MIDLAND MAIL

THE JOURNAL OF THE MIDLAND (GB) POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

President: Derek Smeathers

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Programme Secretary: Richard Farman (01283 566515)

Number 163, January 2010

NEW MEMBER

We extend a cordial welcome to Peter Leach of Hereford who collects the 1844 type of cancellations of England and Wales as well as the postal history of Herefordshire.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Chris Jackson whose entry '*Bromsgrove Undated Circles*' won the postal history competition and was also judged to be 'Best in Show' in the Individual Competitions at the MPF Convention in October. In the same class Bryan Jones obtained a silver-gilt with his '*Civil Censorship in Figi in WWII*' Alan Godfrey won the social philately class with an entry '*Angel Delight*'.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

On **13th February** we meet at the Black Country Museum, Dudley when, starting at **1.30 pm**, the meeting will be devoted to members' one board displays on '*WWI or WWII Civilian or Military Mail*'.

Then on **17th March** our meeting, which begins at **1.30 pm** will be held in conjunction with the Streetly Society's Fair at the Collingwood Centre, Great Barr. The subject of members' one board displays will be '*Postal Stationery Postcards or Postcards*'. There will be a committee meeting starting at 11 am.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND AUCTION

These will be held on **17th April** at St Germain's Church Hall, Portland Road, Birmingham. The AGM will begin at 1pm and the auction will follow promptly at 1.30 pm. Viewing of auction lots will take place from 11 am.

Members are reminded that lots should be sent to Eric Lewis, preferably by 9th January, but definitely no later than 13th February. Eric Lewis, 27 Rathbone Road, Smethwick B67 5JG.

THE SOCIETY RULES

The committee has recently completed a review of the current rules of the Society. A revised draft has been agreed and a copy, now the Society Constitution, is enclosed with this issue.

The aim is to ensure that the rules fully meet the needs of the Society. To this end there has been some re-ordering of the content to provide a better 'flow'. The numbers which constitute a quorum for meetings and decision making have been included. Also, new clauses have been added to provide for Honorary Life Membership and to cover any matter not specifically mentioned. The 'rules' governing the award of the Jon Baker Trophy have also been added.

It is proposed to present the revised draft for formal agreement at the April 2010 Annual general Meeting. The library rules are being revised in a similar format.

THE NOVEMBER MEETING.

The theme of our meeting on 14th November was '*Something from the County Catalogue*". Thirteen members and two guests met at Carr's Lane and after opening notices we were entertained by nine members who had brought displays. Alan Godfrey began the proceedings with material from Stratford-on-Avon. A letter of 1787 with a two-line '95 STRATFORD/ON AVON'- addressed to Marlow had been redirected to Brighton gaining a '32 HIGH/ WICOMB' in the process. This was followed by a range of straight-line and mileage marks including the short lived '99' from 1823.

Guy Bridges brought 'Missent' marks of Shropshire, starting with an 1815 boxed mark of Shrewsbury, along with the only known copy struck in red in 1827. Missents of Shifnal and Oswestry followed with various only known copies in particular colours. Richard Farman displayed Newcastle Penny and 5th Clause Posts. He explained the difficulty in identifying the actual charge for 5th clause post as letters were free in that and the general post whereas in the Penny Post they were chargeable. The Penny Post receiving houses extended up to number 14 although not all numbers are known. A June 1839 cover had the only 5th Clause stamp in black and was used after that type of post had finished.

Roy Summers showed a superb Wolverhampton skeleton from 1845 on a letter to Stratford and followed it with an equally outstanding framed oval Missent mark of Wolverhampton' on an 1826 entire to Sheffield. A first day Uniform Fourpenny Post letter, a 'time weary' (Roy's description) 2d Mulready sent from Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth and a Wolverhampton Market Place handstamp on a registered letter to Sheffield from 1876 completed his display.

Mick Gill covered Sutton in Ashfield Penny Post and showed a superb 1d black on cover from 1841 cancelled with the penny post handstamp. A UDC from 1842 and a '141 MANS/FIELD' mileage mark on a 1¼ ounce letter to London followed. Alan Marshall showed mail coming into Nottinghamshire. An 1800 straight-line mark of Leicester was followed with a Bristol 122 circular mileage together with a 'Too Late' from the same city. Items from Southwell, March and Greenock were followed by an 1839 Bristol Penny Post and the display ended with a Seaton Carew UDC.

Chris Jackson showed a nine sheets of Tenbury including all the marks in the County Catalogue. It started with a 'plague year' letter from Tenbury with a Bishop mark the only postal marking and included both a Mulready and a 1d black and finished off with 3 and 4 barred duplexes. Eric Lewis showed the Birmingham Town Office handstamps numbers 1 to 7 starting in 1826 with Fiveways, Gt Hampton St and Lancaster St. Coleshill St. Deritend, Bristol St followed. The final office of Sandpits was very late in being established. Derek Smeathers showed the village marks of Northamptonshire starting with UDC's of Byfield, Aynho, Middleton Cheney (in red) and Bozeat. Straight lines from Braunston (in pink!) Weedon, Long Buckby and West Haddon followed and the final sheet showed an 1853 UDC of Wilbarston.

After time to view the first displays, the President decided to reverse the order in the second half. This meant he was first up, this time with Mulreadys including one from postmaster of Wellingborough and a 2d Mulready from Oundle. Penny Pink envelopes showing the two coloured threads which should have been through the stamp but were often nowhere near. He finished off with postcards including a first day postcard from 1st October 1870, a second type addressed to Mr Death which had been returned 'Deceased'(!!) and a ½d postcard uprated for foreign usage by adding a 1d stamp (¼d overpaid).

Eric continued with Birmingham local posts this time unofficial ones. Selly Oak in 1838, followed by Small Heath, Ward End and Yardley the next year. A cover which showed the 3d local post to Moseley charge, from Wolverhampton to B'ham charged 4d plus 3d local post to Moseley and a Newhall St to Canon St (just round the corner) charged 1d.

Chris had brought Bewdley town, he showed 23 of the 24 listed marks together with 4 new marks which will appear in the new Midlands BCC. Alan put up Bingham including 1795 to Bristol and the very unusual 1809 BInGHAM. A letter to Holme Pierpoint without charge and several straight line dated local post handstamps. Mick started with UDC's from Basford and the Isle of Man following them with Worksop mileage marks and Penny Posts finishing with a Worksop skeleton of 1833 on a cover to Australia with 1/- green embossed stamp.

Richard Farman showed the remainder of the Newcastle Penny and 5th Clause Posts, beginning with two 5th clause letters from the first year without any markings, and showed the 5th clause handstamp in various colours. A redirected cover Greenock to Glasgow was charged 3/1½d plus 1/6½ a total of 4/8d. Alan Godfrey ended the afternoon with Stratford-on-Avon marks including an 1840 oval 'Paid at Stratford A', a large framed Missent in oval in black, blue and red. The Penny Post receiving houses of Feckenham, Wellesbourne and Bidford finished the display.

We had enjoyed an excellent afternoon which, although not always adhering to the title of '*From the County Catalogue*', had been fascinating and interesting in many different ways.

Editor's Note: My thanks to Chris Jackson for providing this report of what was clearly an entertaining afternoon.

THE DECEMBER MEETING

On 5th December we met, for the second time, at Sharp's Pottery Museum, Swadlincote. The morning saw a wide range of standing displays from members; there was even a fine display of line-engraved material. After an excellent buffet lunch, our speaker in the afternoon was Mike Roberts of Ilkley whose subject was '*Scilly Islands*'.

Mike began by setting the location with the aid of a number of maps and explained that there were five inhabited islands. St Mary's first had a post office in 1804 and was followed in later years by Tresco (1870), St Martin's (1879), St Agnes (1880) and Bryher (1880). Next came postcards of the various lighthouses, The 'Outer Circle' consisted of the Bishop Rock, the Wolf Rock and the seven Sisters, while Round Island and Penninis comprised the 'Inner Circle'. These were followed by postcards and photographs of the various mailboats used in the Scilly Isles. These included the RMS Lyonesse (1818-1916), RMS Peninnis (1918-1926) and RMS Scillonian (III) which has been in use from 1977 to the present day. An unusual cover, carried on board RMS Scillonian, had been marked with the ship cachet 'SCILLONIAN'.

The earliest cover in Mike's Scilly Isles collection was sent to London on 25th September 1832 and was postmarked in Penzance on the 26th. Arrival in London was on the 28th September. The first postal marking from the islands was a straight-line 'SCILLY' which was in use from 1804 to 1840. We saw two covers carrying this very scarce mark. The first, sent from St Mary's to London, was charged at a triple rate of 3s/3d which was made up of three times the 1/- rate from Penzance to London plus three times the packet rate of 1d from St Mary's to Penzance. The second cover was sent from St Martin's to London in May 1839 at a cost of 1/1.

A letter sent from St Mary's to London on 29th March 1841 carried a penny black and was shipped to Penzance by the 'Lord Wellington'. The contents concerned the sinking of the steamship Thames in January 1841 with the loss of 60 lives. This was followed by a number of covers showing the '610' numeral cancellation along with the circular date stamp 'SCILLY'.

A letter sent from Jakarta (Batavia) to London in March 1845 passed through St Mary's. The ship carrying the letter, the 'Straat Sundra' was reported to off the Scilly Isles on 23rd July 1845, and later departed for Amsterdam. The letter was treated as consignee mail and put into the post on St Mary's. On arrival in London on 30th July, it was treated as unpaid UK mail and charged twopence. Another overseas letter which passed through St Mary's was sent from Montevideo to Liverpool in July 1860 on the ship Ranneys. In this case a penny red, which was cancelled by the '610' numeral handstamp, was put on the letter.

In the next section we saw a variety of nineteenth century mail. An unpaid letter from St Mary's to Perth was charged twopence on arrival. A one penny letter card sent to Plymouth in July 1893 was cancelled by a superb strike of the vertical '610' handstamp. Inward mail was represented by a letter of 1875 from Stettin to the German Consulate in Scilly. We also saw a number of items from the 'Off Islands' of St Martin's, St Agnes, Tresco and Bryher which were bagged up locally and then cancelled in Penzance..

