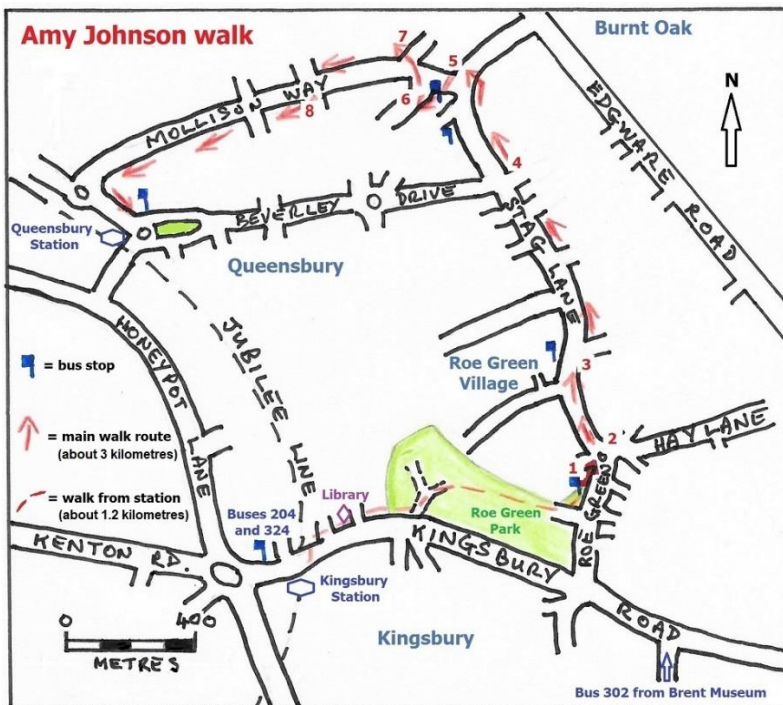


In Amy Johnson's footsteps - a self-guided walk, through Kingsbury and Queensbury



Thank you for reading this document, which we've prepared to help you discover places where Amy Johnson lived and worked, and to follow in her footsteps. If you walk the whole route (about 4.2 kilometres), in a loop from Kingsbury to Queensbury Stations, it will probably take you around 90 minutes. For those who can only walk shorter distances, or wheelchair users, the main areas of interest can be covered in two short sections, each about 400 metres, linked by bus rides.



The formal walk route begins at the Fairfields Crescent bus stop in Roe Green, Kingsbury. A bus stop seems a good place to start, as it was a bus ride in April 1928 which brought Amy to Stag Lane Aerodrome, on the border between Kingsbury and Edgware. It was one of her weekend jaunts to explore the countryside around London, which she'd moved to from Hull the previous year. She sat down and watched the planes for several hours, and went back to her rented room in Maida Vale, knowing that she wanted to fly.

Fairfields Crescent bus stop (RH) is served by three bus routes. The 302 (towards Mill Hill Broadway) starts from Kensal Rise Station, and stops at Willesden Green Library (the home of Brent Museum and Archives), before passing through Neasden on its way here. Unless you live near that route, it will probably be best to travel to Kingsbury Station, on the Jubilee Line, and then catch a 204 (towards Edgware) or 324 (towards Brent Cross). Coming out of the station, turn left and walk along Kingsbury Road to the crossing opposite the Aldi supermarket. Cross safely here, and the bus stop (A) is just to your right.

If you have the time, and the energy, there is a pleasant walk from Kingsbury Station to the starting point, which will take about 15 minutes. For that walk, turn right out of the station, then cross Kingsbury Road at the lights a short distance away. Going right again, follow the pavement in front of the shops and past the library, passing through a suburban shopping centre built in the 1930s. This rapid development was triggered by the [building of the Metropolitan Railway's Stanmore branch line](#), which opened in December 1932.

Just after the Valley Drive bus stop, you will see a narrow road on your left leading into Roe Green Park. This was originally the drive to a late Victorian country house, now known as [Kingsbury Manor](#), and you should take this route, going to the right when the drive splits after a short distance. This arm of the drive heads towards a two-storey brick building, which was originally the coach house for the mansion, and a children's playground. A block of concrete, in the middle of the grass on the left, is a reminder of a piece of science history that happened here during Amy Johnson's time in Kingsbury.

