

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

As a final fling in their experimental flights, Imperial prepared special envelopes of similar design to the ones used for the first return flight from Australia. There were two changes made. One was the removal of the word FIRST in the top left corner of the envelope and replacement of it by the word PER. Thus the caption now read PER “ALL THE WAY /BY AIR”Royal Mail”. The other was a change in the substitution of Cairo for Alexandria on the bottom of the envelope.



In the space for the stamps the rates to various destination was shown. 1/11 being the correct franking here. At 1/10½ it was thus ½d underpaid without being taxed on arrival

The return flight left Melbourne on May 15 1931 in the ANA Avro X VH-UNA *Southern Sun* for Sydney with the South Australian, Tasmania and Victorian mail under the command of James Mollison who was later to have some fame in the Melbourne Centenary Air Race. The aircraft stayed overnight in Sydney where it was loaded with the Sydney and New Zealand mail and departed for Brisbane on May 16 with the same crew. The next day May 17, the mail was transferred to Qantas DH 50J VH-ULG *Hippomenes* and the Queensland mail was added. After an intermediate refuelling stop at Camooweal, for an overnight stay, Hudson Fysh as pilot and Managing Director of Qantas with Dudley Wright as engineer, reached Darwin on May 18. This was the last time that Fysh flew as a pilot for his company.



Part of the mail added at Brisbane on the 2nd Imperial Experimental return flight dropped at Singapore.



A good strike of the Imperial special cancellation applied at Singapore before forwarding to Kuala Lumpur.

According to the official records¹, by the time the mail left Darwin on May 19 it consisted of the following items

Singapore	284
Rangoon	10
Calcutta	161
Karachi	550
UK, Irish Free State, Europe	5646
Total	6651

¹National Archives File C3898 239/5 Mail Transport air first flights -Australia -London 1931-1981.

This was a far cry from the quantity shipped on the first flight (31,584) and indicates that there was no major interest in this flight from the general public nor the philatelists in Australia. The flight warranted no mention in the article by Dr. D.J. Banerjee² on the Stephen Smith catalogue of Indian flights even though there was still quite some activity amongst the Indian philatelists.

The beginning of the Imperial Airways “Experimental” connection was from Darwin when Roger Mollard, took off on May 19. Mollard who had negotiated the purchase of a West Australia Airlines DH66 VH -UJQ to replace the crashed DH 66 aircraft *City of Cairo* wrecked at Timor. He had flown it part of the way from Perth with the Perth mail to Darwin.



A cover prepared by Western Australian philatelist Mitchell was posted too early for the flight to Darwin. It was sent East by the then available route by air to Adelaide, by train to Melbourne and then by air through ANA to Brisbane via Sydney to join the Qantas flight to Darwin. It was not flown by the replacement aircraft as indicated on the cover. The backstamp of Darwin is the evidence for this assertion.

² Dr.D.J.Banerjee “Stephen Smith’s List of Official etc. Flights” The FIAF Journal 1993

The flight plan for the 2nd Imperial Experimental service West

	1931 Imperial 2nd Experimental Return Flight				
Arrive	Place	Depart	Notes	Aircraft	Coy
	Melbourne	May-15		Southern Sun	ANA
May-15	Sydney	May-16	Overnight	Southern Sun	ANA
May-16	Brisbane	May-17	Overnight	Southern Sun	ANA
May-17	Charleville	May-17		Hippomenes	Qantas
May-17	Longreach	May-17		Hippomenes	Qantas
May-17	Cloncurry	May-17	Overnight	Hippomenes	Qantas
May-17	Camooweal	May-18		Hippomenes	Qantas
May-18	Daly Waters	May-18		Hippomenes	Qantas
May-18	Darwin	May-19	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-19	Koepang	May-20	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-20	Rambang	May-21	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-21	Sourabaja	May-22	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-22	Singapore	May-23	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-23	Alor Star	May-24	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-24	Victoria Point	May-24		VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-24	Rangoon	May-25	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-25	Akyab	May-25		VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-25	Calcutta	May-26	Overnight	VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-26	Allahabad	May-26		VH-UJQ	Imperial
May-26	Delhi	May-27	Overnight	City of Karachi	ISAS
May-27	Jodhpur	May-27		City of Karachi	ISAS
May-27	Karachi	May-28	Overnight	City of Delhi	Imperial
May-28	Gwadur	May-28		City of Delhi	Imperial
May-28	Charbar	May-28		City of Delhi	Imperial
May-28	Jask	May-29	Overnight	City of Delhi	Imperial
May-29	Bushire	May-29		City of Delhi	Imperial
May-29	Basra	May-30	Overnight	City of Delhi	Imperial
May-30	Baghdad	May-30		City of Delhi	Imperial
May-30	Cairo	May-31	Overnight	City of Alexandria	Imperial
May-31	Corfu	Jun-03		City of Alexandria	Imperial
Jun-03	Genoa	Jun-03		Train	
Jun-03	Basle	Jun-04	Overnight	City of Glasgow	Imperial
Jun-04	Croydon			City of Glasgow	

