

Classifying 1935 New Zealand – England Jubilee Flight Covers

Jeff Mitchell

An air crossing of the Tasman Sea by Sir Charles Kingsford Smith was planned for May 1935 as part of the Jubilee celebrations. The carriage of mail was an important part of this flight as Kingsford Smith was keen to establish a regular airmail service between Australia and New Zealand (Jillett, L. 1953). The initial flight from Sydney in the *Southern Cross* departed early on 15 May. The plane experienced mechanical trouble enroute to New Zealand and returned to Sydney with most of the mail (except 7 bags) being jettisoned overboard.

Several printed covers were prepared for the flight, which would have been the first opportunity to send a letter by an all-air route from New Zealand to Britain. Covers were prepared in Australia for the flight (Australia – New Zealand – Australia) and the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department also produced printed covers for use on the New Zealand – England route. It is these second envelopes that this article focuses on.

There have been several versions of the New Zealand – England cover found along with evidence of progressive damage on one of these versions. This article is an attempt to classify the versions by looking at the differences between them. Areas requiring further investigation or explanation are also outlined.

Covers Produced

Three sets of covers were produced for use on the intended 1935 Jubilee Air Mail:

- Australian commemorative covers (AU-NZ-AU)
- New Zealand commemorative covers (AU-NZ-AU)
- New Zealand commemorative covers (NZ-AU-EN).

The first two sets of covers were prepared and printed in Australia and forwarded to New Zealand for use. The third set of covers were arranged and printed in New Zealand and were specifically for the mail traveling from New Zealand to Australia and then on to England via the existing Australia – Singapore – England air route.

Australian Covers

Australia produced commemorative covers for the flight which were designed by Sir Charles Kingsford Smith (Donen, N. and Gilmour, P. 2026). 50,000 covers were produced in one design and printed on either white, blue or old gold lightweight envelopes. These were distributed free of charge at post offices in Australia and New Zealand.



Australia – New Zealand – Australia cover produced in Australia. Sent from Masterton (New Zealand) to Melbourne (Australia).

New Zealand Covers (Australian Design)

A further 25,000 covers were produced in New Zealand (Donen, N. and Gilmour, P. 2026). These used the same design as the Australian version but were printed on larger and heavier envelopes. The ink was either blue or chocolate and the envelopes were white.



Australia – New Zealand – Australia cover produced in New Zealand. Sent from Te Aro (New Zealand) to Victoria (Australia).



Australia – New Zealand – Australia cover produced in New Zealand. Sent from Huntly (New Zealand) to Huntly via Sydney (Australia).

New Zealand Covers (New Zealand Design)

The third set of covers were produced by the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department. These were designed for the New Zealand – Australia – England route. A design for these covers was submitted to the Director of the Post and Telegraph Department (Manawatu Standard, 8 May 1935, Page 7).

A “BY AIR MAIL PAR AVION” etiquette was printed in offset on two lines in the top left corner with an outline box. The text “New Zealand – Australia – England” appeared in a box to the left of the cover and further text appeared at the foot of the cover. This travelled the length of the envelope. It is these covers that we focus on in this article.



Unused copy of the New Zealand – England cover prepared by the NZ Post and Telegraph Department.

Previous Research

It would appear that the New Zealand – Australia – England printed covers have not been well studied. Very little information can be found on the covers themselves or the process of producing them. I could not find any reference to the variations noted in the covers while researching this article. I contacted several people that have written or exhibited on the 1935 Jubilee Air Mail flights and none had looked into these specific covers. Many of the records that could shine a light on these covers are no longer available making the task of researching them that much harder.

Most of the information presented in this article has been gleaned from contemporary newspaper accounts, discussions with collectors and the study of covers I hold along with scans shared by other collectors and found online. One difficulty with contemporary newspaper articles is that it is generally unclear if the articles refer to the AU-NZ covers (based on the Australian design) or the covers for the NZ-AU-EN route (the topic of this article). Any further information regarding the covers would be most welcome.

