



# SIPA

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Mount Everest Expedition 66

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Birth of Regd. Letter 75

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Visiting National Exhibition - by Florence Vilen

A stamp collector is free to collect material according to personal taste, but any person who collects something also ought to see how it can be done truly well. When there is a great stamp exhibition going on it is a good idea for anybody who could arrange it to have a careful look at the exhibits.

Stockholm recently staged a huge international stamp exhibition, with some 1100 exhibits. The standard was exacting. There were more than 160 thematic (and documentary) collections, a small number in comparison to more traditional areas, yet impressive, a feast and a challenge for the visitor. Good thematic collections were also shown in the youth department and in an excellent new area called modern philately, implying stamps - and other postal material - only from the last ten years.

Which thematics had a chance with the judges? Those that showed a great amount of unusual postal items. There were genuinely old letters such as Canada's beaver (#1) illustrating forest animals, there was postal stationery from the early century, and there were covers with marks of various catastrophes. For a gold medal you had to display a considerable number of truly exclusive and elusive covers. For the other medals, genuine cancellations were a must, as well as postal stationery.

A collection with only stamps - beautifully displayed, singles, in miniature sheets, with an occasional special cancellation - had little chance of more than a bronze. It could be very pleasing to the eye, though.

Text was always at a minimum. No catalogue-type information on any stamp, but sometimes short identifications of cancellations. The next was used for telling the story, binding the stamps together. When in Dutch or Bulgarian, for instance, it was of no help for most visitors. Some of the English was also rather difficult; many

countries do not teach it well. But then, could you write up your collection in impeccable English?

What else? Genuine covers; no FDCs. Acceptable, indeed widely used, were such items as telegrams with illustrations by postal authorities. They did, however, make the stamps look paltry. A special attraction was the postal stationery, etc., from Nazi Germany.

The emphasis was on postal items. The single stamps seemed quite subordinate, rather a pity when considering the special point of thematic collecting.

(Courtesy: Topical Time, 1987)

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## INPEX 2008

January 2-6, 2008  
Raja Muthaiah and  
Rani Meyyammai Halls,  
Egmore.

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## STAMP NEWS

### 1857 : First war of Independence

09.08.07

1500,500

0.8 Mill Each

The year 1857 witnessed the first war of independence, which is perhaps one of the defining moments of Indian freedom struggle. Scholars and historians ascribe many causes and among these causes



one that triggered the chain of incidents was reaction of the Indian soldiers of the East India Company's army, to the grease of the new kind of cartridge they were compelled to use. Perhaps the more important causes were people's discontentment with the land taxes taken by the British government, the seizure of many kingdoms and princely states by the British, and above all, people's desire for freedom from foreign rule.

One of the early incidents of protest by soldiers took place in Barrackpur near Kolkata. On March 10 they marched to Delhi and declared the Moghul King Bahadurshah II, as the Emperor. Soon after in the month of May, 1857, Indian soldiers of the East India Company, called by the British "Native sepoy", revolted. The fire soon spread to Kanpur, Lucknow, Jhansi, Bareilly and many other parts of the Gangetic heartland, and the storm centers were spearheaded by Nana Saheb, Diwan Azimullah, Tantia Tope, Kunwar Singh and Rani Laxmi Bai. The big battles between the British and the rebels took place mainly in the region between the Narmada and the Ganga. But reverberations were felt in distant parts such as South Maratha Country, some parts of South India, parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan and even in North East India in Khasi-Jaintia hills and Cuchar.

The significance of 1857 is that unlike many a battle against the British earlier, for the first time simultaneously there were rebellions in many regions, imparting an all-India character to the uprising. 1857 was remarkable not only due to its unprecedented scale, covering almost half of India, but also due to its impact on popular mind everywhere. It was a source of inspiration for the freedom struggle that followed.

Moreover, the unity that was displayed between the different communities during the uprising was quite remarkable. Another significant aspect of 1857 was the unity under the Mughal Emperor. The allegiance to the

emperor was accepted by almost every leader in the rebellion and thus it can be said that this loyalty brought about a measure of political unity among those who were in the struggle against foreign rule. For all these reasons 1857 and the stories of heroism and martyrdom and struggle for independence have a place in the hearts of the people of India.

The stamps and the miniature sheet artistically depict the two pitched battles at Kanpur and Lucknow focusing on unknown soldiers.

The First Day Cover depict the dawn of the new nationalism symbolized by the rising sun; the guns whose greased cartridges provided the immediate catalyst. The First Day Cover also depict a part of the constitution drafted by the sepoy.

The two maxim cards depict war scenes, adopted from murals and tribal paintings from Madhya Pradesh.

Theme : Freedom Struggle.History



## 1924 MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION

### JONATHAN SPOONER

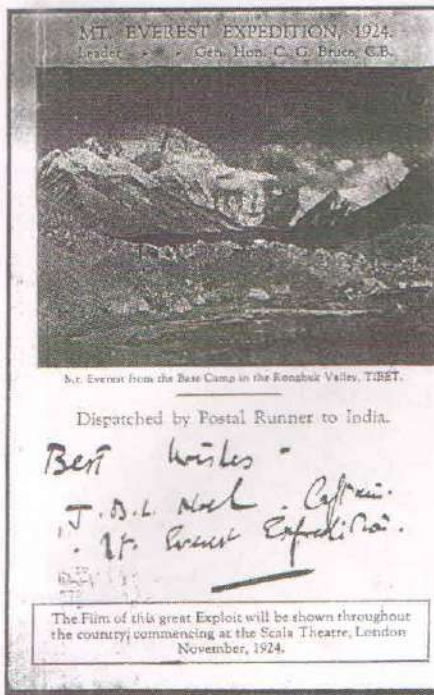
In the 50th Anniversary year (2003) of the conquest of Mount Everest, Jonathan Spooner looks back at the unsuccessful 1924 expedition and the philatelic souvenirs created to help finance it.

The first recorded ascent of Everest was made by Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay on 29 May 1953, a remarkable event which celebrated its 50th Anniversary earlier this year. The achievement marked a water shed for mountaineering which also laid to rest many of the disappointments of previous Everest expeditions. Perhaps the most famous of these was the 1924 British Everest Expedition which resulted in the tragic deaths of George Mallory and Andrew 'Sandy' Irvine.

A sense of mystery has surrounded the efforts of Mallory and Irvine. Although considered by many to be unlikely, there has remained the possibility that the two climbers reached the summit of Everest and fell during their descent. Proving this theory relies on finding a Kodak camera which the pair were thought to have taken with them. Processing experts believe that, were the camera to be found, there is at present a reasonable chance the film inside could be developed. Mallory's body was found by the 'The Mallory and Irvine Research Expedition' in 1999 without the camera, but the remains of Irvine have yet to be located.

