

Early Powered Flight

A talk by

Mr. R. A. Rostron

given to the members of the Malta Philatelic Society on 3rd November, 2010

As a schoolboy I enjoyed collecting stamps (and still do). I also liked to build and fly model aeroplanes and as a young man worked for De Havillands. Consequently, after about 50 years I have been able to connect the two interests in the form of a talk.

It has always amazed me how quickly the development of the wood, wire and canvas planes progressed from the first successful flight by the American Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk in 1903, to the first Airmail Postal Services in 1911 and then passenger aircraft, etc.

The subject has been very well researched and documented by specialists. All I have tried to do is to put my material into an interesting 'story' mainly from 1903 to 1911.

Pictures of various designs of the first flying machines were shown starting with a Wright Flyer 111 of 1905. Whilst the Americans slowly made improvements 'behind closed doors', in Europe things moved rapidly. By 1909 there were several designs mainly monoplanes and biplanes, some with pusher engines, some with pullers; some had skids some wheels; some designs looked almost the same front and back.

Designers, manufacturers and aviators all wanted their machines to fly faster and over greater distances.

The world's first Airshow was held in Rheims, France in August 1909. There was much competition and record setting. Meanwhile, another record had been set, namely the first ever flight across the English Channel. It was achieved in July 1909 by the Frenchman Bleriot (Fig 1), an automobile spare parts manufacturer. He designed and flew the plane (not very well), but success was his, whereas Latham from England had just failed earlier in the month.

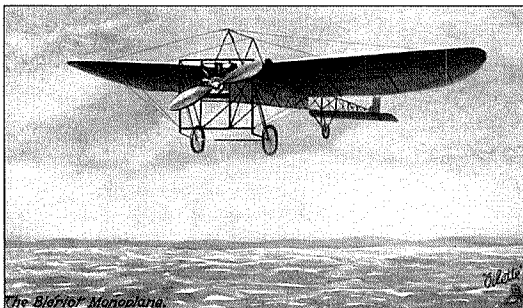


Fig.1

There now follows a fairly extensive selection of postcards, capturing early planes, mainly in flight. Where possible I have collected used postcards because for these the date can be important.

Various aviators acquired Bleriot's. The postcard producers often included an inset photo of the pilot. Fig 2 shows Aubrun with his Bleriot.

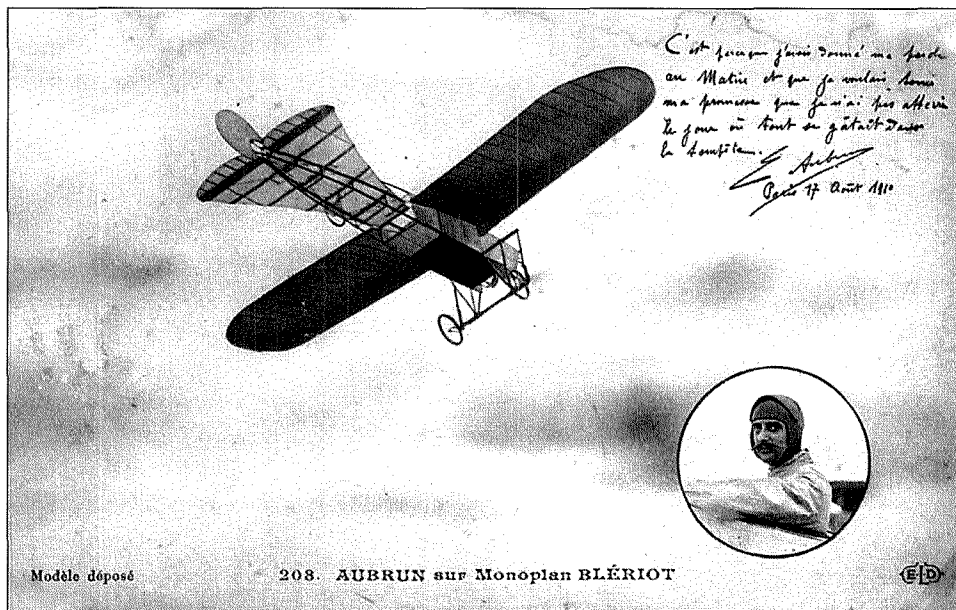


Fig.2

The next pages show the following cards:-

- A Farman Biplane with a good close-up picture of pilot Van Den Born, sent 14/12/1910 (Fig 3).
- A 1909 postcard of a Farman at Mourmelon and a signed picture of Farman himself, top left (Fig 4).
- Kinet setting a duration record with a passenger, in a Farman. Card dated 11/7/1910 (Fig 5).
- A similar plane flown at Camp du Mailly. Dated 7/8/1913. Note the military tents (Fig 6).
- Hubert Latham, a British Aviator/Designer, who failed in his attempt to be first across the Channel, is shown on this 1910 postcard setting out over the Channel (Fig 7).
- Latham's distinctive 'Antoinette' is shown on a colour postcard. The card was sent from Italy to Tunisia 8/5/1910 and has Milan and Tunis R.P. postmarks (Fig 8).

- The next two cards are also ‘Antoinettes’, one used 18/9/1909 (Figs 9 & 10).



