



MIDLAND MAIL

THE BULLETIN OF THE MIDLAND (G.B.) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY



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Chalk and Cheese

This season's Annual Society Competition, of which a report appears later, was another undoubted success. However, in its wake, an important point has been raised by the competition judge. He has pointed out that the entries fell into two quite distinct categories, those of pre-1840 material and those of post-1840, each having its own approach and method of presentation. Faced with a good pre-1840 entry and a good post-1840 entry, a judge will usually come down on the side of the early material.

Our judge believes that fairness demands two trophies. Some will say that a competition with about ten entries cannot reasonably be split and that we probably have to find but a single entry for the Midland Federation. However, the alternative may be disillusionment for those who consistently turn up with excellent post-1840 material and win nothing. A second trophy costs little and, if it can result in two happy faces and (more importantly) a fairer competition, it must be worthy of serious consideration. The whole question will be raised at the AGM - please be ready to have your say.

Forthcoming Meetings

Important changes have had to be made to the two remaining meetings of the season due to circumstances outside the immediate control of your Committee.

The next meeting will be on Saturday 3rd March, as planned, at Dr Johnson House but there has been a change of speaker. However, it is an

ill wind that blows no good and the Society is delighted to inform the members that MARTIN WILLCOCKS has agreed to return to give us a second inimitable display. Those who were fortunate enough to hear him last season will need no convincing that this is an afternoon not to be missed on any account. The meeting will begin at 2 o'clock.

The Annual General Meeting and Society Auction will not now be held on 7th April but on Saturday 14th April. This change of date has been made necessary by a date clash with a provincial meeting of the 'Royal' at Birmingham which appears to have been arranged at short notice. Our meeting will again be at Dr Johnson House at 2 o'clock and committee members should note that it will be preceded by a Committee Meeting at 1 o'clock. (They are also reminded that they should have their brief annual reports prepared in good time.) Once again, the AGM will be short and to the point and the Auction should be under way soon after 3 o'clock. Please make a note of the new date - 14th April.

The Society Auction

The Society Auction list is being sent out with this issue of 'Midland Mail'. Anyone who cannot attend the auction but wishes to bid is invited to send postal bids to our Chairman, Mrs Lewis, who will ensure that they are handled in the approved manner. Any member who has included items in the auction but now finds that he cannot attend, may send them to Mr and Mrs Lewis during the week immediately prior to the date of the AGM and Society Auction.

Members attending the auction should not send their own items in advance, of course, but bring them to the meeting.

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We offer a wide range of GB Postal History and stamps on and off cover with emphasis on quality. We have a particular enthusiasm for anything which may be unusual with a personal bias which places equal emphasis on the historical development of the post and the post as a reflection of contemporary history with consequent interest in letter origins, destinations, authorship and content. If not already on our mailing list, send for post free list for our next fixed date (and price) sale.

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The January Meeting

The good attendances of the season continued at the meeting on 7th January when 19 members crowded the room at Dr Johnson House to see two fine displays by members. John Soer opened the afternoon with postmarks of Ashby-de-la-Zouch and district and, although John promised no esoteric fireworks, he nevertheless provided a thoroughly comprehensive coverage of the subject which proved not only that he had the material but that he knew his subject inside out.

A letter of 1685 from Appleby to London had a charge mark indicating that it might well have travelled part of the way by carrier and further early correspondence from Ashby (1693) and to Ashby (1705) was followed by letters showing an extra charge of 1d for local delivery; a charge that was later reduced to $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Even the $\frac{1}{2}$ d charge was dropped in 1828 after protest. The first 'Ashby/Z' mark of 1796 apparently arose by error as the order had been for a seal and not a handstamp. The town boasted two mileage marks, '123' (via Atherstone) and '115', both having two periods of use. The mileage was never erased and a mileage mark was still in use only nine days before an undated mark was introduced on 30 August 1830, the year that Ashby became a post town. We were shown a cover from the second day of uniform penny postage and, better still, a 'first day cover' of a dated handstamp (29 April 1849). Routeing of letters to and from Ashby became very complicated in the 1840s but John took us sure-footedly through all the intricacies.

When, in 1815, a mailcoach was established from Leicester to Liverpool through the Potteries, there were protests from the villages between Atherstone and Ashby whose service deteriorated. John showed us the marks of the penny posts that were set up to serve the villages. There were three different Atherstone Penny Post marks (Oxley types 1, 2, and 3) and the numbered marks of the various receiving houses. There was the 'Ashby de la Zouch Penny Post' and a straight line 'Overseal' (under Ashby). These were followed by the 'village type' marks and early undated stamps with serifs. Surprisingly, two sub-offices (Melbourne and Ticknall) were issued with 'maltese cross' cancellers in 1842, a procedure guaranteed to confuse any postal historian.

John completed his display with a comprehensive look at the more modern marks (double rings, rubbers etc) and members who would like to remind themselves of all the many items they saw are recommended to get hold of Mr Soer's excellent book, 'The Postal History of Ashby-de-la-Zouch', at an inclusive cost of £1-35 from Leicestershire Libraries Service,

Thames Tower, Navigation Street, Leicester LE1 3TZ. It is a model of its kind.

It was apparent that several members could scarcely contain their enjoyment of your reporter's discomfiture during the second display as it became clear that a worthy report was beyond his limited abilities. Frank Thompson's material was quite remarkable. In the course of half an hour or so, he showed us about 80 (yes, eighty) examples of the famous 'Dockwra' marks of the Government Penny Post (1682-1792), their rarity being matched only by their outstanding condition. Erudite members were seen to pale and murmurs of "I've never even SEEN one of those" drifted along the back row. If Mr Thompson made an error, it was in assuming that we knew so much more than we did and many of us will have returned home to open Volume 3 of The British County Catalogue of Postal History to increase our appreciation of the amazing items we were shown.

Mr Thompson opened with a detailed study of the marks of the Temple Office. He explained why the first series (Willcocks & Jay Type 2) appeared with 'Payd', 'Peny' or 'Post' on the left hand side of the stamp on different days of the week and showed us examples for each day - only Friday was absent. The early dates (1685, 1687, 1692, 1699 etc) were hardly thought worthy of mention but were an eyeopener to those of us who consider anything pre-1800 to be early. He then turned to the second series of marks (Type 3), again showing examples for each day of the week. Dates of 1766 and 1774 were now beginning to sound positively modern.

The Chief Office of the Government Penny Post began by using stamps with a 'B' (Bishopsgate) and Mr Thompson was able to show that none of these ever had the double 'n' in 'Penny'. He included a late strike of Bishopsgate (1713) before the Chief Office used 'G' (General Office). One of the rarities of the General Office is the mark with dots in the corner but, of course, it was represented. The later 'G' stamps adopted the modern spelling of 'penny' as did the stamps of the Hermitage Office although, as we were shown yet again, the first and second series (Types 2 and 3) did not. Many of the covers in the display had lovely strikes of the time stamps, not to mention the various receivers' names.

