



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 02 WINTER 2020

Editorial

Welcome to this the second edition of our newsletter.

Our organisation, like so many others, has suffered significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in an appreciable slowdown of our activities and future plans, however, we are still determined to achieved our objectives as detailed in the “President’s Report” printed in our last newsletter.

With the hopeful completion of the Roving Curator’s programme our objectives will become more apparent eventually culminating in an important collection of Tasmania’s aviation history available for viewing.

Our prime task in the short-term future is the refurbishment and display of “Miss Flinders”.

This classic aircraft, so important to Tasmania’s aviation history, and fortunately placed in our society’s trust is the stepping stone for the organisation’s future. Already interest and contact has been received from other aviation bodies giving our group confidence in the direction and future of the society’s strategy and planning.

This edition commences the first instalment in a series about prominent Tasmanian aviation giants. People who played a massive part in the development of Australian aviation all Tasmanian born. Folk like the Holyman Family, Gatty and the founder of QANTAS Hudson Fysh. Additionally, we will include stories about the lives and careers of Tasmanian’s who simply were bitten by the bug known as aviation.

Your membership (only \$20 per year) will assist in ensuring this project and the future development of the Tasmanian aviation history so badly neglected in the past.

Wayne Dearing

Newsletter Editor

This Issue Includes

- History snippets of early Tasmanian aviation
- Tasmanian aviation giants – Hudson Fysh the Co-Founder of QANTAS
- Launceston Airport - a brief history
- Photos from the Past
- “Miss Flinders” the continuing story
- Mysteries of Aviation
- Do you remember?



Historical Snippets of Early Tasmanian Aviation

Early Days of Georgetown Airstrip

The recent trip to the Georgetown Rotary Club's Wings and Things stimulated the memory back to May 1937.

Known in those days as the Umbrella Flats emergency landing ground it was situated about five miles east of Georgetown for use as an emergency airstrip in the event of bad weather at Launceston.

Prophetic words.

The Australian National Airways (A.N.A.) Dragon Rapide "Memma" had flown to Flinders Island the previous day and was undertaking the return flight but it was deemed advisable, due to weather in Launceston, to use the Umbrella Flats emergency landing ground, and the machine landed without mishap thus becoming one of the first aircraft to use what is now known as Georgetown Airport on the 29th of May 1937.

Flight Record – Three Times across the Strait

The de Havilland 86 airliner "Loila", the latest acquisition used by the Holyman's Airways Ltd fleet in the Bass Strait passenger service, created a record back in November 1935.

Pilots Frewin and Bayne flew three trips across Bass Strait in less than ten hours, calling at both Flinders and King Islands. The flight became the first aircraft to cross Bass Strait three times in one day.

The first double crossing was by Pilot Mollison in the original A.N.A. Avro monoplane "Southern Star" in March 1931.

Airline "Lepena" Forced Down

In December 1935, whilst flying en-route from Western Junction to King Island and Melbourne, the DH 86 aircraft with two pilots and eight passengers onboard developed a broken wing strut that ultimately resulted in an emergency landing on a rough undulating area on Hunter Island, which essentially wrecked the aircraft.

Fortunately, all aboard survived with no injuries and the pilot's cheerful message was sent out: "All safe. Machine wrecked. Send food" So unconcerned by their experience were the passengers that they spent the afternoon swimming and sunbaking. They spent the night in the plane and were taken off the island by the ketch "Phyllis" the next morning.



Tasmanian Aviation Giants – Sir William Hudson Fysh The Co-Founder of “QANTAS”

Son of Frederick and Mary Wilmot Fysh, William “Hudson” was born in Launceston on the 7th January 1895, one of five children. He was educated at the Launceston Church Grammar, then at Geelong Grammar School, before becoming a jackaroo and wool classer.

At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Fysh enlisted in the 3rd Regiment 1st Australian Light Horse Brigade, aged 19. On completion of his training, he was shipped out to Egypt. He was sent to Gallipoli, arriving in May 1915 only two weeks after the first landings. He spent seven months at Gallipoli before being evacuated in December 1915.



After service with the Light Horse in Palestine and Sinai, Fysh commenced training as an Observer/Gunner in July 1917, then serving with No 7 Squadron Royal Flying Corps before transferring to Number 1 Squadron Australian Flying Corps. He was commissioned as a Lieutenant, replacing Lieutenant Ross Smith following his transfer to flying duties.