Fig.3

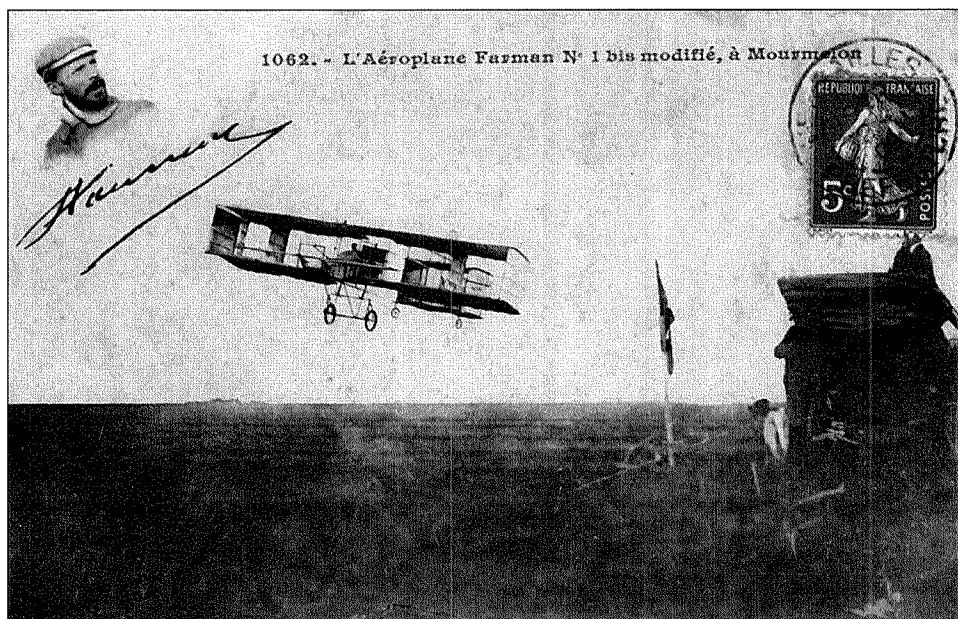


Fig.4

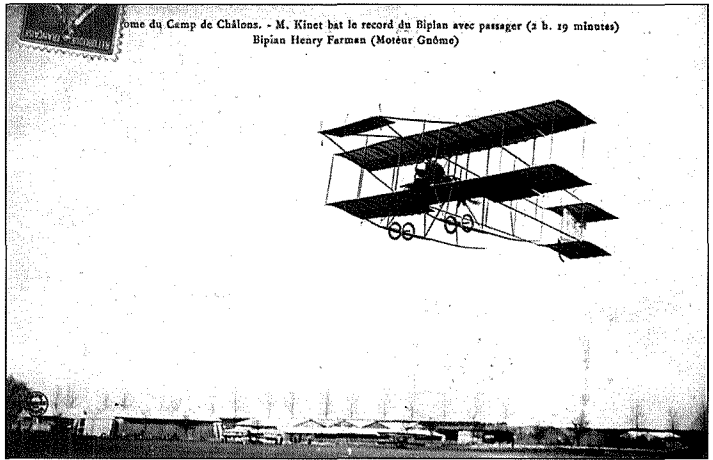


Fig.5

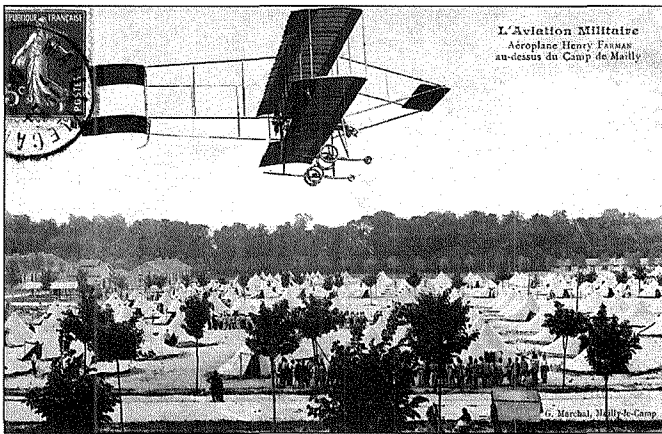


Fig.6

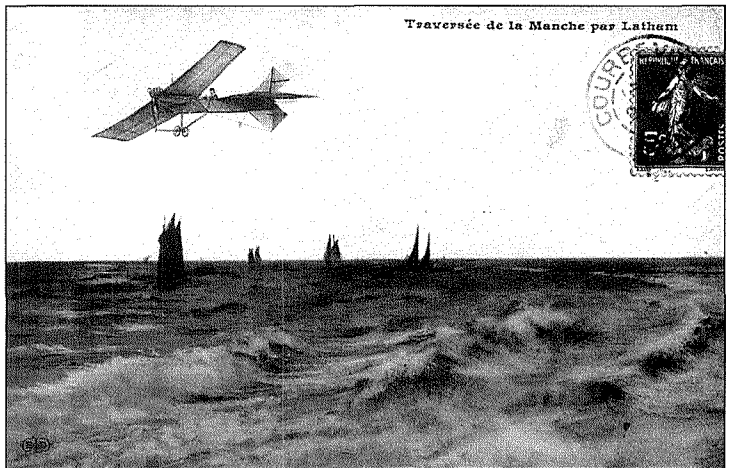


Fig.7

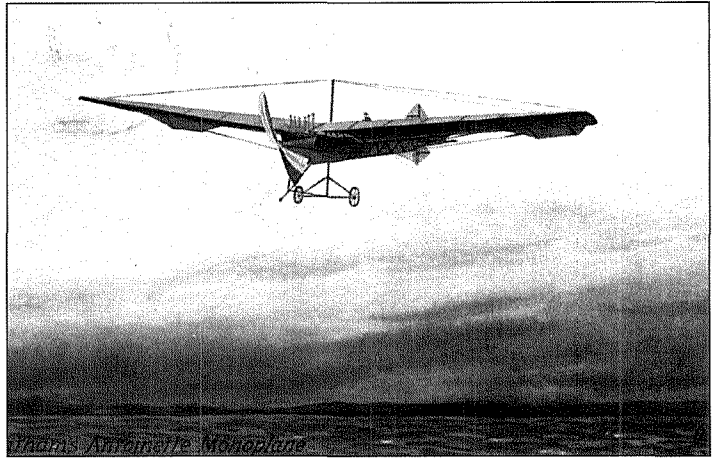
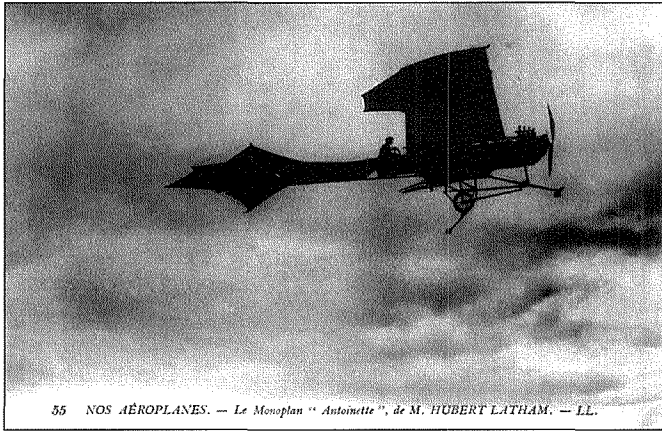


Fig.8

Hubert Latham. Antoinette Monoplan



55 NOS AÉROPLANES. — Le Monoplan " Antoinette ", de M. HUBERT LATHAM. — LL.

Fig.9

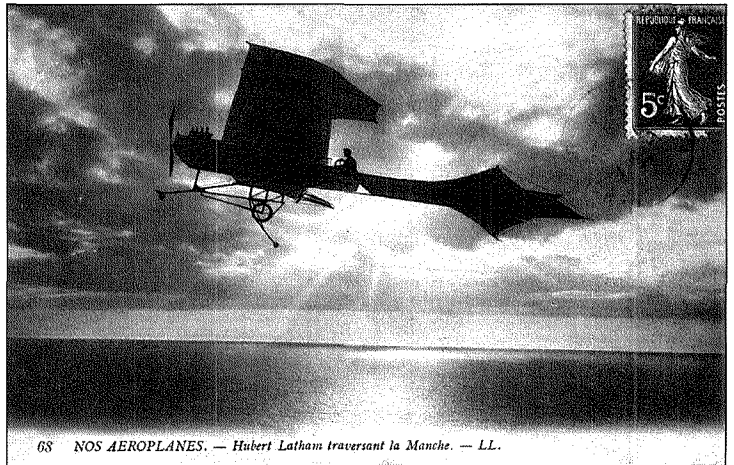


Fig.10

68 NOS AÉROPLANES. — Hubert Latham traversant la Manche. — LL.

Rheims was the First Airshow anywhere, taking place in August 1909. This card (Fig 11) shows pilot Paulhan setting a world distance and duration record at Betheny 26/8/1909.

