

Airmails of Jamaica

From the collection of Steve Jarvis FRPSL

This frame contains a selection of airmail covers highlighting the variety of topics that encompass aerophilately.

The introduction of the first services to the island, inbound and outbound:

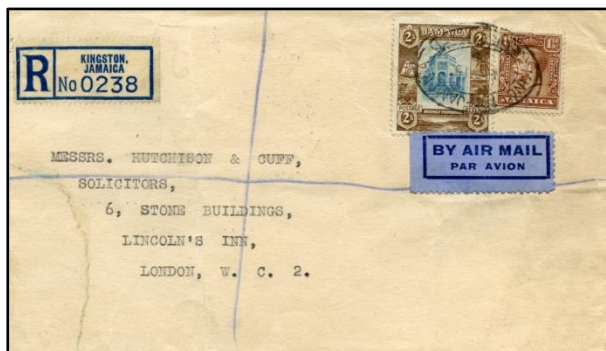
Jamaican mail services were not introduced until late 1930 due to contractual requirements of the Government. Eventually, the contract for inbound mail was awarded to Pan American Airways. However, the outbound mail contract was awarded to a local company (Caribbean Airways) who flew mail by a symbolic initial flight but operations were thereafter sub-contracted to Pan Am.

Representative covers are shown featuring these first flights, together with initial difficulties in understanding the rates to be used.



Kingston (10 Dec 1930) to Cardenas, Cuba (10 Dec 1930) by Caribbean Airways

Services and Airmail Postage Rates to the United Kingdom:



Jamaica (15 May 1934) to New York by Air then by Sea to UK at triple rate plus registration (2s1½d).

Rates to the UK changed frequently during the 1930s, generally reducing due to the improving technology but also affected by the GB£ to US\$ exchange rate (as Pan Am had to be paid in US\$).

Step rates were complicated to calculate. Up to 1938 the rate consisted of two components: Surface plus Airmail. The former was charged per ounce but the latter was charged per half ounce.

Trans-Atlantic Services

Up to 1939, transatlantic mail was flown to New York and then carried by sea. In 1939 an optional (higher rate) 'All Air' service was provided via New York.

Post war, more direct flights were introduced but not without difficulties, as shown by a BSAA crash cover.

Airmail covers from Jamaica to mainland Europe during the 1930s are not common. A few examples are shown including a cover flown across the Atlantic by Zeppelin in 1936.



First Jamaica Acceptance (1 Jun 1939) for Transatlantic Service to UK at 2s Rate (applied from 1 Jun to 15 Oct 1939). Pan Am started its Southern Transatlantic airmail service on 20 May 1939. The route was from Kingston via New York, the Azores, Lisbon, Marseilles.

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First Service

Jamaica received an airmail service relatively late compared to several other Caribbean countries. Pan American Airways had been negotiating with the Jamaica Government to introduce the service throughout 1930. However, the Jamaican Government insisted that a British or Jamaican involvement in the contract was required.

Bahamas (8 July 1930) to Miami; Miami (3 Dec 1930) to Kingston (3 Dec 1930)



This cover from the Bahamas was sent in July 1930, in anticipation of a contract being agreed, but was held in Miami awaiting finalisation. The cover was eventually forwarded on 2/3 December on the first inbound southbound flight by Pan Am. Outbound mail was contracted to Caribbean Airways, who sub-contracted to Pan Am.

Airmails of Jamaica

Introduction of Scheduled Inbound Service

First Inbound Mail from the North, By Pan American

Mail was carried from Miami on 2 Dec 1930, staying overnight in Cuba, via Jamaica to Cristobal, Canal Zone arriving 3 Dec. Mail was dropped off at Jamaica but none was picked up (due to no outgoing mail contract having commenced with Pan Am.)
4,767 items of mail were destined for Kingston.

Miami (2 Dec 1930) to Kingston (3 Dec 1930)



FAM 5 from Miami on 2 Dec. via Cuba, to Kingston, arriving 3 Dec.
The black cachet was usually applied to mail originating at Miami.
A violet cachet was usually applied to mail via Miami.

Consolidated Commodore (NC668M) being loaded with mails at Miami, 2 Dec 1930

Scan of violet cachet on the reverse applied at Kingston.



plus machine cancel, '11 am 3 Dec 1930'
'Spend Your Vacation in Summerland'.



