

WILLIAM (BILL) RUDOLF BUDDICOM BEDFORD of KYANCUTTA (9.7.1909 – 25.3.1972)

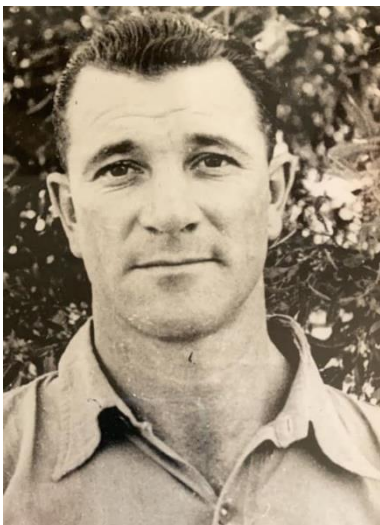


Figure 1 - Bill Bedford c1940s
(Margaret Luscombe via Eyre Peninsula Yarns & Family History)

Fellow SAAM History Group member Jim Best brought the idea of profiling Bill Bedford as a significant aviator to the Group. He completed some of the basic research required, but being relatively new to the Group, he asked for assistance in writing the story. I volunteered and, after reading Jim's notes and more about the Bedfords, I realised what a fascinating story it is. It is a story that can't be told without reference to all the contextual issues: his polymath father in many ways much more noteworthy than Bill himself; meteorites, archaeocyatha and museums; Eyre Peninsula Airways' Junkers F13; West Australian Airways' DH66 Hercules; the Bush Church Aid Society; and finally, Bill's DH82, Austers and Beagle.

I think the story must start with Bill's incredible father. He was born Robert Arthur Buddicom in 1874 to a family of minor Shropshire landed gentry and known as Bob. He was educated as a gentleman at Charterhouse, one of England's most notable public (what we would call private) schools and then Oxford, where he graduated in 1897 in classics, physiology, chemistry and biology. He became a fellow of the prestigious Geological Society of London and lectured in Germany and Italy as well as England. He also ran a market garden and was an honorary curator of Shrewsbury Museum and curator of the Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery. A polymath indeed.

There was, however, another side to him. By 1915 he had separated from his first wife and two children and sired two more children out of wedlock with his new partner, Ethel Hilda Lewis. He was a gambler and had racked up considerable debt, and he was convicted for misrepresentation in a prospectus involved in a failed business venture. Bankruptcy loomed.

It was at this point that emigration to Australia seemed sensible. His family paid off his debts on condition that he left the country, he swapped his house for land in NSW his first wife (an Australian) owned, took his inheritance, and set off with Ethel as Mr and Mrs Bob Bedford with their two children on the SS Geelong on 25 February 1915. It seems he settled on the name Bedford because his market gardening venture had been called Bedford and Co. The children were Bill Bedford aged six, and his two-year-old sister Hilda Joan, known as Joan. Ethel Hilda, known as Hilda, and Bob were eventually married in Port Adelaide in 1921.



Figure 2 - Robert Arthur (Bob) Bedford c1940s [Bedford family collection via online images]

Bob sold the land in NSW and bought 2,000 acres (809 ha) of scrub near Kyancutta that he spent the next 5 years clearing for wheat cropping. During this period two more sisters to Bill were born: Sylvia in 1917 in Port Lincoln and Brunhild (Bryn) in 1923 in Kyancutta. A brother, Robert (Bob Junior) was born in 1926, also in Kyancutta. At that time Kyancutta was very remote indeed and Bob quickly established himself as an indispensable community member. In particular, he acted as its de facto doctor, dentist and veterinarian although he had no formal qualifications as any. He sewed wounds and medicated snakebites and fevers, pulled teeth, treated horses staked in the rough scrub clearance, and went on to deliver 99 babies.

By 1922 the family had moved into Kyancutta. Bob established a general store and railway refreshment room and built a cottage hospitalⁱ. By 1925 a new hospital and the Kyancutta Museum to house his eclectic collection of historical manuscripts and artefacts sent out from England had been built. By 1928 he had taken over the post office and in 1929 the State Governor opened the museum.

