

## AWE 2006 - Clare Walker

Good morning/afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

[SLIDE] The date is November 30 1945. The place: White Waltham Airfield, near the Berkshire town of Reading in England. The event: the final lowering of the Air Transport Auxiliary flag, marking the disbandment of one of the most extraordinary aviation organisations that has ever existed. Just a few months after it was founded, on September 3 1939, two days after Britain declared war on Germany, it became:

- [SLIDE] The first organisation anywhere in the world where women were officially employed to ferry military aircraft.
- [SLIDE] The first where women were allowed to fly fighter aircraft
- [SLIDE] The first where women were allowed to fly bomber aircraft
- [SLIDE] The first organisation to grant men and women equal pay as a matter of policy.

By the time the ATA flag had been lowered, the members of the ATA could hold their heads high because, collectively, they had:

- [SLIDE] Ferried 308,567 aircraft.
- [SLIDE] Flown 25 different types of single-engine aircraft
- [SLIDE] 18 types of twin-engine
- [SLIDE] 7 types of four-engine
- [SLIDE] and two types of flying boat, except the women
  
- [SLIDE] In total, during the course of 5 years, 166 of the ATA's 1,318 pilots were women. 26 American women signed up for the ATA. Other countries represented included Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Poland, Holland, Chile and South Africa.
- Despite the difficult conditions they flew in and the pressures they were under to deliver as many aircraft as possible, [SLIDE] only 14 women pilots, or 4.9%, lost their lives, 12 of them British.
- [SLIDE] 51 women pilots were appointed First Officers, [SLIDE] 11 of whom flew four-engine aircraft.
- [SLIDE] One, the tiny Joan Hughes, was the only woman to instruct both men and women on all classes of aircraft with the exception of seaplanes on water.
- [SLIDE] At the end of the war, 11 received awards for their bravery and their achievements.

By the end of 1945, women had proved beyond all doubt that there wasn't an aircraft they couldn't fly, even if they had never flown it before. Surely, they would now take their rightful place in the fast-growing commercial aviation industry?

So, tell me, when did Britain's Royal Air Force employ its first operational female pilot? 1991, 46 years after the end of the ATA and ninety years after Hilda Hewlett became Britain's first licensed female pilot. And when did Britain's biggest airline employ its first lady pilot? 1986, seven years after she had first completed her training with them. What happened and why did it take so long for British women pilots to regain so much lost ground? This is the story of "The Forgotten Pilots".

To set the scene briefly, the pre-war years of the 1930s were exciting times for aviation in Britain. This was the era of:

- [SLIDE] Lady Mary Heath, the first woman to fly from South Africa to England
- [SLIDE] Lady Mary Bailey, the first woman to fly from England to South Africa and back again.
- [SLIDE] Amy Johnson, the first British trained ground engineer and the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia.
- [SLIDE] The Duchess of Bedford, the oldest woman at 67 to get her pilot's licence and a record-setting pilot.
- [SLIDE] Jean Batten, the first pilot, male or female, to fly solo from England to New Zealand, a record that remained unbroken for 40 years.
- [SLIDE] Pauline Gower and Dorothy Spicer, the first to run an all-female joy-riding business, Air Tours Ltd, founded in 1931.
- Dorothy was also the first woman in the world and one of just a handful of people to gain all four ground engineer's licences and the first female Chief Engineer of a flying circus.
- By 1939, Pauline had set a world record for flying the most passengers: 25,000 in total.

... and there were many more. These were indeed extraordinary times for women and aviation. Yet, when Pauline Gower suggested that women pilots should play their part in the war effort, she was eventually told there was too much opposition to her proposal. Opposition from the RAF, the Air Ministry and even members of the public, with many women fearing that female pilots would be taking jobs from their husbands.

But it soon became evident that Britain would need more male pilots to fight the threatened invasion by Hitler's troops and his Luftwaffe. Just a few weeks later, Pauline was given the go-ahead to establish a small pool of just eight of Britain's most experienced women pilots.

