

# MALAYA CRASH & DISRUPTED AIRMAILS 1931 – 1939

## Introduction

The aviation and airmail history in Malaya began in 1911 when Belgian aviator, Joseph Christiaens made history as the first man to fly an airplane in Singapore. Since then, Malaya witnessed the rapid development and growth of airmail services and evolved as a hub for air routes between Europe and Australasia and also between the Far East and Africa/Australasia/Americas.

With the development of aviation route from Europe to the Far East, and increased competition for business of airmail transportation between Imperial Airways and Dutch KLM (Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij), the nascent aircraft technologies were still primitive causing infrequent crashes, their stories which are being told in this exhibit.

## Scope

This exhibit starts in 1931 when the earliest Catalina Flying boats started plying between Europe & Ais and ends in 1939 with the commencement of hostilities in Europe. This is a study of the incident airmails is organized into two slightly different situation and identified by the postmark(s) and routing, physical damage, special cachets, labels or official mimeograph explanations by the various destination post offices to explain the damaged covers, namely:

**Crash** – Incomplete flight due to aircraft accident resulting in damage to or destruction of the aircraft, with mails forwarded by other aircraft or other means to their destination.

**Disrupted Flight** – A flight which is disrupted or delay en-route, resulting in an unscheduled or forced landing, usually due to adverse weather conditions or an aircraft mechanical problem. Flight continued later by the same aircraft and if the flight cannot be continued, then the mails on board are forwarded by other aircraft or other means to their destination.

## Organization of Exhibit

The one-frame exhibit is displayed in chronological order of Malaya Mail carried by Imperial Airways, KLM and Australian National Airways involved in the crash or disrupted flight.

Page 2	1931 Imperial	– Crashed of CITY OF CAIRO
Page 3	1931 KLM	– Disrupted Flight of RAAF
Page 4	1931 ANA	– Crashed of SOUTHERN SUN
Page 5	1931 KLM	– Crashed of OOIEVAAR
Page 6	1935 Imperial	– Crashed of CITY OF KHARTOUM
Page 7 - 9	1936 Imperial	– Crashed of SCIPIO
Page 10	1936 Imperial	– Crashed of ATHENA
Page 11 - 14	1937 Imperial	– Crashed of CYGNUS
Page 15 – 16	1939 Imperial	– Crashed of CENTURION

*Reference: Kendall C Sanford – Air Crash Mail of Imperial Airways and Predecessor Airlines*  
*Peter Wingent – Aircraft Movements on Imperial Airways' Eastern Route Volume 1 & 2*  
*A.E. Hopkins – A History of Wreck Covers*

# IMPERIAL AIRWAYS

# CRASH MAIL

1931 Crashed at Koepang, Netherlands East Indies on 19<sup>th</sup> April

DH 66 Hercules – CITY OF CAIRO G-EBMW : Pilots by R Mollard and K Alger  
First Experimental Flight, UK to Australia



11 April 1931  
Singapore to Sydney section  
480 covers flown.

Singapore 16 April meter  
cancellation with Imperial  
Airways Ltd slogan and  
Sydney 29 April arrival  
date-stamped on back.

Letter Rate : 6 cents  
Airmail Fee : 40 cents

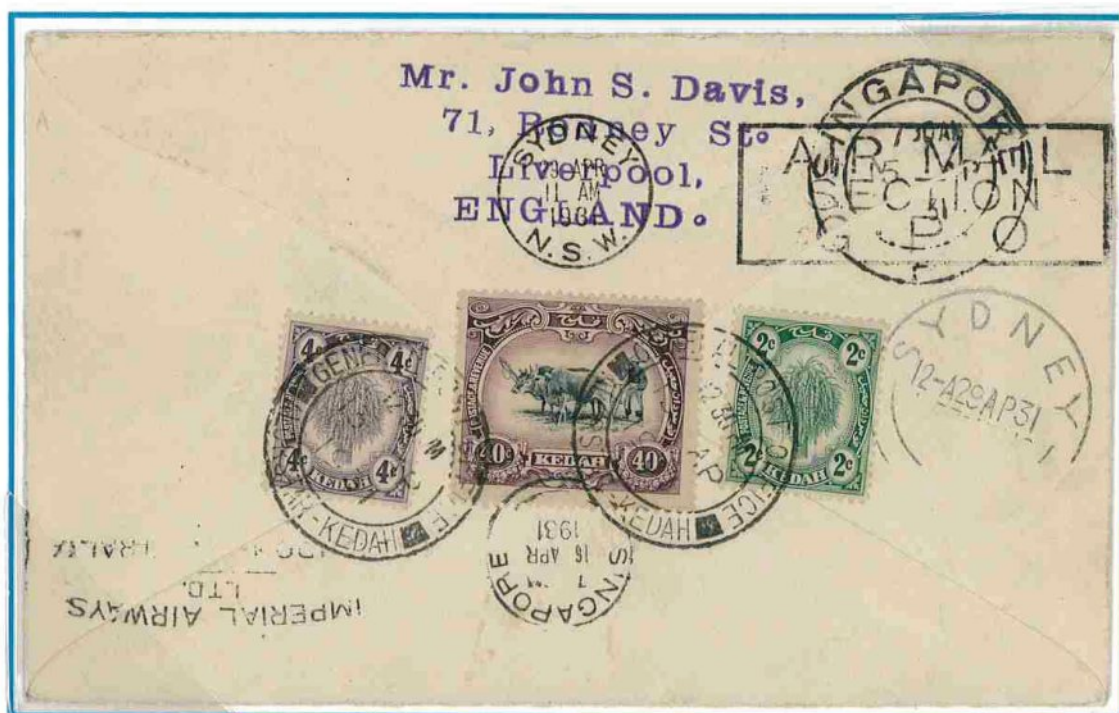
No crash cachet was applied

13 April 1931  
Alor Star to Sydney section  
123 covers flown

Transit Singapore 16 April  
via meter cancellation with  
Imperial Airways Ltd slogan  
and Sydney 29 April arrival

Letter Rate : 6 cents  
Airmail Fee : 40 cents

No crash cachet was applied



*During the late stages of the flight over the Dutch East Indies, the aircraft developed a fuel leak and the pilots R Mollard and K Alger were forced to make an emergency landing at Koepang on Timor. The plane was wrecked but the mails was recovered. Kingsford Smith arrived from Australia on the 25<sup>th</sup> April and took the mails to Darwin in the 'Southern Cross', The mail for Western Australia was offloaded and the remainder carried by Qantas to Brisbane on 28 April and by ANA to Sydney arriving on 29 April.*

