

MIDLAND MAIL

THE JOURNAL OF THE MIDLAND (GB) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Number 159, March 2009

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Our Annual General Meeting and Auction will be held on **25th April**. Although the actual venue was uncertain at the time of writing, it is shown at the head of the auction catalogue. Lots will be available for viewing from 11.00 am. The Annual General Meeting will begin at 1.00 pm and the Auction will follow at 1.30 pm.

IS ANY ONE OUT THERE?

During the past three months, several appeals have been made to the membership, all of which have fallen on stony ground. Just in case you have missed these appeals and are now saying to yourself "Oh yes, I could have helped had I known", they are being repeated, not with any sense of admonition but with just a smidgeon of pleading.

The Chris Beaver Archive

When Chris Beaver died, he left a collection of hand-written notes and photocopies concerning several aspects of English postal history but many relating to his beloved county of Staffordshire. Chris' research was exemplary and these notes, although handwritten, are not chaotic or totally disorganised. Unable to find a home, they are languishing in a garden shed, where their condition inevitably deteriorates by the month. If anyone, preferably a Staffordshire collector, could find a home for the material and, over a period of time, organise the archive so that the information in it can be used, he would be benefiting himself, the Society and postal history research in general.

A Society Website

Any self-respecting organisation now has a website to inform members and attract new ones. For several years, the Society had an interim site, based on a free non-philatelic host and updated annually by a kind friend, that included little more than the Society programme, its officers and publications. This has now been discontinued as it was felt that prolonged dependence on a non-member's goodwill could not be justified. With so many computer-literate members among us, there must surely be someone who could compile a proper website, hosted by a philatelic organisation, without significant cost. If you are squirming in your seat, overcome by guilt, please do get in touch.

The Society Publications

Finally, there are the Society's early publications, produced on a typewriter and printed by photocopying from the master sheets. These urgently need scanning into a computer and what better way to begin than to deal with the Society's publication No. 2 whose title is almost longer than its contents, a mere 68 pages. Once scanned into a computer, the work can be updated and the lessons learned from the exercise extended to the Society's rather larger publications. Again, this is a task that should appeal to a computer-literate member. You could even make a name for yourself!

Anyone who thinks they may be persuaded to help with any of the above small tasks is asked to contact either the Secretary, Mick Gill, on 01636 672868 or John Calladine (john.calladine@mac.com) or 01249 758148)

THE JANUARY MEETING

It was unfortunate that the meeting on 17th January found us in a bitterly cold St Germain's Church Hall which, after some discussion required the meeting to be terminated at its mid point. The display with the somewhat intriguing title '*Signs of the Times*' was by Eric Lewis and we knew, whatever its content, it would be comprehensive and entertaining. In that we were not to be disappointed because Eric, even in the space of only half a display, gave a masterly exposition on newspaper tax stamps.

Eric told us that an Act of 1712, brought into effect on 1st August, introduced a tax on newspapers. The introductory rate, for what was described as a 'half sheet', was one halfpenny. The stated purpose of the tax was to raise money to pay for a War of the Spanish Succession but it was inevitable that such a tax would indirectly enable the government to control the press. It was later heavily criticised as a "tax on knowledge". The tax stamp was impressed, in red, on each sheet of paper before the newspaper was printed. We were shown how the stamps were laid out on the printing plate and it was explained that each individual stamp bore a serial number, numbering being continued from plate to plate. If a plate was repaired at any time, a line was engraved through the serial number and further repairs could result in more than one line. Eric showed us an example from the very first week of newspaper tax stamps. The plate number on the printing plate is not normally something that would be visible on the paper but we were told that, if the paper has been misaligned the plate number can sometimes be seen. To avoid the newspaper tax, a publication could be considered a 'journal' but only if the pages were consecutively numbered throughout the year and not for each issue or edition.

Inevitably, the tax on newspapers was increased, along with other taxes, at later dates. The first increase came in 1757 to help pay for what eventually proved to be the Seven Years War. Because of the way the original Act was worded, it was not possible simply to increase the halfpenny tax to one penny but this was done by what is known as the first 'additional halfpenny'. Eric had conveniently prepared a sheet of examples of the various stamps and we were able to see how the second halfpenny charge was added to the tax stamp design. It was in 1768, during the use of this stamp, that the London Gazette showed examples of the Bishop Marks and thereby became the first paper to include a diagram of any kind.



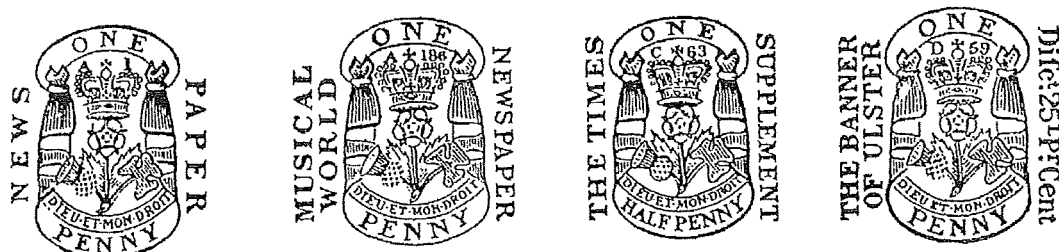
Examples of newspaper tax stamps showing the original Halfpenny tax and the subsequent 'Additional halfpennies'.

In 1776, the tax was increased again (to three-halfpence) and this time the additional halfpenny was added at the top of the design. Eric showed us an example. The rate was increased yet again in 1789 and thus became two pence. It was pointed out that, if a publication such as the London Gazette was printed on, say, five sheets folded to produce twenty pages, then each of the sheets had to bear a tax stamp. (A number of the tax stamps bear a printed discount rate, which Eric decided to exclude from his discussion, but basically this had much to do with encouraging prompt payment of tax.)

The twopenny rate lasted for just eight years before being increased in 1797 not by a halfpenny but by a massive three-halfpence, taking the tax to three and a half pence. It led to a petition against further increases. In fact, there was just one more increase when in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the newspaper tax became fourpence.

Eric explained that much of the correspondence of Sir Francis Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office, had come onto the open market at one time and he had acquired part of it. He was therefore able to show us a number of letters written to Freeling that complained of problems with the transmission of newspapers. A letter of 1797 from a member of the House of Lords complained that postage had been charged on a newspaper (when, because of privilege, it should have been free). Another letter of 1798 complained of delivery delays and yet another related to the closure of a rolled newspaper at both ends. A publisher complained that letters sent along the North Road frequently got wet and even offered to provide a leather bag. Perhaps the best of the letters was one complaining that the postmaster of Leamington took delivery of newspapers in the morning, spent the day reading them and then had them delivered in the evening.

From 1825, the newspaper tax stamps were surface printed rather than engraved. A more significant change followed in 1836 when, after more protests about the 'tax on knowledge', the tax on newspapers was reduced to just one penny. As newspapers did not also have to pay postage (other than in local posts), it now became advantageous to have stamped paper. Most interestingly, from early 1837 the names of the newspapers were added to the tax stamps, thus producing a proliferation of different dies. We saw an Irish newspaper that had actually passed through the post. (this is unusual because most surviving papers are those that had not been sent in the post.) We saw that the front page of 'The Albion' was printed straight across the page, whereas the inside pages were printed in the familiar columns, and we were shown a number of the different dies used on other publications. From 1853, the tax stamp could be printed in black and printed when the newspaper itself was printed, rather than as a preliminary.



1837 tax stamps bearing the names of the publications.

Taking us away from the tax stamps themselves, Eric's display included a range of sheets relating, in many varied ways, to the subject of newspapers. There was the famous cartoon showing the relative weight and charges for letters and papers in the post; there was part of a parcel wrapping used on the paper itself, when it was taxed purely as paper before a newspaper tax was subsequently charged. There was a spoof tax design; a design of 1843 for what amounted to a coal-fired aeroplane; 'Punch' predictions of the 1870s for broadcasting and even for television; and several well-known items from the Illustrated London News. Inevitably there was much more.

Eric completed what was intended a half a display with examples of actual die proofs of many newspaper tax stamps including what are believed to be dies for Scottish and Irish papers. They provided a fitting climax to what had been a remarkable display and one can only sympathise with Eric that it had to be shown in such disadvantageous conditions. We were promised the second part of his display at Dudley in February.

THE FEBRUARY MEETING

The Society's meetings at the Black Country Museum have not always been well attended but there were twenty members and guests present on 14th February, notwithstanding Valentine engagements elsewhere. The subject of the members' one-board displays was to be '*Official Mail*'. However, because of the curtailed meeting in January, it had been agreed that the first part of the afternoon would be devoted to a continuation of Eric Lewis' newspaper-stamp-related display. '*Signs of the Times*', and as usual Eric did not disappoint us.

