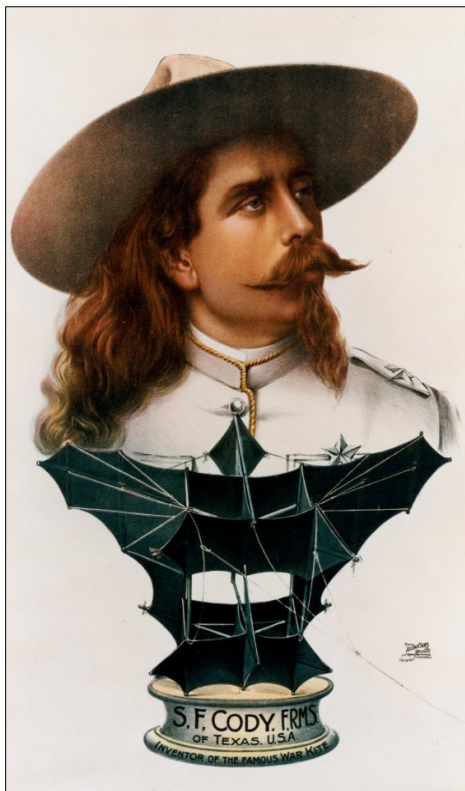


# The Eccleston Times

Tuesday 29th December 2009

Special Valencia Farm Souvenir Edition



Mr Cody atop one of his famous kites

**Mr Samuel Cody**, renowned aviator and first man in Britain to fly a heavier than air machine, landed at Valencia Farm, Eccleston one hundred years ago today. It was the first ever aeroplane to arrive in St Helens and caused great excitement.

Mr Cody was attempting to win the £1000 prize offered by Sir William Hartley, the celebrated jam manufacturer on Merseyside, to the first person to fly non-stop between Liverpool and Manchester.

Mr Cody took off from Aintree Racecourse, Liverpool at 12.16 hrs, but was forced to land at 12.37 at Valencia Farm alongside Eccleston Hill because of thick fog over the region.

This was not however Mr Cody's first visit to St Helens. He had been

here on at least two previous occasions at the town's Theatre Royal, not as an airman, but as a "Wild West Showman" - an expert in shooting and horse-riding. His most famous previous appearance was in October 1899 with his show "The Klondyke Nugget". In the early hours of the 14th October, some hours after his performance the previous evening, the beautiful and relatively new Theatre Royal caught fire and was totally destroyed! The reason for the fire was not established although there were some mischievous suggestions it may have been a consequence of shooting and explosions in his show.

**Today** Mr Martin Keen is flying his vintage Tiger Moth bi-plane over Valencia Farm celebrating 100 years since Cody's epic flight.



The scene at Valencia Farm today—with Mr Cody's aeroplane attracting a huge crowd to see the first aerial machine

A Souvenir leaflet to mark the 100th Anniversary of S. F. Cody's arrival in St Helens on 29th December 1909—  
Prepared by Keith Hardwick and Graham Ward (Friends of Liverpool Airport) in association with the St Helens Heritage Group Aviation Sub-Group

