

The
General Post Office
London
1844

Introduction

This account was originally published in **The Illustrated London News** on the 22nd and 29th June 1844. In September 2007 an eBay dealer started offering scans of the articles as an e-Book claiming copyright. We assume this applied to his layout and presentation, as the information is no longer within copyright. The e-Book being offered contained scans of the text from the paper along with the illustrations and in our opinion was a poor production.

In this version the text has been copied from the original making it possible to search the text. Some spelling is not as we use today and again, these are copied direct from original source. The illustrations are in a slightly different position from how they appeared in the original paper, having now been placed with the text that refers to them.

The illustrations used are those that appeared in the original, and in the case of the postmarks illustrated, are very poor compared to what is available today. They have been retained so that the reader gets the full impression of what was being conveyed at the time.

If scans are required of the original columns of newspaper print, these can be supplied on request.

The Text

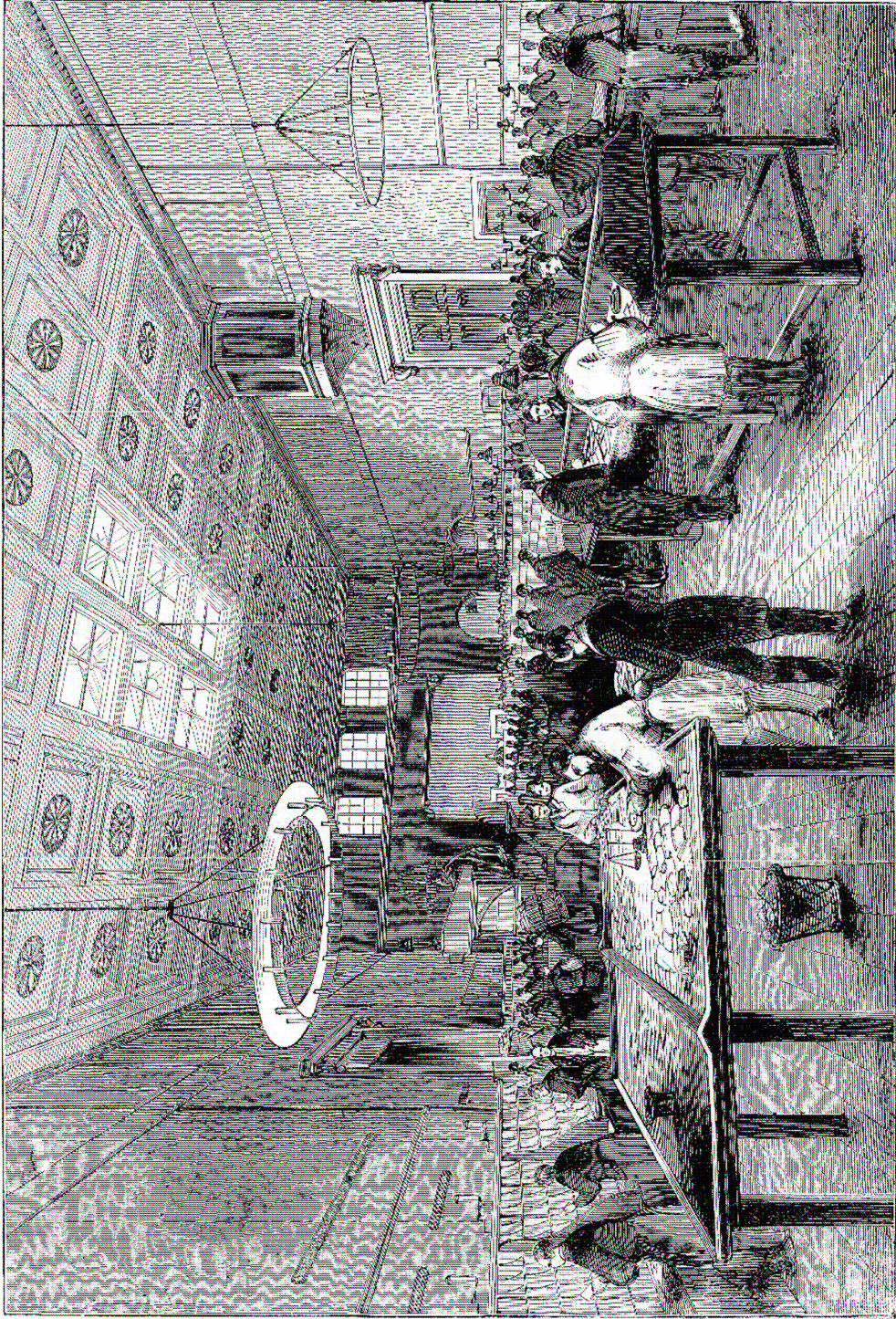
The great interest excited by the case of “espionage” at the General Post Office, which have just been brought under the attention of both Houses of Parliament, suggests our continuation of the details of the economy of the great Postal Establishment, commenced in No. 54 of our journal. We there gave a description of the exterior of the General Post Office, and a brief outline of its origin and progress as a national establishment, second to none in importance, both to the social, commercial, and fiscal relations of this great country.

We propose, in pursuing the subject, to present to our readers the details of the duties of the department, and to give a full description of the internal workings of the several branches of this extraordinary machine.

