28 Gliding Notes - Dr Slater - Aeroplane 7 Oct 1949	<Aeroplane Gliding Notes> Image 51
29 Gliding Notes - Dr Slater - Aeroplane 11 April 1950	<Aeroplane Gliding Notes> Image 52
30 Gliding Notes - Dr Slater - Aeroplane 23 April 1954	<Cuttings Album> 1608
31 Gliding Notes - Dr Slater - Aeroplane 16 Sept 1955	<Aeroplane Gliding Notes> Image 70
32 Letter from Lyn McFarlane 2003	<Miscellaneous> 010
33 "Tommy" Thompson log book	<Miscellaneous> 030-10
34 Early Days of the Bristol Gliding Club - Lyn McFarlane and David Farrar	<Miscellaneous> 056 page 4
35 Report on Tutor accident	<Accidents> a-83
36 Report on Olympia accident	<Accidents> a-77
37 Report on Grunau accident	<Accidents> a-63
38 As remembered by Ken Brown in 2006	
39 As remembered by Doug Jones in 2006	
40 Report on Grunau accident	<Accidents> a-91 (E4)
41 Instructors' rota June 1950	<Miscellaneous> 068
42 As remembered by John Harding in 2007	
43 Bulletin May 1954	<Bulletins> b May 1954
44 Bulletin July 1954	<Bulletins> b Jul 1954