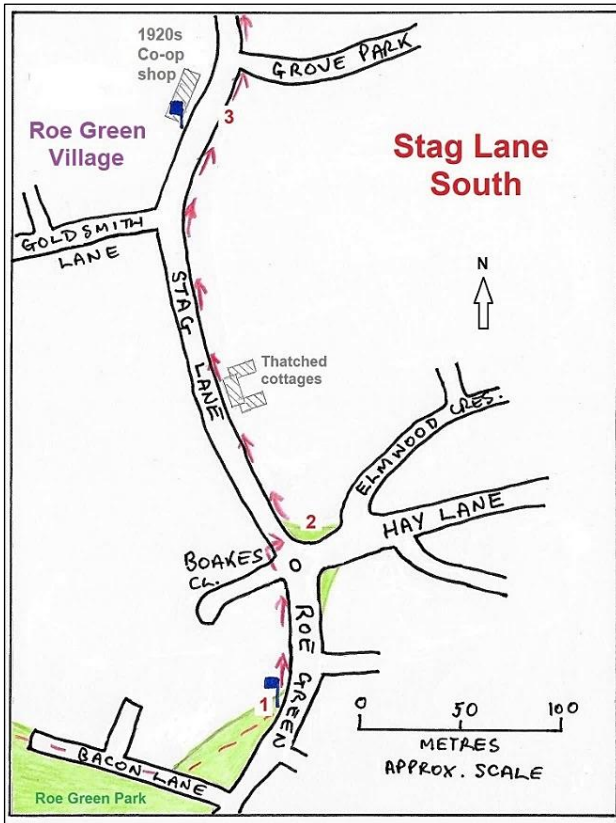
In the autumn of 1928, the disused coach house was rented by John Logie Baird. He employed a small team of engineers to work there on his invention, television. The concrete block was the base for a 25-metre high mast, used for experiments in sending television signals over long distances. The first ever picture broadcast from the continent was received here in 1929, and the first successful combined transmission of sound and pictures the following year. There is a stone monument commemorating this achievement by the wall of the building, below a blue plaque, but you can't go to view it as this is now a children's day nursery.



The memorial to John Logie Baird's television experiments.

Follow the path past the former coach house. From here, continue until you reach the school at the northern edge of the park, then turn right along the path beside its fence. (Although this building, now part of Kingsbury High School, did not exist in Amy's time, it has taught some famous pupils, including [Charlie Watts](#) and [George Michael](#)). Alternatively, from the coach house, you can cut across the grass, heading right towards the park's far corner. The line of old oak trees you will pass was part of a hedgerow between fields that were bought by the Council to create the park in the mid-1930s.

The path becomes a narrow road, Bacon Lane, as you head towards Roe Green. After passing Holy Innocents' Church Hall, if the ground is dry, you can cut across a last triangle of grass to the Fairfields Crescent bus stop. This small green area is a remnant of the old Roe Green, where farm labourers, who owned no land of their own, could graze their cow or other animals.



1. We are now at the formal start of our walk. In the Spring of 1928, Amy had made up her mind that she wanted to fly. That was easier said than done for a young woman (then not quite 25 years old), working as a secretary in a City solicitors' firm for £4 a week. But she was determined, and joined the London Aeroplane Club, based at Stag Lane Aerodrome, for three guineas. This allowed her to book flying lessons, which cost "only" thirty shillings for an hour!

She had to wait until mid-September 1928 for her first flying lesson. Bad weather through the winter, changes of instructor and the cost of lessons on her limited income, meant that Amy did not make her first solo flight (of just 5 minutes) until 9 June 1929, after 16 hours tuition. In July, she passed the tests to obtain her Private Pilot's "A" Licence.

It was never Amy's ambition just to fly for fun – she wanted flying to be her career. To achieve that, she had to learn how aeroplanes worked, and to get a "B" Licence (for commercial pilots). That needed a minimum of 100 flying hours, which she knew was not possible with just short flights at week-ends. In August 1929 she resigned from her job in the City of London to devote all her time to aviation, relying on an allowance from her father to pay her way.



Roe Green in a 1930s postcard. (Image from the internet)

Setting off from the bus stop, walk along the same side of the road towards a junction with a mini-roundabout which you can see ahead of you. As you can see from the old postcard above, looking towards this junction, there were old cottages (dating from Tudor times) on your left, where there are now more modern homes. The blue arrow added to the picture points to the house where Amy lived from early September 1929 until early May 1930.

As you come to the roundabout, Boakes Close is on your left. Cross this carefully, then follow the pavement round, past Cherry Tree Court into Stag Lane. After a few metres, you will see a pedestrian island in the middle of the road, and you should use this to cross carefully. Turn right, and walk a short distance along the path by the low brick wall, until you are standing by the grassy area in front of Kenwood Court.