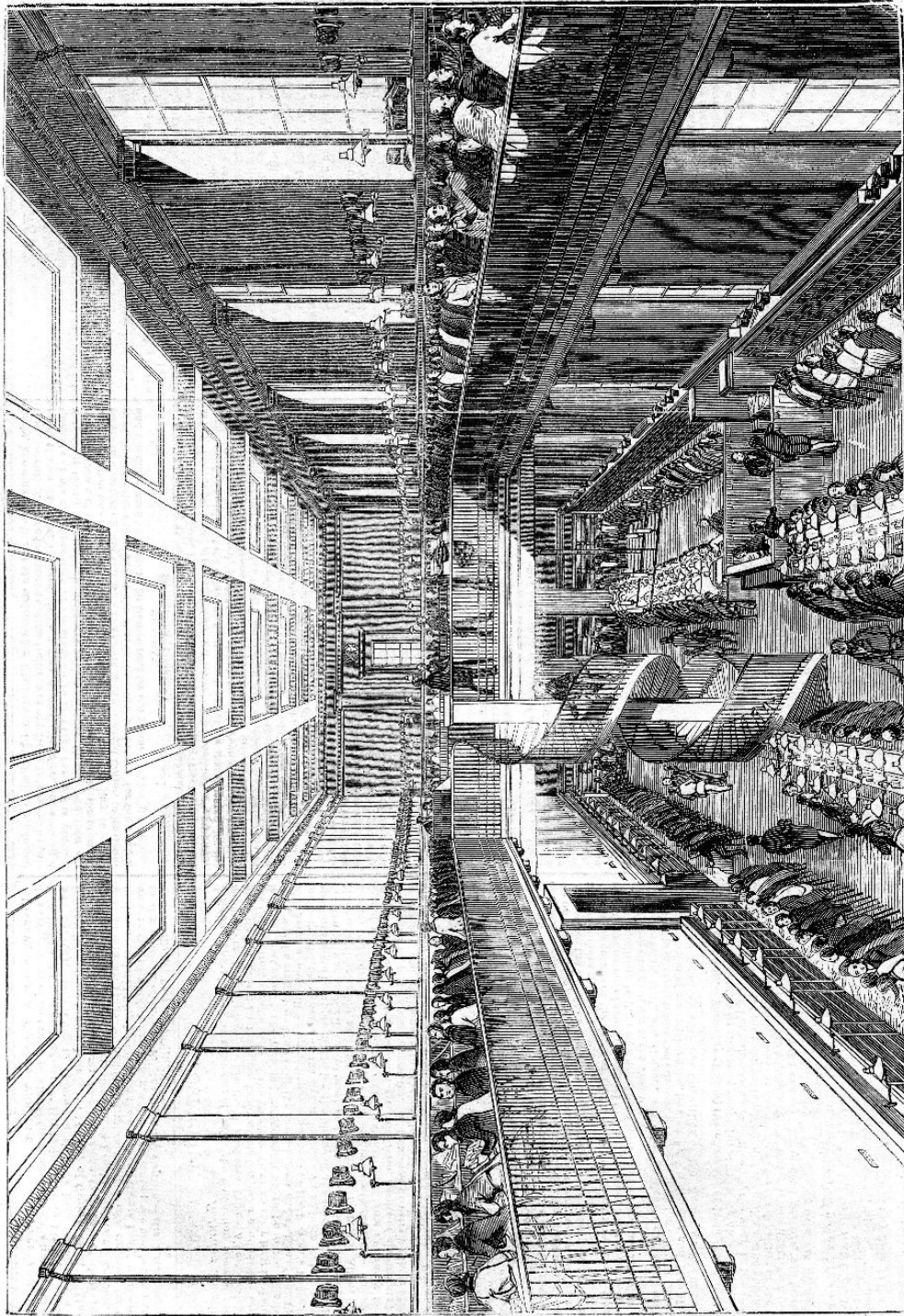
THE INLAND OFFICE

The Inland office of the General Post Office is situated northward of the vestibule, or entrance hall, immediately behind the rooms appointed for the reception of letters intended for any place within the limits of the United Kingdom. Northward of this office lie the offices of the Superintending president, upon the ground floor, which front the yard facing Aldgate Street.

The inland sorters’ room, which is tastefully furnished and well ventilated, is about eighty feet long by forty feet wide, so that it forms a parallelogram; in height it is about seventy-eight feet. In the central portion of the roof is an extensive sky-light, which, with three sash-windows at the top of the walls at each end, are the only places where the light of day is admitted. At the southern end of this spacious room is placed a long table, transversely fixed, upon which the letters are thrown as they are from time to time received from the boxes or brought into the office from the different collecting carts employed for the purpose throughout the metropolis. Ranged in rows, diversely placed, are other tables used for the purpose of duty – such as stamping, examining, and sorting letters. On the eastern or lobby side of the inland office, and level with the first floor, is a projecting latticed window, from which may be had a minute view of every corner of the spacious room, and of the different kinds of duty as they are simultaneously performed. In this office is a square table, usually denominated the “Missorted Table”, originally intended for the seats of those experienced officers who were most expert in making out illegible and vague addresses and for the examination of the signatures of members of parliament when the franking privilege was permitted by legal enactment. But that privilege being abandoned by the Penny Postage Act; and the practice having of late years materially changed, they (by number) assemble and assort the letters into their respective walks. The gallery will hold 100 men; and the body, with auxiliaries, 270 more. A portion of the floor is parted off in the middle, where two clerks sit to rectify any mistake which may arise in charging the letters to carriers. In the evening this room is used for sorting newspapers to be next described as ...



THE INLAND LETTER OFFICE.



THE LETTER CARRIERS' OFFICE.

