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## Part Two: Approaching the Dark Days of War... *The Fleets are in at Poole'*

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In the aftermath of the Munich crisis of 1938, decisions were made by the [Air Ministry](#) with [Imperial Airways Limited](#), that in the advent of war, it would be necessary to establish an airport for Flying Boats away from [Southampton Water](#). It was regarded that this would be a target for enemy attacks by the Luftwaffe - with many important sites located there. Various options were considered, and discounted due to rail connections with the length of time in travelling to London. With its expansive natural harbour, its channels, backwaters and islands, [Poole](#) was an unsurprising and ideal selection, for it was also substantially quieter than a busy deepwater port, with its installations, manufacturing & heavy industries. There were also the essential mainline rail links to London, and a variety of routes running northwards and to the west.

The Admiralty surveyed [Poole Harbour](#) in association with IAL's Station Superintendent Clive Adams, and John Lee... Permutations of up to 7 runways were decided: Assorted Flying Boats trialled & several sets of moorings were laid out. In the event of war 2 large Motoryachts would be acquired and suffice as [Control vessels](#), one to lie by [Brownsea Road](#), the part of the main channel where the principal runway would be set out from [North Haven Point](#) parallel to [Brownsea](#). the other to moor beside [Poole Quay](#) - until emergency powers would allow for the requisitioning of suitable buildings ! These initially were earmarked to be properties clustered at the bottom end of Poole High Street and along the quayside.

On the 12th. June 1939, the BOAC Bill was introduced in the House of Commons and received ascent on 4th. August. The next step was the establishment of [BOAC](#) under the BOAC Act on 26th. Nov. with Sir John Reith as its Chairman. This was determined to pave the way for BOAC to subsume IAL and to take over its operations for the [1st. April 1940](#). For the time being all those serving with IAL were proud to uphold the traditions developed since its inception in 1923.

At midnight on 1st. Sept., the UK east of Poole was closed to civil aviation, and IAL services from Croydon curtailed... The next day mail-up services were also suspended. IAL head staff made their final preparations for transfer to Bristol. Under emergency orders issued by the Air Ministry, Seaplanes had to be routed to the UK *via* Poole or [Pembroke Dock](#). Flights by privately-owned aircraft were stopped. Also, with the declaration of war on the 3rd. IAL's Flying Boats were directed to Poole as staff had been relocated from [Hythe](#) just 2 days earlier. [Capt. Griffith Powell](#) supervised this move, which left Hythe the base for maintenance & repair as Poole Harbour did not have a suitable facility with hangar space.

This change in circumstances occurred during the sequence of [Transatlantic Crossings](#) initiated by [G-ADHM Caledonia](#) and [Capt. Wilcockson](#) (Foynes to Botwood) 6th. July 1937 and then by [G-ADH Cambria](#) with Capt. Powell on the 29th. The vast distance of such an Atlantic survey crossing involved modification of these aircraft with long range fuel tanks, for the [Empire C-Class](#) had been designed specifically for routes to Europe, Africa and the East with legs of 500 miles. The challenge included experiments in assisted flight involving the composite pair [G-ADHK Maia](#) & [G-ADHJ Mercury](#), and those of [\\*Sir Alan Cobham](#) through in-flight refuelling *via* his [FRL Harrow Tankers](#) for extending the range of FBs. Despite successes, it was increasingly apparent IAL needed FBs which could rival the new Boeing Clippers of Pan Am, which would have capacity & engine power sufficient enough for large pay-loads: This was expected to be the [G-Class](#).



Formed by [\\*Alan Cobham](#) in 1934, [FRL](#) had been based at Ford in West Sussex from 1936, but with the interruption of war and the cessation of such methods - experimentation moved to Malvern for the duration, returning to Ford in 1946, before moving to [Tarrant Rushton](#) with refuelling techniques tested over Poole Harbour but not including Flying Boats ! The surrounding area around here was familiar to him - as a Cobham family home for many years was in Bournemouth at '[Falaise](#)', No. 12 Westcliff Drive (today converted to flats) ...Cobham PLC has its Headquarters at nearby Wimborne, + Sir Alan's daughter-in-law is [Lady Nadine Cobham](#) (widow of Sir Michael Cobham) - a Patron of our Charity, PFBC.

