

Indian Aerophilatelists and the 1931 2nd Imperial Experimental Flight to Australia.

The second attempt to fly all the way to Australia from England had been planned for take-off on Saturday April 25 from Croydon exactly three weeks after the first flight. The same Argosy G-AAEJ *City of Coventry* was used to carry the mail items bound for Australia and New Zealand made up in 6 bags. There were 2 bags for Sydney which would have included the New Zealand mail and one bag each for Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth. There were other bags on board as well particularly mail for India and 260 items were apparently sent from London bound for Calcutta.

Unlike the previous service Imperial Airways did not produce a special envelope to commemorate this event. The franking at 1/4d per half ounce to Australia and New Zealand was the same as the previous flight as was the 1/- for the Strait Settlements and the Malay States.



There were only 101 letters sent from London to Darwin. Items were backstamped May 11, 1931.

The usual Central European route was followed as far as Skopje where the mail was transferred to the train for Salonika. At Salonika on April 29, the flying boat Short Calcutta G-EBVH *City of Athens* transported the mail through Athens to Alexandria in Egypt. Transferred once more to a motor car, the mail was delivered to Cairo for the onward flight by DH66 G-EBMY *City of Baghdad* as far as Karachi on April 30.

At Karachi on May 3, the DH66 G-ABCP *City of Jodhpur* took the mail to Delhi via Jodhpur. For the Karachi- Delhi leg, the aircraft owned by Imperial Airways had been chartered to Indian State Air Service to overcome some internal politics and Imperial Airways could not claim for that portion of the journey.



The 3-line cachet was applied unofficially by Stephen Smith subsequent to the flight.

Items carried from Karachi beyond Delhi, were subject to a claim for reimbursement by Imperial Airways and Traffic Manager Dennis Handover did so in a separate letter dated August 19, 1931 to the British postal Authorities for the following:.

Karachi – Allahabad	90 grams
Karachi – Calcutta	130 grams
Karachi – Akyab	30 grams
Karachi – Rangoon	40 grams
Delhi – Allahabad	354 grams
Delhi – Calcutta	1019 grams
Delhi – Rangoon	297 grams
Allahabad – Calcutta	227 grams
Allahabad – Akyab	30 grams
Allahabad – Rangoon	28 grams
Calcutta – Akyab	280 grams
Calcutta – Rangoon	765 grams

The total claim was for 3.29 kgs or about 660 items assuming an average of 5 grams per item. This appears a severe case of “penny pinching” by Imperial Airways, but provided us philatelists with information not otherwise available! It is also interesting that Handover used the metric system by quoting the weights in grams when the British Post Office applied postal rates based on Imperial half ounces. As there are 28 grams to an ounce it would appear that at least some of the conversions were from the Imperial measure in the first place.

The Indian Government rejected Handover’s claim as the mail was carried by Indian State Air Service at least part of the way in the case of the Karachi covers.

Jal Cooper ¹ provided quantities for some of the destinations which allows us to convert Handover's weights into item numbers and averages. For example for Karachi- Calcutta Cooper states 20 items thus providing an average weight for those items as 6.5 grams.

Appendix 2 records the quantities arrived at by Cooper and various other authors. It will be seen that in the main Cooper's quantities were accepted and adopted by others and that the variance from them is negligible.

Author A.R.Binns ² provided a further break-up of the Delhi-Rangoon and Rangoon started covers, thus adding to the overall knowledge though we have no idea of the source of his information.

Delhi – Rangoon	10
Rangoon – Singapore	17
Rangoon – Batavia	?
Rangoon – Brisbane	5
Rangoon – Sydney	10
Rangoon – Melbourne	6

Pickering³ records “from 5 ports of call in India 585 items were picked up, of which 261 were for Indian destinations; 162 for Burma; 55 for Singapore and 96 for Australia and New Zealand.” Presumably the 5 ports were Karachi, Jodhpur, Delhi, Allahabad and Calcutta.

Using Cooper's quantities against Pickering's version we end up with a slightly different result however the overall quantities are relatively small.

Destination↓	Karachi	Jodhpur	Delhi	Allahabad	Calcutta	Total
Jodhpur	?					
Delhi	?	?				
Allahabad	?	6	?			
Calcutta	20	10	150	40		220
Akyab	3	4	6	3	20	36
Rangoon	?	6	?	10	95	111
Total	23	20	156	53	115	367

Even though Jodhpur was technically not part of the experimental mail service there were some 10 covers created there by Stephen Smith to record the flight as far as Calcutta.

