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**‘NOBODY IN THE AIR FORCE HAD ANY IDEA’:
UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINS AND THE EARLY
DEVELOPMENT OF THE AIRCRAFT COLLECTION OF
THE AIR FORCE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND**

**A research report presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of**

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Declaration

I certify that I have pursued the study in accordance with the requirements of Massey University's regulations, including:

1. That the research carried out for my Master's research report has been used in whole for this qualification only.
2. That the research is my original work, except as indicated by appropriate attribution in the text and/or acknowledgements; quotation marks have been used where required; and I take responsibility for the content and quality of this research report.
3. That the text, excluding appendices/annexes and references, is within the recommended 20,000 word count plus or minus 10%.
4. All the ethical requirements applicable to this study have been complied with, as required by Massey University.
5. All photographs reproduced in this research report are available under Creative Commons licenses and are attributed in accordance with those licenses.

Abstract

The Air Force Museum of Zealand was opened on 1 April 1987, originally as the Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum. This research report is a historical study of the museum's early development. It identifies early thwarted attempts by members of the Air Force to establish a historical collection and then traces the decade-long Air Force project that resulted in the first the establishment of a RNZAF Historical Centre and finally the opening of the RNZAF Museum on the fiftieth anniversary of the Air Force's creation. As the museum project was implemented only in the late 1970s, the RNZAF missed opportunities to ensure the preservation of certain historic aircraft and other relics. As a consequence, museum collecting and exhibition policies (particularly around aircraft) were shaped in large measure by a need to plug perceived gaps in the historical collection, particularly in relation to World War II and the early Cold War periods, with at times less emphasis placed on the provenance of airframes. This was in line with the approaches taken by several air force museums worldwide in this same period. While the late development of the museum required some compromises, the establishment of the RNZAF Museum must nevertheless be recognised as an achievement by dedicated and enthusiastic service members who possessed no prior experience of museum development.

Acknowledgements

In one of the more challenging moments of writing this research report, I found myself asking why it was I embarked on a historical study of a museum. I came across Craig Clunas's observation that: 'It is very hard to research the history of a museum. The point of a museum is that it has no history, but represents the objects it contains transparently, in an unmediated form.'¹ Naturally, the phrase 'very hard' caught my attention, and I seized on the former Oxford chair of art history's remark as some form of validation. But then, as a historian, I found myself railing against the notion that any institution would have 'no history'. As is often the case when one first looks, the meaning was not as first presumed and instead Clunas's observation was intended as a challenge. He was not suggesting that a museum has no history, but rather he was commenting on the fact curators in the past tended to perceive themselves as recorders (collectors) and presenters (exhibitors) of history but not as active participants in their collection's story. By not appreciating their role in shaping the institution and collection's history, they purposely or inadvertently erected obstacles to the historical study of their museum, often by the simple act of neglecting to record collection and exhibition philosophies, choices, and decisions. Of course, every museum possesses a history that when uncovered and unravelled can contribute to our understanding of the collection.

The intent of this research report is to understand how the Air Force Museum of New Zealand was conceived and then developed to enable a museum to be opened. In essence, it is the story of how a group of service members and veterans of the Royal New Zealand Air Force with no prior experience of museums nevertheless lifted *their* museum off the ground, setting it on the path to becoming an institution of national importance. I start by acknowledging their contribution and expressing my gratitude for the fact they did leave enough markers for a museum studies scholar to gauge what they were striving to achieve.

I have been fortunate to study under an incredibly knowledgeable and well-connected Museum Studies scholar, who is also an uncommonly dedicated supervisor, Dr Susan Abasa. In accepting

¹ Craig Clunas, 'China in Britain: The imperial collections', in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (eds.), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1998), 44.

the supervision of my research report, she allowed me to stay somewhat within my comfort zone of historical studies, whilst stipulating that the research report had to be worthy of Museum Studies. Her pastoral care and her reassurances in those moments of self-doubt helped steady the course, while her advice about the museums landscape and literature proved invaluable.

The research report would not have been possible without the generosity of the Trust Board of the Air Force Museum of New Zealand. Trust Board members considered my request for access to records and granted this without conditions. I also thank the Director, Brett Marshall (Wing Commander, Retired), who paved the way for my access request and welcomed me to the Museum. I am especially indebted to Simon Moody, Research Curator, and his small team, who hosted my research trips, going above and beyond locating records both at the museum and in response to emails.

I conducted three interviews and therefore express my gratitude to John Barry, a former Director, and his daughter, Sally Barry, who facilitated my visit; David Provan, another former Director, and his wife, Margaret Provan; and Rob Angelo, a former executive officer, who was able to speak about his own experience at the Museum and that of his late wife, Thérèse Angelo, another former Director. Each was generous with their time and sharing of knowledge, and in David's case documents. While the research report ended up with a focus on the museum's origins, up to the point of opening, I intend for their information to be incorporated into further studies that explore the museum's subsequent history.

The research could not have been completed without the services delivered by Archives New Zealand, with acknowledgement of the staff of the Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington branches. I thank also the staff of the Massey University Library.

Finally, but not least, I thank my partner, Negin Nematollahi, for her encouragement and patience as she waited for this research report to be completed. I am thankful for her presence and for the person that she is.

Abbreviations

AFHQ	Air Force Headquarters (Air Staff, Defence Headquarters)
AFMNZ	Air Force Museum of New Zealand
AFO	Air Force Order
ATC	Air Training Corps
ATC	Air Training Corps
BAC	British Aircraft Corporation
CAS	Chief of Air Staff
CFS	Central Flying School
CO	Commanding Officer
DCAS	Deputy Chief of Air Staff
FAS	Ferrymead Aeronautical Society
IAF	Indian Air Force
IWM	Imperial War Museum
MOTAT	Museum of Transport and Technology
NASM	National Air and Space Museum
NMUSAF	National Museum of the United States Air Force
NZAF	New Zealand Air Force
NZEF	New Zealand Expeditionary Force
NZMF	New Zealand Military Forces
RAF	Royal Air Force
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
TEAL	Tasman Empire Airways Limited
US	United States
USAAC	United States Army Air Corps
USAF	United States Air Force

Introduction

The Air Force Museum of New Zealand (AFMNZ) was officially opened on 1 April 1987 on the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) on 1 April 1937. More than 3000 people descended on Wigram, a suburb of Christchurch, for celebrations that included aircraft displays, a uniformed parade before the Governor-General and the Chief of Air Force (CAS), and finally the dedication and opening of the service's museum. On that day, and for several years after, the museum was titled the Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum. Christchurch's *Press* reported that the Governor-General, Sir Paul Reeves, when addressing the parade, linked the Air Force's past and the present with his observation that: 'Today's air force reflects the fine traditions and standards set during the last 50 years by the men and women who served in the RNZAF, many of whom have come to Wigram today to mark this occasion. It was their valour, their skill, and their tenacity which helped form the service as we know it.'² Whilst this statement was not about the museum itself, it encapsulated the intent, which Reeves then opened as the culmination of the event. The museum was intended to be a place for commemoration for those men and women who contributed to the RNZAF's history, a resource to educate serving members and the general public about that history, and an opportunity to promote the contribution of the RNZAF to New Zealand society and national security.

Three days after the opening, the *Press* published a letter to the editor from a self-confessed 'geriatric', C.W. Bromley, a seventy-one-year-old retired air force officer who was one of the many veterans present at Wigram for the anniversary. Bromley declared: 'It is fair to say that the museum is truly magnificent in conception and execution.'³ No doubt many, if not all, those who had formed the bustling crowd that surged into the building and through the exhibitions would have agreed. For many, Wigram was something of a spiritual place, being widely regarded as the 'birthplace' of the RNZAF and having played a formative role in the lives of so many pre-war, wartime and early post-war veterans who had served there at one time or another. Bromley's own connection was forged fifty years earlier, less than two months after the RNZAF's creation, when at the age of twenty-one he left his home in Christchurch and arrived at Wigram, where he was to

² Nigel Malthus, 'Jets salute golden anniversary', *The Press* (Christchurch), 2 April 1987, 2.

³ C.W. Bromley, letter to the editor, 'Air Force Museum', *The Press* (Christchurch), 4 April 1987, 20.

swear true allegiance to the King, don a uniform, and commence training. Offered a short-service commission in the Royal Air Force (RAF), he sailed for Great Britain in 1938, transferred to the RAF, and in September 1939 went to war as a bomber pilot flying over western Europe. During the Second World War, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Force Cross, retiring from the RAF in 1958 as a Wing Commander.⁴



C.W. Bromley (back row, third from left) and fellow pilots of No. 1 Pilots Course at the Flying Training School, Wigram, in 1938. (WgF58, AFMNZ)

Bromley's life story reminds us that, for many years, the RNZAF's history was entwined with, and shaped by the RAF. Moreover, its history forms part of an international history of air power.

⁴ Bromley's service is noted in H.L. Thompson, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force*, Vol. II, *European Theatre, January 1943–May 1945* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1956), 402; retirement noted in *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 20 May 1958, 3178.

This understanding that the story of New Zealand's military aviation is something more than the story of the RNZAF is reflected in the current title, the Air Force Museum of New Zealand. Neither the current title nor mission statement specifically reference the RNZAF, with the mission being: 'To preserve and present the history of New Zealand military aviation for commemoration, inspiration, learning and enjoyment.'⁵ Nevertheless, the RNZAF remains central to the story that is told at the museum, and it remains the museum's primary stakeholder, as clarified within the current goals:

- To preserve and present the history of New Zealand military aviation
- To educate the public about the history of New Zealand military aviation
- To be an enduring tribute to the vision, determination and generosity of Sir Henry Wigram, the founding father of military aviation in New Zealand
- To contribute to the training of serving Royal New Zealand Air Force personnel in the history and traditions of the Service, in the evolution of military aviation technology and in the development of air power
- To be the prime repository of information about the Royal New Zealand Air Force's history
- To be a memorial for New Zealand's airmen and airwomen
- To generate sufficient revenue to provide for the operating costs of the Museum that are the Trust Board's responsibility, and for the further development of the Museum.⁶

As one of New Zealand's three Service museums, the AFMNZ is in a peculiar situation: it exists *because* of the RNZAF and in large measure it tells the story of that Service, yet it is not part of the Service, not named after the Service, and is now remote from any operational air force base (the Wigram base having closed in 1995). Nevertheless, the link is sustained, with the RNZAF delivering material support, donating retired aircraft and equipment, and contributes staff members and a proportion of the museum's funding. In accordance with the Charities Act 2005, the AFMNZ is governed by a Board of Trustees on which the RNZAF, as principal stakeholder,

⁵ Air Force Museum of New Zealand (AFMNZ), *Annual Report 2016* (Christchurch: AFMNZ, 2016), 2. This is the most recent annual report publicly available.

⁶ Ibid.

is represented. This ensures that the Service continues to contribute to the museum's strategic direction and to some degree its oversight. The AFMNZ's website explains the governance structure and the nature and extent of the linkage:

The Museum is part funded by the RNZAF and part by a charitable trust. The Museum Trust Board, chaired by Air Vice-Marshal Peter Adamson (retired), has governance responsibility for the Museum. The Board decides policy, sets budgets and makes commercial decisions regarding the public aspects of the Museum, while the RNZAF funds facilities management and infrastructure and utilities costs.

The Trust Board employs the Business Development Officer and Marketing and Social Media Coordinator, retail and events staff and individuals within other teams employed for special fixed term projects. The remainder of the staff employed at the Museum [including the Director] work for the RNZAF, either in uniform or as civilians.⁷

There is in addition an intangible benefit derived from this enduring relationship, as there is for the New Zealand Army and the Royal New Zealand Navy in relation to *their* museums. The New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) Annual Report of 2022 explains that the Service museums are public-facing institutions that contribute to reach programmes: 'NZDF supports the community by promoting national identity, improving civil-military relations, publicising the work of the armed forces, maximising recruitment, and safeguarding New Zealand's military history, heritage and culture, most visibly through its three Service museums.'⁸

Museums, like every other institution, possess a history that will have bearing on their contemporary services. Museums collect, record, safeguard and interpret tangible and intangible heritage, but what tends to be unclear to the museum visitor is the extent to which the museum's own history influences their experience, whether the visitor experience be physical (within the building and grounds) or virtual (online). Past decisions and processes influence the museum in different ways, including that personalities, policies and events contributed to shaping the institution's culture and the nature and scope of its collection, while decision-making around

⁷ Air Force Museum of New Zealand, 'About our Museum', <https://airforcemuseum.co.nz/about-our-museum/>

⁸ New Zealand Defence Force, *Annual Report 2022* (Wellington: NZDF, 2022), 40.

building design influences how visitors are channelled through exhibitions.⁹ Past collecting policies influence exhibition design in that they determine what objects may be available to be displayed or to what extent alternative forms of representation may be required when artefacts desired by curators are not available from within the collection or by means of loans.¹⁰ Museum professionals appreciate that the institutional history and past decisions ‘always have a range of both intended and unintended consequences associated with them’, but still, in most cases, the museum’s history is ‘by no means clear’.¹¹

Understanding a museum’s history is important because knowledge of the institution’s past can shed light on contemporary and emerging challenges faced by the institution, board of governors, staff, and volunteers. Study of a museum’s origins and development can ‘illuminate the coordinates within which questions of museum policies and politics have been, and continue to be, posed.’¹² In essence, the formative years ‘provide a series of markers’ to internal and external influences, including the social, economic, and political contexts and the relationships that have played a role in shaping the museum’s vision and development.¹³ For Catherine M. Lewis, interpreting collections with reference to the museum’s past can be ‘a form of power’ because the knowledge derived can be used to advantage by those responsible for governance and curatorship when facing up to the new and emerging challenges.¹⁴

There are multiple and different ways in which a museum’s history can be explored and the intended and unintended consequences of its development explained. Arguably, the two primary approaches are narrative history or thematic history. The former will construct essentially a story of development and change seeking to identify and embed key issues and trends that will become discernible by studying the museum over a passage of time; the latter will, at the outset, identify key themes (for example, governance, management, collections policy, and finances) and deliver a case study based around those themes, essentially a series of sub-histories. The choice for this

⁹ Suzanne MacLeod, *Museum Architecture: A New Biography* (London: Routledge, 2013), 5.

¹⁰ Clive Gray, *The Changing Museum: A history of New Walk Museum* (London: Routledge, 2022), 37-38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹² Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 5.

¹³ Gray, *The Changing Museum*, 13.

¹⁴ Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the transformation of an American museum* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 9.

research report is narrative history. In part, this is because the author is a historian with a preference for narrative historical studies, but more importantly this approach offers certain advantages when studying an institution with a history that is not well-recorded. A narrative history can track developments in a sequence, with the ability to embed thematic issues within the broader narrative. The historian does not attempt to deliver every possible fact in the timeline that is revealed by the sources but will seek to identify and shed light on key identified issues, trends, and developments. As Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton explain, ‘Rather than simply chronicle past events in a linear fashion, historical narratives attempt to explain the past, and this involves making interpretive and narrative decisions.’¹⁵

Aviation and air force museums are comparatively new in the cultural landscape. The world’s oldest aviation museum, France’s *Musée de l’air* (Museum of the Air), celebrated its centenary in 2019, having been established a year after the First World War; the proclaimed oldest air force museum, the National Museum of the United States Air Force (NMUSAF), celebrated its centenary in 2023 having traced its origins to another museum established by a predecessor, the United States Army Air Corps (USAAC), in 1923, three decades before the present museum opened its doors. Most such museums are considerably newer. In 1997, *Museum International* declared that air and space museums had ‘come of age’, at which time Michael A. Fopp, the then director of the RAF Museum at Hendon, London, observed that a good many aviation-focused museums opened between the 1960s and 1980s. He remarked: ‘There is, to my knowledge, no country untouched by aviation and few that do not have an aviation collection of some kind.’¹⁶

Despite their prevalence, the literature on aviation and air force museums is sparse. Studies tend to point to a desire to positively promote technology as the primary driver for the development of aviation museums, although this perspective may be skewed by the dominance of literature on the United States’ National Air and Space Museum (NASM) in Washington, DC, which is the world’s most visited aviation museum. Michael McMahan wrote in a 1981 review of the NASM that: ‘On the surface, the museum celebrates the romance of aviation, but in the exhibition of the artifacts of air and space technology there is a fundamental message which proclaims the fact

¹⁵ Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2020), 84.

