



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

TASMANIAN AVIATION GIANTS – SIR WILLIAM HUDSON FYSH

Tasmanian Aviation Giants – Sir William Hudson Fysh

The Co-Founder of “QANTAS”

Author: W. Dearing, Dec 2021

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,



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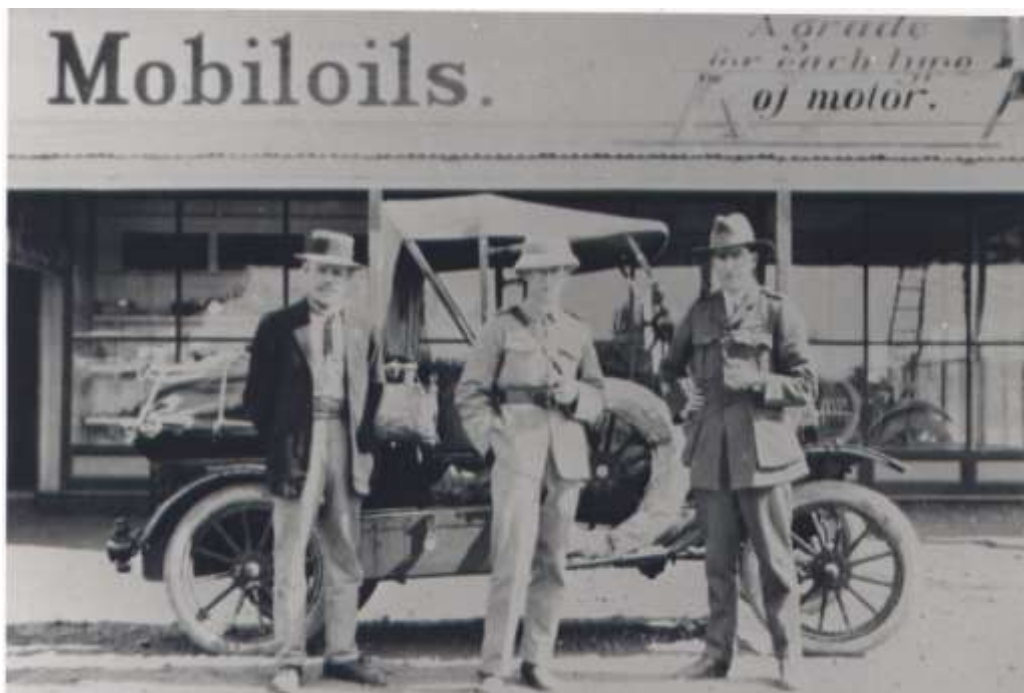
for which he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. At the end of the War, in February 1919 Fysh obtained his pilot's licence in Heliopolis, (Egypt).

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.



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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.

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).



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QANTAS Early Days

After registering the company in 16 November 1920, its first aircraft was an AVRO 504K, purchased for £1,425 pounds. Powered by a 100 h.p. Sunbeam Dyak engine, it had a cruising speed of 65mph. It was modified to carry up to two passengers as well as the pilot.



This high-quality replica was one of two built by Qantas engineers and apprentices from the original plans and is the central exhibit in Qantas Founders Museum. After higher capacity aircraft were received, the original Qantas Avro 504K was sold in 1926.

