

IMPERIAL AIRWAYS GAZETTE



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Front cover illustration: Cover flown from Limassol to Karachi, 19th to 22nd April 1932, by the first I.A. eastbound service to call at Cyprus. See article pages 4 to 8. (Illustration by kind permission of Robin Davis, editor of the "Cyprus Circular Post," magazine of the Cyprus Study Circle).

Editorial

Welcome to another edition of the Gazette. I am afraid it is a smaller edition than usual but I can only include what I receive and this time, apart from myself, there are only three contributions from other members. Luckily I received a substantial article, via Sue Burn, which was published originally in the journal of the Cyprus Study Circle. I think I am correct in saying that it is the first time air mail related to Cyprus has been included in our pages. Perhaps someone can think of another neglected area and write something about it. Hope springs eternal!

On a brighter note: another first, at least for as long as I have been editor, which is that an article in the previous issue has drawn a lengthy response from another member. Excellent! Laurence Kimpton's article in the June 2019 issue on Imperial Airships greatly interested Nick Arrow and prompted him to enlarge upon the story of the loss of the R-101. I believe Nick has been in touch with Laurence, who was interested to learn of Nick's additional information and is happy for it to be included in this edition.

I was delighted to receive a letter from Bill Legg who wrote to say, amongst other things, that he had purchased and recommends a book by Scott Anthony and Oliver Green entitled, "British Aviation Posters." Bill says it covers the period 1920 to 1960s and costs £45 but he was able to obtain a copy from Postscript Books for £19.99. Thank you for bringing this book to our attention Bill.

I have to thank Nick Arrow again! This time for enabling me to resurrect the long defunct Questions and Answers page. This time we have some questions, so please, please, provide some answers for me to include next time and some more questions wouldn't go amiss either!

Speaking of questions, I expect many of you, like me, are asked questions regularly, arriving by email from all over the world. I recently received one relating to a cover from Khartoum, addressed to Bandon which was carried on the first Eastern service to be extended from Rangoon to Singapore in December 1933. It was backstamped Alor Star 18 December; Ban Hat Yai 19th, Thung Song 20th and Bandon 21st. The service departed Rangoon on 18 December and reached Alor Star the same day and should have also called at Bandon that day. Hence my enquirer wanted to know why his cover did not reach Bandon until the 21st.

I discovered an answer of which I was not previously aware and although those of you who collect the Eastern route seriously will know it already, I thought I would mention it here in case there are others like me!

Nils Ramm-Ericson provides the explanation in Part 3 of his "Airmails of Siam." He wrote:

"Originally, when the extension of the IA service beyond Rangoon was planned, a stop at Bandon had been scheduled. In the event, this stop was deleted, and mail intended for Bandon was either unloaded at Bangkok and sent on with the twice-weekly South Express train, or carried to Alor Star and from there sent back to Bandon by train service."

Sure enough, the two intermediate datestamps of Ban Hat Yai and Thung Song are on the railway line between Alor Star and Bandon. The I.A. Eastern timetable of December 1933 includes Bandon but subsequent timetables do not.

I will leave you with my usual plea: send me something for the next edition please. Surely you all have at least one or two really interesting covers which you could share?

The loss of the R-101

By Nicholas Arrow

The writer acknowledges that he has drawn heavily from two sources of information:

a - "Giants of the Sky" by Douglas H. Robinson (probably the greatest airship historian)

b - "Airshipwreck" by Len Deighton (renowned military and aerial historian) & Arnold Schwartzman.

I read Laurence Kimpton's article in the last edition of Imperial Airways Gazette with great interest. The loss of the R-101 rang the death knell on the place of airships in British aerial communication in precisely the same manner as the loss of LZ-129 'Hindenburg' did for the German airship service in 1937. However, I must add to what Laurence said concerning the cause of the loss which was somewhat airbrushed out of the findings of the official enquiry despite the evidence given to it.

The problems faced in the construction of R-101 were most, if not all, self-inflicted and the loss of the airship was entirely foreseeable - indeed at the time of the loss, the Certificate of Airworthiness which had been issued in respect of R-101 was at the very least suspect and at the worst entirely fraudulent, of which more anon.

As Laurence points out, there were two airships constructed at much the same time, the "capitalist" ship, R-100, and the "socialist" ship, R-101.

Cutting a long story as short as realistically possible, the R-100 was a superb machine. It was designed, down to the finest detail, by one man, Barnes Wallis, and strongly built. When launched, it proved itself airworthy in every way, flying to Canada and back in the summer of 1930.ⁱ On return, it was walked into the hangar, from which it never emerged again.

In contrast the R-101 was a disaster. In the writer's opinion, it should have been scrapped at every stage of its development, almost from the drawing board onwards. Every mistake in the book was made, and the resulting airship was an accident waiting to happen.

The British had had some experience in airship construction,ⁱⁱ although they never seemed to learn anything positive in the process. They had had one previous disaster, with R-38, which was built for the Americans - perhaps the only lesson that the British did learn was the necessity for airships to be structurally sound. To seek guidance from the very successful German airship designers was of course unthinkable after the Great War, so the "capitalist" ship basically had to have everything tested to the nth degree, and then whatever was being tested had to be included in the design, whether it was of any value or not. The fact that something had been exhaustively tested was of course announced to the Press and given as much publicity as possible.ⁱⁱⁱ Due a pre-conceived notion that petrol engines would not be safe in tropical climate, the R-101 was powered by Diesel engines designed for locomotives, which weighed 17 tons and produced inadequate power anyway.^{iv} As the R-101 was technically a "ship", she had to have a capstan, and the use of stainless steel (to provide strength) for the shell instead of duralumin added considerable extra weight. Lastly, no attempt was made during her construction to keep a tally of the weight of everything included in her construction.

The result of all this was that, when initially completed, the gross lifting capacity was only 35 tons. After testing, the inadequate lift had to be addressed, and, in addition to the fitting of the extra bay, commented upon by Laurence, one measure taken was to remove the method of securing the gas bags in place, so that they could surge backwards and forwards by as much as 14 feet - just imagine the entire lift of an aircraft being completely unrestrained and moving forwards (or, worse, backwards), with the direction of travel going up (or, more seriously, down) at the whim of any prevailing breeze!

The summer of 1930 saw frantic attempts by the construction team to breathe some life into this totally useless project. Matters were not helped by the successful flight to Canada and back by R-100, the "capitalist" ship, which incidentally had cost about £100,000 less than R-101, which by that time had cost in excess of £500,000.

Furthermore, the entire R-101 project was really hijacked by Lord Thomson of Cardington, the Secretary of State for Air, who had visions of returning, in triumph, from a flight to India in time for the Imperial Conference.^v He drove the project forward and insisted on flying in the R-101, hopefully to India, and was deaf, dumb and blind to any suggestion that the airship was not ready. Laurence refers to his comments that the R-101 was "as safe as a house", but he gives Thomson a wholly undeserved favour by omitting Thomson's proviso that this was "save for the millionth chance"!

The last days of the R-101 were farcical, but totally unfunny. On the 1st October, the airship made a trial flight, in fine weather conditions, during which an oil cooler broke and no speed trial was undertaken. Lord Thomson insisted that the flight to India should take place within a day or so, and this pressure resulted in the issuing of a Certificate of Airworthiness **without** an inspector's report!

It seems that verbal instructions were given that the speed test could be done during the flight to India, but, as Len Deighton pithily comments - "*When one considers how the French might have felt about an airship with a bogus Certificate of Airworthiness, but with a full complement of passengers, doing test flights over their heads, it is understandable that this provision was not included in the written instructions given to the airship commander.*"

The R-101 took off on the 4th October 1930, the weather being dark and stormy.^{vi} It never managed to gain any respectable height and progress was pathetically slow. It finally hit a hillside near Beauvais, at no more than a walking pace. It was blown along by the wind, bounced and struck the ground again. All would have been well, had it not been for five million cubic feet of hydrogen producing some spectacular pyrotechnics. The subsequent Court of Inquiry worked out how the airship may have crashed, but seemed to gloss over the reasons behind the crash - perhaps it was not surprising as the only possible answer would have been a finding of total governmental incompetence!

However, a scarcer report^{vii} reported testimony that R-101 would never have had enough lift to return from Karachi, had she ever got there, as high temperatures would have prevented her from loading sufficient fuel for the leg from Karachi to Baghdad, because, for most of the year, R-101 would have needed 24 more tons of fuel over and above her normal lifting capacity! It was quite clear that these figures, prepared from 40 years of meteorological data, were known to several members of the construction team, although apparently not to Lord Thomson.

The really sad thing was that R-100, which had done nothing wrong, was simply destroyed on the orders of the very politicians whose incompetence and stupidity led to the disaster of R-101. Such orders were bitterly resented by those who had contributed towards the success of R-100, and a poem was published, the last stanza of which was -

*Airworthy, tried and found trusty,
She showed up a ship that was not.
They knew she would never rot rusty -
So a steamroller rolls o'er the lot!*

It is idle to speculate how aerophilatelic history might have worked out had the Government scrapped the R-101 and relied on the perfectly reliable and competent R-100 as the basis for a regular airship service.

Remember that the physical barrier of the Atlantic prevented any regular airmail service between Europe and America until the middle of 1939, nine years after R-100 achieved its crossing and nearly eight years after the R-101 crashed. Remember too that the German Zeppelin service (using a smaller airship, constructed to a design which was hugely restricted due to lack of funds) was by 1931 making regular crossings of the South Atlantic, and continued to make them until the loss of the '*Hindenberg*' (which had made several trips across both the North and South Atlantic) brought to an end any air passenger service which was reliant on hydrogen as its lifting power.

Might there have been a tie-up with Imperial Airways, which would result in heavier than airplanes tackling the route to Australia etc and airships conquering the longer haul over the "pond"? One never knows.

