

The Development of Victorian Postal Stationery

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3. Inland Postcards

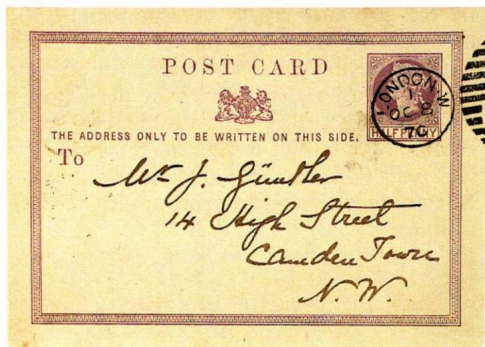
The postcard was originally suggested by Dr Heinrich von Stephan, Postmaster General of Prussia, in 1865, but not implemented at that time. However, when it was independently proposed by Dr Emanuel Herrmann of Austria in January 1869 it was speedily taken up, by them with the result that the world's first postcard was issued in Austria on 1 October of the same year and it is Herrmann who is given most of the credit for its invention.

In Great Britain there was ever-growing pressure on the Post Office to reduce postal rates and they quickly seized upon the postcard as an opportunity to appease these demands, while at the same time maintaining the basic letter rate at 1d. In any case the PO believed few people would be prepared to send open correspondence through the post for all to read. How wrong they were, for on the first day of issue, 1 October 1870, over ½ million cards passed through London alone and stocks which were meant to last years had to be quickly replaced.

The introduction of the postcard saw a change in policy and for the first time since 1840 stationery carried a non-embossed stamp. The front of the new postcard included instructions that only the address was to be written on that side, reinforced by the word "To", with the coat of arms placed centrally on the card to show they were official issues. Finally, a border was placed round the whole of the front to assist both the printing of the cards and sorting them in the post.

Competition by the Stationery Trade

When they were first issued, inland postcards were sold at ½d each, so that unlike all previous stationery they were sold at their face value and there was no extra charge made for the cost of the card itself. They were made available in two sizes, but the larger of these, being taller than most other postal items, suffered damage to the top and bottom edges when bundles of mail were tied with string and this larger size of card was soon discontinued.



The larger of the two sizes of the first issue of the postcard (back stamped contrary to Post Office instructions)



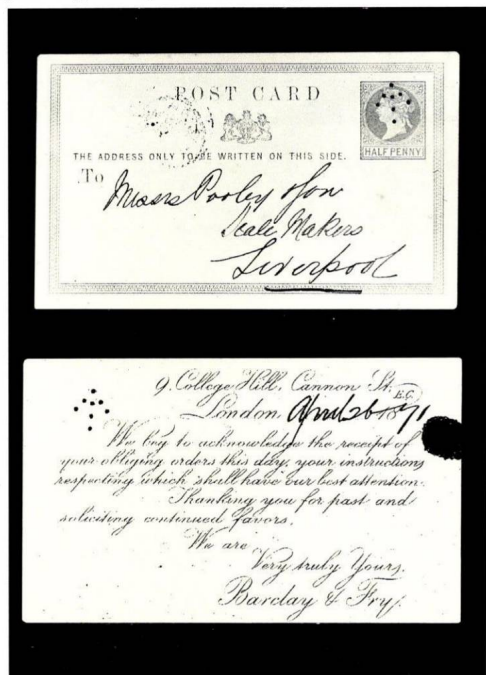
The revised layout of postcards first released in 1878, with a new stamp design

The sale of cards at face value lasted only a few years. As soon as privately printed cards were sanctioned in 1872 complaints were made by the stationery trade of unfair competition, since private cards stamped for ½d each could not possibly be sold at face value without the manufacturer making a loss. In October 1872 revised charges came into effect to include a premium varying from about ½d to 1d a dozen for all PO cards. With the introduction of these charges, cards were only sold in packets of 12, although later this regulation was relaxed and packets could be split, with single cards then being charged ¾d. Despite the fact that the costs of printing both private and PO cards were passed to the user, sales of PO cards far

exceeded those of their private counterparts, the latter mainly being used by businesses rather than private individuals.

The introduction of the postcard greatly increased the volume of mail which the PO handled each day, and during the first few years of their use attempts were made to cancel bundles of postcards in one single operation by punching holes through the area of the stamp. Groups of holes shaped into arrows and orbs, and single holes and side clips were experimented with. However, the system attracted numerous complaints about the loss of part of the message area where the card was punched away. In addition, the PO was also concerned that this method gave no indication of the date that the cards passed through the post. In the end the experiment was gradually abandoned, being superseded by other more reliable cancellation methods.

In Liverpool and London holes in the shape of an arrow were punched through several cards at once in an attempt to speed the cancelling of post cards. Following complaints that parts of messages were being lost the practice gradually declined, ending in 1876.



