# TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

## NEWSLETTER ISSUE 12 SUMMER 2022


***FROM ALL AT TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY***

TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 12 SUMMER 2022

## Editorial

Welcome to issue number twelve of the TAHS Newsletter.

This edition introduces two new contributors, Peter Mantkelow, who shares the story of an aviation career of almost 50 years flying helicopters and Owen Bartrop from Devonport who presents an absorbing look at Delfosse Badgery's first flight in Tasmania and the difficulties he encountered.

A new series begins in this edition with stories of the unfortunate accidents that befell the Tasmanian aviation industry in its early days.

Wayne Dearing

Newsletter Editor

Included in this edition



***On behalf of everyone at Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society we would like to wish our readers and their families a very merry Christmas and the best wishes for a safe and prosperous New Year.***

# Introducing Our New Contributors

## Peter Mantkelow

Peter started flying in 1968 with the North Queensland Aero Club before joining the Royal Australian Navy as a trainee pilot. After training with the RAAF on Winjeel's and Macchi's, he was posted to RAAF Fairbairn for conversion to helicopters that he flew with 723, 725 and 817 Squadrons.

Retiring from the Navy in 1974, he flew helicopters in New Guinea, a short stint in Tasmania with Hookway Aviation Ltd before he commenced flying multi engine helicopters.

Overseas next, where after an epic ferry flight in a S61 from Australia to Ireland and a short time in India. He continued to fly worldwide, primarily supporting the offshore oil and gas industry.

In 2005 Peter re-joined the Canadian Helicopter Corporation, known as CHC, as check pilot in Thailand and other world-wide locations before a seven-week period flying S76A's in Antarctica, returning to CHC Australia in 2011.

Peter's last flight was on the 14th of August 2017 in Dili. He had accumulated in excess of 16,000 hours over a 50-year period, flying in various countries on every continent except South America. His log books show endorsements on six different fixed wing aircraft and 16 helicopter types.

His roles included not only that of a pilot but also as a Chief Pilot, Check Captain, Base Manager and Operations Manager.

In Peter's words:

***"It was a grand adventure"***

Bell 206 B Jet Ranger, Photo by Brent Newbery, 1982

## Owen Bartrop

Guest contributor number 2 is a spritely 89-year-old veteran RAAF pilot, author and owner of a Pipistrel Virus two-seater aircraft that he still flys.

Owen spent 28 years in the RAAF, joining on the 29th of September 1953. As a fighter pilot he flew Vampires, Meteors and Sabres out of both Williamtown NSW and Butterworth Malaya. Some considerable time was spent as a test pilot at ARDU Laverton and 2AD Richmond that also included test flying in operational squadrons. He was a member of the Meteorite Aerobatic Team that managed to get the highest score in an inter-squadron shoot between all fighter squadrons in the RAAF.

In 1965 Owen was sent to the UK to assist in creating a computerised air defence system. His part in the programme was in the design and checking of its software for accuracy. On returning to Australia, he set up the first operational software department in the Australian military. He was also seconded as an advisor to the Malaysian Air Force at Butterworth.

On leaving the RAAF he became an avocado grower and started his second career as an author when he became editor and publisher of a magazine, that subsequently went international, called “Talking Avocados.”

Owen’s current role is editing a book on the life of Andrew Delfosse Badgery. The book was authored by Peter Badgery, Delfosse’s son, and Group Captain Milton Cottee. With their passing away, Owen has the task of publishing their work. Owen’s love of flying is recorded in his book:

***“From Bottom Rung to Top Gun”***

**Delfosse Badgery, with his Caudron biplane at the Elwick. [Tasmanian Mail 17 September 1914.]**

# Tasmanian Aviation Tragedies

## The DH.86 *Miss Hobart* Incident

*By W. Dearing*

As with the development of any new industry, the early years of Tasmanian's aviation industry were not without its problems and in the case of the stories to be published in this and a forthcoming newsletter, its tragedies.

This issue deals with the accident that claimed the first DH.86 aircraft of Holyman's Airways and the lives of the crew and passengers, in particular the life of Victor Holyman who at the time was the driving force behind the fledgling airline. Although Qantas had placed orders for the DH.86, Holyman's Airways received the first one to arrive in Australia. The arrival of DH.86 (VH-URN) caused enormous excitement as this news article shows:[1]

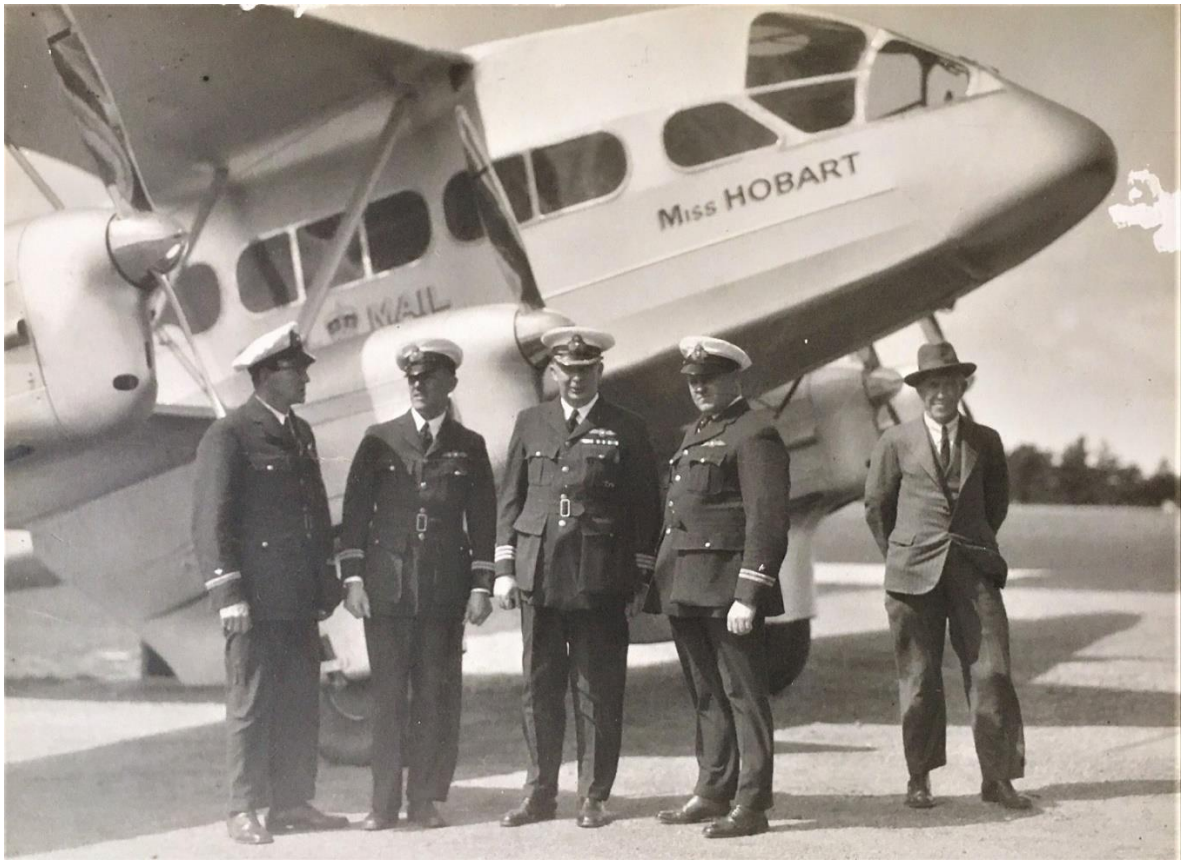
> *The first de Havilland 86 which is to be named Miss Hobart is due at Melbourne on board the Baradine on September 10. It will be unloaded, transported to the RAAF aerodrome, Vic, where the construction will be carried out. The machine will be flown to Tasmania about September 27 or 29.*