ⁱ It is true that the flight was not without two adverse incidents. Firstly, in an effort to reach Montreal before nightfall, speed was increased, coincidentally at a time when there was violent air turbulence, the resultant pitching and rolling causing damage to the fin coverings, which was repaired en route. Secondly, the Captain chose to take the airship into a thunderstorm rather than fly round it, which caused some further, but minor, damage. In addition, during a short flight showing the airship off to the Canadians, an engine failed, but it was considered, correctly, that the flight home could be undertaken with the remaining 5 engines.

ⁱⁱ R-34 was the first airship to cross the Atlantic, in 1919, but a potentially ambitious project of airship development at the time fell victim to post-war economies.

ⁱⁱⁱ Len Deighton's comment puts things in a nutshell - "All concerned had been trapped by their own publicity".

^{iv} One engine was only capable of propelling the ship backwards, and was otherwise completely useless, adding a huge weight for the other inadequate engines to push forward! The construction team commented that they could no more be blamed for the excess weight of the propulsion of the airship than a man walking in heavy boots that he was not allowed to change.

^v It is generally accepted that he had an ambition to become the next Viceroy of India.

^{vi} At a time when the airship should have been fully trimmed and ready for take off, it had to jettison 4 tons (Robinson - Deighton says 1½ tons) of ballast, leaving only some ballast in the nose which could not be jettisoned from the cockpit! The heavy rain did not help, as of course it only added to the total weight of the airship by soaking into the outer fabric.

^{vii} "Minutes of the Proceedings at the Public Inquiry into the Loss of the Airship R-101"

The first air mail flights between England and Cyprus, April 1932: a mystery solved

By Haris Chrysostomou

[Ed.: This article was first published in "Cyprus Circular Post," the journal of the Cyprus Study Circle (Vol. 22, No. 2, August 2018). It was sent to me by Sue Burn who obtained the article and permission for it to be included in our magazine from the author and also from Robin Davis, editor of "Cyprus Circular Post," both of whom we thank].

Introduction

The first regular airmail service between Cyprus and Great Britain was realised in April 1932, when Limassol was included in the summer schedule of the Imperial Airways flying boat service operated between England and India. The first scheduled eastbound airmail flight from England to Cyprus left London on 16th April 1932 and arrived in Limassol on 19th April 1932 *via* Paris, Brindisi, Athens and Rhodes. The first westbound airmail flight from Cyprus to England was scheduled to depart Cyprus on Saturday, 23 April 1932, but it did not do so, for some reason, until Sunday, 24 April 1932. Until today, this flight delay had been veiled in mystery. With the encouragement of Robin Davis, the President of the Cyprus Study Circle, I decided to conduct some research in the Cyprus newspaper archives in order to try and lift the veil of mystery on this important event. For sources I relied primarily on contemporary newspapers published in Cyprus.

In the end, the findings of my painstaking research at the archives, not only helped in solving the 'flight delay mystery', but also brought to light some unknown new information about the first airmail flights to and from Cyprus, proving once again the importance of the local newspaper archives in exploring the postal history of Cyprus.

The eastbound airmail flight to Limassol on 19 April 1932

The first Imperial Airways flying boats direct service was officially announced by the Post Office Notice No. 333, which was published in the Cyprus Gazette. The Notice stated that "*weather permitting, the flying boats operating the Eastern Mediterranean section of the England-India air service will make regular weekly calls at Limassol. The Eastbound boat is appointed to call on Tuesday, the 19th of April, and the Westbound on Saturday, the 23rd of April, calling every Tuesday and Saturday, respectively, thereafter.*" [1] Following this notice, the acting Colonial Secretary to the Government of Cyprus sent an announcement that was published in all Cypriot newspapers of the time, with details about the introduction of the new flying boat air service.

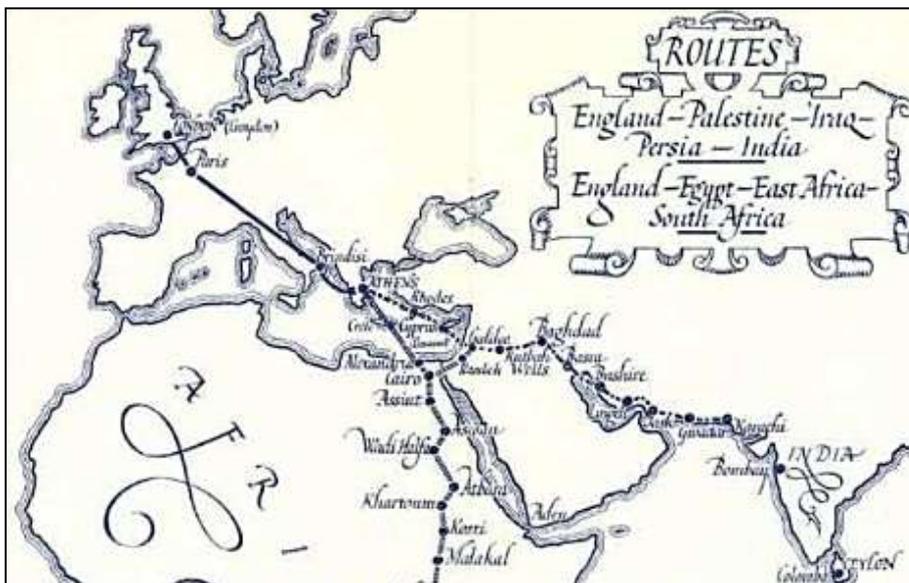


Fig 1: The imperial Airways summer services route in 1932. Map included in the company's official timetable (second edition) (Retrieved from <http://www.timetableimages.com> in June 2018).

Imperial Airways used the Short S.17 Kent flying boats - also referred to as Scipio Class - to perform the Mediterranean section of the London-India air route. Three aircraft were built and entered service in 1931, each receiving its own identification letters as well as its own name: 'Scipio,' 'Sylvanus' and 'Satyrus.'

'Sylvanus,' with identification letters G-ABFB, was the flying boat that performed the first Imperial Airways airmail flight to Cyprus on Tuesday, 19 April 1932.

On 23 April 1932, 'Eleftheria', one of the leading Cypriot (weekly) newspapers of that period, based in Nicosia, published a detailed report about the arrival of the 'Sylvanus' flying boat in Limassol:

"Limassol, 22 April 1932,

The first Imperial Airways flying boat that will perform the Cyprus-Greece-Europe-Palestine air route, alighted at 02.30 p.m. last Tuesday (note: 19 April 1932) from Phaleron via Rhodes. The representative of Imperial Airways, Mr. W. H. Whelan, the Commissioner of Limassol, Mr. Wright [2] along with his spouse, the Comptroller of Customs, Mr. Wilson, the island's Postmaster, the Mayor, Mr. Hadjipavlou, Mr. P. Kakoyiannis (note: known lawyer of Limassol), the Customs authorities and many other Englishmen and Englishwomen were all standing on the small dock waiting for the arrival of the flying boat. At exactly 2.30 p.m. the flying boat with registration number G-ABFB alighted on the sea and almost immediately the officials and people that were waiting on the dock boarded on it.

The flying boat departed from Phaleron at 7.00 a.m. and landed in Rhodes at 9.00 a.m. From there, it departed at 10.00 a.m. and called at Limassol at 2.30 p.m. The flying boat was flying at 4,000-5,000 meters above the sea and did not encounter any bad weather conditions during its journey. Additional to its five-member crew, it carried two passengers, one from Paris and one from Brindisi, as well as five mail bags and a large parcel. [...]

Four new passengers embarked on the flying boat at Limassol, all of them British, heading to Syria and Europe along with one mail bag destined for Syria and Palestine. The flying boat took off around 3.45 p.m. heading to Galilee. Each of the passengers paid a £6 flight ticket fee. Thousands of people, men and women alike, gathered on the quay to watch the taking off and alighting of the flying boat. Tomorrow Saturday (note: 23 April 1932) another flying boat is expected to arrive from Jaffa." [3]

'Alithia' newspaper, another leading Cypriot newspaper, published a similar detailed report of the arrival of the 'Sylvanus' confirming that the flying boat carried five mail bags and a parcel to Limassol. [4] The rest of the Cypriot newspapers of the time provided less coverage to the first Imperial Airways flight arrival, such as the 'Foni tis Kyprou' that simply announced the arrival of the "first airmail flight between Athens and Cyprus," also stating that the newspaper had already received two airmail postal cards and other printed items that flew with the said flight. [5]



Fig 2: The 'Sylvanus' flying-boat (Source: Charles Brown Press Photo, London).

The alighting area for the flying boats

There seems to be some confusion concerning the alighting place for the Imperial Airways S.17 flying boats in Cyprus. In philatelic literature, including auction catalogues, it is often mentioned that the Akrotiri Salt Lake, near the city of Limassol, was used as the alighting place for the Imperial Airways flying boats. Wilfrid T. F. Castle was not exactly clear about this issue in his study, albeit noting that Akrotiri Salt Lake was considered by the British authorities as a potential alighting place for the flying boats during the winter time. [6] The Cyprus Study Circle Airmail Study Paper has been more explicit on the matter stating that *“the Salt Lake at Akrotiri was used in preference to the open sea of Famagusta.”* [7] However, there is no evidence to support the supposition that the Akrotiri Salt Lake was ever used as an alighting area for the Imperial Airways flying boats.

As a matter of fact, archival newspaper accounts show that on 19th April 1932 the ‘Sylvanus’ flying boat alighted on the bay of Limassol just in front of the town’s quay. This is confirmed by the reports of the two leading Cypriot newspapers, ‘Alithia’ and ‘Eleftheria’. More specifically, “Alithia”, the newspaper of Limassol, on 22 April 1932, described the arrival of the flying boat as follows:

“...the small and large dock, parts of the quay, as well as the balconies of the houses on the sea front were all swarmed by the crowds that wanted to watch the arrival of the first airmail flying boat which was expected to alight on our port at 2.30 p.m. of April 19th. [...] Indeed, on Tuesday at 2.30 p.m., with typical English time accuracy, the Imperial Airways flying boat [...] alighted near the large dock, while on the small dock, which is opposite the Continental Hotel, the Commissioner Mr. Wright with his spouse [...] were waiting.” [8]

After alighting on the sea of Limassol, the Short Kent flying boat was docked at the pier in front of the Continental Hotel, which at that time was one of the most famous buildings of the city. The hotel is depicted on a postcard (Fig 3: the first building on the right side) showing Limassol quay during the mid-war period. Today, the building no longer operates as a hotel; it belongs to the Cyprus University of Technology, housing the School of Economics and Management.



