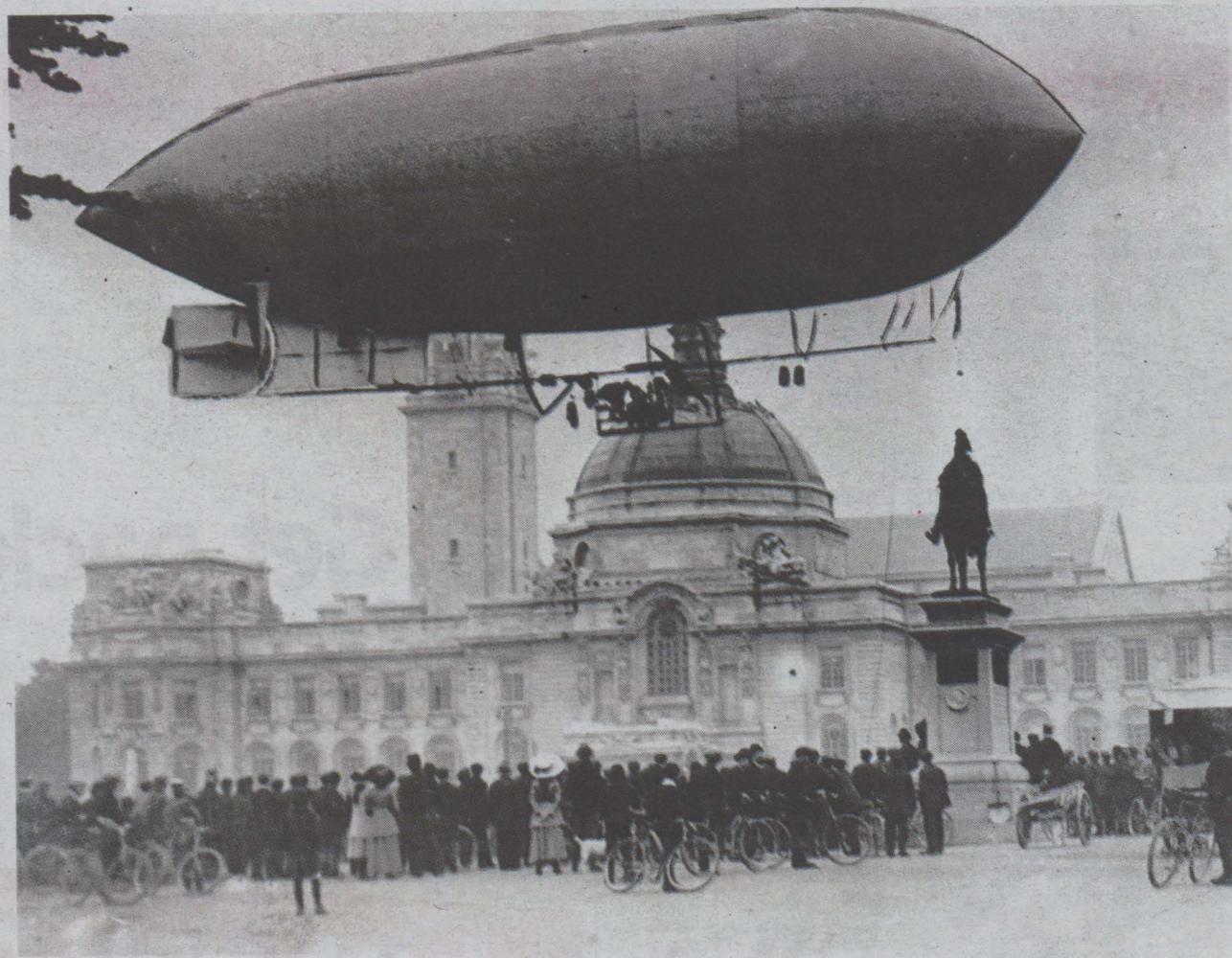


WHEN A HIGH FLYER



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WHEN a local aviation pioneer touched down his airship in front of Cardiff City Hall in 1910, the crowds that gathered must have been amazed.

Although UFO wasn't a familiar term then, Ernest Thompson Willows, who was born 125 years ago today, left many people scratching their heads.

