

BUSES



The life of
Sidney James CHAMBERLAIN OBE DFC
1899-1974

Bryn Elliott

Sidney Chamberlain was the only person known to have been involved, at a variety of levels, in the first forty years of Metropolitan Police flying activity. The police section of his life's work was preceded by a somewhat more exciting period in the service of his country during the Great War.

I never knew him but many years ago met his son who proudly showed me the family collection of artefacts he had left them. From copies of these precious images and documents I was able to work backwards to discover yet more documents and even an ancient flickering News-reel to present the story that follows.

The joy in this task was that I have merely embellished his own story, a story that had been largely overlooked by historians but that he was quite clearly proud of.

Family Lines

Born in Islington, London, on April 24, 1899 Sidney came from a God fearing family with a number of church connections. Whereas his father, James Arthur Chamberlain, was a civil servant with the General Post Office, later awarded the perhaps obligatory Imperial Service Order for his work there, his mother, Annie Maria was for many years Church Secretary of the Islington Congregational Chapel in Upper Street, N1. Elsie his sister followed their mother's leaning toward the church in being Chairman, later President, of the Congregational Federation in Nottingham. Elsie, like Sidney, had aeronautical connections, being the first woman Chaplain to the Royal Air Force at St.Athan, Cardiff in 1946-7.

Sidney was educated at the prestigious Dame Alice Owen's School, or Owen's School, then in Islington, prior to joining the Royal Navy at the age of 18 in mid-1917. Between June 3 and July 11 he joined hundreds of others being inducted to the military way of life at Crystal Palace in south London. The strict regime of 'square bashing' was followed by immediate transportation to France to start flying training with the Royal Naval Air Service (R.N.A.S.) at Vendome.

France

The airfield was some 145km south-west of Paris, between Le Mans and Orleans and was located 5 km to the South of the town of Vendome. The area was sufficiently removed from the war to enable training to be undertaken with little danger from incursions by the enemy. For the new trainees flying was not to be undertaken for more than a month as the theory of flight was first tackled in an intensive period of ground instruction. Although Vendome was a British R.N.A.S. airfield the majority of the equipment was French or American. In addition to the French Caudron G.III and American Curtiss JN4 "Jenny" that Sidney and his compatriots were to learn to fly in, examples of the French A.R., Maurice Farman Shorthorn and Henry Farman F20 occupied the airfield. The main aircraft used for training, the Caudron, was a frail looking biplane powered by a 100hp Anzani engine. Over 50 of this type were used at Vendome, some reports suggested that there were as many as 100.



Finally the great day of commencing flying instruction arrived for Sidney Chamberlain on August 17, 1917. Pupil and instructor, Warrant Officer Lloyd, climbed aboard the frail looking Caudron G.III, N3051, shortly before 0600hrs and undertook the first seven minute flight.

Sidney underwent five hours of dual control instruction in three Caudron's over the next two weeks, always under the watchful eyes of Lloyd, before this Warrant Officer sent him on his first solo flight on September 3, 1917. The first flight of the day, at 0706hrs, was a final ten minute

check test of circuits and landings in N3050 prior to the moment when he was sent off on his own in N3296 at 0732hrs. He had not flown this machine before. After twenty minutes of lonely circuits Sidney returned to the airfield, being then almost immediately placed in yet another strange machine, N3258, for a further fourteen minutes of solo flight.

In five days of continued solo flying he was able to extend himself enough to undertake a two hour flight in N3240 - although this jaunt came to an unscheduled halt in a precautionary landing at Auzouer some twenty miles from Vendome after Sidney lost his bearings. He spent the night in a farmhouse. This particular Caudron became the standard training mount for a week of solo flight which ended when the fledgling pilot reported to 'F' Flight at the same airfield for further dual control training in a new type of machine.



Over a few days new instructors', Flight Lieutenant How and Flight Commander Huggan, replaced Lloyd in passing on the individual idiosyncrasies of the more conventional looking American Curtiss "Jenny" aircraft for a matter of 90 minutes dual flying time prior to the pupil's return to solo flight.

With only a matter of twenty two and one half hours flying in Caudron and Curtiss aircraft to his credit Sidney Chamberlain was posted on to the next section of his training in Lincolnshire, England.

CHAMBERLAIN'S AIRCRAFT

FRANCE Vendome

Aug/Sept 1917	Caudron GIII	N3050, N3051, N3053, N3240, N3258, N3296
	Curtiss JN4	3438, 8813, 8838, 8869, 8871, 8874

England

After spending a week travelling and taking a short break from duty he reported to the R.N.A.S. station at Cranwell for further training. The first week of renewed training was spent on a workshop course; it was not until October 2 that Sidney was again able to take to the air. As a probationary flying officer he was introduced to another new type, the 80 mph Avro 504; both the 504B and 504G model attached to 'C' Flight were to be flown in the first section of the ensuing weeks training. The dual training instructors in 'C' Flight were Flight Lieutenants Howe and Cook.

On October 20 Sidney transferred over to 'D' Flight at Cranwell to undergo flying in the Royal Aircraft Factory B.E.2. Two models of this sturdy but sedate type were flown, the 70mph B.E.2c and the B.E.2e which featured different wings and was capable of around 90mph - a debatable accomplishment which led to it being pressed into service as a make-shift interceptor defending London against attacks by giant airship's and aircraft much faster than itself. With 'D' Flight Sidney learned, initially under Flight Lieutenant Hinchcliffe to work with an aircraft - not merely fly it. Although circuits and bumps were still the order of the day, more cross country flights were interspersed with attempts at mastering the skills of aerial camera work—a skill that was to stand him in good stead in the years ahead working with the Metropolitan Police.

On the morning of October 30, Sidney Chamberlain's final flight in a B.E. aircraft ended ignominiously. At 0925hrs he set off on a solo flight in B.E.2e B3702, a machine built by the Vulcan Motor and Engineering works against an army contract it had actually been delivered to the

Royal Navy at Cranwell only two months earlier. The purpose of the flight that morning was to undertake a height test in the vicinity of the airfield. With ease the aircraft climbed at a sedate 35knots to a maximum altitude estimated as 11,600 feet. The flight to height took the best part of one hour to accomplish, 1¾ hours had elapsed before the B.E. returned to land at Cranwell.

The final flare of the landing was a rather bumpy affair, marred by a sudden gust of wind raising the right wing and driving the tip of the left into the grass. The biplane turned onto its nose and slewed around. A further gust of wind blew the machine completely over, wrecking the propeller. After safely extricating himself from the upturned machine he was able to see that, bar the splintered prop, the flimsy machine was virtually unmarked by the incident. Later that same year, on December 3, that same aircraft, B3702 suffered a further crash at Cranwell South at the hands of Probationary Flying Officer E.H. Dyson. Dyson died when the B.E. burst into flames and was destroyed.

On November 5 1917 the final move at Cranwell took place when he transferred to 'E' Flight and met up with the Bristol Scout; the single seat Bristol aircraft dated from 1916 and had been largely withdrawn from front line service. The experience with E Flight was destined to be eventful.

Just before 1000hrs on the morning of November 5, 1917 Sidney took off on his first flight in a Scout type aircraft. The machine, a Scout D 5565, was one of only two delivered to the R.N.A.S. After fifty minutes aloft in the Cranwell area he returned, landed fast and promptly lost the propeller whilst taxiing! This flight was followed by another the next day in a Scout C, 3021, which ended up in a forced landing outside the airfield. On the day following that a flight in a third Bristol Scout resulted in yet another forced landing east of the aerodrome. On November 9 and 10 a return to flying in the original Scout D in gusty conditions resulted in both his best ever flight in the diminutive biplane and, just to round off the days at Cranwell - another lost prop whilst taxiing in for the last ever flight!

