

The Story behind the stamp. The first non-stop transatlantic flight



On April 2nd 1969 the Post Office issued a set of five stamps commemorating "Anniversaries".

The 5d value commemorates the first non-stop transatlantic flight of Alcock and Brown



John Alcock was born on 5 November 1892 at Basford House on Seymour Grove, Firwood, Manchester, England. He attended St. Thomas's Primary School in Heaton Chapel, Stockport and Heyhouses School in Lytham St. Annes. He first became interested in flying at the age of 17. His first job was at the Empress Motor Works in Manchester. In 1910 he became an assistant to Works Manager Charles Fletcher, an early Manchester aviator and Norman Crossland, a motor engineer and founder of Manchester Aero Club. It was during this period that Alcock met the Frenchman Maurice Ducrocq who was both a demonstration pilot and UK sales representative for aero engines made by the Italian Spirito Mario Viale. Ducrocq took Alcock on as a mechanic at the Brooklands aerodrome, Surrey, where he learned to fly at Ducrocq's flying school, gaining his pilot's licence there in November 1912. Alcock then joined the Sunbeam Motor Car Company as a racing pilot. By summer 1914 he was proficient enough to compete in a Hendon-Birmingham-Manchester and return air race, flying a Farman biplane. He landed at Trafford Park Aerodrome and flew back to Hendon the same day.

Arthur Whitten Brown was born in Glasgow, to American parents in 1886 and shortly afterwards the family moved to Manchester. Known to his family and friends as "Teddie", he began his career in engineering before the outbreak of the First World War.

In 1914, he enlisted in the ranks of the University and Public Schools Brigade (UPS) for which he had to take out British citizenship. The ranks of the UPS were full of potential officers and Brown was one of those who sought a commission to become a Second Lieutenant in the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion of the Manchester Regiment. After service in France, Brown was seconded to 2 Squadron Royal Flying Corps as an observer.





Alcock (right) with Arthur Brown in 1919

In April 1913 the London newspaper the Daily Mail offered a prize of £10,000 to the aviator who shall first cross the Atlantic in an aeroplane in flight from any point in the United States of America, Canada or Newfoundland to any point in Great Britain or Ireland in 72 continuous hours. The competition was suspended with the outbreak of war in 1914 but reopened after Armistice was declared in 1918.

Brown became a prisoner of war after being shot down over Germany. Alcock, too, was imprisoned and had resolved to fly the Atlantic one day. As Brown continued developing his aerial navigation skills, Alcock approached the Vickers engineering and aviation firm at Weybridge, who had considered entering their Vickers Vimy IV twin-engined bomber in the competition but had not yet found a pilot. The Vimy had originally been manufactured at Vickers in Crayford, the first twelve being made there and tested at Joyce Green airfield, Dartford. It was a great inconvenience to have to dismantle the aircraft to move them to Joyce Green so production was moved to Weybridge. The thirteenth Vimy assembled was the one used for the trans-Atlantic crossing. Alcock said 13 was his lucky number. Sir Henry Norman got involved in the detailed planning for a proposed transatlantic flight using the F.B.27. This planning included the route to be flown and of course, the hangar facilities and the provision of fuel needed for preparation of the aircraft in Newfoundland.

Alcock's enthusiasm impressed the Vickers' team and he was appointed as their pilot. Work began on converting the Vimy for the long flight, replacing the bomb racks with extra petrol tanks. Shortly afterwards, Brown, who was unemployed, approached Vickers seeking a post and his knowledge of long distance navigation persuaded them to take him on as Alcock's navigator.

Several teams had entered the competition and, when Alcock and Brown arrived in St. John's, Newfoundland, the Handley Page team were in the final stages of testing their aircraft for the flight, but their leader, Admiral Mark Kerr, was determined not to take off until the plane was in perfect condition. The Vickers team quickly assembled their plane and, at around 1:45 p.m. on 14 June, whilst the Handley Page team were conducting yet another test, the Vickers plane took off from Lester's Field. Alcock and Brown flew the modified Vickers Vimy, powered by two Rolls-Royce Eagle 360 hp engines which were supported by an on-site Rolls Royce team led by engineer Eric Platford. The pair brought toy cat mascots with them for the flight – Alcock had 'Lucky Jim' while Brown had 'Twinkletoes'.