He reminded us that the January display had taken us to the end of what is known as the 'compulsory tax' period. We were therefore shown a newspaper of 29th June 1855, the final day of compulsory use of newspaper tax stamps, and an early use of what was now an optional tax. (The advantage of having a newspaper stamped was that the paper qualified for free postage.) The last day of the 'optional tax' period was 30th September 1870 because, on 1st October 1870, the halfpenny postage stamp appeared, a stamp intended for use on newspaper wrappers. Eric informed us that larger newspapers, such as the Illustrated London News, were given permission to print stamps on their papers, with a cancel over them, and were therefore early 'pre-cancels'. All these developments were comprehensively covered in the display.

The next part was concerned with newspaper advertisements. An 1839 advert for letter weighing machines neatly preceded the 1840 postal reforms. There was a group of pages concerning Midland newspapers that carried advertisements including the Dudley Herald, Worcester Advertiser, Malvern Advertiser, Hereford Journal and (Stourbridge) County Express, to mention just a few. Particularly interesting to a Midlander was a 'family tree' showing the antecedents of the ubiquitous Birmingham Post. We were shown a supplement to Aris's Birmingham Gazette, first published in the 1740s, and both a preliminary advertisement and an actual Birmingham Journal newspaper launched in the 1820s. These were followed by an original unopened wrapper, with the Birmingham Herald newspaper still inside.

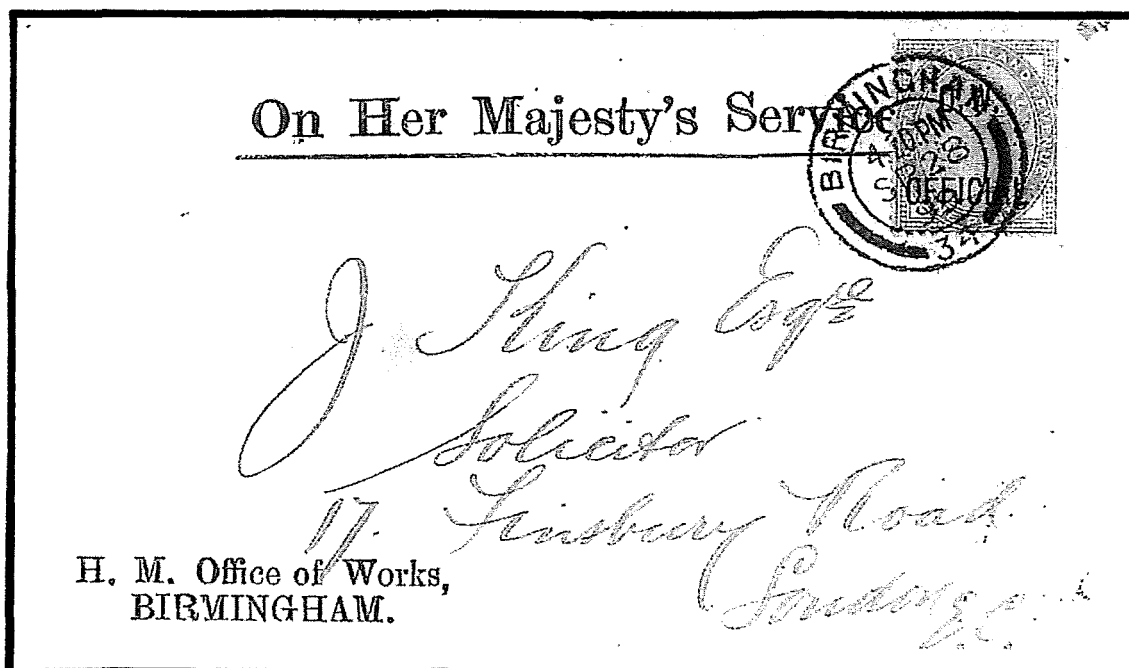
A special edition of 'The Times', devoted to Birmingham on the occasion of the centenary of the town hall, was published in 1934 and we were surprised to see its front page in full colour. We saw a King George IV mourning newspaper issue and a 1907 Braille edition of the Daily Mail, with only the front page also in printed form. If that was unusual, so was a wrapper used to post a newspaper to a blind person and above all, a newspaper for the deaf!

Eric had a number of other items, not newspapers, which could be sent using newspaper tax stamps, for example Prices Current. (These lists contained a great deal more information than the summaries published in newspapers.) We saw cancellations used in the Newspaper Branch, including pre-cancels, and the wrappers and stamps that were used when papers were sent in bulk to the main offices. There were Nottingham papers in packages marked "Important Parcel", bearing some desirable and elusive railway stamps, and a similar package for the Evesham Journal. Finally we were shown how two newspapers could be sent together in one wrapper in the 1930s for just a halfpenny but how a similar but overweight attempt had resulted in the sender being charged a penny. Those were the days!

Our Chairman had presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Eric at the January meeting and the second half of his display merited further warm applause.

After an opportunity to examine Eric's display in detail, the meeting turned to its one-board displays. (these were formerly nine-sheet displays but most members have lost any ability they once had to count their sheets.) Richard Farman had the gall to open with a display of what he claimed was Official Mail (or was it Official Male?) for 14th February - a display of Valentines. One with flowers had messages underneath each flower, another was padded attractively (with perfumed pads?) and there was the first Valentine postal stationery postcard. The well-known "Barkis is Willin" card was displayed, as was (inevitably) a Burton-on-Trent Valentine with matching envelope. Derek Smeathers stuck to the intended subject and showed official mail associated with Northamptonshire. There was a facsimile signature and a printed signature of W.L. Maberly, an ex local MP but better known as Colonel Maberly, Secretary to the Post Office after Sir Francis Freeling. We were shown an official item from Weedon Barracks and, instructively, an Inland Revenue item with 3d paid in postage stamps, this being an additional registration fee.

A display by a new member, Maurice Brown, was an example to us all in that he used the correct number of sheets and held strictly to the topic of official mail by succinctly displaying the history of the official paid crown and its successors from 1992 to the present day, from the straightforward official paid crown, through the 'crown in TV screen' to the official paid PPIs. He was followed by Eric Lewis whose brief contribution (on this occasion only) included an item lent by Ian Baker, illustrated below. It was an OHMS item with an 'OW Official' overprinted 1d lilac adhesive cancelled by a Birmingham double circle. He also showed us a 'Freeling' facsimile signature on a wrapper with its original contents.

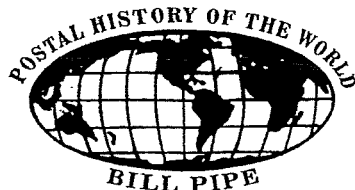


The first Nottinghamshire contribution was from Alan Marshall who had a stationery card advising people how to visit wounded soldiers and another item that had originally contained medals, both official mail, of course. He also showed an item from the House of Lords and a somewhat esoteric official letter from Brisbane to Loughborough. Alan was followed by his compatriot Mick Gill, who showed a wide range of Nottinghamshire-related material. There was a communication from Somerset House to Southwell and another from the Admiralty in Sheffield, missent to Tuxford instead of Newark. He added a 1943 printed notice referring to the War Damage Act, a payment from RAF Newton and a 1981 official letter to Kneesal, missent to Eakring

Roger Broomfield said he would "set the tone" by beginning with a carrier's letter - do not ask how! There were three items from Kington, two relating to Money Orders and a sub-postmaster's bill from Kington to Penybont. Other items included three returns from Somerset House, a jury summons, an item mailed to Ledbury in 1962 but delivered in 1970 and a large envelope used to send postage stamps from Hereford main post office to Bartestree. He completed his display with an unusual postmaster's Christmas card, derived from a PHQ card, an official item apparently unknown to the cognoscenti.

The final two displays were from Alan Godfrey and Chris Jackson, the Warwicks/Worcs mafia. Alan showed an 1853 communication to Wappenbury, OHMS from London, concerning Death Duties but missent. Another item showed the extra 3d charge for registration, seen earlier in Derek's display. There was a P.O. 'economy' envelope, well-known to older members, and three 'Free' items, which one might legitimately regard as official mail. He completed his display with the 1981 official envelopes, all with 'crown in TV screen' marks.. Chris showed a House of Commons item, from the Speaker no less, addressed to York and several House of Commons items with single and double rings not to mention a wrapper for Parliamentary Proceedings. There was also an Admiralty cancellation and redirected packets that contained House of Commons reports. (Does he offer 'financial inducements' to get these items?) Richard Farman and Derek Smeathers offered second displays before the Chairman thanked all who had contributed and wished members a safe journey home.

I would like to thank John Calladine for providing the above two reports.



THE MAGPIE

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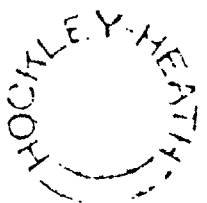
Tel: 01202 623300
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Web: www.magpiebillpipe.com
Email: magpiebillpipe@free.uk.com

HOCKLEY HEATH (WARWICKSHIRE) - UNDATED CIRCLE HANDSTAMP

By Bryan Jones.

A paragraph, contributed by Eric & Elizabeth Lewis, using information supplied by Ian Baker, in the November 2007 edition of Midland Mail (No 152, page 8) suggested a possible recut of the Hockley Heath undated circular handstamp. Having had an opportunity to examine examples in my collection I have compiled the table below showing those examples of this handstamp known to me, with characteristics identified. The table includes those examples mentioned in the earlier report plus those residing in my collection, with initials of the contributor where known.

