

# Cowpat Hill



WHITE HORSE KITE FLYERS  
SPRING ISSUE 2007  
APRIL - JUNE

## SWINDON KITE FESTIVAL 12/13<sup>th</sup> May

Remember next month sees our festival return. Make sure your calendar  
Is free for this unmissable event.

Any help you can offer on the Friday to  
Set up the festival would be much appreciated  
As well as clearing down the on the Sunday

For more information please contact Arthur or mail us at the web site

Here's looking forward to a great weekend

And a big thank you in advance

White horse kite flyers  
PO Box 585  
SWINDON  
SN3 4YR

# Diary Dates 2007

W = Workshop, D = Display, T = Teddy bears

## APRIL

22 Streatham Common Kite Day

## MAY

5/6/7<sup>th</sup> Weymouth

**12/13<sup>th</sup> SWINDON**

19/20<sup>th</sup> Rougham Kite Festival

26/28 Tewkesbury Kite Fun Weekend

26/28<sup>th</sup> Flexi Wallop 3

## JUNE

2/3<sup>rd</sup> Basingstoke

2/3<sup>rd</sup> Cleethorpes

10<sup>th</sup> Barbury

10<sup>th</sup> Buster hill

16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Southampton

23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> Bedford

## JULY

8<sup>th</sup> Barbury

7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Brighton

14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Leominster

Please note all events are liable to alteration or cancellation. For up to date information please check our web site [www.whkf.co.uk](http://www.whkf.co.uk)



When Pete Dawson of the White Horse Kite Fliers asked me to help out at the Benjamin Franklin tri-centenary at the American Museum in Bath, I wondered whether it would be possible to create, and then fly a genuine electricity-gathering kite.

XCV. *A Letter of Benjamin Franklin, Esq; to Mr. Peter Collinson, F. R. S. concerning an electrical Kite.*

Philadelphia, Oct. 1, 1752.

Read Dec. 21 1752. **A**S frequent mention is made in the public papers from Europe of the success of the Philadelphia experiment for drawing the electric fire from clouds by means of pointed rods of iron erected on high buildings, &c. it may be agreeable to the curious to be informed, that the same experiment has succeeded in Philadelphia, tho' made in a different and more easy manner, which any one may try, as follows:

Make a small cross, of two light strips of cedar; the arms so long, as to reach to the four corners of a large thin silk handkerchief, when extended: tie the corners of the handkerchief to the extremities of the cross; so you have the body of a kite; which being

[ 566 ]

being properly accommodated with a tail, loop, and string, will rise in the air like those made of paper; but this, being of silk, is fitter to bear the wet and wind of a thunder-gust without tearing.

To the top of the upright stick of the cross is to be fixed a very sharp-pointed wire, rising a foot or more above the wood.

To the end of the twine, next the hand, is to be tied a silk riband; and where the twine and silk join, a key may be fasten'd.

The kite is to be raised, when a thunder-gust appears to be coming on, (which is very frequent in this country) and the person, who holds the string, must stand within a door, or window, or under some cover, so that the silk riband may not be wet; and care must be taken, that the twine does not touch the frame of the door or window.

As soon as any of the thunder-clouds come over the kite, the pointed wire will draw the electric fire from them; and the kite, with all the twine, will be electrified; and the loose filaments of the twine will stand out every way, and be attracted by an approaching finger.

When the rain has wet the kite and twine, so that it can conduct the electric fire freely, you will find it stream out plentifully from the key on the approach of your knuckle.

Benjamin Franklin is celebrated in America as the first, in 1752, to collect an electric charge from the atmosphere by using a kite. However, like any claim there are challengers. The French support De Romas<sup>1</sup> while there may be some evidence that the concept, at least, was supposed possible by Scotsman Alexander Wilson in 1749<sup>2</sup>.