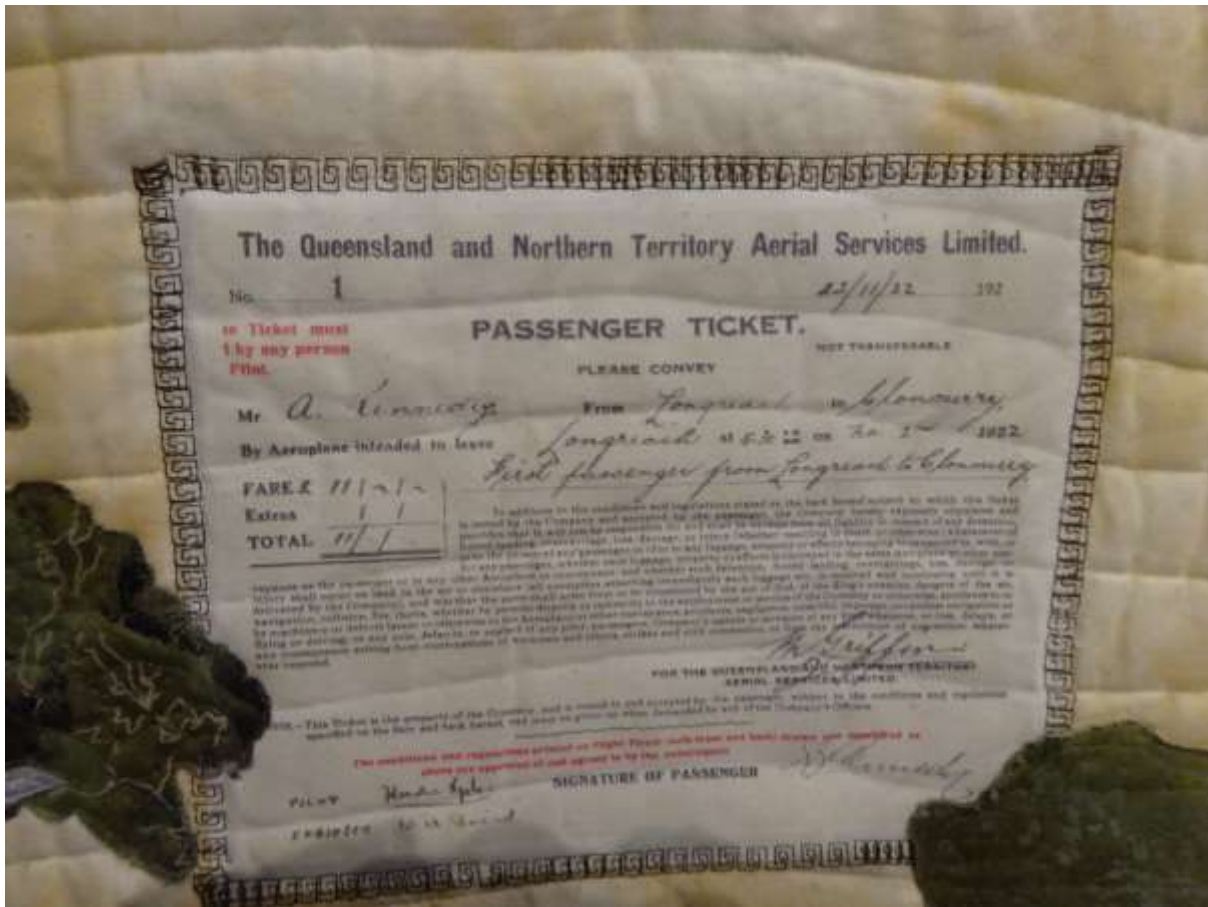
Paul McGuiness left Qantas in 1922 for other interests. He served in the R.A.A.F. during World War II and died in Perth in 1952, aged 56.

The airline's first scheduled service was flown on 02 November 1922. The flight was from Longreach, where QANTAS had now installed their head office, to Cloncurry. Piloted by Hudson Fysh it carried one passenger, Alexander Kennedy, an 84-year-old outback pioneer, who was issued with ticket, appropriately, numbered No 1.



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Ticket Number 1 Issued to Alexander Kennedy

Hudson Fysh was appointed Managing Director in February 1923, (while still being a regular route pilot).

QANTAS was a multi-faceted airline in the early days. It operated the Australian government subsidised air mail service in western Queensland. Between 1926 and 1928 QANTAS built seven de Havilland DH50's and a single DH9 under licence in their Longreach hangar. In 1928, a QANTAS chartered aircraft made the inaugural flight for the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia departing from Cloncurry.

In 1934 QANTAS Ltd and Britain's Imperial Airways (a forerunner of British Airways) formed a new company, Qantas Empire Airways Ltd (QEA). Each partner held a 49% interest with 2% being held in the hands of an independent arbitrator. Commencing operations in December 1934, and using obsolescent DH50 and de Havilland DH61, the airline conducted flights from Brisbane to Darwin. The service was extended from Darwin to Singapore using newer de Havilland DH.86s. Imperial Airways operated the rest of the service through to London.



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In July 1938 this operation was replaced by a thrice weekly flying boat service using Shorts S.23 Empire flying boats. The Sydney to Southampton service took nine days, with passengers staying in hotels overnight.



Shorts S23 Empire Flying Boat

For the single year of peace that the service operated it was profitable, and 94% of flights were on time.

When Italy entered the war in 1940, the route to London became the Horseshoe Route operating between Sydney and Durban in South Africa, with the Durban to UK leg being conducted by sea. This air service maintained vital communications between Australia and England and operated until the fall of Singapore in February 1942.

Enemy action and accidents destroyed half the fleet of ten aircraft after they were taken over by the Australian Government.

Between 1942 and 1943, QANTAS lost eight aircraft during its involvement in Australia's war against the Japanese. Over sixty passengers and crew perished yet QANTAS's contribution and the courage of its people is often forgotten. Jim Eames has produced an excellent narrative entitled "COURAGE IN THE SKYS" that details the challenges that faced the airline and its people.

Flying boat services were resumed with American built Consolidated PBY Catalinas in July 1943, with flights between Swan River, Perth and Koggala lake in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). This linked up with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC, the successor airline to Imperial Airways) service to London, maintaining the vital communications link with England. The 5,652 km non-stop sector was the longest flown up to that time by any airline, with an



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average flying time of 28 hours. Passengers received a certificate of membership to *The Rare and Secret Order of the Double Sunrise* as the sun rose twice during the flight.



In 1944 the Catalinas were augmented by conventional Consolidated B-24 Liberators, flying from Ratmalana Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) via RAF Minneriya in Ceylon for refuelling and then across the ocean to Learmonth in Western Australia.

