

Goodhart

The story of an exceptional man

**RICHARD HARRIS &
BARRIE WILLIAMS**

The front cover photograph,
taken in February 1962,
shows Nicholas Goodhart
following his promotion
to the rank of captain.

GOODHART

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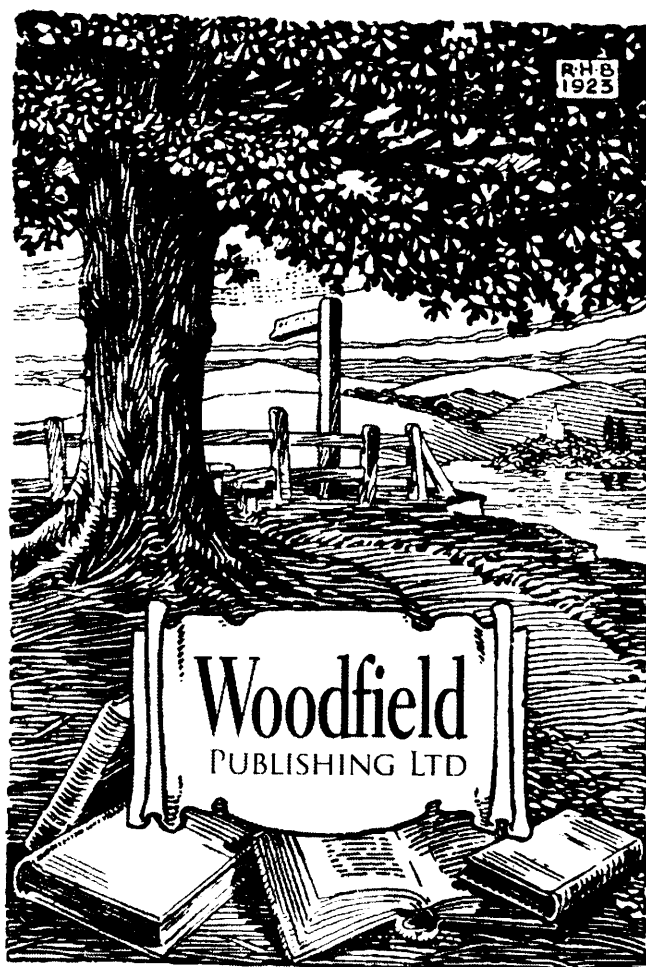
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I would like to dedicate this book to my beloved wife Molly who has, these past few years, encouraged me to 'get on with it.' Without her, I would not have got on with it!

Nicholas Goodhart

(Written shortly before his death in April, 2011)

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Foreword ~ by David Ince

THROUGHOUT HIS LONG LIFE and many interests, Nicholas Goodhart was above all the complete aviator; ranked amongst those in our armed forces who are destined for the highest command. A member of that rare and valued breed an engineering test pilot, he was also a world-class gliding champion and no mean inventor in his later years. Nicholas Goodhart was a truly remarkable man

In the 1930s whilst training at Dartmouth, and then at Keyham, the Naval Engineering College, we catch a first glimpse of his growing attachment to 'soaring flight' and his encounters with the great Robert Kronfeld. Later, when he and I were together at the Empire Test Pilots School (ETPS), Kronfeld came to tell us about the Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment. Nicholas wanted to get him to talk about gliding and was much frustrated that his brief had been limited to dreary projects like aerotowed guns and winged jeeps!

How he moved from air engineering to test pilot is a story in itself. After an active and singularly dangerous two years in the Med – and an incredible Fred Karno performance convoying 28 Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs) back to the UK for the invasion of Normandy – he reported to the Admiralty and found himself posted for flying training. This led to a tour on Hellcats over Burma with a ditching, following engine failure, over the Malacca Straits.

How he subsequently made it to the first ETPS post war course with just 400 plus flying hours remains shrouded in mystery. Those who know him well might guess that he used his engineering background and debating skills to beat the many naval aviators with far more flying time and experience. At ETPS he soon proved that their Lordships had made a wise decision.

After watching helplessly from above, as Pete Garner was killed in the prototype Wyvern, the way in which Nicholas volunteered to take over the testing is typical of this splendid man as we come to know him better. His feelings of loss, his courage, and his sense of responsibility are reflected forever in that decision to pick up the torch from his friend.

As we move on to gliding his actions, his achievements and the stories of his record breaking flights speak for themselves. Gliding brought further challenges, on the ground and in the air. As a member of the BGA Council and chairman of the Airspace Committee he fought many battles to protect us from the ever encroaching demands of the National Air Traffic Control Service and the airlines. Perhaps his greatest single achievement as Airspace Boss, an apt description, was that of helping to win the Lasham Gliding Society's vitally needed long term security of tenure.

In the early summer of 1971, with a magnificent championship winning record of over 20 years to his name, Nicholas won the British Standard Class Championships. By now he was becoming less enamoured with high performance soaring unless it was in direct competition with others. In August that year, on a superb gliding day, I caught him listening out on the radio from his home at Inkpen. 'Old warhorses,' he said, 'stir at the sound of the trumpets!'

