

SPECIAL CANCELLATION HANDSTAMP

USED FOR THE 8 JUNE 1948 AIR-INDIA INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT

- by Piyush Khaitan



Fig.1 The Air-India International souvenir cover

The Air-India International flight from Bombay to London on 8 June 1948 resulted in a 12a postage stamp being issued in India valid for use on mail carried on that flight alone. Many unusual aspects of this flight have been recognized as unique in world philately.

Much has been written about this and I should mention an article by Ashok Kumar Bayanwala^[1] which is available on the Stamps of India website, and another by me published in the *India Post*^[2]. I have also provided a reference to my website^[3] which is reasonably detailed on this subject. These make for fascinating reading, and I would encourage any philatelist who is unaware of this story to check these out, whether he is into postal history, or focuses on Post-Independence or aerophilately.

Therefore, without going any further into other as-



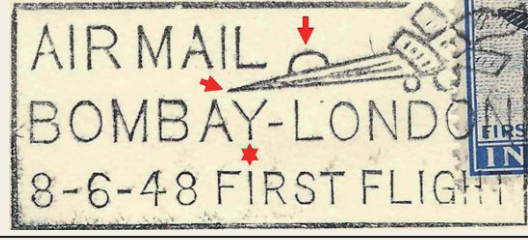

pects of this postage stamp and its related postal history, I will now concentrate on the narrower scope of the title to this article only. What is relevant for this article is to know is that a boxed rectangular handstamp was specially prepared and affixed on mail carried on this flight which read AIR MAIL / BOMBAY-LONDON / 8-6-48 FIRST FLIGHT.


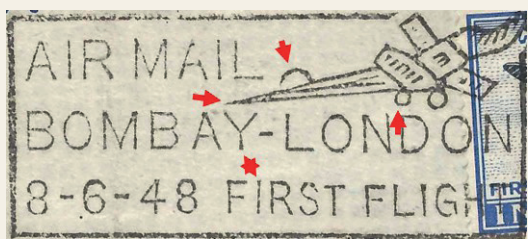
Bayanwala writes 'It appears that at least 4 different Special Cancellation Dies were prepared from a Master Die'. He goes on to illustrate four varieties and to explain the differences. I have illustrated and described examples of all four in Table 1.

Upon further examination of 157 cachets (applied on 146 covers), I have identified and described 2 additional varieties shown in Table 2.



Fig.2. Cover with Type A & Type C cachets.

Type	Cachet	Characteristics
Type A (50x22mm)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tail of 'Y' of BOMBAY is a little to the left of the head of 'I' of FIRST. The tail plane, which has a semi-circular shape, slopes more steeply towards the left side. The tip of the tail ends just a little before the left hand of the 'Y' of BOMBAY
Type B (51x22mm)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tail of 'Y' of BOMBAY is little to the left of the head of 'I' of FIRST but the gap is narrower as compared to Type A. The tail plane, which has a semi-circular shape, has an even arc. The tip of the tail ends just beyond the left hand of the 'Y' of BOMBAY.
Type C (51x22mm)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tail of 'Y' of BOMBAY is exactly on top of the head of 'I' of FIRST. The tail plane, which has a semi-circular shape has an even arc and looks more like a half circle. The tip of the tail ends just beyond the left hand of the 'Y' of BOMBAY.
Type D (50x21mm)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The left hand of 'Y' of BOMBAY is in between the 'A' and 'I' of MAIL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tailplane is elliptical and slopes to the left. The 'M' of AIRMAIL in the top line is exactly above the second 'B' of BOMBAY in the lower line. The tip of the tail ends a little before to the left hand of the 'Y' of BOMBAY.
Table 1. The four recorded varieties (Type A-D)		

Type	Cachet	Characteristics
Type E (50x22mm)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is the only cachet where the tail of 'Y' of BOMBAY is a little to the right of the head of 'I' of FIRST. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tailplane is elliptical and slopes to the left. The tip of the tail ends a little before to the left hand of the 'Y' of BOMBAY.
Type F (50x22mm)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tail of 'Y' of BOMBAY is little to the left to the head of the 'I' of FIRST. The tailplane, has a semi-circular shape and is a little stepper towards left side. The tip of the tail ends just above the top of left hand of 'Y' of BOMBAY. A wheel of the airplane is a little to the left of the 'D' of London <p>(This type is almost similar to the type A, except the position of the wheel.)</p>
Table 2. The two newly identified varieties (Type E & F).		

The next natural questions would be: What was the extent of usage of each cachet; are there any circumstances under which a particular cachet was used, and are there any further conclusions to be arrived at.

Table 3 provides the distribution of the 157 cachets by type. Two things stand out when reading this table. Firstly, Type C was used about twice as frequently as compared to the rest. Secondly, all other Types were used about equally.

Cachet Type	Quantity
A	19
B	25
C	50
D	19
E	27
F	17
Total of sample	157

Table 3. Quantity of each type special flight cachet (A,B,C,D,E & F)

One interesting find was a cover (Figure 2) which has strikes of two different cachets, Type A & C.

Another aspect to consider was whether the use of a particular cachet was determined by the city of origin. The sample I had was too small to arrive at any conclusion by city, so I simply divided the articles into two categories; mail originated at Bombay vs. mail originated outside Bombay. Table 4 shows that all 6 Types were used in almost the same proportion between these two classifications.

Cover sent from	Cachet A	Cachet B	Cachet C	Cachet A & C	Cachet D	Cachet E	Cachet F	Total
Bombay	9	7	19	-	10	8	7	60
Rest of India	8	17	29	1	9	12	10	86
Total of sample	17	24	48	1	19	20	17	146

Table 4. Use of cachets on mail originated in Bombay vs. Rest of India by cachet type

Some mail on this flight was sent as Registered Post. The sample of 146 articles contained 28 such items. The distribution by Type is shown in Table 5. I separated the articles that were mailed at Bombay GPO to see if any specific cachet could be attributed for use on such mail. What stood out that while Type A-D were used there uniformly, there were no examples of Type E & F. Another interesting observation was that Type E were used on all 5 articles mail booked at post offices outside Bombay. I have not come across a single example of a Registered article with Type F cachet.

Conclusion

The identification of two more Types is certainly of interest, including to marcophilatelists. However, given that several thousand postal articles were carried on this flight, the sample being examined is too small to consider this study as definitive to arrive at firm conclusions on any other aspect.

I would like to acknowledge with thanks the role played by Dharm Dev Maurya who painstakingly helped with the research and preparation of this study.

For further reading on philatelic aspects of this flight:

- [1] *Indian Postal History 1947-1997 (Part 12)* by Bayanwala, Ashok Kumar. www.stampsofindia.com
 [2] 1948 'Air-India International' by Khaitan, Piyush. *India Post* Vol. 54 (2020) No. 215
 [3] *The First Flight – 8 June 1948. An Aerophilatelic Tribute.* www.indianairmails.com

Quantity of registered cover and name of registered Post Office								
Registration Post office	Number of Registered cover	Cachet A	Cachet B	Cachet C	Cachet D	Cachet E	Cachet F	Total
Ballard Estate Bombay	1			1				1
Bombay G.P.O.	21	5	4	6	6			21
Darjeeling	1					1		1
Delhi G.P.O.	4			1		3		4
New Delhi	1					1		1
Total of sample	28	5	4	8	6	5		28

Table 5. Quantity of registered covers and name of registration post office

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