[SLIDE] But although they each had hundreds of hours in their log books - Pauline herself had 2,000 hours - and two were chief flying instructors, they were only allowed to ferry open-cockpit, single-engine RAF training aircraft, primarily Tiger Moths.

Although it was galling for them to see men, with much less experience, flying fighter and bomber aircraft, at least the principle had been established that women pilots could ferry military aircraft. The foot was in the door. [SLIDE] However, it is doubtful if the first eight women could have fully appreciated the extent to which all eyes would be firmly trained on them. Their appointment attracted substantial media interest and wherever they landed, their arrival generated considerable comment. This is what ATA pilot Lettice Curtis wrote in her excellent book "The Forgotten Pilots":

*"If ATA itself had come into existence under conditions almost amounting to secrecy, the opening of the women's pool at Hatfield certainly made up for it. There were photographs in every paper, cinema newsreel and magazines and Pauline herself spoke over the radio. The reaction from the public at large to all this publicity, as expressed in letters to the Press, was generally far from favourable."*

The women were accused of being publicity seekers, only doing it as a hobby, being paid far too much and even described as "this contemptible lot of women". *Aeroplane* magazine noted that the first nine women (including Pauline) all had their commercial licences or "A" licences endorsed for instructing. But although private pilots with an ordinary "A" licence were obviously much less skilled, the magazine added: *"There are undoubtedly many men pilots of 'A' licence standard who feel they should be given a chance to use their flying experience before the women are mobilised."* Later, the women had to endure headlines such as "Mother Knits While Waiting for her Bomber" and being described as "slim, beautiful, nonchalant, devil-may-care, yet modest". As Alison King - the first female ATA Operations Officer - pointed out, whoever this paragon of virtue was, no-one had ever met her!

Given that they then had to endure flying open-cockpit Tiger Moths to Scotland in freezing weather and then travel back overnight in over-crowded, cold trains, often sitting in corridors on their parachutes, it's a miracle they withstood all the criticism so stoically. The most scathing of the attacks came after Lady Mary Bailey had been forced to leave the ATA after just one week when it was alleged that she had only been given the job because her husband was an influential millionaire. Besides, her critics pointed out, Lady Mary was older than the age limit of 45. In response to her letter asserting that women's potential was being wasted, the editor of *Aeroplane* magazine, wrote:

***“The menace is the woman who thinks that she ought to be flying a high-speed bomber when she really has not the intelligence to scrub the floor of a hospital properly..”.***

This barrage of criticism must have made the women pioneers in the ATA acutely aware that women's future progress in the organisation relied heavily on their performance, that they walked a tightrope between not taking too many risks and not being seen as over-cautious or timid. A good example of the heavy responsibility that rested on their shoulders was Lettice Curtis's reaction to the news that she was to be the first woman pilot to train to fly four-engine bombers.

“Any mistakes or failures, even if not of my own making, could result in an official decision that four-engined aircraft were not for women,” she wrote. Yet, despite all the dire warnings about women not being strong enough to fly four-engines, there was not one single accident, however slight. [SLIDE] Here we see Lettice climbing into a Spitfire.

There's a wonderful story about Lettice in the ATA book, *Brief Glory*: Her instructor had stepped out of a four-engine Halifax to allow Lettice to undertake her first solo flight. The Halifax had barely taken off [SLIDE], when the Group Captain commanding the station, accompanied by an Army Staff General, arrived at the Control Room and asked what was happening.

“Just watching a first solo, Sir. It's a woman pilot.”

“It's a WHAT?” gasped the Station Master, and, turned to the General: “Come on, Fred, we must watch this,” he said, leading the way on to the balcony. The runway in use, he soon realised, was the one adjacent to the Control Tower and passing it within about 30 yards. He rushed back to the Control Room.

“Which way will the Halifax swing when it lands?” he asked urgently.

“Away from the Control Tower, Sir, with this cross-wind,” came the reply. Suddenly the loudspeaker began to buzz and Lettice's voice came through. “May I come in to land? Over.” The Control Officer nodded. “You may land. Over.”

