

MIDLAND MAIL



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



President: Richard Farman

Chairman
Derek Smeathers

Treasurer:
Elizabeth Lewis

Secretary
Mel Matthews

Number 132, November 2003

CONGRATULATIONS

The Birmingham Philatelic Society have awarded the **Manley Cup for Research** to **Eric Lewis** in recognition of the enormous amount of time and effort he has put into finding, researching, explaining, writing about and displaying the postal history of Birmingham to many societies in the Midlands. The Manley Cup is awarded on average once in a decade. Elizabeth Lewis received it in the 1990s and Stanley Cohen was presented with it in the 1980s for his book on "Squared Circles". The award this year was presented on 24th September by the visiting speaker, David Scott, who is a member of our society. Our warmest congratulations are due to Eric.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

The premises of Messrs Warwick & Warwick in Warwick will be the venue for the meeting on **15th November**, starting at 1.30 p.m. The afternoon will be devoted to members' displays of "*Oversize and Three Dimensional Material*". A topic which allows participants a great deal of scope.

Our annual visit to the Bass Museum, Burton-on-Trent takes place on **13th December**. The day starts at 10.30 a.m. with members' standing displays. Lunch will be at 12.30 p.m. The cost will be approximately the same as in previous years and if you would like to join us, please ring Richard Farman on 01283-566515 by 6th December. At 2.00 p.m. Frank Laycock will display "*The Postal History of Johore*".

On **10th January 2002**, we meet at Carrs Lane Church Centre. There will be a committee meeting at 11.00 a.m. The afternoon, starting at 1.30 p.m., will be devoted to members' one board displays on "*Undated Circles*".

THE ANNUAL AUCTION

This will be held on 17th April starting at 1.45 p.m. In order to distribute the catalogues in good time, particularly to our overseas members, it is necessary that lots are handed to Eric at either the meeting on 10th January or that on 7th February. Alternatively, they may be sent to Mrs E Lewis at 27 Rathbone Road, Smethwick B67 5JG by 14th February. Please include full descriptions together with estimated market values and your reserve price, or state that there is no reserve. A gift of surplus material that you may care give to sell for Society funds would be much appreciated. The money raised by the auction not only gives us an opportunity to dispose of surplus material or to acquire items for our collections, but also raises a valuable amount of money, so keeping subscriptions down. So please sort out those surplus items over the Christmas holiday, if not before then.

SOCIETY ENQUIRIES

For any enquiries, other than those about the auction or the library, would members please telephone our Secretary rather than Elizabeth or Eric. This particularly applies to enquiries about the location of meetings as Mel now has a stock of maps which also give details of public transport. Mel's telephone number is 0121 6898147.

THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

The fact that the 13th September was a glorious autumn day did not prevent an excellent turn out at a new venue - The Abbey Centre in Northampton. In the morning Brian White, the curator of the Nene Valley Railway Museum, gave a talk on "*The History of the TPO with Personal Reminiscences*". Brian began by saying that as a boy he had wanted to be an engine driver but his grandfather encouraged him to join the Post Office. After some years in the Post Office, he applied successfully for a position on a Travelling Post Office.

Brian's talk was illustrated by many slides, covering the TPO vehicles, inside and out, the exchange apparatus in operation, again inside the coach and by the lineside, and various documents used in the TPOs. One slide showed the interior of an early coach, actually one built by the LMS in 1938 to celebrate the centenary of the introduction of the TPOs. This vehicle had no heating, no sanitation and no refreshment facilities. It had a short wheel base and so would have given a rough ride. That the men managed to sort any letters must rank as a miracle.

The slides were punctuated by a number of amusing stories about incidents that occurred during Brian's time on the TPOs. Brian ended his talk by mentioning that the Nene Valley Railway have a TPO which has cost an enormous amount of money to restore. The applause at the end indicated how much Brian's talk had been enjoyed by those present.

After a good lunch, though perhaps a discrete veil should be drawn over one of the cheeses, it was time for the members to present their one board displays. John Bradnock began letters carrying the circular M/NR and E/NR marks (See MM46/8). A letter sent in 1868 from Gibraltar to Scotland but redirected to Herefordshire carried a circular C&G/RPO mark. John ended with a card posted in a TPO but on which the late fee had not been paid.

Among the items shown by Eric Lewis were the 1st and 2nd types of Paid Parcel Post Labels used by the GWR. Also of note was a letter posted at Derby station at 11 p.m. Prior to 1891, the railways were not allowed to carry letters. The sender had got round this regulation by tying string around the letter and sending it as a parcel.

In addition to a LNWR 9d Parcel Stamp on a large piece Paul Bradshaw showed us some of the stamps used in the parcels service provided by the Northampton Corporation Tramways.

Michael Champness (How good it was to see him again venturing up from the west.) produced penny black covers showing the numbers applied to letters carried on the train between Manchester and Liverpool. There was an example of the missent mark of the GNR Post Office used in 1844 as well as examples of the handstamps applied by the mail guards on missent/misdirected letters. Of particular note were a number of wafer seals dating from c1860.

Bob Ricketts concentrated on the postmarks of Bletchley station. These included duplexes, cds and double circles. All of this was illustrated with postcards showing the post office.

The temporary datestamps used in the TPOs in 1986 when Proof House Junction in Birmingham was being remodelled necessitating the diversion of some trains were shown by Rick Martin. We also saw similar handstamps that were used when the lines at Crewe were altered.

Richard Farman began with a timetable of the Grand Junction Railway of 1st October 1838 - 22 minutes for 12 miles (about the same rate of travel provided by Southwest Trains in 2003). This was followed by the UDC of Whitmore Station, the double arc datestamp of Stoke-upon-Trent Station used in 1855. Richard also included parcels labels from the Shropshire Union, Midland and Great Western railways.

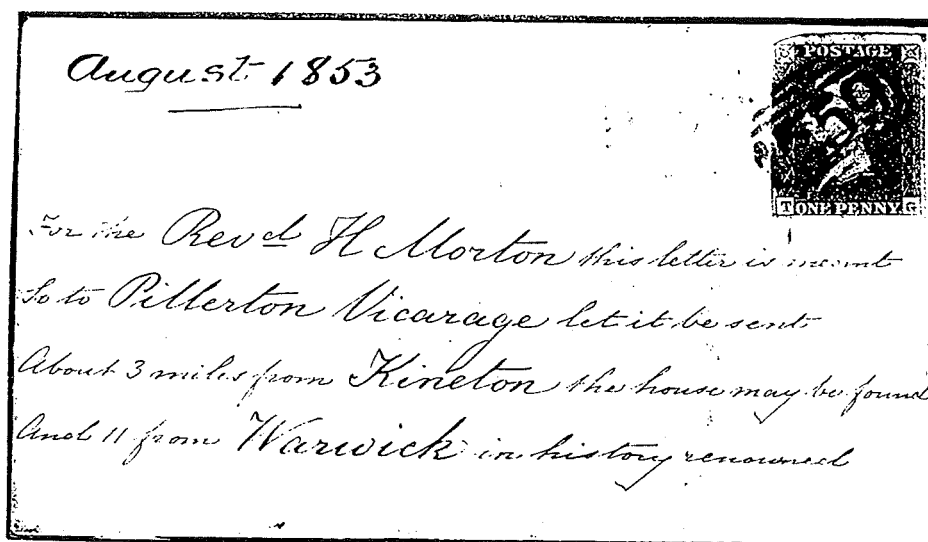
Twenty-five UDCs were issued to the sub-offices of Bromsgrove. Chris Jackson managed to show fourteen of these in twenty different colours. Two of the marks had not previously been recorded used.

