

THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER



OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS

Number 175

April - June 2019

CONTENTS

Page 1	1919 and the Daily Mail « Challenge »	Jean-Claude Vasseur FRPSL, AEP
Page 2-10	The Nightmare Of The Hawker Letter Bill	Jean-Claude Vasseur FRPSL, AEP
Page 11-13	Hawker and Grieve Photo Collection	Rob Moore
Page 14	Hawker Photo	
Page 15	Two Anniversary Covers	Bruce Robertson
Page 16	The Challenge – A Bibliography of BNA Topic Articles and A Bibliography of Newfoundland Newsletter Articles	Malcolm Back



© John Walsh

1919 AND THE DAILY MAIL « CHALLENGE »

by Jean-Claude Vasseur, FRPSL, AEP

The Destiny of humanity is in the hands of Communication.

Everything began when the first writings emerged in the Middle East (Somewhere around 3500 years B.C.). This opened the door to the exchange of information (knowledge) other than by words ... at a distance not exceeding a few meters.

Meanwhile, until the middle age, texts remained almost unique (manuscripts) - even if copyists did exist. They were usually kept in libraries for the use of happy few scholars. This did not favour transmission and the sharing of knowledge. The first great change came with Gutenberg and the invention of mobile characters for printing (middle of the 15th century). Meanwhile the spreading of books and writings in general remained limited in the following centuries while a limited number of “couriers” started to carry mail across Europe . The first official organisation opened to the public was by King Louis XI of France in the middle of the 16th century. At the same time, Tours and Taxis (Thum and Thassis or Thum und Taxis), the “Guild of Merchants” and others had their own organisations reserved to the transportation of commercial information.

Even if the mail had developed during the 18th century, it had to wait until the 19th century to see a major change with the “Industrial Revolution” and the train. Speed and volumes across countries allowed lower prices and democratisation of the mail as well as people meeting more easily. Communication was increased by a large factor and knowledge spread even to remote locations.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the last gap was between continents. At a time where writings/newspapers were still dominating communication, a week was still necessary to cross the North Atlantic between the Old and New Worlds. Aviation would be the means to reduce this from one week to one day. While the Daily Mail Challenge (posted in 1913) was just a competition for glory, it was the honour of the Newfoundland Post Office to understand the benefit from attaching the transportation of mail bags to the enterprise.

Doing so, the Post Office changed a competition to a Mark for the Future ... just 100 years ago. This edition of the Newfoundland Study Group Newsletter is dedicated to this event.

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THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

by Jean-Claude Vasseur, FRPSL, AEP

Soon after WWI peace (Nov. 11th 1918), the CHALLENGE, placed before the war by the Daily Mail, was reinitiated under the supervision of the RAeC (Royal Aero Club of Great Britain). Early 1919, several teams arrived in Newfoundland with different levels of preparedness.

Fig 1: Early May 1919, front of the Cochrane Hôtel (author's collection)

At left, in front of the Cochrane hotel, the contenders of the Challenge, or their representatives: Left to right, front row : Mr Pritchard, Major Morgan (Martinsyde); Harry Hawker (Sopwith pilot); Major Freddy Raynham (Martinsyde pilot); Captain Fenn (Head of Sopwith).

Left to right, back row: A.J. Peters (Boulton and Paul Alliance "Seabird" aircraft); Cdr K. Mackenzie-Grieve (Sopwith); Mr G.E. Platford



First arrived, the Sopwith team (Harry Hawker, pilot) was approached by J. Alex. Robinson (the P.M.G.) to carry an "official" mail of 10 letters. An agreement was concluded including the transportation of an additional 100 covers.

For this purpose, Robinson made overprinted 200 stamps of the 3¢ "Caribou" Issue - the appropriate rate to Great Britain by surface. Of this quantity, only 182 survived with the signature of the P.M.G. on the gum side.

The mail was quickly closed April 12th, the Post expecting a take-off "any time" even if meteorological conditions for such a take-off were not present before the middle of May.

In his authoritative book, Cyril H. C. Harmer summarizes the Hawker mail in a "check list" as:

- 80(?) covers with Hawker stamps
- 1 package photos (? With Hawker stamp)
- 6 (?) covers with non-overprinted 3¢ Caribou stamps
- 1 Letter Bill

These question marks were puzzling, while the overall count of 86 covers is confirmed by the receipt given by the Admiralty to the Captain of the 'Lake Charlottesville' in Falmouth, stating : "Received from the Captain USS Lake Charlotte(s)ville one open bag containing seventy six stamped letters, ten unstamped letters, one letter bill addressed to Postmaster London, one parcel, two loose stamps (ordinary Newfoundland stamps, not special air-post stamps). This bag has been sealed..."



