



**Tasmanian Aviation
Historical Society**

“MISS FLINDERS”



A TRIBUTE



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

“MISS FLINDERS” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER MARCH 2022

When next you enter Launceston Airport’s departure lounge, look up and admire an incredible piece of Tasmania’s aviation history elegantly elevated for all to see. After so many years this 91 year old lady is finally back home.

Back in March 1932, Lawrence Johnson purchased a Desoutter monoplane and flew the aircraft from Essendon airport to Western Junction (as Launceston’s airport was then known) and commenced a twice weekly passenger and freight service between Western Junction and Flinders Island. Tasmania’s commercial aviation had been born but before this “Miss Flinders”, as she was later named, was born in England, first flown in Ireland as an Air Taxi, then later purchased by two Australian gentlemen who flew it from England to Australia. The aircraft was then purchased by Johnson.

“Miss Flinders” paved the way for Tasmania’s commercial aviation industry and this commemorative newsletter reflects on the aircraft’s history, from her early days in Ireland, through to her last 55 years display and storage history.

Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society (TAHS) are the custodians of this aircraft. Following her transfer from Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in 2020, TAHS were keen to see the aircraft displayed once again at Launceston Airport, a venue she had graced from 1966 until 1997.

It would be remiss of TAHS not to acknowledge the encouragement we received in once again placing the aircraft on display. Enthusiastic support, and financial funding, was received from Launceston Airport, Michael Ferguson (Minister of Transport on behalf of the Tasmanian Government), Launceston Distillery and TAHS members. Further appreciation is acknowledged to Ian Miles from Artlab, TAHS volunteers and Launceston Airport staff for the reassembling and displaying the aircraft, accompanied by her history mounted on the walls of the display area.

TAHS members are dedicated to ensuring the history of Tasmanian Aviation is recorded and made available to everyone. With the passionate support of the above businesses and people, the future of “Miss Flinders” is assured.

Enjoy Part of Tasmanian Aviation History



The Desoutter Aircraft Company and the Birth of “Miss Flinders”

Englishman Marcel Desoutter, learnt to fly when he was only 17 years old with the Bleriot Flying School at Hendon Aerodrome in London. He could not be recognised as a pilot until he was age 18 and so he received his Royal Aero Club Certificate Number 186 on 27 February 1912, making him one of the youngest pilots in the early days of British aviation.

The National Flying Services (NFS) was established in 1928 with the objective of creating a network of landing grounds and flying clubs around the UK to train pilots. They turned to Marcel Desoutter to provide a three-seater enclosed cockpit monoplane for their air taxi business.



Marcel Desoutter

Desoutter had acquired the rights to manufacture the Dutch designed Koolhoven F.K 41 monoplane in England and had set up the Desoutter Aircraft Company at Croydon in South London. The first Desoutter was registered as G-AAPK and delivered to the National Flying Services in 1929.

Designed alterations followed resulting in the Mark II Desoutter. Changes included a different tail and rudder, cabin windows that were now angled to reduce cabin reflections, two doors instead of one, a lower undercarriage allowing easier entry and the fuselage was 6 inches



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shallower. Another significant modification was the use of the inverted Gypsy III engine, allowing the propeller to be at the top of the nose not on the bottom as with the Mark I.

The company manufactured 41 aircraft which were registered between August 1929 and October 1931. Of these 26 were the Mark I design and 15 were Mark II's. Three of the Mark II design were flown in Australia. Aircraft build number 30 (VH-UEE “Miss Flinders”), build number 35 (VH-UPR) and build number 37 (VH-UPS).

Today three Desoutter monoplanes survive. Besides “Miss Flinders”, VH-UPR is at the Australian National Air Museum at Moorabbin Airport, Melbourne and another is at the Shuttleworth Collection in the UK.

