

NOTEBOOK

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IN THIS ISSUE.....

Page

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IN THIS ISSUE.....

We start with an extract from pages of the Ninth Report of the Commissioners appointed to "Inquire into the Management of the Post-Office Department", published in 1837.

There is a great volume of material but the selection here relate to the Two Penny Post , an area of collecting of we hope will be of interest to many members.

For convenience, marginal notes appearing in the Report are shown in **bold** type at the beginning of the a paragraph.

There is always a need for members' contributions, this reinforced with requests for specific information relating to contributions in the following pages.. A decent photocopy (scan if possible) of a single, or several, choice items from your collection. No detailed article necessary but your notes would be much appreciated: a short novel not essential, though that will be most welcome.

Page 2 : Twopenny Post. Ninth Report of the Commissioners.....

11 : The Location of the London Head Office and Post Houses 1526 - 1687
by Jeremy Greenwood

13 : Post Office Losses in the Great Fire

15 : Foreign Office Barred Oval, by Antony Shine

16 : Newspaper Branch Cancellations, a query from Alex Porteous

17 : Quartered Circle Stamp by Antony Shine

19: Post Office Espionage

A personal note: for some time now, declining health has caused a reduction of activity and, much though it is regretted, the tasks of both the auction and producing 'Notebook' must be passed to other members.

Volunteers for both are urgently needed. If you, not someone else, are willing to at least find out what is involved, do contact the Editor as soon as possible.

TWOPENNY POST

In our Seventh Report we stated to your Lordships, that before proposing any considerable change in the system under which the Post-Office communication is maintained between the metropolis and the rest of the empire, it would be necessary for us to examine into the arrangements of the Inland and Twopenny-Post department, with a view to ascertain whether the existing establishment would be capable of performing the additional duties which a more frequent arrival and despatch of letters would occasion.

We now present your Lordships with the result of our inquiries respecting the Twopenny Post-office, which has always been considered as a distinct department from that which is usually termed the General Post-office.

Separate accounts of the Revenue are kept, and a separate establishment maintained for the performance of the duties; and, although some of the enactments under which the Revenue is collected apply also to the country Penny Posts, the control and management of the latter are entirely unconnected with the former; nor does the Revenue derived from the Penny Posts in the country form any part of the Revenue of the London Twopenny Post.

It will, therefore,, be more convenient on our Report to maintain this distinction, and confine our observations to the delivery of letters in London and the suburbs before we enter upon the more extensive and equally important part of the investigation relative to the Penny Posts throughout the Kingdom.

Origin of the London Penny Post. The establishment of a post for the delivery of letters in and around London originated from the enterprise of a private individual about the close of the protectorate.

Appendix No. 24. In a Report made by the Postmasters-general to the Lord High Treasurer in the year 1702, they say: "We are informed your petitioner, **William Dockwra**, was the person who did first "set up a Penny Post, and that it being thought to interfere with the power granted by Parliament to the "Postmaster-general, suit was commenced against him by order of the last King James, then Duke of "York; whereupon there was a trial at the King's Bench bar, and a verdict given against him and "damages found."

In consequence of this verdict the Penny Post was taken possession of, in 1683, by the Postmaster-general; and, after the Revolution, a pension was granted to Mr. Dockwra on consideration of the expense he had been put to in establishing the post and in defending the action brought against him. He was subsequently appointed Comptroller of the office.

Appendix No. 27 In 1708 another attempt was made by a **Mr. Povey** to set up a Halfpenny Post, in opposition to the Government office. A suit was likewise brought against this individual, and the undertaking suppressed within a few months of its first establishment.

The regulations under which letters were conveyed by the Penny Post cannot be clearly ascertained from the records of the Department.

No limit appears to have been assigned to the weight of the parcels and packets, although it was required that they should not exceed £10 in value; from which it may be inferred that the office as held responsible for that amount for their safe delivery.

The Comptroller and projector. Mr. Dockwra, having been removed by the Lords of the Treasury for mismanagement, we find the following, among other charges which were exhibited against him:-

"He forbids the taking of any band-boxes (except very small), and all parcels above a pound, "which, when they were taken , did bring in considerable advantage to the office, they being now at "great charge sent by porters in the city, and coaches and watermen in the country, which formerly went "by the Penny-Post much cheaper and more satisfactory."

"He stops, under spetious pretences, most parcels that are taken in, which is great damage to "trad'smen by loosing their customers or spoiling their goods, and many times hazard the life of the "patient when phisick sent by a doctor or an apothecary,"

The conveyance of parcels continued down to 1765, when it was enacted by the 5 Geo. III/ c.25, that no packet, exceeding the weight of four ounces, should be carried by the Penny Post, unless it had first passed, or was intended afterwards to pass, by the General Post.

RATES

Rates Postage paid in advance. From the establishment of this post until the year 1794, the Postage (one penny) was paid in advance, and the delivery of letters was originally confined to the cities of London and Westminster, the borough of Southwark, and the respective suburbs thereof.

Appendix No. 25 These deliveries were soon extended to the towns and villages around London on application of the inhabitants, who voluntarily agreed to pay an additional penny on receipt of their letters, which was for some time a perquisite of the messengers, but afterwards, in 1687, carried to the account of the Revenue.

4 Geo.II.c. 33. The charge of this additional penny was not, however, authorized by law until the year 1727.

The first enactment applicable to the **Penny Post** is the 9 Queen Anne, a.10, which authorized the rate of one penny to be levied on all letters "passing or repassing by the carriage called the Penny Posts, established and settled within the cities of London and Westminster, and borough of Southwark, and parts adjacent, and to be received and delivered within 10 English miles distant from the General Letter-office in London."

34 Geo. III.c. 17. An Act, passed in 1794, empowered the Postmaster-general, at his discretion, to extend the limits of the delivery of letters by this post beyond 10 miles from the General Post-office in London.

An additional rate of one penny was at the same time made chargeable on letters conveyed **from** places beyond the cities of London and Westminster and the borough of Southwark, in like manner as letters conveyed **to** places had, by the 5 Geo.II., been charged with an additional penny.

It was likewise made optional, under this statute, for persons sending letters to pay the postage, on putting them in, or not, as they thought proper.

41 Geo. III.c. 7 The next and most important alteration in the rates was made in 1801, when an **additional charge of one penny** was imposed on all letters delivered by the Penny Post within the cities of London and Westminster and the borough of Southwark, and the suburbs thereof.

45 Geo. III.c. II In 1805 the postage on letters delivered beyond this limit was advanced to **three-pence**, and newspapers were allowed to pass from London to the country for one penny.

Appendix No. 30 No other alterations took place until 1831, when the limits of the Twopenny-Post delivery were extended to include all places within three miles of the General Post-office; and, at the same time, letters to be dispatched by the General or Foreign Post were exempted from the Twopenny-Post rates, if put in at the receiving-houses within the said limits.

The rates now levied for letters transmitted by the Twopenny Post are as follows:-

Present Rates on Letters and Newspapers passing through the Twopenny Post-office.	For every letter transmitted by such Post between places within the limits of delivery for the time being of the General Post.	2d
	For every letters transmitted by such Post between a place within the said limits and any place beyond the same, or between places, both of which are beyond the said limits.	3d
	And for every letter originally sent by the General Post directed to places beyond the said limits, and for every letter originally sent by the Twopenny Post, and afterwards passing through the General Post, in addition to all other rates chargeable thereon.	2d
	Newspapers sent by the Twopenny Post, and not passing or intended to pass by the General Post are charged. each	1d

But newspapers by the General Post and delivered by the Twopenny Post, or received by the Twopenny Post and afterwards passing by the General Post, have, since August 1836, been exempted from postage.

CIRCULATION

Circulation. The boundaries of the town and country districts of the Twopenny Post-office, and of the deliveries of Foreign and General-Post letters in London, were, at the period when the Commissioners of Revenue Inquiry presented their Twenty-first Report, extremely irregular and arbitrary, and the limits do not appear to have been fixed with reference either to the comparative distances of the respective

boundaries from the chief offices, or from any consideration with respect to the number of inhabitants, or the extent of the correspondence, in the different districts.

Boundaries of the Twopenny and Threepenny Post. The Commissioners say, " In attempting to "regulate the circulation of correspondence in the metropolis, and parts contiguous or adjacent to it, "upon impartial and consistent principles, having regard to comparative accommodation and "comparative charge, under circumstances of equal claim and equal expediency, as affecting the public "convenience on the one hand and the fair interests of the Revenue on the other, it is impossible to "adopt, as any criterion or guide, the established limits of either of the three differently defined "deliveries of the General Post, the Foreign Post, or the Twopenny Post.