Release

The covers went on sale on the 9th of May in Auckland and Wellington (Auckland Star, 8 May 1935, Page 7) and 10th of May in Dunedin (Evening Star, 13 May 1935, Page 8). It is presumed that these dates refer to the NZ-AU-EN covers though separate dates for the AU-NZ-AU covers have not been seen to date. The covers were distributed through the post offices. The number printed and sold is not known although there were about 11,000 letters at the Auckland Post Office for the flight (Poverty Bay Herald, 17 May 1935, Page 13) of all types so the number will likely be less than this.

Printing Process

The covers were printed in deep blue on a standard No. 8 envelope (Walker, D. 1986). The covers were printed using letterpress (Grant Longley, personal communication, 7 December 2025). Currently it is unclear if the covers were printed by the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department or if they were printed by the Government Printing Office of New Zealand. The Government Printing Office had a Letterpress department (Glue, W. 1966) making it a candidate for the printing of these envelopes.

Pre-formed envelopes were used for the covers. A print run of over 25,000 would probably be required for the envelopes to be printed in flat sheets to then be cut, folded and glued (Grant Longley, personal communication, 11 January 2026). It is clear from observing the rear of the covers that the BY AIR MAIL etiquette was printed onto the envelopes rather than the paper in sheet form. The impression of the offset border and text is clearly impressed on the rear of the envelope (on the flap) in the correct place. While difficult to see in an image the black lines on the image below provide a guide of where to look.



Rear flap showing impression of BY AIR MAIL etiquette.

Cover Versions

At least four versions of the covers have been identified. Each of the versions represent a separate setting of the type for the printing. Changes to the placement of the type were introduced between each setting resulting in the identified versions. The versions can be easily identified by the primary characteristic which is the form of the text in the lower right of the cover – the “King’s Jubilee” section. Secondary characteristics are also discussed as these too are consistent for a given cover version. The versions are labelled 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Primary Characteristic

The “King’s Jubilee” section would have been composed of separate sections of type making the variations possible. The placement of the letters differs slightly between each setting however it is the presence of the comma after “Jubilee” and the full stop after “1935” that is the easiest to identify. It is unclear if these changes were deliberate or an omission when the type was set up.

The versions are distinguished by text in the lower right of the cover as follows:

- **Version 1:** Comma after “Jubilee” and full stop after “1935”
- **Version 2:** No comma after “Jubilee” and no full stop after “1935”
- **Version 3:** Comma after “Jubilee” but no full stop after “1935”
- **Version 4:** Comma after “Jubilee” but no full stop after “1935”.
 - The type for “1935” has changed and the “Y” of “MAY” is weak.

Examples of each version are as follows:

Version 1



Comma, full stop

Version 2



No comma, no full stop

Version 3



Comma, no full stop

Version 4



Comma, no full stop, changed type

Secondary Characteristics

Each cover version can be further identified by several secondary characteristics which also changed during each print setting. These include the form of the bar under “FIRST AIR MAIL” at the foot of the envelope, the positioning of the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette, the positioning of the “OFFICIAL COVER” text, and the gap in the lower left corner of the border. There are other slight variations in the positioning of the other components of the covers, but these are considered trivial.

With each of these characteristics some variance will be observed between covers of the same version. In Version 2 covers the bar under “FIRST AIR MAIL” can vary considerably in quality. The positioning of the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette is not exact and neither is the “OFFICIAL COVER” text. Despite this, when viewed as a group of covers, and when the combination of these characteristics is taken into consideration, the covers fall into four versions that align with the versions determined by the previous primary characteristic.

Cover versions can also be distinguished by the form of the blue bar below “FIRST AIR MAIL”:

- **Version 1:** The bar is solid
- **Version 2:** The bar tapers to the left
- **Version 3:** The bar is solid with a blob of ink at the left side
- **Version 4:** The bar tapers to the left.



