

The Development of Victorian Postal Stationery

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4. Overseas Postcards

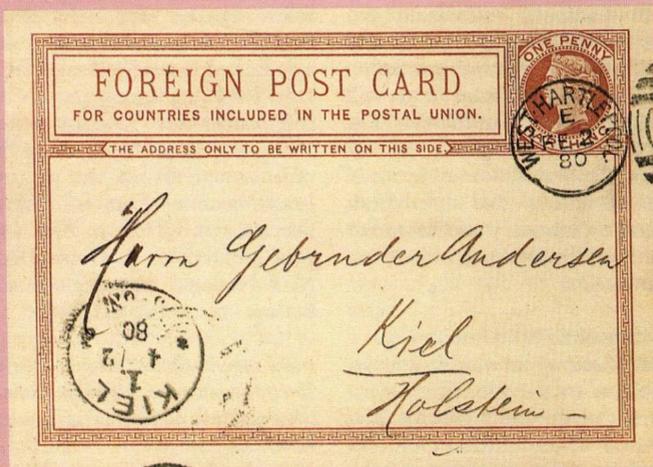
When the postcard was first introduced in this country in 1870 its use was limited to destinations within the British Isles, any attempt to send it abroad resulted in it being treated as an unpaid letter and it was surcharged accordingly. Pressure was placed on the Post Office to extend the use of postcards to foreign destinations, but it took seven years for this to be implemented. However, when overseas cards were finally introduced in 1877 they gave rise to a number of features which were unique to postal stationery.

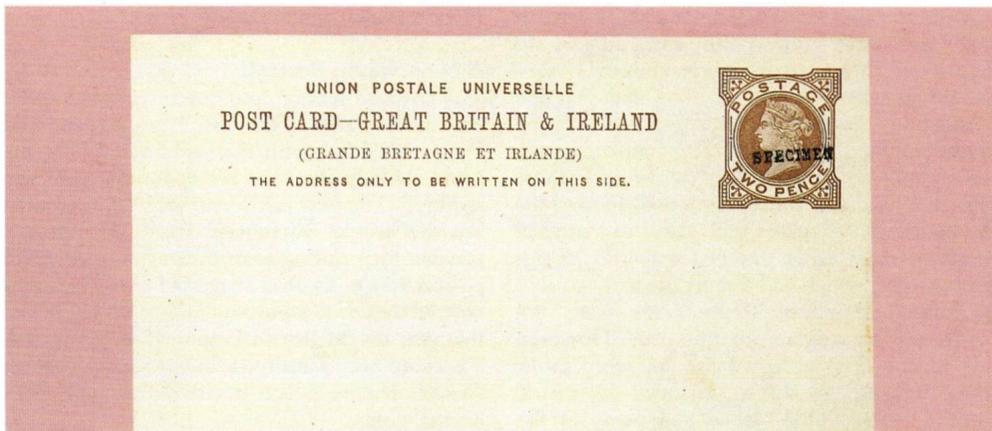
The first overseas postcard was prepared following agreement by the General Postal Union (forerunner of Universal Postal Union), that these be accepted by all member countries as part of the normal mail. At that time membership of the GPU extended mainly to those countries which we now call Western Europe, plus the USA and Egypt, and so the possible use for an overseas postcard was limited. The GPU agreement also set the postcard rate at exactly half that of the basic letter rate to countries in the Postal Union, which in the case

of Britain was 2½d, and so the postcard rate became 1¼d. This was a unique rate which has never been repeated and it is the only time the farthing was ever used as part of a postal rate in this country, although it was frequently used when setting the selling price of stamped stationery.

The GPU agreement covering overseas postcards only allowed them to be sold at their face value and no premium could be added for printing and distribution. This directly opposed the selling arrangements for inland cards whereby the cost of producing these was passed to the purchaser to allow greater competition between the PO and private publishers. (See part 3 of this series). Since no premium could be charged above the price of the stamp, private publishers were unable to compete with the official version and no private cards were ever produced. However, it was sometimes the practice of private companies to overprint PO cards, although until the regulations were changed in 1897 only the reverse of these cards could carry any message.

The first foreign postcard, the 1¼d rate being half the basic letter rate to countries in the General Postal Union.





The 2d post card issued in 1883 for the route via Italy to India and the far east.

Ireland Excepted

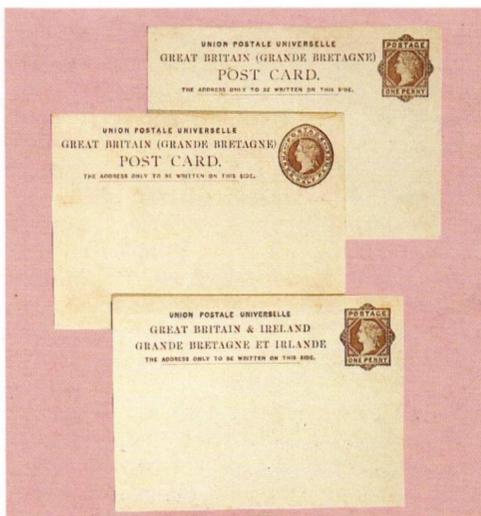
As the membership of the GPU, and subsequently the UPU, expanded, so did the possibility of sending postcards to a greater number of destinations, many of which were spread around the world. At the time Britain's overseas postal rates were also decreasing, which included the postcard rate to Europe, and so it soon became necessary to abandon the original 1½d card and prepare new ones in 1d and 1½d values.

The first overseas card was simply headed "Foreign Post Card/For Countries Included In The Postal Union", but the heading of the next issue in 1879 read "Great Britain (Grande Bretagne)". At that time the postal administration of this country covered the whole of the British Isles, including Ireland and the Channel Islands. This second heading upset the people of Ireland by omitting that country from the front of the card, and following representations by Irish Members of Parliament new postcards were prepared for issue five months later with a revised heading correctly reading "Great Britain and Ireland". However, only the 1d card was re-issued, the sales of the 1½d card not warranting a further printing.

During this period both the letter and postcard rate to many countries depended on the route taken. The overland journey via France and Italy to countries as far away as Australia was much quicker than the journey by sea via the Cape of Good Hope, and postal rates reflected this, the faster journey attracting the higher rate. From 1889 rates to many places bordering the Indian Ocean were 1½d via the Cape and 2½d via Italy. Cards were sometimes marked "via" a

specific country or port to ensure transit by the quicker route. It is possible, therefore, to find different value cards used in the same period, sent to the same destination but by different routes, although most people tended to opt for the more expensive but quicker transit time.

In 1883 a further change was made to overseas postcards. Although the basic layout remained similar to the earlier redesigned cards their size was increased following public pressure for larger cards to allow more space for correspondence. In addition a new 2d value was added to cater for the reduced postcard rate for the route to the east via Brindisi in Italy.



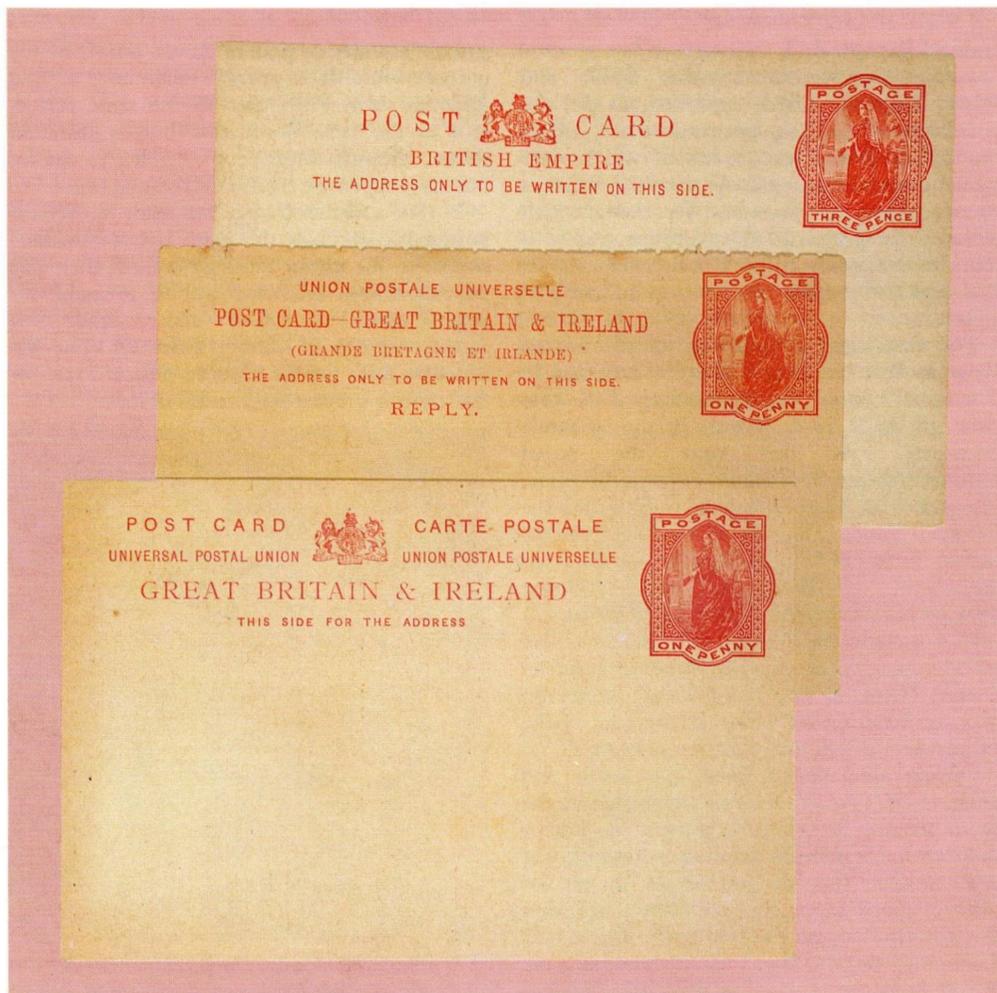
1879 Foreign Post Cards. The heading on the first two cards upset the Irish people and this was soon changed to the heading on the third.

