

PIONEER OF AVIATION.

By: Howell Rees

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Nowadays people fly so frequently across the vast Atlantic, which is still an awesome journey, that they take the experience in their stride as their aircraft hurtles to its destination whilst being miles up in the sky.

In the context of aviation history the year 2003 is a significant milestone, as it is too for Burry Port and Pwll. Seventy-five years ago, on June 18th 1928 to be precise, a woman, Amelia Earhart became the first female to fly across the Atlantic from Trepassy,



Newfoundland, to the Burry Estuary, Carmarthenshire in the seaplane 'Friendship'. It maybe opportune therefore, on the 75th anniversary of the momentous achievement, which blazed the trail in the dramatic development in air travel since those early

pioneering days, that we pause and reflect on Amelia Earhart's contribution to it, and on Burry Port's fleeting moment of fame on the world stage as the result of the record breaking 1928 'Friendship' flight, and to look briefly at Amelia's background and early years which led inexorably to fulfilling her ambition to fly aeroplanes.

The small town of Atchison in Kansas seems an unlikely place to be the birthplace of a woman, whose name, many years after her death, remains synonymous with courage and adventure, and mystery, as to her death. And yet is it so unlikely, is there a more American heroine than Amelia Earhart? Amelia Earhart had that brand of questing courage, which typified American settlers in the century in which she was born. Although her early years were spent in the safe and sheltered communities of Atchison and Kansas City, almost every adult with whom she came in contact was, to some degree, a pioneer. Perhaps the drive to succeed that she was to display time and time again as an adult, had its roots from those early relationships.



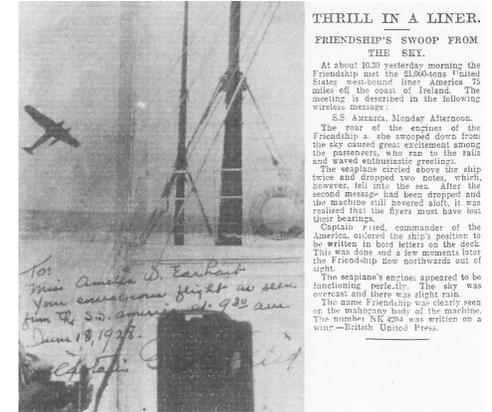
Amelia was 10 years old when she saw her first aeroplane in 1908 on the occasion of the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines. This was five years after the Wright Brothers Orville and Wilbur made the first flight in a heavier than air machine in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Amelia's interest in flying was aroused much later by the numerous air circuses held in her part of America, and she made her first flight, for which she paid \$10, at Long Beach, California, as a passenger, for a ten minute trip. She loved the sensation and was determined there and then to fly, which she did in December 1920. From then on flying became more and more important to her, which led to her record making flight in June 1928 and to other outstanding aviation achievements, and

tragically to her untimely death, her final hours still shrouded in mystery.

After four unsuccessful attempts to ascend, the sea plane 'Friendship' with the crew of Wilbur Stultz as pilot, Amelia Earhart as co pilot and Louis Gordon, mechanic left Trepassy, Newfoundland at 2.51pm (Greenwich Meantime). The 'Friendship' had sufficient fuel for a twenty-seven hour flight. It was anticipated that the journey across the Atlantic to their intended goal of Southampton, England would be completed in twenty hours. The 'Friendship' was fitted with wireless and during the early stages of the flight messages from the 'Friendship' were being picked up by a number of ships. Although the weather was clear at the start, later, because of fog, the ships at sea reporting wireless contact with the 'Friendship' did not sight the seaplane, although the signals were received loud and clear. The SS Rexmore wirelessed that she received a radio message from the 'Friendship' at a point 700 miles east northeast of Newfoundland at 8.40pm (GMT). The message read 'weather good' but the 'Friendship' was not sighted. From then on they were rarely clear of fog and rain, only occasionally catching glimpses of the sea. Amelia spent only a short duration in the cockpit, but conditions were always too rough for her to take the controls and she spent most of the time in the cabin at the rear. Later, after the flight, during a press interview, she explained that she did not take the controls herself because transatlantic flying was a perilous and exacting test for the pilot and they were not going to take chances. It would not have been fair for her, perhaps less experienced and skilful, to have taken the joystick and jeopardised the prospect of success or safety in any way. Flying blind, as they were, navigation had to be done by instruments and very few pilots were complete masters of making their way across uncharted routes by such means.

