

POST OFFICE NUMBERS

**NUMERALS USED IN POST OFFICES IN ENGLAND
WALES AND USED ABROAD
1844 TO 1969.**

AND

**THE STATUS OF OFFICES WITH NUMERAL
CANCELLATIONS
1844 TO 1906.**

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This book contains two parts:

1/ A list of all the numeral allocations to Post Offices in the official lists of England, Wales and Used Abroad. Much of this information has previously been available but in separate publications. Brumell stopped in 1906, which was the last official list available when numeral cancellations were still in widespread use. However the allocation of new numerals continued until 1967.

2/ A list of the status of each office that was allocated a numeral cancellation, for the period 1844 to 1906. This can explain where outgoing mail from an office was cancelled. Of particular interest is the use of barred numeral cancellations of a superior office on mail from a subordinate office during a period when the latter had a number allocated to it.

PART 1/ LIST OF NUMBERS

This consists of the numbers allocated to the Post Offices in England and Wales from 1844 onwards. Also to those abroad that were under the control of the GPO in London. In the nineteenth century almost all of these were allocated barred numeral cancellations. In the twentieth century numbers remained in use in surcharge marks and explanatory marks. Their use diminished rapidly in the 1970's and by the mid 1980's very few survived. Today they are very rarely found in use.

The full list of numbers is a combination of several sources:-

The Official Lists held in various forms in the Post Office Archives and several that are privately held.

Individual changes in allocation listed in the *Post Office Circular*, which was a set of weekly instructions to Postmasters.

The destination of numeral bearing explanatory marks that were entered in the Proof Books of steel and rubber handstamps held in the Post Office Archives. These are listed if the destination and number are not in any List.

Previous publications that are still relevant;

George Brumell, *British Post Office Numbers 1844 – 1906*. R.C.Alcock Cheltenham 1946 and 1971. This was the collectors "bible". The first edition has a section on postmarks, which was unfortunately left out of the later 1971 edition. It also contained a good description of earlier books published on Post Office numbers.

George Pearson, *List of Index Numbers used in Surcharge Explanatory and other Stamps in Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. Privately printed 1959. The only source for the 1954 and 1959 lists. A rare publication.

James A. Mackay, *British Post Office Numbers 1924 : 1969*. Published by the author 1981. A good summary of what information was available at that time. This is the only source for the 1962 list.

Marshall, Dendy *The British Post Office from its beginnings to the end of 1925*.

Oxford University Press 1926. An interesting collection of information on the history of stamp issues and an index of people, places and items associated with British Postal history. Contains a good annotated bibliography.

The Official Lists that have been used:-

- 1844 – contained in Dendy Marshall’s book. Not seen by Brumell.
- 1845 - contained in the Post Office Directory for 1845.
- 1847 - contained in the Post Office Directory for 1847.
- 1855 - contained in the Post Office Directory for 1855.
- 1856 - contained in the Post Office Guide for 1856.
- 1857 - contained in the Post Office Guide for 1857.
- 1874 - currently available in the Post Office Archives, see their file called Post 55
- 1882 - currently available in the Post Office Archives, see Post 55. A new list that has turned up. It was not seen or mentioned by Brumell.
- 1887 - currently available in the Post Office Archives, see Post 55.
- 1892 - currently available in the Post Office Archives, see Post 55.
- 1899 - Brumell mentions a list that he had not seen that was quoted by Whitworth (Southport 1905) as the “1899” list. Post Archives have an 1887 list with manuscript additions up to about 1900. This is almost certainly Whitworth’s “1899” list
- 1902 - seen and listed by Brumell, but there is no longer a copy in the Post Office Archives. We have used Brumell’s listing.
- 1906 - currently available in the Post Office Archives, see Post 55. This was the last list used by Brumell.
- 1924, 1929 and 1949 - these have recently become available in the Post Office Archives, see Post 55, called Post Office Form 1013. They were not available to Mackay.
- 1954, 1959 - listed by George Pearson in his 1959 publication. Not in the Post Office Archives.
- 1962 - an original list seen and quoted by Mackay. Given by him in 1990 to the Post Office Archives, but no longer available. **(Another copy has now turned up)**

PART 2/ EXPLANATION OF THE LISTING OF OFFICE STATUS

The main body of the text has some eight columns which are explained below:-

OFFICE

This is the name used on the published lists. We have also listed offices that had their own numeral cancellations but were not separately listed i.e. the various sub offices of Brighton, Birmingham, Bristol etc. These have no date in the FIRST LIST and LAST LIST columns.

