



Launceston Airport – A Brief History

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On the 26th September 1927 the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Division) was incorporated in Launceston. Tasmania now had an aero club but no aerodrome or aircraft!

Planning had commenced in 1926 to establish an aerodrome at Western Junction, but it took until late 1929 before the land was purchased. Throughout 1930, the site was cleared, levelled and grass sown. The Aero Club also built their Hangar and Clubhouse.

The all-over grass airfield at Western Junction was the first official aerodrome operated by the Civil Aviation Authority in Tasmania. The airport was opened for use with the first plane flown off the drome being the Aero Club Gypsy Moth “VH-ULM” on the 23rd November 1930.

The official opening on the 28th of February 1931, when almost 20,000 people gathered on Evandale Road for the opening by Colonel Brimsmead, the Controller of Civil Aviation.

In 1940 the only Tasmanian RAAF Base was established on this site and No 7 Elementary Flying Training School commenced operations in September of that year. By late 1944 over 1,800 pilots were trained before the base was disbanded in August 1945. An excellent [article](#) written by Evandale historian Neil Louis details the history, and Evandale’s memorial, to the aircrew who trained at Launceston. During the period that encompassed the RAAF base’s operations the first air traffic control tower was built by the RAAF. Constructed in the early 1940’s the tower remained until replaced by the current structure in 1959.

In 1946 Civil Aviation resumed at Western Junction with facilities amounting to an all-over grass runway for light aircraft and a sealed 1,158 metre runway with a second 1,585 metre runway completed in 1949. While the airport runway was being redeveloped, flights would use Valley Field 36 km south of Western Junction, which was originally a training field for RAAF 7 EFTS.

Trans Australian Airlines (TAA) was formed in 1946 and operated from a hanger 10 (currently occupied by Virgin Freight), slightly north of hanger 17, both airlines operating regular services to Essendon and beyond.

One notable change was the renaming, in 1953, of Western Junction Airport to “Launceston Airport”.

By the early 1960’s Launceston Airport had grown to become the sixth largest airport in Australia with more than 127,000 passengers annually, and the third busiest airport for freight movements.

In 1962 under the leadership of Tony John OAM, a plan for major redevelopment of the airport was approved. This included strengthening of all pavements, an extension of the runway and the construction of a new purpose-built terminal. The airport was officially opened in 1964.

In 1982 the runway was further upgraded to accommodate Boeing 727 aircraft.

In 1998 the airport was privatised under the ownership of Australian Pacific Airports Corporation and the Launceston City Council. 2007 saw a further milestone with 1 million passenger movements in the year. The completion in 2009 of a \$20 million refurbishment and expansion doubled the size of the terminal.



LAUNCESTON AIRPORT – A BRIEF HISTORY



Western Junction about 1968, with the new terminal at the northern end (top)

Launceston had become the gateway to Tasmania with QANTAS LINK, JETSTAR and VIRGIN AUSTRALIA operating regular daily flights to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, SHARP AIRLINES operating to both Flinders and King Island and TOLL and QANTAS FREIGHT operating nightly freight services. The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) also operates from a purpose-built facility at Launceston Airport undertaking in excess of 2,300 flights annually.

Now after 90 years the airport boasts a modern terminal, regular flight schedules, and its first tenant the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Division) now known as the Tasmanian Aero Club, is still operating from the original airport.