2. Amy had found lodgings close to Stag Lane Aerodrome with the Evans family in “Oldways”, at the corner of Stag Lane and Hay Lane in Roe Green. She rented one of the two ground floor rooms at their thatched wooden house. Its address at that time was 10 Elmwood Crescent, part of the Elmwood Estate built by the Kingsbury architect, Ernest Trobridge, in 1922. Amy’s room looked out over a small green by the road junction, where you are now standing.



An Elmwood Crescent cottage in 1964, similar to the one where Amy lived. (Courtesy of Gareth Davies)

Since June 1929, Amy had been going to the aerodrome after work. The London Aeroplane Club’s Chief Engineer, Jack Humphreys, could see that she was genuinely interested in aircraft, and allowed her to watch him at work and ask questions. Although it was a Club rule that no women were allowed in the maintenance hangars (in case they distracted the engineers), he’d persuaded the Club Secretary to allow Amy to come and work there. She was to work unpaid, and was called “Johnnie”, so the Club could pretend that she wasn’t a woman!

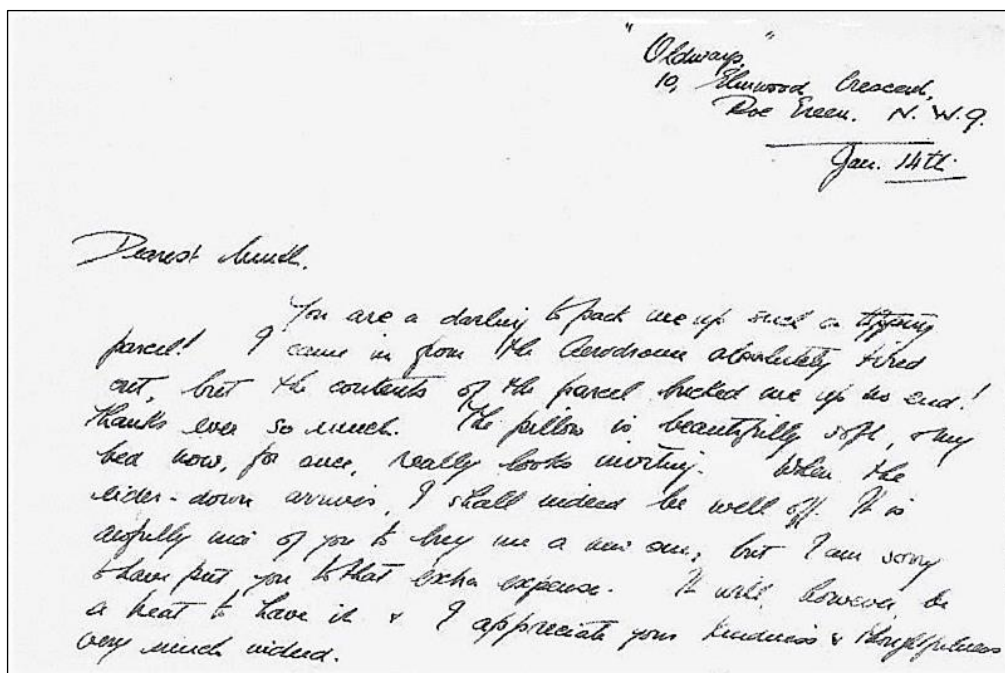
Once she moved to Roe Green, Amy worked full-time, but unpaid, at the aerodrome. In a letter to her father on 25 September she wrote:

‘I’m at the aerodrome at 8am & work hard until we close down, when I walk straight home down a country lane & get to bed about 9.30 or 10pm. Am feeling much stronger, and better in every way.’

Before we walk up that ‘country lane’, I must explain why the house where Amy lived is not still here. It was one of a pair of semi-detached cottages, later renumbered 1&3 Hay Lane, which was burnt down on Guy Fawkes night in 1964, after firework rockets landed on their thatched roof. A developer then bought the ruined homes, and persuaded the owners of some neighbouring cottages, also with large gardens, to sell-up and make way for Kenwood Court.

The thatched roof would have provided some insulation during the winter, but Amy's room must have felt cold as she came home from work on winter evenings. This extract from a letter to her mother, on 14 January 1930, was written after a nice surprise:

'You are a darling to pack me up such a topping parcel! I came in from the Aerodrome absolutely tired out, but the contents of the parcel bucked me up no end! Thanks ever so much. The pillow is beautifully soft, & my bed now, for once, really looks inviting. When the eider-down arrives, I shall indeed be well off. It is awfully nice of you to buy me a new one, but I am sorry to have put you to that extra expense. It will, however, be a treat to have it, & I appreciate your kindness & thoughtfulness very much indeed.'



