

Reginald Charles Hope Bewes



**Died in action
23rd May 1915**

**While flying an RE 5 reconnaissance plane
In the Vieux-Berquin area, in the North of France
During World War One, 1914-1918**



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Reginald Charles Hope Bewes



In a nutshell :

Date of birth : 28 July 1890
Birthplace : Cheltenham
Death : died 23 May 1915, in France
Cause of death : killed in action
Burial place : Vieux Berquin, France

Close family :

His father : Reginald Anstis Bewes and his mother : Alice Anne Elizabeth Bewes

His sister : Lady Margaret Elizabeth Hope Archer

This diseased brother had a son, also diseased :

And a grand-son :



and his brother: George Price Hope Bewes

Charles Hope Bewes

Colin Bewes

Reginald Charles Hope Bewes is therefore the great-uncle of our visitor, Colin Bewes, for whom we have made this research.

About Reginald Charles Hope Bewes

REGINALD CHARLES HOPE BEWES was the second child and elder son of REGINALD ANSTIS BEWES of Plymouth and ALICE ANNE ELIZABETH (born HOPE). He was born on 28 July 1890 at Cheltenham, and baptised at Charles, Plymouth.

Known as ROY within the family, he was educated at Clifton College (South Town and Smith's House) in Bristol, and at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst.

He joined the 1st Battalion King's (Liverpool) Regiment in October 1910, and was promoted to Lieutenant on 11 September 1913. At the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War, ROY was seconded for service with the Royal Flying Corps, and appointed Flying Officer in the RFC on 6 August 1914. He served in France from September 1914 until 27 December 1914, and then had seven weeks sick leave. He then joined n° 7 Squadron at Netheravon, and flew from Folkestone to St Omer on 9 April 1915.

As a Lieutenant at the age of 24, he was killed when on reconnaissance duty on Sunday 23 May 1915, his machine falling at Vieux Berquin in France, where he was buried in the village cemetery. His father's gravestone in Plymouth Ford Park Cemetery records his death, although he is not buried there.

He had gained for himself a first-class reputation for gallantry in the air. One of his enterprises in dropping bombs on St André Station, near Lille, was particularly meritorious. At the time of his death he was engaged and was to be married... His name is recorded in the War Memorial Arch at Clifton College where he had been educated.



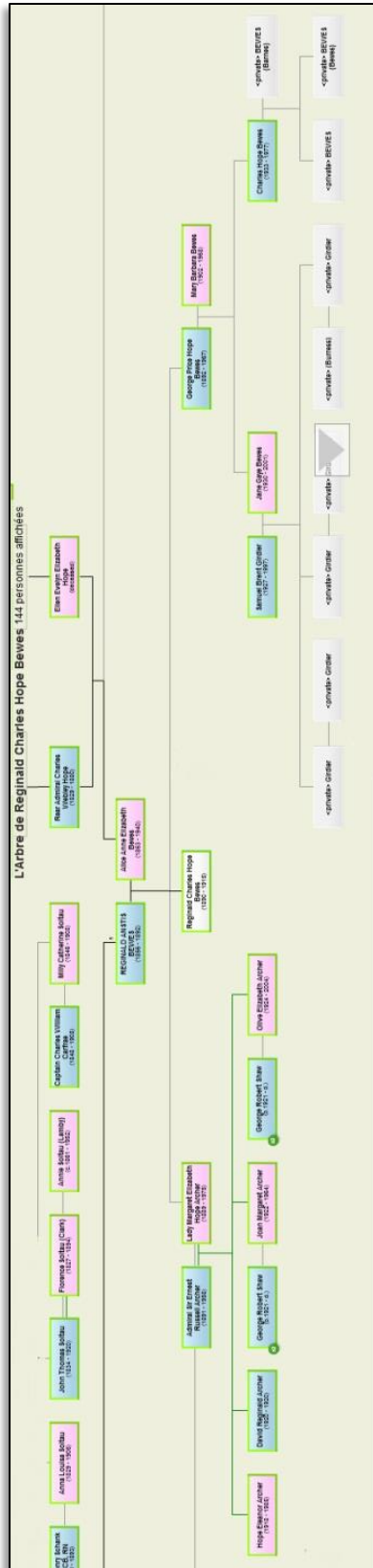
Saint André station, as it was rebuilt.

This data was gathered from the site managed by David Arthur Bewes :