We may never know how far Mallory and Irvine got towards reaching their goal, but their endeavours and

those of other members of the 1924 expedition are well documented in mountaineering history. Looking at photos of the climbers dressed in tweeds and woollen garments, wearing hob-nail boots with some carrying bulky breathing apparatus, only serves to reinforce the magnitude of their achievements.



### The souvenir postcard

One small but not insignificant legacy of this expedition survives in quantity; a souvenir postcard

sent from the Everest base camp to subscribers. It has an obvious appeal to many stamp collectors and together with the special label and several cachets tells its own story of the 1924 expedition. The expedition itself was the result of growing fascination with Everest after it was revealed, in 1852, to be the World's highest mountain.

In 1849, the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India began and included approximate triangulations of those Nepalese peaks which could be seen from within the Indian border. Since the borders of Nepal remained closed, Everest was in fact measured at various positions over 100 miles away.

Without knowledge of local names, most peaks were assigned a Roman numeral; XV in the case of Everest. With so many triangulations to calculate, it was not until 1852 that the survey concluded Peak SV was higher than Kanchenjunga (28,307 ft.), the Indian mountain which had, up until that point, been considered the world's highest. The survey estimated Everest's height to be 29,002 ft. which astonishingly, given the great distance from which the triangulations were taken, is only a few feet below the present estimate of approximately 29,028 ft.

### Chomolungma

The world's highest mountain was named after Sir George Everest, the Surveyor General of India, by his successor Sir Andrew Waugh in 1865. The naming of Peak SV was seen as a tribute to Everest's work for the survey, although he himself was uneasy about the 'accolade'. It was, after all, official policy that the discovered mountains should be known by their local name. The Tibetan name is

Chomolungma meaning 'Goddess, Mother of the World' but for better or worse the mountain is popularly known as Everest.

The sheer size of the newly named Everest was such that most people believed it could never be climbed. Political events too played their part in ensuring that Everest remained something of an enigma. Nepal's



borders remained closed whilst Tibet was ruled by China. During the early years of the 20th century, Britain's imperial eye was focused on the perceived threat of the invasion of Tibet by Russia.

In 1904 Colonel Francis Younghusband led a military expedition into Tibet which quashed any possibility of Russian influence in the country. As a result of the expedition and subsequent political manoeuvring, Chinese rule was also ended. Britain quickly sought to establish diplomatic links in independent Tibet which paved the way for British climbing expeditions to approach Everest from the Tibetan side. On consequence of Younghusband's military expedition of special interest to philatelists was the establishment of Indian Post Offices in Tibet, some of which were later to be used by climbing expeditions to Everest.

It is not coincidental that Younghusband himself was fascinated by Everest, for he already had a reputation as something of an adventurer with an appetite for climbing. In 1893 he had met the like minded Hon Charles Granville Bruce, a lieutenant in the Gurkhas. The two men spent some time climbing together and the subject of Everest arose. Whatever their individual thoughts on the possibility of successfully ascending Everest, both men clearly saw the mountain as worthy of exploration to assess its climbing potential. Whilst political events conspired to thwart any immediate thoughts of mounting an expedition, the possibility of doing so had been seriously considered.

### The first expeditions

In fact it was not until 1921 that an organised climbing expedition set out to explore the mountain, in preparation for an expedition the following year. Both

Bruce and Younghusband were to undertake pivotal roles in early British expeditions. Bruce was team leader of the 1922 expedition and was chosen for the same role in 1924. A bout of malaria and less than perfect health meant that he had to relinquish the leadership of the 1924 expedition within three weeks of leaving Darjeeling. There is little doubt that his leadership skills were greatly admired and his presence was missed. Fortunately his replacement, Edward Norton, although a very different character, proved to be an equally capable leader. Younghusband was one of the founder members of the Mount Everest Committee, which was set up by the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club. He resigned after the 1922 expedition but continued to play an important role in British pre-war Everest expeditions.

During the 1922 expedition two climbers, George I Finch and J Geoffrey Bruce, reached a height of 8320 metres (27,297 ft.) but their achievement was marred by the deaths of seven Sherpa porters as a result of an avalanche below the mountain's North Col. The Everest Committee were keen to ensure however that the knowledge and impetus gained from the previous two expeditions was used to good effect. As a result, the third Everest expedition was planned for the summer of 1924. It was while on a US lecture tour in 1923 that a reporter asked George Mallory, a member of the 1922 expedition, why he wanted to climb Everest and Mallory immortally replied, 'because it's there'.

Finance was proving to be the biggest obstacle for the Committee; an issue which had caused ructions during the 1922 expedition. In the event the issue was resolved by Captain John Noel, who approached the Committee with a proposal to buy the rights to all the photographic work on the expedition for £8000. This was to include both stills and film. Understandably the committee leapt at the opportunity, gladly accepting Noel's offer because this huge sum effectively reduced their financial burden to minimal.

Noel himself was confident that in spite of this huge expenditure he would make a good profit from the deal. To raise this sum, which was to be paid to the Committee prior to the expedition's departure, Noel set up a company, Explorer Films Ltd., with a certain Sir Francis Younghusband as Chairman.

### A risky venture

Although Noel's financial offer to the Everest Committee was even in the mildest terms risky, it was not simply a case of bank-rolling the expedition from a position of blissful ignorance. Noel was both a great adventurer and entrepreneur; a man evidently not content to sit back and watch the world go by. In 1913 he had made an unauthorised and consequently hazardous journey into Tibet, eventually sighting the massive form of Everest. He subsequently gave lectures on his journey which were to add impetus to plans for exploring Everest.



The scarce 'Rongbuk Glacier Main Base Camp 17,000ft' cachet

John Noel had been chosen as a member for the 1921 expedition, but his military obligations meant he could not join the team. He was accepted for the 1922 expedition and placed in charge of filming, the result of which was later shown in Britain where it was moderately successful. This was enough to convince Noel of the commercial potential of such a film, especially if the summit of Everest was reached. Of course, once he had struck his deal with the Everest Committee for filming rights on the 1924 expedition, his place in the team was guaranteed.

One of Noel's ideas for raising the revenue he required was the subscription based postcard advertising the expedition film which was to be shown in venues throughout Britain on the return. On the front is a photo taken from the expedition base camp; the tents are visible in the foreground against the backdrop of the north face of Everest. The latter stages of the northern route taken by the climbers in 1924 roughly followed the north east ridge. In this view the ridge is to the left of the summit.

Below the photo is a greeting, 'Best Wishes - J.B.L. Noel, Captain - Mt. Everest Expedition', which deceives many who believe their card has been signed in Noel's own handwriting. In fact the greeting was printed to save Noel from what would have been the daunting task of individually signing thousands of cards. Nevertheless its inclusion was a personal touch which must have added to the pleasure of those who received one.

