



# MIDLAND MAIL

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



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Number 35, May 1984

### The Jon Baker Trophy

The introduction of an annual award for the best article submitted to 'Midland Mail' is an excellent idea in itself. That it should be known as the 'Jon Baker Trophy' is particularly fortunate for it will serve as a permanent tribute to a most popular member of the Society, still sadly missed by those who knew him. Jon would probably have derived wry amusement from it himself: the early 'Bulletins' are replete with urgent appeals from the Editor for articles and literary contributions from the members - a plea that more often than not fell on deaf ears. If we can make amends in the years ahead, Jon's solicitations will not have been in vain.

### Subscriptions

Yes, it is annual subscription time again. Happily, there is no increase in the sub to report and £3-50 must be less in real terms than it was a year ago. The difference this time is that we have a new Honorary Treasurer whose name and address appear above. As members who attended the AGM will know, Peter Baxter has stepped down after some nine years distinguished service and Trevor will regard it as a matter of honour that he has at least as many paid-up members this year as last. Please don't disappoint him.

Our membership still hovers around the 50 mark. We really ought to be able to double it.

The March Meeting

It was no surprise that a return visit of the renowned Martin Willcocks attracted another good attendance of 18 members and friends at Dr Johnson House on 3rd March. On his previous visit, Mr Willcocks had displayed an outstanding mixed bag of postal history. This time, he was able to display an equally outstanding collection of a single subject - Registered Mail.

The first half of the afternoon was devoted almost entirely to British registered mail. We were told that registration of mail being sent overseas had begun in the 1780s and that the first handstamp for registered mail found in the archives dates from 1805. The first registered item we were shown was from none other than the famous Lord Byron and the term for 'registered' was in English, Italian and French. We saw the mysterious 'F.O.' in dots which appeared to replace a 'registered' handstamp and this was followed by covers with the curved 'registered over crown' in red and black ink. Inland registration began in 1841 and we were shown early registered letters with 1d blacks and 2d blues, not to mention a registered 2d Mulready. These were followed by examples of the green and white wrappers for early registered letters, embossed stamps on registered letters, the Liverpool registered 'spoon' and the 'R5' of the Lombard Street office. Most unusual was a registered newspaper, the explanation being that it was required as evidence in a court case.

Mr Willcocks strayed from Great Britain for a moment to show us the likely German origin of orange registered labels which were probably derived from German parcel labels. Then we saw in profusion the early British 'R' in an oval labels used on registered parcels but including an example of their use on an envelope rather than a parcel. There were many examples of early postal stationery with the 'R' incorporated in the envelope design but of particular interest were the privately issued registered labels that preceded the official introduction of such items in 1907. We saw registered envelopes from various exhibitions, some inevitably philatelic but certainly not the large registered envelope from the 1924 British Empire Exhibition which originally contained admission tickets. The registered letters we were shown addressed to the Crimea probably represented the earliest army registered mail and these were followed by registered telegrams and week-end telegrams, registered parcels, registered Ocean Letters, registered mail sent by diplomatic bag, Post Office internal registration - in fact, anything and everything that could be registered seemed to be represented. A particularly interesting section was that devoted to special registration labels used by the Inland Revenue, Public Trustee and various government ministries and, in similar vein,

were the 'Army Official' and 'IR Official' stamps used on registered letters. Rounding off the first half of the display were registered items from Ireland and Scotland, the latter including the scarce experimental Scottish tripartite labels with tear-off sections.

After members had been given a chance to examine the vast array of British material in more detail, Mr Willcocks explained that the second half of his display would be primarily concerned with registered mail in foreign countries. But, before launching us on a world tour, he showed us the interesting 'crown Registered' marks of 1836-40 which were used on mail coming into this country from overseas (largely from Prussia), at some packet stations and, quite exceptionally, on the Coln-Verviers TPO.

One can do little more than hint at the range of foreign registered mail we were shown. It came from the early German States, the Americas, Italian States, Tannu Tuva (yes, really), France, Russia, the Australian States, British East Africa, India, Tonga, Nepal, Austria, Canada, Panama, Colombia etc etc etc. Registered letters from the German inflation period were spectacular but we were reminded with appropriate material that Russian inflation at the time of the revolution was no less severe. Indian registered letters had a nice range of handstamps while registration in the United States began as a private service and operated as such for about ten years up to 1855. South American countries often had adhesive registered stamps and enormous seals on registered letters suggesting a degree of mistrust between them verging on the obsessive. There were registered letter cards, registered newspaper wrappers, registered samples - registered anything that you care to name.

It remained for Frank Peach to thank Mr Willcocks for visiting the Society a second time. It is to be hoped that the obvious interest and enthusiasm of the members will persuade him to return to Birmingham again and again. We had had a tremendous afternoon.

### The April Meeting

Last year's Annual General Meeting and Auction were held in one of the smaller meeting rooms at Dr Johnson House and seemed crowded. This year's meeting on 14th April was in a very much larger room and the attendance (14) appeared almost sparse but was, in fact, little different. As usual, the AGM proceedings were conducted with commendable speed.

In her Chairman's report, Elizabeth Lewis described the past season as

probably the most successful the Society had enjoyed, marred only by the sad news of the death of Jon Baker. The competition had again been a great success with Denis Salt winning for the third time. She thanked the committee for their efforts and commented that the only thing the Society had failed to do so far was to publish any combined research. It was hoped that the new attempt to list the Midland undated circular handstamps would rectify this omission.