"Your Lordships will remark how very small a portion of the populous precincts of London, "Southwark, or Westminster, is comprehended within the space of the General-Post delivery, and the "singularly capricious and irregular line which describes its boundary.

"We are unable to offer a reasonable solution of the causes which have continued to "circumscribe the actual delivery of the General Post, or a satisfactory explanation of the advantage, "both in lesser expense and greater expedition, which has been afforded partially in situations equally "distant from the centre of this circulation with others to which it has not been extended."

Appendix No. 63 and 64. We have appended to the Report two Maps, on which are traced the respective boundaries of the different deliveries at the time when the above remarks were made, and likewise showing the boundaries as they now exist and the alterations effect since 1831.

Extension of the Boundaries. The Foreign delivery(for which a distinct class of letter-carriers was maintained) has been abolished, and the Foreign letters are now delivered by the General Post letters-carriers, whilst the free delivery of Inland and Foreign letters, and the Town delivery of the Twopenny Post, were, in 1831, made co-extensive, and now comprehend all places within three miles of the General Post-office.

Appendix No. 30. Mr Smith states, that when this extension took place, it was expected the loss to the Revenue would be £20,000 a-year.

The first year after the change, the reduction was about £10,000, but the correspondence has rapidly increased since that time, and it appears from the subjoined account that the gross Revenue for the year 1836 exceeded by upwards of £10,000 the Revenue received in the year previous to the extension of the deliveries.

Appendix No. 36.

AN ACCOUNT of the Gross Revenue of the Twopenny Post-Office from 1830 to 1837.

Year	Gross Revenue		
	£.	s.	d
1830	110,373	12	9½
1831	104,652	6	9½
1832	100,873	5	0
1833	102,203	2	1
1834	109,148	13	11
1835	112,924	17	8
1836	120 801	3	10

Appendix No. 30. The boundary of the delivery of letters by the Threepenny Post was not altered until November 1833, when it was extended to all places beyond the three-mile circle, not exceeding 12 miles from the General Post-office*

* On referring to the Maps which have been constructed with much care for this report, it appears that the limits of the Threepenny-Post deliveries extend to about 12½ from the General Post-office, the boundaries having been inaccurately defined in 1833.

It will also be observed that the Twopenny Post delivery comprehends the West India Docks, which are beyond the three-mile circle, whilst Hampton Court and some of the places adjacent are within the limit of the Threepenny-Post delivery; these places, having been comprised within the old, irregular boundaries, were not excluded when the new boundary were fixed.

Your Lordships will observe that the objections which the Revenue Commissioners made with respect to the boundaries have been obviated, and we have had much satisfaction in ascertaining that many of their recommendations have been carried into effect in this department, with great advantage to the public service.

Appendix No. 29. The offices of Collector and Accountant have been abolished, and their duties transferred to the offices of the Accountant-general and Receiver-general. The office of Comptroller was likewise dispensed with, upon the abolition of the chief office in Gerrard-street, in 1834, and a Superintending President appointed, who now exercises a general control over the whole department.

Ibid. Appendix No. 30. The answer of the Postmaster-general to the recommendation contained in the Twenty-first Report of the Revenue Commissioners; and a statement of Mr. Smith's, which will be found in the Appendix, will explain to your Lordships the nature and extent of the alterations which have been made within the last five years.

We have now to propose some changes in the management of the department, and the system under which the circulation of the correspondence is at present provided for, and at the same time have to suggest an alteration in the mode of collecting a portion of the Revenue, which, if adopted and approved by the public, will afford the means of effecting a most important improvement in the circulation of the correspondence which passes through this department.

The chief obstacles to a more rapid delivery of letters in London and the suburbs arise from the present system of conveying all letters to the chief office to be sorted, from whence they are distributed to the different parts of the town for delivery by the letter-carriers: the deliveries are further greatly delayed in consequence of the letter-carriers being obliged to wait to collect the postage.

Appendix Nos. 3, 4. Mr Hill's Propositions We have had under consideration various proposals which have been made with a view to expedite the transmission of the correspondence, and, in particular, a Plan, which has been suggested by Mr. Rowland Hill, the author of an ingenious pamphlet on "Post-office Reform", which is detailed at length in the Appendix, and to which we would beg to call your Lordships' attention.

To bring Mr. Hill's plan fully into operation, it seems to be essential that the rates of postage should be uniform, and the payment made in advance, and, although we conceive that we should exceed the limits which have been prescribed to our inquiries if we were to entertain a proposition of this nature, involving a great and general reduction of the rates, with respect to the General Post, yet we have considered it to be our duty to examine whether it might not be applicable either wholly or in part to the delivery of letters in and around London.

The principal objection to Mr. Hill's scheme appears to be, that it would deprive the public of the option of sending unpaid letters through the Twopenny Post-office, and, on this point, Mr. Smith, the Superintending President of the department, (**Appendix No. 4**) states "that in his opinion any attempt to "fetter the post by compelling payment of the letters when put in, would check correspondence, cause "much dissatisfaction, and be considered a very oppressive measure."

We are disposed to attach great weight to Mr. Smith's statement upon this subject, although the dissatisfaction he alludes to might probably arise, not so much from any objection in principle to the payment of postage, as to the mode in which the postage is collected.

From the evidence which we have received, we are inclined to believe that the public would far more generally take advantage of the option of paying the postage of letters in advance, were it not for the additional trouble and inconvenience they are thereby put to.

The postage can only be paid by sending the amount with the letter to the receiving-house, which offers an inducement to servants and persons to whom the letters are intrusted not to post them at all, or to do so without paying the postage. If they adopt the former course, there is no possibility of detection, and very little in the latter case.

Appendix No. 9. The check of the receiver's accounts of paid letters is also very imperfect, and the same opportunity is afforded them of appropriating the postage and not transmitting the letters; whilst another objection arises from the time of receiving paid letters being necessarily limited by the period fixed for opening and closing of the shops or receiving-houses.

There are other causes which operate to prevent the payment of postage in advance, and the practice is so little resorted to, that, in numerous instances where it is desirable to have a letter delivered without any expense to the party to whom it is addressed, a special messenger is employed sometimes with great inconvenience, and for no other reason than because it is unusual for the writer to pay the postage of a Twopenny-Post letter.

We cannot, therefore, propose the adoption of any plan which would render it compulsory on the public to pay the postage of their letters on putting them in at the receiving-house.

Introduction of "Stamped Covers"

Another suggestion has been made by Mr Hill, which we think may be carried into effect with advantage, namely, to permit the free circulation of letters by the Twopenny Post under stamped covers.

We have had much communication with the officers of the department with respect to this plan, and we informed that no difficulty will be experienced in adapting the system to conveying letters by means of stamped covers to the present mode of collection and delivery.

Your Lordships will perceive from the evidence of Mr. Pressly, the Secretary of the Board of Stamps and Taxes, that he also entertains a favourable opinion of this proposal; whilst he has, at the same time, fairly stated such objections as he conceived might be raised against the adoption of the plan, the first and most important of which is, that the Revenue would be liable to be defrauded by the forgery of these stamps.

Appendix No. 18. With respect to this objection, Mr. Pressly says, "It has occurred to me, however, that it might be prevented, if the Government manufactured a Particular paper for such envelopes. There is a paper which has been produced to the Commissioners of Stamps for another purpose, and it is the best suggestion that occurs to me for this purpose, namely, by the introduction of a silk thread into the paper, which is difficult to manufacture, and very expensive, and, with the vigilance of the Excise, would be almost impossible to forge. The silk is wove in the pulp, and is written on with the greatest facility: the manufacturer is Mr. Dickinson, of the Old Bailey."

Appendix No. 20, 34. Mr. Dickinson has fully described the mode of fabricating the particular description of paper to which Mr. Pressly refers, and we are satisfied that, if the use of this paper was confined exclusively to stamped covers, it would be almost impossible to imitate the paper, or commit any forgery without detection.

Ibid. The expense of such covers will be somewhat greater than if they were made of common paper but it appears from Mr. Dickinson's evidence that they may be supplied at a very low rate, Mr. Dickinson having assumed in his calculation, that the paper, being applied solely for Government purposes, would be exempted from the Excise duty, which, in our opinion, it ought to be.

Under the present regulations, one uniform rate of twopence is paid for all letters delivered by the Twopenny Post within three miles of the office, and 3d. if conveyed beyond that distance.

