

MIDLAND MAIL

THE JOURNAL OF THE MIDLAND (GB) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Number 176, November 2012

As a number of our members are aware, our Editor, Sadie Cole, is seriously ill and I am sure that Sadie and her family will be very much in our thoughts and prayers. So, for the time being, your previous Editor has taken over the reins. I apologise for the fact that this edition will be rather shorter than usual since I would like to give members adequate notice of the December meeting.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

On 8th December we pay our annual visit to the National Brewery Centre, Burton-on-Trent. From 10.30 a.m. there will be a standing display on '*GB Postage Due Mail from 1839*' by Patrick Frost. If you would like to join us for lunch please contact Richard Farman by 1st December. At 2 p.m. Patrick will display further material on the same topic.

Our first meeting of 2013 will be held on 5th January at St Germain's Church Hall, Birmingham. The afternoon, which starts at 1.30 p.m. will be devoted to members' one board displays on '*Surcharged/Underpaid Mail*'. If you are travelling to this meeting by public transport, please see the note on the back page.

Then on 16th February we visit the Black Country Museum, Dudley when, starting at 1.30 p.m., Gordon Hardy will display '*Derbyshire Postal History*'.

MAURICE BROWN

It is with regret that we report the death of Maurice Brown in early August. Maurice was at the December 2011 meeting but, sadly, his health deteriorated. Born in Nottinghamshire he always took a great interest in anything to do with his home county. A letter of condolence was sent to Maurice's family.

AUCTION LOTS

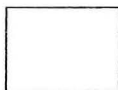
Eric Lewis will be very pleased to receive lots for the next auction, these can be handed to him at forthcoming meeting or alternatively sent by post to Eric Lewis, 27 Rathbone Road, Smethwick, B67 3JG.

LIBRARY CATALOGUE

The catalogue of the Society's library has been updated and a copy is enclosed for your use. Please destroy (recycle) any former editions that you may have.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

If your subscription for the 2012-2013 season has not been received by our Treasurer you will find an 'X' in the box below. In that case, our Treasurer, Eric Lewis, 27 Rathbone Rd, B67 3JG would be pleased to receive a cheque for £10 at your earliest convenience.



THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

The first meeting of the Society's new season was a joint meeting of the Midland (GB) Postal History Society and the Birmingham Philatelic Society at St Germain's Church Hall on Saturday 8th September. It was a well-supported all-day meeting with an attendance in excess of 30. The programme included two very different displays of Birmingham material. Ian Baker, visiting from Scotland, displayed '300 years of Birmingham's postal history' while Eric Lewis entertained us with "Enter Miss Gottwaltz – the social side of Birmingham's post(al) history". Remarkably, both were new displays.

Ian explained that his display was intended to give an overview of Birmingham's changing handstamps from the early 1700s to the end of the 20th century. The earliest recorded handstamp is from 1714 and we were shown the second, from 1718, of which this was the only known strike. Thereafter Birmingham used a wide range of single and two-line marks – more than 30, in fact – before the final single line mark of 1790. Two of particular note were the three-line mark of 1749, an unusual style used at some other local towns, and the renowned Birmingham 'chandelier' of 1772/1773 of which we were privileged to see the finest extant example. We saw the two different Birmingham 'horseshoe' marks of c1800 and then a selection of the 28 different mileage marks, some straight line and many circular. (Until recently, 27 different marks had been recorded but both Ian and Eric have now found examples of a 28th mark, of which we saw a strike in yellowish ink.) Four different 'Too Late' marks are known from Birmingham, used between 1805 and 1833 and all were displayed.

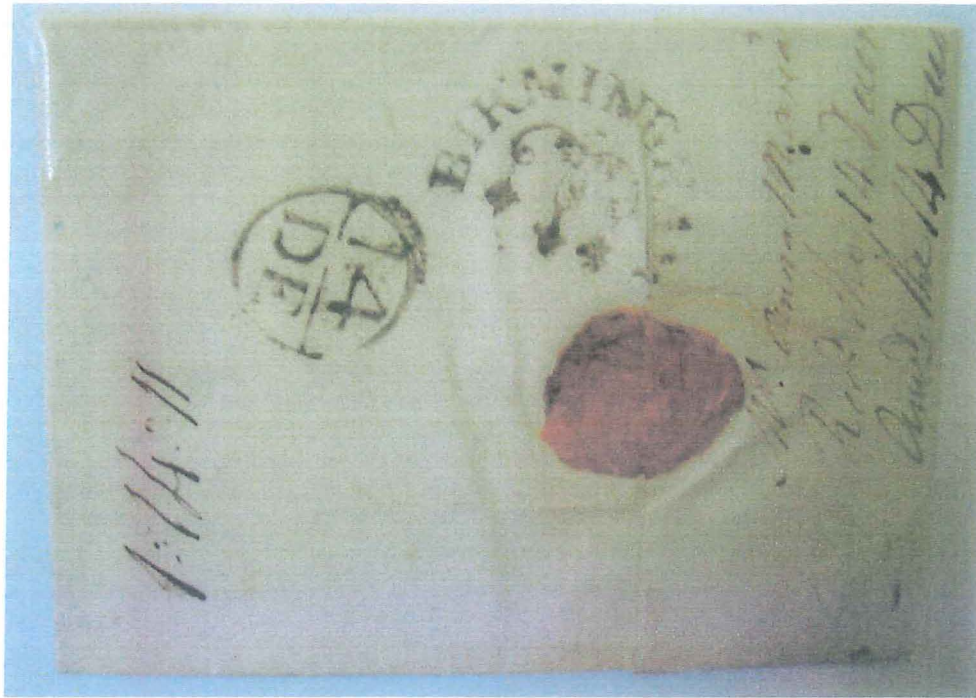
Moving on to the post-1840 period, it may not be generally known that Birmingham used two different Maltese Cross (MX) cancellations and we saw fine strikes of each, one on a 1d black and the other on a 1d red-brown. Inevitably the MX was followed by the '1844 numerals' but Birmingham also had other unusual usages and handstamps. Very unusual was the "No.15" penny post stamp of Handsworth cancelling a Mulready, contrary to regulations, and then further cancelled with a smudgy MX at the head office in Birmingham. Also on a late-use Mulready, was a remarkable vertical cancellation of Britannia employing the distinctive Birmingham 'roller' of c1856. We are unlikely to see another.

From the 1850s we were shown a number of experimental circular receiving marks used at Birmingham which will be listed in the new Midlands Edition of the British County Catalogue for the first time. Also experimental, was use of a roller to apply the blue lines to registered letters, of which only about eight examples across the country are known. While they look superficially like the usual crayoned lines, closer examination shows the lines to have a noticeably serrated pattern. We then saw the distinctive "LC" marks of Birmingham, denoting mis-sorting by a letter carrier, in circular, oval and rectangular frames, used between the 1840s and the 1870s. Other explanatory marks, such as variations of "Missent to Birmingham" were well represented.

Ian was careful to distinguish between the true duplex marks, the Birmingham 'spoons', and the double cancels – confusingly commonly referred to as 'duplex' marks – which comprise two separate parts on a single base. Birmingham employed a 5-bar cancel, one of the few towns to use one. Most of us will have learned much from Ian's explanation of the double stamps that used a secret code to denote the time of use. This code was unique to each office that employed it and Birmingham had no fewer than six types. Quite different are the double stamps using the clock code and eventually time 'in clear'. Not to be outdone, Birmingham also used four types of 'squared circle' cancel.

Ian then showed parcel post labels including, most notably, those from Sparkbrook, where sixpenny and fourpence-halfpenny handstamps were employed instead of adhesives. (Few of us will ever have seen these.) There were also interesting commercially nominated gummed parcel post labels used in the late 1940s. Inevitably, beyond the world of the parcel post, machine cancels of many different types were used at Birmingham and we saw examples of most.