Fig. 2: Letter Bill

(Courtesy of the BPMA www.postalheritage.org.uk)

THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

-continued

Note: For better understanding, attached at the end of this article is a full listing of the covers as known by the author, classified by date of cancellation in the St John's Post Office. Overall there are 45 flown covers - presumed to have been in the mail bag. It is noticeable that, unless necessary to close covers by a sticker, no receiver stamp was struck on arrival at the Foreign Section in London. As shown in the listing, the reverse of the covers is not always known. Meanwhile, when the reverse is known, only 3 covers (# 14, 201 and 202) out of 20 do not carry a cancelled sticker.

I. NOTABLE COVERS

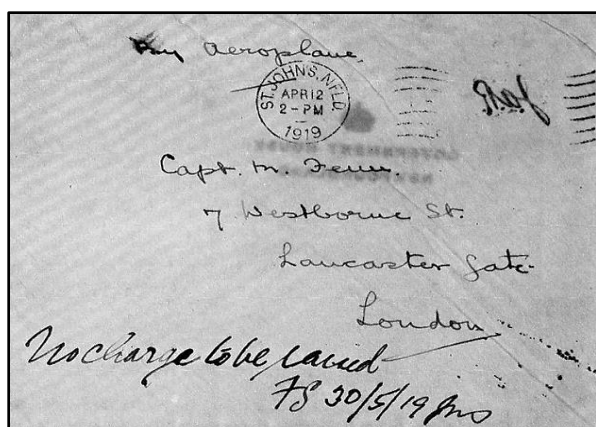


Fig. 3 : Letter from/to Cpt. H. Fenn, Head of Sopwith team, with lost stamp leaving the signature of Postmaster General as an offset together with cancellation APR 12 / 2 - PM. At bottom, note written by the clerk in the Foreign Section : "no charge to be carried F.S. 30/5/19 jns". Only known (Harmer)

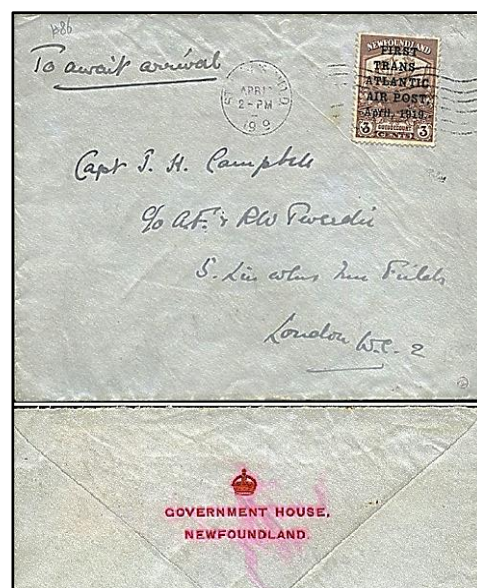


Fig. 4: "GOVERNMENT HOUSE NEWFOUNDLAND" envelope to London cancelled APR 12 / 2 - PM. Some moisture on reverse but no sticker or handstamp. (author's collection)

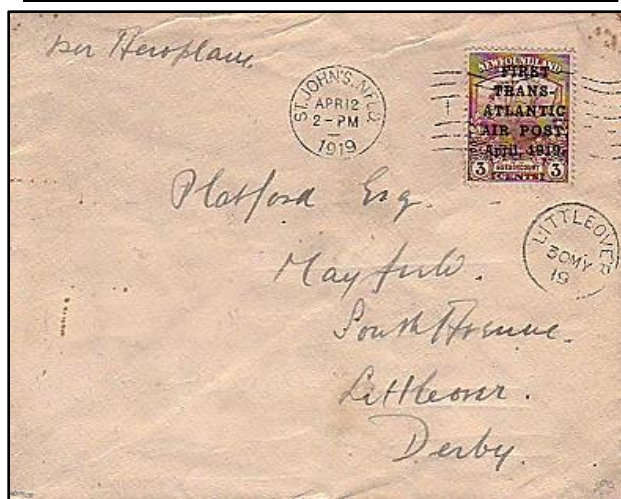


Fig. 5: Cover to Littleover (receiver on front) with sticker, Foreign Section hand stamp "F.S. 61" dated MAY 30 on sticker and signature "jns". (author's collection)



