

Twentieth Century Postal Stationery

COLIN BAKER

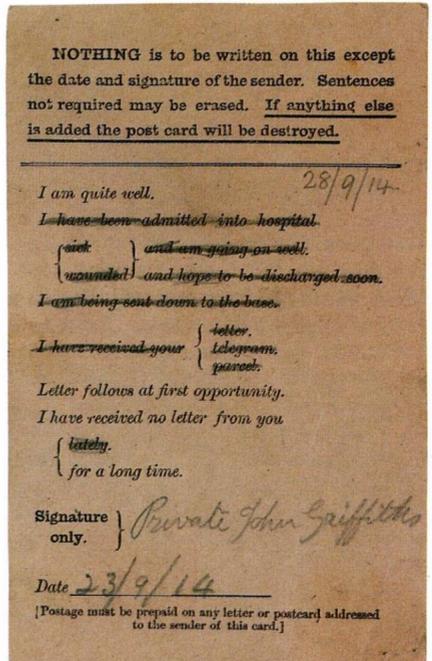
Part 3. George V, Special Stationery

Changes to Registered Envelopes

The postage on registered letters naturally followed the same increases and decreases in postage rates as those for the letter post, with the added complication of an increase in the basic registration fee to 3d in June 1922. Envelopes were prepared to match the new rates, impressed with combined postage and registration stamps appropriately valued. In June 1920 the cost of these combined stamps became 4d (2d postage plus 2d registration). Because registered envelopes were expensive to produce, old stocks of the 2d forces issue and the 3d and 3½d normal issues were used up by adding 2d, 1d or ½d embossed stamps directly beneath the dual registration and postage stamp. In 1921, following further postage rate increases to make the combined registration and postage charge 5d, 3d embossed stamps were similarly added to old stocks of 2d forces envelopes, while 2d and 1d stamps were added to the normal 3d and 4d issues respectively.

Minor changes were made to the layout of registered envelopes during the years of George V's reign, two of which are worth noting. In 1923 the size of the envelope (given as letters F, G, H or K) was printed in the box reserved for the registration label and in 1935 a space was set aside on the reverse of the envelopes for the sender's name and address. This was to ease problems of returning registered letters that the PO found to be undeliverable.

From November 1915 members of the armed forces on active service were allowed free postage, but not free registration or other PO services. Therefore the standard registered envelopes could not be used, since they included the basic cost of inland postage. Rather than overprint these, it was decided to prepare a special Forces Envelope impressed with a new registration fee stamp, similar to that used for all the Victorian envelopes. A new 2d George V die was prepared, the stamp being printed in black on an otherwise standard registered envelope. This special issue came into use late in 1915.

