

# DOCTORS FLY FOR FUN

This month we talk to joint members John and Jenny Whicher, both pilots.  
Jenny is also a Class Rating Instructor

## Hello John and Jenny. What are your current/past careers?

**John:** I trained as a doctor at Cambridge University and the Westminster Hospital (now sadly gone). I specialised in Pathology and ultimately Chemical Pathology. I was a consultant in Bristol for about eight years and then moved to Leeds to take the Chair of Chemical Pathology and ultimately became Professor of Experimental Cancer Research. Learning to fly was a great way to escape the pressures of work. My hobby of geology complements my flying as many aspects of the terrain can be seen so much better from the air.

**Jenny:** I graduated from Bristol University with a doctorate in pharmacology and my first real job was as a 'rep' for a pharmaceutical company, trying to persuade doctors to prescribe my drugs. We then moved to Yorkshire and I worked for a veterinary pharmaceutical company, sorting out the drug licences for both pets and farm



animals. Eventually I became a self-employed consultant, helping companies to get drugs onto the market. I am now fully retired and can enjoy my time flying and travelling. I became a Class Rating Instructor three years ago and enjoy flying with other pilots who need their biennial training hour and helping them if they have problems with other flying issues.

## What led you to become involved in aviation?

**John:** It's in my blood. My father worked for the CAA when it was the Air Registration Board, starting in 1934. I flew in many types of aircraft as a kid and always wanted to take up flying. In the 1970s I started ballooning in Bristol, during which time I jointly formed a balloon syndicate

*(Left)* Two very keen LAA members and pilots, John and Jenny Whicher.

*(Below)* Their beloved Bucker Jungmann, a somewhat 'homely' bird.





**Ballooning has been a joint aviation interest.**

known as the Flying Doctors Balloon Group. We flew a lot and had a lot of fun. I also built and flew model aeroplanes for many years. I learnt to fly fixed-wing at Sherburn-in-Elmet in Yorkshire and got my licence in January 1999.

**Jenny:** My grandfather flew for the Canadian Airforce in WW1 and my mother flew him around in a Luscombe on floats when she was 15, but she was too young to get her licence. I never thought about flying until I met John and he invited me to 'come up in his balloon' – a great chat-up line! I learnt to fly balloons and we shared a balloon for several years. Many years later, when John got his PPL he took me flying and I realised this was far too much fun for him to do it on his own! Obviously I had to get my PPL and three months later I too had a shiny new licence.

**In what, where and when was your first flight?**

**John:** In a Percival Proctor for my sixth birthday present from my father. It was at Elstree but I don't remember much except being very frightened until we were in the air, and then again when we were landing. Nothing changes!



**The Whicher's staple: a Cessna 182.**

**Jenny:** Probably some sort of commercial Boeing when I was too young to think! My first flight in a light aeroplane was out of Leeds, probably in about 1990, in a Cessna 152 and we did lots of aerobatics – which was VERY memorable!!

**How long have you been in the LAA?**

We both joined the LAA (PFA then) in 2001 when we decided to buy a Bucker Jungmann. We imported it from Holland where it was on the Dutch register and needed to transfer it to the British register and the LAA helped us with allowing it to become one of their Permit aeroplanes. We completely disassembled the Jungmann and rebuilt it in our garage in Yorkshire. Our LAA engineer – Chris Turner – and the people at Brighton Airfield were so generous with their time, expertise and encouragement. In 2005 we completed the rebuild and started flying our beautiful Jungmann, which we still fly regularly.

When we moved to Somerset, six years ago, we discovered the Wessex Strut. This Strut is based at Henstridge Airfield which is next door to our home, and we quickly joined as it provides a wonderful social side to our flying, organising fly-ins, fly-outs and monthly

meetings including some excellent lectures. We are now both on the organising committee which is keeping us busy!

**What types of aircraft have you flown and how many hours do you have?**

**John:** In balloons I have over 200 hours; in fixed-wing around 800.

**Jenny:** In balloons quite a few, but not as many as John. Fixed-wing it's around 750.

Between us we have flown: Cessna 140, 150, 172, 182, Robin 2160, YAK 52, PA 12 & 28, Bucker Jungmann, Slingsby, AN2, Extra 300L, CAP10b, Harvard (not P1), Pitts S2b, Pulsar, Alpi Pioneer, Jodel, plus a few other miscellaneous types.

