

The
"Brunswick Star"

with notes on the "Pillar Stamp" Duplex Obliterator

By James Arnot

2/6



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

I gratefully desire to acknowledge the assistance, which I have received from Mr Fred Aitchison, F.R.P.S.L., Gateshead for permission to use the photograph of "The Pendant Jewel of the Most Noble and Most Ancient Order of the Thistle," also to Mr Graham, Edinburgh, who prepared photographs from drawings of the component parts of the Pillar Stamp.

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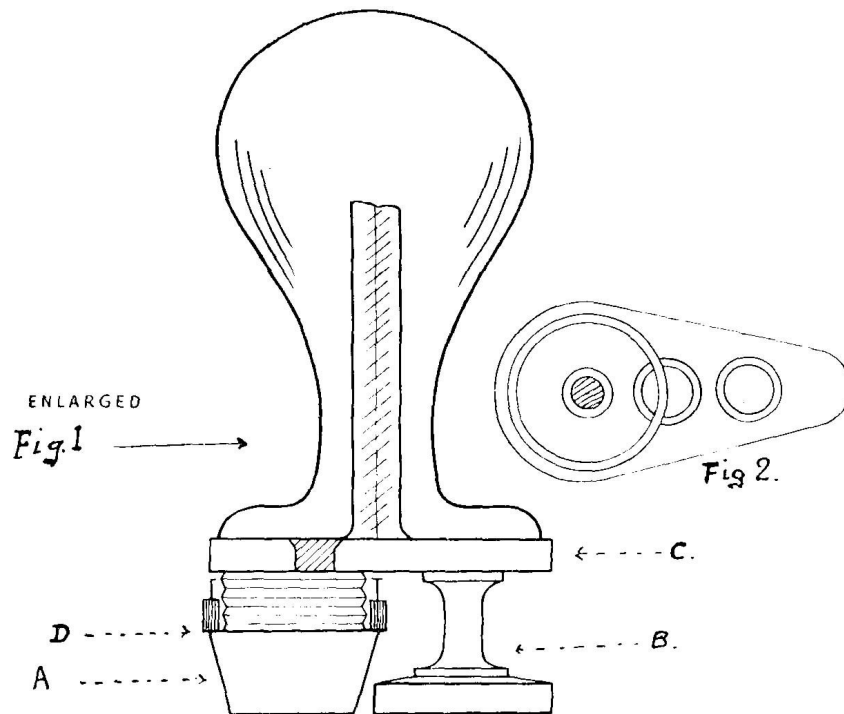
I dedicate this book to the late Professor J. Eadie Todd,
who was a recognised authority on all matters relating to
Scottish Postmarks, and Postal History.

His interest in my researches into the History of this
section of Edinburgh Postmarks greatly encouraged me
to have my findings put into print.

When in 1934 I was making enquiries into the use of the “Brunswick Star” postmark, so called, a senior craftsman in the firm in Edinburgh that had the Post Office contract for all the obliterated kindly made drawings for me of a Pillar Stamp (Duplex Mark). This is the term used in their “Work Done” book for this instrument, which was first used at the G.P.O., Edinburgh, and Post Offices in Scotland in 1857. I had suggested to him, when discussing the items in the “Work Done” book that a Pillar Stamp might be an obliterator of restricted use, say for letters taken from pillar-boxes. To this he replied “Not at all,” and proceeded to make a drawing of a Pillar Stamp. He remembered the construction quite well, and the accompanying illustrations, except that for the “Brunswick Star,” are from the drawings made by him then.

In Seymour and McGowan’s pioneer work on the Brunswick Star which appeared in the *British Philatelist* in January 1925 and also in stamps of Great Britain, part I, by J. B. Seymour, the authors describe the components of the duplex Mark (Scotland) as being date stamp and obliterator clamped in a box and struck together. Then in A. M. Smeaton’s article on the Brunswick Star in “*Stamp News*,” Mar 1947 the same theory is put forward by him. Finally, the best description of tile construction of the duplex Stamp is that by G. Brummell on page 183 of his book on *British Post Office Numbers, 1844—1906*. The opinion as to the construction of this stamp put forward by him was that the “obliterator” was part of a fixed frame, but that the head of the stamp screwed off when the movable types of tile date required changing. He ended by asking for further information about the construction of these double stamps.