Major Sydney Addison and Hudson Fysh in Palestine

Flying as the observer with both Major Sydney Addison and Lieutenant Paul McGinness, Fysh became an observer ace shooting down five enemy aircraft between June and August 1918, for which he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. At the end of the War, in February 1919 Fysh obtained his pilot’s licence in Heliopolis, (Egypt).



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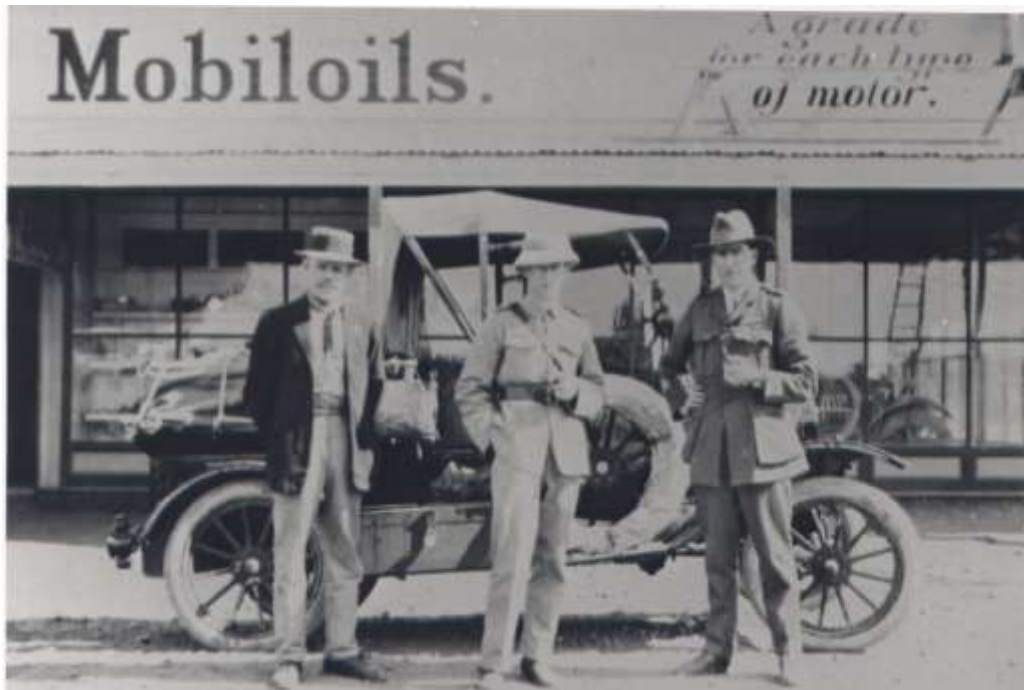
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In March 1919 the Prime Minister of Australia, William Morris Hughes, announced a “Great Air Race”, offering a prize £10,000 for the first machine manned by Australians to fly from Great Britain to Australia before midnight 31st December 1919.

Fysh and McGinness decided to compete in the race with funding support from Sir Samuel McCaughey. However McCaughey died in July 1919 and the executors refused to honour the funding agreement. As a result, their plans to fly to Australia were abandoned.

Instead, after arriving back in Australia, Fysh and McGinness were commissioned by Major-General James Gordon Legge to survey the route the air race competitors would fly from Darwin to Longreach, identifying suitable landing grounds along the route.

Arriving in Longreach in August 1919 they acquired a Model T Ford and with mechanic George Gorham, they set off on 18th August 1919.



George Gorham, Paul McGuinness and Hudson Fysh in Longreach

Throughout the trip Fysh began a diary of maps and photographs to record their journey. The group arrived in Katherine on the 8th of October after a journey of 51 days and 2,180 kms. From Katherine they boarded a train to Darwin thus becoming the first people to travel by car across the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Following the trip both Fysh and McGinness believed Legge’s route was unsuitable due to the lack of open spaces for the aircraft landings and were convinced that the course through the Barkley Tablelands would be more convenient for the air race winners.



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McGinness and Gorham travelled back to Cloncurry to survey and build landing strips along the way. Fysh stayed in Darwin to build landing strips in Darwin and Katherine.

On his return trip to Longreach in May 1920, Fysh met Alexander Kennedy and was given hospitality at Kennedy's homestead, Bushy Park. McGinness had also stopped at the homestead on the way back to Katherine and had talked about his idea of an airline service for the area. After reuniting in Cloncurry, Fysh and McGinness began making plans to commence their airline operations confident of the future of commercial aviation.