NUMBER.

Most of these numbers are derived directly from the published lists. There a few numbers that are derived from examples seen either on cover eg. 163 Wallington and S938 South Croydon, or come from charge marks entered in the Proof Book with new numbers. An example of the latter is the charge mark with number 426 sent to Rhyl in September 1918. 426 was allocated to Crowhill up to 1887 and then to Hassocks from 1928 onwards. Rhyl may well have not been the final destination – the number could have gone to a subordinate office.

COUNTY

The county is that which the office was in during the latter part of the 19th Century.

FIRST LIST

The majority are from the various Lists shown on page 3. Different dates will have come from copies of the Post Office Circular – a journal that was circulated amongst Post Office staff.

LAST LIST

Same as above.

FIRST ISSUE

The year of the first numeral cancellation entered in the Proof Books, or the first date of use if earlier.

NONE means that there was no numeral cancellation used with this allocation. After 1887 very few cancellations were entered in the Proof Books so an estimate was made of when they should have been entered, using the sequence of numbers and when they were first recorded in use.

LAST USE

This is the latest recorded use of a barred numeral cancellation. Charge marks went on for very much longer. GPO means that the cancellation/s have not been recorded in use.

STATUS

The postal status of each Office is described for the period from 1844 to 1906. This shows where mail from each Office was cancelled before, after and sometimes during the period that it had a numeral cancellation. Head Post Offices always cancelled their own mail. Other offices were in some way subordinate and sent and received their mail via a Head Post Office or equivalent such as a Railway Sub Office. The subordinate offices often had a numeral obliterator for a short period or did not use them continuously. Their mail was thus frequently cancelled at the relevant Head Post Office.

We have stopped listing the status of offices after 1906, because that is when all offices could cancel their own mail.

Some offices would send their evening mail to one Head Office and their morning mail to another.

The Post Office had a large and confusing number of types of office. We have simplified the terminology and ignored those with little direct significance in cancelling mail.

HEAD POST OFFICE:

The address of mail sent to a town with a Head Office ended with just the name of the town i.e. Bedford.

Post Town, a term used in the 19th Century for a town with the equivalent of a Head Post Office.

Head Post Office an office that collected, sorted, cancelled and distributed mail from and to a series of subordinate offices.

Sub Office a term restricted to former Head Offices of London Districts ie Putney and Wimbledon.

INDEPENDENT SUB OFFICE AND RAILWAY SUB OFFICE :

Mail sent to these addresses ended with R.S.O. or S.O. and the county name.
i.e. Shefford S.O. Beds. (1873 to 1886) and
i.e. Shefford R.S.O. Beds. (1886 to 1905)

Independent Sub Office These evolved in the second half of the 19th Century having an address that was independent of the nearest Head Office, thus the majority of their mail could come straight to them. They had a Head Office for administration purposes (cancellations were often sent there – see the annotations in the Proof Impression Books). The Post Office used the initials S.O. for these offices.

Railway Sub Office. These were offices that received and sent their mail direct to a Travelling Post Office. When the term “Railway Sub Office” was abolished in 1905, these became Independent Sub Offices. In 1909 most became Post Towns.

SUBURBAN DISTRICT:

A Suburban District or Sub District were terms used in London for a group of Receiving Houses with a primary Receiving House where the Letter Carriers met. It was the office where queries about mail delivery were answered. Eventually most offices ended up sorting, cancelling and delivering mail.

