*The magazine for collectors of UK stamps*

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# Philatelic Bulletin

VOLUME 59 NO.4

# Back to black

The Penny Black as revealed in the Victorian newspaper archives




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# Contents

**The postal revolution – what the papers said**
Victorian postal reforms were as progressive as the technological advancements of the era, but the media mocked the Penny Black **100**




**Salvaged and delivered** Mail recovered from the depths after the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879 **108**



**Dropping a line** A fellow artist tries to impress the illustrator of the William Blake facsimiles **118**

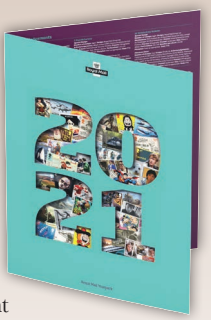


**Can you recall?**
Take the quiz and test your knowledge on the stamp issues of 2021 **116**

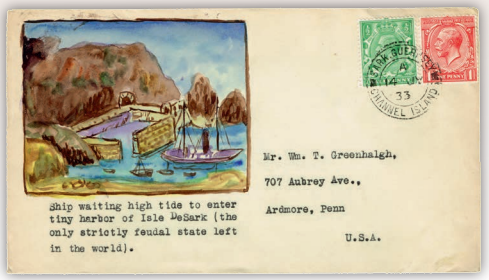



**Complete collections**
The choice of Royal Mail annual products **122**




**Sark** Dane Garrod sheds light on the first Dark Sky Island **124**




**Editor** Chloe Tuck, Royal Mail, 185 Farringdon Road, Floor MP-03, London EC1A 1AA ● **Design and content creation** Ian Boardman, Adesso Creative Ltd ● Price £2.45 from Post Office Ltd philatelic outlets or by order from Post Office branches ● **12 months' subscriptions** £22.95 UK and Europe; £29.50 rest of the world. Send subscriptions to Royal Mail Stamps and Collectibles, PO Box 1373, Sunderland SR5 9PG, UK or subscribe online at royalmail.com/bulletin ● **Binders** (to hold 24 issues) are priced at £4.99 and are available by post or online ● Copyright and editorial rights are reserved by Royal Mail Group Ltd ● All rights reserved ● Reproduction in whole or part is prohibited without prior permission of Royal Mail Group Ltd ● **Printed** in Great Britain by Zenith Print & Packaging Ltd ● **ISSN** 2633 2310 ● Royal Mail is a trading name and registered trade mark of Royal Mail Group Ltd. Registered in England and Wales, number 4138203. Registered office: 185 Farringdon Road, London, EC1A 1AA ● Stamp images © Royal Mail Group Ltd.

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# The Penny Black and the Victorian media

*Article by Ian Boardman, but all credit to Dr Norman Watson for his research into the Victorian newspaper archives and commentary on the era as presented to the Great Britain Philatelic Society.*

The Penny Black, the world's first postage stamp, surely retains the title as the most famous. Although on sale to the public on 1 May 1840, it was five days later when validated for postage that the date of 6 May was set to become firmly etched in the hearts and minds of postal historians and lovers of traditional philately – both globally and throughout the generations. The simplicity of the label (as it was known at the time) with the beauty of William Wyon's portrait design as the main feature, has proved to be the blueprint for numerous stamps that followed – today's celebrated Machin definitives, although simplified further, have followed the essential visual style.

The Penny Black was of course synonymous with Rowland Hill's postal reforms and uniform tariffs. These inaugurated cheaper rates that opened doors for the poor and working classes to send mail – encouraging broader and higher levels of literacy. The postal initiatives went on to impact hugely on global communications – perhaps as much as the world wide web in the modern era.




The beautiful Penny Black printed from Plate 1a. The plate was not hardened and soon showed signs of wear. Having been withdrawn, repaired and hardened, 1b became the plate's reference in its new condition. A contemporary writer for *John Bull* wasn't impressed with the red Maltese Cross cancellation, he wrote: 'the indignity upon Her Majesty... daubs of red paint they smear upon her Royal cheeks'

Widespread studies comprising various depths of analysis of the stamp have fed ravenous philatelic appetites, and books written on the subject are legion. So what is there to add? Well, when we reflect on the stamp's impact, we tend to assume that it was almost universally received with glowing acclaim, however a study by postal historian Dr Norman Watson has revealed that this certainly was not always the case. And in a presentation he gave to the Great Britain Philatelic Society he revealed how the press of the time printed the thoughts of writers that were often quite poisonous with their pens. Norman explains that at the root of much of the negative press was the hostility between the political rivals of the day – 'a Whig government was in place in 1840 with the Tories being their bitter political rivals. The Whigs welcomed the increasing political participation of the middle classes. They supported the abolition of slavery and had triumphed as champions of the parliamentary reform, they also used a national network of newspapers and magazines to deliver their messages... this was countered blow by blow by the Tory press and so politics dominated how the press viewed the new stamps.'

With the Whigs in power and overseeing the postal reforms, the Conservatives were keen to use the media to criticise their initiatives in no uncertain terms. *The Essex Standard* described the stamp as 'a vulgar little label', *The Leeds Advertiser* expressed that it was 'libel to call it a resemblance to the Queen', and *The Northern Star* lamented the prospect that 'the Queen's face be spit upon.' *The Liverpool Mail* on 19 May 1840 even questioned the integrity of the arrangement – 'It is a scheme of fraud and humbug from beginning to end. It possesses not

one redeeming quality.' *The Morning Post* was no less scathing when it christened the stamp a 'sticking plaster' – 'They can never bring the sticking-plaster system into general use, for a common idiot can see the absurdity of it... the people will have none of it.' And it would seem that some sections of the media endorsed the alias as reported in *The Birmingham Journal* of 16 May – 'We can fancy its application to a cut finger.' And some were even influenced to use it as such, the following month a correspondent at *The Newry Telegraph* wrote – 'The other day a friend of mine, while shaving, cut his face, and on the wound he stuck a penny postage stamp, from which, with Her Majesty's face to the front, he derived all the advantages of Court plaister!'

However not all press coverage was politically motivated or simply laced with ridicule and mockery, it seems that at one point health scares were circulating with suggestions that the stamps may contain poison. Anxieties were probably fuelled by comments such as those in *Household World* magazine which warned of 'a variety of diseases engendered by the rash letter writers who used their tongues to moisten the labels. Even the cholera was traced to that pernicious practice.' This confirms that there's nothing new about fake news! The reality of course being that nothing more sinister than potato starch was found to be contained in the adhesive.

The press also muddied the waters as to where the stamps should be placed. You would think there was little ambiguity in the GPO Notice of 7 May stating 'The labels should be placed on the front of the letter and upon the right hand corner of the upper side.' Despite this, confusion reigned, and understandably, when you consider on the same day a leading newspaper, *The Morning Post*, suggested the stamps 'were to serve as a substitute for a seal or a wafer' – thus advising they were to be stuck on the fold of the envelope's reverse. Although the incorrect instructions were generally not followed, the concept of using the stamps to seal a letter was developed with the Henry Tuck Hermetic Envelope. They allowed extra width on the right hand side which ►




How not to do it! But as advised by *The Morning Post* – the Penny Black used as a seal, placed upside down on the reverse of a Leeds to Hartlepool entire – the address also being written in error on the back

could be wrapped round to the front and sealed with a stamp on the top right hand corner. Thereby rendering sealing wax or wafer seals unnecessary. These items are relatively rare, but were certainly used in the highest echelons of society – as illustrated. The cover (opposite, top) was sent by Sir Robert Peel to William Gladstone – both served as British prime ministers. Sir Robert Peel added his own seal in wax – no doubt for added security. Another example of the Henry Tuck Hermetic Envelope is below that one, again from Sir Robert Peel but this time to the Duke of Wellington. The whole stamp remains intact on this one, perhaps the Duke even in those early days recognised it was sacrilege to tear a Penny Black in two! He consequently tore into the top of the envelope to access contents and avoided damage to the stamp. This item also clearly demonstrates how the envelope folded down the right hand side, and once again shows Sir Robert's seal.