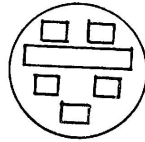
I shall try to describe how a “Pillar Stamp” was built up, and explain what is meant by the frequent notes in the “Work Done” book of “all beaten up, case sharpened, types and pillar re-cut.” I shall illustrate by referring to Brunswick Star sub—types. The description is as recounted to me in 1934 by that most capable craftsman when he was over 70. This craftsman had been employed all his working days with the firm whose trade title runs as follows—“Seal Engravers, Medallists, Memorial Brasses, etc.”



In the illustration, Fig. I shows a Pillar Stamp enlarged details are

- A. Case holding components of date with circle on Base.
- B. Pillar, having on its base, office number, Brunswick Star, dotted circle. — It will be observed that this is in the form of a pillar, hence the name given.
- C. Plate holding the whole rigidly together. (Fig 2 shows three placings for fixing the centre held the column that is worked into the handle, the right and left were for welding obliterator and date circle holder respectively.
- D. Position of circular surface inside the date circle holding the various parts of it.

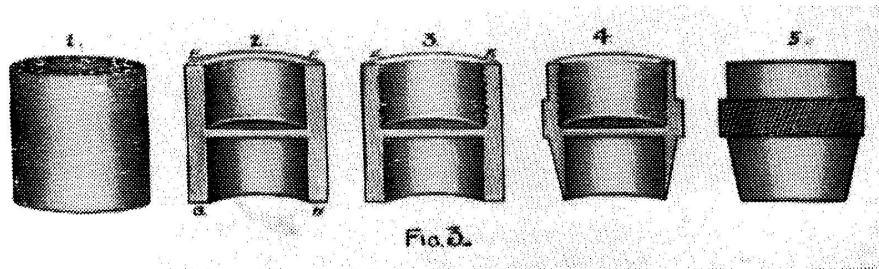
Now to return to the case or (late circle shown at "A," this worked on the principle of Bolt and Nut, that is, the case screwed on and off to permit changing date, etc. inside the case at the point marked "D" was a flat circular slotted surface, into which fitted the name, date, stamps number, etc. (see Fig. 2A), and hence the name "case," a receptacle for holding something.



CASE
Fig 2a

In the making of this “case,” a circular block of metal Fig. 3 (1) cut to size was taken, at points “e” and “f” the metal was cut out to the depth shown, fig. 3 (2). After this it was inverted and the same process repeated—“g” and “h”, leaving the aforementioned circular surface Fig. 1 (D). Fig. 3 (3) shows this case was cut with a screw at “e” and “f” by the use of a chuck and master screw, standard to the size of the series of circles or cases in general use at the time.

Finally, Fig. 3 (4)—at “g” and “h” the diameter was reduced and shaped by cutting as shown, and after this final cutting the knurling was put on, giving a firmer grip for screwing and unscrewing this piece— fig.3 (5).



The slots in the case for holding the components of the date stamp were cut to standard size, likewise the various pieces for making up the date, so that they could fit every standard case of the period. The types, fitted into the case, had shoulders to hold them in position, and a leather washer was placed over all, and then the whole was screwed on to the stamp. Curiosities, such as the year inverted, Edinburgh inverted and reversed, figures on side, etc., are sometimes found. Incorrect placing by the stamper of the type gave these results.

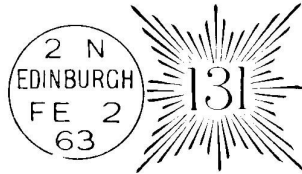
It is often found in the stamp of certain Post Offices that the date circle is out of parallel with the obliterator. This could be caused by some foreign matter lodging in the thread of the screw. If the date circle is first screwed on to the limit, the least turn backwards gives the result indicated. I have tried this with an old stamp. Also a worn washer would allow the date circle to go a little beyond the original horizontal position, and the date circle would then be leaning towards the obliterator.

It remains for me to explain the operation of “all beaten up, case sharpened, types and pillar re-cut”, and the relation this operation had to the Brunswick star sub-types. It will be appreciated that the daily use of any type of obliterator would result in blunting of the striking surface and adjustments would be necessary. One might suppose that this could be done by filing and re-cutting. The process, however, was termed “beating up” and was achieved by beating up with a punch from the sides the design or part to be treated – “knocking up the metal” – and thereafter the part was re-cut. By this method as against filing there was practically no loss of metal. If we examine the 48 fine rays Brunswick star, without and with small stars added at the sides, it is found that there were very slight variations during its period of use, but the star still retained its original character. The components of the date circle were similarly treated when worn. I might mention here an exception in which the design was altered by this process of re-cutting. This was Seymour and McGowan’s type IX – 24 club rays with flat-topped 3 in the office number. The makers assure me that it was quite a simple matter to make an alteration from a round 3 to a flat top 3. This I am confident is a sub-type of Seymour and McGowan’s type VIII, and will be described by me as type VIa.

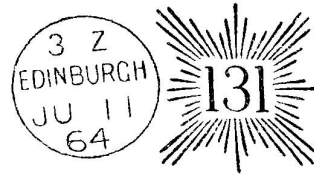
Before proceeding to examine what Messrs Seymour and McGowan so successfully wrote on the “Brunswick Star” in the *British Philatelist*, (January and February 1925), without the assistance of written and oral evidence as was made available to me, I should like to make a few observations on this intriguing Edinburgh postmark. In perusing the “work Done” book, the very significant fact emerges that when the Post Office required this new type obliterator and later types, they ordered pairs. These had the dates in the “proofs” shown in the work book – 31st January and 2nd February 1863, (first two), 20th November 1863, (same date on the next two impressions), 24th August 1865, (again two impressions of the same date) and lastly 1st September 1865, (two impressions), making eight main types. Seymour and McGowan list eleven. I shall therefore have to explain away three types and with what I have already written regarding the meaning of “all types and Pillar beaten up and re-cut” I hope successfully to achieve this. They also classify these types into four groups, which I can reduce to three. I consider any slight variations in the size of the date circle are not of much importance, there being enough scope for the postmark specialist in completing the various types – some of which have eluded me after fifteen years. Seymour and McGowan give lists of the various stamps, line engraved and surface printed plate numbers either in their own collections or seen by them bearing the “Brunswick Star” postmark. Many of these are very elusive, especially the small halfpenny and the penny-halfpenny shield type.

Group A

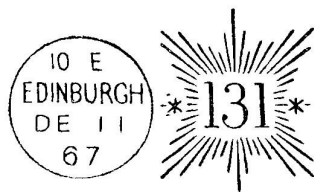
48 fine rays



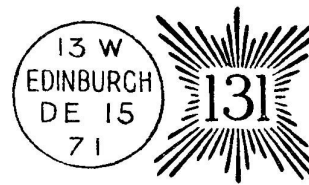
Type 1.



Type 1a.



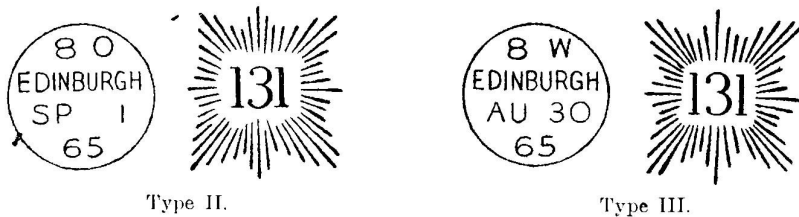
Type 1b.



Type 1c.

I shall now deal with the first group, which I call "A". This will include the type known as the 48 fine rays, which was actually the first one to be made. It was handed to the General Post Office on the 31st January 1863. This is type 1. It was characterised by having a long ray at each corner. This fact was overlooked by Seymour and McGowan, although the stamp must have been quite familiar to them. These long corner rays were shortened on the 4th March 1863 making the first sub type, 1a. It continued in more or less the same state until the 18th January 1866 when the second alteration was made by adding small stars at the sides, type 1b. Lastly on the 25th October 1871, these small stars were cut away giving the third sub type 1c. We have the following dates of type 1 and its three sub types: -