Fysh was later to write:

"We could not help but be struck by the natural advantages which favoured the establishment of an air service in the district. We are convinced of the important part aircraft will play in transporting mail, passengers and freight over the sparsely populated and practically roadless areas of western and northern Queensland and north Australia."

On the 16th November 1920, a meeting between Fysh, McGinness, Fergus McMaster, Ainslie Templeton and Allan Campbell took place at the Gresham Hotel Brisbane to form an airline. After much consideration the name Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services was chosen with a paid-up capital of £6,700 (about \$0.5M today).

The story of the early days of Qantas will be told in the next newsletter.

Photos from the Past



An early passenger embarkation Launceston Airport.



Launceston Airport – A Brief History

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.



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

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 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.



Photos from the Past



RAAF Fairy IIID aircraft on Tamar River Launceston 1926.



Holding for a train Wynyard Airport 1971.
One of the runways (08/26 now decommissioned) had a train line running through it.



The Miss Flinders Story

Now safely secured back in Hanger 17 the Society has commenced planning for the reassembling and subsequent displaying of the aircraft. This newsletter, and our web site, will continually update our plans and subsequent amended timetable.

Until then the history continues.

The First Owner: Iona National Air Taxis & Flying School, "EI-AAD"

Hugh Cahill established Iona National Air Taxis & Flying School in Dublin in July 1930 as the first commercial civil aviation company in Ireland to operate an Air Taxi business (operate charter flights), and also to train pilots.

He purchased two planes, a Gypsy Moth and the Desoutter. The Desoutter was the fourth plane to be entered onto the Irish Aircraft register as "EI-AAD".



Welcoming party at Baldonnel aerodrome (Dublin) on 06 September 1930 for The Gypsy Moth G-ABBV and Desoutter EI-AAD of Iona National Air Taxis & Flying School. The young boy is Pearse Cahill, aged 13.

The Desoutter now undertook charter flights, including to England and back.



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The size of the Desoutter and its need for a longer runway than the Gipsy Moth proved to be too big a problem. The number of airfields that the authorities would allow the Desoutter to operate from was limited. At this time, civil aviation in Ireland was in its infancy, and the Desoutter was bigger than the Avro 594B Avian IIIA and Gipsy Moths already on the Civilian Aircraft Register.

Therefore, Hugh decided to sell the Desoutter as it was not suitable for commercial aviation work in Ireland at the time. Its last local flights from Baldonnel occurred on the 1st and 3rd of November 1930. At this time, the plane had flown for 35 hours, 50 minutes. No flights were undertaken for another six months.

The Desoutter EI-AAD left Ireland for the last time on 21 April 1931.

On 11 February 1931, the company was renamed as Iona National Airways Limited and operated until November 1933, when it ceased operation.

In 1955, his son, Pearse Cahill re-established Iona National Airways, which operated until December 1994.

In 1988 Pearse Cahill visited Launceston to view the plane, "Miss Flinders" which was on display at airport. Until his death in 2011, aged 93, Pearse Cahill actively planned to bring back EI-AAD to Ireland for display as it is the oldest surviving airplane on the Irish Aircraft register.

Links:

Video of the Recollections of Pearse Cahill in 2010 (including the Desoutter)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JqTTYMx1s>

Shuttleworth Collection Mark I Desoutter

In flight: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAybk3UrC9A>

Pilot talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_Vcl6Iy5w

(Note "Miss Flinders" is a Mark II Desoutter, which visually has a different tail)

"More in the next newsletter"



Mysteries of Aviation – Frederick Valentich and VH-DSJ

The Mystery

At approximately 1819 hours on the 21st October 1978, a Cessna 182L, registered VH-DSJ piloted by Frederick Valentich, departed Moorabbin Airport for a flight to King Island. Nearly an hour later, communication with the plane was lost and no trace of the plane was found. So what happened to VH-DSJ?

The Flight

After obtaining meteorological information from the Moorabbin Briefing Office, Valentich duly submitted a flight plan for a night VMC flight from Moorabbin to King Island and return. The flight required a Class Four Instrument rating, allowing night operations in visual meteorological conditions (VMC) for which Valentich was licensed and therefor authorised to undertake.

The cruising altitude was planned at below 5,000 feet via Cape Otway thence direct to King Island with an estimated total time interval of 69 minutes. The return flight would be on the reverse track with a similar time interval. The aircraft was refueled to capacity at Moorabbin and was shown to have an endurance of 300 minutes.