The flight East beyond Delhi, on May 5, was really the “Experimental” portion and was flown by Imperial Airways without any interference from Indian politics. It was also the portion where Indian philatelists were keen to record the events. At each of the intermediate stops across the sub-continent such as the one at Allahabad, mail was added to the Eastbound aircraft

¹ Jal Cooper “Stamps of India” India's Stamp Journal 1942, Bombay

² A.R. Binns “Asiatic Air Mail”, The Philatelist Dec .1960 p.64

³ John Pickering “The routes of the Valkyries”, Picton Press, Chippenham, Great Britain 1977, p.21.

but not made up into a specific bag. Gordon Anstee ⁴ recorded a total of 509 items for the various stops en-route of this flight as it went through India and beyond. Unfortunately, he did not indicate his source of information. We will refer to his results for the various stops.



Again, note the same 3-line cachet this time apparently “used” between Delhi an Akyab.

The mail was carried from Delhi by DH 66 G-AARY *City of Karachi* as far as Akyab via Allahabad and Calcutta. The *City of Karachi* had arrived at Delhi early in the day on May 5 from its first Westward journey with the first Experimental service. It was quickly relieved of its UK bound mail and loaded with the mail bound for Australia and took off for Calcutta that same day and arriving at Akyab the next day May 6.



The 3-line cachet used in black as a variation to the theme here “used” between Allahabad and Calcutta.

⁴ Gordon Anstee “Experimental Airmails England-Australia-England 1931” May India Post Vol.2 May 1968.

At Akyab, Kingsford Smith was waiting in the Fokker F.VIIb 3m VH-USU *Southern Cross*. Smith had been at Akyab since May 3 to perform the shuttle service for the missing aircraft which had crashed on the first outward service at Timor.



In addition to the 3-line cachet a neat 3-word sentence described the cover's journey.

Following the transfer of the mail, Smith took off and flew to Rangoon the same day for an overnight stop. He picked up some mail at Rangoon destined for Alor Star and Singapore. This mail was meant to be on the First Experimental flight from Tavoy but was not picked up earlier as the First flight had not called at Tavoy so ended up waiting at Rangoon.

Such mail was NOT delivered when Kingsford Smith reached Alor Star on May 7, where the Tavoy mail should have been dropped off (non-delivery is indicated by the faint inverted Singapore May 9, backstamp). The circular backstamp of Kedah 10 My 1931 shows the delay caused by flying it to Singapore.



Note the date of sending was April 17, 1931



Due to the predominant printing, there is only a faint outline of the Singapore postal marking at the base. The Kedah cancellation is clear of any printing.

The *Southern Cross* arrived late Singapore, much to the consternation of the Acting Secretary⁵ for Postal Affairs of the Federated Malay States, who in a letter to the London Postal Authorities dated 15th May 1931 wrote:

“Difficulties and uncertainty was also experienced in connection with the dates and times of arrival of the second outward flight. The aircraft however arrived at Singapore at 11.45 am on the 8th of May instead of on the 7th as was notified in the original schedule.”

⁵ Post 33/679-80 Letter from Sec. for Postal Affairs S.S.&F.S to London Postal Authority.



The cover was held in Singapore for two months, then returned to the sender after being unclaimed.



The Imperial Airways commemorative cancel is just visible at top right.

At Singapore, the special postmark used for the 1st Experimental service, with the line "First Flight" omitted, was applied to the mail received and a small quantity of outward mail from Singapore also had the cancel applied to its franking. The quality of the impression was extremely poor, most are very faint.

Three separate bags of mail were added in Singapore, one each for Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne and in addition a further 3 bags were made up for mail from Penang to the same capitals. It is not clear whether the *Southern Cross* called at Penang or the mail bags were forwarded to Singapore.

Kingsford Smith's effort to accelerate the mail is indicated, by his overflying Batavia and landing at Sourabaya on May 9 and arriving at Koepang on May 10 where he picked up the stranded Imperial Airways radio operator Mr Sang from the fatal *City of Cairo*. If there was any mail added in the Dutch East Indies it did not make it into a separate bag

The *Southern Cross* completed its charter by arriving at Darwin at 2.15pm on May 11 where Smith handed over the mail consisting of the 12 bags, 6 from the UK, 3 from Singapore and 3 from Penang.

At Darwin itself, mail was created for the onward south journey via Qantas DH50J VH-ULG *Hippomenes* flown by Russell Tapp on May 12. Three bags were created one each for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, thus making a total of 15 bags heading south once Australian shores had been reached.

