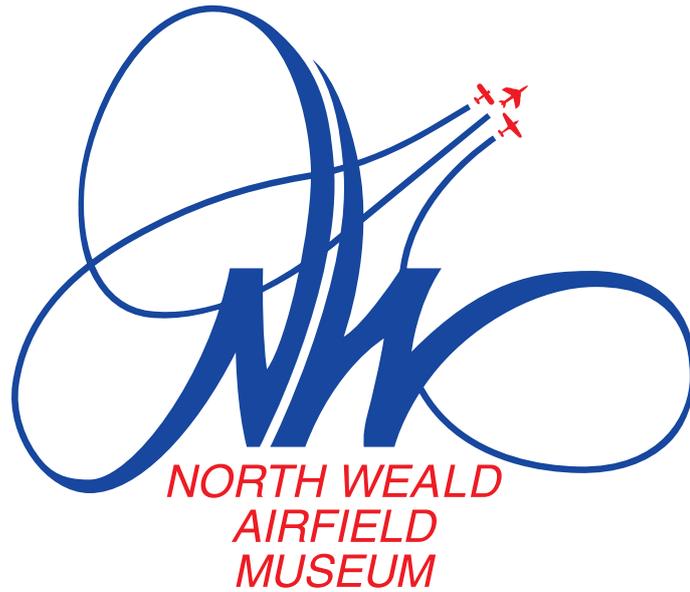


WEST ESSEX AVIATION



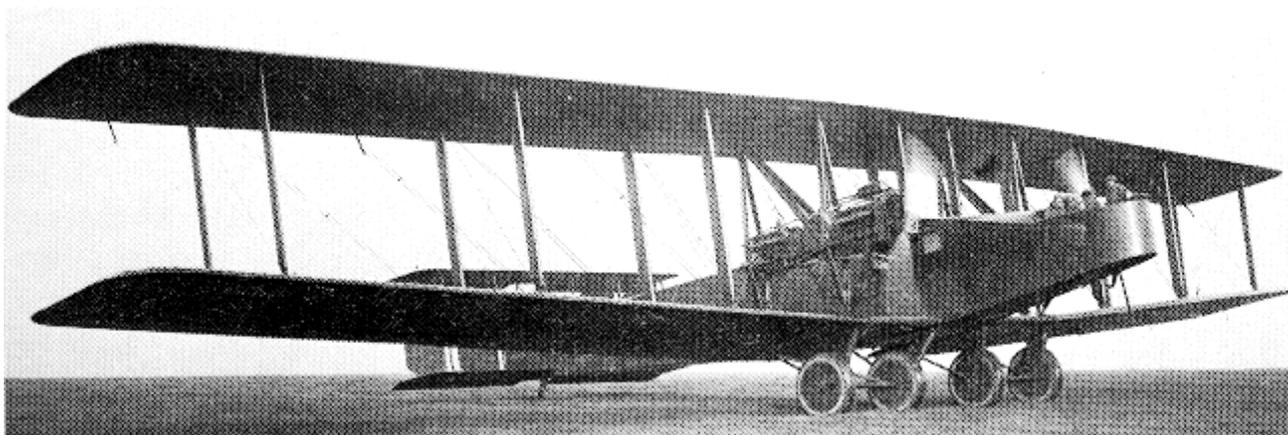
CRASHES & MISHAPS

2

BETWEEN THE WARS 1919-



Battered and mauled by the enemy and the weather during the Great War years, the flimsy, unreliable, aircraft grew in stature and represented a far more robust face to the years of peace. Much of early activity was based upon the myriad of war surplus types the military divested themselves of in the post-war downsizing. That fact that a tiny proportion of these flimsy Great War aeroplanes were still to be flying many seventy years later speaks highly of their potential longevity and the numbers that undoubtedly fell by the wayside. Only in time were new types to appear.



