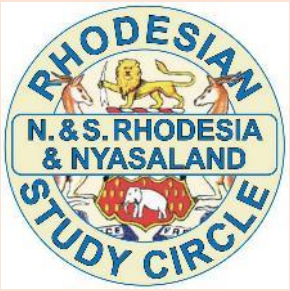


RHODESIAN AIRMAILS 1925 TO 1939



A miscellany of airmail covers mainly carried

Imperial Airways

The Rhodesian Aviation Company

Rhodesian and Nyasaland Airways

South African Airways

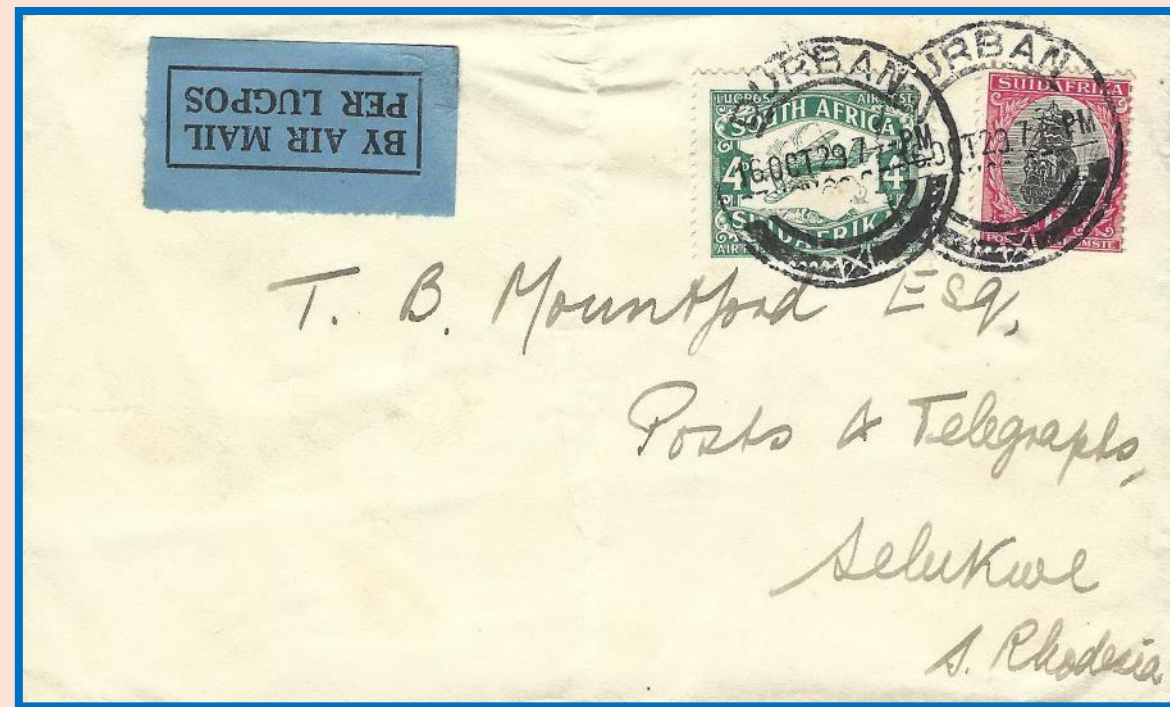
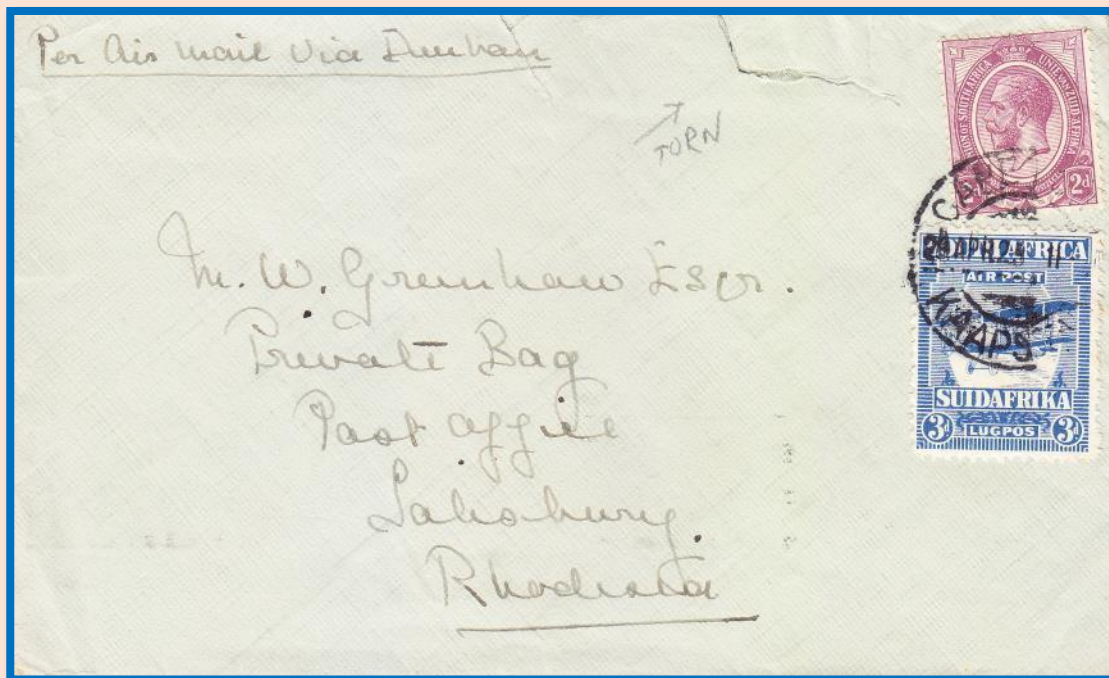


Presented by Adrian de
Bourbon

RSC Conference May 2026

1925 AND 1929

Early part flights



These two covers were posted in South Africa. The first in 1925, posted in Cape Town addressed to Salisbury, was carried by air to Durban by the South African Air Force experimental service, which operated for 15 weeks between March and June 1925.

The second, posted in Durban in 1929 addressed to Selukwe, was carried by air to Johannesburg by Union Airways. Union Airways operated as an independent company for five years, from 1929 to 1934, before being taken over by the government as South African Airways.

Both covers would then have travelled to Southern Rhodesia by train. The first cover arrived in Salisbury on 3 May 1925; the second cover does not have an arrival stamp. The covers each bear the 4d airmail charge.

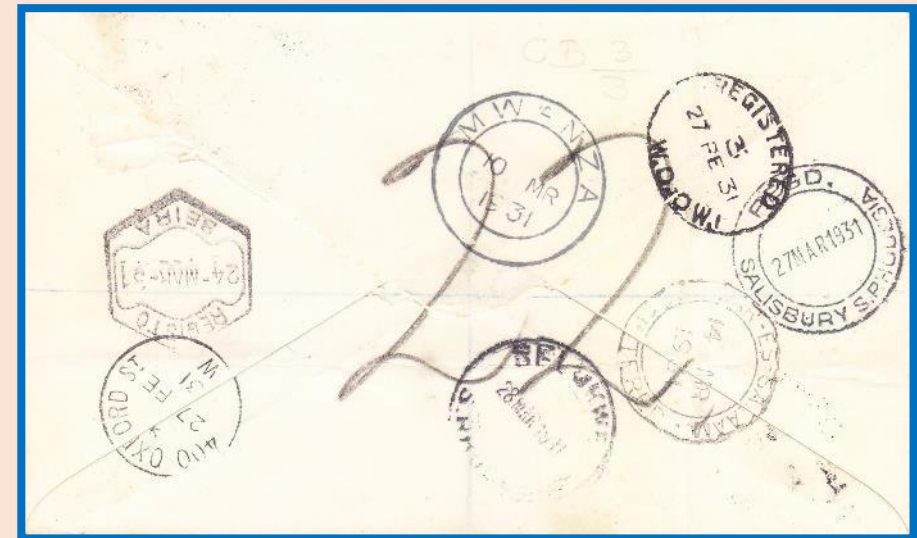
1931

East Africa service

Prior to February 1931 Imperial Airways had operated a service to India through Cairo. On 28 February 1931 the first scheduled service down the Nile to Mwanza at the bottom of Lake Victoria commenced. The service continued to operate for about a year before being replaced with the scheduled service through the Rhodesias and onto Cape Town.



