

THE LITTLE AVIATION MUSEUM

Workbench notes

DEHAVILLAND DH-86 (ANA) IN /144 BY ARCTIC DECALS

(September 2020)

The deHavilland DH-86 is a very important airliner in Australia's air transport history because it marked a new beginning in the 1930s. Before that, the country's airlines had flown a variety of smaller aeroplanes on air mail routes in remote areas. In 1933 the Australian government agreed with the British government to set up an Imperial air mail service linking the two countries, the route to be flown by Imperial Airways as far as Singapore and an Australian company to fly the mail the rest of the way to Australia. Inside Australia the existing air mail routes were reorganized to get British air mails to every state capital as quickly as possible though the mail to Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart only went as far south as Cootamundra because the state owned railways insisted on being involved in the new system. There was no railway between Melbourne and Hobart so that service was also provided for by air under the new plan. Under this plan mail would be flown between Britain and Australia in 14 days, which was less than half the time that mail sent by sea took.

To tender for the proposed services QANTAS formed a partnership with Imperial Airways to create Qantas Empire Airways and, in Tasmania, the brothers Ivan and Victor Holyman expanded Holyman's Airways as a subsidiary of the family's shipping company. QEA ordered from

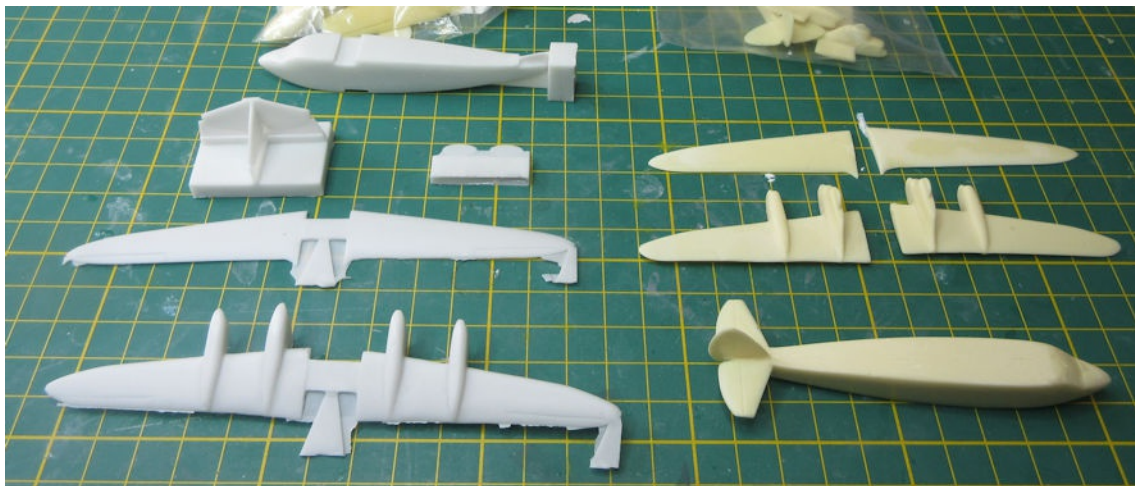


deHavilland a new airliner capable of flying from Singapore to Australia and Holyman's Airways also ordered it.

The result of their orders was the deHavilland DH-86 which was basically a four engined and streamlined version of their successful DH-84 taxi aeroplane. It was designed and built very quickly, QEA placing its order at the end of September 1933 and the prototype first flying on 14 January 1934. Because it had been developed so quickly the design had some serious faults so three crashed very shortly after they arrived in Australia; a Holyman's DH-86 disappeared on a flight across Bass Strait on 19 October 1934, the first QEA DH-86 crashed on its delivery flight four weeks later and then another Holyman's aircraft disappeared on a Bass Strait on 2 October 1935. As a result the DH-86s were grounded for a time in Australia and QEA had to start its new service with an old deHavilland DH-61 Giant Moth that could only fly as far as Darwin. A partial fix of large endplates fixed to the tail fins was developed in Britain but Australians were not told about it, so it appears that only the DH-86's later ordered by W R Carpenter for a service to Papua New Guinea flew with them in Australia.

The failure of the DH-86s was one of the reasons why the Australian government lifted its ban on the import of American airliners at the end of 1936. After that DC-2s, DC-3s and Lockheed 10s and 14s quickly replaced the deHavillands on Australia's main air routes, although they continued to fly on secondary air routes until the war when they were taken over by the RAAF.