Also in 1928 Bob set aside a triangular 60-acre plot of his land 5km east of the township and constructed an aerodrome with the help of the local Progress Association. He and Bill, by then 19 years old, had become increasingly interested in aviation and saw the potential for Kyancutta to be made a passenger/refuelling stop for Eyre Peninsula Airways' Junkers and West Australian Airways' Hercules on Adelaide-Perth flights. Both airlines were due to start services the following year and Kyancutta was strategically positioned half-way between Whyalla and Ceduna. West Australian Airways' DH66 'City of Perth' gave it a tick after an aerial inspection of the aerodrome on 17 July 1929, and on 23 July the 'City of Adelaide' made a fuel stop enroute to Ceduna. It was licensed by the Department of Defence (then responsible for civil aviation regulation through the Civil Aviation Board) on 18 September and officially opened on 14 October. The licence, incidentally, was only the 31st issued in Australia. The aerodrome was described in the pressⁱⁱ as being Australia's best, being well drained with good approaches, 800m runways, wind indicators, flood lights, boundary lights, flashing beacon, fuel and telephone.

Eyre Peninsula Airways started services with the Junkers F13 on 19 August 1929, initially on a route to Streaky Bay via Cowell and Port Lincoln. This was changed in October to Cowell-Kimba-Kyancutta Streaky Bay but, sadly, by August 1930 the airline, a victim of the Depression, was no more. However, Bill managed a flight to Streaky Bay with his sister Sylvia and Molly Duggin, his wife to be, sometime during that period before the airline failed; and Bob's wife Hilda was on board on 8 March 1930 when the Junkers dropped its prop and made an emergency landing in scrub near Darke Peak, 70km southeast of Kyancutta.

Aviation activity at the aerodrome in the early days extended well beyond the airline fuel stops. Three aircraft returning from the east-west WA Centenary air race from Sydney to Perth had landed there on opening day on 14 October 1929, and on 3 July 1930 Major Hereward de Havilland made a planned stop there in his Hawk Moth VH-UNW, carrying Amy Johnson on her way to Perth after touring the east-coast capitals and Adelaide. She was the first woman to fly solo from England, which she did in 19 days in her DH60 G-AAAH 'Jason' and was a huge celebrity as a result. She was presented with an engraved silver tray Bob designed, then lunched and was farewelled by an adoring crowd before the long flight to Perth. She was flying with the Major because she'd damaged 'Jason' in a downwind landing at Brisbane.



Miss Amy Johnson greeted by Mrs. R. Bedford in July, 1930, at the aerodrome.
Figure 3 - Amy Johnson at Kyancutta 3.7.1930, Bob's wife Hilda at right [Humphrey Morgan/Melva Winter via Eyre Peninsula Yarns & Family History]

Then towards the end of May 1932 Lawrence Matulich and Laurence Newman flew in in their DH60s, bringing FLTLT Reece who had made a name for himself making parachute jumps. He jumped from Newman'sⁱⁱⁱ aircraft at 1,400 feet watched by a huge (for Kyancutta at the time) crowd of 400 people. The aerodrome was enlarged to accommodate West Australian Airways' Vickers Viastras when they replaced the Hercules in 1931. The RAAF also staged through Kyancutta with their Westland Wapitis in the early 1930s and 2BAGS Port Pirie used the aerodrome for navigational exercises during the war. In fact, the RAAF retained the aerodrome as an emergency field well into the 1950s.

Bob started actively collecting geological and fossil samples in 1928 on some ten expeditions through until 1937. Most of them were to very remote Australia in a time when few roads existed, and travel was hard. Three were to the Henbury craters for meteorites, 145km southwest of Alice Springs for instance. Others were to Lake Callabonna for diprotodon remains, the Yorke Peninsula and Murray for archaeos and trilobites, and even to Teetulpa, out near Yunta, for gold prospecting. Bob's acquisition of meteoritic material from Henbury and his exchange of samples with the British Museum and the Smithsonian caused him much strife with the SA Museum, which did much to disparage his character and credentials – neither of which were ever in question by the overseas museums^{iv}.



