



# MIDLAND MAIL

## THE BULLETIN OF THE MIDLAND (G.B.) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY



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### Candid Camera?

Do we ever stop to consider the sophistication and skill of modern 'informative entertainment'? We watch the presenter of a natural history programme peering down the crater of a simmering volcano: a moment later he is clad in fur on the arctic icecap, his commentary having continued without a break. We see models of unbelievable detail and complexity filmed in such a way that it is impossible to discern the real from the imaginary. If we stop to think, we may have just an inkling of the time, expense, travel and expertise that has been devoted to a few seconds of throw-away entertainment - just to attract our attention.

If we were curators of a museum, we might well despair at the task of interesting the public long enough to convey even a small fraction of the information that is at hand. They will not stop to read lengthy notices; they can scarcely be attracted by anything static. It must move, it must light up - better still, it must explode.

Perhaps you will think again about the problem when you next saunter past the often deserted frames of a philatelic or postal history exhibition. Will we be forced to change our approach as the 21st century nears? Instead of a 36 sheet display, will we be asked to produce a 15 minute video? Could our staid world consider anything so radical? If we hope to gain the attention of the outsider, if we hope to excite the interest of young people, we may yet have to think the unthinkable. It may not explode but perhaps it could illuminate.

### The Annual Auction

It is not too early to be thinking about the Society's Annual Auction which will follow the Annual General Meeting on 26th April. Descriptions of any lots that you wish to enter should be sent to Mrs Elizabeth Lewis (whose address is above) to reach her not later than 15th March so that a catalogue can be prepared in good time. Please make your descriptions reasonably brief and indicate your assessment of the condition as 'poor', 'good', 'fine' or 'superb'. Also clearly indicate the number of items in each lot together with a fair market valuation and your reserve price, if any. The actual lots should not be sent but brought to the auction on 26th April.

May we again ask members for the odd lot, or two, to be sold for Society funds. It helps our Treasurer to keep the subs down.

### The November 30th Meeting

The room provided at The Birmingham and Midland Institute was, once again, crowded for the display by Eric and Elizabeth Lewis which they had called 'A Village by the River Rea'. (For the uninitiated, the said "village" is Birmingham!) The first half of the display was opened by Elizabeth with a Birmingham straight line stamp first recorded in 1714. The Birmingham straight line marks were split in various ways; after 'G', after 'N' and after 'I', the later ones being split in the normal manner after the 'G'. A rare treat was a very fine Birmingham 'Chandelier' dated 16 January 1773. This mark is recorded for a five week period from the middle of December 1772 into January 1773. Only seven examples are known, four of which were found by the late Sidney Raines and dated between 13th and 17th December 1772.

Another scarce mark shown was the mileage mark '111 Birmingham' which was in use for just two or three months in 1785. There followed the undated horseshoe of 1795-1800 and the second type of mileage mark, 'Birmingham/120', which was introduced in 1805. The mileage marks were temporarily put aside by Elizabeth in favour of the attractive 'Missent to Birmingham' stamps but then it was the turn of more mileage marks, this time the circular ones which also illustrated the change in mileage from 120 to 109. This change may have been made when a new road was opened (but see Chris Beaver's article later in this issue). There was a map by way of illustration and a description taken from Aris's Gazette of the time which reported eight mail guards in full uniform parading the streets and being liberally supplied with wine, biscuits and sandwiches before their departure for London. (It is hoped to include a fuller copy of this report in a later 'Midland Mail'.)

The Birmingham Penny Post was introduced in 1793 and we saw a cover with a previously unrecorded 'pp13/UNPd' which must have been used at Halesowen or Bilston, both of which had a penny post for a few weeks before reverting to their long established  $\frac{1}{2}$ d post into Birmingham. This cover may well be the earliest known provincial penny post item. Marks of the penny post were followed by those of the villages including 'The Lozells', a stamp that was presumably corrected locally since the strike of the issued stamp in the proof books is incorrect.

Eric had completed the first half of the display but Elizabeth again took the floor for the second half with items of surcharged mail and examples of instructional marks such as 'Firm Unknown'. There were several Birmingham Ship Letters (including the item illustrated in Robertson's book which was carried on HMS Cape Town from the West Indies to Portsmouth), mail being taken direct to Birmingham for sorting when the sorting offices at the ports could not cope. Birmingham's boxed 'LC' stamp, a mystery for many years, was shown together with the letter Sidney Raines received from the Post Office in the 1950s which finally established the meaning of the mark as 'Letter Carrier' and its use for stamping mail delayed for various reasons in the Birmingham office. Eric concluded the display which brought us right up to date with such items as a bomb-damaged letter, suitably endorsed by the Post Office, which had been harmed when a letter bomb exploded in the Birmingham Sorting Office in 1979.

It had been a quite excellent afternoon's entertainment with Eric and Elizabeth providing as comprehensive a display of Birmingham material as one could ever hope to see and presented in a way that was both interesting and indicative of their deep knowledge of the subject.

### The December Meeting

The meeting at The Bass Museum is now so well established and popular that one takes it for granted that it will attract the largest attendance of the season. Numbers were down a little this year but more than twenty members were present

for Mr A.R.Lloyd's talk on the postal history of Stone, Lichfield and Uttoxeter. He began with the postal history of Stone which was a very early post town. The first letter shown was dated 1613 and sent to 'Blythfeild' (near Rugeley) and it was followed by another, also to Blithfield, of 1680 by ye Stone Bagg. A letter of 1731 had a 'Stone' albino strike and one of 1741 had the 'N' and 'E' of 'Stone' joined. This mark was replaced by one with letters separated in 1771. The first mileage mark, '140 Stone' dated from 1786 but was replaced with a straight line mark in 1787 which continued until 1800. We saw various sizes of the second mileage mark, 'Stone/141' and a letter of 1820 with the boxed 'Missent to Stone' in three lines. There were 'Mulreadys' with red and black Maltese Crosses struck at Stone and a much travelled cover of 1840 that had been to Italy and back. More modern material included the various duplexes, double rings and sub-office rubbers. A 1943 letter with a bisected 1d making up the 2½d rate had been charged postage due but may have been a correct usage.

Moving on to Lichfield, Arthur explained that the spelling could be with or without a 'T'. Lichfield was the second most important post town in Staffordshire in 1677 but the display began even earlier with a photocopy of a document c1640 complaining of overcharging by the postmaster. A letter of 1746 was struck 'Litch/field', one of 1756 was 'Lich/field' and 1777 saw 'Litchfield'. The first mileage mark was '119 Litch/field' but the 1787 straight line reverted to 'Lichfield'. The 'Lichfield' reversed horse-shoe appeared in 1798 and the second mileage mark, 'Litchfield/119', was seen on a letter of 1802. In 1806 there was a large 'Litchfield 119' ring mileage mark but, in 1810, the Reverend Whites wrote to the Post Office requesting that the 'T' be dropped from stamps and the PMGs agreed. The dated mileage marks were shown in various sizes up to 1830. Then came a letter of 1836 with the first Lichfield/Penny Post mark and other examples had a straight line 'Barton' (under Needwood) & 'Alrewas'. A different penny post mark appeared in 1838. Duplex marks up to 1903 were shown and then postcards with sub-office cancels including those of Burntwood and Shenstone. There were skeletons and machine cancels of Lichfield and, finally, a photo of the new post office of 1905.

