

The Rooley Moor Oxford/Anson

by David Stansfield with help from Russell Brown

This article came to fruition following an e-mail from Russell Brown of Lancashire Aircraft Investigation Team, forwarded by Peter Moran. Russell had been in contact with someone who had been based at RAF Kirkham and amongst other things the gentleman recalled a visit that crashed near Cowpe on the moors above Bacup, and at the same time liberating some items. LAIT were trying to identify the aircraft involved, believed to be an Anson, this was where I came in to the equation.

This story originates for me in the 1970's when I was teaching at a Primary School in Bacup. Talking to a parent during a parents evening, local crash sites were being discussed, one has to get ones priorities correct! He recalled an aircraft that I was unaware of that he believed had crashed 1942/43. He knew the aircraft was a trainer, possibly a Tiger Moth, as he had visited the site after the airframe had been removed and collected some pieces of fabric coloured yellow and dark green. Small pieces such as joint assemblies were also present at the site.

He gave me written details as how to locate the site, even at this point in time some thirty years since the aircraft crashed. The directions were good and eventually I found a small bare patch of peat I took to be the impact point, with small pieces of wood lying around. At the time I was developing an extensive log of crashed aircraft in the North of England, but I had nothing for this location, and with no positive aircraft type to go with, the task proved then to be impossible.

In September, 1977, I placed details of my search in the local newspaper, The Rossendale Free Press, and shortly received a letter from a Mr Edward Heap, formerly of Rossendale and then residing in Canada. He went onto describe the crash site as he remembered it, as he had made several visits to the spot.

He recalled that there was no fire and in the belly landing the aircraft had made both engines had been torn off. (Tiger Moth theory gone!) The engines lay approximately twenty yards from the fuselage and were radials. He said the aircraft was either an Airspeed Oxford or an Avro Anson. Later the RAF cleared up the site but not before he and several of his friends had 'borrowed' items from the instrument panel. Edward then went on to give details of the

crash site of DH103 Hornet F.1, PX274, of 64Sqn which had crashed close by in Stacksteads in 1947.

We had now narrowed the aircrafts identity to two types and the research started again. Eventually after lots of searching I found an Oxford that was identified as crashing on moors near Rochdale. After I obtained a copy of the Form 1180, accident card, I was pleased to find that this was indeed the aircraft in question. The aircraft was Airspeed Oxford II, serial P1920, which had crashed at 04.40hrson the night of 9th February, 1942. The aircraft was on the charge of No.6 Flying Training School based at Little Rissington. The aircraft was on some type of night navigational exercise when the pilot, Cpl Wicks, with a solo total of just 69 hours, became lost in bad weather. According to locals a snowstorm was raging. Unsure of his location he attempted a forced landing, which in the dark conditions seemed reasonably successful as he and the other occupant of the aircraft survived with injuries.

This particular aircraft had had a busy career after being built by Airspeed in 1939. In its early days it had served at Farnborough with the Royal Aircraft Establishment, taking part in air flow tests.

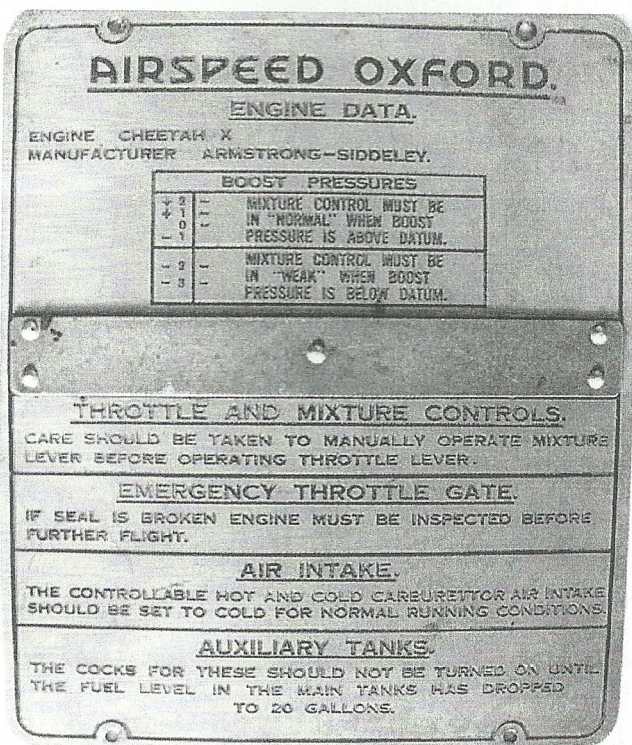
Shortly after this I was contacted by another person who said he had a plate from the cockpit of the aircraft that crashed at Stacksteads, and would I like it? Of course you never say no! The plate duly arrived and the photograph on the following plate shows that it was liberated from the Oxford cockpit not the Hornets. Unfortunately over the years I have misplaced the letter of the person who donated the item. Possibly the only piece of P1920 in existence!

Russell forwarded details from his contact who had also visited the site whilst all the remains were in situ. The aircraft crashed before Ron Blezzard joined up and whilst he was living at Waterfoot only a couple of miles from where the aircraft crashed. He recalls the aircraft crashing one night in a snow storm, local rumour had it that the pilot was Polish and he managed to make his way off the moor to a local farm. The crash site was eventually located by officials re-tracing the pilot's footsteps in the snow. As news of the crash reached locals, several enterprising youngsters, including Ron, made plans to visit the site. Off they went equipped with a hammer, pliers, screwdriver, etc. It didn't take long to locate the aircraft and no guard had been posted,

presumably the authorities thought that no one in their right mind would wander around in those dreadful conditions. Ron and his friend eventually reached the Oxford, Ron went into the cockpit whilst his friend Tom decided he was going to liberate the tail wheel. As Ron set about removing the instrument panel he heard a knock on the canopy, it was his mate Tom, blue with cold and minus the tail wheel, he joined Ron in the relative warmth of the cockpit. The panel was eventually liberated and the pair headed back to civilisation. As they headed back they saw a searchlight battery on the edge of the moor, the panel was quickly tucked under their coats and they hurried past without being seen, albeit 'looking like a pregnant woman', with the panel tucked under their coats!

Many years later, after the war, they re-visited the site, nothing remained that was recognisable, not even a furrow from the wheels up landing.

The instrument panel, well that also faded into history! No doubt finding its way into a local refuse bin!



Many thanks to Russell at LAIT for the help and inspiration to produce this short article.