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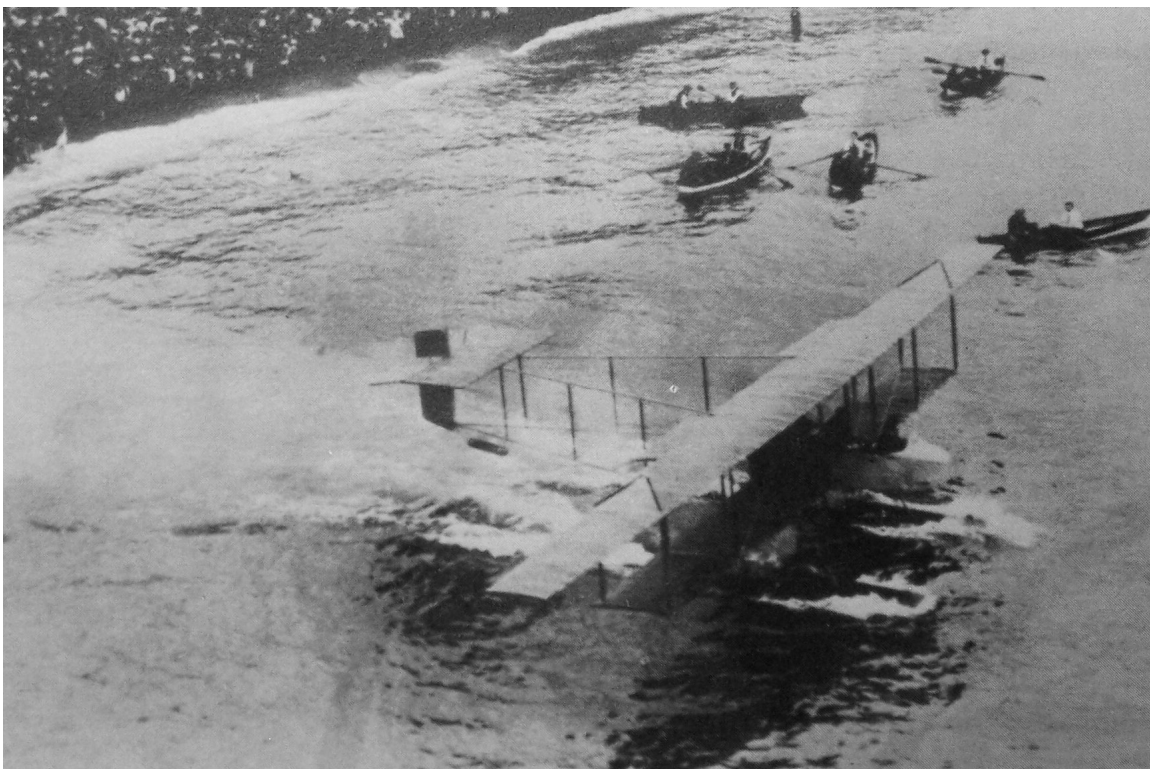
## The Earliest Records of Flying Boats & Seaplanes at Poole and Bournemouth © PFBC

With the expanse of Poole Harbour and its somewhat sheltered waters it is hardly surprising that there has been a significant and lengthy association with Flying Boats & Seaplanes, which encompasses most of their History.

The first record though, relates to Poole Bay and to Bournemouth Beach, with the excitement generated by the arrival of the famous aviator [Henri Farman](#) with his hydro-aeroplane (aka 'waterplane') for a Meeting in 1912.

Bournemouth already had an involvement in the exploits of early Aviators - with 'local' William E. McArdle & J. Armstrong Drexel on Wallis Down near Talbot Village in 1910 (not far from today's Bournemouth Univ.) followed by the first Meeting held at Southbourne in July, which drew a large crowd to watch 'thrills + spills'. Two biplanes came to grief on consecutive days, when sadly on the 12th. the popular Charles Rolls was killed, and so became the first Briton to die in an air accident (- a memorial to him in playing fields at St. Peters Sch.). This was witnessed by a huge gathering which included many glitterati/dignitaries, and [Samuel Franklin Cody](#). SFC was the hero of British aviation with a [first Flight in Oct. 1908](#) and his [hydro-aeroplane Cody VI in 1913](#), but like his friend CS Rolls, was to perish in a flying accident with a passenger WHB Evans on 7th. Aug. 1913.

Farman's visit was eventful, for one of his landplanes crashed at Southbourne (with the pilot being uninjured): On 11th. July in flying circuits round the bay on alighting his waterplane flipped over, luckily in shallow water, so that damage resulting from capsize and inundation was rectified '*in only 10 days*'. (ref: Dave Fagan HLM) No record has yet been located by PFBC to confirm that this aircraft was brought to Poole Harbour for repairs.



