

MIDLAND MAIL

THE JOURNAL OF THE MIDLAND (GB) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Number 161, August 2009

At a meeting of our local philatelic society a few months ago I was predicting the demise of the printed auction catalogue for I had just received from two Belgian auction houses catalogues in the form of CDs. I could see the benefit of this to the auctioneers as I imagine it is much cheaper than a printed catalogue to produce and to send in the post. Also, for the collector there is the advantage that all the individual lots are illustrated. Yet, at the same time I was bemoaning this development, for, there is no substitute for a printed catalogue where it is so much easier to move from page to page, and it is so much more comfortable to sit in the armchair and peruse the lots that one cannot afford. Then, one morning in May, the postman tried to demolish the letter box with a large thick envelope. It was the catalogue for the Gilbert Wheat Collection from Cavendish, and what a delight that was. I hardly think that a CD could do justice to such a superb collection and it will serve as a very useful reference book for years to come. It is a pity that I wrote in it.

The weather for Midpex followed the trend established on the previous two occasions - wet. It was clear that Brian Jones and the rest of the committee had put a tremendous amount of work into making a success of this event. However, I heard a number of people complain about the venue, in particular the difficulty in moving around the hall, and the lack of car parking. Certainly in the morning it did seem very cramped, but by the afternoon it was possible to circulate more easily. It was a pity that the society stands were so close together and limited in space. To a certain extent Midpex has become a victim of its own success for it is clear that a larger venue is needed. But where is it to be? The large conference centres are expensive - probably far too expensive for most philatelic dealers. This year visitors gained free entrance along with a well produced catalogue (a pity about the diagram of the layout of the hall) of fifty-six pages. Would collectors be unwilling to say £3 for entry to this very popular event, and societies pay more for a larger stand if a more spacious venue were used? I notice that when I compare the catalogue for 2005 with this year's that in 2005 there were 41 dealers and 51 societies represented; this year there were 52 dealers and 39 societies present. Does this mean that the specialist societies are becoming less interested in Midpex? It would be a great loss if this event were to disappear from the philatelic calendar.

NEW MEMBER

We extend a cordial welcome to Frank Walton of Dronfield Woodhouse whose postal history interests are Derbyshire and Sheffield.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

The first meeting of the new season will take place on **12th September** at Greens Norton near Towcester. Full details are enclosed with this issue. On **17th October** we meet in Warwick at the premises of Warwick and Warwick. At **1.30pm** Richard Farman will give a display, *'The Chester Road through Staffordshire'*. This will be preceded by a committee meeting at **11am**. We meet at Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham on **14th November** when, starting at **1.30 pm**, members are asked to bring a one board display on *'Something from the County Catalogue'*.

A SECOND EDITION OF THE SOCIETY'S 'STRAIGHT LINE BOOK'

In 1985, the Society produced its first publication, 'The Undated Circular Marks of the Midland Counties'. This book has now reached its fourth edition and amended usage lists in 'Midland Mail' Nos 140-151 have paved the way for a fifth edition when the time is ripe. The second Society publication appeared three years later in 1988 and, by now, is possibly unknown to some members. This had the long but necessary title of '**The Straight Line and Numbered Receiving House Marks of the Midland Counties, 1840-60**'. Its purpose was to include any undated marks, other than the circular marks, also used after 1840. (Roger Broomfield later produced a book of undated Welsh marks that combined all types.) The immediate difference between the Society's two early publications, apart from the obvious difference that the so-called 'straight line' book is much smaller, is that, for the first time, we illustrated all the marks listed.

*Kilsby
PennyPost*

Nº5

LADYWOOD

Typical undated marks used after 1840.

Only one amendment list has ever been published to the 'straight line' book, in 'Midland Mail' No. 67, almost twenty years ago. (Even then the list inadvertently contained one or two significant errors, due to an erroneous report.) The 'straight line' book, like the UDC book, was produced on a typewriter with primitive memory disks. An appeal was made in 'Midland Mail' for a member with computer skills to scan the pages and transfer the data to a computer. The task has now been accomplished in an exemplary manner by our member, Bob Viney, and we are therefore in a position to produce a second edition of the 'straight line' book without the need to start from scratch. We are fortunate to have Bob's expertise.

The future intentions for Society were outlined in 'Midland Mail' 148/7. This explained that the Society's priority would be the production of a 'Midlands British County Catalogue of Postal History' under our new Co-ordinating Editor, Chris Jackson. Of the older books, it was suggested the first priority would be to update the 'straight line' book and perhaps produce a second edition *after the* (production of) *the Midland Counties BCC*. However, following discussions with the Coordinating Editor, it has been agreed there would be advantages in progressing a second edition of the 'straight line' book in parallel with the Midlands BCC and in bringing it to print first. Chris would not be responsible for this parallel work - he has more than enough to do! The proposal is that the limited numbers of the new book required by Society members would be ring bound and produced 'in house', as was the first edition. The cost would be minimal.

The time has therefore arrived to ask the entire membership to advise either the appropriate County Editor or, on this occasion alone, John Calladine, of any amendments to the original book. Most of these will be extensions of the usage dates but one or two new entries have come to light in the intervening years, most commonly of pre-1840 marks that continued in use after 1840. It should be stressed that all amendments notified to John over the past twenty-five years have been retained and will be included. However, if you are uncertain whether an amendment was notified or you have no memory of it, do not hesitate to notify it again. John will pass consolidated amendment lists for each county to Bob Viney and it is Bob who will incorporate them into the new computer record.

Please advise amendments as soon as you can - it is a minor task with such a small book (68 pages). In many counties (with the notable exception of Birmingham itself) there are only a handful of marks to consider. It would be our hope that a second edition could appear early next year. However, this will depend on members responding quickly. (County Editors may already have been given some of the information for inclusion in the forthcoming Midlands BCC.) We shall not need illustrations of the marks unless they are new entries. If you wish to use e-mail try john.calladine@mac.com or, if that is too much trouble, phone 01249-758148 and give information orally. PLEASE respond!

POWER STATION POSTMARKS

by Mick Gill

While I am not a Staffordshire collector, the existence of a 'RUGELEY.STAFFS./POWER STATION' datestamp points to there having been a sub post office on site, almost certainly during the construction of the site

On 19th October 1956 a sub post office was opened to serve the workforce then engaged in building the Central Electricity Generating Board's (CEGB) power station at High Marnham on the River Trent, north of Newark. The office, designated High Marnham Power Station, remained open until 1962 when the station became operational. It was at the time the largest and most modern coal-fired power station in the UK.

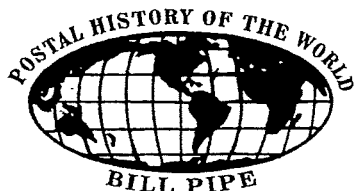
I have spoken to a former colleague from my days at Newark Head Post Office who tells me that he had the job of setting up the sub-office. He recalls that it was staffed by CEGB personnel and had a nominal sub-postmaster - a member of the CEGB management. He thinks that the sub-office was open full time but cannot be certain of this.

Unfortunately, I do not have an example of the datestamp. However, an illustration (no. 1285) from 1957 appears in James Mackay's 'Postmarks of England and Wales' and records the datestamp as 'HIGH MARNHAM POWER STN./NEWARK.NOTTS'. In his listing of Nottinghamshire post offices, member Ken Smith records sight of such a datestamp used on 21st February 1962.

In connection with the above, Ken Smith has kindly sent the following list of post offices that opened in power station construction camps:

Downreay Camp, Thurso, Caithness.	PO opened 1/5/1955; closed 10/1/1959.
High Marnham Power station, Newark, Notts	PO opened 19/10/1956; closed on or after 21/2/1962.
Hinkley Point, Bridgewater, Somerset	Single circle datestamp issued 11/3/1958; PO closed 1964.
Pembroke Power Station, Pembroke	PO opened 1/6/1966; closed early 1970s.
Rugeley Power Station, Rugeley, Staffs	PO opened 4/12/1967; closed 1971 (notified in PO Circular 13/10/1971).
Sellafield, South Camp, Seascale, Cumberland	PO opened 22/3/1951; closed 29/3/1961.
Sizewell, Leiston, Suffolk	PO opened 1960; closed 24/12/1965
Towers, Ironbridge, Shropshire	Opened 1966 (PO Circular 24/12/1966; closed August 1969.
	Under Telford from 2/4/1969 (Telford datestamps in use from 12/5/1969.
Wylfa, Cemaes Bay, Anglesey	Open by 1964 (Construction started 1963 ended 1971).

Ken also points out that Mill Meece, Eccleshall was a Police Training College and a post office existed from 1952 to c.1961.



