



# Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society

*Preserving Tasmania's aviation history*



## ***“ROARING FORTIES”***

***OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN  
AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY INCORPORATED***

**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 20 - DECEMBER 2024**

**WEBSITE: [WWW.TAHS.ORG.AU](http://WWW.TAHS.ORG.AU)**

**EMAIL: [info@tahs.org.au](mailto:info@tahs.org.au)**

## **TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Welcome to the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of our quarterly Newsletter “Roaring Forties”.

### **TAHS OFFICE BEARERS 2024**

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### ***In this issue:***

Aviation in Australia was well developed by 1930, except in the island state of Tasmania. There had been numerous visits to the state by planes from the mainland, but without an operational aerodrome, there were no planes operating routinely in the state.

This all changed in November 1930, two DH.60 Gipsy Moths VH-ULM & VH-ULN, were assembled at the new Western Junction Aerodrome at Launceston for the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section). Now the Aero Club could commence flying operations and train new pilots in Tasmania.

In 1931, commercial flights from Melbourne with Australian National Airways (operated by Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm) flew for six months. The following year, commercial flights from Tasmania to Flinders and King Island started. Then in 1933, Bass Strait services with the mainland resumed and have been operating ever since.

The Aero Club quickly acquired a third plane, a DH.60 Cirrus Moth VH-UAU to service the huge demand Tasmanians had to fly. They would operate six Gipsy Moths up to the start of the Second World War, when its operations ceased for its duration. Two of these planes still exist today.

In this newsletter our **Guest Editor, Lindsay Millar OAM**, will tell some of the stories of the Gipsy Moths in Tasmania, both the Aero Club planes, plus other visitors to the state.

We acknowledge the excellent book, *Aussie Moths, De Havilland D.H.60 Moths in Australia* by Bruce A Winley (1997), which also provided supporting information used in the newsletter.



## ***THE de HAVILLAND MOTH PLANES***

In the mid-1920s, the British de Havilland aircraft manufacturer introduced the new twin seat single engine biplane which had designation of DH.60 Moth. These planes were very successful and used extensively for pilot training.

The planes also incorporated the name of the engine they used. The early Moths used the Cirrus engine, thus the “Cirrus Moth.” Later Moths, manufactured from late 1928, used the de Havilland “Gipsy” engine, thus the “Gipsy Moth.”

The early planes had a plywood fuselage and wings. The later planes had a metal framework and doped fabric fuselage, which were known as Metal Moths.

These Moths were used extensively in the late 1920s and early 1930s, before the slightly bigger DH.82 Tiger Moth arrived in Australia in 1935.

By 1932, over half the aircraft on the Australian Civil Register were DH.60 Moths, and it was used extensively by the different state Aero Clubs.

## ***MOTHS USED BY THE TASMANIAN AERO CLUB***

Five Gipsy Moths and one Cirrus Moth were used by the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section), which was renamed the Tasmanian Aero Club in 1936.

VH-ULM (1930 – 1944)	VH-UMD (1934 – 1944)
VH-ULN (1930 – 1939)	VH-UVO (1936 – 1939)
VH-UAU (1932 – 1938) (Cirrus Moth)	VH-UNQ (1937 – 1944)

By 1938, with five operational Gipsy Moths, (the Cirrus Moth had been sold), the Aero Club operated two planes in the south of the state, two in the north and have one in reserve / undergoing maintenance.

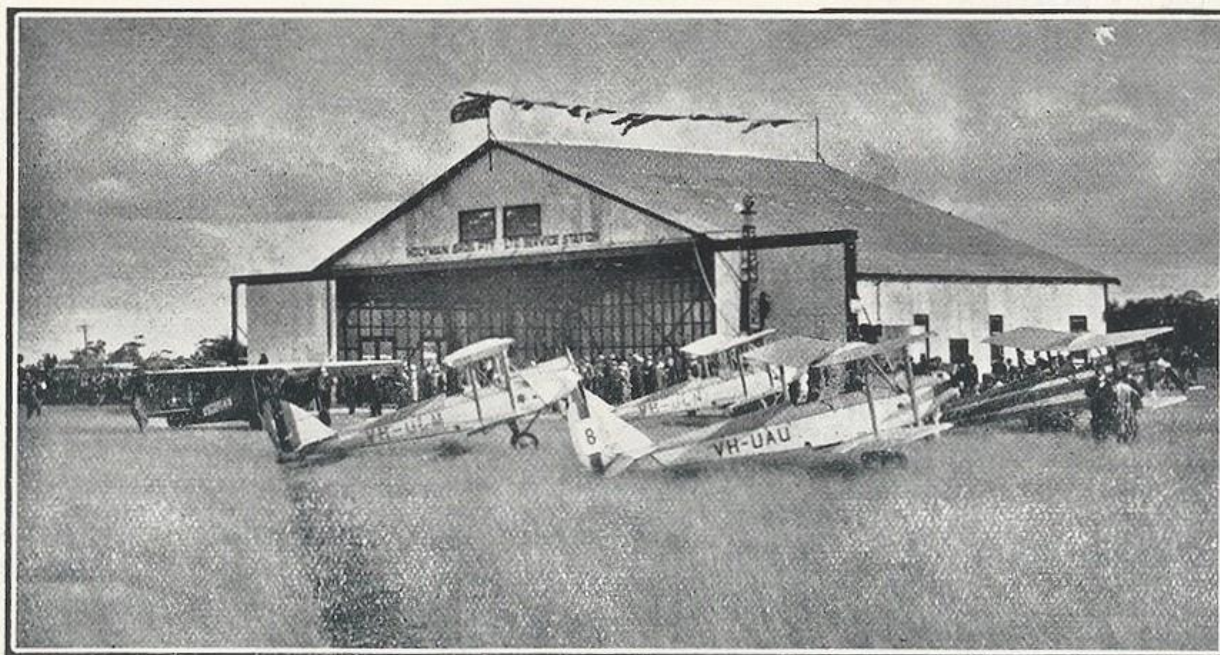
Two Moths were lost to crashes in 1939, so at the outbreak of the Second World War, the Aero Club had three operational Moths.

