

MIDLAND MAIL

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



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The No Vote Society?

Annual General Meetings are not the most popular dates in any club calendar. Few could be less demanding than our own, conducted at a gallop as a curtain-raiser to the Annual Auction. The agenda is brief and the election of the Society's officers often no more than a formality. It may be a good moment to reinforce the point that members' nominations for the positions of Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Editor are keenly sought.

Readers of the more obscure columns of the newspapers may have noticed the growth of a No Vote Society whose members want the public to hold appointments on local councils not by election but by random selection. The principle would be much the same as selection for jury service and the advantage claimed for it is that many more people would have first hand experience of the realities of local government thereby increasing public awareness of what is done on their behalf. There is no truth in the suggestion that the 1985/86 officers of the Society will be appointed by means of a raffle but the no-vote principle may help to underline the advantages of involving new blood. If you would like to try your hand as, say, Editor or Secretary, persuade a friend to nominate you or nominate yourself. You may be just the transfusion we need.

News from Burton

Please note that our Secretary, Richard Farman, has completed the major part of his work for the Henhurst Hill Rehabilitation and Construction Company and has moved across the road to number 131. For those not in the picture, some explanation is in order. Having run out of jobs at No.124, Richard decided to buy the house on the other side of the road, pull it to pieces and put it together again as a way of passing the winter. When No.131 is as comfortable as No.124, he will call it a day. Who said marathon running was harmless? His phone number is unchanged.

The Auction List

Elizabeth and Eric Lewis will distribute the Auction List at the March meeting. Those who are absent can expect to receive a list by post at the end of the month.

The January Meeting

It had seemed likely that bad weather would restrict the attendance at the meeting on 19th January but, in the event, some 17 members and friends reached Dr Johnson House. The topic for the nine sheet displays had been suggested as Instructional Marks (including manuscript marks) and considerable ingenuity was evident as members believed almost anything to be instructional - even the address on the letter. Eric Lewis was directed by his better half to open the proceedings with some rare and early 'express' letters whose marks included "haste haste", gallows, stirrups and feathers attached by wax. 'Ches' Chester also showed some early manuscript marks ('by Coventry bagg', 'Turn at Ipswich') and a London letter that entered the General Post from the 2d Post thereby attracting no fewer than five instructional marks. Mike Young found his marks in the Worcester area - if 'Missent to Worcester, Mass' is counted as such. There was a 'Missent to Worcester' and 'Missent to Stourport' on a single cover and a 1978 'Deliver as Addressed' cachet which was happily ignored by the postman and thus ended in appreciative hands. Chris Beaver had a manuscript 'Stone bagg' which has attracted facetious comment before, a stamped 'Not Known at Newcastle upon Tyne' (often confused with Newcastle under Lyme), some Staffordshire 'Missent's and a '2'd due mark on a supposed OHMS letter. Of particular interest in Ian May's display was the use of a Coventry mileage stamp about 20 years after it was withdrawn with 'Missent to' added in manuscript. His more modern marks were modern indeed - right up to 1984.

Trevor Clewley went some way towards inclusion in the Guinness Books by mounting a mere 28 items on his nine pages. From early French postcards (in good taste) to contemporary letters, we saw a vast range of 20th century instructional marks: 'Return to sender for reason stated', 'Insufficiently Stamped', 'More to Pay' etc etc. Denis Salt's material was generally a century older with an Inspector's crown mark for amending a postal charge, 'Too Late' with the postmaster's initials, 'Not' Wellington and 'Mis-directed to' with a Shrewsbury handstamp. Don Keen had some international mail including a letter from Russia to America which found the addressee deceased and, appropriately enough, ended up in the Dead Letter Office. Don had also remembered that 'Par Avion' is probably the commonest instructional mark that no one else had thought to include. Steph Stobbs, not surprisingly, could go back to 1681 with 'Post paid 3d' on a letter to Shrewsbury but we had to take his word for it that a later cachet in French and German meant 'Stamps on the other side'. His knowledge extends far beyond Wem and Wig Wig.

One of the more unusual contributions was by Ted Coles who showed marks of the 1914-18 war. There was 'Posted on Board Ship Abroad', 'Improperly Posted - DELAYED' (soldiers should not have put their reduced rate letters in a civilian box), cachets used by military hospitals (wounded soldiers could usually send letters free) and marks on picture postcards intended for abroad but returned by the censor. John Calladine went back to the 16th century and looked at manuscript markings on letters of the Corsini correspondence. Peter Sharp had more modern marks on letters not delivered for various reasons or refused or returned to sender and he included one of the familiar stepped '1d to pay/liable to/letter rate' marks used as recently as 1963. Harold Wilson's marks were all connected with Derby. There were some nice missent markings - notably 'Missent to Derby Railway Office' in 1840, very soon after that office opened - and a letter with a manuscript '2' applied at Melbourne and '2' stamped at Derby. Elizabeth Lewis entrusted herself with the final display and she had some fascinating off-beat postcards with addresses in verse or by reference to distance from other points (no, that was not successfully delivered). There was an extra unscheduled concluding item concerning a young bear from Peru lost at a London railway terminus but if the label around its neck is an instructional mark then anything goes. Mostly it did.....

* * * * *

The February Meeting

Fourteen members attended the 'Competition Afternoon' on 23rd February, nine of whom submitted entries for the pre-1840 trophy and seven for the new award for predominantly post-1840 material. All entries were well up to the standard that we have come to expect (reports Eric Lewis) and brief details of each nine sheet entry are as follows:

For the Pre-1840 Trophy, Ian May entered Coventry mileage marks from the first type of 1785 to the time when the mileage numerals were removed from the handstamps. John Soer showed The Posts of Ashby de la Zouch from 1687 complete with notes on the routes taken by the mail. He had a cover clearly endorsed with an additional $\frac{1}{2}$ d for local delivery, a charge often made but rarely written down. From Ashby, we could move on to Stratford on Avon to see a variety of markings used there between 1773 and 1837, this entry being submitted by Peter Sharp. Gay Parker's display told the story of the mail coaches at Atherstone with examples of covers carried on them. He included a nice illustration of an old mail departure notice board still preserved at The Olde Red Lion Hotel in the town. Derek Smeathers traced the routes of the Penny Posts at Daventry from 1809 to 1837 and Harold Wilson showed straight line handstamps of Derby. Among the latter was a particularly attractive type with slanting letters ending in a fancy 'Y' which was evidently manufactured for the Post Office by the local printer as the same size and shape of lettering was already used for a column heading in the 'Derby Mercury' when this stamp appeared. Shrewsbury's inability to decide whether to use 'Shrewsbury' or 'Salop' for its handstamps of 1717 to 1800 was demonstrated by Steph Stobbs with the aid of a chart and, of course, suitable covers indicating a change of name in no less than six separate groupings, finally settling on 'Shrewsbury' which has been used ever since. Still in Shropshire, Denis Salt moved us on a few miles to Llanfyllin where appropriate covers amply illustrated the story of the mail routes to and from the village. Elizabeth Lewis completed the entries as they began - with mileage marks - but this time of Birmingham.

