

# The adventures of the Hon Mrs Bigg

## Memorabilia from solo flight to be auctioned

By Sean O'Neill

A COLLECTION of memorabilia from the life of Mary Bruce, aviatrix, racing driver and speed boat enthusiast, is to be sold next month.

The Hon Mrs Bruce, who died aged 89 in 1990, at one time held 17 world records for feats of speed and endurance on land, sea and in the air.

She is perhaps best remembered for her solo flight around the world in 1930, undertaken in a Blackburn Bluebird after just 40 hours of flying practice.

Most of the sale items belong to her collection of souvenirs from the flight. They will be auctioned at Woolley & Wallis in Salisbury, Wilts, and are expected to fetch more than £5,000.

The collection includes press cuttings, her pilot's log book and an old 78 record of her flight commentary made in the cockpit.

The four-minute crackling recording offers a report on her escapades. "I have never heard anything like it," said Bill Hoad, of the auctioneers. "It sounds like a Girls' Own story, it really is Biggles, except it's Mrs Biggles."

One typical extract begins: "8am. Another sight of land now. 8.15. Oil failing rapidly. Great doubts whether she will hold out long enough to reach the land. This may be my end as the oil pressure is down to nought."

"8.30. See land in the distance. I fear the engine will fail before I reach it. 8.45. Have reached the coast and am about to make forced landing in the sand."

The flight from India to French Indo-China included a frightening incident when,

low on fuel over the Annamitic range, she had no option but to descend.

She dictated: "If I happen to be killed this will be my end, so goodbye. I have done the best I can but I am lost and therefore if I come through it will be by the grace of God."

Her log book, issued in July 1930, records eight hours of practice in a Tiger Moth and a further 32 hours in her Bluebird. One accident is attributed to bad weather and a broken undercarriage.

Her return home was a major event. Amy Johnson and Winifred Spooner were among the aviators who flew to Paris to accompany her across the Channel.

Mrs Bruce's trip was classified in the record books not as a round-the-world flight but as a series of long distance trips. She was credited with the first solo flight from England to Japan, the longest solo flight and the record solo flight from India to French Indo-China.

Although *The Daily Telegraph* had prepared her obituary in 1930, she went on to live a long life. In 1933 she captured the British air refuelling endurance record and in 1939 won the show jumping event at the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

She was divorced from her husband, the Hon Mr Victor Bruce, in 1941 and in her latter years she lived in semi-retirement at Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts.

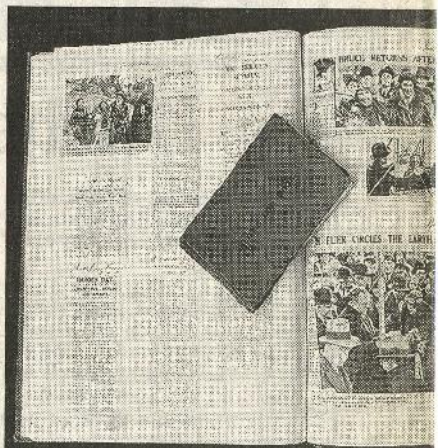
At 81, after 37 years out of the air, she took a refresher course and demonstrated her undiminished skills by looping the loop over Bristol.



Mary Bruce prepares for her around-the-world flight in a Blackburn Bluebird



Mrs Bruce looped the loop at the



The scrapbook that recorded her fl