

THE STREET LETTER BOXES OF JAMAICA

by Thomas Foster

Although the house-to-house mail delivery had been in operation within the old city of Kingston since 20th August 1860 it was very slow in expanding, chiefly because most of the trading and business interests were located in the area, immediately north of the harbour, within which the General Post Office was sited. It was, therefore, a relatively simple matter for any members of the public residing a little further away to collect and post their correspondence from that office.

Even in 1889 the limit of the Kingston delivery service was, starting on the east, up Paradise Street and through Rae Town to the junction with the Windward Road, thence westward along that road to South Camp Road and then north to the junction with North Street at DeCordova's property of Devereux Park. From there, the limit of delivery extended northwards to Allman Town before turning westwards across the Racecourse to Torrington Bridge. It then turned south down Orange Street as far as Drummond Street, then through the Hannah Town area to the Spanish Town Road and on to the Harbour, past Railway and the Slaughter House.

Within this area the only service point was the General Post Office, and outside it, apart from Port Royal across the harbour, the only existing post office in Lower St. Andrew was at Up Camp Road, Cross Roads. This did not open until 1884 and was a good two miles distant, unless one counted far-off Stony Hill (formerly Golden Spring) about 8 miles further northwards. This situation was not remedied until the turn of the century, when the offices at the Myrtle Bank Hotel (1901, and seasonal), and on the Windward Road (1909), were opened, and it was not until Constant Spring and Hope commenced operations in 1900 and 1906 respectively that any further facilities were available in Lower St. Andrew.

All this meant that anyone wishing to post a letter had in some instances a considerable way to travel, and it was in order to meet this situation that it was decided in 1863 to erect a series of pillar boxes after the fashion so popular in Great Britain. These were to become known as Street Letter Boxes (to distinguish them from the private letter boxes at the GPO), within the city of Kingston and later in Lower St. Andrew.

The first four boxes, constructed of cast iron, were erected in that year at advantageous collecting points on North St., at the Parish Church, on Harbour St. and at the Victoria Market. By 1891, eleven boxes were in operation conveniently located at:

- corner of North Street and King Street
- corner of Parade and King Street
- corner of Harbour Street and Princess Street
- corner of Port Royal Street and Luke Lane
- Victoria Market
- Myrtle Bank Hotel on Harbour Street
- Police Station, Up Park Camp Road (Cross Roads)
- corner of Prince of Wales St. and Race Course in Allman Town

- corner of Central Avenue and Elleston Road in Rae Town
- Park Lodge Hotel on Windward Road.

These boxes were quickly added to and often resited in better positions and today they are too numerous to list. In 1891, however, they were cleared three times daily, thus providing a very speedy and efficient service for a local population who were saved an often hot and tiring journey down to the GPO to post a letter. In addition, there was a special clearance on the morning when the Royal Mail Steam Packet was due in port, and an extra morning clearance of all but the box at Up Park Camp when the mail for the USA was due to leave on a steamer of the Atlas Line.

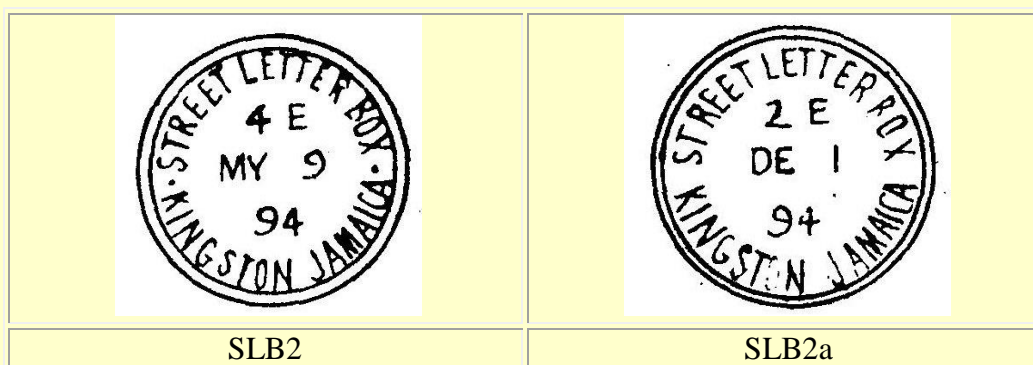
By 1878 letter boxes had been erected also on all the rail stations in the island, but the collection and cancellation of mail from these is another story.

The street letter boxes were cleared by letter carriers operating on foot from the GPO, where by 1889 it had been decided to cancel all such mail by means of special postmarks, which presumably enabled the authorities to determine by whom a late-collected letter had been handled. Why such a procedure was considered necessary is unknown, and the author would appreciate details from anyone who has managed to unearth any further reason for this differential cancellation.



