

MIDLAND MAIL

THE JOURNAL OF THE MIDLAND (GB) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Number 171 August 2011

It is with a great deal of trepidation I pick up the mantle of Editorship of Midland Mail. I can only say that John Soer will be a very hard act to follow, I will do my best to continue his example but crave members' indulgence for the many and varied mistakes I shall undoubtedly make along the way. John Soer has been more than kind and patient in helping me take my first tentative steps towards producing this my first edition of the Society's journal. Many thanks John, I will try to maintain the standard you have set over the past 25 years.

I am very grateful to the members who have already passed articles to me for inclusion in this edition but would like to receive contributions from members at anytime either by email, on disk or via the old method of the postal service. My email address is sadiecole@mypostoffice.co.uk - my postal address Sadie Cole, Pool House, Discoed, Presteigne, Powys LD8 2NW.

I shall rely almost completely on contributions from members so please help me fill the pages of Midland Mail.

NEW MEMBER

The Society extends a cordial welcome to Clive Jones of Kings Heath, Birmingham, whose interests are G.B. T.P.O.'s and Yorkshire Postal History.

CONSTITUTION

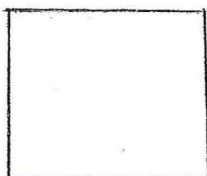
Following the verification of the constitution agreed at the A.G.M. A revised Paragraph 10 - Dissolution - was included with the June issue of Midland Mail to replace the original issued last year. If you did not receive the revision please contact Mick Gill.

WORPEX 2011

If any member purchased items but left them behind at the dealers stand can they please contact Phone No. 01299 824829.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2011 - 12 SEASON

If your subscription has not been received by our Treasurer you will find a "X" in this box. In that case, Eric Lewis, 27 Rathbone Rd, Smethwick, B67 5JG, would be pleased to receive a cheque for £10 at your earliest convenience. A renewal form was sent out with the previous issue of Midland Mail.



M.P.F. SPRING 2011 INTER-SOCIETY COMPETITIONS HELD AT WOMBOURNE

Congratulations to the following M.P.H. members who were awarded the following. Although not entered in our Society's name but of their local Society it is still very worthy of note here.

Clive Jones, our new member, his entry "The Development of the Late Fee Surcharge" was awarded a Gold and voted Best in Show, hearty congratulations. The display illustrated how the payment of the Late Fee was paid from 1844 to 1911 and included examples of the surcharge on TPO and International mail.

Peter Elms was awarded Silver for his entry "Birmingham Postal Marks".

Brian Purcell was awarded Silver for his entry "Mulready envelopes and Letter Sheets"

Alan Godfrey was awarded Silver Gilt in the Thematic Competition for his entry "Pteridophytes - Ferns and their Allies"

MIDPEX 2011

The Society made a very creditable showing at Midpex with a display of covers supplied by Alan Marshall and Eric Lewis, both of whom kindly supplied the details.

Alan's consisted of covers from Loughborough, Bingham and Nottingham. Eric's contribution consisted of the 'Cresswell' undated circular marks as seen at the April meeting and detailed in the last Midland Mail.

Alan's consisted of a group of **Loughborough** items illustrating the 1711 LOUGHBOROUGH mark, a 1781 entire to London showing the large LOUGH/BOROUGH with a manuscript 'MISSENT' alongside a large NOTTING/HAM previously unrecorded mark and examples of the curved LOUGHBOROUGH circa 1795. An EXPRESS cover of 1894 and 2 items which show a combination of earliest and latest recording of marks of Loughborough, Leicester, Mountsorrel and Cossington.

Bingham was represented with examples of both the Bingham Post Office numbers 584 and 656. The 584 being the earliest recorded 1844 type barred numeral accompanied by a Nottingham Traveller of 1847. Two other items showed the only recording of a particular lower case Bingham with the date after of 22nd July 1839 and an entire uprated and redirected by and with a postscript by the famous Bingham Postmaster, John Strong. Also shown was an example of the earliest BINGHAM straight line mark of 1795 and the earliest and latest Skeleton CDS's April and May 1906.

Nottingham items included a double rated 1664 entire to London with a very early Bishop Mark. An example of the 1713 earliest NOTTINGHAM mark. A handstruck '4' Nottingham to Newark and an 1896 Nottingham Station Parcel label with a Parcels Depot C.D.S.

My own experience of Midpex was somewhat coloured by a rather fraught journey to get to the venue. Once there I was impressed by the venue, light and airy with plenty of space to move around and the improved parking over previous venues. I noticed that there seemed to be very little interest in the displays by Specialist Societies and towards the end of the afternoon asked several members manning these displays about the level of interest generated. None were able to report signing up new members, (including the MPH) a few said one or two people had taken leaflets and one or two displays were left unattended. On reflection I wonder if this lack of interest was due to the lay out of the Hall. The dealers were grouped in one part with quite a large gap between them and the Specialist Societies. The main purpose of most visitors was to see what they could add to their collections so the dealers were the main attraction. Very few seemed to have crossed over to browse the displays. Maybe a better layout could be arranged next time. Any suggestions!

Footnote: My journey home was more pleasant being a tour of four Midland counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and Herefordshire. Perhaps The Journey Home could be a new collection for me!

OBITUARY

Peter Thompson.

Members will be saddened to learn of the death of our member Peter Thompson of Dronfield Woodhouse, near Sheffield, at the age of 66. Peter joined our Society shortly after his father, who had been a member, died some years ago.

Peter's collecting interests mainly ranged from Worcestershire northwards, through Birmingham, Staffordshire and Derbyshire and into South Yorkshire. He also had a completely separate interest in Transatlantic Mail to and from Liverpool.

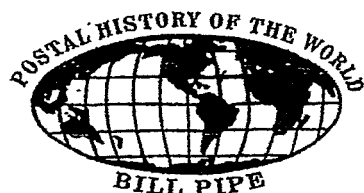
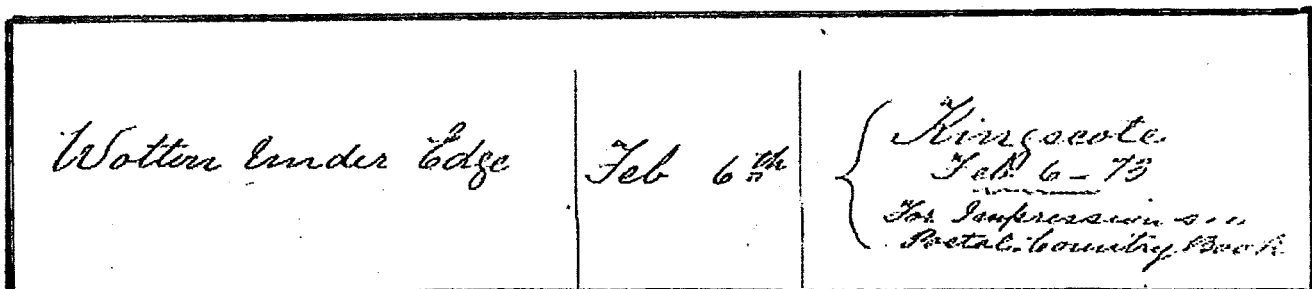
I was probably the last member to speak to Peter when he telephoned me in February this year. He seemed well enough at that time. The Society extends its deepest sympathy to his sister, Elizabeth Salt, and her family.