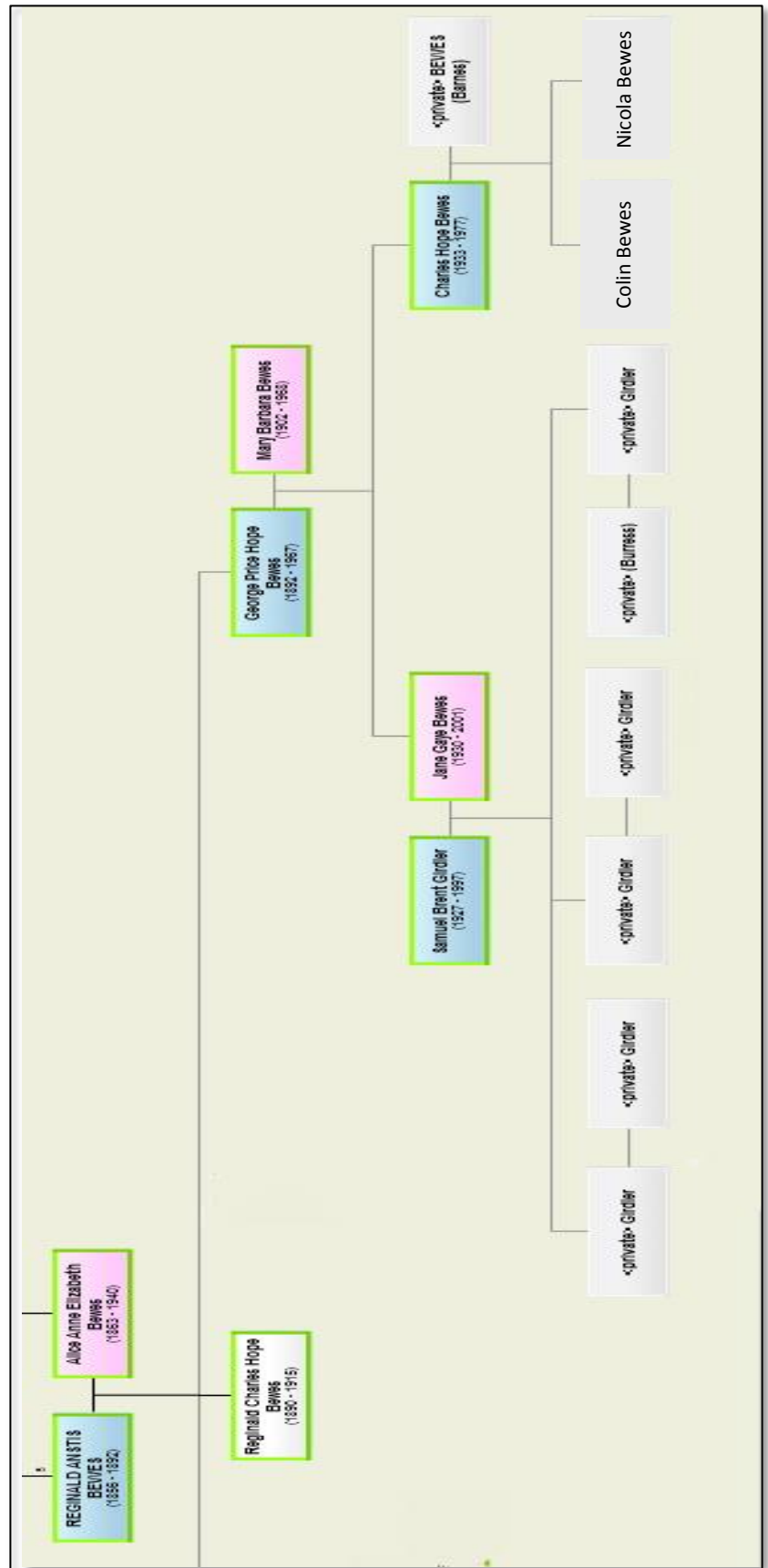
<http://www.geni.com/people/Reginald-Charles-Hope-Bewes/600000018767822703>

2. R.C.H Bewes' Family Tree

General view



Right hand side : the brother's side



3. Three different accounts of the accident

Lieutenant **Reginald Charles Hope Bewes** obtained his Pilot's Licence, No. 523 on 17 June 1913. He was attached from the Liverpool Regiment to the Royal Flying Corps on 5 August 1914 and was killed in action on 23 May 1915, whilst piloting an R.E.5 of 7 Squadron. He is buried alongside his Observer, Lieutenant F. H. Hyland at Vieux-Berquin Communal Cemetery, France.

His observer's full name was **Frederick Hunter Hyland**, he was a second-lieutenant formerly of the Yorkshire regiment before being attached to the Royal Flying Corps. His parents were Samuel and Eleanor Hyland from Radcliffe House in Pudsey, Yorkshire.

Both of them were entitled to the **1914-15 Star**, **British War Medal** and **Victory Medal**.

There are three different accounts of the accident :

Contemporary sources are divided in their opinion as to the reasons for the downing of Bewes' plane :

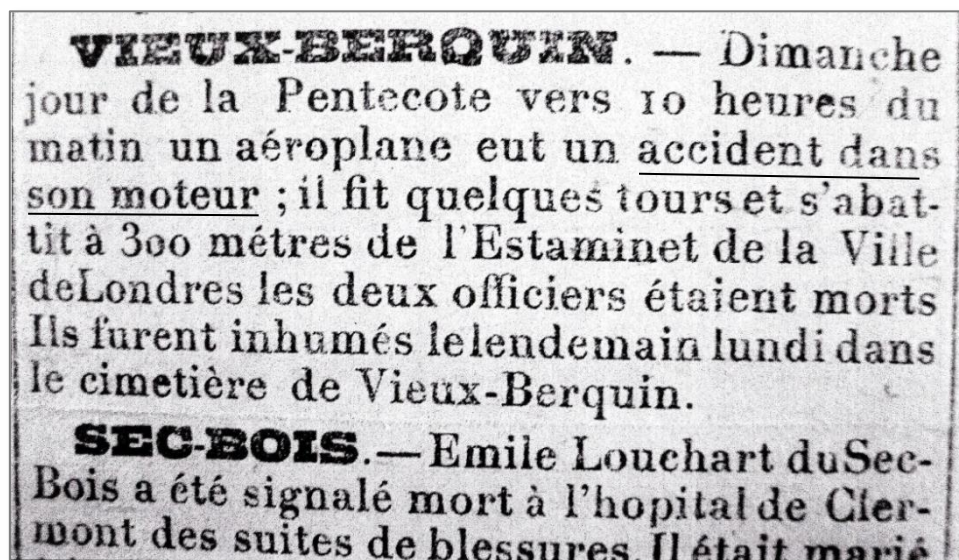
1. One school of thought being that a grenade being carried on the plane accidentally exploded.
2. But here is what we find in a contemporary report of the incident by Lieutenant Bernard Simenel, an interpreter serving with the Army Service Corps :

*'The aeroplane appeared to be 500 metres up, and came from the direction of Armentieres. When it was over Rue *Trovost I saw one shell burst apparently very close to it, on the left hand side of the aeroplane. The shell gave out pure white smoke. I think it was an English shrapnel. One wing (I think it was the left wing) buckled up at once. The aeroplane came twisting down rather slowly. Its fall was faster as it neared the ground. I then lost sight of it. The time was about 9:30 a.m...' (*in fact rue Pruvost)*

This data was gathered on a site managed by DAVID ARTHUR Bewes :