SUBORDINATE OFFICE

The address of mail sent there should include the name of the Head Office:-
i.e. Potton, Biggleswade. (1844 to 1854)
i.e. Potton, St Neots. (1854 to 1872)
i.e. Potton, Sandy. (1872 to 1906+)
These received and sent all their mail direct to a Head Office. In the list they are shown as being “under” a Head Office. They either cancelled their own mail or sent it to the Head office for canceling.

TOWN RECEIVING HOUSE.

Town Sub Office, a Sub Office in an urban environment, which before 1892 was called a Town Receiving Office.

Town Branch Office, still a Sub Office in an urban environment, but more important. Initially these were just receiving houses but later many started cancelling and then delivering mail. Abbreviated to BO in the cds.

LETTER BOXES.

Pillar Boxes and Wall Boxes. Clearly these did not normally have their own cancellation, but the exceptions were Letter Boxes at Railway Stations placed there to accept Late Fee letters. The cancellation was then applied either in the Travelling Post Office, eg. Euston Square Station with its provincial style 964 cancellation or in transit eg. the Manchester/Liverpool/Leeds/Bradford Late Box cancellations that were cancelled in London.

Dates of a change in status are derived largely from the Post Office Guide for January of each year. Thus if a change occurs in say the 1865 edition, it actually took place some time in 1864.

Most sources mention office status at various points in time. However these listings attempt a continuous chronology.

INTRODUCTION TO THE USED ABROAD LISTINGS.

The term “used abroad” applies to GB stamps and their cancellations used in either Postal Agencies that were located in British consulates or in a few colonies such as islands in the West Indies and Cyprus. In the latter GB stamps were used for a short period of time in conventional post offices prior to their own stamps being ready for use. Most of the colonies controlled their own postal systems and had their own stamps.

Prior to the formation of the precursor to the UPU in 1875, international mail was organized and carried by individual countries and their mail boats. The British Consul acted as a postman with a stock of GB stamps and cancellers to be used on mail which he would take down to the British mail boat the next time it was in port.

The same number was often allocated to an office in the UK and then to one abroad. In almost all cases different styles of cancellation were used for the UK allocation compared to the ones used abroad.

e.g. Number 556 allocated to Shelton (Staffs) from 1844 to 1857 using an 1844 type. The later allocation to Cape Castle (Gold Coast) used a 3VOS on the stamps of Gold Coast.

The few exceptions and areas of possible confusion are listed below:

193 1844 type – Chipping Sodbury Glos on GB stamps.

193 3HOS – Worthing (in error) on GB stamps.

193 3HOS – Coldspring on Jamaican stamps only.

617 1844 type – Storrington Sussex on GB stamps.

617 3HOS – Storrington Sussex on GB stamps.

617 3HOS – Hayes on Jamaican stamps only

A01 3HOS – Kingston Jamaica on GB stamps 1858 to 1860

A01 3HOS – Kingston Jamaica on Jamaican stamps 1860 to 1864

A01 3HOS – Inspectors mark in the Foreign Branch London c.1900 to c.1910.

A80 3HOS – Mailboats usage in 1859

A80 3HOS – Used as an Inspectors mark on a cover from London to Glasgow on a TPO.

B16 3HOS – Mailboats usage 1861 to 1870

B16 3HOS – Used onshore in a Sorting Carriage in Plymouth after 1870.

C65 4VOS – Used in Carthagena Colombia from 1867 to 1881 (in error).

C65 4VOS – Sent to Heywood Lancs in 1870 but it has not been seen used.

Numbers D47 and D48 were used in 4VOS format in the Chief Office in London in the 1860's. They were then issued in 3VOS format in 1881 to Polymedia and

Headquarters Camp, Cyprus. This is after GB unoverprinted stamps had been withdrawn in April 1880 and Cyprus stamps had come into use. These numbers are therefore not “used abroads”

MAIL BOAT CANCELLATIONS

These are a series of 3HOS's and 4VOS's that were used by Post Office sorters on board mail boats. The cancellations were used from 1858 to 1870 and then the numbers were reallocated to other Post Offices.

