

## **AERODROME.**

As with similar country towns, the residents of Armidale became aware of the development of aircraft during World War One. Then on Friday 5 September 1919 a Peace Loan biplane flown by Captain Holden and Sergeant Murphy landed at the Armidale racecourse watched by a crowd of several thousand residents. The purpose of the visit was to establish support for the Peace Loan and the *Armidale Chronicle*, 6 September 1919 reported 'the total subscribed was £9,300'.

The district works engineer at Armidale set out in May 1920 to locate 'sites for aerodromes at Inverell and Glen Innes'.<sup>1</sup> At that stage, the engineer was following instructions from the Public Works department and was attempting to locate an aerodrome site at Armidale. A suggested site was the plumpton coursing ground to the east of Armidale.

In January 1921 the Secretary of the Armidale Branch of the Soldiers League in Armidale received advice from the manager of the Diggers Co-operative Aviation Co. Ltd. that they will be sending a couple of aeroplanes to Armidale next month for the purpose of joy-riding, giving business flights and advertising. All shareholders in this company were returned servicemen and the *Armidale Express* felt the company 'should be able to rely on patriotic Armidale to rally round and accord their machines liberal patronage'.<sup>2</sup> In March 1921 Ryans Motor Garage advertised joy riding in the air at a cost of £2 10s at the racecourse.<sup>3</sup>

The Town Planning Association N.S.W. asked council in June 1927 to reserve an area for an aeroplane landing park close to the town. Aldermen decided to ask permission of the racecourse trustees and a month later the trustees offered no objection to the request 'provided no obstructions were erected'.<sup>4</sup>

In February 1928 Lieutenant Hammond in a De Haviland Moth plane was doing much business on the Armidale racecourse. The advertisement in the *Armidale Chronicle*, 29 February 1928 stated '8,000 passengers without accident' and passengers were carried daily from 10 a.m to dusk at 10s and £1. That June, Bert Hinkler, the aviator who flew from England to Australia landed his biplane, an Avian Cirrus at Armidale Racecourse. He was welcomed to Armidale by a mayoral reception and handed a cheque for £55 10s from the people of Armidale. Mr and Mrs Hinkler lunched with the mayor and mayoress at the Imperial Hotel before flying off to Glen Innes that afternoon.

The Local Government Act of 1919 gave councils and shires the power to establish and maintain aviation stations. Few took advantage because the public had not realised that air travel had passed the experimental stage. The *Armidale Chronicle*, 30 June 1928 felt council could take the first step 'of making the Armidale racecourse an official landing ground'. By this stage the Australian Aero Club and the Department of Local

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<sup>1</sup> *Armidale Chronicle*, 22 May 1920, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Armidale Express*, 25 January 1921, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> *Armidale Chronicle*, 16 March 1921, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> *Armidale Chronicle*, 20 July 1927, p.3.

Government were asking councils and shires to establish municipal aerodromes although the R.A.A.F. felt that the Armidale racecourse was suitable only for light aircraft. Members of council met with the racecourse trustees in July and the latter body agreed to the area becoming a landing-ground and aerodrome. Council then took action to approach the Department of Civil Aviation to inspect the area and approve it under the air navigation regulations.

In September 1928 'the Defence Department noted the desirability of the council co-operating with the Trustees of the Racecourse with the view to the establishment of an aerodrome'.<sup>5</sup> Not all aldermen were in agreement because there was the possibility of housing being located on the racecourse in a model suburb and there was obviously some consideration of an alternative site some four to five miles from town, near the New England Highway. In October, the shire clerk informed council the matter had been held over to enable enquiries be made of a suitable area.

By May 1929 the Civil Aviation Department had decided that the Armidale racecourse was too small for licensing as an aerodrome because the requirement for a runway was at least 550 yards for safety. The *Armidale Chronicle* correspondent felt that the requirement that the council carry out improvements was unreasonable and the area could be licensed for smaller aircraft because many aviators were 'quite satisfied to use the area in its present state'.<sup>6</sup>

A contributor to the *Armidale Express* revealed to the public that the N.S.W. Aero Club was prepared to advise on the 'laying-out of a landing-ground and the erection of a hangar'<sup>7</sup> in New England. The Department of Civil Aviation was not prepared 'to license the racecourse for the largest types of 'planes, but offered to license same for use by smaller craft if certain costly works were carried out'.<sup>8</sup>

During the depression, assistance was made available to councils by the Unemployment Relief Works Act and the Defence Department suggested that the 'Commonwealth grant should be utilised by employing men to level off and clear a suitable site to make an aerodrome'.<sup>9</sup> The letter was received and the mayor pointed out that racecourse was the only suitable site.

Initial moves to secure a site for an aerodrome were discussed in July 1933 by the Dumaresq Shire. The shire felt that the 'establishment of an aerodrome a fitting work to be carried under the work for the dole principle'<sup>10</sup> and also decided to place the matter before the municipality. It was obvious that the shire would have to be approached by council for suitable land and so any decision about an aerodrome would involve both councils. Twelve months later, the *Armidale Express*, 11 July 1934 commented 'it is up to the Council to seek the co-operation of the Dumaresq Shire in deciding upon a suitable

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<sup>5</sup> *Armidale Chronicle*, 12 September 1928, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> *Armidale Chronicle*, 4 May 1929, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> *Armidale Express*, 4 October 1929, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> *Armidale Express*, 18 December 1929, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Armidale Express*, 1 June 1932, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> *Armidale Express*, 31 July 1933, p.4.

ground for all types of crafts, and then bringing the project to a successful issue'. In August the Armidale Chamber of Commerce requested council consider 'the question of providing Armidale with an aerodrome, and to co-operate with the Dumaresq Shire Council in the matter'.<sup>11</sup> Aware that monetary assistance was unavailable and that the racecourse was not an acceptable site to aviation authorities, council could only offer moral support and advice to the chamber. A meeting of the council, shire and the chamber took place in November and the motion was passed: 'That this meeting considers it most desirable to establish a suitable ground at Armidale and that a search be made immediately for a suitable site'.<sup>12</sup> The representatives then inspected two sites west of Armidale and decided to apply for an inspection by Aviation Department officials.