Fig 3: *The Quay, Limassol. Illustrated postcard (Foscolos).*

It should be noted that the newspaper accounts confirm that the British authorities, at a certain point, were examining the possibility of using the Akrotiri Salt Lake as an alighting place for the flying boats in the winter time, but these plans never materialised. ‘Eleftheria’ newspaper reported on 13 April 1932 that two Imperial Airways experts arrived in Cyprus and visited the Akrotiri Salt Lake to inspect the area with a view to creating an airfield station. [9] ‘Neon Ethnos’ newspaper, on 7 May 1932, gave more details about the works that had started in Akrotiri Salt Lake i.e. *“primarily the cleaning of a small canal which was believed that it was constructed by the Venetians.”* [10]

'Neos Kypriakos Fylax' newspaper also confirmed in an article published on 24 August 1932 that the Department of Public Works carried out works in the Salt Lake area for the same purpose. [11] As already mentioned, the project was never concluded because the direct Imperial Airways airmail service to and from Cyprus was discontinued as of 1st October 1932.

The delayed first westbound flight (24 April 1932)

As already mentioned, according to the Post Office Notice No. 333 the Imperial Airways westbound airmail flight was expected to call at Limassol on Saturday 23rd of April. But things did not go as planned because the arrival of the flying boat was delayed for one day. The newspaper accounts provide an insight into the real cause of the flight delay. In an article published on 29 April 1932 about the arrival of the flying boat from Tiberias, 'Alithia' newspaper reported the following:

"The second airmail flying boat was scheduled to arrive in Limassol on Saturday morning (note: 23 April). However, due to fierce winds, the flight was delayed in Basra for 23 whole hours and as a result the flying boat arrived and alighted on our port at 8.20 a.m. on Sunday (note: 24 April)." [12]

'Eleftheria' newspaper on 30 April 1932 confirmed that the airmail flight arrived a day late due to a delay in Basra:

"The flight of the second flying boat that was scheduled to arrive from Jaffa on Saturday morning was delayed in Basra for 23 hours due to fierce winds. The flying boat eventually alighted on our port on Sunday morning. It is the same flying boat that departed last Tuesday for the Jaffa-India air route." [13]



Fig 4: Imperial Airways 'Satyrus' flying boat anchored on Sea of Galilee.
(Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC)

The arrival of the 'Sylvanus' on 24 April 1932 from Tiberias was accompanied by the same fanfare that occasioned its arrival in Limassol five days before. Public interest was evident in the crowd that had gathered at the town's sea front for some time before the arrival. The following description is from an article published in 'Alithia' newspaper on 29 April 1932 concerning the arrival of the Imperial Airways westbound flight:

"Many people, men and women alike, gathered once again at the quay to watch the alighting and taking off sequence of the flying boat. After the flying boat alighted on sea, the port authority assisted the disembarkation of the 14 passengers, 6 women and 8 men. Two of the passengers embarked in Karachi of India, seven in Basra, two in Baghdad and three in Galilee. Their final destination is London. All the passengers disembarked on shore and visited our city."

They had breakfast at the Continental Hotel and they bought flowers and oranges for which they said they are of superior quality than the oranges of Jaffa. [...]

This time the flying boat carried no mail on board. If there had been any available seats, 3-4 of our fellow citizens could have travelled to Athens aboard the flying boat. At 9.35 a.m. the flying boat took off for Rhodes – Piraeus – Brindisi. It is the same flying boat with identification letters G-ABFB that called at Limassol the first time (note: on 19 April 1932). Eight mail bags were taken on board the flying boat, in total about 10,000 letters destined for Athens, Europe and everywhere else in the world. [...] Undoubtedly, 5,000 of these letters were sent by the stamp collectors of Cyprus on the occasion of the first direct flight between Cyprus and Europe. In fact, each one of these stamp collectors had sent hundreds of empty souvenir envelopes to all the parts of the world in order to be returned back to them. It is believed that the value of these souvenir letters will rise in the near future. Today, some people are buying these letters for five shillings each. After a few years' time, each one of these souvenir letters will be considered scarce and it is estimated that their value will rise up to five pounds or more. It's a stroke of luck for the stamp collectors. We wish them so." [14]

The flying boat left Limassol for Rhodes at 9.35 a.m. on 24 April 1932 and reached Athens in the evening. 'Eleftheria' newspaper confirmed that eight mail bags were carried on board the flying boat from Limassol. [15]

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the inauguration of the first scheduled airmail flights to and from Cyprus in April 1932 is a landmark in the island's postal history. The research that was conducted in the Cyprus newspaper archives has revealed many unknown details about these flights. First of all, it helped us in solving the 'flight-delay mystery' as it revealed that the first airmail flight from Cyprus to England departed one day later than scheduled (24 April instead of 23 April 1932) due to a delay in Basra of the Karachi-Tiberias service caused by harsh weather conditions. Secondly, the newspaper accounts showed that the alighting area for the airmail flying boats was the bay of Limassol, in front of the town's quay, and not the Akrotiri Salt Lake. Thirdly, the newspaper accounts provided us with interesting information about the amount of mail that was carried to and from Limassol by the Imperial Airways flying boats. Finally, the research demonstrated that the arrival of the Imperial Airways flying boats caused great excitement among the local population as they rushed to see these fabulous flying machines.

Above all, our archival research reminds us that there is still more knowledge out there to be discovered. I hope that providing a survey of my findings concerning this early period of airmail services will suggest areas for further study of this fascinating field of Cypriot postal history.

References

- [1] *Letter Airmails*, Post Office Notice No. 333, The Cyprus Gazette, 15 April 1932.
- [2] According to the 'Cyprus Blue Book 1932', A. B. Wright, Chief Assistant Secretary acted as Commissioner of Limassol from 1 March to 27 June 1932. It should be noted that when the first airmail flying boat called at Limassol, the Governor of the island, Sir Ronald Storrs was out of Cyprus.
- [3] *News from Limassol: Air transport*, 'Eleftheria' newspaper, 23 April 1932.
- [4] *The arrival of the first airmail flying-boat*, 'Alithia' newspaper, 22 April 1932.
- [5] *Short news*, 'Foni tis Kyprou' newspaper, 23 April 1932.
- [6] Wilfrid T. F. Castle, *Cyprus 1353-1986: History, Postal History and Postage Stamps*, Christie's-Robson Lowe, London, 1987, p. 195.
- [7] *Study Paper No. 3: Air Mails 1929-1960*, Cyprus Study Circle, Study Papers issue, 4 November 2007 [electronic version].
- [8] *The arrival of the first airmail flying boat*, 'Alithia' newspaper, 22 April 1932.
- [9] *Air transportation*, 'Eleftheria' newspaper, 13 April 1932.
- [10] *Salt Lake and the seaplane station*, 'Neon Ethnos' newspaper, 7 May 1932.
- [11] *Airfield*, 'Neos Kypriakos Fylax' newspaper, 24 August 1932.
- [12] *The arrival of the second airmail flying boat*, 'Alithia' newspaper, 29 April 1932.
- [13] *News from Limassol: The airmail flying boat*, 'Eleftheria' newspaper, 30 April 1932.
- [14] *Ibid*, 'Alithia,' 29 April 1932.
- [15] *Ibid*, 'Eleftheria,' 30 April 1932.

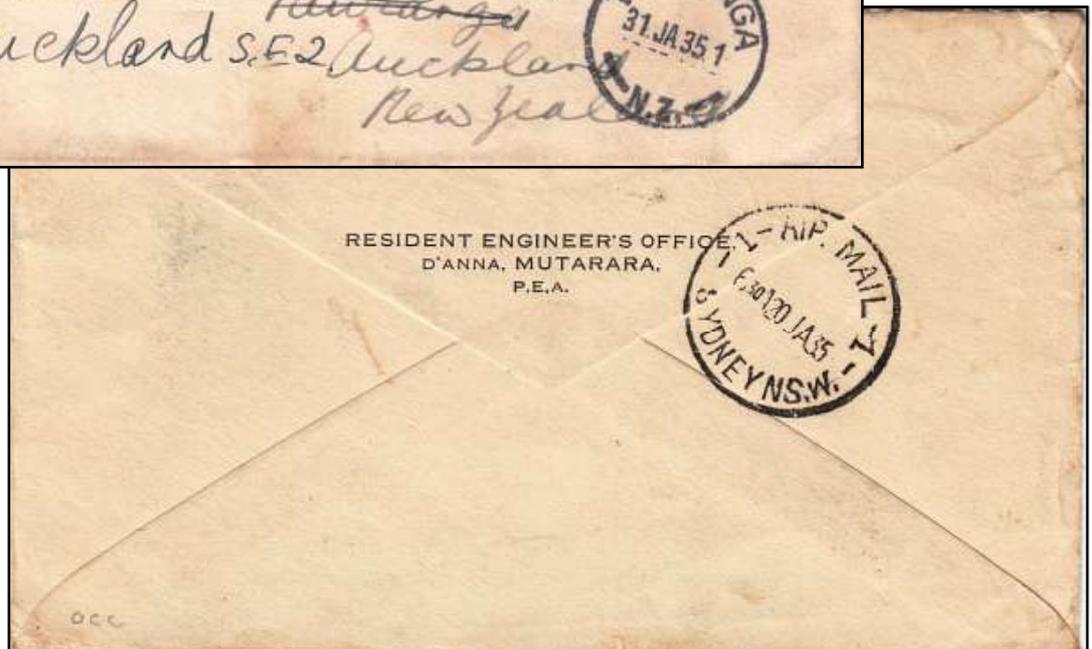
A cover which had an eventful journey!