The great undercarriage appeared and slowly extended itself. The Halifax slowed perceptibly, made its final turn towards the aerodrome and descended steadily towards the runway. It crossed the hedge, checked its descent and held off just above the ground. Then the wheels kissed the surface gently and the 30-ton aircraft rolled steadily down the runway in the smooth manner which seldom characterises a first solo, and came to a dignified halt.

“It didn’t swing!” said the astonished Station Master. “It didn’t even bounce! And my lads have always kidded me how difficult Halifaxes are. Why, damn it, they must be *easy* if a little girl can fly them like that!”

They certainly were easy - in the hands of skilled pilots like Lettice and Joan Hughes. Joan, [SLIDE] who was just 5ft 2in tall and barely bigger than the wheels of this Stirling bomber, ferried 200 of these aircraft. An astonishing photograph.

However, I am jumping ahead in time, so back to the beginning. After it was decided that every able-bodied male pilot had to be deployed fighting the enemy, that left the ATA in the very capable hands of what was jokingly known as either the “Ancient and Tattered Airmen” or the “Always Terrified Airwomen”. Although the number of male pilots had doubled in the first few months of ATA’s creation, only two more women had joined: Lois Butler and Lady Mary Bailey who had to leave after just a week. These next slides show a little of what life was like for the ferry pilots. [SLIDE] Here we see the pilots collecting their ferry chits telling them what aircraft they were to collect and where they were to take them; next, [SLIDE] we see Faith Bennett, a British actress who lived in Hollywood before the War, filling in the aircraft log book. [SLIDE] If the weather was bad, the pilots relaxed in the rest room. And here [SLIDE], at the all-female ferry station at Hamble, they were even able to play a game of pool. And finally [SLIDE], here is a photograph recording the meeting of the British women pilots with the first American women pilots, led by the renowned Jacqueline Cochrane, see here on the extreme right.

When you consider the many difficulties the ATA pilots faced, it is remarkable so few were killed. [SLIDE] The rules they flew under were as follows:

- No night-time flying
- No flying above cloud
- A minimum 2,000 yards visibility
- An 800ft cloudbase limit
- No aerobatics
- And finally No formation flying

Possible the greatest danger ATA pilots faced was [SLIDE BULLET 1] the **British weather**, particularly in an era when the atmosphere around cities and industrial centres was heavy with pollution and smog. Always a hazard for British pilots, the weather was blamed for claiming the lives of more British pilots than the Germans. Lord Balfour, Under Secretary of State for Air, said of the ATA:

***“They did not fight the enemy with guns, but they fought and beat an enemy which can kill just as effectively as the bullet. Snow, fog, ice and storm were faced daily and only triumphed through skill and courage as they kept the ferry moving.”***

**[SLIDE BULLET 2]** Many of the aircraft flown by ATA pilots only had **basic instrumentation and no radios**. Anyway, the pilots were deliberately not trained in either blind flying or radio communication.

**[SLIDE BULLET 3]** In the early days, there was often just **one map** for several aircraft which necessitated flying together like a gaggle of geese and hoping you weren't separated from the leader. This led on one occasion to the near death of Ann Welch **[SLIDE]**. After losing the lead aircraft in a bank of fog, she had no idea where she was. With her airspeed rapidly increasing, Ann tried to fly on instruments, despite having had no practical "blind flying" experience. She knew, however, from the books she had read that she had to keep her eyes focused on the instruments. However, the instinctive need to look up was overwhelming. She found she was about to hit the water. After levelling the aircraft, she was now flying just above the waves and beneath the fog. Eventually, she flew back towards the cliffs, just managing to avoid a large black rock which she later discovered was the base of a lighthouse! She concluded that had she not looked up at that instant, she would "for ever be resting on the cold and muddy bottom" of the estuary.