The next frame was devoted to the wreck of the SS Schiller which on 7th May 1875 hit rocks ¼ mile east of the Bishop's Rock lighthouse. Most of the crew and passengers perished and this was the worst maritime disaster of the nineteenth century in the Scilly Isles. Of particular interest was a letter sent on 23rd July 1874 from Harlestone, Norfolk to New Zealand where it arrived on 26th September. Unfortunately, the addressee could not be found so on 15th March 1875 it was returned in a bag on board the Schiller. The letter carried the boxed mark 'Saved from the wreck of/ the Schiller', the second line being in manuscript.

Mike then showed us material from the different island post offices. In addition to the usual types of datestamps we saw a parcel post datestamp of the 1960s from Bryher, a parcel post label from St Agnes dated 20th March 1929, and a '694' in a triangle cancelling a printed paper item sent from St Martin's. Of particular note was a postcard showing a pram with the EIIR insignia on the side which was used to deliver parcels on Tresco.

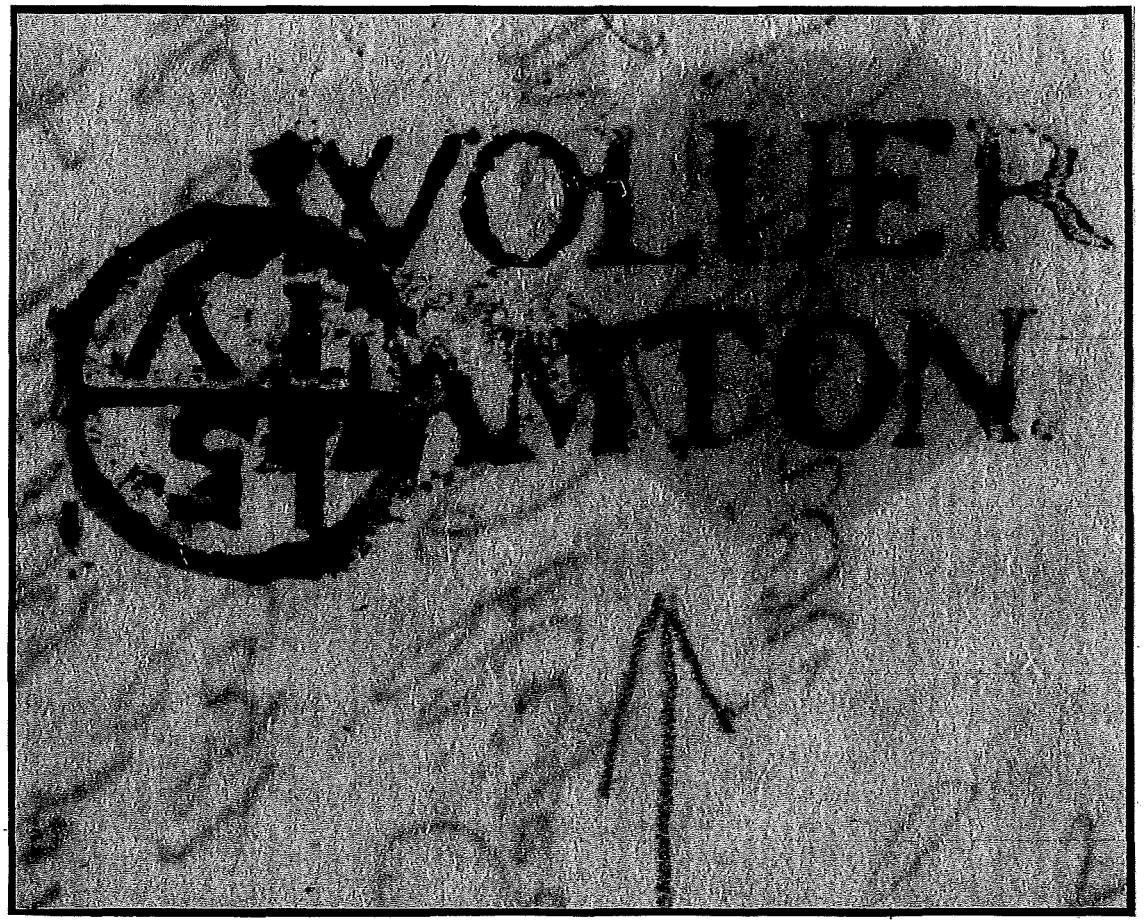
On 15th September 1937 Great Western & Southern Airlines introduced an air service between St. Just near Lands End and St Mary's. A letter to Sutton Coldfield in March 1847 was charged 2½d postage plus 4d for the air service. When BEA took over the service in 1951 the charge was increased to 6d. We saw examples of this rate on envelopes which carried a special BEA label.

We had all enjoyed a fascinating display of some very scarce material of a type not normally seen at our meetings. Once again our thanks are due to Richard Farman for arranging such an excellent meeting.

A NEW STAFFORDSHIRE DISCOVERY

by John Calladine

It was while examining the Fletcher Collection at the British Library (MM 162/7) for marks and usage of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire that a mark from Staffordshire caught the eye as being unusual. What was immediately striking was the use of what is clearly a letter 'U' for the intended 'V' in 'WOLVERHAMPTON' and the absence of the letter 'P'. An enlarged reproduction of the mark is shown below.



A glance at The British County Catalogue of Postal History showed no similar mark listed. In fact the first recorded Wolverhampton mark is a two-line stamp with the double 'O' 'WOOLVER/HAMPTON' used in 1726. It measures 23x10mm. The mark illustrated above measures 36x14mm and is on a letter dated 13th July 1720, some six years earlier. (The Fletcher Collection reference is 228109.) The dates of early handstamps of towns such as Lichfield, Stone, Newcastle and Stafford suggest there may be earlier Wolverhampton marks than this but it would be disappointing if there were nothing left to discover.

DECISION TIME - A NEW, TIMELY DISCOVERY

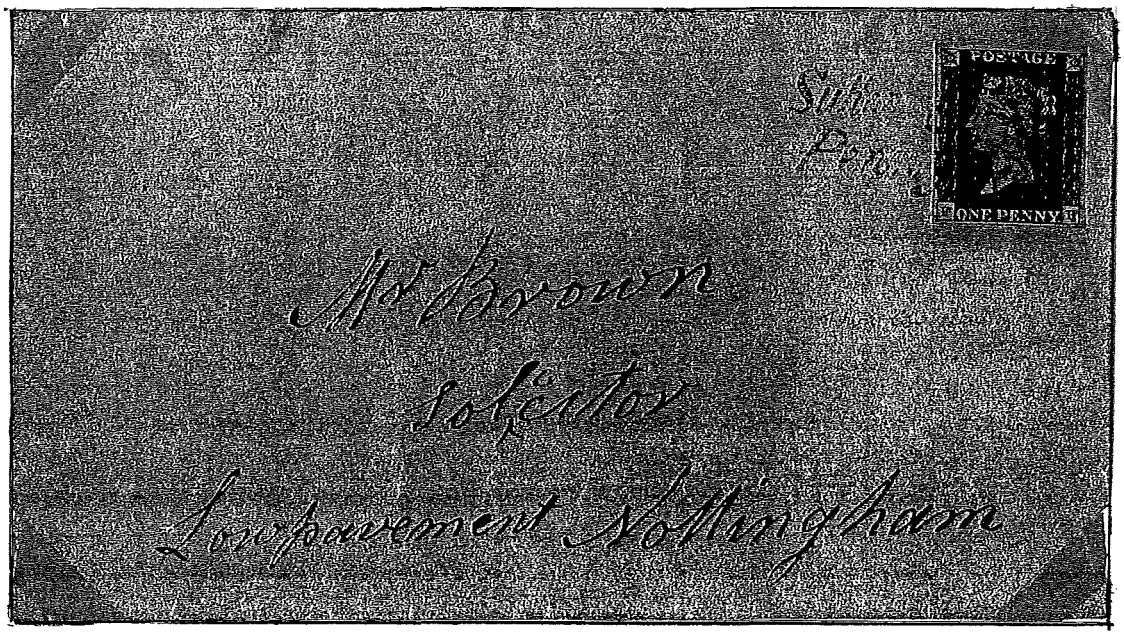
by Mick Gill

When I returned after a day out last summer, I found a catalogue from a well-known dealer had arrived through the letterbox. My initial thoughts were that there would be many items of interest but, as usual, nothing for my collecting area. I sat down with a mug of coffee and, to my great surprise, I found not one, not two but three items of most definite interest. Two of these were unquestionably in the 'must have' category and the third not far behind. I went to bed to sleep on matters.

Next morning, after further thought, I contacted the dealer fully expecting (and perhaps secretly hoping) the items to have been snapped up. But no, all three were available. Now it was decision time! Many years ago I passed on one particular item of local interest and have regretted the decision ever since. Given this, there really was no alternative - by the following lunchtime all three items had arrived for me to view and, needless to say, they were not returned.

The plea in the 'Midland Mail' 161 for information on amendments and additions for inclusion in a reprint of the Society's 'Straight Line Book' proved timely, for the first item to have taken my eye in the dealer's catalogue was just such an example.

The item, reproduced below, is a wrapper, annotated on receipt '*25 March 1841*', with a fine, four-margin penny black cancelled by a '***Sutton IN Ashfield/Penny Post***' handstamp (40x16 mm) overstamped with a black Alfreton Maltese Cross. On the reverse are an 'ALFRETON/ MR 25/ 1841' double arc datestamp (29mm) and a 'NOTTINGHAM/ MR 26/ 1841' single arc datestamp (25 mm), the latter unfortunately struck over the seal.



AN UNUSUAL DERBY CANCELLATION

I am indebted to Roger Broom field for sending the Derby postmark illustrated below. I have not seen this before but it looks like the type of mark that would be used on packets rather than an envelope.



MIDLAND POST OFFICES OPENED OR CLOSED DURING 2009

By Ken Smith

DERBYSHIRE

Holymoorside, Chesterfield	reopened 3/8/2009	(Hosted Outreach, village hall.) had closed 17/9/2008
Hulland Ward, Ashbourne	reopened 4/2/2009	
Marsh Lane, Sheffield	closed 10/2/2009	

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Acton Turville, Badminton	closed 20/1/2009	Reopened 3/11/2009. (Closed for rebuilding)
Berry Hill, Coleford	closed 4/3/2009	
Broadwell Lane End, Coleford	closed 12/8/2009	
Coalway, Coleford	open 24/8/2009	
Dymock	closed 27/5/2009	
Forthampton, Gloucester	closed 14/8/2009	Replaced by Evesham Mobile
Kingscote, Tetbury	closed 8/12/2009	Retirement
Minsterworth, Gloucester	reopened 26/1/2009	Closed 8/10/2007 - damaged by a car.
Tytherington, Wotton-under-Edge	reopened 29/6/2009	Hosted Outreach in village hall. Had closed 5/9/2008
Barnwood (TSO), Gloucester	closed 25/8/2009	Reopened 14/12/2009. Hosted Outreach, Wotton hall Club
Podsmead (TSO), Gloucester	12/1/2009	Partner Outreach in same premises.