Gerald Marriner also took not only a non-railway theme but went beyond the mainland of this country. In this case it was postage due material from Jersey. Gerald began with an 1858 manuscript surcharge and then went on to show a variety of surcharge handstamps, carefully explaining the reason for each deficiency in postage.

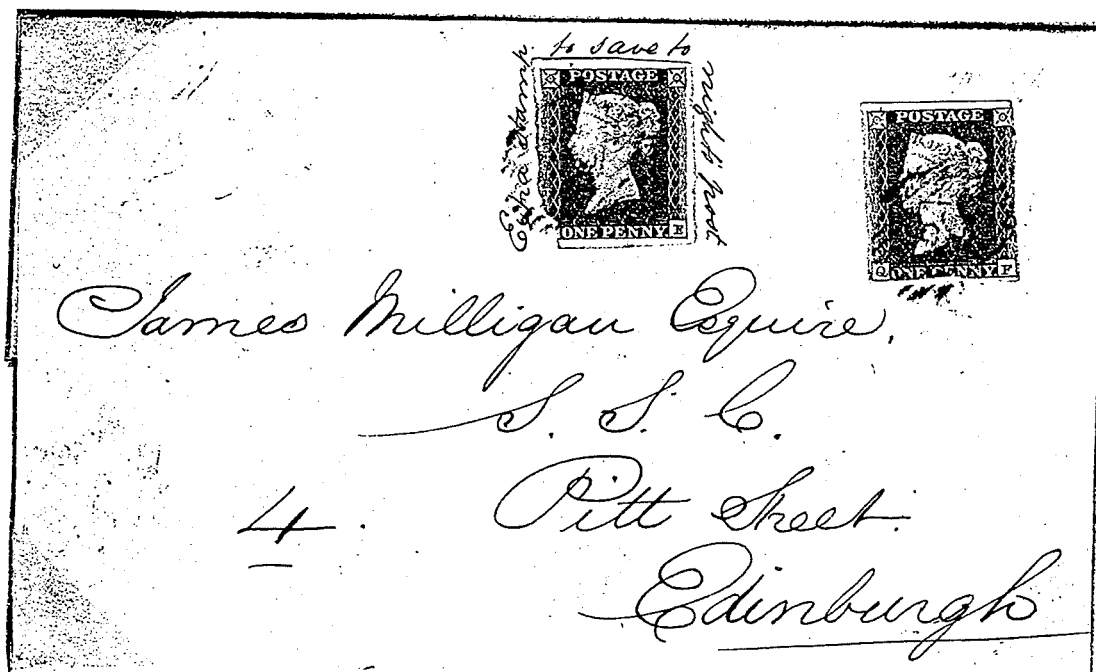
Our thanks are due to Derek Smeathers for arranging this meeting for us and allowing us to enjoy such a fascinating day. It was an excellent venue to which I imagine we shall return in the future.

My thanks are due to Eric Lewis who kindly provided photocopies of two items he showed at the September meeting.

A letter addressed in rhyme to Pillerton in Warwickshire.



A manuscript endorsement to ensure that the sorters realised the extra stamp was to cover a late fee for dispatch the same evening, rather than for an overweight letter.



Following repeated complaints that the Society had never been given a full display of 'Gloucestershire', the only Midland county not to have been shown, the conscripts duly appeared on Saturday 18th October. John Hine, our Gloucestershire County Editor, had travelled from Holland, while John Calladine, the warm-up act, had deserted rural Wiltshire for the day. The 'two Johns' were said to have much in common - a shared name, a previous existence in Gloucestershire and a noticeable shortage of hair. The venue for this Gloucestershire extravaganza was, once again, the Portland Road Philatelic Centre - alias 'The Hut'. It attracted no fewer than 23 members.

With so many post towns, it was inevitable that the strength of the displays would have to be in breadth rather than depth. It had been decided that the London mailcoach route from London to Gloucester would be the dividing line. John Hine would cover Gloucester, Cheltenham and all towns in the north of the county and would also include the towns beyond Gloucester and the River Severn, to the west of the River. This, the first display, was to be of the towns in the south of the county, mostly served through Cirencester or Stroud.

The largest section of this part of the display was from Wotton under Edge, a town on the Great Cross Post from 1799 but later by-passed by the Bristol-Birmingham mailcoaches. The various three-line stamps were well represented. Of greater significance were the straight line datestamps, with asterisk, from 1805/06 (of which two were shown) and the 1810 'WOTTON*G' mark. Wotton's most famous mark is undeniably its distinctive Maltese Cross and there were two examples cancelling penny blacks and another cancelling a 1d red-brown, all on entires.

Letters from Dursley, Berkeley and Thornbury - including a 1795 letter relating to Berkeley's notable Dr Jenner, the founder of modern vaccination practice - were followed by several more from Tetbury. The existence of a TEDBURY handstamp of 1721 appears inexplicable, as Tetbury was not a post town before the 1790s and other Gloucestershire marks from this period are almost unknown. The variation in postal routes in and out of Tetbury, via Cirencester or Chippenham, was discussed. This inevitably led to consideration of the mileage stamps at Dunkirk, where the later '103' mileage to London (again illustrated by two examples) was impossible by any postal route and completely at odds with mileage stamps from neighbouring offices. The first display was completed by items from Uley, Kingscote, Wickwar and Sodbury where the sad story of the submarine HMS Sunfish, for which Sodbury raised thousands of pounds, provided a suitable anti-climatic conclusion.

After a viewing break, we came to the star of the day, our Gloucestershire County Editor from the farthest reaches of the Netherlands. In explaining his philatelic background, John Hine produced the ultimate Freudian slip by claiming to have been born in 1840! (It might have seemed plausible, even probable, for the other John.) He began by showing a Stow in the Wold namestamp of 1791 and commented that no other Stow handstamp has been recorded before 1825. It was followed by a range of marks from Moreton in Marsh, occasionally rendered as 'Moreton in Mush' without apparent complaint. An 1840 letter was addressed to Wm Jauncey with the instruction that it was to be left at the Bartester gate, near Hereford. John identified the location and pointed out there was no office there but the absence of a Hereford stamp indicated the letter had indeed not been carried on to the city. There was a unique 'K91' numeral of Blockley found on a letter of 1896. Of the Campden (now Chipping Campden) items, the earliest was a letter to the area of 1705 with an annotation that it was to be carried in the Campden bag.

From north Gloucestershire, John moved to the route of the Gloucester mailcoach, although the first item, a 1735 2-line namestamp of Northleach was one of a number pre-dating the mailcoach era. An interesting recent discovery was an unrecorded boxed stamp of 1779, apparently an abbreviated 'N'Leach'. The mileage stamps of Frogmill (Inn) are the only stamps known from a post town that consisted of no more than the hostelry itself. After road improvements by Thomas Telford, Frogmill was sidelined and Andoversford took its place. From Andoversford, we were shown the first recorded usage of the Fossbridge UDC. Cheltenham was well represented by some twenty sheets. Notable were the early mark of 1742, the 'No.6' receiving house stamp, and the Cheltenham 'spoon' of 'hens teeth' scarcity. John commented on the odd italic numbered stamps, 'No. 4' and 'No. 5', issued long after Uniform Penny Postage and, in the case of No.5, shown used in 1842 and 1844. Marks from Winchcombe and Tewkesbury covered the period 1737 to 1838.

Inevitable there was much from Gloucester, including the earliest mark yet recorded, a 'GLOU/STER' of 1720. Considering the importance of Gloucester in the early post, it was surprising that this is the earliest known mark from the county. One noted the variations in the spelling of 'Gloucester' in the early namestamps. The 'mis-sent' mark of Gloucester is relatively common, we were told, because of the confusion between an abbreviated 'Glos' for both the city and the county. John managed to include a couple of examples of his other favoured postal history interest, the 'squared circles', from the 1880s.

