

Twentieth Century Postal Stationery

COLIN BAKER

Part 2. George V and Rising Postage Rates

When George V became King on 6 May 1910, following the death of his father Edward VII, the stability of postage rates looked set to continue for many years to come, the basic letter rate having remained at 1d for 70 years. Indeed the public were still pressing the PO for even lower postage rates, including a universal penny post, but this was not to be. In just a few years the toll of war in Europe would affect everybody, eventually doubling the cost of using the post.

New Stamp Designs on Familiar Stationery

Just over 12 months of the new King's reign had passed when new stationery envelopes were issued in 1911, with redesigned embossed stamps showing George V's head in profile. The 1d stamp retained a similar border to that used for the Edward VII issues, but for the first time the numerical value was included in the design in addition to the value in words around the border.

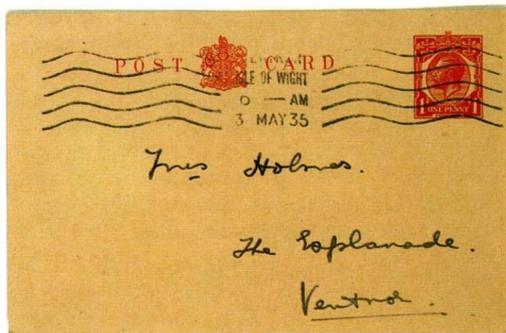
The Edward VII ½d embossed stamp had remained much the same size and design as that developed and used during the 19th century. However, for the new George V unsealed envelopes the ½d stamp was enlarged to the same size as the other George V embossed issues. A new border was prepared for this lower value surrounding the same profile as that used for the 1d stamp. Once again the value was incorporated into the border in both words and figures. Both the unsealed printed paper rate and the gummed letter rate envelopes were manufactured in the same sizes as those issued during the previous reign, these having proved popular with the public since the Victorian period.

Redesigned Impressed Stamps

The ½d and 1d stamps used for postcards, lettercards and newspaper wrappers continued to be impressed by the letterpress process. In addition to the changes made to some of the embossed stamps used for postal stationery, it was felt desirable to change the design of these letterpress stamps. The Edwardian issues of these stamps had been based on Victorian



George V's three-quarter portrait on the 1911 postcard and the revised design showing him in profile on the 1918 issue



designs, and the accession to the throne of a new monarch gave the PO the opportunity of bringing these up to date. The design for the new style border was prepared by William Pitcher under a commission from the Royal Mint. The three quarter profile photograph of the new king, taken by Court Photographers W & D Downey, was used as the basis for the engraving of the King's head. It took over a year for the new stamp designs to be finished and approved and these were eventually released on Coronation Day, 22 June 1911, along with the embossed envelopes and adhesive stamps.

One important change was made with the introduction of the new stationery. From the time that the stationery trade had successfully

campaign for a premium to be placed on PO postcards in 1872, cards had always been sold at a price above their face value. However, now that picture postcards had become very popular, and since it was no longer necessary to use stationery cards to enjoy the benefit of the $\frac{1}{2}$ d postage rate, the PO decided to sell thin buff cards at $\frac{1}{2}$ d each, although all other cards, envelopes and wrappers continued to be sold with a premium attached.

The stationery trade was naturally upset at this change, but the PO was adamant that the trade still had fair competition with their many other styles of postcard and insisted that the cheapest card in the PO range must be available at the new low price. This price reduction did not last long and on 2 July 1918, the selling price of all postcards was increased, the thin card then costing more than the value of the stamp. The opportunity of buying postcards at their face value was never repeated.

The First Increase in Postage Rates For 75 Years

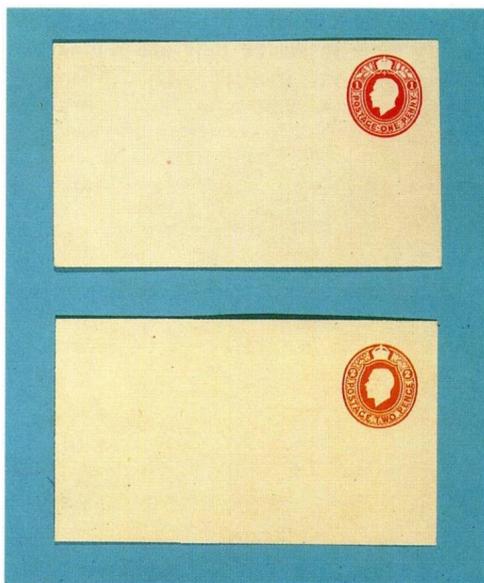
The outbreak of war in August 1914, which initially encompassed the whole of Europe and latterly many other countries throughout the world, eventually forced some British postage rates to be increased in 1915 (although at that time the basic rates were left unchanged), and again in 1918, 1920, and 1921, these last three rises also affecting basic postage rates.