Version 1



Version 2



Version 3



Version 4

The positioning of the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette can vary slightly within a given version, both from the top and from the left side of the envelope. There are clear differences between the versions however:

- **Version 1:** 4-5mm from top of cover, 2mm above the “OFFICIAL COVER” text
- **Version 2:** 3mm from top of cover, 4mm above the “OFFICIAL COVER” text
- **Version 3:** 5mm from top of cover, 2mm above the “OFFICIAL COVER” text
- **Version 4:** has not been sighted with the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette.



Version 1



Version 2



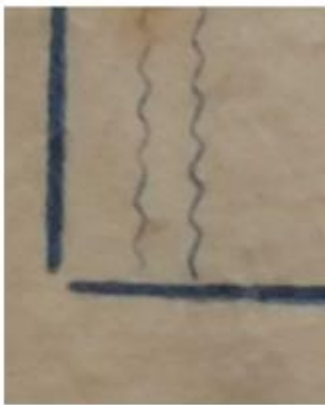
Version 3



Version 4

The form of the lower left corner of the border shows clear differences in Version 1 compared to the other three versions:

- **Version 1:** The horizontal border does not reach the vertical border resulting in a clear gap in the lower left corner
- **Version 2:** The horizontal bar is under the vertical bar with a slight gap between them
- **Version 3:** Unclear as the only Version 3 cover I have sighted had writing over the lower left corner
- **Version 4:** Essentially the same as Version 2.



Version 1



Version 2



Version 4

Cover Subtypes

Within the Version 1 covers there are some variations which can be considered subtypes. These covers have the same general characteristics of Version 1 covers, such as the form of the “King’s Jubilee” section, suggesting they are from the same *setting*. Progressive damage or omissions may have led to the subtypes that have been identified.

Currently the following subtypes have been identified which will be discussed:

- Progression of damage observed in Version 1 covers
- Absence of the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette

Progressive Damage

The letterpress printing process uses type to impress the design on the surface. The type used would have been either lead or zinc letterpress (Grant Longley, personal communication, 7 December 2025). Both are soft and susceptible to damage during the printing process. Version 1 has been seen in an initial *undamaged* state and four *damaged states* which appear to have been caused through progressive damage to the type. The combination of these flaws makes it possible to order them as once a flaw appears it remains consistent. These subtypes have been classified using letters for the damaged states. The four damaged states are listed in the order the damage has occurred.

An interesting feature of Version 1 covers is that there is evidence that the type was altered during the printing process. The distance between the two lines of text in “King’s Jubilee” is very close in the initial state and has been increased for the *second damaged state*. To date no intermediate covers have been observed (e.g. with the lines of text placed further apart but no damage to the “e” of “Jubilee”). Based on this it is currently assumed that the damage to the “e” occurred **while** the type was being modified.

Initial Setting (Undamaged State)

Version one covers have a comma at the end of “Jubilee” and a full stop after “1935”. The *initial undamaged state* can be identified by the well-formed second “e” of

“Jubilee” shown to the right and the clean text of “MAY, 1935.” This is **Version 1**. It is also identifiable by the distance between the two lines of text. In the initial state the two lines are very close together with only around 0.25mm separating them. From the *second damaged state* onwards the lines of text are about 1mm apart.



Version 1 cover. Initial state with no damage.

First Damaged State (a)

The *first damaged state* shows some imperfections to the text “MAY, 1935.” These can be difficult to see without seeing the cover up close. In all other respects the covers appear the same as the *initial undamaged state*.

The text of the *first damaged state* is shown below. These are classed as **Version 1a**. At least two covers have been sighted with these changes confirming they are not merely caused by a transient inking issue:

- Upward tick top right of “M”
- Top left portion of “Y” is missing
- “9” is poorly formed.