HEREFORDSHIRE

Almeley, Hereford	11/3/2009 -	replaced by Kington Mobile
Bishops Frome, Worcester	closed 26/1/2009	Replaced by Hosted Outreach, c/o Malvern P.O.
Bosbury, Ledbury	10/3/2009 -	Hosted Outreach, c/o Malvern P.O. Had closed 2/6/2008
Cradley, Malvern	6/3/2009 -	Partner Outreach in same premises.
Dorstone, Hereford	closed 18/3/2009	Replaced by Kington Mobile - 30/3/2009
Lower Eggleton, Ledbury	c -/1/2009 -	Hosted Outreach, Newtown Inn, Thursday pm.
Pembridge, Leominster	closed 11/3/2009	Replaced by Kington Mobile.
Putley, Ledbury	closed 15/6/2009	Reopened 17/8/2009.
Upper Sapey, Worcester	closed 28/1/2009	Partner Outreach
Whitney-on-Wye, Hereford	closed 18/3/2009	Replaced by Kington Mobile - 25/3/2009
Wigmore, Leominster	closed 11/3/2009	Replaced by Kington Mobile

LEICESTERSHIRE

Anstey, Leicester	closed 10/8/2009	Reopened/relocated 17/9/2009
Long Clawson, Melton Mowbray	closed 22/5/2009	Was in village hall c/o Harby P.O.
Oakthorpe, Swadlincote	closed 18/9/2009	
Glenfield (TSO), Leicester	reopened 12/2/2009	Had closed 8/10/2008 - serious fire.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Barnwell, Peterborough	closed 1/10/2009	Hosted Outreach in Montagu Arms from 26/10/2009.
Brigstock, Kettering	reopened 5/11/2009	Had closed 17/1/2008.
Clopton, Kettering	closed 20/2/2009	Replaced by Home Delivery Service.
Nassington, Peterborough	closed 27/5/2009	
Yelvertoft, Northampton	closed 9/1/2009	Reopened 25/4/2009.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Farndon, Newark	reopened 15/6/2009	Had closed 11/12/2008
Gringley-on-the-Hill, Doncaster	reopened 2/3/2009	Had closed 21/5/2008
Sneinton Boulevard (TSO), Nott'm	closed 10/10/2009	
Wilford (TSO), Nottingham	closed 3/8/2009	
Montrose Court (TSO), Stapleford	reopened 9/3/2009	Had closed 18/9/2008

OXFORDSHIRE

Aston Tirrold, Didcot	reopened 16/6/2009	Hosted Outreach in village hall, c/o Pangbourne P.O.
Cropredy, Banbury	reopened 18/6/2009	at Bridge Stores. Had closed 26/6/2008.
Enstone, Oxford	closed 16/2/2009	Partner Outreach from 18/2/2009.
Islip, Kidlington	closed 12/2/2009	Was in the village hall c/o Weston-on-the-Green.
Little Milton, Oxford	9/9/2009 -	to the village hall.
Marcham, Abingdon	closed 22/4/2009	Reopened 15/6/2009.
North Leigh, Witney	reopened 22/6/2009	In the Memorial hall. Had closed 11/9/2008.
Sandleigh, Abingdon	reopened 10/9/2009	Listed on P.O. website as "Wootton". Closed 24/9/2008.
Tackley, Kidlington	5/3/2009 -	Partner Outreach
Wiggington, Banbury	closed 20/4/2009	
Northcourt (TSO), Abingdon	closed 26/10/2009	
St. Giles (TSO), Oxford	closed 3/2/2009	Pharmacy closed. Reopened/relocated 28/4/2009.

SHROPSHIRE

Cleobury North, Bridgnorth	reopened 21/9/2009	Hosted Outreach, Thurs. 2.15-5.15pm. Closed 15/11/2007.
Cosford Camp, Wolverhampton	closed 29/9/2009	
Hadnall, Shrewsbury	closed 4/3/2009	Replaced by Hosted Outreach in the village hall 31/3/2009.
Lydbury North	26/2/2009	Hosted Outreach in Community Shop.
Montford Bridge, Shrewsbury	closed 24/3/2009	Replaced by Hosted Outreach, The Old Shop 31/3/2009.
Munslow, Craven Arms	closed 24/2/2009	Replaced by Home Delivery Service.
Norton, Shifnal	19/2/2009 -	Outreach started. Had closed 28/4/2008.
Rhydycroesau, Oswestry	closed 11/3/2009	Replaced by Hosted Outreach in the village hall.
Wroxeter, Shrewsbury	reopened 31/8/2009	Hosted Outreach in Wroxeter Hotel, Mon/Thurs pm.
Greenfields (TSO), Shrewsbury	closed c. 3/9/2009	Reopened 14/9/2009, Closed 29/9/2009.

STAFFORDSHIRE

Waterhouses, Stoke-on-Trent	reopened 11/2/2009	Had closed 1/7/2008.
Hill St (TSO), Burton-on-Trent	closed 5/8/2009	

WARWICKSHIRE

Brailes, Banbury	closed 3/2/2009	Replaced by Hosted Outreach, George Hotel 31/3/2009.
Ilmington, Shipston-on-Stour	closed 21/1/2009	Replaced by Outreach (?)
Lighthorne Heath, Southam	reopened 11/9/2009	Hosted Outreach in village hall. Had closed 22/9/2008.
Long Compton, Shipston-on-Stour	closed 15/7/2009	Replaced by Evesham Mobile.
Preston-on-Stour, Stratford-on-A	closed 7/1/2009	Replaced by Outreach (?).
Wilmcote, Stratford-on-Avon	closed 9/7/2009	Replaced by Evesham Mobile.

WEST MIDLANDS

Clent, Stourbridge	closed 5/2/2009	
Wilkin, Walsall	closed 18/2/2009	
Brasshouse Lane, Smethwick	closed 3/3/2009	Posttown is Warley
Brockmoor (TSO), Brierley Hill	closed 2/3/2009	
Quarry Bank (TSO), Brierley Hill	closed 3/2/2009	
Jubilee Crescent (TSO), Coventry	closed 7/8/2009	Reopened/relocated 1/10/2009
Hasbury (TSO), Halesowen	closed 6/2/2009	
Long Lane (TSO), Halesowen	closed 6/2/2009	
Greets Green (TSO), W. Bromwich	closed 4/2/2009	
Ordnance Road (TSO), Coventry	closed 14/10/2009	Replaced by Stoney Stanton Road early Dec 2009.

WORCESTERSHIRE

Callow End, Worcester	4/2/2009	Partner Outreach in village shop.
Elmley Castle, Pershore	closed 3/ 4/2009	Replaced by Evesham Mobile.
Fairfield, Bromsgrove	closed 9/1/2009	Armed robbery. Reopened 26/1/2009.
Upper Welland, Malvern	6/3/2009	
Bengeworth (TSO), Evesham	closed 9/2/2009	
Link Top (TSO), Malvern	closed 3/2/2009	
Bilford Road (TSO), Worcester	closed 26/1/2009	

TWO ROUTES BETWEEN BRITAIN AND NEW ZEALAND, ILLUSTRATED WITH SHROPSHIRE COVERS (1872 to 1878)

By Brian Atkins

The General Post Office Notice of May 1870 stated "The Government of New Zealand has entered into contract with the California, New Zealand and Australia Mail Line for a monthly mail packet between San Francisco, Auckland and Sydney; 6d post paid for letters up to ½oz. New Zealand mail will be sent via San Francisco unless otherwise directed". The cover to Otago on the south island of New Zealand (Fig 1) is a perfect example of this route with the rate paid by the 6d chestnut (SG 122, plate 11).

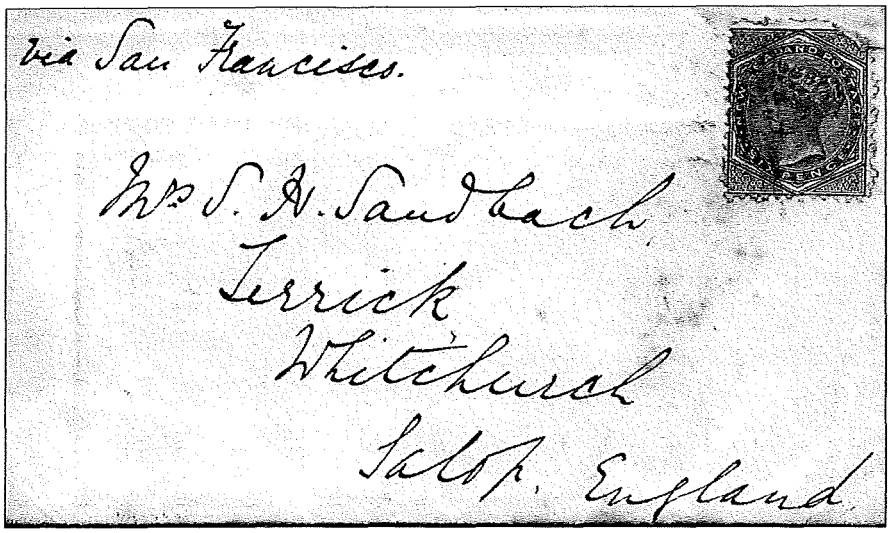


Fig 1, Cover from Much Wenlock to Otago, New Zealand, 25th June 1872.

The letter was sent in a closed bag on the *City of Brooklyn* (Inman Line), which left Liverpool 27th June 1872, arrived New York 8th July. It was then forwarded to San Francisco by train, from where the steamship *Idaho* (J. D. Howell commander) left for Honolulu on 17th July. The side-wheel steamer *Nevada,* of the California, New Zealand and Australia Mail Line, took the bag from Honolulu to Auckland, arriving mid-August. The correspondent of a publication called the *Alta California* reported in 1872, that "Whole towns turned out in New Zealand when Captain James H. Blethen sailed the magnificent steamer *Nevada* into port. In Auckland, after the signal had been run up that she was making for harbour, the excitement was intense and thousands crowded on the wharf awaiting her arrival". The bag was opened in Auckland and the domestic coastal service took the letter via New Plymouth, Nelson, Wellington and Port Lyttleton (for Christchurch) to Port Chalmers (for Dunedin). The letter arrived at Dunedin on 3rd September 1872 and was delivered through Milton, south west of Dunedin, on 4th September 1872.

