



MIDLAND (G.B.)
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY 1975



Please reply to:

Chairman
Elizabeth Lewis
Tel No 021/429/1222

Treasurer
Peter Baxter
72 Midhurst Rd
Kings Norton
Birmingham

Secretary
Richard Farman
Tel No 0283/66515

BULLETIN NO 20 FEBRUARY 81

NEXT SOCIETY MEETING

Will be held next Saturday St. Valentine's Day 14th February
at Dr. Johnson House, Bull Street, Birmingham commencing at
2 pm. Subject being ANNUAL COMPETITION for the Society
Shield - nine sheets by members.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The two remaining Society Meetings for this Season will be
also held at Dr. Hohnson House as below :

Saturday 14th March - Special BIRMINGHAM display
by Eric Lewis

Saturday 11th April - A.G.M. (see Page 4 of this
Bulletin)

AND Annual Society Auction

ANNUAL SOCIETY POSTAL HISTORY AUCTION

Enclosed for members who were not at the January meeting is
a form for submitting the few items you must have surplus
to requirements. Please complete and send to Jon Baker,
13 Station Road, Hinckley, Leics. by 1st March to enable an
Auction List to be circulated to members. Response so far
has been miserable. The Auctioneer has agreed to accept
postal bids from members who are unable to attend the Auction.

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(There are some interesting articles which have been submitted
by members still to be published - it is hoped to
include them in the next Bulletin - Editor)

Membership

Remains static around the 40 mark - this Bulletin has been
sent to 'paid up' members only. Our membership drive has
not been very encouraging. Any new members registering now
will be excused the Subscription for the remaining part of
this Season. Members do not have to live in the Midlands
but only to have an interest in Midland Postal History.

POSTAL HISTORY AND THE PARCEL POST LABEL

by

John and Jonathan Calladine

The Parcel Post is a relative newcomer in the timescale of postal history. The service was not officially inaugurated until 1st August 1883 and, unlike other postal reforms, the United Kingdom lagged behind its competitors. Within Britain, the proposed service had been opposed both by the private carriers and the railway companies. Even today, carriage of parcels is not a post office monopoly. In fact, it would hardly be surprising if the post office discontinued what is frequently a loss-making service.

There are many aspects of the parcel post that might be studied. At its introduction, the post office ran its own parcel-carrying coaches on some road routes. On other routes, carriage was totally or partly by the railways who claimed 55% of the postage fee. Routeings were defined by the 'X' lists. To those for whom routes hold no fascination, one might commend the special obliterations that were developed to cancel large strips or blocks of stamps. Then there are those bits of paper unique to the parcel post - the Parcel Post Labels. There are at least ten major types and a galaxy of sub-types. The potential for a study of the parcel post is clear.

This article concerns none of the above subjects specifically. Rather its aim is to draw attention to the postal markings, sometimes unique, that are to be found on parcel post labels. Figure 1 illustrates a typical parcel post label of the 1890's. Although many readers will know how it was intended to be used, some may not.

Not Always?

PARCEL  POST. STROUD (SD)	X LIST. Letter and Number	S.	D.
		Postage	4/6
FOR POSTAGE STAMPS.		Fee paid on Registration...	
		OFFICE STAMP.	
			

Figure 1

The parcel post label was adhesive and very approximately 3" x 2" in size. Beneath the crest and 'Parcel Post' designation, was printed the name of the parent post office and its telegraphic code (used in the 'X lists'.) To the right were, at various times, spaces for the X list routeing, the postage fee and any registration fee (which was not shared with the railway companies). The lower part of the label was divided into two areas: a space for the postage stamps and a space for a date stamp. The postal official receiving the parcel at, let us say, a country sub-office was supposed to stick the necessary adhesive stamps to the label in the left hand space and strike his datestamp in the right hand space before he stuck the label to the parcel. The parcel then went to the parent post office where the stamps were cancelled, often with a special canceller with the office name across the centre. Most labels that one finds bear no postage stamps. Often they were stuck directly on the parcel and, if they were on the label, collectors have since removed them! Fortunately such vandalism need not desolate us.

The procedure above required the sub-office to identify itself in the right hand space and not over the postage stamps. How was it to do this? It will be recalled that, in the 1850's, the small sub-offices usually had undated circular stamps. But, by 1860 they were no longer required to backstamp letters nor did many handle registered letters, and consequently they were without an office stamp of any kind when the parcel post was introduced in 1883. Many began by inserting their name in manuscript in the panel reserved for the office postmark.

It so happens that, at about this time, the post office recognized that rubber date stamps could be produced more cheaply than steel stamps. Furthermore they were very suitable for marking parcel labels, even when the label had already been stuck to a parcel. So, as the parcel business built up, many sub-offices were issued with a rubber datestamp. (If the office was subsequently upgraded to a telegraph office, its rubber stamp was replaced by a more expensive but harder wearing steel single-datestamp.) It now had a stamp to apply to the right hand space on the parcel post label. Because rubber would be harmed by the oil in normal black cancelling ink, a special violet ink composition was introduced. Inevitably many offices soon stopped bothering to use it and resorted to the normal black ink. The result is the distortion one so often finds in the marks made by rubber stamps.

The rubber datestamps were only intended for postal use on parcels and sub-offices were not allowed to strike them on letters and cards. But, soon after 1900, the rule was relaxed a little and country sub-offices struck them on envelopes and postcards adjacent to, but not cancelling, the postage stamps which were cancelled at the parent office. Then, in 1905, the rule was further relaxed and sub-offices began to cancel postage stamps. However, by this time, a significant number of offices had graduated from a rubber stamp to a steel one.

Thus it comes about that sub-office rubber datestamps prior to 1900 are to be found almost exclusively on parcel post labels. In many cases, these sub-offices had not been opened in the 1850's and these are their very first marks. In some cases, the rubber stamp was replaced by a steel stamp before 1900 and therefore later examples of the rubber mark on Edwardian postcards simply do not exist. Figures 2 and 3 show examples of the rubber datestamps of two Gloucestershire villages in 1895 and 1902 respectively.

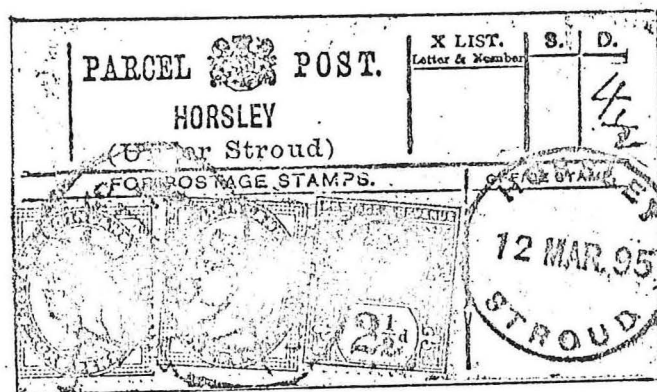


Figure 2

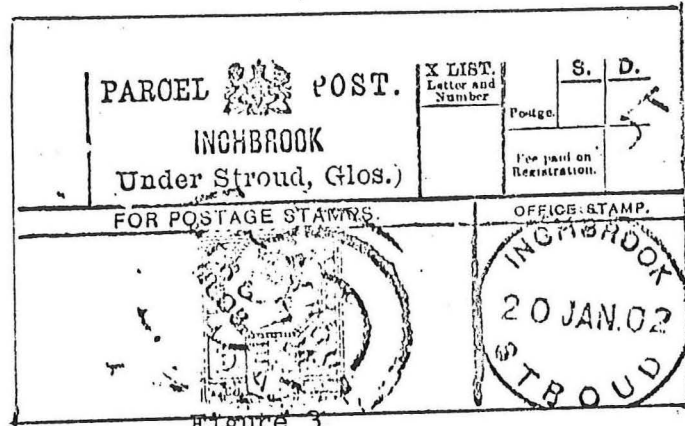


Figure 3

We hope that no one is left in doubt that the parcel post label has an important place in a postal history collection. It is perhaps surprising that any quantity survive. George Brumell (Author of 'British Post Office Numbers') had the foresight to build up a comprehensive collection which, when auctioned in 1952, largely passed to the late Lt. Cdr. J.O.A. Arkell. He added to it and began the task of listing its unique contents but the collection has since been irrevocably dispersed and anyone able to acquire the parcel post labels for their own area of interest is unlikely to regret it.

Useful references:

1. English and Welsh Postmarks Since 1840
(Particularly Chapters 1X and XX.) James A Mackay
2. Great Britain Parcel Post Labels
(An article in Gibbons Stamp Monthly, March 1980.) John Simpson
3. The Parcel Post Labels of Great Britain Lt Cdr J.O.A. Arkell
Part 1 : Berkshire
Part 2 : Yorkshire
Part 3 : Devonshire and Gloucestershire

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Annual General Meeting - NOTICE

The sixth AGM of the Society will be held on SATURDAY 11th APRIL 1981 at Dr. Johnson House, Bull Street, Birmingham and will start at 2 p.m. prompt. We hope to book the "larger" Room for the AGM as it will be followed by the Annual Society Auction.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of Last AGM (29th March 1980)
3. Any matters arising
4. Officers Reports : Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer.
5. Election of Officers (as above)
6. Election of Committee
7. 1980/1981 Society Meetings and Venues.
8. Any other business.

AUCTION

Viewing as from 3 p.m.
Auction commences approx. 3.20 p.m.
Guests and Visitors will be welcome.

JANUARY MEETING AT BIRMINGHAM

An excellent turnout of approximately 20 members attended our January meeting, twelve of whom gave short displays of nine or more sheets. All the material displayed was up to the high quality that we have become accustomed to and to attempt to describe each display in detail would more than fill the whole of this bulletin.

