



The Old Fliers' Group

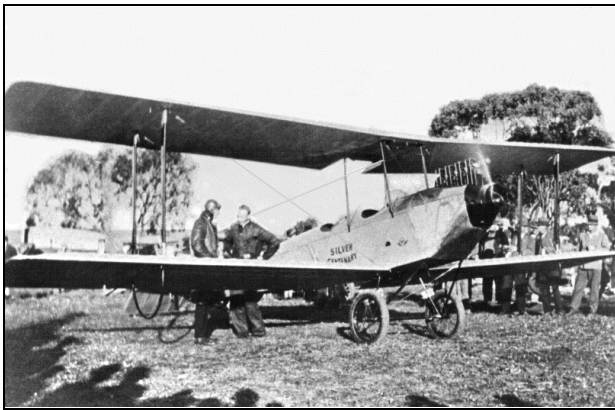
Attached to the Royal Aero Club of WA (Inc).

Coordinator: Brian John, Ph 9883 8001

Bulletin No 64, January 2010

November Meeting

Once again we had a good attendance to hear our *Speaker of the Day*, Rod Edwards, who told the story of the *Silver Centenary*, the aeroplane which his grandfather, Selby Ford, built in Beverley in 1928 to 1930.



The Silver Centenary in 1930.

We had a few sound problems at the beginning of the talk, but they were gradually overcome as the show proceeded. Rod took his audience through the three distinct phases: (a) the construction and testing of the aircraft, (b) the restoration, and (c) the recent trip to Avalon in Victoria, and return.

Western Australia's oldest aircraft was built by Selby Ford to commemorate the State's Centenary in 1929. It was constructed in the Beverley powerhouse.

Ford lived most of his life in Beverley and his interest in flying can be traced back to 1919 when one of Major Norman Brearley's aircraft visited the town to carry out joy flights. Ford went for a flight, and from that time he had a driving ambition to build and fly his own aircraft.

The first steps in fulfilling his dream came in 1928 when he made some rough chalk sketches on the powerhouse floor, setting out the general layout for a two seat biplane in much the same configuration as light aeroplanes of the day.

The chalk drawings were the only plans he worked from and would ultimately prove to be a major

obstacle in his battles with the bureaucracy to have his aircraft officially registered. Ford's guiding principles were common sense, strength and lightness, and these were all applied throughout the entire construction stage. From his drawings, he made up templates which were used to make the components, using spruce and maple timbers. He also interested the local butcher, Tom Shackles, in his project, and he became an enthusiastic partner in the venture.

Work continued on the aircraft into 1929 and after trying an underpowered engine a search was undertaken for a more suitable one. By a stroke of luck, the 1929 Centenary Air Race was then in full swing when the Gipsy Moth, flown by Pratt and Guthrie, crashed at Baandee in bad weather. This proved to be Ford's salvation. He drove to Baandee and purchased the damaged engine for £170.

Sydney, N.S.W.

AMATEUR 'PLANE BUILDERS.

PERTH, Friday.

In their leisure time two young Beverley residents, S. A. Ford and T. A. Shackles, have been building a biplane to their own design, and the bodywork has now been completed. The wing span is 30 feet 4 inches, the length is 23 feet 6 inches, and the height 8 feet 6 inches. Authorities on aviation have expressed satisfaction with its construction, and the builders are negotiating for the purchase of an engine from C. D. Pratt's 'plane, which crashed at Baandee during the East-West air race.

The purchase brought his work on the aircraft to the attention of the authorities when an item on his engine purchase appeared in a Sydney newspaper. The Department of Civil Aviation immediately despatched their Western Australian inspector, Jim Collopy, to Beverley to talk to Ford and to examine the almost completed machine. Collopy's report was thorough but unfavourable. There were no plans for him to study and he could not carry out a detailed inspection of the important parts of the aircraft's structure as it had already been covered with either plywood or fabric.

Undaunted, Ford continued with his project and on June 30, 1930, the *Silver Centenary* test flown by Charles Nesbit who, on landing, announced that it was an extraordinary machine which handled in a similar fashion to the then popular Gipsy Moth

After the maiden flight Nesbit took Ford aloft to enjoy the fruits of his labour. On the same day, four more flights were carried out. The second was to take aloft Ford's partner, Tom Shackles; then followed their sisters Rita Ford and Elsie Shackles who had also assisted in aspects of the construction.

Over the next few years the *Silver Centenary* was flown for well over 50 hours, but with the repeated refusal by the department to licence it, Selby Ford returned the aircraft to the powerhouse in 1933, where it remained suspended from the ceiling for the next thirty-one years.



The Silver Centenary today.

In January 1964, Selby Ford's sons removed a wall of the old Beverley powerhouse so that the aircraft could be rolled into the open for a clean-up and publicity photographs. Following that, it was placed in temporary storage for a few years before it was displayed as the centre-piece in the Beverley Aeronautical Museum in 1967.

The aircraft held pride of place in the Beverley museum until recently when Rod Edwards, a qualified pilot, decided that the historic machine should be restored to flying condition. Much to the consternation of the Beverley townspeople, Rod trucked the aircraft firstly to Jandakot and later to Serpentine where the strip down and rebuild took place over a number of years.

The reconstruction was a long and thorough process where every component had to be carefully examined, then either refurbished or re-made.

Eventually, after about three years, the job was completed and Rod flew the aircraft at its second "Christening" in March 2007. Since then he has derived hours of pleasure in flying the historic machine.

In 2008 he had sufficient trust in his aircraft, and his workmanship, that he flew it to the Avalon Air Show in Victoria.

All OFG members were delighted to hear Rod's talk and to watch movie clips of aspects of the rebuild of the *Silver Centenary*, the "second" maiden flight and the trip across Australia.

Congratulations must go to Rod for accepting the challenge to preserve one of Australia's most historic aircraft.

We did not have a Mini-Speaker for the November meeting as we knew that Rod's talk and film clips were going to occupy the entire timeslots.

2010

We have some great speakers organised for the coming year. The booking sheet is about three-quarters full already. However, there is still room for a few Mini-Speakers, so if you have a tall tale or an incident in your flying life that you feel could fit the bill, contact your editor at a future meeting.

Call for Cash

Once again it's time to raise the awful subject of money. You can pay the annual subscription of \$10.00 at the next meeting, or any future meeting should you wish. Alternatively, you can mail a cheque to Brian Hernan, 1 / 4 Kings Park Ave, Crawley, 6009. Cheques must be made out to "Royal Aero Club".

January Meeting

The January meeting will be held, as usual, on the last Friday of the month. In this case, Friday 29th January. Our *Speaker of the Day* will be Kevin Gomm who will talk about the sixteen Japanese air raids on Western Australian soil which took place between February 1942 and September 1943.

Air raids took place in the far north near Cape Londonderry and as far south as Exmouth Gulf. Hear all about it, and other things, at our next meeting starting at noon Friday 29th January.

I hope to see you there.

Brian Hernan