



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

HART AIRCRAFT SERVICE – BASS STRAIT SERVICE TO TASMANIA

### Hart Aircraft Service – Bass Strait Service to Tasmania 1933 - 1934

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Three companies were flying passengers and mail across Bass Strait during late 1933 and early 1934. Tasmanian Aerial Services with DH.84 *Miss Launceston*. Matthews Aviation operated via King Island with the Windhover amphibian. The third was Hart Aircraft Service with the Avro Ten, *Tasman* (the old *Southern Sky*).

#### James “Bob” Hart

James Robert Hart was born in the United Kingdom in 1891 and used the name “Bob.”

He joined the Royal Flying Corps in England in 1912 when it was first formed. He stayed in the RFC for the duration of the First World War and specialised in ground engineering.

After the war, he came to Australia in 1921 and was initially employed as a mechanic and aircraft engineer with the Shaw-Ross Engineering and Aviation Company, before becoming the first resident engineer for the Department of Civil Aviation at Essendon. He had this role for eight years and he was the first licensed ground engineer in Australia.

He established the Hart Aircraft Service in 1929 to perform aircraft repairs and maintenance. This included servicing the Avro Ten monoplanes of Charles Kingsford Smith’s Australian National Airways.



**Essendon Aerodrome, (L – R) Government Hangar, Hart Aircraft Service Hangar, Larkin Hangar, Matthews Aviation Hangar and the ANA half hangar, ~ 1930s (State Library of Victoria)  
(Note the Desoutter monoplane in front of the Hart Hangar)**

Hart also were the agents for the Desoutter monoplane in Australia. They purchased *Miss Flinders* from Jeffrey & Jenkins, and then on sold it to Lawrence McKenzie Johnson in March



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1932. Hart purchased their own Desoutter (VH-UPR) in 1932. This plane is now part of the Moorabbin Air Museum Collection in Melbourne.

#### **Bass Strait Service**

When Australian National Airways was liquidated, its planes and other assets were offered for sale by Tender. The Avro Ten *Southern Star* was advertised as “airworthy except for slight repairs”. (The *Southern Star* was the plane which undertook the [first Airmail flight](#) between Australia and England in late 1931).

Hart Aircraft Services purchased the *Southern Star* (VH-UMG), which they renamed the *Tasman*. The plane could carry 10 passengers.



**VH-UMG “Southern Star” in ANA Livery over Melbourne (Ed Coates Collection)**

On 04 April 1933, Hart Aircraft Service started their bi-weekly service between Melbourne and Launceston. The service departed Essendon at 8 a.m. arriving at Western Junction at 11 a.m., then returning at 1.30 p.m.

At this time Matthews Aviation were conducting a weekly service from Melbourne to Launceston via King Island, using their Windhover Amphibian, which could carry 5 passengers. Tasmanian Aerial Services were operating a twice weekly service to Flinders Island and King Island with *Miss Currie* and *Miss Flinders*. (Note, Tasmanian Aerial Services did not start their service to Melbourne until *Miss Launceston* arrived in September 1933).



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<p><b>BY AIR TO VICTORIA</b></p> <p>LAUNCESTON TO MELBOURNE EVERY TUESDAY AND FRIDAY, COMMENCING TUESDAY, 4th APRIL.</p> <p>Intending passengers please meet Aerodrome Car opposite Launceston P.O. on Tuesday, 4th April, at 1.30 p.m. Fare, £5/10/-. Book Tourist Agencies.</p> <p><b>Hart Aircraft Service Pty. Ltd.</b></p>	
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In mid-April 1933, the service from Essendon was forced to land on Flinders Island and stay overnight due to bad weather. The service from then on would then stop at Flinders Island as required, to drop off and pick up passengers, including on 12 May 1933, as reported by "The Examiner":

*Yesterday was a red-letter day for Flinders Island residents, for they received a visit from the world-famous aviator, Air-Commodore Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, who, with Mr. J. Turner, chief pilot of the Hart Aircraft Service piloted the air liner Tasman from Melbourne to Launceston. A passenger was picked up on the island and brought to Launceston. The Tasman is to call at Flinders Island when required.*

In May 1933, with winter coming on and services impacted more by the weather, the service was changed to a weekly service.

From 22 August 1933, airmail services commenced with the three companies carrying airmail between Flinders and King Islands, Tasmania and the mainland, which included Hart Aircraft Service. This provided an additional income source for all the operators.

The summer schedule of two flights per week started again on 25 September 1933, with the *Tasman* leaving Melbourne on Mondays and Thursdays, then making the return flight from Western Junction on Tuesdays and Fridays.

This is when *Miss Launceston* of Tasmanian Aerial Services commenced operating its Melbourne to Launceston service.

The *Tasman* was caught in a strong gust of wind while attempting to landing at Flinders Island on 21 December 1933 and it was turned up on to her nose, and the centre propeller was smashed. The engine stand was also bent. The damage left the plane out of action for a number of days in the busy holiday season.



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In January 1934 a number of engine issues plagued the plane. On the 12 January 1934 one of its engines cut out at Flinders Island. The plane returned to the Western Junction aerodrome, with a full load of passengers on two engines. A fault in the lubrication system in the engine was identified which resulted in a seized bearing. The plane was then flown to Melbourne on two engines with two passengers. Then another incident occurred on 18 January 1934 when the crankshaft of an engine broke before leaving Melbourne, which caused delays till it was repaired.

Even with these problems, the *Tasman* carried more than 120 passengers during January between the mainland and Tasmania.

More engine trouble was experienced on 26 February 1934 when the *Tasman* was flying over Launceston with a Fox Movietone cameraman on board who was filming the city. The plane landed safely at Western Junction, where it was found that a connecting rod had broken and had scored the cylinder block. The machine stayed in Launceston until a new engine was shipped from Sydney and installed. The plane was then flown back to Melbourne on 10 March 1934 for a complete overhaul.

While in Launceston awaiting repair, Hart Aircraft Service suspended its Bass Strait service on 02 March 1934 due to the engine trouble.

In April 1934, when it was announced that Tasmanian Aerial Services had won the Government Airmail Tender to on the Bass Strait route, Hart Aircraft Services did not restart its Bass Strait Service.

In August 1934, the *Tasman* was sold to Australian Transcontinental Airways of Parafield (Adelaide). It later crashed at Mascot in November 1936 and was written off.

In 1936, Victorian and Interstate Airways Ltd, (VIA) was founded at Essendon by veteran pilot Frank L. Roberts. VIA went on to operate airline services to northern Victorian towns and into NSW. VIA purchased Hart Aircraft Service in August 1937, with Bob Hart remained as Chief Engineer at VIA. VIA became the main light aircraft maintenance organisation at Essendon, servicing RAAF aircraft during WWII.

Bod Hart died in 1951, aged 60.