No distinction is made with respect to the weight, provided it does not exceed four ounces, in which case the packet would be returned to the writer through the Dead Letter-office.

We are of opinion, however, that it will be desirable to fix stamp duty on the envelopes, without reference to the boundary which now regulates the two rates of postage on letters sent through this department, and to increase the duty only in cases where the packets exceed the weight of an ordinary letter.

It is impossible for the public to ascertain with any degree of certainty the exact limit of the Twopenny-Post boundary, which extends to every place within three miles of the General Post-office; and, consequently, a letter directed to one house in a street may be subject to a rate of 2d., whilst, if delivered next door, it would be charged 3d.

When the postage is paid on delivery, this produces little inconvenience, but if, on introducing stamped covers, it was necessary to adopt one description of envelopes for letters with this circle, and another description for letters addressed to places beyond, much confusion and complaint would arise.

We, therefore, propose to your Lordships that the distinction in the rates and districts which now applies to letters delivered by the Twopenny and Threepenny Posts, shall not in any way affect

Recommendations. Reduction of the present Rates on Letters sent under Stamped covers.

correspondence transmitted under stamped covers; and that any letter not exceeding an ounce in weight shall be conveyed free within the metropolis and the districts to which the town and country deliveries now extend, is enclosed in an envelope bearing a penny stamp.

We are also of opinion, that the weight of letters and packets transmitted under stamped covers should, for the present, be limited to six ounces; and that the stamp or envelope required for the purpose of franking parcels above an ounce, and not exceeding six ounces, shall be charged twopence.

We do not propose that any alteration should be made in the postage of *unpaid letters*, which will be declared subject to the existing rates and regulations both as regards weight and distance.

Page 12. We have appended to the Report specimens of the paper and envelopes which we propose should be introduced for the conveyance of letters by what may be termed "The London District

Post," which, at present, comprises all places within 12 miles of the General Post-office; although we are inclined to believe that it may be found advantageous to extend the deliveries beyond this boundary to several of the towns within 15 miles of London.

In order to afford the public every facility for obtaining the covers, they should be kept at all the receiving-houses, and it will be necessary for the Stamp-office to make such an allowance to the distributors as will induce stationers and others in and around London to vend them. We recommend that the envelopes shall be sold to the public without any additional charge beyond the respective duties of 1d. and 2d.; whilst labels may also be prepared of such a form that they can be attached to other envelopes or covers of any size and description

In proposing that letters shall be conveyed by means of stamped covers, and for a charge of not more than half the present rates, we do not anticipate that the increase of correspondence will be so great as to compensate for the reduction of postage.

We are opinion that any very large increase in the number of letters could only arise from combining with the introduction of stamped covers an additional number of deliveries, and **establishing district offices**, by means of which an interchange might be effected in a very short space of time, which cannot be done whilst the whole correspondence is collected simultaneously and conveyed to the chief office to be sorted and despatched from thence.

With a view to accelerate the delivery of letters, Mr. Hill has suggested that the portion of the metropolis comprised within the boundaries of the Twopenny Post, should be **divided into 10 District Sorting - offices** districts, and that Sorting-offices should be established in each district.

Appendix No. 3 He has calculated that, with hourly dispatches, the average time which would elapse between the receipt and delivery of a letter (if posted at any hour between eight A.M. and seven P.M.) would be, if received in one district and delivered in another, one hour and a half; if received and delivered in the same district, about three quarters of an hour.

An interchange of letters might thus take place in about two hours and four hours respectively.

The average time which now elapses before an answer can be received to a letter put into the receiving-house between eight A.M. and seven P.M., is 14½ hours; and the average period between the receipt and delivery of a letter is about 5½ hours.

The Superintending President having had his attention directed to Mr. Hills' plan, has stated various objections which occurred to him, and after making an estimate of the expense which it would

Appendix No. 31. occasion, he concludes his observations by saying, "That should the plan be carried into effect in the way proposed, it will not "realize the expectations of the Commissioners, as the deliveries cannot possibly be "made within the time calculated; and it is also my decided opinion that the facilities that will be afforded "to

Appendix No. 32. the public in their correspondence by the reduction in postage and the additional number of "deliveries, will not increase the circulation anything like equal to pay the expenses of the "establishment and meet the reduction of the "tax."

Although we do not altogether concur with the view taken by Mr. Smith respecting the propositions submitted to him, still we should have considerable hesitation in recommending to your Lordships to adopt so great a change in opposition to the decided opinion of the Superintending Officers, upon whom would devolve the duty of carrying into effect whatever alterations may be agreed upon.

Optional Payment. There is, however, another objection which has still greater weight, namely, the difficulty of carrying the plan into successful operation, unless the whole of the correspondence is sent under stamped covers, or the postage paid in advance. It has been said that the stamped covers will be generally approved of, and that they will be used for a very large proportion of the correspondence passing between the different parts of the metropolitan districts; but we did not feel ourselves warranted in entertaining any proposition which would at once deprive the public of the option of sending unpaid letters, and require the immediate and universal adoption of these stamped covers:: we therefore directed an estimate to be made of the expense which would be incurred by establishing 10 district

Appendix No. 32. offices and the employment of a separate class of letter-carriers for the delivery of letters sent under "stamped covers" without interfering with the existing arrangements for the receipt and dispatch of unpaid letters. We found that the **additional charges were estimated of upwards of £34,000 a-year**, which, in all probability, would exceed the total gross revenue derived from the stamps covers in the first years of their introduction. We

cannot, therefore, under these circumstances, recommend the establishment at present of district offices and hourly deliveries. The experiments we have proposed will enable your Lordships to ascertain to what extent the public are disposed to adopt stamps covers for the conveyance of letters in and around London, and whether any inconvenience or dissatisfaction would arise if the whole of the revenue of the "London District Post" was collected in this manner. If it is found practicable the stamped covers into general use, the accounts and charges will be got rid of, and the arrangements of the department so much simplified that there will be no longer any difficulty in increasing the number of deliveries and establishing sorting-offices in different parts of the metropolis.

In that case we have little doubt that the number of letters would be multiplied to such an extent as would in a short time compensate for the reduction in postage which we have recommended, and render the "London District Post" not only the cheapest, but the safest and most expeditious means of communicating with and effecting an interchange of letters and packets between different parts of the metropolis and the suburbs.

Although we cannot recommend the establishment of district offices and hourly deliveries, there are some alterations which may be introduced without in any way disturbing the present mode of conducting business, or materially increasing the charges of management.

Appendix No. 5. There are now six deliveries daily, viz., at 8, 10, and 12 o'clock A.M., and 3, 5, and 7 P.M., - the collections being made from the different receiving-houses two houses before each delivery, with the exception of that for the first, which is made at eight the previous evening.

It will be observed that in three hours of the day, (viz., from two to five,) a period when the number of letters posted is probably greater than at any other time, there is no delivery; and that the last collection of letters is made at five o'clock, whilst letters from the General-Post receiving-houses are not collected until six.

Additional Deliveries We propose that the deliveries in shall, future, be every second hour from eight A.M. until eight P.M., and that the collections shall be made at the same hours, viz. at 8, 10, and 12 A.M., and 2, 4, 6, and 8 P.M.

In addition to expediting the delivery of letters received in the afternoon, there will be another advantage in making the periods of collection and dispatch every alternate hour, as the period of receipt and delivery will be readily ascertained, which is not the case at present. The time of closing the receiving-houses will also be the same as that of the General Post, viz., six P.M. It is now an hour earlier, and we are informed that this occasions much disappointment, particularly in situations where the offices of the Twopenny-post departments are used for the receipt of General-Post letters.

ACCOUNTS

Accounts. Appendix No. 59. From a Return which will be found in the Appendix, it appears that the total number of letters, the postage of which has been paid at the receiving-houses during a week, was 50,955.

Each receiving-house sends daily six accounts of the paid letters, and there being, at present, 209 receiving-houses, the number of additional accounts occasioned by these paid letters, for one week, is 1,254. The Revenue Commissioners, on the subject of these accounts, say, "Referring to the "amount of revenue received through this channel, we are doubtful whether the degree of convenience "to the public, in the option of paying this lowest rate of postage, be a sufficient reason for incurring the "official inconvenience and expense of keeping and checking various accounts, which in a limited extent "must still attend the continuance of that option at all the receiving-houses."

Appendix No. 29. They subsequently recommend, with a view to obviate the number of accounts, that the option of paying the postage of letters should be limited, both in town and country, to one or two offices in each division.

Ibid. This has been objected to by the Postmaster-general on the ground "that any restriction in this "respect would deprive the public of a most valuable accommodation."

