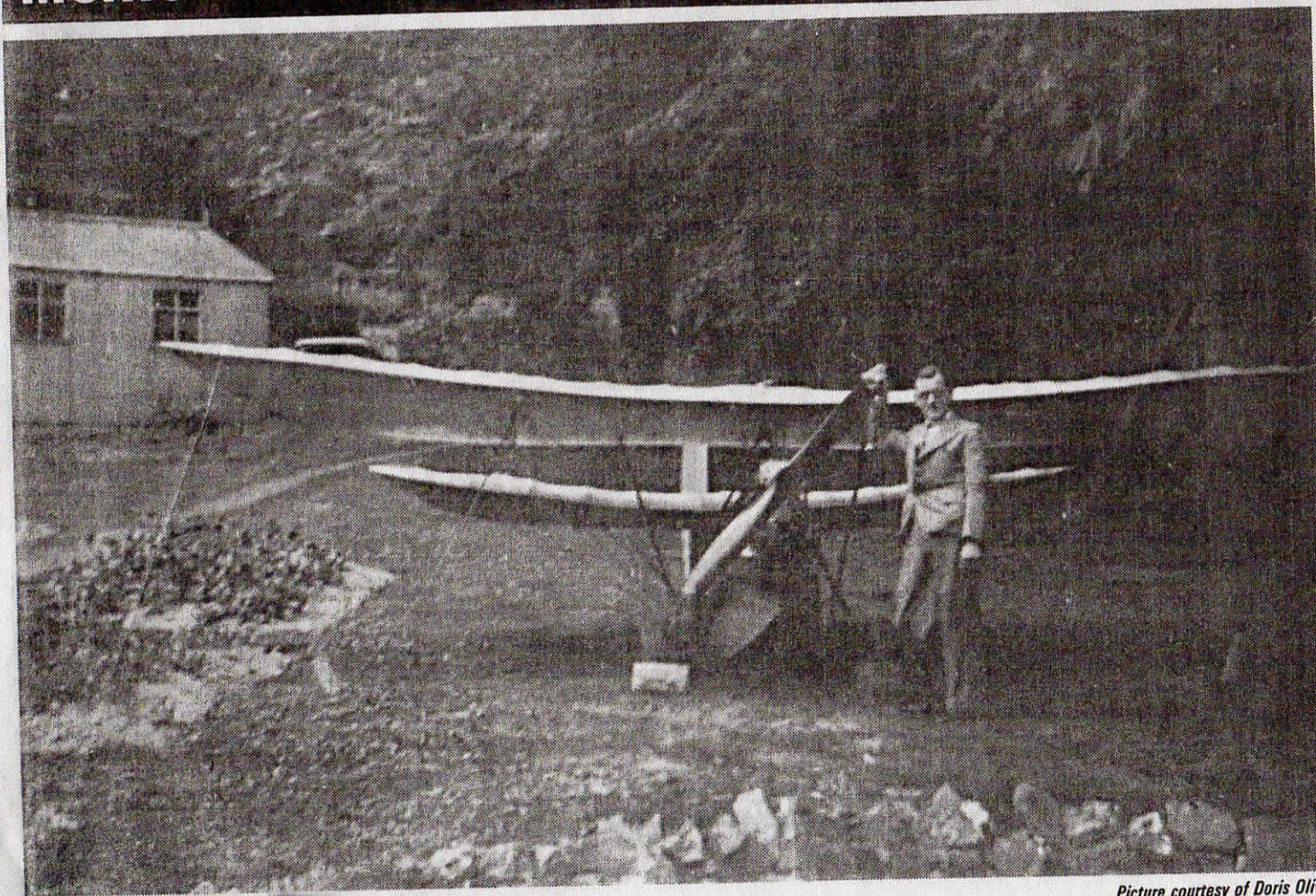


Memories



THIS photograph shows the late Andrew Oliver with the Flying Flea – a small one-man plane he helped to build.

The picture was taken in the 1930s at businessman Eric Chambers' house called Up the Lane, in Whiteleaf, near Princes Risborough. The shed at the back left of the photograph is where the plane was actually built.

Building the plane was Mr Chambers' idea and he financed the project. Mr Oliver became involved when Chambers went into his factory to buy the materials needed.

Mr Oliver's wife, Doris, said her husband immediately asked if he could help when he heard about the project. He was an expert with plywood and adhesive and his special skills helped a great deal with the construction of the plane.

The initial idea to build a one-man plane came from a Frenchman called M Minet.

"He thought the roads were getting too crowded and that everyone should have one of these planes, and that was in the early 1930s," said Mrs Oliver, of Kiln Lane, Lacey Green.

M Minet invented the plane, which he called the *Peu de Ciel*, and brought it over to England in pieces. After reassembling it, he flew it at Hendon airfield, in North London, in 1933.

But the Flying Flea, as the English translated *Peu de Ciel*, in this picture was flown by a professional pilot across the Channel and was the first one to do so.

M Minet wrote a book of instructions on how to build the planes and that is what Mr Chambers and Mr Oliver followed. Unfortunately they loaned the book to someone who never returned it.

Mrs Oliver does not know what happened to this plane, but she said there is one in the Shuttleworth Museum of Old Aircraft, near Bedford.

These Flying Fleas could be the forerunners of today's helicopters. The small planes were powered by a motorbike engine.

Mr Oliver spent his weekends working on the plane and his wife said it took about six months to complete.

Picture courtesy of Doris Oliver