Eric Lewis.

CAN YOU HELP?

A query has been received via John Calladine.

John Hine is preparing detailed lists for each of the Gloucester offices and has now reached Kingscote. Its first small dated circular stamp was issued in 1873 and the relevant extract from the Proof Impression Book is illustrated here. There is no strike of the mark - although we have seen used examples, of course - but includes the intriguing comment "For Impression see Postal Country Book". Do any of our members know what the "Postal Country Book" might be?



THE MAGPIE

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The Story of a Floating Post Office. "RMS Columba"

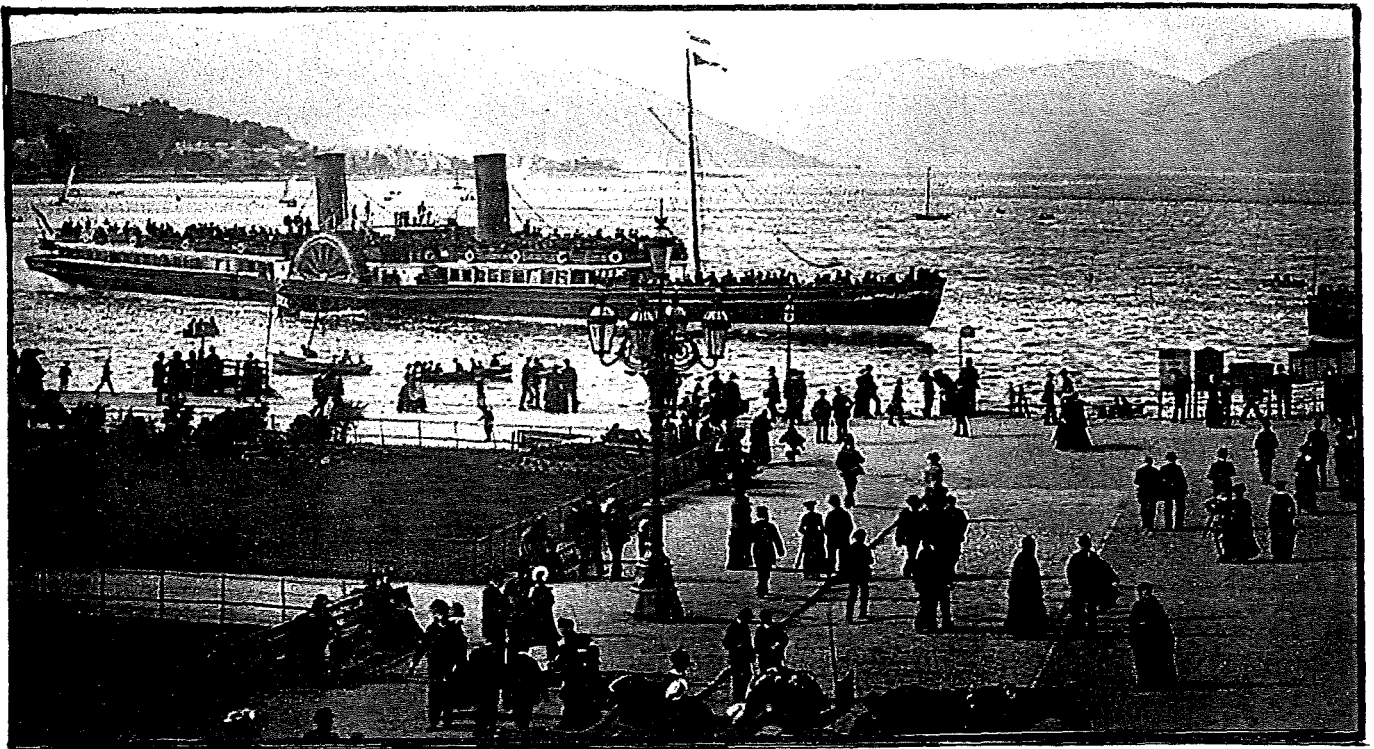
By: Mike Wilesmith

Among the many ships in the hands of the breakers in 1936 was the majestic paddle steamer "*R.M.S. Columba*", this one in particular should be of interest to Philatelists.

Built by Messrs J&G Thomson in 1878, Owned by David MacBrayne's Caledonian Canal Steamer Company and was in operation between 1878 and 1935. Gross tonnage of 602. Over 300 feet in length, she had a curved bow and was magnificently fitted out. "*Columba*" had a barbers and a post office on board and this was unique in Clyde steamer history. Whilst the post office was closed in the Great War it was later reinstated.

Its distinguished career was on Tarbert and Ardrishaig route, which was used by Queen Victoria and the cream of Victorian and Edwardian society as part of the "Royal Route" through the Crinan Canal and the Caledonian Canal to shoots and lodges in the Highlands. During her career she visited Ardrishaig over 5600 times. "*Columba*" was re-boilered in 1900, when her four navy boilers were replaced by two haystack boilers. Such was the reduction in her weight by the change of boilers that she floated five inches higher in the water afterwards. At that time she also had a smoking room erected on the promenade deck immediately abaft the after funnel. After fifty eight summers, she was sold to shipbreakers, Arnott & Young and was scrapped at Dalmuir in March 1936.

David MacBrayne's Ltd later became Caledonian MacBrayne who now sails to twenty-two Scottish islands.



"*R.M.S. Columba*" and her claim to distinction is that at one time, she was our only floating Post Office under the official title of "The Greenock and Ardrishaig Packet." When the office was instituted in July 1879, it was intended principally for the sorting, receipt, and despatch of mails. In addition, however, it was open for public business, including the transmission of telegrams.

Greenock provided the Post Office with a complete staff of two sorting clerks, a telegraphist, and a postman. Instead of the usual uniform the men wore semi-naval rig, a proceeding which must have given the Post Office a distinctly nautical flavour.

