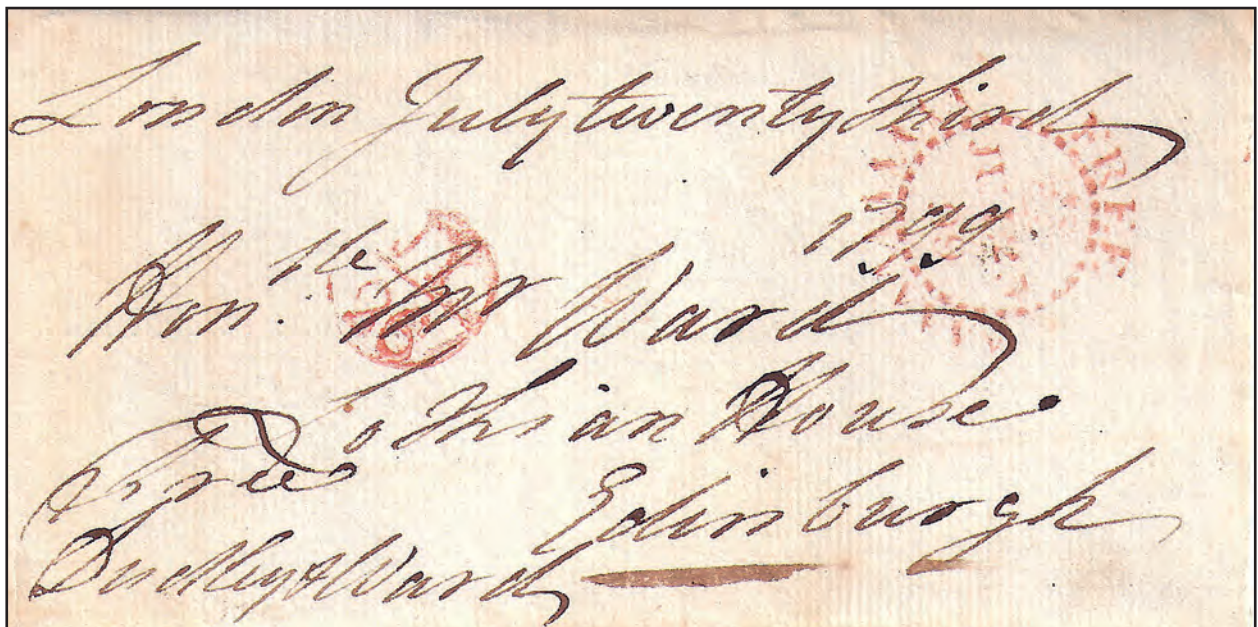


Evolution of the British Franking System

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A Display to
The Royal Philatelic Society London
on 5th March 2020

Preface

Many items from the Franking System have been shown at the Royal Philatelic Society over the years as part of other postal history collections. The last display specifically dealing with the Franking System was by Finbar O'Mahony in November 1998.

This display describes evolution of the Franking System and two complementary systems which developed in parallel; one with letters marked To Be Delivered Free to bypass some of the Franking System's Regulations and the other used in the Ship Letter Office. Ways in which official letters were handled before the Franking System are illustrated along with features which were retained after the Franking System was introduced. Letters to Francis Freeling are included where they explain vagaries of the system.

Black and white diagrams of some of the handstamps associated with the Franking System shown in this display are included. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview of all handstamps known but simply to clarify those shown. A previously described descriptive and chronological classification is used when referring to Failed Free handstamps.

Introduction

The Romans established a postal system whereby official mail could be sent to Rome. This was not available to the public except by favour. The Franking System, represents a period of nearly 200 years of dealing with official mail from Roman times to the present day.

The Franking System allowed Parliamentary, Departmental and other official mail to be carried free of postage. Until 1652, when the Franking System was introduced, this type of mail was carried in several ways including private messenger and via a Court Post. In effect the Franking System provided a means of bringing all such mail under control of the Post Office. Free postage for Members of Parliament may have been an inducement to gain unanimous approval of the General Bill for the Establishment of the Post Office in the 17th century.

Some postal features established before 1652 were retained. Free mail usually went with normal mail at the normal speed. However, from the 16th century (before the Franking System started) letters of extreme urgency could be authorised by top officials and were often endorsed *Haste Post Haste* or similar (Figure 1). They were carried without a break, other than to change horses, and were often inscribed with times of arrival. This type of endorsement was retained with the advent of the Franking System (Figure 2). Later an Express endorsement was used (Figure 3). Route to be used and times of arrival at towns along that route was retained into the 19th century (Figure 4).

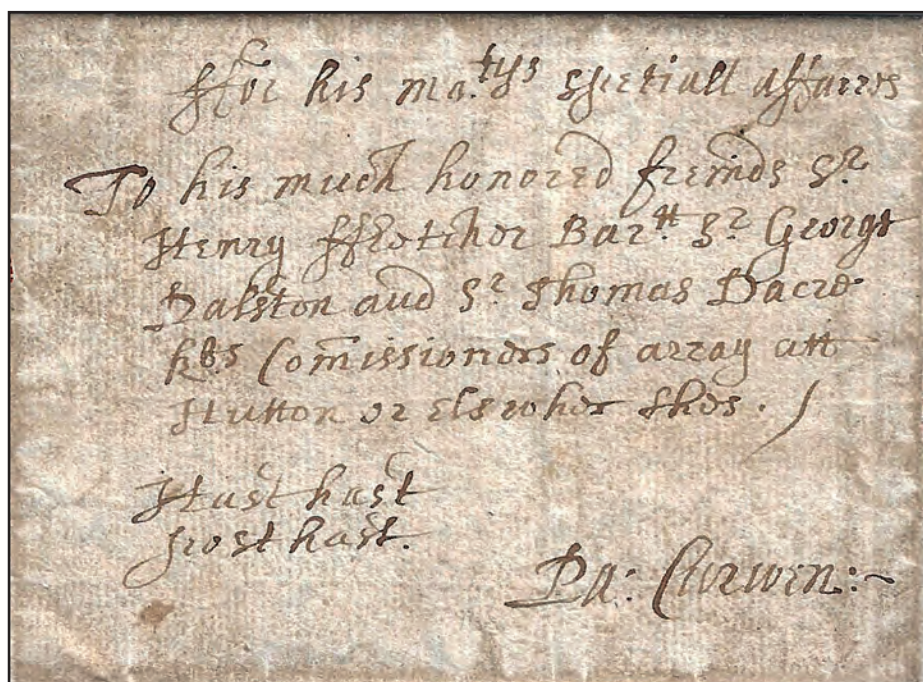


Figure 1. Haste hast / post hast inscription on entire of 1643.

For his Ex.^{cy}
General, Cromwell
& wife.
Hast Hast
at
Whitchall.

Figure 2. Entire dated 9th June 1653 to General Cromwell regarding a shortage of stores in Scotland. Endorsed Hast Hast. The writer, Robert Lilburne, was one of the 59 who signed the death warrant of Charles I. After the Restoration of the Monarchy he was sentenced to death, commuted to life imprisonment.

Establishing the Franking System

Before 1652 Official letters were carried either by Private Messenger or Carriers or by the Court Post. Private messengers dealt with both official and mail from private individuals. The Court Post was established during the reign of Edward II. Paid by the Exchequer, Members of Court carried letters to locations within London and the Provinces.

Figure 5 shows a letter from the Court of Elizabeth I signed by William Paulet, first Marquess of Winchester, Lord Treasurer to Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I. Figures 6 and 7 show parts of a letter signed by Charles I.

Reprieve:
to be sent by Express.

On His Majesty's Service
Geo. Brown

To the High Sheriff for the County of
Lancaster, Or his Deputy; And, in their
Absence, to the Keeper of the Goal, and
all Others whom it may concern.

Secretary of States Office } at Lancaster.

Figure 3. Express endorsement on letter from the Secretary of State's Office.

P.M. Service at 5 miles
 per hour
 Capt. Hutchinson
 or Officer Commanding
 Mycomia Infy
 Roscrea
 Sgt. Macke
 Route
 Mullamore
 Frankford
 Wytheboro
 Pine-Is
 Roscrea
 Morris
 Wm
 Mullamore
 9th Dec
 60 Clock

Philippe Jorouage one of the Ordnance
messengers of the quenes mat Chambers of the
allowaunce for expenses in haste by the commandment
of the lordes high Chamberlains of England and
of the quenes mat most honorable paynt
Comptroller from London to Dorsetshire to
Sir John Wyke knight and there to him
delivered lxxs. from thence into Comptroller
shire to Sir Marmore Bartolay knight and
there to him delivered lxxs. from thence to
into Devonshire to Sir John Sturgeson and
there to him delivered lxxs. from thence
into Cornwall to Richard Oxenford
Esquire and there to him delivered lxxs. and
so returned to London againe wth the like last
wherefore the said Phillippe prayeth to
have allowaunce for his charges and paimes
to be rated by the lordes high Chamberlains of
Englande and at the King & the date.
And paid by one of the tellors of the receipt
at westm. of real out in his Exchequer
the space of xxiiij daies. A — mto. a fur

Wichster

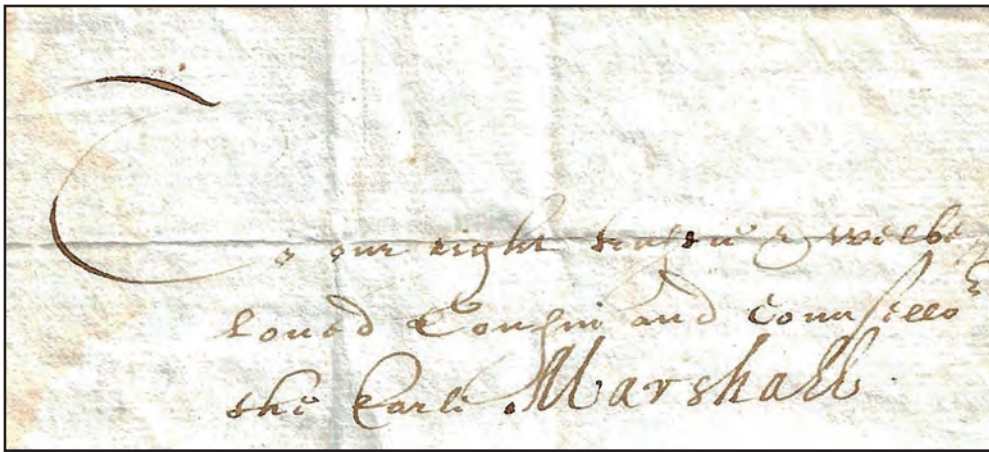


Figure 6. Address on entire signed by King Charles I ...from our court at Windsor, ye 8th day of July 1627... Addressed To our right honourable Lourd (sic) Cousin and Counsellor the Earl Marshall. The letter deals with the cost of maintaining the king's ships and the need to sell some to raise funds.

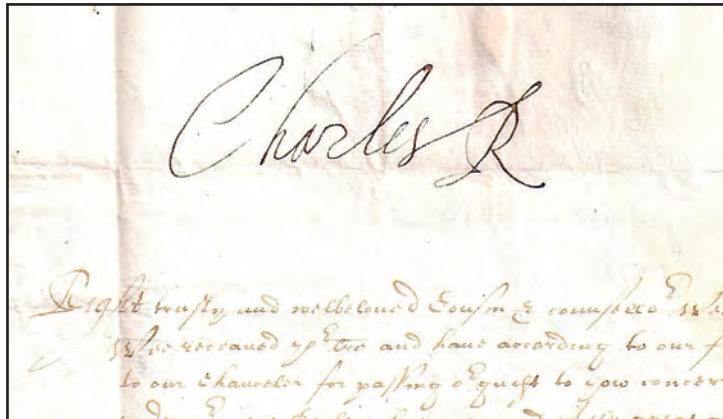


Figure 7. Copy of the signature and part of the upper lines of text.

On introduction of the Franking System Official letters seemed to have satisfactorily passed free until the start of the Convention Parliament. The latter met 25th April 1660, following the Restoration of the Monarchy on 4th April. On 8th May it proclaimed that Charles II had been legal monarch since the death of Charles I. All Acts introduced during the Commonwealth period were rescinded. Since this included the Franking Act of 1652 the Franking System was abolished. This resulted in confusion. Some letters were carried free as an act of grace (Figure 8), others were not (Figure 9).

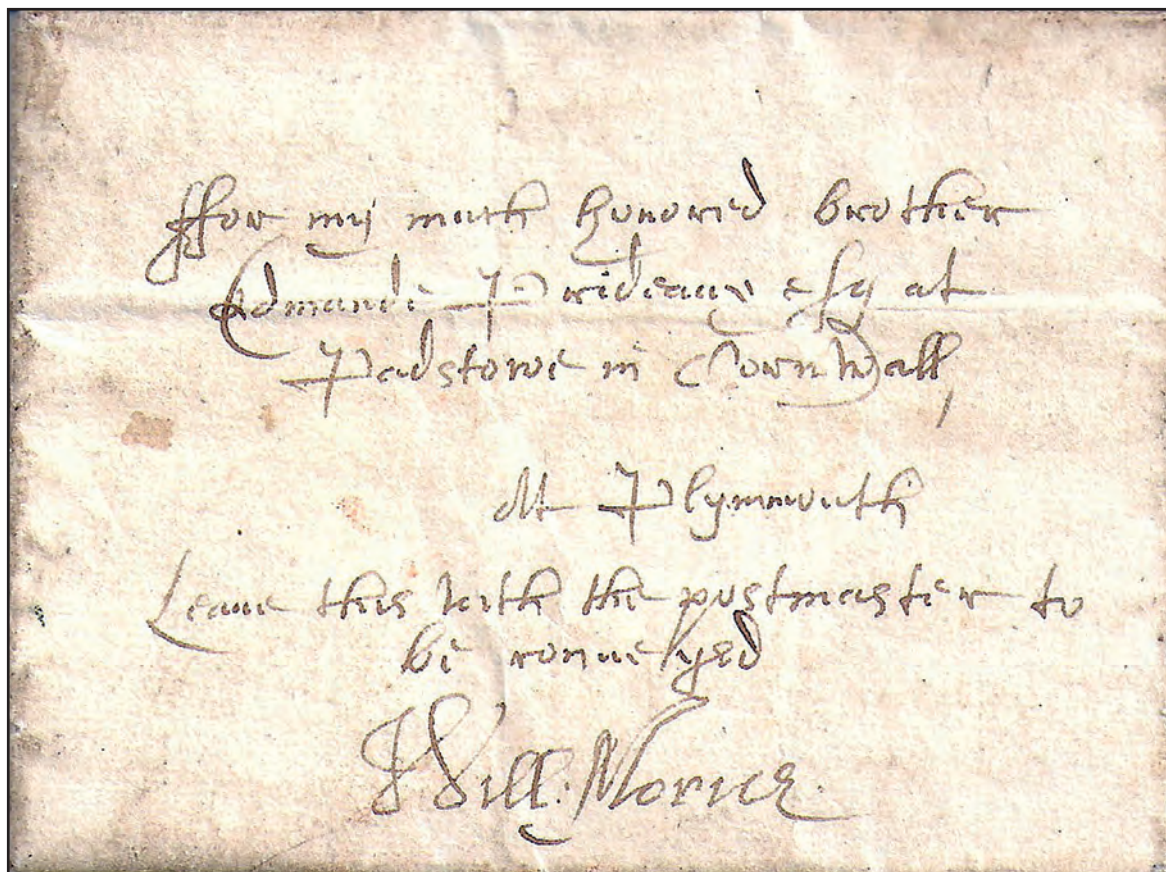


Figure 8. Entire dated 11 December 1660 ffor my much honored brother Edmund Prideaux esq at Padstowe in Cornwall. Signed below the address Will Morice who was Secretary of State 1660-1668. His frank was granted allowing the letter to go free.

Figure 9. Entire, from Guildhall, London dated 16th October 1660 To the high Sheriff of the County of Derby from the Commissioners for Disbanding the Army. Concerning gathering cash for paying off the Cromwellian army. Despite being signed by three Privy Councillors Wheeler, Richard Browne and Thomas Player postage was paid.



Following complaints from both Houses the king was petitioned to restore free mail. This was granted by Royal Warrant 14th May 1661.

Indication by Sender that a letter should be Free of Postage

Departmental Mail

A number of officials in Government Departments had unlimited franking privileges. Official letters had been identified by such endorsements as *for his ma.tys speciall affairs* before the Franking System was introduced (Figure 1). In 1653 the Council of State ordered the first condition for acceptance of a frank, namely that letters, if not recognised by their seals, should be endorsed *For the Service of the Commonwealth or State*. This expression was modified until it became *On His or Her Majesty's Service*. During the co-regency of William and Mary 1689-1694 the expression ... *their Majesties'* ... was used (Figure 10).

