

THE ICAO CORNER

by Albert Pelsser

ISLE OF MAN: THE DIGITAL SCHNEIDER TROPHY

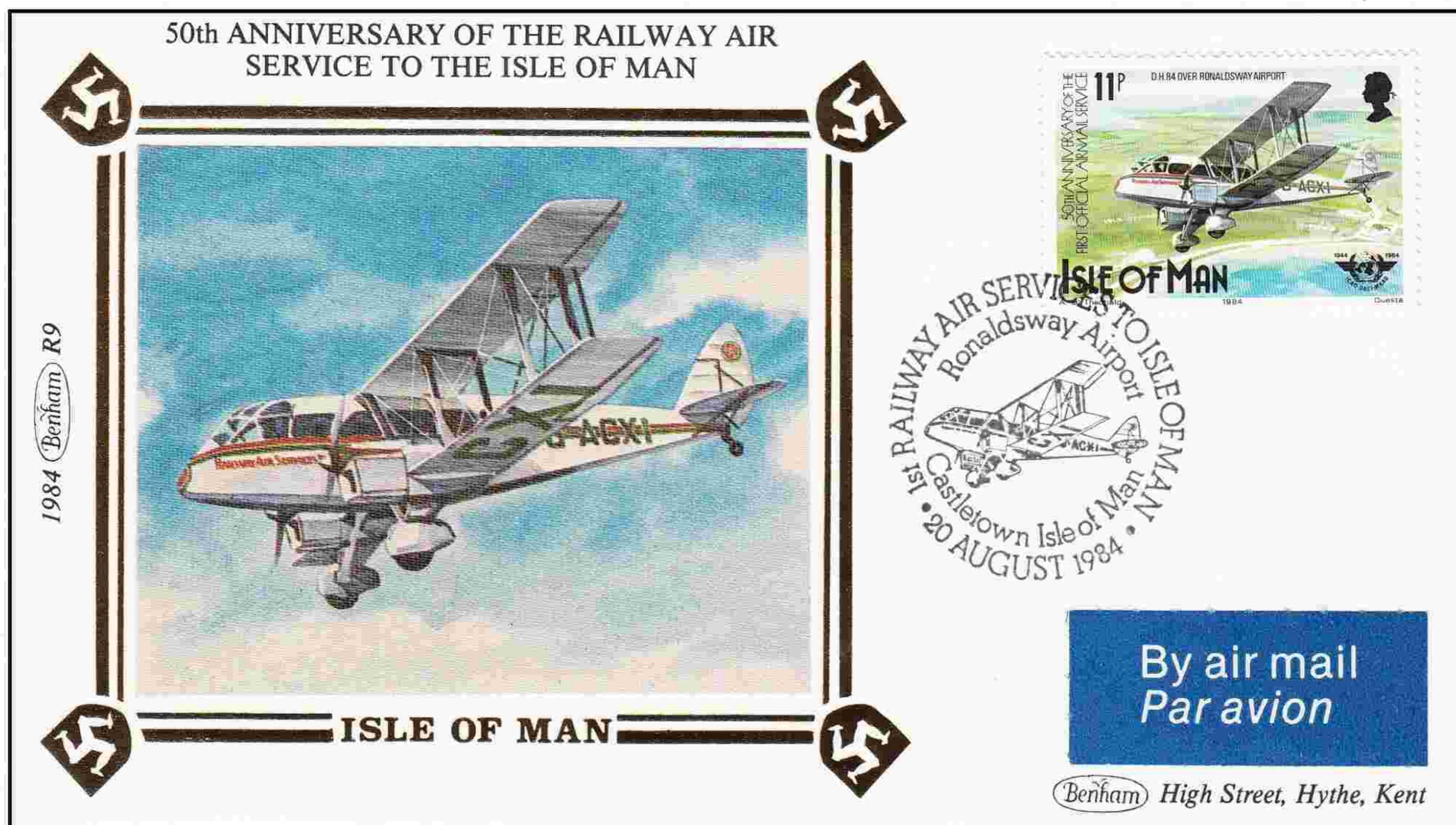


Figure 1

The September issue of *The Canadian Connection* provided a framework for a new series of articles titled "The ICAO Corner." This is the first story within this series and focuses on the Isle of Man's issue commemorating the 40th anniversary of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which has its headquarters in Montreal, Canada, since 1945, and the 50th anniversary of the first official airmail service to the Isle of Man. The five stamps of this issue bear, in the lower-right corner, the ICAO emblem with the dates 1944-1984. Since its 40th anniversary, ICAO has decided to use the ending date of the Chicago Conference (that is, 7 December 1944), which created the permanent organization, for the celebration of its anniversaries.

