

After the three important Pioneer Aviation Centenaries in India, Great Britain and South Africa during 2011, the centenary of pioneer flights in Great Britain during 2012 will not capture the headlines in the same way. They are nonetheless important to the development of both civil and military aviation in Great Britain as Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS, explains in this special report.



A Cameo of Important Pioneer Flights in Great Britain During 1912

By Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS

There are only four entries listed under Great Britain for 1912 by D Field in the second edition of his *Priced Catalogue of Air Mail Stamps and Airposts of the World*. In the Foreword to his Catalogue dated December 1933, Field writes: 'As this is the only Catalogue comprising the whole of aerophilately published in this country, we feel sure that it will continue to be of assistance to all those interested in this branch of philately.'

Bath to Hendon

The four listings for 2012 in order are: The flight on 24 May 1912, from Bath to Hendon aerodrome. A special gummed label was attached that read: 'This card was carried from Bath to London Aerodrome by aeroplane on Friday 24 May 1912. Aviators initials....' These were later filled in 'B.C.H.' by the pioneer aviator Bentfield Charles Hucks (1884-1918). He flew the mail from Bath and the covers bear the Hendon postmark of Tuesday, 28 May 1912.

These cards are extremely rare and today only a few examples are known. The one illustrated here is in my collection, 'Pioneer Airmails 1902-1936'. It was purchased by me some years ago from Maurice Porter, the doyen of British airmail dealers, then working for J A L Franks.

The rare 24 May 1912 Bath to London postcard flown by pioneer aviator B C Hucks. It is postmarked at Hendon and addressed to Bath



The front of the postcard showing the aviator Bentfield Charles Hucks and in his machine



'Daily Mail' Aeroplane Circuit 1912, postcards showing the great pioneer aviator Gustav Hamel and his 50 h.p. Bleriot

Flight to Falmouth

June 1912, 'Bath-Falmouth, via Land's End flight by pioneer aviator Henri Salmet, arranged under the auspices of the Daily Mail. Covers are postmarked Falmouth, 15 June 1912.'

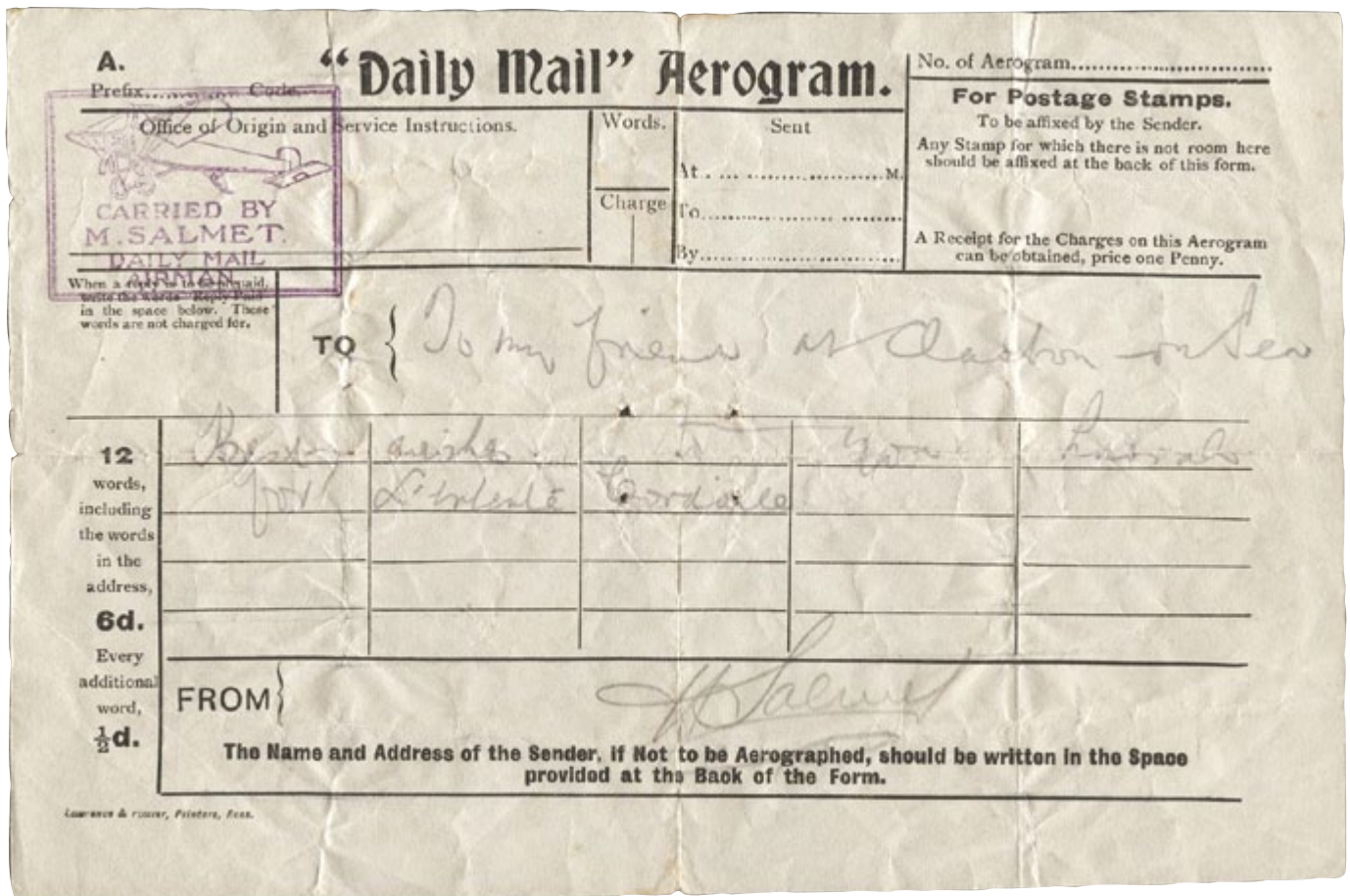
Field is incorrect in stating that the flight went via Land's End. Although Salmet had intended to fly to Land's End he was prevented from doing so by the very inclement weather. During his tour of Cornwall Salmet flew from Truro to Falmouth on 14 June 1912.