The opening of Amy's letter, quoted above. (Courtesy of the RAF Museum Archive)

When you are ready, go back to the corner and turn right into Stag Lane, staying on this side of the road. When Amy was living here, the opposite side of the road was still mainly fields, and you can still see the red-brick farmhouse of Roe Green Farm tucked away behind Cherry Tree Court. On our side, there was a line of the thatched timber cottages designed by [Ernest Trobridge](#) ("[Kingsbury's extraordinary architect](#)"), as comfortable and affordable homes, using local materials, to help meet the housing shortage after the First World War.

After a short distance, you will see the remaining four of these Trobridge cottages on your right. Pause for a while in front of numbers 347 and 349 Stag Lane (originally 2 and 3 Elmwood Crescent), to get an impression of what Amy Johnson's home in Kingsbury would have looked like, more than 90 years ago. Carry on up this side of Stag Lane for a minute or two. Then, after passing the junction with Goldsmith Lane on the opposite side of the road, stop by entrance to The Village School (with its mural of large photographs).

3. When Amy was walking up and down Stag Lane, the late-Georgian Grove Park Mansion stood where The Village School is now. At that time, it was used as a boys' preparatory school, but in 1916 the mansion, and its large grounds stretching all the way across to the Edgware Road, had been bought by the Aircraft Manufacturing Company.

Airco, as the company was popularly known, grew rapidly during the First World War, building aircraft for the war effort. The Grove Park estate allowed it to have its own airfield, extra space for its factory buildings and the mansion for offices. By 1918, it was probably the biggest aircraft factory in the world, employing 4,400 people. More than half of them were [women workers](#), as most men who could have done the basic manual tasks were serving in the forces.



The workers of Airco's woodworking shop in 1918. (Source: Brent Archives, "The Airco Rag")

Airco's story played a vital part in preparing the way for Amy's time in Kingsbury. Its aircraft designer was Geoffrey de Havilland, and when the Aircraft Manufacturing Company was closed down in 1920, he moved up the road to Stag Lane Aerodrome and started his own aircraft business.

The picturesque houses you can see across Stag Lane are part of Roe Green Village. This was designed by Sir Frank Baines, of the government's Office of Works, and built between 1918 and 1920 for workers at the Airco factory. The large red brick and tile building, with shops on the ground floor, was an integral part of the plans. The first floor provided a village hall, while the shops were run as a store by the Willesden and District Co-operative Society. It's quite possible that Amy bought things there! (A convenience store is one of the shops here now, should you need a snack during your walk.)



The Roe Green Village Willesden & District Co-op Store in Stag Lane, 1920s. (Brent Archives)

If you wish to follow the walk in two short stages, cross Stag Lane safely via the pedestrian island, or lights opposite the shops, to the Grove Park bus stop (RJ). Take the 302 bus (towards Mill Hill) for three stops, to the Holyrood Gardens bus stop (W), to rejoin the route just before point **5**. To walk the route, stay on the same side as the school, cross the road called Grove Park, and continue walking up the east side of Stag Lane.



An aerial view of Roe Green Village, c.1920, with arrow showing Stag Lane.

At first, the houses on the opposite side of the road were part of Roe Green Village, but as you can see from the aerial view above, this was originally surrounded by open fields. When Amy was walking up and down Stag Lane (marked with an arrow) this country lane probably had a few gas streetlamps. On your left you will pass the end of Princes Avenue, which was being constructed around 1930, ready to open up this area for suburban development.

On your right, parts of the former Airco site (see the hangars in the photograph) had been taken over by other industries. One of the largest of these, which opened in the mid-1920s on the Edgware Road side, was the Frigidaire works (part of the American General Motors Corporation) making refrigerators. There is now an Asda superstore on the site. Carefully cross over Capitol Way, then up the gentle slope past Carlisle Road, and you'll come to a busy crossroads at Holmstall Avenue. Cross at the pedestrian lights, and then continue for a short distance up this side of Stag Lane. Stop by the end of the corner house's wooden fence, and look across the road.

4. The houses on this side of Stag Lane had been built down from Burnt Oak to Holmstall Avenue by the mid-1920s. But as Amy walked up from her lodgings, she would have been able to look across the fields on the opposite side of the lane and see the De Havilland aircraft factory. You can see the factory in the photograph below, with an arrow pointing to where you are standing now.