“Miss Flinders” Her Life

“Miss Flinders” was first flown on 30th August 1930 for a period of 30 minutes. Her original owner was Iona National Air Taxicab and Flying School in Dublin (Ireland), registered as EI-AAD, which was the fourth aircraft to be entered onto the Irish Aircraft Register and today is the oldest surviving aircraft on this register.

AIRCRAFT.

Type *Desoutter Monoplane MTE II*
Category *Normal* Sub-division *A to C*
Nationality and Registration Marks *British* ~~EI-AAD~~ *G-ABDM.*
Certificate of Airworthiness *AUST. YH-UEE*
VH-UPR

Certified correct *P.W. Guerson.* Date *30-8-1930.*

L. Durb, Paradise, N.S.W.

OWNER.

Name *Hugh Cahill*
Address *Iona Engineering Works, Dublin*
Nationality *Irish* *British*

CONSTRUCTOR.

Name *Jessie Desoutter Aircraft Co Ltd*
Address *Aerobome Broadway*

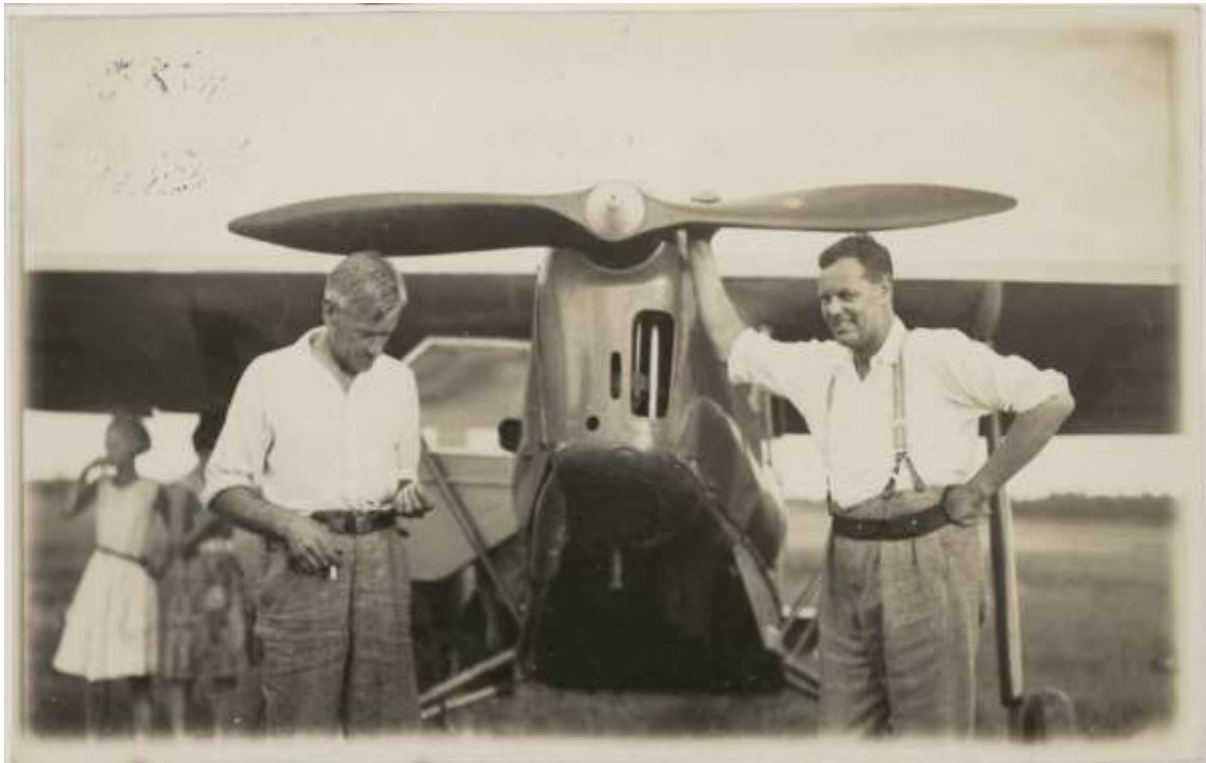
The cover page of the First Aircraft Logbook for the Desoutter Build No 30



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The Desoutter plane was not a commercial success for Iona and whilst “Miss Flinders” undertook a number of flights during September and October, her last flight was on 03 November 1931. These flights totalled only 28 hours flying time. No further flights took place for a further six months and she was put up for sale leaving Ireland on 21 April 1931. The aircraft was flown to England and re-registered as G-ABOM.

