

INDIVIDUAL HISTORY

SOPWITH F.1 CAMEL F6314/9206M  
MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 74/A/18

Jul 18 AID stamps found on the airframe fuselage and original woodwork during restoration in 1960 (see Air Pictorial Jan 1964 p.20) suggest this or October 1918 as the date of manufacture, the latter being more likely, based on probable contract date. The original log book, now lost, gave the manufacturer as Boulton and Paul Ltd of Norwich. This company built 1,575 of the 5,490 Camels constructed.

The original serial number is unclear. In 1935 the then owner D C Mason wrote to 'Popular Flying' stating that on the lower wings the painted-over traces of roundels and the serial 'F6314' could be discerned. F6314 was one of a batch of 200 Camels, F6301-F6500, built by Boulton and Paul to contract 35a/1302/c.1293, ordered 18 June 1918, and delivered week ending 7 September 1918 - week ending 16 November 1918.

However, restoration by R G J Nash c.1936 discovered traces of the serial H?508 on the rudder. This does not tally with any known Camel serial, leaving F6314 as the most likely contender.

There is however a further complication. Two different Camels carried the same serial number! This is explained in the Air-Britain Camel File (1993).

Sopwith F.1 Camel rebuilds by Repair Parks in France were numbered in range F5801 and F6300. Range initially issued up to F6513 by mistake and flown as such, but F6301 onwards mostly renumbered subsequently. The 'alternative' F6314 (in error ex B9235, taken on charge 9 Aug 1918 in rebuilt form) renumbered H7281 in late September 1918. B9235 was another Boulton and Paul built Camel, ordered 2 August 1917 in the batch B9131 to B9330.

This still leaves the problem of which F6314 does the RAFM have; since B9235 was delivered to 80 Squadron by 9 February 1918 this would suggest that the RAFM aircraft is F6314 as built rather than as wrongly renumbered, given the AID date stamp on our airframe.

c.1919 Presumably placed into store. Not listed as one of the six Camels still on RAF charge after Jan 20 when the last two Camel squadrons disbanded.

Apr 23 Purchased from Aircraft Disposal Company, Waddon (Croydon) by ex Camel Pilot and journalist Grenville O Manton. Unused and war-surplus.

The engine-less and instrument-less Camel, according to its logbook, was Boulton and Paul built and had little over two hours flying time.

The Camels early days as a civil machine are described in Mantons' own words in J Pudneys' book 'The Camel Fighter (1964)' "My idea was to carry out a major 'mod' and transform that which I had known in 1917/18 as a magnificent, fierce and incredibly manoeuvrable fighter aircraft into a demure and docile aeroplane by replacing the Clerget rotary engine with some lower-powered radial type which would not produce the strong gyroscopic effect going round at 1,200 rpm ... all I could get was a 45HP six-cylinder Anzani which, even in those days was obsolete".

Much of the preparatory work on the airframe was carried out in Bushey at the bottom of the garden behind the house of a friend of Manton, a Mr F.R.C. Hounsfeld. It was originally intended to fly the machine as a high-wing monoplane with a flat-twin ABC motor, so a local workman enlarged the top centre section opening to improve visibility for the pilot.

The first attempts to start the Anzani (reports Peter G Cooksley in FlyPast, January 1985) ended in failure so that as these continued the throttle was gradually opened, little by little. The motor finally burst into life, the resulting surge of power tipping the machine on its nose and breaking the airscrew. As tests continued the prop was temporarily replaced by that from an ABC motor.

Around this time the khaki doped fuselage fabric was stripped off to inspect the fuselage structure, then recovered and, without Mantons permission, doped white with a blue trellis design rear of the cockpit, leaving probably original fabric on the decking. The rudder had a figure '1' on it. No civil registration was carried. Examinations of the fuselage fabric c1960 found 2 main layers of dope - civil and 30s/50s display camouflage. (Air Pictorial May 64 p.140).

When the conversion, including revised nose and uncowed engine, was complete, Manton persuaded a farmer near Tring, Herts to let him use a field for final assembly and test flying. As Manton described "As I taxied up the gentle slope from the dell into the broad expanse of the field, and taxied to and fro on the not-so-smooth surface to gain the feel of the machine I became aware of the ineffectiveness of the rudder in coping with the strong, gusty cross-wind which was blowing. I had not sat in a cockpit for years, so I was right in deferring operations until the weather was more favourable ... then with the impatience and recklessness of youth I became determined to get the Camel airborne and ignore the unkindness of the weather. So with my team of helpmates I went out to the field one day when the air was chilly, a wind was blowing and the sky threatened. The engine was started and, after 'chocks away' I moved off with full throttle. I found myself airborne".

The underpowered machine flew 'not more than twice' piloted by Manton and his friend the Dutchman Captain L.van Oppen. the lack of power and inadequate rudder area made it dangerous to fly, so the Camel was advertised for disposal in the columns of 'Motor Sport' magazine.

