

MIDLAND MAIL



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



President: Richard Farman

Chairman:
Derek Smeathers

Treasurer:
Elizabeth Lewis

Secretary:
Eric Lewis

Number 128, January 2003

CONGRATULATIONS

Our congratulations to Eric Lewis whose entry "Payment through the Post, 1782 - 1850" won the nine sheet competition at the Midland Federation's Autumn Convention. It was entered in Eric's name representing the Midland Postal History Society.

NEW MEMBER

We offer a cordial welcome to Matthew Toomey whose postal history interests include London and Reading - both the pre-stamp and Victorian eras.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, 12th April at 12.45 p.m. at St Germain's Church Hall, Portland Road, Birmingham. It will be preceded by a Committee Meeting at 10.45 a.m. Tea and coffee will be available throughout the day and fresh sandwiches will be made to order at lunchtime for those wanting them.

THE ANNUAL AUCTION

This will be held on 12th April starting at 1.45 p.m. In order to distribute the catalogues in good time, particularly to our overseas members, it is necessary that lots are handed in either at the meeting on 15th February or sent to Mrs E Lewis at 27 Rathbone Road, Smethwick B67 5JG in the following week.

Please include full descriptions together with estimated market values and your reserve price, or state that there is no reserve. A gift of surplus material that you may care give to sell for Society funds would be much appreciated.

NOMINATIONS REQUIRED

Eric Lewis' term of office as Secretary ends in April. At the committee meeting in November it was decided to split the position into three, reflecting the tasks that Eric has carried out hitherto. Eric will continue to look after the auction but nominations are sought for a programme secretary and a general secretary who will have to arrange the printing and distribution of *Midland Mail*, among other things. Please pass nominations, along with the name of a seconder to Eric Lewis. Of course, the consent of the person proposed must be obtained.

THE JON BAKER TROPHY

Members are reminded that their votes are now required for what they feel was the best article to appear in *Midland Mail* during 2002. Possible nominations include "*Midland Post Offices opened or closed during 2001*" by Ken Smith (MM124/10), "*Carriages and Coaches by Truck*" by Christopher Beaver MM125/5, "*An Update on some elusive Nottingham Marks*" by Alan Marshall (MM125/7 and MM127/12). There are probably some that I have missed that you feel worthy of the trophy. Whatever, please let me have your votes, preferably by the date of the March meeting.

THE NOVEMBER MEETING

Some fifteen members gathered at Warwick for a meeting billed as "Members' one board displays of *The Content of Letters or Messages on Postcards*." Ten of those present and brought items to show and three were given the chance of an encore, the Chairman having spotted they were carrying enough material to fill a small room. With such a subject, it is not practical to describe everything seen and so your reporter has described just two or three items from each display, picked at random to give a flavour of the afternoon's entertainment.

John Bradnock had two letters of 1745/46 written by the son of the Earl of Belmont to his father, one of which commented on what sounded like saddle soreness after a long ride. (Had he waited forty years, perhaps he could have afforded to use a mail coach?) In fact, an unrelated letter of 1785 made particular mention of "the new Colchester coach" (probably the Norwich mail coach established on 28th March). A letter of 1776 from Lisbon spoke of American privateers attacking shipping and the need for protective convoys. (These are likely to have been John Paul Jones' eastward forays during the War of Independence and illustrate their effectiveness.) David Scott's first offering also concerned war with America but this time in 1814, a purser in the Royal Navy telling his father of the continuance of the fighting. David had a very long cross-written letter of unimaginable complexity and a letter of 1844 from Bishops Castle commenting that some railway shares were now worth (only) what had been paid for them. We especially enjoyed a 1903 postcard from a lady who would not be "a troublesome chaperone" as it took her all her time to look after herself.

Paul Bradshaw included some nice items from Pitcairn. It seems remarkable that, in 1943, anyone would be sailing a private yacht in the Pacific and, according to their postcard, taking a route to avoid the war zone. The card, clearly from an American, was refused and subsequently returned. Another Pitcairn item included a painted feather, a local symbol of good luck. Eric Lewis had a letter of 1791 from the GPO to the postmaster of Ludlow. He was advised that a salary increase, apparently due for several years would be paid - perhaps in the next quarter or, maybe, the quarter after that. The added insult to undoubted injury by expressing the hope he would attend to his duties with punctuality. A modern highlight was a letter, addressed to a Mr Woodward (deceased), specifically inviting Mr Woodward (deceased) to renew his insurance! A letter of 1836 concerned a lad, not stuck in a chimney but sleeping on the job in one. Eric told us that it was four years later that an Act of Parliament finally prohibited the use of child chimney sweeps.

Guy Bridges had an early letter, dated 1660, from Shrewsbury to Derby about raising money to pay off the Army following the accession of Charles II. Another military item, of 1854, related to the South Salopian regiment and what they needed to bring to their assembly. They were not to forget to bring their horses with them. An 1832 letter delved into the problems of correct payment, without overcharging, for conveying a haunch of venison by coach. (One just hopes it wasn't in high summer.) Chris Jackson's contribution included a particularly personal item. Chris' father had served for twenty-five years with the Parochial Church Council of Sheldon Chapel (of Beoley Church, Redditch). Chris had found a complete notice of the appeal to rebuild Sheldon Chapel in 1922 and no other like it was known to exist. He also had the ultimate "snob letter" from the 6th Marquis of Hertford (of Ragley Hall) advising the governors of a school at Broome that he could not attend a presentation to the school's headmaster because he would be shooting - in Windsor Great Park, no less.

Richard Farman's selection was of prisoner's letters or of matters relating to penal servitude. The earliest, to Walter Bagot in 1599, was from a man locked up "in the Sergeant's house at great expense" and pleading for his liberty. A letter of 1762 from Portsmouth made it clear the writer would be sailing for the east Indies the next day - perhaps to make a fortune or serve his time? An intriguing account of a riot at Tamworth described an attack by colliers on a meeting of farmers but the background to such a disturbance remained a mystery to us. Harold Wilson also had an early letter, dated 1680, from Ashbourne which, because there was no direct post, had been sent to a Mr Gibb by private carrier and he had promised to forward it (by post). A letter from Derby to London referred to a visit to Liverpool which had, it seemed, been extended by a mere five year apprenticeship in the "West Indian Service"!

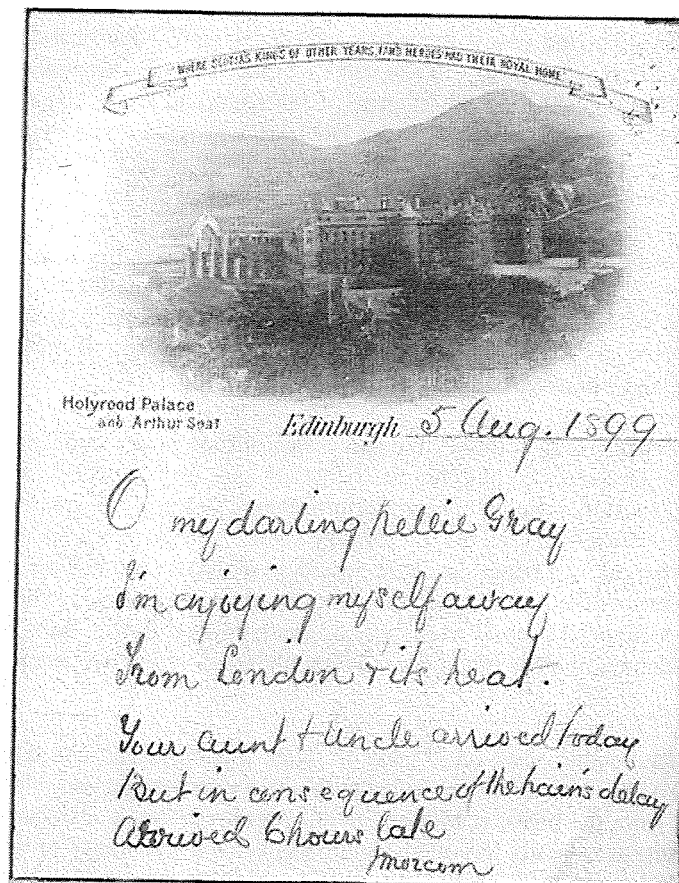
Alan Godfrey - whose contribution was aimed to please Chris Jackson - included a letter from a gentleman seeking a £100 loan to enable him to finish and sell needles. He said he much preferred Studley to Redditch and that "the country, now enclosed, is very pleasant". Doubtless Chris is aware of folk today that share the same preference. John Calladine spent most of his available time delivering an unsolicited lecture on the prophetess Joanna Southcott as background to three letters from the Rev Philip Foley of Oldswinford to followers of the prophetess. The death of a Bishop of Exeter and the madness of King George were attributed to her curses.