Operating from East Moors, Splott, the intrepid young man, born in Newport Road, dazzled people with his exploits in the early years of the 20th century.

But he really shot into the news when he landed the enormous airship in front of City Hall watched by a huge crowd on June 7, 1910.

In its reportage the following day, the Echo announced: "A New Era Has Begun".

On July 11 he flew from Cheltenham to Cardiff pursued by an army of cars, and the following August took 10 hours to travel from Cardiff to London, at the time the longest flight ever made in the country.

He had to drop close to the ground 12 times on the way to shout for directions, but in

SWOOPED INTO CITY

September he astounded Londoners by flying over St Paul's Cathedral.

Willows went on to achieve worldwide aeronautical fame, becoming the first person to cross the Bristol Channel in a powered aircraft, the first to cross the English Channel from England to France in an airship and the first British airship pilot to cross the channel at all.

Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George were among the crowds when he took off, after which he eventually reached Paris, his most epic journey of all.

Retired Echo journalist Alec McKinty, 76, of Penylan, Cardiff, who wrote his biography, *The Father of British Airships*, said: "It was amazing that he started at all.

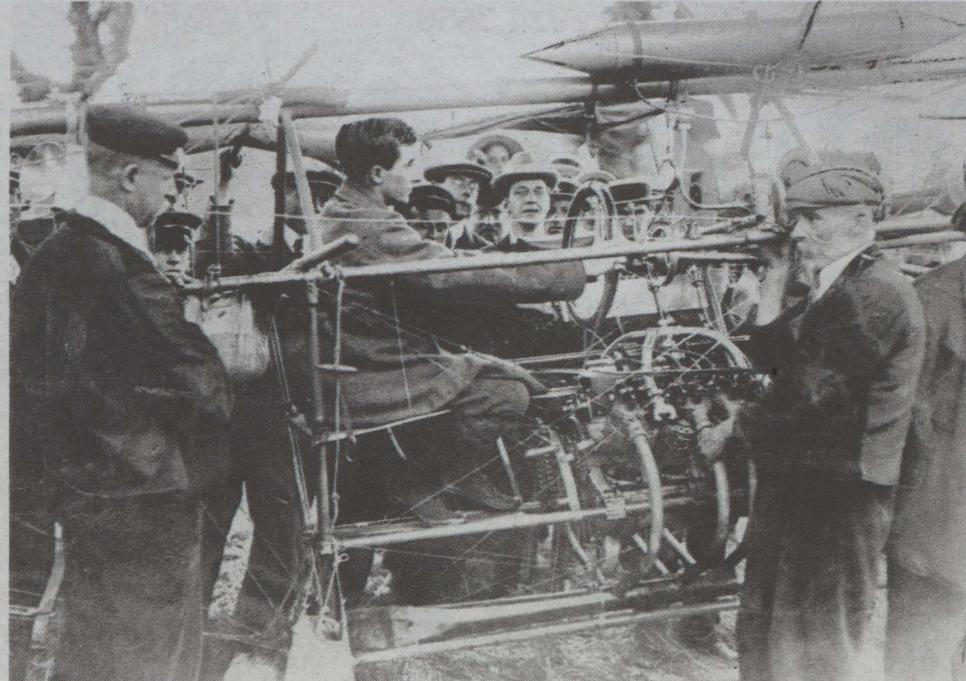
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■ Splott-born aviator E T Willows, inset, touches down in front of Cardiff City Hall in 1910

Willows, the son of a local dentist, has left his mark on Cardiff - Willows Avenue is named after him, as is Willows High School, Splott,



and the illuminated clock with a plaque in Mermaid Quay, Cardiff Bay.

There is also the Ernest Willows Wetherspoon pub on City Road.

The son of a dentist, he was made a captain in the Royal Flying Corps in 1916, after seeing a version of his airship develop into the fam-

ous blimp, although he never received much recognition.

Tragically Willows was to die with four passengers when he was flying a spherical balloon at a fete in Kempston, Bedford, on Tuesday, August 3, 1926 - 85 years ago next month.

The net surrounding the

balloon tore away and the basket plummeted 100ft to the ground. He was just 40.

The arrival of his coffin in Cardiff was greeted by large crowds and his body was buried at Cathays Cemetery, although his headstone retains the name Captain Willows.