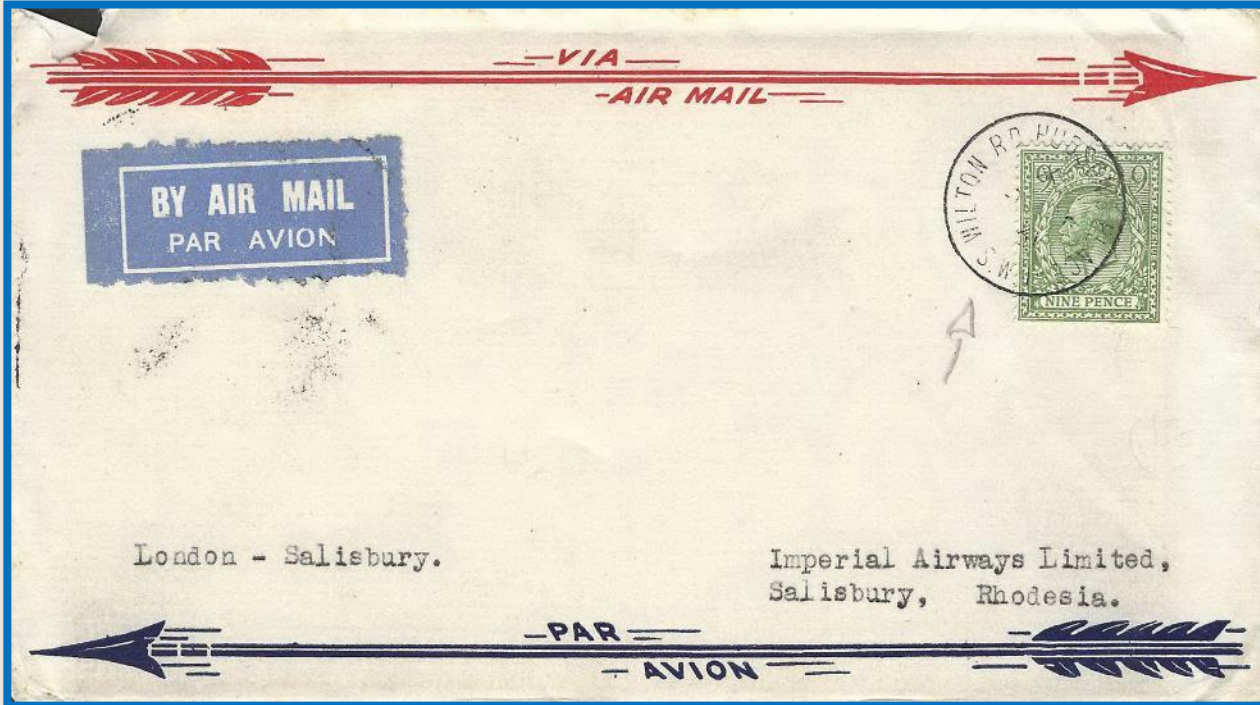
Cover posted Oxford Street, London 27 February 1931
Departed Croydon 28 February 1931 (service AS1)
Offloaded Mwanza, Tanganyika 10 March 1931



Then by train to Dar-es-Salaam arrived 14 March 1931
By ship to Beira arrived 24 March 1931
Arrived Salisbury 27 March 1931
Arrived Selukwe 28 March 1931

1931

'Christmas' - 'Experimental' – 'Positioning' Flight Incoming mail



Cachet Cover Club
7371 Maple Avenue
Maplewood, Missouri

Cover posted in Khartoum on 12 December 1931. Carried on AS41 to Broken Hill. Arrived 19 December 1931.

Cover posted in Hudson Place, London in December 1931.
Arrived Salisbury on 19 December 1931



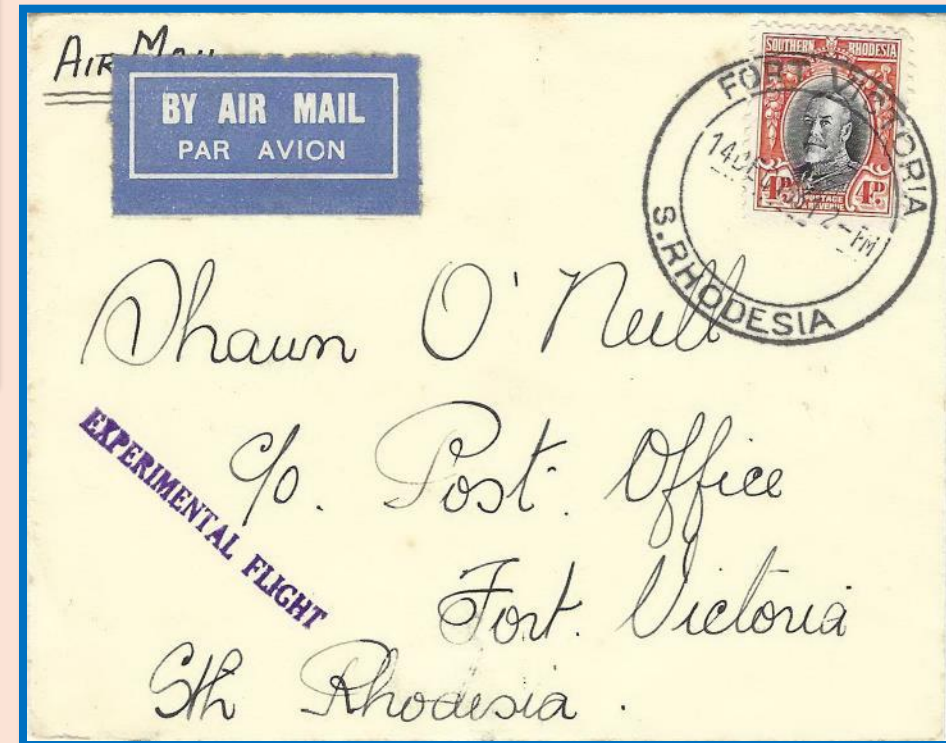
1931

'Christmas' - 'Experimental' – 'Positioning' Flight Internal mail



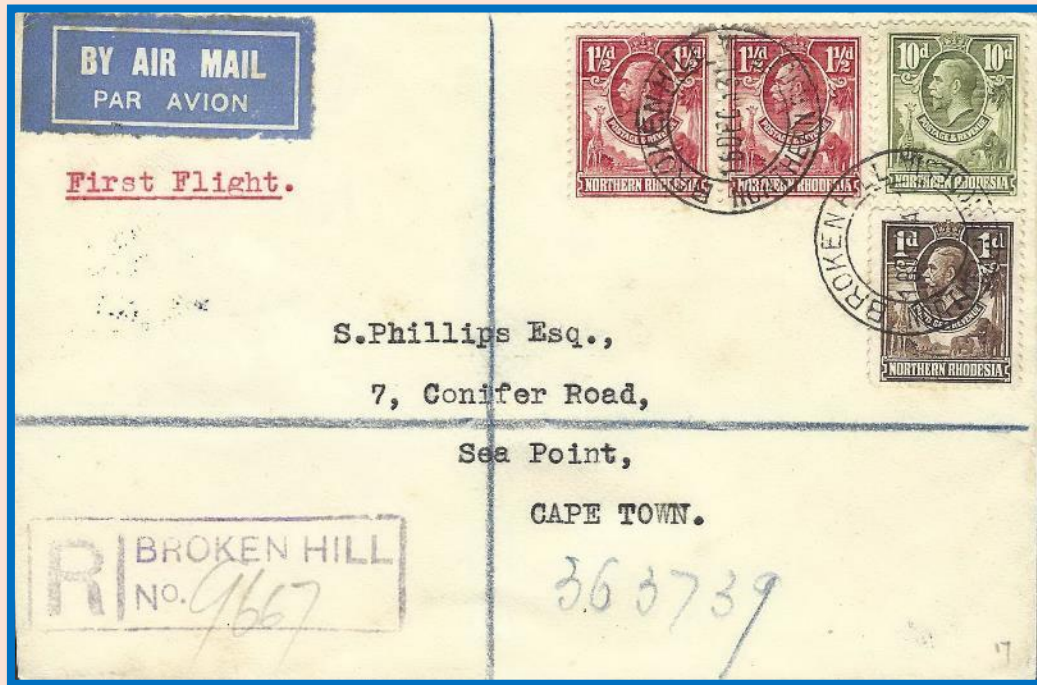
Cover posted at Fort Victoria on 14 December 1931. Carried by train to Gwelo and then to Salisbury, arriving on 16 December 1931. Carried on the Christmas flight to Bulawayo on 20 December 1931. It was returned by rail to Gwelo and then back to Fort Victoria. The postage of 4d was correct for internal air mail.

Cover posted in Broken Hill on 17 December 1931. Arrived at Salisbury on 19 December 1931.



