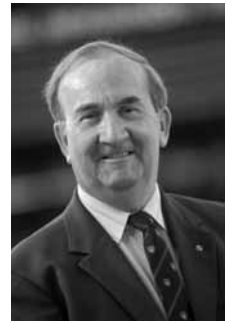


# *Preserving Australian military aviation history*

An edited version of a presentation to Institute on 30 March 2017 by

**Michael Hough**

Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, New South Wales<sup>1</sup>



*Australia's military aviation history is being preserved in three official and eight private museums, several of which focus on flying historic aircraft. The Historical Aircraft Restoration Society is one example. Military aircraft preservation and restoration, however, faces personnel, equipment, legal, financial and other challenges; and the Institute could assist by developing and storing the aural and visual history of ADF aviators.*

**Key words:** Australia; military aviation; historic aircraft preservation; Fleet Air Arm Museum; Historical Aircraft Restoration Society; Temora Aviation Museum.

It is reasonable to ask why we should preserve our military aviation history. To me, the answers include:

- We cannot fully understand our present or our future, unless we can ground both aspects within the context of an understanding of the past, and this applies across all aspects of history including military history.
- The earlier technologies underpinning historic aviation are complex and challenging, especially the ultimate stages of development of piston engine aircraft and sub-sonic flight.
- By observing the technology in action, we can come to appreciate and understand the bravery and accomplishments of earlier military aviators.
- There is a growing public interest in military heritage, as evinced by interest in the anniversaries of the Great War and higher public turn-outs on Anzac Days.
- Increasingly, historic military displays, especially aviation events, are seen to be image building and positive experiences in support of the modern Australian Defence Force (ADF). They help overcome the growing lack of community awareness and support for the ADF, as increased security measures cut off the public from ADF bases, equipment and activities.

In this paper, I shall summarize the current scene – especially collections accessible to New South Wales residents (e.g. Temora Aviation Museum); review the role of The Historical Aircraft Restoration Society (HARS) located at both Albion Park Rail and Parkes, New South Wales; and provide some suggestions for the role that the Institute could play in this heritage field.

## **The Current Australian Scene**

There are three official collections competing for scarce resources within Government or ADF budgets, and we are beginning to see an emerging policy of outsourcing some aviation heritage to selected partners. The three major official collections are:

- Australian War Memorial, Canberra, which contains an extensive collection of all types of military heritage including aviation;

- Royal Australian Navy Fleet Air Arm Museum at HMAS Albatross, Nowra, which is located adjacent to the naval base; and
- Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Museum at Point Cook, Victoria, with the RAAF having limited partnerships with Temora Aviation Museum and HARS.

There also are four significant private collections in New South Wales: the Temora Aviation Museum; HARS; Fighter World at RAAF Williamtown; and the Evans Head Air Museum. There are also some single aircraft-focused collections: Catalinas at Lake Boga, Rathmines and Bankstown; and B24 Liberator at Werribee. The website address of each museum is in the Appendix.

## **A Focus on Flying**

A more specialized set of aviation heritage collections are those that still fly historic aircraft. The RAAF Museum (Point Cook) provides a mainly static collection, plus selected aircraft that fly. Flying at Point Cook are a Sopwith Pup, a Tiger Moth, a Mustang, a Winjeel and a CT4A trainer.

The Temora Aviation Museum has 15 aircraft still flying, including a Sabre, two Spitfires, a Boomerang, a Meteor, a Hudson and a Tiger Moth. It collects and maintains, in airworthy condition, historic military aircraft types that have been flown by or in conjunction with air forces. It operates mainly warbird-type aircraft and maintains them in immaculate condition. It has an excellent website with good visuals [see Appendix].

HARS at Albion Park flies a Super Constellation, two Neptunes, three C47 Dakotas, two Caribou, a Catalina, a Tiger Moth and a Winjeel.



A PBV Catalina flying boat on display at the Historical Aircraft Society

<sup>1</sup>Professor Hough is a member of the Institute's Board. These are his personal views. Email: mhough5@gmail.com. The presentation included some 60 photos of historic aviation planes and artefacts. They have not been reproduced in this paper.

## Historical Aircraft Restoration Society

HARS recovers and, where possible, restores to flying condition, aircraft that have played a significant role in Australian aviation. The HARS collection focuses on a wider heritage than does the Temora Aviation Museum, and to a very large degree the two museums' collections complement each other. The two organisations readily co-operate in presenting flying aircraft to the general public, especially at air shows.