The Uttoxeter section began with a letter of 1743 with a two-line mark followed by others of 1754 and 1779. Other straight line and mileage marks followed the normal pattern but 'Uttoxeter/Penny Post' appeared as early as 1816 and we saw it used with boxed nos 1 and 7 offices. A particular highlight was the original Post Office Notice setting up Mr Robert Richards Junr as Postmaster of Uttoxeter in 1835. It carried the official seals and the signatures of the Earl of Lichfield and Francis Freeling. Perhaps not surprisingly, a letter of 1838 from Uttoxeter to Hammerwich had found its way to Hammersmith and had collected four London office marks during its travels. Post-1840 material included a 1d black and 1d reds with Uttoxeter Maltese Cross cancels, small and large duplex marks, a registered letter of 1895 and some early postcards. Finally, there was a parcel post label of 1903 showing 'Uttoxeter R.S.O. (Under Stafford)' and skeleton marks of 1905 and 1921.

This was a remarkably detailed display of not one town but three and anyone with a similar collection will know the difficulty of finding material in such abundance. It set the seal on another enjoyable outing to Burton on Trent.

### Forthcoming Meetings

A notice has already been circulated to most members to advise them of the next meeting. This will be at Dr Johnson House, Birmingham on Saturday 18th January at 2pm when members are invited to display nine sheets with the theme 'Items chosen to interest/amaze/infuriate my friends'. There will be a Committee Meeting at 1pm to which the County Editors are invited.

The following meeting, also at Dr Johnson House, will be on Saturday 22nd February at 2pm. This is the occasion of our two Annual Competitions - one for nine sheets of material primarily pre-1840 and the other for nine sheets primarily post-1840. You may submit one entry for each competition. The Society looks forward to the usual keen contest for the attractive trophies.

## Books that may interest you - 13

From a list compiled for the Society by Ted Heath:

CLEGG, Chris and Rosemary 'Dream Palaces of Birmingham', paperback, 104 pages, 310 illustrations. From C.&R.Clegg, 64 Somerton Drive, Erdington, Birmingham B23 5ST, Price £4-95. Published Aug 84 (ISBN 0-9509272-1-X)

SMITH, Donald John 'New Street Remembered: the story of Birmingham's New Street Railway Station, 1854-1967', hardback, 124 pages, illustrated. From Barbryn Press, 37-38 Calthorpe Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 1TX, £7-95. Published Nov 84 (ISBN 0-906160-05-7)

HOWAT, J.N.T. 'South American Packets: British Packet Service to Brazil, the River Plate, the West Coast (incl Straits of Magellan) and the Falkland Islands, 1808-1880', paperback, 284 pages, illustrated, map. From Postal History Society, c/o J.G.S.Scott, Lower Street Farmhouse, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 8PT, £12-00. Published Nov 84 (ISBN 0-900657-95-2)

JOHNSON, Peter 'British Travelling Post Offices', hardback, 104 pages, 145 illustrations. Ian Allan, Feb 85, £8-95. (ISBN 0-7110-1459-0)

MACKAY, James A. 'Surcharged Mail of the British Isles', paperback, 202 pages, 2477 illustrations. From J.A.Mackay, 11 Newall Terrace, Dumfries DG1 1LN, £10-35 post paid or £12-60 overseas. Published Jan 85 (ISBN 0-906440-33-5)

BEITH, Richard 'Yorkshire Air Mails: a chronological history of aerophilatelic events with Yorkshire connections', illustrated. From The Yorkshire Postal History Society, 48 Banner Cross Road, Sheffield S11 9HR, £4-40 post paid. (Yorkshire Postal History Society Special Series No.5)

SMITH, Clive (compiler) 'British Private Posts 1680-1980, a Series', Volume 1: 1971 Strike Posts, Isle of Man and Volume 2: 1971 Strike Posts, Posts Beginning with 'A'. Available from Clive Smith, National Bank of Abu Dhabi, 90 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AS, £3-60 each post paid.

## The Undated Circular Marks of the Midland Counties

Members are reminded that corrections, additions and amendments to our UDC book should be forwarded not later than the end of February if they are to be included in the revised pages to be made available at the end of the season. This will allow new finds at Stampex to be included.

## Solihull Post Office

A young man is doing a project on the history of the post office at Solihull as part of a History 'O' level. If anyone has information that might be useful to him, the editor would be pleased to forward it.

## Ride Letters

Following the query in the last 'Midland Mail', Michael Champness wrote to advise that Ride Letters were handed to the 'mailman' when on his round, often for delivery later on the same round. During the adhesive label period, the instructions were to deface the stamps in manuscript or at a convenient receiving office with its obliterator - cancellation/namestamp. All marks on the Hinckley front were London Chief Office functions.

# Mileage and Postage: Ups and Downs

by The Reverend Christopher M. Beaver

For the great majority of provincial towns, postage to London and postage from London were always identical. There were a few exceptions because mail could be carried by one route in one direction and by another route the other way. Carmarthen had two routes both ways and two mileage stamps in use for many years and, for a time, two postage rates resulted. Mileage marks were intended to indicate the distance by the normal 'up' route to London. The prime object of them appears to have been to enable the clerks at the GPO to check, and correct as necessary, the total General Postage on mail passing through London without constant reference to lists of rates between provincial towns served by different post roads. For discussion of other possible theories, see John Harrison's article in 'Postal History' No.233, pages 9-16.

There was always more than one direct or indirect mail coach connection between London and Birmingham throughout the period 1785 to 1838 but the route through Warwick and Banbury (119 miles 4 furlongs), used from the early '20s, needs to be mentioned now only for the sake of completeness and because it may have affected some mileages, for example on the road to Stourport. (There had indeed been two mail routes between London and Birmingham since 1755 - see Denis Salt's article, also in 'Postal History', No.228, pages 10-13.)

