

June, 1911), Austria (Vienna, May-June, 1912) and numerous others. The final item in the display was a booklet priced 3d entitled "Henri Salmet, The Perfect Airman and His Wonderful Flights for the Daily Mail". Such was the variety of the material in this display that only a limited coverage may be given here. nevertheless, readers will have perceived why the London Group members were so appreciative of Dennis's efforts.



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### NEW MEMBERS

Council on behalf of the British Air Mail Society extends a very warm welcome to the following individuals who have recently been elected to membership of the Society:—

- 535. R. A. Downer, Wimborne, Dorset.
- 536. A. H. Bishop, Sunningdale, Berkshire.
- 537. Angus Parker, Argyll Etkin Ltd., London.
- 538. E. G. J. Oliver, Woodford Green, Essex.
- 539. Constantine Politis, Upper Darby, Pa 19082, U.S.A.
- 540. D. J. Hardwick, PO Box 37, Damman, Saudi Arabia
- 541. Herbert Reed, Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37830, U.S.A.
- 542. D. C. Wilkinson, B.E.M., Fareham, Hants.

## THE AIR MAIL LETTER BOX OF 1930-1938

by Brian Lamb.

The first official carriage of mail by an aircraft in the United Kingdom took place in 1911 when a Coronation Aerial Post was conveyed between Hendon and Windsor. Services to the Continent commenced in 1919 and by 1929 the carriage of mails between London and Paris and other continental cities had become established practice. It was at this time that the airline companies requested from the Post Office the installation of special boxes in their agent's offices in London — intended air mail could then be posted and collected without any loss of time in sorting.

The Post Office refused the request but, in November 1929, the Controller of the London Postal Service was asked to consider if there was a need for the provision of special posting boxes for air mail correspondence only. It was thought that separation of the airmail would be of advantage and great value to the Post Office and proposals were made for 'AIR MAIL' boxes to be placed on prominent sites. Initially it was thought only a few boxes would be needed but as the service grew the number of sites would be increased.

Approval was given to the proposals and 'as an experiment' eleven 'AIR MAIL' boxes were provided in London for use from June 23, 1930.<sup>1</sup> To enable speedier collection, special motor mail vans, painted blue and with an illuminated 'AIR MAIL' sign, took the airmails direct to the General Post Office. Letters posted in these 'AIR MAIL' boxes had either to bear an airmail label or be marked 'AIR MAIL' and be pre-paid with the appropriate airmail rate.

The 'AIR MAIL' boxes were painted Air Force Blue and on top bore an oval blue enamel notice with the words 'AIR MAIL' painted in white. From 1932 the boxes also had a double Collection Plate Holder giving, in the left holder, the latest times of posting and that on the right the various airmail postage rates. The boxes were of the 'B' size type manufactured by the Carron Company of Falkirk, Scotland between 1930 and 1938.

In May 1931 the service was extended to the rest of the country<sup>2</sup> with the erection of a further thirteen boxes in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Two of these boxes were different from the London boxes. That in the vestibule of the General Post Office, Edinburgh was made of wood due to the Corporation objecting to the bright colour! One of the boxes in Manchester, at the Newton Street Sorting Office, was found to obstruct the pavement and a box was built into one of the windows.

By 1936 the number of 'AIR MAIL' boxes in London had risen to 139 and in the provinces to 174 — this was the high point of the scheme. With the introduction of the 'all-up' airmail

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scheme to Europe in 1936 and its extension in 1937 to cover the Empire, all first class mail was sent by air without the need for the special 'Air Mail' labels. The original purpose for having a separate posting box for airmail no longer applied and arrangements were made to have them withdrawn.

In August 1938 a statement to the press gave the facts and figures why the blue 'AIR MAIL' boxes were being taken out of use<sup>3</sup>. The last box to be withdrawn was in fact the first to be erected, the one sited outside the General Post Office in King Edward Street, London, EC1 (see illustration).  
(with acknowledgements to Jean Farrugia 'THE LETTER BOX', Centaur Press and to H.M. Postmaster-General for permission to re-produce the photograph of the box sited in King Edward Street).

1. *The first eleven AIR MAIL boxes*

- 1—King Edward Street, EC1 (The General Post Office HQ).
  - 2—Ludgate Circus Branch, EC4.
  - 3—Moorgate, EC2 (Opposite Britannic House).
  - 4—Royal Exchange, EC3.
  - 5—Western Central District Post Office, Hyde Street.
  - 6—High Holborn, WC (opposite Staple Inn building).
  - 7—East Strand, WC (near Surrey Street).
  - 8—Charing Cross Branch Office, WC.
  - 9—Oxford Circus, W1 (on the North East side).
  - 10—Piccadilly Circus, W1 (opposite the Pavilion Theatre).
  - 11—Victoria Station, SW1 (entrance to forecourt).
- two further boxes were to be erected:
- 12—Charles Street, Haymarket, SW1 (Imperial Airways office)
  - 13—Parliament Street Branch Office, SW1.

