

**Blackpool's Aerodromes 1928-36:
Politics and the Local Media**

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Abstract

The thesis describes the development of a municipal aerodrome at Stanley Park, Blackpool, between 1928 and 1936, and explores the reasons for the aerodrome's failure to be a profitable enterprise for Blackpool Corporation. It argues that this issue caused a breakdown in the interventionist strategies, described by historians as 'municipal capitalism', that the Corporation had used successfully in the inter-war years in order to provide the resort with modern, but costly, amenities. Evidence provided suggests that the Corporation's overreaching ambition to demonstrate 'airmindedness' was only partly responsible for the aerodrome's failure and that successive governments' air policies gave neither useful guidance to local authorities, nor sufficient funds to support aerodrome initiatives.

The thesis also examines the role played by the local newspapers, the Blackpool Evening Gazette and Gazette and Herald, in influencing public opinion on the issue of the aerodrome and finds that, although the newspapers provided a forum for discussion for Blackpool residents and took on the mantle of moral guardians of readers' interests, there is little evidence to show that the newspapers stance on the issue influenced decisions taken by the Corporation. While historians have generally disregarded such newspapers because of their lack of interest and influence in local politics, the wider value to the local community of its locally-owned newspaper is demonstrated,

The thesis further investigates the aerodrome's contribution to modernising and changing the established image of Blackpool in this period, and finds that the siting of the aerodrome at Stanley Park, in an area of planned housing and a public park, far from supporting Blackpool's aim of encouraging the middle-classes to visit and make their homes in the town, did, in fact, add to its unpopularity and became one of the reasons for its failure.

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PREFACE

The years between 1920 and 1939 could be considered the time when Blackpool consolidated its reputation as Britain's most popular holiday resort. The town's publicity department boasted of 7,000,000 visitors a year in the 1930s¹. While many of these visitors were day-trippers, taking advantage of Blackpool's good rail and road links with the industrial North-West, there were 4,000 lodging and boarding houses to cater for those who wished to stay longer². Although traditionally Blackpool's holiday-makers came from the North of England, its national reputation led to increasing numbers of visitors from further afield, including Scotland, the Midlands and even the South.

Blackpool's image was of a brash, lively resort where conventional moral values and behaviour could be relaxed. Walton has pointed out the rise in this period of groups of single-sex young men and women holidaying together, enjoying the entertainment readily available, particularly dancing at the sumptuous ballrooms of the Tower and Winter Gardens³. While a holiday in Blackpool was an opportunity for young people to mix more freely than was usually possible at home, it should be remembered that practically the whole working population of North West towns took their holidays together at 'wakes weeks', with the result that any overtly immoral behaviour was likely to be noted by neighbours or fellow workers.

The central area of Blackpool around the Golden Mile was the traditional heart of the resort. Press photographs of the time show a mass of people on the central promenade and beach. This was, for most people, what Blackpool was: a place where the working-classes took their leisure. This image was reinforced not only through the local and national press, but also in other media such as film. Blackpool was the setting for a number of films in this period, including *'Sing As We Go'* (1934), starring Gracie Fields as a working-class mill girl on holiday.

Although the primary image of Blackpool was as a 'popular' resort, it should be remembered that the resort was also popular with middle-class holidaymakers who stayed at the less crowded North and South Shores. As the 1920s progressed, the Corporation endeavoured to attract more middle-class visitors to the resort and to develop the town as a more 'select' resort, reasoning that it was unlikely that there would be any great increases in the number of working-class visitors, and the middle-classes could take their holidays at any time, potentially increasing the length of the holiday season.

Blackpool's residential population was growing during this period. The building of new housing estates in the eastern part of the town was a deliberate attempt by the Corporation to encourage middle-class residents. The Stanley Park area was planned as both a recreational amenity and housing estate, and in the 1930s the possibility was raised that the administrative centre of the town should move away from the central promenade area to a site adjacent to the park. Although this move never took place, it demonstrates the wishes of the Corporation to distance itself from the traditional, popular heart of the town by the sea front.

While middle-class residents increased, so did previously migrant workers who in earlier times had spent the summer season in Blackpool and the rest of the year employed in industrial towns. When factory work became scarce, many of this group chose to stay in Blackpool, often living in abject poverty. Increasingly, also, retired people moved to Blackpool, perhaps after spending many holidays there. They were living on fixed incomes and saw little benefit in the Corporation spending large sums of amenities that they themselves were unlikely to use.

Changes in the residential population were reflected in the occupations of the town's councillors. Traditionally councillors were from the holiday industries, but as the 1920s and 1930s progressed, representatives from this sector decreased, losing influence to those who were representative of middle-class and retired residents. Council meeting minutes and the local newspapers show the dislike councillors felt about some of the insalubrious attractions on the

Golden Mile, which, although attractive to Blackpool's traditional visitors, did not fit into the modern, select image the Corporation was trying to promote.

The inter-war years, therefore, were times when superficially Blackpool's position as most popular holiday resort appeared to be unassailable. Beneath the surface, however, there were concerns about the high level of municipal spending on visitor attractions, attempts to change the town's image in order to attract a different type of visitor, and tensions between holiday and residential interests.

INTRODUCTION

Blackpool has had a long association with aeroplanes: in keeping with the town's motto of 'Progress', one of the world's first flying meetings was held at Blackpool in 1909, and there have been flying facilities at Blackpool almost continuously ever since. This study examines the town's involvement with flight through the 1920s and 1930s, when flying was fast developing as a means of transport, yet still held a fascination for the general public that had evolved through the admiration of the pilots, or 'air aces' of World War One and continued with the record-breaking flights of civilian pilots such as Lindbergh and, in Britain, Alan Cobham and Amy Johnson. Yet while Blackpool was proving its commitment to 'airmindedness' by providing flying facilities for residents and aviation events for visitors, the consensus between local businesses and residents that had, in the inter-war years, allowed the Corporation to invest heavily in new amenities and attractions, began to break down under the financial burden of the development and management of the new municipal aerodrome. A forum for objectors to the aerodrome were the local evening newspapers, the *Blackpool Gazette and Herald* and *Evening Gazette*, both owned by the Grime family, who were proud of their 'sand-grown', Blackpool origins. This study explores the role played by these newspapers in the debate over the municipal aerodrome, not only in allowing objectors to express their views, but also by the use of differing types of texts within the newspapers to demonstrate the medium's power to influence public opinion and decision-making by the municipal authority.

In July 1931, after almost four years in the planning, Britain's first municipal aerodrome was opened at Stanley Park, Blackpool. Less than four years later, in November 1934, Blackpool Corporation bought land at Squires Gate, including the site of an existing aerodrome, which, in 1936, became the town's municipal aerodrome. Stanley Park aerodrome's limited life, extended by its use in World War 2 as a parachute training ground and aircraft repair site, finally ended in its closure in 1945.

The Corporation's original hopes that Blackpool would prove its modernity and air-mindedness through the provision of a busy, successful and nationally important aerodrome at Stanley Park did not materialise. Neither did the aerodrome make a difference, as the Corporation had hoped, to the established image of Blackpool as a working-class holiday resort. By the time the municipal aerodrome was moved to Squires Gate the speculation that 'aerial motor cars', as the *Daily Mail* described aeroplanes¹, would be an everyday mode of transport for visitors to Blackpool and residents alike, had been proved wrong. Blackpool had added the experience of flying to its established attractions for visitors with joy-flights from Stanley Park and, a vicarious pleasure, through the spectacle of flight provided by air shows and similar events, but the contrasting business and pleasure needs of aircraft users sat uneasily together.

This research investigates the development of the aerodrome at Stanley Park and the reasons why Blackpool endeavoured to provide its visitors and residents with opportunities to fly. It further analyses Stanley Park's years as Blackpool's municipal aerodrome and the reasons for its lack of success, within the context of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when air-mindedness and the modern age gave Blackpool an opportunity to change its already well-established image.

Morgan and Pritchard have investigated the theme of social tone in relation to the resorts of the South West of England in the twentieth century, social tone being a concept that originates with Harold Perkin's examination of social tone in the Victorian resorts of the North West². Morgan and Pritchard conclude that social tone was the 'result of interaction between the local population and the visitors and a balance was often achieved only after conflict, both between the residents and the visitors and within the local community itself.'³ There was a continuing debate about social tone in Blackpool in the inter-war years and this study will show the part played by the development of the municipal aerodrome in that debate.

For Blackpool, as for other resorts, the 1920s and 1930s were years in which local authorities played a crucial role in the development of amenities and

attractions. Morgan and Pritchard describe this 'municipal capitalism' in holiday resorts:

In such towns, local government pursued highly interventionist strategies designed to provide the resort infrastructure (such as parks, promenades and theatres) and the resort superstructure (such as entertainments and orchestras and, of course, advertising). The 1920s and 1930s were the high point of local authority investment in seaside amenities, with the public sector providing everything from promenades, parks, pavilions and swimming pools to sun-terraces and sea defences.⁴

Morgan and Pritchard show that in some resorts there was opposition from residents to local government expenditure. For example, in Torquay a 'Citizens' League' was formed in the early 1930s to represent those who opposed what they termed 'squandamania' – the spending of public money on new amenities and developments in the town⁵. The Citizens' League was reviving a term, although with a slightly different spelling ('squandermania'), used as the title of a campaign by the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* in 1921 against what these Northcliffe-owned newspapers saw as excessive government spending⁶.

Blackpool Corporation's investment in infrastructure included South Shore Open-Air Baths. A visitor who attended the opening of the baths in June 1923 is quoted in the *Gazette and Herald* as saying 'such a place could not have been provided by private enterprise any more than the Imperial Stadium at Wembley⁷. It also extended to Stanley Park itself, which was officially opened in 1928 and included a middle-class housing scheme on adjoining land, following established Victorian models such as Hesketh Park in Southport.

Walton has written about the conflicts between residents, particularly (as was often the case in Blackpool) those who had retired on moderate incomes, and those businesses whose success was dependent on maintaining or increasing visitor numbers and whose owners had traditionally been either members of the local council or who were able to influence its decisions. He argues that some smaller resorts benefited from an influx of affluent middle-class retired people who sought out quieter, more select resorts. But Blackpool's growing retired and residential population was, as Walton says: '...not the sort of people who could afford, or chose to afford, large numbers of domestic servants, unlike their south coast counterparts'⁸. It is not surprising, therefore, that these residents

were opposed to public expenditure on an aerodrome and, if the word had ever made its way north from Torquay, would see it as an example of 'squandamania'.

The importance of town planning to resorts from the early twentieth century is examined by Chase in her comparison of the social tone of Frinton and Clacton in the inter-war years. Chase says:

Town planning was a 'modern' discipline in that, as a profession created in the twentieth century on the back of nineteenth century liberal reform movements, it could lay claim to promoting health, rationality, efficiency and progress. Seaside towns attempting to promote a modern image thus saw town planning as an integral part of it.⁹

The planning and development of the Stanley Park area is an example of a local authority using town planning in an attempt to impose a new image on a resort. Frinton and Clacton were both what Chase describes as 'planned' communities, beginning as resorts as late as the 1870s and 1880s. Blackpool, by that time, was already Britain's most popular working-class resort and continued so up to the 1930s, with a well-defined image. The chaotic jumble of stalls, shows and amusements on the Golden Mile were familiar attractions, along with the liminality of the beach and open sea beyond. Perkin sees Blackpool's development as being a result of land in the central area of the town being split into small plots at an early stage in the town's development (1830s and 1840s). On these plots was built 'an ill-planned mass of small properties, boarding houses, small shops, working-class terraces and so on, with no space for the grand public buildings, broad avenues and gardens of Southport'¹⁰.

There were some attempts at planned development in Blackpool in the later nineteenth-century, followed by the inter-war 'broad avenues' of the new promenade and the gardens at Stanley Park, but these modern examples of town planning left untouched the central area. How much more difficult it would be, therefore, for Blackpool Corporation to attempt to create a 'modern' image than for Clacton and Frinton, or even Blackpool's neighbour, St Annes, all resorts which had been planned from their beginnings.

Chase applies Rojek's examination of leisure (using Lyotard's theory of modernity) as a clash between 'Modernity 1' (order and control) and 'Modernity 2' (disorder and fragmentation), to modern imagery in seaside resorts during the inter-war years. Rojek describes 'flux, motion and ceaseless movement' as 'inevitable features of modern life'¹¹. For Blackpool, modernity meant movement away from its traditional role providing a free and easy, libertarian environment that encouraged its working-class visitors to go beyond, if only marginally, the boundaries and constraints that prevailed in their everyday lives. It is perhaps significant that the development of Stanley Park Aerodrome came only a few years after Blackpool's Carnivals of 1923 and 1924. Rojek quotes Bakhtin on the carnivalesque: 'carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions'¹². Walton has described Blackpool's carnivals as 'a commercial exploitation of a romanticised imagery, mediated through the Nice version of carnival, which had already been sanitized, tidied up and packaged for the Riviera resort's (largely British) visitors from the 1860s onwards'¹³. Nevertheless the 1924 Carnival in particular was perhaps the antithesis of the modern image that Blackpool Corporation hoped to project into the 1930s. As Rojek expresses it: 'with the rise of the market society and the insistence that modernity should be different from other societies in producing the rational order of time and space, the carnivalesque was marginalized and repressed.'¹⁴ We shall see that at various times when discussions about air-minded events were reported in the local newspapers, a carnival was suggested as an alternative: modernity and order contrasted with traditional disorder.

What could be more modern for the new Blackpool than an aerodrome to serve the symbol of the modern age, the aeroplane: 'The airplane, advance guard of the conquering armies of the New Age, the airplane arouses our energies and our faith.'¹⁵ 'Air-mindedness' was to be the spirit of the times, not only in Britain but in Europe and the USA where it was described as a 'nearly religious declaration of faith in modern improvement and civic prosperity.'¹⁶ Fritzsche investigates the German experience of air-mindedness. He describes aviation thus: 'Aviation was thoroughly part of the theatrical sensibility of state politics in

the modern era; power was choreographed for public display'.¹⁷ Wohl describes Mussolini's aeronautical policy as

.... based on his belief that aviation had a profound spiritual – hence political – meaning that went beyond technology, military strategy, or any utilitarian end that it might serve. His goal was nothing less than the creation of an aviation culture.¹⁸

To embrace air-mindedness, and, in its own small way, to create an aviation culture, would enable Blackpool to develop an image as a modern, progressive and planned resort, while at the same time bringing financial benefits to the town. The aerodrome itself would provide an attraction for visitors as well as being a centre for regular, scheduled flights and a home for a flying club to enable local people to learn to fly and mix socially with others interested in flying as a hobby.

This study will show that, in Britain, towns and cities were encouraged by government to develop aerodromes, not only to compete with developments in Germany, other European countries and the USA, but as part of a move to control nationalist elements emerging in the Empire. Omissi shows the propaganda value of British flights across the countries of the Empire.¹⁹ The municipal aerodrome at Stanley Park will be seen as playing a supporting role in the development of Britain's defences as the political situation in Europe became less stable in the 1930s and the bombing of civilians became a certainty in any future war.

The study will also investigate how attitudes to aeroplanes, and particularly the image of those who flew them, changed in the inter-war years, and show how this is reflected in the *Gazette and Herald* and *Evening Gazette*. The daring individualists who had been World War 1 flying 'aces' and later made and broke long-distance and other flying records were still admired, but by the early 1930s flying was being promoted as a sport, or hobby, or an essential way for a businessman to travel. The limited success of air-mindedness in Blackpool goes some way to explaining why Stanley Park aerodrome was ultimately a failure as a municipal aerodrome.

For Blackpool, the early 1930s were years when airmindedness was an idea with some support, but the town had yet to fully understand and agree on the part aeroplanes and the concept of flight might play in the development of the resort. The local newspapers, the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald*, were in general supportive of the Corporation's actions in providing new attractions from public funds. However, the aerodrome plan came under severe and prolonged criticism from these newspapers as they took on the role of 'civic watchdog' by both reporting the views of critics of the aerodrome plan and, perhaps more importantly, by publishing critical articles written by their own journalists.

The provincial press, and in particular the provincial evening newspaper, has attracted little interest from historians. Stephen Koss in his definitive study of the press in the twentieth-century, 'The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain', is dismissive of provincial newspapers: 'If the provincial press receives short shrift in these chapters, it is because it received short shrift in reality.'²⁰

However, there are instances within Koss's history where he describes the political influence of the provincial press and demonstrates how this fits within the wider picture of the political role of the national press. Koss shows that provincial newspapers were considered a valuable propaganda tool by both Liberal and Conservative Parties, and, from the 1920s onwards, by the Labour Party, although by the late 1920s all parties were doubting the usefulness of continued financial investment in newspapers.

Prior to World War One provincial newspapers, as well as the national press, were the mouthpieces of either Conservative and Unionist or Liberal Parties (with the exception of the *Daily Herald*). Newspapers were often owned by local politicians or members of parliament, or financed by the parties themselves or party members. The proprietors of national newspapers, courted by political parties, could on occasion come to the rescue of ailing provincial newspapers in the cause of providing a local 'voice' for a party.

For example, in 1903, C. Arthur Pearson, proprietor of the *Daily Express* and *Pearson's Weekly*, was persuaded to support Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform League by promoting Tariff Reform in the *Daily Express*. Pearson provided more opportunities to promote the cause in the press by buying the *St James Gazette* and the *Evening Standard* (both London papers) and the *Newcastle Daily Leader*, a previously Liberal paper, which he transformed into the *Newcastle Evening Mail*, a supporter of the Conservative and Unionist party and of Tariff Reform. At the same time, the North East was assured of a Liberal daily paper, as the *Northern Echo* (and the weeklies, *Auckland Chronicle* and *South Durham* and *Cleveland Mercury*) was rescued by the prominent Liberal family, the Rowntrees of York.²¹

After World War One, there were a number of reasons why this close relationship between politics and the provincial press broke down. Firstly, the rise of the Labour Party, and decline of the Liberal Party in a time of a coalition government meant that the once clear-cut party loyalties were less secure.

Koss describes Lloyd George as the

foremost maker of news, he enjoyed incomparable advantages as well as the facilities to exploit them..... a daily news "summary" was distributed among 250 ministers, MPs, and civil servants; "Labour papers had been found "especially useful" in disseminating the contents; articles were planted "continuously in friendly papers like the *Daily Chronicle*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Observer* and (occasionally) *The Times*"; the "hostile press is reached, sometimes effectively, by personal contact, letters to the editors and by other means"; and, finally, there had been "steady headway" in serving the needs of the provincial press "either in the form of special articles, letters or notes, explanations and a defence of the Government's action" in matters of legislation.²²

Gliddon gives an example that demonstrates the waning political power of the press: in the North East the Labour party had the majority of M.P.s, but had no official support from any local newspaper, while four daily newspapers backed the Liberals and one backed the Conservatives. In the period 1918 to 1929 'Labour advanced without support from the press of the North East.'²³

Between 1905 and 1939, The Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust, which had extensive newspaper interests in the first half of the twentieth century, lost

£69,989 on provincial newspapers. By the late 1920s the Trust was beginning to doubt the value of newspapers as a way of influencing public opinion.