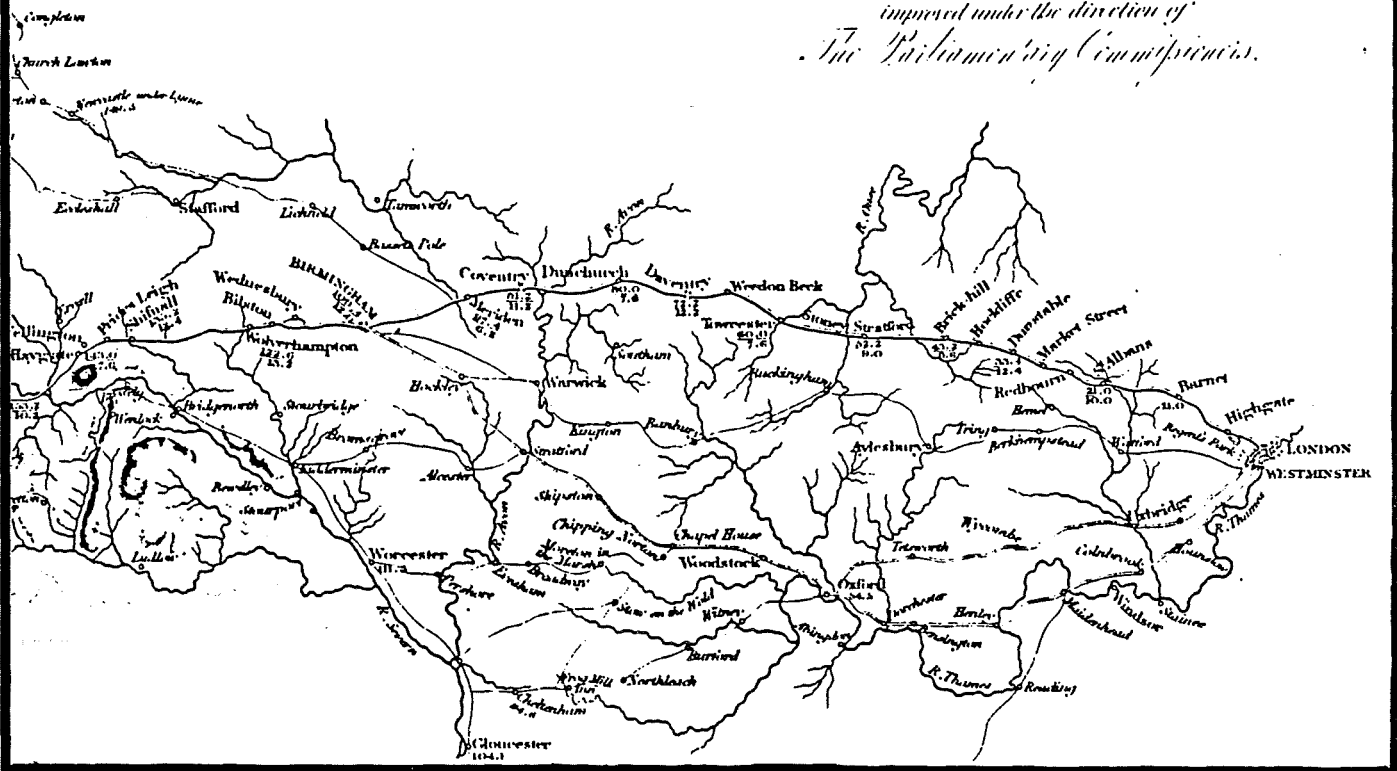
In the whole of England, there appear to be only two post towns where the normal London rates of postage were different 'up' and 'down'; that is Birmingham, between 1801 and 1812, and Walsall, between 1801 and 1817. What happened in 1801 was that 80 and 120 miles became limits between postage rates in place of 100 and 150 miles; each rate applied up to but 'not exceeding' such distances. Birmingham had a '120' mileage stamp in use from 1801 but the measured distance was 120 miles and 1 furlong by the "mail coach route through Oxford" and that was the way Birmingham's mail bags for London were then carried. A 'Shrewsbury mail' continued to use that route until 1819 and the Birmingham '120' marking occasionally found after 1812 is likely to have been used on mail carried that way. However, the 'down' mail for Birmingham from London had gone via Coventry and Stonebridge from before 1801 (see below) and, from 1812 with the introduction of a through 'Auxiliary' mail coach between London and Birmingham which took this route, Birmingham's mail to London also normally went this way. The distance was measured to be 109 miles 5 furlongs and a '109' mileage mark came into use in 1812.

Both the London Post Office Directory of 1808 and Paterson's British Itinerary of 1811 show the Birmingham-London postage as "8d and 9d", meaning 8d 'down' but 9d 'up'. The inhabitants of Birmingham did not often pay the higher rate themselves but, for other locally significant reasons, a victory for commerce and common sense was celebrated with a parade, a feast and a peal of bells on the day the first direct mail coach was sent off to the capital.

June 1, 1812 - On Tuesday last the new Birmingham and London Royal Mail Coach, established for the particular accommodation of this town and neighbourhood, set out from the Swan Hotel, at four o'clock, the bells of St Martin's Church ringing, and thousands of spectators assembled on the occasion, greeting it as it passed with cheering shouts.

from 'Aris's Gazette'

(PART)  
*M A P*  
*of the Mail-Road from*  
 LONDON to HOLYHEAD.  
*improved under the direction of*  
*The Postmaster-General.*



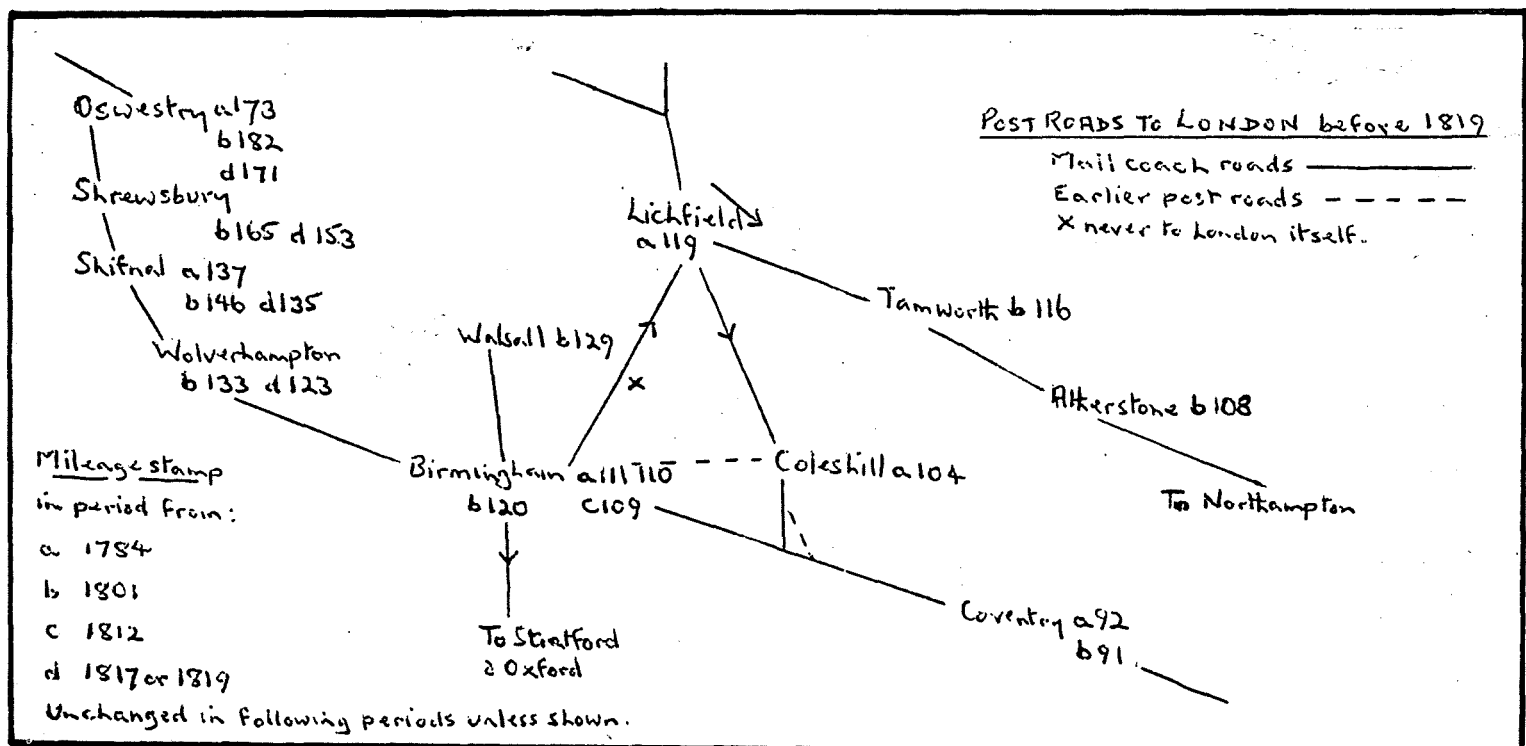
Walsall had the same "8d and 9d" rates as Birmingham in the same sources. The London Post Office Directory of 1815 has "9d" for Birmingham (rates had been increased from July 9th 1812 so 8d each way had only lasted six weeks!) but "9d and 10d" for Walsall. That means Walsall's mail to London continued to go from Birmingham on the 'Shrewsbury' coach, though the 'down' Birmingham Auxiliary did carry Walsall's mail from London. By the time of the 1819 London Post Office Directory, there were no 'up' and 'down' discrepancies within England; Walsall was simply "9d" and the change probably occurred in 1817 when the Holyhead Mail was transferred from the Oxford and Stratford route to the Daventry and Coventry route - or just possibly not until 1819 when the London-Oxford-Shrewsbury coach ceased. (The 'Shrewsbury' mail had actually been extended through to Holyhead since 1808 but it became the quickest connection to Ireland from London only with the change of route in 1817 and then lost its old name.) The odd thing, as far as Walsall is concerned, is that a '129' mileage mark continued in use right through to 1829 though the 'up' distance was reduced to 118 and the charge adjusted accordingly.