The second part of the display covered the St Paul's, Southwark and Westminster Offices. From St Paul's we saw a 1687 Monday, a 1715 Tuesday and a 1703 Thursday, to mention just three items at random. The Southwark marks, we were told, vary more than those of the other offices and we were shown that some are unusually narrow. We were also treated to the sight of a perfect strike of the rare 'Not Paid' handstamp of Southwark.

The Westminster Office was apparently one of the busiest and there were no fewer than four series of stamps. Each was shown, inevitably in welcome profusion, including the largest of the 'Dockwras' - those of the final Westminster series.

Nothing in this display was usual so it is probably specious to select the unusual. However, a letter with strikes of two Dockwras for different days (not re-addressed but showing delivery difficulties perhaps) must be worthy of special mention. So must three very rare examples of penny post handstamps of the 'experimental period' that briefly followed the 'Dockwras' in 1793/94. The whole display was truly a 'once in a lifetime' experience and Elizabeth, our Chairman, expressed the Society's keen appreciation of both Mr Thompson's and Mr Soer's contributions.

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The February Meeting

The meeting on 4th February at Dr Johnson House was devoted to the Society's Annual Competition. No fewer than ten members took the trouble to submit carefully prepared entries. Trevor Clewley got the afternoon off to a good start with his display of 3d surcharge rates of the present century. His covers also had other tax markings and endorsements including 'Pay at Office' against a 3d postage due label. Steph Stobbs showed 19th century Registered Mail from Shrewsbury, commencing with a

registration receipt of 1846 and including an 1865 registered voting notice at the 3d special rate for this service. Dr Ian May's entry related to the Coventry Penny Post with various penny post handstamps and numeral markings of the sub-offices. On a completely different theme, Peter Sharp displayed Parcel Post labels used at the main office and sub-offices of Leamington. One unusual item was a label for Clarendon Avenue overprinted in blue 'Upper Parade' when the office was moved in 1903 and bearing the appropriate date stamp for that year. Some nice adhesive stamps up to the 10d value attracted members' attention. Ted Coles brought along an unusual selection of Ship Letter and Ocean Post wireless letter telegrams, complete with their envelopes. He mentioned how he had corresponded with the late Mr Alan Robertson on this subject and this had resulted in Mr Robertson publishing illustrations of the actual covers that Mr Coles had brought along. To conclude the first half of the afternoon, Denis Salt showed material illustrating the development of the post at Bridgnorth from the early 1700s to the 1840s. Examples of the handstamp markings used over those years were backed up with details of the routes taken and rates charged.

The members had a chance to take a close look at these entries before Chris Beaver continued with a display demonstrating the development of the cancellation of the adhesive stamp from its introduction in 1840. Of particular attraction was a bright purple rubber handstamp for Ingestre, Stafford. Richard Farman followed with a varied selection of Newcastle under Lyme markings of the 18th century replete with different spellings and settings of the town's name including 'Line' and 'Lyme' and with two obviously complete marks ending in the word 'under' without either 'Line' or 'Lyme'. His title of '88 years in and out of Line' was thought most apt ! We were then taken on a tour of the villages around Derby by Harold Wilson who showed examples of unofficial and official 2d and 1d posts of the first half of the 19th century. As Chairman, Elizabeth had the doubtful privilege of concluding the displays by submitting her entry of 'The Birmingham Post during World War 2. In this, she showed how the Post Office coped during the war, having temporarily to discontinue Business Reply Letters but maintaining essential services and, at the same time, remembering workmates in the armed forces with two special Christmas airgraphs produced and despatched in 1943 and 1944.

It was fortunate that Mr Chester had not brought an entry for the competition this year and was thus able to put his extensive experience of judging to good use. While he was at work, members were entertained to displays of Air Crash Mail and Undated Circles of the Midland Counties before, after long deliberation, Ches announced the competition winner as Denis

Salt with Harold Wilson as runner-up. He assured all competitors that the standard throughout was extremely high and Denis was further congratulated by our Chairman as she presented him with the Society's trophy.

The Editor would like to thank Eric Lewis for providing the material for a report.

Books that may interest you - 9.

A few books on postcards rather than postmarks

LEWIS Marilyn 'Walsall in Old Picture Postcards'. European Library, January 1983, £7-95.

BREWSTER D.E. 'Edwardian Postcards of Road and Rail Transport'. Oakwood Press, Sep 1982, 24 pages, 44 illus., paperback, £1-80.

McNIGHT Hugh 'Waterways Postcards, 1900-1930'. Shepperton Swan, The Clock House, Upper Halliford, Shepperton TW17 8RU, Oct 1982, 96 pages, 300 illus (50 in colour), hardback, £4-95.

GREEN Steve etc 'Pontypool's Past in Pictures and Postcards'. Village Publications, 13 Victoria Street, Cwmbran NP44 3JS, Aug 1982, 52 pages, 90 illus., paperback, £1-95.



..... and a recent Post Office regional card showing a GWK post office van in the Promenade outside Cheltenham Post Office c1920.

A Visit to Post Office Archives - Part 6.

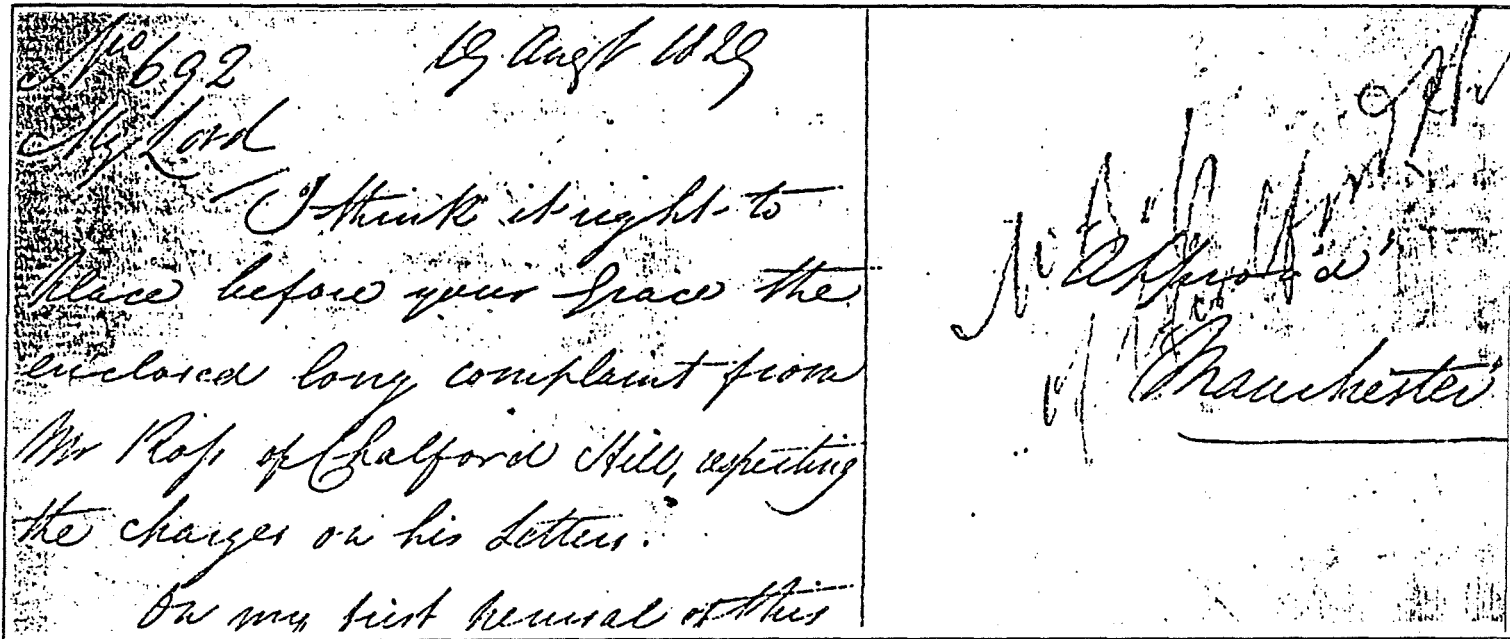
In Part 5 of this series, we began to look at the Postmaster General's Reports and Minutes in Post Office Archives and examined Post 35 in some detail. Up to the year 1837, Post 42 contains even more information than Post 35 since it includes copies of reports and minutes on all aspects of Post Office organization. The early volumes, Post 42/1-25, 27-52 and 53-58, consist of four similar sets of minutes from the Postmaster General to the Secretary concerning reports submitted by the then Resident Surveyor, Francis Freeling. They are also similar to the minutes in Post 35 for the same period but, such was the activity at the time, that an entire volume may only cover a span of two weeks.

