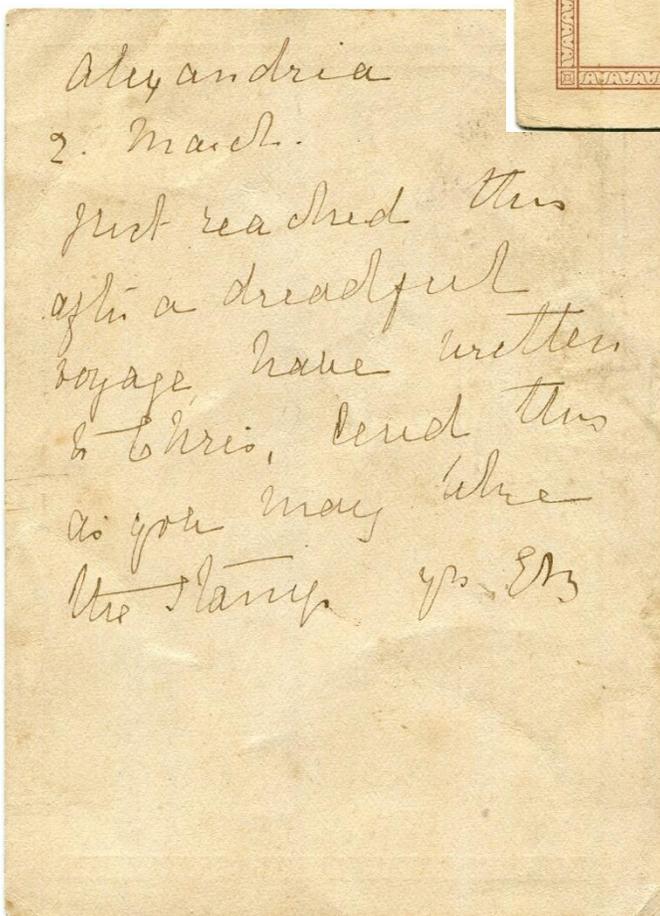
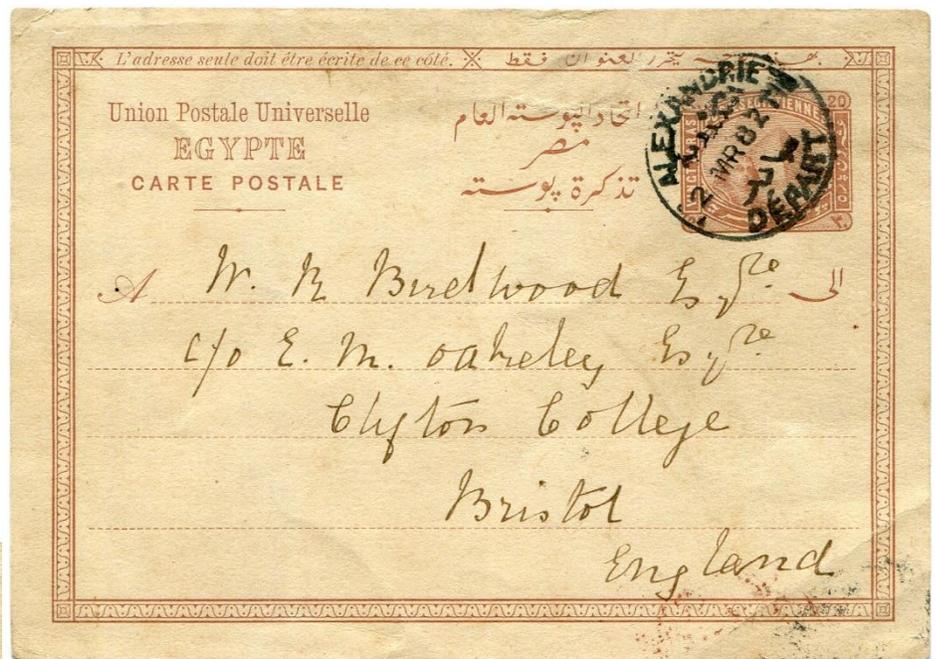


# THE LIFE AND CAREER OF FIELD MARSHAL LORD BIRDWOOD OF ANZAC AND TOTNES, GCB, GCSI, GCMG, GCVO, CIE, DSO, LLD, DCL, DLitt, MA

William Riddell Birdwood was born on 13 September 1865, son of Herbert Birdwood, Under-Secretary to the Government of Bombay, at Kirkee, near Poona, India. He was the second of five sons, and had one elder sister. He came from a family with a strong military tradition: his grandfather, General Christopher Birdwood, was of the Bombay Army, and his mother Edith, was daughter of Surgeon-Major Impey of the Bombay Horse Artillery, and was for a time the Postmaster-General of Bombay.

Birdwood attended Clifton College (Oakeley's House) from 1877 to 1882, and gained a commission in the 4th battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers. He then went to the Military College at Sandhurst. He received his commission in May 1885 (early, because of fears of a Russian invasion of Afghanistan), and was gazetted as a lieutenant in the XII (Prince of Wales's) Royal Lancers, and immediately embarked for India.



Above:  
2 March 1882 - postcard from his mother to William Birdwood, school boy at Clifton College

Left:  
Scan of back of card, text reads:  
'Alexandria, 2 March, Just reached this after a dreadful voyage, have written to Chris, send this as you may like the stamp'. Yours, initialled EMB (Edith Marion Birdwood)

Major Reference: KHAKI AND GOWN,  
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY by Field Marshall  
Lord Birdwood, published Ward, Lock &  
Co Ltd, London and Melbourne, 1941

## Lieutenant Birdwood - Officer in Bengal Lancers

William Birdwood sailed for India in 1885 as a newly commissioned officer, and transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> Bengal Lancers in 1887. Note that the card is addressed to Mr W R Birdwood, and that his military rank is not used.

British postal card (with a printed reverse) from the London shipping agent Davies, Turner & Co, postmarked with a hooded London date stamp of 11 November 1892. There is also a SEA POST OFFICE cancel dated 21 November 1892, and the RAWLAPINDI DELIVERY date stamp of 30 November 1892.



## Captain Birdwood - family postcard

This Swiss postal card was written by his mother. The postal card is prepaid at five cents, with another five cents to pay overseas delivery. It has been postmarked Weggis (near Lucerne), Switzerland, dated 21 August 1895. There is also the transit postmark of SEA POST OFFICE (with code A), dated 2 September 1895.

The card is addressed to Mr Birdwood, Tehra Tun (a town), NWP (North West Province), India. This was the location where William Birdwood was based with the 12th Lancers. In 1893 Birdwood was appointed adjutant of the Viceroy's bodyguard, with the rank of Captain.

The hand written message on the reverse of the card reads:

*Weggis 21-8-95 Just a pc (postcard) as I am unable to send a letter to acknowledge yrs (yours) of 30 July w. (which) I was glad to get. I am thankful to get good news of Gordon (William's brother). I am afraid I shall miss seeing him as I hear he sails the end of September. Love to you all yrs (yours) initialled EMB*



## Major General Birdwood - QuarterMaster General for the British Army in India, 1912

In 1912 Major-General W R Birdwood was promoted to QuarterMaster General of the British Army in India. Birdwood was also a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, and in 1913 became the Secretary of the Indian Army Department of Government.

Cover (damaged) addressed to W R Birdwood M.G. (=Major General), Quarter Master General for the British Indian Army. It probably advised of the arrival of perishable goods, probably horses for the cavalry.