### The label and cachets

Noel designed a label that was affixed to the reverse of the souvenir postcards, as well as other

expedition correspondence, and as such it has been suggested that the label served a local postal need. The 'local' adjunct is probably superfluous, since each item of mail was already prepaid to its destination with Indian stamps. It is possible that the label had local status in Tibet before the mail was handed over to Indian post offices, but there are no obvious reasons why this should have been necessary, given the use of runners employed by the expedition.



The 'Tractor Party' cachet

It is easier to view the label as another form of promotion which endorsed every item of expedition mail. Printed in dark blue, the label is very striking with its bold depiction of Everest's north face as viewed from the base camp. In each corner is the symbol of peace, frequently used prior to World

War II. Sikkim, which in 1975 became the 22nd State of the Indian Union, is named in the left - hand border. Bordering both Nepal and Tibet, Sikkim was of strategic importance since it offered a practical route from Darjeeling (which it 'gifted' to British India in 1835) to Tibet. In the top and right-hand borders are the names of the two countries within which the world's highest mountain lies; Tibet and Nepal.

Each label was tied to an item of expedition mail by one of four special cachets. By far and away the most commonly found cachet is that which was used to tie the usually struck in red, the double circle cachet reads Mount Everest Expedition 1924' around the circumference and 'Rongbuk Glacier Base Camp' in the middle.

Two variations in which the central wording is different are known but these are much scarcer. The first reads 'Rongbuk Glacier Main Base Camp 17,000 ft' and was used as an alternative to the standard version since it refers to the same location. The second, struck in grey, was purportedly used at a camp established near Pharijong had its own Indian post office from which the telegram confirming the deaths of Mallory and Irvine was sent on 19 June.

The fourth cachet was a single circle cancel bearing the words 'Mount Everest Expedition Tractor Party' and in the centre 'Tibet 1924'. It is a rare cachet and the few examples of its use that I have seen are on items of apparently commercial, as opposed to souvenir mail.

### Tractor party

The Tractor party itself was instigated by Noel to help carry his vast array of photographic equipment during the early stages of the journey across Tibet. Central to the plan was a Citroen tractor which was to be accompanied by Lt Col Haddick, Mr Milwright, Mr. Cundell, a Citroen representative and Lt Fitzgerald, the driver. Unfortunately

the tractor did not arrive in Darjeeling until the main expedition party had left, but Arthur Pereira, who was in charge of developing the vast quantities of film shot by Noel, decided it should follow the party towards Tibet.

Initial progress was good, but Fitzgerald began to feel the effects of altitude sickness and was sent back to Darjeeling. Cundell took over the driving only to be presented with increasingly challenging and unstable terrain. This slowed the tractor to such an extent that it was quietly abandoned in Sikkim, still some way short of the Tibetan border.

Pereira, together presumably with the other members of the tractor party, made his way back to Darjeeling where a purpose - built film processing laboratory had been established for his use. Runners were employed to carry the copious roll of film which Noel had shot in the vicinity of Mount Everest to Pereira's laboratory. In the wider context of the expedition this route was also a vital communication link to the outside world.



The 'TIBET' cachet

Urgent messages from base camp were sent by telegram, which would take about a week to reach England having been despatched by runner (once the telegram had reached a post office it would only be a matter of hours before it was received by the addressee). By contrast, items of mail took the best part of two months to make the same journey, although many members of the expedition wrote personal letters to family and friends which were sent by post.

Items of mail with the Tractor Party cachet were forwarded to the Indian post office in Yatung, which lies in the south of Tibet, close to the Indian border. Examples I have seen of the Yatung cancel on expedition mail are dated in June, although it is difficult to be more precise about the original date or location of despatch unless there is additional evidence such as an enclosure.

### Speculation

Being the most commonly found item of souvenir mail, it is a matter of some speculation as to how many of the postcards were processed and sent to subscribers. Colin Hepper in his article 'Stamps. Covers and Cachets from the Nepal Himalayas' says, 'It was reported that Capt Nash (sic) signed 40,000 of these cards which were all posted in Calcutta'. This is probably a useful guess, although the accuracy of the 'report' is open to question since many cards were posted in Darjeeling in addition to those sent from Calcutta.

Neither did Noel sign the cards, although this does lead us to the question of when the cards were processed,

since they were all hand addressed, had labels affixed and cachets applied. Subscriptions would have been received prior to the expedition's departure, so some processing was probably done in England. I have viewed a number of cards and it is clear from the different handwriting styles that several people were involved in writing the addresses.

The bulk of the 1924 expedition left Darjeeling for the Everest base camp on 25 March, but it was not until 15 June that the expedition decamped from Everest. This leaves a total of nearly three months, excluding the long journey back to India from Tibet, during which time the cards could have been processed. Most of the cards were posted to addresses in Britain, although there were a few subscribers from other countries. The foreign post card rate from India at the time was 1 1/2 annas and various definitives were used for pre-paying the cards.

### Earliest dates

The first batches were postmarked in Darjeeling during August and September. The earliest date I have seen is 18 August and the latest 3 September. There was then a gap before the remaining batches were postmarked in Calcutta. Postmarks I have seen are dated 2 October and the latest 30 October. This means that even the postcards sent from Darjeeling would have arrived at their destination approximately three months after the final, tragic summit attempt.

Why the postcards were sent in two batches is unclear. Perhaps they were still being processed during the homeward journey and were handed into the Indian post offices once they had been prepared. Another possibility is that the cards were split into batches before they left the Everest base camp. We know that once the base camp had been disbanded, members of the team split up taking different routes through Tibet. Most went to the Rongshar valley but Noel for example went to Shekar Dzong and the Chumbi valley. Possibly the cards were divided amongst the team members to be handed to the Indian Post Office once they had arrived in Darjeeling or Calcutta.

It was of course always hoped that subscribers would receive their souvenirs on the back of the first recorded ascent of Everest. Instead, the deaths of Mallory and Irvine muted any cause for celebration. The considerable achievements of other climbers in the expedition were, and in many ways remain, secondary to the final outcome and the resulting 'did they reach the summit?' debate. Edward Norton for example, on his earlier summit attempt, had reached a confirmed height of 28,126ft which remained an altitude record for nearly 30 years.

The 1924 British Everest Expedition souvenir postcard was an effective revenue raiser; a fact not lost on subsequent expedition parties. Today most expeditions

have a souvenir postcard or cover, often signed by members of the team. But few if any such souvenirs are quite as evocative or poignant as Noel's postcard.