Arriving on 28 September *Miss Hobart* commenced services on the 1st of October 1934.[2]

**The Aircraft**


The DH.86 was conceptually a four-engined enlargement of the successful de Havilland Dragon, but of more streamlined appearance with tapered wings and extensive use of metal fairings around struts and undercarriage. The most powerful engine made by de Havilland, the new 200 hp (149 kW) Gipsy Six, was selected. For long-range work the aircraft was to carry a single pilot in the streamlined nose, with a wireless operator behind. Maximum seating for ten passengers was provided in the long-range type; however, the short-range Holyman's aircraft were fitted with 12 passenger seats and carried the pilot and radio operator.[3]

**The Crew**




**Victor Holman (centre) and Gilbert Jenkins (2nd from right)**

Mr Gilbert Jenkins and Captain Victor Holyman, Managing Director and Chief Pilot of Holyman's Airways, crewed the plane on the fateful day. Gilbert Jenkins was ex-Royal Australian Air Force and ex-Canadian Air Force, with which he had commanded a squadron. After leaving the services, Mr Jenkins had further comprehensive flying experience, commuting between the mainland and Tasmania many times with Matthews Aviation. It was only in July of that same year that he had accepted the post with Holyman's Airways Pty Ltd.[4]

**The Passengers**

Ten Tasmanians were aboard; seven men, including the Rev. Hubert. E. Warren of St Mary's township on the east coast (the father of black box inventor David Warren) and two women, one with a small child. Rev Warren was on his way to take over St Thomas' Church, Enfield, Sydney. His wife and children, deciding not to accompany him, had planned to travel to Sydney by steamer. One woman was Miss K Mercer, a well-known competitive horse rider from Campbell Town in the Midlands and one of the men was Garnet Rupert Gourlay who had served with the 1st Battalion Commonwealth Horse during the Anglo-Boer War and later with the 40th Battalion in WWI.[5]

**The Flight**

The aircraft departed Launceston at 9 a.m. on 19 October in good flying conditions and bound for Essendon airport. Visibility was reported to be excellent and the aircraft made a routine radio call at 9:50 am some 30 miles north west of Flinders Island and a further call at 10:20 a.m. over Rodondo Island. When the 10:50 a.m. and 11:20 a.m. reports were not received and attempts to contact the aircraft by Melbourne Radio were not acknowledged, the Civil Aviation Branch and Holyman's Airways organised a search utilising aircraft and any ships that were in the area. Several days of searching proved fruitless with only an oil slick and some floating "wreckage," (which was never positively identified), was reported.

The last message was received by Melbourne Radio stating: "Over Rodondo; all's well."

**Rodondo Island looking south from Wilson's Promontory**

**The Inquiry and Possible Causes**

An official inquiry was opened in Launceston on Tuesday October 30, 1934, sparking great public interest. The inquiry went into great detail about the prevailing weather at the time and the plane's range, but there was no clear reason for the mishap.[6]

Following the inquiry several scenarios were presented as to what may have caused the accident:

- The aircraft may have run out of fuel and crashed when the pilots attempted to "pancake" the aircraft into the water.
- The pilots may have lost control of the aircraft when changing seats.
- Detailed weather conditions with possibility of very strong headwinds were discussed but never ascertained as a possible reason given weather conditions on departure.

None of these circumstances were positively concluded as to the cause of the accident, however, other theories tend to throw a possible different light as to the cause of the accident. Seriously lacking in directional stability, the DH.86 aircraft were frequently in trouble and following the loss of Qantas' VH-USG near Longreach four weeks later while on its delivery flight, it was found that the fin bias mechanisms of the crashed aircraft and at least one other were faulty.[7] Tragically a second Holyman's DH.86 aircraft, the *Loina*, was also lost off Flinders Island with witnesses reporting the aircraft spun into the sea.

Although unable to present a conclusive report, investigators suggested that the fin design and adjustment mechanism was excessively sensitive. This could cause the aircraft yawing at an increasing rate, which if not corrected, could cause a potentially fatal spin.[8]

What's more, to the question asked as to engine failure, the experts assured investigators there was "no way" all four of the plane's engines would have stopped working at the same time. Even if this was the case, they would argue, the plane would still have been able to maintain height long enough to make an emergency landing.

Searches would proceed in Bass Strait, including the use of military warships and aircraft. However, not one piece of wreckage surfaced. Reports of the case at the time did mention strange aerial machines and an audible humming. One of the official transmissions from *Miss Hobart* would state that they could hear the "drone of a plane suddenly stopped" as the aircraft came towards them. This last transmission was sent around the same time the airliner is thought to have met its unfortunate end.