On November 19, 1917, with over 40 hours flying to his credit, he was awarded pilot's certificate number 1045 and promotion to the rank of Flight-Sub-Lieutenant with seniority of September 30, 1917.



CHAMBERLAIN'S AIRCRAFT

LINCOLNSHIRE Cranwell

November 1917

Avro 504B (C Flight) 9874, 9882, N6657

Avro 504G (C Flight) N5800, N5801, N5806, N5811, N5817

RAF B.E. 2c(D Flight) 8422

RAF B.E.2e (D Flight) 6326, 6327, A1835, A8699, B3701, B3702

Bristol Scout C (E Flight) 3021, 3051

Bristol Scout D (E Flight) 5565 [one of only two delivered to the R.N.A.S.]



The next stage in his training also took place in Lincolnshire. From November 19 gunnery and weapons training commenced at the coastal airfield at Freiston. Ground instruction took up two days of the course, the following ten days allowing a number of flights, amounting only to 3½ hours flying, in the familiar B.E.'s as well as a single example of the Sopwith Camel, a type not previously encountered.

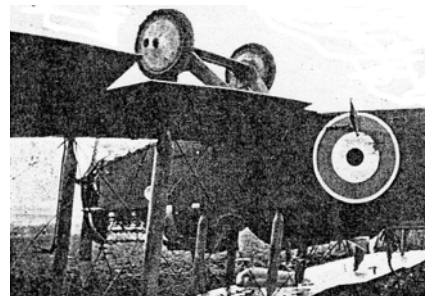
CHAMBERLAIN'S AIRCRAFT

LINCOLNSHIRE Freiston

November 1917	RAF B.E.2c 9473
	RAF B.E.2e B3703, B3710, B3717, B3737
	Sopwith Camel not known

Operational training commenced at another coastal aerodrome Manston, Kent, on December 3, 1917. Possibly due to Sidney's apparent difficulty with the fighter type Bristol Scout C & D at Cranwell he ended up being chosen as a bomber aircraft pilot, a role he himself term—"bus driver".

Although larger twin engine Handley-Page bomber aircraft were then stationed at Manston, the aircraft type he was to fly was somewhat smaller, the Airco (de Havilland) DH4; a 110mph single engine bi-plane. Due to enemy action the big Handley-Page aircraft were withdrawn to Stonehenge, Wiltshire, in January 1918, a move that did not affect the numerous other smaller aircraft at Manston.



Sidney may have been short on personal flights but he was around to witness the lack of skill displayed by other trainee pilots —this was the outcome of Lt Kelly's trip that came to an abrupt end. ©Sidney Chamberlain

A first flight as a passenger in a DH4 took place on December 12 before the weather took a decisive hand in slowing the continued progress of training. It was January 7, 1918 before a second flight took place, and January 27 prior to his first solo flight. Although a number of other aircraft types were stationed at Manston, no opportunity arose to fly any of them. It was not until the middle of February that sufficient hours had been accrued in the de Havilland bomber and leave was taken of the immediate surroundings of the RNAS station for the a spot of embarkation leave, prior to travelling to Italy and involvement in the war on March 11, 1918.

CHAMBERLAIN'S AIRCRAFT

KENT, Manston

December 1917 & February 1918	Airco DH4	B9482, B9486, B9490, B9491, N6412, N6425
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War Service

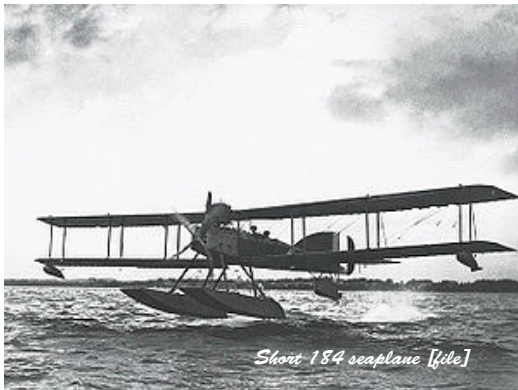
The lengthy delays in the completion of the training brought about by the weather meant that by the time Flight Sub-Lieutenant Sidney Chamberlain arrived at his operational wing major changes were in train. Although he was posted to 6 Wing at Otranto, southern Italy, where 496, 497 and 498 Flights RNAS were operating DH4 bombers against Austrian bases in Albania and Montenegro when he left home waters in March. By the time he arrived in theatre all was quite different. He was never to fly operational sorties with the RNAS, from April he was in the newly formed Royal Air Force.

Three flights of the R.N.A.S. in Italy were combined to create No.224 Squadron Royal Air Force on April 1, 1918.

Sidney's first flight in Italy took place on April 3, 1918. The chosen type for his airfield familiarisation sortie was a previously untried type in the form of Sopwith 1½ Strutter bi-plane N5640; once a capable two seat bi-plane fighter-reconnaissance type that was by now operationally past its best. He experienced some trouble with handling the unfamiliar engine controls and only managed a poor quality landing. The following day's solo practice flight in a DH4 lasted 45 minutes, being an enjoyable effort with an embarrassing finale when the wing tip skid was smashed on a ridge on the ground. It was fortunate that later flights were of a far higher quality.



A preserved Sopwith 1½ Strutter similar to that flown by Sidney in Italy. ©Author



On April 13 Flight Sub-Lt. Spooner took Sidney aloft in a 320hp Short seaplane N1486, his first experience of flying in this type. For 20 minutes the large ungainly seaplane circled in the vicinity of the harbour and Sidney commented that it was a strange experience. The flight should never have taken place according to surviving historical records. This Short 320 was it seems written off three months earlier! In spite of his sense of misgiving when flying in the Short seaplane (especially one that ostensibly ought not to be flying) in the July Sidney undertook a second flight as observer to Lt. Davenport on a flight from Valona to Otranto after his DH4 was shot up.

Operational flights in Italy, and indeed across the whole spectrum of aviation at this time, were often interrupted by mechanical failures. Two of the next three flights were cut short by major engine problems. Fortunately, his first operational flight, an anti-submarine patrol over the Adriatic on April 25, in N6418, went off without a hitch.

The majority of subsequent operations involved flights across the Adriatic, from the heel of the Italian mainland to support operations in and beyond Albania and what was then Montenegro, later Yugoslavia. The RAF, as it now was, acted in support of a weak Italian Air Force to give air cover to ground forces spasmodically attacking Austro-Hungarian armies in the countries north of Greece.

Action at last! On May 11, 1918 No.224 Squadron sent a formation across the Adriatic Sea to bomb an Austrian submarine base at Caltaro. After successfully following the others in dropping their bomb load and turning for home, Lieutenant Chamberlain in DH4 N6418 became split from the other aircraft and encountered a hostile flying boat. He attacked the enemy aircraft, sending tracers into the hull and forcing it down. A safe return to southern Italy nearly five hours after takeoff showed that the encounter had not been wholly one sided. Five hits were found on the DH4. This first mission was to be the longest ever undertaken by him.

Two days later, May 13, another bombing mission was undertaken against the Austrian's. It was to be a solo mission not without its problems, the target for Chamberlain and his observer, Lt. John Ellingham, was Durazzo. As the DH4, D1773, advanced through moderate anti-aircraft fire - called "Archie" by fliers in those days - the engine started to misfire spasmodically, enforcing a return along the coast to land at an Italian Air Force Caproni bomber base situated at Va-

Iona. The Italian mechanics traced the problem to oiled up sparking plugs, these were attended to and the pair set off to make a safe return flight to Otranto later that evening.