The Camel was purchased by a North Wales builder who arrived at Tring, Herts expecting to fly the Camel back, despite never having flown before; he was persuaded, thankfully, not to attempt this and returned a fortnight later to tow the Camel back to Wales behind his Fiat car, on its own wheels, with wings dismantled and lashed to the top of the fuselage.

- Late 1935            The Camel re-surfaced, having been purchased by Mr D C Mason of Hornchurch, Essex. His letter published in the Jan 36 issue of 'Popular Flying', page 557, stated that it was in good condition and that he hoped to fly it. On the underside of the wings were the doped over traces of roundels and the serial 'F6314' which he was 'pretty confident' was correct.
- 16 Apr 36            By the edition of 'Flight' of this date in which details were given, ownership of the Camel had passed to Mr R G J Nash, racing driver, and stored at Brooklands where repairs were undertaken including the fitting of a Clerget rotary.  
The Nash machine is assumed to be the Mason (Essex) machine although this has never been proved 100%, though the enlarged wing aperture visible at Hendon (below) would suggest that they are one and the same aircraft. Nash also stated the aircraft was acquired in Essex. It should be noted that 1960 restoration team member Mr H A C Thompson recalled no sign of mods for the Anzani engine when interviewed in 1996.
- 27 Jun 36            Taxied past the enclosures at the RAF Pageant at Hendon by Flt Lt Sealey. No armament or serial numbers - given service roundels and Nivo finish. It was 'riddled with dry rot' so could not be flown. Photos - The Aeroplane July 1<sup>st</sup> 1936 p.27; Prop-Swing Winter 2013 p.37.  
  
Further restoration work was carried out after the Hendon appearance, during which the serial H?508 was found on the rudder plus traces of an insignia - an Indians Head, supposed to represent the 4th Lafayette Escadrille, carefully re-applied but in reality probably dating to its Anzani-powered civil days since it was applied on fine texture fabric not covered by service machines and not laced in the specified service manner. The insignia and 'H508' serial were applied and remained in 1950 (see below). See letter from R G J Nash, Air Pictorial Nov 63 p.357.
- May 37                On static display at Royal Aeronautical Society Garden Party, Heathrow.  
  
Photo with Richard Nash at ? Brooklands, 1937-38; Lost Aviation Collections (Ellis) p.16.
- Jun 39                Displayed at Science Museum, South Kensington with Nash Collection Bleriot XI, Bleriot XXVII, and Fokker DVII.
- 1939-45              Stored, probably at Brooklands.

- Apr 50 Paintwork touched up at No. 39 MU RAF Colerne, Wilts together with more extensive work on other aircraft from the Nash collection, in preparation for display at Farnborough.
- 7-8 Jul 50 Displayed at the RAF display, Farnborough partly repainted and fitted with Dunlop motorcycle tyres, sub-standard cowling and incomplete instrument panel. The 1936 fuselage fabric was retained. Photo: Air Pictorial Nov 63 p.357. Still carried the partial Lafayette Escadrille markings on both sides of the fuselage, and serial H508
- 19-21 Jul 51 Displayed at Royal Aero Club Jubilee/Daily Express '50 years of Flying' display Hendon still as 'H508'. Photos; World War One Survivors (Rimmel) p.115; Lost Aviation Collections (Ellis) p.15.
- Dec 53 Sold along with his eight other historic aircraft by Mr Nash to the Royal Aeronautical Society, with two provisos - that they retained the title 'Nash Collection' and were not flown when restored.
- 13 Jun 54 Displayed with six other Nash Collection aircraft at the Royal Aeronautical Society Garden Party at London Airport (Heathrow). Photos; Journal of the Royal Aeronautical Society August 1954 p.565. Its former owner Mr Manton saw it there and recognised it as his former aircraft by the holes he had made for the engine mountings.
- May 55 On view at RAF Honington, Suffolk. Photo – Lost Aviation Collections of Britain (Ellis) p.18.
- Jul 56 To No.15 MU Wroughton, Wilts with other Nash Collection aircraft. Some repair work undertaken.
- Sep 56 Displayed with other Nash Collection aircraft at RAF Lichfield (Fradley) Battle of Britain Display (Aviation News 2-15 Mar 1990).
- Aug 57 By road to RAF Hendon for storage with other Nash aircraft.
- 15 Sep 57 Displayed at Royal Aeronautical Society Garden Party at Vickers airfield at Wisley, Surrey.
- 7 Nov 57 Displayed at RAF Hendon on last day of formal operational flying there. Photos parked next to a DH Devon - Aeroplane Monthly Dec 1997 p.58 and November 2017 p.112; PRB14095-14097.
- c.1958 Restoration started at Hendon, but little done, other than inspection of the airframe. Photo of incomplete cockpit at this time - Aero Modeller Mar 58 p.141. Photo of complete airframe stored at Hendon, 1958 – Scale Aircraft Modelling January 1986 p.171.
- Nov 1959 Moved by No 71 MU along with rest of Nash Collection to the BEA Engineering base at London Airport (Heathrow). As the Camel was one of the first to be dealt with, the fabric removed and airframe studied to establish its original identity.

