

THE CYPRUS GOVERNMENT RAILWAY

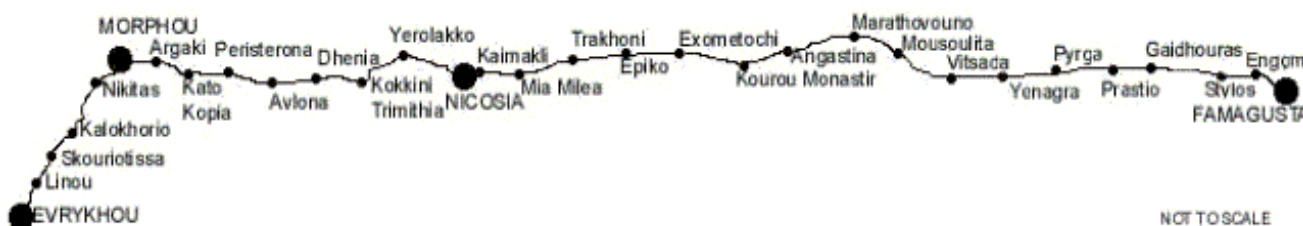
Jim Wigmore



An Imperial Airways route test letter may seem like an odd method of introducing the Cyprus Government Railway (CGR), however both organisations were unique in being postal carriers and Post Offices in their own right. One of the express purposes of the construction of the CGR was to carry, collect and distribute mail.

The CGR was a 2ft 6in-gauge line with a total route mileage of 78 miles, the first 37 from Famagusta to Nicosia were begun in April 1904 and opened in October 1905. By December 1907 an extension to Morphou 27 miles west of Nicosia had been completed. In June 1915 a further extension of 14 miles to Evrykhou was completed allowing development of the copper mines at Skouriotissa. Later ore was shipped via

a 4-mile branch line constructed from Pendaria to a new jetty at Karavostassi completed in 1920.



The headquarters and railway offices were situated at Famagusta. According to an article printed in the Railway Magazine in 1941 the railway had 45 locomotives, this is incorrect, the actual locomotive stock was as follows: -



Loco No.	Type	Maker
1	0-6-0T	Hunslet
11	4-4-0	Naysmyth -Wilson
12	4-4-0	Naysmyth -Wilson
21	2-6-0	Naysmyth -Wilson
22	2-6-0	Naysmyth -Wilson
23	2-6-0	Naysmyth -Wilson
31	2-6-2T	Naysmyth -Wilson
32	2-6-2T	Naysmyth -Wilson
41	4-8-4T	Kitson
42	4-8-4T	Kitson
43	4-8-4T	Kitson
44	4-8-4T	Kitson

Only one steam locomotive survived the closure when all the remaining locomotives and coaching stock were broken up, that was No1, left by the contractor during

construction of the line, and restored by 48 Command Workshops of the British Army and placed on a plinth at the site of the former Famagusta station. (Shown above.)

The railway's career as a mail carrier began immediately upon the opening of the Famagusta-Nicosia section, when the government issued a statement that, "the road should be allowed to fall into disrepair". A number of Station Masters were paid an annual grant to act as sub-post-masters. Cyprus 1353-1986 by Wilfrid.T.F.Castle classifies the various hand stamps used to cancel mail as follows: -



Type 32 - A set of brass cancels numbered 1 to 6 inclusive as shown left. These were once classified as railway cancels and originally thought to have been supplied for a projected line from Larnaca to Nicosia. They have been found used in widely scattered locations well away from the railway, it is now known that they had little or nothing to do with the railway although their exact use is still a mystery. (Examples of both 1 and 3 are regarded as extremely rare.)



Type 33 - Despatched on 4th October 1905 after commencement of running on the 7th August and just prior to the official opening on 21st October. They would not have arrived by the time of the official opening. Could the type 32 hand stamps have been used during the intervening period? The records of the railway were lost in a disastrous fire in 1923 and as the amount of postal history with RPO cancels is very small, it has not been possible to build a history of usage.



