



**Tasmanian Aviation  
Historical Society**

*Preserving Tasmania's aviation history*



## ***“ROARING FORTIES”***

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

**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 21 – MARCH 2025**

**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 21<sup>st</sup> edition of our quarterly Newsletter “Roaring Forties”.

### TAHS OFFICE BEARERS 2024

<b>Patron:</b>	Robin Holyman	<b>Vice President:</b>	John Brett
<b>President:</b>	Andrew Johnson	<b>Secretary</b>	Chris Byrne
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Peter Manktelow	<b>Executive:</b>	Iain Pinkard
<b>Executive:</b>	Lindsay Millar		

### *In this issue:*

We have two articles from the early days of Western Junction Aerodrome at Launceston.

Firstly, TAHS Member Mal Gibson tells the story of his father’s war service as a pilot in the RAAF, which included his training at 7 E.F.T.S. at Western Junction.

Then Kelvin Page shares the story of his father being the first passenger taken aloft at the opening of Western Junction aerodrome in 1931 by pilot Norman Chapman.

This leads onto an article from our *Flying By The Seat of Their Pants* exhibition, prepared with the Furneaux Museum, detailing the story of Norman Chapman. Included are the recollections of a young girl on Flinders Island, Iola Fowler, who describes the visit of Chapman in 1931, his crash and repairs made to his Gipsy Moth, including it being attacked by a bull.

**Right:** “*Flying By The Seat of Their Pants*” exhibition at the Stanley Discovery Museum (on display till the end of March)



The Harold Gatty Memorial in Campbelltown is undergoing a refurbishment at present, Wayne Dearing describes what is happening.

In this edition we start a new series by Ray Mudway on Air Crashes in Tasmania. In this edition, the focus is on the crashes in the 1920s and 1930s.

This newsletter was prepared by the Executive Committee. If you have any ideas for articles for future newsletters, please contact us.

***FLYING OFFICER ERIC WILLIAM GIBSON D.F.C. 410049 R.A.A.F.***

*By Mal Gibson*

Eric William Gibson was born in the western Victorian town of Nhill in 1915. After the death of Eric's father in 1934, the family moved to the Victorian township of Yallourn and Eric took up work in the electricity generation industry.

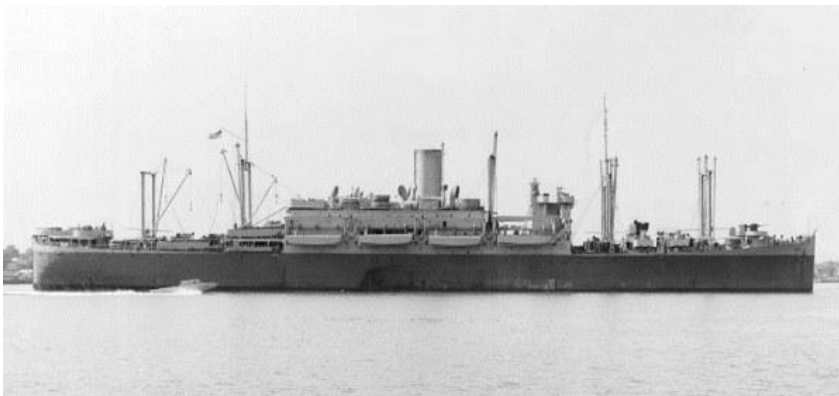


After the outbreak of World War 2, Eric decided to enlist, but because he was employed in a 'restricted industry', he was compelled initially to join a reserve service and he enlisted in the 114<sup>th</sup> Reserve Motor Transport Company as a truck driver for about 12 months. As the war progressed, the demand for servicemen increased, he was accepted into the R.A.A.F. After assessment, he was accepted for aircrew training as a pilot and was allocated the service number 410049.

He commenced the training course on 8 November 1941 at No. 1 Initial Flying Training School (I.F.T.S.) at Somers in Victoria. After completion of this course on 6 March 1942, he was transferred to No. 7 Elementary Flying Training School (7 E.F.T.S.) at Western Junction in Tasmania and learned to fly in Tiger Moth aircraft.

He enjoyed his time in Tasmania, in later life telling of their efforts to fly the Tiger Moths as close to zero ground speed as possible in very high winds.

After finishing 7 E.F.T.S. on 28. May. 1942, he was then due to go to Canada for more advanced training in Calgary at 3 S.F.T.S. (Service Flying Training School). Unfortunately, at that stage of the war, the supply of troop ships to convey troops was very limited and eventually they were forced to accept use of an elderly American troopship, the USS 'Tasker H. Bliss' even after it had earlier been rejected by the R.A.A.F. as unsuitable after inspection. Well known Australian author and actor, Charles 'Bud' Tingwell, who was also a trainee R.A.A.F. pilot and passenger on 'Bliss', along with Eric and just under three hundred other trainees. Tingwell later wrote of the journey from Sydney to Canada on the 'Bliss', in not very glowing terms in his book 'War Stories' (well worth a read).