From the Cheltenham/Gloucester axis, we were taken to the other side of the River Severn, notably to the Forest of Dean area. Coleford was the largest office and its penny post stamps were used firstly in the Gloucester Penny Post and then in their own right. Lea is often considered a Herefordshire office but was an 'island' of Gloucestershire. An 1810 'MICH'DEAN' stamp of Mitcheldean was inexplicable and the abbreviated 'M'Dean/Py Post' of 1828 is much better known. John completed his coverage of the county by moving down the western bank of the river to include the towns of Lydney, Brookend and Newnham and commented on the recently discovered (by Eric) '119' mileage stamp of Newnham, when we had all believed that only a '123' existed. He pointed out that 120 miles was a critical charging distance and the surveyor was keen to ensure Newnham letters paid 1d more. His final two sheets showed marks of Newent, including the unusual framed penny post stamp with both the name of the town and its No.3 receiving house number.

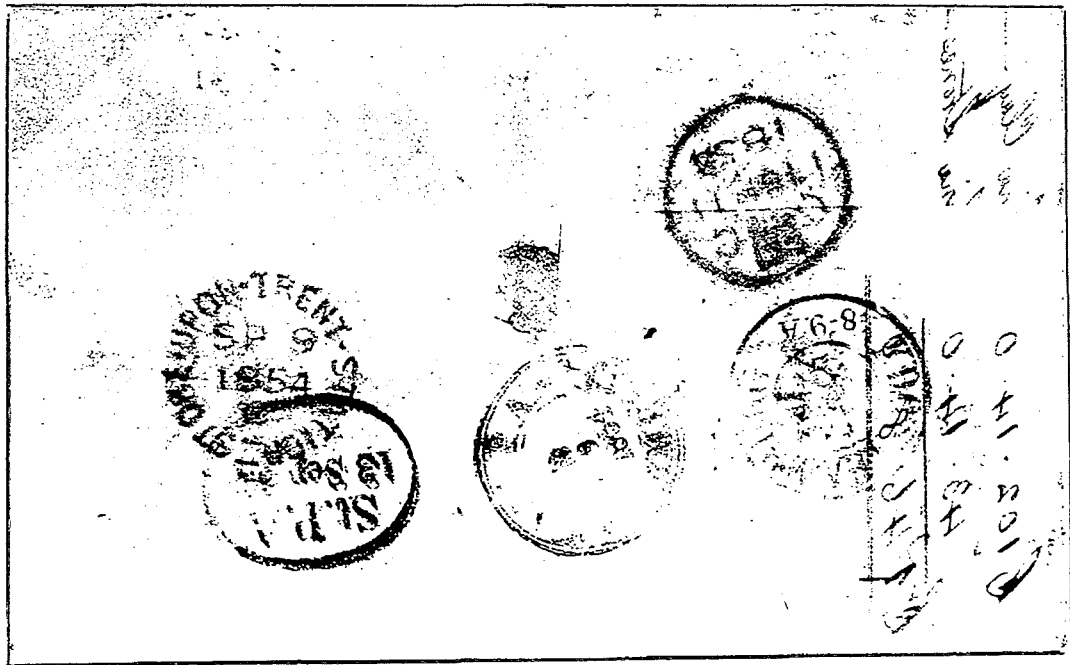
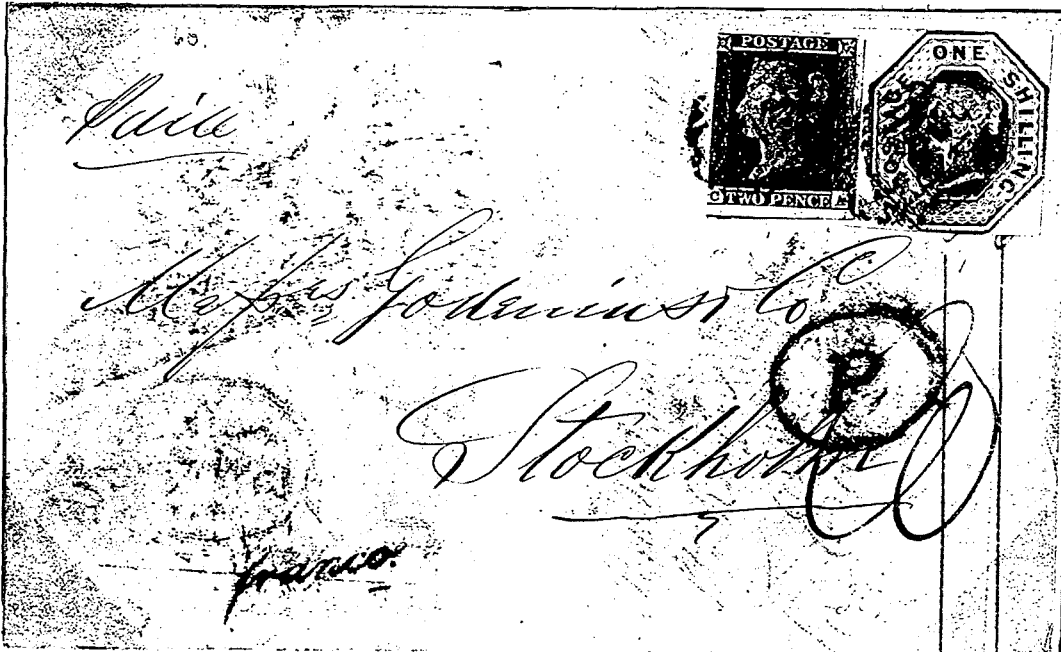
John remarked that we had been living in the past for the past hour or so and he wanted members to think of the future. As a resident of Holland, there was no better way than to offer a packet of Dutch tulip bulbs to all who desired them, to flower next spring! (Not a single bulb remained unaccepted.)

In his vote of thanks, Derek Smeathers, our chairman, said he had never seen a full display of the county of Gloucestershire and he was sure members had greatly enjoyed the opportunity to do so. He handed certificates of appreciation to both Johns, much to the surprise of the local English geriatric.

MORE ON STOKE STATION

I am indebted to Richard Farman for sending the photocopies shown below of material relating to Stoke Station (See MM131/4).

A letter sent from Stoke-on-Trent to Stockholm on 9th September 1854, backstamped with the “STOKE-UPON-TRENT-STATION” double arc datestamp.



A billhead for the Station Hotel at Stoke-on-Trent



A pillar box can be seen below the clock on the left of this postcard.



HAGLEY AND HOLKHAM

by John Calladine

This is the story of two stately homes, Hagley Hall and Holkham Hall. Hagley is a village in Worcestershire, a few miles from Stourbridge, and Holkham is an even smaller village on the north coast of Norfolk, just west of the appropriately named Wells-Next-The-Sea. Both great houses were built by men of wealth and influence. George, the 1st Lord Lyttleton, was secretary to the Prince of Wales and, briefly, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Between 1756 and 1760, he was responsible for the building of Hagley Hall. The foundations of Holkham were dug in 1734 for Thomas Coke (pronounced 'Cook'), created 1st Earl of Leicester in 1744, who died before the completion of the building in 1764. Thomas Coke was, most notably, joint Postmaster General from 1733 until his death in 1759.

What makes these two Halls of particular interest to postal historians is that there are postal markings undeniably linked to them. The first recorded postmark of Holkham is from 1743, an apparent impossibility if Holkham Hall was incomplete until the 1760s. Much better known are two other Holkham marks recorded between 1814 and 1846. The Hagley postmark is known between 1779 and 1781. If the early Holkham mark seems unlikely, the Hagley mark seems impossible. The records show there to have been no official post to Hagley until 1843!