With no accurate and substantiated information, the inquiry handed down "strong headwinds" as the cause of the accident. Hardly a fitting decision!!

---

[1] *Launceston Examiner*, 5 September 1934
[2] *The Hobart Mercury*, 2 October 1934, p5
[3] Wikipedia
[4] R A Watson
[5] Ibid
[6] Ibid
[7] Wikipedia
[8] *The Forgotten Giant of Australian Aviation* by Peter Yule

# My Life Flying Helicopters – Part 1

*By P. Mantkelow*

Whilst I spent some 500 hours flying various fixed wing aircraft, (6 different types both piston and jet), the majority of my flight time, some 15,500 hours, was on helicopters on 16 different types, piston and turbine, single engine and multi engine, civil and military. For this reason, I will try and confine my articles in our newsletter to helicopter operations and as much as possible to the time I spent flying them here in Tassie. For me, Tassie rates as one of four visually stunning areas of the world that I had the pleasure of flying in. The other three were the Canadian Rockies, PNG and Antarctica.

Helicopters now make up a huge fleet worldwide as well as in Australia. They perform in a variety of roles and specialisations. Historically they were about 50 years behind the Wright Brothers fixed wing aircraft, so we only really started to see them in the early nineteen fifties. Igor Sikorsky (a Russian Émigré to the USA) is considered to be the father of the helicopter. He certainly invented the first helicopter that went in to viable commercial production. Sikorsky had military helicopters in action towards the close of WWII and the Nazi regime had a tethered tandem rotor machine but it never progressed beyond being a curiosity.

The application of helicopters within Tasmania was sporadic and seasonal up until about 1975 when the late Peter Hookway established Hookway Aviation Pty Ltd, first at Llanherene (Hobart) Airport then at Cambridge Airport. His company was, I believe, the first helicopter company established permanently in Tasmania and remains to this day after changing ownership first to Brambles and then to Helicopter Resources Pty Ltd. More on that later.

Before I go any further, I should explain how these weird machines actually manage to get airborne and also introduce some terminology that is unique to the helicopter.

The controls consist of a central control column or stick similar to what you would see on say an Auster or Tiger Moth.

This is called the cyclic control and effectively moves the pitch on the main rotor blades differentially. If we looked at a two bladed helicopter that was moving forward in the hover and we froze the blades in the fore and aft position, in crude terms the aft blade would have a greater pitch angle than the forward blade, thus tilting the “disc” forward and dragging the fuselage ahead. (Now an aerodynamic expert will find fault with this simplified explanation but it suits to understanding how the cyclic pitch controls works).

Next is a lever normally to the left of the pilot’s left knee. This is the collective or collective pitch control which when pulled up increases the rotor blade pitch angle equally on both blades. Increase the collective whilst on the ground and the helicopter becomes airborne to

a hover position depending on the amount of collective pulled. Then we have the tail rotor pedals which change the pitch of both blades on the tail rotor.

Most helicopters have hydraulic assistance to all three controls … sort of like power steering … if the hydraulics are shut off or they fail then the machine is, in most cases, very hard to control. In the bigger machines there are dual hydraulic systems. Losing both hydraulic systems in a multi engine helicopter results in a complete loss of control as the pilot or pilots do not have the strength to move them. So, with a normal hydraulics ON situation, we have control of the helicopter both in hovering flight, transitioning flight (known as "translational") and forward flight.

At no time do we have any feel in the controls unlike an aeroplane in which the controls become heavier with increasing airspeed.

**The "office" of an Enstrom as elegantly described by Peter[1]**

Most of the smaller single engine machines require that you have your hands and feet on the cyclic and rudder pedals at all times. The collective usually has a friction device that will hold it in the last position you have pulled it to. As such you really only have one hand free for radio tuning, annotating your flight plan or rolling a cigarette! (I gave up smoking 22 years ago !!) The bigger machines do have autopilots (and co-pilots) which allow hands off flying although we have only started to see really good auto pilots and glass/digital cockpits in the last twenty years or so. Next time you fly Jetstar, glance in at the cockpit of the A320 as you enter the cabin and you will see the almost exact instrument panel of the EC225, a 19 passenger/11 tonne helicopter. (I flew the 225 in the closing days of my career until it suffered a fatal accident in 2016.) The same French company builds both the A320 and the EC225.

Enough aerodynamics for the time being.

**Enstrom F28A**[2]

In January 1975 the main bridge across the Derwent River was struck by a ship and partially collapsed. If you arrived at Hobart Airport and wanted to go to the city, the only way was by a longish car journey via Bridgewater or later on via a ferry service from Bellerive. Enter Peter Hookway with 3 helicopters. One was a 5-seater turbine powered Bell Jetranger and two (piston engine) Enstrom F28A with only 2 seats. The Jetranger was a delight to fly and the Enstrom an utter pig although that is probably not a fair comment given the design and engineering that went into it.

It did have one very unique feature. The control rods for the main rotor went up internally through the mast! I never completed my endorsement on the Enstrom and was not unhappy about that.

So, for 20 bucks, a passenger could fly from Hobart Airport to the Casino car park which is now built over with extensions to the Casino. I came on the scene and did my first Casino shuttle in the Jetranger VH PHA on 25 September 1977. By this time, Peter had acquired another Jetranger VH AJD. The Enstroms were on their way out … thank goodness.