The first stop after Darwin was at Koepang the site of the crash of the 1st Experimental venture by the DH 66 *City of Cairo*, where the replacement Hercules overnighted. No mail is known from this port of call.

The next day May 20, pilot Roger Mollard reached Sourabaja on the island of Java where again an overnight stop was taken and the aircraft refuelled. According to Douglas Walker³ although there was New Zealand mail for Java, this was not offloaded at Sourabaja, but was overcarried to Singapore as it was in the closed Singapore bag.

On May 21 the journey to Singapore was completed as is evidence by the back stamp on the cover addressed to Kuala Lumpur. The special cancellation that had been used for the 1st experimental flight was again utilised in the electric cancelling machine, but with the words "First Flight" omitted. Generally, the strike was very poor and the complete date and time is often not available. In the example shown we can make out that the cancelling occurred at 6 pm on May 22, but the minutes are obscured if they were present.

For the remainder of the journey to Karachi the majority of authors have "skipped over" the details. The exceptions are Peter Wingent⁴ who supplies the dates and Douglas Walker who provides some additional facts. Walker postulates that an overnight stop was made at Alor Star on May 23 based on the fact that Rangoon was reached 2 days after leaving Singapore.

Eustis⁵ claims that there was mail from Victoria Point which would have been the next port of call after Alor Star and this is confirmed by Jal Cooper⁶ in his summary of the flight as shown in the Appendix 2. According to Anstee the mail from Victoria Point was shipped to Rangoon by steamer and went by air from there.



The green cachet was applied subsequently by Stephen Smith

³ Douglas Walker "Airmails of New Zealand Vol. 2" 1986 The Airmail Society of New Zealand Inc.

⁴ Peter Wingent "Aircraft movements on Imperial Airways' Eastern Route Vol 1" 1999 self published

⁵ Eustis & Frommer "The Australian Air Mail Catalogue" 8th Ed 2008

⁶ Jal Cooper "Stamps of India " India's Stamp Journal" 1942 Bombay

Mail from New Zealand was delivered to Rangoon on May 24 and the aircraft flew on to Akyab and Calcutta on the same day. At Akyab mail, prepared for the occasion by Stephen Smith, was picked up for intermediate Indian cities



The green cachet was applied subsequently by Stephen Smith.

An overnight stop was made at Calcutta where considerable mail was added to the flight. Departure was on May 26 to arrive at Delhi on the same day having called at Allahabad along the way.



The name of the pilot was incorrectly recorded on the purple cachet as Mullard when it was Mollard.

At Delhi the flight terminated for the ex WAA aircraft on May 27 and the mail was transferred to the DH 66 *City of Karachi* for onward flight by the chartered Indian State Air Service to Karachi which was reached on the same day.

From Karachi the mail was transferred to the regular Imperial Airways DH 66 *City of Delhi* as far as Cairo then across the Mediterranean by *City of Alexandria* flying boat to Corfu where there was an unexplained two day delay before proceeding to the Italian port of Genoa. A train journey was required from Genoa to Basle where the air service recommenced.

The final leg of the experimental service was by the Argosy *City of Glasgow* arriving at Croydon two days late on June 4.

Ed Wolf

September 2020

Appendix 1 Gordon Anstee's article

Appendix 2 Jal Cooper's research from "Stamps of india"

Appendix 1.