Franklin's account of his electrical kite has been frequently reprinted and is worth reading. The Royal Society recently opened up its archive on the Internet so I was able to download a couple of cuttings<sup>3,4</sup>. Benjamin Franklin's letter to Peter Collinson was written on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1752 from Philadelphia and contains detailed, but simplified, instructions on how to make the kite. According to Franklin "it is necessary to make a small cross of two light strips of cedar; the arms so long as to reach the four corners of a large thin silk handkerchief, when extended: tie the corners of the handkerchief to the extremities of the cross, so you have the body of a kite; which being properly accommodated with a tail, loop and string, will rise into the air like those made of paper: but this, being of silk, is fitter to bear the wet and wind of a thunder-gust without tearing." He goes on to say that "to the end of the upright stick of the cross is to be fixed a very sharp pointed wire, rising to a foot or more above the wood....." And then referring to a letter from John Lining, a similar kite was made using silk called 'alamode' (à la mode) and was flown on a common three-strand hemp line. There is, of course, more detail in the references but this was sufficient for me to build my replica.

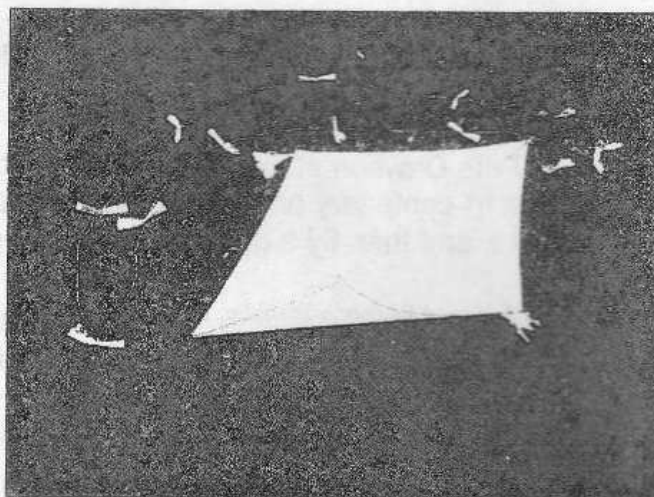
<sup>1</sup> M Guyot. *Nouvelles Recreations Physiques et Mathematiques*. Two volumes, 1799. See Trezieme Recreation – Cerf-Volant Electrique. De Romas is attributed as the inventor while Franklin is given as inventor of other Recreations (e.g. the Vingtieme). My book is based on an earlier book by Jaques Ozanam (1694/96) which I have not seen, but which may contain electrical kite experiments.

<sup>2</sup> Clive Hart. *Kites; an Historical Survey*. 1967, reprinted 1982 by Appel. See chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Society Philosophical Transactions 1683 – 1775. Page 565. A letter of Benjamin Franklin Esq. to Mr Peter Collinson F.R.S. concerning an electrical Kite. 1752.

<sup>4</sup> Royal Society Philosophical Transactions 1683 – 1775. Page 757. Extract of a letter from John Lining, M.D. of Charles Town in South Carolina, to Charles Pinkney Esq. in London: with his answers to several queries sent to him concerning his experiment of Electricity with a Kite. 1754.

I already had a light silk handkerchief of the right size. It had been given to me at the Weifang Kite Festival in China many years ago and so seemed appropriate. The silk was 30 pouces square (French inches are measures in thumbs or "pouces"), which tallies with handkerchiefs of the period<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately there were no cedar laths to hand so I had to make do with the bamboo equivalent cut to 1/2" by 3/16" from a six-inch diameter pole. I made the bamboos overlong with the intention of cutting them down, but when playing with the fabric and sticks I soon realised that the silk would stretch tight on overlong sticks. Because of that I made the upright slightly longer than the cross stick. The silk was then bound to the upright stick using linen boot thread and the cross-stick attached similarly, but making a slight bow. When the cross-stick was pulled down to the upright, both the upright and cross-stick formed concave bows and the silk pulled drum tight. The cross-stick was then bound to the upright just forward of the middle of the upright. The result being a somewhat concave looking diamond. The kite was bridled with hemp lines attached to each of the four corners. This tallies with contemporary drawings that 'look-wrong' in respect of modern kite bridling practice but actually allows a bridling without damaging the expensive silk handkerchief. I am sure Benjamin Franklin would have not wanted to



sacrifice his handkerchief on a kite experiment. The actual bridle point was later found by experiment to be well forward. I then made a tassel tail using folded paper and an old piece of parcel string. I used piano wire for the long metal spike, and, just for fun, attached tissue-paper tassels to the wing tips. The flying line was to be 900 yards of three-strand linen cord, as used for sewing mattresses, attached to an old wooden fishing winder that I had rescued from the flea market in Basel, Switzerland. The first flights were made on the Bristol Downs and, with the exception of a slowly disintegrating tail, all seemed to be going well. In fact very well as the kite soared to a high angle on what was a pretty quiet day.