John Ellingham was again the observer on the next operational flight. Mechanical failure cut short this mission after a mere 40 miles had been covered, it was May 28 before a further operation could be arranged.

At 0640hrs Chamberlain took off in DH4 D1773 to undertake an armed photographic reconnaissance to Caltaro at up to 12,000 feet. The bomb load was dropped on the dockyard as photographs were taken of the scene below. Again, in spite of a number of test flights, the engine misfired, resulting in yet another test flight upon their safe return, a test that inevitably showed the fault to have cleared.



Having suffered more than his fair share of mechanical problems, on July 6 Sidney thoroughly tested DH4 B2131 prior to that evening's bombing operation. The trip was to attack Kuchi Bridge, a mission encountering accurate anti-aircraft fire en-route crossing the coast at Fieri (Albania), and successfully dropped the bombs from 2,000 feet with hits being observed. Chamberlain and Ellingham lost contact with the rest of the attack force and diverted to Valona, again with a defective engine. On this occasion it was found that the cause of the misfire was enemy action. The return trip to Otranto was made in a Short sea-plane, as previously mentioned.

A first, 39 minute, trip in the new Aircro DH9 bomber took place at mid-morning on June 20 in C2161. Lt. Ellingham acted as observer during the incident free flight. The newer aircraft was very similar to the DH4, the prime difference being the fuselage and engine. Although the crew were closer to each other and could communicate far more easily, the engine chosen was less powerful and even more unreliable, resulting in a loss of thirty miles an hour in top speed and effectively required longer over enemy territory.



An early morning return trip to the submarine base at Caltaro on July 21 set off at 0523hrs using N6421. The raid met serious fighter opposition in the form of three land scouts and four or five sea-plane machines over Trask Bay. In the 10-15 minute encounter the DH4 was badly hit in spite of defensive fire put up by John Ellingham, the Lewis gun had hosed some 250 rounds off without visible effect upon the enemy aircraft. The fall of the bombs was not observed. Unfortunately one of the other DH4's, that flown by Lt Eric L Bragg, fell from the formation and was lost. Bragg died. Lt. Bragg and his usual observer Lt. P.E. Linder from the squadron had a near thing the previous month in B9500 when it was attacked by seaplanes on June 13. Both were unhurt in that incident. Unlike Bragg, Linder seems to have survived the war.

The sea-plane base at Durazzo, a relatively short 1½ hours each way across the Adriatic to Albania was the recipient of the next two operational missions. On August 7 the bombing brought gratifying columns of smoke visible 50 miles away. The enemy did not react to this at-

tack. The return visit, carried out on August 12, was less of a success. The seven DH4's involved flew in line abreast to drop their bomb load, only to see each of the missiles fall short in the sea.

Following an uneventful reconnaissance flight to the same venue the sea-plane base at Durazzo was bombed again on August 23. The load from Chamberlain and Ellingham's DH4 (B2122) fell 150 yards west of the vital hanger's. Again they were attacked by defending scouts, seven land machines and a sea chaser. One of the DH4's was seen to go down in flames. B2122 swung to the left on landing, striking a hanger and another DH4 with messy results. After extracting themselves from the crumpled mess it was found that another aircraft, that flown by Corkery, had failed to make it back to base.

The third flight in the DH4 B9484 was another cut short by engine failure. An intended raid on August 27 resulted in a diversion to the now familiar surroundings of Valona. Returning home the evening of the following day was marked by another engine failure after an hour's flight; fortunately the airfield was within reach and an almost normal landing achieved.

The following flight was little better. Chamberlain took Lt. Brockbank to Valona in a DH9, but their arrival there after 55 minutes flight was marred by the aircraft stalling during the landing. The return journey to Otranto was by favour of the Royal Navy - as a passenger in a torpedo boat destroyer. On another delivery flight undertaken on September 5 the DH4 was flown solo with a sandbag acting as ballast in the rear seat escorting a Sopwith Camel across the sea on the 50 minute journey.

The war was drawing to a close but there were still yet just a few more raids and flights to be undertaken. A DH9, D2910, set off on the morning of September 11, 1918 to bomb the quays of S. Giovanni di Medua with 230 and 112 pound bombs. On this occasion the observer was 2 Lt. Abraham, the pair obtained reasonable results from their effort.

On September 17, with 2 Lt. Proffitt in the observers cockpit, B9484 was lead aircraft of No. 224 squadron's attack on Durazzo. Unfortunately the likely kudos earned from the lead aircraft slipped away as the engine again let them down. A serious water leak was noticed when the formation was ten miles off Durazzo and the aircraft had to abort; returning to base with the engine on the point of seizing. This was the third flight where this particular aircraft had been a let down.

On October 2 a return flight was made to Durazzo in a DH9, D1661, some reasonable results being obtained from bombs dropped on the sea-plane base and headquarters. The bombing flight against Durazzo was the last formation attack by the squadron and the last on which Lt. Ellingham accompanied him. The pair had flown together no fewer than two dozen occasions in the five months since May.

From mid-October flights were largely confined to the observation of Austrian troops in retreat. On October 13, on a 3 hour 55 minute patrol in a veteran DH4 N6417, "Bouncing Bertie", with 2 Lt. Abraham it was noted that all the bridges over the River Shkumbin were destroyed, there being no activity at the airfields to the north, Durazzo and Kavaja. The latter, lying close to the line of retreat, was deserted.

The final fifteen flights in Italy were taken up with testing and trips, mere bus rides, to Taranto and back for a variety of passengers. A number of these final flights of Sidney Chamberlain's career were undertaken in "Bouncing Bertie", said to be the sole survivor of some 22 long distance bombing raids, 7 long distance reconnaissances, 5 submarine hunts as well as a number of less stressful trips. Chamberlain's log book shows that he flew N6417 on five occasions, a little over 6 hours in all. True to the behaviour of its ilk,

CHAMBERLAIN's AIRCRAFT

ITALY, Otranto

April to December 1918

Sopwith 1½ N5640

Short 320 N1486 – nominally written off.

Airco DH4 B2122 [crashed], B2131, B2147, B9484, B9500,

D1761, D1772, D1773, N6417 ["Bouncing Bertie"], N6418, N6421, N6422.

Airco DH9 C2161, D1661, D2794 [crashed], D2796, D2910

"Bouncing Bertie" bowed out on December 6 with an oil leak that reduced the local flight with Lt. Legge to 30 minutes.

Finally, on the following day December 7, Sidney undertook what appears to have been his last flight as a pilot. The gremlins that had dogged his operational flying career conspired to prematurely halt this flight also. DH4 N6422 took off, with Corporal Gifford as live ballast/observer but no sooner had they reached an altitude of 200 feet than the front cowling came adrift and enforced a return to the aerodrome after a mere five minutes flight. In his time with the R.N.A.S. and R.A.F. he had accrued a total of 130 hours, about half of which was in training. The next day, December 8, Sidney left Italy via the port of Taranto and arrived in the U.K. after an absence of eight months on December 18.

After Christmas he reported to the H.Q. Midland Area, Leamington Spa.

In the New Years Honours 1919 he was awarded a D.F.C. in recognition of his attacks on the Caltaro submarine base, later he was also awarded the Italian Bronze Medal for Valour. On January 10, he went on to Narborough, Norfolk but did not stay long before being sent away on leave until January 21.