Finally, Derek Smeathers showed a letter from another bishop, this time Bishop John Parsons of Peterborough, who (in 1818) was claiming that a letter of his had been illegally opened by cutting round the seal. Yet another cleric, the then Bishop of Llandaff, was writing to Francis Freeling advising him of his forthcoming elevation to the Peterborough bishopric so that his franked letters would be recognised. As if to console any who might have spent some hours reaching warwick by train, he concluded with a letter of 1889 describing a train journey from London to Towcester, with a change of trains at Blisworth, which took all of two hours. It couldn't be done today!

It had been a thoroughly entertaining afternoon and any lack of logical cohesion had been offset by the sheer variety of the offerings on display. The 'encore displays' added to the fun and who can forget Eric Lewis' unbelievable telegram from a farmer to the fire station asking them to come at once as his rick was on fire!

WJC

An item from Eric Lewis' display postmarked 9.30 p.m. on 5th August 1899.



THE DECEMBER MEETING

The 7th December saw our annual gathering at the Bass Museum, Burton-on-Trent. After an excellent lunch we settled down to see Gavin Littaur's "*Great Britain Postal History*". However, before we saw any postal history, Gavin entertained us by playing twenty short pieces of his own composition on a piano supplied by Eric Reynolds.

Gavin was no more than a few sheets into his display when your reporter realised that he was faced with a totally impossible task in trying in a short report to give an account worthy of the display, such was the quality of the material being produced. So what follows is no more than a brief account of a few items that caught my eye from about 150 sheets, each of which was worthy of being described.

Gavin started by saying that he intended to show how people used to think and write and how the postal services developed between the thirteenth century and 1860. The first item was a letter of 1260 written on vellum. This was followed by letters of 1444 and 1459 sent from London to Venice, and showing merchant's marks. Among a number of Corsini letters, showing postage rates, was one of 1570 endorsed "pay the post 4d" which is the earliest recorded British letter showing a postal charge.

A spectacular item was a letter on vellum illuminated in gold sent by King James in 1610 to "only supreme Monarch of Eastene Empire" - the Sultan of Turkey. Also of note was a "Haste Post Haste" letter marked with a gallows, a reminder to the post boy not to loiter.

We saw a number of letters from the Civil war period, showing postal charges. One sent in December 1642 to Edward Heath in Cottesmore, Rutland was endorsed "3 payed/1 unpaid". Another for Prince Rupert at Oxford showed "Hast hast post post hast with speed". Then came a strike of the Bishopmark from the first day of use - 19th April 1661. The handstamps showing the slogans of the Kent and Essex roads are rarely seen, but those displayed by Gavin were really superb strikes. William Dockwra was represented by his signature on a letter and an original Dockwra letter of 6th May 1680 (the earliest recorded letter in the London Penny Post) which was marked "T/2¾", indicating that it had been posted in the Temple office at 2.45 p.m.

From the provinces came examples of the datestamps of Bristol and Exeter from the 1680s and 1690s, the only known example of the "Loughborough Anchor", and a superb strike of the Bingham mailbag seal on a letter of c1805. One letter was sent to "Jeffrey Ryan on top of the mail coach or asleep inside", while another was refused by the maid of the addressee who "gave bad language". Of particular note from the Midlands was a superb strike of the boxed handstamp of the Sutton-in-Ashfield Penny Post.

Gavin then turned to the era of postal reform. We saw a Post Office notice about the introduction of Uniform Fourpenny Postage as well as a number of examples of letters sent in that period, including one from Oxford. Another P.O. notice announced the introduction of Uniform Penny Postage, the first day of which was shown by the "PAID/ONE PENNY" of Bradford used on 10th January 1840. A penny black had been cleaned and reuse. As a result the recipient was charged two pence. A letter posted on 6th May 1840 had the penny black cancelled with a red Maltese Cross while one of the 31st August 1840 was cancelled in black ink. These were the respective first days of use. Amongst other Maltese Crosses were those of Truro in blue, Burton-On-trent in magenta and Wotton-under-Edge in red. Next came a number of covers showing multiples of the twopenny blue. A letter sent to the USA carried six.

There were examples of Mulreadies used on 2nd and 5th May, four days and one day respectively prior to the official first day of use. We saw Mulreadies cancelled by Maltese Crosses in green, blue and, most notably, bright violet ink. The latter was from the office at Market Street. Another example also carried a penny black. Those who are interested in caricatures were not forgotten, Gavin displaying a wide range of these.

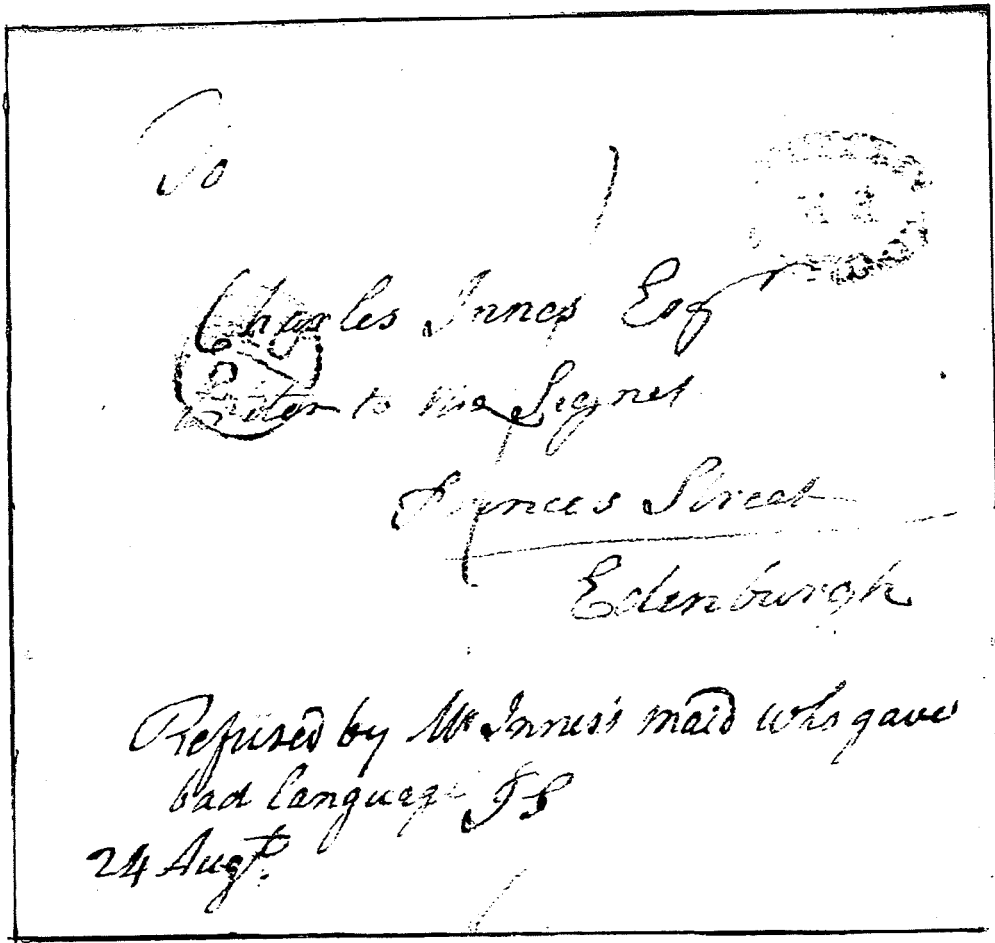
Among a number of missent marks were the oval mark of Leamington cancelling a penny red and the mark of the Railway Office. Among the material dealing with registration were examples of the white wrapper (11th May 1841 to Great Bedwyn) and the green wrapper used in 1846.

Gavin rounded off his display with a brief look at the embossed stationery of 1841.

Derek Smeathers in thanking Gavin said that we had been truly privileged to see such material. The chance to do so does not come very often.

"Refused by Mr Innes's maid who gave bad language"

A cover from Gavin Littaur's display



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THE JANUARY MEETING

Our current meeting place, previously the 'Scout hut' but now possibly the 'Portland Road Philatelic Centre' was notably warm on 11th January, a very cold day, and we were privileged to be given the best display of Birmingham Local Posts, 1650 to 1900, one could ever hope to see. The first part of Eric Lewis' display covered the 'unofficial' local posts, legitimately organised by the Birmingham postmaster from the 1640s, and the official penny post, established in 1793 and continuing until the advent of Uniform Postage in 1839/40. The second part of the display was concerned with letters from local offices after 1840. For most of the 19th century, local offices were not permitted to cancel adhesive stamps but, from the 1880s, firstly three branch offices and then a larger number of sub-offices were given that privilege.