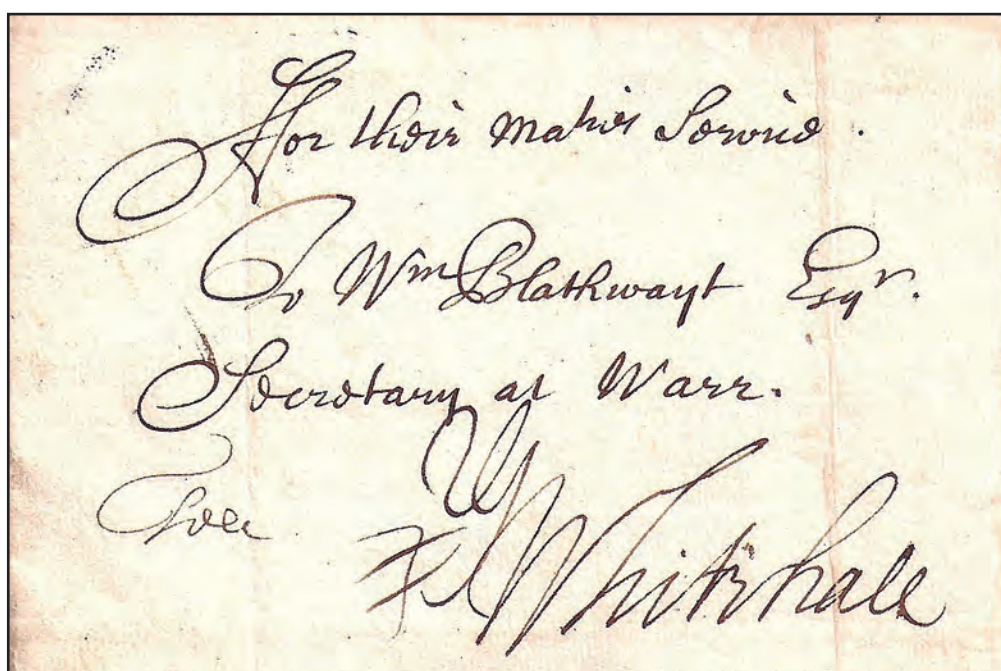


Figure 10. Entire endorsed *for their Maties Service* dated 6th January 1689 to the Secretary at Warr. The co-regency started in February 1689 so the letter was actually written and sent in January 1690 (Gregorian calendar). Charge 7(d) cancelled. Free written by Inspector. Bishop mark IA/8 in black on reverse.

Departmental mail can be considered as arising from three broad groups: Government Departments which existed before the Restoration of the Monarchy eg Army, Admiralty and Exchequer; those created by Acts of Parliament eg Office of Works and Registrar General; those established by the Privy Council eg Board of Trade and Education. These all appeared on the General Franking List. The format on stationary for Government Departments was OHMS heading, name of department, signature of franking clerk and wax seal of department; not all of these were present in all cases. Departments were responsible for informing the Franking Office who was eligible to sign a frank. Not all major departments were entitled to free mail. Customs and Excise, for example, never had its own frank. Any mail to or from that department that did pass free was because of the frank of sender or recipient.

In addition, a steady stream of Special Franking Acts provided the franking privilege for individual departments not on the Franking list. Departments obtaining privilege in that way were required to print details of the relevant act on their wrappers. A frank was given to the Navy Pay Office by a Special Franking Act in 1795 (35 Geo 3 c94) and to the Prize Department in 1805 (45 Geo 3 c72). The Prize Department had its own envelopes by 1813, until then it used those of the Navy Pay Office (Figures 11, 12).

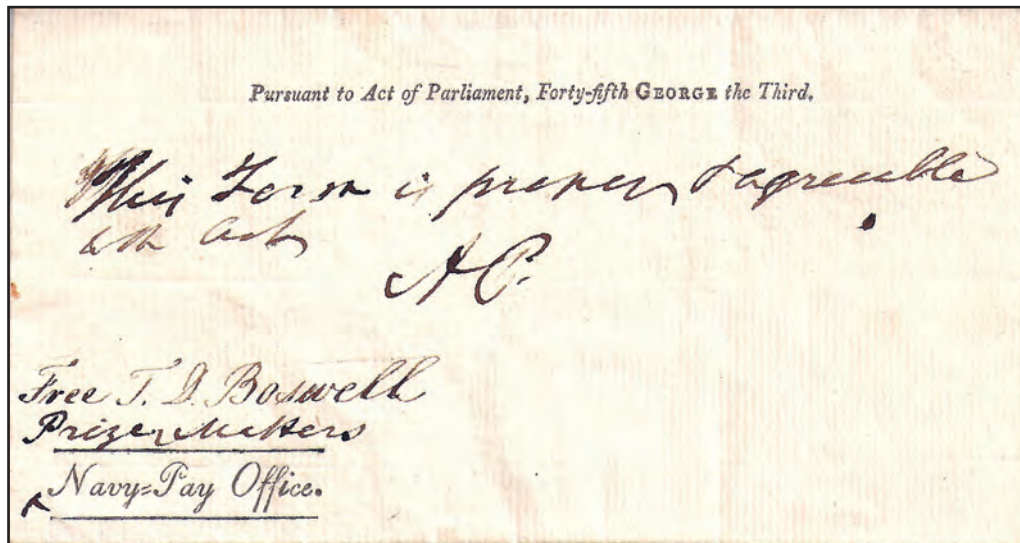


Figure 11. Navy Pay-Office wrapper but with the Prize Department Act at the top, proof endorsed: This Form is proper & agreeable with act. Proofs are very rare. Signed by TD Boswell. Undated but the watermark is K Chilton / Wills / 1804.



Figure 12. Wrapper with Crown-Circle Free handstamp (flat, wide crown) for 15 February 1813. By this time PRIZE DEPARTMENT had been printed above Navy Pay-Office.

The Post Office had arrangements with some departments so that their mail could go free under the PO frank rather than having one of their own via a Special Franking Act. This allowed greater supervision by the PO. The department dealing with Land Tax Redemption was one of these.

Figures 13-16 show progressive change in inscription on front of circulars regarding LTR before and after confirmation.



Figure 13. PAID datestamp for 10 December 1812. Post paid printed on wrapper.

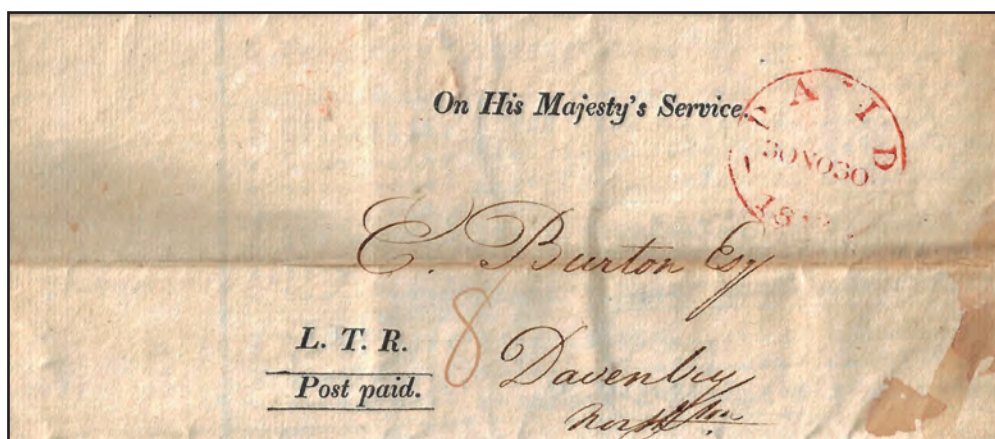


Figure 14. PAID datestamp for 30 November 1813. L.T.R. has been added to Post paid inscription.

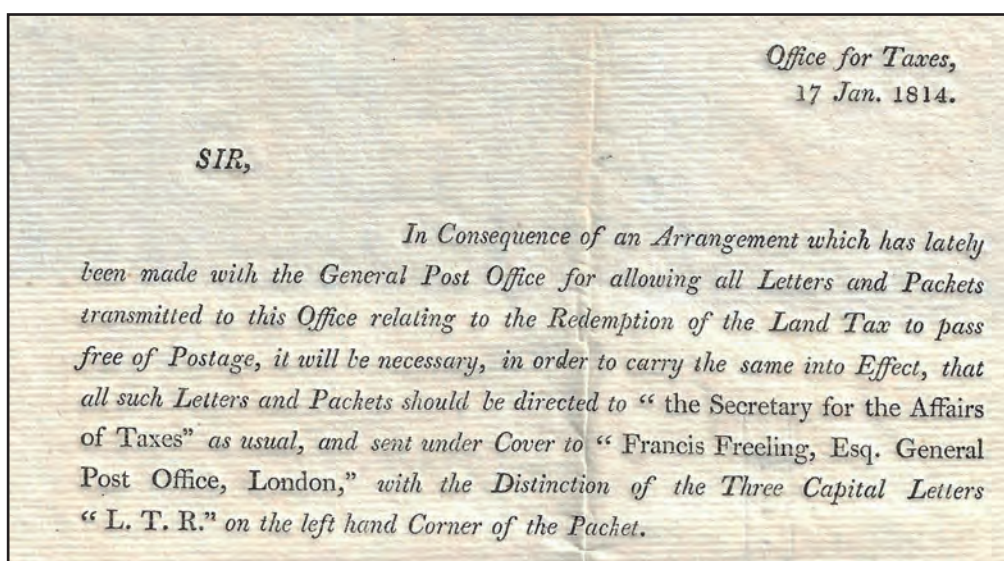


Figure 15. Part of notice dated 17 January 1814 confirming Arrangement.

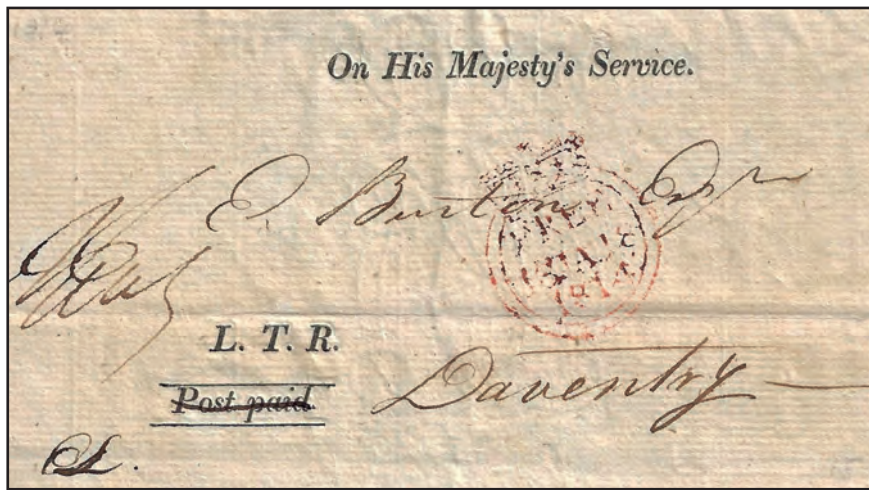


Figure 16. Wrapper with Crown-Circle Free datestamp for 18 January 1814 Post paid having been crossed out.

Finally, letters sent out, usually in small numbers, for political or charitable reasons were granted privilege by Treasury Minute (Figure 17).

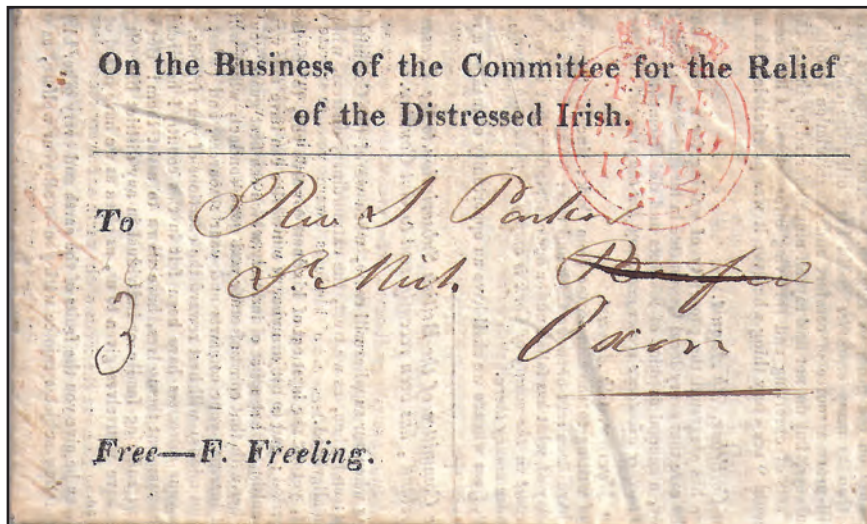


Figure 17. Circular headed: On the Business of the Committee for the Relief of the Distressed Irish which was established in 1822. Entire with Crown-Circle Free handstamp for 19 August 1822, from City of London Tavern describing details of famine and distress in Ireland. ...That the inhabitants of this district have severely suffered, their squalid looks, swoln (sic) legs, and naked bodies sufficiently testify...

Departmental mail usually had the name of the department printed in the lower left corner of their stationary. In addition names of individuals were printed with the departmental names in the case of the Post Office, Admiralty and Admiralty Office (Figure 18). The Ordnance Department printed the date along with department name (Figure 19).

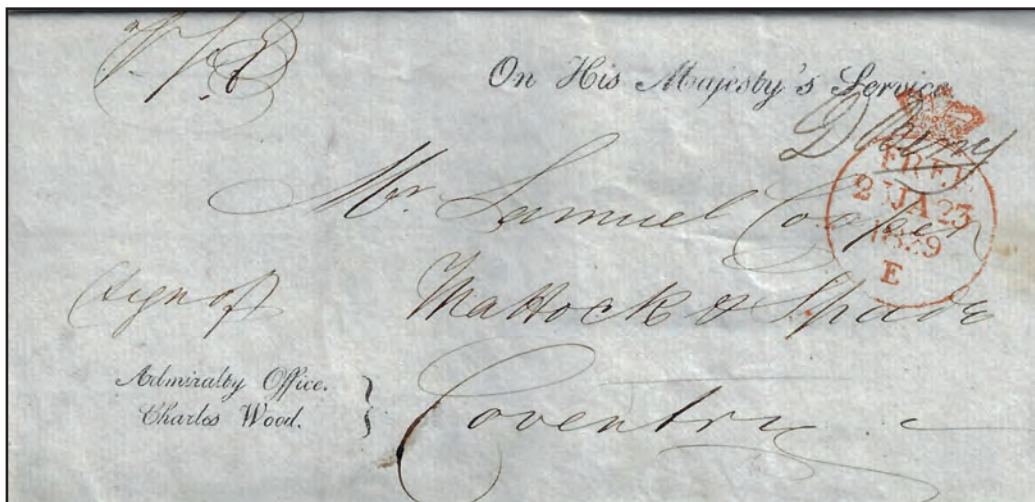


Figure 18. Admiralty Office and Charles Wood printed lower left.

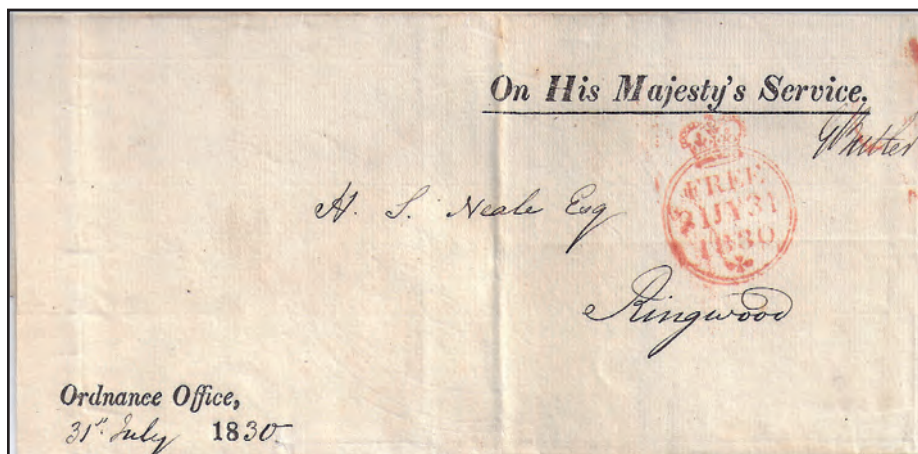


Figure 19. Ordnance Office and date printed lower left.

Parliamentary Mail

Members of both Houses of Parliament were allowed restricted franking privileges. Endorsements by Members of Parliament were usually written on the lower left corner of the letter. Different groups signed in different ways.

House of Lords

Lords Temporal generally signed their names in a manner similar to members of the commons. Lords Spiritual signed differently.

Bishops and Archbishops

Signatures for archbishops and bishops were unusual. The name of their see was included, which might be the traditional Latin name or a modern version. This was usually preceded by their Christian name or an abbreviation of it. Infrequently the word 'Free' or 'Frank' preceded the signature. Having been elected but before consecration bishops attached 'elect' to their names. The time between election and consecration was only a few weeks. Therefore, items which include elect in the signature are rare. Figure 20 shows part of a letter to Francis Freeling, dated 14 May 1824, from the Bishop-elect of Chichester. He states ...*I have enclosed a frank as I shall in future direct them...* and signed the letter *RJ Chichester-Elect*. Figure 21 is a wrapper, dated 6 April 1825, signed *RJ Chichester*. Robert James Carr was Bishop of Chichester 1824-1831, he was then translated to Worcester.

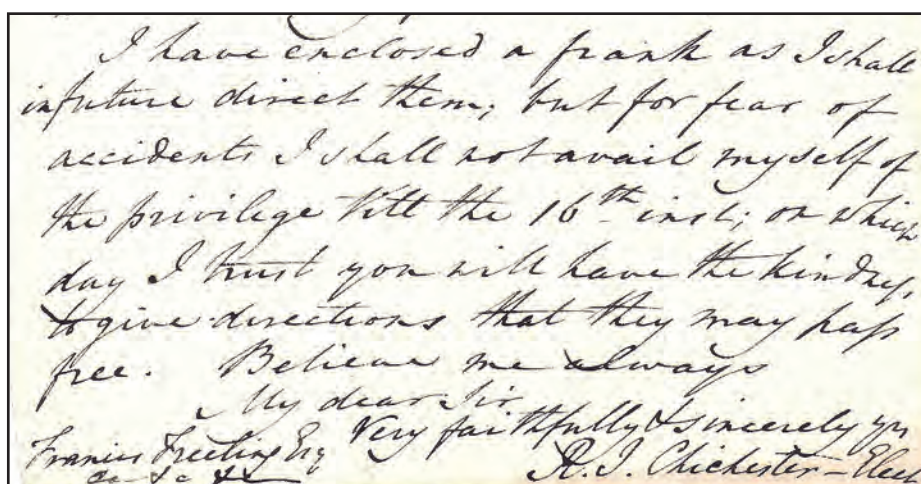


Figure 20. Letter to Francis Freeling dated 14 May 1824, from the Bishop-elect of Chichester.

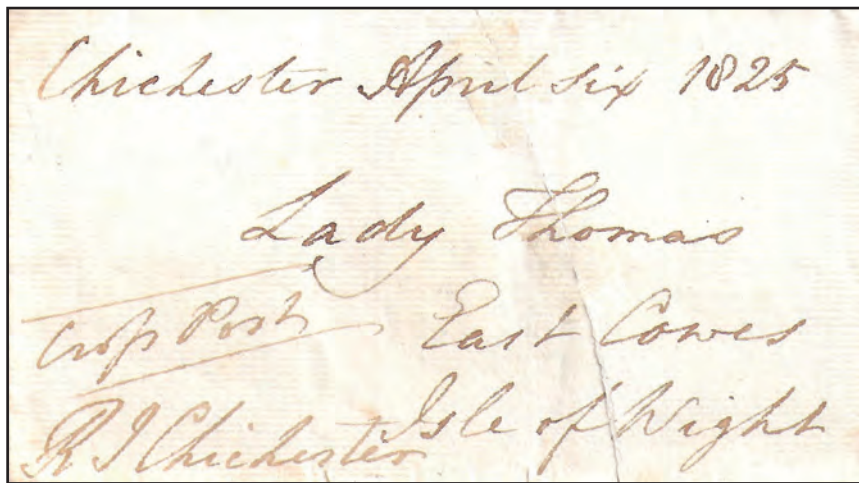


Figure 21. Wrapper dated April six 1825, signed RJ Chichester.

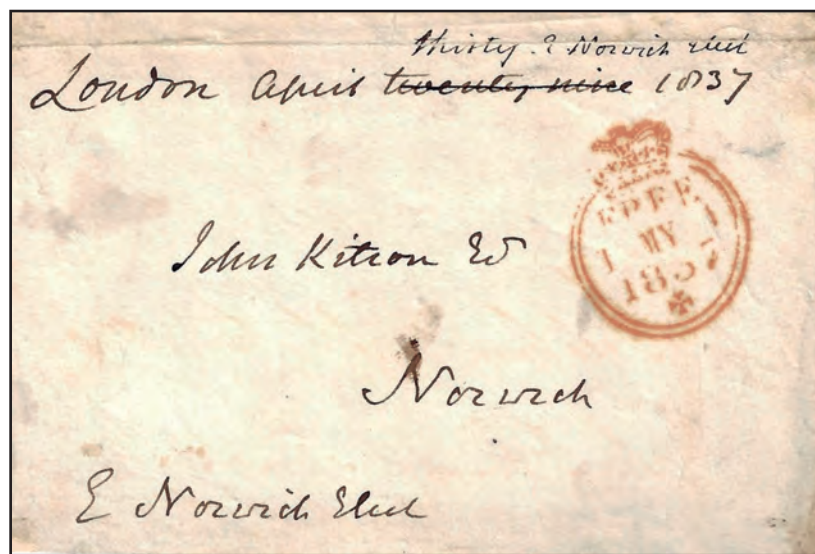


Figure 22. Front signed E Norwich Elect.

Figure 22 shows a front dated April twenty nine 1837 altered to thirty. Both alteration and lower left signed E Norwich Elect. Edward Stanley was nominated on 14 April 1837 and consecrated on 11 June. Died in office on 6 September 1849.

Translation

Once a bishop was consecrated it was for life. Bishops might be translated from one see to another which had greater prestige or was more lucrative. Rarely a bishop might be dismissed either for misdeeds or political reasons. The authorities had to be informed of any changes. Figure 23 shows an entire dated 19 November 1823, signed Geo. H Chester. Figure 24 is a letter, dated 8 June 1824, to the Inspector of Franks, stating ...*The Bishop, late of Chester, but now of Bath & Wells, begs to inform Mr Freeling that he has this day been confirmed Bishop of the latter See, and will therefore in future Frank accordingly...* Freeling has underlined parts of the letter in red. Figure 25 is an entire dated 26 April 1836 signed Geo. H Bath & Wells. The letter has been written by a clerk who has signed it Henry Law. George Henry Law was Bishop of Chester 1812-1824 and Bath & Wells from 1824. He was nominated 8 May and consecrated 8 June 1824. He died in office in 1845.

Chester. November Nineteen 1823
Mr. Marshall Esq.
near
Geo. H. Chester. Northwich.

Figure 23. Entire dated 19 November 1823 signed Geo. H Chester.

The Bishop, late of
Chester, but now of
Bath & Wells, begs
to inform me feeling
that he has this day
been confirmed Bishop
of Walter See, & will
therefore in future
transact accordingly.
Langham Place
June 8. 1824

Figure 24. Letter dated 8 June 1824,
to the Inspector of Franks.

Wells. April Twenty Six.
1836-
Mrs Cockburn
Kingdon
Geo. H. Bath & Wells. Heovil

Figure 25. Entire dated 26 April 1836 signed
Geo. H Bath & Wells.

House of Commons

Members of the House of Commons signed with their Christian name or contraction and surname.

'Frank' was to be included somewhere, though this did not always happen. Free, ffrank or F was often used instead.

Sheets of paper, blank other than a signature of someone with the franking privilege, were often given as gifts to those without the privilege. Members of Parliament were known to give their franks to friends, who could often afford postage anyway, as bribes or to servants to supplement their wages. In the latter case, servants often being illiterate, franks were sold on. When the letter was completed it was apparent that the address (and contents) were in a different hand to the signature. This contravened the 1715 Act which directed that the writer of the letter (by implication being the same person who franked the letter) should write the whole address themselves.

Falling into the wrong hands these sheets could be abused. The Gentleman's Magazine of September 1784 states ... *many...frauds had been attempted, by writing promiffory (sic) or other notes, &c. over their titles or names, artfully erafing (sic) the word free...* The consequence of this was to use a signature for a frank different from the usual signature (Figures 26, 27). These included connecting the word Free with their title, or name (Figure 28), drawing a line through their signature, placing the signature between two lines (Figure 29), writing the word Free between their Christian and surname (Figure 30), or with their Christian name over their surname (Figure 31).

Figure 26. Normal signature of Daniel Parker Coke, MP for Nottingham.

Figure 27. Signature Coke used for franking.

Figure 28. Free and signature connected.

Figure 29. Signature between two lines.

Figure 30. Free within signature.

Figure 31. Christian name above surname with Free between.

Figure 32 shows a typical letter attempting to abuse the system. The signature and address and contents are in a different hand. Unusually, this has been recognised and the signature has been crossed out and the letter charged 4d.

Figure 32. Signature noticed to have been written by someone other than who wrote address.

Since so many franks were being given it is not surprising that it was possible to forget to whom a frank had been given. Figure 33 shows part of a letter dated 1 May 1813, to Freeling from the Earl of Kinnoull. An undeliverable letter franked, but not written, by him has been returned. The letter begins ...*I beg leave to return you the inclosed (sic) letter as I am perfectly ignorant for whom I franked it...* Freeling comments ...*To be opened and returned to the writers...* Beneath that is an initialled note from the Returned Letter Office identifying that the letter was from Ensign Robert Weir of the 27th Regiment of Foot. Neither Freeling nor RLO officials were concerned about the abuse.

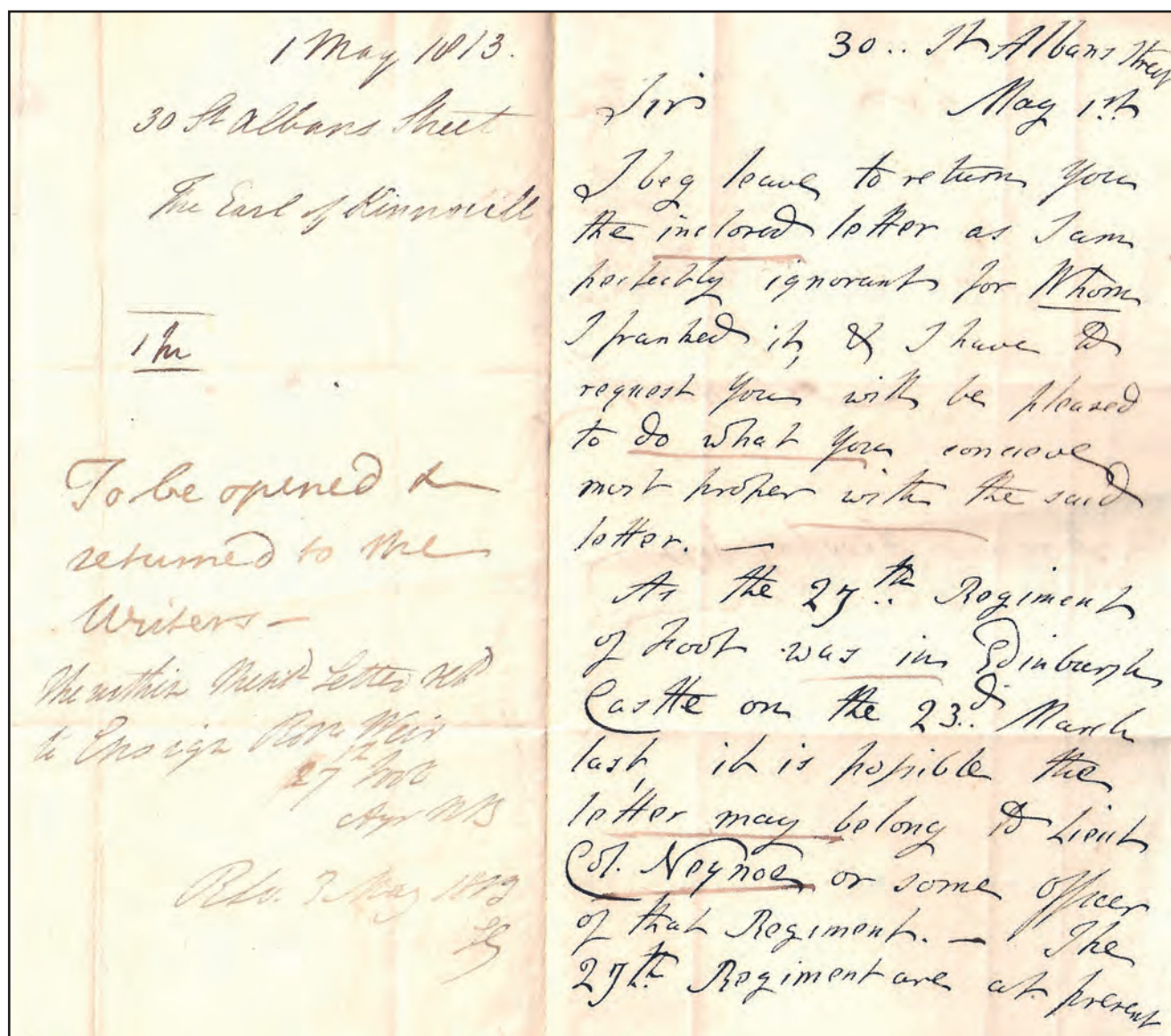


Figure 33. Letter regarding an undeliverable frank.

Change of signature

MPs had to frank using the name in which they were elected. They could not change their name. However, departmental officials were allowed to alter the name on their frank. Figure 34 shows part of a letter dated 1823 in pencil. Sir Robert John Wilmot-Horton was Under Secretary of State for War and the Colonies 1821-1828 and Governor of Ceylon 1831-1837. He is informing Freeling that he has changed his name to Wilmot & Horton. In 1823 he inherited the Catton Hall estate on the death of his father-in-law; as part of the will he had to add Horton to his name. On 22 January 1824 he informed Freeling that he was intending ...*to sign my franks RW Horton instead of R Wilmot Horton...* (Figure 35). By 6 May 1824 (Figure 36) signing his name in any form was clearly too much for him and he asked permission for his Private Secretary to sign his franks because ...*every moment is precious that the time employed in franking letters is positively inconvenient to me...*!

1823
Downing St.
Thursday.

My dear Sir

You will perceive
in the Gazette that
I am in future to
sign my name
"Melmoth Baskin"
& I merely apprise you
that in mistake may

Figure 34. Part of letter dated 1823.

Dear Sir

I intend to sign
my franks "RW Horton"
instead of "R Melmoth Horton".

Figure 35. Part of letter dated January 1824.

employment for two
under-secretaries out
of Post. I find every
moment so precious that
the time employed in
franking letters is
positively inconvenient
to me - You will, or
rather it may be observed
that Lord Baskin
franks very few himself -
under these circumstances

could it not be facilitated
permitted that his private
secretary should frank
for him when he is in
town - or in other words -
cannot letters so franked
be allowed to pass - &
I will take care that
he never exceeds that
average number which
I am in the daily habit
of franking myself - if
you must return a

Figure 36. Part of letter dated May 1824.

Acceptance of Privilege by Inspectors

Before the introduction of Free handstamps

Before the introduction of Free handstamps inspectors indicated that letters could pass free by their signature, initials, inspector's handstamp or the letter 'P' (Figure 37).

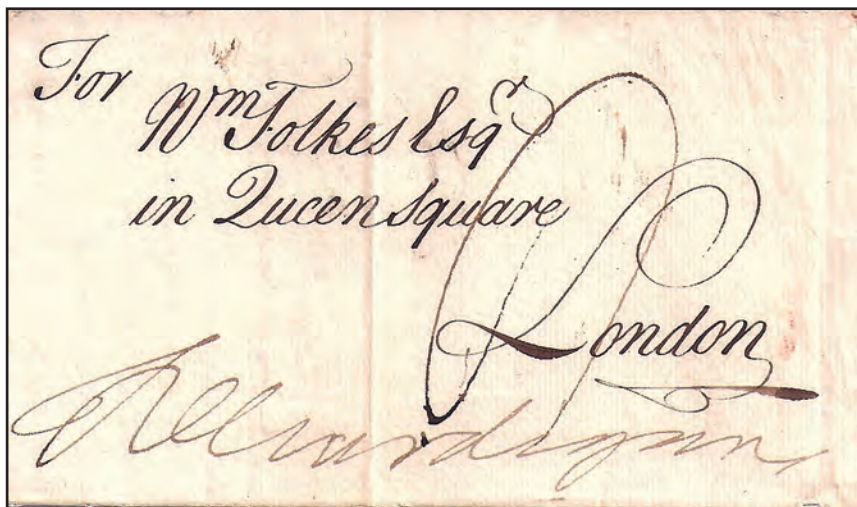


Figure 37. Manuscript P on entire with address written by someone other than Cardigan who franked it.