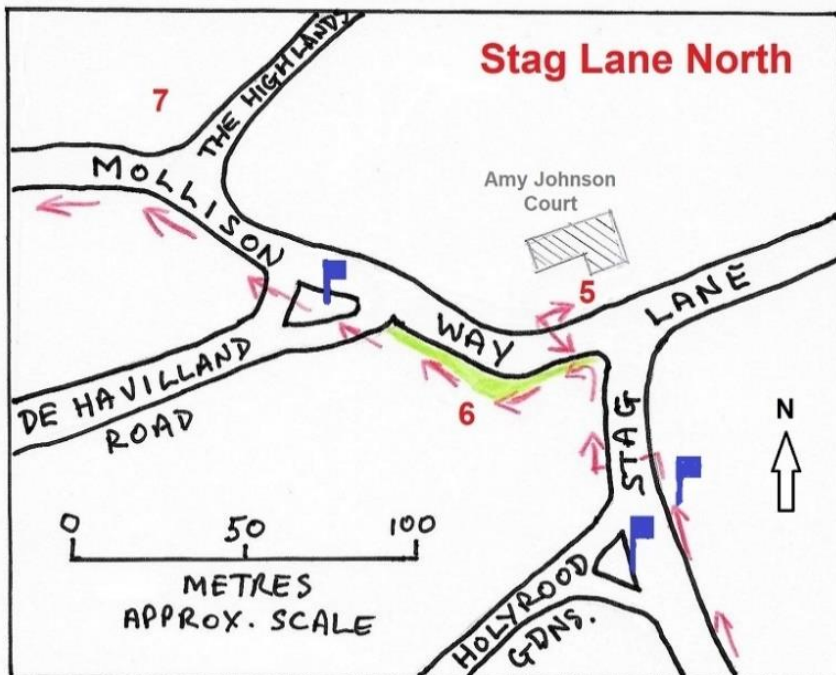


The De Havilland factory at Stag Lane Aerodrome in 1926. (Brent Archives)

In the picture you can see a biplane circling over the factory, and others on the ground. Several of these are "Moths", a plane that Amy would become very familiar with. Geoffrey de Havilland was the test

pilot for this DH60 design, for its first flight in February 1925. It was a basic, easy to fly two-seater training and touring aircraft, which proved to be hugely popular, especially when it was fitted with the “Gipsy” engine, built in De Havilland’s own Stag Lane factory.

When you are ready, carry on walking up Stag Lane. After a while, the road curves round to the right, and you will pass the end of Holyrood Gardens (opposite), and the bus stop of that name. Cross Stag Lane at the zebra crossing and turn right (if you are doing the walk in two short stages, rejoin it here). Walk up to the junction with Mollison Way, then turn left. Almost immediately, there is a diagonal path across the grass verge – take this and cross Mollison Way with care, then turn right to stand on the pavement in front of Amy Johnson Court.



5. You are now standing at what was the entrance to Stag Lane Aerodrome, where Amy first came in April 1928, and which would be at the centre of her life for the next two years. The 1960s block of flats named after her stands on the site of a Second World War works canteen (for workers at the De Havilland aero engine factory). Amy never lived here herself, but if you wish to take a “selfie” with the sign on the flats in the background, as a memento of your walk, please respect the residents’ privacy!



Go back across to the south side of Mollison Way, the same way that you came, then turn right. Walk a short distance, passing the entrance to a small car park, and you will come to a row of distinctive three-storey homes. This is the start of De Havilland Road, a mid-1990s development built for the Metropolitan Housing Trust on the site of the De Havilland factory buildings. Incorporated into the design of the homes are a number of artworks inspired by flying, and the planes that were built here in the past. When you come to the block for numbers 224-234 De Havilland Road, stop by the edge of the grass, where you can see a grey slate plaque on the wall.



“Flying from Brent” heritage walk in September 2021, with guide Sadie Kempner as Amy.

6. When Geoffrey de Havilland started his own aircraft company at Stag Lane Aerodrome in 1920, he brought two partly assembled planes with him from Airco, and operated out of wooden huts and a couple of large tents. Ten years later, there were large factory buildings along one side of the Aerodrome, and he had bought a bigger site at Hatfield to become the company’s main production site. From 1934, the factory here made aero engines for the planes being built at Hatfield. In 1960, the company’s engine division was sold to the Hawker Siddeley Group, which eventually closed down the factory, ending De Havilland’s fifty years here. The road continues that name on the site, with the plaque commemorating that association.

When you are ready, carry on along this side of Mollison Way, enjoying the artwork on the homes on your left. Pass the bus stop, on its small island by the street entrance to De Havilland Road, and cross this road carefully to remain on Mollison Way. After a short distance, you will see the junction with The Highlands on the opposite side of the road. Stop here by the edge of the grass verge, and look across Mollison Way to the houses on the left-hand corner.



