



ULSTER  
ARCHÆOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY

---

# Survey Report

---

---

Reference: **Survey Report No. 58**

Author: **Ray Preston**

---

Location:

**Military Base  
Mount Stewart  
County Down**

---

In association with:

 **THE NATIONAL TRUST**



© Ulster Archaeological Society 2017

Ulster Archaeological Society  
c/o School of Natural and Built Environment  
The Queen's University of Belfast  
Belfast BT7 1NN

Cover illustration: Second World War graffiti on tree

---

---

**CONTENTS**

---

List of figures	4
1. Summary	5
2. Introduction	6
3. 2016 UAS Survey	8
4. Discussion	11
5. Recommendations for further work	17
6. Bibliography	18
Photographic record	19

## LIST OF FIGURES

---

<b>Figures</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Location map for Mount Stewart	5
2. OS County Series map, Down, Sheet 11 (part of) 1834	6
3. OS County Series map, Down Sheet 11 (part of) 1859	7
4. OS County Series map, Down, Sheet 11 (part of) 1904	7
5. Plan of upper site	9
6. Plan of lower site	10
7. Survey Group members at work	11
8. Tree-carving dating from 1940, reading 'Victory is Ours RAF'	12
9. Tree carving dating from 1940, reading 'R.A.F. 1940 J.G.A...	12
10. Stable block accommodation for junior ranks	13
11. An overgrown concrete base	13
12. The remains of an overgrown Nissen Hut	14
13. Remains of a probable shower block	14
14. Remains of a probable shower block	15
15. Remains of a wartime fire bucket	15
16. Wartime tractor towing hitch	15
17. Lysander aircraft	16
18. The Most Honourable The Seventh Marquess of Londonderry	17

## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at a Second World War site adjacent to the main car park at Mount Stewart Estate, county Down, National Grid reference J 5552 3694, 14m OD. The site was partially exposed after routine ground maintenance by National Trust Ranger Toby Edwards in January 2016, of the woodlands near to the main car park of The Mount Stewart Estate.

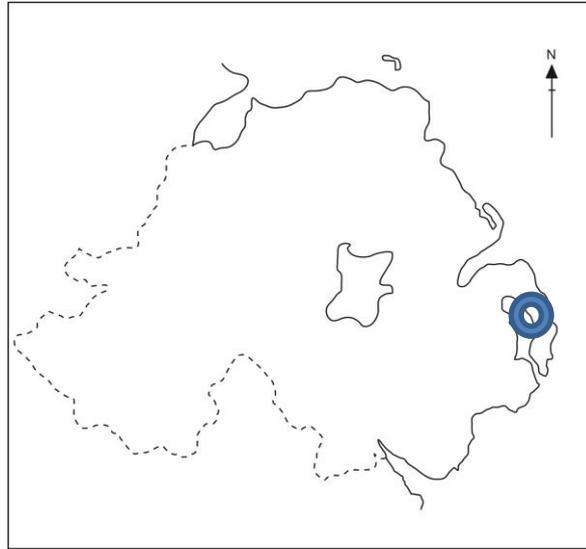


Figure 01: Location map for Mount Stewart

### 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the site and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the National Trust and to the archives of the Ulster Archaeological Society.

## 1 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

A survey of the site took place on Saturday 02 April 2016. It was carried out by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society, in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extent an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological sites not previously recorded comprehensively. During conversations with Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and the military site used by the RAF in conjunction with Army Support at Mount Stewart Estate, County Down in 1940, was subsequently chosen to be surveyed.

### 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

As far as it is known only a basic survey of this site had been carried out and publicised in the *Belfast Telegraph*. This has been entered on the *Second World War in Northern Ireland* website, under County Down Part 1, pages 14-18 and also used on National Trust leaflets about the Mount Stewart estate.

