

# COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS 1907 – 2022

The Cocos Islands were discovered in 1609, settled in 1826 as a coconut plantation, annexed by Britain in 1857, and the site of a submarine cable relay station from 1901. The world paid brief attention to Cocos on 9 November 1914 when HMAS Sydney sank SMS Emden. A short-lived post office opened in 1933 but there was not much demand for postal services until 1945 when British forces constructed an airstrip. Cocos (Keeling) Islands 6799 is now the most remote Western Australian post office. Other than philatelic demand, there have been limited postal requirements of the 600 residents on Cocos.

Cocos postal history is shown in roughly chronological order

**SECTION A: 1907 – 1945** Local postal service, Straits Agency, British forces

**SECTION B: 1946 – 1955** Singapore Postal Agency, RAAF post office

**SECTION C: 1955 – 1979** Australian PMG Department

**SECTION D: 1979 – 1993** Cocos Philatelic Bureau

**SECTION E: 1994 – 2022** Australia Post

Some heavily subscribed philatelic product at various times is readily available but mail to and from Cocos in all periods is scarce.

The SMS Emden landing party under Captain Lieutenant von Mucke damaged the cable station in 1914 but, when HMAS Sydney arrived, escaped to Sumatra on the Cocos schooner Ayesha and then returned to Berlin.

Kodak photo card of German soldier guarding cable station personnel.



**SECTION A: 1907 – 1945**

**TELEGRAPHIC POST CARDS 1907**

Lack of postal facilities and infrequent shipping made communication difficult for the Clunies Ross family, plantation workers, and the cable station staff. Between 1902 and 1921, telegraphic messages were sent from the cable station on Direction Island to Perth where they were transcribed on to post cards and posted. 41 cards are recorded from Perth and 5 (in the 1930s) from Singapore.

Perth  
13 May 1907



Perth  
21 April 1908  
Malta  
10 May  
Sliema  
10 May  
Postman's  
6 in circle

# TELEGRAPHIC POST CARD 1907

*Black Swan*, 12 (8) 96 December 2007 provides a consolidated listing of 34 post cards posted from Western Australia with messages transmitted by telegraph from Cocos. The majority of the cards are to Malta, this one P & T 13 Set MH. Five are recorded as taxed. Message headed Cocos 13 October 1907, Perth machine cancel 15 October, Malta 10 November, Malta unframed T and 1dd in circle, Malta postman's mark 25 in circle.



Victoria Park 2 September 1907, Malta 29 September, Malta T and 1d in circle, Malta postman's mark 24 in circle, boxed Advertised 30 September GPO Malta, boxed Advertised 25 October GPO Malta, boxed Unclaimed, barred A25 cancelling tax mark, Perth Dead Letter Office 7 January 1908.

This card proves that cards other than telegraphic post cards from Malta were taxed, possibly a late fee not collected in Perth.

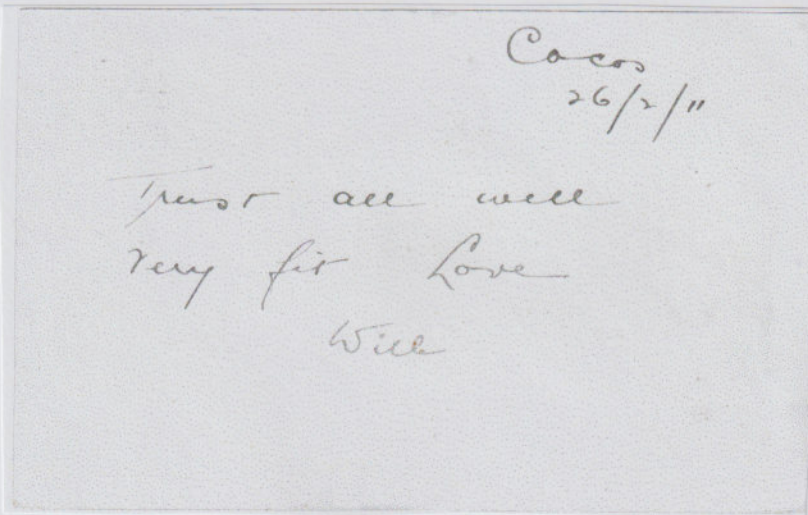
Reference: Pope. B. and Haynes, B. (1991). Taxed in Malta, Why?, *Black Swan*, 7 (3) 28

TELEGRAPHIC POST CARD 1911

The unbordered surfaced Western Australian post card is known used from 31 May 1910.