Figure 4 - From L: Bill Bedford, Ben and Perce Peters taken by Bob Bedford during the 12 Jun-mid Jul 1928 expedition to Lake Callabonna for *Diprotodon* bones [Robert Bedford Papers 1930-66 University of Adelaide]

Bill went on many of the early expeditions and was by then an accomplished bush mechanic. He was the sort of man who could rustle-up an axle for the truck in a farmer's forge, skills that saw him in good stead when he established a garage and repair shop in Kyancutta. He married local girl Mary Hilda (Molly) Duggin with his sisters as bridesmaids on 19 January 1935, when the press described him as a 'local garage lad', so presumably he had established his garage by then. It appears he had little formal schooling – his army enlistment papers list him as having a 'certificate for entry to secondary school' but includes no secondary school qualifications. No doubt he benefited from his father's huge fund of knowledge.

Bill enlisted in Wudinna on 15 January 1942 in B Company (Wudinna Unit) 5th Battalion. He spent most of 1943 at the 5Bn School of Instruction in Wudinna, was promoted to corporal on 31 August 1943, then attended the Engineering Training School in Wagga from 5-18 December. He was promoted to sergeant on 13 October 1944 and discharged on 1 November 1945. His AMF file doesn't shed any light on what he did throughout 1944 and 1945, but it appears he never got farther from home than Wagga. His record does tell us a little more about him though: he was a small man, only 5ft 5½in tall (166cm) and weighed 142lbs (65.5kgs). He was 'medium complexioned' and had dark brown hair and brown eyes.



Figure 5 - This undated photo was captioned "Bill Bedford's place at Kyancutta". A close look at the photo shows the Auster to be Bill's VH-KAV (see later in this article) but the Tiger could not be Bill's VH-AUN which Bill sold 3 years before acquiring -KAV. [John Coulls, via Eyre Peninsula Yarns & Family History]

Bill's flying career started soon after the war. The activity at the aerodrome obviously sparked his interest and he had had a turn at the controls of the Junkers piloted by Jimmy Mollison back in October 1929 on his trip to Streaky Bay, and reportedly the pilots of many of the aircraft fuel stopping at Kyancutta took him up and gave him some stick time. That all led to his purchase of a war surplus DH82A Tiger Moth by auction at Western Junction (Launceston). The auction, on 18 May 1946, included 79 aircraft, 25 of which had been flown over from the mainland in late 1944/early 1945 for storage. The rest were ex-RAAF Western Junction 7EFTS, and the sale of A17-329 was concluded on 31 May to W.R. Bedford. The sale price was recorded as £60, but he wrote in a later article^v that it was actually £62.10.0. He also wrote that "An offer to check and deliver it for £100 was accepted". I haven't been

able to determine the date or route of this delivery ferry, but Bill said in his article that the C of A was carried out at Parafield. The formal 'Issue Date to Purchaser' was on 24 April 1946 but the aircraft wasn't registered to Bill as VH-AUN until 17 April 1947.

Why it took a year between purchase and registration isn't recorded. Bill had yet to learn to fly and since he was busy with his garage business, he was not in a hurry to start training. So it wasn't until 22 November 1947 that he logged his first instruction with Roy Goon on a flight to Port Pirie, then he had to take a break until March the following year. He soloed on 23 March 1948 and by 7 June had accumulated enough hours for his licence. Some of his training was undertaken with Roy Goon in Whyalla, and there is a possibly apocryphal tale^{vi} that the DCA issued him a dispensation

to fly the aircraft solo from Kyancutta to Whyalla for instruction and return prior to achieving his licence. Bill was a member of the Royal Aero Club of South Australia too and some of his training was by Reg Ellis at Parafield.

Bill also acted as some sort of intermediary in the purchase of three war surplus Ansons from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission in 1946 and 1947 from Port Pirie. He was acting for Jimmy Woods^{vii}, who telegraphed the DCA in September 1947 “The two Anson aircraft MG271 and MH219, plus MG841 have passed out of the possession of Mr R. Bedford of Kyancutta SA and will be flown to Perth by me.”^{viii} Woods used them to form Woods Airways, flying tourists over the 19 km hop to and from Rottnest Island until the DCA eventually grounded them in 1962. Precisely what Bill’s role was isn’t clear.