The following year, at the World Championships in Yugoslavia, he was 4th in the Open Class, just off the podium. It was a fitting conclusion to a great gliding career.

Richard Harris and Barrie Williams have done a splendid job in tracking the highlights of his life. Not least his great inventive achievements which are covered in accurate and comprehensive detail – the Mirror Deck Landing System, Sigma with its variable geometry wings, the Newbury Manflyer, Albedo, the giant 3km span Hurricane suppressor and its forest firefighting derivative on which Nicholas was still working at the time of his death.

The authors were still working with Nicholas on this book when he died and consequently it is unfortunate that we miss out on some events from the later years of his Naval career.

Yet largely thanks to his treasured and dearest Molly, his wife and best friend – we encounter something much more revealing. A wonderful partnership, a most loving marriage, a family man at peace with himself and the world. The driving force is still there – in a totally different way – as we see more clearly than ever the warmth, the humour, the kindness and the caring of her Nicholas.

It is there in his year as Master of the Worshipful Company of Grocers, the sixth Goodhart to be so honoured – as a powerfully effective and innovative name at Lloyds – in his contribution to the Lindridge Estate development, a sort-of top rank surveyor to the Irish builder – who trusted him implicitly – waterworks and all! We see it in the man who, on his first visit to the Children's Hospice South West, played with the little ones and wept silently for them. Who devoted much of his last years to that charity – who at 88 became a spritely youngster himself – abseiling down a 120ft church tower and raising £4,200 for its funds.

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Nicholas – dear friend and comrade – what a privilege it is to have known you. What a man and what a life!

As the Last Post is most surely followed by Reveille, and the final bugle call fades into silence, I shall remember you – always.



David Ince flew almost 150 sorties – earning a DFC on the way – after being seconded from the Royal Artillery to become a World War II fighter pilot. After the war he trained as a test pilot at the Empire Test Pilots School, where he met Nicholas Goodhart, who became a lifelong friend.

Preface ~ by Simon Hoggart

I DIDN'T GET OFF TO the very best start with Nicholas Goodhart when we first met 30 years ago. His wife Molly told me, with justifiable pride, that he was about to become Master of the Grocers Company.

Lacking any knowledge of London's grand livery companies – and few are grander than the Grocers – I assumed he was a sort of top grocer, like Lord Sainsbury for example. I said I didn't know that he was in the retail trade. I was very soon put right and since then I have been able to enjoy the magnificent hospitality at Grocers' Hall and admire their tremendous good works.

What a man of achievement Nicholas was!

A trainee cadet at the age of 13, he joined the Royal Navy, served during the war and worked as an engineer on weapons systems. Before then he had taken up his great love, gliding – he flew in nine British championships, winning three firsts and three seconds – and his two seater sailplane record still stands, though admittedly the class has now been abolished.

Once, when Nicholas and Molly were travelling in France, their camper van was robbed and, without money or credit cards, they had set off trying to get home. They noticed a British car behind them, towing a glider. They flagged the vehicle down and discovered that it was being driven by a huge fan of Nicholas who was only too happy to lend them the money they needed.

Nicholas's record of achievement is astonishing. He was a fighter pilot during the Burma campaign, a test pilot at Boscombe Down and a continuous innovator in aircraft design.

His greatest and best-known achievement came in the mid 1950s with the mirror-deck landing system. At the time, propeller driven planes were being replaced by larger, heavier, faster jets. Landing these on an aircraft carrier with an angled deck was far more difficult, especially as pilots had to be guided by a man waving what appeared to be two table-tennis bats. It was human error turned into military strategy.

Like all Nicholas's best ideas, it was very simple. The pilot had to adjust his angle of descent so that the light appeared to be in the centre of the mirror.

In that way he could hold the glide slope, more precisely, all the way to touchdown. It reduced the rate of attrition hugely and saved hundreds of lives – not to mention hundreds of planes. No wonder it was quickly adopted by every nation that had aircraft carriers and no wonder the United States awarded him the Legion of Merit shortly afterwards.

There were other inventions, too. Many were of the '*Why on earth didn't I think of that?*' variety such as the box junction. He sent the idea to the old Ministry of Transport; lo and behold, a few years later they appeared on our roads but he received neither payment nor acknowledgment. I remember once trying to work out with him how much he would have earned if he had only one-hundredth of one penny for each car that crossed a box junction. He would have made Bill Gates look like a church mouse by comparison.

In the 1970s he invented the Newbury Manflyer, a human-powered aircraft made largely of balsa wood and powered by two men frantically pedalling bicycles. In those days, when the computing power we now have in a small laptop had to be

housed in vast rooms like aircraft hangars, he 'borrowed' the huge computer at Farnborough and worked through the night on his calculations. The plane worked well; it flew, though not very far and finally it crashed. The Americans won the prize for crossing the channel but the BBC made a moving film about the Manflyer and if you ever get to watch it you'll see family and friends eagerly crawling under and over the plane as they helped to build it.

