

BRITISH WOMEN PILOTS' ASSOCIATION

Celebrating

100 Years

of British Women
Pilots 1911 - 2011



**Centenary of the first
British Woman Pilot Hilda Hewlett**



www.bwpa.co.uk

More than a century of achievement

British women have played a prominent role in aviation from the beginning and many became household names in their day. As early as 1905 **Dolly Shepherd**, a renowned parachutist of exceptional courage entertained the crowds by ascending to heights of up to 4,000 feet on a trapeze slung below a hot air balloon before descending by parachute to great acclaim.



However, **Hilda B Hewlett**, Billie to her friends, was the first in what is a long line of British women aviation pioneers and record-breakers. A mother of two, she learned to fly at the flying school she ran with her business partner at the Brooklands motor racing circuit in Surrey and received her pilot's licence on 29th August 1911 at the age of 47. Later that year she taught her son to fly. A Naval officer, he was the first, and possibly only military pilot to be trained by his mother. Hilda went on to own and run an aircraft factory that produced aircraft for World War One and trained women for the workforce.

In the 1920s **Lady Mary Bailey** became the first woman to fly solo from England to South Africa and **Mary Russell, Duchess of Bedford** made a record-breaking flight from England to Karachi and back.

In 1930 **Mildred, the Hon Mrs Victor Bruce**, set out after only 40 hours flying experience to become the first woman to fly around the world alone (crossing the oceans by ship), thus also being the first person to fly from England to Japan and the first to fly the Yellow Sea. Mildred helped pioneer mid-air refuelling in Britain and was a major force in pre-war commercial aviation, establishing several freight and passenger airlines. Her factory rebuilt damaged RAF planes during World War II. During the 1930s **Amy Johnson** became the first woman to make a solo flight from England to Australia and set and broke many other long-distance records. In 1934 **Jean Batten** beat Amy's time by more than 4 days on her solo flight from England to Australia and went on to complete the first England - Australia round trip by a woman. **Beryl Markham** became the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean in an east to west direction in 1936 - a difficult feat against prevailing headwinds.



At the outbreak of World War II many women who had learned to fly in the 1920s and 30s were keen to use their skills to help the war effort and in 1940 the women's branch of the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), with **Pauline Gower** at its head, took on its first women to ferry planes to operational squadrons.



Amy Johnson, Joan Hughes, Lettice Curtis, the first woman to be cleared to fly 4-engine bombers, **Jackie Moggridge, Freydis Sharland**, future founding Chairman of the BWPA, **Jean Lennox Bird, Ann Welch** and **Diana Barnato Walker** are just a handful of the many women

who flew for the ATA. The ATA was disbanded after the war but a number of the women continued flying: some as instructors, a very few fought hard to be employed as airline pilots and the rest flew purely recreationally. It was a group of these ex-ATA pilots who founded the BWPA in 1955.

Turned down by the ATA because her engineering expertise was of more use elsewhere, **Anne Burns** became a world expert on Clear Air Turbulence. She took up gliding in 1954 and by 1961 she held 10 of the 11 UK women's records. **Anne Welch** was a leading light in the gliding world from 1938 until the mid-1960s, when she moved on to become closely involved with the development of hang-gliding and paragliding.

In 1952 **Jean Lennox Bird** became the first woman pilot to gain her RAF wings as a member of the WRAF Volunteer Reserve, with 3100 hours experience on more than 90 aircraft types. **Diana Barnato Walker** became the first British woman to break the sound barrier in 1963, in a Lightning T4 jet fighter. **Sheila Scott** made her mark in the 1960s by breaking over 100 aviation records through her long distance flight endeavours, which included a 34,000-mile "world and a half" flight in 1971. On this flight, she became the first person to fly over the North Pole in a small aircraft.



In more recent times **Julie Gibson** became the RAF's first full-time female pilot in 1991 and **Jo Salter** became the RAF's first female fast jet pilot in 1992. **Flt Lt Michelle Goodman** was the first woman to be awarded the DFC in 2008 and former BWPA scholarship winner **Flt Lt Kirsty Moore** became the Red Arrows' first female display pilot in 2010.



Other notable women include **Lynne Barton**, British Airways' first female pilot, 1987; **Judy Leden**, multi-World Champion and World record-holding hang glider and paraglider pilot, 1980s to present; **Barbara Harmer**, the first British female Concorde pilot, 1992; **Jennifer Murray**, the first woman to circumnavigate the world solo by helicopter, 2000; **Polly Vacher**, fund-raiser for Flying Scholarships for the Disabled through her long-distance solo flights between 2001 and 2007; and **Caroline Gough-Cooper**, Ladies' World Helicopter Champion, 2002 and 2005.



The BWPA aims to support and encourage women to fly by promoting practical schemes to assist them to gain licences, advising on career opportunities, and providing a forum to enable them to meet and exchange information of mutual interest.

QUALIFICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN TO WOMEN, MEN, FLYERS AND NON-FLYERS ALIKE

FULL MEMBERSHIP is open to women who hold or have held at least a UK PPL, NPPL, Gliding Bronze or appropriate qualification in another flying discipline, or the foreign equivalent of any of these.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP is open to women training for the above licences and to men and women interested in furthering the aims of the association

FAMILY MEMBERSHIP is available to full and associate Members who wish to include their parents, partners and children under 17 years of age.

Whether you are just starting to learn to fly or are already qualified, we can offer you advice on training, careers, scholarships and other flying opportunities. You can also take advantage of regular events, both national and local, including visits to places of aviation interest, fly-ins, training days and formal and informal get-togethers. We produce a quarterly newsletter, fund an annual scholarship and present a variety of awards each year. Above all, you will have the opportunity to meet and enjoy the company of other like-minded aviation enthusiasts.

For a taste of our events programme, read reports of recent activities, download a membership application form or to contact us via email, please visit our website:

www.bwpa.co.uk

New members welcome!