

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Geoff Burch and Tony Dunn

© September 2018.

Early Aviation.

There is some ambiguity as to who made the first powered plane flight in Australia. Some acknowledge a flight on the 9th December 1909, by Englishman Colin Defries, at Victoria Park Racecourse, as the first whilst others recognise the flight by Harry Houdini, on the 18th March 1910, at Diggers Rest, some 30 km north-west of Melbourne. Houdini made his flight in a Voisin biplane, which he had purchased for US\$5,000 in Hamburg, Germany, prior to his visit to Australia.¹



There are conflicting reports in the newspapers, which suggest that Defries “flight” may not have been a “controlled” flight and therefore did not qualify to be recognised. Houdini may well deserve to be acknowledged as the first person to make a “controlled power flight.”

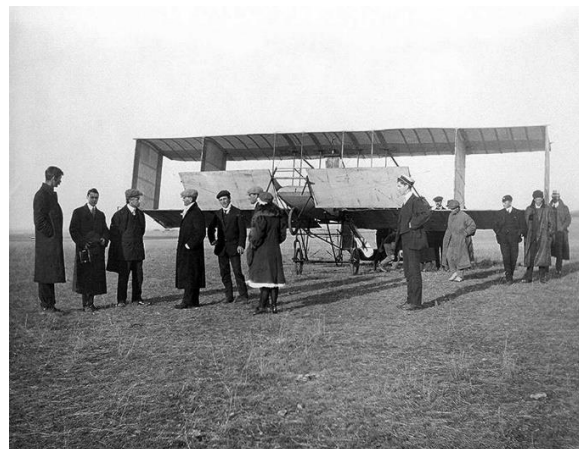
Left: Houdini in the cockpit of his plane.

Below Left: Advertisement for Houdini’s flight demonstrations at Rosehill Racecourse. Courtesy State Library of Victoria



Houdini followed up with flights in Sydney as well. For Houdini it was a commercial adventure that allowed him to earn income from the many interested members of the public, as can be seen in the adjoining advertisement.

Below: Houdini with his Voisin biplane—in Australia



¹ http://www.ctie.monash.edu.au/hargrave/houdini_bio.html. Accessed on 19th February 2015.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



The first flight in an Australian designed and built plane was that by John Duigan, on 16th July 1910, at Mia Mia, in Victoria.²

Left: John Duigan at the controls of his plane c1911. Courtesy Museum of Victoria.

The use of planes in WW1 saw a rapid growth in the number of Australian pilots and the establishment of training schools in Australia. The end of the Great War also left a legacy of surplus planes. Although there were strong interests in aviation prior to WW1, there can be no doubt of the war's influence on the development of an aviation industry in Australia.

Another strong influence were the exploits of pioneer aviators like Ross and Keith Smith (first flight from England to Australia), Bert Hinkler (England to Australia), and Kingsford Smith (America to Australia, et al), in the 1920's & 1930's.

It was around this period that the push for an aerodrome at Wagga Wagga developed. Presumably there was a similar demand in all major population centres around Australia.

An aerodrome was operating at Mascot by 1919, as a private venture, but was taken over by the Federal government in the early 1920's and developed from there.³

Earliest Flights at Wagga Wagga.

The first aeroplane to land at Wagga Wagga is yet to be determined, but certainly in July 1914 (16th) Mr M. Guillaux landed in Wagga Wagga as part of a mail flight from Melbourne to Sydney. The lack of regulations or controls that existed then are demonstrated in Guillaux's landing procedure.

According to a local report:

"Shortly before three o'clock yesterday afternoon the approach of the monoplane was heralded in the south-western end of the town. M. Guillaux followed the course of the railway line, at a comparatively low height, and travelling at a great speed was seen to go in the direction of the Farmers' Home racecourse, apparently attracted thither by the in attendance at the pony races. He landed on the course, and after a few minutes there, during which he was informed of his mistake, he quickly reascended and circled over the town in the direction of the MTC racecourse, where he came to earth near the grand stand."

The flight from Albury had taken sixty five minutes.⁴

On Sunday 30th May 1920 a Captain Snook landed his Avro aeroplane at Wagga Wagga and, *"did a good business conveying passengers for flights over the town,"* up until the following Tuesday when he flew to Junee to make similar flights there.⁵

² http://www.historysmiths.com.au/CentFedPlayKit/events/Advance/1910_first%20flight.htm. Accessed 20th February 2015.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydney_Airport. Accessed 20th February 2015.

⁴ Daily Advertiser. 17th July 1914, p2.

⁵ Daily Advertiser. 4th June 1920, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

As Keith Swan noted⁶, another early flight was that organised by David Jones Ltd, who flew a plane load of parcels weighing some three hundred pounds into Wagga Wagga on the 15th December 1920. The plane, a Sopwith-Gnu flown by Captain Roy King, landed on the Murrumbidgee Turf Club's racecourse where a crowd of some two hundred people, mostly women, took delivery of the Christmas parcels they had previously ordered. An autographed photograph of the Sopwith-Gnu was presented to each person who had purchased a parcel and to each person who placed an order on the day. The plane also delivered a box of films for the local Union Theatre, which was said to be, "*the first occasion in Australia on which films had been delivered by air.*" The plane also carried twenty thousand pamphlets, which were dropped above the different towns on their rural route.⁷

It was around the time of Hinkler's exploits (1928) that local pressure for a Wagga Wagga aerodrome came to the fore.

On the 4th February 1928 a meeting of the Greater Wagga League discussed the need for a landing ground at Wagga Wagga. A Mr Turner urged that an appeal be made for the donation of a suitable block of land. He also pointed out that the racecourse was gazetted as an emergency landing field. Another member, Mr Pitman, believed the race course had been gazetted as a regular landing ground, so it was resolved to write to the local member, Mr Kilpatrick, to clarify the situation. It was also decided to approach the M.P. and A. A. "*with a view to securing the showground as a landing place.*"⁸

Mr E. E. Collins expressed his concerns at the lack of support from business men and property owners for the League and moved that the future of the League be considered at the next annual meeting. The League had been formed back in December 1923, officially as the Wagga and District Advancement League⁹, and, according to Collins, had done a sterling job over the years. It appears that the group folded shortly after a meeting in March 1928.¹⁰



On the 17th March 1928 Bert Hinkler visits Wagga Wagga. A crowd of some six thousand people turn out to see Hinkler land his plane on the Wagga Wagga Show Ground at around 4:30pm in the afternoon of the 17th. In the evening he was given a civic reception at the Town Hall, which attracted the largest crowd ever assembled there. Hinkler had a busy itinerary, visiting the District Hospital and the Riverine Club, partaking of dinner at the Commercial Club, and enjoying a "*smoke social*" in the Empire Hall courtesy of the Returned Soldiers' League, all before flying out of Wagga Wagga at 12 noon on the 18th heading for Melbourne and taking with him a cheque for £350 from the people of Wagga Wagga – a token of their appreciation.¹¹

Left: The Mayor, Alderman W. F. Day welcomes Bert Hinkler to Wagga Wagga in March 1928.¹²

⁶ Swan, Keith. A History of Wagga Wagga. p175.

⁷ Daily Advertiser. 16th December 1920, p2.

⁸ Daily Advertiser. 4th February 1928, p4.

⁹ Daily Advertiser. 13th December 1923, p2.

¹⁰ Daily Advertiser. 3rd March 1928, p6.

¹¹ Daily Advertiser. 19th March 1928, p1.

¹² Daily Advertiser. 21st April 1932, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

On the 22nd April 1928 representatives of Rosenfeld & Co. Ltd flew from Sydney to Cootamundra and then onto Wagga Wagga. At Wagga Wagga they were compelled to land on the showground there being no dedicated landing strip available. The small area of the showground resulted in the plane being damaged during landing, and the occupants returned to Sydney without the plane, it having to be repaired. The firm's representative, Mr H. P. Palsen, expressed surprise that Wagga Wagga did not have a dedicated landing strip, noting that Cootamundra had "*excellent facilities.*" The president of the recently formed Wagga Wagga branch of the Employers' Federation, Mr Charles Hardy Jnr, stated that a primary objective of the branch was the establishment of a "*landing ground*" at Wagga Wagga.¹³

A month later on the 21st May 1928, the newly formed Wagga Wagga branch of the Employers' Federation met and discussed the need for a local aerodrome, which the local Council was endeavouring to secure a suitable site for. The Federation had already written to the Defence Department and to the Controller of Civil Aviation enquiring as to the availability of funding.¹⁴

A response came from the Director of Civil Aviation, in June 1928, with advice that a site for a landing ground for the Australian Air Force had been established at Junee and consequently it was highly unlikely that any federal funds would be available for a Wagga Wagga landing ground. The Director pointed out that his Department was keen to see landing grounds established at centres such as Wagga Wagga and to that end would consider requests to assist with "*technical assistance and advice.*" He further suggested that the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council should be encouraged to take an interest in the matter.¹⁵

Further advice, in the same month, in the form of correspondence from Mr. H. C. Brinsmead, Controller of Civil Aviation, gave some details on the selection process for aerodrome sites, as follows:

*"An aerodrome should be as near as possible to a town, with reasonably good means of access. It should be in as open country as possible, clear of trees, telegraph lines and fences, and away from mountains and hills which cause eddies and gusts and call for a rapid rate of climbing immediately on leaving the ground. For machines at present operating in Australia an aerodrome should give runs of not less than 550 yards; but, except in special circumstances, an area giving runs of 660 yards should be adopted to provide a margin of safety. It is added, however, that for an aerodrome for permanent use the provision should be for runs of 880 yards or even 1000 yards if land can be obtained at no great cost. The surface of the ground should be fairly smooth and level, and the land should not be subject to flooding or boggy, nor be excessively dusty in dry weather. A ground mark and a mud indicator are necessary on the landing ground, and telephone and water supply are desirable."*¹⁶

On the 24th July 1928 a report was submitted at the quarterly meeting of the Wagga Wagga branch of the Employers' Federation. The president, Mr Charles Hardy, Jnr, commented that "*great difficulties had been encountered in finding a suitable ground*" for an aerodrome, and that the matter was now "*in abeyance*" pending an inspection of suggested sites by an inspector of the Aviation Department.¹⁷

¹³ Daily Advertiser. 23rd April 1928, p2.

¹⁴ Daily Advertiser. 25th May 1928, p2.

¹⁵ Daily Advertiser. 20th June 1928, p2.

¹⁶ Daily Advertiser. 25th June 1928, p1.