January 1919

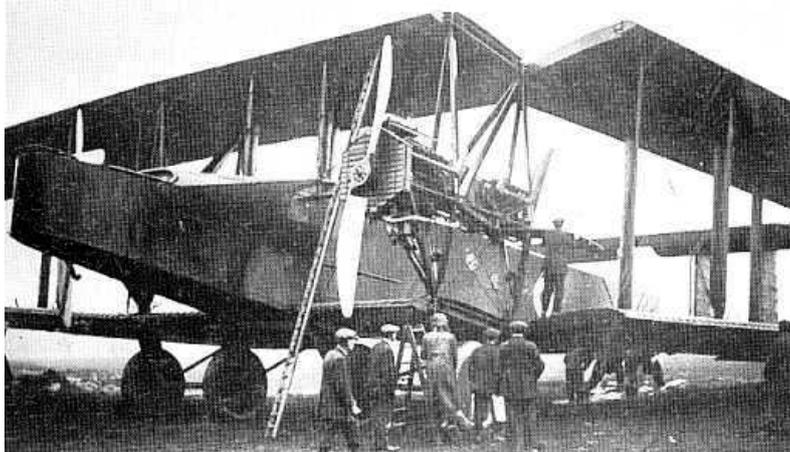
One of the prototypes of the massive Handley Page V/1500 strategic bomber, F7136, made a forced landing on the outskirts of Waltham Abbey early in 1919. On Friday January 10 the 126 foot wingspan bomber was flying over Essex in foggy conditions when it suffered engine trouble, air locks in the fuel line, and was obliged to put down in a field close to the former AA gun site at Thompson's Wood, Sewardstone. In landing it suffered no serious damage.

This aircraft was already well known, if not famous, for taking up into the skies the then unprecedented number of 40 persons, 6,022 lbs., whilst undertaking load carrying trials from the manufacturers Cricklewood factory. That effort had taken place only a few days earlier in December 1918. Only 60 of these large Berlin bombers was completed. The RAF saw no requirement for them in the new peace and did not undertake to strenuously preserve any that came to grief.

The field chosen was one then owned by a local farmer, George Tuck. The land-owner quickly arranged for the hat to be passed around the large crowds drawn from the town to see the giant aeroplane. As a result a considerable sum was donated to the burgeoning building fund for the proposed Waltham Abbey War Memorial Hospital. There was plenty of time to extract the best possible revenue from the event as the Handley Page was on the ground for almost a week.

In spite of the soft ground, the damage to F7136 was not too great and it was deemed that it was worth making airworthy again in order to allow it to fly out of its temporary home. The alternative would have been to dismantle it and use a number of lorries and carts to move the many unwieldy sections back to Cricklewood.

Finally, on Thursday January 16 an attempt was made to fly it out. Probably due to the retarding effect of the soft ground, the massive bomber failed to take-off and crashed into the hedge lining the field. The crew of five were reported to have been "thrown out" in the crash. Captain Paton and Private Ede were sufficiently injured to be taken off to the temporary wartime hospital in Waltham Abbey Town Hall. For their injuries to be attended to it seems quite likely that this pair were the last inmates to arrive in the hospital. After treating thousands of wounded from the war years, it closed its doors the following month. With the bomber now wrecked there was no alternative but to cart the wreckage away.



August 27, 1923

A de Havilland DH6 bi-plane [construction number 649, with no traced military history] registered as G-EAWD on June 21, 1922 crashed at Stanford Rivers a little over a year later. The aircraft was flying from Stag Lane, Edgware, Middlesex with the de Havilland School of Flying. On its last sortie it was being flown by a Dutch pupil undergoing his 'A' Licence tests. He lost his bearings and wrecked the aircraft making a precautionary landing.

This airframe possessed some minor historical connections in that it was at one time the personal mount of Geoffrey de Havilland. It featured a wing with reduced, non-standard, camber and had been unsuccessfully used for racing in the Croydon Handicap Race of September 17, 1921.

There are reports that a DH6OX Moth G-EBVK was involved in an accident at Nazeing on October 13, 1929. There are no further details and as the aircraft was not written off (at Broxbourne) until 1937 this may well be a very minor occurrence.



The arrival of the Armstrong Whitworth Siskin into squadron service with the units at North Weald and Hornchurch from the late 1920s led to a large number of mainly minor incidents taking place at both airfields.