Before burying ourselves in the postal history, it may be helpful to say something of the two families, the Lyttletons and the Cokes, for the family trees are not straightforward. In both cases, the peerage died out relatively quickly because of the absence of an heir to inherit the title. In both families, the title was re-instated at a later date and therefore, to be precise, one should speak of the gentlemen who built the respective halls as the 1st Lord Lyttleton of the 1st Creation and the 1st Earl of Leicester, again of the 1st Creation. What makes the latter peerage so confusing is that, between 1794 and 1799, another Earl of Leicester was joint Postmaster General. He had nothing whatsoever to do with the Coke family but had previously been the Marquess of Townshend of Raynham Hall, also in Norfolk. It was not until 1837, following the demise of that line, that Thomas William Coke became 'our' 1st Earl of Leicester of the 2nd Creation. His relationship to Thomas Coke, the builder of Holkham Hall is not entirely straightforward either. Thomas' son, Edward, had predeceased him and the estates passed to Thomas' nephew, Wenman Roberts, the son of his sister Anne Coke. In 1750, Wenman Roberts assumed the name 'Coke' and his son was therefore, Thomas William Coke, not 'Roberts'. It was Thomas William's agricultural achievements, notably four-crop rotation, and his ability as an MP that earned him the nickname 'Coke of Norfolk'. He was elevated to the peerage by the newly-crowned Queen Victoria in 1837 and chose to resurrect the title, Earl of Leicester.

George, the 1st Lord Lyttleton of the 1st Creation, fared little better. His son, Thomas Lyttleton, became the 2nd Lord Lyttleton but died in 1779 without male issue. This time it was William Henry Lyttleton, a brother of George, who became the 1st Lord Lyttleton of the 2nd Creation, his son by his first marriage becoming the 2nd Lord of the 2nd Creation and his son by his second marriage, also William Henry, the 3rd Lord Lyttleton. Happily the succession has remained consistent to the present day but the 8th Lord Lyttleton is also the 11th Viscount Cobham and is now known by that title.

If, as seems very likely, there was some kind of unofficial 'post office' at Hagley Hall, the dates of the known strikes of the 'Hagley' postmark suggest the 'office' was opened by Thomas, the 2nd Lord Lyttleton. The only clue to what may have been occurring is in a minute from Francis Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office, to the Postmasters General dated 12th December 1793 (see Post 42/171D/1793). It arose from a letter 'Lord Westcote' (another of the Lyttleton titles originating in the 15th century marriage of Elizabeth Lyttleton to Thomas de Westcote) had written to the postmaster of Birmingham. (From the paragraph above, one can deduce that the title 'Lord Lyttleton of the 2nd Creation had not yet been bestowed on William Henry Lyttleton.) In that letter, his Lordship had complained that the (Birmingham & Wolverhampton-) Stourbridge-Kidderminster-Bewdley messenger was now demanding two guineas per annum to carry his private bag and drop it at "the taphouse, as had been accustomed". He said his correspondents were not numerous - no wonder the Hagley mark is so scarce - and he did not, for the present, wish to have his letters "otherwise than by the Stourbridge bag". However, he commented that, if he found he needed a more speedy delivery of his letters, he would be in touch with the Birmingham postmaster again and "*have his private bag in the manner that he has had for some years past*".

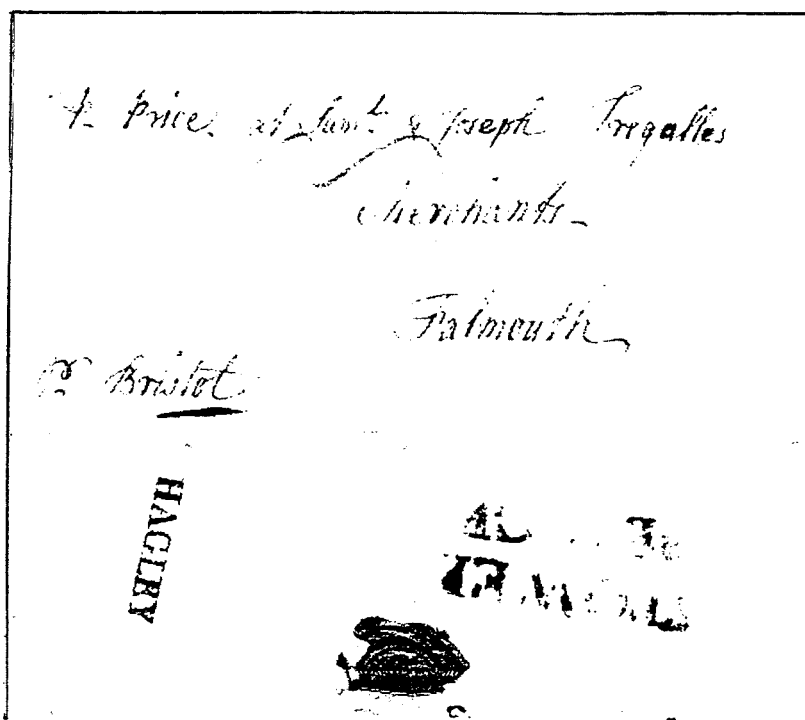
On becoming acquainted with Lord Westcote's letter, the surveyor (Mr Saverland) realised, probably for the first time, that the post between Kidderminster and Stourbridge had not been taking the direct road between the two towns but had diverted through Hagley "*merely for the accommodation of his Lordship*". This added some two miles to the journey and, not only cost the Post Office £9-6-8d a year, but led to a constant delay of the Stone post at Wolverhampton and even an occasional detention of the Liverpool mailcoach at Stone! He suspected, in the other direction, there were similar delays between Bewdley and Worcester. To add insult to injury, the surveyor found that the inhabitants of the village of Hagley sent their own messenger to Stourbridge and did not gain from the Lyttletons' irregular arrangement.

While Francis Freeling supported the surveyor's proposal that, as of 5th January 1794, the post between Stourbridge and Kidderminster should take the direct road, he was very wary of offending the Lyttletons. He wanted it made clear to his Lordship that this change of route had nothing whatsoever to do with Lord Westcote's refusal to pay two guineas to the messenger but was all about speeding up the branches connected to the Bewdley, Wolverhampton and Birmingham Mail. An instruction would be given to the postmistress at Stourbridge that a private bag was to be made up for his Lordship and sent by the messenger employed by the inhabitants of Hagley.

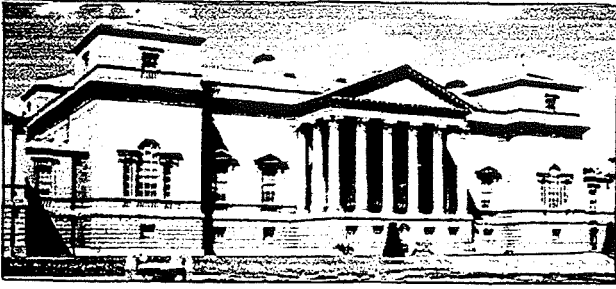
If Freeling was concerned about offending the Lyttletons, the Postmasters General, in their reply, were equally circumspect. They wrote:

"... the acceleration of the mail to Birmingham and Wolverhampton is a matter of so much consequence that his Lordship cannot in reason object to it, if accompanied by every civil assurance of the Postmasters General's concern (that), if it shall deprive his Lordship of the smallest convenience, they will remedy."

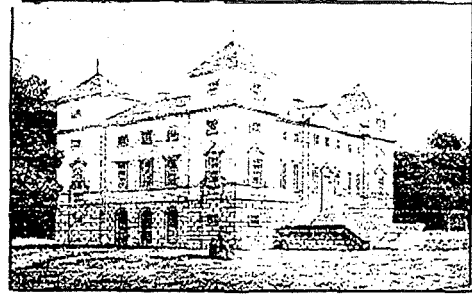
One wonders where the Hagley Hall unofficial 'post office' was located and where the 'Hagley' mark was applied. Could it have been at "the taphouse" - almost certainly the nearby Lyttleton Arms. Illustrated below is an example of the Hagley mark. It is on a letter dated 4th May 1781 addressed to Falmouth, "pr Bristol". As it is also struck with a Stourbridge mark, it would have been passing in the direction of Birmingham. It is not written by a Lyttleton but by "S.Mathews" and his relationship to the family is not known. In itself it provides no link to Hagley Hall and could have been carried by the Hagley messenger, with the 'Hagley' mark struck at the Stourbridge office to confirm its origin. Another letter, in the Worcester Records Office, has closer links to the Lyttletons and to Hagley Hall. On balance, the probability is that the 'post office' was either at the hall or closely associated to it.



Before considering the post office at Holkham Hall, which is apparently so similar but, in truth, very different from that at Hagley, it is worth looking at the Halls themselves because they, too, have important similarities and differences. Hagley Hall was built between 1756 and 1760, Holkham Hall between 1734 and 1764. The estimate for building Hagley was £12,000 and the final cost £25,823. Holkham, on a far grander scale than Hagley, cost £90,000, a sum that exactly equalled the debts left by the 1st Earl on his death! The style of the two buildings is, unsurprisingly, quite similar and both buildings served to house their owner's collections of paintings and sculptures. The architect of Holkham was William Kent, who also designed many of the garden features, while Hagley was designed by Sanderson Miller. The notable garden follies at Hagley were the work of such as Lord Camelford, Thomas Pitt, Henry Keene and James 'Athenian' Stuart as well as the architect himself. The two buildings are illustrated on the next page.



A recent photograph of the south front of Holkham Hall.



An engraving, c1800, of Hagley Hall.

The post office at Holkham Hall was an official office, of that there can be no doubt. There is an early puzzle, however, that even that doyen of English postal historians for so many years, the late Martin Willcocks, never fully explained. Martin was always intrigued by the Holkham post office and described it, in articles in the *Bulletin of the East Anglian Postal History Circle* and in 'Postal History', as "*probably the only post office in a private house until Queen Victoria's office opened at Osborne on the Isle of Wight some eighty years after Holkham handstamps begin*". The problem of the earliest Holkham handstamp, a two-line HOLK/HAM, recorded in 1743 was mentioned briefly earlier in this piece. If Holkham Hall wasn't finished until 1764, where was this mark applied? At the time, there wasn't much else at Holkham and one's first thought was that the solitary record of a strike might not be genuine. That view gained some credence when it became evident that Martin Willcocks never illustrated the mark in his articles, nor was it among the collection of Holkham covers auctioned after his death. Subsequent enquiries have failed to establish the present whereabouts of the 1743 strike but happily there is little doubt of its veracity. Ron Pegg, the BCC Norfolk editor, was sent the 1743 Holkham cover for verification some years ago when it was offered for sale in Derrick Muggleton's postal auction. He reports the strike as being under-inked but of the size and format of the period. A glance at the Norfolk listing in the BCC shows similar marks at other offices, noticeably an AYLE/SHAM of 1743-45, a BURN/HAM of 1741-47, a HAR/LESTON of 1737-74 and a THET/FORD of 1744-49. Furthermore, it is now known that, although the Hall was unfinished, the old building (Hill House) remained standing until the 1750s and was temporarily linked to the new family wing, which was completed and occupied in 1741. The Holkham office may have opened very soon after the family moved into the new wing or it could have existed even earlier in Hill House.

However, the existence of a building and a handstamp doesn't explain why Holkham Hall boasted a post office. The answer to that is almost certain. Thomas Coke, previously Lord Lovell, was not created Earl of Leicester until 1744 but was joint Postmaster General from 1733 until his death in 1759. If, perhaps in the mid-1730s or early 1740s, the Postmaster General wanted a post office in his stately home, who would argue with him. If he wanted his own handstamp, who would deny it? There are, of course, no Post Office minutes to refer to until Francis Freeling established the system (that survives in Post 42 and Post 40 of the Archives) in 1792. By then, the Post Office had probably lost track of the existence of an official office at Holkham Hall. The first reference to it is in January 1797 when a letter from Thomas William Coke to Francis Freeling is recorded. At that time 'Coke of Norfolk' was an MP but he was not to become the 1st Earl of Leicester of the 2nd Creation for another forty years. He had apparently been sending his 'free' letters from Holkham and dating them accordingly. Puzzled by an MP apparently sending his letters from his own home, rather than from the nearest sub post town, their validity as 'free' letters had been queried.

On 20th January 1797, Thomas William Coke wrote to Freeling:

"I am honoured with your letter and must beg of an answer to say that Holkham is a sub post town and has ever been made to my knowledge since it was first established as such . . ."

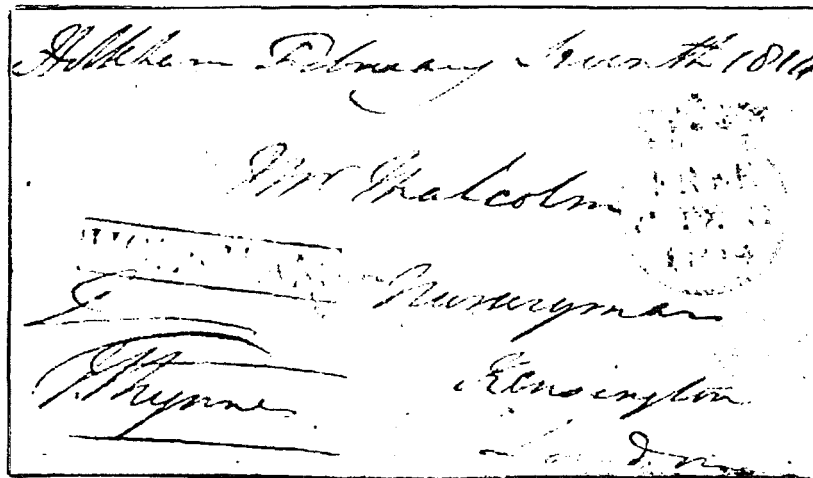
Mr Coke doesn't say when it was established but we know it would have been more than fifty years earlier and Mr Coke, being only 43 at the time, probably had no idea. He goes on:

" . . . and, if it were not to be continued so, a great delay would arrive (sic) in the delivery of letters both at Burnham and Wells as the Post, by its being so, has always been permitted to pass through Holkham Park, which is no thoroughfare but a private road. I therefore hope you will feel with me the propriety of not moving it."

Mr Coke's veiled threat was not an idle one for the Park covered some 3,000 acres and any ride that had to go around the park would not only be delayed but greatly increased in cost. Francis Freeling had no difficulty in understanding exactly what was being said to him; his terse note to the Postmasters General makes that clear:

"The above letter affords very ample reasons . . . why Mr Coke's letters should not be charged when dated from Holkham."

