



EPIC FLIGHT CENTENARY
1919-2019 – YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2019, South Australia celebrated the centenary of the first flight across the world from England to Australia – an awesome feat achieved in a plane of wood, wire and fabric, with open cockpits and only a compass for navigation. Achieved by South Australians Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith, the flight inspired a new generation.



Historic images in this document are published courtesy of the State Library of South Australia, which in 2019 digitised its entire collection of materials relating to Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith.

<https://digital.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/pages/ross-keith-smith>

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Greg Mackie OAM

It's my great pleasure to present this review of South Australia's Epic Flight Centenary 2019 program. By every measure, the centenary was an extraordinary success and an inspirational reminder of what can be achieved when collaboration is king!

As CEO of the History Trust of South Australia, it was my privilege to bring together many (diverse) groups to develop a rolling program of events.

With a key aim to "promote and commemorate in South Australia the centenary of the Smith brothers' epic flight in the Great Air Race of 1919", our focus was very much on bringing the community together to raise awareness and celebrate South Australia's leading role in one of the most significant – yet sadly forgotten – events in world aviation history. Through the enthusiastic work of our EFC2019 committee, and the support of generous sponsors, I believe we have done Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith, Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett's memory and legacy proud.

Greg Mackie OAM
EFC2019 Chairman

THE EFC IN NUMBERS

964: Facebook.com/EpicFlightCentenary followers

15,000: EFC booklets distributed

106,113: people who've seen the EFC stand-up banner series

270,200: people who watched *The Greatest Air Race* documentary on SBS TV in December 2019

PATRONS



Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC

Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd)

Dr Andy Thomas, AO - NASA Astronaut (Ret'd)

COMMITTEE

Greg Mackie OAM, Chair. History Trust of South Australia

Greg Weller, Deputy Chair. Royal Australian Air Force

Lainie Anderson. Epic Flight Centenary Ambassador

David Byrne. South Australian Aviation Museum

Jim Whalley. Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith Fund. Nova Systems

Justine Firth. Adelaide Airport Ltd

Dave Helman OAM JP (Ret'd). RAAF Association

James Blagg. Royal Aeronautical Society

Andrew Boucaut. North Road Cemetery

David Figg. Australian Airmail Society

Steve Harrison. Westmeath Consulting Services

Gary Lloyd. Representing the Smith family

Rob Moore OAM. Honourable Company of Air Pilots

Barrie Newman. Adelaide Mint

Geoff Stempel. State Library of South Australia

Paul Sykes. Veterans SA

Martin Walker. SA Philatelic Society



Dr Andy Thomas, AO



Epic Flight Centenary 2019 Committee

SPONSORS



The tremendous success of EFC2019 would not have been achieved without the generous support of our major sponsor, The Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith Fund, who funded a part-time coordinator's position and contributed to the development of key legacy materials including the website, stand-up banner series and booklet. We sincerely appreciate the support of all sponsors:



The Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith Fund



The History Trust of South Australia



Nova Systems



Adelaide Airport



News Corporation



RAAF Base Edinburgh



RAAF Association (SA Division)



Boeing Australia



Shell Aviation



Royal Aeronautical Society (Australian Division)



\$6M COMMITMENT TO RELOCATE THE VICKERS VIMY

In May 2019, it was announced that a new state-of-the-art home will be built for Sir Ross Smith's Vickers Vimy aircraft at Adelaide Airport. Announcing a \$2m funding commitment by the Federal Government, South Australian Senator Simon Birmingham said it was a major win for South Australia's cultural heritage, for tourism, and would serve to educate generations to come about our state's pioneering and aviation history. The \$2m commitment was matched by both the South Australian Government and Adelaide Airport Ltd, taking the combined total for the rehousing project to \$6m. The Vickers Vimy is scheduled to be relocated in 2021.