The mileages of the other towns beyond Birmingham were affected after 1817 by the shortening of the Holyhead-Shrewsbury-London route - 274 miles 3 furlongs in 1808, 263 miles 7 furlongs in 1817 and 259 miles 2 furlongs in 1836 (but the later improvements were mostly in Wales). Old stamps generally remained in use for some years. Shrewsbury's change from a '165' stamp to '153' occurred in 1824, Shifnal's from '146' to '135' a little later, Wolverhampton's from '133' to '123' rather earlier.

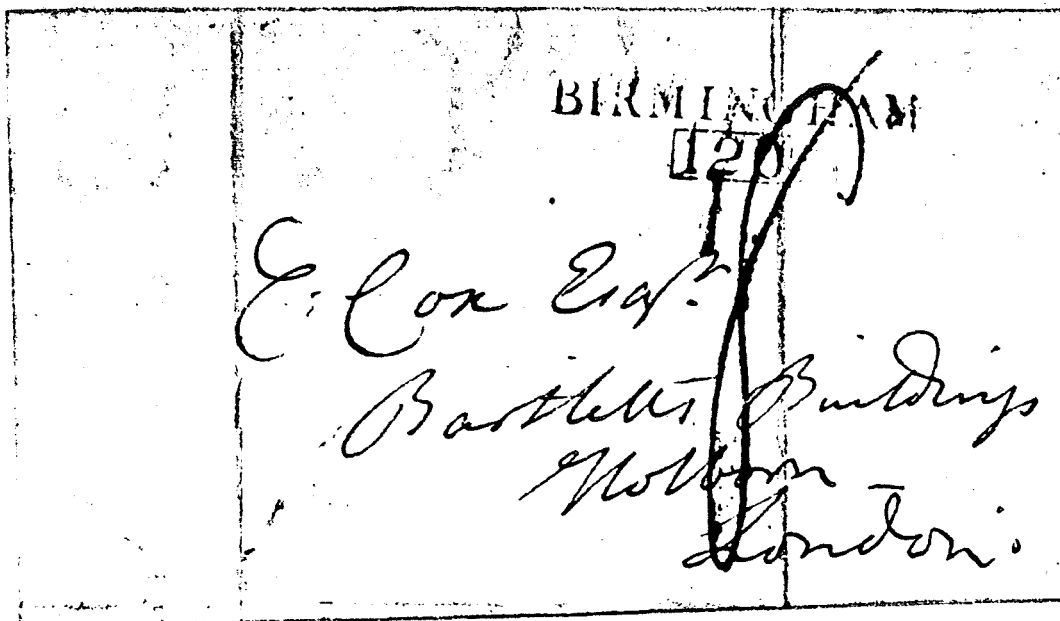
A little needs to be added about the 1st type mileage marks in the area under consideration and the starting points are Coventry's '92' (in 1784) and Coleshill's '104'. Both the Liverpool and the Chester & Holyhead mail coaches went through these towns from 1785 (as the corresponding post boys or mail carts always had before) until the latter was altered in 1789 to go through Northampton and Atherstone, crossing its previous route by joining it from Lichfield to Wolseley Bridge and continuing through Stafford and (for the time being) apparently continuing through Stone. The distance

from Coleshill to Birmingham was over 10 miles and over 13 by what were then turn-piked roads. From Coventry to Birmingham was given as 20 miles about this date and two sources in 1791 show a separate mail coach providing a direct link between these towns. Birmingham's '111' together with Shifnal's '137' (in 1784) are sure evidence that the direct route to Birmingham (not through Coleshill) was in use before any mail coaches reached the Midlands, though the date (between 1785 and 1791) when it was converted from post boy or mail cart has yet to be discovered. Neither has the date been found when Birmingham, and beyond westwards, ceased to be served on bye-routes from Coleshill except that these mileages show that it was before mail coaches and not at the time of their introduction. How much earlier is an important question deserving investigation in a separate article.

Birmingham had a second 1st type mileage figure, '110', but this does not imply a change of route: indeed Coventry's mileage was later '91', unaltered between 1801 and 1829, and, of course, Birmingham's was to be '109' from 1812 on the same route. Coleshill's mileage remained as 104.



Already, by 1791, Birmingham's mail to London went by the Oxford route, though mileage marks do not reveal this since they were not in use at the time or at least not at the towns affected. Pye's Directory of Birmingham of that year states that the Birmingham to Coventry coach took mail for that city and its delivery only. Surprisingly perhaps, mail for all the towns beyond Coventry (including, for example, St Albans) went with the 'north mail' to Lichfield where connection was made with the Holyhead and Liverpool mail coaches in both directions. The next edition of Pye's Directory, of 1797, shows a change for all mail from Birmingham for towns on the Liverpool-London route from Coventry, as far as Barnet, went instead on the Birmingham to Coventry coach. Thomas Hasker's comments on time-bills of the same year, fully quoted in Vale's 'Mail Coach Men of the Late 18th Century' add interesting details, in particular mentioning that the London to Liverpool 'down' mail coach was made to go very fast as far as Coventry because it carried the Birmingham bag but was often delayed at Lichfield where it had to wait for the mail from Bristol to arrive from Birmingham.



The 'Birmingham/120' mileage mark  
on a letter to London dated 1802.

Considering that most newspapers were published in London and therefore were carried on 'down' coaches, it is difficult to believe that there was no room for Birmingham's letters to London on the 'up' Liverpool coach from Coventry: there was clearly ample room on the Birmingham to Coventry connection and it naturally left Birmingham somewhat later in the day than the one through Oxford. No doubt, sending the 'down' bag through Coventry was thought of as a concession by the GPO. However, it was not until 1801, when 'over 120 miles' acquired new significance, that the difference of route for 'up' and 'down' mails meant, unnecessarily, an extra 1d postage one way. It's a wonder the people of Birmingham didn't insist on moving their post office a furlong nearer London!