[1] Photo by Vertical Advance Helicopters
[2] Ibid

# Andrew Delfosse Badgery, That First Flight at Hobart, Tasmania

*By O. Bartrop*

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:[1]

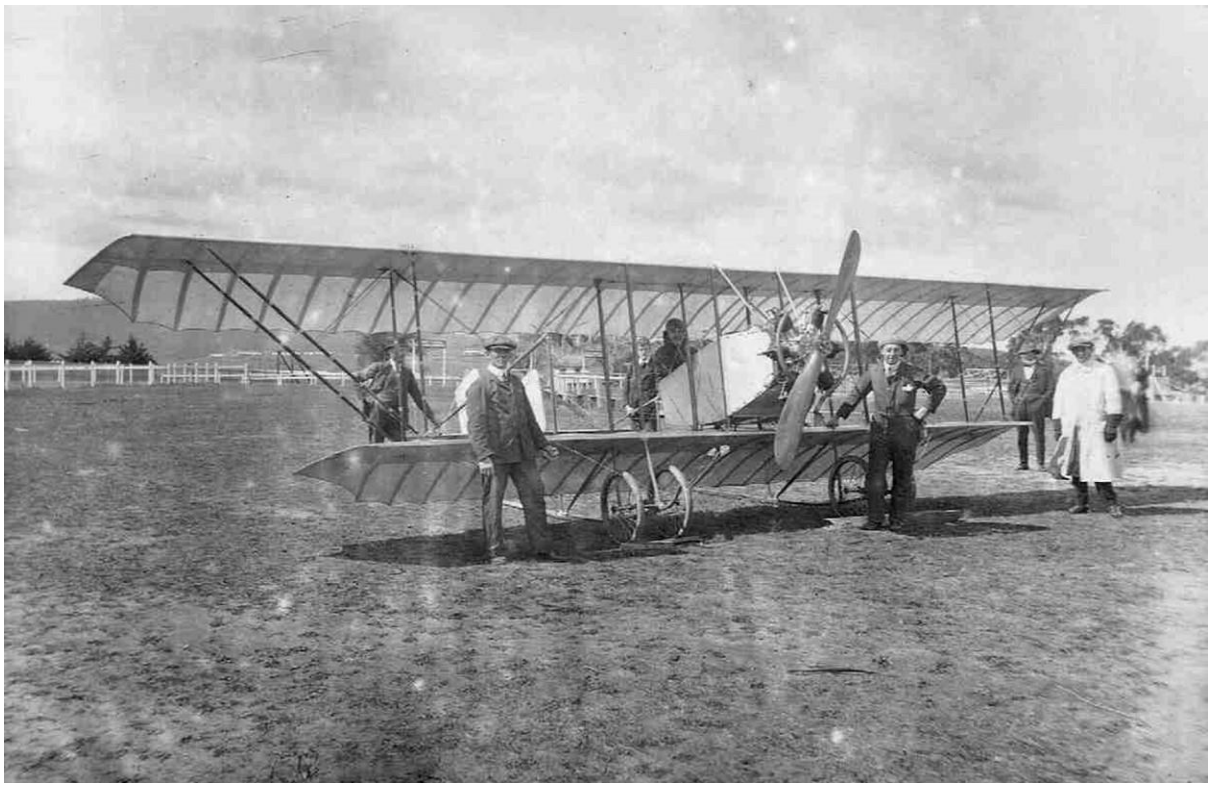
> *It will come as a surprise to Hobart residents to learn that a famous aviator is in their midst and that his intention is to make a series of flights over the city during the next few days.*
>
> *The aviator is Mr Delfosse Badgery, an Australian who was born at Sutton Forest, near Sydney. He arrived 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.

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 4165ft on the western side of the city, was to some extent a windbreak against westerlies.



**Delfosse Badgery in his Caudron aircraft in Hobart, Tasmania[2]**

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 WellingMy ton 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.

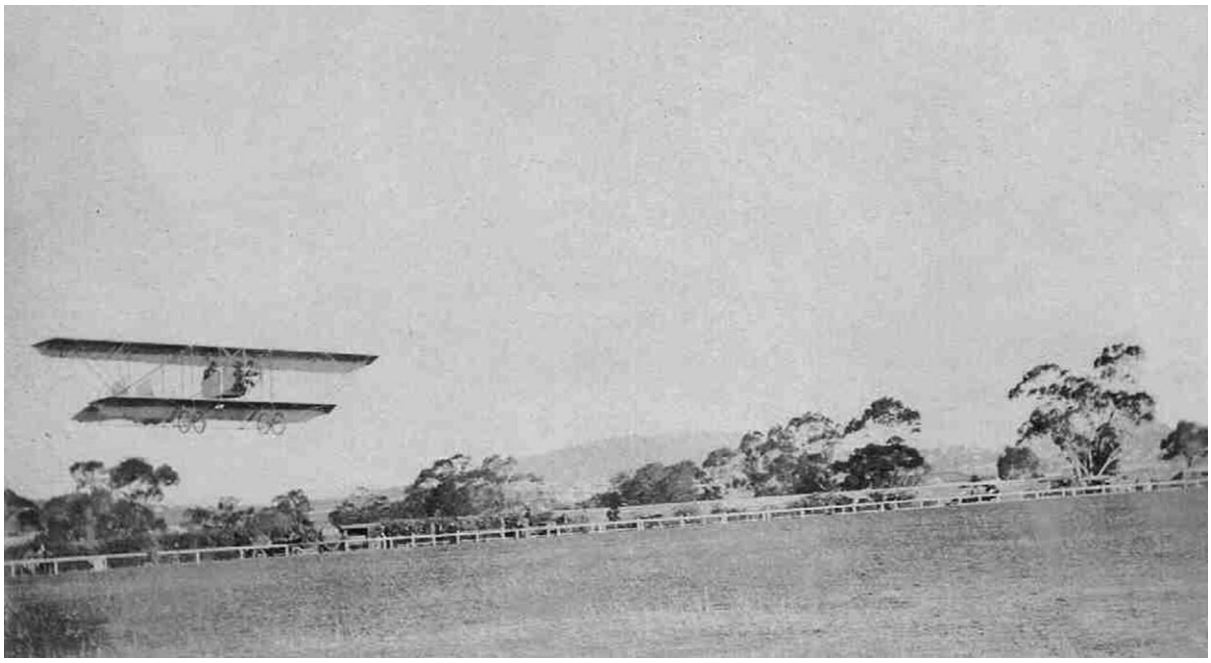
While this work was in progress, the wind increased to gale force during the afternoon, with gusts of up to 70 mph (112 kph). In one squall, the roof of the tent was torn, whilst in that same squall, the large light-pine packing case, which was empty outside the tent, was caught by the wind, lifted twenty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

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.

It is of historical interest for accuracy that this first aeroplane flight in Tasmania was made above the Elwick Showground, 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 realised, 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 1400ft 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.



**Delfosse Badgery flying at Elwick, Hobart, Tasmania, 10th September 1914[3]**

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.

