

News Release

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04 Jul 2019

Alcock and Brown Centenary Celebrations – an exciting month ahead



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An exciting free community fun day on 21 July and a special VIP visit on 23 July commemorate a trans-Atlantic centenary.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the first-ever trans-Atlantic flight made by John Alcock and Arthur Whitten-Brown in a modified Vickers Vimy bomber originally designed and built in the Vickers factory in Crayford. A local group is determined to shine the spotlight on the borough's important role in their epic achievement.

The Alcock and Brown Centenary Project Group (Crayford) have been working tirelessly over the past 10 years to ensure that the heroic pair and their important connection to the borough is not forgotten in this special centenary year.

The group successfully applied for National Lottery Heritage funding last year and were awarded £39,100 to run exhibitions, historical talks, work with local schools and community groups to raise the profile of this fantastic feat and Crayford's role in its success.

Local businesses have also played their part after being approached by the group. A number of key organisations have stepped up to provide funding for a fantastic free community fun day on Sunday 21 July at Hall Place & Gardens. The fun

day will include a Guinness Book of Records attempt for the most model aircraft launched simultaneously.

Other attractions include the judging of a model 'Vickers Vimy' planes made by local schools. The winning plane will be hoist into the air by a crane provided by local company Bronzeshield. Other fun includes a vintage fair, inflatables, stalls, a farmers' market, the annual history fair organised by the Bexley Civic Society and much, much more.

Large local business the Erith Group has funded a magnificent bronze bench, made by artist Tony Stallard, that will be unveiled at a very special VIP event in Crayford town centre on Tuesday 23 July. Along with the bench, a number of plaques designed by local schools and a mental health group Centrepieces and made by 'M@ke', with support from the Learning and Enterprise Centre Bexley, will also be unveiled.

The VIP visit coincides with the 100-year anniversary of Alcock and Brown's return visit to Crayford on 23 July 1919, to celebrate their achievement, at the re-opening of The Princesses Theatre by the Duke of York (later King George VI).

Cabinet Member for Communities, Cllr Alex Sawyer said: "Lead by our very own 2019 Mayor, Cllr Geraldene Lucia-Hennis, this project has really 'taken off'. I know how hard the group have worked to make sure this amazing feat, and the part that our borough played in it, is remembered this year. We have a proud industrial past and Vickers was at the forefront of aircraft construction at the time. It is only right that this link, alongside the amazing bravery of these two men and the team that worked with them, is remembered. I hope that we will see people coming from far and wide to join in with these special events and take part in the celebrations."

The aircraft, took flight on 14 June 1919. The historic flight left Newfoundland, Canada and flew for 16 hours and 12 minutes to Clifden on the west coast of Ireland.

The project group is made up of local volunteers, who have a real interest in the achievement of Alcock and Brown and are proud ambassadors for their home town.

To find out more about the project visit www.alcockandbrownevents.co.uk

Notes to editors –

On 1 April 1913, Lord Northcliffe, owner of The Daily Mail, offered £10,000 to the first pilot that could fly non-stop across the Atlantic. They were allowed 72 hours and had to finish in the same aircraft in which they started. Due to the disruption of the First World War, the first attempt at the prize was made in April 1919 by the Short brothers; their Shamrock plane flew only 12 miles before crashing into the sea.

On 18 May 1919, the second attempt was made by Hawker and Grieve. They had to be rescued by a ship in the Atlantic. Just one hour behind was the Martinsyde Raymor but it crashed on take-off.

The Berlin Bomber and the Vickers Vimy were the final two contenders left to embark on the challenge. After mechanical difficulties concerning the Bomber, Alcock and Brown's Vimy was the only remaining aircraft to take on the feat.

Chairman of the Alcock and Brown Centenary Project Group (Crayford) and Mayor of Bexley, Cllr Lucia Hennis and Deputy Chairman, Janet Hearn-Gilham are both available for interviews.

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Alcock & Brown

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The Viny aircraft courtesy of the Science Museum

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ARTISTS IMPRESSION OF THE NEW BENCH

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The Alcock and Brown Bench taking shape

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Cllr Alex Sawyer

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