[ Photo. courtesy of Bm'th Libraries ~ of Henri Farman's hydro-aeroplane taking off from Bournemouth Beach, 1912...]

Therefore, the earliest record for Seaplanes utilising Poole Harbour featured in 1916 during the Great War... This was in association with the strandline requisitioned by the Admiralty within the [Lake Area of Hamworthy](#), which included a [siding](#) - linking with the railway branch line from Hamworthy junction to Poole's [New Quay](#). This siding connected with the range of buildings and shipyard facilities which had been hurriedly constructed. The Admiralty already had a presence around Poole Harbour with its Cordite Factory at [RNCF Holton Heath](#), also a Naval Base with various stores, wharves, a railway marshalling yard + sidings along Poole's West Quay.

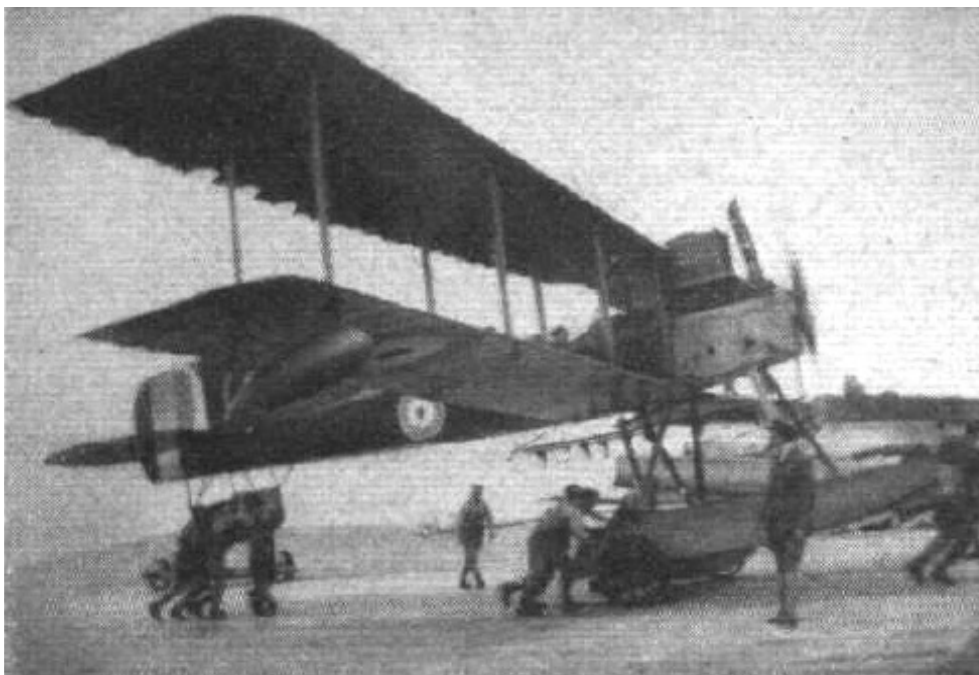
Large boatsheds, slipways & piers were completed at Lake for the building of barges fabricated from concrete. Workers for the Admiralty shipyard could catch a special train from Poole and arrive at the station - [Lake Halt](#) which remained only in operation during the war years (upon the embankment near the bridge over Lake Rd.).



The Site viewed from  
Dorset Lake Shipyard  
© Lake Yard

*[The former Admiralty Shipyard at Lake, Hamworthy with the Seaplane facility just beyond the boatsheds + slipways... In the distance is Doulton's Clayworks pier ~ later used by Lake Fuel Depot... courtesy of Robin Culpan, Lake Yard...]*

This was a significant undertaking which also included a site for Navy aircraft - the [Short 184 Seaplane](#) types. On Channel duties these sub'-spotting Seaplanes (with a crew of two) had the capability of carrying a torpedo. After the war the Admiralty retained a presence until *circa* 1930, whilst some other parts at Lake were sold off to become Gardiner Shipbuilding Co. (- later Dorset Lake Shipyard) and Smiths Ironworks (- later JR Smiths). Today, the yard of [Lake YC](#) retains much interest for the local historian - whilst the ATURM (Royal Marines) occupies a site which includes an area once deployed for Seaplanes - also the land of former RAF Hamworthy which was constructed in WW2 on a large reclaimed part of the foreshore to provide a base for Flying Boats. The Yachtsman P.H. is adjacent to where the railway siding crossed Lake Rd. to then enter the shipyard itself.