\* \* \* \* \*

#### More Help Wanted - Please

During recent leave in England, David Hardwick, our man in Saudi Arabia, visited Peter Sharp to show him a study he is making of the marks of Rugby, Rugby Station, and the sub-offices and villages under Rugby. He had obtained details of many marks from Post Office Archives and from examples in his own collection but he would be most grateful for any information from Midland (GB) PHS members, particularly relating to the periods of use. If anyone can help, please let Peter Sharp have details of the type of mark and its size together with its date so that Peter can enter them in a copy he has of David's study. It is not easy for members overseas to pursue their interest without regular access to dealers and members and help of this kind is often invaluable.

## Great Britain Postal History

from 1840 to date. County material,

FDCs and the unusual. Send for my latest list.

ROGER HUDSON  
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# MERCURY

## THE WINGED MESSENGER

by Derek Smeathers



The title will entirely mislead the reader who is well versed in music, astrology or the Wild West! Even those deeply immersed in Halley's Comet mania need hardly read on. Only the odd individual (and I use the term loosely) who is familiar with the old market town of Northampton may have a glimmer of what is to follow for the "Mercury" referred to is the newspaper of that name which has been published in the town since May 1720 - the longest continuously published run in the Kingdom.

Number 1, published on Monday 2nd May 1720, announces itself on the front page as "Northampton Mercury, or the MONDAY'S POST". Much of the reporting is in the form of letters giving snippets of news - from Sweden, Portugal, Italy and elsewhere abroad - and there is a daily "General Post-Office Letter in Lombard Street". The amount of local news is minimal but several accounts appear of highway robberies.

From the GPO Letter dated April 26th:

"The Bristol-Mail was again robb'd yesterday, in the same place as on Friday, by one Highwayman."

I like the capital letter for the Highwayman. Presumably the 'Bristol-Mail' was a post boy and, from other accounts, it seems they were not usually armed, unlike the mailcoaches which were to follow some sixty years or so on. Another item in Issue number 1 is from a letter of April 30th:

"Last week the Oxford Stage-Coach was robbed between Uxbridge and London, by the same Highwaymen, as is supposed, who robbed the Bristol Mail, one of them having a Scar on his Forehead; as was likewise a Gentleman on Finchley Common, by a Highway Man (sic) who took from him 44 guineas then cut his horses Girts and rode off with his Booty . . ."

One would have thought that, with so many similar hold-ups taking place round the country, post boys would have been supplied with some protection. Did they have any means of self-defence?

Later editions of the "Mercury" detail several local incidents illustrating the dangers of the roads. On 12th September 1732 " . . . about four o'clock in the morning, the Nottingham and Northampton stage-coaches were robbed by three highwaymen (a small 'h' now!) two coming up on the coaches and one standing on the lookout at a small distance, near Hackleton at the crossroad leading to Piddington. They took from the passengers about 100£ in money, beside a portmanteau and cloak bag . . ." It appears that the two stage-coaches were travelling together - perhaps for greater security.

Again on June 23rd 1749:

". . . as Mr Collett, a Baker of Heyford, was returning home from Daventry Market, he was attacked on Borough Hill by two Highwaymen, well mounted, who dismounted him and cut his throat in a terrible manner, but happily missed his windpipe . . ."

On June 19th 1766, a post boy was involved in a fracas, again fully detailed, which seems to emphasise a lack of armament but no lack of enthusiasm for a fight. A certain Captain Fleming was robbed by a single highwayman on the Watling Street (or Chester Road) near Potterspury. He rode to Stony Stratford for a fresh horse

[ 12 ]

bed the Bristol Mail, one of them having a Scar on his Forehead, as was likewise a Gentleman on Finchley Common, by a Highway Man, who took from him 44 Guineas, then cut his Horse's Girths, and rode off with his Booty; the latter of these Robberies was committed in sight of 4 Waggon.

Some Days ago a Woman beat another, who was her Lodger, so unmercifully on the Breast, that she murder'd her upon the Spot; for which Piece of Barbarity she is Committed to the Gate-house.

A Man lately taken up near Maidenhead Thicket, and charg'd with robbing the Cirencester Stage-Coach, has been examined by a Justice of the Peace, who has committed him to Reading Goal: He is said to be a Butcher's Son of Thame in Oxfordshire

This Day at Noon South-sea stock was 340. Bank 152. India, 235. Blanks 1710, to l. 19 s. 0 d.

This Week the Prices of the following Commodities at Bear Key, were,  
Wheat from 24 to 28 s. per Quarter. Rye from 19 to 22. Barley from 19 to 23. Oats from 11 to 16. Beans from 22 to 27. Beans from 25 to 30. Malt from 23 to 30. Rape-seed from 11 l. to 11 l. 15 s. per Last. Hops from 4 l. 5 s. to 4 l. 15 s. per Hundred. Coals from 27 to 28 s. per Chaldron.

### ADVERTISEMENTS.

*Northampton Flying Waggon, in Two Days;*

**S**ETS out from the *Fleece Inn*, on *Tuesday, May 10, 1720*, by *Five of the Clock* in the Morning, and goes to the *Rose and Crown Inn*, in *St. John's Street, London*, on *Wednesday*; returns from thence on *Thursday*, and comes to the *Fleece* every *Friday*. *N. B.* Each Passenger to pay 6 Shillings; and for all Goods above 14 Pounds, to pay a half-penny per Pound.

Perform'd (if God permit) by  
*William Cook.*

*To be Let;*

**A** House belonging to *Madam Underwood*, situate at *Sumerham* in *Huntingdonshire*, together with a good Grainery, Barns, Stables, Out-houses, Dove-house, a wall'd-in Garden, a very good Orchard, and a very good Close of Pasture or about an Acre and a half, adjoining to the House. Enquire of *Madam Underwood* of *Sumerham* aforesaid, or of *Mr. Want*, Apothecary in *St. Ives*, in the same County.