Another item with the stamp used as a seal on the reverse, with the resulting torn Penny Black (Plate 5) after opening. The Manchester datestamp is struck where the stamp should have correctly been positioned. The front of the cover also shows an orange Maltese Cross and a 'PL' cachet indicating 'Paid Late'

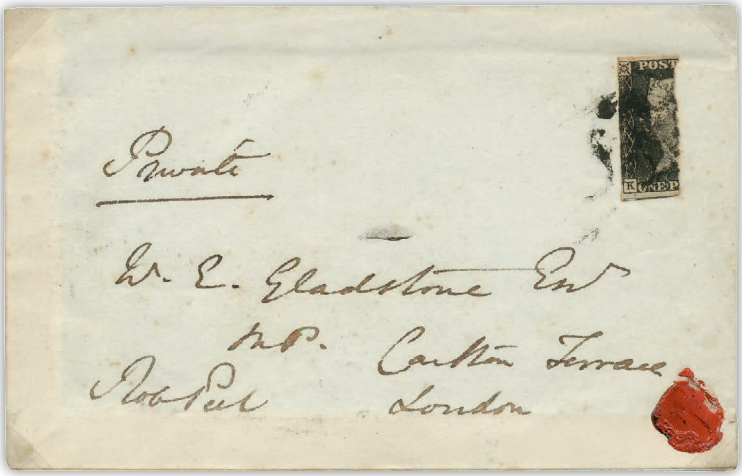


Norman Watson notes an astute observation about Sir Robert – 'He was quite an interesting chap because he was a leader of the Tories in 1840 so he was by and large against the reforms. In fact quite a critic, he argued for the number of characters on the front of the Mulready stationery to be reduced because he believed that there wasn't room for people to put the address on. So that was one thing. But in a way, perhaps he might not only have been remembered for starting the modern police force because he also argued for the minimum postal rate to be thruppence – if he had his way the Penny Black would not have existed at all.'

The Maltese Cross handstamp used for cancelling the stamps also generated jibes from the press. The General Post Office in April of 1840 in advance of the stamp being issued, gave the following directive – 'To all postmasters: You will carefully stamp with the Cancelling Stamp that has been forwarded ►




Henry Tuck's pioneering Hermetic Envelope was designed to use stamps for a dual purpose – to pay for the postage and seal the letter. This cover sent by Sir Robert Peel to The Duke of Wellington is dated on the reverse 26 November 1840




Henry Tuck's Hermetic Envelope with a Penny Black used as a seal. On opening, the stamp was torn in two along the fold it was securing. The contents of the letter of 1841 may well have been sensitive – given the writer Sir Robert Peel and the recipient W. E. Gladstone

to you, the Stamped Covers and Envelopes, as well as the adhesive... in the case of more than one stamp being attached to a Letter, each stamp must be separately obliterated.' However in practice it was not a procedure that everyone embraced, on 17 May the *John Bull* Sunday newspaper expressed disgust at '...the indignity upon Her Majesty as her own servants, the postmasters, offer the daubs of red paint they smear upon her Royal cheeks.' And it would seem that not all postmasters followed the instruction of tying stamps to envelopes with one strike of the handstamp as the example opposite illustrates.

There were concerns before the stamps were issued that unscrupulous members of the public could potentially wash off the red handstamp cancellations for reusage of stamps. Such fears were not misplaced and on 21 May Rowland Hill wrote, 'all sorts of tricks are being played by the public who are exercising their ingenuity in devising contrivances for removing the obliterating stamps (handstamps) by chemical agents and other means.' Subsequently the inks were changed to black, and Hill was confident the black would be more durable, on 27 June he wrote, 'All who have professed to be able to remove the red ink obliteration have been requested to try their hands on the black ink, and have given it up.' However, often in poor candlelight postmasters sometimes struggled to see the black handstamps on the black stamps – tempting some to attempt to repeat the use of stamps as in the example here (opposite, bottom). This stimulated the press supportive of the Whig government and consequently,


THE MORNING POST, THURSDAY, MAY 7, 1840.

NEW POST OFFICE ATROCITY.—As if the effigy of the Queen on the "glutinous wash" affair were not sufficiently libellous on her Majesty, the authorities have added to the affront, in practice, by stamping the Royal head with a sprawling red arabesque. Of course it was quite right to take proper precautions against fraudulently using the badge a second time, but really Mr. Rowland Hill has no business to tattoo the Majesty of England into the resemblance of the Queen of the Cannibal Islands.



A day after the Penny Black was validated for postage, on 7 May, *The Morning Post* heaped scorn on the new postal service. Under the heading 'New Post Office Atrocity' the Maltese Cross was descibed as a 'sprawling red arabesque.' This stimulated someone to repeat the views – handwritten on a Mulready wrapper

the postal reforms and the stamps to suggest in the *Waterford Mail* that 'using a stamp a second time was a felony, and that those doing so could expect to be transported'. And so a more permanent solution was sought to improve security and help prevent forgery, resulting in the famous (to postal historians) 'rainbow trials'. These involved experiments that were conducted using a variety of inks, papers and cancellations, which were tested with different chemicals. These ulimately culminated with the decision to switch to a red 1d stamp – the Penny Red being issued on 10 February 1841.

Running concurrently with the Penny Blacks was the official Mulready pre-paid postal stationery (named after its illustrator, William Mulready) which facilitated another option to pay for postage in accord with the new ►




Although a single strike of the cancellation was stipulated for each stamp, several covers exist with various multiples. This item dated 19 July 1840 with two strikes of the Maltese Cross stimulates additional interest with the first strike of the Maltese Cross (on the left) having been applied with red ink seemingly contaminated with black ink




This is an excellent example of a foiled attempt of postal fraud. The stamp when applied to the cover had previously been cancelled. But this one didn't slip through the net, an astute postal clerk intercepted the item and in manuscript added 'O.S' below the stamp – signifying 'Old Stamp', and endorsed that with 'Stamp been used.' The '2' also indicating '2d to pay'. Dated 15 March 1841, this Lamberhurst to Tenterden wrapper was sent after the introduction of the Penny Red, postmasters were encouraged to exhaust existing stocks of Penny Blacks

reforms. These lettersheets and envelopes depicted images of Britannia surrounded by figures representing various continents. Norman Watson explains that 'they were of course widely condemned in the press. Stationery was seen as pompous and it was ridiculed in both the newspapers that were favourable to the government and those that were not... Not surprisingly therefore they were very quickly parodied and lampooned by copies.' The one illustrated (bottom) was produced by Southgate (envelope no. 6), which was published in June 1840, and is known today as the Papal envelope.

Essentially the Mulready illustration was an ornate frank indicating that postage had been pre-paid. Postmasters were instructed to cancel Mulreadys with a single strike of the Maltese Cross on the figure of Britannia as shown here – a directive not always adhered to. The day after they were made available for purchase on 2 May *The Times* called them laughable and ludicrous




Norman Watson describes the shenanigans going on in this satirical cover: *'If you look at the top centre instead of Britannia, you've got the Holy Father sitting there, lording over the caricature around him. Spoof Mulreadys are generally witty and quite clever, but this envelope is surprisingly offensive, not just because we've got a Scotsman here giving birth to a small child out of his mouth. The Pope blessing a donkey. Priests encouraging depravity and a China man is impaled on the top of a pagoda. The opium wars, of course, had just started at that time'*



It's revealing then that much of the Victorian newspaper coverage didn't welcome Rowland Hill's postal reforms – mocking their implementation, but as we've seen, the evidence suggests that this was borne out of political biases. However, given the success of the very first postage stamp and its immense contribution to communications – regardless of social status, scoffers of the little black label have also had to eat large portions of humble pie ●

*Images below are reproduced with the kind permission of The Postal Museum. Thanks also to Dr Norman Watson for images on pages 101,102 and 103, also to Howard Hughes for images on pages 104 and 105, and to Bill Barrell for the Mulready images om page 106.*




This satire posted on 31 May 1840 was published by Messrs. Fores, of Piccadilly, and has a Penny Black cancelled with a double strike of the Maltese Cross. The artist John Leech adds a nice touch centred at the bottom of the cover – a leech in a bottle! The bizarre illustration includes a cheerful Britannia above a monkey in uniform seated upon a lion






The Southgate Caricature No1 with tombstone, 'PAID' date stamp '26 JU 26' /1840. Britannia dons an eyepatch, a drunk joins the lion below her and raises a glass. Meanwhile an artful dodger spots an opportunity as a gentleman posts a letter