The American Museum can be found high up on the hills just to the south of Bath. The road through the museum grounds winds between the trees, and eventually emerges at a magnificent Georgian mansion overlooking a deep south-east facing valley. Pete Dawson was already setting up the White Horse kite workshop tent when I arrived and, although the situation looked wonderful, I opted for the chance of an indoor exhibition because of the fragility of my old materials. Laura Brown is the Education Officer at *The American Museum In Britain* at Claverton Manor, Bath<sup>6</sup>. She very kindly offered me a corner of the Lecture Hall, which

<sup>5</sup> Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes de Mulhouse. A fine handkerchief approx 30" square. "The Ascension of the Montgolfière" Mulhouse 1783.

<sup>6</sup> [www.americanmuseum.org](http://www.americanmuseum.org)

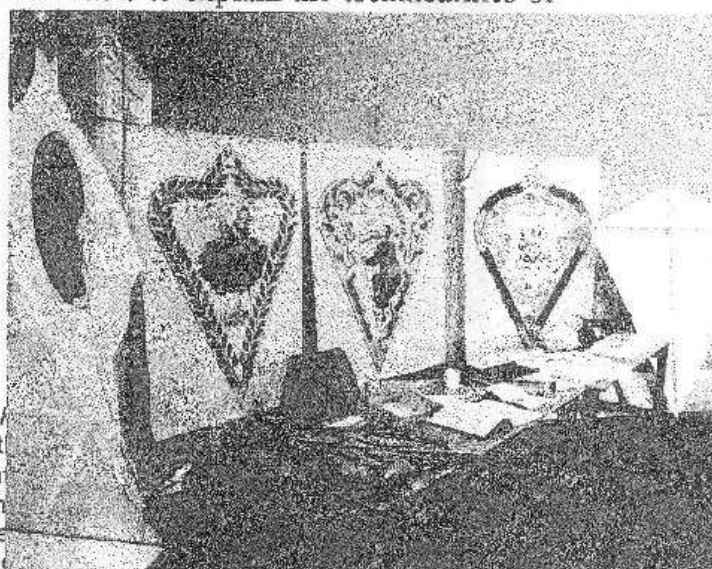


overlooks the museum lawns. The rest of the room was the museum café; that meant that I was well provided for!

I didn't just bring along the silk kite. I had a Somerset Pear-top in cotton and with willow sticks which more or less represented Alexander Wilson despite the kite not being Scottish. Then there were three large silk pear-top kite skins made for me by Mr Qian who is the artist in residence at the Weifang Kite Museum. Mr Qian's kites are copies of the French kites at Epinal<sup>7</sup> in the 1830s and are not unlike a kite dated 1773 currently under restoration by Drachen Foundation in Seattle. These are also similar to the De Romas kite in Guyot's book. Other kites included an Indonesian diamond fishing-kite made from breadfruit leaves and an American Eddy Meteorological kite of the 1890s. These represented, in many ways, the initial and ultimate development of the classic diamond kite. Supporting these kites were the various documents referenced here, together with my copy of 'The History of the Kite Carriage', 1852, to show something of local kite bugging in the Bristol-Bath region, and a photo album and miniature kite to show Samuel Franklin Cody's man-lifting kites of the early 1900s when the American was kiting instructor to the British Army.

We were honoured by the presence of Benjamin Franklin himself. He appeared very distinctive in period costume and sixteenth century style of speech. Not surprisingly he took a great interest in my replication of his famous kite but declined my offer of yellow rubber gloves to protect himself from the ravages of the atmospheric electricity when the time came for the grand electrostatic experiment. We had a brief discussion on De Romas but he could not recollect meeting him for coffee at Le Procope<sup>8</sup> in Paris so claimed independence; whether he met him on the flying field is not recorded either.