1931 Plane Failed To Call at Alor Star, Kedah, Malaya on 11<sup>th</sup> July

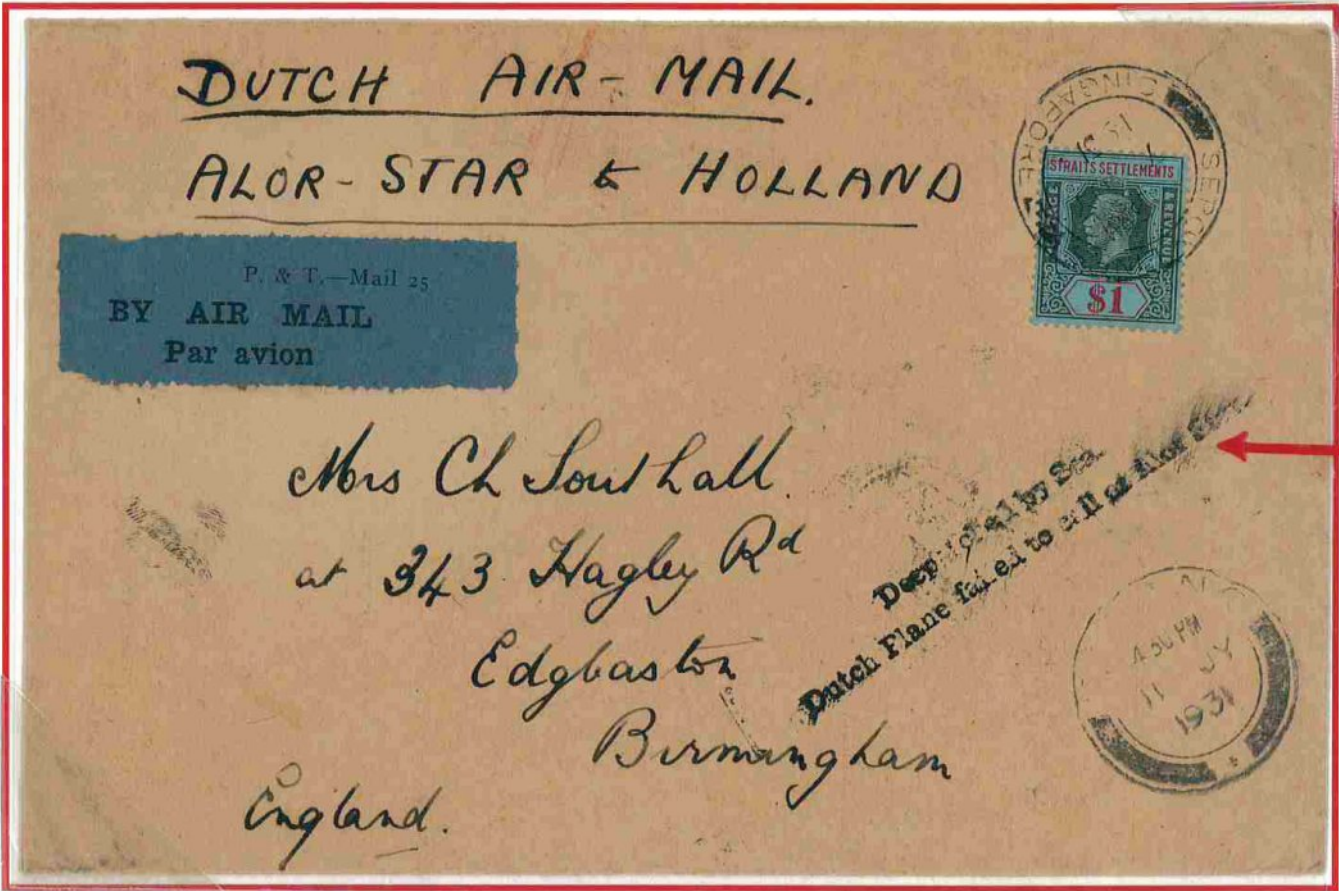
Fokker F.VIIb Trimotor – RAAF PH-AFR

Pilot : Captain van Dijk. 2<sup>nd</sup> Pilot : de Nes. Flight Engineer : Dunik

The 37th Return Flight from Bandoeng, Dutch East Indies to Amsterdam

2-line "Despatched by Sea Dutch Plane failed to call at Alor Star" Cachet

The cover was dispatch by night train to reach Penang on 8 July, delivered to Alor Star to connect the KLM air service between Batavia and Holland. When the plane failed to call, the mail was send to Penang on 11 July to be dispatched by sea as shown by the date-stamp on the envelope front. The post office hastily prepared a hand stamp giving the reason for the delay and as to why it was forwarded by sea. This is the only date on which the cachet was used.



The 1oz letter to UK was underpaid by 6 cents, probably overlooked by the Sepoy Line sub-office clerk

At this time KLM were operating a fortnightly service from Holland to the Dutch East Indies, this started from Bandoeng on 17 October 1930 and became a weekly service on the 30 September 1931. Details of the flights are listed below, note that the flights are all numbered.

From Amsterdam (10 day services)

No	Depart	Aircraft	Arrive	Crew	Days
37	11.06.1931	PH-AFR	25.06.1931	van Dijk; de Nes; Dunik	15
38	25.06.1931	PH-AFS	05.07.1931	Hondong; Both; de Jong	10

From Bandoeng

36	26.06.1931	PH-AGR	04.07.1931	Wiersma; v Veenendaal; Kotte	8
37	10.07.1931	PH-AFR	19.07.1931	van Dijk; de Nes; Dunik	9

As can be seen from the above listing, flight 37 from Holland take 15 days to arrive Bandoeng. It is rather unusual for a plane to be more than 5 days late. Tschroots regularly records any little mishaps and irregularities but makes no mention of flight 37. It can only be assumed that PH-AFR was in trouble as they failed to call at Alor Star and also took an extra day on the return flight to Holland. The plane was next flown to Batavia by Smirnoff on flight 41 depart Amsterdam on 6 August and took 10 days.

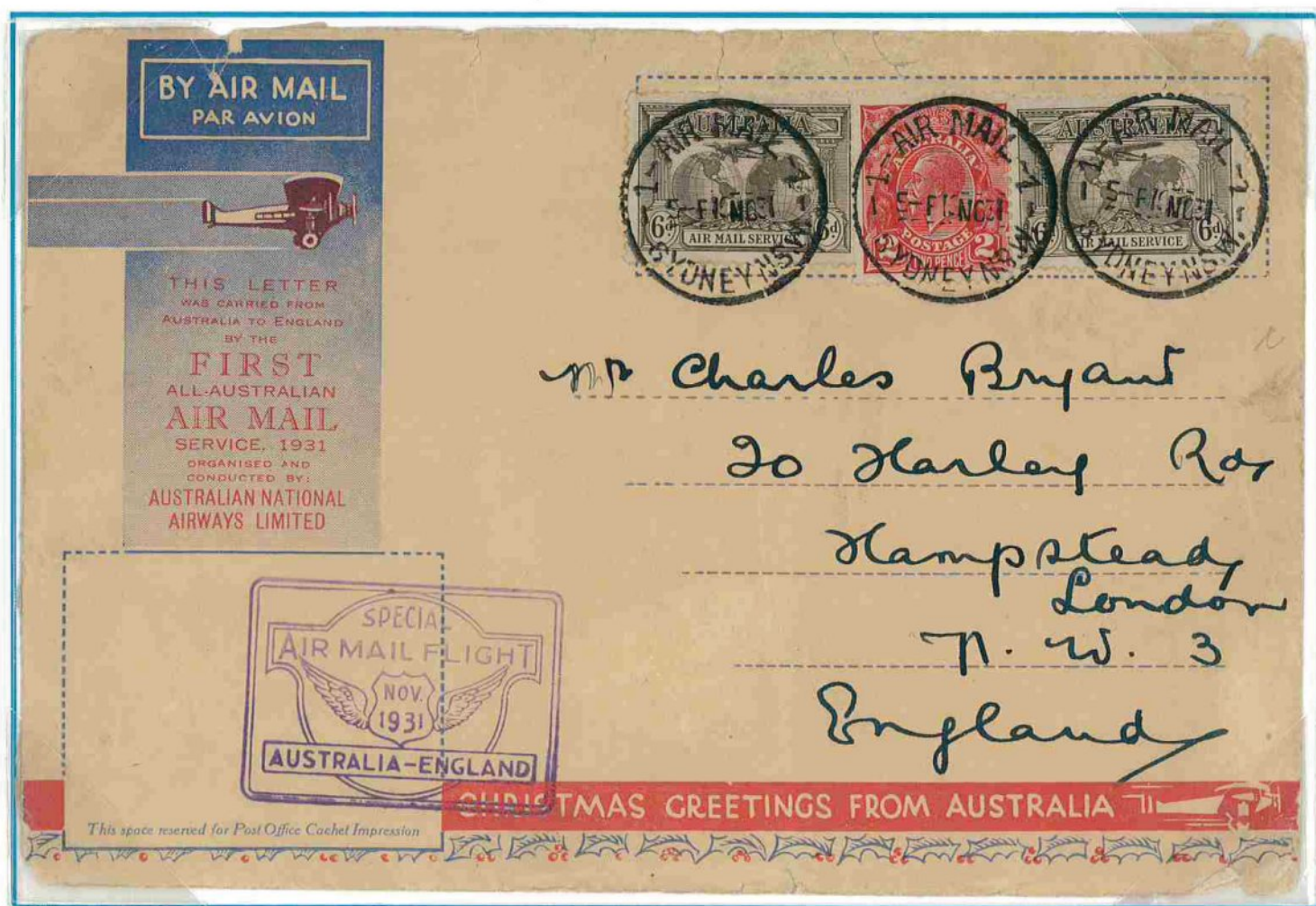
1931 Crashed at Alor Star, Kedah, Malaya on 26<sup>th</sup> November

Aver Ten 3-Engine Monoplane – ‘SOUTHERN SUN’ VH-UNA  
1931 Christmas Flight from Australia to UK

19 November 1931 Sydney to England  
Special souvenir cover with flight cachet

52,000 covers flown and no ‘crash’ marking were applied

Letter Rate (1 oz) : 2d  
Airmail Fee (½ oz): 6d



Mail from Australia to England left Hobart with a special Christmas flight on 19<sup>th</sup> November in the ‘Southern Sun’. On 26<sup>th</sup> November, while landing on Alor Star, the plane slithered out of control on the wet runway and crash into the drainage ditch running around the perimeter of the aerodrome. The plane was wrecked but the mails was intact. Kingsford Smith left Sydney on the ‘Southern Star’ and arrived on the 5<sup>th</sup> December and pick up the mails to England arriving at Croydon on 16 December.