The 'Bliss' was sunk three months later by German 'U' boats on 13/11/1942 off the coast of Morocco during the Allied invasion of North Africa.

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*No. 3 S.F.T.S. Course photographed in front of Cessna Crane aircraft.  
Eric is located standing in front of starboard engine propellor hub.*

Whilst training in Canada, Eric wrote several letters to relatives saying how much he enjoyed that country, even managing to find time to indulge in a little skiing. After completing the course, Eric and others were transported to the United Kingdom and he was then attached to various training units.

On 23 October 1943, he was assigned to his first operational squadron, 623 Squadron of No. 3 Group, located at Downham Market. The squadron was equipped with Short Stirling aircraft and had only been operating for about two months. Eric only completed two 'Gardening' (mine-laying) sorties before the squadron was disbanded and on 24 December 1943, he was then assigned to 115 Squadron, No. 3 Group, situated at Witchford. The squadron was equipped with Mk. 11 Lancaster aircraft which were fitted with Bristol Hercules radial engines in place of the usual Rolls Royce Merlin in-line engines. These aircraft were a variant manufactured under the fear of having the supply of Merlin engines disrupted by German attacks on the Rolls Royce factory. Eric spent the next six months with the squadron, during which time he flew both the Mk. 11 and eventually the Mk 1 after the feared shortage of Merlins did not eventuate.

He arrived at the squadron during the 'Battle of Berlin' when numerous bombing raids were being conducted against that city in an effort to destroy it along with German morale and industry. Over the next 6 months, Eric and crew flew a total of twenty-eight bombing sorties, seven of which were directed against the heavily defended capital, Berlin. His aircraft was attacked on at least four occasions by enemy aircraft and his instruments froze on one occasion but he continued to the target and bombed successfully. On another occasion, his aircraft was struck in an engine by an incendiary

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

bomb dropped from a friendly aircraft above. Luckily the bomb did not ignite and was found, still lodged in the engine bay, by the ground crew on their return. The bomb was defused and the nose weight given to a crew member, the Canadian rear gunner, as a memento. After the war, on a return sight-seeing tour, Eric visited the rear gunner in Canada and was presented with the nose weight. The family still retain that item.

On the night of 30 March 1944, about 780 R.A.F. aircraft, including those of 115 Squadron, were assigned to bomb the city of Nuremberg. Weather forecasts had predicted relatively little cloud cover enroute to and over the target, but these predictions did not eventuate and skies were relatively clear making the locating of attacking aircraft an easier task for the German defenders. A total of 96 Allied aircraft were shot down by ground fire and night fighters. Eric, in later years related that finding the target was made relatively easy by following the burning Allied aircraft on the ground.

On 18 April 1944, 26 aircraft of the squadron bombed the city of Rouen, but on their return to base were followed by German interceptor aircraft. Two of the returning bombers were shot down in the vicinity of the airfield with the loss of all crew members, but luckily, Eric's crew, and others, received warnings and luckily diverted to other airfields and subsequently returned safely.

The month of May 1944 saw Eric involved in seven raids on targets in France prior to the 'D' Day landings, the last being to Wissant on 2 June 1944. This raid saw Eric complete his 'Tour' of 30 sorties. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross which was presented to him by King George VI.

At the end of his tour, Eric became an instructor at various R.A.F. training establishments in England until the end of the war. He returned to Australia and his former employer, the State Electricity Commission of Victoria.



*Eric (centre) and crew at the completion of their tour, including his fellow Australian, F/O Ernest Maskell (410812) on his right hand side*

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### *REG PAGE – FACINATION WITH FLYING*

*By Kelvin Page*

Born in Upper Liffey in 1912, an interest in flying machines and flying developed at a young age. Moving to Stowport (near Burnie) for about four years he somehow came across Captain Fred Huxley and remembers seeing a wooden plane in a shop front at Ulverstone. He would later make his own, experimenting with different pitched propellers. He also built numerous kites with some of the local lads a little older than he. The family in 1920 moved back to his grandparent's farm at Cluan (near Westbury).

After four broken years of primary school (helping with harvest was more important than school) it was farm labour with his father Arthur. It took a few years of selling possum skins to buy his first bike and a new suit at age 15, just in time (5 May 1928) to ride 30 miles to Elphin Showground to watch Squadron Leader Bert Hinkler and Mrs Hinkler fly in and land.

Following is his detailed memory of that event for which the Bert Hinkler Museum sent a certificate of appreciation.

