## **HART, William Ewart**

William Ewart Hart was born on 20th April 1885, at Parramatta N.S.W., the son of William & Maria Hart.

He was educated at Parramatta South Superior Public School. His father was partner in the firm of the well-known timber merchants, Hart, Hitchcock & Co.

At 14 years of age he was making hybrid motorcycles in his very own workshop at Parramatta (N.S.W.). The following year he was riding them.

Aged 16 years he was apprenticed to a local dentist, Mr Maxwell. He was registered as a dentist on 26 June 1906. After registration he practiced as a dentist in Wyalong, where he rode the first motorcycle and drove the first car in town. In 1908 he went on to practice in Newcastle.

He has always been interested in motor mechanics, and whilst still in his teens secured second place in a motor race from Goulburn to Sydney.

On 3rd February 1909, George Jenner saved the life of W. E. Hart. Jenner later recalled that he first met Hart on 2nd February 1909 and met him again the next day about 7 o'clock In the morning, on Newcastle Beach. He warned Hart about the dangerous surf and Hart said he would be careful. A few minutes afterwards, however, there were cries of "Man drowning!" Hart was being carried seawards in a strong current. Jenner swam out, and after a hard struggle, landed Hart at the Soldiers' Baths, near Fort Scratchley. Six months later Ald. Jenner was given a gold medal, from William Hart, in appreciation of his action in saving Hart's life. The medal was presented at a function presided over by the then Mayor of Newcastle (Mr. John C. Reid). On 9th February 1939, during Ald. Jenner's term as Mayor of Greater Newcastle, William Hart came to Newcastle to attend a benefit pageant for Ernie Buck, Instructor of Newcastle Aero Club, who had lost his life some time before, and he again took the opportunity of thanking Ald. Jenner for his action.

After he left Newcastle, Hart went to Wyalong, struck gold on a property there and sold out to a syndicate.

Tiring of his profession he became, in 1909, a commercial traveller for a well-known line of motor cars. The control of a pioneer motor car service on the North Coast gave him further mechanical experience. ‘He had more money than the average young man.’**1**

In March 1910 his grandfather, William Hart, Parramatta builder, and one of the founders of the well-known firm of Hart, Hitchcock and Co., Parramatta, died aged 80 years. ‘He was a native of Throwbridge, Wiltshire, England, and 56 years prior he came to Australia. He settled in Parramatta, where he soon became well known in building circles, for his enterprise and good work. In the early days of Parramatta, when in partnership with the late Mr. Jabez Lavor, Mr. Hart had a hand in the erection of many of the largest and best buildings in this district. Mr. W. Hart was the builder of the present Methodist Church, Parramatta, one of the biggest and costliest of the Methodist buildings in this State. Mr. Hart gave up business some years ago. He was twice married, and his children — the issue of the first marriage — included four sons and two daughters. The sons are Dr. Hart (for some time one of the doctors attached to the Parramatta Medical Institute), and Messrs. Wm. Hart (of Hart, Hitchcock and Co.), Geo. Hart, and Joseph Hart.

He was the last surviving charter member of Prince Alfred Division, Sons and Daughters of Temperance.’**2**

In 1910, with the help of his father, he built the first aeroplane to fly here. It was a crude machine. Set round the motor was a framework made of conduit, piano strings, pieces of cane, and other scraps. The pilot’s seat was taken from an old plough.

There were no instruments on the plane to show the pilot when sufficient engine power and revolutions had been developed to attempt a take-off. This was hinted at, however by straining poundage shown on spring scales, one end of which was tied to a tree and the other to the plane.

Mr Hart wore a mask to protect himself from flying oil fumes and wind.**3**

In 1911 Hart met Joseph Hammond who was touring Australia as a demonstration pilot for the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company.

He bought (for £1,333) a Bristol Box-kite from Hammond, received some instruction from Hammond's mechanic, McDonald.

The enterprise would require complete self-confidence and nerves of steel.