¹⁷ Daily Advertiser. 24th July 1928, p1.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

Shortly afterwards, on the 10th August 1928 Mr J. O'Neill, Inspector of Aerodromes with the Department of Aviation, was in Wagga Wagga to inspect various suggested sites for an aerodrome, having been invited by the Wagga Wagga branch of the Employers' Federation, whose representatives accompanied him on the day. He was reported as being "impressed" with the "opportunities that the district offered", but no details were provided.¹⁸ A meeting of the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council on the 30th August noted that an area of land near the showground had been "mentioned", and as this was outside the Wagga Wagga municipal boundaries, the Employers' Federation representatives had been in contact with the Kyeamba Shire Council.¹⁹

In the latter part of August 1928 the Golden Aircraft Co. Ltd, of Mascot, advertised passenger flights during the annual Wagga Wagga show activities. The pilot, Mr H. M' Causland, along with another company representative, Mr H. Bourke, made a substantial number of flights in a "Golden Moth" plane and, reportedly, made good money doing so. M' Causland made the flights from "Fernliegh Estate (opposite the show ground)", between 10am and dusk. The advertised cost was 10s for short flight, or £1 for a flight over the town.²⁰ Apparently McCausland was not entirely satisfied with his experience, submitting a letter to the editor, which was critical of Wagga Wagga. He claimed that:

"The trouble I have experienced in Wagga with regard to landing grounds and general support has disgusted me beyond measure and I would certainly think twice before coming to Wagga again to give passenger flights. After being promised all support and the use of certain landing grounds, I found that when I required to use these grounds I was refused the privilege for no apparent reason whatever."

An editorial comment advised that McCausland had wanted to use the showground and the racecourse. He had not made written requests in advance, but rather made last minute verbal requests. The editor noted that, "there are legal liabilities involved that preclude the granting of such a request."²¹

In the latter part of 1928 a Westland monoplane landed in Wagga Wagga and sustained some minor damage to the undercarriage. With the assistance of Hardys Ltd the plane was repaired and was deemed to be in good order once again.

The owner and pilot of the plane was Norman Berry Littlejohn, of Strathfield, Sydney, and he was accompanied by Robert J Francis, a mechanic of Mascot, Sydney. Once their plane was repaired they decided to fly to Parkes, and accordingly, on Monday 24th December 1928, at around 11:30am the two men took off from a paddock at Turvey Park, near the showground. The plane attained a height of some 100 feet before the motor stalled and the plane lost altitude. Littlejohn was the pilot and his options to land the plane were severely limited. A fenced house, occupied by the Petty family, lay directly in the path of the descending plane. In order to avoid hitting the house Littlejohn landed the plane on one wing. The house was saved but the plane was destroyed. Littlejohn suffered abrasions and shock, whilst Francis suffered "severe concussion, large lacerated wound over the left eye, abrasions on chin, cheek, and arm." Littlejohn was a friend of a local, Mr T. W. Dunn - the son of Mr R. J. Dunn, of Kurrajong. The two men had attended the flying school at Mascot together, their instructor being Captain F. W. Leggatt, of Mascot.²²

¹⁸ Daily Advertiser. 11th August 1928, p6.

¹⁹ Daily Advertiser. 31st August 1928, p2.

²⁰ Daily Advertiser. 18th August 1928, p6.

²¹ Daily Advertiser. 1st September 1928, p1.

²² Daily Advertiser. 27th December 1928, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

On the 6th December 1928 the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council considered a letter from the Wagga Wagga Employers' Federation asking the Council to take a role in having Wagga Wagga included in the proposed aerial service between Sydney and Melbourne, as proposed by, "*Messrs Kingsford Smith & Ulm.*" The latter had been corresponding with the Albury Council and were obviously keen for regional councils to establish aerodromes that would enhance the commercial viability of their project. As was noted by the Council, the costs for establishing an aerodrome were, "*very expensive.*"²³

By the first week of December 1928 Municipal Council elections in full swing. A number of the candidates listed the establishment of an aerodrome as a priority. One specific candidate, Mr Condon, "*a returned soldier with aviation experience,*" referred to the advantages an aerodrome would bring to Wagga Wagga, "*especially in view of the fact that Squadron-Leader Kingsford Smith and Flight-Lieutenant Ulm were contemplating establishing a passenger-mail service between Adelaide and Brisbane.*" He noted that Albury had been mentioned as a "*stopping place*" and Wagga Wagga risked being left off the route if it failed to respond promptly.²⁴

On the 3rd January 1928 the Council responded to the Employers' Federation, with regard to the establishment of an aerodrome, advising that, "*the council will cooperate as far as practical,*" but, "*there is no suitable landing ground within the boundary of the municipality.*"²⁵

An editorial, on the 7th January 1929 pushed the Council to be more proactive noting that, "*If Wagga is not to be left to languish it is essential that immediate steps should be taken to establish an aerodrome. If, as is stated, a suitable site is not available within the municipal boundaries, one should be obtained as close as possible to the town. The Municipal Council would be well advised to confer with the adjoining shires and the Wagga branch of the Employers' Federation... with the object of obtaining land for an aerodrome.*"²⁶

In March 1929 Australian Aerial Services asked the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council to advise on the progress in establishing an airport at Wagga Wagga and requested a sketch of the chosen site. Mr C. R. MacDonald, the Deputy Town Clerk, advised that he had replied to the company advising them that no suitable site was available in the municipality, but noting the Council was prepared to work with the Wagga Wagga Employers' Federation, who were being proactive in this matter.

On the 26th April 1929 Council considered a further response from Australian Aerial Services who proposed, "*landing at Wagga in connection with its passenger and freight services.*" The matter was referred to the Employers' Federation who had already submitted an application to the Wagga Wagga Common trustees, requesting that a portion of the common be used as an aerodrome.²⁷

The local press viewed this proposal as unacceptable stating that its advocacy for an aerodrome did not extend to "*filching portion of the people's common,*" noting that "*More than 400 persons depasture horses and cattle on the common, and it would be unjust were their right to do so interfered with or restricted in any way.*"²⁸

²³ Daily Advertiser. 7th December 1928, p3.

²⁴ Daily Advertiser. 1st December 1928, p8.

²⁵ Daily Advertiser. 4th January 1929, p2.

²⁶ Daily Advertiser. 7th January 1929, p2.

²⁷ Daily Advertiser. 27th April 1929, p4.

²⁸ Daily Advertiser. 30th April 1929, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

A meeting of the Wagga Wagga Employers' Federation, on the 28th May 1929, noted that the trustees of the Gumly Gumly Common have rejected their call for part of the common be designated as an aerodrome, but decided, in light of a report from Captain Briggs, the chief pilot for Australian Aviation Services Ltd, declaring that the Gumly Gumly Common would make, "*an ideal site for a landing place,*" to resubmit their application to the trustees, pointing out to the trustees that "*it will not be necessary to interfere with grazing rights.*"²⁹ It was left to the president of the Federation, Mr Charles Hardy, Jnr, to take the matter further with the trustees of the common. It was also declared that the area required was less than one sixth of the total.³⁰

The local ALP branch chipped in with a letter to the Council declaring their opposition to the use of part of the Gumly Gumly Common for purposes of an aerodrome, noting that, "*while not wishing to hinder progress we maintain that the commercial interests concerned should be able to buy whatever land they require.*"³¹

In July 1929, Mr Charles Hardy, Jnr, reported to the latest meeting of the Employers' Federation that he was still waiting on a decision from the trustees of the Gumly Gumly Common. It was proposed that Captain E. J. Jones, formerly the Deputy Controller of Civil Aviation, be invited to Wagga Wagga to promote the establishment of an aerodrome. Jones was now employed by the Shell Co. of Australia to encourage the establishment of aerodromes throughout Australia.³² No doubt the increased sale of aviation fuel was a primary objective of the Shell Co.

In the following month, on the 29th August 1929 a mail plane landed at the Coolamon aerodrome for the first time. Over fifty motor cars lined up to see the landing of the *Bell Bird*, which subsequently departed with Mr D. A. Dean, of Fairlie & Dean, the Coolamon agents for the aerial mail service, and Mr M. L. Kingdon. The pair were travelling to Adelaide, as guests of the aerial company, in recognition of their strong support for the establishment of the aerodrome. The aerodrome was located some three miles to the west of Coolamon on the property of Mr Arthur Jennings, it being some 500 yards by 300 yards with a good clearance all round.³³

Progress continued in November 1929 when Captain Larkin, the Managing Director of the Larkin Aircraft Manufacturing Company, Victoria, and also the Managing Director of Australian Aerial Services (AAS), along with the chief pilot of ASS, Captain F. S. Briggs, and Mr M Bleechmore, of the Shell Company arrived in Wagga Wagga to promote the establishment of an aerodrome, which would be utilised as part of their proposed Murray Valley service. Members of the Murray Valley Aerial Services were also in Wagga Wagga, "*endeavouring to sell shares in their company.*" Some thirty two local citizens were taken for a "*flight*" in the afternoon, while Captain Larkin delivered a lecture on the history of Australian aviation in the evening. It was announced at the lecture that Mr Brunskill had agreed to make available, for free, two paddocks near the trucking yards provided that "*other paddocks are made available.*"

The flights were all made from Mr A. G. Tedcastle's paddock on the Oura Road and those who "*went up*" included, the Mayor & Mayoress, Alderman & Mrs E. E. Collins, Mr Anthony Brunskill, Mr R. J. Cunningham, and Mr H. J. Cunningham. According to a local report "*the paddock was not exactly ideal for landing or taking off, being very rough in places, but it suited the purpose.*" The plane, the

²⁹ Daily Advertiser. 29th May 1929, p4. / 27th May 1929, p3.

³⁰ Daily Advertiser. 15th June 1929, p4.

³¹ Daily Advertiser. 7th June 1929, p2.

³² Daily Advertiser. 6th July 1929, p4.

³³ Daily Advertiser. 31st August 1929, p6.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

Sun Bird, was only five weeks old, having been built in Australia, and in addition to the pilot it could carry four passengers.³⁴

Tedcastle's paddock faces Oura Road running north to the base of the hill behind. It is adjacent to the eastern edge of Windmill Lane with the Kurrajong Reserve and Pattersons Road further east.³⁵ GPS measurements for the south west corner of the paddock are 55 H 054029, 6116830, which is some 7 km from Romanos, as the crow flies.

The First Official Aerodrome.