The exhibition went well enough. I was able to illustrate De Romas's experiments using a picture in Clive Hart's book where the 'electric fluid' can be seen doing dastardly things to a pigeon, while a chained dog looks on nervously. And I was able to explain the technicalities of the Franklin experiment using the account in the American Meteorological Journal<sup>9</sup>. The journal article explains the purpose of the experiment in terms of measuring the atmospheric charge rather than attracting lightning. While the experiment seemed dangerous enough I am sure the experimenters did not want to draw a lightning strike and suffer the consequences as happened to Dr Richman of St. Petersburg in 1753. While it is not



<sup>7</sup> Phillipe Cottenceau. *Les cerfs-volants d'imagerie populaire en France*. Paris: 2003. This is a small, but beautifully produced, monograph on the history of kites.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Procope*, founded 1686 is claimed to be the most ancient cafe in Paris. *L'Ancienne Comédie* - 75006 Paris and boasts a clientele that includes many famous names.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander MacAdie. *Franklin's Kite Experiment*. American Meteorological Journal. The Blue Hill Observatory measured 3000 volts in a recreation of the experiment.

clear that a lightning strike on his kite killed Richman, there is a photograph<sup>10</sup> of a later kite line in the process of being vaporised by a strike. Whether the effect of the lightning can reach the ground faster than the line can vaporise it is also uncertain!

At the appointed hour I decamped to the lawns with the silk kite to find Benjamin Franklin and arrange the electric kite experiment. White Horse had been doing a good job since there were children's kites rushing about everywhere. The children must have heard the stories of atmospheric electrics since a suitable gap appeared as soon as Benjamin Franklin (without rubber gloves) was ready to take to the air. The silk kite rose, the metal spike gleamed invitingly to all those charged atmospheric particles. The kite rose higher and higher, well over Claverton Manor but as yet below the 250 ft suggested by John Lining. It was already well above the children's kites. Our hopes rose and I felt I could see a sparkle in the eyes of Professor Franklin. But.....shock! A few tassels fluttered away from the kite's rotting string tail. No matter, the kite climbed higher, and higher as the upper wind grew stronger and steadier. A few more tassels dropped away and the previously steady kite started to sway. More line, more sway, more line and more dropped tassels. And then.... total disaster as the sway turned into a swoop and the swoop turned into a death dive straight into the open arms of a tall tree. And there it stopped. And is still there now. Poor Benjamin Franklin<sup>11</sup>! He was in a state of disarray, his brave experiment ruined.

Back at the exhibition there was a gap where the experimental kite had once been. But we continued flying anyway. The little Cody kite nearly reached the ceiling of the Lecture Hall and every now and again a tiny paper hummingbird kite flew above the heads of the diners from a single strand of silk.