All the secondary characteristics of the Version 1 and 1a covers sighted match those of the remaining Version 1 subtypes. Although the “King’s Jubilee” text is the primary characteristic, and it shows a change following these first two subtypes, the consistency with the secondary characteristics suggests that only the “King’s Jubilee” text was modified rather than a new setting being implemented. This is the justification for keeping them all as Version 1.



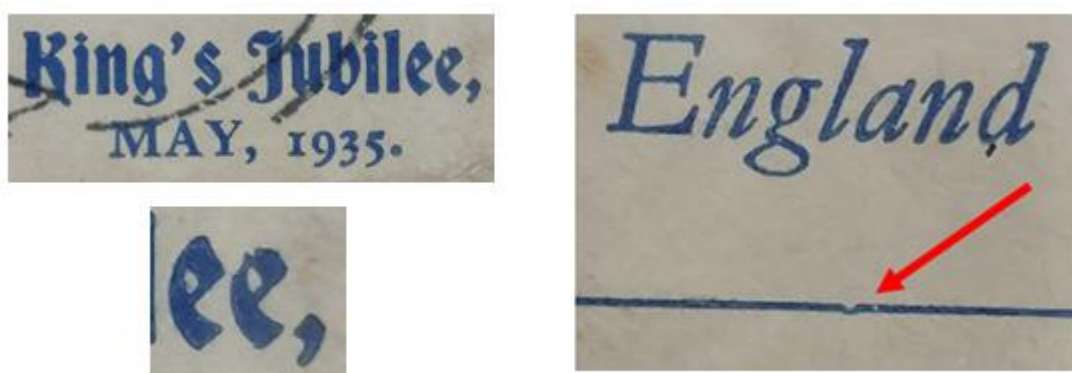
Version 1a cover exhibiting damage to “MAY, 1935.”

Second Damaged State (b)

Changes were made to the type setting with the second row of text being placed further below the “King’s Jubilee” text. While the difference is only around 0.75 mm it is quite distinct when two covers are placed side by side. During (or soon after) this change damage was introduced to the type leading to the *second damaged state (b)*.

Damage was introduced to the second “e” in “Jubilee” which is now shorter and can have a flat appearance or be seen with a chunk missing. This would likely be due to the top of the “e” being knocked off during the printing process where a mallet is used to hit the wooden planer holding the type in place (Grant Longley, personal communication, 7 December 2025). Presumably this could have occurred when the type was repositioned to increase the distance between the two lines of text in the “King’s Jubilee” section.

Damage was also introduced to the lower border around the “New Zealand – Australia – England” text to the left of the cover. To date no covers have been observed with either of these two errors by themselves. Further, no covers have been seen with “MAY, 1935” text placed further from the “King’s Jubilee” line *without* these two errors. They have been grouped together in the *second damaged state (b)* as it is assumed that they occurred either together or close to each other. These covers are **Version 1b**.



Damage sustained leading to the second damaged state (Version 1b).

Unless intermediate state covers can be found it has to be assumed that the damage to the second “e” and the border occurred concurrent with the change to the positioning of the “MAY, 1935.” text. The uptick on the “M” and the weak “Y” are not seen on the second damaged state covers.



Version 1b cover. Damage to second “e” of “Jubilee” has been introduced along with a notch in border below “England”.

Third Damaged State (c)

In the *third damaged state (c)* damage occurred to the right foot of the “F” and the left foot of the “I” in “FIRST AIR MAIL”. This progressively became more distinct. These covers all show the previous damage to the “e” of “Jubilee” and the notch in the border. These are **Version 1c** covers. To date I have only seen three covers from this damaged state.



Version 1c cover. Damage to “F” and “I” has begun. Note “Z” is still intact.

The cover above shows various issues with the inking of “England” in the box to the left. This is just a transitory issue with the inking of this cover rather than a separate state. It is not seen on other covers and later *fourth damaged state (d)* covers with the damaged “Z” do not show any issues with the “England” text.