He gained the first pilot's licence in Australia, and the 199th British "ticket,". When his hobby spared the time, he practised as a dentist.

On 30th September 1911 a flight was scheduled, from Penrith to Sydney Showground, to be the longest yet made in Australia.

The plane, which was parked at Belmore Park, Penrith, was blown over by a gale, and was wrecked. Hart, with the help of friends and the mechanic, built a new aircraft, using some salvaged parts. He made the whole of the woodwork himself.

He then made a trial flight in October in his Bristol Biplane at Penrith, billed as the first Australian Aviator.**4**



On 3rd November 1911, early in the morning, Mr. Hart made three aerial trips from Penrith, in the direction of the Mountains, each trip being about 15 miles, and, on two occasions, he took a passenger with him.

Then came the trip from Penrith to Parramatta, when Mr. Hart, with his 16 years old younger brother Jack as passenger, completed the first cross-country flight in New South Wales [for which he was awarded the shield of the Aerial League of Australia], the trip taking 19 minutes, the distance flown was estimated at 19 miles, flying at the rate of 60 miles per hour, and reaching an altitude of about 3000 feet.

A beautiful descent was made in the Parramatta Park. In 1963, a monument was erected in Parramatta Park, where he had landed.

He then went and had breakfast with his father, and, after breakfast decided to do a circle or two of Parramatta. He decided not to take his brother with him, as the wind was very tricky. Leaving the park, he soon found the wind altogether too tricky, and as the machine was commencing to play up, he took advantage of a clear paddock at Seven Hills, where he made a good descent. He roped the plane down securely, where it would remain till favourable weather conditions would allow a return trip.**5**

In May he was granted the Royal Aero Club of Great Britain Certificate.

That month he was sued by Hugh Byrne, of the Elizabeth Dairy, Epsom-road, Waterloo, for damages, assessed at £20, the claim being the first of the kind made in Australia.

‘The plaintiff claimed that the defendant propelled an aeroplane over, upon, and against his land, on which his dairy cows were de-pasturing, made a great noise and disturbance with the machine, and thereby frightened, disturbed, and stampeded the herd, with the result that two of the cows were killed, and others injured, besides which the supply of milk was greatly diminished, and he was hindered and disturbed in carrying on his business. Plaintiff further claimed that the defendant broke and entered upon his premises wherein the cows were being de-pastured.

The defence was that it was not an actionable wrong for an aviator to pass over a man's land.’**6**

On 15th June 1912 the first aerial race in Australia planned between W. E. Hart, of Australia, and A. B. “Wizard” Stone, of America, from the Ascot racecourse to Parramatta, was cancelled. The gathering witnessed some entertaining exhibition flights by the two aviators and some motor cycle racing; but Messrs. Hart and Stone declared that the wind was so strong and gusty up aloft that to attempt a cross country race would be madness and suicidal.

On 29th June 1912 William Hart, the Australian aviator, won the first aerial race held in Australia by defeating A. B. “Wizard” Stone, the American airman, in a race from Ascot to Parramatta.

Hart was at an advantage in being thoroughly acquainted with the course. Owing to the previous flying fiasco, the attendance was not large. The race was from the Surry Football Ground, Botany-road, Ascot, to Parramatta Park. The conditions provided that the men should toss for first start, that the winner should rise, his time being taken from the crossing of a line on the field, and that he should make straightway to Parramatta. The second aviator was to start within 10 minutes of the first. The arrival in Parramatta of each to be timed, the one making the journey in the shortest time to be named the winner. Hart won the toss. The wind was blowing fairly fresh from the south as he rose, but the Australian kept his course south-west, thus giving himself a chance to rise above it. When he reached about 500 feet he veered round to the right and headed to Parramatta. He accomplished the journey without mishap and received an ovation as he landed in Parramatta Park.