HARS aims to preserve the aviation history of Australia. It flies historic aircraft and has Civil Aviation Safety Authority approval (based on warbirds legislation) to self-regulate crews on nominated aircraft. It is a not-for-profit organisation, which relies on donations, subscriptions and bequests and on volunteers. It has some 500+ members, 80+ of whom are licensed aircraft maintenance engineers. All HARS assets are ultimately vested in the Powerhouse Museum.

HARS is managed by a Committee, and the senior executives are: President and Chief Pilot, Mr. Bob De La Hunty, OAM; Vice President, Ms. Maureen Massey; Secretary, Mr. Ian Debenham, OAM; and Chief Engineer, Mr. Malcolm Hallowes. The Chairman of the HARS Museum Board is Professor Michael Hough, AM, RFD, ED.

HARS (Parkes): HARS has co-operated with Parkes Shire Council to establish HARS (Parkes), which at present stores surplus and overflow aircraft and many of the large slow-moving stores.

HARS Navy Heritage Flight: HARS also is in dialogue with the RAN to create a proposed HARS Navy Heritage Flight.

## Challenges facing Military Aviation Heritage

There are several challenges facing the preservation and restoration of military aviation heritage.

**Personnel challenges** include maintaining the skills and accreditation of licensed aircraft maintenance engineers, pilots and support staff. Replacement qualified younger volunteers are in especially short supply.

**Equipment challenges** include obtaining spare parts, especially operational spares, and replacing out-of-date items with original equipment manufacturer items and/or manufacturing them using safe, relevant and acceptable materials.

**Legal challenges** are often governance and social-engineering-derived requirements, and they are proliferating, driven in part by the community's reduced appetite for risk. Major examples include: housing developments permitted near airports; noise complaints, generating increasing restrictions on actual operational flying; limitations on public access to airfields and air shows; performance restrictions on flying displays; proliferation of Civil Aviation Safety Authority and warbirds legislation and surveillance; occupational health and safety-related concerns *e.g.* asbestos in older aircraft; and safety and access for people with disability.

**Operating cost challenges** include an emerging reduced availability of fuel for older design engines, plus the costs of legally owning and operating older technology-based aircraft (*e.g.* radial engine, piston-driven aircraft).

**Inter-related challenges:** There are also a series of inter-related challenges which include:

- growth challenges, where the initial volunteers, often narrowly skilled and focused on restoration, are neither interested in nor equipped to deal with the management challenges that accompany organisation growth;
- renewal challenges associated with the reluctance of younger generations to replace the older generations as they pass on – this is a general community challenge, not just one for military heritage organisations;
- sustaining the relentless tasks of flying and preserving aircraft with volunteers – this produces pressures to employ staff, in turn often creating tensions between volunteers and paid employees; and
- dealing with an increasing government regulatory and accountability environment, forcing volunteer staff to address governance issues causing frustration to the detriment of the operational effectiveness of volunteers at the 'sharp end' *i.e.* repairing and flying the aircraft!

## Conclusion

The preservation of military aviation history provides opportunities and challenges for the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. They include:

- influencing ADF policy related to the preservation of our military aviation heritage;
- visiting and engaging with heritage groups, as the Institute did when it visited HARS in 2016;
- supporting aviation heritage events by providing networks through which events may be advertised and sponsors sought; and
- identifying, sponsoring and promoting some specific aviation heritage projects.

Indeed, the Institute arguably is in a unique position to assist with the important project of developing and storing the aural and visual history of ADF aviators, and I commend this proposal to our members.

**The Author:** Professor Michael Hough, AM, RFD, ED, JP, is a member of the Institute's Board and is currently chairman of the Historical Aircraft Restoration Society Museum Board. He is a retired Army Reserve Royal Australian Armoured Corps lieutenant colonel and was commanding officer of the University of New South Wales Regiment from 1984 to 1986. He is an Honorary Professorial Fellow in the Business School of the University of Wollongong. [Photo of Professor Hough: the author]

## Appendix: Aircraft Museum Websites

- Australian War Memorial: <https://www.awm.gov.au/>
- RAAF Museum: <http://www.airforce.gov.au/raafmuseum/>
- Fleet Air Arm Museum: <http://www.navy.gov.au/history/museums/fleet-air-arm-museum>
- Fighter World, Williamstown: <http://www.fighterworld.com.au/>
- Temora Aviation Museum: <http://www.aviationmuseum.com.au/>
- Historical Aviation Restoration Society: <http://www.hars.org.au>
- Lake Boga Catalina: <http://www.flyingboat.org.au/>
- B24 Liberator Project: <http://www.b24australia.org.au/home>
- Rathmines Catalina: <http://rathmines-catalina.com/>
- Bankstown Catalina: <http://www.catalinaflying.org.au/>
- Evans Head Air Museum: <http://www.ehmmaa.org.au/>