### Further reading

Colin Hepper's article and H D S Haverbeck's book, which are both listed in the references, specifically mention both the label and the cachets used to tie it to expedition mail. Hepper's article also lists some of the cachets and souvenirs produced for subsequent exhibition. Haverbeck's book includes details of Indian post offices in Tibet with illustrations and listings of postmarks. Walt Unsworth's classic book is recognised as perhaps the most comprehensive history of Everest and it includes much information on characters and events only briefly mentioned in this article. Thanks are extended to the staff of the National Philatelic Society Library who pointed me in the direction of Haverbeck's book. For more details about the society log on to [www.ukphilately.org.uk/nps](http://www.ukphilately.org.uk/nps) or contact the secretary at; NPS, 107 Characterhouse Street, London EC1M 6PT.

(Collectors may also wish to consult A Catalog of Himalayan Mountaineering Correspondence by Armand E Singer and Robert F Gould, published by George Aleinzos in 2002. Ed)

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(Courtesy : Gibbons Stamp monthly 2003 )



## THE LADY BOATS

David F.Sessions

During the 1930s, five gracious ladies plied their trade off the east coast of Canada and America, down to the British West Indies. Needless to say, the ladies in question were ships, their trade the carriage of passengers fruit and mail.

Naming them after famous British Admirals presented a problem as all boats are known to be female. The problem was overcome by christening them Lady Nelson, Lady Somers, Lady Drake, Lady Rodney and Lady Hawkins.

During the 1920s many different shipping lines were active down the east coast of North America and, particularly, among the Caribbean Islands. There was plenty of business to be had, both in terms of trade and cruise passengers.



Canadian National Steamship Company postcard promoting the Lady Boats

Despite the extensive traffic there was no established mail service, through the boats carried mail on an ad hoc basis. In 1925 the Canadian Government

CGMM) bought up one of the smaller operators, the Quebec Steam Ship Company, and negotiated the Canada-West Indian Trade Agreement.

The West Indies Government agreed to subsidise CGMM ships in return for a regular mail delivery service. This contract was the only one granted to shipping companies that were active in the region, though other shipping lines carried mail as required and were paid per delivery. The CGMM fleet changed its title to Canadian National Steamship Company (CNS) and, in order to fulfil the contract, placed an order for the five 'Lady' boats which were to provide a regular fortnightly mail service between Canada, USA and the British West Indies, while providing luxury transport for cruise passengers.

### The boats

The first of the quintet to enter service was the Lady Nelson, which embarked on her maiden cruise on 14



December 1928, out of Halifax, Nova Scotia. The initial trip took in Bermuda, St Kitts and Nevis and other islands on the way to Georgetown, British Guiana; the return trip followed the same route, in reverse, but

terminated at St. John, New Brunswick. The Lady Hawkins made her debut on 28 December and the Lady Drake followed two weeks later on 11 January 1929. Both followed Lady Nelson's itinerary. The ladies Rodney and Somers were in service by the end of April 1929.

The boats were built at the Cammell Laird shipyard, Birkenhead. The Lady Nelson, for example, was 438 feet long, with a gross tonnage of 7831 tons; cruising speed was 25 knots and passenger capacity was 338. In addition there were 270,000 cubic feet of cargo capacity plus 13,000 cubic feet of space for refrigerated cargo. The ladies Rodney and Somers were specially insulated to carry fresh fruit back to Canada without ripening en-route.

Either bananas or oranges and grapefruit (upto 120,000 cases) could be carried in the hold. Keeping the bananas from ripening was a delicate operation. The fruit had to be kept at 52°F for weeks so an engineer had to change the air, cooled by brine, every four hours.

The CNS ran an Eastern Service and a Western Service. The former was an all year service from Halifax, NS and Boston, via Bermuda down to British Guiana,



returning via Bermuda and Boston to St. John, NB. The Western Service started from Montreal in the summer and Halifax in the winter, and sailed via Boston to Bermuda and on to the Bahamas (Nassau) and Jamaica. Studying a brochure for the first half of 1937, it seems that ladies Rodney and Somers plied the Western Service, while Nelson, Hawkins and Drake covered the Eastern Service. This is not to say that other combinations did not occur at other times, during the ten years or so that the services ran, up to the intervention of World War II. However, the ladies Nelson, Hawkins and Drake were on the Eastern 'run' at the commencement of the service in 1928/9. Further study showed that luxury cruising was on offer from \$7.20 per day, though the seriously rich could expect to pay up to \$18.70 per day for a suite.

### Paquebot regulations

Under UPU regulations mail posted on board ship may be franked with stamps of the country in which the ship is registered, in this case Canada. It should therefore be possible to build a near little collection of covers bearing Canadian stamps cancelled in the various countries at which the Lady Boats dropped anchor. Stamps of the country of the port of call would also be perfectly acceptable but one does also find covers bearing US and other BWI stamps cancelled with 'foreign' postmarks. Apart from the home ports of Halifax, St John and Montreal, landfall in the USA (Boston) and Bermuda (Hamilton) was common to both routes, so probably these are the markings most frequently found. The Western Service also took in the Bahamas (Nassam) and Jamaica (Kingston). Interestingly, there was a cutter service from Kingston to British Honduras (Belize) though, presumably, mail having been put off at Kingston would receive a Kingston postmark, even if it was taken on to Belize. Other countries visited on the Eastern Service might include; St Kitts and Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St Lucia, Barbados, St Vincent, Grenada, Trinidad and British Guiana.

Having looked at the possibilities of the cancellation at the various ports of call, there are the ship's marking themselves to be considered. The various Paquebot markings would have been applied, either by

hand or machine, at the ports of call post office, but each boat had its own hand stamp(s). Also a straight line 'MAILED AT SEA' is sometimes similar, is incorporated into some of the ships' handstamps.



### **Ships' markings**

A E Stephenson, founder of the Canadian Philatelic Society of Great Britain, made an initial list of the ships' handstamps back in 1949 (1) but, as with most pioneering efforts, the list was incomplete. With the pre-war service running for some ten years, it seems likely that the Purser's office on each ship went through two or three handstamps as well as more than one inkpad. Unfortunately Stephenson's listing did not include dates and it has not yet been possible to allocate precise periods of use to the various handstamps. Nevertheless a provisional listing has been prepared and it is interesting to see a pattern emerge. With the exception of Lady Nelson, early markings appear to be just the ship's name in a straight line, perhaps accompanied by a straight - line, 'MAILED AT SEA' which may or may not have been separate handstamp. From the relatively small sample of covers/cards available it seems these straight - line markings are relatively scarce. This may be because, in the early days, mail was just marked 'MAILED AT SEA' without the addition of the ship's name. Also the circular or oval markings appear to have been introduced in 1931/2, so the straight-line markings would have been fairly short-lived. Proportionally speaking, the oval and circular markings are much more plentiful although, in the sample reviewed, markings from the Lady Somers were not so frequent as the other boats. Readers with relevant covers are invited to report dates outside the periods shown in the accompanying tabulation.