1931

'Christmas' - 'Experimental' – 'Positioning' Flight Outgoing mail



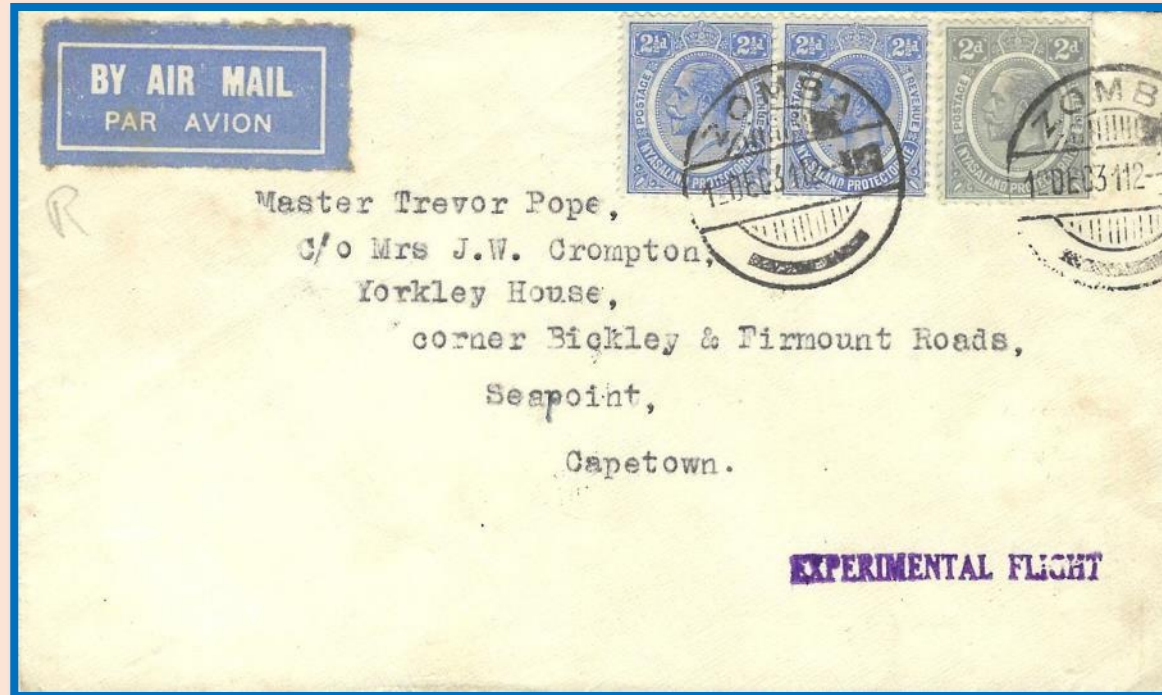
Posted Broken Hill 16 December 1931
Arrived Cape Town 21 December 1931

Posted Bulawayo 19 December 1931
Arrived by air Cape Town 21 December 1931
Carried by 'Arundel Castle' from Cape Town 25 December 1931
Arrived Southampton 11 January 1932
Arrived Salcombe 12 January 1932
Postage paid 7½d to cover air to Cape Town and surface to UK



1931

‘Christmas’ - ‘Experimental’ – ‘Positioning’ Flight Outgoing mail



85 Nyasaland covers flown Salisbury southbound
of which 25 were addressed to the UK



Cover posted in Zomba, Nyasaland, on 12 December 1931 and carried by train to Salisbury arriving 16 December 1931
‘Experimental flight’ cachet placed in Salisbury. Loaded on IA flight at Salisbury on 20 December 1931
Arrived Cape Town 21 December 1931

1932

First scheduled southbound service (AS47) Incoming mail



One of 540 covers posted from Croydon Aerodrome on 20 January 1932 and carried to Northern Rhodesia on the first scheduled southbound service (AS47) which commenced from Croydon on 20 January 1932 and reached Broken Hill on 30 January 1932.



Cover posted in Athens on 23 January 1932 and carried by Imperial Airway (AS47) arriving in Broken Hill on 30 January 1932.

1932

First scheduled southbound service (AS47) Incoming mail



Cover posted Valletta, Malta 16 January 1932
Valletta air mail surcharge 18 January 1932
Via Syracuse and Messina
Brindisi 22 January 1932
Alexandria 23 January 1932
Arrived Mpika 30 January 1932



Cover posted in Mbeya, Tanganyika, on 25 January 1932. Carried by
Imperial Airway (AS47) to Broken Hill, arriving on 30 January 1932.

1932

First scheduled southbound service (AS47) Incoming mail flown from Broken Hill by 'Puss Moth'



Arrived Salisbury 31 January 1932

Arrived Beatrice Mine 1 February 1932

Arrived Bulawayo 1 February 1932

Two covers posted in Salcombe, Devon, on 19 January 1932 and carried to Broken Hill by Imperial Airways (AS47). Then carried to Salisbury and Bulawayo by The Rhodesian Aviation Company 'Puss Moth'.



1932

First scheduled southbound service (AS47) Outing mail flown by 'Puss Moth' to Germiston



Registered cover posted in Bulawayo on 30 January 1932. Flown by 'Puss Moth' to Germiston on 1 February 1932 arriving on the same day. Carried by Union Airways to Durban arriving on 2 February 1932. Signed by Mike Pearce – the pilot of the 'Puss Moth'.

Cover posted in Salisbury on 29 January 1932. Flown by 'Puss Moth' to Germiston on 1 February 1932 arriving on the same day. Carried by Imperial Airways to Kimberley and then by South West African Airways to Windhoek arriving on 2 February 1932.



1932

First scheduled northbound service (AN47) Incoming mail



Posted Keetsmandorp 28 January 1932
Carried to Windhoek and then Kimberley by SWA Airways
Uplifted at Kimberley on 27 January 1932
Arrived Bulawayo 28 January 1932

Posted Johannesburg 2 January 1932
Arrived Broken Hill 4 February 1932 after crash
Arrived Nkana 5 February 1932



1932

First scheduled northbound service (AN47) Incoming mail



Posted Pietersburg 28 January 1932
Arrived Salisbury 28 January 1932

Posted Lobatse 27 January 1932
Taken by road to Kimberley
Departed Kimberley 27 January 1932
Arrived Bulawayo 28 January 1932



1932

First scheduled northbound service (AN47) Internal mail



Posted Bulawayo 28 January 1932
Arrived Mpika 2 February 1932



Posted Broken Hill 29 January 1932
Arrived Mpika 2 February 1932

1932

First scheduled northbound service (AN47) Outgoing mail



Posted Arcturus 26 January 1932
Arrived Croydon 16 February 1932



Locally produced souvenir cover
Posted Salisbury 28 January 1932
Arrived Croydon 16 February 1932

1932

First scheduled northbound service (AN47) Outgoing mail



Posted Broken Hill 29 January 1932
Arrived Nairobi 3 February 1932

Posted Bulawayo 28 January 1932
Arrived Brindisi 14 February 1932



1932

New Zealand

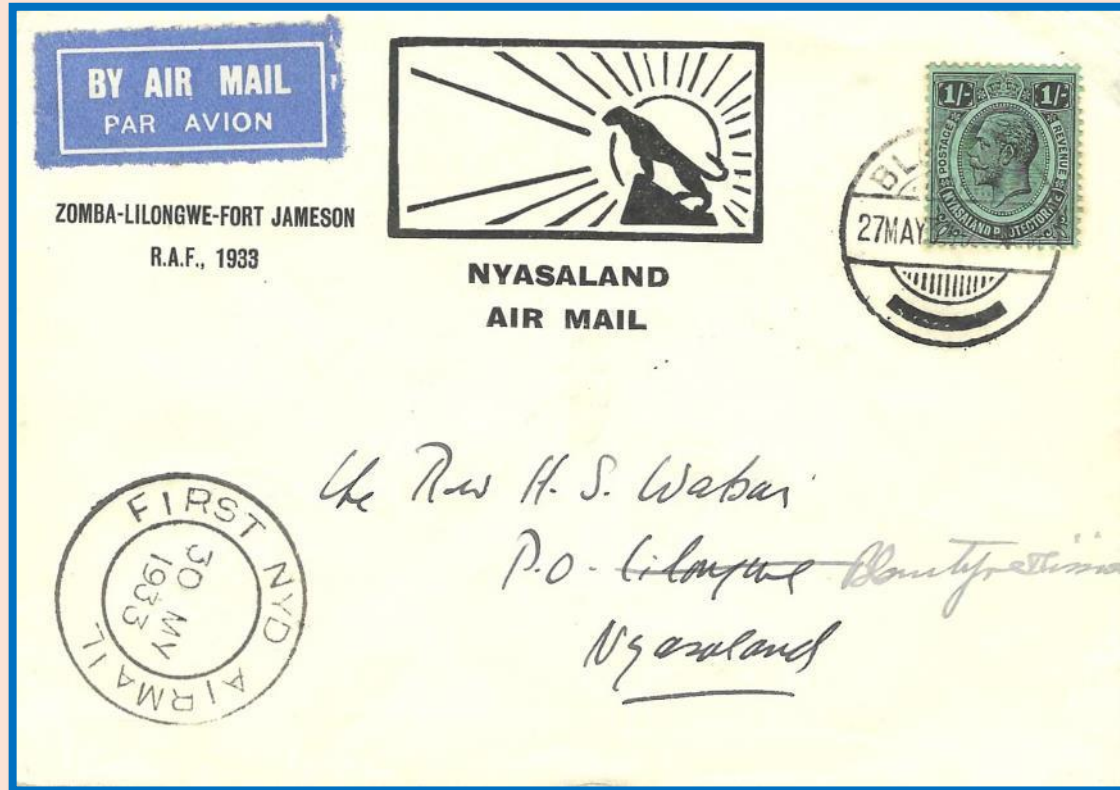
Two covers posted in Timaru, South Island, New Zealand on 28 June 1932. Said to be the 'First Official Air Mail' from New Zealand to South Africa. The covers were not despatched by air. The two covers went by sea on 30 June 1932 to Karachi and from there by Imperial Airways to Cairo, arriving on 30 July 1932 (IW173). From Cairo the covers were carried on AS74 arriving in Broken Hill 5 August 1932. The cover to Livingstone was carried by train arriving there on 7 August 1932. The cover to Bulawayo arrived there on 6 August 1932. Both covers were returned to the sender as unclaimed.