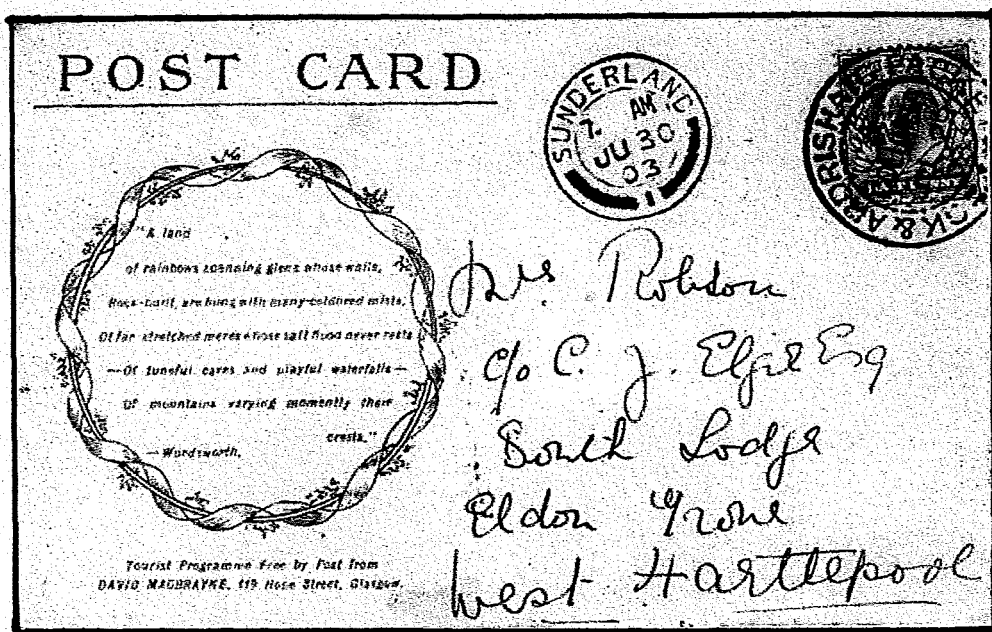
The "*Columba*," which ran between Greenock and Ardrishaig, timed her sailings so that they connected with the night mails, as each of the Clyde resorts was reached letters were delivered, the local inhabitants came aboard to buy their stamps or send their telegrams, and the packet steamed on to her next call.

Ardrishaig was reached at 12.50 p.m. and after a few minutes wait the "*Columba*" set out on her return journey.

An interesting feature of this service was that it was possible to post a letter on the outward journey for Dunoon and obtain a reply on the homeward trip.

The Great War, which altered so many lives, had its effect on the Greenock and Ardrishaig Packet. The leisurely days of pre-War times had gone and, in April 1917 the "*Columba*" was withdrawn from services.

The original emblem which signified that a Post Office was aboard the "*Columba*" is now the property of the Regional Director in Scotland. It takes the form of a clock, surrounded by a scroll of beautifully carved oak on the bottom of which, are the words "His Majesty's Post Office."



Promotional postcard of "McBrayne's Glasgow and Highland Royal Mail Steamers" posted on board "R.M.S. Columba" with cancellation "GK & Ardrishaig Packet/ A / Columba / JU 29 03" and receiving stamp of Sunderland JU 30 03.

The Caledonian McBrayne's fleet on the Clyde continued to provide a wealth of material for collectors of its ships' "Posted on Board..." cachets, particularly from excursion steamers in the 1950's and 1960's but there were no longer any official postal markings, although the company continued to have a contract to transport mail to the Scottish islands.

Bibliography:

Glasgow City Archives Clyde Navigation Trust.

Am Baile - R.M.S. Columba 1908?

Capt. Edwards Baker - Stamp Review April 1937.

ANOTHER POSTAL MUSEUM - IN MEXICO CITY THIS TIME

By John Calladine

A number of postal museums have been described in 'Midland Mail' over the years. We have looked at the first Bath Postal Museum, that has since moved twice, the museum in Athens, those in Singapore, Washington DC and Buenos Aires, and last but not least, the proposed new British postal museum in Swindon, now sadly abandoned. Foreign postal museums can prove perplexing, particularly when not a word of English appears in the brochures or captions and the language is unfamiliar. The postal museum in Mexico City proved to be no exception.

The heart of Mexico City is known as the 'Distrito Federal', normally abbreviated to 'DF', and that is how any reference to the city is made. The main post office is in the grandly named 'Palacio Postal', in the centre of DF. It was in 1900 that the authorities realised they needed a new post office, which, from 1852, had been housed in an annex to the old Casa de la Moneda, near the National Palace. The new building was opened by the President in 1907, on the site of an old hospital, and eventually cost approximately \$7,500. It is a very grand structure, aptly termed a 'palacio', in a classic Art Nouveau style, mixed with a little Spanish Gothic. The postal museum occupies part of the ground floor, the remainder of that floor still functioning as the main post office. On the top floor of the building, occupying considerable more space than the postal museum, is an excellent naval museum!

Guided visits are available from Tuesdays to Fridays but a first visit found the museum closed and a second visit revealed no sign of a guide. With little knowledge of Spanish, that was probably no great disadvantage but I collected the printed free guide leaflet that offered a little of the history of the Mexican post, a description of the Palacio Postal, an explanation of stamp collecting and information about the library, said to contain 8500 volumes and 240 historic documents. A glance at the cover of the leaflet, part of which is reproduced below, was not reassuring.



Penny Black



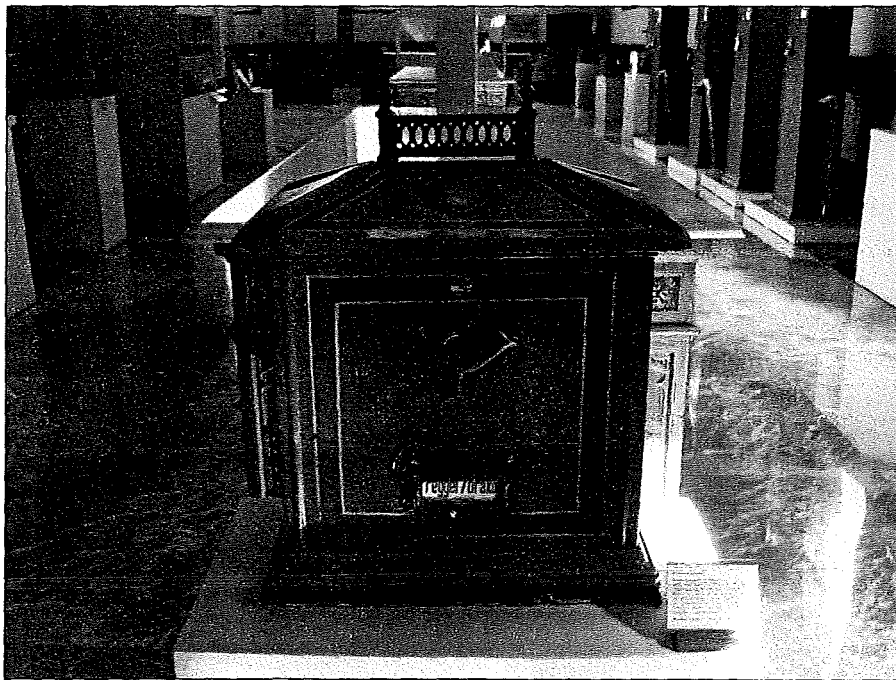
*1ª Estampilla
Postal Mexicana*

The illustration of a penny black accompanying a picture of the first Mexican stamp, issued in 1856, shows a stamp with a head somewhat reminiscent of a colonial issue and with check letters in each corner of the design. However, the text correctly identifies Rowland Hill as the proposer of the first adhesive stamp in 1840, even if failing to mention the more important introduction of Uniform Penny Postage.