## Aviation Milestones

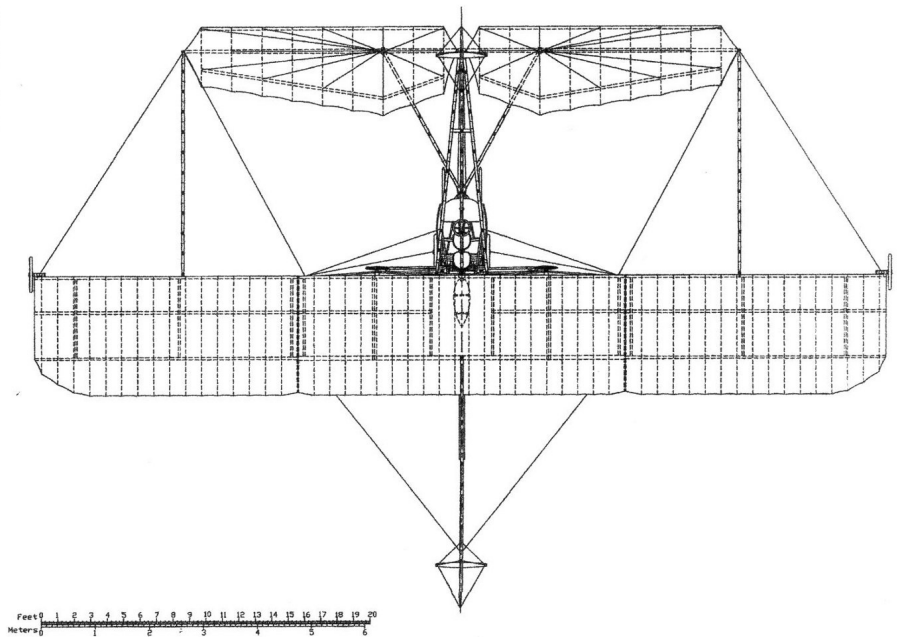
- **1783** – First controlled aerial ascent by man by balloon, The Montgolfier Bros. Paris
- **1899** – First aviation event in **St Helens**. Higgins ascends to 6,000 ft by balloon and parachutes safely down. 20,000 watch at Grange Park.
- **1903** – World's first heavier than air machine – aeroplane - flight on 17 Dec.– Wright Bros, USA.
- **1906** – First aeroplane flight in Europe by Santos Dumont, Near Paris – on 23 Oct.
- **1908** – First aeroplane flight in Britain on 16 October by **Samuel F Cody** in Army Aircraft No. 1 at Farnborough
- **1909** – First aeroplane flight across the English Channel – by Bleriot on 25 July Calais to Dover – 24 miles in 36 minutes
- **1909** – First aeroplane flight on Merseyside by **Cody** at Aintree Racecourse on 15 November 1909

- **1909** – **First aeroplane at St Helens** on 29 December. Cody makes emergency landing at Valencia Farm, Eccleston, attempting non-stop Liverpool–Manchester flight

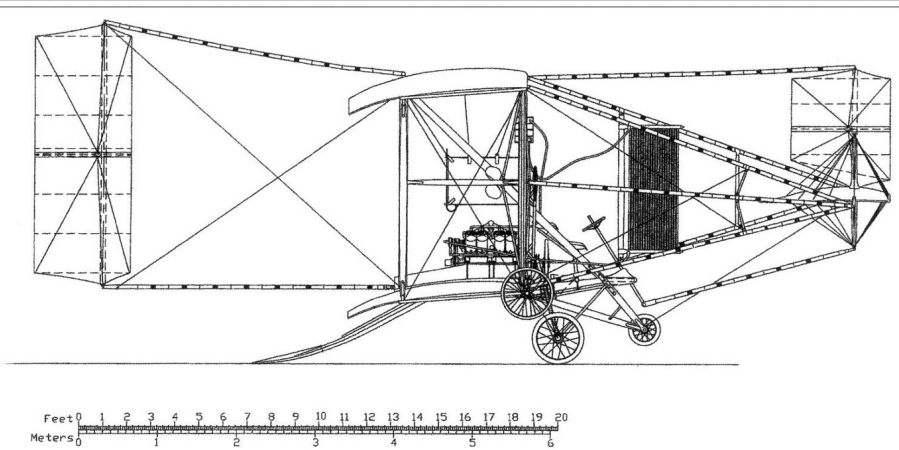
- **1911** – 7<sup>th</sup> July Henry G Melly completes first non-stop Liverpool—Manchester flight.
- **1911** – On 25<sup>th</sup> July Jules Vedrines, short of fuel en route Carlisle to Manchester, becomes second man to land at Eccleston
- **1947** – Small twin-engine business plane lands in darkness at Valencia farm. Pilot was 'lost'. Took off safely next morning

- **2009** – 29<sup>th</sup> December – **A Cody Centenary Celebration** flight at Valencia Farm by Martin Keen in vintage Tiger Moth Bi-plane. Plaque celebrating Cody's flight 100 years earlier is unveiled

## The Cody Flyer—St Helens Visitor



Scale drawing of Cody's aircraft 1C as at August 1909, from overhead. (Courtesy of John Roberts)