¹⁶ Michael A. Fopp, ‘Air and space museums come of age’, *Museum International*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1997), 6.

and the value of technology progress—of the unmixed blessing of continued technical advance and, by implication, economic growth.’¹⁷ This aligns with the original political purpose of the museum when it was established in 1946, which was to promote national aviation achievement and national air-related technological progress, with some reference to achievements and developments elsewhere in the world.¹⁸

Complicating the discussion around air force museums is that they are not simply or exclusively aviation museums. They are, first and foremost, military or service museums, telling the story of an armed service that specifically generates air power. Because air forces utilise aircraft, their museums tend to also be viewed as aviation museums. Worldwide, at least thirty-eight countries have air force museums, at least twenty incorporate air force history into national military and war museums, and at least twenty-eight incorporate air force history into national aviation or air and space museums; a small number have both an air force museum and a notable air force-related collection within one of the other museums.¹⁹ Their origins and paths of development are surprisingly little understood, other than the general assumption that they were established with the objective of preserving historic military aircraft and, in the process, telling the story of an air force. In one of the few published scholarly studies of the origins of an air force museum, Peter Elliott notes that Britain’s RAF Museum, the development of which started in the 1960s, was intended to be a collection of aircraft, but that from the outset the museum also collected other objects relating to the RAF’s history. The museum’s primary attraction was always going to be its aircraft, but in recent decades, faced with declining numbers of veterans and aircraft enthusiasts, the RAF Museum has broadened its appeal by becoming more of a social history museum. Elliott explains: ‘The aircraft are still a major attraction, but the men and women without whom they could not fly and fight are much more visible.’²⁰

¹⁷ Michael McMahon, ‘The Romance of Technological Progress: A critical review of the National Air and Space Museum’, *Technology and Culture*, vol. 22, no. 2 (April 1981), 281-282.

¹⁸ Dominick A. Pisano, ‘The Long Road to a New Museum’, in Michael J. Neufeld and Alex M. Spencer, *Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum: An autobiography* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2010), 188.

¹⁹ There is no definitive listing, but the numbers were identified using web-based information on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_aviation_museums and Aviation Museums of the World <https://www.aviationmuseum.eu/>.

²⁰ Peter Elliott, “‘Flight without feathers is not easy’: John Tanner and the development of the Royal Air Force Museum”, in Kate Hill (ed.), *Museums, Modernity and Conflict: Museums and Collections in and of War since the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2020), 206-207.

This research report seeks to contribute to the understanding of air force museums by examining the origins and early development of the Air Force Museum of New Zealand. Its focus is the period leading up to the museum's official opening on 1 April 1987. The AFMNZ explains that its development 'took some years to gather momentum' but that the objective of opening a museum in time for the RNZAF's fiftieth anniversary was achieved.²¹ The museum has been the subject of two previous scholarly reports. In 1996, Theresese Angelo, a librarian at the museum who was destined to become its Director, while completing Massey University's then Diploma of Museum Studies, produced *From Historical Centre to Air Force World: An investigation into the establishment and four phases of the Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum 1975-1996*, which is an informative although (historically-speaking) cursory assessment of the museum's development up to that point.²² In 2007, Andrew Cardow and Alistair Emerson, of Massey's Department of Management and International Business, produced a working paper, *Tourist Attraction? Or Reverence—The Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum: A case study of the tensions between intent and presentation*, drawing attention to the tensions generated by the desire to attract visitors while telling a story the visitor is comfortable with.²³

While Angelo's research report touches on the history of the institution, it does not delve into the strategic decision-making and curatorial challenges and decisions that were made in the period of development and that may continue to influence the institution to this day. The Air Force Museum has never been concerned solely with aircraft collecting, but nevertheless aircraft form a significant component of the museum collection and visitor experience. With a particular focus particularly on the aircraft of the museum, this research report seeks answer the question: What was the vision behind the Air Force Museum and how was momentum achieved?

²¹ RNZAF Museum Trust Board, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand: Our Story* (Wellington: Defence Communications Group, 2009), 11.

²² Thérèse Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World: An investigation into the establishment and four phases of the Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum 1975-1996* (Palmerston North: Massey University, Diploma in Museum Studies research report, 1996).

²³ Andrew Cardow and Alistair Emerson, *Tourist Attraction? Or Reverence—The Royal New Zealand Air Force Museum: A case study of the tensions between intent and presentation* (Palmerston North: Massey University, Department of Management and International Business Research Working Paper 2007, no.2, 2007).

Chapter 1

Failing to Get Off the Ground: Thwarted Attempts to Establish an Air Force Museum, 1940–1975

This chapter examines failed attempts to establish a RNZAF Museum in the first four decades of the RNZAF's existence. From the earliest years of the Air Force's existence, discussions pointed to the possibility of a historical collection being established. The first important step occurred in the mid-1960s when a short-lived museum steering committee laid the foundations for Air Force heritage policy which then paved the way for preserving a selection of historic aircraft and equipment. Indeed, some objects in the current AFMNZ collection and other collections were saved even before there was a RNZAF Museum because of the heritage policy formulated in this period. The missed opportunities of this period are essential to understanding the foundation and early development of the AFMNZ, as they help to explain collection management decision-making that then occurred after the museum's establishment.

The story of military aviation in New Zealand stretches back to before the First World War. New Zealand's first military aircraft was a Bleriot XI-2 monoplane presented to New Zealand by the Imperial Air Fleet Committee, a group of British businessmen who were intent on promoting aviation across the British Empire. 'Brittania' was delivered in late 1913, assembled, and flown on demonstration flights in the first half of 1914. The New Zealand Military Forces (NZMF) recognised that aircraft would have a role in military operations but refrained from procuring more aircraft having surmised that militaries were still experimenting with the costly machines. After the outbreak of war, the Government took the opportunity to offer the Bleriot to Britain's War Office and arranged for its return to Britain.²⁴

While New Zealand opted not to form an air service of its own, between 1914 and 1918, more than 800 New Zealanders served in the British Army's Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Naval Air Service, and (from 1 April 1918, when these two merged) the RAF; others served in the

²⁴ Adam Claasen, *Fearless: The extraordinary untold story of New Zealand's Great War airmen* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2017), 42-59.

Australian Flying Corps or, towards the end of the war, the Women's RAF. Approximately one-third of those men who qualified as pilots commenced flying training at one of two commercial flying schools opened in New Zealand during the war, the New Zealand Flying School at Waitemata Harbour, Auckland, and the Canterbury Aviation Company at Sockburn, outside Christchurch. At least seventy-nine lost their lives from accidents, illnesses, or aerial combat.²⁵

After the war, Britain organised an 'Imperial Gift' of war surplus aircraft for Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and British India. The intention was to establish air forces in each corner of the British Empire. New Zealand received thirty-four aircraft, allowing the NZMF in 1923 to establish the New Zealand Permanent Air Force (NZPAF), which was a small army branch responsible for air force-related administration, and the New Zealand Air Force (NZAF), a territorial unit that comprised reservist pilots, observers, and ground crews. The NZAF contained veterans of the recent war while being also open to new recruits. Henry Wigram, the Christchurch businessman and politician who set up the Canterbury Aviation Company during the war, donated his airfield and facilities at Sockburn to the Government for use by the new air force; the airfield was duly renamed in his honour.



'Imperial gift' aircraft lined up outside Wigram's original two hangars, originally erected by Canterbury Aviation Company during 1917 at what was then Sockburn. (Source: 1988-242, AFMNZ)

From bases at Wigram and later Hobsonville (Auckland), as well as from civil airfields, the NZAF patrolled harbours and coastal shipping lanes. However, while aviation generated strong public interest, the embryonic air force could offer few opportunities to men interested in flying—and of course none for women. A trickle and later a steady stream of young men left for

²⁵ Ibid., 420.

Britain with the intention of joining the RAF. By September 1939, more than 550 New Zealanders were in the RAF.²⁶ New Zealand's air force finally came out from under the cloth of the army on 1 April 1937, when the RNZAF was established as an independent air force. The date was chosen for the symbolism it afforded of the RNZAF having the same birthday as the RAF. The 750-strong RNZAF entered the war in September 1939 ill-equipped, with ageing aircraft utilised mostly for maritime patrols and training. At the height of the Second World War, the RNZAF's strength exceeded 40,000 men and women, as the air force contributed to the training of airmen for the imperial war effort, the defence of New Zealand, the air wars in both Europe and the South Pacific. Subsequently, during the Cold War, a much-reduced RNZAF contributed to national and regional defence, including deployments to Japan, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. By the 1980s, the RNZAF was contributing to national and regional security with air strike, transport, and maritime surveillance capabilities, however a drastic reduction in the RNZAF's footprint and capabilities occurred in the 1990s and 2000s, with closures of several of the country's bases and depots, and disbandment of the fighter-equipped Air Combat Force. By the early 2000s, the RNZAF had approximately 2500 personnel and was operating barely fifty aircraft.

The earliest attempt to collect aircraft and aviation-related relics for exhibition in New Zealand happened late in the First World War, as part of planning for a National War Museum. In October 1918, Brigadier-General George Richardson, General Officer-in-Charge Administration, New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF), wrote to Britain's Air Ministry requesting aircraft for exhibition purposes. Aircraft had already been set aside for the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and for Australian and Canadian museums. Conceding that 'we are at a disadvantage concerning aerial trophies having no air force of our own', Richardson explained that New Zealand had nevertheless supplied airmen to the war effort, and that 'a worthy collection of Allied and enemy relics and exhibits which would represent the Air force in our Museum' would no doubt be 'of great interest both to members of the NZEF who are personally acquainted with the work of the Air Force and to the people at Home'.²⁷ The Air Ministry allotted several German aircraft as 'war

²⁶ H.L. Thompson, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945, New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force*, vol. I (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1953), 19.

²⁷ Richardson to the Secretary, Air Ministry, 31 October 1918, ACID ZWR 7/20, R2448312, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), Wellington.

trophies', but in March 1920 New Zealand's Government decided these would not be shipped to New Zealand, deeming freight costs to be prohibitive.²⁸ In any event, the National War Museum never eventuated.

It does not appear that thought was given to a historical collection when the RNZAF was formed in 1937. This is hardly surprising, given that military museums were rare at that time.²⁹ Aviation museums were then rarer still. A handful of countries exhibited aircraft in military museums, such as Belgium's *Musée royal de l'Armée et d'Histoire militaire* (Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History), while military aircraft were included in France's *Musée de l'air* (Air Museum) opened in 1919 and Germany's *Deutsche Luftfahrtsammlung* (German Aircraft Collection) opened in 1936 (the latter largely destroyed by Allied bombing in the Second World War). In addition, some national museums, including the Science Museum in London and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, collected some representative pioneering aircraft.³⁰ The only known air force museum was a technical museum at Dayton, Ohio, established by the USAAC in 1923 and exhibiting some First World War and early post-war aircraft.³¹

Given the lack of air force museums in this period, it was somewhat surprising, and no doubt unexpected, when in March 1940 the RNZAF's second Chief of Air Staff (CAS), Group Captain Hugh Saunders, circulated a memorandum to station commanders suggesting there was a plan for a RNZAF Museum. Saunders was a RAF officer who had spent time at Britain's Air Ministry, where there had been intermittent discussions around the possibility of a RAF Museum.³² Perhaps these discussions inspired him to contemplate a RNZAF Museum. Unfortunately, although Saunders instructed base commanders to preserve historical materials and relics, he offered no guidance as to what should be collected nor how objects were to be stored. The instruction was in effect ignored, other than by the setting up of a small armaments

²⁸ Aaron Fox, *Silent Sentinels: The war trophies of the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force in war and peace* (Dunedin: University of Otago, BA Honours dissertation, 1987), 48-49.

²⁹ Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, 'Toward a history of military museums', in Robert Douglas Smith (ed.), *ICOMAM 50: Papers on Arms and Military History 1957-2007* (Leeds: Basiliscoe Press, 2007), 34-35.

³⁰ Colin Divall and Andrew Scott, *Making Histories in Transport Museums* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2001), 27.

³¹ Peter Grier, 'Big Plans for the Air Force Museum', *Air Force Magazine*, February 2012, 64.

³² Elliott, 'Flight without feathers is not easy', 195.

collection by the Equipment Branch at Wigram.³³ When the matter was reprised in 1947 by a staff officer at Air Force Headquarters (AFHQ) in Wellington, the new CAS, Air Vice-Marshal Arthur Neville, quashed the idea, stating: ‘I do not feel very enthusiastic about an RNZAF Museum.’³⁴



RNZAF aircraft no longer required following the war’s end, parked on the aircraft graveyard at Rukuhia, where the majority would be scrapped, circa 1946. (DWAsst14, AFMNZ)

Military and aviation museums started to become more common after the Second World War. In the United States, the Smithsonian Institution established the National Air Museum in 1946. General H.H. ‘Hap’ Arnold, commander of the United States Army Air Forces, threw his weight behind the new museum, gifting a collection of American and enemy aircraft that he had

³³ Group Captain Hugh Saunders, CAS, RNZAF, memorandum to station commanders, ‘Preservation of historical material’, 20 March 1940, photocopy held by AFMNZ, original source unknown; cited in Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World*, 14 (without file reference).

³⁴ ‘RNZAF Museum Policy’, 18 March 1947, photocopy held by AFMNZ, original source unknown; cited in Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World*, 14 (without file reference).

assembled.³⁵ When the United States Air Force (USAF) was formed in 1947, the small collection established by the USAAC in 1923 was found to have been dispersed, and in most cases lost, as the hangars had been taken over for the war effort; after picking up the pieces, a new museum was opened in 1955.³⁶ In the Asia-Pacific region, the Royal Thai Air Force established a museum in 1952, compiling a collection of aircraft and equipment that dated back to the start of Thai military aviation in 1913–14.³⁷ The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) College had meanwhile begun collecting artefacts after the college's formation in 1947, with a view to utilising these to aid officer cadets' education. These formed the basis of a modest museum that opened in a hut on the Point Cook base in Victoria in 1952, before gradually expanding to several adjacent huts, and finally opening to the public as the RAAF Museum in 1971, on the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the RAAF, by which time the collection included several historic aircraft.³⁸

A further development in the 1960s that appears to have had influence within the RNZAF was a plan announced for a RAF Museum in London. Senior officers had long advocated for a RAF museum, but economic constraints and the exigencies of war had thwarted their ambitions. During the Second World War, the Air Ministry's Air Historical Branch collected a small number of representative RAF and enemy aircraft and artefacts, allocating some to the IWM and Science Museum, and distributing others as 'gate guardians' outside base entrances or as exhibits inside ad hoc and publicly inaccessible base museums. Each year, an assortment of aircraft would be dismantled and transported to London for open-air exhibition during annual Battle of Britain displays. In the 1950s, the Air Ministry toyed with the idea of a museum that would be open to RAF personnel and Air Ministry officials, but in 1962, a new Historical Advisory Committee proposed a public museum. Its reasoning was that a public museum could serve to nurture a RAF ethos by providing personnel with a sense of the Service's history and that as a tourist attraction it could inculcate in the public an appreciation of the RAF's history and its contribution to national security.³⁹ Announcing the project in the House of Commons in 1964, the Parliamentary

³⁵ Martin Harwit, *An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of Enola Gay* (New York: Copernicus, 1996), 14.

