



Air Crashes on St. Boniface Down

'HISTORY' is defined as the study of past events, regardless of when these events happened. Something that happened only a few years ago is just as relevant as something that is thousands of years old. This article features two fatal air crashes on St. Boniface Down, separated by fifteen years, but both with the common causes – low cloud, dense fog and pilot error.



The first accident occurred on Thursday, November 20th 1947, when an ex-RAF trainer and utility aircraft crashed on St. Boniface Down whilst en-route from Croydon to Jersey with a cargo of newspapers. Surplus to Air Ministry requirements after the war, the Avro Anson Mk.1, registered G-AIWW, was granted a Certificate of Airworthiness to fly civilian routes for its owners, British Air Transport Ltd., only five days previous to the accident. The Anson crashed into one of the RAF

wooden radar pylons and was a total loss, leaving three crew members dead. Wreckage was strewn over a large part of the hillside all the way down into Coombe Bottom, the heavier items, such as the engines and the landing gear, coming to rest against the red brick wall which formed part of the military firing range used by RAF personnel. A few parts from the crashed Anson were donated to our Museum a few years ago. An inquiry into the cause of the crash found that the aircraft was fifteen miles west of its intended course and was recorded as an 'error of navigation'.

Fifteen years later, on Sunday, May 6th 1962, a Douglas DC3 Dakota (G-AGZB), of Channel Airways, on a scheduled flight from Jersey to Portsmouth, with 15 passengers and 3 crew, crashed into the top of the downs in dense fog.



The plane hit the hill about thirty feet below the summit, catching fire on impact and smashing through the perimeter fence of the disused RAF compound. The wreckage ended up on the far side of the compound, killing all the crew and nine of the passengers - six adults and three infants. Wroxall farmworker, Edward (Ted) Price, who was in the nearby copse cutting bean sticks, rushed to the scene and pulled four people from the burning wreckage, two of whom sadly died in hospital. When he could do no more, he set off down the road to raise the alarm where he came across a group of amateur radio enthusiasts who called the emergency services. He received commendations for bravery for his actions.



The official report on this crash was poor airmanship in flying below a safe altitude in low visibility. In 2003, 41 years after the accident, a memorial plinth was erected in the car park adjacent to the scene of the crash, and dedicated in the presence of survivors, relatives, witnesses and rescuers (including Ted Price).