



Frank Neale

The Essex Adventurer#

We have known about Frank Neale, aviator, for many years now and researched a limited tale of his exploits from time to time. Now thanks to the Internet his Australian connections have become more apparent..

Frank was born in September 1895 and was an ex-Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force pilot who lived in Thornwood in the years after the Great War [1914-18] trading as the Essex Aviation Company offering joy rides from a field near to North Weald airfield using an Avro 504 he acquired in January 1923.

The reason why he was living there is clear, his family ran the garage on what was then the main road from London to Cambridge and Newmarket – the A11 - as George Neale & Son during the 1920s and 1930s. Much changed it is still there today near to the junction with Rye Hill Road serving the travelling public.

Before the war Frank was an Mechanical and Electrical Engineer, presumably in the garage, but he was called up into the Army Service Corps Motor Transport as a probationary 2nd Lieutenant – again making use of his mechanical skills.

He transferred to the Royal Flying Corps as a pilot, and by the end of the war had flown numerous aircraft types including most of the available de Havilland types [DH4, DH6, DH9, DH9A] as well as the BE2e, RE8, Armstrong Whitworth FK8, Bristol Monoplane, the Sopwith Pup and Camel and the Avro 504.

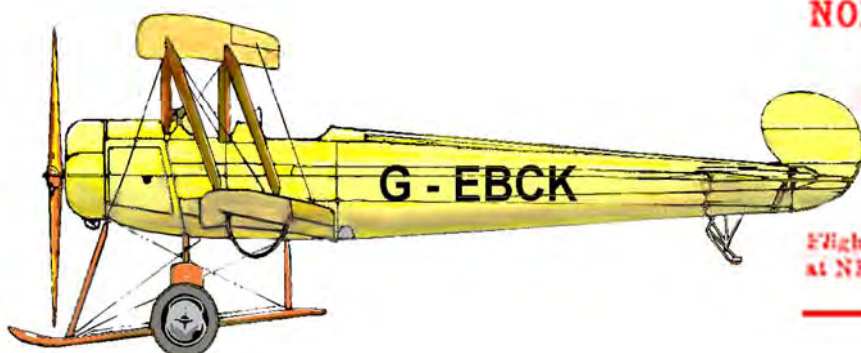
During the war Neale met an Australian aviator Herbert Larkin and it is clear that meeting was to craft the future course of his life. He ended the war as an RAF Flying Officer and an assistant Instructor at No.1 Training Depot Station. Although still in the RAF Reserve he left the service and was issued with UK Civilian Pilots Licence No.171.

Frank was just one of many young men who had been trained to fly in the war but now had a skill and very little use for it. There were many pilots but as yet few airlines to fly for and many sought their fortune in 'start up' businesses that were effectively trying to find out what this very new business of flying could do for the world.

He may be the same F. Neale who was flying 504 G-EAEB for S. Sumerfield & Co. when it crashed at Norwich on 25 September 1921, the pilot was not injured in that incident but the Avro was wrecked.

Frank acquired his own Avro 504, one of a batch of 150 Avro 504K built by Parnall & Sons in Bristol against a military order as E3379. During the war the aircraft was allocated as one of a number for Grand Fleet use.

After military service it was overhauled and converted from being a standard two-seater to a three seat configuration by F J V Holmes at East Hannay and registered to them as G-EBCK on 29.4.1922.