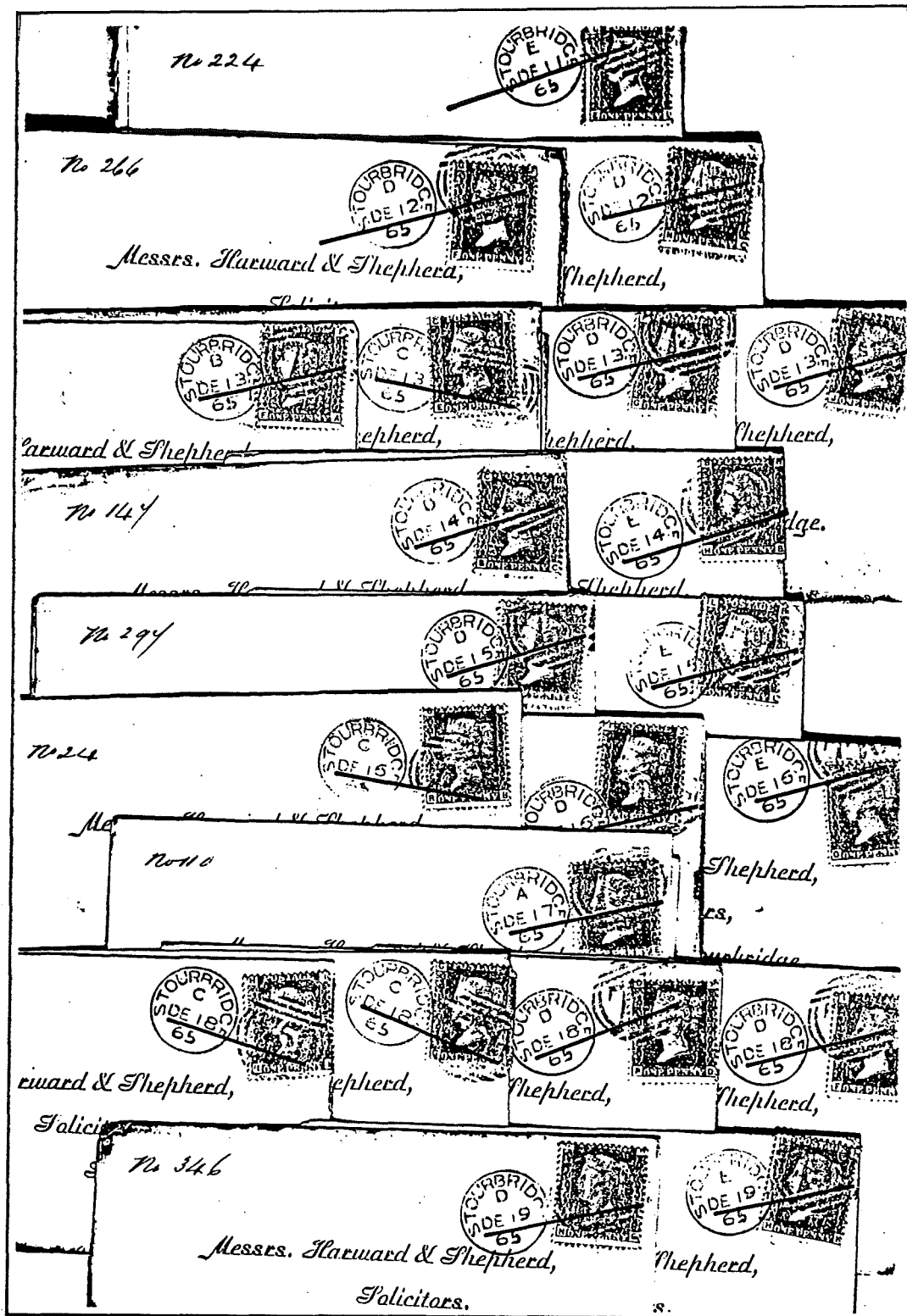
**R**ode away with, the 20th of April last, from the *Red-Lion Inn* in *Northampton*, by a middle-siz'd Man, in his own Hair; with a Grey Riding Coat, a Chesnut Stone-Horse, with a Star in his Forehead, blind in the Off Eye, has had the Farcines on the Off Leg behind, with a cut Tail, comes o this Grass. Whoever gives notice of him, so that he may be had again, to the Printer of this Paper, shall have 10s. Reward, and reasonable Charges.

The last page of the NORTHAMPTON MERCURY, Vol.1 Numb.1, 2 May 1720

and then set off in pursuit of the culprit accompanied by the post boy. On the way, they met up with the Reverend Risley who joined them in the chase and, not far from Towcester, they caught up with the man who then drew a pistol and fired at the trio ". . . which missed. The post-boy called on the Parson to shoot back, and his aim was so good that the highwayman fell stone-dead . . ." Clearly a parson had a suitable weapon for self-defence which the post boy did not. In this particular instance the parson claimed a personal victory for he later became the personal chaplain to the Duke of Grafton, on whose land all this mayhem occurred. Whether the post boy got any reward is not detailed in the "Mercury". Perhaps his reward was that one less highwayman would patrol the Watling Street thereafter!

\* \* \* \* \*

## A SINISTER MARK?



There they were, a bundle of solicitor's reply-paid circulars from the shareholders of the Stourbridge Railway. Not a single unusual postmark to be seen; the adhesives cancelled within nine days of each other by a Stourbridge duplex of 1865. What could a collector find of interest?

Fortunately there are esoteric corners of our hobby untouched by human hand. If the circulars are assembled in date order, it becomes clear that, whereas most of the duplex cancels incline upwards from left to right, a few slope downwards. (Lines have been drawn on the illustration to emphasise this.)

The strikes that slope downwards bear, without exception, the code letter 'C'.

If the coding of 1865 is similar to that of 1885 (which is fortunately known), code 'C' on a duplex stamp indicated duty between 10.15am and 12.20pm. The stamper started work early (his codes begin at 3.45am) and it is not unreasonable to suppose that, by 10.15am, he was due for his mid-morning break and a substitute stamper employed. What might we deduce about the substitute? Yes, you probably have it: you are dexter, he was sinister!

\* \* \* \* \*

**NES**

**NEW**

**ENTERPRISE**

**STAMPS**

**NES**

G.B. Postal History (all aspects and all periods); Postal Stationery; Stamps both on and off cover and other postally related material.

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### THE 10th BIRTHDAY TREASURE HUNT

#### The Third Question

Once again you are invited to answer a question, the answer to which may be found in a popular (not obscure) postal history book. This is the third of five questions.

On Wednesday 8th March 1837, how late was the mail from Manchester at Birmingham?

On this occasion, please make a note of the answer and the page number of the facing page (that must help you). Keep the answers to the three questions by you and the three relevant page numbers (all from different books, of course). When the Treasure Hunt is complete, you will be invited to submit them and the first all-correct answer drawn from a hat or the solution with the most correct answers will win a valuable prize.

FOR

POSTAL HISTORY

ESPECIALLY

G.B. (County)  
MARITIME  
TRANSATLANTIC

and some FOREIGN

CONTACT

**Michael Jackson (Philatelists) Ltd.**  
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## THE STRAIGHT LINE TOWN SUB-OFFICE MARKS OF THE MIDLANDS

In early 1985, the Society published its listing of The Undated Circular Marks of the Midland Counties. This was the first and largest part of a probable 3-phase exercise in which it was hoped to make a complete list of all the undated marks of our area which were in use in the period c1840 to 1860. The 'left-overs' of an earlier era, eg certain mileage and penny post handstamps, were to be swept up in the final phase. We have now, therefore, reached the second phase and the object of this is to list the undated straight line marks of the town sub-offices which were generally contemporary with the undated circular marks of the 'villages'.

Just what to include in the second phase is not simple to define but, as a first attempt, it will be confined to straight line handstamps with upright serif or sans-serif capital letters - designated by Michael Champness as Group A and Group B respectively. Handstamps that are likely to be old mileage marks with the mileage cut off or penny post stamps with 'Penny Post' removed will be omitted and picked up in the final phase. If still in doubt, it is worth remembering that marks in phase 2 are intended to be associated with town sub-offices rather than post towns or villages. However, there is no pretence that the distinction is crystal clear and what is included in or excluded from the final list will be widely discussed beforehand.

The provisional list that follows has been obtained from three sources. Firstly and principally, there are the marks recorded in the Post Office Steel Impression Books which are reproduced here by courtesy of Post Office Archives. Secondly, there are the straight line marks of the Birmingham Penny Post receiving offices. These precede the proof books and the photocopies have been provided by Mr and Mrs E. Lewis. Thirdly, there is the occasional mark, such as ATHENAEUM/UPPER PARADE of Leamington which has been seen on cover but which is not in the proof books. Their status is unknown.

The provisional list is grouped under the following Midland towns and cities:

Birmingham, Bridgnorth, Brierley Hill, Burton on Trent, Coventry,  
Derby, Knowle, Leamington, Leicester, Stafford, Sutton Coldfield,  
Tipton, Warwick, Wednesbury, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton &  
Worcester.