To complete his exemplary display, Ian included a selection of items sent to and from Birmingham to countries across the world, emphasising the commercial importance of the city. There were letters connecting Birmingham to Alexandria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Constantinople – one could continue alphabetically around the world. This display had been far more than a mere 'overview' and Ian was thanked wholeheartedly by Mel Matthews, chairman of the Midland (GB) Postal History Society, on behalf of both societies, who then presented Ian with a certificate to celebrate his visit.



The famous Birmingham 'chandelier' – probably the finest example



The two Birmingham 'Maltese Cross' handstamps cancelling a 1d red-brown adhesive and a 1d black.



The rarely seen 6d handstamp, used instead of a 6d adhesive on a parcel post label.

After lunch, and after presentation of the Jon Baker Trophy to Brian Atkins, who has returned from Canada to live among us, it was Eric Lewis's moment to entertain us. When Eric shows ephemera, we know we are likely to enjoy a very unusual treat. He began by showing us a list of the earliest Birmingham postmasters, the first being Philip Castleton in 1604. This was long before the post was available to the general public, of course, and this was a man who handled what was truly Royal mail. The early postmasters conducted business from their own homes and it became apparent that Eric intended his display to follow a succession of postmasters and postmistresses across the centuries, telling us something of them and of 'happenings' during their time in office. It is one of those postmasters who we have to thank for the Birmingham 'chandelier', which was a privately commissioned handstamp with a short life because, when the Post Office in London became aware of it, they stopped its use. On the same theme of the 'chandelier' Eric showed us a 1953 Christmas Card produced by Sydney Raine, the doyen of Birmingham postal historians, illustrating both the three-line Birmingham stamp and the 'chandelier'. Unfortunately the 1760 date of the three-line stamp was used to caption both and that error of date for the 'chandelier' was thereby perpetuated for very many years.

John Wesley came to Birmingham in 1782 to open the first Wesleyan chapel and we saw a letter he wrote in that year. It was in that same era that the name "Gottswaltz" first appeared in the list of postmasters, John Gottswaltz taking over from Thomas Hazlewood. At the same time, the first picture of the Birmingham post office appeared. A 1791 letter from Birmingham's coffee house was appropriate because this establishment was immediately opposite the post office, a print of which we had just seen. We also saw a report of a riot in Birmingham in 1816 - not to be the last! Miss Gottswaltz, to whom Eric's display was dedicated, first entered the story at this time because, when her father died in office, she was appointed postmistress and had a new house built, which became the principal Birmingham post office, of course. Mailcoaches arrived and departed from the "Hen and Chickens" inn, of which Eric showed a print.

It was in 1824 that Francis Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office in London, complained of the poor quality of many postmarks. A steel stamp was made by a firm in Birmingham and became one of the first used in the country. Eric had a copy of the invoice for its manufacture.

Moving on to the important era of the 1830s, Birmingham's first railway station was built and we were shown both a print of the station and another of the first railway Travelling Post Office of 1838. A year later, in 1839, a letter addressed to an officer commanding troops in Birmingham reminded us of the Chartist Riots in the city. We were also shown a list of those who had received compensation for the damage. From 1840, we were shown a payment for 10/6d worth of the new 1d black adhesives, Eric regretting he did not have the 126 stamps, to which it referred, to show us.

Until this time, the Birmingham post office had remained in Miss Gottswaltz's house but, in 1842, the first Post Office owned post office was created from an existing inn and known as "Portugal House". Eric had a bill-head showing the inn before it became the post office and a picture, also of 1842, of the post office staff outside the building. Miss Gottswaltz moved to Portugal House and we saw a picture of the lady, the first postmaster/mistress of Birmingham of whom there is a likeness. Portugal House remained the post office until 1873, when it closed and was replaced with the first truly purpose-built office, now demolished. This office was, in turn, replaced by a new office in Victoria Square, a building still standing. Eric showed prints of the 1873 office being demolished and of the new office being built. It opened on 23rd December 1890.

Having seen a likeness of Miss Gottswaltz, we were now shown photographs of five of the succeeding Birmingham postmasters from 1927. In fact, there was a rapid succession of postmasters immediately after 1827 before two stalwarts who held office for many years up to 1944. We were shown a pictorial spread from a magazine of 1925 illustrating "The Post Office in Birmingham" and an invitation to a showing of Post Office films, for which the Post Office became noted, in 1937. A map showing the first Birmingham postal districts illustrated an important development in letter deliveries.

We were then told much about the Birmingham postal service in WW2. There was one of the ubiquitous economy labels, a letter delayed through enemy action, another delayed while a bomb was defused, a temporary rubber handstamp and a special registration label used during the war for internal correspondence. We saw evidence of the Business Reply Service, suspended in 1943 and reinstated in 1947. There was an Airgraph form and who but Eric would have a 1943 proof of the same form? There was also an example of the different design used during the following year. In the postwar years, the most significant development was probably the opening of a new mail centre in Newtown (sometimes known as Aston New Town), one of the poorest areas of the city.

The concluding part of the display covered a multitude of items relating to Birmingham's social philately. There were letters from various well-known companies, including the sought-after Samuel Allsop 'advertising' rings, which Eric explained were originally used for security purposes. There were also Avery advertising rings and an invoice from the company. An 1898 letter was largely addressed by means of a map sketched on the front, as the writer clearly not knowing the name of Union Passage, but he requiring the letter to be delivered to the shop where "everything in the window is marked "3/-"!

If that was a puzzle, so was the item with an "NEC" postmark of 1916. (The NEC, as we know it, was opened sixty years later.) In 1937, the owner of a dog, who could not produce a licence when challenged but later found it, was initially fined 10/- and, according to the contemporary newspaper report, not only achieved redress by having the fine

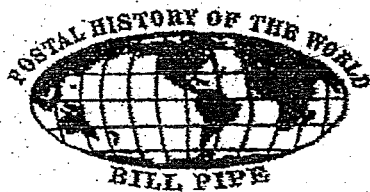
repaid but also by being given a King's Pardon. On the same subject of 'dogs', Eric produced a licence for no fewer than 45 dogs. (Most of us would not realise that police dogs required a licence, just like members of the public.) If the survival of this ephemera is surprising, so were the pen nib wrappers shown to us, together with a picture of the vast Birmingham factory that made nothing else.

A final Birmingham postmark of 12.3.45, a date your scribe remembers being drawn to his attention at boarding school, is one that will be available again to our younger members in 2045. In the meantime, they will simply have to remember that Eric has the prototype!

Alan Spencer, a member of both societies but particularly representing the Birmingham Philatelic Society, thanked Eric on behalf of us all and commented that he never ceased to be amazed at the material Eric produces for his displays. Who would argue with that?



Miss Gottwaltz, the Birmingham postmistress.



THE MAGPIE

POSTAL AUCTIONS & LISTS
POSTCARDS & EPHEMERA
PAPER COLLECTABLES
POSTAL HISTORY

W.T. PIPE
7 Richard Close
Upton, Poole
Dorset
BH16 5PY

Tel: 01202 623300
Fax: 01202 631149
Web: www.magpiebillpipe.com
Email: magpiebillpipe@free.uk.com