1931 Crashed at Don Muang Airport, Bangkok, Thailand on 6<sup>th</sup> December

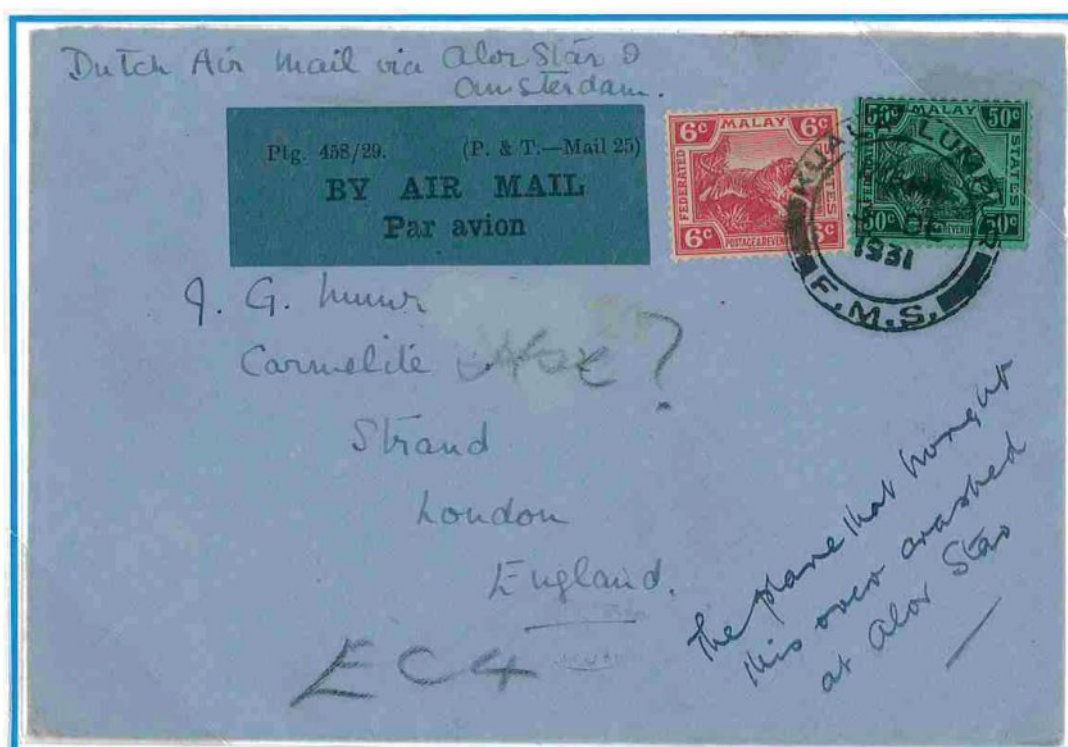
Fokker F.VIIb Trimotor – OOIEVAAR PH-AFO

Pilot : Captain Thaeke Wiersma. 2<sup>nd</sup> Pilot : Jan van Onlangs. Flight Engineer : J.F.W.O. Kotte  
The 51st Return Flight from Batavia, Dutch East Indies to Amsterdam

3 December 1931 Kuala Lumpur to England

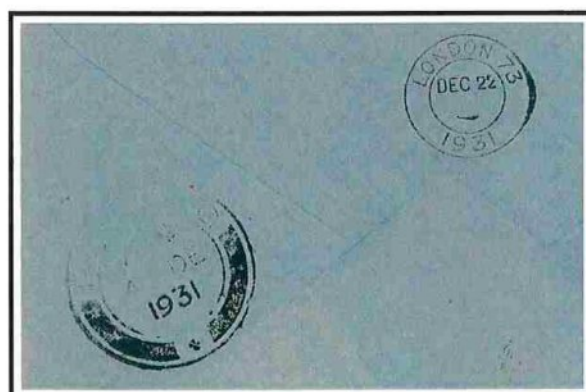
No 'crash' marking were recorded for Malayan covers

Letter Rate (1 oz) : 6 cents Airmail Fee (½ oz) : 50 cents  
The above rate was valid from 2 to 31 December 1931



The cover transit Penang on 4 December and arrived London on 22 December, both transit and receiving date-stamp on the back of the envelope.

Out of the approximately 250kgs of mails, 183kgs were saved with the loss of 2 mail bags. The salvage mails were later taken by KLM "Valk", which fly in from Bandoeng, and arrived Amsterdam on 21 December.



*Known as the Stork disaster. The KLM plane took off from Alor Star for Bangkok on 5 December and have a night rest in Bangkok. Early next morning, during take off for the next stage of the flight to Rangoon, the plane crashed, killing five of the seven on board, including the pilot. The plane took off with an open ventilation hatch above the cockpit. As a result, the aircraft does not get a lift off the ground, preventing the aircraft from taking off. The plane crashes against a dyke at the end of the runway, slides on into a second dyke, flips over and came to rest upside down in a rice field.*

# IMPERIAL AIRWAYS

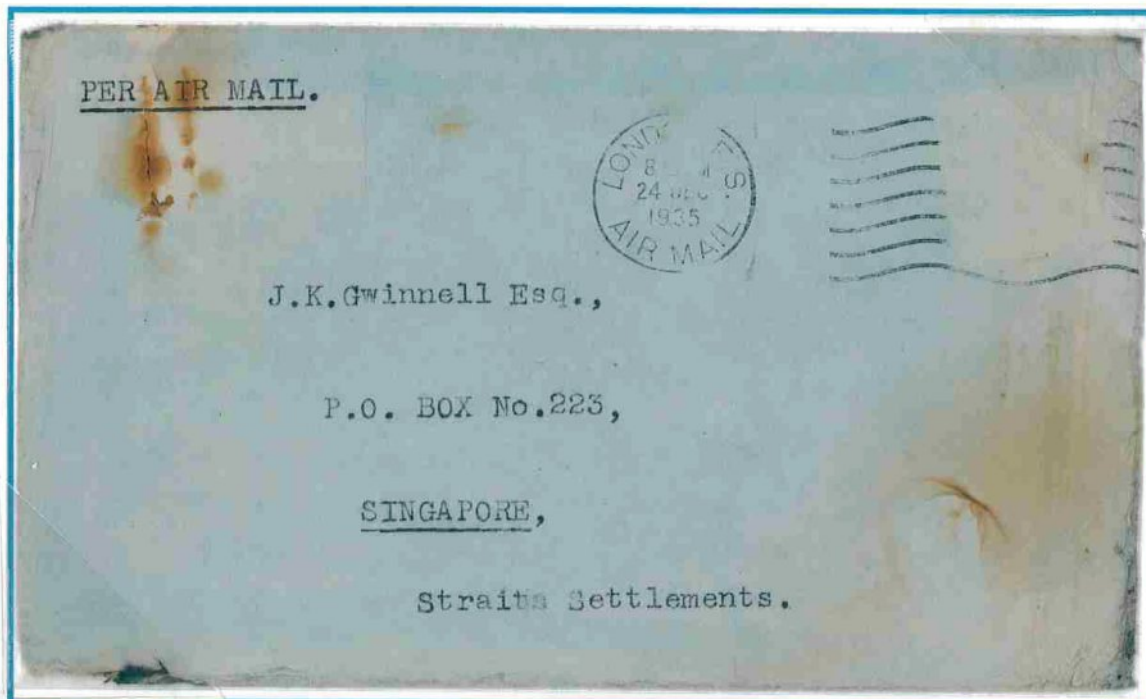
# CRASH MAIL

1935 Crashed at Alexandria, Egypt on 31<sup>st</sup> December

Short S-8 'Calcutta' Class Flying Boat – CITY OF KHARTOUM G-AASJ

Pilot : Captain Vernon G. Wilson. Flight Engineer : H. C. Amor

Service IE 405 – Normal Scheduled Flight, UK to Australia



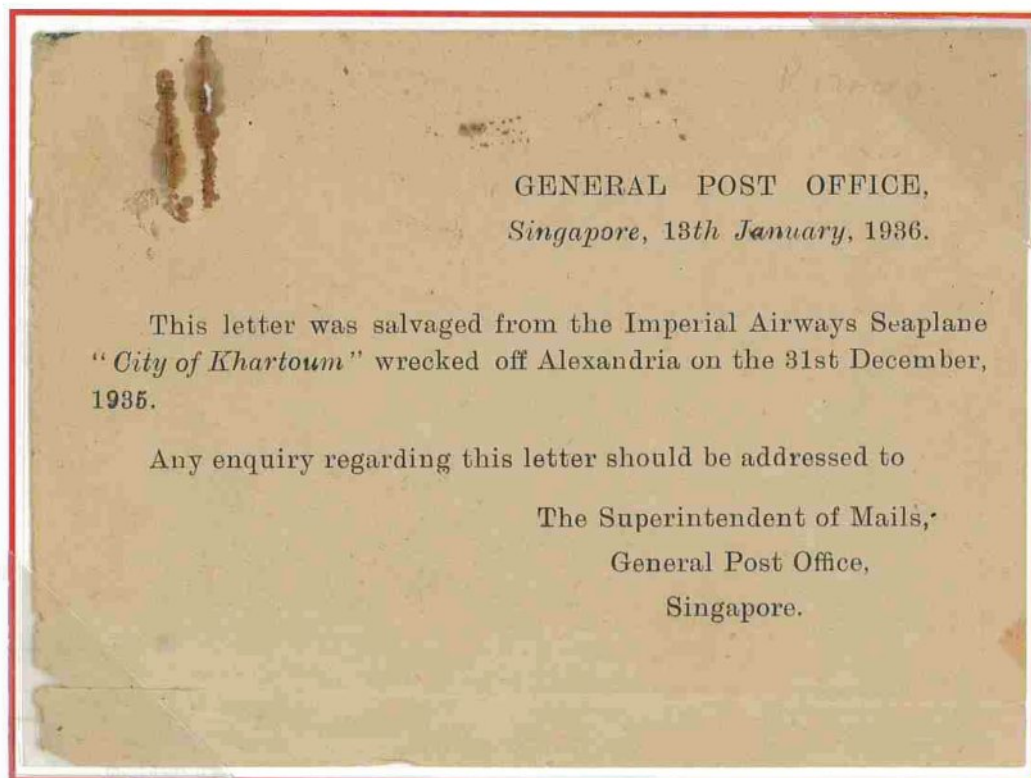
24 December 1935  
UK to Singapore with  
London F. S. Airmail  
machine cancellation,  
with the stamp wash off.

Airmail Rate : 11d

No crash cachet was  
applied on this salvaged  
envelope but an  
explanation note was  
attached with the mail  
when delivered in  
Singapore.

