

A posting to Gatwick brought the daily workload up and with it a new experience – a main runway and a taxiway that could be used as a temporary runway. If maintenance work was required on the main runway, in order to maintain aircraft operations the taxiway parallel to the runway was brought into use. However, after a few missed approaches, it was soon realised that with indifferent weather conditions, that pilots could not visually identify the runway in use so a system of bright lights denoting the runway in use was brought in.



The maintenance hangar at Gatwick is to the south of the runway whilst the passenger terminals were on the north side. This meant that aircraft requiring maintenance had to be towed across the 'live' runway. During a quiet spell at night a tug driver had been authorised to cross the runway but on arrival at the hangar had been asked where his aircraft was – it was nowhere to be seen which was somewhat alarming. The pilot of the next aircraft to land could tell him – in the middle of the runway. Somehow the tow hook had become detached at the critical point of crossing the centre line.

Whilst of these incidents could have had disastrous consequences perhaps it goes to show that we should never have pilot less aircraft, at least in civilian aviation, so that there is always the ability to handle the unexpected – there is also the added incentive that the pilot wants to survive as well. During a lively question time Mark explained how aircraft were kept in a holding stack awaiting their turn to land and that the most frequent emergency requiring a diversion was due to sudden passenger illness. Such an aircraft is then given priority to land while the air traffic controllers manoeuvre the other aircraft into a new pattern. On a slightly different approach and to show his hobby, Mark completed his talk with some excellent videos of gliding at Lasham both of the facilities, operations and in the cockpit.



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