Gliddon quotes the *Northern Echo*, a North East based newspaper owned by the Trust:

"Journalism is ceasing to be journalism as we used to know it. It is becoming more and more a money-making industry.....People are coming into the control of it mainly, sometimes solely, for financial profit. They are no longer coming into it solely, or even mainly, for the purpose of guiding public opinion this way or that way on questions of public policy"²⁴

The cost of producing newspapers and periodicals had much increased. No longer could MPs or party activists afford to buy a newspaper simply in order to have a mouthpiece in a town or city. Koss cites J.B. Morrell and Sir Charles Starmer, who in partnership since 1903 had bought a number of provincial morning and evening papers to promote the Liberal cause (these papers were not profitable but were supported by profits made from other non-political newspapers and periodicals owned by the same proprietors). By 1920 there was no capital available to acquire further newspapers: "A newspaper investment does not interest the ordinary business man and the money required is too great for the working journalist"²⁵.

The development of radio was also a factor. Kingsley Martin makes the point that people turned to the B.B.C. because of its perceived lack of bias compared with the press

We fall back on talk about the educative value of the B.B.C. news because, though it is in fact based on the usual agency messages, it is presented without the colour and emphasis that rouses our suspicions.²⁶

The provincial morning press found itself competing with the national newspapers which developed their northern and Scottish editions and modernised their appearance and content. The early 1930s mirrored the early years of the twentieth century in that provincial newspapers were bought up on a massive scale. This time 'press barons' were the buyers, rather than political parties and their wealthy backers. Williams describes the Berry Brothers buying 26 provincial morning and evening newspapers, and Lord Rothermere buying 14 in the same period in a circulation war. Williams says

The effect of this war of giants on locally owned newspapers was devastating. Some were bought and sold at fantastically inflated prices, others were forced out of existence without regard for community interests. Neither the costs or the effect on relations between press and public deterred other eager buyers.²⁷

Jackson gives figures for the number of provincial newspapers between 1921 and 1969: in 1921 there were 41 morning newspapers, in 1937 this was reduced to 28; comparable figures show 89 evening newspapers in 1921, compared to 79 in 1937. This demonstrates the greater impact of the competition from national newspapers on morning regional newspapers than on evening newspapers.²⁸ However, chain ownership of provincial evening newspapers increased from 7.86% in 1921 to 43.01% in 1937.²⁹

The 1929 slump brought this 'war' to an end, by which time nearly half of all British newspapers belonged to four main groups and, as Koss and F. Williams show, many provincial newspapers could not compete with the national dailies. Yet beyond stating that the provincial evening newspapers were the least vulnerable, neither Koss nor F. Williams go into any details about why and how these newspapers survived. They, like all provincial newspapers, had access to press agencies so were able to publish updated national news and at the same time provide local news, gossip, photographs and features in the 'modern' style. Newspapers of this type, of which the Blackpool *Evening Gazette* was one, were less likely than the morning provincial press to suffer from competition with the national dailies or with radio, which was London-based. They balanced advertising, news, and a local focus which made them an essential part of everyday life for many people.

Raymond Williams describes the situation for local newspapers before and after the 1930s:

Occasionally, in the earlier periods, the same printer or proprietor had owned two or three small circulation papers, but the rule, throughout, had been the ownership of a single paper, either by a printer, a printing family, or a joint stock company. Now, around the new kind of speculative owner, whole groups of papers and periodicals were being collected or begun.³⁰

As will be shown, the *Blackpool Evening Gazette* (and other papers under the same ownership, including the *Gazette and Herald*) was a well-established local newspaper, part of a group of newspapers founded in 1873 by John Grime, a printer from a family of printers. The *Evening Gazette* continued in the hands of the Grime family well beyond the period of this study. Clearly the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* were selling well enough and had sufficient advertising revenue to survive, but were perhaps of so little strategic importance that they did not attract the attentions of the press barons. Although the reasons for their survival will only be briefly touched on, the relationship between the family, the corporation and the readership of the newspaper will be examined, particularly in the context of the municipal aerodrome.

The demise of the small, often family-run newspaper business can, perhaps, be said to have begun in the early twentieth-century, before the circulation wars of the 1930s. Ferris notes the formation of Associated Newspapers in 1905, formed to run the *Daily Mail*, *Evening News* and *Weekly Dispatch*: 'this company marked the formal beginning of the British Newspaper Industry. For the first time, investors bought shares in a newspaper as they might have bought them in a soap factory or a railway.'³¹

Koss describes the trend in the 1930s for newspapers to distance themselves from party politics and suggests a number of reasons: the blurring of party lines over economic and foreign policy; the growing cynicism about Westminster politics; and economic necessity: newspapers could not afford only to appeal to supporters of a single party or to ignore the demands of their readers to provide less politics and more entertainment in the daily newspapers. He identifies this trend as starting in the provinces, particularly in the evening newspapers, and spreading nationally. Here, perhaps, Koss should go further to acknowledge that the provincial press led the way to a new kind of political reporting: while a local newspaper might espouse a political viewpoint, particularly at the time of a General Election, on individual issues the same newspaper could take an independent line to challenge local political decision-making.

Murphy, writing about the 1950s and 1960s, describes local newspapers as providing 'propaganda for the status quo and having a "built-in" dependency on the local authority as a source of regular news coverage, which given individuals can cut off as a form of punishment.'³² He believes this inhibits criticism of local authorities, yet it will be seen that the *Evening Gazette* was fully prepared to be critical on the issue of the development of Stanley Park aerodrome, both because of the newspaper's self-proclaimed role as the voice of the local resident and, therefore, rate-payer and because it made an interesting (and at times sensational) news story. As for Murphy's assertion that newspapers are dependent on the local authority for news, the relationship between the Blackpool *Evening Gazette* and the local council was one of mutual dependency: a symbiotic relationship which neither party could afford to end.

Bromley and Hayes take the view that local evening newspapers were more than a mixture of mundane news about local crime, personalities and sport, and advertising, which sustained the newspaper as a profitable enterprise. They say

It seems overly pessimistic, then, to argue that at this moment of the institutionalisation of "the daily", newspaper journalism simply failed to resist the intrusion of commercialisation, and that political control of newspapers gave way to a form of normative licensing by advertisers.³³

The local newspaper was not only useful for its advertisements and gossip, but took on the 'civic duty' of providing information on local political issues and decisions, and beyond that by inviting: 'greater public scrutiny of local institutions. Through their support of the paper, ordinary citizens licensed it to interrogate, harry and challenge civic authority – and, ultimately, to produce a singularly different version of civic events.'³⁴

It will be seen, therefore, that the municipal aerodrome development, begun in 1927, supported by all political parties represented on Blackpool Council, and enthusiastically endorsed by the *Gazette and Herald* and, later, the *Evening Gazette*, proved to be a project that caused a breakdown in the support for 'municipal capitalism' and showed the limitations of the possibility of change for a traditional well-established resort. Blackpool aspired to modernise its image

by providing an amenity – the aerodrome – which was a powerful symbol of modernity, as part of an attempt to impose a sense of order on the resort's traditional libertarianism. However, the complexities of managing the aerodrome and providing flying facilities required skills beyond those of local councillors whose experiences in running a holiday resort, often on the same principles as they ran their own businesses, were of little use when what was required was an understanding of the culture, economics and technology of flight.

The role of the local press in the story of the municipal aerodrome at Stanley Park will be shown to be limited to providing a forum for the expression of the differing views of local people and a demonstration of the independence of the press when put under pressure by local politicians. Although the municipal aerodrome was eventually moved to Squires Gate, a course which, as it reminded its readers, the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* had regularly suggested, the decision to take this course of action was not influenced by the newspapers' (or its readers') opinion, but rather was a reaction to international political events and, closer to home, the failure to use the aerodrome as a way of changing Blackpool's image and social tone.

Chapter 1 explores Blackpool's decision to have a municipal aerodrome in the context of national aeronautical developments and government concern that Britain should develop a culture of airmindedness, as had happened in other European countries, particularly Germany and Italy. This chapter also examines and provides possible reasons for the siting of Blackpool's municipal aerodrome adjacent to Stanley Park, rather than the apparently more obvious choice of Squires Gate, where flying had been taking place intermittently since 1909.

Chapter 2 examines the background to the local evening newspapers owned by the Grime family, the *Gazette and Herald* and *Evening Gazette*, to demonstrate the 'independent' stance taken by these newspapers when reporting and commenting on the aerodrome project. It goes on to describe the development of the aerodrome up to its official opening in June 1931, analysing the extent

that comments and reports in the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* influenced the corporation's decisions. This chapter also explores the level of air-mindedness nationally at this time, and ways in which government policy to encourage the general public to become involved in flying helped or hindered Blackpool's municipal aerodrome.

Chapter 3 looks at the period beyond the opening of Stanley Park aerodrome to November 1934 when the corporation bought the land at Squires Gate which included an aerodrome which was operating on the site. Although the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* had been critical of the corporation's management of Stanley Park Aerodrome and had provided an outlet for the opinions of residents and business-people, this significant development which would lead to the moving of the municipal aerodrome to Squires Gate and the virtual demise of Stanley Park Aerodrome, was reported without comment. I examine the reasons for this and the role that the local newspapers played in the aerodrome's history.

Finally, the Conclusion sums up the research and suggests possible further opportunities to study both the role of local newspapers in influencing political decisions at a local level and the experience of other holiday resorts which invested in municipal aerodromes in the 1920s and 1930s.

CHAPTER ONE

In order to explain why Blackpool decided to develop a municipal aerodrome it is necessary to examine the public image and political significance of aviation in Europe in the 1920s. This chapter will link national and European perceptions and achievements with the movement to develop municipal aerodromes in Britain and, in particular, Blackpool, before discussing the reasons for Blackpool's choice of the Stanley Park area for its aerodrome.

By the 1920s, aviation was developing and being promoted in, broadly speaking, three ways. Firstly, aviation was seen as a personal means of transport and a new sport, both useful and enjoyable (the 'aerial motor car'). Linked to this was the promotion of flying as a spectacle, so that those people who did not yet aspire to piloting or travelling in aircraft themselves could, at least, watch others participate in races, flying displays and demonstrations. Usually, at air meetings and pageants there was the opportunity to experience flight through joy-rides for those who could afford it. Secondly, and antithetically, while aviation was seen as having the potential to be of use to the general public, there was the image of the pilot as a member of an elite, heroic group, an image that emerged with the air aces of World War One, and which was perpetuated by the media well into the 1930s. These heroes, or at least those who had survived the war, were to be seen at air meetings where they showed off their skills. Thirdly, flying was developing as a means of transporting people, goods and mail more quickly and directly than by existing methods of transport, particularly over long distances.

Perhaps the greatest exponent of the view that anyone could be an aviator was Henri Mignet who, in 1928, wrote that

If you can nail together a packing case, you can construct an aeroplane. Here you have your little pal, all bright and new, with which two or three friends can have some very happy and unforgettable hours. Become an active amateur! Come on, construct your aeroplane!¹

While constructing an aeroplane might prove more complex for most potential aviators than Mignet suggests, in Britain becoming a pilot was simplified by the

development of flying clubs around the country. By 1925 flying clubs were subsidised by the Government so that the cost of joining a club, flying lessons and gaining a proficiency certificate was in total approximately £30. Graham-White, who started the first post-war flying club at Hendon, comments on the diversity of those learning to fly, including women:

....a girl typist saved enough out of her slender earnings to take lessons in a light aeroplane, and not only secured her certificate of proficiency but also proved to be a capital pilot.²

While the government provided subsidies for flying clubs and, as will be seen, for civil aviation companies, Britain was less air-minded than some European countries. That is not to say that Britain, and the British public, were not enthusiastic about powered flight. Aviation meetings were held at towns around the country, beginning in 1909 (including Blackpool, where there was a demonstration of aerial mail-carrying) and regular meetings were held at Hendon and Brooklands. Gate receipts at the London Aerodrome at Hendon were £11,000 in 1911, the first year of operation, rising to £25,000 for the period January to August 1914³, showing the increasing interest in aviation. R. Dallas Brett describes the crowds at the first 'Aerial Derby', an eighty-one mile circuit that started and finished at Hendon, in 1912:

An intensive campaign by the *Daily Mail* whipped up enormous public interest in the event, and pouring rain in the morning followed by a dull afternoon did not prevent 45,000 people from paying for admission at Hendon on June 8th. This was but a small section of the multitude which witnessed the race, for the whole course of eighty-one miles was thronged with spectators, who clustered in tens of thousands at each turning point. The racing pilots were unable to recognize Esher Common as a landmark, as it was literally blackened by the swarming crowd. It was estimated that no less than three million people saw the contest.⁴

The *Daily Mail* was instrumental in promoting aviation both through frequent articles and publicity within its pages, and by sponsorship of a number of early flying contests. Examples include a £1,000 prize for the first cross-Channel flight; a £1,000 prize for the first circular mile flight by a British aviator in a British machine; and, later, a £10,000 prize for the first non-stop Atlantic crossing. Aerial motor cars were a particular interest of Lord Northcliffe and it seems fitting that this technological sensation should be promoted in a

newspaper aimed at providing entertainment, as well as news, to the middle and upper-working classes. Chalaby makes the point that Northcliffe has been described by his biographers as 'not a natural sensationalist', despising vulgarity 'and the use of sex-related news items in his newspapers'⁵. Aviation provided a means of providing sensation without vulgarity. The *Daily Mail's* promotion of aviation implied that its readers, in the future, would use aeroplanes as an everyday means of transport, but, until that day, the newspaper was sponsoring the intrepid pioneer aviators who risked, and sometimes lost, their lives in accidents which inevitably occurred at this early stage in aviation's progress – accidents which provided newspaper copy that was sensational, but more heroic than vulgar.

In 1929 the Government consolidated pilot training by providing a subsidy to National Flying Services Ltd, rather than by subsidising individual flying clubs. National Flying Services was granted £97,000 over a period of ten years in an agreement with the Air Ministry that the company would provide at least twenty new airfields and eighty landing grounds in its first three years of operation.⁶ Captain F E Guest, who set up National Flying Services, said at the opening of the London Air Park at Hanworth Aerodrome, where the company was based, that the purpose of National Flying Services was the 'principle of bringing flying within the range of people of moderate means.'⁷ One of National Flying Services' first aerodromes was at Blackpool, but the company was unable to fulfil its undertaking to the Air Ministry and it went into receivership in 1933, as will be described later in this study.

Other European countries were advancing the cause of aviation more rapidly than Britain. Motorised flying in Germany had been severely restricted by the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, although these restrictions (including the manufacture and size of military aircraft) had finally been lifted in 1926. Germans had, however, continued to develop non-motorised aircraft – gliders. Gliding became a symbol of German progress in aviation, with young fliers taking on the mantle of the national heroes of World War One. Fritzsche describes gliding schools and camps as 'small nationalist republics',⁸ fostering the spirit of a new Germany rising from defeat and the consequent restrictions

placed by the Allies, training young people in the aeronautical and engineering skills which would be needed in the future.

To expert pilots and young school boys across the Reich, gliding resembled a vast summer camp in which Germans gained a practical appreciation for the machinery and technology that modern states required for national defence.⁹

The German people were proving themselves to be enthusiastic supporters of aviation. Huge crowds attended air shows, in small towns and well as in large cities. Charges to enter air shows were low, ensuring that all sections of the public could afford to attend.¹⁰ Gliding meetings continued to draw crowds into the 1930s, continuing a public interest in aviation that could be said to have begun with the excitement generated by the Zeppelin LZ4 in 1908. When high winds destroyed the LZ4, the German public raised 5 million marks for its repair. The donations came from men, women and children, social clubs, and civic collections. Fritzsche describes the spontaneous campaign as 'cast by patriotic boosters as an appealing display of civic spirit and national unity'.¹¹

Historians have noted the interest in aviation by leaders of Fascist states. Hitler used a leased Luft Hansa aeroplane to travel round Germany in the 1932 Reichstag campaign.¹² Mussolini called himself 'an aviation fanatic' and began flying lessons in 1920,¹³ stating that 'Italy should now take back air supremacy.'¹⁴ Some of the most impressive aviation achievements of the inter-war years were supported by Mussolini's government, including Italo Balbo's leadership of mass crossings of, firstly in 1928, the Western Mediterranean (with 40 aeroplanes); secondly in 1931, the Orbetello to Rio de Janeiro crossing with 10 aeroplanes; thirdly in 1933, the double crossing of the North Atlantic with 24 aeroplanes. Although these flights demonstrated the aeronautical skills of Italian pilots, they had a wider purpose:

No less important, however, in the thinking of both Balbo and Mussolini were the display of Italian aviation prowess before an admiring foreign public, the resulting opportunities to publicize Italian international prestige domestically, and the possibility of selling Italian aircraft to foreign powers.¹⁵

By contrast, Eksteins points out that when Neville Chamberlain and Sir Horace Wilson went to Munich to meet Hitler on 15th September 1938 (in an American aircraft), both were flying for the first time.¹⁶

By the late 1920s, when restrictions on the size and power of aircraft had been lifted, air shows became increasingly popular in Germany. Airfields and aerodromes were once again used for rallies and air services. The success of zeppelins, beginning with the ZRIII's crossing of the Atlantic in 1924, which created huge publicity in both the United States and Germany, was matched by the achievements of conventional aircraft. In Germany a single airline company, Luft Hansa, was established in 1925 by a merger of Junkers and Heinkel and supported and subsidised by the state. This mirrored the situation in Britain where, in 1924, four airline companies, already receiving subsidies from the state, were merged to form Imperial Airways. Traditionally, the British government had resisted subsidising civil aviation (in 1920 Winston Churchill had stated 'civil aviation must fly by itself') but the Civil Air Transport Subsidies Committee recommended the formation of a single state-subsidised airline. Thus, Imperial Airways was to be subsidised for a period of ten years, and given responsibility for developing air routes to Australia and South Africa, calling at strategic points on the way to link the countries of the British Empire.