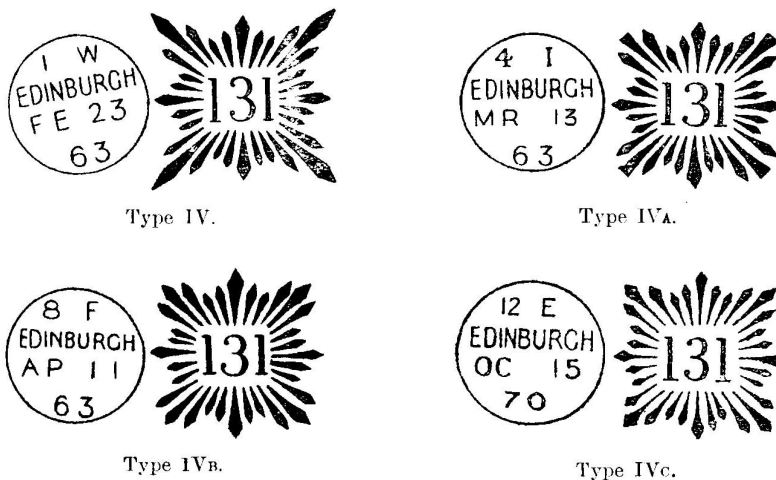
Type 1	31 st January 1863		Rare.
Type 1a	4 th March 1863	- 18 th January 1866	
Type 1b	18 th January 1866	- 25 th October 1871	
Type 1c	25 th October 1871	- 1872 (or later)	Scarce.



In this group two of the rare types make their appearance – types II and III. These were made on the 24th August 1865. While these types resemble type I, the star is not nearly so symmetrical. In type II it will be observed that the top left hand corner rays do not balance with the right hand side, and when used to cancel the stamps slight raising of the surface by the postage stamp accentuates this and the star looks lop-sided. The surface level of both these obliterations must have been uneven. A slight rocking motion by the stamper would give a freak impression such as the malformed “3” in the office number; this would account for Seymour and McGowan’s type IV, which is not admitted by me as a type. Anyone familiar with the use of office stampers should be aware of what can be done with hasty or bad manipulation. Both these obliterations were in general use for the 30th and 31st August and the 1st September 1865, although stray examples have been recorded of type 3 later in the year.

Group B

32 and 24 club rays



The 32-club ray obliterator, one of the original pair made, was handed to the General Post Office on the 2nd February 1863. This I will call type IV. It, like its companion, had very long corner rays, which were shortened on the 4th March 1863, thus making the first sub type, IVa with short rays cut square. Seymour and McGowan describe this variety for the first time in an article in the British Philatelist, July 1928. On the 11th April 1863, this obliterator was again in the makers hands and we now find these cut square club rays pointed, type IVb. This obliterator was again in the makers hands for adjustment on the 12th May 1863 when the rays were trimmed again and were no longer club head but rather spear head, making sub type IVc. This last variety is described by Seymour and McGowan as a separate type, No. V group B. I think this type should be dropped and we are therefore left with three groups instead of four.

Type IVc is the commonest of all the Brunswick stars, being in use for about ten years, though not continuously. It should be noted, although it is not important, that from 1866 onwards the stampers number is always 12, and as a result of continued re-cutting, its overall striking surface tends to smaller towards the final years of use.

Type 4	2 nd February 1863	- 4 th march 1863	Rare.
Type 4a	4 th March 1863	- 11 th April 1863	Rare
Type 4b	11 th April 1863	- 12 th May 1863	Scarce
Type 4c	12 th May 1863	- 1873	Spear head

24 heavy club rays



Type V.



Type VA.



Type VI.



Type VIA.

We have two obliterators in this type, the first one being handed to the General Post Office on the 1st September 1865 – type V. This had a very short life of three or four days, and on the 5th September 1865 we find that the practice of adding stars had again been adopted, making type Va. Type V is one of the very rare types, as its period of use was at most four days. The types here described are Seymour and McGowan types VII and VIIa.

