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The National Archives



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PAULINE GOWER TAKES FLIGHT IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Aviation fans are in for a surprise this week as Tunbridge Wells hosts an exhibition on local heroine Pauline Gower.

To tie in with the Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com theme *Take Flight*, an exhibition about Pauline Gower's life will be on display at Tunbridge Wells Library.

Pauline Gower born in Tunbridge Wells, in 1910, and was the youngest daughter of Sir Robert Gower, MP for Gillingham. After leaving school, she decided she would make her living as a pilot. She was one of three women who were awarded the 'B' licence by the Air Ministry. She was also the first woman to hold a pilot's certificate at Reading Aerodrome.

Pauline set up the first women-only run aviation business during the 1930s with her friend and business partner Dorothy Spicer. As well as carrying passengers, they took part in air pageants and circuses across the country. Her dog, Wendy, frequently accompanied her on her flights!

She is reputed to be the inspiration for Captain W E Johns' female aviator *Worralls* who appeared in a number of his books. She was awarded an MBE for her services to aviation, and became a board member of the British Overseas Air Corporation, the first woman to be appointed to such a position.

Pauline was instrumental in setting up and leading the women's branch of the Air Transport Auxiliary, a civilian organisation which delivered planes to the RAF throughout World War II, often in very uncomfortable and dangerous situations. Pauline died in 1947 at the age of 36, after giving birth to twin sons, Paul and Michael.

An exhibition about her life will be on display at Tunbridge Wells Library throughout the winter as part of the Archives Awareness Campaign, an ongoing celebration of archives and their treasures.

Susan Rogers, Customer Services Development Librarian, said:

“This is of great local interest because Pauline was born, grew up and went to school here. She returned regularly to the town and is buried in the cemetery here. I would like the people of Tunbridge Wells to know about this remarkable woman who did so much for the role of women in aviation, but has largely been forgotten.”

Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer said:

“The Archive Awareness Campaign aims to bring history to life through documents, photographs, maps and treasures. Archives across the UK are opening their doors to the public so that people can search for captivating stories such as this”.

Notes to Editors

The exhibition will run until early February

Venue: Tunbridge Wells Library, Mount Pleasant Road, TN1 1NS

Tel: 01892 522352

Website: www.kent.gov.uk/libs

- Archive Awareness is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives (www.ncaonline.org.uk) and funded by The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (www.mla.gov.uk).
- Archive Awareness Campaign www.archiveawareness.com is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national

archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.



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MISS PAULINE GOWER
Woman Aviator

The younger daughter of Sir Robert Gower, Conservative M.P. for Gillingham, Miss Pauline Gower is one of the three women who have been awarded the "B" Licence by the Air Ministry. She was also the first woman to hold a pilot's certificate at Reading Aerodrome. Her dog, Wendy, frequently accompanies her on her flights and is quite "air-minded." Miss Gower and her friend, Miss Dorothy Spicer, now run an air-taxi service, and between them they hold every Air Ministry certificate and licence necessary to run an air business. Miss Gower alone has carried well over 20,000 passengers, although she did not learn to fly until 1920.

W.A. & A.C. CHURCHMAN

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