Britain (and the other Allies) had a head-start on Germany in developing civil aviation, yet by 1928 Fritzsche states that Luft Hansa

flew more miles and carried more passengers than all other European companies combined..... Even before Hitler's military build-up, Germany possessed in Luft Hansa not only a considerable reserve of trained aviators in case of war but also a fleet of airplanes that experts believed could be converted to military use in a matter of days.¹⁷

By 1930, Britain lagged behind Germany, France and Italy in numbers of passengers carried. Britain's geographical location has to be taken into account as France, Germany and Italy were better placed to carry trans-European passengers. Also, Britain's state-subsidised airline, Imperial Airways, had as its main objective the development of air routes linking the Empire, as mentioned above. It was recognized that the task of communicating with the British administrative and military authorities would be much quicker by air than by

established land and sea routes (for example, travel between England and India was reduced from sixteen days to six and a half days). Also, the arrival of mail by air and the regular appearance of British aircraft en route to India or South Africa boosted British prestige and was a reminder to local inhabitants of the power of the British Empire. While communication by air-mail was an obvious advantage, it should be remembered that there were large numbers of British citizens living and working in the colonies: for example, in 1931 there were approximately 168,000 Britons in India and 7,500 working for the Colonial Service in Africa.¹⁸ Although, for reasons of economy, the majority of journeys would be made by sea and land, here was a ready market of passengers for Imperial Airways.

The importance of these flights across continents and Britain's position at the geographical edge of Europe perhaps accounts for the relative lack of success of British airlines in shorter flights across Europe and internally within the British Isles, certainly throughout the 1920s. Until the formation of the subsidised Imperial Airways in 1924, early civil airlines struggled to survive, competing as they were with subsidised European airlines and the practical problems of promoting a new and somewhat dangerous means of transport in a country with a well-developed rail network.

Here was the dilemma for airline companies, aviation enthusiasts and, by the mid-1920s, the government: how to encourage British people to be as air-minded as Europeans and Americans, where air-mindedness has been described as a 'nearly religious declaration of faith in moral improvement and civic prosperity,'¹⁹ when the pilot was often still regarded and portrayed in the media as the heroic individualist of the Royal Flying Corps in World War One. How could the general public be reassured that flying was a safe means of transport and a hobby that anyone could enjoy when flying 'aces' were still being romanticized as heroes? In France, Germany and Britain pilots became household names: Ball, Rickenbacker, Guynemer, Boelcke, and, perhaps the most famous, von Richthofen, whose squadron's nickname, The Flying Circus, became the favoured name for post-war stunt teams. Morrow, in his essay 'Brave Men Flying', states that

British aviation magazines such as *Flight* and *The Aeroplane*, romanticized the Royal Flying Corps and the sporting, chivalric, heroic and sacrificial images of the air war. From Royal Flying Corps headquarters Philip Gibbs's column "Daily Chronicle" depicted the Royal Flying Corps as "Knights Errant of the Air" recalling the Black Prince in Flanders during the Hundred Years War. In a war with precious little romance, he found it in the "daily tourneys" in the air, as fearless British fliers fought with the ardour of schoolboys flinging themselves into a football scrimmage.²⁰

The image of the pilot as heroic individual continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Partly this was through published memoirs and biographies of the air aces, partly because these pilots continued to fly, often as test pilots, competitors in air-races or by achieving long-distance flights. Films also played a part in perpetuating the myth of the heroic airman. Budiansky says that

Hollywood did not invent the romantic legend of the Great War fliers, but it had a knack for distilling legends into a few emotionally powerful images and phrases that would stick in people's minds. That was nowhere more the case than in the First World War flying movies.²¹

There was still a demand for such films into the 1930s, for example 'Hell's Angels' and 'Dawn Patrol', both First World War films which opened in 1930, and 'Only Angels Have Wings' (1939), the story of air-mail pilots in an Equadorian port. Wohl describes 'Only Angels Have Wings' as a film that focuses more on the emotional world of the aviators, rather than the spectacular flying sequences of earlier films, but the 'stoic fatalism' displayed by the characters is similar, the sense of belonging to a world that can only be understood by those who fly sets them apart from ordinary men (and, occasionally, women).²²

The most famous of the post-war aviators was Charles Lindbergh, whose 1927 solo crossing of the Atlantic caught the public imagination in both America and Europe. Lindbergh displayed the characteristics of war-time air aces, demonstrating courage and skill during his lone crossing of the Atlantic and courtesy and modesty when dealing with the press and public after his flight. Ekstein and Fritzsche suggest that Lindbergh was also a 'modern hero', mastering the air while at one with his machine.²³ Fritzsche describes aviation as 'a crucial part of the modernist experience.'²⁴ Aviation was the ultimate symbol of technological innovation which could overcome the constraints of the

natural world. At the same time, aviation was dangerous and pilots required technical skills and self-discipline if they were to survive. Lindbergh symbolised the past and future of aviation.

It was in the context of European advances in aviation that, in June 1927, Air Marshall Sir Sefton Brancker, Director of Civil Aviation, issued a memorandum in which he compared British towns' commitment to aviation unfavourably with towns in other European countries. Germany was particularly mentioned as a country that had developed aerodromes in every city.

There are many reasons why our British cities should follow this example. Commercial aviation in the future is going to be a serious factor in ordinary business life. The city that provides an aerodrome today will reap a good harvest when aviation becomes an ordinary and universal means of travel. The city that neglects to use this foresight today will find itself in the future between the alternatives of being without an aerodrome or being forced to pay very large sums to obtain a site which may be comparatively cheap today.²⁵

As we have seen, there had been a long-held enthusiasm for aviation in Germany, even with the restrictions on development of motorised aircraft imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. Civil aviation needed aerodromes and support services for refuelling, maintenance of aircraft and administration. In order to attract passengers and freight, aerodromes would have to be conveniently close to major conurbations to compete with an existing comprehensive train network. The memorandum quoted above acknowledges that the benefits of investing in an aerodrome would be felt in the future, although there is no hint as to how far in the future this might be. There is also no mention of government subsidies towards the cost of building and running municipal aerodromes. Just as after 1919, when the government was reluctant to provide subsidies to support civil aviation companies, so now there was a reluctance to support towns and cities which proved themselves to be air-minded by developing municipal aerodromes.

Fritzsche sees aviation in the 1920s as a symbol of Germany's regeneration and the aerodrome as the arena where that regeneration could be demonstrated:

Municipal airports, for example, were built not only as terminals, accepting departing and arriving passengers, but also as arenas with stacked, semicircular decks for audiences to view air rallies and air power; in the summer months, thousands of sightseers came each day to watch air traffic at Tempelhof and dine at the airport's modernist Mitropa restaurant.²⁶

In Britain there seemed to be the potential for a similar level of interest. In the 1920s crowds continued to visit Hendon and Brooklands as they had done before World War One. Air races and long-distance flights were front-page news in local and national newspapers, and in 1927 100,000 people went to Croydon to see Lindbergh arrive from France after his trans-Atlantic flight. Eksteins quotes the London correspondent of the Berliner Tageblatt:

I have witnessed the British potential for enthusiasm at the opening of Wembley, at the Cup Final, at the boat race, and on the return of Allan Cobham from Australia. But the reception given Lindbergh yesterday overshadows all of this.²⁷

There were other reasons for the Government to encourage municipal aerodromes. More aerodromes, and the development of flying clubs, meant more people having the opportunity to fly. As in Germany, civilian pilots would be a useful reserve for future military action, either in Europe or in the countries of the British Empire. In 1924 Imperial Airways had been provided with a subsidy of £1,000,000 over ten years with the intention of opening up Empire air-routes as well as its flights to Europe. Over its first years of operation Imperial Airways used the most luxurious and advanced aircraft of all British airlines. These British-made aircraft visited air shows held at aerodromes around the country, the embodiment of national technological achievements and power, and evidence of the value of a national airline subsidised by the tax-paying public. A network of air routes across the country would allow Britain to continue to develop its commerce and technology and municipal aerodromes, paid for by local authorities and perhaps run by private companies, would minimise Government investment.

The case of Blackpool illustrates these themes in a distinctive setting. Given that Blackpool is a holiday resort on the north-west coast of England, at least 50 miles from the nearest city, it would seem to be unlikely to have ambitions to have a municipal aerodrome. Yet in October 1927 the Mayor of Blackpool,

Alderman Fenton is quoted in the local evening paper as saying 'A Municipal Aerodrome is an absolute necessity'.²⁸

A continual concern for the corporation was the short holiday season which meant a shortage of visitors in the early season months before July and August, although from 1925 onwards the season was extended at the latter end by the Illuminations. A recurring theme in the *Blackpool Evening Gazette* was the problem of devising early season attractions and events. The Carnivals of 1923 and 1924 were perhaps the biggest and most successful of these events but, despite suggestions that further carnivals should be held (in the newspaper and in the Council Chamber as late as 1931) they were not to be repeated.²⁹

The aerodrome provided a possible long-term solution to the problem of attracting early season visitors. We have already seen that the Corporation aspired to raise the social tone of the town. An aerodrome could encourage visitors from the more prosperous, middle-class south of England. This point was made at a Council meeting in January 1931 when middle-class visitors from the south were described as 'emissaries to bring a better class of folk during these months of the year'. The Council was discussing plans for an Air Pageant to be held in June, Alderman Fenton supporting the plans because a pageant would 'appeal to the more leisured class who could choose when to take their holidays.'³⁰

These visitors might be deterred from visiting Blackpool by train, arriving at Central Station and plunging immediately into the chaos and sleaze of the Golden Mile, literally rubbing shoulders with working-class Northerners. Even in the early part of the season, when the crowds were less oppressive, the area around the station was stereotypical of Blackpool's popular image. Equally, although the middle-classes were rapidly becoming car owners at this time, travelling from the south of England was not practical for a short visit. However, arriving by air would mean, firstly, viewing the surrounding countryside and seashore from above, the clean lines of field boundaries, roads and rail tracks leading the way to the landing strip on an open expanse of grass. Once on the ground, the passengers would be escorted to a modern reception building,

probably watched from the terrace by spectators vicariously sharing the experience of flight. While this idea of visitors flying to Blackpool for a weekend or week's holiday was innovative, in reality the market for such trips was small. The *Evening Gazette* printed a photograph of 'sightseers' from London on an organised trip to see the Illuminations leaving Stanley Park Aerodrome, Blackpool, to fly back to Hanworth Aerodrome³¹ but there is no further evidence of such trips taking place. Hanworth (also known as the London Air Park) was the headquarters of National Flying Services, the company contracted by Blackpool Corporation to run Stanley Park Aerodrome and which was in serious financial trouble by 1932. National Flying Services ran a flying club at Hanworth and an air taxi service and it seems likely that the trip to Blackpool Illuminations was either a privately organised air taxi flight, or a speculative venture on the part of National Flying Services to promote a regular air service between the two aerodromes.

Blackpool Corporation may have wanted to provide facilities for air travellers equal to those serving London. In the 1920s the local newspaper regularly presented Blackpool as rivalling London in its amenities. For example, South Shore Open Air Baths was described as 'Blackpool's swimming Wembley'³² and the fact that the Olympic swimming trials were held at the Baths the following year, the first time they had been held outside London, must have given Blackpool reason to believe that the town could provide Northerners with facilities equal to those in the capital city. When the plans for a municipal aerodrome were announced in November 1927, the *Gazette and Herald's* headline read 'The Brooklands of the North.'³³ The Corporation was planning to combine an aerodrome and motor-racing track on the same site, as at Brooklands, but, in reality, that is where the comparison ends. Aviation at Brooklands was well established by the mid-1920s with private pilots, air races and events and, more importantly, several aircraft manufacturing companies on the site. A 'flying village' of aviation companies was in place at Brooklands before World War One and manufacturing was continued in the inter-war years by companies such as Vickers and Hawker. This manufacturing base, along with the private flying community, and the long history of motor-racing and

testing ensured that Brooklands was financially viable. Blackpool could not match this level of established investment and infrastructure.

Watching aircraft had been a popular pastime since the early days of flying. Blackpool held one of world's first air-meetings in 1909 and repeated the event in 1910. Spectators gathered not only at special events at English aerodromes but also to watch aircraft simply take off and land. Joy-flights were popular in the years following World War One, an estimated 20,000 people having flown from aerodromes around England by August 1919.³⁴ While there were a number of aerodromes in the South of England which provided opportunities for viewing aircraft and taking joy-flights, there were few facilities in the North. An aerodrome with regular flying events and joy-flying would be a major new visitor attraction for Blackpool, and the addition of a motor-racing track, as at Brooklands, would add to the interest. The Corporation had the evidence of crowds at Brooklands, Hanworth, Hendon and Croydon to prove the popularity of aviation. As a member of the Council remarked to the *Gazette and Herald* during the 1928 Air Pageant held at Squires Gate Aerodrome

“At Hendon one notices that the crowd take all these things as a matter of course, but up here people have not seen, until today, this particular type of flying and consequently they are tremendously interested.”³⁵

We have already seen that the British public was enthusiastic about flying aces such as Lindbergh. The exploits of long-distance aviators in particular made headline news throughout this period. It is not surprising, therefore, that Blackpool should want to provide opportunities for its visitors to see and be entertained by these celebrities of the air in the same way as the stars of show-business were regular visitors to Blackpool.

There are two aspects to the decision to have a municipal aerodrome at Blackpool: the decision to have an aerodrome at all and the decision over the siting of such an aerodrome. The evidence shows both decisions interlinked and being taken at virtually the same time. While it is possible that the Council agreed to have an aerodrome and then, after taking advice, made a decision to site it at Hardhorn (adjacent to Stanley Park), it seems more likely that there was already a preference to site the aerodrome at Hardhorn, and advisors

merely confirmed that this site would be suitable. Both decisions were made and plans implemented within a matter of a few months at the end of 1927. As the *Gazette and Herald* said

That visit [of Sir Alan Cobham] took place near the end of September and the circumstances that the definite proposal appears in a Parliamentary Bill in the middle of November is a characteristic example of Blackpool's hustle.³⁶

The series of events which led up to the decision to have an aerodrome and to site it at Hardhorn began in August 1927 when the Corporation received a letter from Alan Cobham Aviation Ltd offering to act as consultants to the Corporation on developing and running a municipal aerodrome. Blackpool was only one of several air-minded towns to be offered these services (others included Liverpool and Doncaster).

Alan Cobham Aviation Ltd was formed in May 1927 after Sir Alan Cobham left the De Havilland Aeroplane Hire Service where he had worked for some years as Senior Pilot. He was also one of the most famous aviators of the time through his long-distance flights to South Africa (1925) and Australia (1926). It is probable that consultancy was one aspect of the new business which he intended to develop, at a time when towns and cities in Britain were being urged to provide municipal aerodromes as an investment in a future when, it was thought, aircraft would compete with cars and motor coaches as a means of transport.

The Corporation engaged Sir Alan Cobham to produce a report on the development of an aerodrome and the suitability of various sites. This report was considered by the General Purposes Committee of the Council on the 26th October 1927, six days after the same committee had resolved that Blackpool should have a municipal aerodrome³⁷ and a special sub-committee was formed to deal with this issue. On 7th December the General Purposes Committee authorised the sub-committee to proceed with the purchase of land at Hardhorn and on the 15th December the full Council unanimously agreed the Blackpool Extension Bill which included authorising '... the acquisition by the Corporation of lands in the townships of Hardhorn-with-Newton and Marton for an aerodrome, motor-racing track and other purposes...' These 'townships' were

not, at that time, part of Blackpool Borough and at the same meeting the Council passed the Blackpool Extension Bill, bringing Hardhorn-with-Newton and the whole of Marton within the boundaries of an extended Blackpool Borough.³⁸

Shortly after these events the General Purposes Committee met to consider Sir Alan Cobham's report and to recommend 'site numbered 1'. The special sub-committee considered plans for the site and these were submitted to the Air Ministry for approval.

I have not been able to find a copy of Sir Alan Cobham's report, but it seems likely that 'site numbered 1' was, in fact, the land at Hardhorn that was already favoured by the Corporation. It also seems likely that in his discussions with the Corporation, when he visited Blackpool in September, their preferred site was identified to him, bearing in mind that the special sub-committee were given the task of preparing estimates for the purchasing and leasing of the site at the General Purposes Committee meeting on 26th October 1927, and the swift decisions made after that date. Sir Alan Cobham was probably, therefore, simply endorsing a decision that had already been made by the council.

The only practical alternative site for a municipal aerodrome would have been Squires Gate where the air meetings of 1909 and 1910 had been held and which was used as an aerodrome after World War One. Claude Grahame-White mentions that 'as many as 10,000 people went up for short pleasure flights' at Blackpool in 1919.³⁹ Whether this was from Squires Gate or from the beach, he does not say. The Lancashire School of Aviation was also based at Squires Gate in the 1920s, but the main development at Squires Gate after 1910 was as a race-course, Clifton Park, run by a consortium which had signed a 42 year lease in 1911, and which had gone into receivership in 1915. The army had taken over Squires Gate as a hospital and convalescent centre during World War One and was still in possession by 1924. In November 1927, just at the time the Corporation was considering a site for a municipal aerodrome, the race-course syndicate sued the army for compensation for damage done while the ground was a hospital. The land at Squires Gate was in the Borough of

Lytham St Annes and owned by the Clifton family of Lytham who may not have been willing to sell at that time. As we have seen, the aerodrome site was bound up with the extension of Blackpool Borough, and it seems unlikely that the Corporation would have been happy to develop this prestigious amenity, the 'Brooklands of the North' outside the boundaries of the Borough, even if the court case involving the race-course syndicate had been settled in time. It appears that Blackpool people did not associate Squires Gate with its aviation past as the *Gazette and Herald* described Sir Alan Cobham as landing at 'the old race-course' when he visited Blackpool in September 1927.⁴⁰

Added to this, the Corporation was acquiring a valuable asset in buying the land at Hardhorn. If the plans for an aerodrome and race-track did not succeed, it was possible that the land could be used for other purposes, and, in fact, over the years that the aerodrome was in development and in use, there were regular suggestions for other uses, as we shall see. The arrival of visitors by air at an aerodrome adjacent to Stanley Park and its surrounding housing development has already been mentioned as a way of changing the image of Blackpool and raising the social tone of the resort.