Into Civvy Street

Demobilisation from the RAF came in March 1919 but it was the autumn before Mr. Sidney Chamberlain sought employment with the Metropolitan Police Force in London as a civil servant. The post with the "B2" or Traffic Department at New Scotland Yard was to return him to duties in the air in due course. Meanwhile, Sidney was employed on a number of aeronautical projects that came before the police for approval, thus retaining an element of continuity in his brief flying background.

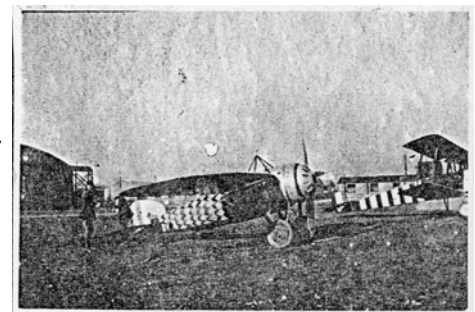
As has often been the case with new fields of technology, immediately after the Great War the Government of the day saw fit to pass on to the police duties for which they would seem the least likely candidates. At that time Police were responsible for the administration of civil airfields and many of the legal, administrative, aspects of the still new field of aeronautics. Passed to the care of the police from 1913, primarily because all early legislation was issued and administered by the Home Office, the untrained bobbies took up the task in the years following the war.

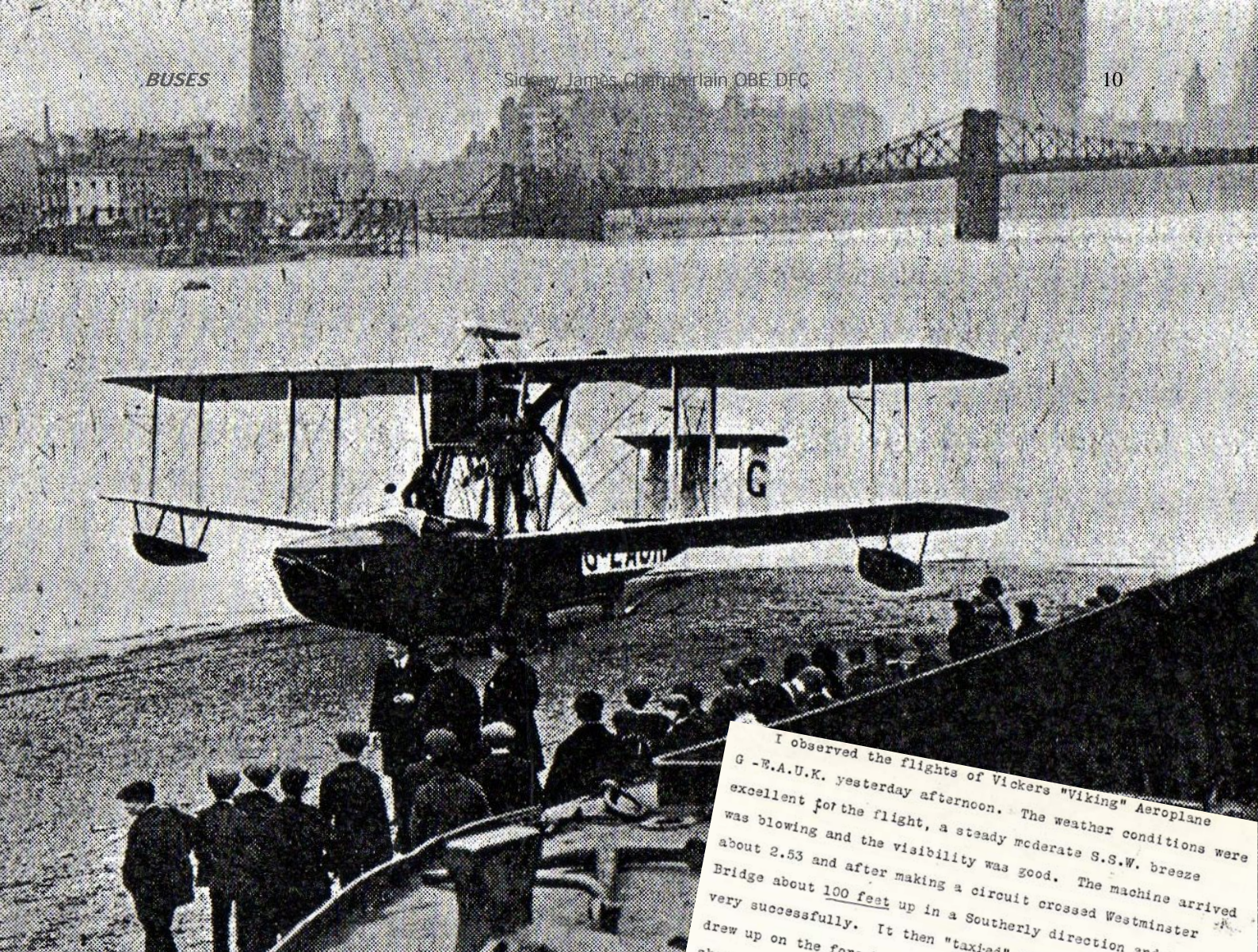


While at Narborough he continued to fill his personal photograph album. This image is of Sopwith Snipe E7352 after it lost a wheel—without too much other damage

The other image is of a brightly painted Bristol Monoplane taken in 1919

Both ©Sidney Chamberlain





London [Westminster] Airport

It was a little over a year after Chamberlain's arrival in the traffic department that initial proposals were put forward for the running of an air passenger service between London and Paris. The plans envisaged the use of a flying boat between a section of the River Thames west of Westminster and the River Seine.

Although the Vickers Viking amphibian was able to provide a fairly reliable return service to Paris, with city centre flight times of 2½ hours being comparable with modern expectations. The experiment did not result in a long term regular schedule as intended.

For the next five years a number of similar proposals, along with related flight trials, were put forward. None resulted in regular schedules being introduced.

I observed the flights of Vickers "Viking" Aeroplane G - W.A.U.K. yesterday afternoon. The weather conditions were excellent for the flight, a steady moderate S.S.W. breeze was blowing and the visibility was good. The machine arrived about 2.53 and after making a circuit crossed Westminster Bridge about 100 feet up in a Southerly direction and landed very successfully. It then "taxied" under Lambeth Bridge and drew up on the foreshore on the right bank of the river a short distance above Lambeth Bridge, under its own power and without outside assistance, the engine was then stopped and the crew of three alighted. The wheels which are hoisted for alighting in the water were, of course, lowered to enable the aeroplane to run up on the shore. I noticed that the engine - a 450h.p. Napier "Lion" - which was warm at the time, was started up quite easily from the deck of the machine aft of the cockpits, by two of the crew, one of whom cranked the engine while the other turned the hand-starting magneto. This is a matter of some importance as in the event of the engine stopping when a landing is made on the water, the machine drifts helplessly and thereby constitutes a danger to other craft until power is restored.

The machine remained ashore for a short time and then the engine was started as described. It left the shore and taxied down to Lambeth Bridge under its own power "taking off" again in a Southerly direction.

The machine was well handled the whole time, and its performance is out of all proportion to that of the craft of 1917-18 of which I have had some experience. The climb is much more rapid and above all the machine is undoubtedly far more "handy" both afloat and in the air. It must be remembered however that this machine is splendidly tuned, and was piloted by a first class man under good weather conditions.