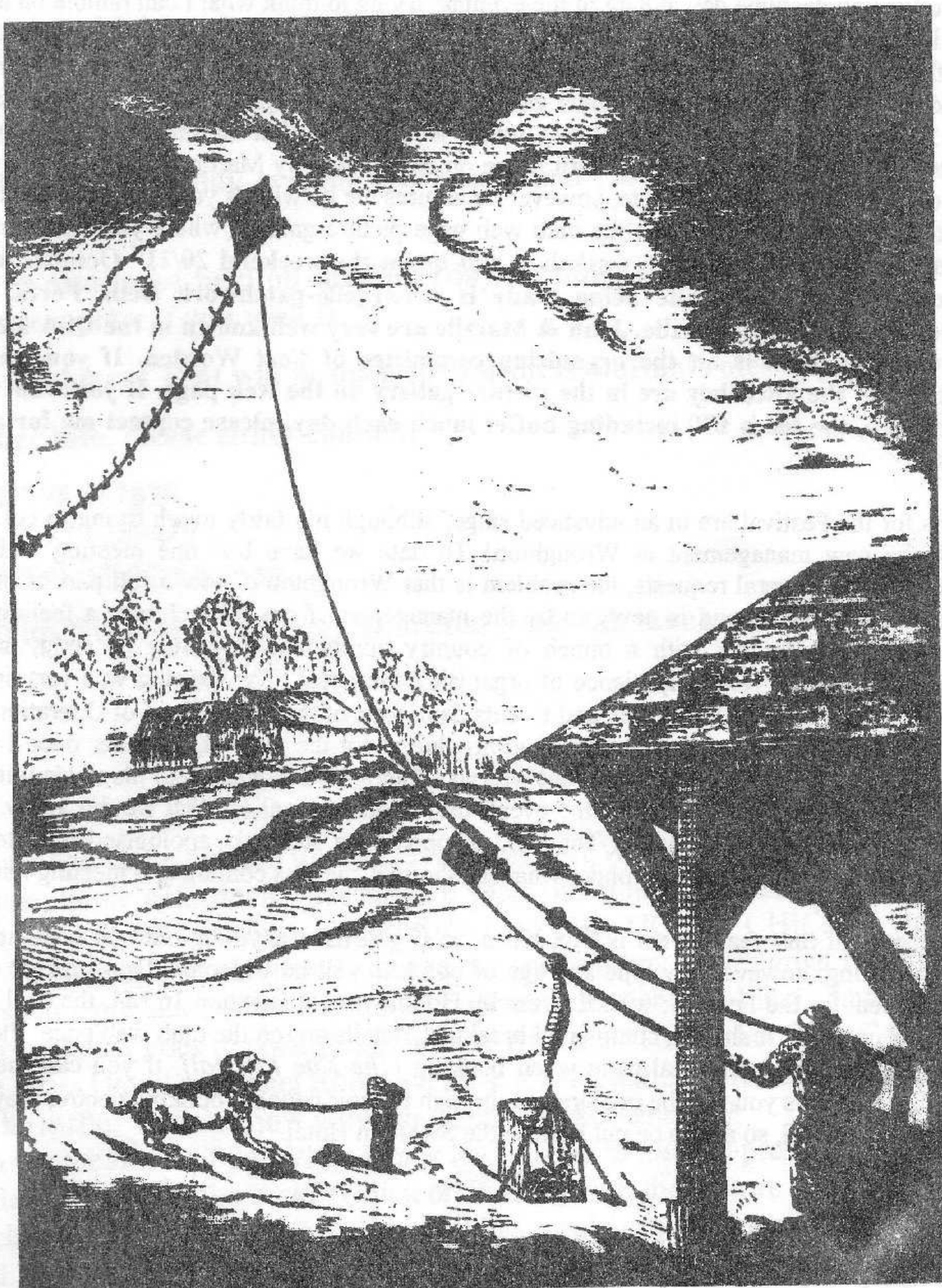
I am not sure that the Benjamin Franklin kite reconstruction proved anything other than the fun of messing about with kites. We had fun, the children had fun and it is likely that even Ben Franklin himself smiled a wry kite smile from somewhere above the thunderclouds.



<sup>10</sup> This photograph was taken at the meteorological observatory at Lindenberg, about 100 km south of Berlin.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Franklin aka Steve Purbrick. Actor – Interpreter. [sp1@ntlworld.com](mailto:sp1@ntlworld.com). Excellent likeness and patter. Good sport too – especially given the evidence of the dangerous nature of the experiment.





25. De Romas's experiments with a pigeon and a dog

## Robinson's Ramble

Here I am on deadline day at 8.45 in the evening, trying to think what I can ramble on about! The workshop by Tom McAllister was an outstanding success, this was quite a different workshop for the participants, it was more akin to model making than kite building, however everyone who took part; took to the task with some gusto and all but one went home with a finished kite, the one that wasn't finished was by Doug Jones, who met Tom at the airport and brought him to Swindon by bus; he was offered a lift home on the Sunday by Martin Croxton, Doug jumped at the offer so didn't finish his kite, however he assures me he will. If you want to look at the range of kites that were made, go to the club web page picture gallery, where you will see all of the finished kites. **The next club workshop will be on the weekend 20/21<sup>st</sup> October, at Penhill Primary School. The kite being made is a bargello-patchwork Della Porta, by John Freeman & his wife Marzlie. John & Marzlie are very well known in the USA kite making community; John is on the organizing committee of Fort Worden. If you want to see pictures of the kite, they are in the picture gallery on the web page. If you want to do the workshop, the fee is £70 including buffet lunch each day, please contact me for a booking form.**

Plans for the Festival are in an advanced stage, although it's fairly tough trying to communicate with the new management at Wroughton! To date we have had one meeting and that was arranged after several requests, the problem is that Wroughton is now a full part of the Science Museum in London, and is now run by the management from there. I have a feeling they just think they are dealing with a bunch of country bumpkins, they may be right, but we are bumpkins with 17 years experience of organising the event. The meeting was very interesting; two women from their Marketing and Events dept. (one of them was Head of Operations) arrived at the meeting 25 minutes late! They had no clue about the festival, however once I had given them a 5 minute talk on what the event was all about and Arthur got into his stride with maps of the site, plus our layout plans for the event, they suddenly realised that we did know a thing or two about what we were doing. The head of operations suddenly apologised for attending the meeting so under prepared. I wonder what she thought she was coming to a meeting about!