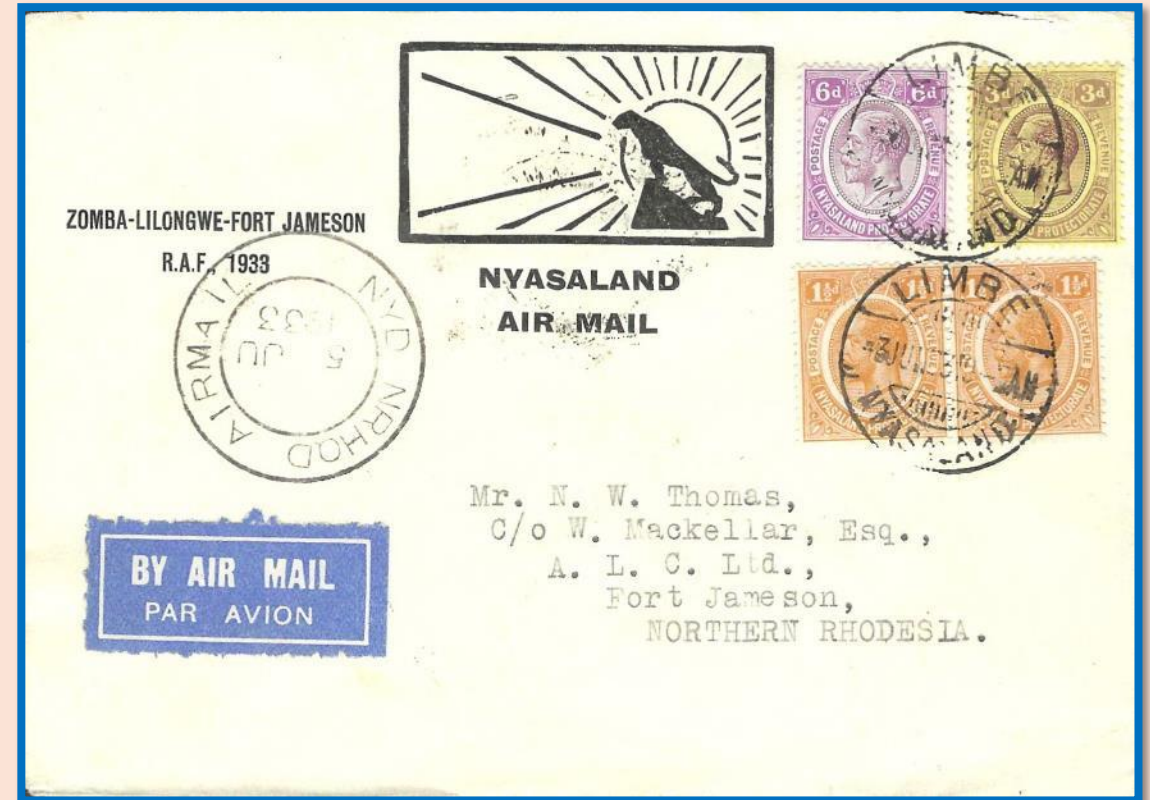
1933

Opening of Chileka Airport

In May 1933 an air rally was arranged at the instance of the Governor to celebrate the opening of the aerodrome at Chileka, near Blantyre. 5 planes of the R.A.F. deviated from their annual routine flight from Egypt to the Cape to attend the rally and carried two batches of mail from Blantyre.



30 May 1933 - First flight Blantyre to Lilongwe
355 covers carried
Cover posted at Blantyre on 27 May 1933



5 June 1933 – Second flight Blantyre to Fort Jameson NR
266 covers carried
Cover posted in Limbe on 3 June 1933

1933

Incoming mail



At Brindisi the mail was carried by Imperial Airways Service AS108 through Athens to Cairo, south to Kisumu and then by DH66 'City of Basra' to Broken Hill where it arrived on 31 March 1933. The cover completed its journey to Lusaka by rail from Broken Hill arriving on 1 April 1933.

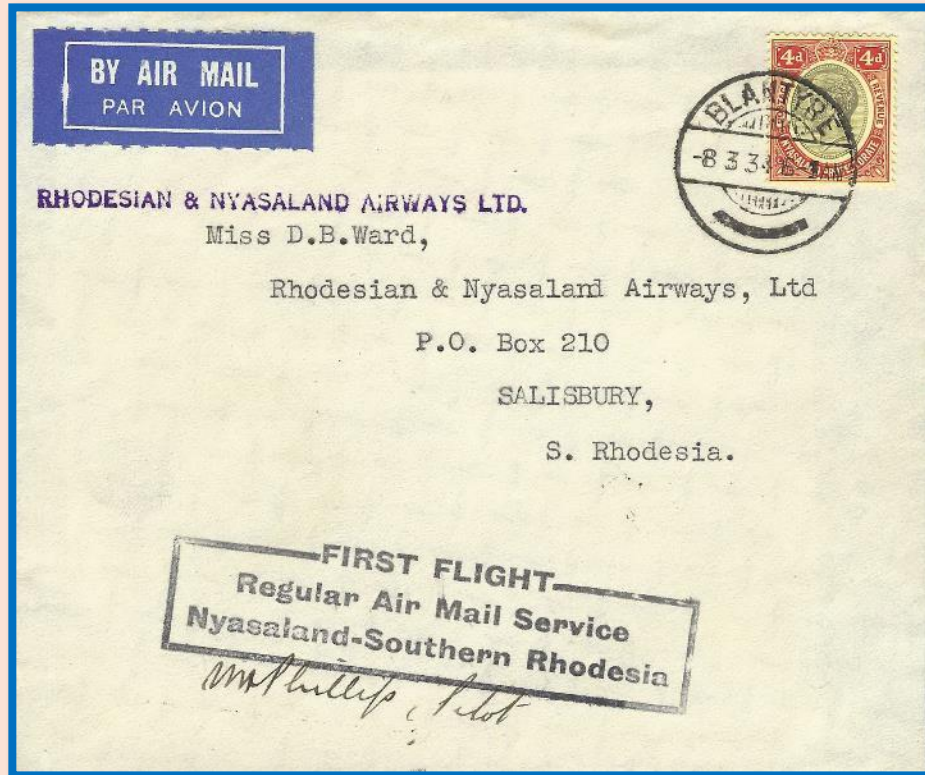
An incoming cover, addressed to Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia, was posted in Berlin on 21 March 1933. Postage totalled 85 pf which was the standard rate for international airmail from Germany. The cover probably was taken by train from Berlin to Brindisi.



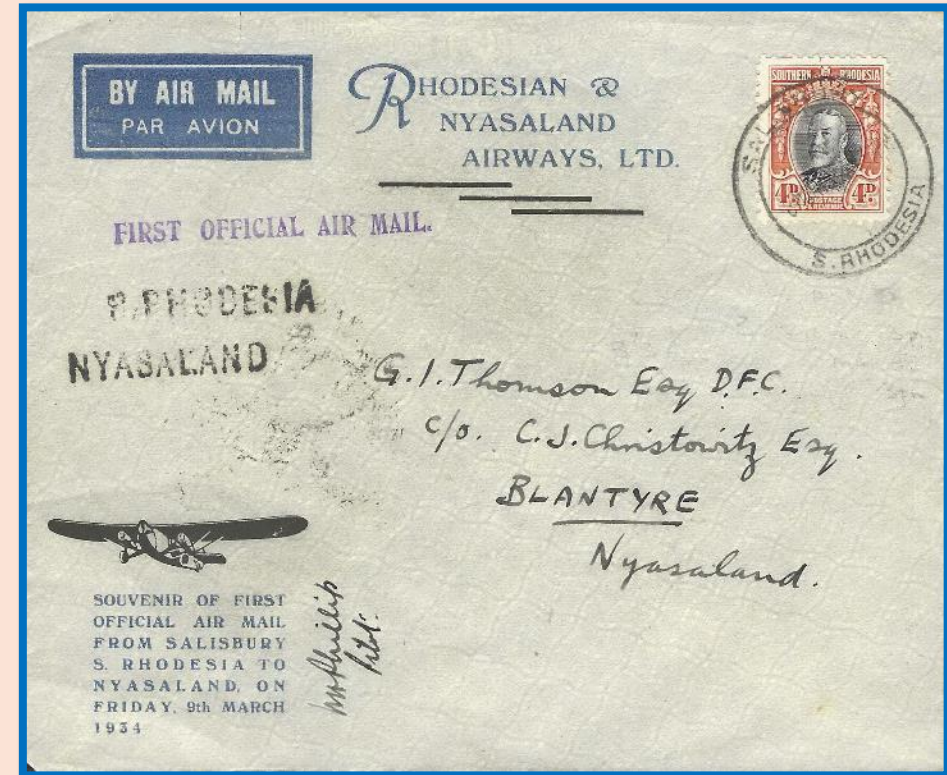
1934

RANA – First Service between Blantyre and Salisbury

The first scheduled service between Blantyre was flown by a Westland Wessex, piloted by MH Phillip, on 8 March 1934. The return flight took place on 9 March 1934 to Blantyre.