*The flying boat apparently ran out of fuel while approaching for landing at Alexandria Harbour after dark. All three engines stopped at a height of about 600 feet and the plane dived into the sea. The aircraft sank immediately after hitting the water. Captain Wilson and two passengers were the only survivors.*

*71 bags of mail were recovered one week after the accident. Many different cachets, labels and mimeograph explanations were used by the various destination post offices to explain the damaged covers.*



Explanation note from the General Post Office, Singapore

1936 Crashed at Mirabella Bay, Crete, Greece on 22<sup>nd</sup> August

Short S-17 Kent Class Flying Boat – SCIPPIO G-ABFA  
 Pilot : Captain A. S. Wilcockson. First Officer : S. G. Long  
 Service IW 470 – Normal Scheduled Flight, Australia to UK



15 August 1936  
 Penang to London with KGV  
 S. S. Malaya 25 cents stamp  
 canceled by machine slogan  
 "USE THE AIRMAIL  
 IT SAVES TIME"

Airmail Rate : 25 cents

This recovered envelope was  
 hand-struck with single line  
 "Damaged By Sea Water"  
 (83mm x 12mm) in red before  
 delivery.



*The flying boat coming from Alexandria was landing at Mirebella Bay during a storm. The aircraft tail-plane was inadvertently set at maximum incidence, making the plane nose-heavy. The flying boat crash into the sea when the Captain attempt a landing, and sank in a few minutes. Two passengers were killed, the Captain, crews and almost all passengers escaped without injury.*

*38 bags of mail were recovered within 6 hours after the accident. Many different cachets, labels and mimeograph explanation were used by the various destination post offices to explain the damaged covers.*

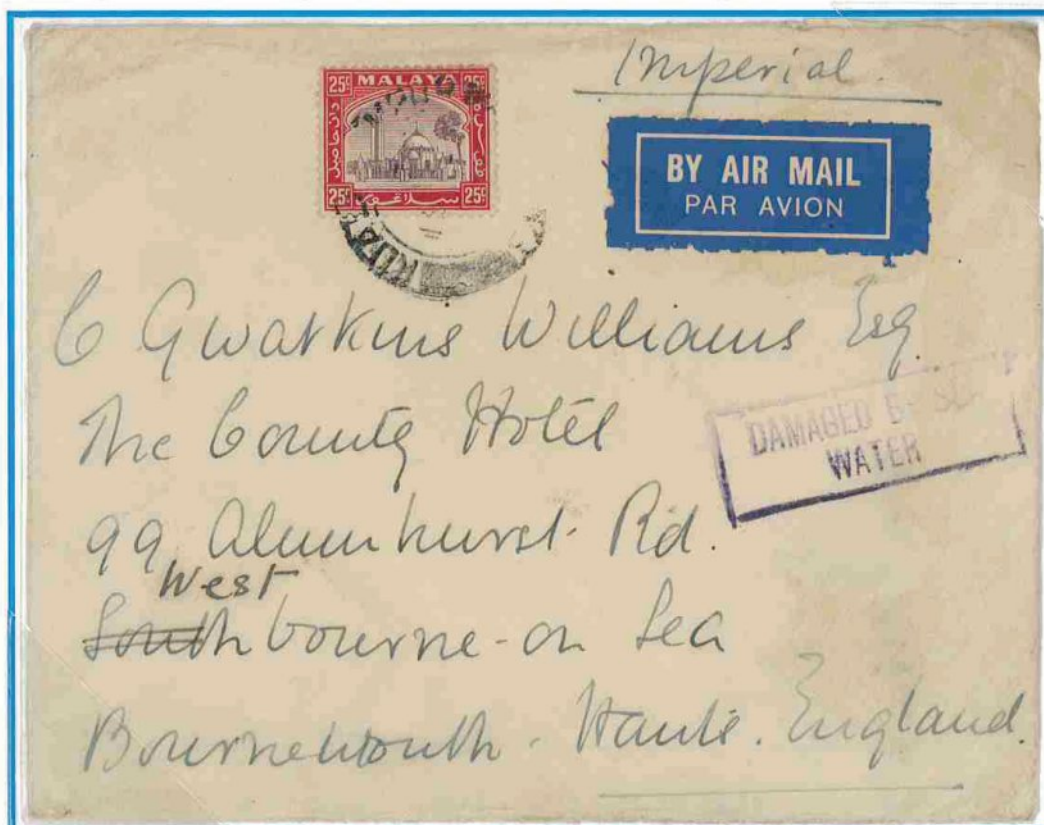
1936 Crashed at Mirabella Bay, Crete, Greece on 22<sup>nd</sup> August

Short S-17 Kent Class Flying Boat – SCIPIO G-ABFA

14 August 1936 Selangor to London canceled Kuala Lumpur, with 25 cents stamp washed off



14 August 1936 Selangor to London with 25 cents stamp canceled Kuala Lumpur



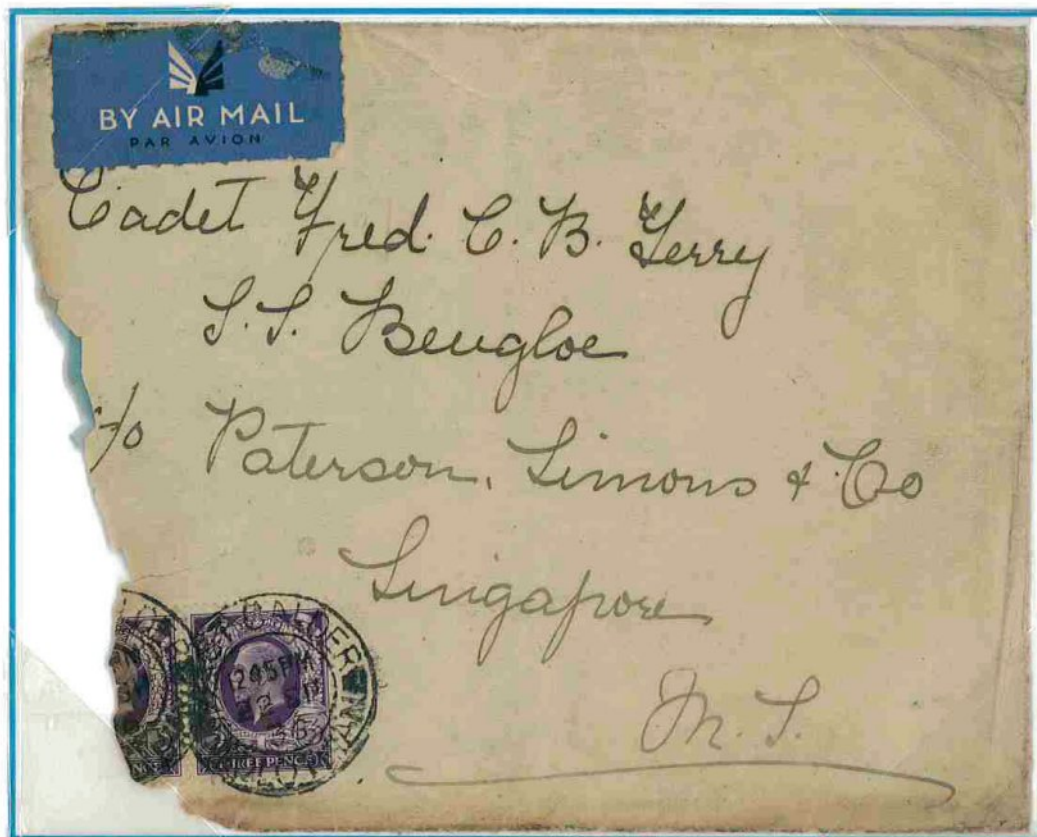
Both recovered envelope was hand-struck with “DAMAGED BY SEA WATER” within a box (40mm x 14mm) in violet before delivery

# IMPERIAL AIRWAYS

# CRASH MAIL

1936 Destroyed by Fire at Willingdon Airport, Delhi, India on 29<sup>th</sup> September

Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft Limited AW XV Atalanta Class – ATHENA G-ABTK  
Pilot : Captain Vernon G Wilson. Captain Anthony C Loraine. First Officer Worradel  
Service IE 482 – Normal Scheduled Flight UK to Australia



24 September 1936  
Scotland to Singapore with 2 x 3d  
stamp canceled by West Calder,  
Midlothian.

Airmail Rate : 6d

No crash cachet was applied.

On the lower left side of the  
envelope, one of the King George  
V definitive stamps of 1934-1936  
was damaged by the fire.

*In preparation for the next stage of  
the flight from Delhi to Cawnpore,  
Athena caught fire while the engines  
were being started. The plane was  
destroyed completely but the crews  
and passengers escaped unhurt.*

*Out of the 113 mail bags and 93  
packages, 35 mail bags were intact,  
43 bags were damaged by the fire,  
the rest were destroyed.*

GENERAL POST OFFICE,  
Singapore, 2nd October, 1936.

This postal article was salvaged from the Imperial Airways  
aeroplane "Athena" destroyed by fire at New Delhi on the  
29th September, 1936.

Any enquiry regarding this article should be addressed to:-

The Superintendent of Mails,  
General Post Office,  
Singapore.

Explanation note from the General Post Office, Singapore

IMPERIAL AIRWAYS

CRASH MAIL

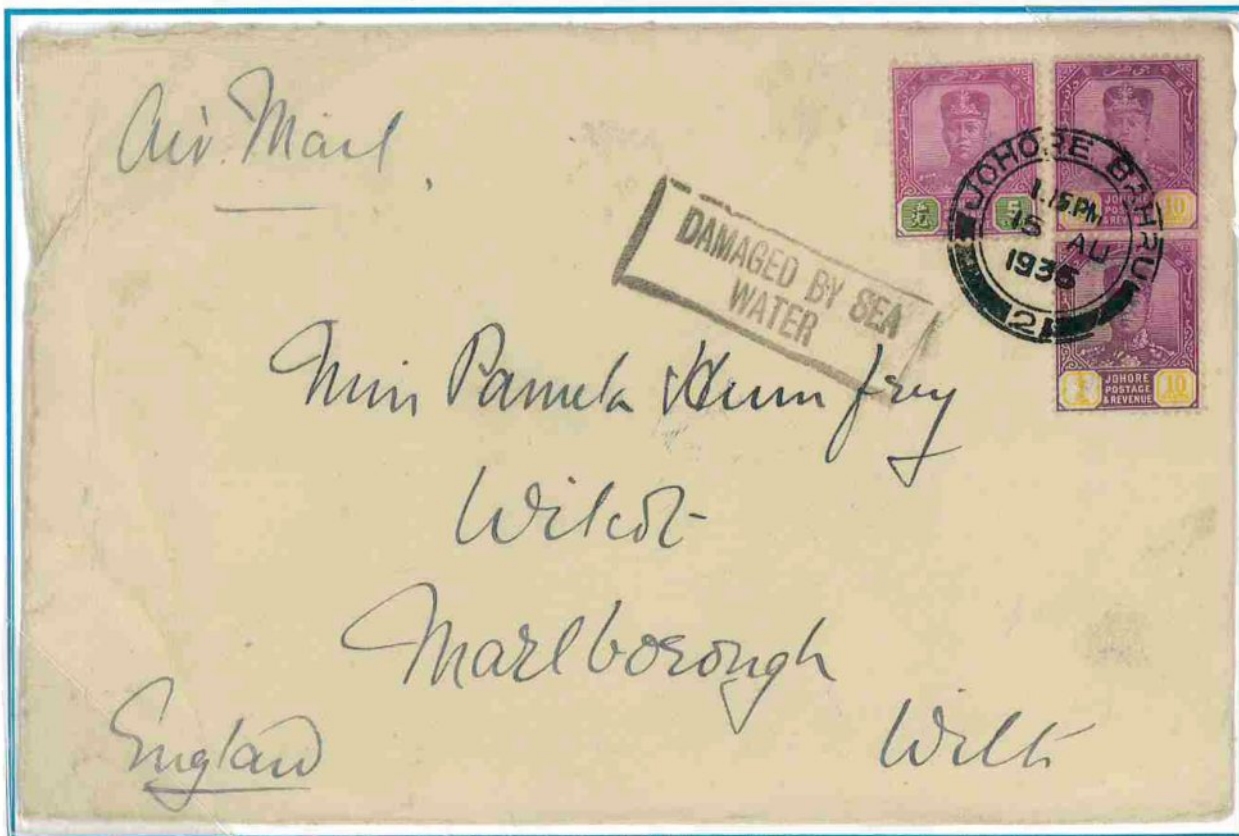
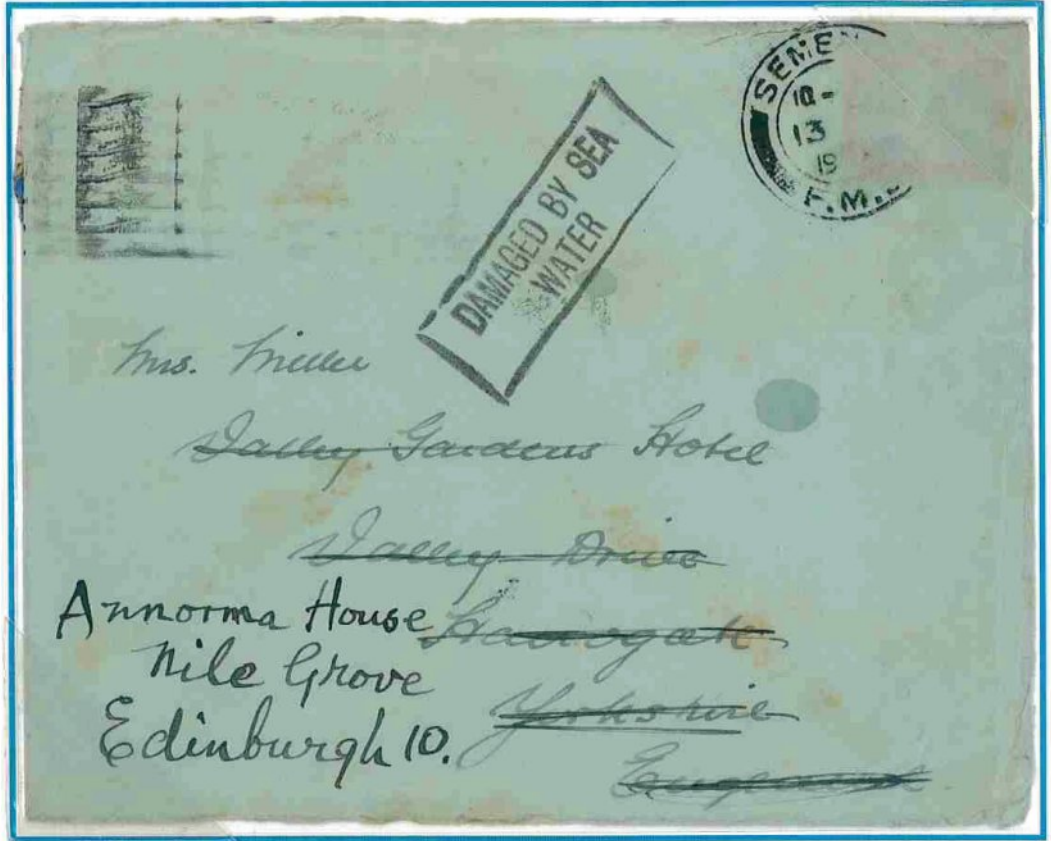
1936 Crashed at Mirabella Bay, Crete, Greece on 22<sup>nd</sup> August

Short S-17 Kent Class Flying Boat – SCIPIO G-ABFA

13 August 1936  
Negri Sembilan to UK canceled  
Seremban, with 25 cents stamp  
washed off.

Airmail Rate : 25 cents

This recovered envelope was  
hand-struck with DAMAGED BY  
SEA WATER within a box (40mm  
x 15mm) in black before delivery.



15 August 1936  
Johore to UK  
canceled Johore  
Bahru, with the  
stamp intact.

Airmail  
Rate : 25 cents

This salvaged  
cover was hand-  
struck with  
DAMAGED BY  
SEA WATER  
within a box  
(41mm x 14mm)  
in black prior to  
delivery.

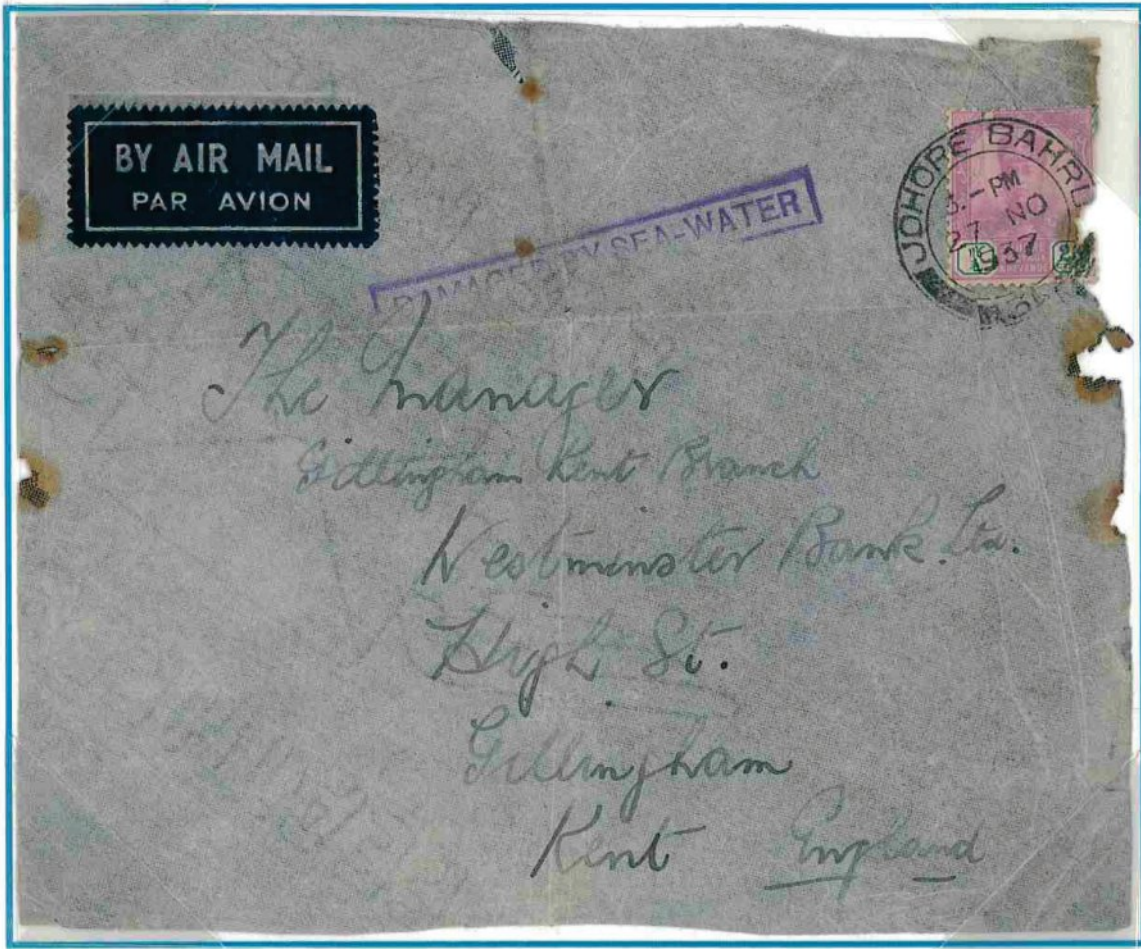
1937 Crash at Brindisi, Italy on 5<sup>th</sup> December