While two members, appointed as judges, were deliberating on the entries, a visitor, Tony Hudson, entertained the meeting with a display of early mail of Boston, Mass. The judges returned in good time for a cup of tea and announced joint winners of the trophy, Harold Wilson and Steph Stobbs, their entries being considered, after deep discussion, of equal merit.

The second competition for later material (with the date of 1840 being taken as a very broad baseline) then took place. The first two entries were from Warwickshire, Peter Sharp's Leamington Spa Sub-offices including both straight line and undated circular markings. The Athanaeum office was located where Rackhams' now stands and was beautifully shown as a straight line stamp on a 'Mulready'. Gay Parker's History of the Bedworth Post Office covered the period from its days as the No.3 Receiving Office of Coventry's Penny Post system to more recent times with notes of letters posted on tramcars. Did Steph notice the item returned to Bedworth with an undated circle of Halesowen? Derek Smeather's entry of the 1840-50 unframed skeleton handstamps of Northamptonshire towns was notable for the variety of coloured inks used. Turning north to Staffordshire, Chris Beaver showed the range of handstamps used at Leek during the 19th and 20th centuries. As a complete contrast, Ted Coles' entry was of Postal Stationery of the early part of World War I. Free mail was introduced for the forces on 29 August 1914 but stamped postal stationery continued to be issued in various forms for some time after that. Steph Stobbs featured UDCs of four sub-offices of Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury being one of the two towns which, with London, received instructions to cease using sub-office stamps experimentally on 9 September 1859. Eric Lewis completed the competition with an entry describing how the Post Office at Birmingham coped during World War II.

Again, two members were chosen to judge this competition and they announced Mr Coles as the winner. The Society's Trophies were presented to the three winners.

Forthcoming Meetings

The next meeting will be at Dr Johnson House, Birmingham on Saturday 23rd March at 2pm. The Society is delighted to welcome Michael Champness, President of The Postal History Society. Mr Champness, who was sole editor of the late, lamented publication 'The British Mailcoach', is probably best known as the most knowledgeable collector of undated handstamps and these marks are sure to feature prominently in his display. However, we have been promised a potpourri encompassing ship letters, wreck mail, coloured duplexes, 'used abroad' - you name it and you'll see it. The postal history of the Midlands is certain to receive more than its fair share of attention and this is a display not to be missed.

The final meeting of the season will be on Saturday 27th April, also at Dr Johnson House at 2pm. This will be the Annual General Meeting and Society Auction, the former quick and painless, the latter pacy and profitable. This year, for the first time, many of the auction lots will be on view from 1pm to give members a better chance to view some bulky 'pandora's boxes' that have been included. The auction proper will be underway as soon after 3 o'clock as a cup of tea will allow.

The April meeting will be preceded by a Committee Meeting at 1pm prompt.

Post Office Archives

Post Office Archives, which has been closed for several months, re-opened at its new location on 4th February. The address is now Freeling House, 23 Glass Hill Street, London SE1 0BQ and the telephone number is 01-261-1145. The new facilities are excellent and lunch can be obtained at one of several pubs in the area. Glass Hill Street is not easy to find and the following brief directions may prove useful:

Take the tube to Borough station which is on one of the remoter stretches of the Northern Line. Leave the lift and turn right around the corner into Borough High Street (you will see a Post Office across the road). Walk to the first set of traffic lights and turn right. Continue to the next set of traffic lights and you will see a prominent 'Cable and Wireless' building almost ahead of you. Walk round the left hand end of the building into Glass Hill Street which is at the back of it. No.23 is an inconspicuous glass door on the right about half way up the street before the railway arch. You will have to ring the bell to gain admittance. The walk from the tube takes no more than seven or eight minutes.

The new search room is on the first floor. It is spacious, warm and well-lit and there is a small kitchen where visitors can make coffee or tea at a nominal charge. There is a splendid photocopier (10p a sheet, either A3 or A4) and a machine for making photocopies direct from microfilm. Many of the Post 35 minutes which previously had to be requested from the staff are now available off the shelf.

Send for a copy of my latest list of GB cover material from 1840 onwards.
It contains a wide selection of interesting and unusual items -
county material, difficult values and rates, from 1840 to date.

All 'Wants Lists' receive my personal attention.

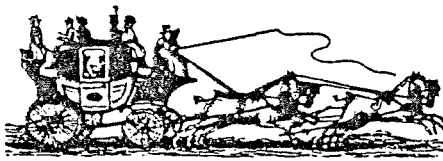


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POST OFFICE LISTS
of
Mail Coaches From London
1823 - 1838

Compiled by The Reverend Christopher M. Beaver

References:

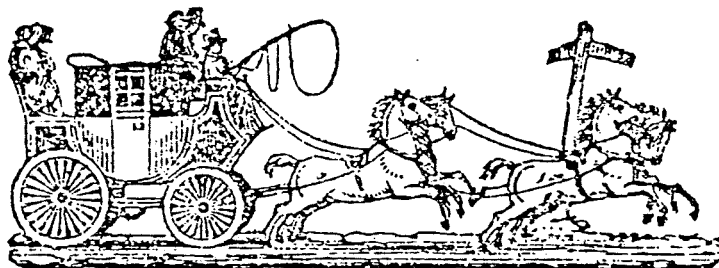
- a. Map of Mr Louis, 5th July 1823 (Post 10A/16).
- b. List of Mail Coaches from London, 6th June 1835.
- c. and d. Return of all Mail Coaches (for each year ending March 1st) for the five years 1837-41 for the House of Commons, 1841.
- e. Mr Wedderburn's List of Mail Coaches from London dated 1827 on the outside but November 22nd 1837 inside (though year of date is unclear). Comparison shows 1837 to be the correct date.