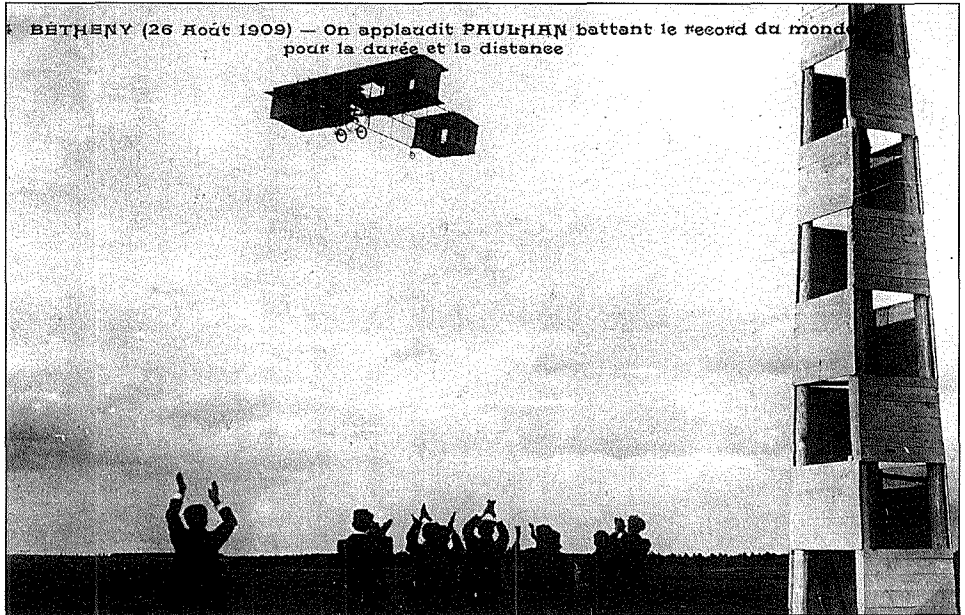


Fig.11

Latham with Entry No. 29 at Rheims. The card (Fig 12) is dated 1910 but could have been used later, and still be the original Rheims 1909 Show.

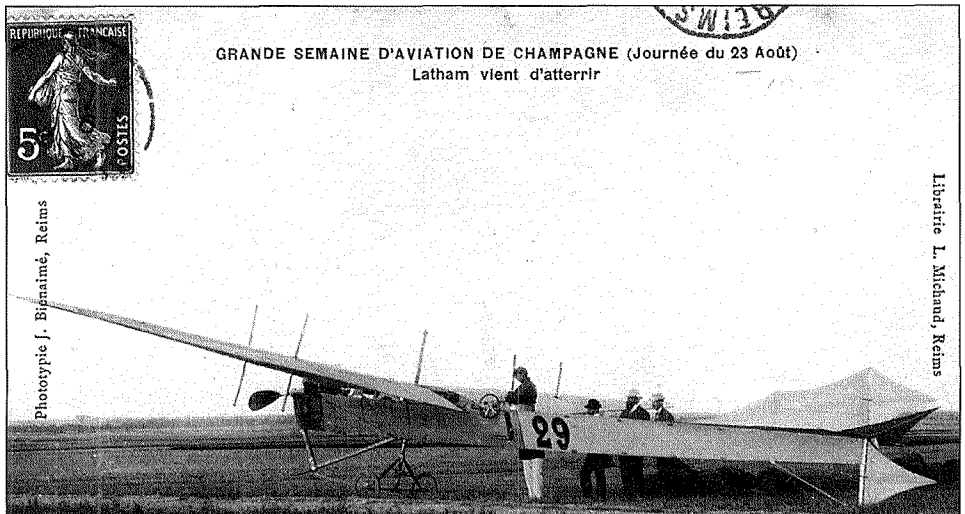


Fig.12

It did not take long before various companies realized the interest being taken in 'flight' and started to advertise their products via picture postcards.

The Lombart Chocolate advertising card (Fig 13) shows Latham at the First Airshow, Rheims 1909. There is message and address space. The 12 photo pull-out card (Fig 14) shows mainly French airmen but includes Wilbur Wright. The 10 photo booklet (Fig 15) also features mainly French airmen.