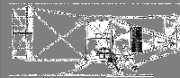


CODY 1C as in August 1909

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## Cody's Aeroplanes

1. Built under contract to British Army, hence called **Army Aircraft 1** or 1A. First flight 16 October 1908
2. Cody 1B – first flew February 1909
3. Cody 1C – also known as **The Cathedral** – first flew mid 1909 and the aircraft which landed at **St Helens**
4. Cody II – first flew June 1910 – had just one propeller – All I series had two.
5. Cody III – first flew mid 1911 – smaller than II but still one propeller
6. Cody IV – first flew 21 June 1912 – was Cody's first monoplane
7. Cody V – first flew July 1912
8. Cody VI- first flew June 1913 – his largest bi-plane designed to fly from land and water (floats fitted) –This plane suffered structural failure in flight and crashed on 7 August 1913, both Cody and passenger killed



**This plaque commemorates the arrival of the first ever aeroplane in the skies of St Helens, on 29th December 1909**

**It was flown by pioneer aviator "Colonel" Samuel Cody, who was attempting to be the first person to fly non-stop between Liverpool and Manchester.**

**Cody took off from Aintree Racecourse, Liverpool at 12.16 pm, but was forced to land here at Valencia Farm, Eccleston Hill, because of thick fog over the region, around 12.37 pm.**

*This plaque was provided by the St. Helens Heritage Network, and unveiled on the 29th December 2009, with the help of a grant from the Heritage Lottery.*

The legend of the plaque that will be unveiled by the Mayor of St Helens—29 Dec. 2009

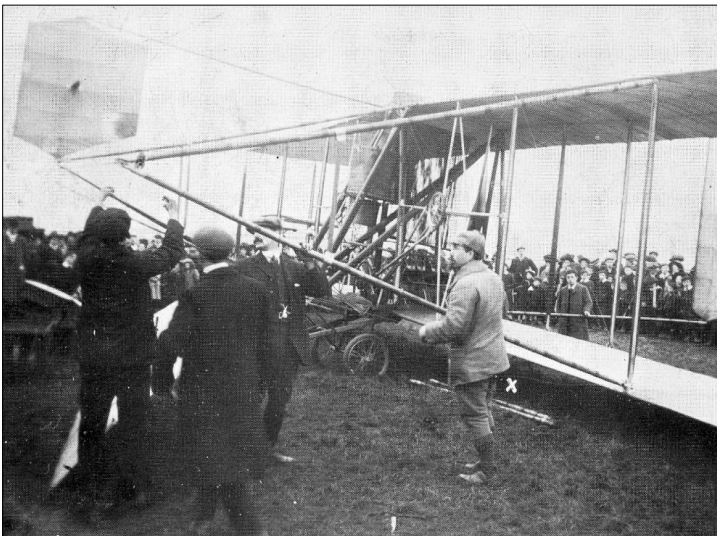
## Events of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1909 reported using extracts from “*The St Helens Newspaper*”.

**Arrival at Valencia Farm.** “The peaceful atmosphere of ancient little Portico was rudely disturbed on Wednesday afternoon, when Colonel Cody, in his aeroplane swooped down on the field close to the old church....He commenced his long and dangerous journey from Liverpool....flying at a height of 80 to 200 feet....suddenly confronted with the sharp rise of Eccleston Hill looming through the hanging fog and as the wind was blowing up smoke and fog in volumes from St Helens [sounds very murky!]....decided was too risky to continue and descended easily in a field at Valencia Farm.. ....stopping within two or three yards of the high road between St Helens and Prescott. Within a few minutes quite a crowd of eager spectators had surrounded the aeroplane, gazing at Cody and his machine as if he were the original “Messenger from Mars”. The aeroplane was soon roped around.....to refrain the eager sight seers, many of whom were anxious to commit their names to posterity by writing them amidst the names already scribbled on the broad white plane [wing] of the machine. Not since the day of the King’s visit to Knowsley have the roads there been so animated as they were within an hour of the aviator’s arrival.....every road was animated with people eager to get their first sight of a flying machine.”