*It was Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1928 I had ridden my new bike into Launceston. It was the first time I had seen a plane land anywhere. About 10,000 people packed the Elphin showground that sunny day. Bert flew direct from Melbourne, climbed to 7,000 feet coming up the Tamar River to give Mrs Hinkler a more comfortable ride. When I first spotted the plane it was like two needles with a match head in the centre. I was trying to point it out to my family when a chap behind said this lad can see it coming and a murmur went like a wave behind me. It disappeared behind a cloud but a minute later it appeared over the top of that cloud and then a second cloud. There was a third small cloud and Hinkler dipped the plane under the cloud levelled out for a few seconds and dipped again. He didn't descend in a straight glide, but in sharp drops and levelling about 30 feet over the race track and the industrial building, opened up the motor right in front of the grand stand. Bert sitting in the front seat and Mrs Hinkler waving a hanky in the breeze as he climbed to 300 or 400 feet around the bottom side of the showground then dropping sharply swinging around in line with two white sheet markers drifting swiftly in with the tail to the left and left wing dipped. I think they call it a slide which gave Bert a clear view to level up at the last few seconds as he swept over the crowd and three pointed perfectly on the first sheet run south west, swung around, motor still running and levelling in front of a barbed wire cage. They closed the gate behind, climbed out put their hats on and looked as if they had just come in from the town centre. The hat Mrs Hinkler wore shaded her face.*

*I followed by newspaper all further movements. At Burnie he was unable to take off from the showground as it was too short so they folded the wings and wheeled the plane to the beach to allow take off.*

*A few years later Western Junction airdrome was started to be built followed by the assembling of two Gypsy de Havilland Moths. I rode over two or three times to watch progress. I have a photo taken sitting in the cockpit of VH ULM in 1930. The moth plane is in Drages Air Pavilion at Wangaratta in Victoria (at time of writing 1986).*

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



**Reg Page in VH-ULM, Western Junction 1930 (Page Family Collection)**

*It was 26th June 1986 that I visited Drages Air Pavilion. I saw there once again the old Gypsy de Havilland I watched being assembled at Western Junction in 1930-31 VH-ULM. I sat in it and had my photo taken. The plaque said "history unknown" so I put that straight with the staff in writing. Once again, I sat in the cockpit and had my photo taken.*

*Around 1929 I wrote to the Ballarat gliding club about purchasing a primary glider. Kit including assembly blue prints and launching rubber approximately 60 pounds. My parents thought that was crazy and I couldn't afford it without help as I received no pay for my farm labour other than keep. I wanted badly to fly, I rode over to Western Junction and spoke to Captain Francis, Mr Stubbs and Mr Hogarth were there also talking about the assembly. Captain Francis stated it would take up to 28 pounds to learn plus fitness check of 1 pound 1 shilling, annual membership 3 pound 3 shillings. I just could not find that money and again my mother said they didn't raise me to kill myself.*

*It was the first aerial pageant on 28 February 1931 that my brother Vince and I rode our bikes from Cluan to Western Junction. After a look around I was talking to a man who was flying a plane named the green moth, a nice-looking green plane with a white strip along the centre of the fuselage. I was told I would get a better ride now than during the afternoon. I asked Vince to hold my hat, climbed in, taxied out, turned into a westerly breeze and was up for my first taste of flying. I could see the steam train leaving Launceston. Coming up from Relbia Mr Chapman said to me "keep your ticket as a souvenir being the first joy rider on the opening day of the aerodrome, first airport in Tasmania."*

*I also went for a joy flight in the de Havilland Hawk Moth VH-UNW on 12 Feb 1932 at Western Junction 2nd aerial pageant.*

There may be some discrepancies with dates as dad wrote his memoirs mostly from memory and a few family diaries. I wish we could find that pageant ticket and know he had it in a family bible until a house move from Whitmore to East Devonport. Incidentally dad also came runner up in a quiz session of aviation history run by the Advocate Newspaper, mostly from memory and few reference books.

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



**Reg Page (third from left) in white shirt, about 1930 (Page Family Collection)**

On further examination of scrap book photos, a note on the rear of the plane Norm Chapman flew, a De Haviland Cirrus Moth DH60 plane VH-UKG owned by Fred Haultain dad referred to as the “green moth” says the plane I (RRP – Reginald Robert Page) first up on opening of airport at Western Junction. The photo Norm Chapman's daughter sent dad of Norm standing by the plane is referred to as the green moth. (Shown below) On the back of that photo it is VH-UKG taken on 15 Oct 1931 at Browns River Beach.



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Editors Notes

Fred Huxley was decorated Tasmanian World War I pilot, who would be central figure in the development of aviation in Tasmania in the 1920s and 30s. He flew a F.E.2b biplane across Bass Strait in January 1921 and then toured the state conducting joy flights until he flew back to Melbourne in July 1921.

The visit of Bert Hinkler to Tasmania in 1927 was organised by the new Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) to promote aviation, the new Aero Club and the establishment of Tasmania first aerodrome.

The Gipsy Moth VH-ULM of the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) was the first plane to fly off the new Western Junction Aerodrome in November 1930. It is still flying today and featured in our last newsletter. ([No 20](#), December 2024).

The Hawk Moth VH-UNW was owned by Hart Aviation in 1932 when it attended the second Air Pageant at Western Junction. It would later be used by Tasmanian Airways in 1934-1935 who operated a commuter service between Hobart and Launceston from August 1934 to January 1935.