**[SLIDE BULLET 4]** Another major hazard was the constant presence of **barrage balloons** protecting major cities and major industrial sites. Lois Butler wittily paraphrased Winston Churchill's famous speech to describe the many problems faced by pilots in the first year of operation of the ATA:

*"Never have so few been so cold so often is the best way to describe that winter. We were told that if we were half a mile off course we would be shot at by ground defences! **[SLIDE BULLET 5]** If we followed railways instead of 'trusting the compass' we would land in a city with a balloon barrage - the map of England was full of places we must not go, under the most dire penalties."*

**[SLIDE BULLET 6]** Another hazard was **mechanical problems** with the aircraft. Every memoir concerning these times relates several such incidents, some of which resulted in the death of the pilots. Often they were required to ferry unserviceable aircraft for repair or to take aeroplanes that had reached the end of their useful life to their last resting place.

**[SLIDE BULLET 7]** Some of the **aircraft were notoriously tricky to handle** and so were unpopular with all the ATA pilots. One good example was the American Bell Airacobra, the handling notes for which warned: "At idling speed, the whole aeroplane shakes violently." Another very unpopular aircraft was the Supermarine Walrus, a three-seater, British-made amphibian used by the Fleet Air Arm as a fleet spotter. Diana Barnato Walker **[SLIDE]** - one of the few ATA lady pilots who is still alive today, gives an amusing description:

***“Every Walrus I flew knew I didn’t like it. It was difficult to get into: either a climb and hoist up the outside of the cockpit, or a crawl along the inside of the hull, past anchors and cables. They were awash with paraphernalia that was murder for elbows, knees and fingernails. After opening the throttle for take-off, nothing much seemed to happen at all, it just rolled along with everything clanking in the back. It didn’t get airborne until the control column had biffed you in the bosom several times over the bumps. ATA handling notes said the rudder and elevator were very sensitive during take off. Let me tell you, as far as I was concerned, nothing was sensitive about that clattering lump of so-called flying machine.”***

It is astonishing to note that it was quite usual for ATA pilots to find themselves climbing into aircraft they had never flown before. One of the many remarkable achievements of the ATA was to devise [SLIDE] the Ferry Pilot’s Notes, which gave the pilots everything they needed to know about how to fly an aircraft, written usually on one or both sides of a small card, just 100 millimetres by 150. Here’s a wonderful story about Jackie Moggridge, who was collecting an Albemarle - a British twin-engine bomber that was used as a transport aircraft. As she waited at the hold for permission to take off, a very important Air Force officer rushed into the watch office, saying he had to get to London urgently. Jackie was kept at the hold until the Air Marshall was bundled into the aircraft which then taxied onto the runway. At this point, the very pretty, young-looking Jackie turned around to smile at her passenger [SLIDE], who was apparently “transfixed with horror”. He had not dreamt he was to be flown by a woman, let alone what looked like a schoolgirl!

“Let me out of here,” he bellowed. But it was too late. Jackie was already airborne. To make matters worse, while they were still climbing, she turned around, with one hand on the throttles and the other waving her Ferry Pilots’ Notes. “You know,” she said confidently, “I’ve never flown one of these things before!”

Another story concerned Ann Welch who was offered an older, rarer aircraft, the Blackburn Roc. ***“I sat in the cockpit and read in my notes how to start the Roc. Then I started her and while she was warming up, I read how to take off, then I took off and while I was flying to Hamble, I read how to land - and I never had a moment’s worry nor a moment’s wonder as to how something worked - it was all THERE!”*** And that clearly illustrates how good the Ferry Pilots’ Notes were.



Of course, given the conditions the ATA pilots flew under, sometimes there were accidents. An amusing example was the time an un-named lady pilot was delivering a Tiger Moth to Wales. As she came in to land, the aircraft hit a high-tension cable, flipped over and landed the right side up without much damage. As the stunned pilot sat with blood trickling down her face, an engineer said reproachfully: “Shouldn’t try a loop at fifty feet, miss. It’s too low for safety!”

Such was the pressure the women were under that the ATA rules were usually rigorously adhered to. Sadly, when Amy Johnson, Britain’s most famous lady aviator at that time, decided to break the rules and fly above the clouds, she ended up losing her life. She was one of the first ATA women to die while ferrying an aircraft.