Investment in an aerodrome was a major undertaking for the Corporation but only the latest in a number of large projects, some of which have already been mentioned (South Shore Open Air Baths, promenade improvements, Stanley Park). This 'municipal capitalism', also mentioned in the introduction to this study, was common in holiday resorts in the inter-war years. Municipal capitalism depended for its success on the tacit agreement of businesses and residents that money collected by the Council from local taxes should be used to provide bigger and better holiday attractions. Morgan and Pritchard have pointed out that the 1930s was a key decade

of conflict in British resorts, coinciding with continuing rising levels of real income amongst the working class that facilitated consumer revolutions – themselves part of the general shift from a production to a consumption culture.....Resort communities across Britain faced decisions over whether to encourage and facilitate or attempt to resist the changes in popular holidaymaking patterns.⁴¹

The arguments and local political disputes that emerged over the aerodrome, built as it was at this period of conflict, were an example of the breakdown of the agreement between residents and businesses that the Corporation should pursue a policy of municipal capitalism. Within eighteen months of the Council unanimously agreeing (45 votes in favour) to go ahead with the aerodrome plan on the Hardhorn site in December 1927, the consensus had fractured completely, and by July 1929, well before the opening of the aerodrome, councillors were protesting against it and advocating the abandonment of the project. This breakdown was not so much a conflict between residents and holiday interests, as happened with some regularity in Blackpool and other resorts, but a coming together of both residents and holiday interests against the Council's aerodrome strategy. The disagreements about the aerodrome were fuelled by the *Evening Gazette* newspaper group, which took on the role of 'municipal watchdog'. Politically, the aerodrome became unpopular with remarkable rapidity.

The development of the aerodrome within the context of local disapproval and a growing national economic downturn will be discussed in Chapter 2, along with an examination of the role played by the *Evening Gazette* newspaper group in reflecting and, at times, leading public opinion.

CHAPTER TWO

The *Gazette and Herald* reported on the original decision by the Corporation to develop a municipal aerodrome without editorial comment. It was the *Gazette and Herald* that used the term 'Brooklands of the North' to describe the plans for the Hardhorn site and up to this time the newspaper had been supportive of the Corporation's policy of municipal capitalism and, indeed, had endorsed the Corporation's management of Blackpool over a number of years. The newspaper's front page frequently showed large crowds on the promenade and beach at the height of the season, publicised new developments and reflected and reinforced the town's image as a progressive, popular (in both senses of the word) resort.

This support was acknowledged at the ceremony to mark the amalgamation of two local newspapers, the *Gazette News* and the *Herald* (formerly the *Fleetwood Chronicle*) at the beginning of January, 1920. Local dignitaries, including Blackpool's M.P., Lindsay Parkinson, attended the ceremony at which they watched a new rotary press produce the first edition of the *Gazette and Herald*. Allowing for the fact that on such an occasion it would be unlikely that any critical words would be spoken, the relationship between the local and national politicians and the newspaper's proprietors is clearly shown in the speeches. After emphasising the importance of national publicity for Blackpool and the advantage for 'self-advertisement' of the two-penny rate levied for that purpose, the Mayor went on to say

But on this occasion we are more particularly concerned with local newspaper effort. I may say without the slightest fear of contradiction that Blackpool is proud of its local newspapers. They have done well for the town. They have helped materially towards establishing its prosperity. Levelheadedness has characterised their policy, and the ultimate welfare of the town has been the goal they have ever aimed at, even when that policy has not been the popular course. There have been occasions when they have run counter to the powers that be, but we will all be ready to admit that their influence has been beneficial. A fearless, honest newspaper in the midst of any community is always a healthy corrective of public life, and earns the sincere respect even of those who may for the time being disagree. Blackpool has been well favoured by its three newspapers in this respect.

Percy J Grime, speaking on behalf of the directors of the *Gazette and Herald* was reported as saying that

.... it might be a matter of argument as to how much exactly the newspapers had contributed to the development of the borough to the proud position it now enjoyed among the health and pleasure resorts of the United Kingdom. As one who has been closely concerned in publicity matters for a long number of years, he claimed that the newspapers had done much to help in the advancement of Blackpool.¹

Jackson, in his study 'The Provincial Press and the Community', comments on the 'localness' of the provincial evening newspaper. Analysing the proportions of national and local news in this type of newspaper in the 1960s, he concludes that the smaller the circulation of a newspaper, the greater the proportion of 'order' news compared to 'disorder' news. Order news is defined as positive stories, generally about community developments, organisations and individuals, while disorder news includes fatalities, individual tragedies and community controversies. He also makes the point that even disorder news generally shows institutional leaders in a positive light. The inclusion of a high proportion of order news about individuals or institutions develops the readers' pride in their locality. Jackson quotes Janowitz on this point

Local news incorporates a strong feeling of local pride and personal respect which print enhances.....If the individual has any personal knowledge of these persons and institutions close at hand or any sense of identification with them, he in turn feels a sense of solidarity and cohesion well beyond being merely informed.²

The Mayor's speech at the inaugural ceremony for the *Gazette and Herald*, hints at possible negative comments and reports from the newspapers. Another director of the newspaper, Robert Nickson, says its policy will be 'as in the past fearless and independent criticism and a desire to help in the prosperity and good government of their town.'³

Walton has described Blackpool in the inter-war period as being seen by its inhabitants as a 'limited company or even a family business where all pulled together to advance its interests in competition with rivals.'⁴ The speeches at the ceremony at the *Gazette and Herald* are an illustration of the idea of the town as a family business. A family has disagreements, sometimes there is an independent-minded family member with differing views from the majority, but

this family member is still on affectionate terms with the others, still considered part of the family and the whole family will close ranks against outsiders. This could describe the relationship between the Corporation and the *Gazette and Herald*, the owner-directors of which were members of the Grime family, who had been associated with Blackpool since the arrival of John Grime, the founder of the newspaper dynasty, from Preston in 1866. The *Gazette* newspaper group was a family business within the Blackpool family business, one of several prominent family businesses in the town, for example, the Bickerstaffes, running the Tower Company and the Beans (later, by marriage, Thompsons) owners of the Pleasure Beach, families which not only ran their own businesses but also involved themselves in the wider business of running Blackpool, often through serving on the local council.

John Grime was a printer by trade when he moved to Blackpool for health reasons at the age of 26 and set up the first printing business in the town. In May 1868 he launched the *Blackpool and Lytham Visitor*, mainly to carry the names of visitors to Blackpool. However, politics and religious issues were also included and as John Grime describes it in his unpublished memoirs printed in the *Gazette News* as part of his obituary, 'some people thought because I was attached to a certain church that I should be on the side of the Conservatives and Protestants'. He goes on to describe a meeting he had shortly before the launch of the *Blackpool and Lytham Visitor*.

No sooner had I announced my decision to start a paper than the Rev. C.H. Wainwright, then Vicar of Christ Church, came to the office and almost insisted that he should supply the leading articles. I denied his right to interfere in any respect with the conduct of the paper, and rather strong language was indulged in on both sides, ending in my showing his reverence the open door, and telling him to get out.⁵

However, John Grime became 'firm friends' with a newcomer to Blackpool, the Rev James Wayman, who was leader of the Victoria Street Congregational Church. Political allegiances were also difficult as the Liberal candidate in the election of 1868, Lord Hartington, published his address in the newspaper while the Conservative candidate, Captain Stanley, did not.

The *Blackpool and Lytham Visitor* lasted only until October 1868, when the end of the summer season meant the end of demand for a newspaper listing visitors to Blackpool. The newspaper had not been profitable and John Grime concentrated his efforts on building up his printing business until launching the *Blackpool Gazette* in April 1873. Having experienced the pressure to demonstrate allegiance to a political party when publishing the earlier newspaper, this time John Grime set out his politics for the *Blackpool Gazette* in its first edition:

I was still independent in my politics, which were described in the opening article as Liberal-Conservative, and I defined them as being Liberal in advocating everything that would be of advantage to the town, and Conservative in conserving those things which were sound and honest. I resolutely set out to act with complete freedom on local as well as Imperial politics.....Refusing to bow to either party, I established a reputation for straightforward support of any and every measure which made for the improvement of the town. The *Gazette* became the medium for letters and articles from all sorts and conditions of men who were not strangled by the red-tape of party.⁶

Chalaby sounds a note of caution about any apparent political independence declared by newspapers. Firstly, he makes the point that 'neutrality' does not mean that a newspaper ceases to support one party over another, but that the editor or owner makes the decision to take a particular political view, independently of any political party itself.⁷ Unlike in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, when, as described in the introduction to this study, political parties used newspapers as a mouthpiece to promote their views, by the end of the nineteenth-century political support from a newspaper was not based on party affiliation or ownership, or financial dependence. Secondly, Chalaby describes the 'depoliticization' of the press, in other words, the de-selection of politics as news. By the 1920s, as has been described in the Introduction, provincial newspapers, as well as the popular dailies such as the *Daily Mail*, included sport, fashion, gossip and features as well as political news. Chalaby shows that by the 1920s, advertisements took up almost half the space of national newspapers with the remaining space being taken up equally by features and news.⁸ However, Chalaby cautions against assuming that depoliticization means 'de-ideologization', saying that a newspaper that claims to be 'independent and impartial', as John Grime claimed for the *Gazette News*,

continues to support an ideology and cannot be considered to be politically neutral. It seems, initially, surprising that John Grime claimed independence for his newspaper, when we remember his personal political career as a Conservative councillor, but Lee tells us that Lancashire had a flourishing Liberal press in the nineteenth-century, including the *Preston Guardian*, owned from 1860 by a prominent Liberal, George Toulmin.⁹ John Grime worked as a printer on the *Preston Guardian* at about this time, and it may be that it was this professional experience coupled with adherence to a Conservative ideology in his personal life that led to his determination to run a Conservative-Liberal newspaper. If Chalaby's view that newspapers cannot be de-ideologized is correct, then the *Gazette* newspapers must be considered Conservative, despite John Grime's declaration, because of his personal membership of the Conservative Party. If this is the case, then it is all the more surprising that, on the issue of Stanley Park Aerodrome, affiliation to a Conservative ideology was stretched to breaking point in the late 1920s and early 1930s. If, as John Grime attests in his memoirs, his main aim was to use the newspaper to support any measures that were for the good of the town, it is no surprise that the *Gazette* newspapers supported municipal capitalism, as practised by the predominantly Conservative council in the 1920s and beyond. When it became commonly agreed that the aerodrome scheme was likely to be a business, and therefore financial, failure, the 'good of the town' over-rode the political ideology of the newspaper. The editor and owners not only reported critical views of the aerodrome scheme but directly criticised it in editorials, diary items and reports, much to the annoyance of some local councillors, as will be seen.

John Grime's personal political affiliation was public knowledge. After his death in 1917 his sons continued to run the *Gazette* newspapers and also continued the family affiliation with the Conservative Party, Arthur Grime perhaps being the most overtly party-political, becoming the editor of the conservative *Yorkshire Evening Post* and later General Manager of the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company (of which the *Yorkshire Evening Post* was one title) before returning to Blackpool and the *Gazette* in 1928, later becoming honorary treasurer of the Blackpool Conservative Society. Although there were these obvious personal political affiliations, the family also developed a tradition

of public service in the town, as Justices of the Peace and supporters of local charities. The brothers were also what would today be described as 'hands-on' in that they were knowledgeable about the whole process of newspaper production and, at least in the case of Arthur Grime, had served apprenticeships as printers, as had John Grime in Preston before his move to Blackpool. Their long-standing commitment to Blackpool was still apparent in the third generation: Harold Grime, John Grime's grandson and Editor in Chief of the *Gazette* newspapers in the 1950s and 1960s, was made a Freeman of the Borough in 1950, was involved in the local hospital charity and was a director of the Tower Company. The Grime family's long-established local presence and affiliation to Blackpool's institutions means that that its readers saw the newspaper as a trustworthy source of local information and their mouthpiece to voice concerns about the aerodrome development scheme.

Following the Corporation's decision, in December 1927, to develop the municipal aerodrome at Hardhorn, 1928 saw the passing of the Blackpool Improvement Bill through parliament and, in July, a two-day Air Pageant at Squires Gate on the site of the 1909 and 1910 air meetings. The *Gazette and Herald's* subsequent criticism of the Corporation's running of the Air Pageant included critical comments about the aerodrome plans, the first criticisms by the newspaper in its role of guardian of the interests of the general public.

In January 1928 the Corporation were approached by representatives of A.V. Roe and Company and the Lancashire Aero Club and asked to facilitate an air meeting in July of that year, to be held at Squires Gate. A.V. Roe and Company was formed in 1913 and based in Manchester and manufactured light aircraft under the trademark 'Avro' for flying club and private ownership. The original Lancashire Aero Club had organised the 1909 and 1910 air meetings at Blackpool, re-formed in 1923 and was based at Woodford Aerodrome. The club owned several aircraft (including Avros) for the use of members, offered flying lessons to new members and had a social programme which was described in the 1928 Air Pageant Programme as a 'country club'. This would seem to be the type of flying club that Blackpool Corporation envisaged for Stanley Park

aerodrome. The Air Pageant would be an ideal promotional event both for A.V. Roe and Company and the Lancashire Aero Club, as well as raising awareness to residents and visitors to Blackpool of the Corporation's air-mindedness and the plans for a municipal aerodrome.

The Special Aerodrome Sub-committee originally turned down the request for an Air Pageant, but by the end of January, after further negotiations, the Corporation agreed to hold the event on 6th and 7th July.¹⁰ The Special Aerodrome Sub-committee also had the title of 'Early Season Sub-committee,' so it seems evident that the development of the aerodrome at Stanley Park was linked to the need to attract more visitors in the early part of the season. It is therefore difficult to understand why it should agree to hold the Air Pageant in the height of the season when there were plenty of visitors, particularly as a two-day event was likely to attract people who would use hotels and other facilities in the town. As the Air Pageant would depend on demonstrations from the Royal Air Force, it is possible that their commitments dictated the timing of the event.

The Air Pageant was well-supported by local businesses, both through advertising in the programme and the sponsorship of competitors. The *Gazette and Herald* also sponsored competitors, but its main support for the pageant was through its promotional reporting of the preparations and of the pageant itself. At the beginning of the week in which the pageant was to be held the *Gazette and Herald* described the event as 'the greatest programmes (sic) ever attempted in the history of aviation'. A quarter of a million visitors were expected with 10,000 cars using the car parks. There were numerous photographs of aircraft arriving and a report headlined "'Awe-inspiring" says Mayor'. In fact, in the report that followed, it is clear that the Mayor was describing the flying he had seen on a visit to Hendon as awe-inspiring, when, along with Aldermen Bickerstaffe and Potter who were also members of the special sub-committee planning the pageant, he had also visited Croydon Aerodrome which left him 'full of admiration'.¹¹

Croydon Aerodrome had been mentioned earlier in the year when an anonymous 'local resident' talked to a *Gazette and Herald* reporter about Croydon Airport and Brooklands. His view was that the aerodrome site at Blackpool was not as good as that at Croydon because of 'problems with the land'. Also mentioned was the fact that Croydon, unlike Blackpool, was subsidised by the government. The cost of developing a northern Brooklands would be very expensive.¹² The question arises: was there actually a 'local resident' with the knowledge and credibility to be reported in the newspaper, or was this a subtle attempt to plant a seed of doubt about the viability of the aerodrome and motor-racing circuit plan in the minds of the newspaper's readers without it seeming to be undermining this latest example of municipal capitalism?

At about the same time as this short report, there was an 'opinion' piece in the *Gazette and Herald* written by 'Zephyrus' (Ernest Lawson) in which he complains about the treatment of the press by the local council, citing secret meetings and a lack of facilities for the press. Journalists are 'professional men' who deserve consideration, particularly as they support the council with publicity for the town.¹³ This highlights another aspect of the relationship between the council and the newspaper. The social status of journalists had always been somewhat ambiguous. Lee describes journalists at the end of the nineteenth century as being poorly paid, but having 'middle-class' status:

In late nineteenth-century Lancashire "young men sometimes of good education though generally self-taught, who had dreaded the atmosphere of mill or factory...had sought to become what came to be called black-coated workers, mostly respectable but inevitably poor". As F.H. Rose, one of the prime movers of union organisation amongst journalists, remarked in 1906, they had the status of receiving a salary instead of wages, and of accepting an engagement rather than a job.¹⁵

Historians of journalism and journalists themselves have debated whether journalism is a craft, a trade or a profession. Lord Riddell, who came in to newspaper management after working as a solicitor, writing in 1929, suggests that journalism is a trade, because the journalist's product must be saleable if the newspaper is to succeed. However, he goes on to say

Journalists are not to be bribed or "got at". Nor are they prepared to be treated as inferiors. There was a time when journalists, called upon to report

a public dinner, were fed in an ante-room. Now they feed on terms of equality.....Indeed, the attitude of the public, and, in particular, the attitude of public men, to the press have entirely changed.....Servility is a thing of the past. On the other hand, pressmen have learned that, when in pursuit of business, like lawyers, doctors and accountants, they must show a certain measure of respect and consideration to their "victims"¹⁵

So journalists can be viewed as tradesmen, craftsmen, and professionals. It would appear that journalists working for the *Gazette* newspapers considered themselves as professionals while being treated as tradesmen by the Council. Bearing in mind that the majority of local councillors were representatives of holiday interests and businesses, in pointing out the professional status of journalists, *Zephyrus* may be making a subtle point about the relative status of journalists and councillors. As we shall see, the Council were reminded of the power of the press shortly after the Air Pageant, when the professionalism and competence of councillors and public officers were called into question.

The 'greatest programmes ever attempted in the history of aviation' was not as successful as had been hoped. This was partly due to the weather. High winds and rain caused several events to be cancelled or curtailed. Entry costs were relatively high: tickets for the various enclosures and grandstands cost from twenty-one shillings to one shilling, joy-riding was available at a cost of ten shillings and six pence or five shillings per person. These costs can be compared with the cost of the most expensive seats at a show on the pier which was one shilling, or the cost to enter an air show in Germany at around the same time: fifty pfennigs to two or three marks when a daily newspaper cost 10 or fifteen pfennigs.¹⁶

The cost of entry, the large car parks (for which an extra charge was made), the concert of light classical music provided by the band of the Royal Marines, the provision of table d'hote lunch and afternoon tea, are all evidence of an attempt to raise the social tone, attract the middle-classes to Blackpool and to raise these visitors' awareness that Blackpool would, within two years, have a new municipal aerodrome and flying club.