By Peter Wingent

Dr. Christopher Cooksey, a Life Vice-President of the Rhodesia Study Circle, sent me scans of the cover shown in figures 1 and 2 with a request for my comments. Little did I realise at first glance just how many comments there were to be made about the approximately 17,000 miles journey from Nyasaland to New Zealand of this very unusual and fascinating item. I am very grateful to Christopher for making his enquiry.



Figures 1 & 2.



It was franked with Nyasaland stamps paying the correct 1/10d. per ½ oz. air mail rate to New Zealand, cancelled in the T.P.O. sorting carriage of a northbound mail train on the Shire Highlands Railway on Friday, 28 December 1934. This is certain, but the question of where the letter joined the train is problematic because the sender's address on the reverse is Mutarara, in Portuguese East Africa. The map in figure 3 shows the location of Mutarara in relation to the railway. Possibly the sender was travelling on the train and posted his letter when the T.P.O. carriage opened. There are no doubt other scenarios, all of which would be conjecture and we will never be sure of the true story.

At this time there were two mail trains per week in each direction between Salisbury and Blantyre, via Beira, the journey from there to Blantyre taking 34½ hours. The train on which the cover travelled was due to depart Beira at 19.00 on Thursday, 27 December and to arrive Blantyre at 05.30 on Saturday, 29th.

Having arrived at Blantyre, the cover then had to be sent to Salisbury to connect with an Imperial Airways' northbound service. There are two possibilities: it might have been sent on the mail train which departed from

Blantyre at 06.00 on Sunday 30th and arrived Salisbury 16.30 on Tuesday, 1 January 1935, or it could have been flown by the RANA service which departed Blantyre 08.00 and arrived Salisbury 11.00 on Wednesday, 2 January. Either way, it connected with I.A. African service AN200, which departed Salisbury at 14.10 on 2 January and arrived Alexandria to schedule at 13.05 on the 7th.

From Alexandria the cover was flown by I.A. Eastern service IE303 which departed at 04.45 on 10 January: two days late due to the Short Kent flying boat *Sylvanus*, which had flown the Mediterranean sector, having had engine trouble at Brindisi, Athens and Mirabella.

To Karachi, the service was operated by the HP42 *Horsa*, which managed to make up some of the lost time but there the AW XV *Arethusa* took over the service, was delayed by engine trouble at Jodhpur, resulting in the service running two days late again although by the time she arrived at Singapore, on 14 January, the service was only one day late. Here, another AW XV, *Athena*, took over the service, departing the same day to fly through the Dutch East Indies and then make the crossing of the Timor Sea from Koepang to Darwin. It was at this stage that the service was further delayed in dramatic fashion, as reported by the "Sydney Morning Herald" [1]:

"Darwin, Wednesday [16 January 1935]

The Imperial Airways mail 'plane Athena made a forced landing 60 miles east of Darwin this morning, after battling against a fierce monsoonal storm over the Timor Sea. It successfully took off again late this afternoon, and arrived Darwin at 5.45 p.m. The 'plane was undamaged.

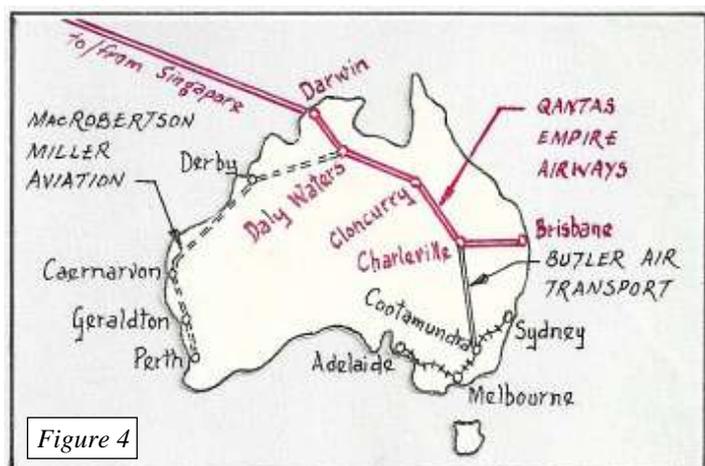
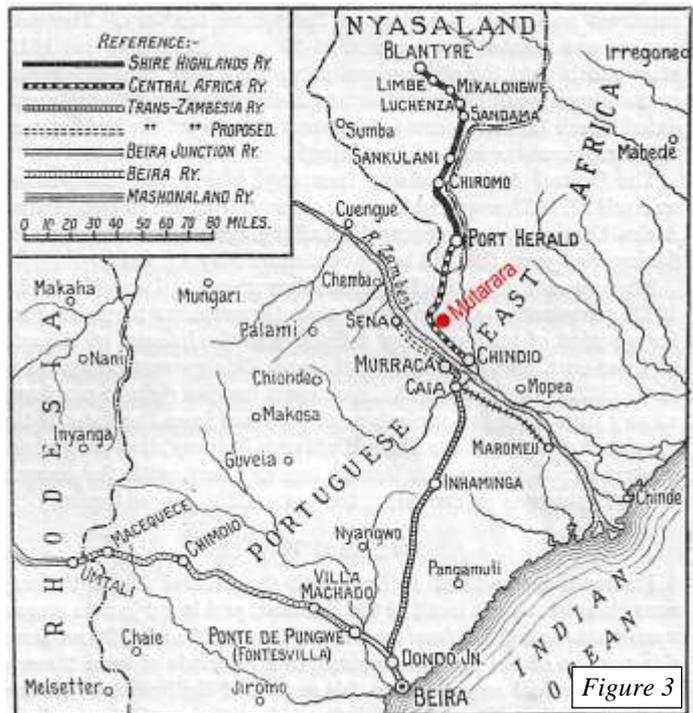
The pilot of the Athena (Captain V.G. Wilson) told a graphic story of the 'plane's flight through the storm.

"The thunder and lightning were the worst I ever experienced," he said. "The lightning played about our wireless aerial, and we had to draw it up to prevent risk of fire. Our wireless direction finder broke down, and because of the terrific thunder we could not receive Darwin's wireless messages. It was a terrible night.

If I had known the Darwin beacon was not burning," added Captain Wilson, "I would not have attempted the Timor crossing for a million pounds."

The Qantas pilot, J.B. Hussey, and two observers were sent from Darwin to assist the *Athena*. They landed near the AW XV, but in taking off again, crashed. The occupants were uninjured and returned to Darwin in the *Athena*.

The Qantas DH-50J *Hippomenes*, piloted by Capt. Hussey, carried the mail from Darwin, departing at 08.00 on 17 January, and was due to reach Cloncurry at 19.00 the same day. However, the "Sydney Morning Herald" [2] reported that she encountered headwinds and was only able to reach Camooweal by 18.39: 2¾ hours behind schedule. She continued to Cloncurry on the 18th and arrived at Charleville that evening. The mail for Sydney (and this cover for New Zealand) was flown from Charleville to Cootamundra on the 19th by one of the two DH84s operated by Butler Air Transport Co., from where it was sent to Sydney by a night train, arriving early on the morning of the 20th. The map in figure 4 shows the regular connections which operated in Australia after the inauguration of the Imperial Airways/Qantas regular weekly service to Brisbane in December 1934.



The next ship bound from Sydney to Auckland was the Huddart Parker Shipping Co. motor vessel *Wanganella*. The “Sydney Morning Herald” [3] reported she sailed from Sydney at 16.55 on 21 January and the “Auckland Star” [4] reported that her arrival at Auckland was on the 29th. The letter was most likely delivered to the original address in Tauranga on the 30th, where it was readdressed and reposted the following day, as confirmed by the Tauranga datestamp on the front of the cover.

Butler Air Transport Company operated the weekly Charleville ~ Cootamundra service with two DH84 Dragons named, appropriately, *Charleville* (VH-URU) and *Cootamundra* (VH-URV). The latter is shown in figure 5.



Figure 5



Figure 6: Huddart & Parker m.s. *Wanganella*, 9,576 gross registered tons. Built 1929 for Elder Dempster Co. as *Achimota*, sold to H. & P. 1933, scrapped 1970.

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Tony Plumbe for providing much useful information regarding the Nyasaland T.P.O. and to Christopher Cooksey for his consent to feature his cover in the I.A. Gazette.

References:

- [1] *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 1935 edition. (Website: www.trove.nla.gov.au)
- [2] *Ibid*, 18 January 1935 edition.
- [3] *Ibid*, 22 January 1935 edition.
- [4] *Auckland Star*, 28 January 1935 edition. (Website: www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast)

The Dundee ~ South Africa flight by *Mercury*

Material provided by Terry Hare-Walker & Laurence Kimpton

Terry Hare-Walker and Laurence Kimpton have been very fortunate to obtain one cover each carried on the flight from Dundee to Cape Town by the seaplane *Mercury*, the upper component of the Short-Mayo composite aircraft, in an attempt to break the long-distance record for a flight by a seaplane.

The record stood at 6,300 miles and the distance from Dundee to Cape Town is 6,500 miles. *Mercury* was launched from *Maia* on 6 October 1938 and, encountering headwinds, was forced to land at the mouth of the Orange river, 400 miles short of Cape Town, on 8 October. She was flown by Captain Donald Bennett and his co-pilot Flight Officer I. Harvey. For those readers wanting a detailed description of the flight, see Wingent [1].

Terry, Laurence and myself were aware of only one cover carried on the flight, which was from the Mayor of Southampton to the Mayor of Cape Town. This was first seen by us in the Rudi Jeidal auction catalogue [2]. Now with the appearance of these two covers, we wonder if there are others tucked away somewhere. If so, there won't be many.

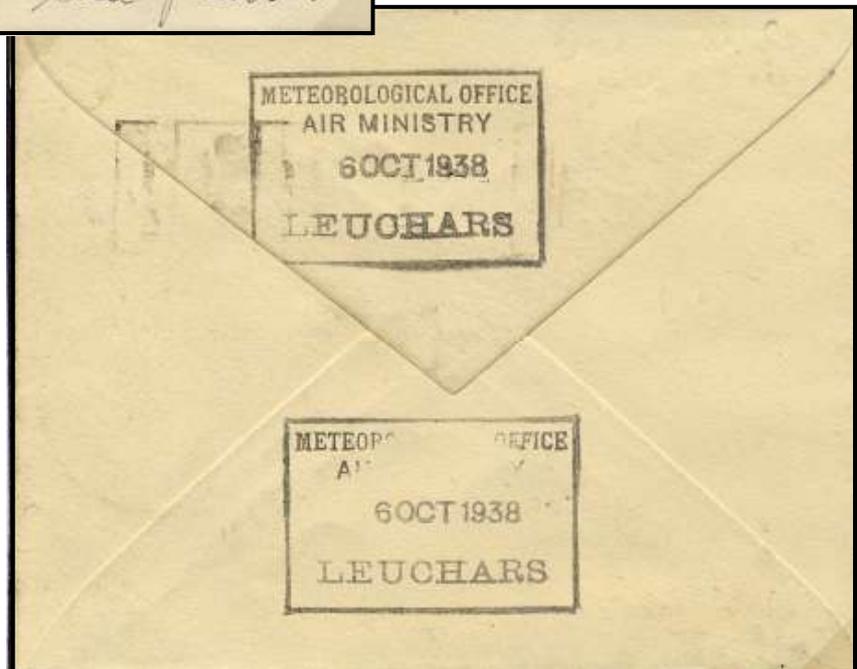


Figure 1 shows the front and reverse of Terry's cover. It is signed by Flight Officer Harvey and originally was addressed to him at Leuchars.

It was not only headwinds but shortage of fuel which caused *Mercury* to land at the Orange River, which forms the boundary between South and South-West Africa. Petrol was taken to her by lorry from Fort Nolloth, 84 miles away, and she then flew to Cape Town .

Figure 1

Interestingly, on her return flight to Southampton, *Mercury* carried a letter from the Mayor of Cape Town to the Mayor of Southampton. I wonder if that letter will come to light one day!



Laurence's cover (front and reverse) is shown in figure 2:

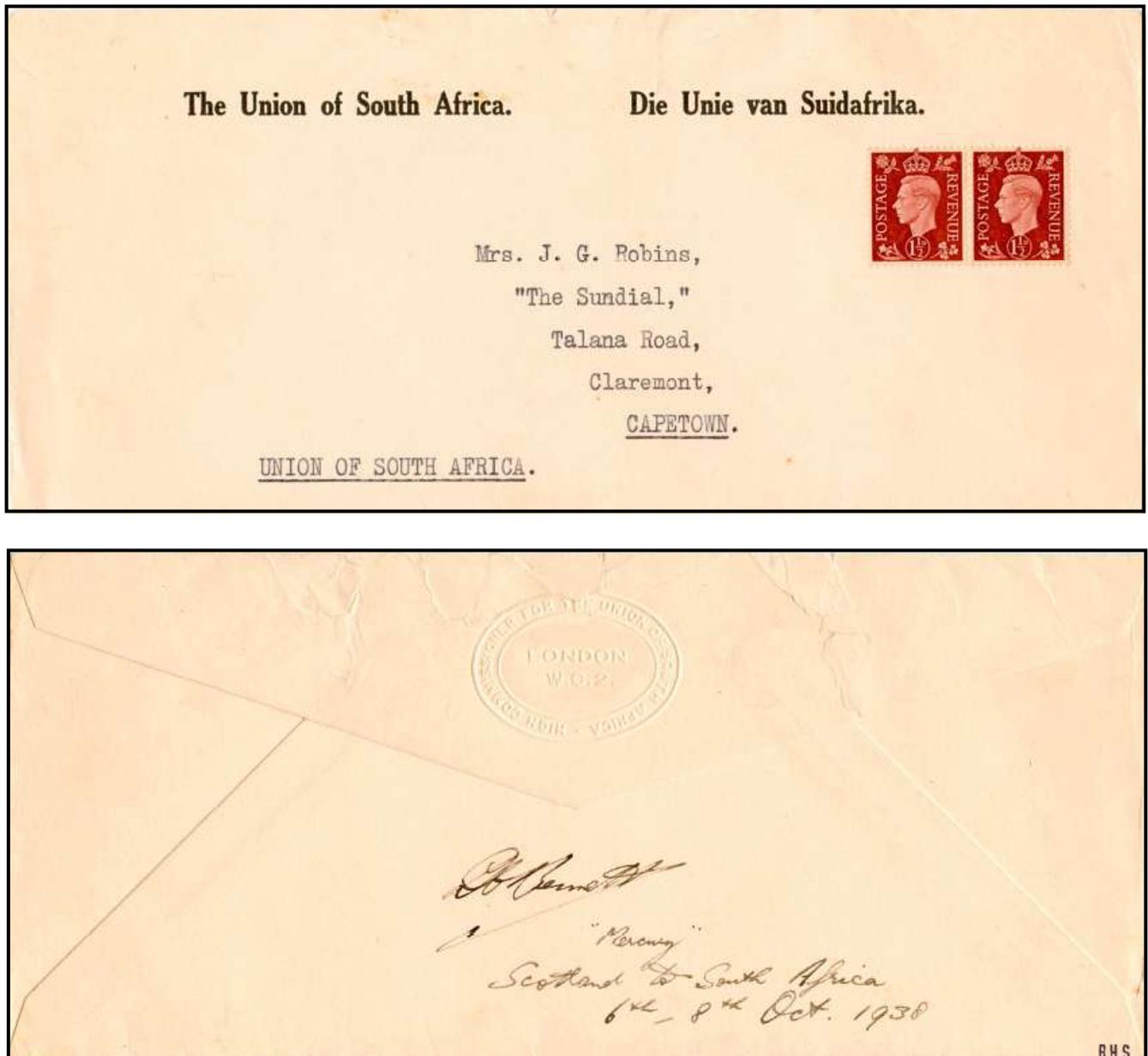


Figure 2

Although it apparently did not pass through a Post Office, it bears Donald Bennett's signature on the reverse and the same notation as that which he wrote on the cover to the Mayor of Cape Town. It would be interesting to know who was the sender and also Mrs. J.G. Robins, the addressee.

They are certainly two extremely rare covers and our thanks must go to Terry and Laurence for sharing them with us.

References:

- [1] Wingent, Peter, *Imperial Airways' Empire flying Boat Services, 1936 to 1939*. Pub. by author, 1997.
- [2] Sotheby's, Johannesburg, *The Jeidal collection of African Airmails*, 15 June 1988.

Imperial Airways Flight Number AN47

Inaugural Flight from Cape Town to London

By John C. Symons

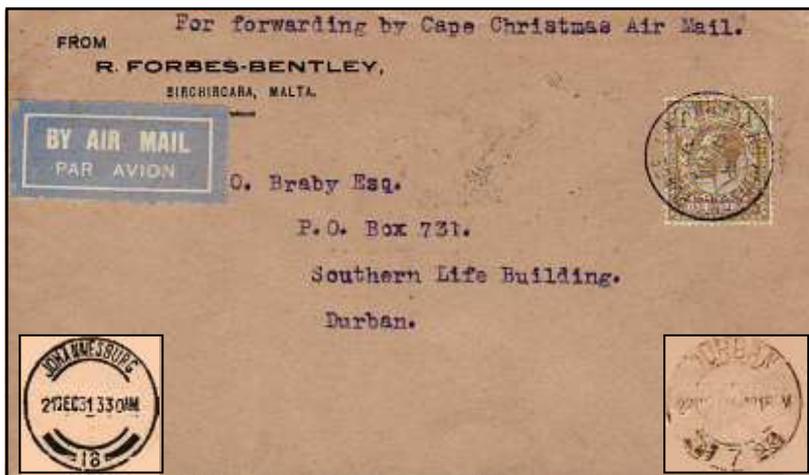
Imperial Airways (IAL) Flight Number AN47, the inaugural flight of the new service operating between Cape Town, South Africa and Croydon, London cannot be considered in isolation. It is essential to include the roles of three other flights which had a significant impact on this service, these are AS41, AS47 (both from Croydon Airport to Wingfield Airport, Cape Town) and AN48 (Wingfield Airport, Cape Town to Croydon Airport), for each in their respective ways ensured the ultimate successful delivery of the mail carried on flight AN47 to England. The story of this inaugural flight has featured in many books and articles, but in many cases is fragmented and incomplete. This article looks to provide a full analysis of these flights, revealing the full story of this historic service.

A new route can be introduced by a number of methods. Firstly, and perhaps most obvious, departure from A, arrival at B, turn around and return to A, a serial approach. Secondly, aircraft could start simultaneously from either end, A to B and B to A, a parallel approach. Thirdly an existing route may be extended to the new destination, returning as in the second example; this was the approach taken by IAL with the inaugural flight AS47 from London to Cape Town departing on 20th January, AN47 the first departure from Cape Town to London on 27th January 1932, and thereafter.

From late February 1931 IAL had been operating a service to East Africa from Cairo to Mwanza in Tanganyika, in conjunction with the service from Croydon to Karachi, India initially carrying the East African mail as far as Cairo where it was transferred to the Mwanza service. From 21st October the African service commenced from Croydon direct to Mwanza.

The first flight to terminate at Cape Town was AS41 [1] which departed from Croydon on 9th December 1931. arriving in Cape Town on 21st December. IAL used this flight to pre-position aircraft on this extended route preparatory to the inaugural flight in January 1932. In addition to this role, the GPO took the opportunity to place on board a consignment of Christmas mail leading to it being referred to as the Christmas Mail flight. Alternatively the flight has been thought of as an experimental flight, some postal authorities even considering it to be a first flight. Not one of these is entirely correct, its primary function was to position aircraft preparatory to the departure of AN47.