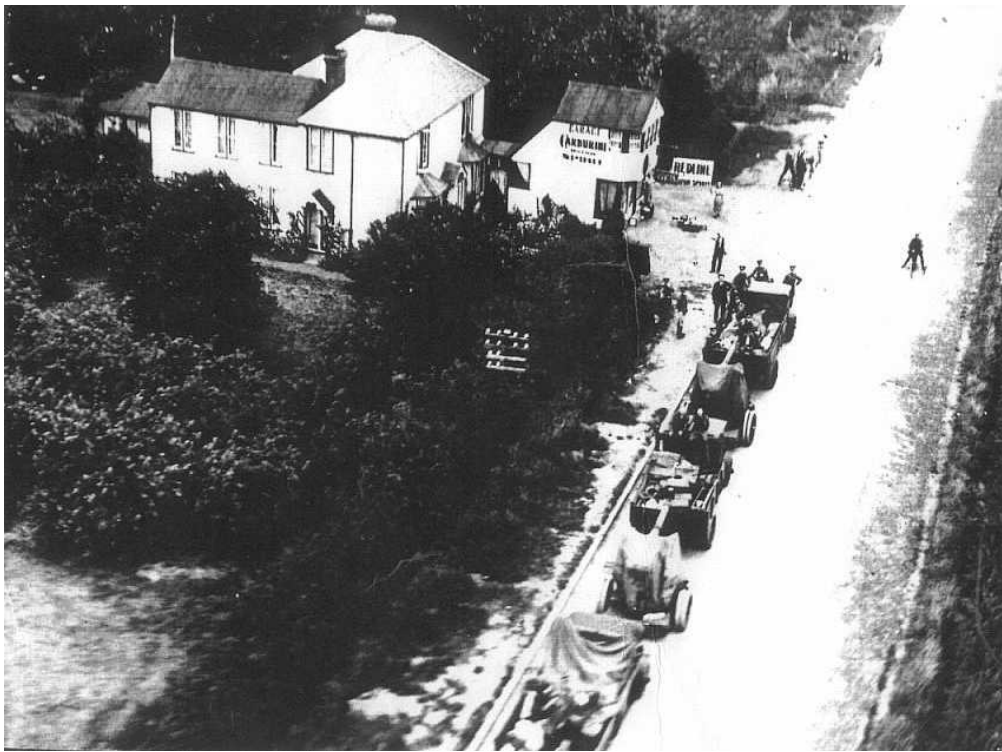


FLYING!

Come and experience the joys of Flying
ON
AVRO 3-SEATER
WITH
FRANK NEALE
(OF EPPING) Late R.F.C. & R.A.F.
AT
NORTH WEALD AERODROME.

Flying from 10.30 till Dusk from
12/6.

Flights can be Booked with DAVIS & Co., Stationers;
at NEALE'S GARAGE; and on the AERODROME.

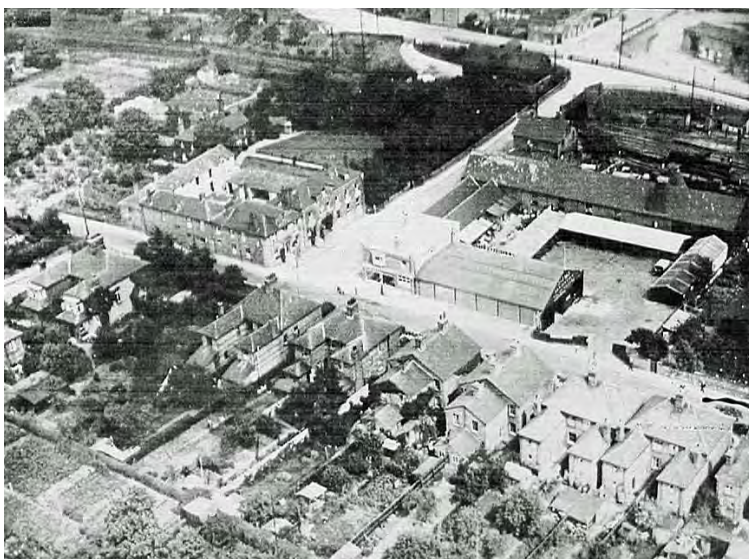


The family garage north of Thornwood with a road train parked up outside on the A11.

We know he used the Avro to undertake joy-rides from North Weald and other locations. It was reported that he 'did well at Epping and also on Margate beach' but was also reported as providing joyriding at Cliftonville August/Sept 1923 with the same biplane.

His posters mentioned he flew from North Weald Aerodrome but we really do not know whether it was the Great War flying ground or some other field nearer to the garage – both offered areas of flat grass.

There are some aerial photographs taken by Frank of the Bishops Stortford skyline and another of the family garage with a road train parked up outside on the A11. The photographs, taken from the Avro, passed down to the well-known local food shop owner and keen local aviation historian Alan Church. From him they passed to the North Weald Airfield Museum.