When the Aero Club facilities at Western Junction were used by the RAAF to establish the No 7 Elementary Flying School, their three Moths were placed into storage at Cambridge aerodrome.

In December 1944, the Moths were sold to the Royal Victorian Aero Club for £1,200 and flown to Melbourne, where they were used for pilot training. After the war, they were then sold to a private owner.

Two of the Tasmanian Aero Club Moths survive today, VH-ULM and VH-ULN.

After the Second World War, the Tasmanian Aero Club purchased war surplus Tiger Moths and recommence operations flying operations. The history of the Tasmanian Aero Club was presented in TAHS Newsletter No 11 and 13, which are available on our [website](#).



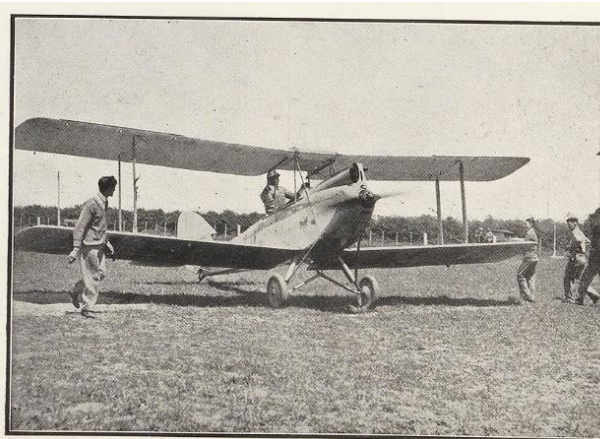
Some of the aircraft outside the hangar.

(L – R) The Desoutter *Miss Flinders* (VH-UEE) and the three Aero Club Moths, VH-ULM, ULN & UAU, in front of the new Holyman Hanger (now Hangar 17) at Western Junction, 1933.  
(Tasmanian Weekly Courier, March 3, 1933)

### ***A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GIPSY MOTH VH-ULM***

Built in England by De Havilland at Stag Lane, Middlesex in August 1929 as a Gipsy Moth DH.60M, (Metal Moth), with de Havilland Serial Number 1403. This was one of several planes purchased by the Department of Defence for allocation to Aero Clubs to undertake pilot training. VH-ULM (along with VH-ULN) was leased to the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) in November 1930 at a “peppercorn” rent.

VH-ULM and VH-ULN were shipped to Launceston and assembled at Western Junction. The first to fly was VH-ULM on 23 November 1930 with Captain Joe Francis at the controls. It was first aircraft to fly for the Aero Club and the first aircraft to fly from the new Western Junction Aerodrome.



Captain J. Francis takes the 'plane on its first flight.  
[Photos by S. Martin]

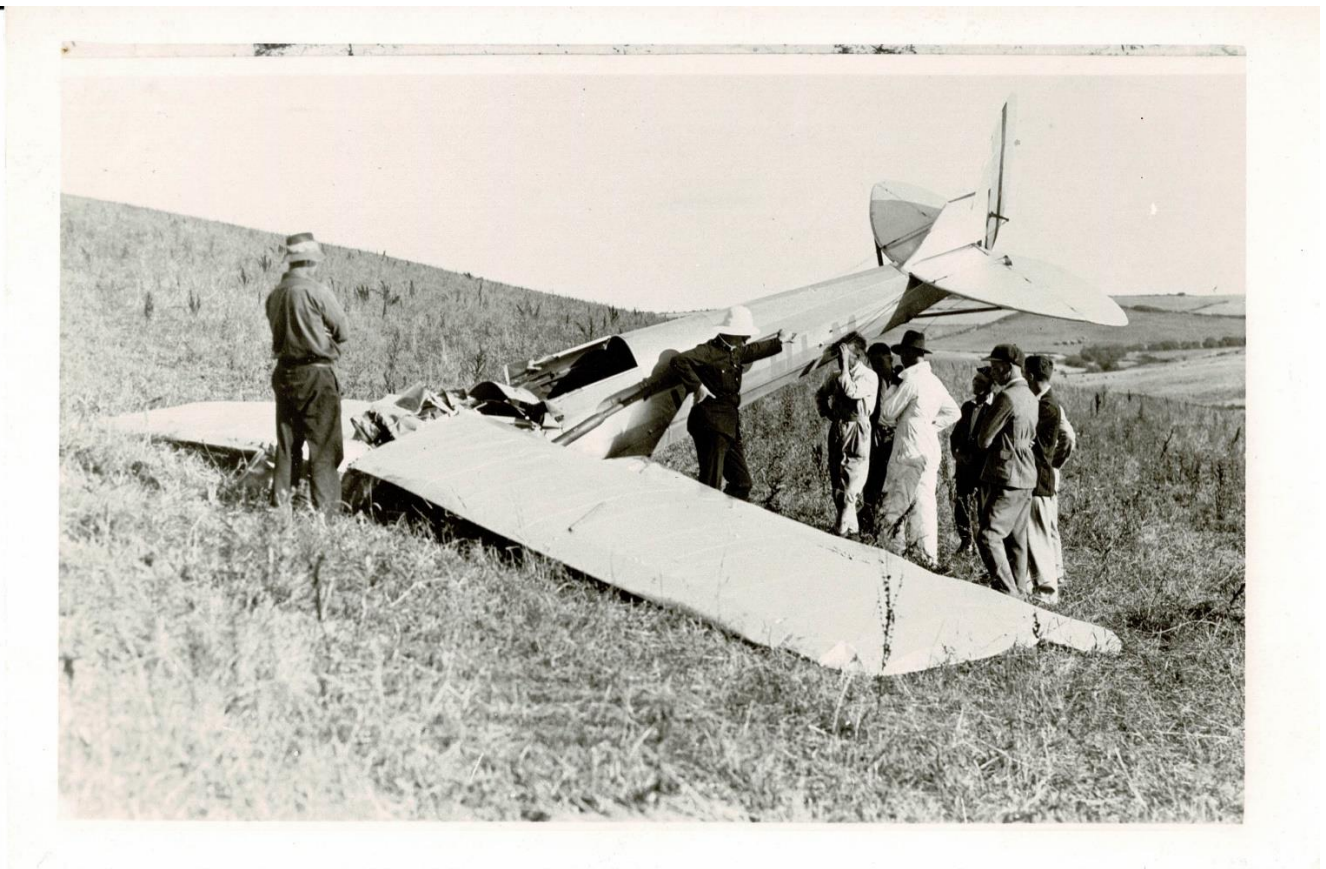
(Tasmanian Weekly Courier, November 26, 1930)