Stag Lane Aerodrome, c.1933, with arrow pointing to the London Aeroplane Club hangars.

7. It would be safest to stay on the same side of Mollison Way, and just look across at where the London Aeroplane Club buildings were (marked with an arrow on the aerial photograph above). The Club was set up at Stag Lane in August 1925, and subsidised by the Air Ministry, as the government

wanted more people (men!) to learn how to fly, both to promote air transport and in case of the need for pilots in any future war. It was equipped with DH60 Moth aircraft, built in the factory at the aerodrome.

The Aeroplane Club's mechanics looking after the planes worked for six days a week, from 8am until dusk (with Monday as their "day off"), and Amy did the same. She wrote about the working conditions in a letter to her mother on 6 October 1929, saying:

'It's very cold at the Aerodrome now & I've had to get myself some warm clothes. I've got a thick tweed skirt & warm jumper & a white sweater & 2 prs. of woollen stockings & woollen knickers & these should last me the winter. I shall have to wear a lot of clothes because of the concrete floors and draughts everywhere.'

When Amy first worked in the Club's hangars she was given jobs like sweeping the floor and washing the planes. After gaining more experience, from watching Chief Engineer Jack Humphreys, she was able to work on the mechanical side of aircraft, and their engines. She also managed to get more flying experience, taking planes up for a test flight after they'd been serviced, or going for private flights at quiet times, as a London Aeroplane Club member.



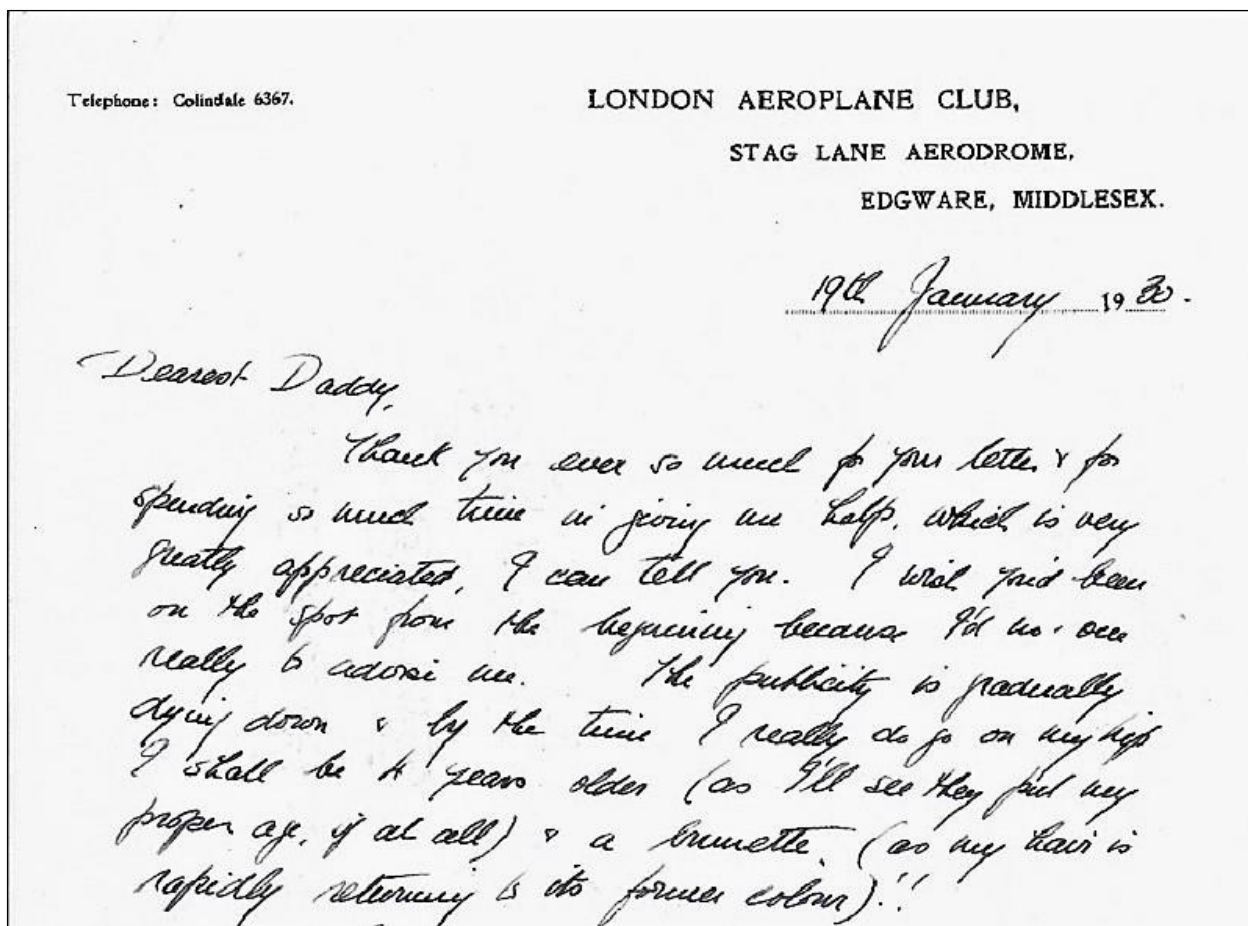
Amy and Jack working on one of the Club's Gipsy Moths. (Image from the internet)



