

**Freydis SHARLAND, née Leaf (1920–2014)**  
**'Spitfire Girl', Air Transport Auxiliary**  
**CHALKSTONE COTTAGE, 40 BROOK STREET, BENSON**



Freydis was born in Cambridge to Charles Leaf, meteorologist and archaeologist, and his wife Catherine, daughter of Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth, 1st Baron Shuttleworth of Gawthorpe Hall, Lancashire. She was educated at Wycombe Abbey School. She had joined her father and brother in learning to fly at the Marshall flying school in Cambridge before the war and was determined to join the Air Transport Auxiliary when it was formed. She first became a Red Cross nurse and was eventually accepted in the ATA in 1943.

The ATA was a civilian organisation with headquarters at White Waltham Airfield in Berkshire. The pilots ferried new, repaired, and damaged military aircraft between factories, maintenance units, and active service squadrons and airfields all over the country. The work was hazardous, involving solo map-reading and navigating by landscape features such as railway lines. Around 160 of the pilots were women.

Freydis was at first based at Hamble and later at Sherburn-in-Elmet, Yorkshire, Prestwick in Scotland, and White Waltham. By the end of her service in October 1945 she had flown 607 hours and 25 minutes, ferrying 38 different types of aircraft from Vickers Wellington bombers to De Havilland Mosquito combat aircraft and most frequently Supermarine Spitfires, which she said were her favourites.

After the war she continued to fly professionally and with distinction. She joined the Women's RAF Volunteer Reserve and was one of the first five women to be awarded RAF pilot 'wings'. She became British Air Racing Champion in 1954, competing against 16 men. In 1953, as a freelance commercial pilot, she delivered a Hawker Tempest V to Pakistan, flying 4000 miles with stopovers at Nicosia, Baghdad, and Bahrain. When she arrived in Karachi, as a woman she was denied access to the mess. In 1955 she became the founding chairwoman of the British Women Pilots' Association whose purpose is to support women in aviation. She was active in her support for the Women's Junior Air Corps and the Girls' Venture Corps, always eager to promote opportunities for women and girls to become pilots.

In 1955 she had married Tim Sharland, a former army officer and farmer in Africa and later in England. She withdrew from flying for some years to bring up her young family but resumed later and was still flying microlights at an advanced age. The family moved to Chalkstone Cottage, Benson (*below*) in 1981.



She was chairman and then president of the local Bensington Society and contributed much to the local community.

The plaque was unveiled at Chalkstone Cottage, 40 Brook Street, Benson, on 18 May 2024.