Gordon Anstee's article published in "India Post Vol 2 "about May 1968

AUSTRALIA TO ENGLAND 16th MAY 1931

On the 16th May 1931 the second return experimental flight left Melbourne and picked up the New Zealand mails at Sydney later the same day. The return flight was operated by Imperial Airways with a D.H. "Hercules", bought from West Australian Airways, as far as Delhi, the pilot of the "City of Cairo" (which ...?... at Kupang, Timor Island) being in charge. The plane arrived at Calcutta on Monday the 25th May, three days later than the notified date of arrival. After an uneventful journey the mails reached London on the 4th June.

The following is a statement of the mails delivered and also picked up from Calcutta:-

Mails delivered in Calcutta -

From Australia	236 items
" Akyab	17 "
" Rangoon	54 "

Mails picked up from Calcutta -

For Allababad	61 items
" Delhi	37 "
" Jodhpur	8 "
" Karachi	366 "

(This Karachi mail includes those addressed to places outside India).

Covers and Cards on the Burma and Indian Stages:

Victoria Point to Akyab, Rangoon, Calcutta, Allababad, Delhi, Jodhpur, Karachi and Croydon (all the above mail was first sent by steamer to Rangoon and thence by air from Rangoon with the exception of the mail for Calcutta. Mail for Calcutta was sent by steamer from Rangoon).

Rangoon (where cachet (see Type 14) in purple applied corrected to Ross Smiths in red ink) to Akyab, Calcutta, Allababad, Delhi, Jodhpur, Karachi and Croydon.

Akyab (where cachet (see Type 15) in green applied) to Calcutta, Allababad, Delhi, Jodhpur, Karachi and Croydon.

Calcutta (where cachet (see Type 16) in purple applied on mail to Allababad and Delhi and cachets types 17 and 18 in black applied) to Allababad, Delhi, Jodhpur, Karachi, Baghdad, Gaza, Paris and Croydon.

Allababad (where cachet (see type 19) in purple or black applied) to Delhi, Jodhpur, Karachi and Croydon.

Interspersed between the First Outward and Second Return Experimental Flights the normal Indian air mail service had resumed the South European route, which although slightly longer than the Central European one, enabled mails to be speeded up by the introduction of the Short "Kent" class of flying boat on the Mediterranean section of the route. As before the Basle Geneva lap was by mail. Part of the acceleration effected on the Indian route was due to the introduction of night flying between Baghdad and Basra in April 1931. The European portion of the Second Experimental Return Flight followed the South European route from Athens.

Until the Imperial Airways extension beyond India, British Mails were accepted via Amsterdam for the Dutch line to the Middle East, and were also carried by the Special Dutch Flight to Australia in May 1931.

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

Type 12a.

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

ہوائی جہازت



2nd. Experimental Flight
Australia - England.

Type 14.

AUSTRALIA - ENGLAND
2ND. EXPERIMENTAL FLIGHT.



ASMANI GHARI.

آسمانی گاری * آسمانی 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.

آسمانی گاری



ASMAN KA GHARI.

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

Type 19.

Appendix 2

Cooper & Anstee comparison on quantities with pricing.

	2nd Experimental West				42 Price
		Cooper		Anstee	Cooper
Description	To	Qty		Qty	Rupees
Australia	Calcutta	?		236	
Victoria Point	Rangoon	?			?
	Akyab	1			?
	Calcutta	?			?
	Allahabad	1			?
	Delhi	1			?
	Jodhpur	1			?
	Karachi	1			?
	Croydon	40			50
Rangoon	Akyab	8			100
	Calcutta	55		54	40
	Allahabad	6			100
	Delhi	25			50
	Jodhpur	4			75
	Karachi	?			?
	Intermediates	?			?
	Croydon	?			?
Akyab	Calcutta	17		17	30
	Allahabad	7			75
	Delhi	10			50
	Jodhpur	?			?
	Karachi	?			?
	Intermediates	?			?
	Croydon	?			?
Calcutta	Allahabad	60		61	20
	Delhi	40		37	25
	Jodhpur	8		8	50
	Karachi	70		?	15
	Intermediates	?		366	?
	Croydon	?			?
Allahabad	Delhi	45			15
	Jodhpur	10			30
	Karachi	6			75
	Intermediates	?			?
	Croydon	?			?
Total		416		779	