Following on from Captain Larkin's visit a site was determined and a Captain Sutcliffe flew from Cootamundra on the 27th November to, firstly inspect the site, secondly to talk to interested parties, and lastly to make a few exhibition flights.³⁶ In fact Captain S. E. Sutcliffe took no less than twenty Wagga Wagga citizens up in the plane on the 27th. He also inspected the proposed landing ground which was on property owned by Mr J. Salmon, on the western end of Edward Street. Captain Sutcliffe deemed the site suitable subject to the removal of some trees and the relocation of a fence. The paddock had been graded for lucerne creating an "excellent surface."³⁷

Captain Sutcliffe had landed his plane earlier in the day at a location known locally as Tedcastle's paddock. The plane, known as Bell Bird, was a De Havilland bi-plane, with a Siddely-Puma engine. It had a cruising speed of eighty miles an hour and in addition to the pilot could carry four passengers, their luggage, and the mails. A report in the local paper named those who flew in the plane and described their impressions, as follows:

*"The powerful and at the same time graceful appearance of the aeroplane was greatly admired by the visitors, the majority of whom were, during the afternoon, the guests of the company in short flights over the town. Among those who enjoyed the experience were Messrs. J. Salmon, M. A. Salmon, J. Hennessey, W. Fitzgerald, E. Symes, J. Speirs, J. Speirs, junr., H. E. Gissing, H. Paull, J. A. Johnston, K. Willoughby, E. F. M'Lean, H. J. Cunningham, and T. Dobney, junr., Mesdames: M. A. Salmon, H. J. Cunningham, and Milne, and Miss Brunskill. It was a delightful afternoon, ideal for flying. Wagga, seen from a height of about 1500 feet, looked very picturesque, and the general impression among the passengers was that it also looked very clean. The streets in parallelogram formation and the rows of trees all looked most precise and orderly and probably the appearance of cleanliness which had evoked comment was largely due to the effect of the great height, making traffic indistinguishable."*³⁸

In December 1929 a Captain Holden, Alderman H. L. Condon, and Mr A. H. Gilchrist, the secretary of the Riverina Development League, inspected the site offered by Mr J. Salmon, at the western end of Edward Street, some two miles from the post office. The Captain confirmed the suitability of the ground subject to the same conditions imposed by an earlier inspection i.e. removal of some trees and relocation of a fence.³⁹

Mr Gilchrist subsequently addressed a meeting of the Municipal Council confirming to them that he had already signed a three year lease, which he hoped the Council might take over at some time. After modifications the area would provide an east west run of 880 yards, and a north south run of 750 yards. He sought funds from the council to clear the land in question, which he estimated would

³⁴ Daily Advertiser. 15th November 1929, p3.

³⁵ Confirmed at site by Tony Dunn on 8th July 2015.

³⁶ Daily Advertiser. 27th November 1929, p4.

³⁷ Daily Advertiser. 28th November 1929, p3.

³⁸ Daily Advertiser. 28th November 1929, p3.

³⁹ Daily Advertiser. 18th December 1929, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

cost from between £120 & £180, and to assist in setting up a “*Wagga Aerodrome Fund.*” A windvane and a direction arrow would be the only structures required. The liability (lease) was £32 per annum. Council resolved to form a sub-committee for the purpose of exploring possible actions.⁴⁰

Early in January 1930 the Municipal Council accepted the recommendations of a sub-committee that Council take over the lease of land owned by Mr James Salmon, at the western end of Edward Street [Flowerdale], which consisted of portions 109, 110, and a part of portion 112, all in the parish of South Wagga Wagga. It was noted that the land was outside the municipal boundaries, but within the Kyeamba Shire boundaries. It was a three year lease from the 1st January 1930 at a weekly rental of 12s 6d. The resolution was subject to a report from the Department of Civil Aviation confirming the suitability of the site as either a landing ground or an aerodrome.⁴¹

Subsequent advice from the Department of Local Government confirmed that the Council could expend monies on such a project, but because it was outside the municipal boundaries it could not lease the land.⁴² The mayor advised he had spoken with the Kyeamba Shire Council and he expected that any issues could be readily overcome.

Mr A. R. McCombe, the Acting Superintendent of Aerodromes for the Department of Civil Aviation visited Wagga Wagga on the 7th February and confirmed that the land in question was, “*suitable for all types of aircraft operating in Australia,*” but was yet to submit his official report to the WWMC.⁴³ His report, when received by Council, stipulated that the following works be carried out:

“The removal of internal fences and trees and stumps; filling in of shallow trench and filling in and consolidating of holes where trees were grubbed out; felling stump-high, of all timber in the surrounding area shown on the plan. It was understood, that the owner of the land desired to retain a large gum tree for shade purposes, also trees in the southern part of the area just outside the aerodrome.

Upon the issue of a necessary license a “circle” and wind indicator were required to be constructed and full particulars would then be promulgated to all pilots and aircraft operators in Australia.”⁴⁴

February 12th 1930 was Aviation Day at Junee. As part of the proceedings it was necessary for two planes to land at Wagga Wagga – both of which did so in Tedcastle’s paddock.⁴⁵

Towards the end of February 1930 it was reported that Mr Adam, manager of Air Taxis Ltd, Sydney, proposed setting up a “*flying school*” at Wagga Wagga. Mr Adams planned to visit Wagga Wagga on Monday 24th February along with two of the company’s pilots to evaluate how many people would be interested to learn how to fly. They planned to stay for a week to ten days and could be contacted at either the aerodrome or at the Commercial Hotel. At the time Goulburn was the only centre outside of Sydney to have a flying school. Like most other proposals it was dependent on the commercial viability for the company.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Daily Advertiser. 20th December 1929, p3.

⁴¹ Daily Advertiser. 10th January 1930, p5.

⁴² Daily Advertiser. 14th February 1930, p5.

⁴³ Daily Advertiser. 8th February 1930, p4.

⁴⁴ Daily Advertiser. 14th February 1930, p5.

⁴⁵ Daily Advertiser. 13th February 1930, p3.

⁴⁶ Daily Advertiser. 22nd February 1930, p8.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

The school did go ahead and on Sunday 27th April 1929, the first student of the Wagga Flying School, which was operated by Air Taxis Ltd, made his debut solo flight. This was Mr Thomas William Dunn, of *Kurrajong*, Wagga Wagga. It was reported that he “*did exceptionally well.*” Further flights were planned for the following week, from the new aerodrome site at Salmon’s paddock.⁴⁷

By the 21st May 1930 Air Taxis Ltd had moved into their new hangar on the new aerodrome site (Salmon’s paddock). Previous to this the majority of plane landings and take offs had been at Tedcastle’s paddock, which being so far from town limited the number of spectators. The new aerodrome was only two miles from the post office and on Sunday 18th May a large crowd was in attendance to witness two machines flying and to participate in “*pleasure flights over the town.*”⁴⁸ Further training continued throughout May when the Wagga Flying School had more students completing solo flights. After only ten hours of “*dual instruction*” Miss Alice Dunn was able to fly solo (on the 26th) to Cowabbie Station and back with Captain Pittendrigh as a passenger. Another pupil Mr C. T. Hibbert was also able to make a solo flight after similar training. Cowabbie was owned by Mr R. Young at the time and had its own aerodrome, which Captain Pittendrigh was using to train four students.⁴⁹

At the end of May 1930 Mr R. Arundel, accompanied by Mr F. R. Bedford, of the De Havilland Aircraft Co., Sydney, flew into Wagga Wagga on the 27th in an orange coloured aeroplane, travelling from Melbourne back to Sydney. They landed on the racecourse first, then realising that this was not the aerodrome took off and found the new aerodrome.

Work on the aerodrome was still in progress, under the direction of the municipal engineer, Mr H. J. Chaston. Almost all of the trees had been removed and there were a few remaining stumps to be uprooted. The ground was not yet clearly identified, which may have explained the confusion for pilots not familiar with the town.⁵⁰

In the same month, May 1930, a joint committee of the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council and the Kyeamba Shire Council recommended to the Wagga Council that it approve the lease with Mr Salmon and also the agreement between the two councils that codified the relationship. The committees report provided an update on the works, which were estimated to cost in the vicinity of £150, on completion. The Aerial Taxi Co. had erected a hangar on the site and an agreement was to be drawn up, at an agreed rent. The works were described as follows⁵¹:

“The committee's report added that the clearing of the land leased was now in progress, four separate contracts having been let for the whole of the grubbing and clearing, and for the lopping of the trees on the adjacent roads. The work of clearing and burning off on an area of 10 chains square was practically completed; also the lopping of the trees on a strip of six chains wide round this area, in accordance with the requirements of the Controller of Civil Aviation. The dividing fence between portions 109 and 110 had been removed and re-erected on three sides of the area of 10 chains. The filling-in of the drain between portions 109 and 110 had received attention.”

Another plane was seen in Wagga Wagga on the 12th June 1930, when Captain J. Tracey, of Queensland Aerial Services, landed at the Wagga Wagga aerodrome to fill up with petrol before flying onto Melbourne. Captain Tracey was a native of Wagga Wagga, his father being the late Mr

⁴⁷ Daily Advertiser. 28th April 1930, p2.

⁴⁸ Daily Advertiser. 21st May 1930, p4.

⁴⁹ Daily Advertiser. 28th May 1930, p2.

⁵⁰ Daily Advertiser. 28th May 1930, p2.

⁵¹ Daily Advertiser. 30th May 1930, p3.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

James Tracey, who was the Australian Champion Pigeon Shooter. It was said that after his war service Captain Tracey was the first person to conduct passenger flights in Wagga Wagga, from the racecourse.⁵²



Left: Advertisement, June 1930.⁵³

In July 1930 the Council advised that Mr V. H. Augenson, an inspector of aerodromes, had visited Wagga Wagga and had reported the surface preparation of the aerodrome was complete, but that there were still some trees to be lopped that were not on the leased area, which would prevent the license application from being granted. The mayor confirmed that their share of the works was £100 and they would not be paying additional for the aforementioned tree lopping. The matter was referred to the aerodrome committee.⁵⁴

Following some wet weather in July the suitability of the location of the Wagga Wagga aerodrome was put into question. In August 1930 it was reported that the road to the aerodrome was “almost impassable,” and that Air Taxis Ltd were compelled to select an alternative temporary site. They chose the old pony racecourse on the Tarcutta Road, just past the mill, opposite Bolton Park.⁵⁵ At the end of the month ATL were operating flying lessons and pleasure flights from a paddock in Urana Road, about three hundred yards from the show ground, to coincide with the annual Show Week.⁵⁶

A meeting of the Municipal Council, on the 29th August 1930, revealed problems with the leasing of the aerodrome. Council stated it had spent £200 on improving the site but that they did not have full control of the area. The arrangements were that Council would not pay rent until such time as their license was approved. They would then pay 12/6 per week and Air Taxis Ltd would pay them 5/- per week. An issue arose in that when Captain Holden landed on the aerodrome he was told that he had would have to pay a percentage of his receipts to a third party. It appeared that pending the taking up of the lease by council (when licensed) Salmon had arranged an interim lease with another party, who demanded the money from Holden.

At the same time there was still the issue of trees to be felled on land outside of that proposed to be leased by Council. Salmon refused to allow them to be felled and Council had no legal right to compel him to do so – but if not felled then Council would not be granted a license. The outcome was that Brinsmead arranged for Mr H. R. McComb to revisit Wagga Wagga and make a further inspection with a view to clarifying the matter.⁵⁷

⁵² Daily Advertiser. 13th June 1930, p2.

⁵³ Daily Advertiser. 21st June 1930, p1.

⁵⁴ Daily Advertiser. 18th July 1930, p2.

⁵⁵ Daily Advertiser. 9th August 1930, p4.

