

women with wings

images of Australian women pilots



Women with wings celebrates 50 years of the Australian Women Pilots' Association (AWPA). Since 1927, when Millicent Bryant became the first licensed woman pilot in Australia, women have flown everything from Gipsy Moths to Jumbo Jets.

Today there are about 2000 women pilots in Australia, flying in all areas of aviation. Powerhouse Museum staff photographer Sue Stafford has travelled throughout the country photographing and interviewing members of the AWPA. This exhibition of portraits and flight memorabilia highlights their achievements.

Women with wings offers a colourful and inspiring experience for students of all ages. These teachers notes include major label texts for each section along with suggested focus questions. The questions are designed for different age groups, and you should choose those you feel are most appropriate for your students.

Introduction

Exhibition structure

This exhibition is on two levels. On level 3, outside the Kings Cinema, you can see 12 black and white portraits of pilots alongside a display of unique objects which tell the story of women aviators in Australia. You can also hear some of the pilots tell their best 'flying tales' in an audiovisual presentation. One level 2, in the Turbine Hall, you can see 21 colour portraits of pilots — including pioneer aviator Nancy Bird.

Links to your teaching

Students can explore issues of:

- the significance of women pioneers in Australian aviation history
- the role of women aviators during wartime
- the diversity of women's involvement in aviation in Australian culture today
- the experiences of pioneer and contemporary women pilots
- the relationships between science, technology, society and the environment.



Extending your visit

Combine your visit to *Women with wings* with some of the following exhibitions:

Transport

level 2

See the vehicles that have brought people together. There are some new and exciting additions to be seen in 2000 that have increased the interactivity in this favourite exhibition. See the enormous Catalina flying boat, 'drive' Locomotive 1243 and be amazed at the complex internal construction of a 1998 Ford car.

Flying high, down under

level 2

Traces the development of aviation in Australia and profiles the work of aeronautical pioneer Lawrence Hargrave.

Space: beyond this world

level 2

Looks at the history of human desire to travel beyond Earth's atmosphere. See early rocketry, follow the 'space race' between the USSR and USA, then glimpse the dream of future space travel.

'... never done': women's work in the home

level 3

Displays the hidden history of the daily work of women focusing on an 1880s bush hut kitchen and a 1920s 'germ-free' kitchen. See the dramatic changes that have occurred — and not occurred — and the creativity and skill of women in the home.

(Cover photo) **Noor Braybrook**. Photo by Sue Stafford, Powerhouse Museum, 1999.

(Left) **Janelle Johnston**. Photo by Sue Stafford, Powerhouse Museum, 1999.

The pioneers women take to the air

Women took up the challenge of flight during the late 1920s and 1930s. Intrepid aviators such as Lores Bonney made long-distance solo flights crossing oceans and continents, while others, like Nancy Bird, made flying their career. However for most women, flying was a social activity fostered by aero clubs which organised races and 'flying picnics'.



Focus questions

Many of the pioneer women aviators took personal things with them on trips, such as a thermos, a stuffed toy leopard and a bottle of perfume. What would you take on a long plane trip? Imagine that you are a pilot in the 1920s, what would you need on a long flight?

One of the pilots, Lores Bonney, had to have a flying suit specially made for her to keep out the cold. Would getting suitable equipment like clothes and aeroplane parts for flying be difficult in Australia at that time?

As well as having to get specially made clothes, what other problems do you think pioneer women pilots would have had to overcome?

When Nancy Bird was first flying, air maps were not available so she had to use road maps. What did she do to the road maps to strengthen them?

Nancy Bird (pictured) learnt to fly when she was 17, taking lessons from Charles Kingsford Smith. As the pilot for the Far West Children's Health Scheme in Bourke, Nancy was the first woman engaged in commercial aviation in Australia and pioneered an Aerial Ambulance and Baby Clinic Service. Photo by Sue Stafford, Powerhouse Museum, 1999.

Women pilots at war grounded for the duration

With the approach of World War II, women formed volunteer groups to support the war effort. Many enrolled in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) and did a range of jobs, from aircraft maintenance to catering. They were unable to serve as pilots because of government prohibition on women flying in military service.

The AWPA celebrating 50 years

The Australian Women Pilots' Association (AWPA) was formed by Nancy Bird in 1950 to forge closer ties among women pilots. The first meeting was attended by 35 pilots. Today there are more than 500 members throughout Australia. The AWPA promotes the achievements of women who fly and the satisfaction to be gained from the pursuit of aviation.

Focus questions

Women pilots at war

Why do you think women in Australia were not allowed to serve as pilots in World War II?

Are women allowed to be pilots in modern airforces? (Hint: look at some of the people in the portraits and their jobs.)

How many women joined the WAAAF during World War II?

The AWPA

What sort of event did Nancy Bird invite women pilots to attend to discuss forming an association of women pilots? How many women attended the first meeting of the AWPA?

What is another name for the All Women's Transcontinental Air Race that is held in the USA? What position did Nancy Bird come when she competed in 1958? What country did her copilot come from?

What sort of a person do you think would want to be a pilot 50 years ago? Do you think the same sort of people become pilots now?