Therefore, whilst it was only a rehearsal or press preview, it was the first flight ever conducted by a powered aeroplane in Tasmania.

*(Editor's note – Whilst other flights for entertainment of crowds paying a nominal fee were conducted at Hobart and Launceston showgrounds the preceding article details the first flight of a powered aircraft in Tasmania).*

[1] Courtesy of Daily Post Archives
[2] Courtesy of Pinterest Photos
[3] Courtesy of the author

# The Development of Smithton Aerodrome 1931 - 1944

*By C Byrne*

In January 1931, the first licenced aerodrome in Tasmania at Western Junction Aerodrome at Launceston was in use. The Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) had its two new Gypsy Moths to conduct pilot training and Australian National Airways of Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm had started passenger services from Essendon in their Avro Ten's.

During 1931, the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) established an aerodrome at Brighton in Southern Tasmania. Work also commenced to developed aerodromes at Latrobe, Wynyard and Smithton. Latrobe aerodrome was the first one to be finished, as described in our last newsletter. In this newsletter, the development of Smithton aerodrome is described.

An Aerodrome Committee was formed in Smithton in late September 1931 following the visit by Captain George Matthews of Matthews Aviation. He was planning to start his Bass Strait passenger service using his amphibian planes (these were flying boats which also had retractable landing gear). Matthews was impressed by the sheltered nature of the Duck River estuary on which to land his amphibian on water. He was also impressed by an adjacent area of ground:[1]

> *"About a mile out of Smithton," he said, "is an area which, from an operator's point of view, could be converted into one of the best aerodromes in the Commonwealth, provided that the ground was adequately drained and sufficiently grassed. From a practical flying man's point of view the area is ideal, as the approaches are low, and road and rail facilities are in close proximity."*

The land was then vested to the Municipal Council from the State Government for a nominal rent.

The site was described as a "ti-tree bog" which required clearing and draining.[2] Work started quickly on clearing about 35 acres of the site. Locals donated 200 days of labour by sending the unemployed to the site and paying them themselves. An overdraft, which was guaranteed by locals, was also used to fund the clearing work.

By February the following year, sufficient land had been cleared for a R.A.A.F. Wapiti to land on Saturday 27 February 1932. The R.A.A.F. had sent three Wapiti's and three Bulldog's from Point Cook to Tasmania on a training flight, which coincided with the Air Pageants held around the state.

Work continued during 1932 on preparing the aerodrome surface and installing an extensive system of drains.

Victor Holyman, of the newly formed Tasmanian Aerial Services, visited Smithton on 13 October 1932, and after inspecting the ground, he thought it suitable for use by small planes. He recommended that the Committee immediately apply to the Civil Aviation Branch for an aerodrome licence for which would allow his company to begin a passenger service from Western Junction to Latrobe, Wynyard and Smithton using the *Miss Currie*.[3]

A provisional licence was granted and he inaugurated the North West coast service on 14 November 1932:[4]

> *When Capt. V. C. Holyman left the Western Junction aerodrome at 9 o'clock yesterday morning in the D.H. Fox Moth "Miss Currie" for Smithton, a valuable air service from Launceston along the North West-Coast was inaugurated.*
>
> *The Fox Moth took the air in bad weather conditions, and on account of the poor visibility Captain Holyman was forced to fly the machine down the Tamar Valley, and then to follow the coast at a low altitude to the mouth of the Mersey. Continuing up the Mersey Valley, Captain Holyman effected the first landing of the flight at Latrobe.*
>
> *Papers were dropped at Ulverstone, Burnie and Stanley. and continuing the- flight along the Coast, the plane was landed at Wynyard, and shortly afterwards took off again for Smithton.*
>
> *Captain Holyman left Launceston at 9 am. Latrobe at 9.40 a.m., and Wynyard at 10.05 a.m., and arrived at Smithton at 10.30 a.m. The return flight was commenced at 4.10 p.m., Wynyard being reached at 4.45 p.m., and Latrobe at 5.10 p.m., and the machine landed at the Western Junction aerodrome at 6.15 p.m.*

The official opening of the Smithton Aerodrome was held on Friday 17 February 1933, with over 3,000 people attended. The opening coincided with various air pageants that were being held in the state, which resulted in a good selection of planes attended.[5]

Civil Aviation granted a licence for all types of aircraft in April 1933.[6] Matthews Aviation commenced its Bass Strait service in early 1933 and used Smithton aerodrome as its northern base.

During the winter of 1933, the surface proved to be too wet for use by large planes as it had not consolidated enough.[7] More drainage work was started, and the three runways set out in a triangle were established.

Civil Aviation approved the aerodrome for all types of planes in late 1934, when it was reported:[8]

> *Up to the present slightly in excess of £1,000 has been spent in the construction of the aerodrome. Up to the present the club has not received any assistance from either the State or Federal Governments; the whole of the amount so far spent either having been contributed voluntarily by the public or raised by means of various efforts.*

*Some idea of the magnitude of the work undertaken by the members of the aerodrome committee may be gained from the fact that the drainage system comprises practically seven miles of drains. An open drain five feet deep, five foot wide at the top and two feet wide at the bottom, almost encircles the ground, its length being three and a quarter miles; while an underground drainage system extending almost all over the ground absorbs another three and a half miles of drains.*

*The east-west runaway is 810 yards in length, and that running north and south 710 yards; while to the north west and south-east there are runaways of 700 yards. The predominating characteristic of the ground is the safety factor, the approach from any direction being level for miles round, and the turfy nature of the soil ideal for landing, and fogs are practically unknown.*

*The process of levelling and draining has been completed, and a new road has been constructed from the Montagu road to the hangar. The ground is ready for the reception of all aircraft, and a bowser, in which there is stored 400 gallons of petrol, provides a convenient service.*

In September 1933, Tasmanian Aerial Services introduced the DH.84 *Miss Launceston* and established their Bass Strait Service, flying either by King or Flinders Islands. When flying the western route, it would call at Smithton if there were passengers to embark or collect (and the landing surface was not water-logged).

With the awarding of the airmail contract to Tasmanian Aerial Services in early 1934, Matthews Aviation ceased its Bass Strait services.

In late December 1934, the Commonwealth Government provide funds to Smithton, Wynyard and Latrobe to improve their aerodromes. Smithton received £500, while Latrobe received £250 and Wynyard £850.[9] This was the first Government funding received by Smithton.

This funding was used to start developing all-weather gravel landing strips. Beginning in March 1935, the work would take 6 years to complete. Initially a bullock drawn plough was used to remove about 300 mm of the surface, to a width of 25 m, which was then filled with in gravel.[10]

While the gravelling work was being undertaken, Holyman's Airways (as Tasmanian Aerial Services was now known as), could not use the aerodrome on its Bass Strait service.

Work continued on the first gravel runway, and it was nearing completion at the end of 1935.[2] This allowed Holyman's Airways, and the later A.N.A., to call at Smithton on their Bass Strait service if there were passengers to embark or collect.

In October 1937, the Commonwealth Government granted Smithton another £750 to continue work on the gravel runways.[11] By the end of 1941, gravelling the three runways had

been completed, with the final work being undertaken by the State Public Works Department.[12]

The Circular Head Municipal Council borrowed funds in 1939 to repay the £520 overdraft held by the Aerodrome Committee in developing the aerodrome. To this time, in total £2,500 had been spent developing the aerodrome, (about $0.25M today), £1,200 from Government grants, £800 collected locally by Committee, and the £520 overdraft. A small aerodrome rate was then applied to the annual Municipal Council rates over the next 5 years to repay the loan.[13]

The Municipal Council then transferred control of aerodrome to the State Transport Commission in early 1944 after paying off the remaining development loan.[14]


**The three runways at Smithton Airport today (Google Earth)**

Note that in the 1940s, the three runways were of similar length. The extension to the runway in the lower part of the image was built in the mid-1950s.

---

[1] *Burnie Advocate*, 24 September 1931, Page 2
[2] *Launceston Examiner*, 18 December 1935, Page 14
[3] *Launceston Examiner*, 14 October 1932, Page 9
[4] *Launceston Examiner*, 15 November 1932, Page 7
[5] *Burnie Advocate*, 18 February 1933, Page 7
[6] *Circular Head Chronicle*, 26 April 1933, Page 2
[7] *Launceston Examiner*, 4 October 1933, Page 6
[8] *Burnie Advocate*, 26 November 1934, Page 5
[9] *Burnie Advocate*, 29 December 1934, Page 2
[10] *Circular Head Chronicle*, 3 April 1935, Page 2
[11] *Burnie Advocate*, 20 October 1937, Page 8
[12] *Circular Head Chronicle*, 19 March 1941, Page 1
[13] *Burnie Advocate*, 14 September 1940, Page 8
[14] *Launceston Examiner*, 12 February 1944, Page 4

# Leviathans of the Air – Part 4 - The Tarrant Tabor

*By W. Dearing*

The Tarrant Tabor was a British triplane bomber designed towards the end of the First World War and was briefly the world's largest aircraft. It crashed, with fatalities, on its first flight.

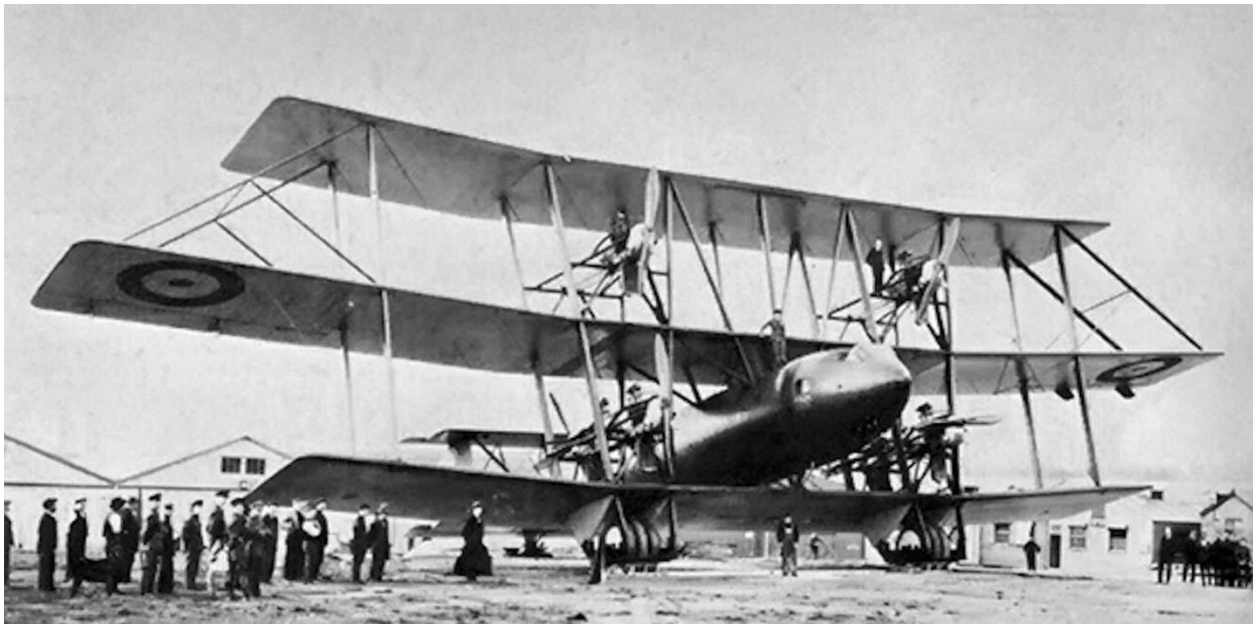


**Photo of only Tarrant Tabor Serial F1765**[1]

The Tabor was the first and only aircraft design produced by W.G Tarrant Ltd, a well-known property developer and building contractor at Byfleet, Surrey, which had been subcontracted to build aircraft components during the First World War. In late 1917 Tarrant assembled a design team, led by Walter Barling (hired from the Royal Aircraft Factory) and Marcel Lobelle (hired from Martinsyde), to design a very large long-range heavy bomber, capable of bombing Berlin. Captain Percy Townley Rawlings DFC formerly of the RNAS was General Manager of the department

Construction was primarily of wood with conventional tri-plane strut-braced wings and a monocoque fuselage built up from ply veneers. Circular Warren girders joined with longerons, formed the fuselage structure.