The stamped covers will continue the accommodation to the public, and, at the same time, enable the Post-office to get rid of all the accounts of paid letters; for, although the option will be afforded of posting letters unstamped and unpaid, as at present, it will evidently be unnecessary and inexpedient to allow the receivers to collect and receive postage on paid letters.

Appendix No .1. The Receiver's accounts of the Twopenny Post are now prepared in the Sorting-office: this duty should be at once removed to the Accountant-general's department, where the accounts will be prepared in the same manner as those of the General Post.

Ibid. Mr. Smith has, in his evidence, stated, that the present system of preparing the accounts is very objectionable in principle, and that the duty ought to be performed by officers entirely unconnected with the Sorting department.

LETTER-CARRIERS

Letter-carriers. The Revenue Commissioners proposed that the three classes of letter-carriers should be incorporated, and in the Twenty-first Report say :-

It appears to us to be almost superfluous to attempt to enforce the opinion originally expressed in our Eighteenth Report, that an incorporation of the three separate classes of letter-carriers, for the common purpose of delivering all letters. must be attended with a diminution of labour, and of the whole necessary number of persons employed, and with a proportionate reduction of expense.

The three several classes are at certain periods simultaneously employed in the services of collecting or delivering, separately and within certain limits in the same space differently divided, letters classed under different official distinctions, which distinctions it is useless to observe in the delivery, whilst in the collection they might be preserved to any necessary extent as well by one class of collectors as by three.

The Foreign letter-carriers have been abolished, as we before remarked, in accordance with the above recommendation; and the change has been in every respect advantageous to the service.

We had, therefore, intended to consider whether the duties of the two existing classes might not be combined, and their services rendered alike applicable to every portion of the correspondence.

The Twopenny-Post letter-carriers are now occasionally employed for the delivery of Inland and
Appendix No. 1. Foreign letters, and their duties are at all times more arduous than those of the
Appendix No. 11. General-Post establishment, although the latter are permitted to receive fees and perquisites, which render their situations more lucrative; the seniors having incomes which vary from £100 to £180 a-year, whilst the highest class of Twopenny-Post letter-carriers receive only from £70 to £80 a-year. We have also been informed that a letter-carrier is never promoted from the latter department to a situation in the former.

It appears to use, however, that, if the Twopenny Post were to remain constituted as at present, it would be desirable to do away with several of the distinctions which now exist between the two classes, and to place the whole of the letter-carriers under the control of one individual, with a view to equalize the labour and remuneration as much as possible, and to offer the same prospect of advancement to every letter-carrier who shall honestly and zealously discharge his duties, without any regards to the department in which he may have been originally employed.

We do not recommend this alteration at present, because, if your Lordships should hereafter approve the establishment of district offices, and the collection of postage by stamped covers, it would be necessary to maintain a separate and distinct class of letter-carriers for the delivery of letters originating in and around London; and, as the collection of postage would form no part of their duty, it would be impossible to employ them in the Inland or Foreign department.

RIDES

Rides. We have not yet been able to obtain the whole of the information which we were desirous to lay before your Lordships with respect to the rides and the state of the circulation in the country districts.

Appendix No. 2. The Superintending President, in addition to the multifarious duties which he has to perform in London, is likewise required to control this branch of the service, and to survey the country districts, and inspect the Sorting-offices, --duties which he admits he is unable to do justice to. It is, however, due to this officers to state, that he already been enabled to effect considerable improvements, although they fall short of what was recommended by the Commissioners of Revenue Enquiry, and which the public accommodation requires.

The riding work of the Twopenny Post-office is now provided for under a contract entered into with Mr. Abbott, in March last, at an expense of 7½d. per double mile for the horse-posts, and 7½d. for **Appendix No. 35.** mail-carts. The wages of the riders and drivers and the expense of the carts are defrayed by the contractor, who undertakes to convey the bags at the rate of eight miles an hour. The total sum paid for this service, in 1836, was £4,107. 0s 4d.

The principle which has been urged against the employment of stage-coaches for the conveyance of General-Post letters, appears also to have obtained in this department. We have already laid before your Lordships abundant evidence to prove that the transmission of correspondence may be in numerous instances more efficiently performed, and with less expense, by established coaches than by mail-carts, horse-posts, or other carriages, the property of the Crown.

Appendix We further beg to refer to the statement of the proprietors connected with **Nos. 16. 17. 19** short-stages and omnibuses in and around London, by which it will appear that they would gladly undertake the conveyance of bags into the country districts at different hours of the day, and agree to perform the journeys with great punctuality.

A small payment would be a sufficient inducement for them, as they conceived that by conveying the mails their carriages would be preferred, and their profits considerable increased.

Appendix No. 35. The present contract may be put an end to at six months' notice; and we should proposed that in future separate contracts should be entered into for the several divisions or lines of road, and the carriages already established for carrying passengers employed; by means of which a great part of the expense of the rides will be saved, and the frequency of communications greatly facilitated.

Additional Dispatch to the Country Districts A letter now, if posted at any of the principal towns in the country districts after nine o'clock in the morning is not delivered in London until between seven and nine at night. The inconvenience arising from this is so great that we think steps ought to be taken, even before the present contracts can be terminated, for giving an additional dispatch to and from the country: the Superintending President suggests, as your Lordships will observe, that this may be done by means of the *short* stages and omnibuses.

Appendix No. 60. We have been surprised to learn that no bags are sent to London by the mails passing through small the towns within the limits of the Threepenny Post, although this would give another delivery without any expense or trouble. The only reason assigned for this not being done is, **Appendix No. 2.** that the Superintending President has already too much to attend to; we are satisfied that this is the case, and beg, in conclusion, to propose that he should be relived from the duties of inspecting and surveying the country districts, and that a subordinate officer should be appointed for this purpose, and be required to report upon the best means of connecting the different rides by cross posts, and in how far this could be done by the conveyances already established.

If omnibuses or short stages are employed, cross posts might, in many instances, be obtained without any additional expense: for example, - we can see no reason why the same carriage which may be employed to convey a bag between London and Richmond might not also take letters between Brentford and Richmond, and prevent the necessity of sending the correspondence of those towns to the chief office in London, though which it passes at present.

Office of Woods,
7th July 1837

DUNCANNON.
H. LABOUCHERE
SEYMOUR

Papers numbered 1 to 23 comprise Minutes of Evidence taken before the Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the Management of the Post Office Department and will be printed in subsequent issues of Notebook.

LOCATION OF THE LONDON HEAD OFFICE AND POST HOUSES 1526 - 1687

by Jeremy Greenwood

Originally published in Notebook No. 13

It is the intention of this article to dispel some of the myths which have arisen about the site of the General Letter Office, in part due to confusion between the terms "post house" and "post office" in the seventeenth century, as at first the post house was the post office and there was no separate or head office.

A post was established in the City of London in 1526 upon receipt of a warrant ordering a certain number of horses to be kept for the King's Post. The Court of Alderman viewed a site for a post house in Lombard Street but selected the Windmill in Old Jewry as a more convenient place and the City authorities decided to require the inn keepers to maintain four horses always in readiness and the Hackney men, four more, to stand for hire for persons wishing or ordered to ride post, although the term at this stage does not necessarily have any connection with the carriage of letters.

In 1538, following complaints by the hackney men that in addition to the four horses they had agreed to furnish, the horses they brought into the City for hire were frequently seized for the King's service, so it was agreed all the horses required of the City for this purpose should be provided by one of their number - Gabriel Abraham - on their behalf and that he should receive payment for both from his fellow hackney men and the inn keepers.

However, this did not resolve the problem entirely and, in 1548, Abraham petitioned for relief of his grievances and once again the responsibility for providing horses for the King's service was shared between the hackney men and the inn keepers of the City.

On January 25 1574 the Privy Council instructed the person who kept the post horses in the City to have six horses ready at all times "For such as come with commissions", so evidently the old system had been reinstated. There was also a Court post, who was Robert Gascoigne at this period, whose duty it was to arrange post stages between London and wherever the monarch happened to be staying. In addition William Gough was "Her Majesty's Post of London" by 1590 and, by 1623, there were obviously several more as Matthew DeQuester wrote to Secretary of State Conway in that year, from Sarjeant's Inn (possibly the location of the Foreign Branch at that date) as follows, "Forwards a packet by special post; the City posts objecting to take packets to Court without a note under Conway's hand".