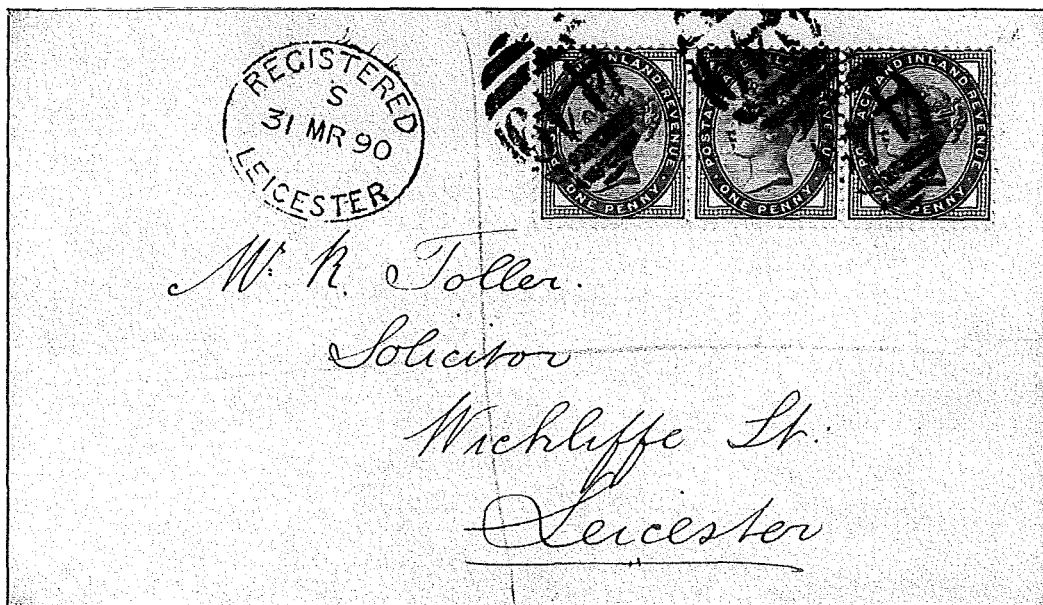
THE OCTOBER MEETING

On 13th October we met at the premises of Warwick & Warwick for a display of *Leicestershire Post Offices* by John Soer. John began by saying that with a few exceptions he would show material from the sub-offices so there would be little pre-1840 material, and that the display was a tribute to the people who run the sub-offices, particularly those who had so patiently had over the years answered his many queries.

The first frame consisted of photographs taken in the early 1990s of the variety of locations in which sub-offices were to be found. We saw photographs of petrol stations (Snarestone and Buckminster), a garden shed (Cold Overton), public houses (South Croxton), a former Methodist chapel (Braunston in Rutland), private homes (Normanton-le Heath, Stonesby and Cranoe) and, of course, shops (Great Easton and Tilton-on-the-Hill). There were two other houses of particular note: Goadby Marwood where a rambler rose grew round the porch in which a letter box carried an enamel plate with the inscription 'Letters which contain coin will if posted as ordinary letters be charged on delivery with a double registration fee, eightpence.'

The one main exception to sub-offices in the display was a section dealing with the Head Post Office in Leicester. Although it was possible to trace the sites occupied by the post office in Leicester from the 1700s, John explained that photographic evidence only existed from the latter half of the nineteenth century. We saw a photograph of the building that was used from 1867 to 1887. However, by 1880 it was apparent that the premises were inadequate for the amount of business being transacted. Eventually the office was rebuilt and extended, opening in 1887. The postal staff of Leicester were clearly very proud of their new office for they featured a photograph of it on their 1887 Christmas card. Next, came a copy of the programme for the opening in 1935 of a new Head Post Office – a very fine building in Bishop Street. In November 2007, the post office vacated these premises for the basement of W.H. Smiths. Our speaker was not impressed.

John then showed two examples of mail that would have passed through these offices. The first of these was mail from the firm of Wildt & Co., manufacturers of machinery for the hosiery and knitwear industries, who used for their correspondence envelopes which had been impressed with stamps at Somerset House. Examples included the 1½d and 2d dies both with adhesives to make the postage to Germany and from a later date the 2½d die. We also saw examples of compound stampings which were possibly made to use up surplus stock of the lower value. The 3VOS and 4VOS handstamps are generally regarded as being rare, yet John was able to show five examples of the two 3VOS marks of Leicester used between 1881 and 1891. All of these were struck on registered mail as were three other examples John has at home. Coincidence?



A 3VOS handstamp of Leicester cancelling the adhesives on a registered letter.

The rest of John's display consisted largely of postcards showing post offices supplemented with photographs taken in the 1990s and appropriate covers, parcel post labels and certificates of posting etc. Material from a number of the Town Sub Offices of Leicester featured in the next section. The postmaster of Berners Street used a postcard of his premises, the windows of which contained a large number of postcards, to advertise his Christmas and New Year cards. An envelope from the Highfield Street office which contained a strip of postcards was of a similar nature.

Braunstone is now part of the urban sprawl of Leicester but when the post office there opened as a T.S.O. of Leicester in 1933 it was surrounded by fields one of which contained a hayrick. Belgrave, Humberstone and Evington were originally rural offices but later became T.S.Os of Leicester. A postcard of c1910 showed that the office at Belgrave was then in the same position as when it closed in 2004.



The post office at Braunstone on a card posted in 1936.

We then moved away from the city to the south. At Narborough we saw postcards of the post office on three different sites as well as a photograph of its present position. Supporting material here included a fine strike in blue of the udc with serifs. Great Glen was a receiving office in the Leicester Penny Post; a 'free' letter sent from Great Glen to Cheltenham in 1839 was signed by Charles Packe who had originally requested the setting up of a penny post, but changed his mind when he found that he would have to penny charge. However, the penny post was established and the letter showed a charge of a penny. At Burton Overy we saw a postcard of the postmistress at the door of her post office, and then a similar one of her successor, in fact her daughter, in the same place. The building was still the post office when it closed in 2008. Of note among the covers was a strike of the small udc issued in 1858.

A superb card of Peatling Parva showing, it is to be presumed, the postmaster, his wife and son along with a rural postman must surely have been produced not long after the office opened in 1910. It is even possible that it was taken to celebrate the opening of the office. John commented that he had never found postcards of the post offices in some of the larger villages such as Ibstock, Birstall and Castle Donnington yet cards from some much smaller places did turn up. He showed cards of Laughton and Shearsby both very small villages where a post office existed for less than twenty years.

John ended the first half of his display with a brief trip in the general direction of the A6 north of Leicester. At Mountsorrel we saw, inevitably, the mileage mark and the well known and unique undated circle. The post office shown on a card used in 1914 is now an open space directly opposite the present post office. There were hounds and huntsmen outside the post office on a card of c1910, a totally different scene from that in a photograph of May 1992. A cover showing a strike of the UDC in blue was of particular note. In the UDC book John had commented that the udc of Wymeswold in which the 'Y' looked like a 'V' had probably not been used as a replacement had been issued shortly afterwards. A recent acquisition showed that it certainly had not only been used but that use was after the date of its replacement.

At the start of the second half we headed out along the valley of the Wreake. At our first stop, Syston, we learned that by 1876 the post office was being run from a chemist's shop. During reconstruction work on the post office in 1980, items were found that suggested the premises had once been a chemist's shop. Certainly, the post office today occupies the same premises that it did as shown on a card of c1902.

Part of the message on the back of a postcard of Rotherby identified the three people standing in front of the post office as the postmistress, her husband and daughter. Another card showed the daughter who was later to succeed her mother. It seemed that all the children of Thrusington had turned out to have a photograph taken of them standing outside the post office.

After a very brief stop at Melton Mowbray to see the post office in Sherrard Street we headed northwards to Scalford where a postcard used in 1906 and a photograph of 1990 showed the post office in the same building. The post office probably occupied that site continuously from 1881 to 2005. The next village we visited was at the start of a drive along the Vale of Belvoir through Long Clawson where the post office occupied the same site in about 1920 as in 1991, Stathern, Plungar, Barkestone and Redmile. At Barkestone we saw a photograph taken in 1991 of the office that had closed in 1984 still looking as though it was open for business. A card with the rubber 'BARKSTON/NOTTINGHAM' struck in purple ink was sent from the Chequers Inn where the post office now operates on two mornings a week. At Redmile it seemed that the ladies of the village were holding a meeting in the road outside the post office.