The pilot reported at Cape Otway to Melbourne Flight Service (FSU) at 1900 hours and the next transmission received from the aircraft was at 1906:14 hours requesting knowledge of any known traffic below 5,000 feet to which the FSU advised at 1906:26 there was no known traffic.

Taken from the official Air Transport Accident Board report, for the next 6 minutes and 26 seconds communication between Valentich and the FSU consisted of Valentich's continued comments that a large aircraft had just passed over him at least a thousand feet above the Cessna. He further transmitted, quote:

VH DSJ "He seems to me that he's playing some sort of game he's flying over me two or three times at a time at speeds I could not identify."

During this period Melbourne FSU confirmed that there were no aircraft civilian or military in the area and that Valentich could not identify the aircraft. When asked if he could describe the aircraft, quote:

VH-DSJ "As its flying past it's a long shape // open mike for three seconds // cannot identify more than (that it has such speed) // open mike for three seconds // before me right now Melbourne."

Melbourne FSU then asked how large the object would be to which Valentich replied, quote:



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VH-DSJ "It seems like it's stationary what I'm doing right now is orbiting and the thing is orbiting on top of me also it's got a green light and sort of metallic (like) it's all shiny (on) the outside."

FSU – "DELTA SIERRA JULIET what are your intentions"

VH-DJS – "my intentions are to go to King Island Melbourne that strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again // two seconds of open mike //it is hovering and it's not an aircraft"

FSU – "Delta Sierra Juliet"

VH-DSJ - "Delta Sierra Juliet Melbourne // 17 seconds open mike //"

The final transmission from the aircraft occurred at 1912:28, no record of any further transmissions occurred.

The weather at Cape Otway area was clear with a trace of stratocumulus cloud at 5,000 to 7,000 feet, scattered cirrus cloud at 3,000 feet, excellent visibility and light winds. The end of daylight at Cape Otway was at 1918 hours.

The alert phase of SAR procedures was declared at 1912 hours and, at 1933 hours when the aircraft did not arrive at King Island, the Distress Phase was declared, and search action was commenced. An intensive air, sea and land search was continued until 25 October 1978, but no trace of the aircraft was found.

What Happened to VH-DSJ?

Proposed explanations are numerous but inconclusive.

One proposal was that Valentich staged his own disappearance. After taking into account the 30–45 minute trip to Cape Otway, the Cessna had enough fuel to fly 800 kilometres. Despite ideal conditions, the aircraft was not plotted on radar, casting doubts as to whether it was ever near Cape Otway. Melbourne Police did receive reports of a light aircraft making a mysterious landing not far from Cape Otway at the same time as Valentich's disappearance.

A further proposal suggested the pilot became disorientated and was flying upside down and that the lights he thought he saw were his own reflected in the water.

A further suggestion put forward was that the aircraft may have entered a spiral dive, which as it tightened, would decrease fuel flow thus the rough running of the engine.

Valentich was an ardent believer in UFO's, (according to his father, Guido Valentich), and had been worried about being attacked by them. Ufologists raised claims that extra-terrestrials



