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Newsletter of the Narromine Aviation Museum Inc.

No.14 - September 2018

Welcome to another annual newsletter - our forum for keeping our members informed of the happenings at the museum over the past year.

Annual General Meeting notice: The museum's AGM will be held at 2:30pm on 23 October in the auditorium. All members are welcome.

State government grant

Last year we received a \$143,000 Arts & Culture Infrastructure Projects grant from NSW Liquor & Gaming (Department of Industry). This very welcome funding is being put to good use for a number of museum projects including a new airconditioning system, roof-mounted solar panels with battery storage (which will greatly reduce our power bills) and a number of renovations and display enhancements - see Display Makeover below.

Precinct redevelopment

Meanwhile, Narromine Shire Council is contributing half a million dollars worth of grounds work to the aerodrome precinct near and around the museum building, including road development, curbing & guttering, underground drainage and a carpark. As recent visitors to the museum will know, this has meant that entry into

the museum is temporarily via the rear of the building. When the work is completed late this year, along with some landscaping around the building and lighting of the museum's wall lettering, the improvement will be dramatic.

Armageddon from the Air: a centennial photo exhibition

Last year Narromine reached an important historical milestone: the centenary of the first locally-build aircraft, Jim Hayden's monoplane of 1917. It was the first in a string of centenaries of early events in the aviation story of the region.

This year we commemorate 1918, the final year of the Great War, and look at how it was experienced by some of the men who went on to form Narromine Aero Club a decade later. The club's wartime origins were the subject of a two-part article I wrote for publication last year in *Sabretache*, the journal of the Military Historical Society of Australia. It also appeared in the society's compilation book *Fighting on all Fronts* which can be ordered by emailing editor@mhsa.org.au.

Last Anzac Day, museum volunteers and other invitees filled our auditorium as the Mayor officially opened our first thematic photographic exhibition. This is a display of previously unseen images which we are able to present thanks to Mr Ewen Simpson, donor of the photographic

glass plates from which they were printed. A 1918 Armistice Centenary Grant of \$3500 from the Department of Veterans' Affairs funded their production, mounting and display on artist's easels.

The exhibition, called *Armageddon from the Air*, will remain on display at least until Remembrance Day, 11 November. It showcases 42 photographic enlargements from the Great War collection of H. Bowden Fletcher DFC, founder of Narromine Aero Club. During the final six months of the Sinai-Palestine campaign against the Ottoman Turks, from April 1918, Fletcher flew as an air observer, gunner and photographer in Bristol Fighters with 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, including in the Battle of Megiddo or Armageddon (19-25 September 1918).

Some of these exceptional photographs have a personal flavour, depicting people and events from both sides of the conflict, while others are aerial views of the settlements, cities and battlefields involved in the campaign. Some will feature in a future issue of *Sabretache* as part of an article I am writing about the photography carried out by Fletcher's squadron.

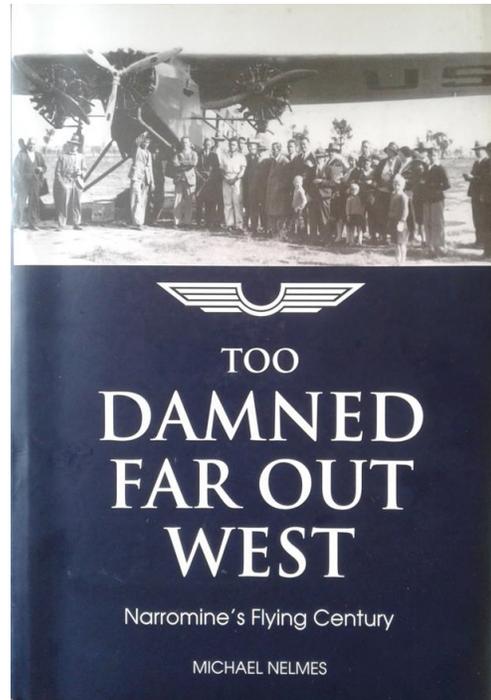


One of the photos displayed in the exhibition: German troops pose before the wreckage of a railway carriage, most likely at Tul Keram railway station in Palestine. H.B. Fletcher participated in its attack from the air in 1918. His role was described in the Official History of the Australian Flying Corps (available online at www.awm.gov.au)

Fletcher's Great War memorabilia, along with that of Narromine Aero Club's founding vice-president Bruce Irvine and WWII Narromine RAAF Station

commander Tom Baillieu, are a focus of our displays this year as they turn 100. One of our most treasured artefacts is a small piece of maroon-coloured fabric which Baillieu souvenired from the Red Baron's aircraft when it was shot down in France on 21 April 1918. Be sure to see it if you visit this year.

History book available



The Great War connections are just some of the stories examined in the museum's recently published history of aviation at Narromine. Printed by Progress Printing of Condobolin, it was launched by the Mayor on Anzac Day during our photo exhibition opening. Buy your copy of this 488-page, limited-edition publication for \$140 at the museum, or in Dubbo at The Book Connection, 178 Macquarie St. Mail orders (postage extra) can be phoned through to Peter Kierath on 02-68894444.