The contract service with the California, New Zealand and Australia Mail Line had ceased by March 1873 (G.P.O. Notice 10/73), from when mail to New Zealand was to be forwarded via Suez and Australia, as previously. However a new contract via San Francisco was given to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company from 27th September 1875 (GPO Notice 36/75) with the rate remaining at 6d.

The rather scruffy letter at Fig 2 shows the newly instituted San Francisco service used from New Zealand. The letter originated at Waimate (2nd Jan 1878), 100 miles south of Christchurch (date stamp 2 JAN 1878, code K), where it was put in a closed bag for England and forwarded to Auckland. The steamship *Australia* left Sydney on 3rd January 1878 and arrived in Auckland on 8th January, Honolulu on 21st Jan and San Francisco on 30th January, from where the bag was forwarded by rail to New York. The Cunard Line *Abyssinia*, departed New York on 6th February and off-loaded mails at Queenstown on 15th Feb, with the letter arriving at Whitchurch post office on 17th February 1878 for delivery to Terrick Hall 1½ miles north, a total journey of 46 days. The *Australia* was an iron-screw vessel of 3000 tons with engines of 2200hp and a maximum speed of 13.5 knots. She was specifically built for the start of the 1875 Trans-Pacific mail contract. The New Zealand 6d blue (probably SG 163) paid the 6d rate.





WHITCHURCH / SALOP date stamp 17th FEB 1878, code A on reverse (WC42). Issued 4th SEP 1875, recorded used 27th APR 1877 to 28th FEB 1881 using codes A and B.

Fig 2, Cover from Waimate, New Zealand to Whitchurch, 2nd Jan 1878

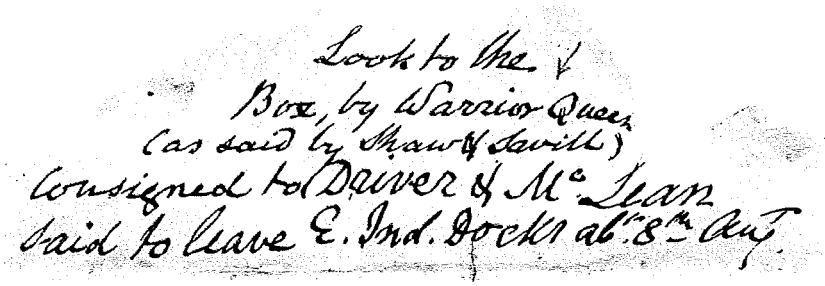


Fig 3, Cover from Much Wenlock to Otago, 30th July 1872

Though service was available via San Francisco, mail had continued by the route via Suez and Australia as evidenced by the double rate cover, also to Otago, shown at Fig 3. The 6d per ½oz rate to New Zealand via Southampton and Suez was first established by GPO Notice 73/1856, from 13th January 1857, when a new service of contract packets was established with the European and Australian (E&A) Royal Mail service. When the E&A failed, a new contract was awarded to the P&O from 12th March 1859. The double rate of 1/- for 1oz was paid by two 6d pale chestnuts, (SG 122, plate 11). The P&O *Surat* departed Southampton 1st August 1872, arrived Alexandria 15th August, from where the sealed bag went overland to Suez. The P&O *Ellora* departed Suez 17th August, arrived in Galle (Ceylon, Sri Lanka) 31st August. The P&O *Bangalore* departed Galle 1st September 1872, arrived Sydney 23rd September 1972, from where the bag was transferred to Auckland and the letter forwarded to Dunedin by the coastal service, arriving in Dunedin 5th October 1872 and Milton on the same day, 67 days in transit.

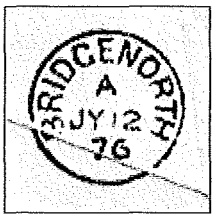
The Reverend H. W. Wayne, Anglican vicar of Much Wenlock, and his wife, were writing to their son Frederick in Otago. Frederick Wayne was educated at Bridgnorth Grammar School, Trinity College, Cambridge and the London School of Mines. He sailed to Sydney, Australia in 1859, and reached Port Lyttelton (Christchurch) on the 1st of January 1860. In those days, newcomers with sufficient finances purchased large acreages with sheep runs, making money from the wool. Mr. Wayne's investment was not successful as his sheep became diseased and he sold the run in 1871 to purchase the large Akatore estate, near Milton, Otago, which he relinquished about 1885 to become a land agent. He was a politician becoming

a JP in 1862, later a local councillor and in the late 1860s he represented the constituency of Hampden in the NZ General Assembly. In 1864 he married a daughter of the Rev. George Barber, M.A., Queen's College, Cambridge, and they had four sons and one daughter.



A note on the back flap, (left), states "Look to the box by the *Warrior Queen*", a ship chartered by Shaw and Saville, which left London on 25th August 1872 (not 8th as per note) and arrived at Port Chalmers on 10th December. Did the box contain that year's Christmas gifts?





BRIDGNORTH arrival date stamp for 12th JUL 1878 (BN111), issued 11th MAR 1874 (SIB 32/201), recorded 8th JAN 1875 to 17th DEC 1880, all code A.

Fig 4, Cover from Christchurch to Bridgnorth, 6th May 1876

A letter from New Zealand to Bridgnorth, Shropshire via Suez is shown at Fig 4, a similar New Zealand 6d blue to that in Fig 2, paying the 6d rate. The letter was put in a closed bag for Sydney, where the P&O *Avoca*, left for Melbourne on 12th May; the bag transferred to the P&O *Bangalore*, which left Melbourne on 16th May and arrived at Galle on 7th June. The *Hindostan* left Galle on 8th June and arrived in Southampton on 11th July, the letter reaching Bridgnorth on 12th July 1876, two months in transit.

These were not the only mail routes from Britain to New Zealand in the latter part of the 19th century. A GPO Notice, (24/66), of 28th May 1866 announced a route via Panama to Wellington at 1/- per ounce, pre-paid, reduced to 6d in September 1866 and ceased operation by February 1869. By 1870 the route via Brindisi was open at a 9d rate, reduced to 8d on 1st July 1876, with 8d also charged for mail on the Marseilles route. The long sea route from Southampton ceased on 1st February 1880 with mail by the Brindisi route reduced to 6d in March of that year. The long sea route was reinstated on 1st January 1889 with the P&O and the Italian Orient Line steamers from London carrying mail at 4d per ½oz, postcards 2d. Finally the letter rate reduced to 2½d on 1st January 1891 with New Zealand entering the Universal Postal Union on 1st October 1891, the rate remaining at 2½d until the end of the century and beyond.

References: North American Mail Sailings 1840 to 1875, Hubbard and Winter, US Classics Soc 1988.
UK Letter Rates Inland and Overseas 1635 to 1900, Tabeart, HH Sales 2nd Edition 2003
Australia New Zealand UK mails to 1880; Rates Routes and Ships Out and Home, Tabeart, 2004
The Hocken Collection, University of Otago, New Zealand, Bulletin 58, August 2008
The Postal Markings of Shropshire, Part 1. ed. Atkins Shropshire Postal History Soc (2008)
http://www.maritimeheritage.org/ships/ss.html

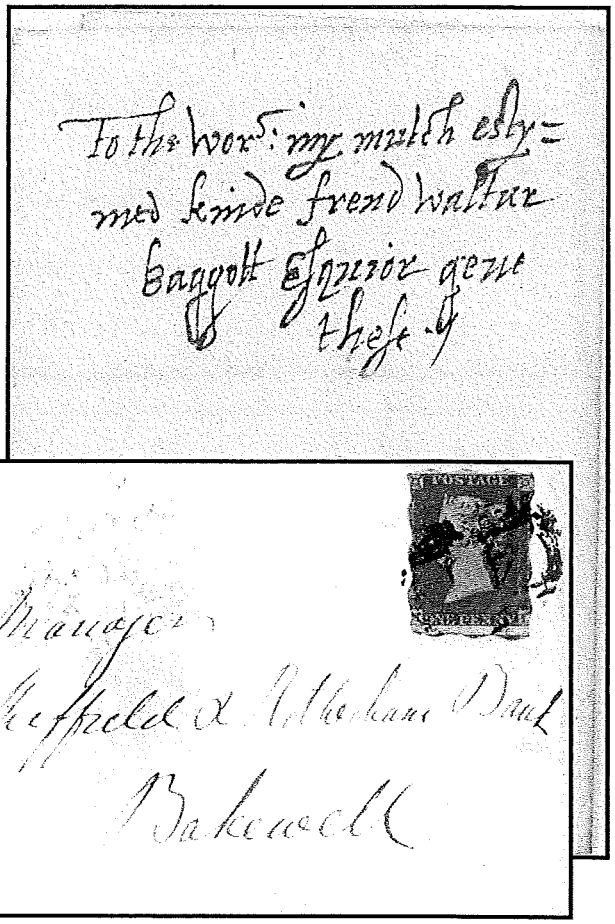
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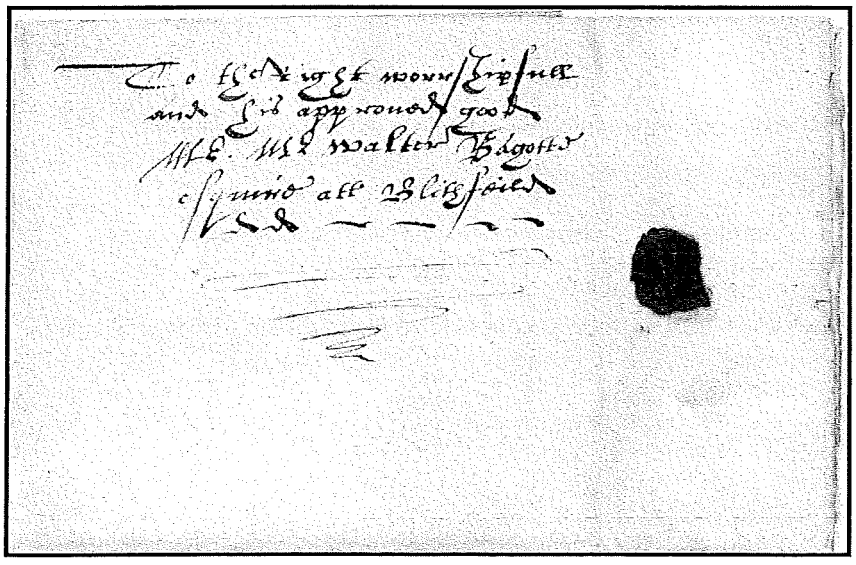
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Treasury Roulette 1d Red on Cover - the only known Midlands usage?