Colour of the handstamps varies between blue, grey to black and purple to mauve, with red creeping in after the War. Shade variations will depend to a large extent upon the ink pads supplied but will also be influenced by their freshness and exposure to light over time so, for the purposes of a simplified listing, just blue, grey / black, purple and red are used in the tabulation. Also one cannot be too precise over measurement as this will be affected by the take-up of ink, the porosity of the paper and the force used to apply the hand stamp, so variations of a millimetre or two may or may not indicate a new hand stamp. Stephenson's listing was not accompanied by illustrations and made no reference to the colour of the markings.

### **War service**

Following the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the five 'Ladies' were commandeered for active service, as indeed were all other ships in the British Empire's Merchant Navy. Sadly the Ladies Somers, Hawkins and Drake were all sunk by enemy action during the war. Lady Nelson was torpedoed on 2 March 1942, while in dock at St Lucia, but was refloated four days later and subsequently towed to Mobile, Alabama, where she was repaired and converted to a hospital ship - Canada's first. Lady Nelson resumed active service in her new role in February 1943 and survived the rest of the war, as did the Lady Rodney.

### **A final flourish**

Although the war in Europe ended in May 1945, the surviving ships were not released from service until the following year and it was not until late 1947 that Lady Nelson and Lady Rodney, having been extensively refitted, were returned to service on the West Indies run. Unfortunately the immediate post-war years were not conducive to a profitable cruise line and the decision was taken to sell the two boats. The Lady Rodney made her last trip to the West Indies in November 1952. The 'Ladies' were replaced by motor vessels which carried mainly cargo and a limited number of passengers. In 1953 both boats were sold to Egypt. Lady Nelson was renamed Gumhuryst - Mier (and subsequently the Ahvadi), while Lady Rodney became the Mecca. The former was assigned to service east to west in the Mediterranean, while the latter served between North. Africa, Egypt and Jeddah.



The fate of the former Lady Nelson is not known to the author, but the former Lady Rodney was scuttled in the Suez Canal in 1967. A sad end.

(Courtesy : Gibbons Stamp Monthly 2003).



## **FLAMINGOS TO HUMMINGBIRDS**

**Giorgio Migliavaca**

Christopher Columbus discovered the Virgin Islands during his second voyage to the New World in 1493. In his diary we find notes about humming birds in the high and lofty hills of some Caribbean island singing beautiful songs in the night.



The British Virgin Islands, with the exception of Anegada, are hilly and therefore constitute a good habitat for birds. Reforestation projects during the last twenty years have helped and enhanced this habitat. Sage Mountain in Tortola with its remnants of a rain forest is a perfect bird sanctuary and so is Guna Island.

Protected areas for seabirds are: Fat Hog's Bay (Tortola), West Dog (Northeast of Virgin Gorda), Flamingo Pond on Anegada, the Dogs (a group of small islands lying to the Northeast of Virgin Gorda), and the Tobagos.

Birds, with their beauty, diversity of form plumage, and behaviour have fascinated mankind since time immemorial. Virgin Islanders and tourists alike are fascinated when they catch sight of some of the exotic species living in the islands. It is no surprise then, that birds have become a favorite theme on BVI postage stamps. From 1951 to 1997 BVI has issued at least 80 stamps depicting birds of the islands.

A source of constant entertainment is the indigenous brown pelican; watching a pelican gliding above the water looking for fish and witness the amazing precision with which the bird catches its prey is an unforgettable experience. This is probably one of the reasons why the brown pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) is the most popular bird on BVI stamps. As a matter of fact, a brown pelican, majestically standing over the coat of arms of the University College of the West Indies, was the first bird to appear on a local stamp in 1951. (Scott 96).

A pelican was also depicted on six other BVI stamps issued in 1953, 1962, 1964, 1973, 1980 and 1988, making this bird "number one" in the philatelic hit parade of the islands.



Brown Pelican Most Popular on BVI Stamps  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 126)



Opening of Pelican's Beak  
West Virgin Islands (Scott 500)

A strong rival of the pelican, philatally speaking, is the "man-o-war" otherwise known as the magnificent frigate bird (*fregata magnificens*). The "man-o-war" was featured on BVI stamps issued in 1953, 1973 and 1980. The last stamp shows the most striking feature of the male which consists of the red gular pouch in its beauty during the breeding season.

Although the turtle dove (*Zenaida aurita*) living on the hills is believed to be responsible for giving the name of the main island in the archipelago, Tortola, she did not appear on local stamps until recently. The sweet bird can

be tame, coming close to take scraps. She calls very often a leisurely soft "coo-a-coo-coo", heard at any time but especially in the early mornings.

The turtle dove was portrayed on a five cent stamp issued in 1973 (Scott 255). Her popularity was further enhanced in 1985 when she was chosen for the top value of the new definitive set.

The Brown Booby (*Sula Leucogaster*) which is a common oceanic species of the West Indies was shown on a 20 cent stamp (Scott 385) issued for the world stamp exhibition "London 1980". The White Booby, or Masked



American Kestrel is known as Killy-Killy  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 499a)



Hummingbird Feeds on a Hibiscus  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 425)  
IND DAK / July 1998

Booby, scientifically known as *Sula dactyatra* is a rare bird in the BVI. It is usually seen to the North of its breeding grounds which are located near the North Western limits of the archipelago. If you are not able to catch sight of this uncommon bird, you may see it depicted on the \$2 stamp issued in 1985. (Scott 506)

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), locally known as "Killy-Killy," became more prominent recently when a 25 cent stamp (Scott 499) depicting the bird in one of its raids was issued in 1985. Shortly after a new \$1.00 stamp (Scott 523) - part of a set commemorating the world's foremost ornithologist and nature artist, John James Audubon - depicted three Killy - Killys.

The Mangrove cuckoo, better known as "rain bird", owes its name to its habitat and its breeding season (April and May are rainy months). In St. Thomas and in the U.S. Virgin Islands, it is called "Dumb bird" and this is probably why it was depicted on the definitive five cent stamp of 1985 (Scott 492) with its beak wide open probably squabbling with its neighbours living on the sister islands. The rain bird previously appeared on a local stamp issued in 1973 (Scott 275)

Green - throated humming birds are a common sight in the BVI; they are most abundant around shrubs and flowers at lower elevations but are also seen at 1,700 feet on the highest hills. You will find this humming - bird around flowering plants. If your are a patient photographer, you may take home a breath - taking picture of one of these birds feeding on a gorgeous hibiscus. It is pugnacious, chasing other birds from near its nest. This is a small neat cup of plant fibers attached to a branch.