Cover posted in Blantyre on 8 March 1934.



Cover posted in Salisbury on 8 March 1934.

Both covers are signed by the pilot, MH Phillip.

1934

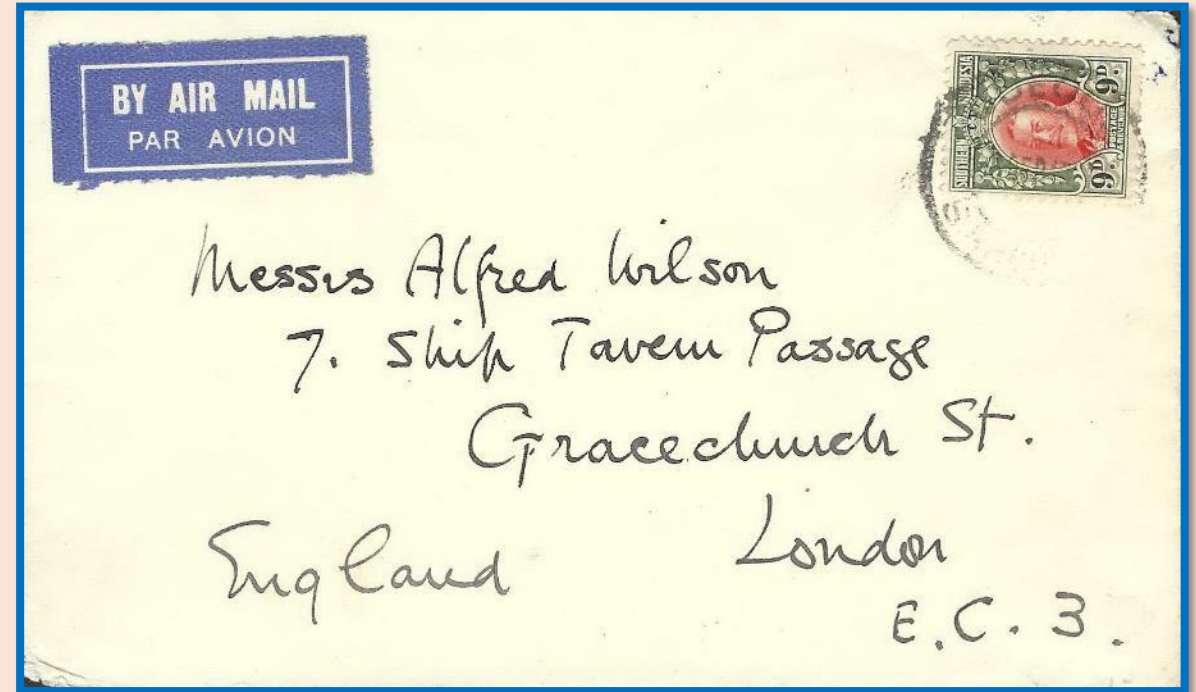
Postage rates

On the date of posting the airmail rate to the UK was 10d per ½ oz. Before the cover left Broken Hill, the rate was reduced to 9d on 1 May 1934. No 9d stamp was produced for Northern Rhodesia.

The 9d airmail rate to the UK was introduced on 1 June 1934. The rate was decreased to 6d from 1 December 1934. The 9d Field Marshal stamp was specifically ordered to meet this rate. - issued on 1 September 1934.



Cover posted in Mankoya on 12 April 1934 and carried, via Broken Hill, to London on Imperial Airways service AN165, arriving at Croydon on 10 May 1934. (Gervas Clay ?)



Cover posted in Gwelo on 24 September 1934 and carried to London on Imperial Airways service AN186, arriving on 4 October 1934.

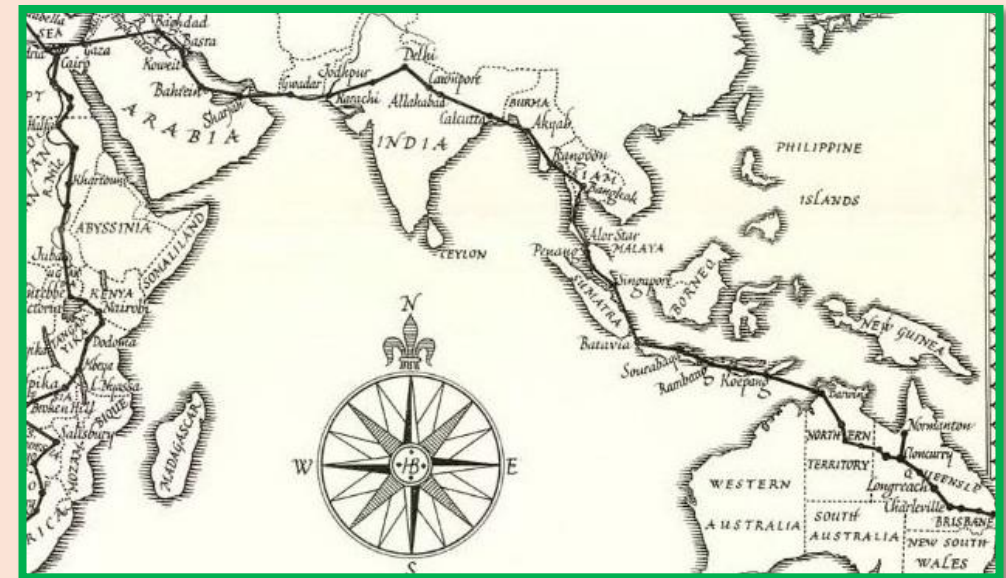
1934

Australia

Mail from Southern Rhodesia
connecting to the first scheduled
lia.



Posted in Bulawayo 5 December 1934.
Carried to Cairo on AN196 arriving 10 December 1934.
Departed Cairo on 13 December 1934 (IE298)
Arrived Brisbane 21 December 1934.



Route map

Correct through air mail rate of 1s8d

1934

Australia

Mail from Australia on the first scheduled service to the UK
connecting with the service south from Cairo to Northern Rhodesia.



All through airmail postage of 2s5d paid.

Posted in Brisbane 7 December 1934.
Departed Brisbane (IW298) on 10 December 1934.
Arrived Alexandria 21 December 1934.
Departed Cairo on 23 December 1934 (AS199).
Arrived Mpika 26 December 1934.

1935

RANA –Service extended between Salisbury and Beira

RANA expanded its service from Blantyre and Salisbury to Beira and return. The first flights took place on 1 August 1935. This service would later be used from June 1937 to deliver mail onto and from the Imperial Airways flying boat service at Beira.



Cover posted in Salisbury on 1 August 1935.
Cover signed by the pilot, JAC Florence.



Cover posted in Beira on 1 August 1935.
Cover signed by the pilot, MH Pearce.