Left to right
Radio Operator Wenstern, Co-Pilot Fatt, Pilot Schulz,
Miami Postmaster Pittman plus friends.

Pilots and airmen were treated as 'A' list celebrities at this time.

Airmails of Jamaica

Outbound Scheduled Service Introduction – to Cuba Caribbean Airways

The Jamaican mail contract was awarded to Caribbean Airways.

It was a token gesture to have a British Company fly the first outbound mails.

This was the only mail flight by Caribbean Airways.

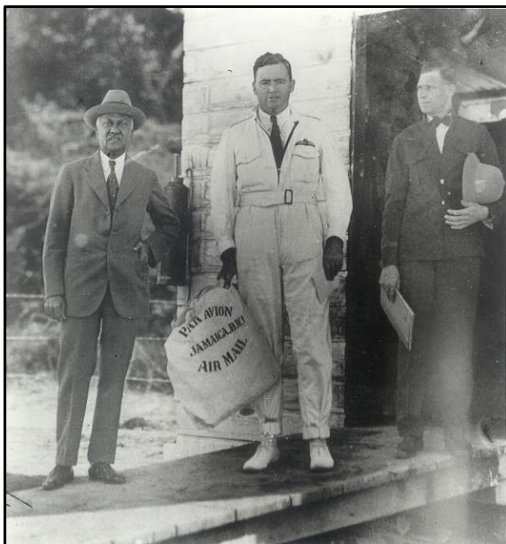
Caribbean Airways sub-contracted the service to Pan Am immediately afterwards.

Kingston (10 Dec 1930) to Cardenas, Cuba (10 Dec 1930) by Caribbean Airways

336 letters were dispatched for Cuba. These were taken from the mail which had already been scheduled to go by the Pan Am flight and bore the special Jamaica – Miami First Flight cachet.



Backstamped at Santiago de Cuba with cds of 10 Dec 1930, 1.30pm (which identifies this as the Caribbean Airways flight).
Cardenas 12 Dec receiving mark.



Left to right:
Governor of Jamaica – Sir Edward Stubbs
Pilot – Capt Holland
Postmaster-General of Jamaica – RH Fletcher.



The plane was a Fairchild amphibian G-CAHL.
The aircraft left the Caribbean Airways sea base at 9.30am and took 2 hours 30 minutes to travel the 180 miles (due to headwinds).
There was no mail carried on the return flight the next day.

Airmails of Jamaica

Outbound Scheduled Service Introduction – to Cuba Caribbean Airways and Pan American

Covers flown by Caribbean Airways and Pan Am can only be distinguished by the earliest receiving date in Cuba.
The 1s0½d rate (plus 2d registration) only applied until 15 Dec.

Jamaica (10 Dec 1930) to Cienfuegos, Cuba (11 Dec 1930) by Caribbean Airways



Jamaica (11 Dec 1930 but mail postmarked 10 Dec) to Cuba (11 Dec 1930) by Pan American

The flight did not take place on the scheduled 10 Dec as bad weather delayed the incoming flight from Cristobal.

As the outbound flight would have arrived after dark at Cienfuegos, an overnight stop was made in Kingston.

The aeroplane was a Consolidated Commodore N669M, piloted by Edward R Schulz on the inbound leg and WD Culbertson on the outbound.

3186 letters were carried to US destinations.



Backstamped
Santiago de Cuba
11 Dec 1930
(which identifies as
PanAm flight).