Introduction of the first handstamps

About fifty years elapsed from the start of the Franking System before the first handstamp was introduced. This was in Dublin. It was another 50 years before the first London handstamp was seen. (During this time Dublin had four Free handstamps, two Counterfeit marks and one Charge mark often associated with franking).

Only seven examples are recorded of the shamrock FREE handstamp (Figures 38, 39). They were used 1706-1710. None are complete. The diminutive Free handstamp, known used 1707-1708, is also uncommon (Figure 40). Table 1 summarises dates of known examples and shows that the two handstamps are recorded in two distinct time periods apart from the one example in orange stated to have been used in 1706. This is an entire sent from Belfast to Charles Campbell in Dublin. There is a photocopy of this item in the Lovegrove collection but there is no date visible on it. Other postal markings do not help. There is no copy of the other side of the letter. Both the National Library of Ireland, Dublin and Trinity College Dublin Library have been suggested as possible locations for this item. This item cannot be found. It is possible that there was a temporal overlap in usage of the first two handstamps. However, if they had been used at the same time more evidence of overlap might be expected even with such a small sample size. Also, perhaps a handstamp of minimal flamboyance might be expected to have been the first one chosen. It seems more likely that the Diminutive Free handstamp was the first. Until or unless the '1706' item can be examined all of this remains conjecture.

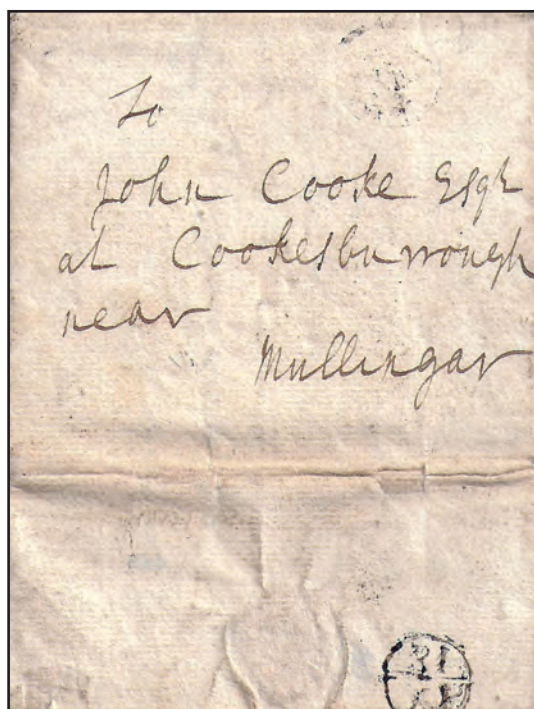


Figure 38. Entire dated inside July 18th 1710. Dublin Bishop mark IY/18. FREE in circle with shamrocks handstamp.

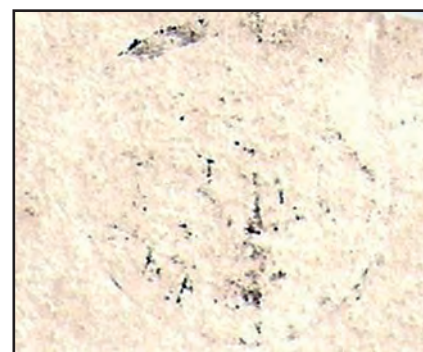


Figure 39. Enlargement of Shamrock Free from Figure 38. RE and lower shamrock can be seen but the F, second E and upper shamrock are not clear.

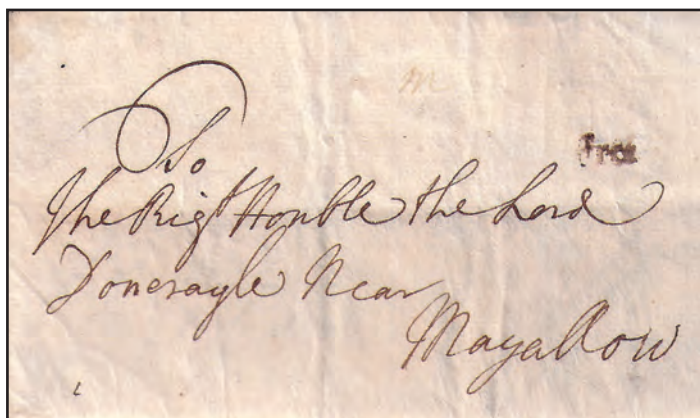


Figure 40. Diminutive, unframed Free. Entire dated inside 27 May 1707. Dublin Bishop mark MA/27. Free handstamp applied in Dublin. This is the earliest of the four examples recorded.

Free

Shamrocks	Diminutive Free
1706	
	May 1707
	June 1707
	?
	February 1708
May 1708 (?)	
May 1708	
May 1708	
June 1710	
June 1710	
July 1710	

Table 1. Known dates of the first two handstamps.

The third and fourth both consist of the word FREE, the third with lines above and below (Figure 41) and the fourth without lines. The former were used 1711-1712 and the latter, which were used for more than 30 years, are known in different sizes.



Figure 41. Third Irish Free mark with lines above and below or frame around FREE.

FREE in a circle with a large letter F

The first London handstamp comprised FREE with large F. In red ink it was used for about two years, 2 May 1764-26 May 1766. Figure 42 shows an example used within the first month.

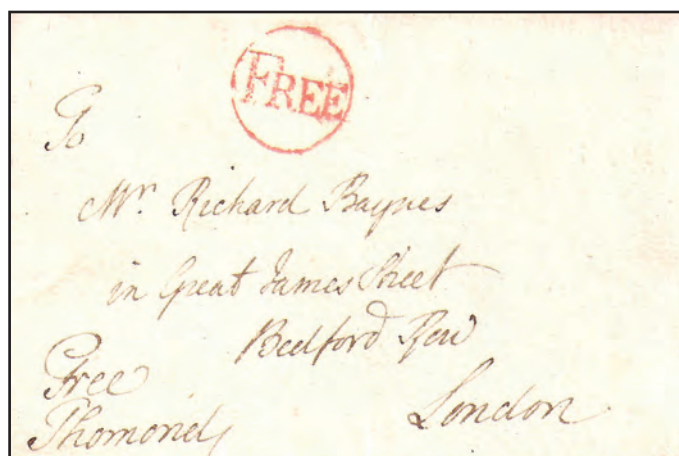


Figure 42. Early use of FREE with large F handstamp.

FREE in a circle with letters of equal size with or without a letter designating the Office of Origin

These were used from June 1765-December 1794.

FREE in a circle without a letter designating the Office of Origin



Figure 43. Variations in circle size and shape of letters.

Used in London for about 20 years, June 1765-originally October 1788. Three later examples are now known, two of which used in April 1792 are in a darker (blood) red colour instead of the normal orange-red. Variations in size of circle and size and shape of letters are recorded (Figure 43). Four examples are known in black ink (Figure 44). Elemental analysis by Scanning Electron Microscopy has shown that the red and black inks have a different composition. Black ink was probably used in error.



Figure 44. Entire dated fifth March 1787. An abuse of privilege as the letter is written in a different hand to the person signing the front.

The last of this type of handstamp was used in Dublin 1785-1795. It is similar in style to the London handstamps.

FREE in a circle and with a letter designating the Office of Origin



Three types of Dublin FREE / D handstamps are known, recorded used in red ink 1769-1784 and purple-brown ink 1772-1784. Type 1: Gap of 1 mm between D and FREE, the latter across centre of circle. Type 2: Gap of 3 mm between D and FREE, the latter in upper part of circle. Type 3: no circle (Figure 45)



Figure 45. Entire dated inside May 4th 1784. From Dublin to Kildare and back to Dublin.
Type 3 handstamp in purple-brown ink.

The only Free handstamp used in the Edinburgh Office was FREE / E (Figure 46). Recorded usage spans over 20 years (1771-1794), however, fewer than 20 are recorded; there is barely one surviving item for each year of usage. Various sizes are known.

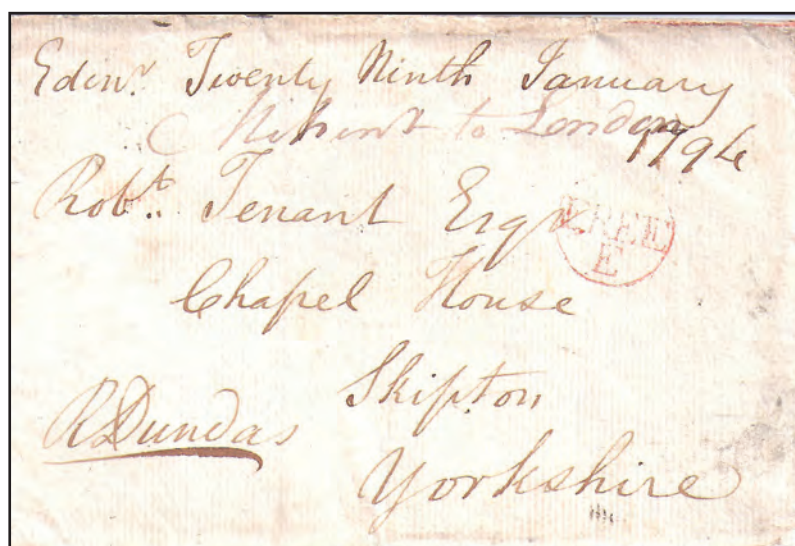


Figure 46. Wrapper dated Twenty ninth January 1794. Delayed having been missent to London.

Free with Inspectors initial

The next stage in development was incorporation of inspector's initials into London handstamps. Initials seen are S (James Stafford), A (William Addison), C (Charles Coltson), P (John Palmer) and B (JH Briggs). They are known in dark and purplish brown/black and red inks and were often used during a short time-frame. Generally, strikes of these handstamps are poor, particularly the earlier ones.

Circular shape, undated handstamps



Type 1



Type 2



Type 3

Type 1: Two concentric circles with initials S, A, C or P (Figure 47). Recorded in dark and purplish-brown, black and red ink. The black ink may simply represent a thicker application of ink rather than a different ink colour. Handstamp in use for five years 1787- 1792.



Figure 47. Wrapper dated May Twenty Eight 1791. The handstamp was used with red ink for about 16 months: 27 February 1791-19 June 1792.

Type 2: FREE, initials A, C or P with two fronds each of nine leaves at the base (Figure 48). Recorded in purple brown, green and red inks. In use November 1789-October 1792.



Figure 48. Entire dated Feb fifteen 91. Place of posting and date are unusually placed at the bottom of the address side. Handstamp in red, initial C, used in February or March 1791 and one in 1792.

Type 3: FREE with wreath of laurel leaves surrounding initials A, C or P (Figure 49). In black, purple or red ink. Used from October 1790-June 1791.

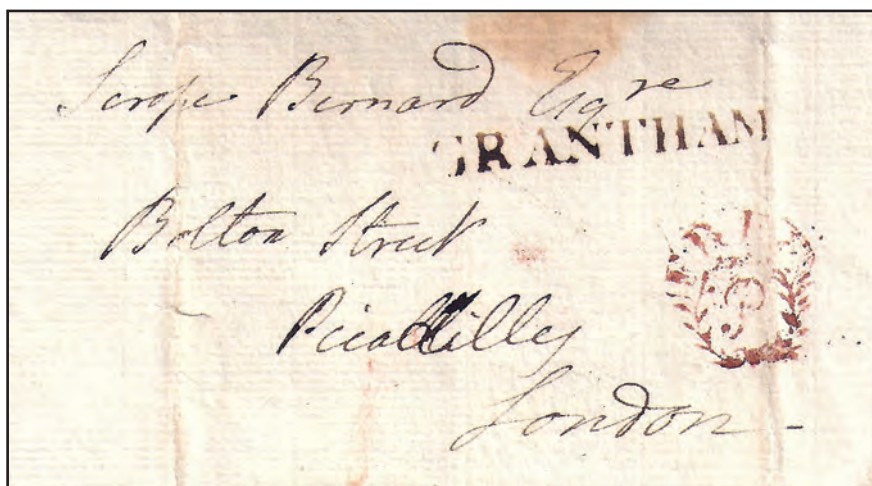


Figure 49. Wrapper dated inside 3 February 1791. Design with initial P in red is recorded 31 January 1791-18 June 1791.

Three-Ringed dated handstamps



Types 1 and 2



Type 3



Type 4

Four subgroups are known depending on size, style and whether FREE occupies one third or half of the circle. Used for about six years, March 1791-May 1797. In Type 1 FREE occupies about one third of the circle. Diamond and two dots below FREE. 30 mm diameter handstamps with initials A or P. These are less common than the larger ones being only in use for about six months. The larger (31-34 mm diameter) Types 2-4 handstamps were in use for more than six years. Type 2 handstamps are in a similar style to the 30 mm handstamps. Type 3 handstamp FREE occupies about one half of the circle, diamond and two dots below FREE. It is only known with initial P and represents an intermediate stage between Types 2 and 4 (Figure 50). Type 4 as Type 3 but diamond only below FREE. Only known with initial C in use for about ten months, 15 August 1796-31 May 1797.



Figure 50. Type 3 datestamp with initial P.

Free without Inspectors initial

Early in 1797 it was ordered that handstamps should no longer have initials.

Three-Ringed dated handstamps of London

Used for about two years from June 1797 to August 1799. This handstamp and Type 4 above (initial B) were the first to show a double rim to indicate evening rather than morning work (Figure 51). Eight years passed from the time of its withdrawal to revival of the principal in a new design.



Figure 51. Entire with single and double rim datestamps for different days.

Two-Ringed dated handstamps of Dublin



Type 1



Type 2

Two types are recorded: with two figures in the year in black ink or with four figures in black, purple or red ink (Figure 52). Used for about 12 years 1795-1807.

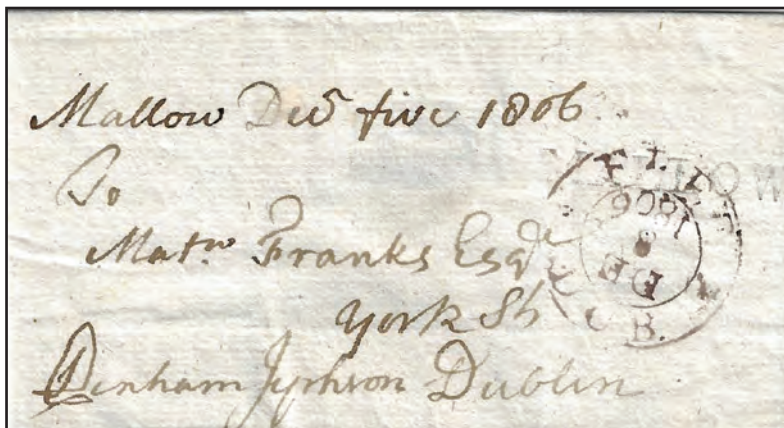


Figure 52. Wrapper dated Dec five 1806. Type 2 handstamp shows all four figures in the year. It was used 1796-1807. In this example the central plug is inverted; it may have been free to rotate within the rim or it may have been struck separately.

Inclusion of Crown in Design

From 1799 until the end of the Franking System in 1840 all free handstamps had a crown incorporated into the design.

Handstamps were generally in red ink from 1791 onwards. However, other colours are known. Apple, Crown-Circle Free of London and Dublin and Mermaid handstamps are all known in black, Mermaid in yellow and in brown and Crown-Shield in yellow. A survey of London datestamps 1800-1840 identified a small proportion with black ink, the majority having red ink. Those in black were all in the period 1800-1825, despite the fact that more datestamps are known 1826-1840. SEM analysis has shown a high lead content in ink until 1826, from then lead is hardly present. Reaction of lead with environmental sulphides caused the black discolouration due to production of black lead sulphide.

Experimental handstamps of 1799

At the London Office, in 1799, three different experimental handstamps were used.



Type 1



Type 2



Type 3

Type 1: Recorded on only two dates 23rd and 24th July 1799. Possibly an unsuccessful attempt to differentiate morning and evening mail. Thought to have been short-lived due to the eleven rays at the bottom tearing letters. Type 2: Slightly smaller ring, different style of crown and rays removed. Used for about three months 24 July 1799-26 October 1799. Type 3: This handstamp was in use for a two month period: 25 October-30 December 1799.

On the front cover is a wrapper from London to Edinburgh dated *July twenty third 1799*, with Type 1 datestamp. Figure 53 shows an entire with two strikes of the Type 2 handstamp dated 24 July 1799, the first recorded date of use. Figure 54 is an entire with Type 3 handstamp dated 28 October and a curved BASING / STOKE handstamp.



Figure 53. Experimental 1799 Type 2 handstamp.



Figure 54. Experimental 1799 Type 3 handstamp.

Apple handstamps 1800-1807



The crown is in a circle which is indented at the top to accommodate an orb surmounted by a cross. Used 1800-1807. Experimental Type 1 has a large crown which occupies the upper half of the circle. FREE within the crown. In use January-July 1800. Experimental Type 2 has a smaller, fancier crown. FREE axially around the lower part of the circle. It has been recorded used 29 July-30 December 1800.



From 1801 to 1807 the crown is smaller, occupying about one third of the height of the circle. Variations in crown width are seen. January-June 1806 the lower part of the crown was embellished with a circlet ring. June 1806-July 1807 re-introduction of the additional outer rim for evening duty.

From March to June 1802 examples are recorded with V substituted for 5 for the day of the month. Figures 55 and 56 shows an entire from Poole to London. Handstamp is dated APR V / 1802.



Figure 55. V substituted for 5.



Figure 56. Enlargement of part of date from Figure 55.

The first Crown-Circle Free handstamps of London 1807



Type 1 was in use July to December and had the crown on top of the circle. Single rim only recorded. Type 2 was in use August to December. It is known with both a single and double rim. The crown is partly within the circle which is the case from now on except for some of the Supplementary date stamps of 1837-1840. There are no pearls in the border of the crown, a unique feature of this handstamp.

Crown-Circle Free handstamps of London 1808-1840

More than 200 types have been recorded based on such features as shape and size of crown, number of pearls in border of crown, size and number of rims of circle (morning or evening duty), size of lettering within circle and if present type of symbol or letter at base of circle. Some examples are shown in Figures 57-60.



Figure 57. Flat crown, rounded wings.



Figure 58. Flat crown, angular wings.



Figure 59. High, narrow crown.



Figure 60. Flat crown, butterfly wings.

Mermaid FREE handstamps of Dublin 1808-1814

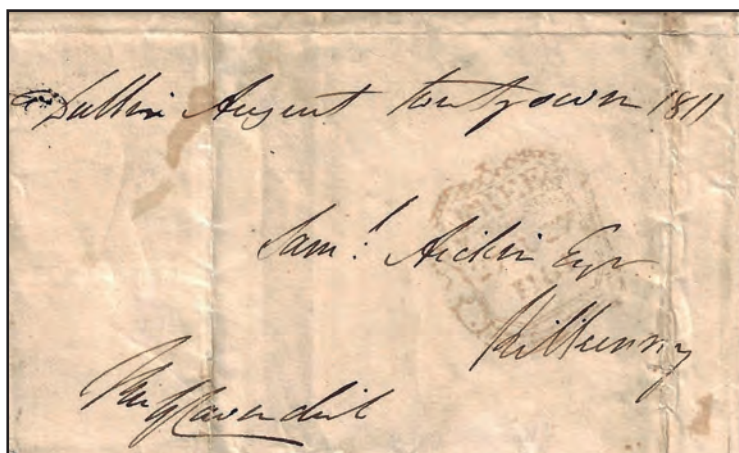


Figure 61. Entire where the middle two figures of the year are transposed producing 1181 instead of 1811.



Figure 62. Close up of date error.

Variations include single or double lines around the date and straight or curved line at base of date box. They are described with ink colours of orange, brown, red, black and yellow.

Mermaid-removed handstamps 1813-1831



Type 1



Type 2

Crown is larger than in the Mermaid handstamps. Only known with a double frame. Two types are recorded.

Type 1: Flat top, small pearls (1813-1818); Type 2: Curved top, large pearls (1819-1831).

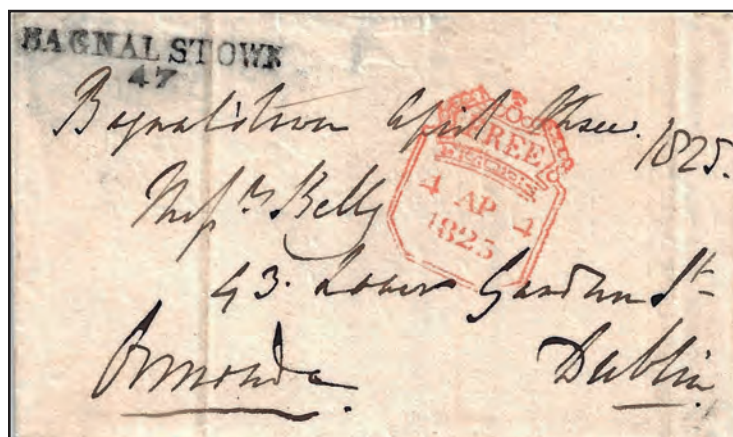


Figure 63. Type 2 Mermaid-removed datestamp.

Crown-Shield Free handstamps of Dublin 1813-1832



Figure 64. Single and double rim Crown-Circle datestamps applied in London 19 July. Crown-Shield datestamp for 21 July 1826 applied in Dublin.

Variations in crown details and width of spade are known.

Crown-Circle Free handstamps of Dublin 1832-1840

Type 1: Outer ring with FREE DUBLIN. Recorded in black and in red ink (Figure 65). Type 2: No outer ring, with time codes at the base of the circle: A signifies afternoon posting (Figure 66), M: Morning, F: Forenoon, *: Noon and E: Evening. One variety has no code. Recorded in black and in red ink.

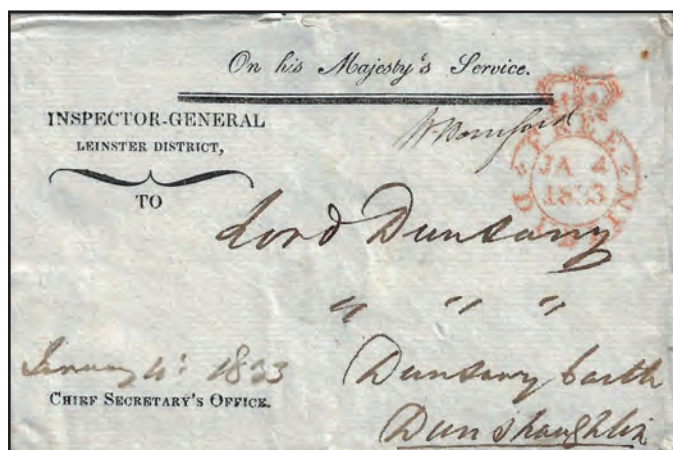


Figure 65. Dublin Crown-Circle datestamp with outer ring, Type 1.

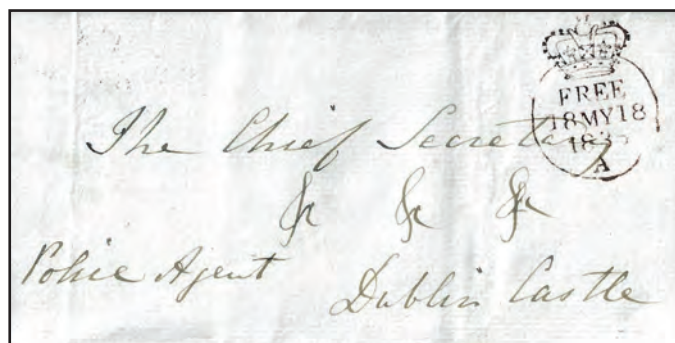


Figure 66. Dublin Crown-Circle datestamp with no outer ring and A code, Type 2.

Supplementary Crown Circle Free handstamps of London 1837-1840



Large E



Small N

Entered into PO Impression books as 'Extra'. Possibly introduced for use on mail carried by rail. Earlier handstamps had large E or N (Figure 67) with crown partly within circle. In later ones letters were smaller, some had a cross instead of code letters, some had no code letters and the crown was on top of the circle. The 3 is flat-topped.

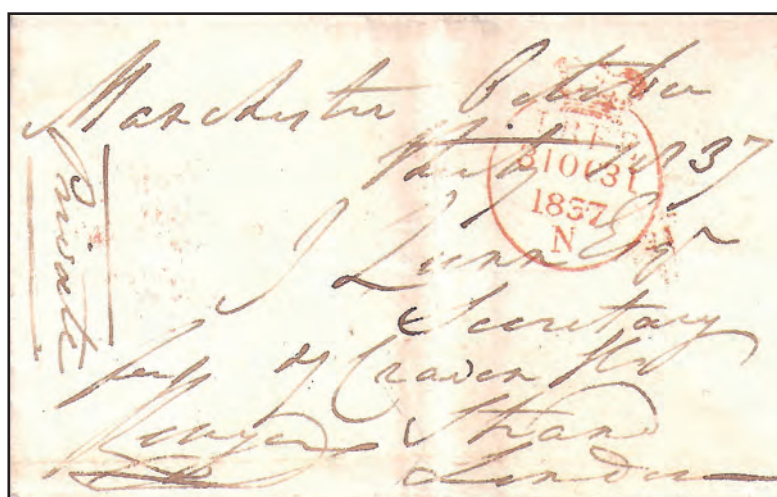


Figure 67. Entire with large N code.

Breaches of Regulations and Abuse of Privilege

Regulations

Minutes or Resolutions, or from 1705 Acts of Parliament, defined rules by which Members of Parliament could have free postage. The writer should write the whole address himself (1715); the recipient of free letters should be living at the place of delivery (1715); the letter should be sent during or within 40 days of a parliamentary session (1693); day, month

and year of sending should all be written in full along with the post town (1784); the member had to be within 20 miles of where the letter was posted on the day of posting or the day before (1795). The letter should not exceed one ounce in weight and no more than 10 should be sent and no more than 15 received each day (1795). Failure to comply with these instructions resulted in payment being required.

Breaches of Regulations: Failed Frees

Departmental Mail was subjected to restrictions, but it was Members of Parliament whose privilege seems to have been controlled most closely.

Originally, breaches of regulations were hand-written on the address side of letters. This practice continued if no appropriate handstamp were available or if letters went by a Cross Post and therefore did not go through London.

Above Privilege handstamps

Non-specific handstamps were used to indicate breaches of Acts to restrict number of letters sent and received and their weight. At least eight different handstamps falling into this category were used in London, although they are often grouped together as one. Differences are based on size, angulation and characteristics of the letters and ink colour. They were in use 1785-1825. Figure 68 shows an undated wrapper to William Baldwin MP. Manuscript 1 oz $\frac{1}{4}$ and 2N6 (2 shillings and sixpence) with Inspector's signature: this rate was in place 1797-1805. On reverse 67 HIGHAM / FERRARS handstamp which was in use 1789-1799. The wrapper was therefore probably sent 1797-1799. There were no specific Above Weight handstamps at that time so a generic *Above Privilege* (LP 4) handstamp was applied, this handstamp has a lower case 'a' in 'above'. In Edinburgh two types of boxed handstamps are known (1821-1837) depending on whether the corners are concave or flat. One type is shown in Figure 69. Dublin had no such handstamp.

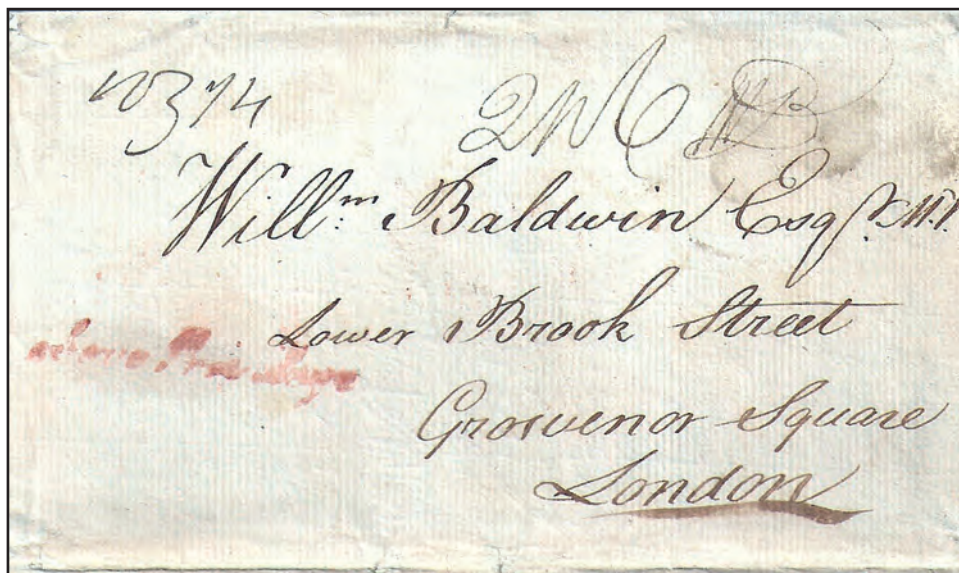


Figure 68. LP 4 handstamp.

Figure 69. Wrapper from Perth to Edinburgh, datestamp for 12 August 1821. Signed by (Lord) Breadalbane MP at Taymouth Castle. Endorsed Per Mail from Perth but no Perth postal marks. Perhaps sent privately in the coach and noticed in Edinburgh Office where it was marked in manuscript 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz and charged 6/9 $\frac{1}{2}$. Red ABOVE PRIVILEGE (EP 1) handstamp was applied.



Above Number handstamps

The earliest recorded London and Dublin examples were used in 1795 and 1799 respectively. Edinburgh had none. They were used until the Franking System was abolished. Seven types from London (Figures 70, 71) and five from Dublin have been identified.

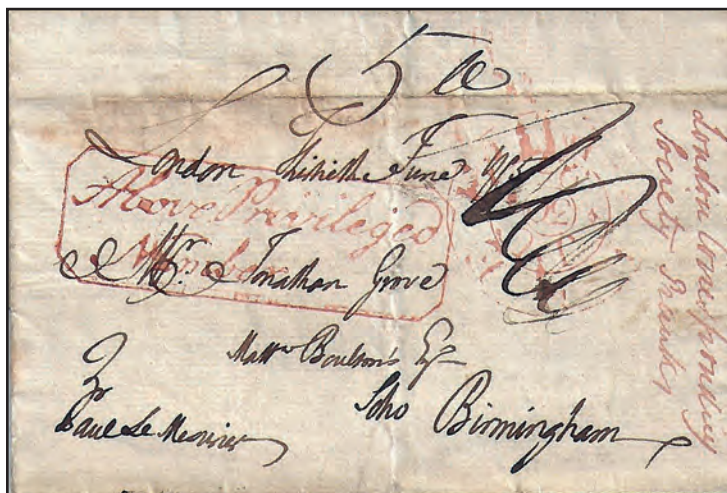


Figure 70. Wrapper from London to Birmingham, dated Thirtieth June 1795. Three ringed, initialled (indistinct) Free datestamp, for the same date, crossed out. Boxed Above Privileged / Number (LN 2) handstamp applied in London.

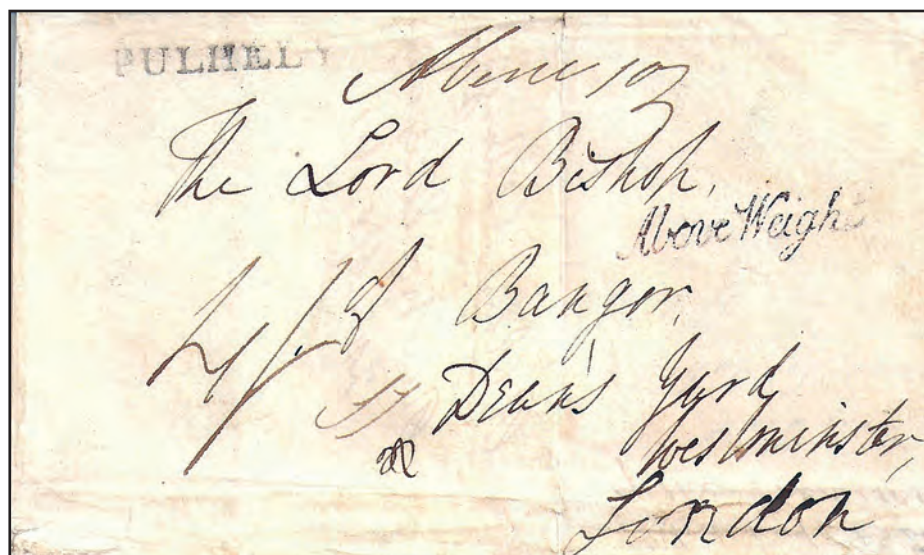


Figure 71. Wrapper from Aylesbury to London. Indistinct Crown Free datestamp crossed. Partial datestamp on reverse ?1812. 1/- charge in manuscript. AYLESBURY / 18 mileage mark.