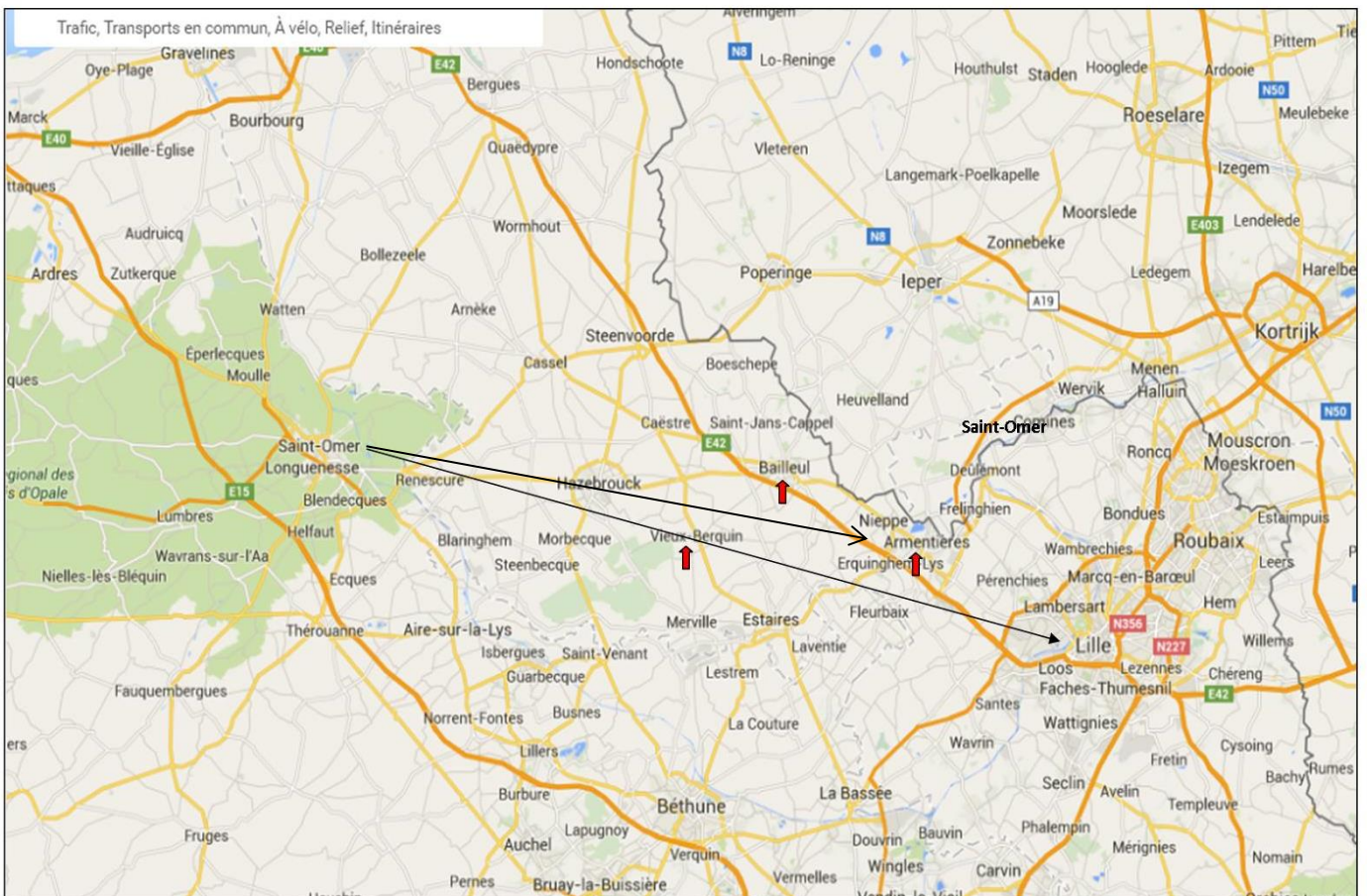
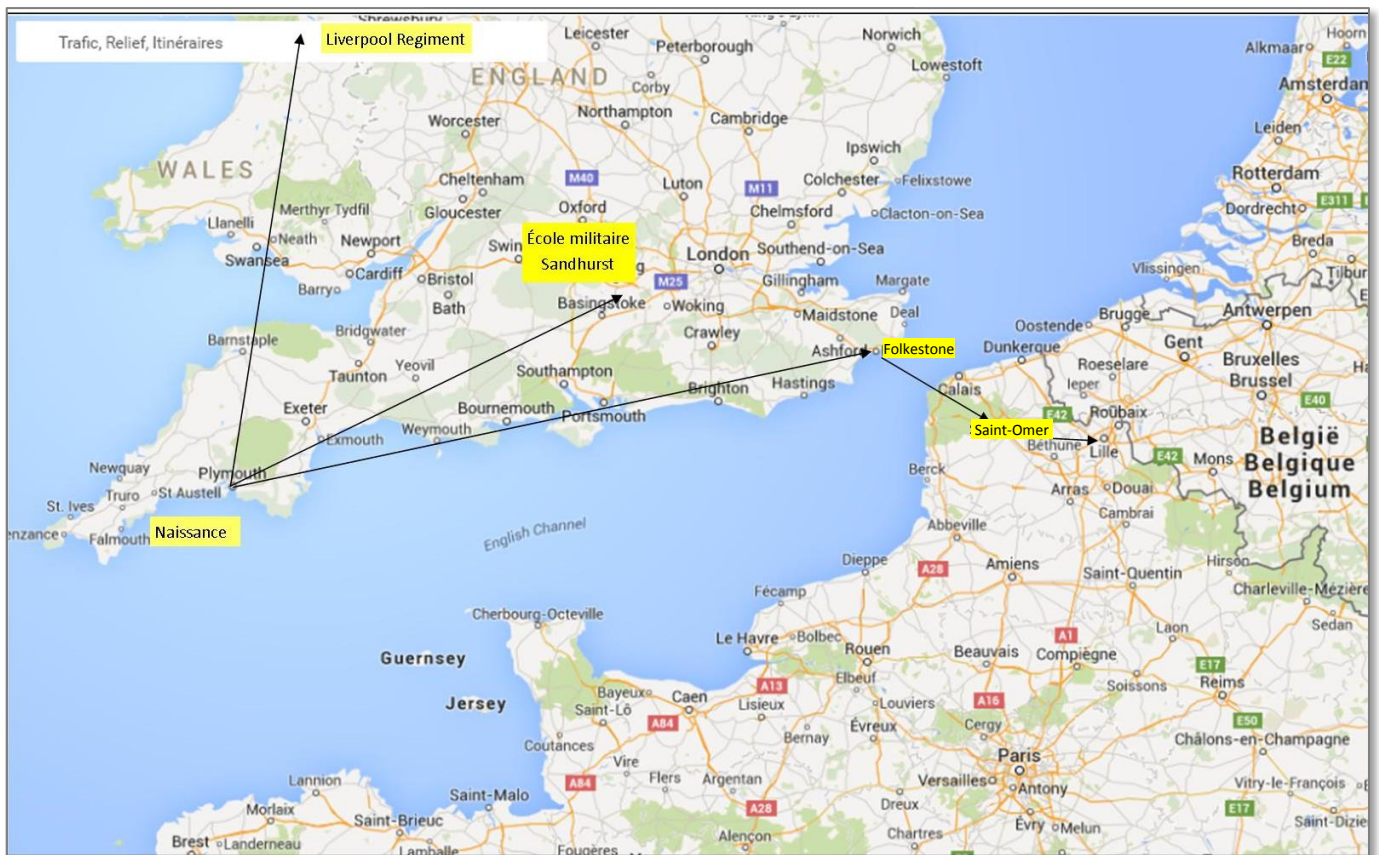
<http://www.geni.com/people/Reginald-Charles-Hope-Bewes/6000000018767822703>

3. And finally, here an extract from the regional newspaper, *Le Cri des Flandres*, Sunday 30th May 1915 :



Translation : **Vieux-Berquin.**- On Sunday, Pentecost day, at about 10 a.m, a plane had an engine failure ; it came spinning down and crashed on the ground, about 300 meters from the pub *La Ville de Londres* (the Town of London). The two officers were dead. They were buried the next day in the Vieux-Berquin cemetery.

4. Useful Maps



5. Two seater reconnaissance plane RE5



A 1/72 scale model of the two seater reconnaissance plane RE5, built during World War One in the Royal air factories

Historical and technical Background (by [Michael Kendix](#))

http://www.internetmodeler.com/2001/april/first-looks/Roseplane_RE5.htm

The RE5 (RE stood for 'Reconnaissance Experimental') was developed as part of a sequence of two-seater aeroplanes built by the Royal Aircraft Factory. Beginning in July 1914 when the first RE1 was acquired by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), through the HRE2 (H stands for 'Hydro'; it was a twin-float seaplane), the RE3, RE4 and finally, the RE5. Powered by a 120-hp Austro-Daimler 6-cylinder water-cooled engine, the span of the RE5 was larger than its RE1 predecessor; the equal-span wing version was a shade over 45 feet.

The RE5 was first used by the RFC prior to the start of World War One hostilities. It continued in use until the middle of 1916 when it was superseded by the RE6, RE7 and eventually, the more famous RE8. The most well-known incident involving an RE5 took place on July 31, 1915, when Captain J A Liddell and observer Lt Peck were flying a reconnaissance mission. Liddell was badly wounded but managed to fly and land his aeroplane back safely behind Allied lines. Liddell was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry and died of his wounds on August 31, 1915. Sadly, Peck did not survive the war, being killed in action on March 10, 1916.

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Additional information provided by Pierre Lemaitre,

French researcher from the local history association : *Les Amis du Cambrésis*

The colours

If we pay close attention to the scale model of the RE5, we may wonder why it bears the colours of France since it was designed and built in Britain and used by the British pilots of the Royal Flying Corps.

As far as the colours are concerned, one must make a distinction between the colours on the rudder and the circle shaped ones on the fuselage. It is indeed the colours of France which were chosen by the RFC, the same as those of the Union Jack, so as not to cause a confusion during the joined combats (there have been soldiers on the ground firing at their own planes because they mistook the Union Jack for the German cross). It is only later on that the allied agreed on the order of the colours on the fuselage : starting from the centre : blue, white, red, for the French and the reverse for the British.

On the scale model reproduced in the previous page, it is therefore, in fact, the British colours that we can see since the center circle is red. This is also confirmed by the order of the colours on the rudder at the back : red, white, blue, and not blue, red, white.

Where did the pilot and the observer sit in the plane ?

The "usual" rule was that the observer sat in the front seat and the pilot in the back seat, as one can see on the document below. There are numerous examples that support this assumption. Generally the observer was less bothered by the wings when sitting at the front. The pilot obeyed the orders of the observer. As for the rules concerning who would be the pilot and who would be the observer, it was common that the observer was a commissioned officer and the pilot, a non-commissioned officer (at least in the German and French forces), but there must have been exceptions.



Air fighting (rather than reconnaissance or bombing flights) would later become the "noble" (!) activity of the pilots. The pilot would then sit at the front and both fly the plane and use his machine gun to shoot through the propeller at the enemy planes. Most fighter planes would in fact be single-seaters anyway.

More about the RE 5

from the site *Royal Aircraft Factory R.E.5*

http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/weapons_RAF_RE5.html

The Royal Aircraft Factory R.E.5 was the first aircraft in the Factory's Reconnaissance Experiment series to enter production, although only in small numbers (24 planes). It was a two-seat two-bay reconnaissance biplane.

The twenty four R.E.5s were built using £25,000 paid to the Military Wing of the Royal Flying Corps in compensation after all of its airships were transferred to the Naval Wing.