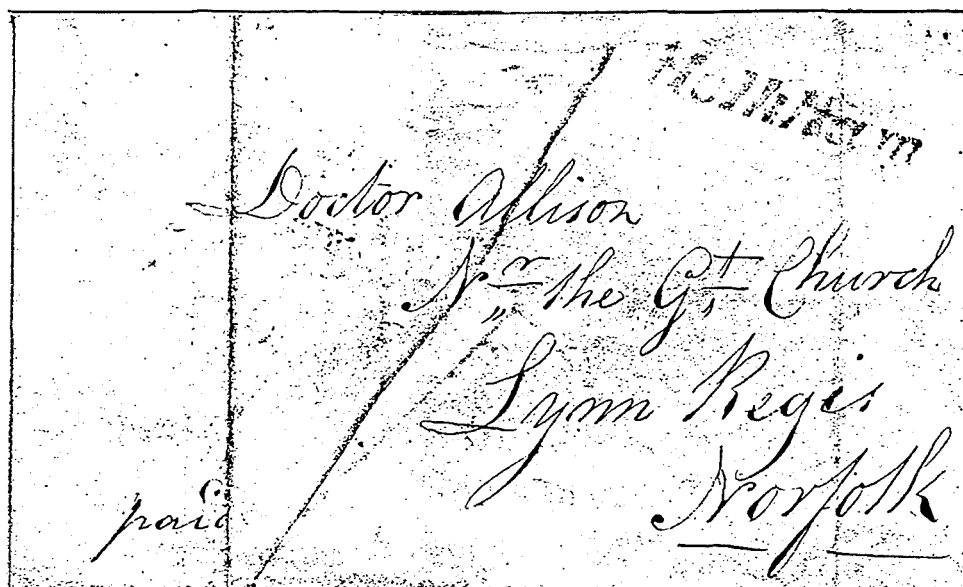
The two Holkham postmarks that are better known than the 1743 example, although by no means commonly found, are from the 19th century. The first is a framed single-line HOLKHAM recorded between 1814 and 1834. The later mark is a script *Holkham* of a type issued to small offices and recorded between 1835 and 1846. The first of these two marks is illustrated below.



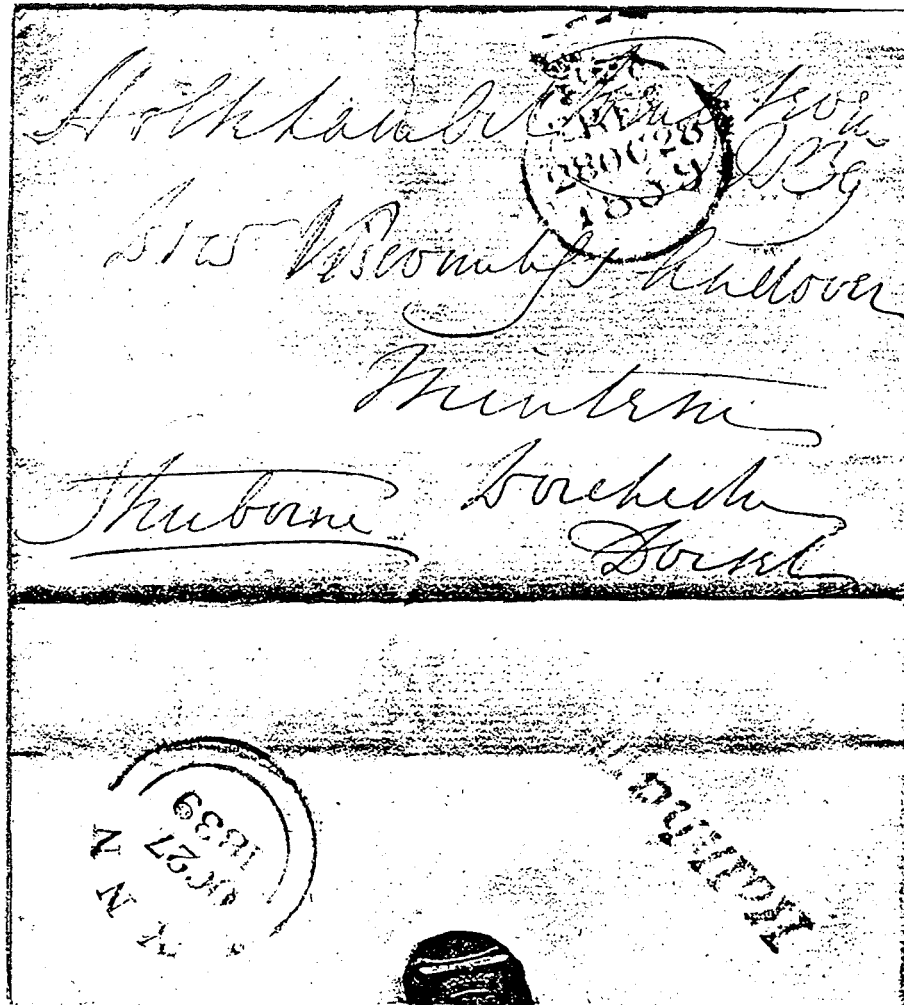
The boxed Holkham mark (NK196, rarity 'E') on a 'free' letter, written at Wells but posted from Holkham Hall on 7th February 1814. The writer was John Sandys, a landscape gardener who planted many of the trees at Holkham, but John Thynne, MP for Bath, used his 'free' privilege to avoid postage. "We have had hard weather for the last six weeks . . . the Gout laid sharp hands on me . . . I can now just hobble about the house."

Not surprisingly, most examples of Holkham marks are found on 'free' letters or 'free fronts'. When Martin Willcocks was seeking items with the second (script type) mark, he discovered a number of letters bearing the mark but with no obvious connection to Holkham. He illustrated 'free fronts' from Dublin to Buxton, Manchester to Buxton and Edinburgh to Knutsford, all neatly struck with the script *Holkham* and dating from 1839. It immediately brought to mind the infamous 'O code' 'free' letters that caused so much difficulty in the postal history world over many years. (For those unfamiliar with this saga, it turned out that these marks had been retrospectively struck by favour on a group of autographed fronts collected by the Countess of Lichfield, wife of the Postmaster General, 1839-40.) Martin came to the conclusion that much the same had happened at Holkham. It appears that the Countess of Leicester, or her daughters, had sought to improve the appearance of their collection of autographed fronts by having them struck with the *Holkham* stamp, possibly after it went out of use in 1846. The handstamp was genuine but its use was not. The covers illustrated below are, of course, genuine.

Late use of the third Holkham mark (NK197) on a cover to Lynn, charged 1d and Backstamped at Wells and Lynn (on 10th December 1846).



A 'free' cover, endorsed by Lord Sherborne, from Holkham to Dorchester,
backstamped at (Kings) Lynn on 27th October 1839.



It would seem that nothing more that is unusual could relate to the history of the post office at Holkham Hall but that would be a mistake. Could anything be more unusual than the sub-postmaster himself, for the position was traditionally held by none other than the Earl of Leicester! One believes the butler generally supervised the post office, which remained at the Hall until 1946, when it was moved to the nearby Estate Office. There is a display board near the kitchen at Holkham Hall giving a historical summary of the post office and including a photograph of a liveried butler serving one of the 'customers', together with other relevant ephemera. The supposed 'customer' in the photo is, in fact, the 3rd Earl!

We will end the story at Hagley, for that is where our Midland interests lie. An official post to Hagley was approved by the Postmaster General on 1st August 1843. It appears, from the marginal annotation, that the new post was established by the surveyor on 8th June 1843 but that is surely wrong. A Hagley UDC was issued on 30th August 1843 and has been recorded used from July 1844. Surely no UDC has been recorded in more shades of ink - red, orange, reddish orange, dark blue, blue-green, black, blue and green. The minute proposing the official post to Hagley (and its approval) is reproduced below.