On 26th July 1928, the *Gazette and Herald* reported that the Air Pageant had left a £6,000 deficit. Only 75,000 people had paid for admission, although many more had watched from outside the site. Only 200 cars had used the car parks against an estimate of 2,000 (as mentioned above, the *Gazette and Herald* had earlier reported that 10,000 cars were expected). There were criticisms of poor estimating, including the cost of improving the ground to a standard necessary for the aeroplanes, which was estimated at £1,000 but which actually cost £4,000. Hoardings were blown down and destroyed in the strong winds.¹⁷

The Corporation tried to put a positive gloss on the deficit, Sir John Bickerstaffe saying that the Air Pageant was worth £100,000 as an advertisement for the town, but Zephyrus in the *Gazette and Herald* called the deficit 'rank bad management', pointing out that if the £6,000 deficit was to be considered advertising, then this was on top of the £8,000 already spent by the Advertising Committee (the Advertising Committee had earlier granted £250 out of its £8,000 budget for promoting the Air Pageant). Zephyrus goes on to say 'In fact, I was asked by a prominent member of the Council not to refer to the loss on the Air Pageant, because "the Council had been led astray with the estimates"'. (The Air Pageant was not the first event to have its costs under-estimated: Walton says that the 1923 Blackpool Carnival cost more than twice as much as the original estimate¹⁸). So not only is money lost on the Air Pageant, but councillors want to keep the facts secret from Blackpool rate-payers. Zephyrus's criticism of the corporation is clearly made: the middle-class residents of Blackpool were paying for an event from which they would not benefit and the newspaper has to defy councillors' attempts to cover up the story. He also criticised plans for the municipal aerodrome itself on the grounds of cost and the unsuitability of the site. At the end of this article there is a paragraph inserted by the editor:

It is the policy of the *Gazette and Herald* to afford its contributors and correspondents complete freedom of expression on matters of public interest, even if – as is the case regarding the Air Pageant – the views expressed do not necessarily coincide with our own. Editor.¹⁹

Here we can see John Grime's original concept of a newspaper providing a mouth-piece for 'letters and articles from all sorts and conditions of men who

were not strangled by the red-tape of party' still in evidence fifty-five years after the launch of the *Gazette News*. The Editor's comment shows, however, that, firstly, the proprietors are, as Conservatives, supportive of the Conservative-dominated corporation; and, secondly, it lays claim to the broad-mindedness and moral superiority of an owner who is prepared to support the democratic principle of freedom of speech.

Ernest Lawson, who used the pen-name 'Zephyrus' (the West Wind), had written a weekly column in the *Gazette and Herald* since 1921 in which he was given a free hand to express his 'ardent radical' opinions. This was his only journalistic assignment, although he had started his working life as a journalist on the *Blackpool Times*. Between 1904 and 1914 he was a Liberal councillor and continued his commitment to the Liberal Party by serving as Honorary Secretary for Blackpool Liberal Association. During his time as a councillor the *Gazette and Herald* referred to the 'guttersnipe tactics of Councillor Lawson, whose Council attitude is so often that of an urchin with his fingers to his nose.'²⁰ Ernest Lawson was a Blackpool hotelier and well-known in the town. His weekly column expressed the frustrations of many small-business people and residents, frequently complaining of the council's wastefulness with public money. The publication of this column allowed the *Gazette and Herald* to reinforce its political independence from local party-politics, without seriously undermining the political status quo. Once the *Evening Gazette* began publication in May 1929 the *Gazette and Herald* became a weekly newspaper, published every Saturday evening with an emphasis on 'soft' news such as home-making, fashion and hobbies, as well as photographs of local events and, particularly, local people. There must have been almost a sense of reassurance and stability for its readers to know that Zephyrus would, every Saturday, be complaining about some aspect of the Corporation's running of the town.

Zephyrus's comments on 26 July 1928 were not the first occasion on which the *Gazette and Herald* had criticised the municipal aerodrome plan. On the 21st July 1928 the newspaper reported the passing for a third reading in the House

of Commons of the Blackpool Improvement Bill. The Parliamentary Committee approving the Bill was reported to have been told that the new aerodrome would be on the old Blackpool race-course. The report went on to say:

There are a good many people who would like to see it at Squires Gate, that being the most accessible and suitable spot, although this view is possibly not shared by the property-owners and occupiers in the vicinity.....

The fact is that the proposed aerodrome is miles away at Hardhorn, and nowhere near the racecourse. We think it is singular that there should be any doubt as to the locality of an aerodrome estimated to cost £100,000.

.....one cannot altogether subscribe to the optimistic prophecy uttered before the committee that in 10 years time, it would be a commonplace for people to go from place to place by air and if all the world and his wife went to Blackpool for weekends it was desired that they should be able to do so in comfort and with every convenience provided.....The present indication is that the world and his wife – and family – will continue to arrive for many years by train, road, Pullman car and ‘baby 7 h.p.’ vehicle of one sort or another. So that, while an aerodrome is a good proposition for the future, we would prefer to see £100,000 spent at the moment on new roads, if so vast a sum must be spent at all.²¹

This report is interesting on several counts: firstly, there is no by-line, as there was for reports by Zephyrus, for example. Articles given a by-line, and particularly in this period, a pseudonym, meant that readers would have some idea of the style and view-point of the writer who would often hold strong opinions which could be expressed in the intimacy of a regular column, almost as if the writer and reader were discussing an issue as friends might. In this case the article is a generic report which would not usually include the opinion of the writer, who in this case is a ‘reporter’ of events. Yet there is an opinion expressed by the writer who, by using the preposition ‘we’ implies that this is the collective view of the newspaper, including editor and management. Secondly, although the report is highly critical of the aerodrome plan on the grounds of suitability of site and cost, the criticism is not aimed at local politicians but at Parliament itself. Here we see the newspaper’s dilemma: to report on a local development and express the opinion that it may be a failure goes against the usual instinctive and deliberate promotion of the ‘family business’ of Blackpool, yet it seems obvious that there are some concerns in the town about the aerodrome plan. Jackson quotes Express and Independent Newspapers Ltd’s evidence to the 1947 Royal Commission on the Press

So far as local newspapers are concerned, local knowledge and experience and a sense of responsibility to local institutions and local 'feeling' are essential to successful management, editorial or otherwise.²²

The difficulty for the *Gazette and Herald* was to show a 'sense of responsibility' to the Corporation while reflecting public opinion which had begun to be critical of the aerodrome plan. Rather than criticize the Corporation, the newspaper chose to criticize national politicians and civil servants who have so little knowledge of Blackpool that they place the aerodrome at Squires Gate when in fact it is several miles away at Stanley Park. The *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* continue to show some ambivalence towards the Council, particularly in editorials, as though unsure how far criticism can go before it begins to demonstrate disloyalty to Blackpool itself, at which point it might alienate its readership. For example, in February 1929 a *Gazette and Herald* editorial calls the Aerodrome Committee 'cocksure' in spending £100,000 on the aerodrome when questions had been raised about the drainage of the site; but in October of the same year an editorial attaches no blame to the Aerodrome Committee, saying that the Council was 'rushed into' the aerodrome scheme, although it does not specify how pressure was put on the Council to make a quick decision.²³

Construction and preparation of the land continued at Stanley Park throughout 1929 but by July of that year concerns about the development were being expressed in Council meetings. Most vociferous was Councillor Evans, a Liberal councillor. He and other Liberal councillors expressed their concern at the cost of the aerodrome and, further, questioned the competence of the Aerodrome Committee overseeing the development. Although the aerodrome was still not finished or officially opened, in August 1929 the Aerodrome Committee received and approved a tender from the Lancashire School of Aviation to provide pleasure flights from the aerodrome. This implies that the Corporation had invited tenders for this service, perhaps to recoup some of the costs of development and to provide a new, modern attraction for visitors. At a full Council meeting on 4 September 1929, an alliance of Liberal Councillors and one Conservative raised several amendments aimed at suspending pleasure

flights and to reduce the power of the Aerodrome Committee by making it answerable to the General Purposes Committee. All councillors served on the General Purposes Committee, so this seems a way of ensuring that the aerodrome development was not only controlled by the Conservative councillors who served on the Aerodrome Committee, but also by councillors from other political parties. A later decision by the Aerodrome Committee to employ a grounds manager at a salary of £4 per week was vetoed by the full Council Committee on 2nd October, and eventually it was agreed that 'a man' be put in charge of the aerodrome at a salary of £3 per week.²⁴

At the same time as these disagreements were being aired in council meetings, a petition was received by the Corporation from residents of North Park Drive, Newton Drive and the surrounding area close to Stanley Park protesting against pleasure flights on the grounds of noise. This was the first of a number of complaints about the noise of aeroplanes which continued over the years, complaints that were often aired in the letters column of the *Gazette and Herald* and, later, the *Evening Gazette*. On the back of a photograph in the *Evening Gazette* archives taken at the aerodrome in the early 1930s, the photographer has made a note of a notice on the hangar wall: 'When flying over Stanley Park do not fly below 500 feet.' It was not only local residents who disliked the noise: there were complaints that the tranquillity of the park itself was disturbed by aircraft. Blackpool was not the only aerodrome to receive complaints about noise: there were recurring complaints at Hanworth and Heston amongst others.²⁵

The General Purposes Committee considered the petition from residents at a meeting on 9th October 1929. At that same meeting a motion was moved to stop the development of the aerodrome altogether and consider other uses for the land. This motion was not passed but it demonstrates the change in attitude by some councillors, less than two years after they had unanimously agreed to build a municipal aerodrome at Stanley Park.²⁶

Councillor Evans was a leading campaigner against the aerodrome both before and after its official opening. He and Councillor Ashton were the most vociferous critics of the plan. Although their criticisms were wide-ranging, the underlying opposition was about the cost and value for money of the aerodrome. The success of Blackpool's policy of municipal capitalism relied on the unspoken agreement of the residents of the town, and particularly those businesses which catered for visitors, that local rates should be used to pay for the development of large-scale amenities, the main purpose of which was to attract more visitors. It is significant that Councillor Evans was president of the Blackpool Hotels and Apartment Keepers' Association²⁷ and Councillor Ashton a Confectioners' Merchant²⁸ as it shows that both councillors had strong links with the holiday industry, which benefited most from previous municipal investments. That the aerodrome scheme did not have the support of businesses of this sort, particularly the support of the Hotel and Apartment Keepers' Association, which, Walton says, had some, limited political influence at this period,²⁹ demonstrates the beginning of a breakdown of the consensus that enabled the Corporation to practise municipal capitalism.

In May, 1930, the Corporation entered into an agreement with National Flying Services which took on a seven year lease, paying rent to the Corporation of £200 per year, plus capital costs and ten per cent of receipts from joy flights.³⁰ National Flying Services was set up in 1929, as has been described in Chapter 1. Its headquarters, London Air Park at Hanworth, was officially opened on 31st August 1929 and described in its advertising literature as 'A Country Club for everyone interested in flying'. The club offered tennis and squash courts, catering, accommodation as well as flying tuition and maintenance and housing of private aircraft. The 'country club' concept implies exclusivity and, indeed, the advertisement quoted above says that a 'limited number of members are being enrolled', yet this club is for 'everyone', an attempt to appeal to the middle-classes who might aspire to membership of a country club which would give them the opportunity to take part in flying, a sporting, daring and modern hobby; or simply to watch the aircraft while taking tea on the terrace of the clubhouse, playing tennis or enjoying the 230 acres of ground.³¹

Blackpool's councillors are likely to have been easily persuaded that a similar club would attract middle-class residents and visitors, particularly for joy-flying, and as Hanworth's members could use any of National Flying Services's clubs, there was the likelihood that they would visit the Blackpool club and find the town a more attractive resort than the working-class stereotype had ever suggested.

Flying at Stanley Park must have begun by June 1930 as complaints of low-flying were considered at a meeting of the Aerodrome Committee on 21 June of that year. On 22 July there was an advertisement for an air-taxi service from Stanley Park in the *Evening Gazette*. An air-taxi service had started at Hanworth on 14 June of that year. Costs at Hanworth were two shillings per mile for a single passenger and three shillings for two passengers. In theory, providing an air-taxi service should have been profitable for National Flying Services. Grahame-White estimated that the operating cost per mile of a light aeroplane would be no more than three-and-a-half pence,³² and, allowing for the capital cost of buying an aeroplane and any equipment required, this should have left National Flying Services with profits to support the development of services at the aerodromes it had leased. However, Sherwood points out that the cost of an air-taxi was substantially higher than that of an equivalent train journey, which also had the advantage of being city-centre to city-centre, rather than to an aerodrome which was usually on the outskirts of a city, if it existed at all.³³ The train was also likely to be considered safer by most members of the public and, at this point in the development of aircraft, faster. Commercial aircraft flew at around 100 miles per hour, but with a headwind their speed could be much reduced. Also, aircraft had to refuel frequently, and therefore over longer distances they would be landing and taking-off at aerodromes en route, adding to the journey time. There was the added disadvantage that aircraft were seldom able to fly after dark, as most aerodromes did not possess lighting equipment, and navigation was by the identification of features on the ground. It is not surprising that National Flying Services began services from Stanley Park well before the official opening of the aerodrome. In the first year

of its existence the company made a loss of £40,000 and must have been anxious to establish more services as quickly as possible.

The aerodrome was officially opened by the Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, on 2 June 1931, three years after the announcement of the start of the development work. At the beginning of 1931 the *Evening Gazette* reported that an 'International Air Pageant' would be held at Stanley Park Aerodrome from 8 – 11 July of that year. The total cost would be £11,500, £5,000 of which would be guaranteed by the Corporation to the Royal Aero Club for the costs of organising the pageant. It had originally been hoped that the pageant could be held in June, when, as has been mentioned above, the Corporation were anxious to attract more visitors to the town, but the RAF were unable to attend until July. It is possible that the RAF were less interested in performing at Blackpool in 1931 than in 1928, when their set-piece bombing attack on desert natives was the highlight of the air pageant. Omissi tells us that the set-piece at Hendon Air Pageant changed between 1927, when it demonstrated the rescue of a party of European women and children from 'Hunyadi Janas in Irquestine' and included the bombing of a village and natives, and 1930, when it was pirates who were bombed after seizing a ship and murdering a planter and his wife. The latter was a more fanciful show, less associated with the RAF's actual role of imperial policing. This was the last time Hendon included a set-piece of this type and, in 1932, a small peace demonstration was held at Hendon, coinciding with the Geneva Disarmament Conference which included discussions on the legitimacy of all aerial bombing.³⁴ By 1931 the importance of the RAF as a defender of Britain against aggressors, as well as its propaganda role across the world, and particularly in the countries of the Empire, was recognised and understood by politicians and, in general, by the public. There was less need to show its worth by taking part in displays, particularly as the RAF was taking part in real-life operations due to increasing hostile activity in Mesopotamia, Palestine and India.³⁵

The *Evening Gazette* quoted extensively from the council meeting at which the plans for the 1931 air pageant were discussed. An amendment was proposed

that the air pageant should be cancelled on the grounds of cost and the fact that Hendon air pageant was to be held two weeks before Blackpool. The amendment was lost, those voting in favour of the amendment including the regular critics of the aerodrome, Liberal Councillors Evans and Ashton. The debate widened to include discussion of the viability of the aerodrome itself.

There were complaints about the attitude of the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* to the aerodrome, in particular complaints that opposition to the aerodrome was actually opposition to 'progress', and there were particular complaints about comments from 'Zephyrus'. The simmering anger at the *Evening Gazette's* role erupted at a later council meeting in July when there was what the *Evening Gazette* described as 'a bit of a hullaballo'.³⁶

The circumstances that led up to the comments at the July meeting began with a series of revelations about the aerodrome in the *Evening Gazette* from January onwards, together with allegations that councillors were not willing to publicly discuss difficulties over the proposed air pageant and the aerodrome itself. By early February the *Evening Gazette* was reporting that the Air Ministry were intending to inspect the aerodrome to assess the suitability of the ground for RAF aircraft. There seems to have been recognition at an early stage that the ground at the aerodrome site was not ideal. In February 1929 a representative of the Air Ministry had attended an Aerodrome Committee meeting. The minutes report his comments that the site was 'admirable' and the 'best to be obtained in the district' – but drainage was a matter for the corporation. There is an implication that the ground would need to be drained and, further, that the cost of any such work would be borne by the corporation.³⁷ Following the 1931 report that the aerodrome site was to be inspected, the *Evening Gazette* commented 'But it will come as an unpleasant shock to Blackpool ratepayers to know that their expensive aerodrome might be deemed unsuitable for an Air Pageant'.³⁸

By March the *Evening Gazette* was reporting that, following the inspection by an RAF official, the corporation had received a letter from the RAF which said that

the aerodrome was not suitable for formation flights or for the largest aircraft. Councillor Potter, Chair of the Finance Committee, who had voted against the air pageant at the January Council meeting, was reported as saying that any alterations to meet the requirements of the RAF could be made without any cost.³⁹ The response from the *Evening Gazette* was a suggestion to hold a carnival instead of an air pageant.

A deputation from the council went to London to discuss the planned air pageant with the Royal Aero Club and the Air Ministry. Following this, at a full council meeting on the 31 March there was a unanimous decision to abandon the air pageant. This was apparently because the Royal Air Force could not attend as it would interfere with training, which may have been true, bearing in mind the rapid developments in aircraft technology that were taking place, but the *Evening Gazette* had already hinted that the Corporation was losing interest in an event that might prove a costly failure.⁴⁰

The cancellation of the air pageant did not silence criticism from the *Evening Gazette* which continued to investigate questions raised about the suitability of the aerodrome for large aircraft. A headline on 8 April read 'Away With This Secrecy'. The article that followed quoted a 'prominent' but un-named councillor as telling the newspaper that, in his opinion, the report by the deputation from the Aerodrome Committee which had visited the Air Ministry to discuss the air pageant, and which had been submitted to the council, should be published. Since there were rumours circulating about the condition of the aerodrome - rumours reported by the *Evening Gazette* - it does seem surprising that the report was not published, but since it was submitted to the council at the meeting held on 31 March, at which the air pageant was called off, it is likely that the report did contain information about the state of the aerodrome which could have proved damaging to those councillors who served on the Aerodrome Committee. The minutes of the Aerodrome Committee show that at a meeting on 26 March it agreed not to carry out 'further alterations' as requested by National Flying Services. It seems likely that these alterations may have been related to improvements to the ground and would have cost money which the corporation was not prepared to spend at that time, and which may be related to

the decision by the RAF not to attend the air pageant. There is no evidence of this report in the minutes of meetings of the corporation held at the Lancashire Record Office.