ADDITIONAL ADVOCACY



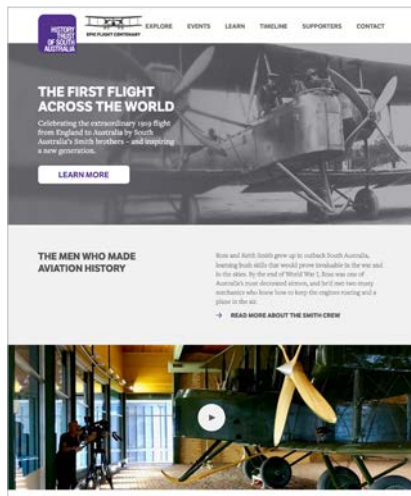
On 16 November 2017 the then Member for Finnis Mr Michael Pengilly moved that *"this house urges the State Government work to secure the future of the Vickers Vimy aircraft and other associated memorabilia contained at Adelaide Airport to work towards placing it on a site that is more publicly accessible and in an optimum environment for its survival in the future"*. The motion received bipartisan support.

In November 2019, Frank Pangallo MLC moved a motion in the South Australian Parliament in further support of the Vickers Vimy and recognising the role of The History Trust of South Australia in convening the Epic Flight Centenary Committee under its auspices. The motion received bipartisan support.

On 12 November 2019, South Australia's 12 Senators from across the political spectrum united in Federal Parliament to acknowledge the historic 100th anniversary of the epic flight. The Senators also extended their thanks to those who coordinated centenary celebrations.

On 17 November 2019, Vickers Vimy mechanics Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett were inducted into the Australian Aviation Hall of Fame at a special ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith were inaugural inductees in 2012.

EPIC FLIGHT CENTENARY WEBSITE



With the help of the History Trust of South Australia's online and marketing teams, we created epicflightcentenary.com.au as an enduring tribute to the Smith crew and their pioneering feat. Key features include articles and historic imagery, a timeline of the 28-day flight, education resources linked to the Australian curriculum, an online collection of photographs, souvenirs and artworks celebrating the flight over the past century, and an exhaustive list of links to additional reading materials and digitised collections in South Australia and around the globe. To complement the website (which remains a work in progress) and further encourage South Australians to explore the story, we also created a new Epic Flight self-drive trail on SA History Hub:

<http://sahistoryhub.com.au/tours/centenary-of-epic-flight-trail>



TARANTO, ITALY NOVEMBER 16, 1919

Ross Smith and the Vickers Vimy crew left Rome in poor weather and set a course for Taranto, 260 miles away in southern

[Read more](#)



CAIRO, EGYPT NOVEMBER 18, 1919

Ross Smith and his Vickers Vimy crew had a highly-eventful, 650-mile flight across the Mediterranean from Crete to Cairo

[Read more](#)

ROME, ITALY NOVEMBER 15, 1919

At first light, Ross Smith arrived at the water-logged Pisa aerodrome to find the Vimy still hopelessly bogged. So he ca

[Read more](#)



SUDA BAY, CRETE NOVEMBER 17, 1919

The Vimy crew almost crashed into cliffs off the coast of Greece as Ross Smith battled driving rain and dense mist on th

[Read more](#)

DAMASCUS, SYRIA NOVEMBER 19, 1919

Ross Smith flew from Cairo to Damascus on the seventh, 450-mile leg of the epic flight. The Vimy crew was now a quarter

EDUCATION PROGRAM

Education was a major focus of the EFC2019, as part of our goal to inspire a new generation with this incredible South Australian story.



THE EPIC FLIGHT CENTENARY SCHOOLS COMPETITION

Sponsored by Boeing, the schools competition attracted 60 students with sensational entries including board games, essays, PowerPoint presentations, a Lego stopmotion video and a five-minute film. The competition resources, created with the assistance of the education team at the State Library of South Australia, have now been tweaked into permanent online materials for teachers to access on the website.



Above: Taye Hebden and RAAF Air Commander Australia, Air Vice-Marshall Joe Iervasi, AM. Courtesy RAAF