LONDON and :-

	a. <u>1823</u>	b. <u>6JUN35</u>	c. <u>36-37</u>	d. <u>37-38</u>	e. <u>22NOV37</u>	
Yarmouth (Auxiliary)	x	-	-	-	-	e includes but has a note 'Not a mail coach out of London'.
Norwich by Ipswich	x	x	x	x	x	
Norwich by Newmarket	x	x	x	x	x	By Bury also, from 1808, but not so shown on a.
Lynn	-	x	x	x	-	By Cambridge.
Wells	-	-	-	-	x	c & d include Lynn-Wells two-horse mail coach.
Louth	x	x	x	x	x	By Boston.
Hull by Lincoln	x	x	x	x	x	c & d have 'New Holland' (Ferry New Holland - Hull).
York	x	x	-	-	-	
York - Edinburgh	x	x	-	-	-	
Edinburgh	-	-	x	x	x	
Carlisle	x	-	x	x	x	By Boroughbridge. a. Connections to Glasgow, Portpatrick. Apparently 3 connected coaches.
Wetherby W - Carlisle	-	x	-	-	-	
C - Glasgow	-	-	-	-	-	
Leeds	x	x	x	x	x	By Nottingham, Sheffield.
Halifax	-	-	x	x	x	By Nottingham, started 1837.
Manchester	x	x	x	-	x	By Derby. a shows connection to Carlisle.
Derby	-	-	-	x	-	Route apparently shortened thus after Nov 37.
Liverpool by Warrington	x	x	x	x	-	Evidently ceased between 4 Jul 37 and 22 Nov 37.

	a.	b.	c.	d.	e.	
Chester	{ x	-	-	-	-	Route extended 1834/5 though Chester-Holyhead conn'n remained. London-Woodside ceased Apr 38.
Woodside (& Liverpool)	{ -	x	x	x	x	
Holyhead	x	x	x	x	x	By Coventry, Birmingham and Shrewsbury.
Birmingham	x	x	x	x	x	By Banbury. Cont'd to Shrewsbury c1830-?
Birmingham (Day)	{ -	-	-	x*	x	e 'Express' so by Coventry.
(i.e. Dublin Express)	(cf Howard Robinson: A Dublin Express Day Mail 8am from London, mail coach to Birmingham, 70 miles by train - Hartford 65m 6f on time bill - arr Holhead by 9.30am, Packet waiting. (1837-38).)					Grand Junction Railway.(cont'd)
Birmingham, Carlisle	-	-	-	x*	x	opened 4 Jul 37, carriages incl 'Liverpool & Birmingham Mail' and 'Birmingham & Manchester Mail'. d* shows mail coaches Warrington-Carlisle and Hartford-Chester-Holyhead. By Worcester.
Birmingham, Liverpool	-	-	-	-	x	
Birmingham, Manchester	-	-	-	-	x	
Ludlow	{ x	-	-	-	-	Started 1835? by Cirencester.
Worcester	{ -	x	x	x	x	
Gloucester	x	x	x	x	x	
Stroud	-	x	x	x	x	
Bristol	x	x	x	x	x	
Bath	x	x	x	x	x	
Exeter by Yeovil	-	-	x	x	x	
Exeter	x	x	x	x	x	c,d and e 'By Dorchester'.
Devonport	-	x	x	x	x	a has 2 Exeter-Falmouth conns.
Southampton	{ -	x	x	x	-	c and d incl Southampton - Poole 2-horse mail coach.
Poole	{ x	-	-	-	x	
Portsmouth	x	x	x	x	x	
Brighton	x	x	x	x	x	b,c and d state this is a 2-horse mail coach.
Hastings	{ x	x	-	-	-	b states a 2-horse mail coach.
St. Leonards	{ -	-	x	x	x	c and d are 2-horse mailcoach. All others on b,c and d stated as 4-horse MCs from London.
Dover	{ x	x	x	x	x	
Dover (foreign)	{ -	x	x	x	-	b specifies 3 times weekly, midnight from London.

Reference 'a' shows some other connections as 'London Mail Coaches' beyond the stated destinations e.g. Milford and Falmouth. Coaching contractors and inns often advertised destinations reached by lesser mail coach connections.



WAGES IN TRUCK

(Item submitted by Eric and Elizabeth Lewis)

One of the many evils of 19th century industrial life was the payment of wages 'in truck'. "Truck" means "barter" and the system involved the employer paying an industrial worker with goods or provisions, or tokens to obtain them, instead of paying him money. Thus the employee received goods of inferior value or was obliged to redeem his tokens at a shop owned by his employer where excessive prices were charged. The worker often needed to seek loans from his employer to maintain a minimum level of subsistence and his debts locked him into an ever-worsening cycle of poverty.

AT a very numerous and respectable MEETING of the INHABITANTS of the Town and neighbourhood of DUDLEY, held at the Public Office of that Town, on the 19th. of January, 1830. to consider the best means to be adopted, for more effectually punishing and prohibiting the cruel and injurious system, of paying the labouring classes in *Truck*, and for strictly enforcing the due payment of all Wages in Money only,

JAMES BOURNE, JUN., Esq.,
THE MAYOR, IN THE CHAIR,

The following Resolutions were unanimously agreed upon.

Moved by Dr. BOOKER, and seconded by THEODORE PRICE, Esq.

THAT in the opinion of this Meeting the great distress which now prevails among so many of the labouring classes, in this Mining and Manufacturing district, is mainly attributable to the cruel and oppressive practices of those Masters, who, instead of paying the wages of their workmen in MONEY, as required by Law, furnish such Workmen with provisions and other commodities, which, tho' of inferior qualities, are charged at immoderate prices.

Moved by E. D. SALISBURY, Esq., and seconded by C. CARTWRIGHT, Esq.,

THAT as the statutes for securing to workmen the due payment of their Wages in Money, are so frequently and openly violated, it is the determination of this Meeting to use every exertion to obtain additional Legislative Enactments for the punishment and prohibition of this mischievous and injurious system.

Moved by J. G. BOURNE, Esq., and seconded by Mr. HADEN,

THAT the MAYOR, The REV. DR. BOOKER, THEODORE PRICE, Esq., ABIATHAR HAWKES, Esq., E. D. SALISBURY, Esq., J. G. BOURNE, Esq., CORNELIUS CARTWRIGHT, Esq., MESSRS. FELLOWES, BADGER, TWAMLEY, ISAAC BADGER, HADEN, BAKER, JOSEPH GUEST, EDWARD GUEST, JONES, SIDAWAY, GORDON and BLAKEWAY, shall be a committee, to prepare the necessary PETITIONS, and adopt such measures as they may deem expedient, for forwarding the objects of this Meeting, with power to add to their number, and that any three of them be competent to act.

Moved by Mr. TWAMLEY, and seconded by Mr. BADGER,

THAT the Committee be requested to solicit subscriptions from all persons interested in the result of the measure, and that Petitions be prepared, and sent to the Members of this and the adjoining Counties, and that the Committee make such other applications to Parliament, and communications with the Board of Trade, His Majesty's Ministers, and the Members of both Houses of Parliament, as they may think fit.