While the deHavilland DH-86 was not really a successful airliner, it is an important one from an Australian perspective. Unlike most modellers, who seem to like lavishing more and more effort on making the perfect model, my interest lies in telling stories through the models I make so, while I lavish less attention on each model, I put even more effort into a range of models telling a story. So, for example, models of the deHavilland DH-86 are the starting point of a line of models telling the story of Qantas Empire Airways (now just Qantas Airways) and Australian National Airways, which began with Holyman's Airways. There was only one problem with this cunning plan, a lack of models of the DH-86. This is not surprising because it is a quite obscure aeroplane and while airliner kits are not great sellers to the general modelling public, a DH-86 would be the kiss of death to a manufacturer like Airfix. VAMI apparently produced a 1/72 resin kit some time back which I have never seen (and, known VAMI, have little wish to see) and Rug Rat Resin are planning to release a 1/72 kit some time in the future which will include the decals for a QEA version. That is at the top of my 'Wanted' list. I never imagined that anybody would be nuts enough to make a kit of the DH-86 in 1/144 but then one day, while cruising the interweb, I came across the Arctic Decals



site and, golly, there it was. Without wondering how good they might be I ordered two with the intention of making one in QEA livery and the other in Holyman's livery. (Actually, I have a few other Arctic Decals products and they are pretty good so it wasn't an order completely in the dark.)

These kits are frightening in their simplicity and, strangely, I got two different versions of the kit. One has a fuselage with a separate tail, lower wings moulded to the fuselage and a one piece upper wing that slots into the fuselage. The other has a fuselage with a tail and four separate wings. Both have shortened tail fins with the big endplates to attach, come with a few lengths of brass wire of two different thicknesses and no propeller blades. The decals are for Railway Air Services, a British airline, and very nicely printed but of little use to me apart from the black windows.

I started on the one that had the bottom wings moulded with the fuselage. It took a while to get the wings and the tail to fit and the only conversion work necessary to make a Holymans version was to extend the tail fins because they don't have the end plates. The project halted there for a time while I got up the courage to instal the struts between the wings. Brass strutting is not my favourite medium to work in and for this kit the tolerances were fractions of a millimeter so, when I could finally put it off no longer. I measured and cut the outer struts to equal lengths and installed them. After that it was a matter of estimating the length of each strut and then a seemingly endless process of filing and test fitting until each one was just right, and then using a dob or two of super glue to fix them in place. Then it was time for a good relax and lie down. The model was then painted in Tamiya LP-11 Silver which seems to be a good match for the doped lacquer of the original.



It was all looking pretty good up to this stage. I had hoped to make this model as VH-URN, 'Miss Hobart', which was the first of Holyman's DH-86s to go missing in Bass Strait. I used the kit window decals originally but I found that I had not located them properly when I went and looked at photos of the real thing again. Fortunately I had scanned them so I printed out a new set which look better than the originals now that they are in their right location. Part of this problem came because, half way through I discovered that 'Miss Hobart' was one of only a few single pilot versions with a different shaped canopy which had led me to put the side windows too far back. Not being able to make 'Miss Hobart' I had to make do with VH-URT, 'Loina' which disappeared off King Island in October 1935. This was not a terribly difficult process as I'd already made decals for a Holyman Airways DC-2 a few years ago that I'd saved just in case I needed them again. They fitted okay with a little adjustment and the creation of new registration decals.

The final problem was the propellers. I did give some thought to not putting them on but that wouldn't be right. I went looking for some replacement parts but, frankly, finding any propellers in

1/144 for four Gipsy Six engines was asking too much even for my spares box. After stuffing around for weeks trying to find replacement parts I finally gave in to the realization that I'd have to make themselves. As it turned out, it was not too difficult because the kit instruction sheet has a nice drawing to scale of the propeller so all I did eventually was to cut a strip of thin plasticard to the right width, cut a dozen or so sections to the right length and then gently file them to something resembling the right shape. Out of the propellers I made that way I selected the best eight and glued them in place, again with super glue. More difficult was the process of masking and painting them in Tamiya TS-83 to make them stand out as shiny against the duller silver of the rest of the aeroplane. As it turns out, they are so small that the differences between the blades is not too obvious.

The only possibly serious inaccuracy with this kit is perhaps the profile around the underside of the nose and the upper wing probably needs to be a millimeter or two further forward of the lower wing than they are in this model. These are not things that anyone would notice unless they had spent a lot of time looking at photos. Talking of which, let me recommend Geoff Goodall's aviation history web site which has photographs and details of all the DH-86s that flew in Australia and without which this model would be even worse than it is.



The kit for the second DH-86 lies waiting my attention. It will be some time yet before I get around to it. One of the main challenges is the markings for a QEA version which include a red/white/red line down the fuselage sides which will be a significant challenge in 1/144. I could do it by using a combination of the two Railway Air Services decals that I have which are red/white/green but I think that might be even more nerve wracking than the process of installing the struts. What I might do is wait until the 1/72 Rug Rat Resin kit becomes available with the QEA decals and use them as a model for some 1/144 decals. I'm hopeful that this will be some time off, I can't say that I enjoyed making this model even though I am delighted that I now have a Holyman's DH-86 with which to begin that set of interlinked Australian National Airways models.



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