³⁶ Grier, 'Big Plans for the Air Force Museum', 64.

³⁷ Chollada Poenateetai, *Royal Thai Air Force Museum* (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University, Masters dissertation, 1987), 1.

³⁸ Steve Campbell-Wright, *An Interesting Point: A History of Military Aviation at Point Cook 1914-2014* (Canberra: Air Power Development Centre, 2014), 162, 183.

³⁹ Elliott, 'Flight without feathers is not easy', 194-199.

Under-Secretary of State for Air, The Honorable Julian Risdale, explained that the RAF Museum would not merely collect aircraft, but all manner of materials relating to the RAF, because: ‘For some years the Air Council has been concerned about the fact that, apart from aircraft, there has been little systematic effort to preserve historic material relating to the Royal Air Force. Moreover, in the absence of such an effort, valuable historic relics of all kinds were being lost.’⁴⁰

The idea of a RNZAF Museum was raised again around 1954—not long after the first iteration of the RAAF Museum—to no avail.⁴¹ In the mid-1960s, the idea was brewing again, and it is likely that the news of a RAF Museum inspired members of the RNZAF. In November 1964, Flight Lieutenant D.G. MacNab, a recruitment officer, wrote to the Director of Manning offering ‘the germ of an idea’. MacNab was a junior officer in a comparatively routine role, but he was a colourful character and creative. He had served in the NZEF during the Second World War and was twice decorated for operations behind enemy lines. After resuming his career as a commercial artist, he wearied of ‘civvy street’ and joined the RNZAF in 1957, employing his talents at AFHQ in the production of recruiting materials; he also continued to exhibit artworks and retained membership of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. Having explored galleries and museums, MacNab no doubt appreciated the importance of conserving and exhibiting cultural objects. Further, from a comparatively young age, he showed interest in recording history; as an eighteen-year-old art student in 1931, he had worked furiously to produce a series of paintings of earthquake-stricken Napier to form a visual record of the natural disaster.⁴² MacNab expressed surprise that the RNZAF showed little interest in its own history, so that ‘after half a century of aviation history we still lack a visual focal point in the form of a collection of aviation relics tracing the pioneer developments and proud history of the Service.’⁴³ He pointed out that a key objective in the RNZAF’s 1964 Policy Statement was ‘to encourage

⁴⁰ The Hon. Peter Risdale, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Air, House of Commons, 9 March 1964, House of Commons Hansard, UK Parliament, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1964-03-09/debates/970731ff-414c-428e-a041-5fccb672694c/Vote9MiscellaneousEffectiveServices?highlight=museum#contribution-57c63304-488c-448b-b18c-6fe3a610b541>

⁴¹ Angelo, From Historical Centre to Air Force World, 15.

⁴² ‘His was a James Bond sort of war’, *Daily Telegraph* (Napier), 23 April 1991, transcript at <http://forum.commandoveterans.org/cdoForum/posts/list/329.page>

⁴³ Flight Lieutenant D.G. McNab, Recruiting Officer, to Director of Manning (thru the Directorate of Recruiting), ‘Establishment of a Central RNZAF Aviation Museum’, 23 November 1964, ABFK, W4766, 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

public confidence in and understanding of the RNZAF as an important and effective instrument of national security’, and reasoned that a museum could help achieve this by educating personnel on their Service’s history and traditions while at the same time a museum could ‘do much’ to stimulate public interest in the RNZAF.⁴⁴ In an accompanying discussion paper, MacNab noted that a museum could become a concentration point for portraits of notable officers and airmen and of relics held by bases and units, as well as becoming a repository for relics and souvenirs then in the possession of former members.⁴⁵

MacNab’s paper received a positive reception from a group of like-minded officers. It seems they had already discussed the idea. Squadron Leader R.A. McDonald, Deputy Director Staff Duties, noted that he too had proposed to ‘correct the position’ regarding the RNZAF’s lack of interest in its own history. He perceived a diminishing window of opportunity for a museum because the last officers and airmen with pre-war and early wartime service were retiring, suggesting it would make sense to ‘preserve the history and traditions of the RNZAF ... while we can profit from the knowledge and experience of those who have made this history and originated the traditions.’⁴⁶ Squadron Leader Geoffrey Bentley, Director of Public Relations, and a budding historian, remarked that he had ‘long felt that such a scheme was necessary and in the best interests of the Service’, and that he had tried to have one or two historic aircraft set aside for display, without success.⁴⁷ With in-principle approval of the CAS and Air Board, McDonald, Bentley and MacNab formed a museum steering committee, roping in another public relations officer, a works (buildings and maintenance) officer, and an accountant. At their first meeting in August 1965, they agreed that Wigram would be the logical choice of location for a museum, given it was ‘the cradle of the RNZAF and the base from which most serving personnel received their initial introduction to service life’.⁴⁸ They envisaged a modest collection comprising small objects, such as photographs, armaments and ‘not unduly large’ equipment, and scale models that

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Flight Lieutenant D.G. McNab, discussion paper, ‘RNZAF Aviation Museum’, attached to memorandum of 23 November 1964, ABFK, W4766, 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

⁴⁶ Squadron Leader R.A. McDonald, DDSD, to DOSD, ‘Minute No. 243/1965: RNZAF Museum Wigram’, AFHQ, 3 March 1965, ABFK, W4766, 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

⁴⁷ Squadron Leader G. Bentley, Director of Public Relations, to Air Member for Personnel, Minute 84/1965, ‘RNZAF Museum’, 3 March 1965, ABFK W4766 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington. Bentley later published *RNZAF: A Short History* (Auckland: AH & AW Reed, 1969).

⁴⁸ ‘Minutes of a meeting of the ad hoc committee appointed to consider the establishment of an RNZAF Museum’, 18 August 1965, ABFK W4766 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

‘could be a most useful and instructive recreational activity of the cadets attending the Airmen Cadet School’.⁴⁹ The concept seems to have been akin to that of the embryonic RAAF Museum, which at the time was confined to objects suitable for display in huts.

The mid-1960s was economically challenging for New Zealand, with a weakening economy and a precarious balance of payments situation. At the same time, the armed services were facing block obsolescence of long-retained Second World War and early Cold War equipment. The defence budget was strained by the procurement of four naval frigates from Britain, an army modernisation programme, and the need to replace ageing bomber, fighter, transport and maritime patrol aircraft. In 1963–65, American manufacturers extended credit to the RNZAF to order new transport (Lockheed C-130 Hercules), maritime surveillance (Lockheed P-3 Orion) and rotary wing (Bell UH-1 Iroquois and Bell 47 Sioux) aircraft.⁵⁰ In this situation of financial strain and imposed austerity, there could be no high-level support for a museum. Lacking a champion, the museum steering committee’s members rapidly lost heart. In April 1966, McDonald signalled his intention to step down because of workload, conceding there was a risk the project could ‘fall flat’. Just how fast the committee fragmented is shown by the fact MacNab, when asked to be committee secretary, responded that he too was too busy and yet he remained devoted to the Combined Services Advertising Committee and the RNZAF Officers Ball Committee. MacNab saw ‘no alternative other than shelving the whole scheme—or finding a new committee member who has the time to devote to secretarial duties.’⁵¹ The committee folded soon afterwards, but had managed to convince the Air Board that while an RNZAF Museum was ‘unlikely to eventuate for some years due to lack of finance the RNZAF should seek to preserve items of historical interest by making maximum use of [external] museums’, namely the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) at Auckland and a mooted Museum of Science and Industry at Christchurch.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.; ‘Minutes of a meeting of the ad hoc committee’, 26 October 1965’, ABFK W4766 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

⁵⁰ John Singleton, ‘Vampires to Skyhawks: Military aircraft and frigate purchases by New Zealand, 1950–70’, *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 42, no. 2 (July 2002), 183-203.

⁵¹ MacDonald to MacNab, ‘RNZAF Aviation Museum’, 4 April 1966; MacNab to MacDonald, 13 April 1966, ABFK, W4766, 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

⁵² Air Commodore A.P. Gainsford, Air Member for Personnel, to RNZAF Operations Group, RNZAF Base Auckland, ‘Museum of Transport and Technology Auckland’, 10 October 1966, ABFK, W4766, 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

Within months of the steering committee's dissolution, the Air Board adopted a policy of extending support to MOTAT and potentially the Christchurch museum, at least until such time as a RNZAF museum could be established. MOTAT had been established in 1960 when the Old-Time Transport Preservation League of Matakoho, the Royal Aeronautical Society, and the Historic Auckland Society agreed to work together to establish a museum.⁵³ Volunteers interested in aviation set about assembling a collection of aircraft by rescuing derelict airframes and components from airfields, farms, and scrapyards. MOTAT also had notable successes acquiring large and intact aircraft, including an Avro Lancaster bomber gifted by France in 1964, a Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) Short Solent flying boat donated by the rebranded Air New Zealand in 1966, and a Short Sunderland flying boat donated by the RNZAF in 1967. By 1976, MOTAT could boast of a collection of twenty-seven aircraft and one hot-air balloon, along with engines, components, models, and a library and archive. From the outset, it collected civilian and military aircraft, declaring an ambitious aim to 'build up a complete collection of every type of aircraft used by the Royal New Zealand Air Force in a little over half a century of operations'.⁵⁴ In essence, MOTAT appeared to aspire to be a quasi-air force museum, which the Air Board's donations and loans policy could potentially facilitate. However, the policy would also attract scrutiny, as Ministry of Defence officials became worried that MOTAT appeared to be 'specially favoured' as the 'prime depository of material of historical importance to the RNZAF pending the possible establishment of an RNZAF Museum.'⁵⁵

Christchurch's science and industry museum meanwhile failed to get off the ground, although several voluntary groups established collections on the intended site at Ferrymead. The Ferrymead Aeronautical Society (FAS) was formed in 1970–71 after the United States Government donated a USAF Douglas LC-47H, a transport aircraft that supported scientific missions in Antarctica, to the City of Christchurch. With small membership and limited funds the FAS could not respond favourably to RNZAF offers of a Sunderland and a Handley Page

⁵³ John Cresswell, *MOTAT: Museum of Transport and Technology of New Zealand (Inc.)* (Auckland: Paul Hamlyn, 1976), 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 66–79.

⁵⁵ 'Brief for the Minister for Defence: RNZAF support of museums', undated, ABFK W4766 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

Hastings transport aircraft. MOTAT was not in a position to accept a Hastings either, resulting in the RNZAF scrapping its last example in 1971—MOTAT volunteers managing to save only the cockpit and nose, and some components, including landing gear.



MOTAT volunteers preparing to sever the forward fuselage and nose section of NZ5801 from the rest of the airframe at Ohakea in 1971. (Source: OhG5271-70, AFMNZ)

The Air Board's museums policy was an expedient that offered the promise that some RNZAF historic aircraft and equipment could be preserved, albeit by compelling manpower-stretched and cash-strapped museums to take on the responsibility and costs associated with large object conservation and exhibition. The different outcomes in relation to the two large aircraft offered to museums in this period, the Sunderland and Hastings, illustrates that while donations and loans to external museums appeared practical from an Air Force perspective, it was not necessarily feasible from a volunteer-run museum perspective. The policy ensured that some aircraft could be preserved, but it ran the risk that other types could not be saved if the museums were not able or willing to accept what was offered. The risk was greatest in the case of large aircraft like the Hastings that were challenging and costly to dismantle, transport, reassemble, display, and conserve. Moreover, any aircraft that had residual commercial value at the end of their service

lives was not likely to be offered, as evidenced by the sales of all eleven English Electric Canberra bombers in 1970, with one going to Britain and ten to India.⁵⁶

The idea of a RNZAF Museum continued to be discussed across the Service, although there was still little appetite for it within the upper echelons. There was an assumption that a museum would in time be established, but unfortunately the Air Board did not have the foresight to authorise the retention of aircraft and other large relics specifically for the future museum—other than some engines and equipment loaned (rather than gifted) to MOTAT. High-level disinterest is illustrated by the fate of the last Sunderland remaining on a RNZAF base. Sunderland NZ4112 was sold to an aircraft trader in 1966, stripped of useful components, and gifted to the Yacht Club at RNZAF Station Hobsonville as a memorial to the RNZAF's flying boat era. By the early 1970s, after several years parked outside the clubhouse, in a salt-air environment, NZ4112 was an eyesore. The yacht club was unable to fund its refurbishment and the base commander was unwilling to chip in public funding or manpower. Part of his reasoning was that there was a Sunderland at MOTAT.⁵⁷ NZ4112's fate was settled in May 1973 when the CAS, Air Vice-Marshal D.F. St George, placing practicality ahead of sentimentality, determined that: 'There is no justification for the retention of this airframe as a sentimental reminder of the past and there is certainly no case to warrant the expenditure of financial or manpower resources to bring it up to a display standard or to maintain it in a satisfactory condition thereafter.' He saw no point offering NZ4112 to MOTAT or the FAS as this would have imposed a delay, declaring instead that 'we should get rid of a derelict and dilapidated piece of junk as rapidly as possible.' St George issued an instruction that NZ4112 be offered for disposal and that if there were no takers 'then we should initiate the action to break it up and convey it to the rubbish tip with all possible speed.'⁵⁸ NZ4112 was scrapped, although a section of the forward fuselage comprising the cockpit and nose turret were saved, as the FAS was able to accept these components.

⁵⁶ NZDF-Serials, RNZAF English Electric Canberra, <http://www.adf-serials.com.au/nz-serials/nzcanberra.htm> (accessed 7 October 2023).

⁵⁷ Wing Commander J.D. Waugh, for Air Officer Commanding, RNZAF Operations Group, RNZAF Base Auckland, to Chief of Air Staff, 'Sunderland NZ 4112', 18 April 1973, ABFK W4766 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.

⁵⁸ Air Vice-Marshal D.F. St George, Chief of Air Staff, Minute 98/1973, 'Sunderland NZ4112', 21 May 1973, ABFK W4766 12/15/22 Part 1, R364877, ANZ, Wellington.



Sunderland NZ4112 on outdoor exhibition at Hosbsonville in early 1972, only months before its scrapping. (Source: WhG1101-73, AFMNZ)

The failure to establish a museum in this period was regrettable but not surprising. Few air forces had museums, and those that did managed to save few genuinely historic aircraft. Even the world's oldest air force museum, the NMUSAF, procured mostly generic representative aircraft that it would then paint as more significant examples; as one former director is said to have quipped, 'We have a handful of historic aircraft in the collection but the rest are basically stage props.'⁵⁹ Establishing a RNZAF Museum would have been an uncommonly enlightened development for a conservative and not well-funded organisation. Regrettably, this also meant the RNZAF missed the opportunity to retain early Cold War-era aircraft retired in the 1960s and early 1970s, or to retrieve any of the few wartime aircraft sitting on farms or in scrapyards. Some of the latter were rescued by other museums and individuals, but most were scrapped. However, the short-lived museum steering committee of 1964–65 appears to have motivated senior officers to at least consider steps that could be taken to ensure that a selection of historic aircraft and equipment could be saved for posterity. The Air Board's donations and loans policy was responsible for the preservation of a Sunderland at MOTAT, for example, except the policy was not sufficiently flexible to ensure that other historically important aircraft and equipment could be preserved. The missed opportunities and the few successes showed that the RNZAF would

⁵⁹ Ric Gillespie, 'Historic aircraft and spacecraft: Enfants terribles', in Thomas F. King (ed.), *A Companion to Cultural Resource Management* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 266.

require a more enlightened appreciation of cultural heritage, a more favourable funding environment, and high-level advocacy for a RNZAF Museum to eventuate.