In his report, the Secretary supported the Chairman's assessment and said he had found it a most enjoyable year with several very good displays. The Treasurer confirmed that the finances were in good shape, an end-of-season balance of £156 representing almost a year's expenditure. He was recommending that the subscription remain unchanged and, with everything ship-shape, he had decided it was now time for him to retire from the post. The Editor reported that the new title of 'Midland Mail' had been adopted for The Bulletin and that the five issues of the past year had contained an average of 18 pages.

Before proceeding with further business, Elizabeth referred to the many years that Peter Baxter had served the Society as Honorary Treasurer and to the skill with which he had conserved our limited finances. On behalf of the Society, she was delighted to present him with a framed antique print of Birmingham suitably inscribed on the reverse.

The election of officers presented no controversy. Trevor Clewley had offered to take over the Treasurer's mantle and was welcomed with alacrity before he could change his mind. The others of the 'gang of four' agreed to remain at their posts.

The Chairman then proposed that two new trophies be instituted. The 'Jon Baker Trophy' would be awarded each September to the member who, in the opinion of the Committee, had submitted the best article to 'Midland Mail'. A second trophy would be introduced into the Annual Competition for the best entry of post-1840 material. Readers may recall that the need for such a trophy had been raised by Mr Chester in the last issue of 'Midland Mail'. He also made the point at this meeting that the Society should have competition rules and it was agreed that the proposal would be reconsidered at the next committee meeting.

Chris Beaver asked if the 'Midland Mail' were sent to such as The Postal History Society and the BPF and it was thought reasonable that this

should be done for a trial period of a year to assess the response. The business concluded, the meeting settled down to the keenly awaited Society Auction which is now run with exemplary efficiency by three-quarters of the Committee - and Eric. There were too many unsold lots but the overall result could be considered quite satisfactory and the Society benefited to the tune of about £36. Unaudited realisations were as follows:

|   |        |    |        |    |        |    |       |    |       |
|---|--------|----|--------|----|--------|----|-------|----|-------|
| A | 60p    | 1  | £1     | 34 | £1     | 56 | 40p   | 74 | £1    |
| B | £4-00  | 8  | £4-50  | 36 | 50p    | 57 | 60p   | 75 | £3-20 |
| C | £2-60  | 10 | £4     | 39 | £7     | 60 | £2-40 | 76 | £3-80 |
| D | 80p    | 12 | £6     | 41 | £7     | 61 | £2-50 | 77 | £3-40 |
| E | £1-60  | 14 | £8-50  | 42 | £5-60  | 62 | £3-20 | 78 | £1    |
| F | £3-00  | 17 | £17-50 | 43 | £4-50  | 64 | £1    | 79 | £2-50 |
| G | £1-50  | 19 | £4-50  | 44 | £1-40  | 65 | £5    | 81 | £2    |
|   |        | 21 | £17-50 | 45 | £15-50 | 66 | £12   | 82 | £1-50 |
|   | £14-10 | 26 | £2     | 47 | £1-80  | 67 | £8-50 | 83 | £2-40 |
|   |        | 27 | £1-50  | 49 | 60p    | 69 | £10   | 89 | £6    |
|   |        | 29 | £2     | 50 | £3-20  | 70 | £15   |    |       |
|   |        | 32 | £6-20  | 52 | £5     | 72 | £1    |    |       |
|   |        | 33 | £1     | 55 | £1-30  | 73 | £2    |    |       |

Lot numbers not listed above failed to attract a bid or did not reach their reserve price.

