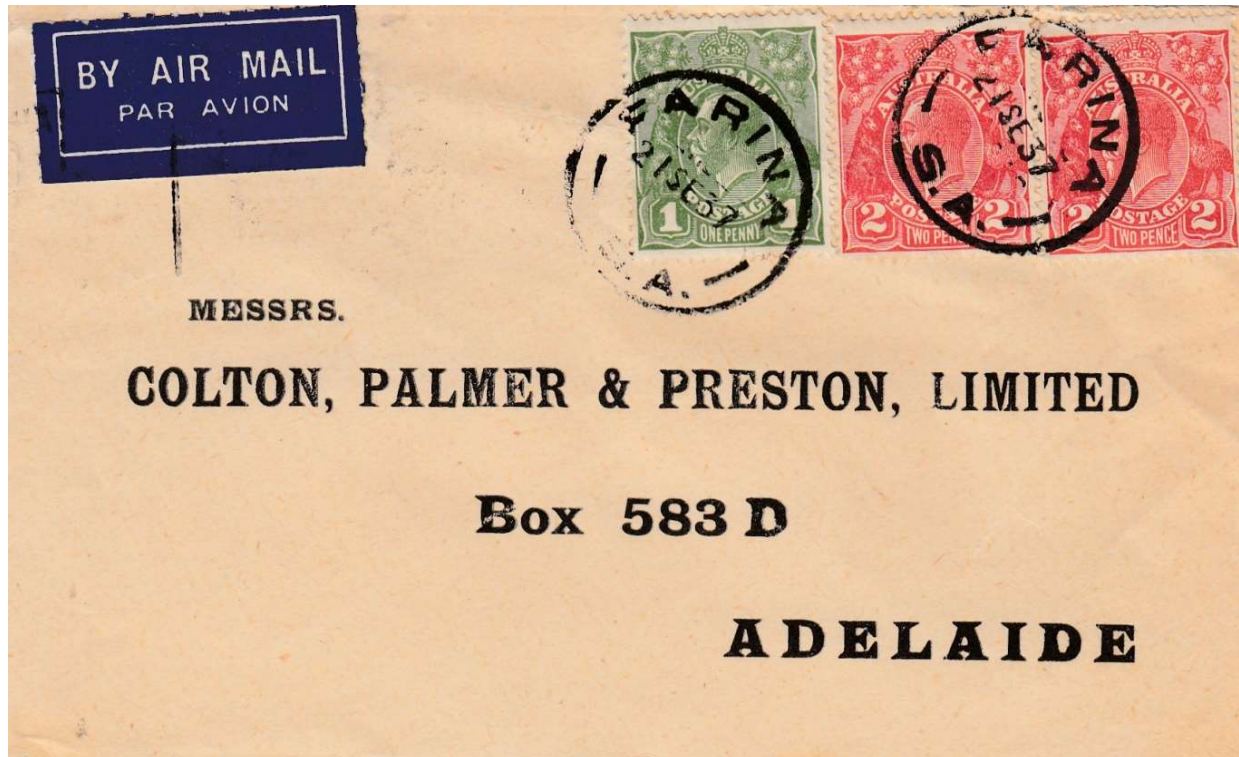


## A COVER STORY UNCOVERED

### *The History Behind An Airmail Cover from Farina to Adelaide in 1937*

*Gordon Oates Para Hills Philatelic Society South Australia*



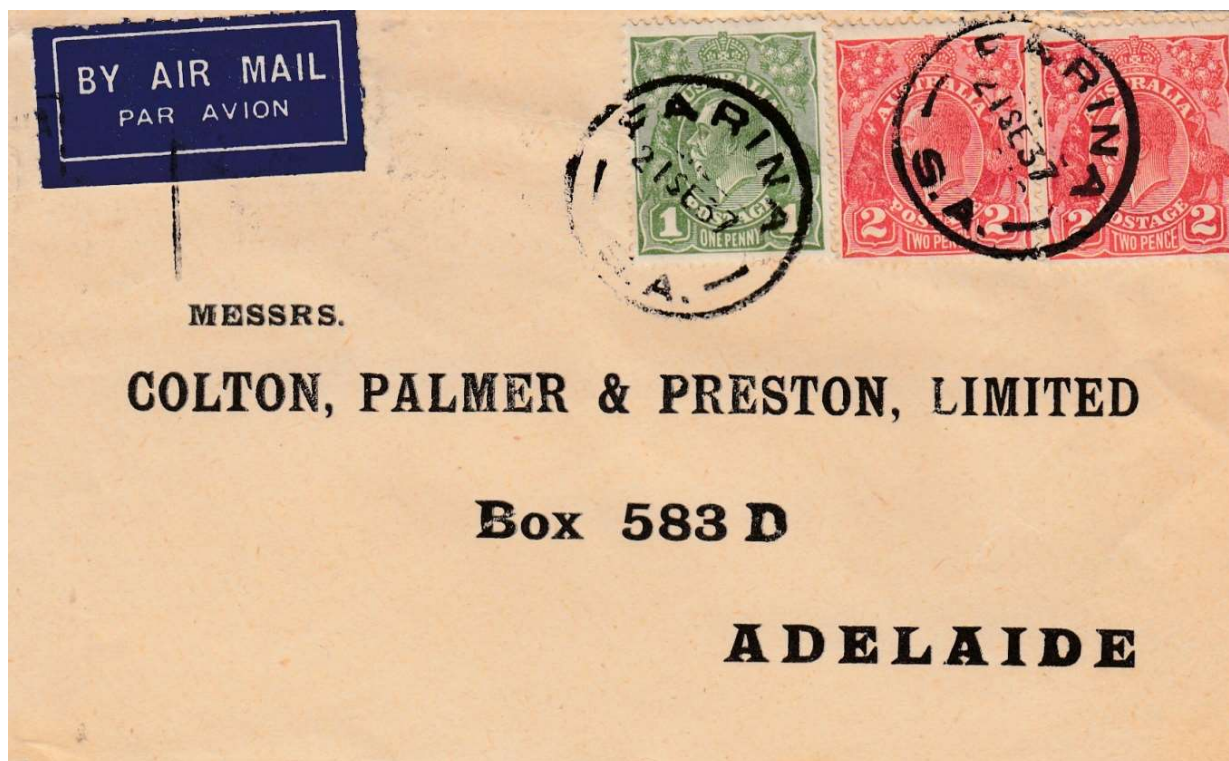
*The original cover as flown by Guinea Airways from Farina to Parafield, then Adelaide's main airport*

This is the brief history behind an airmail cover – town of origin, the company that flew the mail, the aircraft and the destination addressee. It provides a fascinating insight into life in outback Australia in the last two centuries.



*Farina today*

## The Cover Details



*Front of cover, addressed to Colton, Palmer & Preston, hardware merchants in Adelaide. Postmarked at Farina on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1937. Airmail rate 5d*

