

AAIB Bulletin No: 1/96

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Category: 1.3

Aircraft Type and Registration: Piper PA-28-181 Cherokee Archer II, G-BLFI

No & Type of Engines: 1 Lycoming O-360-A4M piston engine

Year of Manufacture: 1984

Date & Time (UTC): 12 November 1995 at 1515 hrs

Location: Old Warden Airfield, Bedfordshire

Type of Flight: Private

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - 3

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - None

Nature of Damage: Right main gear leg detached and distortion of stabiliser

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence with IMC Rating

Commander's Age: 42 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 296 hours (of which 27 were on type)
Last 90 days - 9 hours
Last 28 days - 2 hours

Information Sources: Aircraft Accident Report Form and photographs submitted by the pilot plus telephone calls

Old Warden is an unlicensed airfield with an air-to-ground radio service and operates on a PPR basis. At times of infrequent flying activity the radio service is suspended and pilots can 'book out' at the museum shop. Pilots may then depart non-radio although many depart making 'blind' RTF calls to 'Old Warden Traffic', as this pilot did. He and his passengers had visited the Shuttleworth collection and were departing from grass Runway 12 in good weather and light wind conditions. At the time a large number of sheep (at least 100) were free to graze anywhere on the airfield. Whilst taxiing to the threshold of Runway 12 the pilot checked that the runway was clear of sheep but on reaching the threshold he had to hold whilst another aircraft made an approach and low pass to Runway 04.

Only the first part of Runway 12 is visible from the threshold because of a hump in the runway which obscures most of its length. After holding for a short time on the threshold, the pilot commenced the take-off roll. As the remainder of the runway appeared from beyond the hump, the pilot noticed a number of sheep had moved into the area and some were grazing on the runway. The aircraft was travelling at about 50 kt and the grass was damp; at this speed the pilot was unable to stop, take off or turn, and the aircraft collided with three sheep. During the collision the right main gear leg sheared off

at the base of the shock absorber casting and the aircraft slewed to the right of the runway coming to rest about 50 metres from the impact. No one on board the aircraft was hurt but two sheep were killed during the impact and a third had to be humanely destroyed.

Both Pooley's and the Bottlang flight guides contain warnings that livestock may be grazing on the airfield during winter. Livestock have been grazing there for years without a similar accident but following this one, the airfield management have decided to move grazing livestock off the airfield at weekends.