April 17, 1930

A 111 Squadron Armstrong Whitworth Siskin, J8861, caught fire in the air when operating near Hornchurch and crashed on April 17.

July 17, 1930

Wing Commander B E Smythes DFC, the Station Commander North Weald died in Epping Cottage Hospital of multiple burns sustained when de Havilland DH60M Moth K1209 crashed on this date.

The aircraft was one of thirty Moth light aircraft delivered to the RAF in April and May 1930, this particular machine being on issue to 29 squadron as an addition to its Siskin IIIA fighter aircraft.

Over two days in March 1931 four aircraft were damaged at Hornchurch. On March 30, a 111 Squadron Bristol Bulldog, K1633, being flown

by a pilot only shown as "O'Reilly" ran into a parked 23 Squadron Gloster Gamecock, J8084. The four year old Gamecock may have been written off at this point, but it is unclear. The next day another 111 Squadron Bulldog, K1613, flown by Pilot Officer G F W Heycock suffered a similar mishap. This latter incident was of such little consequence that the details of the recipient aircraft were not recorded.

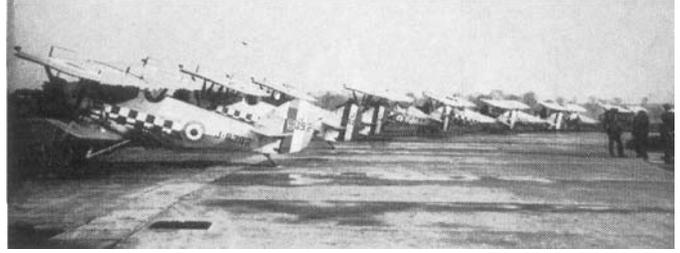


November 25, 1931

An Armstrong Whitworth Siskin IIIA, J8646, which first flew in November 1927 passed to 29 Squadron after service with 111 Squadron and the manufacturers. This aircraft crashed at Upminster, Essex on November 25, 1931.

December 1, 1931

Armstrong Whitworth Siskin J7169 which joined 56 Squadron in late May 1931 was obliged to undertake a forced landing in December that year. The landing was attempted at Harlow Park, resulting in the machine being written off.

**December 13, 1931.**

A Cirrus engine de Havilland DH60 Moth (c/n 272) which had been registered as G-EBOT on August 7, 1926 was written off in a crash at Nazeing in 1931.

May 10, 1932

Shortly after arriving for service with 29 squadron at North Weald Armstrong Whitworth Siskin IIIA J8651 taxied into another of the same ilk, J9918, resulting in both aircraft being written off.

January 4, 1933.

Not all of the well-documented aerial mishaps contain the fullest of information as is illustrated by the crash of a Bristol Bulldog fighter early in 1933.

This particular single seat bi-plane aircraft, attached to 111 squadron then flying from Hornchurch airfield, crashed near Ongar. It is known that the pilot, Flying Officer John Laurence Armstrong, a New Zealander, died in the crash when the aircraft came down at Blackmoor, Norton Heath, about two miles east of Ongar. Although many have attempted to ascertain the identity of the individual aircraft (in the 'J' or 'K' series), to date all have failed.

At an inquest into the fatal crash held on Thursday January 5, Flt Lt D L Thompson and Squadron leader O'Neil stated that the Bulldog had only been delivered to Hornchurch from Northolt the day before and was under test with the squadron. Under test the new Bulldog had been found to be a pleasant machine and in a sound condition.

Charles Robert Weedon, a motor mechanic at Waller's Garage and a resident at Ongar Police Station (and therefore presumably a policeman's son), was a witness to the fatal crash. He said that he had seen the machine loop and that as it came out of cloud three 'bits' appeared to detach themselves from the area of the tail prior to the crash. Sidney Epps, another witness, stated that the machine appeared to be struck by a flash somewhere in the middle, followed by a cloud of thick black smoke. He had not seen any parts detach, but it was in an upside down position as it crashed.

