

JAMAICAN MODERN "TO PAY" HANDSTAMPS
by Robert V. Swarbrick, R.P.S.L.
BCPSG J141

In 1958 the late Tom Foster published his handbook, "The Postal History of Jamaica, 1662-1860". Section 8 thereof discusses the then recorded "To Pay" handstamps in use from 1843 to 1871. Prior to 1858 the public had the choice of paying the postage on a letter in full, paying in part -,for the local postage to Kingston - or sending the letter unpaid.

This system meant that a post office clerk had to inspect each letter to see what postage (if any) had been paid and then mark the letter with the amount of the deficiency or charge that the recipient would have to pay. This system gave rise to the use of the handstamps now under discussion, and also the "Paid" handstamps discussed in Section 7 of Tom Foster's book. The use of these handstamps continued after the introduction of Imperial Postage stamps in 1858 and the subsequent issue of Jamaica's own stamps, as Jamaica was one of the few territories which has never used postage due stamps to indicate fees or charges to be paid.

The enthusiastic response to Tom Foster's long needed book led him to plan a second volume in the course of which he wrote several monographs and accumulated a large amount of notes. Through the Roses Caribbean Philatelic Society I have had the opportunity to read these notes in addition to accumulating all of the articles which have appeared since Tom's death.

Recently, I have reviewed the various articles by Reg Lant on the "Unpaid Tax Markings of Jamaica" which have appeared since 1980 in the BCPJ. In particular my attention was drawn to those parts that considered the "woodblock" postage dues. Naturally, I turned to some of Tom Foster's research on this topic.

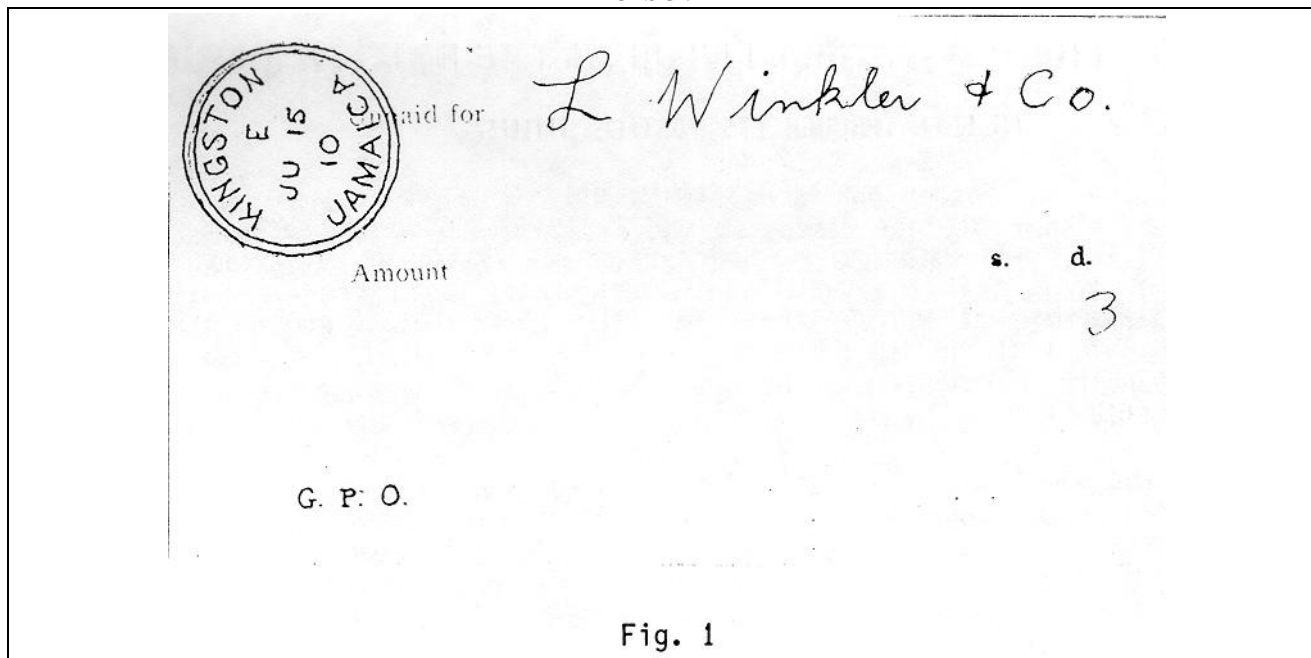
I had a "gut" feeling that something was missing. In particular I felt that the explanation offered for the creation of the "woodblocks" was not convincing. Nor were Tom Foster's notes on this topic able to allay my initial feelings about these markings.

Having researched Tom's notes, my own library, appropriate articles in the "Jamaican Philatelist" and other works in the Royal Philatelic Society library, I now offer, for further research and comment, a resume of my thoughts on this topic.

The Jamaican postal authorities appear to have operated a two tier system to collect any deficiency of postage on incoming mail, a fact which caused no surprise as I had already found a similar two tier system operating for the "Unclaimed" letters of Jamaica.

Within the Kingston postal area (and perhaps in other large towns) letters were and are delivered on a house to house basis, much as we enjoy in this country today. In the case of these delivered letters, the point of contact between recipient and postal authorities was the postman on his rounds. A simple system was evolved to guard against dishonesty to ensure that the money due was paid to the Post Office. In case of a deficiency of postage, the letter itself was retained at the Post Office. The postman delivered instead a printed slip on which was written the addressee's name and a note of the amount due, the form being authenticated and dated by having the post office's dater added. Figure 1 shows an example of such a form. The writer understands that such forms were of local manufacture in Kingston. They are known printed on green or pink paper as well as the more usual white or cream paper.

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On receipt of this form the addressee had to visit the Post Office to pay the charges and receive the letter. This direct contact between the addressee and the Post Office clerk ensured that the fees were paid to the postal authorities and, incidentally, dispensed with the need for postage due stamps as the underpaid letters never left the Post Office until all the fees were paid.

This system was totally impractical for use outside Kingston for areas that did not have a house to house delivery of mail. In practical terms this meant virtually the whole of the remainder of the island. In rural areas the mail reached the office nearest the recipient's address. As there was no official postal delivery of mail, the recipient was expected to collect the mail from that office. To collect the deficiencies a list of addressees, for whom letters awaited collection, was exhibited outside the office concerned, and, in many rural areas, there probably existed an unofficial delivery system operated by neighbors of the addressees.

The simple and effective second tier system devised for the rural areas was based on the Post Office procedure whereby all rural mail was first sent to Kingston. While the clerks at Kingston were allocating the rural mail to the appropriate "pigeon hole", they were also able to check whether the correct postage had been paid.

In the case of underpaid letters these had to be marked in some distinctive manner. For this purpose the Kingston postal clerks were supplied with a series of "rubber" handstamps which had been produced locally in various values from 1d to 5d This system had two main advantages over the alternative method of sending the letters unmarked and relying on the office of distribution noticing and levying the deficiency in postage.

Firstly, as the checking was carried out at a central point rather than at the scattered individual offices manned by different grades of postal employees, there was a uniformity of procedure and expertise in assessing the charges. The fact that this assessment was carried out by the Kingston postal clerks also reduced the possibility of local officials neglecting to collect fees or, indeed, of overcharging the public.

Secondly, when the underpaid letter was assessed for payment, a note of the amount due was made against the name of the Post Office, Postal Agency, or Sub-Postal Agency that would eventually collect the fee. Thus, so far as the head office was concerned, the distributing office became accountable to the G.P.O. for that particular fee, a factor that could be adjusted as a "book entry" when the local official had collected the amount due.

Indeed, because of this system that I have outlined, I consider these markings to be more in the nature of accountancy marks. I make this point as it has been suggested that the marks were applied to show the correct local currency payable when converted from the gold centime standard internationally applicable to underpaid mail. To qualify my statement, I feel that, as many of the

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covers seen bear both Jamaican and British markings, confusion as to the correct amount would have been minimal.

Before considering the various examples of these markings seen, I must comment on the widely held belief that these handstamps were made of wood, the commonly called "woodblocks". Personally, I am convinced that such handstamps were produced in rubber, and in support of this proposition advance the following points.

Firstly, there are financial considerations. It appears that these handstamps had to be replaced fairly frequently. For instance, the 1d. handstamp appears to have been changed every three years or so. Having done some wood carving myself, I know how difficult it would be to produce, for example, the letter "d" and a stop or period when working in wood. The cost would be excessive compared to a handstamp produced in rubber.

Secondly, there is the undoubted fact that, while at first the impressions of these handstamps appear fresh and clean, over a period of use the impressions from the same handstamp became distorted and blurred, a typical problem associated with "rubber" handstamps, well known to those collectors of Jamaica "T.R.D.'s".

In support of the above conclusions, I turn now to a consideration of the examples of these handstamps seen by me.

Some time ago I was fortunate to acquire a range of post cards written over a period of two years or so from a young man in England to a young lady in Jamaica. Although an assiduous letter writer, fortunately for the purpose of this study, the young man never came to grips with the correct postal rates. As a result, all these cards carry one or another of these "rubber" handstamps.

The second favorable occurrence was that, over the two year period, the young lady traveled extensively in Jamaica as shown by the fact that virtually all the cards are addressed to different parts of the island, yet the handstamped markings are identical in all respects.

The facts that these cards ended up at widely different destinations but had identical markings prove to my satisfaction that these markings must have been applied at a central point rather than at the office that handed over the mail to the recipient. These cards also illustrate the gradual change from the crisp and clean earlier impressions to the later distorted and blurred impressions mentioned above.

Since the 1d. handstamp is the one more usually seen, I have restricted myself to a study in depth of this handstamp. Examples of the other handstamps are still elusive. Although the pattern shown for the 1d handstamp appears to be repeated for the 3d handstamp, lack of material for this latter item prevents an analysis except in general terms.

Reverting to the 1d handstamp, I believe that, initially, a series of handstamps for this value were issued to the clerks in the Kingston Sorting Office. As these handstamps were made of rubber and were the handstamps most used, the 1d. handstamp had to be frequently replaced. Thus, my study shows that a replacement of the 1d. handstamp took place about every three years. In the case of the handstamps showing

a higher value, these remained effective over a much longer period, being used to a much lesser degree.

For example, it is possible to find strikes of the 3d handstamp with seriffed type lettering in use long after the similar 1d. handstamp had been replaced. This overlap of use of these handstamps has led to confusion in the past, as their usage during the same period of time led people to believe that the difference in type was accounted for by the handstamps being used at different offices.

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In the hope that a recognized pattern emerges, I have rearranged and list below Reg. Lant's types of these handstamps in chronological order, adding the known dates of use.



Type 1

29.11.1912



Type 2

1. 2.1916
6.10.1916



Type 3

? 5.1924
25.11.1925
25. 8.1925
9, 8,1926
5. 3.1927



Type 4

20.10.1928



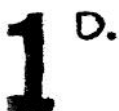
Type 5

22. 8 1931



Type 6

24. 4.1934
24. 7.1934



Type 7

4. 3.1937



Type 8

22.11.1940
21. 2.1941



Type 9

6. 8.1948
10. 8.1948







Type 10

12. 3.1951

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When I first prepared this study in 1985, the type 5 handstamp shown on the previous page was unknown. This was discovered only in mid 1986. Thus, I have hopes that a further handstamp will be found filling the eight-year gap between 1916 and 1924. The handstamps other than the 1d value seem to have had a much longer life, no doubt as they were the handstamps least used. My listing below of the 3d handstamp shows fifteen examples spread over the period 1911 to 1946 and comprising only four types.

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
|  | 3.10.1911 12. 8.1916 13.12.1919 ?. 2.1920 |  | 26. 8.1921 4. 8.1921 16. 7.1928 28. 8.1930 11. 4.1932 |
| Type 1 | | Type 2 | |
|  | 23.11.1936 |  | 9.11.1943 11. 5.1944 30. 5.1944 ?. 2.1944 9.11.1946 |
| Type 3 | | Type 4 | |

A comparison of the various types of the 3d handstamp shows that this handstamp falls broadly into the same categories as the 1d handstamp, except that each type remained in use for a longer period than the similar 1d handstamp.

I hope that this new approach to these modern "To Pay" handstamps will prove of interest. I would be most grateful if readers would check material to which they have access and let me know of examples falling within the pattern suggested or disproving the theory I have propounded.

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