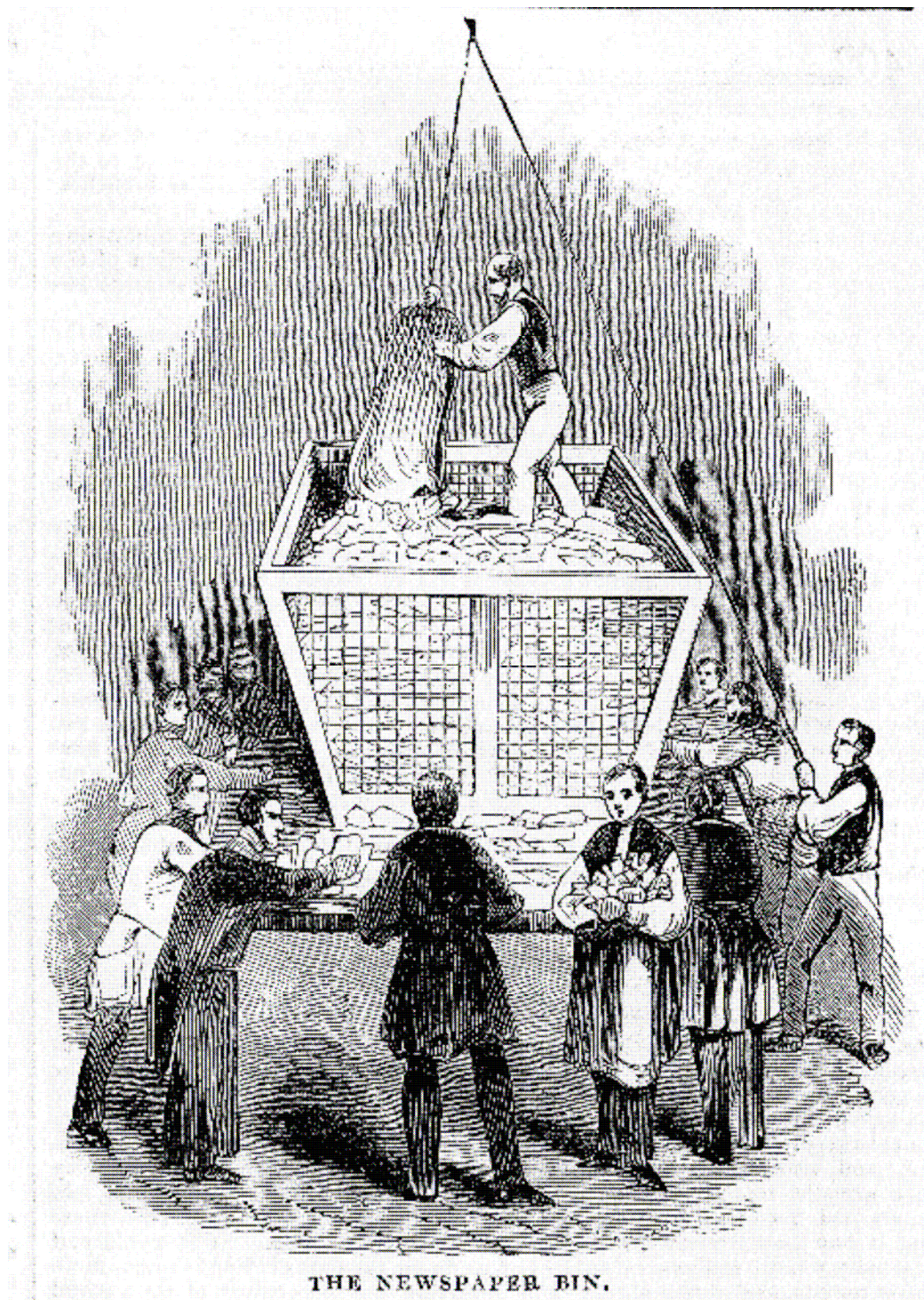
THE NEWSPAPER OFFICE

That part of the General Post Office used in the morning duty as the letter carriers office is devoted in the evening to the assorting and despatch of newspapers. The benches at which the carriers sit in the morning for the purpose of arranging their letters, are in the evening turned into sorting-tables by a simple mechanical contrivance. The business commences daily at half-past five pm., except on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, upon which days the men are assembled about an hour earlier to meet the pressure of the extra duty which is invariable on those nights.

The vast amount of newspapers intended for conveyance into different parts of the country through the Post Office are collected in a variety of ways. From the principle news-vendors and publishers they are brought to St Martin's Le Grand in omnibuses specially employed for that purpose. Those posted at the several receiving houses throughout the Metropolis are brought up by carts. A few of the bags are brought by hand, as there are some of the sub offices which could not be reached in the routes of the mail carts without loss of time. Others are given to the letter carrier whilst ringing his bell; with these a fee or gratuity of one penny is given, as a perquisite to the carrier; and these fees form part of his salary. The remaining portion are posted at the window of the chief office in St Martin's Le Grand. As the box there is closed at six o'clock in the evening, the number posted within five minutes of that hour is incredibly great. On Saturday evening that number, at a moderate estimate, is not less than thirty-thousand, the majority of which are brought in sacks from the establishments of the several newsvendors. From six o'clock to half-past seven all papers which are posted are charged one halfpenny as a "late" fee. The aggregate amount arising these "halfpence" is not less than £1600 per annum, the several sums of which are now daily accounted for by the officers having control of the Newspaper-office, by whom the amount is paid every evening, after the duty, to the president of the Inland-office, who carries it to the credit account of the revenue.

The newspapers from the several vendors and publishers average from 15,000 to 20,000 per night. These are conveyed into the newspaper-office by the northern or letter-carrier's entrance. Those brought by the mail carts from the branch offices of Charring Cross, Lombard Street, Old Cavendish Street and the Borough, and from the various receiving houses in the metropolis, as well as by the bags of the letter carriers, are taken at the lobby, or eastern entrance, into the inland office; their number may be estimated at from 20,000 to 30,000 and the "to late" papers at between one and two thousand daily. The newspapers are sorted in the newspaper-office; and for this purpose, the square partition for the clerks is removed, and a platform placed in its stead; and on this platform is a large bin, of strong iron net work with a wood frame, without bottom, and supported on four legs. The newspapers are brought in - in large sacks, baskets, and hampers, and thrown promiscuously into this bin, above which is suspended a crane, used for the purpose of emptying the sacks. A man mounts the heap of papers, attaches the crane to the bottom of the sack, which by means of ropes and pulleys is raised by other men, and thus disgorges its contents.