Post 42/59-139 are volumes containing copies of reports made by Freeling, firstly in his capacity as Resident Surveyor and then when he became Secretary to the Post Office. There are two sets of reports in Post 42/59-85 dating from his earlier appointment, one set of which was apparently created for his mentor, joint PMG Lord Walsingham, and the content may reflect a different view of certain matters from that expressed by Freeling elsewhere in the Post Office. Freeling continued the report series when he was Secretary in Post 42/86-139, although the last few volumes date from after his death in 1836. All these volumes are indexed with the exception of Post 42/26-34 and 53-58 which have no index.

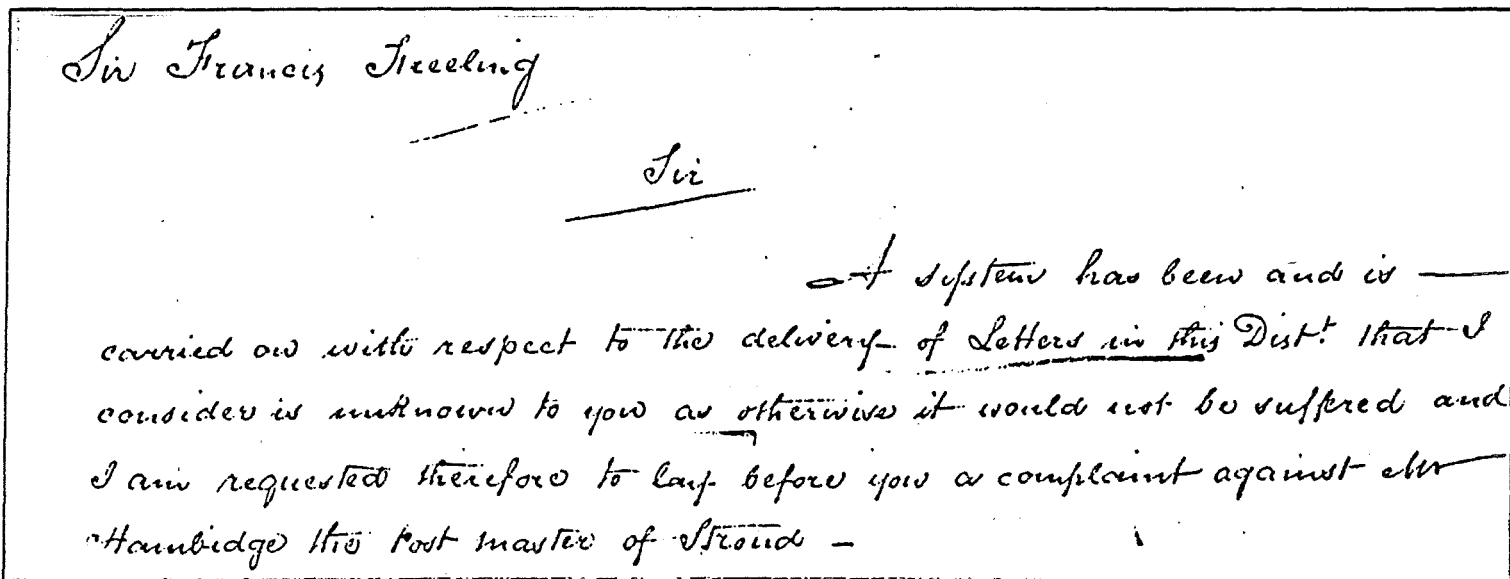
The original reports and the documents relating to them are to be found in Post 40, the only guide to which is, of course, Post 42. The importance of Post 40 can hardly be overstressed. There are sketch maps of local postal routes, petitions from the principal inhabitants of towns and villages, and detailed reports from the District Surveyors. If a particular report appears to be missing ('wanting' in Archive parlance), it may well have been filed with a later report on the same subject; a common practice of the day.

Illustrated on the next page are, firstly, a part of a copy of a report from a volume of Post 42 and, secondly, a part of one of the related documents found under that report reference (No.692 of 1829) in Post 40. The report concerns a complaint received from a Mr Ross about the postmaster at Stroud, Mr Hambidge, who, he says, has introduced an unauthorised delivery service for which he makes a high charge and yet causes the letters to be delivered later to the addressee than if they had been delivered in the normal manner. The original letter from Mr Ross in Post 40 goes into

considerable detail concerning delivery arrangements in the Stroud area and is typical of the valuable contents of the archive.



An extract from Post 42 - note the report reference (No.692) in the top corner.



An extract from the report referenced above in Post 40.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the minute series did not end with Post 35 in 1920. From 1921, the General Minutes continue in Post 38 (the volumes) and Post 33 (the papers). This series lasted until 1941 when the wartime 'decimal filing' system was introduced (Post 102). Although the 'minute' system was reintroduced in 1949, the '30 year rule' prevents public access to papers later than 1953.

