

**In Celebration of the
25th Anniversary of
SAM35**

**A Personal reflection Charting the Events
surrounding the Foundation and
Formulation of SAM35**

1977 - 1982

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“AND THEN THERE WAS SAM35”

In the beginning there was heaven and earth. Several millennia later, people discovered an awful omission. In books of those early days (Genesis, etc), no mention was made of artificial flying machines and it was left to a bunch of amateur inventors to make amends. Even then, they concentrated on big ol' things totally unsuited to the spiritual and mental development of adventurous young people.

Then a magnificent thing happened! Not Baden-Powell! I'm thinking Free-Flight Aeromodelling! Here was the stuff of Kings! No single activity encompasses such a wide variety of skills and knowledge? Not golf! Not sailing! Not knitting! And not that horse racing! Nothing? Think about it for a minute? What else demands such Imagination, Dexterity, Determination, Patience and Fitness, combined with knowledge of Structures, Aerodynamics, Meteorology, Navigation and Prayer as does the real sport of Kings!

When aeromodelling moved on during the 1970's and became super competitive, using modern materials and parallel design concepts, a group of American aero-nuts yearning for times past, formed the Society of Antique Modellers. Their single objective was to be “dedicated to the preservation of vintage model aircraft”.

Inevitably, America's greatest ever concept crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the cause was taken up in England by a small band of like-minded fellows. Within a few years, enthusiasts in other countries latched on to these ideals and embryo SAM's emerged in places as far flung as Australia and Italy. As in the vastness of America, the need to preserve local identity resulted in the formation of various chapters. Number 1 was automatically decided to represent the founder group. Number 7 represented another part of that huge continent, etc, etc. Thus, our emergent SAM35 birthed and thrived in England but not before some trials and tribulations, as you will learn.

These, then, are the personal reflections of my journey through the early years of SAM (and thereafter SAME and eventually SAM35) from 1977 through 1982.

For me it actually started in the year of the long, hot summer, 1976. Elton John and Kiki Dee did not want to break each other's hearts and your scribe was on a family trip which took in the village of Cranfield in Bedfordshire. As an ex College of Aeronautics Apprentice, I had flown model aircraft there as a teenager in the late 1950's, but never seriously. I had visited at least two World Champs and various Southern Area Galas at that great venue. I knew it well. Here then, passing the magnificent airfield twenty years later, the perimeter gates were open and, verily, there were model aeroplanes again. And, Oh! The sweetness of the air! In our world, there are two abiding memories (of the nose) that are never forgotten. They are the smells of burning DT fuse and of ether laden diesel fuel. It makes no difference where you are in this universe, when you inhale these magical aromas; memories of days past come flooding back.

So it was that the steering wheel turned my car, all by itself, onto the Cranfield grass and those aromatic memories began to re-etch their way into my consciousness. So

too, the sights and sounds. My boy, Carl, eyes agog, said something like, “Cor Dad! We could do that”? He was right. Aeromodelling is like a drug. One may be able to abstain for a short time, but if reminded of its attractions, eventually we become hooked, again.

And so it transpired, in the early weeks of 1977 whilst visiting a model shop in my home town of Bedford, Carl reminded me of our Cranfield excursion. Inside the shop an array of kits were displayed for choosing and we emerged with a Performance Kits’ “Buzzard”. Just a simple towline glider but it was a seminal choice, with personal ramifications far beyond the immediately obvious. It became a life changing decision.

Now it is Easter, and the “Buzzard” is almost fledged, but with an unresolved problem, about which no amount of recalled memory could decide. Yet help was to hand! On the side of the box was the name, address and phone number of the purveyor who had his premises only three miles from my own home. A single telephone call resulted in resolution of the immediate problem and a solution to another, as yet un-asked. Where to fly? The voice on the other end of the telephone was the great Peter Fisher, who told me that his local flying field was Biggleswade Common.

So it was on the Good Friday of 1977, I fetched up at Biggleswade Common in the company of my eldest daughter, a jury-rigged towline and an untrimmed “Buzzard”, and soon it soared! So well in fact, that it flew off the Common almost to the next Parish. My first ever flyaway! After a successful retrieve we noticed another fly-boy on the Common and wandered over to exchange Hello’s. Thus I met Peter Fisher and we chatted about HIS two models. The “Buzzard” and his Petrol Ignition powered Old Time Design.

He told me that we (Who We??) were having a meeting on this very Common the following Sunday and why didn’t I come along. I know it sounds strange, but I failed to ask who WE were. Who were WE??? When, on the following Sunday, I emerged into the sunlight of Biggleswade Common from that dark corridor of bushes and trees that fringed the entrance path, it was a sight to behold.