The first mark was a metal "TRD", which had a single-lined diamond frame with 23mm sides enclosing the legend "STREET LETTER BOX / JAMAICA" in three lines of slightly seriffed capital letters 21mm high. Undated, struck in black ink and, in its last year of use, battered and misshapen, it was intended to be struck only on the envelope or wrapper, leaving the adhesives to be cancelled by one of the Kingston date stamps. In practice this rarely occurred. Although uncommon on cover, contemporary stamps can very often be found bearing parts of this postmark and it is not so rare as is often stated.

EKD: 8 May 1889 LKD: 2 April 1892



Type SLB2 is a postmark of the Double Circle classification, which has the normal double-circle format with a diameter of 26½mm and about 1½mm between the circles. The date is in two unit plugs reading "month-day" and "year" in two lines with an index figure and letter above it, all in sans-serif type 2 mm high. The legend at the top reads STREET LETTER BOX and at the bottom KINGSTON JAMAICA in sans-serif caps 2¾ mm high, with small dots separating the two legends.

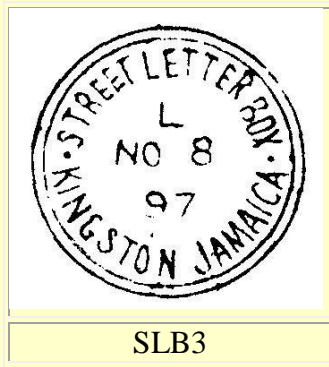
This type consisted of a set of four identical date stamps distinguished by the fixed index figures 1 - 4. The index letter varied from A - , Z and indicated the collection time. The EKD and LKD of each dater are given, together with the index letters known, and, unless otherwise stated, they are always struck in black ink. The author would be interested in hearing of any further index combinations of this or of any of the succeeding types.

Datestamp	1	2	3	4
EKD:	1 July 1892	9 Sept 1892	26 Dec 1896	23 Feb 1893
LKD:	13 August 1902	6 November 1896	1 May 1897	14 November 1897
In black:	1C, 1F 1K 1L	2E 2M	3A 3C 3M	4E 4K 4H 4M
In blue :	1K			4K

The series of Type SLB2a consists probably of six identical date stamps, closely resembling the previous type but without the separating small dots at either side. The lettering and figures of legends, index and date are 3 mm high, and the distance between the circles is 1 mm; the diameter is 26 mm. These were in concurrent use with SLB2 and were probably issued at the same time.

Datestamp	1	2	3	4	5	6
EKD:	20 July 1892	1 Sept 1892	16 March 1893	15 April 1892	15 Feb 1895	Existence doubtful,
LKD:	28 Sept 1896	21 Sept 1896	25 Dec 1897	8 October 1895	23 June 1896	no example recorded.
In black:	1C 1E 1H 1I 1K 1L 1M 1F	2C 2E 2I 2K 2M 2O 2Y	3C 3E 3F 3I 3J 3K 3M 3Q 3T	4C 4E 4H 4I 4K 4M 4O 4U	5C 5I 5M	

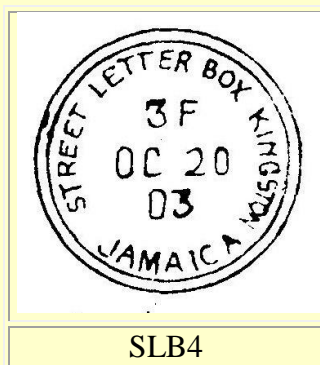
Examples of these stamps are said to exist struck in blue ink, but none has so far been seen by the author.



Type SLB3 closely resembles Type SLB2a in the size of the various units and in overall diameter, but it has dots at the sides and 1½ mm between the circles, as in Type SLB2. The index combination above the date is replaced by a single central index letter ranging from A-Z; it is only known struck in black. The author considers that only a single dater of this type existed, and it would appear to have been issued at a later-date than the previous two types. Examples without the side dots have been reported but never substantiated.

The following indices are known: A C E F I K L M N O

EKD: 28 October 1897 LKD: 13 August 1902



Type SLB4 is another double-circle date stamp of 28mm diameter, with 1½ mm between the circles. It has the legend STREET LETTER BOX KINGSTON around the top and JAMAICA at the bottom in small square capitals about 2 mm high; it is without separating dots at the sides.

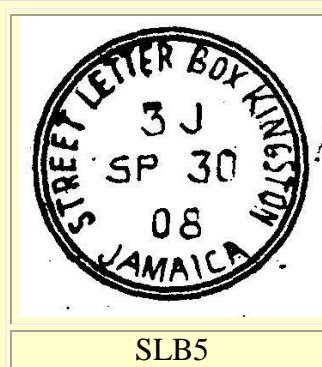
There is an index combination above the date in tall upright 3mm units, the figure being heavily seriffed. Six identical daters of this type were issued distinguished by the fixed figures 1 - 6, the index letters ranging from A - Z. These stamps are, found in either black or blue, and examples exist in which replacement "year" plugs have been inserted in slightly smaller figures.