In late 1930, Charles Kingsford Smith and Chales Ulm were very prominent Australian aviators, having flown from the USA to Australia in 1928. They were operating passenger services from Brisbane to Sydney to Melbourne with the (first) Australian National Airways in 1930. (They would extend this service to Western Junction in early 1931).

The registration VH-ULM was noted by the Aero Club, as detailed in the Launceston *Examiner* article on 24 November 1930:

*"Yes, Charlie Ulm would have given a finger to own her," said Mr. J. Stubbs, newly appointed ground engineer of the Tasmanian section of the Australian Aero Club, on Saturday, gazing admiringly at the neat Gypsy Moth he was assembling at the Western Junction aerodrome. But it was not because of her worth as a plane alone. The chief attraction of the machine for Mr. Ulm would be that it has been registered with the letters VH-ULM. The VH indicates that it is an Australian plane, and the ULM is for special identification purposes. The Moths are registered with letters in alphabetical order, e.g., VH-ULL, ULM, ULN; and it was just by luck that this particular plane was consigned to the local flying body. Advice concerning the registration was cabled to Australia, and Mr. Ulm knows of the circumstance. It is natural that the ground staff at the aerodrome should now speak of the machine as "Charlie."*

On 3 February 1935, while being flown by Launceston Pharmacist "Bonnie" McCausland, VH-ULM failed to recover from a spin and crashed. McCausland was seriously injured and ULM extensively damaged. The Aero Club purchased the damaged aircraft from the Department of Defence for £50 then rebuilt it at a cost of £350.



**Wreckage of VH-ULM wreckage 03 Feb 1935 (Lindsay Millar Collection)**

Up to the Second World War, the Aero club had operated six Moths, flying about 10,500 hours in total. Of these six, VH-ULM was the only plane operated by the Aero Club for this whole period, with over 2,500 hours flying hours.



**VH-ULM (Lindsay Millar Collection)**

The plane was one of the three Moths sold to the Victorian Aero Club in December 1944. After the war it was sold and had about 12 different private owners and had about 5 different colour schemes.

In November 1972 it was purchased by Joe Drage and joined his collection of vintage and historic aircraft at Wodonga, Victoria. Its registration was cancelled on 21 January 1977. The collection was moved to Wangaratta at “Drage Airworld” in 1985. VH-ULM was the oldest plane in the collection and was placed upon static display.

In 2002, Drage Airworld closed and the planes were sold. Brisbane neurosurgeon, pilot, vintage aircraft owner and aviation enthusiast Michael Redmond, purchased ULM for \$52,000. The aircraft was moved to his hangar at Caboolture QLD, joining his DH.82A Tiger Moth and other memorabilia.

### ***The Restoration of VH-ULM***

Michael realised that he would need to carry out a full rebuild. He began dismantling, inspecting parts and sourcing new wing spars from New Zealand and certified aircraft grade Stika spruce and birch ply from Alaska and Finland. The engine was sent to a company “Borg Sorenson” in Victoria for a full overhaul and Michael began making new wing ribs and collecting parts required for the restoration.

Realising that ULM was the first aircraft to fly for the then Australian Aero Club Tasmanian Section and the first to fly from Western Junction aerodrome in November 1930, Michael decided to restore the aircraft to 1930’s Aero Club colours and specification.

I was able to provide our Clubs historical records and photographs, including a hand-coloured photograph of a Club Gipsy Moth by renowned Launceston photographer, H. J. King.

“Bonnie” McCausland’s son also provided his log-book and a section of fabric complete with the registration, removed from the 1935 crash site. These enabled the correct colours for the restoration to be established.



By 2008 Michael realised that work was taking too long and moved the project to restoration specialists ‘Sandora Aviation’ at Caboolture to complete.

In 2010 the airframe was assembled ready for the new fabric, engine and instrument installations and all the other essential parts fitted. This work was completed in early 2012. The aircraft was painted to represent the original 1930’s scheme. The massive amount of paperwork was completed, and ULM was ready to fly.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2012, superbly restored, DH.60 Gipsy Moth VH-ULM, (painted to represent its colours with the Aero Club in Tasmania in 1930), flew again after 26 years of static display and restoration. The aircraft was flown by Engineer – Pilot Bert Persson.

VH-ULM is now probably one of the finest quality Gipsy Moth restorations in the world and is probably in better than brand new condition. Michael is to be congratulated for his dedication and hard work and planning that has seen one of Tasmania’s and Australia’s most important historical aircraft return to flying condition.



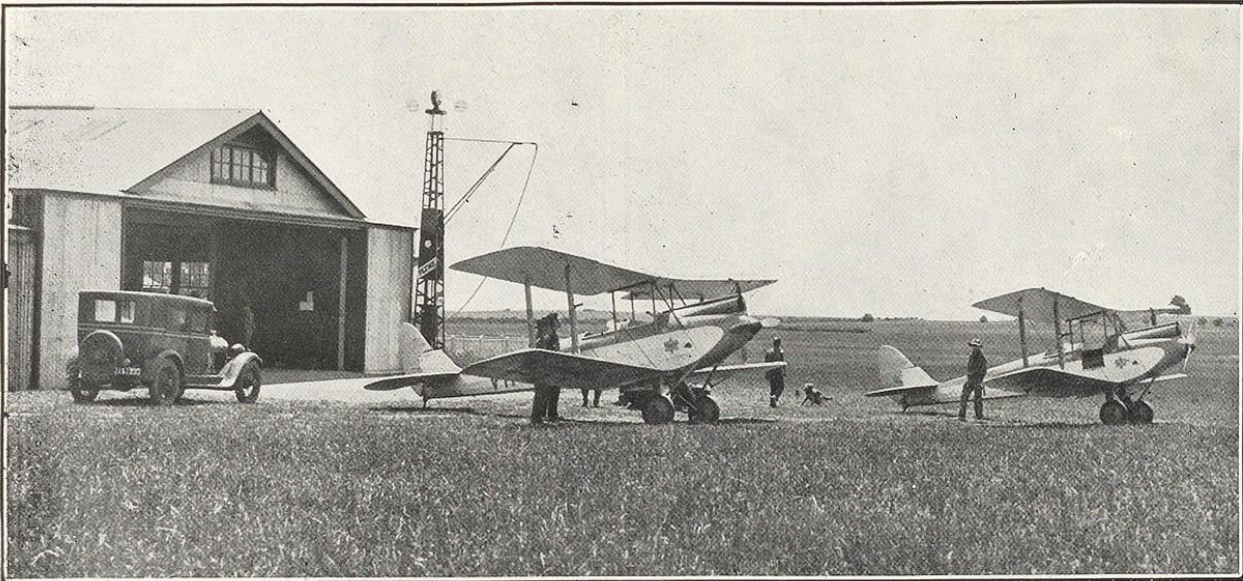
Michael has now retired and has decided to sell VH-ULM. In keeping with his comments when commencing the restoration, he has given first offer of purchase to the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society to provide the opportunity for ULM to return to her first home base, Western Junction, now Launceston Airport.

## ***A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GIPSY MOTH VH-ULN***

(Along with VH-ULM), VH-ULN was the second plane leased to the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) by the Civil Aviation Branch (of the Department of Defence) in November 1930 at a “peppercorn” rent. It was first flown by Captain Charles Martin on 30 November 1930 (a week later than VH-ULM).

It was an updated DH.60M (Metal Moths) with a Gipsy engine, with de Havilland Serial Number 1404.

VH-ULN was gifted to the Aero Club by the Civil Aviation Board in 1937.



The Aerodrome, Western Junction, the terminal airport for Tasmania, showing the two club machines, ULN and ULM.

(Tasmanian Weekly Courier, March 4, 1933)



VH-ULN in flight in Tasmania (Lindsay Millar Collection)





A “manufactured” photograph from the Third Air Pageant at Western Junction on 28 February 1933 by the Photographer H J King. The two planes have been superimposed onto a image of the aerodrome.  
(Lindsay Millar Collection)

VH-ULN crashed into Frederick Henry Bay at Cambridge on 16 July 1939, as described in the following report from the Hobart Mercury on 17 July 1939.

