

LLANDOW – THE STORY OF AN AIRFIELD

by Philip J. Davies

Llandow is a small village situated in the Vale of Glamorgan which is rural lowland. RAF Llandow first opened as a temporary grass airfield for 614 County of Glamorgan Squadron (Auxiliary Air Force). The Squadron came into being on 1 June 1937, equipped with Hawker Hart, Hind and later Hector aircraft.

Construction of the (proper) airfield began in 1939. First to be built were the K type hangars, on a site known as "Glue Pot Road". This nick-name was given to that part of the site because it consisted of soft marshland and even to this day one side of the airfield is known as Glue Pot Road.

The first unit to use Llandow in 1941 was No 53 OTU with Spitfires, moving there from Heston on 1 July. The first to arrive were the WAAFs who arrived by train. Next came the ground crews along with engines and equipment. The CO of RAF Llandow was Wing Commander I R A Jones, friend of the First World War fighter ace Major Mick Mannock.

When No 53 OTU moved in, the field was still under construction, with contractors' plant all over the place. Within a month of moving into its new home, a lone Spitfire took off from Llandow. During the second week of June 1942, the pilot of a Spitfire attacked a small vessel off the Cherbourg Peninsula but was then chased by a small number of FW 190s. Banking round and turning on them he fired a quick burst into them. By scattering the enemy aircraft the pilot was able to reach the safety of cloud and made a safe landing back at Llandow, shaken but otherwise none the worse for his experience.

The only time the station was attacked was when a JU88 flew low over-head and dropped four land mines causing damage to one hangar and demolishing a hut on the main site injuring a sergeant and causing extensive damage within the airfield site.

Aircraft at Llandow (July 1941) included Spitfire Is, IIs and Vs, a Lysander target tug, Master I and III, two Harvards, a Miles Hawk Major on communication work, Blenheim IV, Whitley IV, Wellington IC and one Hind trainer. These aircraft were on charge with No 38 MU which had formed at Llandow on 1 April 1940 and had charge of most of the aircraft types sent there.

PHOTO TAKEN NEAR TO THE AIRFIELD CONTROL TOWER 1941



A Spitfire of No. 53 OTU at Llandow in 1941.

Photo: Philip J. Davies

During August 1942, Canadians were in residence and training on Spitfires. No 53 OTU vacated Llandow on 9 May 1943 leaving for Kirton-in-Lindsay.

The next RAF unit to arrive was No 3 Overseas Aircraft Preparation Unit which formed on the station. It was mainly responsible preparing aircraft for ferrying abroad (to the Middle East) including Wellingtons, Beaufighters, Warwicks and Ventura twin engine bombers. All aircraft for the Middle East were painted white. This unit moved to Dukeswell in August 1945.

No 38 MU dealt with over 1000 various aircraft for disposal from 1945 to 1958 including Lancasters, Wellingtons, Halifaxes, Spitfires, Mosquitos, Hamilcar gliders and one Airacobra. When the faithful Mosquitos were flown in they were towed over to the dump, stripped of all equipment and burned. Lancasters could be seen packed in outlying fields up to their stub axles in mud and were stored for between two and three years before being scrapped.

Lancaster languishing in the scrapping area by "D" site which is the hangar is just behind the Lancaster Bomber



Lancaster TW663 "OJ:X" of 207 squadron languishing in the scrap area at Llandow in 1951 being eventually scrapped in 1955.

Photo: Philip J. Davies

The next unit to form at Llandow was No 4 Civilian Anti Aircraft Co-Operation Unit (CAACU) operating Spitfire 16s, Beaufighter TT10s and Mosquitos. The unit was tasked with support of Army and Royal Navy units, usually acting as simulated targets or as target tugs for gunnery training.

An incident took place on 8 March 1954 concerning Mosquito TK609 which swung to port on take off from Llandow. This was corrected by throttle but a slight swing to starboard then started. After correction this was followed by a pronounced swing to port which took the Mosquito off the runway. As both throttles were closed and the brakes applied the aircraft slid on the soft ground causing a crabbing movement taking the aircraft to the runway intersection where the starboard undercarriage collapsed and firmly came to rest 100 yards further on, after ground looping. The pilot was unhurt.

