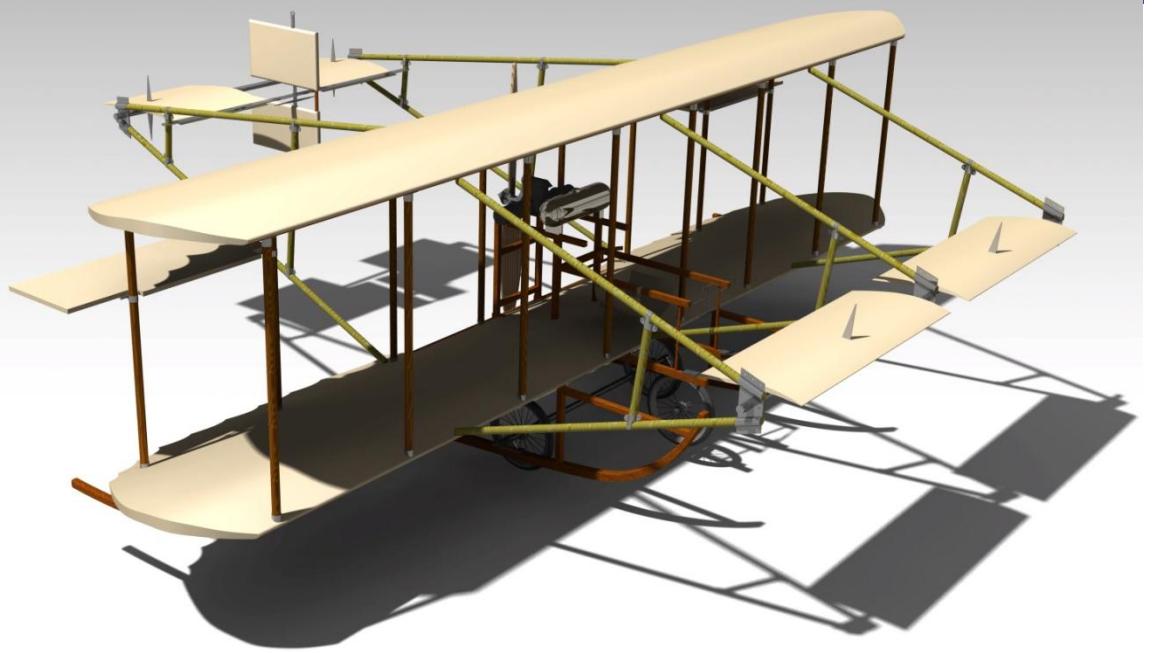


Lilian Bland

Pioneer Aviator



Lilian Bland (1878 -1971)
Carnmoney, Northern Ireland

Lilian Bland was the first woman, in the world, to design, build and fly her own aircraft. A very unconventional individual, she was a sports journalist, photographer, expert marksman and a competent martial arts practitioner, she wore breeches and smoked cigarettes, much to the chagrin of Edwardian society. Certain that she would cause herself serious injury if she continued to pursue a career in aviation, her father offered to buy her a car if she would stop flying. She also realised that if the Mayfly was to be competitive commercially, she would need to upgrade its engines and re-design to match the power of other commercially available aircraft - an exercise that would be beyond her means financially. Having abandoned her pursuit of flight, she took up her father's offer and headed south to Dublin to purchase her 20hp Ford. On the journey back to Belfast, she took over from her driver for her first and only lesson in driving a car.

In 1908 Lilian Bland really challenged contemporary views on where a woman's place was in society. At a time when women could not even vote, she rolled her sleeves up and built her own aircraft, overcoming significant technical challenges in aeronautical engineering - a discipline for which the books had yet to be written. Although her aeronautical interests started and finished with the Mayfly, her greatest legacy is as a role model to any female considering a career in aerospace.

Societal expectations have changed significantly since Lilian's time but we are still faced with enormous technical challenges in the aerospace industry. Developing more efficient, environmentally friendly aircraft are key requirements for the aerospace industry in the 21st century and there are no reasons perceived or otherwise, why women should not play their part.