Fourth Damaged State (d)

In the *fourth damaged state (d)* the top right of the “Z” in “Zealand” to the left of the cover was damaged. During this state the damage at the foot of “FIRST” becomes more distinct and starts to impact the “R”. All *fourth damaged state (d)* covers also display the previous damaged items allowing them to be placed as the final (known) state. These are **Version 1d** covers



Version 1d cover. Damage to the top of the “Z” is now present.

Missing BY AIR MAIL Etiquette

Examples of Version 1 covers exist where the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette has been omitted. The other characteristics of the covers, such as their “King’s Jubilee” type and the location of the left components allow them to be identified as Version 1. It is possible that the Version 4 cover is actually a subtype of a similar cover with the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette but this has not been seen to date. The fact that the covers were intended for the Jubilee Air Mail flight suggests that the omission of the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette was accidental (Peter Gilmour, personal communication, 12 December 2025).

Covers missing the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette are classified with the addition of a Roman numeral (i). To date I am only aware of six Version 1 covers without the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette. The first is an unused envelope which does not show any progressive damage identifying it as Version 1. This is designated **Version 1i**. Further examples have been sighted used at Christchurch and Sumner.



Version 1i (no etiquette) cover.

I have in my collection a Version 1b cover that is also missing the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette. This cover has been used postally, being sent from Dunedin on 13 May 1935. It has the damaged “e” of “Jubilee” and the notch in the lower border. The “F” and “I” of “FIRST” are intact placing it as Version 1b. Although it is the New Zealand – Australia – England cover it was only posted to Sydney. This is designated **Version 1bi**.



Version 1bi (no etiquette) cover.

A similar Version 1bi cover is in the collection of Peter Gilmour. His was posted from Millers Flat which is to the east of Dunedin and travelled the full route to England. I have seen online a further *potential* Version 1bi cover. This cover has a “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette (with perforations) attached in the location that the etiquette should be. This cover was posted from Lawrence which is near Millers Flat.

Version 2 Covers

Version 2 covers show a resetting of the printing process, however, it is not clear if they were printed before or after the Version 1 covers. The text in “King’s Jubilee” has about 1mm between the two lines, consistent with the later subtypes of the Version 1 covers so it is *assumed* that they were printed following the Version 1 covers.

The lack of the comma and full stop in the “King’s Jubilee” text is the most obvious change with the Version 2 covers. There are also some changes to the positioning of the elements including the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette and the “OFFICIAL COVER” text. The lower left corner of the border has been largely closed up.

The vertical lines between “New Zealand – Australia – England” are noticeably thinner on the Version 2 covers and this is also seen on the Version 3 and 4 covers.



Version 1



Version 2

Version 2 covers appear to have had a similar distribution to Version 1 covers and have been seen posted in both the North and South Islands. To date I have not seen any Version 2 covers missing the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette.



Version 2 cover.

In the Version 2 covers the line under “FIRST AIR MAIL” tapers to the left. In some of the covers the line is solid while in others there are patches in the line. Between covers this can be quite varied. Due to this inconsistency it cannot be confirmed that the variances are due to progressive damage and so these variations are not considered subtypes.

Version 3 Covers

I have only seen a single copy of a Version 3 cover and this was online. This cover has a comma after “Jubilee” but is missing the full stop after the “1935”. The cover sighted was a late posting, being date stamped 23 May 1935 which is after the covers scheduled for the original flight had left New Zealand via ship. It has the 2s 1d rate for the original flight, 1s 6d being the correct rate for mail such as this cover that travelled via ship to Australia and then flew via the Australia – Singapore – London route.

As it has been sighted via a photo it is difficult to determine exact measurements. The “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette is lower, being much closer to the Version 1 covers than the Version 2. The vertical lines between “New Zealand – Australia – England” look to be thin like the Version 2 covers. The distance between the two lines of text in the lower right also looks similar to the Version 2 covers. The line below “FIRST AIR MAIL” is solid and there is a blob at the left end of the line. As only one cover is sighted it is not possible to determine yet if this was a transitory printing issue or caused by the type used.



