



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

TASMANIAN AERO CLUB FLAGPOLE

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Author: L. Millar & C. Byrne, February 2021

Introduction

Today, the Tasmanian Aero Club flagpole is the only above ground structure at Western Junction that was present on opening day on 28 Feb 1931.

The flagpole, which was the mast of the S.S. Toroa, was formally presented to the Aero Club on 01 March 1931 by Captain Victor Holyman, on behalf of the Holyman Family.



Plaque under the Flagpole at Western Junction, February 2021

Captain Victor Holyman was a founding member of the Aero Club in 1927, serving as its Vice President. He was a pilot during the First World War and also a sea Captain in the family business, W. Holyman and Sons.



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The S.S. Toroa

The steam ship “Toroa” was built by William Allsup and Co in Preston England in 1899 for Richardson & Co from Napier, New Zealand, who used it for coastal shipping between New Zealand ports. (Its name is Maori for “Albatross”).

It was made from steel, with a length of 42.7 m, 7.4 m wide, and was powered by a triple expansion steam engine.

In 1908, the ship was purchased by W. Holyman and Sons in Launceston. It was used extensively on the service between West Coast, North-West Coast, Launceston, with occasional trips to the mainland and to the Straits Islands.



S.S. Toroa. (Weekly Courier, 20 April 1916)

The S.S. Toroa was also used by the Mawson Antarctic Expedition to transport coal and supplies to Macquarie Island in December 1911.



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The Wreck of the S.S. Toroa

On the 11th of April 1916, the S.S. Toroa, sailed from Launceston for Flinders Island with a cargo of 109 sheep, two rams, two horses and general merchandise. It also carried 28 bags of mail for the islands. On board were its Captain George Cartwright, 10 crew and 12 passengers.

After clearing Low Head at 8.35 a.m. the vessel arrived at Goose Island at 3 p.m. and off loaded some of the mails and a couple of passengers. It left at 4.15 p.m., on a course for Emita on Flinders Island, a journey of about 35 km. The Captain changed course at 5.40 p.m. to save time in reaching Emita. He believed this course would take the vessel a safe distance off Rabbit Island.

Rabbit Island is about a kilometre off Settlement Point on the western side of Flinders Island. There are numerous submerged reefs off the island.

The weather was calm and clear and the sea very smooth. While travelling along the western side of Rabbit Island, which was visible in the evening light, at 6.15 p.m. the vessel struck a rock about half a mile off the island. The vessel was stuck hard on the rock. The passengers were taken off by the ships' launch and landed at Settlement Point. After which the engines were reversed, but the vessel did not move.

The grounding occurred just after high tide. Once the tide receded, the rocks on which the vessel had run aground were clearly visible. If the vessel had sailed 50 m further west, the ship would have missed the rocks.

At 10.45 p.m. the vessel began to break up.



S.S. Toroa on the Rocks. (Weekly Courier, 20 April 1916)



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Of the cargo, all the mail bags, together with the belongings of the passengers and crew were retrieved. One horse swam ashore, but the other livestock and all the cargo were lost.

The official enquiry concluded the wreck was caused by the negligence or carelessness of Captain Cartwright in using a route which was so close the Rabbit Island in an effort to save some time, when safer routes were available. His Captains licence was withdrawn for 3 months as a result.

The wreck of the S.S. Toroa, together with a lifeboat, cargo boat and saloon furniture which had been salvaged was auction off by the Insurers on the 20th April 1916 in Launceston. Bidding started at £50 and the lot was sold to W. Holyman and Sons for £88. Thus the ownership of the mast reverted to Holyman's.

Opening Day

The flagpole was situated between the Aero Club Club House and Hangar, which today, would be between the Control Tower and Hangar 10.



Opening Day, 1931. This photograph taken from the Aero Club Club House looking south, with the Hangar behind the hawthorn hedge, and part of the 15,000 people crowd present on opening day. (Weekly Courier, 04 March 1931)



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This photograph was taken during the third air pageant in February 1933.

