GUSTAVE WHITEHEAD

An RAeS statement regarding claims that Gustave Whitehead successfully flew an aeroplane before the Wright brothers
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Amended and approved by the Chairman and the members of the RAeS Historical Group Committee.

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Front cover: A front view of Whitehead’s bat-winged No 21 monoplane of 1901, in which it is claimed that he flew on 14 August 1901. Library of Congress.
All available evidence fails to support the claim that Gustave Whitehead made sustained, powered, controlled flights pre-dating those of the Wright brothers. The arguments in favour of such flights are based on a single flawed news article combined with questionable witness testimony gathered more than 30 years after the fact. Whitehead's claims were rejected by contemporary local newspapers and by individuals in the best position to judge, including virtually all of those who funded his experiments. Whitehead left no letters, diaries, notebooks, calculations, or drawings recording his experiments, his thoughts, or the details of the aircraft in which others have claimed he made flights.

While there are a handful of photographs of Whitehead aircraft on the ground, the best efforts of his supporters over seven decades have failed to produce a single image of a powered Whitehead machine in flight. The 'discovery' in 2013 of an image supposedly showing Whitehead in flight has been discredited and the image has been proven not to be of Whitehead's machine.

All of this is in contrast to the meticulous and multi-layered records documenting the success of the Wright brothers and other bona fide pioneers of aviation. When it comes to the case of Gustave Whitehead, the decision must remain: not proven.
his aircraft. From the aviation history point of view, Brown's claims were by this point thoroughly discredited.

Claims by earlier advocates of Whitehead, such as Stella Randolph in 1937, are summarised in a 2003 article by RAeS Historical Group Committee member Philip Jarrett in Aeroplane6. In addition, from the 1960s onwards, Charles Gibbs-Smith — another highly-respected historian and member of the RAeS HG Committee — wrote several articles analysing and rejecting the claims, including one for the The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics7.

NOTES

1. Paul Jackson: Foreword to Jane’s All The World’s Aircraft, Development & Production, 8 March 2013.