For the Postmaster General

I submit that an Official Post
 may be established from Stourbridge to
 include Hagley, Bromme, Clevedon & Bellbroughton
 the letters for which amount to 283 in a
 week - The Expence will be £31.8.⁴⁰ a year
 for a Fast Messenger, £4 for a Receiver at
 Bellbroughton, and £11 for a Receiver at
 Hagley - If your Lordship approve I
 will apply to the Treasury to nominate
 the Receivers, and I beg you will be pleased
 to say whether you will appoint the
 Messenger. -

G. L.

1st August 1743.

5.471

Appo? & Expence appoint. Messenger

Aug 27 1743

No. 3117

Bellbroughton
 and Hagley
 official post in
 Clevedon & Hagley
 1743

Mr. Webb

16 Feb 1744

1.69112

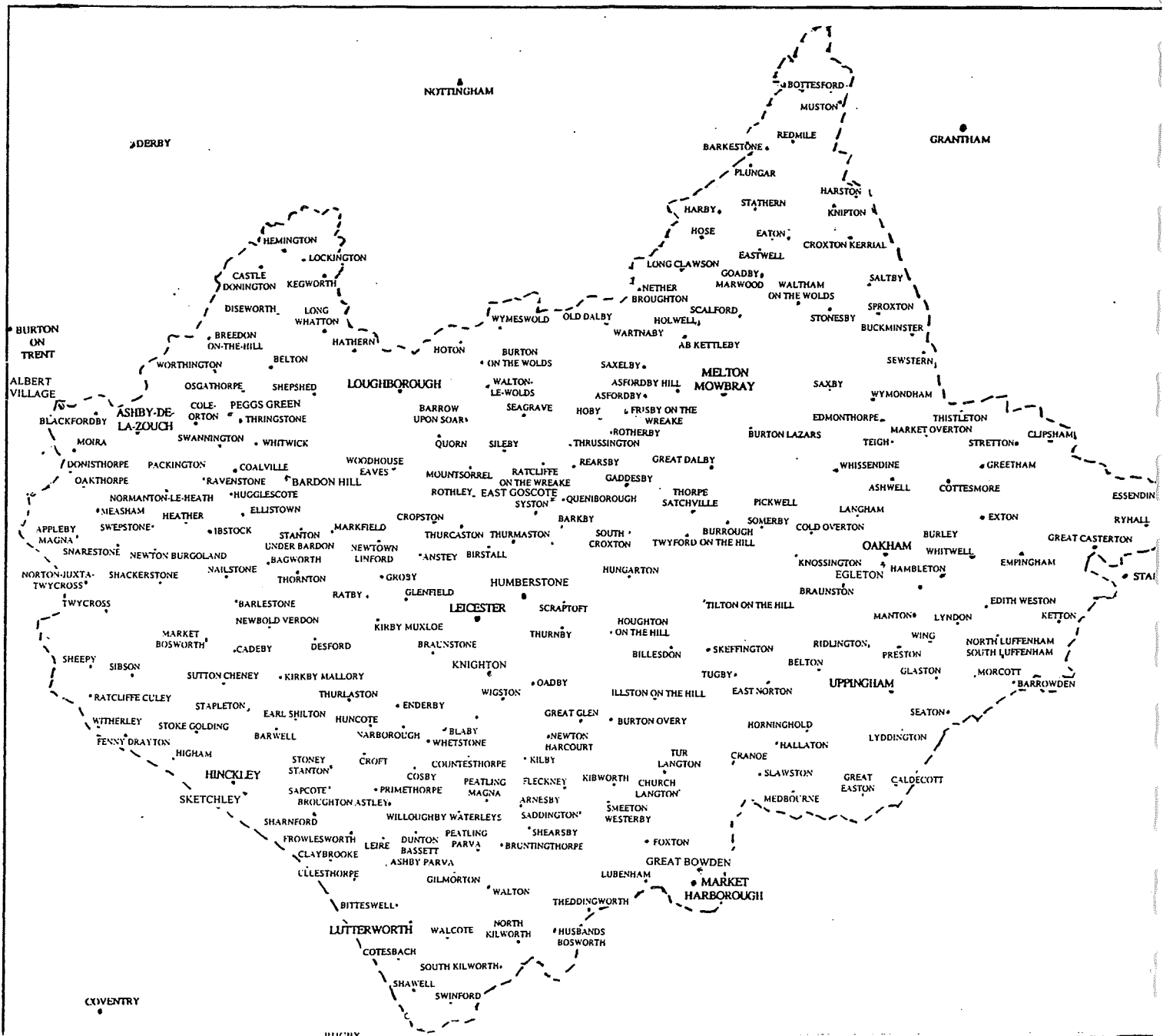
72/76

For the last word on Hagley Hall, perhaps we should recall the visit made in September 1774 by Dr Samuel Johnson, compiler of the first standard English dictionary and literary lion of the 18th century. George, the 1st Lord Lyttleton, had died just over a year earlier, probably still agonising over the expense of a building that had soared to twice the estimated cost. Dr Johnson declared Hagley Hall to be simply "one square mass". Perhaps we should not take his judgment too seriously; George Lyttleton had been a Whig politician and Dr Johnson was a noted Tory. There were old scores to settle

LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND, THEN AND NOW

The map on this page shows the village sub-offices in Leicestershire and Rutland that existed in 1977 which is, as far as I am aware, the date of the last issue of "Post Offices in the United Kingdom". That on the next page shows the offices that are still open at the time of writing, the start of November. I cannot guarantee absolute accuracy as the situation does fluctuate weekly, but this was compiled using the Royal Mail website.