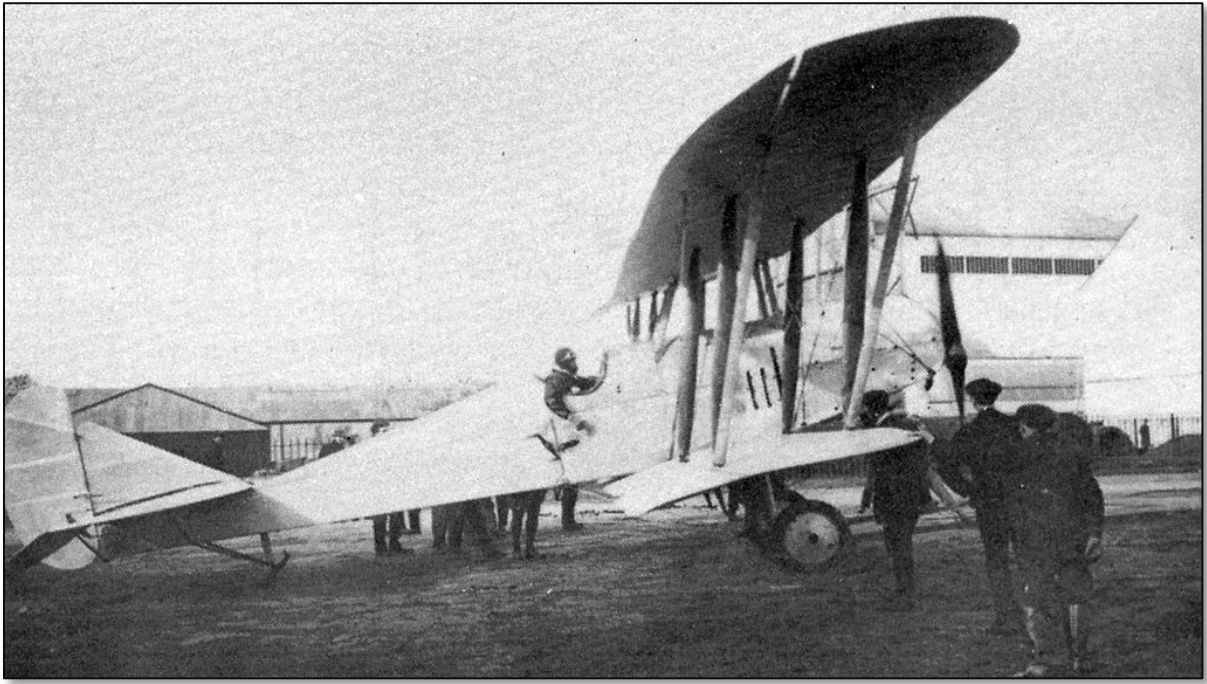
The RFC used a number of R.E.5s in France. Four crossed the channel on 27 September 1914 to join No.2 Squadron, of which three had been struck off or wrecked by the end of the year, as had a fifth aircraft that had gone to France on 1 November. No.2 Squadron received one more R.E.5 early in 1915, but the biggest user of the type was No.7 Squadron, which had six on strength when it moved to France on 7 April 1915. The squadron used the R.E.5 for reconnaissance and bombing duties, but by the end of 1915, four of the original six aircraft had been lost. (One of them must have been that of RCH Bewes and FH Hyland).



An RE5 ready for take-off.

Note the pilot in the rear seat, the double wings of a biplane, the four bladed propeller and the skids which support the wheels of the plane.

The R.E. designation indicated 'Reconnaissance Experimental' and the R.E.5, only 24 of which were built for the RFC, was operated successfully as a reconnaissance and light-bombing biplane during the early stages of World War I. Power was provided by an 89kW Austro-Daimler engine driving a four-bladed propeller, giving a maximum speed of 125km/h. It was a two-bay equal-span biplane with a fixed tailskid landing gear, with the wheels supported on skids. The aircraft had two open cockpits with the observer/gunner in the forward cockpit under the upper wing and the pilot aft.



Preparations for the altitude record flight with an RE5, on 14 May 1914

One of the RE 5 with extended upper wings, set a new world altitude record of 18,900 ft (5,760 m) on 14 May 1914. It was piloted by Norman Spratt.

An R.E.8 (a later, more elaborate, version of the RE 5) preserved at the Imperial War Museum Duxford



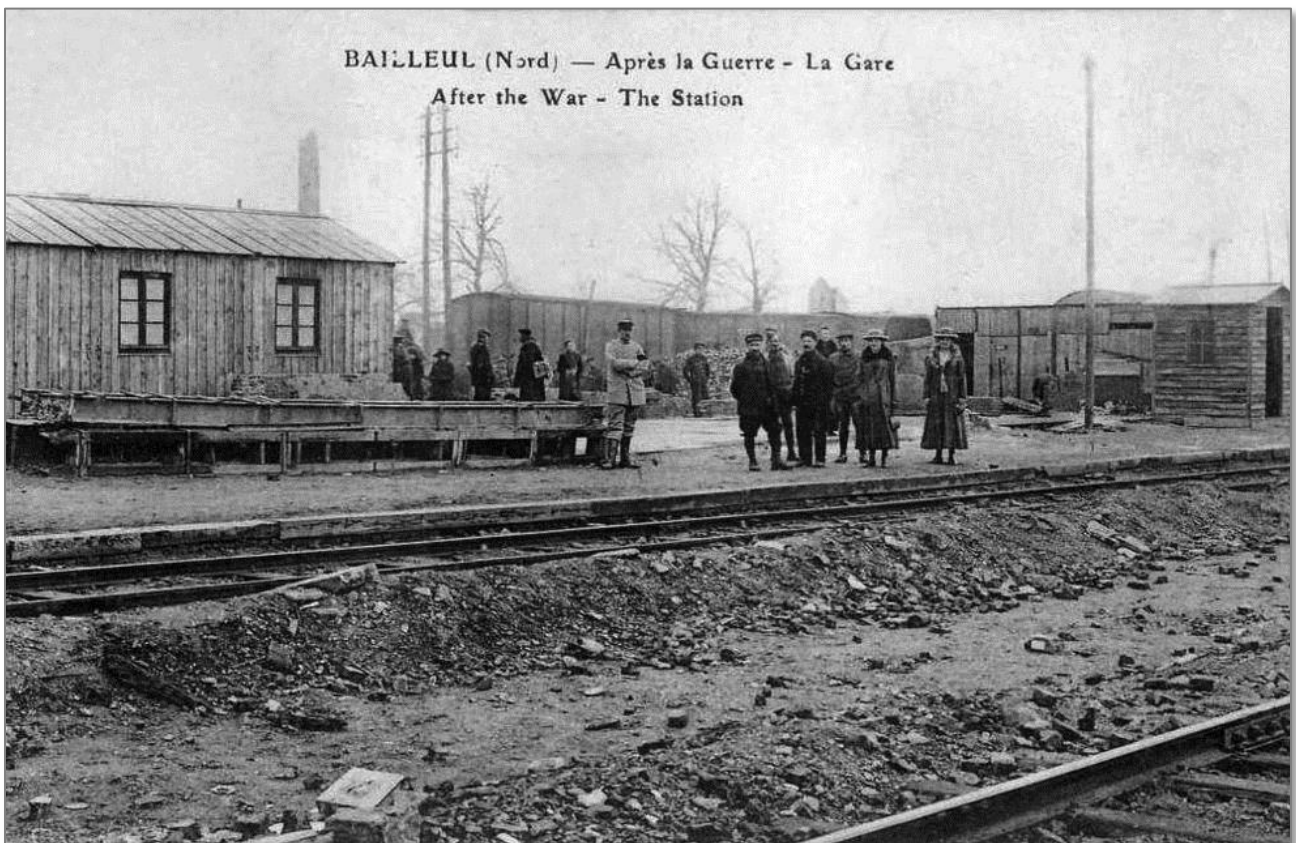
6. The airfields

(Translated from the book : "*Bailleul 1914-1918, Ville de Garnison Britannique*")