Perth  
27 February 1911



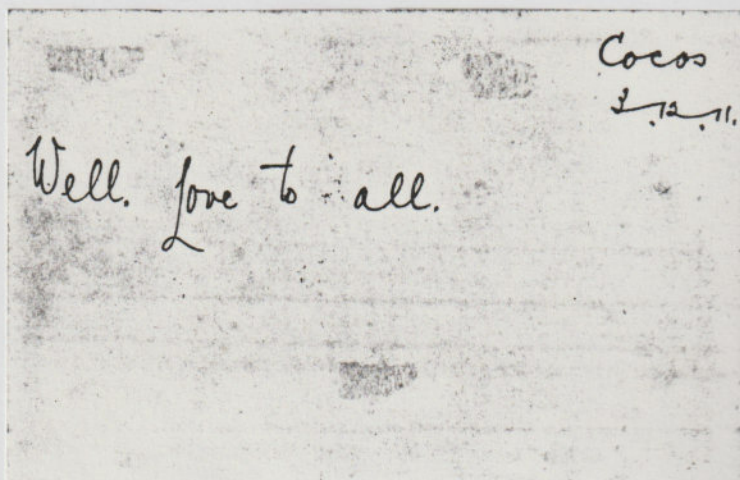
# TELEGRAPHIC POST CARD 1911

No inwards or outwards Cocos mail has been recorded prior to these telegraphic cards.

Officials of the Cable and Wireless Ltd stationed on Direction Island (Cocos) sent cable messages to Perth, Western Australia where they were transcribed on to post cards and forwarded. The messages may well have been in telegraphic code as they usually as cryptic as the one shown below.

No cards are recorded sent in 1909 and only one in 1910 but 11 were sent in 1911. One card was sent in 1912, one in 1915 and one in 1916. This card, ASC PC 1, is one of the last to be sent.

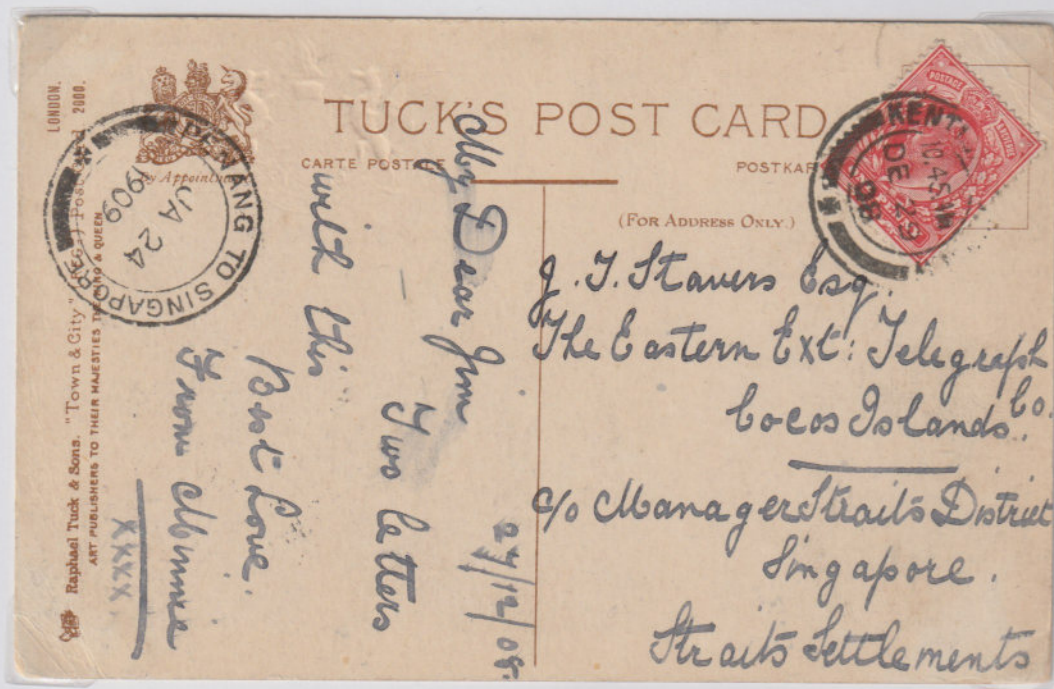
Perth 4 December 1911, Malta 31 December, Malta postman's mark 25 in circle.