(Illustrations by courtesy of Post Office Archives)

THE SHREWSBURY LOCAL POSTSby Denis SaltPart 2 - The Official Penny Posts

On 22nd August 1833, Mr Turner, the proprietor of the Halfway House Inn referred to in the first part of this article, wrote to Sir Francis Freeling applying for the establishment of a regular post office at his house to serve the parishes of Westbury, Worthen and Alberbury and supported his application with a petition signed by a number of magistrates, clergy and others. Mr Churchill, the Surveyor, pointed out that the establishment of a penny post from Shrewsbury to Halfway House would result in an extra 1d being paid on letters to and from Halfway House and the inhabitants of Westbury would have to pay another 1d for the carriage of their mail between Halfway House and Westbury under the arrangements already being run by Mr Turner. As an alternative, he suggested that there should be a free delivery of letters from Halfway House to Westbury and that the Receiver at Halfway House should receive a salary of £5 a year for the daily delivery of letters at Westbury. This suggestion was accepted and the Penny Post from Shrewsbury to Halfway House was authorised on 30th September 1833 (see Post 42, Vol 131, PMG Report 705). The public probably saw little change in their postal service apart from the provision of an open letter box at the receiving house since the new Penny Post merely took over the existing service being operated privately by Mr Turner. The bags for Westbury continued to be carried by the Shrewsbury to Welshpool mail coach which changed horses at the Halfway House in both directions.

It is not known whether the receiving house itself was at Halfway House or at Westbury. There was no village of Halfway House in those days and the main centre of population in the area was at Westbury but Mr Turner was appointed Receiver and he lived at the Halfway House Inn and received and despatched the mail bags there. Be that as it may, the receiving house was named 'Westbury' and issued with a boxed "No.2" stamp. At Shrewsbury, the boxed "Shrewsbury / Penny Post" stamp was also struck (see Figure 1) on

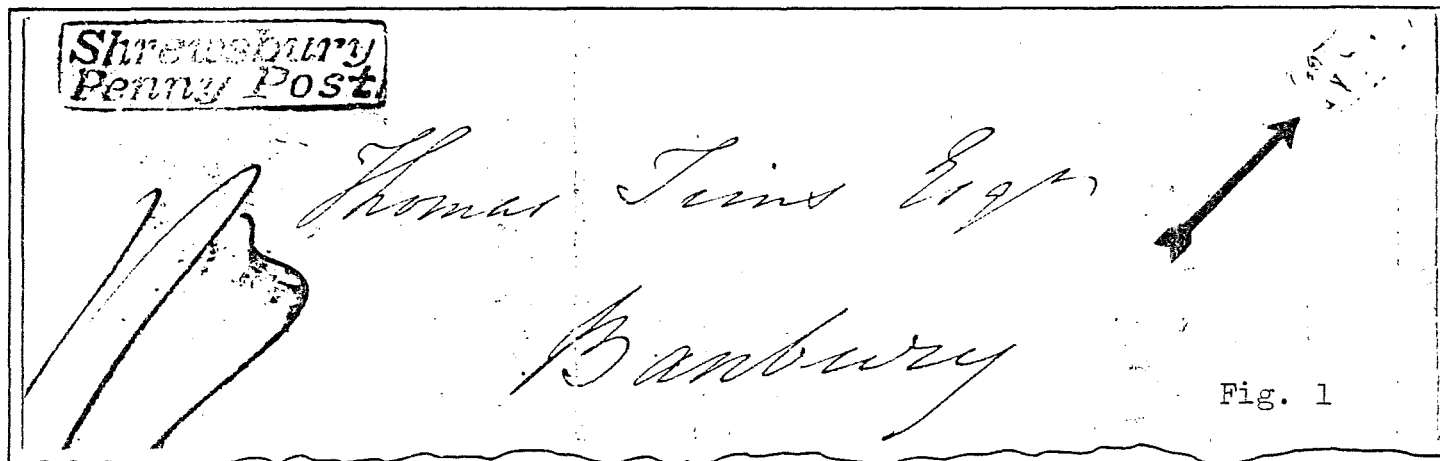


Fig. 1

the letter thus indicating to the postal authorities at the receiving end that an extra ld, over and above the General Post charge, had to be collected from the addressee on delivery of the letter. There was no Receiving House No.1, presumably because Westbury became a receiving house for both Shrewsbury and Welshpool Penny Posts at the same time and there was already a "No.1" at Berriew in the Welshpool area.

In common with other penny post receiving houses, Westbury was issued with an unframed "Westbury / Penny Post" stamp on 27th August 1838 to replace the boxed "No.2" (see Figure 2 but it is not known why the "No.2" stamp has been struck on this letter as well as the 'Westbury Penny Post' stamp.)