It was as though someone had opened an old Aeromodeller Magazine and all the aeroplanes within had flown up from the pages, as if like magic. There were more than thirty people gathered there and probably twice or three times as many vintage model planes spread around and being admired, and flown with great enthusiasm. This was the “WE” that Peter Fisher had spoken of, but who were the people?

I don’t recall exactly, but I have little doubt that this, and later, gatherings included many of the following luminaries: David Baker, Jack Law, Mick Radford, Ben Buckle, Peter Fisher, Ron Raddon, Mike Whittard, Mario Gandolphi, Don Knight, Colin Watts, Noel Barker, Peter Michel, Bryan Yearley, Keith Harris, Jack Frost, Jack Humphries, Ken Hinton, Derek Chester, Don Read, Tony Penhall, John Blagg, Alex Imrie, John Kemp, Dennis Lloyd, John Mayes, Terry King, Brian Ferret, John Kay, Les Saxby, Derek Welch, and apologies to those many others whom I can’t recall. And yes, of course, Tom Copley. This was SAM.

Thus, 1977 became a marker for my personal association with SAM. We paid our dues directly to SAM in the USA or by proxy through the English Spark Plug of our movement, David Baker. Everything seemed to revolve about the boot of David's car or his home in Muswell Hill. Not to say that other worthy members weren't beaver away in their own localities. Colin Watts, for example, was a focal point in the Midlands as was Mike Whittard in the South West. But if you wanted to know what was happening, then you had to go to the back of the Baker-mobile where David would dole out "Hanger One", the latest copy of his personal SAM newsletter, (not SamSpeaks, that came by mail direct from the USA) but 2 to 4 sheets of A4 or Foolscap, sometimes printed courtesy of the Treasury, without which it was nigh-on impossible to know who was who, who was building what, and where the next flying meetings were to take place.

Additionally, David's car was a treasure trove of Xeroxed plans and articles, mostly from American magazines and mostly free, which were offered like confetti to anyone who showed real interest. Indeed I built my first few vintage models from plans given to me by David.

So where were these flying venues of the now, self-styled, "SAME" (SAM England)? Well, on record are the following various locations that beckoned us: Biggleswade Common, of course, the Mecca of our early days, Chobham Common, RAF Halton, RAF's Barkston and Cranwell for the FF Nationals, but also RAF Little Rissington for the '77 Nats. RAF Odiham came a little later but everyone went to Old Warden for Vintage Day and other regular meets. RAF Henlow was also available from time to time, as was RAF Wroughton. The Walsall Old Timers used to meet at Aldridge Airport and I seem to remember an early meeting at Bulls Mill near St. Albans, totally unsuited to FF, surrounded, as it was, by trees and quarries.

Mention of Chobham reminds me of an anecdotal conversation. In H.G. Wells' novel, "The War of the Worlds", the location where the Martians first landed was Horsell Common but it was widely held that H.G. took his inspiration from the terrain at Chobham. So, when a local flyer casually remarked that Chobham Common must have deeply impressed Wells, his exhausted companion retorted that he thought they were just blooming great holes filled with water. Those who flew at Chobham know that to be true!

As the 70's drew to a close, so the developing "SAME" became problematical. It had by now been allocated its own chapter by head office and we became "SAM35". Yet not everyone enjoyed access to the newsletter booted from David's car or from his residence now known to all as "Hanger One", because there was no meaningful mailing list as such, and the USA SamSpeaks had nothing significant to offer the growing number of subscribers in England. We were wastefully paying our Five Quid overseas for very little return, in terms of enlightened local comment.

Thus at the May FF Nationals of 1980, dark mutterings were broadly afoot, and at a buffet in a local pub organised by David and Hilda (which also cost them quite a bit of personal dosh) the mutterings broke into anger. Various factions had different views of

how things should be organised. The newsletter did not reach all parts! There were no rules regarding engines! Nobody was organising FF or RC! And! And! And!!!

It actually got quite bitchy and I got upset because I had my youngest daughter with me for this Bank Holiday bash and we just wanted to enjoy our meal and have a nice quiet evening with friends. Fearing nothing, I decided to give myself to the Martians and after banging my Guinness bottle on the table really hard and loud, the room fell into complete and utter silence. I rose and offered to chair a meeting, there and then, so people might express their views through a chair, without rancour, in order to try and resolve some of the differences that existed.

And that is how it was for forty or more minutes, although I'm not sure that very much was actually achieved that night, except restore some calm to the proceedings, which eventually concluded with everyone cordially watching some old 8mm films of vintage flying activities, long gone. However, a die was set, and within a few months Colin Watts collared me at Biggleswade and asked me if I would come to a meeting in Erdington (Brum). Naive or what? I didn't know there was a flying field in Erdington. Then the Penny Dropped. Colin wanted me to chair a MEETING where we could "sort out something really important for SAM35".