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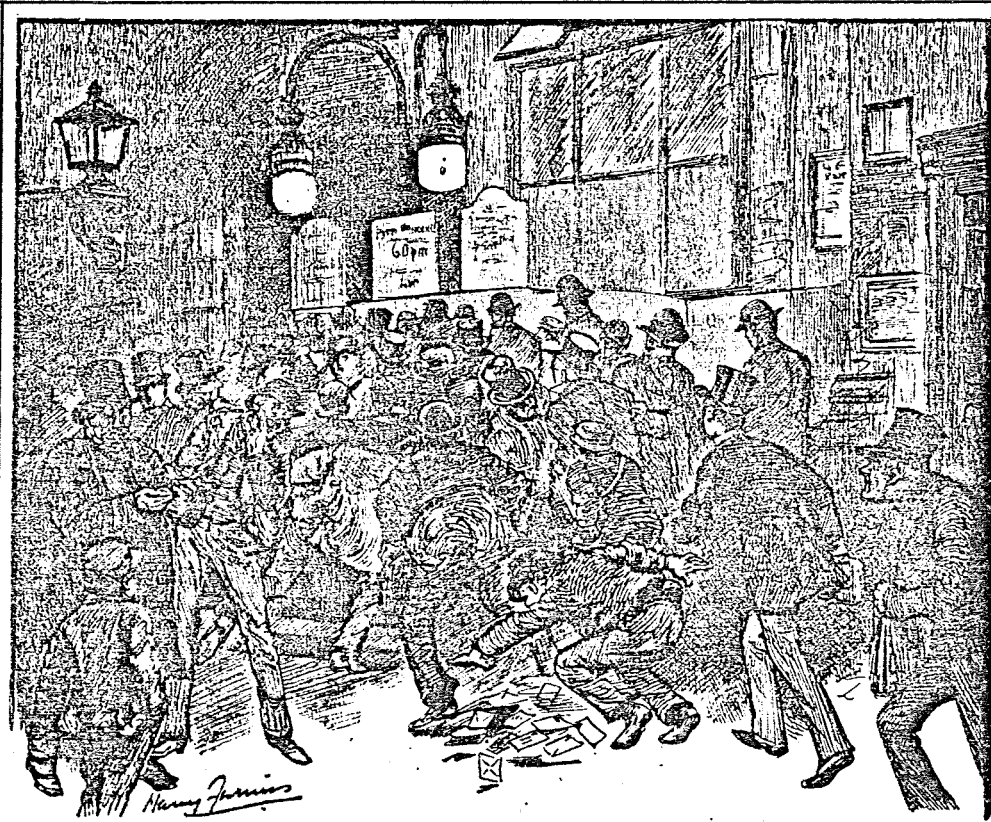
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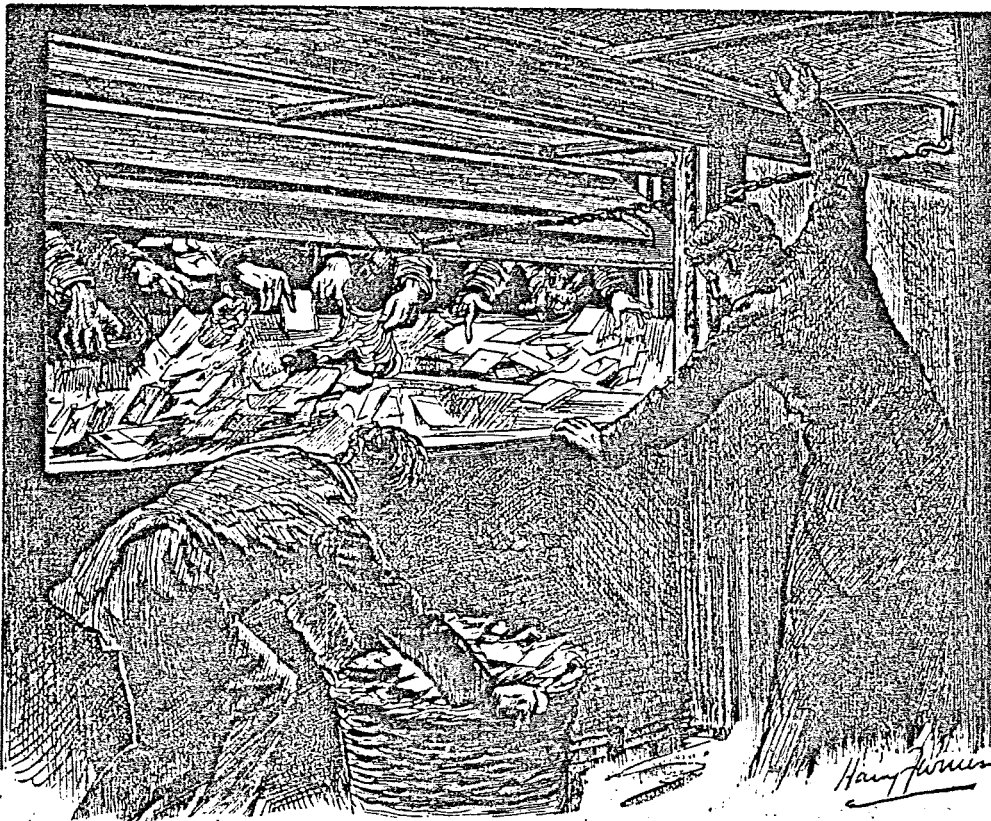
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Typical Scenes at Six o'clock at the General Post Office in London in 1883

Harry Furniss' famous illustrations for an article that appeared in The English Illustrated Magazine in 1883. (Kindly lent by Elizabeth and Eric Lewis.



SIX O'CLOCK AT THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE—OUTSIDE.  
From a Drawing by HARRY FURNISS.



SIX O'CLOCK AT THE GENERAL POST-OFFICE—INSIDE.  
From a Drawing by HARRY FURNISS.

WHATEVER BECAME OF BILSTON ?A Question of Fleurons.

by the Reverend Christopher M. Beaver

Rather less than three miles from Wolverhampton to the north-west and the same distance from Wednesbury to the south-east, surrounded by the remains of collieries, quarries and iron-works, Bilston manages to retain the air of a proudly independent small industrial town. There are buildings that show it flourished in the age of the mailcoach.

'Midland Mailers' will be familiar with two facts. In 1793, the citizens of Bilston and Halesowen reacted so strongly against Receiving Houses 8 and 9 (or 9 and 8) of the Birmingham Penny Post that each was<sup>1</sup> allowed to revert to an unofficial local post before the end of that year. Then, in the mid-1820s, Bilston (with Leamington, Woore and a few more distant offices) had the distinction of being issued with a 'Fleuron' handstamp similar to those sent abroad for use at Packet Stations. All these Fleuron stamps were apparently issued in the period 1823-26, none being recorded in the Steel Impression Books after September 1826. Post Office Archives have so far yielded no clue to account for this peculiarity.

As if deliberately to intrigue the inquisitive, a discrepancy is evident between an assertion in 'England's Postal History' that the places which had fleuron stamps "were Penny Post sub-offices"<sup>2</sup> and the hesitant note in the standard catalogue beneath No.346, "This English use by a few sub-offices probably was connected with the Penny Posts but until more details are known they are listed as Town handstamps".<sup>3</sup> That leaves the way open for a fresh discussion, offered in the hope that others will provide supportive or contradictory evidence and spot any flaws in the reasoning:

1. New post town stamps between 1801 and 1827 include the mileage from London.

2. From 1804, many, but by no means all, new post town stamps were dated; most others were not, though many lesser places with an undated stamp did have the mileage (their own or that of their post town). The decision that all post towns, and all other offices with an annual revenue of £1000 and over, should have dated stamps was not made until 1837.

3. All English fleurons were undated and the decoration, in effect, took the place of the mileage included on other concurrent circular stamps, the intention being to ensure an even strike without spreading out the lettering.