### ***AEROPLANE IN WATER***

#### ***Pilot Able to Walk Ashore***

#### ***Cambridge Mishap***

*Losing flying speed, a Moth aeroplane owned by the Tasmanian Aero Club crashed into shallow water on Pittwater, near Cambridge aerodrome, about 4 p.m. yesterday. Although injured, the pilot, Mr. M. A. MacGoun, of Carlton St., New Town, was able to walk about half a mile through the water to the shore.*

*Mr. MacGoun afterwards desired to return to the aeroplane with Aero Club members who went out to ascertain the extent of the damage. However, he was taken to the Royal Hobart Hospital and admitted with injuries to his head and face, and suffering from shock. His condition last night was regarded as fairly serious, but he was comfortable. A senior member of the club, Mr. MacGoun was engaged in a normal Sunday afternoon flight. During a manoeuvre described by an officer of the club as a "left hand gliding turn," the machine lost flying speed. The pilot apparently almost had the machine under control again, when a wing touched the water, which is shallow for a long distance from the shore. The aeroplane swung round and crashed into the water.*

*Aero club members and other persons witnessed the accident. Hurrying to the pilot's assistance, they met him wading through the water. Both wings of the Moth, which is the club's original machine, were broken, and other damage was done. However, a club officer stated last night that it would be possible to repair the aeroplane. It was partly submerged after the accident, and an effort to salvage it will be made today.*

*As a result of the mishap the southern section of the Aero Club is left without a machine in commission. Of four other machines that the club owned two recently were involved in accidents at Woodbury and Western Junction respectively, one has been dismantled for routine airworthiness examination, and another is in use in the North.*

The plane was not repaired, and its registration was cancelled.

## ***A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CIRRUS MOTH VH-UAU***

The third Aero Club Moth was an older plane, (Serial Number 614) with the wooden fuselage and the Cirrus engine. It was first used by the R.A.A.F. with the Serial A7-13 on 7 May 1928 and was configured as a seaplane at the 1FTS (No 1 Flying Training School) at R.A.A.F. Point Cook in Victoria.

After being converted to a land plane, it was transferred to the Civil Aviation Branch (of the Department of Defence) on 2 September 1932 and re-registered as VH-UAU. The plane was then loaned to the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section).

The Civil Aviation Branch gifted the plane to the Aero Club in 1937 on the condition it be used for pilot training or be sold and replaced by a plane used for this purpose. This allowed VH-UAU to be sold in 1938 and another Gipsy Moth acquired to give the Club a fleet of metal moths with Gipsy engines.

After its time with the Aero Club, it had a number of mainland owners before crashing at Barellan NSW on 14 Aug 1943. Its registration was then cancelled.

The plane would later be restored and is on static display at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.



**VH-UAU at the Powerhouse Museum, prior to restoration (Lindsay Millar Collection)**

The Powerhouse Collection includes a series of detailed photographs of the plane, which can be viewed at this link: <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/208108>

## ***THE Visit of ULM and UAU to Northwest Tas***

The following article from the Launceston *Examiner* on 9 September 1932 describes the visit of both Moths to the new aerodromes at Wynyard and Latrobe on the Northwest Coast of Tasmania. The impact the new Aero Club planes had on the Tasmanian public and the enthusiasm the public had for the new activity of flying is clearly evident.

### ***Visit to North-West***

#### ***Progress of Activities***

*Two machines of the Tasmanian section of the Australian Aero Club visited the North West Coast yesterday and landed at Wynyard and Latrobe. They were the VH-ULM piloted by Mr. W. F. Stewart, and the recently acquired machine, VII-UAU piloted by Mr. C. W. B. Martin. The purpose of the visit was to give added stimulus to the marked enthusiasm for aviation prevailing on the Coast, and to give North-Western members of the Aero Club an opportunity to have some flying in the club machines. Mr. J. Stubbs ground engineer at Western Junction, and a representative of "The Examiner" also made the trip.*

#### ***Good Flying Conditions***

*The machines took off from Western Junction about 8.25 a.m. In dull weather with a slight southerly breeze and headed straight for Latrobe. Flying conditions were good, and visibility good enough to enable the observer to get an impression of the surrounding country within a radius of some thirty miles. The rich rural districts made a splendid picture with their strips of green showing land under crops, and pieces of chocolate soil left by the plough. The present season has produced an abundance of wattle blossom, and the golden trees flashing in the occasional rays of the morning sun completed a scene of beauty which would be difficult to surpass.*

#### ***At Wynyard***

*Latrobe was reached about 9.10 a.m., and after circling over the town several times the machines passed on to Devonport and continued along the coastline to Wynyard, where a successful landing was made at 9.45 a.m. The party was met at the Wynyard Aerodrome by local members of the Aero Club, and the local president (Mr. A. Waterworth) went for a flight over Burnie and the surrounding districts. Copies of "The Examiner." which had been taken in one of the machines, were made available to the people of Wynyard. and the early arrival of the publication was greatly appreciated by those able to secure copies.*

*After spending two hours at Wynyard, the machines left for Latrobe, where they arrived after 40 minutes flying.*

*A number of flights, totalling about two hours, were made by Latrobe members of the Aero Club, and those who went aloft included Captain J. Laker, Harbour Master for the Mersey Marine Board, who took the opportunity of examining the port from the air. From his observations he was able to gain a general idea of the state of the Mersey, and this should be of assistance to him in his work on the river.*

*Mr. Martin left Latrobe some time before Mr. Stewart and returned via Frankford, and the Tamar, arriving at Western Junction about 5.15, whilst Mr. Stewart flew direct and landed about 5.45 p.m. On the homeward trip some beautiful views of the Tamar were obtained, the*

*rays of the sinking sun throwing the surrounding hills into bold relief and sending reflections of superb colouring from the surface of the water.*

### ***The Machines***

*Both machines performed excellently, the ULM once more demonstrating its capabilities of speed and reliability. The new plane, the UAU, although not quite as powerful as the other, did all that was asked of it, and ran very sweetly. Mr. Martin was very favourably impressed with the performance of the machine and said that its lightness made it a treat to handle.*