Moved by Mr. HADEN, and seconded by Mr. ISAAC BADGER,

THAT the Resolutions be signed by the Chairman in behalf of the Meeting, and properly advertised and printed.

SIGNED,—

JAMES BOURNE, JUN.
MAYOR.

The Mayor having left the Chair, and it having been taken by Dr. BOOKER,

RESOLVED.—THAT the Thanks of this Meeting be given to the Mayor, for his prompt attention in calling the Meeting, and for his able conduct in the Chair.

SIGNED,—

L. BOOKER.

There were men of quality who recognised the evil. The illustrated item is a large double-page printed report of a meeting at Dudley which was sent to James Foster, a wealthy Black Country iron-master, enlisting his active support for legislation to

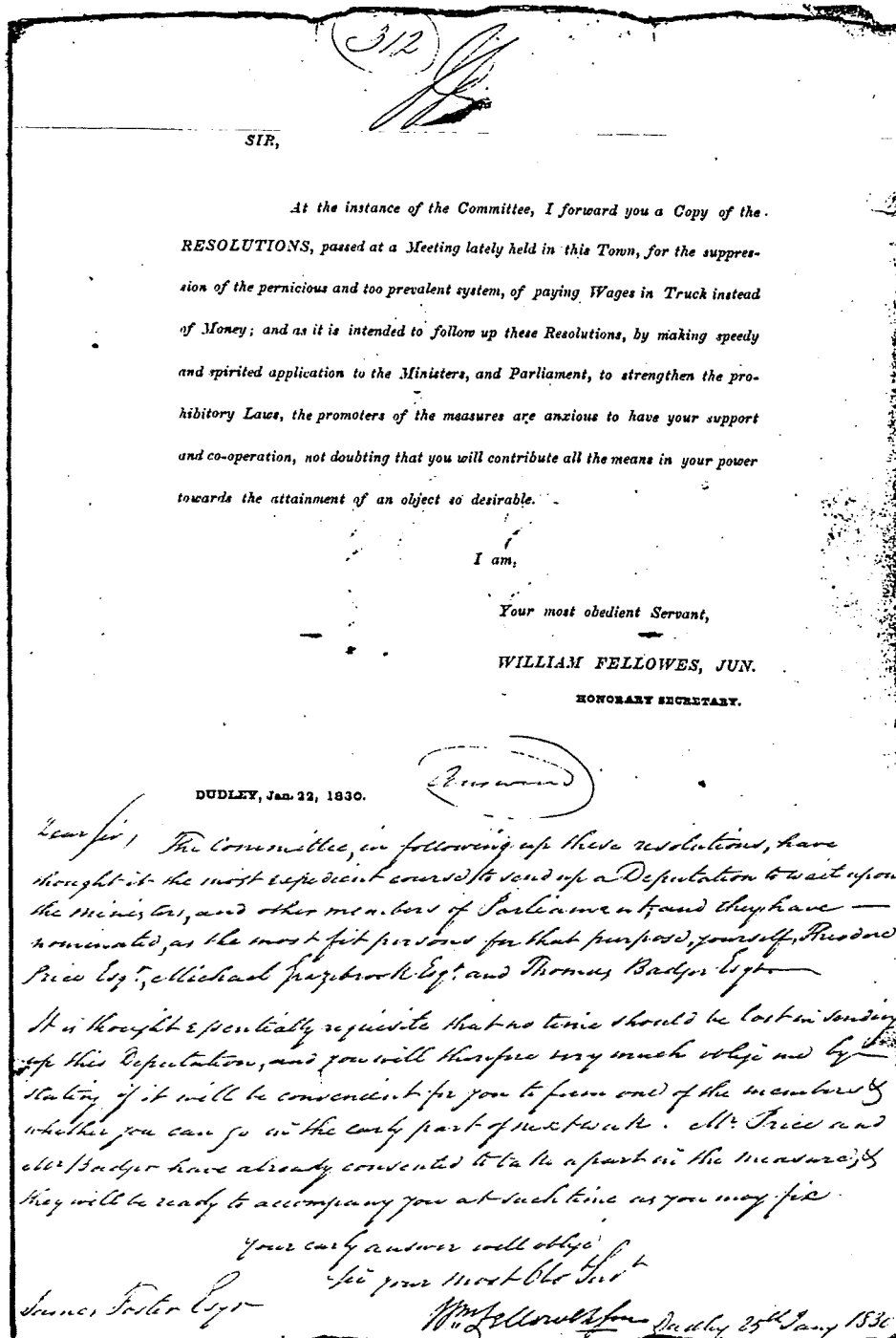
outlaw truck payments. It is dated January 1830 and the outside is postmarked with a DUDLEY undated circular town stamp and endorsed 'P.4' in red ink. The manuscript message on the report reads as follows:

"Dear Sir,

The Committee, in following up these resolutions, have thought it the most expedient course to send up a Deputation to wait upon the Minister, and the other members of Parliament, and they have nominated, as the most fit persons for that purpose, yourself, Theodore Price Esq, Michael Grazebrook Esq and Thomas Badger Esq.

It is thought essentially requisite that no time should be lost in sending up this Deputation, and you will therefore very much oblige me by stating if it will be convenient for you to form one of the members and whether you can go in the early part of next week. Mr Price and Mr Badger have already consented to take a part in the measure and they will be ready to accompany you at such time as you may fix.

Your early answer.." etc



The fate of this deputation is not known but the item may well be of considerable significance because it was in the following year, 1831, that the first Truck Act tackled this pernicious practice. There was a further Act in 1874. Not only did industrial workers win the right to be paid in money rather than in goods but to be paid in cash if they demanded it. To this day, the reluctance of some employees to be paid by cheque can be traced back to the bad old days of wages in truck.