Date	UDC type	UDC colour	Contributor
12 March 1852	A	Black	BAJ
2 April 1852	A		EL
26 June 1852	A	Blue	BAJ
2 October 1852	B		IB
18 October 1852	B	Blue	BAJ
24 January 1856	B	Red	BAJ
7 February 1856	B	Red	BAJ
15 July 1857	B		EL

	Differentiating between the two types, which I have called A & B, can be made by examining the form of the letter "E" in both Hockley and Heath. Type A has the middle bar centrally positioned and almost the same length as the upper and lower bars, whilst Type B has the middle bar positioned higher, towards the upper bar, and appears to be shorter in length than the upper and lower bars.	
---	--	---

I would suggest that the fact that both letter "E"'s have been modified, and that both show the same characteristics, mitigates against a "recut", and that it therefore becomes probable that there were in fact two different undated circular handstamps used at Hockley Heath, the first of which was only in use for a period of six months or less from early March 1852.

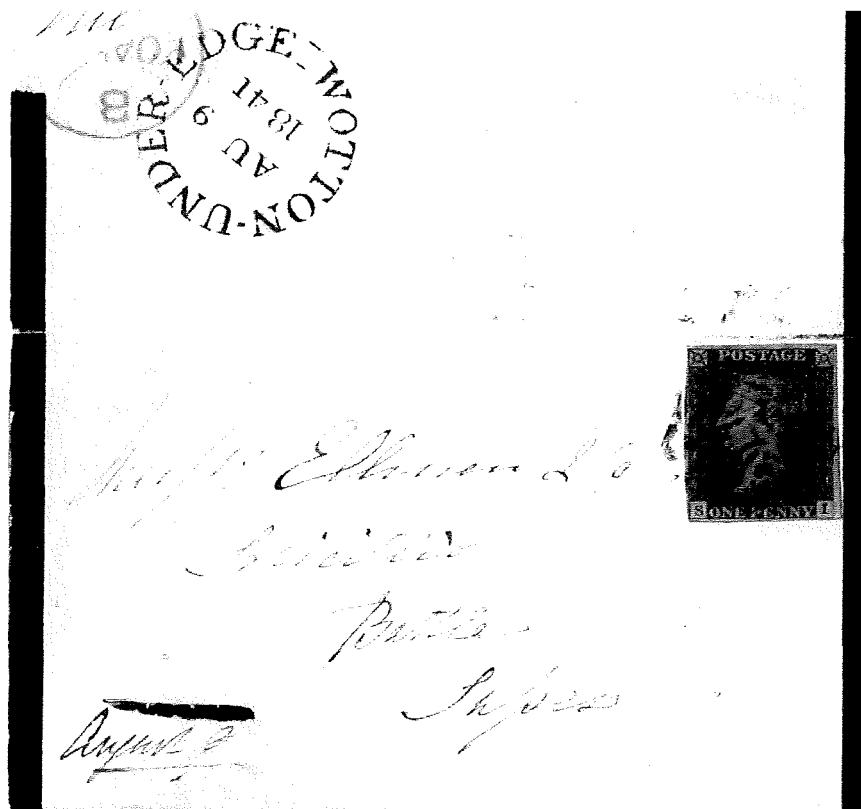
Details of other examples would be welcome, as would any other suggestions relating to this conclusion.

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MAIL BETWEEN SHROPSHIRE AND FRANCE, 1831-1877

by Brian Atkins

I don't know how much difficulty other Midland collectors have had, but finding covers between Shropshire and foreign parts has been very difficult. It is probably because France is our nearest foreign neighbour that I have found more items between Shropshire and that country than any other European country. The illustrated covers reflect some of the rates that existed between the UK and France from 1831 to the establishment of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in 1878. The agreements between the two countries were extremely complex but only the parts relating to the rating of each cover will be described.

The entire letter, dated 2nd Dec 1831, from Ellesmere (Fig. 1) reached London on 5th December 1831 and Boulogne on 7th December. It has three charge marks: 'Pd 1/11 in red; '8' in black and '6' in black. A GPO notice to all postmasters dated 18th April 1814 stated "... the communication between this country and France will be reopened by way of Dover and Calais". (I presume that this was after the Treaty of Fontainebleau on 11th April 1814.) Letters to France were to be charged ½ plus a sum 2d less than the inland rate to London. This was confirmed by a similar GPO notice of April 1831 which also stated that all letters must be prepaid. In 1831 the rate from Ellesmere to London was 11d (1812 Act, 170 to 230 miles), which, less 2d added to the ½ to France made 1/11 prepaid and marked in red ink. The cover was marked 'ANGLETERRE/PAR CALAIS' and 8 decimes added, probably for the carriage from Calais to Boulogne, and '6' for delivery in Boulogne, seen on other covers, though it is not clear what the denomination of this local charge was. From 1797 to 1900, a decime was equal to one penny and it was the French convention to mark unpaid charges on the front of covers and paid ones on the reverse. They did not use black for unpaid and red for paid as was the case in the UK. Several people, who have a greater knowledge of French postal history than I, have given the interpretation of the manuscript '8', but if anyone reading this has other information, it would be most gratefully received!

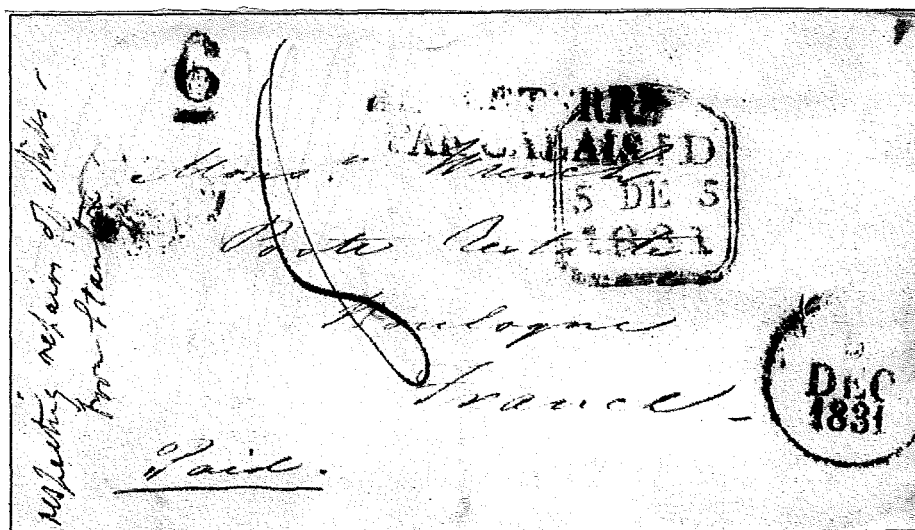


Fig. 1

Entire letter from
Ellesmere to
Boulogne dated
2nd Dec 1831
showing the
ELLESMERE
mileage removed
(EM13 / SH141)
on the reverse

The second entire letter (Fig. 2) is partly paid from Paris to Sir Rowland Hill, MP at Hawkstone Park. It is dated 30th March 1839 in Paris and 1st April in London; there are no Shrewsbury marks. On the reverse of the cover there is a paid charge of 10 decimes, while the front shows a red boxed 'PF' (Paid to Frontier) and a charge of 1/6 which was added in London. The Anglo-French Convention implemented in July 1836 stated that letters could be sent "unpaid, paid to destination or paid to the frontier of the country to which the letters are sent [Dover?]" Furthermore, Article V stated that from Paris to the frontier of the UK was 1 franc or 10 decimes for a single letter under 7.5 grams, so accounting for the '10' on the reverse. In England the letter was charged under the 1837 Act (1 Victoria Cap 34) which showed letters between London and France to be 10d. To this must be added the charge, less 2d, for carriage from London to Shrewsbury. Under the 1812 Act the charge to Shrewsbury was 10d (120 to 170 miles), so adding 8d to the 10d charge from France gives a charge of 1/6 to be collected.

