
FRANKSTON - FAIRY FIREFLY 2 AIRCRAFT

Location

PORT PHILLIP BAY, UNINCORPORATED

Municipality

UNINCORPORATED

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7921-0047

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Hermes Number 12226

Property Number

History

Contextual History:History of Place:

Heritage Inventory History of Site:

Date lost: 20 July 1947

Collision between another Fairey Firefly at 1500ft. Both pilots died, only one body recovered.

Thought to be ditched in the bay on a flight from Pt Cook in the early 1950s when the controls jammed and the crew bailed out and were rescued by boat.

The Fairey Firefly was built in London's Great Western Aerodrome (Heathrow) from 1941.

04.06.1947: Australia announced purchase of two aircraft carriers ('Sydney', 'Melbourne') from the British. There were equipped with the latest versions of the Royal Navy Hawker Sea Fury and the Fairey Firefly. To mark the

occasion two Royal Navy aircraft carriers "Theseus" and "Glory" and a royal Navy destroyer "Contest" would make a visit to Australia and Melbourne in July 1947.

As the British aircraft carriers HMS Theseus and HMS Glory were departing on Sunday 20th 1947 after their visit to Melbourne, two squadrons of Firefly and Seafire aircraft from the HMS Theseus took off for an exercise over the bay out from Frankston. As they climbed to 1500ft and moved into formation two Fireflies collided.

The Argus newspaper recorded the following the next day:

"In a flash the two planes were one. Locked together they turned slowly and fell. Near the water they dropped like stones and disappeared. The destroyer Cockade steamed at full speed to the scene and lowered a boat. The body of one of the four crew was recovered. When the Theseus arrived the only sign was a patch of oil."

Another 2 seamen were killed and another injured and several other aircraft destroyed during landing accidents into the carrier following the air incident. The 3 bodies of the Firefly aircrew who crashed were never recovered and the Royal Navy aircraft carriers continued out of Port Phillip Bay. The bodies of the two other fatalities were buried at sea outside the Heads next day.

There are 2 aircrafts, some 150m apart and possibly a third Firefly somewhere in the Bay if the original story of one from Point Cook ditching some years later is correct. Of the two aircraft which crashed we have seen that one is in condition that is able to be recognised, the other has suffered extensive damage although still recognisable as an aircraft. The second aircraft had the engine removed and taken to the Sale Air Force base some years after the accident.

The Fairey Firefly

The Firefly was designed as a fleet reconnaissance aircraft for the UK's Royal Navy, and was derived from the Fairey Fulmar. First flown on 22 December 1941, the first versions were delivered in March 1943 to RNAS Yeovilton. The main version of the aircraft used during WWII was the Mk.1, which was used in all theaters of operation. Throughout its operational career, it took on increasingly more demanding roles, from fighter to anti-submarine warfare. Main variants included the F1 (with a 1,990-hp Griffon XII engine); FR1 (with an ASH radar underneath the engine); NF2 (night-fighter); Mk.IV (with new outer wing nacelles carrying fuel and an ASH scanner); the FR4, with a two-stage supercharged engine and wing root radiators in place of the earlier "chin-mounted" ones; the AS5 (with new American sonobuoys); TT5 and TT6 (target tugs); and T7 (Anti-Submarine Warfare trainer).

After WWII, the Firefly remained in service in both the UK and Australia, flying anti-ship missions off various aircraft carriers in the Korean War and serving in the ground-attack role in Malaya. In 1956, the Firefly's frontline career ended with the introduction of the Fairey Gannet.

At least two Fireflies are maintained in airworthy condition, one in the UK and one in Canada. However, several others around the world are under restoration to flight status.

Nicknames: Unknown

Specifications (AS5):

Engine: One 2,250-hp Rolls-Royce Griffon 74 V-12 piston engine

Weight: Empty 9,674 lbs., Max Takeoff 16,096 lbs.

Wing Span: 41ft. 2in.

Length: 37ft. 11in.

Height: 14ft. 4in.

Performance:

Maximum Speed: 386 mph

Cruising Speed: 220 mph

Ceiling: 28,400 ft.

Range: 1,300 miles

Armament:

Four 20-mm cannon in wings

Underwing hardpoints for 16 60-pound rockets or two 1,000-pound bombs

Number Built: ~1533

Number Still Airworthy: At least two

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