Separate post houses had already been established at the head of each post road, although only the Dover and North roads had any degree of permanence. A document of 1619 is a receipt from John King, Richard Gladwin and Francis Pitt of Southwark for money paid by the King for the surrender of their warrant "to take up post horses within 5 miles of Southwark and for his (King's) good behaviour in his place as postmaster, his ill conduct therein having been complained of".

There is also a certificate annex to this by John King stating that "Paul Axhall, postmaster of Bishopsgate Street Within, receives a contribution from the inn keepers of London to spare their horses in provision of post horses for His Majesty's travels and that he has lost £200 by providing and that on the King's removing days he sends warrants for horses from Southwark".

Further references to post houses occur in 1628, confirming the one for the North road being in Bishopsgate and adding that the one for the Plymouth road was at Charing Cross. This is almost the end of the era of a postal service for the Court only, as Witherings' plan for a public postal service began to be implemented in 1635 but there is no record of the position of the London head office at this date, although Witherings himself refers to it as being in Sherborne Lane in one of his later petitions.

However, it is not clear whether he means the Inland or Foreign (or both) for the two appear to have had separate establishments almost from the start due to the fact that whilst Witherings was Postmaster for Foreign Parts out of His Majesty's Domain by Royal patent, he was only the Deputy Postmaster for England by assignment from the Secretaries of State. Thus when both offices were sequestered from in 1640 and assigned to Burlamachi by the king, he fairly soon recovered control of

the Foreign Branch as he had assigned part of his interest in it to the Earl of Warwick but he had no further dealings with the Inland Office which Burlamachi, in his turn, had assigned to Prideaux although he continued to run it himself until his death in 1644.

A letter of October 1640 refers to the Letter Office being in Crutched Friars (near Tower Hill) but it is not known if this was the same location as Burlamachi's house from where the Inland Office was run under Prideaux's protection as, in 1635, Burlamachi's residence was in Putney, although he had rooms at a Mr. Gould's house in Fenchurch Street for his business and it is just possible this was the actual location of the Letter Office.

Witherings continued to run the Foreign Office branch of the Letter Office from his own house - location also unknown - until 1642 when it was moved to the Earl of Warwick's house near the Royal Exchange in Threadneedle Street; reputedly in Bartholomew Lane.

As well as these Chief Offices there were a number of post houses as before, one at the start of each road, with a postmaster in charge (as opposed to the deputy postmasters in all other offices) including Thomas Barlow at the "Dog and Bear" in Southwark, John Castleton in the Barbican and Edward Hutchins at the "White Hart" in Charing Cross, according to petitions of 1642 and Barlow, in particular, was there still in 1666.

Although Witherings continued the operation of the foreign mails, Prideaux, the Attorney-General under the Commonwealth, was ordered to take charge of inland mails in 1644 and to reorganise them and he was given the use of "such rooms in the House late of the Alderman Freeman, where this Committee of the Accounts of the Kingdom now sits, as he shall conceive to be necessary for erecting his letter office" but this statement proves to be a red herring as, firstly, "house" can refer to a residence or to the House of Commons (almost certainly the latter) and, secondly, the only record of an Alderman Freeman of the City of London shows he had died some ten years previously, whilst there were no aldermen for the City of Westminster until much later.

In 1651 (the year in which he died) Witherings had a servant running his office in the post house in Bishopsgate Street, whilst a letter of the following year refers to the post for Yarmouth departing from Gracechurch Street but, as these two streets are continuations of one another, they probably refer to the same office in the light of other evidence.

As to the Inland Office, this is more fully documented at this time and the well known broadsheet of January 1653 refers to the " Old Post House at the lower end of Threadneedle street, by the Stocks " i.e. immediately opposite the Stocks market and this situation is also mentioned in Oxenbridge's petition relating to the events of the previous year when, after it was decided to farm the Letter Office, Prideaux lost interest in its affairs and, towards the end of 1652 , Oxenbridge and other, to all intents and purposes, took over the running of the postal services for a short while. When Manley, who had been granted the farm of both Inland and Foreign offices, forcibly took over from Oxenbridge et al. in 1653 he also invaded their premises in Wood Street and seized letters there.

Confusion has arisen as to the location of this chief office as it was at the junction of Poultry, Threadneedle St., Lombard St. and Cornhill ! However, it remained in this situation and is recorded in the Hearth Tax records as being rated at 33 hearths; it being a considerable building as many of the Post Office officials lived as well as worked there.

In addition to this, there were post houses at the beginning of each post road and the survey of 1666 shows these being as follows:

Isaac Bennet in Red Cross St. for the Chester road.

Mr Harrington in Whitechapel for the Yarmouth road.

Thomas Barlow in Southwark for the Dover and Rye roads.

Andrew Snap at Charing Cross for the Plymouth road.

Mr Roberts in the Barbican for the North road.

The oft quoted entry in Pepys' Diary (and also Evelyn's) for October 5, 1664 referring to a visit to a musical evening at a post house near Gresham College, probably means one of those just mentioned rather than the General Letter Office.

We now enter a period, namely around the fire of London in 1666, during which many "fictional" references have been made to the site of the G.L.O. including the "Black Swan in Bishopsgate" - not known ever to have existed - and Cloak Lane, Dowgate - for which there is also not the least evidence, as the Hearth Tax records, already mentioned, c. 1664, as well as Hollar's map of 1666 confirm it was still by the Stocks and was consequently engulfed by the fire causing that redoubtable Post Office veteran, James Hickes, to flee the letters to the post office at the Golden Lion in Red Cross Street on September 3rd. and the next day he moved on to the postmasters at Barnet where he wrote to all the other deputy postmasters instructing them to send the letters there temporarily.

By September 10th. he had found interim accommodation at the Black Pillars in Bridge Street, over against the Fleece Tavern in Covent Garden and about a week later had moved again to more permanent premises at Sir Samuel Bernadistone's house in Bishopsgate Street, opposite the junction with Threadneedle Street. The Kent and Sussex Post Office (i.e. the Foreign Office) was similarly burnt down and had to be temporarily removed from the Round House, Love Lane, where it had been from at least 1661, to the house of John Dane in the passage to and from Tower Hill, near the pump at Crutched Friars

In August 1667 the Kentish office was moved to the " Grand Office in Bishopsgate Street " from the Round House, so amalgamating both offices for the first time. The post house at the Swan near Charing Cross was moved to the Red Lyon near the Meuse (or newest) gate in February 1668, whilst the White Hart in the Barbican is still referred to as the Post House for Chester in 1670.

Finally in March 1678 the G.P.O. was removed to Sir Robert Viner's house in Lombard Street which they rented from him, where it remained for many years whilst an extension was made from it into Sherborne Lane in 1687 with an entrance there.

References : Apart from those listed in Postal History Society Bulletins 7,57,76 and 119, the Hearth Tax records note, afforded by the late Martin Willcocks, these are the London Gazette 1666 - 87, H.M.C. Portland I, 582; Cowper II; Cal. Treasury Books 1685 - 9, p. 1651; C.S.P.D. 1652 and Hendy MSS in P.O. Records.

POST OFFICE LOSES IN THE GREAT FIRE

An unattributed article published in Notebook No. 17

Jeremy Greenwood's article dealing with the locations of the London Head Office clearly places that establishment " at the lower end of Threadneedle Street, by the Stocks ", this confirmed by Heath Tax Records.

In his detailed account of the Great Fire, Walter Bell quotes Cloak Lane Dowgate, though he admits this to be a deduction and not proved by documentary evidence. He makes it clear the office could not have been Bishopsgate as the fire never reached there and the record of James Hickes "coughing departure " is well known. However, he does relate that at One o'clock in the morning on September 3rd., when Hickes was finally forced to flee, the flames were but a few yards distant (State Papers Domestic). According to Bell the fire was " flaming up Dowgate ".

From the State Papers Domestic comes a letter from One J. Barket to Williamson which asks the address of the post office " that by the stocks being destroyed by this unparalleled fire " (dated 3 September 1666).

Apart from the loss of both Post Office and correspondence, the Government of the day suffered, during this particular slum clearing operation, from the loss of a device reputed to open and reseal letters without parties being aware of the malpractice. Many writers would have this apparatus as one of the many figments of historical imagination which have been woven into postal history folk lore and should be treated as such. It is true no records are known of (or admitted to by authority) showing the construction of the device and, very naturally, its use was not a matter for Governments announcements.