Version 3 cover sighted online.

Version 4 Covers

The last distinct version that has been identified is **Version 4**. To date I am aware of six copies of this version. Four are in my collection and were posted in Invercargill (13, 14 and 15 May), one is held by Doug Tennant and was posted at Oamaru 11 May and a sixth is in the collection of Peter Gilmour and was posted at Timaru 15 May.

Version 4 covers do not have a full stop after the “1935” although there is a comma after “Jubilee”. The numbers “1935” are thinner than the other cover versions. The “Y” of “May” is weak on the right upstroke. The text of “MAY, 1935” is clearly different from the Version 3 cover that has been observed. Interestingly, the vertical lines between “New Zealand – Australia – England” are very similar to those of Version 2 (and potentially Version 3) covers. There is about 1mm of space between the two lines of text of “King’s Jubilee” which is also similar to the Version 2 covers.

The sighted covers do not have the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette and it is unknown if there are copies that do. Currently they are classified as only being without the etiquette and this will be updated if a copy with the etiquette comes to light. Some of the covers show weakness in the bar under “FIRST AIR MAIL” but the placement and degree of weakness differ for each cover.



Version 4 cover.

Sequencing of Covers

It is not known in what order the separate versions arose. It is suggested that the progressive damage observed in the Version 1 covers led to a reset of the printing process resulting in the generation of the Version 2 covers, however, this is just an assumption. Progressive damage has not been noted in Version 2 covers. There are several similarities between the Versions 2, 3 and 4 covers which would suggest they were printed as a group separate to the Version 1 covers. These similarities are

- The similar distance between the two rows of the “King’s Jubilee” text (which is also shared by the final three *damaged states* of the Version 1 covers)
- The vertical lines of “New Zealand – Australia – England” being thinner than Version 1
- The gap in the lower left corner of the box is larger in Version 1 but closer together in the subsequent versions
- Absence of the notch in the border from the final three *damaged states* of the Version 1 covers (though this still has to be confirmed for Version 3 covers).

The “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette positioning is much closer in Version 1 and 3 although a physical cover needs to be sighted to make an accurate measurement. The position of the etiquette varies slightly among Version 1 covers although it is always clearly different from the Version 2 covers.

Catalogue Entries

The following is the list of proposed classification numbers for covers that are known to exist. The number in brackets is the number of covers that I have observed as of September 2026:

Version 1 (16)

Version 1i *No etiquette* (3)

Version 1a *First damaged state* (2)

Version 1b *Second damaged state* (11)

Version 1bi *Second damaged state, No etiquette* (3)

Version 1c *Third damaged state* (3)

Version 1d *Fourth damaged state*^{*1} (27)

Version 2 (43)

Version 3 (1)

Version 4 (6)

^{*1} Due to the placement of stamps (covering the “Z”) it is not always possible to distinguish between Versions 1c and 1d. Covers are assumed to be 1d for the purposes of these figures.

Further Research Required

Assumptions have been made in this article regarding the order that the versions were produced. The number of covers sighted is rather limited relative to the number that would have been sent, so it is possible that there are further versions that have not been noted here. Some of the outstanding questions that require further research include:

- Who printed the covers?
- How many covers were printed and how many were sold?
- Were the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquettes omitted deliberately or by accident?
- Were the differences in the type used for the “King’s Jubilee” deliberate?
- Are there other versions of the covers?
- Are there other intermediate states (of each version)?
- Is there a Version 4 cover with the “BY AIR MAIL” etiquette?
- What order were the versions printed in?
- Are there covers of Version 1b that show if the notch in the border appeared before or after the damage to the “e” of “Jubilee”?

To assist with answering these questions the author would appreciate scans of further covers. Please email Jeff Mitchell at sportcoachnz@gmail.com

References

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