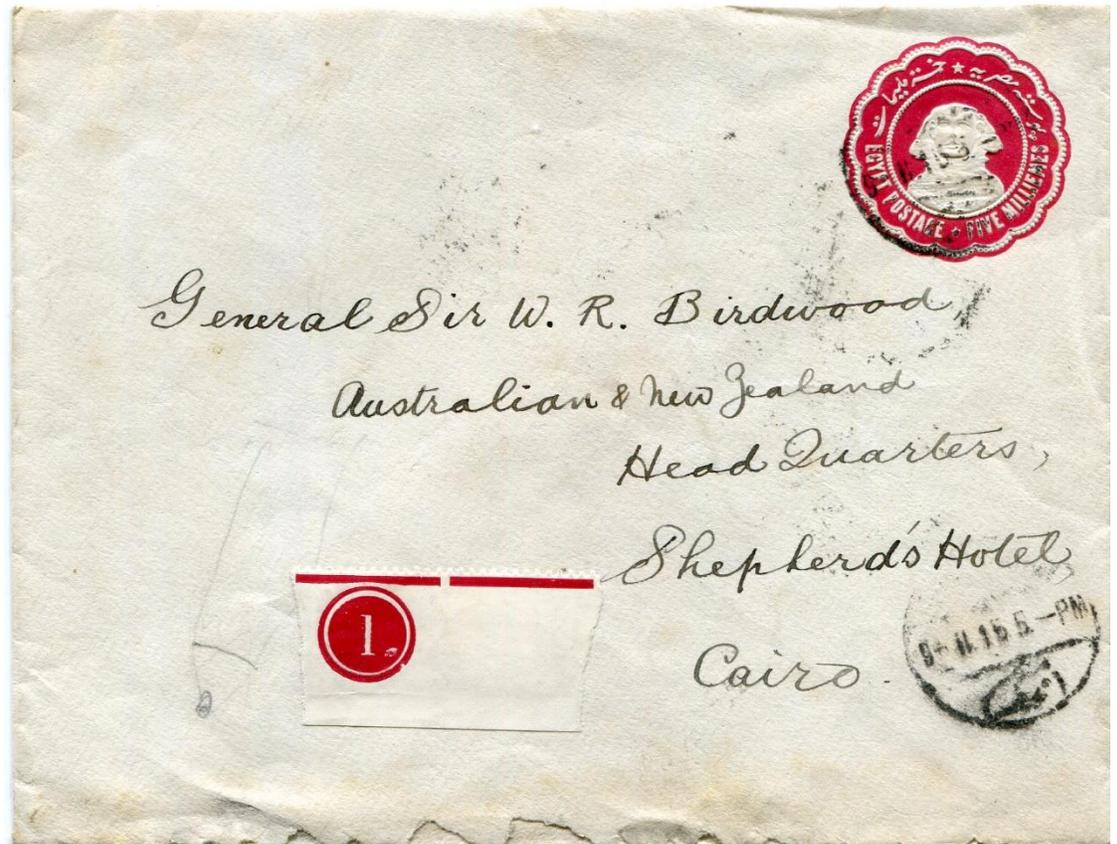


## General Sir William Birdwood - commander of the ANZAC forces in World War 1, 1915

General Birdwood of the British Indian Army was appointed by Lord Kitchener to command the army corps from Australia and New Zealand, who were assembling in Egypt for training.

The administrative headquarters of the new force, later named was Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo. It was announced in July 1915 that General Birdwood was to be knighted later in the year.

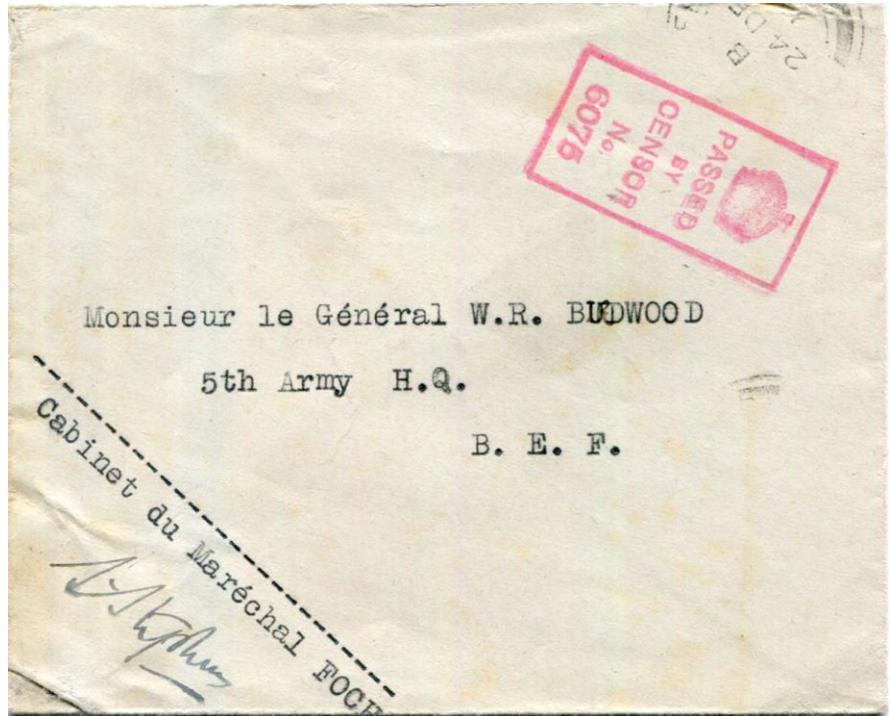
This cover has the arrival date stamp (9 Nov 1915) of Shepherd's Hotel. A temporary post office was located in the hotel foyer.



## General Sir William Birdwood - commander of the British Fifth Army, end of 1918

After the armistice which ended World War I, General Birdwood spent time with the French Premier Clemenceau, the French soldier and Supreme Allied Commander Marshal Foch, the King and Queen of the Belgians, the civic leaders (Burgomasters (mayors), bishop and city fathers) of Lille, Tournai and Roubaix, as well as visiting his troops located across many towns and villages in northern France and Belgium.

Cover opposite, poorly postmarked with a British army field postmark dated 24 December, almost certainly 1918, with the pink British censor mark. This shows that the envelope was posted into the British military mail system.



In 1918 General Birdwood was made a Citoyen de Lille (Citizen of Lille), in appreciation of his liberation of the city. For many years he received a letter from the Mayor of Lille (this letter is from 1922) advising him that the Union Jack had been flown on 17 October that year, the anniversary of the liberation of the city.



## General Sir William Birdwood - duties after the war, 1919

In March 1919 the British Fifth Army was demobilised, and General Birdwood no longer had any command. His time was spent in the office of the Australian Imperial Forces in London. He attended the triumphal march through Paris on 14 July, and London on 19 July. He made frequent trips to Portsmouth to farewell Australian troops returning home. In addition, he was granted the freedom of the Borough of Totnes, presented a captured German gun to the people of Exeter in recognition of their kindness and hospitality shown to Australian forces travelling from Portsmouth to their encampment on Salisbury Plain, and escorted the Shah of Iran from Dover to London.

Cover postmarked Gibraltar, 11 August 1919, addressed to General Sir William Birdwood, re-directed to the headquarters of the Australian Imperial Forces in London.



Cover postmarked Poona, India, dated 16 August 1919 and addressed to General Sir William Birdwood at the headquarters of the Australian Imperial Forces in London.



**General Sir William Birdwood -  
tour of Australia & New Zealand,  
1919-1920**

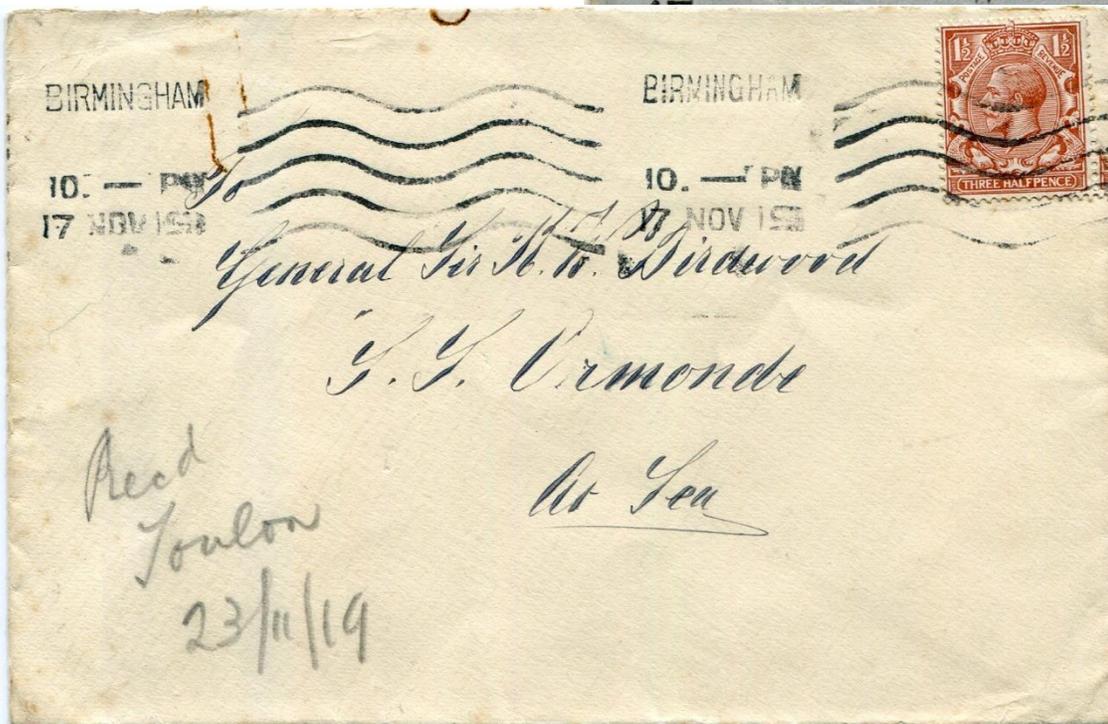
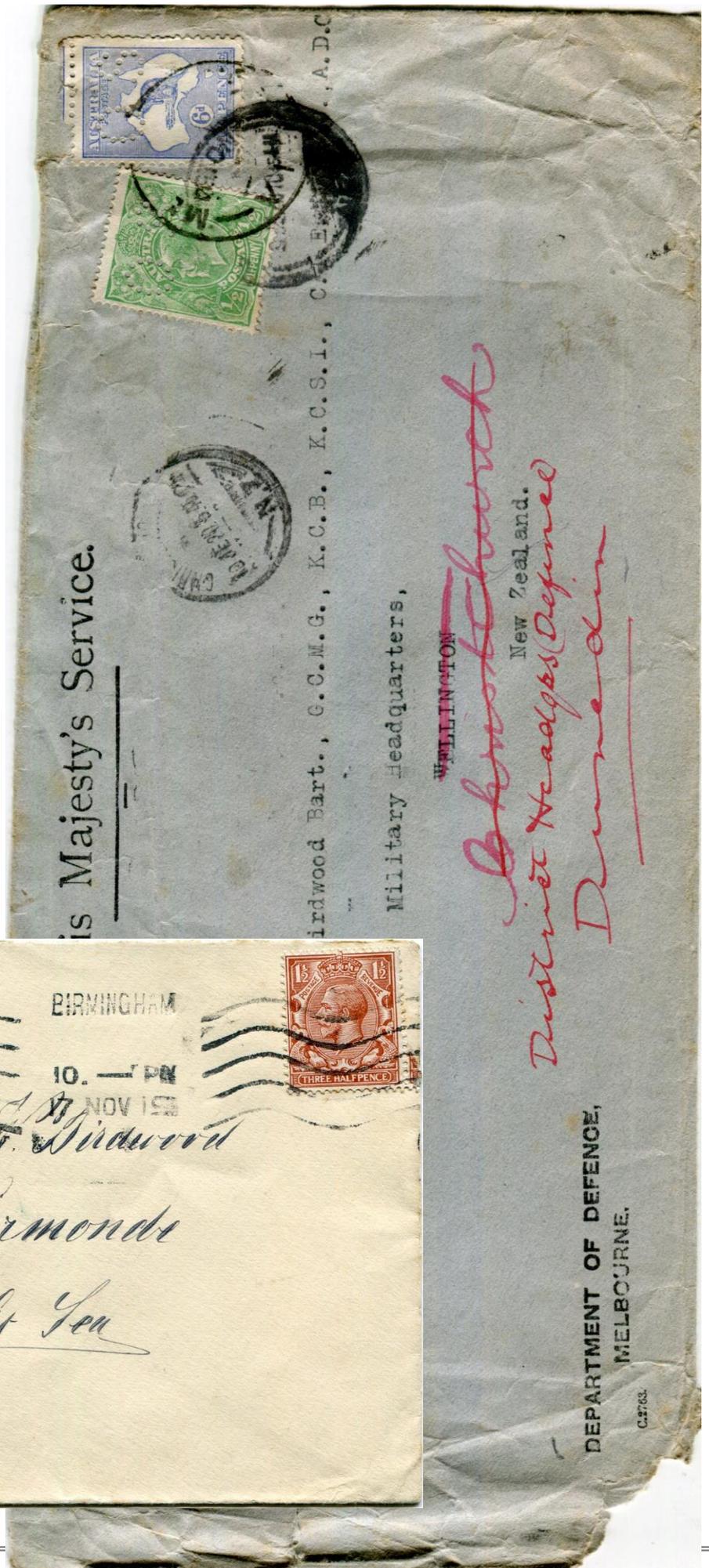
General Sir William Birdwood set sail on the R M S Ormonde on 14 November 1919. His six month tour of Australia and New Zealand was at the request of their governments.

Cover (at right) addressed to General Sir W R Birdwood, during his tour of New Zealand. The cover was posted in Melbourne, then the seat of government for Australia.

The cover has followed General Birdwood around New Zealand, being re-directed from Wellington to Christchurch and then Dunedin.

Postmarks are Melbourne (date unclear), Wellington (10 June), and Christchurch dated 10 June 1920.

Cover (below) posted from Birmingham, dated 17 November 1919, is addressed to General Birdwood 'at sea'. From London GPO it was sent by rail through France to meet the ship at Toulon on 23 November 1919. General Birdwood was on his way to Australia.



## General Sir William Birdwood - visit to Australia and New Zealand, 1919-1920

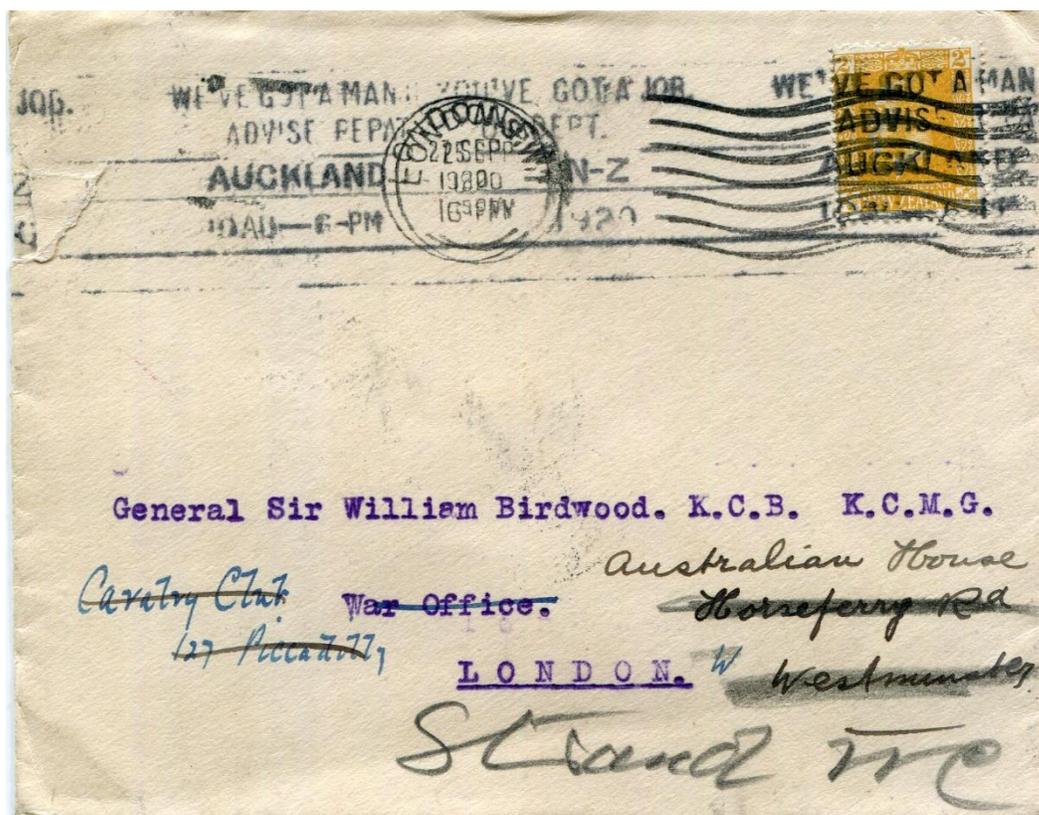
General Sir William Birdwood and Lady Birdwood visited Australia from 19 December 1919 to late May, about 5½ months. They visited every state. After Australia, the General visited New Zealand for 2 months. They returned to England via the Panama Canal and America, arriving in London on 10 September 1920.