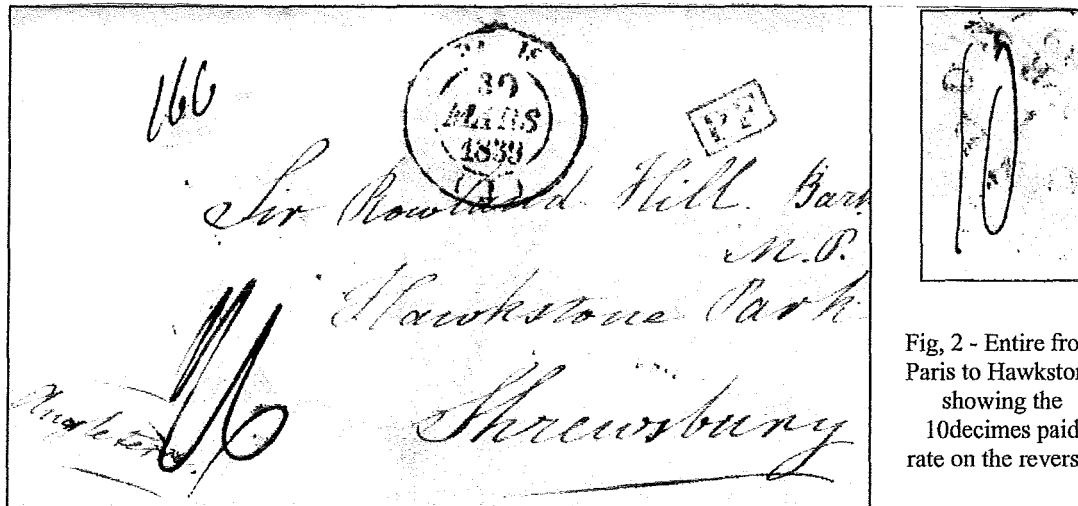


Fig. 2 - Entire from Paris to Hawkstone showing the 10decimes paid rate on the reverse.

The charges on a letter (Fig. 3) sent from Paris on 30th March 1843, and which arrived in London on 31st March and Shifnal on 1st June, are detailed in the 'Instructions to Postmasters' sent from the GPO in May 1841. An 1840 Act (3,4 Victoria Cap 96) stated letters between any town further than 50 miles from Dover and any town in France were now to be charged 1/8 from the UK or 20 decimes from France. This was made up of a UK rate of 10d under ½ oz, plus the French inland rate of 10 decimes (10d) for under ¼ oz (7.5 grams). The instructions added that "particular care" must be taken to mark the British and French rates in separate sums in red ink on the top left hand upper corner of the letter. The French did not do this on the letter, nor on others seen (c.f. Fig. 4). The '10' in red in the top right hand corner may have been applied in the UK as similar marks are seen on other mail between the two countries (in both directions), when French manuscript charge marks, similar to that below, are also present.

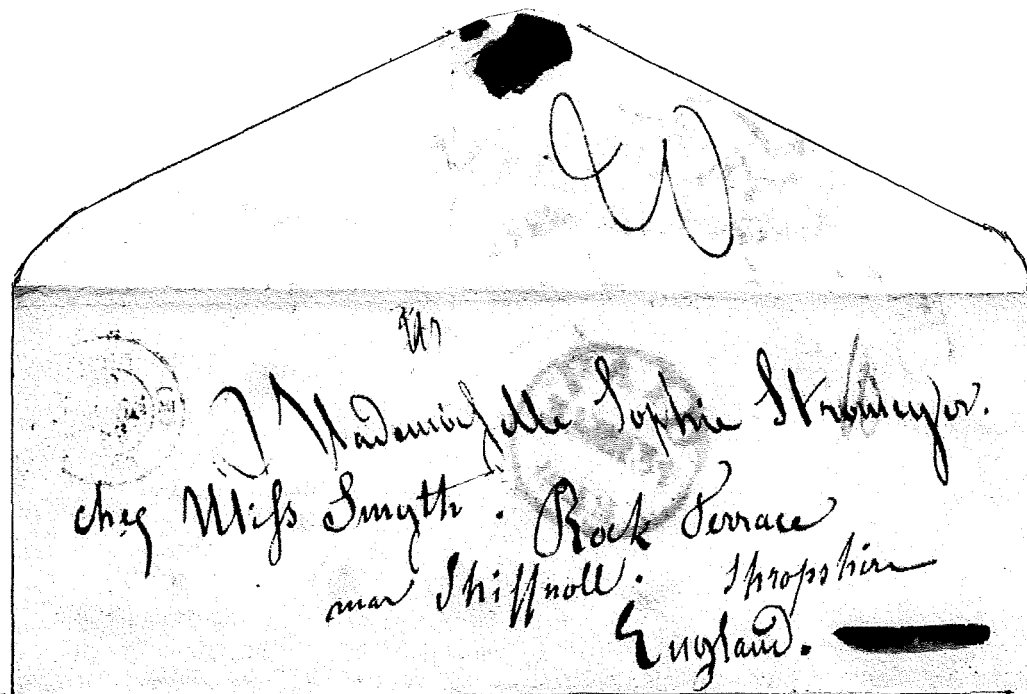


Fig. 3 - 'Paid to Destination' cover from Paris to Shifnal which shows the 20 decimes paid rate on the reverse.

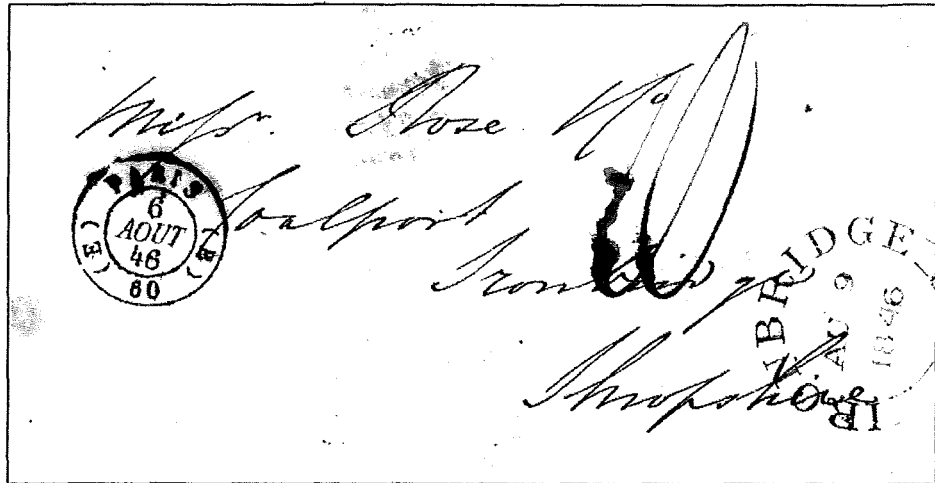


Fig. 4 - Unpaid wrapper sent from Paris on 6th August 1846 and showing 10d (equal to 10 decimes) to be collected from Messrs Rose & Co, Coalport

The wrapper at Fig. 4 was charged under the most complex Convention of all, that of 1st June 1843 which contained 90 Articles! Under this Convention letters could still be sent unpaid, as in this case. The basic rates can be summed up very easily in that the charge on letters between the two countries was reduced to 5d UK rate for under ½ oz and 5d French rate under ¼ oz. The rates on paid or unpaid letters to or from France were subject to the distance the letter had travelled within France, unless the letter started in Paris or passed through Paris (I did say the conventions were complex). Unfortunately I do not have any letters to or from cities other than Paris to test this. The wrapper to Coalport, Ironbridge was correctly rated 10 decimes, though again no effort was made by the French to show the two rates. However, the cover (Fig. 5) sent from Shifnal on 21st July 1847 to Paris where it arrived on 23rd July shows how it should be done!

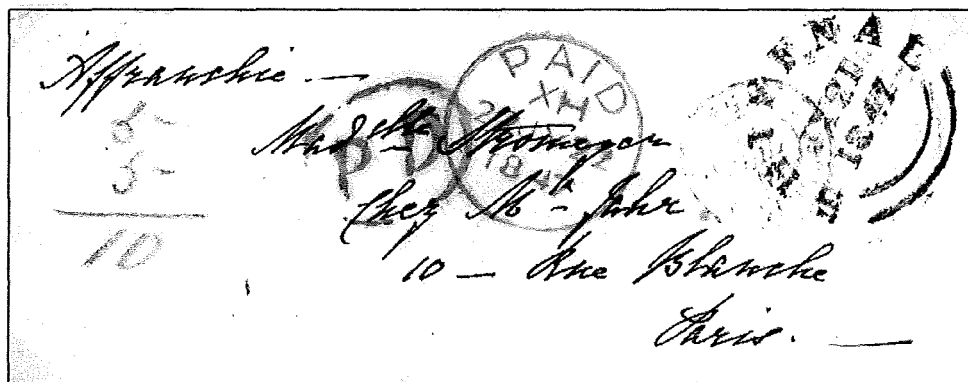


Fig. 5 - Cover from Shifnal to Paris, paid to destination and showing the full 10d rate, broken down into the 5d British rate and 5 decimes French rate.

The Anglo-French Convention of 1st January 1855, followed by that of January 1857, reduced the rate to 4d or 4 decimes per ¼ oz (7.5 grams) paid to destination; unpaid letters were charged double. A paid cover from Shrewsbury is illustrated on the next page, with the rate paid by the 4d vermilion, SG79, plate 3.