Type 34 - A batch of four hand stamps dispatched on 26th October 1906 they carried the numbers 4, 5, 6 and 7.



Type 35 - A single example stated by Chris Cruttwell to have been used at Famagusta. The proof book example is dated 26th October 1906 the same as type 34



Type 36 - a series of six cancels numbered 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The exact locations of use are unknown. Despatched on 7th December 1908.



Type 37 - despatched on 7th December 1908 and thought to have been used between Famagusta and Nicosia. There were three handstamps in the batch numbered 2, 3 and 4. There are known forgeries of this design numbered 1, 3 and 4.

There is no Type 38 - this number was allocated to a design subsequently found to be a forgery.



Type 39 - There is no known date of introduction for this series consisting of four stamps lettered A, B, C, and D. Use of the hand stamp lettered A is stated to be rare.

Type 39A - similar to Type 39 but a single circle lettered CGR at the top and Famagusta below. Recorded uses have been found at both Famagusta and Angastina.

Type 40 - a batch of four hand stamps for use at Famagusta, Angastina, Trakhoni, and Kalokhorio. They were similar to the hand stamps issued to

Rural Postal Agencies. Dates of issue unknown.

Type 41 - similar to Type 40 but lettered RAILWAY STATION above NICOSIA CYPRUS. Dates of issue unknown.

Type 42 - similar to Type 39 but lettered RPO PRASTIO, RPO KALOKHORIO, and RPO EVRYKHOU. Dates of issue unknown.

The railway did not operate any travelling post offices, the use and location of the various issued hand stamps may never be fully known or understood, as previously stated all records were destroyed.



Mail with RPO hand stamps are rare items hence the difficulty of research, however the railway historians should beware, there are a number of very suspicious items, with cancels that are just a little too good to be true. Any CGR cancels on cover definitely need Certificates of Authenticity - you have been warned.

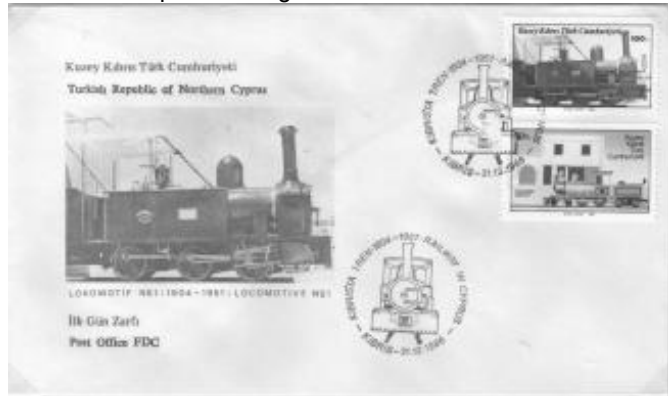
The railway closed the section between Kalokhorio and Evrykhou in 1932, and withdrew both mail and passenger services west of Nicosia at the same time. The station at Kalokhorio still continued to be the village post office, and was serviced by road. The last train on the CGR was the 2.55 p.m. from Nicosia to Famagusta on 31st December 1951. Simultaneously the Railway Post Office Service was closed down with all equipment collected and withdrawn. The post box on Famagusta Station remained for some time, and continued to display the times of posting until

finally removed.

During its less than 50 year span as a postal service provider and transporter of mail, the CGR was never given any publicity philatelically apart from the use of its postal hand stamps, still a source of mystery even today. It may therefore seem strange that the postal service of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) should decide to commemorate the railway on 31st December 1986 some 35 years after its closure.

Two stamps and a maxi card were produced, plus a special cancel.

The two stamps featuring locomotives No.1 and No.11 are shown on a FDC also featuring locomotive No.1



The maxi card above right also features locomotive No.11 at Famagusta Station awaiting departure with the midday train to Nicosia. Note the lack of any platform.



The stamps were printed in blocks of 8 - (4 x 2) with a margin around the block fully perforated as shown here.