The Antillean crested hummingbird is not difficult to encounter, but despite its minuscule size (three inches)

this hummingbird is even more aggressive than its larger cousin. The male's brilliant green crest immediately sets it apart from its uncrested green and pale grey mate. It is found throughout Tortola wherever there are flowering shrubs and plants, especially in gardens. Both hummingbirds can be admired on a set of four superbly produced stamps issued by the BVI in 1982 (Scott 422-425) and on a one cent stamp of 1973 (Scott 254).

Pigeons are quite prolific and though forgotten on stamps they made quite an impact in 1985 when the wild pigeon (*Columba squamosa*) appeared on a 12 cent stamp. They are huge birds - 15 inches - and their plumage is magnificently iridescent when they are not in the shade of dense foliage. A close relative, the passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) non-indigenous were reproduced on a 30 cent stamp (Scott 521) depicting one of Audubon's masterpieces.



The Cow Bird Feeds Close To Cattle  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 507a)



Pond Shakey Is Relatively Rare  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 498a)

Another sweet bird is the ground dove (*Columbina passerina*) shown on a 50 cent stamp (Scott 503) of the 1985 Birds definitive. This dove is common and widely distributed in gardens, waste places, coastal pastures, sand dunes, and woods. Almost always in pairs, they nest close to or even on the ground in nooks protected by spiny cactus or thorn bushes. This protects the site against the predatory mongoose.

All the following birds were depicted on the Birds definitive set issued by the BVI postal authorities in 1985 (Scott 490-508). The green heron featured on the 40 cent stamp is locally known as Little Gaulin (*Butorides virescens*). It is quite common on many of the islands, showing some preference for water but also found in open country, woods, and even gardens. The Little Gaulin shows a very intense blue on the back when flying away.

The Red-billed Tropicbird locally called "Boatswain" (*Phaeton aethereus*) depicted on the one cent stamp can be seen near the isolated cays where it nests. The Night Gaulin or Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violaces*) depicted on the two cent stamp is a large bird - from 22 to 28 inches - easily identified by its black and white head markings and grey underbody.

The longtailed Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) featured on the eight cent stamp (Scott 483) can be seen in winter, spring, and early summer. It feeds on seeds and berries and is a pleasant songster.

The Grey Kingbird, familiarly known as Chinchary (*Tyrannus dominicensis*) depicted on the 10 cent stamp (Scott 494) of the Birds definitive is a very common nesting resident with a large black bill and square gray tail. The Chinchary is a very active flycatcher. The Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) is quite rare in the BVI where it is better known by its nickname "Bittlin" (15 cent).

When Black Witches perch on a tree in your garden, it is traditionally taken as a sign of bad luck. In fact most people in the islands detest them and chase them away. They live in small flocks and follow a leader. The scientific name for this bird is *Crotophaga ani*, or more commonly Smooth-billed Ani (18 cent) (Scott 497) The Black Witch is a relative of the cuckoo.

The clapper rail, locally known as "Pond Shakey" (*Rallus longirostris*) appears on a 20 cent stamp (Scott 498). It is a relatively rare bird. Certainly it is much easier to catch sight of a "Thrushie", a cheeky intruder that enters open windows to attack food left on a table or any kind of leftover. Its more common name is Pearly-eyed Thrasher (*Margarops fuscatus*). This nosy bird is depicted on a 30 cent stamp (Scott 500).

Marmi doves are quite jealous of their privacy and they are not easy to spot. The bird is quite attractive with white stripe below eye, dark red-brown back with lighter red-brown undersides : it is commonly known as Bridled Quail Dove (*Geotrygon mystacea*). The rare species is portrayed on a 35 cent stamp (Scott 501)

The little Blue Heron, locally known as "Blue Gaulin" (*Florida caerulea*), which appears on a 60 cent stamp (Scott 504) has a pure white and black pattern before emerging as a dark slate grey adult.

Audubon's Shearwater. Pimleco for the natives (*Puffinus lherminieri*), is shown on a \$1 stamp (Scott 505). A spring and summer resident, the Pimleco nests in colonies in rock cavities.

The avifauna of the BVI is divided between 80 species of land birds, waders. North American winter migrants, and comparably fewer sea bird species. Many of the later are members of wide - ranging oceanic populations which nest on the outer cays.

Nineteen ninety - two was a historical year for BVI birds; in fact it was in March of that year that a flock of eighteen flamingos (*Phoenicopterus Ruber*) was reintroduced on Anegada, the northernmost isle in the group. In 1831 a scientist observed that Flamingos usually arrived on the island during the rainy season when the Orinoco river inundated its shores and deprived them of the means of procuring food. He remarked that "they usually arrive with the first southerly wind and approach Anegada in flocks of hundreds, and choose Flamingo Pond for their favorite abode; whence they proceed every morning at sunrise to the reefs where they feed till the sun

draws near the horizon. It is a splendid sight to see several hundred drawn up in a regular form, resembling the figure of a cross. It appears they decrease annually; they even do not breed in Anegada. On the Spanish Main these birds are held sacred and are in no way molested by the superstitious inhabitants".

The reason for their



Marmi Doves Are Jealous of Privacy  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 501a)



Flamingos Were Reintroduced in 1992  
British Virgin Islands (Scott 811)  
with pictorial cancellation

abandoning Anegada is to be found in ecological changes in their area of origin: the Orinoco. As late as 1917 another scientist concluded his report on Anegada with the following words: "but, though race succeeds race, and generation follows generation, still the beautiful flamingo with its scarlet feathers and high slender body, comes and goes to Drowned Islands (Anegada), even as it did before the Caribs and the buccaneers, the wrecker, and the settler had ever been."

To mark the historic reintroduction and successful breeding of flamingo, a colourful set of four stamps and one miniature (Scott 811-815) were issued by the BVI postal authorities on 15 November 1995. Two weeks later, a special postmark depicting a flamingo and the unique Anegada Rock Iguana was utilised for the two-day Fifth BVI Annual Stamp Exhibition. The four stamps feature young flamingos (15c); adult flamingos (20c); an adult feeding at the salt pond (60c) and an adult feeding a chick (\$1.45). Inspiration for the design of the top denomination came from a picture taken a few months earlier in the vicinity of Flamingo Pond, Anegada. The miniature sheet features the five chicks which have now brought the flamingo population on Anegada to twenty - three.

A set of four stamps issued in 1980 includes a 50 cent stamp (Scott 387) depicting the White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon leprurus*) which is widespread throughout the islands. The same set was also printed on a souvenir sheet (Scott 388a) whose margins show a map of the BVI pointing out the breeding sites of the brown pelican and of the magnificent frigate bird.

A 10 cent stamp issued in 1973 (Scott 256), depicting local new coinage, reproduces a Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*), a common fall and spring migrant and a winter resident. Its plumage is blue grey with a raised tuft on top of the head.

