

THE FIRST UNITED KINGDOM AIR MAIL DELIVERY

The occupant of 13 Clarence Crescent in 1911 will be unknown to most readers of *Windsors*, yet he took part in an historic event that finds little mention in local guide books.

Mr A. A. T. A'Vard was born on 28th August 1848. He was employed by the Post Office at Brighton as a telegraphist, then a clerk at Hastings, later becoming chief clerk before being promoted to Postmaster at Tonbridge. He came to Windsor on 30th July 1897 and remained there as Postmaster until 30th September 1912. The first major task for the Postmaster was the handling of the immense amount of mail at the death of Queen Victoria when all the outdoor staff were ordered to wear black armbands.

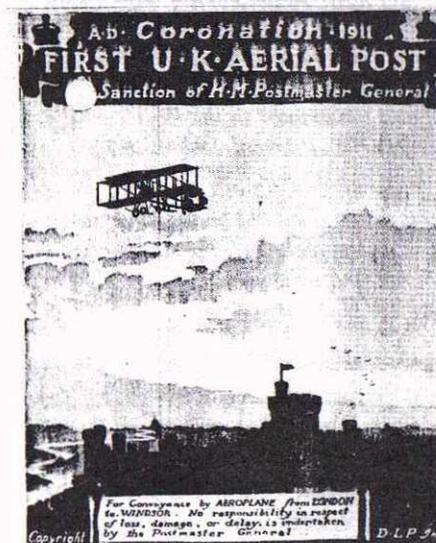
On Saturday morning, 9th September 1911, when Mr A'Vard left his home for the Post office, he must have been looking forward to the honour that was to befall him that day. He was to accept delivery of the first United Kingdom Air Mail. As he entered his office in the High Street the blustery day must have given the Postmaster some qualms, would the fragile aircraft be able to take off from Hendon? then there were the notable visitors to be received, and a meeting with the Mayor, Sir Frederick Dyson, to make the final arrangements.

On the Saturday afternoon the reception party made its way to the East Terrace of Windsor Castle, as the plane was to land on the adjacent lawn. As 5 p.m. approached eyes were anxiously searching the sky for a view of the plane, none more so than those of Mr A'Vard. At last a sighting was made, the pilot Gustav Hamel was attempting to land his Bleriot No.1 at the designated landing site. To the consternation of the waiting party, the machine disappeared from sight and a report was received that it had landed about a hundred yards from the Frogmore Mausoleum. The plane had left Hendon at 4.58 p.m. arriving at Windsor at 5.13 p.m. carrying 23½ lbs of mail.

The Postmaster at once despatched the waiting postmen cyclists to collect the mail; postman Kerswill was to have had the honour of reaching the plane first and accepting the mail from the aviator. Research has shown, however, that it was the nippy fifteen-year-old cycle postman/telegraph boy, Harry Hessey from Eton Wick, who beat the field. The pilot was escorted to the East Terrace where he was

received by the Mayor and Postmaster. Owing to the weather, Hamel had been the only pilot able to take off from Hendon.

After the Postmaster had extracted the goodwill messages, the mail was rushed to the Post Office, there it was sorted and despatched on the 6 p.m. train. A telegram was sent to King George at Balmoral informing him of the successful venture.



(Address only to be written here.)

Commemorative Postcard printed for use in first United Kingdom Airmail

Though the Post Office accepted responsibility for receipt and despatch of the mail, the scheme was privately organised and letters could only be posted in red wooden non-standard letter boxes. The publishers of the *Windsor Chronicle* (Luff's) were appointed sole selling agents for the special postcards and envelopes for the Windsor to London service at a cost of 6½d for a postcard and 1s 1d for a letter. The return service continued from Windsor Great Park until the 18th September.

On the inauguration day it was no doubt a tired Postmaster who returned to No.13 Clarence Road, there to formulate a letter to the Post Office Headquarters in London announcing the details of the successful operation. The letter was despatched on the following Monday as follows: