A Primer of
English Postal History
To the Adhesive Period
By
The Rev'd. William H. Tower
S. P. A. 9406　　　　　　　　　**C. C. N. Y. 1971**

IT seems strange to think that merely giving a servant a distinctive name could set in motion a train of events that would reach on through centuries to come and enter into the daily lives of millions yet unborn! Little did the first Henry of England, back in the eleven hundreds, think that his pride in his fine education that led him to dignify his messengers as Nuncii was the first step, even though such a small one, that would lead to the complex organization that we of today have in our Post Office Departments. But so it was, for one step naturally led to another, although they might be spaced by many years.

A century later, another Henry, the Third, was moved to further dignify the royal messengers, or Nuncii, by putting them in livery; and then under Edward the Fourth (1461) they were relieved from providing their own horses, Posts being set up at convenient points where horses were kept ready for their use. A larger step was taken by Henry the Eighth (1510) when he gave the messenger service a form of organization and appointed Sir Brian Tuke as the first Master of the Posts to direct and operate them. Till then, the Post was for the royal use and convenience, but soon after under Charles the First (1635) this carrier service was made available to the general public for the transmission of their private correspondence, and twenty years later under Charles the Second Parliament passed the first of its Postal Acts establishing postal rates and confirming the operation of the Post as a State monopoly.

As with all things new and young, those in charge of handling the mail for the people at large had to feel their way and met with much difficulty in satisfying those they served. Whether it was because the public were unreasonable in their expectations, or that the imperfections in the new machinery were too pronounced, it was not long before there was loud and general criti-

cism over the "delays" in the delivery of the mail, it being claimed that letters often lay in the Office for days before they got into the hands of those to whom they were addressed. However it was, a measure of good resulted from all this fault finding and in 1661 the first postal markings or stamps appeared.

Previous to 1661, Postal matter as it came to be called bore no markings of any sort other than what the sender himself had inscribed, nothing to indicate whence or when it came, how or by whom it was conveyed, nor the cost of transmission. It was only when complaints began to come in, thick and fast, that letters had taken too long to get into the hands of those for whom they were meant that Henry Bishop, then Postmaster General, advertised that "A Stamp has been invented" to be put upon every letter as a check upon its handling. This "stamp" was a simple handstruck circle, slightly more than half an inch in diameter, with its cross line above which were the two letters indicating the month of the year, and below which were the Roman characters indicating the day of the month. This "Stamp" or mark, with slight variations, was continued in use as a dating stamp until 1787.

A full size illustration of the famous Bishop Mark, the first date stamp, in use between 1661 and 1787.
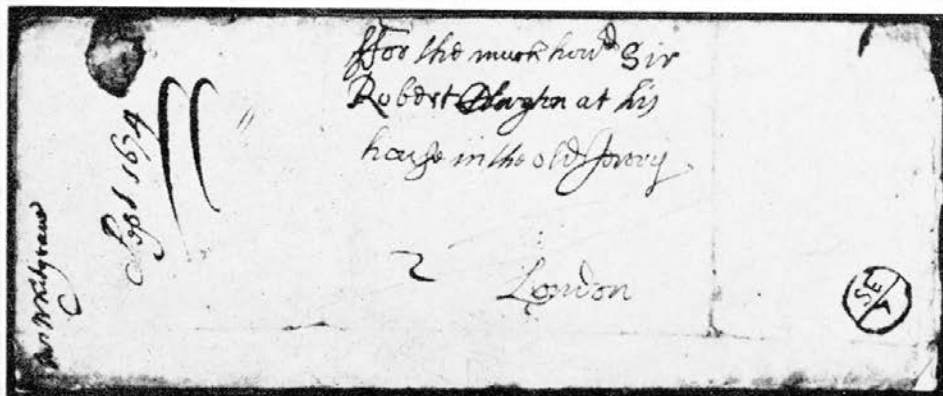
THE BISHOP MARK

Early Cover with the first English postal mark, introduced in 1661 by Henry Bishop to meet the criticisms of delays in his service. He advertised, "A Stamp has been invented to be put on every letter." Its use as a date mark was continued till 1787.