2. *The thirteen, May 1931 boxes:*

- BIRMINGHAM
- 14—Colmore Row
  - 15—Corporation Street
  - 16—Head Post Office
- LIVERPOOL
- 17—near the Town Hall
  - 18—Head Post Office
- MANCHESTER
- 19—Whitworth Street Branch Office
  - 20—St. Peter's (Square) Post Office
  - 21—Newton Street Sorting Office (wall box !)
- EDINBURGH
- 22—George Street and Hanover Square
  - 23—Constitution Street and Bernard Street, Leith
  - 24—Head Post Office (vestibule)
- GLASGOW
- 25—Head Post Office
  - 26—Waterloo Street Post Office.



*H.M. Postmaster-General.*

The blue 'AIR MAIL' post box sited outside the G.P.O. H.Q.  
in King Edward Street, London.

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### 3. *The August 1938 Press Statement.*

The blue air-mail posting boxes which, since they first began to be introduced in 1930, have become a familiar sight in the streets of London and the large provincial towns, will shortly disappear.

In the early days they served to popularise the facilities for sending by air urgent letters marked with a blue air-mail label to certain overseas countries on payment of a special air-mail fee in addition to the ordinary postage. Posting in a blue box was not essential but, as more and more blue boxes were provided, quite a high percentage of air-mail letters were posted in them. This partial segregation of air-mail letters at the posting stage helped the Post Office and was of advantage to the public because, in some cases, the blue boxes offered a slightly later posting time than the ordinary boxes.

The position has been radically changed by the rapid development during the last three years of 'all-up' air-mail services to Empire and European countries, and the culminating point has been reached by the recent extension of the Empire Air-Mail Scheme to Australia and New Zealand.

Carrriage of mails by air has become a normal rather than a special feature of postal operations, and posting in the blue air-mail boxes of correspondence for countries served on the 'all-up' basis so far from being a convenience to the Post Office and an advantage to the posters, has become a source of potential delay.

When the first blue posting box was introduced eight years ago, air-mail letters were being despatched from this country at the rate of about 40 tons a year. By 1935 this figure had increased to nearly 200 tons a year. 'All-up' services to European countries carrying letters and postcards by air at the ordinary international rate of 2½d for the first ounce and 1½d each additional ounce for letters and 1½d each for postcards, were first instituted in 1936 and have developed to such an extent that, at the present time, with the exception of Malta (which will in due course be served under the Empire Air-Mail Scheme) and the Iberian Peninsula, all letters and postcards for European destinations that can be usefully accelerated in delivery are being sent by air at the rate of about 850 tons a year. The Empire Air-Mail Scheme, inaugurated in June 1937, on the route to East and South Africa and since extended to India, Malaya and Australia, carries all letters at 1½d per half ounce and postcards at 1d at the rate of between 1100 and 1200 tons a year.

First class mail is now, therefore, leaving the United Kingdom by air on an 'all-up' basis at the rate of approximately 2000 tons a year. Certain extensions are in prospect which will add about 200 tons, bringing the total to 2200 tons a year. The total weight of the first class air-mail from the United Kingdom for all over-

seas destinations that is susceptible to acceleration by air transmission is estimated at about 3200 tons a year, of which rather more than 800 tons is for the American Continent. For technical reasons it may be some considerable time before services on an 'all-up' basis to the American Continent can be contemplated, but the day when this will be possible will certainly arrive. The above figures show that over 90 per cent of the first class mail for abroad (apart from the American Continent) that can be accelerated by air transmission is already sent, or will be before long be sent, by air as a matter of course — without blue air-mail labels or other special action on the part of the poster.

Recent figures show that the total volume of air-mail correspondence on which a special fee is still being paid is actually less than when the first blue box was installed in 1930. The Post Office finds that, generally speaking, the use made of the blue boxes is now negligible, and a proportion of even the small amount of correspondence now posted in them is incorrectly posted and is liable to be delayed. In less than a decade, the role of the blue posting box has come and gone.

In the near future, therefore, the blue posting boxes will be withdrawn from the streets, and the small amount of correspondence posted at special air-mail rates and bearing the blue air-mail label will then be posted in the ordinary familiar red boxes. Due notice will be given, on each blue posting box, of its impending withdrawal together with an indication of the nearest posting point.

The last blue posting box to be withdrawn will be the one outside the General Post Office in King Edward Street, E.C.1. This box was the first to be erected.

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For further information regarding all types of letter boxes and where some of the more rare types may be found; details of membership of the LETTER BOX STUDY GROUP may be obtained by sending an S.A.E. to:

W. L. MORTON,  
11, Morven Road,  
Bearsden, GLASGOW  
G61 3BU.

★ The 'A' size box had a diameter of 19½" as against the 15½" diameter of the 'B' box.

Dear Ed

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