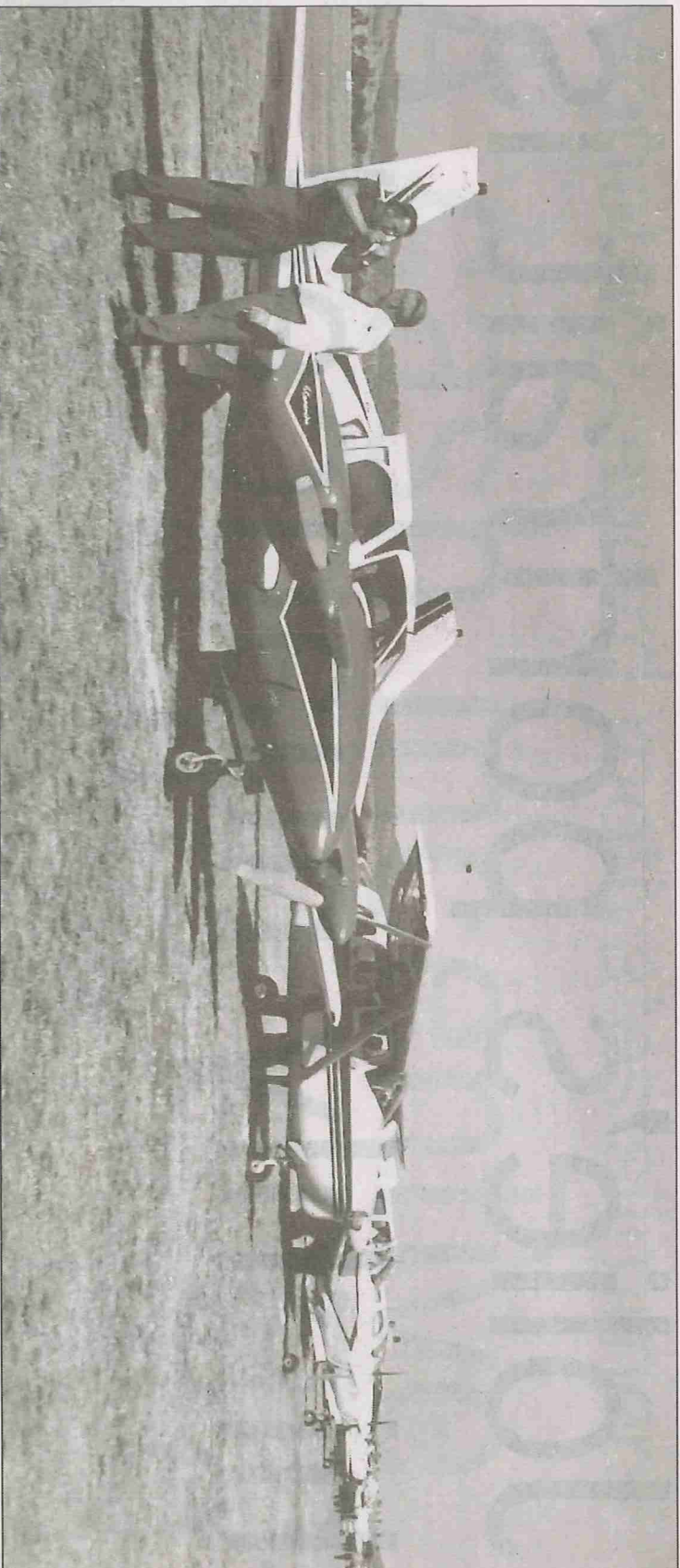


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■ The CSU Regional Archives is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building at the South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue.

■ Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with enquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straightforward enquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour, including copying and postage.

■ For further information, phone 6925 3666, email [archive@csu.edu.au](mailto:archive@csu.edu.au) or visit the website at [www.csu.edu.au/research/archives](http://www.csu.edu.au/research/archives) for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.



# An Aussie legend

## Nancy Bird-Walton's visits to Wagga



at the archives  
Wayne Doubleday

The well-known pioneer aviatrix, Nancy de Low Bird-Walton, passed away on January 13, 2009.

Her remarkable life and love of flying are well documented; this article, therefore, will highlight two of her known visits to Wagga.

After obtaining an "A" licence on September 28, 1933, Nancy later gained an advanced "A" licence that enabled her to carry non-paying passengers.

Unlike her contemporaries at the flying school at Mascot who were flying for pleasure or as a hobby, Nancy realised that she would have to earn a living and to do this it was necessary for her to obtain a commercial pilot's licence, which she gained in April 1935.

She was the youngest woman in the British Empire and one of only five women in Australia who held such a licence. Unfortunately, women were not being employed by any commercial airlines at the time.

With the help of her father and great aunt, Nancy was able to purchase a wrecked Gipsy Moth which was rebuilt and it was then, with the assistance of her friend, Peggy McKillop as co-pilot, she barnstormed around NSW.

The girls scanned the *Country Life* newspaper for the dates of country agricultural shows and race meetings. They arranged their itinerary accordingly, with the hope of trying to convince locals of taking a flight on their day out.

The local papers and radio stations were anxious to interview them, leading to a show of interest among the public.

After seeing the fragility of the tiny plane being prepared for takeoff, their interest would wane somewhat.

The 71st Wagga Show was held from August 29 to 31, 1935 and the two enterprising young women flew into town.

They had completed 7000 miles of touring in the north-west of NSW and they were hoping to complete a similar tour in the south of the state.

Flying into Wagga Nancy was looking for a suitable landing area when, just south of the showground on the Albury Road, a mark had been made by CR Hagan who was a representative of the Australian Transcontinental Airways.



Nancy realised why the mark had been placed in the paddock and it proved to be a perfect landing place for her.

The area had been chosen at the time by Australian Transcontinental Airways for the purpose of making a licensed aerodrome for their stopovers from Melbourne to Sydney.

Nancy was apparently more convincing than Peggy in persuading prospective customers to part with their money, so Peggy piloted the plane.

Nancy was known to have a calming influence on the nervous and anxious who were prepared to fly with a woman pilot.

On the first day of the show, there were 48

joy flights - a record for one day. The next day, this record was exceeded with 101 flights.

IW Macdonald of Wantabadgery West was one of the passengers and by leaning out of the side of the aeroplane he managed to photograph three images of the town and the showground. These were reproduced in *The Daily Advertiser*.

Nancy Bird-Walton also visited Wagga when she was taking part in the RM Ansett Brisbane to Adelaide Air Race in 1964.

More than 140 aircraft landed for the short stopover. There were 17 women participating in the race, all of whom were members of the Australian Women Pilot's Association, which had been founded by Nancy in 1950.

Although the start of the 1400 mile race was delayed for 24 hours because of heavy rain in Queensland, the weather between Sydney and Wagga had been very good and there were no reported incidents on the Wagga leg of the trip. Hundreds of local people travelled to the Wagga aerodrome to see the arrival of the competitors.

The first arrival was around 7.30am, a Mustang. Not long afterwards, a Cessna entered by Jack Masling of Cootamundra landed.

Nancy Bird-Walton was awarded an OBE in 1966, became a Dame of the Knights of Malta in 1977, and was awarded an AO in 1990.

In 2006, the Bourke Shire Council renamed their air terminal in her honour and in 2008 Gantas' first super passenger jet, the A380, was named in her honour.

The achievements of Nancy de Low Bird-Walton should be an inspiration for all women to follow their dreams and to know that anything can be achieved with determination.

■ **References:** *The Daily Advertiser* - August 29, 1935; October 19, 1935; March 26, 1964; March 31, 1964; *Australian Lives* by Robin Hughes; *Great Australian Women Vol. 2* by Susan De Vries; *Obituary January 2009* - [www.westnet.com.au/news/345](http://www.westnet.com.au/news/345)  
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