Flying through the night at about 100 miles per hour towards the coming dawn, still hampered by the fog and rain, and now the radio not functioning, they were uncertain of their location. Stultz decided to lose height hoping that favourable tail winds might mean

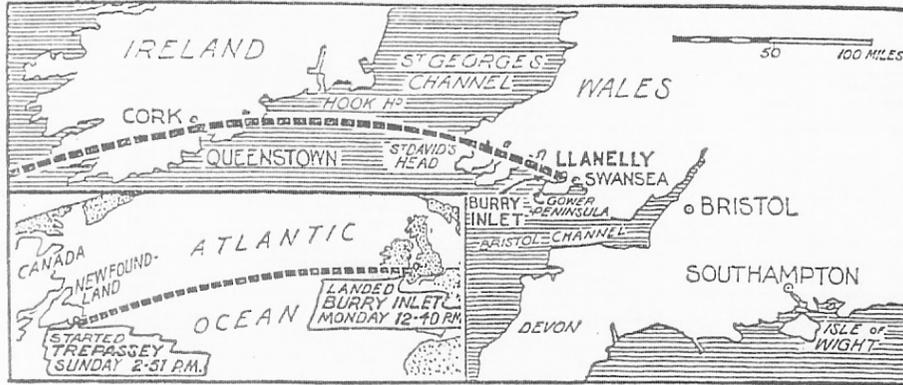
a fast passage and in that case they ought to be able to see Ireland before too long. They were flying by instruments, and to make matters worse, one of the three engines of the seaplane was giving trouble, spluttering and cutting out occasionally. At 3000 feet they broke into patchy clouds and glimpsed the sea again, they had only two hours of fuel remaining.



By all calculations, the coast of Ireland ought to have been in sight within the last hour. Just before 8.00am (GMT), now very concerned about their position, the flyers saw several ships cutting across their course, which, though a welcome sight, it perplexed them. They had expected any ships sighted, to have been steaming a course parallel to theirs, east – west. The liner SS America passed some miles away. They de-toured, using up precious fuel to circle over it while Amelia scribbled a note asking for information as to their position, tied it around an orange and dropped it down on the ship. It missed, as did a subsequent attempt. They considered landing along side the ship, either for refuelling or to be rescued, but they gave up the idea because the sea was so rough, they realised they would never get off again. They decided to fly on.

The cloud cover dropped to 500 feet, all they could see was grey mist as the 'Friendship' droned on, its crew in a state of silent, mounting anxiety. About an hour later, gradually, out of the mist a shadow grew. It

MISS EARHART'S FLIGHT.



The route of the Friendship from Trepassey, Newfoundland, to Burry Estuary, South Wales.

was land. They shouted with relief. They flew over several small islands and followed the coastline in an easterly direction trying to match the coastline with their charts. They found themselves over a big bay, which narrowed into an estuary offering sheltered landing conditions from the big seas running in the bay. They thought they were in Ireland when in fact they were over Carmarthen Bay, leading to the Burry Estuary. The 'Friendship' came in low over Pembrey, up the estuary towards Llanelli. They banked around over the Llanelli New Dock area, returning back down the estuary. Those who saw the seaplane were struck by its orange colour and large pontoons. The name 'Friendship' was clearly seen. The tide was out and large sandbanks were exposed, but there was a smooth stretch of water available, and knowing that their fuel was almost exhausted, Stultz decided to land, gliding down to the water, and then taxied along immediately in front of Pwll village. Coming to an eventual stop at a buoy, located at the western end of Pwll and directly opposite the former Crown Colliery, near Tyrwaun. It was 12.40pm (GMT). They had flown a distance of approximately 2,100 miles in 20 hours 49 minutes.

