

A MAN AND HIS HOBBY

Railways Employee Who Set Out to Commemorate "Smithy"

The remarkable memorial to the late Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, described in this article, was exhibited in Wellington last week and is at present on view at the Farmers' Trading Company, Auckland. The official opening in Wellington last Friday afternoon was broadcast by Station 2ZB, and at seven o'clock the same evening a description of the exhibit was broadcast over the ZB network. Station 1ZB is also conducting a broadcast.

The memorial arrived in New Zealand a fortnight ago with its owner, Austin E. Byrne, of Sydney, New South Wales, and it is Mr. Byrne's intention to give a memorial ambulance to the Royal New Zealand Air Force, in Kingsford-Smith's name, from the proceeds of the exhibitions. Friends and admirers of "Smithy" have been specially invited over the air to send in contributions to the ambulance.

AUSTIN BYRNE is a man with a "super" hobby. He has spent every spare minute of the past ten years on it—17,000 working hours, to be exact.

His hobby is the late Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, and with his own hand and a few primitive tools he has fashioned what can only be described as a portable memorial to "Smithy." It includes an exact scale model of the Southern Cross, a big globe of the world demonstrating the many gallant flights made by the Southern Cross, a "book of remembrance" housed in a marble shrine, and hundreds of photographs and other mementos.

Mr. Byrne made it all himself, is proud of the fact that even the metals used are Australian, and doesn't regret a minute of the 17,000 hours he put into it.

How It Happened

The first question most people ask him is "How did you come to take up such an unusual hobby?" Mr. Byrne doesn't know. Up until a few weeks ago he was a railways employee and he has never learned any trade. About 1930, he says, he suddenly became concerned over the fact that Australia had never made any tangible expression of thanks to America for the part she had played in starting "Smithy" off on his career in commercial flying. He decided to remedy this deficiency as best he could.

Once started, his tribute just grew, and now he even intends taking it to America to exhibit it there.

Mr. Byrne began with his model of the Southern Cross. He explained his idea to "Smithy" and Beau Sheil, now Deputy-Controller of the Commercial Broadcasting Service, but then associated with "Smithy," and was able to borrow some plans of the big 'plane. The model took three years and 5,000 working hours to finish.

The Model Described

About two feet six inches in length, it is a perfect scale model, inside and out, and is complete down to controls, cabin upholstery and navigation lights. The lights were so small that he had to import them specially from Holland. The fuselage and wings are of plated brass, and for privileged visitors Mr. Byrne switches on small electric motors which turn the propellers. There are 2,088 separate pieces of metal in the model, and only 80 of them were machined. All the rest Mr. Byrne patiently worked by hand.

The model Southern Cross rests on a base of black marble in the shape of

a cross, which in turn is supported by a marble column in which are set miniatures of "Smithy," Ulm, Warner, and Lyon, the crew of the Southern Cross on her first great Pacific flight. There are larger oil portraits of "Smithy" and Ulm also framed in marble, and inset in the supporting column are groups of Australian sapphires in the form of two Southern Crosses.

Six Hundred Fretsaw Blades

The globe of the world took a little over two years and 4,000 hours to finish. It is of aluminium, two feet in diameter, beaten out by hand with a crude wooden mallet and block (also on view). The continents and islands are of gold-plated copper, and cutting exact geographical outlines was an even slower business than hammering out the globe itself. Mr. Byrne, who has been nothing if not exact and methodical in his hobby, has it on record somewhere that he used up 600 fretsaw blades in the process. Each of the 600 small islands scattered here and there over the aluminium globe each took half-an-hour to make.

The routes of the many flights made by the Southern Cross are represented by lines of differently coloured enamel dots. Mounted separately on a solid, gold-plated map of Australia, is a key to the flights.

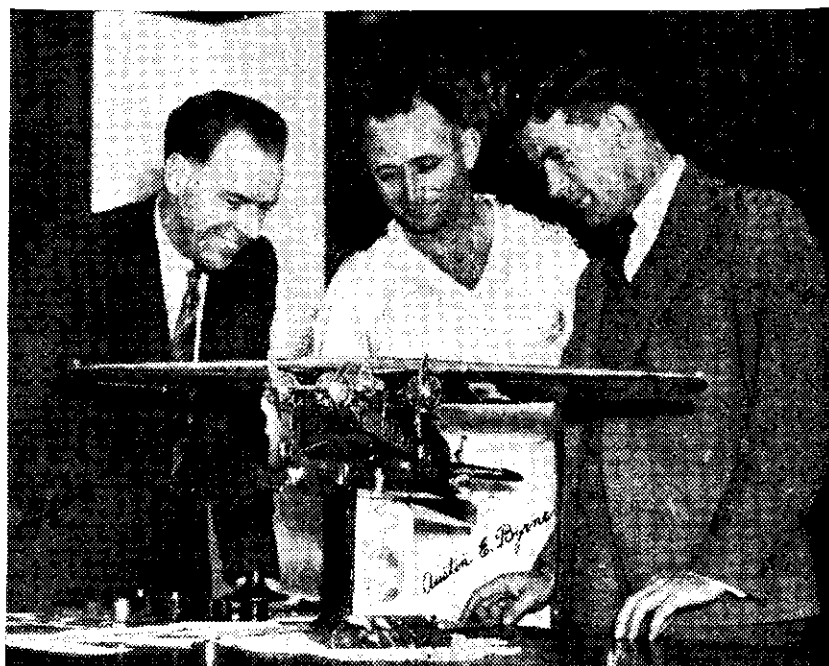
The marble base is in three sections, the bottom one a piece of what Mr. Byrne claims was the first marble ever quarried in Australia. Set round the top section are miniatures of the different crews which flew the Southern Cross, together with young John Ulm and Charles Arthur Kingsford-Smith, sons of the flyers.

A Delicate Compliment

On one side of the metal arm which supports the globe itself is a pair of golden wings with a Latin inscription meaning "Conquerors of the Land, Sea and Air," and on the other side are the crossed flags of America, Australia and Holland. This is a delicate compliment, Mr. Byrne points out, to the three countries to which "Smithy" owed his career in aviation. From Holland came the Anthony Fokker-designed 'plane, and from America the financial help of Captain Alan Hancock, who sponsored the Pacific flight.

The "Book of Remembrance"

Third big item in the collection is the marble and chromium-plated shrine which holds the "book of remembrance." This took about the same time to complete as the model 'plane and the globe of the world. On the base, which is of Cudgegong marble, are further photographic tributes, this time to Kingsford-Smith, Ulm, Anthony Fokker (designer



FAMOUS 'PLANE IN MINIATURE: Austin Byrne (centre), proudly displays his model of the Southern Cross to Harold Gatty (right), famous round-the-world flyer, and Beau Sheil, who was for many years associated with Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith. Mr. Gatty is now New Zealand representative of Pan-American Airways, and Mr. Sheil is Deputy-Controller of the Commercial Broadcasting Service.

of the Southern Cross), Sir Hubert Wilkins (for whom the 'plane was originally built), Captain Hancock, the Hon. J. T. Lang (then Premier of New South Wales who promised public support for the flight), and John Stannage and Captain P. G. Taylor, who were associated with "Smithy" on many flights.

The receptacle for the "book of remembrance" has small, chromium-plated doors, and the book itself is bound in kangaroo hide—Mr. Byrne shot the kangaroo himself. Mr. Byrne says that the book (it took him 13 months to hand-letter and illuminate it) contains the only authentic history of the Southern Cross, together with short biographies of "Smithy" and Ulm, and tributes to "Smithy" from famous flyers all over the world. These include many familiar names—General Balbo of Italy, Ernst Udet, now a guiding genius of Germany's Luftwaffe, the Mollisons, Jean Batten, Harold Gatty, Admiral Byrd, Sir Hubert Wilkins and Lincoln Ellsworth among them. Mr. Byrne wrote personally to each of them, and he has carefully preserved the originals of the replies he received.

The photographic collection is a complete record of the Southern Cross's history from the planning of the Pacific flight in 1927 to the time she was handed over to the Australian nation, in 1935. Mr. Byrne framed the photographs.

A final spot of colour is added by the flags and coats of arms of every country visited by the Southern Cross.

When it is displayed to advantage, the collection is sufficient to fill a small hall.

When it is packed for travelling, it fits comfortably into five solid wooden cases. These—Mr. Byrne made them himself, needless to say—are of Australian wood, each State contributing its most typical wood.

Incidental Information: Mr. Byrne has spent £80 in postage in the last seven and a-half years; the black marble cross was completed just three days after "Smithy's" loss was announced; Mr. Byrne has exhibited his collection only once so far, at the Sydney Royal Show; he values the tools he used at ten shillings and the collection itself at thousands, though he can't afford to insure it; Mr. Byrne doesn't intend to add to the collection any further, but he is still collecting photographs.

"You Asked For It"

Station 2YD is again open for suggestions, so here's your chance to send in your request programmes and hear them played in the "You Asked For It" session on Saturday nights. The last time such a request was made, enough programme suggestions were received to keep the Saturday session going several months, but the arrears have now been worked off and the first of the new requests were heard from 2YD on May 31. Listeners must supply their names and addresses, as well as the noms de plume they want used on the air.