Figure 6 - Woods Airways Anson VH-WAB ‘Willem de Vlamingh’ (ex RAAF MG841) at Rottnest Island, undated [via Geoff Goodall]

In 1947 the Ceduna-based Bush Church Aid Society acquired DH84 Dragon VH-AGI to replace its DH83 Fox Moth VH-AAA. It had used the latter since 1938 when Alan Chadwick flew it from Mascot to inaugurate the Society’s Flying Medical Service. The Fox Moth was placed in Kyancutta on 10 June, and the press reported that it was to be flown by the Whyalla District Hospital’s resident doctor, Russell Roxburgh, on ambulance services taking Wudinna patients to Adelaide and return^{ix}. The Bedfords enlarged the airfield’s hangar to accommodate both the Fox Moth and Bill’s Tiger Moth.



Figure 7 - BCAS’s DH83 Fox Moth being refuelled in Ceduna during its pre-war use prior to its placement at Kyancutta [Undated, SAAM collection]

According to Bill’s article, by June 1949 he had logged 100 hours and was endorsed on the Fox Moth and, from that point on, he took on the role of BCAS volunteer pilot in

Kyancutta. He not only served the Wudinna Hospital but undertook emergency flights “with doctors, sisters and patients to Cook, Coober Pedy, Port Lincoln, Kimba, etc, in all types of weather”^x.

Bill sold the Tiger to Robby’s Aircraft Repair Co at Parafield on 10 November 1950 and replaced it with an Auster. On 15 June 1951, a J/1 Autocrat was registered to him as VH-WRB (yes, his initials!). The aircraft had three previous owners in the UK where it flew as G-AGVR, and the low construction number of 1876, so it was far from new. It was a 3-seater with a useful load of only 276kgs and range of 515km, so it seems doubtful that he would have had much use for it for his air ambulance work, most of which must have been carried out in the Fox Moth. However, the BCAS sold the Fox Moth in 1953 (which by then had been reregistered first as VH-CAS [Church Aid Society] then -GAS in June 1950 when the DCA resumed the -CAA-CAZ range for its own aircraft)^{xi}. The Society wanted the speed and range available from the Percival Proctor III VH-BQR, which it acquired the following year and based in Ceduna.



Figure 8 – A wing off Bill’s DH82 in 1966 on the DCA fire dump at Parafield, discarded by Robby’s Aircraft Repair Co. John Smith, John Streeter & Geoff Goodall surveying the dump [Geoff Goodall]



Figure 9 - J/1 Autocrat VH-WRB in Bankstown in 1956 - 3 years after Bill sold it [Ed Coates collection]

The Society's flying headquarters remained at Ceduna, from where it continued to operate with Alan Chadwick still as chief pilot with the DH84 Dragon and the Proctor until both were sold in 1957 to purchase the much larger (and faster) Lockheed 12A VH-BHH.

Bill, however, had acquired J/5G Autocar VH-BSX from Rev. Shepherdson of the Elcho Mission, which was registered to him on 24 August 1959 - that is, only a couple months after his disposal of -KAV to the Mission, so it seems as if the transactions involved some sort of aircraft swap. The Autocar was notable for its raised cabin roof that must have made it even more suitable for ambulance work than the Adventurer, and he continued flying for the BCAS.

This left Bill with only the severely limited J/1, so he sold it on 4 November 1953 to a Port Pirie purchaser. He had replaced it a couple of months earlier with a larger, more powerful Auster J/5 Adventurer, VH-KAV, which was registered to him on 12 September 1953. It had been purchased by the BCAS and registered to the Society at its George Street Sydney headquarters that July, so whether the Society retained ownership of the aircraft or on-sold it to Bill is not clear. In any event, for the next six years Bill operated it on air ambulance work for the Society out of Kyancutta, until it was sold to the Methodist Mission at Elcho Island on 11 June 1959^{xii}.



Figure 10 - J/5 Adventurer VH-KAV in later life - at Kalgoorlie in 1973 - some 14 years after Bill sold it. [Geoff Goodall]



Figure 11 - Cropped from an undated photo captioned "Bill Bedford's workshop at Kyancutta" Close examination shows it to be -BSX, presumably after the accident described. [John Coulls, via Eyre Peninsula Yarns & Family History]

Bill evidently had a mishap in -BSX. Janet Williams (nee Luscombe) told SAAM member Jim Best that Bill landed at Kyancutta into a willy willy and apparently damaged the aircraft significantly. Janet is Joan Luscombe's (nee Bedford) niece, and Joan, remember, was Bill's older sister. Anyway, the West Coast Sentinel reported on 29 November 1962 that "the Bedford aircraft repair fund closed last weekend at £505/18/0", so evidently a community fund had been set up to help him with costs - no doubt the then equivalent of an online Go Fund Me page! I could find no record of the actual accident date or circumstances but the date of the article suggests the photograph of the wingless aircraft with bent prop at left would have been taken sometime in late 1962.

He traded the aircraft in to Aviation Services (SA) Ltd at Parafield on 1 May 1963 and acquired Beagle A.109 Airedale VH-UEP the day before on 30 April in joint ownership with local Eyre Peninsula residents Lyle and Kevin Barns. Kevin Barns was a pilot and also flew the aircraft on ambulance services. The sad story of The Beagle Aircraft Company^{xiii} is

summarised in the endnotes, but the Airedale was nevertheless a big improvement on the Auster Autocar. Both were 4-seaters, but the Airedale's Lycoming engine gave an additional 50hp, it could carry 550kg more in fuel and payload, range was doubled to 1,690km and it had a cruise speed of 217km/h versus the Autocar's 160km/h.

This was Bill's last aircraft, which he continued to fly for the BCAS, apparently until the St John Ambulance service in Whyalla began air ambulance work in 1965^{xiv}. The BCAS, incidentally, continued its Ceduna based services, still chief piloted by Alan Chadwick, until 1967 when the services were transferred to the RFDS in Port Augusta.

Chadwick had won the 1959 Oswald Watt Medal "For outstanding work and devotion to duty with the Flying Medical Service of the Bush Church Aid Society". His last duty was to ferry the Society's last aircraft, Beech B55 Baron VH-FMS, to Port Augusta in January 1967. This was after 29 years of service since he inaugurated the BCAS's Flight Medical service in 1938.

Bill died on 25 March 1972. Among his many interests was the collecting of antique bicycles, and he was riding a penny farthing on the Kyancutta oval when he suffered a heart attack and died. By then he had accumulated at least a thousand flight hours, most of which were in the service of his community. He left his wife Molly, two daughters and a son and seven grandchildren.



Figure 12 - Loading a patient on Beagle -UEP undated c.1963-1972 [Fiona Kent, via Eyre Peninsula Yarns & Family History]



On 30 April 1972 VH-UEP was reregistered to his co-owners, Lyle and Kevin Barns.

Figure 9 – Beagle A.109 Airedale VH-UEP in front of Bill Bedford's garage in Kyancutta. EJ Holden to the left, possibly Bill Bedford standing under wing circa mid '60s [Chris Finney]

Acknowledgements

Firstly, Fellow SAAM History Group Member Jim Best whose initial research and contacts with Bill Bedford's descendants got this project moving.

Mel Davis, without whose incredible encyclopaedic knowledge of the aircraft register I could not have chronicled Bill Bedford's aircraft purchases, and the contribution of his proofreading skills.

SAAM member Chris Douady, whose Eyre Peninsula upbringing and deep aviation historical interest dates to his father's Port Lincoln-based company, Commodore Aviation, provided some invaluable background to the issues.

Geoff Goodall, who passed on the story of Bill's part in the Kyancutta/Woods Airways Ansons and whose incredible website provided much information and photographs.

Facebook site *Eyre Peninsula Yarns and Family History*, which is a goldmine of stories and photos of early Eyre Peninsula life. Particular thanks to Group members Margaret Luscombe, Neil Humphrey Morgan, Fiona Kent and John Coulls whose photos I've used, and also to Margaret Luscombe who posted family documents that I've cited. All are attributed in the photo captions and/or endnotes below.

Endnotes

ⁱ Both Brunhilda (Bryn) and Robert (Bob Junior) Bedford were born in the Kyancutta Cottage Hospital built in 1922. They are listed among 41 other infants delivered by Bob Bedford there between 1922 to 1932. (Margaret Luscombe family papers via Eyre Peninsula Yarns & Family History.)