Short S-23 C Class Flying Boat – CYGNUS G-ADUZ

Pilot : Captain Roger P Mollard. Ag Captain F. U. Hollins. First Officer Ralph Mountain  
Service IW 604 – Normal Scheduled Flight Australia to UK

Airmail Rate : 25 cents

27 November 1937 Johore to England with 25 cents stamp canceled by Johore Bahru.



The recovered envelope was hand-struck with DAMAGE BY SEA-WATER, Type 'a' cachet within a rectangular box (61mm x 6mm) in violet before delivery.

*When taking off from Brindisi for Rome in a choppy sea, the Captain inadvertently set the flaps fully down, causing the flying boat to bounce off the water 2 times. The aircraft then dropped nose down, overturned and sank. The steward F. L. Stoppani and one passenger were killed.*



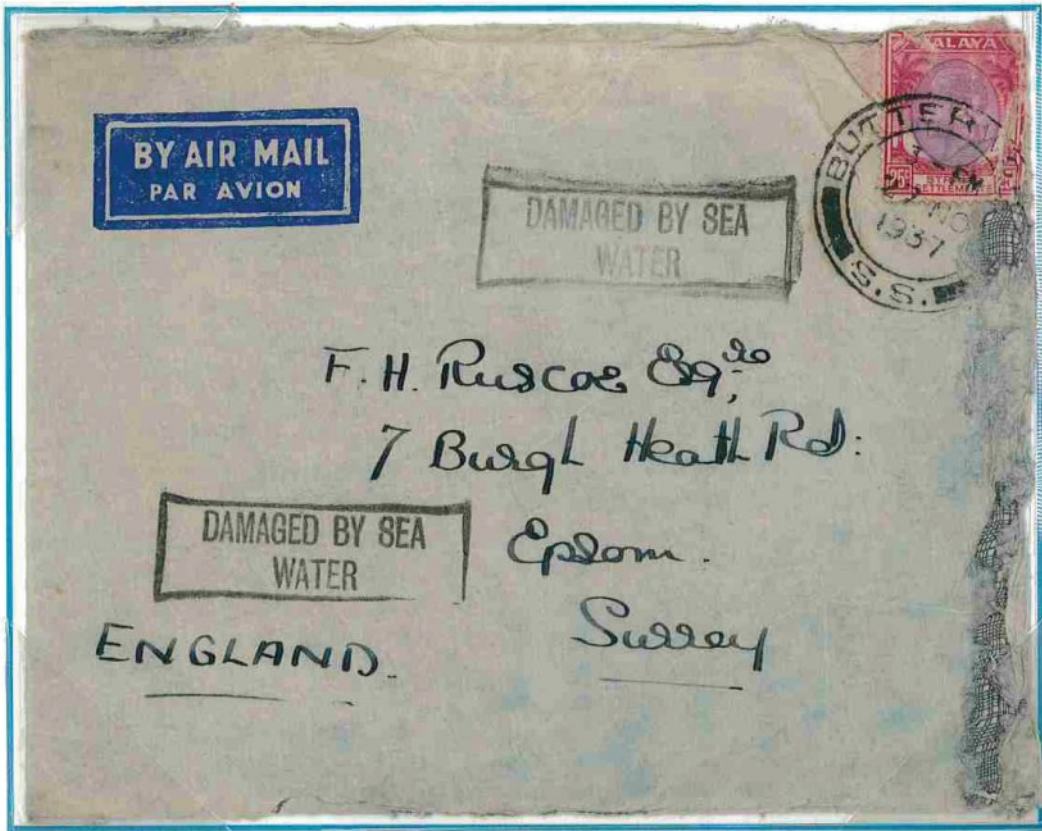
*100 mail bags with approximately 120,000 letters was recovered in water-soaked condition.*

*Many varieties of cachets, markings, labels and mimeograph explanation have been recorded.*

# IMPERIAL AIRWAYS

# CRASH MAIL

1937 Crash at Brindisi, Italy on 5<sup>th</sup> December  
Short S-23 C Class Flying Boat – CYGNUS G-ADUZ



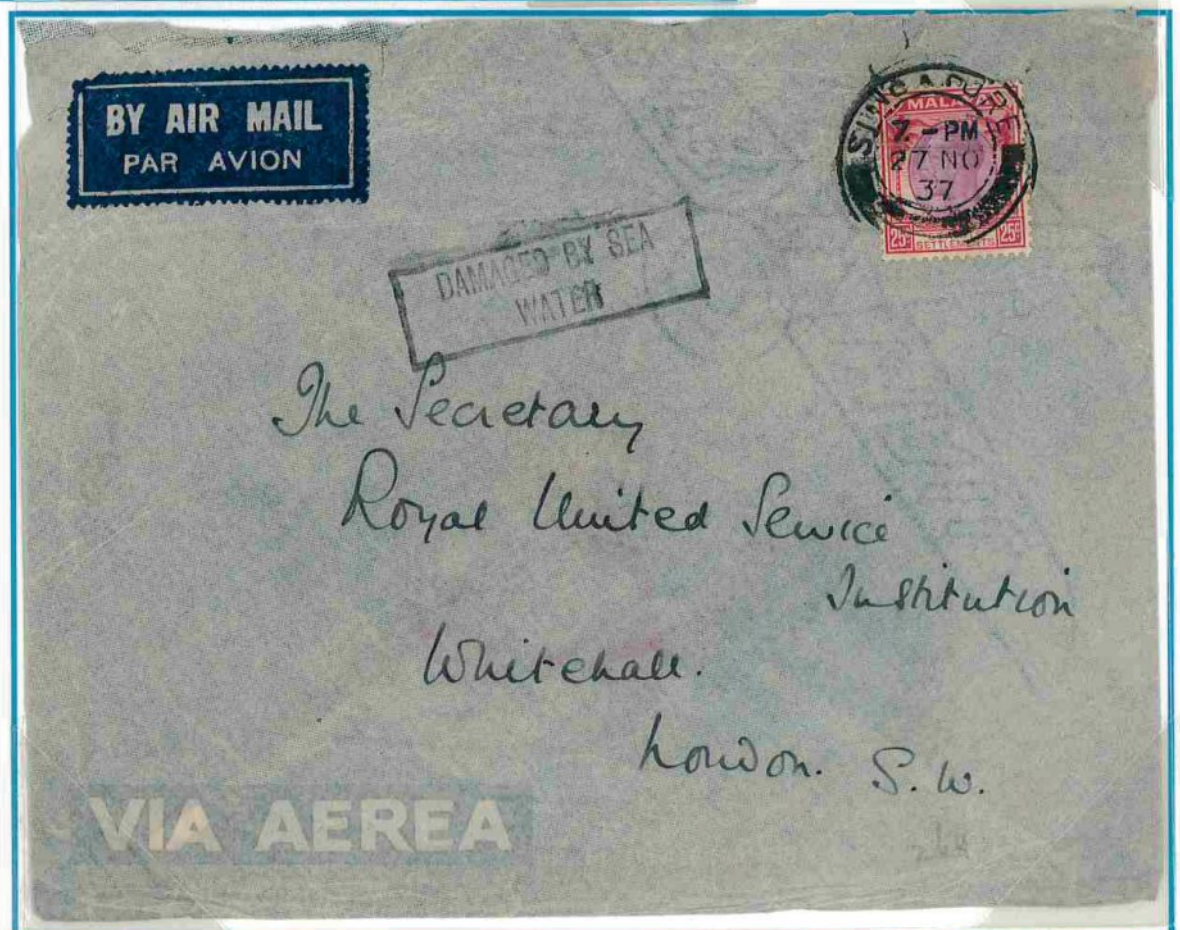
27 November 1937 Penang to England with 25 cents stamp canceled by Butterworth.

Airmail Rate : 25 cents

The recovered envelope was hand-struck 2 times with DAMAGE BY SEA WATER, type 'b' cachet within a rectangular box (42mm x 12.5mm) in black before delivery.

