

Questacon

Doctors in the Air



Centenary of Federation

The wide brown land seems smaller thanks to the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Around the time of Australian Federation in 1901, people living in the outback had little communication, transport or medical treatment available to them.

A GREAT AUSSIE SOLUTION

Reverend John Flynn was the founder of the world's first Aerial Medical Service, now known as the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).



Working as a minister in the bush, Flynn dreamed of making the outback a safe place to live. He thought that instead of a patient travelling in tough conditions to get to a doctor, the doctor could go to the patient. World War I then prompted the idea of using planes to take doctors to where they were needed.

Reverend John Flynn
Image provided by the Reserve Bank of Australia

HOW DOES IT WORK?

In May 1928, Dr St Vincent Welch made the first official flying doctor visit. Within the following year he saw 255 patients but people in very remote places still had no way of contacting the Service.

In 1929 Alfred Traeger brought radio technology to the RFDS by inventing a pedal-powered wireless. He installed a base radio for the Aerial Medical Service and travelled to remote places to install pedal radios and teach people how to communicate using Morse code. Whole consultations and prescriptions for treatment could now be given over the radio. The vast network that had been created was used for the first School of the Air in 1950.



Pedal Radio

Photo courtesy of the Royal Flying Doctor Service

THE FUTURE

The Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia is a not-for-profit charitable organisation. The Service is continuing in its efforts to improve the health of people living, working and travelling in remote regions of Australia although communications no longer rely on the pedal radio!

FURTHER INFO, FACTS & FUN

- The Royal Flying Doctor Service attends about 500 patients each day and services an area of 7 150 000 square kilometres.
- For more info on the Royal Flying Doctor Service check out: <http://www.rfds.org.au>

For more info on great Australian Science check out:

Questacon's Innovative Australians <http://www.questacon.edu.au/innovaus>

CSIRO's Australia Advances <http://www.csiro.au/promos/ozadvances>

The Australian Academy of Science's Nova <http://www.science.org.au/nova>

The Australian Science Archive Project <http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/>