Above Weight handstamps

In 1734 a Royal Proclamation, repeating earlier regulations, stated that letters sent or received by MPs should be less than 2 ounces in weight. In the Act of 1795 maximum weight allowed was reduced to 1 ounce. Handstamps were not introduced until 1814 and were used until the end of the Franking System. London had five (Figure 72) and Dublin two handstamps.

Figure 72. Entire from Pulhelly originally with an enclosure which resulted in the weight being more than 1 ounce as endorsed in manuscript. Dated inside 24th April 1816. PULHELY handstamp, 4/- in manuscript as postage to be paid for an overweight letter to London, 236 miles. Black Above Weight (LW 1) handstamp.



Miscellaneous handstamps

Several handstamps, all from the Dublin Office, fall into this category. Forging the signature of someone with the franking privilege was apparently extensively practiced and a large proportion of Free franks seen today may have counterfeit signatures. Some towns in Ireland passed twice as many forgeries as paid letters or genuine franks. In the 1784 Act for establishing a Post Office in Ireland the penalty for forging a frank was £50 for the first offence, £100 for the second and deportation for seven years for the third offence. In the 1837 Act this was simplified to transportation for seven years for any offence. No London handstamps are known but Dublin had three. These are horseshoe-shaped, straight line or scroll-shaped (Figure 73).

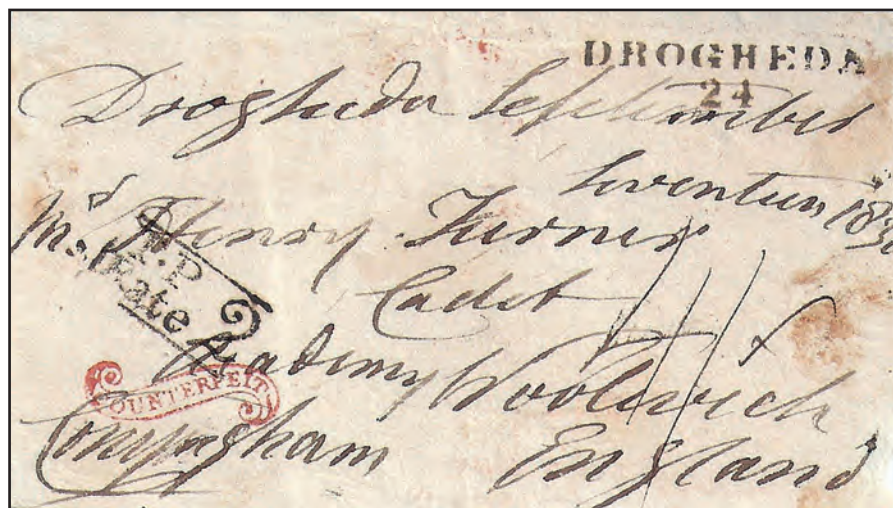


Figure 73. Front from Drogheda to Woolwich dated September seventeen 1830. The forgery of the Marquess of Conyngham's signature was noticed. Charged 4/-. Scroll-type COUNTERFEIT (DC 3) handstamp.

All letters should be dated and any alteration made and signed by the sender. No handstamp for an absent date is known, a manuscript endorsement being used. Two handstamps are known for the date being incorrect and one for it being altered (Figure 74).



Figure 74. Front from Parsonstown to Dublin dated July ten 1827, altered to 11th. Dublin Inspector's Crown in red. DATE-ALTERED in red.

The recipient should be living at place of delivery. Manuscript markings alone was used in London. Figure 75 shows an entire dated inside 6 November, 1829. From Dublin to Limerick it is an invitation to dine with the Irish Volunteers. Redirected to Bracknell. Crown-Circle Free datestamp for 16 November, 1829 with MEMBER NOT IN IRELAND handstamp.



Figure 75. Serpentine MEMBER NOT IN IRELAND handstamp.

In London any additional charge for postage was simply indicated in manuscript. Dublin had three handstamps, two of which are known to have been used for free letters. In the 1784 Act, extended by Dublin Post Office Notice 23rd March 1786, treble postage could be charged under the following circumstances: letter sent to someone entitled to receive free letters but contents intended for someone not entitled to the privilege; letter found concealed in a newspaper or packet which travelled at less than normal letter charges; free letter with any endorsement forged, counterfeit or altered. Figure 76 shows an entire, dated inside 30 June 1794, from Kilkenny to Dublin originally containing an illegal enclosure. There is a TREBLE POSTAGE handstamp. Endorsed 2 indicating that two letters were sent. Inspector's Crown cancels FREE / D handstamp. Manuscript 3/- indicating treble postage for two sheets.

Figure 76.
TREBLE POSTAGE
handstamp.



If the assumption of privilege were not accepted by the supervisor of franks the letter would not pass free. One handstamp from Dublin is known. Figure 77 is a front from Dublin to Cloughjordan, dated *May four 1816*. Bethershan's endorsement was correct but his assumption of privilege was not accepted by the supervisor of franks. Inspector's Crown in black over Mermaid-removed Free handstamp. Charge 2/3 in manuscript. NO PRIVILEGE handstamp. There was no equivalent London handstamp.

Figure 77.
NO.PRIVILEGE
handstamp in red.



Abuse of Privilege

This was widely perpetrated even by senior members of the Post Office and of members of government, clergy and the royal family. Lovegrove stated that... *bending the Franking rules by those who had the Privilege was no more unacceptable ... than tax avoidance is now... Tax evasion (being) a different matter... so deliberate falsification to delude the Franking authorities takes ... a different ... hue*. Extending this analogy, abuse by 'giving' your frank to someone else (avoidance) was deemed acceptable, forging a signature of someone holding the Franking privilege or breaching regulations (evasion) was not and was rigorously monitored by officials. Whether there is a real difference between the two and whether either was morally justified are moot points.

Waiting for a frank

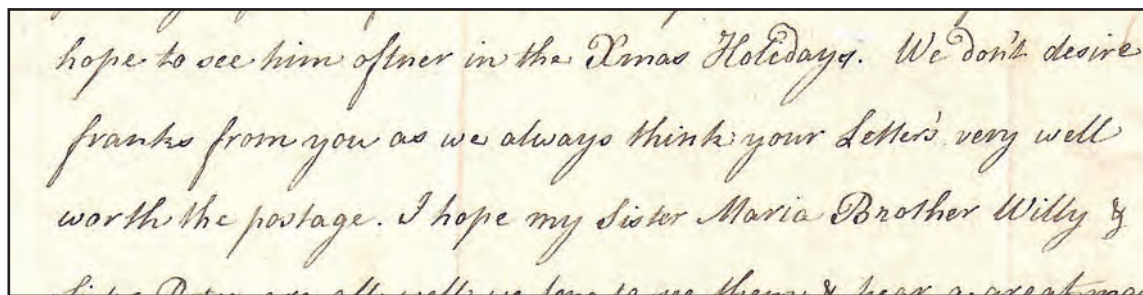


Figure 78. Part of a letter stating that letters were sent without a frank.

Not infrequently letters were not sent until a frank became available. On the other hand, writers were sometimes prepared to send letters even without a frank...and emphasized the point! Figure 78 shows a section of a letter ...*We don't desire franks from you as we always think your letters very well worth the postage...*It was sent to Mrs Massingbird at Lincoln dated November ca 1762 from her ...*Dutiful Grandaughter* (sic)... There was a charge of 3d.

Abuse by Bishops

Bishops were not averse to defrauding the Franking System. Figure 79 shows the front of a letter from Belfast to Londonderry dated 7 February 1796. It is signed W Down; William Dickson was Church of Ireland Bishop of Down and Connor 1 February 1784-19 September 1804. The letter is written and signed by W Ravencroft.



Figure 79. Abuse by the Bishop of Down and Connor.

Not only were bishops prepared to give their own franks they also used franks of others. Figure 80 shows the front of an 1823 entire franked by Earl Strange. The letter is signed G Sodor & Mann by his nephew George Murray, Bishop of the Isle of Mann (Figure 81). Bishops of the Isle of Mann were not allowed the franking privilege as they did not sit in the House of Lords, their dioceses being outside the United Kingdom.




Figure 80. Entire franked by Earl Strange

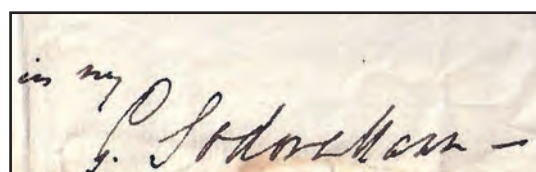


Figure 81. Signature on letter inside G Sodor & Mann.

Abuse by Post Office Officials

The Lees family, leading figures in the Irish and Scottish Post Offices and Francis Freeling in London have been widely criticised for their abuse of the Franking System. Figure 82 shows an entire, dated 11 October 1822, sent under cover from the Earl of Donoughmore to Cape Town via Francis Freeling who endorsed and forwarded it. As Secretary to the Post Office Freeling had unlimited franking privileges. The earl did not have the privilege for letters going abroad. He doubtless used his privilege to send the letter to Freeling. The letters states ...*Your best way of writing to me will be to enclose your letters under cover to Francis Freeling Esqr Secretary Gen Post Office London to whom I have written for permission...* In addition to the evening duty Crown-Circle Free datestamp there is a Ship Letter Office example for the same date.



Figure 82. Abuse by Freeling.

Abuse by Members of Parliament

Figure 83 shows an entire dated 10 March 1825. It was sent from Tallagh in Ireland to Lincoln's Inn in London. The rare HP handstamp indicates that the letter was initially sent to an MP who then posted it on. The letter would have incurred no charges from Ireland to the MP and then to Lincoln's Inn apart from the 2d local post charge indicated by the handstruck 2. Local charges were payable even for free mail. HP handstamps were used at the Twopenny Post Office on letters posted from Parliament.

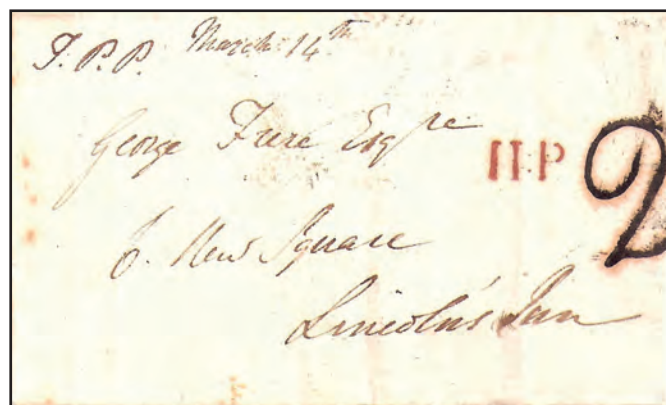


Figure 83. HP mark.

Sending Large Items

Sending parcels did not comply with Regulations, nevertheless large items were successfully sent without charge under the Franking System. These included coats, boots, two bales of stockings, a feather-bed and a piano! Bizarrely, even animate articles were sent including hounds, maid servants, a cow and a horse.

Figure 84 shows the lower part of a letter to Freeling ca 1825. In it the Marquess of Westmeath asks Freeling to allow free return passage from Dublin to Anglesey (probably by Post Office packet) of a group of witnesses involved in his divorce proceedings! He does guarantee that they will only travel for that purpose. There is no record of a response to this letter.

wanted - My request is that you
 would be kind enough if possible
 to give an order to permit these
 people (under my guarantee
 that they shall be for that purpose
 and no other) to pass over from
 Howth to the Head and return
 paper free - I think altogether

Figure 84. Part of letter asking for free transport of divorce witnesses.

Abuse by Royalty

Wrapper from London to Wetherby, signed William Frederick (Duke of Gloucester) great grandson of George II (Figure 85). Crown-Circle Free datestamp (flat crown) for 28 October 1820. The enclosed letter is in a different hand (Figure 86).



Figure 85. Abuse of privilege by royalty.

regard to an exchange into
 the other Battalion - but you
 shall hear from me again
 soon -
 Ever affectionately Yours
 Henry
 Sat. 28 Oct

Figure 86. Signature on letter enclosed in envelope shown in Figure 85.

Abuse but Complying with Regulations

The problem of the address and signature being in a different hand was circumvented by the letter being written, along with details of the addressee, and then sent to the person with the privilege. The latter then copied the address onto the blank address side and signed the letter. In Figure 87 the writer of the letter has written the addressee's details and the date on the reverse allowing Gladstone to copy them so complying with the 1715 Act (Figure 88).

Mrs W. M. Goads.
 at Mr. G. Gladstones
 F. James Place, Liverpool
 28 Oct 1820

Figure 87. Details of the address are indicated for Gladstone to copy.



Figure 88. Abuse by William Gladstone. Supplementary Crown-circle Free datestamp for 12 April 1839.

Abuse but Not Complying with Regulations

Figure 89 shows an entire, dated 19 July 1823. The letter writer has advised the recipient ...*please direct to Mr Martin MP ...* who has duly franked it. Unfortunately, the item was overweight. It is endorsed in manuscript *Above 1 oz* and has an ABOVE / WEIGHT (LW 2) handstamp applied. Not only was 2s 2d postage required but also ½d was added for the Scottish Wheel Tax as indicated by the handstamp.

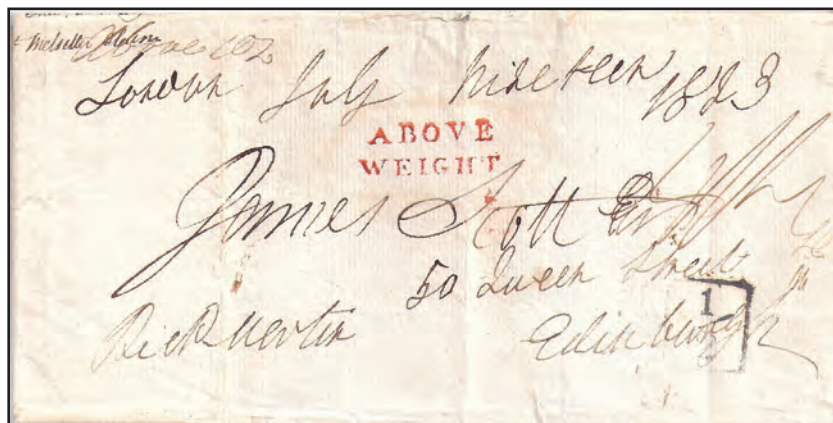


Figure 89. Attempted abuse; found to be overweight.

The system in Use and its Conclusion with the Postal Reforms of 1840

To Be Delivered Free handstamps

Their use allowed ordinary delivery charges for Offices of the Post Office, certain charities and soldiers' letters to be waived. Charges of the Penny and Two penny Post Office did not have to be paid. Four (or five) types of handstamp are attributed to London (1809-1840) three to Dublin (1812-1830) and one to Edinburgh (1826-1831).

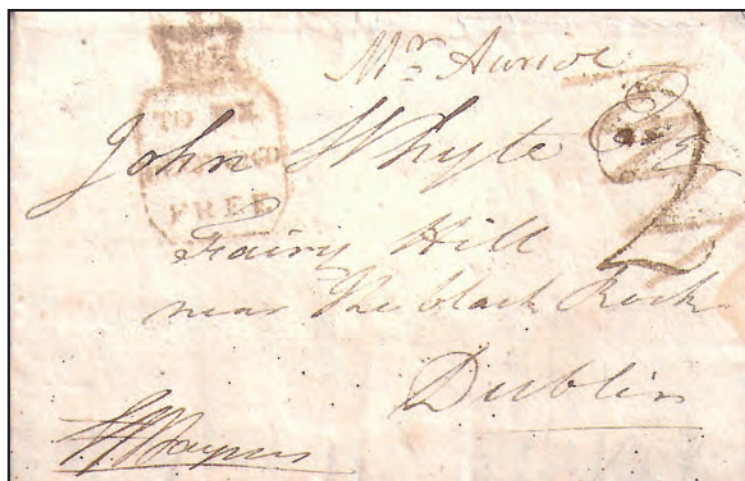


Figure 90. TO BE / DELIVER'D / FREE handstamp of Dublin.

Use to Bypass Regulations

Although this scheme had no connection with the Franking System, it did provide a means of bypassing some of its Regulations. Parochial Returns provided administrative details of individual parishes. Usually sent to ministers rather than bishops. The latter as Members of Parliament, were subject to the same restrictions on their free postage as any other member of either house.