They opened the door and peered out through the light rain. Louis Gordon dropped down on to one of the 'Friendship's' pontoons and made the seaplane secure to the buoy.



They could see houses and factories beyond the beach, and three men working on a railroad track. The fliers waved and yelled to the workmen, Amelia describes the incident in this way, 'Finally they noticed us, straightened up and even went so far as to walk down to the shore and look us over. Then their animation died out and they went back to their

work. The 'Friendship' simply wasn't interesting. An itinerant transatlantic plane meant nothing.'

After a while, a few people gathered on the beach but aviators' shouts raised no answer. Amelia tried waving a towel and one 'friendly soul' took off his coat and waved back. It was almost an hour before the first boat came out. At low tide it is a very long row from the dock where the nearest available boat was kept. At this stage the crew of the 'Friendship' were still anticipating re-fuelling in order to fly on to their intended destination, Southampton. A check of their fuel tanks while they waited revealed that there was nearly 50 gallons remaining, which for practical purposes meant the supply was exhausted because of the gravity feed fuel supply. Stultz later told reporters that fuel had already ceased to flow to the carburettors on the landing run.

Amelia later recalled her feelings surrounding the air crew's moment of contact with the first boat that approached the 'Friendship' as it floated, moored to the buoy in the Burry Estuary, 'I wish now I had cheered the first boat that came alongside. It was a most ordinary greeting that they gave us. One of the men in the boat called out, 'ship ahoy.' He asked what we needed, Stultz leaned out of the window and said we had flown across the Atlantic.' This was the moment of triumph of the 'Friendship's' epic flight, greeted in such a matter of fact manner to journey's end.

The fliers were surprised to learn that they had landed near Burry Port, Wales and not Ireland as they had assumed. This accounted for the ships crossing their path and not steaming parallel to the 'Friendship's' flight path. At that point they had been flying over the Irish Sea, having flown south of Ireland. The ships that they had seen were plying North-South in the Irish Sea.



Miss Earhart and Mr Gordon, photographed at the door of their seaplane immediately after their arrival at Burry Estuary.

It was decided to move the 'Friendship' to a sheltered mooring at Burry Port harbour, the sea having become very choppy due to the rising wind. The inhabitants of Burry Port soon made up for their slow reaction to the arrival of the aviators in their midst. All through the afternoon word had passed from mouth to mouth, and now determined to make up for their initial cool welcome, a huge crowd gathered, its numbers swollen to more than 2000 by visitors from nearby Llanelli.

On the 'Friendship's' arrival in the harbour, the fliers got into a boat and were rowed across to the quay. They were given a tremendous reception and on landing they were so pressed by admirers that it was only with the greatest difficulty that they were able to move along to the offices of the Frickers Metal Co, located at the old Copper works, at the dockside.

According to a Mr Thomas Williams of Burry Port, the engineer of Frickers Metal Co, and who spoke to the fliers in the works office, an ordnance map was produced on the arrival of the intrepid trio at the offices to show them exactly where they were. Mr Williams retained the map as a souvenir. On it is

marked the spot at which the historic fliers of the 'Friendship' ended their epic flight, and around this mark are the autographs of the three fliers. Another souvenir of the occasion retained by Mrs Williams, the works engineer's wife, was the cup out of which Amelia Earhart revived herself with tea. Mr and Mrs Williams were right at the heart of the events unfolding at the works office that memorable day, for they lived in a maisonette above the works offices.



THE PUSH FOR AUTOGRAPHS: On arrival at the shore of Burry Port there was a rush for the plucky young aviatrix's signature. The police had some difficulty in keeping back the throng of admirers.

