



[Home](#) | [Buy Now!](#)

[Contents](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#)

Up Ships! Curly's Airships Launched on October 5th 2000

At mid-day on Thursday 5 October 2000, on a cliff top near Hastings, Sussex, in clear bright sunshine and a stiff breeze, the seventieth anniversary of the R.101 airship disaster was marked in a ceremony by some of the creators of Curly's Airships including Judge Smith, John Ellis, Ian Fordham and Nick Lucas supported by ground crew and an audience of invited guests and the press. The event also marked the official launch of the Curly's Airships CD set and the new web site.



Press and invited guests gather for the launch at Cliff End, overlooking Haddock Gap, through which the R.101 passed, crossing the south coast of England on her maiden voyage.

The cliff top location, overlooking the village of Fairlight marks the exact point at which the R.101 crossed the English coast on its maiden voyage to India, the voyage that was to end only a few hours later when the stricken craft crash landed on a hillside at Beauvais, Northern France and was destroyed by fire, killing all but six of the fifty-four men on board.



Remembering the R.101 Disaster

Judge, wearing the full period uniform of an officer of the Imperial Airship Service, made a short speech about the anniversary and the bravery of the men involved, many of whom had serious misgivings about the likely success of the flight. A minute's silence was observed in memory of those killed in the disaster.

With the formalities over, the festivities began. Two model airships, 1.2m (4ft) long and dubbed r.100 and r.101, each bearing the web-site address emblazoned along the hull, were duly

christened with champagne, and toasted by the assembled throng. Each airship carried a voucher for a free copy of Curly's Airships in the clear plastic gondola, slung below the silver hull.



r.101 and r.100 being readied for launch. In another of those odd co-incidences, the ground crew discovered that while r.100 maintained gas pressure throughout the proceedings, r.101 was found to be losing gas at it's mooring and all spare ballast had to be ditched just before launch.

To the accompaniment of an appropriate track from the audio CD, the ground crew readied the two craft for launch, trimming the ballast and checking the payloads. At the command "Let Go" the ground crew released the mooring lines and the two ships rose majestically into the air and were carried out to sea on the breeze in the direction of France.



Up Ships!

As well as being most appropriate, this southerly flight was unusual, as the prevailing winds on this part of the South Coast normally blow in from the sea.



The two model airships, r.100 and r.101 (top and middle-right in the picture) head out to sea towards France.

Biscuits in the shape of the R.101, iced in silver, were passed around with the champagne, while interviews with the performers took place before we repaired to The Cove at Fairlight for an excellent pub lunch.

777 feet



Refreshments!

Hastings & St Leonards Observer, Friday October 13 2000

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Doomed airship inspires rocker's flight of fancy



▲ Judge Smith as Curly McLeod

FAIRLIGHT'S place in aviation history helped earn it an unlikely place in rock music history last week.

Haddock Cup at Fairlight was the last point on British soil the R101 airship flew over on its maiden flight, which ended in tragedy when it crashed in France, killing 48 people.

So what better place to launch a rock album about the disaster, 70 years to the day after the crash happened?

Curly's Airships is the brainchild of Judge Smith, a founder member of cult '60s and '70s band Van De Graaf Generator, who lives in Poole.

The 26-track, two-hour-20-minute album features 18 performers and was seven years in the making. It tells the tale of fictional airship captain Curly McLeod and his part in the tragedy.

Musicians, actors and the media gathered on the cliffs at Fairlight last Thursday for the album launch. A minute's silence was observed in memory of the 48 who lost their lives, and two model airships were launched, flying out over the sea.

The maiden voyage of the 770ft

by
JAMES CLARKE

long and 150ft tall airship was due to take it to India via Egypt. At 9.38pm on the night of October 4 1930 the vessel passed low over Fairlight, fighting heavy wind and rain, already leaking air and with one failed engine.

Hours later it crashed into a hillside near Beauvais and exploded, killing 48 of the 54 people on board, including Lord Thomson, minister for air.

So why has Judge Smith made an album about the R101?

He explained: "I love airships.

They are the most surreal form of transport ever invented. They remind me of people's dreams and aspirations. Our dreams are big and beautiful and they take us up and out of the everyday world into the sky and, like dreams, airships are expensive, impractical, fragile and sometimes dangerous. It's a bit of a metaphor."

Among artists featured on Curly's



▲ The R101 before its first - and last - voyage. A surreal form of transport, says rock musician Judge Smith

Airships are Arthur Brown, the man behind the Crazy World of Arthur Brown, John Ellis, ex-guitarist with The Stranglers, Peter Gabriel, and three of Judge's former Van De Graaf colleagues.

The album has been produced independently with no major funding other

than a small National Lottery Arts Council grant. It will be on sale from the end of October, priced £19.95. While it will appear in shops, the best place to order it from at the moment - and read about the project - is on the website www.curlyairships.com

The Launch as reported in the local press

[Navigation](#) - [Specifications](#) - [Ship's Manifest](#) - [Meet The Captain](#) - [Flight Plan](#)
[Joyrides](#) - [Flight Debriefings](#) - [Crew's Quarters](#) - [Curly's Snapshots](#)
[Chart Room](#) - [Passenger List](#) - [Ship's Log](#) - [Purser's Office](#)

[Home](#) | [Top](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#)