Part of the mystery of the detaching parts appears to have been cleared up by the evidence given by PC Tupman, this witness stated that a part of the wing was found a quarter of a mile from the main wreckage. Death had been instantaneous, the aircraft having buried itself and the unfortunate pilot something like 3-4 feet upon impact.

Based upon the non-technical aspects of the accident the coroner's jury returned a verdict of "Death by misadventure".

April 20, 1933

Another Bristol Bulldog came to grief on some date prior to April 20, Flying Officer Hobson of 29 Squadron based at North Weald escaped serious injury when he folded K2200 in half during a crash landing near his home airfield. The fuselage and wings forward of the cockpit area remained largely intact, but the rear fuselage and tail area was reversed and ended up upside-down and beneath the main wreckage.

Almost totally wrecked in the impact, the aircraft was struck off RAF charge on the same day.



May 22, 1933

One of the more famous types involved in the air battles of the Great War was the Avro 504K bi-plane, large numbers of which appeared on the civil register after the hostilities. On April 26 1933 an Avro, with no discernible military link was registered to C B (Brian) Field under the marks G-ACAU. This was the first of three Field had constructed from parts he had acquired from Kent Air Services. Less than a month later the same machine was wrecked in an accident on Monday May 22, 1933 at Epping. It was then in the hands of its new owner Mr E W Cox. Another Avro with the next marks in sequence (G-ACAV) was registered to Field only five days later (May 27), this aircraft was more fortunate, eventually being withdrawn from use in March 1937.

November 15, 1933

An almost new Miles M2 Hawk, G-ACHZ, ended up being guarded by a Waltham Abbey police constable, Frederick Barrick, in a field of growing kale in Upshire when a flight was cut short on Wednesday November 15, 1933. The Hawk struck a tree situated in hedgerow between two fields situated about one mile to the south of what is now Bury Farm in Cophthall Green, whilst undertaking a forced landing. At the time, Bury Farm was a number of farm workers dwellings known as Blue Row Cottages. Although the undercarriage, port wing and propeller were all badly damaged in the encounter with terra-firma, the doctor pilot and his passenger were able to walk away from the Hawk unscathed. After repair this aircraft spent most of its remaining life based at Bekesbourne in Kent. It met its end in another crash there on June 25, 1939.

**March 24, 1934**

First registered in 1926 (May 5), de Havilland DH6OX Moth G-EBWT (c/n 590) had almost eight years of use behind it when it was written off in a crash at Nazeing on a Saturday in 1934. The Herts & Essex owned aircraft was being flown from Broxbourne by Mr E Dymond with a passenger identified as Mr. N G Bartholemew. The Moth took off from the field and, apparently in trying to clear the club house, stalled from 50 feet into a field near Nazeing. This location also given as "on the opposite side of Old Nazeing Road".

August 28, 1934

The "Daily Mirror" issue dated August 29, 1934 carried the illustrated story of an air crash where an aircraft had ended up in the back garden of a house in Nazeing Road, Broxbourne after a failed take off and consequent collision with a telegraph pole.

The owner of the aircraft, E W Cox of Forest View Road, Walthamstow, had been piloting himself and two passengers from Broxbourne airfield, but failed to gain height, hit the pole and slewed around into the garden.

The story failed to identify the aircraft involved other than that it was an aircraft owned by the pilot and kept by the Herts & Essex aero club at nearby Broxbourne, but the accompanying illustration clearly showed the crumpled mass of a high wing or bi-plane to possess a registration which appeared to be G-A?VA, suggesting that it was one of two de Havilland types registered G-AAVA or G-ABVA, the former a three seat DHSOA Puss Moth is more likely than the latter, a two seat 6OG Gipsy Moth. Although the aircraft appeared to be a write-off from the photograph neither of these machines was to meet its end on this date.

February 21, 1935

On the morning of Thursday February 21, 1935, Captain John Kirton an Abridge based Hillman pilot took off from Stapleford to Paris with two beautiful female American passengers, expensively clad in fur coats, having paid for all six seats on the scheduled 10am flight. Kirton was already



vaguely acquainted with the pair of society girls, having flown them from Le Bourget to Abridge two days earlier with a number of other passengers.