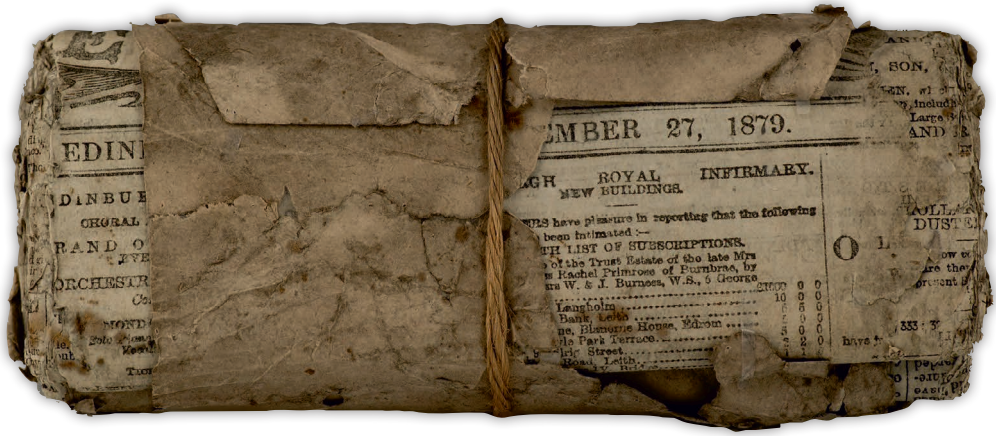
# Lost mail in the Firth of Tay

Sadly, there are occasional tragic accidents when it comes to transport, whether it be sea, land or air. Foremost in the British public's memory is the loss of *RMS Titanic* on its maiden voyage on a clear but cold April evening just over 100 years ago. In air transport it would be the Comet jet airliner accidents, and more recently the Concorde at Paris or the still missing flight MH370. In all of these there was lost mail, burnt on land or missing in the depths of the ocean. However, at times mail has been washed ashore or brought to the surface by intrepid divers, and this is what occurred on what is perhaps the best remembered rail accident in the UK – the Tay Bridge Disaster.

The railway route northbound has always been one that has attracted a desire to lessen the time taken. Linking the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow with London, a need arose to find the shortest route possible, even if that brought obstacles of hills and rivers to cross. Of the two great railway routes to the north, the alliance of the Great Northern and North Eastern Railways had a decided advantage over their rival London & North Western. Their line was more direct and more easily graded, but once they had handed over the traffic to their Scottish partner, the North British Railway, the advantage was lost. North of Edinburgh the deep inlets of the Firths of Forth and Tay cut the line of the route. Twice the unfortunate traveller by the east coast route had to exchange the comparative warmth and comfort of their train compartment for a small ferry boat to slowly cross these storm-swept firths.

Inevitably this had to be remedied, and in 1871, some eight years before these illustrated items of mail sunk to the bottom of the Firth of Tay, a contract for the construction of a bridge to the design of Thomas Bouch was signed. A rock foundation was assumed but soon after construction commenced, he found he had been misled by the preliminary borings and that the bed of the Tay was not as solid as had been supposed. After fourteen piers had been constructed in brick, Bouch decided to reduce the weight on the pier foundations by using cast-iron columns. In order to provide maximum headway for shipping the bridge was built partly on a slightly rising gradient with the rails laid on top of the girders in the central part, this being known as the high girders.

This immense bridge was by far the longest in the world when completed in 1878. Prior to its official opening and use, Major-General Hutchinson of the Board of Trade inspected the construction, in the usual way, and arranged for





tests to be carried out. This included coupling six 73 ton locomotives together and running these over the bridge at 40 miles per hour. Expressing his approval, the inspector qualified it by making two statements which, in the light of after events, were of great significance. 'It is not desirable', he said, 'that trains should run over the bridge at a high rate of speed and I recommend that a limit of twenty-five miles an hour be imposed. I should wish to have an opportunity of observing the effects of a high wind when a train of carriages is running over the bridge'. He did not realise that in a short time that terrible effect would be revealed. By people intoxicated with material progress and achievement, the bridge over the Tay was acclaimed as a masterpiece of engineering skill. Queen Victoria crossed it soon after it was opened and later knighted a triumphant Thomas Bouch who was now busily at work on a bridge to span the Firth of Forth.

The last Sunday of December 1879, the 28th, was a stormy day with deteriorating weather, and after the northbound travellers had suffered the usual discomforts of the Forth Ferry with a full gale blowing, the last train of the day, a Burntisland to Dundee passenger train, finally reached St Fort station on the approach to the Tay Bridge at 7pm by which time the fury of the storm had increased. As ever, mail was being transported by the quickest way possible, and before the advent of air travel, this was the steam train. How many mailbags were on this train is not definitely known. As was usual, tickets of the Dundee passengers were collected at St Fort and then the train moved off at 7.15pm, Driver Mitchell picking up the staff for the single line section at St Fort signal box as he passed onto the bridge. Such was the force of the wind, that after delivering the staff, signalman Barclay had to crawl back to his cabin on all fours. After he had sent the 'Train entering section' signal to his colleague on the north shore, ►



Still tied with the original string is the packet of two folded Scotsman newspapers dated the previous day to the disaster, 27 December 1879. The newspaper wrapper was addressed to the Rev. E.T. Vernon of Arbirlot, near Arbroath, and bears a Dundee postmark. After the fall into the Tay and release from a mailbag, it was washed ashore and recovered from Broughty Ferry beach

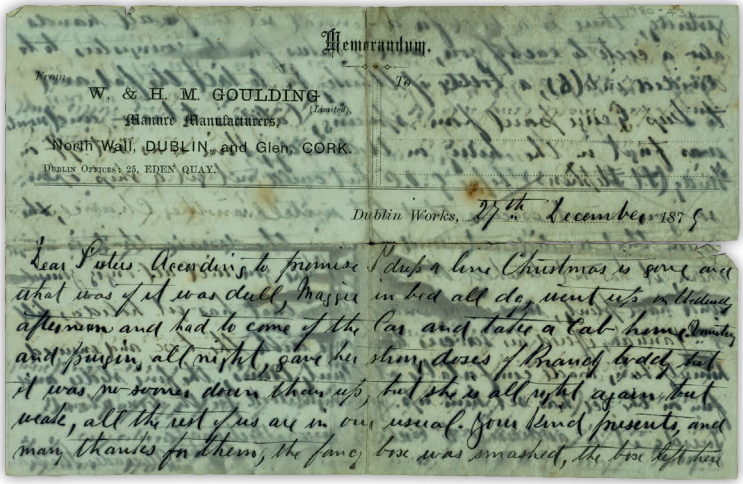
The front of the cover addressed to a sister in Aberdeen from the writer in Dublin, Alexander Strachan, and postmarked on the day before it crossed the Tay and became submerged in the raging waters below. It may have been badly damaged, but fortunately the letter inside survived




The back of the cover from Dublin with the printed entwined initials on the postal stationery of the manure manufacturers, W. & H.M. Goulding Limited. Although water stained and damaged, it was deliverable as shown by the arrival postmark of Aberdeen on 30 December 1879, two days after the fall to the Firth in a mailbag




On a company memorandum where Alexander had access to such stationery as well as company envelopes, the message begins 'Dear Sisters' and recounts the happenings over Christmas Day just gone by with 'Maggie in bed' and 'gave her… doses of brandy'. Fortunately the ink has run just a little, and not enough for any words to be lost with the water staining



Barclay and a colleague named John Watt stood by the window in the signal box watching the tail lights as they dwindled over the bridge girders. Barclay noticed sparks apparently flying from the train's wheels as he had an hour earlier with the previous northbound train, and was pointing this out to Watt when a sudden violent gust of wind shook the cabin. At the same moment both men saw a sudden brilliant flash of light followed by total darkness. Barclay tested his block instruments to contact the signal box on the north shore, but found that they were dead. Both men attempted to go out along the bridge but were driven back by the force of the wind, so they struggled down to the shore of the Firth. Whilst standing there, the moon momentarily shone through the fast moving clouds and they saw to their horror that all the high girders in the centre of the bridge had gone. Barclay's colleague at the northern end of the bridge was also wondering why the expected train had not appeared.