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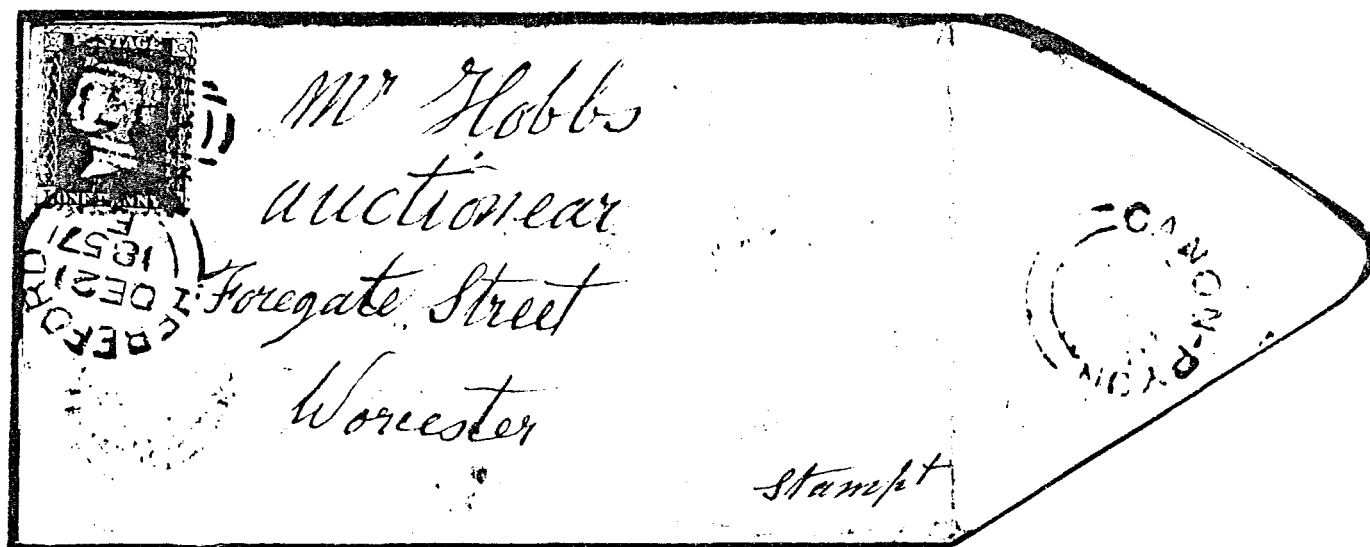
Book Review

'The Royal Mail in Bedworth 1825-1925' by Gay Parker & Robert Hunt.

Because this book was produced primarily for The Bedworth Society and not for postal historians, the authors had modestly assumed it would be of no great interest to the Society. How wrong they were! The forty eight A4 pages are divided into four chapters, the first providing a general background to British postal history - no mean feat - and subsequent chapters dealing in turn with early Bedworth mail (including the Coventry Penny Post), post-1840 developments and, finally, local postmarks and covers. The book is profusely illustrated and it would be surprising if anyone failed to enjoy it. A few points might be disputed but that is the fate of almost any book of local postal history. Perhaps some indication of the book's success is the rapid sell-out of a first printing. Hopefully, a second printing will be available by the time this appears and can be obtained from Gay Parker at 38, Joseph Luckman Road, Bedworth Warks CV12 8BD at a price of only £2.75. The book is well worth having and remarkable value for money. If there is one small niggle, it is that 'Midland Mail' didn't get a mention in the bibliography. We could use the publicity and one item from it was lifted and used in its entirety!

Something for the Cider Makers

As our Herefordshire membership has recently doubled (no prizes for guessing the before and after totals), it seems right to illustrate an item for their enjoyment.



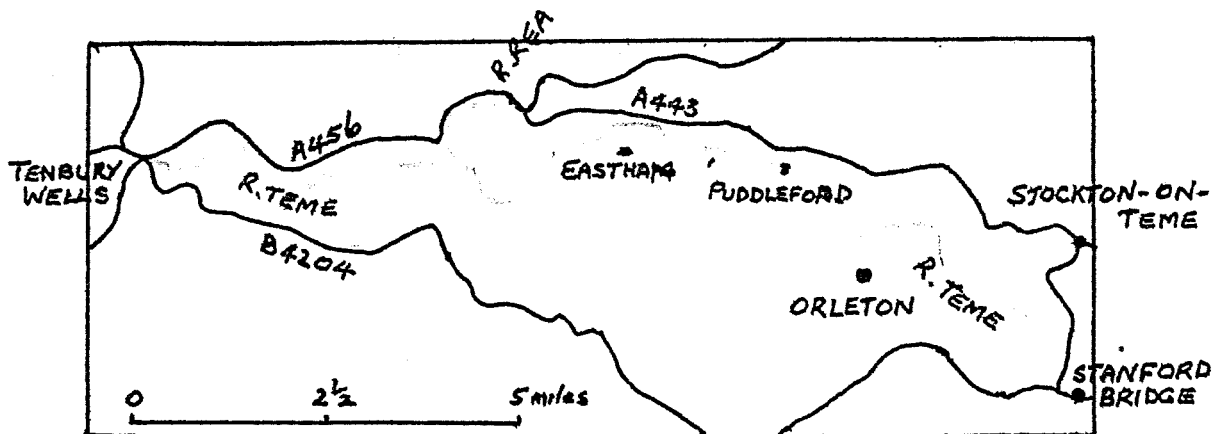
Canon Pyon is a village a few miles north-west of Hereford, one of a number of 'Canon's in the county and not the only 'Pyon' (manor). The sub-office at nearby Kings Pyon has just closed.

THE LAME POSTMAN

Contributed by C.W.E.Coles

An extract from "Down Along Temeside" by Richard Holding who lived at Orleton, Worcs.
Published in 1963.

"The post was delivered by road from Stanford Bridge and the 'walk' was done by a lame postman, taking all day over the round trip and clearing Orleton box on his return. Eastham letters were delivered from the opposite direction from Tenbury Wells and there was a postman's hut just opposite Puddleford where the two used to meet and brew tea. Not that either had much use for tea, for they were welcome to cider at almost every call along the way. Our postman was terribly lame and we always marvelled how he managed to do the twelve or fifteen miles daily over such rough roads, with his poor foot so bent that his heel never touched the ground. He had a stout stick on which he depended to urge himself along. This he hooked over his arm as he cheerfully handed over the mail."



DAVID SHAW

Specialist in Scottish Postal History.