4. Only 14 English fleurons and 1 Welsh are recorded, all (it appears) issued between 1823 and 1826, nearly all of them rare or worse.<sup>4</sup> Others could exist, especially if issued before the Steel Impression Books began in January 1825.

5. From about August 1827, double arc circles (or, much less commonly, single arc circles) were normally issued. Soon the double arc became 'standard' probably because it was suitable for long and short names, dated and undated, varying only in the length of the arcs. For lesser offices, straight line namestamps continued as an alternative to the circular undated types until 1840.

6. The last five fleurons were sent, in 1826, for use at newly-opened 'country' offices of the Liverpool Penny Post: Bootle, Crosby, Seacombe, Upton (not recorded in use) and Woodside.

7. Of the others, only Leamington seems to have been in an official penny post (Warwick) at the relevant period. Corsham was a 5th Clause receiving office of Chippenham. Broadstairs and St. Peter's were penny post offices later: on the 1823 map<sup>5</sup>, a footpost links their post towns, Margate and Ramsgate, through the area and Broadstairs is marked to indicate that there is an office there. None of the others has a known connection with an official penny post. Polperro is shown at the end of a ride from Lostwithiel in Cornwall and Clynog is shown on the ride from Caernarvon to Pwllheli. Two (apart from Bilston) were on major mailcoach routes and both were staging posts to judge from the distances involved: Sleaford, a post town in Lincolnshire, on the London - Hull road through Barton-on-Humber, and Woore in Shropshire, a sub post town of Stafford, on the London - Chester road.

8. There is thus apparent inconsistency in the status of those smaller offices which had fleuron rather than straight line stamps; they range from a post town to receiving offices of several kinds. It cannot be assumed that Bilston must have been a 'Penny Post sub-office' without positive evidence.

So, what more can be deduced about the postal history of Bilston without extensive research in the archives? By the beginning of 1793 it already had a General Post receiving office under Birmingham on both the

London to Shrewsbury and Birmingham to Manchester routes.<sup>6</sup> In 1807, it is included in a list of places served by the London - Shrewsbury Mail but the Birmingham - Manchester Mail, which also went through Wolverhampton, now went through Walsall instead of Wednesbury and so did not directly serve Bilston.<sup>7</sup>

In 1828 the office was located in Lichfield Street, Isabella Jackson named as postmistress, and times are given for the Birmingham - Liverpool as well as the London - Shrewsbury - Holyhead mailcoaches.<sup>8</sup> In addition, there is mention of a 'messenger to meet the North Mail' at Wolverhampton, i.e. the Bristol - Birmingham - Manchester cross post, in both directions. In 1833 Willenhall, two miles north-east, became the only recorded receiving office of the Bilston Penny Post (among others). The next year, a commercial directory<sup>9</sup> indicates that all these arrangements continued and, in addition, a 'postman' was sent from Bilston 'every morning' to Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Walsall, returning every evening. Like the other unofficial post which does not appear among the full Wolverhampton details, this is mentioned only under Bilston. The charges are not recorded. By this time, as a result of a petition from the inhabitants to the Postmaster General, Bilston had in fact been made a post town. The Wolverhampton Chronicle, recording the date of this as August 7th 1829, ambiguously states "Bilston has now the advantage of a regular post office establishment". 'Regular' must mean 'according to the rules' rather than 'at predictable times'. One advantage would be free delivery within the town instead of having to call at the office or pay for the service: the implication is that Bilston had not previously been a sub post town and there is no evidence it had ever been made a penny post receiving office. The chief advantage may have been independence of bigger neighbours ! What the change of status did not mean was that local arrangements made to avoid official postal charges, whether by the postmasters themselves or others, were eliminated. The Post Office never did link Bilston properly into the penny post system, before or after 1829. Evidence given to the Select Committee on Postage in the late '30s makes it plain that, throughout the Black Country, ways continued to be found of undercutting many of the services that were officially established.<sup>10</sup> Many people used only the rival carriers though, by then, there were many penny posts and, for example, a special 2d rate on the frequent General Post service between Walsall and Birmingham (8 miles).

The three letters illustrate the Bilston story. The first, of 1811, (see Figure 1 on the next page) shows a straight line stamp without mileage in use in the unofficial local post to Wolverhampton, carried by a messenger for 1d.

