HIGHWAY TRAVELLING POST OFFICES IN JAMAICA

Contents:

Introduction.

In order to introduce a study of the operation and postal markings: of this type of mail transportation, it would probably be as well to look first at the methods used to carry the post by road from the earliest times.

The evidence presented by early correspondence[1] shows that in 1708, a regular stage-coach service operated between Kingston and Spanish Town but it is not known whether it carried mail, though it would appear likely. it is debatable how long the arrangement lasted and there are no records; in Jamaica of the existence stance of this stage.

Until the advent of the Jamaica Railway in 1845, mail had been conveyed by slave, postboy or mule over a system of five post roads organised to cover all the district offices. Even though the service was extremely slow, it did ensure at least one weekly post to even the most remote parts of the island.

At first, the railway only covered a small area between Kingston, Spanish Town and later. Old Harbour, al though it was responsible for an easing of postal costs, and a subsequent reduction in postal rates for letters: sent between any two points on the railway. Tae mail for the outlying districts however, continued to be carried by mule until 1873;, when the state of the railway became so chaotic that the Postmaster General terminated the mail contract and determined to spend the £200 per annum that it had cost, on the transportation of mail by road between Kingston .and Spanish Town.

The idea of a subsidised mail-coach service, with an initial capital of 26,000, had been raised sore years earlier but no decision-had been reached and it was not until the cessation of the conveyance contract, that public complaints of mail delays began to arrive from the northern parishes and His Excellency, the Governor., ordered two rail-carts to be manufactured in England to begin the service. Only one arrived and it vas described: as. "a clumsy Noah's Ark on wheels:, requiring one or two elephants to draw it and best fitted for a porter's lodge"[2].. It first arrived. at Spanish Town on August 29th 1873, when it was brought in. by Mr. P. Allwood, the Post Office Inspector, having taken one and a half hours to cover the distance of thirteen miles from Kingston Clumsiness and weight proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to its correct functioning and it was soon retired and finally scrapped.

By the end of 1878, complaints- regarding the slowness of the mails had reached a new height and the Government ordered the subsidisation of a light mail-coach to operate between Old Harbour and Mandeville, this latter place: being considered a good centre for the distribution of rail for certain parts of the northern and western parishes.
From 1878 onwards, mail was again conveyed by rail but the services to other districts continued to be made by male, the new mail-coach and later, bar wale carts, similar to that illustrated on the 6d value off, the Postal Centenary issue of 1960. In 1881, the first mule-drawn mail-coach vas put into operation between Kingston and St. Ann's Bay, carrying a number of fare-paying passenger and this new system immediately began to spread, being efficient, economic and well used by the public.
On April 1st 1910, mails were carried. for the first time by motor transport, the vehicles being supplied bay the Jamaica Motor Company under contract with the post office but the experiment was short lived and when re-introduced in 1913, it operated under direct post office control and was used on all the island's chain post roads. Since then, the motor mail-coach service has been considerably extended axed the entire island is now covered by a network of small official services, connecting with many tiny villages and larger offices and still carrying small numbers. of paying

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[1] Notably, the "Chief Justice Peter Heywood - Colonel Charles. Long" correspondence, c.. 1707-11.
[2] "Morning Star" of August 15th 1873

passengers on each van (see Appendix "A"') , in the absence of rural public transport. No postal markings were employed on any of these routes and all rail carried vans in sealed bags.

Mail between Kingston and Port Royal wars and still is conveyed by the Harbour Master's launch across Kingston Harbour and at Port Morant, mail for the "banana" port of Bowden is transported across the harbour by a courier in a rowing boat.

In the late 1950's, in an attempt to effect curtain badly needed economies and increase efficiency, the Jamaica Post Office enlisted the co-operation of .British postal experts to organise a working study of the postal. services and administration, their recommendations resulting in a series of Travelling Post Offices being established from 1961. onwards, which were intended to operate between several of the larger centres of population. These T.P.O.'s picked up and conveyed closed mail between agencies and main offices and did a certain amount of sorting oil each journey, especially forward sorting to offices and agencies: lying immediately beyond the various. terminal points. Each van was equipped wit! a letter box and when halted in a village where the mail. had already closed, letters could be posted therein and dealt with, although none of the units, offered a counter service to the public five Travelling Post Offices were organised., the details and postal markings used bar them being as follows:-

The Routes

HIGHWAY TRAVELLING POST OFFICE 1

Mandeville – Savannah La Mar and return.

This service began on June 1st 1961 and consisted of a large modern, mail van of steel construction, with a compartment for mail sorting and another of big storage capacity for carrying sealed staffed by two postmen, Grade "A" .

The T.P.O. operated n the main A2 road between the termini, picking up and delivering closed mails from and to the Kingston G.P.O, and open mail including registered, from offices and agencies en route[3]. The staff sorted mail for offices directly beyond Savannah La Mar and Mandeville in order to expedite forward despatch from those points. The van was returned to Kingston from Mandeville and during the journey, sorted mail for the eighteen post offices of the Kingston Corporate Area[4].

Letters posted at offices and agencies after the mail had closed could be posted in the letter box provided on the van and were datestamped by the sorter. Evidence of the practice is seldom found and all markings of this unit are scarce. Three successive date s damps, were employed, all of the Temporary Rubber type and struck in purple ink: -

Type HTP01

Jamaica classification TRD41 the wording at the top reading simply, "T.P.O.", It is known used from June 1st 1961 to July 23rd 1963 and favour strikes exist, usually in a very worn condition with the dateline inverted.

Type HTP02

Jamaica classification TRD63 and a larger type, with the office names at the bottom composed of upper and lower case type. it is known used between August 1963 and January 21st 1966, and later impressions are always, worn and distorted.

Type HTP03

Jamaica, classification TRD63a and the replacement for the previous item, having the office names composed of serif capital letters. It t is known used from February 9th to May 14th 1966

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[3] See map on page 8

[4] The Kingston Corporate Area comprises the parish and City of Kingston and a large part of the surrounding parish of St. Andrew, usually called Lower St.. Andrew. The offices, referred to are the main offices of the eighteen Kingston Postal Districts established on February 1st 1958. See Appendix "B"

HIGHWAY TRAVELLING POST OFFICE, 2

Kingston – St. Ann's s Bay and return.

This unit commenced operations on April 2nd 1962 using the same equipment, and establishment as Highway T.P.O.1. It was operated in a similar manner and served all the offices and small agencies along the main Al road from Kingston through Spanish Town to St. Ann's. Bay[5]. In its later years it assisted in clearing mail from offices of the corporate area of Kingston and for this additional duty, often used a smaller van.

Four rubber datestamps were employed, the first being uncommon, whilst the other three are very common and usually found on Kingston mail. All were struck in purple ink

Type HTP04

Jamaica classification TRD61, inscribed "T.P.O.2" at the top. It is known used between April 2nd 1962 and April 12th 1965.

Type HTP05 (i)

Jamaica classification TRD41 (i), inscribed "T.P.O.2" at the top. The asterisks at the sides are in line with the fixed dateline and there is a small break in the inner oval frame-line below the 'O' of 'T.P.O.'. The top of the word 'Jamaica' is placed approximately 1mm from the inner oval.
It is known from July 20th 1963 to April 9th 1965, when the outer double oval shows signs of wear and often appears as a single frame line.

Type HTP05 (ii)

Jamaica classification TRD41 (ii). Similar to previous item but there is a wider space between the 'O' of 'T.P.O.' and the '2'. The asterisks at the sides are placed at about 4 and 8 o'clock, i.e. below the central dateline and that at the right touches the inner frame line, which has a small break between the letters 'A' and 'I' of 'JAMAICA'. It is difficult to discern any space between the top of the word 'JAMAICA' and the inner oval.
It is known used from May 17th 1965 to about July 23rd 1965.

Type HTP05 (iii)

Jamaica classification TRD41 (iii). Very similar to previous item with asterisks still at 4 and 8 o'clock, but both spaced away from central oval frame line which itself shows a break between the letters 'P' and 'O' of 'T.P.O.', and has no space between it and the top of the word 'JAMAICA'.
It is known used from September 23rd 1965 to May 14th 1966, when wear and tear make it often unreadable.

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[5] See map on page 9.

HIGHWAY TRAVELLING POST OFFICE, 3

Montego Bay – St. Ann's Bay and Return

This unit also began operations, on April 2nd 1962 with the same equipment and establishment, and worked the main A1 road between the places mentioned[6]. One of its main. tasks vas the forward sorting; of mail destined for outstations of Montego Bay and offices and agencies, on secondary routes beyond that -town.

Five types of temporary rubber datestamp were used and struck in purple ink, most if not all of them being very scarce and rarely seen :

Type : HTP04

Jamaica classification: TRD61 inscribed "T.P.O.3" at top. It is known used between April 1st 1962 and May 1963.

Type HTP06

Jamaica classification HTP06, with terminal office names at the -top and "T.P.O." placed above the date in. the centre. It is known used from January 1964 to October 12th 1965 and is usually found in a ,very worn condition.

Type HTP07

Jamaica classification. TRD64a(i), with off ice names in smaller lettering and "T.P.O.3" placed above the date: in the centre. It existed in two states,

State I being the original form with the island name at the bottom mis-spelled and reading, "JAMAIACA". It is known used between November 10th and 13th 1965; and State II which has the last four letters of the word at tile bottom excised, thus appearing as "JAMA" Only. It is known used from November 21st to December 1965.

Type HTP05

Jamaica classification TRD41, inscribed "T.P.0.3" at top This dater was manufactured to replace HTP07 State I, but was never put into use, possibly because of the rapid provision of the following type but probably because it was itself faultily inscribed.
Undated proof strikes exist, struck on light card, the "J" of "JAMAICA" always. being missing.

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[6] See map on page 10.

Type HTP07

Jamaica classification TRD64a(ii), with island name at bottom spelled correctly. It is known used from December 20th 1965 to May 14th 1966.

HIGHWAY TRAVELLING POST OFFICE 4,

Corporate Area of Kingston and St Andrew

This was an experimental service which did not commence until March 25th 1963,. It was operated with a smaller type mail van and was manned in the morning by only one Grade "A" postman, in its capacity of exchanging closed mails between the offices of Halfway Tree, Cross Roads, Allman. Town, Franklin Town, Vineyard Town and Windward Road, in both directions[7].

In the afternoon, it took on a staff of three postmen and proceeded to clear street letter boxes in the corporate area beyond the inner belt of the G-P.O., boxes. with heavy postings, being especially selected. This system was inaugurated in order to limit overtime hours being worked, the letters being postmarked and sorted on a. 48 compartment frame during the operation. Three rubber daters were employed, struck in purple ink.

Type HTP05 (i)

Jamaica classification TRD41 (i), inscribed "T.P.O.-4" at the top and showing a hyphen between 'T.P.O.' and '4'. The right hand asterisk is lower than that at the left.
It was used from March 25th 1963 to about September 4th 1963 (lkd) and is not uncommon.

Type HTP05 (ii)

Jamaica classification TRD41 (ii). Similar to previous item but without hyphen in "T.P.O.4". The letter 'P' of 'T.P.O.' slopes to the right and there is a break and displacement of the inner frame-line below the 'O' of 'T.P.O.'. This dater is usually found in a very worn state in later years with the asterisks distorted.
It is commonly known used between August 27th 1964 (my ekd) but obviously in use much earlier) to May 14th 1966.

Type HTP05 (iii)

Jamaica classification TRD41 (iii). Very similar to previous item but with both asterisks placed on a central line.
It is known used between October 28th 1964 and February 19th 1965.

HIGHWAY TRAVELLING POST OFFICE 5

Kingston scheme

The last of the new units and brought into service on May 1st 1963.. Its duties consisted of the clearance of all street letter boxes within the corporate: area[8], sorting and postmarking being carried out at the same time. Only one datestamp was used, struck in purple ink

Type HTP05

Jamaica classification TRD41 inscribed "T.P.O.-5" at the top and showing a hyphen before the figure "5" . It was employed between May 1st 1963 and May 14th 1966, showing considerable signs of wear during its last two years of use when it was commonly found on Kingston mail.

Official proof strikes exist struck on small pieces of paper and dated March 29th 1963

Ironically, all five travelling post offices were withdrawn from service with effect, from May 14th 1966, the official reason given being "in the interests of efficiency and economy"!

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[8] See map on page 11

MAPS

APPENDICES

APPENDIX "A"

Motor Mail Van Services

In June 1;379, Sir Anthony Mulgrave, Governor of Jamaica, wrote:-

"there is at present no public conveyance of any kind whatever about the island except the distance from Spanish Town to Old Harbour of the railway, and a small mail-coach which induced by a guarantee from the Government has run with success for a few months from the Railway Terminus at Old Harbour to Mandeville."

'this position was gradually rectified and due to the mountainous nature of the island, roads have been extended where the railway had to be halted, the result being that .far more mail is nova conveyed by road: than by rail.

After the first experimental passenger mail-coach service between Kingston and 8;t. Ann's Bay in 1881, this system spread rapidly, especially when it was found that daily cervices; could be provided and subsidised by carrying fare-paying passengers, for whom no other rural public transport existed. The following details showing the growth and dates of establishment of the main routes:, mostly operated by private contractors, lead upto the modern network.

1. November 1st 1881. Kingston to St. Ann's Bay. When the railway extension to Ewarton was completed on August 17th 1885, this service operated between Ewarton and Montego Bay and by 1905, was. routed via, Moneague, Claremont, Line Hall, 8t. Ann's Bay, Laughlands, Runaway Bay, Dry Harbour now Discovery Bay, Rio Bueno, Duncans, Falmouth and Little River. From 2922, stops were made at the little market towns of Brown's Town, Stewart Town, Jackson Town and Clarks Town, the van leaving Ewarton at 4.15 pm and arriving at Montego day at 5.25 am, the return journey leaving at 6.20 pm and arriving at 5.15 am. By 1952 , the service had been extended southwards to the present railway terminus at Bog Walk.

2. October 2nd 2884. Kingston to Annotto Bay, by 2.895, via Halfway Tree, Stony Hill and Castleton.

3. circa 1880. Kingston to Manchioneal, extended to Port Antonio by 1893 By 1937, routed via Bull Bay, Yallahs, White horses, Morant Bay, Port Morant, Airy Castle, Bath, Plantain Garden River now Golden Grove, Hecturs River, Manchioneal, :Long Bay, Priestmans River and F'airy Hill. In 1921, the van departed at 2.15 pm and arrived at 10.25 am, leaving Port Antonio on the return journey at midnight and arriving at 8.15 am.

4. circa 1888.Montego Bay to Lucea, amended by 1933 to operate from Anchovy to Green Island via Reading, Hopewell, Flint Rivers Sandy Bay and Lucea.

5. circa 1893. Williamsfield to Savannah La Mar via Mandeville. By 1897, it operated only as far as Mandeville and about 1928, the service vas split into two parts,

a. the first, operating from Williamsfield to Gross Keys and later, Alligator Pond., via Mandeville, Knockpatrick and Newport; and

. the second, from Williamsfield to Savannah La Mar via Hatfield, Spur Tree, Pepper, Santa Cruz, Lacovia, Middle Quarters, Black River, ;Whitehouse, Bluefields and Cave.

6. circa 1897. Lucea to Green Island, later incorporated part of tile revised service 4.

7. circa 1897. Santa Cruz to Balaclava via Braes River, leaving in 1921 at 6.50 am to arrive at 9.55 am, the return journey departing at 3.15 pm to arrive at 6.00 pm. -in 1927, it was extended southwards: to Malvern and later, to Munro College and Southfield.

8. circa. 1897. Black River to Ipswich, amended in 1927 to run from Black River to Maggotty via Middle Quarters and Lacovia

9. circa 1897.. Savannah La Mar to Montpelier via Petersfield, Ramble and Chester Castle, and by 1941, extended northwards to Montego Bay via Anchovy and Reading.

10. circa 1897. Port Maria to Richmond, amended by 1921 to run from St. Ann's: Bay to Richmond via Ocho Rios, Retreat, Salt Gut, Oracabessa Port Maria and Highgate.

11. circa 1921. Linstead to Gayle, extended to Retreat by 1936 via Guy's-Hill, Blackstonedge, Lucky Hill and Gayle.

12. circa 1926 ? Balaclava to Ulster Spring via Auchtembeddie, Troy, Warsop and Albert Town.

13. circa 1926 ? Brown's Town to Shooters Hill via Alexandria, Inverness-, Cave. Valley, Aenon Town, Borobridge, Alston, Spaldings, Christiana and Walderston.

14. circa 1928 ? May Pen to Race Course and later Milk River, via. Hayes and Alley.

15. circa 1936 ? Morant Bay to Trinityville via Seaforth.

16. circa 1938 ? Savannah La Mar to Negril via. Georges Plain, Grange Hill. Little London and Sheffield.

17. circa 1938 ? Middle Quarters to Newmarket via Giddy Hall.

18. Prior to 1952. Cambridge to Maroon Town and extended later to Montego Bay.

19. Prior to 1952:. Hopewell to Jericho via Great Valley arid Cascade.

20. Prior to 1952. Halfway Tree to Newcastle.

The much larger, modern network covers a far greater area and the following list, correct as, at 1964, incorporates most of the earlier services
1 Alligator Pond to Williamsfield via Mandeville. (Earlier service 5a) .

2. Balaclava to Junction.

3 Black River to Maggotty. (earlier service 8) .

4 Carron Hall to Oracabeasa.

5. Chapelton to Kellits.

6. Darliston to Montpelier.

7. Devon Pen to Stony Hill.

8. Falmouth to Bunkers Hill.

9. Gibraltar to Brown's Town.

10. Ginger Hill to diddle quarters.

11. Glengoffe to Stony Hill.

12 . Green Island to Grange Hill.

13. Halfway Tree to Newcastle. (earlier service 20) .

14. Highgate to Port .Antonio.

15. Huntley to Mile Gully.

16 . Inswood to Spanish Town.

17. Jackson Town to Christiana.

18 g James. Hill to Four Paths.

19. Kellits to Bog Walk via. Ewarton.

20. Kingston to Port .Antonio via Morant. Bay. (Earlier service 5) .

21. Kingston to Mandevil1e.

22. Kingston to Richmond.

23. Kirkvine to Williamsfield.

24. Lacovia to Calabash Bar.

25. Lucea to Grange Hill.

26. Mandeville to Brown's Town.

27. Mandeville to Spur Tree.

;28. Mandeville to Farm.

29. Mavis Bank to Gordon Town.

30. Milk River to May Pen. (Earlier service 14) .

33 Montego Bay to Maryland via Lucea.

32. Montego Bay to Savannah La Mar. (Earlier service 9) .

55. Montego Bay to Lottery.

34. Montego Bay to Maroon Town. (Earlier service 18).

35. Morant May to Cedar -Valley. (Earlier service 25) .

36. Negril to Savannah La Mar-. (Earlier service 16) .

37. Retreat to Linstead. (Earlier service 11).

38. Richmond to St. Ann's Bay. (Earlier service 10) .

39 Richmond to Islington.

40. Rock. Hall to Halfway Tree.

41. Rock River to Cold Harbour.

42. Santa Cruz to Watsons Hill,

43 Sherwood Content to St. Ann's Bay.

44. Spanish Town to Point Hill.

45. Spaldings to May Pen.

46. Sunning :Mill to Morant Bay.

47. Ulster Spring to Balaclava. (Earlier service 12) .

In addition, a fleet of post office vans, circulate mail between offices and agencies in the corporate area, also assisting with the house-to-house delivery of printed papers, small packets and parcels.. Montego Bay and Port Antonio are also supplied with, vans for a similar purpose.

Bags of ordinary mail are also exchanged on an express basis, between Kingston and the offices at Moneague, Claremont, Bamboo, Brown's Town, Stewart Town, Clarks Town, Duncans, Discovery Bay, Runaway Bay, St. Ann's Bay, Ocho Rios, Falmouth and Montego Ray. This service is operated by private contractors delivering daily newspapers to the towns mentioned, who collect the mail bags from the G.P.O. at l am. On their return journey to Kingston later in the morning, a bag of mail is collected from each office.

APPENDIX. "B"

Kingston Postal Districts

The: Jamaica Post Office Headquarters, which control the entire island postal service, are located at South Camp Road, Kingston, and it is from there that the Kingston General Post Office and the ten District Post Offices at Black River, Mandeville, May Pen, Montego Bay, Morant Bay, Port Antonio, Port Maria, St. Ann's Bay, Savannah La Mar and Spanish Town are directed, each of these offices being responsible, for the supervision and control of all of offices and agencies in their area.

With effect from February 1st 1958, the Corporate Area. of Kingston and Lower St. Andrew was divided into fifteen postal districts in addition to that covered by the Kingston G.P.O. three further districts being added between .1959 and 1961. These took their names from the main office of the area and controlled all offices and agencies within that district and acted as forwarding offices for other establishments just outside the corporate area.

KINGSTON GENERAL P0ST OFFICE

Located at King Street, Kingston, with a separate Parcels Office at 45 Elma Crescent, Washington Boulevard. The following establishments are supervised by this office,

a. Fletchers Land postal agency -- opened December 11th 1969, and located at the corner of Garrick Lane arid Kings ton Lane, Upper King Street, Kingston.

b. Greenwich Town postal agency (Special) - opened :December 4th 1950 at 19 East Avenue, Greenwich Town, St, Andrew.

 c Issa's sub postal agency opened in early 1959? And closed about 1962? (whereabouts, unknown to the author but stated to have been it the store of the ;same name. Any information about this agency will be welcomed

d. Kingston North West postal agency (Special) - opened -December 9th. 1955 and located at 136D Orange Street, Kingston.

e. Lascelles: post office - opened December 12th. 1921 and closed May 22nd 1970 Located in the store of the same name at 12-14 Port Royal Street, Kingston.

F Myrtle Bank post office --. opened January 16th 1901 in the hotel of the same name and closed when the hotel was demolished on August 1st 1969. Reopened on May 26th 1970 at 82 Tower Street, Kingston.

G New Town postal agency (Grade l:) - opened November 15th 1968 and located at 15 French Street, Kingston.

H Oxford Street postal agency (special) - opened November 15th 1960 at 60½ Oxford Street, Kingston.

i. Palisadoes postal agency (Special) - opened June 30th 1950 and located at the Palisadoes Airport, Kingston.

j. Torrington postal agency (Special) , St. Andrew parish opened in late 1962 ? Now located at 15 Slipe Road.

In addition, the G.P.O. acts as forwarding office for most of the other offices of St. Andrew outside the corporate area, such as Gordon Town, Mavis Bank and Bull Bay.

KINGSTON POSTAL DISTRICT 1 - PORT ROYAL in Kingston parish
Opened in. 1833 and located in Love Street, Port Royal, Kingston 1.

KINGSTON POSTAL DISTRICT 2 – WINDWARD ROAD in Kingston parish
Opened April 1st 1909 and located at 95 Windward Road, Kingston 2. It supervises the following establishment

a. Wareika postal agency (Grade I) - opened December 1st 1955 and now located at 1E Glasspole Avenue, Kingston 2.

KINGSTON POSTAL DISTRICT 3 – VINEYARD TOWN in Kingston parish

located at 63A. Deanery Road, Kingston 3. Originally opened as Vineyard Pen. on November 19th 1934, bean; renamed on March 12th 1945. It supervises the following agency

 a. Ellicress postal agency (Grade II) - opened February 14th 1965; arid located at 4 Jaques Crescent, Kingston 3.

KINGSTON POSTAL DISTRICT 4 – ALLMAN TOWN in Kingston parish
Opened January 13th 1939 at 8 Vincent Street, Kingston 4.

KINGSTON P0STAL DISTRICT 5 CROSS ROADS in St Andrews Parish
Located at Slipe Road, Cross Roads, Kingston 5. Opened originally as Up Park Camp on April 29th 1884 and renamed on January 4th 1909.

KINGSTON POSTAL DISTRICT 6 LIGUANEA in St. Andrew parish

Opened originally as Hope on May 8th 1906 and renamed