

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

### LECALE AND DOWNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### **JOHN JOSEPH GILMORE | Pioneer Aviator**

Joseph Gilmore, was born on 22 June 1900 in 31 Lowry Street in east Belfast. In 1929 he joined the Irish Free State Army Air Force in Dublin as a civil engineer. On 5 June 1933 he made the first parachute jump in Ireland at Balldonnell Airport. In all he made a total of 15 parachute descents.

In 1935 Gilmore joined Imperial Airways. In 1938 he was sent to Quebec to help set up North Atlantic flights. In 1940 he transferred to Gander in Newfoundland where he was in charge of the preparation of the bomber aircraft that RAF Transport Command were ferrying across the Atlantic to assist the war effort, and personally flew many of the 9,000 aircraft involved.

Gilmore flew about half of the over 500 rescue missions made from Gander. On 1 May 1945 he and a passenger were killed on a flight near Prince Edward Island. Gilmore has an impressive record of inventions to his credit. He designed air intake shutters, de-icing and fuel pump systems that were taken up more widely.

Gilmore had a colourful career, apart from his profession. In July 1923 he was arrested in the course of helping a wounded IRA prisoner to escape to the Irish Free State and spent some time in custody. In 1933 he purchased a high wing monoplane, the first of its kind, in East Lincolnshire and crashed it on the way home. He stored it on a local farm and having retrieved the wreckage some time later proceeded to rebuild it, using various spare parts and making his own where none were available. The plane received an official registration that was not cancelled until 1949 when it was noted 'owner deceased'. There are many tales told of his exploits in the plane, which he also used to take aerial photographs. The plane was eventually written off after several more crashes.

For his part in the war effort Gilmore posthumously received the award of an MBE in 1946. He is the only civilian buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Gander.