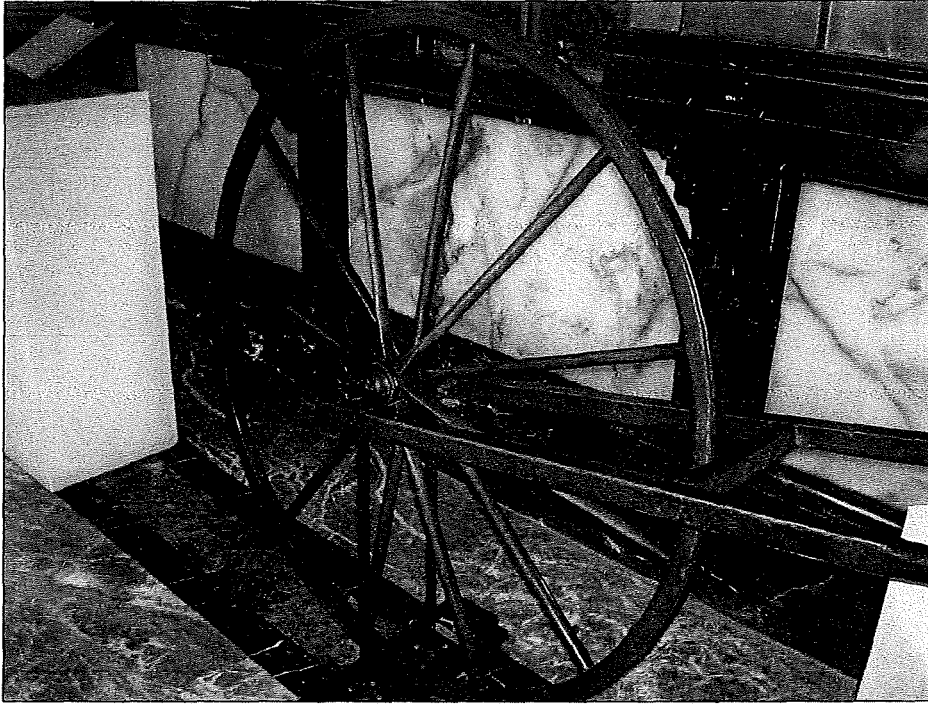
The leaflet tells us that, in 1514, Spain created an "Oficio de Correo Mayor de las Indias y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano" and, more specifically, in 1579, King Phillip II established a "Correo Mayor de la Nueva Espana", a postmaster for New Spain, i.e. Latin America. A notice within the museum lays claim to a postal service of some kind existing in Mexico before the Spanish Conquest of 1521. (Knowing of the Aztecs inclination to remove the beating hearts of their sacrificial victims, perhaps an organ transplant courier service would seem more likely.) However, there is evidence of some kind of postal service or, more accurately, a courier service. The messengers were called "Paynani" and were trained to run from childhood, with constant physical monitoring. Their task was to carry messages, usually concerning military, economic or political matters, between look-out posts situated a fixed number of miles apart in the territory of the so-called Triple Alliance of the rulers of the Aztec cities of Texcoco, Tenochtitlan and Tacuba. They carried manuscripts, folded paintings or fan-shaped items

and occasionally painted hieroglyphics, protected by wooden slats. It was not what we would recognize as a public postal service.

The museum itself is something of a disappointment. It consists, in large part, of a display of post boxes. There is some information about the first Mexican stamp issue (but the actual stamps were not evident) and a few esoteric items, such as a vast picture of what appears to be a Mexican eagle built-up from used postage stamps. However, a 'waywiser' measuring wheel caught the eye, as did some stamp machines of unknown vintage. It was disappointing not to find any handstamps.

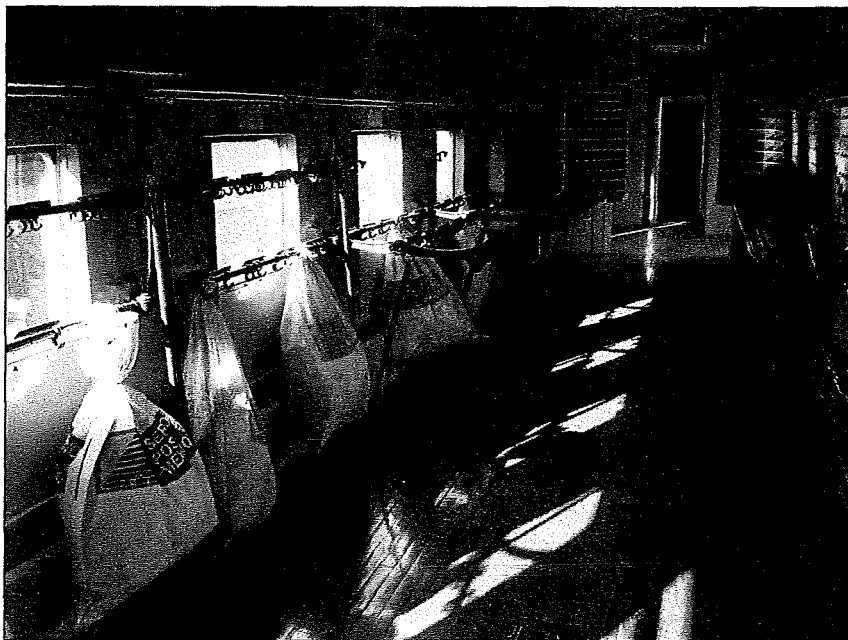


A general overview of the DF Postal Museum and a closer look at of one of the postboxes in the display.



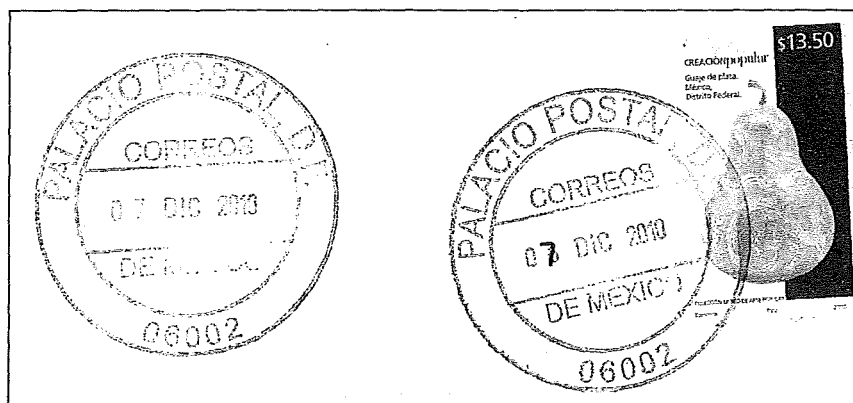
The Mexican version of the 'waywiser', used to measure distances accurately.

If the postal museum was something of a disappointment, another aspect of Mexican postal history unexpectedly turned up in the city of Puebla, to the east of Mexico City. The city, once an important, railway centre has a railway museum or, perhaps more accurately, a large accumulation of old railway locomotives and rolling stock on the edge of town. There appears to have been little effort at conservation and the public can roam over many of the exhibits, to a degree that would turn a curator of the National Railway Museum at York grey overnight. In the middle of the 'display' was a sorting carriage, in good order and fully accessible. With the mailbags hanging on one side and sorting pigeonholes above the desk surface on the other, it could have been used on any British mail train.