At the invitation of Armidale and district community organizations, V.W. Burgess Superintendent of Civil Aviation, visited Armidale in January 1935 to make inspections in the vicinity of the town for a suitable aerodrome. Accompanied by the Dumaresq Shire engineer F. Seaborn and the President J.S. Moorehead, he visited two sites in the west and south west of the town. He was not prepared to divulge the favored site to the *Armidale Express*, 30 January 1935 but commented 'it was within the four miles of Armidale, within easy reach of the New England Highway'. Council applied for an amendment to the Local Government act in April 'giving municipal councils power to spend money outside their areas for the provision of an aerodrome'.<sup>13</sup>

In June the Postmaster General, Senator McLachlan announced the possibility of calling tenders for the daily delivery of inter-state mails. The editor of the *Armidale Express*, 3 July 1935 commented that Armidale should be on that route between Sydney and Brisbane and called on the Armidale organizations to make a determined effort to ensure 'the capital of New England should be provided with an aerodrome capable of accommodating every type of aircraft'.

The Dumaresq Shire wrote to the Minister for Local Government in July 1935 seeking funds for an aerodrome and despite the personal representation of the Hon. D.H. Drummond MLA supporting the request, the Minister E.S. Spooner informed the shire in September that no funds were available.<sup>14</sup> Councillor Wright of the shire claimed that the Premier Mr Stephens mentioned in his policy speech that money would be made available for aerodromes and moved in October 'that the council seek from the Premier's Department full information concerning the Government's intentions'.<sup>15</sup> The editor also said the municipality had much to gain from the move and appealed to the shire council to 'persevere with its progressive move'.

The editor of the *Armidale Express*, 29 July 1936 urged 'the City Council to actively associate itself with the Dumaresq Shire Council in providing this city and district with an aerodrome of a quality in keeping with the importance and prestige of this part of the

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<sup>11</sup> *Armidale Express*, 22 August 1934, p.6.

<sup>12</sup> *Armidale Express*, 2 November 1934, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> *Armidale Express*, 17 April 1935, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> *Armidale Express*, 30 September 1935, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 October 1935, p.4.

state'. In August the engineer L.G. Botham presented a verbal report to council on several sites: on top of a hill near the Glen Innes Road and a site four miles from town on the Gostwyck Road. Two weeks later, he presented a report to Dumaresq Shire which included an additional site on the Uralla Road, about three miles from town. The shire requested the clerk 'communicate with the civil aviation authorities requesting them to send up an officer to report upon the sites suggested by the engineer'.<sup>16</sup>

The maintenance of the aerodrome was 'continued in view of future possibilities, and a part-time caretaker'<sup>17</sup> was appointed in January 1937 to keep weeds and suckers under control. By that month, the choice for an aerodrome had been limited to one area on the New England Highway, close to Armidale.

Mayor Ald. M.H. O'Connor called a public meeting at the town hall on Thursday 4 February 1937. After the investigation of four possible sites, an officer of the Department of Civil Aviation recommended 'a site on the Uralla road would be more suitable provided necessary improvements were carried out'.<sup>18</sup> A committee of representatives from the municipal and shire councils and the Chamber of Commerce was formed to consider further action. Secretary of the committee, F.W. Milner forwarded submissions on behalf of council and the shire seeking financial assistance for construction of the aerodrome. Representations were made in state and federal parliaments but efforts by the committee to secure aid for a site were unsuccessful. In June 1937, the decision was taken to refer the matter to council, shire and the Chamber of Commerce 'for advice as to what further steps should be taken'.<sup>19</sup>

In August 1937 the Chamber of Commerce again urged the necessity for an aerodrome and favoured control by Armidale Council. Discussion took place on 12 August between the council and the shire to consider the proposed extension of the municipal boundary shire supported the purchase of a 377 acre site reserved for the lunatic asylum.<sup>20</sup> Mr Drummond made a personal representation on behalf of the shire to secure the hospital site No 16677 to the east of Armidale. The Minister for Health, Mr Fitzsimmons informed the Minister in September 'that the land in question will be required for the establishment of a mental hospital'.<sup>21</sup>

Following an enquiry by the Chamber of Commerce in October 1937, council resolved to meet the shire Council at the first opportunity with a view to securing an aerodrome without delay. The Department of Lands enquired about the road purchase application of J.C.F. Jackes for the site and in November council notified the department that it intended to resume the site. An officer of the Defence Department visited Armidale in December but only to find a site suitable for Air Force planes during the Light Horse Camp to be held in Armidale.

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<sup>16</sup> *Armidale Express*, 11 September 1936, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Armidale Express*, 13 January 1937, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> *Armidale Express*, 5 February 1937, p.4.

<sup>19</sup> *Armidale Express*, 23 June 1937, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> *Armidale Express*, 6 August 1937, p.8.

<sup>21</sup> *Armidale Express*, 24 September 1937, p.4.

The chamber pressed for the necessary action and in January 1938 council determined to take the necessary action to resume a site on the Uralla road. At the same time, the shire called on the council to again convene the special aerodrome committee. Discussion took place in February to consider resumption of land and it was felt that the government and shire should make a contribution. The Valuer-General informed council in February that an inspection of the Uralla site had been made and the total cost of resumption of the approximate 183 acres would be £1900. Council and shire met in April to discuss the question of acquiring the land. Council had sought a loan of £2000 but the Federal Government informed the State Government it was not prepared to assist in the project. Council also felt that the shire should contribute and the shire delegates announced they were prepared to place the figures before their next meeting.