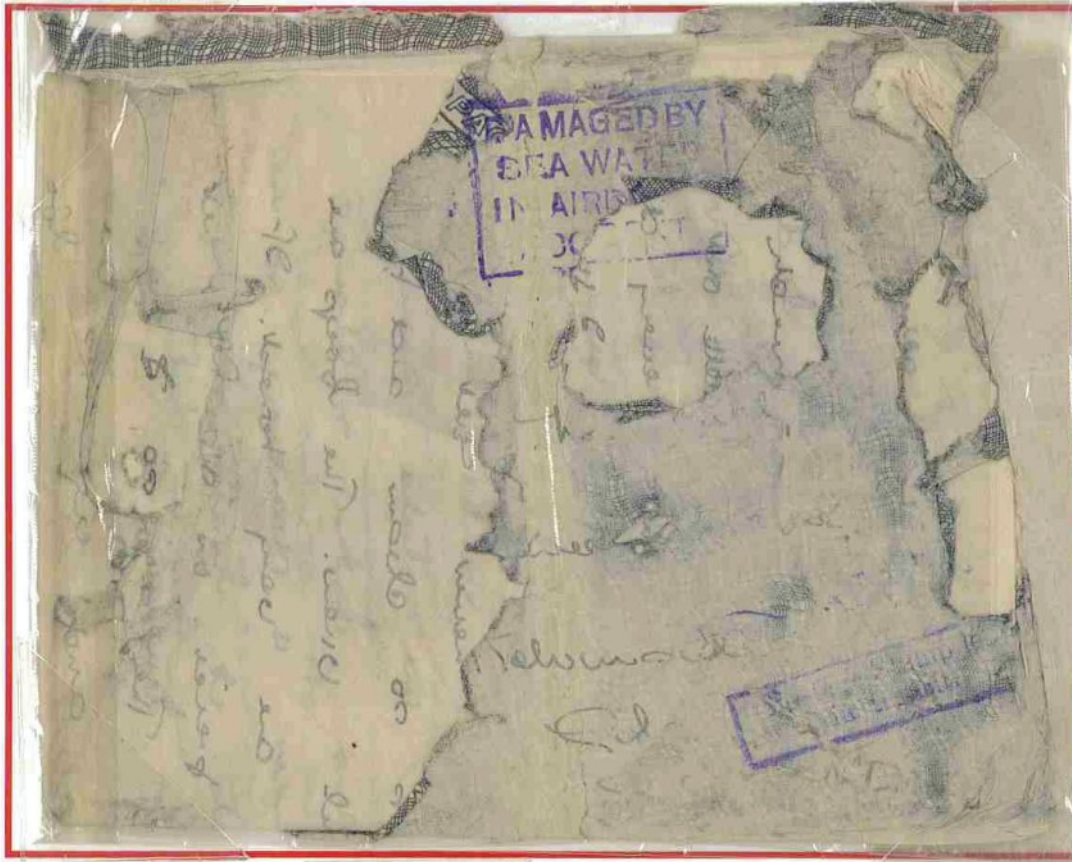
27 November 1937  
Singapore to England  
with 25 cents stamp.

Airmail Rate : 25 cents



The recovered envelope was hand-struck with DAMAGE BY SEA WATER, type 'b' cachet within a rectangular box (41mm x 12.5mm) in black before delivery.

1937 Crash at Brindisi, Italy on 5<sup>th</sup> December  
 Short S-23 C Class Flying Boat – CYGNUS G-ADUZ



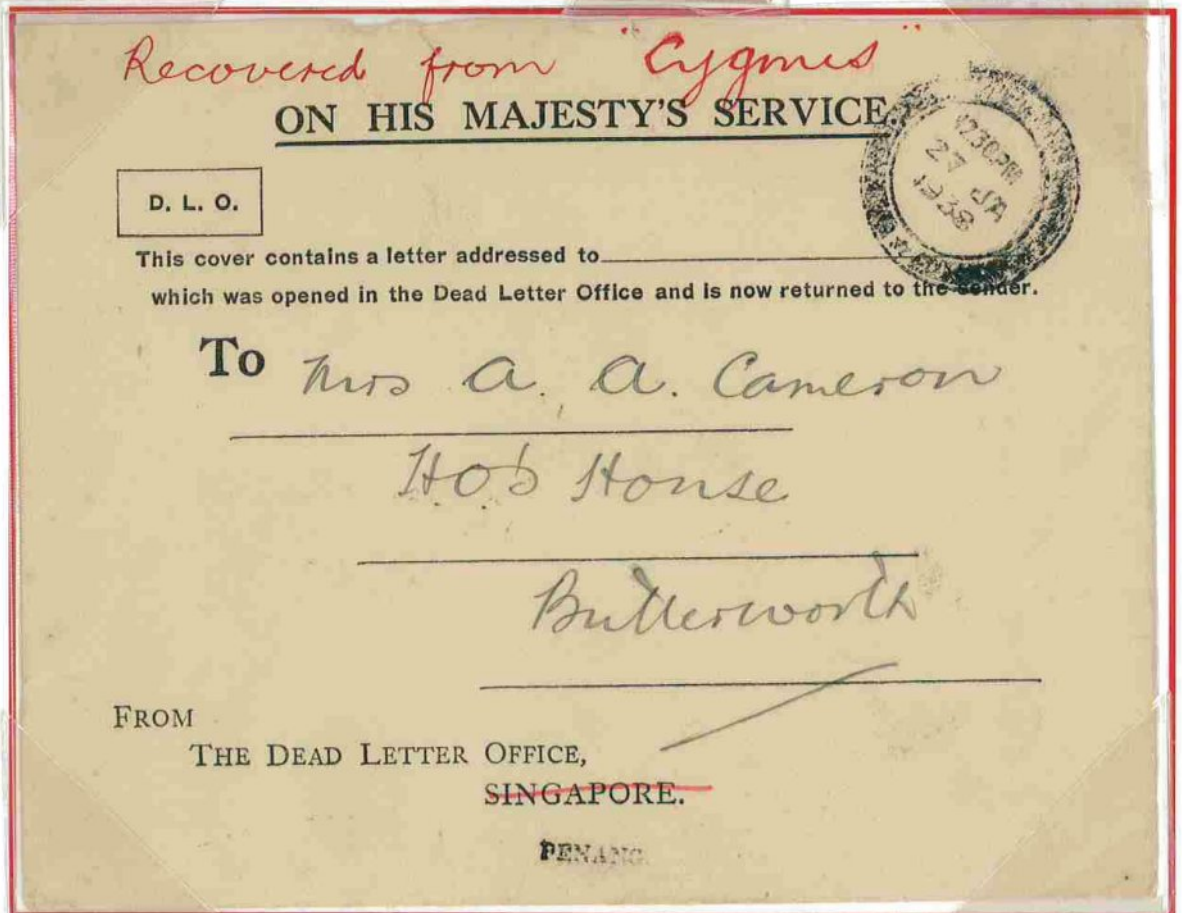
Salvaged letter from  
 Butterworth to Glasgow

The surface of the envelope have been rubbed and washed away with insufficient of the address legible for delivery.

The return address on the flap, are legible and the mail was enclosed in a printed envelope from The Dead Letter Office and returned to the sender.

The recovered mail was hand-stamped with type 'c' cachet DAMAGE BY SEA WATER IN AIRPLANE ACCIDENT, 4-line within a rectangular box (33.5mm x 23mm) in violet.

The Dead Letter Office envelope was written in red ink **Recovered from "Cygnus"** on the top and date-stamp with Penang 27 January 1938.

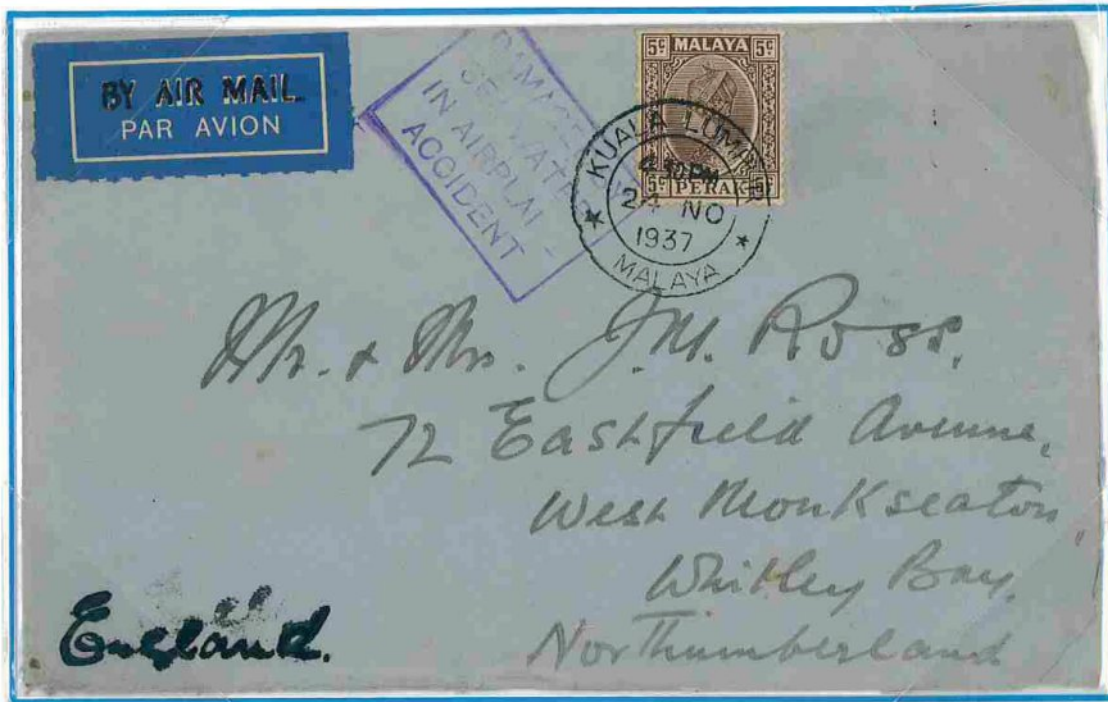


It is interesting to note that the Dead Letter Office envelope was printed for the D.L.O. Singapore only. This show that the Penang D.L.O. handle very few such mails. When Penang office required it, they cross out the word Singapore on the envelope and hand-stamped Penang in black.