The sorting carriage.

Letters mailed between the UK and Mexico, even by air mail, often take an inordinate time. A sealed Christmas card, indistinguishable from a letter, posted in the UK on 26th November 2010 was delivered to an office in the centre of DF on 21st February 2011 and it is not at all unusual for letters to be in transit for five or six weeks. It is said to be inadvisable to post a letter in DF in any box other than at the Palacio Postal. However, there is a silver lining in that letters posted at the main post office are handsomely and clearly handstamped, not machine stamped, in a city where postal mechanization was supposedly introduced in 1981.



The handstamp of the Palacio Postal DF. Note that the date on the right hand stamp has been corrected by hand.

Modern Mexican stamps are often large and colourful, rather like their country of origin. Below are the Christmas stamps issued last year. A pound is roughly equivalent to 20 pesos at the current rate of exchange and the postal rate for Christmas cards is therefore not very different from our own.



After the comments above, it is ironic to read, in the leaflet provided by the Mexican post office, that it wants the public to visit the postal museum to appreciate the “wonders and marvels of our post”. We shall have to assume that the marvels exclude the delivery and collection of mail in the heart of their vast and fascinating city.

* * * * *

DUNFORD BRIDGE CAMP

by John Soer

Do not be misled by the title – this is not a piece of military postal history. Recently, I acquired a booklet *The Third Woodhead Tunnel* issued by British Railways to commemorate the formal opening of the new Woodhead tunnel on 3rd June 1954. This was the third tunnel to be built under the Pennines between Dunford Bridge and Woodhead on the line linking Manchester and Sheffield. Construction of the first tunnel by the Sheffield, Ashton and Manchester Railway began on 1st October 1838 and took a little of six years to complete. Its construction was infamous for the appalling living and working conditions of the navies as well as their behaviour. Extending for a distance of 3 miles 22 yards, it was then the longest tunnel in the country. The single line through the Woodhead tunnel soon became a serious operating bottleneck, and in 1847 work began on a second bore.

When the LNER decided in 1947 to electrify this line between Manchester and Sheffield, such was the deterioration in the state of the two tunnels caused by an average of eighty trains in each direction every day, it was found to be cheaper to construct a new double-bore tunnel rather than repair one of the existing tunnels. In November 1948, the newly constituted Railway Executive gave authority for the work to proceed.

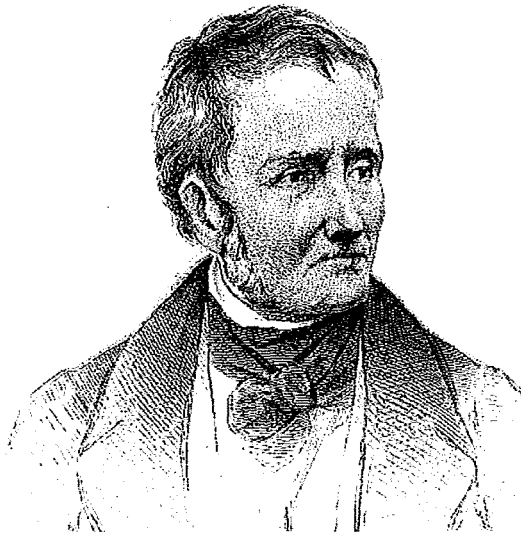
Those of you familiar with the area will know that it is several miles from the nearest town, and exceedingly bleak and desolate in winter. So, an essential preliminary was the building of a camp to house over a thousand workmen. A small township sprung up at the Dunford Bridge end of the tunnel, complete with sewage works, dormitory huts, cinema, recreation hall, 'dry and wet' canteens, sick bay and a shop and post office. The booklet shows a photograph of the shop and post office along with an illustration of the postmark used there. The illustration is clearly an enlargement of the type of handstamp issued at that time with a diameter of 23/24mm. Has anyone seen a copy of this postmark on a letter or other document.



THOMAS DE QUINCEY
and
THE ENGLISH MAIL COACH

by John Calladine

I am surprised and a little ashamed that I have not encountered Thomas de Quincey earlier in my life. Perhaps there should be no surprise at all because other notable Georgian and Victorian authors have undoubtedly failed to cross my narrow path. Maybe there are others among us who share similar literary inadequacies and it may therefore be worth saying something about de Quincey before coming to the subject at hand. He was born in 1785, the son of a prosperous Manchester trader. His father died in 1792 and, thereafter, he was brought-up by guardians he disliked and by his highly gifted mother, who moved the family to Bath in 1796. By now young Thomas was eleven years old and entered St Edwards grammar school in Bath where he quickly established himself as a fine classical scholar. However, after two years, he was moved to a lesser school in Wiltshire for the final twelve months of his schooldays, some say because of an accidental injury and others because his mother did not want him to become conceited! While at school in Bath, he had become friendly with the younger Lord Westport and this fortunate connection led to him travelling widely in England and Ireland, often with Lord Westport's tutor. Probably in 1803, when he was eighteen, he entered Oxford and remained there until 1808 or perhaps 1810. He passed his written examinations with distinction but did not bother to offer himself for the then essential oral exam and consequently did not receive his BA degree. It was while he was at Oxford, that de Quincey developed a liking for opium, perhaps to deal with health problems that had plagued his early life, and it is as the author of 'The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater' that he is undoubtedly best known. Various ventures after leaving Oxford were unsuccessful, he was notoriously careless with the money he had inherited from his father and he endured abject poverty on the streets of London. He lived for a time at Dove Cottage in Grasmere, a well-known home of the poet Wordsworth. He married in 1816 but, by 1820, his financial situation was grave. He was persuaded to write his "confessions" in three parts for the London Magazine. From that time he began to write eminent essays for many magazines and, when he moved to Scotland, he wrote particularly for Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine and the rival Tait's Magazine. His knowledge of classical, English and European literature has rarely been rivalled and his extensive vocabulary is said to have been unsurpassed in any age. To those of the 'text generation', his essays may appear to have been composed in a foreign language.



In 1849, what is perhaps his finest essay appeared in Blackwoods magazine. It will be recalled that de Quincey was at Oxford in the earliest years of the 19th century. At that time, the academic year at Oxford was divided into four terms. A student could therefore make four journeys a year between Oxford and his home, eight journeys in all, and those homes were spread throughout the kingdom. With the Gloucester, Worcester and, from 1808, Holyhead mail coaches passing through Oxford, no one had a better chance to make use of those coaches than an Oxford student and, in those days, the

necessary family wealth to enable them to do so. No one knew more about mail coach travel. Thomas de Quincey's essay, 'The English Mail Coach', is a tour de force, both informative and entertaining. It was written in three sections, 'The Glory of Motion', 'The Vision of Sudden Death' and 'Dream Fugue', perhaps progressively embellished by the demon opium. The second section deals with an accident to the Manchester and Glasgow Mail, when it ran-down a small carriage, killing the young lady passenger, while the driver and guard of the mail coach remain fast asleep. The final section contemplates that awful event. However, it is the first section that will particularly appeal to a postal historian.