Although many of the male ferry pilots were indeed “ancient and tattered airmen”, some with missing limbs or blind in one eye, the women tended to be perfect physical specimens. One notable exception was Mary de Bunsen [SLIDE] who joined the ATA in August 1941 and rose to the rank of First Officer.

It is astonishing to read in her memoirs that one of her legs was two inches shorter than the other and badly damaged below the knee after an attack of polio when she was a child. In addition, Mary was often breathless as a result of a congenital heart problem, which, after the war, led to her having life-saving, pioneering heart surgery in America. As if that wasn’t enough, because her eyesight was so bad, Mary wore heavy triplex-lense glasses. Today’s Civil Aviation Authority and military doctors would no doubt have a fit at seeing such a medical record, particularly when taking into account the fact that, during her four years in the ATA, she flew hundreds of aircraft, including Spitfires and Wellington bombers. Mary recognised what an incredible era she and the other women pilots lived through when she wrote:



***“I belong to a privileged generation, perhaps the most privileged in history, the second generation with wings. Few of us have used them. To pilot an aeroplane for pleasure was impossible in the nineteenth century, dangerous in the first quarter of this century [20<sup>th</sup>] and quite easy in the second....In the third quarter... regulations have so multiplied that practical flying has become a business for professionals.”***

No doubt she would have been pleased to know that, while she was quite right about the huge number of regulations the modern-day pilot has to deal with, her prediction that these regulations would restrict the popularity of flying for pleasure has fortunately not been fulfilled.

By the summer of 1941, some 20 women pilots had graduated from flying single-engine aircraft to twin-engine Masters and Oxfords. In July of that year, for the first time ever, women were allowed to fly operational aircraft to keep up with the rising production of fighter aircraft. Four of the first eight ATA women were each allowed to test fly a Hurricane. Lettice Curtis points out that this step was actually “an insignificant one” which less experienced pilots were taking daily. However, in the women’s case, politically, the implications were great as there were still many men who believed that only ace pilots could fly fighters. [SLIDE] Here, we see American ATA pilot Ann Wood Kelly - who only died recently - flying a Spitfire.

It is obvious from reading the memoirs of these remarkable ladies that, although there were plenty of scary times and accident reports to complete after some near disasters, there was also much fun and laughter and a tremendous camaraderie amongst the pilots. The women were happy to poke fun at themselves as illustrated by the following story: A twin-engine taxi aircraft was returning to base with a load of women pilots when Rosemary Rees looked down and said:

***“Imagine those people down there. They’re probably thinking as they look up: ‘brave bomber boys off to do their stuff’ and actually inside are a lot of women knitting!”***

Rose as she was known, one of the first eight ATA women pilots, wrote that ATA pilots were “extremely childish” about collecting different types of aircraft in their log books. “You felt very smug if you got a rare American type which other people hadn’t flown and when the first jet aircraft began coming in there was keen competition to fly them.”

However, she added, every new type was an anxiety and an ordeal to be overcome. “You wanted them, of course, because that was progress and a challenge which had to be picked up. But you sat in your first one, worrying, carefully reading the notes, noting the angle of the nose and windscreen on the ground, and hoping that everything would work,” she wrote.

Her autobiography explains how the barriers gradually came down as times became grimmer:

*“As the War went on and became very serious and people began to get tired, it came down to men and women becoming just people. Any person who was capable of doing something did it. All those petty little barriers that are put up in peace time to make society more pleasant melt away in a big crisis and life becomes a grim struggle of tired grey people all doing whatever it is they can do. In our case a few diehards in the RAF top brass clung to the idea that women were unsuitable for fierce or heavy aeroplanes, but ATA quietly overrode them and converted everybody to a higher class [of aircraft] as soon as they were ready for it.”*

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Before I move to the conclusion of this talk, I thought you might be interested to know the specialist books [SLIDE] that have been the most valuable to me in my research on the British women pilots of World War II. If anyone would like a copy of this list, please let me know afterwards. [BIBLIOGRAPHY SLIDES 2, 3, 4]