Restored in the BEA hangar, mainly during 1958-1962, by a team led by Mr Howard A C Thompson.

This was when the AID markings on the airframe was discovered. Assisted by Len Knock, John Liles and Mrs Thompson, all fabric and plywood was renewed and the enlarged top wing cut-out restored to standard. The lower right hand longeron was badly oil soaked at the forward end, and was replaced using Sopwith drawings supplied by the Hawker Aircraft Co.

A new tail skid was also manufactured to original drawings.

The original wing spars were retained but all wing ribs were replaced (conversation with Mr Thompson May 1996).

All work was done to flying standard. See also file DoRIS Ref: UA Box 202. The serial F6314 was applied at this time on the basis of the 1936 letter in 'Popular Flying' together with the markings of a No.43 Squadron Camel flown by the then head of BEA. These markings were originally carried by B2510, as pointed out by J M Bruce and they were later altered to represent those of a 65 Squadron Camel, code B, retaining the F6314 serial.

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| Sunday<br>27 Oct 63 | The engine, which had suffered a cracked tappet and external corrosion prior to the restoration, was run up at Heathrow for the first time. Photo; World War One Survivors (Rimmel) p.116. All wiring was renewed and an on/off valve introduced into the oil supply line to prevent oil draining from the tank into the engine during storage. The aircraft was then regularly ground run and taxied at Heathrow and later stored there with airscrew removed and guns wrapped, as it was thought to valuable to be flown. |
| 09 Jan 64           | Passed on loan to the RAF Museum and stored at RAF Henlow, being assembled there 10 Jan 64.   |
| 04 Jul 65           | Two short ground runs of engine at Henlow, the last time the engine ever ran. Photos being ground run, minus wings, at Henlow; Air World International Sep 95 p.29; The Flying M Autumn 2008 p.8/Summer 2010 p.12. Fuel tank drained for last time the following day. See Aircraft Servicing Form DoRIS ref B3367.  |
| 19 Jun 66           | Displayed at Royal Aeronautical Society Centenary Garden Party at College of Aeronautics, Cranfield.  |
| 14 Jun 68           | Displayed at RAF's 50th Anniversary Celebration Review at RAF Abingdon, having moved from RAFM Henlow c.6 May 1968.   |
| Sep 68              | Displayed at Horseguards Parade, London. Soaked in a violent downpour at one stage.   |
| 20 Oct 71           | To RAFM Hendon. On display in main hall there ever since. Photos; Scale Models May 1974 p.270; W.W.1 Aero No. 172 May 2001 p.57.  |
| Mar 92              | Purchased with rest of Nash Collection by MOD (Air) from Royal  |

Aeronautical Society for permanent display at the RAFM.

- 19 Jul 93 Allotted RAF Maintenance serial 9206M.
- Sep 94 Loaned to RAF Finningley, Yorks for temporary exhibition at the presentation of a new standard to No.45 Squadron, returning to Hendon 6 Oct 94.
- 11 Jul 01 Moved by road to RAF Benson, Oxon to act as ceremonial centrepiece at the reforming of No. 28 Squadron to operate the new Merlin helicopter, the ceremony being held on July 17th.
- 19 Jul 01 To temporary RAFM facility at RAF Wyton for storage and preparation for suspended display in the new lottery funded building at RAFM Hendon, due to open in late 2003.
- 30 Oct 01 By road to newly opened restoration facility at RAFM Cosford.
- 17 Apr 02 Returned to Hendon to act as back drop for 'Turf Cutting' ceremony for Milestones Building by The Secretary of State for Defence, Geoff Hoon MP, the following day; the Camel being nominated as first exhibit for the new building, and was displayed in the car park for the event. Photo; Wingspan International No.11 p.6. Stored /displayed at Hendon – photo Aircraft Illustrated February 2003 p.85.
- 2 Apr 03 Moved into new 'Milestones of Flight' building at Hendon. Photo outside prior to installation; 100 Years of British Flight (2008) p.38. Photo on suspended display; Flypast June 2003 p.3.
- Sep 04 Gifted to RAFM by MoD along with the rest of the former Nash Collection.
- 17 June 2014 Following previous lowering from Milestones building suspended display, moved into Grahame White Hangar at Hendon in preparation for upcoming 'First World War in the Air' exhibition, and again placed on suspended display – suspension date October 2014. Photo of ceremonial move – RAF News issue 1350. See Also RADAR Issue 6 pp.14-15, 16,17 and front cover for other photos of the Camel move. Photo on display – Wrecks and Relics 25<sup>th</sup> Edition (2016) p.225.

One of seven known Sopwith Camel survivors, in Belgium, Canada, Poland, the U.K (two) and the U.S.A (two),

**TEXT - ANDREW SIMPSON**