In advance of the development of the G-Class, IAL had opted for the upgrading of the Empire C-Class [S.23](#) to the [S.30](#), which provided four longer-distance FBs: *G-AFCU Cabot*, *G-AFCV Caribou*, *G-AFCW Connemara* & *G-AFCX Clyde*, ready for March/July, that were earmarked for Transatlantic duties. [*Connemara* was soon burnt-out during refuelling.] In this class there was also *G-AFCT Champion* and *G-AFKZ Cathay*, joined by *G-AFCZ Clare* when rebuilt & renamed.

*G-AFCU Cabot* and *G-AFCV Caribou* commenced weekly Transatlantic crossings from Southampton in August 1939. *Caribou* with [Capt. J.C Kelly Rogers](#) inaugurated Southampton-Foynes-Botwood-Montreal-NY services on 5th. August. Flying over Dublin to alight at Foynes, Capt. Kelly Rogers was greeted by Taoiseach Eamon de Valera & huge crowds, rightly proud of a popular national hero, with a significant boost for Imperial Airways and for Anglo-Irish relationships.



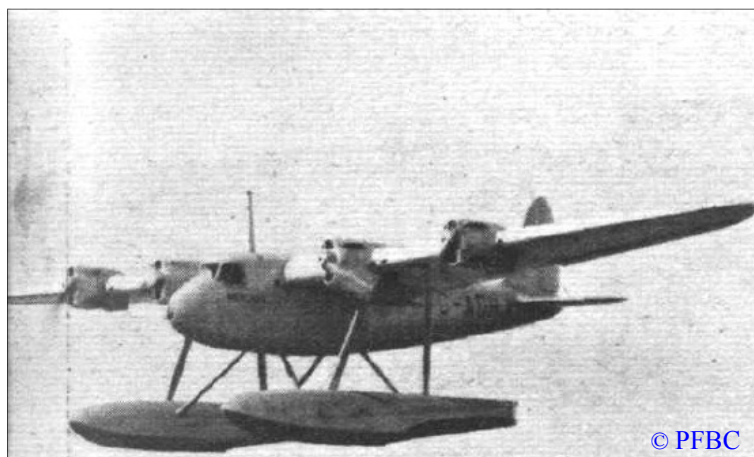
Picture: The Short S30 *G-AFCU Cabot* on Transatlantic Flights Summer of 1939, arriving at Poole on 30th. September 1939  
To RAF control as *V3137* in October 1939 destroyed at Bodø - Norway in May 1940.

Courtesy of Short Bros

A total of 16 crossings using a Harrow Tanker to refuel at [Foynes](#) & above [Botwood](#) (from Hatties Camp), both ways, were successfully completed, although on one occasion the strong tail west-wind made in-flight refuelling unnecessary. After take off and refuelling there would be a *rendez-vous* with a Harrow to 'over-load' fuel by transfer *via* a loop hose, with the whole process taking 8 minutes each time, and just 5 minutes for the in-flight hook up - at a rate of 100gal/min. By using in-flight refuelling IAL's pair could only carry mail but not passengers like Pan Am, due to safety regulations !

The final crossing was made after the outbreak of war and so *G-AFCU Cabot* was directed to IAL's [new home at Poole](#) arriving on 30th. September. On its outward journey Foynes to Botwood *Cabot* had set the new record time of 13 hours.

Picture: Short S20 *G-ADHJ Mercury* in flight approaching an alighting area.  
To RNLA 320 Squadron in Oct 1940 & scrapped at Rochester, August 1941.  
(Unknown Original Source)



© PFBC

[Captain DCT 'Don' Bennett](#) brought *Cabot* to IAL Poole: He was to feature prominently here - until rejoining the RAF ! On the flight he was accompanied by [Fred Mitchell](#) as the RO, who sadly later lost his life in a training incident at Poole. They both shortly linked up again in *Mercury* over s.w. Eire to carry out covert surveillance for possible U-boat activity. Both *Cabot* and *Caribou* were to languish on the moorings in the Harbour - next impressed as *RAF 3137* and *RAF 3138*. After installation of radar facilities in March at Helensburgh, *Caribou* & *Cabot* were involved in action against the Nazi invasion of Norway, but were lost due to enemy aircraft at Bodø on 5/6th. May 1940. However the crews were rescued !