Northbound Rate Errors to the Guyanas

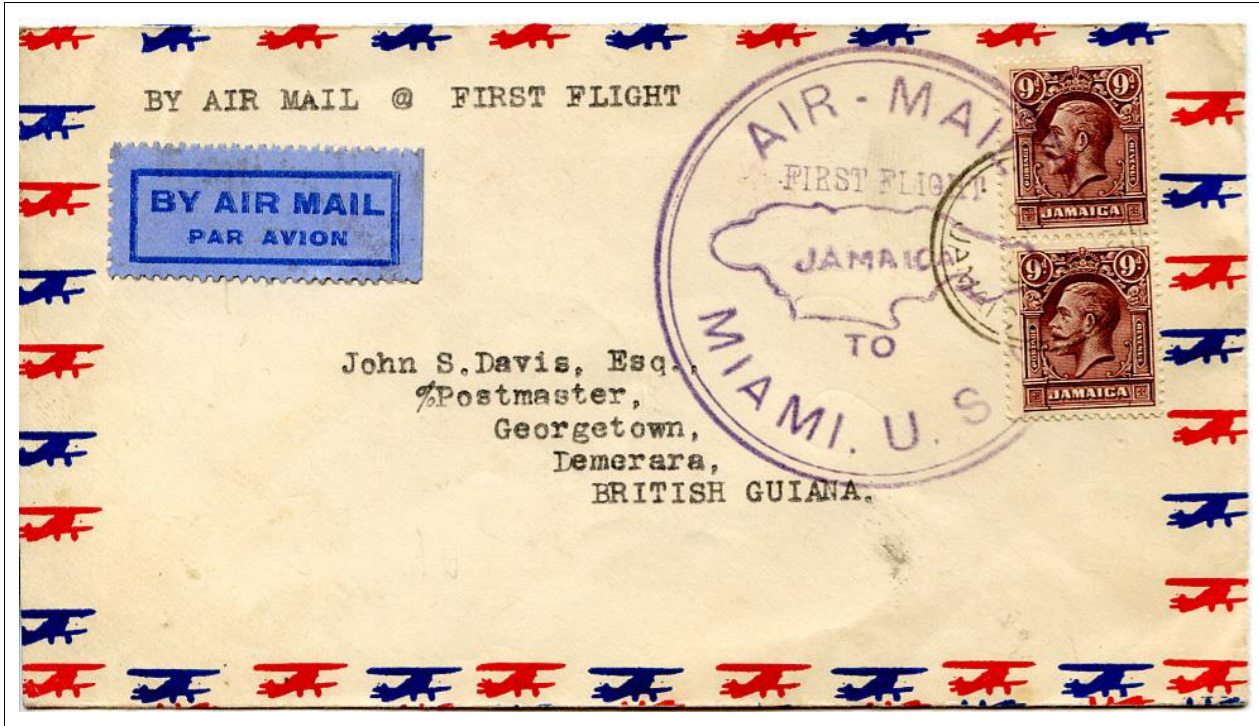
These two covers were underpaid but not taxed.

The Post Office announcement of 6 Dec stated the airmail rate as 1s6d (applied until 31 Dec 1931) to both Guianas, plus the surface rate.

The British Guiana surface rate was 1½d (Empire rate) but not paid at all.

The Dutch Guiana surface rate was 2½d (UPU rate) but paid at the Empire rate.

Jamaica (11 Dec 1930) via Miami to British Guiana (17 Dec 1930)



11oz carried
(circa 37 pieces).

Jamaica (11 Dec 1930) to Dutch Guiana (17 Dec 1930)



5 oz carried
(about 17).

Northbound to Rare Destinations

Mail on the first flight was addressed to many destinations but some rarer than others.

Jamaica (11 Dec 1930) via Miami to Bermuda (? Dec 1930) by Pan American



The only recorded letter on the first flight northbound by Pan Am from Jamaica to destination Bermuda. The envelope is address to ARC Holland, the pilot of the first flight to Cuba by Caribbean Airways. No rate to Bermuda was gazetted until 22 Oct 1934, the 8d rate was used (same as UK).

Jamaica (11 Dec 1930) to New York and then Sea to Grand Turk Island (18 Dec 1930)



Only 2 recorded covers to Turks Islands.
No rate quoted for Turks Islands, 9d rate (same as USA) utilised.

United Kingdom Rates

Jamaica (11 Dec 1930) to New York by air then by Sea to UK (19 Dec 1930) at 8d Rate

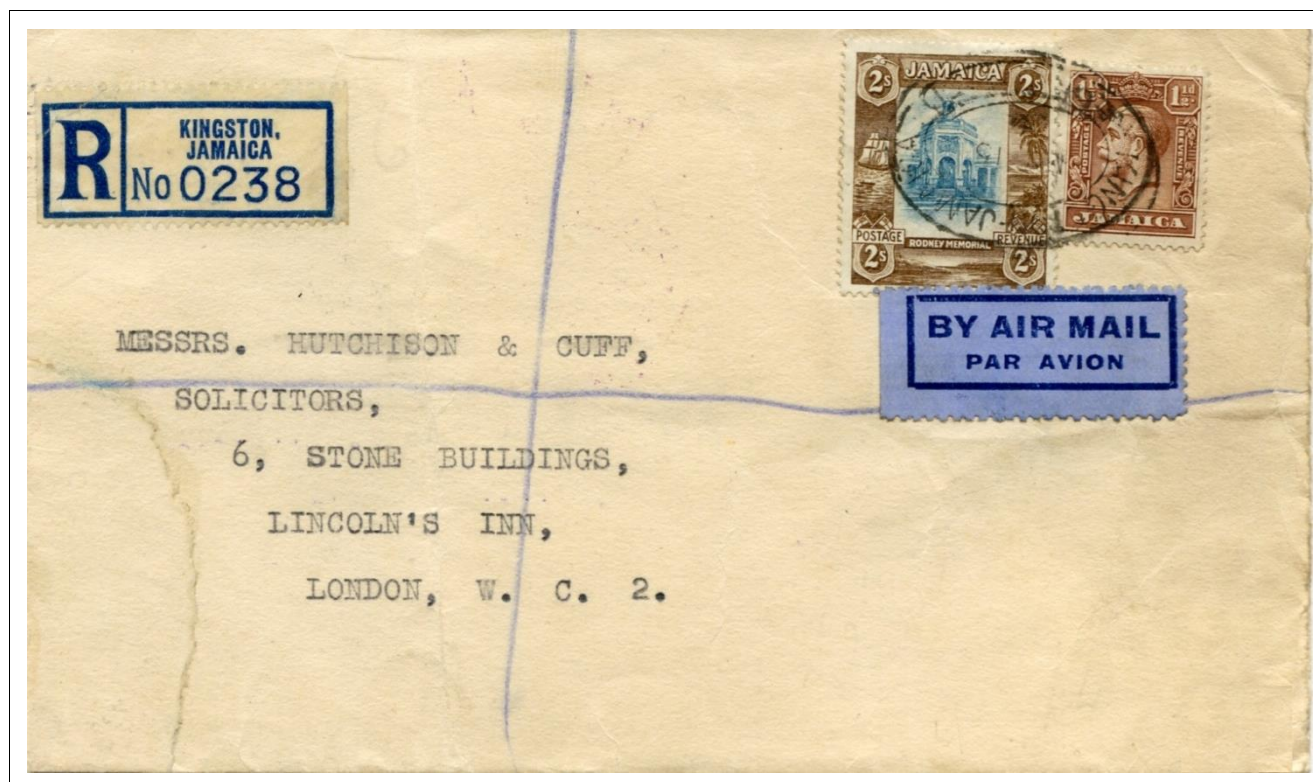


The single rate to the UK of 8d (1½d surface + 6½d air) applied until the end of 1931.

The route at this time was by air to New York and thence by sea. 1019 letters were carried to Europe.

LCC Nicholson was a leading Jamaica specialist of the era. He endorsed the cover on the reverse: 'Received 4.45pm 19 Dec 1930'.

Jamaica (15 May 1934) to New York by Air then by Sea to UK at triple rate (2s1½d)



The triple, 1½oz rate is complicated to calculate, consisting of:

A surface rate of 1½d for first oz & 1d per additional oz, plus airmail rate of 7d per ½oz plus 2d registration.

2s1½d = 25½d = 1½d + 1d + (7d x 3) + 2d. This rate applied 18 Dec 1933 to 21 Oct 1934.