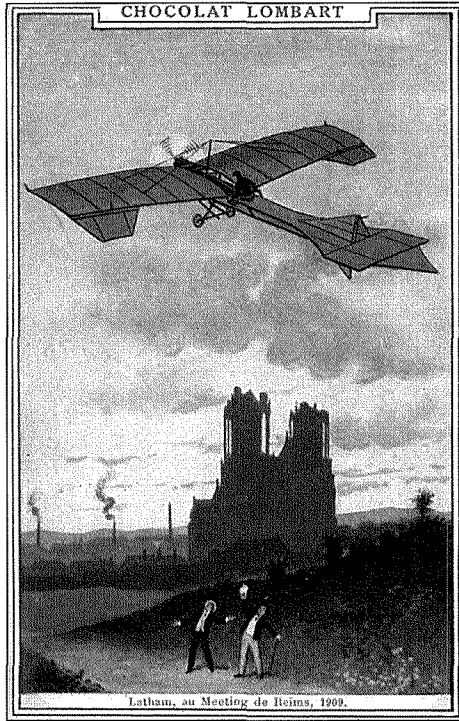


Fig.13

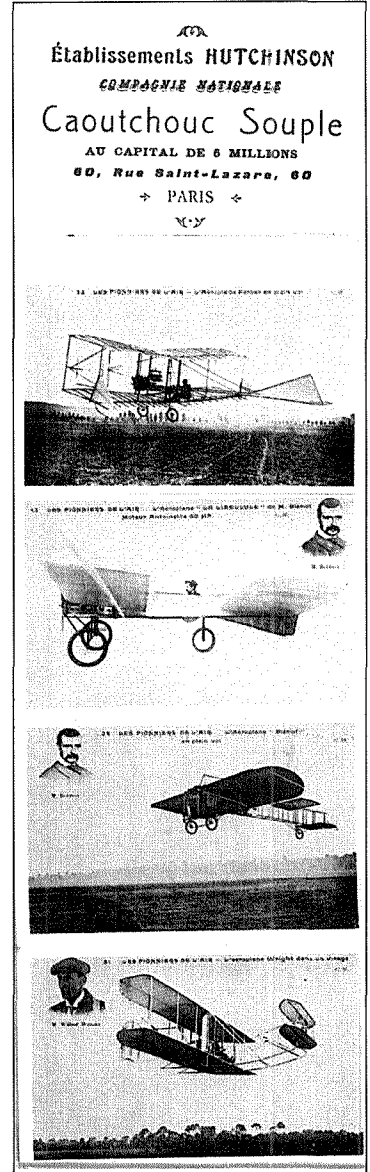


Fig.14

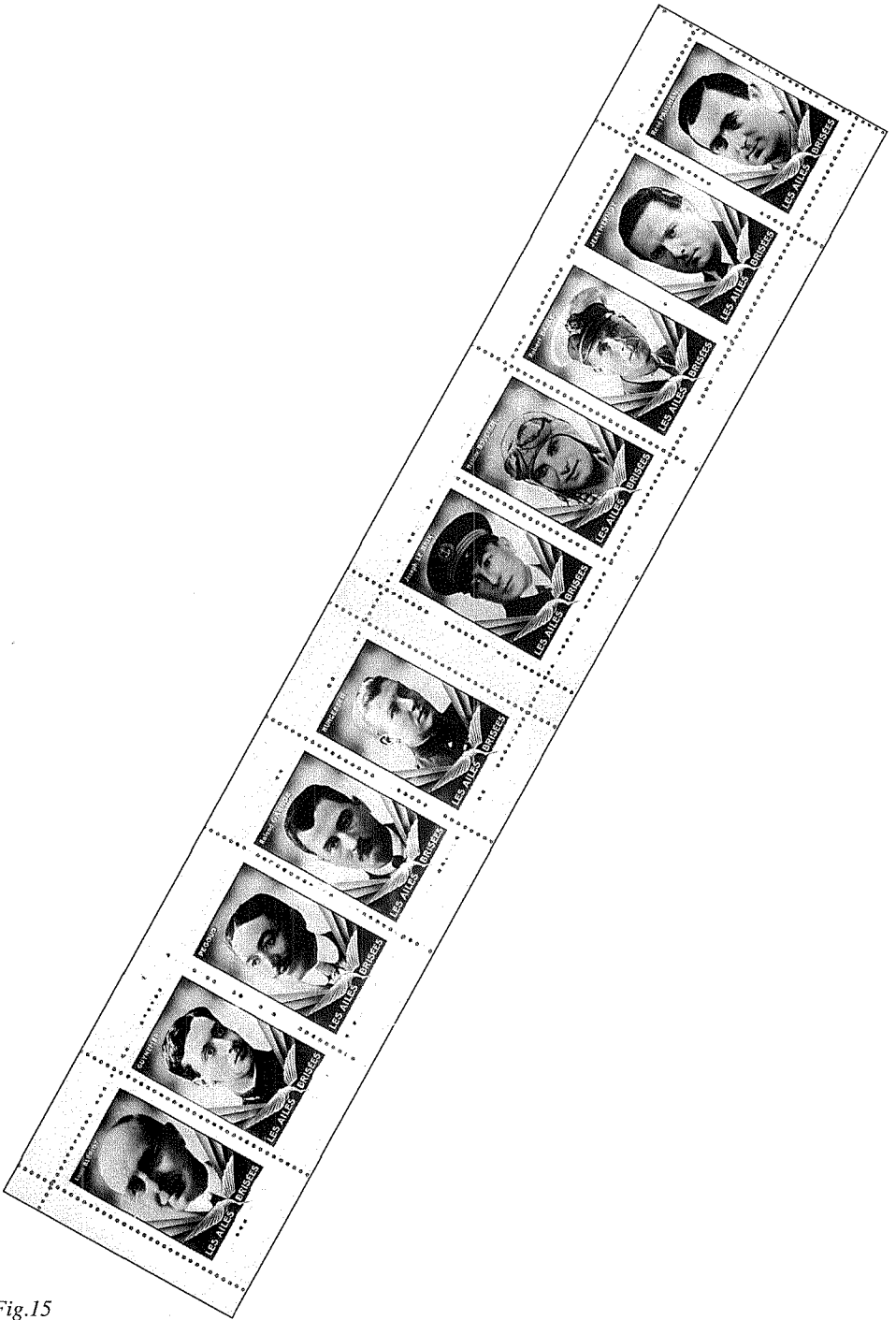


Fig.15

More flight cards follow:-

- Fig 16 shows a Voisin flown by Buneau-Varilla, probably at the 1909 Rheims Airshow.
- A Delagrang plane in flight is shown in Fig 17. It appears to be basically a 'Voisin'. The card is early and dated 11/2/1909.
- A 'Rougier' which is a 'pusher' type is shown in Fig 18. The card is dated 18/10/1910.
- Pilot Paillette at the controls of his Sommer Biplane, also a 'pusher' type is shown on the card dated 2/6/1911 in Fig 19.
- A Curtiss Biplane in flight is shown in Fig 20.
- A Caudron in flight with pilot Duval inset is shown in Fig 21.

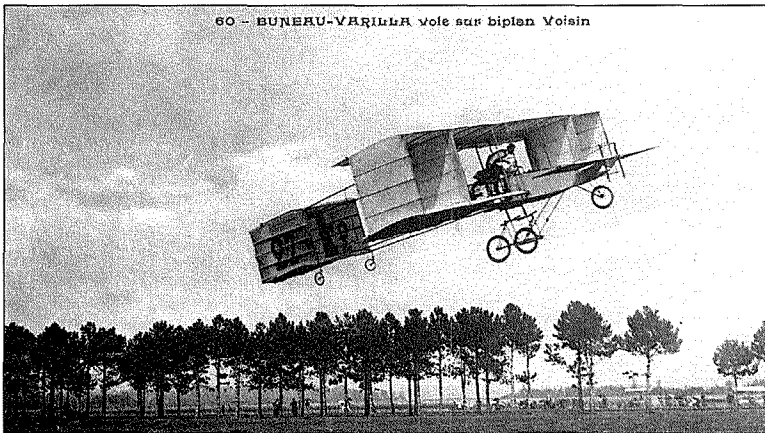


Fig.16

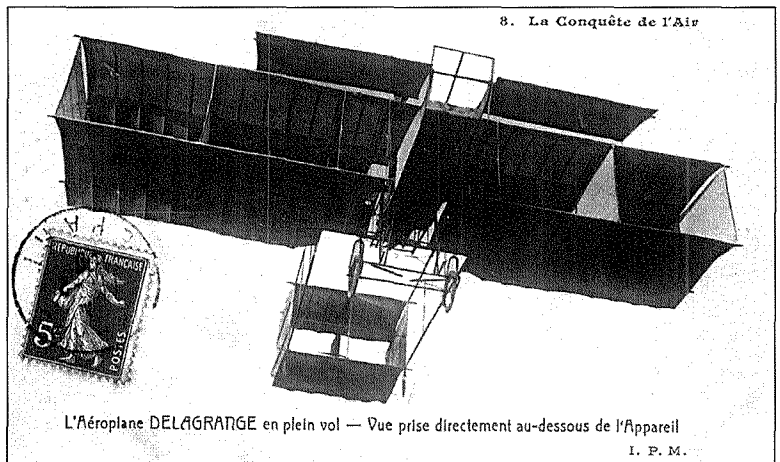


Fig.17

1135. - L'Aéroplane Rougier

compose d'une cellule centrale à 2 plans superposés de 10^m20 d'envergure sur 2^m10 de longueur antéro postérieure. Ces plans distants verticalement de 1^m50, sont réunis par un corps fuselé de 1^m50 de longueur et de section quadrangulaire à une cellule arrière de 6 m. d'envergure sur 2 m. de longueur, dans le sens de la marche, munie d'un empennage stabilisateur spécial. Le gouvernail vertical est au centre de la cellule arrière. La partie du corps fuselé engagée dans la cellule avant, porte le siège de l'aviateur et derrière lui le moteur de 50 HP Antoinette actionnant une hélice de 2^m10 de diamètre et 1^m10 de pas. En avant de l'appareil se trouve un gouvernail de profondeur biplan. Le tout monté sur le chariot orientable, surface portante 50^m c. poids total monte 500 kgr.