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THE KNOWLE STATION POSTMARK

by Eric Lewis

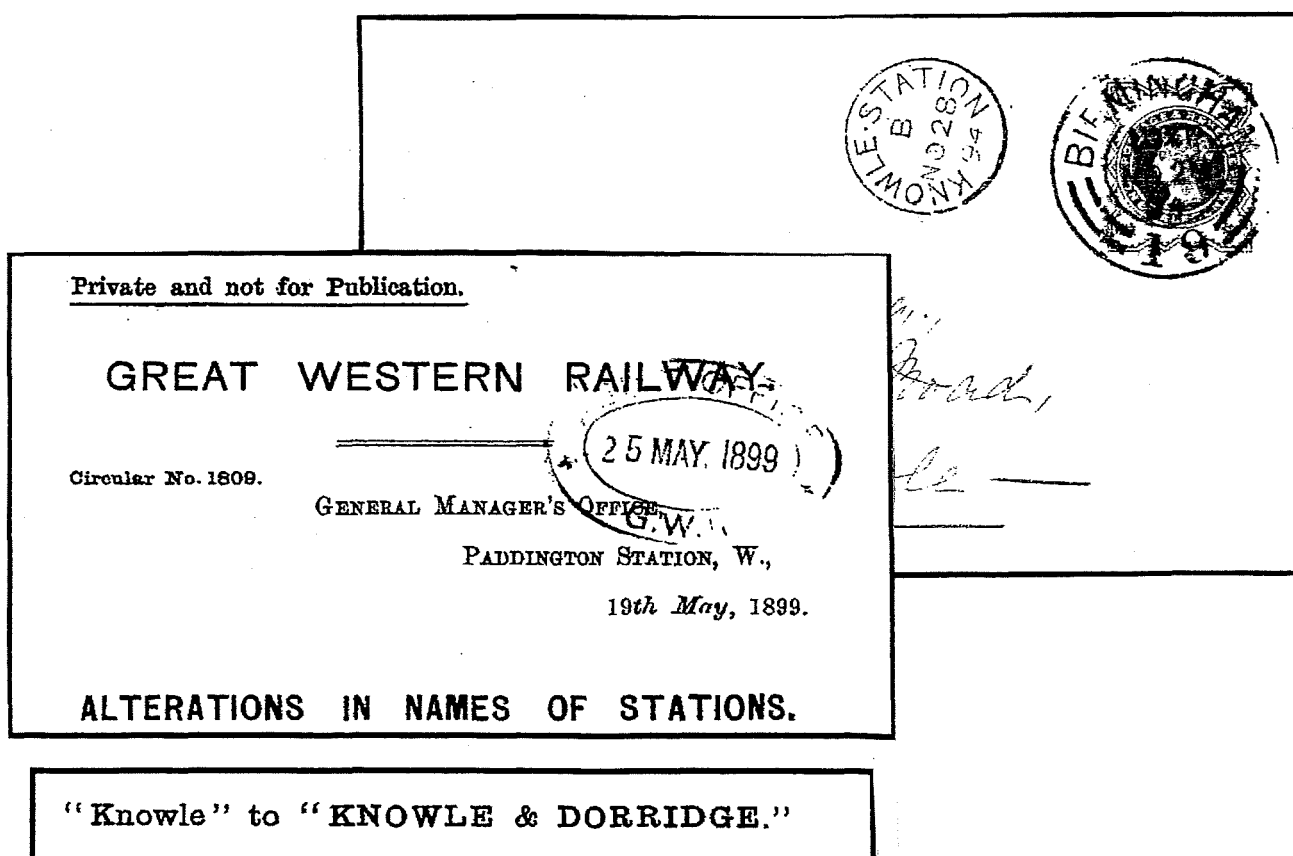
At 'Worpex' I took the opportunity to speak to our member Richard Martin and his friend Mike Dovey who were in charge of the TPO and Seapost Society stand about Mike's article which appeared in MM 159/12-13. I was able to clarify a few points in that article.

Official Post Office business at Knowle started when the village was one of the eight outlying localities incorporated into the Birmingham Penny Post on its establishment in 1793. Knowle was probably served by a messenger in conjunction with Solihull as no trace has been found of the appointment of a receiver at the time. However, by 1814 a sub-deputy had been appointed at Knowle, implying the status of a sub-office rather than a receiving house. The office developed in importance taking on the roles of a Money Order Office (1st October 1867), a Post Office Savings Bank (1st January 1868), and a Telegraph Office (1870)

As pointed out by Mike, the village of Knowle was two miles north-east of the nearest railway station which was situated at Dorridge. However, when a sub-office was opened near the station on 29th July 1884 it was given the official designation 'Knowle Station'. This sub-office should not be confused with that situated in Knowle village which continued to operate separately.

The office near the station prospered under the ownership of a Mr Joseph Pitt whose main trade is not known, but who conducted the post office work from the opening of the office in 1884, incorporating Money Order and Savings Bank business from 1st September 1890, and Telegraph business from 25th May 1892. Mr Edmund Horne, a stationer, took over from 23rd July 1897. The office was renamed 'Dorridge Sub-office' on 1st December 1899, still under the ownership of Mr Horne. This was over six months after the railway station had been renamed 'Knowle and Dorridge'. The Dorridge sub-office was closed on 4th August 2004.

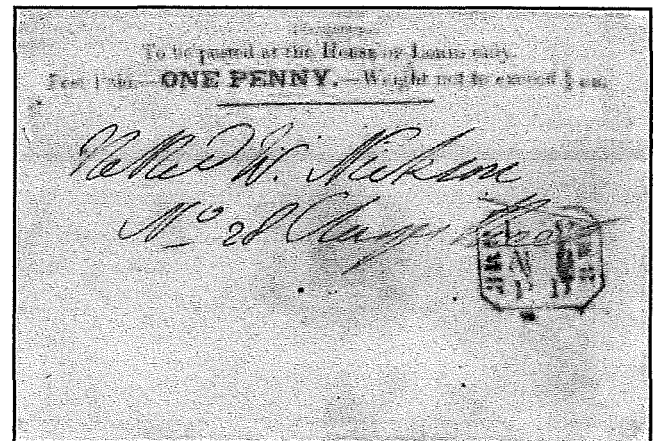
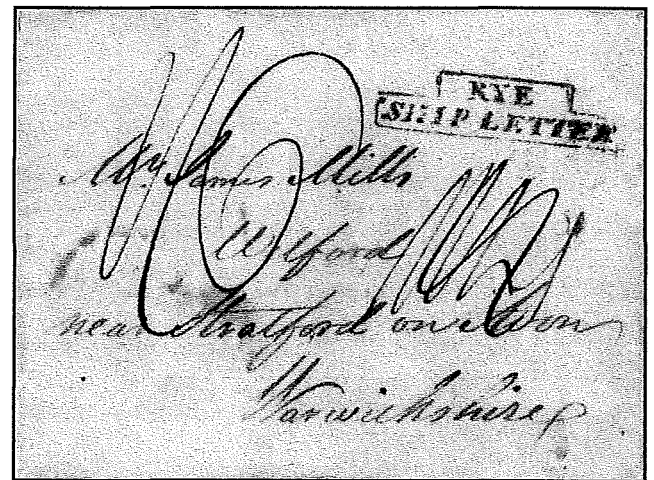
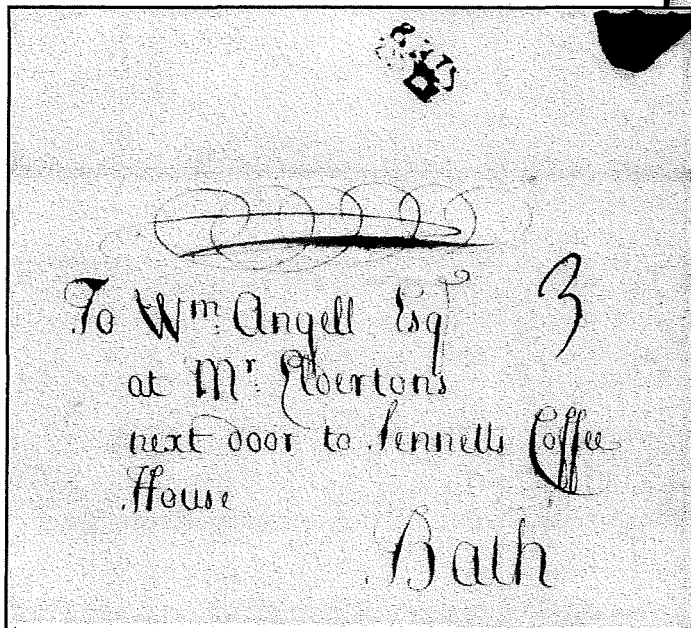
Mike states in his article that the arched bridge in the distant background on the postcard of the station is a mystery as no one can remember such a bridge or roads leading up to it. An Ordnance Survey map of the period shows such a bridge spanning the railway lines but with no roads leading up to it. From the illustration it seems to have been too substantial to have been merely a foot-bridge. Perhaps it was constructed to allow a farmer to move livestock and machinery from one side of the line to the other.



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MAIL BETWEEN SHROPSHIRE AND THE UNITED STATES FROM 1870 TO 1893.

by Brian Atkins

The New Anglo-US Convention of January 1868 reduced the transatlantic rate to 6d (12cents US) per ½oz (see previous article in MM160) but this rate lasted only two years. An Additional Anglo-US Postal Convention (GPO Notice 41/69) was agreed to begin 1st January 1870, when the rate was reduced to 3d (6cents) per ½oz with the progression in simple weight multiples of ½oz. There were a variety of ways in which the 3d rate could be paid, two are illustrated. In the first example the 3d rose (SG 102), plate 5, is cancelled by the SHREWSBURY duplex (SB331) dated 4th June 1870, code I2.

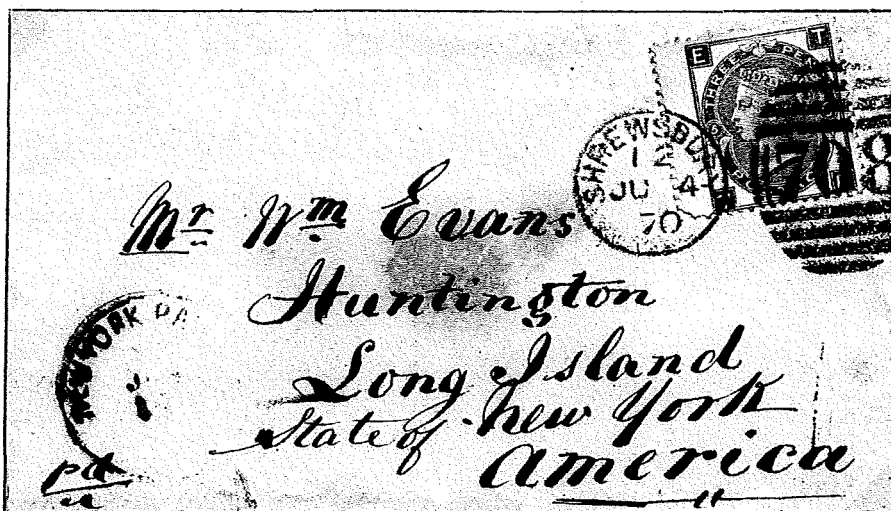


Fig 1, Shrewsbury to Long Island, New York dated 4th June 1870

The cover was carried by the Cunard Line *Scotia*, which left Liverpool on 4th June 1870 and arrived at New York on the 13th June.