The expanses of Poole Harbour had been well-apportioned by the Royal Navy, with attention to defensive arrangements with those areas beyond the main channels as runways, the trotways & moorings, essentially the shallows now protected. Measures included structures called '[spiders](#)' secured into the harbour bed, which protruded just above the water surface, to deter the threat of paratrooper landings. Also [block ships](#) were prepared and held in readiness for sealing the Harbour, whilst a manoeuvrable pair were installed at the neck of the channel approaching Poole, at a point just off West Quay ! Agreement was reached with interested parties that some areas of the Harbour were designated for fishing and pleasure. These were at the margins involving Parkstone & Lytchett Bays, upper parts of the Wareham Channel, also [Holes Bay](#). [Note: *Holes Bay* had once been locally advocated as a water airport for IAL by Poole's newspaper earlier in 1939.]



With various Flying Boats of Imperial Airway's fleet arriving at Poole - concerns grew regarding numbers on moorings with a threat of a Luftwaffe attack - but this didn't materialise as feared at the time, so some operations were reinstated. This involved weekly flights to [Durban](#) and to [Singapore](#); twice weekly to [Sydney](#); + later weekly to [Kisumu](#) (E.Africa); as well as [Shuttle services to Foynes](#) for with the declaration of war US [Pan Am Clippers](#) could not fly into UK airspace. [G-AEUD Cordelia](#) flew from Poole to Foynes on the 13th. to connect with Pan Am but no one was boarded for the UK ! On 14th. [G-AETY Clio](#) surveyed a new reserve route *via* Djerba - Tunisia to Alexandria in an experimental flight so that on 20th. September this route was trialled from Poole by [G-AFCY Awarua](#), through the Mediterranean in avoiding Italy ! [ This contingency was not needed until 1940, just as *Clio* (AX659), + *Cordelia* (AX660), were impressed by the RAF. ]

Picture: Impressed by the RAF and being prepared as AX660 *Cordelia* + AX659 *Clio* for Coastal Command; fitted with ASV Radar

*Clio* was re-launched on 12th. March 1941 with 119 Squadron; crashed at Loch Indaal

*Cordelia* on 16th. April with 119 Squadron for depth-charge trials, then back to Hythe before restored to British register Dec.1941

(Source Imperial Airways and the RAF)

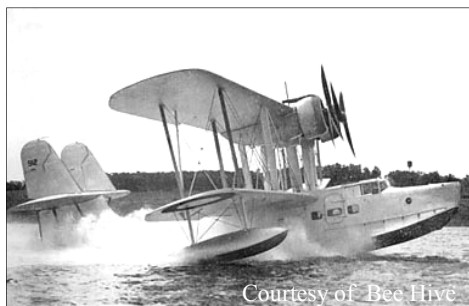


Amongst the control staff brought over to Poole from Hythe was [Harry H.Pusey](#) who had joined IAL locally from school and was trained at the base, where he experienced many of the important events for FB operations during the late 1930s. This included a trial flight on [G-AFCW Connemara](#) along the south coast (- from Kent) when captained by Don Bennett, and sadly witnessed the accident in being refuelled at Hythe, when it was burned-out with the loss of pumpman Vincent. A flashpoint with fuel, and fire, were always potential hazards: The tragedy was also a time for bravery by those present. Harry is an HLM of PFBC - who has been providing a wonderful selection of information so significant for our Archive.

At Poole, Harry was to become a Station Operations Officer before transferring to Lisbon in 1943, and to Foynes (1944). By the time he arrived, a cluster of buildings at the bottom of Poole High Street had been requisitioned for use by IAL... These included the offices of the Pottery along the quayside used by Customs, Medical Officer and Immigration Control - also with a strongroom, stores, waiting room and restaurant for the principal function of handling parcels & passengers.

The lull of the late Autumn of 1939, into the Winter (often referred to as the 'Phoney War' - due to the lack of air raids) was interrupted with the onslaught of January weather in 1940 as a [Great Freeze](#), which almost iced-in the Flying Boats. Any residue of the IAL fleet was now moved to Poole to seek the protection of both the Harbour and its warmer Waters. This included various older types of Flying Boats used as trainers 5 Supermarine Stranraers, and also 5 Saro London IIs. + privately-owned aircraft moved to free up Hangar space at Hythe & Woolston including 2 early Walrus & a Seamew; - also that of the Guinness Family, the Saro A19 Cloud [G-ABHG Flying Amo](#), which again was used for training at Poole.