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S. Chamberlain

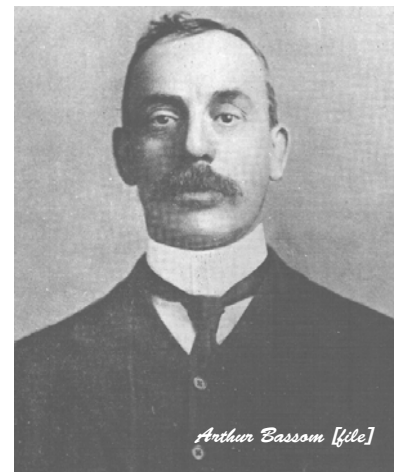
At the Races

The police had half heartedly tried out aircraft and airships for spotting at the Derby Day of the Epsom Races summer meeting, since the summer of 1921. It was for the 1923 Derby Day, held on Wednesday June 6 that they undertook an investigation of the possibilities afforded by fixed-wing aircraft. There is no direct evidence that Sidney Chamberlain was present but his post would suggest he was involved in some way.

The chosen police observer was Superintendent Arthur E. Bassom the head of the Metropolitan Police B2 Traffic Department for many years. The crew he took with him were primarily radio operators.

On June 4 1924 a moored military gas filled 'kite' observation balloon was tried at Epsom. Serviced by military personnel the balloon was anchored within the race-course over Buckles Gap, about half a mile from the grandstand. It afforded a limited field of vision to the observer, Bassom, who was then able to transmit to the ground via a clear telephone link. The resulting sightings of the police operation were passed on by despatch rider and W/T equipped Crossley Tenders.

Bassom was a "workaholic", he refused to retire at the age of 60 despite reaching the age limit for his rank. Promoted to Chief Constable, Director of Traffic Services, to enable his wishes and the needs of the police service to be met, he unfortunately died early in 1926. He was probably one of the few truly indispensable police figures of his time. His encyclopedic knowledge of traffic management and the layout of the streets of Metropolitan London ensured that his opinion carried great weight at Scotland Yard. Fortunately, before his death, he managed to pass some of his knowledge to police and civil staff in his department. Sidney Chamberlain, destined to be the main police observer in the future, was one of those.



Throughout his police service Sidney was involved with the thorny question of advertising from the air. Generally these proposals were related to the employment of aircraft and airships as carriers of advertising slogans. Like the administration of the flying fields in the mid-war years the police were saddled with a large part to play in the regulation of aerial advertising wholly because the Air Ministry wanted no part in the matter and no one had yet thought to create a civil aviation authority.

Lights in the sky

Numerous proposals were directed to Scotland Yard via the Air Ministry relating to a variety of intended aerial means of selling wares to the public on the ground. The general attitude was that such proposals

could create a danger to vehicular and pedestrian traffic by virtue of them looking up rather than where they were going - so it must be a police area of responsibility. It was as a result of this fear for the safety of pedestrians that the 1929 scheme for night advertising by illuminated aeroplane, proposed by



the Transport Union Ltd., and the 1930 proposal for daytime displays from the AD.1 airship, G-FAAX, were successfully opposed by police on similar safety grounds.

International Enquiries

Another aspect of his duties was brought into operation as a result of developments in the United States of America. On October 24, 1929 the Police Commissioner of the New York Police Department, Grover Whalen, unilaterally created what has subsequently been claimed to be the first police air service unit in the world. The unit did not become fully operational until March 28 the following year and there were in any case other pretenders to the title in mainland Europe.

In the autumn of 1929 The Secretary, Aviation Section, Commonwealth Club of California wrote to Scotland Yard asking for information about the arrangements in Britain "as regards Air Police". Chamberlain's dealings with California resulted in semi-official correspondence ensuing between B2 and the Air Ministry, and the matter being fully replied to by the latter. The almost nonexistent state of British air police at that time resulted in little information being imparted. Within three years the situation in London was to change. Sidney is best known for his work as the observer of the series of autogyro flights undertaken by the Metropolitan Police between 1932 and 1939. Although these were not to be the exclusive domain of the normally desk-bound clerk, the great majority were to include his presence.

The availability of the developed Cierva C.19 Autogyro came to the notice of the research branch at Scotland Yard in 1931; it was the following year that the police re-appeared at the Epsom Derby in the new type.

The two-seat rotary wing craft was crewed by police employees. Flight Lieutenant Ralph Eric Herbert Allen, AMIAE, MIAeE, RAFO, a 40yr-old pilot in the Reserve since 1928, and employed by the police as Assistant Engineer to the Receiver. He was originally intended by the terms of a Cierva proposal on April 8 to act as observer to the manufacturer's pilot. This change of heart gave the 33 year old Sidney Chamberlain his chance. Although there were to be reports stating that he flew the autogyro on police flights, current evidence is that he never piloted an aircraft since leaving the cockpit of a DH4 in Italy during December 1918. Chamberlain had shrewdly suggested the possibility of the Cierva Company giving the rotary wing craft freely as an advertising ploy - timely given information that came to pass.



Sidney Chamberlain left and Ralph Allen in the 1932 Derby Cierva G-ABWD in some images taken prior to their operational flight over the Derby Day [Chamberlain family]

Although there were to be reports stating that he flew the autogyro on police flights, current evidence is that he never piloted an aircraft since leaving the cockpit of a DH4 in Italy during December 1918. Chamberlain had shrewdly suggested the possibility of the Cierva Company giving the rotary wing craft freely as an advertising ploy - timely given information that came to pass.

Allen had a few hours of instruction on the autogyro, merely a short course, including half an hour of dual instruction. The Derby flights, on June 1, were undertaken from Croydon Airport after positioning from Hanworth. Generally, all flying decisions were left to the pilot regardless of the status of his varied observers. His opinion was accepted as final.

Although the police used the machine for a number of days - with training and familiarisation included - the only charges they incurred were the insurance cover and the wireless rental from Marconi. The latter charged only £10 for this hire, again reaping extra benefits from the prestige of the users. The same, less understandable, lack of financial return beset the G.P.O. and Air Ministry. Neither made charges for licensing and approving the new fitments. In spite of money saved there were still a few within the service who decried the cost of the insurance premium for the two crew members.



A series of images of the police operation have survived. It is thought that many of them were the handwork of the renowned aviation photographer Charles E Brown [file]

The heavy wireless in use, totalling a little over 65 lb, required a special Certificate of Airworthiness for low flying and over-loading. With the modified Marconi A.D.22 and S.P.3 man-portable sets Chamberlain was able to pass and receive speech transmissions. It is believed that he rarely actually chose to operate Morse, although a number of the other police employees did. This early set possessed a shortened range, intended to reduce any distant interference; the autogyro transmitted to its own special R/T van (another freely supplied 'after-thought' by Marconi) which was placed alongside one of the police Crossley tenders. It was no great problem to pass on fairly clear transmissions for onward passage, either by Morse or by despatch rider, to other posts sited around the course. Unfortunately it was soon found that the speech transmissions were taking longer, word for word, than the Morse messages, as well as also interfering with transmissions from the ground based telegraphic sets in spite of the precautions taken. This problem was quickly overcome but produced a number of moans about 'new fangled things', among the ranks of the Morse operators.

The autogyro covered a two hour period during which the crowd assembled, followed by a similar period as the racegoers left after the last race of the day. The machine reported into Croydon at just before 1045 hrs, but waited an hour before starting operations at 1140 because of slight mist.

