

Twentieth Century Postal Stationery

COLIN BAKER

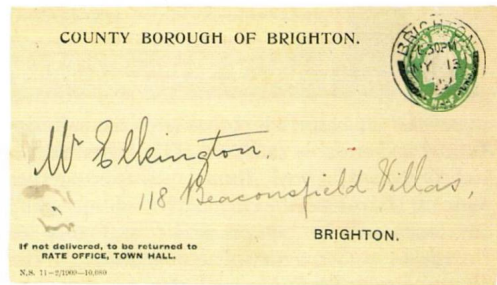
Part 1. Edward VII

The series of six articles published in the *Bulletin* from September 1994 to April 1995 told the story of how postal stationery developed during the 19th century, becoming a popular and comprehensive part of the postal service. However, during this century the use of postal stationery gradually declined, and except for one major development in the 1940s, it now takes a back seat to other methods of prepaying postal services. Once again this series of articles will deal only with Post Office issued stationery. It is intended that the facility for stamping to order private material will become the subject of a separate account at a later date.

King Edward VII ascended the throne on the death of Queen Victoria in January 1901 and during his nine year reign few changes were made to the range of postal stationery available from the PO. New stamp designs were prepared following the traditions built up over the previous 60 years. Embossed stamps were retained for envelopes, the simpler and cheaper letterpress stamps being used for postcards and newspaper wrappers.

Changes to Embossed Stamps

A new border was designed for the 1d embossed stamps, with a crown in the centre of two sprigs of laurel leaves surmounting the profile of the King's head. This profile was engraved at the Bunhill Row premises of De La Rue & Co, hence the initials BR found on the stamps at the base of the monarch's neck. Stamps which include a die number rather than these initials are those impressed on private material by the Stamping Branch of the Board of Inland Revenue at Somerset House. With this new stamp design came a change in colour to carmine, to match that used for the adhesive stamps of the same value. This change was made to bring the 1d stamp into line with the UPU policy on colours to be adopted internationally for all three basic foreign rates; green for printed papers, red for postcards and blue for letters.



A matching pair of 1/2d bag envelopes. The 1902 issue (top) with the blue/green stamp and (below) the 1904 issue in the lighter yellow/green ink

The layout of the 1/2d stamp, intended for inland printed paper rate envelopes, was also changed so that it allowed a similar design of a crown and laurel leaves to sit over the King's head. As with the Victorian issues, this stamp had no border and was about half the size of the higher value embossed stamps. The special bag type envelopes for printed papers developed in the last years of the 19th century had proved themselves to be so successful that they continued to be produced in the same two sizes, one 80 x 135mm for small papers and the other large enough for folded foolscap paper.

Changes to the Popular Postcard

During the early part of this century the postcard continued to be as popular as ever with the public and was used extensively for sending every conceivable message both inland and

abroad. For the Edward VII issue, the stamps impressed on both inland and overseas postcards were redesigned, although they still followed the basic outline adopted for the earlier Victorian issues. The new stamp designs included two major changes. The word "Postage", which had been missing from both the Victorian ½d and 1¼d postcard stamps, was added vertically either side of the new design and a crown was placed above the head of the new King. The new stamps incorporated a profile of Edward VII based on a portrait by the Austrian artist Emil Fuchs. The postcards were prepared by De La Rue.

At the start of Edward VII's reign the format for both the inland and foreign postcards in single and reply versions remained identical to those of the previous issue. Subsequently, in 1908, the instruction that the address should be written on the front of postcards was removed. This change had been agreed for all foreign postcards at the UPU congress in Rome the previous year. The PO had previously considered such an amendment to inland cards, but had delayed the change only to be consistent with the wording on both inland and overseas cards.

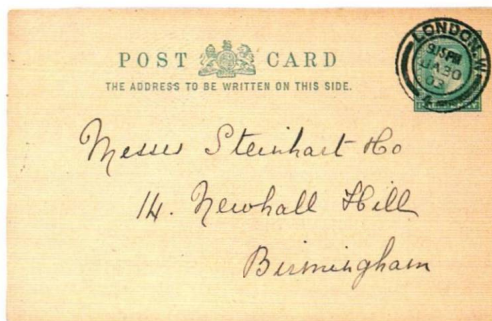
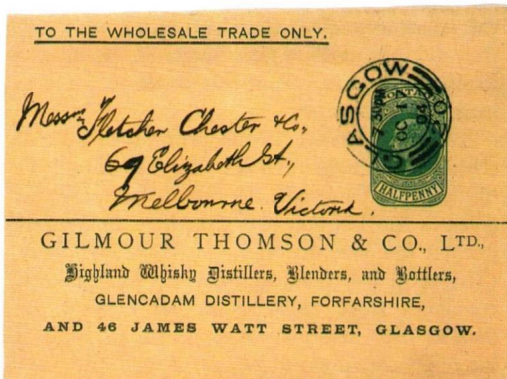
The choice of using both stout and thin inland postcards remained available to the public, the thin buff cards being the larger of the two sizes sold by the PO. However, following the precedent set shortly after the postcard was first introduced, cards were sold at a price above the value of the stamp to allow the stationery trade

fair competition with the PO.