Amy working on a Gipsy Moth engine. (an "Illustrated London News" photo, from the internet)

With Jack's encouragement, Amy studied for her Ground Engineer "C" Licence, passing her exams and becoming the first woman in Britain to receive this licence in December 1929. On 19 January 1930, she wrote to her father, about a private job she had done for a Club member, preparing his plane for sale. It was:

'... one of the hardest weeks' work I've ever done in my life. This last week I've been busy on my first job in aviation, & have earned £3!! Major Nathan ... sold his old machine. I thoroughly overhauled & inspected it before he handed it over. It was in a shockingly bad state & I nearly exhausted myself cleaning & polishing it – however it's all good training & I'm gradually getting much stronger physically, which I need to be to get to Australia!'

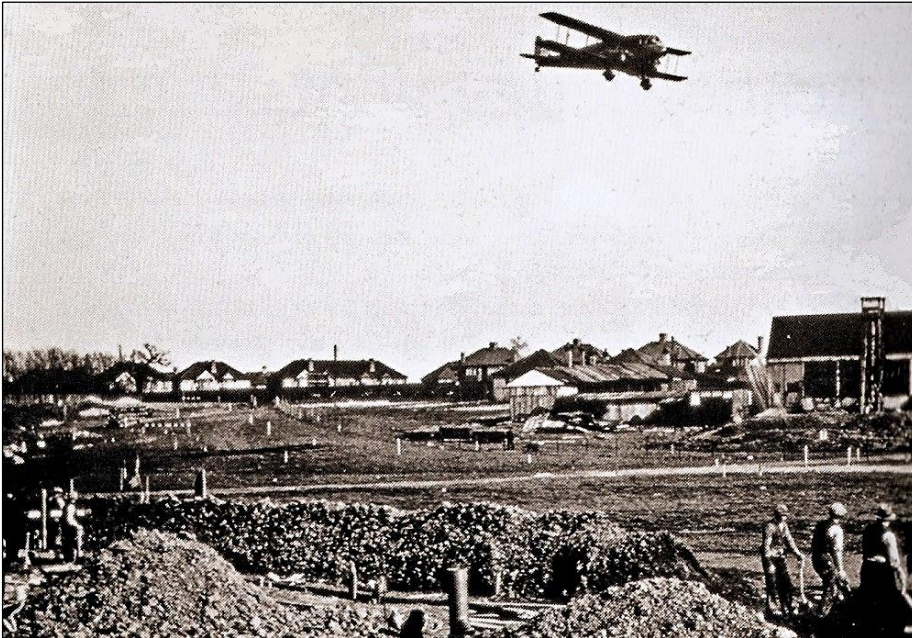


The opening paragraph of the letter Amy wrote near here! (Courtesy of the RAF Museum Archive)

Amy hadn't intended to fly to Australia when she started at working at the aerodrome. She wanted to have a career as a pilot, but when no one seemed to take the idea of a female pilot seriously she decided on a "stunt" to show them what was possible. After four months of detailed planning, by the end of April 1930 she was preparing a second-hand Gipsy Moth plane she had bought (with money from her father and Lord Wakefield), ready for her journey.

If you are doing the walk in two short stages, you should retrace your steps to The Highlands bus stop (X), by the entrance to De Havilland Road, and catch the 114 bus (towards Ruislip) or the 614 (pink Uno bus) to Queensbury Station. If you came by the number 302 bus route, return to the corner with Stag Lane, turn right and walk down to the Holyrood Gardens bus stop – for the service towards Kensal Rise Station cross safely at the zebra crossing to bus stop E.