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A selection of cheaper items from stock:

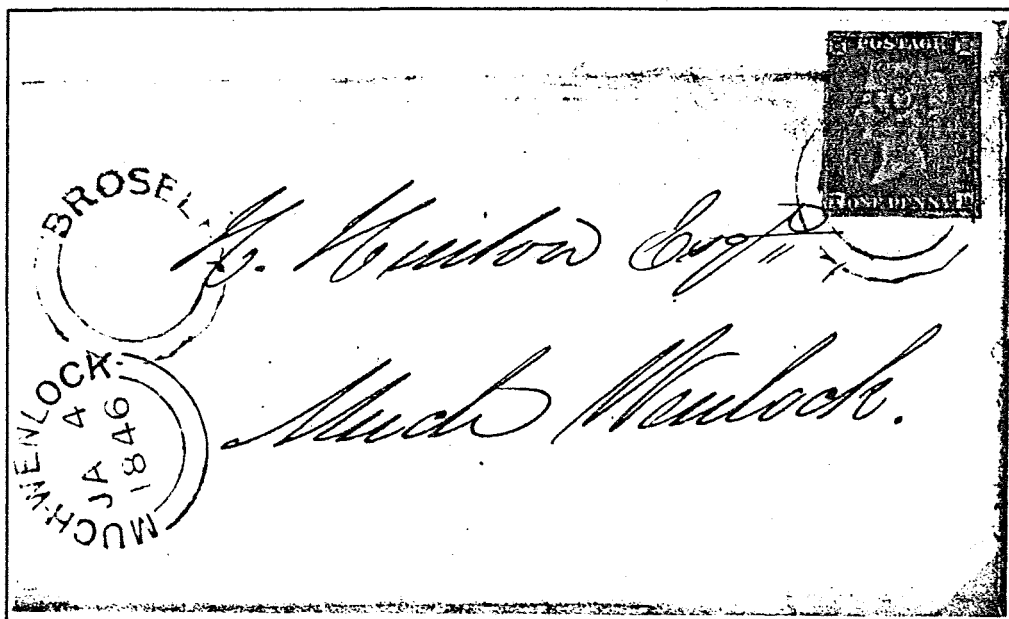
1832	E/L, good NOTTINGHAM single arc CDS on reverse	£3
1832	E/L, good undated circular RUGBY on reverse	£6-50
1839	E/L, fine undated circular ATHERSTONE on reverse	£7-50
1842	E, 4-margin 1d, good to fine Maltese X + MARKET HARBOROUGH CDS	£6
1844	Env, 4-margin 1d, fine =565= + fair NEWPORT SALOP d/arc alongside	£3
1847	E/L, 4-margin 1d, fine =448=, LEEK & BAKEWELL d/arcs on reverse	£4
1873	Front to Norway, 2x1d pl + 3d pl 12, 2 fine LEICESTER 4-bar duplxs	£4
1873	Env, 1d pl 145, fine OSWESTRY 4-bar duplex	£2

Please add 20p under £20 and 40p over this for post and insurance in transit.
Refund for any item not to your satisfaction if returned within ten days.

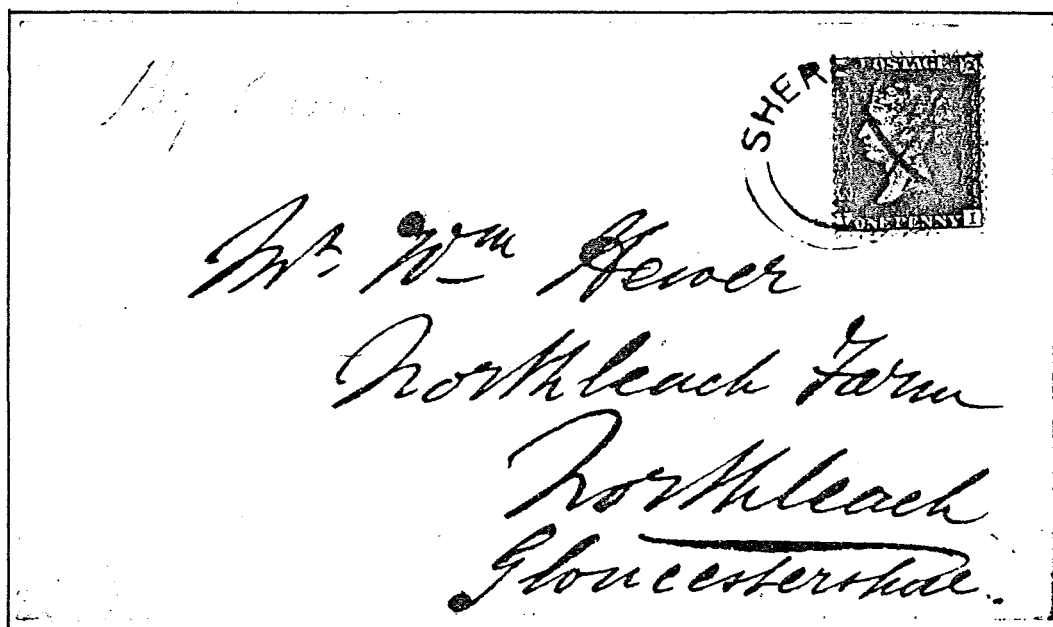
Hens' Teeth

Michael Champness has provided two illustrations of very rare useage of undated circular handstamps as cancellations on 'ride letters'. The regulations permitted letters to be handed to a letter carrier for delivery elsewhere on his ride provided that the adhesive label was duly cancelled in manuscript or by an undated handstamp. Few such letters have survived.

The first example is from Shropshire and can be dated to January 1846. The letter travelled from Broseley to the adjacent village of Much Wenlock. The undated Broseley handstamp was used to cancel the adhesive and was also struck on the cover as it might have been had the letter continued to, say, Ironbridge. However it was at Much Wenlock, the final destination, that the cover received its second handstamp which happened, fortuitously, to be dated since that office conducted Money Order business.



The second example is from Gloucestershire and probably dates from about 1859. The letter would have left the village of Sherborne at 3.50pm to be delivered in Northleach later the same afternoon. The postmaster at Sherborne was J.W.Hewer and it seems probable that it was he who sent the letter to a relative. The adhesive was cancelled by a manuscript 'X', by initials and by the Sherborne undated circular handstamp in blue ink.



HANDSTRUCK AT TOWER BRIDGE?

Dear readers, you are not easily fooled, even by wicked Lewis designs, for it was Eric who submitted the "mysterious" TOWER BRIDGE handstamp.

Chris Beaver wrote:-

" WHO'S TOWER? One tottering London Bridge at a time was deemed adequate until Victoria's glory reigned. True, its thoroughfare got so congested the Court of Common Council decreed as early as 1722 its traffic should always appear sinister, but that's another story. Where then? Not Deritend - Brummagem needed no towering edifice above Rea Brook. If only Abraham Darby had constructed a model for the Thames across the gorge at Coalbrookdale!

My gazeteer reveals no River Tower. An ancient form of 'Tay' perhaps? But no, the mania had taken a firm hold before that Firth was spanned - disastrously it proved one storm-swept night of '79. Ah, but haven't I heard tell of some minor tributary corruptly named 'Stower' with an erstwhile Port-on-Severn at its confluence - and is it an ancient packhorse bridge somewhere upstream? Could there have been a Receiving House nearby in so insignificant a spot?