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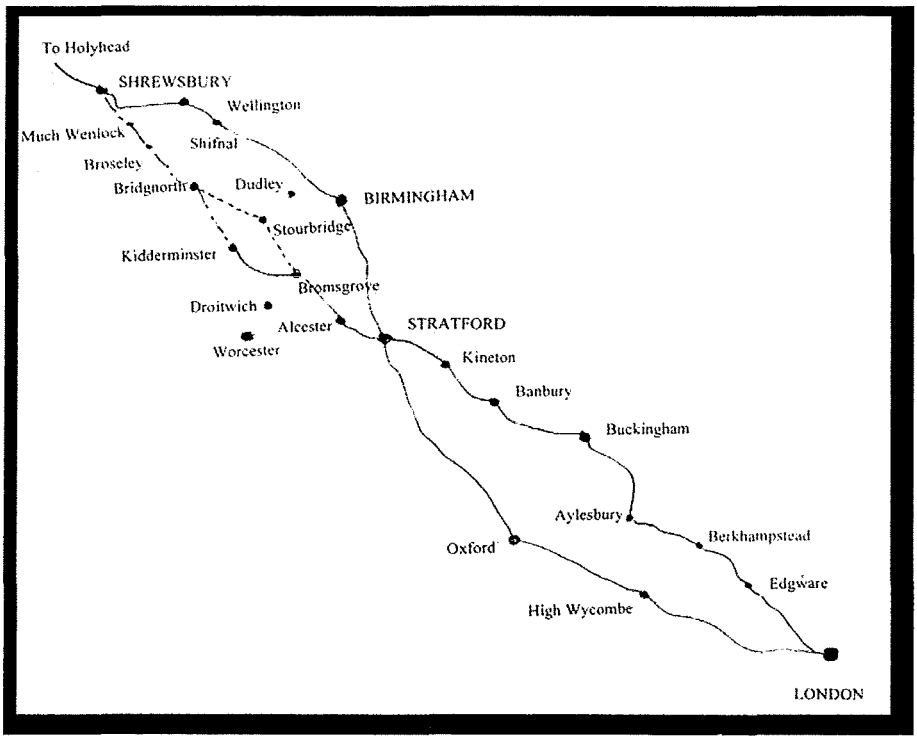
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THE MAILCOACH THAT NEVER WAS

THE PROPOSED STRATFORD-KIDDERMINSTER-BRIDGNORTH- SHREWSBURY MAIL OF 1818.

by John Calladine

An article in "Midland Mail' (73/11 of 1992) with the title "Which Way to Banbury Cross" was probably one of the most complex ever included. Our mailcoach expert, the late Chris Beaver, used it to describe the changes that took place to the mailcoach routes from London to (or through) Birmingham, principally between 1815 and 1825. In the Society's 'mileage mark' book, they are summarised on pages 30 and 31 and Chris conceded they were the most complicated part of the entire mailcoach route sequence in the Midlands. In retrospect, the Midland Mail article would have benefited from the inclusion of a hand-drawn map although Chris did make the point that "constant recourse to a map is advised". For "advised", read "essential". It is not the purpose of this piece to revise or simplify the earlier explanation. The intention is to take one small part of it and to look at it in a little more detail, perversely in the hope that more detail may make it easier to follow. However, it is necessary to set the scene by first covering some of the ground contained in the original article.



The original London-Shrewsbury mailcoach was established on 5th September 1785, very early in the mailcoach era, running via High Wycombe, Oxford, Stratford on Avon, Birmingham and Shrewsbury. On 5th September 1808, it was extended beyond Shrewsbury to Holyhead. The purpose of a Holyhead Mail was not primarily to provide a service to Birmingham and Shrewsbury, even less to give the farmers of Anglesey a quick sight of their London letters. Above all, this coach was established to carry letters to and from Ireland. Therefore it is not surprising that Birmingham's commercial needs led to the establishment of its own through mailcoach from London in 1812. Nor, when the Holyhead Mail was re-routed and retimed (using a much improved road beyond Shrewsbury) in 1817, is it surprising that a London-Shrewsbury mailcoach was re-established to run over its original route.

In 1818, Francis Freeling made the purpose of the two coaches crystal clear in a minute to the Postmasters General. "*Although there are two coaches over the same road from Birmingham to Shrewsbury*" he wrote, "*it turns out on examination that one is requisite for the proper business of that road and is suited to the Cross Mails, while the other was adapted simply to the Irish correspondences and must still be considered an Irish Coach*". The re-established Shrewsbury Mail, following the route of 1785, was thereafter known as the "Old Shrewsbury".

The 'Old Shrewsbury" may have provided a good link to various Midland cross posts but there were important towns in the West Midlands and Shropshire that wanted a quicker and more direct link with London. Among them were Redditch, Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Stourbridge, Bridgnorth and Ironbridge. In 1818, the Post Office received petitions from Redditch, Bromsgrove, Alcester and Kidderminster, all asking for a mailcoach to run through their town. It seems the suggestion had been to introduce an entirely new London coach on a faster route through Banbury but, possibly because of the state of the road in 1818, this was ruled out by Mr Hasker, the Superintendant of Mail Coaches. What was suggested instead was to turn the "Old Shrewsbury" off its established route at Stratford on Avon and take it through Alcester, Redditch, Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Bridgnorth and "the Iron Bridge" to Shrewsbury. The surveyors, whose areas were affected by the change, initially seemed happy with the proposal, aware that the only obvious losers were those resident on the 22 miles of road between Stratford and Birmingham, who would lose their London mailcoach. (Less obvious was the likely affect of the loss of one of the mailcoaches running between Birmingham and Shrewsbury.) The stumbling block might have been expected to be the coach contractors, who had to be convinced that the change of route was in their interest. However, they were described as "not unwilling" and one of them, a Mr Vyse, whose name subsequently appeared in a 'Warwick Advertiser' announcement of 1821 for another London coach, went as far as suggesting he might be willing to continue to run an auxiliary mailcoach on the old route from Stratford to Birmingham so that no one was disadvantaged.

The new route would bring advantages to the towns on its path. Kidderminster, a town particularly important for its manufacture of carpets, would receive its London letters at 2.30pm instead of at 4.10pm. At Bridgnorth there would be a gain of a full two hours (4pm rather than 6pm) and the coach would be at Ironbridge at about five o'clock. Ironbridge was at the centre of an important manufacturing area and nearby towns, such as Broseley, would gain greatly if a penny post bag were made up at Bridgnorth, where there was time to do so, and taken forward on the new mailcoach.

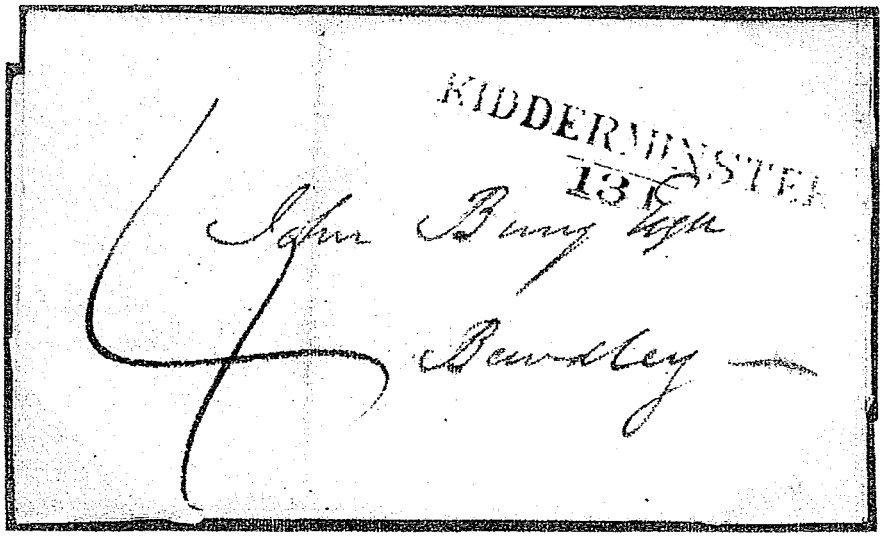
The expected financial benefits of the proposed arrangement were clearly much less than hoped, for few existing rides could be dispensed with. The obvious ones were rides between Stratford and Redditch, along the proposed route of the coach. It was also thought that an existing day ride between Redditch and Feckenham would be redundant. However, the surveyors reported that rides from Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth and from Shifnal to Wenlock would continue to be needed and Wenlock would probably continue to receive all its letters from Shifnal rather than receive them from Bridgnorth, unless it could be proved that the volume of correspondence and the time saved would justify additional expense. Assuming an auxiliary coach between Stratford and Birmingham was established and paid for, the money saved by changing the "Old Shrewsbury" route was almost negligible. It was apparent that the proposed change of route needed to be examined with more care to discover its true merit.

Within a fortnight, Freeling reported to the Postmasters General that the matter had "assumed quite a different shape". A key factor was that the proposed auxiliary coach from Stratford to Birmingham, along the route of the "Old Shrewsbury" "*has not and we think cannot be formed*". No reason was given but one assumes the contractor had second thoughts. Furthermore, the surveyors had reported that the advantages to correspondence on the new line of road would be very limited and they had woken up to the disadvantage of removing the "old Shrewsbury" from the line of road between Birmingham and Shrewsbury. Freeling then set out four arguments both for and against introducing the new coach. It would apparently "*ease the Tolls of one road*", although he doesn't say which one. It would accelerate the London mail to Bromsgrove – which he describes as "*a small town*" – and to Kidderminster, "*a more important town*". (He does not mention that the inhabitants of Stourbridge had no doubt they were a more important town than Kidderminster and there is no mention of any advantage that might accrue to Stourbridge.) He thought the new coach might increase the contractor's profits, the business being "*an indifferent concern*" and, finally, it could be established without expense, but only if the auxiliary coach mentioned above were established at the same time.