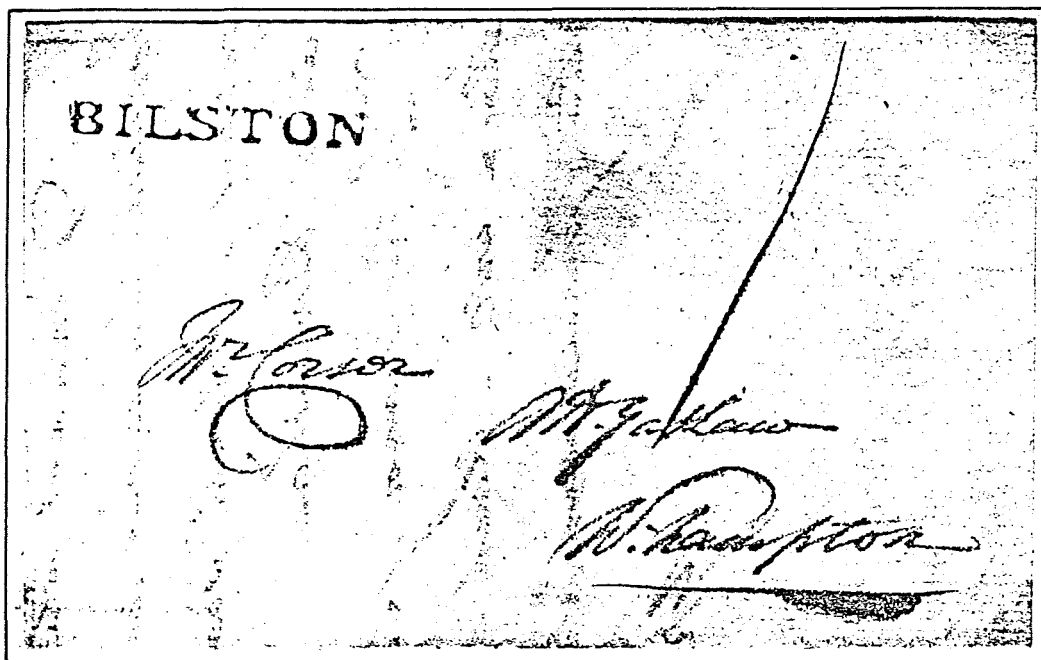


Figure 1.

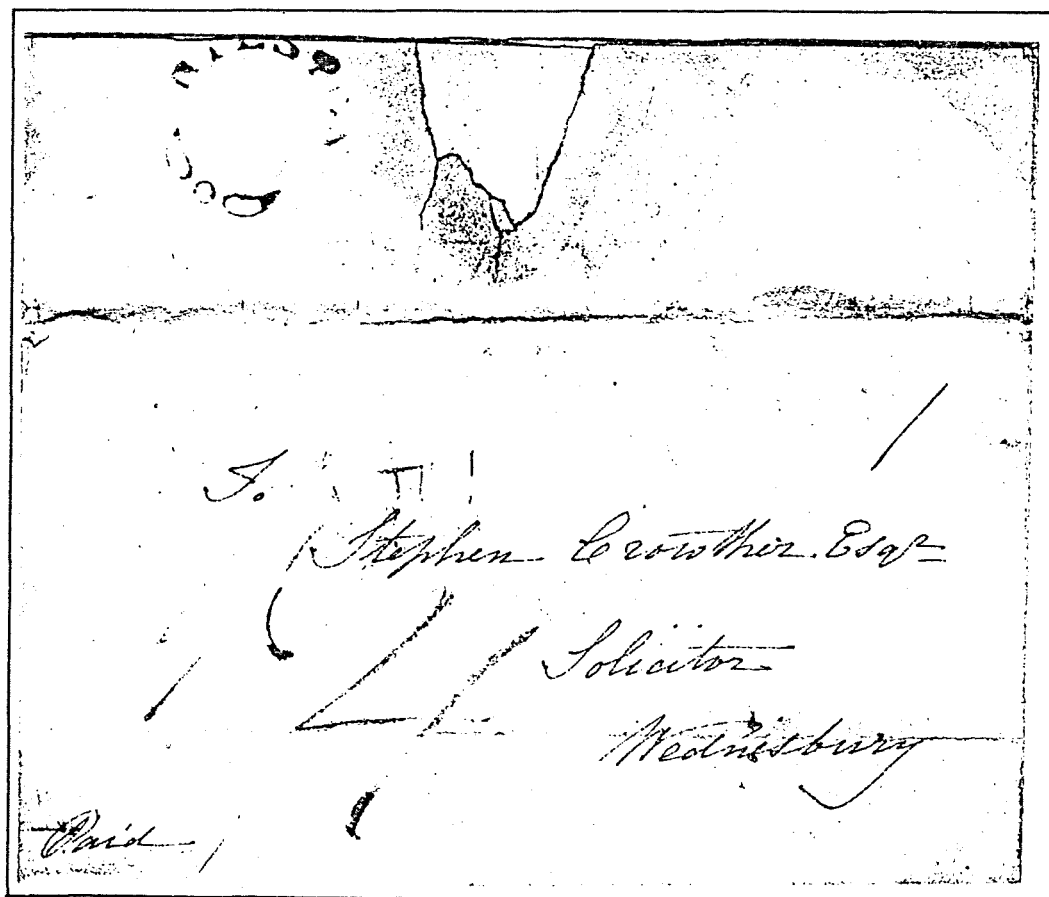


Figure 2.

The fleuron of 1826 (see Figure 2 above), it is assumed, was carried directly on the mailcoach the 3 miles to Wednesbury and charged the minimum GP rate of 4d. There is no connection here between a fleuron stamp and a penny post and no indication of it having passed through Woverhampton, the nearest post town.

In 1834 an undated double arc stamp was in use (see Figure 3 on the next page.) The letter will have passed through Wednesbury and Birmingham