The early mail exchanges between the Isle of Man and its neighbours were by sailing ships and steamers. Although used as an airfield since 1929, Ronaldsway served as the airport for the Isle of Man from 1934 when a license was granted for public transport operations. The Railway Air Services (RAS) was a British airline formed in March 1934 by four railway companies and Imperial Airways. RAS's trunk service commenced on 20 August 1934, using the airline's newly delivered (i.e. on 16 August 1934) DH.84 Dragon Mk2 registered G-ACXI (see Scott #262 at Figure

1) which operated on the route Glasgow/Belfast/Isle of Man/Manchester. The number of letters and postcards carried on this first flight was 797; letters weighing less than two ounces were carried at no extra cost. It was the Island's first experimental airmail service; the first regular airmail service from Liverpool was started on 1 February 1935 by Blackpool and West Coast Air Services Ltd.

The Benham Silk cover at Figure 1 commemorated the actual date of the 50th anniversary of the Railway Air Services to the Isle of Man, i.e. 20 August 1934, at Ronaldsway airport located in the south of the island near Castletown. Each corner of the cachet on the left-side shows the triskelion taken from the flag of the Isle of Man. A triskelion, from a Greek word meaning "three-legged", is a symbol consisting of three bent human legs (or more generally three interlocked spirals) joined in such a way that the overall emblem has a threefold rotational symmetry, but no reflection symmetries; although it appears in many places and periods, it is especially characteristic of the Celtic art. The three-leg symbol is said to represent the three dynamic elements: water, air, and fire; others say that it symbolizes the Sun, the seat of Power and Life.

Since the early airmail, various charter planes were



Figure 2

used to carry mail from and to the Island as shown on the other stamps of the issue, i.e. the de Havilland D.H.86A *Dragon Express* in late 1930s and early 1940s, the *Douglas DC-3* between 1949 and 1963, the Vickers *Viscount 806* from 1960s, and finally the *Britten-Norman BN-2A-27* when this issue was released. The two letter cuts at Figures 2 and 3 show first day cancels at Douglas, the capital and largest town of the Isle of Man, and Ramsey, the second largest town on the island.

Of great interest is the first day cover at Figure 4 depicting a cancel at Jurby dated 27 April 1984 (i.e. date of the stamp issue) and commemorating the 70th anniversary of the first British win of the Schneider Trophy on 20 April 1914. Jurby Airfield on the Isle of Man was originally used as a Royal Air Force (RAF) training base in World War II.

During the 1950s, it was used as a training camp for Officer Cadets on short term commissions in the RAF. Part is now used as an industrial and retail estate; the old runways and taxiways now form the Jurby motorcycle race track. This cancel shows a *Sopwith Tabloid* aircraft, the triskelion from the country's flag, and the Schneider Trophy.



Figure 3

The actual date of the above-mentioned 70th anniversary (i.e. 20 April) fell in 1984 on Good Friday, a day on which no movement of post or post-marking is done. Therefore, the following Friday 27 April 1994 was chosen for this anniversary, which coincided with the issue of the new series of stamps depicting the 50th anniversary of the Air Mail Service in the Isle of Man.



Figure 4

The Coupe d'Aviation Maritime Jacques Schneider (commonly called the Schneider Trophy or Cup) was a prize competition for seaplanes. As race referee at the Monaco meeting in 1912, Jacques Schneider, a French financier, balloonist and aircraft enthusiast, noticed that seaplane design was lagging far behind other aircraft. Seaplanes promised to be the best solution for long-range passenger service; so, he thought that a seaplane race would allow these aircraft to improve more quickly. Announced in 1911 by Jacques Schneider, it offered a trophy to the value of £1,000 (to be passed to consecutive winners), plus a cash prize of £1,000 for each of the three successive years. The race was held eleven times between 1913 and 1931. It was meant to encourage technical advances in civil aviation, but became a contest for pure speed with laps over a triangular course (initially 280 km, later 350 km). The races were very popular and some attracted crowds of over 200,000 spectators. The races were supervised by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) and the Aero Club in the hosting country.

The trophy itself is an overwhelming object of art nouveau style. Designed by E. Garbard, it is a silver-plated casting of a woman with wings, the Spirit of Flight, kissing the waves in which appear four heads of young men: Neptune and three Tritons. Since 1977, the trophy has been

on display at the Science Museum in London and a full-size replica was cast.