This cover has been postmarked SOUTH YARRA – VIC - , dated 5 June 1920. (General Birdwood arrived in NZ on 2 June 1920). The cover has been addressed to Government House, but the Governor General Lord Liverpool was packed to leave the position. General Birdwood and his wife stayed at the Midland Hotel while in Wellington. This cover has been re-directed to Dunedin, with the text 'Gone'.



This cover has the crest on the flap of the North Auckland Mounted Rifles. It has been posted in Auckland on 10 August 1920, with the slogan cancel WE'VE GOT A MAN YOU'VE GOT A JOB / ADVISE REPATRIATION DEPT.

The cover was addressed to the War Office, then re-directed to the Cavalry Club (21 Sept), then to Australia House in Horseferry Road (22 Sept), then to Australia House in The Strand.



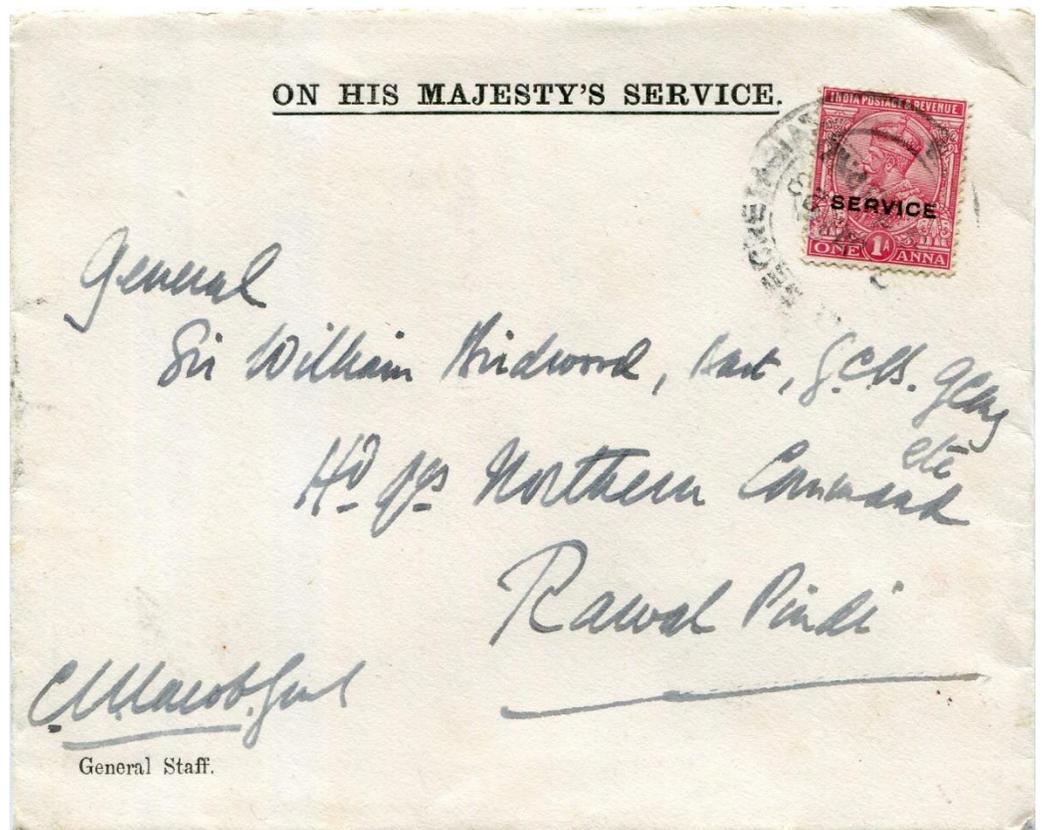
## General Sir William Birdwood - Officer Commanding Northern Army, India, 1920-1925

General Sir William Birdwood and Lady Birdwood arrived in London on 10 September 1920. Upon his return to England, General Birdwood was appointed as the Commander of the Northern Army in India. General Sir William Birdwood arrived in India on 30 October 1920 to take up his command, with the headquarters being at Rawalpindi. The covers below are both embossed with the arms and text GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.

This cover, dated 8 February 1922, was written by Lieutenant General George Barrow, commander of the Peshawar District. Note his signature at the bottom of the envelope: GB LG / Pesh Dist .



This cover, postmarked ??? SECRETARIAT, dated 2 January 1923, was written by Lieutenant General Claud Jacob, Chief of the General Staff in India from January 1920 to 1924. His signature is at the bottom left: "C. W. Jacob. Genl"



## General Sir William Birdwood - Officer Commanding Northern Army, India, 1920-1925

General Sir William Birdwood was involved in social affairs as well as military matters.

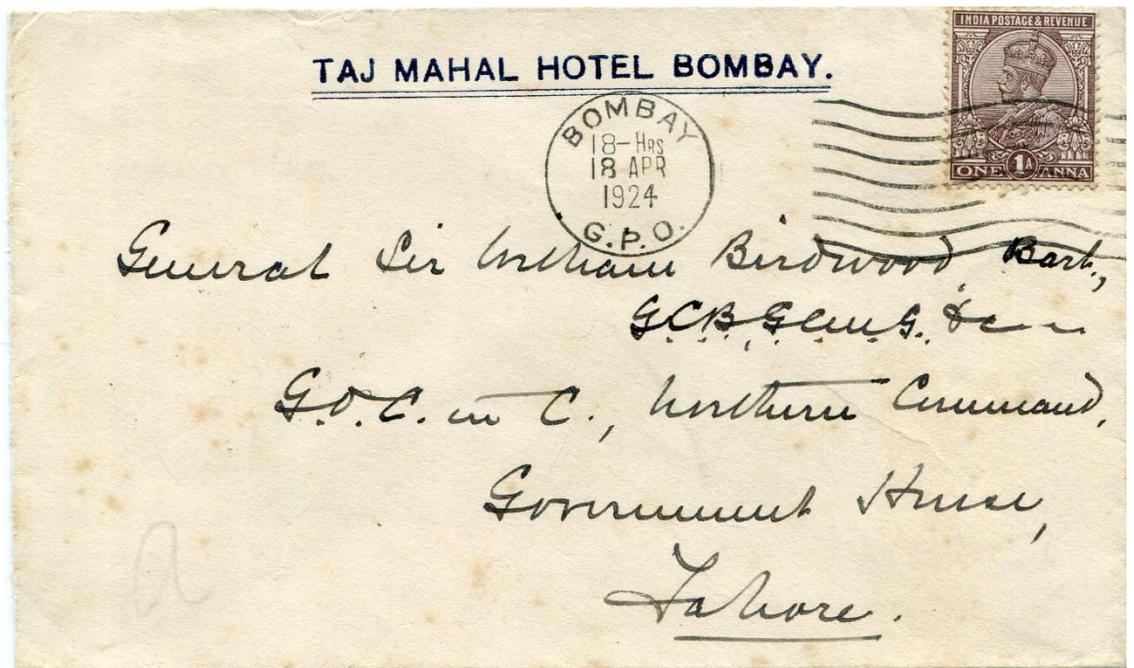
General Sir William Birdwood maintained his interest and connections to Australia during his time in India. He read Australian newspapers, and answered correspondence from Australia.

