



Miss Flinders Returns to Launceston Airport 1966 - 1997

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The story that will unfold is of a collaboration between the Launceston Airport, (owned and operated by the Department of Civil Aviation) and the Launceston Branch of the Royal Air Force Association (AFA, as the Royal Australian Air Force Association (RAAFA) was then known).

Telling this story today would not have been possible if Rex Woodworth of the AFA had not researched the story in 1999 and collated the available documents, which are in the care of the RAAFA Northern Branch today. We are very grateful for having access to these records.

The Initial Proposal

“Miss Flinders” had departed Tasmania in 1935, and after a number of owners, it had been struck off the Civil Aviation Plane Register in September 1961.

In the early 1960’s, the Department of Civil Aviation began the planning for a new Launceston Airport Passenger Terminal at Western Junction. With a new facility, the opportunity to display “Miss Flinders” was investigated. (At this time, the Department of Civil Aviation operated the Launceston Airport).

At this time, two other airports had historic planes displayed, the “Southern Cross” at Brisbane Airport and the Vickers Vimy at Adelaide Airport. (The Vickers Vimy Bomber was the first plane to fly from the UK to Australia in 1919 by Ross and Keith Smith. The “Southern Cross which was flown by Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm on the first flight across the pacific from the USA to Australia in 1928).

Both these aircraft were displayed in dedicated buildings away from the terminal, which had been funded through public subscriptions, with the support of the Department of Civil Aviation.

George Inglis was the Manager of Launceston Airport, and he was also a member of the Launceston Branch of the Air Force Association (AFA). He had made enquiries about the availability of “Miss Flinders” and understood that the Department of Civil Aviation was supportive of the idea of it being on display at Launceston under similar arrangements to Brisbane and Adelaide displays. He had also had informal discussions with another AFA committeeman, Aubrey Greig.

In a letter to the Air Force Association on the 8th of August 1962, George Inglis proposed bringing bring “Miss Flinders” back to Tasmania and display it at the new terminal. He



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proposed that the AFA be the sponsoring organisation to take the lead in supervising the restoration of the plane for its display, for which they had the expertise because of war time service of its members.

The AFA responded that the association was supportive of the concept and over the next year, the project was developed more.

Miss Flinders

“Miss Flinders” was owned by Exec-Air TAXIS, a subsidiary of Australian Aircraft Sales who were based at Mascot Airport in Sydney. Mr Conelly, the Managing Director of both companies was willing to donate the plane to the Air Force Association free of charge.

The plane had been stored in the Bourke Aviation Services hangar at Bourke from about 1958. The unpaid hangar storage fees of £250 (about \$7,400 today) would need to be paid before the hangar owner would allow the plane to be removed.





“Miss Flinders” original 1932 registration was VH-UEE, but was changed to VH-BQE in 1952.

The plane was no longer airworthy, but it could be restored to flying condition. To bring the plane back to Launceston, two options were available. If air freight was used, the wings would need to be cut in two to fit inside the air freighter, after which the plane could not be restored to flying condition, but it would be suitable for display. If road and sea freight was used, the wing could be kept whole, so the option to undertake a full restoration would be available, but this freight method would be more expensive.

The Second Proposal

The Adelaide and Brisbane historic plane display buildings had been funded by Public Subscription, each costing about £30,000, (about \$1M today).

In December 1963, Airport Management presented the AFA with the following proposal:

- The Department of Civil Aviation would cover the costs to bring the plane from Bourke to Launceston, provided the wing could be cut in half to allow it to be fitted in their cargo aircraft.
- The restoration costs to enable display were estimated at £750 (about \$22,200 today) but could be reduced if voluntary labour was used.



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- The Tasmanian Aero Club had agreed to house the plane in its hangar during the restoration phase.
- The cost of a new display building located near the entrance to the new terminal was estimated to cost between £10,000 to £20,000 (about \$300,000 to \$600,000 today).
- The hangar storage fees to remove the plane in Bourke were £250 (about \$7,400 today)
- Finally, and crucially, “that this Department cannot accept responsibility for financial matters connected with this project”.

The Civil Aviation Department were proposing that a similar public subscription funding model be used for the display building as in Adelaide and Brisbane, and that the AFA take responsibility for sourcing the funds necessary undertake the project, potentially £20,000, or \$600,000 today.

The Air Force Association advised the Launceston Airport Manager in February 1964 that “following a long discussion on the subject the committee regretfully decided that the now anticipated cost involved in the project is beyond the capabilities of the Launceston Branch in sponsoring the fund.”

The Third Proposal

By early 1964, detailed design work for the new terminal was underway. The design included a room underneath the main lounge, which was accessible by a stair, which was identified as a potential space to display “Miss Flinders”.

In October 1964, the Civil Aviation Department again approached the Air Force Association to assist with this scaled back project which utilised this downstairs display space. The AFA responded in early 1965 that they were still will be part of the project, but they needed more information on its financial elements of the project before committing themselves.

In February 1965, the Civil Aviation Department proposal has these key elements:

- The plane would be shipped to Launceston by the Civil Aviation Department free of charge by air, (which would necessitate the wing being cut in half)
- The Air Force Association costs would be approximately £2,000, (about \$55,000 today), being:
 - £250 for the hangar fees at Bourke
 - About £500 to restore and assemble the plane
 - The display area costs would be another £1,000, primarily glass partitioning and lighting
- The Airport would cover the on-going maintenance and operating costs, e.g. cleaning and the electricity for the lighting once the plane was installed



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(In later correspondence, the cost to release “Miss Flinders” from the hangar had reduced to £200 and Ansett-ANA had agreed to transport the plane and cover the costs from Sydney to Launceston free of charge).

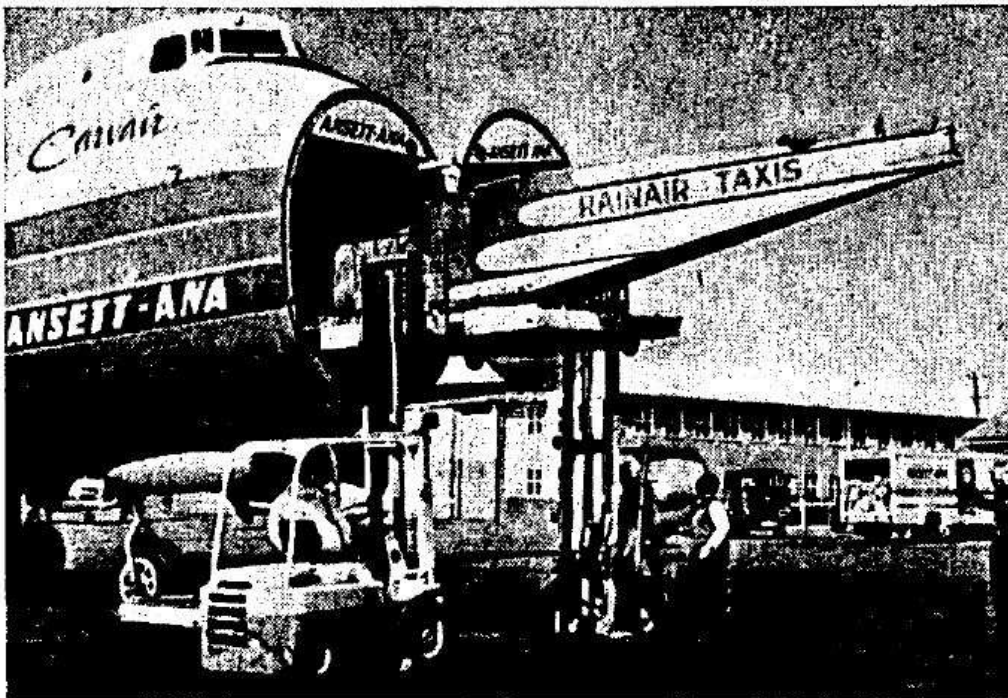
In May 1965, the Air Force Association agreed to undertake the project on this basis.

An AFA sub-committee was formed to undertake the project, with Mr A.S. Greig, the Past President and Life Member of the Association taking a leading role. The Air Force Association President and some of the Committeemen provided financial guarantees to enable the project to be undertaken before funding was sought from the community to cover their costs.

Miss Flinders Comes Back to Launceston

The AFA paid £200 to release the plane from the hangar at Bourke. The hangar owner dismantled the plane, the wing was removed and cut in half, the undercarriage and the tail section were also removed for the trip.

After 6 months in Sydney, Ansett-ANA returned “Miss Flinders” to Launceston in a Douglas Conair on the 26th of March 1966, 34 years after its first flight to Launceston in March 1932. Ansett-ANA brought it down “free of charge”, saving an estimated £400-500.



“Miss Flinders” being off loaded at Launceston Airport



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The plane was in structurally sound, but its appearance reflected that it had been stored for many years without any maintenance. The plywood skin on the fuselage and wings was in bad condition, which was completely stripped and repainted. A set of metal plates were made to rejoin the two wing sections. The fabric surfaces on the tail had to be replaced.

The undercarriage was repaired as the leg strut aerofoils were missing or broken. All of the Perspex windows were replaced. The instrument panel was incomplete and “many other items were not just there”. These were all repaired in a project which took about 200-man hours by the Air Force Association and Tasmanian Aero Club members, who had the technical expertise to undertake the work.

To prepare the display area, a glass partition in a wooden frame was built by W.W. Purse & Sons, Building Contractors and Joiners of 352 Wellington Street Launceston for \$819.20. Additional cost included electrical fitting and lights (\$20.57) and the printing three display photographs (\$75).

The restored Miss Flinders was scheduled to be installed in the terminal in late September of early October 1966.

At the opening of the new Terminal on the 29th of October 1966, the past president of the Launceston Branch of the Air Force Association, Mr Aubrey S. Greig handed over “Miss Flinders” to the Department of Civil Aviation in perpetuity and for its safe keeping.

To assist the Air Force Association in covering the restoration and display costs, the “Mayor of Launceston Appeal Fund” was then established to cover the debt, but limited funds were received. The RAAFA files contain receipts for \$200 from the Rotary Club of Launceston (April 1967), and \$25 from Mobil Oil (July 1967).

A request was made on the 28th of November 1967 to the Premier of Tasmania for assistance in clearing the approximately \$850 debt which was still owing. The premier declined the request, citing the need to address the Black Tuesday Bush Fire funding needs (February 1967) and suggested approaching the Federal Government. (History does not record if this suggestion was acted upon, or if it was successful).

In August 1969, the Air Force Association reported that £343 was owing in a special account. History does not record where the money came from to pay off the debts.



The Display

In a Civil Aviation Departmental letter in July 1972, the Airport Director described the display, which was in the basement of the terminal building behind a glass partition, it was adequately lit and accessible to the public, which included:

- The Desoutter VH-UEE “Miss Flinders”, with aircraft and engine logbooks open at random pages and readable on a glass shelf
- Tablets providing information about the history of the plane and additionally about it being used in the first air service between Launceston and Flinders Island
- Photographs of the plane in its early days
- A panel with old newspaper cuttings of the DC2 “Bungana”, which also included the original name panel from the aircraft
- A frame with 15 model aircraft from Leonardo da Vinci’s flapping wing machine through to the Concorde
- A small display of model aircraft, mainly military, from early biplanes to the Spitfire
- A panel of newspaper cuttings dated 30 March 1930 of the work undertaken in preparing the area for the Western Junction Aerodrome
- A panel on loan from the Tasmanian Aero Club with photographs of old aircraft
- A Photograph of Bert Hinkler
- In addition, the “The Holyman Bell”, which was used by Holyman’s Airways and later ANA to call passengers to the plane, was also in the basement in its own glass case.



“Miss Flinders” was on display till 1997 when the space was needed to house an additional airline in the terminal, which is another story.



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