



Avro Seaplane on Ventnor beach



The picture shows a seaplane beached at Ventnor on the 17th October 1919, as captured by a local photographer. It appears that the Spencer longshoremen have been assisting in securing it, although it looks to be a remarkably calm sea that day, so they probably had little to do. A few youngsters have turned up to watch, perhaps the offspring of some of the men in the boat.

The aircraft in the image is an example of the Avro 504L, a First World War wooden trainer aircraft, mostly mounted on a wheeled undercarriage, but sometimes mounted on sea floats, as seen here. It had a wingspan of approximately 36 feet, a 180 hp engine and a weight of over 2,000 lbs. After the war, many were used for joy-rides, giving ordinary members of the public their first taste of flight. The Isle of Wight was a prominent location for such enterprise, especially using the seaplanes.

This was far from the seaplane's first visit to the resort. It had arrived on 4th July that year and was immediately the object of interest among the crowds then on the beach and on the Esplanade. Soon it became known that flights were to be organised for paying passengers, beginning from 7th July. The flights were to be of 15 minutes duration and there was room for two passengers at a time. The fee was £2 for each flight, no mean sum in those days. The *Isle of Wight Mercury* had forewarned its readers of such seaplane trips back in April of that year. It described a plan for trips out from Southampton to Ryde, Sandown, Shanklin and Ventnor, including additional trips between these various towns, and also short trips out from individual towns. The seaplane captain in this instance was F. Warren-Merriman and the particular seaplane one of a fleet operated by the Avro Transport Company, in alliance with the Supermarine Aviation Works Ltd. Given that the image above is dated early October 1919, it appears likely that the seaplane operated through much of the summer season that year. Unfortunately, there seems to be no eye witness account of a passenger who took one of these flights, or, at least, none that I have yet found.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, from files in Ventnor Heritage Centre



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