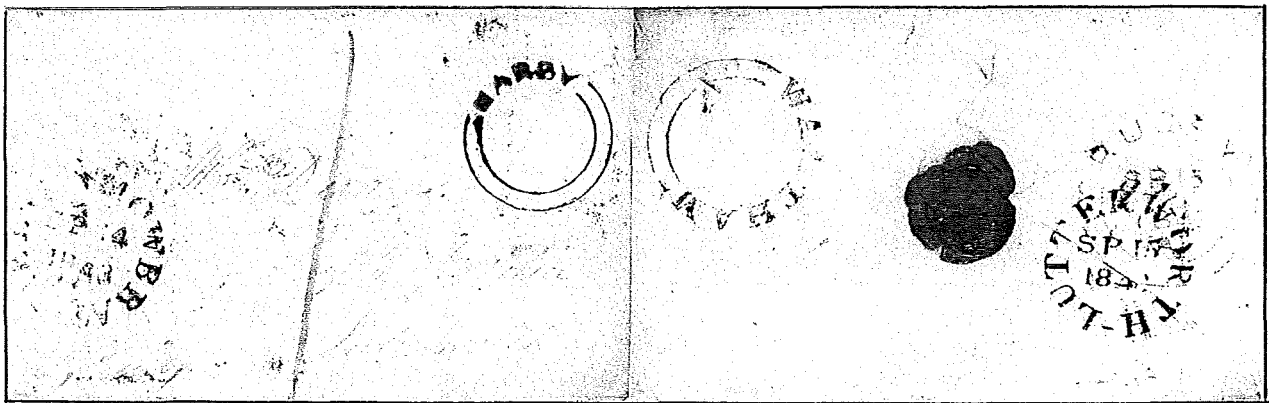
We then travelled southward to Waltham-on-the-Wolds where a letter sent in 1849 showed the udc's of both Harby and Waltham. Also of note was a cover of 1859 where the penny red was cancelled with the rare '073' handstamp. The reverse showed a strike of the small udc issued in 1858. At Sproxtton, John told how the postmistress had dismantled the handstamp so as to find the date of manufacture. Dismantling the handstamp was easy, reassembling it was another matter. A motorised tricycle used in rural posts from Oakham was seen at Wymondham, while a different form of transport was to be seen at Burrough-on-the-Hill where the rural postman posed with his horse and cart. What appeared to be the Boys Brigade of the village was lined up in front of the post office at Somerby. When the post office at Billesdon was faced with closure the villagers formed a company to buy and operate the post office.

Our final journey from Leicester started at Glenfield where the post office has now occupied at least four sites. At Groby we saw a good strike of the udc and a skeleton. Similar items were to be seen at Whitwick where the udc, struck in green, was on a letter to Whitwick endorsed 'Left Whitwick In Australia'. Another udc was seen at Packington, this time on a redirected letter. From there it was on to Ashby-de-la-Zouch, in particular the Bath Street T.S.O. where in addition to postcards of the office we saw examples of the publications produced by the postmaster. A superb photograph of the post office at Measham showed a board advertising the Birmingham Weekly Mercury which was reporting the funeral of Queen Victoria. John said that during the nineteenth century there were a number of instances where the husband was officially the postmaster but it was his wife who did all the work. There was such an example at Snarestone. When the man appointed as postmaster in 1867 died in 1893 his wife did not report his death as during his lifetime she had conducted all the business and considered herself to be the appointed postmistress. When the authorities found out some eighteen months later they decided to appoint the lady. This part then ended with material from Heather including a superb photograph of the post office in 1920.

John ended with over twenty postcards of Rutland post offices which may soon be back in Warwick.

During the viewing we were able to see the albums containing the remainder of John's collection of postcards and photographs of post offices for which purpose the premises of Warwick & Warwick are ideal. Our thanks are due to the company for allowing us to use their premises and especially to Joe Cottrill for giving up a Saturday to accommodate us.

Two udc's on one cover

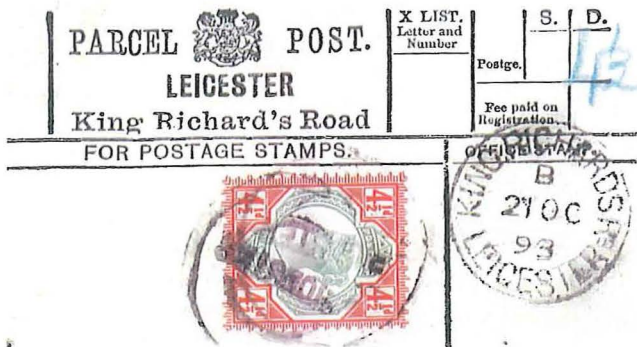


On the next page there are two more items from John's display.

KING RICHARD'S ROAD

PARCEL POST LABELS

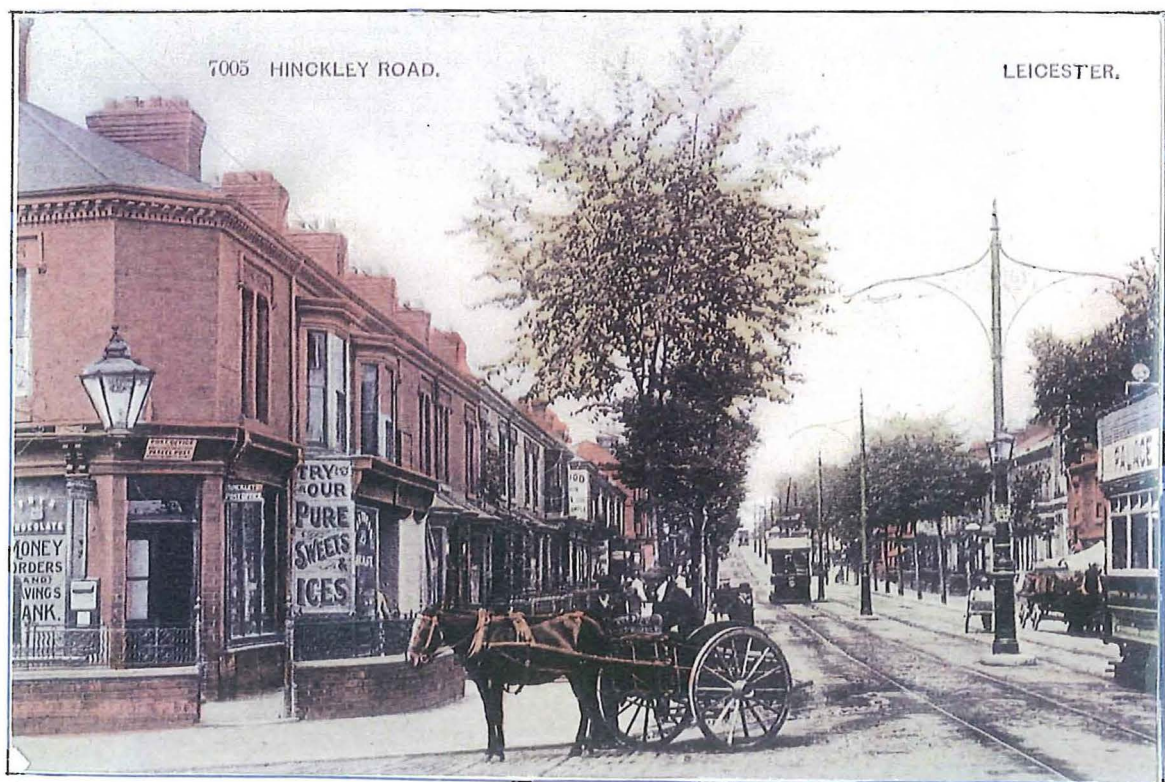
1893. 4½d for a weight over 1lb but under 2lb.



1897. 5d for a weight over 2lb but under 3lb.



1899. 3d for a weight under 1lb



A GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY LETTER

The item illustrated below is almost certainly philatelic in nature, but then, it is the first I have ever seen and I doubt that I shall see another.



The letter was sent from Quorn and Woodhouse station on 5th June 1905 on the 2.27 pm train. The 1903 GCR timetable shows a train leaving Quorn at 2.29 pm and arriving in Leicester at 2.46 pm. From Leicester there was a train at 3.09 pm for Marylebone where it arrived at 5.43 pm, or an express at 4.40 arriving in London at 6.42 pm. The reverse of the envelope was stamped in the SEDO at 8.15 pm so it is unlikely that the letter was delivered that evening. If the sender had put the letter into the post-box in Quorn, it would probably have arrived no later than it actually did.

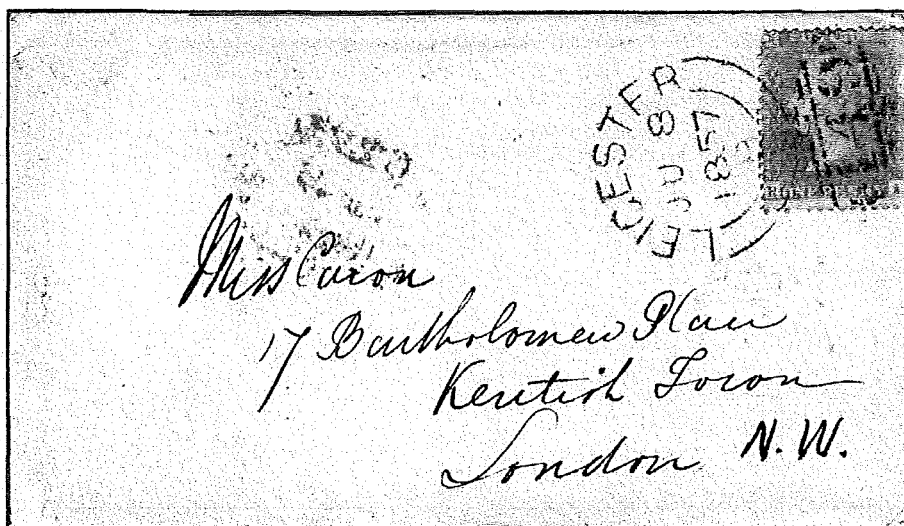


Quorn & Woodhouse station in August 2010.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE JOURNEY

I have no doubt that I am not the only member who, from time to time, finds that the contents of a letter are much more interesting than any postal markings that it carries. At a first glance, I was going to pass over the item shown below – yet another not very good strike of a Leicester sideways duplex – when I realised that the envelope contained a letter. The writer had travelled from London to Leicester by train and clearly had not enjoyed his journey for he wrote: "... I am arrived thus far on my journey in safety: but very much shaken with the railway carriage." Matters had not been helped by the fact that his cab had not turned up.

We take for granted the smooth journeys that we make by rail, thanks to welded rail and modern carriage suspensions. Though, perhaps today someone might describe a journey in a Pacer in exactly the same way.



Leicester:
June 8th 1857

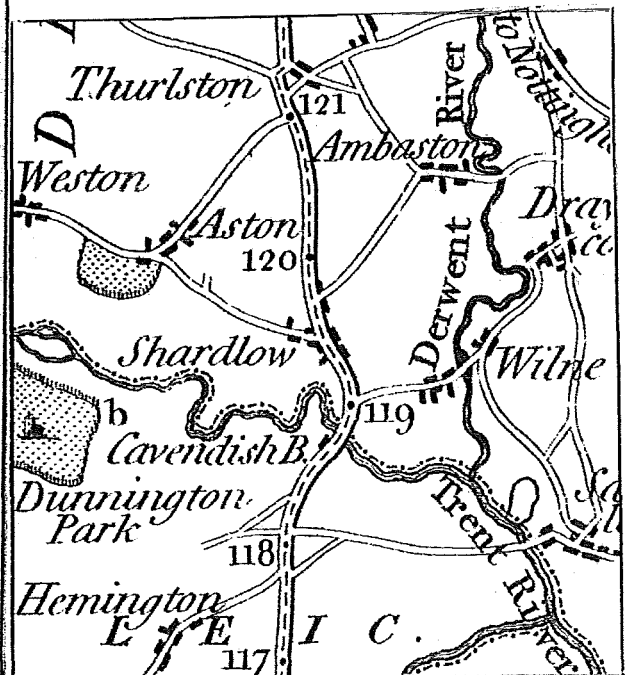
My very dear Leonie,

You will perceive by this note
that I am arrived thus far on my journey in
safety: but very much shaken with the rail
way carriage. I am sorry I was una-
ble to catch a glimpse of you this morning
but the stupid cabman arrived so late that
I had started before he arrived: fortunately
however I met him. I got to Finsbury Square
just three minutes before the train started
and had a desperate rush to get my ticket.
However that's all over and here I am.

Although the issue of a UDC for Cavendish Bridge took place on 30th December 1843, it has never been recorded used. Also, I have not been able to find any mention of a receiving office there after 1843. The minute (one sentence of over ninety words) of April from Colonel Maberly that I came across recently explains why.

It was originally proposed by me to place the Receiving Office at Cavendish Bridge as it appeared to be a more central spot for the general accommodation of the neighbourhood, but as the correspondence of Shardlow is much more considerable and the Inhabitants of the place earnestly desire this convenience I have no hesitation in now recommending that in compliance with this request from Mr Limby [?] MP the Receiving Office may be established at Shardlow instead of Cavendish Bridge and if your Lordship approve I will inform the treasury and Mr Limby to this effect."

Post 35/2018/1844



MADE IN BIRMINGHAM

by Mel Matthews

In the early 1850s Anthony Trollope, a surveyor with the Western Region of the Post Office, suggested experimenting with roadside post boxes in the Channel Islands. He had been sent to help improve the postal service on the Islands and having seen roadside boxes on the Continent, he thought that they were a great help to the public. Permission was given for the manufacture of seven boxes and the first were put into use in St Helier, Jersey on 23rd November 1852.

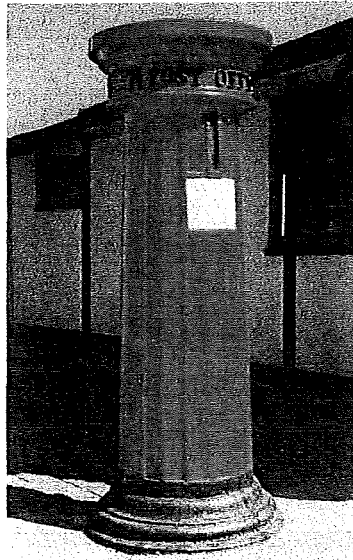
The experiment proved to be a great success and was soon extended to the mainland. The Surveyor in each region was responsible for arranging the manufacture and positioning of post boxes in their area. The Surveyor of the Birmingham District, John St Lawrence Beaufort, asked his architect, Mr Edge, to produce a suitable design. The design was sent to Smith and Hawkes of the Eagle Foundry in Broad Street, Birmingham, with a request for three sample boxes. Upon delivery of the boxes, it was found that they were eight feet in height and the cost was ten times the amount being paid for boxes in other parts of the country. As the misunderstanding regarding the height and cost was attributed to Mr Edge, the Postmaster General said that the Post Office should accept them. The boxes were cast in the form of a Doric column, with the usual vertical aperture. The domed roof was topped by an enormous crown on a tasselled cushion. The three boxes were put into service – one on New Street Station, Birmingham, the second in the Birmingham Bull Ring and the third was sited near the Houses of Parliament. The fate of the first two boxes is not known, but the third box now resides in a private garden in Kent.

After the debacle of the first boxes the second casting was much more restrained. The design retained the Doric column, but without the crown and standing about five feet tall. The boxes retained the vertical aperture and uniquely to the Doric column design, the door for removing the mail was placed at the rear. Several of these boxes are still in use – two can be found in Warwick, others in Banbury and Eton, as well as others.

When, because of concerns about security, the Post Office decided that the vertical apertures were no longer appropriate a further batch of Doric column boxes was cast with a horizontal aperture. Four of these boxes are still in daily use – one in Shirley, Solihull and a further three in Malvern.



1st Version
Private Garden



2nd Version
Eton



3rd Version
Solihull

WANSFORD BRIDGE AND THE MAILS

by Derek Smeathers

The first planned mailcoach service to Peterborough opened in April 1801 – being the new route from London to Barton-upon-Humber. This left the North Road just after Stilton. The North Road continued to Stamford, with a stop at about halfway, for a change of horses, in the Northamptonshire village of Wansford.