J. H.

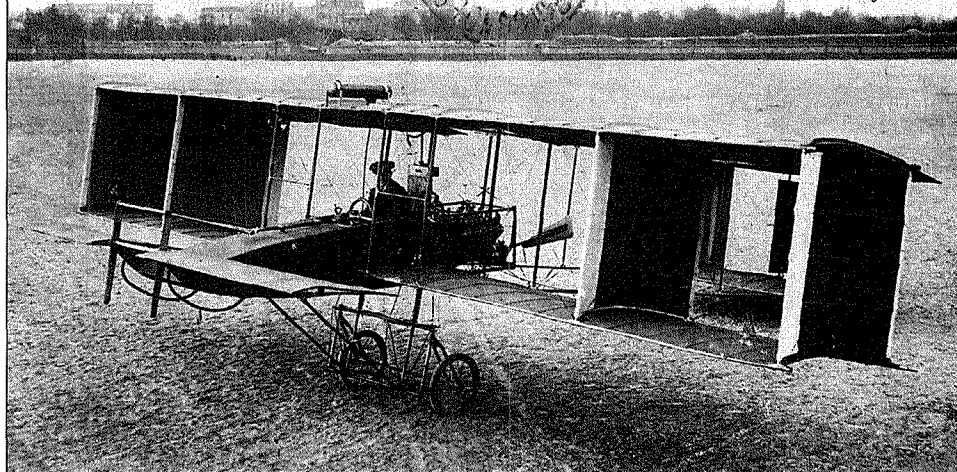


Fig.18

LES GRANDS AVIATEURS

413. - Un Vol de Paillette, sur Biplan Sommer, moteur Gnome, 50 H. P. ND Phot.

103

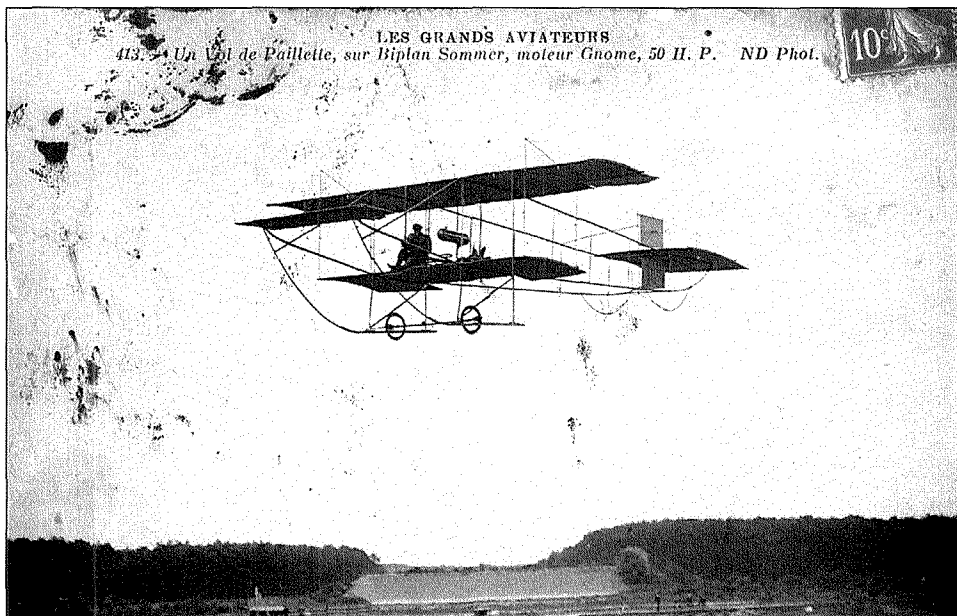


Fig.19

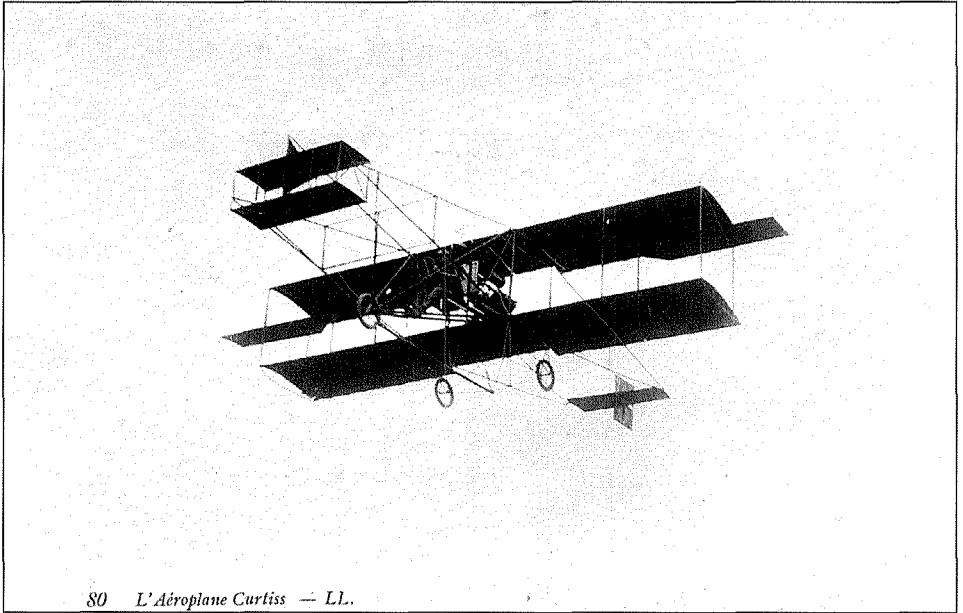
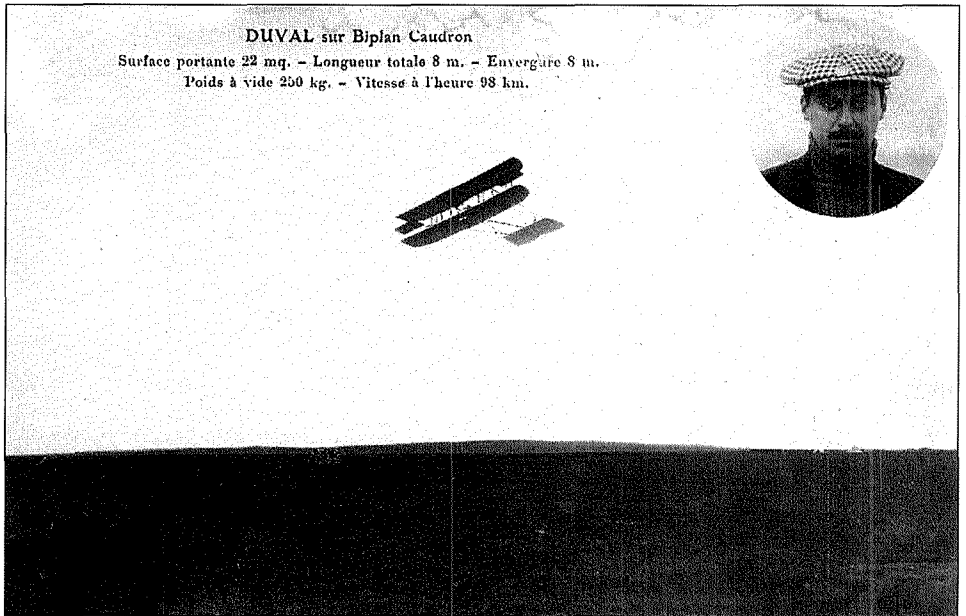


Fig.20



The cards in Figs 22 & 23 are real photos and are almost certainly of Grahame White and others at the 1910 Blackpool Airshow which was the second British Airshow, the first being at Doncaster 9/9/1910.