To finish the walk on foot, continue along the south side of Mollison Way. We've seen that the De Havilland company bought a larger site at Hatfield in 1930, and moved their aircraft production there. The London Aeroplane Club also followed them to Hatfield. In June 1933, De Havilland sold Stag Lane Aerodrome, apart from their factory site, to an estate agent, who wanted to develop the land as a suburban housing estate. The rest of this walk passes through the Stag Lane Aerodrome Estate.



Mollison Way under construction in 1934. (From Geoffrey Hewlett's "Kingsbury Through Time")

Mollison Way is the main road through the estate, and many believe that it was named after Jim Mollison. However, Amy Johnson married him in 1932, and both were famous aviators who made record breaking flights in De Havilland planes. In fact, they flew one of the revolutionary DH88 Comet aircraft together, in an air race to Australia in 1934. They were leading the race, after the first non-stop flight to Baghdad and fastest ever flight to India, but had to drop out because of a mechanical problem. We'd like to think that you're walking along a road named after Jim and Amy Mollison. [She went back to being Amy Johnson after she divorced him in 1937.]

Although Stag Lane Aerodrome was just a very large field, with no solid runway, this straight section of Mollison Way follows the east-west line that most planes would have taken off along. You are walking where Amy would have taken off many times, from her first solo flight on 9 June 1929 to 4 May 1930, when she flew down to Croydon, ready to begin the trip to Australia that made a secretary from Hull one of the most famous women of her time.

After a couple of minutes walking along Mollison Way you will see a local shopping centre ahead of you. Carefully cross the end of Lawrence Crescent to the little grassy island with trees at the eastern end of the shops.



The Mollison Way Heritage Trail information board at the eastern end of the shops.

8. At the edge of the grass you will find a notice board, with information about the history of Stag Lane Aerodrome from 1916 to 1934, displayed over a photograph of Jim Mollison. This is the last panel in a now slightly neglected Mollison Way Heritage Trail, which actually begins at the far end of the shopping parade. If you have time, stop and read this board, which provides lots of interesting details about the De Havilland aeroplanes which first flew from Stag Lane.

Carefully cross the slip road, and walk along past the shops on Mollison Way's South Parade. On this side you will pass two smaller Heritage Trail information boards at the edge of the pavement. Panel 5, which you'll soon reach outside the Surgery, shows the development of the Aerodrome Estate, with aerial photographs. Panel 3, towards the far end of South Parade, tells the story of the DH Moth plane, with a photograph of Amy Johnson working on one.

You are now nearing the end of our walk. If you wish to stop for a short break, or snack from a local shop, cross Mollison Way safely at the zebra crossing and go left to the seats in the small island garden (which also has the Heritage Trail's introductory panel). Otherwise, continue walking along the south side of Mollison Way, carefully crossing Waltham Drive at the end of the shops.

After a long, straight section, the road curves round to the left, before reaching a large roundabout. Cross the first exit from the roundabout, Reynolds Drive, and continue left into Turner Road. After a minute or so, you'll emerge onto Queensbury Station Parade, with its large Underground sign on a roundabout. A zebra crossing will lead you across to the station itself.

We hope you've enjoyed the walk. There are several places where you can buy some food as a reward for your exercise, and perhaps make your way across to the large green, opposite the station, to enjoy it. The Kingsbury name dates from Saxon times, but Queensbury was chosen as the name for this new northern suburb, after a competition in the early 1930s. It was not named after any particular "Queen", but given her association with the area then, we could imagine it named after Amy - she was, as the title of the biography by Midge Gillies proudly states: "Amy Johnson – Queen of the Air"!

Philip Grant (Wembley History Society) and **Amanda Epe** (Fly Girls Wellness), November 2021.

There are a number of online resources that you might like to take advantage of, to discover more about Amy Johnson:-

Don't miss Amanda's 2021 short film about Amy, "Flying from Brent", which you can watch at:

<https://youtu.be/96P0aPz2FgM>

Less exciting, but quite informative (if you have 47 minutes to spare) is the recording of Philip's May 2021 illustrated online talk for Brent Libraries, "Amy Johnson – from Kingsbury to Australia":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtxX5eqbeV8>

You can see all the slides from Philip's May 2021 talk, and enjoy the illustrations at your own pace, at:

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16418633/amy-johnson-from-kingsbury-to-australia-5-may-2021-online-talk.pdf>

Philip's earlier illustrated article, "Amy Johnson – Flying from Kingsbury", is also available on the Brent Archives website:

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16404897/amy-johnson-flying-from-kingsbury.pdf>