1937 Crash at Brindisi, Italy on 5<sup>th</sup> December

Short S-23 C Class Flying Boat – CYGNUS G-ADUZ

24 November 1937 Selangor to England canceled Kuala Lumpur left with Malaya Perak 5 cents stamp, all other stamps wash off



27 November 1937 Pahang to England with 25 cents stamp canceled by Sungei Lembing

Airmail Rate : 25 cents

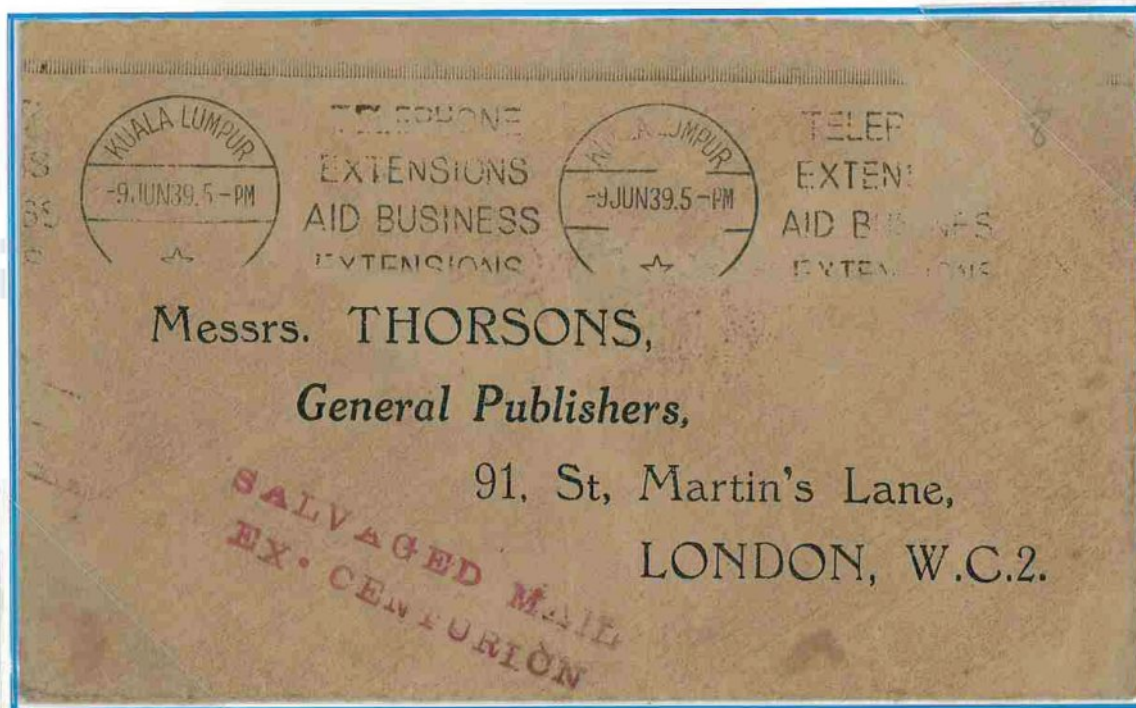
Both recovered envelopes were hand-stamped with type 'c' cachet DAMAGE BY SEA WATER IN AIRPLANE ACCIDENT, 4-line within a rectangular box (33.5mm x 23mm) in violet before delivery.

1939 Crash at Hooghly River, Calcutta India on 12<sup>th</sup> June

Short S-23 C Class Flying Boat – CENTURION G-ADVE  
 Pilot : Captain Anthony C Loraine. First Officer Evan A. T. Murray. Radio Officer Edward B. Brown  
 Service SW 131 – Normal Scheduled Flight Australia to UK

Empire Air Mail Scheme Rate : 8 cents per ½ oz or part of

9 June 1939 Selangor to England with stamp wash off canceled by Kuala Lumpur machine slogan



The recovered envelope was hand-struck with SALVAGED MAIL EX • CENTURION in 2-line, Type 'b' cachet (57mm x 11mm) in Red before delivery.

The westbound flying boat was traveling the section from Akyab to Calcutta on Monday. At 11.57am while landing on the alighting area at Bally air base on the Hooghly River, a severe northwesterly wind caught the tail and lifting it suddenly causing the aircraft to nose into the water.

The Postal Authorities assisted in saving the mail and subsequently the Postmaster General announced that major portion of the mail, about 40 bags, was salvaged. Most of the covers were processed at the Calcutta Post Office.

Many varieties of cachets, markings, labels and mimeograph explanation have been recorded. A cachet with the wording "SALVAGED MAIL / EX • CENTURION" was made up from a 'john Bull' rubber stamp, where the individual letters were inserted. Therefore, many varieties of this cachet such as spelling "Centuria", letters inverted, missing letters, etc are known.



# IMPERIAL AIRWAYS

# CRASH MAIL

1939 Crash at Hooghly River, Calcutta India on 12<sup>th</sup> June

Short S-23 C Class Flying Boat – CENTURION G-ADVE

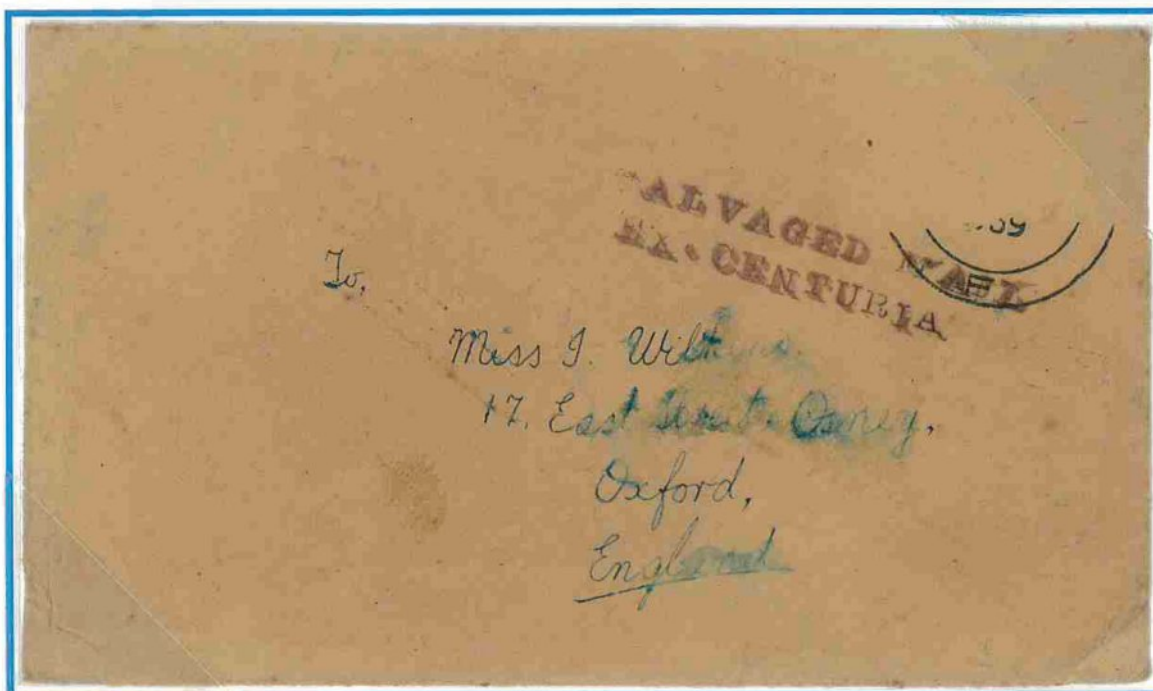
Empire Air Mail Scheme Rate : 8 cents per ½ oz or part of

10 June 1939 Johore to England  
with 8c stamp canceled by Johore  
Bahru double ring date-stamp

The recovered envelope was  
hand-struck with SALVAGED  
MAIL EX • CENTURIA in 2-line,  
Type 'cc' cachet (56mm x 12mm)  
in Magenta before delivery.

The 'S' in SALVAGED is  
inverted and the name spelling is  
CENTURIA.

The letter was delivered to  
Moretonhampstead in Devon on  
20 June 1939 as shown by the  
date-stamp but the receiver have  
left and the mail was redirected to  
Aylsham in Norfolk.



Singapore to England of  
unknown date with  
double ring post mark on  
stamp wash off.

The recovered envelope  
was hand-struck with  
SALVAGED MAIL EX  
• CENTURIA in 2-line,  
Type 'c' cachet (56mm x  
11mm) in Red before  
delivery.

The 'S' in SALVAGED  
is missing and the name  
spelling is CENTURIA.

Both cover were resealed in London with a R.L.S. 54 label.