



FIRST FLIGHT AT HOBART, TASMANIA

First Flight in Tasmania by Delfosse Badgery on 10 September 1914 at Hobart

Author: O. Bartrop, June 2022

On Monday, 7th September 1914, SS Wimmera berthed at Hobart. On board were Andrew Delfosse Badgery, a pilot, and Sam Freshney, his engineer. Andrew Delfosse Badgery had the same name as his father, so he was known as Delfosse or Del for short. Also on board was Del's Caudron aeroplane.

The next day, The Daily Post published the news:

It will come as a surprise to Hobart residents to learn that a famous aviator is in their midst and that his intention is to make a series of flights over the city during the next few days.

The aviator is Mr Delfosse Badgery, an Australian who was born at Sutton Forest, near Sydney. He arrived at Hobart yesterday by the SS Wimmera with his Australian-built machine, a Caudron biplane...

With this biplane, Mr Badgery can reach 1200 revolutions a minute on a flying line and is noted for his daring volplaning, looping the loop, figure-of-eight, and trick flying generally ...

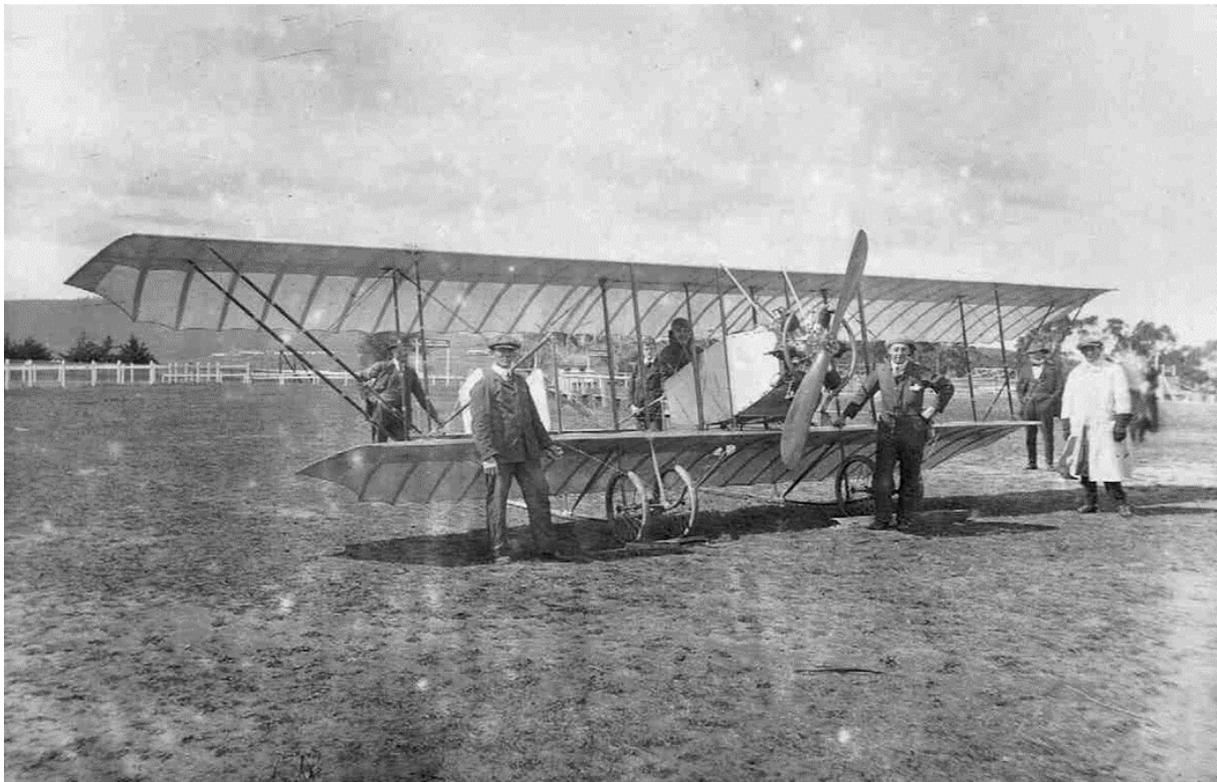
An exhibition flight will probably be indulged in tomorrow.

That news item, evidently written by a journalist who had only a limited knowledge of the new world of aviation, was typical of the very verbose journalistic treatment given in all Tasmanian newspapers to Del Badgery's achievements as the first aviator to fly in a power-driven aeroplane in Tasmania. The newspaper reports were influenced to some extent by advice from the energetic manager of the exhibitions, Tommy Thompson. Still, some of the descriptions were extravagant literary efforts by reporters groping for words to describe in their own way the wonderful sight, seen for the first time, of an aeroplane in flight.

The machine in its three packing cases was unloaded from the steamer's hold early on Tuesday morning. With it were several large bundles of canvas, ropes and poles, the components of a marquee, size 55 feet x 35 feet, which Thompson had hired in Sydney for service as a portable hangar. These items were moved in horse-drawn vehicles to the showground of the Agriculture Society at Elwick, near the banks of the Derwent River, five miles upstream from the city.



FIRST FLIGHT AT HOBART, TASMANIA



Delfosse Badgery in his Caudron aircraft in Hobart, Tasmania

Thompson had booked the showground for an exhibition of flying to be held on Saturday, 12th September. In that season, the unpredictable factor was the weather when wintry blasts of cold air had not yet been replaced by the mild winds of Spring. Mount Wellington, rising sheer to 4165 ft on the western side of the city, was to some extent a windbreak against westerlies. In the northern suburbs, including Elwick, the winds eddied confusingly around the spurs of the mountain cliffs or, at other times, southerly gales roared up the river valley, funnelled between Mount Wellington on the western side and Flagstaff Hill and Mount Direction on the eastern side of the harbour.

Gusts of wind were eddying across the Elwick showground when Del, his assistants and their gear arrived there. Quickly, with the help of some locally engaged workmen, they erected the tent hangar. The engine was left for the time being in its packing case. Meanwhile, the main biplane assembly and the tailplane were unpacked and carried into the tent to be reassembled.

While this work was in progress, the wind increased to gale force during the afternoon, with gusts of up to 70 mph (112 kph). In one squall, the roof of the tent was torn, whilst in that same squall, the large light-pine packing case, which was empty outside the tent, was caught by the wind, lifted twenty feet into the air and tumbled to the other end of the showground.