Circuit of Great Britain

The third flights listed by D Field are the Circuit of Great Britain by Gustav Hamel (1889- missing 1914) organised by the *Daily Mail* at various points, during July and August 1912.

Daily Mail Waterplane Tour

The fourth listing is the *Daily Mail* Waterplane Tour of the South Coast, during July and August 1912.



Above: The extremely rare 1912 'Daily Mail' Aerogram - flown and signed by the great French aviator Henri Salmet



'Daily Mail' Aeroplane Circuit 1912, postcard showing aviator Henri Salmet, and his 50 h.p Bleriot Monoplane



The violet cachet applied to the front of the folded 'Daily Mail' Aerogram

Violet cachet applied

During the 1912 Circuit of Great Britain flights, and also the *Daily Mail* Waterplane Tour a special cachet in violet was applied to some of the souvenir cards flown by the pioneer aviators.

These cards were issued by the *Daily Mail* and available to members of the public for a small fee. When written, the cards could be handed in for conveyance by plane and posted at the place of arrival.

Forged

These thrilling pioneer demonstrations make for a fascinating area of aero-philately - but a word of caution. There are forged cards and cachets about; some more sophisticated than others. Enlarged illustrations of the genuine and the forged cachets are included in a monograph of research into the *Daily Mail Circuit of Britain and Waterplane Tours of 1912*, by H Eric Scott FRPSL, revised 1970 and published as Handbook No 1 by the Aero Philatelic Club.

Aerial tours

Francis J Field RDP, in his Foreword wrote: 'Ever alert to popular trends the *Daily Mail* of London first staged an air race to Manchester, then in 1912 promoted a series of aerial tours by land and seaplanes, enrolling many well-known French and British pilots for that holiday season.'

Mr Field, the doyen of British airmail dealers, who helped and encouraged me so much during the mid-1960s and early 1970s continued: 'Inland and seaside resorts and fairs were visited, Picture postcards were sold on the landing grounds then carried over the next stages of the aerial tours.'

'Daily Mail' Aerogram

Without doubt the rarest 1912 Great Britain pioneer aviation item is the 'Daily Mail' Aerogram. This unique Aerogram was prepared and printed by Lawrence and Fowler, Ross-on-Wye, for use on the tour by Henri Salmet. It appears to be based upon a then existing Post office telegram type, A1 1894. The copy illustrated is one of only five known to exist.

On Friday, 2 August 1912 Henri Salmet flew from Colchester via other places and over the pier at Clacton-on-Sea. It was here that he dropped the Aerogram to his friend M Cadic, a French Consular Agent. The handwritten message read: 'To my friend at Clacton-on-Sea. Best wishes to you. Hurrah for the L'Entente Cordiale.' signed, H Salmet.

I was fortunate to purchase this superb item - it was originally folded into four - from the distinguished dealer, Richie Bodily FRPSL, during the Eur-Apex '93, Aero-Philatelic Exhibition held in London, 2-7 March 1993. What fascinating reading the Salmet message makes today when the United Kingdom and France are not exactly enjoying the most cordial of relationships following the stance taken by the British Prime Minister during the EU Summit in Brussels during early December 2011.

Francis J Field added: 'It should be realised too, that contemporary press reports and reminiscences were far from reliable guides to the itineraries of each plane and pilot, for weather and other conditions led to many diversions from schedule and sometimes flown cards were overlooked and mailed several flight stages and days after being handed over to the aviator postman.'

Infringed

H Eric Scott wrote that on Wednesday 31 July 1912, the *Daily Mail* stated that: 'The arrangements to carry the cards would have to be dropped as it infringed the Postmaster General's monopoly in mail carrying.'

