



Narromine Aerodrome, Mitchell Highway
PO Box 122, Narromine NSW 2821
Open Wednesday to Sunday, 2-5pm

Ph (02) 68897131 or (02) 68891704
Chairman: Peter Kierath, Ph (02) 68894444
www.narromineaviationmuseum.org.au

Newsletter of the Narromine Aviation Museum Inc. **July 2004**

Greetings to all our supporters. We thought it was about time we let you know of some of the exciting things happening at the museum. To those who haven't been out to visit for a while, please do, and bring your family and friends. I'm sure you'll be pleasantly surprised at the changes taking place.

Earlier in the year we began a publicity campaign. This has resulted in a lot of advertising, presentations to community groups, an Internet website, and the enclosed brochure. If you know of some good places to distribute the brochures, we'd appreciate your help. Currently we are getting several hundred visitors per month; but as with any new attraction, it will take time for the museum to be well and truly on the tourist map and to reach our aim of 10,000 visitors annually.



The Mosquito bomber engine, loaned by Russell & John Peacock, in its new spot



A 1930s sitting-room 'setpiece' where you can browse through the Aero Club scrapbook

New displays

The museum has undergone a complete 'makeover', enabling visitors to browse the displays in a logical sequence. With the help of partition walls, the space is divided into three theme areas: the early years and the Aero Club; the RAAF training school period; and Narromine's late-war, Qantas and gliding stories.

Highlights of each era are covered in a wall display of fifty historic photos taken at Narromine from 1919 through to the post-war years. These represent

the cream of our photographic collection, taken largely from the Vic Hall and Rob Bowman collections.

Narromine Aerodrome in miniature

After several months' work by Sydney modelmaking firm Austek, a 1:750 scale diorama of Narromine Aerodrome now forms a centrepiece in the museum. The 2-metre diorama, showing the WW2 flying training school complex and about half of the two runways, was made with



meticulous attention to detail using 1942 plans and photographs. Included are thirty tiny yellow Tiger Moth training aircraft.

Collection notes

Unfolding history

What are the oldest artefacts in the museum collection? Well, there's the photograph of Jim Hayden in his homebuilt Bleriot-type monoplane, c.1917; but no parts of the actual plane are known to exist.

The oldest actual objects are those brought back from France after WW1 by G. Bruce Irvine, one of the founders of Narromine Aero Club, and donated to the museum by his son Bruce. The

elder Bruce flew SE5a fighting scouts with 2 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, and the items on display include his leather flying helmet and log book.

However, it is a souvenired German relic from the Irvine collection which has recently been the subject of research. A piece of distinctive 'lozenge' fabric from a German aircraft (so called because of the pattern of camouflage colours printed onto it) had been stored folded for many years, and its varnish covering had fused together. With the help of a conservator at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, the piece was heated and treated with ethanol to soften the varnish, and painstakingly unfolded. What was revealed is an aviation historian's dream: the painted identity of the aircraft it was cut from. The markings are:

**Fok. D.VII (Alb.)
534/18**

Decoding this, we now know that the piece is from the side of a Fokker D.VII (regarded as the best German fighting scout of WW1). It was built under contract by the Albatros company at Johannisthal, and the 534th D-type aircraft to be built in 1918 for the German Air Service. How Bruce Irvine came by it, however, is not known.



A Fokker D.VII

Arthur Butler's rough landing

Another early piece, recently loaned to the museum by Angus Radburn, is the broken wooden propeller of an Avro 504K biplane with a particularly interesting story. It came from one of the few Avros built at Mascot, Sydney just after WW1 which were re-fitted with an engine called the Dyak. The claim to fame of this particular Dyak propeller is that aviation pioneer C. Arthur Butler force-landed the aircraft



Arthur Butler (with Narromine Aero Club founders T.E. Perry and H. Bowden Fletcher) at Narromine in 1931 after his solo England-Australia flight. His luggage consisted of a spare shirt, a toothbrush and a thermos. (V. Hall)

near Trangie in the early 1920s, apparently after hitting a telegraph line. Also loaned are photos of Butler and Jack Barclay repairing the aircraft at Barclay's *Woodburn* property.

Arthur Butler kept up his association with this region when he started the Cootamundra – Charleville (via Narromine) airmail service, and later when he formed the Butler Air Transport passenger service. In the 1970s, following a stroke, he spent much of his time painting. One of his artworks depicts his white Avro 504K flying over the Narromine-Dandaloo Road in 1928, carrying Butler and Barclay; evidently, their makeshift repair job was successful! The propeller and photographs are now

displayed with the painting – a nice connection.

Dump sees first light in 60 years

Museum volunteer Ross Shepherd has a collection of Mosquito aircraft parts he souvenired as a boy from the aerodrome dump just after WW2. You never know when a Mosquito bomber arrester hook will come in handy! At the time, though, he didn't foresee its use as a museum display piece.

(A *what* hook, you ask? That is a story in itself. The RAF Mosquitos based at Narromine in 1945 had been modified to fly off aircraft carriers for their role of 'skip-bombing' Japanese ships. Carrier-borne aircraft have tail hooks to 'arrest' them by catching cables stretched across the landing deck.)

Ross' tales of his boyhood dump raids led us to try to pinpoint just where it was. From his description, the best bet was a dam marked on a 1942 map of Narromine Aerodrome.



The dip in the ground is the site of the dam along the Warren Road, which was used as a dump for aircraft parts

Sure enough, a quick visit confirmed it: at the dam site, the ground is slightly sunken. Ross and Alan Light took to the ground with an auger; from the first hole, up came a number of pieces, the most interesting being a RAAF identity disc stamped with its

owner's details: Leading Aircraftman Allan Atkins of Sydney.

A check showed that LAC Atkins served with 93 (Beaufighter) Squadron RAAF at Narromine during 1945-46. A phone call to former navigator Ron Leckie revealed that Atkins flew with him to Japan as part of 93 Squadron's escort for the RAAF occupation force. We hope to find out if Mr Atkins is still alive, and if so, how his ID disc ended up in the aerodrome dump!

Seeking hideouts



Ken Makepeace points out the remains of camouflage support posts at one of the Trangie hideouts

Along the Warren road, and dotted around the bush surrounding Trangie airstrip, are the remains of a little-known part of the region's WW2 heritage: aircraft revetments or 'hideouts' where Tiger Moth trainers were parked. These 40m gravel clearings, each marked by a horseshoe-shaped earth bank, were dispersed and camouflaged with wire mesh and netting to conceal the aircraft against possible Japanese air attack.

Thanks to museum volunteer Ken Makepeace and chairman Peter Kierath, we have documented these sites, some of which are quite hard to find. We'd be grateful to hear from anyone who can tell us more about these hideouts

Quick quiz

Test your knowledge of Narromine's aviation history. The answers can be found in the museum displays. The first set of correct answers will win a Narromine Aviation Museum polo-shirt valued at \$35.

1. Who piloted the first aircraft known to have landed at Narromine? (Hint: It may not be who you think).
2. Who was Narromine Aero Club's first secretary?
3. Who was the first female pilot trained at Narromine?
4. How long is Narromine's longest runway, and when was it laid?
5. What was the number of the Mosquito squadron based here?

Please let us know if you have any questions about your museum. Drop in for a visit, and tell your friends.

Mike Nelmes, Curator