It was true! Our loosely knit group needed to get organised with a capital "O" and so it was, thirty people and a dog gathered at the Methodist Church Centre in Erdington Birmingham, on Saturday 25th October in the year of our lord 1980. This was Ground-Zero for the emerging SAM35. You can guess who was nominated as founder Chairman!

Eventually, that day, a committee formed itself to run SAM35 and it was resolved that we would have our own magazine to be called "Sam35Speaks". The founding committee was as follows: President David Baker, Chairman Yours Truly, Sam35Speaks Editor Ben Buckle, Treasurer Peter Michel, Northern Rep Colin Watts, Eastern Rep Tony Penhall, Western Rep Denis Lloyd and Competitions Sec Malcolm Taylor.

The duly elected Editor, Ben Buckle, told us that he had accumulated over 300 names of interested flyers and his first magazine print run would be mailed out to all the names on his list inviting them to join our new organisation. He also committed to produce six magazines in the first year which would go only to newly paid-up members.

The area reps agreed to get things moving in their localities and our esteemed and worthy President was to continue with his mantle as the centre of gravity of the whole organisation. This was not entirely to David's liking, because he really did not want to give up the newsletter role that had passed to Ben. But the organisation was crying out for some stability and despite some hiccups, that is what was achieved, even though "Hanger One" continued to generate its unofficial, free, local newsletter for part of the following year, our embryo organisation was duly born and is living still.

After some other procedural niceties and a welcome cup of tea – the inaugural AGM closed with my following request ringing in everybody's ears. "When you get

home – remember to send a cheque for £5 subscription payable to SAM35, to our new treasurer at his Orpington address and be sure to tell ALL your flying friends to do the same”. And on that note we departed for home.

An entertaining sequence of events was kicked off by this inaugural AGM. Nobody present actually wanted to be Treasurer. From the floor, not a peep, but our newly crowned President told us that one, Peter Michel, had agreed to be nominated for the post. But Peter was not at the meeting and, somewhat concerned, I pressed David about Peter’s generous offer. Yes! Peter had definitely agreed to “look after the money”, and in any case he was an accountant by profession!! Good enough, Eh? So he was duly proposed and seconded, and guess how many hands shot up to vote him into office? You’re right! Thirty! The dog also agreed!

After four unsuccessful evenings trying to contact Peter, I eventually got him on the blower the following Thursday. What on earth, he wanted to know, was all this money coming through his letter box. There were hundreds of pounds and he had no idea what was going on. I belatedly explained the events of the preceding Saturday and how he had been represented. Well, it turns out that Peter had only agreed to collect some money “on the field” at the last flying meeting to cover the cost of producing the bootcd newsletter and far from being an accountant, he was actually a sub-editor on the Daily Mirror. Hmmn! Not even close! (Note: National Daily sub-editors work every evening!)

Peter had shot me in the foot and left me without a leg to stand on, so I said he should parcel up all the cheques and send them to me. I would deal with the crisis! “Hold on” says Peter “what’s actually involved?” Using the only word in English language with three successive double letters, I explained a simple double entry bookkeeping system using a W. H. Smith cash book with income on one side and expenditure on the other and at the foot of each page, produce running totals and start a new set of pages, ad infinitum. Thus, when you get to the end of the first year, the difference between the two columns is what you have in the bank. “It’s that easy!” says I.

Well, Peter agreed to give it a try and I promised to help as required. That, dear reader, is how the illustrious Peter Michel became founder Treasurer and Membership Secretary of SAM35 and continued to do that job for the next 3 years during which time the paid up membership grew at a quite unprecedented rate.

By the Christmas of 1980 (less than 2 months since Erdington) we had over 100 paid-up members. By the October of ‘81 we had 283. By the October of ‘82, 486: and in October ‘83, 690. I don’t believe that Peter ever actually regretted offering to “give it a try” because this period brought him into contact with more good friends than any person has a right to expect, but the downside, he would tell me, was that renewal subscriptions usually brought with them a request for information, always needing a reply. Also, I do believe that his postman would complain bitterly about having to deliver the mail in sacks when SAM35 subs were due.

So it was, SAM35 emerged and grew rapidly, as seen above, into an influential organisation that even worried the establishment in various ways. The end of our first year saw inevitable adjustments to the committee. David Baker, never at ease with the position of President was succeeded by Alex Imrie and David reclaimed editorial control.