The theme of this years event is Box Kites, so if you have anything old and interesting please bring it along, however any type and age of box kite will be welcome. Don't forget we have a special deal for the Festival; with Express by Holiday Inn at Junction 16 M4, the deal is £40 per **ROOM** per night including continental breakfast, details are on the club web page. Please make sure you give them the deal code when booking [*The Kite Festival*], if you call the Swindon Hotel, sometimes you will be put straight through to their national booking centre, they won't be aware of this deal, so ask to be put back to the Swindon Hotel.

Regards  
David Robinson



## **NORTH HAMPSHIRE KITER'S JOLLY UP-July 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> 2007**

**Come along and join us for a FUN Weekend of Kite Flying for Kite Fliers!**

**On site camping is available from Friday evening onwards (£5 per tent/camper for the weekend).**

**There will be a Saturday evening BBQ (nominal cost, bring your plate and cutlery please!)**

**A Raffle is also to be held on the Saturday evening, please be generous (you may donate a prize if you wish !)**

**Roy's Refreshment Tent will be open for Business, normal rules apply..**

**For further info, please either contact:**

**Roy on 07778 352825**

**Colin on 07770 338419**

**Or e-mail [roy@kitesup.co.uk](mailto:roy@kitesup.co.uk)**

**Please Note: this is NOT a Buggy/Boarding weekend, thank-you.**

### **The Banner Yet Waves!**

Some years ago while helping to run the raffle at Fort Worden Kite Makers Conference, Jamie Alford who was about 6 years old at the time decided that we needed a name to call ourselves. Henceforth the "THE TICKET CHICKS" was created. We would both sell tickets during the convention. It was great fun and she was such a pro, she had attended the conference longer than I had. Jamie has grown up and now goes to college and left me with the "The Ticket Chick" name. Over the years David and Janet Robinson have attended the conference and helped me run the raffle. I don't know why they aren't "ticket chicks"?

So when the members of the White Horse Kite Flyers in Dieppe presented me with the Raffle Banner with the Ticket Chick on it along with the picture of all those raffle tickets, well, you knocked me over. What a truly unique gift and one that got me good. This is a terrific gift that you all have given me. The banner flew at Fort Worden this year and I want you to know that it will always be displayed where ever I am flying or now let me think, oh yes, selling raffle tickets.

Many thanks to David for taking the picture of all those tickets and coming up with idea, the White Horse Kite Flyers, Roy and Hayley for the printing and sewing.

You are always in my mind and my heart and I thank all of you for the wonderful gift

Whenever you see the banner waving "LOOK OUT" and hang on to your purse and wallets, I'll want your money. Then get ready for a big hug!

I thank you all and love you and miss you very much.

I should live in England because my heart is there with you all of you.

Marla Miller

The Ticket Chick





## HOW GREEN IS MY HOBBY

Researchers in Italy have come up with a new method of producing green energy. What are they thinking of using? Nothing other than kites. The theory is that you use stacks of power kites (sorry about the pun) flying at 1000 metres fixed to a large horizontal wheel. The kites carry sensors that feed information back to the control system and this combined with a radar system will then steers them round in a circle.