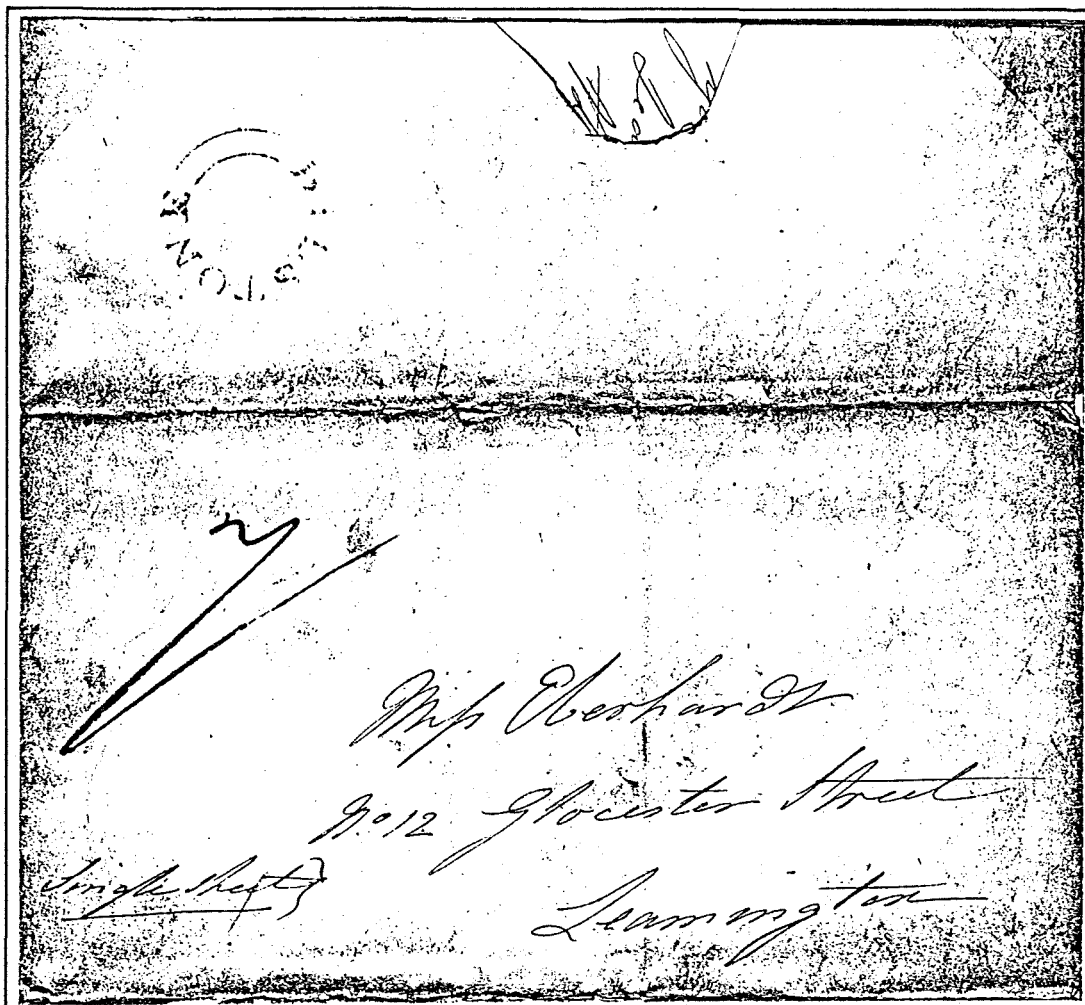


Figure 3.

but, as Bilston was by now a post town itself, no further stamp was struck.

Finally, can we draw a conclusion about 'English' fleurons in general ? On the evidence adduced, the doubt must be firmly expressed that there is any more significance in their distribution than there is in the variety of their design - one 'leaf', two 'leaves' or two 'leaves' on each side of a 'bud', some very much smaller than others.

#### References:

1. Willcocks 'England's Postal History', p87-88. Cary 'Principal Post and Sub-Post Towns', dated January 1st 1793, shows Bilston as a Receiving Office of Birmingham, Hales Owen as a Sub-Post town. Post 40 contains correspondence concerning the controversy.
2. Willcocks op. cit., p52.
3. Willcocks and Jay 'The Postal History of Great Britain and Ireland' 1st and 2nd editions, p19.
4. As ref 3; Willcocks op. cit. p89; Oxley 'The English Provincial Local Posts' refs to type 7. (The 'Rarity Guide' indicates Corbridge was type 8) - no evidence given for use of Davenham fleuron (a R.H. of Northwich P.P. from

1837). The known use of Woore's fleuron is as late as 1839-48 but no P.P. in which that might have been used cf County Catalogue 2. The British fleurons in the Steel Impression Books (all in Volume 1) are:-  
 Davenham & Leamington 29 Dec 1825, Woodside 22 Jun 1826, Upton 30 Jun 1826 and Bootle, Crosby & Seacombe 25 Sep 1826.

5. The 'Circulation of Letters', 1823 map, PO Archives 10A.16.
6. 'Universal British Directory', 1793.
7. Willcocks op. cit., plate 19.
8. Pigot & Co. 'National Commercial Directory', Staffordshire section for 1828-29.
9. White 'Directory of Staffordshire', 1834.
10. 'Royal Mail in Staffordshire' (Staffordshire Education Dept. Local History Source Book G.18) p32-33: Evidence given in 1838 by a Walsall ironmonger - "Letters are delivered up to 14 miles away for 1d. I know 12 such carriers personally. They do not advertise that they carry letters but everyone understands that they do. I never think of using the post. The reason is entirely the high cost of postage." (Abbreviation of oral answers in interview for the Select Committee on Postage.)

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## G.B. COVERS

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### The Postal History Society