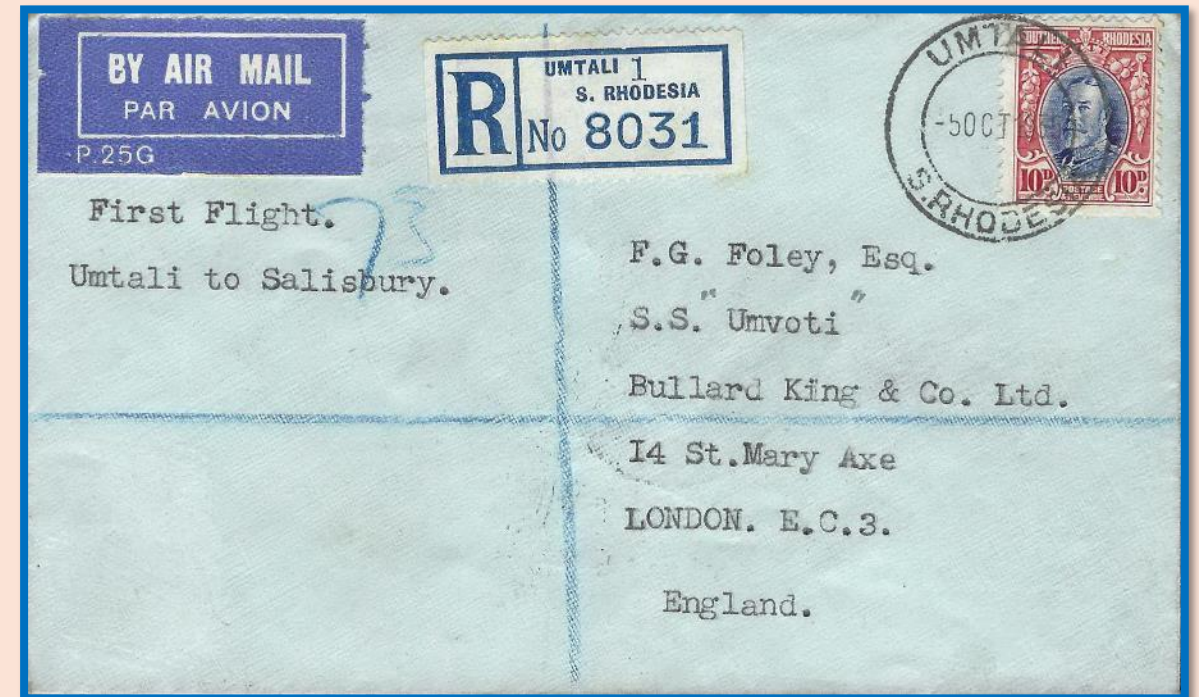
1935

RANA –Service between Salisbury and Beira stopping in Umtali

A brief stop in Umtali was added to the service between Salisbury and Beira - the first landing being on 3 October 1935. The return flight landed in Umtali on 5 October 1935.



Cover posted in Salisbury on 3 October 1935.
Arrived in Umtali the same day.



Cover posted in Umtali on 5 October 1935.
Arrived in Salisbury the same day.
Carried to Croydon on Imperial Airways (AN279)
Arrived 13 October 1935.

1936

No trans-Atlantic air mail service



Posted Salisbury 29 July 1936
Carried on AN 3365 on 1 August 1936
Arrived Croydon 9 August 1936
No air mail service to USA so carried by sea
No arrival stamp

Posted Selukwe 3 April 1936
Carried on AN 331 on 5 April 1936 – the first northbound flight that did not originate in Cape Town
Arrived Croydon 12 April 1936
No air mail service to the West Indies so carried by sea
Transit stamp St Kitts 2 May 1936. No arrival stamp



1937

Temporary overland flights

On 2 June 1937 Imperial Airways introduced the first 'All the Way by Flying Boat' service from Southampton to Durban using the Indian Ocean coastal route. As the new service did not operate in Tanganyika, Northern or Southern Rhodesia, Imperial Airways operated a temporary overland service between Kisumu and Salisbury, stopping in Nairobi, Moshi, Dodoma, Mbeya, Mpika, Broken Hill, Lusaka and Salisbury. This temporary service operated only during June 1937 and eight flights in both directions were undertaken.



The postage paid of 6d was correct as the EAMS rate of 1½d was only introduced on 29 June 1937.

Cover posted at Southampton on 30 May 1937 addressed to Lusaka. The cover was carried on the first flying boat service to Durban (AS453) which departed Southampton on 2 June 1937. As it was addressed to Northern Rhodesia it was offloaded at Kisumu on 6 June 1937 and flown on the temporary overland service arriving in Lusaka on 8 June 1937. 27

1937

Twice-weekly service from Salisbury to Beira carry mail to the incoming Imperial Airways flying boat, and to take mail back to the Rhodesias and Nyasaland.



Cover posted at Salisbury on 30 June 1937 and carried by RANA to Beira to meet the Imperial Airways service DN2 from Durban which arrived in Beira on 5 July 1937 and reached Southampton on 10 July 1937.



Posted Nkana 28 June 1937
Arrived Broken Hill 2 July 1937
Carried by RANA via Salisbury to Beira
Carried on DN2 from Beira on 5 July 1937 to Mombasa
Flown from Mombasa by Wilson Airways to Nairobi
Arrived Uplands 7 July 1937

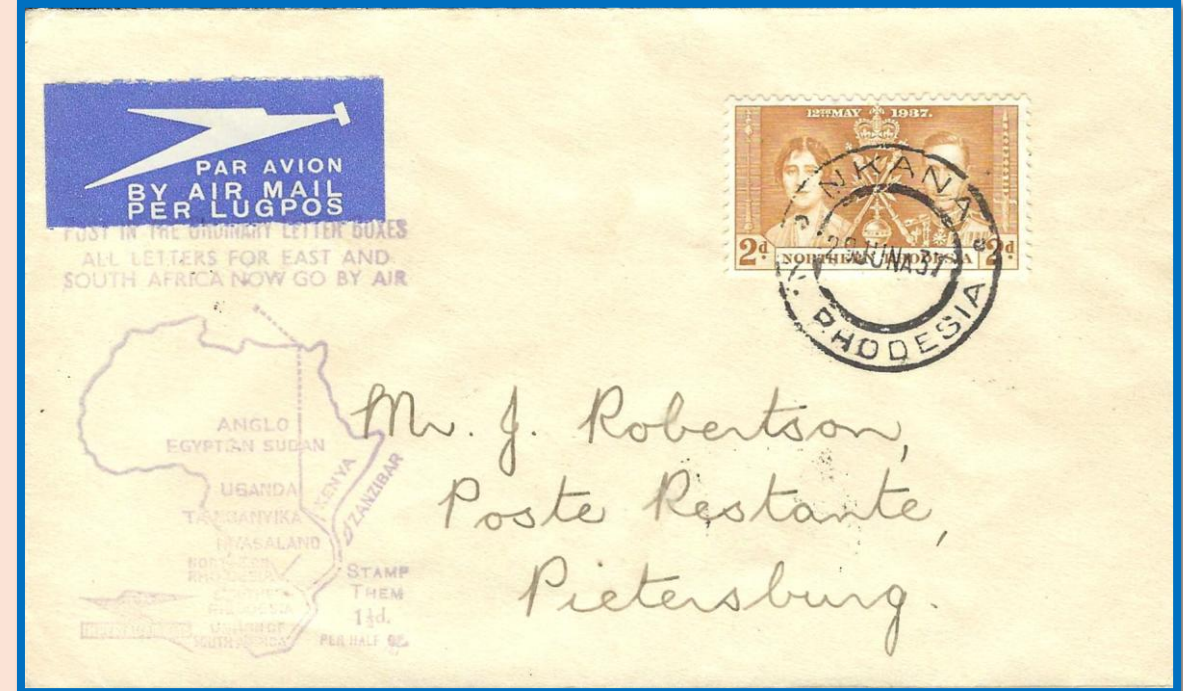
1937

South African Airways

South African Airways started a scheduled once a week service from Rand Airport to Bulawayo on 29 May 1937. The service was extended through Bulawayo to Lusaka on 9 June 1937 and on 4 July 1937 the service was extended to Kisumu via Nairobi.



Posted in Johannesburg on 3 July 1937
Carried by SAA to Bulawayo on 4 July 1937
Bulawayo 'Poste Restante' stamp 5 July 1937
Correct EMAS post rate paid of 1½d



Posted Nkana 29 June 1937
Arrived Broken Hill 30 June 1937
Carried by SAA on first service to Johannesburg
Arrived Pietersburg 6 July 1937