**Return to Aintree.** [Next day] “Cody’s intention was to fly back to Aintree if the weather was suitable....but the fog was too thick....decided to dismantle machine.....with the assistance of his mechanic and carpenter, this work being watched by a large crowd.....The removal of the huge machine was a matter of some difficulty, but on the suggestion of Alderman Dixon-Nuttall, the services of Mr Fred Brown the builder of “Nile dams and pagodas,” were enlisted. Mr Brown drove Mr Cody round to Mr Booth’s carriage works in Eccleston Street and the Colonel was greatly amused to read the printed placard, “Flying machines repaired here”. Mr Booth lent a wheel for the under carriage which Mr Brown was rigging up. The work was completed in good time, but owing to the great width of the machine it was impossible to take it back until after the tramway traffic had ceased..... start journey at half past eleven. The under carriage consists of a heavy oak frame stiffened by two scaffold poles, 30feet long....constructed from a rough design by Cody.....Mr Brown considers he has been very fortunate in getting the work through, as his men were away on [presumably Christmas] holidays.”

**Both man and machine** did get back safely to Aintree, but Cody did not attempt the flight to Manchester again and returned to Farnborough – with aircraft 1C on a lorry.

## 1909—A Comparison of the Aeroplanes—2009



Colonel Cody (marked x) and aeroplane at Valencia Farm 1909

### **Cody Aircraft 1C – *The Cathedral*, which landed at St Helens. Built 1909**

Wing span	52 feet
Wing surface area	780 sq ft
Wing separation	9 feet
Weight	approx 1 ton (2240lbs)
Engine	1 x 80 h.p., 8 cylinders, weight, ~ 300 lbs.
Propellers	Two
Max speed	about 45 mph
Seats	Two
Number Made	1
Range	unknown, but over 100 miles

The aircraft was very large compared with others around at the time – almost twice the wing span and weight of the Wright Bros 1903 ‘Flyer’ aircraft.



The Tiger Moth aeroplane which visited Valencia Farm 2009

### **DH 82A Tiger Moth G-AMCK aircraft which flew today. Built 1941**

Wing span	29 ft 4 ins
Wing surface area	239 sq ft
Wing separation	5ft 6in
Weight	approx 0.8 tons (1825lbs)
Engine	1 x 150 h.p., 4 cylinders, weight, ~ 300lbs.
Propellers	One
Max speed	about 109 mph
Seats	Two
Number Made	8492
Range	248 nautical miles

One of the most famous biplanes in the world, the much loved Tiger Moth was produced in large numbers for WW2 service as a basic pilot trainer, and today is still a highly sought after private aircraft.

## The Fire at The Theatre Royal – Cody involved?

Some ten years before Samuel Cody's unexpected arrival in St Helens on 29 December 1909 he had already booked a place in the history of the town through a 'connection' with the massive fire in October 1899 which destroyed the Theatre Royal. The 'connection' is an intriguing one. Cody was performing at the Theatre Royal with his Wild West show "The Klondyke Nugget" from 9 – 13 October. His show was a spectacular success. Sadly, during the night of 13/14 October, and a few hours after his last show, the Theatre burnt down. Thankfully there were no serious injuries. The *St Helens Newspaper and Advertiser* for 14 October 1909 carried a detailed report. Here are a few extracts. The headline was, "GREAT CONFLAGRATION: COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE THEATRE ROYAL, *The Building Guted, Company's Effects [that's Cody's] Destroyed, £10,000 damage.....*The Theatre Royal which was one of the finest buildings in St Helens was in the early hours of this morning completely destroyed by fire, nothing being now left except the facade and the bare walls. The fire was first discovered by Mr Charles Hardman.....it being almost twenty minutes past two. Mr Hardman rushed to the house of the Manager who ran to give the alarm at the fire station. In a few minutes the brigade arrived.....by a quarter to three.....the roof



Sir David Gamble's Offices and Theatre Royal (Opened 2 August 1890)

crashed in sending up a shower of golden sparks that presented a brilliant spectacle in the dark night.....In the early stages of the fire Mr S F Cody whose company have been appearing in the drama "The Klondyke Nugget", in the course of which by the way, there is a good deal of gun and pistol firing, was on the scene and he made an attempt to save some of his property. He managed to secure one box but the police [it took six of them to stop him it seems!] restrained him from further effort."