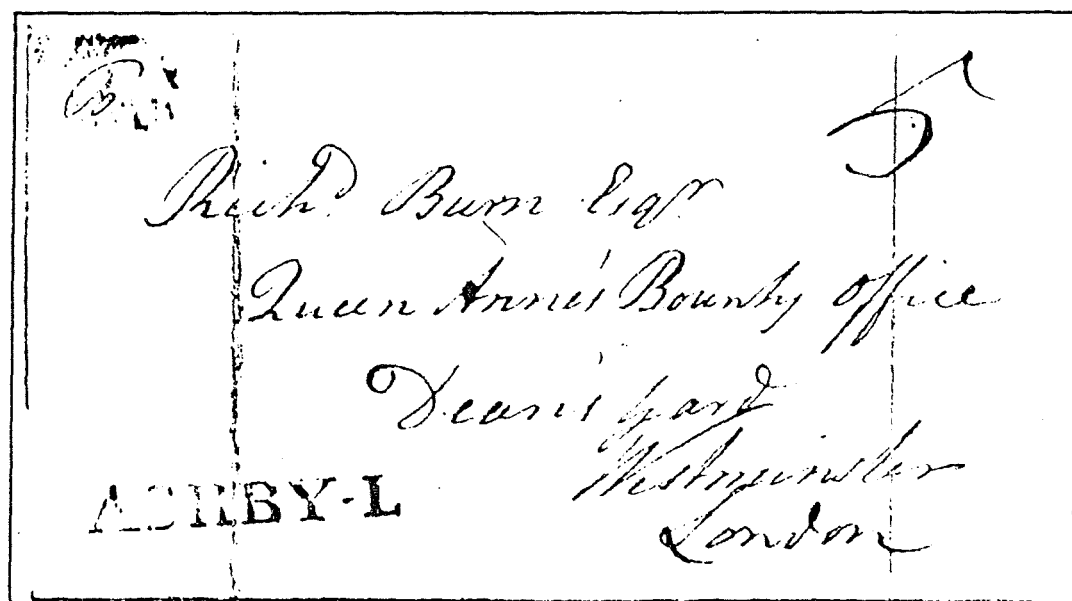
Members of The Postal History Society are reminded that there will be a meeting at Northampton on Saturday 19th May arranged by Mr Michael Champness. The subject of the members' displays will be 'Midlands Postal History'.

ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH

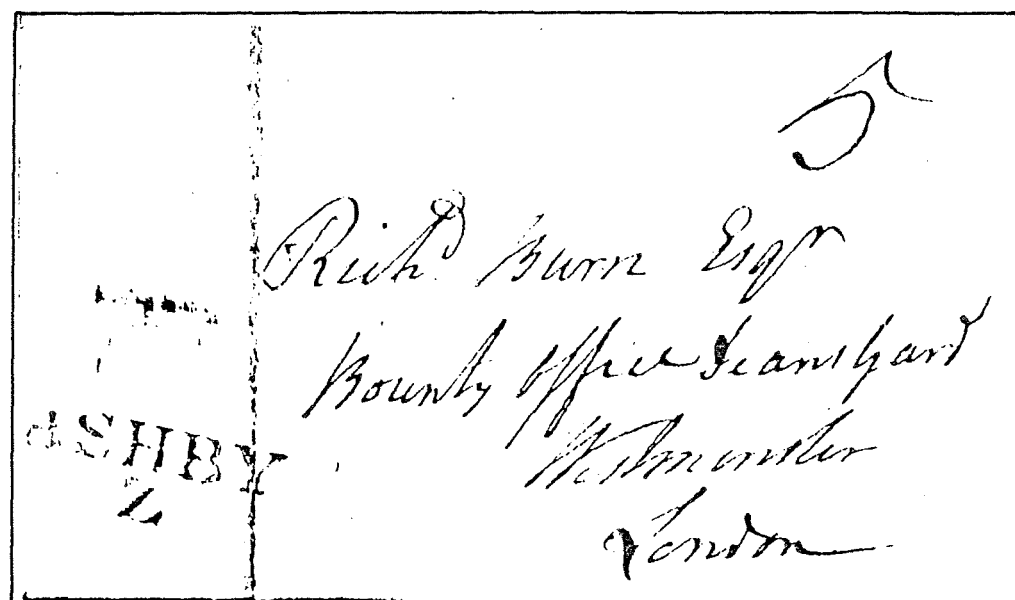
John Soer writes:

"Members who attended the meeting in January, at which I gave a display of Ashby-de-la Zouch material, may remember that I said it was possible that a handstamp was issued to Ashby before the well known ASHBY/Z mark. I based this comment on the fact that a letter in P.O.Archives, written in 1812, seemed to indicate that the stamping of letters at Ashby commenced when an established post office was opened there in November 1794.

Subscribers to the Robson Lowe auction catalogues may have noticed the straight line ASHBY-L mark, on an entire of 1795, in the catalogue for March 13th. It is likely that this handstamp was only used for a little over a year since, in January 1796, the ASHBY/Z handstamp was supplied, in error, when a seal was ordered. All of the letters (seven) I have seen which were sent from Ashby in the period 1796-1801 carried the ASHBY/Z mark. I wonder why the postmistress preferred the ASHBY/Z to the 'authorised version' ?"