Non - resident birds depicted on BVI stamps include : the Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) shown on the 50 cent (Scott 522), 1985 Audubon set, the Seaside

Sparrow (*Ammodramus maritima*); 5 cent, 1985 (Scott 520) ; a red robin and another unidentifiable bird are also shown on the margins of two elaborate souvenir sheets (Scott 519a-b) issued in December 1985 to commemorate the 85th birthday of the Queen Mother.

In recent years more pelicans were featured on the 1988 "Wildlife" set of four stamps. And in 1990 a set of eight stamps and two miniature sheets (Scott 658-667) depicted birds and their eggs.

(Courtesy : Tropical Time, 1997).



## THE BIRTH OF THE REGISTERED LETTER

MARK LAURENCE

Registration of mail in the United Kingdom first took place on 6 January 1841. The events that led to it represent one of the most complex and fascinating stories in the development of British postal services.

The failure to secure letters containing coins, securities, documents and valuables by registration enabled the highest level of theft and fraud ever known within the Post Office to exist for many years. What is more, the vested interests of those in power prevented change from taking place.

The understanding that 'registration' meant the safe custody and handling of letters, with the carrier accepting the responsibility for their arrival did not exist. In fact, such responsibility was specifically excluded. Registration simply referred to an internal listing or noting of each letter for which no copy or receipt was given.

The need for change was clear and led to an extraordinary conflict between Rowland Hill, Advisor to the Treasury and founder of Uniform Penny Postage, and Colonel Maberly, Secretary of the Post Office, the two most prominent figures of the time, that continued for ten years. The fact that this battle occurred, resulting in the defeat of Hill only a few months after the introduction of Uniform Postage, demonstrates the complete change of mind by the Treasury and Parliament and the fragile position of Hill himself.

Prior to the introduction of registration for inland letters, a number of other systems existed. The principal one being the 'money letter' system operated by the General Post Office. At the same time, a semi-official scheme was provided by the 'Clerks of the Road' and a system of registration was operated by the Foreign Office for in-bound and outgoing foreign letters.

### Registration of foreign letters

Typically, the carrying of early mail reflected the needs of Crown and State. The need for the Foreign Office





the carriage of these newspapers. This money was used as the fund to pay for the money drafts drawn on the postmasters. The money being quite separate of Post Office revenue.

A charge for London drafts of 8d, per £1 was made by the Clerks on the sender, the postmaster receiving 2d, of this, and all letters was stamped 'Money Order Office' by the Clerks. Starting off in only a few main towns, the service expanded to cover the whole of the UK.

The misuse of Money Order Office franking for the sending of privileged mail, and the inability to account for monies paid, led in 1832 to a Commission of Enquiry that resulted in the nationalisation of the money order system. At this time Robert Wallace, the radical Member of Parliament for Greenock and a leading postal reformer, referred to the Money Order Office as 'this smug private property concern'.

By 1836 ownership of the Money Order Office was solely in the hands of Matthew Slater and David Stow, who was also Superintendent of the Inland Office within the Post Office. This clearly represented a major conflict of interest, though Stow held out and defended his position until his death in 1837, leaving Slater on his own, and in September 1838 the Money Order Office was transferred to the Post Office.

Detailed accounts for the previous five years could still not be produced or the Money Order Office books reconciled and the service had fallen into sharp decline.

### The need for reform

The campaign for inland registration had raged from as early as 1788, following the first proposals by Harraden. Indeed, taking the period to the new Post Office Act of 1837, which cleared the way for the reforms promoted by the Mercantile Committee and Robert Wallace, together with Rowland Hill, no other issue had received as much public attention. A Parliamentary investigation of negligence and fraud within the Post Office, carried out in 1837, reported that over 1200 letters were lost each year, but only a few money letters had gone astray.

Lord Lichfield, the Postmaster General, recommended to the Lords of the Treasury on 14 December 1837 that money letters should cease and be replaced by a regular system of registration for all inland letters for a fee of 3d. The Commission of Enquiry having already recommended registration at that time.

On 2 May 1838 the Treasury agreed to this, but recommended a 2d. registration fee and that compensation of up to £5 should be considered for loss damage, for the Post Office for the safe delivery of registered letters.

Bokenham, the Superintendent of the Inland Office, quickly reported to Lichfield, confirming that the existing money order system forms and documentation could be used, and that only the addition of a form of receipt to be given to the sender was required. Their intention, however, was to limit the use of the service by only allowing letters to be received at the London branches: at Lombard Street until 5.00 P.M. and Vere Street, Charing Cross and Borough, and a limited number of Twopenny Post receiving houses outside of a three mile radius of London, until 4p.m.

Remarkably, Lord Lichfield considered 2d. too high a fee and thought it should be set lower than the postal rate at all times. The 2d. fee for the metropolis, which incurred a higher postal rate in any case, was therefore agreed, but either a 1d. or 1/2 d. fee should be set for the London local area.

Colonel Maberly, who replaced Sir Francis Freeling as Secretary of the Post Office following his death in 1836, set about implementing the registration system and even ordered the new receipt books.

### For nearly 50 Years the development of securely registered mail was Prevented by the Post Office

All previous objection had, it seem, suddenly been withdrawn, the Inland, Foreign Office and Twopenny Post departments now assisting Maberly.

Their final proposal, made in March 1839, called for the cessation of money letters and for a system of registration for all letters, and not just for those containing coin or articles of value, for which a fee of 2d. on inland letters and 1/2 d. on London local post was to be charged. The letter, was to be stamped plainly, and the address, plus the number of the letter, entered on the left hand side of a newly-introduced. Receipt book, providing the sender with a receipt torn from it, which also had the letter number and address corresponding to that in the book. The receipt was then stamped and both postage and registration fee paid in advance. As for money letter, entry on a letter bill and enclosure in a printed cover was carried out.



The use of coloured covers and a distinctive Registered 2d paid stamp were subsequently proposed.

Having finalised plans for the introduction, to be implemented on 5 July 1839. it was suddenly, set aside because of the impending introduction of Uniform four penny Postage, which took place on 5 December 1839, as a result of which by 1 January the money letter system ceased.