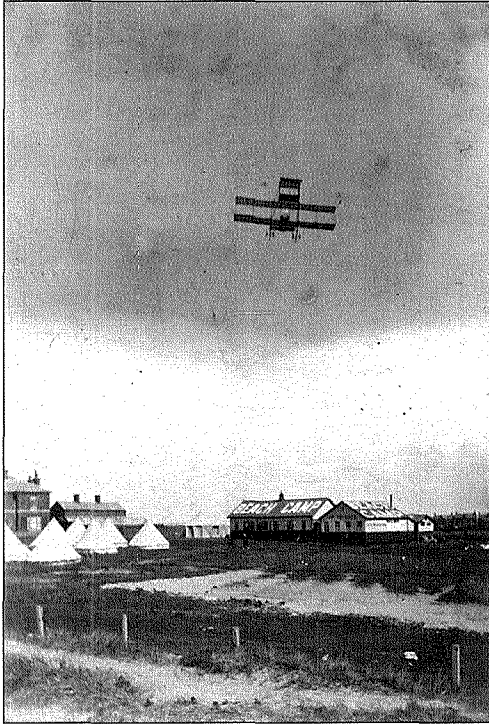


Fig.22



Fig.23

A nice close-up postcard (Fig 24) shows Grahame White about to take off at the August 1910 Blackpool Airshow; card dated 2/8/1910. Grahame White is also shown flying round the Blackpool Tower. The card (Fig 25) is dated 10/8/1910, with the flight almost certainly connected with the Airshow.



Fig.24



Fig.25

The first official Airmail Service was organized in 1911. Special illustrated covers and cards, costing 1/1 and 6½d were used for the first U.K. Aerial Postal Service and to commemorate the 1911 Coronation of George 5th. Several different colours were used. The service operated from the 9th to the 15th of September 1911, London to Windsor and Windsor to London. The cover shown (Fig 26) was flown on the last day of service from Windsor to London, which is the scarcer direction. Gustav Hamel was the main pilot associated with the service and he became known as the 'First Aerial Postman'.

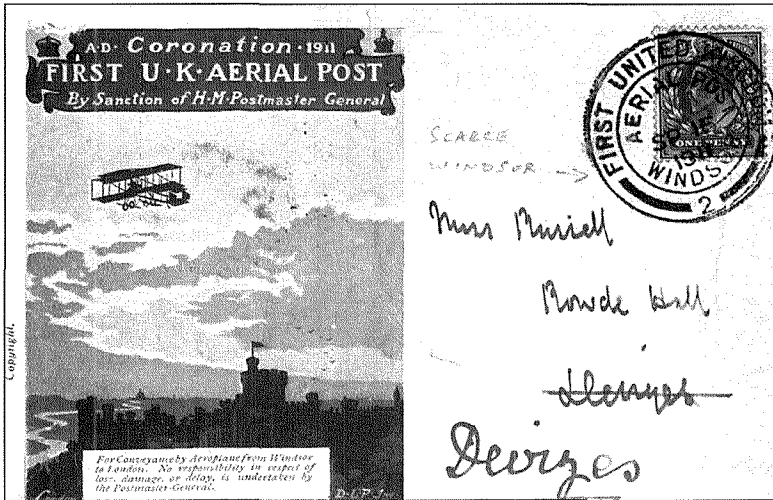


Fig.26

Then there are two First Day Covers for 9/9/1911 in two different colours purple and green (Figs 27 and 28).

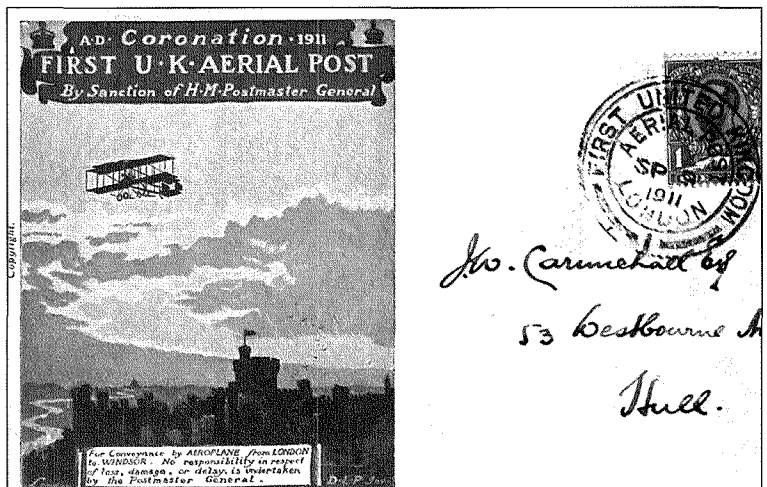


Fig.27



Fig.28

Two cards follow namely (i) the purple-brown card (Fig 29) is a first day of use. It has on reverse instructions as to where they could be bought, their price, how to post etc, and (ii) a grey-green card (Fig 30) which was posted on the 3rd day of the service. A 60th anniversary commemorative card is also shown in Fig 31.

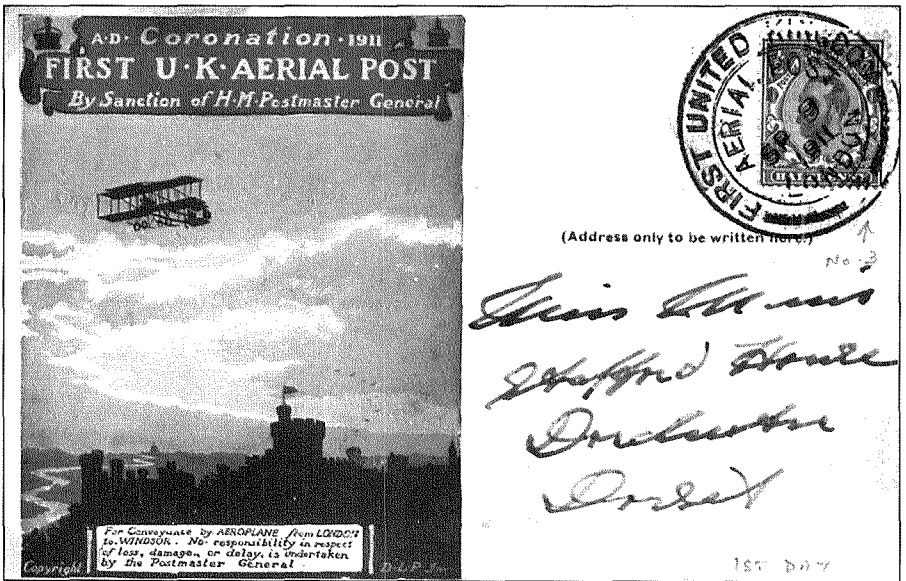


Fig.29



LONDON TO
WINDSOR



(Address only to be written here.)

Miss E Pleydell
30 Telford Ave
Creatham Hill

3rd DM

Fig.30



BRITISH LEGION



50th Anniversary



Flown from RAF Hendon to Windsor Castle, landing on the East lawn in the Home Park Private at 1100 hours on 9th September 1971.