15th October  
1796

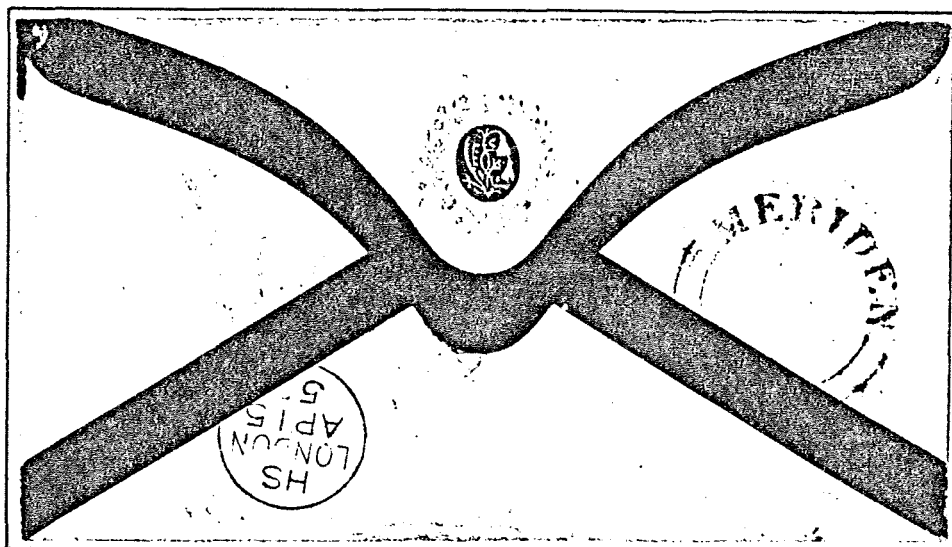


### Calling all Dockwras

Martin Willcocks has asked anyone with pre-1794 London Penny Post letters bearing 'Dockwra' type handstamps to assist with an important bit of research by noting the name of the receiver written in manuscript on the back. Please list the office letter in the 'Dockwra' stamp, the date, the name written on the back and the place heading the letter and send the information to Mr A.J.Kirk, 123 Benhill Road, Camberwell, London SE5 7LZ. If the date or place are unknown, please still send the other information and, if you cannot read something, let Mr Kirk have a photocopy. When a register has been constructed, it will help to identify where many letters were posted that have no heading.

### Late Use of the Double Arc UDC

Ian May is thanked for the illustration below of another double arc UDC that remained in use until 1859 - Meriden, Warwickshire.



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Once again, Ted Heath has provided all the information for this item.

- BEITH Richard 'Yorkshire Air Mails' Sheffield. Yorkshire Postal History Society (Special Series No.5) 76 pages, 117 illustrations, June 1983 £4-00.
- BRIGGS Daniel 'Bristol Post Office in the Age of Rowland Hill, 1837-64' Historical Association (Bristol Branch), Dept of History, Wills Memorial Building, Queen's Rd, Bristol BS8 1RJ. 22 pages, 4 illus. Aug 83 £0-90p.
- BRISTOW Maurice H. 'Postal History of the Crystal Palace' London Postal History Group, 24 Dovercourt Rd, Dulwich, London SE22 8ST. 109 pages, £8-45
- COHEN Stanley F. 'Squared Circle Postmarks of the London Suburban District Offices'. Batley, Harry Hayes (Philatelic Study No.43) Illus. Unpriced.
- GOODBODY A.M. 'Introduction & Guide to the Travelling Post Offices of GB' 2nd revised edition. Railway Philatelic Group, Stablebeck, Grasmere, Ambleside LA22 9PX. 16 pages, 49 illustrations, April 1983, £1-00.
- GURNEY David 'The Channel Islands Sub-Post Offices & Their Postmarks' CISS Publishing, 63 Ravensbourne Gardens, Clayhall, Ilford. £11-00 post free.
- HASLAM D.G. & KIDD C. 'Lancashire & Cheshire Skeleton Handstamps, 1838-1982' From K.L.Hall, 8 Tor Avenue, Greenmount, Bury, Lancs. June 83. £3-00 post pd.

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**MICHAEL A. HARRIS, P.T.S., B.P.F.**  
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Leics. 1699 E.L. to Market Harborough showing m/s instruction 'per Lester bagg'. £38  
 1899 Reg. cover Loughborough to Colchester, Jubilee 1½d SG198. £7

Northants. 1785 E.L. to London. Superb "76 KETTER/ING", BCC 84. £87.50  
 1786 E.L. to Daventry. " "67 NORTH/AMPTON", BCC 128. £69

NOTTS. 1772 E.L. to Beaune, France. part two line 'NOTTING/HAM'. London "POST/PAID" in red. M/s 'Post Pd 4'. £15

WARWICKS/R. 1788 E.L. used from Gopsal to London. Superb strike of two line "ATHER/STONE". BCC WA 6. £60  
 1836 E. to 'Earl Fitzwilliam' Peterborough. V.fine clear strike of "Leamington/Penny Post". No.1 r/h. £32

Redirected Tailpiece

From the April 1984 list of a postal history dealer:

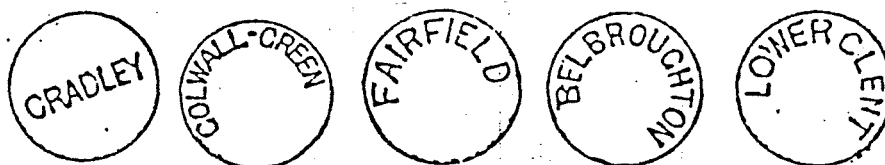
"1861 Notice of objection to St Andrew ....

Worcester CDS twice and m.s. 'gone no address' "

Chris Beaver, who spotted this delightful item, suggests that the writer might have tried St Peter via Broadstairs !

Undated Circular Marks of the Midlands

The first of the completed questionnaires on Undated Circular Marks has reached the Editor. The deadline of Friday 7th September may seem a long time ahead but it is all too simple to forget this little exercise during the sunny summer months and it might be a good idea to make a start NOW. Details are in 'Midland Mail' No.34 on page 18.

The Next Midland Mail

Members will have no 'Midland Mail' to sustain them through the summer months but it will re-appear in late August/early September in good time for the first meeting of the new season. The full programme for 1984/85 will be included in that issue but it is no secret that members will be asked to bring a 9 sheet display of 'Penny Posts' to Dr Johnson House in September. If you have a little time on your hands, you might like to pen an article for 'Midland Mail' or give your camera an airing. There are some promising photographic subjects - what about the bicentennial mailcoach run from Bristol to London ?

... or your local Victorian and Edwardian post boxes ? You could even win the 'Jon Baker Trophy'. See you in the autumn .....

Hon. Editor: John Calladine, Dunley House, Cranham. Gloucester GL4 8HQ

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

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together with many other members who have submitted letters, illustrations, covers and more minor items.