

August 2021



Dear Club Members,

When consulting my calendar of anniversaries this month one date stood out. 150 years ago, on 19th August 1871 Orville Wright was born. Wright was one of the 2 brothers who were pioneers of flight. On December 17th 1903, along with his brother Wilbur, he made the first controlled, sustained flight of a powered, heavier than air, aircraft. From this they then went on to develop the control system that made fixed wing flight possible.

As ever the male names tend to dominate our stories about the past. But the brothers owe a great deal to 2 women in their family. Their father was a Bishop, and often travelling, so much of the boys upbringing was reliant on their mother Susan. She was naturally mechanically minded, her own father had been a carriage maker, and encouraged improvisation and experimentation. She designed and built simple household objects, and made toys for her children.

In later life Orville Wright went on to say-

“We were lucky enough to grow up in an environment where there was always much encouragement to children to pursue intellectual interests; to investigate whatever aroused curiosity. In a different kind of environment, our curiosity might have been nipped long before it could have borne fruit.”

Susan died on 4th July 1889 of tuberculosis, Orville was 18, and Wilbur was 22. It's at this point that the second female of our story develops a key role. Aged just 15 Katharine Wright was now in charge of the household domestic tasks, it being automatically presumed that she would take over her mother's role. Despite this Katharine continued her education, graduating high school, and going on to attend college. She was the only Wright child to graduate from higher education. After this she became a teacher, whilst still continuing to manage the household.

She became the forgotten Wright sibling who allowed her brothers to achieve their pioneering success. After the death of their mother the brothers founded a printing company, and in 1892 opened a bicycle shop, selling and repairing bicycles. This was much closer to their passion for all things mechanical, and by 1896 the brothers were designing and selling their own bikes. They used the profits from this business to finance their designs for powered flight. The shop featured a six-foot wind tunnel to test their prototypes.

Katharine meanwhile was not only running the household and working as a Latin teacher, but also managing the business. She became key to the success of the brothers aviation innovations. By nature the brothers were taciturn, in contrast Katherine was outgoing, and crucially also spoke French. When the brothers were in France in 1909 showing off their aircraft it was Katharine who charmed potential customers. She gained invitations to exclusive dinners, including the Aéro-Club de France, where she was reportedly the first woman ever in attendance. Tellingly all three Wright siblings were awarded the Legion of Honour.

Katherine went on to play a key role in the legal wrangling that followed the brothers first flight. The Smithsonian Institute refused to recognise the brothers' achievement, and a patent war lasted for years. She played a key role in ensuring that the fight in the courts was ultimately successful.

Wilbur Wright died in 1912, at the age of 45, from Typhoid Fever, Orville took over managing the company, but was ill suited to the role, and sold it in 1915. Katharine had remained unmarried, but in 1926, aged 51 she married Harry Haskell. Orville had been dependent on Katharine, she acted as housekeeper, and managed most of his correspondence, social schedule and business engagements. He regarded her marriage as a complete betrayal and refused to attend the wedding and didn't speak to her until just before her death on 3rd March 1929 from pneumonia. Alongside all the things she managed on behalf of her brothers she was one of the first female trustees of Oberlin College, and was a member of the women's suffrage movement. In 1914 she organised a march in Dayton Ohio that drew over 1000 participants including her father and brother.

The brothers were the mechanical geniuses, but the stable environment provided by Katharine's management of their home life and business interest were crucial for them to be able to achieve their success.

Our colour this month is a bit of an homage to that view from above as you fly over this little planet of ours. It was one of the things that always delighted me when coming back from summer holidays, looking out through the tiny window, and down at the green fields that stretched out for miles beneath me.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading/ Watching-

Katharine Wright

<https://www.christies.com/features/Katharine-Wright-Aviations-unsung-heroine-9222-1.aspx>

<https://www.aerotime.aero/22606-the-right-wright-to-know-about-mother-of-aviation>

https://www.wright-brothers.org/Information_Desk/Just_the_Facts/Wright_Family/Katharine_Wright/Katharine_Wright.htm

<http://www.sps-aviation.com/story/?id=2835&h=Katharine-Wright-1874-1929>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOC7lb2lb5s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxBdwCivmcg>

Susan Wright-

<https://www.wyso.org/news/2018-05-11/susan-wright-the-mother-of-flight>

The Wright Family-

<https://airandspace.si.edu/exhibitions/wright-brothers/online/who/1859/index.cfm>

<https://historycollection.com/16-surprising-facts-about-the-wright-brothers-everybody-should-know/9/>

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label

75% Merino

25% Mulberry Silk