Figure 91 shows a letter from Edward Venables-Vernon (name changed to Venables-Vernon-Harcourt in 1831) to Francis Freeling. Harcourt was Archbishop of York 1807-1847. The letter is dated 11 June 1811 and signed *E Ebor*. Due to recent Parliamentary Acts the archbishop has received many Parochial Returns, (exceeding his daily quota of free mail) which he will have to send back to the Post Office if he must pay for them. He has been advised by Lord Chichester (presumably the Bishop of Chichester) that he should withhold payment and give details to the Letter Carrier on appropriate forms. This allowed letters to enter the To Be Delivered Free system. Figure 92 shows the front of an example of a Parochial Return. It is a circular sent from London to the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry dated 15 January 1831. Details are required from one of his benefices.

then returns, if the Post Office should determine
to charge them as other letters are charged,
that, in that case, I shall send them back
to the Post Office, & sign my reasons for
doing so in my place in the House of Lords

I am Sir
With great regard
Yr obliged & obed^t serv^t
Ebor

one enclosed

I have just seen L^d Chichester,
who recommends my receiving all the
returns, & withholding the payment of
my charge upon them, either on account
of number or weight, till all shall be collected,
& then to give ^{for them} my signature, to the Letter Carrier
in the form enclosed -

Figure 91. Part of letter from Bishop of York complaining that he has exceeded his allowed number of received free letters.

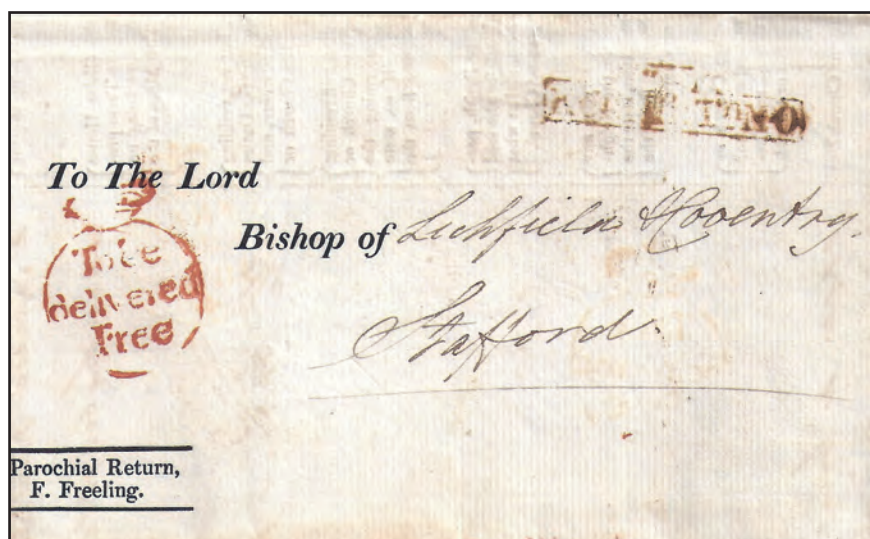


Figure 92. Parochial Return with Type 1 handstamp.



Type 1

Use to indicate an Error in payment

This type of handstamp was also used to indicate free passage of mail charged in error. Entire from Aachen dated 26 June 1829 (Figure 93). Despite the red PP mark it was charged 3/4 on arrival in London. This was erased and a Type 1 London handstamp applied.

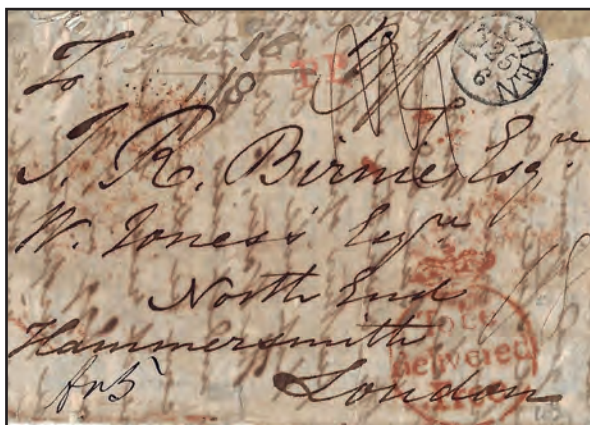


Figure 93. Handstamp used to indicate error.

Use to Avoid Local Charges

Use of the Dublin Crown-Oval TO BE / DELIVER'D / FREE handstamp to ensure that the local charge would not be paid is shown in Figure 94. Sworn affidavit from the Postmaster of Skibbereen sent by the Magistrate of Skibbereen to Edward Lees at the Post Office in Dublin. The affidavit attests that the murderer Simpson (he had shot a man called Tom Mayne with a blunderbuss) had been in Skibbereen Post Office two weeks earlier. The affidavit was then sent to a member of the Mayne family in a wrapper franked by Thomas Orde Lees.



Figure 94. Dublin handstamp in red.

Beyond the British Isles

Few had privileges allowing free mail beyond the shores of Britain. However, when this happened a number of interesting situations arose.

Free India Ship and Ship Letter Office handstamps

Free postage was allowed for services from Parliament to Administration and Offices in India, South Africa and Australasia. In addition the Board of Control and Chairman and Directors of the East India Company had free postage.

Three handstamps are known for Free India Ship and Packet Letters used 1816-1819.

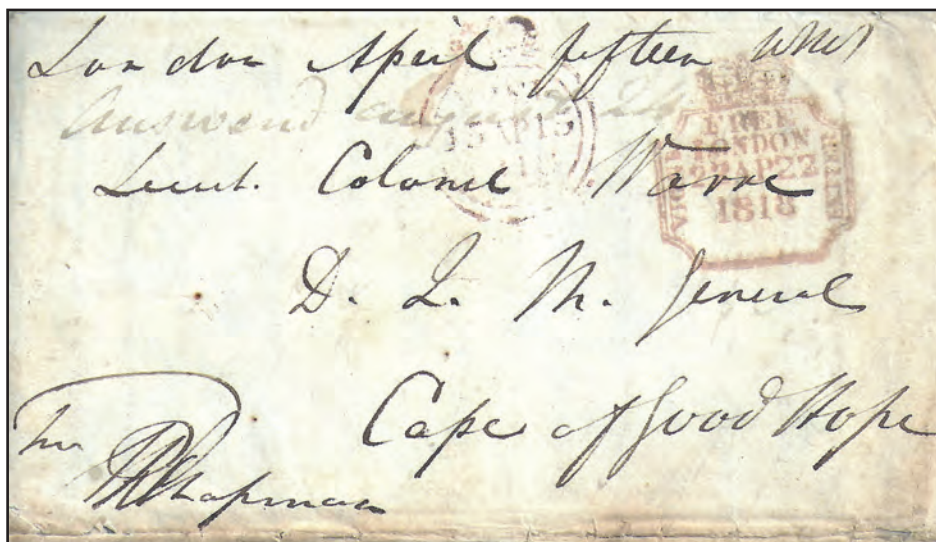


Figure 95. Free India Ship Letter datestamp.

Figure 95 shows an entire with enclosed letter from London to Cape of Good Hope dated 15 April 1818. Franked by SR Chapman (Secretary to the Master General of Ordnance with unlimited franking). However, the contents are written by the addressee's mother and therefore an abuse of privilege. Crown-Circle Free handstamp for 15 April 1818 (flat, wide crown). Black oval London Ship Letter Office sailing handstamp for 15 April 1818 on flap. The India letter handstamp is for 22 April so there seems to have been a delay of one week in finding a suitable ship to carry the letter.

Ship letter handstamps were used for mail to and from overseas rather than in the Foreign Branch of the Post Office as was originally thought. Four types of handstamp are known based on factors such as shape and size of crown; size, shape of upper corners and spacing of text; date configuration (Type 1 is shown in Figure 82)

Disinfected Free Franks

Figure 96 shows a wrapper probably from Egypt, via Malta to Admiral Sir Charles Adam. He was MP for Clackmannan which would not have allowed privilege from overseas. However as a Lord of the Admiralty he had unlimited franking privileges. Disinfection slits are clearly seen. Faint, round PURIFIE AU MALTA / MALTE handstamp in blue. It is thought that only two of these handstamps were in use so impressions are often weak. The words are in French because staff came from Marseille and probably brought the handstamps with them. There is a Foreign Branch handstamp for 22 December on the flap, indicating that it went to the Foreign Branch before being transferred to the Inland Section where it received the Free handstamp the next day.



Figure 96. Disinfected Free frank.

Home Station as Post Town

According to the Act of 1784 inclusion of the post town on a letter and being within 20 miles of that post town when the letter was posted was mandatory. For naval officers who were entitled to the franking privilege an alternative was required. This might take the form of writing *At Sea* or *Home Station*. Figure 97 shows an entire inscribed *Home Station July two 1808* by Edward Harvey. PLYMOUTH DOCK mileage mark on reverse. Not passing through London it has no Free handstamp.

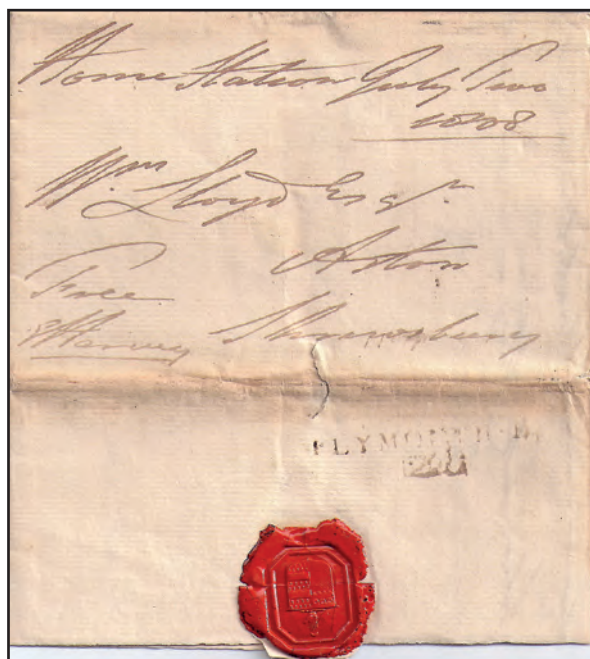


Figure 97. *Home Station* substituted for a post town.

Channel Islands

Several office holders in government departments had unlimited franking privileges and could send and receive letters from Guernsey and Jersey free of charge. However, MPs did not have such rights as these islands were independent of the British Parliament. This, inevitably, caused confusion.

Local Charges

Franked Letters were not exempt from Local Charges

The London Two Penny Post

From the latter part of the 17th century local letters within the Town area of the London post were charged 1d. There was an additional charge of 1d for delivery in the Country area. In April 1801 the charge for all letters carried by the London post became 2d. In 1805 the charge for letters between Town and Country areas was raised to 3d. Any letter, franked or private, posted at a Receiving House of the London Two Penny Post, was subject to charges for being transferred to the General Post.

A franked letter without the relevant fee being paid would not usually be marked Free. Whenever the letter entered the Two Penny Post the letter was simply marked with the charge to be made. In this context handstamps specific to the Franking System were not introduced until the early part of the 19th century. From April 1831 the 2d charge was confined to letters posted in the Country area of the Two Penny Post. Letters posted within three miles of the General Post Office being transferred without charge.

London is the only Office to have had 2d charge handstamps. First recorded used in 1803, their use continued until 1840. Four designs are recorded, one of which is also known without a frame (Figure 98). Most commonly black ink was used but red, green, blue and light brown inks are also known.

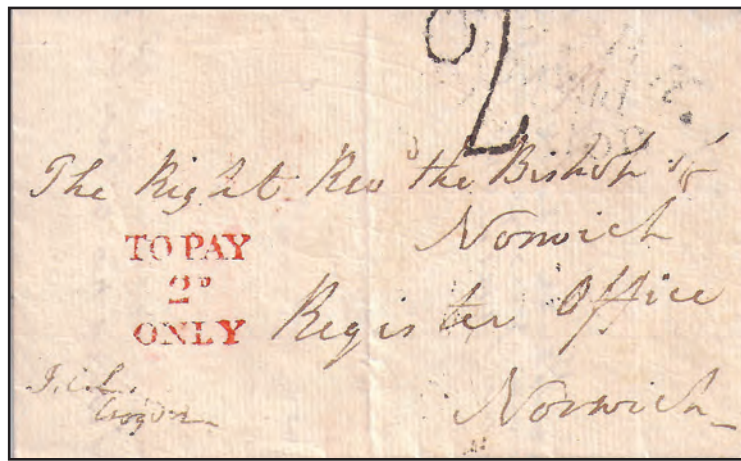


Figure 98. 2 charge mark and an unframed TO PAY / 2D / ONLY handstamp in red. There is no Free handstamp.

Penny Post

Similarly, franked letters were not exempt from London and provincial Penny Post charges. In addition to the usual Penny Post handstamp, when local charges were not paid by the sender the letter was marked by handstamp or in manuscript. Handstamps were introduced later than those for the Two Penny Post. From 1817, on arrival in London, Edinburgh or Dublin a handstamp specific to the Franking System was applied instead of a Free mark. A letter travelling in the reverse direction would be franked Free to indicate that there was no General Postage to be paid. The local postmaster raised the local charge.

Figure 99 shows the reverse of letter to Maberly, the writer complaining that he had been charged for a letter from an MP and asking for a refund. The reply shown is unequivocal ... letters ... from Bristol to Portishead by a regular P. Post ... no letters whatever conveyed by them are exempt from the penny rate, whether franked or not...

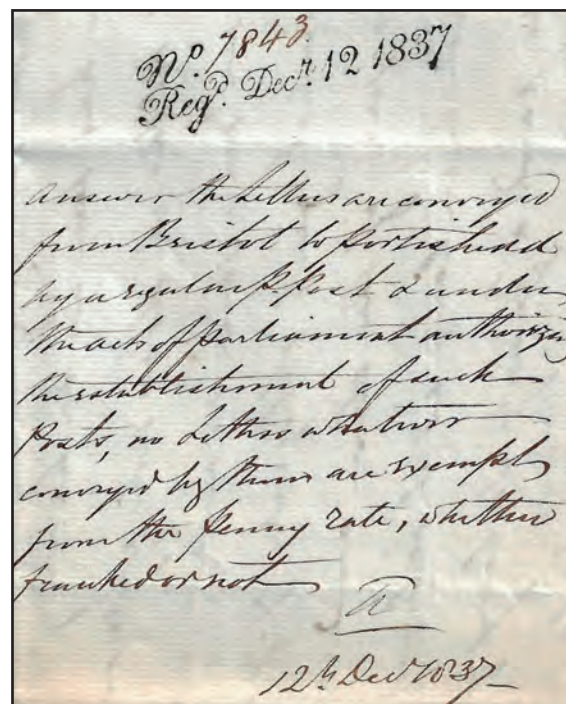


Figure 99. Comment regarding validity of franked mail in the Penny Post.

Figure 100 illustrates an entire from London to Salisbury with an experimental type Free datestamp for 19 October 1799. There is a manuscript 1 to indicate the charge and a PENNY POST / NOT PAID handstamp.

Penny Post
Not Paid

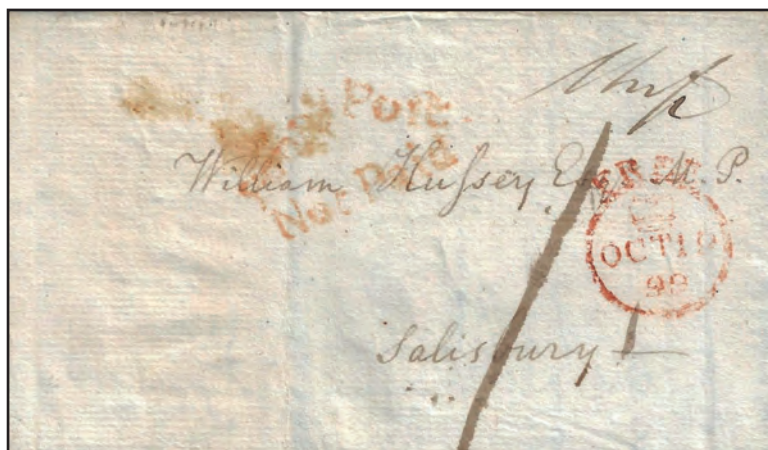


Figure 100. PENNY POST / NOT PAID handstamp used to indicate charge within Penny Post area.