*[Photo. of a Short 184 Seaplane type, at an unspecified location from the Great War ~ courtesy of Flight Magazine...]*

Also, within the shores of Poole Harbour, there was an RAF Seaplane operational training unit base belonging to No.10 Group, which was at the lee of North Haven, Sandbanks between September 1918 and October 1919.



The postwar period was to provide the impetus for the scheduling of Schneider Trophy races for Bournemouth in September 1919, as in the last contest pre-war (held at Monaco in 1913) a British contestant was victorious. With the exclusion of any German entrant, and no contestant from the USA, those from France (3), and Italy, joined three British Seaplanes (and reserve) preparing for this prestigious Event on the 10th. September, 1910.

Bournemouth was selected as the venue for its natural amphitheatre of the promenade with clifftops & beaches. The four British contestants chose to be based at Cowes to prepare, and to undergo trials for the final selection, whereas two of the French entrants determined to arrive there late: [Henri Mallard](#) got stranded in the Channel and was lucky to be rescued - whilst the other [Nieuport](#) piloted by [Jean Casale](#) was damaged when alighting... In the spirit of Schneider, the engineers at Cowes (working around the clock) got this aircraft repaired in time.

The Italian team with its two [Savoia S.13](#) opted to be based at Poole Harbour, and to stay at the stunning new villa known as [Harbour Heights](#) (- which after the Schneider Contest became the famous hotel of that name). Arriving in July, in good time, their Seaplanes were trialled in the Harbour in using the shoreline at Lilliput ! Guido Janello piloted the Italian entry which was chosen and allocated the race number Seven (Lucky No. 7).

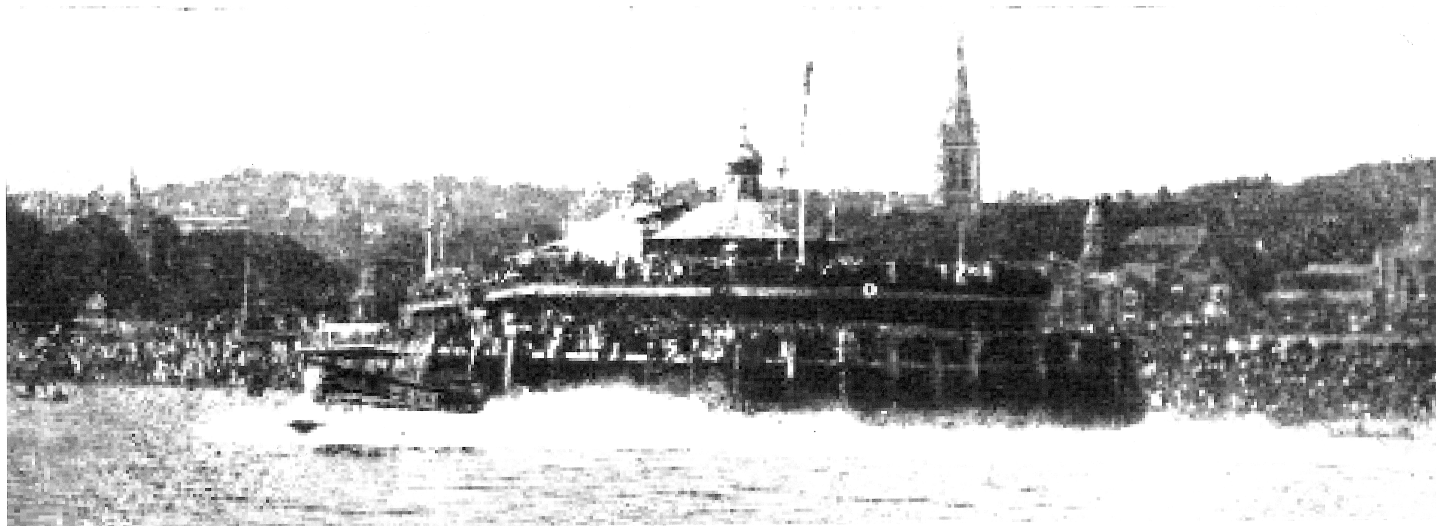


*[Guido Janello with the Savoia S.13 - which was technically a Flying Boat with its hull resting on the water...]*

Race Day on the 10th. September was to be beset by a Sea Fog - which can occur at that time of year in good weather and otherwise fine conditions, shrouding the Channel, when sometimes blanketing the Purbeck Coast. It rolled in to obscure [Old Harry Rocks](#), but the [Race Committee](#) - when it receded with the tide, decided to get racing underway as a timed course of 10 laps x 20 nautical miles on a [triangular circuit](#) from Bournemouth Pier to Durlston Head returning across Poole Bay, to turn again off Hengistbury Head, with a Boscombe finish line. Some in the press termed it a *Fiasco in the Fog* and criticised the Race Committee who had taken the decision, yet the crowds were hugely entertained & gripped by the drama: Cancellation would not have been welcomed. After all, the event arranged by the Royal Aero Club did lift the gloom of the Great War and the flu pandemic !

