

South African Airways Museum Society

Our home – the old Transvaal Aviation Club building, Rand Airport, Germiston.



The Rand Flying Club and The Transvaal Aviation Club.

The South African Airways Museum Society has, in its archives, some valuable historical documents that yield many interesting snippets of information about aviation in South Africa during the 1930s and 40s. One such collection consists of what the Museum has christened "The Rand Airport Scrapbooks" They contain a wealth of information in the form of minutes of meetings of the Rand Airport Joint Committee as well as a stunning collection of newspaper clippings and photographs dating from 1931 to 1947.

On page 120 of the minutes of the meeting of the Rand Airport Joint Committee 18 August 1932 the following is stated:

"(8) That the Joint Committee approves the action of the Superintendent in interviewing the Johannesburg Aeronautical Association, Germiston & Benoni Light Plane Clubs, and the de Havilland Company as reviewed in his report on Airport Development.

(9) That the Joint Committee records its desire for a Flying Club to be established at the Rand Airport at the earliest opportunity.

(10) That the Joint Committee, recognising the value of such a Club to the development of the Rand Airport, is prepared to sympathetically consider any special conditions regarding rents, landing and housing fees, and any other matters which the proposed Club may put forward in arriving at a basis for negotiation.

(11) That the Superintendent be authorised to negotiate with the Johannesburg Aeronautical Association, Benoni and Germiston Light 'Plane Clubs, and de Havilland Company and any other body with the object of drawing up a scheme for the establishment of a Flying Club, to be known as the Rand Flying Club, at the Rand Airport, by bringing about the amalgamation of the interests of the three Clubs mentioned above, and to report to the Joint Committee in due course."

In January 1933 a handful of aviation enthusiasts, met at the Rand Airport, then a rather discouraging stretch of sun-baked land with one hangar on it. They all had an unshakeable belief in the future of flying. There was the Rand and there were people. It only wanted drive, and hard work. They took what was to be an important step in furthering aviation in South Africa. They decided with firm optimism, to form the Rand Flying Club.

Their assets, one de Havilland DH.60G Gipsy Moth, ZS-ABE, known all over the reef as "Lady Betty", and one instructor who went with her. Their liabilities were those of the old Benoni Light Plane Club.

In March 1933 the Rand Flying Club came into existence. The Joint Committee of the Rand Airport had faith in the new club and with foresight set aside a special enclosure for club members.

On page 120 of the minutes of the meeting of the Rand Airport Joint Committee 4 April 1933 the following is stated:

"ITEM "C4" Rand Flying Club

RESOLVED:

"That the enclosure on the North side of Hangar 4b be temporarily allotted to the use of the Rand Flying Club pending further developments."

On page 130 of the minutes of the meeting of the Rand Airport Joint Committee 2 May 1933 the following is stated:

“Rand Flying Club Shelter.

The Chairman stated that the Rand Flying Club proposed to erect a rustic building in the special enclosure allotted to them by the Rand Airport Joint Committee. Members of the Club had promised to provide the material and do the work but they were short of certain deal timber that would be required in the construction of this building. The costs of this was £8. 12. 9d. They asked whether the Committee would be prepared to pay this item towards the total cost. The total estimated cost of the entire building was £45. 0. 0d. and the building would remain the property of the Rand Airport when the Rand Flying Club ceased to use it.

Clr. Palmer suggested charging a nominal rental for the ground.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Rand Flying Club be informed that the Rand Airport Joint Committee would be prepared to contribute an amount of £8. 10. 0d. towards the cost of the proposed shelter on the completion of the building.

(b) That the Rand Flying Club be called upon to pay a rental of £1. 0. 0d. per annum for the exclusive use of that portion of the enclosure allotted to them.”

The members, much encouraged, turned out in the afternoons and on Sundays, and with their own hands built a homely shelter that served as a clubhouse.

The club grew remarkably and by the end of 1933 had over 100 members. Early in 1934 members subscribed towards an aircraft fund which bought another aircraft, ZS-ADE a de Havilland DH.60G Gipsy moth, c/n unknown.

Owing to the rapid increase in membership, the rustic shelter soon became too small for the club and a brick and mortar clubhouse was built and officially opened **on 24 May 1934**. This building still stands but has been modified extensively.

Flying hours were on the increase with over 100 hours being knocked up month after month. Funds were improving and soon another aircraft, a de Havilland DH.60G Gipsy Moth, c/n 1865, ZS-ADY, was bought.

Flying again jumped forward, and with it membership. Two more aircraft were bought, ZS-ABS a de Havilland DH.60M c/n 1367 and ZS-ABI a DH.60G c/n 1124.

The building of two tennis courts, which were officially opened on Sunday 24 March 1935, extended social activities. The monthly dances grew steadily in popularity, as too did the annual ball.

Other forms of social entertainment included Golf on the adjoining Germiston Golf Course, Boating on the nearby Victoria Lake and Rugby and Soccer on the fields of the airport. A Squash Court was built in 1939/40

Membership rose steadily, with 430 members toward the end of 1935. The club completed negotiations for the establishment of a Benoni Branch, from whence the Club originated, operating from Benoni Aerodrome, to cater for the needs of members of the Far East Rand.

The demand for flying grew steadily keener, and with the acquisition of more aircraft the club formed branches at Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp to provide for Western Transvaal members.

The Rand Gliding Club was absorbed into the Rand Flying Club.

Additional machines, of varying types, both cabin and open were bought, so that flying at very low charges could be provided.

The club's fleet of ten power 'planes and five gliders justified the Rand Flying Club in taking the unprecedented step of inaugurating its own workshops.

Progress was so rapid that the clubhouse, of revolutionary size when built, was now too small. The Joint Committee of the Rand Airport provided a new building for the Rand Flying Club in 1938.

His Excellency Sir Patrick Duncan, Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, and Lady Duncan, performed their first gesture towards civil aviation by honouring the Rand Flying Club with a visit during which they performed the opening ceremony on Saturday 8 August 1938.

During 1939 the club's fleet consisted of:

Type	Number
Aeronca Chief	2
de Havilland Gipsy Moth	3
de Havilland Hornet Moth	1
de Havilland Tiger Moth	4
De Soutter	1
Miles Magister	2

The club made provision for Preliminary Flying instruction, Cross-country Flying, Blind Flying, Night Flying and "A" and "B" licence flying.

During the Second World War the South African Air Force (SAAF) 5 Wing used the clubhouse as an Officers Mess and the whole area was a SAAF station including their barracks, what was known as the Government Village, and the present Wits Rifles building was the NCO's Mess and parade ground.

Imperial Airways and subsequently BOAC used it as a terminal building for transporting passengers to and from the Vaal Dam for their Shorts C Class flying boat schedules.

In 1960 due to lack of control the Rand Flying Club was liquidated and the Transvaal Aviation Club was formed in 1961. This too was a very successful club and membership was limited to 1,000 members in the 1970s.

The Transvaal Parachute Club was a subcommittee of the club.

Sadly The Transvaal Aviation Club closed down in 2012.

The runways of Rand Airport are clearly visible from the garden of the TAC building and afford visitors a wonderful opportunity to view the activity of aircraft at Rand Airport.

Entertainment for children consists of a jungle gym.

The South African Airways Museum Society Display Hall and Ian Carrol Library are housed in the old TAC building.

The SAAMS aircraft park is on the eastern side of the old TAC building.



Aerial view of the SAA Museum Society Aircraft Park and the old Transvaal Aviation Club Building, 10 January 2010.

The building houses the Museum Display Hall, Library and Restaurant.

The aircraft are:

- Boeing 737-219 ZS-SMD "Pukeko" (had not yet arrived so not in photograph)
- Boeing 747-244B ZS-SAN "Lebombo"
- Boeing 747SP-44 ZS-SPC "Maluti"
- de Havilland DH.104 Dove ZS-BCC "Katberg"
- Douglas C-118 (DC-6) 9Q-CGZ (On loan to the Museum)
- Douglas C-54D ZS-PAJ "Helios"
- Lockheed L18-08 Lodestar ZS-ASN "Andries Pretorius"

Aircraft Park 10 January 2010.
Photograph: Bruce Perkins.

Hidden from view, under Lebombo's right wing, are the two ex SAA simulators, the Airbus A300 and B747 Classic and the Boeing 707 forward section of fuselage from ZS-SAI.