

Captain Jack Alcock (1892-1919)

The Museum holds archives and objects relating to the career of the aviator Captain Jack Alcock. The archives include letters, photographs and newspaper articles. The object collection includes aircraft parts, medallions and other personal items.

Early Career

John William Alcock (known as Jack) was born in Manchester in 1892. He spent much of his early life living in the Fallowfield area. When he left school, he went to train as an apprentice at the Empress Motor Works on Stockport Road in Longsight. Empress built aeroplanes and rotary engines designed by the Works Manager, Charles Fletcher.

Alcock also worked for Norman Crossland, a motor engineer and founder of the Manchester Aero Club. It was during this period that Alcock met the Frenchman Maurice Ducrocq. Ducrocq was both a demonstration pilot and the UK sales representative for aero-engines made by the Italian Spirito Mario Viale. Ducrocq took Alcock on as a mechanic at the Brooklands aerodrome. Alcock learned to fly at Ducrocq's flying school and was awarded his pilot's certificate by the Royal Aero Club in 1912. Before the outbreak of the First World War, Alcock was also employed as a test pilot for Sunbeam aero-engines.



Camera carried by Alcock on his historic transatlantic flight.

The First World War

Jack Alcock began the First World War as an instructor for the Royal Naval Air Service stationed at Eastchurch in Kent. He was subsequently placed on active duty and sent to Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos in 1916. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for shooting down two German aircraft over the Aegean Sea on 30 September 1917. Alcock later received a letter from Straoka Iliamna, the former girlfriend of Lieutenant Mueller, one of the German pilots. Straoka was a Bulgarian woman living in Varna, who had seen an article about the incident in the *Daily Mirror* that featured Alcock posing with the float from one of the German seaplanes.

On the evening of 30 September 1917 Alcock took off from Mudros in a Handley Page O/100 bomber for a raid on Constantinople. The aeroplane experienced engine failure over the Gallipoli peninsula and crashed into the sea near Suvla Bay. Alcock and his crew survived but were taken prisoner. He was held captive in Turkey until the end of the War when he was repatriated to England. Alcock was demobilised and left the Royal Air Force in March 1919.

Crossing the Atlantic

Jack Alcock is most famous for making the first non-stop transatlantic flight. On the 14-15 June 1919, Alcock, with his navigator Lieutenant Arthur Whitten Brown, made history by flying a Vickers Vimy aeroplane from Newfoundland, Canada, to Clifden in Ireland in just over 16 hours.

After the war Alcock became a test pilot for Vickers at Weybridge. The aircraft industry had boomed during wartime and many technological advances were made. However, the end of the War forced the manufacturing companies to shift from military to civil aircraft production in order to maintain sales. There was a need to promote aviation and the outstanding 1913 *Daily Mail* prize of £10,000 for the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic Ocean soon turned into a competition between a number of teams. Alcock was largely responsible for convincing the Vickers company management to enter their aircraft in the transatlantic competition. The aeroplane that he flew was a modified version of the Vimy bomber which had originally been designed for attacking targets as far away as Berlin.



Alcock's mascot 'Lucky Jim' the cat.

Alcock met Brown at Vickers, where the latter was looking for work as an engineer after the War. Brown had served in the Royal Flying Corps and was also taken prisoner. He taught himself aerial navigation during his period of captivity in Germany. Together Alcock and Brown flew approximately 1,900 miles between St. John's in Newfoundland and Clifden in County Galway, where they eventually landed in a peat bog. They then travelled to London where they were awarded the prize money by Winston Churchill. Both men were knighted by King George V.

Tragically Jack Alcock was killed on 18 December 1919. He was flying a Vickers Viking seaplane from Weybridge to the Paris Aircraft Exhibition when he crashed in bad weather at Cottévrard, near Rouen. He is buried in Southern Cemetery in Manchester.

For more information:

<i>Read</i>	Alcock, J. and Whitten Brown, A. <i>Our Transatlantic Flight</i> . London, UK: William Kimber, 1969. Whitten Brown, A. <i>Flying the Atlantic in Sixteen Hours</i> . New York, USA: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1920.
<i>Study</i>	The John Alcock Archive in the Collections Centre.
<i>Visit</i>	The float from the German seaplane shot down by Alcock in 1917 in Collections Centre Store 1.