

Rhodesia and Nyasaland Returned Letter Branch Mail

Commercial Cover

From Willesden (London), England
To Martindale (Kitwe), Northern Rhodesia
To Bulawayo, S. R. (Returned Letter Branch)

Posted 26 May 1961
Arrived Lusaka 2 June 1961
Arrived Bulawayo 6 June 1961

Undeliverable Mail to Northern Rhodesia, Forwarded to "Returned Letter Branch"

This cover below from May 1961 was addressed to "The Postmaster / Postal Agency / Martindale" in Northern Rhodesia. Both Edward Proud and Hal Hoyte report that Martindale opened 15 December 1958 and were reported closed by 4 August 1961 although the last postmark seen is 30 August 1960. It appears that the Martindale post office was closed in 1961. A Lusaka postmark on the back was applied on 2 June 1961 along with the violet "undeliverable" box on the front. As there was no return address, it was sent to the Returned Letter Branch in Bulawayo as indicated by the "RLO" orange pencil mark on the front. The blue pencil mark "1/SAE" is not identified and is unknown.

Back of cover-->



<- Cover Front

Little is known and published about undeliverable mail. However, when mail can not be returned, postal personnel are allowed to violate secrecy of correspondence to search for clues as to the letter's origin, destination or purpose. Based on their findings, the mail is handled accordingly. If the contents are of no value, it is destroyed, otherwise it is handled based on other written regulations. Few dead letter office mail items survive as the public generally does not have access to them. Because they are rare, they are highly sought after by philatelists.

For this cover, it may be assumed after opening at Bulawayo, the sender was seeking to purchase stamps, obtain information or a postmark from the Martindale post office. On 8 May 1961, Rhodesia and Nyasaland issued two commemorative Mining Congress postage stamps which the sender may have wished to acquire. No conclusion can be drawn without knowing the contents. See RSCJ #254, page 44 for additional information and examples of other "Return to Sender" mail.