'Cards, particularly on the eastern section of the Waterplane Tour, were not posted until many days, and in some cases weeks after the public had handed them in. The town shown in the postmark is the place of posting and usually the arrival point of the flight.'

In his check list, H Eric Scott wrote: 'The Waterplane tours were divided so that Fischer and Hubert went westwards from Southampton and the eastern section was flown by Claude Grahame-White (1879-1959), J L Travers and L Noel. Cards from the eastern section are the most common, as these flights covered the more popular seaside resorts of those days.'

'The eastern section of the Waterplane Tours covered the coast from Portsmouth to Southend-on-Sea with Brighton as the main centre, but cards were not carried beyond Eastbourne, with the exception of a few which had apparently been overlooked and were carried to the end and posted in London.'

Summer holiday season 1912

H Eric Scott records the dates of the flights and exhibitions held during the summer holiday season of 1912: 'On Tuesday 23 July, Grahame-White flew to Brighton for the start of the eastern Waterplane Tour. Travers also arrived. Due to inclement weather no flying was possible on some days.'

'On Monday 19 August, Travers and Noel gave exhibition flights at Margate. The following day, both aviators gave further exhibitions at Margate. On Wednesday 21 August, Travers flew from Margate to Herne Bay and back to Margate. There was no flying at Margate the following day.'

On Friday 23 August 1912, Noel gave an exhibition at Margate but bad weather prevented him from going to Southend as announced. On Saturday 24 August, Noel flew from Margate to Sheerness and then on to Southend.'

Good example

I recently purchased the souvenir postcard illustrated here. It is a particularly good example of the special souvenir postcards sold to members of the public. It depicts pioneer aviator Grahame-White and a waterplane above the three-line caption: '*Daily Mail* Waterplane Tour, 1912.'

Organised by the Grahame White Aviation Co Ltd. 70 H.P. Henry Farman Waterplane.'

Margate

The postcard is postmarked Margate, 6.15p.m., on Friday 23 August 1912, and was addressed during that afternoon by a visitor to Margate and addressed to her mother in Wandsworth, London. The message read: 'Dear Mother leaving here at 7.29 tomorrow evening hope to be home about half past ten, it has been raining here all the morning but has cleared up now. Love to all. Lil.'

There is nothing to suggest that this particular postcard was flown by the French pioneer aviator, Louis Noel, who was born in Paris during 1872. According to a news roundup under the headline, 'The *Daily Mail* Demonstrations', published by *Flight* on Saturday 31 August 1912: 'Friday Mr Noel was at Margate out early, carrying Councillor Adutt as passenger, but the weather prevented him from getting away to Southend as had been announced.'

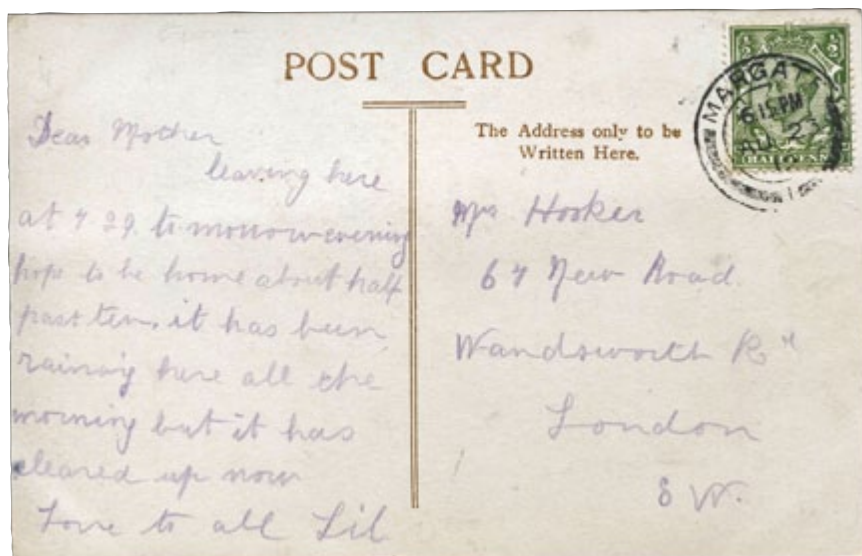
The news story continued: 'On the Saturday Mr Louis Noel on his waterplane flew from Margate to Sheerness and on to Southend.' Interestingly, Margate was also in the philatelic news during 1912 because the Fourth Philatelic Congress of Great Britain was in the town from Wednesday 1 to Friday 3 May.

More research

These pioneer flights in Great Britain during 1912 are a fascinating area of aero-philately. There is an opportunity for further original research into the flights, special postcards and cachets. Since I wrote the first draft of this article in mid-December 2011, I received further information and helpful comments from a member of the British Air Mail Society, of which I am proud to be a member. This is a good example of the importance and advantage of belonging to a specialist society.



The '*Daily Mail*' Waterplane tour 1912, postcard depicting Claude Grahame-White



Reverse with message on '*Daily Mail*' Waterplane tour 1912, postcard postmarked at Margate on 23 August