

Harry Ferguson

Early Life

Henry George (Harry) Ferguson was born on the 4th of November 1884, in County Down. He was born in the townland of Growell, near Hillsborough and Dromore. Harry was the fourth of eleven children in his family. Harry grew up on a farm, where his father farmed 100 acres.

Harry left school when he was fourteen to work on the family farm. He was not keen on farming but really enjoyed problem-solving and mechanics.

As he grew older, Harry thought about emigrating to Canada, but his brother Joe offered him an apprenticeship in the small repair workshop he ran in Belfast. This type of work suited Harry much better than farming, so he went to work for Joe.

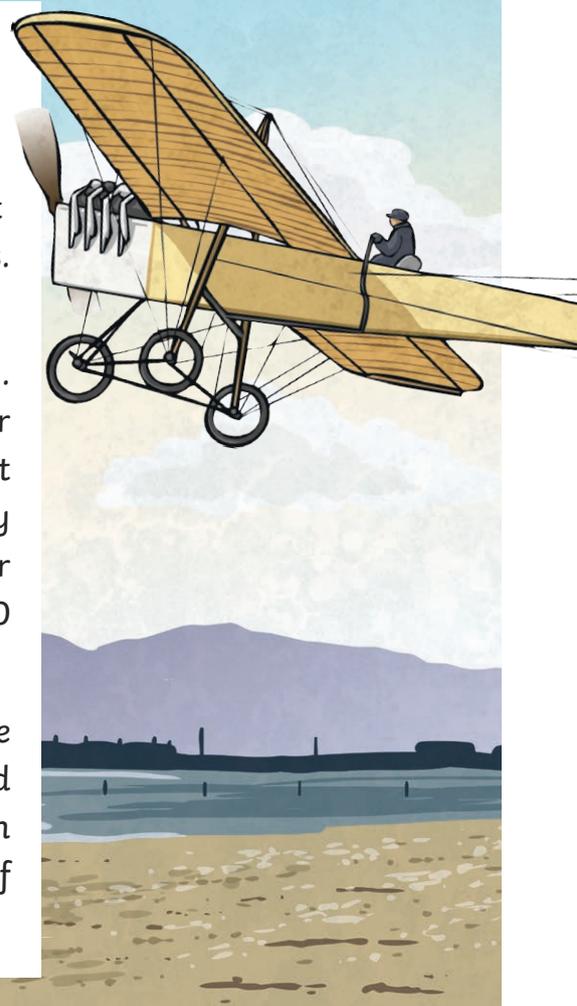


Flying Ferguson

Harry became interested in flight and enjoyed visiting air shows and exhibitions. The Wright brothers had made the first flight in 1903. Harry convinced his brother Joe that designing and building planes would benefit their business. Harry wanted to make the first powered flight in Ireland.

Harry began designing and building a monoplane in 1909. The plane was towed to Hillsborough Park, ready for take-off. Propeller issues meant that this first attempt failed. The propeller was replaced and finally, on the very last day of 1909, the weather conditions were right for another attempt. Harry took off and flew for about 130 yards. He was the first person to fly a plane in Ireland.

In 1910, Harry flew a plane from Dundrum to Newcastle beach in County Down. The town's Sport Committee had offered a £100 prize to anyone who could fly more than two miles. Harry was able to fly his plane a distance of almost three miles and so won the prize.



Farming Ferguson

Harry Ferguson is probably most famous for an invention known as the three-point linkage system. This was an invention that would change the future of farming. The system was designed to allow farming implements and machinery (such as ploughs) to be mounted on a tractor, instead of being towed. The implement could then be raised or lowered using hydraulics. Harry's invention really improved safety. Before this, if the plough had hit a bump or obstacle, it often led to the tractor tipping over backwards. This was very dangerous and could lead to injury or even death. It is thought that 85% of modern tractors still feature Harry's invention.

After he had invented the linkage system, Harry decided he would need a lightweight tractor to show how well it could work. He decided to build a prototype tractor that would incorporate his invention. He wanted a tractor that could be built relatively cheaply and be useful on all sizes of farm, from the smallest to largest. The tractor was completed in 1933 and included the linkage system, hydraulics and automatic depth control. It was painted black. This tractor is a very important part of farming history as it came before many other models that were a common sight in fields all over the world.

It is now kept in the Science Museum in London. Harry also developed one of the best loved tractor models, the Ferguson TE20, known as the 'Wee Grey Fergie'.