In the second example three penny reds from plate 152 are cancelled by the WELLINGTON / SALOP duplex (WT114) dated 27th December 1873, code D. The letter was originally mailed at Broseley. The cover was carried by the Cunard Line *Algeria*, which departed Liverpool on 27th December and arrived in New York on 10th January 1871, the sealed bag arriving at the Chicago Exchange Office on 12th January.

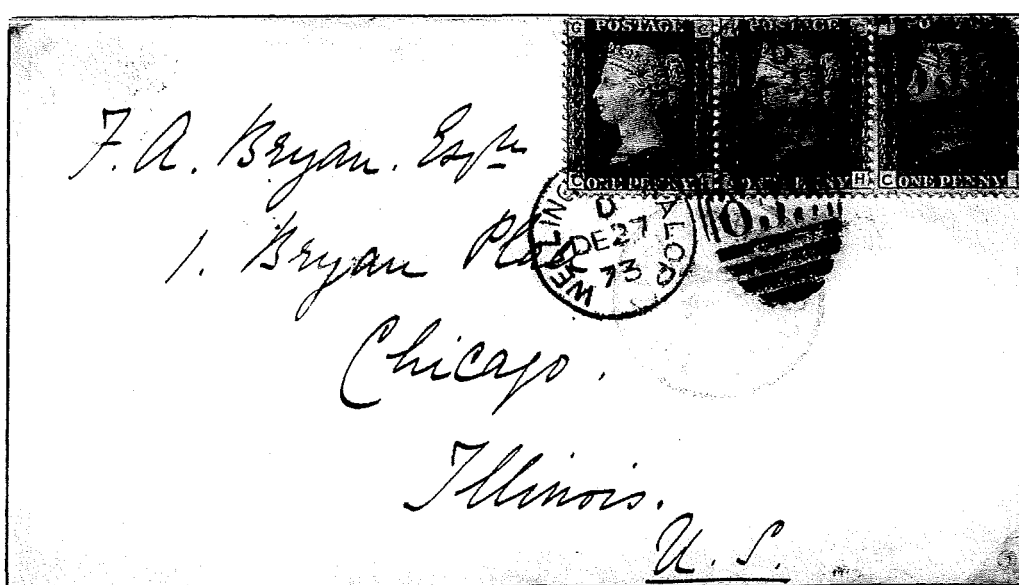


Fig 2, 1873 cover from Broseley via Wellington to Chicago

A cut-down cover but with letter remaining was over ½oz but less than one ounce and thus paid the double rate of 6d (6d mauve, SG108, plate 8, cancelled by the SHREWSBURY duplex {SB377} dated 13th January 1871, code I5). The letter contained the birth records (including times!) of members of John Phillips' family as well as his birth certificate (mentioned in the letter but no longer present).

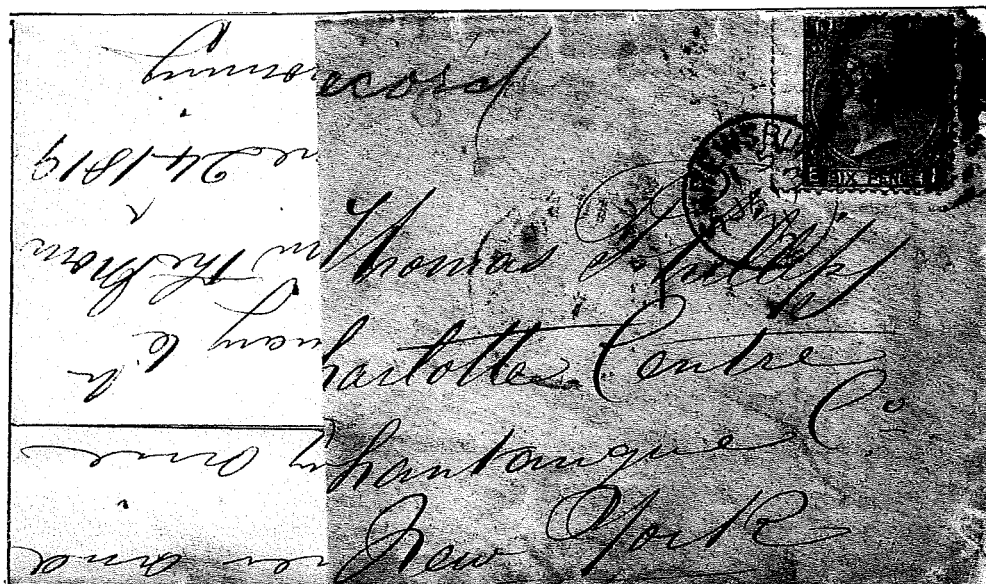


Fig 3, 1871 part cover from Shrewsbury to Chatanque County, New York State

The Cunard Line *Russia* carried contract mails to the US, leaving Liverpool on 14th January 1871, Queenstown on 15th January, arriving New York on 27th January 1871 (figure 7 just visible on date stamp).

Double rates are seen quite frequently on transatlantic covers. Triple rates are not so common but one from Bridgnorth to Boston, Mass dated 12th August 1874 is illustrated below with the 9d straw (SG 110, watermark spray), paying the triple rate of between 1oz and 1½oz (Fig 4). It is a cut-down front, of reinforced, heavier blue paper.

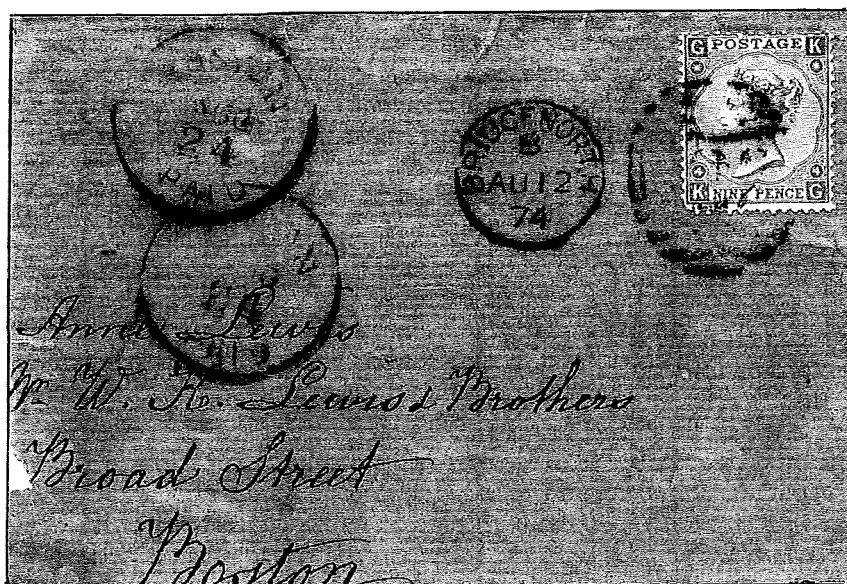


Fig 4, Bridgnorth to Boston 12th August 1874.

The *City of Chester* of the Inman Line left Liverpool on 13th August 1874 and arrived in New York on the 23rd August, when the sealed bag was forwarded to the Boston Exchange Office, arriving there on 24th August 1874.

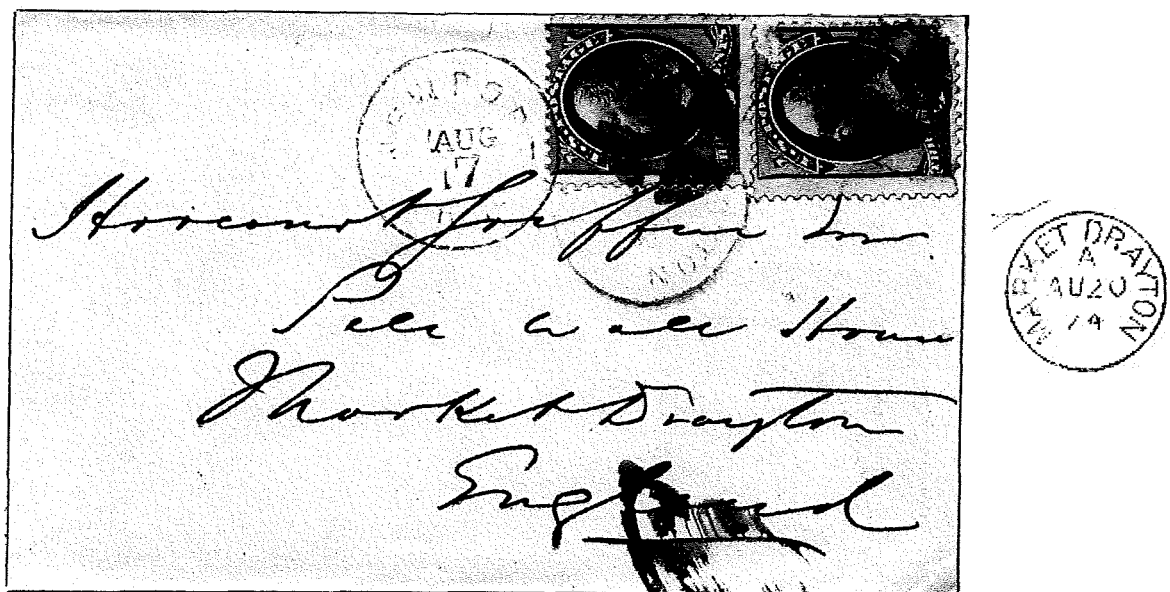


Fig 5, 1874 cover from Newport, Rhode Island to Market Drayton

Fig 5 shows a cover sent under the 1870 Convention from the United States on 7th October 1874 from Newport, Rhode Island via Boston. The 6cents rate was paid by the two 3cent Washington greens. The cover was carried on the *only transatlantic voyage* of the Cunard Line *Saragossa*, which carried contract mails from Boston, Mass on 8th August 1874 to Liverpool, with mails put off at Queenstown on 18th August 1874. The letter was delivered to Pell Wall House, just south of Market Drayton, on the morning of 20th August. Pell Wall House became St Joseph's College Catholic boarding and day school. On a personal note, I recall playing football against the college for Wem Grammar School Colts as they were called then, but under-15s as they would be now! We lost heavily, if I recall correctly!!