Database of wartime graduate pilots

An appendix included in the above book is a list of the graduate pilots of Courses 1 to 30 of No. 5 Elementary Flying Training School at RAAF Station Narromine during 1940-44, compiled by Angela O'Neil. She has now almost completed the remaining Courses 31 to 46. The information on each graduate includes full name, service number, date of RAAF enlistment, honours & awards, whether they became a prisoner of war, and (for those who died in service) the location and unit with which they were serving at the time.

The starting point for this complex project, carried out over several years, was to create a definitive list of names by cross-checking three separate sources of course names. The information will be available at the museum via a database which, we believe, will be a first in Australia.

Once the database is completed, we also plan to commemorate these men on bronze plaques mounted on a granite wall. The most suitable location would be along the edge of the wartime parade ground, adjacent to the museum. In order to fund this and other future projects, we have applied for a \$150,000 grant from the NSW Regional Cultural Fund.

Display makeover



Our recent government funding, as well as visitor admission fees and sales which have nearly doubled since the new wing opened, have allowed

us to take the museum to a new level of presentation. Glassed-in wall displays have now greatly enhanced several of our themes. Last year we enclosed our prisoner-of-war and polo club displays, and this year we created two more glass enclosures for the First World War display (seen above) and for a trio of themes near the museum entrance: Beaufighters (1944-46), Qantas, and the post-war aero club. The Beaufighter display now includes an imposing 2.4-metre long Hispano 20mm cannon, main weapon of Beaufighters and Mosquitoes stationed at Narromine, which was dug out of the ground near Tomingley.



"Wilbur Wright" brings the Wright Flyer 'A' to life, along with a second mannequin of Orville Wright at the wingtip. The period clothes were custom made.

Our reception area has also been renovated, with a new kitchen including a drinks fridge, a sitting area, and a large bookshelf unit to house much of our library. For a historic touch, a set of 1950s-style ceiling lights sourced from the old aero club building has been added to this space and to the original museum gallery. Our thanks, as always, go to Dave Hyland for donating many hours of his time to construction work on the display cases etc, and to Luke Short for electrical work and to Don Tancred for the kitchen work.

Along with this work, it was time to update the original wall paint in the museum and auditorium which was by now 16 years old. A light greyish tone called white duck was chosen, and for the north wall a military-looking dark olive. Along with the existing dull peach and earthy tones of the partitions and display case walls, we think visitors will find this multi-hued scheme more interesting.

Amy Johnson leadlight

Amy Johnson CBE, the first woman to fly from England to Australia, is one of history's most celebrated aviators. Johnson declined an invitation to visit Narromine after her 1930 flight, deciding to fly from Brisbane direct to Sydney. She did, however, accept life membership of Narromine Aero Club, and a 1930 Christmas card received from her is one of the historic documents which museum visitors can view in the club's historical records book.

Johnson's great flight is the theme of our first major artwork, purchased this year from a Tamworth owner. It is a leadlight (stained-glass) window saved from the hotel bar *Amy's* at Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport. Depicting her DH.60 Moth *Jason* as it made landfall over Darwin on 24 May 1930, the scene is created in the art-deco style of the era. *Jason*, one of the world's most famous aircraft, is preserved in the Science Museum in London. As a type, the DH.60 was the predominant aircraft seen at Narromine during the aerodrome's first decade.

Amy and husband Jim Mollison later competed in the 1934 MacRobertson London to Melbourne air race, which included Narromine in its route, but when they had to withdraw in India with mechanical problems, Narromine was denied a second opportunity to greet her.



The museum has also acquired a second artwork, which now greets visitors as they enter the museum. Our chairman Peter Kierath donated a bronze bust purchased from sculptor Brett 'Mon' Garling. This striking figure depicts the artist's

uncle who flew as a bomber crewman in Europe during WWII. Kitted out in oxygen mask and flying helmet, the bust will serve to symbolise the 2,850 young graduates of elementary flying training at Narromine - one in five pilots in the wartime RAAF - and the 25% who did not return home.

Aerodrome Heritage Management Plan

Heritage consultant Don Wallace was engaged by Council last year to write a management plan for the aerodrome, which included identifying its fixtures, buildings and areas of heritage significance. Heading the list are the two historic aircraft hangars, the 1937 aero club hangar and the wartime Bellman. At the next level of importance are the three towers and hut for the Non-directional Beacon (NDB) antenna and light beacon. Together with the "international" light beacon displayed in the museum and the customs pole adjacent to the building, these towers are the only remaining artefacts dating from the early 1950s when Narromine Aerodrome was designated as the bad-weather alternative to Sydney's Kingsford Smith International Airport. Since Airservices Australia decommissioned the NDB in recent years, the museum has been negotiating with Council to have the towers left *in situ* and repainted. As part of the precinct development, we plan to have interpretive signage installed at significant sites.

Speaking of landmarks, Don Wallace emailed to us a 1940 aerial photo of Narromine Aerodrome. Upon enlargement, a pair of interesting features became visible: the 1928 concrete identification circle and the airfield identifier 'NM' laid for the 1934 international race. It was good to finally be able to pinpoint the locations of these markers, although in all probability they were removed during the construction of the RAAF station soon after the photo was taken.

Thank you to all our supporters and volunteers. We hope you can visit soon to see the improvements.

Mike Nelmes (Curator, part time)