A man named Maxwell was watching the lights of the five passenger coach train from the window of his house on Magdalen Green by the northern shore. When the great gust swept up the Firth he saw what he described as three separate streams of fire falling from the bridge. On both sides of the Firth it was now known that the bridge was down but communication between the two shores had been broken. By 10pm on that fateful December night, and prompted by Dundee's alarmed station master, one rivercraft did reach the wreckage and searched in vain for escapees clinging to floating timbers. There were none. With the fate of the train established there remained the task of finding out how many passengers carried. The final estimate of 75 was calculated from the tickets in the box at St Fort, once those collected the previous day had been discounted. The cause of the disaster was established when a diver was sent down as soon as the weather abated. He found the train lying within the southern portion of the wrecked girders which had been unable to withstand the increased pressure exerted by the gale on the surface of the train, so that both had collapsed together.

And what of the mail in the mailbags? Two mailbags were washed ashore at the nearby fishing village of Broughty Ferry and were taken to the postmistress of the local sub-office who immediately sent a telegram to alert Dundee Head Post Office that the mailbags had been recovered. The waterlogged mailbags were taken there and the contents spread out onto a large table before a huge fire. Only a few envelopes had escaped damage, probably those held tightly in the centre of bundles. The majority were soaked with addresses smudged and often with stamps soaked off. As many as possible were dried and forwarded over the following days, those illustrated showing their survival after being thrown into the raging Firth of Tay.

Over the years since, calculations have been made by collectors and philatelists to ascertain how many items of this 'disaster mail' survive. Different totals of mailbags carried have been suggested ranging from six by an eminent philatelist, to 40 mailbags, large and small, by a local newspaper. Of those it said over 30 had been recovered. These damp-stained covers, and in some cases with letters, are exceptionally rare and sought-after, and are believed to total just 20, more than half of which are addressed ►


Tay Bridge before the accident


The Tay Bridge's fallen girders


View from the south


View from south end of the gap


Pier no.5 looking east

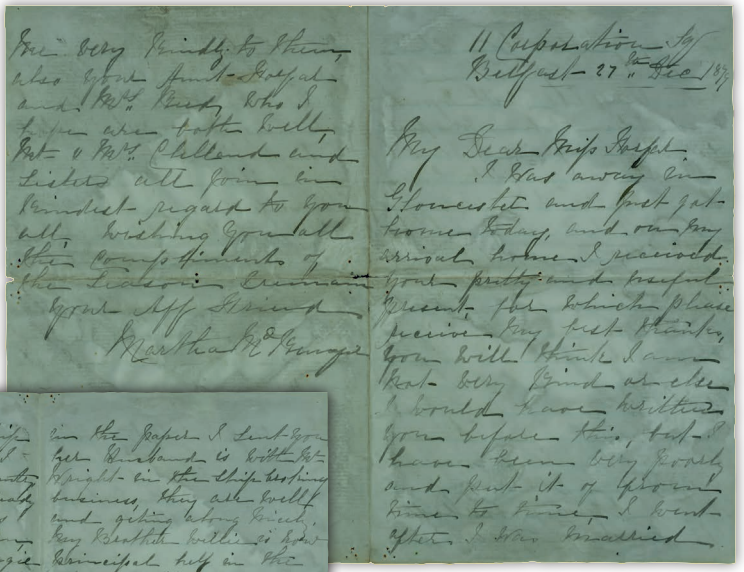

Men salvaging the wreckage


The salvaged steam engine

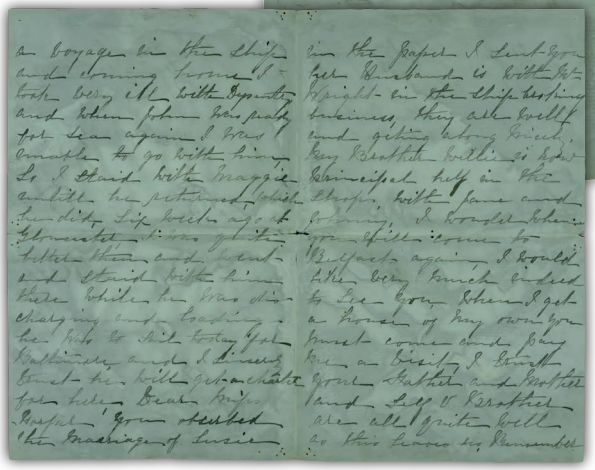
Somehow, the glue on the back of the stamp has kept most of it stuck to the envelope, which with the postmark can still confirm postage in Belfast on the day before the accident. Addressed to Miss Forfar in Montrose, it was delivered after recovery and drying-out



The single sheet of the letter has four sides, and here is shown the first and last page. The writer, Martha, is much travelled and begins with 'I was away in Gloucester and just got home today' and continues by thanking her friend for the Christmas present received and also says 'I have been very poorly'



The middle two pages of the four page letter from Martha in Belfast to her friend Miss Forfar in Montrose, and she kindly says 'I would like very much indeed to see you, when I get a house of my own you must come and pay me a visit'

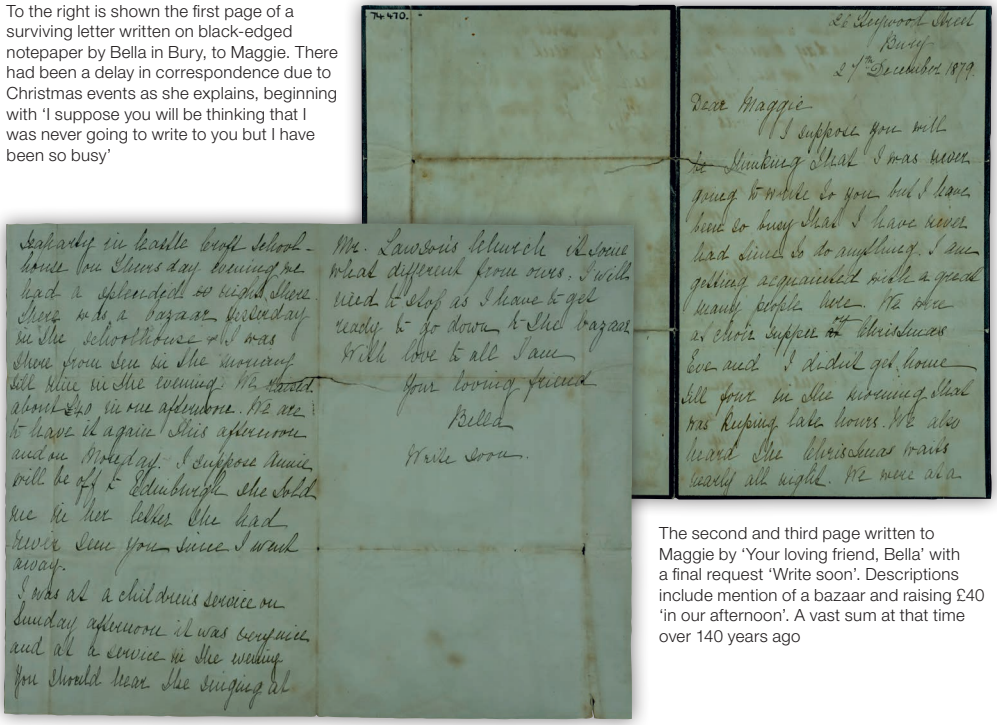


to Dundee or Aberdeen. By the very nature of a disaster happening where there are no survivors and very few witnesses, there is speculation as to the scene at the moment the event occurred. The names of the 59 people known to have died are listed on memorials on both sides of the Firth of Tay, while the stone stumps of the original railway bridge remain as a poignant reminder of that fateful winter night over 140 years ago, a new bridge having been built alongside in the years that followed.

However, being protected in the fall by the cage of broken girders, locomotive No. 224 was free of damage although remaining submerged for three months. After recovery and run on her own wheels to Glasgow for overhaul, she worked east coast expresses until 1907 when relegated to other duties. For nearly 30 years no driver would work her across the Tay until the taboo was broken. On 28 December 1908, the 29th anniversary of the disaster, she worked the same Sunday night down mail to Dundee over the new Tay Bridge.

The final victim of the disaster which included the lost mail in the Tay, was Sir Thomas Bouch who became the scapegoat for the tragedy. The sensation caused by the fall of the bridge has no parallel in railway history, and is comparable only with that occasioned by the loss of *RMS Titanic* over 32 years later. At the subsequent formal inquiry, convened under Section 7 of the 1871 Railways Act to hear evidence concerning the causes and circumstances of the Tay Bridge disaster, the engineer put forward his theory that the rear part of the train had been blown off the rails and fouled the high girders when it came to them, bringing them down into the firth with the train inside. This was rejected and the experts who formed a committee of inquiry came to the conclusion that the immediate cause was the failure of the bracing ties in the structure and the cast iron lugs to which they were secured. Bad workmanship together with makeshift modification of an original design was 'a very grave mistake'. The bridge should have ►

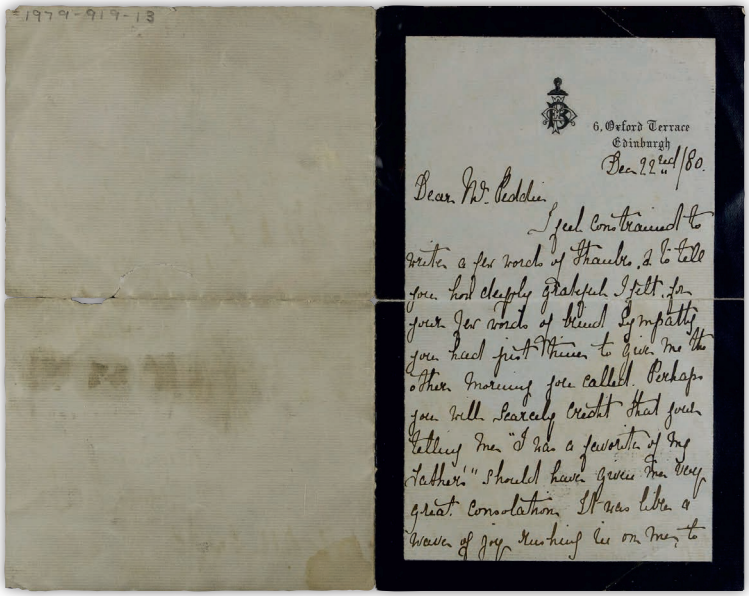
To the right is shown the first page of a surviving letter written on black-edged notepaper by Bella in Bury, to Maggie. There had been a delay in correspondence due to Christmas events as she explains, beginning with 'I suppose you will be thinking that I was never going to write to you but I have been so busy'



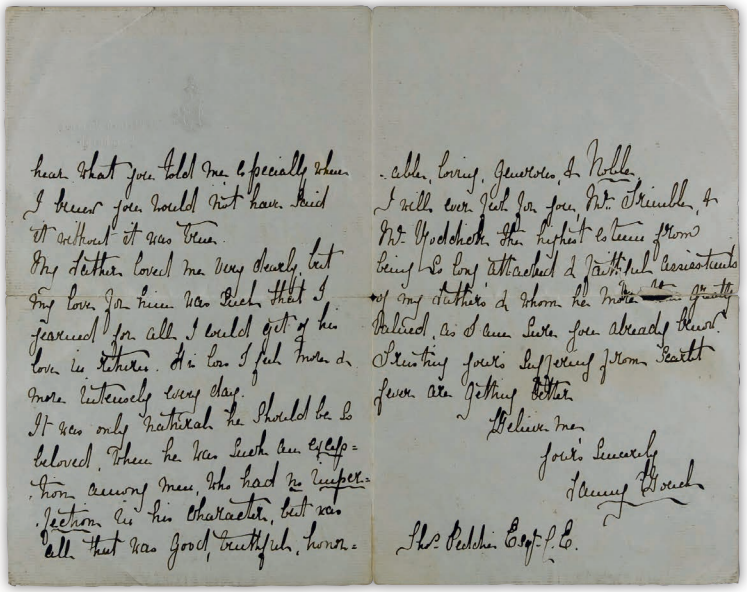
Dear Maggie
I suppose you will be thinking that I was never going to write to you but I have been so busy that I have never had time to do anything. I am getting acquainted with a great many people here. We have a choir supper on Christmas Eve and I didn't get home till four in the morning that was keeping late hours. We also heard the Christmas waits nearly all night. We were also

The second and third page written to Maggie by 'Your loving friend, Bella' with a final request 'Write soon'. Descriptions include mention of a bazaar and raising £40 'in our afternoon'. A vast sum at that time over 140 years ago

On headed notepaper from Edinburgh with a 'B' monogram, a letter to Thomas Peddie from Fanny Bouch, the daughter of the Tay Bridge engineer, Sir Thomas Bouch, thanking Mr Peddie for his sympathy on her father's death. This was written on 22 December 1880, a few days short of a year after the fall of the bridge over the Tay




Fanny Bouch completes her letter with advising that they have 'the highest esteem from being so long attached & faithful assistants of my fathers & whom he…greatly valued, as I am sure you already knew'. And then to something now remote from our daily lives – 'Trusting yours suffering from scarlet fever are getting better'

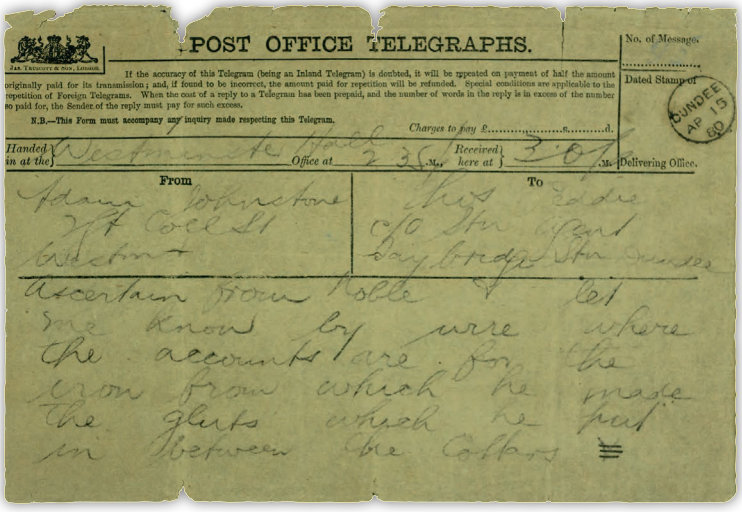


been redesigned when it was found that the solid base did not exist. The final summing up spelt ruin and disgrace for the unfortunate engineer, Sir Thomas Bouch, who died a year later having been shattered by overwork and the rejection of his grand design for a superb suspension bridge across the Firth of Forth.

'We find (they said) that the bridge was badly designed, badly constructed and badly maintained and that its downfall was due to inherent defects in the structure which must sooner or later have brought it down. For these defects both in design, construction and maintenance Sir Thomas Bouch is in our opinion mainly to blame.' This damning verdict not only ruined Bouch but also provoked criticism of the Board of Trade and, in particular, Major-General Hutchinson. If the bridge was so defective, why then had it been passed as fit for public service? It was the reply from the Government that Hutchinson had acted perfectly correctly by subjecting the bridge to a severe test and passing it for traffic. But, he had also recommended a speed restriction and questioned the effects of a high wind upon the structure. As for the North British Railway, it was left humbled with its share of the Edinburgh to Dundee traffic falling from 85 to 51 per cent. Worse, many of its branch lines now headed nowhere in particular.

Can comedy ever emerge from tragedy? Not exactly, but William McGonagall's poem *The Tay Bridge Disaster* is one of the most quoted, most ridiculed, literary accomplishments in the English language. To quote the most ill-used phrase of recent years – 'lessons will be learned' – which they never really seem to be, perhaps they were on this occasion because the replacement bridge has been secure, steadfast, and quite splendid through the many years since being built. The new two-mile-long double-tracked Tay Bridge was approved a year after the death of Sir Thomas Bouch, and when completed it stood – and stands – 60 yards to the west of the original structure with all its 85 piers in an exact straight line. None of the old foundations were used.

The knowledge and remembrance of the Tay Bridge Disaster are always with the descendants of those who died, those who now live nearby, and to a lesser extent with railway historians. And of course, collectors of covers and envelopes that survived the tragedy, some of which are described beside the images in this article ●


POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

No. of Message

Dated Stamp of DUNDEE AP 15 80

If the accuracy of this Telegram (being an Inland Telegram) is doubted, it will be repeated on payment of half the amount originally paid for its transmission; and, if found to be incorrect, the amount paid for repetition will be refunded. Special conditions are applicable to the repetition of Foreign Telegrams. When the cost of a reply to a Telegram has been prepaid, and the number of words in the reply is in excess of the number so paid for, the Sender of the reply must pay for such excess.

N.B.—This Form must accompany any inquiry made respecting this Telegram.

Charges to pay £.....s.....d.

Handed in at the Westminster Hall Office at 2 35 M. Received here at 3 01 M. Delivering Office.

From

Adam Johnstone
17 Cecil St
Weston

To

Thos Edie
c/o Jno Grant
Bay Bridge Stn Dundee

Ascertain from Noble & let me know by wire where the accounts are for the iron from which he made the gluts which he put in between the collars

One of twelve Post Office Telegraph sheets relating to the business of the Court of Inquiry on the Tay Bridge disaster, this message No.315 was handed in at Westminster Hall office at 2.35pm on 15 April 1880 and received at 3.01pm in Dundee for Thomas Peddie. The message includes 'Ascertain from Noble & let me know by wire where the accounts are for the iron from which he made the gluts which he put in between the collars'. Referring of course to engineer Sir Thomas Bouch, upon whose shoulders, perhaps unjustly, fell all the blame

Article by Dane Garrod FRPSL. Acknowledgements and thanks to Dundee Art Galleries and Museums for the images and details of the recovered mail from the depths of the Firth of Tay.

# The Bumper Quiz




**1** The Green Bridge of Wales is near what village?

a) Tenby
b) Castlemartin
c) Newport




**3** How many episodes of *Only Fools and Horses* were there?

a) 60
b) 62
c) 64




**5** Which of the Machin stamp values (below) was issued first?

a) 3d
b) 4d
c) 9d




**7** What was a medieval longbow typically made of?

a) steel
b) yew
c) ivory




**2** The UK has produced how many Formula 1 champions?

a) 10
b) 11
c) 12




**4** Who is the father of Sir Galahad?

a) Merlin
b) Mordred
c) Lancelot




**6** Where was the sci-fi writer HG Wells born?

a) Kent
b) Essex
c) Sussex




**8** Paul's father gave him a..... for his 14th birthday

a) trumpet
b) drum kit
c) piano

**How to enter** Please send your answers, with your contact address or phone number, marked 'Bumper Quiz', to: Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. Or by email to chloe.tuck@royalmail.com.

**Prizes** The first five correct entries drawn after the closing date win the Christmas 2021 Presentation Pack.

**Closing Date** 15 January 2022.

**September solutions** British Army Vehicles: 1)c 2)b 3)c 4)b 5)a.

**Winners** Ronald Smith, Bovingdon; M Burfield, Wigton; Mr T Dungate, Broadstone; A H Harver, Oxford; Mrs Elaine Emery, Portchester.

Test your knowledge on Royal Mail stamp issues of 2021.
It's your opportunity to win the Christmas 2021 Presentation Pack.




**9** Where did the young Prince Philip attend his first school?

a) Corfu
b) London
c) Paris




**11** What bird featured in the Tallents House handstamp of the Wild Coasts issue?

a) guillemot
b) puffin
c) gannet




**13** In what year was the Scorpion tank withdrawn from service?

a) 1994
b) 1995
c) 1996




**15** The Webb Ellis Cup has what nickname?

a) Bob
b) Bill
c) Ben




**10** Who guest-edited *The Beano* in 2018?

a) Andy Murray
b) Norman Watson
c) David Walliams




**12** Who invented portland cement in 1824?

a) Joseph Aspdin
b) Thomas Cotchett
c) James Hargreaves




**14** What colour was the Batmobile originally?

a) purple
b) green
c) red



**16** What is the value of this stamp?

a) £1.70
b) £2.50
c) £2.55

**Terms and conditions** Promotions are open to any reader aged 18 or over, except employees of Royal Mail Group Ltd, their business associates and immediate families. Responsibility cannot be accepted for entries which are incomplete, damaged or not received. Proof of posting is not proof of receipt. Prizes must be accepted as offered; they are not transferable and there are no cash alternatives. Winners are notified within 28 days of closing date stated. For prize draws where readers must answer a question, winners will be the senders of the first correct entries drawn at random by an independent person after the closing date. Royal Mail's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. Entry implies acceptance of these rules. Prizes are subject to availability. The promoter reserves the right to a) substitute a prize of equal or greater value if circumstances so demand and b) to suspend or cancel or hold void any of the competitions or prize draws at any time without notice. The winners' names are available 28 days after closing date. To receive this please send an SAE to The Editor.

# William Muir – the illustrator




*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (The rarest Muir facsimile)

William Muir is remembered today for the hand-coloured facsimiles of the Prophetic Books of William Blake, but that's just a part of the life and work of this man who inspired others to illustrate covers sent to him, as the one illustrated in this article. Born as an eldest child in 1845, William lived in the Gorbals area of Glasgow. At the age of 15 he was apprenticed in a stockbroker's office in Glasgow, but by the age of 22 a change took him to the Inner Hebrides as the quarry manager at the Tormor Quarry. He lived at Fionnphort where the ferry now sails for Iona, his sister Hannah keeping house for him. Forever itinerant, he left this post in 1875 and spent a year or so in Manchester before moving to London. Leaving his foreman as quarry manager, William Muir lived by 1881, as the census shows, at 9 Angel Row (later Angel Place), Edmonton, now known as 191 Fore Street, London N9. Here he was listed as a granite agent, and as a supplier of granite where he made the acquaintance of Count von Gleichen, or Prince Victor of Hohenlohe-Langenburg to give him his full title, who was an accomplished sculptor whose works include the statue of *Alfred the Great* in the market square at Wantage in Oxfordshire.

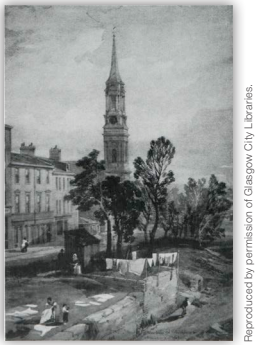
William Muir remained associated with the granite trade to the end of the nineteenth century, but his friendship with Count von Gleichen must have encouraged his own artistic ambitions, and in 1884 he began the work for which he is now remembered: the production of hand-coloured facsimiles of the Prophetic Books of William Blake which were dedicated to the Count whom he terms as his 'Patron'. He spelt out his intentions with the words 'My desire and intention is to reproduce ALL the important works by Wm Blake that exist in book form and also some of his finest designs… I will not use either photography




The front of the envelope to William Muir with scenes of a fisherman being surprised with a catch and his dog looking alarmed. The initials of the artist at the bottom right appear to include 'A', 'J' and 'R', and the visible evidence of a staple to the far left show that something was attached at some time during the previous 137 years

or chromolithography. All outlines are drawn and all the colouring is by hand. I produce fifty copies only of each book and each of them is numbered'. However, he continued in full-time employment as a granite agent until at least 1902 with him and his friends gathering together on evenings each week to work on the facsimiles with printed monochrome outlines being hand-coloured, and each copy taking six to eight weeks to complete. Muir's facsimiles made William Blake's works in 'Illuminated Printing' accessible for the first time in reliable copies and helped to establish Blake's reputation as a visual artist as well as a poet. With the Blake Press underway, Muir began a second publishing venture: the Iona Press, producing small lithographic editions of Gaelic poetry. Living still in Edmonton, he was proprietor, manager, and editor.

If 1880 onwards had been the time of his activity as publisher, then the following decade found him devoting a lot of his energies to chemical experiment. In 1892 he was granted a patent for a process for extracting tin from slag, and then ten years later another patent concerned with igniting material for matches and cartridge fuses. He later sold his rights in this patent for £900 to a company which had a match factory at Bromley-by-Bow. By 1901 William Muir and his wife had left Angel Place and moved to 97 Church Street, also in Edmonton. In October of that year he issued a short religious tract but with the printing press now with his sister on Iona, he had to make use of a commercial lithographer with one hundred copies being printed. In 1907 the Muirs moved again – to 153 Church Street in Edmonton, and again in 1908 to Claremont, Bury Street. Always to surprisingly large houses considering there was just himself, wife Sophia and a servant. They would move house ►



Reproduced by permission of Glasgow City Libraries.

Clyde Terrace and Gorbals Parish Church, Glasgow, in 1845. Muir was born at number 20 – barely visible on the left of this watercolor which hangs in The Mitchell Library Glasgow Room

The back of the envelope with the scene of a man with suitcase striding out to join others at the beginning of the 'shooting season', clearly with a startled cat nearly in his path with its arched back and tail aloft



Reproduced by permission of Enfield Libraries



Angel Row – the house second from the right was the location of the Blake Press

four times in ten years, perhaps because neighbours complained about the chemical experiments. Finally in 1912, and after 30 years in Edmonton, the Muirs moved for the last time, to Romford Road in Forest Gate.

It was in 1884 that William received the letter that was enclosed in the illustrated envelope. Addressed to his home at '9 Angel Place, Upper Edmonton', it celebrates the start of the shooting season – the 'Glorious Twelfth' – on 12 August 1884, nine days earlier. The 1d lilac stamp has a squared circle handstamp, a design that was introduced in Leeds, Liverpool and London five years earlier in 1879 as an improvement to the duplex handstamp cancellation. From the small Cornish village of Ruan Minor with a population at this time of under 300 people, the letter travelled by Great Western Railway train to Paddington in London, and then across the city to Upper Edmonton where the red single circle receiving handstamp was carefully applied on the reverse on the following day. What is fascinating are the drawings that have been applied. The words 'Commencement of Shooting Season' are beneath the humorous scene of a man with shotgun and suitcase for travel, and a cat that looks clearly ill at ease! It's the straight leg stride that reminds us now as a forerunner of the John Cleese walk in the TV drama *Fawlty Towers*. Another gentleman in a checked tweed suit is drawn on the front of the envelope, having caught a fish, lost his pipe and alarmed his dog. The box he was sitting on became the site for the postage stamp. The cover has been opened out for display purposes because inside is a printed coloured country/seaside scene of a young woman reading and a man gazing out to sea. Not unique, but unusual as we open an envelope, take out the correspondence and don't look further inside. The envelope would have to be split open to appreciate the picture inside. But who sent it? At present, we do not know.

To further the interest in William Blake and his work, the Blake Society was formed with the inaugural meeting in 1912. William Muir along with his wife and sister-in-law, Emily Druitt, were active members, and continued to be involved as Muir produced new facsimiles of Blake's work through his later years in the 1920s and beyond. The services to Blake students rendered



With the envelope opened out can be seen the illustration inside of two young people from Victorian times relaxing at a beach, seemingly oblivious to each other. The well-dressed woman reading, and her male companion looking out to sea. Additionally, enclosed inside was a leaflet that has left its mark with words that can be seen at the top and to the left-hand side of the seaside image

by William Muir were considered numerous and important, beginning in 1884 with his admirable series of reproductions of Blake's books. Not until 1935 when he was 90 years old did failing eyesight cause him to give up work on Blake facsimiles. William Muir died on 2 January 1938 at the age of 92 years, long outliving the Victorian world in which he grew up. Today he seems typical of that world with his enthusiasm, his energy, confidence and piety. Other illustrated covers addressed to him surely exist, if only we knew where ●

Article by Dane Garrod FRPSL









Above: two more illustrations from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – an extremely rare variant of the superb Muir facsimile of 1885

Muir's illustrations from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* facsimile of 1885 are reproduced with the kind permission of John Windle Antiquarian Bookseller

# Royal Mail 2021 Annual Collections

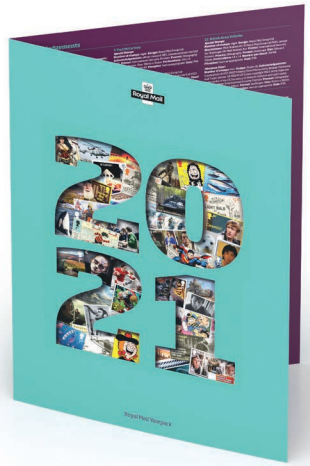
**2021 Yearbook**
This superb 64-page full colour hardback Yearbook houses every Special Stamp issued in 2021 with a combined value of over £174. There's an illustrated focus on each of the stamp issues spanning 64 pages and 15 chapters which give insights from various expert writers. Production is limited to 5,000 copies, and priced at £199 offers excellent value for collectors of GB stamps







**2021 Yearpack**
Priced at £180 the 2021 Yearpack is perfect for those looking to complete their collection for the calendar year – comprising the full set of 2021 Special Stamps (more than £174 worth of stamps). The stamps are held in black protective carriers and a decorative folder ensuring every stamp is kept in pristine condition. The Yearpack offers a brief overview of the 2021 collection and details each stamp issue and their respective specifications




All of Royal Mail's 2021 Annual Collections are available now at: royalmail.com/annualcollections or call 03457 641 641 for overseas customers +44 3457 641 641

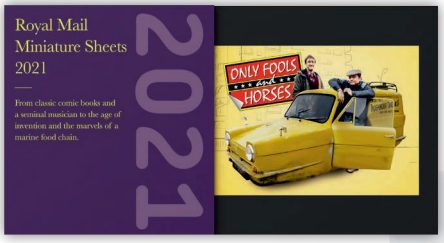
**2021 Year of Presentation Packs**
The complete collection of Presentation Packs from the 2021 Special Stamp issues displayed in a leather-effect presentation case. The set priced at £185 contains every stamp from the year's issues. All the Packs are beautifully illustrated and tell the respective stories that commemorate and celebrate British history, nature and culture









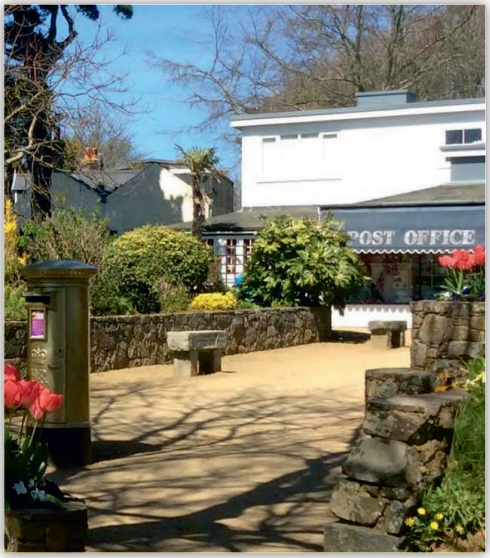




**2021 Year of Miniature Sheets**
A delightfully presented folder containing all ten Special Stamp Miniature Sheets and the Christmas Stamp Miniature Sheet from 2021 and an informative carrier card. Priced at £59, the Special Stamps have a value of more than £56



# Sark The First Dark Sky Island

We've all heard of Sark, but where exactly is it? Well that's just the first mystery and how is it the 'first dark sky island'? All is to be revealed after we've looked into the background to the postal services and briefly into the history long ago of this special and different island in the British Isles. Situated within the Channel Islands off the Normandy coast, Sark is a part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey with its own set of laws and parliament, and with a ruling Seigneur where cars, aeroplanes and divorce were forbidden and life moves at a different pace. As the smallest independent state in the British Commonwealth, Sark lies seven miles east of Guernsey and nearer to the coast of France than to the country to which it owes its allegiance, with much of its customs and language of Norman origin. There is a recognised regional language of sercquiais and a population of around 500. Sark consists of two main parts, Greater Sark and Little Sark, and due to its isolation, the inhabitants of Little Sark had their own distinct form of sercquiais. Separation from the Duchy of Normandy occurred in 1204, but feudalism was not formally abolished until as recently as April 2008.



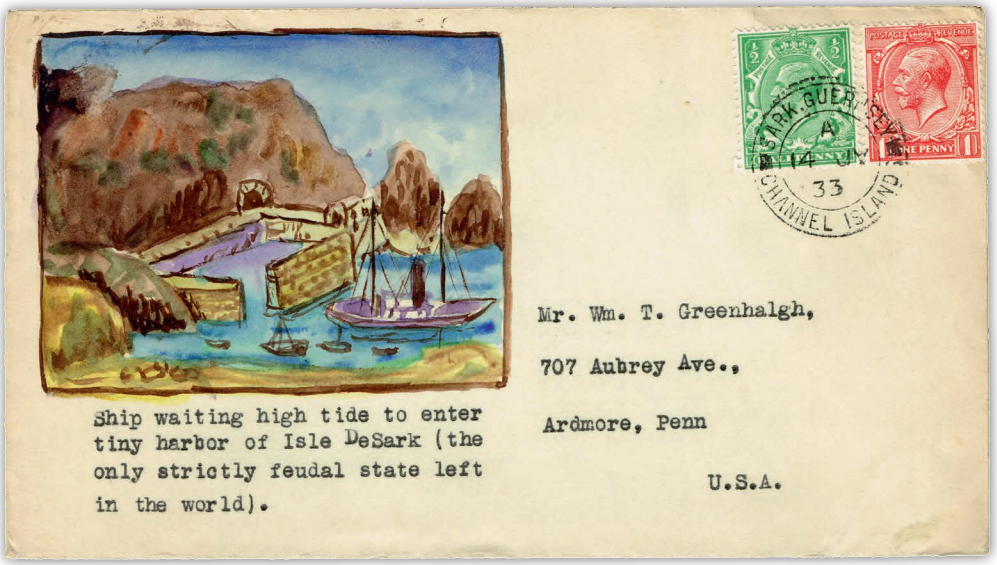

Under glorious summer skies, the Sark post office and stores together with the pillar box, once blue but repainted gold to celebrate the success of a Sark resident at the London Olympic Games in 2012

Offered the opportunity to evacuate the island in June 1940 before the German invasion of the Channel Islands, most locally born islanders decided to stay. The 470 civilians who remained on the island were subject to German rule for the next five years, until Sark was liberated on 10 May 1945, a full day after Guernsey. The German occupation attitude resulted in the residents of Sark treating the small number of Germans more as tourists, and soldiers would be invited to dinner.

Mails are brought to and from Guernsey by boat daily, arriving in Sark in the morning, and items could be collected by intended recipients after 40 minutes had elapsed. There is one post office only, not established on the island until 1858, and noted to be in Rue Lucas in 1914. An undated double arc handstamp was used but is now scarce. Also rare is the 29mm single circle 'SARK' date stamp used during 1888, and then a double circle datestamp from 1920. Registered labels were introduced in 1910, and five years earlier in 1905, Arthur Baker was appointed as the new sub-postmaster, a position he held until 1942 during the time of the German occupation of the island. After his death, his widow took over the work until her retirement. The first pillar boxes in Britain were introduced in the Channel

Islands as an experiment in 1852. Anthony Trollope, the novelist, who was employed by the General Post Office, trialled pillar boxes before they were introduced in Britain.

The Commodore Shipping Company, which held the contract to carry GPO mail on the Guernsey-Sark route between 1950 and 1969, issued its own carriage labels over that period with over 80 different stamps produced. Early labels from 1950 were simple and typeset and are rarely seen. Later pictorial issues between 1961 and 1968 inscribed 'Guernsey-Sark' featured subjects that included local views, ships, and aeroplanes, with some issues later overprinted to commemorate Churchill or Kennedy. Those that featured aircraft showed those that operated in this period from Guernsey. Certainly not from Sark, which has no airport. Additionally, Sark did issue a set of local labels in 1965 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the island's settlement. These had no postal validity but were issued to raise money for a children's playground. Sark, being part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, has used Guernsey postage stamps since October 1969, when Guernsey achieved its postal independence. However, one Guernsey set was issued to commemorate the famous Dame of Sark, Sybil Hathaway. In 1980, the Isle of Sark Shipping Company which had taken over the contract for passenger and cargo services, produced a set of five attractive stamps in the range 5p to 50p. More correctly called carriage labels, they are marked 'Carriage ►




An illustrated cover with a painting of the Creux harbour at Sark, postmarked at the sub-post office on the island in July 1933 and sent by a tourist to Ardmore in Pennsylvania, USA. The spelling of 'harbor' is the clue to the nationality of the sender

Paid' to confirm their use in transporting mail between Sark and Guernsey. These were available together in miniature sheet format or printed separately in sheets of 25 each, and examples also exist overprinted for the 1981 Royal Wedding.

Ten years ago on 31 January 2011, the International Dark-Sky Association designated Sark as Europe's first Dark Sky Island in the world. This recognises that Sark is sufficiently clear of light pollution to allow naked-eye astronomy, and although this was aided by its location, the historic ban on cars and the fact there is no public lighting made it necessary for local residents to make adjustments with re-siting lights to cut the light pollution. Although there are no cars or similar vehicles, transport across the island is made by tractors or horse-drawn vehicles, so one doesn't necessarily have to walk to the post office to send or collect mail. Sark Post Office and Galley Stores really does stock everything, and Caroline and her team are most welcoming. Just outside one can use the facility of the golden pillar box. It used to be blue as are all Guernsey Post pillar boxes, but was painted gold to celebrate Sark's Carl Hester winning a gold medal for Great Britain's Team Dressage at the London Olympic Games in 2012. Collections are at 10am and 4pm weekdays, and 10am on Saturday. Should you visit the Channel Islands, then a journey to Sark by boat from Guernsey is a recommended experience for all ●

*Article by Dane Garrod FRPSL*



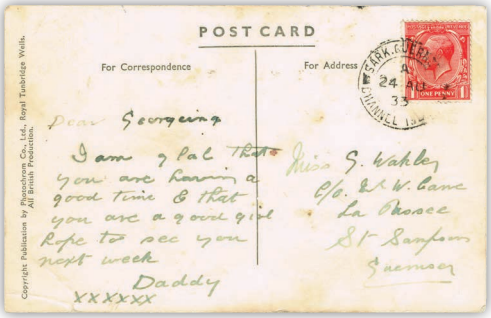

The distinctively shaped harbour at Creux is shown in this picture postcard of one of the most well known views of Sark




The reverse of the postcard sent to south-west London in August 1920 with a 'SARK / A / 18 AU / 20' single-ring 'thimble' postmark




A closer view of the harbour at Creux shows the same larger boat, although the smaller boats are in a different pattern. Perhaps the larger boat transported the mail to and from Guernsey




A double ring postmark 'SARK.GUERNSEY / CHANNEL ISLAND' of August 1933. The postcard is to 'Georgina' from 'Daddy', who is clearly having a week's holiday of sunshine

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# New Issues and Withdrawals

Information correct at the time of going to press

**2** December — **Withdrawal** British Army Vehicles: Stamp Souvenir. Stamp Sheet Souvenir.




**8** December — **Issue** Lunar New Year: Year of the Tiger Smilers® Sheet (20 x 1st Class).

**17** December — **Withdrawal** DC Collection: Stamp Souvenir. Stamp Sheet Souvenir.

**31** December — **Withdrawal** James Bond: Stamps. Q Branch Miniature Sheet. Q Branch Stamp Sheet Set. Postcards.




**Withdrawal** 2018 Standard Yearbook. 2019 Yearpack, Year of Presentation Packs, Year of Miniature Sheets.

**1** January — **Withdrawal** The Gruffalo: Stamps. Miniature Sheet. Presentation Pack. Press Sheet. Coin Cover. Framed Products.

**Withdrawal** Star Wars: Stamps. Miniature Sheet. Presentation Pack. Press Sheet. Stamp Books. Stamp Set Souvenir. Prestige Stamp Book. Collector's Sheet. Postcards. Souvenir Pack. Medal Covers. Bundles. Framed Products.

**19** January — **Withdrawal** Rugby Union: Stamp Souvenir. Stamp Sheet Souvenir.

**20** January — **Issue** The Rolling Stones: Stamps (4 x 1st Class, 4 x £1.70). Miniature Sheet (2 x 1st Class, 2 x £1.70). Stamp Pack. Miniature Sheet Pack. Presentation Pack. Stamp Souvenir. Stamp Sheet Souvenir. First Day Envelope. First Day Cover Stamps. First Day Cover Miniature Sheet. First Day Cover Prestige Stamp Book Pane. Prestige Stamp Book (pane one: 2 x 1st Class, 2 x £1.70, pane two: 2 x 1st Class, 2 x £1.70, pane three: 2 x 10p, 2 x 20p, 2 x 50p, 2 x £1, pane four: 2 x 1st Class, 2 x £1.70). Limited Edition Prestige Stamp Book. Press Sheet. Collector's Sheet (Hyde Park/On Tour). Postcards (13 in set). Stamp Sheets. Fan Sheets. Framed Stamps. Framed Collector's Sheet. Souvenir Folder. Medal Covers. Medal Covers Bundle. Gold Stamp Set. Silver Stamp Ingot. Framed Prints. Bundle.

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