

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



LILIAN BLAND (1887–1971)

Pioneer Aviator

Lillian Bland was born in Kent, and at the age of twenty-eight came to live at Tobarcooran House, the family home in Carnmoney, near Belfast. By this stage she had earned a reputation as a press photographer and sports writer. Her aspirations were fired by the achievements of the Wright brothers in the USA and she began to construct a bi-plane glider, and was the first woman in the British Isles, possibly in the world, to design, build and fly her own plane.

She named the plane 'Mayfly' with deliberate irony. The 'Mayfly' did fly, and she fitted an engine by A. V. Roe & Co. This modified craft flew successfully in 1910. It is said that her father's offer of a car diverted her attention to running a motor agency. In 1912 she emigrated to Canada, married a cousin and carved out a farm on virgin land. At the age of ninety-three the Belfast Telegraph quoted her as saying that the only excitement left to her was gambling.

Mayfly was presented to the Dublin Flying club.