Wrappers and Lettercards

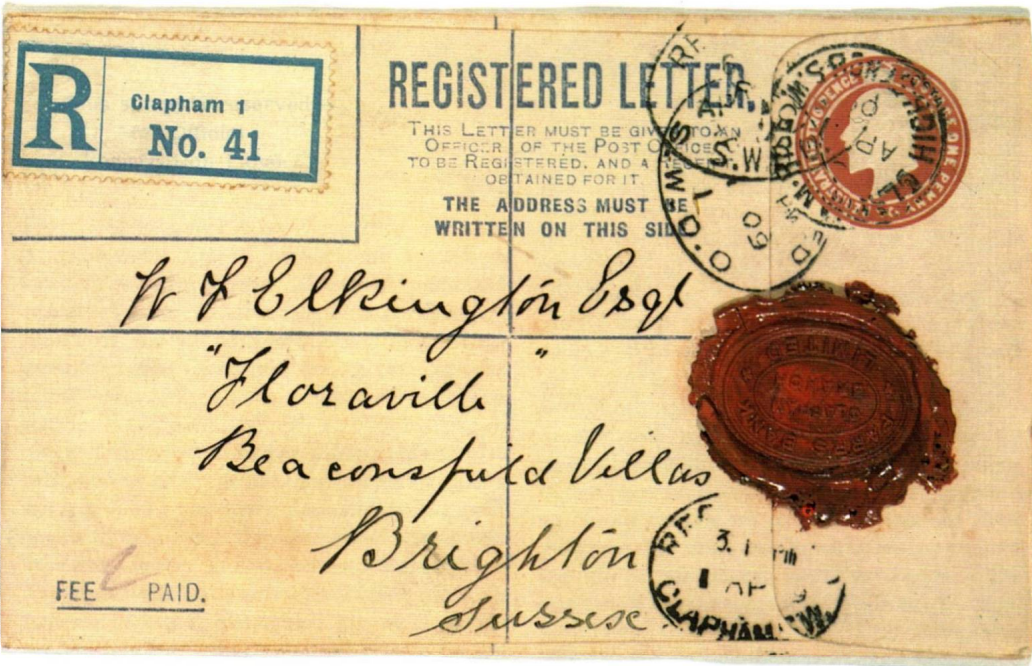
Newspaper wrappers continued to be sold by the PO in much the same size and format as before, with the colours chosen for printing the stamp matching those for other stationery in the PO range. The shape of the ½d stamp remained tall and thin, with the word POSTAGE added across the top of the design, giving it more balance. The stamp for the 1d wrapper matched the oval shape used for Victorian issues, but now had a rather more fancy design for the border. There were no instructions printed on either value of newspaper wrappers, these having been abandoned towards the end of the last century.

Lettercards continued to be popular with the public at the beginning of the 20th century, the format used remaining identical to the Victorian issues, even down to the design of the 1d stamp with its eight pointed border. It was over a year after King Edward's death, while George V stamps were still being prepared, that a major change occurred to lettercards. For the first time in nearly 20 years, white card was used in their production.



1902 Post Office newspaper wrapper subsequently overprinted. The stamp is printed in a dark green colour, later changed to a yellow/green to ease identification in poor lighting conditions

The 1902 postcards for overseas (top) and inland destinations (below)



Combined Postage and Registration Stamps

In addition to the changes made to the design of embossed and letterpress postage stamps, one important change was also made to stamps impressed on registered envelopes. Ever since the introduction of the specially strengthened envelopes in 1878, all Victorian registration stamps paid only the basic registration fee of 2d, postage and any additional fee being prepaid by adding adhesive stamps of the correct value. The new design for the Edward VII stamps included both the basic registration fee and postage, so that for normal inland use, registered envelopes no longer needed to carry extra stamps. This idea of combining the cost of both these standard rates into one stamp was retained for all subsequent issues and has continued to the present day, the only exceptions being "Overseas" and Forces registered envelopes of later reigns.

The layout of registered envelopes remained unchanged until 1907 when the R in an oval frame on the front of the envelope was replaced by a box for the registration label, to conform to a UPU ruling of 1881. A year later the wording on the reverse was also amended as compensation then applied to both inland and overseas addressed registered mail.

1907 registered envelope with the addition of a box on the face for the newly introduced labels

New Printing Arrangements

In 1904 the colour of the ½d embossed and impressed stamps was changed from a dark blue/green to a lighter yellow green in line with similar changes which were made to the ½d adhesive stamps. Post Office staff working in poor light had experienced difficulties in distinguishing between the dark green ½d and the ultramarine 2½d adhesive stamps. Although this did not really effect stationery stamps, a similar change in colour was made to these to maintain consistency.

A further change to the printing of all PO stationery occurred in 1911. On 1 January 1911 the contract for producing postal stationery was given to McCorquodale & Co who subsequently printed the vast majority of all PO stationery. (This firm had manufactured the linen-backed envelopes since 1878). Although Edward VII died in 1910, stationery incorporating stamps of his reign continued to be issued well into 1911 pending the release of the new George V issues in June, the subject of the next article.

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