*Spreading My Wings* Diana Barnato Walker

*Brief Glory - The Story of the Air Transport Auxiliary* E C Cheesman

*The Forgotten Pilots* Lettice Curtis

*Lettice Curtis - Her Autobiography* Lettice Curtis

*ATA Girl - Memoirs of a Wartime Ferry Pilot* Rosemary (Rees) du Cros

*A Harvest of Memories - The Life of Pauline Gower* Michael Fahie

*Throttle Full Open - A Life of Lady Bailey, Irish Aviatrix* Jane Falloon

*Amy Johnson - Queen of the Air* Midge Gillies

*Women with Wings* Pauline Gower

*Golden Wings* Alison King

*Amy Johnson - Enigma in the Sky* David Luff

*Woman Pilot* Jackie Moggridge

*Women Aloft* Valerie Moolman

*Amy Johnson* Constance Babbington Smith

*Happy to Fly* Ann Welch

*The Sky and I* Veronica Volkersz

*Survival in the Sky* Ralph Barker

*Fly and Deliver* Hugh Bergel

*The Encyclopedia of Military Aircraft* Robert Jackson

*Jane's Encyclopedia of Aviation* Michael J H Taylor

So, as we look back at the remarkable era of the ATA and its many achievements, will we ever see anything like it again? Almost certainly not. That soon became apparent to some of the ATA women who accurately predicted that, as aircraft became more complex, only those who have undergone the most thorough and specialist training could ever fly such machines.

Rosemary Rees described the ATA as ***“a phenomenon of the Hitler war..... Never before had civilians participated to such an extent in aerial warfare. One can be fairly certain they never will again. Now there are far fewer aeroplanes, costing several millions a-piece.....There is no place in the air now for partially trained civilians.”***

**[SLIDE]** Veronica Volkerz voiced a similar thought at the end of her book, published in 1956: ***“Any future aerial war will be fought out with push-button-controlled rockets and giant pilotless guided missiles capable of obliterating cities in a flash. Such robots are not for ferrying.”***

It seems to me from reading so many memoirs that, by and large, the women pilots of the ATA accepted that, once the war was over, it was time for them to fade into the background again, to return to family life and a more feminine lifestyle. But a few raged against a system that had shown them how wonderful life could be when you were paid to fly aeroplanes all day every day - weather permitting. Jackie Moggridge, who had flown 2,500 hours, 70 different aircraft types and a grand total of 1,500 aircraft, could not hide her misery:

***“It was as frustrating for me not to fly constantly as it is for a woman yearning for a home and a family to be a spinster. I knew that flying would not be enough without Reg [her husband] and Jill [her daughter]. But equally, Reg and Jill were not enough without flying. It is a man’s right to recognize and admit this by having his career and returning to his family in the evening and weekends. I do not recognise that this is not also a woman’s right.”***

After leaving ATA, she gained her commercial licence and set about applying for a job, but received a stream of rejection letters pointing out that, owing to passenger psychology, it was not the company’s policy at present to employ women pilots. But she persevered and ended up ferrying several Spitfires from Cyprus to Burma before finally becoming Britain’s first female captain for a small scheduled airline called Channel Airways. By the time she published her memoirs in 1957, she was able to write:

***“Now I am partially reconciled to the rebuffs of prejudice but in those early days I felt sick with humiliation and envy every time an aircraft droned by in the sky.”***

Veronica Volkersz also resented the prejudice against women pilots. This is what she said:

***“We thought we had proved ourselves during the war, but some people have conveniently short memories. I firmly believe that women, even in this jet age, can hold down a flying job on equal terms with men. They are usually more careful pilots; they do their work more conscientiously; and, what’s more, they do not suffer from that pre-eminently male failing, the urge to show off. No woman would be stupid enough to kill herself “beating up” the house of a boyfriend. Yet the carefully-nurtured myth of male superiority remains impregnable.”***

Yet, it could be argued those 166 women who flew with the ATA were the lucky ones. Many, many more wanted to fly for their country, but were denied the opportunity. Try and imagine how desperate you must be to learn to fly that you are driven to stow away in the nose wheel compartment of a B-24 Liberator en-route from Prestwick Airport in Scotland to Toronto in Canada. [SLIDE] That is the astonishing story of Elizabeth Drewry, who, after failing to be accepted into the ATA, believed there was a better chance of fulfilling her ambition to learn to fly in America. Betty, as she was called, was a flight mechanic at Prestwick and had discovered that there was room for her to stand inside the nose wheel on the shelf that held the de-icing tank. On the night of November 19 1943, she jumped into the nose wheel compartment as the aircraft was going through its checks on the taxiway.