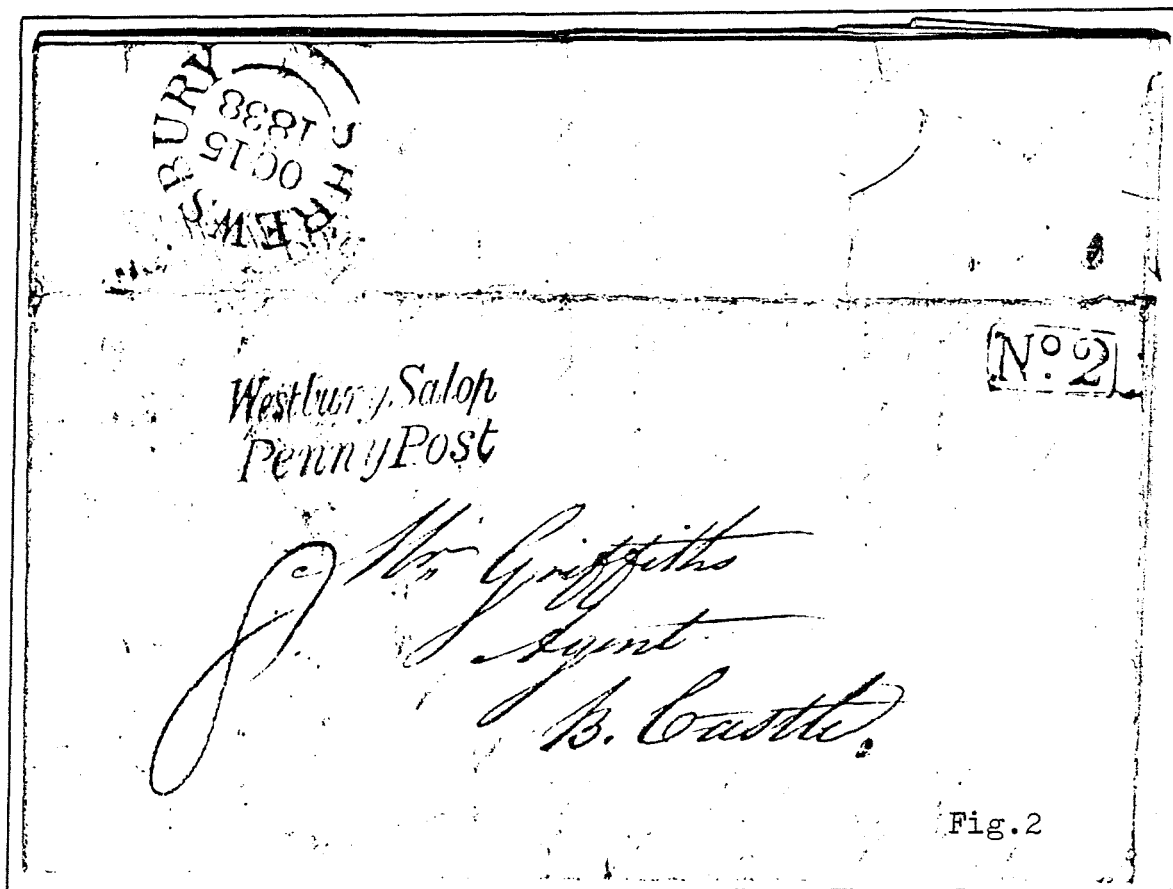


Fig.2

Following an application by Mr Robert A.Slaney MP on 20th February 1838 for the establishment of a penny post from Shrewsbury to Baschurch and Ruyton, and on Mr Slaney giving a guarantee for the estimated deficiency of the proposed penny post, the PMG authorised the establishment of this penny post experimentally for twelve months. A "Baschurch/Penny Post" stamp (unframed) was issued on 26th July 1838 and a "Ruyton/Penny Post" stamp (also unframed) probably on the same day (see Figure 3). No receiving

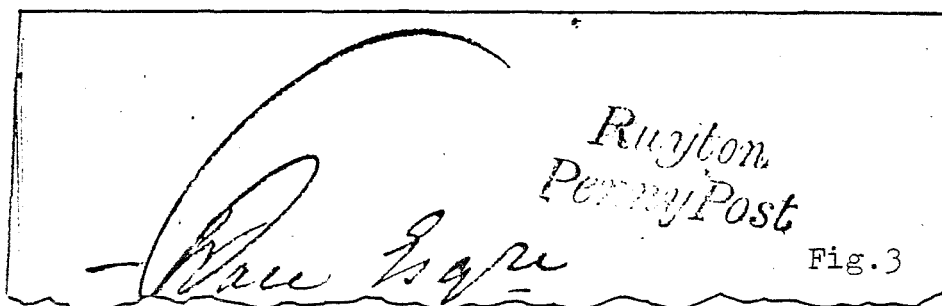


Fig.3

house numbers were ever issued to these two receiving houses as numbers had already been replaced by named stamps before this penny post was established.

The letter shown at Figure 4 is franked by Mr Slaney who was MP for Shrewsbury and personally guaranteed the Penny Post, as mentioned above. Mr Slaney lived at Walford Manor, which is on the road between Baschurch and Shrewsbury. As the letter was not posted at either of the receiving houses, it could not be stamped with a Ruyton or Baschurch stamp and was therefore stamped with a "Shrewsbury/Penny Post" stamp at Shrewsbury before being put into the General Post. This was the normal procedure in the case of letters picked up "on the road".

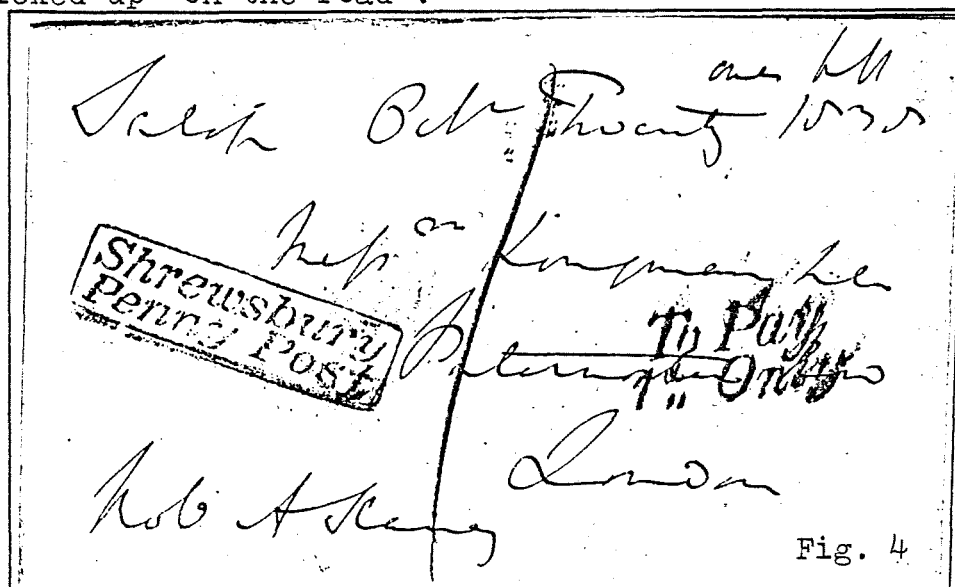


Fig. 4

We have seen how, in certain circumstances, letters could be picked up on the road but it is unlikely that letters between Halfway House and Shrewsbury were ever picked up "on the road" as they were carried by a mailcoach which would not stop between stages. The letters using the Ruyton and Baschurch Penny Post were carried by a messenger on horseback and there was no objection to him picking up letters on the road.

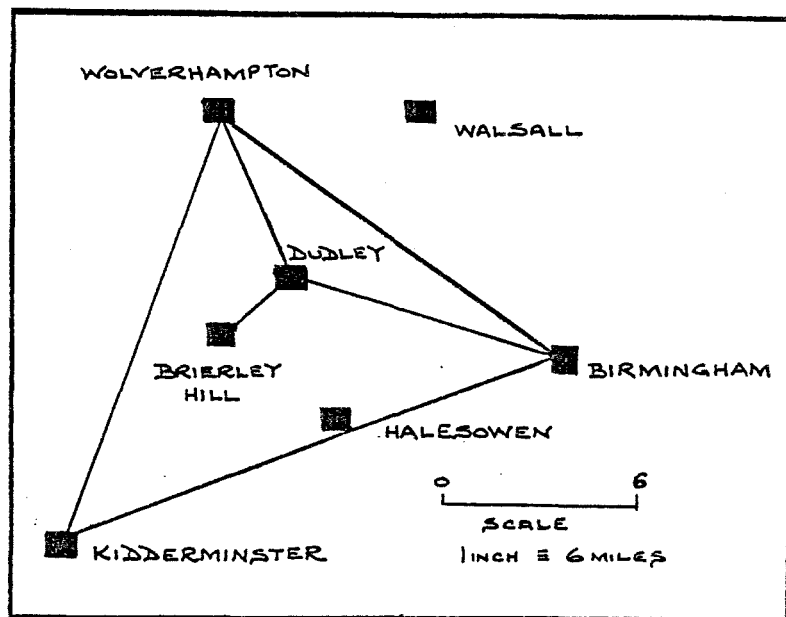
It will be seen that the official Shrewsbury Penny Post served only two very small areas and was insignificant compared with the extensive area served by the unofficial Local Post described in Part 1 of this article. The "Shrewsbury/Penny Post" stamp would be struck on all letters coming into Shrewsbury from the General Post for delivery to a destination served by one of the two penny post services. It would also be struck on all letters posted at Westbury before the issue of the "Westbury/Penny Post" stamp and on letters picked up "on the road" between Baschurch and Shrewsbury. It is not a very common stamp. The three named receiving house stamps are even less common as they were only stamped on outgoing letters actually handed in at the receiving house in question. + + +