Thomas de Quincey tells us that, in the early years of the mail coach service until perhaps 1805, there had been a tradition dating from the days of Charles II that the four inside passengers of a coach were of the "porcelain variety" while the three outside passengers of a mail coach were regarded as the "miserable delftware". When the coach stopped for a meal break, it was assumed the outside passengers would eat in the kitchen, well away from the "consecrated four". At the very least, they expected a stout screen between the tables. The Oxford students, who we were told were addicted to looking down on other persons, decided that the elevated box seat on top of the coach was in fact the "drawing room" and the inside of the coach no better than the "coal cellar in disguise". Once the idea had caught-on and the box seat had become the most desirable on the coach, students and the general public bribed and re-bribed coachmen to reserve the seat for them, so much so that the mail coach yard was said to resemble the hustings at a contested election (where such bribery was rife). However, if a member of the public thought a 6d bribe likely to suffice, it carried little weight against the five shillings a wealthy Oxford student might offer. There was no contest.

"The connection of the mail with the state and the executive government – a connection obvious, but not yet strictly defined – gave to the whole mail establishment an official grandeur which did us service on the roads, and invested us with seasonal terrors. Not the less impressive were those terrors because their legal limits were imperfectly ascertained. Look at those turnpike gates; with what deferential hurry, with what an obedient start, they fly open at our approach! Look at that long line of carts and carters ahead, audaciously usurping the very crest of the road. Ah, traitors! They do not hear us as yet; but, as soon as the dreadful blast of our horn reaches them with proclamation of our approach, see with what frenzy of trepidation they fly to their horses' heads, and deprecate our wrath by the precipitation of their crane-neck quarterings. Treason they feel to be their crime; each individual carter feels himself under the ban of confiscation and attainder; his blood is attainted through six generations; and nothing is wanting but the headsman and his axe, the block and the sawdust, to close up the vista of his horrors."

De Quincey was in no doubt that the mail coach was the King of the Road!

"Once I remember being on the box of the Holyhead mail, between Shrewsbury and Oswestry, when a tawdry thing from Birmingham, some Tallyho or Highflyer, all flaunting with green and gold, came up alongside of us. What a contrast to our royal simplicity of form and colour in this plebian wretch! The single ornament on our dark ground of chocolate colour was the mighty shield of the imperial arms, but emblazoned in proportions as modest as a signet ring bears to a seal of office. Even this was displayed only on a single panel, whispering, rather than proclaiming, our relations to the mighty state; while the beast from Birmingham, our green-and-gold friend from false, fleeting, perjured Brummagem, had as much writing and painting on its sprawling flanks as would have puzzled a decipherer from the tombs of Luxor. For some time this Birmingham machine ran along by our side – a piece of familiarity that already of itself seemed to be sufficiently jacobinical. But all at once a movement of the horses announced a desperate intention of leaving us behind. "Did you see that?" I said to the coachman. "I see" was his short answer. He was wide awake – yet he waited longer than seemed prudent; for the horses of our audacious opponent had a disagreeable air of freshness and power. But his motive was loyal; his wish was that the Birmingham conceit should be full-blown before he froze it. When that seemed right, he unloosed, or to speak by a stronger word, he sprang, his known resources: he slipped our royal horses like cheetahs, or hunting leopards, after the affrighted game. How they could retain such a reserve of fiery power after the work they had accomplished seemed hard to explain. But on our side, besides the physical superiority, was a tower of moral strength, namely the king's name "which they upon the adverse faction wanted". Passing them without an effort, as it seemed, we threw them into the rear with so lengthening an interval between us as proved in itself the bitterest mockery of their presumption; while our guard blew back a shattering blast of triumph that was really too painfully full of derision."

There is a charming diversion to tell us of the delights of Fanny of the Bath Road, who happened to be the granddaughter of the coachman, the rosy blossoms on his cheeks "drawn from the ale cask" and her rosy cheeks from the "fountains of the dawn". The problem for de Quincey was finding sufficient time to impress the young lady, who came to meet the coach during a stop to change horses, which, at the time of Waterloo, occupied six minutes and yet, only ten years later we are told, a mere eighty seconds.

But, we learn, the greatest experience in the whole of the mail coach service was when the coaches left London carrying news of a great victory such as Trafalgar or Waterloo.

"From 8pm to fifteen or twenty minutes later imagine the mails assembled on parade in Lombard Street; where, at that time, and not in St Martin's-le-Grand, was seated the General Post Office. In what exact strength we mustered I do not remember; but, from the length of each separate attelage, we filled the street, though a long one, and though we were drawn up in double file. On any night the spectacle was beautiful. The absolute perfection of all the appointments about the carriages and the harness, their strength, their brilliant cleanliness, their beautiful simplicity – but, more than all, the royal magnificence of the horses – were what might first have fixed the attention. Every carriage on every morning in the year was taken down to an official inspector for examination: wheels, axles, linchpins, pole, glasses, lamps, were all critically probed and tested. Every part of every carriage had been cleaned, every horse had been groomed, with as much rigor as if they belonged to a private gentleman; and that part of the spectacle offered itself always. But the night before us is a night of victory; and, behold! To the ordinary display what a heart-shaking addition! – horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak-leaves and ribbons. The guards, as being officially his majesty's servants, and of the coachmen such as are within the privilege of the Post Office, wear the royal liveries of course; and, as it is summer (for all the land victories were naturally won in the summer) they wear, on this fine evening, these liveries exposed to view, without any covering of upper coats. Such a costume, and the elaborate arrangement of the laurels in their hats, dilate their hearts, by giving to them openly a personal connection with the great news in which already they have the general interest of patriotism. That great national sentiment surmounts and quells all sense of ordinary distinctions. Those passengers who happen to be gentlemen are now hardly to be distinguished as such except by dress; for the usual reserve of their manner in speaking to the attendants has on this night melted away. One heart, one pride, one glory, connects every man by the transcendent bond of his national blood. The spectators, who are numerous beyond precedent, express their sympathy with these fervent feelings by continual hurrahs. Every moment are shouted aloud by the post-office servants, and summoned to draw up, the great ancestral names of cities known to history through a thousand years – Lincoln, Winchester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling, Aberdeen – expressing the grandeur of the empire by the antiquity of its towns, and the grandeur of the mail establishment by the diffusive radiation of its separate missions. Every moment you hear the thunder of lids locked down upon the mailbags. That sound to each individual mail is the signal for drawing off; which process is the finest part of the entire spectacle. Then come the horses into play. Horses! Can these be horses that bound off with the action and gestures of leopards? What stir! what sea-like ferment! what a thundering of wheels! what a trampling of hooves! what farewell cheers! what redoubling peals of brotherly congratulation, connecting the name of the particular mail – "Liverpool forever" with the name of the particular victory – "Badajoz forever" or "Salamanca forever!" The half-slumbering consciousness that all night long, and all the next day – perhaps for even a longer period – many of these mails, like fire racing along a train of gunpowder, will be kindling at every instant new successions of burning joy, has an obscure effect of multiplying the victory itself by multiplying to the imagination into infinity the stages of its progressive diffusion. A fiery arrow seems to be let loose. Which from that moment is destined to travel, without intermission, westward for three hundred miles – northward for six hundred; and the sympathy of our Lombard Street friends at parting is exalted a hundredfold by a sort of visionary sympathy with the yet slumbering sympathies which in so vast a succession we are going to awake."