Note the Gipsy moth VH-ULM has been superimposed over the original photograph for publication.

**Aero Club Club House, February 1933,
(Weekly Courier)**

7EFTS / World War 2

During World War 2, the 7th Elementary Flying School was located at Western Junction. The Aero Club ceased operation during the war, with its hangar and Club House being taken over by the R.A.A.F.. The Club House was used as the Officers Mess and the flagpole was used by the Air Force.

After the War, the Club House was moved to a new position along Evandale Road and the flagpole was removed.

The current Control Tower was subsequently erected where the Club House originally was.

Flagpole Now at Evandale

By some means, the flagpole found its way to the Evandale Memorial Park, where it was used by the RSL for ANZAC services. The plaque indicating its ownership by the Aero Club was situated adjacent to the flagpole.

Later, when the Evandale Memorial Hall was built, the RSL conducted ANZAC services in the hall, so the flagpole was unused.

In 1992, the Evandale Council advised the Aero Club that they planned to remove the flagpole and noting that it had originally been presented to the Club, asked if they would like it



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returned. The answer was “yes”. The Council returned the plaque and advised they would repaint the pole before returning it.

But some RSL members opposed the return of the flagpole, claiming it was owned by the RSL.

Meetings were held between the Evandale Council, the RSL and the Aero Club to try to resolve the situation. The suggestion, from the RSL President, that the Aero Club formally request the return of the flagpole was adopted.

The Aero Club duly submitted the application, together with a letter from Mr K. C. Holyman advising the Holyman family wanted the S.S. Toroa mast returned to the Aero Club.

But the outcome of the RSL meeting was not what the President has imagined! The meeting resolved to loan the Flagpole to the Evandale Fire Brigade instead.

The Aero Club were a little put out by this outcome, and there was even talk of a raiding party being sent to retrieve it!

In 1992, the history of the flagpole was highlighted by Aero Club member Mr Ray Tilley who gave a talk in Evandale about the history of Launceston Airport, which deliberately included the story of the flagpole.

Attending the talk was the President of the now amalgamated Evandale – Longford RSL, who asked the Aero Club to submit another request for the flagpole to be returned. The request was approved, and ownership was transferred to the Aero Club.

The next step was to negotiate with the Fire Brigade to retrieve the flagpole. They agreed provided a replacement flagpole was provided. This was accomplished by welding together some second-hand piping by Marcel Jansen from the Aero Club.

Flagpole is returned to Western Junction

On the 5th of October 2002, Marcel Jansen and an Aero Club working party removed the S.S. Toroa mast from the Fire Station and installed the replacement pole. It was then returned to Western Junction after an absence of 56 years.

The mast was installed in front of the current Aero Club building at Western Junction with the Holyman plaque as part of the 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Aero Club in October 2002. Its location is adjacent to the Holyman Hangar which was built in 1933 (now Hangar 17).



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Footnote

The other structures on site at opening day were the Aero Club Hangar and Club House, and the Matthews Aviation Hangar.

The Club House was originally moved to a position along Evandale Road near the exit to the current long-term carpark. It was then subsequently shifted to Oatlands.

The Aero Club Hangar, which was Government property, was used as the TAA terminal after World War 2, It was then sold and relocated to Longford after the opening of the current Launceston terminal.

The Matthews Aviation hangar was removed prior to World War 2.

The Holyman Hangar, (Hangar 17), built in 1933, is the oldest surviving building on the site.

Terminology

The term "Aero Club" has been used here to simplify the telling of the story.

When the club was incorporated in September 1927, it was the "Australian Aero Club, (Tasmanian Section)", which was a state-wide club. Its name was changed to the "Tasmanian Aero Club" in 1936 and continues to operate at Western Junction. In 1947, the "Aero Club of Southern Tasmanian" was formed at Cambridge.