Chapter 2

The Fledgling: The RNZAF Historical Centre

In early 1975, Group Captain Ivor Mackay, base commander at Wigram, resolved to reinitiate the Air Force's conversation around the possibility of a museum. Although the steering committee formed in 1964 had been disbanded within a year, groups of officers and senior non-commissioned officers had continued agitating for a museum. Inaction had contributed to further losses of RNZAF heritage, however, and so Mackay, and presumably others, became convinced that the RNZAF required a museum. In March 1975, Mackay wrote to the new CAS, Air Vice-Marshal Richard Bolt, outlining the history of previous museum discussions and advocating for a museum to be established at Wigram.⁶⁰ This would prompt further discussions and finally a plan for a service museum. This chapter examines the steps made towards establishing the museum with the establishment of its first iteration, the RNZAF Historical Centre, in the late 1970s.

Like his predecessor, Bolt was a Second World War veteran, although he and St George had quite different wartime experiences. St George had been a fighter pilot in the Pacific and the post-war occupation of Japan, while Bolt had served in Europe with RAF Bomber Command. For some years after the war, there was tension between officers who had served in Europe and those who had served in the Pacific, but there is no evidence to suggest this had bearing on the matter of a museum. It is possible that Bolt simply had more interest in history, especially as his family was part of the fabric of New Zealand's aviation history. Bolt's father, George Bolt, was a respected pioneering aviator who worked as a mechanic for the New Zealand Flying School in the First World War, piloted the country's first air mail service in 1919, and was chief engineer of TEAL during 1944–60. George had maintained an interest in the country's aviation history until his death in 1963.⁶¹ It appears this interest was passed from father to son.

While there was still resistance to a museum in some quarters of AFHQ, Bolt was prepared to entertain the idea. He tasked MacKay with producing a proposal—and MacKay in turn tasked

⁶⁰ Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World*, 15.

⁶¹ R.L. Williams, 'Bolt, George Bruce', *New Zealand Dictionary of Biography*, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4b44/bolt-george-bruce>

Wigram's senior education officer, Squadron Leader G.R. Greenwood, with convening and chairing a working group. The group's report, 'The RNZAF Museum', dated 1 September 1975, noted there was 'a general agreement' within the RNZAF that a museum would be 'a worthwhile asset' and should be located at Wigram. The group suggested that the museum would likely be an in-service affair, opening on weekdays to service members and their dependants, and 'from time to time' to the general public, possibly one Sunday each month and special occasions such as RNZAF Day (1 April) or base open days. The working group proposed that the museum occupy an existing building at Wigram and be raised as a RNZAF unit, enabling it to be partially funded and staffed from the Defence Vote 'as for any established unit', with supplementary funding generated by government grants, donations, endowments, sponsorships, and membership fees from a proposed RNZAF Museum Society. A curator from the Canterbury Museum advised that the museum would require exhibition and storage space, with the working group warning: 'The task of preparing the Museum for its official opening should not be underestimated, as this is the most crucial time of all. What might be accurately described as a store full of bits and pieces, ranging from unique items to junk, has to be organized and transformed into eye-pleasing and informative exhibits.'⁶² To that end, the group emphasised that the museum 'must be staffed adequately', although understanding that financial constraints could limit staffing to a Director (envisaged as an officer or senior non-commissioned officer), a technical assistant, and an administrative assistant, supplemented by volunteers.⁶³

The working group warned that, as others had noted, time was of the essence. The ranks of the RNZAF's earliest veterans were 'growing very thin', and the lack of a museum had meant few leaders and other servicemen from this period had left recollections or records relating to their service. On the other hand, the working group may have suspected that there was material in individuals' or family hands, as members anticipated that once there was a firm policy on a museum and a public relations campaign, 'material will begin to flow into Wigram'. They anticipated a collection comprising of photographs, scale models, operational and administrative records, engines, equipment and tools, uniforms, and other memorabilia, such as aircraft logs,

⁶² 'The RNZAF Museum', 1 September 1975, 4, BCDW A1442 941/1/0 RG Part 1, R23492093, ANZ, Auckland.

⁶³ Ibid.

personal log books, diaries, souvenirs, and war trophies.⁶⁴ The main challenge, they suggested, would be collecting aircraft, as few early aircraft had been preserved, other than a few that had already ended up in museums or were with private collectors. The working group suggested there should be a policy of earmarking selected aircraft as they were being retired from service, and that private collectors might allow their aircraft to be displayed if they were offered hangarage at Wigram. The group concluded: ‘It is hard to visualize the collection in the foreseeable future being very large, but it is considered that interest will be sufficiently generated to ensure that enough exhibits will be forthcoming to make the project worthwhile.’⁶⁵



One of the oldest structures at Wigram was Building 132, photographed in 1983, one of the original Canterbury Aircraft Company hangars erected in 1917. It was structurally modified in 1940 to accommodate a gymnasium. (Source: WgG276-83, AFMNZ)

Critical to the proposal was the identification of a building at Wigram that could be suitable for museum use. One of Wigram’s original hangars, erected by the Canterbury Aviation Company in 1917, was still in use as a gymnasium (Building 132); the other original hangar had recently been

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2–4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.

dismantled and transported to Ferrymead for the FAS. By 1974, the gymnasium building was showing signs of structural stress, leading the Ministry of Works and Development to recommend that the gymnasium be relocated but that the original hangar be retained because of its status as one of Wigram's oldest and most historic structures.⁶⁶ The museum working group recommended that the museum occupy Building 132. A works inspection commissioned by Bolt found that the building was 'totally inadequate' for continued use as a gymnasium but potentially suitable 'for the purpose of housing the RNZAF museum collection'.⁶⁷

While Bolt was showing every indication that he would support a museum, progress was still painfully slow. In May 1976, Air Commodore M.F. McD. Palmer, commander of the Wigram-based RNZAF Support Group, wrote to Bolt that there was 'considerable goodwill and enthusiasm' for the museum in the Christchurch area, but that momentum could be lost. He requested a statement of Air Staff policy to the effect that the RNZAF would establish a museum.⁶⁸ Bolt's chief of staff, Group Captain Patrick Neville, wrote to Palmer that the museum 'has the full endorsement in principle' of the CAS, but that he needed to ascertain the suitability of Building 132 and ensure that the development would be consistent with Defence policy. He added that there was also some concern at AFHQ that the title 'RNZAF Museum' could make the project appear overly ambitious, with a suggestion that a title 'along the lines of an "historical centre" ... might more aptly describe what is realisable and not mislead or disappoint those who have expectations of creating an RNZAF Hendon or Wright-Patterson'.⁶⁹ Hendon was the location of the RAF Museum while Wright-Patterson was the location of the USAF Museum. Although AFHQ was not yet able to release an Air Force Order (AFO) to establish the museum, Neville advised that AFHQ did not want the matter to 'wither for want of application at this end' and so interim authority was granted to commence object acquisition and storage.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ P.F. Reynolds, District Commissioner of Works, 'RNZAF Base Wigram Base Gymnasium (Building No. 132): Structural Report', 11 December 1974, ABFK W4757 3/6/141 PART 1, R20383029, ANZ, Wellington.

⁶⁷ Lieutenant Colonel R. McL. Dickie, Director of Works, to Deputy CAS, 'Base Gymnasium: Wigram', 1 July 1976, ABFK W4757 3/6/141 PART 1, R20383029, ANZ, Wellington.

⁶⁸ Air Commodore M.F. McD. Palmer, AOC, RNZAF Support Group, to CAS, 23 April 1976, BCDW A1442 941/1/0 RG Part 1, R23492093, ANZ, Auckland.

⁶⁹ Group Captain Patrick Neville, for Chief of Air Staff, to AOC RNZAF Support Group, 'RNZAF Museum', 19 May 1976, BCDW A1442 941/1/0 RG Part 1, R23492093, ANZ, Auckland.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

AFHQ released AFO A56/1976, 'The Preservation of the History of the Royal New Zealand Air Force', in August 1976, announcing: 'It is the intention that the Royal New Zealand Air Force should preserve, maintain and display items and records which recognise its history and traditions in a centralised and coordinated manner.'⁷¹ Whether coincidentally or deliberately, this echoed the intent of the RAF Museum. However, the AFO purposely avoided use of the word 'museum', with AFHQ having settled on 'historical centre'. In the four-page AFO, the word 'museum' appeared three times but only in reference to small base museums that were permitted under the plan, 'for the purpose of displaying items relating to the history of their own base'. The AFO explained that the RNZAF Historical Centre would henceforth be 'the principal focal point for identifying and preserving the history of the RNZAF' and 'the pre-eminent repository within the Service'. The fact the Historical Centre would be able to occupy a repurposed historic building generated a sense that this development would be both appropriate and cost-effective. Moreover, the AFO intimated that the centre would remain a modest affair, with a statement that the collection would comprise 'such items as uniforms, personal relics, minor equipments, tools, important private papers of RNZAF personnel, photographs and authorised facsimile copies of public records'. The AFO explicitly stated that aircraft would not form part of the collection, although it was possible that, 'In the longer term the scope may be wider and even the preservation of aircraft and major equipments is not excluded'.⁷²

The AFO also outlined the objectives of the RNZAF Historical Centre, which were (presented here verbatim):

- a. To collect, preserve and exhibit articles and records relating to the history and traditions of the Royal New Zealand Air Force and its association with other air forces and to collect and publish related information;
- b. to encourage research into and foster the accumulation of knowledge and the wider dissemination of information relating to the history of the RNZAF;

⁷¹ Air Force Order A56/1976, 'The Preservation of the History of the Royal New Zealand Air Force', ABFK W4757 3/6/141 PART 1 R20383029, ANZ, Wellington.

⁷² Ibid.

- c. to act as the sole coordinating and recording centre for all RNZAF articles and documents of historical importance [elsewhere specifying that this did not include public records as defined in the Archives Act 1957 and requiring lodgement with the National Archives];
- d. to create public awareness of the RNZAF's contribution in war and peace to the national development;
- e. to mount exhibitions designed around a specific educational theme;
- f. to provide displays at other bases, at Defence Headquarters, or in collaboration with other historical institutions;
- g. to have an administrative capability to loan property on a long or short term basis to organisations concerned with the preservation of New Zealand military aviation history.⁷³

The AFO acknowledged that some objects would be found on bases but that most were likely to be in private hands. Procurement options included loans, donations or purchases, but there was no explanation as to how purchases could be funded nor how the running costs of the Historical Centre were to be met. The timeframe for assembling the collection was however reasonably generous, with approximately three years required to rehouse the gymnasium at Wigram before the Historical Centre could be physically established.⁷⁴

AFO A56/1976 also introduced a command structure that would influence its development and later that of the museum. The Historical Centre was to be integrated into RNZAF Base Wigram, but (contrary to the original proposal) it would not be formed as a unit of the RNZAF. Wigram's base commander was to have command responsibility for the museum, including that he would be responsible for the selection and appointment of an officer-in-charge, the development of a 'comprehensive set of rules', the formulation of a collection policy, and finally the creation of 'educationally orientated' displays that were to be available to air force personnel and the general public. The centre's officer-in-charge would report to the base commander, who in turn would follow the normal command line of reporting to the commander of RNZAF Support Group (who

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

was the senior RNZAF officer in the South Island) who in turn would report to AFHQ and the CAS. The use of these standard reporting lines would prevent the officer-in-charge from communicating directly with the CAS, unless invited to. Finally, the AFO signalled the establishment of a management committee that was to comprise representatives of the RNZAF and the two main ex-Air Force associations, the RNZAF Association and the New Zealand Federation of Brevet Clubs. Further, there was the possibility of a ‘Society of Friends’ being formed to ‘assist the Historical Centre in the acquisition of items and their recording; the mounting of exhibits; the preparation of histories and the raising of funds’.⁷⁵

The inaugural planning meeting for the Historical Centre was held on the evening of 20 May 1977 at the home of Wigram’s medical officer, Squadron Leader Tom Anderson. Despite the project having the backing of the CAS, volunteers were needed to get the Historical Centre off the ground. Reliance on volunteers was not uncommon—MOTAT and the FAS, for example, had been formed by volunteers—and it was necessary, despite the museum being concerned with the history of a public organisation. By authorising the project, AFHQ was giving the green light to a group of like-minded individuals to articulate their vision and take steps towards achieving it on behalf of the RNZAF. They were, in essence, the ‘collective enthusiasts’ that sociologist John Urry suggested play a key role in shaping how societies remember the past.⁷⁶ The establishment of the historical centre also occurred at a time when the democratisation of the museum was underway, resulting in increased community participation and engagement in the philosophies of collecting and exhibition.⁷⁷ Ten Wigram-based officers and senior non-commissioned officers, all of whom had an interest in the RNZAF history’s, attended the inaugural planning meeting for the Historical Centre. Several had actually been collecting relics around the base for some time, and in the absence of a museum they passed some of these on to the FAS at Ferrymead.⁷⁸ Evidently, Anderson had formulated the structure of the management committee, as the brief handwritten minutes note that he ‘opened proceedings & decided what form the committee should take’, although he was careful to emphasise that the structure needed to be approved by Wigram’s base

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ This point was made by Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World*, 17.

⁷⁷ David B. Allison, *Engaging Communities in Museums: Sharing vision, creation and development* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 11.

⁷⁸ Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World.*, 15.

commander, Group Captain G.C. Hubbard. Anderson was duly appointed committee chair, while other attendees formed the executive or headed up sub-committees tasked with overseeing fundraising and collecting heraldry, documents, photographs, and equipment.⁷⁹

Four days after the inaugural meeting, Group Captain Ian Gillard, commander of RNZAF Southern Group, informed the CAS that word was ‘getting around’ and that ‘valuable material is coming forward’, along with promises of more when the Historical Centre was up and running, ‘and this is the Canterbury area only’. On behalf of the new management committee, Gillard then broached the tricky matter of collecting aircraft. He disclosed that the Historical Centre already had three aircraft, these being an ‘immaculate’ North American Harvard trainer, a ‘reasonably sound’ De Havilland Vampire jet trainer, and an Avro Anson trainer of Second World War-vintage that required major restoration. He acknowledged that AFO A56/1976 appeared to rule out collecting aircraft, but he endorsed a determination made by the management committee to interpret the AFO in the broadest sense possible. Gillard explained to Bolt that while the AFO ‘nervously’ pointed to the possibility of collecting aircraft and major equipment at some point in the future, it did not explicitly rule out such acquisitions in the meantime. Gillard contended that when it came to assembling an aircraft collection, which would be important for an air force museum, time was of the essence, and that if the AFO was ‘inflexibly interpreted to mean “not for many years” then valuable opportunities to retain equipments and aircraft of great relevance to our history will be lost forever. It is strongly believed that lack of vision now should not prejudice the quality of the Historical Centre in the future.’⁸⁰

Gillard proceeded, presumably at the management committee’s behest, to stake a claim to one of the RNZAF’s recently retired Bristol Freighter transport aircraft. The RNZAF had operated Freighters since the early 1950s, using them extensively across New Zealand, the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia. The Freighter was ungainly-looking and distinctive with its capacious main cabin front-ended by a pair of large, clamshell doors that were set beneath the overhead cockpit. Gillard explained that the Freighter was ‘a type of aircraft which in only a few years will be of

⁷⁹ Minutes, RNZAF Historical Centre, inaugural meeting, 20 May 1977, RNZAF Historical Centre Minutes, AFMNZ Trust Board Records, AFMNZ, Wigram.