### ***Interest Manifest***

*Although the visit was made on a week day, the enthusiasm of those who were present at the two aerodromes made it evident that the activities of the Tasmanian section of the Australian Aero Club are increasing, and the desire to fly is spreading amongst the older members of the club as well as the more youthful: The visit was doubtless appreciated by the children of the smaller state schools along the Coast, as much as anyone as when each building was being passed, the inmates could be seen hurrying from every available exit to get a look at the planes.*

*It is hoped to arrange another visit at some date in the near future, when an endeavour will be made to secure a day more acceptable to members of the club, and the public, who for various reasons, were not able to avail themselves of the opportunity, to fly yesterday.*

## ***A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GIPSY MOTH'S VH-UMD, VH-UVO and VH-UNQ***

### ***VH-UMD***

VH-UMD was a DH.60M Metal Moth, Serial Number 1377. It was first registered in South Australia in September 1929, before it was purchased by the Tasmanian Aero Club in 1934 having had about 400 hours of use

It was one of the three planes sold to the Victorian Aero Club in 1944. Its registration was cancelled in 1947.

### ***VH-UVO***

Another DH.60M Metal Moth, Serial Number 1496. It was first registered to the Vacuum Oil Company in May 1930 and named "Plume" which was a description of the company logo. It was purchased by the Tasmanian Aero Club in May 1936.

It crashed at Western Junction 18 May 1939 and was not repaired, as described in the following Launceston *Examiner* article:

## ***MOTH SPINS TO EARTH***

### ***Pilot Seriously Injured***

*When a Tasmanian Aero Club Moth plane, in which he was making a practice flight, spun into the ground from about 1000 feet yesterday afternoon, Roger Burbury, aged about 23, of Inglewood, Andover, suffered extensive injuries. He was admitted to the Campbell Town Hospital in a serious condition.*

*Burbury took off alone from the Antill Ponds aerodrome. Before he left the ground, he said he would "practice a few spins." Watchers on the ground saw his plane spin down from 3000 feet to about 1000 feet where it was straightened out. Then, to their surprise, the plane began to spin again and made several turns before it hit the ground with terrific force.*

*The angle at which the plane struck suggested to people who inspected the wreckage afterwards that Burbury had been trying to resume level flight when the machine hit the ground.*

*The plane was extensively damaged, the wings and fuselage as far back as the aft seat being hopelessly wrecked.*

### ***Finger Amputated***

*Burbury, who was bleeding from cuts about the face, was extricated from the damaged cockpit and hurried to the Campbell Town Hospital. At the hospital it was found that he was injured and had, bones fractured in several parts of his body. The little finger on his right hand was so badly injured that it was amputated.*

*It was announced from the hospital last night that Burbury was being treated for concussion of the brain, shock, fractures to the pelvis, nose, left wrist, and to both legs at the ankles, and lacerations to the nose, face and both legs and arms.*

*Captain K. M. Frewin, the aero club's southern instructor, who had charge of the operations at Antill Ponds yesterday, said last night that he was unable to account for the accident, although it appeared that Burbury had underestimated his height and was unable to recover before he hit the ground.*

*Burbury, who was the southern winner of last year's Gatenby flying scholarship, Captain Frewin added, was a particularly sound pilot. Burbury obtained his A licence only recently and he was making a practice flight to secure a passenger-carrying endorsement to his licence when the accident happened.*

### ***Instructor in Air***

*Captain Frewin was in the air giving dual instruction to another member of the Burbury family when the plane span into the ground and he did not see the machine crash.*

*The plane involved was one of the club's fleet of Gipsy I metal Moths and its registration letters were VH-UVO. It was bought by the club from the Vacuum Oil Company in 1936 and before it came to Tasmania had been flown by Captain F. W. Haig, the company's aviation officer, in all parts of the Commonwealth and in New Zealand.*

*The aero club began instruction in the Midlands only recently and before it was able to do so had to secure a temporary licence for the Antill Ponds aerodrome. The field, which in 1931 was used as an emergency landing ground for the Fokker monoplanes maintaining the Bass Strait air service, was delicensed a few years ago when the owner of the property decided to make other use of the land.*

*The accident yesterday was the first in which an Aero Club member has been injured for four years. The club has never had a fatal accident.*

### **VH-UNQ**

A metal moth, Serial Number 1464, it was first registered to the Shell Oil Company in April 1930. It was later purchased by the Victorian Aero Club in 1935. The Tasmanian Aero Club purchased the plane in July 1937. (The plane would effectively replace the Cirrus Moth VH-UAU in the Aero Club's fleet).

Was it sold to Victorian Aero Club in 1944. It crashed at Sale Victoria 14 April 1946.