Stone was not so fortunate. Within five minutes of Hart's departure, Stone was up in the air, and the race had begun. The American flew splendidly, until he reached Lakemba when he got caught in a blinding rain squall and, losing his way he descended between Lakemba and Punchbowl. Being the only one to complete the distance Hart was declared the winner. His official time was 23min. 52sec, and the distance 20 miles.

Hart, who reckoned that over Flemington he was doing 70 miles an hour, with the wind helping him, told an interviewer that he had a pretty stern battle with the wind and rain.

[A 1943 “Daily Telegraph” article mentions a 1913 race between Hart and Stone, from Ascot to Parramatta, whereby Hart was forced down on the way and spent the night in a paddock, but he repaired the engine next day, and won the race. This event cannot be substantiated and is most likely a muddled version of the 1912 race between the two men.]**7**

Mr. Henry Dixon, an English aviator and motor engineer, with considerable experience in aerial flight, arriving in Australia, in late 1911, had become associated with Aviator Hart, and in conjunction with the latter he built Hart's monoplane.

In August 1912 Hart intended giving an exhibition of aviation in Wagga during show week but had to postpone his flight until the middle of September, owing to a mishap to his propeller. At the time he held the southern agency for the Ford cars, and at Wagga would be demonstrating the qualities of the car.

On 4th September 1912, at about 5.40 am., Mr. W. E. Hart was seriously injured, while trying his new monoplane at Richmond, and having ventured out of the aviation ground for the first time, was returning from a flight around Freeman's Reach, when, not far from his hangar, his engine went wrong. He was a couple of hundred feet up at the time, and was observed to be trying to plane down, when the machine seemed to get out of control, and suddenly plunged to earth with frightful velocity. It was literally smashed to pieces, and Hart was found beneath the wreck.

Hundreds of people witnessed the sensational spectacle, and the general opinion was that the aviator could surely not come out of the ordeal alive. His mechanics, who had been awaiting his return to the tent, were the first to reach the wreck, and it was with much difficulty they got him out from among the tangle. They were shortly joined by an ambulance student living nearby, Mr. Headford, who witnessed the accident. He and Mrs. W. Percival rendered first aid, stopping the bleeding from the severe wounds to his head and legs. Two medical men were also promptly brought in motor cars, and an examination revealed a compound fracture to the left leg below the knee, and a bad wound (from one of the wires) to the same leg on the thigh, which bled profusely; also a broken knee-cap on the right leg. He sustained a fractured skull and was unconscious most of the day. He was conveyed to the Windsor Hospital, four miles away, in one of the Army Medical Corps wagons.

A week later it was reported that ‘he was battling for life in Windsor Hospital, with a fractured skull, concussion of the brain, broken leg, broken kneecap, bruises, and cuts all over his body. That he stands any chance of recovery at all, and has been able to thus far survive his injuries, has made the medical men in attendance wonder, and they have stated that only a marvellous constitution could have withstood such a battering. How the accident happened the injured aviator knows, and he is too weak to explain the matter yet. Hart, who had learned his flying on a biplane, was trying out a new monoplane when the accident occurred.

Another week later it was reported that good progress towards recovery continued to be made by the injured aviator, W. E. Hart. He was still unable to explain how the accident happened; his mind seems to be quite blank on that matter. It is said that, in compliance with the entreaties of his relatives, he has declared his intention to give up aviation, and to resume the profession of dentist.

In October he was still receiving medical attention. That month, Aviator A. B. “Wizard” Stone, the man who raced Aviator Hart, fell from his aeroplane in Melbourne, and sustained concussion of the brain, a fractured collarbone and other injuries.**8**