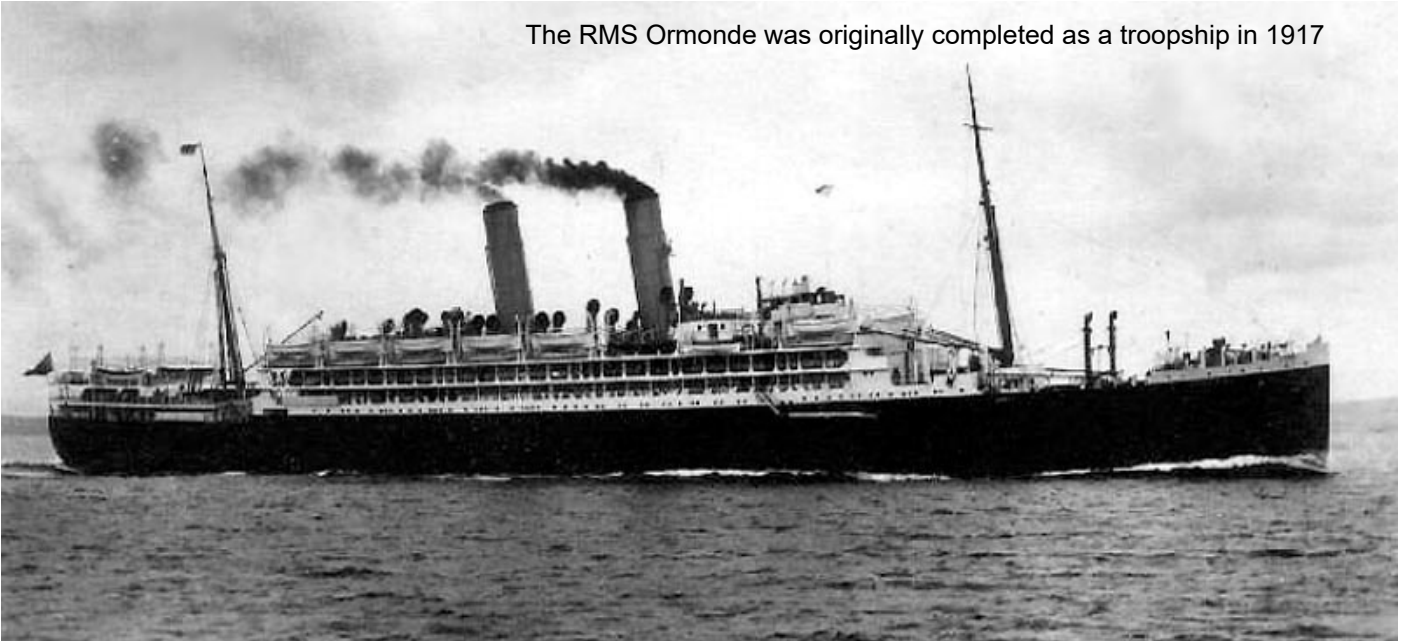


Views of Bishops Stortford taken by Frank Neale

Early in 1925 Frank Neale sold the Avro to B Roberts and left the UK for a new flying career in Australia.

At that point the story of Frank Neale should have finished but Frank Neale thrived in Australia. He went on from relative obscurity to being an aviator – indeed a pioneer - of some standing ‘Down Under’ and his name lives on in two or three remote places in the country and in aviation folklore.

The RMS Ormonde was originally completed as a troopship in 1917



Frank Neale arrived in Freemantle, Perth, Australia on 3 February 1925 aboard the Orient liner R.M.S. Ormonde. He had been persuaded to come to Australia by Bert Hinkler and was contracted as a new pilot for Western Australian Airways. W.A. Airways as it became known had a government mail contract on the route from Geraldton to Derby via intermediate ports and they employed some well known pioneer names of the day including Charles Kingsford Smith. Neale replaced him when he went off to do other things. The aircraft they were flying were tiny compared to today, they were giving up the Bristol Fighter based Bristol Tourer for the much favoured airliner of the day the DH.50.

De Havilland DH50



By late 1926 Neale had joined Jim Larkin at Australian Aerial Services (AAS) in Melbourne flying charters undertaking surveying the vast country and on the lookout for grazing land.

Many of the flights were simply investigating how aviation could be used profitably and involved long distance flights in unsophisticated and relatively unreliable aircraft across still uncharted territory.



1924 Frank Neale and a tri-motor in the desert.

Moving from periods in operating regular airline style flights he soon returned to survey operations and aerial surveys were undertaken in the years 1930, 1933, 1935 and 1937 with Neale as the chief pilot.