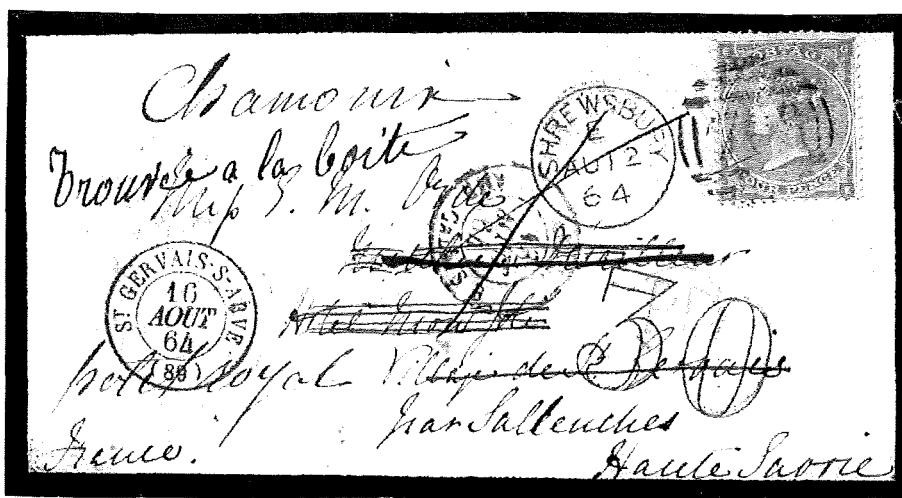


Fig. 6 - Mourning cover sent from Shrewsbury on 12th August 1864, paid 4d to destination (PD) to St Gervais, near Sallenches, forwarded to Chamonix.

The letter reached London on 13th August and was on the Paris to Lyon TPO by the 14th, arriving in St Gervais-sur-Arve near Sallenches on the 16th. But the addressee had decamped to the Hotel Royal, Chamonix and the cover was 'found in a post box' (*trouvé à la boîte*). It was then forwarded and arrived on 17th August, having been charged 30 centimes for the privilege of being forwarded. Foreign letters could be forwarded free of charge if handed in at a post office but were subject to a charge if put into a box.

This rate lasted until 1st July 1871 when it was reduced to 3d, but I do not have any 3d rated covers or their French equivalent. The 3d rate lasted until the Treaty of Berne introduced the General Postal Union and the rate was reduced again, this time to 2½d per ½ oz. Though the Treaty was to take effect from 1st July 1875, France did not allow the reduced rate until 1st January 1876.

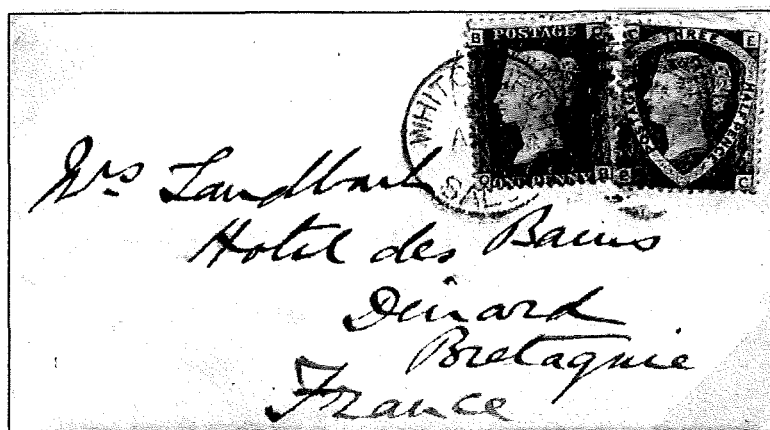


Fig. 7 - Cover with contents sent from Terrick Hall, Whitchurch (7th August 1877) to Dinard, Brittany (arrived 9th August) with the 2½d GPU rate paid by 1d red, plate 189 and the 1½d rose-red, plate 3.

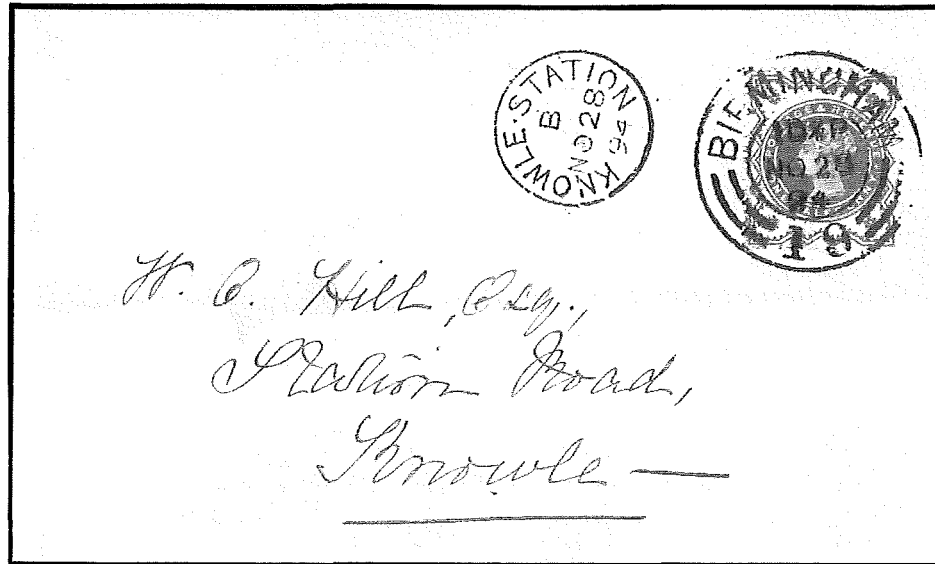
The Universal Postal Union (UPU) superseded the GPU on 1st April 1879, but the rate to France remained the same and stayed like that until the end of the century.

Ref: UK Letter Rates Inland and Overseas 1635 to 1900, Tabcart, HH Sales Ltd, Bradford, 2nd Edition, 2003.

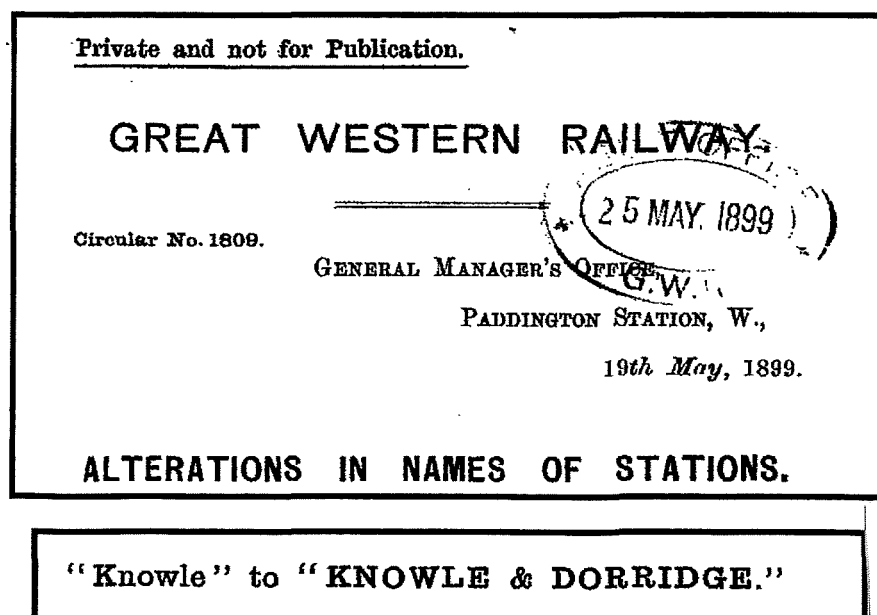
KNOWLE & DORRIDGE STATION

by Mike Dovey

I have lived in Dorridge for nearly thirty years, just half a mile from the railway line, and while I was not here for the splendid sight of the Kings and Castles thundering down the line smoke and steam belching to make us all cough and splutter, I have seen the odd DMU rattle to a halt in Dorridge station, and although I am a Seapost man, I also have always had an interest in railways. It was therefore a pleasure to come across the postcard shown below.