Wansford is on the north bank of the River Nene and its ancient stone bridge was crossed by the Edinburgh mailcoach on its way from London, beginning in October 1786. The bridge was narrow – just wide enough for the coach – and the fifteen arches spanned the whole river which was also the Northants/Hunts county boundary. At the south end of the bridge was the Haycock Inn which is still there. In February 1995, after a severe winter, the river became choked with ice floes with the result that part of the bridge was so badly damaged that it had to be completely rebuilt. It did not open again for almost two years, during which time the mailcoach was diverted just after Stilton to go through Peterborough for the next suitable bridge and thence on to Stamford. So Peterborough had its first mailcoach in 1795 almost by accident, we can say! A horse post carried on from Stilton as far as the Haycock which is actually in Stibbington parish and was therefore in Huntingdonshire. The local mails for Wansford and the surrounding area of Northants were taken across the river by boat.

In the letter opposite, dated 14th August, and addressed to Francis Freeling, the Earl of Westmoreland, a former Postmaster General complains of delays in his mail reaching him at Apethorpe, a few miles from Wansford. He does not mention the bridge, though he would have known all about it, and the altered postal arrangements were clearly not without fault! There is no record of any reply from Freeling. The bridge was rebuilt with only ten arches which were wider to allow the ice to pass through. Mailcoaches had resumed their normal use of the bridge by the end of 1796.



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Dear Sir,

Aethorne, August 14
1796

I am very sorry to be obliged to trouble
you with a complaint of $\frac{1}{2}$ irregularity
with which my Newspapers are forwarded
being often mispent two or three times in
a week with $\frac{1}{2}$ plainest Directions
as $\frac{1}{2}$ one Envelope, & to request you
will have $\frac{1}{2}$ goodness to give orders, that
attention may be shown & that this
mistake may not happen in future,

I am

Very respectfully

Your humble Servant

Aethorne

Wants London

It wants.

W. W. W. W.

THE POST OFFICE IN 19TH CENTURY WANSFORD

by Derek Smeathers

In 1911 the Peterborough Advertiser (a broadsheet newspaper) ran an article headlined "*How Wansford Lost Its Three Industries*" based on reminiscences of the two eldest inhabitants at that time. What follows is an edited version of the story told by the oldest, Thomas Hazeldine.

"I was born in Wansford on the 21st August 1827, so that I am now in my 85th year. My father had lived in Wansford for many years. I left school when I was twelve and my first occupation was to assist my uncle at the Elton toll-bar. He came to my Father and said 'I want Tom to come over to Elton toll-bar and help me.' That was at the height of the coaching days, so at Michaelmas 1839, I went to Elton [*about 4 miles south of Wansford*]. But my uncle died about twelve months after that and I returned home. Then the Wansford postmaster came to my father one day and wanted to know if I should be man enough to take the letters out. I was very glad to accept the post. I took the delivery of letters then, though I was only about 13 years of age. I went over the bridge in the morning, and then went up to Waternewton, Sutton, Upton, Southorpe and Wittering. Of course there were not so many letters in those days, and I did not have to go to each of these villages every day, but they were in my daily round, and I regularly walked the whole distance. I was paid for delivering them, not by the postmaster, but by the people to whom I took the letters, and I was free to fix my own charge. I consulted with the boy who had the duties before me as to what charges he made, and I fixed my scale practically the same as his. It was so much a letter, according to the distance, but if I had several letters for the same house I did not make a separate charge for each letter; one charge covered the cost of delivery for all the letters for a particular house. My responsibility to the Postmaster was that each letter should be faithfully delivered.

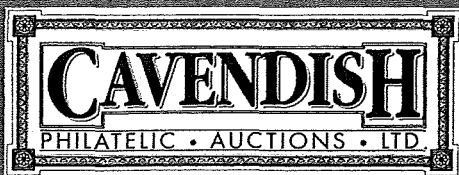
When I grew older I went into my Father's business of a shoemaker, and I learned the trade in my Father's own workshop. After his death I carried on the business until 1872 when I returned to the post office and became Postmaster of Wansford which position I held for 30 years and during the whole of that time I never had a day's holiday.

The coaching days were one of Wansford's three great industries, the other two being the Paper Mills (which closed about 1870) and the Great Langton timber mills, which had disappeared long before the Paper Mills. Coaching was centered on the Haycock Inn and in the 1830s, some twenty-four mail and stage coaches passed over Wansford Bridge every twenty-four hours. The Haycock has had as many as thirty pairs of horses out on the road at a time, independently of the horses required for changing for the mail and stage coaches which would require as many more. The mailcoach that carried the mail bags from Wansford to Stamford every night passed through the village every night, and I often handed the bags to the guard. The coach as it approached the post office would go slowly, but did not actually stop. The guard would jump off his seat, exchange bags, and running behind the coach would climb into his place again, the coach never having stopped. When old Mr Dexter was the postmaster he always had a clothes prop handy. As the coach approached he would hang out the mail bag at the end of it and the guard would snatch it off as the coach went dashing along without any diminution of speed, he having previously thrown the Wansford bag of letters from the coach. The mail coach did not change horses at the Haycock for many years, but in the latter part of the time it did. It had formerly changed horses at the Wheatsheaf at Sibson which catered specially for stage wagons.

The coming of the railways, however, sounded the death knell for the Coaching Industry of Wansford. The Northampton and Peterborough Railway was the first line to be made in this part of England. We watched the making of it by a great number of men who made their rough homes in the old quarry we call 'Hills and Holes'. I was at that time delivering the letters and I had to go to the colony of navvies engaged in the work of tunnelling and making the railway. They lived in wooden huts in the 'holes' where stone had been excavated many years before, and there were so many huts they had divided them into streets, each street being named. I cannot remember all the names but one was called Bedford Street where there was a large hut, number 22, where I often had to leave letters. It was occupied by a very nice family – many navvies had their wives and children with them."



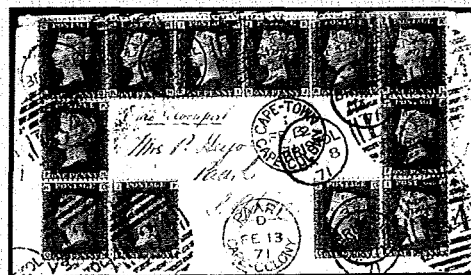
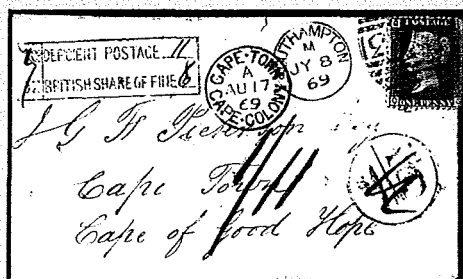
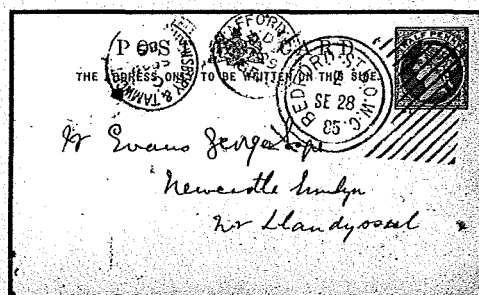
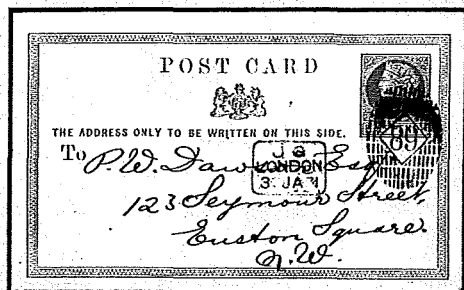
The Haycock Hotel, Wansford in England, in June.



