

## "Aviation in Ireland in 1909" Guy Warner - 8th November 2017

The speaker, Mr Guy Warner gave a talk entitled 'Aviation in Ireland 1909 to 1914' Mr Warner divided what was a very interesting talk into three parts, Early Pioneers, Showmen and the Royal Flying Corps in Ireland.

Of the early pioneers Mr Warner looked in detail at three such flyers, Harry Ferguson, Lillian Bland and Joseph Cordiner. Ferguson was the first person to fly in Ireland when he made the first flight at Hillsborough in County Down on 31st December 1909. Early in the New Year he continued his flying experiments at Massarene Park in Antrim. From June he made further successful flights at Magilligan Strand on the north coast. This was an ideal location for flying as the strand was seven miles in length with plenty of room for flying experiments.

In the summer of 1910 Ferguson flew at Newcastle in County Down winning a prize of £100 offered by the local council if he could complete a flight of two miles. He suffered a number of accidents during his flying period but always escaped any serious injury. He actually crashed at Strangford Lough when flying at Newtownards in June 1911. He returned to the area in October that year. This time he flew without incident though shortly afterwards ended his flying career to concentrate on engineering activities.

Lillian Bland also designed and flew her own aircraft, the first biplane to be designed in Ireland and build and tested by a woman anywhere in the world. She developed an interest in flying after visiting the Blackpool aviation meeting in 1901. On her return to Ireland she built an aeroplane which she called the 'Mayfly'. It first flew as a glider at Carnmoney hill near Belfast in the spring of 1910. Later in the year she added an engine to her craft and powered flights began at Lord O'Neill's estate in Randalstown in August and continued throughout the year. In 1911 her flying activities ended when her father persuaded her to stop.

Joseph Cordiner came originally from County Armagh but had moved to Londonderry in 1908. It was while there that he began to build and tested three aeroplanes of his own design. However little is known about his experiments and how successful they were though he later obtained a pilot's licence. During the First World War he became an instructor at Hall Flying School at Hendon near London.

The years immediately before the First World War brought a number of daring record breakers and showmen to Ireland to perform aerial feats which were reported in the local press. These men brought their machines to fairs and shows gave thrilling displays of flying and in some instances took paying passengers aloft. One of the first was Cecil Clayton from Essex who flew at Ballymoney Show in June 1910. Another was James Radley from Lancashire who flew at Bangor in June 1910. He flew at Bangor Castle or at least tried to, as his first flight crashed into trees and was badly

damaged. Fortunately Radley escaped without injury.

Other such with showmen included Bertram Dickson, from Scotland, Cecil Grace from London and Armstrong Dixel, an American. These men not only gave aerial displays but raced each other to the wonder and awe of the large crowds who turned out to watch them. However as the years passed war clouds grew and the government began to look at aircraft for military use. The Royal Flying Corps was formed and the first association between it and Ireland occurred on the 1st September 1913 when five aircraft flew to Newcastle in County Down landing on the beach on the way from Scotland to Limerick to take part in military manoeuvres.

Mr Warner gave a very interesting talk to all those who turned up to the meeting. The years immediately before the First World War were innovative and exciting times for aviation in Ireland. They were a time of great progress in flying and a time when daring aviators brought flying to the general public for the first time.