⁵⁶ Daily Advertiser. 26th August 1930, p3.

⁵⁷ Daily Advertiser. 30th August 1930, p5.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

Whatever the arrangements were Captain Holden flew his famous plane, *Canberra*, to Wagga Wagga on 28th August to make a series of “25-mile passenger flights” from the Wagga Wagga aerodrome.⁵⁸



Above Left: Advertisement August 1930.⁵⁹



Above Right: Advertisement August 1930.⁶⁰

In September 1930 the Council were advised by the aerodrome committee that Mr McComb had inspected the site and that subject to some additional clearing along the southern boundary of part of portion 112, specifically the cutting back of two green trees that had already been lopped, and the “*felling stump high of three dead trees*”, along with some other minor works, there should be no impediments to a license being issued to Council for the aerodrome. Mr Salmon had no objection to these latest work proposals and the committee made a point of thanking him for his assistance.⁶¹ By the 10th October it was announced that the license had been approved, “*for all types of landplanes.*”⁶²

In the following month, on the 17th October 1930, a plane flown by Mr Arthur Butler crashed when making a forced landing at Wagga Wagga aerodrome. Butler had flown from Cootamundra that morning planning to go direct to Melbourne. He was an experienced pilot who had previously worked for the Larkin Aircraft Company. The plane, which Butler had built himself, was severely damaged, but he personally escaped with only a “*cut face and a few scratches.*”⁶³

With the aerodrome now licensed it was expected that more landings would occur. Air Taxis Ltd advertised that they offered, “*hanger accommodation, fuel and oils supplies, Moth spare parts, workshop facilities, and the services of a licensed aircraft engineer and rigger.*”⁶⁴

On the 9th November 1930 Mr Oscar Garden flew into Wagga Wagga in his Gipsy-Moth, *Kia-Ora*. This was the same plane in which he flew from England to Australia in eighteen days. Two other planes accompanied him for the trip and some three hundred Wagga Wagga citizens witnessed the landings and the official welcome. Alderman Lusher referred to Mr Garden as, “*the first international aviator who had landed at the Wagga aerodrome.*”

Mr Garden was accompanied by Mr M. Haig, the Aviation Manager of the Vacuum Oil Company, Melbourne, with the latter flying his plane, *Plume*, for the same journey. The local representative of

⁵⁸ Daily Advertiser. 28th August 1930, p4.

⁵⁹ Daily Advertiser. 27th August 1930, p6.

⁶⁰ Daily Advertiser. 27th August 1930, p6.

⁶¹ Daily Advertiser. 26th September 1930, p5.

⁶² Daily Advertiser. 10th October 1930, p2.

⁶³ Daily Advertiser. 18th October 1930, p4.

⁶⁴ Daily Advertiser. 25th October 1930, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

the company was Mr Horace Mitchelmore and he did a good job promoting the company's products, with a report in the local press noting that in his flight, from England to Australia, Garden used "*Plume spirit and Mobiloil.*"⁶⁵

At this time, November 1930, Air Taxis Ltd were flying passengers from Wagga Wagga to Sydney or Melbourne (return) for £25.

The benefits of the new technology were on display on the 21st November 1930 when Dr Victor Hurley, surgeon, chartered a Larkins Aircraft Co. flight into Wagga Wagga to perform an operation. The pilot failed to locate the Wagga Wagga aerodrome, instead landing in a paddock at North Wagga Wagga. Mrs Hales drove the doctor into town where he successfully performed the operation before returning to Melbourne that same day. The patient who had been in the Wagga Wagga District Hospital was then transferred to Welwyn Private Hospital.⁶⁶

Early in December 1930 Flying-Officer Harold Owen, who, 18 months ago, flew from England to



Australia with Flying-Officer Moir, and who had since circled Australia twice, flown six times to Darwin, and visited almost every landing ground in Australia visited Wagga Wagga and inspected the aerodrome. His only concern was that there were too many trees, which effectively reduced the size of the landing ground, especially for bigger planes. Owen flew in the Shell Oil Company's Gipsy Moth, the *Golden Shell*, promoting the company's latest underground fuelling equipment.⁶⁷

Above: The Golden Shell.⁶⁸

Advertisements in July 1931 gave notice that Air-Commodore Kingsford Smith proposed landing his *Southern Cross* at *Clovelly*, four miles from Wagga Wagga on the Oura Road with plans for pleasure trips to Burrinjuck and other destinations. Bookings were through Hunter Bros Ltd, with buses moving customers from the post office to *Clovelly*. The latter place has been made available as an aerodrome by Mr J. H. Wooden. It was noted that Kingsford Smith, "*uses Plume apotenic motor spirit and Gargoyle mobidoil for all country flights.*"⁶⁹

In August 1931 the Municipal Council approved the right for Captain Pittendrigh's Riverina Flying Schools to operate one aeroplane from the aerodrome for purposes of instructing students. The company was to pay £1 per month in advance.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Daily Advertiser. 10th November 1930, p5.

⁶⁶ Daily Advertiser. 22nd November 1930, p4.

⁶⁷ Daily Advertiser. 3rd December 1930, p3.

⁶⁸ Daily Advertiser. 1st December 1930, p1.

⁶⁹ Daily Advertiser. 30th July 1931, p2.

⁷⁰ Daily Advertiser. 21st August 1931, p3.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Left: Captain Pittendrigh and SJ Hamre (mining engineer for the Central Australian Gold Exploration Company), with the Gypsy Moth plane named the Golden Quest 2. Photo believed to be taken at Kurrajong, as the pair prepared to fly to central Australia to search for Lasseter's Reef. C.1930. Photo courtesy Tony Dunn.

Below: Left to right: Unknown, William L Pittendrigh, Alice Dunn, RJ Dunn, and SJ Hamre, at Kurrajong (Tedcastle's Paddock). Photo courtesy Tony Dunn.



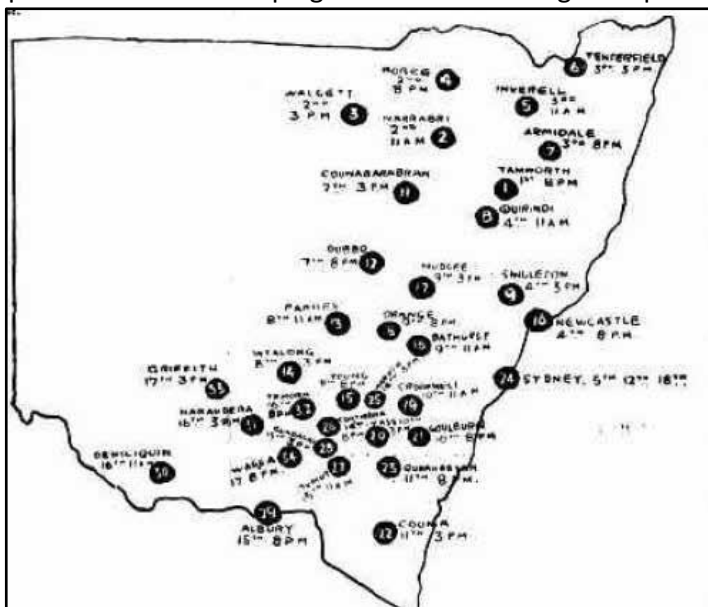
A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



On the 3rd December 1931 Mr Cecil Arthur Butler, the famous Australian aviator who broke Scott's record for a flight from England to Australia flew into Wagga Wagga in his Comper-Swift aeroplane.⁷¹ The plane was noted for its small size. Captain Pittendrigh and Mr L. Shaw flew to Junee to meet Butler and escort him to the Wagga Wagga aerodrome, where some three hundred people awaited their arrival.

Left: Cecil Arthur Butler.⁷²

The benefits of the new technology were further highlighted by Charles Hardy Junior, who used a plane to make a sweeping tour of the state to garner political support.



In December 1931 Charles Hardy Jr, the founder of the Riverina Movement, and the United Country Party candidate for the senate in NSW planned a public return to Wagga Wagga on 17th December.⁷³ Hardy had been making an aerial tour of the state to promote his cause for the upcoming election. A map in the local paper demonstrated his busy schedule- see adjacent map.

Left: Map showing Hardy's scheduled aerial tour of NSW in December 1931.⁷⁴

Captain Pittendrigh, along with the Deputy Mayor, Alderman H. L. Condon, planned to fly out to meet Mr Hardy and to escort him back to the Wagga Wagga aerodrome. It was a well organised event with Hardy's campaign director, Mr J. Graham, advising the police to station officers at street corners in order to control the traffic.⁷⁵ On the day it was estimated that some two hundred cars drove out to the aerodrome to welcome Mr Hardy back home. Hardy's plane circled the town several times before landing. On the underneath of the plane were painted the words, "*Vote Senator Hardy 1.*" He was given three cheers when he disembarked from the plane before being escorted to a car which took him back to town. The other cars followed in a procession. Crowds thronged the streets as his escort drove along the main street towards the Commercial hotel where the Wagga Brass Band and thousands of citizens awaited his arrival. As he approached the Band launched into

⁷¹ Daily Advertiser. 3rd December 1931, p2.

⁷² Australian Dictionary of Biography. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/butler-cecil-arthur-9645>. Accessed 24th February 2015.

⁷³ Daily Advertiser. 16th December 193, p12,

⁷⁴ Daily Advertiser. 17th December 1931, p2.

⁷⁵ Daily Advertiser. 17th December 1931, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

Advance Australia Fair and he was given three more cheers as he alighted from the car. He was accompanied upstairs to the balcony of the Commercial Hotel by the local member, Mr Kilpatrick, where they were the recipients of further cheering and applause. It was said to have been the largest reception ever afforded a local politician.⁷⁶ Hardy was elected to the senate in that month and his use of an aerial tour no doubt had a positive influence in that regard. It is a strange twist of fate that Hardy was killed in a plane crash in August 1941.

In March 1932 the Municipal Council advised that an Aerial Pageant planned for the 20th April would not be held at the Wagga Wagga Aerodrome, but rather at Tedcastle's paddock, due to the fact that the Wagga Wagga Aerodrome was too small to allow several planes to take off at once. It was further stated that, "*To pilots without experience of it the Wagga aerodrome was practically a death trap, as there was a lane of air coming in on the western side that was likely to be disconcerting to pilots who did not know the ground.*" The pageant had been organised by a pageant committee, not the Council.⁷⁷

Some 3,000 people attended the pageant, which, as planned, was held on Tedcastle's paddock. An adjoining paddock, lent by Mr R. J. Dunn, was used for spectators. Funds raised (some £150) were divided between the Wagga District Ambulance and the Riverina Aero Club (Wagga Wagga division). Trophies for the various competitions were donated by, "Messrs. A. McLeash, Dunn Bros., Maples, J. Speirs, and Hunter Bros. There were a total of ten planes featured during the pageant, mostly Gipsy Moths, with one American Eagle.

On the 30th August 1932 the manager of the Capitol Theatre, Mr Dal Cross, found that instead of receiving a copy of the film, "Letty Lynton", he has received something else. As he had advertised the former he rang the film exchange company in Sydney to highlight his dilemma and they subsequently arranged for it to be sent down by plane. The Shell Company arranged for a young aviator, Mr H. F. Broadbent, to fly the film to Wagga Wagga. He was originally meant to leave Sydney at 11am but was delayed until 2:45pm. There was a strong head wind and the Puss Moth was compelled to land at Goulburn at around 4:10pm. The flight thereafter was a little easier and he arrived in Wagga Wagga at around 6:10pm. The road to the aerodrome was impassable (wet weather) and it was decided that it would be best for the plane to land in Salmon's paddock on the Urana Road. A white cross was formed, with paper, and dry bark stacked ready to light, as a signal to the pilot.

Broadbent had landed in Wagga Wagga before but knew nothing of the new arrangements. He ignored the smoke on Salmon's paddock and landed on the Wagga Wagga Aerodrome field. Representatives of the Shell Company drove as far as they could and from their vantage point on a hill viewed a sea of water stretching between themselves and the aerodrome. The representatives waded across the sea of water, which took some ten minutes. There was no electricity at the aerodrome and the party was compelled to store the aeroplane in the hanger under darkness. This done the men waded back to the car and returned to the town delivering the movie film to the theatre in time for a showing around 7:30pm.⁷⁸

In September 1933 the Municipal Council were able to advise that the lease on the Wagga Wagga Aerodrome would expire in October. Officers reported that total expenditure on the aerodrome to-date was £406/10 (£97/10 rent, £309/19 clearing and improvements). Total receipts was £1/10, for

⁷⁶ Daily Advertiser. 18th December 1931, p4.

⁷⁷ Daily Advertiser. 1st April 1932, p5.

⁷⁸ Daily Advertiser. 1st September 1932, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Above: Nancy Bird (left) and Peggy McKillop (right) with their plane at Kurrajong (Tedcastle's Paddock) c.1935. Photo courtesy Tony Dunn.



Above: TW (Bill) Dunn with his plane at Tedcastle's Paddock, with the hangar in the background. C.1936. Photo courtesy Tony Dunn.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

fees, which was described as “trifling.” As a commercial business venture it was a failure. In a more damning explanation the Town Clerk, Mr Robert Emblen, stated that:

“The site did not appear to be a suitable one for the purposes of an aero drome. It was rendered practically useless in wet weather, and was flooded in times of high river. He was told, also, on good authority, that the air currents thereabouts were positively dangerous for flying. Altogether there seemed to be no reason at all for continuing the lease of the ground as an aerodrome.”

The Council resolved to discontinue the lease.⁷⁹

On the 5th November 1933 Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and his entourage visited Wagga Wagga again, landing in Mr R. J. Dunn’s paddock on the Oura Road. There were three planes involved and all made a series of pleasure flights at a cost ranging from 5s to £1, depending on which plane, with children at half fare. The group arrived around 11am and departed around 10am the next morning, for Melbourne, taking with them, “a number of Wagga passengers bound for the Melbourne Cup carnival.”

Kingsford Smith estimated that they had carried between four to five hundred passengers during their visit, which had been organised by the Vacuum Oil Company. The local press coverage reported that all three planes flew on Plume motor spirit and Mobiloil.⁸⁰

In April 1934 the Aero Club of NSW delivered two days of demonstrations and joy flights over the weekend of the 28th/29th, sponsored by the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council. There were twelve planes involved and these all landed at the old aerodrome at the western end of Edward Street.⁸¹

Aeroplane landings were still a bit of a novelty and on the 12th March 1935 a twin engine monoplane belonging to Northern Airways Ltd landed at the Wagga Wagga Aerodrome, causing some interest.⁸²

In August 1935 another famous pilot, Nancy Bird, and her co-pilot, Miss Peggy McKillop, made “no fewer than 48 passenger flights around Wagga.” Miss Bird was one of only five women in Australia to hold a commercial license to fly and was the youngest woman aviator in the British Empire. All flights were from a site marked out by Mr C. R. Hagan, a representative of Australian Transcontinental Airways Ltd, just south of the show ground on the Albury Road. Miss Bird described the site as “really excellent.” The site was some three miles from the Wagga Wagga post office.⁸³

The Second Official Aerodrome.

In a new development, on the 19th September 1935, Mr John Graham, of the Australian Transcontinental Airways Ltd, accompanied by the mayor, Alderman H. McDonough, inspected a potential aerodrome site for which Mr Graham had secured an option from Mr John Lloyd and others. The land in question was to the south of the municipal boundary, with a frontage to the Albury Road. The northern boundary of the site was very close to the southern municipal boundary, at Halloran’s Hill. The ground had been used by Miss Bird as a base during the annual show week, from which she made a series of flights. She had been very impressed with the suitability of the site. It was reported that the company intended to acquire the site and develop it into a modern aerodrome, and further it was their intent to give the Council, “an option to acquire the aerodrome at cost price any time within 10 years.” The company did not envisage exclusive access to the aerodrome preferring to sell or lease the site to council, in order that all planes could utilise the

⁷⁹ Daily Advertiser. 22nd September 1933, p6.

⁸⁰ Daily Advertiser. 6th November 1933, p1.

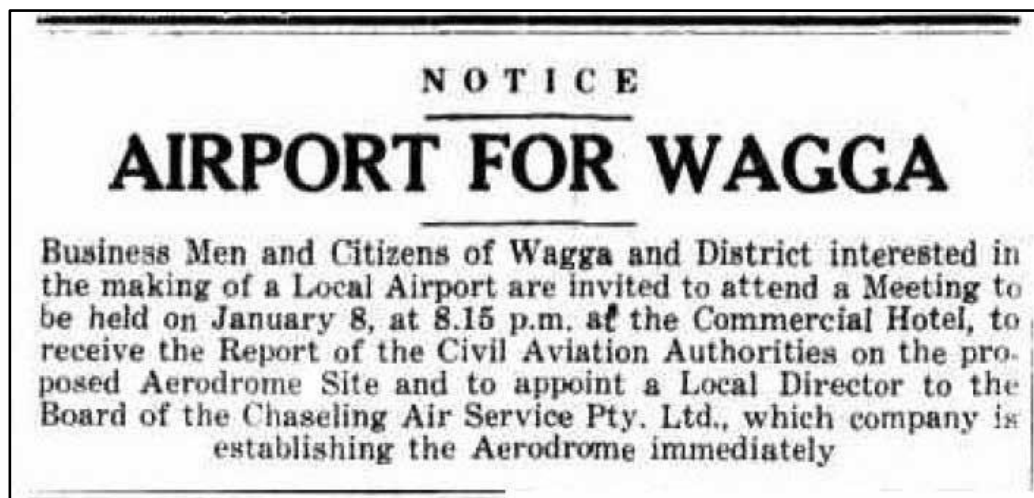
⁸¹ Daily Advertiser. 30th April 1934, p5.

⁸² Daily Advertiser. 13th March 1935, p4.

⁸³ Daily Advertiser. 20th December 1935, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

facility.⁸⁴ A day later it was announced that the company had secured a further option on land immediately to the west of Lloyd's paddock.⁸⁵



Above: An advertisement in the local paper December 1935.⁸⁶

In January 1936 Mr John Graham, manager of the Farmers & Graziers' Co-operative Co. Ltd, was elected as the local director for Chaseling Air Services. The site had been inspected by an official of the civil aviation branch of the Defence Department and he had indicated that he would recommend approval for all types of aeroplanes.⁸⁷

Details from the report showed the extent of works required for the site to be approved and licensed, as follows:

"The preparation required would involve the following work:

- (1) Remove the internal fencing and grub out all stumps and trees on the eastern portion*
- (2) Grade off the slope, fill and consolidate the broken water course and any holes so as to leave a firm and even surface with a gradual slope of not more than 1 in 40*
- (3) Construct boundary marks where shown on plan.*

*It would also be desirable to fell the trees stumps-high along the western boundary, and on the areas shown on plan. If practicable, arrangements should be made for the construction of a drain along the south boundary so as to prevent the erosion of the surface."*⁸⁸

In the same month Chaseling Air Services Pty Ltd declared that although they were building the new aerodrome on the Albury Road, it would be available to other aircraft, provided they did not compete with the company's activities. It was their plans to open a flying school on the 10th February and to initiate their first service, Wagga Wagga to Melbourne, by the 1st March.⁸⁹

In February 1936 the Municipal Council resolved to offer Mr Telacon Lloyd the sum of £50 p.a. for the lease of the proposed aerodrome site, for a period of three years. Further to set the rent for the

⁸⁴ Daily Advertiser. 20th September 1935, p3.

⁸⁵ Daily Advertiser. 21st September 1935, p4.

⁸⁶ Daily Advertiser. 28th December 1935, p5.

⁸⁷ Daily Advertiser. 9th January 1936, p4.

⁸⁸ Daily Advertiser. 6th February 1936, p4.

⁸⁹ Daily Advertiser. 13th January 1935, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

two companies interested in operating from the aerodrome at £70 each for the first year and £50 p.a. thereafter. It was the intent of the council that they would proceed with the necessary works, as outlined by the Aviation Department, as soon as all parties had finalised the relevant agreements. Total cost of the works was estimated at £165.⁹⁰ Lloyd had included an offer, or an option, for the council to purchase the 120 acres concerned at £25 per acre⁹¹, but the mayor clearly rejected this idea.

Amendments to the documentation were approved by Council at their meeting on 5th March.⁹² The land in question was located where The Haven now stands.⁹³

Changes continued and in May 1936, the Council decided that given the current circumstances they should advise Mr Lloyd that they were not likely to exercise their option over the land proposed for an aerodrome. The council understood that the federal government would establish four emergency landing grounds between Melbourne and Sydney, and they expected Wagga Wagga would be chosen as one of those sights.⁹⁴

The Council, instead, in June 1936, resolved to ask Mr Lloyd for an option to lease his property on the Albury Road for a period of twelve months, at £50 p.a., with an option for two additional one year periods at the same rate. Lloyd had already submitted an offer for a two year lease under the same terms as had previously been proposed.