The 3d rate lasted 5½ years until the General Postal Union (GPU, Treaty of Berne) Agreement (from 1st July 1875, GPO notice 25/75), when the rate was reduced to 2½d (5cents from the US). The 8th September 1875 5cents-stationery cover from Shenandoah, Virginia via New York to Oswestry is illustrated at Fig 6.

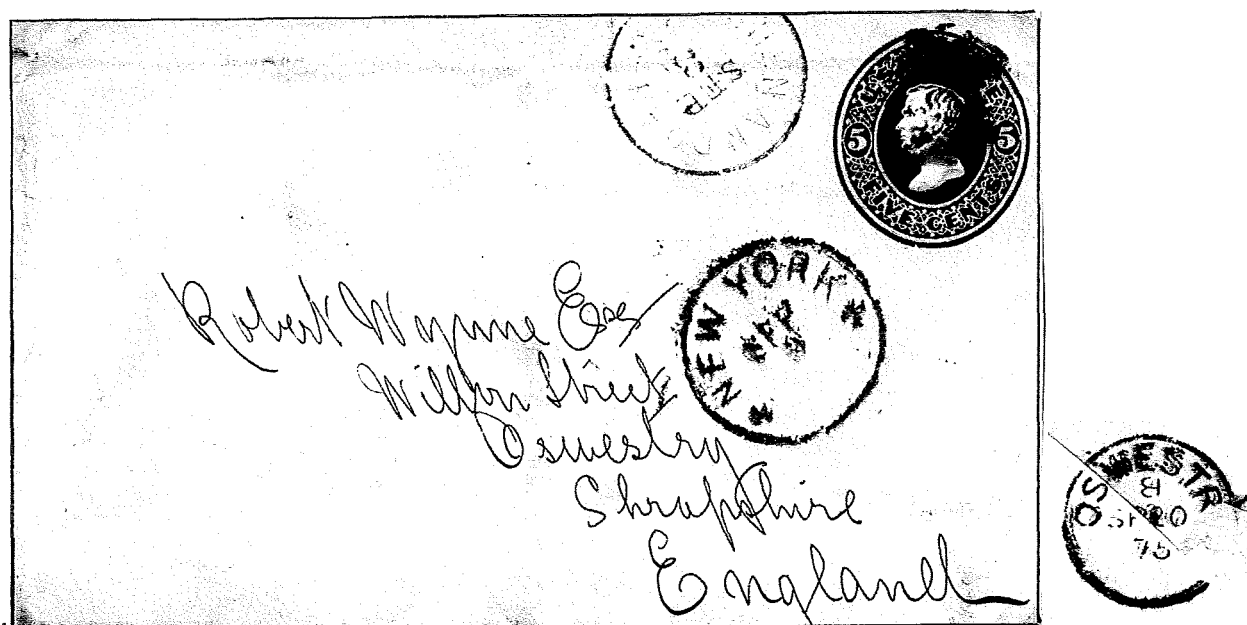


Fig 6, 1875 stationery cover from Shenandoah, Virginia to Oswestry.

The OSWESTRY date stamp (OT83) was issued on 14MAY1873 and is recorded from 30MAY1873 to 20JUL1881 using codes A, B, B reversed, C, D and Blank. *The code B reversed above is the only record of use of that code.* The cover was carried on the *Frisia* of the HAPAG (Hamburg and America Line) which left New York on 9th September and arrived in Plymouth on 19th September 1875.

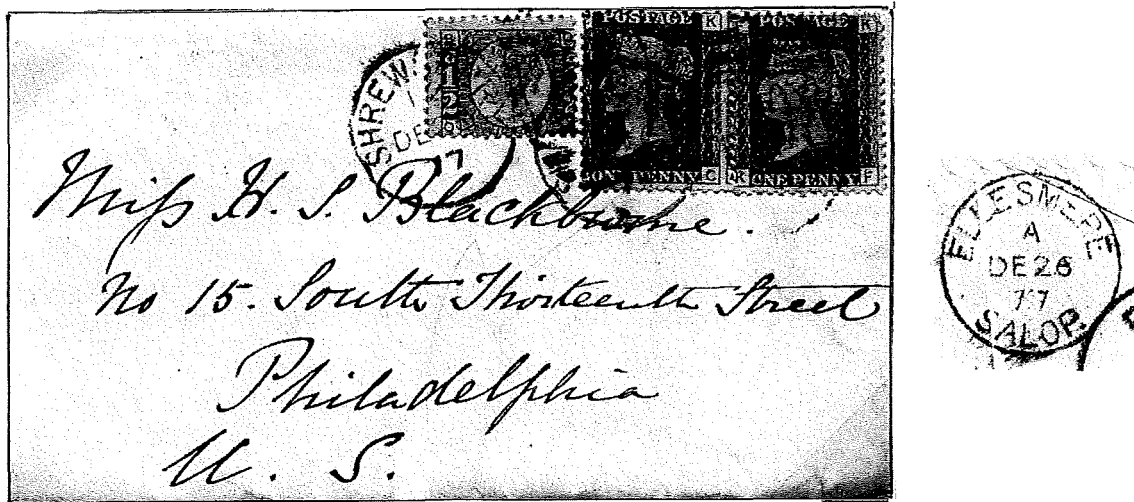


Fig 7 Ellesmere to Philadelphia via Shrewsbury dated 26th December 1877.

The cover at Fig 7 was sent from Ellesmere on 26th December 1877 under the General Postal Union arrangement. The Shrewsbury duplex dated 26th December 1877, code I2 (SB367) cancels the 2 x 1d reds plate 158 (SG 43) and the 1/2d plate 10 (SG 48), making up the correct 2 1/2d rate. The cover reached Liverpool on 27th December 1877 and arrived in Philadelphia on 6th January 1878 but I do not know which ship carried it, because, at the moment, I have no reference beyond 1875!

The Universal Postal Union Convention of 1st April 1879 left the rate between the US and the UK at 2 1/2d or 5cents. An example of the 2 1/2d lilac (SG190 plate 2) was used to pay the UPU rate to the silver-mining town of Georgetown, Colorado, 40 miles west of Denver. The stamp is cancelled by the SHREWSBURY square circle (SB550) dated 17 NOV 1884, code 2O, date of issue not known but possibly 18 MAR 1881. It is recorded used from 13 MAR 1884 to 16 DEC 1885 using codes 2H, 2I, 2O (common) and 2M.

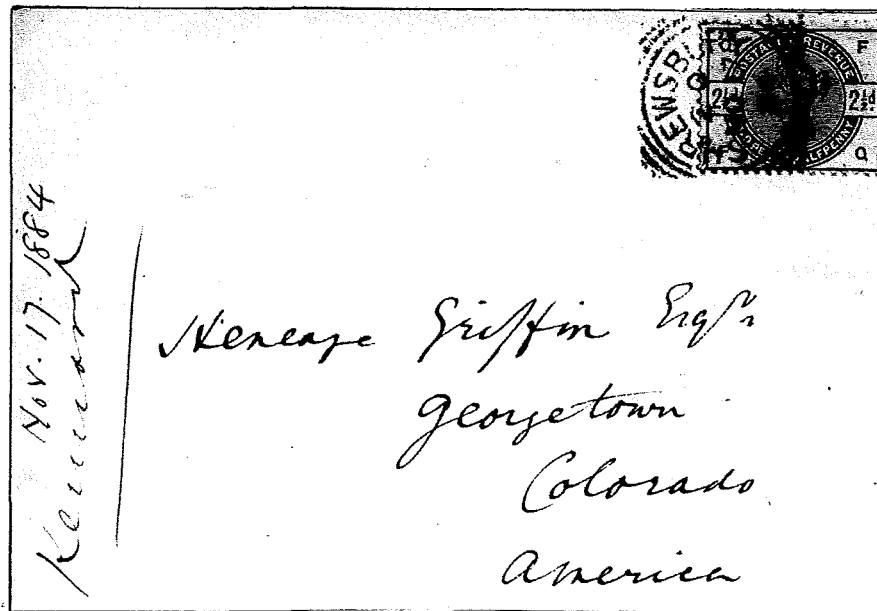


Fig 8 Shrewsbury to Georgetown, Colorado

Heneage Griffin from Brand Hall, Norton-in-Hales, 4 miles north-east of Market Drayton emigrated to America in the late 1870s followed by his brother Clifford in 1880. Heneage Griffin bought the Seven Thirty Silver Mine, near Georgetown, which became the richest mine in the district. The brothers became very rich and letters are known addressed to Heneage at the Denver Club, Denver, Colorado. Clifford Griffin shot himself on 19th June 1887, suffering, it is said, from a broken heart having left England on the death of his fiancée on the eve of their wedding, in what were termed "dubious circumstances". Tales are told that he played a "melancholy violin"! A monument to him still stands above the nearby Silver Plume town site, 2 1/2 miles west of Georgetown on what is now the Interstate 70 highway from Denver through the Rockies to Utah, eventually linking up with Interstate 15 down to Las Vegas.