The British [G-AELP Sea Lion](#) of [Supermarine](#) piloted by [Basil Hobbs](#) flipped on alighting and began to sink - only saved by prompt action of taking it in tow: Evidently, it had struck some object when touching down in Swanage Bay in order to determine position in dense fog, but had not realised this before the dramatic ending. Sadi Lecointe's [Spad](#) - a [Herbemount S.20b](#) was damaged and could not set out, and Casale's Nieuport did not fare much better. British favourites of [Harry Hawker](#) in [G-EAKI Sopwith 107 Schneider](#), and [Vincent Nicholl](#) in the [G-EALQ Fairey IIIa](#) managed only a few laps in the fog, and [Hammersley's Avro539/1](#) did not have the opportunity to challenge through its undoubted capability (as it had been unfortunately eliminated in trials)... This left only Guido Janello with his S.13. Savoia which was to show its paces and seemingly take the Trophy. Yet, this was to no avail - as disqualification was to follow for failure to apparently round the Swanage turn ! The result was declared null & void, but the Italian team was awarded the honour of holding the next contest.

It is not clear whether any of the other Seaplanes joined the Italians at Poole before heading out from the area, but representatives from the Royal Aero Club, and the Race Committee certainly returned to Harbour Heights.



*[Hammersley's Avro 539/1 shows its paces in passing the start-line off Bournemouth Pier ~ but in its reserve capacity...]*

Due to the publicity generated in advance of the Schneider Trophy races, commercial opportunities now arose: Therefore, through the Summer of 1919 the Seaplane [N1714](#), a [Supermarine Channel Mark I](#), provided flights in charging three guineas a person (max. of two passengers) for trips around Poole Bay with passengers ferried from Bournemouth Pier a short distance to its moorings, for the exciting excursion - *an adventure of a lifetime*.



*Photograph is Subject to Copyright*

*[This lovely photograph shows N174 as converted by Supermarine, deployed on excursions from Bournemouth Pier courtesy of the Fyson Family's Collection....]*

Supermarine had converted the Channel Mk I from [Air Department \(AD\) Seaplanes](#) as surplus to requirement, which were purchased from the Admiralty. Accordingly, ten of these Seaplanes were earmarked to be used on Southampton to Ryde flights, and on seaside excursions at Whitsun from the principle resorts around the IOW, and then being available for the Cowes Regatta. Only five operated at this time leaving the others in reserve... The ten were to receive consecutive civil registrations [G-EAED](#) ~ [G-EAEM](#); so [N174](#) was to become [G-EAEJ](#). [G-EAED](#), [G-EAEG](#) & [G-EAEK](#) also operated at Bournemouth from 23rd. July through the Autumn & Winter. Occasionally, when weather conditions dictated, these put in at Poole Harbour to take advantage of protection afforded by the lee of North Haven Shore, which had been an outpost for the Navy Seaplanes during the War.

From 16th. August, flights between Bournemouth & Shanklin became the first scheduled Seaplane service !

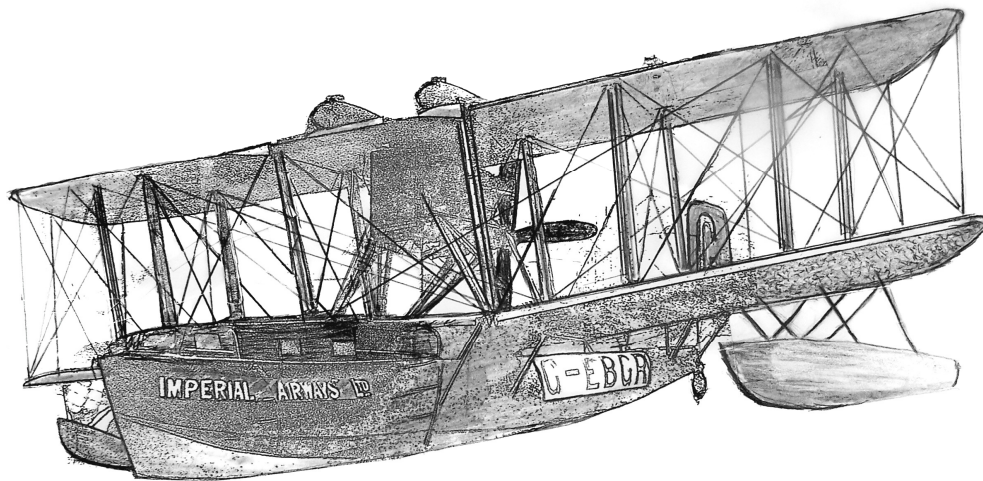
Following the Schneider Trophy races, later that month on 27th. September a railway strike gave opportunity for Southern Daily Echo Newspaper to commission flights from Southampton to Bournemouth for deliveries ! [Supermarine](#) Seaplanes also carried mail across the Channel from its [Marine Airport, Woolston](#) to Le Havre.