Nicholas was always working on something. I remember him visiting us while we lived in Washington and he was employed by Boeing. He played with our baby daughter while working on a device that would squeeze the air out of two-litre plastic bottles, keeping tonic water fizzy and saving, oh I don't know, pennies a day. He gave up when the thing had reached a size only slightly smaller than a wardrobe. His mechanised corkscrew didn't work either – or rather, it would have done if it hadn't weighed roughly twice as much as the bottle of wine it was supposed to open!

He never stopped inventing. Even in the year before he died he was working on a plane with a wingspan of three kilometres. It was to be a hurricane-buster, dropping a lid on embryo hurricanes as they formed in the ocean. An acquaintance of his in the Met Office told him that it wouldn't work so, quite undaunted, he started to convert it into a forest fire buster.

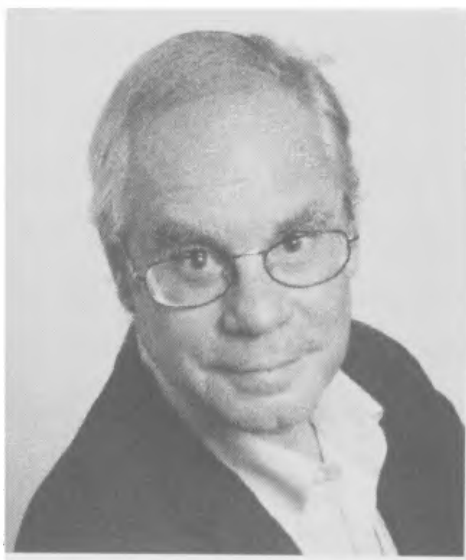
Those of us privileged to know Nicholas remember him not just as an inventor but as a warm, charming man who loved his life: his long walks, good conversation – often combative – a glass of wine with his dinner and port or Madeira afterwards; his lovely home and most of all Molly, his beloved wife of nearly 40 years, who provided such a wonderful setting for his life and his work. Their house was also a second home for so many of his now extended family, especially his step-children

and their seven children. He was a marvellous step-father and step-grandfather and in these days of extended families, I cannot think of a finer role model.

Nicholas never read a novel in his life – *‘waste of time,’* he would say, *‘none of it actually happened.’* But he was fascinated by the factual.

Tact was not, perhaps, his middle name. In America, he was shown around the house of our next door neighbour who was very proud of his modern art collection. *‘I’m afraid I don’t like these,’* Nicholas told him. *‘They don’t look like anything. I prefer photographs.’* But he said it with that engaging, cheeky grin which made everyone forgive him everything.

It was a privilege to know such a man; a privilege no-one who knew him will ever forget. And if I close my eyes I can still see that warm and mischievous grin.



Simon Hoggart, renowned journalist, Guardian columnist, TV and radio broadcaster, is the husband of Nicholas Goodhart’s stepdaughter, Alyson.

About the Authors

BARRIE WILLIAMS' 40-year journalistic career includes the Editorship of three major regional newspapers – the *Kent Evening Post*, the *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Western Morning News*. His acclaimed biography of legendary soccer star Tommy Lawton *Get In There!* (Vision Sports Publishing) was shortlisted in the British Sports Book Awards for 2011 and nominated for William Hill Sports Book of The Year.

His autobiography *Ink In The Blood* was published by Woodfield in 2007 and he also wrote *Somebody Had To Do It* (Authorhouse) – a biography of notorious print industry 'Union Buster' Christopher Pole-Carew.

RICHARD HARRIS spent 25 years on provincial newspapers, rising to become Assistant Editor of the *Nottingham Evening Post* and then Editor of the *Evening News & Star* and weekly *Cumberland News* in Carlisle before becoming a freelance journalist in Cumbria.

His autobiography *The Accidental Editor* – so named because he grew up wanting to go to sea and never intended to be a journalist in the first place – is published by Authorhouse and is available at www.theaccidentaleditor.com

Nicholas Goodhart was indeed an exceptional man and in this enjoyable biography Barrie Williams and Richard Harris record his many achievements as a sailor, aviator, inventor and record-breaker.

Nicholas had an illustrious career in the Royal Navy, joining in 1933 as a trainee cadet at the age of 13 and retiring 40 years later as a Rear Admiral. In the intervening years, after undergoing pilot training during World War 2, he proved himself to be a first-class aviator who, as a test pilot, flew a wide variety of postwar aircraft types to assess their suitability for the Navy. He also invented the mirror-deck landing system for aircraft carriers, which was adopted by navies worldwide and saved the lives of many naval pilots by enabling safer landings at sea.

Nicholas also became a world-class glider pilot, taking part in and winning international competitions and setting records, one of which – the height record for a British pilot of 37,050 feet, which he set in 1955 – remained unbroken for 40 years.

In retirement he continued his inventing, turning his attention to man-powered flight and much else. He was appointed Master of the Worshipful Company of Grocers, was an influential Lloyds 'name' and contributed to the development of the Lindridge Estate, where he and his devoted wife Molly shared their last home together.

All this and more is described in detail in this commendable account of a truly remarkable life.

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