Mr Williams, interviewed again many years after the momentous day of 1928 recalled that the 18th June was a day of mist and thick drizzle with visibility poor. He went on to say, 'That morning somebody was talking about an attempt to fly the Atlantic, and I said I hoped they would not bump into the works stack'. Going home to dinner shortly afterwards he was astonished to see the seaplane. Mr Williams continued, 'It came over Pembrey and passed the works stack on its north side and about 20 feet below the rim'. The first boat to the 'Friendship' out in the estuary said Mr Williams, was that of Captain Fisher, the manager at Frickers, who had with him a Mr Dai Harvey Thomas and it was they who brought Amelia Earhart and her companions

ashore and to the works office. While the fliers were at the work offices the tumult outside continued unabated as the mass of excited people struggled for a glimpse of the aviators. Such was the security that had to be kept at the works entrance to keep the people at bay, that even the Chairman and members of the Burry Port Urban District Council, who arrived to offer a civic reception, were at first denied entry. According to Mr Williams, 'The newspaper reporters were the worst of all, they were like wolves trying to fight their way in'. Their efforts to gain access to the aircrew were in any case doomed to failure, as the details of the 'Friendships' flight were being reserved for the arrival of a representative of the New York Times newspaper, which had bought the rights of the story in advance.

LLANELLY HONOURED LANDING IN THE BAY THEIR FIGHT AGAINST RAIN, MIST, AND FUEL SHORTAGE.

Miss Amelia Earhart (29), the American "girl Lindy," has flown the Atlantic, the first of her sex to do so after three had lost their lives in the effort—the Hon. Miss Mackay, Princess Lowenstein-Wertholm, and Mrs. Francis Grayson.

The name of Llanelli was flashed all over the world on Monday morning when the news got abroad that the American seaplane "Friendship" had effected a safe landing near Pwll after a record run, and the intrepid airwoman deserves to be congratulated.

Aboard were Commander Stultz (Miss Earhart was his assistant pilot), and Mechanic Lou Gordon.

First news of the triumph came when the United States liner America wrecked that the Friendship had twice circled over her and tried vainly to drop two notes, 12 miles off Queenstown, and then flown on. Next came a wire stating that she had been seen near Llanelli, and finally it was officially announced that she had landed in Burry Estuary, having covered 2,900 miles or so in about 21 hours.

The Friendship came down on the sea about two miles from Burry Port Coastguard Station. The tide was out, and the plane came to a standstill quite close to the shore. Coastguards at once went out in a boat to ascertain the crew's wishes.

There were only a few people about at the time.

"We had to fight mist and almost incessant rain," Mr. Stultz told the pressmen.

Mr Williams recalled that when the New York Times journalist eventually arrived, he was soon busy at the works office typewriter at Frickers up to a late hour. Upon each section of his story being completed, the local policeman, a P.C. Hopkins, was waiting to take it to the General Post office at Llanelli, for the report to be wired direct to New York. The

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER
Showers, light, frequent, occasional
and much change to temperatures.
73°-75°; 60°-65°; 50°-55°.

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 PUBLISHED DAILY, EXCEPT ON SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS
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AMELIA EARHART FLIES ATLANTIC, FIRST WOMAN TO DO IT;
 TELLS HER OWN STORY OF PERILOUS 21-HOUR TRIP TO WALES;
 RADIO QUIT AND THEY FLEW BLIND OVER INVISIBLE OCEAN





FOUGHT RAIN, FOG AND SNOW ALL THE WAY
Miss Earhart Says Motors Spat and Gas Ran Low, But She Had Neither Fear Nor Doubt of Success.

PASSED OVER IRELAND WITHOUT EVEN SEEING
Wind Aided Plane—Gat Credits Feet to Stultz a Gordon—She Flew Because It Would Have Been 'Too Inartistic to Refuse.'

By AMELIA EARHART.
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BURRY PORT, Carmarthenshire, South Wales, June 18.—I have arrived and I am happy—extremely.

Who did I fly? Why was it so difficult to fly? I would not like to be too particular to explain it. I have been flying for two years. I had almost to spend my vacation flying from the moment the plane was in the air. I had done it would never forgive myself.

My trip across the Atlantic aboard the airplane Friendship was all I had dreamed it to be as pleasant, and much more comfortable than I have. This is my first trip to England, and it is rather funny because in my slight knowledge I have to make the trip again some day and see it in the same way as it. What I wanted to demonstrate was that the type of land was completely as

'Friendship's' crew were marooned for some hours at the works office before police reinforcements arrived and cleared a way for two motorcars to take them to the nearby Ashburnham Hotel.