Although it was not possible to approach close to the racecourse either before or during the races, the nearest pass being about one mile south of the Grandstand, a variety of messages were sent off reporting traffic condition in the mist shrouded approaches.

Chamberlain became air sick at about 1250hrs. This debilitation grew so bad that the machine had to return to Croydon to let the observer recover during an early refuelling break. This unavoidable incident caused the Cierva to miss air cover of the Royal Party attending the course.

The remaining 20 minutes observer duty of the morning flight was undertaken by Mr. Whistlecroft the engineer from the Marconi station there.

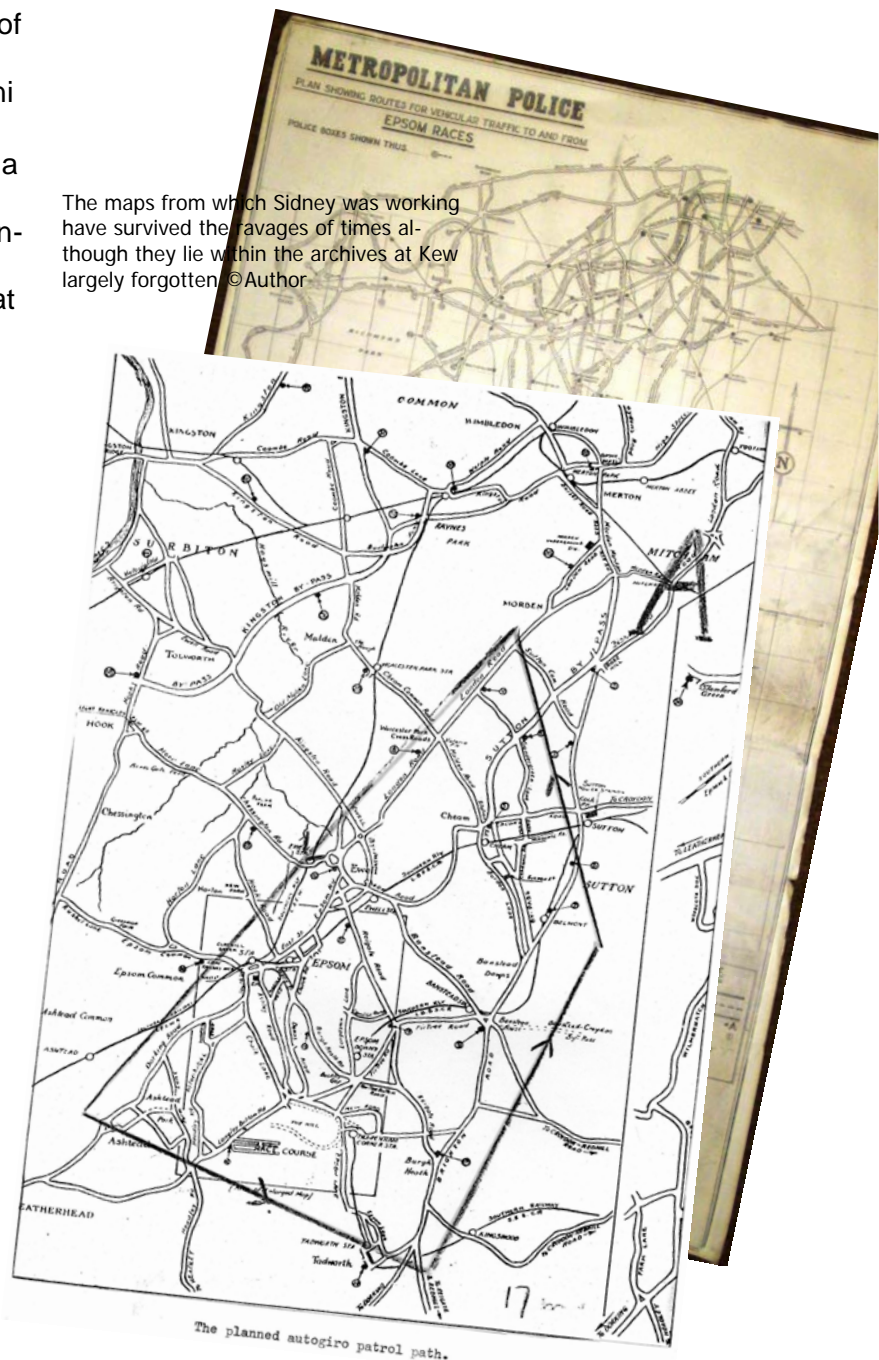
The last period of flying observation, with a recovered Sidney Chamberlain, was from 1640 to 1840hrs. Take off was timed to enable the autogyro to arrive from Croydon prior to the early exit of some racegoers at 1700hrs. Half an hour later the main body of traffic started to block the roads. The return landing at Croydon at 1845hrs was enforced by a low fuel state rather than the total clearing of traffic conditions.

The newspapers again excelled themselves in adventurous reporting of the part taken by the autogyro on the day. Fanciful descriptions appeared in print, as the more adventurous of them let their imaginations rip. The "Evening Standard" on June 1st saw fit to report that the autogyro was fitted with a giant "Spy-Glass" in its floor to enable the crew to focus upon an, equally outsized, coat of arms adorning the roof of the King's car, regardless of the weight penalty that the carriage of the radio was already imposing, or the truth; neither the glass or the rooftop artwork existed.

Some degree of excitement did enter the proceedings towards the end of the day. The presence of a large number of the Gipsy fraternity erupted in violence between rival factions at the close of racing. The crew of the police aircraft were able to alert ground based units to the fighting and an old fashioned baton charge by mounted and foot officers quickly quelled the disturbance after a number of arrests. Whether this skirmish reached the levels of riot subsequently reported is debatable, it most certainly received no mention in Chamberlain's report on the flight.

The prime drawback of the radial engine Cierva C.19 was the position of the observer's cockpit. Although the pilot enjoyed a relatively clear all round view from the rear seat, the observer did not. Chamberlain was surrounded by four thick pillars supporting the rotor assembly. Further restriction of view was caused by the presence of a substantial wing directly below his cockpit space. Although the type could fly as slowly as 25 m.p.h. with little difficulty, observation was restricted to the front and rear quarters. The use of airborne cameras - and therefore wider use by police - was held back until the arrival of an improved, wingless, model C30 from early in 1934. In spite of the limitations it was deemed to be a great start and a similar C.19 was used over the 1933 Derby traffic.

The maps from which Sidney was working have survived the ravages of times although they lie within the archives at Kew largely forgotten. ©Author



On 28 November 1933 the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and a party of his advisers accepted an invitation to go to the Cierva factory at Hanworth to view the latest version of the Autogyro aircraft. As a result of this visit Sidney prepared a technical appreciation outlining the characteristics of the new aircraft and what it might mean to future police operations. What the group witnessed was a significant upgrade in the capabilities of the aircraft and the answering most of their previous criticisms relating to observer view. In the wake of the report further negotiations were held with Cierva.

Early in 1934 the police pilot, Allen, was knocked down whilst crossing the road in Whitehall. He died in hospital a few days later leaving the police temporarily without a pilot.

As time was not available to employ a new pilot in time for that year's Derby Day flight, Scotland Yard approached the autogyro manufacturers, Cierva, direct and obtained the services of their chief test pilot Reginald Brie for the event. Brie and Chamberlain undertook the task at Epsom in the first of the new wingless C30 'Autogyro' used by the police.