I HAVE THE ORIGINAL PHOTOS TO THIS ACCIDENT

Another incident (but this time fatal) concerns Flt Lt E Whetter of No 4 CAACU who was flying a Vampire on 16 June 1954. During the course of an air test, the Vampire (VT820) did a victory roll over the airfield at 300 or 400 feet and at high speed. The port wing bent upwards followed by a complete breakaway of two thirds of the wing. The remainder of the wing struck the tail boom, which caused it to completely break up and fall away. The aircraft then went into a high speed roll to starboard, hit the ground and completely disintegrated killing the pilot. This tragic accident happened at 14.42 hrs. Mosquitos in the nearby hangars were damaged by falling wreckage coming through the hangar roof. The pilot's remains were cremated and his ashes scattered over the station from a Shackleton.

I ALSO HAVE THE ORIGINAL PHOTOS TO THIS TRAGIC ACCIDENT AS WELL

In 1954, a visit was made to Llandow by Princess Margaret to open a Sunshine Home (now an Hotel) for blind babies at Southerdown near Bridgend. Princess Margaret arrived by the Queen's Flight in a twin engine Viking, serial VL247.



Viking VL247 of the Queen's Flight conveying Princess Margaret in 1954.

Photo: Philip J. Davies

The station commander from 1952 to 1954 was Wing Commander G E Robinson. At this time No 614 County of Glamorgan Squadron was in residence equipped Vampires. The CO was the late Johnny Spiers and the Adjutant was Flt Lt Peter Lathom who has since retired as Air Marshal. Also based here from July 1949 and March 1957 was No 663 Squadron's A Flight operating Auster AOP 6s.

PICTURE TAKEN NEAR TO "D" SITE HANGARS

On Sunday 12 March 1950 disaster struck at Llandow involving a Tudor V airliner. The aircraft had left Llandow on the Friday with rugby fans to watch the rugby match between Wales and Ireland at Lansdowne Road, Dublin. The Tudor disintegrated near the airfield just yards away from runway 27, killing all 75 passengers on board. The Captain of the Tudor was D J Parson, and just before he made his approach he flew over the Lancaster dump at Llandow. Suddenly the sound of the engines died away and the aircraft pulled up level then shot up slowly at an angle of 45 degrees. At the top of its climb the aircraft stalled and it dropped 200 feet to earth missing a farm and a couple of young boys playing football. a farmer, David Jones of Coedeva Farm saw the accident.

At that time the airliner was the largest aircraft ever to leave Llandow airfield. The name of the Tudor was "The Star Girl" and a few years earlier it was used on the Berlin Air Lift. Air Vice Marshal "Pathfinder" Donald Bennett (Managing Director of Fairflight - the owners) said: "It's a simple case of the pilot's seat slipping back with acceleration and the pilot took the joystick back with him!" However the real cause of the Tudor V air crash was never fully explained and this explanation may be correct.

Like many airfields supporting Auxiliary squadrons Llandow was left devoid of aircraft after the disbandment of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force in March 1957 including both Nos 614 and 663 Squadrons. There was virtually no choice but to close the base down. Now - Runway 28 lies overgrown and the lonely electricity pole in a lonely field stands tall as a monument - a silent witness to what was then the worst air crash in aviation history. At the time Llandow was to become South Wales' new Municipal Airport, but this was not to be and Rhoose (now known as Cardiff/Wales Airport) serves as the airport for South Wales and parts of the west of England.

Llandow airfield is now the local trading estate and the airfield is still intact including seven L types, one J and one of the original two K types. One, owned by British Tissues Ltd and used for storing paper was burned to the ground on 27 June 1985. All that is left is the concrete base.