⁸⁰ Gillard to CAS, ‘RNZAF Historical Centre’, 24 May 1977, ABFK W4757 26/4/35 Part 2, R21071243, ANZ, Wellington.

great interest from an aeronautical and technical point of view. They would seem to have little monetary, but immense historical value.’ He added that the committee’s wish list included both a Freighter and a De Havilland Devon navigation and signals trainer, which was another type that was in the process of being retired. Being obviously well-versed in the art of lodging a request and presenting a solution at the same time, Gillard headed off a possible response that there would be nowhere to store these aircraft by explaining that the Wigram-based Central Flying School (CFS) was in the process of reducing its training fleet from twenty long-serving Harvards to thirteen NZAI CT/4B Airtrainers, meaning it would be able to give up one of its hangars for use to store historic aircraft and equipment.⁸¹ This had the desired effect, with AFHQ then submitting a request to the Minister of Defence for a Freighter to be allotted to the Historical Centre. The Minister’s decision was aided by the fact only four of the nine Freighters were considered attractive to commercial buyers, as these four had received modifications to their wing centre sections to extend their flying life. The others were deemed to have ‘little value as disposable assets in their present state’.⁸² The Minister approved the allocation of the ‘little value’ Freighters.



A RNZAF Bristol Freighter showing the distinctive clamshell doors. (Source: AFMNZ, WgG2510-52)

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² J.F. Robertson, Secretary of Defence, to Minister, ‘Retention of B170 Aircraft by RNZAF’, 5 December 1977, ABFK W4757 26/4/35 Part 2, R21071243, ANZ, Wellington.

The disposals situation was markedly different when it came to another long-serving transport type. The Douglas C-47 Dakota was a military variant of the famous DC-3 airliner. Many DC-3s were built as C-47s during the Second World War and later sold on the civilian market; three decades later, many were still operated as freight and passenger workhorses in different parts of the world. In 1977, the RNZAF's last six C-47s were scheduled for retirement, but senior officers were stunned to learn that none was reserved for museum display. The Ministry of Defence determined that the C-47 was not sufficiently historic to warrant setting aside one for a museum, even though the type had been in RNZAF service since 1943. Squadron Leader B.G. Anderson, Wigram's base adjutant, surmised that resale value was the deciding factor, noting that the C-47 'still commands a price (circa \$18,000 on the open market) whereas the Freighter would probably only attract scrap metal bids'.⁸³



Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip disembarking from Douglas C-47 Dakota NZ3551 during the 1953 Royal Tour. (Source: AFMNZ, OhG2327-53)

⁸³ Squadron Leader B.G. Anderson, to CAS, Minute 102/1977, 'RNZAF Historic Centre: Dakota Retention', 5 October 1977, ABFK W4757 26/4/35 Part 2 R21071243, ANZ, Wellington.

The CAS made it known that he desired a C-47 for the Historical Centre, while the RNZAF Association and the Aviation Historical Society mounted a political lobbying campaign with a view to saving a particular C-47, NZ3551, a VIP transport that had carried many dignitaries, including Queen Elizabeth II. In November 1977, Dail Jones, Member for Waitemata, used Parliament's Question Time to ask the Minister of Defence what consideration had been given to retaining a C-47 'for historical purposes'. The Honorable Allan McCready's dispassionate response was that although the Dakota had given long and faithful service to the RNZAF, the type's most notable contribution to New Zealand was in civil aviation, 'appropriately recognised by the inclusion of a Dakota in the aircraft display at the Museum of Transport and Technology, Auckland'; the DC-3 he was referring to was donated to MOTAT by the National Airways Corporation under the previous Labour government. McCready explained: 'With this in mind, and in the knowledge that the ex RNZAF Dakotas have a not inconsiderable commercial value, it was decided to dispose of them through the Government Stores Board.'⁸⁴

Jones asked a similar question concerning Harvards, to which McCready responded that the RNZAF had a Harvard on display, 'on a plinth at the entrance to RNZAF base Wigram', and that four others were used for technical trade training, meaning that 'in the fullness of time it will still be possible to consider retaining one of the aircraft for purely historical purposes.' He added what had, by then, become the standard rejoinder when it came to questions around disposals, which was that MOTAT possessed an example.⁸⁵ It is evident that the Historical Centre still had to overcome government and bureaucratic preferences for MOTAT, and that there had to be a change in the disposals mindset so that cultural heritage value could outweigh any residual commercial value. Fortunately, the lobbying to save NZ3551 was successful, leading the Secretary of Defence to recommend to the Minister that it be allocated to the RNZAF Historical Centre, noting that 'a lot of people including serving RNZAF officers will be delighted.'⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The Hon. Allan McCready, 'RNZAF—Retention of Dakota', 4 November 1977, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Third Session, Thirty-Eighth Parliament, House of Representatives, vol. 415 (Wellington: Government Printer, 1978), 4219.

⁸⁵ The Hon. Allan McCready, 'Air Force Harvard Training Aircraft', 9 November 1977, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), Third Session, Thirty-Eighth Parliament, House of Representatives, 415 (Wellington: Government Printer, 1978), 4295.

⁸⁶ J.R. Robertson, Secretary of Defence, to Minister of Defence, 'Retention of VIP Dakota for Historical Display', 19 December 1977, ABFK W4757 26/4/35 Part 2 R21071243, ANZ, Wellington.

The procurements of a Freighter and a C-47 seemingly confirmed that the aim was a museum with a significant aircraft collection. At the management committee's second meeting on 7 July 1977, Hubbard reiterated the concept laid down in AFO A56/1976—possibly for the benefit of the new RNZAF Association and Brevet Club representatives—explaining that the gymnasium building would be available in approximately two years. He then departed, ostensibly to attend to other business, but possibly to enable members to speak freely. Anderson took the opportunity to explain that the gymnasium building was 'possibly too small' and that he had started exploring options, including two hangars on the base and an old factory adjacent to the base. In essence, he was signalling that the Historical Centre would be larger than signalled in AFO A56/1976. The hangars he was interested in were No. 6, which was used by the CFS but nominally allocated to the Historical Centre, and the adjacent No. 7, half of which was a basketball court and the other half an Air Training Corps (ATC) hall. No. 7 Hangar was closer to the base's main entrance, aligning with the stipulation that the Historical Centre be publicly accessible.⁸⁷



Aerial oblique view of No. 7 Hangar (centre) and No. 6 Hangar (top right) in 1980, with several of the Historical Centre's earliest aircraft acquisitions in the foreground. (Source: AFMNZ, WgG2133-80)

⁸⁷ Minutes, Management Committee, 7 July 1977, RNZAF Historical Centre Management Committee Records, AFMNZ.

In addition to being committee chair, Anderson was appointed part-time officer-in-charge of the Historical Centre. He was responsible for day-to-day management, including accepting objects, organising storage, and coordinating a range of other activities, including restorations. He retained both roles until January 1978 when he was compelled to step down, ostensibly due to other commitments, but possibly for health reasons. Hubbard informed the CAS of the heavy demands that had been placed on Anderson as chair and officer-in-charge. He hoped to be able to identify another officer ‘with spare capacity’ to take on these roles, but in the interim, Hubbard was acting chair of the committee while a civilian volunteered to hold the fort as the collection manager.

In this period, the committee turned its attention to fundraising, embracing such avenues as sales of posters and philatelic covers that could be marketed across the RNZAF, the ex-RNZAF associations, and air shows, while at the same time continuing with the collection of objects and documents. The collecting effort was aided by the fact the Historical Centre was able to take over No. 6 Hangar in early 1978 as a storage facility, and shortly afterwards it was allocated half of No. 7 Hangar (the half that had been occupied by the ATC) as an exhibition hall, library and archive, offices, and additional storage. The management committee organised for a fence to be erected between its half and the basketball court that took up the other half, providing space for both the C-47 and Freighter to be parked under cover.⁸⁸ Hubbard explained to committee members in the middle of 1978 that No. 7 Hangar was a good option for the first iteration of an exhibition space but that the Historical Centre would require a building closer to the base’s main entrance to facilitate public access. The committee discussed various possibilities including taking over the whole hangar in-situ with a special arrangement for public access, dismantling and repositioning the hangar close to the base’s main entrance, or, most ambitiously, constructing a new building that would be adjacent to No. 7 Hangar but extending out to the base perimeter to facilitate public access.⁸⁹

Aircraft were not the only objects collected, but they posed a particular set of challenges due to their bulkiness, complexity, and in some cases states of deterioration after years of outdoors

⁸⁸ Minutes, Management Committee, 22 June 1978, RNZAF Management Committee Records, AFMNZ.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

storage or display. The fact there was the ability to store large objects meant the Historical Centre was quickly perceived as a repository for historic aircraft. In early 1978, the Central Institute of Technology at Petone advised that it could return a Vampire fighter received as a technical training aid six years earlier. The Vampire was in reasonable condition, so arrangements were made for it to be dismantled and transported to Woodbourne for refurbishment ahead of a move to Wigram. A private collector then advised that he possessed a Vampire trainer and a very dilapidated Anson, with the outcome being an offer to loan the Vampire and donate the Anson and components. Sergeant George Jaunzemis, a long-serving aircraft mechanic, history enthusiast, and foundation member of the committee, urged the committee to also approach the commander of RNZAF Base Te Rapa, outside Hamilton, with a view to securing a Second World War-era Grumman Avenger torpedo bomber that was on outdoors display as a 'gate guardian'.⁹⁰ This was the oldest and most historic aircraft that had been retained by the RNZAF. Fortunately, the base commander readily agreed to part with the Avenger, giving the Historical Centre its first reasonably intact wartime aircraft.



Grumman Avenger NZ2505 arriving at Wigram after transfer from Te Rapa in 1978. (MUS080116, AFMNZ).

⁹⁰ Minutes, Management Committee, 19 January 1978, RNZAF Management Committee records, AFMNZ.

On 3 May 1978, Squadron Leader John Barry, Wigram's senior education officer, accepted an appointment as part-time officer-in-charge of the Historical Centre. Barry was a history teacher before joining the RNZAF in the late 1950s as an education officer. He was already involved with the Historical Centre when approached to consider the dual roles of committee chair and officer-in-charge. Barry welcomed the opportunity and the challenge because it aligned with his professional interest in education, a personal interest in history, and the fact he considered himself a creative person, which he expressed as an amateur artist. Moreover, the appointment offered the possibility of an extension of service, meaning he could postpone his retirement from the RNZAF. However, like all other members of the project, Barry had no prior experience of working in museums. He was unable to anticipate the scale of the challenge he had taken on, recalling that actually 'nobody in the Air Force had any idea about how you create a museum and what would be involved.'⁹¹

Barry took on the management of collecting, storage, restorations, and early attempts at cataloguing. He was guided by the AFO in the first instance and the policy and directions that were formulated by the management committee (of which he was a member). Not long after his appointment, AFHQ issued a new AFO, A26/1978, which reiterated that the Historical Centre was to continue collecting such objects as uniforms, equipment, tools, private papers and photographs, while also confirming that henceforth aircraft formed part of the collection.⁹² Committee members resisted calls from some quarters for aircraft to be restored to, and maintained in airworthy condition. The Historical Centre lacked the funds, manpower and resources to operate a historic flight. Accordingly, the AFO included a clear instruction that: 'Aircraft allotted to the collection will not be retained in flying condition.'⁹³

The more significant development within AFO A26/1978 was adjustment of the RNZAF's policy around disposal of retired aircraft and equipment. Henceforth, the Historical Centre was to receive first preference in the disposals process, with other museums able to be allotted historic aircraft and equipment 'surplus to RNZAF requirements and not required by the Historical

⁹¹ Interview, John Barry, Diamond Harbour, 18 June 2023.

⁹² AFO A26/1978, 'The Preservation of the History of the Royal New Zealand Air Force', AFMNZ, Wigram.

⁹³ Barry, interview; AFO A26/1978.

Centre'.⁹⁴ This would lead to revision of the RNZAF-MOTAT relationship. Development of the Historical Centre generated tensions between the RNZAF and MOTAT, not least because of an expectation that objects loaned to MOTAT be returned and reallocated to the Historical Centre.⁹⁵ MOTAT collection included at least two RNZAF-donated aircraft, its Sunderland and Harvard, but in addition the RNZAF loaned engines and other equipment, which some MOTAT members presumed were donated. AFO A26/1978 attempted to assuage MOTAT with reassurance that the RNZAF would continue to extend support to 'certain recognised civil institutions and museums in their role of preserving the general aviation history of New Zealand', with MOTAT designated as the primary external museum. In return for its largesse, the RNZAF had for some years been represented on MOTAT's Board of Management, with the intent being to ensure that RNZAF-owned objects were 'properly maintained and displayed and are presented to the public in the manner most favourable to the RNZAF'; in addition, an officer was available to advise on technical and administrative matters.⁹⁶ Despite the fact MOTAT was now ranked below the Historical Centre in the disposals policy, the specific and explicit mention of MOTAT in the AFO concerned the Historical Centre's management committee. Hubbard complained that it 'made the Centre appear to be the handmaid of MOTAT'. The CAS's representative reassured committee members that AFO A26/1978 was an interim order intended to 'hold the line' until a new governance structure for the Historical Centre was in place.⁹⁷

The new disposals policy gave the Historical Centre assurance of receiving aircraft retired in the future, but a greater challenge was to locate and procure older aircraft. Aviation museums worldwide competed with the growing antique aircraft and 'warbird' movements for historic airframes, engines, and parts. The flying of antique and former military aircraft was popularised in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. 'Warbirds' featured prominently in blockbuster movies, such as *The Battle of Britain* (1969), and they were popular at airshows, including in New Zealand. Collectors and traders scoured the world for restorable Second World War and early Cold War aircraft, and indeed older aircraft. The

⁹⁴ AFO A26/1978.

⁹⁵ Minutes, Management Committee, 21 March 1978, RNZAF Historical Centre Papers, AFMNZ, Wigram.

⁹⁶ AFO A26/1978.