The trophy was first competed for on 16 April 1913, at Monaco and won by a French *Deperdussin* airplane (Pilot: Maurice Prévost) at an average speed of 45.71 mph (73.56 km/h). On 20 April 1914 at Monaco, the British won the Schneider Trophy with a Sopwith *Tabloid* (in floatplane configuration), flown by Howard Pixton, at 86.83 mph (139.74 km/h); it was the first British aeroplane to beat all comers in a major international contest. On 13 September 1931, John N. Boothman, Great Britain, won the Schneider Trophy contest outright for Britain in a *Supermarine S.6B* at 547.31 km/h.

Following a number of pre-war designs for the Royal Naval Air Service, Sopwith's first major success in 1913 was the fast and compact (hence the name) *Tabloid*, a design which first showed the influence of the company's test pilot, the Australian Harry Hawker. Fitted with a 100hp Gnome mono-soupape engine, the aircraft's speed made it an obvious candidate for entry to the Schneider Trophy competition. Created originally as a civil two-seater, the *Tabloid* was later selected for military services as a single-seat scout. The first day cover with silk cachet at Figure 5 shows the Sopwith *Tabloid* in a float-equipped version which won the Schneider Trophy in 1914; the race number 3 is painted on

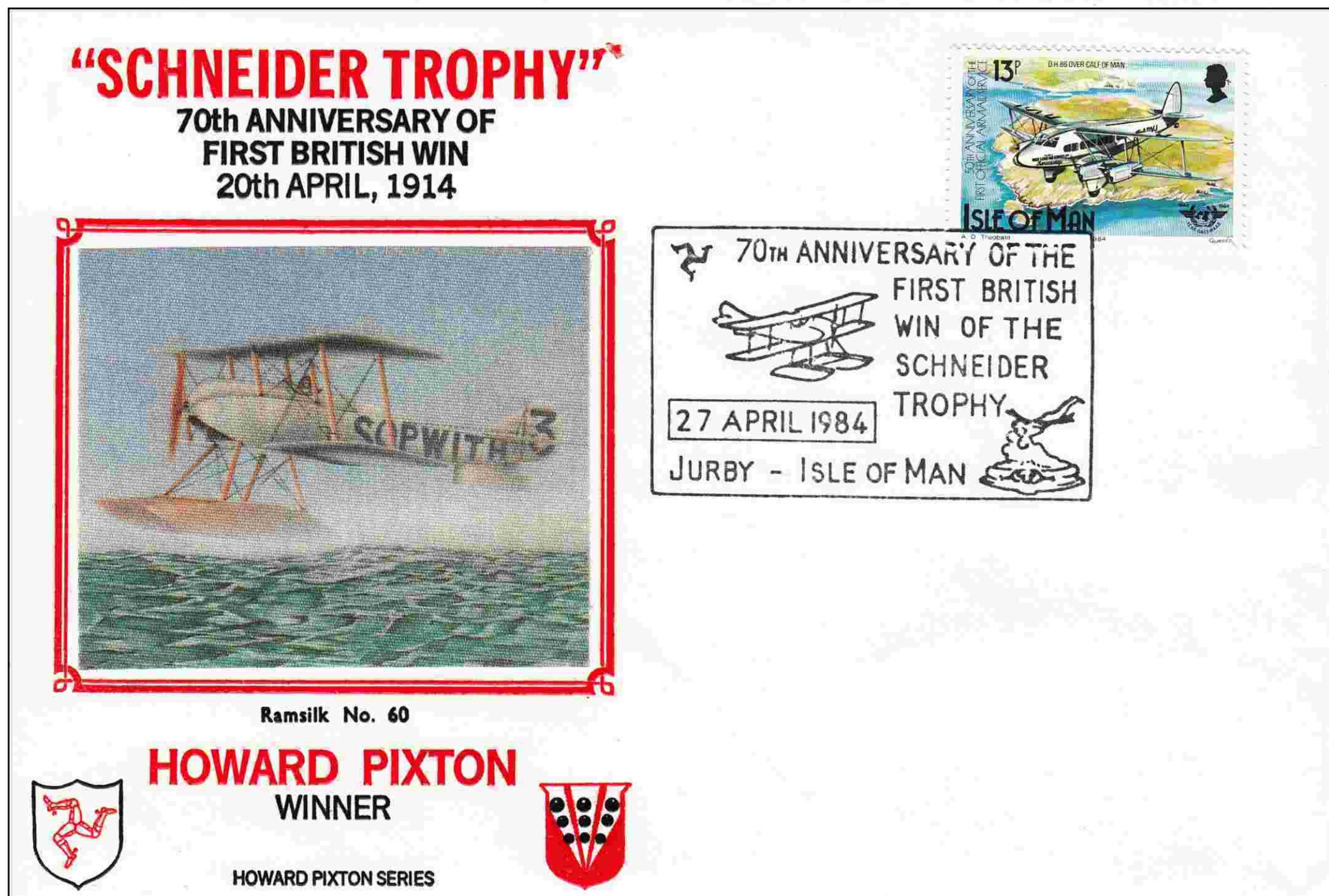


Figure 5

the tail. The floatplane variant consequently became known as the Sopwith *Schneider*, of which 136 were built.

Charles Howard Pixton (1885-1972) was an early British aviator; his later career involved flying the first newspapers to the Isle of Man and Pixton is reputed to have flown the first fare paying passengers, also to the Isle of Man. He is buried at Jurby, Isle of Man.

In 1981, the race was revived by the Royal Aero Club (RAeC) of Great Britain to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Britain's ultimate retention of the Trophy; it was opened on a handicapped basis to any propeller-driven land-plane capable of maintaining 100 miles per hour in straight and level flight. The race venue has varied, but is still flown on most occasions around a Solent-based course, the Solent being the channel separating the Isle of Wight and the mainland of England.

Aimed at raising its corporate visibility in Great Britain, the UK subsidiary of US computer company Digital Equipment Corporation (DIGITAL or DEC) decided to sponsor the 1984 British Air Racing Championship (held from 12 May to 15 September), and in particular the Schneider Trophy, renamed the *Digital Schneider Trophy* with the first race held in 1984, as well as a special event to celebrate the Schneider Trophy races of the Twenties and Thirties. The Royal Air Forces (RAF) bases hosted events and the 1984 Air Racing rounded off the whole season with

the King's Cup air race held on the Battle of Britain Day (i.e. 15 September 1984). The *Battle of Britain* is the name given to the Second World War air campaign waged by the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) against the United Kingdom during the summer and autumn of 1940.