On the 30th June 1936 a strange aircraft landed at Wagga Wagga. An autogyro [helicopter] landed at Wagga Wagga, on the racecourse. The following day the pilot, Mr C. Gatenby took off and landed on Lloyd's aerodrome on the Albury Road, where two accompanying planes from the Royal Victorian Aero Club had landed earlier that day. The three were travelling from Melbourne to Sydney and were stopping at towns along the way to give demonstrations and joy flights. They performed a series of aerobatics for some fifteen minutes on the 1st July, and offered joy rides all day on the 2nd July, at a cost of 10s for the autogyro, 5s each for groups of two in the Genairco plane, and 5s each in the Moth. The pilots were very impressed with the quality of Lloyd's aerodrome.⁹⁵

By July Council had resolved to take up the option to lease Lloyd's aerodrome property and to proceed with the necessary works in order to obtain a license.⁹⁶ By early September men were at work on the site, on the Albury Road just over Halloran's Hill, clearing timber and re-grading the ground. The municipal engineer, Mr H. J. Chaston, expected the works to be completed within three weeks.⁹⁷ By the 1st October the Council was ready for the site to be inspected and to apply for a license.⁹⁸ A telegram from the department of Civil Aviation was announced to Council on the 26th November, in which the department confirmed the new aerodrome had been inspected and it met the requirements for all types of aircraft.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ Daily Advertiser. 22nd February 1936, p3.

⁹¹ Daily Advertiser. 7th February 1936, p5.

⁹² Daily Advertiser. 6th March 1936, p2.

⁹³ From John Winterbottom. February 2015.

⁹⁴ Daily Advertiser. 22nd May 1936, p5.

⁹⁵ Daily Advertiser. 2nd July 1936, p3.

⁹⁶ Daily Advertiser. 3rd July 1936, p3.

⁹⁷ Daily Advertiser. 10th September 1936, p4.

⁹⁸ Daily Advertiser. 2nd October 1936, p6.

⁹⁹ Daily Advertiser. 27th November 1936, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

The 14th December 1936 heralded the first flight of the daily air service (except Sundays) between Wagga Wagga/Melbourne, and Wagga Wagga/Sydney by Australian National Airways Pty Ltd. Some delays were caused by bad weather.¹⁰⁰



Above: An Australian National Airways plane. Believed to be at Wagga Wagga. Note the Royal Mail signage.

The Third Official Aerodrome.

As the industry continued to grow, so too did the size of the planes, and in March 1937, a meeting between representatives of the Municipal Council and of the Australian National Airways (ANA), and other interested persons, was told by ANA pilot, Captain C. H. Scott that the current ground was not big enough for the larger planes the company intended to fly on the route. He also stated that, "*it would be impossible to make the ground 100%.*" The municipal engineer agreed that, "*the best course would be to obtain another ground. It would be a waste of money to effect further Improvements as a permanent work.*" Alderman Lusher pointed out that they had a two year lease on the current site.¹⁰¹

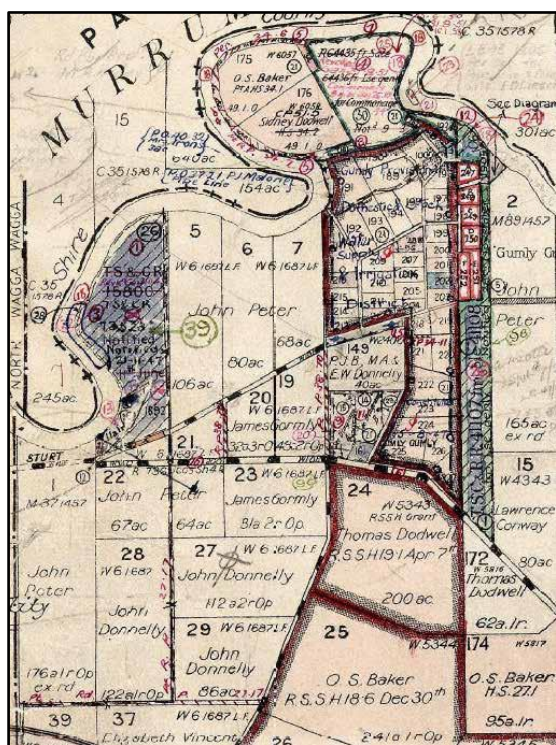
The move towards a new site continued and in April 1937 the Minister for Works, Mr Spooner advised Mr Kilpatrick, the MLA for Wagga Wagga, that the proposed construction of an aerodrome at Gumly Gumly (on portions 23 and 27 and part of portion 21 – parish of Gumly Gumly) would be funded by his government under the "*absorption of relief workers*" program, subject to the Council agreeing to, "*undertake the preparation of plans and specifications, the engineering supervision, and the resumptions without costs, to the department.*"¹⁰² It seems that the land finally purchased, for the third airport site, lay to the east of these original choices.

¹⁰⁰ Daily Advertiser. 15th December 1936, p4.

¹⁰¹ Daily Advertiser. 19th March 1937, p3.

¹⁰² Daily Advertiser. 24th April 1937, p7.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Left: An extract from a 1943 parish map of Gumly Gumly showing portions 21, 23 & 27.¹⁰³

By the end of May 1937 the Council was in receipt of a letter from the Civil Aviation Board advising that the land on the Tarcutta Road (Gumly Gumly), proposed for the establishment of an aerodrome, had been inspected and that it would be suitable for all types of aeroplanes provided certain works were carried out. These were as follows:

- “(a) Removal of all internal fencing.*
- (b) Felling and removing all timber from the area; stumps to be grubbed, and holes filled in and consolidated.*
- (c) Grading of surface to eliminate depressions and unevenness, with filling, rolling, and loaming as necessary.*
- (d) Construction of levee bank along the south-east*

boundary with an open drain through the slight ridge.

(e) Removal of windmill and tank on southern portion of site, filling of well, etc. The house inside the eastern boundary could remain and be used as a caretaker's residence if desired.

(f) Felling of timber stump high outside the aerodrome for a sufficient distance to permit aircraft to approach the boundaries of the landing area at an angle not steeper than one in 15.

OVERHEAD WIRES

The overhead wires to the north and east were bad obstructions, continued the letter, but as the area could be used without their removal providing the poles were adequately marked. However, if the ground was to be used regularly by all types of aircraft it would be desirable for the power and telephone lines to be either deviated or placed underground. For wet weather use by the heaviest type of aircraft, the letter concluded, it was probable that prepared runways would be necessary.”¹⁰⁴

In September 1937 the council considered an offer from Mr Schiller to sell them his land on the Tarcutta Road, for an aerodrome. His asking price was £20/11 per acre, for some 207 acres – a total cost of around £4,256. The council resolved to ask Mr Schiller for a three months option to purchase at this price, while they resolved related issues.¹⁰⁵

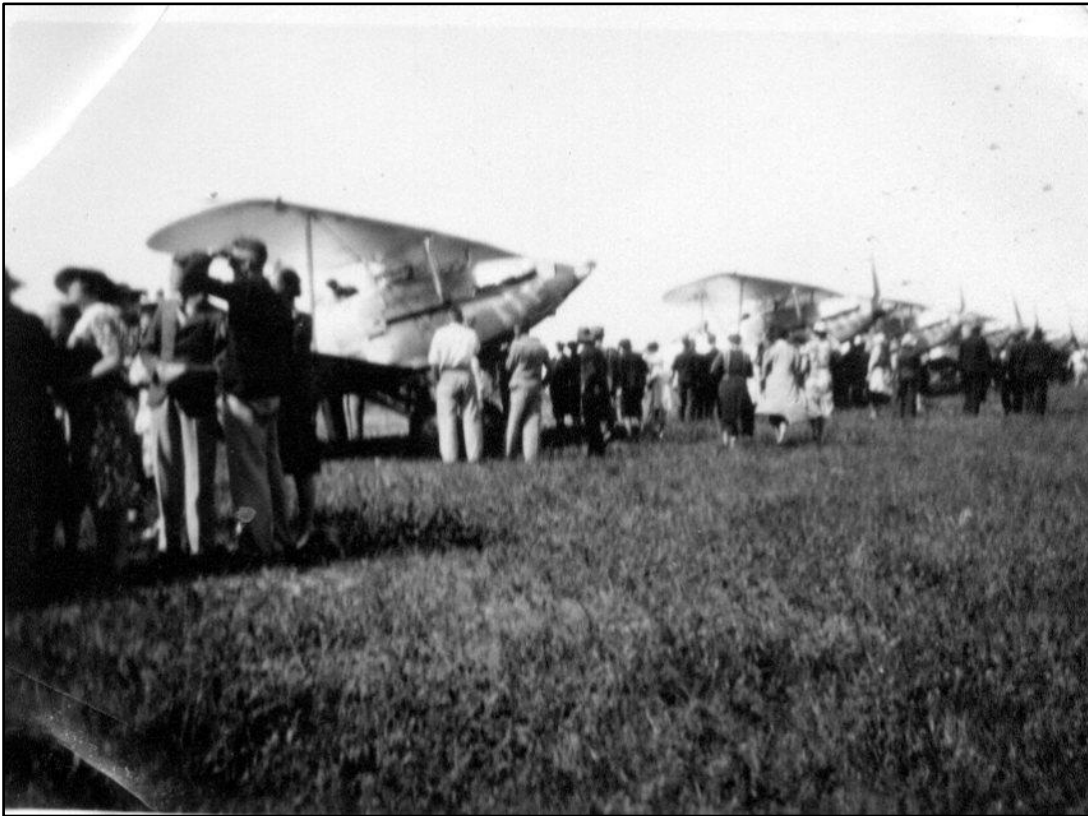
An accident occurred on the 29th December 1937 when an ANA flight from Melbourne crash landed at Wagga Wagga causing considerable damage to the plane. Fortunately neither the passengers nor the pilots were hurt. It appears that the pilot landed safely but veered sharply at some stage when taxiing across the drome, and it was at this point in time that the damage was incurred. There was a suggestion that cattle had strayed into the path of the plane, but this was denied by the person

¹⁰³ NSW Land & Property Information. Historic Parish Maps.

¹⁰⁴ Daily Advertiser. 28th May 1937, p5.

¹⁰⁵ Daily Advertiser. 3rd September 1937, p4.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Above: Aeroplanes and spectators at the Gumly Gumly aerodrome site. Photo courtesy Evelyn Patterson.



Above: The airfield at Gumly Gumly with two planes in the background. Photo courtesy Evelyn Patterson.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

responsible for keeping them clear and by other eyewitnesses.¹⁰⁶ Despite the claims that the cattle had not caused the accident the Minister for Defence subsequently announced that henceforth livestock would be removed from “regularly used airdromes” as a consequence of the accident at Wagga Wagga on the 29th December.¹⁰⁷ The official report (from ANA) to the Civil Aviation Board attributed the cause of the accident to the fact that the landing strip was too short for a plane of this size, and that the pilot was compelled to veer off the runway in order to avoid the fence at the end of same. There were cattle to the right which influenced the pilot’s decision to swing to the left. The inspector’s opinion was that it would have made no difference as to which way the pilot swerved – the result would have been the same.