Fig. 6: Cover to England cancelled APR 15 / 3 PM, with signatures of Hawker, Mackenzie-Grieve, Alcock and Brown (the later obviously after the flight). Water stained. Also receiving (left) a mysterious "JUL 19" as the other cover with same cancellation. Reverse unknown (Harmer)

**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

-continued

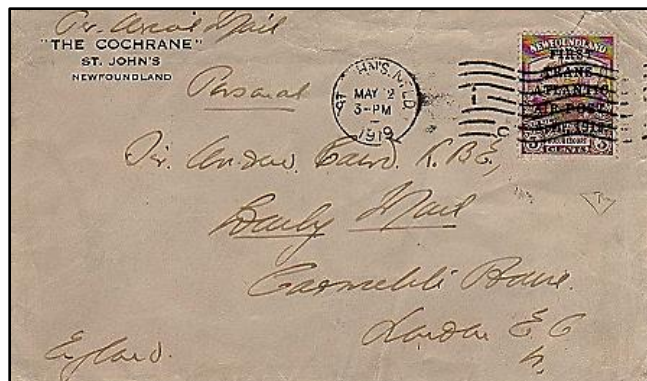


Fig 7: Cover sent to Sir Andrew Caird KBE, GM of the Daily Mail, cancelled MAY 2 / 3 PM.

Cover sent by Rex Pierson designer of the Vickers-Vimy. No back stamp.
(author's collection)



Fig 8 : Cover to London, franked ordinary stamp with companion GB 1½d (?) cancelled by oval of bar, oval blue date stamp MAY 17 1919 from the "P. M. GENERAL'S OFFICE" as on the Letter Bill. Sticker, Foreign Section "F.S. 61" dated MAY 30 and "jns" signature on reverse.
(author's collection)



Fig 9 & 10 : At left, ceremony of remittance of the mail bag to the Sopwith team : 2nd at left (behind) Cpt Partridge, designated starter of the Challenge in Newfoundland; 4th at left Sir Charles Harris Governor of Newfoundland; 4th at right J. Alex. Robinson P.M.G. At right Sir Charles Harris showing a "Hawker" cover with Robinson at right. (author's collection)

II. FIRST CONCLUSION

The mail bag included covers with FOUR DIFFERENT DATES OF CANCELLATION. Also, assuming that 78 covers was the initial count on the Letter Bill, at least 2 covers were added, presumably on April 15th, 3 covers were cancelled on May 2nd and 6 ordinary covers on May 17th (Harmer). This makes a total of 89 covers!

Another question arises: When was the mail bag remitted to the pilot? The date is important as there must be a correlation with the Letter Bill markings. The only information we know is that it was the object of a ceremony as shown at left.

THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER **OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

- continued

"Because of the absence of mention of the addition of the May 2nd covers, I believe that this ceremony took place shortly after April 15th - the Post Office had no control or indication of the date of the expected take-off -, shortly after the addition of two covers (April 15th) on the Letter Bill – from 78 to 80.

Meanwhile this does not solve the discrepancy between the known 86 covers and the potential 89 covers shown above."

III. THE MAIL BAG SALVAGE BY CAPTAIN WILVERS

Apart from the only known cover franked with ordinary stamps (Fig. 8), the Admiralty receipt only mentions two loose (ordinary) stamps. Even if it is obvious that the Captain of the 'Lake Charlottesville' had made some deduction in the mail bag, it is unlikely that he had picked up some ordinary stamps.

Captain Wilvers had declared that he had opened the mail bag, found some loose stamps that he has stuck back on cover - mostly out of place -. He also, had stuck one stamp on the Letter Bill. The Letter Bill was never franked (!) and this stamp shows traces of cancellation without any trace on the Letter itself.

Another curiosity, never mentioned, the Letter Bill shows only horizontal traces of folding. Obviously it has been folded in two, leaving an offset of the blue handstamp at bottom, and folded horizontally a second time. Also, at top left, there are traces of folding and attachment with a wax seal. This procedure is also seen on the Letter Bill of the Alcock flight. Conclusion; the Letter Bill was attached to another document and possibly inside a large O.H.M.S. cover not mentioned. This is confirmed by the receipt of the Admiralty stating "... **one letter bill addressed to the Postmaster London ...**"

IV. SECOND CONCLUSION

Assuming that all the key covers - cancelled April 15th, May 2nd and May 17th - are known, I do believe that the 6 covers added on May 17th were the 3 covers cancelled May 2nd and 3 covers cancelled May 17th of which one only has survived with two loose stamps.

If so, there were 83 covers franked with the overprinted stamp in the mail bag ... and a total of 86 covers!

V. THE FOREIGN SECTION MARKING

Mentioned but not addressed by Harmer, despite a small mailing, the sticker 'FOUND OPEN ...', found on the reverse of most covers, was struck with two different Foreign Section handstamps:



Fig. 11 : Foreign Section handstamps F.S. 61 and F.S. 23 on the Hawker mail

THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

- continued

Why had the mail had gone through the Foreign Section of the G. P. O. London in St Martin le Grand ? Usually the mail arriving in London by standard mail circuit goes straight away to distribution. Here - as it will be for the Martinsyde mail (carried by Raynham) or the Vickers-Vimy (carried by Alcock) - the mail is remitted to the Post Office by a “civil” organization. As in the old times with ship captains carrying the mail, it still had to go to the Foreign Section.

Note: Not the case of the Handley-Page mail which was carried from New-York through a standard mail circuit.

Now, WHY TWO HAND STAMPS? The following are assumptions by the author’s and may be discussed. Below two (of three known by the author) covers struck with the F.S. 23 hand stamps:



Fig. 12 : At left, cover from/to J. Alex. Robinson c/o Cpt Woods Mason (RaeC). At right, cover to the EDITOR of the Daily Mail London at origin of the “Challenge”. Both covers closed by the sticker cancelled F.S.23. (author’s collection)

The third cover known is another cover by the P.M.G. Robinson. These three covers are of some importance and it looks not unusual that they had received a special treatment. They have also another common characteristic: the three covers have been vertically folded ... which is unusual in the mail; looking like, as if they have been placed IN ANOTHER LARGE ENVELOPE.

The Letter Bill is another document which received the F.S. 23 hand stamp (see above) ... and we have said that it was obviously placed in a large envelope.

We have now the beginning of an hypothesis : there was, inside the mail, a large envelope, in which the Letter Bill was sealed and containing a batch of “important” covers. Something like the “Official Mail” announced by the P.M.G. Robinson when discussing with Captain Fenn.

Note: While the whole mail has been treated by the same clerk signing “jns” everywhere (Letter Bill and covers), the exact reason of the use of two different hand stamps is not known. May be the large envelope, with its contents, was directed to the London P.M.G. Illingworth and later stamped and signed by clerk “jns”.

**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

- continued

VI. SOMETHING MORE ?

To add to the mystery, I have in my collection a letter (fig 13). Pencil written, it reads as follows :

“St John’s May 11th / 1919

Dear Henry,

Just a few lines hoping you are quite well. Our machine had a successful trial flight on Monday and is starting the flight today.

Our pilot is carrying (sic) two letters for me, with a special aerial stamp issued by the Government, so though you would like one. We have been very busy this last few days.

Expect to be home in two or three weeks time.

Love to all, your affec (sic)bro. Fred”

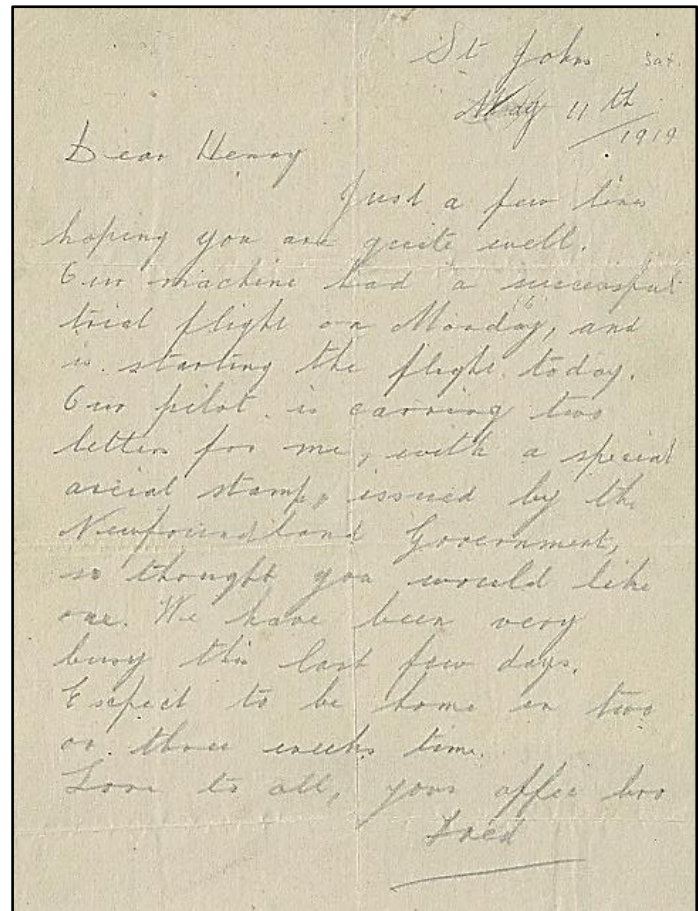


Fig 13 : Letter signed ‘Fred’ May 11th 2019. (author’s collection)

Strangely, when bought it was attributed to J. P. Rayhnam, which it cannot be. The “special aerial stamp issued by the government” cannot be anything else other than the Hawker stamp.

The letter, obviously written by a Sopwith technician, describes two covers franked with the overprinted stamp which “... our pilot is carrying (sic) ... for me”. They were written (and cancelled) between the three May 2nd and the three (?) May 17th covers. Did these covers enter the mail (and when) ... or were they carried by Harry Hawker? If carried by Hawker, the latter may have carried more!!!

Still the question remains: How many “Hawker” covers are there ?

**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

- continued

VII. OTHER INTERESTING PICTURES

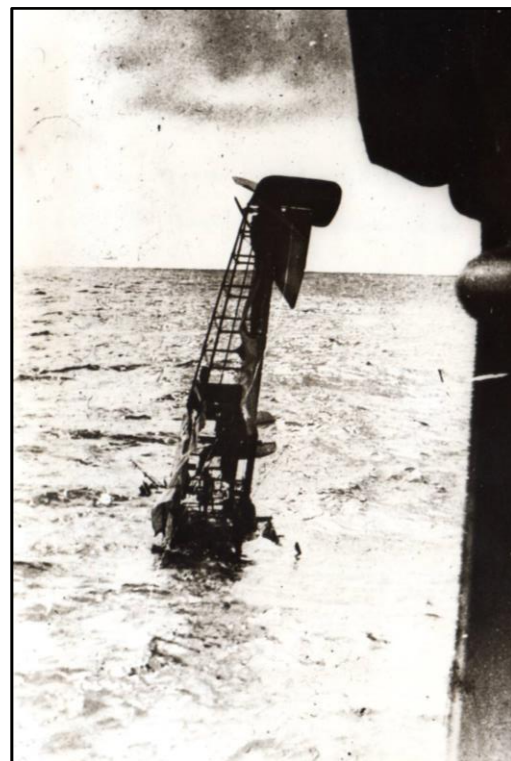


Top left : the "Atlantic" at Mount Pearl Field.

Top right : The "Atlantic" as discovered by Cpt Wilvers and the USS Lake Charlottesville (author's collection.)

Bottom left : The "Atlantic" on the deck of the USS Lake Charlottesville approaching Falmouth (author's collection.)

Bottom right : the wreck of the "Atlantic" lifted to the top floor of Selfridge's Department Store, London.



**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

- continued

LISTING OF THE KNOWN COVERS OF THE HAWKER FLIGHT

Ref	Addressee	Rev	Remarks
HAWKER MAIL with overprinted stamps cancelled April 12th 1919			
1	Halford Esq. Littleover DERby	Y	Receiver May 30 in Littleover. Sticker & F.S. 61
2	The Right Hon The Lord Morris, Durant's Hotel	Y	"per aerial mail". Sticker & F.S. 61
3	Cpt M H Fenn Lancaster Gate Ldn	Y	Faded cancellation / stamp repositioned. Sticker & F.S. 61
4	a.R. Fenn Esq Lancaster Gate, Ldn	Y	"Per aeroplane". GHN offset. '2' left to stmp. Sticker & F.S. 61
5	Mrs Mackenzie-Grieve Droxford Hants	Y	Signed M. Grieve. Stamp repositioned. Sticker & F.S. 61
6	Cptain Mackenzie-Grieve Droxford Hants	Y	"per aeroplane". Slightly water stained. Sticker & F.S. 61
7	Cptain Mackenzie-Grieve Droxford Hants	Y	GHN offset on front at top. . Sticker & F.S. 61
8	Mrs J. Alex. Robinson c/o Mrs Woods Mason	Y	Cc GPO . Stamp repositioned. Sticker & F.S. 23
9	Dr Robinson c/o Cpt Woods Mason	Y	Cc GPO. Stamp repositioned. Sticker & F.S. 23
10	John Malh, Sopwith Aviation Co. Ltd ...Sussex	Y	Stamp slightly slanted. Sticker & F.S. 61
11	Claude Johnson Esq. c/o Rolls Royce, Ldn	Y	Stamp slanted. Sticker & F.S. 61 . Vertically folded
12	Claude Johnson Esq. c/o Rolls Royce, Ldn	Y	"Per Aeroplane frm Newfoundland". Sticker & F.S. 61
13	Mrs Chas Clements Savoy Const. Ldn	Y	Sticker & F.S. 61
14	Capt. J. H. Campbell c/o Peverdin(?), Ldn	Y	"to await arrival. GHN envelop. No sticker
15	THE EDITOR THE DAILY MAIL	Y	"BY AEROPLANE. Sticker & F.S. 23
16	Mrs Woods Mason c/o Wakefesto House Ldn	Y	Sticker & F.S. 61
17	The Right Hon. Viscount Northcliff Daily Mail	Y	Sticker & F.S. ?? (likely 23)
18	Lady M(?) Horraith Winchester Surrey	N	GHN offset on front
19	Mrs Woods Mason London W12	N	"per aeroplane"
20	D. Woods Mason Hay market Ldn	N	"per aeroplane" "to be called for". GHN offset on reverse
21	Cpt M Fenn Lancaster Gate Ldn	N	GHN offset on front. Stamp dropped / "JAR" offset, etc...
22	Cpt M Fenn Lancaster Gate Ldn	N	'per aeroplane'. Stamp repositioned. Water stained at bottom
23	Lors Stamfordham Buckingham Palace	N	"For His Majesty the King". Stamp replaced. GHN envelop
24	Martin Esq. c/o Martinsyde Aviat. Woking	N	Stamp in place ?
25	John Malh, Sopwith Aviation Company	N	Stamp hinged to cover
26	Mrs Chas Bowring, Liverpool resent Ldn	N	"Per Aeroplane Post Sopwith aeroplane". Resent. Ldn w/ hs
27	Sir Edgar Bowring Hign Com. Nfld in Ldn	N	"PER AEROPLANE POST. Stamp repositioned
28	Miss Martin West Malvan Worchestershire	N	3c. added pen cancelled. Sticker not mentioned
29	Idem	N	Without added 3c.
30	Dr J. B. Johnson c/o Mrs Woods Mason	N	"per aeroplane".
31	W. Goodwin Wakefield House, Ldn	N	"per Aeroplane"
32	Mr Q. Dixon, Sopwith Aviation Co Ltd	N	"This envelop was carried by H. Hawker ..."
33	Claude Johnson Esq. c/o Rolls Royce, Ldn	N	

**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE HAWKER LETTER BILL

- conclusion

34	Mrs Franck Fisher	N	"per Aeroplane" (piece)
35	Mrs X Engholm, Brickwood, Ldn	N	Cc "The Cochrane Hotel".
36	Rev Hansard Brittain, Ldn W. C.	N	"open with care"
37	Commander A McDermott RN, Ldn	N	"to be kept till called for or ..."
38	WR Graham, Ldn	N	Per Aeroplane
39	W.M. Home Esq Whitby Gareth Office Whitby	N	By Sopwith machine plane by Hawker & Grieve May 1919
HAWKER MAIL with overprinted stamps cancelled April 15th 1919			
101	Mrs Stevens Bridge Barn ... Surrey	N	Signed Hawker, Grieve, Alcock Brown. Water stained
102	Mrs M. S. Sullivan, Berfeldy	N	" By Sopwith Aeroplane Newfoundland ... etc ...
HAWKER MAIL with overprinted stamps cancelled May 2nd 1919			
201	Sir Andrew Caird KBE Daily Mail Ldn	Y	"Per Aerial Mail". CC "The Cochrane Hotel".
202	Sir G. Fish Esq CBE Daily Mail Ldn	Y	As above. Same sender
203	Mrs E Mason 61 Baxter Gate Whitby	N	"Per Air Mail"
Hawker Mail franked with ordinary stamps cancelled May 17th 1919			
301	Miss Hall Bayswater, Ldn	Y	3c "Caribou" + 1½d UK cancelled by bars. Sticker & F.S. 61
HAWKER MAIL with overprinted stamps cancelled May 2nd 1919			
	Son Excellence Mr Paul Cambon Ambassadeur	Y	"Caribou" Issue stamps added. NOT FLOWN
	To Editor Daily Express, Ldn	N	Martinsyde mail
	Uncancelled below Martinsyde stamp	N	On piece.

Note : 'GHN' Government House Newfoundland with emblems on reverse

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**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

Hawker and Grieve Photo Collection

by Rob Moore

Here are some very interesting photos that I received from Dr. Michael Deal, local member of the St. John's Philatelic Society. I wish to share them with our Newfoundland Study Group. This is very timely for the special newsletter on the First Transatlantic Air Mail attempts in 1919. Hawker & Grieve owe their lives to some early day lifesaving equipment.

These photos give a rare glimpse into their lifeboat which was incorporated into the fuselage in the Sopwith plane and probably the very first survival suits that they wore. This equipment was indeed used as described in Hawker & Grieve's book, "Our Atlantic Attempt". In this book, they describe that after their plane crashed into the ocean, 10 hours after taking off from Mount Pearl, they deployed their lifeboat. Even though the plane was sinking fast and large waves splashed completely over them, they wrote, "we had no difficulty in detaching the boat and our life suits worked splendidly and kept us quite dry".

These photos give insight into the lifesaving equipment that Hawker & Grieve used in their flight attempt. The photo collections were donated to the Memorial University Archival Centre of Newfoundland Studies (MUN CNS) the original grouping from the Frost Collection which originated from the Glendenning Family whose farm land in Mount Pearl is where the Hawker & Grieve flight commenced. Other photos came from newly donated photographs from the Margaret Carter collection. She was a socialite of St. John's who had the means to travel by motor car in 1919 to the various flight teams to socialize and take photos. Carter even packed sandwiches for the Alcock & Brown team to take on their flight and once they arrived in Ireland, they autographed the large silk napkin that the sandwiches were wrapped in and returned it to Ms. Carter by mail. This autographed napkin was also donated with the photos to the MUN, CNS which will soon be available to be viewed online through MUN Archives website.

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Sopwith Camel and the hanger in the background

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***THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS***

Number 175

April - June 2019

Hawker and Grieve Photo Collection

- continued



Hawker and Grieve Testing lifeboat in Bowring Park
(Carter Collection)



The lifeboat (Frost Collection)



Testing rubber life suits in Bowring Park
(Carter Collection)



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***THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS***

Number 175

April - June 2019

Hawker and Grieve Photo Collection

- conclusion



Loading the lifeboat into the Sopwith (Frost Collection)



Sopwith Camel in the hanger and the hanger interior
(Frost Collection)

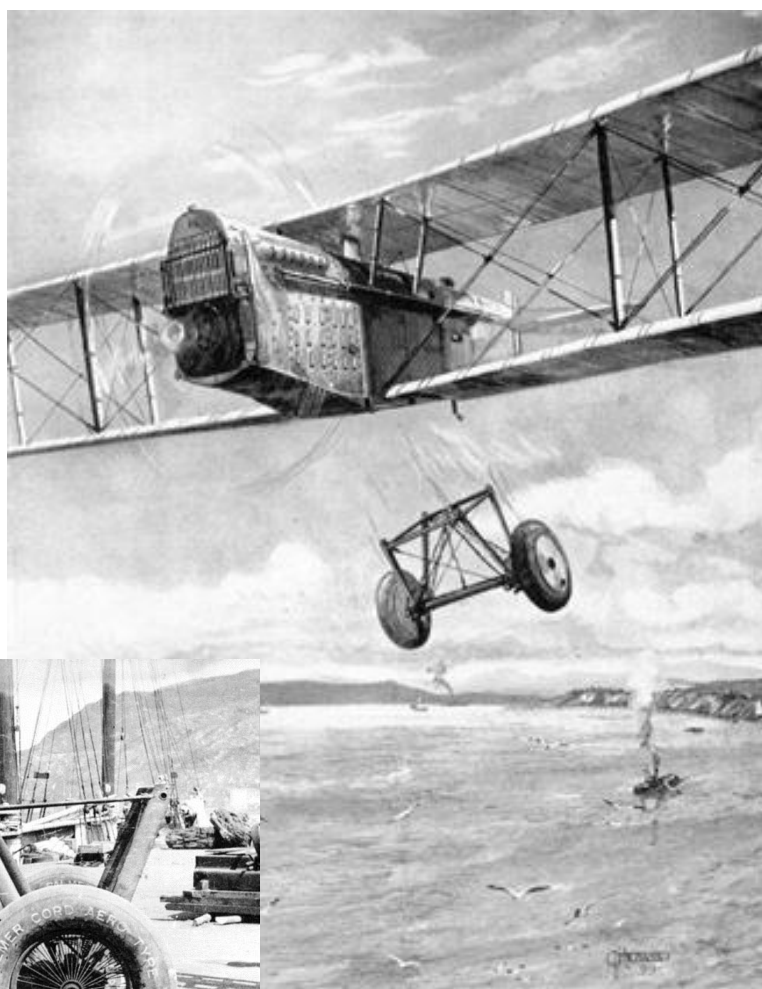
All images © The MUN Center of Newfoundland Studies