[Bournemouth Aviation Co.](#) planned Flying Boat services to Swanage, Lulworth Cove, Weymouth & Torquay; also to the IOW, Southsea & Brighton; but these never materialised - probably due to issues of raising finance.

Meanwhile, designs were being rapidly advanced by Supermarine to construct an aircraft for greater passenger and cargo-carrying capability in the face of competition from other UK plane makers such as Avro, Fairey etc. The Government had indicated the potential of subsidising an air-link between Southampton & the Channel Is. so the objective for Supermarine's entrepreneurial [Hubert Scott-Paine](#), and his innovative designer [RJ Mitchell](#) was to develop a flying boat to achieve this. Accordingly, the [British Marine Air Navigation Co.](#) was formed to be headed up by Robert Scott-Paine, and an order was duly placed for three Flying Boats from Supermarine.

The result in 1923 was the [Sea Eagle class](#): [G-EBFK](#), [G-EBGR](#) and [G-EBGS](#), built to fly services to northern France and Channel Is. G-EBFK received its Certificate of Airworthiness from the Air Ministry on 11th. July.



*Aimée*

*[ G-EBGR 'Sarnia' built at Woolston in 1923, by Supermarine Ltd. to R.J. Mitchell's design, with G-EBGS, in following on from G-EBFK, flew across Poole Bay + occasionally visited. Withdrawn from use then conserved by Imperial Airways at Hythe in 1938: Scrapped 1954...].*

The new company existed for barely two years as in 1924 it was merged with the Handley Page Transport Ltd., Daimler Airway, & Instone Airline, to form [Imperial Airways Ltd.](#) in March, receiving a subsidy of £1 million, after advice from the [Hambling Committee](#) which considered the development of British external air services. The formation of Imperial Airways Ltd. (IAL) then opened a new chapter in the story of British Flying Boats ! Meanwhile the Sea Eagles received a new insignia and continued operating (- carriage of max. six passengers).

For the Flying Boats the focus was confirmed as being on Southampton Water, yet it wasn't until 1936 that the Harbour Board was approached for mooring facilities at Netley, and with [a maintenance base at Hythe](#) in 1937.

Throughout most of the interwar years Poole and Bournemouth languished in relevance to Flying Boat History: On 26th. March 1923 a [3 seater Navy Seaplane](#) came down off the Dorset coast & was salvaged at Poole Quay. However, on occasions privately-owned Seaplanes did briefly visit Poole Harbour - such as [G-AFFH \*Jemima\*](#) on its exciting journey along the south west coastline, or be moored here whilst their owners enjoyed a holiday.

The gathering storm clouds across Europe though, which again threatened war gave impetus for consideration of Poole Harbour as a likely wartime location for the operational base for Imperial Airway's Flying Boat Fleet. The potential of Poole Harbour was well-realised by a range of influential policy-makers in Imperial Airways, in Supermarine, [British Power Boat Company](#), also the British Motor Boat Club, and [Royal Motor Yacht Club](#) (RMYC) which moved to Poole from the [Enchantress](#) by Hythe pier in 1928, with [Florinda](#) as its clubhouse... then acquiring its famous site at Sandbanks in 1935 (- requisitioned by the Fleet Air Arm during World War 2). A key figure in this was Hubert-Scott Paine, and various others significant in Poole's Story and what transpired were Maj. Robert Mayo, [Len Cox](#) (Rolls Engines), and even Aircraftman TE Shaw seconded to BPBC in 1930 often a visitor to Poole, with [Len Cox \(Jnr.\)](#) also at [BPBC Hythe](#), where a second base was to be built at Poole.

*With acknowledgement to Mike Phipp, Leslie Dawson, Colin Stone, and Dave Fagan, with Robin Culpan HLMs PFBC also Harry Alexander V-C PFBC*