Yes, there's no obligation to invent some castellated causeway built across the Wash to search for King John's Treasure. It's our own John who covets this cover! If it's yet entire, he might peep beneath the surface and find a Serpent and - the mystery unfolds - discover his precious pearl cost just 4d in, say, 1781?"

Well, I'm not sure about the 4d so let's see what Denis Salt had to say. "Approximate date", he wrote, "1781 or 1782. I would have expected a charge mark of 3d covering above 2 stages, not over 80 miles." What can one say? There was, indeed, such a charge mark but your unhelpful editor painted it out. "Suggest the Editor refers to his own article in Bulletin No.16" Denis continues. Thank you for remembering that.

No less an authority than Bill Sedgewick had his say. He found an identical mark in an auction catalogue of (wait for it!) 25th March 1964. (I thought Steph was the only collector in Britain in those days.) He was kind enough to forward a photocopy.

Mike Young was quick off the mark too but then he also collects quaint Worcestershire marks from insignificant towns with packhorse bridges. (The Editor will not forget those hurtful remarks from a man of the cloth.)

For anyone who remains in the dark, the strike was an incomplete one of (S)TOWER BRIDGE (an alternative spelling of 'Stourbridge') which is of a type previously known for 1781-82 but this example, of which a part of the contents is illustrated, is dated 12th December 1780. Tower Bridge, by the way, did not open until 1894.

Sir x

Stourbridge Dec^r. 12. 80

*In consequence of an Advertisement in the
Worcester Paper - I transmit you my Demand on
the Estate of M^r Roche for Interest due on Mortgage*

John Soer asks -

PENSIONS FOR HANDSTAMPS?

Recently I was given a copy of the Foxton, Market Harborough, single circle postmark, dated 12 JY 63, of which I already had a copy dated 9 JU 04. As Foxton was not issued with a replacement until 11th March 1965, this handstamp was in use for over 60 years.



This is not an isolated example since similar handstamps of some sub-offices of Market Harborough, along with that of Foxton, were recorded by Post Office Stores as withdrawn in 1965. For at least one of these villages, Cranoe, it appears that no other handstamp was used.

Great Dalby was issued with a double circle on 14th May 1913. This was recorded as withdrawn on 21st March 1974, a replacement single arc having been issued on 1st December 1973: again, over sixty years in use.

I am sure that there are many other examples. There are several Leicestershire offices, to my knowledge, still using handstamps which were in use by 1940. Can any members find instances of marks being used for more than sixty years? I would be delighted to hear of any strikes of the Foxton or Cranoe single arcs before June 1904.

* * * * *

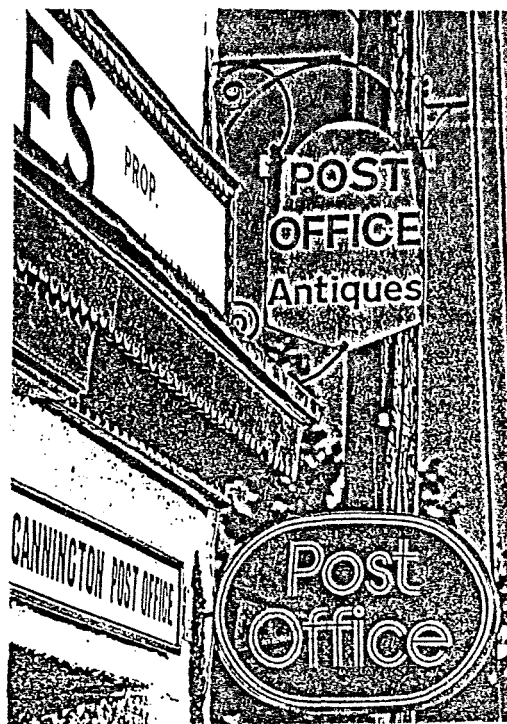
and Roger Broomfield asks -

Is this the emporium for the postal historian?



Alas, no - ALL is revealed.....

Photo of Cannington P.O., Somerset.



Sub-Office Closures

Gay Parker has written about a recent experience he thinks might interest members. He had been keeping an eye open for news of sub-offices being closed so that he could obtain a last day cancellation on a self-addressed registered envelope.

He went to Chapelfields in Coventry to do just that and found himself having a farewell drink with the postmistress and gaining, not only a wealth of local information but a lovely picture of the Victorian shop front complete with the previous postmistress and a Ludlow wall box.

During his discussions, a knowledgeable local came in and, hearing what was being said, went out and returned with a book which he said he wanted to give to Gay. It turned out to be a 1st edition of 'The Romance of the British Post Office - its inception and wondrous development' dated 1897. The donor positively refused any payment but eventually agreed to accept a copy of Gay's new book (reviewed on another page) in return. As Gay says, such actions renew one's faith in human nature.

Incidentally, in another part of the Midlands, the sub-office at Stourton closed recently. The postmistress, who had run it for thirty years or more, died the same day.

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DEACIDIFICATION

An Amateur's Guide to Document Conservation

Few of us who collect letters already 100, 200 or even 300 years old give much thought to their likely condition two hundred years hence. If the paper is brittle and fragile, we clean the item carefully, mount it securely and feel we have done our best. In a public archive, conservators are aware of the need to protect irreplaceable original documents to ensure that future generations have more to study than a micro-film and a packet of dust. To them, deacidification is routine: to us it is still almost unknown.

The problem is that paper contains the means of destroying itself. Acids that are already present cause the paper to become brittle and yellow with age. There are means of measuring the pH value of a sample of paper (its acidity or alkalinity) with a surface probe but the equipment is not normally available to the amateur. Fortunately it is not necessary because, although deacidification may not always be absolutely essential, it is unlikely to be harmful. In the circumstances, it would seem foolish to ignore its potential.

Acid attack causes 95% of all paper deterioration. Deacidification has the potential to increase paper life from two to forty times. Its aim is to impregnate the paper with benign chemicals which will:

- a. Neutralize the acids present.
- b. Prevent the future development of any more acid.
- c. Reduce the rate of oxidation.
- d. Ward off 'foxing' (brown stains caused by moulds).

A single treatment has the capability of doing all this effectively for several hundred years, or so we are told. The products used commercially are often in the form of solutions kept in a tank into which the documents are dipped until thoroughly wet. For amateurs, however, the practical method of deacidification is by means of an aerosol spray and it is this method that has been investigated.