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THE BRIERLEY HILL ANOMALY

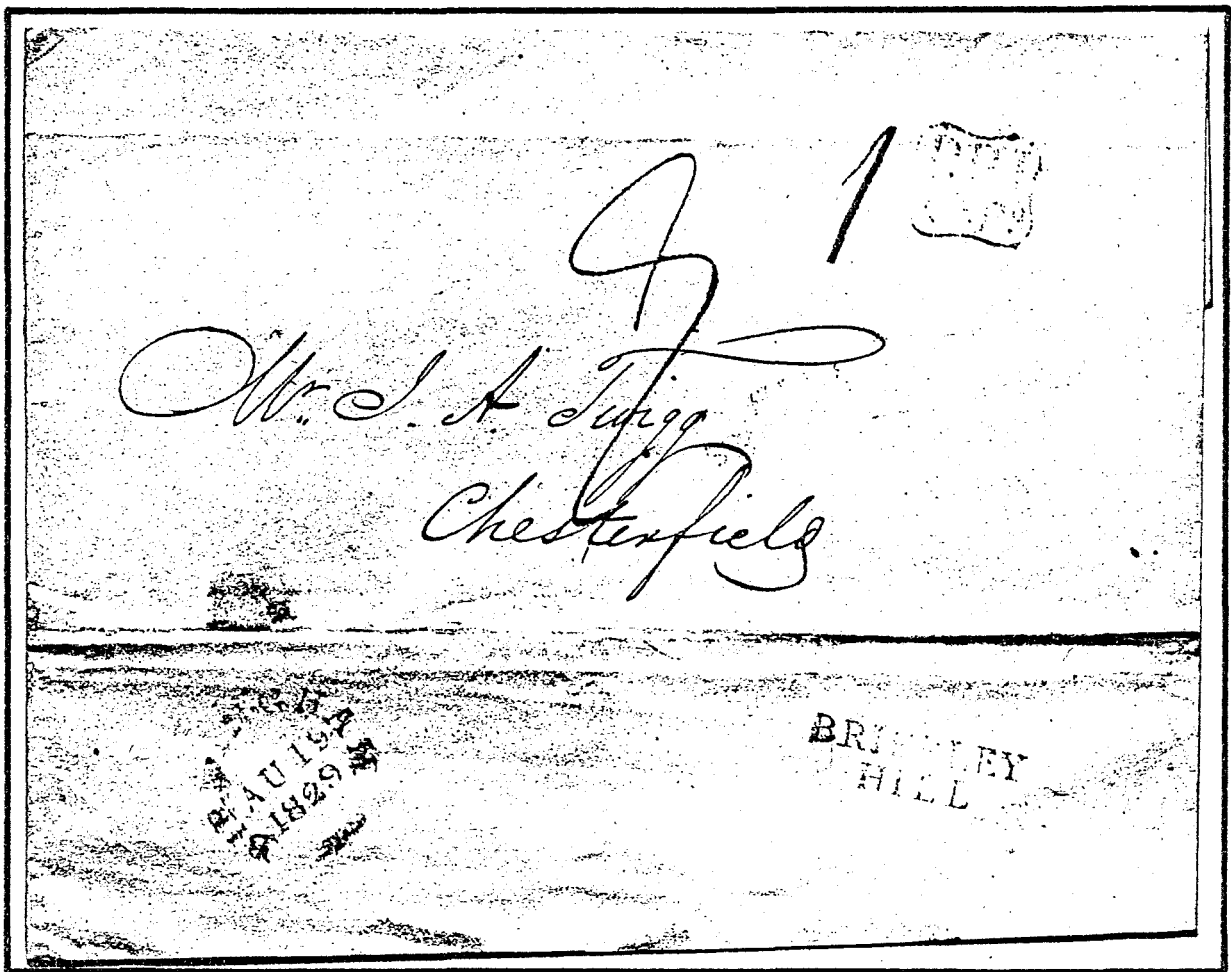
"A very long irregular street, continually receiving new accessions of buildings, stretches for more than a mile along the turnpike rampart a post office is established and all the indications of approximation to a townlike state are observable." Thus William Scott, local historian, described the Staffordshire town of Brierley Hill in 1832. To postal historians it may be known for its association with the early penny posts and Oxley tells us that, in 1817, it became a Receiving Office of both the Birmingham Penny Post and the Wolverhampton Penny Post. It also joined the Dudley Penny Post in 1834 but we are getting ahead of ourselves and thereby hangs a story.

Those readers who have heard of Brierley Hill may yet have difficulty in pinpointing it among the industrial sprawl west of Birmingham known, with good reason in the 19th century, as the Black Country. A sketch map will help to place it and show why it was favoured with incorporation in two major penny posts. Brierley Hill is almost equidistant from Birmingham and Wolverhampton and, whatever Scott may have thought of its merits as a town, it was of undisputed industrial significance. It had major deposits of coal, iron and fire-clay and its crystal glass was, and is, world renowned. Less readily explained is why Dudley was not similarly favoured but the reason may stem from Dudley's relative importance as a town rather than from its lack of it. Instead of becoming a mere penny post receiving office, Dudley achieved post town status on 6 December 1822, only five years after Brierley Hill joined the Birmingham and Wolverhampton Penny Posts. Until then, it appears to have been a sub-post town under Birmingham.



Although Brierley Hill is thought of as the 'No.1' receiving office of the Birmingham Penny Post, it was not, of course, the original 'No.1' in 1793, the year the Birmingham Penny Post was established. One of the five city offices was the original and logical 'No.1' but, when the number was re-allocated to Brierley Hill in 1817, the new receiving office was issued with two distinctive stamps in the manner of the other Birmingham Penny