Later, Avro Lancastrians were flown on the route. They flew from Sydney to Gawler, stopping in Adelaide for refuelling, and on to Learmonth for the overnight stage. On the next leg of the trip, they flew to Ratmalana, where the aircraft refuelled, then on to Karachi, where BOAC crews took over for the final segment of the journey to the UK.

The service was renamed the *Kangaroo Service* and the passenger award became *The Order of the Longest Hop*. It was on this route that the Kangaroo logo was first used. After the war, the return trip could also go from Colombo to the Cocos Islands, then to Perth and on to Sydney. These flights continued until 5 April 1946.



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The Post War Era

In 1947, Qantas Empire Airways Ltd (QEA) was nationalised, with the Australian Labor government led by Prime Minister Ben Chifley buying the shares owned by BOAC, followed by those of QANTAS Limited. Nationalised airlines were normal at the time, and the Qantas board encouraged this move. After the completion of the buyout, QANTAS Limited was wound up and liquidated to shareholders.

Hudson Fysh continued as Managing Director.

Shortly after nationalisation, QEA began its first services outside the British Empire to Tokyo via Darwin and Manila with Avro Lancastrian aircraft. These aircraft were also deployed between Sydney and London in co-operation with BOAC, but were soon replaced by Douglas DC-4s. Services to Hong Kong began around the same time.

In 1947 the airline took delivery of Lockheed L-749 Constellations and these took over the trunk route to London. Flying boats again entered the fleet from 1950, when the first of five Short Sandringham aircraft entered service for flights between the Rose Bay flying boat base on Sydney Harbour and destinations in New Caledonia, New Hebrides, Fiji, New Guinea (dubbed the "Bird of Paradise" route) and Lord Howe Island.

In 1952 Qantas expanded services across the Indian Ocean to Johannesburg via Perth, the Cocos Islands and Mauritius, calling this the Wallaby Route. Around this time, the British Government pressured Qantas to purchase the de Havilland Comet jet airliner, but Hudson Fysh was dubious about the economics of the aircraft and successfully resisted this. The network expanded across the Pacific to Vancouver via Auckland, Nadi, Honolulu and San Francisco in early 1954 when it took over the *Southern Cross Route* of British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines (BCPA).



QANTAS Super Constellation VH-EAM (Qantas Heritage Collection)



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Hudson Fysh was knighted in 1953 and on 1st July 1955 relinquished his position as Managing Director (after 32 years) and continued as the Chairman of Qantas.

In September 1956 Qantas ordered the Boeing 707–138 jet airliner and the first was delivered in June 1959. This order made the airline the first customer for the type outside the US.

The first jet aircraft on the Australian register (and the 29th 707 built) was registered VH-EBA and named *City of Canberra*. This aircraft returned to Australia as VH-XBA in December 2006 for display in the Qantas Founders Outback Museum at Longreach, Queensland.



City of Canberra VH-EBA (Qantas Heritage Collection)

Air travel grew substantially in the early 1960s, so Qantas ordered the larger Boeing 707-338C series of aircraft.

In 1966 the airline diversified its business by opening the 450-room Wentworth Hotel in Sydney. The same year, Qantas placed early options on the new Concorde airliner but the orders were eventually cancelled. Also in 1966, the *Fiesta route* opened from Sydney to London via Fiji, Tahiti, Mexico City, Acapulco, Nassau and Bermuda. In September 1965 Qantas launched the first V-Jet service on the *Kangaroo Route*, via Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

In 1967 the airline placed orders for the Boeing 747. This aircraft could seat up to 350 passengers, a major improvement over the Boeing 707. Orders were placed for four aircraft with deliveries commencing in 1971. The later delivery date allowed Qantas to take advantage



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of the –200B version, which better suited its requirements. Also, in 1967, Qantas Empire Airways changed its name to Qantas Airways, the name of the airline today.

The airline continued its expansion and development and today is recognised as one of the world's great airlines. In his trilogy, written on his career and development of QANTAS, Hudson Fysh remembers some startling facts in the airline's development.

From that August day in 1920, sitting around a glass top table in the Gresham Hotel Brisbane, four men dared to dream and made the decision to form the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service Ltd – “QANTAS”.

The airline commenced operations in Longreach with a staff of three, Paul McGinness, Arthur Baird, Frank Corey (as a part time bookkeeper) and Hudson Fysh with a paid up capital of 6,037 pounds and two rickety aircraft. In mid-1966, on his retirement, QANTAS had 8,873 employees, nineteen Boeing 707 airliners and operated on 72,220 miles or globe encircling routes. In his last year of office, the airline produced \$4,030,183 of profit.

Sir William Hudson Fysh retired as Chairman of QANTAS on the 30th June 1966, after 46 years of service. He died, aged 74, on the 6th April 1979.

At Western Junction, “Hudson Fysh Drive” recognises the huge contribution made to commercial aviation by Launceston born Hudson Fysh. Next time you drive out of Launceston Airport, at the roundabout on Evandale Road, instead of turning north or south, drive straight through to Hudson Fysh Drive.



BOEING 787 – THE FUTURE OF QANTAS