

# Institute of Physics

LONDON AND SOUTH EASTERN BRANCH REMS SECTION

## Visit to the National Air Traffic Services Ltd., Swanwick Centre Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2003

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This visit has been organised by Peter Merden

Following the visit to City Airport this visit has been arranged to enable members to get a behind-the-scenes view of another aspect of the air transport industry, at one of the four regional control centres. Swanwick is known as London Area Control Centre and is the most recent, most publicised, of these centres.

In the earliest days of flying, staying aloft was of more immediate concern to aviators than finding their way from one point to another and staying clear of other air traffic. Although the first aviators had the sky to themselves there were still four mid-air collisions in 1910 and six in 1912. Clearly something had to be done. But the idea of making an aircraft's height dependent upon the track it was flying, so that two machines on converging tracks would be at different levels, was suggested but not adopted until much later. There were attempts made to bring some form of order to aviation but not until after the First World War was legislation introduced to regulate the activities of aviators.

In the late 1980s a major investment programme was undertaken in the UK. By 1990 much of the UK's ATC infrastructure had been comprehensively up-dated and in 1995 the highly complex Central Control Function project was successfully completed with the seamless transfer of airport approach control to the new terminal control room at LATCC. The biggest project was a new air traffic control centre, which by the early 1990s was making good progress at a green-field site at Swanwick, Hampshire. But the project ran into difficulty as its timescale, which in retrospect was seen to be far too ambitious for such a complex project, began to slip. By the end of the decade, the problems were brought under control and it was re-scheduled for opening in winter 2001/2002.

NATS is a public private partnership between the Airline Group, a consortium of seven UK airlines, holding 46%, NATS staff with 5% and the government, holding 49% and a golden share. The Airline Group is a consortium of 7 UK airlines: British Airways, bmi British Midland, Virgin Atlantic, Britannia, Monarch, easyJet and Airtours. The Swanwick Centre entered service on 27 January 2002. The final cost was £623M.

Arrive 11 am Introduction by Mr Tim Norton, Manager, Safety & Quality, Mr Terry Ward, Manager, Public Relations and possibly Mr George Matthews, Manager, Operational Engineering. They will then show us the operations room (from the viewing gallery), systems control room, equipment room and, if possible, the training unit simulator. The importance of reliability, with almost everything duplicated, will be highlighted.

Depart 1 pm for lunch at the Elm Tree public house, for those not wishing to return immediately. It has a good menu; typical cost of a main course is £8.50.

Location maps will be provided for attendees and pick up can be arranged from Southampton Parkway Station if required. The party is limited to fifteen persons.