The two girls and their single item of baggage had been alone when Picked up by the airline motor coach at Kings Cross for transportation to the Essex Airport, although Hillman's had expected a party of their friends to accompany them. To trace the missing members of the flight party, the coach driver had assisted one of the girls to make a telephone call to a Romford number, but after apparently making telephone enquiries from the airport, the girls declared that they had been let down and that they were to fly to Paris alone. The younger of the two girls handed over four £5 notes and a £1 note to the agent at Stapleford and the scheduled morning flight to Paris became, in effect, a charter flight for the heavy smoking young Americans.

Settling themselves into the rear seats of the six seat de Havilland DH84 Dragon airliner, G-ACEV, John Kirton started up the twin engines and taxied out onto the grass of the aerodrome. Shortly after the aircraft left the ground Kirton concurred with a request from one of the passengers that he close the door between the cockpit and the main, six seat, cabin because of the draught.

Kirton, a greatly experienced pilot with commercial pilots and instructors licences, as well as the holder of one of only eight first class navigators certificates then issued, turned the blue and white Hillman airliner to fly south. The flight was not smooth and some minor buffeting was apparent as the airliner headed towards Kent.

Limited in capacity, the small airliners of the day could not afford either to allocate space to, or meet the cost of, a cabin attendant. Although unable to leave his seat, the pilot was duty bound to look after the welfare of his passengers. As the Dragon crossed the English Channel coast forty-five minutes later, Kirton opened the door again to check that his passengers were comfortable. He was shocked to find that the seats previously occupied by the two pretty young girls were quite empty. Ominously, the passenger entry door in the side of the cabin was insecure, being held in place only by the pressure of the slipstream. Unable to leave his seat to investigate, as the type did not feature any form of automatic pilot, after alerting Croydon by radio he turned the Dragon around and returned to Essex Airport.

On landing back at Stapleford, it was no surprise for Kirton to learn that news of his passengers disappearance from within the cabin had already come to the notice of the authorities. An object, not unlike a paper bag, had been seen to fall from the clouds to the ground as an unseen aeroplane flew overhead by two men working on the gas supply of a new bungalow in Park Drive, Upminster. The gas fitters, George Watling and Tom Collins, rushed to the site beside Rushmere Avenue, Upminster, to find that there were two bodies of young women lying face down and holding each other. The police were called and locally based PC Strange was first to help the shocked workmen. The bodies were taken to the local mortuary.



At Stapleford the cabin of the aircraft was sealed to await the arrival of more police to investigate how the pair fell to their deaths. All that remained in the passenger cabin of the airliner were a single suitcase, two pairs of gloves, two handbags, sealed letters, some cigarettes. A flask drained of whisky and, poignantly, a girl's shoe which had apparently become dislodged upon leaving. Fortunately for Kirton, as the only person in the Dragon with the two girls, it was soon apparent from the contents of the two sealed letters that the deaths were the result of a successful suicide bid.

It soon emerged that the two, San Francisco born, Americans were Jane du Bois, aged 20, and Elizabeth di Bois, 23, the daughters and sole children of the 55 year old American Consul-General in Naples, Italy, Coert du Bois, Councillor of the United States Consulate-General in London. As young, vivacious society girls, the pair were often to be seen travelling around seeking out entertaining company among the better off classes in a Europe barely out of a deep and damaging economic slump.

Jane du Bois suffered from chronic asthma, a condition that held out little chance of recovery. Seemingly bored by their lifestyle, the devoted sisters were reportedly regular heavy drinkers and liable to fits of depression, both having recently been found sobbing bitterly over an unknown problem in their hotel room.