Captain John Alcock stowing provisions aboard Vickers Vimy aircraft before trans-Atlantic flight Jun 14 1919.



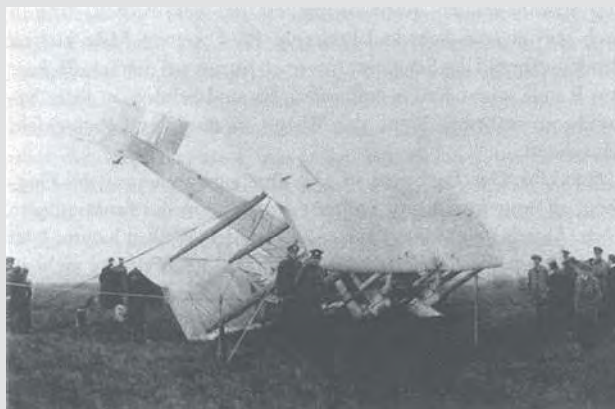
Alcock and Brown take off from St. John's, Newfoundland, in June 1919

It was not an easy flight. The overloaded aircraft had difficulty taking off the rough field and only barely missed the tops of the trees. At 17:20 the wind-driven electrical generator failed, depriving them of radio contact, their intercom and heating. An exhaust pipe burst shortly afterwards, causing a frightening noise which made conversation impossible without the failed intercom.

They had to fly through thick fog. This was serious because it prevented Brown from being able to navigate using his sextant. Blind flying in fog or cloud should only be undertaken with gyroscopic instruments, which they did not have. Alcock twice lost control of the aircraft and nearly hit the sea after a spiral dive. He also had to deal with a broken trim control that made the plane become very nose-heavy as fuel was consumed.

At 12:15 a.m., Brown got a glimpse of the stars and could use his sextant, and found that they were on course. Their electric heating suits had failed, making them very cold in the open cockpit.

Then at 3:00 a.m., they flew into a large snowstorm. They were drenched by rain, their instruments iced up, and the plane was in danger of icing and becoming unflyable. The carburettors also iced up; it has been said that Brown had to climb out onto the wings to clear the engines, although he made no mention of that.



They made landfall in County Galway, landing at 8:40 a.m. on 15 June 1919, not far from their intended landing place, after less than sixteen hours' flying time. The aircraft was damaged upon arrival because they landed on what appeared from the air to be a suitable green field, but which turned out to be Derrygillmlagh Bog, near Clifden in County Galway in Ireland. This caused the air-

craft to nose-over, although neither of the airmen was hurt. Brown said that if the weather had been good they could have pressed on to London.

Their altitude varied between sea level and 12,000 ft (3,700 m). They took off with 865 imperial gallons (3,900 L) of fuel. They had spent around fourteen-and-a-half hours over the North Atlantic crossing the coast at 4:28 p.m., having flown 1,890 miles (3,040 km) in 15 hours 57 minutes at an average speed of 115 mph (185 km/h; 100 knots). Their first interview was given to Tom 'Cork' Kenny of The Connacht Tribune."



Alcock and Brown were treated as heroes on the completion of their flight. In addition to a share of the Daily Mail award of £10,000, Alcock received 2,000 guineas (£2,100) from the State Express Cigarette Company and £1,000 from Laurence R Philipps for being the first Briton to fly the Atlantic Ocean. Both men were knighted a few days later by King George V.

Alcock was killed on 18 December 1919 when he crashed near Rouen whilst flying the new Vickers Viking amphibian to the Paris Airshow. Brown died on 4 October 1948

Statue of Alcock and Brown formerly located at London Heathrow Airport. Relocated to Clifden, Connemara, County Galway, Ireland to celebrate centenary in 2019



Right. Alcock and Brown's Vickers Vimy in the Science Museum

Ian Lasok-Smith

Source: Transatlantic flight of Alcock and Brown - <https://en.wikipedia.org>