

# Amy Johnson – ‘air queen’

On 5 May 1930 at the age of 26, Amy Johnson set off on her first long-distance trip from London to Australia and by the time she reached her first stop she was a worldwide celebrity. Who was she and what happened on this epic journey?

Amy Johnson was born in Hull in 1903. After leaving university with a degree in engineering, she became a secretary and used her salary to pay for flying lessons. In 1929 she obtained her pilot’s licence and her engineer’s licence the following year.

Amy decided to make a long-distance flight to Australia. Her aircraft was a simple plane of wood and fabric. It had an open cockpit and only four instruments. To break the world record, she planned a more direct route to Australia than the previous record-winning flight. This meant that she had to fly through mountain ranges with very high peaks, and her plane could only fly at 10,000 feet. During her trip, she only slept about three hours at a time, she drank tea from a thermos and ate sandwiches and fruit while flying.

She managed to reach Karachi, her first stop, in only six days, beating the previous world record by two days. She experienced many difficulties during her journey to Australia, including a sandstorm, a monsoon and several crash landings. One time, when she damaged a wing, she had to use shirt material to repair the plane’s wing. Because of technical problems and bad weather, she didn’t manage to break the England to Australia record, taking 19 days – the record was 15 days – but she became the first woman to fly solo from London to Australia.

This was the first of several record-breaking flights, including London to Moscow in about 21 hours and Siberia to Tokyo in ten days. In May 1936, she broke the record for a solo flight from England to the Cape and back for the second time.

In 1940 she began work transporting planes from the factory to air bases during the Second World War. On 5 January 1941, she started her final flight in the cold and fog. She had a problem and had to parachute out of the plane into the Thames, but they never found her body. No one knows exactly what happened.

Amy Johnson is remembered in many ways, including an annual scholarship to help outstanding women pilots and an annual gold cup as a prize for outstanding bravery by a Hull child.

**1 Which paragraph in the text (1–7) talks about each of the following?**

- |   |   |                 |
|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | difficulties on her journey                       | paragraph _____ |
| 2 | how we remember Amy now                           | paragraph _____ |
| 3 | her age when she started her journey to Australia | paragraph _____ |
| 4 | her final flight                                  | paragraph _____ |
| 5 | when she began flying                             | paragraph _____ |
| 6 | the route she planned and her aircraft            | paragraph _____ |
| 7 | other record-breaking flights                     | paragraph _____ |

**2 Here are some numbers from the article. Match them with the correct information. Then read the article quickly to check your answers.**

10,000    6    1903    21    26    3    1929    1941    4

- 1 Amy Johnson was \_\_\_\_\_ years old when set off from London for Australia.
- 2 Amy was born in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 3 She obtained her pilot’s licence in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 4 Her plane had only \_\_\_\_\_ instruments.
- 5 Her plane could only fly at \_\_\_\_\_ feet.
- 6 During the trip she only slept \_\_\_\_\_ hours at a time.
- 7 She reached Karachi in \_\_\_\_\_ days.
- 8 She flew from London to Moscow in about \_\_\_\_\_ hours.
- 9 Amy died in \_\_\_\_\_ .

### 3 Match the words from the box to their partner from the text.

ranges	licence	cockpit	record-breaking	peaks
landings	long-distance	technical	worldwide	

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ trip
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ celebrity
- 3 pilot's \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 open \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 mountain \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 high \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 crash \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ problems
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_ flights

### 4 Make sentences about Amy Johnson using the word partnerships from exercise 4.

### 5 Complete the sentences with *during* or *while*.

- 1 She experienced many difficulties \_\_\_\_\_ her journey.
- 2 She drank tea \_\_\_\_\_ flying.
- 3 She only slept three hours at a time \_\_\_\_\_ her trip.
- 4 She flew planes from the factory to air bases \_\_\_\_\_ the war.
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ her life she broke many world records.
- 6 She ate sandwiches \_\_\_\_\_ flying.

### 6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned about Amy Johnson?
- How do you think Amy Johnson felt at different times during her journey?
- Why do you think some people want to break a world record?
- Would you like to break a world record? If yes, which one? If no, why not?

## Glossary

**set off** (*verb*) – start a journey

**epic** (*adj*) – activity that lasts a long time and is sometimes difficult

**fabric** (*noun*) – cloth, especially for making things like clothes or curtains

**cockpit** (*noun*) – the part of a plane where the pilot sits

**mountain range** (*noun*) – a long row of mountains

**peak** (*noun*) – the top of a mountain

**thermos** (*noun*) – a container that keeps liquids hot or cold

**eventful** (*adj*) – with a lot of exciting or unusual things happening

**record-breaking** (*adj*) – faster, longer or larger than anything that has been done before

**crash landing** (*noun*) – when an aircraft has to land in a sudden and dangerous way

**parachute** (*noun*) – a large piece of cloth joined to heavy strings, used by someone jumping out of a plane

**parachute** (*verb*) – to jump from a plane wearing a parachute

**annual** (*adj*) – happening once a year

**scholarship** (*noun*) – money given to someone so that they can study

**outstanding** (*adj*) – extremely good

**bravery** (*noun*) – dealing with danger or pain, without seeming to be frightened