THE MAKERS' EMPIRE 3D PRINTING MASCOT DESIGN COMPETITION

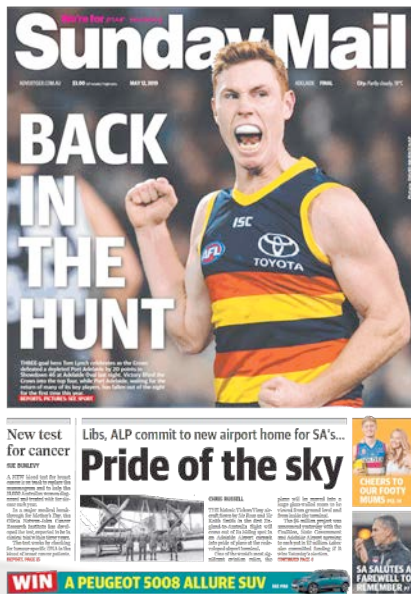
The competition attracted more than 4800 entries from across Australia and around the world, with kids learning the story before being asked to create a contemporary version of Ross Smith's mascot Marmaduke II. Thanks to the RAAF, Henley Beach Primary School student Taye Hebden's winning mascot "Pete the Pilot" is headed off on a trans-global mission to the Middle East aboard a C-17A Globemaster III aircraft.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Other education program highlights included the 2019 Premier's Anzac Spirit School Prize being themed around the epic flight, and hundreds of science students and parents embracing their inner Ross Smith with a paper plane competition at the Oliphant Science Awards Open Day on 25 August.



MEDIA STRATEGY



With the generous support of our media partner News Corporation and widespread engagement among local, interstate and national print, radio and TV media, the EFC generated significant and enduring media coverage throughout the course of the year. Highlights among scores of newspaper articles and broadcast news stories included: a double-page spread in *The Advertiser* on Andy Thomas's role as our patron and presenter/narrator of *The Greatest Air Race* documentary; a front-page *Sunday Mail* article (and related TV news coverage on every local channel) on federal and state funding to relocate the Vimy; ABC TV's *Behind The News* story featuring students from Flinders Park Primary School who took part in our schools competition; national coverage of the Royal Australian Mint coin launch inside the Vimy hangar; a 10-page feature in *Australian Geographic*; a 30-minute podcast on ABC Radio National; and quarterly features in *Wings* magazine.

Below: *WINGS*, Winter 2019

HISTORY. AN EPIC FIGHT

RACE

THE GREAT AIR

CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY OF AN EPIC FLIGHT FROM LONDON TO DARWIN.

Photographs courtesy of State Library of South Australia, Text Adaptation courtesy of Tim Lockley (ANSA)

LEFT The crew with their new Vimy still in its original Royal Air Force markings.

BELOW The Vimy's civil registration was painted in white, interpreted by the crew as a plea to the RAAF: 'Get 'em off the tail'!

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER Billy Hughes was flying over the English Channel when he came up with the idea of a great air race across the world to Australia. Realising the potential of aviation to unite the Empire and inspire his young nation after a devastating war, he offered a £10,000 prize for the first Australian airmen to fly from London to Darwin in a British-built plane. And they had to do it in 30 days.

The planes were made from wood, wire and fabric with open cockpits and only basic navigation. Airstrips along the route were few and far between. Yet six Australian crews accepted the challenge.

Two crews perished and two others crashed out. Only one aircraft reached Australia in 30 days – the Vickers Vimy flown by South Australia's Ross and Keith Smith.

Although a peacetime event, the Great Air Race has strong military connections. The crews that took part were Australian Flying Corps men. Most of their aircraft were military and the four crewmen who died in the race are included in the Australian War Memorial's Roll of Honour.

To mark the centenary year of this landmark in the story of Australian aviation, over the next several issues *Wings* will recount the Vimy's part in the Great Air Race in Ross Smith's own words with edited extracts from his 1921 book *14,000 Miles Through the Air*. Here is part one.

SETTING OUT FROM ENGLAND
HOUNSLOW TO LYON, FRANCE

We climbed slowly upward through the cheerless, mist-laden skies, our engines well throttled back and running perfectly. So as to make sure that all was in thorough working order, we circled for ten minutes above Hounslow, then set off.

At 2,000 feet we suddenly emerged from the fog into brilliant sunshine, but the world below was lost to sight, screened by the dense pall of mist. Accordingly, we set a compass course for Folkestone, and just before reaching the outskirts a rift in the mists enabled us to pick up the grand old coastline, every inch of which is measured by history, and so we checked our bearings.

It seemed hard to realise that we had at last started out on the long flight for which we had been planning and working so long, and as I glanced over the machine and the instruments, I wondered what the issue of it all might be – if the fates would be so kind as to smile on us ever so little and allow us to reach the goal of our ambitions, Australia, in thirty days.

