



Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society

**SPECIAL NEWSLETTER COMMEMORATING
The 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF DH.83 FOX MOTH**

“MISS CURRIE”



Replica of “Miss Currie” courtesy RFDS Museum at Dubbo



**“MISS CURRIE” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

On the 6th of September 1939 a saboteur set fire to the Australian Flying Doctor Service Hangar at Broken Hill that contained two aircraft belonging to the local aero club and a Fox Moth aircraft affectional known as “Miss Currie” who, at the time was, on loan to the Australian Flying Doctor Service. The fire started with an explosion about 11 p.m. and totally destroyed the hangar and all the aircraft housed inside sadly ending the short career of this aircraft that was an integral part of Tasmania’s aviation history.

In this special edition we will trace the aircraft’s early history, some of those early flights and the people associated with the aircraft that contributed to her brief career.

Following the death of Mrs Honora Holyman in 1932, and the settlement of the estate, considerable capital was released for investment and part of this was used for the establishment of an airline. In September 1932 Victor, already a World War 1 veteran pilot, and his brother Ivan formed a company naming it Holyman Bros Pty Ltd (the wholly owned family company) and promptly purchased a new DH.83 Fox Moth. At the time of purchase the DH 83 was de Havilland’s latest model described as the best and most economical multi-passenger aircraft available at the time. The DH.83 Fox Moth was designed to be a short haul passenger plane suitable for charter flights or joy riding. It used the wings, tail unit and undercarriage of Tiger Moth with a different wood and ply fuselage. The pilot sat in the exposed cockpit, while three passengers were seated in the enclosed cabin in the fuselage. The first prototype flew in January 1932, with 154 being produced between 1932 and 1934. Eight new Fox Moths were sent to Australia, and 14 second-hand ones imported before the Second World War.

De Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd in Sydney (the Australian subsidiary) subsequently ordered a DH.83 for Holyman Brothers. The aircraft was issued with a British Certificate of Airworthiness on 15 June 1932 and then shipped to Australia. On arrival in Sydney the aircraft was registered, on 22nd of August 1932, as VH-UQM to de Havilland and an Australian Certificate of Airworthiness issued. This was the first Fox Moth registered in Australia with the ownership being transferred to Holyman Brothers Pty Ltd on the 20th of September 1932. The purchase price was reported as £1,450, (\$145,000 today).



**“MISS CURRIE” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

General Characteristics

- Crew: 1
- Passenger Capacity: 3-4
- Length: 25 ft 9 in (7.85 m)
- Wingspan: 30 ft 10+5/8 in (9.41 m)
- Height: 8 ft 9+1/2 in (2.68 m)
- Empty weight: 1,071 lb (486 kg)
- Max takeoff weight: 2,000 lb (907 kg)
- Powerplant: 1 × de Havilland Gypsy 111 4-cylinder air-cooled inverted in-line piston engine, 120 hp (89 kW)
- Propellers: 2-bladed fixed-pitch propeller

Performance

- Maximum speed: 106 mph (171 km/h)
- Cruise speed: 91 mph (146 km/h)
- Range: 425 mi (684 km)
- Service ceiling: 12,700 ft (3,900 m)



Brothers Victor (left) and Ivan Holyman, c.1917 Founders of Holyman Bros Pty Ltd



**“MISS CURRIE” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

The aircraft, now christened “Miss Currie” ultimately arrived by ship at the Holyman’s Wharf Melbourne was unloaded and subsequently reassembled on the wharf. The problem now facing the Holyman brothers, Keith and Victor, was how to get the aircraft from the wharf to Essendon Airport.

Victor quickly solved the problem by saying – “I’ll fly it there!”. So “Miss Currie” was towed out onto Lorimer Street with Holyman’s workers stopping the traffic and Victor took off and headed for Essendon Airport. Victor had no official authority for the flight, however, amazingly there was no repercussions from what could only be assumed was a most illegal flight, and the aviation career of the Fox Moth, now registered VH – UQM, “Miss Currie” under the command of Victor Holyman, the airlines only pilot, had begun.

Captain Victor Holyman then flew the plane to Tasmania, completing the Bass Strait leg of the trip from Essendon to Western Junction via Flinders Island on the 24 September 1932. Flying into a very strong head wind, the plane landed on Flinders Island in a little under 3 hours (for a trip of 260 miles, or 415 km). After picking up one passenger, Mr Cyril Barrett, a resident of Flinders Island, the final leg of the trip to Western Junction took an hour, again into strong headwinds, landing in the early afternoon.