Carried in Bristol Sycamore Mk. XIV, Aircraft Serial No. XG 544, of No. 32 Squadron, Royal Air Force.

Captain :
Flt. Lt. J. E. Darby
Navigator :
Flt. Sgt. W. G. Taylor
Flight Time :
16 Minutes

Fig.31

With such an interest springing up in the idea of manned flight, it did not take long for Aero Clubs to form across the world. The number of well known aviators was very limited and they were in constant demand for publicity purposes etc. Here we have an example. An interesting original letter (Fig 32) written on behalf of Grahame White, declining an invitation to become President of a small Manchester based Model Aero Club.

GW KBB.,

TELEGRAMS:
"VOLPLANE, LONDON."

THE LONDON AERODROME,
HENDON, N.W.

TELEPHONE:
120 KINGSBURY.
(FOUR LINES)

12th March. 1914.

A. Leslie Herridge Esq.,
Manchester Young Mens Christian Ass.,
56, Peter Street,
Manchester.

Dear Sir,

I am instructed by Mr. Grahame-White to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 7th inst., and, while he is much honoured by your asking him to become President of your model Aero Club, he feels that as he is already President of such a large number of Clubs and Institutions, he could not do justice to the post you are now asking him to fill.

He begs me to convey to you his very best wishes for the success of your Club and to inform you he would be pleased to give you any assistance in his power.

Yours faithfully,

Kate B. Banister
secretary.

Fig.32

Real photo postcards dated 1913 (Figs 33 to 35) show different model aeroplanes.

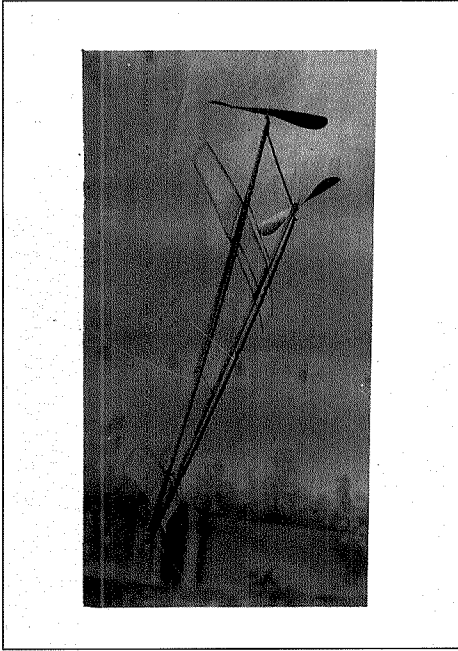


Fig.33



Fig.34

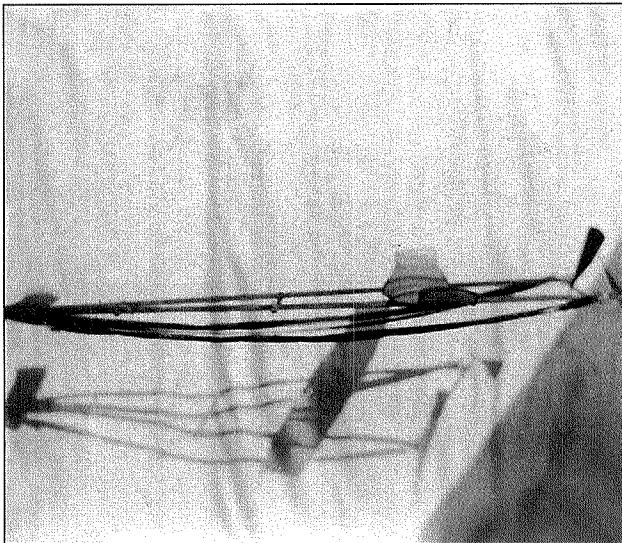


Fig.35

A few entrepreneur aviators started Air Post Services. They included Hamel who had started flying for the Daily Mail (Fig 36) and did the London – Windsor 1911 Service. They developed ‘advertising photocards’ as shown (Fig 37).

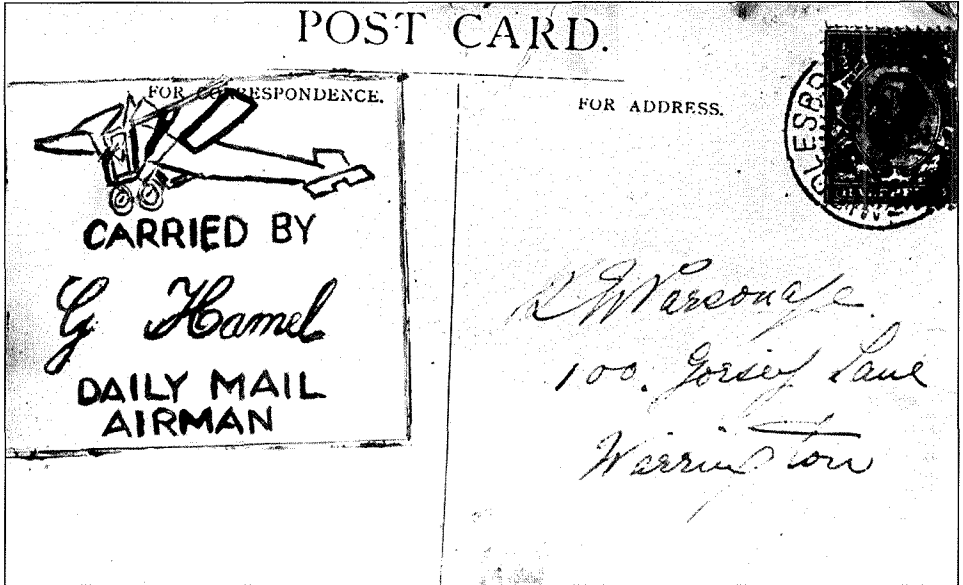


Fig.36



Fig.37

Soon after the first successful flights had taken place, Greeting Cards producers seized the opportunity to create aircraft and flight simulators to photograph and make Christmas, New Year, Birthday and other greeting cards. The first card shown in Fig 38 was sent from the Pyrenees in August 1910. The second card in Fig 39, also dated August 1910, was sent from Accrington, Lancashire. In the background, almost certainly, is Grahame White, who was quick to recognize other business potential. The card was probably bought at the 1910 Blackpool Airshow.

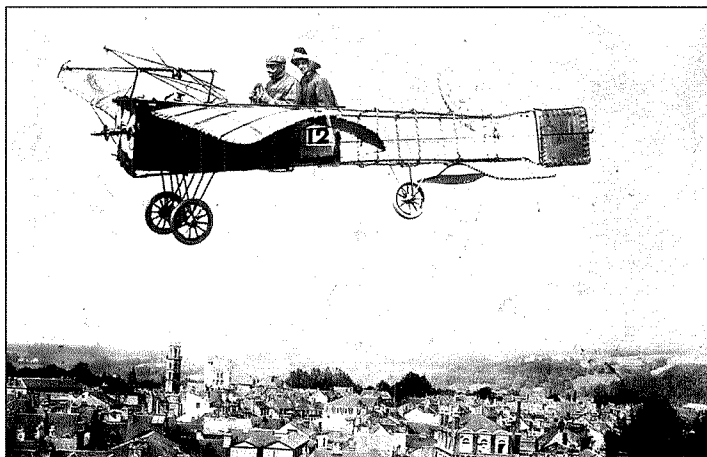


Fig.38



Fig.39

These early and similar greetings cards (Figs 40 & 41) are good examples of exploiting the theme. Both used in 1908, they appear to depict the Wright Brothers biplane.

