

## **Destruction of WWII Airfield Perimeter Track at Stoney Cross**

**Between 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018, a contractor from Somerset carried out the destruction of the last remaining significant lengths of the Perimeter Track on the WWII airfield at Stoney Cross, which were freely open to the public. He had no knowledge of what he was destroying or its significance.**

**So far as can be ascertained, no local residents, historical or heritage organisations (including FONFA) were contacted prior to the work, which omissions have now been admitted by a New Forest National Park official.** The FONFA Trustees have since received several anguished complaints from our Members, variously describing it as "an appalling situation", "a blatant unbridled assault on our aviation heritage" and comparing it to "Parliamentarians demolishing Royalist castles during the English Civil War". One member has even described the action as **"Corporate Vandalism At Its Worst."**



**The work was undertaken following an unheralded, unpublicised and therefore effectively secret "deal" between Hampshire County Council and 'Natural England', with the cooperation of the Forestry Commission.**

The former is reportedly carrying out road widening work elsewhere in the New Forest and, on a 'quid pro quo' basis, they required the Perimeter Track sections to be torn up and 'returned to a natural state', as the area forms part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

There are two sections of WWII Perimeter Track which have been destroyed. One is just north of the entrance to the Ocknell Camp Site (pictured below) and the other is three quarters of a mile further north, near to the eastern end of the former WWII main runway. The damage to the 125 yard long southern site is almost total. The two areas are currently fenced off from Forest Road, which runs between the A31 and Fritham village, along the eastern edge of the airfield.

***Paradoxically, there is no fencing on the side away from the road, to prevent grazing Forest animals from injuring themselves among the hard core, brick, glass and metal fragments left behind.***



The concrete has been removed by order of the Forestry Commission, according to the contractor on site. He stated that there is no intention to remove the hoggin underlying the concrete, which is comprised of various materials, including brick rubble, historically recorded as being from bombed out houses in Southampton, in 1940, much of which was used in the construction of the airfield. According to the contractor, the intention of the Forestry Commission was to "return the area to its former (pre-1940) state". **However, without the total removal of this deep layer of underlying core material, which is foreign to the New Forest area, this aim cannot possibly be achieved, so the outcome will presumably be solely**

**superficial and cosmetic.** Presently, at the beginning of the summer visitor holiday season, the damaged areas are a severe blot on the landscape and a danger to grazing animals.

A statement issued by Lawrence Shaw, of the NFNP Archaeology Department, asserted that “Prior to the works taking place, an independent assessment of the remains was commissioned to assess the significance, importance and vulnerability of all remaining features associated with the airfield. Although these features represent a sizeable (sic) area of the surviving infrastructure of the airfield, their context as fragmented and damaged sections of the boundary road was (sic) not deemed to be of high significance compared to other surviving features.” He added that “There are no plans for any similar work to be carried out elsewhere on the former New Forest Airfields, at present.”

Who carried out the “independent assessment” and “deemed” the areas “not to be of high significance compared to other surviving features”, and by what criteria, was not revealed. **One has seriously to question the level of knowledge and competence of anyone making such a decision, without consulting local experts in aviation history and relevant heritage organisations.**

On further enquiry, Mr. Shaw explained further that the work was “approved by the New Forest Verderers and the Forestry Commission” as “habitat restoration” and that the two sections of concrete were deemed to be “in poor condition”, so were destroyed in preference to former Aircraft Dispersal Pans etc. elsewhere. **At present, the “habitat” is nowhere near being “restored”.**

We have asked that FONFA be consulted on any similar future plans, in the early stages of consideration.

The southern site at Stoney Cross, untouched for over 75 years, was fully accessible to the public by their vehicles (and therefore to disabled people or those with significant mobility difficulties). Private vehicles are currently prevented from accessing the Aircraft Dispersal Pans at the northern end of the former Stoney Cross airfield, by ditches and locked wooden barriers, and therefore anyone with mobility difficulties is effectively disbarred from accessing them. The Dispersal Pans at the southern end of the airfield are on land managed by the Ocknell Camp Site authorities and are similarly unavailable for unrestricted public access by private vehicles.

**We have so few sites in Britain where people can freely 'Stand On The Ground Where History Was Made', when compared with France, Belgium and the Netherlands, that preserving each and every one remaining is important.**

On balance, this act would appear to be Local Government sponsored destruction, agreed between unaccountable Quangos and officials, behind closed doors, without public consultation, involvement, reporting or accountability. Sadly, the damage is now done, to all but a small section, which has not yet been removed, due solely to there being a private car

parked on the concrete at one end of the southern site, during part of the work. I have respectfully asked Mr. Shaw to consider allowing this small piece of local aviation history, which is about twenty feet square, to be left 'as it is'.



**In addition to the irrecoverable damage done to these historical artefacts, the adverse effect on ground nesting birds during the nesting season at this time of year, the potential for injury to grazing Forest animals and the loss of public amenity all appear to have been completely ignored.**

In mitigation, it should be stated that FONFA has today been offered to be included by the NFNP in proposals for “developing new walking opportunities for disability groups around Second World War sites in the Forest”. The first two of these have been suggested at Beaulieu airfield and to the east of Stoney Cross, south of Long Beech. However, cursory examination of these suggestions suggests that, due to the steepness of the slopes to the east of Stoney Cross, this track is unlikely to be suitable for wheelchair users and those with limited mobility. Although FONFA will be following up these possibilities closely, they will be no substitute for the wanton destruction of unique archaeological remains, formerly fully accessible to disabled people and those with limited mobility, without let or hindrance.

**FONFA always seeks to preserve and protect our local aviation heritage. On this occasion, we were prevented from carrying out this duty by failures of consultation in the planning**

**process. Whether this was intentional or by omission is not clear. What has been destroyed can never be reinstated and we have lost something valuable that cannot be retrieved.**

**What our parents' and grandparents' generation of airmen would have to say about this reckless discarding of irreplaceable historical artefacts, which they used daily in the fight to protect our freedom, does not bear thinking about.**