[...] World War One, which lasted from 1914 to 1918, is the first war in history that was fought in the air. During those four years, the development of aviation will accelerate both in terms of operational deployment and in terms of technical advances. The first military missions in 1914 will quickly lose that touch of improvisation on civilian machines derived straight from the conquest of the air in the previous years. The equipment will change, the units will be structured, the small monoplanes or biplanes of the beginning will see their technical characteristics adapt to the conflict over the months.

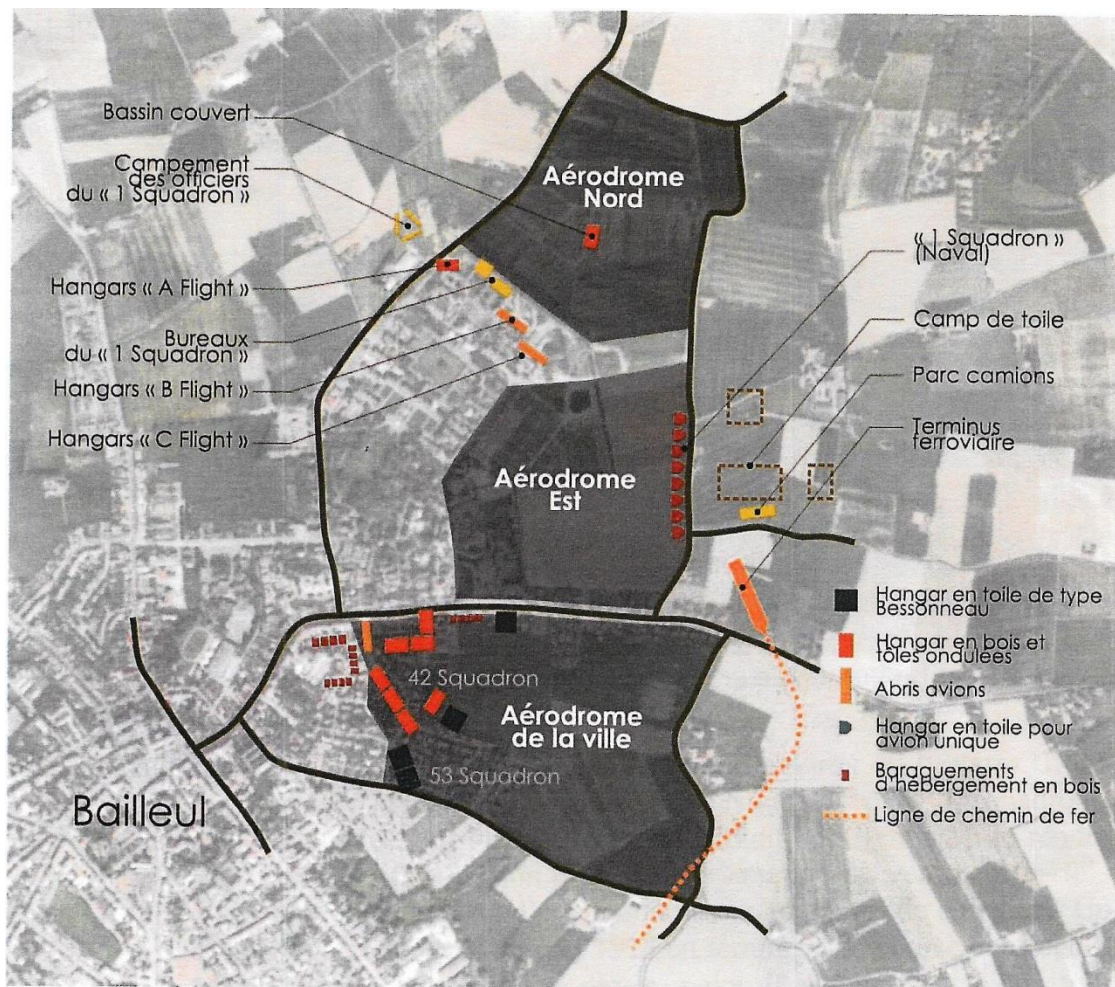
The very first 1914 operations will be observation missions of enemy movements on both sides of the front. Then there will be observation missions for the benefit of the artillery, bombardment missions with increasingly large aircraft. The concept of air fighting will then grow, with its tactics, and the media will then highlight the heroes that the populations at the rear as well as the fighters at the front, both need.

[The air force is then used by the French, the Germans and the British and spreads all along the front line. The planes in those days had little autonomy, so the organization will require airfields close to the combat zone. Thus the town of **Bailleul** will have the first airfield at the beginning of 1915, on which will be deployed several squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps, the forerunner of the RAF (Royal Air Force). Two other airfields will soon be built to expand the capacity of the first, not only because the front line was only a few kilometers away from that town but also because that town had a **railway station** so that a bypass railway line could be quickly built to carry ammunition and fuel and facilitate the logistical support that the airfields required.]



Bailleul railway station (Coll. Jean-Louis Roba)

[The planes came through the air from the depots at the back, such as the one in **Saint-Omer** in the *Pas-de-Calais département*, where a lot of squadrons were stationed before being sent to the front. The planes were multipurpose machines that could be used for reconnaissance, bombing or air fighting.] Until 1918, the town of Bailleul will have three airfields on its territory. This concentration of facilities was due to the fact that the airfields quickly became too small to meet the demands of the forces engaged in the conflict.



Airfield n° 3 : *Aérodrome de la ville* (the town airfield)

This airfield was located in the east of the town, on an area of about 40 hectares. It was built in **January 1915** to enable the deployment of No. 4, 5, 6 and **7 squadrons**, and was operational for the beginning of the fighting on the Flanders front.