A 5cent US stationery cover issued for the 1893 Chicago Exposition is illustrated at Fig 9. It was sent on the *S. S. Majestic* from Chicago to Coalbrookdale on 15th May 1893. The *Majestic* was a White Star liner which left New York on 17th May 1893 and arrived at Liverpool on 24th May 1893, the cover transferring to Wellington on the same day and to Coalbrookdale a day later.

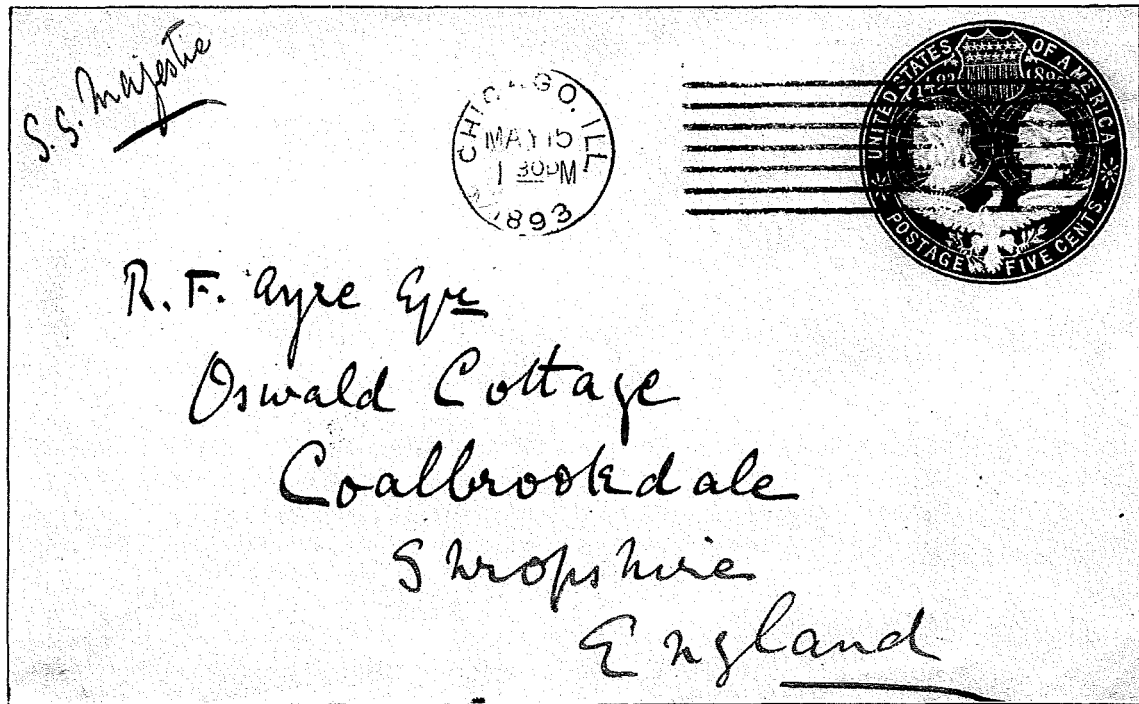


Fig 9, Chicago to Coalbrookdale 15th May 1893

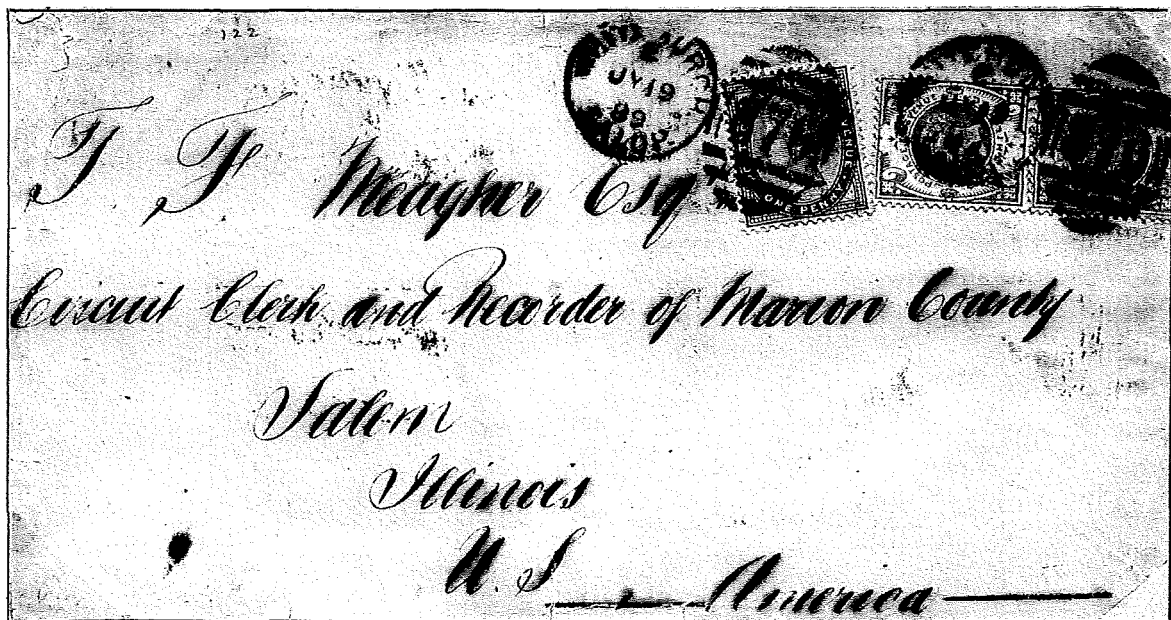


Fig 10: WHITCHURCH 19th July 1889 to the Clerk & Recorder of Marion County, Salem, Illinois, USA

The cover above, which has been cut down on the left side, was paid at the 2s. 1d rate by 2 x 1/- green (SG211) and 1d lilac (SG172, die2), TEN times the UPU rate, for 4½ to 5 ounces (size reduced to fit page). The rate to the US finally reduced to 1d for one ounce on 1st October 1908.

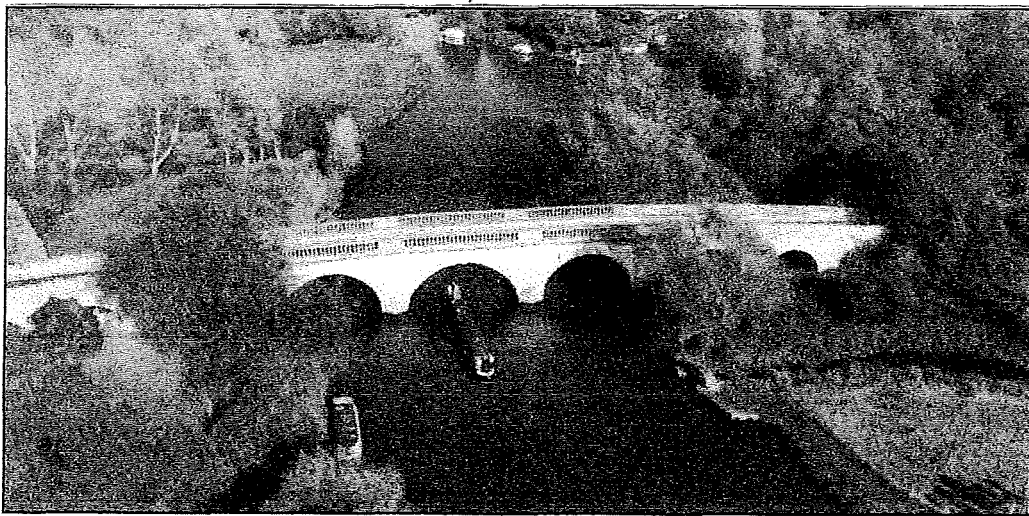
- References:
- North American Mail Sailings 1840 to 1875, Hubbard and Winter, US Classics Soc 1988.
 - UK Letter Rates Inland and Overseas 1635 to 1900, Tabcart, HH Sales 2nd Edition 2003
 - The Postal Markings of Shropshire, Part 1 – ed. Atkins, 2008
 - From the Grave: A Roadside Guide to Colorado's Pioneer Cemeteries, Wommack, 1998

LORD ABINGDON'S PRIVATE BRIDGE

by John Calladine

Subsequent to the piece in 'Midland Mail' No. 159 concerning Lord Abingdon's Private Bridge - now known as the Swinford Toll Bridge - over the River Thames, it has coincidentally been offered for sale. In brief, it can be yours for approximately £1.6 million. The notice of sale confirms the traffic figures suggested in our article, although quoting them as an annual total of between 3.35 and 3.5 million vehicles, producing a toll income of about £190,000 a year. However, the notice of sale makes the point that the toll bridge is unmanned between 9pm and 7am and suggests there is further income of about £25,000 to be raised if, say, some kind of automatic tolling were introduced at night. The surplus each year can be expected to be of the order of £100,000, "part of which is reserved for bridge repairs". The tax-free status of income from the bridge is confirmed.