1937 - 1938

Empire air mail scheme

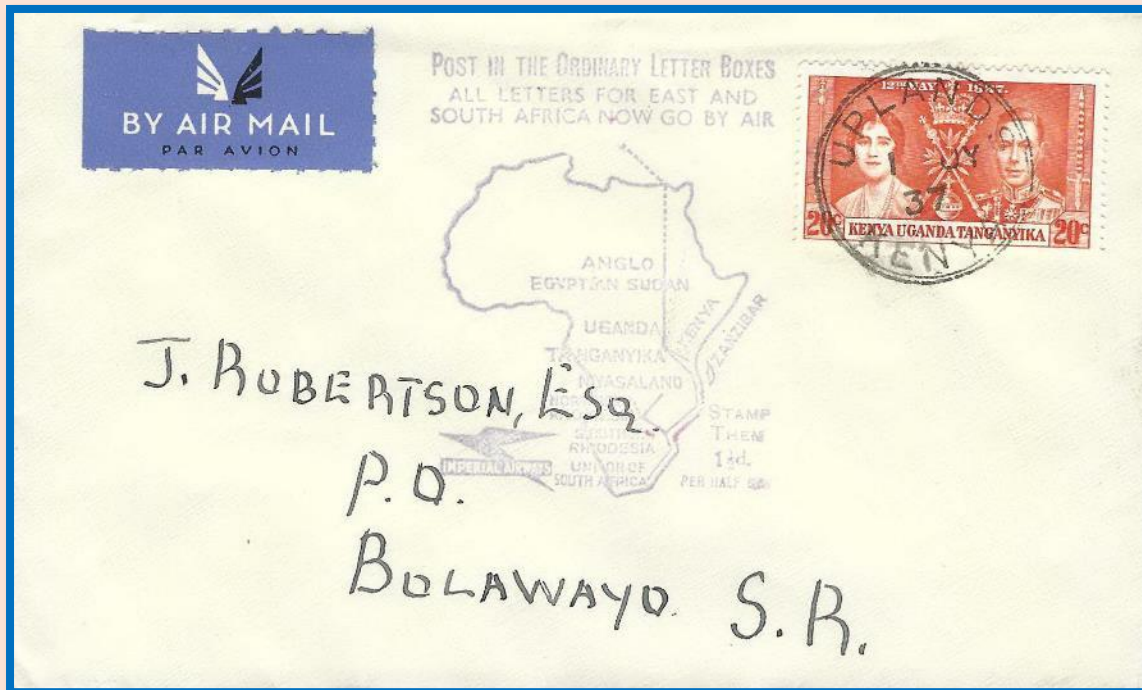
The Empire Air Mail Scheme was introduced in three stages to afford an inexpensive airmail service throughout the British Empire.

29 June 1937 - first stage introduced for mail between the UK and Eire and British territories in Africa.

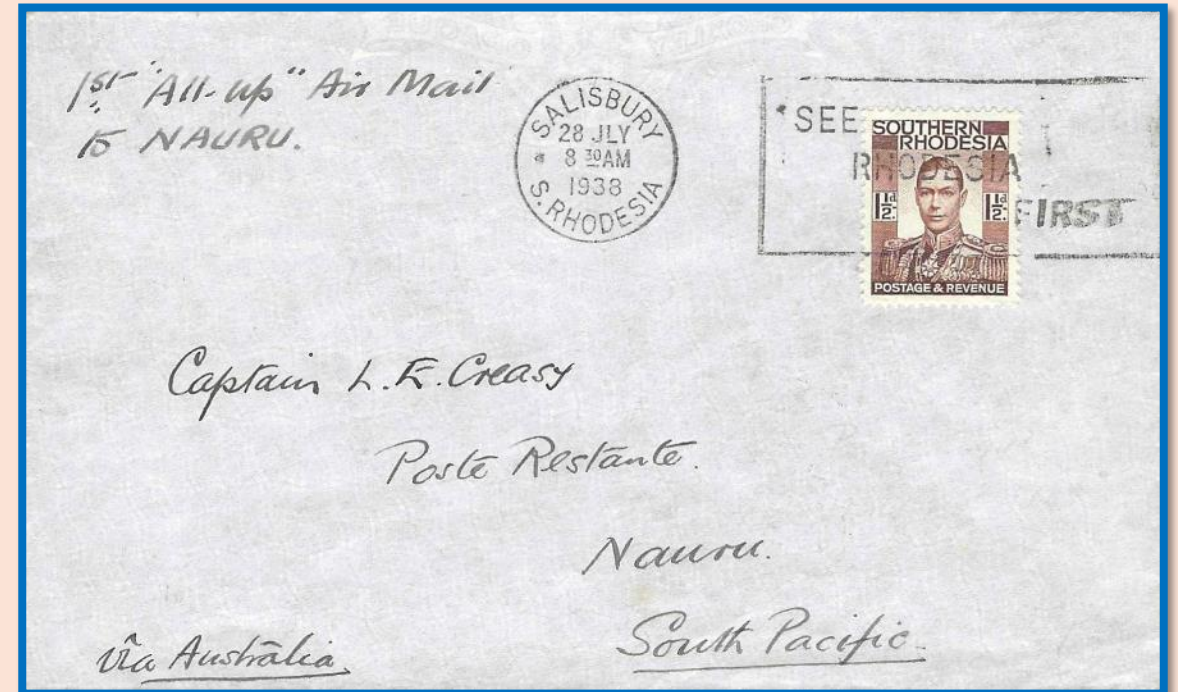
23 February 1938 - second stage introduced for mail addressed to the Empire in America and Asia.

26 July 1938 - third stage introduced for mail addressed to Australia, New Zealand and the British Pacific islands.

4 September 1939 – EAMS suspended on outbreak of war.



Cover posted 1 July 1937 in Uplands, Kenya
Carried on first all-through flying boat service (DN1)
Arrived Beira 5 July 1937. By RANA to Bulawayo
Postage correct Kenya rate of 20 cents for EAMS



Cover posted 28 July 1938 in Salisbury
Carried on all-through flying boat service (SE4)
Arrived Sydney 10 August 1938
By sea to Nauru arrived 26 August 1938
Postage correct rate of 1½d for EAMS from SR

1938

RANA Inter town service

Commencing on 1 February 1938, RANA introduced an inter-town service between Salisbury and Bulawayo. The service was to stop in Gatooma, Que Que and Gwelo with a total flying time of about three hours. For the first week, until 8 February 1938, the airfield at Gwelo was unusable because of heavy rain. The service was run from Salisbury on Tuesday and Friday, the return flights being on Wednesday and Saturday.



Posted Gatooma 1 February 1938
Carried on first flight to Bulawayo

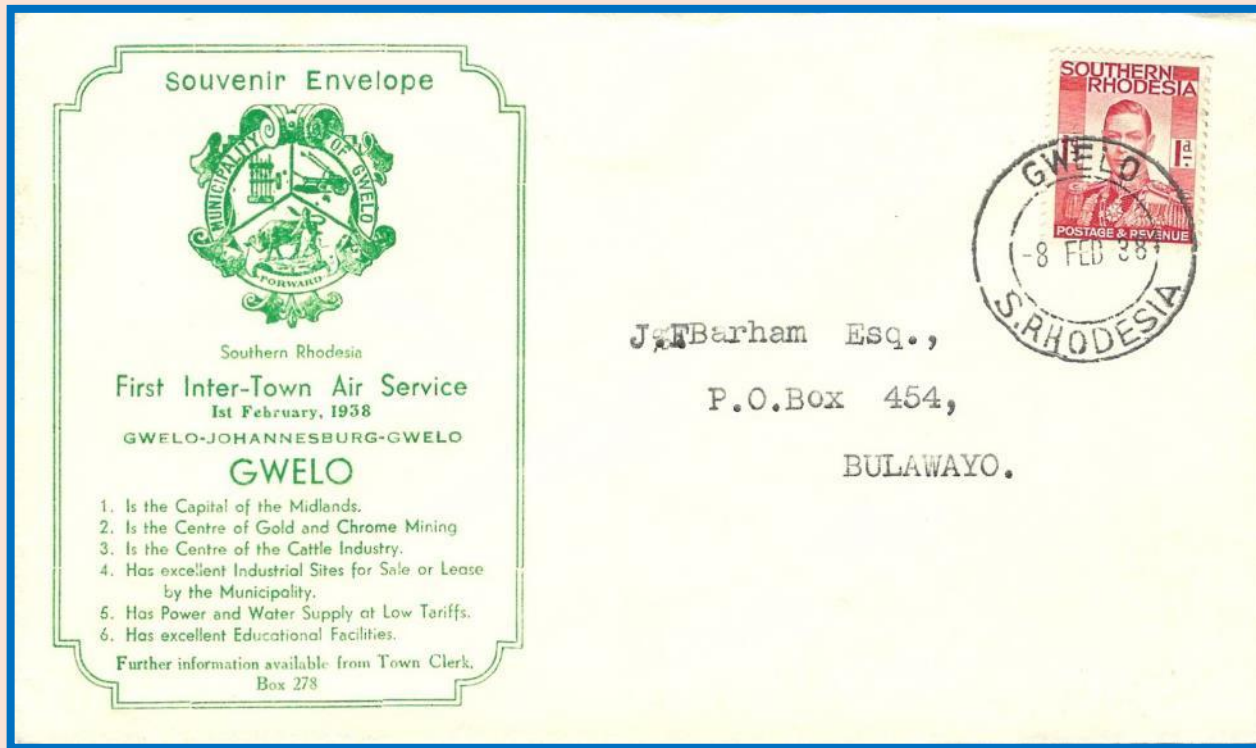


Posted Bulawayo 1 February 1938
Carried on first return flight to Salisbury 2 February 1938

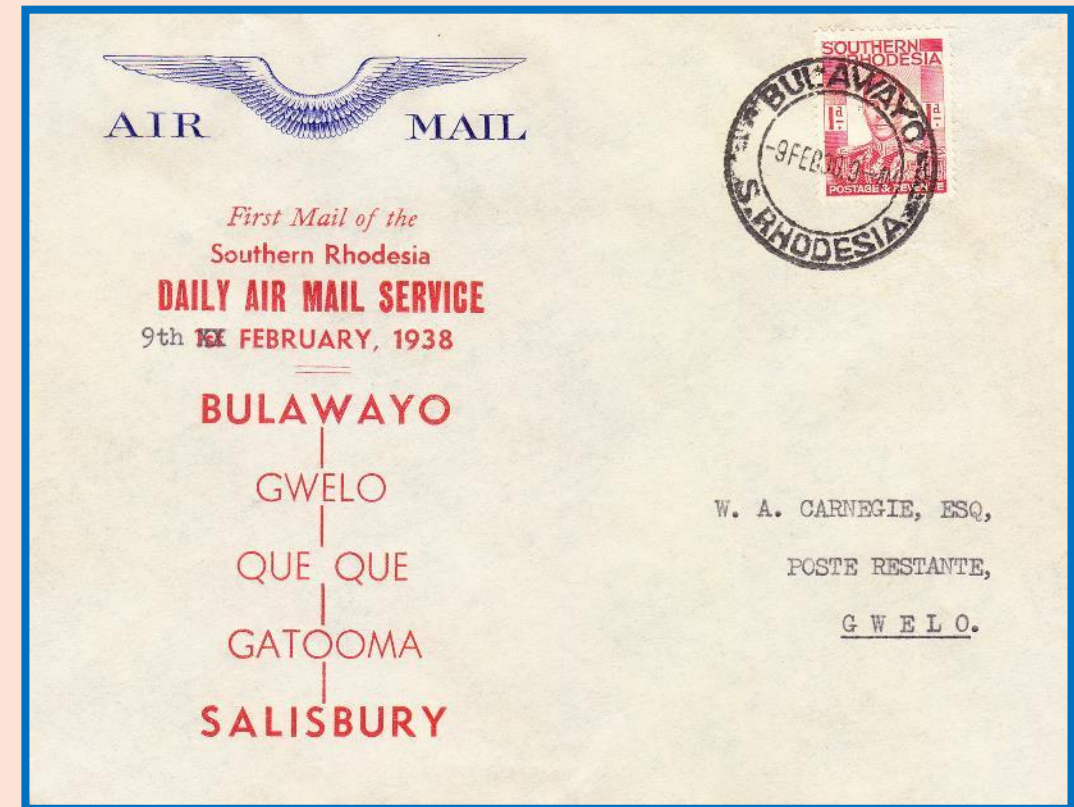
1938

RANA Inter town service - Gwelo

Once the airfield south of Gwelo had dried the inter-city service landed at Gwelo for the first time on 8 February 1938.



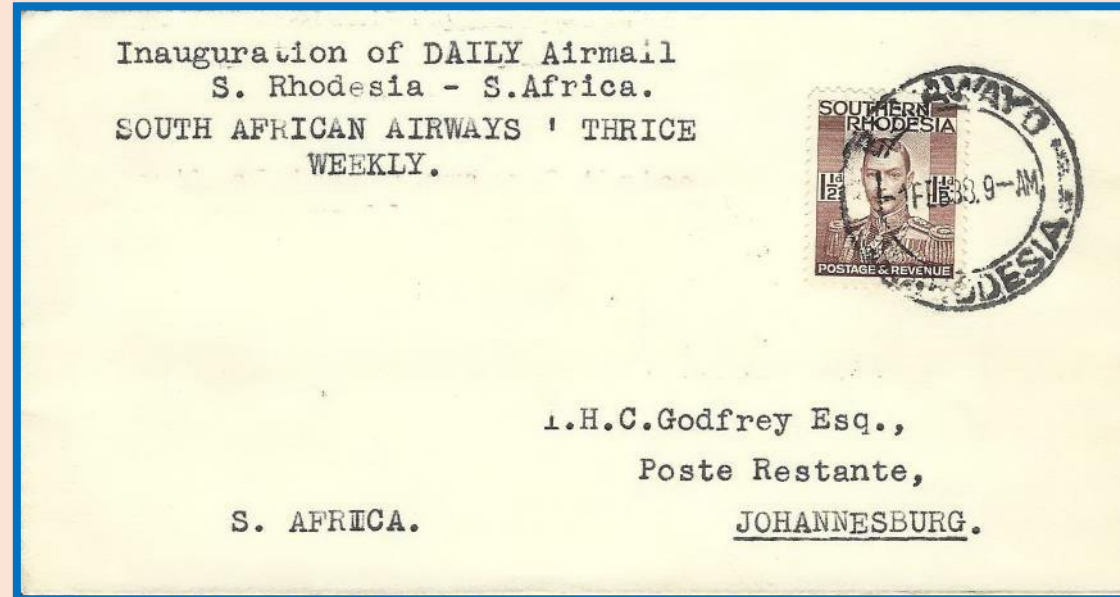
Souvenir envelope produced by the Municipality of Gwelo
Posted Gwelo 8 February 1938
Carried on first flight to depart from Gwelo



Posted Bulawayo 9 February 1938
Carried on first return flight to land in Gwelo

1938

South African Airways



Cover posted in Bulawayo on 1 February 1938 and carried on the first return flight of the new three times a week service between Johannesburg and Bulawayo introduced by South African Airways in January 1938.

Arrival stamp in Johannesburg on 2 February 1938.

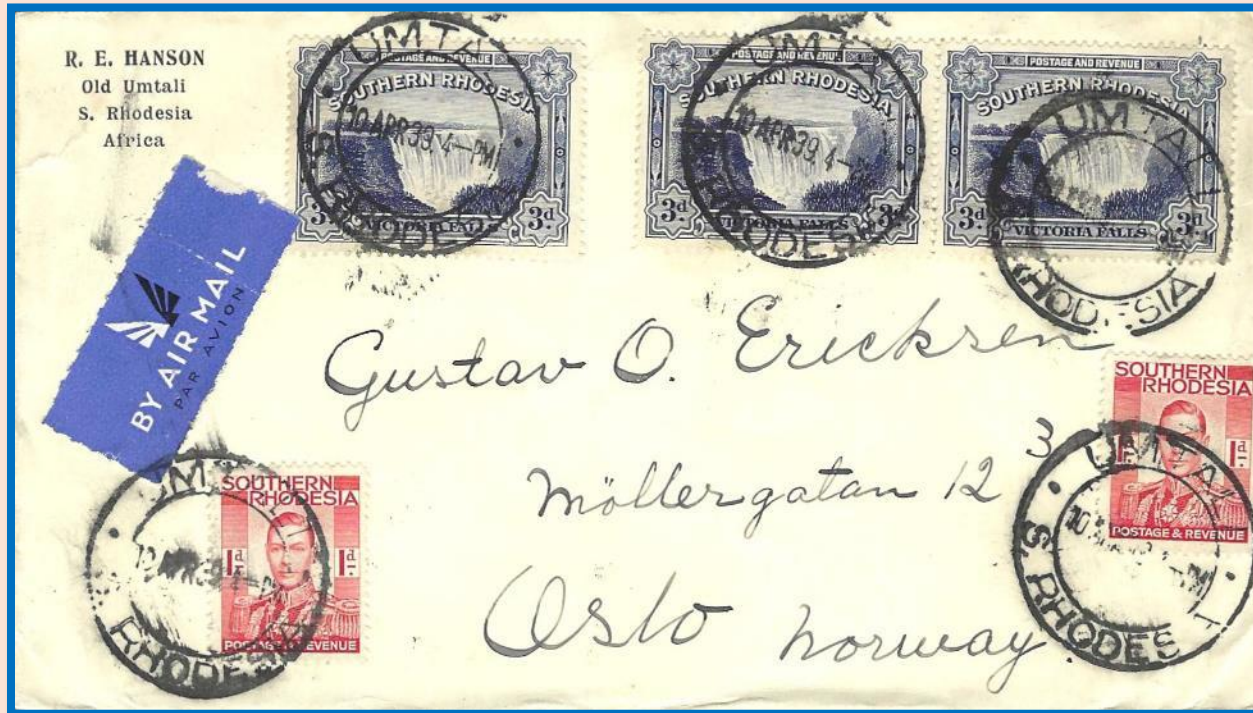
The postage paid of 1½d was the standard Empire air mail rate.

1939

The end of an era

From 7 September 1939 (PN 26 of 1939) the air mail postage rates were substantially increased .

This cover was paid to the 11d rate to Europe.
In September the rate was increased to 3s3d.



With the outbreak of war control of Imperial Airways was taken over by the British Government. On 1 April 1940 Imperial Airways became part of British Overseas Airways Corporation.

Rate became 1s3d from 1½d. This was a tenfold increase in the cost of air mail letters.



My thanks to Peter Wingent and Keith Harrop for all their help.