

Stamped to order

In the first of two articles,



Opposite page From top: a QEII OHMS envelope; a QV agricultural return; advertising on Edward VII 1/2d Cresswell and QV John Oakey & Sons envelopes; a QEII 3p + 2 1/2p *Stamford Mercury* wrapper; and a QV 1/2d pink postcard with arms. Above is an actual-size detail of the embossing on the Cresswell envelope.

THIS YEAR MARKS the 150th anniversary of the stamped to order (STO) scheme, a service that allowed private firms and individuals to have paper impressed with a variety of postage stamps to meet their individual needs. The Post Office announced that it was going to end this facility in October 1973, but it has remained an option to private companies and Government Departments to this day, albeit to a lesser extent than previously.

When adhesive stamps and prepaid postal stationery were introduced in 1840 it had been intended that the public should be allowed to have their own paper stamped at Somerset House to any desired value, thus allowing heavyweight and overseas mail to be sent under their preferred method – postal stationery. However, the Treasury feared fraud and loss of revenue, and blocked the scheme for a number of years.

By 1855 it was obvious that nobody had been able to successfully copy embossed stationery stamps, and that the loss of revenue which the Treasury feared was much more likely to occur from the re-use of adhesive stamps rather than forging postal stationery. The Treasury relented and agreed that paper submitted to the Stamping Office at Somerset House could be impressed with a stationery stamp(s) to any required value, which could then be made into lettersheets or envelopes. The Treasury stipulated that only white paper was to be accepted, but soon buff and coloured papers were being processed.

Important rules were applied to the stamp to order process. Paper had to be submitted in a flat, unfolded state to avoid secondary, albino impressions being embossed elsewhere on an envelope, and the layout of the envelopes had to be marked on the paper so that the stamps would be struck in their correct positions. This was usually achieved by printing cutting lines that were later removed at the guillotining stage prior to the envelopes being gummied and folded. To avoid the nuisance of having to deal with small orders, a fee of one shilling was charged where the value of the order was less than £10 for each size of paper to be stamped.

Envelopes and lettersheets At the start of the stamped to order scheme in 1855 only 1d envelopes were available from the PO, although the 2d die had been in use during the first years of the Penny Post era. It was recognised that these two values would be insufficient, and more dies would be needed if a full service was to be offered to the public. The PO wanted to avoid the possibility of envelopes becoming festooned with stamps. Thus in October 1855 three new stationery stamps were issued in the values 4d, 6d and 1/-, with 3d being added from May 1859. This allowed envelopes to be stamped to any reasonable value with just one or two stamps. In 1871 the introduction of the 1 1/2d rate for letters weighing up to 2 ounces meant a further value was required. Very soon envelopes might need up to three stamps to make up a desired rate: for example from 1875, 7 1/2d was the cost of sending a letter weighing 1 1/2 ounces to anywhere within the UPU, which could not be printed with any less than three different impressions.

Articles by Colin Baker about illustrated postal stationery were published in the *Bulletin* in October and November 2004 and January 2005.

Colin Baker describes the scheme introduced 150 years ago

On Her Majestys Service



Census 1991
It counts because you count

CONFIDENTIAL

RETURN FOR THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE.
To be filled up on the 4th June, and then sent to the address opposite.

MR P. W. Thorniley Esq
8 Shooters Hill
Worm

Or Present Occupier.



AR

INTERNATIONAL SPONGE IMPORTERS LIMITED

RESSWELL BROTHERS & SCHMITZ
BRANCH

SPONGE IMPORTERS, EXPORTERS AND MERCHANTS

Red Lion Square London W.C.

In case of non-delivery please return to above.



Messrs [Handwritten]

NON MERCURIAL SILVERSMITHS SOAP

INDIA RUBBER KNIFE BOARDS

JOHN OAKEY & SONS, LONDON

Mr John Sellers Esq
100 Boulevard St
Sheffield




FIRST CLASS

Adam A. Hunter Esq.,
14 Tyrone Road,
SOUTHWEND ON SEA,
Essex
SS1 3HF



POST CARD

THE ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

Miss Eva Mary Stagg
Lords Collingham
no. Newark



Over the following years, different values were added to the selection of stamps available. Unlike their adhesive equivalents, stationery stamps were produced in a variety of shapes, as well as different colours, to aid their identification in dimly lit sorting offices.

The STO service quickly became very popular, much more so with commercial organisations than with the public. This did not mean that the public only used PO envelopes, as there are many examples of STO envelopes having been sent by private individuals; these would normally have been purchased from a stationer, either singly or in small packets. Large firms took advantage of the STO scheme to have logos and advertising printed on their envelopes – a cheap way of promoting their goods and services.

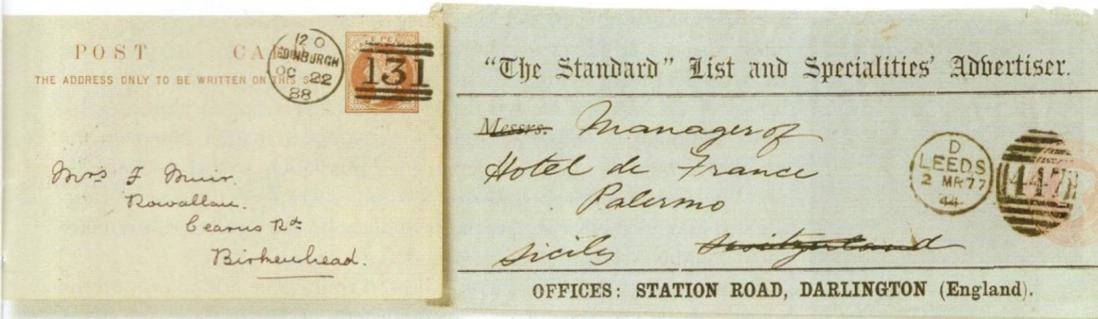
STO envelopes had another advantage to commercial organisations, as they were a deterrent against the theft or misuse of stamps and stationery – an employee caught using a firm's envelope for private use could hardly say he had bought it from the local post office. Some firms who frequently corresponded with other offices even had pre-printed addresses on their envelopes, a time saving device which again helped to prevent stamped stationery being misused. Other firms had their own address printed on envelopes that were sent to clients to prepay return postage on orders.

Official envelopes and lettersheets Older collectors will have been used to the Crown Circle Paid mark introduced in 1904. Prior to this, Government departments had to have stamps impressed on envelopes and lettersheets where return postage was to be paid by them. The inclusion of impressed stamps was carried out under the STO facility at Somerset House. Such material is scarce since all stationery returned to Government departments was kept in storage until destroyed under strict controls. The few items existing today have survived by chance. They may represent only a part of the range of Government prepaid stationery produced in Victorian times.

The introduction of the Crown Circle did not signal a complete end to the Government's use of the STO scheme, which continued into George V's reign, with some items even appearing in the last few years.

In the Victorian era some Government departments amassed a huge amount of information on an annual basis, particularly that relating to agriculture. This gave the authorities an overview of land use and allowed the Government to shift the emphasis from one type of farming to another by means of taxation and allowances. To ensure questionnaires were returned by farmers and landowners, they were doubly stamped to pay for both the outward and return postage.

Postcards In the early years of the STO scheme, only envelopes and some lettersheets were normally created by private firms and individuals. In 1872 STO postcards were also allowed. The new 1/2d postal rate was a boon to industry and was used for acknowledgements and small messages, many of which were partially pre-printed on the reverse of the cards. But the 1/2d rate needed a new stamp for STO work, the lowest value of stamp available up to that time being 1d. The PO had already been criticised for the



lack of space on the address side of its own cards, and as STO postcards had to be a similar size (75 × 122mm or 3 × 5in) a smaller stamp was required to that used for all other STO work. This new stamp was about half the size of the other STO stamps and fitted well on Victorian STO postcards.

The strict regulations regarding postcards were often flouted by private companies. In the end the PO got fed up with all the colourful, fancy printing and the improper use of the Royal Coat of Arms. From 1884 the whole of the fronts of STO cards were printed at Somerset House, but without the Coat of Arms. This time the existing 1/2d stamp used for PO postcards was incorporated into STO work allowing them to be printed by the letterpress process, much faster and cheaper. Five years on and the PO reversed its decision about the use of the Coat of Arms, so that from 1889 STO cards were almost exactly the same as their PO equivalents, although there is one subtle difference between the two. A section of chain was removed from the neck of the Unicorn on STO cards, making it very easy for collectors to identify the two types.

Newspaper wrappers Another popular area for STO stationery was the production of newspaper wrappers. In 1870 PO wrappers were printed on thin white paper and were liable to split open in the post. Firms wanted to avoid complaints from customers about lost contents, and had their own wrappers made, sometimes to a larger size, using stronger paper than the PO equivalent. At the same time some newsagents and newspaper publishers took the opportunity of printing advertising on their wrappers. Yet another 1/2d stamp had to be prepared for use on PO and STO wrappers. It was much taller than it was wide, so that when it was wrapped around a rolled newspaper it presented a much better 'target' for the cancellation.

Fears that newspaper stamps might miss being cancelled were unfounded and in the reigns of Edward VII and George V the newspaper stamp reverted to standard proportions. Although wrappers continued to be popular with commercial organisations, their use by the general public grew less so that by 1936 only STO wrappers were being produced. After the Second World War the public's use of prepaid newspaper wrappers continued to decline but they remained popular with firms such as WH Smith who had a large number of different values prepared for despatching printed matter all over the world.

Above: a QV 1/2d brown postcard without arms, and a QV 1d pink newspaper wrapper.



Detail of embossing on the newspaper wrapper shown on p25 (actual size).

Postal Stationery Society

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Pre-cancelling newspaper wrapper stamps started in Victoria's reign in an effort to speed up the despatch of the mails. Once again it also prevented the wrappers from being misused by staff. In the present reign the publishers of the *Stamford Mercury* used pre-cancelled wrappers almost exclusively and many of these have found their way onto market. Normally the PO liked to have the date included in any cancellation, so that delays in the post could be monitored, but with newspaper wrappers the date of posting was also normally the newspaper publication date, and so this requirement could be relaxed.

Between 1857 and 1888 the PO allowed rings to be added around the outside of stationery stamps which could carry a firm's address, and sometimes other details. Although these were mainly used on newspaper wrappers, some envelopes were also prepared. Two methods of applying the rings were used. One was to have Somerset House prepare new dies with the ring incorporated around the stamp so that it was printed in one operation and in a uniform colour. The second, and probably cheaper method, was to have the ring added later by a local printer, which always resulted in two shades of printing, or sometimes two distinct colours. The expense of preparing and printing these rings meant few companies indulged in them, and thus they are difficult to find today • *To be continued.*

Text © Colin Baker 2005

Chris Harman Richard West re-visits the Royal's President

NINE years ago, your Editor interviewed Chris Harman (*Bulletin* May 1996), and was impressed by his enthusiasm, adding 'his approach to the hobby shows that serious philately need not be stuffy and boring'. Chris is about to begin his term as President of The Royal Philatelic Society London. Has his enthusiasm mellowed over the years, or have his views in any way changed?

As John reported, Chris's original collections were virtually destroyed in a fire, making him reassess his interests: he started to explore more unusual bye-ways, looking at Revenues and the classic local issues. Working as part of the Expert Committee of the 'Royal', he discovered a fascination for forgeries, of which he has built a large collection, finding these help him to understand better the genuine stamps. Noting where gaps existed in the resources available to the Expert Committee, Chris decided to build a reference collection of Central and South America.

His collection of the Chalon Heads of Queen Victoria, particularly of Queensland and Grenada, encouraged him to look further into the work

of Perkins, Bacon. He recalls how they came from Boston in the USA to England in 1819, in the hope of winning the contract to print banknotes for the Bank of England. They did not succeed in that aim, but did start successfully to print banknotes for other clients. Chris notes that at the time there was a duty paid on banknotes, providing a good link with Revenue stamps. As is well known, Perkins, Bacon became renowned for their stamp printing, being responsible for the first stamps of over 20 countries. Chris's collection of their work embraces not only the British Empire, including Mauritius and the British West Indies, southern Africa and the Australian States, but also extending to such places as Chile and Peru.

GB interests Chris does not forget Great Britain, with particular emphasis on postal history from Edward VIII to date. It is quite an eye-opener to see his display of Machin definitives paying the rate for which they were intended. He comments on how examples of correct usage can be rare, citing in particular the 75p black. This was issued