“Miss Currie” arrived in Launceston in a blaze of publicity for the airline’s planned services.

The Launceston Weekly Courier in a glowing report stated:

“Probably the most striking feature of the airplane is in the interior of the cabin in which the three passengers are accommodated. Entrance is gained by stepping onto the lower wing and then onto the cabin. Two of the passengers are seated in a hammock-like seat against the back wall of the cabin, with the third passenger in a “dicky” type seat facing the tail of the airplane. The cabin is fitted with sliding windows and from these a good view of the country can be gained particularly directly in front.

The pilot’s cockpit is situated directly behind the passenger’s cabin, the two parts being entirely separated. Communications between the passengers and the pilot may be made by a speaking tube or by passing notes through an opening above the passenger’s heads.”



**"MISS CURRIE" COMMEMMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**



File photo "Miss Currie" in flight named as much out of sentiment, because it was Holyman's first aircraft, as it was historically after the town of Currie on King Island.

From October 1st 1932 the Holyman Brothers offered twice weekly flights to Flinders Island for both passengers and freight in direct competition to Laurie Johnson's service with the Desoutter aircraft "Miss Flinders" and within a few weeks the Holymans and Johnson agreed to merge their operations forming a new company called Tasmanian Aerial Services.

When not operating the Flinders Island flights "Miss Currie" was available for private air taxi use to any licensed airstrip in Tasmania and Victoria.



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

"MISS CURRIE" COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2022

HOLYMAN'S AIR SERVICE — FOR PASSENGERS AND FREIGHT

LAUNCESTON TO FLINDERS ISLAND TWICE WEEKLY.

The Launceston to King Island Service will be inaugurated as soon as the Civil Aviation Department sanctions the use of a landing ground there.

Available for private air taxi hire to any licensed aerodrome in Victoria or Tasmania.



Air service in charge of Capt. V. C. Holyman, chief pilot. 'Phone 178 (at night 565).

BRITAIN'S LATEST

The first unit of the aircraft necessary to maintain the services is a Fox D.H. 83 aeroplane with passenger accommodation for three. This machine is the latest type of passenger aeroplane to be perfected by the British de Havilland Company, and is a biplane with a single engine. Probably the most striking feature of the 'plane is the interior of the cabin in which the three passengers are accommodated. Entrance is gained by stepping on to the lower wing of the 'plane and then into the cabin. The cabin itself is large and roomy, with ample foot room. The fittings have been carried out in toned leather. Two of the passengers are seated on a hammock-like seat against the back wall of the cabin, with the third passenger in a "dicky" type seat facing the

tail of the 'plane. A rack for luggage is situated above the back seat. The cabin is fitted with sliding windows, and from these a good view of the country can be gained, particularly directly in front. The pilot's cockpit is situated directly behind the passengers' cabin, the two parts being entirely separated. Communication between the passengers and the pilot may be made by a speaking tube or by passing notes through an opening porthole above the passengers' heads. The machine is a biplane fitted with a de Havilland Mark III. inverted type engine. The 'plane is fitted with air wheels (or "doughnuts"), which considerably improve the ground performance, while wheel breaks shorten the run on landing.

By Sea or by Air, Holyman's Modern Transport Service is Cheapest and Best

So "Miss Currie" continued her career in commercial aviation as part of the fleet of two aircraft operated by Tasmanian Aerial Services



**"MISS CURRIE" COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**



Two views of the cockpit (above) and passenger cabin (below) of a restored DH 83 Fox Moth courtesy Vintage Wings of Canada.





TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

“MISS CURRIE” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2022

With the acquisition of “Miss Currie” the fledgling airline was then able to expand its services along the North West Coast of Tasmania via Latrobe, Wynyard, Smithton and ultimately King Island.

By December 1932 the King Island Council decided a property of Mr J Attrill was suitable for an airstrip and was subsequently selected and approved by Civil Aviation subject, however, to the satisfactory clearance of the site before a licence would be granted.

At this time Tasmanian Aerial Services correspondence was also received stating they wanted to start flying passengers as soon as possible, ideally in the early new year. Civil Aviation provisionally approved the aerodrome (without an inspection).

Once again Captain Victor Holyman, using his initiative, travelled to the Island on the steamer “Koomeela” on December 21st, inspected the site, was satisfied with the surface as being suitable to use and returned to Launceston to plan the inaugural service on the 24th of December.