With the success of the inland reply card, it was agreed by the UPU that subject to agreement between member countries they should prepare overseas versions and that the originating members' stamps would be honoured for the return postage providing the reply cards met certain requirements, such as bilingual headings and instructions. From 1883 the British PO prepared reply cards to match all single overseas cards, except for the 3d British Empire card, which had a short life and was sold in limited numbers. Reply cards were not considered appropriate for this issue. However, not all countries accepted foreign reply cards; those refusing to do so included Denmark, Greece, Russia, USA, Japan and many of the

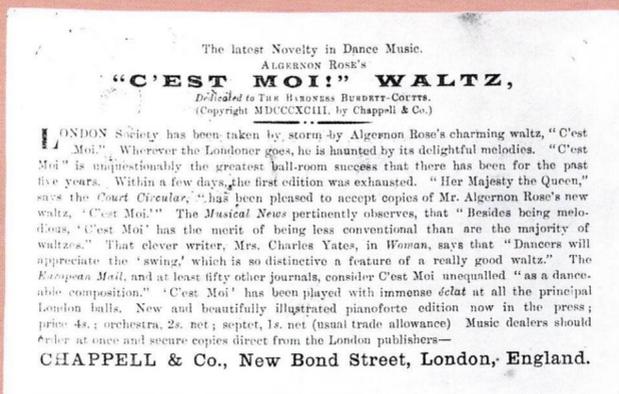
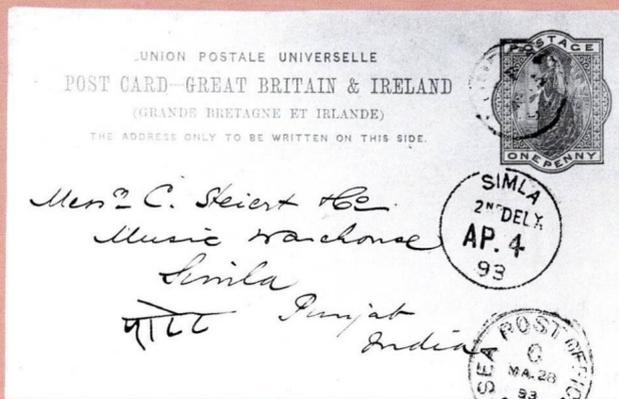
French, Dutch and Portuguese colonies.

A New Stamp Portrait

The postcard service continued to expand and it eventually reached Australia, New Zealand and Fiji in 1889, but with the rate set at 3d for the route via Italy, the issue of yet another card was required. The new cards were needed in a hurry, but the normal 3d postage stamp die was not suitable for printing onto the coarser surface of postcards. De La Rue suggested they prepare a new 3d die for this purpose and in September of that year the 3d British Empire card was issued. This card was shortlived, but it introduced yet another feature which deviated from the PO's normal policy.



The three foreign postcards (1889, 1892, 1893) which used the portrait of Queen Victoria painted by Heinrich von Angeli.



1892 Foreign Postcard with printed advertisement on reverse by Chappell & Co.

The stamp which was used on all overseas cards from this issue onwards included a contemporary full length portrait of Queen Victoria taken from the painting by Heinrich von Angeli which he had completed in 1885. This was the only occasion when British postage stamps showed her as anything other than a very young Queen, all other issues being based on the William Wyon engraving showing her as she was in 1837.

By October 1891 the overseas postcard rate to nearly all destinations had fallen to 1d, the last few landlocked countries in Southern Africa benefiting from this reduced rate six months later. Thus had finally come about a universal postcard rate and a new card was prepared. This also used the same portrait of Victoria based upon von Angeli's portrait of her, but both the size and thickness of the new cards were reduced in order to lessen the total weight, and therefore the cost to the PO of sending cards overseas.

The colour chosen for the card was changed to red, which was the UPU adopted colour for stamps for overseas postcards. New reply cards similar in design to the new single cards were also prepared and issued at the same time.

Finally in 1899 the overseas card was modified following a relaxation of the UPU rules relating to what could be included on the front of postcards and the PO took the opportunity to incorporate the coat of arms onto the front. At long last overseas cards carried the same Royal authority which the inland postcard had always enjoyed.

Thus in just over 20 years, from its initial shaky beginning and unique postage rate, the cost of the overseas postcard had been reduced to 1d to all countries and it had become a much needed and well used system of rapid communication around the world.