*Cierva C-30A Autogyro G-ACM
was the main police aircraft*

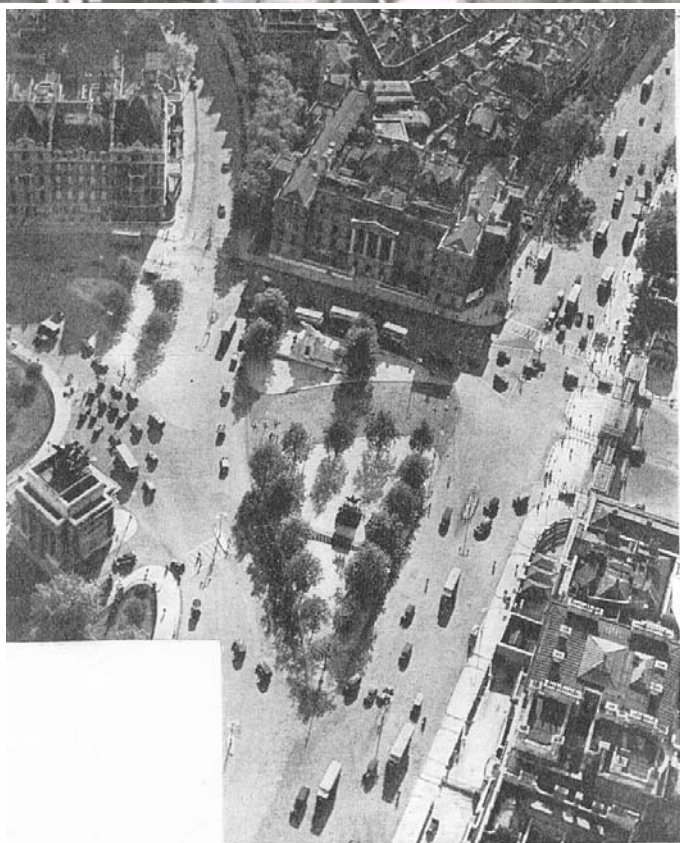
Having found that the new Cierva was far better than its forbear, it was decided that it would be useful to undertake a more extensive autogyro trial with the type in the late summer of 1934. On this occasion the R.A.F. supplied the pilot and the chosen man did a conversion course in 80 minutes of dual flying with Brie on August 12 and 13.

Flt.Lt. Richard Rupert Nash, aged 29, was ready to take his part in the seven week police trial starting on August 15. Not a police employee like Allen, Nash was scheduled to retain the post only for the duration of the trial period. In a reciprocal arrangement designed to cover costs, it was arranged that the R.A.F. would have free access to the machine when not in police use. For the convenience of both parties to the deal, the autogyro was kept in a hanger at R.A.F. Hendon. All these useful, cost cutting, details were arranged by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner of the day, 'Father of the Royal Air Force' Lord Trenchard, and his senior police officers - many of whom had followed him into Scotland Yard from high ranking posts in the Air Ministry.

The extended autogyro trials, costing around £300 for two months, with the C.30P G-ACIN, the same machine that had been used by Brie and Chamberlain over the 1934 Derby, were publicly launched on August 15. Inevitably the promotional event included flights for those senior officers brave enough to take up the offer.

Cierva's Reggie Brie piloted for the initial launch ceremony of the new police scheme. Foremost among his special passengers was the Assistant Commissioner for Traffic, H. Alker Tripp. After the public face of the operation was duly presented to the press, Nash and the observers were able to take their places for the job in hand. Throughout this particular phase there were seven observers; Best, Butterfield, Carmichael, Chamberlain, Hooper, Minchin and Wynn Williams. Chamberlain undertook most of the duties, his recorded flying hours in the September being 5½, compared with the 1¾ amassed by the next highest, Carmichael.

For once Chamberlain and the other six regular observers were able to take reasonable air-to-ground shots from a machine, some impressive photographs being duly passed on to Fleet Street for use over the next few days and weeks as part of the high profile publicity.



Some of the images produced by the Metropolitan Police autogyro unit and subsequently handed out to the newspapers of the time as free publicity material and used as manufacturers publicity.

Top image is of Oxford Street London showing the numerous white roofed buses plying the street.

Above a scene above Epsom taken during operations over the Derby Race meeting in 1934.

Right A police photograph of Hyde Park Corner handed out to the newspapers as publicity in August 1934.

The sting in the tail of each of these images is that the only way the police can now get copies of many of these images is to buy them back off the various Newspaper archives! ©Author

ANOTHER LOW-ALTITUDE PICTURE of London from the police autogyro, taken over Hyde Park Corner. St. George's Hospital, the Artillery Memorial, the Wellington Statue, and the arch at Constitution Hill are easily distinguishable.



Sidney Chamberlain poses with the cameras they used to take the air-to-ground images [via Chamberlain family]



★ TRAFFIC CONTROL FROM ALOFT

The DIRECT CONTROL C. 30 AUTOGIRO has been used by London's Authorities as the most practical Aircraft for the difficult duty. No other Aircraft could give such safety under difficult conditions—the Autogyro's unrivalled slow flying characteristics make it ideal where ground co-operation and accurate observation is desired.

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Stop Police!

The first recorded instance of a police air unit undertaking the prosecution of other flyers was over the Derby meeting on Wednesday May 27, 1936. Four defendants were summonsed to Epsom court on September 3 for low-flying offences. The accused were Aerial Sites Ltd., Air Publicity Ltd., and their respective pilots, Frederick Freeman and William Woodward. Each of the two companies had employed an aircraft towing banners over Epsom Racecourse.

The case was dismissed by the Bench after the pilot of the police autogyro was questioned by the defence. Both the pilot, Max J. Bingham-Stoker, and the observer, Sidney Chamberlain, agreed that the height at which the police machine was flying was quite safe for the public and that the two banner-towing aircraft were at a similar height.

The lack of Air Ministry authorisation for the two banner flights was successfully obscured by the defence calling in a pair of aeronautical "big guns" as witnesses. Tom Campbell, well known as a London - Australia "McRobertson Race" pilot, had been present on the ground at Epsom, and Capt. Henry Schofield, a one time World Speed Record "Schneider Trophy" pilot, was allowed to express his opinion although not actually present. Both mounted an effective destruction of the police case.

The 1936 Derby flight was also interesting in that it provided the only known instance of actual police duty involvement by an aircraft of the Reigate Borough Police Special Constabulary operation. Although absolutely nothing to do with the Borough police force, the autogyro used by the Metropolitan Police was the Cierva C30A, G-ACWZ, of the Redhill Flying Club. Bingham-Stoker was undoubtedly one of the pilot members of the Special Constabulary.



File Photo © The Aeroplane

In spite of his time consuming flying duties, in March 1936 Sidney had been selected for "Special Duties" in connection with the Greater London Highway Development Survey, a task he undertook as a Senior Clerk. His air activities were of use in this task as an increasing use was made of photography to monitor traffic movement on the ground.

The 'Highway Development task lasted two years and on his return to "B2" department in May 1938 Sidney was to be Senior Clerk in charge of the branch. Another Senior Clerk in the same department, E.R. Hooper, with whom Sidney was to share war work, took charge of work connected with accident prevention at the same time.

At this period - unfortunately existing entries in the log books of Reginald Brie and Sidney's own diaries fail to pinpoint when - Brie and Chamberlain were flying together from Hanworth in a Cierva C30A Autogiro posing for the cameras of the now defunct monthly magazine "Pearsons" in order to illustrate the continuing police autogyro activities.

Early in 1939 the Metropolitan Police agreed to take part in an early, live, television transmission on the subject of traffic control. One of the "stars" of this programme was Sidney Chamberlain.

On the afternoon of Sunday February 5, the B.B.C. set up their cameras at Bignell's Corner on the A1 Great North Road Barnet by-pass in preparation for the programme "Mobile Police" - even motor car use by police was still in its infancy in 1939. The show employed its human characters as well as a variety of police vehicles and a police emergency telephone box as props for the twenty minute transmission that was broadcast to the minute London television audience from 3pm.

Bignall's Corner is somewhat lost as a road feature these days, its bones lie beneath the vast road complex created by the junction of the present A1 and the M25 junction 23. Here is the first M25 Services but they took the name of South Mimms Services.

Only Sidney's annotated copy of the script for this fly on the wall television precursor has survived, no photographs have surfaced and it was in days before such events were recorded for posterity.

By chance I found an image of the next programme in the series—it was mentioned in the script— *The next of this series "Television Surveys" will be on the afternoon of Sunday 19th February.....* The programme included presenter Jasmine Bligh flying with Cierva Test Pilot Reginald Brie in the latest version of the Autogiro

MOTOR CYCLE CONSTABLE motions BLIGH to follow him round.
Brings her towards CAM.

.4.

.3.

Chamberlain, Hill, Frith and Turner alight.
RICH introduces them in this order:

1. Mr. Chamberlain of the Traffic Department
2. Superintendent Hill of the Traffic Department, Scotland Yard
3. Chief Inspector Frith of Scotland Yard

S. J. C

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Television Outside Broadcast

"TELEVISION SURVEYS.. No. 3"

METROPOLITAN POLICE: BIGNELL'S CORNER, BARNET BY-PASS



February, 1939.

3.00 - 3.3.20 p.m.

Homeland Security

The outbreak of war in September 1939 closed down the infant television service for the duration and stopped all normal Metropolitan Police flying for the best part of sixteen years.

In September 1939 it was assumed that all police flying would cease forthwith; in fact not all aspects of flying were curtailed by the break out of war. The Joint Home Office and Illuminating Engineering Society Lighting Committee were authorised to undertake some live trials with the severely curtailed street lighting that the wartime "black out" brought.

Whilst embarking upon the street level experiments the 'Lighting Committee initially operated alone but required Lighting Restriction Order exemption's from the police to undertake the tasks. One aspect of these waivers was that they ceased to provide immunity from prosecution as soon as an air raid was signalled! Beside the Home Office the group was allied to the British Standards Institution (B.S.I.) and the Illuminating Engineering Society, with a main industrial participant being the Wembley based General Electric Company (G.E.C.).

As the experimental work necessarily related to roads and road lighting, it was the B2, Traffic, department at Scotland Yard which was involved with the exemption orders. It was Hooper, rather than Chamberlain, in the department who became involved in the greater part of these trials.

The first aerial observation tests were to be undertaken in Rapide transport bi-planes over London from the evening of November 9, 1939, others taking place over Liverpool from November 17, and a single flight over Witney in March 1940. Hooper undertook the role of police observer in each of the flights except that over Witney which was undertaken by Chamberlain. After each of the flights the various service and civil pilots and observers produced their own varied, and often conflicting, impressions of what they had been able to see of the scene below. A cross section of these documents tends to show that the term "black out" was somewhat of an overstatement.

With the exception of that single flight, Senior Clerk Sidney Chamberlain's prime war role was very much earthbound, concerned with the planning and execution of military convoys in and around the Metropolis. Details of his war duties are sparse due to a failure to trace directly related files and a, characteristic, lack of detail in his diaries, but the task gained some early recognition from on high with the award of the M.B.E., announced in Police Orders dated June 12. 1941.

In September 1947 he was again put forward for further recognition of his continued war convoy work, this resulting in the 1948 New Year Honours list awarding him the O.B.E. The higher award reflected his new status as Assistant Secretary in 'B' Department.

The years after the war were lean as far as any continuation of Metropolitan Police aerial activity was concerned. Some forces, particularly the Lancashire Constabulary, managed to put up at least one traffic spotter sortie a year, but not London. It was the availability of some Civil Defence helicopter flying time in mid- 1956 that re-introduced flight to the Metropolitan Police and brought a face from the past briefly to the fore again.

On the Tuesday June 5, 1956 Captain Reid of BEAH took the Westland-Sikorsky WS-55 G-ANUK aloft over the Epsom area, operating in effect a rehearsal prior to the trial. The design of the helicopter separated the pilots cockpit from the main passenger compartment. Great difficulty was experienced with intercommunication between the pilot and police observer, usually Inspector Trendall, on the flight deck and the lesser observers in the main cabin. The passengers in the cabin reported that they had great difficulty in shouting messages to each other - let alone gaining contact with the pilot and front observer. The "walkie talkie" sets used

for air to ground communication were also intended for use in passing messages internally; neither intention was very well served. The engine was just too noisy, a common fault reported in the piston-engine Westland.

The design related difficulties experienced in the WS-55 were contrasted by the experience of others in a Bristol 171 G-AMWH used for flying on the Wednesday. With a single common cabin for all the flying personnel, even the repeated lack of an efficient intercom system was unimportant in this aircraft. Although served by an almost identical engine, the noise level was found far less obtrusive. Subsequent reports heaped praise upon the British designed Bristol to the detriment of the licence built Westland-Sikorsky.

The helicopters operated from the well kept grass of the golf links at the R.A.C. Country Club at Woodcote Park. The position of this club fortunately coincided with the usual position of the main police control area in the north-east (Tattenham) corner of the race-course. Buckles Gap, the mooring point of the observation balloon used by the police in the experiments of 1924, adjoined the same golf course. Much later, in the 1970's, police helicopters alighted in the car parks in the same area. Much of this section has now been re-developed.



Flying at Epsom commenced at 1140hrs on the Tuesday and 1028hrs on the Wednesday. The first day was marred by wind, the second by almost non-stop rain. In the WS-55 the four additional passengers carried in the main cabin were rotated as each of five 30 minute flights, ended. Most passengers were of Superintendent rank upwards. One additional face from the past was Sidney Chamberlain, who flew for 15 minutes at tea time. Only three rear seat passengers flew in the Bristol, which undertook six flights in two sessions. The flying was restricted to times when no racing was being undertaken, with one flight each day being allotted to Sergeant Carter of the Photographic Branch to record the events.

Sidney Chamberlain, flew for 15 minutes in a police helicopter as a passive observer at tea time on June 6, 1956. The helicopter was a B.E.A. Bristol 171 Sycamore normally in use for Civil Defence duties, but loaned on this occasion to undertake traffic duties.

On the Bank Holiday Monday, August 6 1956 the aerial photography experts "Aerofilms" supplied an Auster for police use. On this occasion no radio equipment was fitted, it was merely a traffic observation exercise for senior officers to gauge the possibilities. One passenger in the first of two flights was Sidney Chamberlain, one of his last recorded flying appearances prior to retiring in 1961. At subsequent decision meetings, mostly chaired by Chamberlain in his post as Secretary, it was generally agreed that the best observation height was 1,200 to 1,800 feet and that a normal police presence would be restricted to a single observer with his radio. As a result of these meetings the Metropolitan Police entered into three years of flying up to three Auster light aircraft on traffic spotter duties in high demand periods.

Sidney Chamberlain retired from his Secretary post with Scotland Yard on May 19, 1961. Aged 62 on retirement, he enjoyed thirteen years in retirement before dying at Tunbridge Wells on May 9, 1974, aged 75 years.