This envelope, post-marked Melbourne (then the location of the Australian Government), dated 2 March 1922, probably contained a letter or invitation addressed to Birdwood care of the Prime Minister, and has been forwarded in a separate envelope.

Backstamp ANUSHKOR, 19 April 1922.



This cover, dated 18 April 1924, was posted when General Birdwood was in Lahore for discussions with the Sikhs, aimed at improving relations (and reducing the risk of armed conflict) between some members in the Sikh community and the government.



Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood - annual notification of the flying of the Union Jack,  
over the French city of Lille

Each year General Birdwood received a letter from the Mayor of Lille (this letter is from 1925) advising that the Union Jack had been flown in the French city of Lille on 17 October that year, the anniversary of the liberation of the city in 1918 from the Germans near the end of World War 1.

Cover postmarked Lille, 21 October 1925, with the corner text MAIRIE DE LILLE / CABINET DU MAIRE, which translates as LILLE TOWN HALL, OFFICE OF THE MAYOR. India arrival backstamp dated 6 November 1925

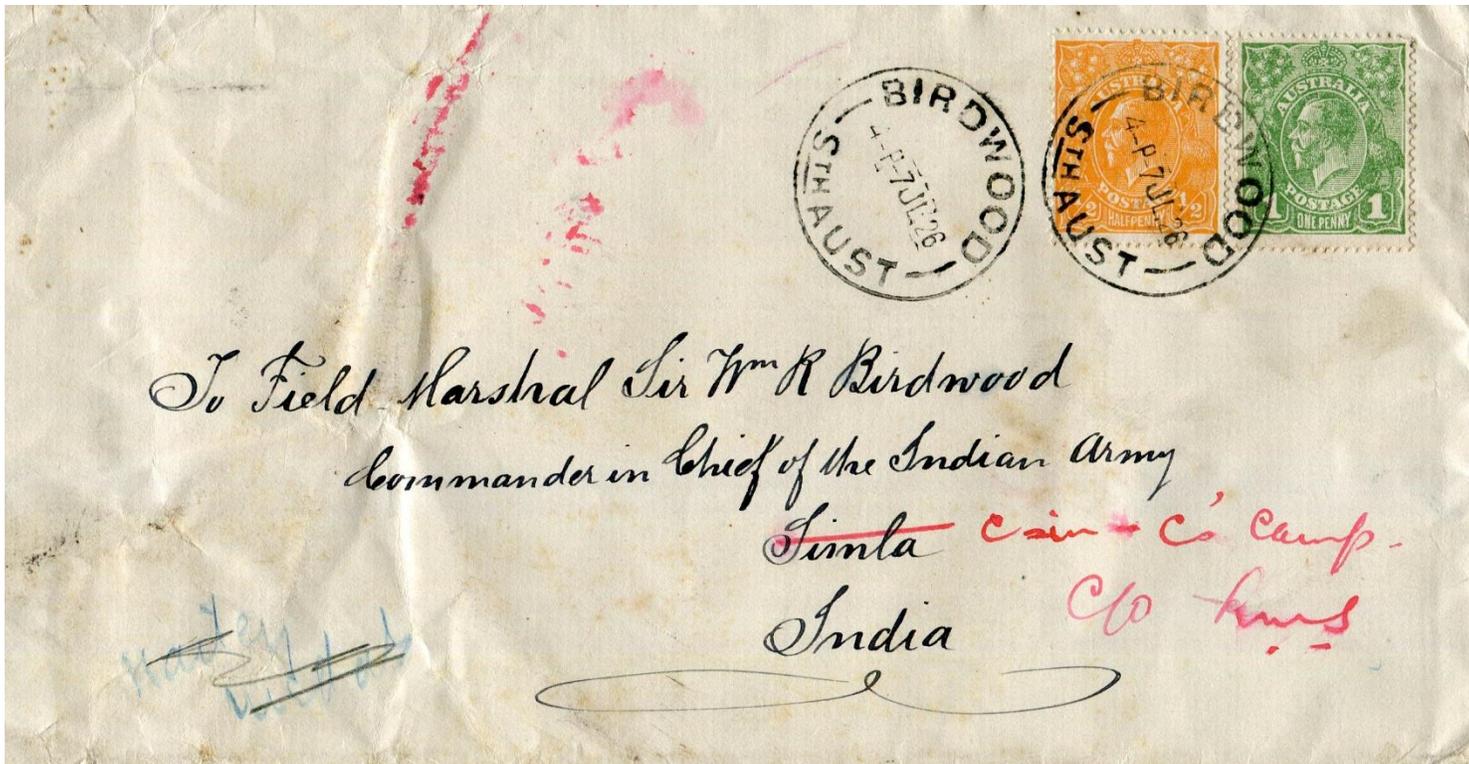


Plain cover postmarked Lille, 30 November 1925. India arrival backstamp dated December 1925. The sender is not known. The envelope is made of thick patterned paper, lined with purple coloured paper. This type of envelope was used to post cards, such as greeting cards, sympathy cards or Christmas cards.



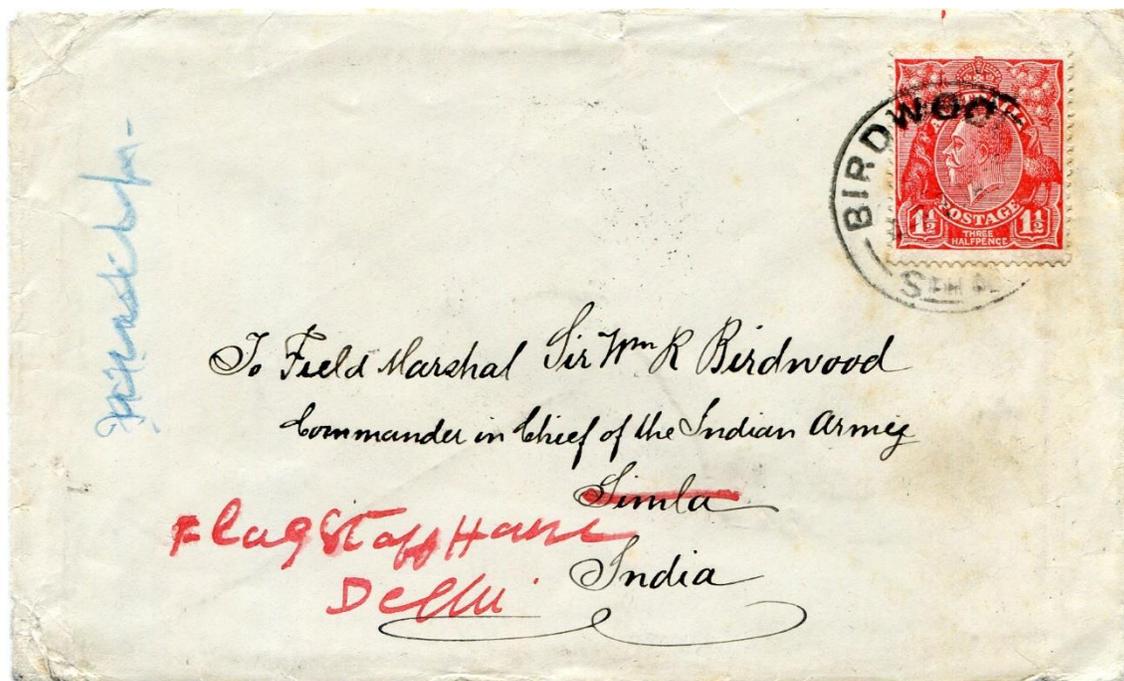
## General Sir William Birdwood - connection to the town of Birdwood, South Australia

These covers have been posted by the mayor (Mr F Pflaum) of the town of Birdwood, South Australia. The town was renamed in honour of General Birdwood in 1918, from the German name of Blumberg. In 1924 General Birdwood wrote to the mayor, suggesting that he donate an annual prize at the local school, for "the best boy in the local school who would be likely to grow up a good citizen for the State and Empire, and develop a straight, honest and brave character". Lady Birdwood instituted a similar prize for a girl. The value of each prize was £5.