### ***TASMANIA AVIATION PIONEER - NORMAN CHAPMAN***

In the preceding article, Reg Page recalled his joy flight with Norman Chapman at the first aerial pageant held in conjunction with the opening of Western Junction aerodrome in February 1931.

In this article, we detail more of the Norman Chapman story.

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

When the economic depression made it difficult to find positions in the merchant navy, Chapman turned to flying in 1931. He purchased a de Havilland DH.60 Gipsy Moth, VH-UKG, which was named *Viking* which he brought to Tasmania in February 1931 to conduct joy rides and pilot training, returning to Melbourne in October 1931.

After this he flew for Matthews Aviation during 1932 – 1934, including on their Bass Strait service. He was the first pilot to fly Bass Strait 100 times. When these services were halted in 1934, he joined Qantas in August 1934. Shortly afterwards, on 3 October 1934, the Qantas DH-50J *Atalanta* he was piloting crashed between Longreach and Winton. Chapman and his two passengers were killed.

His Obituary in the Launceston Examiner on 5 October 1934 details his aviation career:

*The news of the untimely death of Mr. Norman M. Chapman in the crash of the Atalanta in Queensland was received with general regret in aviation circles in Launceston yesterday. A native of Hobart, Mr. Chapman gained himself almost universal popularity during his flying career in Tasmania, first as the pilot of his own Moth, in which he made an aerial tour of Tasmania that has never been repeated, and later as the pilot of the Matthews Aviation Company's amphibian Windhover on the Melbourne-Launceston service.*

*Before entering aviation as a career, Mr. Chapman served a lengthy period as a steamship officer, gaining his master's certificate. It was no doubt due to his seafaring experience that he became recognised as one of the most skilful aerial navigators in Australia. He made a special study of*

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*the problems of aeronautical navigation and also held a wireless operator's licence in addition to his pilot's commercial licence. He had done 2400 hours flying at the time of his death.*

*It was in 1931 that Mr. Chapman brought his Gipsy Moth (VH-UKG), now the property of Mr. Stewart Devine, of Warragul (Vic.), to Tasmania, about the time of the first pageant at Western Junction. The Moth, at the time of its arrival in Tasmania was owned by Mr. Chapman, in association with Lieut. C. G. Haultain, now conducting a navigational school at the Essendon aerodrome, Melbourne. Following the Western Junction pageant, Mr. Chapman commenced a joy-riding tour of Tasmania that took him into almost every corner of the state. He landed the Moth on a dump at Queenstown, piloted it over the Great Lake in the middle of winter, and a photographer who was the passenger thus secured the first aerial pictures of the Great Lake country under snow. The Moth was landed in the vicinity of Maypoles in Hobart, a most unlikely place for an aerodrome, but nevertheless utilised by Mr. Chapman. He traversed the Midlands, the North-West, and the East and North-East Coasts, at some places using beaches and small fields scarcely big enough for the purpose with astonishing ease.*

*Flying the Moth back to Melbourne, he made the first landing of an aeroplane on Deal Island. Returning to Melbourne he secured a position as aviation officer for the Texaco Oil Company (Aust.) Ltd. and embarked on a long tour of Victoria. In November 1932, he obtained an appointment as pilot with the Matthews Aviation Company, disposing of his Moth and taking over duties as pilot of the Saunders Roe amphibian Cutty Sark. With the Windhover, then piloted by Mr. Frank Neale, Mr. Chapman piloted the Cutty Sark to Tasmania late in 1932, and while the Windhover came to Launceston to make arrangements for the commencement of the service from Melbourne he took the Cutty Sark to Strahan, landing a machine for the first time in Macquarie Harbour.*

*Mr. Neale severed his connection with the Matthews Aviation Company and Mr. Chapman was promoted to the command of the larger amphibian Windhover. It is in this connection that he will be best remembered as the genial and skilful pilot of the Windhover. During a year's operation he established a record that will be hard to beat. Mr. Chapman carried on for nearly a year before he missed a trip.*

*When the Matthews Aviation Company stopped running on the Bass Strait route, Mr. Chapman secured a position with the Qantas Airways of Queensland and notice of his appointment as a senior pilot on the new England-Australia service was only received in Launceston on Wednesday, about the same time as the report that he was missing.*

More information on is available at the [Chapman family website](#).

On his Tasmanian trip in 1931, he recorded a number of "firsts", including:

- The first plane to fly to land on the West Coast at Queenstown in July 1931
- The first plane to land on Flinders Island in September 1931
- The first plane to land on Deal Island in October 1931

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

On his return to Victoria, he had planned to stop at Flinders Island for a short time, conduct some joy flights, then travel on to Melbourne. His visit was recorded by local resident **Iola Fowler** and is reproduced here with the permission of the Furneaux Museum:

*It was an interesting day for us (Iola Fowler nee Wood) when we were told a plane had landed in a paddock near the road in the vicinity of the Whitemark school. Soon afterwards Mr Reg Cooper phoned us to say that a plane had landed in his paddock and was making short joy flights for 10 shillings a time.*