### 2.3 Cartographic Evidence

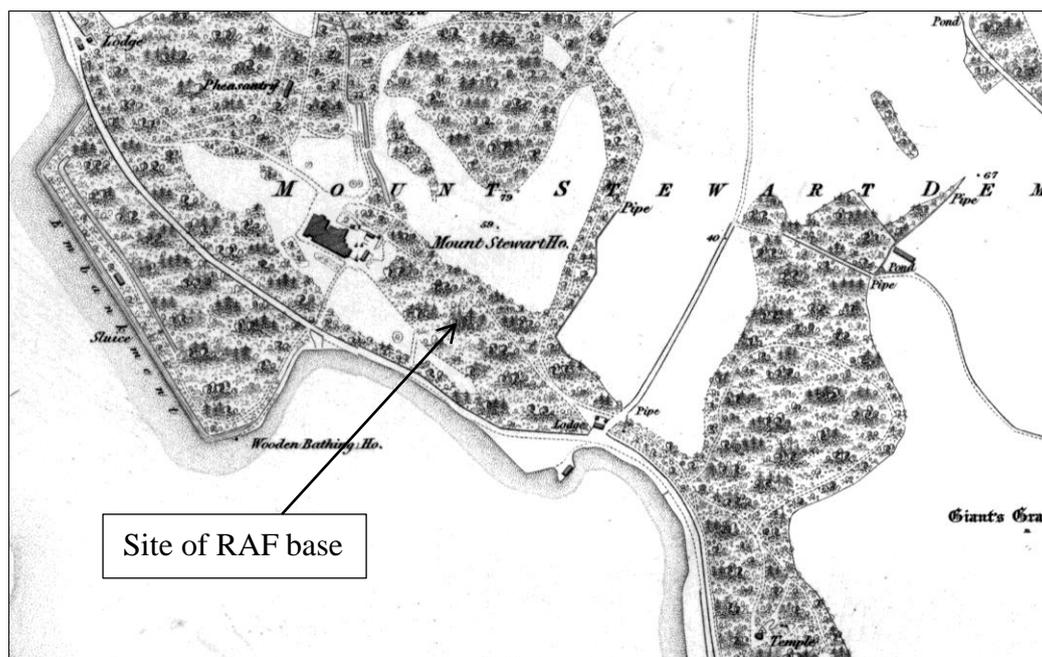


Figure 02: OS County Series map, Down, Sheet 11 (part of) 1834

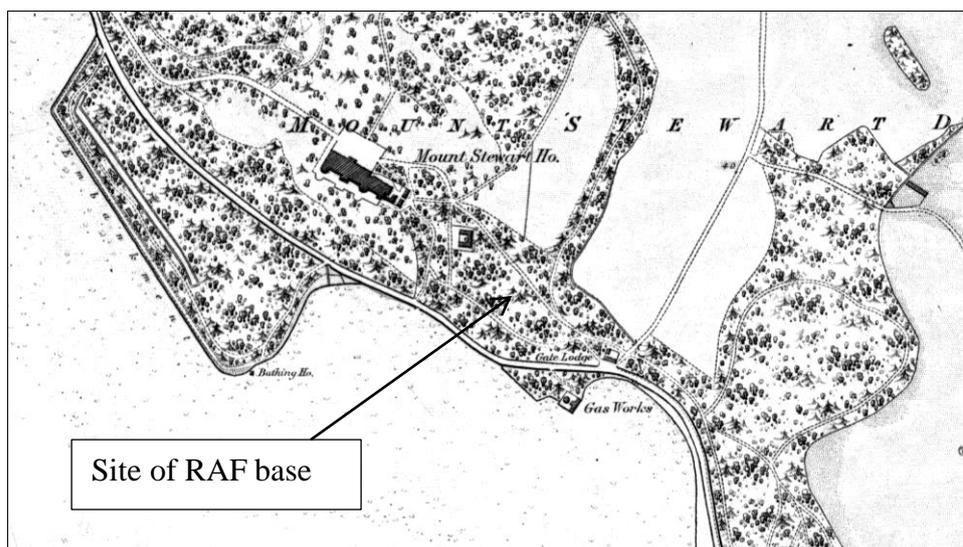


Figure 03: OS County Series map, Down, Sheet 11 (part of) 1859

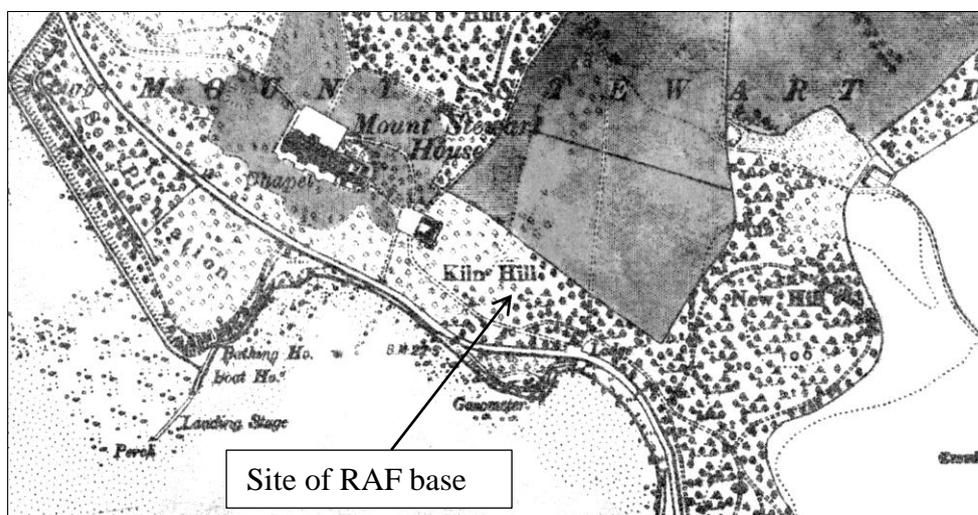


Figure 04: OS County Series Down, Sheet 11 (part of) 1904

The site of the military camp has, by 1904, acquired the name *Kiln Hill*.

#### 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down.

#### 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The Survey Group would like to thank the National Trust staff at Mount Stewart for their assistance in providing access to the site, particularly Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the group during the survey.

### 3. 2016 UAS Survey

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and other members of the survey team included Ian Forsythe, Lee Gordon, Randal Scott, Chris Stevenson, Ian Gillespie, Ray Preston, David Crabtree, Colin Boyd, George Rutherford, Michael Carney, Grace McAlister, Heather Montgomery, Olive Campbell, Kate Crane, Hilary Boyd, David Craig, David Irving, June Welsh and Karine Wright. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Malachy Conway, Survey Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access.

#### 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings and elevations, accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material.

#### 3.2 Production of plan drawings

Plan drawings and elevations were completed, using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:20 scale [or other] were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

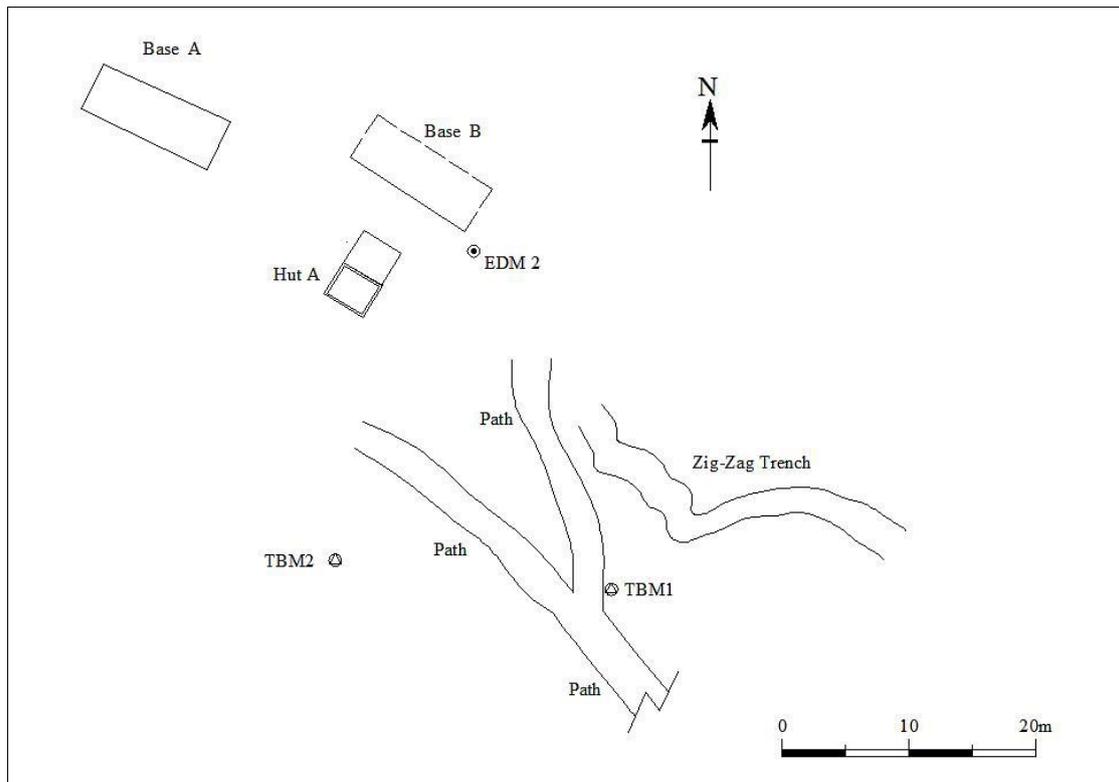


Figure 05: Plan of upper site

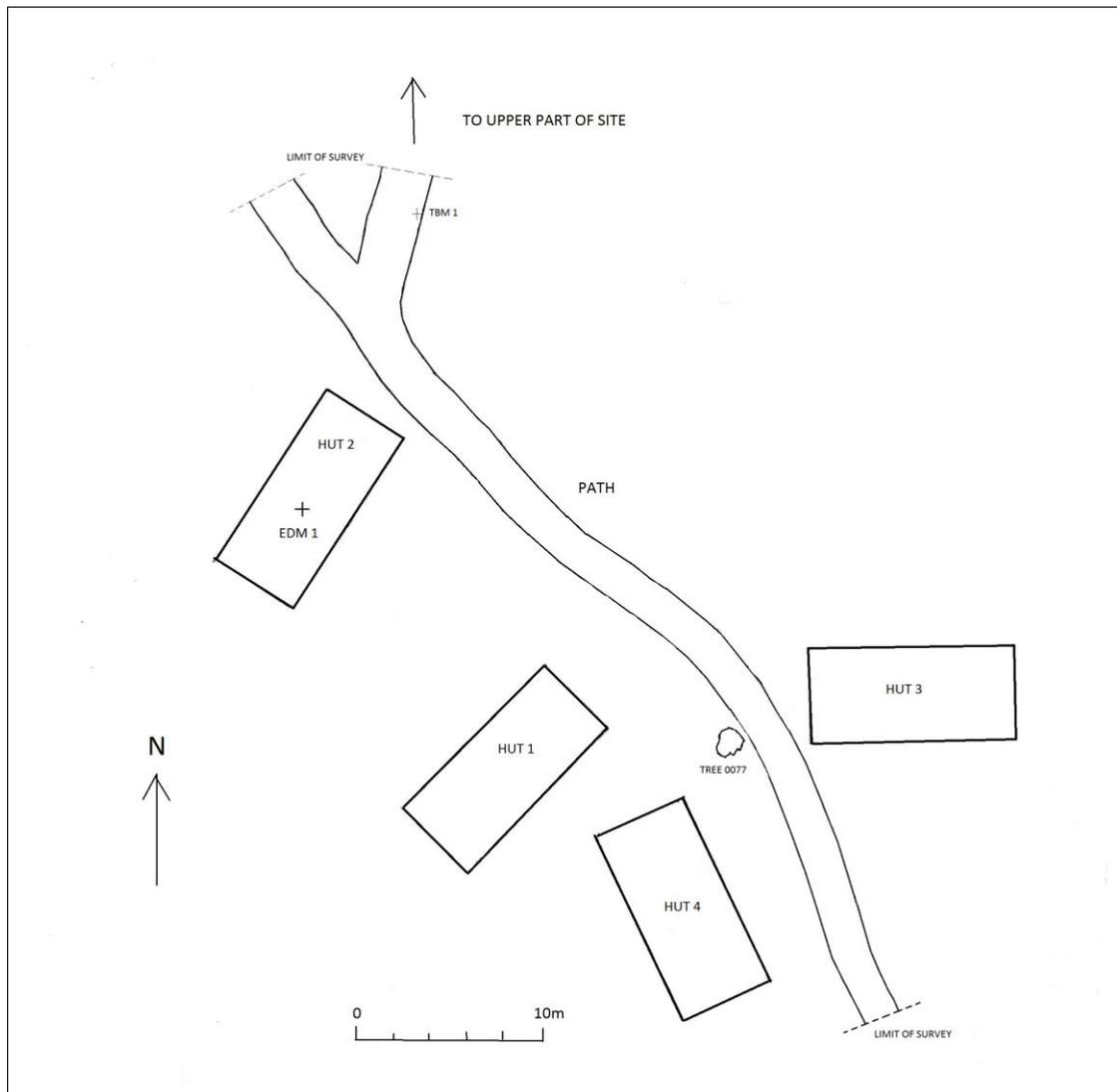


Figure 06: Plan of lower site

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Ricoh G600* 8 megapixel and *Nikon Coolpix* 5.1 megapixel digital cameras. A photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 2 April 2016. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.



Figure 07: UAS Survey Group members at work

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

After spending decades hidden beneath vegetation, the remnants of Mount Stewart's involvement in the Second World War surfaced once again when National Trust ranger Toby Edwards was clearing rhododendron bushes at the County Down landmark when he noticed markings on a tree. They appear to have been made by soldiers and airmen stationed at the estate during the war. Mr Edwards said that he had seen carvings on the trees in other parts of the grounds, but added that none had been as well preserved as the ones that he had recently discovered. The 2016 survey revealed several concrete platforms that would have been provided for the construction of Nissen huts to accommodate personnel and equipment. Also observed, but not surveyed in detail due to the presence of remaining undergrowth, were a number of other structures, tentatively identified as a possible shower block and tractor store, along with two possible bunkers. Several items of wartime equipment were also noted, including a tractor towing hitch and fire bucket. In addition to the surviving features from the Second World War military presence on the site, a section of First World War practice trench system was also identified.

### 4.2 First World War practice trench system

The Survey Group were fortunate to have Heather Montgomery present on the day of the survey. Heather, a member of the Survey Group, was at the time working on a PhD thesis on First World War trench systems at the time and was able to identify the remains of a previously unrecorded section of practice trench, used to train soldiers before their deployment to the trenches of the Western Front.