By the end of December 1937, the local member, Mr Kilpatrick, announced that the government would allocate a grant of £7,500 to the Municipal Council for works on the proposed new aerodrome.¹⁰⁸

In the first week of January 1938 it was announced that work on the new aerodrome at Gumly Gumly would start within a week. It was hoped to be sufficiently advanced by early February to obtain a temporary License to operate the aerodrome. The Council was arranging to borrow £5,000 to purchase the 220 acres of land required for the project. The state government was to carry out the required works to make it one of the best aerodromes in the Commonwealth. Total cost for the works was expected to be in the order of £10,000. When completed the aerodrome would feature a runway exceeding 1,300 yards, along with offices, rest rooms, car parking areas, taxi ways, and caretaker’s quarters. The runway would be capable of accommodating the largest planes known. The land was said to be four miles from town on the Tarcutta road and it was owned by Mr Schiller.¹⁰⁹ Work commenced on the 8th January.¹¹⁰

In February 1938 an update on works at the new aerodrome revealed that, “For several weeks now, 35 men have been employed as relief workers grading and levelling the ground, grubbing trees, and removing a mile and a half of division fences. This work is being speeded up so that at any time from a fortnight to a month the ground may be used as a temporary landing area.”¹¹¹

Some two weeks later some 120 trees have been felled and grubbed, with another 50 to 60 still to go.¹¹²

On the 15th March 1938, an ANA flight from Melbourne, complete with a full load of passengers, landed at the new aerodrome, which the pilot described as “beautiful.” This was the first landing at the new aerodrome. The same plane took off for Sydney later that day.¹¹³

In the same month the new aerodrome was inspected by Major Mann, of the Civil Aviation Department, along with Mr H. W. Matthews, manager of ANA, and Captain Scott, chief pilot for ANA. They were more than satisfied with its progress and as a consequence issued a provisional license allowing lighter planes to land.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ Daily Advertiser 30th December 1937, p2. / 31st December 1937, p4.

¹⁰⁷ Daily Advertiser. 6th January 1938, p2.

¹⁰⁸ Daily Advertiser. 31st December 1937, p4.

¹⁰⁹ Daily Advertiser. 5th January 1938, p4.

¹¹⁰ Daily Advertiser. 8th January 1938, p5.

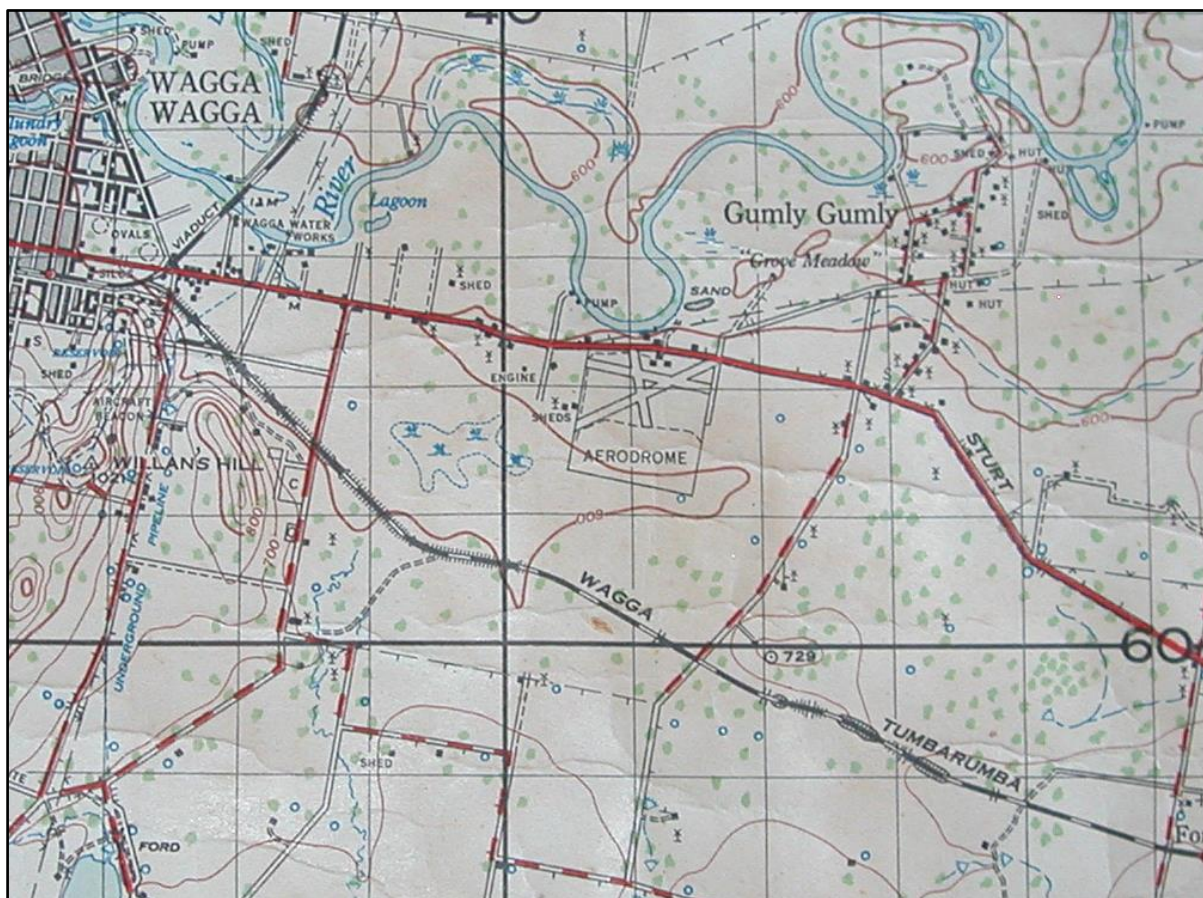
¹¹¹ Daily Advertiser. 3rd February 1938, p6.

¹¹² Daily Advertiser. 15th February 1938, p4.

¹¹³ Daily Advertiser. 16th March 1938, p2.

¹¹⁴ Daily Advertiser. 24th March 1938, p5.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Above: 1946 Lands Department map showing the location of the Wagga Wagga Airport at Gumly Gumly.¹¹⁵

The Council received confirmation, in March 1938, from the Civil Aviation authority that, “on completion” the aerodrome could be officially designated as *Wagga Wagga Airport*.¹¹⁶

As a consequence of the new developments, in April 1938, the municipal engineer advised the Council that ANA intended using the new aerodrome rather than the old Albury Road ground and made the following recommendations:

- 1— *Application be made to have existing licence on Albury-road ground cancelled.*
- 2— *Remove temporary buildings from Albury-road ground to the new airport.*

After cancellation is approved of:

- 3— *Take up circle indicator.*
- 4— *Wind indicator dismantle.*
- 5— *Remove ramp from entrance.*
- 6— *Short division fence material to be returned to Mr. Lloyd.*

The report was adopted.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ <http://www.waggabiketires.com/HISTORY.htm>. [Wagga Bike Tyres site] Accessed 27th February 2015.

¹¹⁶ Daily Advertiser. 25th March 1938, p8.

¹¹⁷ Daily Advertiser. 8th April 1938, p3.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Above: The old service station on the left hand side of Hammond Avenue driving out of town towards Forest Hill (in 2018). Located a little before the Carriage house motel. The airport stood directly opposite, on the other side of the road. It fronted Hammond Avenue and its eastern boundary was Tasman Road, while its western boundary was probably Blaxland Road. It would have included portions 1 and 22 in the parish of Gumly Gumly and portion 129 in the parish of South Wagga Wagga. The airport land spread over the two parishes, and was immediately west of the original portions proposed.

The trend to larger aircraft continued and in April 1938 Council was advised by the Civil Aviation Board that heavier planes could land at the new aerodrome, specifically DH & Douglas machines (as flown by ANA).¹¹⁸ The first such plane, the Douglas fourteen seater landed on the 17th April, piloted by Captain Scott.¹¹⁹ Other larger planes, such as the DC16's had landed as early as the 5th April.¹²⁰

The official opening of the Wagga Wagga Airport, by the Minister for Defence, Mr Thorby, took place on the 10th October 1938, with some 10,000 people in attendance. The building housing the caretaker, along with reception and restrooms for passengers, and a control tower were still under construction. Large concrete letters spelling "WAGGA" had been set into the ground thanks to the contribution of the Girl Guides.¹²¹

The Fourth Aerodrome at Wagga Wagga.

The goal posts were moved again in March 1939, when the RAAF recommended that a flying school be established at Forest Hill, with the project to be completed by end 1941 at a cost of some £450,000. It had not at that time been approved by the Federal Cabinet. The Prime Minister, Mr Robert Menzies, confirmed, in May 1939, that the RAAF flying school would be built at Forest Hill.

¹¹⁸ Daily Advertiser. 20th April 1938, p2.

¹¹⁹ Daily Advertiser. 18th April 1938, p4.

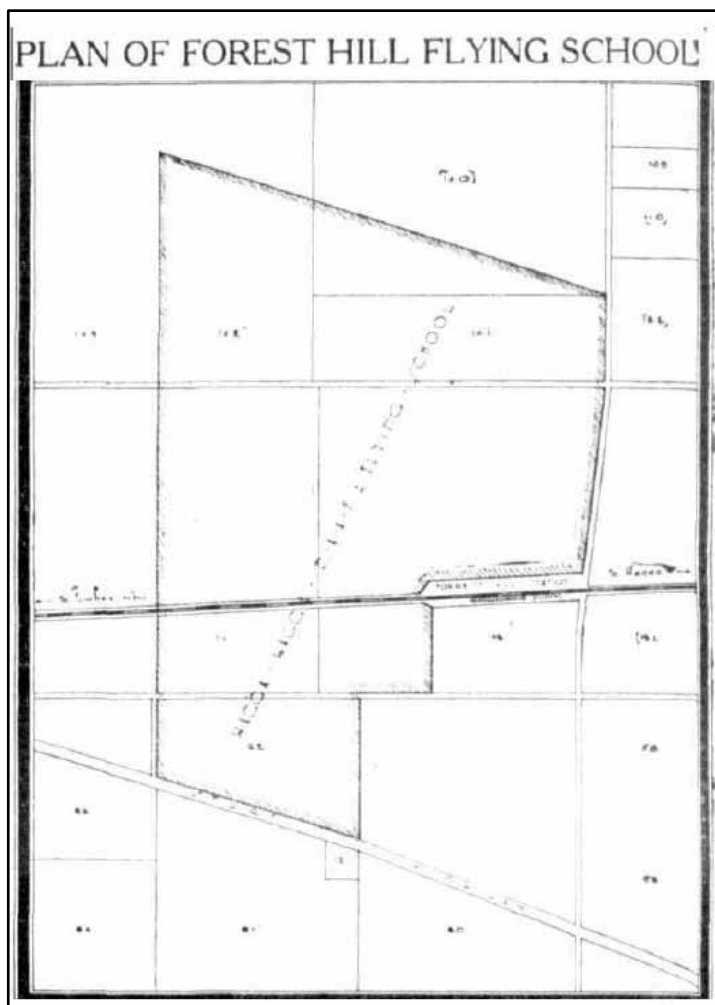
¹²⁰ Daily Advertiser. 7th April 1938, p4.