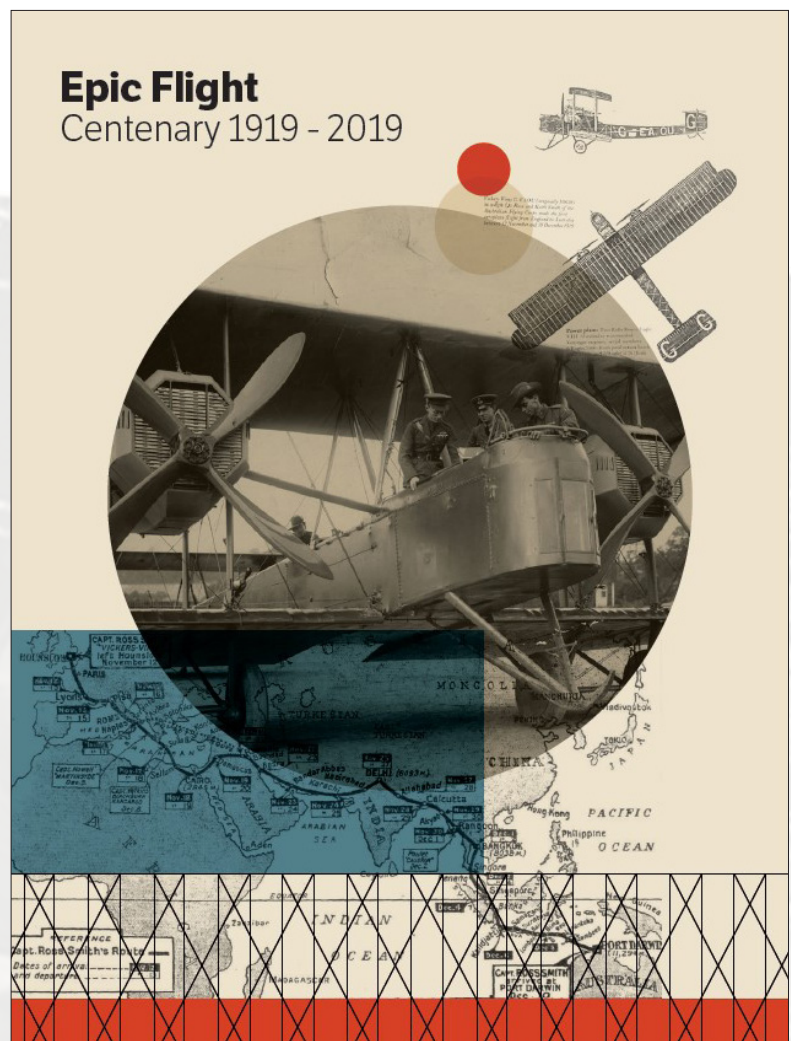
My brother marked our assumed position off on the chart, by dead reckoning, every fifteen minutes. The cold grew more intense. Our hands and feet lost all feeling and our bodies became well-nigh frozen. The icy wind penetrated our thick clothing and it was with greatest difficulty that I could work the machine. Our breaths condensed on

Preparing the Vimy

BANNER SERIES AND BOOKLET

To complement the EFC website, we created a series of eight stand-up banners and a complementary 16-page booklet to tell the story of the Smith crew, their Vickers Vimy aircraft and the many enduring legacies of their pioneering flight. The comprehensive, beautifully-crafted materials have been accessed by libraries, schools and community groups across the state. More than 106,000 people have seen the stand-up banners, and we've distributed 15,000 booklets as a lasting memento of the centenary year.

A complementary 16-page booklet telling the story of the Smith crew and their Vickers Vimy aircraft.



Eight stand-up banners used by libraries, schools and community groups across the state.



EPIC FLIGHT UNEARTHED

In July we invited South Australians to send in their family photos and memorabilia relating to the England-Australia flight for a permanent online “Epic Flight Unearthed” exhibition on epicflightcentenary.com.au. Hundreds of photos were received, showcasing everything from the Smith crew’s 1920 Adelaide landing, to souvenirs, commemoration materials and artworks. They have now been compiled into an exciting new collection under the ‘Explore’ section of the website.