Freeling spent more time on the disadvantages. On the return of the coach to London, letters from Shrewsbury, Shifnal and the north would arrive late at Wolverhampton, "*a most material matter*". The new coach would not pass through Coalbrookdale "*where the great porcelain manufactury is*" and it would deprive Wellington of a mailcoach. Suddenly the advantages gained in the Bridgnorth area by establishing a penny post were negated and Freeling appears a little confused in his argument when, having said Bridgnorth would receive its London letters two hours earlier, now said the same mail would not be accelerated. He claimed that, because some rides would be despatched sooner, penny post letters from the Oxford Road would be left behind. He concluded his minute to the Postmasters General by immediately countering two of the 'pro' arguments and said it was very doubtful that the contractor's business would improve on the new road and it was equally doubtful that Mr Vyse would ever establish the auxiliary connection at Stratford. It seemed clear to him that their Lordships would not wish to alter the line of the "Old Shrewsbury" coach and, indeed, they replied that they considered the weight of evidence to be against such a change.

One might think that would be the end of the story but the Post Office had clearly noticed that the proposed diversion of the 'Old Shrewsbury' would have brought worthwhile advantages to Bromsgrove and Kidderminster. As Chris tells us in his original article, within months and possibly weeks, a proposal to establish a new London-Kidderminster coach was being considered, running on a new route from London through Edgware, Watford, Berkhampstead, Aylesbury, Buckingham, Brackley, Banbury and Kineton to Stratford on Avon. From there it would continue via Alcester, Redditch and Bromsgrove to Kidderminster. It was to be supported by a branch mailcoach from Stratford to Birmingham, much as had been proposed in 1818. In the event, the new coach was not established as a London-Kidderminster coach but as a (through) London-Birmingham coach on 15th March 1819 and the section from Stratford to Kidderminster, probably established on the same date, became the branch mailcoach. The 'Old Shrewsbury' was discontinued. For the town of Stourbridge, this was the final straw. The Hon W.B.Grey of Enville Hall immediately wrote to Freeling and expressed the town's objections to a Kidderminster coach rather than a Stourbridge coach. Freeling apparently sent him a clear answer and, in a minute to the Postmasters General dated 20th June 1819, expressed his exasperation that the Hon Mr Grey had not taken "no" as an answer. Mr Grey wanted the new coach to quit Kidderminster and run through Stourbridge to Bridgnorth. In 1818, the Post Office had concluded that a coach running as far as Bridgnorth would not be worthwhile and they had not changed their mind. Furthermore, Freeling reminded the Postmasters General that the coach contractors had looked to Kidderminster and its extensive carpet factories for support and told them "*it has done as much for the mailcoach as Birmingham itself*".

Stourbridge was pacified by the establishment of a Birmingham-Halesowen-Stourbridge branch mailcoach in 1820. By 1823, as mailcoaches accelerated, it was possible to run a Birmingham-Bewdley branch mailcoach, passing through Dudley (not Halesowen), Stourbridge and Kidderminster and give the inhabitants of both Stourbridge and Kidderminster time to answer their London letters the same day. Perversely, this had always been the chosen route for mail from this area, although operated by a double ride rather than a coach. The connection to Stratford had become an irrelevance.



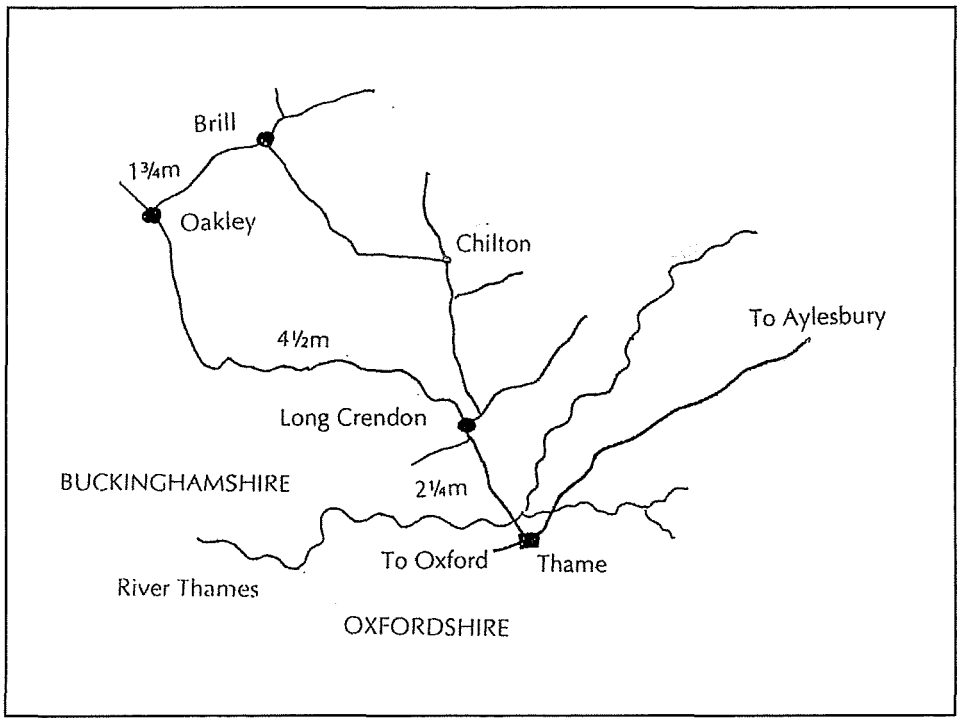
A Kidderminster wrapper dated 25th April 1819 from the era of the Stratford-Kidderminster coach but not using it, as it was addressed to Bewdley and therefore taken on a Birmingham-Bewdley ride. Note that the '131' figure on the mileage stamp was unaffected by the introduction of the 1819 Stratford-Kidderminster coach, the total distance to London being unchanged. (Illustrated by courtesy of Chris Jackson)

References: Post 42/33/1818
Post 42/190/1818
Post 35/609M/1819

THAME PENNY POST

1838-1840

The establishment of a penny post at Thame was recommended to the Postmaster General, the Earl of Lichfield, on 3rd March 1838 and approved, probably the same day. A "statement" had been received from the surveyor but it has not survived and we therefore know nothing of the justification for the post. It was to serve the villages of Brill, Long Crendon and Oakley, each of which was to have a receiving house with a receiver paid £3 a year, subject to the Treasury's agreement. As the salaries appear among the Allowances to Deputy Postmasters of 1838, we know that approval was gained. A foot messenger to and from Thame was paid 12/- a week.



Thame Penny Post

As at Henley on Thames, an Appendix to the 2nd Report of the Select Committee on Postage lists revenue received from a penny post at Thame in the year ended 5th November 1837. However, as this amounted to just 4/6d, representing 54 letters, we can be sure this was only for letters delivered in the town, payment for which had previously been a perk of the postmaster. Nothing more is known of this short-lived penny post except that it continued through to 1840.

Thame was issued with a type 5 penny post handstamp. No handstamps have been recorded from the receiving houses.

References

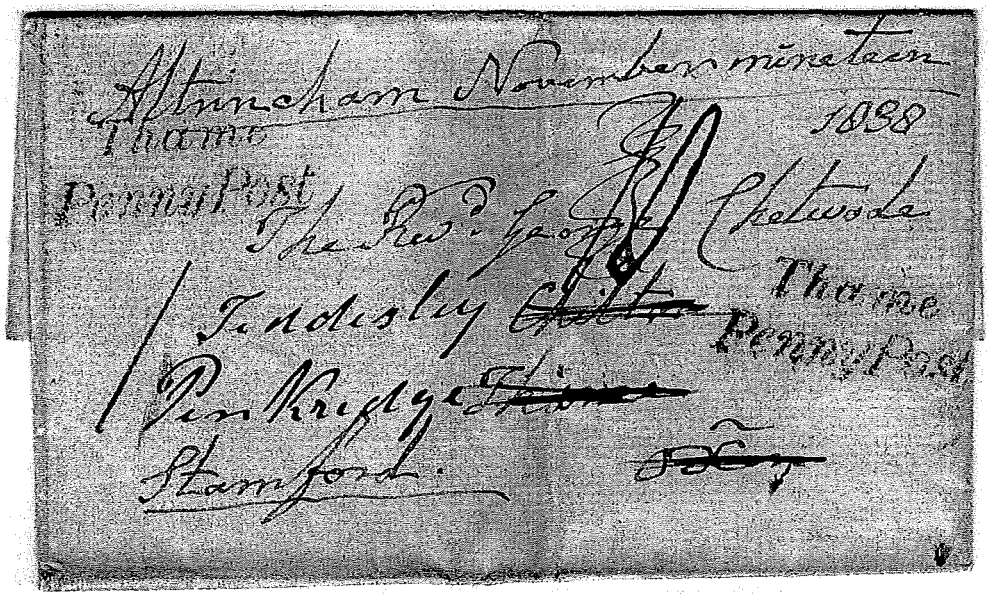
Post 35/101L/1838
Post 9/132, page 312
Appendix 23 to the 2nd Report of the Select Committee on Postage (1838)

HANDSTAMPS OF THE THAME PENNY POST

Post town: Thame

Receiving houses: Long Crendon, Oakley and Brill (all in Buckinghamshire)

MLP1141 — Thame / Penny Post (issued 9JUL38) — B — 22NOV38- 5DEC39 — E



Two strikes of the Thame Penny Post handstamp on a letter sent from Altrincham to Chilton, Thame, on 19th November 1838 and re-directed to Penkridge.



An early photograph of Thame, probably taken in the mid 1870s when the town looked much as it would have done at the time of the penny post. The building in the foreground, the William and Mary market hall, was demolished in 1884 to make way for the new town hall celebrating Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

POSTAL HISTORY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Somewhere, and I cannot remember where, I have read a comment about the book '*Lark Rise to Candleford*' the authoress of which, on leaving school, was an assistant to the local postmistress, and whose husband eventually became a postmaster. Towards the end of the book there is a description of the work of a rural letter carrier at the end of the nineteenth century. The person who wrote the comment said that it would be interesting to know what other books contained information about the postal system. That was enough to set my mind thinking about books had I read that might fit that description.