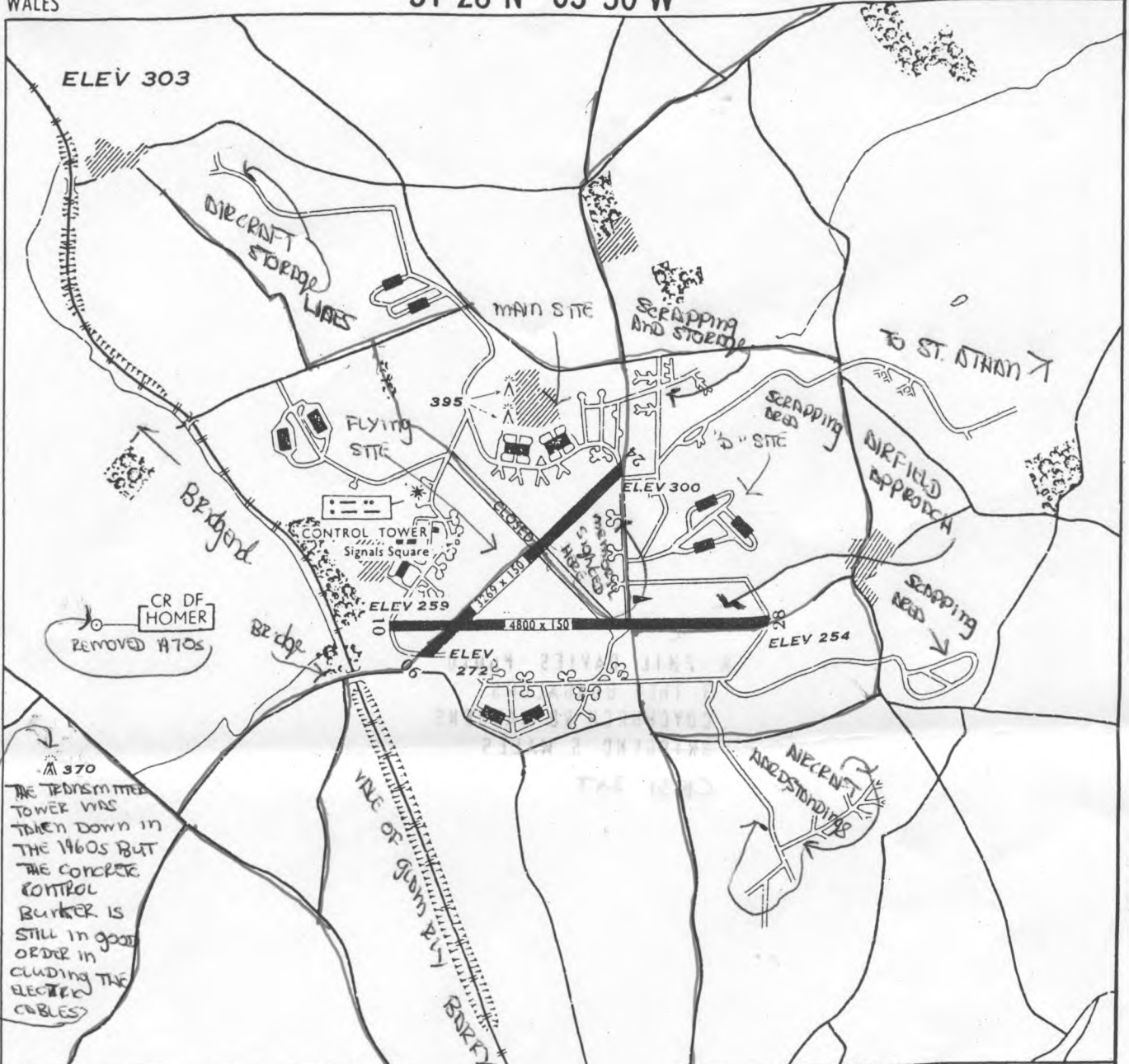
Since many aircraft were broken up at Llandow bits of aircraft are still being found and even today, visitors can still go around the airfield.



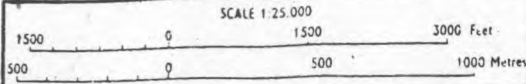
The control tower at Llandow, now used as offices, as seen in February 1982. Photo: Aldon P. Ferguson

SINCE THE ABOVE PHOTO WAS TAKEN THE CONTROL TOWER IS THE ESTATE OFFICE THE BOTTOM PART IS A CAFE AND THE TOWER IS PAINTED ALL WHITE (1994)

LLANDOWS TOWER WAS BUILT DURING 1940 OF BRICK TO AIR MINISTRY 518/40 PATTERN.



BEARINGS AND TRACKS ARE MAGNETIC
ELEVATIONS IN FEET AMSL 500
HEIGHTS IN FEET AGL (200)
RUNWAY DIMENSIONS IN FEET



IDENTIFICATION LW	
RADIO FACILITIES	
VHF Approach and Tower CR DF	
For callsigns, frequencies and latest information see Radio Facility Charts	

AERODROME LIGHTING
Runway 28/10 contact lighting Runway 10, 4 sodium lights on approach Identification beacon flashing L W
SPECIAL WARNINGS
Night flying in emergency only Variable circuits in force Air traffic in area Llandow/St Athan/Rhose is co-ordinated For special instructions see page "U.K. Aerodromes Special Instructions, Warnings etc" at the front of this book Danger areas within 25 n mi: - W 26 W 33 W 37 W 47 W 58 W 62 W 75 Maximum height: 35000 feet

Light recovered from Llandow and restored after 1964