The Messenger | Wednesday, July 24, 2019



Wendy Robertson with scrapbooks relating to the epic 1919 journey.

PICTURE: AAP/ROY VANDERVEGT

Wendy shares flight stories

WOODCROFT

Jessica Mason

The hunt is on for mementos of the Smith brothers’ 1919 historic London-Darwin flight.

To mark this year’s 100th anniversary celebrations of Ross and Keith Smith’s journey, people are being asked to

contribute images of memorabilia for the Epic Flight Centenary website.

Wendy Robertson, 64, of Woodcroft, has emerged as a major contributor.

“One of my most significant pieces of memorabilia is a piece of linen taken from the Vimy that the Smith brothers flew,” she says. She has collected photographs, too,

maintaining a family record begun by her parents.

Her father, Arthur, started the collection in the 1930s.

Sixty years later, his interest was still so strong that he built a model of the aircraft for permanent display at the Torrens Parade Ground.

For more details log on to epicflightcentenary.com.au

SOCIAL MEDIA

The EFC's major social media presence was on Facebook, generating nearly 1000 highly engaged followers over the course of 2019. From 12 November to 10 December (the actual centenary of the epic flight), we shared daily '100 years ago today' posts with comprehensive insights and imagery. These proved hugely popular, with individual posts shared up to 40 times.

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Above and beyond the many speeches delivered at our major events, Epic Flight Centenary Ambassador Lainie Anderson delivered more than 50 talks to Probus and Rotary clubs, history societies, libraries, schools, aviation enthusiasts and other groups in SA, Victoria and the ACT over the course of the year.



Instagram social media activity.

EPIC EVENTS

A series of events – developed in partnership with the EFC2019 Committee, key stakeholders and allied organisations – ensured the EFC remained on the public agenda throughout 2019 and generated awareness among a diverse cross-section of the South Australian community.

MARCH

Superloop 500 Adelaide, with a major EFC presence in the RAAF marquee.

APRIL

AFL ANZAC Round presentation to Port Power members at Adelaide Oval.



*EFC presence in the RAAF marquee at Superloop 500 Adelaide.
Courtesy RAAF*

MAY (SA HISTORY FESTIVAL)



Magical History Bus Tour, backed by a week-long competition promo on ABC Radio Adelaide, to key locations across Adelaide
Series of four 1919 Air Race lectures at the SA Aviation Museum
EFC appraisals table an Australian Postcard Society event

Book launch for *Flight to Fame* (a reprint of Ross Smith's *14,000 Miles Through the Air* edited by Peter Monteath and published by Wakefield Press)

Who's Wally? – an event honouring the life of Wally Shiers at his resting place, Centennial Park Cemetery

HTSA Talking History event on the epic flight and its legacies, incorporating the public launch of *Long Flight Home*, published by Wakefield Press.

JUNE



Sir Ross Smith Commemoration Service at St Peter's Cathedral, commemorating the 97th anniversary of the aviator's burial, followed by lunch for 200 VIPs hosted by the Adelaide Oval Stadium Management Authority

JULY

South Australian Aviation Museum launch of Vickers Vimy mural with projection art and light show

Defence Teaming Centre annual dinner and awards ceremony, themed on the EFC



SEPTEMBER

Launch of Royal Australian Mint's Great Air Race collection in the Vickers Vimy hangar

World Routes Conference, Adelaide Showgrounds

OCTOBER

Anzac & Aviator book launch with Sir Ross Smith biographer Michael Molkentin

Adelaide Airport Vickers Vimy Open Day & Honourable Company of Air Pilots Australia Fly Past

CEDA lunch celebrating the EFC and featuring patron Andy Thomas

RSL Remembrance Day breakfast, honouring the Vickers Vimy crew and the Smith brothers' younger sibling Colin



NOVEMBER

State Dinner hosted by the Premier of South Australia, Hon. Mr Steven Marshall in honour of the Epic Flight Centenary

RAAF Base Edinburgh Air Show, themed 'From Vimy to Fifth Generation in 100 Years'