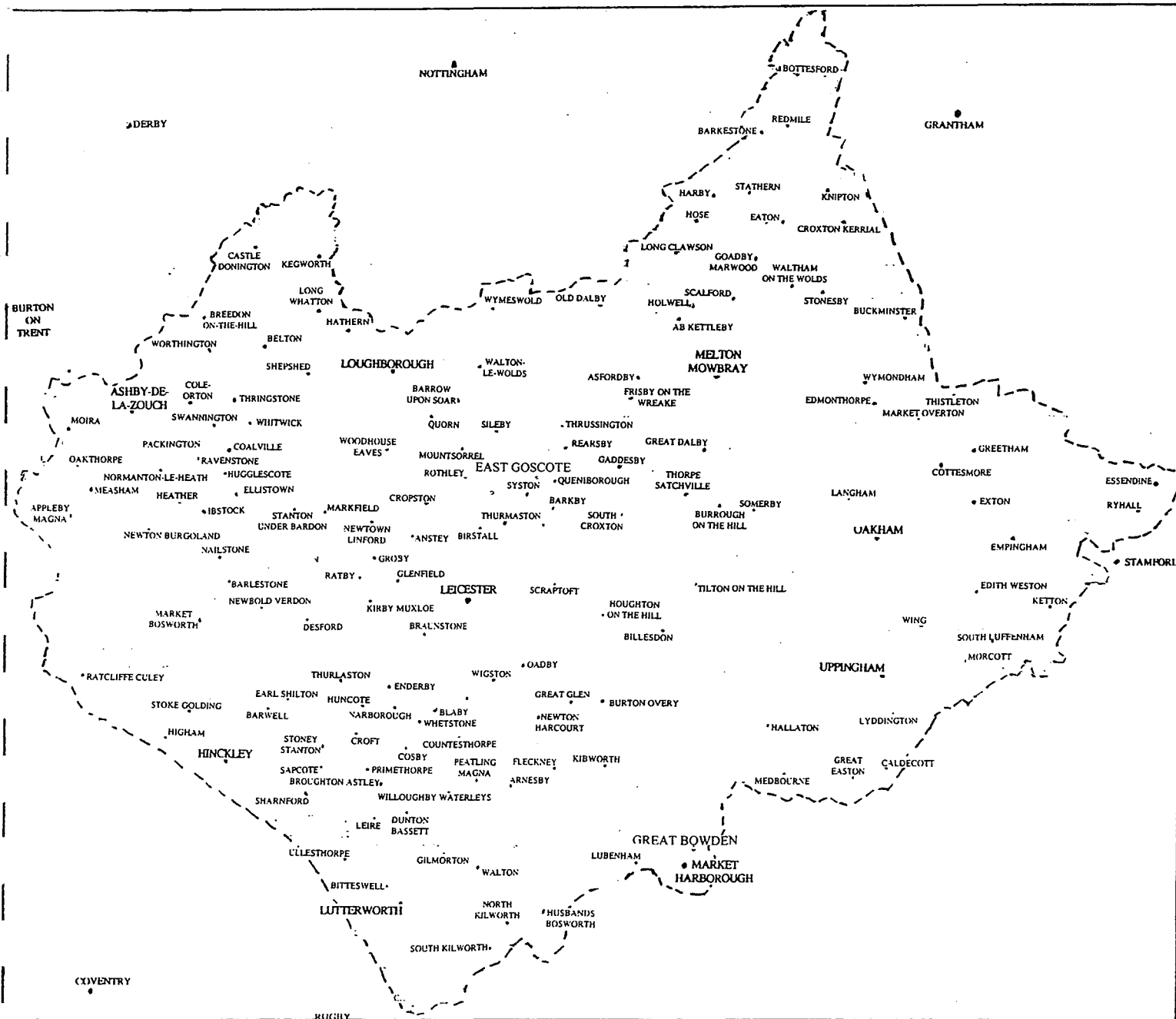
1977



2003

Please note that Albert Village is scheduled to close on 12th November so is not shown here. Also the position occupied by Sketchley on the 1977 map should now be occupied by Three Pots.

I understand that Sheepy will soon reopen for limited hours in the village church. Willoughby Waterleys opens on one afternoon a week in the village hall, and there may be others with limited opening hours.

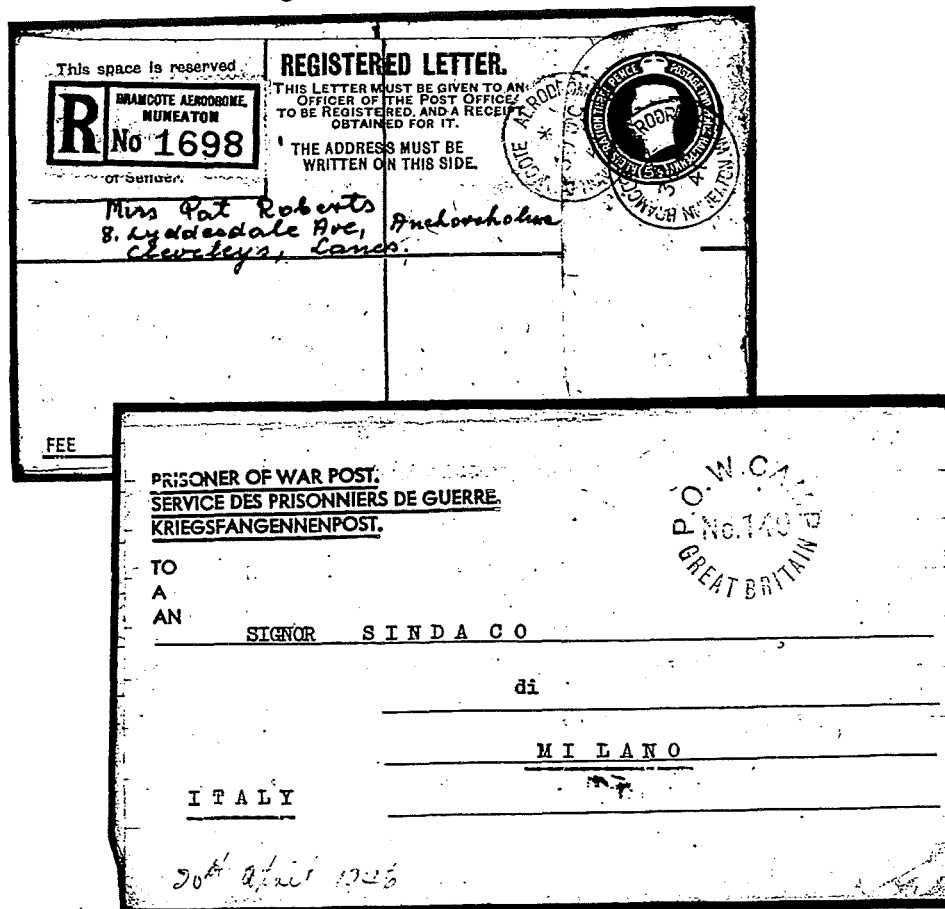


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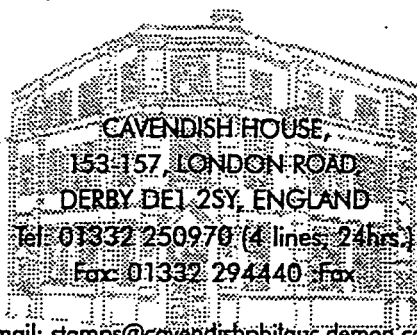
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WWII POW Camp 140 (Warwick Racecourse)

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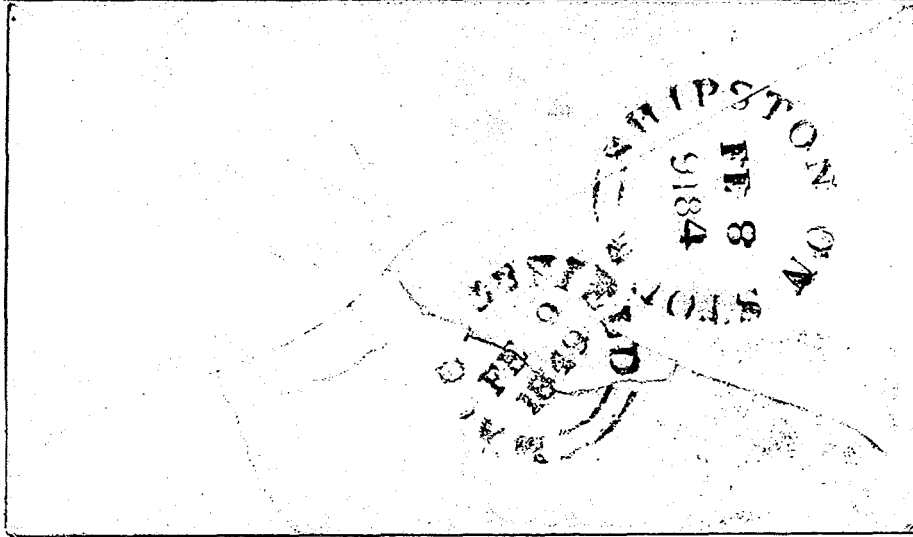


E-mail: stamps@cavendishphilauc.demon.co.uk
www.Cavendish-Auctions.com

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Chris Jackson has kindly sent a photocopy of a letter sent from Shipston-on-Stour to Macclesfield on 8th February 1849. The envelope is backstamped with the Shipston on Stour cds. However, the date slugs have been misplaced and the year reads 9184, some seven thousand three hundred and thirty five years later.

Chris expects that others have similar items in their collections and wonders who has one to beat his.



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THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

It is hoped that this will appear in mid-January. It will contain the usual features. I have one major contribution in hand but there is a need for articles to be sent to:

John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG

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