The *Evening Gazette* continued to remind its readers of the 'mystery' of the aerodrome and its condition and to demand that the report should be published in the interests of ratepayers who had paid, and were continuing to pay, some of the costs of the aerodrome.⁴¹ The newspaper did not directly criticise individual councillors, perhaps because of its dependence on advertising revenue which might be affected if it offended the local businessmen who served on the council. As mentioned above, Jackson's view is that 'disorder' news, in other words negative news, still showed institutional leaders in a positive light, and while the *Evening Gazette* was not 'positive' about local politicians, it refrained from personal attacks. This may also have been to preserve the newspaper's political neutrality, as negative comments about politicians of one party could have implied support for other parties. Chalaby says that once newspapers became autonomous, and not tied to a political party,

they had to find a new basis of legitimacy in order to comment on politics from a position external to the political field, from a viewpoint which claimed not to be directly involved in the political struggle. One of the new sources of legitimacy became morality.⁴²

Chalaby is referring to newspapers which revealed the immorality of certain politicians' private lives, but his point can be used to illustrate the position of the *Evening Gazette*. The newspaper was questioning the morality of using ratepayers' money to fund a project which might benefit only a minority of residents of the town and which might be a financial burden for other residents, including some businesses. Furthermore, the council was refusing to make documents available which would perhaps have shed light on the reasons for certain decisions having been made.

Despite concerns about the costs and condition of Stanley Park Aerodrome, flying was proving to be popular with Blackpool holidaymakers. The Whitsuntide Bank Holiday saw 2,750 passengers taking pleasure flights from

Stanley Park and Squires Gate aerodromes. In the same week Captain C D Barnard's Flying Circus held a display at Squires Gate. It is interesting to speculate on the reaction of Blackpool Councillors at receiving a letter from Captain Barnard inviting them to the air display for a flight in 'The Spider', an aeroplane well-known for flying to India and South Africa carrying the Duchess of Bedford.⁴³ Possibly councillors felt that the municipal aerodrome should organise a similar event, but one that would involve them in little expense and, since National Flying Services were now tenants at Stanley Park, they should organise it. A representative of National Flying Services was asked to attend a meeting of the Aerodrome Committee to discuss such an event.⁴⁴

The Corporation hoped that Stanley Park aerodrome would be the focus for flying in Blackpool; attracting private fliers, country-club members, air-taxi services and scheduled flights at a site removed from the sea-front and its holiday crowds, alongside the park and its adjacent houses. Yet the people living around Stanley Park and those who visited the park itself did not appreciate the aircraft and continued to complain about noise nuisance. It is not surprising that in April 1931 councillors rejected a request from a Mr Hilton who wanted to sell ice-cream at the aerodrome entrance.⁴⁵ An ice-cream kiosk would do nothing to maintain the social tone of the Stanley Park area. Squires Gate's use as an aerodrome was on a small scale, as the headquarters of Lancashire School of Aviation and providing joy-flights, but it was conveniently situated close to the sea-front, on tram and bus routes and therefore well-placed to attract holiday-makers. Much of the land to the east, north and south of the aerodrome at Squires Gate was not built on, so the chances of disturbance to nearby residents was minimal. Councillors were beginning to say openly that the municipal aerodrome should have been sited at Squires Gate.⁴⁶

There was national endorsement of Stanley Park aerodrome at the highest level when it was officially opened on 1st June 1931 by the Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald. Zephyrus, in his *Gazette and Herald* column, described the circumstances that led to the Prime Minister being invited to open the aerodrome: National Flying Services, not the Corporation, had invited him to

open the aerodrome as he was to be in Blackpool at that time to attend the Labour Women's Conference. Zephyrus was critical of the Corporation for not being 'go ahead' enough to invite the Prime Minister, and for a belated decision to hold a civic reception. In Zephyrus's opinion the Corporation's inaction was because Ramsey MacDonald was a Socialist, not a popular political creature in Blackpool, or, in fact, with Zephyrus, as his columns regularly make clear.⁴⁷ The Prime Minister was quoted in the *Evening Gazette* as saying 'The Corporation of Blackpool has in days gone past done wonderful things in the name of the common people and this is one of the latest additions.'⁴⁸ The newspaper informed its readers that the 'luxury clubhouse' was for the use of the Blackpool Aero Club, which had a membership of thirty. It added that the cost of the aerodrome was £82,000 and left 'ratepayers' to decide for themselves whether this was value for money. The *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald's* criticism of the aerodrome has already been described in this chapter and is perhaps the reason why no representative of the *Gazette and Herald* was invited to the opening ceremony. An editorial in that newspaper commented that the Prime Minister had described critics of the aerodrome as a 'handful' of people, but, in fact, the aerodrome was 'criticised not by a "handful" but from end to end of Blackpool as the most riotously wasteful extravagance ever planned by a too ambitious "handful" of enthusiasts. The newspaper's headline reporting the opening was 'An Aerodrome Comedy'.⁴⁹

It was not until March 1932 that the facts about the cost of the aerodrome were made public, in Alderman Potter's budget speech. The aerodrome had cost £87,000, £38,000 of which was provided by central government with the Corporation spending £49,750. Labour on the aerodrome site had been provided by unemployed men as part of a 're-training' scheme and £78,000 of the total of £87,000 had been spent on this relief of unemployment.⁵⁰ These figures show that the cost of the aerodrome to ratepayers was less than the costs usually quoted in rumours reported by the newspaper. However, by the time the official figures were announced, the unpopularity of the aerodrome was such that the cost alone was only one of the issues for local residents.

Shortly after the official opening some councillors expressed their displeasure at the reports in the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* at a council meeting held on 30th June 1931. The Vice-chair of the Aerodrome Committee, Councillor Bagot (Conservative), introduced a resolution from the committee appreciating the Prime Minister's remarks praising the 'progressive spirit' of the council in developing a municipal aerodrome, 'a necessity in the national interest'. Other councillors, members of the aerodrome committee, strongly criticised the attitude of the *Gazette and Herald*, which they described as 'entirely reactionary'. The Chair of the committee, Councillor Parkinson, then went on to describe a correspondent to the letters column of the newspaper as 'a rather stupid young man...who happens to be a resident of the park' and who was encouraged to complain by the press. The correspondent is not named, and it is possible that Councillor Parkinson was generalising about the residents who complained about the noise of aircraft, but it is likely that this was Mr G Slade Lawrence. Slade Lawrence was an ophthalmic optician with practices in Blackpool and St Annes which were regularly advertised in the *Evening Gazette*. He was the leader of a group of Stanley Park residents who met members of the Aerodrome Committee to discuss the noise from joy-flying in June 1930.⁵¹ Mr Slade Lawrence continued to complain about the aerodrome, on the grounds of noise and cost, both to the aerodrome committee and through the letters column of the *Evening Gazette*.⁵² The group of residents protesting to the corporation about aircraft noise seem an unlikely alliance: they included a solicitor, book-maker, builder and Justice of the Peace,⁵³ but it is understandable that the owners of successful local family businesses felt that they had earned the right to join the professional men living in Blackpool's newest, most prestigious housing estate. They, above all perhaps, would appreciate a home in the peaceful, middle-class surroundings of Stanley Park and would be most annoyed by the disturbance caused by joy-flying working-class holiday makers.

As the council meeting of 30th June continued, Councillor Parkinson went on to make a personal attack on the editor of the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald*:

“During the last few days I have been in the company of two interesting gentlemen and I am not sure yet which one of them I consider to be the more conceited – Mr Hannan Swaffer or the Editor of the *Gazette and Herald*..... There is a big difference between Mr Hannan Swaffer and the Editor, because Mr Hannan Swaffer has a wonderful brain and he has vision”.

Councillor Parkinson had taken personally criticisms by the newspapers of decisions made by the Aerodrome Committee, although we have seen that up until March that year, when secrecy about the air pageant, and subsequently the aerodrome site itself, became an issue, the newspapers had tended to be supportive of local politicians, while criticising political decisions at a national level. One dilemma for councillors, and particularly for Councillor Parkinson, was that National Flying Services was about to hold an air pageant at Stanley Park. Following the criticism of the newspapers described above, he went on to ask the press for help in publicising the air pageant, since National Flying Services did not have the financial resources to promote it themselves. He went on to say ‘We members of the council give the press plenty of copy for which we make no charge and I ask them to reciprocate.’⁵⁴

An analysis of these comments should first consider whether the newspapers were justified in criticising the Aerodrome Committee for poor management of the aerodrome project. The Prime Minister, in his speech at the opening of the aerodrome, talked about municipal aerodromes being ‘in the national interest’.⁵⁵ As far as civilian flying was concerned, as we have already seen, Britain lagged behind other European countries, and in military aviation, also, Britain’s pre-occupation with policing the Empire led to a reliance on bombers at the expense of fighter aircraft. The view of successive governments in the 1920s that bombing recalcitrant natives undermined morale and provided an example to other potentially rebellious tribes, led to a belief that, in any future conflict within Europe, bombing cities and towns would have a similar effect, and, further, that the bombing of civilians would be inevitable. In November 1932 Stanley Baldwin told the House of Commons

I think it well also for the man in the street to realize that there is no power on earth which can protect him from bombing, whatever people tell him. The bomber will always get through.... The only defence is in offence, which

means you have got to kill more women and children quicker than the enemy if you want to save yourselves.⁵⁶

The major airports and aerodromes in England were around London, including RAF stations. Budiansky notes that by 1934

.... an incoming bomber flying at 150 miles per hour could be over the capital in twelve minutes from the time it was spotted crossing the coast. The Hawker Fury biplane, the RAF's fastest fighter in regular service in 1934, took seven and a half minutes to reach twenty thousand feet. That didn't leave much room for error.⁵⁷

It is not surprising, therefore, that the government welcomed the development of aerodromes further north, away from the vulnerable south coast and London areas. Municipal aerodromes were paid for by local authorities with no government subsidies, in many cases run by National Flying Services, whose government subsidy of £97,500 was intended to pay for the training of pilots but whose other roles (including running flying clubs and air-taxi services) were self-financing. Blackpool Corporation was only one of several local authorities developing municipal aerodromes: in 1931 there were municipal aerodromes at Leeds, Hull, Reading and Nottingham, all run by National Flying Services, as well as others, all strategically placed to take on the role of military aerodromes if necessary. Blackpool was not alone in believing in the importance for the future of having an aerodrome and in this view it was encouraged by the government.

National Flying Services' credentials must have made it the apparently ideal tenant for the aerodrome and it is unlikely that Blackpool councillors were aware of the precarious financial position of the company when they agreed the contract to run the aerodrome, although the corporation must have known about the financial situation as it related to Blackpool's aerodrome by the 30 June 1931, when Councillor Parkinson made his comments about the lack of funds to promote the air pageant. As will be shown, the Corporation had great difficulty in breaking the contract with National Flying Services. Had they been able to do this at an earlier stage, the aerodrome might have been a more successful venture.

It must have come as a shock to councillors, and in particular, Conservatives, that the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* were prepared to be strongly critical of their actions regarding the aerodrome. Municipal capitalism, led by the dominant Conservative group but supported by other parties, had been endorsed by the newspapers, and by the majority of the town's population, through the inter-war years. As Morgan and Pritchard point out

Blackpool's dominant municipal faction, the 'municipal capitalists', who presided over its overwhelmingly Tory council, were even more effective at marginalizing opposition and pressing on with their project to use municipal enterprise to attract visitors who would bring prosperity to local businesses. The value of an entrepreneurial approach to investment in amenities had been demonstrated by the success of the promenade-building project as early as 1879 (sic) and defied effective challenge thereafter.⁵⁸

The *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* gave a voice to those who did challenge the way in which municipal enterprise pushed forward the aerodrome project. The protesters, an alliance of holiday-interests and residents, both middle and working-class, whose letters were published, and the councillors and others whose views were quoted were unlikely allies, but the strength of feeling against the aerodrome enabled the newspapers' reporters and editors (and, in effect, the proprietors) to express similar opinions without the fear of alienating readers. If a local newspaper wanted to prove its legitimacy, then it must reflect local opinion and be willing to expose failings on the part of elected representatives. It was, perhaps unwise for Councillor Parkinson to attack the editor of the *Gazette and Herald*, and, even more so, to denigrate a local resident. It is ironic to find that the 'professional' men whom the corporation had wanted to attract as residents in order to raise the social tone of the town, were the very people who complained about an amenity which was, to a large extent, intended to encourage them to choose Blackpool as a home.

As to Councillor Parkinson's comment that the council gave 'free copy' to the newspapers, this must reflect the frustrations felt by local politicians that they were unable to control the press. The Introduction to this study outlines the decline in political control of the press in the early part of the twentieth-century, and the parallel decline in the amount of political reports published in newspapers. Chalaby says that these changes

....had one major impact on the process of political communication. The decline of the parliamentary column limited the amount of unmediated political discourse in newspapers. As long as politicians' speeches and interventions at the Parliament were recorded in the press, politicians enjoyed direct access to their constituents. Once editors began to omit or summarize these speeches and interventions, politicians became more dependent upon journalists to access the public. This dependence created a new role for journalists in the process of political communication, that of gatekeeper between politicians and the audience. This role gave them the power to regulate both the amount and the type of publicity politicians would get in the press.⁵⁹

Chalaby is referring to national government, but a similar change in the balance of power can be identified in local politics in Blackpool in that news, information and opinions about the aerodrome project printed in the newspaper were the choice of the editor and local politicians could do nothing to stop it. At the beginning of 1929 council meetings were being reported verbatim in the *Gazette and Herald*, but gradually over the next few years the reports, while including factual information about debates and decisions, selected information which was of interest to, or which might affect, its readers. It seems inevitable that this should be so, bearing in mind that in other parts of the newspaper the work of the council was being criticised in both opinion and editorial columns. The way in which some of this news was reported shows that the newspaper could, as Chalaby suggests, regulate the type of publicity it gave to political matters, for example, the recurrent descriptions of the 'mystery' and 'secrecy' of the 'problems' of the aerodrome which owe more to the newspaper's desire to provide its readers with a mildly sensational story, rather than an overtly political one. Councillor Parkinson is right in that newspapers need the copy that local politics provides as much as politicians need the press.

The final line of the *Evening Gazette's* report on 1 July of the Aerodrome Committee meeting is a note from the editor:

Ed. Note: The Editor of the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* has not been in Councillor Parkinson's company or spoken to him for at least a year.⁶⁰

The implication, of course, is that the councillor, an elected representative of the people of Blackpool and responsible for spending ratepayers' money, is a liar.

The result of Councillor Parkinson's request to the *Evening Gazette* to publicise the air pageant to be held the following week was a front page article which did promote the air pageant, while at the same time implying that the council, and National Flying Services, were reliant on the press for success.⁶¹ Following the relatively successful air pageant, attended by 11,000 paying spectators, *Seasider's Diary* commented

Members of the Council and Aerodrome Committee were pleased at the crowds at the Air Pageant. They walked about congratulating themselves and saying it was a triumphant vindication of their policy. What they meant was that it was a triumphant proof of the pulling power of the *Evening Gazette*..... Nothing was spent with local firms on advertising but the *Evening Gazette* was glad to be able to give all the publicity it did, for the good of the town, and the good of aviation.....If the Aerodrome Committee passes a vote of thanks to the *Evening Gazette* the editor will probably swoon but he will print it..... Pageants can never again be a great attraction.⁶²

We are reminded of the Mayor's comments at the celebration of the amalgamation of the *Gazette News* and the *Herald*: 'the ultimate welfare of the town has been the goal they have ever aimed at, even when that policy has not been the popular course.' The power of the press had its limits, and although there were further criticisms levelled at the council by the newspapers themselves and their correspondents, they became fewer as time went on. This was because the continual problems that arose with the aerodrome were beyond the control of the council and, after 1933, concerns about the political situation in Europe made the necessity for an aerodrome more apparent, even if Stanley Park was proved, ultimately, to be an unsuitable site.

Chapter 3 traces the history of Stanley Park aerodrome after its official opening and the circumstances that led up to the moving of the municipal aerodrome to Squires Gate, examining the level and style of comments in the local newspapers.

CHAPTER THREE

Three and a half years after the council unanimously agreed the plans, Blackpool's municipal aerodrome was officially open. The vision of members of the Aerodrome Committee, and the majority of councillors, was for Blackpool to become a centre for civil aviation, a stop on national and international air-routes and a show-ground for air pageants and other air-minded events. In practice, at the time of opening, the majority of flights were joy-flights, an attraction for holiday-makers, but unlikely to add to Blackpool's credibility as an aviation centre, or to raise the money needed to recoup the costs of development. In addition, joy-flights were the main cause of complaints from those who lived in the Stanley Park area and they were also available at Squires Gate, which continued to function as an aerodrome, including being the base for the Lancashire School of Aviation.

There were a number of special events held at Stanley Park Aerodrome, including, in 1932, Sir Alan Cobham's National Aviation Day display, the Blackpool – Isle of Man Air Race and Captain Stack's flight to India (carrying copies of the *Gazette and Herald*) to test a new type of mail-carrying aircraft and, incidentally, to promote Blackpool at stops along the way; and in 1933 a Liverpool – Blackpool Air Race to celebrate the opening of Liverpool's municipal aerodrome at Speke and, inevitably, Sir Alan Cobham's air display. It was recognised by the council that the days of air pageants in their traditional form were over. As Councillor Evans pointed out 'Air Pageants are attractions of the past and have little or no place today in a seaside's [sic] make up'¹

Sir Alan Cobham was able to attract the crowds with his air show because, as the *Evening Gazette* put it, everything was at a fast pace, with aircraft always in the air. Attendance at the two-day show was estimated to be 7,500 in the aerodrome with a further 20,000 people watching from Stanley Park itself. The cost to enter the aerodrome to see the show was 7d.² This type of show, often called an 'air-circus,' attracted the general public who were not necessarily air-minded but who wanted to be entertained and have fun cheaply – exactly what had always made for successful attractions in Blackpool. While councillors

may not have been experts in running an aerodrome, which is why National Flying Services was contracted to do it for them, they could be considered experienced in running a holiday resort, and it may therefore seem surprising that they turned down the opportunity for the Graf Zeppelin to visit Blackpool in July 1932. The Graf Zeppelin had been touring the world since 1929 and visited English aerodromes in 1931 and 1932. At Hanworth in 1932, 40,000 people were estimated to have seen it, those who entered the aerodrome site paying one shilling.³ The cost to the Corporation would have been £1,500 for a half-hour 'hover' and the *Gazette and Herald's* headline, for once endorsing a decision of the Aerodrome Committee, was 'Air-minded? Not at £50 a minute, thank you.'⁴

While concerns about costs and noise nuisance had caused most difficulties for the Corporation, the financial health of National Flying Services itself became a cause for concern during the later months of 1931. As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, the Aerodrome Committee had asked the *Evening Gazette* to publicise the July air-pageant in that year as National Flying Services could not afford to do so. Later that year the company asked the Corporation to write off debts for work associated with the air pageant.⁵ The financial situation for National Flying Services worsened in 1932 and by December the Aerodrome Committee was considering terminating the lease and taking possession of the aerodrome due to non-payment of rent.⁶ By that time the government had withdrawn from its agreement with National Flying Services on the grounds that guarantees had not been met. On 20 June 1933 a Receiver took over the running of the company until it was finally wound up in October 1934.⁷

National Flying Services' situation left Blackpool Corporation in a difficult position, both financially and as owners of the aerodrome. Although a receiver was running the company, no money was forthcoming, but the Corporation had no powers to take over the management of the aerodrome. While Aerodrome Committee meeting minutes show National Flying Services paid rent up to the end of 1932⁸ this did not address the wider problem of the management and development of the aerodrome and its services. After January 1933 there is no

evidence that National Flying Services paid any further rent and in October 1933 the Corporation issued a summons in the High Court against the company (now run by a receiver) for arrears. The case was lost and the Corporation were refused permission to 're-enter' the aerodrome.⁹ It was not until April 1934 that National Flying Services' lease was terminated.