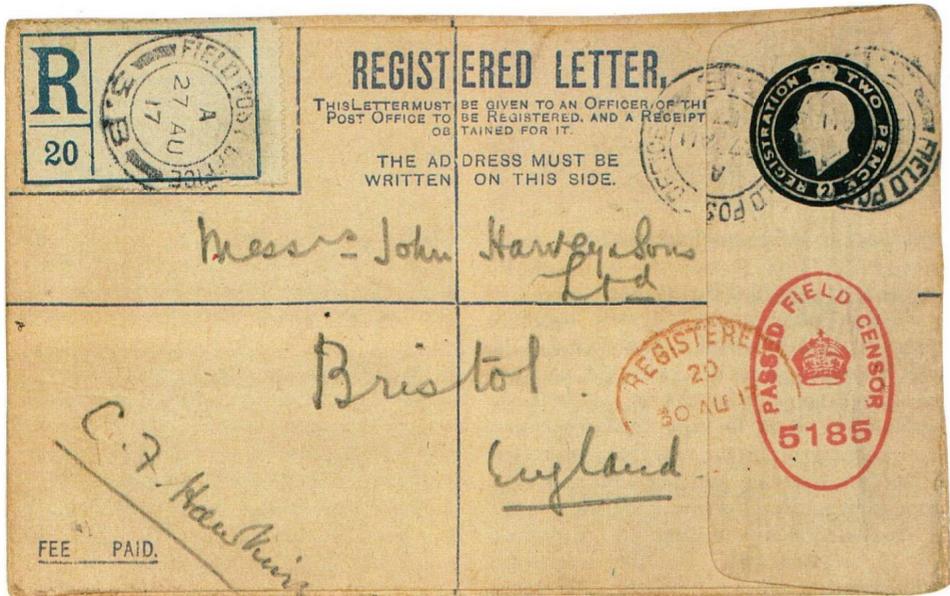


Although field service cards carried a 1d stamp, servicemen were given a free issue. To ease censorship the reverse carried short sentences, those which were not true being deleted by the sender

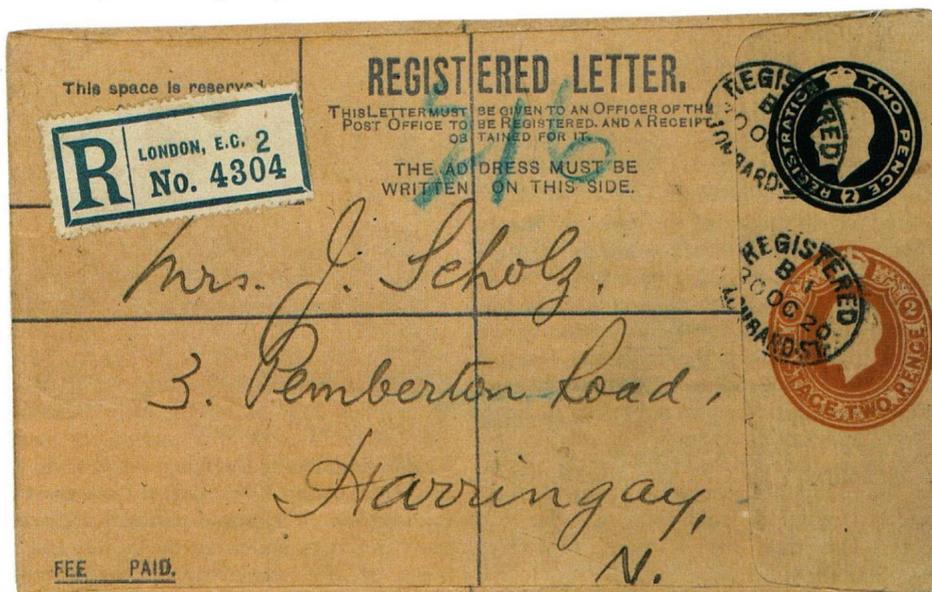
The Field Service Card

In 1912 the War Office proposed the introduction of a simple postcard printed with short messages indicating the health and well-being of the serviceman sending the card. Sentences could be ticked or deleted as necessary and providing nothing else was allowed to be written on the card, censorship would be unnecessary.

The cards were headed "Field Service Card" and were to be distributed free to the troops, but to avoid the possibility of the PO treating them as unpaid mail on delivery in this country it was



The forces registered envelope (top) only carried a 2d reistration stamp, as postage was free to servicemen on active service. Stocks of these were uprated for civilian use in 1920.

