

MEDIA RELEASE

30 October 2019



Sir Ross Smith and Sir Keith Smith, SLSA: PRG 18

Local Smith brothers win Great Air Race

Discover the amazing story of the England to Australia air race of 1919, won by two of South Australia's favourite sons, Captain Ross Smith and Lieutenant Keith Smith in a free exhibition, ***Heroes of the skies: The Smith brothers and the Great Air Race of 1919***, opening at the State Library of South Australia on Friday 1 November. Together with their mechanics, Sergeants Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett, the Smith brothers were the first Australian airmen to fly from England to Australia in 28 days in a modified Vickers Vimy bomber.

The exhibition follows the lives of the Smith family from their early days at Mutooroo Station in the far north of South Australia to service in World War One and the public response to the tragic death of Sir Ross Smith in an air crash in 1922.

The exhibition brings to life the excitement of the race and its aftermath through the State Library collections including the *Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith Archive*, as well as precious items on loan from other libraries, museums, and private collections.

Highlights relating to the race on display include the log-book and the intercom book of the Vickers Vimy, notebooks kept by Ross and Keith, a pocket compass, a magneto from the engine, a piece of Vimy aircraft fabric and a Sidcot flying suit of the day. Photographs taken by the crew during the race are on display and document first-hand their journey. Also on display are the rarely seen knighthood medals awarded to Keith and the 'flying wings' won by Ross in the Australian Flying Corps and Keith in the Royal Flying Corps, which were taken into space with astronaut Dr. Andy Thomas in 1996.

Director State Library of South Australia, **Geoff Strempel**, says “We are proud to be a part of the celebrations of the Epic Flight Centenary 2019. This flight is considered one of the world’s great pioneering aviation feats and the story deserves to be told.”

“This exhibition has been made possible thanks to the donation to the State Library of the personal papers of the Smith brothers by Sir Keith’s widow Anita, Lady Smith in the 1960s. It illustrates the importance of donations from the public and the vital part these donations and the State Library play in the preserving and sharing of the state’s history.”

As well as forming part of the physical display, the donated archives have also been digitised to provide easy access so people from anywhere in the world can explore more about the brothers and their extraordinary achievement. The papers are part of the Library’s Digital Collections, available on the Library’s website – www.slsa.sa.gov.au.

The ***Heroes of the skies: The Smith brothers and the Great Air Race of 1919*** exhibition is on display at the State Library of South Australia until 5 April 2020.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITY:

The curators of the exhibition and Director of the State Library will be available for media interviews on **Friday 1 November 2019**, from 10.30 to 11am, in the Treasures Wall, level 1.

EXHIBITION DETAILS:

Heroes of the skies: The Smith brothers and the Great Air Race of 1919

1 November 2019 - 5 April 2020

Treasures Wall, level 1

State Library of South Australia

Corner North Terrace and Kintore Avenue

Free entry

Open daily (except public holidays):

Monday to Wednesday: 10am to 8pm

Thursday and Friday: 10am to 6pm

Saturday and Sunday: 10am to 5pm

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