There were further financial blows: firstly, in October 1931 the Ministry of Labour decided to close the scheme whereby it paid for unemployed miners to work on draining the aerodrome site, although this work had not been completed,¹⁰ and negotiations with the Lancashire Aero Club for them to move their base from Woodford Aerodrome to Stanley Park, and take over the running of the clubhouse, fell through in July 1933.¹¹

While these negotiations were going on, the first scheduled flights from Blackpool to the Isle of Man began in March 1932. The original agreement to operate these flights had been with National Flying Services,¹² but by the time the service began, the operating license had been transferred to a new company, British Amphibious Air Lines Ltd. As its name suggests, this was a flying boat operation, in fact a single flying boat carrying four passengers, the airline being owned by Flying Officer Monk, who was chief pilot for National Flying Services at Stanley Park Aerodrome. Whether he was still employed by National Flying Services by this time is unclear, as at a meeting of the Aerodrome Committee reported in the *Evening Gazette* on 22 February 1932, Flying Officer J.C.W. Mackenzie was described as being in charge of the aerodrome.¹³

The flying-boat was named 'Progress', the Blackpool motto, and between June and September 1932 it was possible to make a booking to the Isle of Man from various Yorkshire cities and towns, travelling by 'Progress' buses to Blackpool and flying the final stage of the journey.¹⁴ Between June and September 348 passengers used the Blackpool – Isle of Man service, but it has to be remembered that although this was the type of flying the Corporation was hoping to attract, the flying boat only landed at the aerodrome when the sea was rough, otherwise, having both wheels and floats, it landed on the beach at

South Shore. There is an evocative photograph in the archives of the *Evening Gazette* showing the flying boat 'Progress' coming in to land on the seashore, alongside a pleasure boat and horse-drawn cart, the aircraft dominating the scene and watched by nearby bathers. There were complaints from pleasure-boatmen about the flying boat which, under the terms of its agreement with the Corporation, was supposed to land in the sea, its passengers conveyed to shore in a rowing-boat. Landing on the beach itself interfered with the boatmen's trade, but the Aerodrome Committee agreed that Blackpool's progress should not be held up purely in the interests of the boatmen.¹⁵

Flights to the Isle of Man from Stanley Park and, later, Squires Gate continued to attract passengers. As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, on over-land routes airlines were competing with trains, coaches and cars, which were often faster, cheaper and more direct means of transport. Over water an aeroplane was more competitive, although still more expensive than train and ferry travel. By the early 1930s short-haul airlines were flying from aerodromes in the south of England to various destinations across the English Channel to mainland Europe, the Channel Islands and Isle of Wight. While not always financially successful, there were plenty of potential destinations and variations of routes. Blackpool, however, could only offer the Isle of Man as an over-water destination. Belfast could also have been considered as a possibility, but after the opening of Speke Aerodrome on 1st July 1933, Liverpool, a major city with far greater land and sea transport links than Blackpool, began to be seen by airlines as a more convenient link with Belfast. Air transport links with Belfast were established in 1934 by Northern Airlines and through north-west aerodromes by Hillman Airways (Hull, Manchester, Liverpool, Belfast) and Midland and Scottish Air Ferries (Renfrew, Belfast, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Croydon). The latter service connected Blackpool and the Isle of Man from Manchester, and a further service operated by Railway Air Services ran between Liverpool, Blackpool, Manchester and the Isle of Man.¹⁶ An additional advantage for Liverpool was that Speke was an 'airport' with customs facilities, rather than an aerodrome. Passengers leaving Blackpool for Europe had to stop at some point on the route to go through customs before leaving Britain. The *Evening Gazette* carried details of a Midland and Scottish Air

Ferries service to Amsterdam beginning in May 1934: passengers would leave Blackpool at 9.00 am, arrive Liverpool 10.25 am and, having cleared customs, arrive at Amsterdam at 3.40 pm. The same article reports on a Blackpool to Malmo service beginning on 1 June 1934.¹⁷ Malmo is close to both Stockholm and Copenhagen so was convenient for visitors to both cities. Again, this would involve stopping at Hull to clear customs.

As can be seen by the developments described above, by the mid-1930s civil aviation was advancing both in terms of services provided and in numbers and types of airlines. However, airlines providing scheduled flights in the 1930s, particularly internal flights, were financially precarious and often ran at a loss. From 1934 the Post Office began to offer mail contracts which helped to subsidise some flights.¹⁸ There were many small airlines, some of which survived for a short time only, or amalgamated with other airlines. This situation had a knock-on effect for aerodromes, which could not rely on revenue from scheduled services which might, at any time, be changed or discontinued. Aerodromes had to be attractive to airlines in terms of costs, and for Blackpool this meant that in April 1933 landing fees were abolished at Stanley Park Aerodrome.¹⁹ Successful aerodromes usually had aircraft manufacturers based within the aerodrome area, as has been described at Brooklands and Manchester, where Avro had been established since before World War One.

Manchester's municipal aerodrome was opened at Barton in January 1930 and, bearing in mind the success of Manchester Airport, it is interesting to note the similarities between the experiences of Blackpool and Manchester in their early years. Barton Aerodrome was owned by Manchester Corporation and managed by Northern Air Lines. Like National Flying Services, Northern Air Lines promoted an air taxi service, joy-riding, flying displays and events, and in 1930 there was a scheduled service between Croydon, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. Robinson says that in mid-1933 the Airport Committee (the equivalent of Blackpool's Aerodrome Committee) transferred the management of the aerodrome to Airwork Ltd, which was successfully managing Heston Aerodrome, and Northern Air Lines went into liquidation shortly afterwards.²⁰ Manchester Aerodrome does not appear to have been as

successful as Liverpool in attracting airlines to operate scheduled flights, but Manchester had a thriving flying club, the Lancashire Aero Club, one of the flying clubs established in the early 1920s that had received a government subsidy before the formation of National Flying Services. By 1930 the Lancashire Aero Club had a membership of over 300, owned five aircraft and was financially secure.²¹ As mentioned above, Lancashire Aero Club were in negotiations with Blackpool Corporation for the first six months of 1933 over transferring operations to Stanley Park Aerodrome. Like Stanley Park, Barton Aerodrome was found to be unsuitable for the larger aircraft of the later 1930s and land for a new municipal aerodrome at Ringway was bought by Manchester Corporation in 1935.²² Objections from local authorities in Cheshire led to a public inquiry to investigate what they considered to be an encroachment by Manchester into a high-class residential area of the county.²³ It was perhaps inevitable that, with the rapid changes in the size and design of civil aircraft in the 1930s and the lack of experts in aerodrome development for local authorities to call on, unsuitable sites and, in some cases, poor management caused problems for local authorities, as happened at Blackpool and Manchester.

The *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* continued to report complaints about the cost of the aerodrome from local bodies such as the Ratepayers' Association and letters from those living near Stanley Park complaining about the noise from aeroplanes. In early 1932 there were, once again, proposals from the Aerodrome Committee for an air pageant to be organised by National Flying Services, the Corporation to contribute £1,000 towards the costs. An editorial headlined 'More Air Pageant Folly' commented

[The Aerodrome Committee] seem quite unable to realise that Blackpool is not in a position to pour out money on flying events which every year become more commonplace and less likely to attract big crowds. Thanks mainly to the courage of the *Gazette and Herald*, our associated weekly journal, the proposal to spend a great deal of money on an air pageant last year was killed..... The idea that Blackpool should spend £1,000 on such an event will arouse inevitable opposition. Blackpool is already pouring out money on the Aerodrome at the rate of over £4,000 per year. Over £70,000 has already been sunk in its establishment.... What Blackpool wants from its aerodrome is more revenue and not more expense. The development of aviation has cost Blackpool quite enough already.

The newspaper carried interviews with a range of residents to gather their views on the Air Pageant and found that most, particularly tradesmen, were not in favour.²⁴

After the Corporation agreed a much smaller contribution to its costs, the air pageant went ahead, as described earlier in this chapter, but the constant need to justify decisions made by the Aerodrome Committee led its Chairman, Councillor Jacob Parkinson, to resign from the committee. In his resignation letter, published in the *Evening Gazette*, he said: 'I endure the position of scapegoat of the intensely disliked Municipal Aerodrome...there has been such a storm of protest against the aerodrome and such a revulsion of feeling expressed against it'.²⁵

It seems likely that Councillor Parkinson did not believe that the committee itself was to blame, or had made bad decisions, as its members were representative of the business and professional men that had run their own businesses and, as councillors, guided the Blackpool 'family business' successfully in the past. The following year Councillor Parkinson was quoted in the *Evening Gazette* as follows:

"In a recent by-election there was one candidate who was an ex-police officer....an ex-police officer has not had the insight into business and the experience which makes him suitable for such an important authority as Blackpool Town Council."²⁶

There is some evidence that the uncertainty about the future of the aerodrome, and the costs already incurred by the Corporation, influenced voters at a by-election in November 1933. In November 1932, at a time shortly after National Flying Services was reported in the *Evening Gazette* as owing rent to the Corporation,²⁷ the issue of the aerodrome was raised at election meetings.²⁸ In the by-elections of November 1933 there were gains for two Independents and one Liberal candidate at the expense of Conservative councillors, all strong supporters of the aerodrome, including Councillor Bagot who was chair of the Aerodrome Committee. A further Liberal gain from a Conservative candidate took place in Marton Ward in February 1934.²⁹ It would be wrong to attribute these election results to the influence of the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and*

Herald. After the summer of 1932 and the critical comments about the potential cost of an air pageant, the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* ceased to criticise or comment on the aerodrome situation, instead simply reporting on the difficulties the Corporation were having with its management and, later, reporting the decision to buy land at Squires Gate which included the air-field on that site.

There could be a number of reasons for this change in the manner of reporting on the aerodrome. Firstly, events following Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933 and the subsequent withdrawal of Germany from the Geneva conference on disarmament and the League of Nations in October 1933 led to agreement in parliament in July 1934 to expand the Home Defence Air Forces. Budiansky describes Winston Churchill's contribution to the debate:

He revealed what he had learned through the network of confidential sources he had assiduously recruited in the Air Ministry and Foreign Office: Germany's aerial rearmament had been going on in secret for years, in violation of the Versailles Treaty; pilots had been trained, and hundreds of German-made bombers and fighters were already in service. If the current trends continued, Germany's still officially nonexistent air force would surpass the RAF in little more than a year.³⁰

In March 1935 Hermann Goering, Germany's Minister of Aviation, announced that Germany did indeed have an air-force which quickly demonstrated its strength:

It must have been with a mixture of pride and dread that Germans listened to the machine thunder of airplanes, which every few minutes cruised low over Berlin's night skies after Hitler renounced the Versailles Treaty in March 1935 to report the Reich's intention to build a thirty-six-division air force.³¹

Not only was Hitler's government committed to the creation of a formidable air force, in March 1933 all aviation clubs were merged into the German Airsport League, partly financed by the Air Ministry and partly by local authorities who were, as Fritzsche puts it, 'strongly encouraged' to fund their branches of the German Airsport League. Up to this time, as in England, there had been a shortage of funds for aviation clubs so it is perhaps not surprising that the nationalisation of private flying was generally welcomed. Later, after 1935, the German Airsport League was supported solely by the government itself.³²

In Italy, which had had an independent air force since 1923, Mussolini and his Air Minister, Italo Balbo, recognised the value of aviation to the fascist regime: "Aviation, which is the most powerful and superb instrument of force and domination, must be served by people permeated by pride in their race, which is a thoroughly fascist feeling."³³ Mussolini had increased the air budget from 200 million lire in 1923-4 to 630 million lire for 1926-7, along with funds for the many prestigious long-distance flights undertaken by the Italian air force in the late 1920s and early 1930s.³⁴

The situation in Germany and Italy can be contrasted with that in Britain, where, as described above, National Flying Services called in the receiver in June 1933 and municipal aerodromes were expected to pay their own way without government funds. By 1933 there were signs that at national government level there was an awareness that Britain lagged behind Germany in its aeronautical development, perhaps dangerously so, and that there should be more active involvement by the government in the promotion of airmindedness. A conference was held at the Mansion House on 8 December 1933 to discuss subsidies to municipal aerodromes,³⁵ something that would have certainly been helpful to Blackpool in the early period of Stanley Park Aerodrome's development. An indication of the attitude of the British public to flying is that Sir Alan Cobham's company, formed in 1932 and called National Aviation Day Ltd, was always referred to as an 'air circus' in the *Evening Gazette*.³⁶ Sir Alan Cobham strongly promoted airmindedness and perhaps hoped to inspire national pride in British aeronautical achievements in the same way that in Nazi-led Germany 'aeroplanes helped narrate a story of national prowess and imperial glory.'³⁷

The expansion of the RAF, approved by parliament from 1934 onwards, was also a response to the development of the German Air Force. Displays at Hendon had been popular since before World War One, and from 1935 onwards Empire Air Day displays at RAF stations around Britain were a demonstration of British air power and possible recruiting opportunities. The growing popularity of these events can be judged by the increasing numbers of people visiting them. At Northolt in 1935 there were 5,000 visitors, by 1938,

22,000 visitors.³⁸ At Blackpool on 23 June 1934 an RAF Squadron gave a display at Stanley Park Aerodrome, as part of a plan to visit all municipal aerodromes, and attracted 20,000 people.³⁹ Considering that in 1931 the RAF had declined to attend an air pageant at Blackpool because Stanley Park aerodrome was unsuitable, it may be that three years later promotional visits around the country were seen to be a high priority both in terms of propaganda and reassurance to the general public that the government was preparing for the possibility of a war in which there was no doubt that civilians would be considered legitimate targets.

As has been described above, although civil airlines' finances were often precarious, aerodromes around the country were being used more regularly for scheduled flights by larger and faster aircraft. Blackpool began to be used by Spartan Air Lines and Railway Air Services for daily services. The *Evening Gazette* carried advertisements for airlines and regular reports and photographs of special events, famous passengers and national, syndicated articles on the future of aviation.⁴⁰ On 7th April 1933 the *Evening Gazette* carried a report of the opening by the Blackpool Greyhound Stadium and Racecourse Company of a new greyhound stadium at Squires Gate and, as part of the same site, a new aerodrome. The new chief pilot of Blackpool and West Coast Aero Services, which was the operator of air services from Squires Gate, was pictured in the *Evening Gazette* with his family, which emphasised his local connections: he flew an illuminated plane in the 1930 illuminations and was the first pilot to fly from Stanley Park.⁴¹ The plans for the future of Squires Gate Aerodrome included a taxi service from Squires Gate Railway Station, an example of co-ordinating air, rail and road transport that could not be matched by Stanley Park Aerodrome which was only accessible by road.

The opening of Blackpool's second aerodrome proved the town's airmindedness and endorsed the Corporation's commitment to air transport that had led to the development of the municipal aerodrome. The provision of a modernised aerodrome at Squires Gate also legitimised discussion within the Council about alternative uses of the Stanley Park site. Although the original plan for a motor racing track does not appear to have been mentioned at this

stage (not surprisingly, given the complaints about aircraft noise), in March 1934 the Aerodrome Committee raised the idea of a sports stadium 'near' the aerodrome and the following month the *Evening Gazette* was reporting the possibility of Blackpool having a 'great sports stadium of the north.'⁴² However, in September 1934 the full Council deferred a decision on building a sports stadium on the grounds of costs and because it would be impossible to attract big sporting events to Blackpool. An unnamed councillor told the *Evening Gazette* that 'it would be futile for Blackpool to compete with Wembley.'⁴³ The decision at this early stage not to proceed with the sports stadium is a sign that the economic problems of the country that had affected Blackpool in the early 1930s had led to a curbing of the policy of municipal capitalism that had allowed large-scale development of amenities in the 1920s, but which, in the case of the aerodrome, had been strongly opposed. There is also an acknowledgement that Blackpool was not comparable with London, again a contrast to the 1920s, when the South Shore Open-air Baths was described as 'Blackpool's swimming Wembley,'⁴⁴ although the *Evening Gazette* was still tempted to make similar comparisons in 1936 when it reported that local horse-riders had requested that the Corporation provide an exercise track on the aerodrome site at Stanley Park, and described the idea as 'Blackpool's Rotten Row.'⁴⁵ The newspaper went on to say that because of the aerodrome itself, this plan could not be implemented. In this case there is an implication that the aerodrome was holding back the progress of a new idea for a sports facility that was in keeping with the select area around Stanley Park, although there is no overt criticism of the aerodrome itself. It should be remembered that the policy of municipal capitalism was revived in the late 1930s with the development of the Derby Baths, a new sewerage scheme and the planned improvements to the Central Station and Golden Mile area.⁴⁶ These schemes symbolised the 'modern' interest in health and the outdoor life, as well as enhancing the traditionally popular, seaside area of Blackpool. Chase describes Rojek's Modernity 1 (order and control) as emerging in the late Victorian period, while Modernity 2 (disorder and fragmentation) appeared post-World War One. She uses the examples of two contrasting resorts to show how modernity can have different meanings, dependant on the resort's established image.⁴⁷ We have seen the importance of town planning in the attempt to change Blackpool's 'popular'

image in the 1920s and 1930s, the later schemes described above being further examples of Modernity 1. However, after the Corporation's failure to use Stanley Park and the surrounding area to change Blackpool's dominant image, by the late 1930s in Blackpool Modernity 1 and Modernity 2 come to exist side by side, or layered, with symbols of Modernity 1 such as Derby and South Shore Baths, Squires Gate aerodrome, and the new promenade extensions co-existing with the disorder and freedom traditionally associated with the liminality of the sea-shore itself, the freak shows and amusement stalls.