Within a few hours of the landing, congratulatory messages were pouring in from all parts. President Coolidge cabled Amelia in the following terms from Washington D.C. 'I wish to express to you, the first woman successfully to span the North Atlantic by air, the great admiration of myself and the United States for your splendid flight.' News of Amelia's success caused jubilation throughout the United States. Special editions of the newspapers describing her achievement were eagerly bought by crowds in the streets.

It had been intended to leave Burry Port the same evening, but it was eventually decided to postpone departure until the following day, Tuesday, and the fliers were put up at the Ashburnham Hotel for the night. Her worshipers crowded outside. Some minor repairs were carried out on the 'Friendship' with the assistance of Mr J E V Evans,

surveyor to Burry Port Urban Council. The seaplane was re-fuelled and at 11.00am, Tuesday 19th June, 'Friendship' taxied out of the harbour. After running along the water some distance, the seaplane rose like a bird, circled around, waiting in the light rain for its escort, a seaplane from the Imperial Airways Company to take off, and about 11.30am the two seaplanes flew off together, en-route to Southampton, and another tumultuous reception.

Burry Port, its brief period of fame over, subsided once again into comfortable obscurity. But Burry Port did not let the historic event, which had occurred on its doorstep simply fade away from memory to be lost in the mists of time. Two years later, its citizens subscribed to a commemorative monument celebrating the day when the 'Friendship' and its crew put the name of their town on the front page of newspapers across the world. The plaque unveiled by Sir Arthur Witten Brown, the first man, with Sir John Alcock to fly across the Atlantic, is still in place today in the Square near the Burry Port railway station.



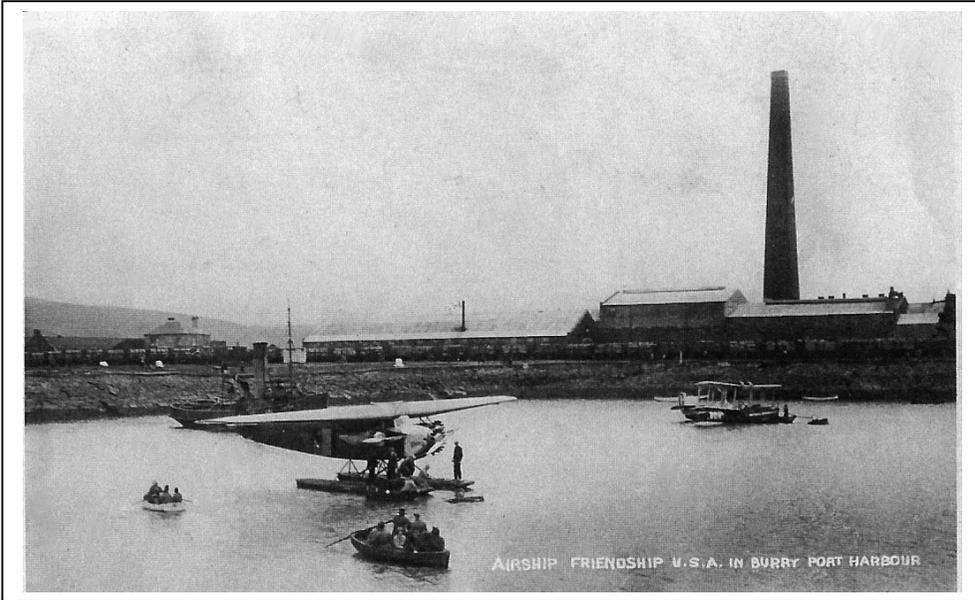
ATLANTIC FLIGHT TRIBUTE.—Sir Arthur Whitten Brown, first man (with the late Sir John Alcock) to fly the Atlantic, beside the monument he unveiled at Burry Port, near Llanelly, to Miss Amelia Earhart, first woman to achieve the feat.

These were only some of her achievements in air travel in the decade following her sensational crossing of the Atlantic in June 1928. Still pursuing her aviation career, she undertook a 'round the world' flight in June 1937. Taking off from Miami airport, and flying east. She had indicated that this could be her last flight, as she intended to retire from active flying, settle down, pursue a lecturing career and fly 'for fun only'.