Flight No. AS41 – Croydon Airport, London to Wingfield Airport, Cape Town



Flight AS41 (Figure 1) departed from Croydon on 9th December 1931, the first stage was to Paris. It carried 127 letters which had been posted at Croydon Airport [2]. At Paris this small quantity was added to the vast bulk of the mail which had been forwarded the previous day. From Paris the mail was carried by rail to Brindisi, the result of a dispute which prevented the transit of British aircraft across Italy. On 12th December the mail arrived at Alexandria, having been flown via Athens and Mirabella, Crete. It was immediately forwarded to Cairo by rail arriving later the same day.

Figure 1. Flight AS41. Postmarks: Departure: Hudson's Place, Wilton Rd, SW1, *, 9 Dec 31. Transit: Johannesburg 16, 21 Dec 31 330am. Arrival: Durban 7, 22 Dec 31

The 14th December marked the departure of de Havilland DH66 Hercules *City of Delhi* for Aswan, Egypt carrying the mail, where it was delayed by one day due to inclement weather. At Aswan the mail was transferred to an Armstrong Whitworth AW154 Argosy *City of Glasgow* departing on 15th December and flown to Khartoum, Sudan, arriving later the same day. From Khartoum to Kisumu the mail was carried aboard a Short S8 Calcutta flying boat *City of Alexandria* departing on 16th December and arriving later the same day. At Kisumu the mail was transferred to a de Havilland DH66 Hercules *City of Basra* which after a night stop departed on 17th December for Johannesburg via Nairobi, Mbeya, and Salisbury (Figure 2).

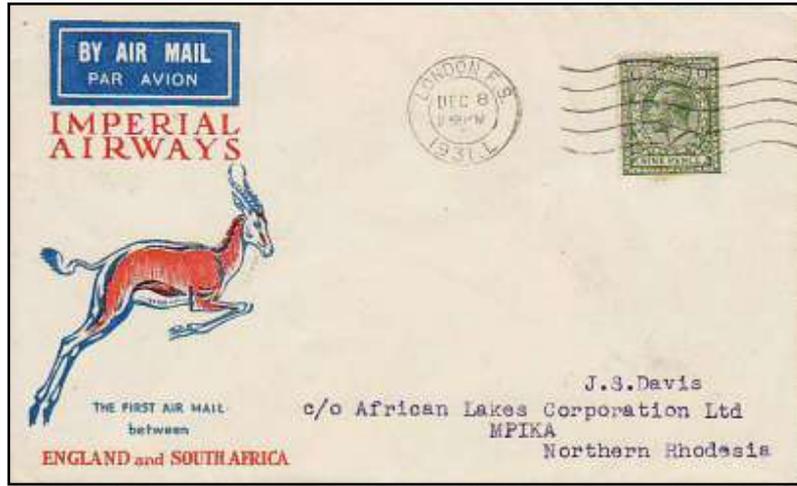


Figure 2. Flight AS41. Postmarks: Departure: London F.S. 1931.L, Dec 8, 2⁴⁵ pm. Arrival: Mpika Northern Rhodesia, 19 Dec 31



On arrival at Johannesburg on 20th December all mail was offloaded and backstamped prior to reloading onto a further de Havilland DH66 Hercules City of Karachi. The aircraft departed on 21st December for Cape Town routed via Kimberly and Victoria West, arriving later the same day (Figure 3). Following the arrival of flight AS41 all necessary aircraft were in their correct positions for the first scheduled flight from Cape Town's Wingfield Airport to London's Croydon Airport.



Figure 3. Posted in Johannesburg on 21st December addressed to Cape Town where it arrived the same day and redirected to Ladysmith. The reverse carries a clear indication this flight was considered a "Special Christmas Air Mail."

Flight No. AS47 – Croydon Airport, London to Wingfield Airport, Cape Town

Flight AS47 was the first scheduled service to operate on IAL's trans-African route from Cairo to Cape Town. It departed from Croydon on 20th January 1932, carrying three passengers and some 20,000 letters. The route to Cairo was identical to that flown by AS41. From Cairo passengers and mail were carried aboard an Armstrong Whitworth AW154 Argosy City of Arundel which departed from Cairo on 24th December, and following night stops at Khartoum and Juba, arrived in Kisumu on 27th January. The passengers and mail were transferred to the DH66 Hercules City of Baghdad.



Figure 4. Postmarks: Departure: Purley Middlesex, 19 Ja, 32. Arrival: Moshi Registered, 28 Ja, 1932



The Hercules departed from Kisumu the following day, making an overnight stop at Nairobi before proceeding en route to Broken Hill in Northern Rhodesia. This stage was fraught with difficulties. Firstly

on the approach to Mbeya the aircraft landed on an airfield sodden from recent heavy rains and sank into the muddy surface rendering a take-off with the load it was carrying impossible. The passengers and mail were taken to nearby Mbalazia which had an emergency airstrip. The reduction in weight enabled the aircraft to take off for Mbalazia. On arrival passengers and mail were able to resume their flight to the next stop Mpika. As it approached Mpika the aircraft was forced to turn back the result of a fierce approaching storm and search for the relief landing ground at Chinsali (Appendix A). Unable to reach it the aircraft made a forced landing in the bush at Shiwa Ngundu, the estate and residence of Col Stuart Gore-Brown (Appendix B). Having been entertained by Gore-Brown and his wife that evening, next morning, after a suitable area had been cleared by Gore-Brown's native staff, the aircraft was able to depart and arrived safely at Broken Hill on 30th January (Figure 4).

The flight terminated at Broken Hill. The storm which resulted in the overnight stop at Shiwa Ngundu had also forced the northbound service, AN47, to make an emergency landing some distance to the south east of Broken Hill, and being unable to communicate with it the decision was taken to use the "City of Baghdad" in conjunction with two other aircraft to search for the missing aircraft. The passengers continued to Johannesburg by rail, whilst the mail was placed aboard a chartered DH80a Puss Moth of Rhodesian Aviation Co Ltd, which departed on 31st January arriving the same day at Salisbury. Following a night stop the aircraft continued onto Johannesburg, arriving on 1st February. The following day saw the conclusion of this inaugural scheduled service from Croydon, having departed from Johannesburg on 2nd February and arriving in Cape Town the same day, albeit two days late the result of the appalling weather conditions experienced in Northern Rhodesia. The aircraft was immediately serviced in preparation for a departure the following day.

Flight No. AN47 – Wingfield Airport, Cape Town to Croydon Airport, London

On 27th January 1932 the DH66 Hercules *City of Karachi* took off from Wingfield Airport, Cape Town on IAL's inaugural scheduled service AN47 to Croydon Airport (Figure 5). The first leg, completed the same day was to Johannesburg, having made brief stops at Victoria West and Kimberley. At Johannesburg the mail was transferred to a further DH66 *City of Basra*, and after a brief overnight stop left for Salisbury at 03.55am, which was reached the same day, having again made brief stops at Pietersburg, South Africa, and Bulawayo and Salisbury both in Southern Rhodesia.



Figure 5. AN47 official first day cover. The batch of 200 arrived late in Cape Town, probably on board AS47, and few were returned to England (Baldwin, pg 54)



Figure 6. This cover lacks a single 1d postage stamp, as indicated by the incomplete postmark. This plus the water stains (front and back) suggests the cover was at some point immersed, most probably between the crash prior to Broken Hill, and its recovery. No arrival postmark. Alternatively it is not unreasonable to assume the stamp was removed by an unscrupulous collector or dealer.

The next leg destined for Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia was a short stage departing from Salisbury at 12:50pm on 29th January. As the aircraft taxied out preparatory for take off, it sank

deep into a patch of soft earth, causing sufficient damage to prevent any further progress to be made, and requiring a replacement aircraft to be flown in. The DH66 *City of Delhi* was made available, and with the mail on board departed the same day en route for Broken Hill. Where this aircraft was located at the time of the incident is unknown, the last record shows it at Khartoum on 21st December 1931 having completed a leg of flight AS42 from Wadi Halfa; it was not possible to arrive at Salisbury the same day, so if this was the aircraft which continued the service it had to be a lot closer than Khartoum. As the aircraft approached Broken Hill it encountered the same storm that forced the southbound service to make its emergency landing at Shiwa Ngundu. The *City of Delhi* was also forced to make an emergency landing, but unlike its southbound counterpart, the only clear space the pilot could find in the poor visibility turned out to be a swamp some 50 miles south-east of Broken Hill, rendering any further take off impossible (Figure 6). The situation was further exacerbated as all communications had been lost between it and Broken Hill. A search was instigated at first light the following day undertaken by the *City of Baghdad* and two DH80a Puss Moths. The aircraft was found the following day, but a further two days elapsed before a recovery party was able to reach it and bring the crew and mail to Broken Hill, arriving on 4th February.

Supplementary Flight. Broken Hill to Nairobi and onwards to Kisumu



Figure 7. Supplementary Flight. Departure Dodoma 27th January. Arrival: Nairobi 3rd February. and London 16th February.

Arundel. Whether this mail was flown to Kisumu by Wilson Airways (no IAL aircraft being available), or sent overland is not known. This departed on 2nd February (Figure 8), and arrived in Kisumu later that day, thereby enabling it to connect with the waiting aircraft which departed on 3rd February. From thereon no further delay was experienced by the AN47 service, and Croydon was reached on 11th February, following in the reverse direction the same route as that taken by AS47, albeit arriving in Croydon three days late. The mail that was carried as far as Broken Hill arriving on 3rd February remained there, the decision having been taken to await the arrival of flight AN48 from Cape Town.



Figure 8. Nairobi to Kisumu. Departed Kisumu on continuation of AN47 and arrived in London on 11th February.

Flight No AN48 – Wingfield Airport, Cape Town to Croydon Airport, London

On 3rd February the DH66 *City of Karachi* departed on the first leg of the second flight to Croydon, making brief stops en route at Victoria West and Kimberly, before its first overnight stop at Johannesburg.