Three of the races were designated as British Aviation Bicentenary events which commemorated the first balloon ascent from British soil; an apothecary familiar with chemistry, James Tytler, launched on 25 August 1784 his hot air balloon (without the furnace) from Comely Garden, Edinburgh, and descended on the road to Restalrig, about half a mile from the place where he rose.

The Royal Aero Club of UK also sponsored the major events and organized the 1984 event of the Digital Schneider Trophy air race on 23-24 June at Bembridge (Isle of Wight) airfield (start and finish), among a calendar of various air races. The 1984 race field was 62 entrants, believed at the time to be the largest-ever in all forms of air racing; five nations entered: France, Germany, Switzerland, America and Britain. Pilot Paul Moorhead won the 1984 Trophy on a *Beagle Pup* at the average speed of 215.65 km/h (134.00 mph).

The cancel shown at Figure 5 was reutilized on the latter dates to commemorate both events, i.e. the 70th anniversary of the first British win of the Schneider Trophy by Great Britain and the Digital Schneider Trophy held for



Figure 6

the first time in 1984 (see first day cover with silk cachet at Figure 6).

Bembridge Airport is a local airport located to the east of the island. The airport is the home to the aircraft manufacturer Britten-Norman, which has sold more than 1,250 aircraft to customers in more than 120 countries. In addition to aircraft manufacturing, the company also performs maintenance, overhaul and repair work as well as performing sub-contract engineering and design work. The company's sole factory is located at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight, although airframes are assembled under sub-contracts.

DEC sponsored this revived race series from 1984 until 1991, which also marked the diamond jubilee of the final race in the original series. This sponsorship had a

profound effect on the awareness and popularity of handicapped air racing in the UK and further afield, as well as markedly increasing DEC's commercial profile in the UK. The appeal of the race, its historic connections, and the fact that prize money was now on offer, meant that the entry list for the race was large enough to warrant the introduction of heats from 1985 onwards. After DEC's departure as sponsor after the 1991 race, the race continued. The venue has varied, but is still flown on most occasions around a Solent-based course, usually around September of each year.

This story only illustrates a few philatelic items related to the Isle of Man's stamp issue. Of course, many others were released; should the reader have a particular interest in those, the author of this article may be reached at sar4gerdo@sympatico.ca.

CHECKLIST

Isle of Man	262-266	1984 Apr 27	40th anniversary of International Civil Aviation Organization ICAO
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