One that immediately came to mind was Charles Dickens' '*A Tale of Two Cities*' which was written in 1859, fifteen years after the withdrawal of the Dover mailcoach. However, Dickens tells us the novel opens on a Friday night late in November 1775. Dickens wrote in Chapter 2:

> " *The Dover road lay, as to him, beyond the Dover mail, as it lumbered up Shooter's Hill. He walked up-hill in the mire by the side of the mail, as the rest of the passengers did; not because they had the least relish for walking exercise, under the circumstances, but because the hill, and the harness, and the mud, and the mail, were all so heavy, that the horses had three times already come to a stop, ... with the mutinous intent of taking it to Blackheath. Reins and whip and coachman and guard ... the team had capitulated and returned to their duty.*
>
> *"So the guard of the Dover mail ... stood on his own particular perch behind the mail, beating his feet, and keeping an eye and a hand on the arm-chest before him, where a loaded blunderbuss lay at the top of six or eight loaded horse-pistols, deposited on a substratum of cutlass.*
>
> *"The Dover mail was in its usual genial position that the guard suspected the passengers, the passengers suspected one another and the guard, they all suspected everybody else, and the coachman was sure of nothing but the horses; as to which cattle he could with a clear conscience have taken his oath on the two Testaments that they were not fit for the journey*" [1]

Since the first mailcoach to Dover did not start until 31st October 1785 and the mail for Dover would probably have been carried in a cart in 1775, Dickens was in error here as later in the chapter he uses the term '*mail-coach*'. Dickens was born in 1812 so would have been familiar with the working of the mailcoaches. Though whether or not this was an accurate portrayal we cannot say.

In Chapter 4 Dickens describes the arrival at Dover:

> "*When the mail got successfully to Dover, in the course of the forenoon, the head drawer at the Royal George Hotel opened the coach-door as his custom was. He did it with some flourish of ceremony, for a mail journey from London in winter was an achievement to congratulate an adventurous traveller upon.*
>
> *By that time, there was only one adventurous traveller left to be congratulated; ... The mildewed inside of the coach, with its damp and dirty straw, its disagreeable smell, and its obscurity was rather like a larger dog-kennel.*" [2]

This is hardly the '*Romance of the Road*'. The coach was very late as, according to a time bill of 1798, the arrival in Dover should have been at 6.30 am. The scene on Shooter's Hill took place at 11.10 pm some three hours after scheduled departure from the General Post Office.

We see how mailcoaches could disseminate news in Chapter 48 of '*Oliver Twist*' where Bill Sikes initially fled from London after the murder of Nancy. He arrived in Hatfield at about 9 pm and after spending some time in an inn he is walking up the street when:

> "*... getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he recognised the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at the little post-office. He almost knew what was to come; but he crossed over, and listened.*
> *The guard was standing at the door, waiting for the letter-bag. A man, dressed like a gamekeeper, came up at the moment, and he handed him a basket which lay ready on the pavement.*
> *'That's for your people,' said the guard. 'Now look alive in there, will you. Damn that 'ere bag, it warn't ready night afore last; this won't do you, you know!'*
> *'Anything new up in town, Ben?' asked the gamekeeper, drawing back to the window-shutters, the better to admire the horses.*
> *'No, nothing that I knows on,' replied the man, pulling on his gloves. 'Corn's up a little. I heerd talk of a murder, too, down Spitalfields way, but I don't reckon much upon it.*" [3]

On the 1827 timebills, the London-Leeds-Carlisle mailcoach was at Barnet at 9.20 pm and at Welwyn at 10.51 pm so the arrival at Hatfield was probably at about 10 pm.

In the same book, there is a wonderful description of the despatch of an Express Letter. [4]

The novels of Jane Austen are renowned for their accurate portrayal of life, albeit in one particular stratum of society, in the early nineteenth century, and a variety of references crop up in her six novels. We all have, no doubt, a number of 'Missent' marks in our collections. In Chapter 46 of '*Pride and Prejudice*' we read:

> *"Elizabeth had been a good deal disappointed in not finding a letter from Jane, on their first arrival at Lambton; and this disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had been spent there; but on the third her repining was over, and her sister justified by the receipt of two letters from her at once, on one of which was marked that it had been missent elsewhere. Elizabeth was not surprised at it, as Jane had written the direction remarkably ill. ... The one missent must be first attended to; it had been written five days ago."* [5]



A piece sent from Northampton to Stanford on the Northants/Leicestershire border but miisent to Stamford in Lincolnshire and charged 8d for a distance of 50 to 80 miles instead of 6d for 23 miles. Endorsed in red ink "Missent to Stamford, Lincolnshire" and "near Lutterworth".

A number of reports can be found in Post 40 concerning the loss of money from letters. One way of trying to avoid the loss of coin was to place it in the letter but under a large wax seal as described in Chapter 2 of '*Mansfield Park*' where Edmund Bertram helps Fanny Price to write a letter to her brother, William. Edmund, too, writes to William:

> *"He wrote with his own hand his love to his cousin William, and sent him half a guinea under the seal."* [6]

Before they sat down to write their letters, Edmund told Fanny that her uncle, Sir Thomas Bartram "of Mansfield Park, in the County of Northampton", would frank Fanny's letter so it would cost William nothing. Austen also mentions the franking system in Chapter 20 of '*Sense and Sensibility*' where Charlotte Palmer speaks of her husband:

> " *"How charming it will be," said Charlotte, "when he is in Parliament!-won't it? How I shall laugh! It will be so ridiculous to see all his letters directed to him with an M.P. - But do you know, he says he will never frank for me?"* [7]

Clearly Mr Palmer was not going to abuse the franking system - or at least - not for his rather silly wife.

In 1801, the cost of sending a letter in the London penny post doubled. In '*Sense and Sensibility*' there are two mentions of the two-penny post. [8, 9]

As is well known, there was usually no delivery of letters outside the posttowns, and some times not even there without further payment. It was necessary to collect the letters from the post office. We read of one such instance in '*Sense and Sensibility*' where the following is said of Sir John Middleton who has found accommodation for Mrs Dashwood and her two daughters:

> *"He insisted moreover on conveying all there letters to and from the post for them, and would not be denied the satisfaction of sending them his newspaper everyday."* [10]

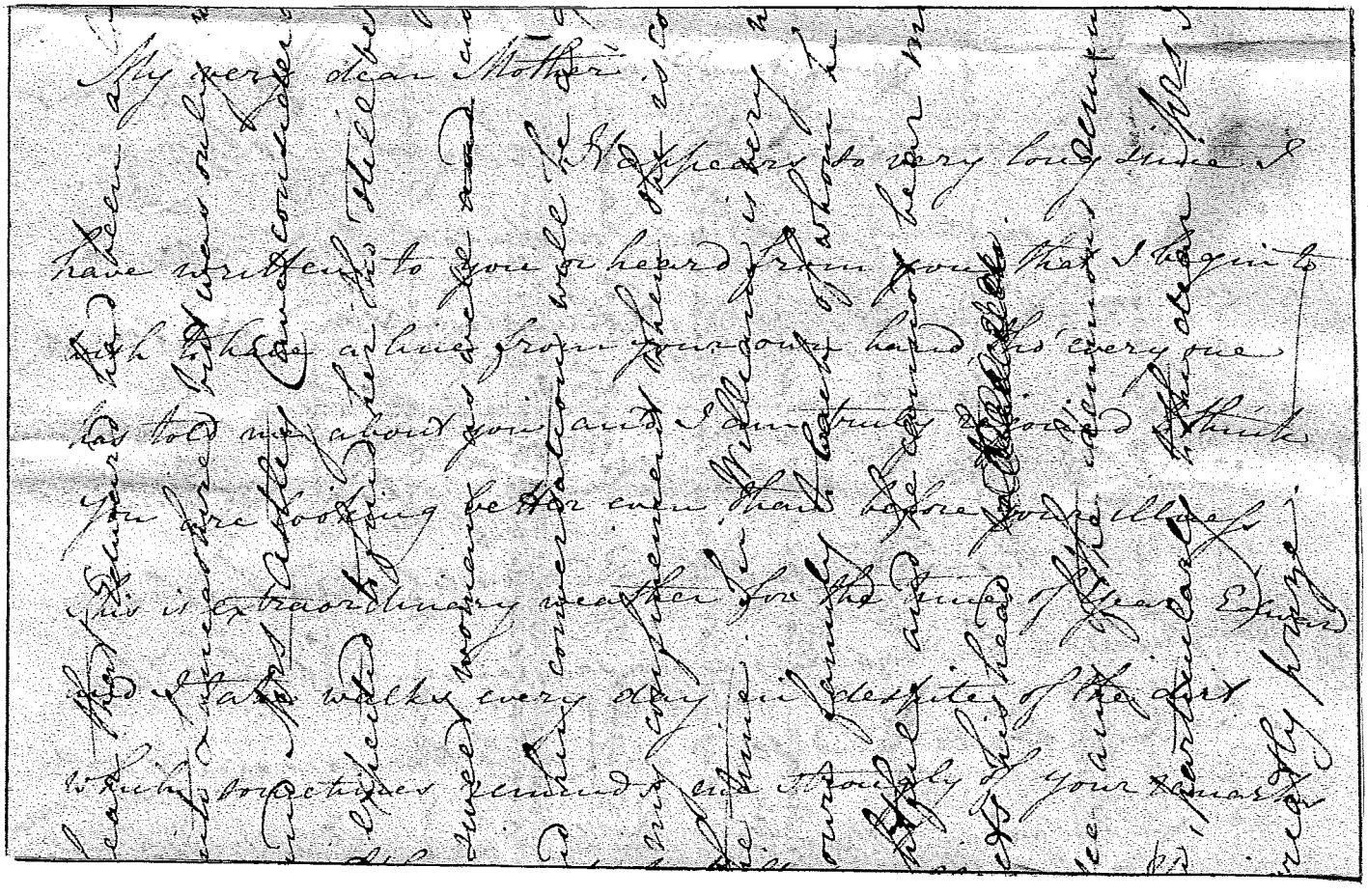
In '*Emma*' we find Jane Fairfax in conversation with Mr Knightley:

> " *"I went only to the post-office," said she, "and reached home before the rain was much. It is my daily errand. I always fetch the letters when I am here. It saves trouble, and is a something to get me out. A walk before breakfast does me good."*"" [11]