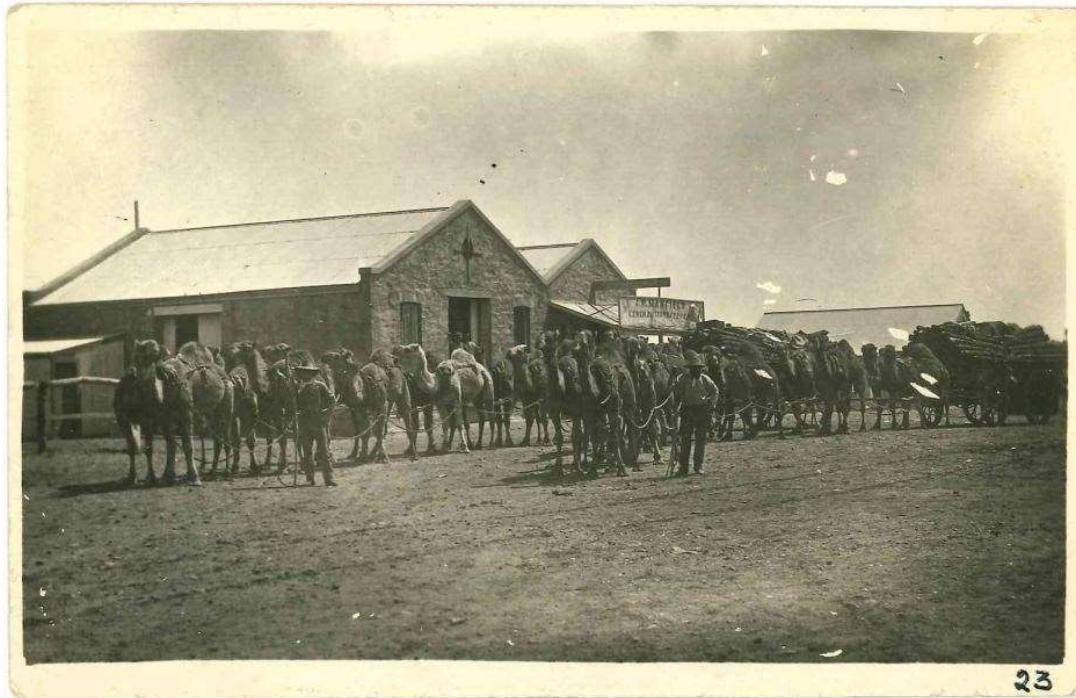


*Rear of cover, showing arrival time in Adelaide as 5.15 pm on the same date, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1937*



# The Township of Farina

Farina was located on the Great Northern Railway from Port Augusta to Alice Springs. It served as a watering point for the railway and a supply point for the sheep and cattle stations in the area. Originally named Farina in the hope of growing crops, the annual rainfall proved insufficient. At its peak it boasted a population of about 600 with a bakery, grain store, two breweries, two hotels, general store, post office, Anglican Church, cemetery, five blacksmiths, a school and a brothel. The realignment of the Alice Springs railway line in the 1980's resulted in the abandonment of the town but it is now being restored by a small group of enthusiastic caravanners.



*Gool Mahomet's camel train in front of Farina General Store*



B 64275 Reproduction rights: State Library of South Australia

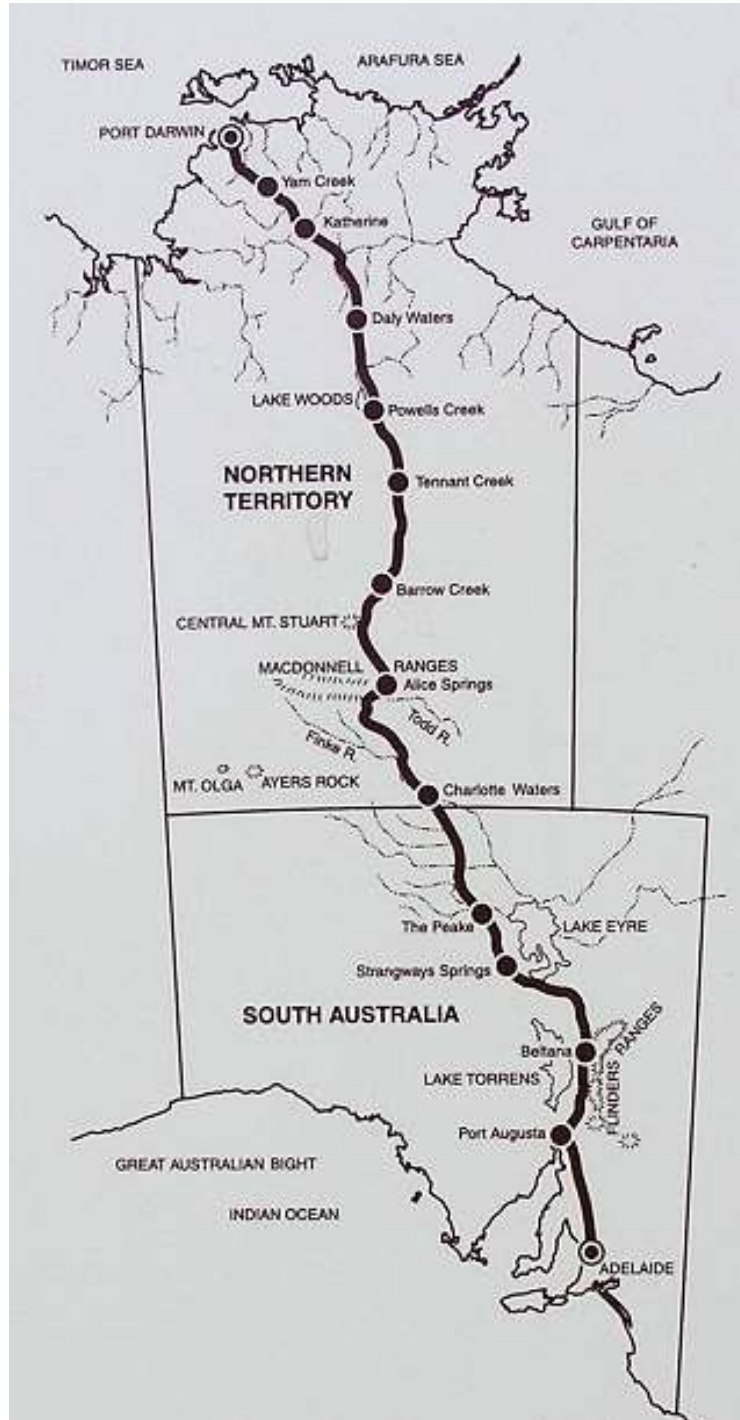
*Post Office Farina*



*Postmark Farina*

## The Overland Route Adelaide to Darwin

The first survey of a route from Adelaide to Alice Springs was completed by John McDouall Stuart on his sixth attempt in 1861 – 1862. Ten years later fierce competition between South Australia and Queensland resulted in the construction of the Overland Telegraph route, following Stuart's route through the centre of Australia and terminating at Port Darwin, where the undersea cable from Java had been terminated. This cable officially opened on Thursday 22 August 1872 and now the southern states were directly connected to Great Britain. In 1871 a second cable connected Perth to Java and finally in 1877 a cable across the Nullarbor Plain connected Perth to Adelaide.



*The Overland Telegraph Route from Adelaide to Darwin. Farina was located between the repeater stations at Beltana and Strangways Springs*

# The Coming of the Railway to Farina

As early as the 1860's, mineral discoveries in the Flinders Ranges prompted the authorities to consider the merits of building a railway north from Port Augusta. The initial plan was to build a line 200 miles (330 km) into the interior. Several routes were considered but eventually it was decided to construct a railway through Pichi Richi Pass, across the Willochra Plain to Wonoka (present-day Hawker), through Nooltana Gap to the plain on the western side of the Flinders Ranges then generally northward. The line was declared open at a ceremony in Quorn by the State Governor of the day, Sir William Jervois, on 22 May 1882. Henceforth Government Gums was known as Farina: Latin for flour, as the tablelands to the east were intended to be the northernmost agricultural area. Initially Farina may have been the intended terminus but by the time construction of the line was under way, most people realised that there would be no wheat to carry from Farina.

Even before the railway had been opened to Farina, the nature of the traffic it would carry changed from wheat and minerals to cattle, sheep and wool. In 1882 – 1883 nearly 15,250 bales of wool were transported to southern markets – notably Adelaide – compared with 13,880 in 1881 – 1882. For two years Farina was the railhead for the Oodnadatta, Birdsville and Strzelecki Tracks. But an extension of the line beyond Farina to Marree (then known as Hergott Springs) was logical to tap into livestock travelling from pastoral leases west of Lake Eyre and down the Birdsville Track from the north-east. The extension beyond Farina to Hergott Springs was officially opened on 7 January 1884.

The line passed to Commonwealth ownership on 1 January 1911, but continued to be operated by the South Australian Railways until the Commonwealth Railways took over operations on 1 January 1926. The Commonwealth Government also undertook the extension of the railway to Alice Springs, and this was completed in 1929. In the years following World War II large tonnages of coal were railed from Leigh Creek and heavy demands were placed on the railway. In many ways the original line was inadequate; sharp curves and heavy gradients limited train loads, whilst light track and bridges restricted speeds and axle loads. Consequently a new railway, of 4 ft. 8½ in. gauge, was constructed to avoid the heavier graded terrain, and extended from Stirling North, via Telford (Leigh Creek) to Marree, opening on 27 July 1957 to Marree. The Old Ghan and the Budd diesel rail car provided passenger services between Farina and Adelaide until the new line from Tarcoola to Alice Springs opened in 1980.

With the closure of the Port Augusta Power Station and Leigh Creek Coalfields, the rail line from Port Augusta to Leigh Creek closed in 2016.



*Cattle train Farina railway station 1898*



*Passenger luggage label Adelaide to Farina*



## Air Route Adelaide to Darwin

Farina was the first stop out of Parafield Airport, Adelaide, on the Darwin air route. It was served by Guinea Airways, a company formed originally in New Guinea to service the gold mines and later expanded to Australia to operate the Adelaide – Darwin route. After World War II the Federal Government forced the company to hand over the Adelaide – Darwin route to TAA, leaving the company with only local South Australian services. It eventually became Airlines of South Australia which was taken over by Ansett Airways until that company's demise. With the outbreak of World War II, air traffic on the route increased considerably and a shorter route from Adelaide to Oodnadatta via Mt. Eba station was implemented, as shown on this TAA route map prior to 1949.



*The Adelaide– Darwin route continued until 1949 when with the opening of the Leigh Creek Coalfield airport, the flights were rerouted as Adelaide – Leigh Creek – Oodnadatta – Alice Springs*

## Guinea Airways Services to Farina



*Advertising poster for Guinea Airways, showing the sister aircraft VH-UXH*

Flights between Adelaide and Darwin operated three times a week in each direction with an overnight stop in Alice Springs. The aircraft used were the Lockheed Model 10a from the Lockheed factory at Burbank, California, shipped as deck cargo from Los Angeles to Port Adelaide.



*Towing the Lockheed aircraft from Port Adelaide to Parafield after unloading*

## VH-UXI Service History

The particular aircraft used to carry this cover was VH-UXI “*Moresby*” which arrived at Port Adelaide on the S.S. “*Mirrabooka*” in June 1937. It was towed on its undercarriage minus the outer wings and tail from Port Adelaide to Parafield via Grand Junction Road and Main North Road. A test flight was flown on 12<sup>th</sup> August and a certificate of airworthiness issued on the same day. Four days later it entered service on the Adelaide – Darwin route.



*VH-UXI after its delivery from Port Adelaide. It was a wet day!*



*VH-UXI at Parafield with cowling removed from the starboard Wright Whirlwind engine*



## Departure Point – Farina Airport

Only basic facilities existed at Farina, with refuelling by hand pump from 44 gallon drums on a handcart.



*Refuelling at Farina, 1937*



*Nursing sisters were flown into Farina for regular clinics until the construction of the hospital*

## Destination – Parafield

Parafield was the main airport at Adelaide from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1927 to 11<sup>th</sup> February 1955, when the new airport at West Beach became Adelaide's principal airport with Parafield as a secondary airport for light aircraft.



*Parafield Airport in its early days*



*Guinea Airways hangar at Parafield*

## The Short Life of VH-UXI

The aircraft only had a short service history. On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1937 the aircraft departed Darwin for Adelaide at 0535. Twenty miles out of Darwin, the starboard engine failed and the pilot turned the aircraft back to Darwin. With the engine still on fire and unable to maintain height, the aircraft was force landed in the dark in trees adjacent to the railway line about a mile south of Darwin. Captain Noble “Nobby” Buckley and First Officer U.G. Edgerton evacuated the ten Army passengers and their baggage before the aircraft was destroyed by fire. The aircraft was struck off the register on the same day.

By a curious coincidence I met Nobby Buckley when I was a Pilot Briefing Officer at Parafield Airport in the late 1960’s, just before he gave up flying.



*VH-UXI burning after crash Darwin*

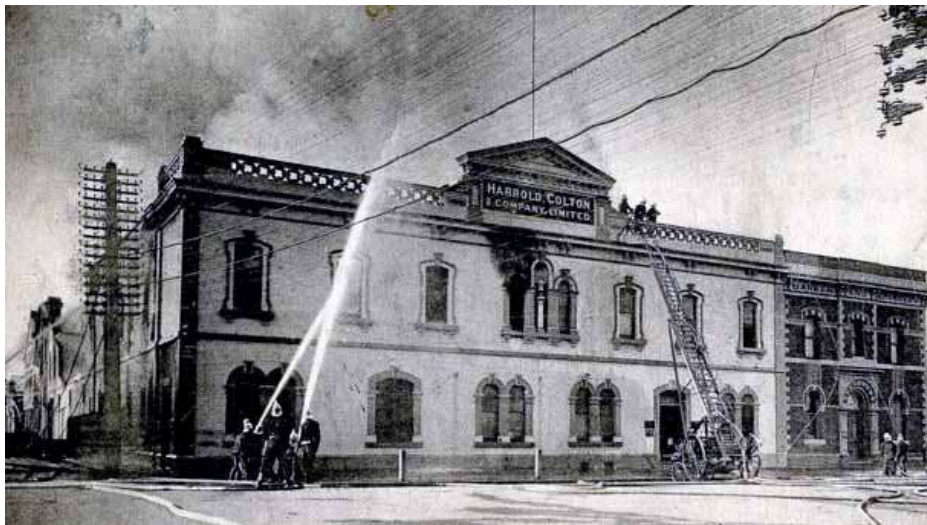


*Wreckage of the aircraft after the fire was extinguished*



## **The Addressee – Colton, Palmer & Preston, Adelaide**

Colton, Palmer and Preston were ironmongers and hardware merchants in Adelaide. Founded by John Colton in 1842 as a hardware and saddler company, the company amalgamated with Harold Brothers in 1889 and expanded their business to become ironmongers, hardware merchants, manufacturers of saddlery, harness, tarpaulins, canvas blinds, makers of cabin and travelling bags, suit cases, etc, from premises in Currie Street, Adelaide, with branches in Port Adelaide, Port Pirie, Broken Hill and London. In 1907 a huge fire caused damage in excess of £80,000, which required the stores demolition and a complete rebuild. In 1911 another business amalgamation took place with Preston and Co Ltd. From this date the store would then trade as 'Colton, Palmer and Preston Ltd' under the management of R.T. Palmer and A.H. Preston. The business remained in solid solvent condition and around 1927 employed around 300 staff. Trading from the city site continued until the early 1960s, then re-locating to Port Road, Allenby Gardens. The company was taken over by Geo. Wills & Co. in January 1965.



*Fire at Harrold, Colton & Co Ltd, Currie St. 5 February 1907*



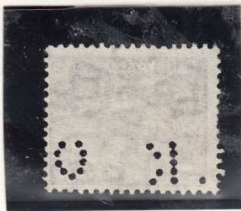
*Rebuilt premises, Currie St., Adelaide*

## Colton, Palmer & Preston Perfins

In 1858 one Joseph Sloper, having patented several devices for punching out railway tickets to cancel them, turned his attention to precancelling postage stamps with company initials, later called perfins. Like many companies of its era, Colton, Palmer & Preston used perfins on its stamps to prevent misuse by company employees. The company was unique in that one of its predecessors, Harrold Brothers, had a London office which became the buying office for Harrold, Colton & Co. This office purchased a Sloper hand-perforating machine in 1884 for use in its London office with pattern O.K. until 1890 when the machine was forwarded to the Adelaide office where it continued in use through the various amalgamations of the company. The thin pins proved troublesome and in 1925 they were replaced with thicker pins. In 1928 one of these pins was "lost" from the "O". Examples may be found with the stamps inserted either face up or face down. This machine continued in use after the company was taken over by Geo. Wills & Co. in 1965 until at least 1970.



*Perforated from printed side*



*9d Platypus*



*4d Christmas 1957*

*Perforated from gummed side*



*3d King George VI*



*5d Dame Nellie Melba*

## **Acknowledgements**

The photographs and information about the aircraft VH-UXI in this article by courtesy of the Civil Aviation Historical Society of South Australia, of which I was President.

Philatelic information from the Australian Commonwealth Specialists Catalogue.

Stamps from the author's own collection.