For those unable to attend a glimpse into what they missed is given below. Many items led to discussion both whilst items were being described and again when they were viewed by those present.

We started the afternoon with a glimpse into the Airmail, F.P.O. and Registered Postal Services of Thailand in the 1920's and 1930's shown to us by Mr. D. Keen followed by Mr. C.W.E. Coles' story of the Mobile Box cancellations applied on letters from France to England and Jersey, many with ship marks in addition to the M.B. cancellation. Mr. J. Calladine's display was entitled 'The Cinderella of Postal History', comprising a selection of the Uniform Penny Post handstamps of the 1840's. The marks shown included those containing town names and some unusual shaped handstamps used at individual towns. In the same period of use but of a completely different nature were the Mulready Caricature letter sheets and covers shown to us by Mr. J. Baker. He included later examples on the same theme up to a caricature that he had produced himself in 1969 lampooning the change of the two tier posting. Among his earlier items was a forgery produced by N.Evans but postally used in 1862. He also brought along one of his Christmas presents, namely a curved brass plate inscribed with postal rates from 1lb - 3d up to 7lb - 1/- . Shame on him that he did not know what this was used for, (quite right Editor) but other members soon enlightened him that it was a G.P.O. Parcel Post scale pan. I have since looked up those parcel post rates and can confirm to him that these were the original rates when the parcel post was introduced in 1883. As the rates were soon changed it has proved to be an early example and no doubt he will treasure it all the more.

Mr. W. Chester then entertained us with various unusual Coventry items including four picture postcards addressed to the same person. On each was a part message which when combined together read 'I have lively and beautiful collection of Coventry views'. It was also interesting to note that each of these four cards was surcharged '1d to Pay' and presumably the recipient had not objected to paying the postage due four times in succession. He narrated some interesting and amusing stories on several of his other items but it would not be possible to condense these into this report.

The History of the Shrewsbury Agricultural Shows and the Shrewsbury Flower Shows over the years was told to us by Mr. S. Stobbs commencing with example of cards depicting balloons in the early 1900's, he himself having attended many of the earlier shows in his school days.

Richard Farman continued the afternoons entertainment with some of his acquisitions over the past twelve months including a letter addressed to Ind Coope's London office from Demerara in 1868 querying the beer label on the beer being exported at that time. He also showed part of a set of Coaching Inns cards all connected with Dewar's Whisky.

Variations of the double ring handstamps of Birmingham as used between 1884 into the 1890's, when the double ring was replaced by a single ring, were shown to us by Mr. Baxter, followed by Mr. T. Clewley's display comprising an assortment of instructional and surcharge marks, including Scottish, Foreign section, 'Liable to letter rate', 'delayed

through being put in the wrong box', misdirected and other interesting markings of this nature.

An interesting comparison of the make up by various postmasters in Staffordshire of the inks used in the pre and post 1840 period was shown to us by Mr. C. Beaver. A variety of different shades of 'red' were apparent when comparisons were made varying from brown to bright red. After 1840, Staffordshire was apparently supposed to use blue or green and examples of these colours were also shown.

After a refreshing break for a cup of tea we were shown some London hooded cancellers incorporating 1d for late fee, various registered and express delivery letters showing increases in rates during the 1920's and post office savings bank forms of the 1880's by Mr. E. Lewis followed by a few items which I took along such as two miniature envelopes, one barely big enough to receive the postage stamp and both with their original letters written by two entirely different children about their Christmas and Birthday presents, one in 1894 and one in 1926.

May I thank members who came to the meeting for supporting the Society in this way. It was a great encouragement for your Secretary and Committee to see a good turn out which justified using a larger room than we normally have in Birmingham. Please try your best to attend our next meeting and to bring along an entry for the competition if possible.

Elizabeth Lewis.

To the Receiver General

*Pay To the Secy. Genl. Secretary
to the London & Birmingham Railway
twenty Pounds being the Allowance
at the rate of £4- per Annum
to the Secy. of that Company
for the care of the Apparatus for
the Exchange of the Letter Bags at
the Stations, Boxmoor, Berkhamstead
Lighton Buzzard, Blisshley &
Blisworth due the 5th March last
and place the same to account of
Incidents / Mails / and for so
doing this shall be your Warrant
General Post Office June 9. 1840*

A POST OFFICE WARRANT.

Illustrated in a reduced size, is a Post Office Warrant for payment to the London and Birmingham Railway for working the mail apparatus for the exchange of letter bags (a device for exchanging letter bags in transit attached to the first T.P.O.) The warrant is signed by the Earl of Lichfield who was Postmaster General from 1835 to 1841.

The original document measures approximately 10" x 7" and is dated at the bottom 9th June 1840.

Submitted by
ERIC LEWIS

*L20-
Earl of Lichfield
20/11/40*