⁹⁷ Management Committee, RNZAF Historical Centre, minutes, 27 July 1978, RNZAF Historical Centre Papers, AFMNZ, Wigram.

popularity of warbirds saw prices soaring, potentially putting these aircraft out of the reach of museums.⁹⁸ Museums and ‘warbirders’ contended that they were driven by a desire to preserve historic aircraft, but they had markedly different philosophies and motivations. Aviation historian Barrett Tillman explained that many warbird enthusiasts ‘insist that an aircraft is only at home in the air’ and that keeping it inside a museum ‘is somehow to curtail its usefulness’, whereas pragmatists contended that ‘it does no good to fly an airplane to destruction. Better “trapped” indoors and intact than “free” and scattered over two miles [following a crash]’.⁹⁹



Former RNZAF North American P-51D Mustang, which was operated on the New Zealand civil register during the 1960s and early 1970s. The aircraft was exported to the USA in 1974. (Gary Danvers Collection, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gcdnz/8470565836>; open license under Creative Commons)

There was a critical difference when it came to restoration approaches. The act of restoring an aircraft to airworthy condition required discarding or modification of much of its original

⁹⁸ Barrett Tillman, ‘The Vintage Aircraft Movement—Who, What, and Why?’, *Aerospace Historian*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Spring/March 1984), 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

material, as the airframe, engine and equipment had to meet modern airworthiness standards for civil registration. There was a place for both forms of preservation, and public appetites for both airworthy and static exhibition. In New Zealand, the antique aircraft and warbird fraternities shared concerns and frustrations around the fate of the country's aviation heritage, as well-heeled overseas collectors snapped up airworthy and restorable historic aircraft. The New Zealand Sport and Vintage Aviation Society was formed in 1974 out of concern that historic aircraft were disappearing from the country, while the export of an airworthy North American P-51 Mustang prompted the formation of the New Zealand Warbirds Association.¹⁰⁰ The challenge for the RNZAF Historical Centre, MOTAT, and the country's warbird fraternity was that they were interested in essentially the same airframes, components, and spares—museums to have aircraft for static exhibition, and 'warbirders' to restore and maintain aircraft for personal enjoyment and airworthy exhibition. The Historical Centre had no sooner organised for the Avenger at Te Rapa to be transferred into its collection when it became necessary to repel a bid by the new Warbirds Association to restore the Avenger to flying condition.¹⁰¹

In late 1978, the Historical Centre was alerted to the existence of an Avro 626 biplane on a farm near Havelock North. This was precisely the type of discovery those tasked with building the collection were hoping for: a rare aircraft from the early years of the RNZAF. The NZPAF procured four 626s in 1935 for pilot training, and when the RNZAF was formed, they became some of its first aircraft. NZ203 was grounded in 1943 and used as an instructional airframe until sold after the war, when it was refurbished and flown on the civil register for several years. In the late 1950s, Jim Frogley, a farmer, purchased the 626 with the intention of converting it into a crop duster. Instead, the aircraft was placed inside a shed that also served as a chicken coop. When rediscovered, it was dilapidated but virtually complete.¹⁰² In December 1978, Barry travelled to Havelock North to inspect the 626 and discuss the possibility of acquisition, to no avail. The management committee suggested that the former air force officer who had located the aircraft should continue to 'pressure the owner to take up an RNZAF offer to accept his aircraft

¹⁰⁰ 'Aerial recreation—Vintage aircraft', Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/aerial-recreation/page-7>

¹⁰¹ Minutes, Management Committee, 27 July 1978, RNZAF Management Committee Papers, AFMNZ.

¹⁰² Ibid., 7 December 1978.

on permanent loan' by promising it would be restored to display standard.¹⁰³ Frogley expressed a willingness to loan the aircraft but he wanted it restored to flying condition and with a right to fly it and repossess it at any time. The committee deemed this a 'far from attractive' proposition because it ran the risk of volunteers expending time, energy and finances restoring the aircraft only to watch it disappear.¹⁰⁴ Another two years of negotiations were required for Frogley to sell the aircraft, with the 626 coming into the collection in October 1980; as the museum did not have \$20,000 required for purchase, insurance and restoration, an interest free loan from the RNZAF was arranged.¹⁰⁵



Avro 626 NZ203 as recovered from Jim Frogley's property at Havelock North in 1980. (Source: AFMNZ, OhG3851-90)

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1 February 1979.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes, RNZAF Museum Trust Board, 13 February 1980, AFMNZ Trust Board Records.

¹⁰⁵ Group Captain C.W. Rudd to Commander, RNZAF Support Group, Wigram, 'Purchase of Avro 626 ZKAPC (NZ203), 29 October 1980, and sale document dated 28 October 1980, ABFK, W4757, 26/4/35 Part 3, R20383910, ANZ, Wellington; Group Captain J.S. Boys to CAS and DCAS, 'Avro 626 Aircraft Purchase Loan', 23 October 1980, BCDW A1442 941/1/0 RG Part 1 R23492093, ANZ, Auckland.

Other attempts to procure significant aircraft proved less successful. High on the wish list was a Canberra bomber. Barry had a RNZAF representative contact the British Aircraft Corporation, hoping the Canberra it had purchased from the RNZAF could be gifted to the Historical Centre, but that aircraft had been scrapped.¹⁰⁶ Attention next turned to the Indian Air Force (IAF), which had purchased the other Canberras disposed of by the RNZAF. In the late 1970s, the Indian Navy gifted the Royal New Zealand Navy Museum at Devonport the aft turret of the scrapped light cruiser INS *Delhi*, which had previously been New Zealand's most famous warship, HMNZS *Achilles*.¹⁰⁷ This gave hope that the IAF could be persuaded to donate a Canberra. In early 1980, during a visit to Wellington by the Indian military attaché to Australia and New Zealand, the CAS's principal staff officer, Squadron Leader John Francis, who was also a member of the management committee, enquired as to the status of the IAF's former RNZAF Canberras. To the New Zealanders' embarrassment, the Indians interpreted this as an approach to purchase second-hand Canberras and produced a list of eleven aircraft and engines available for sale. The CAS assessed that diplomatically the RNZAF was in 'something of a bind' because there was 'no question of our buying a Canberra even for a nominal sum'. He put an end to the discussions and directed that Barry be instructed 'against pursuing the matter himself'.¹⁰⁸ Air Commodore Ian Gillard, Deputy CAS, described the quest for a Canberra as 'wishful thinking but worth a try'. He arranged for the Indians to be informed that no sale was possible, while staying hopeful that they might still offer one, noting: 'we would like to get hold of one of these aircraft—the question is how do we make it next to no cost?' Gillard organised for Barry to be informed of the official line, which was that the RNZAF had no intention of purchasing a Canberra, adding an instruction that 'you do not pursue the matter yourself'.¹⁰⁹ Barry could not circumvent what amounted to an order. The last avenue for procuring an ex-RNZAF Canberra was seemingly shut off.

¹⁰⁶ Management Committee, minutes, 1 February 1979, AFMNZ; 'English Electric Canberra B(I).12 Aircraft Data', Airfighters, <https://www.airfighters.com/aircraft-data/english-electric-canberra-bi-12>.

¹⁰⁷ 'HMNZS Achilles Twin 6-inch Turret', Torpedo Bay Navy Museum website, <https://navymuseum.co.nz/explore/by-themes/technology-and-weapons/hmnzs-achilles-twin-6-inch-turret/>

¹⁰⁸ Note by CAS, 20 March 1980, on letter of Group Captain N.E. Richardson, Defence Liaison Staff, Canberra, to CAS, 10 March 1980, 420383910, ANZ(W).

¹⁰⁹ Air Commodore I.M. Gillard, DCAS, letter to Group Captain N.E. Richardson, NZ Defence Liaison Staff, Canberra, 24 March 1980; Squadron Leader L.M. Laing, Principal Staff Officer, AFHQ, letter to Squadron Leader J.K. Barry, 24 March 1980, ABFK, W4757, 26/4/35 Part 3, R20383910, ANZ(W).

The RNZAF Historical Centre was the first iteration of the Air Force Museum of New Zealand. Established with the intent that it would be comparatively small scale and cost-effective, with a focus on modest displayable objects, in only a few short years it morphed into a service aviation museum. The acquisition of aircraft was accepted by the CAS, and followed by the high-level demand for aircraft to be allocated to the new collection. While AFO A56/1976 appeared to rule out an aircraft collection, the willingness of the CAS to approve of such a collection and his efforts to ensure that aircraft were allocated to the Historical Centre suggests that he tacitly approved of the founders' plan to produce an air force museum that was in large measure also an aviation museum that included aircraft exhibits. The further critical development in this period was the recognition that the RNZAF should both retain retired aircraft for historical display and to prioritise its own museum in the allocation of those aircraft.

Chapter 3

Establishing a RNZAF Museum

By the time of the Avro 626's discovery, there had been sweeping changes to the title, aim, and governance of the museum project. In late 1979, AFHQ released AFO A29/1979, changing the collection's name from the RNZAF Historical Centre to the RNZAF Museum, and establishing a Trust Board tasked with setting the museum's strategic direction and fundraising. This chapter examines the progression from the renaming of the collection to the opening of the RNZAF Museum on 1 April 1987, the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the RNZAF. It will show that this achievement required both vision and dedication on the one hand, and collection philosophy compromise on the other.

The RNZAF Museum Trust Board had conducted its first meeting even before the release of AFO A29/1979. The board's composition sent a clear message that the museum project was fully supported by the RNZAF's senior leadership and ex-service organisations, with membership including: both the CAS and Deputy CAS, along with the Wigram-based commander of Support Group; the Secretary of Defence; representatives of the RNZAF Association, the Federation of Brevet Clubs, and the Returned Services Association; and finally a representative of the National Museum. At its first meeting on 10 October 1979, the Trust Board established a division of responsibilities, with the Trust Board responsible for 'national aspects of the RNZAF Museum', including the setting of strategic direction and fundraising, while the management committee and the officer-in-charge would be responsible for 'day to day running of the Museum and local affairs', with Barry in addition authorized to 'liaise with persons or organisations outside the local area as circumstances or Museum interests demanded'. The Trust Board directed that Barry also produce six-monthly reports for the Trust Board, and newsletters to inform stakeholders and the public about progress.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Trust Board Minutes, 10 October 1979, 1, AFMNZ.

The changes that AFO A29/1979 introduced appear to have been at the behest of the Historical Centre's management committee, which by this time was also more formalized, comprising the officer-in-charge (Barry); three senior officers from Wigram, being the commanding officers of the Technical Wing, Supply Squadron, and Administrative Squadron; representatives of the RNZAF Association and Brevet Club; three co-opted members; and a secretary.¹¹¹ By late 1978, it had become evident to committee members that the museum project was bigger, more challenging, and likely to be more costly than originally anticipated. While there had been some notable successes, particularly in relation to the collection's growth, the project was at risk of stalling due to a lack of strategic direction and inadequate funding. The need for a Trust Board that could provide the required direction and generate traction with fundraising was clear. Both Hubbard and Barry travelled to Wellington to assist in drafting a trust deed.¹¹² At Barry's behest, the management committee also agreed to take this opportunity to seek a change of title to the more appealing and marketable 'RNZAF Museum'.¹¹³

For committee members, it may have seemed that the release of AFO A29/1979 placed the project on the cusp of a period of profound and accelerated development, as the establishment of a trust board for the National Army Museum had seen that museum's construction fast-tracked, resulting in its opening in October 1978. Barry cautioned committee members that they should not anticipate the same rate of progress, explaining that the New Zealand Army had the advantage of having collected objects over many years, whereas the RNZAF 'has first to complete its collection phase', with more time required to plan and develop a comparable institution. He counselled that if the process was rushed, 'inexperience might prove costly'.¹¹⁴

The committee also determined that a provisional museum should be opened to demonstrate to service members and the public that meaningful progress was being made. Barry proposed adhering to previously agreed development plans that included completing the exhibition spaces and displays in Hangar 7 and opening to the public as soon as there was an 'interesting enough

¹¹¹ AFO A29/1979, 'The Preservation of the History of the Royal New Zealand Air Force', undated (late 1979) AFMNZ.

¹¹² Management Committee, minutes, 5 October 1978 and 2 November 1978, AFMNZ.

¹¹³ Ibid., 8 March 1979.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1 February 1979.

collection'. In February 1979, the committee agreed that that year's Battle of Britain Sunday (16 September 1979) would be a suitable occasion.¹¹⁵ A further anticipated benefit of opening was that more members of the ex-service community could be motivated to come forward with offers of voluntary work once they were able to witness a tangible collection.¹¹⁶ Wigram's base commander and subsequently also the Trust Board agreed, but the plan proved overly ambitious, with Barry and his small band of volunteers becoming hamstrung by a lack of manpower and financial constraints. The target date came and went without a museum opening. Barry drafted a discussion paper for Hubbard to present to AFHQ and the Trust Board, warning the project was at risk of failing. Hubbard explained:

... the major remaining question is: how far, how fast? Progress in all areas has been limited to date; the display is by no means yet at a stage where the doors can be opened to the public and the displays within presented as an entity. It is essential that this be accomplished before very long if the enthusiasm of those associated with the museum and of those considering material support is to be maintained, yet the various means of achieving the object are elusive. Firm, attainable objectives must be set, both for the short term and the long term.¹¹⁷

The Trust Board had already been presented with the management committee's long-term development plan that included relocating Building 132 and bringing both it and No. 7 Hangar up to 'full display standard' to enable the first iteration of the museum to be opened, which would be followed by construction of a new exhibition hall on the perimeter of the base to provide ready public access, car parking facilities, and landscaping. Hubbard explained that the Trust Board had to choose between gradual progression of the project or (as Barry was advocating for) attempt 'to emulate Army with a major drive now to the final conclusion'. The two key issues preventing opening of the first iteration of the museum were inadequate manpower and 'painfully restricted availability of exhibit material', both of which were impacted

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 1 February 1979.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1 March 1979.

¹¹⁷ Group Captain G.C. Hubbard, Commanding Officer, RNZAF Base Wigram, to Commander, RNZAF Support Group, 'RNZAF Museum: Development', 28 November 1979, ABFK W4757 26/4/35 PART 3, R20383910, ANZ, Wellington.

and constrained by paltry funding. Hubbard pointed out that Barry was still the sole RNZAF appointment to the RNZAF Museum and was ‘impossibly overloaded’, while the enthusiastic but small band of volunteers could not complete all the essential tasks of museum development. Further, while progress was being made with collecting all manner of objects, it was impossible to ensure that all objects were stored, restored, and prepared for exhibition without ‘a team of adequate size at Wigram able to orchestrate the resultant effort’ and without more assistance from across the rest of the RNZAF.¹¹⁸

Barry continued the discussion around the museum’s future in his first six-monthly report for the Trust Board, which he produced in January 1980. As an Air Force officer, he normally had to adhere to command lines, but the report for the Trust Board was an opportunity to inform the Trust Board and the Air Force’s senior leadership (the CAS and DCAS were both members of the Trust Board) of the situation directly. Barry had been full-time officer-in-charge of the museum for more than a year and part-time for a year before that. In this time, he had been able to visit other museums across New Zealand and overseas, including the RAF Museum, observing their operations, and discussing challenges facing the museum sector generally and other air force museums. He also forged contacts across the museums sector, particularly benefitting from the expertise of curators at the Canterbury Museum. This gave him a much better understanding of what a museum was and what it could strive to be.¹¹⁹ Critically, he understood that most members of the Trust Board would have very little understanding of the challenges facing museums. The only board member who possessed museums experience was Dr John Yaldwyn, who, with more than two decades of museum experience in New Zealand and Australia, had recently been appointed Director of the National Museum of New Zealand.¹²⁰ Barry drafted his report using plain and simple language for the laypersons on the Trust Board.

Barry painted a picture of an aspirational museum that had too many projects on the go given it was faced with inadequate staffing and deficient funding. He began by drawing attention to the

¹¹⁸ Group Captain G.C. Hubbard, CO, RNZAF Base Wigram, to the CO, RNZAF Support Group, ‘RNZAF Museum: Development’, 28 November 1979, ABFK W4757 26/43/35 Part 3, R20383910, ANZ, Wellington.

¹¹⁹ Interview, Barry, 23 June 2023.

