

THE MOST IMPORTANT  
**FLIGHT COVER**  
IN AN AUSTRALIAN COVER

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In December 1934, in preparation for the first scheduled air service between Australia and England, the Australian Post Office issued a new 1/6 stamp to pay the basic letter rate by air to England. Shortly after on 8 December 1934 the first scheduled air service left Australia. Why are First Flight Covers on this flight so important in Australian airmail history?

It all started with the first settlers who arrived in Australia in 1788. They were so remote from relatives and friends in England and completely isolated. The sea journey to England, through some of the roughest seas in the world, took at least eight months. Few ships called at the Colony. Those that did had to sail to China or India for cargo before sailing to England.

ABOVE : A first day cover of the 1/6 stamp flown to England on the first flight to England by QEA and IAL on 8 December 1934.

So dangerous was the journey to England that at least two copies of any letter was sent on other ships as there was a real possibility that a ship may not reach its destination.

Gradually sail gave way to steam and the journey back to England by sea was reduced to about six weeks. The shipping service, however, could not be relied on for in every war, and there were several in the early days, the ships were taken off the run to Australia to carry troops. Getting mail to and from England was of the utmost importance to the Australian people.

The Ross and Keith Smith flight from England to Australia was so important because it provided the hope that aircraft might eventually solve the mail problem with England. It is interesting to note that the Smith flight arrived shortly after the first mail ship from England following the withdrawal of the regular shipping services during WWI.

In the 1920s Imperial Airways began flying toward India reaching Karachi and later extending to Delhi. The aircraft being flown were outdated in design and unprofitable. Australians could then send mail by sea to Colombo, by train to Karachi and then mostly by air to England. This service did not always significantly shorten the travel time and although it continued for many years was eventually not advertised by the Post Office.

Imperial Airways, under pressure from Commercial organisations to provide an airmail service to Australia, flew to Singapore and Qantas Empire Airways flew from Singapore to Brisbane. This was the break through. At last there was a scheduled air service every couple of weeks taking about 14 days to fly the mail to England. The Australian people were so excited yet surprisingly it appears there has been little philatelic celebration of this extremely important event.

Illustrated is a First Day Cover, (Figure 1), of the 1/6 stamp sent on the first scheduled flight to England. I would be interested to hear from collectors who have similar items. One would have expected a special cover to be designated for such an important flight.

There is, of course, much more to this story than I can tell in this short article. In this issue of Stamp News is an advertisement for a pre-publication offer for Book 2 of my series, entitled, 'The Rapid Advances between 1934-1939 of the England/Australia Airmail'. This book, as per the title, covers the period from 1934-1939 when WWII began and details not only Imperial Airways struggle to maintain the England/Australia service but its triumph on introducing the 'C' Class Empire flying boats and the 'All UP' scheme for cheaper airmail. I can be contacted via email at [ron@airmailaustralia.com](mailto:ron@airmailaustralia.com).

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