Five 1d charge marks were produced for London from 1817 to 1840 in red, black, greenish-black and brown inks. Early examples seem to have been used over several years, whereas later designs lasted only for a few months (Figure 101). Edinburgh had two handstamps in black ink (1827-1839) and Dublin one which is known in black or in red ink (1813-1835).⁶

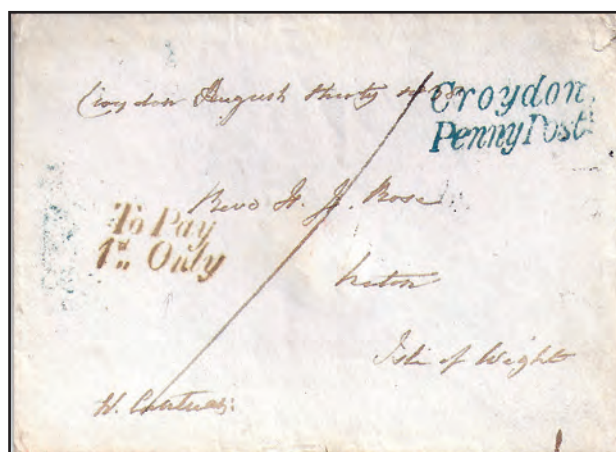


Figure 101. The penultimate London handstamp used.

Forerunners of Houses of Parliament envelopes

Before Houses of Parliament envelopes were introduced in mid-January 1840 there were a number of forerunners (Figure 102). Generally these were used to disperse or obtain information in the form of circulars or surveys.

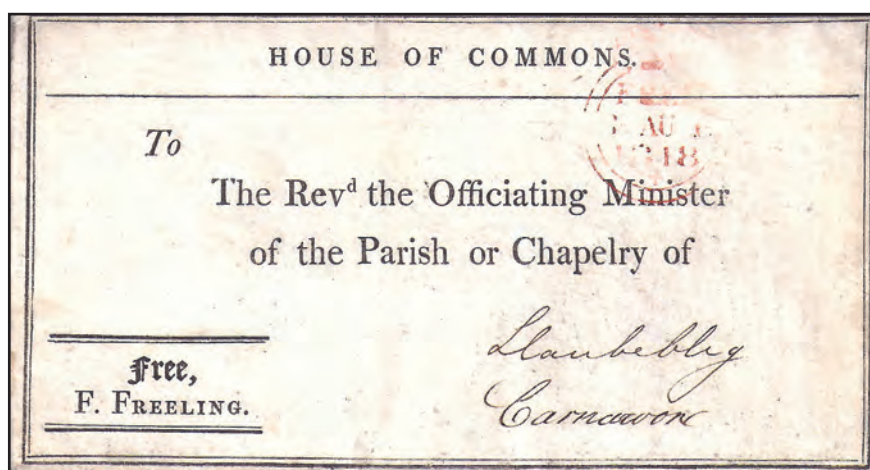


Figure 102. Circular from the Committee on Education dated April 1818.

Sunday and Transfer handstamps

Sunday datestamps were used predominantly but not exclusively with the Franking System. Introduced in 1798 their use continued until the late 1860s but showed a steady decline after the Franking System was abolished. Letters which missed the last post on a Saturday or which were brought in on a Sunday required the use of this type of handstamp as there might otherwise have been an anomaly with date of posting. It is thought that until mid-1832 Free letters held over in the Chief Office on Sunday were not franked until evening duty Monday and therefore had evening franks. After mid-1832 they were franked in the morning duty and had morning franks.

Several types of handstamp are known from London in red, black or blue ink. Only one is known from Dublin in red ink. The Dublin Sunday datestamp (1820-1831) may have been more closely allied with the franking than occurred in London; Free is included in the design and it does not seem to have been used after the Franking System ended.

In London Sunday letters were accepted not only at the Chief Office but also at Lombard Street, Vere Street and Charing Cross Branch Offices. In addition to the Sunday handstamp the latter three offices applied L, V or C in a circle handstamps to show the Branch Office where the letter had been posted (Figures 103, 104).



Figure 104. Sunday datestamp and C transfer mark.

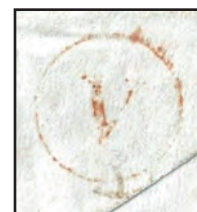


Figure 103.
V transfer mark.

Money Order Office

Founded in 1792, it provided working families with a means of sending small payments through the post. Any letter declared to contain money or valuables had *Money letter* written in the top left corner. The letter was sent separate from ordinary letters and was entered into a register. There was no compensation for loss and no additional charge for the service. However the enclosure would have resulted in a price increase. As money order usage increased the need for money letters decreased. They were stopped on 6 January 1840.

Parliamentary Proceedings

Parliamentary Proceedings (Par Pro) were sent free of postage if endorsed appropriately. They were to be without covers or in covers open at the ends. These were allowed in addition to MPs normal quota of letters and the weight restriction was 6 ounces. Acts 42 Geo III c.63, 1802 and 6 Geo IV, 1825, re-iterated in GPO Instructions No. 6, August 1828.

Undeliverable Free Mail

As with any other mail undeliverable free letters had to be dealt with. Returned Frank wrappers are known from the London Office under the signature of both Freeling and Maberly. None have so far been identified from either Edinburgh or Dublin.

Non-delivery of Parliamentary Papers

Figure 105 is the reverse of a letter written by Sir Compton Domville, MP for Bossiney. Dated 15 June 1825. An enquiry is made whether Parliamentary papers addressed to the MP have been held at the GPO. Endorsements include ...*Do the Inspectors know of any such packages?*... and ...*Dead Letter Office Not any Parliamentary Papers in D.L.O. If Par. Pro. They are returned to H(ouse) of C(ommons)*... This confirms that Parliamentary undeliverable mail was dealt with in a different way to normal undeliverable mail.

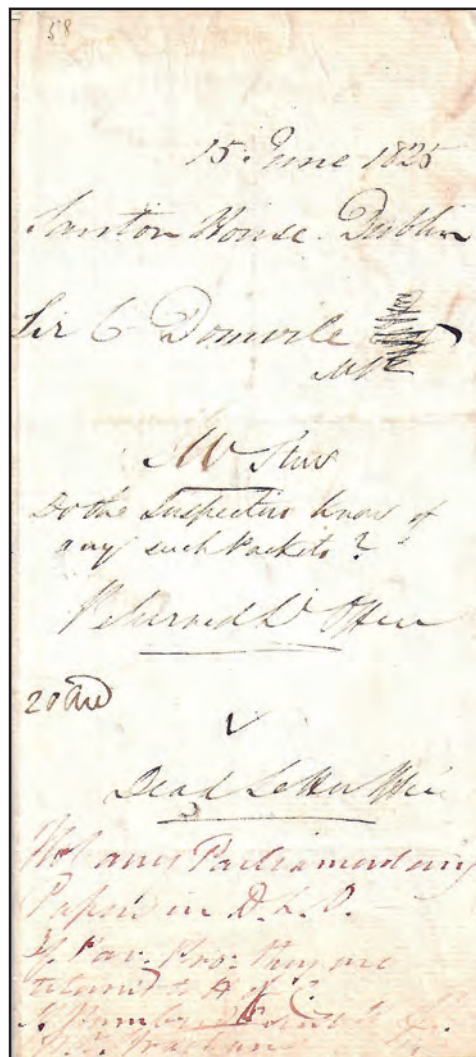


Figure 105. Dealing with Parliamentary undeliverable mail.

Newspapers

During the 17th and 18th centuries most newspapers were sent through the post under the frank of the Clerks of the Roads who supplied regular subscribers. The privilege, which provided a considerable income, was withdrawn 1834 (Act 4 & 5 William IV, c44) - 1836 (Act 6 and 7 William IV, c54). The Clerks' salary and allowances were increased to make up for this loss.

The End of the Franking System

Postal Reforms

As part of the Postal Reforms of 1840 the system was abolished: Act 3 and 4 Vict. Cap. 96. The last day was 9th January

From 1838 three groups worked closely together to convince Parliament and the country that a uniform pre-paid postage rate was both desirable and economically possible. These groups were Parliamentary headed by Wallace, Warburton and Lord Lowther, Educational led by the Hill brothers, Knight and Lord Brougham and Mercantile led by Moffat, Ashurst, Cole and Bates. The Mercantile Committee sent the items shown in Figures 106-108 to each member of both Houses of Parliament. As the addressees all had the franking privilege the letters were sent free. Thus the Post Office paid for propaganda against itself! Both items are addressed to A Pringle Esq, MP, London and have a Crown-Circle Free datestamp for 4 July 1838. Narrow crown with rounded wings and flat-topped 3.

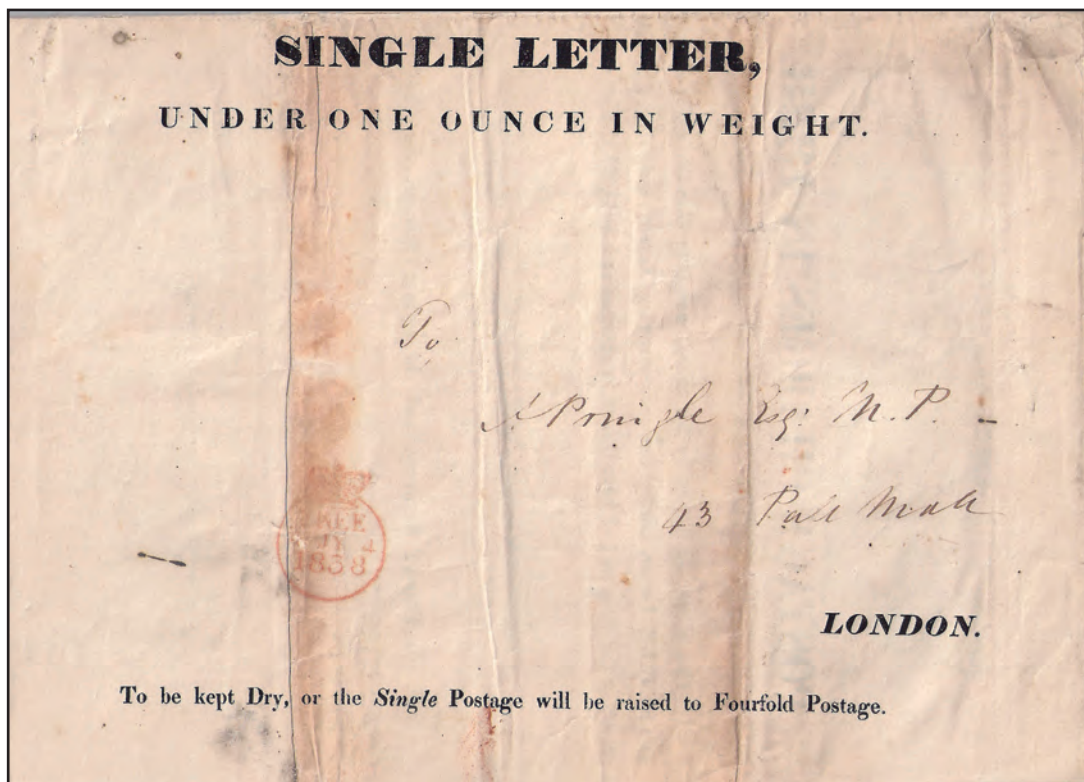


Figure 106. Folded, single sheet measuring 35 x 22 inches charged as a single letter.

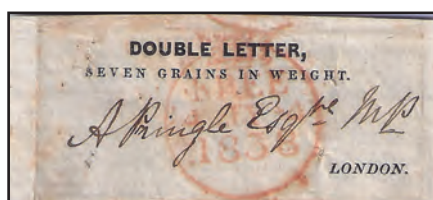


Figure 107. Wrapper 4 x 2½ inches, folded to 2¾ x 1¼ inches. It contained the enclosure of a similar size. Charged double postage.

Uniform 4d Post: 5 December 1839-9 January 1840

This was the time of an experimental flat rate of 4d per ½ oz regardless of distance. The Franking Privilege was still valid. The success of the scheme led to the Uniform 1d Post being introduced on 10 January 1840.

Use after 9 January

Any free frank that was still in the Postal system having been posted on or before 9TH January was treated as a free letter until the end of its journey. Figure 109 shows a front dated *January eight 1840*. Redirected from London to Scotland. Double rim Crown-Circle Free handstamp (narrow crown with rounded wings) for 10 January 1840.

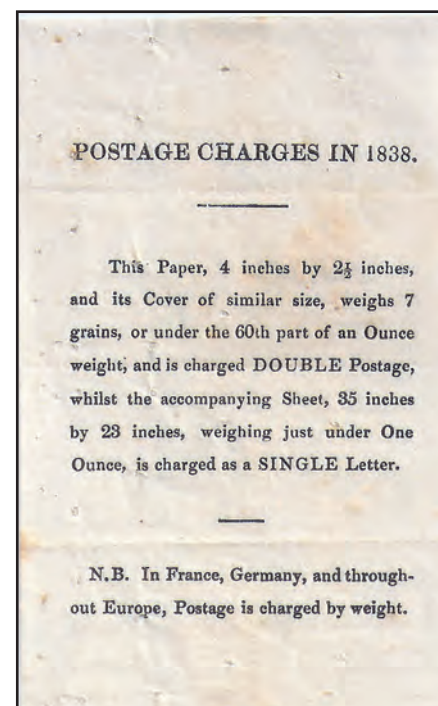


Figure 108. Enclosure from Figure 107.

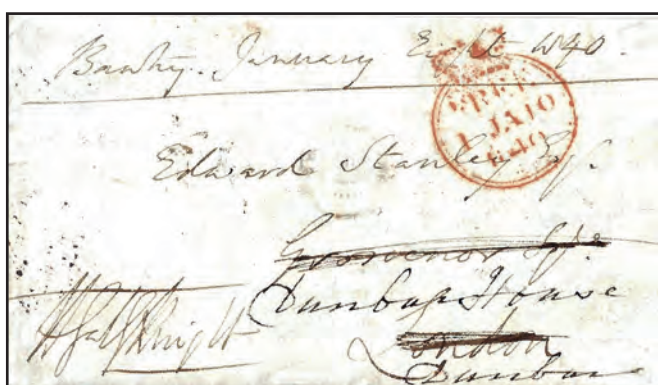
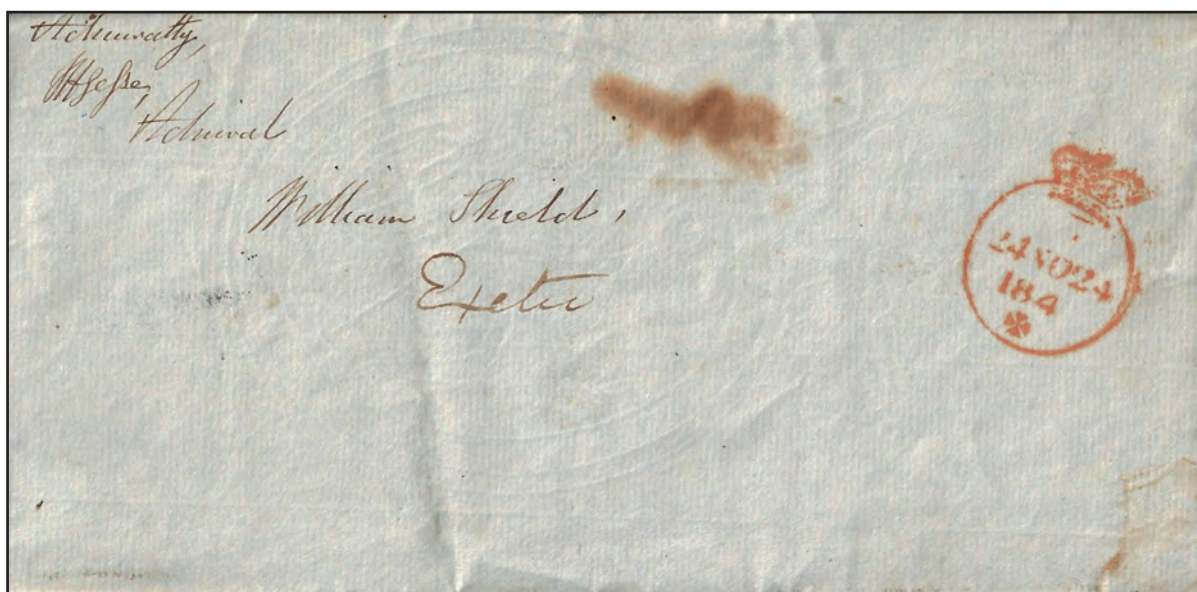


Figure 109. 10 January datestamp.



Use of handstamp in 1841

Illustration of an official printed letter dated inside 23 November 1841 informing William Shield that he had been appointed Admiral of the White. A very unusual Crown-Circle Free datestamp with FREE and 0 removed.

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