The Captain that night had never flown the Atlantic lower than 15,000 feet, but this time the weather was very strange, so he flew at between 4,000 and 5,000 feet. Otherwise Betty would have frozen to death or died of oxygen starvation. In total, she remained standing for 19 hours, without food or water and unable to sleep. Although she survived the trip, she was discovered trying to escape from the hangar at Toronto. The Canadians allowed her to stay for 6 months during which she worked her way across Canada until the President of the Northern Aircraft Company of Seattle heard her story and sponsored her pilot training. But there is no happy ending to this extraordinary tale of courage and determination. Betty couldn’t find a job as a pilot as no-one would take her seriously as a flyer. At the age of just 34, after returning to Britain, she tragically died of natural causes.

As for the lady pilots of the ATA, after the war, [SLIDE] Joan Hughes went back to instructing at flying clubs; [SLIDE] Lettice Curtis tried to get a job as a pilot, but ended up working as a Flight Test Observer, recording the basic instruments from which an aircraft’s performance was assessed; [SLIDE] Rosemary Rees ran her own one-woman air taxi charter service with a Proctor aircraft; [SLIDE] Monique Agazarian also founded and ran her own more extensive charter business, giving joy rides around the London area; [SLIDE] Freydis Sharland became the first British woman Air Racing Champion and a leading light in the Women’s Junior Air Corps, as was Diana Barnato Walker, [SLIDE] seen here in 1963 when she became the third woman in the world and the first British woman to fly faster than the speed of sound.

**[SLIDE]** Jean Lennox Bird, who flew as a pilot on aerial surveys, became the first woman to be awarded her RAF wings - but not as a full-time operational air force pilot. Sadly, she was killed a few years later after the twin-engine freighter she was flying crashed on take-off.

As for **Pauline Gower** **[SLIDE]**, the woman who commanded the ATA women's section from its very beginning to its end, she deserves tremendous credit for the achievements of her lady pilots. It was her negotiating skills, contacts and perseverance that led to the establishment of the women's section. Astonishingly, when she first became its Commander, she was just 29, often younger than the women under her command. It is a huge tribute to her that she was accepted and respected as their leader. In 1946, she got married, but shortly afterwards tragically died while giving birth to twin sons - a terrible loss to her family and the aviation community.

And so, decades later, any woman pilot who broke through the barriers that had been so effectively raised after the war to keep women out of aviation, was guaranteed to be front page news. I am certain that Pauline and her team of female ferry pilots **[SLIDE]** would have been more than disappointed if they had been able to look into the future and see that, despite their best efforts, more than 60 years later, only 3% of all Britain's commercial pilots are women and only 6% of private pilots are female.

Oddly, there were fewer barriers to women in the golden era of the 1930s. It is likely the ATA women were victims of their own success. Having proved there was nothing they could not fly, their capabilities were a huge threat to the hundreds of fighter and bomber pilots who now had to find jobs to support their families.

I must confess that it is hard not to feel aggrieved that after the ATA women had achieved so much, the role of women in aviation should have suffered such a terrible and lengthy set back. Women like me never had the opportunity to fly for a living. I had a hard enough time stopping the University Careers Department from forcing me to become a teacher like most of my fellow female students. And so my hopes for women's role in aviation rest firmly on the shoulders of the young women who are slowly, oh so slowly, pursuing careers in commercial and military aviation today. In the meantime, we cherish those few terrific women pilots of the ATA who are still with us. They are our heroines and they deserve our utmost admiration. Thank you.