**Do you have a favourite and worst type?**

**John:** My favourite by far is the Yak 52. I owned a part-share in one at Sherburn-in-Elmet for about eight years. It's a beautifully balanced, powerful machine, what more can one say? It is a 'warbird' after all. The Cessna 140 is my least favourite aircraft. I did my tailwheel conversion on one and found it underpowered and very prone to horrible precession when I lifted the tail up. It

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## MEET THE MEMBERS



(Above) John's favourite aircraft, a Yak-52. He owned a part-share for some years.

would probably be fine now. A friend calls it a gentleman's flying sedan chair – there is no accounting for taste!

**Jenny:** I don't think I have a favourite as I love them all. I find all sorts of flying exciting (even being in the back of a commercial jet!). Similarly no worst aeroplanes, only 'challenging' ones.

### Do you currently have an aeroplane?

**Jenny:** Yes, our lovely Bucker Jungmann is our 'baby'. We painted her in the scheme of a German one that came over to England in 1933 to compete in an aerobatic competition at Lymph. We fly her entirely for fun... mostly 'bothering' the skies in the local area and doing a few gentle aerobatics.

We also have a Cessna 182 which we bought in 1999. It is the most wonderful 'workhorse'. She is perfect for taking friends and family flying and we do a fair amount of touring, both around the UK and abroad. We also use her as a camera ship for air to air photography and have photographed quite a lot of aircraft for *Light Aviation*.

### Do you have a best aviation moment and flight?

**John:** I think the most stunning flight I have made was up the coast of Wester Ross on a crystal clear morning in the Cessna 182. The scenery was great and the geology utterly visible.

We once took the Jungmann to a Luscombe fly-in at Oaksey Park, managing to fit a toothbrush and a tent on board. What a memorable weekend – just what LAA flying is all about. However our Jungmann is a stay-at-home aeroplane, whenever we take it anywhere it develops a fault to tell us that it

prefers being at home! On this occasion it was a cracked exhaust pipe, but it usually rustles up an oil leak or two.

**Jenny:** My first (and only) solo in a balloon was quite awesome – nearly an hour floating along and then nearly landing in a lake as I discovered that the evening katabatic winds just 'stop' in the middle of a large lake – oops!

The flight in our Jungmann after its restoration was wonderful. First, everything seemed to work and second, it was my first experience of flying in an open-cockpit biplane. One of my greatest joys is taking people for their first flight and the Jungmann really excels at that.

We also had an amazing flight in our Cessna 182 when we flew into Berlin Tempelhof. We flew from Koblenz, low over all the dams in a pretend 'Dambuster' raid and then on to Berlin, just months before Tempelhof closed.

### Do you have any aviation heroes - if so who and why?

**John:** Tony (Taffy) Smith. Not only did he fly a Bucker Jungmann to Australia but he taught us to fly ours, along with Brian Brown. Taffy is a great enthusiast and a source of so much knowledge and expertise. He has created something very special at Brighton Airfield.

**Jenny:** Only heroines of course! That includes all the female pilots I know but particularly Corinne Dennis, my great friend, who has just finished building a Pitts S1.

### Any 'hairy' moments - if so, any lessons learnt?

**John:** When I was learning aerobatics in the Yak with Dominic Pozorski, I finished the sequence to find the throttle jammed fully open, which in a Yak means you are whizzing

around the sky. After Dominic had crawled around on the floor, between the two cockpits, searching for a foreign object or some such to no avail, we called a Pan to land at Church Fenton. After a very fast practice run down the runway, we cut the engine before the threshold and made a nice landing most of the way down the 1.5km runway. Lesson learnt – military airfields are a great place to land!

**Jenny:** I took off in the Jungmann from Popham with a dodgy magneto and discovered that Jungmanns don't fly very well with only one magneto! A quick circuit and down again, with the engine stopping on the runway after landing, left my heart racing for a bit. The lesson learnt was that if it isn't right, it is better not to take off.

### Do you have an aircraft wish list – to fly or own?

**John:** I would love to own a Yak 52 again. It gave me such pleasure and it always felt so solid and secure.

**Jenny:** I really love trying to fly anything new, but I am very happy with the aeroplanes we have at the moment. I suppose it might be rather nice to have a twin so we wouldn't have to worry so much about engine failures over inhospitable terrain! I'd also rather like to have a jet helicopter!

### What advice would you pass on to fellow pilots?

**John:** Enjoy the terrain and geology that you see from the air. And fly a Yak 52 if you get the chance.

**Jenny:** It's the best – just keep throwing the money at it! ■

(Right) John and Jenny with the Concours d'Elegance Trophy they won for their Jungmann at the Brighton Bucker Fest in 2013.