Eric began with a letter of 1650 to Walsall, through Birmingham (where the General Post ended). It had been carried on to its destination by one of the postmaster's unofficial local posts. He showed us other local post letters, including examples from Perry Hall and Northfield. We saw copies of Post Office correspondence relating to the establishment of the official Birmingham Penny Post in 1793, culminating in a notice in Arris' Gazette. There were to be five receiving houses in the town and a further eight around its outskirts. There are no known postmarks from the original town offices. The outlying offices had P.P. numbered stamps for both paid and unpaid charges. These were later replaced by straight line handstamps - many of these are rare. We began at Nos. PP6 and PP7 (Solihull and Knowle) and moved around Birmingham in a clockwise direction. We were shown an 1805 letter from Solihull and two from Knowle, going in the direction of Warwick (since Knowle was in both the Birmingham and Warwick Penny Posts). Continuing around Birmingham, we saw the third oldest recorded letter of the Birmingham Penny Post, dated February 1797, from West Bromwich (PP10) and also bearing a Birmingham straight line stamp. Examples of both the Paid and Unpaid numbered stamps of West Bromwich and Wednesbury, were followed by a Paid stamp, PP13, and this, dated 17th October 1793, is the earliest known Birmingham Penny Post item. The location of the PP13 office is not certain but it was probably Sutton Coldfield. Originally there was no PP12 because it had been intended to allocate the number to Bilston but the inhabitants of Bilston retained their unofficial halfpenny post. Sutton Coldfield therefore subsequently gave up PP13 and adopted PP12. Castle Bromwich, PP14, is often said to have joined the Birmingham Penny Post in 1822 but was, in fact, in the post from the start. We saw an example of its mark; only four are known. When a local office failed to strike a penny post letter, the General Office in Birmingham ensured that the unpaid charge was noted by using its own handstamp and we saw this distinctive mark struck in one of the reddish shades used.

From 1815 to 1836, several new offices were introduced into the Birmingham Penny Post. Tipton used PP8, originally intended for Hales Owen (which also maintained its unofficial halfpenny post). An 1823 example of its paid mark had previously been uniquely recorded but we now saw another of 1833. Brierley Hill joined the Penny Post in 1817 and used PP1 which it struck in shades of red. Oldbury was PP4.

Eric then moved on from the numeral stamps of the country offices to their straight line handstamps. We were shown the distinctive Smethwick Py Post stamp with 'Smethwick' in lower case and the remainder in upper case. We were shown an example of the Oldbury office striking its straight line stamp across an adhesive. Eric commented that all Society displays now seemed to include a Mulready letter sheet so, not to be outdone, he included one cancelled by the PP15 stamp of Handsworth! Erdington joined the Birmingham Penny Post in 1832 but apparently soon broke or lost its handstamp. The office briefly wrote 'Erdington PP' in manuscript and we saw the earlier (seriffed) and later (sans-serif) stamps.

The town offices were reorganised in 1826. The town office numbers now went from a framed No. 1 to No. 7 and we saw them all, including the only recorded example of No. 3. We also saw No. 7 used after 1840 - none of the others were similarly used. Between 1837 and 1840, more outlying offices joined the Birmingham Penny Post and some of these have only one recorded example of their mark. Among those shown were pre-1840 examples from Great Barr, Elmdon and Curd worth (where, after 1840, the receiver put his initials on the adhesive.)

Eric completed the first half of his display with examples of unofficial local posts in the centre of Birmingham. Some of the letters had been carried over a surprisingly short distance and he highlighted two cases where it would surely have been quicker to take the letter to the addressee than to the post office! One letter bore a 3d charge, which seemed difficult to explain, but Eric had found an old newspaper cutting quoting a retired postmaster who confirmed a 3d local post charge to Moseley. Apparently letters going out of town were retained in Birmingham post office until the postmaster sufficient of them to make payment of a messenger worthwhile.

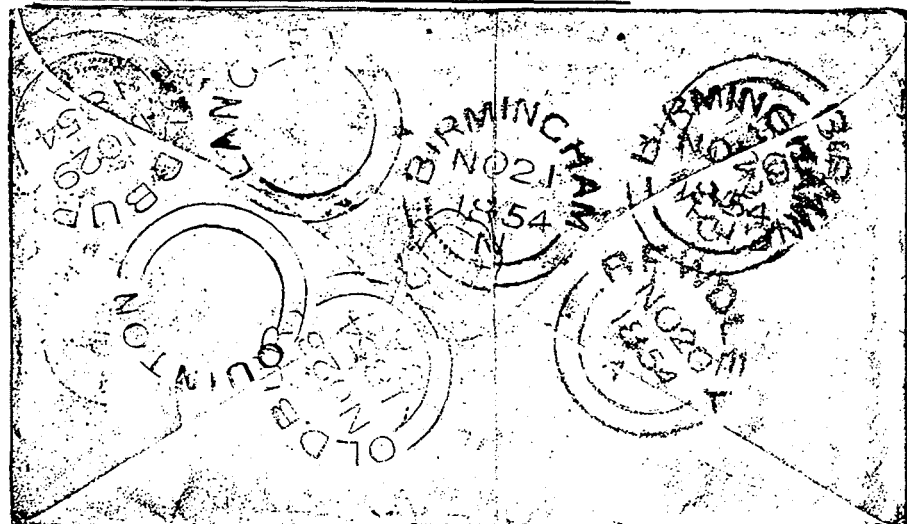
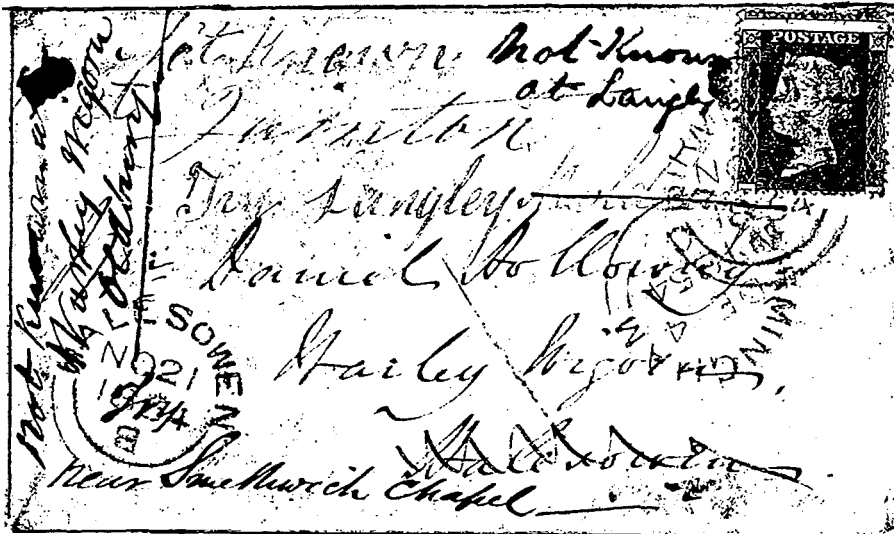
After the meeting had been given a chance to view the first half of the display, Eric continued with "the next sixty years" (after 1840, of course). A number of new receiving houses were opened in the 1840s and 1850s, using straight line handstamps. Among those displayed were Ashted Row (with four different stamps), Bristol Street, Camp Hill, Duddeston Row, Five Ways, Gooch Street, Great Hampton Street (one mark of which was a unique record), Icknield Street (also unique), Ladywood, Lancaster Street, Sand Pits and Wellington Road. There then followed a remarkable selection of undated circular marks. Eric explained that many of these were fine examples selected by the doyen (pre-E&E) of Birmingham postal history, Sidney Raine who had access to a large number of letters then retained by several 19th century Birmingham solicitors. Of particular note was a mis-sent letter (illustrated below) that went in and out of Birmingham four times and which carried the only recorded strikes of the Quinton and Langley UDCs. We were reminded that 'R.O.' in a Birmingham UDC did not stand for 'railway office' but for 'rural office'. Lozells R.O. used a small UDC and Hockley Hill R.O. one of the tiny Cresswell marks. Eric concluded the circular marks with examples of offices using dated stamps intended for Money Order Offices (M.O.O.) or Post Office Savings Bank (P.O.S.B.).

To complete his display, Eric told us of three district offices, Smethwick, Five Ways and Great Hampton Street, allowed to cancel adhesive stamps in the 1880s (when the load on the Birmingham office had become intolerable) and he showed us examples of two. Towards the end of the 19th century, some other Birmingham sub-offices cancelled stamps, including examples shown from Aston Manor, Moseley, Erdington and Highgate.

In his sincere vote of thanks, Derek Smeathers commented, not only on the quality of the material, but on how well Eric had illustrated his display with maps and ephemera. Your reporter (suffering from a geriatric back) would like to add how pleasant it was to view such material from the comfort of an upholstered armchair!

A cover from Bewdley to Warley Wigorn, Halesowen.

