



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

MISS FLINDERS – THE DESOUTTER ON DISPLAY AT LAUNCESTON AIRPORT

Title

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The TAHS had been formed earlier in 2019, and we had just received a donation of some model aircraft. We were informed by the Launceston Airport that the Department of Infrastructure and Transport, were looking for a new home for Miss Flinders.

The Federal Government purchased the plane in the 1960s, when it was brought back to Tasmania, restored by the Air Force Association and displayed at the new Launceston Airport terminal from 1966 to 1997. It was then leased to the Launceston City Council and displayed at QVMAG.

After a meeting with representatives of the Department in December 2019, the TAHS forwarded a proposal where we would store the plane and find a new display home for it. This was accepted, and in March 2020, (the week before COVID lockdowns were implemented), we received the dismantled plane from QVMAG and it was placed into storage in Hangar 17 at Launceston Airport (the original Holyman Brothers Hangar, that was built in 1933 to house Miss Flinders).

The TAHS, less than a year old, now had a real plane in its collection, as well as some models! We then started to actively find a new display home for the plane.

On our radar was the 90th Anniversaries associated with Western Junction. In discussions with the Launceston Airport, they proposed to put the plane back on display in the Launceston Terminal as part of the 90th Anniversary of the official opening of the airport on 28th February 1931. This long-term display offer was accepted by the TAHS and planning commenced in late 2020.

The critical part of the project was engaging Ian Miles from Artlabs Australia to reassemble the plane. Ian had disassembled it at QVMAG, so his intimate knowledge of the plane was crucial in reassembling it.

On Monday 22nd February, the plane was moved from Hangar 17 to the Launceston terminal. The fuselage, the wings in two sections, and three crates with the tail section and under carriage. (The Gypsy major engine remains in Hangar 17).

Assembly then started with Ian and a Group of TAHS Volunteers and took three days.

Firstly, the two wing sections needed to be elevated on trestles to about 2.4 m off the ground and bolted back together. The wooden wing had been cut in half when the plane was transported back to Tasmania, and four steel plates used to join the two sections together.

This sounds simple, but was a slow process, especially in aligning the wings that high off the ground, and then aligning and then joining them together with the steel plates.

Then the fuselage, which was bolted to a large dolly, was then wheeled under the wings, and slowly lifted up by jacks at the front and tail, adjusting the alignment, so that at the last small lift, it fitted into the wings. The fuel tank was then strapped back into the recess in the wing above the cockpit.



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Then finally the undercarriage was bolted back on, and the tail section added, then lowered down to sit on floor stands. All completed by late on Wednesday 24th February.

The next step the airport will undertake is to elevate the plane to hang from the ceiling.



(Clockwise from top) Andrew aligning the fuselage (or offer a blessing) before starting the lift, Ian and the TAHS the team present on the last day, and Andrew and Ian confirming before the final lift to lock the fuselage onto the wing

During the assembly process, and since, TAHS members have received a lot of positive comments from the Launceston public on how appropriate it is for the plane to be back on display in the Terminal. Many locals remember the plane when it was on display at the terminal “last century”, how as children it was the highlight of the visit to see the plane. Now they can bring their own children (and grandchildren) to view they plane.



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Andrew Johnson (TAHS President), Hans van Pelt (Launceston Airport CEO) and Michael Ferguson (State Minister of Infrastructure and Transport), unveiling the Miss Flinders Story Board on 28th February 2021



Andrew Johnson and Hugh Targett (President of the Tasmanian Aero Club), with a photograph of the founding members of the Aero Club, who were the driving force behind the establishment of Launceston Airport at Western Junction