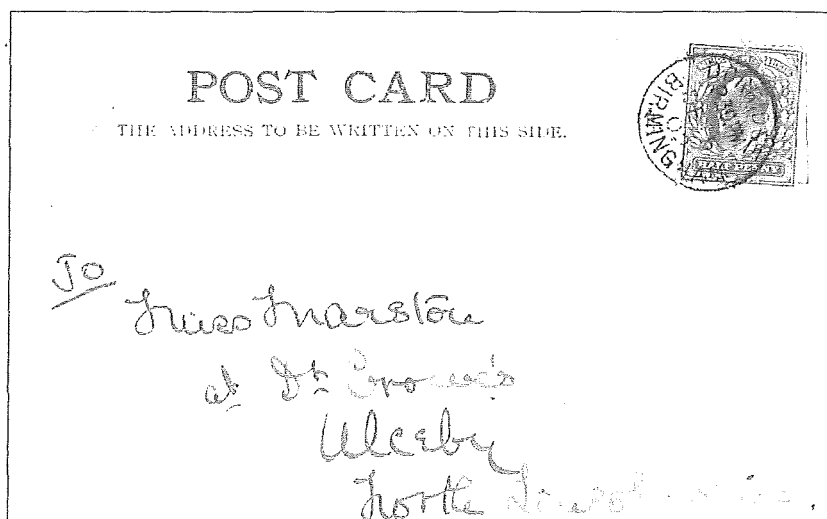
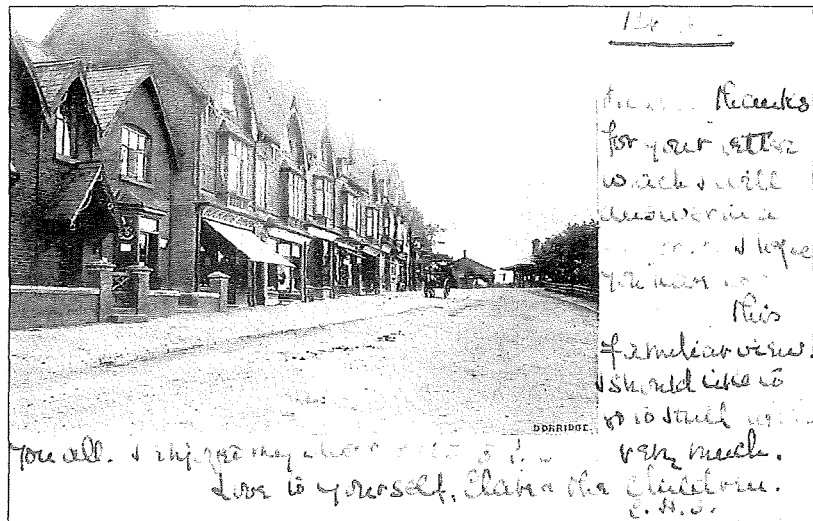
It is a superb, near perfect, strike of the handstamp used at Knowle station and is dated 28th November 1894. While I do not collect rail items this was an opportunity too good to miss. Later, I was given a copy of 'Railway Station Postmarks' by DP Gowan. In this I found that the earliest date shown for Knowle was 26.4.1897, some thirty months after mine while the final date for use was 15.7.99 and that triggered the question -Why? The answer is found in the notice a small part of which is shown below. In May 1899, the name of the station was changed from 'Knowle' to 'Knowle & Dorridge', the reason being that Knowle is in fact a couple of miles away while Dorridge, although when the station was built was nothing, was fast beginning to expand because of the link to Birmingham etc. Shown on the next page is the station as it was in about 1900, and although the station was rebuilt at a later date the shops on the right are still there. However, the bridge in the background is a poser as no-one can remember such a road or bridge and even I am not old enough to have seen it.





After the closure of the station office for mail in July 1899 there must have been a decision by the GPO to open a sub-office in the village. The postcard below (reduced to 80%) shows the same shops as above but from the Station Approach. You can make out the station at the top of the road. The adhesive on the card was cancelled with the 'DORRIDGE/BIRMINGHAM' datestamp on 5th December 1902, timed at 8.30 pm. This means that in the space of three years the names 'Knowle' and 'Knowle & Dorridge' were disposed of, although the station was known with the dual names for many years after that and even into the 1960s.

The author of the above article is a member of the TPO & Seapost Society, and the article was sent to me by Rick Martin, one of the editorial team for the journal of that society. My thanks to both of them.



159/14

OXFORD PENNY POST

1829 – 1840

Two penny posts were ultimately established at Oxford, one to the north in the direction of Bicester and the other to the west, in the direction of Witney. The circumstances of their establishment were quite different, as were the dates of their introduction.

UNOFFICIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Prior to the Penny Post, some villages to the north of Oxford were served from Woodstock and others from Oxford. Gosford was said to be a village of just a few houses, five miles from Oxford and on the route of a horsepost – in fact a mail cart - that ran between Oxford and Bicester. To the east of Gosford and six miles from Oxford, the small town of Islip was said, in the 1820s, to have a population of between seven and eight hundred inhabitants and, moreover, to be the summer home of the Dean of Westminster. Both places were served from Oxford, a local delivery charge of 2d being levied on each letter. If an inhabitant wanted to reply to a letter the same day, he had to pay a further 2d for the messenger to return to Oxford.

Kidlington was closer to Oxford and had a population in excess of 1400. Although only four and a half miles distant, it was half a mile nearer to Woodstock. In the 1820s it was described as being a place of “*great respectability inhabited by many families of opulence and independent fortune*”. Hampton Poyle was a small village to the north-west of Kidlington “*inhabited by a doctor of divinity and some gentlemen of independent fortune*” and, by the prevailing roads, was said to be five miles from both Woodstock and Oxford. (A modern map suggests it is eight miles from Woodstock and something over six miles from Oxford.) Both Kidlington and Hampton Poyle were served from Woodstock and, in this instance, the extra delivery charge for each letter was 4d.

The significant village of “Ensham”, now Eynsham, lay to the west of Oxford, on the main mailcoach route to Gloucester, via Witney and Burford, half way between Oxford and Witney. Until the mid-1830s, it received its mail in a Private Bag, dropped by the Gloucester Mail. The person who received the letters at Ensham charged 1d for each. Doubtless the residents were very satisfied with that arrangement but circumstances were to change and possibly disadvantage them.

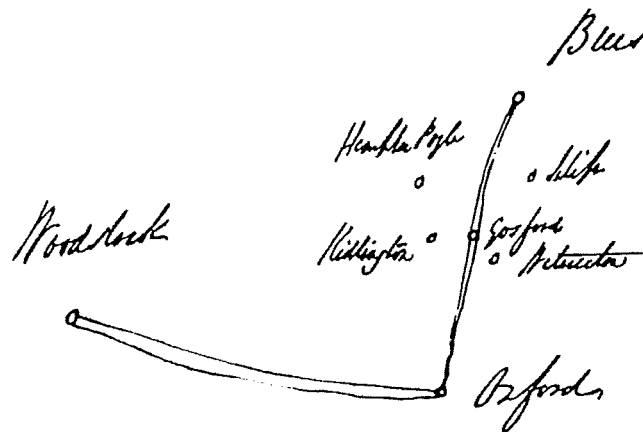
THE PENNY POST TO GOSFORD

On 20th August 1828, Dr Jones, the Vice Chancellor of Oxford, wrote to Sir Francis Freeling (who was awarded his baronetcy in March of that year) to submit a petition on behalf of the inhabitants of Kidlington, Islip and Hampton Poyle seeking his willingness “*to afford any reasonable accommodation*” of their postal requirements. We do not know when that letter was forwarded to Mr Rideout, the surveyor, but, somewhat unusually, it was 16th June of the following year, 1829, before the surveyor submitted his proposals to Freeling. In them, he outlined the prevailing postal arrangements and the possible operation of a penny post. He suggested that a bag be made up at Oxford and dropped at Gosford by the ride to Bicester, which passed through Gosford at 7am. It would not return from Gosford until 7pm, giving the inhabitants of the neighbourhood plenty of time to answer their letters. As at the Woodstock Penny Post receiving houses in 1826, the surveyor proposed there should be no delivery of letters from the receiving house at Gosford and all letters would have to be “*applied for*”. Because of this, the receiver at Gosford would be required to give more attention to his duty than was normally the case and his salary should reflect that. He proposed an annual payment of £8 which, the surveyor emphasised, would be “*his whole remuneration*”.

The surveyor made it clear that the financial viability of this new penny post would be marginal. His analysis of the likely receipts concluded that 112 letters (of which 59 would be to Kidlington and 37 to Islip), 38 franks and 27 newspapers would give total receipts of no more than £12 a year. However, this would cover the small cost of the post and he asked that it be given a year's trial.

In his submission to the Postmaster General on 18th June 1829, Freeling wrote:

"I should have felt some difficulty in the case recollecting that where we set up a Penny Post it is usually expected we shall deliver the letters at the houses but Mr Rideout states that he has reason to believe the inhabitants will be satisfied with our conveying their correspondence to a spot near them."

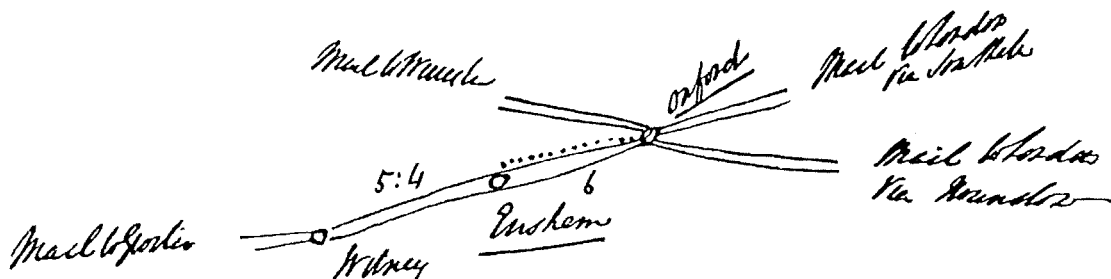


The surveyor's sketch map of the penny post to Gosford

The Oxford Penny Post to Gosford began in September 1829 and, when the surveyor reported on the results of the year's trial in November 1830, it was to show how pessimistic his estimate of the likely receipts had been. The receipts for the year were, in fact, no less than £28-19-0 and the revenue therefore profited to the extent of £20-19-0. The Penny Post was made permanent.