During 1930 survey flights several new salt lakes were mapped and named. The largest was named Lake Mackay after its discoverer, and another in Northern Territory, Lake Neale after Frank. In local terms it may have been 'small' and inhospitable but it still covers 120 square miles of Aboriginal land – about a tenth of the size of Essex.

As if that were not enough there is a nature reserve in the Western Australian desert that is known as Neale Junction.

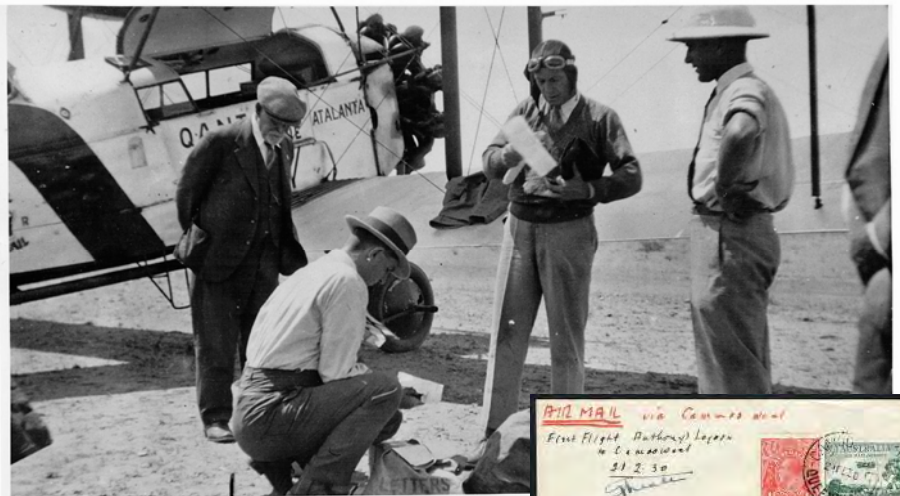
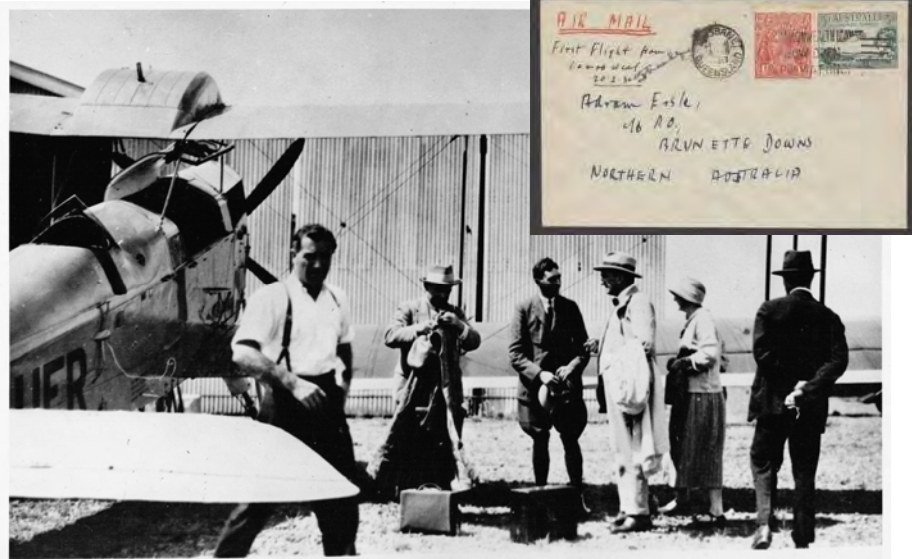
Today Neale Junction is a hot and dusty spot marking the junction of Connie Sue Highway and Anne Beadell Highway. Red soil, kangaroo and even an abandoned aircraft wreck To give you a handle on the magnitude of this other remote bit of territory there is a location about 25 miles from Neale Junction that is known as Neale Junction Camp. So it may be just a desolate spot on the map but it is again a mighty big one!