United Kingdom All Air Service

First Jamaica Acceptance (1 Jun 1939) for Transatlantic Service to UK at 2s Rate

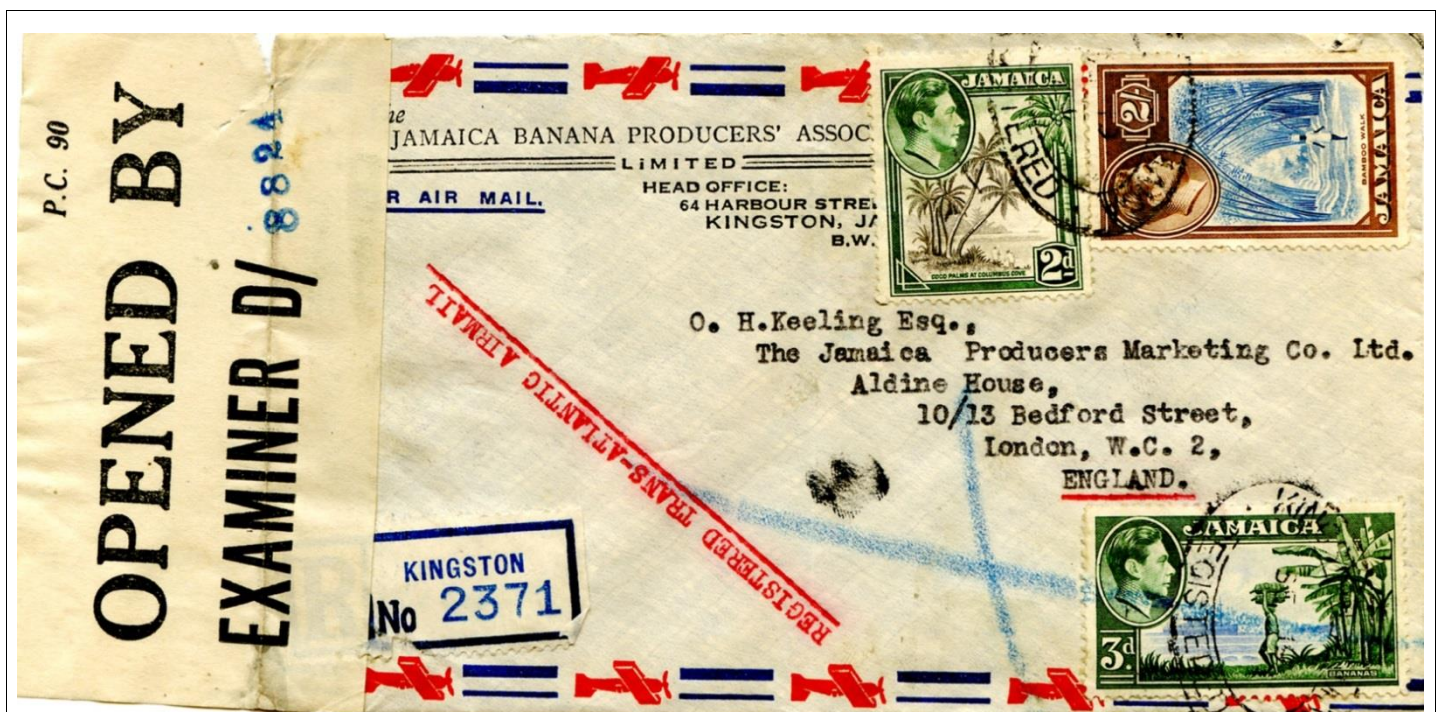


Pan Am started its Southern Transatlantic airmail service on 20 May 1939 with first mails leaving from Jamaica on 1 Jun. The route was from Kingston via New York, the Azores, Lisbon, Marseilles.

The 2s rate applied from 1 Jun 1939 to 15 Oct 1939.

Jamaica (22 Sep 1944) to New York to UK at 2s2d Rate

Soon after the war began services were disrupted and the rate was increased.