In June 1938, the Dumaresq Shire stated it was not prepared to contribute unless they knew of the total costs whilst the Municipal Council was adamant that the shire should contribute because an aerodrome would serve the whole district. The shire asked the Armidale council to provide details of costs involved. 'The engineer's estimate provided for clearing and grubbing of 180 acres at £900, taking out stones £360, gravel, refilling surface depressions and levelling up £250, concrete anchors for planes £25, windvane £10, grading £30, ground mark £25, a total of £1,600.'<sup>22</sup> Council was prepared to have the deeds of the land made out in the names of both councils 'if the Shire Council contributed some cost of acquiring the land'.<sup>23</sup> The Department of Works and Local Government informed council in July of the need for a plan of the area showing the location of the aerodrome in relationship to Armidale. Council was also reminded of the need to approach the Civil Aviation Board concerning the proposal.

In August 1938 Armidale City Council agreed to co-operate with Glen Innes Municipal Council in making representations to the State Government for the establishment of an aerodrome at each centre. In response to the joint submission from the two councils, Armidale received information from the Minister for Defence in October the Commonwealth Government could not provide funds for aerodromes in centres where such facilities 'were not essential for departmental reasons'. The minister added: 'The provision of aircraft landing grounds from the point of view of improving local communication, must continue to be regarded as the responsibility of the local governing authorities'.<sup>24</sup> In reply to a question in council concerning the aerodrome, the Mayor Ald. McBean said: 'We are really waiting to see what the State can do for us if we buy the land'.<sup>25</sup>

The editor of the *Armidale Express*, 4 January 1939 fully supported the development of first class aerodromes but warned:

it is essentially a co-operative effort to which the whole of the residents in the surrounding district should contribute ... in addition to

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<sup>22</sup> *Armidale Express*, 8 June 1938, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> *Armidale Express*, 10 June 1938, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> *Armidale Express*, 12 October 1938, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> *Armidale Express*, 26 October 1938, p.4.

contributions from the Federal Government and franchise-holding air travel concerns.

Council decided to purchase land 'near the State Highway on Moore Park hill at a cost of £3,500'<sup>26</sup> in February 1939. The owner of part of the land in question, J.C.F. Jackes indicated to council he did not wish to sell the land 'as it was useful for his adjoining paddocks ... However, he was agreeable to sell for £1,600'<sup>27</sup> and to retain all timber rights for seventy one acres of land with council to bear all legal costs. At the same time, E. Ferris the other owner involved approached council to see if they wished to buy 112 acres in the proposed aerodrome site or his total block of 152 acres

In May 1939 the Department of Civil Aviation acknowledged the council's proposal to establish an aerodrome. Council took action in August to apply for the promised grant of £1500 from the Department and council was prepared to add £400. But a £2000 loan for the establishment of the facility was approved in November. The Minister for Works and Local Government L.O. Martin appropriated two areas of land for the establishment of the aerodrome in February 1940. The areas comprised 185 acres in the estates of E. Ferris and J.F.C. Jackes and the control of the area was vested in the Armidale Municipal Council. That month council introduced a new aerodrome rate to 'bring in approximately £250 on a basis of one farthing on the unimproved capital value'.<sup>28</sup>

Mr Drummond, the Minister for Education agreed in March 1940 to assist the expedition by the Department of Works and Local Government on the establishment of the aerodrome. The department informed council in May that it could commence establishment of a "B" class aerodrome. By July, 110 acres of land had been cleared with timber ready for removal from the site. The Minister for Works and Local Government, L.O. Martin visited the site in July and urged council 'to continue its representation to the Defence Department with a view to that department assisting in construction work'.<sup>29</sup> An officer of the Valuer General's Department visited Armidale in August to confer with Jackes and Ferris.<sup>30</sup> This department valued the resumed land for the estate of E. Ferris as £1340 and J.C.F. Jackes £850. Roads within the aerodrome were now to be closed and vested in the council.

The Minister for Air, A.W. Fadden advised council the existing landing area could be extended to meet departmental A class licensing standards. The decision was taken by council to approach the Federal Government 'for a grant of £1,000 to help complete Armidale aerodrome, in the interests of Australia'.<sup>31</sup> The mayor also moved that the council be approached for financial assistance.

By October 1940, council had cleared and grubbed 181 acres of land, cleared 140 acres and were grading and levelling 160 acres of land surface. Once the ground work was

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<sup>26</sup> *Armidale Express*, 6 February 1939, p.4.

<sup>27</sup> *Armidale Express*, 20 February 1939, p.6.

<sup>28</sup> *Armidale Express*, 28 February 1940, p.4.

<sup>29</sup> *Armidale Express*, 22 July 1940, p.4.

<sup>30</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 August 1940, p.3.

<sup>31</sup> *Armidale Express*, 11 September 1940, p.3.

completed then an application could be made for a B class licence. The Director-General of Civil Aviation, Mr H.A. Mann informed council 'it would be necessary to prepare the whole area, due to increased landing dimensions required owing to altitude'.<sup>32</sup>

The field received its first plane, a Gypsy Moth on an errand of mercy on Sunday 15 December 1940. At the same time, an inspector from the Department of Civil Aviation inspected the area and commented 'all precautions for the safe landing of machines had been taken'.<sup>33</sup> By the end of that month, council held a little more than 265 acres, purchased for £2498 16s. One year later, council had expended, including a grant of £1500 from the government, £4496 for land purchase and various improvements. No assistance had been received from Dumaresq Shire and at the time the aerodrome was licensed as a 'C' class.

Aldermen expressed concern in October 1941 that councils were unable to meet aerodrome regulations as departmental requirements constantly changed. The matter arose following the abandonment of a patriotic day when authorities announced they would not bring a Lockheed Hudson to Armidale.