Cover postmarked Birdwood, South Australia, dated 7 July 1926, and has been re-directed from the city of Simla, in the North West Frontier province, to the Commander-in-Chief's Camp, care of the Railway Mail Service.

Cover postmarked Birdwood, South Australia, on 2 June 1930, has been re-directed to the army headquarters at Flag Staff House in the Indian capital of Delhi.

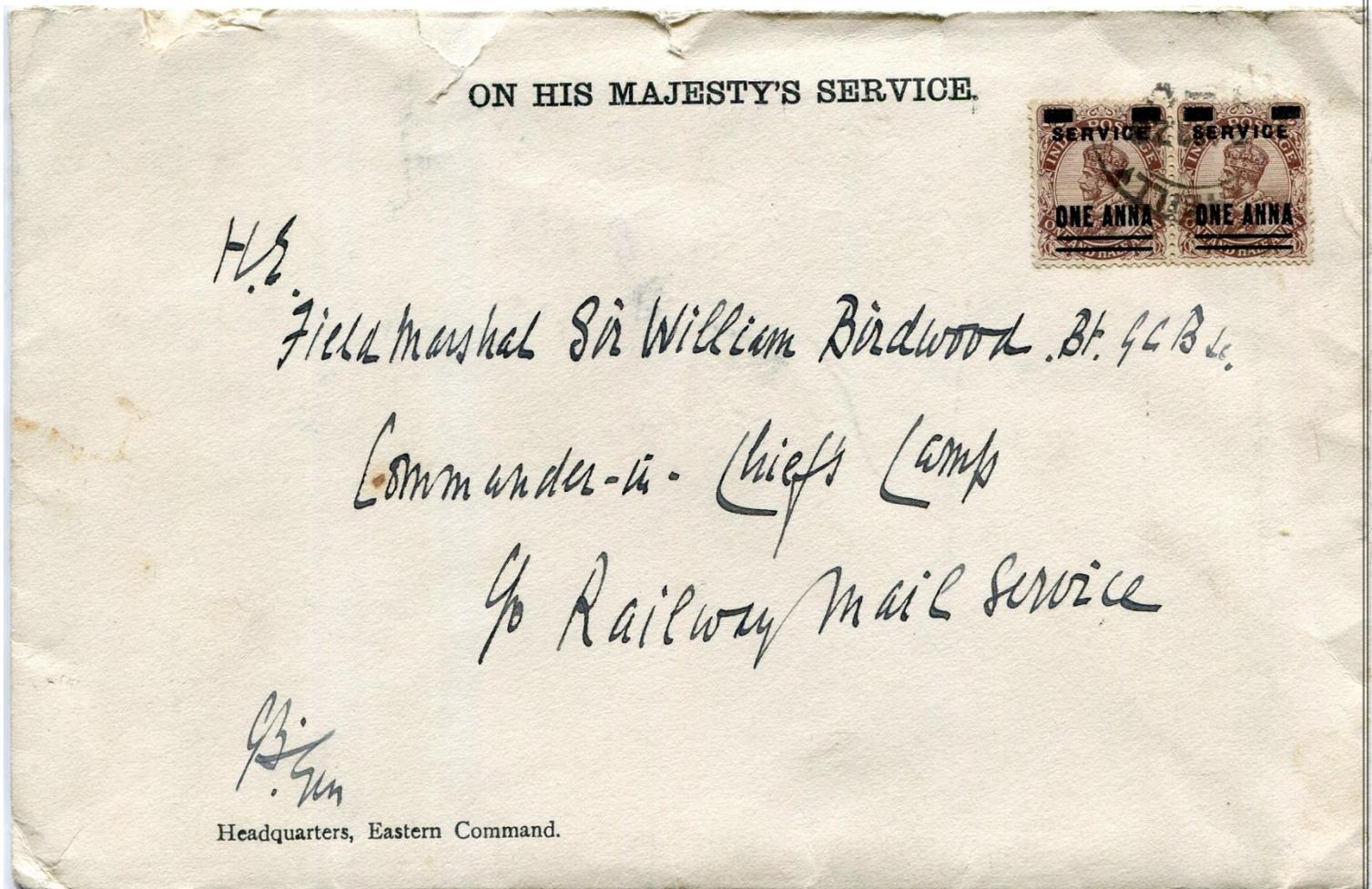
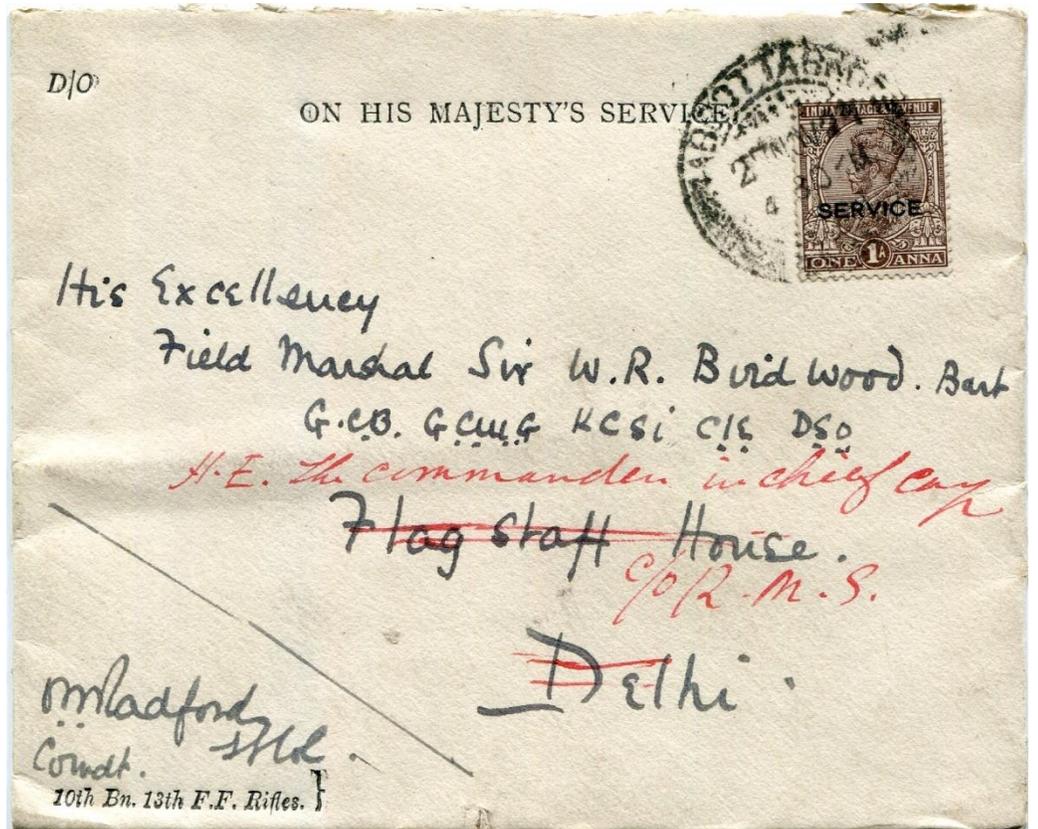


Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood - official correspondence from British officers

Officers remained in touch with their commanding officer by mail. These covers are made from heavy weight paper and have the embossed coat of arms of the Government of India on the flap.

