

SUNDAY: I'm likely to waken up in some hotel close to an airport — Manchester, Luton or Edinburgh — ready to take holiday-makers to one of the popular resorts.

It can be Palma, Alicante, Corfu, Gerona or Athens but we don't see much of these places. We stay about an hour then bring a load of suntanned people back.

I'm a co-pilot with Monarch on Boeing 707s which carry 175 passengers. It sounds exciting, but really it's a bit like driving a bus — though you do get moments of sheer terror.

My most hairy incident? A long haul flight to Africa in a 707 when we were hit by the worst thunderstorm you can imagine and lost all electrical power.

The flight engineer restored it just in time and we got down at Chad. But if the blackout had come three or four minutes later, we'd almost certainly have crashed.

We'd another bad time taking the last plane out of Teheran before the revolution. We got off with all the British hostesses, but Iranian fighters forced us down. We were surrounded by troops for 10 hours before being allowed to fly to London.

I'd another terrible flight with a captain who was drunk, but I'd better not say much about that. Air crews are banned from drinking for 12 hours before going up.

MONDAY: More holiday flights. During the season we fly the package trips from Friday to Monday, going back and forward between the three airports here and continental resorts.

Passengers are known as the bucket and spade brigade. We don't see much of them, though those who ask are usually allowed on to the flight deck to see what we do.

One sad feature is when somebody dies on holiday. They go out happy and excited, and come back in a pine box. Considering the number who go it's bound to happen at times.

I've had a passion for flying since I was eight years old, when I made model aeroplanes. I bought an old Tiger Moth for £800 in 1967 and flew it at weekends, then decided to make it a profession.

I went to America to train for a commercial licence then worked as a flying instructor in San Francisco. Back in Europe I was a demonstration pilot for Britten-Norman before getting a commercial licence here.

Now I've flown 7,000 hours or about 3,500,000 miles. But lines I've worked for have a habit of going bust — Channel Airways, Court Line and Scimitar all failed. Since then I've been with Dan Air before joining Monarch.

TUESDAY: Back home. After all the travelling it's great to be at Lartington doing odd jobs like cutting the grass.

£100,000 spent to put 45 room mansion back in good shape

SEVEN DAYS IN THE LIFE OF

Robin Rackham

Airline pilot

I'm delighted about having the hall. It's the sort of place that should be lived in as a family home, though I admit to being claustrophobic when I go into ordinary houses now.

Our sitting room is 45ft. by 30ft., so you could get a modern house into it. The kitchen is about half that size.

We've put in a very good heating system, which can run on gas or solid fuel, and it costs around £1,200 a year.

It took 500 rolls of paper to do the walls, and over 70 gallons of paint. Carpets? Oh, we had to buy them by the acre — enough to do three or four houses twice over.

But it's a very liveable house and quite manageable. All you need is a whip round with a vacuum cleaner once a week. There's so much space that no part of it can get cluttered up.

We've 45 rooms in all but use only a few of them ourselves. My parents have a flat and some other flats, which used to be the servants' quarters, are taken by relatives and friends.

People are amazed when I tell them that Claire and I have no more rooms of our own than most families, but it's true. They just happen to be rather bigger than usual.

WEDNESDAY: There's still plenty to keep me busy around the hall, though we've done an enormous amount of work so far.

The oldest part was built in 1605 by the Maire family, then it passed on to the Withams, who expanded it from a small manor house into a grand country house in the 18th century.

It then passed to the Silvertops before Mr Norman Field bought it in 1917. It had been empty for nine years before we bought it a few years ago and was in an awful condition.

The most conservative estimate was that it would cost £250,000 to restore it. But I got busy as a contractor myself, using local firms to do various jobs. We've spent £100,000 ourselves and had a £22,000 grant from the Historic Buildings Council.

The work we've done would have cost at least double if we'd hired an outside contractor. But there's still a lot more to do.

We're just finishing the second of three phases on the roof. The next phase will be the magnificent ballroom and corridor.

Much of this was designed by Joseph Hansom of Hansom cab fame. He also laid out the gardens. The ballroom was originally the museum of Thomas Witham, who was considered the founder of modern geology.

THURSDAY: Lartington Squash Club which we started is thriving. The members are all our friends, and it's good to have them around. The tennis courts are also popular now.

One squash court is in the ballroom, but we intend to move it and have the room available for functions and weddings. It's the sort of place that should be available for local people.

My own feeling is that the hall belongs to Teesdale; we just happen to live there. You never really own a house. You only have it for a time before it passes on to posterity.

But I'm interested in any worthwhile property, and that's why I'm chairman of the Teesdale Buildings Preservation Trust. I spend part of the day with George Stasny, the trust architect, seeing plans for our latest project.

After renovating two houses in Thorngate we're tackling three at the bottom of The Bank. We hope to start in late summer.

The Queen Mother, one of our patrons, was very interested in our work during her visit. She really understands and agrees with what we're doing.

Lord Barnard and the Earl of Strathmore are our other patrons, and we're grateful for their support.

FRIDAY: I'm also a trustee of Heritage North, a preservation trust for the whole region, and we're looking for a house in County Durham that can be tackled.

We've been looking at various towns including Bishop Auckland — which to my mind is an absolute disaster area... a real mess. They just don't know what conservation is.

I'm also chairman of Teesdale Civic Society, but it's not the force it used to be. The area has improved tremendously over the last 10 years, so there's not so much to do. But we still look at all



Robin Rackham's two great interests in life, apart from his family, are flying and saving some of Teesdale's best old buildings. He spends part of each week ferrying plane loads of holiday-makers to and from sunny resorts around the Mediterranean. The rest of the time his mind is on restoring a number of the dale's attractive buildings which are in danger of crumbling into derelict eyesores. And he is happy to practise what he preaches, for he has poured a fortune into rescuing Lartington Hall and turning it into his own home. Since he moved in with his wife Claire and their family — Aidan, Nicky and John — he has gone a long way to reverting the 45 roomed hall from a sorry state into an elegant country mansion.

planning applications and give our comments.

Another interest is the Teesdale Country Fair, for which I'm publicity officer. It's been a great success and I enjoy being involved in it.

But on Fridays my mind has to turn from all this and get back to flying. I must say it's extremely pleasant to be busy around Teesdale in midweek and then get back into the air at weekends.

Do I ever worry about being responsible for so many passengers? Not really — I worry about my own neck. If that is safe it follows that the passengers are safe too.

I tend to be conservative in my flying. They say there are old pilots and bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots.

SATURDAY: The one big snag about holiday flights is that if there is a delay on one flight it builds up on all the others.

Bad weather or air traffic control problems can put you so far behind that one group of holidaymakers might have to spend six hours at Palma airport waiting to come

home. We're sorry about it, but it's the hostesses who have to deal with them when they get on the plane.

Much as I love flying, I wouldn't recommend anyone to be a pilot. We're well paid and it's a pleasant job but it's too insecure. As soon as there's a depression the airline industry suffers.

There are about 800 airline pilots out of work at the moment. Of the 350 or so Laker pilots thrown out of work, only about 15 per cent have found new jobs.

It can be a plum job if you can find one, but there is a great deal of uncertainty, and you have to retire at 55.

There are perks of course, such as staying at good hotels and getting free air tickets to just about anywhere. You can take spare seats with your own line and there are arrangements with others.

But after seeing most of the world and spending so much of each weekend in the air I'm content to potter around Lartington when I'm free instead of flying off to somewhere exotic.

WHY THE QUEEN MOTHER IS SO WELL LOVED

During the Queen Mother's visit to Barnard Castle it became clear why she has long been many people's favourite member of the Royal Family.

Everyone realised, of course, that she would smile charmingly most of the time and be pleasantly agreeable to all who were chosen to shake her hand.

She did just that, turning thoughtfully this way and that to let as many spectators as possible get an unhindered view of her.

But what most impressed those near enough to hear what was said was the way she showed a real interest in everyone she met and was eager to know about them.

She asked a wide variety of questions and turned each little interview (and there were many of them) into a friendly chat, rather than merely exchanging the same pleasantries.

Time and again people were heard remarking: "My goodness—

MERCURY COMMENT

how does she do it... how does she keep going?"

It was no mean feat to be so bright and cheerful on such a dismal afternoon but she gave the impression of genuinely enjoying every minute.

Perhaps the best example of her interest came in Kirkby House where she talked about the decoration, coal fire, housework, kitchen and garden — and then asked: "What about upstairs?"

Upstairs wasn't on the agenda, but up she went like any housewife visiting a friend's new home and eager to see everything.

When she thanked the owner for letting her call, and told spectators outside she was sorry about the soaking they were getting, it was obvious she meant every word.

It is little things like that, repeated over many years, that have resulted in her being held in such warm affection.

PEEPS INTO THE PAST

5 YEARS AGO

Mr John Nixon of 24 Town End, Middleton, will be driving a lorry for Britain during an international rally in Switzerland, where he will take a 32 ton vehicle around tortuous Alpine roads on snow and ice.

Middleton School won the road safety quiz for the second year running. Captain was John Trotter and others in the team were Sarah Whitfield, Gillian Hodgson and Steven Raper, with reserves John Lee-Shield and Sarah Lee.

10 YEARS AGO

The head gardener at Glaxo Laboratories, Mr Tommy Wilkinson, of 5 Zetland Road, Barnard Castle, retired after 25 years' service. He was presented with a set of tables on behalf of his colleagues.

Miss Olwen Hall was crowned Boldron carnival queen by the retiring queen Elizabeth Bellas. Her attendants were Caroline Bellas, Rita Nixon, Patricia Kearon, Heather Close, Beverley Clement, Richard Harrison and Richard Mason.

15 YEARS AGO

Peter Dennyson, youngest son of Mr and Mrs George Dennyson, of 59 Harmire Road, Barnard Castle, gained an M.A. degree with second class honours in English.

Among fancy dress prizewinners at Boldron carnival: Stewart Metcalfe, R. Wood, D. Goodfellow, J. Spencer, G. Simpson, Susan Gibson, Ann Wood, G. Morris, C. Stoker and O. Hall.

20 YEARS AGO

Michael John Bayley, 26 year old son of Comd. and Mrs J. M. Bayley, of Scargill Lodge, Barnard Castle, was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Ripon and was licensed to the curacy of Gipton Church, Leeds.

Cotherstone School were sports winners when they competed against Mickleton and Stanforth Schools. Among the winners: I. MacDonald, R. Wall, J. Smith, D. McRobbie, S. Bayles, M. Heavisesides, J. Loraine, I. Walton, J. Bell and S. Bentley.

25 YEARS AGO

Pupils who passed scripture exams and were presented with certificates by Rev. Dan Hunter: Barry McCutcheon, Stephen Blackett, Richard Laybourne, Neville Hogarth, Margaret Wearmouth, Phyllis Blackett and Arthur McCutcheon.

A travelling case and handbag were presented to Miss Gibson on behalf of her friends when she retired after being organist for 30 years at Stainton Methodist Church.

Hobbies on show

At Barnard Castle Business and Professional Women's Club's meeting, a hobbies' exhibition to be held in Barnard Castle on 1st and 2nd September was discussed. It was decided to mount a display to publicise the B. and P.W. Club's aims and activities with the intent of adding to the membership.

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