

# WESTERN AUSTRALIA: AIRMAIL 1911-1939

One of the earliest multi-stage long haul scheduled airmail routes in the world commenced in 1921 as an intrastate route from Geraldton to Derby. Some interstate and international airmail, including transit airmail, became available to Western Australians in 1929 when the Perth to Adelaide and London to Karachi routes were opened. Extensions of the routes beyond Derby, Adelaide and Karachi in the 1930s made airmail more readily available but the new route from Perth to Wiluna had little use as most destinations had adequate rail service.

Airmail is defined as mail that is carried by air for part of the route.

Crash or interrupted mail is identified where carriage of the mail has been delayed.

## PLAN

Early international airmail to WA

North/South route: Perth to Geraldton

Geraldton to Port Hedland

Geraldton to Derby

Perth to Derby

Perth to Wyndham

Perth to Daly Waters

East/West route: Perth to Adelaide

Transit airmail

Wyndham reopened

Goldfields route: Perth to Wiluna

International airmail: London to Karachi

London to Sydney

Route extensions

KLM

Airmail rates

Adventurers and crashes

Survey flights

## EARLY INTERNATIONAL AIRMAIL TO WA

The second airmail route in the world was from London to Windsor in 1911. This card is from the world's *first crash mail*. On 11 September 1911 Charles Hubert crashed his Farnam biplane on takeoff at London and broke his legs. The mail was carried to Windsor by another plane. Three London/Windsor items have been identified as addressed to Western Australia and carried from England to Fremantle on RMS Marmora. This card was *missent* to Adelaide (Denmark mistaken for Renmark?) before being sent back for delivery.



First United Kingdom Aerial Mail London 11 September 1911, Adelaide 14 October

## References:

Eustis, N. (1990). *The Australian Air Mail Catalogue*, (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). Adelaide, Hobby Investments  
Parnell, N. and Boughton, T. (1988). *Flypast: A record of aviation in Australia*, Canberra, AGPS

## LONDON TO MELBOURNE 1920

Prime Minister Hughes offered a 10,000 pound prize for the first aircraft to fly from England to Australia in under 30 days. Ross and Keith Smith landed at Darwin in a Vickers Vimy on 12 December 1919 and proceeded to Melbourne, arriving 25 February 1920. Several other contestants crashed and some were killed.

Mail was carried from London and some intermediates. 364 envelopes had a vignette produced by the Prime Minister's Department affixed and forwarded. Some mail was struck with a 3 line cachet in violet Per/Vickers "Vimy" Aeroplane/to Australia.



Galle Face Hotel, Colombo envelope, vignette cancelled First Aerial Mail Great Britain to Australia received 26 February 1920, forwarded by Prime Minister's Department under cover.

## Early international airmail

### LONDON TO MARSEILLES 1923

From 1920 it was possible to post late letters in London and some provincial cities to catch the mail steamer at Marseilles. Initially only available for official mail in summer (the route was closed in winter), by 1923 the route was open to the public. The GPO notice issued October 1929 stated "Correspondence prepaid for this route is sent by the direct Air Mail to Marseilles, closing in London at 7 a.m. every Friday, to overtake the mails despatched by ordinary route the previous evening." Few examples to Western Australia have been recorded.

London EC  
Official Paid  
28 May 1923



### GRAF ZEPPELIN 1928

This cover was carried on the first intercontinental airship passenger flight.



Friedrichshafen  
10 October 1928  
New York  
16 October  
airship cachet

## North/South route

### PRE-AIRMAIL 1919

This cover illustrates the benefit intended by airmail on the North/South route. Instead of about one month, the Geraldton-Derby airmail was intended to cut delivery time to 3 days.



Port Hedland  
29 March 1919  
East Cannington  
23 April

### PERTH TO GERALDTON (UNOFFICIAL) 1921

Major Norman Brearley established West Australian Airways in 1921 and hired Abbott, Blake, Fawcett, Kingsford-Smith and Taplin as pilots. Kingsford-Smith left in 1924 to establish the Gascoyne Transport Company and drove the mail truck on the Carnarvon-Meekatharra route. WAA was awarded a contract to fly mails from Geraldton to Derby, mails to and from Perth were to travel by train to Walkaway and truck to Geraldton. However the first mail was flown unofficially from Perth to Geraldton.



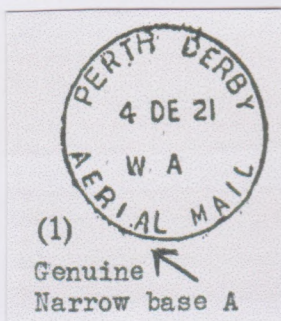
Subiaco  
? December 1921  
Perth Derby Aerial Mail  
4 December cachet  
Geraldton  
4 December

## Perth – Geraldton

### GENUINE

The PMG declined to provide a distinctive postmark for the first flight on the Geraldton-Derby route but allowed WAA to apply their own commemorative cachet. 2288 letters and newspapers were flown from Perth to Geraldton.

Perth  
3 December 1921  
Perth Derby Aerial Mail  
4 December cachet  
no backstamp



### FORGERY

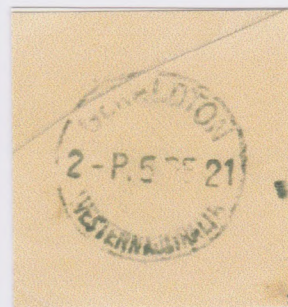
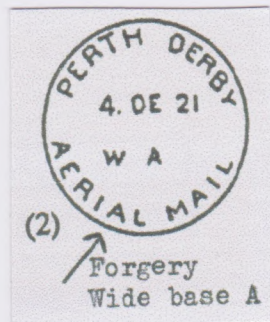
The WAA cachet was not authorised to cancel stamps. The difference between the genuine and forged cachet is illustrated below. The 4 ½d rate is incorrect. The Geraldton backstamp is also forged.

PER AIR MAIL

THE GERALDTON BREWERY CO.

GERALDTON

W.A.



## FIRST NORTHBOUND FLIGHT CRASH 1921

On 5 December about 600 letters from Perth plus some posted at Geraldton (none have been recorded) were carried on the first official northbound flight. 3 aircraft headed for Carnarvon. Taplin's aircraft was forced down north of Geraldton but Fawcett and his mechanic were killed when they dived to investigate. The flight was cancelled and mails were returned to Perth. Mail was carried north on SS Bambra on 10 December and arrived at Derby on 20 December.



Perth 3 December 1921, Perth Derby Aerial Mail 4 December cachet, Derby 20 December (e)

## INTERMEDIATE



Nungarin 28 November 1921, Perth Derby Aerial Mail 4 December cachet

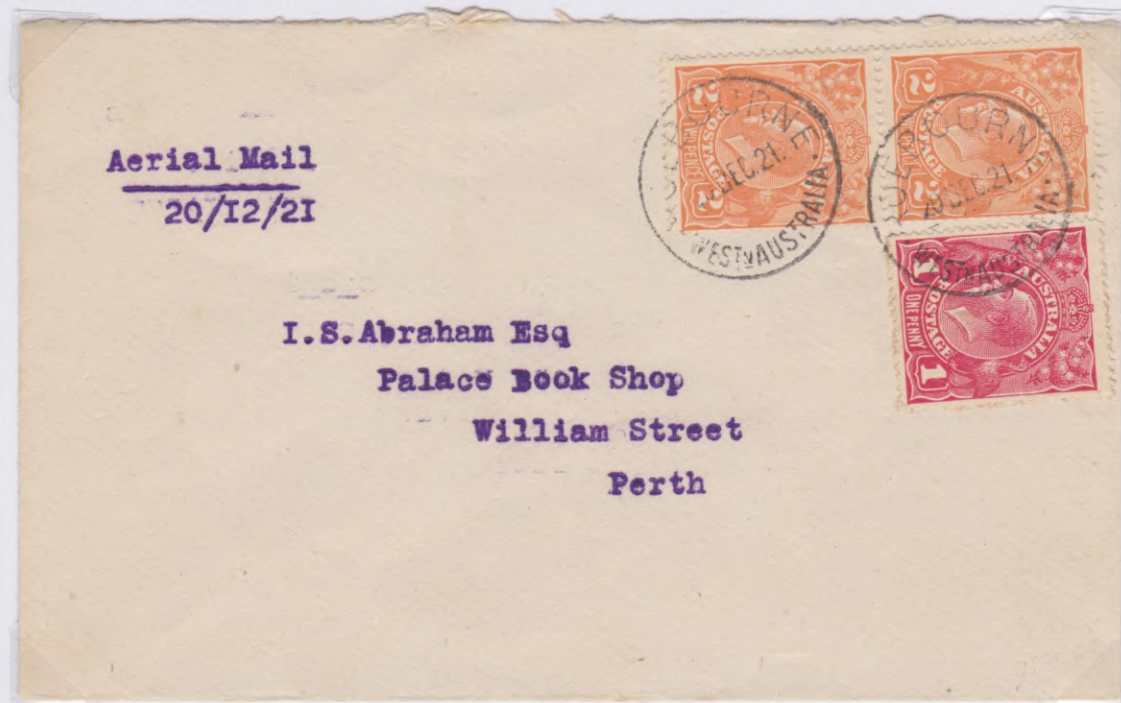
# FIRST SOUTHBOUND FLIGHT CRASH 1921

The first southbound flight departed Derby on 19 December and Broome on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The aircraft was forced down on the beach 70 miles south of Broome. SS Bambra retained the mails it carried for the southbound flight, collected the mail, crew (Brearley, Kingsford-Smith, Hansen) and the aircraft for the southbound voyage.



Broome 14 December 1921

SS Bambra also collected mail from intermediate ports intended for the southbound flight and arrived at Fremantle on 30 December.



Roebourne 20 December 1921

## FORGERY

The broad second A of aerial and the use of the cachet to 'cancel' a stamp are indicators of a forgery. Both the Fremantle postmark 3 December 1921 and the Derby backstamp 22 December are forged. The address of a prominent Sydney stamp dealer and no indication of redirection gives some clues as to the source of the forgery.



## PUZZLE

The WAA cachet was only to be applied to the first flight on 4 December 1921. Whether this application of a modified cachet was intended to mark the resumption of contract flights is not known. The dateline of the cachet has been removed and the WA centred.



Subiaco  
13 April 1922  
modified  
Perth Derby Aerial Mail  
cachet

## FIRST? SOUTHBOUND FLIGHT 1922

This cover was intended to be carried on a southbound flight from Port Hedland to Geraldton, by truck to Walkaway, train to Perth and train to Narrogin. Flights were suspended following the crash of the first southbound flight. In the 1930s the PMG advised that articles inscribed Air Mail that missed the intended flight would be sent by the next surface mail if that would expedite delivery. Mail inscribed By Air Mail Only would be held until the next flight. Given the lack of experience of postal authorities anywhere, and Port Hedland in particular, it is not known whether they held this cover until the next flight in February 1922 or sent it by the next ship south. With no transit or receipt backstamps it is not possible to identify whether this did fly in the first southbound airmail or who subsequently inserted 1<sup>st</sup> in Per Aerial Mail.



Marble Bar 29 December 1921

# NON-CONTRACT FLIGHTS 1922

Weekly (non-contract) services resumed on 22 February 1922 from Geraldton to Carnarvon, Onslow, Roebourne and Port Hedland until 28 March.

This cover missed the second southbound flight and was carried on the third southbound flight to Geraldton and truck to Walkaway. Inscribed on back "Carried in 2 hours and 50 minutes".



Carnarvon 10 March 1922, Geraldton 17 March

This cover was carried by the fifth southbound flight to Geraldton and by rail to Perth.



Carnarvon 29 March 1922, Applecross indistinct date.

## CONTRACT MAILS

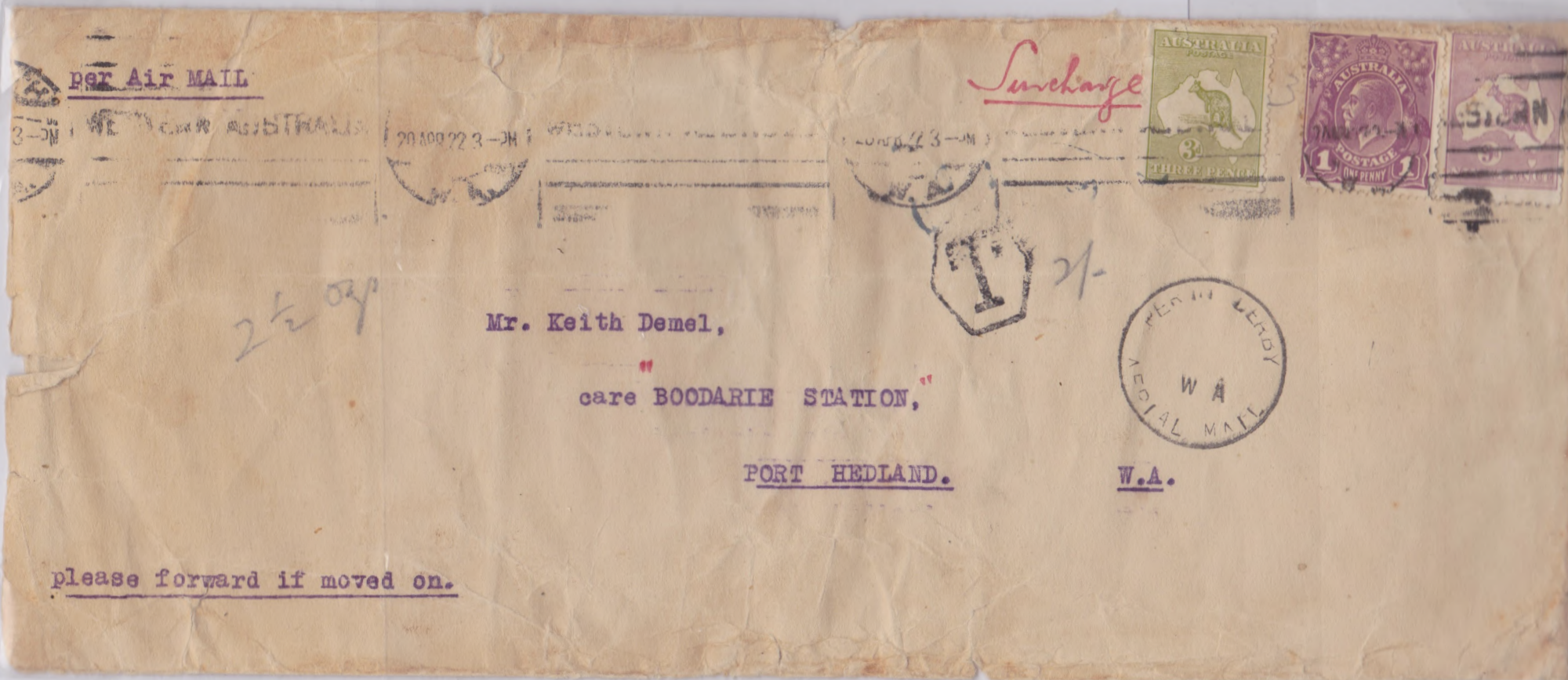
Contract flights resumed on 5 April between Geraldton and Derby.

De Mouncey (28 April 1922) wrote The first aerial mails bore the postmarks, "Perth-Derby Aerial Mail, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1921", used to commemorate the occasion. Since that date the special air mail postmarks have been discontinued... *Black Swan*, 8 (1) 7.

Two examples of the undated cachet have been recorded, both on 20 April 1922.

5d per half ounce = 2/1 for 2 ½ ounces. Franked 1/1. Taxed 2/- Inscribed Surcharge.

Perth 20 April 1922, Port Hedland ?, postage due collected Port Hedland 6 May



Geraldton-Derby

## INTERMEDIATE PORTS

Contract flights resumed in April 1922 between Geraldton and Derby.

### CARNARVON



Carnarvon 31 July 1922

### ONSLOW



Onslow 21 August 1922

Geraldton-Derby

PORT HEDLAND



Port Hedland 14 August 1922

WALLAL



Wallal 15 June 1923

Geraldton-Derby

BROOME



Broome 16 September 1923

**UNIDENTIFIED**

Mail handed to the pilot at a north-west airport does not seem to have been charged a late fee nor taxed on arrival where the stamps were cancelled in Perth.



No name or address of sender, Perth 18 May 1923

## FIRST SOUTHBOUND FLIGHT 1924

On 5 December 1923 the contract with WAA was extended for another 3 years and the Perth-Geraldton leg was included. The route, of about 2.300 kilometres, was the longest airmail route in the world at that time. Maylands airport was also opened at that time. WAA official envelope.



Broome 14 January 1924, Perth 7pm 15 January

Mail carried	
1922	49,761
1923	127,715
1924	190,511
1925	233,902
1926	255,624
1927	256,741

## Perth-Derby

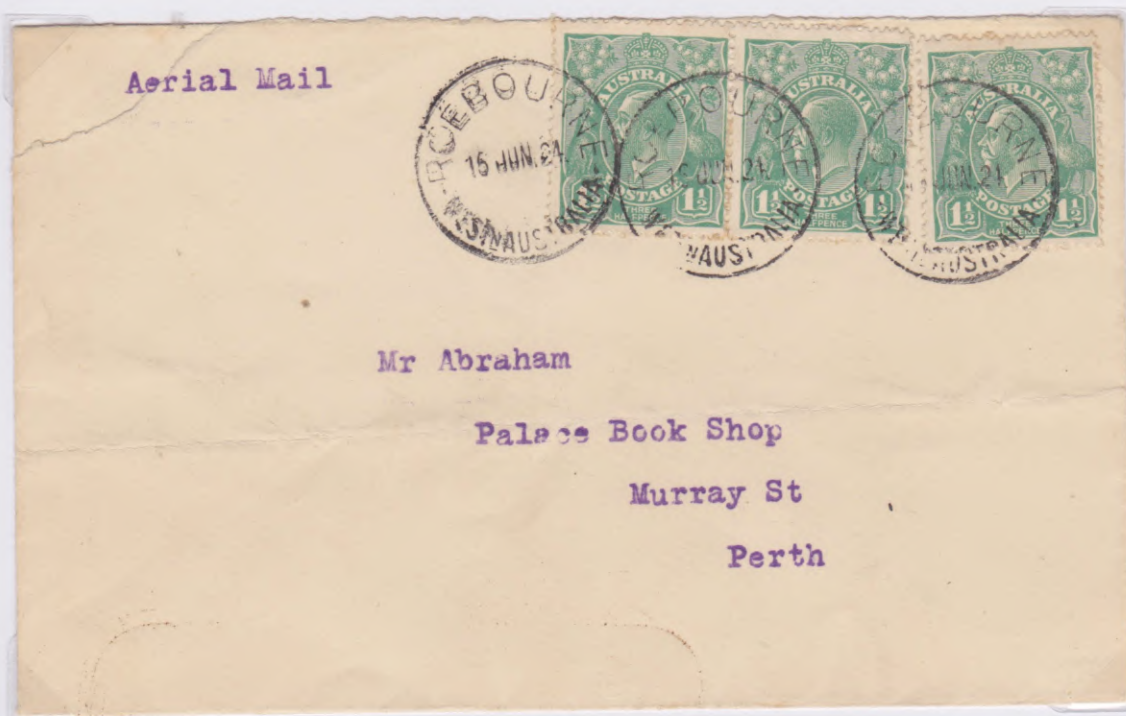
1924 the airmail route was extended to Perth.

## CARNARVON



Carnarvon 9 March 1925, private Aerial Mail cachet, received 11 March

## ROEBOURNE



Roebourne 15 June 1924