## ***OTHER GIPSY MOTH'S TO VISIT TASMANIA***

### ***The First Gipsy Moth to visit Tasmania***

The first Gipsy Moth to visit Tasmania was by P.G. Taylor in his Gipsy Moth VH-UIH which was configured as a seaplane. The visit was described in the Hobart *Mercury* on 03 May 1929:

#### ***SEAPLANE AT HOBART***

#### ***FLIGHT FROM N.S.W.***

*An unusual visitor in the form of a De Havilland Gipsy Moth seaplane stole into Hobart as dusk was approaching last evening. The arrival of the plane was quite unexpected, as the trip was just a pleasure jaunt, and unannounced. The plane was piloted by Captain P. G. Taylor, of Pittwater, Sydney, and with him was Mr. R. F. Oakes, of Wellington, N.S.W.*

*The aviators left Broken Bay, North Sydney, on Wednesday for Narooma. At 8.30 yesterday morning a start was made for Tasmania. They proceeded down the coast of New South Wales and stopped at Paynesville to take petrol on board. From here they cruised along the Victorian coast, finally branching off, and making for Deal Island, in Bass Strait. They did not stop there, but continued on, going down the west coast of Flinders Island and Barren Island. After this they struck the East Coast of Tasmania, and followed it, finally reaching Hobart at 5.30 p.m. As they were flying over Storm Bay the lights of Hobart were noticed. The River Derwent was followed until Hobart was reached. A landing was then made at the Battery Point Shipyards. The landing was a particularly meritorious one, being made in the dusk by a pilot who was unacquainted with the harbour into which he had descended. Good weather was experienced most of the way, a little trouble being met while crossing Banks Strait.*

*Interviewed last evening Captain Taylor stated that the trip was solely a pleasure one. It was connected with no commercial enterprise. He hoped to remain in Tasmania for two or three days. A return would then be made to Sydney via Melbourne. Both were members of the N.S.W. Aero Club and had served in the war as members of the Air Force. He was particularly impressed by the East Coast of Tasmania. It was a great relief to reach this sheltered area after the buffetings received in Banks Strait.*

(Banks Strait lies between the Northeast of Tasmanian and the Clark and Cape Barren Islands).

### ***The Visit of Norman Chapman in Gipsy Moth VH-UKG in 1931***

Norman Chapman grew up in Hobart. After finishing school he entered the merchant navy, gaining a Master Mariner Certificate. He learnt to fly in 1926 with the Victorian Section of the Australian Aero Club.

As he could not secure an aviation job, he turned to “barn storming” in Tasmania, offering joy flights for a fee of 1/3 per mile (about \$6/mile today). He purchased a Gipsy Moth, VH-UKG, named *Viking*, in February 1931 and flew it to Tasmania in March 1931 with his business partner Lieut. Haultain.

They attended the opening of the Western Junction Aerodrome on 2 March 1931, when the First Aerial Pageant was held. His first passenger at the Pageant was Reginal Page, who is believed to have been the first paying passenger to be flown by any aircraft on the day.

Over the next seven months, they toured the state offering joy flights and undertaking pilot training. The *Viking* was the first plane to land in Queenstown.

They planned to return to Melbourne flying the *Viking* via Flinders Island, conducting some flights for a few days on the way. Their flight from Bridport to Whitemark was abandoned at Swan Island lighthouse due to the bad weather. After spending the night on the beach, they flew on to Whitemark the next day (1 September 1931), landing in a paddock. As their visit was unannounced, they took the locals by surprise.

As the Launceston *Examiner* reported on 7 September 1931:

*On Tuesday they were busy taking passengers for flights. On Wednesday morning they flew to Emita, and landed in Mr. A. R. Cooper's paddock, returning to Whitemark for dinner. In the afternoon the plane flew to Vansittart Island, and landed there, afterwards returning to Whitemark, and took up half a dozen or so passengers.*

*On Thursday morning the airmen again flew to Emita, but after taking up a few passengers for flights had to land at "Settlement" with Mr. Geof. Cooper as passenger, owing to engine trouble.*

It took five weeks to repair the plane. Chapman then flew it to Melbourne on 17 October 1931, landing on Deal Island on the journey.





*Norman Chapman and Viking on Flinders Island 1931. (Furneaux Historical Society)*

### ***The Shell Oil Tasmanian Survey Flight 1931 by Huxley and Owen***

In mid-1931, Tasmania's first aerodrome at Western Junction had just opened and the Aero Club had commenced flying operations. Many municipalities around the state were considering establishing grass flying strips or aerodromes. The Shell Oil Company assisted by bringing a Gipsy Moth to Tasmania where its local representative, Captain Fred Huxley and Lieutenant Harold Owen, flew to numerous locations around the state and offering advice on suitable locations.

It is probable that the plane was VH-UNQ (which would later be purchased by the Tasmanian Aero Club), but this has not been confirmed.

The planning for the trip was summarised in this Hobart *Mercury* article on 18 May 1931:

#### ***GOLDEN SHELL'S MISSION***

##### ***TOUR OF TASMANIA.***

*The Shell Co. of Australia Ltd., Hobart, has received advice from Melbourne that the company's Gipsy Moth plane Golden Shell, will be flown from Melbourne to Launceston tomorrow, provided weather conditions are favourable. Flying-Officer Harold Owen will pilot the machine, which, will probably land at Bridport to refuel. The aeroplane will be in Tasmania about a fortnight, and during that time will visit all the chief towns in Tasmania with a view, to locating the best landing grounds and definitely establishing them for civil aviation purposes, in conjunction with the. Tasmanian section of the Australian Aero Club.*

*The tour of Tasmania is being undertaken solely with the object of encouraging civil aviation in Tasmania. The towns visited will probably be: Launceston, Scottsdale, St. Helens. Swansea, Sorell, Richmond, Brighton, New Norfolk, Bothwell, Hobart, Kempton, Oatlands, Campbell Town, Tunbridge, Ross, Deloraine, Devonport, Latrobe, Ulverstone, Burnie, Penguin, Wynyard, Stanley, Smithton, Sheffield. Westbury, Longford, and possibly Strahan. Captain F. G. Huxley, the Shell aviation officer for Tasmania, will meet Flying-Officer Owen on arrival at Launceston, and will accompany him on his tour of the State. Flying-Officer Owen was associated with Flying-Officer Moir in a flight from England to Australia.*

## ***The Crash of Matthews Aviation Gipsy Moth VH-UNL at the Opening of Western Junction Aerodrome 1931***

Matthews Aviation, based at Essendon, purchased the Gipsy Moth, serial number 1418 in late 1929. It was named the *Skylark*, VH-UNL. In March 1930 it crashed at Essendon, killing the pilot and passenger. The plane was rebuilt and flown again in late 1930.

Matthews Aviation were contracted to provide personnel to the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) to operate its first Gipsy Moths and train pilots from late 1930. They brought VH-UNL to Tasmania in early 1931 to support the operation and explore commercial opportunities.



### ***The Skylark of Matthews Aviation at Western Junction (Tasmanian Weekly Courier, March 4, 1931)***

Soon after arriving in the state, at the official opening of the Western Junction Aerodrome, tragedy struck when the Gipsy Moth crashed, killing its passenger and severely injuring the pilot, as detailed in this excerpt from *The Launceston Examiner*, on 2 March 1931:

*Unfortunately, the brilliant success of the pageant was shadowed by tragedy, as just before the last event was scheduled for decision a fatal crash occurred. Mr. L. M. Johnson (Matthews Aviation Company representative), who had flown with success in several of the competitions during the afternoon, was engaged conducting passenger flights in his Moth, "Skylark," when, with Miss Jessie Elizabeth Allen, aged. 37, as his passenger, he crashed in a field near the aerodrome and Miss Allen was killed instantly. The pilot himself was rather severely injured. The accident occurred in full view of a large section of the crowd, and when its serious nature became known the effect was immediately noticeable, a gloom being cast over the whole of the gathering.*

The plane was not rebuilt.

Johnson would recover and in 1932 he purchased VH-UEE *Miss Flinders* and inaugurated the first commercial air service from Tasmania between Western Junction and Flinders Island.

## ***The First Female Pilot to Fly Across Bass Strait (in a Gipsy Moth)***

Nancy Lyle from Toorak in Melbourne, was a painter and sculptor, visiting and studying in England twice during the 1920s as a young lady. She then developed a keen interest in aviation.

Nancy was the second lady pilot trained by the Australian Aero Club (Victorian Section). She qualified for her Class A Pilot's Licence in July 1929. Later she also qualified for the B pilot's licence. In April 1931, she purchased a Gipsy Moth, VH-UKV, which she named *Diana*. (The plane is in the Moorabbin Air Museum collection today).

Through her flying, Nancy achieved two aviation "firsts." She was the first female pilot to fly from Melbourne to Adelaide in October 1930. She was also the first female pilot to fly across Bass Strait in May 1933, as described in the Launceston Examiner on 6 May 1933:

### ***MYSTERY VISIT***

#### ***Melbourne Girl Flier***

### ***CROSSED BASS STRAIT***

*Launceston had a mystery visitor yesterday - Miss Nancy Lyle, a well-known Victorian aviatrix. By her flight Miss Lyle gained for herself the honour of being the first woman to fly a plane across Bass Strait.*

*She left Melbourne yesterday morning flying her own de Havilland Gipsy Moth plane, accompanied by the Matthews Aviation Co.'s two amphibians the Windhover and the Cutty Sark. The planes landed at King Island, where the amphibians took passengers for Hobart. Then the planes came on to Western Junction.*

*News of Miss Lyle's coming had preceded her, and soon after her plane passed over the town a representative of "The Examiner" got into telephonic communication with the aerodrome. Miss Lyle, however declined to answer the phone and deputed Captain J. Francis, instructor of the Tasmanian section of the Australian Aero Club, to inform the pressman that she had nothing to say. Upon being questioned further, Captain Francis said that Miss Lyle was going somewhere, but she did not say where.*

*A further telephone conversation with the aerodrome revealed that Miss Lyle had not signed the cross-country flight sheet, having already done so in Melbourne. (Captain Francis said that she, filled her plane with petrol and then left "heading towards the West Coast." He stated that the aviatrix said that she was going to see some friends. Miss Lyle did not have a passenger when she left the Launceston airport.*

*Mr. N. Chapman, who flew on to Hobart from Western Junction yesterday afternoon, stated last night that he thought that Miss Lyle was going to visit friends at Cressy. Enquires at Cressy last night revealed that the plane came low over the property of Mr. E. Scott-Young, but did not land. Mr. Scott-Young stated that the plane flew away again, possibly towards Western Junction.*

*Mr. Chapman stated that Miss Lyle was of a retiring disposition and did not like publicity.*

(Norman Chapman was the pilot of the Matthews aviation amphibian which operated passenger services across Bass Strait at the time, also flew on to Western Junction).

She returned to Melbourne by flying the same route five days later.



Tuesday 15 January 2025: Executive Committee Meeting – 6 p.m. Venue Glebe Helibase & Zoom.

Tuesday 11 February 2025: Information and Guest Speaker Evening - Details to be advised.

Tuesday 11 March 2025: AGM & Executive Committee Meeting - Details to be advised

Executive meetings are open to all members as observers (non-voting) via ZOOM or attendance in person.

***Remember if you have any historical articles you would like to share, just send us an email. Look forward to hearing from you!***

### ***NEXT NEWSLETTER MARCH 2025***

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