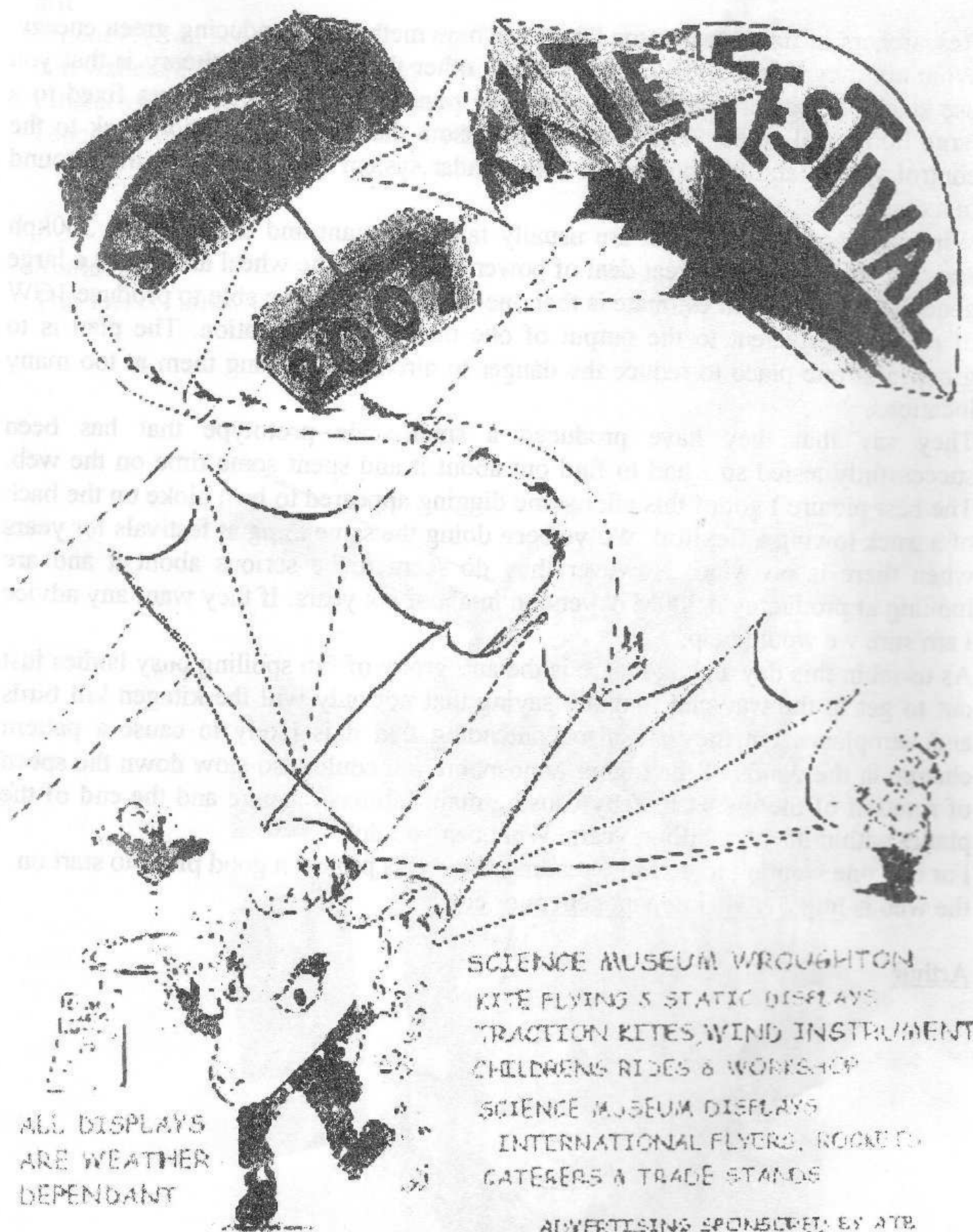
Wind speeds at that altitude are usually fairly constant and can often be 300kph and that will produce a great deal of power. This turns the wheel and hence a large generator. The current estimate is that one of these should be able to produce 1GW of energy equivalent to the output of one nuclear power station. The plan is to group 5 at one place to reduce the danger to aircraft by having them at too many locations.

They say that they have produced a small-scale prototype that has been successfully tested so I had to find out about it and spent some time on the web. The best picture I got of this after some digging appeared to be a bloke on the back of a truck towing a flexifoil. We've been doing the same thing at festivals for years when there is no wind. However they do seem to be serious about it and are looking at producing a 200MW version in about six years. If they want any advice I am sure we would help.

As usual in this day and age there is the anti group of fun spoiling busy bodies just out to get in the way and they are saying that not only will the kitegen kill birds and aeroplanes but they are also contending that it is likely to cause a pattern change in the winds of the higher atmosphere but could also slow down the speed of rotation of the planet thereby causing major climate change and the end of the planet within the next billion years. What can you do?