### 4.3 Second World War military features

Mount Stewart was used by 231 Squadron Royal Air Force (RAF) during 1940 in conjunction with 106 Field Squadron (Air Support) Royal Engineers (RE). The men of these units were billeted at Mount Stewart during this period, commanded by Major Fulton of the Royal Engineers (*Belfast Telegraph*).



Figure 08: Tree-carving dating from 1940, reading 'Victory is Ours RAF'.



Figure 09: Tree-carving dating from 1940, reading 'R.A.F. 1940 J.G.A. [probably his initials] Oxton B'Head'

The Headquarters Company of the Royal Engineers was also based at Mount Stewart, with Officer Commanding, Major Fulton, lodged in the mansion house while junior ranks were billeted in the buildings around the coach house and stables.



Figure 10: Stable block accommodation for junior ranks

Slabs of concrete where bunkers and outpost service buildings are believed to have once stood were uncovered. The buildings are thought to have been used to house showers, toilets and storage as well as Nissen hut accommodation for personnel and equipment during the Second World War. During the clearance work, similar buildings were also found buried in woodland in other parts of the estate. Attic rooms connected to the mansion house were also used as convalescence wards in both World Wars.



Figure 11: An overgrown concrete base on which a Nissen hut would have been constructed.



Figure 12: The remains of an overgrown Nissen Hut which appears to have contained two tractor bays.



Figure 13: Remains of a probable shower block



Figure 14: Remains of a probable shower block



Figure 15: Remains of a wartime fire bucket



Figure 16: Wartime tractor towing hitch

#### 4.3 World War Two Airfields in the Ards Peninsula

World War Two airfields were located in the vicinity of the Mount Stewart Estate. Among the units based at Mount Stewart Estate in 1940 was 231 Squadron RAF reformed in July 1940 from number 416 flight, originally based at RAF Aldergrove as

an Army co-operation squadron equipped with Lysander aircraft operating from RAF Newtownards. The Lysanders were employed until 1943 when they were replaced by the Tomahawk aircraft, reflecting the realisation that more powerful aircraft were needed by Army Co-operation in the face of the German air force, or Luftwaffe.



Figure 17: Lysander aircraft. (After [www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk))

Following the deployment of 231 Squadron RAF to Newtownards Airfield in 1940 soldiers from 106 Field Squadron (Air Support) Royal Engineers (Volunteers) arrived to work on the airfield to make it suitable for the RAF to operate from. In addition to RAF Newtownards, there were numerous RAF Stations in the Ards Peninsula such as RAF Ballyhalbert, Kirkiston and grass runways at Ballywalter. The Lysander aircraft were used by Army co-operation Squadrons, because they had low stalling speeds and were relatively slow flying aircraft which made them ideal aircraft for insertion or extraction of military personnel and SOE Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents (especially in occupied France) and also for patrolling and reconnaissance duties on the border of Northern Ireland with Éire. They were the forerunners of helicopters because of the type of tasks they carried out.

#### 4.4 The part played by the Stewart family in wartime

It is no coincidence that Mount Stewart became a part of the aviation history of Ulster, since it was the ancestral home of Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart the seventh Marquess (13 May 1878 – 10 February 1949). Amongst his many achievements, he was the Secretary of State for Air in the 1930s, which became incorporated into the Ministry of Defence in 1964. During his time in as Secretary of State for Air, he managed to preserve the core strength of the RAF at the time, even when it was under threat from the Treasury. He also encouraged the planning of vital

new aircraft such as the Hurricane and Spitfire. It was also under his tutelage that radar was developed for use by the RAF. The RAF Staff College at Cranwell, Lincolnshire was opened during the last months of his time as air minister. However, he failed to impress his second cousin Sir Winston Churchill, who thought little of his talents. Controversially, he extolled the virtues of Nazi Germany and badly underestimated the strength of the German Luftwaffe. His family had interests in Coal Mining and due to the relative success of his pits in North East England and the way his workers benefited from this drew him closer to the Socialist Parties in Government, this resulted in him adopting a diplomatic attitude to Nazi Germany, he also made many visits to Nazi Germany and once had a top level Nazi Party official Von Ribbontrop in 1936 visit him at Mount Stewart as he pursued a policy of diplomacy with Nazi Germany.



Figure 18: The Most Honourable The Seventh Marquess of Londonderry KG, MVO, PC, PC. (After Wikipedia.org)

## 5. Recommendations for further work

The association between the Londonderry family, the Mount Stewart estate and the Second World War is well-known, but the physical evidence of this was, until recently, hidden by many years of plant growth. Preliminary work to cut back this growth has revealed substantial evidence of Second World War military activity and surprisingly, evidence of First World War activity as well. These discoveries add a further dimension to what is an amazing record of human activity at the Mount Stewart estate, from man's earliest colonisation of Ireland during the Mesolithic period, to the present day.

During the 2016 survey it became clear that this is a much more extensive site that was initially apparent. Further survey work here would be required to establish its full extent and to identify further features.

Hopefully, further archaeological survey, excavation and research will add detail to existing knowledge and provide future generations of visitors and researchers to enjoy this site to its maximum potential.

## **6. Bibliography**

*Belfast Telegraph* [website] (accessed January 2016): Mount Stewart (Extracted from the website *Second World War in Northern Ireland*, Co Down, Part 1, Pages 14-18.)

*Wikipedia* (accessed 22/5/16) File: Westland Lysander Mk3A AN2070947.jpg.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

**Site:** Mount Stewart RAF site

**Date:** 2 April 2016

**Make and model of camera...***Ricoh G600 & others*

Frame no	Viewed From	Details
RIMG0001	North	UAS Survey Group members at work
RIMG0052	West	Tree-carving dating from 1940, reading 'Victory is Ours RAF'.
RIMG0082	West	Tree-carving dating from 1940, reading 'R.A.F. 1940 J.G.A. [probably his initials] Oxton B'Head'
RIMG0077	East	Stable block accommodation for junior ranks
RIMG0162	South	An overgrown concrete base on which a Nissen hut would have been constructed.
RIMG0131	West	The remains of an overgrown Nissen Hut which appears to have contained two tractor bays.
	West	Remains of a probable shower block
RIMG0110	North	Remains of a probable shower block
RIMG0145	N/A	Remains of a wartime fire bucket
RIMG0151	N/A	Wartime tractor towing hitch