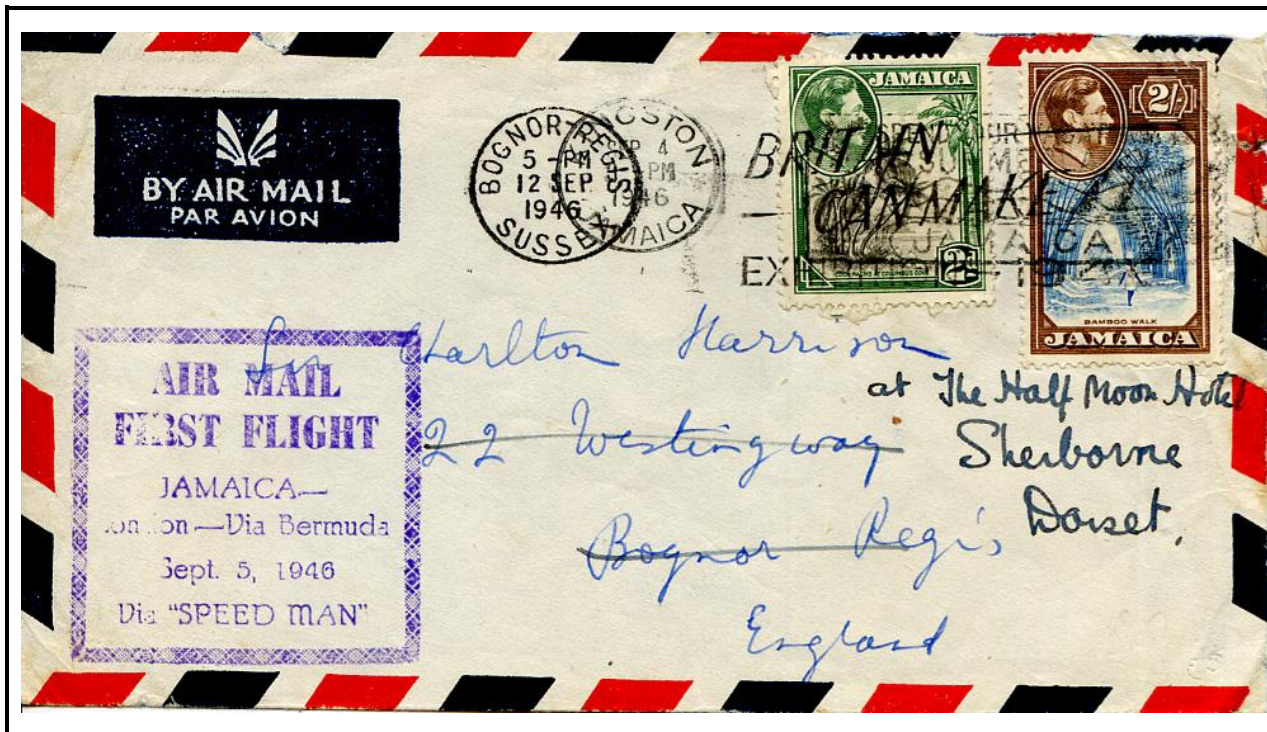


Rated 2s5d = 3d Registration plus 2s2d. This airmail rate applied 16 Oct 1939 to 15 Jun 1947.

United Kingdom British South American Airways

First Flight Jamaica (5 Sept 1946) via Bermuda

BSAA was formed in 1945 and initially flew converted Lancaster and York bombers.
On 5 Sept 1946 BSAA started to fly from Jamaica to London via Bermuda and the Azores.



32 lbs 11oz
of mail despatched
to London
and 24 oz
to Bermuda.

2s2d airmail rate
applied 16 Oct 1939 to
15 Jun 1947.

First Flight UK (5 Sept 1946) via Bermuda to Jamaica



From London on 4 Sep 1946,
carried by BSAA Star Leader
which crashed off the Gambia on 7 Sep.
Item was salvaged, reposted and arrived
at Half Way Tree, Jamaica on 9 Sep
(backstamp)

Only six recorded covers to Jamaica.

BSAA lost 'Star Tiger' in the Atlantic during 1948 under mysterious circumstances,
followed by Star Ariel between Bermuda and Jamaica on 17 Jan 1949 and all other Avro Tudor planes were grounded for investigation.
The loss of the operational aircraft, coupled with the UK 1949 'Airways Corporation Act'
forced BSAA to be absorbed into BOAC on 30 July 1949.

Mainland Europe

Rates to mainland Europe changed every year during the 1930s.

The service was to the UK and then initially by surface but latterly by air – with a circa 50% extra charge.

	Date>	1930	1932	1933	1933	1934	1937	1938	1939	1939	1939	1941	1943	1947
Air/Sea	Dec-10	Jan-01	Mar-01	Dec-18	Oct-22	Jan-15	Jan-01	Apr-01	May-30	Oct-16	May-05	Sep-15	Jun-16	
UK	½oz	0s8d	0s9d	0s11d	0s8½d	0s8d	0s8d	0s6½	0s6½	0s6½d	0s10d	0s8d	0s6d	
EUR	Air + Sea	1s3d	1s4d	1s4d	1s1½d	1s1d	0s11d	0s9½d		0s9½d	0s10d	0s8d		
	Air-Sea-Air									1s0d				

However, in 1939 the 'All Air' service was introduced at the same fee as to the UK.