Cody was clearly under some suspicion regarding the reason for the outbreak of fire and some sources even say a firework used in the show caused it. Maybe it smouldered for a while till after the Theatre was empty before igniting it.

The loss of the Theatre was a great blow to St Helens, though it was subsequently rebuilt on the same site and remains there to this day, though now with a modern glass frontage/facade.

## Cody—The Man

**Samuel Franklin Cody –  
a man of many talents!**

Very briefly.....Born 1867 in Iowa, USA as S F Cowdery: Cowboy, Horse Trainer, buffalo hunter, gold prospector (at Klondyke/Dawson City), Ace pistol/rifle shooter, Wild West show writer/producer/principal performer, changed name to Cody, King of the Cowboys, married 1889, came to England 1890 and toured Europe with his shows and became very rich. With son Leon developed his interest in kites, produced successful man-lifting kite. Many kites developed under Army contract with salary of £1,000 a year plus free hay for his famous white stallion!, designed and built first UK dirigible (powered air ship), flew it Farnborough to and around St Paul's in London – another first of course. Commenced designing and building an aeroplane in 1907, first 'hops' in Sept 1908 and first officially recognised flight in Britain 16 October 1908 in Army Aircraft I at Farnborough. 1908/09 built further aircraft and flew them throughout Britain including at Doncaster in October 1909 where he was star of first Aviation Meeting in Britain. Became British citizen at Doncaster. Made the first aeroplane flight in North West/Merseyside 15 Nov 1909, first aircraft landing at St Helens 29 Dec 1909. Won numerous prizes in major flying competitions during 1910/11/12 including Michelin Trophy three times. Crashed while flying aircraft VI with one passenger on board near Farnborough on 7 August 1913 and both were killed.

It was realised that the whole world, not just the aviation world, had lost one of its most successful and colourful pioneers. How could one man achieve so much in one short lifetime? An estimated 100,000 people attended his funeral including King George V who had a very high regard for Cody.

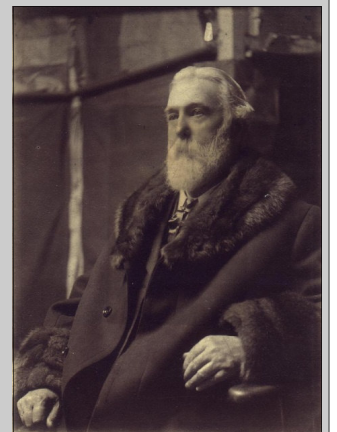


### The £1,000 prize Cody was chasing—

...aviators should welcome the prize of £1,000 which has been offered by Sir W. Hartley for a flight in a heavier-than-air machine from Liverpool to Manchester. The event is international, and will hold good for six months.

Flights can be made any time between sunrise and sunset, but twelve hours' notice must be given to the Liverpool Daily Post, who are in charge of the competition. The aviator must start from within the boundary of Liverpool and land without any intermediate stoppage within the boundary of Manchester.

*Flight—31st July 1909*



Sir William Hartley

### Acknowledgements & thanks to...

Aintree Racecourse Management—Generous Help with the Flying  
Keith Atherton—FoLA—Event Instigator  
David Birchall—Use of Valencia Farm Site and Farm Shop  
Chris Coffey—Heritage Group—Event Organiser  
Keith Hardwick—FoLA—Event Instigator & Organiser  
Martin Keen—Keenair—Tiger Moth Owner and Pilot  
Philip Pickford—Rotary Wing—Generous Help with Aircraft Handling  
John Pinfold—Aintree Racecourse Historian—Generous Help  
Jean Roberts—Cody Expert—Much Encouragement  
John Roberts—Cody Expert—Superb Aircraft IC Drawings  
Len Saunders—Period Master of Ceremonies  
Simon Skidmore—Heritage Group—Event Organiser  
Graham Ward—FoLA—Leaflet Design & Organiser  
Don Wilson—Watercolour Artist