At the same time as the sports stadium idea was being discussed, the Airport Committee (previously referred to as the Aerodrome Committee) raised the possibility that the Corporation should move the municipal aerodrome to Squires Gate and use the land at Stanley Park for housing.⁴⁸ It is surprising that what would seem to be a radical idea should be reported almost in passing in a report of a committee meeting. Squires Gate aerodrome had had a successful summer, the *Evening Gazette* reporting an increase in passengers on the Blackpool – Isle of Man route from 1,863 in the period 3rd July to 30th September 1933, to 3,762 passengers in the same period in 1934.⁴⁹ The passengers were described as 'mostly holiday-makers' but the airline planned to continue the service with one flight a day through the winter. Squires Gate also offered joy-flights, with no apparent complaints from residents, and facilities on the same site included horse-racing, greyhound-racing and a golf course. On 7 November 1934 the *Evening Gazette* reported that the Corporation was to buy the Squires Gate site from Harry Clifton at a cost of £175,000 for 461 acres.⁵⁰ At that point there was no overt suggestion that the municipal aerodrome would be moved from Stanley Park and both aerodromes continued to operate as before.

In December 1935 the Corporation had discussions with the Air Ministry about the future of the aerodromes. Squires Gate runway was larger (800 yds by 650yds) than that of Stanley Park (650 yds by 400 yds), and although both were below the requirements for a Class A aerodrome, which should have a minimum runway of 1200 yards by 1000 yards, there was room for expansion at Squires Gate, but not at Stanley Park. The increase in night flights meant that

there should be floodlights and the surrounding area should be clear of buildings. Again, Squires Gate fitted these criteria while Stanley Park did not. Even without the formal report from the Air Ministry, which was considered by the Airport Committee in May 1936, it was clear that Squires Gate was the superior site and therefore Stanley Park's future was limited. Unlike in 1927, when decisions about the municipal aerodrome were made in haste, the Corporation took its time to decide on how to proceed. Although the *Evening Gazette* took a mildly critical tone when reporting developments, it did not question the need for Blackpool to have an aerodrome, but rather concerned itself with the cost of upgrading Squires Gate to Class A standards. Indeed, Seasider's column had reported that 'local businessmen' were planning to buy the Stanley Park site for housing for a figure which would more than cover the costs incurred by the Corporation over the period of the aerodrome's existence.⁵¹ Over the period 1936 to 1937 the Air Ministry appear to have been pressing the Corporation to improve Squires Gate to the extent that it could be used by RAF bombers, Blackpool being at a safe distance from potential enemy bombers and usually free from fog.⁵² The RAF planned to disperse bomber squadrons from air-bases accessible to attack by enemy aircraft to more remote airfields such as Squires Gate. The Air Ministry also planned to use Squires Gate as a Coastal Command training centre.⁵³ The *Evening Gazette* could not disagree with the Corporation's view, expressed on 29 April 1937, that the government should give financial support to towns which were being urged to expand their airports.⁵⁴ A suggestion made in the newspapers at this time was that, in order to share the costs of an aerodrome, Blackpool should join with Blackburn and Preston to provide a single aerodrome for Lancashire. While this might seem a far-fetched idea, there was in existence a Preston and Blackburn Joint Aerodrome Committee which led in 1938 to the opening of Samlesbury airfield, although this never served as a civil airport.

There are a number of possible reasons why the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* did not criticise the corporation or express strong opinions on the fate of Stanley Park, or the expansion of Squires Gate. Firstly, although the purchase of the land at Squires Gate was a big expense for the Corporation, the site included other amenities as well as the aerodrome itself, managed by a

company that had proved successful both in running the site and promoting the attractions. There should not, therefore, be any further costs to the ratepayers of Blackpool and when the Air Ministry did attempt to persuade the Corporation to expand Squires Gate, there was resistance from councillors. Any expansion, in the short term at least, would be advantageous to the Air Ministry, but would not necessarily benefit Blackpool's holiday industry or residents. Secondly, although there was no talk of closing Stanley Park aerodrome at this time, the possibility of using parts of the site for other purposes had been raised, as mentioned above. If, as the economic situation improved, the land was used for building and perhaps sold off to developers, the Corporation could recoup its original investment.

Thirdly, the possibility of a war in Europe was becoming increasingly likely. Blackpool's security might be dependent on its having an aerodrome that could be used by large, military aeroplanes and, nationally, it was important to establish a network of Class A aerodromes around the country. By 1936 the British public were watching newsreels of the bombing of Spanish cities, including Madrid where 133 people died in four days of bombing in November, 1936. As Wohl puts it:

Through photographs published in newspapers and illustrated magazines and newsreels shown in movie theatres, Europeans outside of Spain could view the shattered buildings and mangled bodies that were the result of bombing raids and wonder when their turn would come.⁵⁵

The *Evening Gazette* reported on 27 April 1937 on the events at Guernica, which were described as '...the most appalling air-raid in modern history', the report having a sub-headline: 'German Bombers with German pilots.'⁵⁶ There could be little doubt that the RAF would need safe landing-grounds in the near future. It is hardly surprising that a news source such as the *Evening Gazette*, publishing daily reports on a war within Europe where air power was being used against civilians, was reluctant to criticise expenditure on a resource that might be used to defend its own readers or take offensive action against aggressors.

Events in Europe forestalled any plans the corporation might have had for either Squires Gate or Stanley Park. Throughout World War 2 Stanley Park was used

as part of a training centre for recruits to the RAF. Wellington bombers were assembled there, taking off when completed and landing at Squires Gate, as the runway at Stanley Park was too short for them to land. Even before 1939, developments in the size and power of aircraft meant that an aerodrome such as Stanley Park would be unable to compete for scheduled services, both because the length of its runway would be unsuitable for larger aircraft and because passengers chose to use services which would get them to their destination as quickly as possible. Apart from flights to the Isle of Man, there was little reason for most air passengers to travel by air via Blackpool, once aircraft no longer needed to break journeys to refuel. Although aircraft manufacturers used both Blackpool aerodromes during World War 2, it was inevitable that once the war was over and there was no longer any urgent need to quickly produce large numbers of aircraft, Stanley Park would cease to be of use as an aerodrome. The aerodrome closed for flying purposes in 1946. Despite suggestions in the late 1930s that the site might be sold for housing, as mentioned above, the corporation continued its ownership. The aerodrome site, including the original club-house and hangar, is currently in use as Blackpool Zoo.

CONCLUSION

The *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* were conservative-controlled newspapers which, as has been shown, were usually supportive of the Corporation's management of Blackpool and positive about the town's progress. However, over Stanley Park aerodrome the management of these newspapers was prepared to challenge decisions which it believed were not in the best interests of the town and its residents. It used a number of strategies to show opposition to the aerodrome at Stanley Park: editorials, diary and comment columns and readers' letters, as well as reporting events as they occurred. As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, Chalaby's view is that newspapers in the twentieth-century, while not being directly linked to a political party and reducing the amount of space allocated to political news, commented on political issues by scrutinising the morality of politics. Chalaby also points out that the press became 'gate-keepers' between politicians and the public. Smith suggests that 'Journalism became the act of structuring reality, rather than recording it'.¹ We have seen the irritation with which local politicians in Blackpool responded to reports and comments in the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald*. Even seemingly objective reports of events could include facts which reflected badly on local politicians, for example, the report on the opening of the aerodrome reported the cost of the aerodrome as £82,000, which included the building of a 'luxury clubhouse' for the use of 30 members of the local flying club (see Chapter 2). Critics of local newspapers (for example Murphy, Koss and Elliott) who have described them as little more than gossip and advertising sheets, should consider the value of a medium that provided information on local political decisions and allowed opinions to be expressed, both in letters columns and through quotations in news reports. I have not found evidence that the *Evening Gazette* held back on reporting or expressing opinions through fear of offending advertisers or those with influence in the town. It was to the *Evening Gazette's* advantage that those opposing the aerodrome included many local business-owners, particularly hoteliers and others directly and indirectly involved in the holiday industry, who were, themselves, often readers of and advertisers in the *Evening Gazette*.

It is interesting to speculate on whether the *Evening Gazette* would have been more reluctant to criticise the corporation if there had been any likelihood of the Conservative party losing its dominance on the council because of the aerodrome saga. Stanley Park aerodrome was clearly supported by Conservative councillors but there is no evidence of the *Evening Gazette* identifying as Conservatives those councillors who were criticised for their support of the aerodrome. Chalaby, discussing the 1922 General Election, points out that the Daily Mail and Daily Mirror were strongly against the Labour Party, but 'evasive' about whom they supported.² If anything, the *Evening Gazette* took the moral high-ground by avoiding personal attacks (unlike some councillors, as has been described in Chapter 2) and adopted an ironic or humorous tone in a number of reports and comments on decisions and actions taken by the council. The protests and criticisms of the council voiced in the *Evening Gazette*, therefore, give a sense of a newspaper following a good, and sometimes sensational, news story, uncovering facts that the corporation would have preferred to keep hidden and highlighting perceived ineptitude on the part of elected members of the council that might make for uncomfortable questions at election time. As this is taking place in a town where there is virtually no possibility of there being any revolutionary change in the political make-up of the council the newspaper can safely criticise without seriously damaging the political party its owners support. In case readers might harbour thoughts of radical change at election time, Zephyrus, described in his obituary as 'an ardent radical' while a Liberal councillor³ and a regular critic of the aerodrome scheme, would remind his readers where their political loyalties should lie:

It would be a catastrophe to have a Socialist administration in Blackpool, or even one with any Socialist influence, however small. The Socialist speeches in this election make no concealment of enmity for the private trader....[The Socialist candidates] municipal policy is as extravagant and impractical as their national policy. If the electors of Blackpool do not today bestir themselves and vote down the socialists they will deserve every evil that may befall them.⁴

It is noticeable in the article quoted above that Zephyrus does not advise his readers who they should vote for, only which party they should reject, an example of Chalaby's point mentioned above.

This study's research concludes that the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald*, while providing a voice for local opinion on the aerodrome plan, did not noticeably influence decisions made by the Corporation. However, the deteriorating international political situation and threat of European war, particularly after 1933 when Hitler came to power in Germany, made local disagreements over the future of the municipal aerodrome seem trivialities, when British towns were faced with the possibility of total destruction by enemy bombers. Also, it became clear by this time that Stanley Park was not a suitable site for an aerodrome, bearing in mind the advances in aviation technology, but to criticise the corporation at a time when the nation was threatened may have seemed unpatriotic. By the late 1930s the *Evening Gazette* confined itself to making suggestions about what should be done with the site and where Blackpool's airport should be sited in the future.

The strength of the *Evening Gazette* and *Gazette and Herald* were that they were firmly based in the local community, while using modern technology that enabled them to bring national and international news to their readers. The *Evening Gazette* was launched on 13 May 1929 as an evening newspaper produced every week day, and from that date the *Gazette and Herald* moved to Saturday evening only and being a magazine-type newspaper with less serious news. The fact that the *Evening Gazette* was to be produced nightly demonstrates that there was a demand for this type of newspaper with a local focus at a time when the total number of evening provincial newspapers was falling and when there was an expansion in other media such as radio and cinema newsreels. An advertisement for the new newspaper in the *Gazette and Herald* describes it as using the latest technology (a 'private telegraph wire connects Blackpool and London') to bring national news to its readers while the newspaper itself is controlled by men

born and bred on the Fylde coast. Whilst the newspapers of so many other towns are owned by great Trusts operating from London, and subject to the dictates of magnates who do not know local problems and requirements, this will be an independent journal in the hands of men whose foremost aim will be the best interests of the people of the Fylde.⁵

The success of the *Evening Gazette* is due to its being the only medium for news that was seen as valid by the people of Blackpool. The reports published and the opinions expressed were demonstrably reflections of the views of many of its readers who valued its independence. As we have seen, Chalaby's view is that 'independence' in newspaper terms is more about the freedom of an editor or owner to choose the political stance of their newspaper than about true political independence. The *Evening Gazette* chose to take an independent line on the development of a municipal aerodrome while remaining within a Conservative ideology. Further research could investigate the way in which the *Evening Gazette* reported other municipal capitalist projects and might establish whether the independence demonstrated over the municipal aerodrome was a single example, or whether it was part of a pattern of opposition in the inter-war years. The people of Blackpool were fortunate to have an independent locally-owned newspaper, even with the reservations about 'independence' which have been discussed above. As was shown in the Introduction to this study, many provincial newspapers in the nineteenth-century were clearly the mouthpieces of political parties, while in the early twentieth-century, up to half of provincial newspapers were owned by London-based press barons.

The municipal aerodrome was part of a plan to change, or at least widen, the variety of visitors who were attracted to Blackpool. The development of Stanley Park itself was part of that change. Walton has pointed out the decline in the number of councillors with interests in the entertainment industry and the rise in the number of professional men serving on the council in the inter-war years⁶ and it seems possible that this change meant that there was a greater interest in providing amenities for residents, while also encouraging middle-class visitors who, as has been mentioned, were thought to be more likely to visit Blackpool in the early season and, perhaps, travel there by aeroplane. Stanley Park began to be seen as a modern centre for Blackpool, with the possibility of a new Town Hall being built in the area, instead of replacing the current Town Hall in Talbot Square, in the traditional heart of the resort. Interviewed by the *Gazette and Herald* in May 1929 the Mayor, Alderman Potter, who was by profession an accountant, set out his vision for a future Blackpool which would have suburbs of tree-lined streets and avenues, open

squares and boulevards. He wanted Blackpool to be an 'international resort.'⁷ For Blackpool to attract visitors from Europe it would be necessary to provide air transport links, as was already the case in the south of England where by 1929 2,000 passengers a week were travelling between Croydon and Paris.⁸ The plans to increase the activities for visitors in the area of the park was strongly opposed by W.G. Bean as it threatened the continued success of the Pleasure Beach⁹ and financial constraints meant that the Town Hall was never replaced, either at Talbot Square or at Stanley Park.

The aerodrome was bound up in these aspirations to 'modernise' Blackpool. Aircraft could 'transport people to a realm fundamentally different from the one in which they lived.'¹⁰ It should appeal to the middle-classes, who were residents of the housing scheme around Stanley Park area and who were most likely to take advantage of aircraft as a means of transport. Grahame-White describes the interior of an Imperial Airways 'Argosy' airliner

Each passenger has a softly-cushioned, separate armchair seat. On one side is a curtained outlook window, which can be opened if desired; on the other is a central carpeted gangway. Racks are provided for coats, hats and light articles, while at the rear of the saloon, which is scientifically heated and ventilated, is a completely-equipped toilet compartment.¹¹

The Argosy took part in Blackpool's 1928 Air Pageant with flights available to those attending at a cost of 10/6d. In the programme, Imperial Airways advertised itself as 'Britain's Link with Europe' and air travel as unique for 'speed, interest and sheer freedom from jostling crowds.' There would seem to be no reason why businessmen should not use this form of travel from Blackpool to Europe but in reality with the large number of small airlines starting up, some of which were short-lived, flying from Stanley Park on business was likely to be slower than train travel, more expensive and possibly more dangerous.

The 'flying club' at Stanley Park might also have appealed to the middle-classes and there were certain aerodromes where clubs were successful, for example Manchester, Heston and Brooklands. A share of the blame for the lack of

success of Blackpool's flying club must lie with National Flying Services, but the complaints about aircraft noise from residents and visitors to the park would have been the same whoever was managing the flying club, and would have therefore constrained expansion of this activity.

The 'sheer freedom' of flying, as Imperial Airways described it, would appear to be an ideal amenity to offer holidaymakers to Blackpool. Blackpool's role was to provide an escape from everyday life, an escape emphasised by the liminality of the sea-shore, the place between land and sea. Its visitors were now offered an escape into the sky, sharing the experience of heroes such as Lindbergh. Where else but while on holiday would most people have this opportunity? Again, this activity, which seems to fit more easily into Blackpool's image as a resort providing the latest attractions for its visitors, was a matter for regular complaints about noise. The conflict between the interests of visitors and residents, including patients at the newly-opened Victoria Hospital close by, meant that the site could never be used to full capacity, even if National Flying Services had been successful managers of the aerodrome.

Was the corporation wrong to choose Stanley Park for the site of the municipal aerodrome when there was another potential site at Squires Gate that had been used for that purpose since 1909? This question has been considered in Chapter 1 and, while with hindsight it seems obvious that Squires Gate was a more suitable site, there were valid reasons for choosing Stanley Park. There were a limited number of experts in the field of aerodrome design that the Corporation could call on. The government wanted to increase the number of aerodromes around the country but was not willing to make a financial contribution to the cost to local authorities of development or running aerodromes. Towards the end of the 1930s, when a European war seemed likely, when the Air Ministry urged expansion, Blackpool Corporation was reluctant to spend its own money on upgrading Squires Gate, in contrast to the late 1920s, when spending money on large projects was a matter of pride. As the Mayor said when announcing the 1928 Air Pageant: 'It will be a big expense, but in Blackpool we look on the main chance of getting people here and I am quite sure we shall more than repay our outlay...'¹² This disregard for

the cost of the Air Pageant impressed 'The Aeroplane', a journal of the time: 'Blackpool never seems to mind losing a lump on one attraction for it knows it can make it up in other ways.'¹³ This attitude shows a certain arrogance and certainty that there will always be enough visitors to Blackpool to recoup the costs of big projects. This attitude had worked well for Blackpool up to this time, but the aerodrome was out of the experience of local councillors, who, as we have seen, were mainly representatives of holiday interests, either directly or indirectly, and professional men. Added to this were the national economic recession and the threat of European war.

Useful further research might compare Blackpool's experience in developing a municipal aerodrome and that of other holiday resorts which also invested in aerodromes in the same period, for example Newquay, Bournemouth and Southend. While these examples include both select and popular resorts, I do not know of any resorts outside the South of England having a municipal aerodrome. The opportunities for scheduled air services in the South, for example to Europe, were far greater than in the North West, where Blackpool was competing with aerodromes based close to the large industrial centres of Manchester and Liverpool with a consequently greater number of potential customers.

Blackpool's municipal aerodrome at Stanley Park was an attempt by the Corporation to provide an amenity that could compete with similar amenities in London, not the first time this had been attempted. The Corporation must share some of the blame for the limited success of the project when, perhaps through arrogance or ignorance, a site was chosen that was unsuitable, but Blackpool was not the only town or city in Britain to find its attempt to modernise through promoting air-mindedness was beset by difficulties, an inevitable consequence of embracing a technology that had had only been successfully practised for twenty years. What should be recognised is that Blackpool, one of the first towns in the world to host an aviation meeting, has had a continuous commitment to flying for nearly 100 years which, in the 1920s and 1930s offered a rare opportunity for its visitors to experience the freedom of flight.

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