One may start the story with Charles II and the restoration. Times were not at all easy for the Monarch who was beset with problems of distinguishing true friends from false. One of those he apparently trusted, although others - including Pepys - did not, was one Sir Samuel Moreland. This knight as a most under valued inventor of devices mechanical. Had he lived two hundred years later and retained good patent lawyer he would, no doubt, have received proper recognition. Amongst his inventions were a calculating machine, the heavy anchor drum capstan, practical water raising equipment and, not the least, the "letter opener". Some acknowledgement of his talent was made when, late in life, he was made Magister Mechanicorum by the King. Despite Charles' interest his reputation was not untarnished since he had the office under Cromwell as one of the Board of Examiners of the Post Office. The functions of this body included the opening of suspect letters !

However, Moreland was a Royalist, or at least kept up a correspondence with Royalists overseas. When, by chance, he overheard a plot to lure Charles and others into an attempted landing in the Sussex coast, a warning in time caused Charles to abandon the scheme which was under active consideration. It is of interest to learn that Moreland escaped death at Cromwell's own hand at the meeting setting the trap by feigned sleep - which his superior sustained (unaware of the true case) by an assurance that Moreland had been working for two nights in a row and was exhausted. After the Restoration Moreland was one of the first to be knighted.

Having some knowledge of matters postal he continued in that office with Lord Arlington as his chief. For years the Spaniards had been regarded as past masters in the art of opening and resealing letters and Arlington learning of Moreland's own skill agreed to take part in a demonstration of his art.

Arlington wrote a short note of some ten or twelve lines, sealed it well and handed it to Moreland. Two days later the letter was returned, apparently free from any sign of tampering. He also received AN IDENTICAL LETTER IN EVERY RESPECT THE SAME, both as to seals and contents. Arlington was quite unable to tell which was the original and which the copy. Clearly, the possibilities were considerable. Charles was brought into the matter and, being fond of matters mechanical and matters devious, was most impressed by the combination of both activities. Indeed, the King ordered two rooms at the General Post Office to be set aside for Moreland and his device.

Three months after this Charles visited the two rooms to inspect the equipment which achieved the following results:

- The opening and resealing of all types of seals, wafers or wax, without and trace.
- ii. The counterfeiting of all types of seals, both wafer and wax, again without and danger of detection.
 - iii. The counterfeiting of all writings, again to perfection.
 - iv. The exact and rapid reproduction of writing. Two sides of a sheet closely written were reproduced in just over one minute.

The results, particularly the last in an age when photocopying was still over two hundred years away, were proof positive of Moreland's skills. No doubt the only concern in the official mind was the adage that a good sword has two edges. With the blessing of the Monarch, Moreland and his two rooms continued in operation until fire destroyed everything.

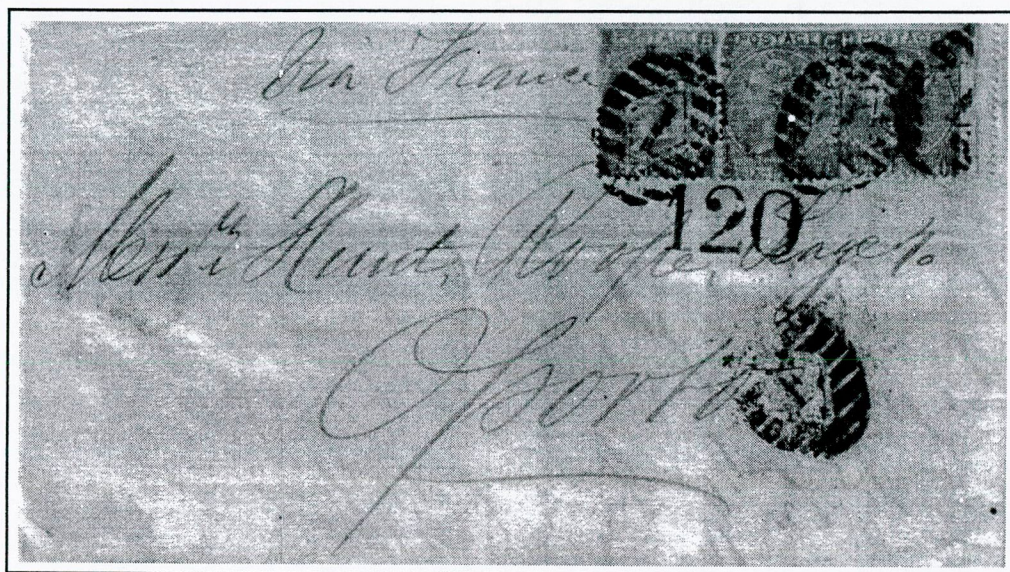
One might reasonably expect such a valuable part of the State's operation to be replaced at an early date but this was not to be. Until the time when William was King and Moreland an ageing and near destitute man did the subject surface again. In an engaging letter to the Postmaster General, Moreland stressed the advantages accruing from the employment of the equipment - and of Moreland to operate it - in glowing and engaging phrases. Will, however, was not a Charles, was not prepared to give his consent, believed the secret too dangerous and should die with Moreland.

And so it did ??????

.....
FOREIGN OFFICE BARRED OVAL

Antony Shine

Alan Robertson, in his "The Maritime Postal History of London"* notes the issue of four barred oval "Killer" obliterations, lettered **B F H** and **P**, being issued to the Foreign Office in 1865. He goes on to say... " The precise significance of their use is not yet established; they may be found obliterating adhesives (illustrating one such use of the letter **P**, cancelling another handstamp, or separately on a letter to the U.K. from a **foreign** country. Whatever the specific purpose, they also served as indicators of "Foreign Branch" handling. Of uncommon occurrence, the majority of those seen by the author, have been on incoming letters from the continent bearing uncanceled G.B. adhesives requiring obliteration."



The example shown here was used to cancel the paid mark, the one shilling and sixpence prepayment to Oporto being deemed an underpayment, a view shared on arrival, as shown by the hand struck " 120 " charge mark.

As can be seen from the apparent size of the adhesives, the illustration is a slightly reduced copy.

Given his book was published on the occasion of the London International Stamp Exhibition of 1960, it should be possible for readers to provide examples from their collection, stocks or records of the use of the "lettered diamonds". The Editor has a couple to start the ball rolling but it is YOUR material we all want to see.

* "THE MARITIME POSTAL HISTORY OF LONDON". by Alan W. Robertson, Published 1960.

NEWSPAPER BRANCH CANCELLATIONS - A QUERY

Alex Porteous

The writer is due to give a display of his Newspaper Branch material in September and has been disappointed in not being able to find anything to assist. Like many other collectors a copy of "Newspaper Branch Cancellations" by W.G. Stitt Dibden, a compilation of articles published by the Postal History Society as long ago as 1971, remains the main source of information. It should be noted the most recent of the seven articles was dated February 1960 !

The query is simple: does anyone have any other published information material or notes from Post Office Archives / Records derived from their own research? Surely in the past 49 years there must be something. Please send in any references, or better a copy, for any such articles.

A HALFPENNY
BOOK POST
CANCELLATION.

Stitt Dibden
recorded seven
stamps, A to G,
being issued
23rd. May, 1876.