*The plane was a VHU KG De Havilland, single engine biplane with a seat for one person behind the pilot's seat. The pilot was Norman Chapman and he had flown the plane from Greens Beach Tasmania that morning, noting the islands enroute for a possible landing should it every be necessary to make a forced landing.*

*My father, Jim Woods, drove us out to the Coopers paddock where a couple of people had already been up for a fly and Geoff Cooper was just going up as we arrived. After circling around the nearby hills, the plane headed towards Wybalena but as they didn't return after a reasonable time the men set off in their vehicle hoping to locate them. The engine had cut out in flight and Norman had landed safely in a paddock close to the Cemetery.*

*Despite many efforts the engine could not be restarted so in the end father brought Norman home to our house for the night.*

*Next day the weather had turned bad and lasted for a few days but when it cleared my sister Edie, and I went to see Norman take off but just as he was lifting off, he became away that something wasn't right and had to look for somewhere to crash land. We tried to signal to him to go to Little Plain but in the end, he landed on a very steep slope in our hill paddock. The plane turned upside down and we hurried to his assistance and helped to lift the plane so he could crawl out.*

*The propellor of the plane was broken and we could see that a lot of the flimsy plywood and canvas was damaged. Norman telegrammed Melbourne for a new propellor but due to bad weather and the boat to Flinders only coming every 3 weeks there was a long delay.*

*In the meantime, I accompanied Norman in his search to find any light pieces of wood from the beaches which he used to rivet and glue into the broken areas of his plane.*

*Soon after the new propellor arrived and was fixed another disaster took place. Edie, while milking the cow heard a ripping noise and looked up the hill to see our bull attacking the plane! It was found that a lower string was ripped badly. This was luckily replaced by the pilot of one of two seaplanes which had landed at Lady Barron. He also gave Norman some mending paper so after a lot of stitching together with a packing needle and plenty of glue the plane soon appeared to be once again in good repair.*

*Norman said he could now take me up for a fly but after all that had happened to the plane, I didn't feel altogether confident but thought if the pilot said it was alright it must be so, so away we went towards what is now known as Memana and back along the Marshall Bay. When we were preparing to land in a small paddock on the side of the road opposite the war memorial at Emita, I wondered why we were losing altitude so quickly and heading for a wire fence. I called out to Norman "Do you know there is a fence in front of you?" The plane was by then very low, and he replied, "We damn soon will". I took a grip of the seat thinking that it may save my head*

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*when the plane crashed into the fence, but the plane managed to just lift enough to clear the fence and land safely.*

*It was now late in the afternoon but Norman decided to fly the plane back to Whitemark and land in the same paddock as he did when he first arrived. I phoned Henry Bryant at his garage and he went out and helped signal Norman to a safe landing in the rough, stumpy paddock.*

*The next morning, he flew to Launceston Airport where he had some repairs done and later returned to Bass Strait flying over Emita and circling our house on his way to the Inner Sister Islands, but he was not as welcome there as expected as his plane frightened the sheep. So instead, he went on to Deal Island and landed there in the thick tussocks.*

*The weather prevented the plane from taking off for several days, but Norman was made welcome by the lighthouse keeper. We knew where he was as we could listen in on our Ericson phone at 6.00 pm and hear the lighthouse keeper speaking to everyone and so were able to let the wireless station know when Norman's wife made enquiries about his whereabouts.*

*It was a very unsafe little plane that finally arrived at Essendon from Deal Island.*

*The propellor which was broken when his plane crashed on Flinders Island is now on display at the Emita Museum.*



**Norman Chapman with his Gipsy Moth on Flinders Island (Furneaux Museum)**

Editors Note: 10 Shillings in 1931 is about \$50 today

*THE REFURBISHMENT OF THE HAROLD GATTY MEMORIAL  
AT CAMPBELL TOWN*

**By Wayne Dearing**

In 1960, three years after his death, a memorial with two plaques was established in Campbell Town in central Tasmania.



In 2022 the writer commenced discussions with both the custodians of the Harold Gatty Memorial and the Northern Midlands Council with the aim of refurbishing the memorial and grounds. Both had suffered significant damage due to the effect of the weather and environmental conditions and both were in need of urgent repairs and refurbishment to prevent further damage.

A restoration programme was submitted to the Council on behalf of the custodians and following attendance and discussions at a scheduled Council meeting a programme to renovate the grounds and enhance the monument itself was agreed upon.

Those who know where, in Campbell Town, the Gatty Memorial is located would be quick to agree that the memorial was difficult to see from the road and this was the starting point. The removal of trees and shrubs that blocked both views and sunlight was undertaken and planting of flowers and bushes to enhance the natural beauty of the sight will be complete before this Newsletter is published.

The memorial itself contains two plaques both pictured on the next page.

A bronze plaque forged and presented by the Hobart Technical College and a plaque recognising the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gatty and Wiley Post's record breaking round the world flight presented by the American/Australian Association both of which had suffered significant damage from the elements.