In March 1913 ‘Mr. W. E. Hart spent a few hours in Albury. It is Mr. Hart’s ambition to be the first bird-man to fly from Sydney to Melbourne, and he is going over the ground by motor car to see what the conditions of his trip in the air may be like. Owing to bad weather, Mr. Hart left his motor car at Wagga, and came on to Albury by train. The honour and glory of flying seem to appeal more to Mr. Hart than does the money to be made out of this novel form of killing oneself. He simply wants the record of flying the Sydney to Melbourne trip - nothing more; and suggests that, as he will have to land at Albury to replenish his petrol tank, the Albury hospital authorities should take charge of some suitable local enclosure, and charge for admission to see the plucky aviator and his machine. He will alight for only a few minutes - not more than ten - but this should be a rich ten minutes for the hospital. Mr. Hart expects to cover the inter-capital flight in 6 ½ hours, and to make the attempt in about three months. He is now about to repair his biplane, which, it will be remembered, was wrecked in the flight in Sydney some months back, which nearly cost the aviator his life. On this occasion everything but the engine was ruined, so that the machine has to be rebuilt.’**9**

[The Sydney to Melbourne Race appears not to have happened.]

By May 1913 ‘Mr. W. E. Hart, who sustained severe injuries through his monoplane accident, had now quite recovered his health. Now he has dispensed with his stick, and there is not even a limp ln his walk. Now that he Is restored to full health and strength, Mr. Hart has re-commenced the practice of his profession of surgeon-dentist at 183 Pitt-street, Sydney. In his spare time the aviator is building a hydro-aeroplane.’

In June 1913 he sold 1726 acres situated at Wyalong to Mathew Bunnett of Yammathan, Victoria.

In July 1913 it was reported that Mr. W. E. Hart, dentist, had resumed the practice of his profession at his new rooms, 183 Pitt-street, near King-street. Phone, City 3813. ‘Parramatta patients may see Mr. Hart at his home, Wentworth-street, Parramatta, by appointment. Phone 434.’**10**

On 20th January 1914 ‘he ascended again in a biplane he built himself, near Richmond, this morning. Several other flights were made, and in the longest he was carrying a passenger for a distance of three miles at a height of 150 feet.’

[On the previous night, the tent in which his new biplane was housed at Richmond was blown down and the aeroplane was badly damaged. Several ribs of the machine were broken, and the rudder and steering gear were smashed.]

‘Hart nearly came to grief. While descending for the last time some wires which were fastened to the wheels of his machine, snapped, and part of the landing gear crumpled. The machine is much smaller than the usual biplane, and It carries an engine with which Hart has already flown 5000 miles. [Joseph] Hammond flew over Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and Perth with it, and it was also the engine used when the first army aeroplane wireless experiment was made on Salisbury Plains. Hart found that he had forgotten all he knew about flying and was like a novice when he first ascended.’

‘Mr. Hart now only flies, to use his own words, "for amusement.” He announces his intention of keeping to flying only as a hobby - he might fly at charitable affairs but was averse to flying publicly again.’**11**

In May 1914 the Aerial League of Australia awarded the gold medal to Mr. W. E. Hart for his pioneering achievements In Australia aviation. The presentation was made at the League’s annual meeting.**12**

By February 1916 Mr. Hart had enlisted and was in the garb of a British officer. On final leave, he was due to go overseas as a Flight-Lieutenant with an Australian flying corps in March. The crowd going comprise 200 mechanics and 30 officers (about 20 pilots like W.E.H.). They had been hard at work training, for some weeks now, at Point Cook, Laverton, Victoria. He played a major part in the formation of No. 1 Squadron, A.F.C. They were to join the Royal Flying Corp.

In August he returned home with a number of invalided troops. Lieut. Hart was far from being an invalid, but when he got to work practicing at an English aerodrome, he found that his old injuries came against him. He says he had a couple of fairly bad turns in the air and once, when he was up 2000ft, by himself, his nerves completely failed him.

As he remarked: "I was never nearer being killed in my life. Another 500ft and I would not have got down. When I got down I was all out. They would not allow me to fly any more. A couple of days after, even when watching some of the airmen flying, my hands shook like leaves. Then, again, all my old injuries came against me. Dr. Mills, who examined me, said I had no right to be there. He said he knew my case, as Dr. Hinder had told him all about it."