(See the engraving)



THE NEWSPAPER BIN.

The pressure and weight from above keep up a constant supply of papers on the platform, from whence they are carried to the sorters, who arrange them in districts; and from them they are again collected in trays, and carried to the road clerks, who subdivide them into their respective post towns. Each road clerk is furnished with bags for every post town, into which he throws his papers as his divisions fill. The large towns, such as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham &c &c., will frequently have as many as five or six sacks, each about five feet high, proportionate width, and weighing upwards of 2 cwt. These, as they are filled, are tied, and sealed, and removed at once into the omnibuses, and forwarded to their respective railways.

The total number of newspapers passing through the General Post Office alone on Saturday night from sources above enumerated, is not less than 100,000; and if the quantity despatched by evening and morning mails and passing daily through London, as well as those delivered within its vast range are taken into account, the weekly average may be fairly set down below 600,000, which number if multiplied by 52, will give the astonishing aggregate of 31,200,000 newspapers annually.

This department is controlled by the inspector of Letter carriers, and his assistants.

FOREIGN AND SHIP LETTER DEPARTMENTS

Adjoining the Inland office is the Foreign and Ship Letter Department, where all letters and papers for foreign and colonial ports are assorted, packed, and dispatched. The India and other mails are made up in this room. The papers are packed in large strong white leather sacks, about as tall as a man, and of proportionate width, the name, as "Smyrna", "Sidney", "Hong Kong", "Demerara" &c., painted upon them

Our engraving shows the interior of this office during the business of packing the Indian Mail. In this department too, is a 'hoist' for raising bags of letters into the Ship Letter office above, as represented in the next illustration.



PACKING THE INDIAN MAIL.

THE RAILWAY ROOM

Contiguous to the Inland office is the Railway Sorting room. The duty inclosure is now used for the purposes of the duty of the 'Inspector of Official Letters' who examine all Government correspondence for the purpose of checking the handwriting of the person in office who presides over the departments whence free-of-postage letters are issued. Under the immediate inspection of these officers all despatches and pouches belonging to her Majesty, his Royal Highness Prince Albert, the several branches of the Royal family, the ministers of State, and other persons of rank necessarily pass, prior to their being placed in the bag of the post town for which they are directed. Entirely around the office, against the walls, so fitted as to shut up, lock, and present the appearance of neat wainscoting, are fixed an immense quantity of pigeon-holes, labelled. These are separated into divisions called 'roads' and consist of boxes so arranged as to represent the post towns carried by the several mails and railways. These of course, are so subdivided, that each officer employed is furnished with an equivalent quota of work, whilst the process of stamping, assorting, checking, tying, and despatching continues.

At the bottom of the range of boxes is a ledge, or flap, where the letters are laid as they are brought in from the first sorting, and from that moment their safe despatch is entrusted to the road-officer. In this department alone there are upwards of a thousand boxes. This office is lit up by several hundred gas burners, some of which are suspended after a manner of chandeliers; others are affixed to the sorting tables and roads. The appearance of the whole during duty is extremely imposing.

Erected at the north end of the Inland office is a substantial business like desk, or elevated platform for the presiding officers, whence a distinct view of the whole body of men may be had, while the several operations are thus watched by them from the commencement to the close of duty. Some few years since, the northern wall of the Inland office stood where the seats of the presidents and vice-Presidents are now placed; but in consequence of the great increase of the business by the institution of morning mails from London, a considerable portion of the wall was cut away, and the super-incumbent mass ingeniously upheld by the insertion of an iron girder, weighing several hundred weight. By these means, the room immediately behind the Inland office was thrown into the original Inland office; as were also, about the same time, the 'Ship Letter office' and the 'West India Mail office', all of which in the practice form part and parcel of the now somewhat misnamed, but technically called, 'Inland office'.

THE LETTER-CARRIERS' OFFICE

Is a large room, with a gallery running round its four sides, and across the middle, to which are attached two spiral staircases for ascent and descent. On the floor are two large ranges of tables, divided into two double tiers of compartments; and down each side of the room is a narrow table, above which are five tiers of wooden partitions, or pigeon holes; and the gallery has also a double tier running round it; beneath the tables are enclosed cupboards for the use of the men. In the morning, the letter-carriers (to each of whom one partition is appropriated).

This important department consists in a separation of the letters after the first sorting has taken place into towns, bags for which are conveyed per rail. Nearly 200 bags are made up in his section of the service. Upon some of the long lines of railway the letters for the intermediate post towns are sorted and 'made up' during the journey, so that the delay of their transit to London and back again to their destination is thus avoided; time is saved to the public; and the office at St Martins' Le Grand is not burdened with an overcharge of duty arising from this source. It is probable that this branch of the service may be further extended as the new lines are opened throughout. Stationary post-offices are also being placed upon some of the railways, a desideratum which has not been lost sight of by the noble earl at the head of this gigantic establishment.

A most peculiar feature in the practice of the General Post Office, is the necessity which exists for employing the same premises for the different descriptions of the duty, namely, despatch and delivery. This necessity, in many instances, seriously retards the introduction of salutary changes in the one, because the operation of them would interfere with the unfettered performances of the other. Hence it arises that the fittings are so constructed that they by an ingenious contrivance they may be without difficulty or delay, adapted to save other kind of duty, by which much room is saved, as is also economy maintained in the management.

There is a curious mode of communication opened between the Inland and Twopenny post departments, by the medium of a tunnel passing underneath the floor of the vestibule of the great hall. A kind of tram-way is laid, upon which wagons are drawn by means of a jointed chain worked by a simple crank in the London District office. By this contrivance much time is saved, and errors in the assorting are quickly remedied by the officers of each department. Mr Barrow was the inventor of this mode of transfer, but of late years several improvements have been made in its construction. By this means are sent from the London District, or 'Twopenny' post department, all letters for the country which have been collected by the various branch offices in the district. They are packed in boxes; each box, when filled, weighs about 58lb, and a train of 36 of these boxes is no unusual occurrence.

THE MONEY ORDER OFFICE

This branch of the General Post Office, now so important to all classes in her Majesty's dominions, owes its origin to the private enterprise of Robert Watts, Esq., at present one of the senior clerks to the Inland office, of which he is also one of the presidents. For many years the business was conducted by Mr Watts and his clerks, as an individual speculation, under the auspice of successive Postmaster-Generals, who countenanced the project. The office was in Foster Lane, Cheapside. Some few years ago this office was attached to the establishment and since then it has been coupled with its various branches, under the control of the Postmaster-General. W Berth Esq., is its president and he has under him seventy four persons who are daily engaged in conducting the granting, paying, and checking money orders. Since the reduction of the rates of charge on these kind of payments, the business of the department has increased, at least, ten fold.

All 'money orders' granted are duly registered, as to amount, names of the sender and receiver, what office drawn upon &c; and a copy of this register called an 'advise' is sent to the postmaster, authorising payment. The advices, after having been paid, are collected and arranged according to date, in a series of vaults wherein the 'advices' are deposited.

It has been stated in a morning paper, that an apartment which is now partly used as 'the Money Order office' (at the south west corner of the main building), was, some years since known as the 'Espionage office' 'The system of espionage in the General Post Office, St Martins' Le Grand' adds the information 'is comparatively unknown to the public. During the secretaryship of Sir Francis Freeling, the opening of letters posted in London for the continent as well as those from the provinces passing through the Foreign office, was carried on to a great extent, and we know to a certainty that there are now in the Post office, more than one individual who, in carrying letters and packets which had been opened and resealed in the "Espionage office" to the Inland offices, have found the wax on violated letters and packets sticking to their hands, from it not having had sufficient time to cool' We challenge contradiction to our statement.

On a future occasion, we shall detail the several duties of the offices as to complete our picture of the most important and interesting establishment.



THE MONEY-ORDER VAULTS.

THE SECRET OFFICE, AT THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE

The sensation produced by the recent cases of letters being opened at the General Post Office, by the authority of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, has induced us to engrave for the gratification of our readers, the identical apartment in which this extraordinary power is exercised. It is also used as the Money Order office, and is situated to the right of the principle entrance, facing into the great area. A portion of the room is partitioned off, along with the windows, for the payment and granting of Post Office Orders. The ordinary business transacted in the room, is the keeping of the accounts connected with the order department, and the franking &c., of official communications. From one corner of the room is an elegant spiral staircase, which leads to the other offices connected with this division; and beneath the staircase, is a door, which communicates by a flight of steps, with vaults beneath. A door at the side of the room opens into the private office of the principle, Mr Barth, whose name is signed to all the official documents passing through the office.

Few persons are aware how letters are opened and re-sealed by the Post Office. Wafers are opened by the application of moisture, and sealed letters are opened thus: - The letter is laid on an anvil with the seal up, upon the seal is laid a square piece of pure lead, and upon this lead descends a hammer with considerable velocity. The sudden impact converts the lead into a seal as faithful as an electrotpe, and accordingly is used to re-seal the letter, which is now open by destroying the wax bit by bit. For all letters similarly sealed the lead seal will do. A blunder in the management must have recently led to suspicions. In small country towns, curious postmistresses keep by them an assortment of seals, with impressions of hearts, darts, &c., for the purpose of enabling them to get at little secrets.



SECRET-OFFICE, AT THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE.

MORNING DUTY OF THE INLAND OFFICE – DELIVERY OF LETTERS

Before the bell of St Paul's tolls six of the clock AM, the bustle in the Post office yard in St Martin's Le Grand, indicates that business has commenced. Rattling over the stones come the mail coaches – those reliques of departed days – with their foaming steeds chewing their bits, and snorting as if in defiance of the power of steam. The horn of the guard, whose spirit-stirring note had tingled the ear and roused to action the village awain from the earliest dawn of his infancy, is gradually silenced by the opening of successive lines of railway. Regularly, however, as of old, the few remaining coaches come. Lumbering omnibuses also arrive with railroad precision, bringing their heaps of bags from the termini of the several railways, attended by guards paid by the newly adopted "sliding scale" of salary. Somehow or other, these officers have lost much of their sprightliness of their original character; they seem to be dejectedly brooding over the innovation made upon privileges long vested, but now matters of history; to wit, the right they once enjoyed of soliciting compensation in the shape of fees from passengers. We strongly suspect that to these hardy servants of the public, a fixed salary is a "fixed injustice"

We forgot, by the way, that we were in the yard of the General Post office, at one of the busiest moments; for while we have been musing, the several conveyances have been emptied of their valuable contents. As we have been duly authorised, we will step inside, and note the proceedings during the progress of the morning duty.