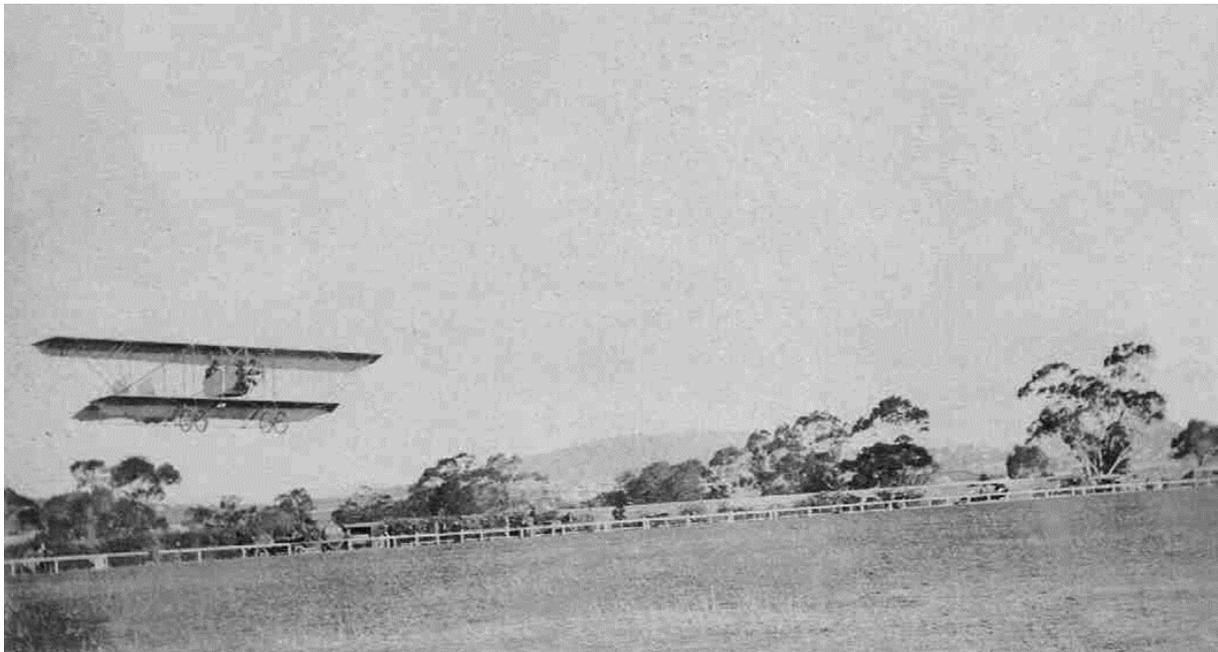


FIRST FLIGHT AT HOBART, TASMANIA

After these welcoming outbursts, the wind dropped to a moderate breeze, and the next day (Wednesday), the tent was repaired, the airframe assembled, and the engine was reinstalled and test run. All was in readiness then for a test flight.

The first time a phenomenon is witnessed remains in people's memories as an event without precedent, superior to all others similar that might follow. Such was to be Del's first flight in Tasmania. That island state would soon find its isolation eliminated by the progress of aviation with daily flights of mail, cargo and passengers from Melbourne, but Del's flight was to be the pre-eminent leader of the future. That awareness of the unprecedented brought to the Elwick showground on Thursday afternoon, 10th September, a small group of people who were invited to witness a short test flight before the public exhibition on Saturday afternoon. They were chiefly newspaper-men. Among them were Charles Davies MLC, Manager of The Mercury, Harold Holmes of the Daily Post, and the Hobart correspondent of the Launceston Examiner. What they saw gave scope to their descriptive abilities as journalists with little knowledge of the principles of aviation.

The test flight on Thursday, 10th September, was intended chiefly to check the assembly and tensioning of the airframe wires and flying controls and to run and, if necessary, adjust the engine settings. Also, it was to give some experience of conditions near the ground and in the air at Hobart. Therefore, it was only a rehearsal or press preview, but it was the first flight by a powered aeroplane in Tasmania.



Delfosse Badgery flying at Elwick, Hobart, Tasmania, 10th September 1914



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

FIRST FLIGHT AT HOBART, TASMANIA

It is of historical interest for accuracy that this first aeroplane flight in Tasmania was made above the Elwick Show Ground, as stated in *The Mercury* and not above the adjacent Elwick Race Course, as incorrectly stated in *The Post*.

As Del climbed spirally above the showground, he became aware at each turn that the air was filled with eddies and up-and-down currents such as he had never before encountered, making control of the machine very difficult. Some of the air currents were intensely cold. They flowed, as he realized, from the snow-capped summit of Mount Wellington, on which the winter snows had not yet melted. The cold air mass poured downwards to a confused mingling with up-currents rising from the river's surface and the ground in the valley, warmed by the spring sunshine. In addition, there were crosswinds of variable direction at different altitudes caused by the airflow around the mountain spurs. In this violent air turbulence, the flimsy and low-powered aircraft was buffeted like a sea bird in a gale and frequently tilted onto one wing in the turbulent air. Suddenly, at about 1400 ft altitude, Del found himself in a fierce down-current which caused the biplane to roll swiftly into an extreme side-slip, out of control. Only Sam Freshney among the spectators realized what was happening. Del succeeded in recovering from the side-slip only a short height above the ground and put the aircraft again into a climb to gain height for a turn before he landed safely in the show ring.

It should be remembered that the side to side (lateral) control of the Caudron design was by a series of wires warping the wing trailing edges up and down, and this was only adequate for normal turns and flight and not nearly as effective as "ailerons", which were yet to be invented. So, in these extreme conditions, the lateral control was insufficient to cope. Hence, Del lost control as he could not quickly roll the aeroplane and level his wings. The tailplane also suffered this fault but not to the same extent, so control in the pitching plane (i.e. nose up and down) was not so critical.