The Post Office used sorters on board ships and trains in order to speed up the handling of the mails. The ship-based sorters frequently had their own cancellers to use on mail posted on board ship and military mail that was delivered to the ship. The majority of covers recorded are soldiers or sailors letters posted at their privileged rate. Very few examples of civilian mail posted and cancelled on board exist.

RAILWAY OFFICES

These are either numbers allocated to offices that were located at railway stations or for use on Travelling Post Offices on the railways. Separate listings are given. There are a few examples that fit in either category: 964 Euston Square Station and 049 Paddington Station.

Euston Square Station used 964 on Late Fee mail on the London and North Western Railway. The cancellation first issued in 1848 must have been applied in the T.P.O. because up until 1870 the “Office” at Euston Square Station was only a letter box or a “suspended bag”.

049 was probably of a similar nature because Paddington Station is not separately listed as a Station in either the London or the Provincial listings in any of the Post Office Guides.

LONDON OFFICES

These lists comprise all the numbers allocated to offices that were within the area of the London District Post and include cancellations either in a provincial style (numbers in bars) or in a London suburban style (numbers in a circle).

In 1844 suburban style numbers were allocated to a series of “Rides” or mail cart routes radiating from the Chief Office. Provincial numbers were given to a peripheral ring of offices at the end of each ride, with these offices being both in the London District Post and General Post. As the population of London expanded into the outer suburbs, the offices located there became larger and started cancelling mail. They were then transferred from the London Lists to the Provincial lists. These offices often started using Provincial style cancellations before leaving London. In the Post Office Guide they were listed with the comment “District Initials should no longer be used in the address”.

Cancellations of the General Post, then the Inland Office, and later the Inland Branch had numbers in a diamond. With very few exceptions these numbers were not allocated to specific offices.

1844 OFFICES IN THE LONDON DISTRICT AND GENERAL POSTS

At this time the Post Office was issuing 1844 type, provincial style cancellations to several offices that were only listed as being within the London District Post. Most were situated at the end of Rides and were also part of the General Post. Notably:-

144 Bromley
201 Chislehurst
394 Hounslow
395 Southall
422 Kingston
668 Romford
770 Stanmore
771 Shooters Hill
835 Waltham Cross
937 Barnet
938 Croydon

OFFICES THAT WERE ALWAYS IN LONDON

Several offices used provincial style cancellations, despite always being in the Suburban Area of London.

These offices which were in London using provincial style cancellations, were characterised by having the comment "*District initials should be omitted from the address*" being listed under London Districts in the Post Office Guide. Notably:-

42 Chiswick
43 Turnham Green
102 Leyton
109 Walthamstow
117 Tottenham
119 Edmonton
801 Wimbledon
809 Merton
833 Chingford

Chingford was an exception in not always being part of London. It moved from the North Eastern District to the Provincial Area in 1867, when the former was broken up. Returning to London in 1877 when a provincial style duplex 833 4VOD was issued.

WOOLWICH DISTRICT

A more complex example is provided by Woolwich, which became a district in its own right and used provincial style obliterators from 1873/5. It still reported to London.

In 1879 it became fully part of the Kent Provincial Area (all the employees got a pay cut! – the Postmen in London received a higher salary than those in the provinces).

In this interim period, between 1873/5 and 1879, provincial style cancellations were used (with the exception of Halfway Street Eltham).

When these offices were in London but using provincial style cancellations, they were characterised by having the comment "*District initials should be omitted from the address*" when listed under London Districts in the Post Office Guide.

In 1879 when Woolwich was transferred to the Kent Provincial Area, the following Offices were also transferred along with it:- (The year in brackets is when provincial numeral obliterations were first issued.)

Belvedere (1875).
Bexley. (1875).
Bexley Heath. (1875).
Charlton (1875)
Crayford. (1875).
Crook Log. (1878).
Eltham District. (1874)
Erith. (1875).
Lessness Heath. (1875).
New Charlton (1875)
Plumstead. (1875).
Shooters Hill. (1875).
Welling. (1876).