After being sent to Halesowen, Langley (a small receiving office under Oldbury) and Quinton, the letter was directed to Warley Wigorn near Smethwick Chapel.



MIDLAND POST OFFICES OPENED OR CLOSED DURING 2002

by Ken Smith

BIRMINGHAM

378, Dudley Road, 18	closed 24/9/2002
Hurst Lane	closed 25/2/2002
Telephone House MSPO	closed 28/10/2002

DERBYSHIRE

Ashford-in-the -Water, Bakewell	(closed 25/7/2001); reopened 10/1/2002
Cutthorpe Road (TSO), Chesterfield	closed 29/5/2002
Eggington, Derby	temporary closure 21/3/2002; reopened 26/9/2002
Hodthorpe, Worksop	temporary closure 4/4/2002; reopened 1/5/2002
Holbrook Road (TSO), Belper	closed 28/5/2002
Low Leighton, Stockport	closed 30/1/2002
Mapperley, Ilkeston	closed 22/5/2002
Palterton, Chesterfield	(closed 30/7/1999); reopened 22/4/2002 (Welfare Social Club)
Walton-on-Trent, Swadlincote	closed 9/8/2002; reopened 2/12/2002

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Acton Turville, Badminton	closed 30/1/2003
Adlestrop, Moreton-in-Marsh	closed 31/10/2002
Moorend (TSO), Cheltenham	renamed Bath Road TSO 2/1/2002
Redbrook, Monmouth	reopened 8/8/2002; (closed c. 1998)
Temple Guiting, Cheltenham	closed 28/6/2002; reopened 7/11/2002
Windrush, Oxford	closed 14/3/2002

HEREFORDSHIRE

Aymestrey, Leominster	closed 28/8/2002
Cleghonger, Hereford	closed 23/8/2002; reopened 16/12/2002 (The Top Shop)
Dilwyn, Hereford	closed 26/7/2002
Eardisland, Leominster	closed 16/8/2002
Gladestry, Kington (in Radnor)	(closed 31/10/2001); reopened 21/11/2002
Eign Street, Hereford	closed 26/6/2002
St Peter's Street, Hereford	closed 9/6/2002) ('Hereford B.O.' relocated from 20, Broad Street to 14/15, St Peter's Street, 10/6/2002)
Michaelchurch Eskley, Hereford	closed 4/1/2002
Pencombe, Bromyard	closed 16/8/2002; reopened in Village Hall 28/11/2002
Risbury, Leominster	closed 30/5/2002; reopened 2/7/2002
Staunton-on-Arrow, Leominster	closed 11/10/2002 (in Village Hall since 1992)
Titley, Kington	closed 21/3/2002; reopened 15/1/2003 (Chestnut Cottage)
Ullingswick, Hereford	closed 24/1/2002

LEICESTERSHIRE

Coalville MSPO	closed 16/10/2002; reopened 17/12/2002 (8-9, Marlborough Square)
Diseworth, Derby	closed 29/5/2002
East Norton, Leicester	closed 2/4/2002
Gaddesby, Leicester	(closed 10/10/2000); reopened 20/6/2002
Goadby Marwood, Melton Mowbray	(closed 3/1/2001); reopened 7/1/2002
Belgrave Boulevard, Leicester	closed 29/5/2002
Lubenham, Market Harborough	(closed 28/6/2000); reopened 10/6/2002
Seagrave, Loughborough	closed 29/4/2002
Thurnby, Leicester	closed 5/8/2002

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Arthingworth, Market Harborough	(closed 22/9/1999); reopened 14/1/2002
Chapel Brampton, Northampton	closed 25/9/2002
Cranford, Kettering	closed 14/8/2002
Farthingstone, Towcester	closed 29/5/2002
Isham, Kettering	closed 23/1/2003
Islip, Kettering	(closed 18/8/1999); reopened 19/6/2002
Laxton, Corby	closed 29/5/2002 (or by November 2001)
Collingwood Road (TSO), Northampton	closed c. 31/5/2002
Barry Road (Coop Store), Northampton	opened 18/10/2002, replacing the two offices below
Abington Part (TSO), Northampton	closed 16/10/2002
Wellingborough Road (TSO), N'ampton	closed 16/10/2002
Pury End, Towcester	closed 11/3/2002
Spratton, Northampton	(closed 13/12/2001); reopened 11/2/2002
Sulgrave, Banbury	closed 28/8/2002
Turweston, Brackley (in Bucks)	closed 15/1/2002
Cedar Way, Wellingborough	replaced by Northern Way, 9/1/2003
Whittlebury, Towcester	closed 11/3/2002

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Upper Nottingham Road, Mansfield	closed 12/10/2002
Clifton Village (TSO), Nottingham	closed 26/6/2002
Edingley Avenue (TSO), Nottingham	closed 15/5/2002
Gedling (TSO), Nottingham	closed 28/10/2002
Wheeler Gate (TSO), Nottingham	closed 19/1/2002
Rampton, Retford	(closed 27/5/1999); reopened 29/4/2002
Sutton, Retford	closed 2/4/2002; reopened in Village Hall 23/1/2003
Warsop Vale, Mansfield	closed 3/1/2002
Hawthorne Ave, Shirebrook, Mansfield	closed 23/12/2002

OXFORDSHIRE

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Wallingford	closed 26/6/2002
Bucknell, Bicester	(closed 30/8/2000); reopened in Village Hall 3/10/2002
Drayton, Banbury	closed 20/3/2002
The Broadway, Kidlington	closed 9/1/2002; reopened 17/10/2002
Iffley (TSO), Oxford	(closed 16/10/2000); reopened 24/1/2002
North Aston, Bicester	closed 30/12/2002
Upper Tadmarton, Banbury	closed 31/10/2002 (Village Hall)

RUTLAND

Edith Weston, Oakham	closed 9/1/2002
North Luffenham, Oakham	to close 12/2/2003

SHROPSHIRE

Buildwas, Telford	closed 7/8/2002
Dorrington, Shrewsbury	closed 23/12/2002; to reopen 6/2/2003 (Horse Shoes Inn)
Dudlestone Heath, Ellesmere	closed 23/1/2002; reopened 5/2/2002
Ightfield, Whitchurch	(closed 22/11/2001); reopened 26/9/2002
Lilleshall, Newport	closed 5/7/2002
Steventon Road (TSO), Ludlow	closed 6/3/2002
Upton Magna, Shrewsbury	(closed 28/8/1996); reopened 31/10/2002
Wentnor, Bishop's Castle	closed 28/3/2002; reopened 16/7/2002

STAFFORDSHIRE

Acton Trussell, Stafford	(closed 30/3/2001); reopened 22/5/2002 (Community Centre)
Bramshall, Uttoxeter	closed 26/6/2002
Cotes Heath, Stafford	(closed 28/11/2001); reopened 21/3/2002
Glascote, Tamworth	closed 26/10/2002
Milford, Stafford	closed 9/1/2002; reopened 7/3/2002 (Home Farm)
Oulton, Stone	closed 29/5/2002
King Street, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent	closed 2/7/2002
Talke, Stoke-on-Trent	closed 27/11/2002
Wedges Mills, Cannock	closed 24/4/2002

WARWICKSHIRE

Berkswell, Coventry	(closed May 2001); reopened 27/6/2002
Corley, Coventry	closed 27/4/2002; reopened 18/11/2002
Fenny Compton, Southam	(closed 27/10/2000); reopened 26/9/2002 (Village Hall)
Frankton, Rugby	closed 22/8/2002
The Parade, Leamington Spa	closed 3/8/2002
Ratley, Banbury	closed 26/2/2002
Willoughby, Rugby	closed 22/5/2002
Wood Lane, Atherstone	(closed 26/4/2000); reopened 1/11/2002 (?)
Tanworth-in-Arden, Solihull	closed 22/1/2003

WEST MIDLANDS

Hillmorton Road (TSO), Coventry	closed 15/8/2002
Moseley Avenue (TSO), Coventry	closed 26/7/2002
Mount Nod (TSO), Coventry	closed 2/5/2002
Westbourne Street (TSO), Walsall	replaced by The Butts 2/10/2002
Harvest Rd (TSO) Rowley Regis Warley	closed 16/11/2002 (originally announced as closing 31/8/2002)

WORCESTERSHIRE

Abberley, Worcester	closed 27/4/2002; reopened 25/7/2002
Cleobury Road, Bewdley	closed 8/6/2002
Bradley Green, Redditch	closed 29/5/2002
Callow End, Worcester	closed 23/3/2002
Clent, Stourbridge	(closed 26/9/2001); reopened 1/2/2002
Cookhill, Alcester	closed 31/12/2002

It is likely that other post offices have closed during 2002, without by becoming aware of it. Reports from members are always welcome, and also newspaper cuttings relating to post offices as well as 'last day' certificates of posting. In 2003 it seems that Town Sub-Offices are under threat, with reports suggesting that up to a quarter of all TSOs may be closed.

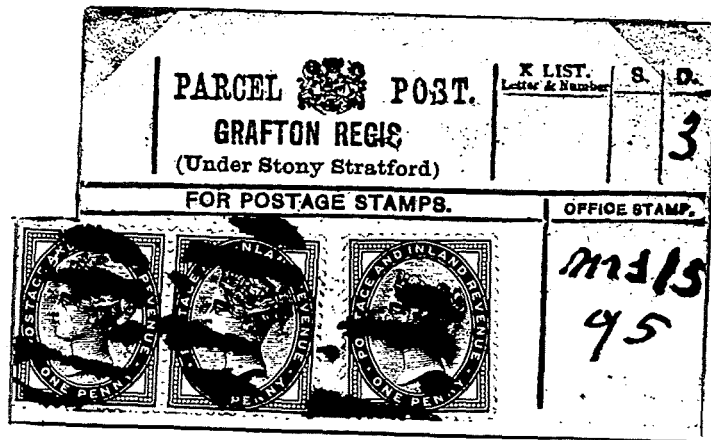
The closure dates given by the Post Office are sometimes the last working day, but often are the "next working day after closure" as I discovered when I tried to visit some of them on their last day. For example, the last day at Cookhill, Alcester was quoted as 6/1/2003 - a Monday. When I visited I discovered the office had closed officially at 9 a.m. that day! Furthermore, according to a notice in the window, opening had been on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays only since October 2002. The previous Wednesday was New Year's Day so the actual 'last day' must have been Tuesday, 31st December. There was no closure notice displayed in the window; presumably it must have been inside the office.

Windrush, Oxford (though in Gloucestershire) was a surprise to me as I thought it had closed years ago. In fact, it had been open in recent years on Thursdays, 1 to 2.30 p.m., using a SID (self-inking datestamp). It closed on 14/3/2002. But did it close at 2.30p.m. on that day, or at 1 p.m.?

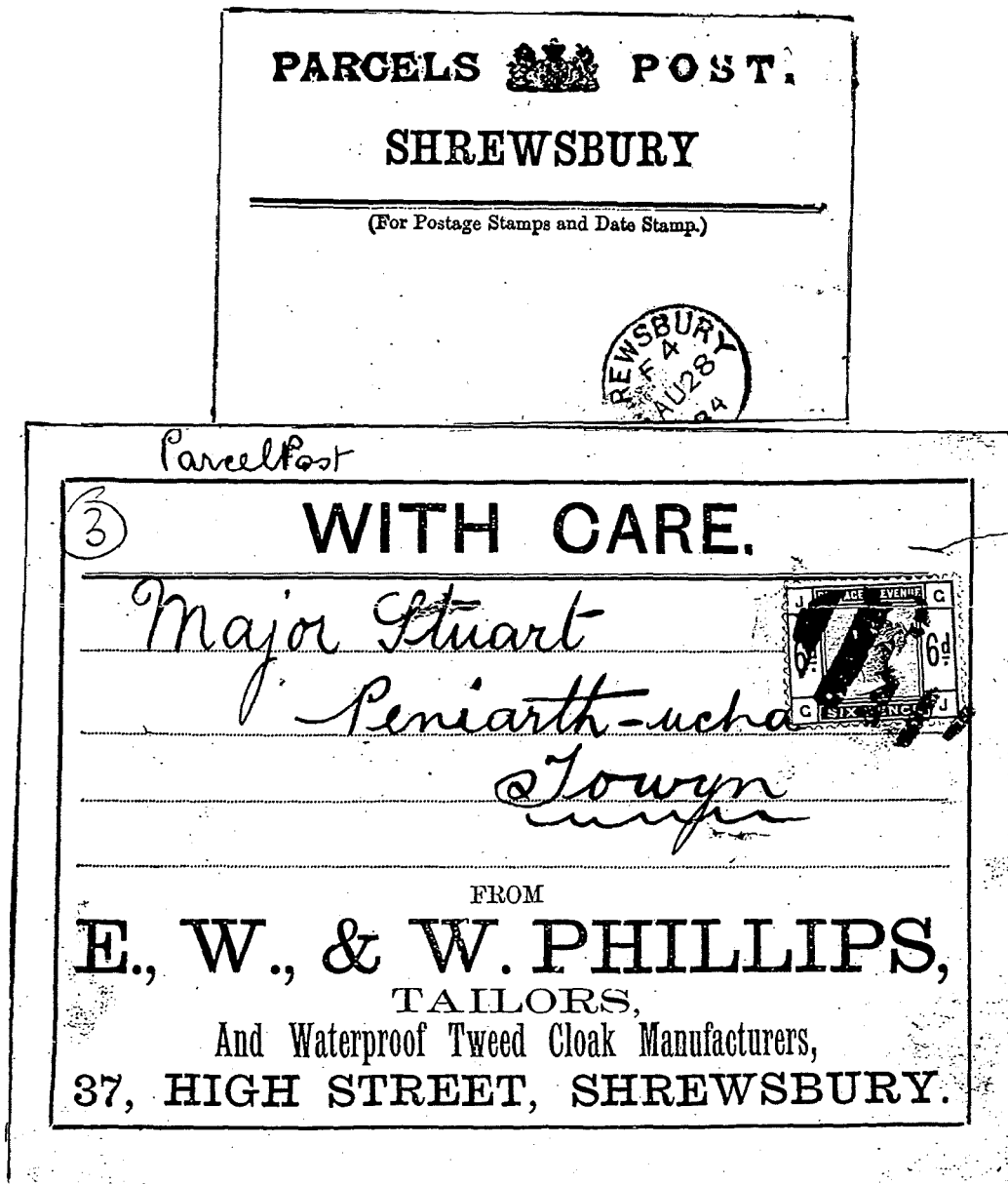
Any further information, please, to Ken Smith, 3 St Agatha's Close, PERSHORE WR10 1DQ.

PARCEL POST LABELS

I have received two responses to Roger Broomfield's article in MM127/8 about the use of 'dumb cancellers' on parcel post labels. Derek Smeathers has sent a copy of a Grafton Regis label in use in May 1895. At the time the village office did not have a datestamp.



Brian Atkins has sent a "PARCELS POST" label from Shrewsbury used in August 1884.



MORE THAN POSTAL HISTORY

by Derek Smeathers

When we acquire a new item of postal history, we probably do so because of one particular aspect of it, the postmark or the unusual rates or possibly the contents of the letter itself. The item goes into the collection - and may not be seen again for weeks or even months. This was brought to my mind for the second time recently when I saw in the local newspaper the announcement of an elderly lady's death.

In February 1994, I gave a talk on postal history to a village history society with a display of early letters from that area. During this display, a lady in the audience asked whether I had any letters "written on a sheet one way, and then across sideways ...". I said this was called 'cross-hatch' and no, I had not included one in the exhibit. A minute later, I remembered that I had been to the Record Office that morning with a letter recently purchased, and that it was a cross-hatch letter which I still had in my pocket. I apologised to the lady and said I would put it on the display table for her to look at. When most of the people had gone, I noticed this lady still sitting in her seat looking rather pale. "Did you see that letter?" I asked. She nodded and I then saw she had it in her hand. She came over to me and said "What an astonishing coincidence!"

I should say here that the letter was dated 1847, from a village some ten miles north of where our meeting took place, and was addressed to someone named Irby in Sydney, New South Wales, and readdressed there within Australia to Clarence River. The name meant nothing to me - hence my visit to the Record Office which incidentally was fruitless.

The lady introduced herself as Miss Stockdale, a name I did recognise as an old Northants family. Then she told me why she was so surprised to see my letter. Her great uncle had married Caroline Irby and Caroline's two brothers had emigrated to Australia in the early 1840s. My letter was addressed to one of them and sent by Caroline's sister! The coincidence did not end there; their descendants still lived at Clarence River, and Miss Stockdale had returned from a prolonged stay with them only three weeks before our meeting! No wonder she looked pale! By the time we had got this far in the story, the hall was empty and the caretaker was about to lock up. Miss Stockdale said she would send me a copy of her family tree and I promised to send her a copy of the letter and to check my collection for anything else with connections to her family.

Her family tree soon arrived, showing several other well-known names. I was delighted to find that among my collection were no less than six other letters of interest - one to Australia three years later, others between the sisters Caroline and Emma, and one to Lady Sarah de Crespigny who was their grandmother - the first name on the family tree in the 18th century.

All this was brought back to me recently when I saw that Margaret Stockdale had died at the grand old age of 90. I still have her letter saying how glad she was that she went to that meeting and saw my letter. So am I.