For any one wanting to do more reading about this project a good place to start on the web is <http://www.kitewindgenerator.com>.

Arthur



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Not



## Skychat

Well here we go again, it seems like yesterday that I was writing the last "Skychat" and we are at it again. If only Pete would give me a couple more days to print it all up. Dead lines how I hate them.

We had a wonderful workshop with Tom McAllister and I finished my kite in the allotted time. Very time consuming and fiddly especially with my big mitts, but everything worked out and I do not think I made any serious mistakes. Still it flies beautiful and looks bigger than it is in the air. I am tempted to build a bigger one (no Dave not in 6foot units) but not just yet. Think of the time taken to put it together on the flying field and then at the end taking it down again.

You can have a go at another different kite this autumn with John Freeman and his wife Marzlie. I made one of his butterflies at Fort Worden a few years ago and it is a very pretty kite. John's flair is with Bargello work which gives his kites that individual look, no matter what type of kite it is.

Now it is begging time again. With our Festival only a month away as always we are looking for assistance at the Festival and **DONATIONS** for the raffle. In past years you have done the Club proud and I hope and trust that you will come up trumps again this year. The Raffle is our single biggest money earner and without it we would not be able to run the Festival, so please dig deep. Thank you in anticipation. This year, barring accidents "The Ticket Chick" will be with us, prising our wallets open. Do not say that you have not been warned! and she does it with a smile on her face. Let us hope that the sun shines on us over the weekend with the same radiance as Marla's smile.

As always we are looking for bodies to help at the functions we are booked in to do this year. More hands make light work. There may be one or two new events to cover this year, but if you know of any event that would like us to attend, please get in contact with Hon Sec. Dave at the earliest possible opportunity.

Sorry about the Cover colour this issue. I hope Dave does not go a nasty shade of puce. I thought I had a box of green paper, but on opening it up, twas blue and no time to get any more paper. Sorry.

Well Pete said "fill this page if you can", not quite, but if I keep going I will not have time to print and collate it all up ready for Sunday. So here's clean winds and tight lines.

Neil.



## Club Merchandise Now Available

New club patch £1.50	The New club jacket £35.00	Cap £7.50
Legionaries cap £8.50	Cap with ear flaps £10.00	
Tee shirts	Polo tee shirts	
s-xl £9.00	xs-xl £14.00	
2xl-3xl £9.50	2xl £14.50	
	3-4xl £15.00	

### Sweatshirts

Xs-xl £16.60

2xl £17.90

3-4xl £18.40

### Festival sweat shirt

xs-xl £25.00

All items can be viewed on our web site [www.whkf.co.uk](http://www.whkf.co.uk)  
all above price's **do not** include post and packing if you like it posted to you please mail or ring us  
first for a price .To order please send your order with cheque to  
W.H.K.F , P.O.Box 585 , Swindon , SN2 4YR

## Kite Flying Safety Tips

### The NEVERS of Kite Flying

- Fly a kite in wet or stormy weather, try to keep your kite line dry.
- Fly a kite near power lines, transmission towers or aeriels.
- Fly a kite with wire or anything metallic in the line.
- Fly a strong pulling kite without wearing GLOVES.
- Leave odd bits of flying line etc on the flying site.
- Fly a kite at over 200 feet\*.

\*Kite festivals may have C.A.A. clearance to fly higher.....ASK!

### The Things to AVOID

- Motorways, roads, car parks railway lines or buildings.
  - Airfields and low flying air traffic patterns.
  - Members of the public....stunt flyers please take care!
  - Those kite eating trees.
  - Animals, they can be frightened by kites.
- Remember...your kites can get really quite lonely up high in the sky, just occasionally, look up and give them a little SMILE.*

AND PLEASE, MIND THOSE POWER LINES!

## Where the WHKF go to fly their kites

WHITE HORSE KITE FLYERS fly at Barbury Castle Country Park, Wroughton, Swindon, Wilts on the SECOND  
Sunday of each month  
Will YOU be there?

### Local WHKF contacts are:

Neil Harvey on: (01285) 740295

Arthur Dibble on: (01635) 865976

Dave Robinson on: (01793) 824208

### COWPAT HILL

Journal of the White Horse Kite Flyers

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