ⁱⁱ *The Referee* (Sydney) 12.11.1930.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sadly, Newman was killed in a mid-air collision of a DH60 VH-UGV (owned by Alan Rodda) with an Aero Club of South Australia DH60 VH-UNE on 23.6.1934 in the circuit at Parafield. A club trainee flying -UNE, 18-year-old Horace Cowan, was also killed. (See *Wing Tips – the story of the Royal Aero Club of South Australia, Book 1* – chapter 14, 2011 Mike Milln). The Club became “Royal” later that year.

^{iv} Bob continued his very useful life in Kyancutta until dying of a heart attack in the Wudinna hospital on 14.2.1951. Hilda and the Bedford family maintained the Kyancutta Museum until 1971 when most of the collection was dispersed to the National Museum of Victoria and the Australian National University. According to Barry J Cooper & James B Jago of the University of South Australia, on whose January 2018 article much of my references to Bob Bedford are based, the South Australian Museum got nothing.

^v *A thousand Hours of Flying Light Aircraft*, an excerpt of which is included on pp141-143 of his sister Sylvia Laube’s book *Robert Beford of Kyancutta* [The Wednesday Press 1990].

^{vi} Email dated 27.6.2008 from Ron Fuller to Sue Chappell, Sec. of the Port Lincoln Flying Club, via Chris Doudy. In it Ron claims to have sighted this certificate of dispensation.

^{vii} Captain James Woods, born Scotland 1893, died Albany WA 1975. He served in the RFC, joined Norman Brearley in West Australian Airways in 1924, flew a DH60 from Broome to England in 1933, competed in the 1934 England-Australia air race and formed Woods Airways in 1947 with Ansons MG841 (sold to Bedford 10.10.1946 and registered to Woods 25.10.1948 as VH-WAB); MG271 (sold to Woods 23.9.1947, registered VH-WAA 15.1.1948, and re-registered VH-WAC --.12.1948 when registrations suffixed AA were withdrawn); and MH219 (sold 25.9.1947 to Woods, not converted to civil use and reserved for spares). Bedford corresponded with Geoff Goodall in the 1960s, saying “*Yes we purchased 2 Ansins (sic) from Pt Pirie and ferried one to Kyancutta. The other we left at Pt Pirie. In the meantime we sold them to Captain Jimmy Woods and both were put in service of the Rottneest Island run. I believe Woods purchased a further one from Pt Pirie for spares.*”

^{viii} Geoff Goodall, email to me 23.08.1922

^{ix} West Coast Sentinel 12.6.1947

^x Also quoted from *A thousand hours of Flying light aircraft ref footnote ii*.

^{xi} In recognition of this inconvenience, the DCA had suggested -GAS figuring the ‘C’ in -CAS could most easily be overpainted as a ‘G’!

^{xii} Shepherdson sold VH-KAV a year later and it went through several more owners until it was crashed by Goldfields Gliding Club (Inc) at Kambalda WA on 21.9.1975 and struck off the register on 8.10.1975. It is now on display in the RAAF Association Bullcreek Aviation Museum in Perth.

^{xiii} The Beagle Aircraft Company (British Executive & General Aviation Ltd) was formed in 1960 from the takeover of the floundering Auster Aircraft Co and in technical partnership with F.G. Miles Ltd (Miles Aircraft). The first Airedale, hurriedly developed from the last 1957 Auster designs, flew in April 1961. Only 43 were built of which six were imported to Australia. Three of these went to Aviation Services (SA) and Bill’s -UEP was the first sold in Australia. Beagle estimated 567 were needed to achieve profitability, so, unsurprisingly, the company was broke by 1966. The British Government briefly bailed it out and then liquidated it in 1969. Although the company had hoped to compete with the Cessna and Piper aircraft then becoming available in the UK (and Australia), the Airedale continued the outdated steel tubular construction with fabric aft fuselage, wings and tail and could never hope to compete with the cheaper, all-metal American products. RACSA for instance, purchased its first American aircraft in November 1958 (a Piper Tri-Pacer) followed by a stream of Cessna models in early 1960.

^{xiv} Press, photocopied undated article of March 1972 *Well-known flier dies at Kyancutta*.

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