Before buying a suitable aerosol and setting to work, a few words of caution seem directed at the amateur postal historian. The first concerns the ink used on old letters. Fortunately few problems are likely to be encountered with the product tested but, as a matter of routine, the ink should be tested for bleeding, feathering, discolouration and sensitivity to pH change by trying the product on the least significant part of the written text. The aerosol could be directed at a small paint brush and the brush used to wet a little of the ink. The other cautions concern safety. The aerosol should be used in conditions of good ventilation - by an open window or even outdoors - and it is an excellent idea to wear PVC gloves. It hardly needs pointing out that it should not be sprayed into one's eyes or onto a hot stove but such actions would seem to constitute deliberate mis-use. In truth, the suggested product is classified as non-flammable and non-poisonous and the vapour is considerably less hazardous than the vapours of some common household products.

The product tested goes under the somewhat unusual name of "Wei T'o" spray. There are three such sprays, known as Nos.10, 11 and 12. All are nonaqueous and therefore dry in seconds rather than hours. The one chosen was No.10 which is described as 'professional standard' but it is the spray least likely to affect ink of any kind. For the chemistry masters in our midst, the deacidification agent is magnesium methyl carbonate, the primary solvent is trichlorotrifluorethane and the aerosol propellant is carbon dioxide. It is not cheap: a large (1lb 6oz) aerosol will cost £12-70 + VAT but it should preserve many letters and a can could be shared. It is available from Messrs J.Hewit and Sons Ltd, 97 St John Street, London EC1M 4AT.

The comprehensive instructions on the aerosol suggest that the document or letter

be placed on a spray-board-rack in an upright position. In the absence of a suitable rack and a fume cupboard, the following method was tried. A taut string was fixed across an open window and the top edge of the letter clipped to it. The instructions call for the document to be wetted thoroughly by spraying evenly from side to side in an overlapping pattern. In fact, against the light, it proved very easy to see the area wetted and no difficulty was experienced in covering every inch of the letter. The aerosol is a little messy and there is good reason to wear a glove, at least on the spraying hand, to avoid skin contact. Blockage of the aerosol spray is admitted to be a common problem but no trouble was encountered and a spare spray head was supplied with the aerosol.

The paper of the letter dried quickly. If it starts to cockle, the letter should be placed between two sheets of clean white blotting paper under moderate pressure. Most of our letters are on quite heavy paper and this is not expected to be a common problem. If anyone would like to try their hand at a wider range of samples, an aerosol can be made available. There is a catch - 'Midland Mail' will want to know how you get on but that seems a small price to pay. Members may feel that the wider subject of document conservation and repair would be a suitable subject for a professional display at a future meeting.

* * * * *

The Jon Baker Trophy

The first winner of the Jon Baker Trophy, an engraved rosebowl, is Chris Beaver for his article on the Newcastle under Lyme Fifth Clause and Penny Post Provisions. A prolific contributor to 'Midland Mail', Chris had several articles for consideration and there can be no doubt that his award is well deserved and hard earned. The Jon Baker Trophy, which is in memory of our late Bulletin editor, is awarded each year for what is judged to be the best original article in 'Midland Mail'. The Trophy will be presented at the March meeting.

The Committee

At the AGM in April, a proposal will be discussed to increase the number of members on the Committee of the Midland (GB) Postal History Society. At present it comprises only the four elected members and, with a larger Society membership, it is felt that wider representation may be welcome.

MICHAEL A. HARRIS, P.T.S., B.P.F.
PHILATELIST

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THE UNDATED CIRCULAR MARKS OF THE MIDLAND COUNTIES

Members were promised important news of The Great UDC Exercise. The news is that the Society's first publication, "The Undated Circular Marks of the Midland Counties", will go to press at the end of March. The book, which will be reproduced to the same standard as 'Midland Mail', will contain approximately 100 A4 pages and will be illustrated. Two versions will be offered; one spirally bound and the other punched to fit any standard A4 ring binder.

The scope of the book is extensive, taking in the counties of Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire (and Rutland), Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire (with a separate Birmingham section) and Worcestershire. It aims to list every undated circular mark issued to sub-offices in these counties or under their post towns. This data has been obtained from a comprehensive search of the Steel Impression Books in Post Office Archives. To it has been added a record of the known useage of each mark by date and ink colour obtained from your completed questionnaires and from other societies and individuals with important collections.

The book also includes, for each county, a list of the post towns and subordinate offices at the time of the undated circular marks. Each mark has been indexed against its sub-office so that it can be quickly found in the chronological list and also, when desired, in the Steel Impression Books themselves. It is doubted that anything on this scale has been published previously on UDCs and the scarcity of many of the later marks will become apparent.

The data in the book has been simultaneously recorded on magnetic discs and will be amended continuously. It is anticipated that updated pages will be offered each year to members who elect to have the loose-leaf version. A simple system of forwarding new information to the County Editors has been devised.

With our modest subscription fee, it is impossible to offer the book without charge but "The Undated Circular Marks of the Midland Counties" will be available to paid-up members of the Society at a reduced price of £4. A further announcement will be made when the publication is immediately available.

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Special Offer No. 1 : 25 different Ship or £1
India Letters for
Special Offer No. 2 : 40 different Ship or £2
India Letters for

Note.—In neither of the above offers can we guarantee the number of different ports contained in the collection, but each item will be different either in colour or type. The additional 15 items of offer No. 2 brings in a few quite scarce items in order to maintain this.

Special Offer No. 3 : We have made up two collections of India Letter stamps, comprising one example from each of the following 20 ports:—Brighton, Cowes, Dartmouth, Deal, Devonport, Dover, Falmouth, Gravesend, Hastings, Kingsbridge, Liverpool, Lymington, Margate, New Romney, Penzance, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Ramsgate, Southampton and Weymouth for £5 per collection. This is a snip and we cannot repeat. We have only one each of Brixham, Exeter, Lewes, Milford, Swanage and Port Glasgow, all extremely £3 scarce, which the first purchaser can have for

Special Offer No. 4 : We are prepared to offer a collection comprising £20 one good example from each of 40 different ports for
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POSTAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT.

This offer may have been withdrawn by now. The advertisement appeared in May 1940 when our minds were on other things.

The next 'Midland Mail'

Andrew Watton's magnum opus on Bengeworth, tentatively scheduled for this issue, will now appear in the May number of 'Midland Mail'. Following hard on the heels of Ted Coles' very popular item on 'The Cleobury Mortimer Postman' which even the BPF has asked to use, Denis Salt and Mike Young have put together an illustrated article on The Cleobury Mortimer Post for our further enjoyment. There will be a report of Michael Champness' visit and, of course, the results of the Annual Auction. A useful index to the Minuted Series of P.O. Archives will bring up the rear and, by then, it will be time to mow the lawn. Until May.....

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