If these extracts might tempt you to read further, Thomas de Quincey's essays are long out of copyright and can be read freely on the internet or, for those of a technical disposition, downloaded without charge onto their Kindle e-reader. When he wrote "The English Mail Coach", the railway era had arrived but de Quincey was not impressed. He did not feel that travelling in a train at fifty miles an hour was a personal experience. "Seated on an old mail coach", he said "we need no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity". "We heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it as thrilling." I believe him.

GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY - PHOTOGRAPHS

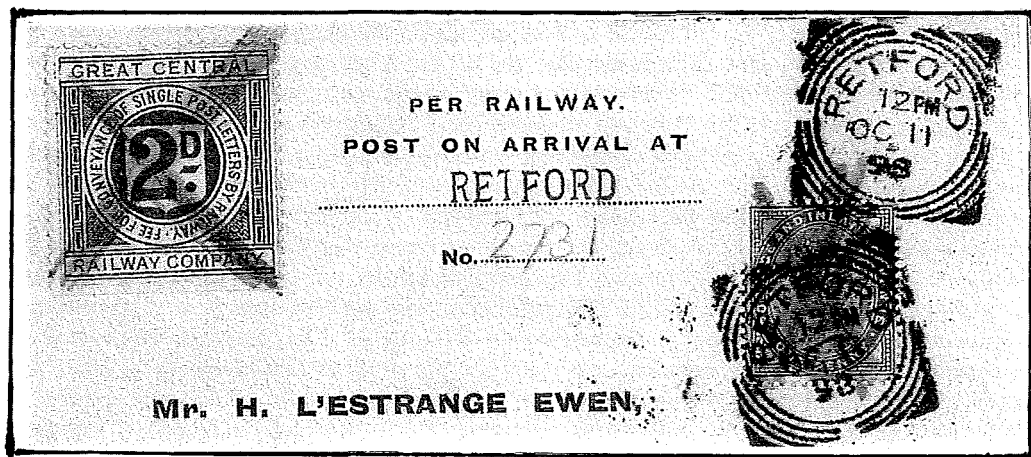
Amongst the papers passed to me by John Soer was an article which he thought might be of interest to members with a railway interest and in particular the Great Central Railway and the photographs taken by S.W.A. Newton a commercial photographer based in Leicester. As well as recording the construction of the London Extension line between Annesley and London, he photographed the work and life of the navvies. Over 2,000 of Newton's glass negatives are now held by the Leicester Record Office and have been used in publications such as L.T.C. Rolt's "The Making of a Railway."

Newton also visited nearby villages taking photographs and these have now been transferred to English Heritage at Swindon. Among these photographs are images of village post offices in Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. To view these visit www.englishheritage.org.uk/viewfinder and enter, for example, Northamptonshire Post Office.

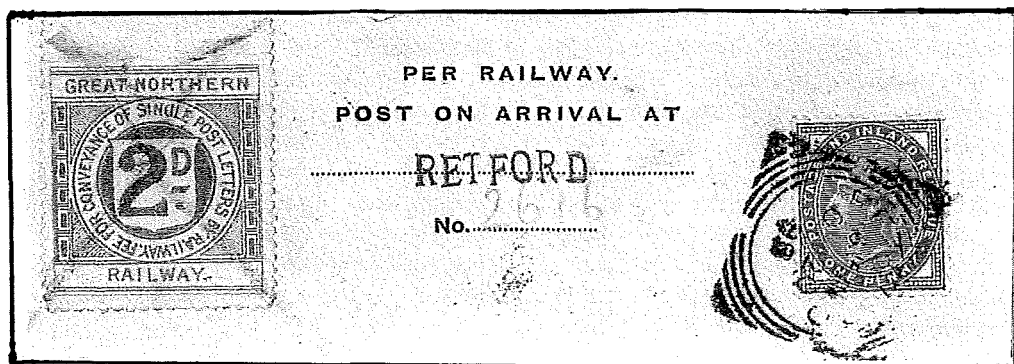
GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY - CHAIN REACTION!

As always one item leads to another. Also received from John Darnell were the two items shown below.

Retford - 11th and 20th October 1898 Great Central Railway - 2d Dark Green
"Post on Arrival at Retford"



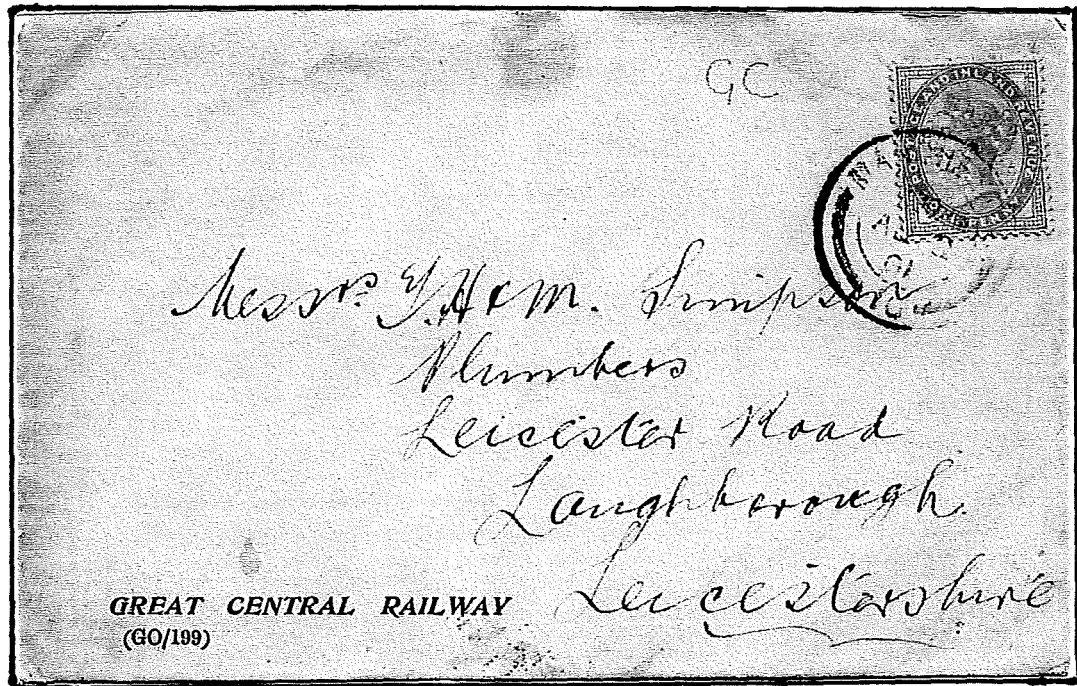
Great Northern Railway 2d Yellow Green
"Post on Arrival at Retford"

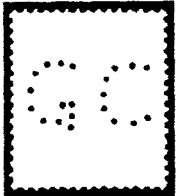


Retford was the junction of these two railways. Has anyone any suggestions as to which country station these two items originated?