Reverse of card

PO regulations at the time of the introduction of the postcard were strict. Only the reverse of the card could carry a message, the whole of the

front being reserved for the address and stamp. In order to pass at the $\frac{1}{2}$ d rate, only stationery cards were allowed. Blank cards with adhesive stamps were not permitted, although adhesives could be used as make-up values on cards where a higher rate prevailed, for example in later years where inland cards were used to overseas destinations. In addition, cards had to be printed on their front with the words "Post Card/The Address Only To Be Written On This Side". This last regulation was strictly adhered to when the PO issued a card celebrating the jubilee of the Uniform Penny Post in 1890. The wording on the front did not conform to their own regulations and the card had to be printed with a 1d stamp for the inland letter rate. Of course at the time the PO was celebrating 50 years of the penny post and not the $\frac{1}{2}$ d postcard rate.

By 1875 the PO concluded there had been sufficient time for the public to learn how to use postcards and the word "To" was removed from the front, giving a little more space for the address. They also introduced cards printed on a heavier, better quality cardboard, a suggestion made by Mr Gladstone, the Liberal Prime Minister, who was a prolific user of postcards. These cards were printed in a light brown colour, the forerunner to a later colour change, which also helped to distinguish them from the normal thin cards. Many people felt that these higher quality cards reflected the social standing of the writer far more than the earlier thin cards had done and these were used in great numbers, despite the higher premium of 2d a dozen which they carried.

The Redesigned Card

In 1878 the whole of the front of the postcard, including the stamp, was completely redesigned and a new coat of arms was prepared. The border was removed and instructions were moved up, once again giving more space for the written address. A change was made to the colour used to print all postcards from then on, the PO selecting a reddish brown in lieu of the original purple. The new stamp used the same engraving of the Queen as before, but the value was transferred from the bottom of the design to a curved band above the Queen's head. Other minor changes were later made to the inland cards including yet another change to the coat of arms in 1888.

In 1897, due mainly to the growing popularity of the picture postcard, the PO agreed that any postcard could carry a message on its front face,

providing this did not interfere in any way with the address. This required an amendment to the wording on the front face of cards deleting "only" but still instructing the address to be written on that side. Finally, in 1901 the colour of the stamp was changed to green to accord with the Universal Postal Union's policy of stamp colouring. (See part 2 of this series for further details of this arrangement.)

In 1895 a new size of postcard was issued, following a trend set by the sale of similarly sized private cards over the previous few years. These new cards, known as court cards, were printed on thick card and were 3½ x 4½ ins in size, which was slightly larger than the previous issues of 2⅞ x 4⅓ ins. In 1899 the size of normal postcards was increased to 3½ x 5½ ins following pressure on the PO to accept picture postcards of a similar size to those used on the Continent.

The Reply Card

It was not until 1882 that Britain produced an inland reply card, these having been first introduced in Germany in 1872, quickly followed by a number of other countries in the intervening 10 years before they were finally made available in this country.

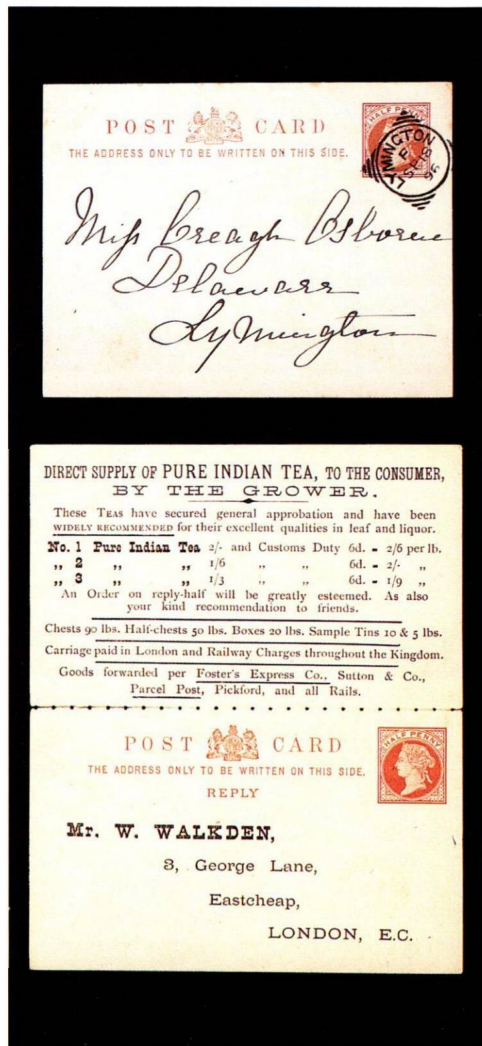
The delay in preparing these cards resulted from lengthy discussions between officials of various Government Departments about how the reply cards should be constructed. In the early years discussions centred upon a single card with the front divided into two. It was proposed that the upper half would be written with the forwarding address which would then be crossed out and the lower half filled in for the return. Both top and bottom halves were each to carry a ½d stamp. This idea was considered for a number of years, but it was eventually abandoned in favour of a folded double card.