**INWARDS CORRESPONDENCE 1909**

A correspondence to Jim Stavers came on to the market in recent years. Stavers commenced duties at the cable station on Cocos on 23 December 1908. This is the only recorded pre-war inwards correspondence other than to the Clunies-Ross family. The letters referred to have not been recorded.

Kentish Town  
29 December 1909  
Penang to Singapore  
24 January 1909

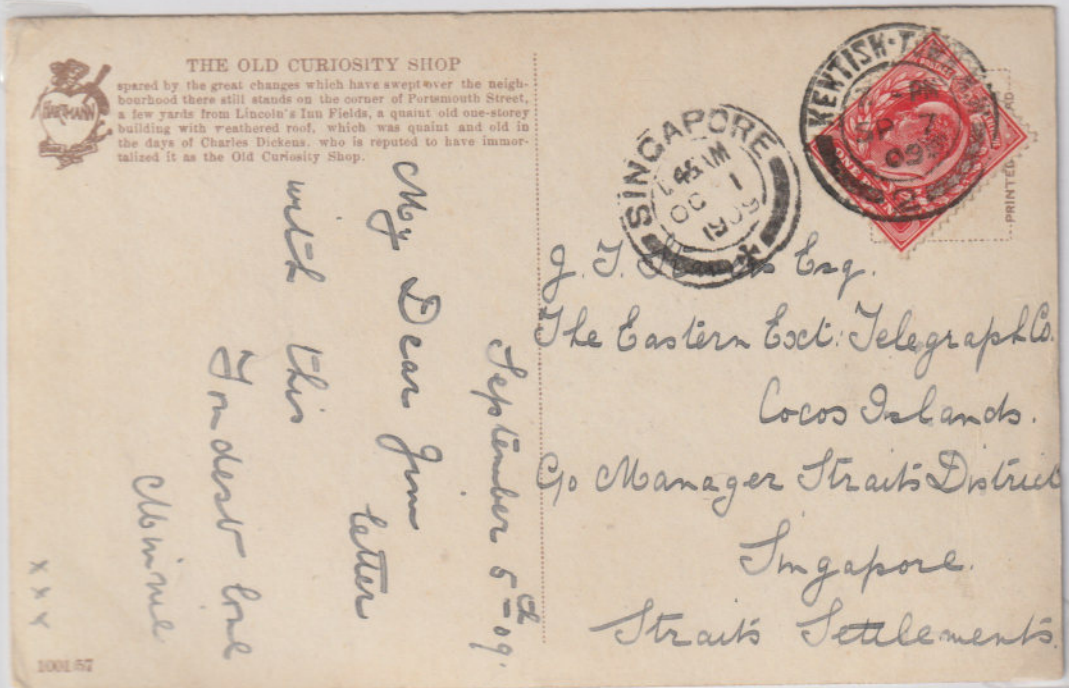


Kentish Town  
8 June 1909  
Penang to Singapore  
2 July 1909  
Unidentified 1

INWARDS CORRESPONDENCE 1909

Sorted on the Penang to Singapore TPO.

Kentish Town  
19 November 1909  
Penang to Singapore  
11 December



Kentish Town  
7 September 1909  
Singapore  
1 October

Sorted in Singapore and forwarded on next available ship, sometimes only 3 ships a year called at Cocos.

**CLUNIES-ROSS CORRESPONDENCE: PRE-WAR**

8 pre-war Clunies-Ross covers are recorded of which this has the highest franking.  
1/- for 6 ounce letter, 2d for registration = 1/2d  
This cover would have been forwarded to Cocos on the next available ship.

London 12 March 1912, Singapore 22 March

**R**  
LONDON, E.C. 10  
No. 2492

J. S. Clunies-Ross Esq

(of Keeling Cocos Islands)

10<sup>no</sup> The Eastern Extension Australasia & China Telegraph

Singapore





## CLUNIES ROSS CORRESPONDENCE: WAR TIME

Three war-time Clunies Ross covers are recorded. This is the only cover from Singapore and inscribed 'Per S.S. Islander'. The S.S. Islander was owned by the Christmas Island Phosphate Company. It called at Cocos Island three times a year under charter paid for 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Clunies Ross and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> Cable Company.

Singapore 8 October 1915



## STRAITS SETTLEMENTS POSTAL AGENCY

Cocos was attached politically to the Straits Settlements from 1886. On 1 April 1933 the Straits Settlements opened a postal agency on Cocos. The Malay plantation workers maintained family connections but no example of mail is recorded.

