

## Peter Jennings FRPSL

Born in December 1947, Peter Jennings started stamp collecting at the age of five and began specialising in Aerogrammes in 1963 when he realised he was unable to make his mark in the philatelic world with any conventional form of collection. He joined Birmingham Philatelic Society, in 1962, where he was awarded the silver *La Trobe* medal (1966-67), the Society's premier award, for his collection and lecture on the history of the Aerogramme.



Elected to membership of the Royal Philatelic Society, London in 1966 and elected a Fellow of the Society in November 1974, writer and broadcaster, Peter Jennings has written numerous articles for the Philatelic Press throughout the world.

Made a Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society in 1970, Peter Jennings has exhibited his collection of Aerogrammes both nationally and internationally, including the British Philatelic Exhibition in 1966 and Stampex in 1967, at Aerofila 1967 (Budapest), Ifa Wien 1968 (Vienna), Sofia 1969 (Bulgaria), and Lupo 1969 (Lucerne). He was a member of Philympia 1970 Press Committee and his exhibit of Aerogrammes was awarded a bronze medal.

In 1971 some items from his collection were included in the National Postal Museum's special 'Britain's Pioneer Airmails' Exhibition, while in 1973 his book *Aerogrammes* was published by Picton Publishing. This book was awarded a bronze medal at British Philatelic Exhibition 1973, a silver-bronze medal at Interna 1974 (Basle) and a bronze medal at Stockholmia 1974 (Sweden).

## The History of the Aerogramme and the Start of Commercial Air Mail— Part One

### In the Beginning

The world's first Air Letters, or Aerogrammes as we now call them, were privately produced in Paris during the Siege 1870-1871, as novelties to supplement the letters in use at the time. They are inscribed, 'Par Ballon Monté' (via Piloted Balloon), and carry a series of four different patriotic slogans in both French and German. Two different types exist and can be distinguished by the printer's type of 'Par Ballon'. They exist in blue, green, rose, azure and lilac and are extremely rare genuinely used.

The details of the Siege of Paris, and the Franco-Prussian War which brought about the downfall of the House of Bonaparte and the Second Empire in France and resulted in the unification of Germany under Prussia, are well known, but worth recalling.

On 18 September 1870, the last mail train left Paris and the Siege got under way. Five days later Jules Duruof, piloting the balloon Neptune, lifted off from the Place St. Pierre carrying 275 lbs of mail. Three hours later he landed some 60 miles away, at Evreux, and finding himself near a railway station, took a train for Tours where the mail was relayed by more conventional means. Thus by courage and ingenuity, the world's first air mail service had begun.

By the time the armistice was signed at Versailles on 28 January 1871, bringing the siege to an end, sixty-six balloons carried about 110 passengers and over 2½ million letters out of Paris. However, no balloon succeeded in making the return flight and incoming mail depended upon pigeons.

Once a letter had been flown out of the city, it was put into the postal system at the nearest convenient office to the landing point. Mail for abroad carried the framed cachet PD (Paid for transport till Destination). The postal charges for letters sent out of the city were: France (internal), 20 centimes, Luxembourg, 25 centimes, Belgium, Switzerland and Great Britain, 30 centimes.

Amongst the most spectacular and import-

ant of the great technological advances of the past hundred years has been mankind's conquest of the air. Great Britain has been a pioneer in this field, contributing the first mail service by jet powered aircraft and carrying the first aerial mails between continents.

The history of air mails is linked so closely with civil aviation progress that it is interesting to recall the development of various companies and routes, and some of the special postal media produced to speed the expansion of air mail services across the world.

The RAF was formed on 1 April 1918, as an independent military organization, alongside the Army and Navy. In March the following year, an RAF plane flew from Baghdad to Cairo in a single day. The British Government recognized the commercial value of air transportation before the end of World War I and following a report by the Civil Aerial Transport Committee under Lord Northcliffe in February 1918, created a department of Civil Aviation under the Air Ministry on 12 February 1919.

The First World War had demonstrated the practicability of aircraft and proved that what had been regarded as sport or entertaining novelty had serious applications. The trail-blazers of the twenties, in turn, proved that aeroplanes were capable of making flights covering thousands of miles and spanning the oceans. It only remained for this experience to be converted to commercial use. Civil aviation on a commercial basis emerged as soon as the First World War was over.

On 25 August 1919, Aircraft Transport and Travel Limited, flew one passenger and mail from Hounslow Heath landing ground to Paris in  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours. Thus opened the first regular daily international air passenger service in the world.

Navigation was primitive in those days, the pilots making much use of railway lines and checking their positions from town names painted on station roofs. Forced-landings were not infrequent, though the journey was nearly always completed.