The other made at this time is recognised by the blunter rays and the “131” in the office number being slightly larger – type VI. This apparently was not in use until the 4th September. It is the one described by Seymour and McGowan as type VIII. They also describe the variety with 24 light club rays and the office number with a flat top “3”, already referred to as type IX. This is, in my opinion, type Via evolved by the process of “beating up and re-cutting”. Type Via and one other to be dealt with are the only examples not referred to in the “Work Done” book.

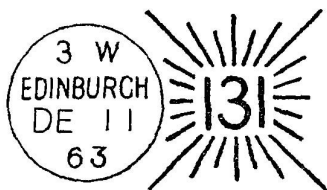
It should be noted that the date circles of types V and VI show the same year pieces as in types II and III.

Type 5	1 st September 1865	– 5 th September 1865	Very Rare.
Type 5a	5 th September 1865	– December 1865	
Type 6	4 th September 1865	– December 1865	Scarce
Type 6a	26 th June 1868	– 1873	

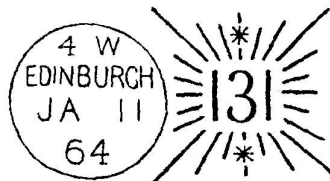
The end date for type 6a is again taken from Seymour and McGowan.

Group C

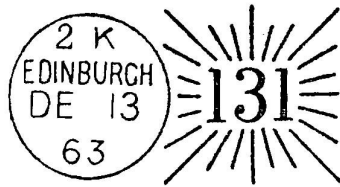
24 straight lines



Type VII.



Type VIIa.



Type VIII.

There remains but one other type to record, namely, that with 24 straight lines. These were two of the same types made and were handed to the General Post Office on the 20th November 1863, one of them having the office number “131” in sans serifs, type VII. The other had similar rays but the office number “131” is much bolder and the numbers have serifs – type VIII. Type VII lasted in its original state until the 17th December, (Seymour and McGowan’s date – this is the other occasion when the “Work Done” book fails me), when stars were again added, this time, however, on the top and bottom instead of the sides, now type VIIa. This variety was in use as late as the 16th January 1864, (copy in my own collection). While type VIII is known used in December, it is possible that examples of this variety may turn up in January as it was issued with a new year piece in 1864. All three types are rare.

Type 7	20 th November 1863	– 16 th December 1863
Type 7a	17 th December 1863	– 16 th January 1864
Type 8	20 th November 1863	– December 1863

An analysis of the varieties reviewed shows that we have three groups instead of the four given by Seymour and McGowan, with eight main types and nine sub-types, making seventeen collectable varieties against eleven main and six sub-types by the same authors.

I have indicated in the text the rarer types, but as some are scarcer than others, I have grouped certain types together in descending order. In group one I would classify types V, VIII, III and II as very rare with I, IV, IVa, VII and VIIa as rare, lastly types Va, Ia, Ib, VIa and IVc in that order, with type IVc, the spear head variety, as the commonest. This classification closely approximates to Seymour and McGowan’s findings. It is impossible at this date to hazard a satisfactory theory concerning the purpose for which these obliterators were required. This much, however, can be said with confidence, keeping in mind the fact that they were issued in pairs and used over certain definite periods.

Anyone able to search through virgin Scottish Bank Head Office daily correspondence to, say, one of its branches at Perth in the year 1864 would find that, though not of daily occurrence, type IVc (spear head variety), would occur in the proportion of at least three to one compared with the contemporary type Ia, 48 fine rays with Va and VI at least ten to one in favour of the former. With types VII, VIIa and VIII the percentage is even greater of finding a specimen of type VIII. And so on, one predominating over the other. If it is realised that the head office would deliver their daily correspondence in bulk direct to the G.P.O. it is proved, I think, that the obliterations were of restricted use, fulfilling some definite purpose. My theory, for what it is worth, is that the Brunswick star was the tool of the senior sorter or stamper on duty at given periods, who would assist in the stamping only at peak hours or holiday periods.

