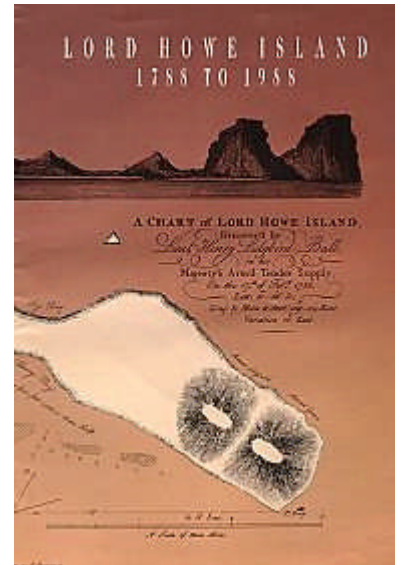


Transportation & Communication

During the early days, the Islanders relied on passing ships to bring news of the outside world, supplies and passengers. The Islanders would fly a flag from Signal Point or Jim's Point, depending on wind direction, to indicate on which side of the Island an approaching ship should anchor. The first regular trading vessel was 'The Rover's Bride' and she was followed by a succession of similar vessels until Burns Philp commenced a regular steamship service to Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands in 1893. The SS 'Morinda', probably the best known of the Burns Philp ships to service the Island, provided a regular passenger run between 1932 and 1952.



Unloading the Catalina (c. 1947) and Kingair (c. 1987)

Prior to 1893 mail was received only rarely, letters or business papers being handed over in Sydney to anyone coming to the Island. The duties of postman were undertaken by Captain Spurling, who settled on the Island in 1861, and he delivered all mail received.



Unloading the "Thetis", circa 1882

Captain Richard Armstrong was appointed the first official postmaster in 1878 with the result that residents had to call for their letters instead of having them delivered.

Campbell Stevens was appointed postmaster in 1882 (after the Bowie Wilson commission) and held the position for many years, eventually being forced into retirement by his total deafness. Towards the end of his term of office, anyone wishing to convey a message to him was compelled to write every word on a slate, which was kept for the purpose. (Stevens' Reserve, where the post office was located, was named for Campbell Stevens.)

In 1924 the post office was transferred to the residence of Harry Smythe, and he held the position of postmaster until 1929 when a radio station was established on the Island. All postal business was to be undertaken in the same building and Stan Fenton, radio operator for AWA,



The Miranda, circa 1937

was appointed postmaster. He sent the first telegram, in Morse code, from the Island on 19 August 1929.

During World War II the Island played an important role in the collection and transmission of meteorological data and monitored aircraft movement across the Pacific. Radio facilities were taken over by the Department of Civil Aviation and upgraded, a radio telephone being installed which enabled voice communication with aircraft over a limited range.

After the War, numerous cargo ships operated from Sydney on a fairly regular basis but there was no passenger service. One of these vessels, the 'Jacques del Mar', was wrecked on the reef near the North Passage in 1954.

The post-war period also heralded the era of the flying boats which spanned the years from 1947 to 1974.

Trans Oceanic Airways commenced the first commercial passenger service to the Island in 1947 followed a few months later by QANTAS Airways (The Burns Philp shipping service had deteriorated during the War years due to a shortage of ships, irregularity and one way service - mainland to Island.)

Trans Oceanic Airways later took over the Lord Howe Service from QANTAS by mutual agreement to avoid competition after both airlines had operated simultaneously for some time. Catalina and Sunderland flying boats were utilised until Ansett-ANA took over the service and introduced Sandringhams in the early 1950's.

Providing the last scheduled flying boat service in the world, the majestic Sandringhams 'Pacific Chieftain', 'Islander' and 'Beachcomber', each able to carry 42 passengers, took off from Rose Bay in Sydney Harbour to touch down in Lord Howe's beautiful lagoon some three hours later. Flights were timed to arrive at the Island one hour before high tide to ensure take-off on the full tide; this meant that departure from Rose Bay often occurred in the early hours of the morning, seeming to add to the romance and drama of the trip.

During this time, the lagoon and jetty (where passengers alighted after being ferried by launch from the flying boats) were virtually the social centre of the Island. Islanders and visitors alike gathered to meet incoming passengers, collect parcels, or farewell departing guests with frangipani and hibiscus leis. Traditionally, leis were thrown into the water from departing launches, inevitably washing ashore to signify their wearer's return.