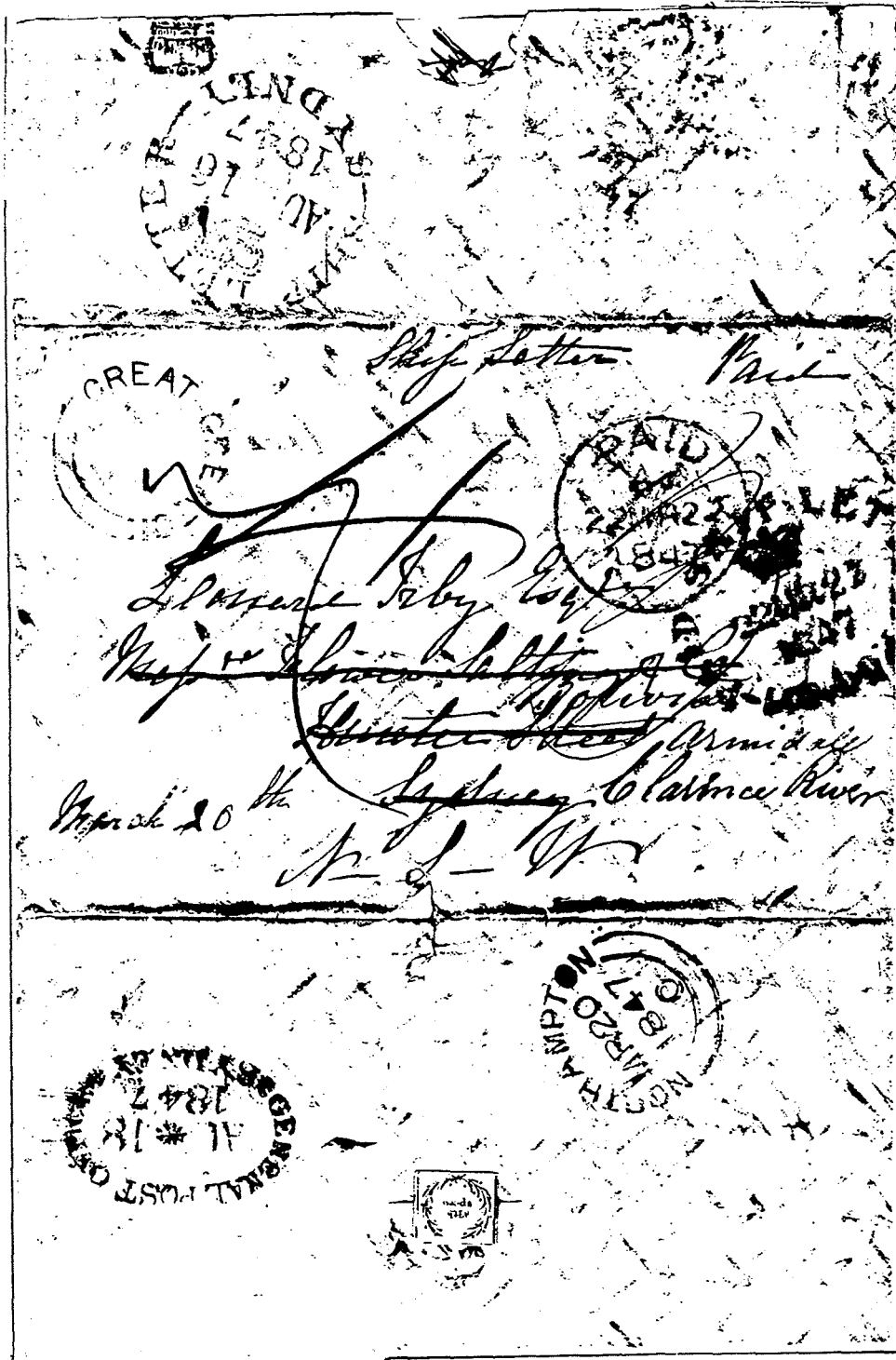
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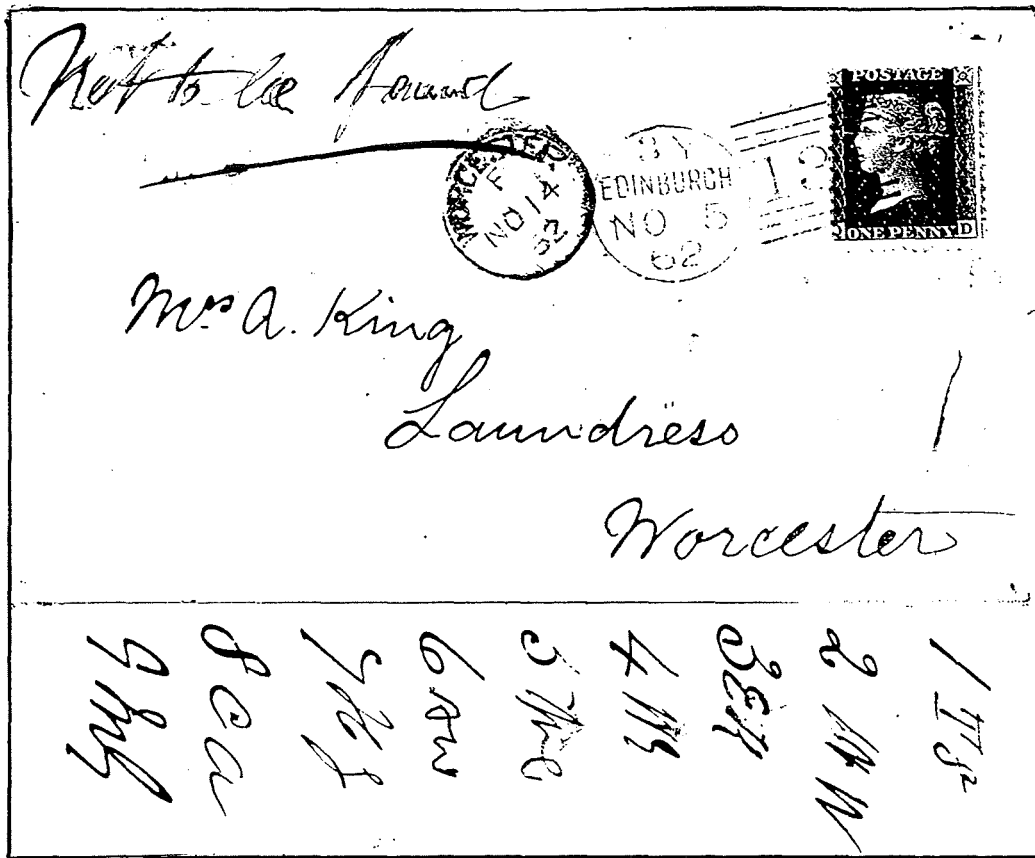
The letter written at Cottesbrooke Rectory by Emma Irby to her brother Leonard. There was no post office at Cottesbrooke until 1852 and the letter was dealt with at Creton where the undated handstamp was struck in black. The Ship Letter rate of 8d was written in orange crayon (too faint to be seen on this copy). At Sydney, an inland charge of 4d was shown, but the letter was redirected so a further 3d rate was added. From Cottesbrooke to Australia took more than 4½ months. The pink wafer which sealed the letter reads "with speed".



NOT TO BE FOUND

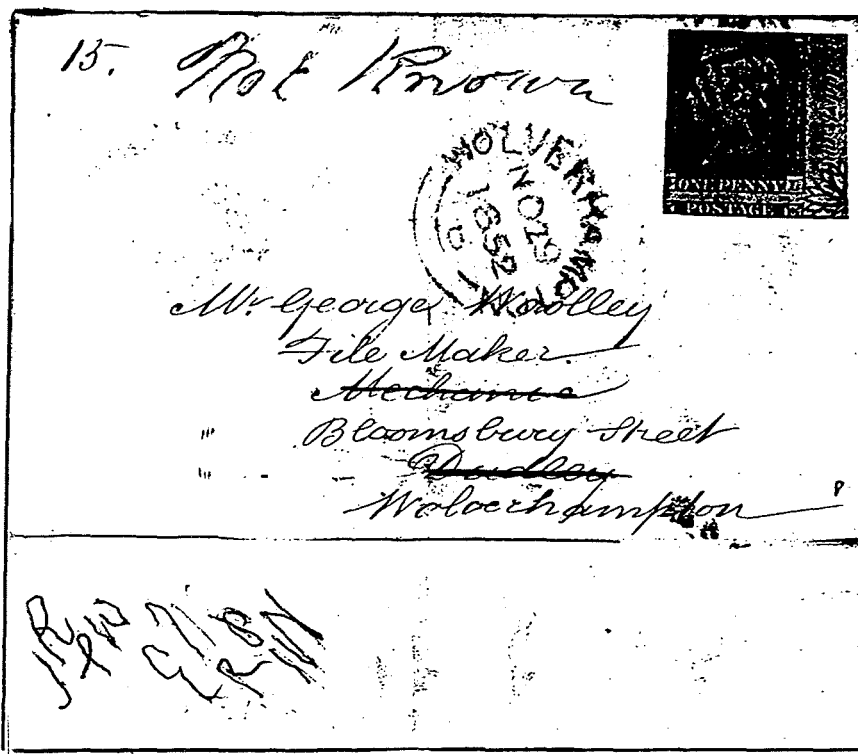
by Geoff Wood

A letter from Edinburgh to Worcester tested the knowledge of eight local postmen who all initialled the reverse to show that they had failed in their search for the elusive Mrs A. King.