What sort of problems did woman have becoming pilots 50 years ago? Did they have equal chances at jobs and training as men?

Background information

Selected events in aviation history

Significant events in the history of aviation, including those that are represented in the Powerhouse Museum are listed in chronological order (objects on display are shown in bold, the names of pilots and organisations featured in *Women with wings* are shown in italics).

1858 William Dean made the first balloon ascent in Australia.

1888 Lawrence Hargrave began work on the first of the 36 engines he was to design and build.

1890 Valorie van Tassell became the first woman in Australia to ascend in a balloon and parachute to earth.

1894 At Stanwell Park beach, Lawrence Hargrave was lifted 4.8 metres above the ground by four box kites tied together.

1909 On 5 December, the first heavier-than-air free flights in Australia were made at Narrabeen Beach, Sydney. Two women, *Florence Taylor* and *Emma Schultz* were among the pilots who made flights in the glider.

1910 Erich Weiss, known as Harry Houdini, made the first officially recognised powered flight in Australia.

1911 W E Hart became the first pilot to obtain an aviator's licence in Australia.

1914 On 16 July, Maurice Guillaux took off from Melbourne in a **Bleriot XI monoplane** to make Australia's first airmail flight.

1919 First flight from England to Australia (Smith Brothers, Bennett and Shiers).

1921 Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services (QANTAS) began with an Avro 504K aircraft.

1921 Formation of the Royal Australian Airforce.

1924 Goble and Macintyre first to circumnavigate Australia by air.

1927 *Millicent Bryant* became the first licensed woman pilot in Australia.

1928 First trans-Pacific flight, USA to Australia (Kingsford Smith, Ulm, Lyons and Warner).

1929 The Honorable Hugh Grosvenor became the first person to circumnavigate Australia solo by air.

1930s The **Cirrus Moth** helped to popularise private flying.

1931 On 17 February, the homemade **Clancy Skybaby** flew at Sydney's Mascot Aerodrome.

1932 *Lores Bonney* became the first woman to circumnavigate Australia by air.

1933 *Nancy Bird* received her 'A' (private) pilot's licence.

1935 *Nancy Bird* received her 'B' (commercial) licence becoming the youngest woman commercial pilot in the British Empire.

1937 Lores Bonney became the first person to fly from Australia to South Africa via Asia and North Africa.

1941 Founding of the *Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)*.

1950 *Nancy Bird* founds the *Australian Women Pilots' Association (AWPA)*.

1951 The **Catalina Frigate Bird II** charted the last great air route in the world-across the South Pacific from Australia to Chile.

1965 Luigi Pellarini first saw the prototype of his agricultural aircraft, the **Transavia Airtruk** fly.

1967 The **Beechcraft Queenair B80** became the first official NSW air ambulance.

1974 The **Skycraft Scout Mk1**, one of the first microlight aircraft was launched.

1983 Dick Smith became the first person to fly solo around the world in the **Bell 206B Jetranger III helicopter Australian Explorer**.

1985 The prototype of the **Eagle X** aircraft flew.

Teachers resources

Books

Bird Nancy, *My god! it's a woman: the autobiography of Nancy Bird*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1990.

Gwynn Jones T, *Pioneer aviator: the remarkable life of Lores Bonney*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1988.

Joy W, *The aviator: true adventures of Australian airmen*, Rigby Limited, Sydney, 1978.

Kennard G, *Solo woman: Gaby Kennard's world flight*, Sally Milner Publishing, Sydney.

Kingsford Smith, C A, *Sir Charles Kingsford Smith: the Southern Cross story*, Rigby Limited, Sydney, 1978.

Parnell N, Broughton T, *Flypast: a record of aviation in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Services, Canberra, 1988.

Taylor Sir G, *The sky beyond*, Bantom, Sydney, 1983.

Whitty Helen, *Adventures in the sky*, Scholastic Australia, Gosford, 1998.

Websites

The AWPA <http://www.awpa.org.au/home.htm>

Women in Aviation Resource Centre <http://www.women-in-aviation.com/>

International Women's Air and Space Museum <http://www.iwasm.org/>

The aviation home page <http://www.avhome.com/>

Great aviation quotes <http://www.skygod.com/quotes/>

Australian Women Pilots <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~flydoc/pilots.html>

Please note

These websites were available and suitable at the time of publication. We advise that teachers should check sites before recommending them to students.

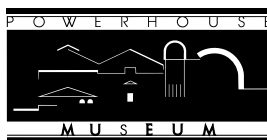
Bankstown Airport

As a companion to the *Women with wings* exhibition, teachers may like to take an excursion to an airport. Educational visits to Bankstown Airport can be arranged subject to staff availability. Contact the Bankstown Airport on (02) 9796 2300.

For further information

For more information on the *Women with wings* exhibition, visit the Powerhouse Museum's website <http://www.phm.gov.au>

For more information about the museum or your booking, contact Education and Visitor Services at the Powerhouse museum: telephone (02) 9217 0222, (02) 9217 0366, fax (02) 9217 0441, email edserv@phm.gov.au



Ideas in Action

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