The outcome of the inspection was communicated to the Civil Aviation department, who replied by radio that they now required the site to be inspected by a Departmental Officer before the licence would be issued. Notwithstanding the department’s requirements Captain Holyman decided to fly the inaugural service on the 24th without a licence being granted.

Thus, “Miss Currie” entered the history books as the aircraft used for the first passenger flight to land at King Island. On Christmas eve 1932 at 12:30 p.m., with Captain Victor Holyman, at the controls of “Miss Currie” and two passengers aboard, Mr Waterworth of Wynyard and Miss K Jackson from Launceston arrived on the island.

The aircraft returned to Launceston the following morning, Christmas Day, and regular trips were then planned for Monday and Thursday arriving at 11 a.m. and departing at 2 p.m.

“Miss Currie” along with “Miss Flinders” commenced regular flights to both Flinders and King Islands with the popularity of these services encouraged the airline to expand its fleet further with the purchase of a DH.84 Dragon.

In her short life “Miss Currie” enjoyed some interesting experiences none the least the incidents at Bathurst Harbour and Queenstown.



Bathurst Harbour Forced Landing – 16 April 1935

At Port Davey / Bathurst Harbour in the rugged south-west corner of Tasmania, the New Harbour Tin Development Co of Melbourne has established a camp with huts which were about seven or eight prospectors present. The nearest beach was Cox's Bight, about six or seven miles away.

Holyman's Airways had been chartered to fly in two mining surveyors to Port Davey. Mr H. L. Connolly, field engineer of the New Harbour Tin Development Co and E. D. Blackwood of Moonah, District Surveyor in the Lands and Survey Department.

On Thursday 16 April 1935, "Miss Currie" with pilot Alex Barlow, passengers Connolly and Blackwood left Cambridge aerodrome and the intention was to land at Cox's Bight if possible and discharge the passengers, otherwise they would return to Cambridge.

During the flight they encountered a heavy storm just before reaching Bathurst Harbour and there had been torrential rain on the rough runway before the plane arrived which would have left it saturated.

After deciding that the runway was suitable to land, the plane landed and as it was nearing the end of the landing run, at a speed of about 15 mph, the wheels slid into a boggy patch, the plane tipped forward onto her nose, then quickly slipped back and immediately came to rest with the wheel's axle deep in mud. No one was injured.

Upon inspection the only damage was to the propeller which was badly cracked near the centre and so the plane could not be flown without a new propeller.

The party settled into the prospector's camp to wait for potential help. The plane was moved to the solid ground and lashed down to protect it from the constant strong winds and periodic rain.

At 6 p.m. that day, (Thursday) when the plane had not returned to Cambridge, the Civil Aviation Representative in Tasmania (Mr. P. J. McGinness) was notified and Ivan Holyman informed. They decided that if "Miss Currie" had not returned by 10 a.m. the following day (Friday), a search plane would be sent to Port Davey.

(Note: Mr. P. J. McGinness was the co-founder of QANTAS)

When the plane did not return, the Tasmanian Aero Club Instructor at Cambridge, Captain D. F. Savage departed in the Club Moth. He located the plane about midday near Bathurst Harbour. Alex Barlow signalled him not to land and indicated out the propeller which had been taken off the plane and held up a part of the broken propeller. Also, the word "Beach" had been formed on the landing ground using pieces of paper, which was to indicate that was a more suitable place to land. Captain Savage circled for a period and then returned to Cambridge.



**"MISS CURRIE" COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

The party stayed in the prospector's huts again on Friday night, not knowing how long they would be there, but they assumed it would likely be a week if a boat was dispatched to collect them.

The next day (Saturday) Captain Saville departed Cambridge with another propeller and a 4-gallon tin of petrol. Connolly, Blackwood and a young prospector known as "Sam" had travelled to the beach in case another plane arrived and lit fires to indicate the firm stretch of sand which was suitable for landing.

Captain Saville also encountering a severe rainstorm on the way saw the fires and landed on the beach at about 10.30 a.m.

"Sam" then undertook the six or seven mile walk back to the camp with the six-foot propeller which took three hours, crossing many swollen creeks and patches of marshy land.

Captain Saville then returned to Cambridge with Mr Connolly as passenger, leaving the can of petrol on the beach with Mr Blackwood.

Pilot Barlow replaced the propeller and after lighting the plane as much as possible made a successful take-off and flew to the beach and landed safely. After refuelling from the can of petrol and taking on Mr Blackwood, the plane took off successfully and returned to Cambridge, arriving about 4.30 p.m. on Saturday.

"Miss Currie" and Pilot Barlow returned to Western Junction over the weekend.





Damaged Propellor at Queenstown – 17 February 1937

This story intersects attempts to develop an airport on the West Coast, commercial plans for passenger services, and an incident with "Miss Currie."

As early as December 1932, Tasmanian Aerial Services had enquired with the Queenstown Municipal Council regarding opportunities to develop an aerodrome near Queenstown. They suggested a daily or bi-weekly aerial service between Launceston and Queenstown could be possible if an aerodrome was available.

The Council did pursue the project over the following years, with advice from the Civil Aviation Department that finding a location that was sufficiently well drained to allow planes to land in what was reported to be the second wettest place in Australia, would always be a technical challenge.

Holyman's Airways and then Australian National Airways repeatedly supported the completion of the aerodrome, however, by January 1937, the aerodrome was still in poor condition and the matter was raised at the Municipal Council meeting:

Cr. Argent raised the question of the aerodrome runway, which was in a bad condition, the surface being very uneven. Cr. Bartram stated that he had driven over the aerodrome in a car recently and had found the surface was in a very rough condition. It was badly corrugated and although he knew little about aeroplanes it seemed to him that it would be difficult to travel over the runway at any speed.

An inspection of the site was arranged with the Civil Aviation Department and Australian National Airways on 17 February 1937.

Word was received in Queenstown earlier in the day that the Miss Currie, with Captain C. H. Scott, flying service superintendent, as pilot, accompanied by Major H. A. Mann, of the Civil Aviation Department, and Mr. E. C. Buttfield, manager of Australian National Airways, would land, and make an inspection of the aerodrome.

Leaving Smithton at 2.30 p.m. the fliers followed the coastline to Strahan and were first sighted by the crowd assembled at the drome at 3.40 p.m. circling over the town. The pilot then made a thorough survey of the runway but owing to the strong cross wind deemed it inadvisable to use it. The adjacent ground looked quite safe from the air, but it was soft, peaty soil, and the plane stopped within 30 yards, and almost turned over. Onlookers immediately hurried to the scene and were relieved to find that the occupants were uninjured.

The plane was not damaged beyond a broken propeller blade, and several dents in the casing of the engine. Willing hands gave the fliers assistance to pull the machine out of the soft



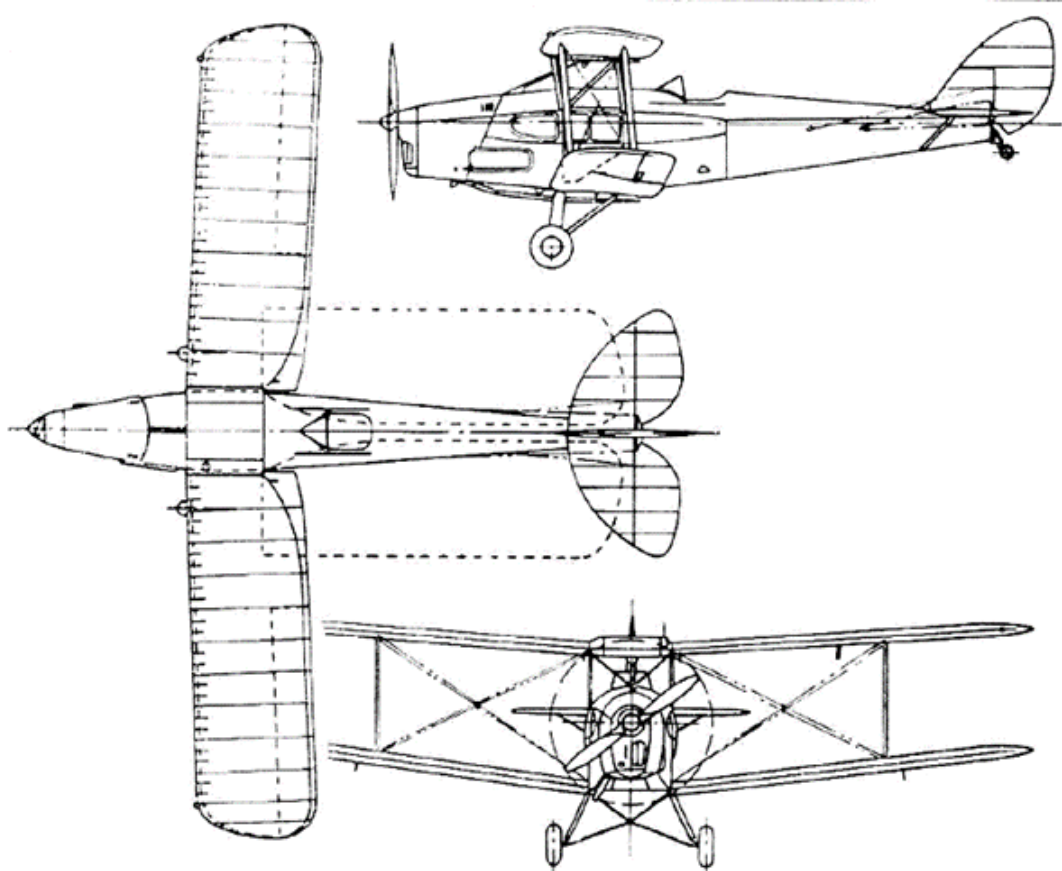
**“MISS CURRIE” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