The dampness of the soil would sometimes make it impracticable. The direction of the wind could sometimes make take-offs difficult, especially when the flight axis had to pass over the cemetery. A crew of a RE8 experienced that at their expense in June 1917, finishing their landing run in that cemetery !

In November 1916, the N° 42 squadron, commanded by major L J Kinnear, was in its turn deployed on that airfield. They stayed a full year, pursuing reconnaissance, bombing and air fighting on the nearby front line. They were to be joined later by No 53 Squadron, commanded by Major CS Wynne-Eyton. Both units depended on the 2th Wing, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel S Murphy. In July 1917, the command centre was located in *Mont Rouge*. Both squadrons would develop a close cooperation with the Australian artillery units *II Corps Anzac* and *IX Corps* for adjusting their firing at enemy positions during the fighting in the Third Battle of Ypres.

In August 1918, this airfield was the last one still to be in use, the other two had been quickly abandoned after a German offensive, as they were under continuous artillery fire.

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1. Additional information from the site :

"The British At War in the Air 1914-1918"

<https://airwar19141918.wordpress.com/tag/7-squadron-rfc/>

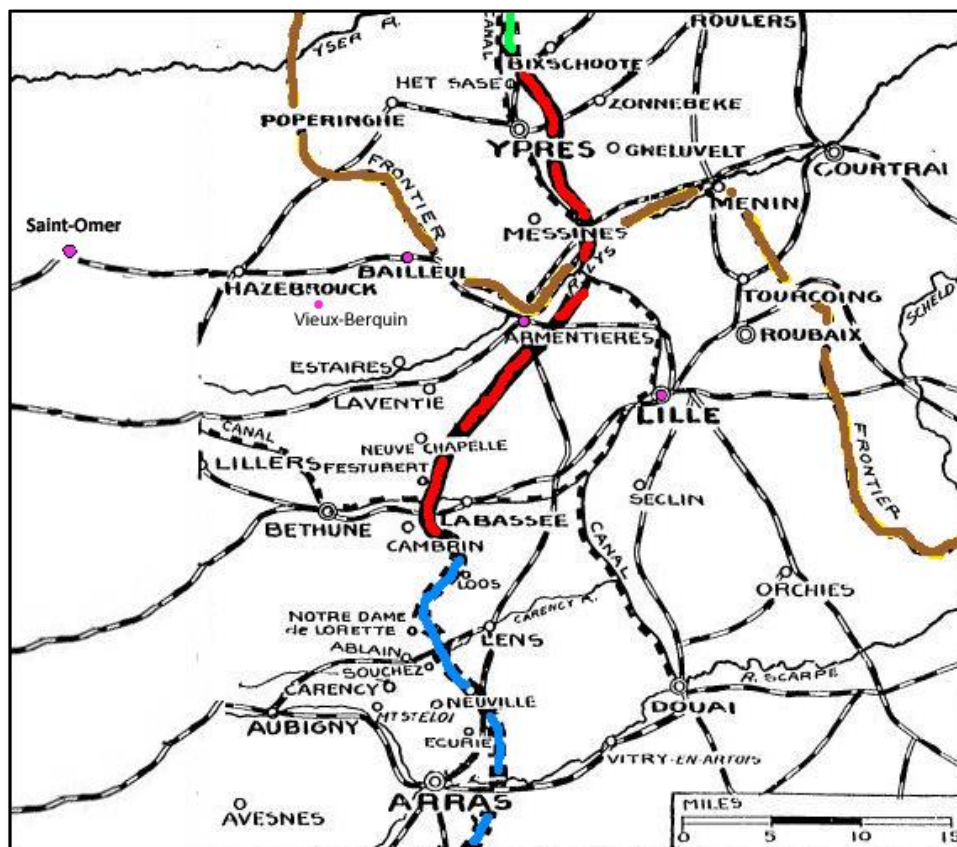
[...] **27 April 1915** – 2 Wing RFC joins Plumer's Force

In response to the German offensive in the Ypres area, at 5.0 p.m. today, General Sir H. C. O. Plumer, currently commanding the V Corps, has been placed in control of all the troops in the area – his command will be known as Plumer's Force.

As the main role of the Royal Flying Corps squadrons is to provide support for Army operations, the flying squadrons will also reorganise. The new force will be supported by 2 Wing, which consists of 5 and 6 Squadrons located at Abeele (5 Squadron moved there today). To make up the strength of 2 Wing, 8 Squadron will transfer to Abeele on the 1st of May. 2 Wing Headquarters will be at Poperinghe

> 3 Wing will now support the Second Army (reduced temporarily to one Corps (the II)), and the III Corps which had been withdrawn from the Second Army on the 6th of April for operations directly under G.H.Q. 3 Wing is made up of 1 Squadron and 4 Squadron at Bailleul and **7 Squadron** at **St Omer**. <

The dividing line for close reconnaissance between the Second and Third Wings is the Ypres-Roulers railway.



Map of British positions on 27 April 1915 :

The **Brown** line shows the frontier between France and Belgium.
The **green** line to the north shows the position of the Franco-Belgian army.
The **red** line represents the territory held by the British.
The **blue** line to the south shows the position of the French army.
The **pink** dots show the locations of Lille, Armentières, Bailleul and Vieux-Berquin

7. Vieux-Berquin cemetery



F. C. Fearis - E. F. Smith - R. C. H. Bewes - F. H. Hyland - A. J. Battley – Unknown



What conclusion can we draw from our investigation ?

Reginald Charles Hope Bewes died in action on 23rd May 1915, aged 24, while flying an RE5 reconnaissance plane in the Vieux-Berquin Area, in the North of France, during World War One, 1914-1918.

To understand the circumstances of his death, one must know how the war and aviation developed both in time and space and try to establish the causes of the accident.

1. How the war and aviation developed in time.

When the war broke out, planes had just been invented in the few previous years and nobody had had time to realize all their potentialities, imagine ways of using them in warfare and consequently conceive completely new ways of conducting a war. If the war had not broken out, it is highly probable that the development of aviation would have been a much slower and longer process. The war provided both the incentive for the constant development of new aircraft and the possibility of testing them as soon as they were conceived and built.

