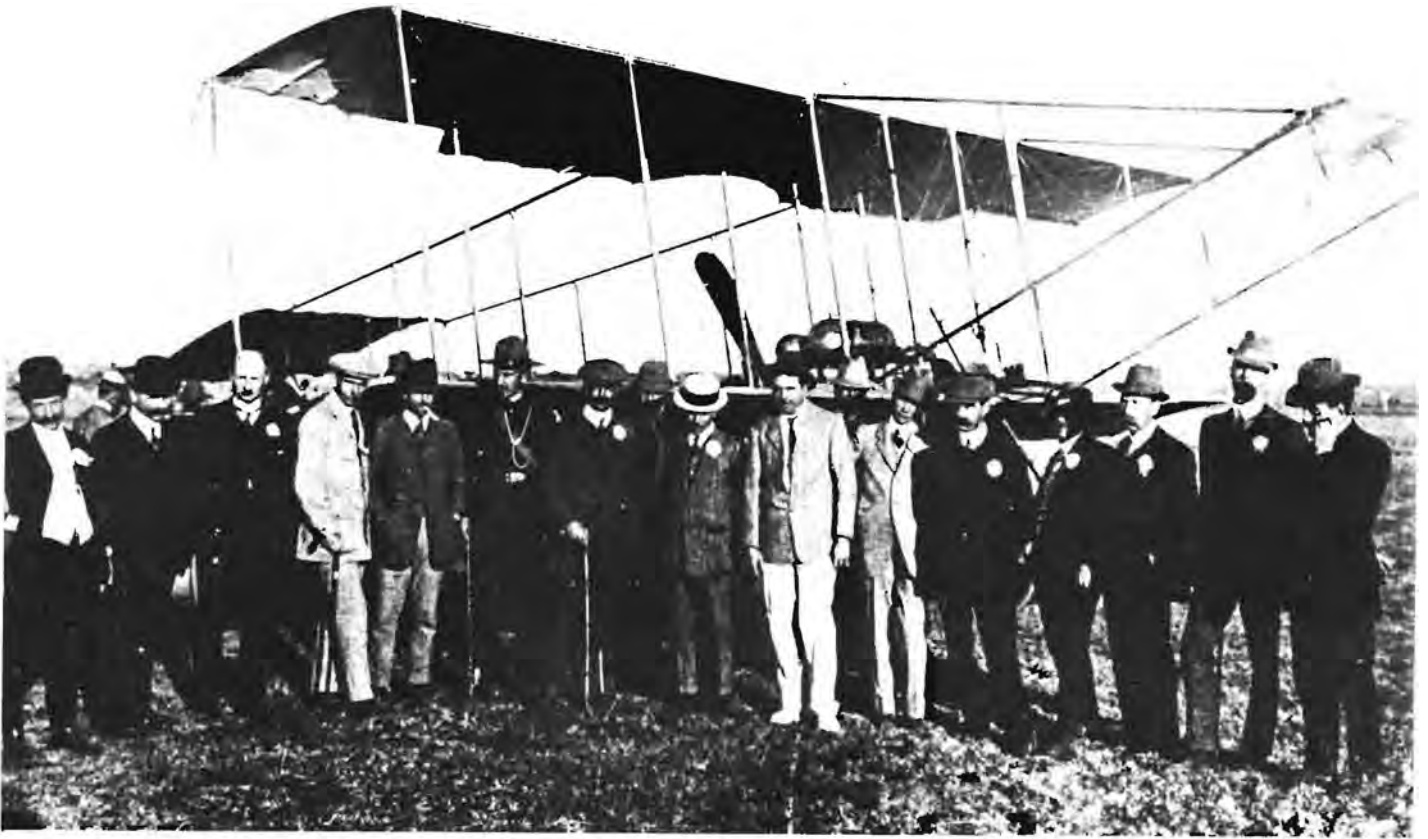


THE FIRST AEROPLANE FLIGHT IN THE O.F.S.



Can you help to identify the members of the working committee who organised Weston's demonstration in Bloemfontein and the other persons on this photograph taken by Fray?

Reading from left to right:
 1. Mr French 2. Dr. A. Flockemann 3. Mr Smeitham 4. 5. 6. Scoutmaster, Shaw 7 Mr George Stewart, City Engineer
 8. 9. 10. Mr Arthur Fichardt 11. 12. 13. 14 Mr H. Daubney 15
 16. 17.

On 24 August 1911, *The Friend* announced that: *Bloemfontein is at last to be permitted to see a real aeroplane in full flight, that is, of course, if the curiosity, not to mention the educational value, of seeing a modern aeroplane is sufficiently enterprising and keen to furnish the necessary guarantee, without which the flight or flights, cannot naturally be made. Mr John Weston, the well-known South African aviator, left Bloemfontein yesterday afternoon en route for Brandfort, which is his residence. His visit to Bloemfontein was made principally with a view of arranging a series of flights in the Free State capital . . .*

On 2 September *The Friend* mentioned that a working committee in connection with the proposed demonstration, consisting of the following prominent Bloemfontein gentlemen had been founded, namely: *Messrs A. E. Fichardt, French, Mace, Daubney, Butt, Botha, Evans, Nicolai, Ruffel, Smeitham, Clayton, Beamish, Dr De Kock, together with Colonel Chapman, Colonel Thring, Major Broadrick, Major Wright and Captain Dickey.* If there is anyone who doubts the statement that the aviation demonstration scheduled for 13 September 1911 was one of the top events ever to create a public interest in the Orange Free State, he should read the letter by *A Malcontent* published in *The Friend* on that day, and the very lengthy leader on the *Conquest of the Air* in the issue of 14 September 1911. In the former the railways were taken to task for refusing to reschedule the train leaving Bloemfontein so that its passengers could attend the flying demonstration.

The latter article describes how Bloemfontein emptied itself with a vengeance to attend the demonstration. *A perfect aviation craze possessed all and sundry when Mr Weston appeared shortly afterwards, looking very businesslike in his aviator's headgear. After a cursory examination of the machinery and the steering gear, he mounted the pilot's seat. His assistant stood ready at the propellor to give the necessary motive power for the engine to do its work, while a number of willing helpers manned the body of the machine to act as an anchor after the machine had been started . . . with a rasping, shrieking and unearthly noise, the propellers were being*



John Weston aboard his Bristol biplane during the first demonstration in the Orange Free State. This took place on the Bloemfontein Race Course where the present suburb of Universitas is situated. Note Naval Hill in the background

revolved at about 1 600 revolutions a minute. At a given signal the anchors let go and the whole structure was hopping and running like some enormous and peculiarly proportioned animal across the veld. Its speed became faster and having gone for about a couple of hundred yards it gently rose from the ground, made an inward curve, rose higher and higher . . . etc.

After being in the air for about five minutes and having attained an altitude of 150 feet Mr Weston landed and stated his willingness to take passengers. The privilege of being the first passenger on an aeroplane in the Free State was knocked down to Dr Flockemann at £15 (R16,00).

Dr Flockemann mounted the aeroplane and took his seat just behind the pilot's seat. He was requested to leave his hat and gloves behind, and ensure that there were no loose articles in his pockets which might . . . jump out and cause disruption of machinery. thus necessitating and unexpectedly speedy but uncomfortable descent. Finally he had to sign an indemnity form . . . The doctor's flight was not void of interest, although the ground was closely hugged on several occasions, and what might be described as huge jumps principally divulged in . . . The flight came to an abrupt conclusion owing to one of the wheels supporting the chassis becoming buckled . . . The huge crowd which assembled went away thoroughly satisfied and pleased with what they had seen.