**NOT KNOWN**

by Geoff Wood

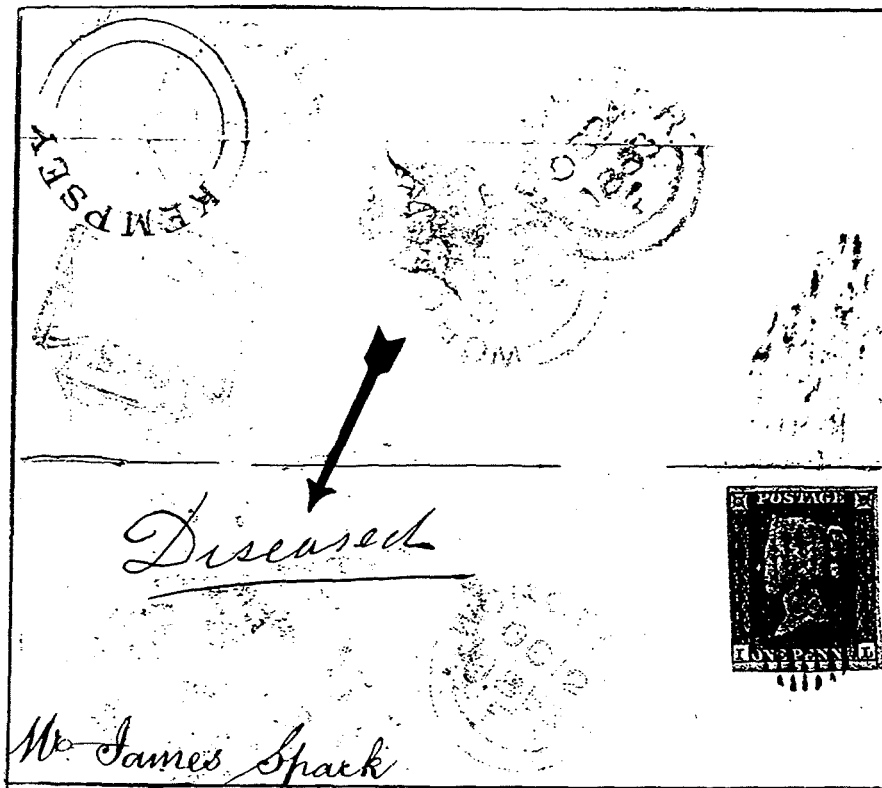
No marks for the postal clerk who roughly cut this penny red from an imperforate sheet. Have you seen worse? Five postmen initialled the letter to indicate it could not be delivered on their particular walk.



DISEASED OR DECEASED

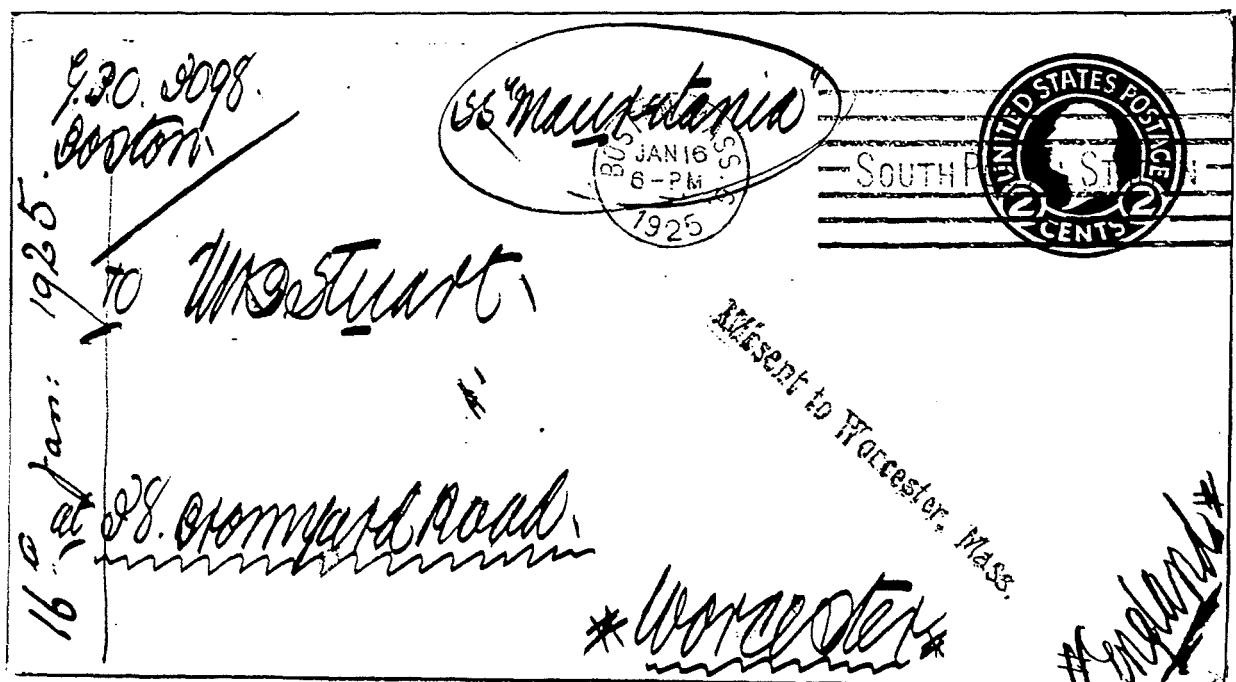
by Geoff Wood

A cover sent from London to Worcester which shows the Kempsey UDC in blue and the Worcester datestamp with double arcs and which the addressee never received because he was 'Diseased'.

**MISSENT TO WORCESTER. MASS. USA**

by Geoff Wood

A cover sent from Boston, Mass to Worcester England endorsed "ss Mauritania" incorrectly sent overland to Worcester, Massachusetts, USA.



General Post-Office,
February 8, 1799.

SIR,

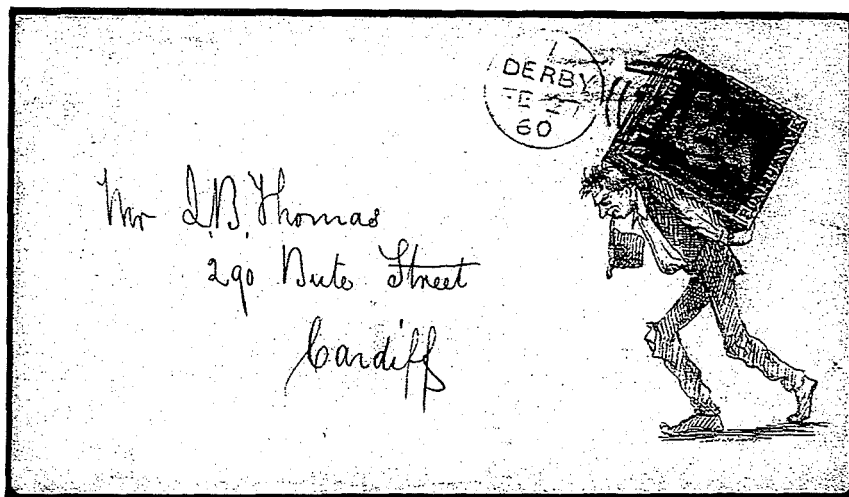
THE late heavy Fall of Snow having occasioned great Irregularity in the Mail Coach System,—I have the Commands of my Lords the Postmaster-General to direct, as the Roads are now open, that you do not delay longer in Towns than the Time allowed by the Time Bill; that you do not stop at Inn or Alehouses, but that you use all your Time on the Road to the End of *your* Journey,—and that you give Orders to Horsekeepers to have the Horses ready harnessed at the Time the Coach ought to arrive, and should they not, that you assist them as much as your other Duty will allow. And that you do every Thing in your Power to get your Coach regular. A proper Notice will be taken of your Conduct.

THOMAS HASKER,
Surveyor & Sup^t. of M. C.