Perhaps ominously for users of the bridge, it is suggested that, as the Retail Prices Index has increased by 45% since the last toll increase (from 2p to 5p for a car) in 1994, a further toll increase could be justified in the near future. Members may like to know that OAPs can buy books of a hundred tickets at a discounted rate of just £3.00.



MORE REDUNDANT STAFFORDSHIRE POSTMARKS

This follows on from those shown on MM160/18. My thanks to Rick Martin for providing these copies.

Contrary to regulations
745

1 D. TO PAY
LIABLE TO
LETTER RATE
730

1 D. TO PAY
LIABLE TO
LETTER RATE
745

... D TO PAY
745

D TO PAY
CLOSED
CONTRARY TO
REGULATIONS
LIABLE TO
LETTER RATE
730

D MORE TO
PAY
..... RATE
730 ABOVE.....0Z

More to pay
above 0Z
745

1^D
745

2^D
745



D TO PAY
POSTED
UNPAID

THE 1844 BARRED NUMERALS OF NOTTINGHAM

by Alan Marshall

The move away from the Maltese Cross cancellation to the numeral obliterations was a natural step towards quick and easier identification from the front of a letter of the post town or sub-post town of origin of the letter. There were five different designs issued to cover the towns of England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the London Inland Office and the London District Post. Of the 942 numbers issued to the towns of England and Wales, Nottingham was allocated 583 and Bingham 584.

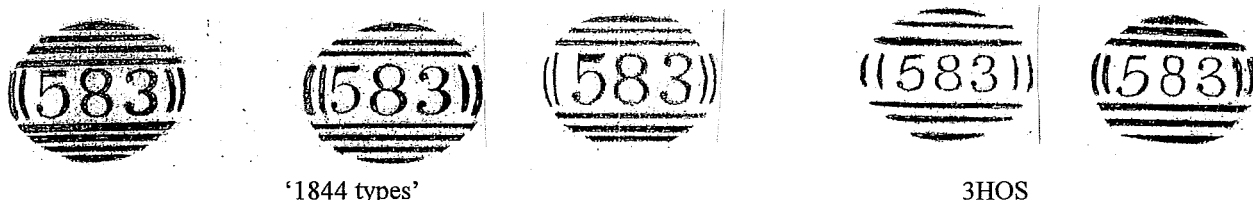
The initial issue - the '1844 type' was sent from the GPO in April 1844 for use from 1st May onwards. The normal design had four bars above and four bars (4/4) below the numerals but can vary from three to five above or below. From the mid-1850s onwards stamps with three bars above and below (3/3) and with smaller numerals - 3HOS - were issued.

In the case of Nottingham it is important to state at the outset that both Hall and Parmenter in their respective publications segregate the recorded dates by colour e.g. black, blue or green, and not by the number of bars nor, in the case of Parmenter, by the size of the numerals. There is nothing to indicate that either a blue or green ink was ever intended for use with the '1844 type' stamp. Also, there is no evidence that Nottingham ever produced or used a green ink. However, a blue ink was brought into use at the same time as the introduction of a 25mm double-arc cds in June 1847, and continued in use with that stamp until 1858. In fact, the blue ink is first seen with the second Nottingham skeleton (with code 2) which is recorded used from 2nd to 20th June.

Overlapping the use of the 25mm cds were two 29mm double-arc cds - 1841 to 1847, one with serif letters and the other sans-serif. Examples of these two stamps are sold as blue or blue/green marks, depending on the vendor's interpretation. Examination of more than two-hundred of the '1844 type' barred numerals and the three types of cds has, it is argued, confirmed that the claim of a green ink is to be treated with caution. On the other hand, examples of strikes in a truly blue ink are to be found sporadically from 1842. Michael Champness has shown that blue ink was recognised as an official colour (British Mailcoach, June 1980).

The recording of marks as blue/green in colour is possibly justifiable. Some strikes appear to be partly black and partly blue/green depending on the density of the mark and/or the colour and type of paper of entire. This observation is supported where the colour of the ink on the postage stamp appears different from that on the paper to which the adhesive is attached. Of the numerous examples examined from the period 1841-1847 only two items in 1842 were found to be truly blue/green, three in 1843 and two in 1845. The sporadic occurrence of blue/green examples continued up to the introduction of the 4VODA duplex in October 1866. Thereafter all strikes were in black ink.

In order to establish a reliable method of identifying and recording the '1844 type' handstamps of Nottingham, it is necessary to rewrite the listings of both Hall and Parmenter. Hall illustrates three barred numeral marks of this type which he segregates by the height of the numerals with no mention of the number of bars. Only one of the three illustrations is in fact an '1844 type'. The other two examples are clearly the 3HOS mark (the numerals are smaller in height) as later identified and recorded by Parmenter. In Nottingham's case, the height of the 1844 numerals is 6.5/7mm while those of the 3HOS marks are 5/5.5mm in height.



If we ignore the colour listing in the 1986 Parmenter and subsequent updates, there are two '1844 type' stamps illustrated and two 3HOS. The initial '1844 type', issued in April 1844, is shown as having four bars above and four bars below, while a handstamp issued in April 1850 has three bars above and four bars below (3/4).

Recent research, involving forty-five items, identifies the most common type as having the 3/3 arrangement, thus confirming the existence of a third '1844 type'. The earliest Parmenter recording of 13th May 1844 is in fact a three bars above and three bars below example in the writer's possession. The note in Parmenter that an '1844 type' with the 3/4 arrangement was issued on 17th April 1850 should really refer to it as being the second of these to have been issued since much earlier recordings, from 6th January 1847 onwards, of this arrangement have now been identified.

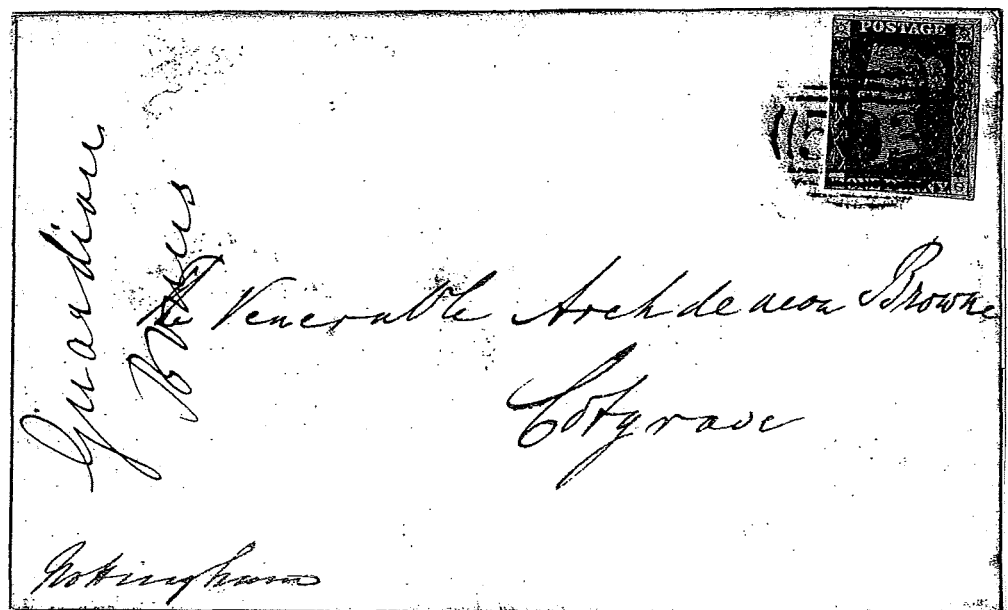
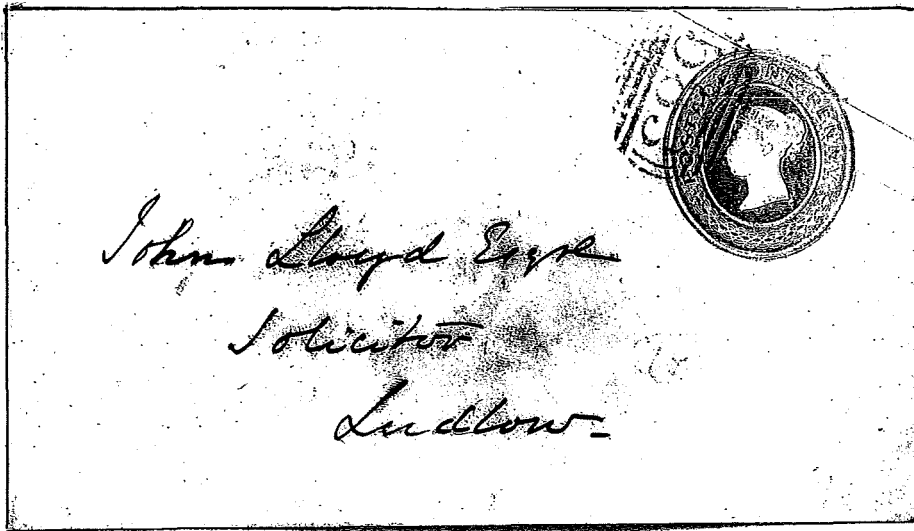
An example recently recorded from 27th April 1852 has the 3/4 arrangement, so it is likely that the recording of 23rd June 1852 in both Hall and Parmenter is of the same type.

A revised listing now shows the 3/3 arrangement as being the first stamp issued and reverses the order of issue of the other two arrangements as follows:

3/3	13 th May 1844	to	16 th June 1847
3/4	6 th January 1847	to	23 rd June 1852
4/4	6 th July 1847	to	4 th February 1850

The GPO proof books list a 3/4 arrangement on 17th April 1847 and one with the 4/4 arrangement on 30th June 1847.

