

Early in 1954, rumours were circulating that there were plans to move Bristol Airport from its home at Whitchurch to Lulsgate, because the airfield at Whitchurch was restricted in size and was surrounded by housing and so was unsuitable for development. At the Club's AGM in March that year, John Cochrane, the Chairman, told the Members that the Club's future at Lulsgate was uncertain³, and a few months afterwards a sub-committee was set up to investigate possible alternative sites⁴.

The main areas of interest were the Mendips, the Cotswolds and a number of disused airfields. It was considered that Roundway was not suitable as a main site because it was not suitable for training, it did not have scope for expansion and its use was subject to constant re-negotiations with the farmer as he rotated the use of his fields¹. Possible sites on the Cotswold edge were explored on the ground and the Heron winch was withdrawn from Roundway and was used to try out various fields.

On the 18th September John Hahn aerotowed the Olympia, piloted by Doug Jones, to Haresfield, where Fred Worley of the Old Gloucestershire Club had flown⁵, and next day 16 flights were made there⁷⁴. The Olympia was then moved to Nympsfield and between the 25th September and the 23rd October a number of flights were made from the two fields alongside the B4066 bounded by the two roads into Nympsfield Village. This involved capping the wall dividing the two fields with a balk of timber and pulling the cable out over it by hand to get as long a winch run as possible⁶⁷. The T21 was taken out on the 10th October and gave flights to a number of Club members as well as to Mary Wooldridge, who owned the land⁶⁶. During this period some good soaring flights were made in northerly winds. However, the wind was southerly for most of the period and though attempts were made to soar the south west bowl, these were not successful. (See Appendix 1 for details of these expeditions).



Fields where the first exploratory flights were made at Nympsfield: The two fields just beyond the road



Basil Meads

Halesland on the Mendips was looked at, but no flying was done there⁵. By November, Nympsfield was the firm favourite and a field on the Cotswold edge alongside the north ridge had been put up for sale²³. The Prefect was taken there and flown on two days in November and December⁷⁴ and further site exploration ceased⁷¹.

The Club immediately contacted Basil Meads, the secretary to the trustees of the Kemsley Flying Trust for his opinion of the site and the prospects of a loan to purchase it⁶. Pending a visit to look at the field, Basil Meads requested the Club to provide up to date accounts, a 6 inch to mile map of the site and estimates of the cost of developing the Club there^{24,26}.

The field on offer was the west most of a group of three⁶⁸ fields which together constituted a 90 acre unit running between the B4066 Stroud to Dursley Road and the Woodchester Valley about a mile from Nympsfield Village. This ran alongside a north facing slope and within easy gliding range of a slope facing west. The field was unsuitable for grazing cattle because it lacked water, and was generally of poor agricultural quality. It had been put down to crop that year, but not very successfully⁶⁷. The farmer, Mr Dalby, was offering 30 acres at £25 per acre²⁵. The Club considered that 30 acres was insufficient for safe operation but the farmer was adamant that it was out of the question to sell more than 50 acres²⁷.



The Field on offer was the one cut by the left edge of the photograph



John Hahn

An informal Club Meeting was held at the Crown and Dove Hotel in the Centre of Bristol on 26th November to inform the members about the situation. The various options were set out by John Hahn; namely to try to get the use of another disused airfield at Charmy Down where the RAFGSA operated, or Keevil, or to go for a hill site on the Mendips or at Nympsfield. Although the Mendips provided a long ridge, the wind on the slope also tended to bring bad weather. John Parry-Jones had devise a system for rating the potential sites, with points for suitability for operating, soaring potential, membership catchment etc, and considered that Nympsfield rated highly.

John Burleigh, the secretary, pointed out that it was not a straight forward question of buying a site, but that there would be a number of bureaucratic obstacles to overcome. Permission would be required from various authorities such as Agricultural Executive Committee, the electricity distribution authority who put up pylons, as well as District Planning Offices etc. John Cochrane told the meeting that 40 acres was now definitely for sale at Nympsfield, but that we really needed more like 90 for satisfactory operation². The consensus was that the Club should try to rent the required fields. However after the meeting the farmer ruled this out. ^{2,74}.



John Parry-Jones



John Burleigh

Basil Meads believed that though 50 acres would give a run of 1150 yards, compared with 1200 at Lulsgate, the fact that the site was surrounded with trees meant that the comparison was not valid²⁵. As a result of persistent negotiation by John Parry-Jones, the offer had risen to 65 acres by early December, plus a strip giving a run of 1500 yards. But Dalby was pressing for a firm commitment to buy as he needed either to sell or to prepare the land for the next year's use. By the middle of December, without having definite backing from the Kemsley fund, the Club was forced to tell Dalby that it could not give him a firm commitment; he was free to sell elsewhere, though the Club was still interested in buying³⁰.

Because of other demands on his time, Basil Meads asked John Furlong to visit the site on his behalf, which he did in Early January³². As a result of his assessment, the Kemsley Trustees agreed at their January meeting to increase the scope of their loan to the Club from the roughly £900 which was then outstanding, to a total of £5,000, repayable over 15 years³³ to support the purchase of the field. At a special Club committee meeting on 27 January 1955 attended by Basil Meads, John Cochrane responded that this was insufficient to set the site up, being little more than enough to buy the land and buildings and that £7,300 would be needed, while John Parry-Jones argued that £12,500 would be a more adequate figure to set up a viable club. Basil Meads responded that £5000 was the maximum the Trustees were willing to lend to any Club, but he appeared to appreciate the force of the argument^{7&71}.

In the meantime, the Club had set in motion the necessary planning applications and at Basil Meads' request had obtained a quotation for a hangar and a valuation of the site and had prepared a costed development plan^{29,31,34&35}. The valuation, dated 26 January, was for 71 acres and included an implement shed and a building described as "comprising sheds and loose boxes"³⁴.

On 1st February Basil wrote to John Cochrane to say that he was willing to propose to the Trustees that the Club should be granted a Mortgage of £3,200 at 2% pa to buy the land and the buildings with an indefinite repayment period, in addition to topping up the loan to £5,000, with the Trust having a first debenture on the Club's assets³⁶. On the 12th February he confirmed that the Trustees had agreed these provisions in principle and that the Club could go ahead with the purchase³⁷. The Club had held an extraordinary general meeting of members on 10th February in Carwardines Tea House in Baldwin Street in which it was agreed unanimously to go ahead with negotiations for the purchase. It was mentioned at the meeting that The Electricity Board were currently erecting a line of pylons just off the west end of the field, but that the committee did not believe that this constituted any additional hazard to the already existing trees⁷⁵.

At this stage the farmer had agreed to sell 77 acres for £3,350 including £1400 for the implement shed and barn³⁸. Finally, after the formalities had been completed and the various planning consents obtained³⁸, the Club Secretary, John Burleigh, signed the contract on the purchase on 29 March 1955. The final figure was £3,400 for 80 acres and the buildings⁸. The conveyance was completed on 25 May⁵³, and the development of the site was started.



The field under plough May 1955



John Cochrane

Following the signing of the contract a work programme was agreed by the Committee which included an immediate start to the cultivation and seeding of the land and provision of fencing. A brochure was to be prepared by the end of May laying out a development plan with estimated costs⁸. This Committee meeting was attended by Basil Meads, and it should be noted that the Kemsley Trust was consulted and kept informed about the Club's plans throughout.

Once the contract had been signed, erection of fencing proceeded using Club labour under the direction of John Parry-Jones^{47,49} though this had not been completed by January 1956^{9,58}. The field was ploughed, and seeding was under way at the start of May. A good quality grass seed mixture was used, costing £900, so as to be able to graze sheep or to take a hay crop in later years and so raise revenue^{9,47}. This also allayed local criticism that the field was being lost to agriculture⁴⁸. It was recognised that gliding operations at Nympsfield would not be possible for several months until the grass had established itself and a hangar had been built, though a great deal of preparatory work was necessary on the site in the meantime⁴⁵. This included the construction of a wide entrance onto the roadway to the west of the barn, for which a tree and a section of the boundary wall had to be removed^{44,71}. John Cochrane consulted experts on soil stabilisation, for giving sound foundations for runways and paths^{46,52} though this was not found necessary as the field had shallow soil over a limestone base⁷¹. A large cylindrical water tank and a pump, donated by John Burleigh's mother, were collected from the Roebuck Hotel in Okehampton using the fire engine^{9,71}.



Collection of the water tank

At about this time, attempts had been made to revive the old Gloucester Gliding Club, but they had had trouble getting the 40 members needed to secure Kemsley support. Once they heard of the Bristol Club's activity in the area they enquired about the possibility of their members joining the Bristol Club as a block with the waiver of the entrance fee. This was agreed, with the warning that there would be little chance of flying for some time^{9,45}. The new members included Fred Worley,

a local farmer, who had been secretary of the original Gloucester Club, and

who gave the Club a tractor and other agricultural implements and a winch (in need of overhaul) on permanent loan^{14,16}, and Toby Fisher and Col Don Tapp who owned a Kite II⁷¹.

The Club President, Air Commodore Sir Egbert Cadbury, made a donation of £250 towards the development of the new site. The donation was routed through the Playing Fields Association to take advantage of tax relief on charitable donations^{54,12}.



The Barn in May 1955

Throughout the summer, tenders were explored for building a hangar and providing a Clubhouse. John Cochrane contacted several firms for estimates for the hangar^{37,40,41,42&56}, and made unsuccessful bids to buy surplus hangars situated at Lyneham⁵⁰ and Aston Down^{10,51}. While visiting an agricultural show, John Burleigh came across the stand of Curtis Engineering, a firm who specialised in farm buildings and whose prices seemed reasonable⁷³. It was decided in November to accept a tender from this company for a 60 by 70 by 10 foot hangar for £1640¹⁵, and work started on the foundations in January 1956¹⁶. Initial estimates for the conversion of the barn for a clubhouse proved very costly, around £1500, partly because both of the building firms contacted proposed to rebuild the roof from scratch^{55,60}. Consequently the idea of buying a prefabricated building was investigated¹², but this proved even more expensive⁵⁷. So a local builder, Mr W T Whitman, was approached, and he was able to submit a much lower estimate (£438-2-7¹⁹) which included rectifying the roof rather than rebuilding it⁵⁹. Also at this stage, the Club expected to be able to supply some materials, such as hardboard and window frames, from redundant Air Ministry stock at Lulsgate and from the Bristol Aeroplane Company Housing division, which was being run down. The Club labour was also proposed to do much of the internal fitting^{61,62}. These investigations meant that work was not started on the barn conversion until March 1956¹⁹.



The hangar under construction early 1956



The site before flying started (Just possible to make out the quarry and shed - also treeless caravan site)

Meanwhile flying continued at Lulsgate. The courses were again run very successfully by Mike Royce and the trading surplus for the year was an excellent £442²⁰. At the end of the season, Mrs Clarke at the Golden Lion Hotel was presented with an engraved cup in acknowledgement of her hosting the courses over eight years¹³. In order to prepare for the transfer to Nympsfield, where auto-towing would not be possible, it was decided to build a new two drum winch under the leadership of Mike Garnett. Also two new trailers were to be built for the Prefect and as a replacement for the open T21 trailer which had been wrecked in a road accident. These were under the leadership of Alwyn Sutcliffe and Jack Houghton. Jack was employed as a full time ground engineer. A last visit was paid to Roundway to retrieve anything useful^{11,14}.

In October 1955 John Burleigh resigned from the secretaryship because of his work in Australia, and he was succeeded by Tom Parkes¹⁴.

Towards the end of 1955, the grass at Nympsfield had established enough for a limited amount of flying to be done there to familiarise the instructors with the site. This was done in the Olympia^{12,70}. Sheep were introduced to the field in December, and additional electric fencing was put up to control them¹⁶, though fencing continued to be a problem for some time¹⁷. General development work continued, with the hangar site being levelled, the dew pond in front of the barn being filled in with top soil being moved from an area on the south side of the field to the area in front of the barn. That work was done by a local farmer¹⁸. The Council levelled and surfaced the area of the new entrance²¹. Members made a rough job of building dry stone walls bounding the entrance, but these were later rebuilt by a professional waller⁷¹.

Work on the hangar had started by early December¹⁶ and was completed in early May²². The price had risen by £120 to cover the building of a dwarf wall and the provision of roof lights⁶⁵. A camp was held on the site over Easter 1956²¹ with 17 hours soaring done by three gliders in ridge and thermal lift over the first two days. As John Cochrane said, "it is reassuring that we really have bought a serious soaring site and not just a hayfield on a hill top"⁶³. It was decided to cease operations at Lulsgate at the end of May²¹ and to hold a rally at Nympsfield over Whitsun 19 to 22nd May to inaugurate the site⁶⁴.



The hangar complete, and work started on the clubhouse conversion. The area in front of the barn cleared, and the dew pond filled in. About May 1956

The final removal from Lulsgate was accomplished using the fire engine as transport, towing the closed trailer. Several journeys were made, with members packing up everything removable from the buildings the Club had rented, including the concrete picketing blocks and wooden staging from the hangar. During all these journeys a Cadet wing was tied into the trailer to comply with the law then current that trailers of that length were only permitted on the road if carrying an indivisible load⁷³. It was found that the new part-built two drum winch was too tall to come through the workshop doors, and these were suitably modified so that it could be extracted⁷¹.

The Whitsun Rally was a great success with 7 visiting sailplanes and the club's 5 aircraft. 50 hours were flown in thermal over the 4 days and 6 Silver legs were gained⁶⁵. This marked the end of the transfer of operations from Lulsgate, but only the start of the development at Nympsfield.



Some of the gliders at the rally

The credit for pushing through the purchase of the site must be shared between John Parry-Jones and John Cochrane. John Parry-Jones for his persistent and persuasive negotiations with the farmer to sell the area the Club required, and his energy and foresight in planning and pushing through his plans for the new site. John Cochrane for his negotiations with Basil Meads, and for organising the provision of the buildings and dealing with the enormous quantity of paper-work which the move involved.

Appendix to Section 7Details of the expeditions to the Cotswolds^{66,67 & 74}At Haresfield

18th September Doug Jones had given an aerobatic display in the Club Olympia at a Battle of Britain day show at Filton. Immediately after this John Hahn towed him to Haresfield for site evaluation. They arrived too late for any further flying that day.

19th September The wind was South 10 knots. In 10 launches, Derek Stowe, John Hahn and John Cochrane managed 14, 16 and 17 minutes respectively.

At Nympsfield

The fields used were the two alongside the west ridge, on the east side of the B between the two roads leading to Nympsfield village. The winch cable had to be drawn out by hand and passed over a balk of timber on the wall dividing the fields.

25th September The party was moved to Nympsfield and flying started late in the afternoon. In a 10-15 knot northwest wind, 3 launches gave flight times of 34, 26 and 26 minutes for John Parry-Jones, Derek Stowe and Peter Westmoreland.

26th September A late start due to mechanical problems, but 4 flights of 50, 18, 15 and 15 minutes by Mike Hodgson, Peter Westmorland, John Hahn and John Daniell.

2nd October A south east 10 - 15 knot wind. 2 launches: a circuit by John Parry-Jones and 18 minutes by Peter Westmoreland over the south east bowl.

3rd October 7 Circuits in a 5 knot south wind.

10th October The T21 arrived lashed to the partly finished iron trailer. It made 12 circuits in a light west wind. John Parry-Jones did the first six and flew Mary Wooldridge, who owned the land, and her family. Alwyn Sutcliffe flew the rest. Alwyn's P2s included Gordon Fisher, Jim Tudgey, Duffy James, Laing, George Foord^{66&67}.

17th October Alwyn Sutcliffe's log showed flights on this day, but they were not recorded in the summary given in the Club's bulletin.

23rd October Last day of flying from these fields. With the T21 back at Lulsgate, the Olympia made 4 flights in a strong turbulent south wind, and no steady lift was found in the south east bowls.

From the "long narrow field at the north end of the ridge", using the Prefect

21st November Only 2 circuits were attempted in a strong south wind, but the cross wind landing technique was considered satisfactory in the very turbulent conditions.

5th December 6 launches in a light west wind. Launch heights of between 1200 and 1400 feet were achieved, but the only soaring was 15 minutes by Gordon Fisher.

Section 7 References

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>File</u>
1	Aeroplane - Gliding notes 8 October 1954	<Aeroplane Gliding Notes> Image 65
2	Aeroplane - Gliding notes 10 December 1954	Ditto Image 66
3	Minutes of 8 th AGM on 26 March 1954	<Min2> 2-234 to 2-236
4	Minutes of Committee meeting undated	<Min2> 2-248 to 2-249
5	Minutes of Committee meeting 11 October 1954	<Min2> 2-250 to 2-254
6	Minutes of Committee meeting 11 January 1955	<Min2> 2-257 to 2-259
7	Minutes of Extraordinary Committee meeting 17 January 1955	<Min2> 2-260 to 2-261
8	Minutes of Committee meeting 29 March 1955	<Min2> 2-268 to 2-269
9	Minutes of Committee meeting 27 April 1955	<Min2> 2-275 to 2-280
10	Minutes of Committee meeting 19 May 1955	<Min2> 2-280 to 2-286
11	Minutes of Committee meeting 16 June 1955	<Min2> 2-287 to 2-290
12	Minutes of Committee meeting 17 August 1955	<Min2> 2-291 to 2-295
13	Minutes of Committee meeting 19 September 1955	<Min2> 2-296 to 2-300
14	Minutes of Committee meeting 18 October 1955	<Min2> 2-301 to 2-306
15	Minutes of Committee meeting 7 November 1955	<Min2> 2-307 to 2-311
16	Minutes of Committee meeting 5 December 1955	<Min2> 2-312 to 2-316
17	Minutes of Committee meeting 12 January 1956	<Min2> 2-317 to 2-321
18	Minutes of Committee meeting 9 February 1956	<Min2> 2-322 to 2-326
19	Minutes of Committee meeting 8 March 1956	<Min2> 2-327 to 2-330
20	Minutes of 10 th AGM on 22 March 1956	<Min2> 2-331 to 2-336
21	Minutes of Committee meeting 24 April 1956	<Min2> 2-342 to 2-346
22	Minutes of Committee meeting 14 May 1956	<Min3> 3-0 to 3-4
23	Letter John Cochrane to Basil Meads 9 November 1954	<NPF>n4
24	Letter Meads to Cochrane 17 November 1954	<NPF> n6
25	Letter Cochrane to Meads 19 November 1954	<NPF> n8
26	Letter Meads to Cochrane 22 November 1954	<NPF> n9
27	Letter Cochrane to Meads 30 November 1954	<NPF> n10/11
28	Letter Meads to Cochrane 8 December 1954	<NPF> n12/13
29	Letter Cochrane to County Planning Officer 9 December 1954	<NPF> n14
30	Letter Cochrane to Meads 12 December 1954	<NPF> n15/16
31	Letter Cochrane to Cymric Trading Co 15 December 1954	<NPF> n17
32	Letter Meads to Cochrane 3 January 1955	<NPF> n21
33	Letter Meads to Cochrane 14 January 1955	<NPF> n24/25
34	Howes, Luce, Williams & Paynes Valuation 26 Jan 1955	<NPF> n31-n33
35	John Parry-Jones' Estimate of cost of setting up Club at Nympsfield	<NPF> n35-n38
36	Letter Meads to Cochrane 1 February 1955	<NPF> n41/42
37	Letter Meads to Cochrane 12 February 1955	<NPF> n50
38	Letter Cochrane to Meads 14 December 1955	<NPF> n51
39	Letter Scott & redwood to Cochrane 14 Feb 1955	<NPF> n52
40	Letter Cochrane to Cement & Concrete Assoc. 16 February 1955	<NPF> n55

NB <NPF> is short for <Nympsfield Purchase File>

References continued

<u>Ref</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>File</u>
41	Letter Cochrane to Sawyers Manufacturing 18 February 1955	<NPF> n67
42	Letter Cochrane to Ludwell & Co 25 February 1955	<NPF> n68
43	Letter Cochrane to Meads 5 March 1955	<NPF> n73
44	Letter Cochrane to Gloucester C.C. 6 March 1955	<NPF> n78
45	Letter Cochrane to S W Reeves 25 April 1955	<NPF> n87
46	Letter Cochrane to H E Brook-Bradley 25 April 1955	<NPF> n89
47	Letter Cochrane to Meads 1 May 1955	<NPF> n91
48	Letter Cochrane to R A Davis 10 May 1955	<NPF> n99
49	Letter Dalby to Parry-Jones 10 May 1955	<NPF> n100
50	Letter Cochrane to Clerk of Works RAF Lynham 12 May 1955	<NPF> n105
51	Letter Cochrane to Under Sec. of State, Air Ministry 21 May 1955	<NPF> n116
52	Letter P J Squelch to Cochrane 24 May 1955	<NPF> n120
53	H Willott Solicitors to Cochrane 25 May 1955	<NPF> n121/122
54	Nat. Playingfields Assoc. to Cochrane 13 July 1955	<NPF> n133
55	Philip Ford & son to Cochrane 19 August 1955	<NPF> n146/147
56	Letter Cochrane to Curtis Engineering 22 August 1955	<NPF> n150
57	Letter Meads to Cochrane 22 December 1955	<NPF> n162/163
58	Letter Dalby to Cochrane 6 January 1966	<NPF> n167
59	Schedule o work on barn February 1966	<NPF> n170
60	Letter Baxter to Cochrane 1 February 1966	<NPF> n171/179
61	Letter Cochrane to Meads 13 February 1966	<NPF> n178
62	Letter Cochrane to Meads 4 March 1966	<NPF> n198/199
63	Letter Cochrane to Meads 3 April 1966	<NPF> n203
64	Tom Parkes: general invitation to Whitsun Rally	<NPF>n214/225
65	Letter Cochrane to Meads 24 May 1966	<NPF> n224
66	Alwyn Sutcliffe's log Book	
67	As remembered by Alwyn Sutcliffe	
68	As remembered by Gordon Fisher	
69	Doug Jones' log book	
70	Ken Brown's log book	
71	As remembered by Ken Brown	
72	As remembered by John Harding in 2007	
73	As remembered by John Burleigh in 2008	
74	Bulletin December 1954	<Bulletins> b Dec 1954
75	Bulletin February 1955	<Bulletins> b Feb 1955
76	Bulletin March 1955	<Bulletins> b Mar 1955

NB <NPF> is short for <Nympsfield Purchase File>