GRAND CENTRAL RAILWAY - CONTINUED

The envelope illustrated below has the imprint of the Great Central Railway. It was posted in Manchester August 2nd 1901 and received a small single ring of Loughborough dated August 3rd on the reverse. The illustrated strip of Great Central Railway perfin is copied from the Perfin Society Catalogue.
 .(These two items come courtesy of the man in the next room!)



Great Central Railway.	
	Die in use: 1895-1922.
	EDR: 12 th September 1897.
	LDR: 30 th November 1920.
	QV 1d Lilac (16 dots)
	QV Jubilee ½d(vm/gn), 1½d, 2d, 2½d, 3d
	EVII ½d(ye-gn), 1d, 3d
	GV 1911/12 ½d, 1d
GV 1912/22 ½d, 1d, 1½d, 2d	
G0760.03	Bowman Die 1.



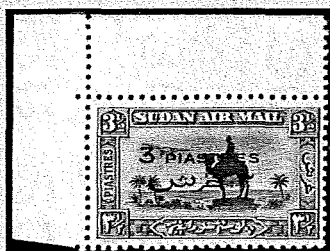
Note: Minor variations reported.



16 November
2011



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BOOK REVIEW

THE CORSINI LETTERS, by Philip Beale, Adrian Almond & Michael Scott Archer, published by Amberley Publishing, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4456-0085-7, 224 pp, hardback with dustjacket.

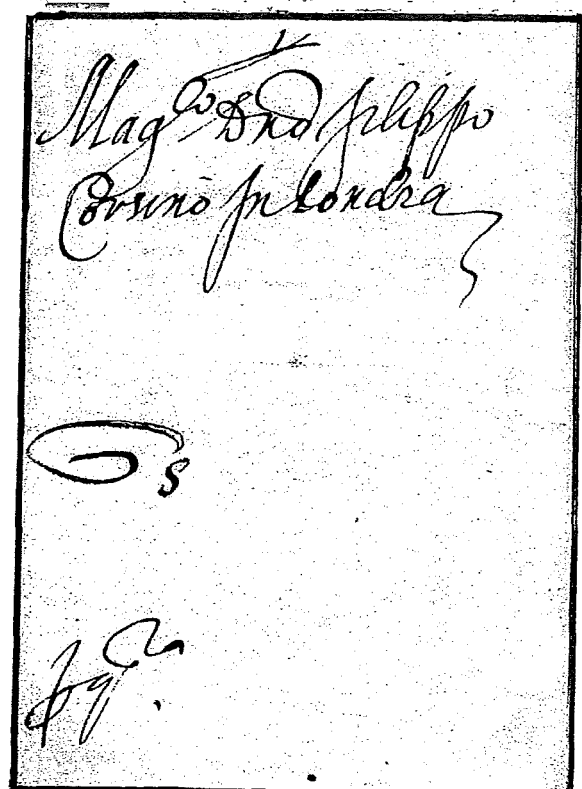
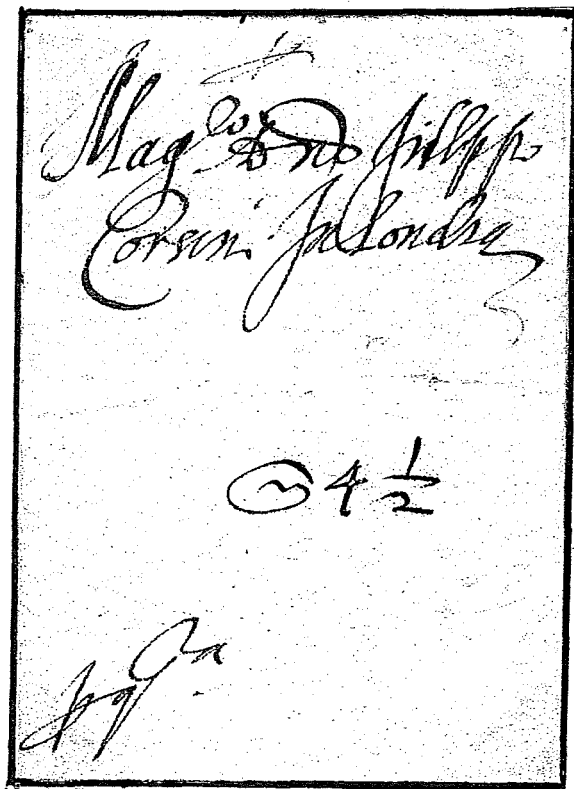
Most, if not all, readers will be familiar with the collection of sixteenth century letters all addressed to the Corsini firm of London merchants that were auctioned by Christies in the 1980s. Before the sales copies were made of each of the letters, and these were placed in the Guildhall Library London.

The Corsini Letters is the first book to look at the archive as a whole. It begins with a chapter that describes the city into which the brothers, Philip and Bartholomeo, came and the Italian community that resided there. Then comes a description of the letters, the methods of trading and an analysis of the merchandise mentioned in the letters. Further chapters deal with the postal services available to the Corsinis in London and European postal services in the late sixteenth century. Particularly fascinating and informative was a profusely illustrated chapter showing a number of letters with translations and comments. There are seven very informative appendices, dealing with matters such as the charges shown on some of the letters, other examples of early European postal charges and examples of the merchant families' signs.

Though the dustjacket gives an 'eye-watering' price of £40, I managed to obtain a copy for £28 (inc. p&p) on-line from W. H. Smiths. It is well worth every penny for I have already learned a considerable amount from this book.

JS

Illustrated below are two letters sent to Philip Corsini from Antwerp in 1574. The one on the left shows a charge of the Merchant Strangers' Post of $4\frac{1}{2}$ groats which would have been applied to the top letter of a bundle of nine letters, while the other shows a charge of 8 groats for a packet of sixteen letters.



THE NEXT MEETING

The meeting in September will be an all-day affair at the Abbey Centre, Northampton on 10th September. Full details of the programme etc. are enclosed with this Midland Mail.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

As this is the first edition of Midland Mail since I became Editor I crave understanding for any errors which I have failed to spot. I will try not to repeat any in the next edition. I would like to thank all members who have contributed to this edition, in particular our new member, Michael Wilesmith, as well as the regular contributors.

The next edition is scheduled for November and although I have two contributions in hand it will be a very thin edition if I do not receive any more. Please look through your collection I feel sure that there are many items worthy of appearing in Midland Mail, either as a full blown article or a single item from your collection. **Please help your very new Editor and remember it is your Midland Mail.** I await your contributions with bated breath.. Please send to - Sadie Cole, Pool House, Discoed, Presteigne, Powys LD8 2NW or sadiecole@mypostoffice.co.uk



Aston Commercial School, where I learned to type (or otherwise).