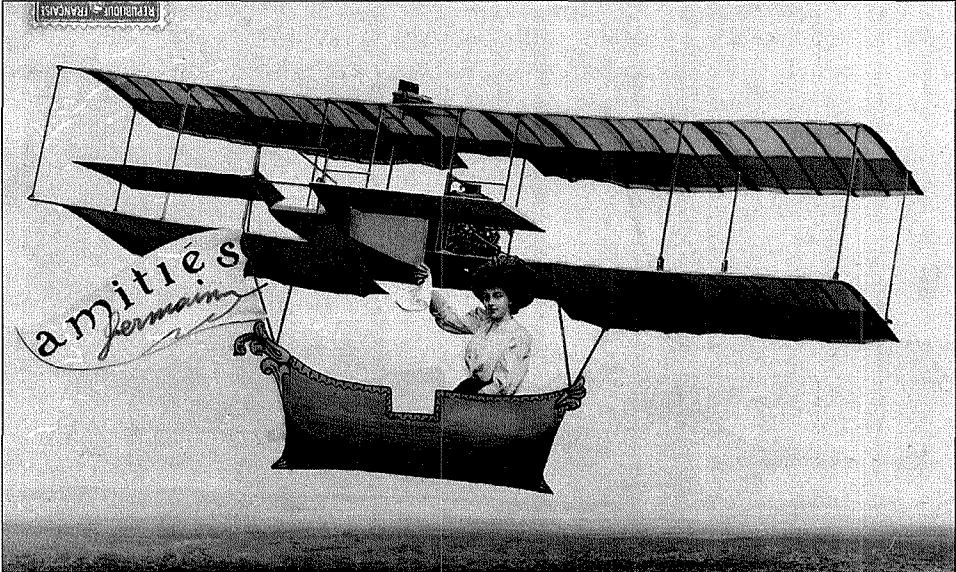


Fig.40



Fig.41

Since the early spate of postcards there have been many commemorative issues of stamps, First Day Covers etc. The cover in Fig 42 commemorates the 60th anniversary of the First Channel crossing by Bleriot in 1909. The flight would have taken about an hour. By Concord (on the stamp) about a minute. The French stamp (Fig 43) is about the same event, but issued for the 25th Anniversary. Also interesting to note Lebanese stamps (Fig 44) were overprinted with an impression of a Bleriot for airmail purposes.

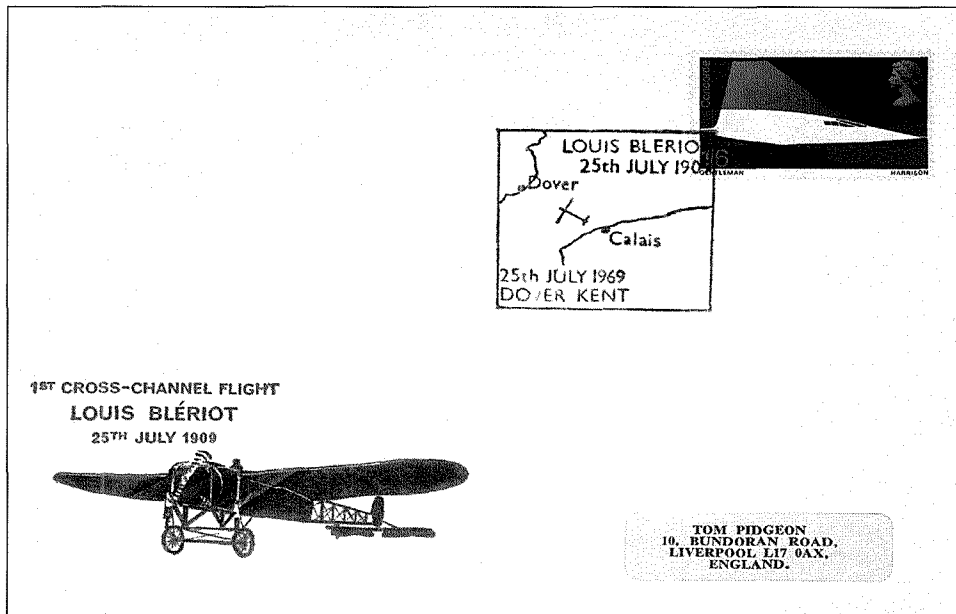


Fig.42



Fig.43

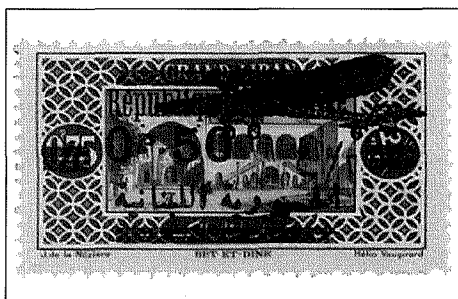


Fig.44

Cigarette manufacturing companies were amongst many who exploited the subject for advertising and publicity purposes. Various series of cigarette cards were produced. The cards shown are from the set issued by Wills titled 'Aviation'.

The cards show:-

- A bicycle powered helicopter (Fig 45).
- An eight engined biplane (Fig 46).
- The first lady aviator Baroness de la Roche, who flew a Voisin in 1909 (Fig 47).
- The German powered airship 'Clouth' (Fig 48).

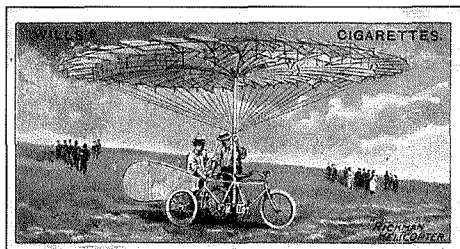


Fig.45

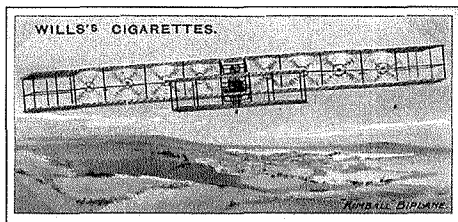


Fig.46

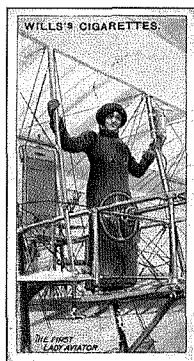


Fig.47

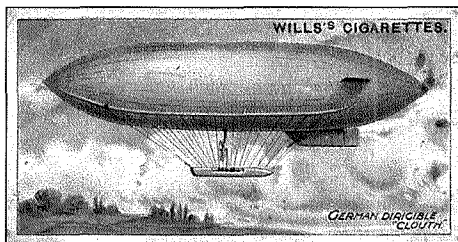


Fig.48

I fully recognize that powered airships are part of "Early Powered Flight". To include them would have made this talk too long. Consequently I have included them in "Part II" – "Balloons and Airships", - a future talk.

Once again it was a pleasure to present my material to the Malta Philatelic Society. In order to make it more manageable for the MPS Journal, about half the items have been omitted.