

During the year preliminary flights were made by a French airline operating from New Caledonia to Papeete through other islands, including Aitutaki. If the projected commercial service is established between Papeete and Aitutaki, it will provide a welcome means of transport to Cook Islands people, many of whom have family connections in French Oceania. Commencement of a regular service has been delayed by damage to aircraft caused by a hurricane in New Caledonia.

Within the Group itself normal communications were maintained by two trading schooners for the greater part of the year. With a view to improving internal communications, consideration has been given during the year to the provision of a small Administration vessel for use entirely within the Group. Such a vessel would serve a useful purpose in an emergency and would also be a most valuable unit for official transport. A decision to provide such a vessel has been made since the end of the financial year.

25. POSTAL AND RADIO SERVICES

Financial and executive responsibility for the Postal and Radio Departments rests with the Cook Islands Administration, but close liaison is maintained with the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department. The latter supplies European staff as required on secondment and also gives technical advice and assistance whenever required.

Post Office business in the outer islands is handled by the Resident Agents, but trained Native telegraphists are in charge of all outer islands radio substations, of which there are eleven in the Group.

The regular air-mail service from Rarotonga has become increasingly popular. A test check made towards the end of the year indicated an average despatch of between one thousand and one thousand five hundred letters each fortnight.

With the exception of two minor substations, radio communication within the Group was maintained with very little interruption throughout the year. Under a reconstruction programme which has been approved for Rarotonga Radio, new and up-to-date equipment is to be installed and new buildings and staff residences built. Although work on the site itself has commenced, the actual reconstruction is expected to extend over a considerable period. Meanwhile, owing to the great increase in all classes of traffic handled, which has severely overtaxed existing facilities, additional transmitting equipment was installed in the present station towards the end of the year.

Besides paid traffic, the radio service handles a considerable quantity of free messages, such as medical advice to the outer Group, weather reports, point-to-point traffic for aircraft, and press news. During the year a total of 931,524 words was handled, of which 322,318 words were paid traffic.

Comparative statistics for both Departments for the last five years are as follows :—

—	1943-44.	1944-45.	1945-46.	1946-47.	1947-48.
Money-orders issued	£106,883	£86,230	£98,483	£99,012	£146,404
Money-orders paid	£27,210	£23,024	£13,640	£32,800	£42,003
Post Office Savings-bank deposits ..	£40,689	£44,940	£45,929	£60,778	£63,910
Post Office Savings-bank withdrawals	£23,629	£26,470	£38,150	£57,105	£65,846
Number of depositors as at 31st March	3,173	3,676	4,145	4,489	4,914
Amount held to their credit ..	£57,333	£77,408	£87,020	£92,714	£92,946
Number of Native depositors ..	3,037	3,553	4,026	4,352	4,581
Amount held to their credit ..	£39,929	£44,780	£60,670	£59,368	£58,533
Number of radio messages handled	7,895	9,170	12,125	14,309	15,565