



Britain's Largest Stamp

It is often said that Rowland Hill favoured postal stationery rather than stamps for the prepayment of mail and certainly at the beginning of May 1840 there were huge numbers of envelopes and lettersheets available for sale to the public throughout the British Isles, whereas the printing of the Penny Black and Twopence Blue stamps had only just begun, their availability and distribution being very erratic at first.

Mulready's poetic design for the first issue of postal stationery, quickly rejected by the public even before it became valid for postage.

The Uniform Penny Post was brought into being in a great hurry and it was not until late in 1839 that a prominent Irish artist, William Mulready, RA, was asked to design the new stamped stationery. Mulready's design showed Britannia sending winged messengers to all corners of the empire, below which were scenes of the letters they conveyed being eagerly read.

The Printed Advertisements

Despite their lack of popularity, the lettersheets received a new lease of life less than two weeks after they were first released. It is not known who thought of the idea first, but many of the 1d lettersheets and some of the 2d values were printed with advertisements on their reverse sides. These advertisements fall into two groups, those promoting firms such as insurance and manufacturing companies who printed and used the lettersheets themselves and those containing a collection of small adverts, the income from which enabled the publisher to sell the lettersheets at less than face value (often between 8d or 10d a dozen) but still making a profit for himself.

There are over 300 different advertisements and other designs known to have been printed on the reverse of the Mulready stationery, some being fairly common, while only one or two copies of others may exist today. In the majority of cases it was the 1d lettersheets which were used in this way, although some 2d lettersheets and occasionally one or two envelopes were also printed in a similar fashion. All of these additional printings make a fascinating study in their own right and give us a glimpse into the history of that period. However this reprieve and substantial price reduction failed to regain popularity for the Mulready stationery and in the end huge stocks were destroyed, so great was the task that the Post Office had to construct a special machine for the purpose.

Fear of Forgery

The Victorians were extremely concerned that their envelopes and lettersheets would be forged. During the initial design stage early in 1840 it was originally intended that watermarked paper would be used for printing both the envelopes and lettersheets, but when prices were sought from various paper manufacturers in February of that year, the lowest quotation was submitted by John Dickinson, not for paper with a watermark but for one with silk threads laid in the paper itself.

Dickinson had invented the process and owned the patent for making silk thread paper. It was manufactured in a continuous sheet on machines kept secure behind locked doors, guarded night and day and worked by carefully selected and trusted operators. Silk thread paper had proved itself for a number of years previously, having been used for government bonds and legal papers, and with this kind of pedigree it was accepted in lieu of the more

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HALLET'S

The plan of this work is to sell the Envelopes at 8d. per dozen to Advertisers, and to the Public at 10d. Every Advertiser shall be at liberty to draw (if he pleases) after the rate of one dozen stamps for every line of his advertisement, by which the circulation will be, in a great measure, in their own hands. Nevertheless, the Proprietors will sell to the public the whole, should the advertiser not require them. It is hardly necessary to say, from the great reduction in price, they are immediately bought up by the public, and the edition being 5000, added to its novelty, offers a medium for publicity hitherto unprecedented; and means will be used for each advertiser to see that that number is really printed.

Ease and Comfort in Shaving.

MESSRS. B. and S. COWAN have now completed their invaluable QUADRILATERAL CHINESE RAZOR SHARPENER, the use of which renders the operation of shaving no longer painful to the most tender skin. By a very simple process the keenest edge may be speedily given to the bluntest razor or penknife. To be had wholesale, of the Proprietors, B. and S. Cowan, No. 164, Fenchurch-street; and retail, of all respectable perfumers, &c., in the United Kingdom, price 5s. 6d., 7s. 6d., and 9s. 6d. Also may be had, Cowan's Canton Razor Strop Paste, at 6d., 1s., and 2s. per pa. ket.

TO THE LADIES!—The following Articles for the Toilette have elicited General Commendation, and are confidently submitted to the Patronage of the Public as possessing a decided Excellence in their effects and appearance.

PROUT'S INDIAN RUBBER STICKING PLASTER, which does not wash off. Embracing the advantages of being waterproof and flexible, whilst the superiority of its manufacture must render it a general favourite over the old and exploded Court Plaster, which it bids fair entirely to supersede. From its peculiar flexibility it sticks firm and close on joints and other places where the Original Plaster would be useless. The present valuable article may be placed on the hands and face without renewal for several days; it is characterized by extreme tenacity of adhesion, which prevents the liability of its being washed off.

WITHER'S SICILIAN BLOOM, of Youth and Beauty, or impalpable Vegetable Powder, for improving the complexion, is recommended to the Ladies with the utmost degree of confidence, as the most exquisite production in universe for beautifying the skin, without the possibility of the slightest injury; it is a peculiarly elegant preparation from the beautiful Azalea (a Shrub indigenous to

GLOBES.—SON, beg constantly on 5 of the above t and in great These globes h many distingui honoured with —Manufactory, may be obtaine globes, in good

WINDOW Wretts, Chintzes, of the most el house in Lond A splendid d newest designs furnished in a High Holborn Upholsterers at

SPLENDID prices in born, near Red of Green Drag Church, where of HATS and C

NEW LABEL. the most variety of Counterfeit Wrappers of ACASSAR OIL, now in circulation, and which is original as frequently to deceive the unwary, in der a sense of duty, and regardless of expense in r object—the protection of the public from fraud r employed—these celebrated artists Messrs. Perkins

Typical private advertisements in general advertising lettersheets.

expensive watermarked paper. However modern research has shown these threads not to be silk but to be coloured yarn, although the name "silk thread paper" is unlikely to change now.

The Future

The rejection by the public of the Mulready design may have slowed down the initial acceptance of postal stationery but it did not prevent its future development in all aspects of the postal service, nor did it discourage the later extensive use of all types of prestamped material.

The remaining articles in this series will show that the continuing development and extensive use of Victorian postal stationery was probably as important to the development of the postal service in this country, with the benefits that it brought to the ordinary citizen, as was the earlier introduction of the Uniform Penny Post in 1840.

To be continued.

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