THE PENNY POST TO E(Y)NSHAM

It was decided, early in 1835, to avoid delaying the Worcester and Gloucester mailcoaches at Oxford by waiting for mail to be sorted there before continuing the run. Up to that time, a private bag had been made up at Oxford for Ensham and sent on the Gloucester mail. On 13th March 1835, the surveyor submitted his proposals to Sir Francis Freeling for a new arrangement at Ensham. He proposed a penny post to Ensham from Oxford, using a foot messenger. The distance between the two places was six miles and, if the messenger left Oxford at 6.30am, he would be at Ensham at 8.30am. Similarly, he would leave Ensham at 5.45pm and reach Oxford at 7.45pm. Although the new arrangement might seem likely to give Ensham a poorer service than before, the surveyor pointed out that the inhabitants would gain the advantage, in both directions, of their letters connecting with important rides between Oxford and the West, via Newbury, and to the North, via Towcester and Northampton. Unlike the Oxford Penny Post to Gosford, the penny post messenger would be available to spend all day delivering the penny post letters at Ensham. Thus the receiver at Ensham would only have to deal with the letters handed-in there and the surveyor suggested he be paid just £2-2-0 a year. The messenger, on the other hand, should be paid 14/- a week (£36-10-0 per annum) and, rather interestingly, this salary was to include the toll payment at "Lord Abingdon's private bridge" over which, it was said, he must pass in each direction (and therefore twice a day).



The surveyor's map of the penny post to E(y)nsham

"Lord Abingdon's private bridge" is now known as the Swinford tollbridge and is no longer on the main road between Oxford and Witney but on the present B4044. It is just half a mile from E(y)nsham and was opened in the late 1760s. The local landlord, the 4th Earl of Abingdon, built what is regarded

by many as the finest bridge over the River Thames at the same point as an earlier ford and ferry. To ensure the Earl remained responsible for its maintenance, he and his successors were allowed to retain the proceeds of a 2d toll over the bridge without payment of taxes. It would have cost the messenger 4d a day to cross Swinford bridge and would therefore have reduced his effective wage to 12/- a week.

Freeling sought the authority of the Postmaster General for the Oxford Penny Post to Ensham on 18th March 1835 and added "*it appears that the Penny Postage will cover the expense of £38-12-0 per annum*". In fact, the surveyor's prediction had been a revenue excess of just 13/9d.

Handstamps were not issued to either Gosford or Ensham.

References

Post 40/504/1829

Post 40/882/1830

Post 40/159/1835

HANDSTAMPS OF THE OXFORD PENNY POST

Post town: Oxford

Receiving houses: Gosford and E(y)nsham

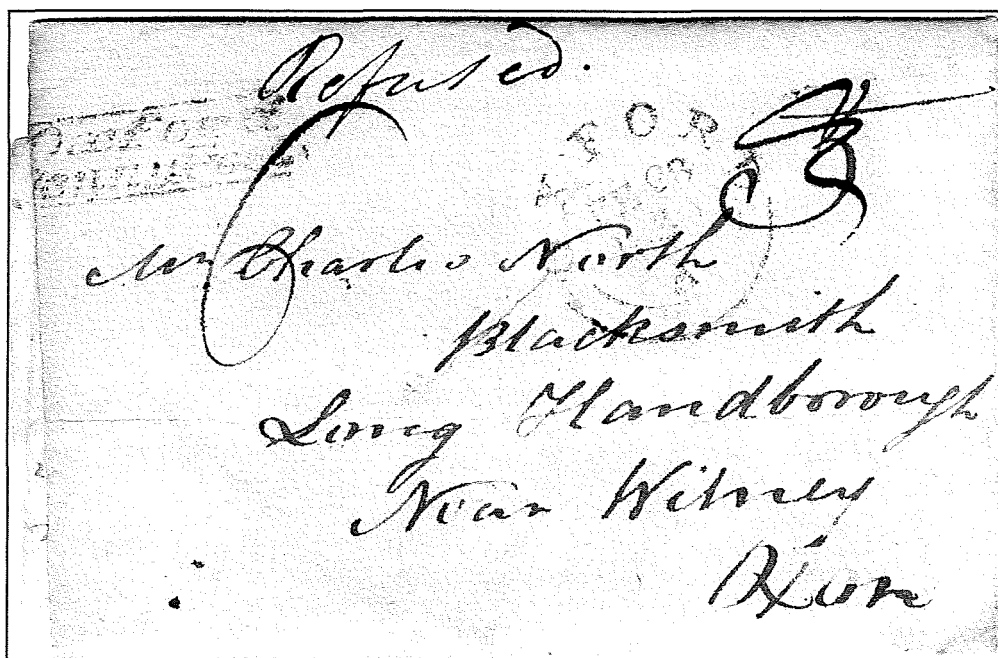
MLP1128

*Oxford
Penny Post*

B

18JUN32- 6JAN40

C



A letter from Stow on the Wold to Long Handborough but refused by the addressee and subsequently brought into Oxford by the penny post from Ensham and datestamped 28th February 1839 at Oxford.

“LORD ABINGDON’S PRIVATE BRIDGE”

by John Calladine

Elsewhere in this number of ‘Midland Mail’, there is a description of the Oxford Penny Post to Eynsham. (At the time of the Penny Post, the village was usually known as “Ensham” and, even though the name is now spelt with an added “y”, the added letter is silent.) The Oxford Penny Post messenger walked from Oxford to Eynsham each day, a distance of some six miles. We read that his weekly pay of 12/- was increased to 14/- because he was required to pay the toll at “Lord Abingdon’s Private Bridge”. Where was the bridge and why did a foot messenger have to pay a toll?

The choice of route between Oxford and Witney, to the west, in the first half of the 18th century depended, to a great extent, on how you were travelling. By the mid 1700s, several stagecoaches were using this route. The most direct line was through Botley and Eynsham but it involved a crossing of the River Thames. A longer route took the traveller north-west to Bladon and then south-west to Witney. This route avoided a Thames crossing altogether. The difficulty with the direct Eynsham route was that the ground to the west of Oxford at Botley was low-lying and therefore likely to be muddy, if not flooded, and, between Botley and Ensham, there was no bridge over the river. In an attempt to overcome the problems at Botley, a causeway had been constructed, with some seven separate small bridges to cross the many branches of the Thames. The causeway was said to be 14 feet wide, but much narrower at the bridges, and between six and ten feet above the neighbouring fields, with no fence on either side. Anyone attempting to use it with a cart found it necessary to unload their cart and transfer the load to pack-horses. This route was therefore impassable to stagecoaches. Beyond Botley and just before Eynsham, the Thames crossing was at Swinford, where there was a ford and, certainly by the 17th century, both a ford and a ferry. As a consequence, those on foot or horseback preferred the direct route, in spite of the difficulties at Botley and Swinford, while the stagecoaches took the longer route through Bladon.

As early as 1755, the local gentry began to consider upgrading the causeway so that it could be used by wheeled vehicles. A number of local landowners subscribed £600, conditional on there being an Act of Parliament to widen and improve the road. Tenders for the work were invited in 1767. The improved causeway was to be thirty feet wide and a minimum of twenty feet wide at the bridges. A new turnpike trust was created and toll-gates approved.

There is said to have been a river crossing at Swinford for almost a thousand years, at which tolls were paid. There are several stories highlighting the danger of the crossing. In 1636, a party of Welsh Sheriffs was bringing ‘Ship Money’ to Charles I and chose the direct route. A combination of windy weather, overloading and the unruliness of the sheriffs’ horses overturned the ferry. Three or four passengers drowned, eight (and some horses) escaped by swimming and the then large sum of £800 was lost but eventually recovered. John Wesley arrived at the crossing in 1764 when riding from Oxford to Witney to visit friends. He described the river as like a sea on either side and, electing not to hazard a ferry trip, asked the ferryman if it were possible to ride what he described as a causeway. The ferryman replied “Yes, sir, if you keep to the middle”. However John Wesley found that the “causeway” was covered in water, as one might expect at a ford, and in parts the water ran over it with the swiftness and violence of a sluice. His horse lost both her fore feet but contrived to leap back onto the causeway and Wesley avoided being dumped in the river which, he said, was ten or twelve feet deep on either side.

There is a popular story that, three years later, in 1767, it was no lesser a traveller than King George III who arrived at Swinford in his carriage – an unconvincing statement - to find the river in flood. He, too, almost came to grief and decided enough was enough. It is said he prevailed upon the local landowner, the 4th Earl of Abingdon, who had extensive properties on both side of the river, to build a bridge and, when the Earl pleaded poverty, the King told him he could seek authorisation to charge a toll of 2d and the bridge would soon pay for itself. In truth, the Earl had proposed both a bridge at Swinford, to replace the ferry, and improvements to the Botley causeway a year earlier. Clearly, a bridge would not have enabled wheeled vehicles to use the route unless causeway improvements were also made.

Whatever the true origin of the bridge, in 1767 an Act of Parliament was presented “*for building a bridge cross the River Thames, from Swynford in the County of Berks, to Eynsham in the County of*

Oxford.” The Act declared that the Earl was the owner of the ferry, which he had probably recently acquired, and that he was now “*willing and desirous, at his own expence, to build a bridge over the said river at or near the said ferry*”. Two factors, apart from the supposed insistence of the King, possibly helped to clinch the matter. Ownership of the bridge and its tolls was given to the Earl and to “his Heirs and Assigns for ever”, a highly unusual step. The Earl was to pay taxes that the ferry had previously paid, such as Land Tax, but no other taxes. Even if he appreciated the value of this concession, he could hardly have foreseen the introduction of Income tax in 1842 and how extraordinarily valuable that concession was to be and has remained to this day.

Work started on the bridge in 1767 and it was completed in 1769. A tollhouse was built at the Eynsham end of the bridge, that still survives, and, as a speculative venture, a substantial inn was built at the Oxford end. In 1791, a writer commented that the inn “though provided with all proper accommodation and out-buildings” had been an unfortunate speculation and had never been occupied. A contemporary picture shows a large building, supposedly on three floors, but an early photograph taken in 1885 suggests there were two floors. In 1909, it was still standing and divided into cottages. Fred Hatcher, author of a book called “The Stripling Thames”, described it as a handsome old building and claimed it was used as a posting house in coaching days. In view of the proximity of Eynsham, that seems rather unlikely. The building was eventually demolished.

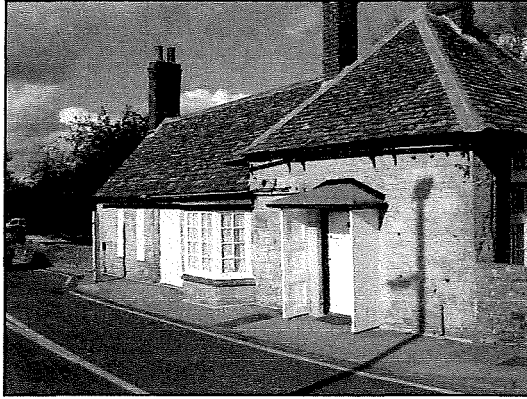


Swinford Bridge in October 2008

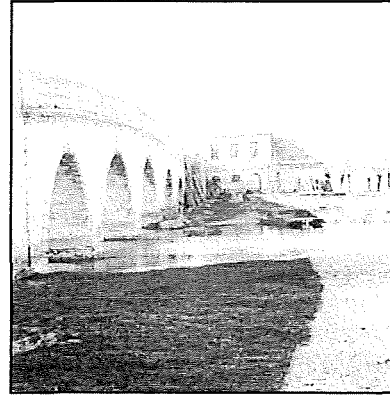
Swinford Tollbridge is considered by many to be the finest bridge over the River Thames. Built in stone during the golden age of Georgian architecture, it has three central arches and a stone balustrade over those arches. It cost £4,850, roughly the equivalent of three hundred thousand pounds today so probably a bargain. The tollhouse at the Eynsham end of the bridge is both attractive and an essential feature of the bridge but nowadays the tolls are collected from a booth in the centre of the road and a single tollkeeper is therefore able to collect tolls from vehicles travelling in both directions.

At the same time as the new bridge was built, the new causeway at Botley was completed, enabling the first coach from Oxford to cross the bridge on 5th August 1769. The coach is reputed to have been the Stroudwater (stage)coach. Neither the London-Stroud mailcoach that ran briefly in 1785/86 nor the through coach from London re-established in 1827 would have crossed this bridge, for both were

routed through Abingdon, to the south. However, the Gloucester Mail through Oxford would have used the bridge from 1785 and, since mailcoaches were exempt from tolls, it would have passed over the bridge without delay or charge. Until 1835, this coach was used to carry Eynsham's letters but, as the Oxford Penny Post write-up explains, the practice was stopped in 1835 to avoid delaying the coach at Oxford.



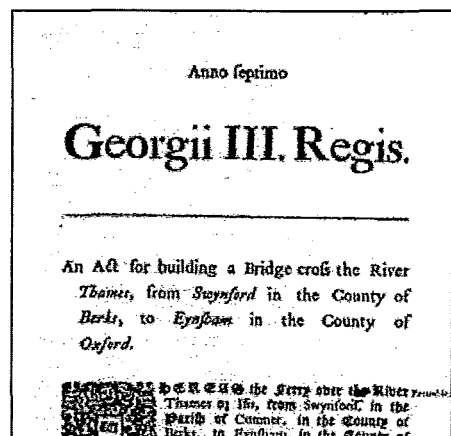
The tollhouse at the Eynsham end of the bridge



An 1885 photo of the inn at the Oxford end

The roads on both sides of Swinford Bridge were controlled by turnpike trusts in 1835. The bridge, however, remained private property and at private bridges it was not unusual to charge pedestrians to cross. Had it been a normal county bridge, no extra charge would have been levied, either on the penny post messenger or any other pedestrian. In the 20th century, cars were charged 1d for each of five wheels (including the spare!) and this remained unchanged until decimalisation. Thereafter, cars were charged 2p until 1994, when the current owner of the bridge (believed to be Mr Michael Hawley) was allowed to increase the charge to 5p to cover maintenance costs. Some claim the 5p charge was only authorised for twelve years. The principal complaint nowadays is that toll payments seriously delay local traffic using the tollbridge as a "rat run" to and from Oxford. Pedestrians are no longer charged.

For almost 200 years after its construction, Swinford Tollbridge remained on the main road between Oxford and Witney. However, in 1935, a new road from Headington, north of Oxford, to Eynsham allowed through traffic to avoid Oxford and the two river crossings. The bridge is now on the B4044 and one might expect it to be almost deserted. That is far from the case and, talking to one of the toll collectors, I am assured that between ten and twelve thousand vehicles cross the bridge on a typical day. The congestion at rush hours is notorious and, if the A40 is impeded in any way, becomes intolerable. Since 1906, campaigns to have the toll at the bridge removed have come and gone. In 2006, an on-line poll conducted by the local newspaper showed that 87.5% of voters wanted the toll scrapped. There is currently a campaign to petition the local MP, a certain David Cameron, to help get it removed. Since it would require an Act of Parliament to do so, perhaps the voters shouldn't hold their breath?



BOOK REVIEW

THE POSTAL MARKINGS OF SHROPSHIRE (Part 1) - THE MAIN OFFICES, SUB-OFFICES AND PENNY POST VILLAGES 1705/6 to 1910.

The title of this book states exactly what it is - a book on the **postal markings** of Shropshire up to about 1910; it is not a volume on the detailed postal history of the county. However, for the novice there is an outline of the postal history of Great Britain with particular reference to Shropshire.

The introduction contains a page which illustrates the types of postmark used in Shropshire up to 1910, though one omission here is the circular rubber handstamps issued for use on parcels. Then, starting with the county town which takes up 34 pages, there is a list of the postmarks used at each place with the size, date of issue, colour and recorded dates. There is no rarity guide/value - a wise decision in the view of this reviewer. The only monetary value that our collections have is what another person is prepared to pay on the day that we want to sell. Where possible every mark is illustrated some on very interesting covers, and this, along with notes which enable similar marks to be differentiated, is a great strength of the book. The quality of the illustrations is very good despite the fact that no attempt has been made 'to clean up' the marks. There are only one or two instances where the adhesive makes it difficult to distinguish the mark. One small criticism is that the 'skeleton' handstamps appear among the circular datestamps. I wonder if a beginner would pick them out, especially as the example at the front of the book is an unframed 'traveller'.

The penny post receiving houses are listed at the end of the book under each post town, again beginning with Shrewsbury., and both the early marks and those used when the place became a sub-office are shown.

Brian Atkins and the Shropshire Postal History are to be congratulated on producing such a detailed and informative publication, clearly the result of much research .

120 pages, edited by Brian Atkins, published by the Shropshire Postal History Society, ISBN 978-0-9811241-0-0

INDEX TO ISSUES 1 - 150 OF MIDLAND MAIL

An index to the first 150 issues of Midland Mail is almost ready for publication and will be available, in the first instance, at the AGM. The cost will be £1 if collected at a meeting or £1.50 if sent by post. This index runs to at least fourteen pages, and should enable members to easily locate any past articles of particular interest to them.

FURTHER DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

There was not sufficient space on the first page to mention that on **9th May** in conjunction with 'WORPEX' at **Oldbury Park Primary School, Worcester** we have a meeting, beginning at **1.30 pm**, the subject for which is '*Latest Acquisitions*'. The fair opens at 10 am.

On **11th July** MidPex 2009 will be held at a new venue - Xcel Leisure Centre, Mitchell Avenue, Canley CV4 8DY. There will be about fifty dealers present as well as numerous specialist societies. Our Society will have a stand so please pay us a visit while you are there. The opening times are 10.00am - 5.00pm.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

This is scheduled to appear in June. It will contain a report of the March meeting which has been held over to give a better balance in this issue. While I have some material in hand, there is a need for more so please send articles, long or short, to: John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG.