
Introduction

If you travel by the route from the south which so many have used over the years, you turn off the Great North Road at Colsterworth. By the back roads you pass the grass airfield of Spitalgate and come to the village of Ancaster rich in Roman remains. Following the Ermine Street northwards for about three miles you top a rise and see in the distance a white dome surmounting an imposing building. This improbable sight amid the dappled and ordered Lincolnshire fields has evoked much stirring of emotion and memory since it rose in the early 1930s. CLM Brown wrote in *Air Power* in 1954:

Coming from Newark as one surmounts the Jurassic Ridge at Caythorpe, the distant dome of the College catches the eye, brooding a little incongruously over the west Lincolnshire wastes.

From whichever direction you approach Cranwell the central pinnacle by day or the flashing beacon on top of the College by night takes the attention. But the history of the station or base at Cranwell is older than that of the College and this narrative seeks to tell the whole story of Cranwell which together with Halton has been one of the enduring centres of tradition in the Royal Air Force. The story begins in the autumn of 1915 and is still continuing. The College will feature prominently as the major unit of the station but there are other stories of other units which form part of the incongruous but successful union between the Service and the people of Lincolnshire who are proud of the camp that grew up near the village of Cranwell.

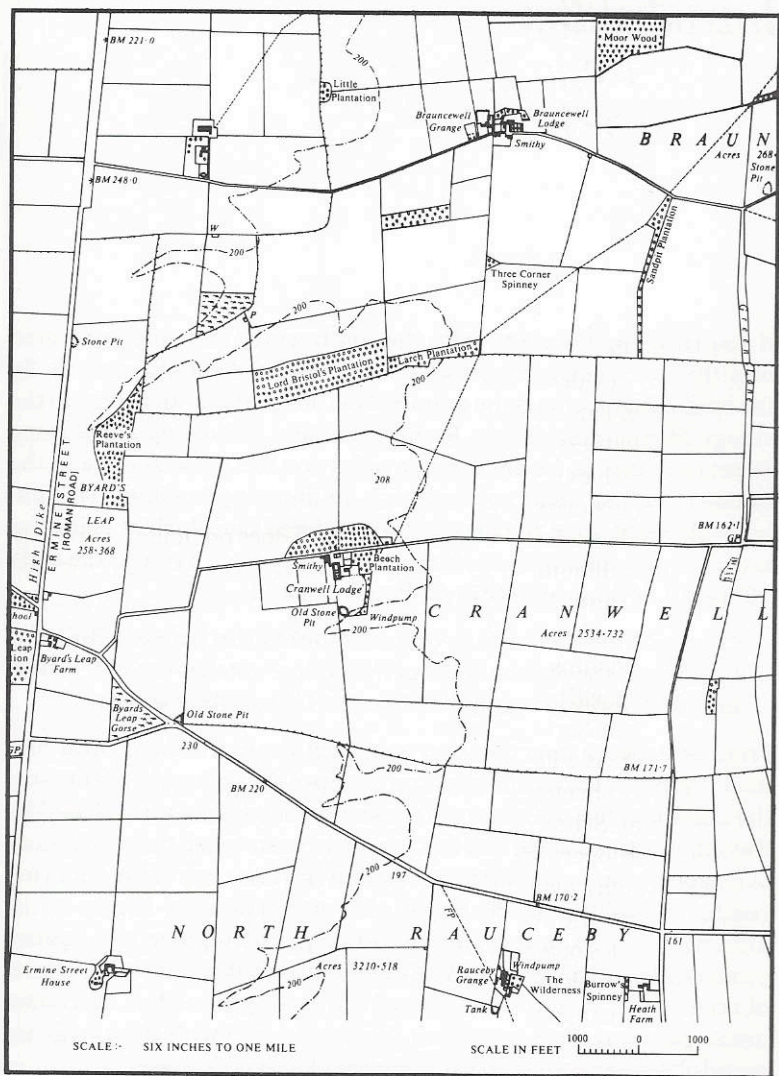


Fig 1 The land around Cranwell in 1916.