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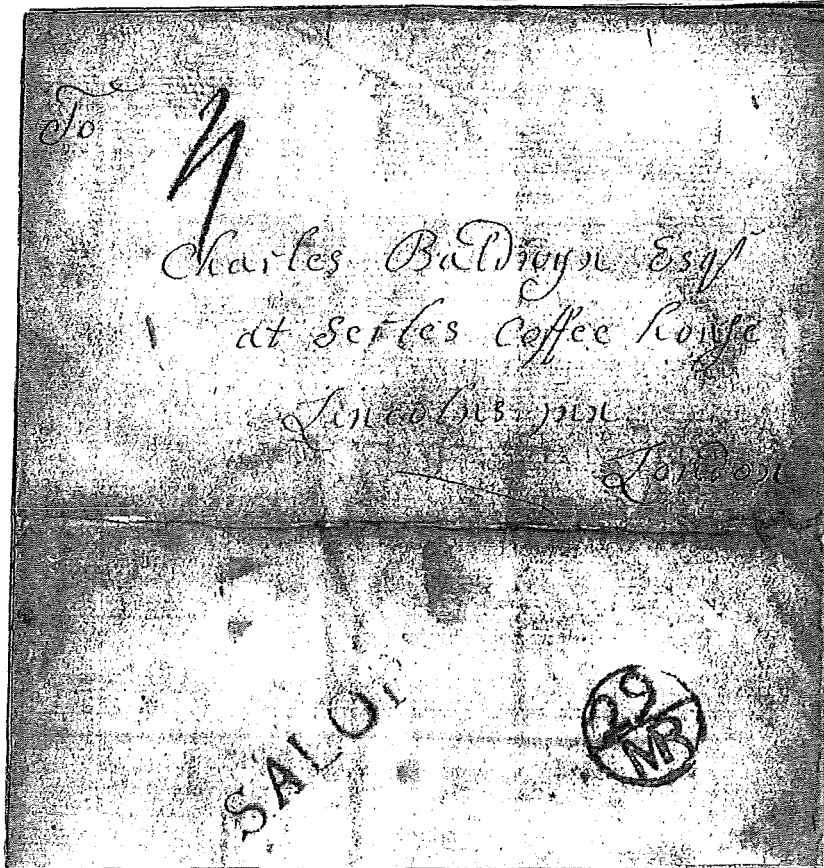
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LONDON COFFEE HOUSES LETTERS SENT FROM SHROPSHIRE

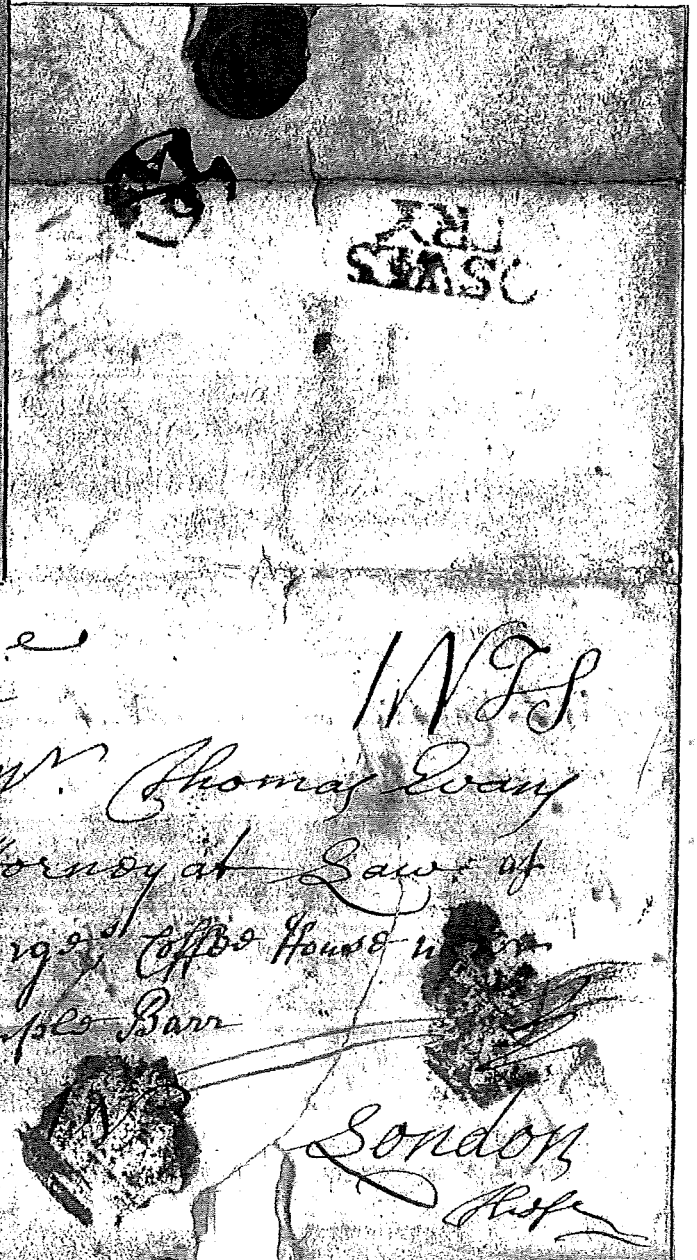
by Guy Bridges

Illustrated below is a selection of London Coffee House letters sent from various Shropshire towns.

A letter written at Pitchford (six miles southeast of Shrewsbury) on 26th March 1725, and addressed to 'Serles Coffee House, Lincolns inn, London'. The letter was posted at Shrewsbury where it was struck on the reverse with the 'SALOP' handstamp and charged fourpence, the rate for a single letter for a distance over eighty miles.