	Date>	1930	1939	1939	1939	1947
All Air			Apr-01	May-30	Oct-16	Jun-16
				2s0d	2s2d	1s3d
Registration		0s2d	0s3d			

Jamaica (3 Mar 1931) to New York by Air then by Sea via the UK to Liechtenstein at 1s3d Rate



The 1s3d rate applied until 31 Dec 1931.

The 2d registration rate applied until 1 Apr 1939.

Mainland Europe

DELAG, Zeppelins – First Acceptance Hindenburg

Kingston via Lakehurst, USA (12 May 1936) to England at 2s2d Rate

Deutsche Luftschiffahrt Aktien Gesellschaft was founded in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany,
by Count Zeppelin on November 16, 1909.

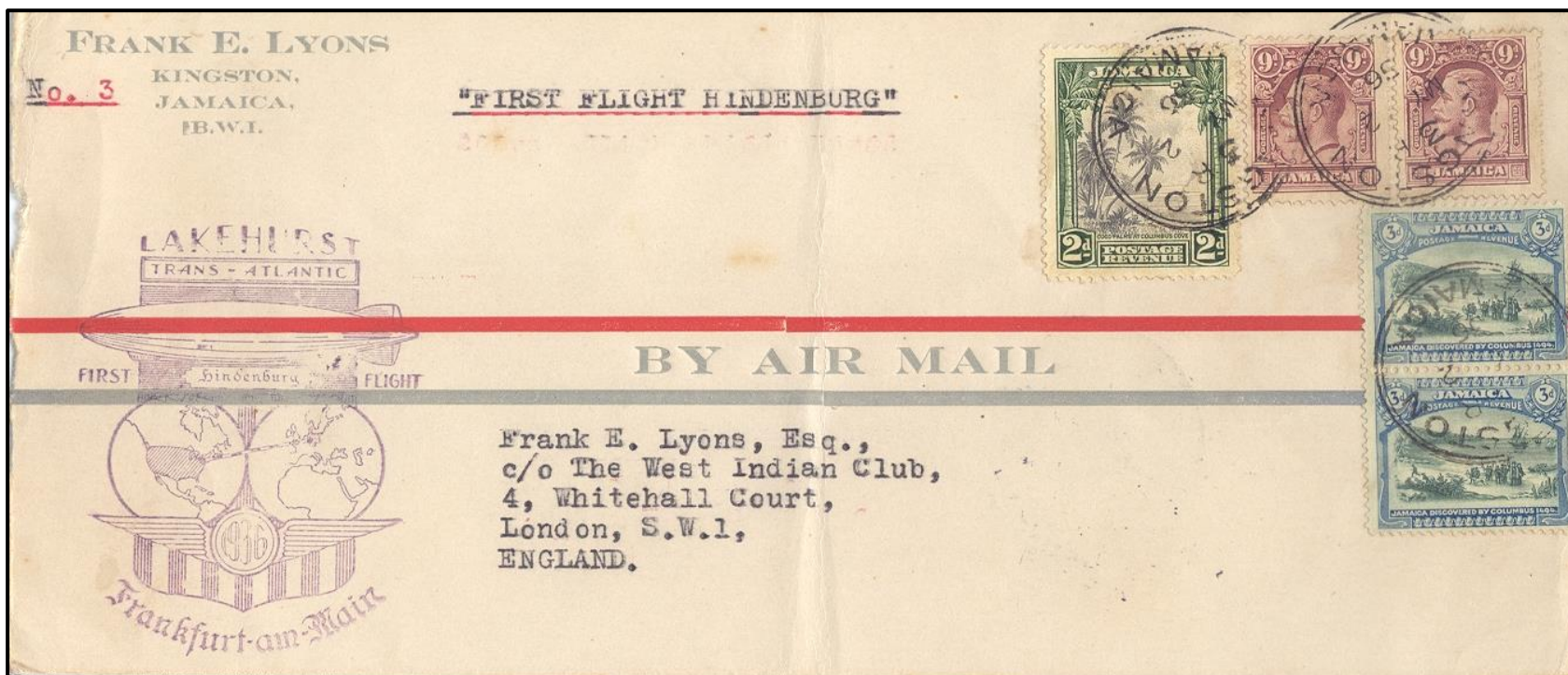
The Hindenburg (LZ129) had its trial flight on 4 March 1936 and flew to South America in April.