The bronze plaque will be washed and cleaned whilst the American/Australian Association plaque will re-printed and re-erected behind a weatherproof covering to ensure that similar damage does not reoccur. The monument will then be cleaned and maintained by the Council.

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Whilst the plaques detail dates of the round the world flight the monument and park area does not cover other achievements that earned Gatty to be named “*The Prince of Navigators*” and it was agreed by the custodians and Council that story boards be erected detailing a brief coverage of his life and achievements.

Gatty and Post were given a hero’s welcome following their round the world record flight by the American public with Gatty and his navigation ability loudly praised throughout the country sadly; however, this was not the case in Australia

The Australian Government refused to recognise Gatty’s achievements labelling him as “*an agent of the Americans*” culminating in 1940 when A B Corbett the then Director of Civil Aviation stating that “*there are other Australians whose services to British Aviation are more worthy of official recognition,*” The Australian Press took delight in printing this statement.

It is hoped that visitors to the monument gain an insight to Gatty’s life, achievements and enormous contribution to aviation from these boards. In addition to the boards, tables and picnic areas will be erected to afford visitors the opportunity to reflect on Gatty’s life and accomplishments with a degree of comfort.

Throughout Gatty’s life he made it quite clear to anybody who ask where was he born and on every-occasion stated simply “*I am from Campbell Town in Tasmania.*” He was a proud Australian even refusing American citizenship when Australia refused to recognise his achievements. With regard to the Australian Government’s attitude toward Gatty journalist Norman Ellison reflected, following Gatty’s death “*He never openly complained, but I knew he was hurt.*”



Subject to state regulations roadside signage boards will be erected advising visitors of the memorial with adequate safe parking made available. There have even been some discussions of illuminating the monument of an evening. So, hopefully, by the time this newsletter is published (March 2024) the work and upgrading will be completed and the memorial will show visitors more of the man that in the words of Charles Kingsford-Smith “*was the greatest navigator in the world.*”

Further information on Harold Gatty is available on our [website](#)

*Tasmanian Crash Reports – Part 1*

By Ray Mudway

Flying in the early days was dangerous – so it is not surprising just how many flights failed to make their destination. Aircraft were fairly crude and unreliable; they did not have the benefit of later design experience and pilots too did not usually have extensive experience. Of course, weather plays some part, but it is surprising how many accidents happened in good weather.

This is the first article in a series compiling major crashes in Tasmania of both civilian and military aircraft. The articles have been compiled from various sources, and, where known, the causes of them.

I have used a loose definition of a “crash” to include both those with and without fatalities. If there are other crashes you know about and we could detail in future newsletters, please contact me.

**23 Sept 1920, RAAF, de Havilland DH.9a**

Pilot Captain Billy Stutt and Sgt Dalzell were lost without trace when flying from Victoria to Tasmania. What is known of this story was recounted in TAHS Newsletter [No 6](#). It is not yet over as further information has come to hand and will be told in the future.

**28 February 1931, Matthews Aviation, Gipsy Moth, VH-UNL, Skylark**

VH-UNL was conducting joy rides at the opening of Western Junction aerodrome. At 5.45pm the Skylark, piloted by Lawrence Johnson with Miss Jessie Allen as the passenger crashed when its engine stalled just before landing after a 10-to-15-minute flight over Launceston. Miss Allen was killed and pilot Johnson seriously injured. The coronial inquest could not determine why the plane entered a spin and crashed, ruled it an accidental death.

**VH-UNL photographed at Western Junction prior to the crash  
(Weekly Courier, 4 March 1931)**



Further reading: See TAHS Newsletter No [20](#).

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### 15 Jan 1933, Hart Aviation Services, Desoutter II Monoplane, VH-UPR, *Latona*

VH-UPR crashed on Deal Island just after 10am due to engine failure. In the crash the undercarriage was smashed on the rocky ground and the fuselage damaged. The pilot was Jack Turner, Chief Pilot of Hart Aviation and the passenger was Mr Thompson, managing-director of the Robur Tea Company, Melbourne who was flying back after visiting his property on Flinders Island.

**VH-UPR on Deal  
Island  
(Furneaux Museum)**



The pilot and passenger went to the lighthouse and Keeper Dunley, of the Wilson's Promontory light, over the long-distance telephone, advised the authorities. The Holyman company's ship *Koomela*, which traded between Tasmania and the Bass Strait Islands, left Launceston on its usual round trip to Flinders Island but instead of returning to Launceston went to Deal Island to pick up the stranded aviators.

VH-UPR was recovered and repaired, remaining with Hart Aviation Services. In company with Desoutter II VH-UPS it had helped in the Snowy Mountains search for the missing Smith and Ulm's Australian National Airways (ANA) Avro10 aircraft *Southern Cloud* in 1931 and later in the 1934 Bass Strait search for Holyman's Airways missing de Havilland DH.86 *Miss Hobart*. It took part in the 1936 South Australian Centenary Air Race.