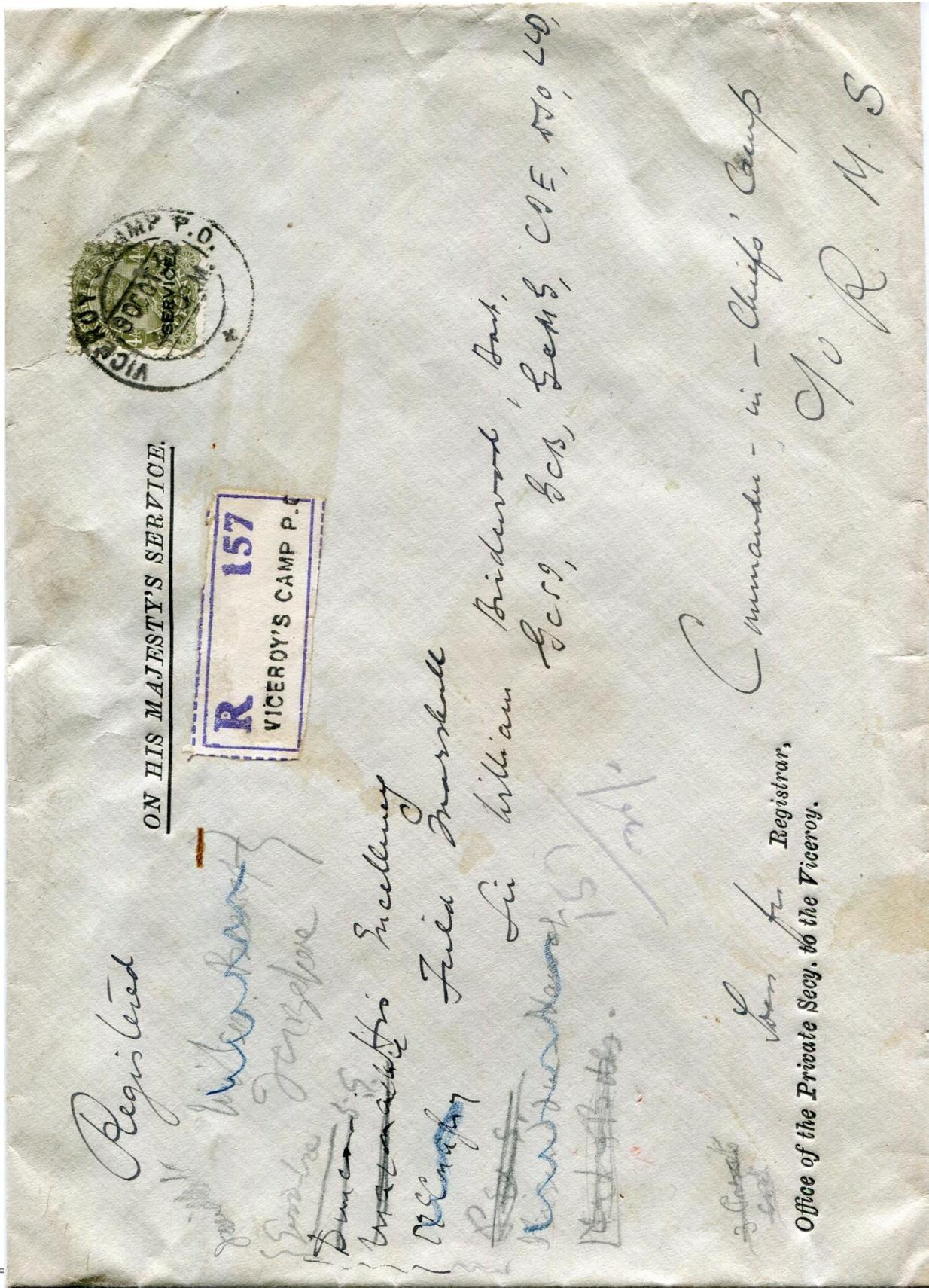
This cover has been signed by Colonel Radford, commandant of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion Field Force Rifles, postmarked at ABBOTTABAD, 27 November 1927.

The cover below has been initialed by General George Barrow, town name indistinct, dated 2 April 1928.



Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood - from the camp of the Viceroy of India, 1930

When the Viceroy was travelling throughout India, his staff included postal officials. This large registered cover has been postmarked from the VICEROY'S CAMP POST OFFICE on 9 October 1930. The signatures at the left side of the envelope are the military officers and non-military officials who read the contents of the envelope. It may have contained a revised list of duties following the planned departure of Field Marshal Birdwood to England. (He left Delhi by rail on 25 November, and sailed from India on 29 November 1930. RMS = Railway Mail Service).



## Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood - arriving in England from his service in India, 1930

Field Marshall and Lady Birdwood arrived in Plymouth, England on 24 December 1930, and travelled to his wife's family home Thurlby Hall in Lincolnshire, to spend Christmas and the new year.

This cover, postmarked Abbottabad 1 January 1931, was the headquarters for some parts of the Northern Army.

On the flap of the envelope is the logo of the 6 Gurkha Rifles. Birdwood was the Regimental Colonel of this regiment from 1926 until his death in 1951.



The cover was flown air mail from Karachi to London, arrival backstamp 15 January 1931.



This cover, postmark town unclear, dated 11 December 1930.

On the flap of the envelope is the logo of the 16 Punjab Regiment.



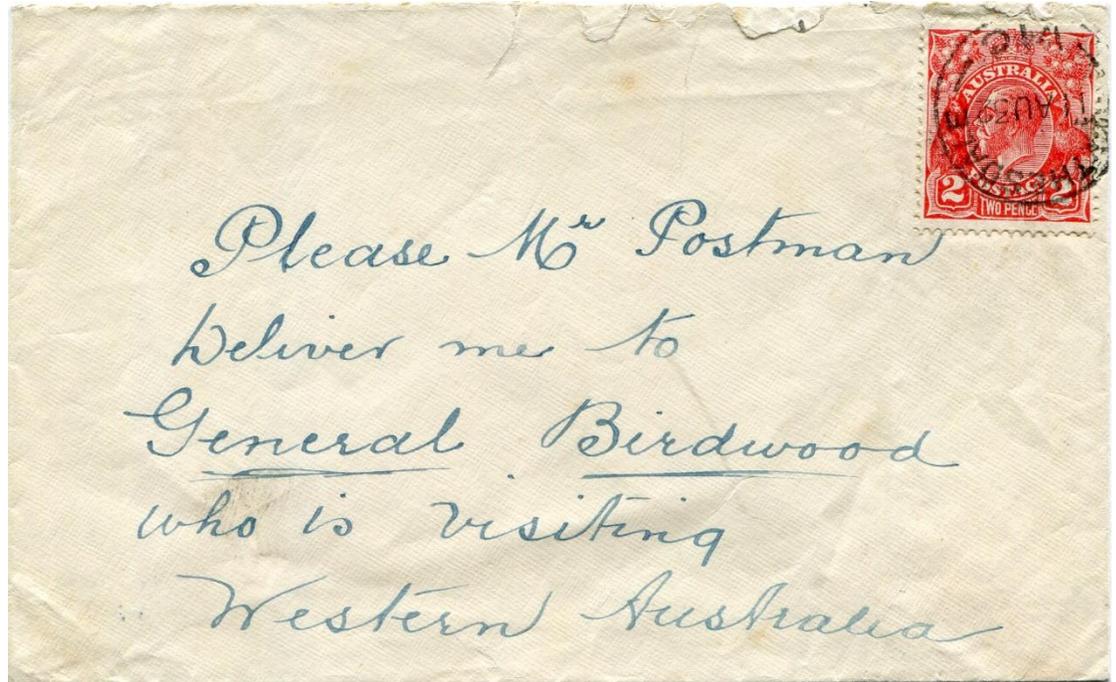
The cover was flown air mail from Karachi to London, with the re-direction cancel London 27 December 1930.