The following day it left for Broken Hill, where it collected the mail that had been recovered from the forced landing made by AN47 on 29th January south-east of Broken Hill. This was the only event of significance to record relative to IAL's inaugural services to South Africa (Figure 9).

From Broken Hill flight AN48 proceeded without any major incident to Croydon where it arrived on 16th February. At some point between Broken Hill and Juba a day was lost, to which was added a further day lost between Juba and Malakal, both airports located in Sudan. The reason for these delays is not known to the author, but given the weather experienced on the earlier flights, inclement weather conditions were the most probable cause. These four flights could hardly be called satisfactory: AS41 arrived one day late; AS47 three days late; AN47 Cape Town departure nine days late, Kisumu



Figure 9. AN48. First through flight, departed Capetown 3rd February and arrived Croydon 16th February.

departure three days late; AN48 one day late. To a large extent these delays were excusable. All were caused by the weather

conditions experienced through central and southern Africa. A further factor which IAL quickly became aware of was the shortcomings of the aircraft deployed on the route, the DH66 Hercules class used from Kisumu south was far from an ideal aircraft for that route, it was not designed for operation in the tropical climate and high altitudes of the many airfields used on the continent (Nairobi and Johannesburg both at altitudes of 5,500ft. Appendix A). To depart with a full fuel load meant many early morning departures before temperatures became excessively high, as early as 03.45hrs. in the case of AN47's departure from Johannesburg on 28th January 1932. Fortunately these early flights did not carry passengers. Slowly the service improved as experience was gained, but it was not until the introduction of the Armstrong Whitworth Atalanta class of aircraft in March 1933 could the Africa service be considered reasonably reliable and satisfactory.

Whilst the prevailing environmental conditions could be considered a not unreasonable excuse for the early unreliable performance of the IAL service, the handling of the mail by the airline's staff left much to be desired especially that on flight AS47; Colley writes:

“As a mail service for Tanganyika it was, however, very much a shambles with some scathing comments coming from the PMG Tanganyika. At Moshi, there was a delay of an hour in handing over the mail, even then three items could not be found and one Nairobi packet was found to have been overcarried. The mail for Dodoma was overcarried to Mbeya, this including the Dar es Salaam mail, whilst Athens–Mbeya mail was offloaded at Dodoma.

At Mbeya, the mail was only handed over just before the aircraft departed southwards; as a result; South Africa mail sent forward to Mbeya failed to despatch.”

(Colley W, (2009), *The Airmails of East Africa*, 2nd ed., pps 44–45)

Even though these flights were fraught with difficulty, this new route fulfilled the dream of Cecil Rhodes of what was to become a routine operation between Cairo and Cape Town, what he referred to as ‘The All Red Route’, although his expectation was for a railway line across the ‘Dark Continent’ not an air service.

This leaves one unanswered question. Which was IAL's first flight from South Africa, AN47 or AN48? Mail from Cape Town aboard AN47 terminated at Broken Hill to await the arrival of AN48 before continuing to London. The only mail to reach London and to have been carried on AN47 was that which departed from Kisumu on 3rd February, arriving in Croydon on 11th February, whereas Cape Town mail did not arrive until 16th February carried by AN48.

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to Peter Wingent over the past months and years for his advice and clarification on the complexities associated with the four flights.

References & notes

- [1] Flight details throughout, unless otherwise stated, are taken from Wingent P (1991), *Movements of Aircraft on Imperial Airways African Route 1931 – 1939*, Winchester. His findings were based on the reports contained in *Lloyd's List*, and *The Times* 'Mails and Shipping' columns making it the best primary source available. Note: Flight designations are identified by A: Africa S: South and N: North, thereafter numbered sequentially starting with AS1 and AN1.
- [2] Wyndham (page 47) also contends late mail posted at IAL's headquarters, Wilton Rd, London was also carried on the 9th December departure.
- [3] Alternatively it is not unreasonable to assume the stamp was removed by an unscrupulous collector or dealer.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Imperial Airways: African Trunk Route, Airfield and Marine Landing Areas 1936

Appendix B: Extract from C Lambs' *The Africa House*.

Appendix A

Imperial Airways: African Trunk Route

Airfield and Marine Landing Areas 1936

Airfield	Altitude	Surface	Airfield	Altitude	Surface
Cairo, Heliopolis	50 ft.	–	Gulu	–	–
Cairo, Almaza	–	–	Butiaba	(flying-boats only)	–
Helwän	–	–	Masindi	–	–
El Rus	–	–	Kampala	(flying-boats only)	–
Samälüt	–	–	Entebbe	3,700 ft.	Sandy soil
Asyüt	100 ft.	Loose gravel	Jinja	–	–
El Qara	–	–	Tororo	–	–
Luxor	250 ft.	Firm sand	Kisumu	3,760 ft.	Short grass
Idfu	–	–	Nakuru	–	–
Aswän	250 ft.	Sandy gravel	Naivasha	–	–
El Alläqi	–	–	Narok	–	–
Toshki Garb	–	–	Nairobi	5,500 ft.	Murrain runways
Wadi Halfa	400 ft.	Hard sand	Moshi	2,700 ft.	Grass
Station 6	–	–	Arusha	4,400 ft.	Grass
Station 10	–	–	Kondoa	–	–
Shereik	1,200 ft.	Gravel	Dodoma	3,690 ft.	Metalled
Merowe	–	–	Iringa	–	–
Karima	1,150 ft.	Hard sand	Rungemba	–	–
Atbara	–	–Shendi	Brandt	–	–
			Mbeya	3,690 ft.	Metalled
Khartoum	1,200 ft.	Cotton soil	Mbalezi	–	–
Kosti	1,250 ft.	Cotton soil	Isoka	–	–
Renk	–	–	Chinsali	–	–
Melut	–	–	Mpika	4,650 ft.	Grass
Malakal	1,279 ft.	Bitumen	Kanona	–	–
Duk Fadiat	–	–	Mluga	–	–
Kongor	–	–	Broken Hill	3,780 ft.	Hard surface
Yirol	–	–	Lusaka	3,980 ft.	Grass
Bor	–	–	Leopards Hill	–	–
Juba	1,485 ft.	Sandy soil	Chipani	–	–
Nimule	2,800 ft.	Cotton soil	Miami	–	–

Airfield	Altitude	Surface	Airfield	Altitude	Surface
Banket	–	–	Pretoria	4,500 ft.	Hard sand and
Salisbury	5,000 ft.	Red soil	Veldt		
Gatooma	–	–	Germiston	5,500 ft.	Short grass
Que Que	–	–	Hoopstad	–	–
Gwelo	–	–	Kimberley	4,000 ft.	Grass veldt
Insiza	–	–	De Aar	–	–
Bulawayo anthills	4,380 ft.	Good, beware	Victoria West	4,160 ft.	Veldt
Lana	–	–	Touwsrivier	–	–
Sengazi	–	–	Worcester	–	–
Messina	–	–	Mulders Vlei	–	–
Palapye Road	3,000 ft.	Cleared bush	Cape Town	50 ft.	Smooth grass
Pietersburg	4,270 ft.	Grass veldt			

Jones D (1971), *The Time Shrinkers*, David Rendel Ltd, Appendix 2

Appendix B

The Africa House

C. Lamb

Noticing dark banks of cloud gathering again in the Mpika direction, he (Stewart Gore-Browne) started walking back up to the house, stopping just in front to admire the white lilies from Brooklands which were flowering either side of the path. He smiled as he saw Lorna (his wife) coming towards him, returning from overseeing the vegetable gardens which were her latest obsession, and was about to ask her how things were coming along when he heard what sounded like the whirring of a propeller not far off.

Recounting the episode later to Ethel, (his aunt) he wrote: *I said to Lorna it sounded like an aeroplane, but of course it couldn't be so I thought perhaps it was someone coming up on a motorcycle. She said it sounded like a mechanical flying flea, and we both laughed, and then the noise got louder and we saw a silver twin-engined bi-plane fly right overhead, then back again lower, circling the house.*

The plane was heading down low over the trees, almost brushing the tops, and towards the lake, apparently making for the flat meadow area near the shore. Realising it was trying to land, the Gore-Brownes started to run like hares down through the avenue of jacarandas, jumping over gnarled tree roots, and scattering villagers who had come out of their huts and were pointing upwards at the strange beast in the sky and putting their hands over their ears as the throb of engines grew louder. As they came out on to the meadow, the ground seemed to be vibrating and there ahead of them the aeroplane had landed and was drawing to a halt, narrowly missing a large red cathedral-shaped anthill.

It was a Hercules with an open cockpit and the name *City of Baghdad* painted on the side. Seeing the legend 'Royal Mail' with a crown above, Gore-Browne realised it must be one of the new Imperial Airways mail planes which he had read about in the *Bulawayo Chronicle*. The first Imperial Airways service in Africa had started the previous February with a successful flight from Croydon to Mwanza in Tanganyika, and ironically, when they announced they were extending the weekly Croydon—Mwanza/Nairobi route on to Cape Town and starting an African air-mail service, he had tried to get Shiwa Ngandu designated one of the stops, and a runway built. But the surveyors who had come to inspect the previous year had decided the boma at Mpika was more important, and built a small aerodrome there instead.

The engine shuddered to a halt, the door opened, and a tall uniformed pilot jumped out of the cockpit, removing his goggles and leather flying-cap to reveal movie-star looks. He appeared as astonished to see two white people in the middle of the bush as they were to see him, and for a moment seemed lost for words. Then he peeled off a glove and stuck out a hand, introducing himself as Captain John Sheppard of Imperial Airways, piloting the maiden voyage of the African Air Mail from Croydon to Cape Town. He apologised for 'landing on the lawn', but explained that the weather had closed down on them at Mpika and it would have been dangerous to cross the hills. Having failed to find an opening, he had turned back but did not have enough fuel to return to Chinsali, so had been looking for somewhere to land when he spotted the Shiwa estate. 'Saved our lives,' he told them.

