

Jamaica Newsletter No. 4

By Thomas Foster

Among several stamp issues announced for 1970 is a set depicting some of Jamaica's national heroes, one of which will portray Mr. Norman Manley, but there is still no news of the long awaited 'Ferns' issue.

The low face value of the Christmas stamps is a meritorious feature, but it is a pity that the island could not continue the policy of using local influence and design material in creating its special stamps. As it is, the subjects chosen are disappointing and altogether divorced from how the festive season appears to the Jamaican and I am convinced that island folk lore and artistry could have provided far better subjects for the issue. The stamps themselves show considerable differences in shade, according to which set of plates were employed, and many are badly off-centre as a result of using perforating heads that do not exactly fit the stamps. The other recent set commemorating the centenary of the first Jamaican coinage is flat and disappointing and the name of Perkins Bacon, at one time pre-eminent for recess printing, does not yet lend itself to stamps printed by lithography.

The provisional decimal overprints on the definitive series do not appear to have produced any worthwhile varieties as yet, but one major variety occurred during the printing of the old 8d value from the new plates 1B1B1B1B released on July 16th, 1968, when one sheet passed the checkers with the red colour missing, affecting the bill of the humming bird. A fine shade, as yet uncatalogued, occurs on the 3s Commonwealth Games stamp, where the gold colour exists in two very distinct shades, i.e., dull gold and bright shiny gold. These most attractive shades were distributed both in the island and by the Crown Agents.

Postal History. The most important recent discovery has been three examples of the Dry Harbour date-stamp illustrated, which should be included in the listing of type P12 with a rarity rating of VR3+. This item appears to have been the present P11a recorded by the late Gilbert Collett, which could not be confirmed when my book¹ was being published. Readers should note that that serial should now be deleted and the present Dry Harbour P11b serial amended to read P11 only.

Another of Mr. Collett's unconfirmed observations was a probable earliest known date of 1810 for May Hill (T4a), and the recent sales at auction of entires bearing this hand-stamp and dated May 10th, 1816, now appear to confirm his early date.

On August 1st, 1969, one of the best known of all Jamaican post offices closed, that in the garden of the Myrtle Bank Hotel. This hotel has been sold and demolished to make way for new Government projects on the waterfront, and the Post Office is seeking premises for a further office in the area. The Myrtle Bank was one of the first tourist hotels in the Caribbean and was built on the site of the chief watering place in the city, known as 'McLeans Ship Building Yard'. When first opened, it was advertised as "being in a healthy situation where all invalids can enjoy the fresh sea breezes and an abundant supply of the most beautiful and wholesome drinking water fed from the never failing springs having their origins in the Hope River".

The Myrtle Bank post office opened on January 16th, 1901, and at first was only open during the tourist season of each year,—from about December to April. When the hotel was destroyed during the earthquake of 1907, the office closed temporarily but reopened on a permanent basis when the hotel was rebuilt in 1910.

CAMP GIBRALTAR. Type M-GC1

Military Mail. For readers of my notes on Gibraltar Camp², I can now illustrate type M-GC1 struck in purple ink, and it will be noted that the wording is transposed. This hand-stamp came into use on November 13th, 1940, and the camp probably opened about the same time. A registered cover dated July 3rd, 1942, carries a registration label inscribed GIBRALTAR CAMP, the first I have ever recorded, and this is a startling find. The registration number is '0768', which would indicate that items like it had been used for some time, and although the cover bears the usual M-GC2a hand-stamp with the adhesives cancelled at the Kingston G.P.O., it is beginning to look as though the date of opening of the Gibraltar Camp Postal Agency will need revising.



Type P12



Above: Jamaican perfin from West Africa
Left: The "Nimrod Caper" hand-stamp

I can also illustrate the Canadian F.P.O.5003 date-stamp used on mail from 'Nimrod Caper'³. The 1,000 personnel concerned, under the command of Lt.-General W. A. B. Anderson, Commander Mobile Command, consisted of the 1st Royal Canadian Regiment of London, Ontario, accompanied by 429 Buffalo Squadron and 403 Helicopter Training Squadron from No. 10 Tactical Air Group.

A further Canadian Army exercise, 'Nimrod Leap', was held in the island between November 3rd and 28th, 1969, when 800 officers and men of the Canadian Airborne Regiment were supported by 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel. As yet, I have no knowledge of any C.F.P.O. in support.

Mr. H. B. McMillan has shown me an interesting cover from Sierra Leone to this country dated May 13th, 1896, and bearing a 2½d adhesive of that colony perforated with the initials '2/WIR' as illustrated. The letter is from Sergeant-Major Duggan of the 2nd Bn. West India Regt., a regiment largely recruited in Jamaica and whose battalions served regularly in West Africa, except when on service elsewhere during the two wars. This perfin is, therefore, part of the island's postal history and it is interesting to speculate on whether it was manufactured in Great Britain, in what quantity and on whose orders.

New T.R.D. A new postal agency known as 'The Airport Montego Postal Agency' opened at Montego Bay on October 6th, 1969, using the usual temporary rubber date-stamp.

¹ Jamaica: Postal History 1662-1860 by Thomas Foster. (Robson Lowe).

² See Stamp Collecting, June 5th, 1969

³ See Jamaica News Letter No. 3, Stamp Collecting, October 16 1969