



The Old Fliers Group

Attached to the Royal Aero Club of WA (Inc).

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Last Meeting

Over 60 members listened with interest to two speakers, a "mini speaker" and the "speaker of the day." At our last meeting. We have found that we have so much experience in the membership that a 10 minute session on a specific area of aviation at the start of proceeding is appropriate.

The first ever "mini speaker" was John Roulston, who briefly told of how he pioneered and developed the technique of aerial mustering. He hatched the idea in Kalgoorlie and in a few years it was the main method of mustering sheep and cattle in the pastoral areas of the State. John went on to set up Nor' West Air Taxis which after numerous takeovers ended up as Skywest. Thank you John, for an illuminating delivery.

Howard Wheatley was the "speaker of the day" and told us of highlights and incidents in the 57 years that he held a licence. In his well-prepared delivery, Howard related a number of exciting, and sometimes scary episodes, in the islands to the north of Australia in WWII when he was flying Beauforts. His civil flying started after the war with Airlines (WA) Ltd. where he flew a Monospar, Dragonfly, Rapides and finally the de Havilland Dove. As well as being a company pilot, as a qualified accountant, he was the company secretary and was deeply involved in the amalgamation of Airlines with MMA in 1955.

In the post-war years, Howard owned 11 fixed and rotary wing aircraft, all used for pleasure and business, During his flights within Australia he established 13 records that were ratified by the FAI – some of the records still stand today.

Among those who listened with interest were, Norm Campbell who was in the same squadron in WWII, and at time flew on Howard's wing. Shirley Adkins was among those who listened with interest. She accompanied Howard on one of his record breaking high altitude flights to Sydney – it was not without its dramas.

Howard let his licence lapse only a few years ago after a 57-years romance with aviation. Among his other interests, he has re-developed a passion for the violin and plays in an orchestra on a regular basis.

Thanks Howard, for a most interesting talk.

In the Beginning

The following is a condensed version of a longer article by aviation historian, Jim Grant.

In February 1891 Professor Price, an American citizen and balloonist, arrived in Perth to commence the preparations for a series of exhibitions.

His first, and the State's first, aerial voyage was arranged for March 4 near Bullen's Albion Hotel in Cottesloe. About 1000 spectators gathered to watch. The balloon inflation commenced by suspending the mouth over a funnel that was connected to a fire in a nearby trench. As hot air was forced up into the funnel it filled the balloon. Unfortunately, when about three-quarters full it burst and caught fire. The flames were quickly put out but the damage ruled out any further attempt that day. Despite the serious setback, Price, wishing to restore his credibility, promised a free demonstration in Perth in the near future.

On March 24, Price gave his promised demonstration in Perth. By 5 pm on that day between 1500 and 2000 people had arrived, but due to the poor condition of the balloon it took until 7.30 pm to get it ready. With Price sitting on a trapeze, which hung 40 feet below the balloon, it rose to about 150 feet before losing buoyancy and gently settled onto a nearby tree in Stirling Street. This is recognised as the first aerial ascent in Western Australia.

Price returned to Bullen's Hotel on March 30, where at an "Olde Englyshe Fayre" he used the original balloon, which was still plagued with leakage problems, to rise to about 2000 feet. At that height he abandoned the balloon, took to his parachute and landed safely.

The next demonstration was held in the Horticultural Show Grounds in Perth on April 24. The balloon climbed to 4000 feet, but Price was unable to jump as a rope became entangled in his parachute harness and he was unable to let go. Man and balloon drifted down to land undamaged.

Nothing daunted, a further exhibition in Perth was scheduled for April 25, and the star attraction for the "Grand Balloon Ascension" was Miss Millie Viola, a so called "world renowned lady balloonist". Late in the day of April 25, 1891, after problems with a slow filling balloon, she became airborne and rose to about 3500 feet and drifted as far as North Perth. Her daring attempt made her the State's first female aerialist.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is pushed back a week due to Good Friday falling on our scheduled date. So I hope to see you on Friday April 1st when we will hear Tony Munday's talk on "Canberras and Cameras".

Also, Doreen Newell will be our first female speaker. As "mini speaker" she will briefly talk about flying with MMA as a hostess in the good old DC3 days.

Hope to see you there

Brian Hernan