Sir William and Lady Birdwood - visiting Western Australia for a private visit, 1932

The elder daughter of William and Jeanette Birdwood was Constance, known as Nancy. She married Colin Craig, a grazier from the property named Boraming, near Williams, 160km south east of Perth. Although Sir William and Lady Birdwood visited their daughter in a private capacity, they were welcomed by the Governor and Premier of Western Australia. Sir William attended functions and hospitals related to soldiers who served with him in World War 1, and Lady Birdwood attended functions organised by the Country Women's Association.

Cover above has been posted from SMYTHESDALE, VICTORIA, dated 11 August 1932. There are no 'return to sender' markings or backstamps, so it is assumed that the letter was delivered.



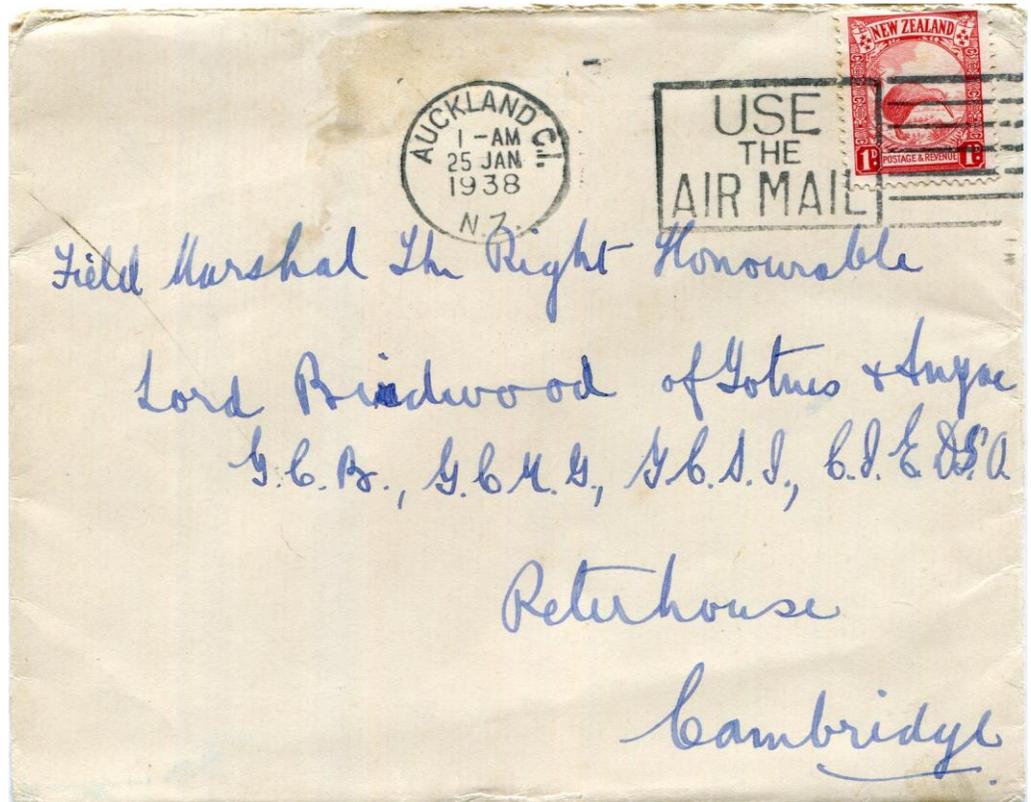
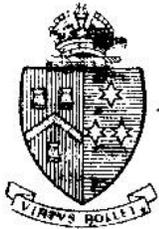
Sir William and Lady Jeanette Birdwood left Western Australia on Monday 5 September, 1932, on the P&O liner S S Chitral. SS Chitral stopped at Colombo, Bombay, Aden, and arrived Port Said on Sunday 25 September. This letter has the backstamps Karachi, Lincoln (UK) 9 September, Rafa-Qantara TPO and Qantara 14 September, and Port Said 15 September. The letter would have been held at the P&O office until the ship berthed.

The cover has been addressed to Field Marshal Sir William Birdwood, Sahib Bahadur. Sahib is a polite title or form of address for a man, originally meaning 'companion' in Arabic. Bahadur is a title of respect, commonly affixed to the name of European officers in Indian documents or ceremonies.

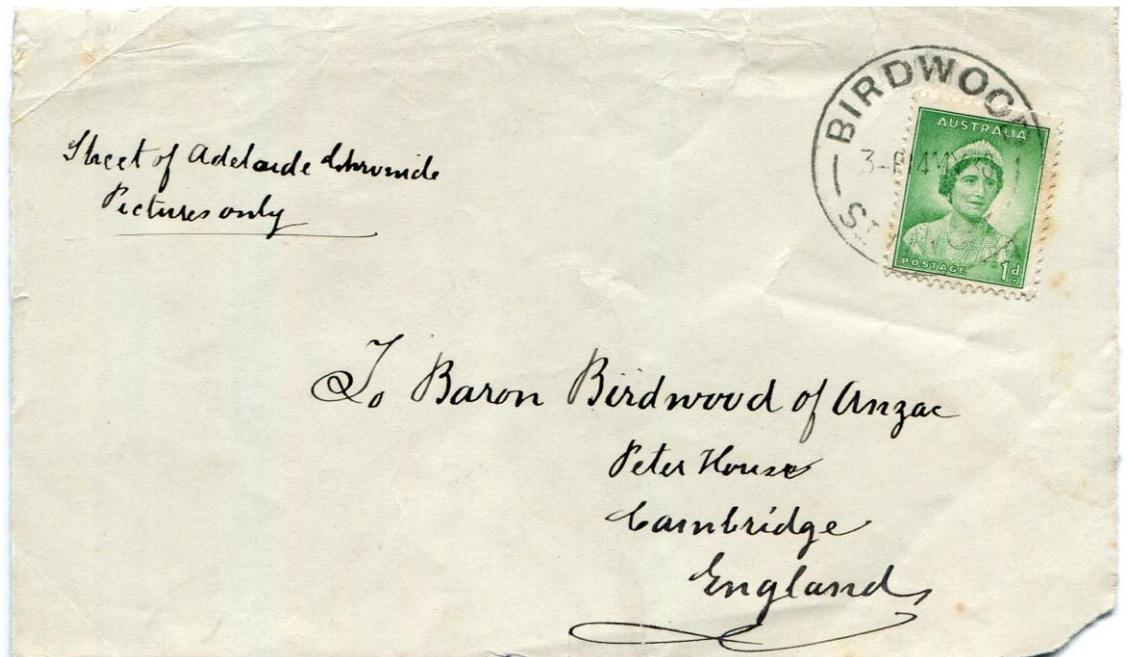


In 1938 Birdwood was raised to the peerage as the First Baron of Anzac and Totnes, with the title Lord Birdwood of Anzac and Totnes. He maintained his connections with schools and communities in Australia & New Zealand.

Cover has the crest of the King's School Auckland on the flap (shown below), and has paid the Empire Mail Scheme printed matter rate of one penny. Lord Birdwood visited the school in June 1920 as General Birdwood, the commander of the Anzac Forces in WW1, and presented prizes. It is highly probable that he was a patron of the school.



Cover front (right) has paid the printed matter rate of one penny, with the datestamp of Birdwood SA, dated 14 May 1938. The cover has been addressed by Mr Pflaum, the former mayor of the town of Birdwood. The notation on the front of the cover indicates that it contained newspaper cuttings.



Lord Birdwood of Anzac and Totnes died in May 1951. A memorial service was held in Clifton College, which he attended from 1877 to 1882, first as a day boarder and later as a full time boarder in Oakeley House. Upon his return from India in 1930, Birdwood was nominated to be a member of the college council (the governing body) at Clifton. He was elected President of the Clifton College Council in May 1935, a position he held until his death.