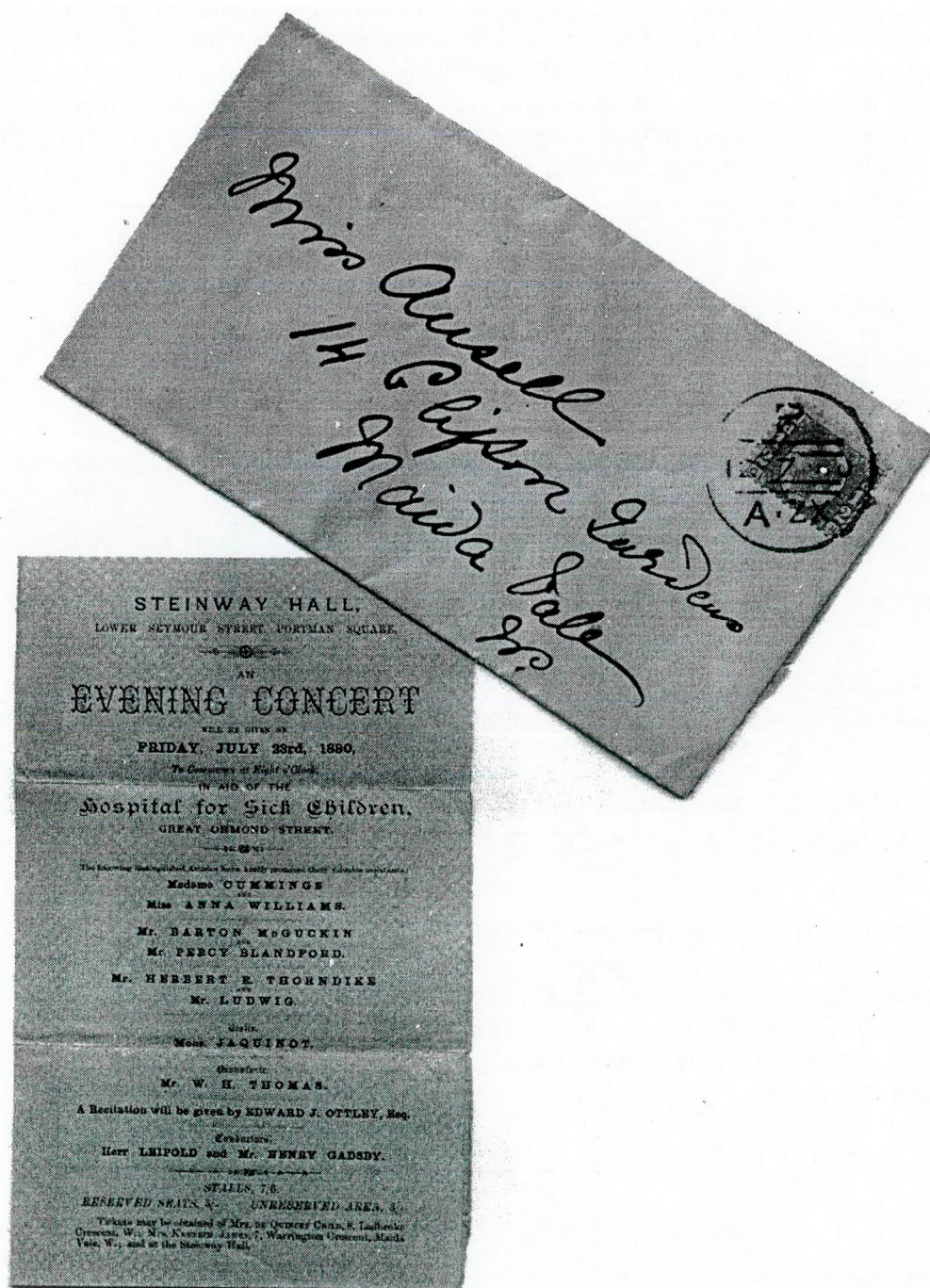
This example, on
an envelope, still
with the
advertisement for
an Evening
Concert, dated
12th. July, 1880.

Code letter P
Paddington

Stamp Code

A ZX

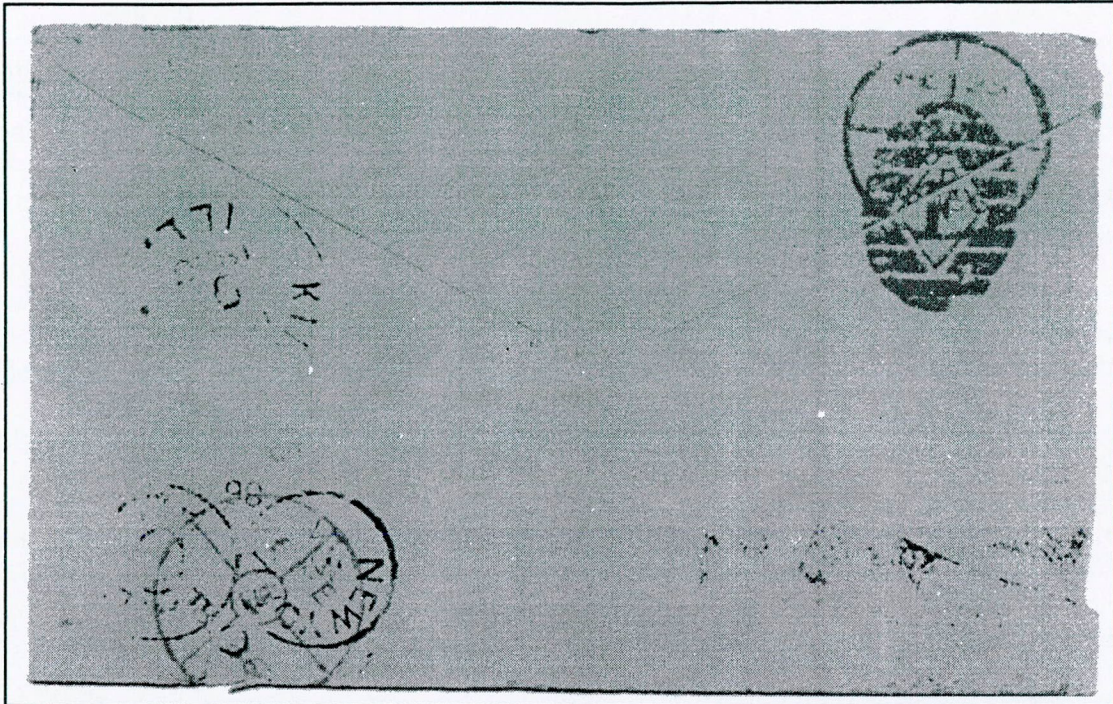
illustration
slightly
reduced
size



QUARTERED CIRCLE STAMP

Item Provided by Antony Shine

The Editorial scan and subsequent crop do not really do justice to this.



The letter was addressed to Illinois, carries a 2½d adhesive, smartly cancelled by a Taunton Squared Circle for February 25, 1886. As can be seen from the reverse of the cover above, the attempts by both the British and American Post Offices to provide a clear record of handling the item failed miserably in terms of clarity but can be read.

The New York arrival date seems to be March 7th, that for Illinois being two days later.

However, for London collectors there is the curious use of what is known as the 'Quartered Circle' * date stamp. This comes too late for either Jay or Feldman and a brief look through Alcock and Holland (1940 Ed.) yielded no example.

The design is an outer circle some 33 mm diameter with an 8 mm diameter circle in the centre, containing a code letter, in this case seemingly an 'A'. The left upper quarter has the day, 26, the right the month, (F)E, with the year, in two parts in the lower quarters.

What is most interesting is the use of the Foreign Office F in Barred Diamond used to obliterate another Quartered Circle date stamp. This, oddly, has a slightly different arrangement, reading, left to right at the top, FE 25. Two points worth making here. Were there two 'QC' date stamps, the one reading the 25th. being applied incorrectly and, therefore, cancelled or were the Post Office attempting to cover the over night delay? Of course, a major matter is the use of a red ink pad for both the 'QC' and the Foreign Office Barred Diamond F. If nothing else, it places the 'QC' firmly in the Foreign Office.

As always, further examples requested, scans if possible but copier examples most welcome.

* Any reader with more information on this type of date stamp is invited to send the information for publication.

.....
WANTED.....by the Editor for his collection

Entire letters written from CARSHALTON or WALTHAMSTOW, any period.

From the pages of the Illustrated London News for the week ending Saturday June 22, 1844, brimming with references sufficient to infuriate the modern political sensibilities, comes this splendid article on.....

POST OFFICE ESPIONAGE

Whether the present Home Secretary has deliberately planned out a scheme for making himself more unpopular than he is already, we know not, but he could not have hit on anything so likely to effect his purpose as to order, in a time of perfect domestic quiet, the detention and opening of letters committed to the care of the Post-office.

No public establishment has so much in its power; the most unreserved of family communications, not to be profaned by the eye of a stranger; the most important commercial correspondence, the knowledge of which by others might involve whole establishments in ruin - all these are completely in the power of Government officials. A fragile seal is all that stands between them and the secrets of a whole community.

What has inspired that universal confidence which allows men without the slightest misgiving (as far as the Post Office is concerned) to put their very souls on paper, and entrust even more than life and wealth to the care of Her Majesty's Government? Simply the conviction, till now unshaken, that the seal which, like that of Solomon in the Eastern fabric, held in captivity so many spirits of good and evil, was sacred and inviolable.

The statute which makes the detention or opening of a letter a misdemeanour had but little weight with the public. The disposition that is only withheld from crime by the fear of punishment, is the very last to be trusted, and the boundless confidence of the people was created by a long experience of official honesty. It is no slight injury to public morals that this confidence has been destroyed - not by a mere underling, but by the chief of the executive department of the Government - the officer who controls the administration of justice - the Secretary of State. The measure has all the objections that can apply to an official act, and in doing and defending it, Sir J. Graham has exhibited the worst faults which can be possessed by a public man.

