

Synopsis

Imperial Airways First Flights, London - Mwanza - London, 1931

Historical Background

Imperial Airways, forerunner of BOAC and British Airways had humble beginnings - first in Britain, then Europe and finally the British Empire. Each continent was a challenge. The first flights were to the middle east in 1927, India in 1929, Africa in 1931 and 1932, and Australia in 1934. Communication and the promotion of trade and commerce with the far corners of the Empire was the objective of the airline. As improvements in technology made flight by man more readily available and accessible, it was inevitable that mail by airplane was one of the first beneficiaries of commercial flight. The new flights were the start of advancing north-south communication and travel.

Scope

There were five noteworthy "First Flights" to Africa that are recorded and documented in the archives of the company and historians. There is also the philatelic evidence provided along the route by the mail carried on these first flights. **This exhibit includes the first two flights listed:**

1) February 28 - March 9, 1931 - London, England to Mwanza, Tanganyika - Outbound flight to East Africa

2) March 10 - 19, 1931 - Mwanza, Tanganyika to London, England - Return flight to London England

3) December 10 - 21, 1931 - London, England to Cape Town, South Africa - Experimental Christmas flight

4) January 20 - February 2, 1932 - London to Cape Town - First regular scheduled flight southbound

5) January 27 - February 16, 1932 - Cape Town to London - First regular scheduled flight northbound

(Flights 3, 4 and 5 are covered in three separate exhibits)

Plan & Organization

This exhibit is organized by cachet type, geographically and chronologically. For each cachet, the earliest points of origin are recorded first, working geographically toward the final destination. As the flights made stops at a number of countries, covers are identified by each country's postage and cancel markings leaving evidence of point of origin, the destination and dates. Some covers intended for the first flight missed the connection and were posted later. Unusual and exceptional items are identified with a **red border**.

Material Available

A considerable amount of mail was carried on the first flight as it was considered a historic north-south route into Africa. Imperial Airways was quite advanced in promoting and marketing the first flights by issuing special first flight cachet covers which were sold to the public at 1d per cover. Some philatelists created their own cachets or used plain envelopes for the first flight. Subsequent mail on later flights is not prized as are first flight items.

Philatelic Element

A number of philatelic elements are shown in this exhibit. The two most distinguishing feature of any air mail are: 1) air mail marking or an "Air Mail" etiquette and 2) correct air mail postage. Other philatelic elements included in this exhibit are pre-printed cachets, rubber stamp instructions and notes, registration, forwarding and returning instructions, "Jusqua" markings and others.

Bibliography/References

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