As this novel is set in Surrey, some sixteen miles from London, the letters would certainly have arrived at the post office by early morning at the latest. In the same novel we find a mention of "cross-writing" where, in an attempt to save postage by reducing the number of sheets of paper used, the writer turned the sheet through a right-angle and wrote over the script that was already there. Miss Bates describes a letter she has received from Jane Fairfax, her niece, to Emma Woodhouse:

> *"... - but, first of all, I really must, in justice to Jane, apologise for her writing so short a letter - only two pages you see - hardly two - and in general she fills the whole paper and crosses half. My mother often wonders that I can make it out so well. She often says, when the letter is first opened, 'Well, Hetty, now I think you will be put to it to make out all that chequer-work' - ..."* [12]

Part of a cross-written letter sent from Stretton, near Ashby-de-la-Zouch in 1832



Further mentions of "cross-writing" are to be found in Oliver Twist[13] and Elizabeth Gaskell's '*Wives and Daughters*'[14] when Molly Gibson receives a letter from her step-sister. This novel is set in the period just before the time of the reform Act of 1832, a time when high postal charges were of considerable concern. This is reflected in a number of instances in '*Wives and Daughters*'. When Mrs Gibson spends a week in London she writes to her husband on two occasions.[15]

> "*Now two letters during the week of her absence showed what was in those days considered a very proper amount of conjugal affection. Yet not too much - at elevenpence halfpenny postage. A third letter would have been extravagant.*"

A little further on we read:

> "*Cynthia's correspondence went on pretty briskly with her London cousins, according to the usual rate of correspondence in those days. Indeed Mrs Gibson was occasionally inclined to complain of the frequency of Helen Kirkpatrick's letters; for before the penny post came in, the recipient had to pay the postage of letters; and elevenpence-halfpenny three times a week came, according to Mrs Gibson's mode of reckoning when annoyed, to a sum 'between three and four shillings.'*"[16]

And then in Chapter 47:

> "*All this time Mrs Gibson was busy reading a letter from Cynthia which Mr Gibson had brought from London; for every opportunity of private conveyance was seized upon when postage was so high;*" [17]

I wonder if the postage of 'elevenpence-halfpenny' was 'plucked out of the air' by Mrs Gaskell or if it was a charge she had encountered. If the latter, the halfpenny surely denotes a local delivery charge. The town of Hollingford is set in Worcestershire/Herefordshire/Gloucestershire for there is mention of being able to see the Malverns from the top of a hill, a little beyond the second milestone from Hollingford. I do not know if Mrs Gaskell ever visited that area. The distance to London from most post towns in those counties would have fallen within the 80 to 120 miles band, giving a rate for a single letter of ninepence. Was there a local delivery charge of 2½d at any town in those counties? Though, if the letters had originated in the London twopenny post, then we have the more likely local charge of a halfpenny.

One of my favourite novels is '*North and South*' by Mrs Gaskell marred only slightly by the rather hurried and contrived ending. Here we find a little postal history that it is crucial for the development of the story-line. Margaret Hale's brother, Frederick, has returned to this country, despite facing arrest on a charge of mutiny, on the imminent death of his mother. After that death, he is accompanied, on his way to London, by Margaret to Outwood station where she is recognised by John Thornton. She waits for a letter to confirm that Frederick has completed his business in London and has safely left the country for Spain. When one does not arrive Margaret is forced to lie concerning her whereabouts on the evening of Frederick's departure, leading to an estrangement from John Thornton.

> "*The Sunday post intervened, and interfered with their London letters, and on Tuesday Margaret was surprised and disheartened to find there was still no letter.*"[18]

At the time this novel was written there was no transmission of mail through London on Sundays. Indeed, from 23rd June to 31st August 1850 there was no delivery of letters on a Sunday throughout the UK. For an article on 'Sunday Labour in the Post Office' during the nineteenth century see Midland Mail 61/11ff.

Eventually, a letter does arrive.

> "*She opened it at last. The first thing that caught her eye was the date two days earlier than she received it. He had then written when he had promised, and their alarm might have been spared.*
> *... Margaret turned to the envelope; it was marked 'Too Late.'*"[19]

Margaret ascribes the delay as probably having been caused by the letter being trusted to some careless waiter who had forgotten to post it, rather than the letter having been posted after the last collection of the day - a more likely cause.

I suppose given its recent showing on television we cannot leave Mrs Gaskell without making some reference to '*Cranford*'. In Chapter 5 we find a number of postal references, though postal historians will certainly shudder when they read of Matty burning old letters, especially the two bundles labelled of '*Letters interchanged between my ever-honoured father and my dearly-beloved mother, prior to their marriage, in July 1774.*'

The narrator describes an old gentleman of her acquaintance who was very economical.

"Envelopes fretted his soul terribly when they first came in; the only way in which he could reconcile himself to such waste of his cherished article was by patiently turning inside out all that were sent to him, and so making them serve again." [20]

There are two footnotes to passages[21] in this chapter which intrigue me. The first concerns some of the sheets of writing paper had a stamp in the corner which represented a post-boy riding hard and blowing his horn. The footnote says that this is a description of a type of writing paper with this watermark in one corner. I cannot be sure without taking out all the older covers in my collection but I do not recollect ever seeing such paper. The second is about wafers. The letters of Mrs Jenkyns and her mother were fastened with large red wafers for, we are told, this was before a book '*Patronage*' by a Miss Edgeworth had "*banished wafers from polite society.*" The footnotes informs us that a character in that book was offended to receive a letter closed with a wafer, and wonders how any man could "*have the impertinence to send me his spittle.*" I need to do a little research here for I have always associated wafers with the Victorian era.

There are also mentions of Members of Parliament selling franks (nothing ever changes), and cross-writing.

Of a totally different era and genre I turn to Robert Goddard's, '*Take No Farewell*'. The story is set in 1923/4 when the postage on a letter weighing up to one ounce was 1½d. So when two letters, postmarked in Hereford at 7.30 pm, on 19th July 1911, turn up with a three-halfpennny stamp it is realised they are forgeries. At a later trial the postmaster of Hereford gives his opinion on these and other postmarks.

"He said they confirmed in every particular way with franking practices in the Hereford sorting office, but he expressed surprise at how consistent they were. He explained that he would expect a random sample of postmarks to display differences in ink density, clarity and positioning. This was because the stamping pad was refilled with ink only ehen postmarks became noticeably faint and because some operators took greater pains than others to avoid blurring or skewing the mark. It was remarkable, therefore, that three letters posted at weekly intervals seemed to have received exactly the same treatment." [22]

Can any of the Herefordshire members tell me if the Hereford office was still handstamping letters in 1911? James Mackay gives the earliest date of a Hereford Krag machine as 4th June 1913.

I am sure that there must be many more examples of postal practices to be found in our Literature, and I would be pleased to hear of them. I am sure there are members more qualified to write on this topic as my degree subject could not be more removed from English Literature. Anthony Trollope would have been in the position to give accurate information in his novels. However, I have read nothing of his other than some of the 'Barsetshire' novels.

1. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859; Penguin Books, 1970, p 37-9.
2. idem, p 48.
3. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 1838; Penguin Books, 1986, p 427.
4. idem, p 296-7
5. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813; Penguin Books, 1985, p 291.
6. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 1814; Penguin Books, 2003, p 17.
7. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811; Penguin Books, 2003, p 110.
8. idem, p 154.
9. idem, p 259.
10. idem, p 32.
11. Jane Austen, *Emma*,1815; Penguin Books, 2003, p 272.
12. idem, p 147.
13. ibid, 457.
14. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 1866; Penguin Books, 1996, p 637.
15. idem, p 440.
16. idem, p 451.
17. idem, p 504.
18. Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South,* 1855; Penguin Books, 1995, p 265.
19. idem p 279.
20. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, 1853; Penguin Books, 2005, p 51.
21. idem, p 58.
22. Robert Goddard, *Take No Farewell*, 1991; Corgi Edition p 365.

JON BAKER TROPHY

It is time again for members to vote for what they think is the best article to appear in Midland Mail during 2009. So please look back through the previous five issues and then complete the enclosed form which should be returned to the Editor at, or by the date of, the March meeting. The definition of 'best' is left to you.

TWO HALVES DO NOT MAKE A WHOLE - OFFICIAL

Trevor Radway writes:

Post Office (advice for staff) in Operational Focus, Issue 50 (5th - 11th March 2009)) states officially that two half penny stamps put onto your letter will **not** now count as **one** penny. In other words a 14½d stamp plus a15½d stamp will only add up to twenty-nine pence. If you think it adds up to thirty pence, you are wrong, and the recipient will have to pay £1.02 for your letter I.e. 1p underpaid plus 1p deficiency fine plus £1 servicing.

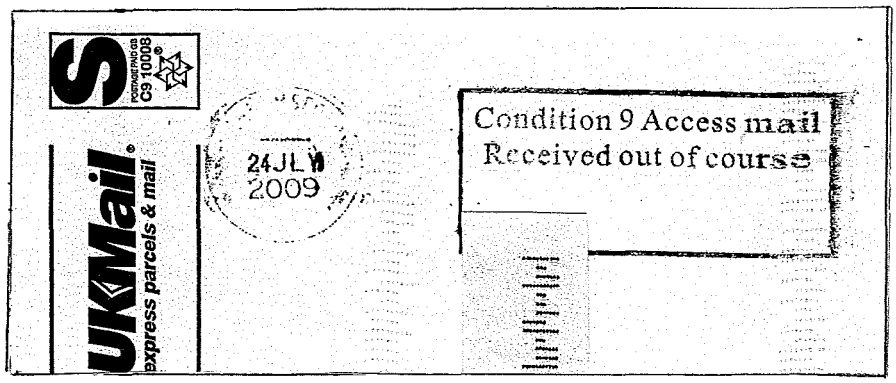
Since we innocent idiots purchased these half pence stamps as a prepayment for the Post Office to deliver a future letter, the thought crosses my mind that the Post Office might now be in breach of contract with us.

Answers on the back of a £10 note please, I have to cut my losses somehow!

Editor's Note: I will try this by sending a letter to myself. I will keep you informed.

CONDITION 9 ACCESS MAIL

Roger Broomfield has sent the following postmark. Can anyone tell us what this slogan signifies?



THE NEXT MIDLAND MAIL

This scheduled to appear at the end of March. It will contain the last of the pieces on Oxfordshire local posts. The rest will depend upon what is sent to:

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0118 978 2671

johnesoer @ aol.com

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