Delighted by the unexpected visit, and always keen for the chance to see the latest in technology, having inherited his aunt and uncle's fascination with aircraft and mechanical things in general, Gore-Browne began to introduce himself and Lorna. He had just finished when the passenger door swung open and a strident female English voice rang out from inside the plane.

'Captain Sheppard! Are you going to stand there all day gossiping or are you going to help us out of this infernal machine?'

Looking a little sheepish, the pilot lowered some steps and held out a hand to a substantial woman in her fifties, aristocratic in bearing and dressed for northern climes with a mink stole over a tweed suit, a large floppy hat, a string of pearls and a furled umbrella in her hand.

'This is Lady Frances Vyvyan,' said the pilot. 'Colonel and Mrs. Gore-Browne.'

Watched by a gathering crowd of bemused locals, jabbering excitedly at the plane and 'the people who had descended from the heavens,' they all shook hands. Lady Vyvyan was very relieved to see white people, Gore-Browne later wrote to Ethel. *She told us that when they started hurtling down through the jungle, she and her husband had been imagining cannibals and witch doctors and all sorts.*

Air Marshal Sir Vyell Vyvyan, director of Imperial Airways, Mr. Francis Bertram, the deputy director of the Civil Aviation Department, dressed in dark suit and bowler hat, and a wireless mechanic followed Lady Vyvyan out of the plane, and soon the whole party was making for the house, where tea and fresh orange juice was served in the library and Lady Vyvyan was persuaded to remove her fur stole. It was agreed that they would stay the night as the plane could not take off until the weather had improved and a runway been cleared. The Vyvyan and Mr. Bertram were shown to guest-rooms and Gore-Browne called Peter Mulemfwe (his manservant) to accompany him, Captain Sheppard and the mechanic back to the plane so that they could clear a runway. The crowd of villagers had grown even larger, some children daring each other to touch the strange beast, and everyone asking how it stayed up in the sky. After a good look round, the pilot told him that he would need a runway about 800 yards long and 70 yards wide, which would mean taking down several large anthills and two of Gore-Browne's treasured ornamental fir trees. Quite liking the idea of a Shiwa aerodrome, though so obviously distressed about the trees that Captain Sheppard would apologise about them in Christmas cards years later, Gore-Browne issued some instructions and soon there was an army of 200 or so men at work, clearing and levelling the ground under Mulemfwe's supervision. With no mechanical equipment, it was a hard task. Some of the anthills were as high as 25 feet tall and 40 feet in diameter, and as one cubic yard of anthill weighs more than 2,500lb, this meant carrying away large amounts of earth, in baskets, and the two Shiwa wheel-barrows.

Back at the house, Lorna was busy organising dinner. Gore-Browne was pleased there were some new people for her to talk to, and hoped she would dress up for the evening. He had, he wrote to Ethel, felt a little embarrassed introducing her to their titled visitors in the baggy dungarees she had designed for herself, a pair of secateurs pushed through her belt, and no stockings or hat, though she had been wearing shoes, which was not always the case. *Sometimes I wish she would be more feminine*, he complained. He himself wore khaki shorts round the estate, exposing his long hairy legs which because of his red hair and pale skin stayed surprisingly white despite all the sun, as well as a blue cotton shirt with notebook and pen in the pocket, and a leather belt from which his keys hung in a big bunch, but he always dressed for dinner.

Lamb C. (1919), *The Africa House*, Viking, London, pps 167 – 171

The Dundee ~ South Africa flight by *Mercury* ~ the other cover!

A postscript by Peter Wingent

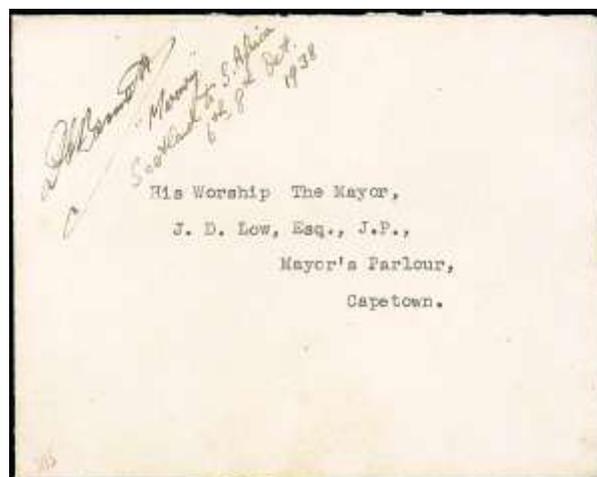
Terry Hare-Walker's and Laurence Kimpton's covers from this flight are featured on pages 12 – 13 of this issue and mentioned is made of the only other known cover: one sent by the Mayor of Southampton to the Mayor of Cape Town. By a remarkable coincidence this cover appeared in the Spink auction of the Neville Polakow collection, held on 25 April 2019 (cover shown below). The catalogue description was as follows:

Lot: 2219

1938 (Oct.) Air Vice Marshall Dundee-Cape Town Flight
1938 (6 Oct.) unfranked envelope from Scotland to the Mayor of Cape Town, marked "*Mercury, Scotland to S. Africa 6th-8th. Oct. 1938*" and autographed by the pilot; accompanied by a contemporary photograph of the "piggyback" planes. Very rare, being one of only three covers carried by Bennett to South Africa.

Note: Air Vice Marshall Bennett flew the seaplane "Mercury" which the upper component of the short Mayo composite aircraft. Bennett was released at Dundee and flew 6,045 miles to the mouth of the Orange River non-stop where lack of fuel forced him to alight. He flew on to Cape Town later the same day.

Provenance: Jeidel, June 1988. Est. £800 - £1,000



Questions and answers

Nick Arrow sent the following:

Dear Editor,

I hope that someone can help me. I have two queries.

Firstly, I have recently acquired the cover displayed immediately below.



This cover was posted in Basrah on the 12th July 1934, and received in Durban, where it was franked with South African stamps and readdressed, initially to Basrah (see red ink address, later deleted), being posted by registered post on the 24th July, the Durban R-number being 90750. It was then flown North via Cairo, arriving in Cairo on the 30th July - and transferred to the Imperial Airways eastern service to Basrah arriving on the 1st August. It was re-addressed back to Baghdad on the 7th August, arriving back in Baghdad on the 9th August [1]. One deduces from this that it arrived in Johannesburg on flight AS176 on the 19th July, and flown to Durban by S.A.A. It was then posted in Durban on the 24th July, flown by S.A.A. to Johannesburg, placed on Imperial Airways flight AN177, being transferred in Egypt to the Eastern service, arriving in Basrah and then readdressed back to Baghdad. So far so good.

However, the interesting feature about this cover is the triangular cachet to the bottom right, which indicates that this was carried on the “First Aerial Despatch / Iraq to Durban / by Imperial Airways.”

This is partially explained by a very short article in “The Aeroletter” of July 2010, when Neville Pokalow refers to covers being sent (a) from Iraq (with an identical cachet) and (b) Kuwait (with a similar cachet). The copy of the item from Iraq illustrated in “The Aeroletter” was posted by registered post in Baghdad (unlike the cover illustrated), as well as from Durban, the Durban R-number being 90751, one different from my cover. Pokalow claims in his article that “[i]t is known that two covers were carried from Kuwait while the assumption is made that a similar number emanated from Iraq.” Pokalow is an extremely experienced and knowledgeable aerophilatelist, and, although sadly he does not give an indication as to the source of his knowledge, his comment should not be lightly dismissed.

In my book, I refer to these covers (in retrospect somewhat sniffily!) by saying “*however decorative or exotic these covers are, it is difficult to see how they add anything new by way of airmail services. The Imperial Airways service to India etc lay through Baghdad [2], so it had always been possible to have connecting mail between the two countries and Kuwait would have had connections with Baghdad for mail to be carried on the IA service. Apart from the suggestion in the cachets of these covers that there is something special about the mail, allied to the hint that the service was to Durban, which it plainly was not, there seems to be no logical reason for the creation of these covers.*”

Can anyone please explain what I may have missed?

Secondly, I show another cover and I must apologise for the indifferent quality of the scan.

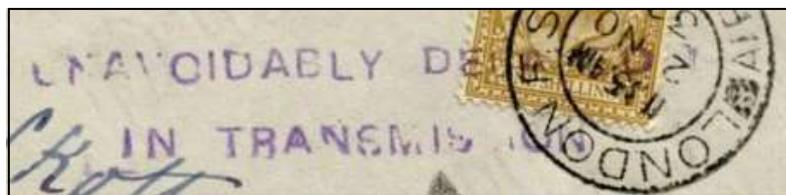


Posted in Lingah (or Linge) on the 6th March 1932, it was addressed to Johannesburg. Not having been collected (part “Non Reclamé” cachet partly over the bottom stamp) it was returned to the sender, and there is a Calcutta arrival mark on the back of the 6th June 1932. The sender was, in reality, Charles Griffiths, the Secretary of the APC in Calcutta and responsible for many interesting philatelic covers and not renowned for sending uninteresting ones!

The question of course is why did he send the cover in the first place? Lingah, like Basra, was on the route from Cairo to Calcutta, so if he wanted to create a first flight cover, he missed the boat by about 5-6 weeks. I do not think that the answer lies in the smudged and wholly illegible heavy oblong mark at the bottom right corner, but if anyone can put me right on this, I would indeed be very grateful!

[1] There are various transit and arrival marks on the rear of the cover.

[2] As well as through Basra - the cover in the article was from Baghdad.



Here is a question from your editor! I spotted this cover on Ebay and I ask if any reader has seen the purple “UNAVOIDABLY DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION” cachet before? Presumably it was applied upon arrival at Johannesburg – or was it? It is new to me.

Unfortunately there is no arrival backstamp to show whether it was flown by AS88 or AS89. Both services departed Croydon at 12.30 on the 2nd and the 9th November 1932 respectively.