The Tabor was originally planned as a biplane powered by four 600 hp Siddeley Tiger engines. However delays in development of the engines meant these would be unavailable and so the aircraft was redesigned to use six 450 hp Napier Lion engines to give a similar power/weight ratio, and a third upper wing added.

The final design had a wingspan of over 131 ft (40 m), with the central wing of much greater span than the other two. The upper wing was 37 ft (11 m) above the ground. Four engines

were mounted in push pull configuration pairs between the lower and middle wings with the other two mounted in tractor configuration between the middle and upper wings, directly above the lower pairs. The tractor engines used two-bladed propellers, the pushers four-bladed ones. Ailerons were fitted only on the middle wing, which Flight magazine commented on as possibly affecting their efficiency.

With the end of the war conversion to a passenger aircraft was planned.

The monocoque construction gave a large open space within the fuselage, described as the length of a cricket pitch in Flight magazine. The pilots were situated in the nose, with a partition separating them from the engineer's station and the engine controls mounted on either side of the opening in the partition. The fuel tanks were in the top and sides of the fuselage to maintain the clear internal space.

The aircraft was built at Farnborough in a large balloon shed. Work on the aircraft as a bomber had stopped at the end of the First World War, with the design altered to allow it to be used as a commercial or transport aircraft. The Tabor's maiden flight was from the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough on 26 May 1919.

Wheeled out at daybreak, the Tabor, with two pilots (Captain Frederick Dunn AFC with Rawlings as his assistant pilot) and five others (Captain Wilson of the Air Ministry, Lt Adams in charge of engines, superintendent of the department at the RAE Mr Grosert and two mechanics) was taxied around the landing field in a "mile-wide circle" using only the four lower engines. Satisfied with the behaviour of the aircraft the crew decided to take-off. The tail was off the ground but it was still running on the main wheels, intermittently lifting off. When the top two engines were started the aircraft pitched forward, burying the nose into the ground and injuring all on board with the pilots severely injured. Fortunately, there was no fire as someone, presumed to be one of the pilots, turned off the engines. Rawlings died after reaching hospital and Dunn died of his injuries two days later.

**The aftermath of the one and only flight[2]**

Later analysis suggested that the upper engines were so far above the fuselage that they forced the nose down when driven up to full power. The situation may not have been helped by the addition of 1,000 pounds (450 kg) of lead ballast in the nose, against the wishes of Tarrant.[3]

**General characteristics[4]**

- **Crew**: Six
- **Capacity**: 9,000 lb (4,100 kg) load as passenger aircraft
- **Length**: 73 ft 2 in (22.31 m)
- **Wingspan**: 131 ft 3 in (40.02 m)
- **Height**: 37 ft 3 in (11.36 m)
- **Wing area**: 4,950 sq ft (460 m2)
- **Empty weight**: 24,750 lb (11,250 kg)
- **Gross weight**: 44,672 lb (20,305 kg)
- **Fuel capacity**: 10,000 lb (4,500 kg)
- **Powerplant**: 6 × Napier Lion W-12 water-cooled piston engine (four tractor, two pusher), 450 hp (336 kW) each.

**Performance**

- **Maximum speed**: 110 mph (177 km/h)
- **Range**: 1,200 mi (1,932 km) estimated with 10,000 lb fuel and 9,000 lb load
- **Endurance**: 12 hours
- **Service ceiling**: 13,000 ft (3,970 m)
- **Time to altitude**: 33 min 30 sec to 10,000 ft (3,050 m)

**Armament**

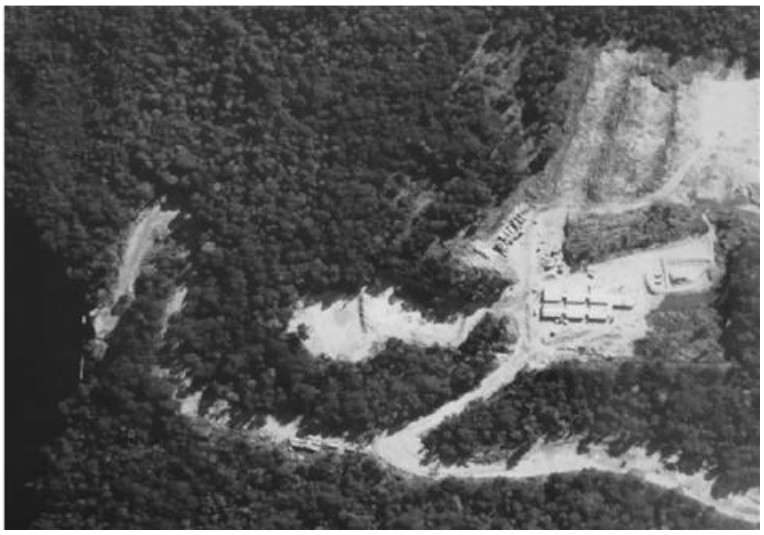
- **Bombs**: approximately 4,600 lb (2,100 kg) planned.

---

[1] Courtesy of Pinterest
[2] Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarrant_Tabor
[3] Ibid
[4] Idid

# Do You Remember?

## Second 'Spy' Mission over Tasmania on 8th of April 1983



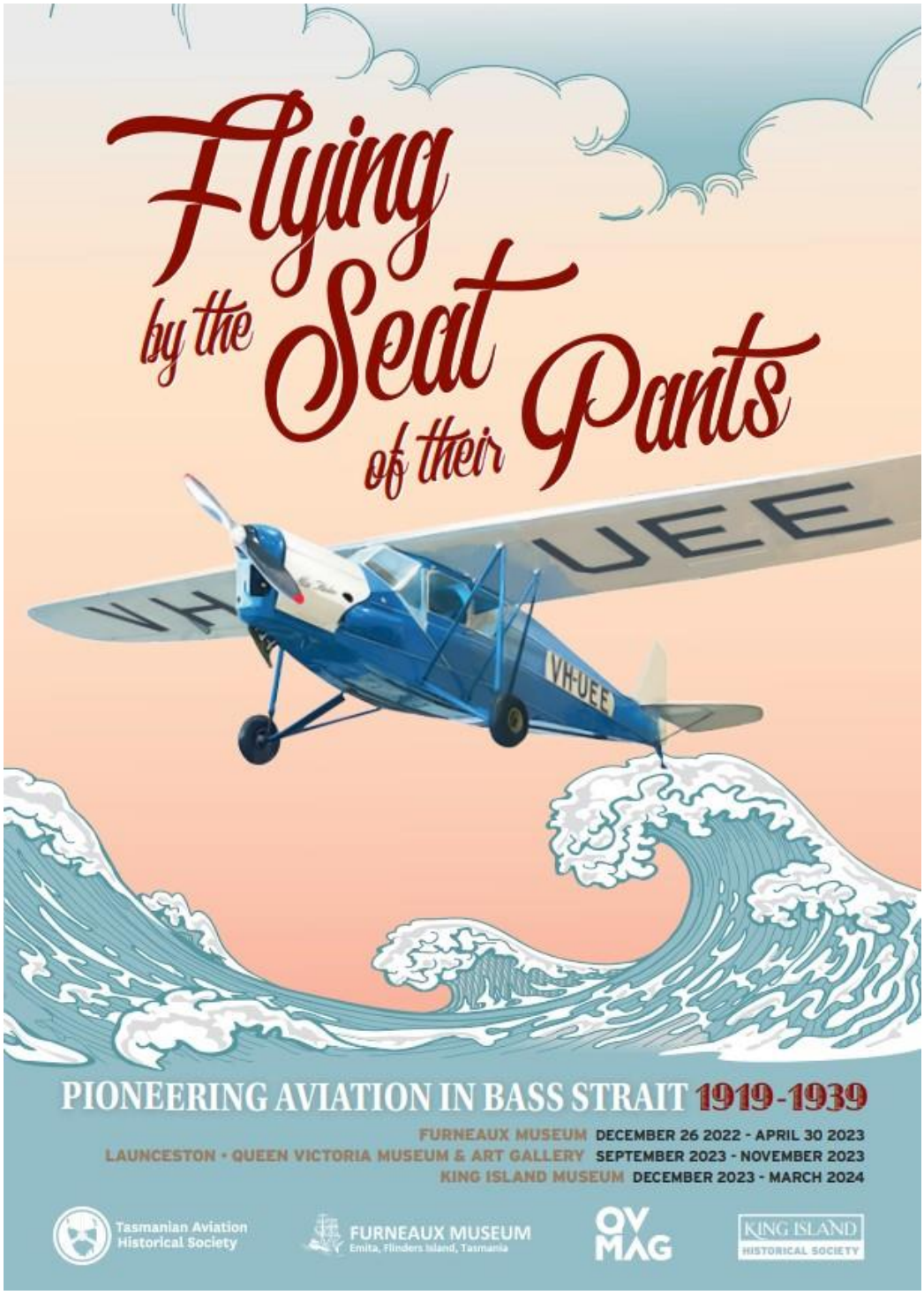
On this day, an RF-111C from No 6 Squadron based at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland, made a photographic reconnaissance of the Franklin Dam site in Tasmania, after a Mirage failed to carry out the task successfully the day before.

Whereas the Mirage flew at an altitude which was easily observed from the ground by anti-dam protesters, construction workers, Tasmanian Government officials and police, the F-111 completed its mission at 30 000 feet and no-one was any the wiser. After the story was broken in a Sydney newspaper two days later, however, there was uproar in Federal Parliament. This was directed principally against the Attorney-General in the newly-elected Labor Government, Senator Gareth Evans, who had ordered the operation without informing the Prime Minister or Minister for Defence, nor consulting appropriate Defence figures. Evans was henceforth known as 'Biggles'—the name bestowed on him by the Australian media.

**RAAF Vampire jet at Wynyard Airport photographed in front of the then Wynyard Control Tower during the Town's 1950 Air Pageant (QVMAG Collection)**

## Next Years Upcoming Events

### TAHS Presents "Flying by the Seat of their Pants"



## Harold Gatty Memorial at Campbell Town

In collaboration with members of the Campbell Town Museum and Information Centre, the two organisations will commence a restoration programme on the Harold Gatty Memorial that commemorates this great Tasmanian Aviator.

## "IN THE AIR" Seminar – 8th September 2023

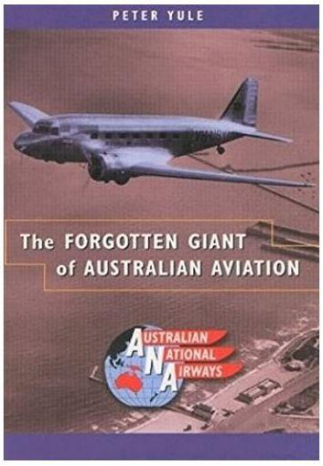
Following the success of this year's function, a further seminar is planned next year. The venue, at the Launceston Church Grammar School remains the same, with numerous key note speakers and a couple of surprise we will talk about later.

Bookings and further details will be advised closer to the date.

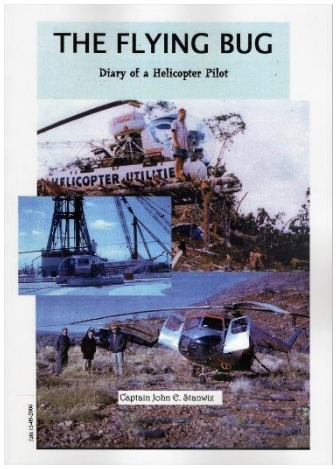
## The Classifieds

| Individual Articles are Available from our Website | |
|---|---|
| **Article** | **Link** |
| Tasmanian Aviation Tragedies - The DH.86 Miss Hobart Incident | TAHS2022.021 |
| First Flight in Tasmania by Delfosse Badgery on 10 Sepetmerb 1914 at Hobart | TAHS2022.014 |
| The Development of Smithton Aerodrome 1931 - 1944 | TAHS2022.020 |

## Available at our Website




**The Story of Holyman's Airways and Australian national Airways. $50**




**The complete diary and photohraphs of pioneer Tasmanian Helicopter Pilot John Elson Stanwix (1932 – 2014) $70**


**Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society Caps $20.00**


**Tasmanian Aviation Pioneers Postcards**

**$10 - $20**

Please visit our Website Shop for more details

# *SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!*