¹²⁰ Diana Dekker, ‘From marine biologist to museum director’, *Dominion Post* (Wellington), 22 December 2005, B6.

large objects that attracted most interest in an aviation museum and perhaps were the easiest to explain. He noted that the RNZAF Museum had acquired several aircraft, most of which required some form of restoration, however the volunteer restoration team at Wigram could work on only two at a time. Their priority was the Avenger, which had been stripped of external paint to receive skin repairs and anti-corrosion treatment, had its fuselage interior refurbished, cockpit layout restored, hydraulics and electrical circuits restored and tested, and the Wright R-2600 Twin Cyclone engine deinhibited after having been idle for two decades. The Avenger could be taxied and its folding wings—the Avenger was designed for use on aircraft carriers—were operable, allowing it to be ‘a bit of a TV star’ for promoting the museum to the press. The other active restoration project was a Tiger Moth biplane, for which progress was markedly slower, as volunteers did not possess the requisite knowledge and trade skills to restore this older aircraft; technicians trained since the 1950s were not familiar with the 1930s-designed, wood-and-fabric biplane. Barry was frustrated that few Wigram-based technicians were coming forward and dedicating some of their spare time to working on the old aircraft, and although he managed to ‘farm out’ some jobs to other units on the base, these could only be attended to whenever the unit had a little spare capacity, which was not often. The restoration efforts were further complicated by the fact there was no policy around what equipment and parts could be utilized for the museum restorations, compelling volunteers to resort to using their own tools and parts that they scrounged or acquired by other means, sometimes at their own expense. Barry suggested that the cost factor was bound to ‘annoy those who work voluntarily to produce an enduring asset for the RNZAF’. He added that work on the next aircraft in line for restoration, an Anson, simply could not be started because there was neither manpower nor funding available. The challenge of bringing aircraft up to display standard was made even harder by the fact that restoration activity was only occurring at Wigram, whereas Barry hoped that restorations could be undertaken at other bases as well, or perhaps by kindred external organisations such as Air New Zealand; he hoped to also form a restoration group from former RNZAF personnel when a ‘friends’ organisation was established.¹²¹

¹²¹ Barry, ‘Six Monthly Report by Director’, 24 January 1980, appended to RNZAF Trust Board minutes, 15 February 1980.



Avenger NZ2504 with engine running following restoration in 1979. Flight Sergeant George Jaunzemis, who headed the restoration, is standing at the starboard folded wing. (WgG3273-79, AFMNZ).

Turning to staffing, Barry explained: ‘One of the biggest bottle-necks in the acceleration of work on the Museum Project is the lack of suitable, permanent staff.’¹²² The RNZAF supplied one staff member (Barry) and the Department of Labour supplied three staff on temporary work placements but none of those supplied by the Department of Labour were trained or trusted to undertake essential museum tasks such as storage, classifying objects, and cataloguing.¹²³ Barry had no say in their appointments and indeed he would later summarise one group that arrived on placement as ‘an intellectually handicapped young man, an alcoholic, and a sickly youth who

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

can't spell. Soon there will be a new lot to break in and train.'¹²⁴ On occasion, he was able to call in favours from Wigram-based units, normally for routine administrative tasks, but the usual option an officer had of 'exercising crisp military authority' was not available to him because no personnel were posted to the Museum, leaving him 'unable to give any orders to servicemen since none of them are tasked with any obligation to the Museum, save perhaps a moral obligation'. He requested a staffing review, but feared this would not occur any time soon. In a moment of 'wallowing in self-pity', he wrote: 'If I succeed in my attempts to make the Museum better known it may prove our undoing, because when donations begin to flood in, when the public demand that we open, when schools start queueing to visit and scholars badger us for documents and research facilities, I and my inadequate staff will go under.'¹²⁵ Already, some tasks were not being completed on time or to a satisfactory standard. For example, while the Trust Board had tasked Barry with producing a newsletter to promote the museum, as time-pressed 'editor, writer, compositor, illustrator, sponsor-hunter and despatcher,' he could not guarantee production in a timely fashion.¹²⁶

Barry suggested that the Trust Board needed to refine the museum's vision and identify avenues for funding all areas of activity if the pace of development was to be accelerated. To illustrate the array of challenges, he took the Trustees on a tour of No. 7 Hangar, explaining that neither the hangar nor its annexes were up to museum standard. In part, this was because he had authorised work on the annexes not long after his appointment as officer-in charge, whereas with more experience 'many mistakes and omissions are now obvious to me', including poor colour choices, inadequate lighting, and lack of security to protect exhibits on display. He explained that the hangar space where aircraft were to be displayed posed more challenges, because: 'A great deal of money would have to be spent on this area to bring it to a standard even approximating overseas examples of similar display areas.' His worry was that there was 'no final goal' other than to produce some form of exhibition, and he was uncertain how much money, time and

¹²⁴ Barry, 'Six Monthly Report', August 1980, appended to Trust Board minutes, 13 August 1980, Trust Board Records, AFMNZ.

¹²⁵ Barry, 'Six Monthly Report', 24 January 1980.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

energy should be expended on No. 7 Hangar and its annexes, ‘if in a few years time they may change their current function from that of display areas to, say, storage or staff rooms?’¹²⁷

Barry noted a further concern that neither the management committee nor most of the trust board members really understood what a museum was, what was required to run a museum, and the expenditure to be entailed. He was at pains to emphasise to the Trust Board that public-facing exhibitions represented only part of the museum’s responsibility, explaining to the laypersons on the board that a museum was not merely a collection of objects on display but rather the custodian or guardian of all objects that came into its care. Although he was not a museum professional, Barry was by this time sufficiently aware of the challenges to be able to explain at some length why a museum could not operate on a shoestring budget. He noted:

One does not have to be in the museum business very long to discover that the putting of items on display is only a fraction of what a museum must do. One of the first habits to go is that of thinking in the short term. The ad hoc display that is put up for an Open Day or Air Force Day display [for promotional purposes] is what many people have in mind when they envisage an RNZAF Museum. Obviously, though, if artefacts are not only to be displayed but kept in good condition for centuries, one has to think in a different dimension. For this reason money spent on a Museum must often be on hidden but necessary aspects like creating optimum storage conditions. It is useless to protect the fraction of your collection which is on display yet allow the bulk to disintegrate under the effects of fluctuations in humidity and temperature, through atmospheric pollution, over-exposure to light, the ravages of insects or rodents. Hidden costs also attend other aspects such as restoration and renovation, publicity, insurance, etc. Again there are many items of museum equipment which are not obtainable from service sources but which need to be purchased: special glues, inks and paints, special acid-free cardboard storage boxes and tissue papers, special cleaning agents, special lights, tools and office equipment, specially printed forms, registers, cards and so on.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Barry's message was that minimal funding and inadequate manpower threatened the viability of the museum. The small group of staff and volunteers were compelled to direct their efforts towards 'the more obvious things' like aircraft restorations and preparation of exhibition spaces, making it appear that the museum's development was on track, albeit slower than hoped for, whereas the less visible tasks and responsibilities such as object care also needed resourcing if the museum was to be responsible and successful. The Trust Board took Barry's advice on notice, but as it was still in the process of gearing up to meet the challenge of fund-raising, there was little the board could do at the time except note the issues raised. The Trust Board supported Barry's suggestion that other bases be asked to contribute to restoration activities, with the CAS seeing no reason why equipment and parts could not be moved between bases if the RNZAF had spare air transport capacity. On the subject of staffing, however, the Trust Board was hamstrung, acknowledging that more staff were needed for the museum 'to grow and meet the aims for which it was created' but that the level of staffing required was 'beyond the present capability of the Board to finance'.¹²⁹ Barry was scheduled to visit the Army Museum at Waiouru and so he was tasked with ascertaining how the New Zealand Army attended to the staffing issue. He would report back that the Army was able to provide staff from within its operating budget because its museum was used as a resource for the training of soldiers at Waiouru, which was not really an option for the RNZAF.¹³⁰

Critically, Hubbard and then also Barry's straight-talking made it clear to the Air Force's senior leadership that the museum was at risk of failing. While neither the Trust Board nor the RNZAF could inject significant operating funds into the project, the CAS initiated discussions around how to improve staffing. In early 1981, AFHQ issued AFO A18/1981, which made the RNZAF Museum a unit of the RNZAF, as had been suggested in the proposal produced in 1975. By making the museum a unit, rather than an adjunct project, the RNZAF was able to post a small number of personnel to the museum. The staffing establishment was set at: the Commanding Officer (CO), who could be a squadron leader of any branch of the RNZAF; one warrant officer of any trade; one flight sergeant aircraft technician; one sergeant avionics technician; and one sergeant senior publications specialist. Barry was duly appointed CO, with responsibility for

¹²⁹ Trust Board, minutes, 13 February 1980, AFMNZ.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

selecting other staff. As explained in a staffing review some years later, the technical positions were used to appoint the heads of the aircraft restoration and stores teams who would ideally be senior non-commissioned officers ‘in the twilight of their careers, wishing to eventually terminate their service in the Christchurch area, [and] who, by reason of longevity of service, would be familiar with the older aircraft requiring restoration and maintenance’.¹³¹ Barry anticipated that there would be keen competition for these postings, as any postings to Wigram tended to be popular with those officers and other ranks planning to retire in the Christchurch area. However, he was conscious of the fact the museum required staff with particular skillsets. Fortunately, there were several obvious candidates, including Jaunzemis, who was a foundation management committee member and a stalwart volunteer.¹³²

By the time of the release of AFO A18/1981, the Trust Board was sufficiently well-versed in the needs of the museum to start planning for its permanent future. In June of that year, Group Captain Neville, a member of the Trust Board on account of his position as the CO of Support Group, steered the discussion towards the museum’s development. He argued that the time was right to develop the museum, for reasons including that the project could receive support from the then sizeable veteran community, and the fact there appeared to be a rising nostalgia for the Second World War. He pointed out that this was the last opportunity to confirm where the museum should be located—there had been discussion around the fact Wigram was perhaps not ideal—explaining that Auckland had limited hangar space and that a RNZAF museum there would be in competition with MOTAT; that there was no space at Te Rapa, Ohakea, Wellington, or Woodbourne; and that Wigram really was the only site that had hangarage available and offered the additional advantages of being in a large metropolitan area and a tourist gateway. The CAS added that the ‘historical and emotional aspect of Wigram as the cradle of military aviation in New Zealand’ was an important consideration. The Trust Board confirmed that Wigram would be the permanent site of the RNZAF Museum. The further decisions were to establish the Friends of the RNZAF Museum, seek Royal patronage, mount a significant fundraising campaign for a new museum building, ensure service-wide commitment to the museum’s

¹³¹ Barry, ‘RNZAF Research and Studies Dept: Establishment’, 11 April 1990, CAAT, CH655 2806 1920/11 PART 1, R20007999, ANZ, Christchurch.

¹³² Commander’s Comments, for September 1981, RNZAF Museum Unit History Sheet, ABFK W4718 7232, R16095882, ANZ, Wellington.

development, and finally to identify a date for the new museum's opening. At the suggestion of the CAS, the Trust Board agreed that 1987, which would mark the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the RNZAF, 'would be the appropriate time for opening of the Museum complex'.¹³³

Once RNZAF personnel began to be posted to the RNZAF Museum in the first months of 1981, Barry was able to devote more time to outreach and 'other important activities associated with locating aircraft and artefacts, and organising systems to care for these'.¹³⁴ One early mission was to secure loaned objects from MOTAT, with relations having deteriorated after the release of AFO A26/1978, which bumped MOTAT down in the disposals policy and signalled that loaned objects needed to be returned. In early 1980, the Trust Board noted that MOTAT staff and volunteers were 'a little unhappy about handing back what is still public property'.¹³⁵ Barry had first visited MOTAT in 1977 with a view to organizing the return of loaned objects, but he was 'dismayed to find that they were vague as to the actual location of many of the items', with loaned objects having become dispersed across different storage sites. In the two years that followed, little, if anything, had been located and returned. In December 1979, Barry wrote to the senior officer at Auckland with responsibility for liaising with MOTAT, Wing Commander B.R. Knight, that it appeared as if MOTAT staff and volunteers expected Barry to locate and retrieve the objects himself, with Barry's frustration evident in the comment that: 'they do not emerge as grateful or responsible borrowers'. Feeling that he did not possess the strength or inclination to remain diplomatic himself, Barry requested that Knight 'sensitively but firmly' pass on the message that the RNZAF Museum wanted all loaned objects returned. He explained that loans had been made 'when the RNZAF Museum was but a fond wish. Now we are reality and we need to have exhibits.' However, the objects in question did not merely have value as potential exhibits, as they could also be useful as potential sale and trade items. Barry explained: 'The world of military aviation museums is a hard and competitive one—we all deal in a diminishing resource.'¹³⁶

¹³³ Trust Board, minutes, 10 June 1981, AFMNZ.

¹³⁴ RNZAF Museum, Unit History, summary for February 1982, ABFK W4718 7232, R16095882, ANZ, Wellington.

¹³⁵ Trust Board, minutes, 13 February 1980, AFMNZ.

¹³⁶ Barry to Wing Commander B.R. Knight, Operations Group Headquarters, RNZAF Base Auckland, 19 December 1979, BCDW A1442 941/1/0 RG Part 1 R23492093, ANZ, Auckland.

Despite the fact the museum was not officially open, the placing of several aircraft in and around Hangar 7 enabled behind-the-scenes visits by special arrangement. Barry reported in September 1981 that the museum was already ‘a popular attraction for primary and secondary schools, and plays its part in the education, training and motivation of regular and non-regular servicemen.’¹³⁷

The emphasis placed on aircraft and components was understandable. By the time the Historical Centre had been established, most of the country’s restorable military aircraft had been snapped up by other museums or private collectors in New Zealand and overseas. Although the Historical Centre, and subsequently the RNZAF Museum, was not concerned only with aircraft, naturally there was emphasis placed on aircraft acquisitions and restorations, firstly because museum visitors would expect to see aircraft, and secondly because older aircraft were hard to come by. One reason why Barry was keen to ensure that relations with MOTAT never became too strained was that the Auckland-based museum was viewed as a potential source of exhibitable aircraft. Having been established in the mid-1960s, MOTAT had been able to acquire some of the last examples of Second World War and early Cold War aircraft available in the country, and naturally these aircraft were of interest to the RNZAF Museum. In the early 1980s, several MOTAT aircraft displayed outdoors were noticeably deteriorating, including the Lancaster and Sunderland. There were questions around whether MOTAT would be able to finance the construction of a new exhibition hall to bring the aircraft under cover and restore them to display standard. Some veterans of RAF Bomber Command were agitating for the Lancaster to be given a new home. In mid-1982, Air Commodore Neville wrote to the senior officer at RNZAF Base Auckland requesting that he conduct discrete enquiries as to the status and availability of the Lancaster. For MOTAT members, the Lancaster was a treasured and highly valued asset, meaning any such enquiry had to be discrete. Neville noted that ‘it would be impertinent for us “Johnny-come-latelies” to be taking an initiative in this matter’, but that if the Lancaster happened to be offered to the RNZAF Museum, ‘we would accept it with alacrity’.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ RNZAF Museum, Unit History, Summary for September 1982.

¹³⁸ Neville to Operations Group Headquarters, RNZAF Base Auckland, 2 July 1982, BCDW A1442 941/1/10 RG Part 2 R23492094, ANZ, Auckland.

Barry also connected with a network of collectors across New Zealand holding airframes and parts. The collectors likewise were keen to develop a relationship, as the RNZAF Museum became potentially a source of spares for their projects.¹³⁹ Some of their aircraft had come from the famed scrapyards at Rukuhia, Hamilton, where remnants of the post-war scrapping operation sat, neglected, into the 1960s. In the South Island, John Smith, an enthusiastic and enigmatic collector, had assembled a small but notable collection on his farm at Mapua, west of Nelson, including a couple of Kittyhawks, a Mustang, and a De Havilland Mosquito fighter-bomber. The latter was of wooden construction and most of those that had been sold to farmers, who would strip the airframes of metal components, had perished or were burned. Smith's Mosquito was under sheets of iron and reasonably intact. In April 1981, Group Captain Gillard visited Smith to view the collection, which was 'of considerable interest to the RNZAF Museum'. He observed that most of the aircraft were under cover, but that little had been done to conserve them. Gillard worried that there was a danger the aircraft 'could be lost forever through deterioration' or that they could be sold and exported. Smith complained of receiving countless visitors, particularly from members of the RNZAF, many of whom tried to convince him to part with the aircraft. Gillard reported: 'Smith is more than eccentric to say the least and his possibly well-founded reaction is that people are trying to "steal" everything he has. In order that the RNZAF might benefit Smith will need delicate handling.' Recognising that there was no point badgering Smith, Gillard sent a message to all air force bases requesting that no visits be made without prior clearance, with the hope being that the RNZAF could gain Smith's confidence and potentially procure one or more of his aircraft.¹⁴⁰ Barry also visited Smith, with a view to negotiating a trade for a Kittyhawk, but he was never able to. Smith's collection eluded the RNZAF Museum.¹⁴¹

The quest for aircraft dominated collection search and restoration efforts. The only genuine World War II combat aircraft located in this period was a dismantled Lockheed Hudson on a farm at Oamaru. Barry reported in 1982 that: 'Although 90% of the aircraft exists, its separate parts have been left lying about outdoors for nearly 40 years and would take approximately nine

¹³⁹ Barry, interview.