OFFICES THAT MOVED FROM LONDON TO PROVINCES

Sometime in the 1860's a large number of offices simply went from the London Suburban Area into the Provincial Area:-

In 1865:-

Romford moved to the Essex Provincial Area taking the following Offices with it:

Grays
Purfleet
Rainham
Stanford le Hope

Barnet moved to the Hertfordshire Provincial Area taking the following Office with it:

Potters Bar

Waltham Cross moved to the Hertfordshire Provincial Area taking the following Office with it:

Cheshunt

Bromley moved to the Kent Provincial Area taking the following Offices with it:

Bickley Station
Chelsfield
Farnborough
Orpington
West Wickham

Hounslow moved to the Middlesex Provincial Area taking the following Office with it:

Feltham

Croydon moved to the Surrey Provincial Area taking the following Offices with it:

East Molesey
Kingston
Norbiton
Surbiton
Thames Ditton
Warlingham

In 1867:-

With the demise of the North Eastern District on 31stDec1866. Woodford Green moved to the Essex Provincial Area, taking the following Offices with it:

Buckhurst Hill
Chigwell

Loughton
Woodford Bridge
Harrow moved to the Middlesex Provincial Area taking the following Offices with it:
Harrow Station
Harrow Weald
Sudbury

Twickenham moved to the Middlesex Provincial Area taking the following Offices with it:

Hampton
Sunbury
Teddington

Chislehurst moved to the Kent Provincial Area taking the following Offices with it:
St.Mary Cray
Sidcup

In 1868:-

The following were made Head Post Offices and transferred to the Provincial Area:

Brentford
Edgware
Isleworth
Mitcham
Richmond
Stanmore
Sutton
Barking (1870)
Ilford (1870)

NUMERAL ERRORS

These are numeral cancellations that used a different number from what was currently allocated to the office in the Post Office Lists. Errors of type such as Easingwold 931 or Brighton 132 are not included.

Some apparent errors entered in the Proof Books have never been seen. These may never have been actually sent to the office concerned e.g. 123 Grantham, 365 Northampton, 070 Witheridge and H14 Workington.

The annotations in the Proof Books saying where an entry had been sent can be difficult to interpret. Most are laid out in neat rows and are thus unambiguous, but some are dotted all over a page with annotations in various positions. In the Proof Books the first 3HOS numbered 704 appears to have been sent to Sheffield rather than South Shields. It has never been seen used at either.

Several "errors" may well have been undocumented changes in allocation e.g. C63 Tampico / Heywood, or 958 Fence Houses / Leigh.

Brumell lists three errors that I have never seen. These are in this list but not the main listings:-

087 Goginan Cardigan used number 089 in error in 1876 (ex Dendy Marshall).
920 Upton on Severn Worcs, used number 931 in error in 1851.
273 Eccleshall Staffs used number 372 in error in 1870.

Stitt Dibden describes the following doubtful errors, which are from his articles in Stamp Collecting (18th Dec 1959 p473) (1st Jan 1960 pp525&527) & (13th Apr 1962 pp203&205)

- 83 Bishops Stortford Herts. This is an 1844 type used from 1850 to 1858 with thick numbers and inner arcs. If heavily inked it can be read as 88.
- 252 Torpoint Cornwall. An error 253 used in 1869. This has never been seen and by 1869 Torpoint was not using numeral cancels.
- 558 Newnham Glos. Used 559 in error – the 3HOS of Newnham are often badly and heavily applied – it can be difficult to read the number.
- 669 Saffron Walden Essex. The 1844 type used upside down reads 699 hence the error! The 699 error in a 4VOD is genuine.
- 788 Tewkesbury Glos. A 788 badly struck could look like a 789.
- 965 Alderney. On the 3VOD of Winchfield (963) there is a very strong serif and a weak diagonal bar on the flat topped three. This can easily appear to be a figure 5. Hence the so called error.
- 073 Waltham Lincs. Used in error in Melton Mowbray. The only cover recorded has a Melton Mowbray cds and a Waltham cud. If the latter were ignored then it would appear to be an error of number.
- 089 Usk Mon. Stitt Dibden says that 087 was used at Usk instead of Goginan. It has never been seen.
- F79 Sandy Beds. Stitt says that 097 was used at Sandy in lieu of D97 between 1868 and 1869 and refers to two illustrations in his text: one of these is a 3HOS used at Shiplake/Twyford and the other is a 4VOS that has never been seen. The latter looks like a poor tracing of the 4VOS D97 used at Sandy.