Yes! There was friction between members of the executive but, hey, this was not an easy birth and I found myself acting as peacemaker on a few occasions. Nevertheless, the ends did justify the means, because the following year was much smoother. We now had 5 regional coordinators with Jack Law now assigned to the North, Colin Watts was re-titled our man in the Midlands and Sid Sutherland brought in for the South. Ben Buckle took on the new role of Safety and Venues. We also had 2 comp secs. Malc Taylor for RC and Keith Harris for FF. Dick Hardwick was to coordinate our relationships with the parent body in the USA. Shortly thereafter Dick took over Safety and Site Liason from Ben Buckle who wanted to develop his emerging plan's service. Despite various problems, major contributions were made by the committee and other members during this formative period and most important was that of the successive editors, Ben and David, who during their tenure, set the organisation in concrete by their dedication to that massive task. For the members, a regular magazine was their rock!

A popular addition to the organisation was "Don the Bulk". Don Knight was to coordinate our Bulk Buying activities and his visits to every venue were eagerly awaited by flyers waiting to purchase various goodies such as DT Fuse, Nylon, Tissue, Diesel Fuel, Rubber Strip, Dope, Thinners and Engines. You name it! Don would try to get it. He was most popular, but it always puzzled me why he was invariably late, until the penny dropped. It probably took him absolutely ages just to load up the car before setting out. Either that or he was high on ether after mixing fuel the night before.

Regarding the style of the magazine, not only did we now have 12 issues per year with the new and fabulous Les Hoy cover but David added something mystical to the end product. Why so? Well, I remember certain issues where page numbering took on a mind of its own, and there was one particular issue containing a page that could only be read by viewing it from all four points of the compass. But that was the style we all knew and loved and didn't we lap it up? The professional press did not see things quite the same way and one notable comment from the pen of an erstwhile Aeromodeller editor described our magazine as DROSS. Totally un-phased, members of SAM35 took this as a complimentary acronym meaning "Dedicated Readers Of Sam Speaks". Years later, that famous scribe became our totally dedicated president. It was fun all the way.

Through these early years, quite a few famous names emerged as members or life members of our little club. Bert Judge, Bob Copland, Laurie Barr, Howard Boys, C.P. Fry, Ron Firth, Ron Moulton, Alwyn Greenhalgh to name just a few.

During this period, the parent body of aeromodelling (S.M.A.E.) in the UK eyed us with suspicion, probably because we were too much of a free spirit, but they could not ignore the growing strength of the movement particularly in the numbers of people turning out at popular venues. "Bums on seats" was always an issue in this generally

declining hobby. Overtures regarding affiliation were made, but SAM35 resisted these and merely recommended that all its members joined the S.M.A.E. on an individual basis. Of course, this was really a necessity, if only for the issue of insurance. Never-the-less, S.M.A.E. were always keen for SAM35 to attend their premier event, the FF Nationals, and over time, encouraged us to run our own events, culminating in the current Vintage Wakefield contests, alongside their standard program.

During our second year a number of significant magazine developments occurred. The most notable of these was the emergence of regular columnists. Some operated under pseudonyms such as the “Ramblings of a Cement Squeezer” and “Encounters”. “The Bulk” was there, of course, but a significant other was the most influential columnist ever to grace our pages. “The Rubber Column” No 1 appeared in complete anonymity in February 1982, but the following month the author was revealed as Mike Kemp. Mike went on to champion vintage rubber free-flight in its purest form, competition flying. He alone, took more people to the edge of the flying envelope than any other contributor.

Vintage Wakefield flying became commonplace under his tutoring and he later developed a new competitive class for small rubber powered models now universally known as Mini-Vintage. He showed members where the “Fear Factor” ended and “Mad” began. Some of his pupils even took to winding full blown 8 oz Wakefield motors to destruction, not always with the protection of blast tubes. This was indeed the start of the “Crazy Rubber Band”. Yes! I admit it, he is my hero! He retired undefeated after a magnificent 100 columns, only to be usurped by his successor who has since passed 165, but Mike had set the gold standard for all future “Speaks” contributors.

Of all the milestones charted in this trawl through my personal recollections of SAM35 from ‘77 until the end of ‘82, I would remind you of two crowning glories. The first was a massively increased SAM35 presence at both the 51st and 52nd Model Engineer Exhibitions at Wembley Conference Centre at the start of ‘82 and ‘83 respectively. A mind-boggling display of Vintage designs was shown during the 9 days of each of these two exhibitions. The SAM35 Stand was permanently manned by a band of enthusiastic stalwarts and many new members were recruited to our society as a result.

The second and arguably the finest of all our early achievements came in December ‘82 when the 1st Year Book was published under the professional guidance of Peter Michel and David Parker with major contributions from many others. What a legacy this proved to be, considering that I have just finished reading Year Book 13.

As my tenure of office ended, SAM35 moved on to ever greater achievements under the chairmanships of the late Vic Dubery and his successors. Need I say more?

Ramon Alban. SAM35 Founder Chairman, 1980-82.

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