

Larkhill - Aviation

1912

Mr Robert Cooke Fenwick – Fatal accident in monoplane on Salisbury Plain



Accident on Salisbury Plain.

Report on the fatal accident to Mr Robert Cooke Fenwick, when flying on Salisbury Plain, on Tuesday 13th, 1912.

Brief description of the Accident. - Mr R. C. Fenwick, flying on a Mersey monoplane fitted with a 435 h.p. Isaacson engine, has been in the air about two minutes, and, when about 200 ft. high, was seen to be in difficulties. The aircraft dived for about 50 ft., recovered an even keel, and then made a vertical dive to the ground. The aviator was killed instantaneously.

Report. - The Special Committee met at Larkhill Camp, on Tuesday, the 20th August, 1912, and heard the evidence of several eye-witnesses. The Committee also received the report of the designer and manufacturer of the aircraft.

From the consideration of this evidence, the Committee is of the opinion that the following facts are clearly established:-

1. That the aircraft was the first of its type to be constructed.
2. That the accident originated while the aircraft was at about 200 feet from the ground.
3. That the aircraft was unstable fore and aft and not easily controlled.
4. That there is no reason to believe that any part of the aircraft broke whilst in flight.
5. That the aircraft, which had started two minutes before in a calm, flying in the direction of Fargo Wood, was struck by a gust, dived, straightened out and again dived, from which dive it never recovered, the aircraft striking the ground beyond the perpendicular. The aircraft was completely smashed and the pilot killed on the spot.
6. The wind rose very suddenly, as shown by the wind chart, at about the time of the accident.
7. The examination of the aircraft immediately after the accident showed all the control wires to be intact.
8. Mr R. C. Fenwick was granted his aviator's certificate, No. 35, on November 29th, 1910, by the Royal Aero Club.

Opinion. – The Committee is of opinion that the cause of the accident was primarily due to the instability of the aircraft, which made it difficult to control in a disturbed atmosphere. That the point where the accident occurred is well known to be one where irregular disturbances of the air are prevalent under certain wind conditions. One of these disturbances must have struck the aircraft, and the aviator eventually lost control.

(Source: Flight The Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom. – Official Notices to members. September 21st 1912.)