General Comments

D69,D71 and D72,D73.

The initial set of numeral cancellations were a series of 4VOS's sent in 1868 to:-

- D69 - Wingate
- D71 - Castle Eden Colliery
- D72 - Coxhoe
- D73 – Trimdon Grange

These were used in the 1870's and could be justifiably called numeral errors, because the 1874 list had the following:

- D69 - Castle Eden Colliery
- D71 - Wingate
- D72 - Trimdon Grange
- D73 – Coxhoe

The allocations of 1882 were correctly used in a series of late 3VOD's:-

- D69 - Castle Eden Colliery (none issued)
- D71 – Wingate 1890 - 1906
- D72 - Coxhoe 1890 - 1909
- D73 – Trimdon Grange 1879 – 1909

- C63 Heywood Lancs. There was a gap of 16 years between the last C63 used at Tampico Mexico and its use at Heywood Lancs. C63 was not listed as being allocated to Heywood but nothing else was, so it is likely to be a failure of the official lists rather than an error of number.

- F79 Sandy Beds. Sandy was issued D79 in 1868 and used between 1870 and 1872. This was before the 1874 allocation of F79. It may not have been an error of number as there are no surviving lists between 1860 and 1874.

Double entries

If an office had two numbers in the lists and the usage coincides with the dates of the lists, then they really are not numeral errors.

- 438 & 974 Sedbergh Yorks. Sedbergh was allocated numbers 438 and 974 in the lists from 1850 to 1857.

- 931 & 975 Easingwold Yorks. Easingwold was allocated numbers 931 & 975 in the lists from 1850 to 1857.

- 992 Penygraig Glamorgan. As pointed out in Brumell Penygraig had both numbers 252 and 992 allocated to it in the 1882 to 1892 lists.

RAILWAY SUB OFFICES (R.S.O's)

These were offices that received and sent most of their mail to a travelling post office on a railway rather than a conventional head office.

We have listed all the offices that had a numeral cancellation during their period as an R.S.O.

Often a numeral obliterator was issued when an office changed its status from a subordinate office to an R.S.O. Very few duplex cancels have R.S.O. in the cds. The initials R.S.O. rarely occur anywhere until after 1900 when a series of cds's were issued with R.S.O. after the office name.

The designation R.S.O. has been taken from the lists of offices in the Post Office Guides. R.S.O's still had a Head Office for administration purposes, so there can be some confusion in that an office can change its head office but remain a R.S.O. In our lists the fact that the office is an R.S.O is paramount.

If the first R.S.O's were designated in 1856, there is a gap of four years to 1860 before they were clearly designated in the Post Office Guides. Indeed it was not until 1868 that the description Railway Sub Office was used in the guides. Between 1860 and 1868 an R.S.O. was shown by the office name having the county in brackets after it. This was the official address. A Head Office stood by itself, whilst a R.S.O. needed the county name and a sub office needed its head office.

When the term "Railway Sub Office" was abolished in 1905, they became Independent Sub Offices and in 1909 they became Post Towns. However the term remained in use in many cds's for many years afterwards.

Acknowledgments

Post Office Archives. Many thanks for all the help in the past, although under the current regime research is becoming very awkward. This follows a general tendency amongst archivists to make preservation the all pervading priority and making access increasingly difficult.

This project started in conjunction with David Atkinson working on mail posted at an office having a numeral cancel that was cancelled at a different office. This led to using Ken Smith's listings of the status of all Post Offices to find out the Head Office of the offices in question. A full set of listings of the numeral allocations from 1844 to 1967 was also needed, hence the present publication.

Many thanks to all those who have helped check individual counties and in particular Mike Goodman who ploughed through it all.