A letter from the defence authorities indicated in January 1942 that council had been granted a B class license. The Air Board was not prepared to consider the request by council to convert the aerodrome into a secondary defence aerodrome although the life of an American airman was saved when a kittyhawk became lost and made a safe landing on 21 April.

With Departmental approval, council took action 'to have specifications prepared for the leasing of the aerodrome for grazing purposes in return for a caretaker's work'.<sup>34</sup>

In November 1942 council set aside money for the acquisition of roads within the Armidale Aerodrome area. The suggestion from the Armidale and District Progress Association that the council purchase sufficient suitable ground to meet the requirements of an A class standard aerodrome was rejected by council in June 1943 because of the money already spent.

The issue of lighting arose from an incident on Thursday 24 June 1943 when the lives of two young Australian airmen were saved. A Wirriway became lost and landed with aid of citizens who provided emergency lighting. A letter was sent to Mr J.P. Abbott MHR requesting him to 'put before the authorities the type need, the cost and whether the Minister ... was willing to meet the cost of the installation'.<sup>35</sup> He agreed to make representation to the Minister For Air to provide adequate lighting and 'also to make available funds to convert the aerodrome from B class to A class standard'.<sup>36</sup> The Minister, Senator Drakeford commended the action of citizens who assisted the airmen in

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<sup>32</sup> *Armidale Express*, 16 October 1940, p.8.

<sup>33</sup> *Armidale Express*, 20 December 1940, p.3.

<sup>34</sup> *Armidale Express*, 12 August 1942, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> *Armidale Express*, 30 June 1943, p.6.

<sup>36</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 July 1943, p.6.

trouble and 'who subsequently made a forced landing ... with the aid of car headlights'.<sup>37</sup> But Abbott and aldermen expressed their resentment when the minister refused the request for lighting and improvements a month later. A reply of protest was sent to the Director of Civil Aviation and in October the minister promised further consideration of the council's request but news was received in November that the minister had again rejected the claim for assistance.

On Tuesday evening 28 December 1943, a Douglas airliner was forced to make an emergency landing because of a violent storm as it travelled from Brisbane to Sydney and Melbourne. The ten passengers included military men representing Britain, United States of America and the Netherlands. Consequently a public meeting convened by Mayor L.E. Dawson 'urged upon the Minister for Air ... a claim for government assistance in bringing the Armidale aerodrome from "B" class standard to "A1" standard'.<sup>38</sup> To that stage, Armidale had spent over £4000 of ratepayer's money and £1500 provided by the State Government. The aerodrome was available to the Air Cadet Training Corps and £3333 had been raised by Armidale residents and presented to the Minister for Air for the purchase of a fighter plane. In February 1944 the Minister for Aviation informed council that the request to bring the aerodrome up to A class standard was being further considered

In March 1944 council rejected a request by the Air Training Corps for council to construct a hangar at the aerodrome for use by the corps.

A series of incidents involving military aircraft occurred towards the end of World War Two. An Avro Anson plane made a forced landing on Thursday 20 April 1944 owing to engine trouble. Spare parts were sent from Sydney. A twin engined Douglas transport carrying twenty six US Army Air Force personnel was forced to land because of engine trouble on Tuesday 27 June. Another twin engined Douglas transport plane carrying twenty six R.A.A.F. personnel made an emergency landing on Saturday morning 15 July. On Sunday 8 July 1945 an Avro Anson transport landed at the aerodrome with engine trouble. A Beaufort Bomber, with a crew of seven was forced to land because of bad weather and a shortage of petrol on Thursday 18 April 1946.

Following a request from J.P. Abbott requesting a permanent aerodrome at Armidale, the Minister for Air Mr Drakeford informed council in July 1944 the matter was receiving further consideration from the government. In August council took action to provide a small number of kerosene lanterns, flares and containers to be used by the Volunteer Air Observers Corps in the case of emergency landings. The Armidale Chamber of Commerce again asked council in December to renew its efforts in getting the Federal Government to establish the aerodrome.

The Minister for Air promised 'Armidale's claims for improved aerodrome facilities would receive "the utmost consideration" when the Commonwealth policy on post-war civil aviation was implemented'.<sup>39</sup> The action of council in its efforts to have the

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<sup>37</sup> *Armidale Express*, 28 July 1943, p.6.

<sup>38</sup> *Armidale Express*, 21 January 1944, p.8.

<sup>39</sup> *Armidale Express*, 7 March 1945, p.8.



aerodrome brought up to A1 standard was supported by the Armidale branch of the Northern Farmers Union of NSW in April 1945 and in June council took further steps to obtain the cost of establishing an A class standard aerodrome.

Following an address by an official from the Newcastle Aero Club, a public meeting of enthusiasts decided to form an Armidale Club in November 1945 and 'The Mayor (Alderman D.D.H. Fayle) intimated that the Armidale City was prepared to give the scheme every assistance.'<sup>40</sup> In March 1946 'the Department of Civil Aviation forwarded a sketch showing a tentative building area for the aerodrome which could be used by the Aero Club'.<sup>41</sup> In April council costed a building to house two small planes at £200 and stores, shed, offices and workshops for £100. That month council also decided to construct a small hangar to house two Tiger Moth aeroplanes at an estimated cost of £350. The expenditure was to be charged against the loan.

The Department of Civil Aviation renewed the aerodrome B class licence for a further period of 12 months in February 1946. That month, council announced its intention to approach an airline company intending to establish a route connecting with Tamworth, to include Armidale in its itinerary. The Armidale City Council in May 1946, met representatives of a Queensland company Australian Aircraft Pty Ltd. which was planning to introduce air services to the coastal and inland areas of N.S.W. At the time the caretaker of the aerodrome was allowed to graze cattle and once an agreement was reached between the council and the Brisbane company, council recommended the fencing of forty acres of ground at the northern end of the landing ground for grazing. Thus 'ensuring that the landing ground is kept free from cattle'.<sup>42</sup>

By June 1946, a hangar at the aerodrome was 'being erected by the Armidale and Newcastle Aero Club'.<sup>43</sup> The Armidale Aero Club was authorised in August to construct a hangar on Armidale aerodrome with the council to purchase the building within three years. In October council instructed the city engineer, J.D. Brown to prepare a report on extending the runway for an additional 1300 feet to accommodate Avro-Anson planes. This move now prepared the way for establishment of an Armidale air service. Once permission was granted, council announced its intention in December to apply for a special loan under Section 181 of the Local Government Act 1919, 'for the purpose of improvements ... extension of runways and erection of sundry buildings at the Armidale Aerodrome'.<sup>44</sup>

City engineer, J.D. Brown investigated and reported on 'extending the runway at the aerodrome for an additional 1,300 feet to accommodate Avro Ason planes likely to be used in a projected air service'<sup>45</sup> in October 1946. In November council applied for a loan of £1000 for aerodrome improvements.

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<sup>40</sup> *Armidale Express*, 21 November 1945, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> *Armidale Express*, 20 March 1946, p.13.

<sup>42</sup> *Armidale Express*, 15 May 1946, p.10.

<sup>43</sup> *Armidale Express*, 19 June 1946, p.8.

<sup>44</sup> *Armidale Express*, 20 December 1946, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> *Armidale Express*, 16 June 1948, p.8.

The District Superintendent of the Department of Civil Aviation advised council in January 1947 the available runway at Armidale Aerodrome is 660 yards short of requirements for Anson Aircraft. He stated that the runway requirements for an Anson aircraft at Armidale was 4620 feet, with two subsidiary runs of 3800 feet and one of 3000 feet. The engineer from the department who visited the area late in January 'said he did not see why the drome could not be extended to the dimensions required'.<sup>46</sup> Council decided to apply for a grant in March to increase the length of the runways. At the time the hangar construction was almost complete. However the Armidale Aero Club informed council in May that it had purchased two planes but was 'unable to keep them at Armidale because of a lack of lock-up hangar facilities'.<sup>47</sup> Aldermen asked the finance committee to consider allocating some money out of the £1000 aerodrome loan to complete the required hangar.

The Armidale Agricultural Bureau supported moves to have the aerodrome brought up to 'A' class standard in June 1947. At the same time the shire and the Armidale branch of the Grazier's Association expressed their support. Four months later, the Minister for Civil Aviation, Mr Drakeford advised the council the Commonwealth Government could not spend money on the development of the airport as it 'was not an approved stopping place on a regularly operated civil airline route'.<sup>48</sup>

On 9 May 1947 the New England Tablelands (Noxious Weeds) County District was proclaimed and a county council was formed. Two delegates from each of the Dumaresq, Gostwyck and Guyra Shires comprised the membership. District organizations felt that such a model could be used for the management of an aerodrome. A conference at Armidale organised by the Grazier's Association of N.S.W. in August was attended by nearly forty delegates and representatives of business and local government bodies in the Guyra, Armidale, Uralla and Walcha areas. Consequently councils in these areas were requested to form a county council to develop and control a New England airport.

The Armidale town clerk organised a further meeting on 1 October 1947 attended by local government representatives from Armidale City Council, Guyra, Dumaresq and Gostwyck Shires to attempt to form a district aerodrome at Armidale. Agreement was reached that the New England Tablelands (Noxious Weeds) County Council could handle the aerodrome development but both Apsley Shire and Walcha Councils were not prepared to support such a move. The County Council discussed in October the possibility of the council controlling the construction and maintenance of the airport. On the suggestion of the county clerk, L. de V. Slade, councillors decided to extend an invitation to Armidale and Uralla Municipal Council to join 'before the proposal could be considered'.<sup>49</sup> Armidale Municipal Council rejected the invitation to join because the aerodrome was almost ready for commercial use and council intended to complete the necessary work with the co-operation of 'organisations interested in its future development'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Armidale Express*, 5 February 1947, p.8.

<sup>47</sup> *Armidale Express*, 28 May 1947, p.7.

<sup>48</sup> *Armidale Express*, 1 October 1947, p.8.

<sup>49</sup> *Armidale Express*, 13 October 1947, p.6.

<sup>50</sup> *Armidale Express*, 23 October 1947, p.5.

A further meeting on 29 October 1947 decided that as the aerodrome was almost ready for commercial development 'the time was not opportune for the council to join the New England Tablelands for the development of an aerodrome'.<sup>51</sup> The Minister for Civil Aviation, A.S. Drakeford advised council in November that commonwealth funds for aerodromes were dependent on the selection of that centre as an approved stopping place on a regular airline service.

Once again council was advised in January 1948 there was no provision for the early introduction of an airline service to Armidale. On 1 March, the Civil Aviation Department advised council of the need to return its license for classification and council was advised that a license was classified according to the basic length of the main runway (signified by an letter) whilst the load bearing capacity was indicated by a numeral. An A1 aerodrome would have a runway of not less than 8400 feet and a load bearing capacity of 100,000 pounds. The lowest classification was G7. According to this reclassification the council's license was now made provisional and determined below G7.

B.S. Brown, the manager of East West airlines advised council of the changing circumstances concerning aerodromes in March 1948. The State Government was now the responsible body for the approval and authorisation of air services within the state whilst the Department of Civil Aviation controlled air safety, pilot qualifications and general operation of aircraft. The department still approved aerodromes and council received notification from the department that the aerodrome was still rated below G7.