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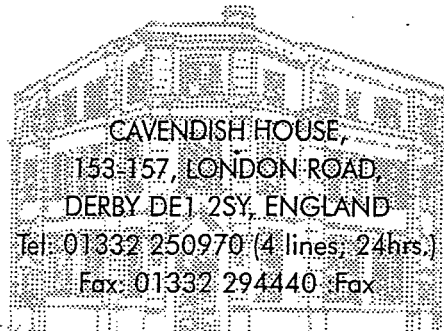


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A JOLLEY GOOD LETTER

by John Calladine

I think there is a simple answer to Brian Atkin's query in MM127/17. He asked why a two-line BRIDGE/NORTH mark was being used on 2nd August 1784, rather than a first type mileage mark. The evidence indicates that mileage marks were not introduced until late in 1784 following an Act of Parliament that became effective on 31st August. The reasons for this will, we hope, be cogently explained in the introduction to the Society's new publication on the subject of 'Midland Counties Mileage Marks and Mail Routes to London, 1784-1840'.

However Brian has made the point that he recorded a Bridgnorth mileage mark in the collection of Dr E.C. Druce on a letter dated 30th March 1784. There is a great danger in saying that this is "impossible" but the most likely explanation is that the year - or even the month - was mis-read. There have been several claims to mileage marks dated before September 1784 but, after checking them, not one claim has been upheld, either within or outside the Midlands. In fact, any date earlier than the beginning of October would be a find.

No, the likely answer to Brian's query is that the Bridgnorth postmaster was using the two-line stamp one would have expected him to have used in August 1784. Even if the writer had apparently dated his letter in March, one would be very sceptical of its veracity.

THE UNDATED CIRCULAR MARKS OF THE MIDLAND COUNTIES

It is now six years since the Society published the 4th edition of its book on *The Undated Circular Marks of the Midland Counties*. Since then, a few members have kept the Co-ordinating Editor informed of marks they have come across, previously unreported used, or, more commonly, of date extensions they have noted. Since there is no probability that a new edition of the book will be published in the short term, several members have said they would like to know what has turned up in their county since the book was published. It is therefore proposed to include a comprehensive amendment list in a future issue of *Midland Mail*.

It is likely that many of us have acquired UDCs for our collections in the past six years. Everyone is asked to make a special effort to dig them out, note the dates and advise the Co-ordinating Editor, *not later than the March meeting*. Remember to include the *type*, the *proof book reference* (if known) and the *ink colour* when advising of a new usage date. Information should be sent to John Calladine, 5 Skillins, Kington St Michael, Chippenham SN14 6RL or to his e-mail address (john.calladine@ukgateway.net). If all that is too much trouble, please phone him on 01249 758148. We hope for an early and energetic response.

THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

First of all, I must apologise for the late production of this issue, but I have been dogged by a spell of poor health. I intend that the next edition will appear towards the end of March. The nature of the contents will depend on what members submit in the meantime. I have two major unfinished articles. Unfortunately, when Archives were open during the Christmas holiday, I was not well enough to go there and I now see that it is intended to close Archives for a period of time to allow alterations to the premises to be made. Elsewhere in this issue Geoff Wood and Derek Smeathers (and I thank them for their contributions) have shown that we all have covers in our collections that would be of interest to others and about which we can write one or two lines. So, if you want *Midland Mail*, please send contributions to:

John Soer, 51d Barkham Road, Wokingham RG41 2RG

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

On **15th February** we meet, starting at 1.30 p.m., at the Collingwood Centre, Great Barr when the afternoon will be devoted to members' one board displays on "*Undeliverable or Redirected Mail*". This meeting will be held in conjunction with the Streetly Philatelic Society's annual fair.

A copy of the leaflet produced by the Streetly Society should accompany this edition but those travelling by car will find it useful to consult the map opposite which shows the position of the Collingdon Centre in relation to Junction 7 of the M6.

For those travelling by public transport from the centre of Birmingham, the quickest bus route is the number 33 which leaves Dale End opposite McDonalds every six minutes. The bus will show Pheasey as its destination and the journey time is about 35 minutes. The fare is 95 pence (no change is given so have the exact fare ready). The location of Dale End is shown on the lower map opposite.

We visit **Worcester** on **15th March** when Godfrey Townsend and Albert Bayliss will display "*Oxfordshire*". This meeting will be held in conjunction with the Worcester Society's annual fair at Oldbury Park Primary School. A leaflet on how to find the venue is enclosed.

Our Secretary has received a proof copy of an impressive twenty-seven page booklet which will be available at the fair. He notes that the number of dealers has increased to no less than thirty-four so come along in plenty of time! Our Society thanks the Worcester Society for a whole page write up on our Society in the booklet free of charge. The booklet also contains a similar page on the Midland Philatelic Federation although the event is a Three Counties Convention.

To find the bus station from Foregate Street railway station (not Shrub Hill) turn left from the station exit into the main street, take the second turning on the right which is Angel Street, go along to Angel Place which leads to the bus station. The bus required is the number 26

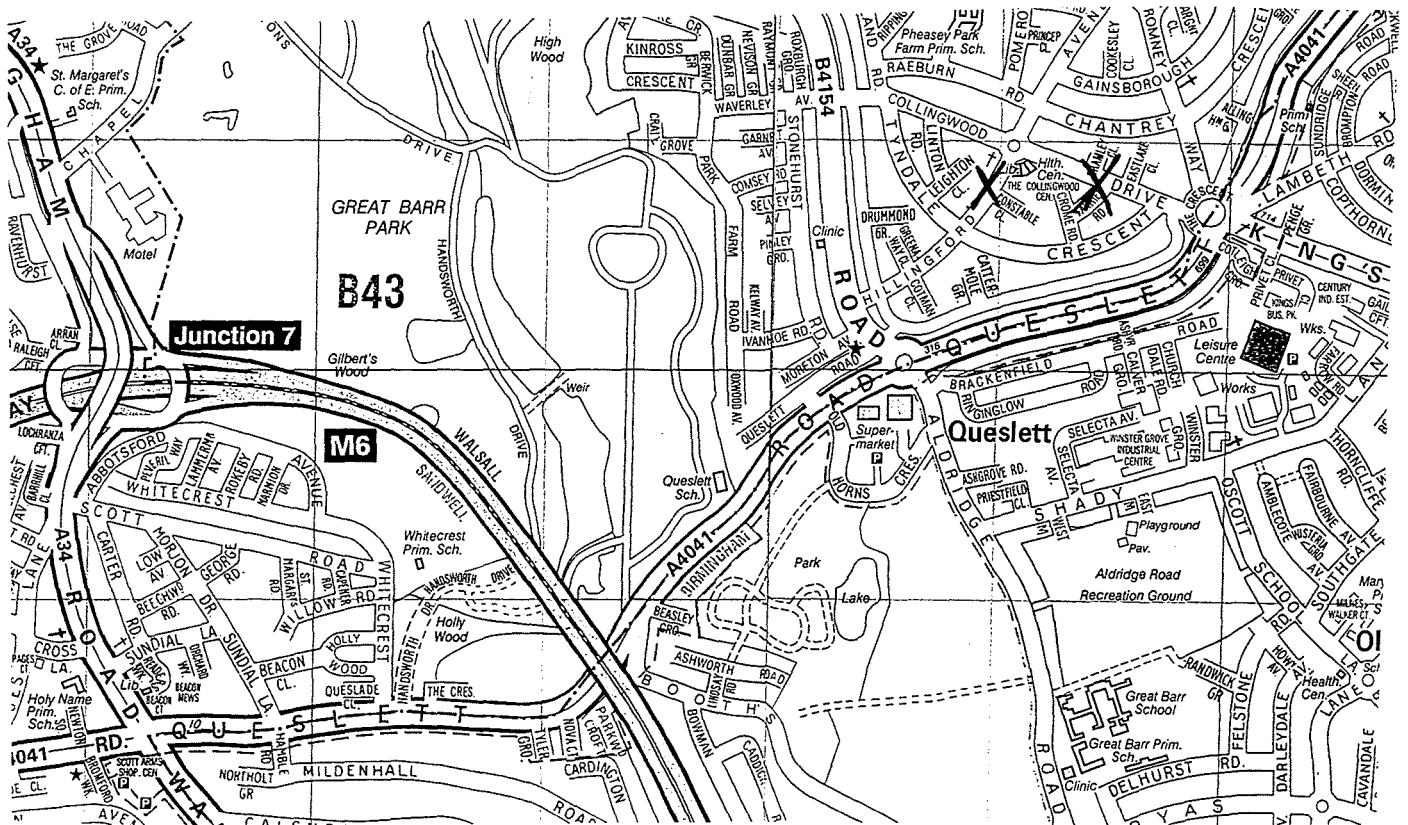
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We were pleased to provide free of cost, other than transport and tuning, the top of the range Yamaha piano used by Gavin Littaur at the Society's December Christmas gathering at the Bass Museum.

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FROM SNOW HILL
STATION WALK
THROUGH GRT
WESTERN ARCADE
AND FOLLOW MAP