#### These Older Types of Aircraft used as trainers - Poole, Hythe & Hamble



Supermarine Stranraer K7293 was with BOAC from 9th. June 1940

Returned to RAF 19th. Nov. 1944

Below: Saro A27 London... K5259 with BOAC from 30th. August 1940  
Returned to RAF 7th. February 1941



(Photo. from pre-war era poss. at Cowes)

Below: Saro A19 Cloud [G-ABHG Flying Amo](#) of the Guinness Family brought to Poole with Family Yacht  
Deployed by BOAC as crew trainer, crashed on landing Ibsley May 1941



( Photo. from Unknown Original Source)

With the New Year (4th. January), [G-ADHL Canopus](#) left Poole with VIPs for Centenary Celebrations in New Zealand, collected from the [Haven Hotel](#): Lord & Lady Willingdon transferred to [VH-ABE Coorong](#) at Karachi 5 days later (9th.).

Significantly, a Flying Boat left Poole early on 15th. March 1940 bound for Sydney, and for Auckland on 4th. April, this Empire C-Class initially was launched as *ZK-AMA Aotearoa*, and then loaned to IAL in March '39 as *G-AFCY Awarua*. Though *Aotearoa* was delivered to New Zealand in 1939, *Awarua* now became the first to carry fare-paying passengers. This was not the original *ZK-AMA Awarua*, which had been renamed *ZK-AMA Aotearoa* to have distinction of that name in being so important for the Maori peoples - translated as 'Land of the Long White Cloud' - in meaning New Zealand ! Switching of identification between the two was thereby enacted to recognise the first delivery flight of a C-Class to NZ



Picture: *ZK-AMC Awarua* (formerly *G-AFCY*) in New Zealand - on the moorings near a Clipper in Auckland Harbour, December 1940

*ZK-AMC Awarua* belonged to Tasman Empire Airways (TEAL): It was designated that its 3 Flying Boats be prefixed by 'A', but in the event only *Aotearoa* and *Awarua* were subsequently deployed on the route between Sydney & Auckland, With TEAL established on 26th. April. The third, initially registered as *ZK-AMB Australia* was loaned to IAL, and then rebuilt as *G-AFCZ Clare* in August 1940, following damage incurred in the previous month when moored near to Basra. *G-AFCZ Clare* was subsequently to become (- *arguably*) the most significant of the Flying Boats when based at Poole !

Whereas, IAL took delivery of 33 Empire C-Classes, all famously named with a capital Letter 'C', just as *Qantas Empire Airways* similarly opted for 'C~ names', but with specific relevance to Australia, for its six C-Class S.23 Flying Boats.

The Phoney War (*aka* 'Sitzkrieg') was drawing to a certain close as the new organisation BOAC was set to replace IAL: On 12th. June 1939 the BOAC Bill had been introduced in the House of Commons, and received ascent on 4th. August. The next step had been the establishment of BOAC as an entity ('in waiting') under the BOAC Act on 26th. November with Sir John Reith as the Chairman. This was determined to pave the way for BOAC to subsume IAL and take over its operations for the start of the new Financial Year on 1st. April 1940. So Poole became one of the Birthplaces of BOAC !

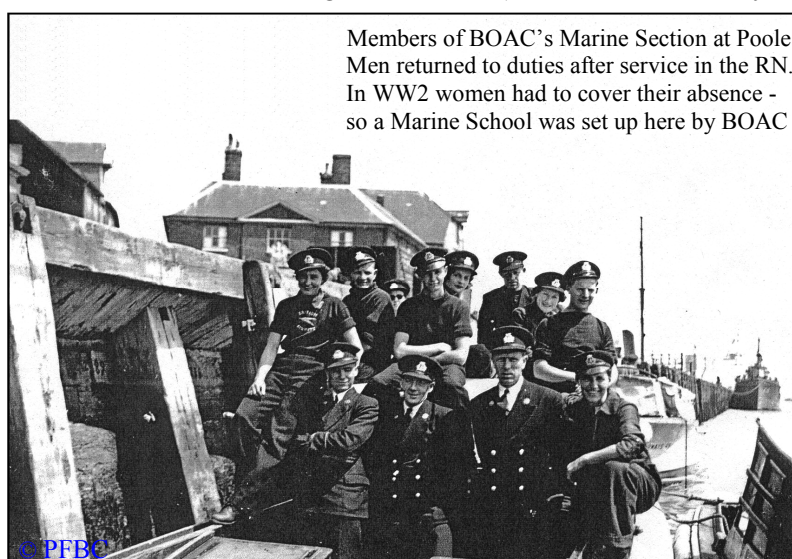
The *Marinecraft Unit* of Imperial Airways was previously involved during 1938/39 in the moving of marine equipment to Poole from the Solent, as part of preparations in advance of prospected relocation of the Flying Boats to the Harbour: The identification of the MCU vessels & the uniform of the marine crews bearing the title *British Airways* were retained for the time being, whilst the staff (even new local recruits such as Douglas *Dave Rose*) continued to identify with IAL !

Picture: Members of the BOAC MCU to the stern of one of the fast launches, by the Customs' House Steps at Poole.

Front Row: Dave Rose on the far right, Coxswain Gilbert Davis near quayside.

(Courtesy of the Dave Rose Collection.)

PFBC welcomes any info. regarding BOAC's MCU and especially about those members once at Poole



There was a variety of MCU vessels ranging from fast passenger launches, to tenders, cargo launches & the work boats ! Men from the *Poole Sprat Fleet* with good local knowledge of the Harbour and its Approaches were recruited as crews. 2 work boats were hired from the *Davis Family* - and brothers Gilbert and David were later to become senior coxswains. These former fishermen were keen to join with the evacuation of Dunkirk by the little boats, but were turned back by the Royal Navy beyond the Poole Bar as being too important to operations of BOAC Flying Boats based in Poole Harbour !



The [Ministry of Civil Aviation](#) (MCA) also had its craft - specifically the powerful Pinnacle [MCA 1316](#) with its derrick and searchlights - as used by the Water Controller, also runway control launches. MCA was based at [Poole Harbour YC](#). *[Peter Davidson was the last Water Controller at Poole + took many photos, before moving to Traffic Control at Hurn.]*

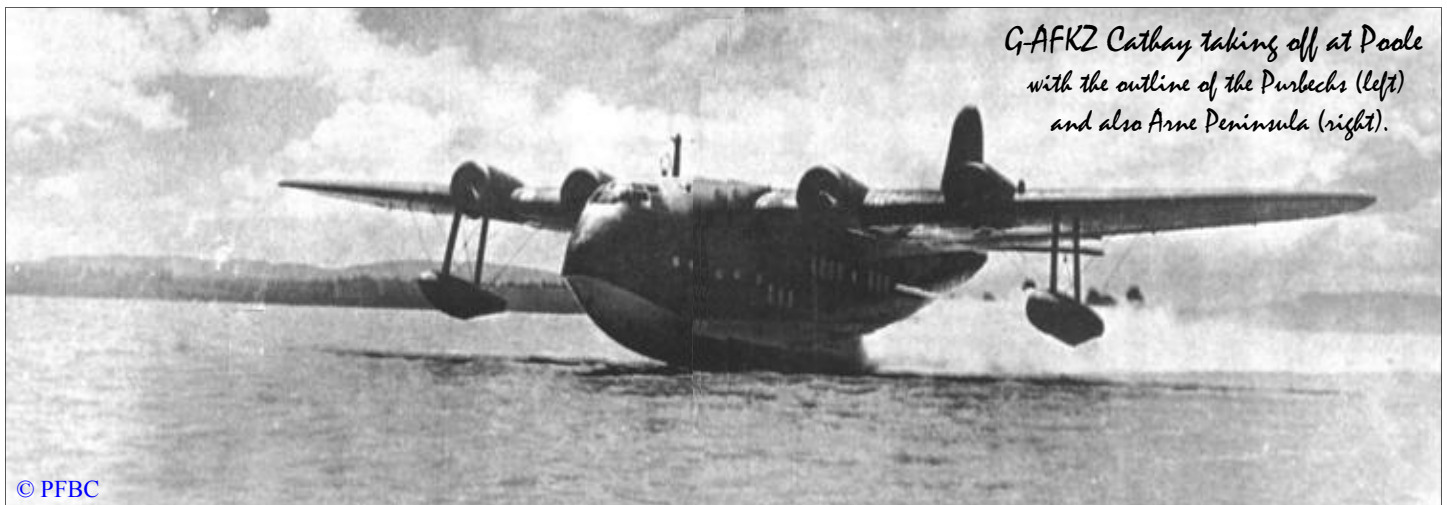
The Lightning War *aka* Blitzkrieg vented its full fury in the Low Countries on 10th. May, pushing the British & French back towards the Channel. This dire situation meant that BOAC had to progress its well-formulated contingency plans...

