

'Finding Smithy'

The legend



Source



Elements of the Austin Byrne memorial to Sir Charles Kingsford Smith in the Eternity Gallery of the National Museum of Australia

'As from today, I dedicate this my life's work, the *Southern Cross* Memorial and bequeath it to the youth of my country, for them to hold in trust for future generations, with the hope that it may inspire many to the glory of our great country.'

'This work was inspired by the noble and magnificent efforts of my fellow countrymen, Air Commodore Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, Flight Lieutenant C.T.P. Ulm, and the many other members of the gallant and courageous crews of the *Southern Cross* in their endeavour to help the onward march of civilisation by their pioneering explorations and flights in the early days of aviation.'

'I walked the streets of this city for 40 years trying to get recognition, not for me, I don't count. I am only the instrument that has given my country this priceless historical record.'

'Have a look at the map today — there's thousands of lines, mighty hops over oceans and continents — all brought about by two great Australians, Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm.'

'I myself today maintain that the crossing of the Pacific by Smith and Ulm was the greatest feat ever, [greater] even than landing a man on the moon. It took 25,000 human beings to put a man on the moon. To fly the Pacific it took two men with terrific interest, terrific inspiration and the backing of some of his great country men.'



'This work belongs to the children of Australia — it's theirs.'

'I designed a globe that would show all the pioneering flights of that plane... I vowed, "It will have to be great, for these great men."'

(Scale model of the *Southern Cross* made by Austin Byrne. Completed 1938. National Museum of Australia)

The Byrne memorial is an illustration of the way a 'legend' may be represented in a nation's consciousness and history.

'The greatest aircraft the world has ever known. When the Pacific was crossed I went to Smithy and asked would it be possible for him to get me the blue prints of the *Southern Cross*. I wanted to make a model.'

- 1 What is meant by a 'legend'?
- 2 What are the elements of the Kingsford Smith legend that are presented here?
- 3 How is 'legend' different from 'history'?

Austin Byrne was not the only admirer of Smith. Look at the evidence in sources 2–5.

Source



Some popular images of Kingsford Smith



(Australia Post)



'Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith Aviator' (Museum of Victoria)



'The Southern Cross: England-Australia. Trans Tasman. Trans Pacific. Trans Atlantic' (Museum of Victoria)



(In Edward P. Wixted, *The Life and Times of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*, Brisbane, 1996, page 286)

Source

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From a letter by a female admirer to Charles Kingsford Smith

'Dearest Captain Kingsford Smith, I am dreaming wonderful dreams with you always as my hero. If only they could come true, one would feel in paradise with Prince Charming. I would just explode with wonderful feelings.'

(Ian Mackersey, *Smithy. The life of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*, Warner Books, London, 1999 page 171)

Source

4

Crowds at Christchurch (NZ) greet the *Southern Cross* in 1928



(Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales)

Source

5

A treasured memento

Thousands of people paid for joy-ride flights with Smithy during his barnstorming tours around Australia. For many, it was one of their most-treasured memories in later life.



(In Edward P. Wixted, *The Life and Times of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith*, Brisbane, 1996)

- 4 If you only had this information available about Kingsford Smith, what would your image of him be?
- 5 Why do you think Kingsford Smith is a national Australian legend?
- 6 How do these sources contribute to the popular image or legend of Kingsford Smith?

The National Museum of Australia exhibit about Austin Byrne and his obsession raises an important question: **how do we properly remember and commemorate a significant person and event in a museum?** Do we emphasise the legend or the historical reality? Do we emphasise the feat? Or the qualities and characteristics of the person who achieved it? Or do we emphasise the whole person, and therefore include any faults or dark elements that might be there?

You can explore this idea in this unit through the person of Kingsford Smith and his achievements. We will provide you with a variety of information, and ask you to create your own museum exhibit at the end – 'Finding Smithy'. It will be fascinating to compare what different people decide to include!

Work through the information that follows about Kingsford Smith, then create your museum exhibit. As you work through the material, keep in mind the following considerations about creating a museum exhibit:

Creating a museum exhibit

An exhibit should combine historical information with effective display techniques to produce an informative, entertaining and accurate presentation.

- What stories do you want to tell? What messages do you want to convey? What ideas and impressions do you want the public to take away from the exhibit? How do you decide what information to include and what to exclude? For example, do you stress factual details, or give a broad outline? Do you stick to facts only, or include opinions and judgements? Do you raise ideas and issues explicitly, or let people ask their own questions about the exhibit? Do you stress the feats and the achievements involved, or do you include failures and weaknesses?
- Who is your audience? What approach or emphasis might be most appropriate for them?
- What look and feel do you want your museum exhibit to have? How does this reflect the content?
- How would you like your audience to interact with your exhibit? Consider building in an interactive element.

In addition you should ensure that:

- Labels are relevant and 'add' to the story the symbol or object tells. Consider the length of your labels. How much text will your audience read?
- There is continuity of language and style throughout the exhibit. What is the reading level of your audience?
- Your exhibit is supported by research.
- Different media, where appropriate, are utilised in your display (e.g. audio, visual, tactile).
- All objects, images, audio etc are sourced and credited. For example:
'Scale model of the *Southern Cross* made by Austin Byrne. Completed 1938.'
- There is a balance between text and objects.
- Your exhibit complements the materials/information it presents.





30th ANNIVERSARY OF
FIRST TASMAN FLIGHT
1928 * 1958

8^D



AUSTRALIA



Well

Done

Kingsford Smith

Australia is Proud of You





Souvenir *of* Flight
"Southern Cross"
piloted by
C. E. Kingsford-Smith

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