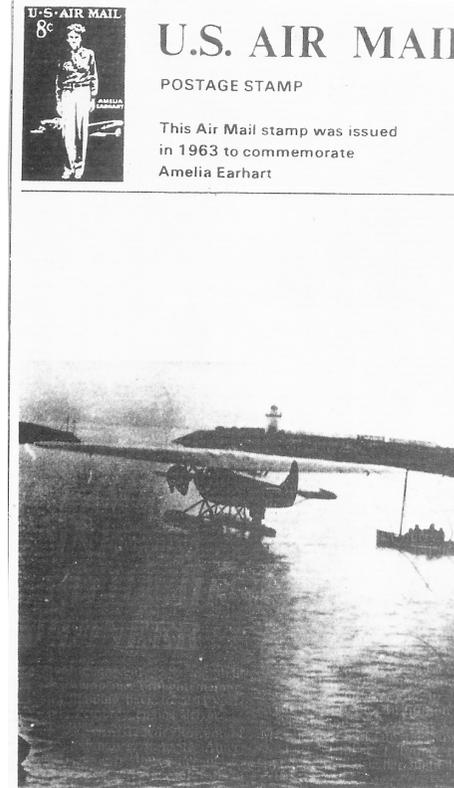
Nearing the end of the flight, but with the Pacific Ocean still to be crossed, she took off from Lae Airstrip in New Guinea for Howland Island in the Pacific. She never arrived there. Although radio contact was made with her on this fateful leg of the journey, radio contact was eventually lost. She was never seen again.

Amelia Earhart was the object of the most extensive mass rescue attempts ever made for a single lost plane. Four thousand men, manning ten ships and sixty-five airplanes combed two hundred and fifty thousand square miles of the Pacific. No trace of the 'Electra' airplane was found.

Amelia Earhart continued to follow her passion for flying, creating new aviation records. In May 1932 she became the first woman to fly the Atlantic solo and also the first person to fly the Atlantic twice. In 1935 she became the first person to fly solo in the Pacific, and the first person to fly solo over both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.



AIRSHIP FRIENDSHIP U.S.A. IN BURRY PORT HARBOUR



U.S. AIR MAIL
8c

U.S. AIR MAIL
POSTAGE STAMP

This Air Mail stamp was issued
in 1963 to commemorate
Amelia Earhart



In Burry Port and Pwll too, there is special regard, an affinity for Amelia Earhart because of the hand of fate which guided her seaplane the 'Friendship' on that perilous flight across the wide North Atlantic, through the mists, to the eventual landing in the Burry Estuary and a safe haven in Burry Port harbour, on that now so far off day in the summer of 1928. The dramatic impact of the flight and landing lingered long in the recollection of those who witnessed the exciting scenes as the drama developed, and who have passed on to the succeeding generations, their experiences, impressions and knowledge of it, and the day of Burry Port and Amelia Earhart's rendezvous with destiny.

Material for this account of the 'Friendship' flight comes from the following publications, which the author acknowledges: -

'The Sound of Wings' by Mary Lovell

'Amelia Earhart' a biography by Doris L Rich

*The Llanelli Mercury, Western Mail
Daily Mail, South Wales Evening Post*

[Article written by: Howell Rees]

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Over the nine years spanning her first and last transoceanic flights, Amelia Earhart became one of the most famous women in the world. The 'private' Amelia disliked that fame intensely, but the 'public' Amelia played on it relentlessly as a platform on which to fight for her ideals of equality for women, of which she was one of the leading lights with the likes of Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the President of the United States, and a world where flying would be common place, acceptable and accessible to all. She lived and died, in dogged pursuit of her vision and by so doing brought it ever closer to reality. The memory of her achievements lives on in the annals of aviation history and an indication of the regard for her in America was highlighted by the issue of an Airmail stamp in America in 1963 to commemorate her and the thirty fifth anniversary of the crossing of the Atlantic in the seaplane 'Friendship'.