

First Regular Airmail on 9th September 1911

by
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Photograph of pilot Gustav Hamel, who flew the first regular airmail on 9 September 1911 from Hendon to Windsor for the Coronation Aerial Post.

Gustav Hamel

Gustav Hamel, one of the most famous pioneer pilots, was born on the 25th of June 1889. He was of Scandinavian descent, his father being Dr Gustav Hamel, M.V.O. He was educated at Westminster School and learnt to fly at Bleriot's School, Pau, France, taking his pilot's ticket on the 3rd of February 1911. He rapidly reached the front rank and it was



only through illness that he failed to win the Daily Mail £10,000 prize for a circuit of Great Britain. He won fame by being the first airman to fly the 1911 Coronation Aerial Post from Hendon to Windsor. He made the first flight with a lady passenger between London and Paris. In 1912 he was engaged by the Daily Mail to give demonstration flights in various parts of the country, and the souvenir postcards, specially cacheted, which were posted at the conclusion of the flights, are amongst the most sought after of British rarities.

Hamel was well known for his exhibition flights and his loss in the English Channel was a sad blow for aviation. The following best typify the regard in which he was held:-

‘It has been decided to suspend the searching operations by flotillas and aircraft which have been in progress for the last 48 hours. In relinquishing this quest the Admiralty desire to place on record their recognition of the services rendered to British aviation by the missing airman. He was without question the foremost exponent in these islands of an art whose military consequence is continually increasing. His qualities of daring, skill, resource and modesty merited the respect of those who pursue the profession of arms, and his loss, if this must be accepted, is received with deep regret by the officers and men of the naval wing of the Royal Flying Corps.’

‘The King and Queen, fearing that the worst must now be realised as to the fate of your son, desire me to assure you how deeply they feel for you in your sudden and grievous sorrow. Their Majesties knew your son personally. They had seen him fly on two occasions at Windsor this year, and were struck by the skill, courage and mastery with which he controlled the aeroplane, no less than by his modest and unassuming bearing. In offering you their heartfelt sympathy their Majesties recognise that in this young, useful life the country loses its most accomplished and experienced aviator. Signed Stamfordham. Dated May 27th 1914.’

I am reproducing pages of the Souvenir Programme issued for the 1912 Exhibition Flights as we are sure Readers will be interested in this Historical Document.



First U.K. Aerial Post Coronation 1911 Flown by Gustav Hamel.

465- 1	Sep. 9	London-Windsor	Violet	Cover	Die	1-4	£10	\$40
465- 2	9	“	“	“	“	5-6	£15	\$60
465- 3	9	“	“	Card	“	1-4	£10	\$40
465- 4	9	“	“	“	“	5-6	£15	\$60
465- 5	9	“	Scarlet	Cover	“	1-4	£4	\$16
465- 6	9	“	“	“	“	5-6	£7	\$28
465- 7	9	“	Red-Brown	Card	“	1-4	£1	\$4
465- 8	9	“	“	“	“	5-6	£2	\$8
465- 9	9	“	Dark-Brown	Card	“	1-4	£1	\$4
465-10	9	“	“	“	“	5-6	£2	\$8
465-11	9	“	Olive-Green	Card	“	1-4	£1	\$4
465-12	9	“	“	“	“	5-6	£2	\$8
465-13	9	“	Brown or	Cover	“	1-4	£4	\$16
465-14	9	“	Green	“	“	5-6	£7	\$28

Hamel made flights on the 9th, 11th, 12th, 14th, 18th, 19th, 25th and 26th from London to Windsor and on the 17th and 18th from Windsor to London, but only the violet or privilege items were definitely flown by him. Others may have been flown by his co-pilots E. F. Driver or Clement Creswell. Full information is contained in ‘The Coronation Aerial Post 1911’ by Francis J. Field and N. C. Baldwin.

A Thrilling Exhibition

At five o’clock, however, Mr Gustav Hamel decided to go up, and gave one of those thrilling exhibitions in which he has no rival. In spite of the strong wind he piloted his machine with all apparent absence of effort. The consummate mastery of his flight was only brought into strong relief a little later, when Lieutenant Spencer Grey ascended in a Deperdussin monoplane and was compelled to alight within a few minutes.

Almost immediately Mr Hamel rose from the ground once more, but this time on a brand-new Bleriot monoplane; shooting up in a wide circle, he steadily for minute after minute the monoplane scarcely advanced suspended almost motionless; at last, with a swift turn, it headed about and shot away before the wind with amazing speed. The haze was now spreading fast, and the aeroplane almost lost from view; later on after his descent Mr Hamel informed me that at this height, some 8,000 feet, he emerged into brilliant sunshine. Then, in two sharp spirals, left and right handed, the aeroplane shot down, finishing up with a steep glide before the wind just over the enclosure, and within a few feet of the crowd – a fine performance, it is true, but one not devoid of the element of danger.

When dusk had fallen, and surrounding objects were scarcely discernible, he ascended for the last time and remained aloft until darkness had almost set in.

The Times, Monday, September 30th, 1912.

R. GUSTAV HAMEL flew before the King and Queen at Ranelagh, and was afterwards presented to their Majesties and Princess Mary. He was also presented to the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Family, when he carried the first Military Dispatch from Hendon to Aldershot which had been previously signed by Lord Haldane, and returned to Hendon with reply. He made his way into England from France entirely unobserved from the clouds 11,000 feet high, despite the fact that all Coast Guards and Harbour Authorities were on the look out, and landed safely at Maidstone. He holds the British Circular Special Track record.