The Armidale Chamber of Commerce requested East-West airlines to extend its service to Armidale in May 1948. At that time the company's aircraft passed Armidale on their way to Glen Innes and Brisbane whilst Tamworth had three air services per day. In reply the chamber was informed by the managing director, B. Brown 'that a 4,600 feet runway was required at Armidale before the Department ... would permit its everyday use by East-West Airlines planes'.<sup>52</sup> That month council also took action to ask East West airlines to include Armidale as a stopping place and prepared plans for the aerodrome as required by the Department of Civil Aviation. Once completed, plans and specifications were to be forwarded to the Minister for Public Works, Mr Cahill with a request for a government grant.

In June 1948 the Armidale and District Chamber of Commerce 'appointed a deputation to approach Dumaresq Shire Council with a view to enlisting the council's support in the development of Armidale aerodrome'.<sup>53</sup> Councillor P.A. Wright of Dumaresq Shire discounted statements that the shire was not interested in supporting the development of the aerodrome. He stated, 'This council was the prime mover in the aerodrome project' and the councillors 'after an extensive survey ... suggested the present site, a suggestion which was confirmed by expert opinion'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Armidale Express*, 16 June 1948, p.13.

<sup>52</sup> *Armidale Express*, 10 May 1948, p.6.

<sup>53</sup> *Armidale Express*, 7 June 1948, p.3.

<sup>54</sup> *Armidale Express*, 18 June 1948, p.3.

A further conference convened by the Armidale branch of the Grazier's Association was held on 28 June 1948. It was agreed that a committee should investigate and report on the development of an aerodrome for the district. The Hon. D.H. Drummond felt that the city and shires should combine 'to finance a drome to take the biggest type of plane at present in use'.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, city engineer, J.D. Brown advised council that in his opinion 8,500 feet of runway could be constructed but the question of cost was another matter. Council was prepared to support another meeting planned for 28 July and appointed Aldermen Davis Hughes and Ken Jones as delegates with plans and other relevant information to be made available to the meeting. Council also decided to approach East West airlines to establish an air service once a license for a seven to ten passenger aircraft was granted by the department.

In August 1948, the city engineer was given authority 'to do what was necessary to have the aerodrome approved ... for use by East-West Airlines' Avro-Anson seven-passenger planes'.<sup>56</sup> But because of difficulties in obtaining a heavy grader, levelling work did not commence at the site until Monday 16 August. At the same time the shire asked council 'for plans for future development of Armidale aerodrome, so that these may be taken into consideration when re-alignment of the highway on Moore Park Hill'<sup>57</sup> was developed. Council also asked whether the shire had any objection to the closing of a road on the northern side of the aerodrome which belonged to the late Mr Behrend. It was later revealed that a number of roads to be closed were not dedicated roads and were under the control of the Lands Department.

In September 1948 council asked the shire to forgo charges for labour and equipment used in preparing the aerodrome. The city engineer reported that 'all stumps have been removed on runways and the first and second runways have been graded ... Trees have been felled on the main approaches and felling of trees on approaches to the third runway is at hand'.<sup>58</sup> Council was now awaiting an inspection from a Department of Civil Aviation inspector. The request by council involving the amount of £189 16s 4d to waive charges for shire equipment used in the construction work was rejected 'because its members believe that a district aerodrome should be controlled by a county council'.<sup>59</sup> The city engineer, J.D. Brown informed council in November 1948 that the runways were completed and the aerodrome was ready for inspection. Shortly afterwards, J. Hammer of the Department of Civil Aviation inspected the aerodrome.

At that stage East-West Airlines Ltd. was prepared to provide a service between Armidale and Sydney on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday whilst a Tamworth-Sydney service also landed at Armidale on the same days. The *Armidale Express*, 17 November 1948 commended the council 'for the courage shown' and also felt that the shire 'will make its contribution once it is convinced that the 'drome will meet reasonable requirements of the air authorities'. News that the aerodrome was licensed was received

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<sup>55</sup> *Armidale Express*, 5 July 1948, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> *Armidale Express*, 4 August 1948, p.8.

<sup>57</sup> *Armidale Express*, 20 August 1948, p.5.

<sup>58</sup> *Armidale Express*, 15 September 1948, p.8.

<sup>59</sup> *Armidale Express*, 18 October 1948, p.3.

on 25 November and the air service commenced on Monday 29 November with the use of ex-military aircraft, Avro Ansons.

Correspondence was received by Mr Abbott and the Minister for Air, A.S. Drakeford in December 1948. The minister indicated that the Department of Civil Aviation is prepared to take over responsibility for the aerodrome when Armidale is approved as a stopping place on a regular operated airline service. An estimated 5000 attended Armidale Aero Club's pageant on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 December. Before the program began, the mayor of Armidale officially opened the aerodrome.

Whilst conscious of the work of council in developing the aerodrome, the Armidale Chamber of Commerce favoured the handing over 'to the Civil Aviation Department for further development'.<sup>60</sup> By this stage, the Minister for Civil Aviation had informed council that if the department assumed responsibility council would be reimbursed for all reasonable expenditure incurred in the development of the aerodrome to that date. With no dissent amongst the aldermen, council was prepared to hand over the aerodrome.

In May 1949 council took action to approach East-West Airlines and other users of Armidale aerodrome for statistics showing the use made of the aerodrome. The statistics were to be used to prepare a case for the transfer of the aerodrome to the Commonwealth Government. The Hon J.P. Abbott, MHR for New England intimated to council in June 1949 that 'the Department of Civil Aviation is likely to take over Armidale Aerodrome and to reimburse Armidale City Council for money spent in developing it'.<sup>61</sup> At that stage, council estimated the amount spent was £9000.

Once Armidale was approved as a regular stopping place for the East-West Airlines service, the Minister for Air, A.S. Drakeford announced the Department of the Interior will be requested 'to proceed with the acquisition of the aerodrome at Armidale'.<sup>62</sup> In July council was prepared to proceed with extension work at the aerodrome provided the Department of Civil Aviation met the cost. That month, the minister promised council that he will consider proposed extensions to the aerodrome. Next month, council determined to claim £8300 reimbursement when the Civil Aviation Department takes over the aerodrome. The minister claimed that all his department could do was to take over the facilities but development would be considered in the works programme for 1950-51. Council asked the department in November for £20 a week maintenance and to expedite the move to take it over. In his annual report, Mayor Dawson announced the 'Federal Government has agreed to take over control ... and to refund the council its expenditure on the acquisition and improvement of the area since 1939'.<sup>63</sup>

In January 1950 council forwarded a submission to the Department of Civil Aviation Regional Director 'for a maintenance grant of £120 per year to be allowed the Armidale City Council for upkeep of the aerodrome'.<sup>64</sup> A previous application had been made to

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<sup>60</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 January 1949, p.8.

<sup>61</sup> *Armidale Express*, 8 June 1949, p.13.

<sup>62</sup> *Armidale Express*, 29 June 1949, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> *Armidale Express*, 21 December 1949, p.4.

<sup>64</sup> *Armidale Express*, 18 January 1950, p.5.

date from 29 November 1948. The officer promised to take the matter up with head office. By February, the Department of Civil Aviation had taken over the aerodrome and council claimed £9028 6s 6d as reimbursement for expenditure. Council agreed to provide labour and plant to maintain the aerodrome under the department's control. The department agreed to reimburse council 'and assumed full financial responsibility for future work'.<sup>65</sup> The Department sought survey data from the council in April to implement plans for the aerodrome and in May, Meehan and Hill, two surveyors from the department arrived in Armidale to conduct preliminary surveys to determine what work is required for the extension of runways. In August, council took action to call a public meeting because of delays in developing the aerodrome. Despite the promises, the acquisition of aerodrome still had not been completed by September because of difficulties in obtaining a valuation report on the land.

Extensive rain in Armidale during June 1950 closed the aerodrome 'for three weeks because of the boggy nature of the landing strip'.<sup>66</sup> Again in October, the proposed visit of the Federal Minister for Air, T.L. White was cancelled because of the closure of the aerodrome from rain. Finally, council received advice in November that the Department of the Interior would recommend to the Minister reimbursement of £9028 6s 6d for the Aerodrome. But in January 1951 the Director General of Civil Aviation advised council that no funds were available for improvements to the aerodrome for that financial year. Concerned about the lack of action by May, the Armidale Chamber of Commerce called on local government and civic organisations to demand improvements. The Minister for Civil Aviation, Mr H.L. Anthony informed the chamber in July that 'provision for construction of a paved runway and associated works at Armidale has been made in preliminary draft estimates for 1951-52'.<sup>67</sup> At the time, the length of the runway was 5050 feet but a further 3350 feet was necessary for DC3 aircraft because of the altitude. Further developments required a complete contour feature and appropriate survey of the whole area.

Captain A.J. Smith, a representative of East-West Airlines, told the Chamber of Commerce in September 'until an aerodrome with adequate landing strips was established his company felt that there was nothing to be gained by maintaining the present service to Armidale'.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the Regional Maintenance Director of the D.C.A. advised he would submit the report on the aerodrome to the Minister for Civil Aviation, H.L. Anthony.

Throughout 1951 action was taken by council, the Hon. D.H. Drummond M.H.R., the Armidale branch of the Grazier's Association and Chamber of Commerce to convince the Department of Civil Aviation to carry out improvements to the aerodrome. Council received news in February 1952 that the amount of £2000 authorised could not now be expended. The Chamber of Commerce asked council in April to have the aerodrome moved back to the control of council but the aldermen said 'the development of the

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<sup>65</sup> *Armidale Express*, 27 March 1950, p.4.

<sup>66</sup> *Armidale Express*, 5 July 1950, p.8.

<sup>67</sup> *Armidale Express*, 25 July 1951, p.6.

<sup>68</sup> *Armidale Express*, 10 September 1951, p.3.

aerodrome was beyond the Council'.<sup>69</sup> A committee called the Armidale District Aerodrome Development Committee was established in May 1952 at a conference called by the Armidale branch of the Grazier's Association. Council was represented by Deputy Mayor Ald. Ken Jones and the terms of reference included: the development of the present site; to investigate alternative sites and to investigate the establishment of an immediate air service. In June 1952 council was informed by the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor that further money could not be paid until the boundaries of the aerodrome were finalised. At the same time the Minister for Civil Aviation advised council further work could not be carried because of insufficient money. Two surveyors from the Department of Interior arrived in July to survey the aerodrome with a view to the extension of the runways.

The Minister for Civil Aviation, H.L. Anthony advised the Hon D.H. Drummond M.H.R. the present site was the most suitable available and that plans were in hand 'to acquire additional land to lay down a run-way costing at least £15,000 so that an all-weather landing area will be available'.<sup>70</sup> Following the receipt of correspondence from the Minister and Mr Drummond by May, council sought advice on whether there was any provision for the Armidale aerodrome in the estimates.

Council asked East-West to re-introduce a feeder service to Armidale in January 1954. In reply the company stated there are unique problems associated with an air service to Armidale. The company had informed the Department of Civil Aviation that a more suitable site should be found 'before additional funds were spent on the present aerodrome' or 'modern radio navigational aids' should be incorporated into 'any plans to improve the aerodrome'.<sup>71</sup> The company was prepared to reintroduce a service when the aerodrome was brought up to DC3 standard. The Federated Chamber of Commerce of the Northern Tablelands and North Western Slopes took action in March to ask the Minister of Civil Aviation, the Hon H.L. Anthony, to explain the delay in carrying out work at the aerodrome to make it suitable for commercial and passenger travel.

In January 1954 the Department of Works was instructed to supply to the Minister for Civil Aviation costs of removing the groundsmen's residence to another site and for preparation of the strip. Information from the Department of Civil Aviation in June indicated the requisitioning procedure for additional land required for the extension of the Armidale aerodrome was underway. The East-West Airlines hoped to resume operations before the end of the year.

The Department of Civil Aviation asked council in November 1956 to act as their agents in the maintenance of the airport and council referred the matter to the incoming Council. Armidale airport was officially opened on Saturday 8 December 'after a £50,000 reconstruction to enable modern transports to serve the district'.<sup>72</sup> A crowd of nearly 400 attended. At that stage a new terminal building had been completed at a cost of £10 000.

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<sup>69</sup> *Armidale Express*, 23 April 1952, p.4.

<sup>70</sup> *Armidale Express*, 23 March 1953, p.6.

<sup>71</sup> *Armidale Express*, 29 January 1954, p.7.

<sup>72</sup> *Armidale Express*, 10 December 1956, p.6.

The first regular passenger service aircraft landed on Monday afternoon at 4.30 p.m. after a break in the service for five years.

The Department of Civil Aviation again requested the City Council in January 1957 to 'take over the responsibility of control and maintenance of the new Armidale Airport, while the Department would continue to meet the cost of works and inspections involved'.<sup>73</sup> Council rejected the proposal on the grounds that the staff of the council were too busy to undertake outside work because of the heavy works programme for that year. Earlier in the month, the shire was emphatic that control and maintenance of the airport should remain with the department. A further offer to council for local ownership was made but council again declined in October 1960. In August 1961 discussions took place between the shire and the department but again the shire declined.

The first official landing of a Fokker Friendship took place on Sunday 30 August 1959 and some 1000 to 2000 spectators attended to witness the event. In September the Dumaresq Shire appealed for the provision of night landing facilities and the possible laying down of a tarmac strip. Council also asked the Department for the installation of night landing facilities at the Armidale airport through the Hon. D.H. Drummond MHR in October. The Minister, Senator S. Paltridge informed council in November that the traffic did not justify the expenditure of £15,000-£20,000 for the installation of night landing facilities together with £1,000 a year operation and maintenance costs.

In June 1960 action was taken to gravel the aerodrome. At that stage, the gravel strip was 100 feet wide, 6000 feet long and involved 8000 tons of material.

Council did not withdraw its application and in July 1960 the Minister for Civil Aviation announced that dual purpose navigation and landing aids, including non-directional beacon radio homing devices will be installed at the Armidale airport. The night landing facilities were used for the first time on the last weekend in May 1962 by the aero club enthusiasts and the regular Sunday evening Fokker service.

An emergency meeting of representatives from the Armidale City Council, Dumaresq Shire, Chamber of Commerce, East-West Airlines and Armidale Travel Centre took place at the airport in January 1963. Following expressions of concern by council and the shire about the condition of the runway, the Hon. D.H. Drummond sought an 'inspection ... by a senior officer of the Department'.<sup>74</sup> Not impressed by the complaint, the Minister for Civil Aviation rejected the provision of a sealed runway and told Mr Drummond 'he expected gratitude and not resentment for the airport facilities at Armidale'.<sup>75</sup> Council accepted the minister's offer of consultation with a senior officer.

Two senior officers of the department met with representatives of the City Council, Dumaresq Shire and the Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday 27 February 1963. Following a report on the conference, the shire announced it was prepared to consider taking the Armidale Airport over from the Department of Civil Aviation provided it 'is

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<sup>73</sup> *Armidale Express*, 25 January 1957, p.3.

<sup>74</sup> *Armidale Express*, 25 January 1963, p.7.

<sup>75</sup> *Armidale Express*, 30 January 1963, p.3.



brought up to standard with an extended runway, suitable for aircraft of the Fokker Friendship type'.<sup>76</sup> The shire was informed in June it was not policy to seal runways before handing aerodromes over to local ownership.

Concerned about the state of the runway, the Armidale Chamber of Commerce contacted the Department of Civil Aviation. The Regional Director, A.W. Doubleday informed the chamber in February 1965 'he did not expect sealing of the main runway at Armidale to be included in the Departments' 1965-66 works programme'.<sup>77</sup> Dumaresq Shire took over operational and maintenance control from the department in February and by that time there was 1200 feet of asphalt. The Chamber of Commerce asked the shire in May to apply to the department for the extension of the runway. Such work would ensure that fully laden Fokker Friendship aircraft could use the airport. The sealing and extension of the runway was one of the matters discussed at a meeting between the Regional Director of the Department of Civil Aviation and J.C. Sutherland, Dumaresq Shire engineer in June.

The East-West Airlines managing director, D.M. Shand expressed concern in December about the cost to his company brought about by effects of weather on the runway. It was planned to have 3150 feet of runway sealed by the end of December and the Dumaresq Shire stated 'when the major improvements have been completed' the Shire 'will consider taking it over under the local ownership plan'.<sup>78</sup> The shire also expected that Armidale council would contribute towards the cost of upkeep.

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<sup>76</sup> *Armidale Express*, 22 March 1963, p.2.

<sup>77</sup> *Armidale Express*, 8 February 1965, p.6.

<sup>78</sup> *Armidale Express*, 22 December 1965, p.2.

A proposal by the Department of Civil Aviation to build a service station and perhaps a motel and restaurant at Armidale airport was rejected by the State Planning Authority in February 1966. Five months later, the authority reconsidered the application and the Shire felt that they were a necessary part of the aerodrome. The Dumaresq Shire invited the Regional Director for Civil Aviation, J. Davis to address the July meeting.

The Shire announced in February that the Department of Civil Aviation planned to have the runway completed for Fokker Friendships in 1967. By May the survey work and soil tests were complete and the Shire was awaiting plans from the Department of Civil Aviation. Initial planned runway extensions included a 200 foot gravel extension to the northern end and 300 feet to the southern end of the runway at a cost of £20 000. The southern extension was finally made possible through resumption of 12 acres from J. Jackes and the southern extension was increased to 900 feet in September.