VH-UPR was sold to Victorian & Interstate Airlines that took over Hart Aviation Services in 1937 for charter services until sold in 1943. After a further four changes of ownership, it was finally struck off the Register in 1960, after which it went into storage at Parkes NSW until donated to the Australian National Aviation Museum, Melbourne in 1968. It has since been completely restored by Museum member Nelson Wilson in February 2014. VH-UPR is currently on loan to the Nhill Air Museum in country Victoria.

Editors Note: VH-UEE, *Miss Flinders*, which is on display at Launceston Airport, is also a Desoutter II.

**19 Oct 1934, Holyman's Airways, DH.86 Express, VH-URN, *Miss Hobart***

Scheduled flight, Launceston-Melbourne. Only 16 days in service, while flying over Bass Strait, the four-engine aircraft crashed in unknown circumstances some 10 miles off the coast of the Wilsons Promontory National Park. Search and rescue teams found some debris and oil in the water a day later but no trace of the two pilots or nine passengers was found. Captain Victor Holyman, who was among the missing, was the chief pilot and co-founder of the airline.

The last transmission from the *Miss Hobart* spookily shares a detail with that of the Valentich account in 1978. The crew allegedly claimed they could hear the sound of a plane around them, and there were even several reports of an "aerial machine" coming toward them. They then reported that the humming sound had suddenly stopped. Nothing more was heard from the *Miss Hobart* after that.

Further reading: See TAHS Newsletter No [12](#).

**9 Nov 1934, Holyman's Airways, DH.84 Dragon, VH-URD, *Miss Launceston***

Scheduled flight Launceston-Flinders Island-Melbourne. While landing in strong winds, the plane hit a rough patch in the Whitemark aerodrome. One wing touched, breaking the wing backwards and throwing the plane on to the other wing, which was also broken. The undercarriage then collapsed, and the machine stood on its nose, only to fall backwards again and to turn completely round before coming to rest about 40 yards from the spot where it first touched the aerodrome.

The pilot, F.T Patterson and six passengers escaped injury. *Miss Currie* and *Miss Flinders* were dispatched to bring the passengers back to Launceston.

The plane suffered damage to the undercarriage, the breaking of the lower wing, the breaking of both propellers, and slight damage to both engines and the nose of the machine. The plane took a month to repair before VH-URD was back on the Bass Strait service.

**3 Feb 1935, Aero Club, DH.60M, *Gipsy Moth*, VH-ULM**

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.

Further reading: See TAHS Newsletter No [20](#).

**2 Oct 1935, Holyman's Airways, DH.86 Express, VH-URT, *Loina***

Scheduled flight, Sydney-Melbourne-Launceston-Hobart. The four-engine aircraft went out of control and crashed into Bass Strait, some 5.3 km off Flinders Island. Two pilots and three passengers were killed.

It was determined that VH-URT had gone into an uncontrollable spin, and evidence of a small fire in the rear of its cabin, which may have occurred before the crash, but this probably did not factor in the accident. It was found that the fin bias mechanisms of the crashed aircraft and at least one other were faulty.

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Prime Minister, Mr. Lyons, said that the Government would have to very seriously consider the need for compelling contractors to use flying boats on the route.

One passenger lost on *Loina* was Mr. G. Garlick, the Australian representative of the English company R. A. Lister and Co Ltd. a company dealing principally in shearing materials, diesel engines, and general agricultural requirements. Due to business, he had previously missed the fateful flight of *Miss Hobart*.

### 13 Dec 1935, Holyman's Airways, de Havilland DH.86 Express, VH-USW, *Lepena*

Flying en-route from Western Junction to King Island and Melbourne, the aircraft with two pilots and eight passengers on board developed a loose port outer wing-strut fairing. Thinking that the strut was broken, the pilot decided to make a precautionary landing on (a rough undulating area) of Hunter Island that ultimately resulted in essentially wrecking the aircraft.

Fortunately, all aboard survived with no injuries and the pilot's cheerful message was sent out: "All safe. Machine wrecked. Send food". So unconcerned by their experience were the passengers that they spent the afternoon swimming and sun-baking. They spent the night in the plane and were taken off the island by the ketch *Phyllis* the next morning. *Lepena* was later salvaged & repaired.



In 1936 *Lepena* was sold to McRobertson-Miller Airlines. On 16 Dec 1945, she dived and shook near Carnarvon WA but landed safely; an engine cowling had detached and caught on the tailplane. Sold again to a UK company she was abandoned in India on 26 December 1946 by the British ferry-crew as it was considered too dangerous to continue due to severe tail flutter.

An investigation by the Civil Aviation Board using stop-motion film of the wing of a D.H.86 Express in flight resulted in identification of wing distortion and failure under certain flight conditions. Authorities immediately required the installation, on all Australian DH.86 aircraft, of complete lift-bracing in the wing rear-spar and redesign of the bracing on the tail unit to provide greater redundancy.

The D.H.86s were seriously lacking directional stability, the Aviation Board recommended that the rudder-trim tab gap be sealed. As they were frequently in trouble and in view of two fatal accidents and other difficulties with the type, Australia would subsequently suspend the certificate of airworthiness of the DeHavilland 86.