An overnight stop was made at Cloncurry and the mail arrived at Brisbane at 4.20 pm on May 13 where the local mail was back stamped that very afternoon. The next day mail for Sydney (and New Zealand) as well as the Melbourne bag were loaded on the ANA Avro X VH-UMI *Southern Moon* flown by P.G. Taylor to Sydney where the Sydney bag was received at the GPO and backstamped May 14. The New Zealand mail then went by steamer arriving at Wellington on May 18 and the mail for Christchurch on May 19.

The Melbourne bag, on arrival in Sydney was transferred to ANA Avro X *Southern Sky* which proceeded to Melbourne flown by Eric Chaseling arriving the same day. Adelaide and Perth mail were sent on by rail to Adelaide and then by air to Perth from there.

For completeness the following is the official record as supplied by the Post Master General's Annual report for 1930-1931 on the question of quantities delivered to Australia. It must be recognised that a significant number of items were "passengers" for part of the journey only and did not reach Australia at all.

Postal articles to Australia on the Second Imperial Airways Experimental Flight.

For	Number of articles	Net weight lb. oz.
New South Wales	2,288	65 1½
Victoria	1,355	38 5½
Queensland	541	12 13¾
South Australia	299	7 13
Western Australia	316	9 6
Tasmania	59	1 7½
Darwin	101	1 14½
New Zealand	272	*(incl. In NSW)
Total	5,231	136 13¾


Waybill for Incoming mail from the 2nd Imperial Airways Experimental flight.

AIR MAIL SERVICE FROM DARWIN TO BRISBANE. DATE 12/3/31

Mails for	Mails from						Total number of bags received	Signature of person receiving the mail	Date of arrival of mail	Time of arrival of mail
	London	Karachi	Calcutta	Rangoon	Singapore	Darwin				
Brisbane	1				1	1	4	<i>R. L. G. Smith</i> <i>15/3/31</i> <i>13-5-31</i>	<i>5.10 PM</i>	
Sydney	2				1	1	5			
Melbourne	1				1	1	4			
Auckland	1						1			
Perth	1						1			
Total number of bags despatched from each office										

Hudson Fysh
Pilot
Darwin - Darwin

A signature must always be given by the Receiving Officer for the mails delivered to him.
 Particulars of mails and the total number of bags despatched must be entered at each air port.
 The total number of bags received at each air port must be inserted by the receiving officer in the column provided.



Signed subsequently by Hudson Fysh, this document refers to the Darwin -Brisbane sector of the second inward flight flown by Russell Tapp. (Fysh had flown the mail North on the first outward flight).

Ed Wolf

August 2020

Appendix 1 Gordon Anstee Article in India Post Vol. 2

Appendix 2 Compilation of various authors details

Appendix 1

Gordon Anstee Article published "India Post Vol 2" about May 1968

EXPERIMENTAL AIRMAILS - ENGLAND-AUSTRALIA-ENGLAND 1931

by Gordon R. Anstee E.R.D.

PART II - SECOND EXPERIMENTAL SERVICE

ENGLAND TO AUSTRALIA 25th April, 1931.

The mail which left Croydon on the 25th April 1931 arrived at Dum Dum aerodrome, Calcutta on the "City of Karachi" on the 5th of May being piloted by Mr. Alcock.

The mail delivered in Calcutta was made up as follows:-

London to Calcutta	- 260 items
Delhi (1st packet) to Calcutta	- 139 "
" (2nd ") " "	- 8 "
Karachi to Calcutta	- 20 "
Allababad to Calcutta	- 37 "

(The small mail from Jodhpur is included in the Delhi lot).

After delivering the above mails to the Postal Authorities the undernoted mails from Calcutta were handed over to Mr. Alcock:-

Calcutta to Akyab	- 20 items
" " Rangoon	- 94 "
" " Victoria Point	- 48 "
" " Singapore	- 17 "
" " Darwin	- 51 "
" " Sydney	- 10 "
" " Melbourne	- 6 "
" " Brisbane	- 5 "

On Wednesday the 6th May the "City of Karachi" left Dum Dum Aerodrome, and flew to Akyab where the mails were made over to Kingsford Smith who left the same day in the "Southern Cross" for Darwin via Rangoon, Victoria Point, Singapore and Batavia. Melbourne was reached on the 14th May.

Covers and cards on the Indian and Burma Stages:-

Karachi to Allababad, Calcutta (20 items), Akyab (3), Rangoon, Victoria Point, Australian Cities and New Zealand.