The provisional list has three columns. The first is the P/MSL (Provisional Midland Straight Line) identity number. The second column illustrates the actual mark and the third column notes either the Date of Issue (as recorded in the proof books) or the approximate earliest known date of use. Members are now invited to notify the County Editors (through John Calladine, the coordinating editor) of examples of any of these marks known to them. All that need be done is to write on a postcard or piece of paper:

- a. The P/MSL number.
- b. The colour of the strike.
- c. The full (or incomplete) date of the main office datestamp.
- d. Your name.

An example might be:- P/MSL 59 Orange 13FEB41 John Smith

It may be that members have marks which they believe should be on this list but have been omitted. In that case, they are requested to obtain a photocopy of the cover and to annotate it with the date (if not evident), the colour of the strike (if not black) and their name.

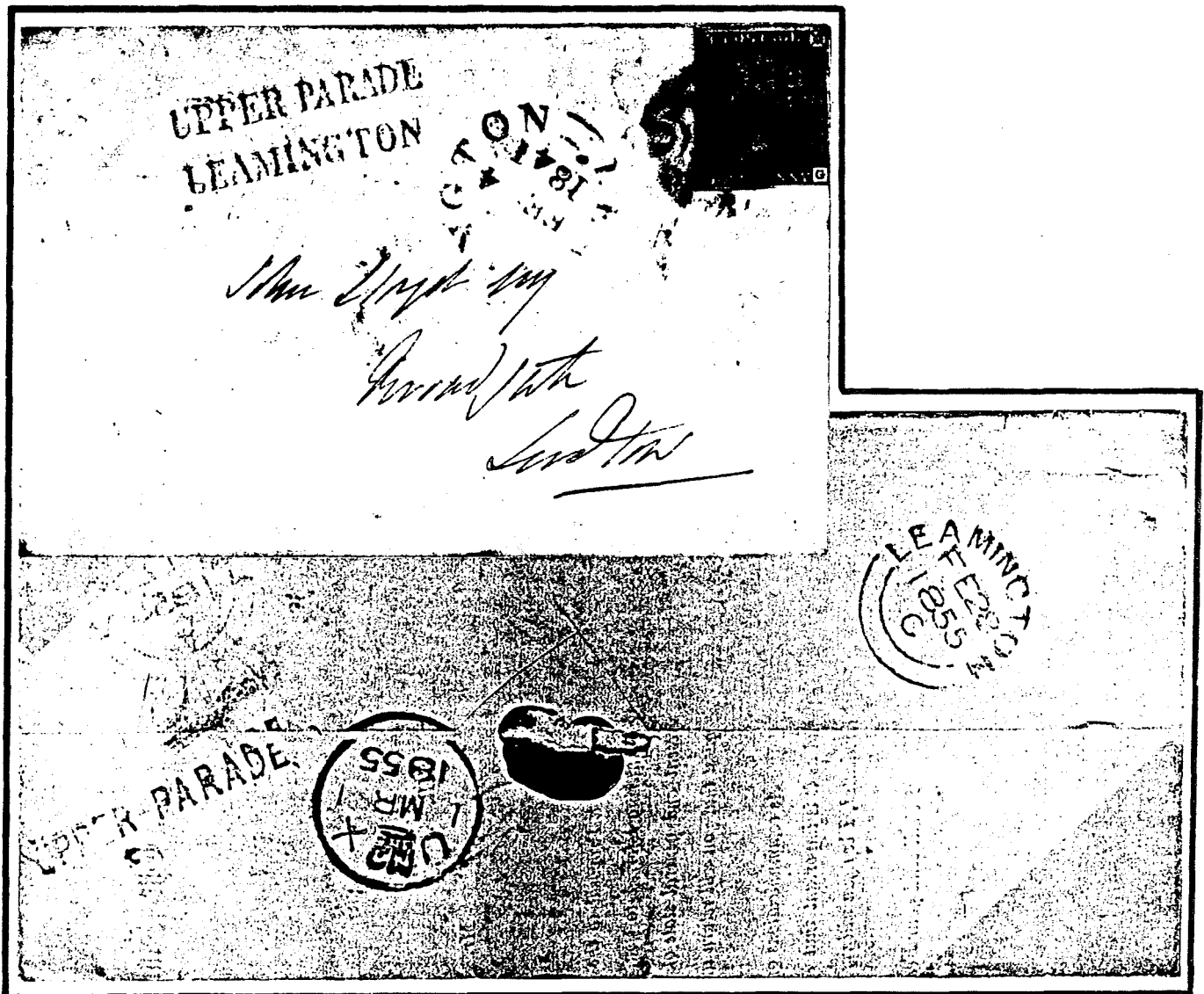
When the final list is prepared for publication, it will, of course, contain full details of

the Steel Impression Book references and the known usage of each mark in the form employed in our UDC book and compiled from the information now being sought from members. Incidentally, it is appreciated that the identity numbers in the final list are likely to differ from those in the provisional list as the inclusion of any new finds will upset the entire sequence. To avoid any chance of confusion, identity numbers in the final publication will be in the form 'MSL 1xx'.

It remains to ask members (and friends) to send details of examples they have seen to:

John Calladine, Dunley House, Cranham, Gloucester GL4 8HQ

At this point there is no closing date but the sooner information is forwarded, the sooner the County Editors will be able to set to work. If the UDC exercise was any guide, this smaller and simpler exercise should produce a good response.



THE STRAIGHT LINE  
TOWN SUB-OFFICE MARKS  
OF THE MIDLANDS

BIRMINGHAM

|          |                    |         |
|----------|--------------------|---------|
| P/MSL 1  | ASHTED-ROW         | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 2  | ASHTED-ROW         | 6AUG50  |
| P/MSL 3  | ASHTED ROW         | 20APR55 |
| P/MSL 4  | ASTON-ROAD         | 6AUG50  |
| P/MSL 5  | ASTON-RD           | 22MAR56 |
| P/MSL 6  | BRISTOL-STREET     | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 7  | BRISTOL-ST         | 2SEP46  |
| P/MSL 8  | BRISTOL-ST         | 25MAR57 |
| P/MSL 9  | CAMP-HILL          | 5OCT55  |
| P/MSL 10 | CASTLE<br>BROMWICH | c1828   |
| P/MSL 11 | DERITEND           | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 12 | DERITEND           | 6AUG50  |
| P/MSL 13 | DUDESTON-ROW       | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 14 | DUDESTON           | 6AUG50  |
| P/MSL 15 | FIVE-WAYS          | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 16 | FIVE-WAYS          | 6AUG50  |
| P/MSL 17 | FIVE WAYS          | 13FEB56 |

BIRMINGHAM (Continued)

|          |                 |         |
|----------|-----------------|---------|
| P/MSL 18 | GREATHAMPTON-ST | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 19 | GT-HAMPTON-ST   | 22AUG48 |
| P/MSL 20 | GT-HAMPTON-ST   | 11FEB49 |
| P/MSL 21 | GT-HAMPTON-ST   | 18FEB52 |
| P/MSL 22 | GT-HAMPTON-ST   | 27FEB56 |
| P/MSL 23 | GOOCH-ST        | 22MAR56 |
| P/MSL 24 | HANDSWORTH      | c1832   |
| P/MSL 25 | HOCKLEY-HILL    | 22MAR56 |
| P/MSL 26 | ICKNIELD-ST     | 27FEB56 |
| P/MSL 27 | LADYWOOD        | 23FEB55 |
| P/MSL 28 | LANCASTER-ST    | 15AUG43 |
| P/MSL 29 | LANCASTER-ST    | 6AUG50  |
| P/MSL 30 | LANCASTER-ST    | 11DEC51 |
| P/MSL 31 | LANCASTER-ST    | 22MAR56 |
| P/MSL 32 | LANCASTER-ST    | 22MAR56 |
| P/MSL 33 | LOZELLS         | 15JUL56 |
| P/MSL 34 | OLDBURY         | c1832   |
| P/MSL 35 | OLDBURY         | 14JAN50 |
| P/MSL 36 | SAND-PITS       | 15AUG43 |

BIRMINGHAM (Continued)

|          |                        |         |
|----------|------------------------|---------|
| P/MSL 37 | SAND-PITS              | 22MAR56 |
| P/MSL 38 | SUMMER LANE            | 28APR57 |
| P/MSL 39 | WELLINGTON RD          | 16OCT45 |
| P/MSL 40 | WELLINGTON<br>ROAD     | 22MAR57 |
|          | <u>BRIDGNORTH</u>      |         |
| P/MSL 41 | LOW-TOWN               | 1JAN57  |
|          | <u>BRIERLEY HILL</u>   |         |
| P/MSL 42 | BRIERLEY<br>HILL       | c1819   |
| P/MSL 43 | BROCKMOOR              | 13JAN57 |
| P/MSL 44 | HART-ST                | 13JAN57 |
|          | <u>BURTON ON TRENT</u> |         |
| P/MSL 45 | HORNINGLOW-ST          | 15DEC55 |
| P/MSL 46 | NEW-ST                 | 15DEC55 |
|          | <u>COVENTRY</u>        |         |
| P/MSL 47 | BISHOP-ST              | 1JAN55  |
| P/MSL 48 | HILL-FIELD             | 20AUG47 |
| P/MSL 49 | JORDAN-WELL            | 20AUG47 |
| P/MSL 50 | PARK-ST                | 24JAN49 |
| P/MSL 51 | PARK-ST                | 10MAY56 |
| P/MSL 52 | SPON-END               | 1JAN55  |

DERBY

P/MSL 53 BROOK-ST 31MAY49

KNOWLE

P/MSL 54 KNOWLE c1830

LEAMINGTON

P/MSL 55 LEAMINGTON 14MAR40

P/MSL56 SOUTH-PARADE 20AUG47

P/MSL 57 SOUTH  
PARADE 16MAR57

P/MSL 58 MUSEUM  
UPPER PARADE c1840

P/MSL 59 UPPER PARADE  
LEAMINGTON 8APR40

P/MSL 60 UPPER  
PARADE 16MAR57

P/MSL 60A UPPER PARADE - see illustration c1855

LEICESTER

P/MSL 61 WATERLOO-ST 1OCT50

STAFFORD

P/MSL62 FOREGATE 1JAN55

SUTTON COLDFIELD

P/MSL 63 SUTTON  
COLDFIELD c1832

TIPTON

P/MSL 64 OCKER-HILL 27MAR55

TIPTON (Continued)

|          |              |         |
|----------|--------------|---------|
| P/MSL 65 | TIPTON       | c1830   |
| P/MSL 66 | TIPTON-GREEN | 10MAY56 |
| P/MSL 67 | TIVIDALE     | 27MAR55 |

WARWICK

|          |         |         |
|----------|---------|---------|
| P/MSL 68 | WEST-ST | 25MAR55 |
|----------|---------|---------|

WEDNESBURY

|          |            |       |
|----------|------------|-------|
| P/MSL 69 | WEDNESBURY | c1836 |
|----------|------------|-------|

WEST BROMWICH

|          |         |       |
|----------|---------|-------|
| P/MSL 70 | HIGH-ST | OCT52 |
|----------|---------|-------|

|          |           |         |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| P/MSL 71 | SPON-LANE | 20OCT48 |
|----------|-----------|---------|

|          |                  |       |
|----------|------------------|-------|
| P/MSL 72 | WEST<br>BROMWICH | c1830 |
|----------|------------------|-------|

WOLVERHAMPTON

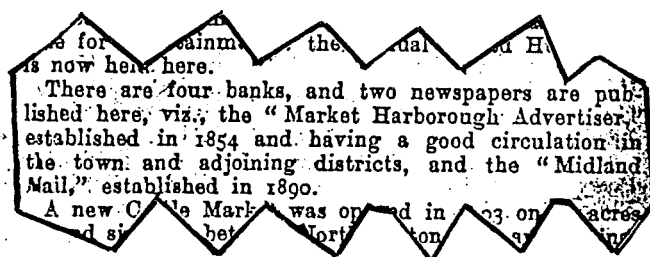
|          |              |        |
|----------|--------------|--------|
| P/MSL 73 | BILSTON ROAD | 5OCT55 |
|----------|--------------|--------|

|          |                |         |
|----------|----------------|---------|
| P/MSL 74 | HORSLEY-FIELDS | 15NOV54 |
|----------|----------------|---------|

|          |               |         |
|----------|---------------|---------|
| P/MSL 75 | MONMORE-GREEN | 20FEB55 |
|----------|---------------|---------|

WORCESTER

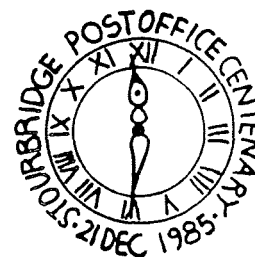
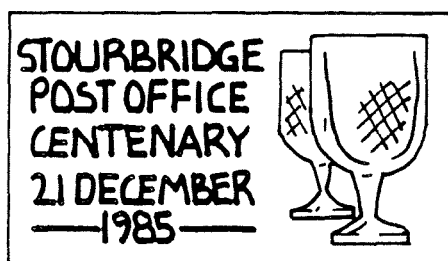
|          |             |        |
|----------|-------------|--------|
| P/MSL 76 | CORN-MARKET | 4JAN49 |
|----------|-------------|--------|

Tailpiece

From a Kelly's Directory of 1916 - and  
you thought our first issue was in 1975

The Stourbridge Post Office Centenary

It is hoped that you will receive with this number of 'Midland Mail' one of the special postcards sponsored by the Society for the centenary of the 'new' main post office at Stourbridge cancelled with the special 21st December postmark. In 'another publication' you will have seen illustrations of rejected preliminary designs for British postage stamps but it is doubted that you have ever seen preliminary designs for a special postmark. The examples shown, reproduced by kind permission of the Post Office, feature the town's connection with the crystal glass industry, its town clock cast in iron by John Bradley Ltd and its noteworthy park gates.

The Next Issue

'Midland Mail' will appear again in March. While it may be inviting trouble to forecast its contents, there will certainly be more information about Mr Geoff Oxley's forthcoming display to the Society and, less certainly, more about possible routes for mail from Norwich and Yarmouth to the Midlands. There are some interesting extracts from newspapers of 1785 celebrating the new mailcoaches and a new book list from Ted Heath to bring us right up to date. In the meantime, please don't forget to look out a few lots for the Annual Auction.