The "Tick-room" is nearly full; and the clerk at the dingy desk is checking the receipt of the bags, as the labels representing the post towns whence they were dispatched, are called over by the shrill-voiced letters carriers in uniform, who throws them into bins fixed around the Tick room. These bins are lettered, so as to correspond with the reverse side of the brass label attached to each bag, and the table in the Inland office, at which the bags are opened. Now several of the letter carriers clear the bin, shouldering the bags or dragging them off with desperate perseverance. We have passed the folding doors leading from the Tick room into the Inland office, and as there appears to be a good natured sort of letter carrier now going along the Inland office with several of the bags brought by the Brighton mail, we will follow him, and note the whole process. He has put the bags into one of the little wagons, which is now drawn out at the end of the table, called the "opening table". Now the clerk, appointed as "opener" cuts the sacred fastening, and out come the letters upon the table as they were tied into bundles by the country post-master. The bill is now checked and ticked of as "right" and the money letters in it safely deposited in the drawer until the collector of the registered letters comes round to collect it, for entry in the money-book. The opener now lays the letters in long rows before the examiner, or eldest clerk, who occupies the seat at the centre of the table, the end places being filled by the openers. Now and then a letter is taken out of the mass by this clerk, who in the course of his examination of them, finds the odd one improperly taxed. These he tries by the scales; they are overweight or informally charged; he therefore, places them in that little box before him after he has retaxed them and affixed his initials to the altered rate. They are then stamped by the messenger "more to pay" and the postage charged on accordingly. The body of the letters having thus undergone the ordeal of examination are put on the further side of the table to be stamped by the person appointed for that purpose. He has laid the letters in a long row before him. At his right hand lies a pad saturated with of rd lead ground oil. With his left hand he

draws the letters under the stamp, while he impresses each one of them with the hand stamp marked “paid” which he holds in his right hand. There, he has finished that long row; by the tally he has thrown out there are more than two hundred of them, yet he has not been more than two minutes accomplishing the task. Now he has completed them the man behind him takes them to the sorters, who occupy the long lines of table stretching in a double line nearly the whole length of the Inland office. We will notice this process by-and-by, as it is very different to the sorting in the evening. We observe that the stamper is now using another kind of stamp; mark the difference; the “paid” stamp was impressed upon the front of the letter in red ink; this is stamped upon the back of the letter, and is marked in black. These are the inward letters, the postage upon which is not paid, whether inland, ship or foreign; by the Hong Kong stamp upon some of these we perceive they had passed through the newly appointed post-office in that colony of Anglo-China. Upon all these letters the amount of postage is charged in black in figures over the address.



There is another row of letters laid to the left and right of the openers, which the clerk of the table does not trouble himself to examine, nor that stamper to stamp. We must find out what they are. A messenger has just now taken them away to the seats allotted to the “Inspectors of Official Letters”. They are the “state’s” or letters belonging to the official representatives of the Government. That row is directed to “The Poor Law Commissioners, Somerset House”, these to the “First Lord of her Majesty’s Treasury”; those to “The Secretary of State for the Home Department”; and those to the “Chairman of the Committee on Railways”. They are all stamped with a stamp marked “paid” but which is surmounted with a crown, to distinguish it from the common stamp.

This description of correspondence is assorted and made up in bags bearing the label of each department, and sent down to the various offices, as soon as the duty is complete, by a special mail.

Now we must notice the mode of sorting for the morning delivery. At those long tables there are upwards of eighty sorters now employed, or subsorters, as they are officially designated, for, strictly speaking, the clerks alone are entitled “sorters of letters”. There are two rows of these men to each table; on each side the duty is differently performed. We will attempt to describe both kinds of duty. The table is furnished with a shelf. Before each of the men on this side, upon the bottom and top rows of the bench are labels numerically marked, from one to nine inclusive, on the first row, and from ten to fifteen inclusive on the second. Now the principle is this: - This vast metropolis is divided into fifteen parts or “divisions”. One, two, three and four represent or embrace the western part; five and six, the northern; seven, eight, nine and ten; the city; eleven, the eastern part, beyond Aldgate Church; twelve, the whole of the Borough.

To thirteen, the official letters above noticed are assorted after they have been stamped; fifteen embraces the outside of the western walks not included in the four first divisions; while the whole of the suburban districts of town beyond the delivery of letters by the General Post letter-carriers, belong to the suburban walk of the Twopenny, or as it is now more appositely called, the "London District Post".

As the letters are thus assorted, they are conveyed to the sorters upon the opposite side of the table, who sort them into subdivisions or "walks". Hence it is that in this case the first sorters must have a correct knowledge of the street, alleys, squares, lanes, and public places throughout this vast metropolis, as well as of the several firms whose letters come to town directed "London" only; while the second sorters must be most minutely acquainted with each letter-carrier's delivery. The letters, after being thus assorted, are collected in trays made for the purpose, and taken from the Inland office to the seats of the men who have to deliver them, which are in the adjoining or "Newspaper-office".

This is the practice with reference to paid letters. With those unpaid there is much more delay. They are sorted in the same manner separately from the paid letters; but as the price of the transit postage has not at present been paid upon them, it is essential that the office should debit the letter carriers with the charge marked upon them before they reach his hands. As they are sorted into walks, therefore, they are told – that is, the amount is added up and entered in the check book, by the telling clerk, who makes out the sum, upon a small docket, upon which the name of the walk is printed against which the charge is made. This docket is then given to the check clerk, who sits at an elevated desk. The letters thus "told" are put into boxes representing the walks. The letter carrier then adds up the sums, and reports his telling to the check clerk. If the sum made by the carrier agrees with the amount marked upon the docket, the check clerk calls out "Right"; if not "Wrong". If the letter carrier can not make it right after again trying, the matter is referred to the president or vice president, or senior clerk on duty to retell, to decide between the original teller on the part of the office and the letter carrier; the decision of the last teller being final. The carrier then initials the docket, and he from that time becomes responsible for the amount so charged. He payments of the carriers must be made three times a week.