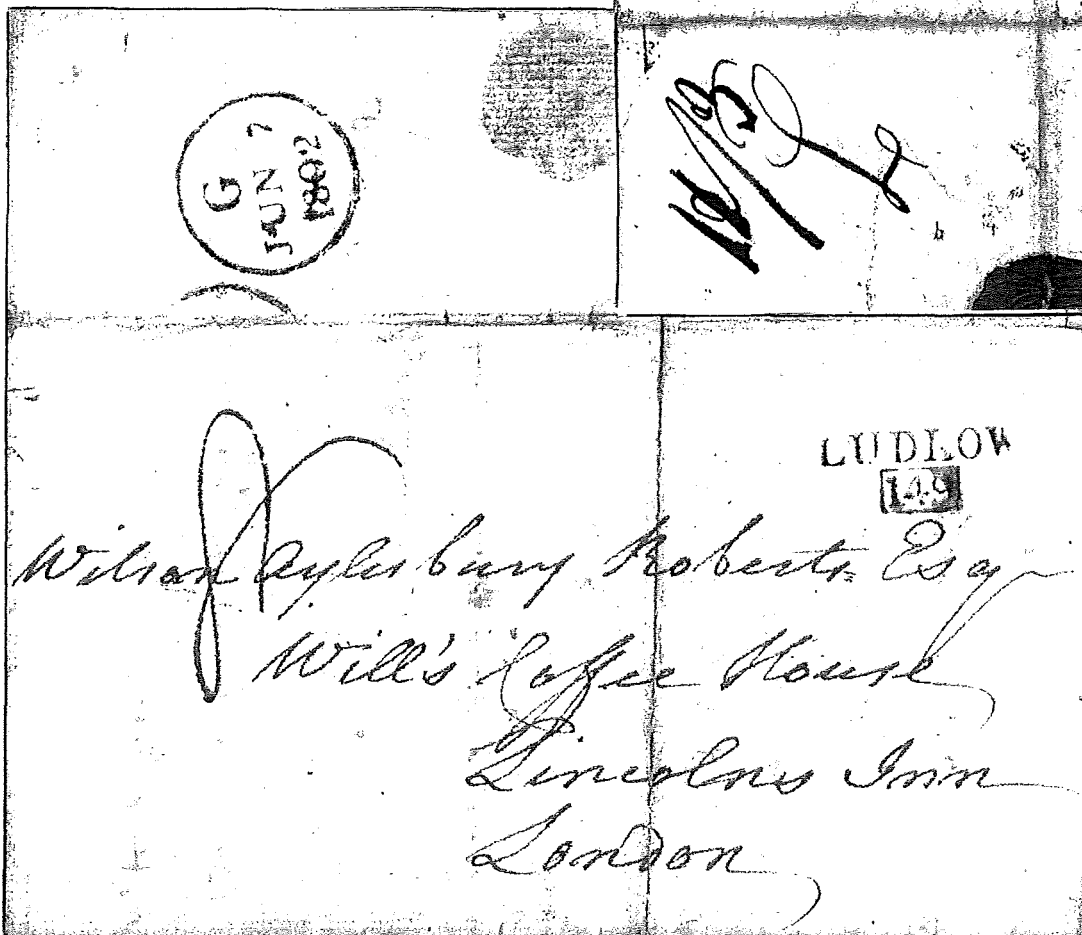
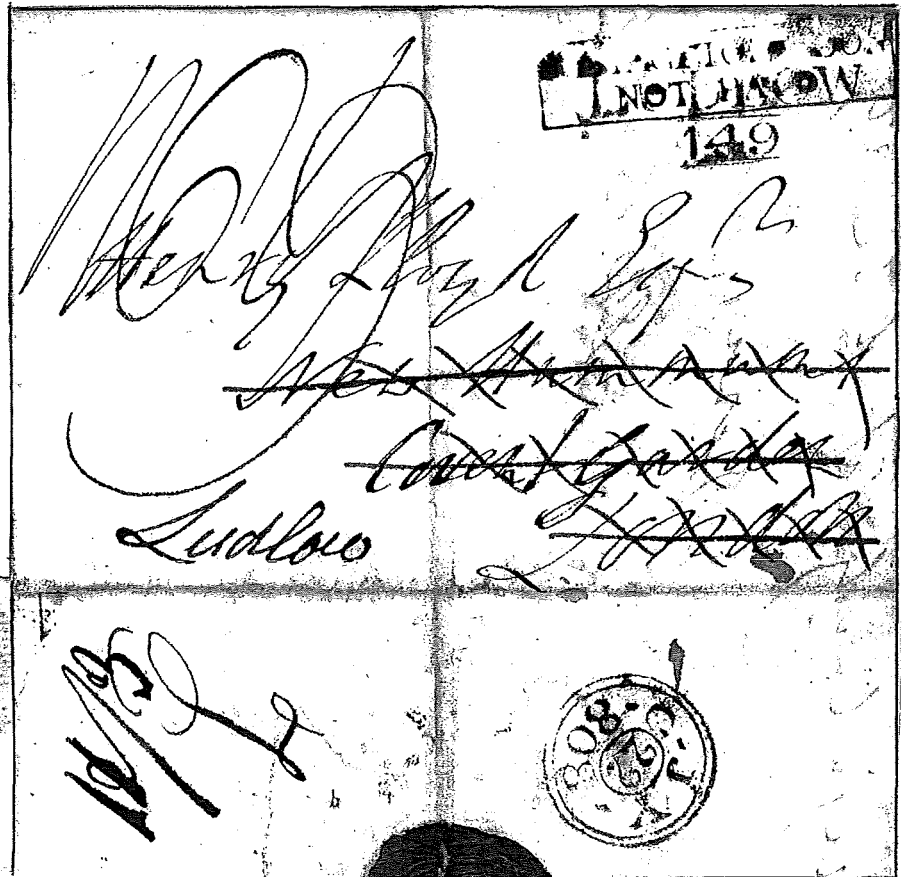


A letter sent to 'Georges Coffee House near Temple Barr, London. Written on 13th December 1745 at Oswestry where it was struck with the two-line 'OSWESTRY' (SH407). It was charged fourpence, but on arrival in London on 6th January 1746 an inspector amended the charge to 1/- as it contained enclosures.



A letter written at Crofton on 20th July 1808, and addressed to 'New Hummums, Convent Garden, London'. It was posted at Ludlow where a mileage stamp (SH 250) was applied and charged ninepence, the rate for 120-170 miles. It was also marked on the reverse with a manuscript 'L' and 11/3, showing the value of the bundle of letters to London. By the time the letter had arrived in London on 22nd July, Mr Lloyd had returned to Ludlow. So, the letter was redirected back to Ludlow. The framed 'POSTAGE TO LONDON/NOT PAID' was struck on it and the charge altered to 1s. 6d for carriage in both directions.

A cover sent to 'Will's Coffee House' Lincoln's Inn, London in June 1802 from Ludlow where the mileage mark SH 246 was struck on it. It was charged eightpence for 120-170 miles.



THE NORTHERN MAILCOACHES

As many readers will know, the late Reverend Chris Beaver, one of our most distinguished members, carried out major research into the British mailcoach system and his definitive work on the London Mailcoaches was published in the Journal of the Great Britain Philatelic Society shortly before his untimely death in 2003. However, beyond that work, Chris prepared notes on other parts of the mailcoach system, most significantly the provincial northern mailcoaches, including those in Scotland.

Our member Mike Mapleton had hoped to produce a comprehensive write-up of the northern mailcoaches and had access to Chris' notes. However, like many of us, he has found that the hoped-for additional research and his available time do not match, nor have any practical chance of doing so. Chris's research notes have therefore been returned to the Society's Coordinating Editor and we are looking for a member, whose postal history interests extend beyond the Midlands, who might like to make a name for himself and tackle this fascinating project. Those who are familiar with Chris' research will know that his notes are usually handwritten on fragments of old hymn sheets and orders of service but are both organised and rigorous. If this is a project you feel able to tackle, please advise the Editor and he will let John Calladine know of your interest. It could provide someone with a very special opportunity to make a major contribution to postal history knowledge.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND AUCTION

This will be held on Saturday 27th April at St. Germain's Church Hall, B16 9TD, starting at 1 p.m. To enable the auction catalogue to be distributed in good time, it is essential to let Eric Lewis have your lots by the date of the January meeting, 5th January, but at the very latest by the meeting on 16th February. Alternatively lots may be sent by post to: Mr E Lewis, 27 Rathbone Road, Smethwick B67 5JG to arrive by 16th February. Please give full descriptions with an estimated market value and your reserve price for each item. Please note the minimum reserve for lots remains at £3. As usual, a gift of any surplus material you may care to donate to sell in aid of Society funds will be much appreciated. These lots usually raise a significant sum of money, enabling subscriptions to be kept down. So please sort those surplus items as soon as possible to enable descriptions to be incorporated into the printed catalogue.

FUTURE EDITIONS OF MIDLAND MAIL

At the committee meeting in October it was decided that from January 2013 the number of editions of Midland Mail will be reduced to four per year. The dates of issue will be timed to accommodate other essential details such as the programme and auction lists. It is intended that in a year there will be approximately the same number of pages. When the basic weight for letters was 60g the maximum number of pages that could be included without exceeding that weight was twenty. Now that a letter weighing up to 100g can be sent at the basic rate, it is more economical to send out four issues per year with each containing about twenty-four pages. Though the number of pages depends on how many contributions are received by the editor.

THE JANUARY MEETING

Please note that because of pedestrianisation of Corporation Street, bus routes to St Germain's Church from New Street Station have changed. If you have not kept the details of the revised bus stops sent out with the details of the September meeting, Eric Lewis will send a copy if you contact him on 01214291222. In addition to the 127 and 128 routes mentioned on the above sheet, a number 129 route runs on the same route as far as St Germain's Church. Services continue to run at ten minute intervals on Saturdays.

MIDPEX 2013

Please make a note in your diaries that this will be held on 6th July at the same venue as the last event which was very successful – The Warwickshire Exhibition Centre. It is hoped that our Society will have a stand in the same position as in 2011.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

The date on which the next edition will be issued is uncertain but in the meantime I wish you all a very happy Christmas. However, please sort out all those unwanted items and send them to Eric Lewis for the auction, and articles, long or short, to:

John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG (email Johnesoer@aol.com)