The story was sensationalised by the British press, most of the tabloids carrying headlines on the story for three days. Quite early editions suggested that a recent RAF air crash might have some bearing upon the state of mind of the pair. The du Bois sisters were romantically linked with Flying Officer John A C "Charles" Forbes and Flight lieutenant Henry L Beatty, crew members of a flying boat detained for some time in Naples by mechanical problems. The aircraft was one of four development standard Short Singapore 111 four engine bi-plane flying boats delivered to the RAF for operational training and trials with individual squadrons in 1934, almost a year ahead of a main production batch. This aircraft, serial K3595, was serving with 210 Squadron when it crashed into a mountain at San Fillipo near Messina, Sicily, on Friday February 15, 1935 killing Forbes and Beatty along with seven others in the crew, less than a week prior to the Hillman incident.

March 3, 1936

After only twelve months with the type, 56 squadron withdrew the last of its Siskin fighters in December 1930, having already started the task of re-equipping with the Bristol Bulldog in April 1930. Six years later, although due to be replaced by the radial engine Gloster Gauntlet in the September, the Bulldog was still in service.

The vast majority of this time the squadron remained at Hornchurch, it was on a flight returning there that resulted in Bulldog K2960 crashing in March 1936.

March 30, 1936

A resident of Hawkinge since 1923, 25 squadron had operated the Hawker Fury 1 since early in 1932 and were due to replace them with the Fury 11 in November 1936. One of the Fury IIs, K2059, stalled on the approach to North Weald and crashed on March 1936.

April 23, 1936

A Bristol Bulldog of 32 squadron, then stationed at Biggin Hill, was involved in a crash landing at North Weald on April 23. The Bulldog, K2155, was written off in the incident,

July 1, 1936

During a formation take off from Hornchurch two 54 Squadron Bristol Bulldog IIA fighters collided on the ground. K2951 flown by Pilot Officer Milward suffered an engine choking on take off and lost impetus, this leading to the second aircraft, K1664, flown by Acting Sergeant S A Richens running into it from behind.

Neither aircraft suffered unduly from the unscheduled meeting, K2951 survived into 1938, although K1664 was written off in another crash later in 1936.

July 9, 1936

Another 54 squadron Bristol Bulldog, K1623, crashed on landing at Hornchurch,

November 16, 1936

A civil registered Tiger Moth, G-ADXC, was reported as wrecked at Parndon, near Harlow, on November 16, 1936.

May 25, 1937

de Havilland DH60 Moth (c/n 338), G-EBYH, registered on July 3, 1928, crashed and was written off in a landing at Theydon Bois on May 25, 1937. A different source gives the date of this aircraft's demise as January 25, 1937. This event should relate to:-

On Tuesday evening May 25, 1937 a stunting aircraft dived into fields between Loughton and Theydon Bois following structural failure. The two seat biplane aircraft was seen to spin, dive and enter a loop the loop, unfortunately as it entered another loop the struts broke, allowing half the wing to break clean off. The machine plunged into the ground and burst into flames. The location was given as a field adjoining a wood and the railway line between Theydon Bois and Chigwell Lane (now Debden) stations and about one mile from Theydon Bois Service Station.

Some confusion surrounded the location of the crash upon the raising of the alarm at Loughton Fire Station at 7.44pm. As a result the call was sent to Chigwell, which Brigade set off and ended up returning the compliment when they found that the crash was almost out of reach on the Loughton side of the land between the two areas. Loughton did not set off until 8.33pm.

The first person on scene was Leonard Magson from Theydon Park Road. He found that for ten minutes one of the occupants was still alive and groaning, but totally entangled in wires so that he could not be extricated, the aircraft was burning. Although firemen could not get their machines to the site, a number set off across the fields with hand extinguishers.

The two occupants of the aircraft were charred remains by the time it was possible to extricate them. The pilot was Pilot Officer Arthur Thomas Campling of 151 Squadron RAF North Weald and Mr. Peter Arison Scott a medical student, aged 23, from the London Hospital, Mile End Road, East London. Police, fire and ambulance crews, faced with a detour, and confusing messages prior to gaining access to the crash site, were only able to remove one of the bodies from the wreck prior to the arrival of specialist lifting gear.

July 6, 1937

The ten year old DH6OX G-EBVK apparently damaged in October 1929 was finally damaged beyond economical repair costs at Broxbourne (presumably the aerodrome) on this date.