Hawker Photo

Source: Harry Hawker, One of Aviation's Greatest Names, L.K. Blackmore
(ISBN 10: 0949135275 ISBN 13: 9780949135278)

<https://www.harryhawker.com.au/Trans-Atlantic-Attempt-1919.html>

When they crossed the coast line Harry pulled the under-carriage trigger which released the 450lb undercarriage and the Atlantic immediately increased its speed another 7mph.



Bottom left: The undercarriage of the "Atlantic" - after having been released by the crew when passing the coast line - recovered by a St John's fisherman.

from "HAWKER a biography of Harry Hawker" (L.K. Blackmore, Airlife Publishing, England)
(ISBN-10: 9781853104374 ISBN-13: 978-1853104374 ASIN: 185310437X)

THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS

Number 175

April - June 2019

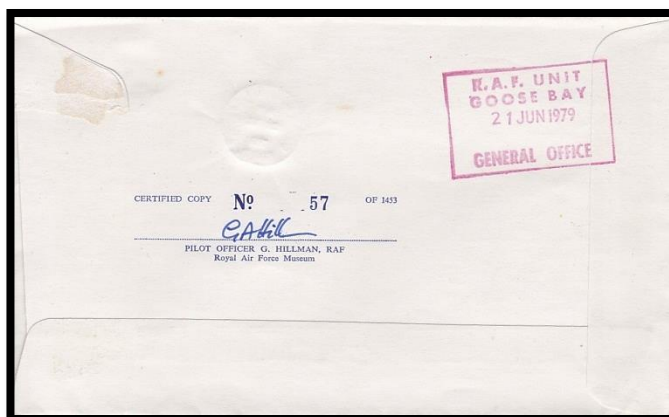
TWO ANNIVERSARY COVERS

by Bruce Robertson

Bruce Robertson writes from England "although I have not been able to contribute to this special issue, I can offer two 'anniversary, covers from my collection".

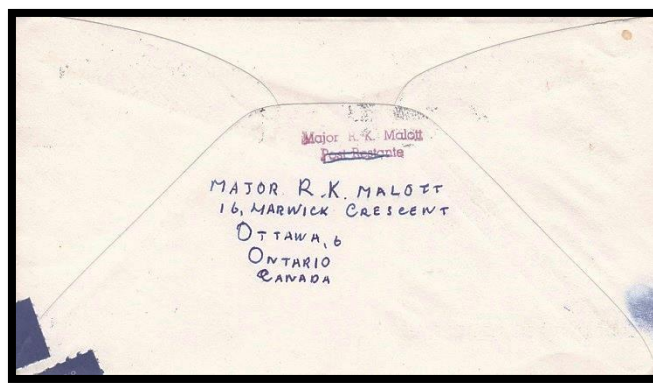
60th Anniversary Cover

The Royal Airforce 60th Anniversary cover with GB Royal Mail and Canada stamps + British Forces Postal Service 1643 of 14 June 1979 and Station 'A' RAF Goose Bay. Enterprisingly, the RAF found from within their servicemen, a Sqd. Ldr. A.J.H. Alcock and a Flt. Lt. W.N. Brown to recreate the first Non-stop Crossing of the Atlantic of 1919.



50th Anniversary Cover

The First Day Cover Rose-Craft Commemorative cover, with the GB Royal Mail 5d commemorative stamp and Canadian 15c commemorative stamp with the St. John's 1st Flight slogan cancel of 14 June 1969 + a partial green 'Clifden' h/stamp dated 16 Jun 1969



**THE NEWFOUNDLAND NEWSLETTER
OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND STUDY GROUP OF BNAPS**

Number 175

April - June 2019

The Challenge – A Bibliography of BNA Topic Articles

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