Jodhpur to Allababad (6 items), Calcutta (10), Akyab (4), Rangoon (6), Victoria Point (2), Australian Cities and New Zealand.

Delhi to Allababad, Calcutta (147 items), Akyab (6), Rangoon, Victoria Point (2) and Australian Cities.

Allababad to Calcutta (37 items), Akyab (3), Rangoon (10), Victoria Point (2) and Australian Cities.

A cachet (see Type 12a) in violet, purple or black was applied at each of the five Indian airports and at Akyab.

Calcutta to Akyab (20 items), Rangoon (94), Victoria Point (48), Singapore (17), Darwin (51) and Australian Cities) (21)
and New Zealand)

Akyab to Rangoon, Victoria Point (2 items) and Australian Cities.

Rangoon to Victoria Point, Singapore, Darwin, Australian Cities and New Zealand.

Victoria Point to Alovstar, Singapore, Batavia, Bina and Darwin.

A cachet (see Type 13) in purple was applied at either Rangoon or Singapore.

2nd. Experimental Flight,
England.....Australia,
"CITY OF KARACHI."

Type 12a.

VIA THE AIR TRAIL BLAZED BY THE
ROSS SMITHS AND COBHAM.

ہوائی جہاز



2nd. Experimental Flight
Australia - England.

Type 14.

AUSTRALIA - ENGLAND
2ND. EXPERIMENTAL FLIGHT.



ASMANI GHARI.

آسمانی گاڑی * اسمانی گاری

Type 15.

AUSTRALIA-ENGLAND

SECOND OFFICIAL
TRIAL FLIGHT

CALCUTTA-KARACHI

Type 16.

2nd. Experimental Flight.
By "SOUTHERN CROSS" VH - USU.
Pilot. Commander C. Kingsford Smith.

Type 13.



ASMANI GHARI.

Carried by the West Australian
Airways Air Liner, "V. H. UJD "
Pilot.:-MR. R. P. MULLARD

Type 16.

AUSTRALIA-ENGLAND

SECOND OFFICIAL
TRIAL FLIGHT

CALCUTTA-JODHPUR

Type 17.

اسمانی گاری



ASMAN KA GHARI.

Via.:-W. A. A. "V. H. UJD "
PILOT. MR. R. P. MULLARD.
From. ALLAHABAD.

Type 19.

Appendix 2

Cooper, Anstee, Binns etc comparisons on 2nd Experimental East

	2nd Experimental East						'42 Price	
		Cooper	Anstee	Binns	Handover		Cooper	
Description	To	Qty			grams		Rupees	
Karachi	Allahabad	?	?		90		?	
	Calcutta	20	20		130		75	
	Akyab	3	3	3	30		150	
	Rangoon	?	?		40		?	
	Victoria Point	1	?	1			?	
	Singapore	?	?				?	
	Darwin	?	?				?	
	Aust Cities	?	?				?	
Jodhpur	Allahabad	6	6	6			100	
	Calcutta	10	10	10			75	
	Akyab	4	4	4			75	
	Rangoon	6	6				75	
	Victoria Point	2	2	2			150	
	Singapore	?	?				?	
	Darwin	?	?				?	
	Aust Cities	?	?				?	
Delhi	Allahabad	?	?		354		25	
	Calcutta	150	147		1019		10	
	Akyab	6	6	6			75	
	Rangoon	?	?	10	297		?	
	Victoria Point	1	2	2			?	
	Singapore	?	?				?	
	Darwin	?	?				?	
	Aust Cities	?	?				?	
Allahabad	Calcutta	40	37		227		50	
	Akyab	3	3	3	30		100	
	Rangoon	10	10		28		75	
	Victoria Point	1	2	2			?	
	Singapore	?	?				?	
	Darwin	?	?				?	
	Aust Cities	?	?				?	
Calcutta	Akyab	20	20		280		100	
	Rangoon	95	94		765		15	
	Victoria Point	50	48				15	
	Singapore	17	17				50	
	Darwin	50	51				30	
	Aust Cities	21	21				40	
Akyab	Rangoon	?	?				?	
	Victoria Point	2	?	2			?	
	Singapore	?	?				?	
	Darwin	?	?				?	
	Aust Cities	?	?				?	
Rangoon	Victoria Point	?	?				?	
	Singapore	?	?	17			?	
	Darwin	?	?				?	
	Aust Cities	?		21			?	
		518	509	89	3290			

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