



# The West Torrens Historian

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## LOCAL HERO - WALLY SHIERS

THE boy in this 1900 photograph shown sitting atop a cart load of hay at Torrensville is Wally Shiers – a lad, who, within a few years would reach even greater heights and become one of the West Torrens district's most famous sons.



There is a more significant image of Wally Shiers at Adelaide Airport. He is one of the four airmen depicted below in the John Dowie sculpture on the memorial building which houses the restored converted World War I Vickers Vimy bomber (registration G-EAOU), which Adelaide brothers Captain Sir Ross and Lieutenant Sir Keith Smith flew in the 1919 Air Race to become the first to fly from England to Australia. Passengers on that epic 27-day 20-hour flight were air mechanics Sergeants Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett. Born Walter Henry Shiers, at Stepney, on May 17, 1889, the eighth child in a family of

12, Wally Shiers, attended Richmond Primary School, after his father, William, moved in 1896 to Davenport Tce, Hilton, to take up one of the workingmen's "Richmond Blocks" (see page 3).

Wally left school in 1902 and worked with a market gardener where he learned the basics of pump and motor mechanics. Following the death of his mother (Annie), he went in 1904 to Broken Hill to live with his elder brother and worked at the Broken Hill North Mine. He later established an electrical contracting business at Leeton in the NSW Riverina. With the outbreak of World War I, Wally enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Light Horse Regiment and embarked for Egypt in June 1915. He transferred in July 1916 to No 67 (Australian) Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, which later became No 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps. He was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Class Air Mechanic in November 1917 and with fellow air mechanic Jim Bennett flew with Ross Smith on his pioneering flight from Cairo to Calcutta in 1918. After the historic 1919 England-Australia flight Wally Shiers married and settled in Sydney. He worked for various aviation companies and spent sometime "barnstorming" with a Sydney pilot, Dave Smith. Wally gained his pilot's licence in 1929 and he and Dave Smith set out from Sydney in March 1930 for England but after crash landing in Thailand (then Siam) they abandoned their flight. Back in Sydney, Wally was chief engineer of Airlines of Australia until 1939. During World War II, he was manager of the textiles branch of the Light Aircraft Co, which manufactured parachutes. Wally Shiers was the only survivor of the England-Australia flight when the Vickers Vimy - Ross and Keith Smith Memorial was unveiled at Adelaide airport in April 1958. Widowed and in ill health, Wally Shiers returned to Adelaide in 1965 to live with his brother Arthur at Hilton. He died on June 2, 1968.



Wally Shiers far right.

*\*The photograph of Wally Shiers on the cart was taken about 1900 outside the home and dairy of George Robert Poole (standing right), at the corner of Rankine Rd and Torrens St, Torrensville. The horse and cart belonged to George Poole and on top of the horse's harness was inscribed "Cowandilla Dairy". Poole's dairy was demolished in the 1970s to make way for subdivision of the area.*