July 8, 1937

In April 1936 151 squadron moved into North Weald equipped with the Gloster Gauntlet Mk II. The squadron was to keep this type until the introduction of the Hawker Hurricane early in 1940. Gauntlet K5351, crashed when taking off from North weald on July 8,

**September 30, 1937**

Another resident at North Weald at this period was 29 squadron. A pair of Hawker Demon two seat fighter aircraft belonging to 29 squadron suffered a fatal collision over North Weald airfield, the impact sending both aircraft crashing in the vicinity of Weald Hall Lane to the west of the airfield. A subsequent enquiry decided that the cause of the crash was a temporary blindness of the crew to their respective positions as they returned to land after a serving as 'targets' for the pilots of 56 squadron. It was believed that this was caused by the position of the top wing in the pilots arc of vision. Three men in the aircraft died. Sergeant 5617975A A C R Wood aged 25 and his observer, Aircraftman 518245 R. Pull, in K3769 and Aircraftman 532606 B T South who was observer to P/O L Maxwell-Muller aged 24 in the other machine.

The aircraft, K3769 and K3803, were machines from a batch of 44 delivered from the manufacturers between June and August 1934, having served with other RAF units prior to arrival at 29 squadron. They were both probably the later standard, gun turret equipped, version which 29 squadron re-equipped with in 1936 after service in the 1935-6 Abyssinian Crisis, although a mix of versions was operated. The Demon was in RAF service from 1933 to 1939, 29 squadron itself operating them from North Weald for a year between late 1936 and 1937.

North Weald hosted two single seat Gloster fighter aircraft in the 1930s, the Gauntlet and the Gladiator operated by 56 and 151 squadrons. Both types suffered a number of mishaps, largely confined to the airfield itself. In one instance, 17 squadron were attending the airfield to exchange their Gauntlet's for the Hawker Hurricane's of 56 squadron when one of the former aircraft was wrecked landing. It is believed that the hapless pilot was still allowed his swap !! The loss of that Gauntlet (K7822) was echoed in a differing manner by the wrecking of a Gladiator, K7993, of 56 Squadron on July 26, 1937 as it came into land.



April 28, 1937

A Gladiator, K7994, came to grief near the airfield following engine failure whilst in the control of Sergeant 564608 J W Elliott aged 23 years. The engine failure itself may have ended in a less catastrophic outcome for the aircraft except for the appearance, during the last moments of an enforced glide, of a house in front of the aircraft. In trying to avoid the house the wings became entangled in a tree. Although the aircraft was wrecked the pilot escaped reasonably intact – under the circumstances.

February 11, 1938

A fatality marred the collision of two Gladiator's of 65 squadron on this date as they flew in the vicinity of North Weald from their own field at Hornchurch.

Three pilots, Acting Flt Lt L C Bicknell flying the eight month old K7942, P/O P R Austin-Sparks in seven month old K8002 and P/O Boyd in another machine, were undertaking formation flying training when K8002 hit the formation leader from behind, it is thought due mainly to obscured vision caused by oil thrown up by the engine coating the windscreen. Bicknell, the senior pilot, managed to get out of his aircraft and parachute to safety. Twenty-one year old Austin-Sparks died in his aircraft. He had served 13 months in the RAF, three of them at Hornchurch.

The three aircraft had been flying in the vicinity of North Weald when they apparently came upon Acting P/O John Thompson flying in a locally based 151 Squadron machine and decided to "bounce" him with a series of mock attacks. Such manoeuvres near an airfield were in any case banned.

Bicknell, who had gained his pilots brevet in December 1934, was Courts Martial over the crash and death of Austin-Sparks, only a qualified flyer some seven months, and was reprimanded. He later flew in, and survived, the Battle of Britain. As a Squadron Leader he flew 23 squadron Bristol Blenheim's

August 7, 1938

Just over thirty different types of RAF aircraft were officially stationed at North Weald in its service period, many others arrived there in the hands of visitors. It was a visiting Fairey Battle that crashed at North Weald on August 7, 1938.

The Battle bomber, K7630, was attached to 88 squadron, then stationed at Boscombe Down, Wiltshire.