This meant that the Post Office, had no Practicable secure or registered system for the delivery of even coins, other than the vastly expensive Money Order system, despite all of the plans made and public outcry that



Challenging the vague objections from Maberly and the Post Office to his earlier proposals, Hill used the Tenth Report of the Commissioners as the basis for his attack. This Report had not only recommended a fee of 2d. for any



Above: Though under the new system letters could only be registered within Britain, increasing examples exist of the first outgoing registered letters. The earliest is believed to be that sent from Edinburgh to New South Wales dated 6 March 1841. This stampless prepaid letter not only shows a registered line of origin coding and Registered EDINBURGH handstamp but an additional 6d. ship letter rate with two PAID SHIP LETTERS NEW S 1841 LONDON oval datestamp plus a further manuscript "7" charge on arrival in New South Wales.

existed. Lord Lichfield and Col Maberly considered ways of introducing a restricted registration system. By either imposing high fees of 2d. for London and 1s. for general inland service, to London. Likely complaints on a preference toward London and the overloading and potential delay to the mails were their reasons for rejecting any interim arrangement. Clearly, both held the same outdated attitudes toward registration, also held by Bokenham, as Superintendent of the Inland Office and Smith, as Superintendent of the Twopenny Post Office or London District Post, who both now claimed the need for at least three more clerks each to cope with the increased workload which even the highest fees would generate. A far from their recommendations and intended implementation and intended implementation of March 1839, just nine months earlier.

inland letter to be registered, but a £5 fine on the Post Office for non-delivery. This was similar to the French system, which Hill had already investigated during his visit, and similar to those proposed in March 1839, other than the £5 fine. One must assume that pressure from both the press and public on the Post Office was the reason for Maberly, Bokenham and Smith to once again change their minds and agree to these recommendations, except for the fine

**Hill's Scheme**

The scheme proposed by Hill in his report to the treasury initially required the use of a room to act as a registration Martin's le Grand, staffed by registration clerk of proven integrity, to take delivery of letters to be registered from the public. The clerk would be responsible for the adhesive stamps were to be used for the advance payment of the registration fee of 2d. and the raising of a receipt for each letter. The receipt having the address details clearly entered and stamped with the registration office date stamp and given to the sender. The letter was also to be struck with the date stamp and then sorted by the Clerk into a box for each town. A listing was then to be made in a registration book by town and name of addressee, the street names being omitted. This list was then to be copied and cut into separate lists for each town and stamped with the date stamp. All the letters for each town were to put into a cover inscribed Registered Letters and addressed to the Postmaster for each town and again date stamped.

Meanwhile, these events led to chaos, the level of theft and loss of letters of value reaching extraordinary levels and resulting in press campaigns and public protests..

**Hill turns to registration**

Having introduced the Uniform Penny post, the urgency for an affordable system of registration was Rowland Hill's next priority. As early as 19 November 1839, following a visit to France, he had Proposed a plan for the introduction of registration, entitled Report on the Security in the Delivery of letters as affected by Prepayment Unfortunately, the introduction of the Fourpenny Post had prevented him from taking this further.

Finally, the clerk was to pass the town covers to the inland postage clerks for each area, who were to sign for the receipt for each cover into the clerk's registration book. The covers were then to be entered on to the existing inland letter bills listing and put into mailbags for each town.

As result of the work Hill had done on postal reform, including the campaign he and others such as Robert Wallace had waged as part of the Mercantile Committee which led to the introduction of Uniform Penny Postage. He had made enemies of both Lichfield and Maberly. Hill was not a civil servant but a special advisor to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Francis Baring, and worked from the Treasury.. This was a Political appointment made by the Whigs who were in power at the time.

On delivery to each town, the local Post master was to check the registered letters against the list and sign and return the letter bill. The recipients signed preprinted delivery forms discharging the Post Office's obligation.

Perhaps it was to be expected therefore that it seems that he had not been informed about the registration system put forward by Lichfield and Maberly in March 1839 when making his own proposals. By February 1840 Hill had updated himself and wrote a second lengthy document entitled Report on the Registration of Letter, which was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in March 1840

Inward letters to London were treated the same way, in that the registration clerk was to provide the receipt for covers received, sort the letters for delivery forms to be signed as if a local postmaster.

It was accepted that London branch offices and receiving houses could also take in registered letters, enclosing them into one cover and forwarding them to the registration clerk for processing

### Colonel Maberly defeats Hills.

The Treasury duly presented Hill's proposals to the Post Office. Maberly was outraged, regarding Hill's plan as deficient, impracticable and even a personal slight. Based on previous experiences between the two, this reaction must have been expected.

Again Maberly changed his mind on the level of fee to be set, writing to Lichfield on **Hill now faced defeat at the hands of those who controlled the Post Office** 8 August 1840, stating that the low 2d. fee proposed by Hill would seriously jeopardize the whole Postal service. It would, he suggested, vastly increase numbers of registered letters, overloading the system and delaying the mail. It was as if time had stood still.

Maberly now insisted that any trial of Hill's system should involve a fee of at least 1s., making registration prohibitively expensive, representing an average working man's pay for a day's work.

Needless to say, both Smith and Bokenham supported Maberly and Lichfield was certainly not going to override them in favour of Hill. So it was that within nine months from the introduction of Penny Postage, regarded by the Public as a major reform, Hill now faced defeat at the hands of those who controlled the Post Office over the establishment of an affordable system for the registration of letters within the U.K.

On 17 October 1840 proposals from the Post Office were sent to the Treasury for approval. They reflected Maberly's wishes, setting a 1s. Registration fee for all inland letters, ignoring any difference between local and general mail. This fee was also to be paid in cash and not stamps as Hill had wanted, on the basis that the fee was not postage. A reduction in the poundage on money orders was also to be considered as a way of further limiting the demand for registration.

To avoid possible delays to the mail, all registration had to be completed half an hour before the post office closed.

### The registration of letters

A printed Instruction No. 21 dated December 1840 was issued by the command of Maberly as Secretary to all postmasters, sub deputies and receivers, introducing the first system of registration within the UK to become effective from 6 January 1841 and applicable to all letters without distinction

The system described by this Instruction makes use of a receipt book and the issuing of a receipt. It also includes handling instructions for foreign outbound letters through France and confirms that the money letter system had then ceased.

Compensation or responsibility for the safe delivery of letters had also been ignored.

Registration was, in fact, further delayed, following the issue of these instructions, as the necessary forms and documentation were not distributed until mid-January. As a result, the earliest known registered letter is a stamp less pre-paid cover dated 15 January and the earliest stamped cover is dated 20 January and bears a 1d. Black.

Rowland Hill's position remained a precarious one. By the end of 1840 the Treasury recognized that the penny Postage rate had been set too low and a previously strong source of revenue had become a burden. When the Whigs were defeated in the General Election of 1841 he believed the Tories would increase the letter rate to 2d., despite his insistence that gross Post Office revenue would return to pre-penny post levels. This in fact took over 30 years to happen, demonstrating how high postage rates had been.

Whilst Hill was eventually dismissed in September 1842, he returned as Secretary to the Postmaster General in 1846, when the reformed Whigs came back to power as the Liberals. For a further eight years Hill and Maberly continued their open conflict, which Hill eventually won, ending what is certainly the most notorious personal battle in the history of the Post Office.

(Courtesy : Gibbons Stamp Monthly 2003).



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