It remained for William Dockwra, a Quaker merchant of London, to devise and make use of the first stamp approaching our present postage stamp indicating the prepayment of postage. He was evidently a wide awake man of parts for in 1680 he conceived the idea of having a service within the limits of London whereby letters might be collected from various stations and, what was even more to the point, delivered to the addressee at his home. So well did

he develop his plan that in some parts of the city he made as many as ten or twelve house deliveries a day—a service which few of us enjoy even now. His handstamp was an improvement upon Bishop's for, triangular in form, it carried the wording on its three sides, PENNY-POST—PAID, while the center of the triangle carried a distinguishing letter indicating the particular station that handled it. So popular was his service, and so financially profitable, that it soon attracted the attention of the Duke of York who enjoyed as his perquisites the income from the General Post, and he, seeing in Dockwra's service an infringement upon the state monopoly, brought suit against Dockwra who was deprived of his post and stamp and fined in addition.

THE MARK OF DOCKWRA'S PENNY POST
In 1680 William Dockwra, a London Quaker Merchant, established his local "Penny Post." Charged with infringing on the State monopoly, he was penalized and his post taken over in 1682. Original Dockwra's are exceedingly rare. The impression shown originated in the "Lime Street" Office.

For a short time London was left without the benefit of its Penny Post, but it had proven itself so great a convenience that it was soon taken over by the State and run as a branch of the Postal Department. The triangular stamp, with slight variations in its design, was continued up to 1794, when a new type of stamp was adopted and regulations permitted that letters might be sent postage collect, which in itself resulted in Postage Paid and Postage Not Paid stamps.

LONDON PENNY POST
This cover carried by the London Penny Post shows a mark of the Dockwra type, such as was used by the state, and which is but very slightly different.

For comparison this full size impression of the London Penny Post Stamp is shown. This Penny Post Mark was in use between 1683 and 1794. The marking in the inner triangle establishes the receiving station and the day. "T"—Temple, "Th"—Thursday.
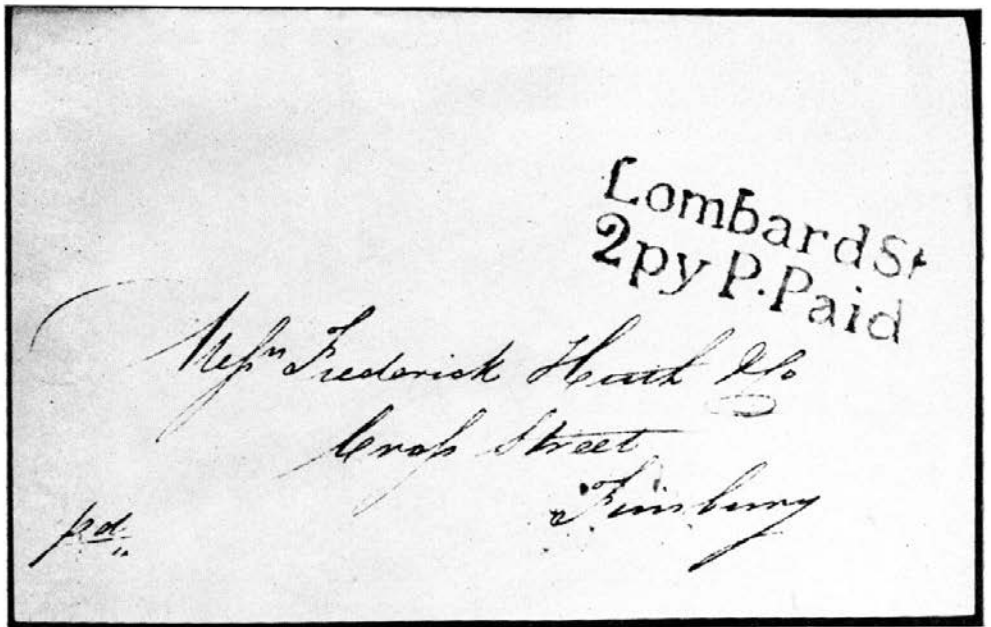
PENNY POST

Soon after depriving Dockwra of his Penny Post the State took it over as a branch of its Postal Department. Later it permitted letters to be sent "collect," if so desired.

The Penny Post Stamp in use between 1794 and 1822. This stamp clearly established the full day and year date as well as the hour of the day when the letter was posted. A similar marking is shown on the cover above.

In 1801, the rate on this local service was raised to twopence and the Penny Post consequently became the Twopenny Post. Various changes, more or less noticeable, were made in the form of the stamp used, some of them by their mere form or color indicating whether the postage had been paid or not, and some including the hour of the day when the letter was posted as well as the full day and year date. There was practically no other change in this local post except that in 1805 an additional penny was charged on letters going beyond certain limits so that there were then two local London Posts, the Twopenny and the Threepenny, according to their limits in distance and their relation to the delivery of the General Post, for they were all feeders one to the other.

TWOPENNY POST PAID
In 1801 the postal rate was increased and the Penny Post became the Twopenny Post.
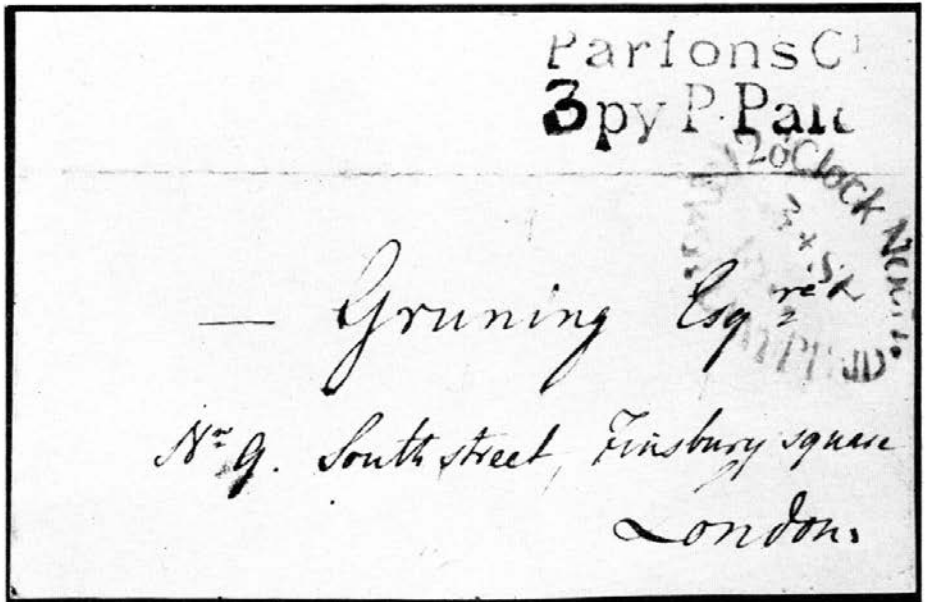
THREEPENNY POST PAID
In 1805 an additional charge was made on letters going beyond a certain limit, so that there were then two local London Posts, a Twopenny and a Threepenny.

The Penny Post, later the Twopenny Post, had always been a purely local post restricted in its operations to London and its boundaries, but it was not to be expected that so great a public convenience could be kept to one city alone, so that in 1764 in response to a general demand Parliament authorized the Post-

master General to establish local posts in other cities and towns. It seems, however, to have been not until 1793 that Manchester established the first of these new posts, and not until 1808 that there were any considerable number of them. As these multiplied, the names of the individual towns appeared in the stamps that they used in varying forms and settings. The London and
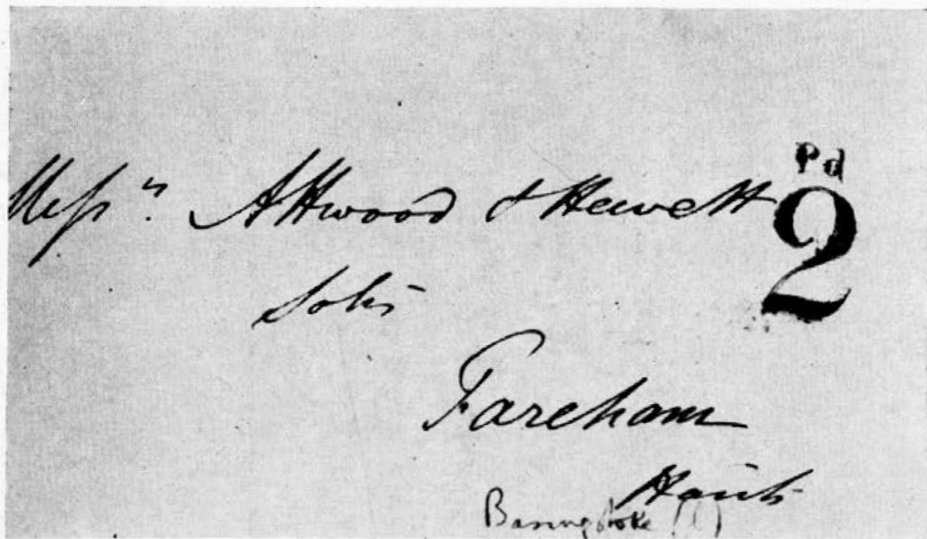
BASINGSTOKE PENNY POST
The London Penny Post proved to be so great a public convenience that there was a general demand from other cities and towns for a similar service. This shows one so used by Basingstoke.

other Local Posts continued their separate existence for some years, but with the introduction of Uniform Penny Postage in 1840 there was no longer the same need for them and they gradually passed out of existence—the London Post being possibly the last to go, being renamed the London District Post in 1844, and being absorbed into the General Post in 1855. This turns us back to what, through all these years, was known as the General Post, serving the Country at large along the line of its operations.

The General Post, as its name implies, was the post of the Country in contrast with the local posts which operated only within community limits. It grew out of the sending of written messages of friendship or business, the carrying of which was dependent upon some acquaintance who was conveniently going that way, or upon some party who, for a consideration, might serve as the carrier. It first began to have established means and regularity when Henry the Eighth (1509) appointed Sir Brian Tuke to serve as the Master of the Posts, which at that time existed only as a matter of Royal convenience and for messages of State. Not until the time of Charles the First (1635) was the Post thrown open to the public at large so that any one who wished might make use of it. This service as laid out by Thomas Witherings went out from or through London over the five main post roads weekly, except on the Edinburgh road which was covered twice weekly, and included by-posts for towns beyond or off of the main roads. Not without a struggle did the State maintain its

claim to a monopoly in handling the mail, but it eventually won out and thus secured for itself a sure means of revenue.

It must not be thought, however, that the General Post reached the entire country. For many long years it operated only over the main roads connecting the larger cities and towns, and did not take in such communities as lay to one side of these highways—if we may call them such—which had to be dependent upon such arrangements as they might make to connect with the main Posts. We might think of it as the main artery of the body politic, but lacking in any system of veins and capillaries reaching out to all of its parts. As we have already seen, it was not until Henry Bishop was Postmaster General that mail carried by the General Post bore any official marking, and development along that line was limited and slow. The date stamp of Bishop remained unchanged a full hundred years before the State made any improvement upon it and began to give the date more clearly, and to indicate the hour or time of day when each letter was handled. Beginning with 1794 we find various forms
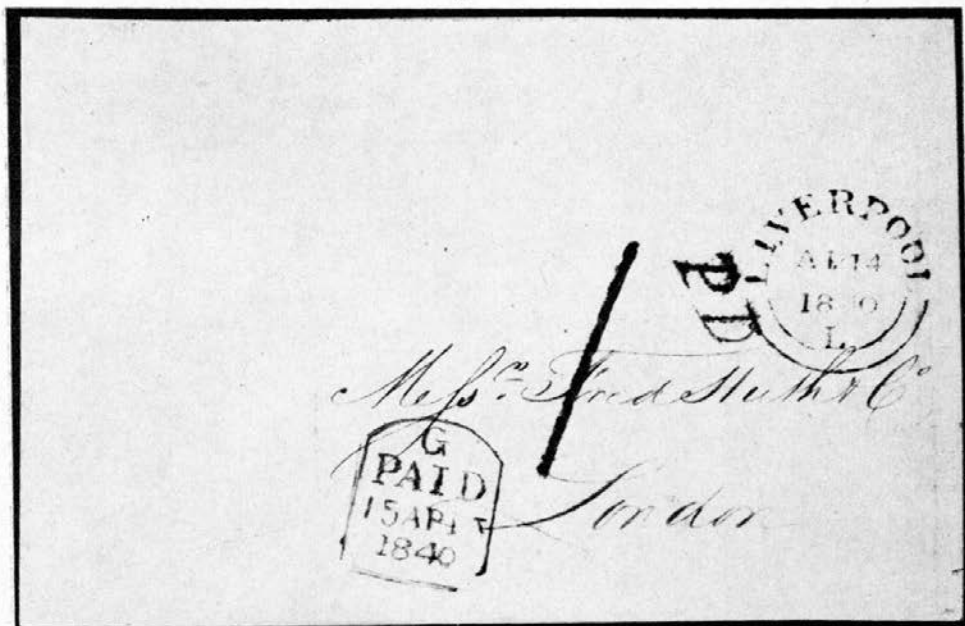

1794
The first stamp to bear
the word " Postage "

1795 - 1801

THE GENERAL POST
The General Post was the Post throughout the Country as distinct from the purely local
service. We show two types of the General Post mark.

THE "TOMBSTONE" MARK
It is not hard to tell why this type of the General Post marking was commonly called the
"Tombstone" mark. The resemblance is close.

of markings or handstamps, some of them quite ingenious so as by their very form to give information as to the time of passing through the central office. The usual form of the new mark was still that of a circle although there were departures from it, one of them with a straight base and curved top strongly resembling a tombstone and being so called the "Tombstone" mark.

In 1805, Parliament enacted what was known as the "Fifth Clause" which provided for a connecting service between the towns that lay off of the main line of mail travel and the State service that, till then, had passed them by. This Fifth Clause Post, however, came in conflict with the local connections already existing and providing as it did inferior facilities, was not the success that was anticipated. This was not the only innovation that was tried, for both the need for compensating revenue for the Post and the spur of criticisms from the public kept the Department, conservative as it was, occupied with studying how it might improve the service and meet the criticisms that were directed against it. One of the more interesting innovations was the so-called Milage Marks that were adopted for Provincial mail when postage was charged accord-


THE MILAGE MARK
For some years following 1765 English postage was based on the distance the letter had to be carried, and provincial stamps indicated the distance from London.

ing to the distance carried from London. This distance was supposed to be stamped upon the letter together with the name of the town. For some reason this practice was stopped in 1797 but started up again in 1801 and continued until it gradually died out with the introduction of Uniform Penny Postage around the middle of the nineteenth century. Differences in the given distance to the same town are to be found on letters of differing dates, showing that the measurement or estimate of the distance was not always accurate and correction had accordingly to be made. Another variety in the General Post marks is to be seen on Provincial mail starting from cities and towns outside of London, many of them showing the name of the town of their origin. Nor should we overlook the distinctive stage-coach mark that appeared following the change from postboys to coaches. At first these stage-coaches were allowed to pass

without being called upon to pay the usual road toll, but in 1813 Parliament enacted that they should no longer enjoy this exemption. As compensation for the additional expense to the service, the Postmaster General was authorized to levy an additional charge of ½d on all mail going into or leaving Scotland by such coaches "with more than two wheels." This additional fee was indicated on the cover by the distinctive handstruck mark, already mentioned, with its ½ or ½d within or without a frame.
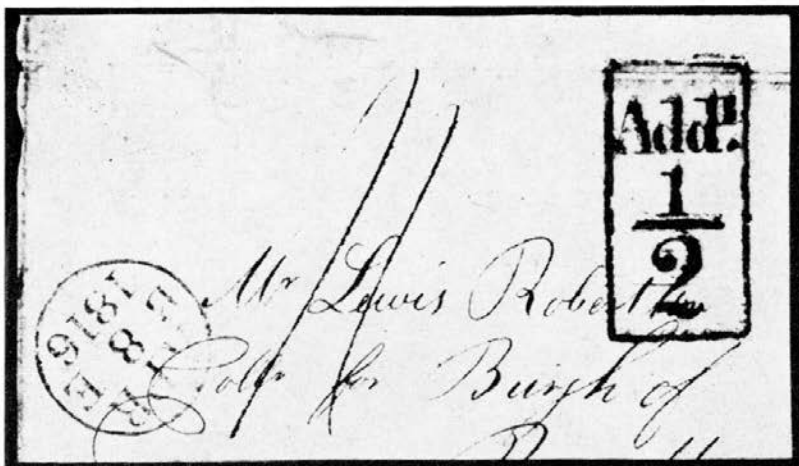
**STAGE-COACH MAIL**
The large "Addl. ½" indicated the additional fee on letters carried by stage-coaches "with more than two wheels," as compensation to the Department when it was required to pay the "Toll-fee."

The man who enjoys being taxed for any community or State service is hard to find, and it was ever thus. So it was that in 1835 a Committee was appointed by Parliament, to be known as the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, to investigate the management of postal affairs. Its main consideration seems to have been given to postal rates and differences in the charges made for mail to different communities. Roland Hill, who was fond of mathematics, pointed out that the cost of carrying a letter varied very slightly with the distance it was carried, with a first result that an experimental uniform rate of 4d was adopted for "letters carried in Great Britain and the Channel Islands for distances not exceeding eight miles, or in Ireland not exceeding fifteen miles." This was put into effect December 5, 1839 but met with such vigorous protest from all directions that it was discontinued on January 10, following, and a uniform one penny rate adopted.

As far back as 1835, suggestions had been made for the use of an adhesive postage stamp, and in 1839 the Treasury invited further suggestions as to the nature and design of such proposed stamps, with the result that some twenty-six hundred responses were received, although not all of them submitted designs. Decided progress was being made in regard to the issuing of such a stamp but nothing had been finally accomplished when Uniform Penny Postage was put into effect January 10, 1840, and it was not until May 1 that the public first saw the Adhesive, and May 6 that it began to be used on letters. In the
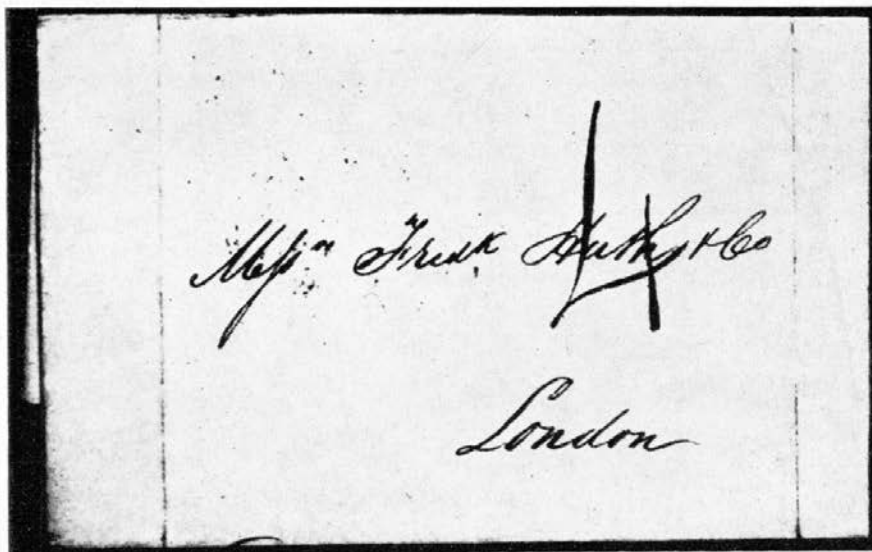
FOURPENNY POSTAGE

Preceding the introduction of the "Uniform Penny Postage," a Fourpenny rate was in effect from December 5, 1839 to January 10, 1840. This rate was usually indicated in manuscript, the handstruck "4" being rare.

meanwhile provisional handstruck stamps were being used to meet the new rate. These stamps were quite simple, merely indicating the one penny rate, although they appeared in many different varieties or types according to the different towns. In May of that year, as stated, appeared the famous "Penny
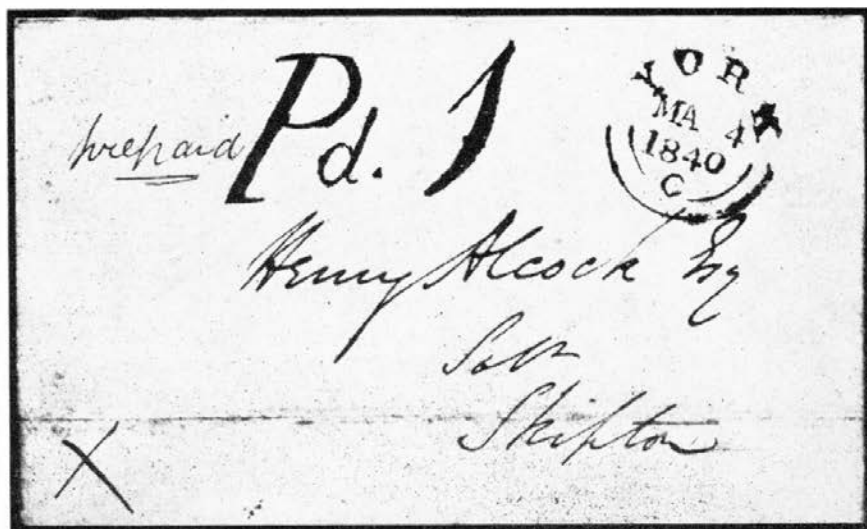
HANDSTRUCK PENNY PROVISIONAL

"Uniform Penny Postage" went into effect in England on January 10, 1840, but it was four months before the penny adhesive was put into use. In the meantime, "Handstruck Penny Provisionals" were used by many cities and towns, and their use was freely continued for some years.

1ᴰ 24

| 1840 - 1849 | 1847 | 1847 |

Additional types of Hand Stamps used instead of stamps between 1840 and 1847.

Black'' and its companion the ''Mulready'' envelope or letter sheet. As it took some time to supply the whole Country with them, and longer yet before the people fully accepted their use, handstamps continued in use for a considerable while and it was not until 1855 that the use of the adhesive was made compulsory. In considering it as a stamp, it must be borne in mind that the name ''Stamp'' was first applied by Henry Bishop to his ''Invention'' and that when the ''Penny Black'' appeared the printing upon the margin of the sheet read, ''1d per *Label*.'' Because the people were so accustomed to speaking of their postal markings as ''Stamps,'' they continued the use of the name for the new adhesives, although we might say that, in reality, they were and are not stamps but prints, being printed by press not stamped by hand. But what's in a name? It is simply a matter of use and of definition!

THE PENNY BLACK

The ''Famous Penny Black'' calls for no comment. The cover pictured here is of early date being postmarked, ''Torquay, June 14, 1840.''