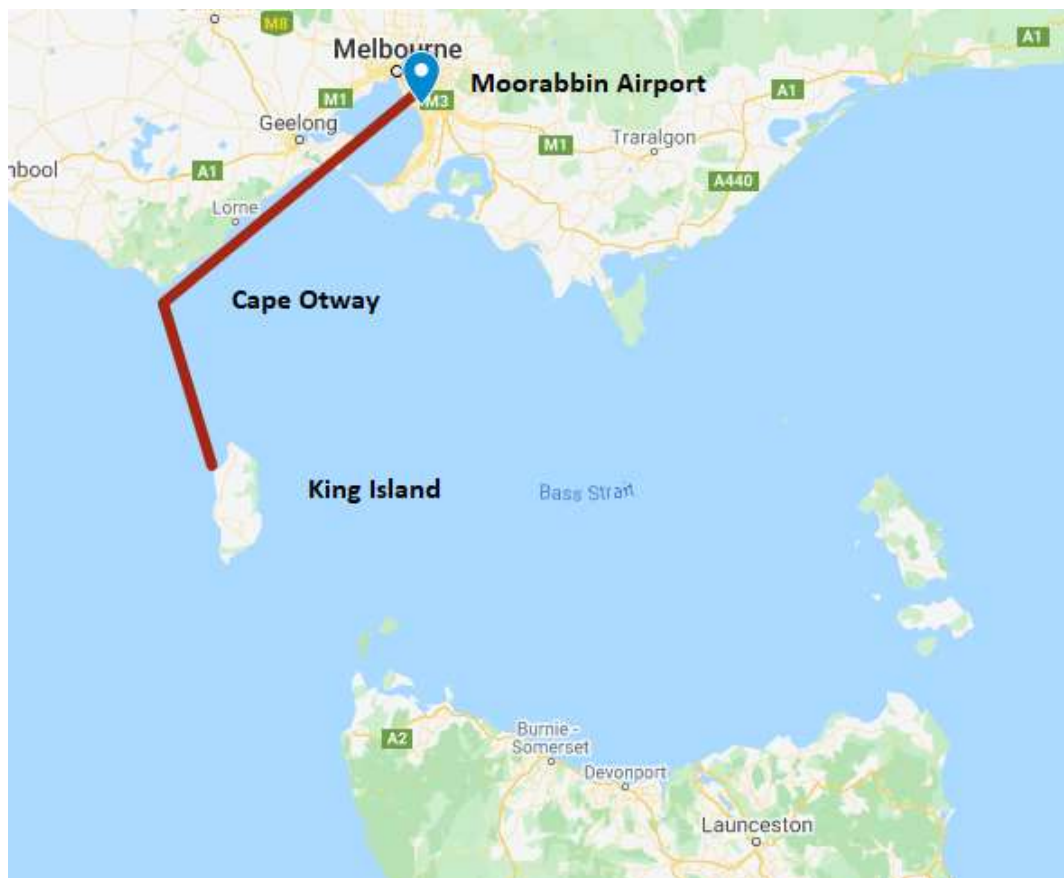
either destroyed his aircraft or abducted him. Claims asserting that some individuals reported seeing “an erratically moving green light in the sky” were received.

Some 36 years to the month after the aircraft’s disappearance, a South Australian farmer claimed he witnessed a 30-metre craft hovering over his property with a Cessna aircraft, that was leaking oil, stuck to its side. He even had time to scribble the aircraft’s registration down but, for fear of ridicule after telling friends, declined to be identified and remains anonymous to this day.

Five years after the disappearance an engine cowl flap was found washed ashore on Flinders Island. In July 1983 the Bureau of Air Safety Investigation asked the Royal Australian Navy Research Station about the likelihood of the cowl having “travelled” to Flinders Island from the region where the aircraft disappeared. Nothing conclusive was reported except that the bureau noted,

“the part has been identified as having come from a Cessna 182 between a certain range of serial numbers.”

That serial number range was within the range for Valentich’s aircraft.



The Intended Flightpath



Do You Remember?

1937

In 1937 the Acting Minister of Defence, (Mr Thorby), announced that all fees for the issue of pilot's, navigators and wireless operators license's as well as airworthiness certificates and aircraft registration fees would be abolished immediately. Oh were it still true today!!

1939

- The first Wirraway manufactured and assembled by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation took to the air in March of 1939 and was flown by a Tasmanian, Flight-Lieut. H F Boss - Walker, promptly putting paid to the critics who said Australia couldn't build aircraft.

1946

- Trans Australia Airlines (TAA) announced that effective 4th November 1946 return flights to Hobart would commence with return flights to Launceston commencing 18 November. Operated by Douglas DC-3 aircraft the single trip fare from Hobart to Melbourne will be 5 pounds 6 shillings and 3 pence whilst one way Launceston to Melbourne will be 3 pound 16 shillings and 3 pence.

1953

- Aviation history was made in Tasmania on the 21st October 1953 when the first turbo prop airliner to visit our state landed in Launceston. The aircraft, a Vickers Viscount was on a brief tour of Australia on its way back to England. Bearing British European Airways markings, the aircraft, initially bound for Hobart, diverted to Launceston due to Hobart's bad weather. On board was the General Manager of Trans Australia Airlines (TAA), Mr Lester Brain, who confidently predicted this aircraft type would soon operate to and from Launceston.
- April 1953 saw the opening of an exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Hobart portraying 50 years of aviation history. Photographs, etchings and models, (loaned by the RAAF), were on display for several weeks and show the huge advancements made since that first flight 50 years ago.

EDITION NUMBER 3 COMING IN SEPTEMBER