

High Wych History 71

People wandering along High Wych Lane might be familiar with the sight of a decorative windmill overgrown with ivy in a front garden. However, not many people know that it actually is an old drop tank from the second world war.

Some have claimed that this comes from a Mosquito aircraft. In fact an inscription on it did say that that was what it was. However as the windmill is made of metal, that cannot be true. Mosquitos were made of wood as were the drop tanks, the latter sometimes even made of papier machee! The High Wych lane windmill is made of metal so must have come from another aircraft. Hayley Erica Bird, in whose mother's garden the windmill stands kindly allowed me to take a few photographs. She has also been very helpful with my research.



It was in fact Walter Ruse, then of Mablets. who transformed the object from what it was into a garden windmill. Joy Passfield, Walter's daughter, remembers this well as did the late Harry Ruse, Joy's brother. It was Harry Ruse that allowed Eric Bird (aka Buster) to move it from Mablets to the front garden of his house. It seems that the 'mosquito misunderstanding' originated with him as it was Buster who suggested his daughter put an inscription onto the windmill. Buster's widow Sandra still lives in the 'windmill house'.

Now my own son Tom was in fact quite friendly with Harry Ruse. Tom reports that Harry told him the drop tank came from an aircraft stationed at either Hunsdon airfield or the one at Allens Green – Sawbridgeworth. According to Tom, Harry suspected it came from a Mustang, an American aircraft.

After talking to Hayley and her mother Sandra the former became quite intrigued. Consequently the windmill was stripped of Ivy and layers of paint and more photographs were taken. Hayley and her partner also got the idea of restoring the object to its former glory.

Suspicious and even educated guesses are one thing but certainty is another. In the search for certainty the Imperial War Museum sadly was of no help. But posting a question and later photographs (thanks Hayley) on an American WW2 aircraft forum did result in a positive identification. The learned opinion from people writing there was that our drop tank definitely came from a Mustang P51, albeit in a variety used by the Royal Air Force. So the mystery was solved.



Above you can see two pictures of the stripped down drop tank windmill. Let us hope that Hayley Erica Bird and her partner will indeed soon restore it to its former glory.

Below you can see on the left a Mustang P51 at Sawbridgeworth Airfield. On the right you can see a drop tank being mounted onto a Mustang P51



Information for this article came from Hayley Erica Bird, Tom van de Bilt, Douglas Coe, Joy Passfield, Aircraft of World War II – WW2Aircraft.net and Wikipedia. As always, if you have anything to contribute or remarks to make, do get in touch. Contact me at theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone me at 01279 725468