Three stages can be distinguished in the gradual use of aviation as a weapon of war:

1. The soldiers first thought of using the planes for reconnaissance missions, first to observe the movements of the enemy and then to help the artillery select the right targets. As it was not convenient for one man alone to both fly the plane and at the same time observe the ground in detail, observation planes were usually two seater planes. The pilot would usually sit in the back seat and obey the orders of the observer who would sit in the front seat where he was less bothered by the wings of the plane to observe the ground. The observer would then be in command and be a commissioned officer and the pilot a non-commissioned officer. But there must have been a lot of exceptions as in the case of RCH Bewes who was a lieutenant and the pilot of the plane and his observer FH Hyland who was a second-lieutenant as we can see on his tombstone.
2. The pilots then thought that while they were flying over the enemy positions, they might as well drop some of the hand grenades that the soldiers on the ground used to throw at the enemy. Then they realized that larger bombs would cause more damage, so they started building larger and more powerful planes to carry and drop larger bombs. But most planes, at least at the beginning of the war, remained multipurpose planes that could be used both for reconnaissance and for bombardment. And this seems to have been the case with Bewes' and Hyland's plane since one of our sources says, on the one hand, that Hyland was an observer and, on the other hand, that it is thought a hand grenade exploded in the plane. Also that same source says that one of Bewes' enterprises in dropping bombs on St André station near Lille, was particularly meritorious...

3. Then came the epic and heroic era of the fighter planes and the fighter pilots. When a British plane crossed the front line to go and observe and possibly bombard the enemy positions, it would often come across a German plane flying in the opposite direction to carry out the same mission on the other side of the front line. So the pilots would take guns with them and shoot at each other in the air, pretty much in the same way as the cowboys did in the westerns. But it did not amount to much because it was not easy to aim a gun at the enemy while flying a plane. Then the soldiers managed, on both sides, to install a machine gun in front of the pilot which could shoot between the blades of the propeller. The pilot could then fly at the enemy plane and open fire. But as the enemy could do the same thing, it gave birth to a lot of brilliant tactics to shoot at the enemy while avoiding to be shot at. It was the time when the most brilliant fighter pilots on both sides became heroes and even living legends.



On this painting, a German fighter plane is engaged in a duel with a British fighter plane.

Situation of the accident in time :

Bewes and Hyland did not live long enough to know the era of the fighter planes and pilots. They died at the beginning of the war, in May 1915, when reconnaissance planes were beginning to be used also for bombardment purposes.

4. How the war and aviation developed in space.

The planes that were used during World War One, had a limited fuel reserve and consequently a limited flight range. That's why the planes that were built in Britain would take off from **Folkestone** to land in Saint-Omer because Folkestone is the nearest place to France. Saint Omer was chosen to serve as a depot for the planes arriving from Britain before they were dispatched to other smaller airfields closer to the front line, like the ones next to Bailleul.

Saint-Omer was chosen to serve as a depot first because of its rather central position in the north of France, from which the planes could be dispatched, as they were required, to the different smaller airfields along the front line. And also because there was a railway line with a convenient railway station which could be used to bring all the fuel, ammunition and equipment needed for the planes.

Bailleul was chosen to build three airfields near it because it also had a railway station and was near the front line.

Situation of the accident in space :

One of our sources says that the RE 5 flown by RCH Bewes and FH Hyland was coming from Armentières and that it crashed in Vieux-Berquin. It could not therefore have been heading for one of the Bailleul airfields because Vieux-Berquin is not located between Armentières and Bailleul. Vieux-Berquin is on a straight line between Lille and Saint-Omer and not far from a line between Armentières and Saint-Omer. So we can assume that the plane was coming back from a reconnaissance and possibly bombing mission over Lille or Armentières and was heading back for Saint-Omer.

This is confirmed by the information that we found on the site *The British At War in the Air 1914-1918* and that we have reproduced in this booklet page 11 : "On 27 April 1915 [...] 3 Wing is made up of 1 Squadron and 4 Squadron at Bailleul and 7 Squadron at St Omer."

We may now try to understand what caused this RE5 reconnaissance and light bombing aircraft, on its way back from Lille or Armentières and heading towards Saint-Omer... to crash in Vieux-Berquin !

The causes of the accident

We have three reports giving each a different account and therefore a different explanation for the accident.

- One school of thought is that a grenade being carried on the plane accidentally exploded.
- An eye witness of the accident says he saw a shell exploded near the plane, causing one of its wings to buckle up at once. The plane came twisting down rather slowly and then faster as it neared the ground. The eye witness said he thought it was an English shrapnel.
- The French regional newspaper "Le cri des Flandres" also reported the incident but said the plane had "an accident in its engine", spun round several times and then crashed on the ground.

Who and what should we believe ? Was the accident caused by a grenade that accidentally exploded in the plane, a British shell or an engine failure ?

If we confront the three versions to find out what they may have in common, we notice that the first is only presented as a "school of thought" and does not give any detail that we can find in the other two versions.

In the other two versions, on the contrary, we find one concordant detail : "*the plane came twisting down rather slowly*" in one and "*the plane spun round several times*" in the other. But they differ as to their explanation of the cause of that twisting down or spinning round several times.

If the plane had had an engine failure, why should it spin round several times ? Instead the pilot would push the stick forward to bring the nose of the plane down as quickly as possible to pick up enough speed to keep it flying on, straight ahead, like a glider and attempt to land it in this way. It would not be likely to spin round, except for poor piloting...

On the contrary, if a shell distorted one of the wings of the plane, it would inevitably push it out of balance and make it impossible for it to fly in a straight line.

I would be tempted therefore to give credit to the second explanation : RCH Bewes' and F.H Hyland's plane may have been shot down by some men of their own artillery who mistook them for a German plane coming on a reconnaissance or a bombing mission.

Yet Nobody can tell with certainty, only the two pilots who died in the accident could have told us what happened on that day, but they took their secret away with them so that the cause of the accident which took place a hundred years ago, will for ever remain a mystery which is buried in the tombs of those two brave and for ever young British soldiers...

Gérard Pique



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This research was conducted :

- For **Colin** and **Nicola Bewes**



- By **Bernard Roussel** helped his brother- in-law **Gérard Pique**
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- On behalf of the association ***HISTOIRE LOCALE DE VIEUX-BERQUIN***
(President **Arlette Flammey**, Secretary: **Geneviève Lerdung**)

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