A modern image from Neale Junction

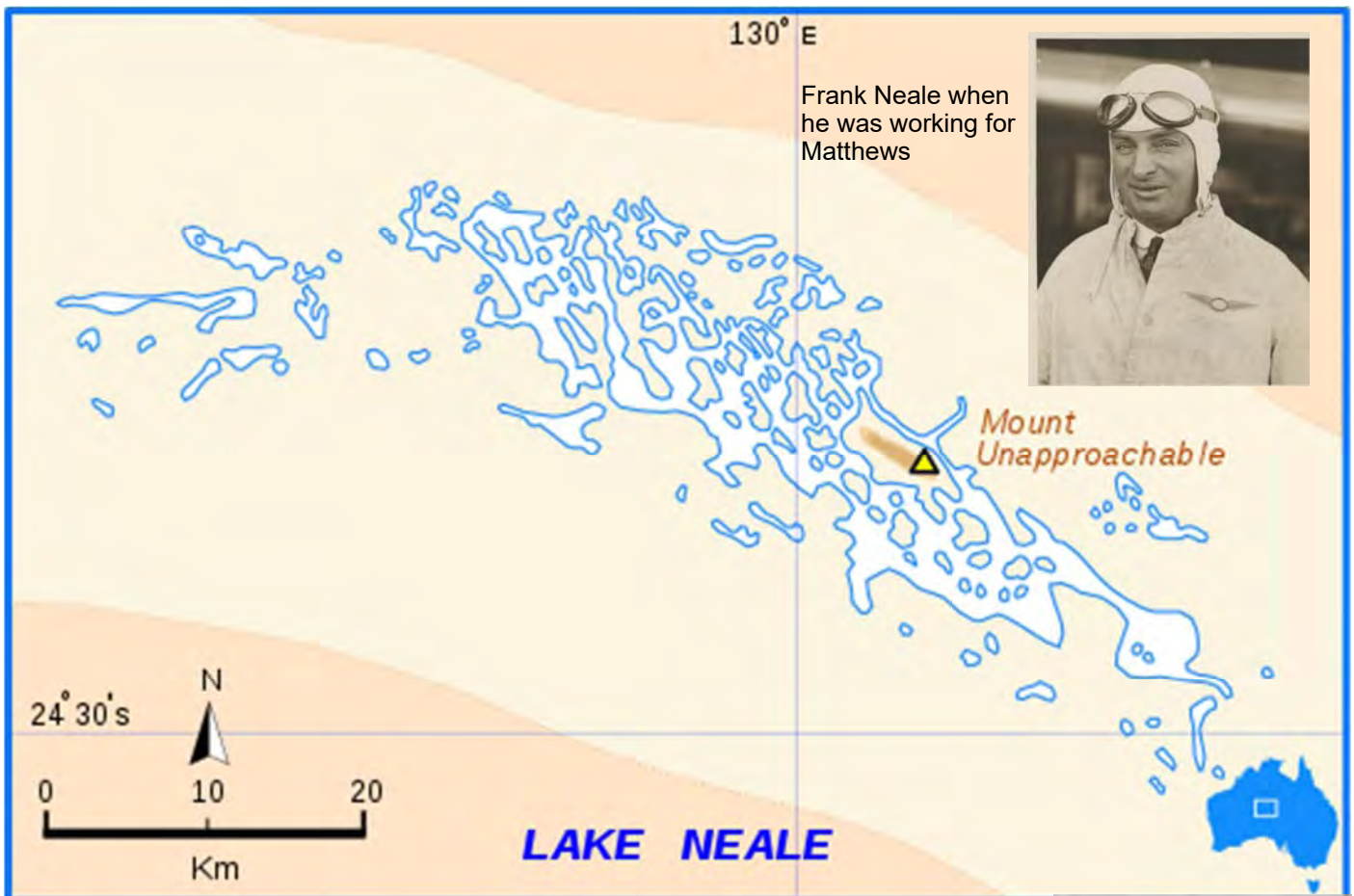


In June 1930, Frank Neale became the first pilot to land an aircraft at Ayers Rock (Uluru) during one of these survey flights.

With the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Larkin's companies came under financial pressure, and Frank Neale teamed up with



Frank Neale is the second from the right



G.C. Matthews [Matthews Aviation Pty] operating regular flights across Bass Strait to Tasmania.

The aircraft in the first instance was a Saro Cutty Sark VH-UNV, a twin engined amphibian. It was replaced in September 1931 by a Saro Windover with three engines.

In January 1933 while flying between King Island and Melbourne, the aircraft suffered a failure of two engines forcing Frank Neale to land on the

BASS STRAIT SERVICE.
May Begin Next Month.
FRANK NEALE AS PILOT.

