

The passenger with Cody

William Henry Brereton Evans (29 Jan 1883 – 7 Aug 1913)

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Samuel Franklin Cody and the Cody Floatplane

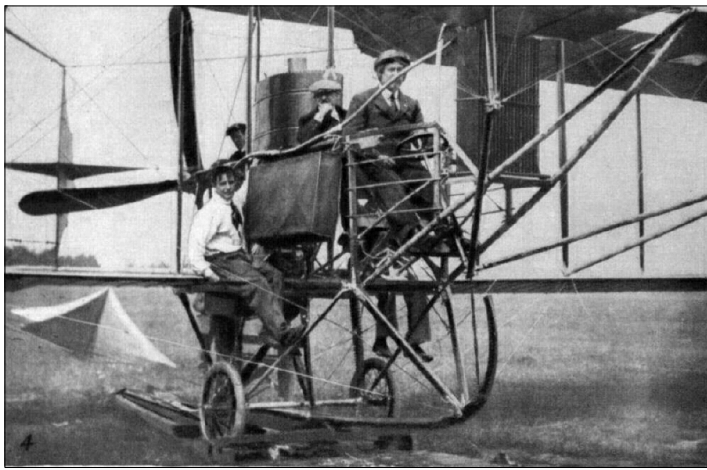
Samuel Franklin Cody (6 March 1867 – 7 August 1913) was an American Wild West showman and early pioneer of manned flight. Amongst his claims to fame Cody was the first man to fly an plane in Britain, on 16 October 1908.

In 1913 Cody designed and built the Cody Floatplane (also referred to as the Cody Hydro-biplane) as an entrant in the 1913 Daily Mail Circuit of Britain race, which offered a prize of £5,000. Construction was completed in July, and it made its maiden flight as a land plane on 14 July. On 30 July it was fitted with its floats and carried out flotation tests on the Basingstoke Canal at Mytchett, Surrey. The floats were then removed and replaced again by skids and wheels for more flight trials.

Early on the morning of 7 August Cody carried out a 70-mile (113 km) test flight around Farnborough, from Laffans Plain near Aldershot. The plan was to then fly down to Calshot, Southampton, where the aircraft would



Cody aircraft mark VIB Hydroplane on the Basingstoke Canal, Cody at the controls. People on the tow path are pulling on a rope attached to the aircraft.



Cody in his plane

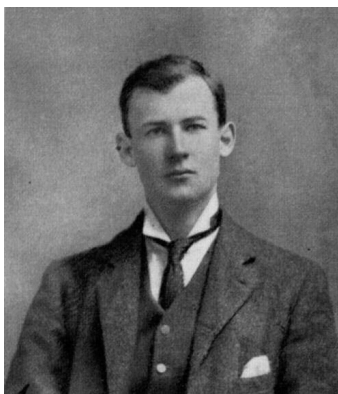
be fitted with its floats to carry out further test flights from water. However, beforehand Cody agreed to take William Evans up for a flight. He was used to taking passengers up for flights, sometimes charging five guineas a time – he had said jocularly, "I may as well make a little pocket money." (five guineas = approx. £600 today).

William had driven down to Laffans Plain with his friend Lieutenant Norman Keyser, 20th Hussars, of Aldermaston Manor. Norman had been the passenger with Cody on the earlier flight around Farnborough. Cody's son, Leon, had intended accompanying his father on the crash flight but gave up his seat to William at the last moment.

The flight took off at 10:30, but after about eight minutes, near Forest Lodge, Farnborough the plane broke up at a height of about 200 ft (60 m) over Boll Hill and crashed. Neither Cody or Evans were strapped in. Cody was thrown from, or jumped out of, the aircraft and both were killed; Cody's neck was broken while both Evans legs were broken and he was terribly injured.

The Royal Aero Club accident investigation concluded that the accident was due to "inherent structural weakness" of the plane, and suggested that Cody and Evans might have survived the crash had they been strapped in. At the inquest on 8 August Norman Keyser said his flight lasted for about twenty minutes and he could not understand how the accident happened, adding when he was up with Cody the latter seemed to have the most wonderful control of the machine.

William Henry Brereton Evans



William, the eldest son of five children, was born in South Africa into a family with a history in the colonial service in India and South Africa. His grandfather, William, was Deputy Surgeon General and Inspector General of Hospitals in India in the mid 1800s and at a later date, we believe, a practising doctor in Tadley, Hampshire. It was at this time that he and his wife Emma moved

into Fairlawn House, Tadley where he died in 1898.

William, probably known as 'Harry', had been home on leave from Sudan since June visiting his sister Dora and aunt, both of whom were living at Fairlawn House.

The report in *Wisden* of William's death described him as being "one of the best all-round amateur cricketers of his day." The obituary goes on to extol his virtues on the field

of cricket at Malvern College (1896 – 1901) and later Oriel College, Oxford (1901 – 1905), where he won his Blue as a Freshman. He also played county cricket for Gloucestershire and Hampshire.



Malvern College football team, 1900. William is standing, second from the left.

On leaving Oxford William entered the Egyptian Civil Service and so his chances of playing first-class cricket diminished. Had he continued to do so it was considered "likely that he would have had the distinction of playing for England". An all-round sportsman, William also played football for Malvern and Oxford and won the Public School Racquet Championship in 1900.

The funerals

Cody was buried with full Military Honours in the Aldershot Military Cemetery, with an estimated crowd of 100,000 people attending.

William's body was cremated at St John's Crematorium Woking on Monday 11 August And his ashes interred at St Peter's Church, Tadley on 13 August. Cremation was, at the time, an unusual decision but one made no doubt due to the condition of his body on impact with the ground. The extensive report of his burial in *The Hants and Berks Gazette* gives a clear picture that the occasion was attended by a large number of mourners, many perhaps drawn there by curiosity, excited by the tragic event that led to his death. The casket with his ashes was placed in a grave next to that of his grandmother, Emma who had died in 1911. Revd L P Phelps, from William's alma mater, Oriel College, was invited to say the committal prayers. Many prominent local residents attended the funeral as the family were well known in the area; his sister Marjorie was married to Gerald Strange of Strange's Brewery, Aldermaston (Beenham). Cody's son, Leon, was also amongst the mourners.



W H B Evans Jan 29 1883 - Aug 7 1913