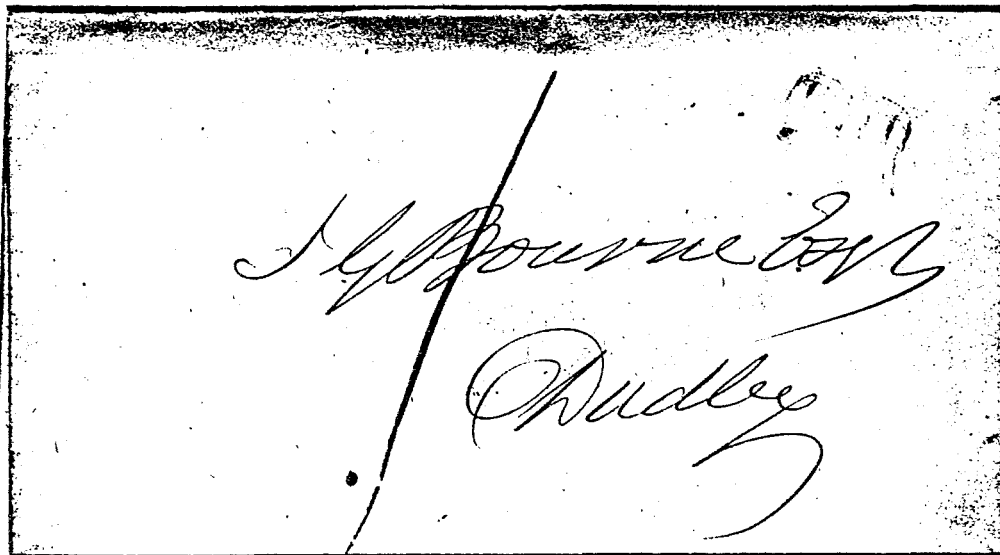
Post receiving offices; a stamp for paid mail and another for unpaid mail. At some time in the late 1820s, it was also issued with a straight line namestamp, again in common with some other Birmingham Penny Post receiving offices. It appears to have used these 'Birmingham type' stamps in the Wolverhampton and, later, the Dudley Penny Post and it was never issued with any kind of 'standard' penny post handstamp such as the ubiquitous 'village type'. The illustration is of a letter put into the Birmingham Penny Post at Brierley Hill in 1829 for onward transmission to Chesterfield and it shows, not only the manuscript charge marks of the Penny Post and the General Post, but also three handstamps struck in orange - the penny post paid stamp of Brierley Hill, the Brierley Hill namestamp and the Birmingham circular datestamp.



A second look at the sketch map may suggest what should have happened in 1822 when Dudley became a post town. In fact, what should have happened, did not. When, in 1838, a small community within a few miles of Brierley Hill asked to be linked into a penny post, Colonel Maberley (Secretary to the Post Office) explained the problem to the Earl of Lichfield (PMG) like this:

"Your Lordship will see that the whole difficulty of this case has arisen from making Dudley a post town without taking into consideration at

the same time the situation of Brierley Hill which was a penny post under Birmingham and which has been permitted to continue so, as well as with Wolverhampton, after Dudley was made a post town. Thus a total deviation from the general rule of the Post Office was sanctioned insomuch as the charge on letters from Birmingham and Wolverhampton to Brierley Hill, even when passing through the post town of Dudley, has only been 1d instead of 5d and 3d which it ought respectively to have been viz 4d from Birmingham to Dudley and 2d from Wolverhampton to Dudley with the addition of 1d for the postage from the latter town. To increase the rates to their proper amount according to the general principle pursued in the Post Office service would be a great hardship on the people of Brierley Hill after they have been permitted to enjoy the benefit of a penny rate from these towns so many years. I therefore think the best course will be to continue this anomaly as it stands but not to extend it in the slightest degree"



Only implied mention is made of Brierley Hill being in the Dudley Penny Post but, if letters from Birmingham and Wolverhampton travelling via Dudley were only charged 1d, it would be surprising if the inhabitants of Brierley Hill would have

countenanced paying more than 1d for letters to and from Dudley itself. Thus Brierley Hill was probably effectively a penny post receiving office of Dudley years before the Dudley Penny Post was officially established in 1834. The illustration above is of a letter from Brierley Hill to Dudley in 1836. It has been charged 1d and, although they are too faint to copy well, the letter also bears two 'Birmingham type' penny post marks of Brierley Hill.

One can only surmise what an inhabitant of Dudley itself must have thought. He would pay 4d or 5d for a letter from Birmingham and yet his friend who lived 3 or 4 miles further along the road paid only 1d. It is perhaps fortunate that uniform penny postage painlessly put an end to the 'Brierley Hill anomaly' before too many citizens of Dudley became aware of it. Civil wars have started from lesser grievances.

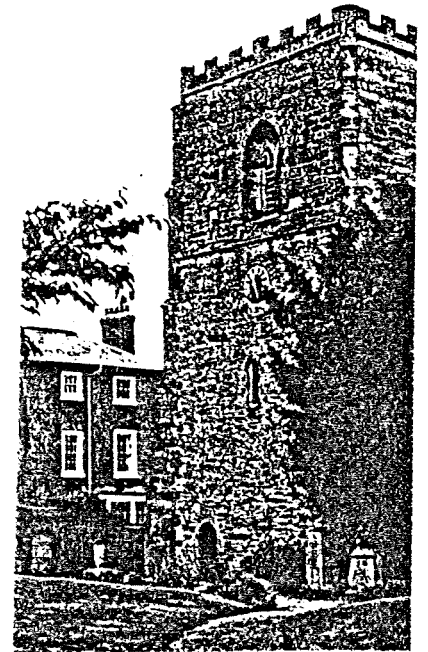
(Extract from Post 35 Vol 44 by courtesy of P.O.Archives)

'A TALE OF TWO CRADLEYS'- More about the Herefordshire Cradley.

It was the brainwave of one of our members who lives in Malvern, Roger Broomfield, to show the item in issue No.32, 'A Tale of Two Cradleys', to two senior residents of the Herefordshire Cradley - the Misses Margaret and Evelyn Edwards. One of these good ladies delivered milk in Cradley for more than 50 years and her knowledge of distances in and around the village must be second to none. Furthermore, the Misses Edwards' combined knowledge of the history of the village post office is remarkable and adds much to the brief sketch given in the original article. Every detail of what follows has been extracted from a letter that the Misses Edwards wrote to Roger Broomfield and their help is most gratefully acknowledged.

From its beginnings and during the first quarter of this century, the Cradley post office was in the hands of the Kings family and situated at the top of the bank, in the upper part of the village, near the turn off to the church. At the turn of the century, the old house was wrecked by an explosion and only a small part remained. The new house that was erected on the same site included a purpose-built post office.

A James Kings lived at the house in 1834 and, in an 1858 directory, the postmaster is named as Henery (sic) Kings. He was followed by his son, Edward Symonds Kings, a remarkable man who, beside being Postmaster, was also Rate Collector, Collector of Taxes and Clerk to Cradley Parich Council. If that were not enough, Mr Kings was a keen astronomer and owner of a profitable cherry orchard.



The 1913 directory says that, on weekdays, letters arrived in Cradley at 7am and 5pm and were collected from this post office at 7.45am and 5.35pm after letters from the post boxes and the other post offices in the parish had been collected to go with them. On Sundays, letters arrived at 7.30am and were collected at 10.30am. Telegrams could be sent and received up to 10am on Sundays. The reference to 'other post offices' seems remarkable but, in the early years of this century, there were indeed two other post offices in Cradley - one at Ridgway Cross and another at

Stiffords Bridge. Later, the Stiffords Bridge post office closed and one opened at Storridge instead. When the telephone came to Cradley, the people of the Parish were asked at which post office they would like the manually operated exchange to be. It is good fortune that Ridgway Cross office was chosen for the exchange name of 'Ridgway Cross' has successfully avoided the risk of a muddle between the two Cradleys.