At this time, it just happened that two Australian businessmen had travelled to England to buy an aircraft and leisurely fly it back to Australia, seeing the sights enroute as tourists. Harry Jenkins was a Melbourne dentist with a passion for motor bikes and cars who had recently taken up flying qualifying for his licence in 1931. Harold Jeffrey was a director of Dimmeys Models Stores who had qualified as a pilot at the end of World War 1, after serving as an Observer with the Australian Flying Corps during the conflict.



Harry Jenkins (L) and Harold Jeffrey (R) at Darwin. (National Library Australia obj-144694818)

Arriving in England they initially looked for a Gypsy Moth but eventually settled on the purchase of the Desoutter registered G-ABOM. With the fitting of dual controls and an additional fuel tank, they undertook a short trip to Belgium and Holland as a test flight. They set off for Australia on 27 December 1931 with just 6 hours and 40 minutes flight time experience on the aircraft. The trip took 44 days, encompassed 147 hours and 50 minutes flight time and covered about 22,500 kms.

Upon arriving at Melbourne’s Essendon Aerodrome, they sold the aircraft to Hart Aircraft services, who were the Australian agents for Desoutter, and it was registered VH-UEE.



The Route from London to Melbourne

Enter Lawrence McKenzie Johnson

Following the formation of the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) the club contracted Mathews Aviation from Melbourne to provide staff allowing training of pilots to begin.

Along with the very experienced Captain Joe Francis as Chief Instructor and Jack Stubbs as ground engineer, they also appointed Lawrence McKenzie Johnson as assistant instructor and Tasmanian Manager for Mathews Aviation.

Lawrence McKenzie Johnson was born in February 1904 the second son of Ben and Emily Johnson. Lawrence attended Yarram State School (Gippsland) before being a boarder at Melbourne’s Wesley College for four years. After finishing college, he worked as a farmer for a couple of years before his father proposed he should takeover the family legal practice. Lawrence agreed and started his legal training in 1925.



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At about this time Johnson had been a passenger a number of times in the Moth biplane flown by World War 1 pilot Frank Leonard Roberts. Johnson then became hooked on flying and decided to become a pilot, a decision his father accepted.

Johnson commenced his flight training in 1930 with the Victorian Section of the Australian Aero Club at Essendon Aerodrome, gaining his Private “A” License (no 502) and his commercial “B” license (no 291) in 1930 after instruction from George Matthews of Matthews Aviation.



With the Civil Aviation Department certifying both Western Junction and Flinders Island landing strips for passenger aviation services in 1930 and 1932 respectively, Johnson saw the opportunity to operate a commercial passenger service from Western Junction to Flinders Island.

In late 1931, Matthews Aviation shipped their de Havilland DH4 to Launceston. The aircraft was modified to take three passengers and Johnson would pilot this aircraft to and from various parts of the state. On 29 January 1932, Johnson flew the DH4 from Western Junction to the new airstrip at Flinders Island.



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This was reported to be the first “heavy aircraft” to land at Whitemark with Johnson commenting on how good the airstrip was.

Twenty-eight year old Lawrence Johnson had heard the Desoutter VH-UEE was for sale and he could see an opportunity to operate a commercial passenger and freight service between Western Junction and Flinders Island. He took a ship to Melbourne, inspected the aircraft, called on Jenkins and Jeffries and purchased the monoplane for £1,000 that he had borrowed from his father. He then formed Flinders Island Airways and flew the aircraft back to Tasmania. Within ten days he had a passenger, freight and mail service running between Western Junction and Flinders Island.

AIRCRAFT		VH-UEE.		Desoutter, Mark II		
DATE.	HOUR.	TIME IN AIR (c)		TIME BEHIND OYERHAUL (a)		
		HRS.	MIN.	HRS.	MIN.	
1932 Brought	Forward	225	40	158	40	
March 11.			25	159	05	Flight test - Brennan
12.		1	00	160	05	Preparatory
13		3	20	163	25	"
14		3	15	166	40	Brennan to Launceston
14			10	166	50	Test.
15			10	167	00	Preparatory
16		1	00	168	00	Pitcairney to Hobart
17		1	40	169	40	Preparatory
18		2	00	171	40	Hobart to Pitcairney
19		3	00	174	40	Flinders to Brisbane
20		3	00	177	40	Flinders. Wrecked East Coast.
22		2	15	179	55	Flinders to return
25		4	40	184	35	Flinders returns twice
26			30	185	05	Paul J Knight.
27			50	185	55	" " + 10 min for radio.
29		2	20	188	15	Flinders return.
Carried Forward		255	15	188	15	

VH-UEE’s logbook with its first entries recorded by Johnson

Note the first commercial service to Flinders Island on 19 March 1932 and the first medical evacuation by plane from Flinders Island on 20 March 1932.



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Commercial Aviation.—The de Soutter monoplane which is used by Mr. L. M. Johnson in the Launceston-Flinders Island air service. This picture was taken during a recent trip to Melbourne by Mr. Johnson.

Johnson was a one-man band, booking the freight and passengers, driving the passengers to the aerodrome and delivering the mail bags to both the Launceston and Whitemark post offices.

He would bring back shopping lists to Launceston for Islanders, make the purchases and deliver them back to the islands. One notable example was the sale of an engagement ring to a Flinders Island gentleman, who was to be engaged to the local schoolteacher (that Johnson had flown to the island on an earlier trip). Johnson brought across on his flight a selection of rings from a Launceston Jeweller. While unloading the plane, the gentleman made his selection and wrote out a cheque for the Jeweller, which Johnson returned with the other rings.

On Tuesday 07 June 1932, Johnson carried the first airmail letters from Western Junction to Flinders Island. The mail service closed at the Launceston Post Office at 8 a.m., with the mail bag of 412 letters collected for the flight which departed at 9.30 a.m. On the return flight, 73 letters were carried, which were delivered to the Launceston Post Office by 1 p.m. This service was not subsidised, thus the airmail surcharge was applied to each letter carried. Prior to this service, all mails were carried by ship, which ran fortnightly.



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Johnson had many memorable flights to and from Flinders Island, not the least was a flight from Flinders Island to Western Junction with a large suitcase which was stored inside the cabin with the pilot and passengers. On arrival at Western Junction the passenger offered to show Johnson the contents of the case. The suitcase contained about 20 live and very venomous snakes which the passenger had caught to sell to a circus.



“The Examiner” went to Flinders Island yesterday by the de Soutter 'plane piloted by Mr. L. M. Johnson. The picture shows the paper being read on arrival at the island. The ability to place the paper in the hands of the islanders and pictorially record the fact in the next day's issue gives an idea of the facility which this rapid service means. No doubt the residents will recognise the convenience, and utilise it to the fullest extent. A service must depend upon the patronage it receives.

—Photo. by W. C. A. H.

After the service had been running for about six months, Johnson received a phone call from Ivan Holyman. At the time, he scarcely knew Ivan, although he would have known his brother Victor as he was the Vice-President of the Aero Club.

Johnson met with Ivan in the Launceston Holyman shipping office, where Ivan informed him that he and his brother Victor had purchased a De Havilland Fox Moth, which they would use to operate services between Launceston and the Bass Strait Islands. Ivan proposed that Johnson and the Holyman's could merge and form Tasmanian Aerial Services. Johnson agreed, with his share of the company being the Desoutter, while the Holyman's would provide the Fox Moth and other funding.

Now Johnson was a Director of Tasmanian Aerial Services, as well as chief pilot and he did the bulk of the flying, with Victor Holyman doing the balance. Following the merger, the two aircraft were then named “Miss Flinders” (the Desoutter) and “Miss Currie” (the Holyman's Fox Moth).



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**“Miss Flinders”, with “Miss Currie” behind, at the Western Junction Air Pageant 1934
(Weekly Courier 04 March 1934)**

Even though Johnson’s plan was to service Flinders Island with a passenger and freight aircraft there was another role for “Miss Flinders” that was discovered a day after the service began.

At 7pm on March 20th, Johnson received a telegram from Dr Connell on Flinders Island advising that an island resident, Mr Alfred Cook, needed urgent transfer to hospital in Launceston.

At daybreak, “Miss Flinders” left Western Junction and flew through heavy rain and bad visibility, arriving at Whitemark after a flight time of the 1hr 15min. Mr. Cook was taken to the Whitemark aerodrome on an improvised stretcher, and placed in the aircraft, it being big enough for the patient to lie at full length at the floor of the plane. Mr. Johnson left Whitemark at 9.20 a.m. and after piloting the machine through some very heavy weather, arrived at Western Junction at 11 a.m. The Launceston city ambulance was waiting on the field and Mr. Cook was rushed into the Launceston Public Hospital for the operation. This was the first medical transfer by air from Flinders Island, a role so professionally conducted today by the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

“The Examiner” reported on the views of the patient:

Before he left the aerodrome Mr. Cook was asked his opinion of the trip. In spite of the pain he was suffering, he had nothing but praise for the pilot, who had handled the machine during the difficult journey, in the course of which they had flown through numerous rain ' storms and squalls. Mr Cook also stated that he was very interested in seeing from the air the islands that he knows so well.

On 26 February 1933, Captain Victor Holyman of Tasmanian Aerial Services, received an urgent message from King Island that a man was in a critical condition and that it was



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necessary for him to go to Melbourne for an immediate operation. In answering this call, Johnson departed Western Junction at 5 a.m. the next day and flew to King Island in “Miss Flinders”. After picking up the man, he then flew to Essendon, arriving at 10.30 a.m. Upon arrival at Essendon, he flew to Yarrum in Gippsland to visit his father, Mr Ben Johnson and the following day, “Miss Flinders” returned to Western Junction, flying directly, taking 2 hours 20 minutes, with Mr Johnson senior and daughter Aenid as passengers.

Two notable firsts were also achieved by Johnson and “Miss Flinders”.

The first night flight over Launceston was carried out by “Miss Flinders” and Johnson on 01 May 1932. Six electric lights were placed on either side of the plane with a 12 volt accumulator in the body of the plane. The flight was made just after 8.30 pm. and was about 20 miles in duration.

“Miss Flinders” piloted by Johnson, was the first plane to land on Cape Barron Island on 06 October 1933. A landing field had just been cleared on the island and during a routine trip between Flinders Island and Western Junction, the plane diverted and landed on Cape Barron. As well as providing the opportunity for general aviation, the landing strip provided an additional landing strip for planes to use in an emergency for planes flying across Bass Strait.

Tasmanian Aerial Services expanded its operation from September 1933 with the introduction of “Miss Launceston” (a DH84 Dragon) and commenced flights to Essendon with this new plane. Johnson and Victor Holyman flew this route, with Johnson reaching the milestone of 100 flight across Bass Strait first.

In July 1934, after piloting “Miss Launceston” across Bass Strait 120 times, Johnson left the company and returned to be a Pilot Instructor in Hobart. He would later become the Chief Pilot Instructor at the Victorian Aero Club, before re-joining Ivan Holyman at Australian National Airways in 1937.

Tasmanian Aerial Services was then renamed as Holyman’s Airways and expanded its passenger services and its fleet of aircraft with bigger passenger planes. In June 1935, the usefulness of “Miss Flinders” to Holyman’s Airways was limited. She was sold to De Havilland and departed Tasmania on its delivery flight to Sydney on 11 June 1935.

Johnson and “Miss Flinders” were indeed at the forefront of Tasmanian commercial aviation.



Back to the Mainland

Over the next three decades “Miss Flinders” was owned by a number of individuals and companies.

During World War II the aircraft was dismantled and placed in storage for the duration of the conflict by its then owner Charles Pratt. After the war, it was sold to Wollongong and South Coast Aviation Services and rebuilt by Alan Brierley Smith at Wollongong and fitted with a Gypsy Major Engine.

His son, Terry Smith, remembers:

Dad and another fellow took a trailer down to Melbourne to recover a single wing enclosed aircraft, the Desoutter, and pulled it with a jeep back to McKellars Garage in Wollongong to rebuild it and repair wing damage etc and install an altered engine, a Gipsy Major. This plane then went into service for South Coast Airways.

In 1948 she was damaged in a windstorm when blown against a DC3 and once again put into storage. In 1952 “Miss Flinders” was again restored and the registration was changed from VH-UEE to VH-BQE.

The last mainland owner was Rainair Taxis who lets its Airworthiness certificate lapse in 1958 and the plane was left in storage in a hangar in Bourke NSW. It was struck off the Civil Aviation plane register in 1961.



VH-BQE in storage at Bourke



Back Home to Tasmania

In the early 1960's, planning was underway for a new Passenger Terminal at Launceston Airport.

At this time, the airport was still owned by the Federal Government and operated by the Department of Civil Aviation. In 1962, the Launceston Airport Manager, George Inglis, who was also a member of the Launceston Branch of the Air Force Association, proposed that both organisations could collaborate and bring “Miss Flinders” back to Launceston to be placed on display at the new terminal.

Over the next 3 years, the proposal was investigated and a display area in a room underneath the main lounge was developed.

The owner of the plane donated it to the Air Force Association, who paid the outstanding storage fees for its storage at Bourke. The aircraft was trucked to Sydney and Ansett-ANA brought “Miss Flinders” down from Sydney in a Convair freighter. The Air Force Association and the Tasmanian Aero Club members undertook the restoration project in Launceston, which took about 200-man hours to complete. The Air Force Association also covered the costs to set up the display area.

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



“Miss Flinders” on display at Launceston Airport (1966-1997)



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Today, the TAHS looks back and applauds all involved in bringing “Miss Flinders” back to Launceston over 50 years ago. In particular, the Launceston Branch of the Air Force Association who accepted the financial and logistical responsibility to bring her back, undertake the restoration and fit out the display

For nearly 33 years, “Miss Flinders”, the “little blue plane” was on display downstairs at the airport.

In March 1997, with the expansion of services at the airport, the display space for “Miss Flinders” was needed to house the Tasmanian headquarters of Southern Airlines.

The Launceston Branch of the Royal Australian Air Force Association (RAAFA) (which was previously the Air Force Association) and Airport staff then dismantled the plane and it was placed in storage at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston. Then in 2010, the project to reassemble and display the plane was assigned to the Museum’s exhibition coordinator, Andrew Johnson, the grandson of Lawrence Johnson and the current president of TAHS.





“Miss Flinders” on Display at QVMAG

The Final Move

After 10 years on display at the QVMAG, the museum was concerned about the integrity of the aircraft, especially the wings, when she was suspended from her fuselage and decided to remove the aircraft from display.

The Department of Transport, who owned the plane, accepted a proposal from the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society to become the custodian of the plane, and who were committed to finding a new display home for the Desoutter.

The QVMAG undertook the massive task of dismantling “Miss Flinders”, removing the wing the tail section and undercarriage. The aircraft was then stored by Launceston Distillery in Hangar 17 at Launceston Airport in late March 2020. Appropriately Hangar 17 had been built in 1933 by Tasmanian Aerial Services to store “Miss Flinders” and “Miss Currie.”

“Miss Flinders” was reassembled in the Launceston Airport Departure Terminal to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the official opening of the Airport on the 28 February 1931.



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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

In December 2021, the final part of the display was completed, when “Miss Flinders” was elevated to her current position.



Back Home to Stay



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Further Information

[TAHS Website Miss Flinders Page](#)

TAHS Articles on Miss Flinders (which are also on the Miss Flinders Web Page)

[The First Owner: Iona National Air Taxis & Flying School \(Ireland\)](#)

[Jeffery and Jenkins: The trip to Australia](#)

[The Examiner Newspaper takes a flight from Western Junction to Flinders Island](#)

[Miss Flinders Time in Tasmania](#)

[Miss Flinders at Launceston Airport 1966 to 1997](#)

[Miss Flinders reinstalled at Launceston Airport 2021](#)

[Aircraft Logbooks including 1947 rebuild by Alan Smith](#)

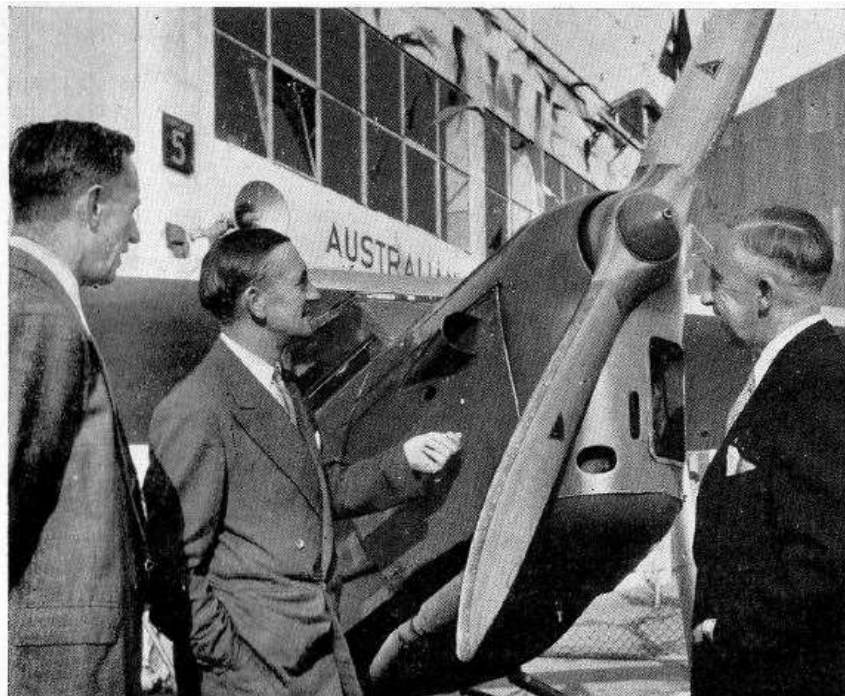
Videos

[Raising Miss Flinders onto its current display](#)

Shuttleworth Collection: [Mark I Desoutter flying in England](#) and [Discussion with the Pilot](#)

Reference Information

[The Desoutter Monoplanes in Australia](#) compiled by Geoff Goodall



Captain L. McK. Johnson gives his tiny Desoutter monoplane, Miss Flinders, an affectionate rub as he proudly shows her to Sen. Route Captain R. N. Smith and Airport Manager L. E. Austin at Mascot recently. "Holyman Bros. Pty. Ltd. purchased both of us way back in 1932," said Capt. Johnson, "and we all played a significant part in the formation of A.N.A. and the Australian Aviation story." Photo by Frank H. Johnston