

# The Development of Victorian Postal Stationery

COLIN BAKER

## 6. Registered Envelopes

On the 1 January 1878 the Post Office introduced a revised registration service under which, it was possible to send money through the post knowing that if this were lost in transit compensation would be payable. The upper limit for coin sent by this new service was initially £2, although by the end of the century compensation limits had risen to £120. However, in order to benefit from this new scheme it was necessary to use the specially prepared postal stationery envelopes released on the same date.

On 6 January 1841 the PO introduced inland registration with a fee of one shilling, reduced to 6d in 1848 and 4d 1862. Although these fees provided additional security for a letter or packet, no compensation was made in the event of any loss of money. The revised registration scheme, costing 2d per letter, changed all that and proved to be very popular, the new lower fee and added security making it attractive to many more people for whom bankers' cheques were out of the question. Cheques were in any case subject to 1d stamp duty, in addition to bankers' charges and so the new registration service was a very competitive one.

*With the introduction of registered envelopes in 1878 it became possible to send coin through the post.*

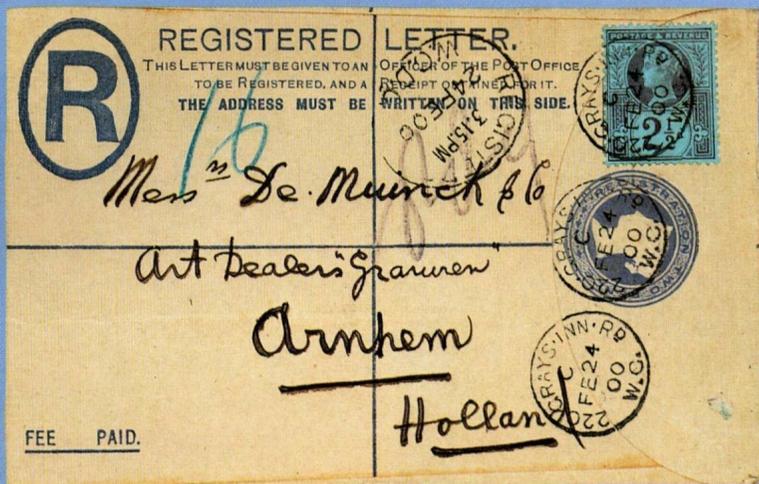
## The Strengthened Envelope

During the development of a suitable envelope for use with the new registration scheme, the PO conducted extensive trials to ensure that during handling, the envelopes would not burst open under the weight of coins, causing consequent loss to the PO. The envelopes eventually approved were manufactured from a strong, heavy duty paper, reinforced on the inside with a coarse open weave linen material known as "scrim". These two layers were bonded together to form an extremely strong, yet light weight envelope. No scrim was provided to the gummed flap to allow it to be sealed more easily, and since all Victorian issues had the 2d registration stamp impressed on this flap, it avoided undue wear to the stamp dies which the scrim would otherwise have caused. The envelope was a success and proved it was as strong in use as it had been in the trials. The construction of these envelopes remaining basically the same until the latter half of this century when stronger papers were developed.

## The Envelope Format

Registered envelopes were printed with blue crossed lines to indicate they were to be registered, a hangover from previous years when registered letters and packets had been tied with either green tape or green string. Included on the envelope front were instructions that for the item to benefit from registration, the envelope had to be handed to a PO official against a receipt and not simply dropped into the nearest





Revised envelope layouts with the registration stamp falling on the front first came into use in 1893

letter box.

This standard printing of registered envelopes was retained for the remainder of the Victorian period, although the instructions on the envelope front were amended from time to time and in 1881 an "R" was added to reinforce the registration requirement, it being enhanced even more in 1883 when it was set in an oval frame.

### Registration Stamps

Three different designs for the registration fee stamp were prepared during the period 1878 to 1901, all of which indicated that only the registration fee had been paid. In all cases, postage had to be paid for registered letters by means of adhesive stamps which were added to the envelope front. The stamp impressed on the first series of registered envelopes was an emergency issue as the main design was still in the course of preparation. This first stamp used the normal 2d stationery die previously impressed on PO 2d envelopes which of course read "Postage Two Pence". To show that only the