¹⁴⁰ Gillard, message for Deputy CAS and all base commanders, 10 April 1981, ABFK W4757 26/4/35 Part 3, R20383910, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁴¹ Trust Board, minutes, 14 May 1980, AFMNZ; Barry, interview.

man years and considerable expense to reassemble.¹⁴² While the owner wanted \$20,000, Barry was intent on offering only \$2000 because of the high restoration cost anticipated. When it became apparent that no other reasonably complete Hudson existed, Barry urged the Trust Board to approve acquisition, which it did in November 1984, for a sum of \$12,000. The stimulus was that other parties had become interested in the aircraft. An Otago support group undertook to fund the acquisition—although, ultimately, it could not do so, being able to raise only one-third of the purchase cost, with the rest then covered by the Trust Board.¹⁴³



Lockheed Hudson NZ2013 on the farm at Oamaru before it was procured for the RNZAF Museum.
(MUS9612310, AFMNZ)

¹⁴² Barry, Director's Report, September 1981-March 1982, appended to Trust Board minutes, 17 March 1982, Trust Board records, AFMNZ.

¹⁴³ Trust Board, minutes, 17 January 1985 and 11 June 1986, AFMNZ.

For other Second World War and early Cold War aircraft, the RNZAF Museum explored options of recovering wrecks from South Pacific islands or acquiring generic examples of aircraft that could be painted in New Zealand markings. This philosophy borrowed from that of some overseas museums, whereby an aircraft with a run of the mill history could be modified and painted to represent a notable example, essentially ‘stage props’.¹⁴⁴ The near absence of genuine RNZAF aircraft from before the 1960s meant this approach was the only way to have a fair representation of RNZAF aircraft, but it was not always successful, and required compromises. Locally, the Brevet Club of Christchurch had a Supermarine Spitfire Mk XVI fighter displayed on a plinth, which was offered to the Museum in exchange for a fibreglass replica; while this Spitfire had no RNZAF provenance, it was restorable and could be painted in No. 485 Squadron markings from the war in Europe.¹⁴⁵ In 1985, the Indonesian Air Force offered to exchange one of its Mustangs for a Vampire fighter, which was agreed to, except the Mustang was found to be a post-war Cavalier variant—a 1960s update of the Mustang featuring minor structural modifications and entirely new avionics, with the RNZAF restoration team reporting that the airframe was in very good condition but that the cockpit instrumentation was all new and the electrical system ‘now bears no resemblance to that of a P51D’.¹⁴⁶

In 1984, at Barry’s behest, the Trust Board accepted a MOTAT offer of a Consolidated-Vultee Catalina flying boat. The RNZAF used Catalinas during the Second World War and for some years after. By 1982, relations between the RNZAF Museum and MOTAT had been restored, with MOTAT loaning the remains of a pre-war Vildebeest torpedo bomber. The Catalina in question presented MOTAT with a problem. It had no New Zealand provenance—it had been shipped from Papua New Guinea after rescue from the Port Moresby airport’s fire dump—and required a restoration effort beyond the resources of MOTAT. The RNZAF Museum explored procurement options for a Catalina, including possibly recovering an ex-RNZAF Catalina from a lagoon in Tuvalu.¹⁴⁷ MOTAT Catalina enabled this gap in the collection to be filled, but the decision to accept the donation was ill-informed. The aircraft was found to be too large to be

¹⁴⁴ Gillespie, ‘Historic aircraft and spacecraft’, 269.

¹⁴⁵ Trust Board, minutes, 27 July 1984, AFMNZ.

¹⁴⁶ Wing Commander R.A. Keown, for Base Commander, Ohakea, to CAS, 9 July 1986, BCDW A1442 1900 1328-3 Part 1, R23492261, ANZ, Auckland.

¹⁴⁷ Air Commodore P. Neville, RNZAF Support Group, Operation Instruction 1/82, 26 February 1982, BCDW A1442 1900 1328-3 Part 1, R23492261, ANZ, Auckland.

transported on any RNZAF vehicle, and it was in worse condition than anticipated. The RNZAF explored lifting the flying boat using a Iroquois helicopter, but the aerodynamic shape of the hull made it ‘difficult and very slow to carry’, and being in ‘very poor condition with marked corrosion/damage [in] many places’ it was a ‘dangerous proposition for underslinging’.¹⁴⁸ The museum considered breaking the aircraft up into selected display sections, selling it, or scrapping it, but scrapping was thought to ‘have adverse effect on our future relationships with MOTAT ... and certainly would give bad publicity for RNZAF Museum in Auckland area’.¹⁴⁹ The RNZAF Museum reluctantly took possession of the aircraft essentially to ‘keep faith with the donor’, having acquired an example it could not possibly restore before the museum’s opening.¹⁵⁰



The Catalina flying boat following its removal from MOTAT storage site to Whenuapai. (WhG561-12-84, AFMNZ)

¹⁴⁸ RNZAF Auckland to Air Staff, Defence HQ, teleprinter message, 30 September 1983, BCDW A1442 1900 1328-3 Part 1, R23492261, ANZ, Auckland

¹⁴⁹ RNZAF Auckland to Air Staff, Defence HQ, teleprinter, 5 September 1983, BCDW A1442 1900 1328-3 Part 1, R23492261, ANZ, Auckland.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Subsequently, attempts were made to procure other aircraft from MOTAT. During 1985, the RNZAF Museum was able to exchange a civil-model Auster light aircraft for a more notable example held by MOTAT, being one the RNZAF had operated in Antarctic missions. Late that same year, Group Captain W.R. Donaldson, Wigram's base commander, proposed to the Trust Board that it could be an opportune time to approach MOTAT with a view to securing more of its military aircraft, noting that the RNZAF Museum was becoming 'recognized as the logical and appropriate repository of historic military aircraft' and that MOTAT could be convinced to deaccession certain aircraft in order to focus on transport technology. Donaldson described the relationship between the two museums as 'cautious, correct, but still co-operative', as shown by the exchange of Auster airframes and the gifting of the Catalina along with a set of Hudson wings. Donaldson understood that MOTAT's 'previous *lasses-faire* [sic] attitude' had been 'replaced by calls for tighter management, rationalized aims, and greater justification of expenditure', and that with its collection of aircraft exceeding the museum's capacity to shelter them, MOTAT could consider deaccessioning previously loaned Vildebeest, a Kittyhawk (which had been restored by RNZAF personnel), a Ventura, and, ambitiously, the Lancaster. However, Donaldson conceded that the Lancaster was 'unlikely', unless perhaps an offer of a less significant Freighter or Andover 'might mollify Aucklanders looking for a change'.¹⁵¹

In many respects, the most significant challenge of this period was fundraising for the new museum exhibition building. The Trust Board committed to funding an exhibition hall, and selected the winning design in early 1985. However, it struggled to generate sufficient funds to cover its part of the cost of museum operations, object acquisitions and restorations, and building works. By early 1985, the Trust Board had \$500,000 in its accounts, but required at least a million dollars more to meet its part of the project costs. During that year, however, the Trust approached the Minister of Defence with a proposal for cost-sharing to establish a new institution at Wigram. The idea developed between the Trust Board and AFHQ was to build a RNZAF College that would include a Historical Research Centre, with the RNZAF Museum forming part of the complex and playing a more clearly defined role in officer and other rank

¹⁵¹ Group Captain W.R. Donaldson, Base Commander, RNZAF Base Wigram, to RNZAF Museum Trust Board, 'RNZAF Museum Co-operation with the Museum of Transport and Technology', 22 October 1985, BCDW A1442 1900 1328-6 Part 1, R23492263, ANZ, Auckland.

education. To that end, Barry was retitled as the Director of Research and Studies. Of a total anticipated project cost of \$3.5 million, the Minister of Defence approved the expenditure of \$1.9 million of public funds for the construction of the RNZAF College.¹⁵² This gave the impetus required, although the RNZAF College would never actually eventuate, being stripped from the project planning, after the Trust Board had committed to building the new exhibition hall.

The raising of significant funding required three forms of investment, in addition to that provided by the RNZAF: first, donations by corporations; second, donations from the veteran community and the general public; and third, donations and commitment from service members. In essence, the RNZAF Museum became a community project, establishing what Elizabeth Crooke has termed an ‘inclusive community’,¹⁵³ with a concerted effort being made to ensure the museum was seen as relevant by all stakeholders and worthwhile investing in. In briefings that were conducted on all air force bases, Barry and others emphasised that they saw the museum as ‘necessary to provide a home for our heritage’ and to ensure that there could be a stronger knowledge of the service’s history and traditions and that the Air Force’s story would be ‘well’. A further message was that it was timely to create the museum, in part because the ranks of those who had forged the air force’s early history were becoming thin, but that at that time there was also ‘most enthusiastic support’ for the museum project from World War II veterans in particular. By establishing the museum, that earlier generation could see *their* museum, and a step would be taken to stop items of heritage disappearing ‘into rubbish dumps or into private collections’.¹⁵⁴ To secure greater support from across the RNZAF, the original management committee was replaced by a RNZAF Museum Co-ordination Committee (alternatively titled the Development Committee) that included representation from each air force base, and liaison teams were established on each base. By pulling together government support, corporate support, and the individual support of serving members and veterans, the Trust Board was able to generate the funding required, even in light of the collapse of the RNZAF College concept.

¹⁵² Trust Board, minutes, 10 April 1985 and 30 October 1985, AFMNZ.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Crooke, ‘Museums and community’, in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 170.

¹⁵⁴ ‘RNZAF Museum: Base briefing team notes’, undated, BCDW A1442 941/1/0 RG Part 2, R23492094, ANZ, Auckland.



Inside the main exhibition hall during the preparation phase in early 1987. The Canberra bomber in the foreground is an example donated by the Royal Australian Air Force, and retained in Australian markings. (WgG312-59-87, AFMNZ)

The timeframes between the decision to proceed with the new exhibition building, construction, and opening were remarkably short. During 1986, as the deadline for the museum opening loomed, and the new exhibition hall neared completion, calls were put out for volunteers from across the RNZAF, and the local veteran community, to assist with planning, administration, restoration, and exhibition preparation.¹⁵⁵ The pace was frenetic. Barry noted in February 1987 how the tempo of work ‘increased significantly’, and that ‘new faces come and go’, as staff and volunteers, including also veterans, worked all week, through weekends and at times through the

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Rob Angelo, Christchurch, 19 June 2023.

night, to complete aircraft restorations and prepare exhibition spaces and objects.¹⁵⁶ During March, the new exhibition hall was prepared, with aircraft moved into position, some in their original RNZAF markings and others with different histories serving as representative airframes. It was these aircraft, and objects placed around them, that drew crowds on the opening day of 1 April 1987.

Regrettably, there is little information in the archival files pointing to the exhibition philosophy, or noting the stories that individual objects conveyed. Barry's executive officer, Flight Lieutenant Rob Angelo, described the museum as 'something like a church'.¹⁵⁷ This was no doubt a place to remember, worship, reflect, without necessarily being challenged. A decade after the opening, it was evident that the past was portrayed in a manner that veterans and service members could live with, with there being obvious 'tensions between the need for historical accuracy as to social consequences, and the need of survivors and descendants to sanitise their actions'.¹⁵⁸ This is reflected in the fact that Barry commented, at the end of the first month of the museum's official opening, that there was satisfaction to be derived from 'hearing the accolades of praise' but understanding that it was 'mainly "the converted" coming through the doors'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Commanding Officer's comments for February 1987, RNZAF Museum, Unit History Sheet, ABFK W4718 7232, R16095883, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁵⁷ Angelo, interview.

¹⁵⁸ Cardow and Emerson, '*Tourist Attraction? Or Reverence*', 6.

¹⁵⁹ Commanding Officer's comments for April 1987, RNZAF Museum, Unit History Sheet, ABFK W4718 7232, R16095883, ANZ, Wellington

Conclusion

The story of the foundation of the Air Force Museum of New Zealand is one first of missed opportunities and then optimistic creation, pained development, and finally frenetic development and achievement. In many respects, the opening of the museum on 1 April 1987 was merely the completion of the museum's first phase. The museum had been established to record the history of the RNZAF, and (while not explored at depth in this research report) it had achieved the objective of collecting historical materials including important collections of documents and photographs. However, the expectation that an air force museum would exhibit aircraft, which became evident as soon as the RNZAF Historical Centre was established, and the need to prepare exhibits for a museum opening, meant many of the other important aspects were pushed to one side. Thérèse Angelo wrote that in some respects, the opening meant the honeymoon was over, as the need to build an aviation collection, restore aircraft, and be able to present these to the museum visitors in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the Air Force's creation, meant other important aspects of museum management and curatorship had been, of necessity, neglected.¹⁶⁰ This was a perspective that Barry himself agreed with.¹⁶¹

The missed opportunities explored in the first chapter of this research report had profound effects for the early development of the RNZAF Historical Centre and then the RNZAF Museum. The failure of the RNZAF to retain examples of historic aircraft from its earliest years, its test of arms during the Second World War, and the challenging decades of the Cold War meant the pickings were slim when eventually the RNZAF resolved to establish a museum. Decades of neglect of cultural heritage, and a lack of understanding as to the importance of aircraft as museum objects, meant firstly that the RNZAF needed to change its mindset to ensure that historic aircraft would be preserved, and secondly that the new museum would encounter collection gaps that were impossible to fill without compromises. The new museum sought to procure genuine RNZAF aircraft to the extent that was possible, including types that were recently retired from service, such as the C-47 Dakota and Freighter—something that has continued to this day, with at least one example of newly retired aircraft type being allocated the RNZAF Museum, most recently

¹⁶⁰ Angelo, *From Historical Centre to Air Force World*, 29.

¹⁶¹ Barry, interview.

with the 2023 allocation of a retired Lockheed P-3K2 Orion to the Air Force Museum of New Zealand.¹⁶² On the other hand, the missed opportunities compelled the RNZAF Museum to make a collection decision to procure a number of representative aircraft to be presented to the visitor wearing generic or fictionalised identities.

The primary objects in any aviation museum are its aircraft. While other objects contribute to telling the social history of the organisation, the aircraft dominate the exhibition space and may in fact be a dominant factor in motivating people to visit the museum. The emphasis on aircraft may however act to also emphasise the story of aircrews and to a lesser extent those ground staff tasked with servicing the aircraft, to the exclusion of others—a circumstance that is, of necessity, outside the scope of this research report. Like many aviation museums worldwide, the AFMNZ includes a mixture of authentic and fictionalised aircraft that together tell part of the story of, in this case, the RNZAF and those who flew and serviced the aircraft. The decisions made in both the Air Force's and the Museum's pasts, around what to preserve and exhibit, continue to have collection management ramifications to this day. Understanding those decisions will help us explain the nature and scope of the collection.

¹⁶² David King, 'National hero on its way to the Museum', 15 August 2023, AFMNZ, <https://airforcemuseum.co.nz/blog/national-hero-on-its-way-to-the-museum/>

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