Finally, the question arises why was this particular cancellation called the Brunswick star cancellation? It is first described thus by a Mr Whymper in the Stamp Collectors' Magazine for June 1863. In my early research days into this matter I was of the opinion that it took its name from the order instituted by one of the Dukes of Brunswick, and I had a photograph taken of this from a book on heraldry. Mr Dawson, writing in Stamp News, December 1946, apparently was of the same opinion on account of its name and similarity of general design to the postmark in question. In the "London Philatelist" for October 1948 however, Mr Fred Aitchison of Gateshead explodes his idea. His suggestion that no one in Scotland would go to a German or foreign source to create a characteristic Edinburgh cancellation is sound. He is convinced that the design for this postmark was taken from the pendant jewel of the most noble and most ancient order of the thistle, and considers, while late in the day, that this postmark should now be called the "Edinburgh St Andrews Star".

While one must seriously consider Mr Aitchison's contention, it should also be stated that the late Mr G. A. Higlett held the opinion that this "star" could have been taken from Queen Anne and George II silver coinage, (mentioned in Mr Aitchison's article). Recently, when examining a George II sixpence, I found for myself this star on the reverse and was particularly struck by its resemblance to the Brunswick Star as it has 32 rays. I had this photographed and slightly enlarged. This alternative source of the origin of the design is also worth consideration as we have here a design already used on coinage of the realm.

The official description of the reverse of the Queen Anne shilling is as follows, "Four shields surmounted by the English Crown arranged crosswise, the arms of England and Scotland impaled in the first and third, France in the second and Ireland in the fourth quarters, the centre 'The Cross of the Star of the Garter'".

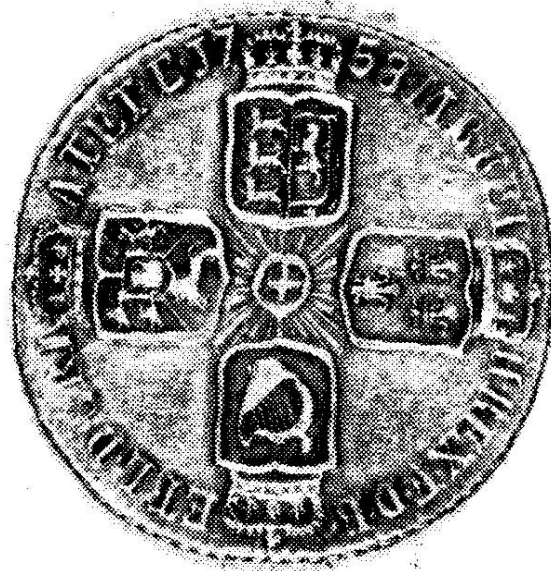


Fig. 4.

The illustration fig 4 shown, is an enlargement of a George II sixpence. The Garter Star in the Queen Anne shilling, in the double florin of Queen Victoria 1887 and also the George V florin, is somewhat similar to the 48 fine rays type.

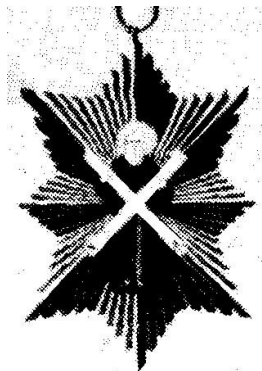


Fig 5

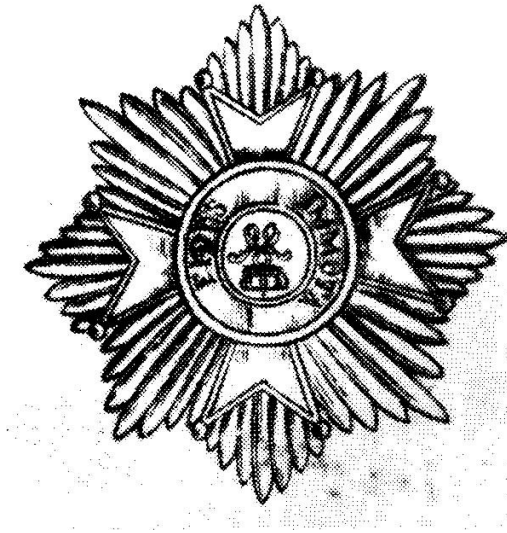


Fig 6

I show photographs of the “Brunswick Star” Pendant Jewel of the Order of the Thistle and Order of the Garter Star, figs 5 and 6.

The subject matter in connection with the pillar stamp and its components, together with the explanations as to the “beating up” have been confirmed by the makers.