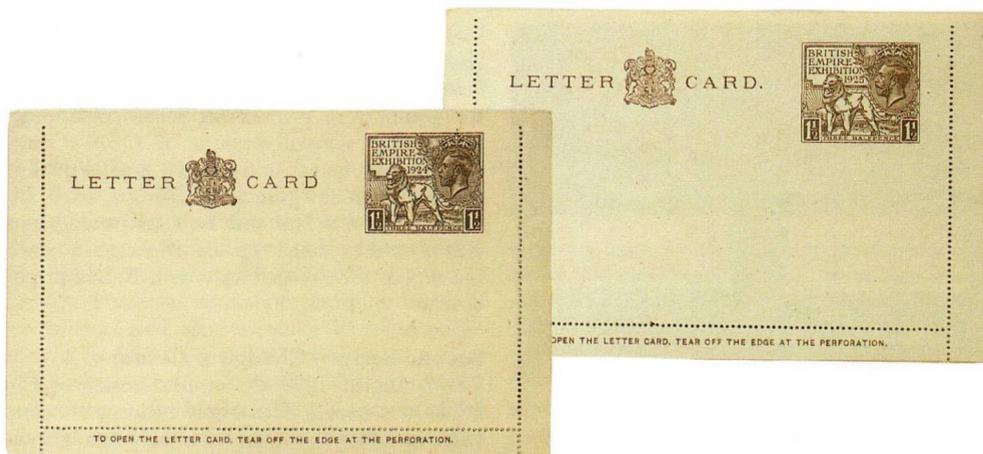


considered essential that they carried a stamp. The use of the "Official Paid" mark was considered, but since the cards were likely to be used abroad, objections were raised by the PO, already concerned at the constantly expanding use of this mark.

The PO finally agreed that the 1d letterpress

stamp should be used. Despite steering away from the use of the Official Paid mark, the PO were refused permission to charge the War Office account with the cost of these cards and in the end they were forced to include all charges in their own accounts.

Of course there was always the possibility that



The second set of commemorative stationery included lettercards impressed with both the 1924 and 1925 British Empire exhibition stamps

if these postcards were not used by the servicemen to whom they had been issued, the stamps might be used as cut-outs, thus defrauding the PO of revenue. However the PO decided that the risk of this was small enough to be ignored in the circumstances.

Initially both sides of these field service postcards were printed in black, the red 1d stationery stamp being added in a subsequent printing run. The stamp was impressed at Somerset House with the same die as that used for stamping private material. These cards were first issued to the troops in August 1914. In October 1914 their production was streamlined and while the wording on the reverse continued to be printed in black, the fronts were printed in one operation so that both the lettering and stamp appeared in red.

Finally in October of the same year armed forces on active service were given the privilege of free postage, after which the Field Service Cards continued to be issued in the same format as before, but without the 1d impressed stamp. Providing mail was endorsed "on active service" no charges were made on delivery.

A Second Issue of Commemorative Stationery

In 1924 an exhibition was mounted at Wembley in which all the countries of the British Empire were represented. To help publicise this event, Britain's first commemorative adhesive stamps were produced. A completely new stamp design was prepared by Harold Nelson depicting the Wembley Lion astride a rolling landscape. This

was used in the production of adhesive stamps in addition to being applied to four different kinds of postal stationery. However, some of the fine detail in Nelson's original design had to be changed to suit the letterpress printing process and the relatively coarse paper and card used to manufacture the stationery products. The PO produced 1d inland postcards, plus inland envelopes, lettercards and foreign postcards, the last three items all bearing the 1½d stamp.

The year of the exhibition had been included in the original stamp design, and when after a few months break it was resumed in April 1925, the stationery, along with the adhesive stamps, was reissued showing the revised date. Thus there were eight new stationery items produced in a little over a year, all being commemorative issues celebrating one event.

The foreign postcard in this series was the first to carry the 1½d stamp and the first issue of a foreign postcard since the rate increase of 1921. All the new commemorative stationery could only be purchased at the post offices located in the exhibition at Wembley. Although this event spanned two years, none of the eight different items were used to any great extent, a fact reflected by their relative scarcity today.

George V passed away on 20 January 1936; his son, Edward VIII, reigned for a mere 10 months until his abdication in December. His reign was too short for the PO to seriously consider introducing postal stationery and George V material continued to be used throughout this period until it was eventually replaced in 1939 by new stationery bearing George VI embossed and impressed stamps. The design and production of these will be dealt with in the next article.

© Colin Baker 1996