¹²¹ Daily Advertiser. 11th October 1938, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

By August 1939 the land for the RAAF training school had been secured and was described as follows:

“Three estates are involved in the purchase. Beginning from the Sturt Highway, 87 acres belonging to Mr. R.H. Blake have been acquired. This block extends from the Sturt Highway to the Forest Hill railway line. On the opposite side of the line 417 acres have been acquired from W. R. Lyons Pty. Ltd., on Sackville, and 280 acres have been secured in Allonby from the estate of Anthony Brunskill and Sons, making a total of approximately 784 acres.”¹²²



Above: Map of land resumed for RAAF Flying School in 1939.¹²³

Comments on Wagga Wagga Airport by Flight Superintendent J. McLaughlin of Ansett Airways, in May 1940, revealed that Wagga Wagga Airport was dependent on a windmill in the north-east corner of the airport for its water supply and that it did not have electricity connected. Both services ran past the site but had not been connected by council. The windmill was seen as a hindrance to landing in some conditions.¹²⁴

¹²² Daily Advertiser. 17th August 1939, p4.

¹²³ Daily Advertiser. 25th October 1939, p6.

¹²⁴ Daily Advertiser. 1st May 1940, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

The Wagga Wagga RAAF Training School at Forest Hill was officially opened on the 29th July 1940. Senior officers had arrived early in July to prepare for the opening, from which date the first batch of trainees would go through the sixteen week training program.¹²⁵

During the war years the military authorities had taken over the airport, but with the end of the war they no longer required the facility. In August 1944 the Council was advised by the Australian Military Forces that the Commonwealth no longer required the airport, which was to be handed back to the Council on the 28th July 1944. Council were now in possession. This was the beginning of the end for the airport at Gumly Gumly.

In July 1945, the Mayor, Alderman J. V. Doyle, reported on an inspection of Wagga Wagga's two airports by representatives of the Department of Civil Aviation and the municipal engineer. The purpose of the visit was to gauge the council's views on a proposal to move all commercial air traffic to Forest Hill. Council was ambivalent so long as a Wagga Wagga was served by a modern airport.¹²⁶

Another nail in the coffin occurred in April 1946, when the Council was advised that unless they made certain improvements to the Wagga Wagga Airport it would revert to a C class license. The Director-General of Civil Aviation had also advised that approval had been given for the transfer of operations from the municipal aerodrome to the RAAF Forest Hill aerodrome.¹²⁷

In April 1947 the Minister for Agriculture, Mr Eddie Graham, suggested to the Council that the Wagga wagga Airport land be resumed for closer settlement. The Town Clerk advised that Council's lease on the site would expire in eighteen months, and Council subsequently resolved to do nothing until then.¹²⁸ When the mayor delivered an annual report in December he noted that, "*With the growth in both the number and size of planes calling at Wagga, the council's airport on Tarcutta Road was found to be inadequate and all traffic was transferred, under an agreement between the Civil Aviation Department and the RAAF, to Forest Hill aerodrome.*"¹²⁹

The Council would not have wanted to spend monies on what was now a white elephant, and services, accordingly, suffered. In October 1947 there were complaints regarding the lack of facilities at the Forest Hill Airport. There was no waiting room for passengers, nor toilets. It was also stated that the airport had to be closed in wet weather as planes could not land safely.¹³⁰

The situation was untenable and in February 1948, the president of the Wagga Aero Club, Mr E. Condon, criticised the current operation of the Forest Hill aerodrome. His concern was that Wagga Wagga did not have a licenced civil airport. His understanding was that the airport was managed by the Department of Civil Aviation, but that it was subject to RAAF regulations. At the same time the former Wagga Wagga Airport had been delicensed and applications to relicense it had failed on the basis that it was too close to the Forest Hill site.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Daily Advertiser. 2nd July 1940, p2.

¹²⁶ Daily Advertiser. 17th July 1945, p2.

¹²⁷ Daily Advertiser. 6th April 1946, p2.

¹²⁸ Daily Advertiser. 19th April 1947, p3.

¹²⁹ Daily Advertiser. 1st December 1947, p3.

¹³⁰ Daily Advertiser. 2nd October 1947, p1.

¹³¹ Daily Advertiser. 14th February 1948, p5.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

On the 20th June 1953 a new all-weather air strip at Forest Hill airport was officially opened, by the Member for Farrer, Mr D.E. Fairbairn.¹³² The Federal government continued to control the airport up until 1992.

In 1992 the Wagga Wagga City Council negotiated an agreement with the Commonwealth Government, to take over the airport, which included a \$2 million upgrade of the runway. The Council still maintained control in 2018.

Riverina Aero Club.

According to Keith Swan the Riverina Aero Club was established in 1928, with H. L. Condon as its president (Mayor of Wagga Wagga in 1958), and at first operated out of the field at Frog Hollow.¹³³ This may be incorrect as no references to same could be found in the newspapers of that time, and Swan did not provide a source for his claim. Captain Pittendrigh was running a flying school at Wagga Wagga by the middle of 1930 and it would appear unlikely that the Riverina Aero Club was formed before this.

The Cootamundra Aero Club was formed in August 1931.¹³⁴ The catalyst for forming the new club. Had been a visit by Captain Pittendrigh, in the previous month. The latter was an instructor with the Goulburn Aero Club, and undertook a series of visits to Wagga Wagga, Cootamundra & Young, with the view to forming flying clubs in each town, supported by the Riverina Flying School.¹³⁵

A club was also formed in Wagga Wagga, in August 1931. It was in this month that the committee, which controlled the Wagga Wagga Aerodrome, consented to Captain Pittendrigh, of the Riverina Flying School, using the aerodrome to provide training for local enthusiasts. There was also a request to hold an air pageant at Wagga Wagga, and the committee decided that the Wagga Aero Club should organise this.¹³⁶ The latter was, presumably, a section of the Riverina Aero Club.

In April 1932, Pittendrigh, now described as an instructor for the Riverina Aero Club, spoke to a meeting at Young, who made the decision to form a section of the club at Young.¹³⁷ It appears the Riverina Flying School was now known as the Riverina Aero Club. In the same month Pittendrigh organised a very successful air pageant at Wagga Wagga, which raised some £150, half of which was to go to the Wagga Wagga section of the Riverina Aero Club.¹³⁸

In May 1932, Captain Pittendrigh travelled to Sydney to pick up a new plane, which had been purchased by members and pupils of the Riverina Aero club. The new plane was an Avro-Avian, with the markings VH-UKD, and was to be deployed at Wagga Wagga, Cootamundra and Young, all towns in which the club operated. The centre of operations, was Cootamundra, and this is where the plane was to be based. Pittendrigh, and his wife, moved from Wagga Wagga to Cootamundra to be at the centre of operations.¹³⁹

¹³² Daily Advertiser. 22nd June 1953, p2.

¹³³ Swan, Keith. A History of Wagga Wagga. p175.

¹³⁴ Cootamundra Herald. 14th August 1931, p2.

¹³⁵ Daily Advertiser. 8th July 1931, p2. / Cootamundra Herald. 2nd October 1931, p5.

¹³⁶ Wagga Wagga Express. 22nd August 1931, p8.

¹³⁷ Sydney Morning Herald. 8th April 1932, p10.

¹³⁸ Daily Advertiser. 29th April 1932, p2.

¹³⁹ Daily Advertiser. 6th May 1932, p2.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports

Captain Pittendrigh was accompanied by Mr T. W. Dunn on the flight back to Cootamundra. The latter had gained his pilot's license under Captain Pittendrigh, in the "previous summer."¹⁴⁰

At the AGM of the Cootamundra club, on the 30th June 1933, a new president was elected and the committee resolved to suspend flying operations due to a lack of public interest. They also decided to sell the plane, which having flown some two thousand three hundred and fifty miles, was now considered old. The intent was to purchase a newer plane at some later date. The flying instructor, Mr S Austin, left Cootamundra for Western Australia where he had gained employment as a pilot.¹⁴¹

The Wagga Wagga section went a step further by going into recess, but it reformed in August 1938. The club had some thirty four members initially and the elected officials were as follows:

"Mr. H. Condon was elected president; Messrs. V. Slattery, W. B. Davies. E. Roberts and Dr. G. Kerfoot vice-presidents; Mr. A. J. Hoban, secretary; Mr. J. J. Speirs, treasurer; and Mr. Ken. Kenneally, auditor. A committee was appointed comprising Messrs. H. Condon, Hoban, J. J. Speirs, E. Roberts, K. Carmody, G. Kerfoot, Wal. Higgins, W. B. Davies, K. Beeby, Slattery, Hurst, and Father Glover."

A primary objective of the new club was to procure an aeroplane so that members could be taught to fly and the committee had several options before them as to how that might be achieved.¹⁴²

In December 1939 the Wagga club were using a plane that belonged to the NSW Aero Club to provide training. Mr Darcy Wentworth was the new instructor, having just taken over from Captain Jack Bennett, who had secured a position with Australian National Airways Ltd, at Essendon. Wentworth took the plane up, with Ian Cork of Tumut accompanying him. When the plane landed, at around 7pm, on the 10th December, the left wing dipped, causing the plane to crash. The damage included a broken petrol pipe, which allowed the fuel in the tank to flow freely onto the ground. Both men escaped without serious injury, but the plane shortly afterwards burst into flames and was completely destroyed. The plane, a Gypsy Moth valued at some £600, was not insured. It was believed that a lit cigarette had caused the petrol to ignite.¹⁴³ The local club was now without a plane.

The club went into recess during the 2nd World War,¹⁴⁴ but was reformed on the 1st January 1947.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Cootamundra Herald. 16th May 1932, p2.

¹⁴¹ Cootamundra Herald. 5th July 1933, p3.

¹⁴² Daily Advertiser. 12th August 1938, p4.

¹⁴³ Daily Advertiser. 11th December 1939, p4.

¹⁴⁴ Daily Advertiser. 24th December 1946, p2. / Daily Advertiser. 8th May 1946, p2.

¹⁴⁵ Daily Advertiser. 3rd February 1947, p2. & 10th September 1947, p1.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Above: Members of the recently formed Wagga Wagga Aero Club at Forest Hill in c.1947. The plane was Eric Condon's Avro Anson. Photo courtesy Wagga Flying School.



Above: Eric Condon talking to some young women who were competing in a competition for flying lessons c.1946. Photo courtesy Wagga Flying School.

A History of Wagga Wagga Airports



Above: Left to right: Ron Hutchings, AB (Tony) Dunn, Mildred Hutchings, Alan Hartwig and Jack Bennett. Bennett was the instructor with the Riverina Aero Club from March 1939,¹⁴⁶ till around December 1939, and the photo was almost certainly taken in this period. Photo courtesy Tony Dunn.

¹⁴⁶ Daily Advertiser. 28th March 1939, p4.