It was not until Mr Edward Symonds Kings died that the Cradley post office moved to the picturesque village shop where it remains to this day. Mr F.H.Nind became its first postmaster in the new location. In the original article, a 17 mile delivery route from this office was quoted but the Misses Edwards do not think this included collection of the mail from Malvern and believe that the total distance covered by Cradley postmen was probably even greater. Cradley is a very large parish stretching miles in all directions and, until recently, there was one full-time postman and two (at one time there were three) part-time postmen. The full-time postman delivered on foot to the outlying farms and distant houses, travelling across country from one farm to another. At one time, he had to visit every one of these outlandish places each day to deliver the daily papers. An Official from Malvern post office came out periodically to walk the rounds with the postmen and check the time taken. The two part-time postmen also had long rounds branching out on each side of the main delivery route. They were provided with uniform but had to find their own means of transport, usually a bicycle. The third person once employed delivered letters and parcels across fields as far as The Bank Farm, Mathon, which is near West Malvern but received its mail from Cradley post office. In the afternoon, the full-time postman collected mail from Cradley post office and delivered it round the centre of the village.

Until the recent re-organisation of the post offices, letters in Cradley were delivered between 7 and 8 o'clock each morning and there was a second delivery in the afternoon. Now letters are delivered directly from Malvern and even residents within yards of the Cradley post office have to wait until after 11.30am. Letters must be correctly addressed to 'Cradley, Malvern, Worcestershire'. If either 'Malvern' or 'Worcs' is omitted, the letters go to the other, better known, Cradley. Strangely, in the past, the two Cradleys were linked by more than missent mail. Each year, people from the other Cradley, Cradley Heath and the neighbouring towns came to the Herefordshire Cradley for about six weeks for the annual hop-picking. It is a little sad that these unlikely but close ties are now passing into history.

Undated Circular Marks of the Midlands

The long-awaited questionnaire on Undated Circular Marks is being sent out with this issue of 'Midland Mail'. (Straight line handstamps will be dealt with later.) All members who have examples of UDCs from the Midland counties (or have information from the proof books in Post Office Archives about such marks) are invited to help the Society by completing the questionnaire and returning it to the Editor, 'Midland Mail', not later than Friday 7th September 1984. The Editor will ensure that your completed sheets reach the correct County Editors and will, if necessary, photocopy replies if more than one county has been entered on a single sheet.

The exercise has been devised to provide as much information with as little effort as possible. Take a sheet of blank A4 paper and use the lined page underneath it as a guide - there is then no need to draw any lines or columns. The column headings and other information you need are on the second sheet which also includes an example of a completed entry. The 'type' numbers follow Michael Champness' national system and will cover almost all cases but, if you have a mark that does not appear to fall within one of the eight types, please describe it fully or add a sketch. Please do not include the town stamps of c1830 such as 'Dudley'.

Finally, before returning your completed sheet or sheets to the Editor, please make sure that your name appears somewhere - on the back of the sheet will suffice.

Staffordshire & Warwickshire Sub-Offices

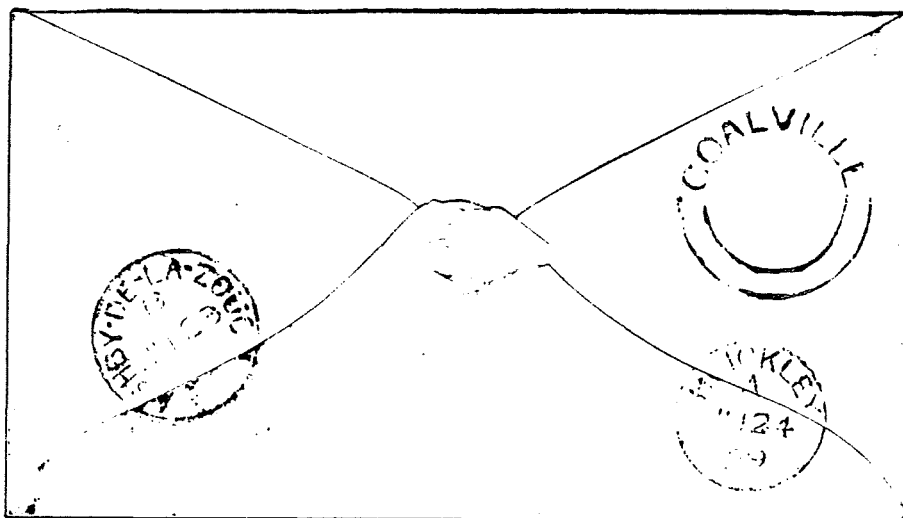
Our Secretary has produced lists of the Staffordshire & Warwickshire sub-offices which he has compiled from a mid-19th century Post Office list. If any member would find either of these lists useful in connection with the UDC exercise above, please send a suitable SAE to the Editor, 'Midland Mail' and say which list you require. The pages (3 for each list) are A4.

County Editors

As mentioned in the last 'Midland Mail', Mr Peter Sharp has taken over from Mr Chester as the Warwickshire Editor. He notes that the response to previous requests for information about postmarks of the county has been patchy and therefore asks members who have not previously sent in details of Warwickshire marks (including duplex and squared circles) or have recent acquisitions, to send him the new information as soon as possible so that it can be collated. Please write to Mr T.P.L.Sharp, 6 Burns Road, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 7EL.

Late Use of the Double Arc UDC

John Soer has sent an illustration of another UDC that remained in use until 1859 - Coalville, Leics, struck in June.

Late Use of a Duplex

Roger Broomfield has found a postcard forwarded from Newbridge on Wye to Rhayader bearing a Newbridge on Wye 'D 18' duplex dated 21 August 1923. Later dates of use of a duplex are known but do we have Midland examples ?

Missent Marks

Perhaps the final word on the date of the first official instruction for marking missent letters should be left to Messrs Alcock & Holland:

" ... it seems probable that for some time after the establishment of the Dead Letter Office in 1784 only those missent letters that reached London were dealt with at that office but there was a short-lived attempt to have all such letters sent there. This attempt, according to Joyce, came to an end in 1793 when it was decided that missent letters should be forwarded to their correct destination from the office at which the mis-sending was discovered. "

(A&H, page 444)



ROGER HUDSON

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Telephone: Warwick (0926) 492326

Send for a copy of my latest list of GB cover material from 1840. All 'Wants Lists' for specific items or county material receive my personal attention.

I am also keen to buy good quality material.

Tailpiece

Overheard recently in Post Office Archives

"Collecting of postmarks has as much relevance to postal history as the collecting of doorknobs has to the history of architecture."



Detail from a painting 'The Post Boy' by Edmund Bristow (1787 - 1876) dated 1828.

The Next 'Midland Mail'

The final issue of the 1983/84 season will be sent to members early in May. Chris Beaver has promised a controversial item posing the improbable question - 'Whatever happened to Bilston?' The Editor will do his level best to provide an updated and improved index and there will be a comprehensive report of the AGM with a list of Auction realisations. An extended book list, courtesy of Ted Heath, will compensate for its near-oblivion this month. That's unlikely to be all for there's usually more - much more - in the 'Midland Mail'.

Hon. Editor: John Calladine, Dunley House, Cranham. Gloucester GL4 8HQ