ground and wheel it to the runway, about 200 yards away, where it was pegged down. Runways from three different directions seemed essential before safe landings could occur.

With purchase of the DH.84 in 1933 and other subsequent larger aircraft the utilisation of “Miss Currie” became limited, however, the versatility of the Fox Moth was again shown.

In December 1935, a DH.86 operated by the now re-named Holyman Airways, force landed on Hunter Island whilst en-route to King Island. Freddie Patterson flew “Miss Currie” to Hunter Island and landed the aircraft on the less than smooth strip, loaded the mail that was being carried by the DH.84, and flew out ensuring the mail was delivered in a timely manner.

As time rolled on, and Holyman’s Airways became known as Australian National Airways (ANA), the development of commercial aviation resulted in larger multi-engine aircraft being available to the operators and towards the mid 1930’s “Miss Currie’s” role within the ANA fleet was becoming somewhat limited.





**"MISS CURRIE" COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

Dromana

In May 1937, ANA adopted a policy to use names from the Australian aboriginal languages, the name of "Miss Currie" was changed to "Dromana", which was an aboriginal name for "Pelican". The Dromana name was again reused on a DC-3 (VH-ANQ) in 1946.

Australian Aerial Medical Service, Broken Hill NSW

The precursor to the Royal Flying Doctor Service was the Australian Aerial Medical Service (AAMS), which was formed in 1928. Throughout the 1930s bases were established with radio communication and planes. Australian National Airways (ANA) had the contract to supply planes, pilots and ground engineers for the AAMS in NSW, (QANTAS did similarly in Queensland).

The Broken Hill AAMS base was established in 1937, with "Dromana," as she was now called, being the first plane used there. The "Dromana" departed Western Junction on 30 April 1937 for Melbourne, where it was fitted out as an air ambulance.

Pilot Ern Annear flew "Dromana" to Broken Hill on 19 May 1937. Although the pilot's, first responsibility was to the aerial medical service, the plane was also available for charter work when it is practicable, within a radius of 300 miles of the city. When Dr L. E. Odum arrived in Broken Hill in mid-June 1937, the air ambulance service commenced.

"Miss Currie", now named "Dromana" continued in her new found role until that ill-fated September evening. There is some conjecture as to whether the perpetrator was a pro German or Italian saboteur, however, either way the associated explosion and fire totally destroyed the Fox Moth and the other aircraft contained within the hangar's confines.





TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

**"MISS CURRIE" COMMEMMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**



The sad remains of "Miss Currie" can be clearly seen in this photo following the blaze.



**“MISS CURRIE” COMMEMORATIVE NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2022**

So ended the short life of “Miss Currie – Dromana” Her history was not as long and famous as other aircraft like “Miss Flinders” and unlike other aircraft she is not available for viewing in a museum.

Notwithstanding all of this the little Fox Moth registered VH-UQM must still be remembered as an integral part of Tasmania’s aviation history as detailed below:

- The first aircraft owned by Launceston’s Holyman family who went on to develop Australian National Airways.
- The first passenger flight for the fledgling airline to Flinders Island on 1st of October 1932.
- The first commercial passenger flight to and from King Island.
- It could be argued that she was the first Tasmanian aircraft that provided cabin service as before each flight Hazel Holyman, Victor’s wife, provided passengers with flasks of tea and biscuits for consumption during the flight.
- Became a mail carrier when rescuing the mail stranded on Hunter Island.
- Was the first aircraft used by the NSW division of the Australian Flying Doctor Service.

All of this was achieved in seven short years when aviation was in its infancy.

The 1930’s proved to be an era of incredible development of the aviation industry with aircraft like “Miss Currie” at its forefront.