Thus concludes the "morning duty" of the Inland office.

Before we leave this interesting department, however, we must not forget to notice the business of the letter carriers of the General Post office are like those of the London District Department, merely letter deliveries. Indeed this fact constitutes the difference between them; and is, in reality, one of the grand obstacles against the consolidation of the two bodies.

When the men receive their letters they have them to examine and arrange. If any mis-sorting has taken place, they must rectify it; and in all cases of removal, or alteration of the addresses of parties who once used to reside on a given walk, the transfer is entrusted to the letter carrier holding the original address. These men have also to attend to the instructions of the inspectors on a variety of miscellaneous business connected with so large and important an adjunct to the Inland office, as is the letter carriers department of the General Post office; in which they are kept by the men some hundreds of accounts with the public for early delivery &c. The whole of the letter carriers and sub-sorters are under the control of Frederick Kelly Esq., and seven assistant inspectors of letter carriers.

The forty thousand letters which the several inland ship and foreign mails have brought into London being now tied up in bundles, arranged in streets and numbers, to save time in delivery, and put into the bags of the letter-carriers, the departure bell is rung, and the men issue in crowds from the northern outlet of the establishment, facing Aldgate Street. The “City” men pass along on foot to their walks; but the more distant deliveries are commenced nearly as early by the conveyance of the letter carriers in accelerators from which they drop as they reach their walks. Thus it is that the “written ideas” of a nation and the important intelligence despatched by the eager hand of business, or in the affectionate haste of friendship from foreign climes, is concentrated and again distributed to shed its gratifying pleasure, or its sombre gloom, over the hearths of the prince and the peasant, the poor and the rich, whom habit, inclination, business, pleasure, or necessity may have congregated within the limits of the first city in the world, which, as Dickens has beautifully observe red of it, is so like eternity, that “no one knows where it begins nor where it ends”.

EVENING DUTY OF THE INLAND OFFICE

The evening duty of the Inland office consists officially of the following parts:
- Collecting, facing, stamping and obliterating, carrying letters to the assorters, first assorting, taking to the roads, second assorting, tying, making up the bags, and putting them into the road sacks of the several guards, where the responsibility of the in-door duty officer ends.

Collecting – This process consists in gathering the letters in carts from the various receiving houses in the metropolis, and from the “boxes” or drawers – which, more correctly speaking, they are – into which the chief office letters are posted by the public through the various apertures in the vestibule of the establishment in St Martin’s le Grand.

Facing – This operation consists in so placing the letters so that the whole of the addresses “face” the person so employed. This part of the practice is purely preliminary, and performed for the purpose of facilitating the subsequent parts of the process.

Stamping – This is one of the most important parts of the business, from the fact of several stamps forming the key either in cases of delay, mis-delivery, mis-sending, or, indeed, mistake of any kind, whilst the letters are in *transitu*.

We consequently furnish engravings of the several stamps: -



Thus ends the evening duty of the Inland office

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of the duty above named, it will scarcely be believed that upwards of eighty thousand letters pass through the whole of the sages every evening! And upon reference to the returns of mis-sending, forms of which return daily to the General Post office, it is proved that the errors are more in the ratio of one in ten thousand! Practiced stampers will stamp distinctly one hundred letters per minute; and thirty are sorted in the same period by each officer employed. The efficient manner in which the whole of the Inland office duty is performed reflects the greatest credit upon the Superintending President, William Bokenham, Esq., and his colleagues, the President and Vice-Presidents of the Inland office, and the whole of the officers under their charge.

THE LONDON DISTRICT (LATE TWOPENNY POST) OFFICE

It was about the close of the Protectorate that the establishment of the post for the delivery of letters in and around London originated. William Dockwra, a private individual, was the originator. In the year 1702, the Postmaster-general reported to the Lord High Treasurer, that in consequence of the penny post carried on by William Dockwra “being thought to interfere with the power granted by Parliament to them”, a suit was commenced against him by the order of James, then Duke of York; which whereupon there was a trial at the Kings Bench bar, and a verdict given against him and damages found. This was nine years after the penny-post was taken possession by the Government. Subsequently to the revolution, however, a pension was granted to Dockwra, who lived in the enjoyment of it for several years afterwards.

Until AD 1765, parcels and packets were conveyed by post, to the weight of which no limit seems to have been assigned. It was required however, that they should not be above the value of ten pounds; “from which it may be inferred”, remark the commissioners of the Post office inquiry (9th Report) “that the office was held responsible to that amount for their safe delivery”. By the 5th Geo III cap 25 it was enacted; “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, the general post”.

It should be remembered here, that from the first establishment of this post, the postage was paid in advance; so that compulsory pre-payment will be seen to be no novelty. In the year 1794, however, the act 34 Geo III was passed; in the 17th cap of which it was enacted, “that an additional rate of one penny should be charged upon all letters conveyed from places beyond the cities of London and Westminster and the Borough of Southwark, in like manner as letters conveyed to these places by the 5th Geo II had been charged one penny”; and further, “that persons sending letters should pay the postage on putting them in, or not, as they thought proper”. Here then we note the foundation of the optional mode of payment for the postage of penny-post letters.

By the 41 Geo III cap 7 passed in the year 1801, an additional rate of one penny was levied on all letters delivered, by the heretofore penny-post, within the cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, and the suburban districts of the metropolis, thus constituting the “Twopenny post”.