A fleet of 14 C-Class S.23 and the S.33s *G-AFPZ Clifton* and *G-AFRA Cleopatra* were to be based at [Congella, Durban](#). The route from Durban, *via* East Africa, Lake Victoria, & the River Nile up to Cairo - before heading eastwards through the Middle East and India, handing over to Qantas at Karachi for the stages to Australia became known as the [Horseshoe](#) because of its shape. Key staff required to operate the route independently from the UK when connections were severed (with a cargo of vital spares) were ferried from Liverpool, bound for Durban in the [Capetown Castle](#) on 27th. July 1940.

Also S.20 *Maia* was next converted to the standard of a S.23 to carry passengers and join the Shuttle Services to Foynes. Both *Maia* + *Mercury* (S.21) had received their names to honour Major Robert Mayo, Technical General Manager IAL, who had conceived the development of the composite pair as Flying Boat + Float Plane for the concept of assisted flight. With conversion from a 'barebones' to C-Class S.23 standard, *Maia* proudly retained the name which was now famous !

With the fall of France imminent, on 10th. June 1940 Italy declared war joining the side of the Axis powers, and invaded. This initiated a [siege of Malta](#), and effectively closed the Mediterranean route to BOAC's Empire C-Class Flying Boats. *G-AFCX Clyde* was at Malta so on the following day [Capt. Kelly Rogers](#) took off from Kalafrana heading for [Biscarosse](#) (the long-standing Flying Boat base on an étang just south of Bordeaux), to be refuelled there before departing for Poole.

With air raids on Marseilles, BOAC aircraft heading homewards were redirected *via* Ajaccio capital of the French island of Corsica. Capt. Taylor with *G-ADUX Cassiopeia* heading for Hythe was then followed by *G-AFKZ Cathay* bound for Poole which brought an end to trans-Mediterranean flights. Conversely, *G-ADHM Caledonia* became the last east-bound Flying Boat in evacuating staff from Brindisi, travelled *via* Alexandria to head southwards to Congella Basin at Durban.



With the bombing of Bordeaux on 20th., BOAC arranged the evacuation to Poole of its remaining staff from Biscarosse and from St. Nazaire. France fell on the 22nd. - this surrender saw the north occupied, and the Vichy Govt. in the south.

On the 20th. Capt. Don Bennett left Poole with *G-AFKZ Cathay* at 09.30 outbound for Biscarosse on the special mission to *rendez-vous* with [General Sikorski](#), the leader of the Free Polish forces based in France - together with his entourage. Entreated by PM Churchill this group was significant to the Allied cause so had to be successfully evacuated to the UK. It involved an anxious wait, keeping a low profile from the Luftwaffe when concealed by a tree-lined shore of the étang. At last, the passengers were embarked very early in the morning of the 21st. so that *Cathay* could then leave at first light to arrive back safely at Poole just 24 hours since setting out. Capt. Bennett then moved to BOAC's new responsibility of the [North Atlantic Air Ferry Organisation](#) established for August 1940, in leading this with Capt. Wilcockson and Ross. *[Bennett was re-commissioned in 1941 and went on to command the elite Pathfinder Force of RAF Bomber Command.]*

In further special flights from Poole, Capt. Kelly Rogers with *G-AFCX Clyde* departed here to embark the Duke of Kent with his party at [Mount Batten](#) - heading to Lisbon for the 800th. Anniversary Celebration of Portuguese Independence. *Clyde* was returned to Poole on 26th. Subsequently, Capt. Kelly Rogers with *G-AFKZ Clare* ventured back to Portugal despite the threat of the Luftwaffe now with French bases, to collect his passengers and to return to the UK for 5th. July. These 2 flights were to prove to be significant to those plans being formulated to establish an alternative route to Africa.

*(Aimée - with acknowledgement to Mike Phipp, Harold Bennett, Val Honan, Harry H. Pusey and Barbara Plumbridge.)*