The crash of the *Lepena* and the subsequent investigation into the safety of the DH.86 is presented by Phil Vabre in this [YouTube video](#) of a presentation to the AHSA (NSW).

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### 6 Feb 1936, RAAF, Hawker Demon, A1-3

Crewed by Plt Off Lansell and Sgt Tonks and accompanied by A1-4 and A1-9 from No. 1 R.A.A.F. training squadron at Point Cook / Laverton on the mainland, departed for the Annual Tasmanian Training Flight. The aircraft were scheduled to give air displays at Swansea 6<sup>th</sup> Feb; Hobart 11<sup>th</sup> Feb; Wynyard 12<sup>th</sup> Feb and Cambridge 15<sup>th</sup> Feb. After the demonstration at Swansea aerodrome, they planned to continue on to Launceston.

Jean Cotton and her parents, Louisa and Arthur of Kelvedon had planned a day at the beach but decided to watch the planes at Swansea instead. Jean's older sister, Mabel, had gained her pilot's licence 3 years earlier. Jean was shown over the plane piloted by Pilot Officer Eric Lansell and was even invited to sit in the cockpit. Around 200 spectators watched as the aircraft finally took to the air around 2.30pm. The first two lifted off without incident, but Lansell's plane failed to rise in time and ploughed into a section of the crowd at the end of the field. Many people had been startled by the plane's increasing proximity and escaped by flinging themselves to the ground. Tragically, being more familiar with planes, Jean and her mother had a misplaced sense of confidence.

Mother and daughter were struck by the propellor, both suffering shocking, fatal injuries. Mrs Louisa Cotton was decapitated & Jean's body was cut in half. Ella Graham, another local, had been standing a few metres back, against a fence, she was hit by Jean Cotton's body. Her physical injuries included broken ribs, a lacerated chin and a badly bruised thigh - her mental trauma can only be imagined. Thomas Watt, from Prince of Wales Bay, had ducked, but was hospitalized with a scalp wound.

Meanwhile the disabled Hawker Demon climbed into the air, but its propellor was badly damaged and its undercarriage had collapsed. In the midst of his unthinkable loss, Arthur Cotton was heard to say that he hoped the plane would land safely, which miraculously it did.

#### R.A.A.F. PLANE IN FATAL CRASH



TWO WOMEN WERE KILLED and two other people were injured when this Hawker Demon plane, of the Royal Australian Air Force, failed to clear the crowd when taking off from Swansea Aerodrome (Tasmania) on February 6. This close-up picture shows the damaged propeller of the machine.



A Coronial Inquest found that the plane, which had a new Rolls Royce engine, was mechanically sound and that pilot error was the main cause of the tragedy. Plt Off Lansell was committed for trial by the Coroner and was acquitted.

The aircraft was dismantled on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb and transported to Western Junction airfield, Launceston for survey. It was then shipped to Sydney, arriving 4<sup>th</sup> March 1936 and transported by Service Transport to 2AD for repair.

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Further reading: See TAHS Newsletter No [10](#) and [11](#).

### **3 Feb 1937, RAAF Hawker Demon, A1-3 and A1-8**

Two RAAF Hawker Demon's were flying from Melbourne to Hobart, with a stop at Wynyard to refuel. Upon reaching Tasmania, the low cloud and misty rain made navigation very difficult. With fuel running out, they landed near Waratah. One of the Demons (the now repaired A1-3) luckily ended up in a paddock smashing the undercarriage & port-lower wing. The crew alerted the locals that the second plane must have also crashed in the vicinity.

A search was mounted for the plane in the very rugged and dense scrub around Waratah. The crews were looked after at the Bischoff Hotel, which still displays the broken propeller of A1-3 in the dining-room.

A1-8 was recovered for the RAAF in 1977, restored & now on display at the RAAF Museum, Pt Cook, Victoria.

Further reading: See TAHS Newsletter No [09](#).

### **18 May 1939, Aero Club, DH.60M Gipsy Moth, VH-UVO**

The pilot, Roger Burbury suffered extensive injuries when the plane spun into the ground from about 1000 feet at the Antill Ponds aerodrome in the Tasmanian midlands. The plane was wrecked beyond repair.

Further reading: See TAHS Newsletter No [20](#).

### **30 Jun 1939, Holyman's Airways, de Havilland DH.86 Express, VH-USW, *Lepena***

Scheduled service Launceston-Wynyard-King Island-Melbourne. When landing at Wynyard in heavy rain, the *Lepena* failed to stop on the runway, hit a ditch and then a barbed wire fence bordering the aerodrome. The plane came to rest facing back down the runway and a wing blocking Quiggins Road. The pilot E. B. Annear, the co-pilot and six passengers were not injured.

It took several days to repair the undercarriage and allow the plane to be towed back to the aerodrome, where further repairs were undertaken.

***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 JUNE 2025***

***All rights reserved. Apart from use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 and its amendments, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means whatsoever without prior permission in writing from the publisher.***