

## Flight of the Baird

By Isaac S. Baird



On the wide open sand of Ettrick Bay, in 1910, an engineering marvel from a island small village took flight and changed the United Kingdom. At the age of 25, 1887, a young Blacksmith opened his shop on the small island of Rothesay (Baile Bòid) in the highlands and began the work of shoeing horses for the local population. Born in in Sandhead, in Galloway, Andrew Blain Baird's life already bore the hallmarks of a restless soul looking to be free. He worked in the shipyard in Clyde, and in a light house in Lismore (Lios Mòr).

For a normal person, this would be the story of poor country blacksmith slugging out a living as industry and technology reduced his place in the word. Andrew Baird, the uncommon sort, instead slugged back. Driven by a dream to design and invent, this highland bound blacksmith demonstrated the innate Scottish Engineering ability to design, invent and engineer.

Andrew Baird stared into the sky and dreamt larger than before. Spurred by news of air flight, Andrew could not be held back by the fears of failure or ignorance. He corresponded with the top aeronautical engineers, as well as aviation pioneers, such as Louis Bleriot, the first man to cross the English channel in a heavier-than-air flight. In October of 1909, he even traveled to England for the first ever Aviation Week. He may even have met the leader of the oldest Aeronautical Engineering society, the Royal Aeronautical Society led by Baden Baden-Powell, the brother of Robert Baden-Powell.

For the average person, such an event would have been enough to discourage. For Andrew Baird, the trip enflamed his passion for flight. He returned even more dedicated to his cause, determined to build a monoplane equal to Bleriot. The next summer, after toiling on his plan, Andrew emerged from his shop, not as a Blacksmith but as the premier, but unknown, Scottish Aeronautical Engineer. With him, the

Baird Monoplane sallied forth to go on display at the Esplanade Flower Garden. Finally, Andrew moved his plane to the Bute Highland Games on August 20, 1910.

The day arrived on September 17, 1910 to move to the landing strip. Using a horse drawn wagon, the Baird Monoplane arrived on the beach at Ettrick Bay. He started the plane with the help of another engineer, Ned Striven. The plane taxied along the sandy beach, increasing in speed before lifting into the air. Andrew Baird, the Blacksmith turned Aeronautical Engineer and Pilot, achieved the dream of not only the first heavier-than-air flight in Scotland but also the first Scottish Monoplane. Upon gaining altitude, disaster struck. The plane listed to the left during taxing and as the plane rose, the plane over corrected to the right and swooped down clipping the sand.

Andrew Baird crashed into the earth after short but successful flight. He designed the plane so well that there was little damage despite plummeting to the earth in a monoplane with only a tubular frame covered in silk. According to Flight Magazine, the experience of crashing was not uncommon, even amongst experienced pilots. Andrew Baird was a success.

If the story ended here, it would be amazing. However, Andrew Baird changed the course of the United Kingdom. While his plane sat in the Highland games, a man named Tommy Sopwith sailed his yacht into to the harbor. He examined the Baird Monoplane and gained permission to use many of its advancements into his own design. Sopwith would found one of the first Aviation Manufacturing companies that would later supply the famous Sopwith Camel in WWI and thus revolutionizing how the world moved both in peace and at war.

Today, the Baird of Bute Society holds an annual commemoration of this first flight and to keep the memory of Andrew Blain Baird alive. Each year, in Rothesay, they celebrate his life and achievements including holding school presentations, developing DVDS, and a Museum of Andrew Baird artifacts. More information is available at [www.bairdofbutesociety.com](http://www.bairdofbutesociety.com). The Baird of Bute Society is a registered Scottish charity.

For Andrew, the best is the tribute listed in the newspaper under the advertisement:

A.B. Baird & Son,  
General Blacksmiths and Horse-shoers,  
Implement Makers and Mechanical Engineers - and Ornamental Iron Workers  
**"A valiant Scotsman with a creative mind. His hand was ever open and against no man. A man of mettle".**