When finally this configuration was considered, based upon the Italian design then in use, legal objections were raised on two counts. Firstly, the stamp on the reply half would have already passed through the post and even though it was not cancelled the PO felt it might be considered invalid. Secondly, the regulations relating to postcards clearly stated that nothing could be attached to them, nor could they be folded. The PO was concerned that the reply half could fall foul of this regulation which the British postal authorities had vigorously enforced in the past to the extent that even address labels were not allowed. Therefore a supplementary act had to be

introduced in 1882 changing these regulations before reply cards could finally be issued.

In the beginning both thin and stout reply cards were perforated and folded between the two halves, but problems arose with the stout cards and this method of separation was abandoned in favour of joining the two separate cards with thin linen strips, which still enabled the recipient to easily divide the cards for his reply. Some problems were also noticed with the thin cards, these occasionally becoming separated in the post. This was overcome by

Top: The 1875 court card

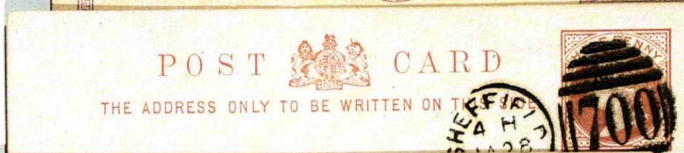


Bottom: The reply card, popular with the business community

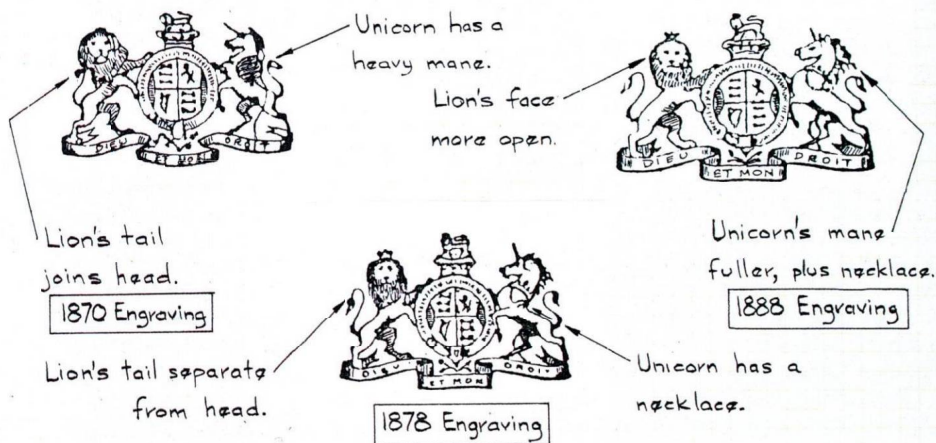
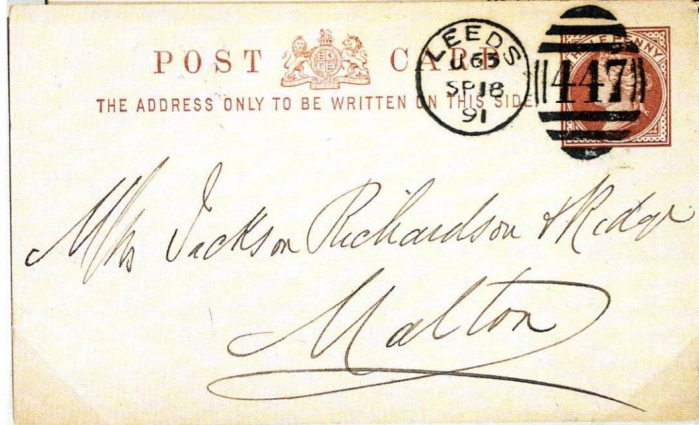
1870
issue



1878
issue



1888
issue



The three different engravings of the coat of arms used on Victorian postcards using less holes per inch and thin cards continued to be perforated until the end of the century.

Once again a fee was imposed for the cost of printing reply cards to allow the stationery trade fair competition, this varying between 1d and 2d per half dozen. Despite the extra cost, reply

cards were very popular items. Many were overprinted by businesses and other organisations who found that when return postage was prepaid a reply was more readily forthcoming. These cards remained popular with commercial organisations until the introduction of the business reply service in the 20th century.

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