Datestamp	1	2	3	4	5	6
EKD:	23 Nov 1903	No example has been recorded.	2 Sept 1902	No example recorded.	3 Nov 1901	17 Sept 1906
LKD:	2 March		27 October		29 Sept 1905	January 1907

	1904		1909			
In black:	1A 1M		3A 3B 3E 3F 3J 3K 3M 3O		5K 5M	6A
In blue :			3A 3F 3K 3M			



Post card (c.5¾ x 3¾ in) posted unstamped and showing Type SLB4-3E. Kingston T-mark Type D9a applied to show deficiency; the amount due, 1d postage + 1d tax, shown by "2" handstamp applied at Liverpool.

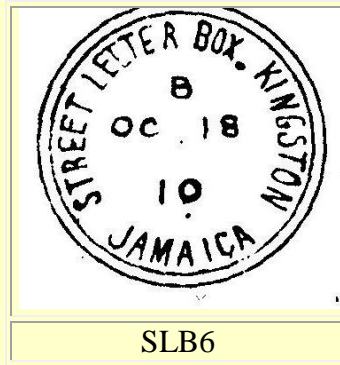


Type SLB5 is very similar in format to SLB4, but with an overall diameter of 27½ mm and with 1 mm between the circles. The lettering is 2½ mm high, tall and slender, but the date units and index combinations are exactly as in Type SLB4. There are, however, dots at either side.

In all probability a set of these daters was issued, but only one has been recorded, struck in black. The illustration M18 in 'Nicholson' is incorrect, and should be disregarded.

Datestamp 3 EKD: 26 Feb 1905 LKD: 10 Sept 1910

In black: 3B 3C 3J 3O



The next dater closely resembles SLB4 with the same diameter and distance between the circles. The lettering is similar to that of SLB5 but is narrower and closer together, with a period after the word "BOX" but without the dots at the sides. A single central index letter above the date ranges from A-Z, but this and the date are in smaller squarer type 2½mm high

Probably only one stamp of this type existed, and it is known, only in black.

The following indices are known: B C J K O

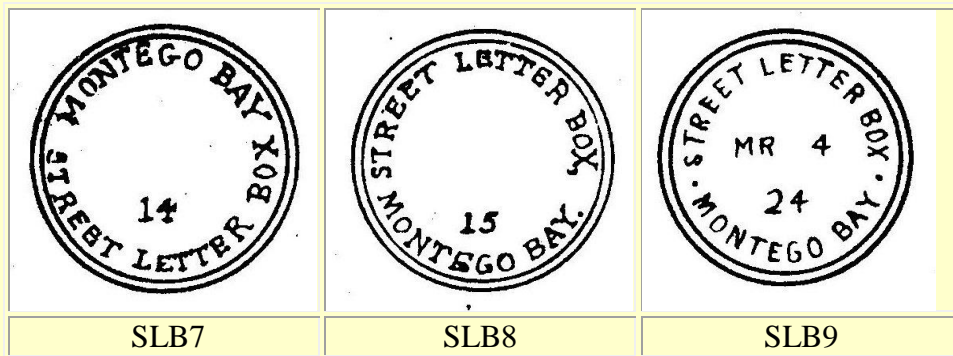
EKD: 19 Sept 1910 LKD: 5 December 1919

'Nicholson ' mentions Kingston street-letter-box postmarks as being in use until 1928 at least, but the present author regards this as extremely doubtful. The latest recorded date is given above (1919), and it is evident that the Kingston GPO ceased using special daters about 1920.

Street Letter Boxes were also erected in four other towns by 1930, but their use elsewhere does not appear probable. Where put into use after 1920, special daters were not used. Details now follow.

MONTEGO BAY, St. James

Boxes were erected initially in 1914 and by August 1927 six were in operation, clearances being made twice daily before the mail despatches of 5.30 am and 5.30 pm. A further two boxes were in use by 1937, when they are first mentioned in the Post Office Guide. The reason for this may well be that the boxes were located in the tourist hotels within the town and were not accessible to the general public.



The first postmark employed by the Montego Bay-office was a rubber TRD (Type SLB7) This had a diameter of about 27 mm and closely resembled the then current steel date stamps in format, having MONTEGO BAY at the top and STREET LETTER BOX at the foot, all in serif capitals about 2 mm in height. In the centre is a fixed year plug "14", leaving the day and month to be inserted in manuscript, usually black ink. The figure 4 of the year can be found altered in m/s to read 15 to indicate that year, but on many occasions this was not done and false dates can occur.

This mark was usually in purple ink, but later it was struck in black, when it was often distorted due to decomposition of the rubber.

In purple EKD: 16 Nov 1914 LKD: 10 Feb 1915

In black EKD: April 1915 LKD: 1 May 1915.

Type SLB8 is another rubber TRD resembling the last type but With legend and name transposed. It has a comma after STREET LETTER BOX and a period after MONTEGO BAY. The fixed year plug "15" leaves the day and month to be inserted in m/s, and it.is always struck in purple.

EKD: 21 July 1915 LKD: 1915

Type SLB9 is a steel double-circle date stamp of 27 mm diameter with widely spaced circles. The legend reads STREET LETTER BOX With MONTEGO BAY at the foot, in sans-serif capitals 2 mm in height separated on both sides by large dote, The two-line date is in slightly taller type.

EKD: 17 September 1915 LKD: October 1954

This postmark is often found without the year plug, and it is possible that two daters of the same type existed.

PORT ANTONIO, Portland

The first boxes were installed in this busy little port and tourist centre during July 1911, but they were not mentioned officially until 1925, probably for the same reason as those at Montego Bay.

The first type used here (SLB10) was a rubber TRD. The single-lined oblong frame measures 32 x 22 mm and contains the legend in two lines "Street Letter Box/Port Antonio, Ja" in u/lc italic type about 2 mm high. A line of dots across the centre terminates in a fixed year plug with period -1911.- leaving the day and month to be inserted in manuscript. In practice this was seldom done, and most letters seen have the adhesives additionally cancelled by one of the normal Port Antonio datestamps. It is always struck in purple.

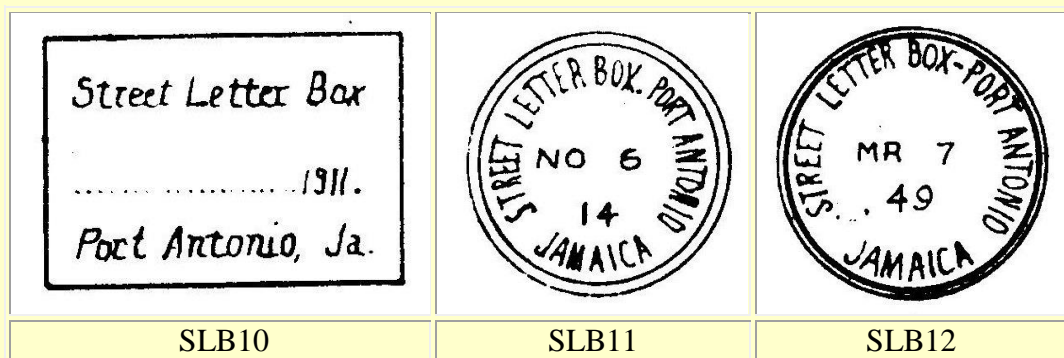
EKD: July 1911 LKD: 18 May 1912.

A metal stamp similar to the normal double-circle type followed. This was 27 mm in diameter with 1½ mm between the circles, and it enclosed the legend STREET LETTER BOX. PORT ANTONIO at the top and JAMAICA at the foot in thin sans serif capitals 3 mm high. The date, in normal style, is in large square type 2½ mm high. It was struck in black ink.

EKD: 27 August 1913 LKD: 29 July 1927.

The final stamp resembled SLB11 in format, with a diameter of 28 mm and with 1 mm between circles. The legend, narrow and 3 mm high, is the same except that the period after "BOX" is replaced by a hyphen. The date style is the same, and the stamp is always struck in black, often with the year missing.

EKD: 14 September 1927 LKD: 13 November 1967.



SAVANNAH LA MAR, Westmoreland

A street letter box was erected here on 3rd March 1923, but no special date stamp has ever been used.

SPANISH TOWN, St. Catherine

A box was sited in the old capital about 1930, and by 19` a further two boxes were in operation. Special deters have never been used.

As a final point of interest, it is not generally known that Highway TPO 4 and Highway TPO 5, operating within the corporate area of Kingston and Lower St. Andrew between 25th March 1963 and 14th lay 1966, included amongst their

duties the clearance and cancellation of mail from street letter boxes within that area. Between them they used four different Travelling Post Office TRD's for this purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- "Jamaica Street Letter Box Postmarks" circulated privately during the 1950's by the author
- R..H.Lant
- Clinton L. van Pohle
- Col F.F.Seifert (U. S. A.F.)
- V.N.F.Surtees
- A.P.D.Sutcliffe
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- L.P.Voller
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- Ronald Wong
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