‘He added that he was very disappointed at being "turned down," but he realised that, after his bad accident at Richmond, the air was no place for him. Apart from flying, however, he says he feels in splendid health. He says there are a great many lads from Australia and other outposts of the Empire in the flying schools in England, and they are doing excellent work.’**13**

On 10th August 1929, at St. Phillip's Church, Church Hill, Sydney, Miss Thelma Clare Cock, younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. Cock. of Lamrock-avenue, Bondi, was married to Mr. William Ewart Hart, second son of Mr. and Mrs. William Hart, of "Bertonia," Wentworth street, Parramatta.14

In February 1937 he is described thus: ‘Now in his 51st year, his thickset frame is well covered; he has a big dental practice in Sydney, some wheat farms at West Wyalong, and a son and heir, aged nine months.’**15**

In February 1938, in a lecture at the Australian Air "Wings Over Australia" exhibition, at the Sydney Town Hall, he told of his many interesting early experiences in aviation. ‘He was the first Australian to hold a pilot's licence and flew a homemade biplane in Sydney in 1911 at a speed of 37 miles an hour. Mr. Hart, who is a Sydney dentist, said that he built the machine himself, fitted it with a 37-horse power Gnome rotary engine, and learned to fly it himself. His machine was the only plane in Australia, and he obtained the first Australian pilot's certificate at Penrith. He also passed tests in Australia to obtain one of the early English flying tickets. His pilot's seat, he said, was on the front of the machine, and he was exposed to all the weather. It was the first and only machine to land on the Sydney Showground, and take off again. He could claim that he was the pioneer of Richmond Aerodrome, as he had landed there several times, after noting its possibilities for aviation. He was also the first man to make a cross-country flight, and had startled the residents of Parramatta, his birthplace, by making a landing there.

POWER TESTING

With no revolution indicator on his plane, his only method of testing the power of his engine was to tie a strong spring scale to the tail of his machine and fix the scale to a post. If the machine pulled the scale to 90lb. he knew that it was in flying condition. The fabric "dope" which he used on the wings of his plane was a mixture of sago and hot water. When the mixture dried, it tightened the fabric on the wings. Mr. Hart said that the plane was so slow that it was extremely difficult to manage. He had to fight for control all the time he was in the air. He flew the plane a total of about 10,000 miles, but towards the end of its career a crash was almost a weekly occurrence. The first aerial pictures were taken from the machine, when he took two other men and a camera up. He considered that a remarkable performance. Mr. Hart said that he built other planes in 1911 and 1912. His flying career was temporarily ended shortly before the war by a bad crash from 303 feet. He broke both legs, fractured his skull, and suffered other injuries. He gave up flying until the war, when he went away with No. 1 Squadron, A.F.C., but was invalided home because of his pre-war injuries. He flew after the war, and still maintained the keenest interest in aviation. A section of the exhibition is devoted to Mr. Hart's machines.’**16**

William Ewart Hart died on 29th July 1943, aged 58 years. He was found dead in Stuart Lane, off Bathurst Street, City. An autopsy showed that his death was caused by heart failure. Mr. Hart, who was a well-known city dentist, had left his surgery in Elizabeth Street shortly after 11 a.m. to visit an electrical firm near Stuart Lane. Apparently, he had a heart seizure and staggered into the lane where he collapsed. His body remained in a sitting position against the wall for six hours, although thousands of people walked past the lane in that time. At 2 p.m. a woman noticed the body and reported to the police.

Up to the time of his death he was a reserve officer of the R.A.A.F. He was also an honorary member of the Aeronautical Society of England (he held English flying licence 199) and was a vice-president of the Australian Flying Corps and Air Force Association.

He was survived by a widow, (Clare), and young son [William].

His home was in Chorley Avenue, Cheltenham.

His remains were interred in the Methodist Cemetery, Rookwood.**17**

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**NOTE**: Additional information contained within Beecroft Cheltenham History Group website.