On 17 August 1920 the GPO issued the first Air Mail leaflet and the first 'By Air Mail' label with which we are now so familiar.

In March 1921, a Colonial Office Conference, attended by Winston Churchill (in charge of Civil Aviation at this time) and Sir Hugh Trenchard, Chief of Air Staff, met in Cairo and decided, amongst other matters, that the RAF should open a regular air service, carrying mails between Cairo and Baghdad. This service flown by De Havilland aircraft of Nos 30 and 47 Squadrons began operating on 23 June 1921.

The first mail from England (one official letter) left on 4 August 1921 and on 21 August, the first formal arrangement for the transmission of mail (official correspondence only) was made. On 31 October, the air mail service, which cut transit time from England to Baghdad from twenty-eight to nine days, was extended to the general public. Letters from India via the Cairo-Baghdad service attracted an air rate of 1/- per oz., and had to be endorsed 'By Air, Cairo-Baghdad'.

'Air travel must fly on its own feet' said Winston Churchill, but the running of an airline was very expensive and the British companies, left to their own resources, had to keep up with foreign airlines which were subsidised. The result was that for a short time in 1921, no British airline operated—all were bankrupt. Consequently the Hambling Committee was appointed by the Government in 1922 to review the nation's civil air policy. Direct grants totalling £105,000 were made to the airlines but competition between them did not produce profits. The Hambling Committee recommended that the four leading companies should be consolidated. The Government accepted this recommendation and ordered the formation of a single company, which would receive a monopoly of Government help.

On 1 April 1924, four rival companies, British Marine Air Navigation, Daimler Airways, Handley Page Transport and Instone Air Lines, came together to form Imperial

Airways Limited, with two Government members on the Board and a grant of 10 million pounds to help it off the ground!

Imperial Airways, with 15 assorted aeroplanes, flew in its first year to Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin and Cologne — in most cases at weekly intervals.

For the longer route-stages, the twin-engined airliner was inadequate so Imperial Airways introduced the three-engined De Havilland Hercules, the first airliner built in Great Britain specifically for service overseas. Cairo to Basra being the first route.

Air navigation across the featureless desert was difficult—the ingenious solution was to send convoys of cars to mark out a track; in difficult areas a deep furrow was ploughed by a tractor and emergency landing grounds were prepared every twenty miles.

This fortnightly service from Cairo-Baghdad, which had been pioneered by the RAF was taken over by Imperial Airways in December 1926. The first aircraft, the Handley Page biplane, 'City of Baghdad' left Croydon on 18 December.

In late 1924 the Air Ministry, Imperial Airways and oil and aircraft companies joined together to pay the cost of a survey flight to Burma. It was undertaken by Sir Alan Cobham, who had with him as a passenger Sir Sefton Brancker (Director of Civil Aviation). Starting on 20 November 1924, Cobham flew his De Havilland 50 via Turkey to Baghdad, then via Persia and India to Akyab and return, a total of over 17,000 miles without serious trouble. While Cobham investigated the practical difficulties for aircraft and passengers, Brancker sounded the attitude of the various governments towards the establishment of a British air route to the East across their territories.

More of this next time. PETER JENNINGS

## New 10p Stamp Books

From 10 March the Post Office is to commence trials in selected London District Offices of a new 10p stamp book vending from

machines. The stitched type book with inter-leaves has been abandoned in favour of a more modern design. The new booklet has a set-tenant pane of 6 stamps (2 x ½p: 3 x 1p: 1 x 6p) stuck inside an outer card cover. From the first day of the trial the new 10p book will also be available from the Philatelic Bureau, Lothian House, 124 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9BB, and from philatelic counters.

## 1976 Special Stamp Issues

### 10 March Centenary of the First Telephone Call by Alexander Graham Bell

A mother making a social call.

A policeman making an emergency call.

A midwife making a service call.

An industrialist can be seen at work.

### 28 April British Pioneering (Social Reformers)

Hands feature symbolically in each of the stamps together with the following captions:

Thomas Hepburn.

Robert Owen.

Lord Shaftesbury.

Elizabeth Fry.

### 2 June Bicentennial of American Independence (One Stamp)

Design based on a bust of Benjamin Franklin sculpture by Jean Jacques Caffieri.

### 30 June Roses

Roses depicted are:

Sweet Briar.

Rosa Mundi

Elizabeth of Glamis.

Grandpa Dickson.

### 4 August Folk Activities (Four Stamps)

Based on the 800th anniversary of the Welsh Eisteddfod and featuring other cultural events in the British Isles.

### 29 September 500th Anniversary of the Introduction of Printing into Britain (Four Stamps)

The designs will include examples of contemporary printing and printing presses.

### 24 November Christmas

Further details will be announced later.