Heroes of the Skies exhibition at the State Library of South Australia

Cinema screening of *The Greatest Air Race* documentary

Numismatic Society of SA exhibition of coins and banknotes

Adelaide Soaring Club 75th anniversary



Courtesy RAAF

DECEMBER

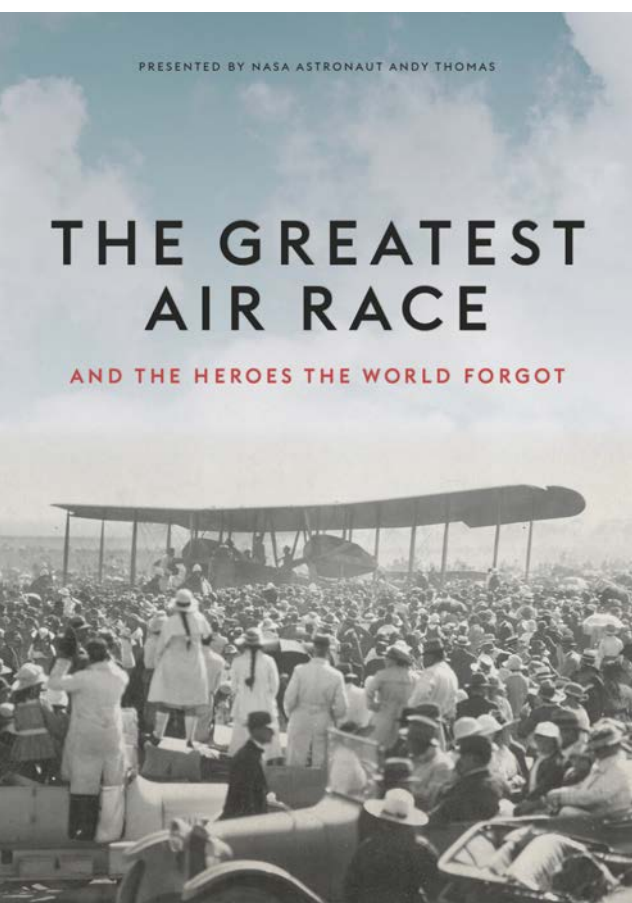
AEROPEX 2019

Re-dedication ceremony of the Sir Ross Smith Memorial in Creswell Gardens, Adelaide

Royal Aeronautical Society (SA Division) Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith dinner

Epic Flight Centenary Civic Reception hosted by the Adelaide Lord Mayor Sandy Verschoor





THE GREATEST AIR RACE DOCUMENTARY

A key goal of the EFC2019 Committee was to support the development of a professionally-produced documentary on Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith's pioneering flight. This was achieved when Epic Flight Centenary Ambassador Lainie Anderson teamed up with co-producers Susan Harrington and Max Anderson to create *The Greatest Air Race*. The 54-minute documentary, produced with the support of the History Trust of South Australia and other EFC sponsors including the Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith Fund, Nova Systems and Adelaide Airport, is presented by former NASA Astronaut (and EFC Patron) Andy Thomas. It aired on SBS Television on Sunday 8 December 2019 to a nationwide audience of more than 270,000 viewers, with international broadcasters including PBS in US and UKTV now considering acquisition.

The documentary has been made available on DVD and USB, while All Of Us Productions has also commissioned a 29-page study guide by Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) and academic Robert Lewis. Designed to connect students from Years 7-12 with the story via the documentary, the free guide is ideal for students of History, English, Media Studies and Geography. www.theeducationshop.com.au.

LEGACIES & MEMORABILIA

Thanks to the commitment of individual South Australians and the combined lobbying efforts of our EFC2019 Committee, we achieved significant local and national legacies of the centenary that will serve to keep the story alive for decades to come. *The Greatest Air Race* documentary is just one example. Here are others:



VIMY PROPELLER ARTWORK

The History Trust of South Australia has commissioned this photographed, limited edition of 50 framed, numbered artworks signed by the original artist, SA's Gregg Mitchell.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM'S VICKERS VIMY MURAL



Created by artist Janice Eames and sponsored by the RAAF Association (SA Division), this huge public artwork now graces the front hangar of the South Australian Aviation Museum in Port Adelaide.

VICKERS VIMY CARDBOARD POP-OUT MODELS



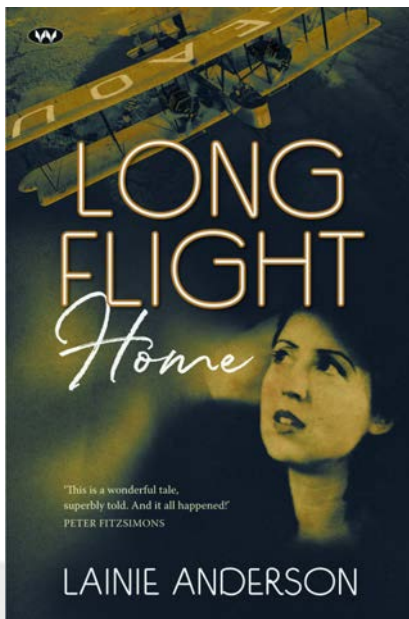
Developed by the Adelaide Airport team in conjunction with design firm Transit Graphics, the A4 kit comprises dozens of tiny pieces that come together to make a perfect little cardboard Vimy.

ADELAIDE MINT MEDALLION

Copper/bronze medallion struck by The Adelaide Mint to replicate similar medallions commemorating the event which date back to the 50th anniversary in 1969.



LONG FLIGHT HOME



Written by Lainie Anderson, *Long Flight Home* is an historic fiction which tells the story of the Great Air Race through the eyes of mechanic Wally Shiers. Published by SA's Wakefield Press.



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN MINT COIN SET

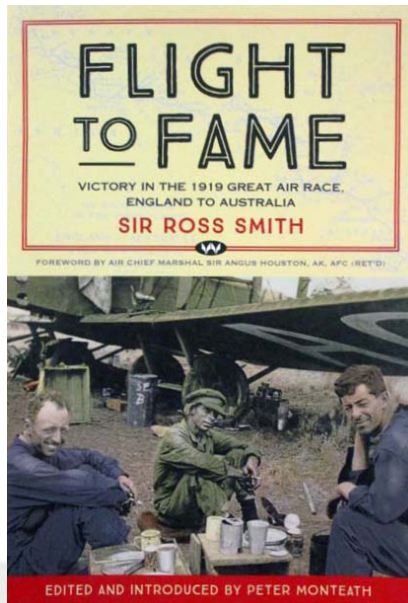
Launched in Adelaide's Vickers Vimy hangar and generating nationwide broadcast media exposure, the RAM collection features eight coins in a Vimy-inspired tin.



AUSTRALIA POST STAMP ISSUE

Created by Janet Boschen Design, the national issue includes domestic-rate and international-rate designs, a commemorative coin and prestige booklet.

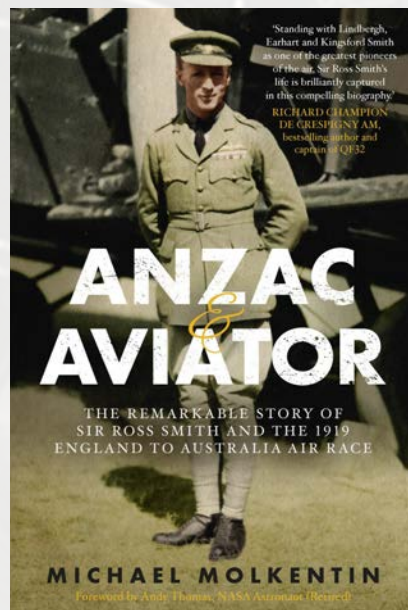
FLIGHT TO FAME



Flight to Fame, a reprint of Sir Ross Smith's 1922 memoir *14,000 Miles Through The Air*, is edited and introduced by Adelaide historian Peter Monteath. Published by SA's Wakefield Press.

ANZAC & AVIATOR

Launched at Adelaide's Torrens Parade Ground, *Anzac & Aviator* is a ripping story of Sir Ross Smith's life by NSW-based biographer Michael Molkentin. Published by Allen & Unwin.



VIMY GIN

Vimy Gin is a special release from South Australian business duo Tony Parkinson (Penny's Hill Wines) and Suzie Hayward-Annese. Distilled by Kangaroo Island Spirits, with packaging by Voice in Adelaide.