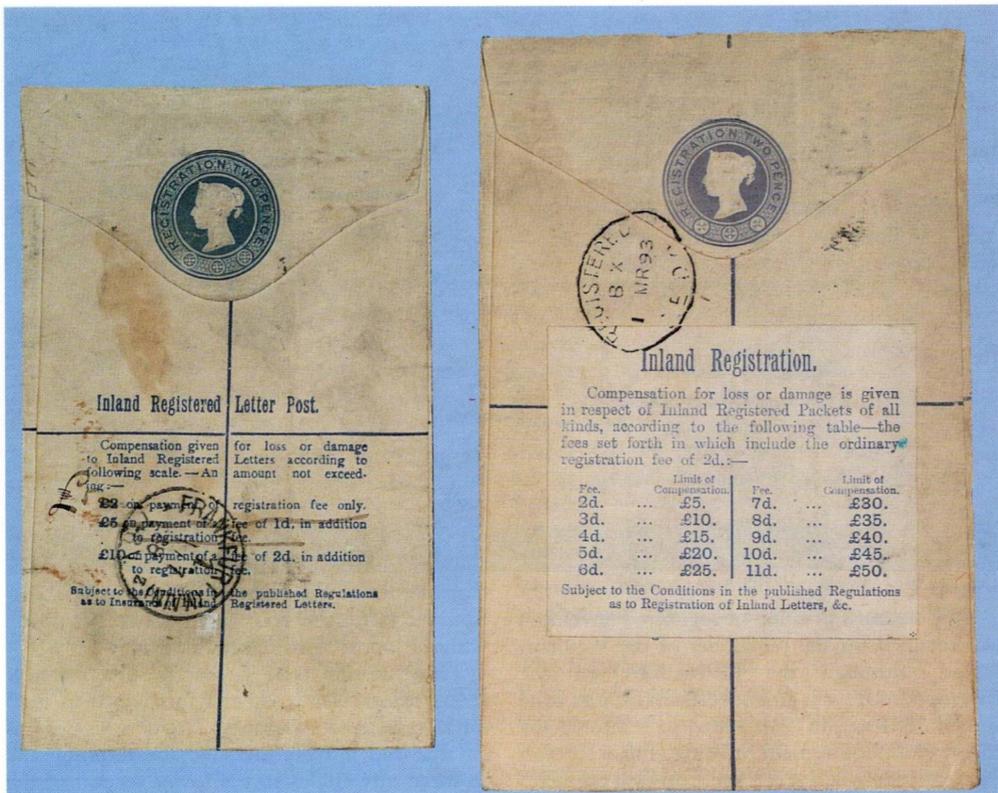
registration fee had been prepaid, a semicircular band or cartouche was added above the stamp with the words "For Registration Only".

Three months later in March 1878, the new stamp design was ready and this was then used for all registered envelopes. The new design was circular and initially included the printing date in three tiny circles in the lower section of the stamp border. These date plugs were similar to those used on other stationery dies, but as with those stamps the date plugs were abandoned and replaced with florets in 1882.

A further change was made in 1891 when a revised design of stamp was introduced, it being slightly smaller than the previous issue. Neither dates nor florets were included in this design and it remained in use until the end of Victoria's reign.

During the initial years following the introduction of the new envelopes the registration stamp was positioned such that it appeared on the reverse of the envelopes when





Typical envelope backs showing revised compensation tables, one amended in manuscript, the other with a pasted on the flap was sealed. In this way it was clearly a registration stamp and could not pay for postage. By 1893 the PO felt the public were very aware of this and the envelope was redesigned with the flap folding over onto the envelope front, thus also placing the stamp on the front face, but lying sideways. Finally in 1901 the stamp was repositioned so that when the flap was closed, it fell into the normal position for any stamp, that is, on the envelope front, in the top right hand corner and in a vertical orientation.

### Compensation Tables

As the registration facility developed and the PO became more confident that they were not incurring great losses, so compensation limits were extended. During this period the lower compensation limits were raised without any increase in the basic fee, but from 1886 the introduction of higher limits required correspondingly larger fees, with a top limit of £120, being available from 1898 for a fee of 1s 2d.

From 1886 to the end of the Victorian period,

the reverse sides of envelopes were printed with compensation tables, listing the maximum compensation payable for loss or damage in the post depending on the fee that had been prepaid. However, these compensation limits were frequently changed and extended, rendering stocks of envelopes obsolete. To avoid the necessity of destroying large quantities of envelopes merely because the tables were out of date, the PO prepared separate labels with details of the then current limits, which the counter clerks pasted over the original printing. However, not all envelopes were revised in this manner and in the case of the earlier issues, some were amended in manuscript where changes were relatively simple.

So in 1878, for the first time since the introduction of the Penny Post, there began a much needed system for sending coin and valuables through the post in the confident assurance that should anything go wrong the value of any loss would be made good by the PO.

© Colin Baker 1995