Backstamp

The first flight to North America was 6th to 9th May.
This cover was sent from Kingston (2 May 1936) to Lakehurst, USA,
then on the airship (12 May) to Frankfurt am Main, Germany (14 May)
and finally to England.

The airship exploded at Lakehurst in May 1937.



Although frequently offered as “very rare”, circa 30 covers have now been recorded from Jamaica.
Postmaster Fletcher announced on 28 April 1936 that the Zeppelin air fee would be 2s2d to the UK.

This was an additional 1s6d on top of the normal airmail rate.

Despite the fact the cover travelled to the UK via Germany, the rate to Germany was charged at (2s7d = 1s1d + 1s6d), an extra 5d.

Mainland Europe

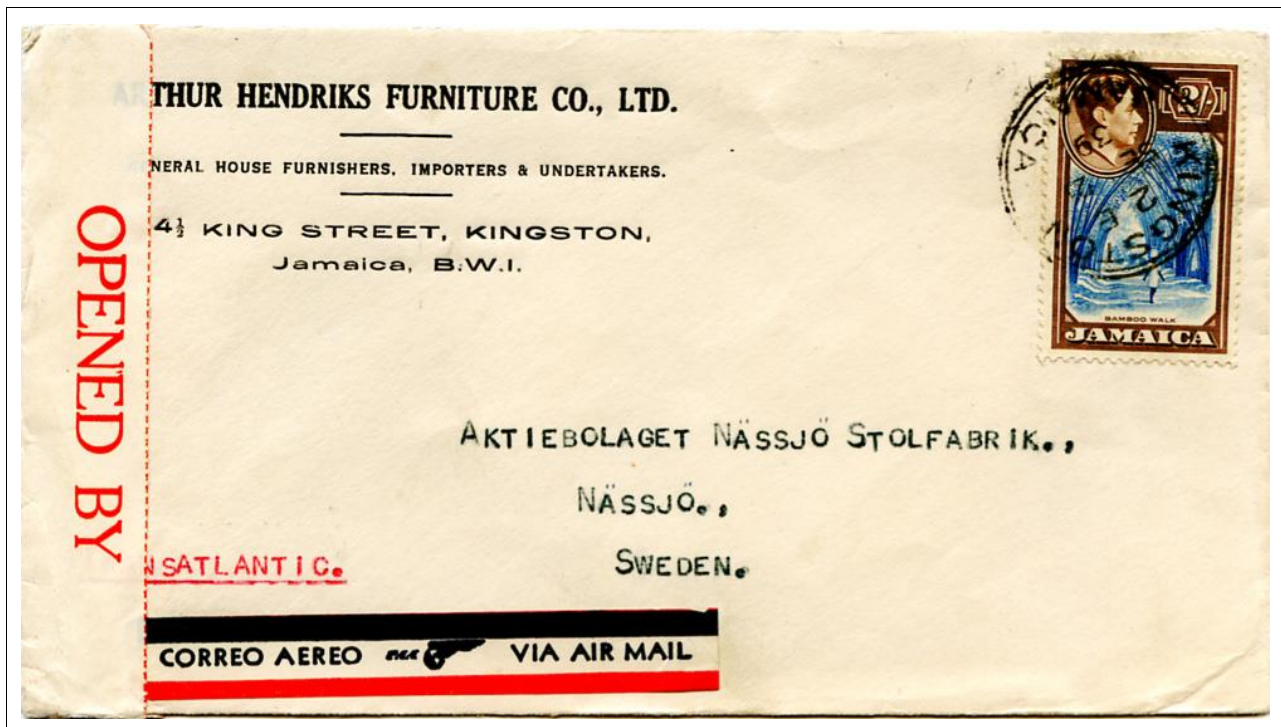
These two covers show the price differential between air/sea and all air.

Jamaica (20 Jun 1939) to New York by Air then Sea to UK and surface to Switzerland at 9½d Rate



Air to New York, by sea to UK, surface to Switzerland.
9½d rate (1 Jan 1938 to 15 Oct 1939) plus 3d registration from 1 Apr 1939.

Jamaica (20 Sep 1939) All Air, via New York to Sweden at 2s Rate



The 2s all air rate only applied from 30 May 1939 to 15 Oct 1939.