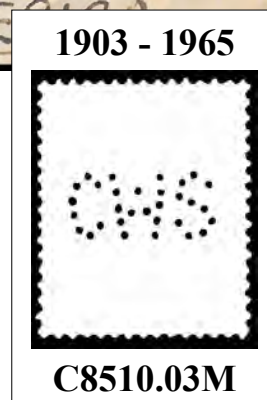
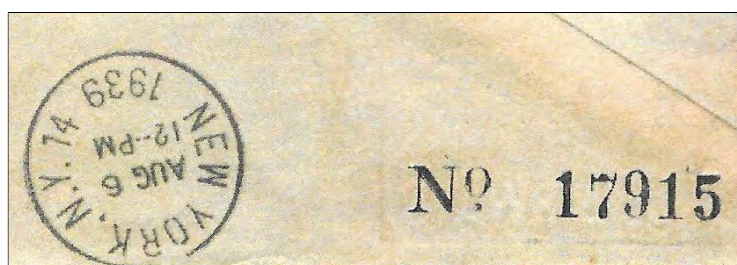


IMPERIAL AIRWAYS TRANS-ATLANTIC FLIGHT

Melvyn Green



Illustrated above is a first flight cover for the Imperial Airways Regular Transatlantic Service between Great Britain and North America, numbered 17915. It left Southampton on the Caribou (Short S.30 series flying boat – G-AFCV) on 5 August, 1939 and arrived in New York on 6th August, as per the back-stamp. The route was Southampton - Foynes (Eire) - Botwood (Newfoundland) – Montreal - New York. The letter has a KGV 1/- brown SG449 and KGV 3d violet SG467 both perfined CWS (C8510.03M) and known to have been used by the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd. There is a handwritten letter inside on notebook paper so the use of these perfined stamps was probably unauthorised. The letter was sent to New York City, USA with circular ring London E1 and "Road Users Take Care Avoid Risks", machine cancels.

Imperial Airways was created against intense competition from French and German airlines that enjoyed heavy government subsidies. The Government recommended that four of the largest existing airlines, The Instone Air Line Company, British Marine Air Navigation (part of the Supermarine flying-boat company), the Daimler Airway and Handley Page Transport Co Ltd, should be merged. A £1m subsidy over ten years was offered to encourage the merger. The company, under the title of the 'Imperial Air Transport Company' was to acquire existing air transport services in the UK. The agreement set out the government subsidies for the new company: £137,000 in the first year diminishing to £32,000 in the tenth year as well as minimum mileages to be achieved and penalties if these weren't met.



Imperial Airways Flying Boat Caribou – G-AFCV

Imperial Airways Limited (IAL) was formed on 31 March 1924 with equipment from each contributing concern. The land operations were based at Croydon Airport to the south of London. IAL immediately discontinued its predecessors' service to points north of London, the airline being focused on international and imperial service rather than domestic. Thereafter the only IAL aircraft operating 'North of Watford' were charter flights.

The establishment of Imperial Airways occurred in the context of facilitating overseas settlement by making travel to and from the colonies quicker, and that flight would also speed up colonial government and trade that was until then, dependent upon ships. The

launch of the airline followed an intense period of air route surveying in the British Empire after the First World War and after some experimental and often dangerous long-distance flying to the margins of Empire. However, during the late 1920's and the 1930's routes were set up and it was serving parts of Europe but principally the British Empire routes to South Africa, India and the Far East, including Malaya & Hong Kong as well as Australia.



Handley Page W.8b inherited from Handley Page Transport when Imperial Airways was formed.

In 1934 the Government began negotiations with Imperial Airways to establish a service (Empire Air Mail Scheme) to carry mail by air on routes served by the airline. The Empire Air Mail Programme started in July 1937, delivering anywhere for 1½d per oz. By mid-1938 a hundred tons of mail had been delivered to India and a similar amount to Africa. In the same year, construction was started on the Empire Terminal in Victoria, London, designed by A. Lakeman and with a statue by Eric Broadbent, "Speed Wings over the World", gracing the portal above the main entrance. From the terminal there were train connections to Imperial's flying boats at Southampton and coaches to its landplane base at Croydon Airport.

Imperial's aircraft were mainly small, most seating fewer than twenty passengers, but about 50,000 passengers used Imperial Airways in the 1930s. Most passengers on intercontinental routes or on services within and between British colonies were men doing colonial administration, business or research. To begin with only the wealthy could afford to fly, but passenger lists gradually diversified.

Imperial Airways was merged into the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) in 1939, which in turn merged with the British European Airways Corporation in 1974 to form British Airways.