From April to August 1933 a double ring datestamp was used and three strikes are recorded. From August 1933 until the agency closed on 1 March 1937 a double ring datestamp with solid arc at the bottom was used and 10 strikes are recorded on stamps, piece, or cover.

Three registered covers are recorded.

Cocos Island 16 November 1935, Singapore 26 November



During the 1930s, the British Phosphate Commission ship *Islander* made three trips a year to Cocos so connecting it to Christmas Island and Singapore. Agency mail could be carried at these times. Other trading vessels and the *Clunies Ross* schooner also made trips to Batavia and Singapore. Mail carried by these means are likely to have been handled by the *Clunies Ross* agents there and so not readily recognised. Lack of business led to the agency being closed on 1 March 1937.

## GUBA II SURVEY FLIGHT

This is the first airmail for both Cocos Island and Seychelles. Cocos had no post office, datestamps or postage stamps so cover is struck with Clunies Ross cachet, J.S. Clunies Ross rubber stamp, 12 June 1939 rubber datestamp, and initialed by Clunies Ross in pencil. Inscribed on back "Carried between Diego Garcia and Seychelles Indian Ocean Flight 1939. Jack Percival." Stamps cancelled Victoria 19 June.

One other cover recorded originating from Cocos



QSL card New York 29 August 1939 to VK6??? South Perth

AIR MAIL GUBA 1939

The first inwards air mail through and from the Cocos Islands was carried on the Consolidated PBY Catalina "Guba II" which arrived from Sydney via Port Hedland, Batavia, and Cocos on 14 June 1939. This was not an official air mail as the Kenya Post Office refused to participate and the 5/- stamps prepared for the flight by the Australian Postmaster General's Department were destroyed.



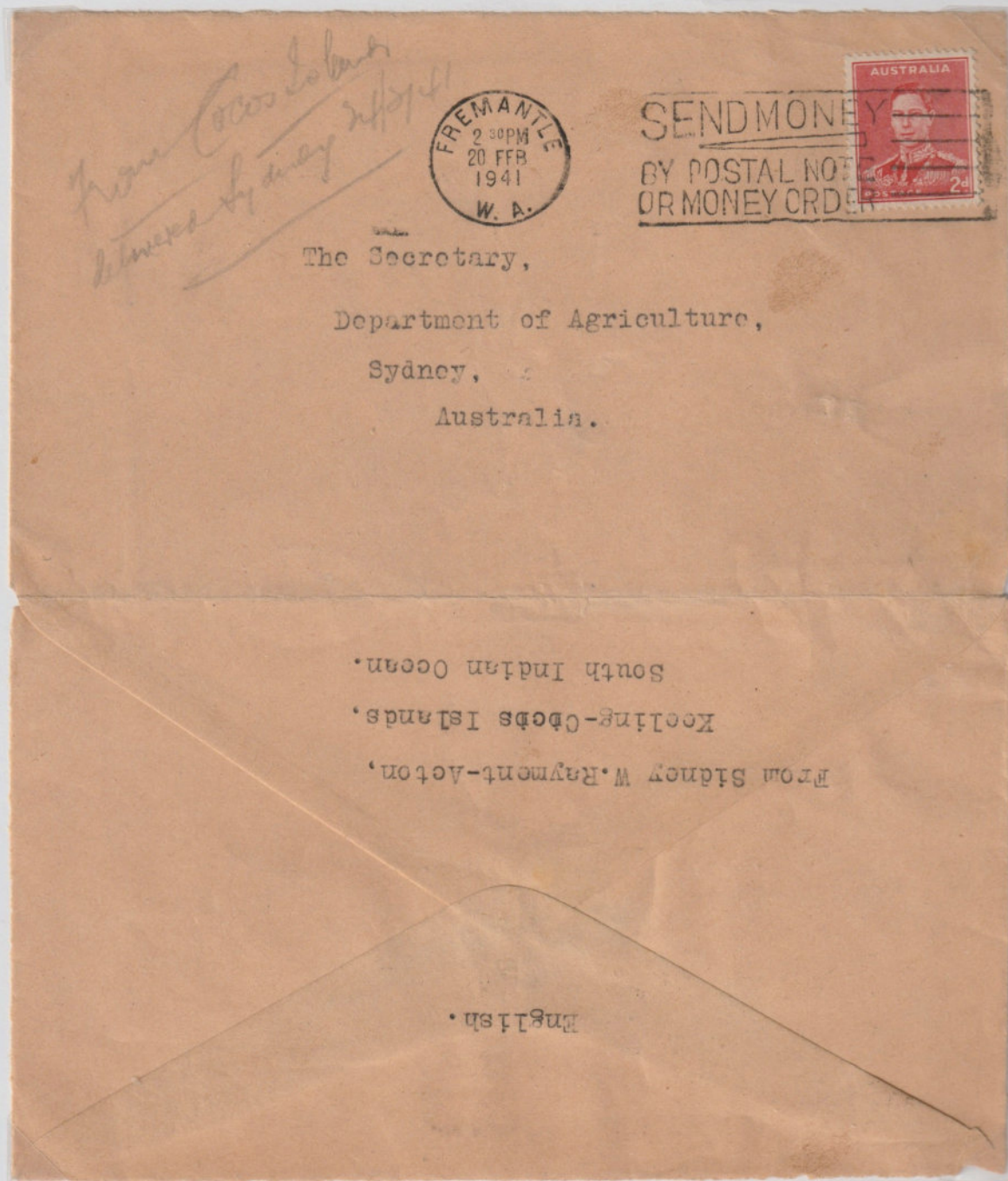
R. Scribner Esq.,  
26 Old South Head Road,  
VAUCLUSE.  
SYDNEY. N.S.W.  
AUSTRALIA.



Posted Rose Bay East, NSW Australia 3 June 1939, C & W Ltd, Cocos 12 June, Victoria Seychelles 17 June, Kisumu Kenya registered ? ? 1939, GPO Sydney RS NSW Australia 6 July transit marks and Watson's Bay NSW Australia 7 July receiving backstamp.

WARTIME MAIL 1941

Three items of civilian mail in the period 1939 – 45 from Cocos have been recorded. One was posted at Singapore (1941) to Sydney and another, with Straits stamp cancelled with C & W Cocos Ltd cachet (1942), was posted to Colombo. Barrel mail was suspended during wartime so this cover may have been carried on board a trading vessel.

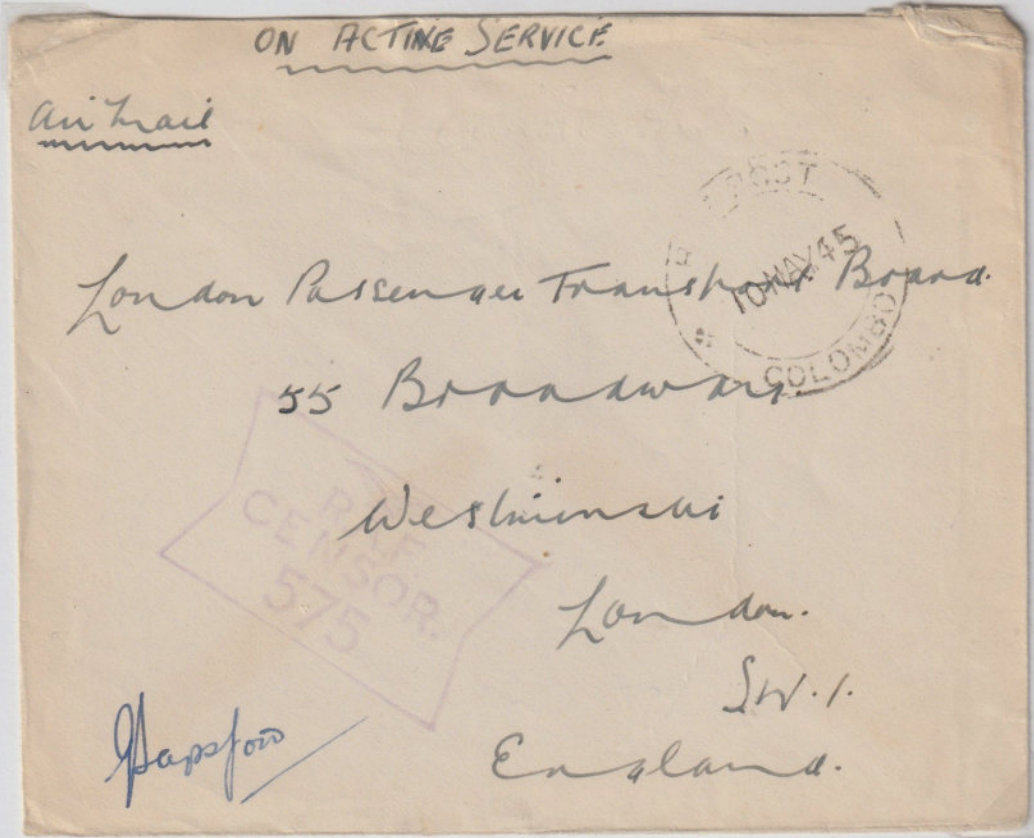


Inscribed From Cocos Islands. Delivered Sydney 24/2/41.

A Ceylanese garrison unit was stationed on Cocos during the war and, despite a mutiny and three mutineers being executed, no forces mail is recorded.

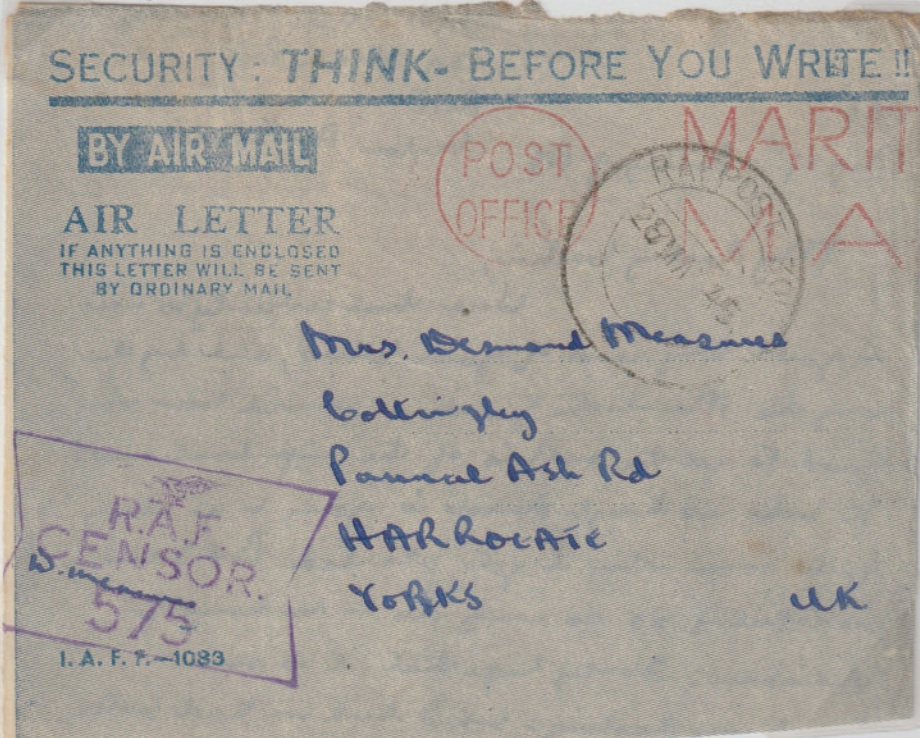
R.A.F. AIRFIELD CONSTRUCTION

Collas and Hill state that RAFPOST 301 was used by the airfield construction force. What little mail can be identified from that force is postmarked in transit in Colombo by either No. 9 Advanced Base P.O. or RAFPOST COLOMBO.  
RAFPOST COLOMBO 10 May 1945, RAF CENSOR 575



RAFPOST 301

136 Squadron (Spitfires) arrived on Cocos on 26 April 1945 and RAFPOST 301 may have come with them. This is the earliest recorded strike of RAFPOST 301.  
RAFPOST 301 25 May 1945, RAF CENSOR 575, Post Office Maritime Mail.



An airfield construction unit commenced work on West Island in 1944 in preparation for attacks on Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. The field was completed in March 1945. RAF PO 301 operated from April 1945 to March 1946 during which time forces airmail in the Ceylon Command was free.

Letter headed Section M, RAF Station Cocos, Ceylon Air Forces.  
RAF PO 301 16 October 1945.



#### R.A.F. IN COCOS ISLANDS

The Cocos or Keeling Islands, a group of some 20 small coral-islands in the Indian Ocean, 700 miles south-west of Sumatra and annexed to Singapore in 1903, provided bases for R.A.F. aircraft of South East Asia Command. Here, Spitfires of No. 136 (Fighter) Squadron are lined up on a Cocos airstrip. This top-scoring squadron was credited with 100 'kills,' besides 150 'probables' and 'damaged.'

*Photo, British Official*