Beyond the aforementioned limits threepence was charged, by an act passed in the year 1805 (45 Geo III cap 11). No other alterations took place until 1831, when the limits of the Twopenny delivery were extended to include, under that rate, all places within three miles of the General Post office. The recent abolition of the above charges, and the substitution of an uniform rate of one penny on all inland correspondence under the weight of half-an-ounce, projected by Rowland Hill Esq., is fresh in the memory of all our readers.

The Twopenny post office as at present constituted is an establishment in itself. Robert Smith Esq. is its superintending president. Under him there are one chief clerk, four assistant clerks, one surveyor, one remittance clerk, two presidents, three vice-presidents, two windowmen, twelve clerks of divisions, fourteen assistant clerks, eighteen sorters, nineteen sub-sorters, one inspector of letter carriers, two assistant inspectors, five junior assistants, fourteen stampers, and about four hundred letter carriers.

His duties of stamping and assorting, despatch, and delivery are similar in principle to that practiced in the Inland office, the only difference is in the detail, which is altered so as to suit the peculiarities of this branch of the service.

For the convenience of the letter carriers and expanding the delivery of letters, branch offices are established in different parts of the town, where the second assortment, or arrangement of letters for delivery of letters in the immediate neighbourhood, takes place. It is at these offices that the majority of the assistant inspectors of letter carriers are employed.

There are, up to the latest alterations just included, ten deliveries daily of London local letters. The first delivery takes place at 8am; the second at 10; the third at 12; the fourth at 1pm; the fifth at 2; the sixth at 3; the seventh at 4; the eighth at 5; the ninth at 6; and the tenth at 8 in the evening. Collections are made at the same hours throughout the day.

In the practice of the Twopenny post there are some anomalies: for instance the rigid rule that all letters, wherever they may be posted, must pass through the chief office in St Martin's Le Grand before they are delivered. This produces both vexation and delay. Improvements, however, have, in many instances, been made; and there can be no question that the *vis inertia* introduced into the establishment by the new principle of Mr Hill, will eventually lead to the removal of prejudices to which a long and uninterrupted flow of official practice has given a character of unalienable sacredness; and with which it has been considered almost impious to interfere.

CONCLUSION

Having thus minutely explained the duties of the extensive branches of this truly national establishment, we have merely to make a few miscellaneous observations. Of the remaining departments we have not space now to write. Besides the duty already detailed, there are other branches of the service completing vast arrangements necessary in so large a concern. There is the secretary's office, the grand depot of complaints, and the controlling office of all the subordinate departments; the surveyor's office, in which the arrangements for the appointment of post-offices, both metropolitan and provincial are made, the Mail-coach Department, embracing an establishment in itself of inspectors and mail guards; the solicitor's office where all the legal business incident to so great an affair is conducted; the Receiver and Accountant General's Offices, where the money is paid and accounted for from thousands of officers daily; the ship and foreign offices, through which the correspondence of thousands far distant from our fertile shores is continually passing; and finally the dead and returned letter offices, where twenty-one officers are employed daily in opening letters which "for the causes thereon assigned cannot be delivered" – which letters, if the addresses of the writers are inscribed therein are returned to them. Though last, "not least" there is the "window", where the letters are called for by those merchants and others who pay for the accommodation of having their letters as early as the despatch of the letter carriers is announced.

The number of letters passing through the Post offices of the United Kingdom is upwards of 219 million per annum; the gross revenue is about £1,600,000; the cost of management nearly a million, and the net revenue of 1843 was given at no less a sum than £600,000, the cost of the packet service being, as it ought to be, placed to the accounts of the Admiralty.

Notwithstanding the liberal additions recently made in the several branches of this interesting department, in consequence of the enormous increase in the number of letters arising from the reduction in the foreign and ship letter rates, and the application of the uniform payment upon letters under half ounce in weight, posted for delivery in the United Kingdom, we are informed, upon unquestionable authority, that other, and still greater alterations are at this moment in contemplation. Large as it is, the Inland office is found too small for the duty.

Preparations are making for enlarging it, as well as the Newspaper office, by raising the floors, if the surveyor deems such a step compatible with the safety of the gigantic building in St Martin's Le Grand. To maintain the hourly deliveries recently introduced in the local office, as well as to pave the way for a still further extension of the principle, it is probable that several other appointments will shortly be made both in the Inland, the letter carriers', and the London District offices.

Mr R Wallace, M.P. for Greenock, recently moved for a return of the names, rank, and date of appointment of the Postmasters-General, from the earliest period up to the present time. We find that the following noblemen and gentlemen are included amongst the list of Postmasters-General in England appointed between the year 1678 (in the reign of Charles II) and the year 1841, viz., Sir R Cotton, Sir John Evelyn, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Lovel (afterwards Earl of Leicester), the Earl of Besborough, 1759; Hon R Hampden, 1765; the Earl of Egmont, 1768; Lord Hyde, 1768; Lord Le Despencer, 1768; Viscount Barrington, 1782; the Earl of Tankerville, 1783; Lord Foley, 1784; the Earl of Claredon, 1786; the Earl of Westmoorland, 1790; the Earl of Chesterfield, 1794; Lord Auckland, 1799; Lord Gower, 1801; Lord G Spencer, 1804; the Duke of Montrose, 1806; the Earl of Buckinghamshire, 1806; Lord Caryafort, 1807; the Earl of Chichester, 1814; the Earl of Clancarty, 1816; the Marquis of Salisbury, 1823; Lord F Montague, 1827; the Duke of Manchester, 1827; the Duke of Richmond, 1830; the Marquis of Conyngham, 1834; Lord Maryborough, 1834 – 1835; he Marquis of Conyngham again, 1835; the Earl of Litchfield, 1835; and the present noble Postmaster-General, Viscount Lowther, who was sworn in on the 14th of September, 1841.