MELBOURNE, Tuesday. — Mr. Frank Neale, who has seen most of Australia from the air in the past 10 years, is about to join Captain G. C. Matthews at the Essendon aerodrome. Mr. Neale piloted the air mail machine on the Melbourne-Hay route for several years, and recently he spent some months on the Northern Australian service inaugurated by Australian Aerial Services Ltd. He has flown several parties to Central Australia.

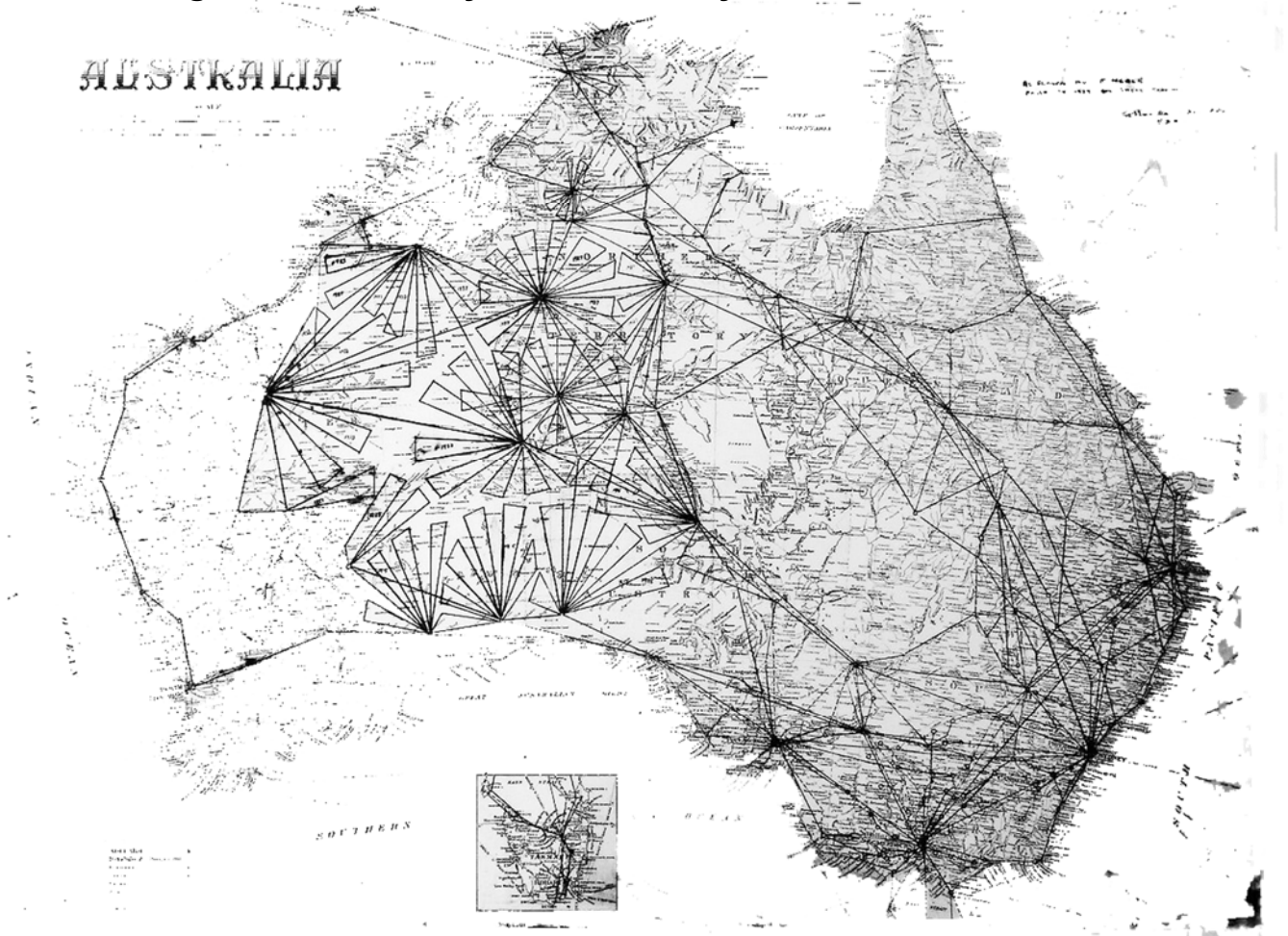
Mr. Neale will probably have charge of Captain Matthews' amphibian, the Cutty Sark, which will link Tasmania with the mainland. This service is expected to begin next month.

Mr. F. Neale.




1933 Saro Cutty Sark VH-UNV when operated by Matthews

Flights of discovery undertaken by Frank Neale in Australia



ocean and taxi 25 miles to the beach with the remaining engine. All six occupants survived. In 1935 Frank formed a charter service under the name Neale's Air Services Ltd., Sydney.

He returned home to England at least once in the inter-war years; he is reported to have flown a



1936 DH90 Dragonfly VH-UXA back to the UK via Hong Kong in early 1939 after the machine was sold to a new owner from Croydon in the UK.

Frank returned to Australia and continued to fly right up to the Second World War in September 1939 and then signed up for service with the RAAF as a Flying Officer at No.1 Communications Unit based in Laverton, Victoria. By then he was in his mid-forties so spared from the front-line and he flew a variety of aircraft for communications and transport of staff.

It was perhaps a quiet war but there were highlights such as that on 7th February 1940 when Frank was flying a Communication Flight Percival Vega Gull A32-2 that made a forced landing. The exhaust manifold broke in flight and the resulting flame caused a small portion of the lower fuselage to be burnt.

By 1941 he had been promoted to Flight Lieutenant, and in 1942 was a Squadron Leader, commanding the Unit. He was awarded the Air Force Cross in June 1942, and had logged 17,400 hours flying.

He was fifty years old by the time he was again discharged from the Air Force in March 1946, with the rank of Wing Commander and as far as we currently know he seems to have retired from active aviation. There may yet be more stories to tell about this particular man from Thornwood.

He died at his home in Glen Huntly a suburb of Melbourne in 1979.



Pioneer outback pilot, Mr Frank Neale, dies

MELBOURNE: One of Australia's pioneer outback pilots, Mr Frank Neale, died in Melbourne on Monday.

English-born Mr Neale, 84, who died at home in Glenhantly, will have a private funeral today.

He came to Australia in 1925 and commanded the RAAF communication unit in World War II, transporting defence force and civilian VIPs.

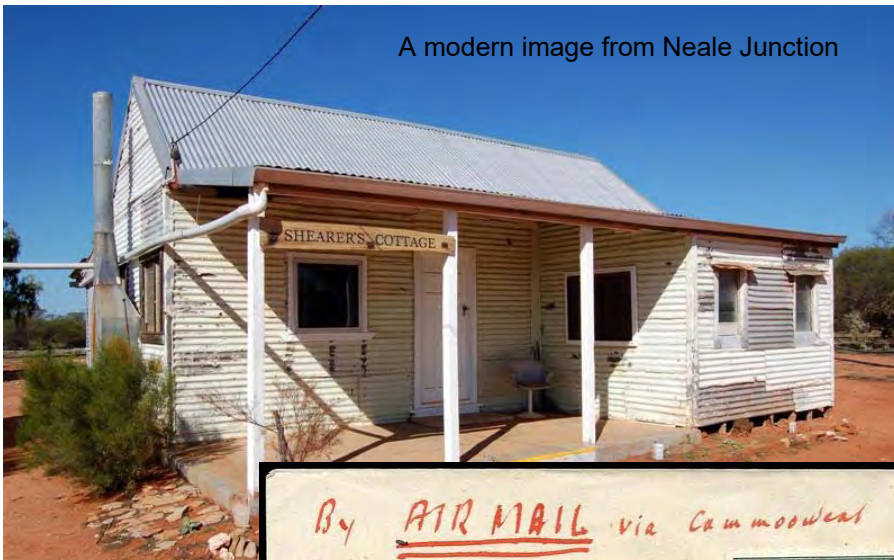
Later, Mr Neale followed Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith as pilot-in-charge at Port Hedland under contract to West Australian Airways.

During an early flight he discovered a lake in South Australia, which was named after him.

He later ran his own service, Neale's Airways, from Cloncurry to Charters Towers in western Queensland.

He was grounded in 1946 because of diabetes.

Story compiled using various sources including NWAMA archive, Wikipedia, goodall.co.au and aviadejavu.ru



A modern image from Neale Junction



Letters flown and signed by Frank Neale