By 1974 operation of the much loved flying boats had become uneconomic and so, after all efforts to retain them had failed and exhaustive investigation of alternative aircraft, a 1000-metre all weather airstrip was constructed.

Construction was carried out by the Royal Australian Engineers as contractors to the NSW Department of Public Works and completed in September 1974. (On 10 September 1974 virtually the whole population turned out to farewell the flying boat 'Beachcomber' on the last scheduled flight to the Island.)



From 1939 to 1975 telegrams and letters were the main means of communication, with sometimes hundreds of telegrams being sent when flying boats were delayed by bad weather.

In 1975 the Department of Transport, through Telecom, supplied a direct telephone link between the Island and mainland Australia. Public access, at the post office, was provided for a few hours each day when Department traffic permitted.

The last morse code telegram was sent from the Island on 11 August 1975 by Rupert Giles, officer-in-charge for the Department of Civil Aviation. This was the last morse public correspondence circuit to be used in Australia.

Private telephones were installed in 1982 and communication was through a manual exchange. Direct dialling via satellite was installed in July 1987. Direct television reception also became possible with the advent of the AUSSAT satellite.



Today Islanders still depend on ships to transport cargo and two vessels are currently operating to the Island - one maintaining a service from Sydney and another providing a fortnightly service from Yamba (NSW).

Visitors travel to Lord Howe by twin-engined aircraft, which make up to six flights per day from Sydney and are more reliable if less romantic than the flying boats. There are **regular services** from Brisbane, Port Macquarie and Norfolk Island, bringing passengers from all over Australia and overseas, mail and a limited amount of freight.

There is, however, growing concern over the long term viability of existing airline services utilising small aircraft and, because the airstrip cannot be extended due to environmental and engineering constraints, the feasibility of short take-off and landing aircraft is being investigated.

* * *

Sailo

In the days of the early settlers, the arrival of a sailing ship was of great importance to the Island. Visiting ships brought mail and news from the outside world, and were frequently a source of income for the Islanders (who sold or bartered their own farm produce in return for tea, flour, sugar and cloth). In the heyday of the whaling industry, up to 60 sailing ships per year are known to have called at the Island.

When a sailing ship appeared on the horizon, the first person sighting it would shout "SAIL-O!!!" at the top of his or her voice. The cry would be picked up by the nearest neighbour, who would repeat the call - and so on down the Island until every person knew of the impending arrival.

Strange as it may seem, the cry 'SAIL-O' continued to be used even in the era of Burns Philp steamships. For example, during World War 11, when there was a complete radio blackout to avoid giving information to the enemy, Islanders had no idea when the B.P. ship would

arrive. A lookout posted on Malabar, upon sighting the steamer, would start the cry "SAIL-O!" to alert the Island to the imminent arrival of freight, mail and passengers.

* * *

Where are they now?

Flying boats commenced operating to Lord Howe in 1947 and flights were fortnightly.

By the 1970's the flying boats were averaging six or seven flights per week during busy periods and, on occasions, there were two flights per day. Each flight carried up to 42 passengers.

Up to 7,000 visitors were transported to the Island annually, each staying an average of 10 to 12 days.



LHI Courier Post stamps depicting Island aviation

The construction of an airstrip on Lord Howe Island in 1974 brought an end to the flying boat service. The two remaining flying boats, 'Islander' and 'Beachcomber', were sold to Captain Charles Blair, President of Antilles Air Boats. They flew the Pacific to the Virgin Islands to join the fleet of smaller flying boats and amphibians already operated by the airline. A number of the Australian crews had become so attached to the Sandringhams that they elected to change airlines to stay with them.

'Beachcomber' was taken to England in 1976 and 1977, enabling many people to take pleasure flights along the south coast. In 1980 she again returned to the United Kingdom and the Atlantic crossing proved to be her last flight. She now holds pride of place in the Southampton Hall of Aviation.

'Islander' is still airworthy and it was hoped that she would return to the island for celebrations in November 1987 to mark the 40th anniversary of the commencement of the flying boat service. Sadly, the proposal had to be abandoned because of the high cost involved.