In 1915 although the minimum postage rate was kept at 1d, this now only paid for 1oz, the cost of each step above that weight being similarly reduced.

On 3 June 1918 the minimum charge for inland letters became $\frac{1}{2}$ d requiring new postal stationery to be issued. Dies for embossed stamps in this higher value were already available, having been prepared for impressing on private material and so the PO was able to issue new stationery envelopes early in 1919, eight months after postage rates were first increased.

Almost two years to the day after the first basic rate increase in 1918, the cost of sending a letter rose again to 2d on 1 June 1920. As before, dies in this value were already available and 2d stationery envelopes in this new value were quickly issued.

Three months later on 1 September 1920 the newspaper rate was also raised from $\frac{1}{2}$ d to 1d for 6oz. As 1d wrappers had been on sale since Coronation Day in 1911, there was no need for a new issue to be made.



The 1d bag and 2d sealed letter rate envelopes were prepared for the short lived postage rates applicable between June 1920 and May 1922

Although the first weight step for printed papers had been reduced from 2oz to 1oz in June 1918 the basic rate had been left at $\frac{1}{2}$ d during this period of postcard and letter rate increases. But on 17 June 1921, this rate finally succumbed to an increase and the minimum cost of sending unsealed envelopes became 1d. New bag type envelopes printed with the embossed 1d stamp were placed on sale in 1922. They had a short life and were replaced by the previous $\frac{1}{2}$ d envelopes when the printed paper rate was reduced a few months later.

In 1922, following a great deal of pressure from the public for a reduction in postage costs, the rates for inland letters, printed papers and postcards were reduced to their 1918 levels, at which they remained for the rest of George V's reign. The one exception to this general decrease was the rate for newspapers which remained at 1d per 6oz. However $\frac{1}{2}$ d wrappers continued to be sold by the Post Office and were used for printed papers weighing up to 1oz in 1922 or up to 2oz from May 1923 onwards.

After the rate reductions of May 1922 had come into force the PO made arrangements to exchange higher value stationery for equivalent items stamped with the correct values, refunding each $\frac{1}{2}$ d difference in cash. A refund was also made where cards and envelopes had been

overprinted and could not be exchanged, but to identify these to ensure only one refund was made, they were stamped with a triangular inspector's mark. It was the PO's policy that these inspector's marks were only used for identification purposes and never as cancellations, even though they sometimes encroached upon the stamp.

Foreign Postcards

It had been intended that all the new postal stationery would be ready for issue by Coronation Day in 1911, but delays in agreeing



The three different lettercard rates, 1d from 1911, 1½d from 1918 and 2d from 1920. The 1½d rate again applied from 1922 onwards

the designs and preparing printing dies meant that the foreign postcard was not ready until 1912. In following the rules laid down by the UPU for foreign postcards, a similar format was adopted to that used for the Edward VII issue, but with the new three-quarter face stamp and the Garter Coat of Arms which had been adapted from a new design by Garth Jones.

Between 3 June 1918 and 29 May 1922 the rate for both inland and foreign postcards was the same, being 1d initially, rising to 1½d in 1921. It was only with the reduction of inland postage rates in 1922 that overseas cards once again became the more expensive to send, requiring a new issue of postcards in both single and reply versions.

With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921, the decision was taken to amend the heading on the foreign postcard, and once again only the name of Great Britain appeared on the front.

The PO were very slow in preparing 1½d foreign postcards. Apart from the two Empire Exhibition special issues of 1924-25, it was not until 1930 that these once again went on sale, the public having used inland cards with adhesive stamps for the previous eight years.

Under the agreement made between UPU members, the PO had always fixed the selling price of foreign postcards at the value of the printed stamp. From 1918, when inland cards were also used to foreign destinations, a premium had to be paid over the price of the stamp. Having persuaded the public to accept this for all postcards, the practice was continued, even when foreign cards were once again put on sale in 1930. As with the inland card, they were never again sold at their face value.

A large number of changes were made during George V's reign, far too many to discuss in a single article. Therefore, registered envelopes, stationery for the armed forces and other special issues will be reviewed next time.

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The first part in this series was published in September's *Bulletin*. Six articles by Mr Baker, on The Development of Victorian Postal Stationery appeared in the issues of September, October and November 1994, January, March and April 1995.