The act itself was unworthy, because petty and mean; and impolitic, as it was wholly uncalled for. In doing it the Home Secretary was unscrupulous, rash, and oppressive; and when called to account in Parliament, he, with as much bad taste as bad temper, refused to give a single reason for his conduct, obstinately confining himself to an assertion of two things which no one disputed - that he had the power and thought it proper to use it.

Much more was necessary, by way of explanation of a proceeding so sure to excite public feeling. Government is armed with extraordinary powers, but they are to be used only on extraordinary possessions. In dealing with traitors and enemies of the public weal, a Government may be justified in getting information when and how it can. In war, an enemy's despatches are opened and read, if seized, as a matter of course; and the thing is so well known, that communications are often written and sent on purpose to be intercepted.

The opening of a private letter, from Charles I to his Queen, by Oliver Cromwell, is said to have been the cause of the final rupture between the King and the Parliament; it proved that in Charles no trust could be placed, and that he would be bound by no conditions. The captive King even then contemplated the execution of Cromwell; and the game thus being reduced to the desperate one of life against life, the warrior never felt a scruple sent to the scaffold the monarch without faith.

But war, whether foreign or civil, is, happily, an exception to the general rule, and society is not to exist in a period of foreign peace and domestic tranquillity, as if it were of the eve of social disorganisation. To foes we may act in the spirit of Shakespeare's Edgar, and say with him -

Leave gentle wax,
To know our enemies' minds, we'd rip their hearts,
Their paper are more lawful!

But every discontented man is not an enemy, and to put the most objectionable part of the machinery of official power in operation for the very petty purposes of getting at the private thoughts of a Chartist orator, like Mr. Lovett, or of an unfortunate Italian, as we presume M. Mazzini, from his name to be, seems contemptible. What need the State for care for the private promulgation of the same mad

theories of government that have for years past been expressed in public ? For the next two centuries, at least, our Constitution is not likely to be superseded by the "five points", nor is that state of the public mind at all favourable to a conspiracy for dethroning our gracious Queen. Neither do we believe there is any plan hatching for delivering up our fleet of war steamers into the hands of that " royal imp of fame ", the Prince de Joinville.

As far as any plot against the State is concerned, Sir James might have slept in as much security as the ticklish state of the ministerial majority would have allowed him. And what, we would beg to ask, are the internal squabbles of other States to us, that we should disgrace ourselves by making out Post-office an instrument of the detestable police of Italy and Austria - a system never to be named by an Englishman without abhorrence ? Sir James Graham has doggedly refused to give any reason for his step, and the public mind is therefore left free to ascribe it to the worst possible motives. So it is currently stated that a sacred trust has been violated by the Executive, to oblige one of the Italian Governments.

The late outbreaks have been confined to the Papal States and Sardinia; many victims have been shot, more imprisoned, and some have escaped. Those who remain may have friends and sympathisers in England, and the letters of these last might possibly given the Italian police a clue as to some who, being implicated in the rising, may have managed to conceal themselves. But even if information could be afforded by this means, we say it is a base and cowardly act on the part of the Government of a great nation to betray the thoughts of those to whom our soil has given a refuge, and those persons not even a Secretary of State would dare to deliver up. There is to us an unspeakable baseness in it; it is gratuitous, mean, and useless treachery. Why should we condescend to aid the leaden despotism of Austria, or the miserable imbecility that seems to paralyse the temporal Government of the Pope? Under his sway, every liberty of thought, action, and speech, seems to be crushed, while his administration is at once so incapable and so corrupt that the people are, in addition to other evils, plundered and starved. The wiser Metternich manages to feed and amuse the people he oppresses, and though not free, they are contented. Still the espionage of Austria is incessant, and at present it is assisting the Pontiff to keep down his subjects, on the same principle that keenly interest a man in the extinguishing a fire next door.

But we have nothing to do with their blunders or their crimes; England ought to scorn even the attempt to make either the spy or the policeman of any state on the face of the earth. The probability is, that it is the best and worthiest men who in these countries who are driven to revolt, as in the case of Silvio Pellico and his comrades, and we should no more aid an Emperor or a Pope in perpetrating political vengeance now, than we assisted the National Convention of France to seize and guillotine the emigrant Royalists. On every account this tampering with letters for the benefit of a foreign power is an act of which we ought to be, as a nation, ashamed.

Even as a means of detection, it is but a poor expedient. If it is once known to be resorted to, the Post-office simply ceases to be trusted, except for mere matters of business. A most striking instance of this is given in the case of the Marquis de Custine, the author of an able work on Russia. He knew that every letter of a foreigner is, as a matter of course, opened at the Russian Post-office, and that if he put on paper what he really thought, he would, within twenty-four hours, have been escorted to the frontier. He baffled the Government by a very simple expedient; he sent through the post, letters written to be read, full of admiration of all and everything. The letters he should have sent, had he been free, he wrote at the same time also, but retained them, publishing them when he returned to France ! Russia gained nothing by her jealousy; the opinions were recorded and given to the world, and given with the addition of the discredit to the Government of obliging itself to be so outwitted.

We attach no blame to the Post-office establishment, which could not do otherwise than obey orders; but we sincerely regret that it should have been so instructed. The whole question has been very well stated in a characteristic letter from Mr. Carlyle to the 'Times'.

".....it is a question vital to us that sealed letters in an English Post-office be, as we all fancied they were, respected as things sacred; that opening of men's letters, a practice near of kin to picking men's pockets, and to the other still vile and fataller forms of scoundrellism, be not resorted to in England, except in cases of the very last extremity. When some new Gunpowder Plot may be in the wind, some double eyed treason, or immanent national wreck not avoidable otherwise, then let us open letters: not till then. To all Austrian Kaisers and such like, in their time of trouble, let us answer, as our fathers from of old would have answered:- Not by any such means of help here for you. Such means, allied to picking of pockets and viler forms of scoundrellism, are not permitted in this country for your behoof. The Right Hon. Secretary does himself detest such, and even is afraid to employ them. He dare

not: it would be dangerous for him ! All British men that might chance to come in view of such a transaction, would incline to spurn it, and trample on it, an indignantly ask him, what he meant by it ?"

(The original article included a very imperfect illustration of the General Post Office, Letter Carriers Room arranged for the dispatch of Newspapers the reproduction of which would be little better than a grey/black haze and is not reproduced here. Ed)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OBLIQUE IN EXPRESSING SHILLINGS AND PENCE

John A. Grimmer

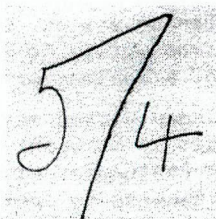
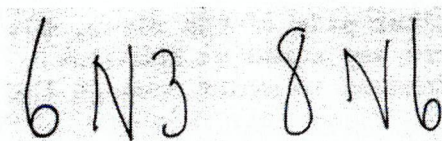
~~(Originally published in Notebook No. 12)~~

The familiar oblique stroke, used to separate shillings and pence, thus making it unnecessary to use words or abbreviations for the denominations was invented, it is suggested, by Post Clerks.

Outward unpaid mail from London, around 1770 to 1780, often bears marks such as :

The " translation " is the letter ' N ' is a corruption of the word ' AND '.

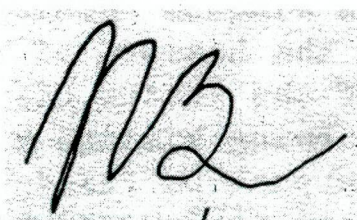
Semi-literates would write what they heard :
SIX 'N THREE (pronounced just as written).
It was not required to say SIX SHILLINGS AND
THREE PENCE, since all concerned knew
what was intended.



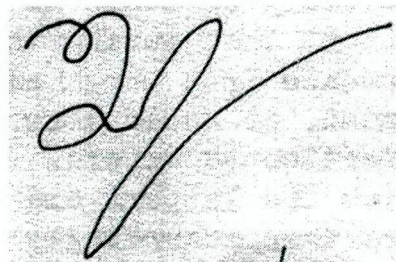
In the decade to about 1780, the forming of the marks as above, was usually done with great care and, probably, at no great speed. During the following decade to about 1790, the marks became less scrupulously formed and this may be attributed to the great volume of mail handled.

By 1820, or even earlier, the marks are usually in the form we ourselves used until decimalisation. Many of the marks of this period are evidently hurried, surely an indication of the greater volume being handled.

The two examples below illustrate the degeneration of the letter ' N ' and a study of examples from, say, 1790 to the advent of the postage stamp, could well trace this loss of care but this study is for the reader to send, as ever, ' letters to the Editor '.



One Shilling and Twopence



Two Shillings