1844 type (4/4) used on 21st July 1847



1844 type (3/4) used on 7th June 1850

THE STORY OF THE CLOSURE OF A VILLAGE POST OFFICE WILMCOTE (SOUTH WARWICKSHIRE)

by Bryan Jones

Wilmcote, the home of Mary Arden (Shakespeare's mother), a small but prosperous village with a strong local community, a church, village school, two pubs and a thriving tourist trade, is located some 4 miles north of Stratford, one mile off the main Birmingham to Stratford-on-Avon road. Wilmcote has had a post office since the 1860's.

Wilmcote Post Office, located in the village shop, was amongst those scheduled to be closed in October 2008, to be replaced by an "Outreach" service, comprising a Mobile Post Office van which would be parked on the shop forecourt for a part of six mornings or afternoons each week.



Some months before the planned closure date, and whilst the "so-called" consultation process was supposedly under way, the old two ring datestamp for Wilmcote, which had been in use for at least 40 years, became unusable. The postmaster was informed that the old datestamp could not be repaired but that a new datestamp could be provided if he was prepared to pay £70-£80 for the privilege. Knowing that the post office's future was under review the postmaster naturally declined to throw good money after bad. The result was that in early April the post office issued Wilmcote with a "temporary" datestamp, reading "EQUIPMENT TEAM TEMPORARY" with number 28 above the dateline.



Once the closure was announced, notwithstanding considerable petitioning by the villagers, the postmaster began to reduce his staff numbers to compensate for the forthcoming loss of the post office counter, and also, only naturally, began to cut back on ordering replacement stamps and office supplies.

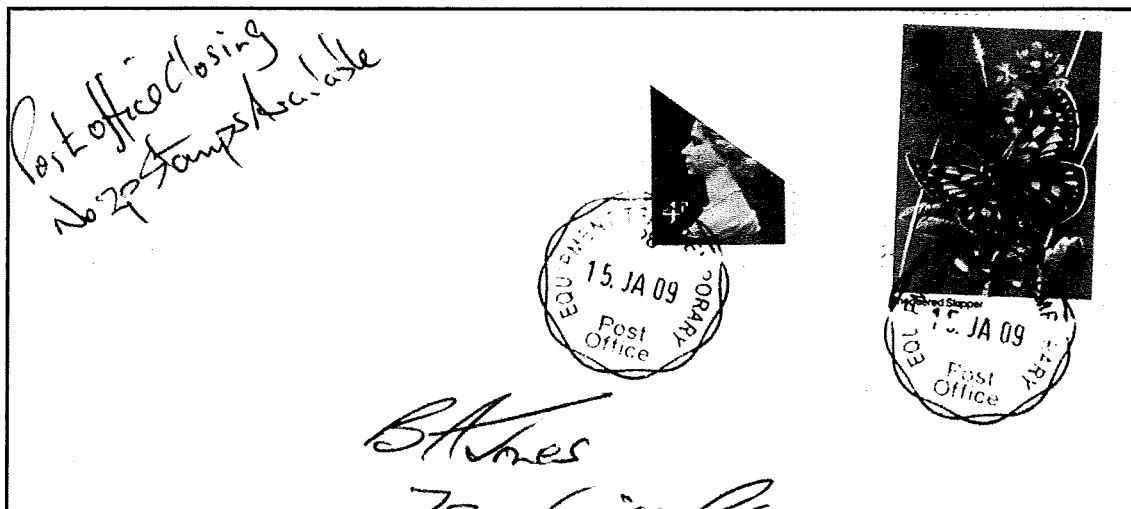
Some two weeks before the planned October closure date the postmaster was informed that, because the "Outreach" service was not yet ready to commence operation, the closure date would be deferred, the new estimated date being end November, subsequently deferred yet again until the end of December 2008. Having reduced the number of staff employed this put the postmaster (and shop proprietor) in a difficult position however they decided to carry on as best they could, their primary concern being the maintenance of a service to the villagers.



The "Temporary" Datestamp used on Overseas Mail.

January 2009 came and went without any change in the situation, until another revised date of end February for the availability of the "Outreach" service was promised. It was at this time that the postmaster was offered another option, if he did not want to continue, after being continually messed about with successive postponements, he could of course decide on his own authority to close down, (leaving the villagers without a service of any kind). Naturally again he declined to do so.

One additional problem manifested itself in mid January 2009. As the postmaster had not re-ordered certain stamps as stocks began to run low, the stock of 2p stamps was exhausted, and for a short period around 16th January no 2p stamps were available. A very small number of letters carrying bisected 4p stamp were handled to compensate for this shortage. Having been forced to re-order replacement supplies of the 2p stamp because of the continued deferment of the post office closure, these became available on 22nd January.



The February closure date came and went with no further clarification of the situation, until finally on 6 March a verbal request was received for the post office to remain open until late April, this message being confirmed in writing on 9 March. This remained the position in mid March, the "temporary" datestamp being still in regular use, and the shop with its reduced numbers of staff still struggling to provide the village with the services they have come to rely on.

With the end April date rapidly approaching the current postmaster/store proprietor became increasingly concerned that there had been no contact with those organising the "Outreach" service to indicate what exactly was about to happen. Then three days before the closure date a letter arrived indicating that "because of problems with the telephone interlink", an essential part of the security arrangements for the planned service, it would not be possible to introduce the "Outreach" service at the end of the month. The letter offered a further one month extension to the end of May, which was accepted. One has to question why such a technical problem, if it really existed, only came to light at this stage, as several false starts already made. Was it really the reason or just a convenient excuse for yet another delay?

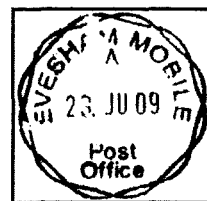
However this particular saga inevitably draws to a conclusion, the postmaster went off on holiday at the beginning of June, and the individual, who had been trained to the required standard to operate the post office in his absence, was no longer available to be called on. There was no point in attempting to train someone else to undertake this activity, and so during this absence the village had to make do without any services of any kind.

Nothing had been resolved when the proprietor/postmaster returned from holiday so he re-opened the post office "pro-tem". There was no sign that the "Outreach" service was ready to commence operations at the end of May, and so June passed with matters still unresolved.

Finally at the beginning of July things began to happen, possibly triggered by an ultimatum from the proprietor/postmaster, who was getting increasingly angry at the prevarications of the Post Office officials, and the "Outreach" service finally commenced operations on 9 July 2009, and on that day the Post Office at Wilmcote closed its doors for the last time.

The "Outreach" service operates six days a week from the car park in front of the village store, a two hour period on the mornings of Monday; Wednesday; Friday and Saturday, commencing at 9.30am, and a three hour period during the afternoons of Tuesday and Thursday, commencing at 1.30pm. There are apparently two Mobile Post Office vans operated by Evesham P.O, each of which covers two different offices on those days on which a service is provided. On the first day that I visited the Mobile P.O it arrived on time for a 1.30 pm opening, having spent the mornings at a Worcestershire village called Chadlington. This is not, however, a constant route, the two Mobile Post Offices apparently alternate between the various offices that they serve, all of which, apart from Wilmcote, are located in Worcestershire.

We therefore find ourselves with an interesting Postal History oddity, an item posted in Warwickshire carrying a clearly defined Worcestershire postmark.



However the machinations of providing the "Outreach" service provide yet another cause for hilarity!

Perhaps it is relevant at this point to outline the background to the supply of an "Outreach" service, not only to Wilmcote, but any other village so affected.

Overall control, including responsibility for whatever money is handled by the "Outreach" service, together with provision of a suitable vehicle and suitably qualified staff to man it etc, has to be accepted by whichever main post office is tasked with providing the "Outreach" service. In the case of Wilmcote one assumed that this would naturally rest with the main post office at Stratford-on-Avon, some 4 miles away. However some two years ago the main post office at Stratford-on-Avon lost its identity and became just another counter in a Co-Op mini-supermarket. It would appear that the new owners were reluctant to accept these additional responsibilities, after all their main business is selling snacks and foodstuffs, not expanding their post office services. This apparently was the reason for the initial series of deferments, and after several requests to them were rejected the Post Office decided to call it a day and look elsewhere. Eventually it seems the Post Office found someone prepared to accept the responsibility for providing the "Outreach" service, namely the post office at Evesham, not 4, but 16 miles away, and not in Warwickshire but in another neighbouring county, Worcestershire.

My commentary on this long drawn out saga – "What a way to run a Post Office"!

SOUTH WARWICKSHIRE UNDATED CIRCULAR HANDSTAMPS

One is Good; Two is a Bonus; but Three is Really Special!

by Bryan Jones

As anyone knows finding undated circular handstamps from some of the village post offices is always difficult, so when you discover a good example you consider yourself lucky. When, however that example is accompanied by not one, but two, other undated circular handstamps from adjacent villages, well then that is something to savour.

The cover illustrated, carrying a Birmingham "Spoon" duplex dated 24 January 1855, and addressed to the Secretary to the Gas Works at Stratford-on-Avon, finally arrived the following day at its destination. The interest however is contained in the various undated circular handstamps applied to the reverse.

Three different undated circular handstamps have been applied, in order of application, these are :- Ullenhall (the point of origin, and a village on the Henley-in-Arden to Redditch road); Tanworth (Tanworth-in-Arden – an adjacent village some 3 miles further north cross-country towards Birmingham); and finally Hockley Heath (another village some 3 miles north of Tanworth and on the main Birmingham to Stratford-on-Avon road). As it happens the point of origin – Ullenhall – is closer to the eventual destination, Stratford-on-Avon, than the other two villages, and so with each hand-over this letter moved further away from its destination. I surmise that a local carrier wended his way daily from village to village, possibly beginning at Henley-in-Arden progressing through the three villages, terminating at Hockley Heath where mail collected en-route could be transferred to the Stratford-on-Avon to Birmingham mail coach, before he returned to his starting point. Otherwise why travel cross country when the nearest point on the Stratford-on-Avon to Birmingham route was only about 3 miles away along a well established road?

The undated circular handstamps have added interest:-

Ullenhall (the poorest strike of the three) applied in red, and according to the MPF handbook the only recorded usage.

Tanworth, a fine strike in blue. This udc was issued on 23 May 1848, but only infrequently recorded in blue between 24 March 1851 and 16 January 1856.

Hockley Heath, a good strike also in Red. Although recorded in use between April 1852 and August 1857, this is the only reported usage in Red.

BENSON PENNY POST

1837-1840

Benson – previously known as Bensington - had been served by a penny post from Wallingford, Berkshire, since 1812 (see the later descriptions of Penny Posts into Oxfordshire from without) but, in April 1837, it became a post town. The Postmaster General, Lord Lichfield, commented in a minute dated 29th April 1837:

Wallingford is off the main road and Benson directly on it, and a great convenience and accommodation will be given to the Public by making it a Post Town.

The change of status was provoked by a complaint from a Mr Vernon Harcourt about the late delivery of letters at Benson and Dorchester in the Wallingford Penny Post. This was passed from Colonel Maberly, the new Secretary to the Post Office, to Mr Rideout, the surveyor, and following Mr Rideout's recommendation, Colonel Maberly sought authority from the Postmaster General for the change of status, saying it would obviate any inconvenience thereafter. Miss Padbury, the new postmistress, was not appointed until July.

According to the 2nd Report of the Select Committee on Postage, the Wallingford Penny Post to Benson (and to Shillingford and Dorchester) ceased on 6th July 1837. The Benson Penny Post, with receiving houses at Shillingford and Dorchester, was established on 15th July. Receipts during the first four months of the new penny post were £9-13-0, the Wallingford Penny Post having taken £40-17-9 in the earlier part of a financial year that began on 6th November 1836. The total was therefore £50-10-9 for the year compared with receipts in the discontinued Wallingford Penny Post in the year to 5th July 1836 of £69-2-7. However this was at a time when 2d charges in penny posts were declared to be illegal and the revenues of most were adversely affected. The expenses of the post were £30 for the sub-deputy (postmistress) at Benson, £5 for a letter carrier, £2-4-0 salary for the receiver at Shillingford and £8-16-0 for the receiver at Dorchester, a total of £36-0-0.



From Cary's 1823 map of Oxfordshire.
The distance from Benson to Shillingford was less than 2 miles
and from Benson to Dorchester a little over 3 miles.

The receiving houses of Dorchester and Shillingford were both within the county of Oxfordshire. Wallingford, the previous post town, was in Berkshire and, again according to the 2nd Report of the Select Committee on Postage, was reduced to sub-post town status.

Although Oxley reported use of a Benson type 2 penny post handstamp in the Wallingford penny Post, it has not been confirmed and seems unlikely. Benson was issued with a type 5 handstamp in 1837. Neither of the receiving houses is known to have an identifying stamp but this may be due to lack of evidence, examples of correspondence from this penny post being scarce.

References

Post 35/288Y/1837

Post 35/733X/1837

Post 35/845X/1837

Post 9/132, page 376

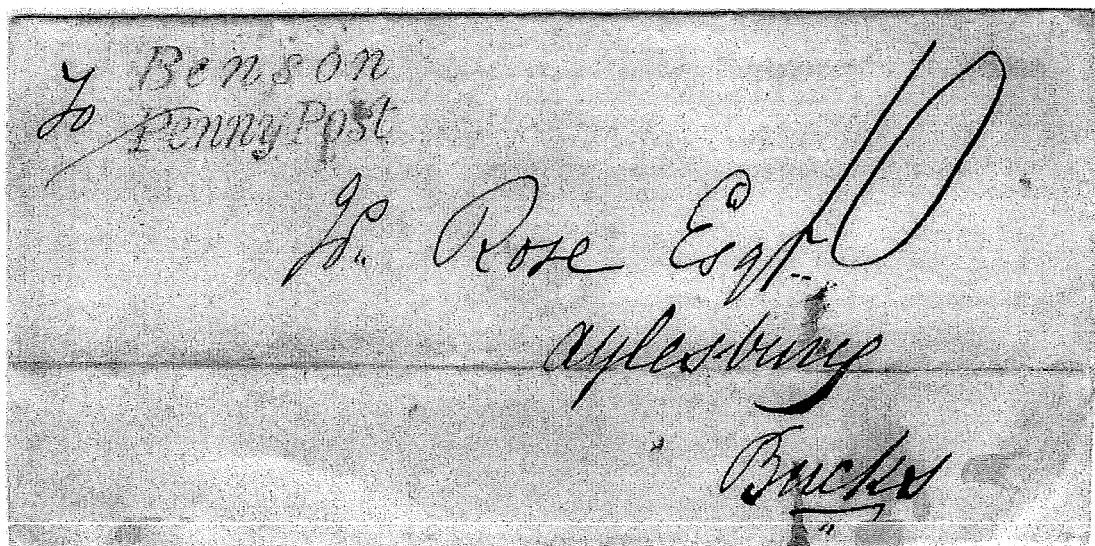
Appendices 23 & 25 of the 2nd Report of the Select Committee on Postage (1838)

HANDSTAMPS OF THE BENSON PENNY POST

Post town: Benson

Receiving houses: Shillingford and Dorchester

MLP1132 *Benson*
Penny Post B 1MAY38-24JUN39 D



The Benson Penny Post handstamp on a letter to Aylesbury dated 1st May 1838.

PHILATELIC EXHIBITION IN THE BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

In December 2009 the Birmingham Philatelic Society will be celebrating 125 years of continuous existence. This milestone will be commemorated with a number of special events including an exhibition in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery from 12th September 2009 until 9th January 2010. The exhibition will be a collaboration between the museum and the Birmingham Philatelic Society, and will look at the history of the postage stamp and the art of collecting. The majority of the objects on display will be from the collections of two of the members of the Birmingham Society who are also members of this Society, plus items from the archives of the Birmingham Society as well as a portion of the vast stamp collection presented to the city by Dr, T.D.F. Evans in 1938. This is said to be second only to the Tapling Collection in the British Museum.

The Art Gallery and Museum are open from 10 am to 5 pm on Saturdays so members could visit the exhibition when coming to the November meeting at Carr's Lane. The Art Gallery is in Chamberlain Square at the top-end of New Street about five minutes walk from Carr's Lane.

THE CHRIS BEAVER ARCHIVE

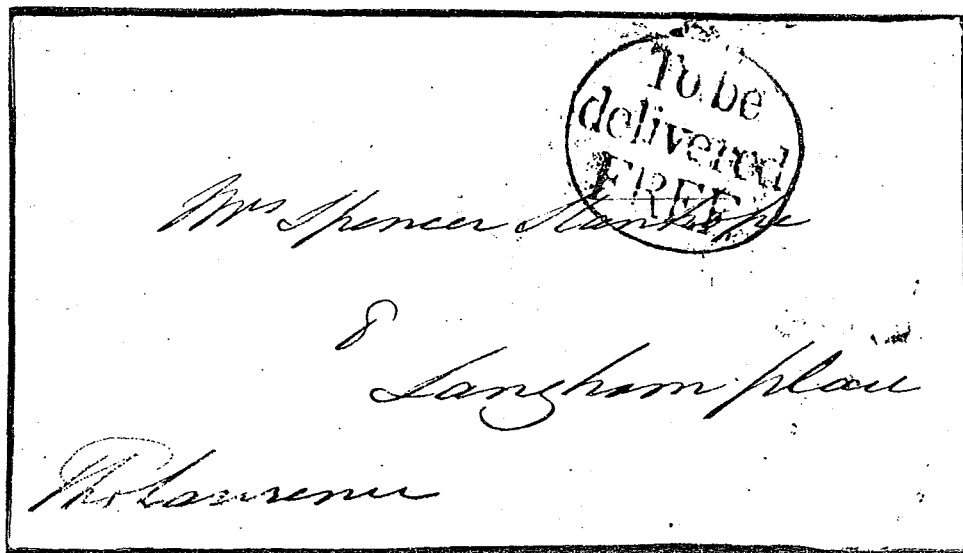
As a result of the appeal in 'Midland Mail', Sadie Cole has kindly agreed to house the Chris Beaver Archive and to rescue it from the ravages of life in a garden shed. The Society is most grateful to Sadie for this offer and also, of course, to Bob Viney for his work on digitising the Society's 'straight-line' book, the subject of a parallel appeal. It remains to find a member willing to set up a suitable web site and our cup will 'surely runneth over'.

OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL POSTS

At the present rate of progress, the descriptions of the Oxfordshire Local Posts in 'Midland Mail' should come to an end at this time next year. Following Benson Penny Post in this issue, Henley-on-Thames, Thame, Reading (into Oxfordshire) and Wallingford (into Oxfordshire) will complete the series. For members who wish to retain the series in a readily accessible form, it will be offered as a ring-bound volume shortly after the series has been completed. This will not be a formal Society publication but rather a temporary expedient until a second edition of our 'local posts' book is published.

TO BE DELIVERED FREE

My thanks to Eric Lewis for sending a copy of the cover below which he displayed at the February meeting. The handstamp was used from 1837 to 1840 at the London Chief Office to authorise the exemption from postal charges on letter sent on official Post Office business and the private letters of a few postal officials. There is no connection with the 'Free Franking System', though an authorising signature was required in the bottom left-hand corner.



THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

It is intended that this will appear at the end of October/early November. I have some material in hand but there is a need for articles to be sent to : John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG