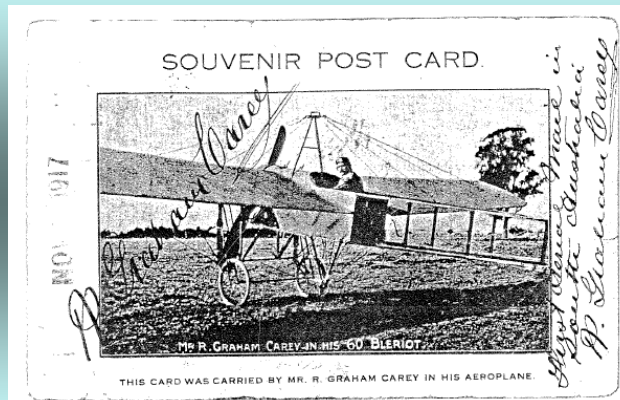




TOWN OF GAWLER

South Australia's First Air Mail Delivery - To Gawler



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R. Graham Carey became smitten by the lure of flight in 1914 but due to the war, opportunities to acquire an aeroplane were few. Eventually he purchased the remains of a Bleriot 60 which French aviator Maurice Guillaux had crashed at the Ascot Racecourse, Sydney. During the next two years, Carey and his mechanics rebuilt the Bleriot and he learned how to fly it. In November 1916, Carey obtained his pilot's licence and he began to explore the commercial aspects of aviation. He contracted to appear at numerous fetes, regattas and country shows and on 27 October, 1917 he appeared at the Commercial Travellers' Association carnival at Adelaide Oval which was raising money for the Army Nurses Fund. Upon hearing of this, the Gawler Red Cross Committee also arranged for Carey to visit their Carnival the following week. Unfortunately the Bleriot developed engine trouble shortly after take-off from Enfield and Carey made a forced landing in a paddock near Islington where he made some minor adjustments to the engine. However, when he attempted another take-off, the aircraft clipped some wires causing it to crash and an inevitable end to the flight. The crowd at the Red Cross Carnival at Gawler were understandably disappointed and they left, some protesting that the advertised appearance was a fake.



R. Graham Carey, date unknown.
(From R. Graham Carey: pioneer aviator by H.N. Eustis)

GAWLER'S GREAT GALA DAY.
 GRAND RED CROSS CARNIVAL AND PROCESSION
 AND
AEROPLANE FLIGHT
 (by R. GRAHAM CAREY, of Victoria).
GAWLER OVAL, NEXT SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3rd.
 (By permission of the State War Council.)
 ALL KINDS OF OTHER ATTRACTIONS.
 Governor arrives at 12.15 p.m. Procession starts at 1.30 p.m. Aeroplane between 3 and 5
 Excursion Fares on Railway. Tourist Bureau Oberbank. Spend a day at Modern Athens.
 1917's E. A. SMITH and D. H. EY, Hon. Secretaries.

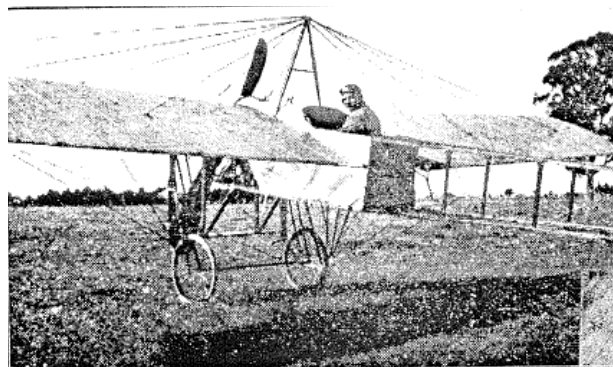
Carey and his mechanics hastily repaired the aircraft and were willing to make the flight on the following Monday but some members of the Red Cross Committee must have rejected the idea and Carey returned to his home base of Ballarat. The secretaries of the Gawler Red Cross who had to deal with the community's disappointment were less than impressed and they began negotiations to have Carey return to Gawler.

At some point arrangements were made with the Postmaster-General's Department in Adelaide for Carey to transport official mail from Adelaide to Gawler and another mail on his return. On 23 November 1917, Carey flew his Bleriot 60 aircraft from Enfield to the Gawler Racecourse at Evanston, carrying the first official air mail delivery within South Australia. The mail consisted of 100 souvenir postcards (which sold at 2/6d. each) and 10 letters including a letter from the Lord Mayor of Adelaide to the Mayor of Gawler.

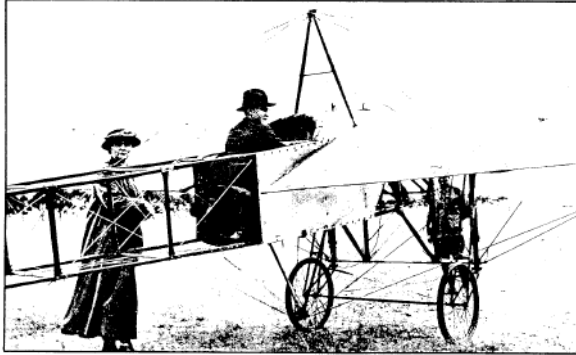
The Bleriot took off from Enfield at 3 pm and arrived over Gawler at about 3.30 pm. Carey described the flight as uneventful although the weather was bad, with heavy showers. His arrival at Gawler attracted great attention as he circled over the temporary landing field. Following his successful landing on the racecourse, Carey handed over the mail to junior telegraph messenger, Walter Nelson, who delivered it to the Gawler Post Office.

Carey's aircraft went on display for the weekend at the racecourse in a marquee erected as a hangar. An Army guard was on constant duty to prevent accidental damage by enthusiastic sightseers. During the weekend he conducted joy flights but on one flight, engine trouble caused a forced landing in a paddock. The Bleriot came to rest in a haystack, causing slight damage to the aircraft and, fortunately, no injury to either pilot or passenger.

On the return flight to Adelaide on 26 November, Carey again carried official mail.



R. Graham Carey in his Bleriot 60, date unknown.
(From *R. Graham Carey: pioneer airman* by H.N. Eustis)



R. Graham Carey with passenger
(possibly Florrie Robinson, at
Evanston Racecourse, 24 November,
1917
(From *Australian Postal History* by
Richard Breckton)



(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)

This plaque was unveiled on 23 November 1997 to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the first air mail flight within South Australia. It is attached to a large rock which was supplied by Boral Quarries at Kapunda and is situated on the eastern side of Gawler Racecourse, the site of the landing. The metal plate was partly funded by Taylor & Forgie Funeral Directors and the unveiling was performed by R. Graham Carey's daughter, Mrs Bertha Harvey and grand-daughter, Edith Martin. Due to obstructions on the racecourse, the mail on this occasion was flown in by a helicopter from the RAAF Base at Edinburgh.

References: Eustis, H. N. R. *Graham Carey: pioneer airman, the Adelaide to Gawler 1917 experimental air mail.*

Souvenir Programme of 80th Anniversary re-enactment of the first air mail carried within South Australia. Adelaide-Gawler-Adelaide, November 23, 1997.